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Mirror on Middle-earth: J.R.R. Tolkien and the Critical Perspectives

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of English
University of Toronto

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This dissertation evaluates the commentary on J.R.R. Tolkien, which includes the author's self-criticism. Commonly-held views of Tolkien reception, such as that there is a large body of "hostile" criticism or that relatively few "serious" studies exist, are misinformed. Rather than being concerned about the presence of negative or adulatory views of Tolkien, scholars should acknowledge the potential problems in adopting Tolkien's comments on his own works, especially since many of these remarks are slippery or possibly disingenuous. Still, as the varied and numerous critical perspectives on Tolkien indicate, for sixty years scholars have recognized the literary depths and merits of the author's writings.

The first part of the dissertation examines the elusive literary concept "fantasy" and the premises of "Tolkienian fantasy;" this analysis sets the context for the discussion of the scholarship on Middle-earth. Next, the study evaluates the first major period in Tolkien criticism, which starts with reviews of The Hobbit in 1937 and ends at the publication of the second edition of The Lord of the Rings in 1965. In the years following the publication of the Middle-earth tales,
Tolkien provided commentaries on the creative inspirations behind them. The dissertation assesses the initial block of Tolkien’s self-criticism, such as his article "Tolkien on Tolkien."

The next major period of commentary comprises studies published between 1966 and 1976 (the year before the initial publication of *The Silmarillion*). The dissertation then examines another significant block of Tolkien’s self-criticism, which includes the collection of his letters. The last chapter provides an assessment of the current state of the extensive and diverse commentary on Tolkien.

Therefore, the customary labels for Tolkien criticism, such as "hostile" vs. "laudatory" or "popular" vs. "serious," are more misleading than representative. While there may be starkly differing views of Tolkien and uncertainty as to whether he is considered a "canonical" author, his writings remain among the most widely read and consistently admired works of literature of the twentieth century.
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Introduction:

'Many things I can command the Mirror to reveal," she answered, 'and to some I can show what they desire to see. But the Mirror will also show things unbidden, and those are often stranger and more profitable than things which we wish to behold. What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, the things that yet may be. But which it is that he sees, even the wisest cannot always tell. Do you wish to look?'

J.R.R. Tolkien would appear to be seldom read with indifference. The Hobbit has received essentially high praise since its initial publication, but The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion are another matter. Commentators have taken strong positions for and against these books. C.S. Lewis hailed The Fellowship of the Ring as a work of genius (1954, 1082), whereas Peter Green declared that he could not take the book "seriously" (8). Richard Hughes called Tolkien's work a "very remarkable achievement" (1954, 408), while Edmund Wilson labelled it "juvenile trash" (332). William Blissett regarded The Lord of the Rings as "perhaps the last literary masterpiece of the Middle Ages" (449); Mark Roberts claimed that the trilogy "is not moulded by some controlling vision of things which is at the same time its raison d'être" (459). W.H. Auden, who said that no other work of fiction "I have read in the last five years has given me more joy" (1954, 37), stated that either "people find [Tolkien's work] ... a masterpiece of its genre or they cannot abide it" (1956, 5). Thus at the outset of The Lord of the Rings' reception, it was assumed that admirers and detractors of Tolkien had formed opposing camps or factions.

Commentary on the Middle-earth tales indeed contains both positive criticism and negative remarks. In the sixties, Marion Zimmer Bradley noted that love was "the dominant emotion" in The Lord of the Rings, not only love of honour and country, but "Gandalf's paternal and Goldberry and Galadriel's maternal love" (Isaacs 1968, 109); Catherine Stimpson thought
that Tolkien displays "subtle contempt and hostility toward women" and that unlike "many very good modern writers, he is no homosexual" (19,20). In the seventies, W.R. Irwin called Tolkien's trilogy "the most impressive" work of its kind of the twentieth century (1976, 161); conversely, C.N. Manlove judged it to be "facile and weak" (1975, 206). With regard to The Silmarillion, in 1977 John Gardner considered Tolkien's vision to be "philosophically and morally powerful" (39), whereas Christopher Booker called the book "one long, self-indulgent, pseudo-mythical whiffle" (18). In the eighties, Ursula Le Guin stated that Tolkien's style was "outstanding" (79), while Michael Moorcock claimed it was like "Winnie-the-Pooh posing as epic" (125). Lastly, in 1996 C.W. Sullivan commended "Tolkien’s eminently successful attempt to create a traditional narrative" (82); John Goldthwaite, after quoting a passage of a battle scene from The Return of the King, stated: "Very seldom does one encounter emotion this fraudulent and writing this bad in any genre" (218). On the surface, Auden's proposal that critics either admire Tolkien or disparage him still seems applicable today.  

However, many great writers have been subject to derision or condemnation. John Galt remarks that "I have never been able to bring myself to entertain any feeling approximating to respect for the works of Chaucer;" ... his lists and catalogues of circumstances are anything but poetry" (Brewer 1:268). John Davies thinks that "Spencers [sic] confusion, and different choice of names, are things never to be forgiven" (Cummings 296). Leonard Welsted states that if writers do not use "Skill or Delicacy" when "introducing foreign Treasures" into the English language, "the Attempt will end in nothing but an uncouth unnatural Jargon, like the Phrase and Stile of Milton, which is a second Babel, or Confusion of all Languages; a Fault, that can never be enough regretted" (Shawcross 1:244). Lady Bradshaigh declares that Tristram Shandy is "mean," "dirty," "scandalous," and "the worst that ever appear'd in print" (Howes 90). And Oliver St. John Gogarty succinctly offers his view of Ulysses: "That bloody Joyce whom I kept in
my youth has written a book you can read on all the lavatory walls of Dublin" (Deming 1:282). If the mere existence of severe remarks on authors were some sort of criterion for doubting their literary worth, then no writer, famous or obscure, would be highly regarded.

Furthermore, given that scholarship on Middle-earth spans sixty years and comprises thousands of titles, the presence of negative assessments of Tolkien’s work is not only inevitable but needlessly alarming. While critics like Edmund Wilson have affected the content of certain studies on Tolkien, none of the condemnations has prevented either the reading of or scholarship on the author’s work. There always have been intelligent and supportive responses to Tolkien, which at present and in general show no signs of disappearing.

The most common rejoinder to the observation that there are a multitude of positive views on Tolkien is that these remarks are mainly "popular" or "cult" adulation. It has been stated that relatively few "serious" studies on Tolkien exist. Neil Isaacs in 1968 (1) proposed this view, which was reiterated by Jared Lobdell in 1975 (2), Robert Giddings in 1983 (7), and Brian Rosebury in 1992. Rosebury actually combines the "positive"/"negative" and "popular"/"serious" paradigms:

The other obstacle which needs to be surmounted in achieving a balanced assessment of Tolkien is, to be blunt, the quantity of shallow and silly commentary, both hostile and laudatory, he has already received, ... (with some distinguished exceptions), ... [which] might be taken by dismissive critics as a reflection of the quality of his work. (2)

While Rosebury expresses a recurrent idea in Tolkien criticism, he provides no developed analysis for his summation of a critical history that has existed for six decades and has ranged over many different subjects. In the context of his statements, Rosebury cites no "shallow and silly" criticism as proof, displays no extensive knowledge of scholarship on
Tolkien (except for Humphrey Carpenter's and T.A. Shippey's books), and provides no bibliography. Rosebury states that he has made valuable use of Judith Johnson's listing of Tolkien criticism, yet he quotes few commentators from her book. Rosebury's assessment stands as an unsupported impression rather than as a conclusion based on a critical study.

The issue here is not only whether Rosebury is essentially right or wrong. His position has some validity, especially if one considers all the "popular" commentary found in Tolkien fanzines, illustrated books, or club newsletters, which sometimes poses as scholarly work. But the most important point is that such views as Rosebury's need to be derived from an extensive analysis—not bluntly asserted in order to justify a certain approach. This dissertation presents such an analysis.

The main purpose of my study is to evaluate the critical reception of Tolkien written in English and to give a more thorough assessment of the scholarship on Middle-earth than those which hitherto have been offered. Even a bibliographical list of the existing commentaries on Tolkien would itself constitute a long book. Johnson's volume cites 1649 titles, which comprises work done up to 1984; a recent search of the Modern Language Association CD ROM bibliography for the years 1985 to the present displayed 598 entries; there are also many other publications (those not listed by the MLA) around the world. Clearly, an attempt to track down and analyze virtually every piece of Tolkien reception would be impractical for a study of this kind. Therefore, the Tolkien criticism considered here is by necessity selective; still, this dissertation assesses the important moments in the corpus of the scholarship on Middle-earth.

In selecting the Tolkien commentary for this study, I first looked at initial reviews in news publications (e.g. *Times Literary Supplement*), which in some cases have greatly affected future criticism (e.g. commentaries from Lewis, Auden, Wilson, Gardner); next, I examined critical articles, which include those found in well-known academic journals (e.g.
Essays in Criticism), publications of "fantasy" studies (e.g. Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts), Tolkien journals (e.g. Mallorn), as well as many other articles not listed by MLA bibliographies; then, I considered university theses on Tolkien's works; and lastly, I assessed critical books: that is, works that comprise analyses and interpretations, rather than mere plot summaries or descriptive lists of the characters or settings of Middle-earth. (There is a Tolkien industry that offers postcards, magazines, role-playing games, and other such materials.) From the various sources of criticism, I chose to discuss a representative cross-section of the studies based on their influential nature, inherent quality, and general availability in Tolkien scholarship. In short, I have offered a chronological overview and extensive analysis of the critical perspectives on Middle-earth.  

The need for such an analysis is clear when considering recent assessments of Tolkien commentary that fittingly appeared in 1992, the author's centenary. First, Wayne Hammond discusses the "critical response" to Tolkien's fiction. Hammond states that his brief paper is intended merely as an "introduction" for someone else who might do a lengthy study of Tolkien criticism; Hammond cites a selection of book reviews on Tolkien's works, but chooses not to evaluate "formal scholarship" (1995, 230). Hammond alludes to the hostile views and "adulatory" remarks and notes that between these two "poles" there exists "a vast territory of comments, opinions, and serious criticism," which has been "little described, though well mapped" (226). Yet he feels the distinction that Isaacs makes between criticism for "serious students" and that from "Tolkien fans" is "artificial and even insulting;" Hammond states that the "fan journals are the backbone of Tolkien studies" and it is "there, I think, that new ground is most likely to be broken" (230). Hammond, an editor of a Tolkien journal himself (The Tolkien Collector), displays allegiance to publications devoted mainly to Tolkien studies and annoyance towards those commentators who think that criticism in academic journals or books is presumably superior.
Brian Rosebury presents a contrary view. In addition to the comments noted earlier, Rosebury thinks that Tolkien "has attracted ... a poor secondary literature" (2). He implies that both Tolkien detractors and supporters are responsible for this: "[I]t is no use declaring an anathema on modern literature and then worshipping Tolkien in a temple in which he is the solitary idol" (2). Rosebury further states that his study will avoid what he perceives as flaws in Tolkien commentary, such as "coy puns, ... ('Tolkien's prose flows as boldly as the Great River Anduin')" or "excerpts from the autobiography of a devotee" (3). Rosebury dismisses most of Tolkien commentary as unworthy of regard and proposes that his book will be literary criticism, not fan adulation; Rosebury thinks that the "centenary of Tolkien's birth in 1992 should ideally mark the point at which he can begin generally to be assessed as a literary artist rather than an event in contemporary culture" (1).

T.A. Shippey does not concentrate on the "popular" response to Tolkien, but instead argues that the "hostile" remarks reflect critical antipathy rather than an understanding of Tolkien's work. In his book on Tolkien, Shippey offers another opposition to characterize the criticism: "'Lit.' vs. 'Lang.'." In Tolkien's terms, which Shippey follows, 'Lit.' critics are those who care little for ancient languages or literature, or for philological studies; naturally, 'Lang.' scholars are proponents of these subjects. According to Shippey, certain individuals, such as Wilson or Manlove, have disparaged Tolkien's work in a way similar to the manner in which critics have undervalued Beowulf or the study of ancient languages (1992, 3-5, 294-5). In another commentary written in 1992, Shippey declares that Tolkien's genre and popularity have caused "the literary Establishment" to exclude him from "the unstated but well-known 'canon' of academic texts." Shippey emphasizes the perceived opponents to Tolkien, and their "critical rage" (1992, 5), and thinks that "whether hostile criticism directed at The Lord of the Rings was right or wrong --an issue still to be judged--it was demonstrably compulsive,
rooted only just beneath the surface in ancient dogma and dispute" (1992, 25).

Jane Chance offers a much different assessment of Tolkien criticism and his reputation in academic circles. While Chance also acknowledges the presence of negative commentary and thinks that the "cult celebration delayed Tolkien's entry into the canon of twentieth-century writers within the academy" (1992, 11), she notes that there have been many valuable approaches to the Middle-earth tales: "This legitimizing of Tolkien took several forms--book-length studies of the themes, imagery, and psychology of the work" (13). Furthermore, Chance observes that articles, theses, dissertations have considered the genre, medieval sources, and even anthropological implications of Tolkien's work (13-18). Chance states "Tolkien's academic reputation has been ensured," and that "he is no longer being considered only as a Catholic or Christian writer, an Inkling, a fantasist, a medievalist or a philologist;" at last, "he is being studied as important in himself, as one of the world's greatest writers" (17-18).

There is something strange about these assessments of Tolkien criticism. Common views exist among Hammond, Rosebury, Shippey, and Chance (e.g. the existence of "hostile" and "popular" opinions), but the differences are more striking. Hammond thinks that there is much "serious criticism," with the best work being done in "fan journals," whereas Rosebury declares that most of Tolkien commentary is "shallow and silly." Shippey argues that forces in the "literary Establishment" have condemned Tolkien, while Chance states that Tolkien's "reputation" as "one of the world's greatest writers" has been "ensured." In the same year, and with the same materials available, these four critics have offered disparate views of the nature of Tolkien scholarship and his position in the literary community.

My study will attempt to clear up the current confusion regarding the state of Tolkien scholarship. This dissertation will examine key moments in Tolkien criticism, which include scholarship both widely known and generally neglected. Part of
the reason there are contrary views of Tolkien studies is that so many critics display scant knowledge of the scholarship, beyond the readily available examples. (Of the four critics discussed above only Chance cites numerous commentaries on Tolkien to support her views, though her discussion is brief.) Whether or not the academic community as a whole regards Tolkien favourably, as Chance maintains, or suspiciously, as Shippey thinks, remains debatable. But the many positive and intelligent critical perspectives on Middle-earth indicate that Tolkien should be considered to be more than only a pop-cult figure.

When evaluating the scholarship on any author, there are many possible criteria. Briefly, what constitutes "good" or "poor" criticism? Are the standards the same for all kinds of reception, from daily newspaper columns to books published by university presses? With regard to Tolkien, these issues are particularly problematic because the widespread appeal of his works has aroused reactions ranging from the phrase, "'Gandalf for President'" (Carpenter 1992, 233) to the sentence, the "polarity of light and dark which defines the physical and spiritual realities of Tolkien's world is both mirrored in and codified by the developing languages of Middle-earth" (Flieger 1983, 67). As noted earlier (pp. 4-5), I have chosen to concentrate on the scholarly articles, theses, and critical books on Tolkien. However, within this large body of responses, there remain disparities in the quality of the analyses. Even critics supportive of Tolkien have made obvious errors when representing the content of his texts. As well, some commentators offer conclusions based on mere conjecture rather than a developed argument. There could be almost as many ways to evaluate a given piece of criticism as there are scholarly approaches.

It would appear that one fundamental factor that may shape a critical response is an awareness of the "immanent poetics" of the literary work's genre. This is especially relevant for Tolkien studies. Not only do many critics think that Tolkien virtually initiated the "fantasy" genre and remains the best
exemplar of it, they note that he was one of the first scholars
to devise the principles of this literary form. Therefore, a
key concern when examining a given approach to Tolkien's works
is whether the critic has displayed a knowledge of the
particular aspects of "fantasy" literature.

Chapter One of this dissertation presents an overview of
the critical history of the literary term "fantasy," beginning
with E.M. Forster's seminal statements in Aspects of the Novel
and ending with some recent commentaries, such as T.A.
Shippey's. Although there are some conflicting perspectives on
the quality of Tolkien's works, the majority of the relevant
"fantasy" theorists acknowledge the author's profound impact
both in formulating the concepts of the genre and influencing
the works of successive writers. However, even given Tolkien's
influence, the current theoretical discussions of "fantasy"
remain enigmatic and contentious.

Chapter Two discusses Tolkien's own perspectives on this
literary form. These concepts can be determined from the
author's scholarship (essays, lectures, prefatory remarks to
editions of literary texts), most notably in his landmark paper
"On Fairy-Stories." While it is difficult to formulate a
definition for "fantasy," the essentials of "Tolkienian
fantasy" are identifiable and critics should be aware of them
when discussing Tolkien's works or those of a similar nature.

Chapter Three examines the first major period in Tolkien
criticism, which began with the initial appearance of Hobbit in
1937 and concluded with publication of the second edition of LR
in the United States in 1965. During this period, there was a
steady growth of commentary which, despite the presence of some
dissenting views, did take account of Tolkien's scholarly
ideas, especially those from "On Fairy-Stories." Contrary to
the perennial notion that Tolkien was initially subject to
widespread misreading and contempt, most early critics
recognized Tolkien's concepts of "fantasy" literature and
praised his fiction.

Since the mid-sixties, there has appeared another factor
in Tolkien studies that merits special attention and possible
concern: the impact of Tolkien's extensive comments on his own creative works. These authorial remarks exist in some of his essays, lectures and interviews, while the bulk of this self-criticism appears in the collection of his letters. To consider writers' views on their own work may lead to the question of "authorial intention." Critics have opposing perspectives on this issue. W.K. Wimsatt thinks that an author's "intention" is "neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary work" (3). Conversely, E.D. Hirsch asserts that the "reader should try to reconstruct authorial meaning, and he can in principle succeed in his attempt" (1976, 8). While in some of his commentary Tolkien denies that he had any pre-determined objectives, in other remarks he alludes to his "intentions."

Ultimately, it is a moot point in Tolkien studies whether or not critics, in general, should take into account his authorial statements. Throughout the corpus of the scholarship, commentators frequently have cited the author's remarks and have used them to structure their analyses. Of all the critics of the Middle-earth tales, Tolkien himself appears to have been the most influential for successive commentators. Tolkien critics often ignore the critical history, but seldom the author's views.

However, few scholars have analyzed closely Tolkien's key comments on his work. There has been the tendency to accept them without qualification or concern. In Chapter Four, I examine Tolkien's authorial remarks that were generally available to critics by 1975. These remarks, especially those in the "Foreword" to the second edition of LR, provide valuable insight into the author's creative process. Given that these statements have affected the critical response to Middle-earth, it is important that Tolkien scholars be aware of the subtleties and incongruities in the author's self-criticism.

Chapter Five examines the critical response to Tolkien from 1966 to 1976 (the year before the initial publication of Sil.). During these years, a dramatic rise in the readership of Tolkien's works occurred because of their popular appeal
(especially in the U.S.) and a heightened interest in literary circles. Despite Tolkien's apparent pop-cult status, serious criticism on a range of topics continued to appear in this period.

The final major block of Tolkien's authorial remarks appeared in the late seventies and early eighties when previously unavailable essays and letters were published. This self-criticism also has affected the critical response; yet, again, few Tolkien scholars carefully scrutinize these authorial statements. In Chapter Six, I evaluate Tolkien's comments on his own work in order to propose a middle position: one where his ideas are assessed as to their potential relevance to the Middle-earth tales, rather than being merely ignored or unquestioningly avowed. This positioning of Tolkien's views and those of the critics draws attention to the author's significant influence on the subsequent scholarship of his works.

Lastly, Chapter Seven discusses Tolkien criticism printed after the initial publication of Sil. and up to the present time. The appearance of Tolkien’s posthumous account of the mytho-history of Middle-earth gave critics the opportunity to re-evaluate some of their perspectives on Tolkien's work as a whole. While studies of Sil. still require much more sophistication, criticism of that work and the other Middle-earth tales continues to expand. In brief, Tolkien scholarship has many strengths, despite (as is the case with the criticism on any author) its evident shortcomings.

Therefore, the present evaluation of the major moments in Tolkien criticism, many of which hitherto have received little regard, may encourage critics to avoid a defiant or apologetic tone when confronting the relatively few "hostile" views of the author's works. As well, my assessment of the state of Tolkien commentary may inspire worthwhile discussions of the fine criticism available and help scholars develop fresh approaches to Tolkien's works: criticism that includes a recognition of how the author's views have affected the critical history of his writings, yet avoids an over-reliance on this self-
criticism. In the final analysis, as the varied, extensive, and enduring critical perspectives on Middle-earth reflect, Tolkien’s works can stand strongly on their own merits.
Notes

1 Hereafter, I abbreviate Tolkien's major works as follows: The Hobbit (Hobbit); The Lord of the Rings (LR), which comprises The Fellowship of the Ring (FR), The Two Towers (TT), and The Return of the King (RK); The Silmarillion (Sil.). As well, it has become a convention in Tolkien scholarship that when critics refer to studies on "Middle-earth," they mean discussions of the Middle-earth tales; these stories include Tolkien's major books and the editions of his working drafts edited by Christopher Tolkien.

2 The materials chosen come from Great Britain, North America, and, in a few instances, Poland and Australia. However, the only organizing principle for this overview of Tolkien criticism was chronological order of publication. For brief discussions of the reception of Tolkien in certain countries, see Marlene McKinley (the United States), Vladimir Grushetskiy (Russia), Johan Vanhecke (Belgium and the Netherlands), Giorgio Spina (Italy), Jutta Eisenach (Germany), Nils Agoy (Norway), Renee Vink (the Netherlands), Beregond Stenstrom (Sweden), and Anne Kotze (South Africa).

3 In her book J.R.R. Tolkien: Six Decades of Criticism, Judith Johnson provides brief summaries of Tolkien commentary published in certain chronological periods (e.g. "The Fourth Decade: 1954-1963" [23-4]). Many of her general comments are valid but, as this study shows, other remarks are not supported by her listings (which end with work published in 1984). Johnson's book comprises mostly title references and annotations of Tolkien commentary.

4 Hammond first presented his paper at the Tolkien centenary conference in 1992. The paper was published in 1995 in the proceedings of the conference.

5 Shippey first published The Road to Middle-earth in 1982. Yet he did not alter his general view of the critical response to Tolkien in the second edition, published in 1992. Also, Shippey's comments here are consistent with his paper presented at the Tolkien centenary conference (see note 7).

6 Tolkien draws the distinction between "Lit." and "Lang." in two places. Tolkien discusses the contention between scholars of "Lit." and of "Lang." in his "Valedictory Address." (I consider these remarks in chapter 6.) As well, Tolkien wrote a poem called "Lit. and Lang.," which was published in Songs for the Philologists.

7 Shippey presents these views in his paper "Tolkien as Post-War Writer," which was also delivered at the centenary conference. This paper is published in the proceedings (1995, 84-93).
8 Hans Jauss has proposed a concept called "horizon of expectations" (24), which Robert Holub describes as a "system of references' or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text" (59). Jauss positions the "familiar norms or the immanent poetics of the genre" as the first basic factor that formulates a reader's "horizon of expectations." Whether or not considerations of genre should precede or supersede other aspects, such as the text's "literary-historical surroundings" or "the opposition between the poetic and practical function of language" (Jauss 24), is open for debate. Still, Jauss's ideas properly draw attention to the importance of a critic's being familiar with a work's genre. After listing Jauss's three factors producing a reader's "horizon of expectations," Holub remarks: "The problem here is not so much the procedure that Jauss proposes, which is more or less what many literary scholars do when they relate a work to the literary tradition and the social structure, but rather the notion of objectification itself" (60). My concern here is not whether Jauss's paradigm is more objective or superior to other models of reception. I think that Jauss's formulation may be valuable as a guide, not necessarily as a rigid prescription. Furthermore, Holub glosses over the fact that many critics do not take into account the "immanent poetics of the genre" when they evaluate a given work. As this study shows, often critics seemingly hostile towards Tolkien have not considered the key aspects of his kind of "fantasy."

9 For other perspectives on authorial intention, see Edmund Husserl, Stanley Fish, and Roland Barthes.
Chapter One: The Elusiveness of Fantasy: Critics on the Genre from E.M. Forster to T.A. Shippey

I must follow in their train
Down the crooked fairy lane
Where the coney-rabbits long ago have gone,
    And where silverly they sing
In a moving moonlit ring
All a-twinkle with the jewels they have on.
    They are fading around the turn
Where the glow-worms palely burn
And the echo of their padding feet is dying!
    O! it's knocking at my heart--
Let me go! O! let me start!
For the little magic hours are all a-flying.
(from Tolkien's "Goblin Feet")

Long before literary "fantasy" had been acknowledged as an area for study, the authors of such works were the field's most visible critics. E.M. Forster, Herbert Read, H.G. Wells, August Derleth, Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, L. Sprague de Camp, and Robert Heinlein each provided critical discussions before the mid-1960s.¹ In 1966, Witold Ostrowski published one of the first theoretical papers on the nature of "fantastic" literature. While there were some studies on "fantasy" between Ostrowski's key essay and C.N. Manlove's Modern Fantasy in 1975, since then there has been a virtual eruption of commentary, which seems to be expanding exponentially. The terms "fantasy" and "fantastic" have been considered as interchangeable, complementary, or even conflicting concepts. Shippey that thinks there is a literary chasm between those who write, publish, and read "fantasy" and those who devise theoretical models and terms: "'The fantastic', as academically defined and studied, is just not the same phenomenon as the bestseller genre of 'fantasy' now to be found in every bookshop" (1994, xii). Although an academic himself, Shippey draws attention to the way that some critics (e.g. Rosemary Jackson) define "fantasy" without adherence to "common usage and current practice" (1994, xxii). Gary Wolfe states that the dubious quality of some of these studies "seemed to give credence to fears within the science fiction and fantasy community that academia was after all opportunistic and
exploitative, that academics were less interested in doing serious research in the field than in seeking tenure in a contracting profession" (xii).

I do not think it is helpful here to try to reconcile the many disparate views of fantasy or fantastic literature. At various times, W.R. Irwin, Brian Attebery, Kathryn Hume, Gary Wolfe, Lynette Hunter, and others have made admirable attempts to evaluate the massive amount of theoretical commentary available. In this overview of the key studies on literary fantasy, I focus on how critics over the years have tried to provide a working definition of the literary form. "Fantasy" has been considered to be virtually everything, from an aspect that appears in almost any work, to a mode that functions in many texts, to a genre label for a certain type of literature. As a result, it seems that no single definition of "fantasy" can be specified or widely acknowledged. The essential nature of this concept appears to be as elusive as the realm of a fairy-story. As Tolkien seemingly prophesied, when people approach the world of "Faerie," it is dangerous "to ask too many questions, lest the gates be shut and the keys be lost."

Most of the existing criticism on "fantasy" has developed after Tolkien's work was first published. Gary Wolfe notes "it can be argued that much of modern academic scholarship of fantasy derives from one essay" (xix): Tolkien's "On Fairy-Stories." Among the pre-Tolkien commentators, E.M. Forster is probably the most influential critic. (Wolfe considers Forster to be the first theorist of literary "fantasy" [xix,38].) Forster does not use fairy-stories as his point of departure, but rather invokes some of the most well-known literary texts and states that they have the essential nature of the "fantastic:" Tristram Shandy, Moby Dick, and Ulysses (74-85). He attempts to clarify why certain books, which critics might consider "realistic," have an inherent "fantastic" nature:

What does fantasy ask of us? It asks us to pay something extra .... [O]ther novelists say, 'Here is something that might occur in
your lives,' the fantasist: 'Here is something that could not occur. I must ask you first to accept my book as a whole, and secondly to accept certain things in my book.' (75)

While Forster notes that the appearance of an "angel" can be termed as something that "could not occur," there is no overt presence of the supernatural in Moby Dick. Forster further states: "Obviously a god is hidden in Tristram Shandy, his name is Muddle, and some readers cannot accept him" (77). It seems that Forster's view of "fantasy" is quite malleable.

Perhaps many critics would agree with Forster that there is something strange and unique about a text like Sterne's, which contrasts with the social realism of George Eliot or George Gissing. But if the word "fantastic" can be applied to tales where the "supernatural" or an imaginary state (e.g. another world, the future, etc.) is not present, then this term could accommodate almost any text. Forster lists the various types of motifs or conventions that "writers of a fantastic" story have used:

... such as the introduction of a god, a ghost, ... or the introduction of ordinary men into no-man's land, the future, the past, ... or divings into and dividings out of personality; or finally the device of parody or adaptation. (78)

The first category indicates the magical and the second evokes George MacDonald's idea of an "imagined world." However, the last two possibilities do not appear to depend on the presence of magical beings or phenomena. Forster's succinct "definition of fantasy" is that it "implies the supernatural, but need not express it" (78). Without a clearer idea of what constitutes an implication of the supernatural, including the degree to which this aspect may occur, Forster's definition seems vague and general.

In their collection Fantasists on Fantasy, Robert Boyer and Kenneth Zahorski include American writers H.P. Lovecraft, James Thurber, and August Derleth; these authors provided commentaries before Tolkien's "OFS" was first published in
However, only Derleth’s views seem directed towards describing the nature of the genre; neither Lovecraft nor Thurber considers "fantasy" or the "fantastic" extensively or attempts to define the terms. In "The Fantastic Story [1946]," Derleth discusses a range of authors, including Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, G.K. Chesterton, E.M. Forster, Lord Dunsany, A.A. Milne, and C.S. Lewis, thereby exhibiting a sensitivity to some general issues of the literary form. Derleth’s aim was to give advice for novice writers, and so he considers "fantasy" to include works as diverse as The Picture of Dorian Gray, Winnie-the-Pooh, and Perelandra (Boyer 100-08). On the special style of fantasy, Derleth states the "writer of successful fantasy is usually a man whose prose style is quite superior to the average writer ... because it requires skill to make fantasy convincing" (100). (Tolkien calls this "a kind of elvish craft" [TL 46].) Derleth’s view that "the fantastic story offers the widest basic variety, as distinct from tales of ghosts, of pseudo-science" (109) prefigures the theories of the "fantastic" presented over 20 years later.

In English Prose Style, Herbert Read discusses the rhetoric of "Fantasy," using fairy-tales, such as "The Three Bears," as his models and alluding to Coleridge’s ideas on the "Imagination" and "Fancy" (136-40). Read distinguishes "Fantasy ... by two qualities which we may briefly summarize as objectivity and arbitrariness" that are notably expressed only in "the fairy tale" (138).

With regard to "objectivity," Read thinks that Charles Kingsley’s Water Babies is not a successful fantasy because "it has a subjective, or moralizing, intent" (144); this is certainly true of Kingsley’s work, yet fairy-tales plainly encourage moral learning as well. Intrusive narrators might impinge on the enjoyment of fantasy, as Tolkien implied in regard to his narrator in Hobbit (L 297); but authorial intrusion is not confined to fantasy stories. Many people may think that the "dear reader" phrase in realistic novels disrupts the enjoyment of their reading experience. Moreover, Read does not make it clear at which point a text ceases to
display "objectivity" and becomes "subjective" in nature.

Read makes other observations on the nature of fantasy that are more specific than these concepts of "objectivity" and "arbitrariness." Read observes: "To pass to more sophisticated types of Fantasy, written as deliberate artifices, it is easy to quote quasi-fantastical compositions, but very few have the purity of traditional fairy tales" (146). But other critics, including Tolkien, might oppose some of Read’s ideas on "arbitrariness;" for example, Read states "[r]eal fantasy ... dispenses with all logic and habit, and relies on the force of wonder alone" (146). Fantasy, as evident in fairy-tales, may start out with the advantage of "arresting strangeness" (TL 45); but the inner logic of a tale, as both MacDonald and Tolkien have argued, must be maintained for the experience to be a satisfying one. It is perhaps not possible that lizards can turn into footmen in our world; but the phenomenon is presented in plain and rational fashion in the land of "Cinderella." Read’s discussion hovers around, but does not firmly ground, a coherent idea of literary fantasy. Still, he is almost prophetic when he states that once elusive concepts, such as "Fancy and Imagination," are better distinguished, perhaps writers "will turn to Fantasy as to a virgin soil, and give to English literature an entertainment comparable to the Thousand and One Nights" (151). Many readers would say Tolkien was that writer.

H.G. Wells has made some brief, yet significant comments on the nature of his "fantasies." In the "Preface" to his Seven Famous Novels, Wells states that his stories are fundamentally different from Jules Verne’s:

[Verne’s] work dealt almost always with actual possibilities of invention and discovery, and he made some remarkable forecasts .... But these stories of mine collected here do not pretend to deal with possible things; they are exercises of the imagination in a quite different field. (vii)

Wells seems to imply that his works are not "science fiction"
in the sense that they either predict or envision a future state based on known scientific principles. He states that his stories in this collection "are all fantasies; they do not aim to project serious possibility; they aim indeed only at the same amount of conviction as one gets in a good gripping dream" (vii).

Wells uses the terms "fantasy" and "fantastic" interchangeably, and notes that the fantasy construct should be based on reality and be internally consistent:

> Anyone can invent human beings inside out or worlds like dumbbells or a gravitation that repels. The thing that makes such imaginations interesting is their translation into commonplace terms and a rigid exclusion of other marvels from the story. Then it becomes human. (viii)

However, Wells maintains that "magic" is not necessary for his kind of "fantasies." While "jiggery-pokery magic" had been used to good effect, such as in *Frankenstein*, Wells thinks that by the end of the nineteenth century "it had become difficult to squeeze even a momentary belief out of magic any longer" (viii). Wells, then, merely substituted "scientific patter" for "magic" to evoke the reader's wonder. He states that since magic is no longer believable, pseudo-science (e.g. time-travel) is more "ingenious" and "up to date" (viii).

Wells' comments on the relative effectiveness of "magic" in a story place him on uncertain ground. It is somewhat presumptuous to conclude that people, in general, tended not to believe in magic at the beginning of the twentieth century and so something else was needed. Moreover, if "possibility" is not required, only plausibility or believability, as Wells maintains above, then why cannot this occur with magic as well as something like time-travel? (Tolkien thought that Wells' *The Time Machine* "is weakened only by the preposterous and incredible Time Machine itself" [TL 17].) Further, Wells' presentation of invisibility in his famous tale hardly can be considered as "near to actual theory as possible" (viii). His pseudo-science, because it is so strange and may lack an
established theoretical basis, might be actually less effective than the presence of "magic," which may make no pretense to its verity in our world. In any case, Wells uses the term "fantastic" for a range of tales, which include the Golden Ass of Apuleius, the True Histories of Lucian, and Gulliver's Travels (vii-viii).

In years following the publication of Tolkien's fiction and "OFS," criticism of fantasy steadily increased. Not surprisingly, C.S. Lewis began to write about "fantasy" after he had read Tolkien's work. In the same collection of essays where "OFS" first appeared, Lewis considers in "On Stories" some aspects of "marvellous or supernatural" tales; his views that "children do not always like them," and to enjoy reading about "fairies" or "giants" or "dragons" one does "not have to believe in them" (1947, 98-9) echo Tolkien's (e.g. TL 35,51). Further, when considering a "very large class of stories" that turn on "fulfilled prophecies," Lewis mentions "the story of Oedipus, or The Man who would be King, or The Hobbit" (100). More significantly, he notes that Tolkien's book is better than many other "adventure" tales:

The Hobbit escapes the danger of degenerating into mere plot and excitement by a very curious shift of tone. As the humour and homeliness of the early chapters, the sheer "Hobbitry," dies away we pass insensibly into the world of epic .... Thus we lose one theme but find another. (104)

With Tolkien's work as his reference point, Lewis was one of the first critics to recognize the interesting use of the tone and structure of the epic in books considered "fantasy."

Lewis is most specific on his concepts of the genre in "The Meanings of 'Fantasy'" and "On Realisms." In the former essay, Lewis begins: "The word fantasy is both a literary and a psychological term. As a literary term, a fantasy means any narrative that deals with impossibles and preternaturals:" for example, "The Ancient Mariner, Gulliver, Erewhon, The Wind in the Willows" (1961, 50). There is a clear difference between Lewis's definition and Forster's; Lewis indicates that the
"preternatural" or supernatural must be in the story, whereas Forster states it needs only to be implied. In order to distinguish literary fantasy from stories where readers merely fantasize, Lewis labels one of these psychological states "Normal Castle-building:" a mindset where people imagine conditions, ranging from being on a holiday in the Alps to creating their own landscapes (51-2). He then separates this state of mind into "the Egoistic and the Disinterested," which are very important distinctions.

Lewis thinks that stories of "egoistic castle-building," are "unliterary" fantasy because readers demand that these stories be possible, no matter how unlikely that might be; they want to know that perhaps with more money, they could also indulge in luxuries and exotic romantic flings (1961, 55-6). Conversely, "Disinterested castle-building," where someone "may feign a whole world and people it and remain outside it," is a kind of imaginative process which can lead, "if the day-dreamer has any talent," to "literary invention" (52-3). Lewis thinks that this type of story "which introduces the marvellous, the fantastic," does not require for its enjoyment that it be possible "in the real world" (56). While Lewis does not cite LR as an example, by his definition Tolkien’s tales of Middle-earth can be called "literary fantasy."

In "On Realisms," Lewis reiterates his ideas on the form in relation to what he considers is the "dominant taste" which "demands realism of content" (1961, 60). He thinks that most of the great literature of the world has not maintained these strict guidelines of realism (67). By citing the works The Odyssey, Kalevala, and Beowulf, and the authors Malory, Sidney, and Spenser, Lewis argues that literary fantasy should be highly regarded and not subject to "the charge of escapism" (70). He states that most of the "great fantasies and fairy-tales were not addressed to children at all" and refers to Tolkien’s comments in "OFS" for support (70). Admittedly, Lewis does not specify further his definition of "literary fantasy" beyond giving some examples of works, which he acknowledges are "very heterogeneous in spirit and purpose"
(1961, 50). Still, Lewis has attempted in the latter half of the twentieth century to legitimize works of "fantasy" by drawing attention to their roots in the classic literature of myth, epic, romance, saga, and fairy-tale.

In the mid- to late-fifties, a few well-known science fiction writers, who also thought that they wrote "fantasy" stories, defined these two fields in relationship to each other. In "Imaginative Fiction and Creative Imagination," L. Sprague de Camp sub-divides "imaginative fiction" into "fantasy," comprising stories based upon supernatural assumptions (spirits, magic, life after death, et cetera) and "science fiction," based upon scientific or pseudo-scientific assumptions (space travel, time-travel, extraterrestrial life, telepathy, robots, et cetera)" (Bretnor 121). de Camp does not refer to Tolkien here, but his views that a fantasy story must show great "care in details" (123) and may use "some fictional prehistoric civilization" seem to echo Tolkien's in "OFS" (e.g. TL 36-7,45).

Robert Heinlein also considers "fantasy" literature to mean "imaginary-and-not-possible," whereas "science fiction" belongs in the class of literature that is "imaginary-but-possible" (Davenport 18). He cites as examples of fantasy his story "Magic, Inc." and Eddison's The Worm Ouroboros (19). Reginold Bretnor seems to agree with de Camp and Heinlein: "fantasy accepts all its off-map [i.e. non-real] phenomena uncritically, but science fiction must at least extrapolate a partial 'new map' of its own to account for them" (287). While neither of these authors mentions Tolkien's work, their definitions of "fantasy" can accommodate both Hobbit and LR. And, more importantly, these authors have set out to specify fantasy as a genre distinctive from other forms of "fantastic" literature; this is something that neither Forster nor Derleth chose to do.

Edmund Fuller was both an early critic of Tolkien and a commentator on "fantasy" or the "fantastic." By using ideas drawn from "OFS," and considering the works of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams particularly, Fuller notes that "fantasy," though
it appears in many forms (e.g. fairy-tales, science fiction), must be purposeful and enchanting:

What concerns us here is ... solely the consciously projected, controlled literary fantasy. ... The response to fantasy requires the preservation of the sense of wonder, a ready acceptance, and a self-giving. Some people cannot or will not enter its world. ... If you bring nothing into the world of wonder you will go away from it unfilled. (135-9)

Fuller does not exclude bizarre or horrific works set in modern times as fine "fantastic" tales; still, he positions the wondrous "Secondary World" as the key aspect that facilitates "Uncorrupted" fantasy, which (in Tolkien's terms) "does not seek delusion, nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves" (TL 50). Fuller concludes that Tolkien's LR is a "most special case;" while it can be called "a romance, a saga, an epic, or a fairy tale," it is still "a novel, atypical, indeed unique, though it is" (142).

In his landmark essay, Witold Ostrowski attempts to isolate why a text is termed either "fantastic" or "realistic." He notes that beliefs in magic vary among eras and cultures, and what people may believe to be "real" or "unreal" has changed throughout history (54). He proposes, then, a model for realistic fiction and considers that any divergence from this displays elements of the "fantastic." The basic factors are "characters (matter + consciousness)" in a "world of things (matter + space) in action regulated by causation and/or purpose in time" (57). He provides a diagram for his model, but it is just as convenient to devise a sentence of "realistic" fiction and alter it to make it appear "fantastic." For example, "Bill Johnson, living today in Toronto, walked to the shop to buy some milk in the morning;" this is what Ostrowski would term as something "everyday," "typical," or "familiar." Now, if I alter everything I produce a "fantastic" text: "A Never-was being, living in Never-was world, flew to a land mass in the sky to concoct a magic potion at Never-was
time." Further, if I just change one or two aspects and leave everything else the same, Ostrowski would consider that this also displays the "fantastic" (e.g. "A Never-was being, living today in Toronto, ..." or "Bill Johnson, living in Never-was world ...," etc.). He concludes that "it is easy to realize how many ways lead to wonderland" (57).

This model has merits for its inclusiveness but its very generality can minimize the importance of variations in the forms of "fantasy" or "fantastic" literature. Ostrowski may have been more methodical than Forster or Derleth, yet he is not much more definitive. Ostrowski observes that texts as diverse as Gulliver's Travels, "Snow White," Alice in Wonderland, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and The Time Machine all exhibit aspects of the "fantastic" (60-2). However, the disparities in tone, structure, and setting of these works are extensive as well. Irony and social satire abound in Swift's text, while "Snow White" appears ingenuous and archetypal. Stevenson's tale is situated in 19th-century England, whereas Wells's time-travel story posits different societies over vast stretches of time. All of Ostrowski's examples have the appearance of the strange or extraordinary in common, but the differences can be equally or more pronounced.

Furthermore, while Ostrowski notes Lewis's and Charles Williams's works, he does not mention Tolkien's fiction or ideas.5 Ostrowski's views on the necessity of realistic detail to support a fantasy construct (63-4) essentially parallel Tolkien's (TL 51). Ostrowski does try to be more specific by listing five ways a writer may consider the verity of his fiction's alternative world; the third one appears close to Tolkien's aims: "The writer does not suggest that his fantastic world may come true, but he wishes to show what might happen if it came to objective existence" (67). However, the examples he cites, such as The War of the Worlds or The Day of the Triffids, do not postulate a "Secondary World" in Tolkien's sense (TL 36-7), but rather speculate on a possible future "Primary World" reality. Thus, in short, Ostrowski presents pertinent ideas on the "fantastic," but his model does not draw
attention to the distinctive nature of "fantasy" as Tolkien and successive authors have considered it.

Lloyd Alexander, a notable author of "fantasy," comments on the nature of the form in "Wishful Thinking—or Hopeful Dreaming." He echoes Lewis in defending fantasy literature against charges that it is inferior because it is not "naturalistic" (Boyer 143). He thinks all art, "by definition, is fantasy in the broadest sense," and one might "define realism as fantasy pretending to be true; and fantasy as reality pretending to be a dream" (143). Alexander is more detailed in his views on the literary concept, including Tolkien's central importance, in "High Fantasy and Heroic Romance." Again, like Lewis, he mentions classic literature (e.g. Beowulf, the Eddas) and post-18th-century writers (e.g. Morris, Dunsany), and remarks: "Of course, heroic romance is the basis of the superb achievements of J.R.R. Tolkien" (171). Alexander proposes that this genre "as we know it today" is "the form of the novel using epic, saga, ... and within the conventions of an earlier body of literature and legend, draw[n] from a common source: the 'Pot of Soup,' as Tolkien calls it" (171).

Lin Carter was also deeply interested in these conventions of ancient literature, the "bones" of a 20th-century fantasy story's "Soup." He has written extensively on the appearance of elements of classic heroic texts in works considered "fantasy," most especially with regard to Tolkien. Carter wrote one of the first book-length studies on him: Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings". Carter thinks that Tolkien's fantasy exhibits the motifs and themes of works such as The Iliad, The Song of Roland, and Amadis of Gaul (1969a, 96-133). He discusses Tolkien's ideas in "OFS" and raises the point that "fantasy is a catch-all term that encompasses everything from Homer and Swift and Kafka to Poe, Milton, and The Turn of the Screw" (94). He thinks that any "genre so broad as to include both Dracula and Utopia demands further redefining" (94).

Carter distinguishes "fantasy" from other forms of
"fantastic" literature, such as the Gothic story, horror tale, or science fiction. After discussing in general some features of the classical epic, and medieval and Renaissance romances, he lists the elements of "heroic or epic fantasy."

... the concept of the imaginary world or land in which magic works and 'gods, ghosts, and gorgons' dwell; the twin themes of the wandering adventurer or quest hero and of the war between opposed forces; even the work of fantastic literature with all the scope and grandeur of an epic. (1969a, 134)

He considers William Morris to be the man who invented "fantasy" because he was the first "to draw these elements together from epic, saga, and romance and to reintroduce them into modern fiction" (134); furthermore, he concludes that the group Morris, Dunsany, and Eddison form "the precise tradition to which The Lord of the Rings belongs in every way" (151). Unlike some of the critics before him, Carter, by using Tolkien's ideas and fiction as his points of departure, clearly labels "fantasy" as a mode distinct from all its sources (e.g. epics, fairy-tales) and its supposedly kindred forms (e.g. Gothic romances, ghost stories).

Carter also wrote introductions for Ballantine Books' re-issues of the works of William Morris. In The Wood Beyond the World he repeats his definition of fantasy, emphasizing the importance of the "Secondary" world: "By fantasy, I mean the tale of quest, adventure or war set in an invented age and worldscape of the author's own imagination" (1969b, ix). When he mentions the "potentials of a ... carefully worked out context of subreality" (x), this parallels Tolkien's ideas on "Sub-creation" (e.g. TL 36-7).

This concept of a "subreality" becomes the central focus in Carter's most extensive book on the nature of the genre, Imaginary Worlds: The Art of Fantasy. He discusses many works from Morris to "the Tolkiens of today" (1973, 8). Carter consistently emphasizes the idea of an imaginary world; he states that this concept is what separates "fantasy" from the genres of the "scientific" or the "supernatural" because only
an "invented milieu" is a "literary universe in which magic works" (6). Since he thinks that in "the real world in which we live, magic does not work" (6), an imaginary world becomes a pre-requisite for a book to be called "fantasy." (Like Wells, Carter assumes too readily that "magic" does not "work" in our world.) And while Carter has negative views on some aspects of Tolkien's work, with regard to the depiction of a "secondary universe" he is unequivocal: "Tolkien's achievement is superlative, and ... in this sense, at least, I would say: yes, The Lord of the Rings is the greatest fantasy novel ever written" (124-5).

Hugh Crago also positions Tolkien as the focal point for his "Remarks on the Nature and Development of Fantasy" (Ryan 1969, 212-20). He begins by discussing the various kinds of wondrous settings evident in The Epic of Gilgamesh, Lucian's Satirical Sketches, The Odyssey, Yvain, fairy-stories, and the Gothic novel (212-15). He observes that elements of fantasy, such as exotic gardens or medieval castles, have been around for centuries but the "modern form" developed, somewhat paradoxically, when there developed a "gradual growth of rational disbelief in magic and superstition" (216). Crago explains:

But as the wonders that the men of earlier ages had confidently accepted as possible occurrences were reduced to other superstitions of ignorance by philosophers and scientists, they could be 'believed in' in another way—not as things in the real world, but as parts of a literally impossible but imaginatively consistent other-world. (216)

Again, I think that one should avoid a general claim that people no longer believe in "magic;" it is difficult to prove this view objectively. More to the point, Crago sees this emphasis on the "other-world" as the key change from previous literature which was set in the actual world, even though strange landscapes and phenomena often appeared. He defines "Fantasy ... as literature whose primary purpose is to appeal to the imagination," which arose in the nineteenth century with
"the growth of agnosticism and of science," as well as "the appearance of literature intended especially for children" (216).

Crago's definition, on the surface, is not much more exact than some others proposed because literature like ghost stories, vampire tales, or science fiction could "primarily appeal to the imagination." As well, I think that "impossible" is a poor choice of words in this context; no person can know for certain what was, is, or will be possible. However, the works that Crago discusses indicate that his notion of "fantasy" relates to alternative realm stories, such as those found in the books of Kingsley, Carroll, MacDonald, Morris, and Eddison (216-18). Crago closes with noting the landmark nature of Tolkien's work:

We can see, then, that The Hobbit is perhaps the first great world-creating children's book (MacDonald was not a world-creator, and the dream landscape of the Alice books is, as we have seen, something quite different from other imaginative creations) -- a fact that has been to a large extent obscured for us by its many imitators and successors. (219)

Perhaps Crago naturally considers Tolkien's fiction as the standard in "modern" fantasy given that his paper was part of a Tolkien symposium held in 1969. Still, his ideas parallel other critical views on Tolkien's central importance to the genre.

Tzvetan Todorov is one of the most influential theorists on the "fantastic" for a number of critics in the field. He seems to be credited with devising the concept of the "fantastic," even though MacDonald, Forster, Derleth, Read, Wells, all used the term, and Ostrowski made it the basis of his theoretical model. Like Carter, Todorov argues for a narrow definition because he thinks that to propose a "literary category" based solely on when "the supernatural intervenes" is not specific enough: "[A] genre ... would thereby have to accommodate Homer as well as Shakespeare, Cervantes as well as Goethe. The supernatural does not characterize works closely
enough, its extension is much too great" (34). His proposition is to consider the "fantastic" as the doubt or hesitation of the main character or reader or both as to actual presence of the supernatural:

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

So, unlike almost every commentator noted so far, Todorov considers "fantastic" literature to be that in which the supernatural is not plainly present. Forster has allowed for the fact that fantasy "need not express" the supernatural, but he includes stories where magic abounds. Todorov isolates what he calls "fantastic" literature from all tales where the supernatural co-exists with the ordinary.

It appears that Todorov is interested in certain kinds of texts, such as James' *The Turn of the Screw* or Poe's "The Black Cat" (43-8), and so has designed his genre definition around them. He does qualify his term by noting that the "fantastic ... seems to be located on the frontier of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny" (41); the latter describes texts where the reader has decided that the laws of reality remain intact and the indications of the supernatural have some (albeit often undetermined) rational explanation; the former describes texts where the reader accepts the appearance of the supernatural and new laws of existence must be entertained (41). Todorov further proposes "sub-genres" of this kind: the "hyperbolic, where entities are larger-than-life, but not magical (e.g. a fish which can swallow an elephant), the "exotic," where supernatural events are only reported but not presented, the "instrumental," where gadgets exist in a story which are not possible, especially for the current level of technology (e.g. the flying carpet in *Arabian Nights*), and, lastly, the "scientific," where "the supernatural is explained
in a rational manner, but according to laws which contemporary science does not acknowledge" (54-6). It is uncertain where Tolkien's fiction would fit into the above schema, especially since Todorov usually confines his distinctions to settings in our world. For him, the four types of the "marvelous" are "'excused,' justified, and imperfect" and "stand in opposition to the marvelous in its pure -- unexplained -- state" (57). If this "pure" state of the marvelous means "the supernatural accepted," rather than explained away (42), then perhaps in some sense this corresponds to other notions of "fantasy." Still, Todorov's definition for "fantastic" literature does not accommodate what Tolkien and others have described as literary "fantasy."

Jane Mobley, in her essay "Toward a Definition of Fantasy Fiction," places Tolkien's ideas at the centre of her analysis, though she is a little remiss in documenting her source. She begins by isolating "fantasy" from the general term "speculative," deeming that "fantasy depends on a conjunction of focus and form peculiar to itself" (117). She also states that "fantasy ..., as a fiction, ... requires the reader's entering an Other World and following a hero whose adventures take place in a reality far removed from the mundane reality of the reader's waking experience" (117). (Bretnor, Heinlein, Alexander, and Carter in addition to Tolkien all have offered similar characterizations.) Further, when she states that fantasy fiction "creates an absolute reality which is not contingent upon everyday reality, but is instead self-sustaining," and "I exclude dream fiction" (118), she echoes Tolkien's views without directly citing them (TL 45,17).

Mobley maintains that "fantasy" should be distinguished from other forms of non-realistic literature; other critics often leave this point unclear. She notes that in fantasy "the world evoked is magical and therefore not bound by our usual modes of discursive explanations, be they those of dreams, psychosis, physical nature, or science" (120). She stresses that the obvious presence of "Magic" is the key to fantasy and alludes to Tolkien's view regarding its "'indescribable, though
not imperceptible’” nature (120). Further, Mobley lists six aspects of fantasy which, while individually present in "other fictional forms," are "perhaps not in the exclusive conjunction that fantasy affords:" "Poetic quality," "Creation of Secondary Magical Worlds," "Multidimensionality," "Essential extravagance," "Spirit of carnival," and "Mythic dimension" (121-5). The first, second, and sixth features are likely self-evident (and have been considered by Lewis, Alexander, and Carter), yet the others might require further explanation. But rather than summarize too extensively here, I should note that Mobley set out to distinguish "fantasy" literature from other forms because she sensed it was being marginalized:

Those critics who have seen fantasy fiction chiefly as a minor form of speculative fiction often wind up naming its parts but missing the whole. Other critics who ‘do’ fantasy as as a habit of mind find themselves facing critical barriers and escape on the wings of metaphor, deserting us earth-bound and still without a concrete vocabulary. (127)

While the second part of her statement may not apply to Tolkien, Mobley has drawn attention to a lack of regard for fantasy literature by the critical community—something Tolkien had observed many years earlier (TL 45-6).

Northrop Frye also notes that fantasy literature, or in his terms "twentieth century romance," has been subject to critical prejudice, particularly because of its popular nature (1976, 23-31). Frye is concerned with romance structures, such as those evident in Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Morris. Yet he observes that "fantastic" literature is often not deemed worthy of regard:

This leads to a general distinction between serious and responsible literature on the one hand, and the trifling and fantastic on the other. Again, these are not literary categories, or qualities inherent in literary works themselves. They are primary elements of the social acceptance of or response to literature. (1976, 17)
Frye contextualizes his ideas on romance (or fantasy) in opposition to realism: "The realistic tendency moves in the direction of the representational and the displaced, the romantic tendency in the opposite direction, concentrating on the formulaic units of myth and metaphor" (37). While Frye does not focus on Tolkien or his successors, he acknowledges the central significance of Tolkien’s work. For instance, Frye recognizes that after _LR_ had appeared the roots of 20th-century romance suddenly had become noticeable: "On the T.S. Eliot principle that every writer creates his own tradition, the success of Tolkien’s book helped to show that the tradition behind it ... was, if not ‘the great’ tradition, a tradition nonetheless" (43). Although he states that this tradition is of more interest to him than Tolkien is, Frye credits _LR_ for giving romance "a new lease of fashion" in this century (4).

In _Modern Fantasy_, C.N. Manlove shows no awareness of other fantasy critics (besides Tolkien and Lewis), though he thinks that his study perhaps fills a "gap." He states: "Modern fantasy has a very large readership, and already enjoys considerable academic repute, particularly in America: it is surprising that as yet no serious study of the subject has appeared" (1975, vii). It is not clear what he means by "serious." If it is something considered not "comic" or "mock," then he was mistaken; others provided astute studies before Manlove. If he means, "academically-acceptable in Britain," then that is matter for debate elsewhere. In any case, Manlove’s book comprises studies of Kingsley, MacDonald, Lewis, Tolkien, and Peake, rather than a theoretical analysis. His definition of "fantasy" is familiar:

> A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the reader or the characters within the story become on at least familiar terms. (10-11)

The core of this was discussed by Tolkien, Lewis, Alexander, Carter, Crago, and Mobley before Manlove.

Manlove attempts to distinguish "fantasy" from other forms
of "fantastic" literature. He qualifies his idea of "impossible" by noting that he means "of another order of reality from that in which we exist and form our notions of possibility," (3)—which a Secondary World posits by its very presence in a tale. His condition of "evoking wonder" is less adequately explained. Any text may or may not evoke "wonder," from a historical book to a realistic novel to a science fiction story. Manlove supports his view (7) with reference to Tolkien's idea of "the primal desire at the heart of Faerie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder" (TL 18). Tolkien makes these remarks when giving reasons for excluding "dream fiction" from his description of a "fairy-story," while Manlove uses them to distinguish "fantasy" from "science fiction" (7). His source could have been helpful for him, but his usage in this context is questionable.

I shall consider Manlove's lengthy discussion of Tolkien in a later chapter. Here, I should point out where Manlove is seminal in his views: he is among the first fantasy critics to disparage Tolkien's work. While Manlove acknowledges Tolkien's great success and widespread appeal, he engages in "armchair" philosophy (his term) and thinks "one should hazard a guess" at reasons for Tolkien's prominence, such as "the perennial American longing for roots" or the British "following the fashion" (157). Furthermore, Manlove states that Malory's epic brings "poignancy to the story" because of "the sheer number of pages the reader has to turn," but not "Tolkien's book, for we have never been very much involved anyway" (206). As Shippey observes, who are this "'we'? Readers of Modern Fantasy? Readers of The Lord of the Rings? There is no sensible answer to the question" (1992, 2). It is critical sleight-of-hand to disguise a personal lack of involvement (or enjoyment) in a text by using the rhetorical "we." Manlove concludes that it "is possible that his [Tolkien's] work becomes facile and weak because of an over-simple judgement on the modern world which is its source and end" (206). Any reaction to a text, of course, is "possible;" but a work "becomes facile and weak"
only when a judgement is passed, as Frye notes (see above, p. 31). Manlove appears to consider that his view of Tolkien’s work is a widely accepted assessment.

Eric Rabkin is another fantasy theorist who displays little awareness of the relevant critics before him, except Tolkien and Todorov. He attempts a metacritical approach to the “fantastic” in literature, which prompted R.D. Mullen to title his review of Rabkin’s book, “Every Critic His Own Aristotle.” Rabkin begins by proposing that Alice’s surprise at a speaking Tiger-lily indicates “the fantastic contradicts perspectives” (3-4). He thinks that her astonishment “signals the fantastic” because, given advancements in science which suggest plants might be able to communicate, “we moderns can see such phenomena as perfectly orderly, as unexpected but nicely complementary data in the notebook of the world’s experience” (3-4). Again, here is that troublesome rhetorical “we.” I (as a modern of sorts) do not see Alice’s talking plant as a “perfectly orderly” experience. Plants lack the anatomical apparatus to produce human speech, and so a talking plant should be “fantastic,” supernatural, or magical from any perspective. Whether plants can communicate in a way similar to cats when they want nourishment is a completely different issue. Plants likely did not, do not, and will not talk like humans; if they do so in a story, they are inherently a fantasy element—not just because of the character’s shock or surprise. A human from the deep jungle might believe a voice contained in a box is magical, but radios are not “fantastic” because there is a technical explanation for the phenomenon. It seems that in an effort to be ground-breaking, Rabkin has posed a doubtful critical perspective.

Rabkin quotes Tolkien’s “OFS” but does not use his stories to explicate theoretical ideas. Rabkin refers widely to the works of MacDonald, Carroll, Morris, and Wells, as well as many other writers. He considers the “fantastic” as a mode or motif, rather than a genre label for a certain group of literary works:
The fantastic is a quality of astonishment that we feel when the ground rules of a narrative world are suddenly made to turn 180°.... In more or less degree, a whole range of narratives uses the fantastic. And at the far end of this range, we find Fantasy, the genre whose center and concern, whose primary enterprise, is to present and consider the fantastic. (41)

Like Ostrowski's, Rabkin's notion of the "fantastic" may be more detailed than Forster's but it is not more definitive.

W.R. Irwin considers the issue of the "fantastic" vs. "fantasy," and he appears to counter Rabkin's perspective and to re-express Tolkien's. Irwin thinks that confusion has resulted in literary criticism because some have equated the "fantastic" with fantasy: "the fantastic ... is not of itself a literary form, and its presence, even preponderance, in a narrative does not necessarily make a fantasy" (1976, 8). He agrees with Rabkin that the fantastic appears in works as different as an epic and a farce, but Irwin states that Carroll's Alice books are "not typical" or "orthodox" fantasy (x). Focusing on content alone, Irwin thinks, is an error when deciding what is or is not a "fantasy." Thus he proposes a definition to highlight the importance of a certain kind of rhetoric:

... a fantasy is a story based on and controlled by the overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into 'fact' itself .... In this effort, writer and reader knowingly enter upon a conspiracy of intellectual subversiveness, that is, upon a game [which] ... must be continuous and coherent. (4-9)

Irwin distinguishes "fantasy" from the "fantastic" in order to provide a detailed view of the genre divergent from those of others such as Forster or Todorov.

Furthermore, Irwin attempts "to demonstrate that ghost stories, fairy tales, gothic romances, beast fables, pornographic stories, and works of science fiction usually are not fantasies" (89-100). Irwin's view of literary fantasy,
though, is quite broad for he includes works as diverse as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Orlando*, *The Hobbit*, and *That Hideous Strength*. In this list, only Tolkien's book presents a Secondary World, while the others posit alternative modes of existence set in the Primary World. Still, Irwin has drawn attention to the special kind of rhetoric of fantasy which other critics often gloss over or completely ignore.

Ursula Le Guin is certainly one of the most eloquent and influential authors and critics of fantasy and science fiction. In *The Language of the Night*, she addresses the question, "'Dragons and hobbits and little green men--what's the use of it?''' She answers: "'The use of imaginative fiction is to deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own feelings, and your destiny'" (34-5). She alludes to her own work to describe the nature of fantasy, and time and time again invokes Tolkien's name for further illustration. When discussing the created languages of her fiction, she notes: "It's not like Tolkien, who in one sense wrote *The Lord of the Rings* to give his invented languages somebody to speak them. That is lovely, that is the Creator Spirit working absolutely unhindered--making the word flesh" (42).

Perhaps Le Guin's most important contribution to the concepts of literary fantasy is her analysis of its special prose style. By the time Le Guin was writing her essays, the conventions of fantasy (e.g. invented world, magical beings, etc.,) had begun to emerge. In "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," Le Guin develops the view that good fantasy requires a carefully-wrought tone and diction. She quotes from a book by Katherine Kurtz and changes the excerpt only slightly; the result is that the altered version, though now set in modern-day Washington, sounds virtually the same as the original. Le Guin remarks:

The book from which I first quoted is not fantasy, for all its equipment of heroes and wizards. If it was fantasy, I couldn't have pulled that dirty trick on it by changing four words. You can't clip Pegasus' wings that easily--not if he has wings.
... in this book something good has gone wrong—something real has been falsified.
... I think it is the style. (72-3)

Le Guin then offers three examples from Eddison, Kenneth Morris, and Tolkien to emphasize the importance of a fine literary language for a work of fantasy to be effective. She concludes her analysis with a comment on Tolkien's style: "Its outstanding virtue is its flexibility, its variety. It ranges easily from the commonplace to the stately, and can slide into metrical poetry" (79). Le Guin would reject many claims (e.g. Moorcock's) that Tolkien is not a fine writer.

This aspect of style is a key point, though extremely elusive, in the history of commentary on fantasy. From Read to Irwin some critics have discussed it, though often inadequately. According to Le Guin, if the characters are required to speak and act in a way different from those of the work's initial audience, then a story set in the contemporary, actual world—even those that have the presence of the supernatural—is not true literary fantasy. Tales where ghosts or angels or other magical phenomena appear in real, historically identifiable settings could be considered "fantastic" but not "fantasy." Le Guin clearly states that a special style, a certain tone and diction, is vital because "in fantasy there is nothing but the writer's vision of the world. There is no borrowed reality of history, or current events, or just plain folks at home in Peyton Place" (81). She also thinks that if the vocabulary is too "anachronistic" or "a bit heavy on the ichor," this can impinge on our acceptance of the "book as fantasy" (81). Some sort of balance between eloquent prose and accessible language, however difficult that is to achieve, is absolutely required. And, to reinforce her convictions, Le Guin cites an appropriate source:

To create what Tolkien calls "a secondary universe" is to make a new world. A world where no voice has ever spoken before; where the act of speech is the act of creation. The only voice that speaks there is the creator's voice. And every word counts. (81)
In *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers*, L. Sprague de Camp considers the difference between the barbarians of some "sword-and-sorcery fiction," who often act like "overgrown juvenile delinquents," and those heroes of "epics," who "strike nobly self-sacrificing attitudes, go on long solitary quests, and converse with supernatural beings" (26-7). He seems to distinguish literary fantasy from those represented by "dime novels" (30). After tracing the publishing history of works that he considers to be "fantasy," de Camp states:

For a decade after 1945, all fantasy fared badly. With the end in 1954 of *Weird Tales* and the failure of its would-be successors, it seemed as if fantasy had become a casualty of the Machine Age. Then came a surprising revival, beginning with the publication of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. (30)

Here, and elsewhere, he clearly acknowledges Tolkien’s importance.

In contrast, Michael Moorcock in *Wizardry and Wild Romance: A Study of Epic Fantasy* appears to go out of his way to belittle and even censure Tolkien’s work. Moorcock starts off with rather unpromising remarks: "I have no intention in this book of 'defining' the term epic fantasy. Neither do I expect my polemics to convince anyone already opposed to my points of view" (13). It is difficult to consider "a study of epic fantasy" judiciously if the author begins in a flippant and dismissive way. Still, Moorcock displays a great deal of pertinent knowledge by discussing the origins of 20th-century fantasy. Although he appears to seize any opportunity to be derisive of Tolkien, he finds himself continually forced to come to terms with Tolkien’s work (e.g. 15,17,22,59,74,126). Moorcock quotes a letter from Fritz Leiber to Lin Carter on Tolkien’s weaknesses (44-5), but ignores the many views on his strengths. Clearly, Moorcock’s negative comments on Tolkien derive from personal taste rather than from an objective analysis:

Doubtless Tolkien will also inspire writers who will take his raw materials and put
them to nobler uses. I would love to believe that the day of the rural romance is done at last. (139)

In his first book on the literary form, Brian Attebery uses the term "high fantasy" in order to separate a certain group of works from tales of fantasy in general; he states "fantasy" must satisfy the "single condition, that a story treat an impossibility as if it were true" (1980, 2-3). He thinks that the "simpler the definition, the more room it leaves for subclassification and evaluation," and calls Todorov's and Rabkin's approaches "limited" (3). Attebery considers that the works of Ruskin, MacDonald, Morris, Lewis, and Tolkien "outline a natural progression in the development of literary fantasy from recounted folktale" and "show an important consistency" in five particulars: "setting, structural framework, role and character of the protagonist, types of secondary characters, and ways of tying events to values and ideas" (12). Of the five, only the last focuses on thematic concerns. The first four refer to the postulating of an "Other World," the motifs of quest and adventure, the presence of an "ordinary hero" who is "lucky and clever," and the appearance of strange beings and beasts (e.g. elves, goblins) (12-13). Attebery qualifies his fifth "particular" by stating that in "most fantasies there is a strong polarization of good and evil, so that the hero's quest concerns not only his own coming of age but also the fate of the kingdom" (13). Further, he thinks that acts "in a fantasy are always meaningful, because everything connects with, or signifies, everything else" (13-14). When he uses the words "most fantasies," it is apparent that for Attebery the term should mainly be applied to the works of Tolkien and his direct predecessors, contemporaries, and successors.

While Attebery's chief concern here is fantasy in the American tradition, he clearly places Tolkien at the centre of his ideas. Like Irwin, and unlike Manlove, Attebery unequivocally notes Tolkien's eminence:

J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy The Lord of the
Rings, compared to others, is an achievement of such magnitude and assurance that it seems to reshape all definitions of fantasy to fit itself. Indeed, no important work of fantasy written after Tolkien is free of his influence, and many are merely halting imitations of his style and substance.

Attebery further comments on the importance of Tolkien's tone and diction, seemingly echoing Le Guin: "Like Morris, ... he developed a lofty style for presenting heroic materials, though Tolkien's benefits from a counterbalancing style, comic and familiar, used primarily for hobbit doings" (11). When Attebery considers the future of American fantasy, he clearly positions Tolkien as the standard: "The fantasies, ... if they can learn from Le Guin as she learned from Tolkien, without being overwhelmed, will arise from as yet unguessable troubles within American life" (186).

In stark contrast to Attebery, Rosemary Jackson disregards Tolkien's prominent position. For her, "fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss" (3). Jackson appears to diverge from many commentators, from Tolkien to Attebery, in suggesting,

Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently 'new', absolutely 'other' and different. (8)

If her notion of a "non-human world" signifies a realm where "non-humans" exist, then it is not clear why a story set in an invented world could not invert elements of our world, or re-combine them, "to produce something strange" or "other." Perhaps the key point is that "fantasy" is "not transcendental;" that is, readers perceive the fantasy world as their own, not someone else’s, even as they recognize the reformulation of basic elements. In any case, Jackson appears
to favour "fantasy" stories set in our world (e.g. Gothic tales) over "other world" stories, such as Tolkien's or Le Guin's.

Jackson qualifies her views by calling Tolkien's works "faery" or "romance" literature. Jackson appears to be proposing different terms rather than new theoretical concepts. She states:

It is possible, then, to modify Todorov's scheme slightly and to suggest a definition of the fantastic as a mode, which then assumes different generic forms. Fantasy as it emerged in the nineteenth century is one of these forms. It seemed to become a genre in its own right because of its extremely close relation to the form of the novel, a genre it undermined. (35)

While nothing here would seem to exclude Tolkien, Jackson uses subtle and obvious phrases to disparage him. She states that her focus on such works as Gothic tales does not derive "simply through prejudice" (9) yet then claims Tolkien reinforces "a blind faith in 'eternal' moral values, really those of an outworn liberal humanism;" for her, Tolkien's popularity "indicates the strength of a romance tradition supporting a ruling ideology" (155). Jackson's concepts of "fantasy" evidently depend on socio-political ideas apart from standard motifs or conventions (e.g. "magic").

Ann Swinfen, on the other hand, considers Tolkien's work to be the best exemplar of the genre. Her perspective on "fantasy" is essentially dependent on Tolkien's writings. She begins by noting that while certain "academics condemn the whole genre," Tolkien "made fantasy 'respectable'," which previous authors "had not been able to do since the growth and dominance of the realist novel" (1). Further, she states "that an understanding of Tolkien's conception of fantasy becomes indispensable for an understanding of the genre" (4). Finally, her definition of "fantasy" re-expresses Tolkien's:

In this study the term 'fantasy' will be taken to mean both the sub-creative art, with its quality of strangeness and wonder,
and the kind of novels which such art produces. The essential ingredient of all fantasy is the 'marvellous,' which will be regarded as anything outside the normal space-time continuum of the everyday world. (5)

Swinfen excludes science fiction, yet includes "animal fantasy" (e.g. The Wind in the Willows) and stories that depict "worlds in parallel" (e.g. the Alice books), "where the primary world and otherworlds are juxtaposed" (10). While her range of texts is broader than Tolkien's, she firmly accepts his general ideas and notes that the "pure secondary world fantasy [e.g. LR], some would argue, provides the highest expression of imaginative creation in this genre" (10).

Critics from Mobley through Irwin to Jackson have excluded certain texts from their notions of fantasy for various, and sometimes conflicting, reasons. Kathryn Hume takes the opposite approach. She offers an "inclusive definition," one that does not "avoid other definitions" but rather "includes their specifications" (20). She thinks that critics "must start instead from the assumption that literature is the product of both mimesis and fantasy, and talk about mimetic and fantastic elements in any one work" (my emphasis; 21). Her definition, then, labels "fantasy" as a "impulse" instead of a genre:

Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor. It includes transgressions of what one generally takes to be physical facts such as human immortality, travel faster than light, telekinesis, and the like. (21)

Hume's approach collapses all the distinctions previous commentators have made among works such as ghost stories, science fiction, vampire tales, and heroic or "high" fantasy. With "fantasy" considered to be an aspect which exists alongside "mimesis," Hume levels the field to accommodate Homer, Langland, Richardson, Tolstoy, Donaldson and almost every writer.

Furthermore, Hume does not really go beyond the model
described by Ostrowski; her book is far more expansive and
comprehensive than his essay, but the approach is essentially
the same. Hume states that an "inclusive definition cannot
confine itself to treating fantasy as a genre (Todorov) or even
as a mode (Jackson)" (24). She notes some of Tolkien's ideas,
though she does not hide her general dislike of his fiction.
Hume adopts Tolkien's view that fantasy is "a natural human
activity" (24) and does not dismiss his point that "fairy
tales" offer joy to the reader (16, 26). But she disparages his
fiction with complaints, such as the "Shire is not economically
viable," "the wealthy families have money but no source for
it," "an artistic flaw is the ineffectuality of evil," "the
fellowship of the ring is too little damaged," and concludes
that "[h]eroism that exacts no price loses its meaning" (47).

For all her claims towards inclusiveness and objectivity,
Hume slides into mere opinion and displays a superficial
knowledge of her primary texts. Tolkien, who did not think
that his world's economy was perfectly conceived, actually
provides details on the hobbits' agrarian and manorial ways of
life (FR 22-9). Sam, Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, Merry, and
Pippin live on at the end, but Frodo is physically and
psychologically wounded from his trials and indeed must "give
up" life on Middle-earth with his beloved friends (RK 376).
The heroism of the elves, especially that of Elrond and
Galadriel, exacts a tremendous price: loss of their cherished
homelands and a sorrowful separation from their loved ones (RK
310, 316). Since Hume has set out to discuss the presence of
"fantasy" in Western literature, she should properly represent
the content of her chosen texts.

While there certainly have been other critical studies of
"fantasy" after Hume, many of them offer discussions in their
own specific terms. Titles such as Tobin Sieber's The Romantic
Fantastic, Don D. Elgin's The Comedy of the Fantastic, and
Lynette Hunter's Modern Allegory and Fantasy highlight
specialized approaches. Indeed, Hume's model is as wide open
as is possible, and so any successive critic can only narrow
the focus. Still, the disparities as to what actually
constitutes "fantasy" remain. William Touponce comments that conflicting critical views indicate that "everyone is his own Aristotle" (xiii). In 1986, Gary Wolfe stated that "the study of fantasy is far from a settled matter, still very much fragmented by the various communities that have given rise to it, and still uncertain in its critical vocabulary" (xxv). Before finishing this overview, I will briefly consider a couple of discussions published in the 1990s. Despite a virtual mountain of commentary (or, perhaps, because of it), the nature of "fantasy" continues to be elusive.

In the introduction to The Oxford Book of Fantasy Stories, Shippey shows little regard for "current academic definitions" (1994, xi), even though he is a renowned academic in the field himself. He states that "fantasy" defined as a "'saga of old times'" is "much more useful as a guide" than some others "which leave one wondering whether those who produce them ever stray into an ordinary bookshop at all" (xi). He thinks that the Todorov model is too narrow and the "'known-to-be-impossible'" definition (e.g. Hume) is too broad, since it includes "all the ancestor-genres of fairy-tale and romance and the rest;" "modern fantasy" is "still recognizably not the same thing" (xii). Shippey suggests that "fantasy," while in kinship with ghost, horror, 'strange,' and Gothic tales, has the "closest relationship" to modern science fiction because each genre "helped to define the other" (xii-xiii). Shippey considers that historical forces, as well as inherent features of the works, have shaped the present publishing phenomenon: "Modern fantasy is above all a reaction to scientific advance and the general spread of the scientific imagination" (xiii).

Shippey distinguishes modern fantasy from 19th-century "'genteel' fantasy" because the latter merely invokes the supernatural and goes no further, while the former wishes "to control, to explore, to discover the rules and absorb the implications of the other world which produces fantastic events" (xiv). Since he includes stories set in our world, Shippey does not consider a Secondary World setting to be absolutely required for "fantasy." His emphasis seems to be on
how the work has brought the supernatural or impossible "into some accommodation with the rational and the scientific" (xv). He thinks that even the sword and sorcery "fantasy sub-genre" challenges the rationalistic world, while still re-affirming the "ordinary, non-magical, human powers of courage, pity, self-control, common sense" (xvi). Shippey properly considers such factors as literary history instead of merely making individual preferences. And he draws attention to one key factor ignored by so many other critics, "tone: appallingly hard to strike truly, correspondingly valued when it is reached" (xx). Shippey concludes that though fantasy provides "millions of readers a distinctive literary reward," it is "a pity to see this so continually neglected, and even despised, by modern academic criticism" (xxi).

When Shippey noted in 1994 that "future definitions and discussions of fantasy should pay some attention to common usage and current practice" (xxii), it was as if he had in mind studies like Yuan Yuan's. In 1995, Yuan published a 197-page book called The Discourse of Fantasy, and did not mention a single work in the genre's tradition, from George MacDonald through C.S. Lewis to Stephen Donaldson or Guy Gavriel Kay. As well, neither Tolkien's ideas on fantasy nor his fiction is mentioned. Yuan reviews some definitions but discredits them because "all inform a principle of negativity and relativity in response to a privileged reference of authority" (5). His solution, then, is to refuse to define fantasy at all:

As a mode without preconceived models, fantasy is discursive and elusive in nature. It is simply absurd to attempt to master fantasy by confining it within a single system in a monologic form. Instead, what we need is a postmodern dissemination and uncertainty. (20)

Many critics would likely agree it is not easy to specify "fantasy" in plain, concrete terms, as the foregoing overview clearly exhibits.

However, Yuan cannot escape defining fantasy because he indeed does so, albeit obscurely, through his "need" to label
it "indefinite" (20); this word signifies that some things are definite. Yuan further states: "In short, the in(de)finite intertextual play characterizes the essential nature of the fantastic discourse in the postmodern era" (20). Far from being "indefinite" or indeterminate, Yuan sets up firm criteria. His book's title indicates a broad view, yet he confines his ideas to a single perspective on textual response, chooses only three authors to discuss (two of whom are non-English), and situates the genre in exclusively contemporary times. Ironically, Yuan closes his study with the question "The End of Fantasy?" (185); his view of the concept, by leaving everything "indefinite," signals an end to any attempt to define "fantasy." And yet, interestingly, Yuan begins to answer his own question with the words "I believe;" apparently, even for him, some things, if not "definite," are at least believable.

In his consideration of the critical notion of "realism," René Wellek concludes that because there are so many disparate views of the concept critics would be better off without the term (255). After reflecting on this overview of discussions of "fantasy," one might come to the same conclusion. While the authors of "fantasy," from Tolkien to Moorcock, generally agree on some conventions (e.g. magic, alternative world, special literary style), Shippey's appeal for criticism to take account of "common usage" seems to be exhibited only by some critics, such as Crago, Mobley, Manlove, Attebery, and Swinfen. Others such as Todorov, Jackson, Hume, and Yuan have given slight regard to "current practice." What most authors have called the "fantasy" genre, other critics have labelled "the fantastic," "the marvellous," "modern romance," "game of the impossible," "fabulation," "poetics of reverie," "the unreal," and "modern allegory." As well, adjectives such as "modern," "romantic," "realistic," "scientific," "orthodox," "heroic," "high," "low," "mythological," "faery," "animal," and "genteel" have been used to distinguish kinds of "fantasy." As some commentators have implied, it is difficult to regard "fantasy" as a stable and coherent literary concept when many critics
propose to be the Aristotle of their genre.\textsuperscript{9}

Since the focus in this study is on Tolkien and his views of fantasy, it is appropriate now to consider them closely. Whatever various critics have stated about Tolkien’s merits, most have acknowledged his ideas are fundamental to an understanding of “fantasy,” most particularly of the kind which he studied and wrote. Even some of Tolkien’s severest detractors (e.g. Manlove, Moorcock, Jackson, Hume) cannot escape coming to terms with his ideas and fiction.
Notes

1 Neither Forster nor Read is generally considered to form a major part of the "fantasy" literature tradition. However, Forster’s supernatural tale "The Celestial Omnibus" does reflect his definition of "fantasy;" Read’s novel The Green Child, according to Boyer/Zahorski, is considered to be an "intriguing fantasy," the "work by which he will be best remembered" (43).

2 I use the 1964 version of "On Fairy-Stories" ("OFS") found in Tree and Leaf (TL); I shall note those places (which are relatively minor) where the 1964 text of "OFS" differs from the 1947 text. Also, I use this form when citing Tolkien’s letters: (L p.#).

3 In "The Fantastic Imagination," MacDonald comments on the creative process with regard to the invention of an "imagined world." He states that once a writer has offered this alternative realm, he must maintain "harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist;" as well, the "moment he forgets of them, he makes the story, by its own postulates, incredible," and if those "laws of existence" are "broken, we fall out of it" (314-15). The concept of an internally consistent "Secondary" world has become a hallmark in discussions of literary fantasy.

4 See MacDonald (314-15) and Tolkien (TL 44-5).

5 Since Ostrowski had read Lewis’s books, it seems likely that he would have had access to Tolkien’s work in Poland. The Polish translations of Hobbit and LR both appeared in 1960 (Carpenter 1992, 269,271).

6 In Thomas Clareson’s edited collection of essays on fantasy and science fiction, Julius Kagarlitski (29-52) and Rudolf Schmerl (105-115) also use issues of "realism" to discuss aspects of "fantasy."

7 Other titles include Toupance’s Ray Bradbury and the Poetics of Reverie, Kroeber’s Romantic Fantasy and Science Fiction, and Slusser’s and Rabkin’s Mindscapes: The Geographies of Imagined Worlds.

8 Orson Scott Card has considered "fantasy" as a genre distinctive from "science fiction," taking account of the related forms (e.g. "Gothic" romances, "horror" tales), and the dictates of editors and publishers (4-25).

9 For other views of the genre (and Tolkien) that are "complex and elusive," see the essay collection Bridges to Fantasy, edited by Slusser, Rabkin, and Scholes.
Chapter Two: The Nature of Tolkienian Fantasy

Now it happened on a certain time that a traveller from far countries, a man of great curiosity, was by desire of strange lands and the ways and dwellings of unaccustomed folk brought in a ship as far west even as the Lonely Island, Tol Eressea in the fairy speech, but which the Gnomes call Dor Faidwen, the Land of Release, and a great tale hangs thereto. 1

Many of the views of literary "fantasy" are often elusive and obscure, but there are some common touchstones. Clearly, one of the most significant is the central position of Tolkien's work. Carter credits Morris with inventing modern fantasy and uses his fiction to develop a definition of the form (1969a, 134). Morris's work is indeed seminal to 20th-century fantasy, a fact that Tolkien himself acknowledged. Still, in The Young Magicians, Carter situates Tolkien's work as the standard in the genre: "By 'Tolkienian' Fantasy, I mean ... stories more or less similar in style, mood and setting to J.R.R. Tolkien's magnificent fantasy epic LOTR" (1969c, 1). Before Tolkien there was little criticism of "fantasy," and the literary form did not have the acceptance that it has today. Charles Cornwell observes that the impact of LR and "On Fairy-Stories" have "encouraged critics to regard works of fantasy in Tolkienian terms" (1). It does seem that no other single author's work in the genre has been so influential. Even given the dismissive views of some critics (e.g. Manlove, Jackson, Moorcock), a good knowledge of Tolkien's work, both his fiction and non-fiction, is essential for scholarship of fantasy literature.

While "On Fairy-Stories" is the most important of Tolkien's non-fiction writings for issues of fantasy, some of his other scholarly works complement the ideas expressed in this key essay. Tolkien's discussions of heroic literature, such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Beowulf, and The Battle of Maldon, provide further insight into the basic features that constitute his views on the form. The Tolkienian
concept of "fantasy" is that of a story set in an imaginative realm in an ancient world, which has the clear presence of the magical or numinous co-existing rationally with the familiar and ordinary; in addition, the work should exemplify the narrative tone and structure found in the traditional forms of myth, epic, romance, saga, and fairy-tale; lastly, the story should attempt to inspire religious joy, wonder and enchantment in the reader. There have been numerous attempts to define "fantasy" in different terms, using either broader or narrower approaches. However, the Tolkienian concept, which has been echoed, cited, and developed by many successive critics of literary fantasy, should serve as a fundamental point of departure for criticism on Tolkien.

Before discussing Tolkien’s scholarly writings, I should mention one point that some recent critics often ignore: Tolkien was not an academic first and a creative writer second. The situation was rather the reverse. Tolkien was a published poet before he published scholarly work. He had written tales of great imagination years before he became a professor of English; Carpenter describes the background of Tolkien’s first writings (1992, 97-106), and West lists the details (1981, 1-2). As early as 1938, Tolkien stated in a letter printed in The Observer that Hobbit had links to the uncompleted “Silmarillion” materials (L 31); Christopher Tolkien has edited and published these manuscripts, which are later versions of the two books of “Lost Tales;” these stories were written in the period after Tolkien had returned from the Great War and before his first academic post. Johnson observes that Tolkien’s roles as a creative writer and a scholar were not separate but really “two parts of an indivisible whole” (ix); this view neatly avoids a circular argument with regard to Tolkien’s artistic development. While here the focus is on Tolkien’s critical ideas of “fantasy,” it should be noted that Tolkien had written such stories and conceived his mythological cosmos before his first major work of scholarship.

Tolkien’s edition of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, co-edited with E.V. Gordon and published in 1925, is the most
important of his early scholarly work. The "Introduction" reflects key interests of Tolkien:

The story ... has all the traditional elements which medieval authors had learned to excel in treating—marvellous adventure, courtly life, knightly love-making. It was, moreover, a story to call forth all that humanity which was the greatest virtue of the medieval romancer—a virtue which is usually overlooked. *Sir Gawain* is as human as Chaucer or Shakespeare or any modern romance. In spite of this humanity, it must not be forgotten that magic is a fundamental element in the plot. (xi)

Notice the emphasis on the "marvellous adventure," human nature, and magical aspects of the poem. It would be interesting to know which work Tolkien considered to be a "modern romance" (a Morris book is a good possibility). In any case, Tolkien was clearly attracted to certain features of *Gawain* which would later prominently appear in his own published fiction.

Tolkien and Gordon comment on other aspects that make the poem remarkable: its vivid description and English character. They state that the poet "has elaborated the whole setting with a richness of detail unusual in French romance," and that the story is handled "with a moral sensitiveness not to be matched in any of the analogues" (xvi). But perhaps the most significant comment, which can be regarded as self-reflexive for Tolkien, is that the "work indeed is not mere reproduction: it is a fresh creation" (xvi). Tolkien admires the poet for using literary sources and traditional poetic styles in such a combination to produce something unique and impressive. As well, he highlights the especially English nature of the work, which includes the allusions at the beginning and ending of the poem to the founding of Britain by Brutus (xvi). Tolkien's keen interest in the legendary past of his homeland would remain a fascination for him all his life.

These brief comments on *Gawain* note aspects that inform Tolkien's concepts of "fantasy:" adventure, heroic and "human" behaviour, the prominence of magic, and the aura of a distant
past age. As well, Tolkien and Gordon praise the poet’s concern for accurately presenting familiar and realistic details, such as the tactics of hunting, the service in a nobleman’s house, the latest castle architecture of his time, and the armour and gear of a knight (xx). Tolkien seems to value the poet’s attempts to make the bizarre magical events, like the beheading of the green “aghlich mayster” (l.136), appear plausible by situating them among common aspects of life, such as the tradition of feasting and games “vpon Cristmasse” (l.471). Interestingly, the closing comments on the Gawain-poet seem similar to critical remarks, such as those of Lewis, Alexander, Attebery, or Swinfen, on Tolkien: "Perhaps the only safe conclusion to be drawn about the poet from his poems is that he was a man of learning and genius" (xx).

Tolkien’s knowledge of philology is evident in essays written for The Year’s Work in English, where he reviews scholarship on the subject. While he does not focus on heroic literature, he displays a constant interest in the distant past: “[T]he pre-history of Europe and nearer Asia looms dark in the background, an intricate web, whose tangle we may now guess at, but hardly hope to unravel" (1926, 27). Throughout this 1926 paper, Tolkien makes further references to England’s pre-history, using revealing phrases such as "that phantom which becomes more and more elusive, and more alluring" (28), "the dark mystery" (39), "the remote and enchanted past" (49), and "the imagination of most people reacts quickest to the glimpses that are gained of England before the English-speakers" (58). When responding to a comment on English place names, Tolkien states, "this alone will show how essential it is for all who desire to probe into English origins to follow and weigh this and all succeeding volumes [i.e. records of place names]" (59). As he concludes this essay, Tolkien once more indirectly discloses his own interests when remarking on someone else’s work:

In other words this study is fired by the two emotions, love of the land of England,
and the allurement of the riddle of the past, that never cease to carry men through amazing, and most uneconomic, labours to the recapturing of fitful and tantalizing glimpses in the dark. (1926, 65)

Tolkien’s exhaustive work on his mytho-history, as he notes in a key letter (L 144-5), was “fired” by the same “emotions.”

Other Tolkien essays, which also allude to England’s remote past, show that this was a dominant concern for him. In “Ancrene Wisse and Hali Meðhad,” he refers to “the throngs of folk in the fair field of the English centuries, busy and studious, learned and lewd, esteemed and infamous, that must have lived without leaving a shred of surviving evidence for their existence” (1929, 116). In part one of “Sigelwara Land,” Tolkien observes that hostile “demons of the sun are naturally no part of northern mythopoeia” (1932, 194), and in part two, he remarks that the “disappearance of knowledge probably seldom, if ever, fully recorded in writing, the destruction of documents, and mystification, ancient and modern, have made the study of runes difficult” (1934, 98). While Tolkien acknowledges that examinations of past languages and cultures are fraught with problems, he feels that they are well worth the effort: “Yet it may not be pointless to have probed. Glimpses are caught, if dim and confused, of the background of English and northern tradition and imagination” (1934, 111). Clearly, these ideas reflect Tolkien’s views of fantasy since long before 1934, he had written stories set in a distant past age (see BLT1 and BLT2); his scholarly interest in England’s pre-history was certainly anything but “pointless.”

Perhaps Tolkien’s most renowned scholarly work in his field is the landmark lecture in 1936, “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics.” George Clark states that Tolkien’s paper “marks the turning point in the history of Beowulf … [and] dramatically set a new agenda for Beowulf scholarship” (8). In addition to this essay’s profound influence on Anglo-Saxon studies, Tolkien’s lecture indirectly highlights the major aspects of his concepts of fantasy. By the time Tolkien delivered this paper, he had gone through over twenty years
worth of revisions on his history of Middle-earth, which also included the unfinished, yet very long and complex poems that feature ancient metrical modes. His chief concern in the Beowulf lecture is that the poem had not been properly studied as a work of art, but rather was used "as a quarry of fact and fancy" (Essays 5). Tolkien sets out to defend the poet's extensive depiction of the "monsters" because he thinks this is central to the poem and not peripheral, which other scholars had believed (6).

Tolkien observes that Beowulf offers the "illusion of historical truth and perspective," and that the poet has used his "instinctive historical sense--a part indeed of the English temper (and not unconnected with its reputed melancholy), of which Beowulf is a supreme expression" (7). The "fabulous" elements, then, are skillfully woven into the familiar. (As Shippey notes [1992, 3], when Tolkien defends certain aspects of Beowulf and opposes those critics who belittle them, it is almost as if he were answering hostile commentators on his own fiction.) Tolkien also praises the poem's fine style:

The high tone, the sense of dignity, alone is evidence in Beowulf of the presence of a mind lofty and thoughtful .... Any theory that will at least allow us to believe that what he did was of design, and that for that design there is a defence that may still have force, would seem more probable. (13-14)

Tolkien notes that if critics look only at the bare plot of Beowulf, or indeed any other story, "great or small," then anyone could call the work "trivial" (14). But even a "tragic" or purely historical tale can appear dull if the literary design is not highly-wrought, showing "metrical art, style, and verbal skill" (15-16). Tolkien dismisses those views of Beowulf, such as Ritchie Girvan's, which note that "[c]orrect and sober taste may refuse to admit that there can be interest for us--the proud we that includes all intelligent living people--in ogres and dragons" (16).

Tolkien also considers the genre of Beowulf. He had no
hesitation in calling Gawain a "romance," but his view of this poem's literary form is not so clear-cut: "Beowulf is evidently not a well-conducted epic. It may turn out to be no epic at all" (13). This comment is given in answer to critics who disparaged Beowulf because it was not something which in fact it may never have intended to be. Still, the high tone, exciting adventures, fates of nations, and battles of Beowulf, if not enough to make it a pure epic in the classical sense, certainly evoke the essence of this genre. More importantly, Tolkien concentrates on what Beowulf is—not what critics would like it to be:

Something more significant than a standard hero, a man faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy of house or realm, is before us, and yet incarnate in time, walking in heroic history, and treading the named lands of the North. (17)

Tolkien further states that Beowulf surpasses both "mere folktale" or "heroic lay" because the hero has "no enmeshed loyalties, nor hapless love," which then gives him a universal appeal: "He is a man, and that for him and many is sufficient tragedy" (18). The magical content, familiar surroundings, and "dignity of tone" do not clash in Beowulf but rather, according to Tolkien, impressively complement each other in a unique poem of "high seriousness" (19). These statements reflect the foundation of Tolkien's ideas on fantasy literature.

Tolkien again displays his interest in England's remote past, especially that time of "fusion that has occurred at a given point of contact between old and new, a product of thought and deep emotion" (20). Furthermore, one of "the most potent elements in that fusion is ... the theory of courage, which is the great contribution of early Northern literature" (20). Tolkien thinks that England likely had a "similar heroic temper" to that of Scandinavia, but Beowulf reflects the way the English "imagination was brought into touch with Christendom" (21). Tolkien compares the Beowulf-poet to Virgil (22) and praises the joining of an ancient ethos with fresh impulses:
The author of Beowulf showed forth the permanent value of that pietas which treasures the memories of man's struggles in the dark past, man fallen and not yet saved, disgraced but not dethroned. It would seem to have been part of the English temper in its strong sense of tradition ... that it should ... preserve much from the northern past to blend with southern learning, and a new faith. (23-4)

It seems appropriate when considering such words to think of Tolkien's own work. In both "OFS" and "Mythopoeia," Tolkien declares, "Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed. / Disgraced he may be, yet not de-throned, and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned" (TL 50,98). What Tolkien admires in Beowulf appears to have infused his concepts of fantasy.

As he has done in his comments on Gawain, Tolkien praises the Beowulf-poet's skill in using traditional materials and motifs to craft a new work of art. Tolkien notes that "Beowulf is not an actual picture of historic Denmark or Geatland or Sweden," but is "a self-consistent picture, a construction bearing design and thought" (27). This view anticipates his comments in "OFS" on the need for an effective work of fantasy to have "'the inner consistency of reality'" (TL 44-5). Tolkien thinks that the poet has "succeeded admirably in creating in the minds of the poet's contemporaries the illusion of surveying the past, ... a past that itself had depth and reached backward into a dark antiquity of sorrow" (27).

Therefore, criticism which deems the "important matters [e.g. historical details] are put on the outer edges misses the point of artistry" (28). The poet has made antiquity "appealing" (28), but he recounts struggles with monsters for a loftier purpose:

But for the universal significance which is given to the fortunes of its hero it is an enhancement and not a detraction, in fact it is necessary, that his final foe should be not some Swedish prince, or treacherous friend, but a dragon: a thing made by imagination for just such a purpose .... And the conquest of the ogres comes at the right moment ...
which often comes in great lives, when men look up in surprise and see that a hero has unawares leaped forth. (31-2)

Tolkien emphasizes the fact that the poet did not depict the supernatural in a trite or peripheral way, but rather designed the entire poem around the episodes with the monsters and used familiar detail in supplementary service of this central concern.

As the essay draws to a close, Tolkien reiterates his view that Beowulf transcends its historical period and exhibits the ageless sorrows of earthly life. For him, the monsters are absolutely necessary for this impression:

It is just because the main foes in Beowulf are inhuman that the story is larger and more significant than this imaginary poem of a great king's fall. It glimpses the cosmic and moves with the thought of all men concerning the fate of human life and efforts; .... At the beginning, and during its process, and most of all at the end, we look down as if from a visionary height upon the house of man in the valley of the world. A light starts ... and there is a sound of music; but the outer darkness and its hostile offspring lie ever in wait for the torches to fail and the voices to cease. (33)

Tolkien values the poet's use of ancient materials, such as the aura of past ages, the creatures of folklore, an intricate poetic design, and lofty tone, "for a new purpose, with a wider sweep of imagination, if with a less bitter and concentrated force" (33). And thus, Tolkien appears to have described his own ideas on fantasy when he discusses Beowulf: "There is not much poetry in the world like this; ... it was made in this land, and moves in our northern world beneath our northern sky, and for those who are native to that tongue and land, it must ever call with a profound appeal--until the dragon comes" (33-4).

Tolkien's "Prefatory Remarks" on John Hall's prose translation of Beowulf supplement the views outlined in "Monsters." Once again, Tolkien displays his interest in a distant past age as reflected by nature of Old English
"poetical words:"

"[T]hey come down to us bearing the echoes of ancient days beyond the shadowy borders of Northern history" (Essays 50). He recognizes that many modern readers might have difficulty with the poem's style, yet notes this is not a defect of the poet:

Personally you may not like an archaic vocabulary and word-order, artificially maintained as an elevated and literary language. You may prefer the brand new, the lively and the snappy. But whatever may be the case with other poets of past ages (with Homer, for instance) the author of Beowulf did not share the preference. (54)

Tolkien emphasizes the fact that the highly stylized language enhances the literary impact of Beowulf, and while some sensibilities may not appreciate it the deficiency lies in the recipient, not the artist. This statement appears almost prophetic when one considers Tolkien's fiction and recalls negative opinions of his creative style (e.g. Moorcock).

Throughout this commentary, Tolkien stresses the point that an awareness of Beowulf's carefully-wrought style is not only important for translating the poem, but for appreciating the overall effect. While some readers might regret the poet's design, Tolkien thinks that it exhibits something vital:

"[T]he development of a form of language familiar in meaning and yet freed from trivial associations, and filled with the memory of good and evil" (55). He concludes his remarks "on translation and words" by reiterating some of views discussed in "Monsters." Tolkien notes that there is an "unrecapturable magic of ancient English verse," but thinks that the artistic impulses of Beowulf are still discernible:

The poet who spoke these words saw in his thought the brave men of old walking under the vault of heaven upon the island earth, beleaguered by the Shoreless Seas and the outer darkness, enduring with stern courage the brief days of life, until the hour of fate, when all things should perish. (60)

Therefore, with such an exalted theme, an elevated tone and
ornate diction are necessary, not merely decorative, for works of heroic literature.

Before I examine Tolkien's most influential essay for critics of fantasy, "On Fairy-Stories," it is important to note that this work was published not at the start of Tolkien's writing of LR but near its completion. The 1939 oral version of "OFS" has not appeared in print, yet the 1947 text came out in the same year that Tolkien had submitted a "'fair' typescript" of Book One of LR (first part of FR) to Unwin publishers (L 119). C. Tolkien states that by the end of 1946, his father had "largely completed" Book Five, the first part of RK, and had detailed outlines of Book Six (SD 3-13). Tolkien does not refer to his Middle-earth tales in "OFS," but inevitably they would have shaped his concepts of fantasy, especially since Hobbit had appeared before the 1939 lecture. The first published version of "OFS," then, reflects a culmination of Tolkien's interests in fantasy rather than an initial expression of them.

In "OFS," Tolkien does not set out to define "fantasy" as a literary genre in all-inclusive terms. In this sense, he is not "metacritical." Some critics who disagree with Tolkien's views often fail to acknowledge this fact. Near the start, Tolkien plainly states his central purposes:

There are, however, some questions that one who is to speak about fairy-stories must expect to answer, or attempt to answer, whatever the folk of Faerie think of his impertinence. For instance: What are fairy-stories? What is their origin? What is the use of them? I will try to give answers to these questions, or such hints of answers to them that I have gleaned—primarily from the stories themselves, the few of their multitude that I know. (TL 9)

In the process of discussing and describing "fairy-stories," Tolkien makes statements that have become influential in discussions of "fantasy." However, Tolkien is not wholly definitive in his terminology; this factor may have confused certain commentators. Tolkien sometimes uses the terms "fairy-
story," "romance," and "fantasy" interchangeably, whereas some critics, such as Shippey (1994, xii), would prefer to distinguish among these forms. For Tolkien, all "true" fairy-stories or romances are fantasies (TL 64-5); but not all "marvellous" works are "fairy-stories" (16-18). "Fantasy" for Tolkien is both a vital ingredient of a fairy-story and a term that can be applied to other supernatural tales.

This is a vital point since Tolkien does not exclude certain works because they have no magical or "marvellous" content. The key factor is whether the given story displays an imaginary realm, which is self-contained and adequately described. After dismissing the pejorative connotations of the word "fairy," Tolkien outlines his view of the essential feature of a fairy-story:

... for fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is Faerie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. (14)

When Tolkien states certain works are not "fairy-stories," he means that these tales are not intrinsically concerned with the realm of "Faerie" and its many marvels. He thinks that "the primal desire at the heart of Faerie" is "the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder;" therefore, while readers (as well as "mortal men" in the story) may be "enchanted" by unexpected marvels, a "genuine fairy-story ... should be presented as 'true'"—that is, as a plausible actuality (18).

For Tolkien, then, a tale set in a modern location or one which depicts its imaginary realm to be a "figment" or "illusion" is not a true fairy-story. Since Gulliver's Travels displays marvels in "our own time and space, distance alone conceals them," the Alice books have dream frames and "dream-
transitions," and "Beast-fables" situate humans as "mere adjuncts," or with "the animal form ... only a mask upon a human face," these literary works are not "fairy-stories" (16-20). Still, Tolkien does not exclude these tales as examples of "fantasy;" he excludes them as "fairy-stories" because they are based on other factors besides a depiction of the land of "Faerie." Tales that exhibit magic or marvellous aspects may be considered types of fantasies; however, for Tolkien the essential nature of a "fairy-story" is "one which touches on or uses Faerie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy" (15).

Once Tolkien has established the imaginary realm to be the fundamental feature of a "fairy-story," his perspectives on "fantasy" flow from this central concern. He discusses the creative process whereby the "incarnate mind" is able to produce both familiar and fantasy elements:

The mind that thought of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into swift water. ... We may put deadly green upon a man's face and produce a horror ... or we may ... put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such 'fantasy,' as it is called, new form is made; Faerie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator. (24-5)

The concept of "sub-creation" is the new element in Tolkien's discussions of heroic literature. (The OED credits Tolkien with introducing this word to the English language.) His comments on Gawain and Beowulf note the key aspects of magic, a distant age, and adventure; but in "OFS" Tolkien emphasizes that the "essential power of Faerie is thus the power of making immediately effective by the will the visions of 'fantasy'" and, in turn, these visions become real, not merely fanciful imaginings: "This aspect of 'mythology'--sub-creation, rather than either representation or symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world --is, I think, too little considered" (25).
After introducing this idea of "sub-creation," Tolkien considers the origins of fairy-stories and speculates on the process of how they were tossed into the "Soup" or "simmering stew" of a tale (25-33). He does not much favour these types of examinations, since the most important factors with regard to a tale's mythological, legendary, or historical sources are "precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot" (21-2). For Tolkien, whatever might have been the origins of fairy-stories, their power lies in being able to stand as effective works of art on their own individual terms. As "sub-creations," they leave behind their specific historical context and display an other-worldly reality:

Such stories have now a mythical or total (unanalysable) effect, an effect quite independent of the findings of Comparative Folk-lore, and one which it cannot spoil or explain; they open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe. (32)

Thus Tolkien thinks that the most impressive fairy-stories, sub-creations, or "fantasies of fallen Man" (25), are those that have a unique character which displays a "literary effect" of "ancient elements" (33), yet stand apart from the readily identifiable sources or historical facts.

Tolkien then discusses the way readers of fairy-stories (whom, he thinks, some mistakenly assume to be only children) will accept a "sub-creation," a tale set in an "Other Time," through some sort of "literary belief" (36). He alludes to Coleridge's phrase "'willing suspension of disbelief'" (37), but feels that this is really "a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe" (37). Tolkien thinks that truly effective stories of fantasy are the ones where possible "disbelief" is not a factor at all:

What really happens is that the story-maker
proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from the outside. (36-7)

For Tolkien, the two key factors are a reader's belief in the "Secondary World," which should be detailed enough to be both credible and enchanting, and an emancipation from the dictates of "Primary World" realities and beliefs.

Tolkien reinforces these points by stating that views that treat children as a class, independent of individual interests and upbringing, are delusory: "Belief depended on the way in which stories were presented to me [as a child], by older people, or by authors, or on the inherent tone and quality of the tale" (39). (Notice again Tolkien's ever-present concern for the appropriate "tone" in "true" fantasy.) Tolkien thinks that fairy-stories are "not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability" (39), and because he had "desired dragons with a profound desire" (40), the most effective form of fantasy is one set in a Secondary World:

The dragon had the trade-mark Of Faerie written plain upon him. In whatever world he had his being it was an Other-world. Fantasy, the making or glimpsing of Other-worlds, was the heart of the desire of Faerie. (40)

Tolkien's view does not exclude other forms of "fantasy;" but it certainly highlights the kind that he preferred and developed.

When Tolkien narrows his attention to "Fantasy" as an intrinsic feature of fairy-stories (44-52), he makes a number of statements that have shaped the ideas of many critics in the field. "Fantasy," for Tolkien, naturally deals with "images of things that are not only 'not actually present', but which are indeed not to be found in our primary world at all, or are
generally believed not to be found there" (45). This sounds straight-forward enough. But the key factor, which for Tolkien is absolutely required, is that these imaginative "notions of 'unreality' (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World)" must be the product of a precise artistic design:

The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) 'the inner consistency of reality', is indeed another thing, or aspect needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. (44-5)

The inexplicable presence of supernatural phenomena in a story might not achieve "fantasy" if there is no creative context or framework for its existence. Tolkien thinks that "Fantasy" is a "higher form of Art" because its "'inner consistency of reality' is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World" (45-6). If fantasy elements are used "frivolously, or only half-seriously, or merely for decoration: it remains merely 'fanciful'" (46), and thus "disbelief" arises and dissipates the desired literary effect.

Tolkien continually emphasizes the necessity of a rigorous artistic design in order for fantasy to be compelling. For him, "Dreaming," "delusion," or "hallucination" are not products of "Art," whereas literary fantasy "is a rational not an irrational activity" (45). This point is very important because Tolkien's views here are not only firm but his standards are high. It is not enough simply to say "the green sun," though Tolkien notes this may be a "more potent thing than many a 'thumbnail sketch' or 'transcript of life' that receives literary praise" (46). Much more effort is required:

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode. (46)
Given that Tolkien had been working on _LR_ for over nine years when this statement was first published, he was commenting not merely in abstract terms but from exhaustive personal experience.

Tolkien's perspective on the potential for "Secondary Belief" of the "green sun" is at the heart of his ideas on fantasy. This concept sets Tolkien apart from the narrower views of Todorov or Jackson, and the broader ones of Ostrowski, Rabkin, Hume, or (to a lesser extent) Irwin. Tolkien foregrounds the Secondary World because he thinks that this serves to facilitate the "'inner consistency of reality'" within a fantasy construct. By situating magical or marvellous entities outside our own time/space existence, writers have a better opportunity to make their dragons, spectres, non-human talking creatures, green suns, etc., believable to readers. Whether or not supernatural entities exist in the Primary World, when they appear in a Secondary World, there is, according to Tolkien, a greater potential for "Secondary Belief,"--that is, a reader's literary belief in the "fantasy" elements. Tolkien thinks that "Drama is naturally hostile to Fantasy" because visible presentations of "talking animals may achieve buffoonery or mimicry, but they do not achieve Fantasy" (47); in short, fantasy best displays an "'inner consistency of reality'" through written text. Since something like a "green sun" does not exist in the world's purview, if found in a Secondary one, and supported by many other vivid and internally coherent details, readers may accept its 'reality' in a story.

Tolkien comments further on a reader's "Secondary Belief" in a fantasy story and maintains that the depiction of an imaginary realm is the best way to encourage such literary belief. He notes that "Magic" is an elusive term to describe the writer's methods to obtain acceptance of the fantasy construct, and so proposes "Enchantment" as a "less debatable word" (49). Again, it all has to do with the designs of "Art:"

Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter,
to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose. ...
To the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires, and when it is successful of all forms of human art most nearly approaches.
[sic] (49-50)

Far from seeking corruption, "delusion," "bewitchment," or "domination," Tolkien feels that "Fantasy" actually "seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves" (50). Whether Tolkien would state that "fantastic" literature which is morbid or mainly horrific is not really "fantasy" at all is difficult to say. But he would likely not consider it to be "potent" or "true" fantasy in his terms.

Tolkien earnestly defends the art of fantasy against the literary views that consider it "illegitimate" or that it "insults Reason" (50-1). This is a key point because he wishes to counter the notions that "Fantasy" is an arbitrary, whimsical, or purely bizarre literary mode. Tolkien considers it to be "a natural human activity," which "does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity" (51). In this sense, then, fantasy is not some sort of playful or subversive activity (though, Tolkien feels standard literary opinions have deemed it to be a fringe element), or a non-rationalistic or anti-scientific impulse. Like other forms of art, "Fantasy" is (or should be) a design of clear reasoning:

If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured. If they ever get into that state (it would not seem at all impossible), Fantasy will perish, and become Morbid Delusion. For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. (51)

Unlike works of social realism, "Fantasy," while using the familiar elements of our world, offers a release from "the domination of observed 'fact'" (45). Still, the imaginative
"green sun" needs the "sun" part, the fact of reality, as much as the "green," the aspect of fantasy.

After having stated these points, Tolkien observes that like many things in "this fallen world," fantasy can be put to "evil uses" (51). These comments, especially those on the "false gods" of money or nations, might seem to counter those above regarding fantasy's compatibility with rationality or science. However, Tolkien emphasizes that it is the human treatment of such matters as "social or economic theories" that "have demanded human sacrifice" (51-2). As with all endeavours, Tolkien believes that "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" (52).

The above statement clearly situates the artist, the sub-creator, the fantasist in a religious context. George MacDonald (whom Tolkien alludes to [TL 20, 28, 62]) also has proposed this idea; humans, as part of God's creation, have "the necessary likeness of the thing made to him who makes it;" thus, the "imagination of man is made in the image of the imagination of God" (3). Tolkien thinks that the fantasist not only sub-creates to celebrate God's grace, but does so because of it. In this sense, the artist is imbued with divine breath; he or she writes at God's behest, as well as for God's glory. Still, this does not make the writer merely a passive transcriber or automaton. Tolkien plainly asserts above that the fantasist as "sub-creator" has free will to do good--or ill.

Tolkien's comments on "Recovery," "Escape," and "Consolation" center on the positive values that readers may find in a fantasy or "sub-creative" tale. In the section on "Recovery," Tolkien thinks that the fairy-stories allow readers not merely to gaze with delight (and, hopefully, not in disgust) at dragons and centaurs, but to view ordinary things with renewed wonder:

Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining--regaining a
clear view .... We need, in any case, to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity—from possessiveness.

(53)

Tolkien does not think fantasy needs to "blunt" or undermine the elements of the real world; instead, if readers are re-invigorated by the marvels of a fairy-story, they may look upon their daily existence with less apathy, dismay, or contempt.

Moreover, Tolkien draws attention to the importance of a Secondary World to achieve this "Recovery." He comments on a "Chestertonian Fantasy", one set in the Primary World, which contains odd phrases such as "Mooreeffoc, ... Coffeeroom viewed from the inside through a glass door, as it was seen by Dickens on a dark London day;" Tolkien thinks that Chesterton used this literary device "to denote the queerness of things that have become trite" (54). Here, again, Tolkien acknowledges there can be other types of fantasy. But he believes such tales set in the real world are not as effective as fairy-stories:

That kind of 'fantasy' most people would allow to be wholesome enough; and it can never lack for material. But it has, I think, only a limited power; for the reason that recovery of freshness of vision is its only virtue. The word Mooreeffoc may cause you suddenly to realize that England is an utterly alien land; ... but it cannot do more than that: act as a time-telescope focused on one spot. Creative fantasy, because it is mainly trying to do something else, (make something new), may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. (54)

I have quoted this view at length in order to clarify Tolkien's position. He does not exclude as "fantasies" stories set in our world; however, he thinks that they are inferior to tales of the land of "Faerie"—fairy-stories. Critics, such as Jackson or Little, may choose to diverge from Tolkien’s ideas; but his views need to be properly understood and represented.

Tolkien reiterates the above idea, noting that the "'fantastic' elements in verse and prose of other kinds, even
when only decorative or occasional, help in this release" (or "Recovery"), however, "not so thoroughly as a fairy-story" (54). Since "Fantasy is made out of the Primary World" (54), Tolkien thinks readers can gain an appreciation for both marvellous and familiar things:

By the forging of Gram cold iron was revealed;
by the making of Pegasus horses were ennobled;
in the Trees of the Sun and Moon root and
stock, flower and fruit are manifested in
glory. (55)

Clearly, Tolkien admires the ancient things of this world--
iron, horses, wood, fire, bread, and wine; a distant past era
interests him the most. Therefore, his concept of a Secondary
World or Sub-creation denotes a pre-industrial realm, which
excludes technological settings, both modern and future.

Tolkien's comments on "Escape" reinforce the fact that his
favoured kind of fantasy is one set in an imaginary realm of an
ancient world. He dismisses the charge that fairy-stories are
"escapist" in a pejorative sense by distinguishing between "the
Escape of the Prisoner" and "the Flight of the Deserter;" the
prisoner's escape is honourable, like "the resistance of the
patriot," whereas the deserter's flight dishonourable, like
"the acquiescence of the 'quisling'" (56). Tolkien wonders why
people who are imprisoned in dreary lives should be condemned
because they desire some sort of imaginative respite. His
harsh comments on horrible technological realities, the
"'ravness and ugliness of modern European life',' indicate his
preference for times long past:

And if we leave aside a moment 'fantasy',
I do not think that the reader or the maker
of fairy-stories need even be ashamed of
the 'escape' of archaism: of preferring not
dragons but horses, castles, sailing-ships,
bows and arrows; not only elves, but knights
and kings and priests. For it is after all
possible for a rational man, after reflection
(quite unconnected with fairy-story or romance),
to arrive at the condemnation, implicit at
least in the mere silence of 'escapist'
literature, of progressive things like
factories, or the machine-guns and bombs
that appear to be their most natural and inevitable, dare we say "inexorable", products. 
(58)

Again, I have been rather lengthy in quoting in order to clarify Tolkien's position, which has been misrepresented by some commentators (e.g. Hunter 185-8). His criticisms of modern life have little to do with politics or social institutions. His views on "escapism," then, do not invariably advocate some sort of return to feudalism.

Tolkien's main concern is that many people "desire to escape, not indeed from life, but from our present time and self-made misery" (59). Therefore, a tale set in an imaginary realm of a distant past age may help us to put aside our "disgust with man-made things" (e.g. machine guns) and allow a respite from ageless woes, such as poverty or death: "[T]here are ancient limitations from which fairy-stories offer a sort of escape, and old ambitions and desires (touching the very roots of fantasy) to which they offer a kind of satisfaction and consolation" (60). Tolkien seems to think that this type of literary "escape" is best achieved by a Secondary World tale.

Tolkien then describes the "Consolation" of a fairy-story, which is essentially "the joy of the happy ending" (62). On the surface, this concept does not seem solely connected with "fantasy" because realistic tales, such as David Copperfield or Little Women, offer joyous endings too. However, Tolkien thinks this consolation is most powerful when cataclysmic disaster looms in the forefront:

In its fairy-tale--or otherworld--setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (62)

This positive view of the potential of a fairy-story does
relate to some kind of religious experience, which readers may or may not feel. In any case, Tolkien believes that this type of literary "joy" can best be inspired by a fantasy set away from modern or futuristic times.

Near the end of "OFS," Tolkien implies that a "true fairy-story (or romance)," or "successful Fantasy," are all ultimately the same thing (64-5). When he states that every "sub-creator" hopes to be a "real maker," he is commenting on a "reality" of a different order than the observable phenomena of common life:

The peculiar quality of the 'joy' in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a 'consolation' for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question 'Is is true?' The answer to this question that I gave at first was (quite rightly): 'If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world.' That is enough for the artist (or the artist part of the artist). But in the 'eucatastrophe' we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater—it may be a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world. (64)

Again, the effects of this kind of fantasy may not be felt by all readers. Still, Tolkien's view does not exclude the existence of other fantasies that have their own purposes. But he thinks that this glimpse of "reality" in a fairy-story is of an eternal nature, and plainly not bound to any contemporary (and, possibly, fleeting) ideology.

For it is clear that Tolkien's concepts of fantasy are linked to Christian thought. (In the 1947 version, he begins a closing paragraph with "I am a Christian." The entire section is deleted in the 1964 text.) Tolkien believes that the story of Christ, his birth and resurrection, "has pre-eminently the "'inner consistency of reality'," and that there is "no tale ever told that men would rather find was true" (65).

Furthermore, as discussed earlier (p. 68), Tolkien sees the fantasist as the conduit or conveyer of "evangelium"—"good
news." The sub-creator, in accordance with the Chief Creator, God, enriches the world through blessed art. This is both a humble and exalted position for fantasists: They can be the guided instruments of God's will, as well as being, like the gospel writers, sources to express "evangelium" to the world.⁹

While critics may disagree with Tolkien's views, his ideas are generally consistent and clear in "OFS." From the start to the end, Tolkien emphasizes the importance of an imaginary realm in encouraging the reader's Secondary Belief in a fairy-story, with the potential also for "Recovery," "Escape," and "Consolation." The writer, as sub-creator, can use "Fantasy" to enrich creation and re-invigorate the human spirit:

All tales may come true; and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know. (66)

Between the initial publication of "OFS" and the appearance of LR, Tolkien produced another notable piece of scholarship: "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son." This work is a most unconventional work, despite its presence in Essays and Studies, since the bulk of it is a verse drama (1953, 3-13). But even the critical comments appear curious because they seem to conflict with Tolkien's remarks on Beowulf in "Monsters."

Tolkien discusses in "Homecoming" the fateful moment in a battle fought near Maldon in Essex where the English leader Beorhtnoth allowed his Viking adversaries to cross a causeway, even though this narrow strip of land prevented an expedient attack, in order that a "fair fight could be joined" (1). Since the results were disastrous for the English, Tolkien thinks that Beorhtnoth's decision was an "act of pride and misplaced chivalry" (1). But Beorhtnoth's followers neither desert nor rebuke him. One such retainer, Beorhtwold, speaks the most famous lines in the poem that Tolkien translates as "Will shall be the sterner, heart the bolder, spirit the greater as our strength lessens" (3). Tolkien notes that these
words are not "original" in the sense of being historical; but since they epitomize the northern courage (which Tolkien wrote of and admired in *Beowulf*), the "ancient and honoured expression of heroic will," Tolkien suggests that "Beorhtwold is all the more, not the less, likely for that reason actually to have used them in his last hour" (3).

However, as Shippey observes, Tolkien concentrates on Beorhtnoth's deplorable "ofermod," his "over-mastering pride," when making the fatal decision rather than what E.V. Gordon had thought was the Maldon-poet's main concern, the praiseworthy loyalty of Beorhtnoth's followers (1991, 10-14). Shippey further suggests that Tolkien's harsh comments concerning Beorhtnoth's "diabolical" act are really an attack on the heathen heroic spirit, which had arisen in Tolkien's own times and was incompatible with both Christian virtue and the kind of heroism Tolkien was depicting in *LR* (14-15). Shippey calls Tolkien's verse drama an "authorisation," which was written as "a way of clearing up doubt in his own mind, of sorting something out in his own head so that he could go further forward" (15). Certainly, Tolkien's own ideas on the "theory of courage" would not accommodate a leader who sacrifices his loyal followers for personal glory. As Shippey suggests (16), the actions of Aragorn and Theoden exhibit heroic humility.

Perhaps Tolkien's doubt concerning the full value of the northern "heroic spirit," while retaining an admiration for it, affected his altered views of Beowulf's decision to battle the dragon alone. In "Monsters," Tolkien considers the dragon fight to be perfectly in line with the poet's purpose of depicting the grim realities of life and humanity's inevitable sorrows when facing them (*Essays* 31-3). But in the "Ofermod" section of "Homecoming," Tolkien strangely disparages Beowulf's decision:

> He will not deign to lead a force against the dragon, as wisdom might direct even a hero to do; for, as he explains in a long 'vaunt', his victories have relieved him of fear. He will only use a sword on this occasion, since wrestling singlehanded
with a dragon is too hopeless even for the chivalric spirit. (14)

At the very least, this is a rather pragmatic reading of these moments in Beowulf, which certainly contrasts with both the spirit and text of Tolkien's comments in "Monsters." Beowulf recounts his past glories before the dragon fight to re-animate his courage before a deadly task, not to show that he has no fear of it. Just before this long "vaunt," the poet describes Beowulf's mood:

... Him wæs geomor sefa,
wæfre and wælfus,  wyrd ungemete neah,
se ðone gomelan  gretan sceolde,
secan sawle hord,  sundur gedælan
lif wið lice;  no Dön lange wæs
feorh æþelinges  flæsce bewunden.

(2419b-24)¹⁰

Modern prudence might dictate that Beowulf should take a band of warriors into the barrow in order to have a better chance of surviving. But the poet tells us Beowulf is fated to die, then and there. And, as Tolkien has noted in "Monsters," Beowulf's death is certainly more moving and meaningful because he faced alone the cosmic forces represented by the dragon, rather than die of old age or in some petty dispute between princedoms.

Shippey's perspective on the reason for Tolkien's negative view of the heroic ethos in "Homecoming," if not completely right, likely hovers around the truth. After living to see another horrible war in Europe, Tolkien may naturally have thought that any self-aggrandized act of a leader--in life or literature--was extremely suspect, if not condemnable.

In any case, Tolkien shows a deep interest in the heroic ethos in relation to contemporary thought. He did not simply accept and praise all the impulses of the literature he admired but questioned them as well. Whether or not one agrees with Tolkien's views in "Homecoming," his discussions of the heroic ethos reveal that he did have doubts about it. As Shippey notes, Tolkien was certainly grappling with this contrast between ancient ideals and modern sensibilities, and seeking a way to reconcile them (1991, 15-16). And thus, Tolkien's views
of the heroic ethos in a modern context certainly influenced his concepts of fantasy literature.

As the foregoing analysis has shown, in most of his scholarly work Tolkien concentrated on certain features that shaped his ideas of fantasy. The key studies would have been available to commentators when LR initially appeared, especially the most important piece, "OFS." Given his profound knowledge and deep interest in literature such as Gawain, Beowulf, Maldon, and various fairy-tales and romances, the nature of Tolkienian fantasy is not difficult to discern. Tales of this type depict adventures set in an imaginary realm of ancient world, where magical beings, beasts, and paraphernalia exist; as well, these supernatural elements co-exist rationally within recognizable landscapes and among ordinary people, animals, and things; furthermore, such stories should reflect in modern English some kind of lofty tone and diction, an "elevated" style, which is evident in heroic literature; and, lastly, "fantasy" should try to inspire the reader's capacity for "enchantment," "Secondary Belief," and the "joy" of "evangelium." Tolkien was not the first writer to foster this form of "fantasy;" but the Tolkienian concept has been the most influential of its kind.

Commentators may cast doubt on the relative success or value of Tolkien's work, but the literary aspects that infuse it are not obscure or ridiculous. When critics were first confronted with Tolkien's fiction, most especially LR, they did not have to search far in order to contextualize their responses. Tolkien's profession and scholarly writings offered readily accessible insight. If myth, epic, romance, saga, and fairy-tales are considered to be serious art forms, then this should serve as a starting point for criticism on Tolkien's work. In his last scholarly piece before RK was first published, Tolkien comments on M.B. Salu's translation of The Ancrene Riwle:

This language now appears archaic .... But it was in its day and to its users a natural, easy, and cultivated speech,
familiar with the courtesy of letters, able to combine colloquial liveliness with a reverence for the already long tradition of English writing. It has been the endeavour of the translator to represent this in modern terms: a difficult task, which Miss Salu, specially fitted by long familiarity with this text and research into peculiarities of its idiom, has carried out with great success. (v)

In _LR_, Tolkien offers a narrator as translator who has selected and arranged this "history" of "the great years of 1418 and 1419 of the Shire long ago." Tolkien's assessment of Salu's efforts may stand as an example of the kind of critical view of _LR_--and of himself--that Tolkien might have hoped for.
Notes

1 From The Book of Lost Tales, Part I (BLT1). This volume is the first in a series, edited and published by Christopher Tolkien, with the general title of The History of Middle-earth (HOME). I designate the other volumes as follows: The Book of Lost Tales, Part II (BLT2); The Lays of Beleriand (LB); The Shaping of Middle-earth (SM); The Lost Road and Other Writings (LROW); The Return of the Shadow (RS); The Treason of Isengard (TI); The War of the Rings (WR); Sauron Defeated (SD); Morgoth's Ring (MR); The War of the Jewels (WJ); The Peoples of Middle-earth (PM).

2 Tolkien's poem "Goblin Feet" was published in 1915, whereas his first scholarly publication was a note in A Middle English Vocabulary in 1922. His first professorship was granted in 1924. C. Tolkien relates the inception and the early history of "The Lost Tales" (BLT1 1-13). Tolkien began these tales in 1917, three years before he was appointed "Reader in English Language" at Leeds University (Carpenter 1992, 264).

3 This lecture was originally published in Proceedings of the British Academy 22 (1936): 245-95. Most of the key essays of Tolkien have been collected and edited by C. Tolkien in The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays (Essays).

4 See C. Tolkien's comments in LB (e.g. 1,140) and SM (e.g. 11,76,262).

5 In my Master's thesis, I analyzed the Beowulf-poet's use of realistic detail to enhance the believability of the "fabulous" elements.

6 See Ker's comments on Beowulf and classical epic (e.g. 158-175).

7 T.E. Apter in Fantasy Literature excludes Tolkien's works and those of a similar nature. The reasons are that in texts from Hawthorne to Borges, "fantasy is essential to the authors' various purposes, which must be understood not as an escape from reality but as an investigation of it" (2). It is not clear why a story set in our world "must" be understood in a certain way, or why worlds "separated from ours spatially or temporally" could not comment on, or be an "investigation of," our "reality" (2). Again, this is a matter of individual perspective and preference, and has little to do with the presence of an alternative realm in fairy-tale, myth, or saga. In his book, Edmund Little takes issue with Tolkien's views on the genre, stating they "were written with his own work in mind" and so exclude texts where "Secondary Worlds can have marvels without magic" (2-3). But Tolkien's notion of a Secondary World is not wholly dependent on the presence of magic. His description of a "Sub-creation" or "Secondary World" considers "images" that are "not in the primary world," which could include "magic" but not absolutely so (TL 44-6); in fact, he uses the word "Enchantment," and contrasts this
with the devices of a "Magician," in order to emphasize the
difference between creative "art" and "delusion" or "bewitchment" (TL 49-50). Little claims that Tolkien has not defined "either
deadly stories or Fantasy as such," but rather "has defined the
task faced by any writer of creative fiction, because, in a
sense, all creative fiction is Fantasy" (3). Actually, it
appears that Little has not defined anything by stating all
fiction is "Fantasy" in some sense. Tolkien clearly draws
distinctions among various forms of literature, whereas Little
leaves everything open.

8 See Coleridge's comments in "Biographia Literaria" (314).

9 For lengthy discussions of these issues, see Ruth-
Elizabeth McLellan's "Form and Content in The Lord of the Rings,"
Gracia Ellwood's Good News from Tolkien's Middle-earth, and
Margaret Syme's "Tolkien as Gospel Writer."

10 "A mournful spirit was upon him, restless and ready for
death; destiny, exceedingly near, was to overcome that aged one
there, to seek to separate his soul's hoard, life from body; not
for long now was the prince's life to be bound in flesh."

11 From the "Foreword" to the first edition of FR (1954, 8).
Chapter Three: The Rise of Tolkien Criticism: 1937 to 1965

As they sang the hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and a jealous love, the desire of the hearts of dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves and wear a sword instead of a walking stick .... He shuddered; and very quickly he was plain Mr Baggins of Bag-End, Underhill, again. (Hobbit 25-6)

Tolkien’s concepts of fantasy, as evidenced by his scholarly writings, are not only consistent and clear but were readily accessible when his fiction started to appear. The key works, the "Introduction" to Gawain, the commentaries on Beowulf, and "OFS" would have been available in most university libraries, the British Museum library and, likely, major city branches.¹ Reviewers at newspapers and magazines might not have had the time or opportunity to seek out the author’s non-fiction, but in the main they appeared to know Tolkien’s profession and so took it into account. The first major period of Tolkien commentary began with reviews of Hobbit and ended with criticism published just before the sudden surge in the popularity of the Middle-earth tales. In these early commentaries, critics often did consider Tolkien’s scholarship, especially "OFS." The view that somehow most of the first commentators were bemused by Tolkien’s work, or could not contextualize it at all, is not borne out by criticism done in this period. Relatively few critics showed blatant bewilderment at Tolkien’s fiction, though there were those who seemed to be either unaware of genre particularities or found them distasteful. In turn, this ignorance or antipathy was used to disparage the work, rather than to give an objective, well-argued analysis.

As I suggested at the beginning of this study, Auden’s view that people find LR either "a masterpiece of its genre or they cannot abide it" (1956, 5) indirectly set an unfortunate
precedent in Tolkien criticism. Perhaps in Auden’s literary circle, and in other academic quarters, it might have been accurate. Certainly there were negative views of Tolkien’s fiction, but no writers can claim universal approval of their works. Ben Jonson wished that Shakespeare "had blotted a thousand" lines, and Abraham Wright claimed that Hamlet is "an indifferent play, the lines but meane: and in nothing like Othello" (Vickers 1:26,29). Lady Mary Wortley Montagu assumed that Gulliver’s Travels was some sort of insidious collaboration of Swift, Pope, and Arbuthnot and stated "Great Eloquence have they employd to prove themselves Beasts" (Williams 65). Eliot’s The Waste Land was not immune to negative and, indeed, hostile voices; Louis Untermeyer wrote:

> The result [i.e. the poem] -- although, as I am aware, this conclusion is completely at variance with the judgement of its frenetic admirers -- is a pompous parade of erudition, a lengthy extension of the earlier disillusion, a kaleidoscopic movement in which the bright-coloured pieces fail to atone for the absence of an integrated design. (Grant 1:151)

Clearly, Tolkien is not unique when it comes to being the object of negative commentary.

The facts of the matter are simply that most of the reviews and virtually all of the critical studies of Tolkien between 1937 and 1965 are thoughtful and positive. They are not flawless, of course, and some comments seem uninformed. Yet from the start of Tolkien criticism and in each following year there appeared intelligent approaches to his works. There were some hostile pieces, notably from Peter Green, Maurice Richardson, Robert Flood, Edmund Wilson, Mark Roberts, and Philip Toynbee. But these are all short reviews, comprising mainly bold opinion, faulty conjecture, and textual errors. It is strange that these names would still be invoked in Tolkien criticism after so many years when they were more than countered by the positive and perceptive writings of C.S. Lewis, W.H. Auden, Derek Traversi, Douglass Parker, Patricia
Meyer Spacks, William Blissett, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Robert Reilly, Roger Green, as well as many others. Tolkien scholars sometimes go to such great lengths to oppose the negative voices, which indicates the Middle-earth tales have struck an emotional chord as well as an intellectual one. But even the early body of criticism shows that Tolkien never really required a fervent defense against vocal hostile views.

Hobbit did not garner much critical response when it first appeared in 1937 because it was considered children’s literature, which was then not an established area for scholarly work. Still, reviews were positive. Carpenter states that C.S. Lewis was the reviewer for TLS (1992, 186), and so it is not surprising Lewis would praise his friend’s book. Lewis also had heard Tolkien read the manuscripts and was well aware that the book’s details are "so rooted in their own soil and history as those of Professor Tolkien--who obviously knows much more about them than he needs for this tale" (1937, 714). Lewis recognizes "the saga-like tone of the later chapters" and comments that though it appears to be a "children’s book," older readers one day will "begin to realize what deft scholarship and profound reflection have gone to make everything in it so ripe, so friendly, and in its own way so true" (714). The book’s enduring appeal validates Lewis’s cautious prediction: "'The Hobbit' may well prove a classic" (714).

Subsequent commentators echoed and expanded on Lewis’s remarks. Richard Hughes states:

Professor Tolkien is saturated in Nordic mythology: so saturated that he does not rehash this mythology and serve it up at second-hand, rather he contributes to it at first hand: and thus his wholly original story of adventure among goblins, elves and dragons, instead of being a tour-de-force, a separate creation of his own, gives rather the impression of a well-informed glimpse into the life of a wide other-world; a world wholly real, and with a quite matter-of-fact, supernatural-history of its own. (1937, 945-6)

Mary Lamberton Becker (7), Anne Moore (92), and Monica Redlich
(1024) also praise the literary depth of *Hobbit*. Even without access to "OFS" (given that Tolkien's essay was first published in 1947), these reviewers have been able to discern the resonances of heroic literature in Tolkien’s work, as well as to commend its special nature. Like Lewis’s, Marcus Crouch’s prediction about *Hobbit* in 1950 was a perceptive one: "It will be read in the twenty-first century" (53).

While *Hobbit* received generally high praise, and close studies of it occurred only after *LR* was published, Tolkien’s larger, more serious work had mixed responses. Still, most were positive and insightful. Tolkien himself acknowledged that the early reviews "were a great deal better" than he feared they would be.⁴ Out of 65 reviews that Johnson has annotated in her bibliography (26-40), only six stand out as plainly hostile. The rest are either wholly praising or essentially supportive. Once more Lewis was at the forefront in acclaiming Tolkien’s work. These opening lines of Lewis have continued to resonate in Tolkien studies: "This book is like lightning from a clear sky; as sharply different, as unpredictable in our age as *Songs of Innocence* were in theirs" (1954, 1082).

Lewis contextualizes FR within the heroic literary tradition, since this reflects Tolkien’s scholarly interests, and remarks on the book’s uniqueness: "The utterly new achievement of Professor Tolkien is that he carries a comparable sense of reality unaided. Probably no book yet written in the world is quite such a radical instance of what its author has elsewhere called ‘sub-creation’" (1082). Lewis’s comments flow from references to the text and knowledge of Tolkien’s concepts of fantasy, rather than from only personal opinion.⁵ Lewis observes that Tolkien’s work is unlike most contemporary literature in the way that it offers "myth," a sense of "diuturnity," and an "invented world," rather than a realistic setting showing "the anguish of abnormal or contorted souls" (1083). At the end, Lewis observes that Tolkien’s fantasy is not frivolous or whimsical; its tone and diction match its themes:
And after all the most obvious appeal of the book is perhaps also its deepest: 'there was sorrow then too, and gathering dark, but great valour, and great deeds that were not wholly vain'. Not wholly vain—it is the cool middle point between illusion and disillusionment. (1083)

Other reviewers followed Lewis's praise, though few were so insightful or eloquent. Edwin Muir, while having reservations about the grand claims on the book cover (e.g. the comparison of the work to Malory's and Ariosto's) and on Tolkien's style, observes FR is "an extraordinary book" and to "read it is to be thrown into astonishment" (1954, 7). The TLS commentator recognizes the appropriate literary context and titled the review "Heroic Endeavour" (1954a, 541). The reviewer has some doubts that the motivations of the "Good" characters are adequately explained, since there is no Grail or romantic love quest, as is found in Malory. This view is one instance when looking at previous heroic models has led a critic astray. Tolkien's work clearly has different emphases from Malory's, and the "Good" characters' goals are wholly obvious: destruction of a talisman of Evil and overthrow of a horrific tyrant (FR 352). Still, the reviewer concludes that FR "is a book to be read for sound prose and rare imagination" (541).

Peter Green offers a contrary view: "I presume it is meant to be taken seriously, and am apprehensive that I can find no really adequate reasons for doing so" (8). Conversely, Christopher Derrick, after trying to position FR within a recognizable genre (e.g. science fiction or modern novel) and commending Tolkien's use of "elevated diction," states: "Professor Tolkien shows amazing fertility in devising an endless God's plenty of character and incident and place, endless perspectives of space and time in a world that is quite new and yet utterly familiar" (250). Whenever a negative view of Tolkien's work appeared, there were always plenty of positive remarks to counter it. Naomi Mitchison observes: "Above all, if you are someone who still likes reading fairy
tales, with acceptance of their symbolic and sometimes historical truth, then you will welcome this" book (331). She asserts that FR is not an "allegory" but more like a "mythology," worked out in a "scholarly manner" to produce a "story magnificently told, with every kind of colour and movement and greatness" (331).

Richard Hughes, while thinking that Muir has a point about the work’s stylistic faults, draws attention to Middle-earth’s vast details and considers that nothing "has scarcely been attempted on this scale since Spenser’s Faerie Queene," due to the work’s "width of imagination" (1954, 408). Auden also commends Tolkien’s creative achievements. Auden mentions FR’s kinship with Malory and Icelandic sagas, yet stresses the impressiveness of Tolkien’s "imaginary world": "[B]y the time one has finished the book, one knows the histories of Elves, Dwarves and the landscape they inhabit as well as one knows one’s own childhood" (1954a, 37). In another review, Auden remarks that Tolkien’s work surpasses medieval romances:

Perhaps Mr. Tolkien’s greatest achievement is to have written a heroic romance which seems wholly relevant to the realities of our concrete historical existence. In reading medieval examples of this genre, .... [o]ne cannot altogether escape the suspicion that, in relation to such knights, the word ‘vocation’ is a high-faluting term for a game which gentlemen with private means are free to play while the real work of the real world is done by "villains". In The Fellowship of the Ring, on the other hand, the fate of the Ring will affect the daily lives of thousands who have never heard of it existence. (1954b, 61-2)

Whatever view one holds about the nature of medieval romances, Auden correctly notes that Tolkien’s heroes work to save all peoples—rather than only damsels or their own prestige.

When The Two Towers first appeared, the responses were generally similar to those about FR. The TLS reviewer notes that Tolkien’s second book, with its wide-scale battles and valiant deeds, displays the aura of a "prose epic" (1954b, 817). The reviewer also praises Tolkien’s unique invention:
"With his imagined world the author continually unveils fresh countries of the mind, convincingly imagined and delightful to dwell in" (817). Concerned that the review might appear too one-sided, the writer tries to qualify the "high praise" of the work's links to stories of "Asgard and Camelot" by noting flaws such as the lack of women, an uncertain economic structure, not much use of the sea, and no mention of religion (817). Further, the reviewer expresses confusion about what "lies behind the wickedness of Sauron" (817). Even a quick reading of the text should be enough to see that Sauron wants to possess and control all of Middle-earth. This a clear explanation for the motives of any tyrant, imaginary or real.

Maurice Richardson was among the first reviewers to attack Tolkien's work. His piece is representative of the starkly personal, rather than objectively critical, negative comments on Tolkien. It is difficult to regard some remarks judiciously when a reviewer begins so:

First, let me get Professor Tolkien out of my delusional system. The Two Towers is the second volume of his mammoth fairy tale, or some call it, heroic romance, The Lord of the Rings. It will do quite nicely as an allegorical adventure story for very leisured boys, but as anything else I am convinced it has been wildly overpraised and it is all I can do to restrain myself from shouting: Conspiracy! and slouching through the streets with a sandwichman's board inscribed in jagged paranoid scrawl in violet ink: "Adults of all ages! Unite against the infantilist invasion". (835)

Given that there were many other positive reviews of Tolkien's work, it is difficult to explain Richardson's obvious vehemence. The key phrases seem to be "mammoth fairy tale," "leisured boys," and "infantilist invasion." Evidently, Richardson thinks that "Adults of all ages" should reject a long tale that deals with beings like hobbits, elves, and wizards, and their endeavors; Tolkien is somehow being presumptuous to think his story could appeal to adults, given its fairy-story tone and structure. Richardson also attacks Tolkien's supporters, rather than acknowledge that others might
find the work worthwhile: "Mr. Auden ... has always been captivated by the pubescent worlds of the saga and the classroom" (835). Perhaps some readers would agree that only adolescent minds in the twentieth century, when works like sagas and romances might only be read in school, value stories of heroic deeds and magical feats. But attitudes like Richardson's seem to reflect only literary preference, as Frye has noted (1976, 17), rather than the qualities inherent in the works themselves. In any case, Richardson's concluding comments point to the proper genre of the work yet reveal the source of his perspective: "Nevertheless, the fantasy remains, in my opinion thin and pale" (836). Richardson is certainly entitled to his negative "opinion," but the positive views of Lewis, Hughes, Mitchison, and Auden should not be so readily dismissed.

The selection of the comments detailed above reflects the general pattern of the early response to Tolkien's work. Reviewers recognized the trilogy's literary resonances, though relatively few actually referred to Tolkien's scholarly work. There were some harsh comments, such as those from Robert Flood who wondered if LR is "the type of 'quaint' thing that could well be a hoax to snare the hacks who would call it any more than a deadly, overlong bore" (170). By and large, though, reviewers continued to react positively to both TT and RK as they appeared. Donald Barr refers to Tolkien's literary skill in crafting the story: [LR] has a kind of echoing depth behind it, wherein we hear Snorri Sturluson and Beowulf, the sagas and the Nibelungenlied, but civilized by the gentler genius of modern England" (4). Anthony Boucher states that Tolkien's books are "'pure' fantasy novels" and "may well be the major achievement of the year or even of the decade" (1955a, 82). R.R. Grady considers it is possible that "Mr J.R.R. Tolkien will be found to have written one of the great literary creations of the century" (25). Many other reviewers followed in this vein. On the whole, commentary recognized the suitable literary context of Tolkien's work, and usually the negative remarks revealed an unfavourable view of LR's genre,
"fantasy" literature.

Lewis's review "The Dethronement of Power" was another influential piece for future Tolkien critics. Lewis touches on a number of issues that have inspired many approaches in the history of Tolkien criticism. He observes that Aragorn's statement that "'Good and ill have not changed ... nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men'" is "the basis of the whole Tolkienian world" (1955, 1373); Lewis also recognizes that characters like Boromir, Wormtongue, Denethor, and Gollum show that "nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so" (FR 350). Lewis commends Tolkien's skill in weaving together the various complicated plots, stating that this "is structural invention of the highest order: it adds immensely to the pathos, irony, and grandeur of the tale" (1373). The presentation of the themes and processes of war is not merely a reproduction of heroic texts; rather, Lewis thinks that Tolkien's "war has the very quality of the war my generation knew. It is all here: the endless, unintelligible movement, the sinister quiet of the front, ..." (1373). As he has done previously, Lewis presents his views with references to the text and with allusions to Tolkien's "OFS." And while he is hesitant to impose a "moral" on the story, Lewis characterizes the essence of Tolkien's art:

... a recall from facile optimism and wailing pessimism alike, to that hard, yet not quite desperate, insight into Man's unchanging predicament by which heroic ages have lived. It is here that the Norse affinity is strongest; hammer-strokes, but with compassion. (1374)

The TLS reviewer, while questioning Tolkien's depth of characterization and doubting that LR will be "a work that many adults will read right through more than once," states, "even a single reading will not be quickly forgotten;" and if it is read in the schoolroom, "perhaps again and again, ... its influence will be immeasurable" (1955, 704). The reviewer also observes that "Dr. Tolkien manages this difficult feat very well, buttressing the idiom of Nordic saga with the melody of
fantastic proper names, fantasies which must have given great pleasure to the learned philologist who invented them" (704). And lastly, Auden again discusses the work on its own terms, noting that the dissenting voices seem to be against LR's genre (1956, 5). Auden links Tolkien's name with an acknowledged cornerstone of English literature: "Mr Tolkien is not as great a writer as Milton, but in this matter [i.e. the vivid portrayal of Good struggling against Evil] he has succeeded where Milton failed" (1956, 5).

I could continue citing perceptive comments from distinguished critics and accolades from other commentators, but I hope my point has been shown. While there were some negative views on Tolkien's work, these did not constitute a sort of initial ground swell of opposition. Positive remarks, such as this one from Derek Traversi, are more representative of the early reception:

It is Professor Tolkien's achievement that, by the very integrity of his devotion to the supernatural essence of his chosen material, he has given it actuality, made it live fully and consistently in relation to a common experience which might have seemed, at first sight, to be entirely removed from it. (371)

Even if Traversi had not read "OFS," he certainly was able to discern Tolkien's concepts of fantasy from LR itself. Michael Straight does allude to "OFS" and makes one of the boldest statements on LR's stature: "For Tolkien's fantasy does not obscure, but illuminates the inner consistency of reality. There are very few works of genius in recent literature. This is one" (26).

The most quoted and discussed negative commentary is Edmund Wilson's "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!". This piece has been subject to refutation so many times, from Marion Zimmer Bradley in 1961 to Brian Attebery in 1992, that it might seem redundant to do so now. Still, Wilson's comments have been cited throughout the critical history on Tolkien, and so there remains the need to consider them here. Wilson does have a stature in literary circles, though this is matched by the
likes of Lewis, Auden, Le Guin, and Shippey. Perhaps Wilson's continual presence in even recent discussions of Tolkien indicates that it is a time-honoured method in criticism to present a contrary view and then proceed to unravel it. But I question why such a critical practice should continue to be necessary in this case.

First of all, Wilson's observations are often simply inaccurate. These flaws range from the misspelling of "Gandalf" (329) to the view that the reader does not know what is so "terrible" in Mordor because the Ring's destruction causes the Fall of Barad-dur too abruptly (331). Wilson, who apparently read the work aloud to his daughter (327), fails to take note of the more than two hundred and fifty pages of description of Frodo's journey through the desolation near and within Sauron's realm (TT 259-442; RK 205-71). Like Richardson, Wilson attacks Tolkien's supporters (rather than attempt to understand the possible logic behind their views), since he thinks that LR is very "bad" (326-28). Wilson does suggest one reason for the positive assessments: "I believe, that certain people--especially, perhaps, in Britain--have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash" (331-32). Wilson states that LR is a "children's book which has somehow got out of hand" (327).

It is difficult to counter such comments, besides pointing out textual errors, because they rely on a personal impression rather than a developed argument. Some readers might agree with Wilson, even if they would not adopt his tone. Certain scenes or details in the work, such as the hobbit's bathtub antics (FR 142-3), appear "juvenile" and perhaps undermine serious concerns, such as the portrayal of a being's descent into depravity--e.g. Gollum (TT 298-99). And if readers prefer stories of love or sex or politics set in contemporary or historical settings, then certainly Tolkien's work would appear "juvenile" and perhaps only fit for "leisured boys." Still, these views flow from no close analysis, no citations from the text, and no attempt at critical objectivity. Wilson's remarks are mainly opinions with which anyone may agree or disagree.
However, Wilson seems to assert that his view is the right one: "As for me, if we must read about imaginary kingdoms, give me James Branch Cabell's Poictesme. He at least writes for grown-up people, and he does not present the drama of life as a showdown between Good People and Goblins" (332). (The Cabell reference is of some help; this author's work evidently has sexual overtones and no hobbit-like episodes.) Besides the dismissive tone of Wilson's view, the logic behind it is poorly explained. What kind of "life" is he referring to? In Middle-earth? In the history of our world? In the mid-twentieth century? It seems that Wilson does not like "Secondary World" tales in general, despite having some interest in Cabell. Thus, it is difficult to accept his judgments when he displays no understanding of or appreciation for the premises of Tolkienian fantasy.

One last point on Wilson's commentary. He was able to obtain remarks from LR's American publisher Houghton Mifflin in which Tolkien discusses the "inspiration" for his "invention." These statements were not widely available, since they originally were in a letter from Tolkien to his publisher (L 218). Wilson takes Tolkien's comments at face value and uses them to dismiss his invention. When Tolkien remarks that LR is "'largely an essay in linguistic esthetic'," Wilson claims the work is just a "philological game" or "curiosity," as well as being an "overgrown fairy story" (328). (He shows no awareness of Tolkien's ideas in "OFS.") Apparently, "Dr. Tolkien has little skill at narrative and no instinct for literary form" (329). Thus, in the end, not even Tolkien's profession or philological knowledge is enough to salvage "these long-winded volumes of what looks to this reviewer like balderdash" (331). As Tolkien has noted when responding to a negative review of Lewis's Out of the Silent Planet, if someone uses terms like juvenile trash, or balderdash, or "bunk," then he or she will "inevitably find matter of this sort--bunk" (L 33).

The initial reviews of Tolkien's books in newspapers and magazines generally ended in 1956. Soon there appeared articles in scholarly journals. Douglass Parker's "Hwmt We
Holbytla..." was among the first important pieces of Tolkien criticism. Parker notes that it "appears necessary to preface any treatment of The Lord of the Rings with some remarks on fantasy per se, its demands, and, ultimately, its claim to any serious reception" (598). After commenting on the nature of the literary form, Parker concludes that LR "is probably the most original and varied creation ever seen in the genre, and certainly the most self-consistent; yet it is tied up with and bridged to reality as is no other fantasy" (602). Parker refers to Tolkien's ideas (especially those on Beowulf), notes the Anglo-Saxon aura of the names, setting, and themes (e.g. 605), and properly contextualizes his remarks around genre issues.

Parker castigates Wilson for "wrong-headedness" (608) and praises Tolkien for using the impulses of ancient heroic literature. Parker perhaps over-states his case by claiming that Tolkien has "recreated Beowulf" (608) for Frodo has little part in the "'Scouring of the Shire'," taking mainly a passive role (RK 345-65), and the incident does not at all parallel "Beowulf's killing of the dragon in his own land" (609). Parker emphasizes the sorrowful part of LR's ending, the passing of the elves and much of Middle-earth's wonders, and de-emphasizes the possible "Christian" essence; he concludes that the mood and theme of the work follow Tolkien's view of Beowulf, which was borrowed from Widsith: "'Life is fleeting: everything passes away, light and life together'" (609).

Readers may prefer Wilson's views to Parker's; but at least Parker discusses LR with an awareness of the issues involved with Tolkienian fantasy.

Like Wilson's, Mark Roberts's views of Tolkien have been subject to refutation over years in learned studies from Robert Reilly in 1960 to T.A. Shippey in 1992. While Roberts's piece was published in the prestigious Essays in Criticism, his opening appears inappropriate for an academic journal:

Once upon a time, in the Third Age of Middle-Earth, there was a Ring of great powers which belonged to Sauron, the Dark Lord, who was
perhaps the Devil himself in disguise. (450)

The mock fairy-tale tone and structure, with the off-hand view that Sauron could be the "Devil," might make readers doubt that this piece will treat its subject fairly. When Roberts begins to discuss Tolkien's concepts of fantasy in "OFS," he remarks that "it is a theory that one is tempted to call 'perverted Coleridge’" (451). But, as with Wilson's comments, the standards of excellence remain unclear here. What is stated in derision by this critic could be a point in its favour with another. Readers might think Tolkien has made accessible that which is valuable in 'obscure Coleridge.' In any case, such a view needs more explanation than Roberts provides for he refers to Coleridge's ideas only in one other sentence.

Roberts echoes a few commentators in disparaging Tolkien's style, though he mentions no other literary work which is superior within the genre. Actually, he undermines his own argument by acknowledging that Tolkien varies his tone and diction depending on the situation: "One cannot very well talk about the style of the book, for the style changes so constantly and radically" (455). One could suggest that this is a point in its favour; a variety of styles in a work may indicate creative skill. Yet Roberts calls this "mechanical" writing; however much Tolkien uses the heroic mode, such as "'stock responses’" (456-7), experiments with tone and diction within a single work could be points of praise, not of condemnation.

Roberts concludes that Tolkien's work "is simply an adventure story:" the author's adherence to his own theory of fantasy and story-telling competence "is a dangerous substitute for 'something to say'" (458-9). It is not clear why Tolkien's work is "dangerous," even if a given critic disagrees with certain statements in the book; for example, there is Gandalf's declaration: "This is your realm, [Aragorn], and the heart of the greater realm that shall be" (RK 302). Tolkien might have wished to see society return to effective monarchical rule; however, his work is not a political treatise but rather a
fiction set in an imaginary realm. While readers may think such views as Gandalf's are "dangerous," Tolkien himself does not specifically propose Aragorn as a model ruler for the modern world.

Roberts, like Richardson and Wilson, does not develop his views from textual citation and careful argumentation but merely asserts them as apparent facts: "adventure" stories are only simple tales for "a children's matinee" (458), and it is somehow "dangerous" for anyone to think that they are something more. Tolkien has used the motifs and themes from fairy-stories and, according to Roberts, has improperly tried to present them in a tale for adults. Whether or not one appreciates LR, Roberts' perspective appears to be a statement of literary preference, rather than a conclusion based on a developed analysis: "In these last pages [of RK], what began as fairy-story (for adults, of course) comes perilously near to Common Room joke" (459).

Not long after the reviews of LR were published, there came more lengthy commentaries in academic journals, theses, and books. There was no gap in the history of Tolkien criticism. From the very start, scholars took Tolkien's books seriously. Caroline Everett produced a Master's thesis on Tolkien only two years after RK was first published. Interestingly, Tolkien responded at some length when Everett wrote to him for information, even though he was not much in favour of being the "subject of a thesis" (L 257-9). (Everett included part of this letter in her study [86-7].) By examining Tolkien's scholarship, and an acceptance of the work on its own terms, Everett observes what seemed to elude Richardson, Flood, and Wilson: "LR may thus by definition be classified as a fairy-story in the same way in which Tolkien considers the Arthurian and the Border ballads to be fairy-stories" (75). Everett notes that even if readers had not read the appendices, through "exposure to the narrative," they would be "aware that language does indeed play an important part in the world of Middle Earth" (75). With Tolkien's scholarly interests as her starting point, Everett has drawn attention to
important aspects of Tolkien's literary mode.

In 1958, C.W. Trowbridge completed possibly the first doctoral dissertation using Tolkien's works. He focuses on the twentieth-century British "Supernatural Novel," and so discusses Tolkien at length and authors such as Williams, Lewis, Eddison, and Cabell; Trowbridge thinks that "these writers have made literary contributions of genuine merit which have been largely overlooked" (3). He discusses "OFS" and states that other writers have offered "sub-creations," yet "neither Eddison nor Cabell approaches Tolkien in scope of imagination, nor, in fact, do they even aim at the kind of completeness that Tolkien achieves in describing his imaginary world" (398-9). Further, Trowbridge thinks that Tolkien's style is most effective, showing an adroit use of an heroic tone and eloquent diction. He dismisses Wilson's complaint about Tolkien's characterization; Trowbridge notes: "The characters are supposed to talk a 'story-book language'" and "are not meant to 'impose themselves'. Gandalf is a wizard, someone who can grapple with a Balrog, return from the dead, be borne of the back of an eagle" (422). Trowbridge implies that Tolkien's purpose is not to provide characters whose egos and personal quirks dominate the book, but rather ones who remain accessible, though larger-than-life, in service to the progress of the story. Perhaps one of Trowbridge's most significant, yet seemingly obvious, points concerns a wise critical approach to a given work: "In the final analysis we must measure Tolkien by his achievement and not by the limitations that are contained within it" (426). Like all works, Tolkien's books have flaws. But it is still a sound method of criticism to focus on their merits rather than only perceived faults.

Like Parker's commentary, Patricia Meyer Spacks' article of 1959 has been influential in Tolkien studies. She states that Tolkien had not been taken seriously up until that point (30), which, as the foregoing examples of Lewis, Auden, Parker, and Trowbridge show, was not really the case. She asserts that while Tolkien may have some similar creative impulses to those of Williams and Lewis, Tolkien "virtually created a new genre:
one possessing obvious affinities with folk epic and mythology, but with no true literary counterpart" (30). Spacks disputes Wilson's claim that the figures of Good and Evil are simplistically presented; she observes that Tolkien deliberately created a work where "the conflict between good and evil appears, in this trilogy, to be largely a contest between representatives of opposed ethical systems" (32); the motivations of Good proceed from free will, whereas the actions of Evil flow from an insatiable desire to dominate and corrupt (32). While this view seems self-evident from the work itself, as some of the previous comments indicate (e.g. Wilson 331), the stark differences in what is Good and what is Evil in Tolkien's work have appeared either to bemuse or disturb certain critics. Spacks firmly concludes: "Gigantic in effect, unique in conception, his trilogy must assume, it seems, a central position in the canon of serious supernatural literature" (41).

William Blissett follows Spacks in remarking on the landmark nature of Tolkien's work. Blissett takes into account Tolkien's profession and discusses "OFS." While noting a number of medieval motifs evident in Tolkien's work (e.g. quest, numinous object, etc.), Blissett observes: "Without detailed historical allegory and without explicit religious doctrine, Tolkien's fable is a parable of power for the atomic age. Against such dangers within and without, Frodo's exploit, accomplished after a hundred adventures, is a heroic one" (450). It is not clear whether Blissett is suggesting Tolkien has designed this "parable" for the "atomic" era; the author first conceived his story in 1937 (L27), long before the use of nuclear weapons. But certainly readers may see that the Ring stands as a symbol of cataclysmic power, like the H-Bomb, which probably no human should possess. In any case, Blissett develops his analysis from pertinent literary models, while also pointing out where Tolkien's work is special. Blissett thinks that the "style is appropriate to the action," with its blend of comic, formal, and stately modes (450-1), and the characters, while having distinctive individual traits, form a
"composite characterization" found in romance (454). In the end, Blissett notes that while some think that Tolkien's "noble style and heroic action are hard to accept" (448), Tolkien has deliberately turned to "pure narrative" of an order much different from that of Joyce, Proust, or Mann (455). Blissett states that Tolkien's world has its own "imperial completeness and totality" (456).

In 1960, there were more dissertations on Tolkien's work. Robert Reilly and Marjorie Wright both discuss Tolkien in relation to the other Inklings (C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams), thereby establishing one of the fixtures in Tolkien's studies. Reilly's ideas on Tolkien were later published in an article and a book, and so I will consider them in due course. Wright discusses the "realistic" essence of LR, while still acknowledging the uniqueness of its "numinous" character (95). She concludes that Tolkien's "greatest invention," Middle-earth, even given its mythic or thematic commonalties with Lewis or Williams, appears as "a completely chronicled world" (154-5) with a cosmic structure of its own" (172).

Philip Toynbee's short article in the London Observer in 1961 has become a widely-quoted piece not because it is good criticism, and not because it adversely affected the critical history, but because his prediction turned out to be wholly untrue:

There was a time when the Hobbit fantasies of Professor Tolkien were being taken very seriously indeed by a great many distinguished literary figures .... I had the sense that one side or the other must be mad, for it seemed to me that these books were dull, ill-written, whimsical and childish. And for me this had a reassuring outcome, for most of his more ardent supporters were soon beginning to sell out their shares in Professor Tolkien, and today those books have passed into a merciful oblivion. (19)

Again, here is the charge that Tolkien's work is "childish;" and again, there is no developed analysis for this view. Actually, Toynbee plainly notes that others do not share his
assessment and is at a loss to explain why. Moreover, as Shippey observes, it was clearly a poor move to predict that LR would virtually cease to be read because unlike opinions of literary merit, which can rest "undisprovable," hasty predictions of "popular appeal" can be easily recognized as ill-advised (1992, 1). Hammond observes that 17 years later, after the facts had disproved the previous claims to the "oblivion" of Tolkien's works, Toynbee was still remarking on the "'immaturity'" of LR, and that the Inklings were "'childish' in their devotion to 'make-believe'" (1995, 226). Toynbee may choose to label any work any way he wishes. But his view appears to stem from no other factor beside literary preference.

Moreover, even in 1961, Toynbee's views misrepresented the situation. Far from wishing to "sell their shares in Professor Tolkien," three distinguished literary figures wrote valuable studies of Tolkien's work. Irwin, whose landmark book on fantasy literature was considered in chapter 1 (p. 36), discusses the "romances of Williams, Lewis, and Tolkien," borrowing Hobbit's subtitle: "There and Back Again" (1961, 566). Irwin concludes that Tolkien along with Lewis and Williams powerfully show "man that his world and his soul have become a wasteland" and "urge as a consequence one kind or another of regeneration through a rediscovery of unified spiritual values" (577). Bradley also firmly kept her "shares" in Tolkien. In her important study, Bradley sums up the significance of Tolkien's fantasy:

Possibly Dr. Tolkien has written the definitive Quest novel. Certainly he has written a great masterpiece and one which will long endure to seize on generations of children, adolescents and adults with its pity and terror, its catharsis and consolation. What more can anyone ask? (51)

While Bradley acknowledges "children" may enjoy LR, she does not label derisively Tolkien's books as "juvenile" or "childish." She implies, much like Tolkien in "OFS" (TL 41), that certain works evoke a child-like desire for wonders, which
can be felt and enjoyed by readers of all ages.

Auden furthered his "shares" in Tolkien as well. Like Lewis and Spacks, Auden recognizes the importance of a clear demarcation of Good and Evil in Tolkien's fantasy. The hope of the free peoples in Middle-earth lies in the fact that Evil's "primary weakness is a lack of imagination, for, while Good can imagine what it would be like to be Evil, Evil cannot imagine what it would be like to be Good" (1961, 90). This is a vital point because those critics who question Tolkien's portrayal of Good and Evil fail to acknowledge that the inherent distinction of each is the foundation of Tolkien's cosmos and story. Anybody is free to reject it, but no one can claim it is obscure or inconsistent in LR. Auden observes that Tolkien does not offer a hackneyed ending "'And so they lived happily ever after'"; while Good has triumphed over Evil, Auden states: "Victory does not mean restoration of the Earthly Paradise or the advent of the New Jerusalem. In our historical existence even the best solution involves loss as well as gain" (92). Auden concludes that Tolkien's "Quest Tale" has done "more justice to our experience of social-historical realities" than any story he knows (93).

In 1962, Edmund Fuller, as noted in chapter 1 (p. 23), discussed the nature of fantasy in general, as well as Tolkien's work in particular. Fuller shows a good awareness of Tolkien's concepts of fantasy in "OFS" and states that while Tolkien uses elements drawn from ancient heroic tales, "he has brought something uniquely his own" (171). Fuller echoes many other commentators on the high artistry of Middle-earth's conception and thinks Tolkien "is a poet of much skill in the special veins appropriate to the work" (175); Fuller implies that the standard of Tolkien's poetry must be measured against its forbearers, the "comic to heroic to elegiac, in the modes of those that characterize Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature" (175), rather than modern poetry. Fuller rejects Toynbee's view quoted above, calling himself a "small shareholder" in Tolkien, and concludes:
I think it safe to say that whatever anyone might hold to be the flaws, idiosyncrasies, or excesses of the hobbit story, this extraordinary imaginative feat in the making of an Other-world, meaningfully related to our own, is likely to be one of the most tenacious works of fiction in this present age of Middle-earth. (196)

Like the views of Lewis, Crouch, and Boucher, Fuller's prediction appears to have been accurate.

In 1963, Robert Reilly extracted a key chapter from his dissertation and published it as an article. He properly reviews some of the major critical responses to Tolkien's works, noting that uncertainty about its genre had shaped both positive and negative reactions (1963, 90). Reilly states that the trilogy is a "fairy story" in the Tolkienian sense, since "in dealing with fantastic things rather than with real ones it attempts the purest form of narrative art, and succeeds to the extent that it induces in the reader the state of mind called Secondary Belief" (101). Reilly notes that LR encourages a sense of Recovery in scenes such as Frodo's feeling towards Galadriel and the other elves: "'[A] living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time'" (102); the sense of Escape is the pleasure in reading about wondrous lands and leaving behind horrors of reality (103); and Consolation is "the justification of the fairy story--and thus of the trilogy--that it gives us in small, in the beat of the heart and the catch of the breath, the joy of the infinite good news" (105). Reilly concludes that "Tolkien's defense of Fantasy and, I would add, of the trilogy ... may be the last defense, of the doctrine of the creative imagination, which brings the making of God and the making of man so close that they nearly touch" (106).

Margery Fisher in her book Intent Upon Reading, published in 1964, discusses Tolkien's work in the chapter "The Land of Faerie" (84-7). Her focus is on issues in "children's literature" but she thinks that Tolkien's work surpasses such formal labels: "These books [LR] are not in the strictest
sense children's books, as THE HOBBIT is. I do not mean children cannot read them. Every child should read them, somehow between the ages eleven and sixteen, and everyone with a feeling for poetry, of any age, should read them too" (85). Fisher appears to have been a student of Tolkien, remarking that "I can remember Professor Tolkien reading Beowulf aloud at Oxford" (84); she concludes that LR is superior to traditional fairy-tales:

It is an extraordinarily varied world; you move from a rough village inn to the stately hall of the Elves, from the dark deadly caves of Moria to the earthly, infinitely reassuring home of Tom Bombadil the elemental. And as the scene changes, so does the style. (85-6)

Like many critics before her, Fisher discerns the essence of Tolkien's fantasy by acknowledging his profession and the literary resonances of his books: "But, though they reflect the climate of our time, they have the universal dateless quality of imagination" (87).

In the chapter "New Wonderlands" of his 1965 book Tellers of Tales, Roger Green remarks that stories of imagination set in alternative realms have "a hidden element" which he calls "'the mythopoeic'"--"a glimpse for a moment of what we seek--only it is gone before we can give it a name or shape" (269). Even if he had not read "OFS," Green certainly invokes Tolkien's view of the "indescribable, though not imperceptible" realm of "Faerie" (TL 9-15). Green calls Tolkien "one of the greatest living scholars of old Norse and Germanic language, literature and mythology," noting that this helped make Hobbit a richly varied and "breath-taking book" (277). He concludes that LR's readers can find "the key into their own inner experience--and it is a story of great beauty, many excitements, and an amazing creation of, outwardly, a complete new world" (277).

In "The Elvish Art of Enchantment," Loren Eiseley echoes Green. Eiseley discusses "OFS" and remarks that Tolkien's imaginary realm transcends the "Primary or Baconian world," even if many people "can never be persuaded to leave" their
'real' existence (364-5). Eiseley finds this antipathy, or "phobia," towards the "art of enchantment" strange because "our generation has done more 'meddling,' more downright dangerous fumbling with the actual world and its contents than any rational wizard such as Merlin or Gandalf would dare attempt" (365). But whatever parallels exist between the evils in Middle-earth and those of contemporary life, Eiseley states this "great tapestry" is not merely a "moralizing, didactic, simple allegory;" it is "rich with all manner of invention and of symbols, of the peculiar ethnology of a created world" (366). A "great tapestry" may be one of the most insightful metaphors for Tolkien's work. Whether or not a reader likes LR, it clearly has many threads that are multi-hued.

In her dissertation, Mariann Russell examines "The Idea of the City of God" in Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams. She shows a good knowledge of Tolkien's concepts of fantasy evident from "OFS" (e.g. 169), and notes that the author "creates history and legend to give a sense of timelessness to the immediate struggle between Sauron and the Company" (180). While Tolkien displays opposing images of the City, Minas Tirith restored and Minas Morgul depraved (187-193), Tolkien does not offer a kind of New Jerusalem at the end; the "joyous yet grave happy ending" reflects "the quality of man's struggle," which "inevitably presents an unspecified idea of the City" (193,196).

Dorothy Barber's dissertation in 1965 is the first to focus solely on Tolkien's works. She has expanded on Lewis's and Auden's views that the clear demarcation between Good and Evil is the foundation for the structure of LR. She properly reviews the existing criticism and discusses Tolkien's scholarly work and ideas of fantasy (1-50). While for the most part her conclusions echo previous critics', she provides a good model for sound criticism in Tolkien studies. Barber methodically proves her assertions through extensive argumentation and citations from the text. She concludes that whether or not one accepts that "God is light," Tolkien's fantasy reflects the value of the possibility:
The mysteries remain, for Light itself, in primary world, measurable, terms, is a mystery. ... Such realizations may 'move,' not argue, us 'to virtue,' for we feel that Good, or God, exists, that we, like hobbits, are a significant although small part of creation, and that we need not lament our lack of omniscience and omnipotence. (192-3)

There were certainly many other commentaries on Tolkien between 1937 and 1965, but the foregoing overview represents important moments in Tolkien criticism from major news publications, academic journals, dissertations, and critical books. Clearly, Tolkien's works at the outset of their publication inspired not only accolades but insightful criticism, which includes considerations of themes, literary style, genre issues, as well as the landscapes, inhabitants, and languages of Middle-earth. The ground had been laid for future scholars to develop and expand on the ideas of the critics from Lewis through Auden to Roger Green. Perhaps the negative views, such as those of Wilson and Roberts, represented a silent majority in academic circles which was against Tolkien. But this is a precarious and likely unrewarding critical judgement.

In order to prove that Tolkien was singled out for exclusion, one would have to show that his contemporaries in the genre, C.S. Lewis or T.H. White, or his predecessors, MacDonald, Morris, Eddison, Dunsany, had received wide acceptance. By 1965, none of these authors had obtained a stature in fantasy fiction which superseded Tolkien's. For the kind of literature that Tolkien wrote, he was esteemed above all others. If there were critical discrimination, it was against the genre, not Tolkien alone. Tolkien, and the enthusiastic and thoughtful responses to his works, helped to place fantasy literature in both the popular and critical limelight. The first period of Tolkien criticism shows that while some commentators rejected the author's importance or merits, many others were not dissuaded from appreciating and studying the Middle-earth tales.
Notes

1 For publication details of all of Tolkien's writings, see West (1981, 1-12), Carpenter (1992, 266-275), and Hammond (1993, 1-368).

2 In the 1990s, Colebatch (59-60), Attebery (1992, 38-9), and Hammond (1995, 226) have invoked the negative commentaries from Richardson, Wilson, and Toynbee, respectively.

3 C. Tolkien discusses the state of the Sil. material at the time of the composition and publication of *Hobbit* (SM 1-11).

4 Tolkien remarks on the reviews of FR by C.S. Lewis, Peter Green, Edwin Muir, J.W. Lambert, A.E. Cherryman, Howard Spring, H.l'A. Fawcett, and the reviewer in *Oxford Times* (L 184-5). Carpenter provides a brief sampling of some of the comments (L 444), which are all complimentary except for Green's.

5 One indication that a critic has not read Tolkien's work closely enough is when spelling and plot mistakes appear in the commentary. Lewis's review oddly has a number of typographical errors; it is hard to imagine they are his. If these mistakes are not Lewis's, the copy editor or type-setter at *Time and Tide* was quite careless.

6 Other very positive reviews include two more by Anthony Boucher (1955b, 122; 1956, 91-2), three by Dan Wickenden (1954,5; 1955, 5; 1956, 3), and others, such as R.C. Scriven (129-30) and that in *Booksellers* (327). Jane Chance provides some selections of negative views (1992, 11-12).

7 Johnson lists over 400 items of commentary on Tolkien between 1937 and 1965 (15-62).
Chapter Four: Tolkien on Tolkien: Authorial Comments to 1975

He sighed. 'I suppose it is the threat of war that maketh me look upon fair things with such disquiet,' he thought. 'The shadow of fear is between us and the sun, and all things look as if they were already lost. Yet they are strangely beautiful thus seen. I do not know. I wonder. A Numenore! I hope the trees will blossom on your hills in years to come as they do now; and your towers will stand white in the Moon and yellow in the Sun. I wish it were not hope, but assurance—that assurance we used to have before the Shadow.' (LROW 58)

In addition to Tolkien's scholarship, his comments on his own fiction provide further insight into his fantasy. Even if one concurs with Wimsatt that designs or intentions of an author should not be "a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (3), it appears unwise to ignore the writer's views. At the very least, they represent a notable contribution to the responses to a literary work and so should receive due consideration. In Tolkien's case, it is necessary to come to terms with his remarks, given that they are often emphatic and have been influential.

In several commentaries from 1954 to 1975, Tolkien discusses his own creative work and some of the "inner" motivations behind it (FR 11). These authorial statements range from the brief, though curious, "Foreword" to the first edition of LR to the extensive and blunt remarks to Henry Resnik in an interview. Of the early pieces, neither "Foreword-1st" nor "English and Welsh" had much impact on the critical response, whereas the "Foreword-2nd" in 1965 and Tolkien's Diplomat article in 1966 appeared to affect significantly the successive scholarship. These authorial remarks indicate that Tolkien both disliked critical approaches to his works and felt that, as the author, he held "the key" to their elucidation (Resnik 1967, 38). Tolkien believed that writers should be the final judges or arbitrators of the criticism on their works. However, due to the subtleties and contradictions within Tolkien's account of his tales, he was at
times a slippery and unreliable judge of his own books.

In "Foreword-1st," Tolkien displays a peculiar tone and approach. The remarks start off quite matter-of-factly:

This tale, which has grown to be almost a history of the great War of the Ring, is drawn for the most part from the memoirs of the renowned Hobbits, Bilbo and Frodo, as they are preserved in the Red Book of Westmarch. (7)

It seems that Tolkien has adopted a literary persona here; the narrator is a translator/transcriber of the "memoirs of the renowned Hobbits." He considers that he is dealing with the records of "history"—not a fictional text; further, this translator remarks that "Bilbo was not an assiduous, nor an orderly narrator," and errors have crept in because "the copiers were pious and careful, and altered very little" (7). (The errors are apparently Bilbo's incorrect account of some "true" events in Middle-earth's history.) This seems to be an effective literary device because it immediately encourages the reader to become immersed in the "sub-creation;" from the start there is no clear hint of irony or whimsy. By having a narrator plainly say he is conveying an actual account, Tolkien's fantasy shows an initial aura of verisimilitude; this observation certainly reflects Tolkien's ideas on the "inner consistency of reality" in "OFS." ¹

However, in the third paragraph Tolkien begins to complicate matters. He claims that the "tale has been put into its present form in response to the many requests that I have received for further information about the history of the Third Age, and about Hobbits in particular" (7). This is a reference to Hobbit and its favourable reception, but who is speaking here—Tolkien or the narrator or hybrid of both? Readers should know that the Middle-earth tales are fiction, not historical records. But Tolkien seems to want to have it both ways: he speaks as both the author—the real person, and the narrator—the fictional persona. This is confirmed further on when the text reads, "I dedicate the book to all admirers of Bilbo, but especially to my sons and daughter, and to my
friends the Inklings" (7). The biographical allusion indicates Tolkien is speaking as himself; and yet a few sentences later, he remarks that his family and friends "have all helped me in the labours of composition. If 'composition' is a just word, and these pages do not deserve all that I have said about Bilbo's work." Clearly, this a remarkable literary device. The conflation of author and narrator, and the pretense that the fiction is history, indicates this "Foreword" is not plain authorial commentary.

The reason that this issue of author vs. narrator becomes important is that a critic is mistaken to assume that the comments in this "Foreword-1st" are in fact wholly Tolkien's views. He appears to collapse the ironic distance between narrator and author, especially with the facts of his own life intermixed with remarks on the historical nature of the fiction. On the next page of this account, Tolkien seems to drop the narratorial voice and speak solely as the author. He comments on the years of the composition on the work and mentions "England and across the Water [i.e. North America]" (8). Yet again, he calls LR an "almost forgotten history; but it is not yet universally recognized as an important branch of study" (8). With the melding of authorial and narratorial voices, it is difficult to discern if there is some irony in these statements. The narrator may casually state a work like LR is "not yet universally recognized as an important branch of study," yet Tolkien the author might be wryly indicating that his work could be received unfavourably. (In a letter written not long before FR was first published, Tolkien states bluntly "I am dreading publication" [L 172]; yet in a later note, he acknowledges the reviews were better than expected [L 184-5].) This dual author/narrator perspective may be effective as a literary device, since the tone indicates readers should treat the text seriously, not fancifully; as well, the details establish the appropriate frame of reference for the complexity of Tolkien's sub-creation.

Still, critics need to keep in mind that Tolkien offers here a rather peculiar literary persona. They should be
hesitant to consider that the comments in "Foreword-1st" come straight from the author's mouth. Whatever enjoyment Tolkien (and readers) may receive from viewing LR as an actual "almost forgotten history," critics should maintain an objective stance and consider such remarks in both their existing context and in relation to the work itself. Tolkien concludes this commentary with the curious way of treating LR--his sub-creation, his Secondary World--as our real, Primary World history, a verifiable account drawn from the fictional "Red Book:"

It was in that hope that I began the work of translating and selecting the stories of the Red Book, part of which are now presented to Men of a later Age, one almost as darkling and ominous as was the Third Age that ended with the great years 1418 and 1419 of the Shire long ago. (8)

In the lecture "English and Welsh," which was given in 1955 but not published until 1963, Tolkien makes some brief comments on his fiction. Tolkien delivered "EW" at the time when a major portion of his creative work was at the publisher. By 1955, Tolkien had published the first two volumes of the LR and was apparently anxious that RK would be in print before he delivered this lecture (L 227). Tolkien refers to his creative work at the outset of "Welsh:"

... the years 1953 to 1955 have for me been filled with a great many tasks, and their burden has not been decreased by the long-delayed appearance of a large 'work', if it can be called that, which contains, in the way of presentation that I find most natural, much of what I personally have received from the study of things Celtic. (Essays 162)

Notice the inverted commas around "work" (i.e. LR), and the implication that it may not be worthy of the title. Either he openly expresses concern (or humility) about LR's reception or ironically refers to the reactions of his Oxford colleagues, who were reported to have declared, "You have had your fun and you must now do some work" (Carpenter 1992, 226). Tolkien appears to adopt the modesty topos when discussing his own
writings, which is certainly a common rhetorical posture and perhaps even an admirable one.

However, in a letter written before this lecture Tolkien apparently wishes that RK will act as a distraction from his discussion of "things Celtic," rather than a reflection of it: "I must hope that a large part of my audience will be so bemused by sitting up late the night before [i.e. to read RK] that they will not so closely observe my grave lack of equipment as a lecturer on a Celtic subject" (L 227). It is part of a lecturer's strategy to get the audience on his or her side; yet the indirect way Tolkien introduces his fiction in "EW" is artful.

Tolkien's remark in "EW" that his creative work reflects Celtic matters appears confusing or, perhaps, even disingenuous. His fondness for the Welsh language is well-documented, not only in this lecture but throughout the letters (e.g. L 218-19). But when he had received a reader's comments on a version of Sil. in 1937, which mentioned the "eye-splitting Celtic names" (L 25), Tolkien firmly responded:

Needless to say they are not Celtic! Neither are the tales. I do know Celtic things (many in their original languages Irish and Welsh), and feel for them a certain distaste: largely for their fundamental unreason. They have bright colour, but are like a broken stained glass window reassembled without design. They are in fact 'mad' as your reader says --but I don't believe I am. (L 26)

Tolkien possibly altered his view in the 18 years between those words and the present lecture. (In 1955, he wrote to Auden that the reader's comments that Sil. was "too full of the kind of Celtic beauty that maddened Anglo-Saxons in large doses" were "[v]ery likely quite right" [L 215].) Shippey notes that Tolkien used the Welsh language to construct the "Sindarin" form of "Elvish" (1992, 105). However, when describing the essence of his mythology in 1951, Tolkien makes it clear that his work attempts to achieve "the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine Celtic
The point here is not to catch Tolkien in a lie. Certainly his scholarly interests influenced, directly and indirectly, his creative work. But these elusive comments on "things Celtic" indicate that critics have to be careful when reviewing Tolkien's remarks on his own fiction. The rest of the lecture echoes Tolkien's other academic work, such as his interest in the languages and history of Britain's distant past (e.g. 162,174-5,182-3). And when he mentions the treasure of medieval Welsh, "The Red Book of Hergest," this could bring to mind Bilbo's "Red Book of Westmarch" (FR 34). But when Tolkien states in an endnote that the names in LR derive from the Welsh language, and give "perhaps more pleasure to more readers than anything else in it" (197), critics should pause before fully accepting this rather startling remark. There is scant evidence that the names in LR were somehow more pleasurable to readers in general than the moving story. Tolkien seems to be playing up to his audience here, which is understandable; yet critics should take into account such rhetorical techniques when discussing Tolkien's self-commentaries.

In the "Introductory Note" to the 1964 edition of Tree and Leaf, Tolkien comments on the inception of a few of his creative works. While these remarks are brief, they indicate Tolkien's peculiar and error-prone way of charting his compositional process. He notes that both "OFS" and "Leaf by Niggle" are related "by the symbols of Tree and Leaf, and by both touching in different way on what is called in the essay 'sub-creation'" (TL 5). This appears appropriate, though "Niggle" is a rather minor sub-creation in comparison with the massively detailed LR. But his remarks on the composition of the two works' are curious:

[T]hey were written in the same period (1938-39), when The Lord of the Rings was beginning to unroll itself and to unfold prospects of labour and exploration in yet unknown country as daunting to me as to the hobbits. At about that time we had reached Bree, and I had then no more notion than they had of what had become of Gandalf or who Strider was; and I
had begun to despair of surviving to find out.

(\textit{TL 5})

It is interesting that an author would say he must "find out" what will happen next in his story, rather than "figure out" or "devise" where the tale should go. Tolkien has stated that he always "had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'" (L 145).

Tolkien's remarks on the "sub-creator" as conveyer of "evangelium" to the world, which I discussed in chapter 2 (p. 68), may help to illuminate the elusive authorial stance in this "Introductory Note." If the artist is, as Tolkien implies, some sort of conduit of God's will, then the writer will have to "find out" what will happen as the creative process proceeds, since he or she is receiving divine inspiration in the measure given by God. This might indicate a kind of automatism, but Tolkien seems to eschew this in "OFS" by asserting that the fantasist has free will to do good or evil (TL 51). Later in this chapter, I shall return to this key point about Tolkien as both the active author of his work and the passive sub-creator.

But whatever authorial posture Tolkien chooses to adopt, his overall account of "Niggle"'s composition is filled with contradictions. The story is first mentioned in May 1944 (L 81); it was then submitted for publication in October 1944 (L 97) and printed in January 1945 (West 1981, 6); Tolkien's first account of "Niggle" places its inception at around 1943 (L 113); and then, in 1962, he approximates the publication date correctly, yet states it "was written (I think) just before the War began, though I first read it aloud to my friends early in 1940" (L 320). Of course, as an elderly man, Tolkien might simply have had a faulty recollection. Yet in 1945, he speculated the story was conceived around 1943 (L 113), which would seem plausible because it was not mentioned in his letters before 1944. Further, in the "Introductory Note," he states "Niggle"'s original publication (1945) was "1947," the date of the first published version of "OFS." Therefore, Tolkien could have been so intent on drawing a link between
"OFS" and "Niggle" that this clouded his memory.

Indeed, Tolkien has engaged in retrospective critical discussion of the tale. He states in 1945 that he has no real recollection of how the story arose, since it cost him "absolutely no pains at all" (L 113); then in 1957, he states, upon reflection, "it arose from my own pre-occupation" with LR, and his fears that he would never complete the trilogy (L 257); in 1962, he elaborately suggests that it is a quasi-biographical allegory, which would again place it some time after December 1942 (L 47), yet claims it was read to friends in 1940 (L 320-1); and, lastly, in 1964 he states that it was written in the "same period" as the "OFS" lecture, which was actually delivered in 1939, not 1938 as Tolkien notes (TL 6). In short, critics have to be very careful before adopting Tolkien's account of his own writings. His penchant for retrospective self-analysis complicates even ordinary matters, such as dates of composition.

Wariness is especially required when considering Tolkien's "Foreword" to the second edition of LR, first printed in 1965 for the "official" American paperback edition and then in 1966, in the British. These remarks have been quite influential for critics (as is noted in chapter 5); however, many commentators fail to discern the incongruities in Tolkien's statements. This account bears only cursory similarity to "Foreword-1st." In "Foreword-2nd," there is no conflation of author and narrator; Tolkien consistently maintains the authorial persona and reserves the narratorial one for the "Prologue." Still, "Foreword-2nd" has its own elusive aspects.

First of all, in the initial paragraph Tolkien's account of LR's inception varies dramatically from the evidence in the letters. Tolkien states:

It was begun soon after The Hobbit was written and before its publication in 1937; but I did not go on with this sequel, for I wished first to complete and set in order the mythology and legends of the Elder Days, which had then been taking shape for some years. (FR 9)
The actual date when LR began to be composed was December 19, 1937 (L 27)—three months after Hobbit’s publication (L 20). If it were just a matter of a mistaken month or year, critics could put it down to faulty memory; but the process of inception was wholly different. Tolkien actually wrote in October 1937 that while he was pleased with Hobbit’s general acclaim, "I cannot think of anything more to say about hobbits" (L 24). In November 1937 Tolkien did submit a version of Sil., but his publisher’s outside reader reported unfavourably on it (L 25). When responding to some of these comments on December 16, 1937, Tolkien stated, "I think it is plain that quite apart from it [i.e. Sil.], a sequel or successor to The Hobbit is called for," though he still wondered "what more can hobbits do?" (L 26). Remarkably, only three days later he wrote the first chapter, "A long expected party" (L 27). Given the doubts Tolkien had about the sequel, and the back and forth correspondence with his publisher, it is very strange that he would forget most of the affair and note in 1965 that LR was started before Hobbit was published.

The account of LR’s composition in the second and third paragraphs of the "Foreword-2nd" is only partially accurate as well. The end date of 1949 appears correct (see L 133), but the 1936 start date is wrong. Actually, the accurate remarks make the inaccurate even more mysterious. If in 1965 he could remember so exactly that he had not completed Book I before World War Two began (see L 41-2), why was he so forgetful of its inception date and process? Further, C. Tolkien notes that his father’s account of his writer’s block (FR 10) "seems impossible to accommodate ... to such other evidence as exists on the subject;" it was late 1939 when he "halted a long while," not 1940 (RS 461). The rest of the dates of composition appear correct, with the FR written in 1941 and the TT half-written in 1942 (L 58). Interestingly, Tolkien thought in late 1942 that the book "is now approaching completion" (L 58), but in 1944 he was still writing part 2 of TT (L 74). When he states "[f]oresight had failed" him (FR 10), this appears to follow the letters, since his optimism in 1942 (L
58) proved to be premature. So, while the general account has some supporting evidence, key details and dates are incorrect. This becomes quite significant when considering his comments on the possible influence of World War Two.

Tolkien goes on to provide rather firm remarks on "the motives and meanings of the tale" (10). As I noted from his comments in TL, Tolkien implies that he was chiefly a recorder, rather than an inventor, of his story. He employs this literary device in Hobbit (11) and LR (FR 18-36), but also uses the role in authorial comments: "It was during 1944 that, leaving the loose ends and perplexities of a war which it was my task to conduct, or at least to report, I forced myself to tackle the journey of Frodo to Mordor" (11). The subtle way Tolkien draws a distinction between literary conducting and reporting exhibits, depending on one's view, either a remarkable creative psyche or strange authorial posture.

Again, perhaps Tolkien’s remarks on the "sub-creator" as the passive recorder of God's "good news" illuminate this literary conducting vs. reporting. But, of course, he also states that "I forced myself to tackle ..." (my emphasis). It seems wise not to carry too far this notion of the author as the passive conduit of imaginative art. Tolkien may have believed that he wrote at God’s behest, which would account for his modesty topos and humble posture at times. However, he was also firm on some matters, such as the implications of allegory, which indicates that he still felt he was in control of his writing and its artistic expression. This desire for authorial control will become quite apparent in chapter 6 when I consider extensively Tolkien’s comments in the letters.

In "Foreword-2nd," Tolkien is plainly emphatic about his creative desires in LR. After alluding to readers' "many opinions and guesses," he states:

The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them. (FR 10)
Notice how he confidently knows what was "the prime motive" of his art. If he were just a passive recorder, he should not be so certain. Tolkien further notes that he "had only his feelings for what is appealing or moving," and others often found "fault" with this (10). He states that he has "no cause to complain" about certain negative views, since he holds "similar opinions" of his detractors' works or preferences; yet there is the subtle remark, which Shippey calls catty (1992, 3), on whether or not critics closely read LR: "Some who have read the book, or at any rate reviewed it" (10-11). (As outlined in chapter 3, Tolkien really had little reason to be concerned about the hostile voices given the fact that there were far more praising views.) When Tolkien mentions "many defects" in the work, while stating it is impossible to please or displease everybody on any point, he singles out one particular flaw: "the book is too short" (11). There seems to be a touch of comic irony here, though many readers may have wanted even a longer version after being so moved by the published one. And so, besides expressing a dislike of "opinions" or "guesses" about his work, Tolkien could be giving subtle digs at his detractors; by 1965, the book was profitable and had garnered many admirers (Carpenter 1992, 245-7).

Tolkien's remarks on any possible "inner meaning or 'message'" produce a whole series of complications. First, to return to the account of LR’s composition, Tolkien again misrepresents the process:

The crucial chapter, ‘The Shadow of the Past’, is one of the oldest parts of the tale. It was written long before the foreshadow of 1939 had yet become a threat of inevitable disaster, and from that point the story would have developed along essentially the same lines, if that disaster had been averted. Its sources are things long before in mind, or in some cases already written, and little or nothing in it was modified by the war that begun in 1939 or its sequels. (11)

Now, what did Tolkien mean by "long before," months or years? As noted above, LR began as a **Hobbit** sequel in December 1937;
Tolkien stated in July 1938 that the story "has remained where it stopped. It has lost my favour" (L 38). (Further on in this letter, he actually considers abandoning the whole work because he much preferred to write, complete, and publish Sil.) So, even if he had written the "crucial chapter" between July 1938 and August 1938, when the story started "flowing along" (L 40), it was not "long before the foreshadow of 1939." Tolkien certainly drew on his Sil. material as he composed LR; but his description of the process here implies the "crucial chapter" was essentially composed "long before" the looming threat of war in Europe.

Furthermore, on October 13, 1938 Tolkien plainly stated that the "darkness of the present days has had some effect on it [i.e. the composing of LR]" (L 41). There seems no other way to regard this statement except as a direct contradiction to what he wrote in 1965. C. Tolkien has shown that "the crucial chapter," in its published form, is not "one of the oldest parts of the tale," or at least the chapter which would become "The Shadow of the Past." C. Tolkien remarks this chapter had a particularly confusing textual history for it "seems impossible to say" when it started because the manuscript has no date or title (RS 76). As well, in a plot summary dated August 1938, "The Quest of the Fiery Mountain" appears for the first time (RS 126). This seems supported by the letters because Tolkien noted at this point that the story had "reached Chapter VII and progresses towards quite unforeseen goals" (L 40). C. Tolkien notes that the manuscripts indicate that as late as October 1938, the epic scope of LR had not been conceived: "It is indeed far from certain that the idea of the Ruling Ring had yet arisen. Of the great lands and histories east and south of the Misty Mountains--of Lothlorien, Fangorn, Isengard, Rohan, the Numenorean kingdoms--there is no shadow of a hint" (RS 189). Tolkien himself at one point envisioned a much simpler story and thought in October 1938 that he had "the threads all in hand" and "may be able to submit it early next year" (L 41). Lastly, to clinch the matter, Tolkien states in 1947 that he
recently had completed a major revision of FR: "Chapter II is now called 'The Shadow of the Past' and most of its "historical material has been cut out, while a more attention is paid to Gollum" (L 124).

As I noted before, if it were just a matter of mistaken dates critics could put it down to faulty memory. But it is most strange Tolkien would misremember the compositional history of this "crucial chapter" and so provide an inaccurate account in the "Foreword-2nd." The letters from June 1938 to February 1939 (L 36-43) detail a steady commentary on LR's composition; it is very curious Tolkien would forget the process, no matter how many years had passed. In fact, in February 1939 Tolkien thought that he could "finish it off before June 15th [1939]" (L 43). And, as a final point in this murky matter, C. Tolkien provides comments on his father's notes, dated "August 1939" (only a month before World War Two began), which indicate—for the first time—a war or battle is envisioned: "Land of Ond [i.e. later, "Gondor"]. Siege of the City" (RS 381). Far from having the plot set "long before" the war began, these August 1939 notes indicate, as C. Tolkien observes, that his father was "at a halt, even a loss, to the point of a lack of confidence in radical components of the narrative structure that had been built up with such pains" (RS 370).

The explanation for Tolkien's seemingly revisionist account of LR composition, I think, lies in his comments on "the inner meaning or 'message'." He states that "it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical" (11). (Again, notice how the first sentence seems to allow for some other source to have intended a "'message'," yet the next phrase clearly maintains there is no allegorical "meaning.") Tolkien appears quite intent on dismissing critical views that LR was composed as such because of World War Two, or that the work is a hidden commentary or a disguised allegory of it. Therefore, he altered, either consciously or sub-consciously, the account of the composition of LR to undercut these kinds of analyses. This could also explain why
he firmly belittles any allegorical reading of LR (10-11) and
draws a distinction between "'applicability'" and "'allegory'":
"the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in
the purposed domination of the author" (12). In other words, 
"as a reader, you are free to make whatever associations you
like; but just don't claim I intentionally devised them."
Obviously, certain responses to LR (e.g. influence of the war
or allegorical intent) had bothered Tolkien. And so, he set
out to counter them in both open and subtle ways.

Tolkien's tone and approach in this "Foreword-2nd"
indicate that not only did he dislike certain responses, he
wished to dissuade attempts at criticism, or, at the very
least, subordinate them to the pure enjoyment of his story. While granting that an author's experiences can affect his
literary work, Tolkien is quick to dismiss the approach:

... but the ways in which a story-germ uses
the soil of experience are extremely complex,
and attempts to define the process are at
best guesses from evidence that is inadequate
and ambiguous. It is also false, though
naturally attractive, when the lives of an
author and critic have overlapped, to suppose
that the movements of thought or the events
of times common to both were necessarily
the most powerful influences. (12)

Obviously, all "attempts" to analyze the biographical or other
"influences" of literary work pose difficulties. However, this
does not mean they are usually "false" or "at best guesses."
The merit of any piece of criticism depends on the quality of
its argument and evidence. It is true that critics should
retain a measure of doubt that aspects of an author's life or
critical writings were "necessarily the most powerful
influences." But Tolkien made "guesses" about the poets of
Gawain, Beowulf, and Maldon. Tolkien is rather inconsistent to
disparage scholarly approaches that he himself used. In fact,
he indicates in the "Introductory Note" to TL that "Niggle" and
LR are related to his concept of "sub-creation" (5). Given the
strong remarks in this "Foreword-2nd," Tolkien would seem to
have disapproved of almost any critical approach to Middle-
earth—other than his own.

Tolkien’s general dislike of criticism on his works is further evident in a short article in *The Diplomat*, entitled "Tolkien on Tolkien." He used comments from a letter to his American publisher, Houghton Mifflin (L 218-21); in "T on T," Tolkien rearranges the paragraphs of the 1955 letter, though the points are almost identical to the previous text. In the letter, Tolkien sought to set the record straight on some prior comments he made to Harvey Breit of the *New York Times Book Review*. Tolkien was particularly annoyed with Breit’s inquiry, "what makes you tick?" Tolkien’s terse response was apparently quoted out of context, and so he made a "few notes" to clear up confusion on certain points (L 217-18). In "T on T," Tolkien begins with an account of the "birth" of his creative work:

This business began so far back that it might be said to have begun at birth. Somewhere about six years old I tried to write some verses on a dragon about which I now remember nothing except that it contained the expression a green great dragon and that I remained puzzled for a very long time at being told that this should be great green. (39)

This interesting anecdote draws attention to Tolkien’s delight in language matters, which is obvious from his scholarship. Tolkien’s account of when he began writing the stories of his mythology, such as "the birth of Earendil" (39) seems supported by the letters (L 7-8). Also, his comments on the seriousness of a "fairy story" here (39) concur with "OFS" (e.g. TL 34).

Questions begin to arise, however, when Tolkien remarks on the linguistic "inspiration" of his work:

To me a name comes first and the story follows. I should have preferred to write in 'Elvish'. But, of course, such a work as *The Lord of the Rings* has been edited and only as much 'language' has been left in as I thought would be stomached by readers. (I now find that many would have liked more.) But there is a great deal of linguistic matter (other than actually "elvish" names and words) included or mythologically expressed in the book. It is to me, anyway, largely an essay
in 'linguistic aesthetic', as I sometimes say to people who ask me 'what is it all about?' It is not 'about' anything but itself. (39)

Should critics consider this at face value? Was LR to Tolkien "largely an essay"? Is Tolkien here ironic, coy, or just plain irritated? LR, with its many languages and dialects, obviously reflects a profound and remarkable "linguistic aesthetic," no doubt nurtured by Tolkien's personal and professional interests in such matters. But why go so far as to claim it is a kind of "essay," when clearly it is not--or, at least, not an academic essay. In "Foreword-2nd," Tolkien states the "prime motive" of LR was to tell a moving story, not to provide "largely an essay." 6

However, there need not be any conflict between the "inspiration" for a story and final product itself. In "T on T," Tolkien states that his creative process apparently began with a delight in words, their phonetics, semantics, and history, which later would affect the stories he wrote. Still, Tolkien does seem here to over-emphasize linguistic "inspiration" and subordinate the story "invention." Critics may wonder why he would not merely maintain that there was a symbiotic relationship with regard to his pleasure with ancient languages, his invention of his own languages, and the writing of stories--and leave others to cope with the implications of this for his art. In "T on T," Tolkien seems intent on setting the record straight. And yet, as noted in "Foreword-2nd," Tolkien appears to dismiss a critical approach that would link his creative and professional interests, calling it "false" when "the lives of an author and critic have overlapped, to suppose that the movements of thought or the events of times common to both were the most powerful influences" (FR 12).

Is there an explanation for this apparent contradiction? Why would Tolkien dismiss the idea that his professional interests were "the most powerful influences" only to affirm such a claim in "T on T?" Perhaps part of the reason that Tolkien purposefully stressed his "linguistic inspiration,"
sometimes to the subordination of story-writing, seems to be related to reactions at Oxford. Throughout his academic career, Tolkien remarked on a number of occasions, in both obvious and subtle ways, that some of his colleagues thought writing "fantasy" stories took away an inordinate amount of time and energy from "serious" academic work. And Tolkien, while begrudging these comments, might have had some guilt about the matter. In 1937, Tolkien stated that writing stories had been stolen, "often guiltily, from time already mortgaged" (L 24). Further on in this letter, Tolkien states that his "own college is I think good for about six copies [of Hobbit], if only in order to find material for teasing me," and appearance "in The Times convinced one or two of my more sedate colleagues that they could admit knowledge of my 'fantasy' (i.e. indiscretion) without loss of academic dignity" (L 24-5). Besides Lewis, there seemed few others at Oxford who thought that Hobbit "may well prove a classic" (1937, 714).

It seems that even the appearance of LR did not convince his colleagues that Tolkien's efforts were totally worthwhile. In "T on T," he remarks:

The authorities of the university might well consider it an aberration of an elderly professor of philology to write and publish fairy stories or romances, and call it a 'hobby', pardonable because it has been (surprisingly to me as much as to anyone) successful. But it is not a 'hobby', in the sense of something quite different from one's work, taken up as a relief-outlet. The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. (39)

(Interestingly, on other occasions, Tolkien called his language invention a "useless hobby" and a "mad hobby."7) The link between his language interests and story-writing which he appears to dismiss in "Foreword-2nd" is avowed in "T on T." Tolkien's terse tone above indicates that he had to deflect more than a few negative comments from his Oxford colleagues. Perhaps this is why Tolkien went out of his way to assert that
his complex work on languages preceded his creation of stories. In 1914, in the earliest Tolkien letter published, he mentions his adaptation of a *Kalevala* ballad for "a short story somewhat on the lines of Morris' romances with chunks of poetry in between" (L 7). He seemed always to be developing his languages and writing stories at the same time. I shall return to this issue again when I examine further Tolkien's letters in chapter 6. Here, it seems curious that Tolkien should claim--over 50 years later--that his languages were "the foundation" and the stories came afterward. One could respond to Tolkien's remarks by saying (to paraphrase Gertrude's words in *Hamlet* [III.ii.240]), "methinks thou dost protest too much." In any case, Tolkien plainly shows a desire to exert some kind of control over the criticism on his work, either dismissing views he disliked or channeling responses down paths he preferred.

Tolkien mentions other critical responses that "annoyed" him. He re-asserts in "T on T" that *LR* has "no allegorical intentions general, particular or topical; moral, religious or political" (39). As well, Tolkien was apparently bothered by the "no women" and "no religion" charges, claiming they are not true (39). He states that while the Third Age of Middle-earth was not a "Christian" one, the fictional world is "monotheistic" and he is a Christian himself (39). The implication is that his work is infused with Christian thought, but there was no design or intent to provide a religious allegory. It seems that Tolkien wishes to dissuade any critic from reading *LR* as a disguised religious treatise, even if "'natural theology'" is evident in the book (39).

As Tolkien concludes "T on T," he shows further irritation at critical responses that assume Middle-earth is a "never-never land without relation to the world we live in" (39). He notes that the name of his fictional realm derives from Old English: *Middangeart*: the name for the inhabited lands of men between the seas" (39). There seems no contradiction here between Middle-earth being directly related to our world and Tolkien's concept of a Secondary World or sub-creation in "OFS." Tolkien notes in his essay that vividly presented
materials from the Primary World serve to encourage belief in the Secondary World fantasy construct (e.g. TL 52). Tolkien admits that his land masses do not correspond to known geological facts, and that "imaginatively this 'history' is supposed to take place in a period of the actual Old World of this planet" (39). Middle-earth is clearly not a bizarre, nonsensical world, but it is still an imaginary realm because Tolkien did not attempt to reproduce the exact geography or recorded history of our planet at any known time. Tolkien possibly disliked his imaginary world being associated with Carroll's "Wonderland" or even Lewis's "Venus," since he felt Middle-earth's literary resonances and impulses were distinct from other fictional models. But whatever motives might have been behind Tolkien's terse remarks in "T on T," his annoyance at certain critical views is evident.

In early 1966, Tolkien gave a telephone interview to Henry Resnik, who later incorporated some of the comments in a Saturday Evening Post article (July 2, 1966) and then reprinted a large portion of the interview in Niekas in 1967. In the Niekas remarks, Tolkien makes several unequivocal statements about the nature of his fiction. He says that he does not really mind the then emerging "cult" or "fad" reaction to his work, calling it a "game" which does not "obsess" him (Resnik 1967, 38). Also, he thinks that the enthusiastic response to his work is a reaction against "rather more dreary stuff," such as Lord of the Flies (38). But when Resnik asks him whether he approves of "very intense research" into his work, Tolkien answers:

    I do not while I am alive anyhow.
    I do not know why they [i.e. thesis writers] should research without any
    reference to me; after all, I hold the key. (38)

There could not be a plainer statement of Tolkien's view of authorial supremacy. There is no modest, passive role for the writer expressed here. Tolkien, not God or other creative muse, holds "the key." And Tolkien seems indignant that while
he is living, critics continue to comment on his works without his approval. He calls the theses that he has read "very bad," since "they are nearly all either psychological analyses or they try to go into sources, and I think most of them rather vain efforts" (38). It appears that Tolkien views any piece of criticism as an unwelcome treatment of his work.

Tolkien's comments are a printed telephone dialogue, which means he could have been quoted out of context or just happened to be in a surly mood that day. However, if Tolkien later retracted these statements there apparently is no published record of it. Furthermore, as Resnik continues to inquire about the studying of LR, Tolkien does not waver from his stance:

R: Some high school teachers have decided to teach the books. Do you feel that they should be taught in high school or anywhere else?

T: No. I am rather against that; I think that a lot of damage is really done to literature in making it a ... method of education, but I'm not sure about that.

R: I think that some of your readers would certainly agree with you; they view the books as a pleasant escape and don't want to 'tear them apart'. That seems to be the common phrase.

T: Yes, I know. I think very often in the letters I get the influence of teachers who test me for sources, allegory, and that kind of thing. (38–9)

Tolkien displays here a very suspicious attitude towards commentary on Middle-earth.

Such an attitude is both fitting and surprising for Tolkien. In "Monsters," he disparages Beowulf commentators who "pushed the tower [i.e. the poem] over," rummaged through the pieces, and neglected the grandeur of the original structure (Essays 8). As well, in "OFS" Tolkien argues for criticism of the "soup" rather that of the "bones" which went into making it (TL 22–3); he also discredits the practices of comparative
folklorists and declares that it "is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count" (TL 21-2). So, critical disassembly or dissection of *Hobbit* or *LR* would naturally meet with Tolkien's disapproval.

However, Tolkien himself used similar approaches in his own scholarship. He minutely examined the language of "The Reeve's Tale" in his article "Chaucer as Philologist," giving little attention to "the general purport" of the "soup" (1-70). While Tolkien may not have "pushed over" *Gawain*, *Beowulf*, and *Maldon*, he offered close readings of the poems and made rather firm statements about their creative impulses (see chapter 2).

And, lastly, in "OFS" Tolkien states that while source studies are dubious, "I do not, of course, forbid criticism of the soup as soup" (TL 23). In this Resnik interview, Tolkien disparages the scholarship, especially while he is alive, on the "soup[s]" of Middle-earth. Clearly, when it came to criticism of his creative work Tolkien set aside any scholarly or personal objectivity. If he had the power, he likely would have forbidden critical studies which did not have his approval.

When Resnik asks about some of the sources of the "inspiration" for his stories, Tolkien responds much in the manner of his comments in "T on T;" he mentions the origin of the name "Middle-earth," touches on his interest in mythology, and reaffirms that language invention was "the seed" of his tales (40-1). Tolkien states that he had considered the Greek and Norse myths and "tried to improve on them and modernize them--to modernize them is to make them credible" (40). Tolkien thinks that his Middle-earth stories attempt to blend ancient aspects with modern impulses. He also notes that his "imaginary country" is "the real world" while "you're inside the book," which, of course, echoes "OFS" (TL 36-7).

Yet Tolkien states in the interview that readers should not equate Middle-earth's "Fourth Age" with our present age:

> It isn't necessarily quite that. It's the beginning of what you might call history.
What you have is an imaginary period in which mythology was still actually existing in the real world. Let's say you would have ... abstract figures—not abstract figures, but myths incarnate; but once that's gone, scattered, dispersed, all you get is the history of human beings—the play of good and evil in history. (42)

In addition to having this interesting insight into Tolkien’s work, critics can see that he again overturns previous remarks. In both "Foreword-2nd" and "T on T," Tolkien claims that his works have no "inner" meanings or messages. But the above quotation is a critical analysis of the end of Third Age in LR; these statements reflect the views of Galadriel, Elrond, and Gandalf. Tolkien here is plain and succinct. He may have been sincere in maintaining that LR "is not 'about' anything but itself" ("T on T" 39). However, Middle-earth "itself" is "'about'" many things, including the decline of the mythological imagination and the rise of secular and rationalistic historical thinking—as Tolkien states above. This is literary criticism on Middle-earth; but since Tolkien himself has provided it, readers are encouraged to accept his views without question or concern.

The last part of the interview exhibits few critical comments, though Tolkien’s final words are curiously elusive. Tolkien offers his views of modern life (42), which essentially re-express those in "OFS" (e.g. TL 57-61). He states that he is not totally pessimistic about the world, yet there are certain terrors: "My view of current affairs is not as depressed as some people’s. I should say that I’m a bit frightened that the Greeks hadn’t got something in the saying that those whom the gods wish to destroy they first drive mad" (Resnik 1967, 42). Resnik mentions that Frodo appears to have savior-like traits: "How do you feel about the idea that people might identify Frodo with Christ?" (43). Tolkien responds:

Well, you know, there’ve been saviors before; it is a very common thing. ... You don’t have to be Christian to believe
that somebody has to die in order to save something. As a matter of fact, December 25th occurred strictly by accident, and I let it in to show that this was not a Christian myth anyhow. It was a purely unimportant date, and I thought, Well, there it is, just an accident. (43)

The first part appears reasonable because other cultures have their own saviors, and Middle-earth is an imaginary realm. But critics should pause when Tolkien says that the date—which is a very important one—when the quest to destroy the Ring begins, December 25th, was chosen "by accident." The text in FR notes that it "was a cold grey day near the end of December" (364). The date of December 25th appears only in the appendix account "The Tale of Years" (RK 468). Furthermore, C. Tolkien states that in an early version of "The Ring Goes South" from 1940, the Dec. 25th departure date of the Company "had not yet entered" (TI 163). Tolkien re-aligned the chronology of the story much later, and so the date happened not by "accident" but by design. Finally, Tolkien on more than one occasion pointedly stated that he was a Christian. The date of the birth of Christ appearing in LR would naturally conjure up associations—even if Tolkien claimed it was merely an "accident."

The main point of the foregoing discussion—to reiterate a previous comment—is not to catch Tolkien in a lie. Years later, as an elderly man, he could have misrecalled something like the point at which he chose the pivotal "December 25th." But also critics have to consider that Tolkien might be intentionally elusive or disingenuous, either for pure enjoyment or to obfuscate critical approaches to his works. In a different interview, Tolkien appears to have been bothered by comments which noted that hobbits had rabbit-like characteristics: "I don't know where the word [hobbit] came from. You can't catch your mind out. It might have been associated with Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt. Certainly not rabbit, as some people think" (Plimmer 32). Shippey observes: "Internal evidence runs against him here" (1992, 62). In at
least four places in *Hobbit*, Tolkien compares Bilbo to a rabbit; Bilbo himself makes the association when the eagles are carrying him: "[He began] to think of being torn up for supper like a rabbit" (110).

Then again, in the same interview, when asked if fairy-stories can properly "be staged in modern settings," Tolkien responds:

'\[
\text{They cannot, ... not if you mean in a modern technological idiom. The reader must approach Faerie with a willing suspension of disbelief. If a thing can be technologically controlled, it ceases to be magical.' (32)
\]

These remarks concur with Tolkien's views in "OFS" (TL 59), though in the essay he prefers to argue for a "Secondary," literary belief rather than "a willing suspension of disbelief" (TL 36-7). And, finally, Tolkien re-states views from "T on T," only in much more emphatic terms: "'Of course God is in *The Lord of the Rings*. ... The book is about the world that God created--the actual world of this planet" (33). Despite Tolkien’s prior disclaimers, the Middle-earth tales are certainly about momentous and serious matters.11

The final selection of Tolkien’s self-commentary to consider in this chapter was actually first published two years after the author’s death. In 1975, Jared Lobdell included in his edited collection essays on Middle-earth a piece by Tolkien, "Guide to the Names in *The Lord of the Rings*" (153-201). It mainly comprises a glossary of "Peoples," "Places," and "Things" in the work and explanatory notes for translators. Not only does this commentary exhibit the author’s profound knowledge of language matters, it indicates Tolkien’s firm desire to dictate the treatment of his writings:

All names not in the following list should be left entirely unchanged in any language in translation .... It is desirable that the translator should read Appendix F in Volume III of *The Lord of the Rings* and follow the theory there set out ...; the names in English form should therefore be translated into the other language according to their meaning.
Although Tolkien disclaims "any competence in these modern languages beyond an interest in their early history" (157), the general approach in this "Guide" shows Tolkien's intent to make sure that LR receives an acceptable (according to his standards) translation. Whatever sense of modesty that Tolkien tries to offer, he clearly thinks that his wishes should be adhered to: "From the author's point of view it is desirable that translators should have some knowledge of the nomenclature of persons and places in the languages used in translation" (156). It is likely that given Tolkien's expertise, his views would be appreciated by translators and followed as much as possible. Still, the key here is the tone of control. In this matter of translation, as well as in many other issues of the Middle-earth tales, Tolkien appears to think that his perspective is the most valid one.

From this analysis of Tolkien's authorial statements to 1975, there have appeared a number of perplexities. Tolkien's accounts of the compositions of his works are often filled with errors. As well, previous remarks, such as possible "meanings" of his stories, are later ignored, overturned, or even contravened. Moreover, Tolkien's tone and rhetorical approach vary from commentary to commentary. Critics, then, should always consider carefully all his words before readily adopting them. Many remarks are consistent with his scholarly work, but others reveal that Tolkien had separate standards for literature in general and for his fiction. Scholarly approaches that he used on certain texts were appropriate; but when it came to his creative work, Tolkien believed that critics should either desist until he had passed away or check with him first. At times, as a writer and sub-creator, he adopted a modest and humble posture--much like a guided conveyer of God's "good news." Yet this plain and succinct statement appears more representative of Tolkien's view of his creative writing: "I hold the key."

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren offer a sensible perspective
as critics consider Tolkien's remarks: "'Intentions' of the author are always 'rationalizations,' commentaries which certainly must be taken into account but also must be criticized in the light of the finished work of art" (148). Tolkien's comments give insight into possible points of interest in *Hobbit*, *LR*, and *Sil.*, such as mythological and religious motifs and themes. Still, critics should always maintain a measure of objectivity—even if Tolkien does not—and assess his remarks in relation to the books themselves. In the next period of Tolkien criticism, it is evident that critics often unhesitatingly used the author's views on his own works.
Notes

1 Tolkien states that it "is at any rate essential to a genuine fairy-story, as distinct from the employment of this form for lesser or debased purposes, that it should be presented as 'true';" also, he commends Grahame's opening in The Wind in the Willows: "So it begins, and that correct tone is maintained" (TL 18,66).

2 "English and Welsh" was first published by University of Wales Press in 1963; I have used the reprinted text from Essays.

3 In reference to Tolkien's claim that the "names and persons and places in this story were mainly composed on patterns deliberately modelled on those of Welsh," Shippey qualifies the point: "'Mainly' is a bit of an exaggeration; the Welsh-modelled names in Middle-earth are only those of Gondor and of Elvish, or more accurately of Sindarin, and these are precisely the most doubtful cases" (1992, 105).

4 Tolkien was working on the 2nd edition of LR when Ace Books published an unauthorized edition. Tolkien rushed through the revisions and provided the new "Foreword" for the authorized Ballantine edition of 1965 (Carpenter 1992, 230-2). The differences between the "Foreword-2nd" in Ballantine edition and that in the Unwin Paperbacks are Tolkien's general remarks on corrections of errors in the text, a condemnation of Ace Books, and a plea to readers to buy the Ballantine editions (1965, xii-xiii). To be consistent, I continue to use the Unwin Paperbacks text.

5 For examples of Tolkien's speculations or "guesses" about the Beowulf-poet, see "Monsters" (Essays 18,23,26) and "Prefatory Remarks" on translating the poem (Essays 54,55,60); on the Gawain-poet, see the "Introduction" to his edition of the poem (xiii,xv,xvii-xx) and his Gawain lecture (Essays 73,82,90); on the Maldon-poet, see "Homecoming" (15,16,18).

6 Professor Ian Lancashire has noted to me that "essay" in this context could mean "try" or "attempt." This is an intriguing possibility, yet Tolkien's other comments on the Middle-earth tales as being part of his "work," and not a "hobby," suggest that "essay" here may signify scholarly work.

7 See "A Secret Vice" (Essays 210) and a letter dated March 2, 1916 (L 8).

8 Resnik comments on the nature of the interview: "It is very edited. There are several deletions--passages that I simply couldn't make out from the static filled tape (we had a bad connection). Also a long elision at the end that consisted mainly of thanks from me. We actually talked for half an hour" (1967, 43).

9 Elrond foretells the end of the elves' powers on Middle-
earth: "But maybe when the One has gone, the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten. That is my belief" (FR 352); Galadriel confirms this: "Yet if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlorien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten" (FR 474); after the quest is successful, Gandalf tells Aragorn: "For though much has been saved, much must now pass away; and the power of the Three Rings also is ended. And all the lands that you see, and those that lie round about them, shall be dwellings of Men. For the time comes of the Dominion of Men, and the Elder Kindred shall fade or depart" (RK 302).

10 When anyone craves the Ring in LR, they appear "mad;" Boromir, after an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Ring from Frodo, laments, "'What have I done? Frodo, Frodo! ... Come back! A madness took me, but it has passed. Come back!'" (FR 519).

11 Tolkien echoes some of these remarks on the creative impulses behind his work in an article by Philip Norman (e.g. 30-1).
The lights went out. A great smoke went up. It shaped itself like a mountain seen in the distance, and began to glow at the summit. It spat out green and scarlet flames. Out flew a red-golden dragon—not life-size, but terribly life-like: fire came from his jaws, his eyes glared down; there was a roar, and he whizzed three times over the heads of the crowd. They all ducked, and many fell flat on their faces. The dragon passed like an express train, turned a somersault, and burst over Bywater with a deafening explosion. (FR 48)

Henry Resnik notes in his interview with Tolkien that there was an "explosion" of interest in *Hobbit* and *LR* in the mid-sixties (1967, 37). Tolkien wondered if this was the right way to describe it, since he thought that the surge in the popularity of his books had been "building up steadily" even before the American paperback editions. Carpenter reports that up until 1965 there had been "no drastic change in the pattern" of the sales of *LR*, but by the end of 1966 the "wildfire of this American enthusiasm [had] spread to other countries" (1992, 229-33). Not surprisingly, this sales phenomenon was paralleled by a large expansion of Tolkien commentary. Johnson lists 129 items published between 1962 and 1965; she notes 368 entries between 1966 and 1969; up to and including 1976, she lists over 1100 items (44-104), which still does not account for every piece of Tolkien criticism. During the height of Tolkien's popularity, a course of continual and extensive discussion of Middle-earth developed and has yet to recede.

Neil Isaacs noticed this trend in 1968 and did not approve of it:

This is surely a bad time for Tolkien criticism. Stories in Holiday, Esquire, [etc.] ... and the Luce(fer) publications, to say nothing of the feverish activity of the fanzines, do not produce a climate for serious criticism. (1968, 1)

Isaacs further proposes that a widely-read author often does not have a "critical bandwagon," but his remarks seem
unconvincing. First, there were many valuable discussions in reviews, articles, and dissertations before Tolkien's surge to prominence in the mid-sixties. It would have been logical to think that once readership expands, so would the critical activity in some relative proportion. Perhaps there was the knee-jerk response in some academic circles that popular writers are, by definition, bad ones—which disregards the fact that Shakespeare, Bunyan, and Dickens were popular in their times. Furthermore, there was not widespread "controversy" between Tolkien detractors and enthusiasts in the manner that Isaacs or Johnson (49) describes. As in the first period of Tolkien criticism, there were negative views of the Middle-earth tales; but these commentaries were countered by much positive criticism.

Isaacs might have had a point that certain books, such as those by William Ready or Lin Carter, could have been devised primarily to take advantage of Tolkien's popularity. But this is sheer speculation that fails to account for the many fine studies available by 1968. And, in any event, why should Isaacs have propagated the above view, even indirectly, by arguing for its inevitability? Which other critical "climate" would Isaacs have preferred? Some sort of decline in Tolkien's popularity to the point where he becomes obscure and so worthy of "serious" study? By mistakenly adopting this "enemy" mentality, Isaacs clouds the issue. Tolkien's "deplorable cultus" (Carpenter 1992, 233) might be held against him by some; yet as long as critics attend to Tolkien's works and use scholarly practices, then the value of his writings will be clearly evident in spite of sensationalistic media or zealous fans.

Because of this concern about the effect of the author's popularity on the criticism of his works, there is a large body of Tolkien scholarship that is not widely-known. This wave of criticism remains largely an undercurrent; commentators often cite the most visible (and readily available) works, such as those of Isaacs/Zimbardo, Catharine Stimpson, Lin Carter, Randel Helms, and Jared Lobdell; many Tolkien critics have
noted both the merits and flaws of these commentaries. However, numerous other critical articles, dissertations, and books have received far less regard. Despite the presence of "fanzines" or "fannish" books, serious studies in a range of topics on Tolkien's works appeared in every year. As occurs in the criticism on any author, these discussions vary in quality and importance. A reputable source of the criticism does not necessarily determine that the analysis will be totally sound. Perhaps Tolkien's widespread appeal has given rise to unusual disparities in the quality of the commentary. But, again, scholars should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the criticism in relation to relevant issues (e.g. genre considerations, Tolkien's authorial comments, critical history, etc.), rather than be too pre-occupied that "hostile" or "pop-cult" opinions exist.3

Discussions of both the Northern literature sources and Christian essence of Tolkien's work were common in this period. J.S. Ryan and Donald Reinken exhibited these dual strains in 1966. Tolkien wrote that he particularly disliked Ryan's article, "German Mythology Applied: The Extension of Ritual Folk Memory" (L 380), and the reasons are not hard to see. In both his scholarship and self-criticism, Tolkien often disparages the approach of studying the "sources" of literary works--including, most especially, his own.4 Furthermore, when Ryan discusses the way aspects of the Poetic Edda and the Nibelungenlied function in Hobbit and LR, he uses many bold phrases, such as "must suggest," "irresistibly suggest," or "we are inevitably reminded of" (1966, 47-9), which might have rankled Tolkien. Further, when critics go to great lengths to seize on any element in Tolkien's work and match it with a source, they might, however unintentionally, neglect the author's inventive skills or deflect interest from the finished result--the tale. Still, Ryan notes that Tolkien's "highly ingenious" use of the "Northern mythological imagination" reflects "its quality of originality," which "is all the more enhanced by being fused to materials which give it vast sweep and mythic timelessness" (59). Ryan recognizes and admires
Tolkien's linguistic aesthetic, as well as the author's skill in displaying it.

Donald Reinken focuses on religious aspects of *LR*, which exhibit a kind of "teaching" that "is accomplished in a poetic framework which is Christian, albeit elusively so, yet ineluctably so" (6). This view appears to exemplify Tolkien's remark on the "applicability" of literary works (*PR* 12), since Reinken does not state that Tolkien specifically designed a Christian allegory. In any case, Reinken first published his article in *Christian Perspectives* and so reads these aspects into a number of incidents in *LR*, such as Aragorn's return to his rightful kingship and the "more or less recognized workings of Providence" (6–9). Interestingly, Reinken proposes reasons for Tolkien's deliberate exclusion of formal religious rituals, the "veiling of the Divine," which both complement and counter the author's own:

Firstly, the nature of a mystery itself requires that we allow ourselves to be led by it into concrete understanding, rather than that we approach it upon our own preconceived terms. ... The second reason for so great an apparent silence about God in a book which is about Him is that it is addressed to a "secular" age and audience. ... This epic is written for us and as such must begin from the "godless" surface where twentieth-century man thinks to live and move and have his being. (9)

Tolkien has stated that *LR* "is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work," and "the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism" (*L* 172). In "T on T," Tolkien maintains that the work has "no allegorical intentions," neither "moral" nor "religious," and the fact that there are "no churches" reflects the "historical climate" of Middle-earth's Third Age—not the 20th century world (39). Therefore, it appears credible to see religious symbolism in *LR*, as even Tolkien has affirmed; but one should avoid a claim that the story functions as a Christian allegory or parable.

Charles Moorman also analyzes Tolkien's work in a
religious context. In his book, Moorman considers "The Shire, Mordor, and Minas Tirith" in order to show that "the concept of the City is of vital importance in the myth of the quest of the hero" (1966, 88). Moorman's discussion is weak without being plainly "hostile" or embarrassingly "laudatory." He compliments LR, stating that "perhaps no work of prose fiction, in any way rivals its scope and diversity" (86), and shows an awareness of the author's scholarly work. However, he displays an imprecise knowledge of Tolkien's texts. Moorman states that LR is "genreless," though he thinks "myth" is the best label, even better than "fantasy" (86-7). If Moorman had considered "OFS" more closely, as well as analyses of other critics, he would have seen that LR fits Tolkien's definition of a "fairy-story" or "fantasy" quite well. Further, Moorman gives plot allusions that misrepresent the main focus of work. For example:

Odysseus journeys to Ithaca, Aeneas to Italy, Beowulf to Denmark, and Frodo Baggins to Mount Doom to found a City, to dispel the reign of chaos and old night, and to establish a community, a civility, in the midst of what had been a wilderness of landscape or emotion. (88)

He places Frodo in very honourable company, but the humble hobbit does none of the things that Moorman lists--at least, not on his own. Frodo reluctantly accepts the task of attempting to destroy the Ring in order to end Sauron's tyranny, largely through the kindly, yet earnest, persuasions of Gandalf and Elrond (FR 90-2, 352-4); Aragorn re-establishes the glory of Minas Tirith after the quest is achieved, even though Frodo had faltered at the last moment and disaster was averted by Gollum's actions (RK 269-304). In fact, Frodo was well-suited to his task because he did not have the pride of Odysseus, the fervour of Aeneas, and bravado of Beowulf; these qualities would have made Frodo readily susceptible to the corrupting influence of the Ring--as Boromir's fall so vividly shows (FR 516-19). There may be religious imagery in Tolkien's depiction of the City; however, Moorman should not pursue his
interests to the point where he passes over, or distorts, fundamental features of LR.

Merle Fifield also somewhat misrepresents the essence of LR, which is unfortunate because the article begins in a promising way: "Only fantasy encourages the free imagination and the creativity so lacking in many young adults and so necessary to any significant improvement of the human condition" (841). (Tolkien expresses similar sentiments in "OFS" [TL 52-8].) But then Fifield characterizes LR as some sort of socio-political allegory, stating that it is the "fantasy of 'the little man' who triumphs over twentieth-century evils disguised as folk tale, chivalric, and science fiction characters" (842). Tolkien's remarks on "applicability" (FR 12) are pertinent here. Fifield may speculate that the details of LR reflect modern realities, but it is going too far to state that the "defeat of Communist totalitarianism parallels the triumph and failure of Frodo" (843). Saruman, not "Sauron the White" (843), despoils the Shire, and to position Frodo as a freedom fighter distorts his actions; he tried to do his best to save Middle-earth (and the Shire), yet many others (e.g. warriors, sorcerers) had a part in his eventual success; also, in "The Scouring of the Shire," Saruman's plans fail due to the collective efforts of the hobbits (RK 347-65). Fifield seems to recognize that "fantasy" can provide relief and hope within, as Tolkien observes, "our present time and self-made misery" (TL 59). However, while Fifield may apply meanings from Tolkien's fantasy "in and for the Sixties" (841-2), critics need to be careful about labeling LR as an allegory of any one era.6

Peter Beagle's article on LR in Holiday magazine, which the Tolkien publisher reprinted as a preface to The Tolkien Reader, offers mainly laurels instead of analyses. Yet Beagle properly notes the literary context of LR and comments on the vastness of Tolkien's sub-creation:

... the true delight of the book comes from the richness of the epic, of which The Lord of Rings is only a few stanzas. The structure
of Tolkien's world is as dizzyingly complex and as natural as a snowflake or a spiderweb: the kingdoms of Men in Middle-earth alone have endured for three ages, and each of their histories, as Tolkien sets forth in the fascinating Appendix, contains enough material for a ballad as long as The Lord of the Rings. (Reader xi)

While many critics agree with Beagle's view of the books' greatness, relatively few emphasize the fact that Tolkien's invented realm, his "sub-creation," is the most complex work of its kind in all of English literature. (Perhaps the ever-present inclination to relate Middle-earth to Nordic, Christian, or modern features, which sometimes neglects the uniqueness of LR, caused Tolkien to state in exasperation, "It is not 'about' anything but itself" ["T on T" 39].) Beagle concludes: "Beyond the skill and invention of the man, beyond his knowledge of philology, mythology and poetry, The Lord of the Rings is made with love and pride and a little madness" (xvi).

By 1967, Tolkien's popularity was still strong and, as Isaacs later noted, many magazines and newspapers reported the phenomenon, even though they could take no credit for bringing it about (1968, 1). But this flurry of commentary did not adversely effect serious criticism of Tolkien's works. In their article Noreen Hayes and Robert Renshaw focus on LR as a "fairy tale" in the Tolkienian sense, consider some prior scholarship, and allude to the author's self-criticism, while still retaining an objective view: "Although Tolkien must be believed when he denies that the book is in any sense allegorical, ... [it] definitely presents an ethos which is as significant for the contemporary world as it would be for any other" (58). Hayes and Renshaw recognize that Tolkien offers subtleties in characterization (59-60) and observe that there can be distinctions between "ethical" and "religious" values: "The narrative strongly suggests that the mission of the Fellowship of the Ring was worthwhile even in the absence of a deity or a life after death" (63). They conclude that perhaps "the issues explicit in The Lord of the Rings are not original,
but the vehicle used to present these issues is;" the work "is the product of a powerful imagination," which "deserves critical attention and imaginative readers" (65).

George Thomson considers Tolkien's use of time-honoured literary forms, such as the "traditional romance," and discusses the author's creative skill:

Moreover, the attempt [to write a romance] is made in prose, no easy medium for conjuring up extra-ordinary events. But like his own hobbit heroes, Tolkien against all odds wins through. He does so at a time when it is commonplace to say: the novel is dead. Which is a short way of saying that the long prose narrative is dying. Tolkien, defying the prophets of gloom, shows it to have incalculable resources still. (44)

Thomson proceeds to apply Frye's "six phases of romance" to LR, noting that the traditional motifs exist in the book, yet they appear with a unique colouring of their own (45-8). He also observes that the structure of the book parallels "the traditional Medieval-Renaissance pattern of the tapestry romance," though, again, Thomson points out that Tolkien has modified it for his own purposes (48-9). Thomson also shows a regard for Tolkien's scholarship and self-criticism, stating that LR may reflect certain religious values but the "historical accretions" of Middle-earth are not blatantly Christian (47). This conclusion seems to echo Tolkien's comments in "T on T" that Middle-earth "is a monotheistic world of 'natural theology'" and "the 'Third Age' was not a Christian world" (39).

The first essay collection on the author, The Tolkien Papers, was published in 1967 by Mankato State University. This small-run printing, not widely available, contains sound and interesting discussions by Bruce Beatie, W.D. Norwood, David Miller, and Dainis Bisenieks. Beatie considers the genre implications of Tolkien's work by evaluating the concepts of "Folk Tale, Fiction, and Saga" and Tolkien's ideas on these literary forms (Tolkien Papers 3). Beatie diverges from Tolkien somewhat (and follows Moorman), preferring the more
generally-accepted genre labels to the appropriate, though then suspicious term, "fantasy;" still, he examines the way that Tolkien has modified, instead of strictly followed, traditional literary models:

We are dealing here with a work wholly of the imagination, with no literal tie to actuality, contemporary or otherwise, and yet Tolkien's characters are not folk-tale "types"--the handsome, heroic prince and the evil witch--but beings (whether human or hobbit, dwarf or elf or ent) who live in the words of narrative, often as complex psychologically as any in world literature. (8)

Some critics might think that Beatie's claims are rather large or over-stated; but at least he supports his views by considering prior criticism (e.g. 2-3) and by offering examples of Bombadil's speech and Frodo's developing wisdom in the story (8-11). Unlike some commentators (e.g. Richardson, Wilson, Roberts), who have disparaged LR's style or lack of characterization without a clearly-developed analysis, Beatie presents his views on "Tolkien's greatness" (12) using the proper literary context and scholarly methods.

W.D. Norwood tackles the difficult issue of the possible "intention" of LR. Norwood proceeds from Tolkien's "theory of art," which can be seen in the author's scholarly essays, "Monsters" and "OFS" (Tolkien Papers 19-21). Norwood displays a good knowledge of the implications of Tolkien's ideas, such as the concept of "sub-creation," and correlates them to similar perspectives from Coleridge and Yeats (21). After citing Tolkien's view on "allegory" vs. "applicability," Norwood observes that the author's "intention" need not be considered in rigid terms:

Tolkien does not want his work to symbolize anything in particular; he wants it to set in focus certain aspects of a felt invisible world so the readers may meditate upon them as Yeats did on the sunlight and see in them whatever genuine metaphors they may generate. The purpose seems to me far higher, or at least far closer to the really poetic, than allegory or designed symbolism could be. (21)
Again, unlike the "hostile" critics, Norwood develops his views through an understanding of Tolkien’s scholarship and proposes ideas that are potentially applicable to LR.

David Miller discusses the "moral universe" of Tolkien’s fiction through an examination of the internal structure of its sub-creative history. The ethos apparent in Middle-earth parallels our world’s, naturally, but Miller notes that it has a distinctive nature: "The moral universe of Tolkien is at once a very comfortable and distressing place: comfortable in that no more is required of man than may be accomplished; distressing in that evil is omnipresent and real; man is free to fall despite the adequacy of his strength" (Tolkien Papers 51). Miller further observes that this moral structure is not static; by considering Middle-earth’s history from the First Age to the beginning of the Fourth, he notices that there has been a gradual decline in the powers of both good and evil, which, as the end of LR indicates, are "diminished" in man (54). Furthermore, Miller notes that "the omissions of sex" in the work "clarify, rather than falsify," Tolkien’s depiction of man’s "moral limitations," his "carnality and futility"; the success of LR’s characters, despite inherent weaknesses, indicates that to "'cast aside regret and fear', ... 'to do the deed at hand', ..., man needs to be reminded of strength which he has forgotten" (60).

In the last selection of Tolkien Papers, Dainis Bisenieks takes aim at commentators who belittle Tolkien’s work based on no criteria besides literary taste (98). Bisenieks notes that even if Tolkien’s essays are mentioned in negative criticism, often they are misquoted and misunderstood; these oversights indicate that the commentator has "never given a moment’s thought to their meanings as Professor Tolkien develops them" (98). Bisenieks observes that "indignation would be wasted on" critics who seem determined to disparage LR; he thinks that the tale’s essence is evident and defensible:

For The Lord of the Rings is the great eucatastrophic tale of Middle Earth. By
courage and good fortune, "never to be counted on to recur," the world is saved from the great peril of its time. If the critic finds the outcome no more in doubt than "in a classic Western," we cannot deny the fact. That is why the story is told—as it certainly would not have been if Sauron had recovered his ring. The appeal to any classic form should strengthen our argument. (99)

Bisenieks states that our interest in a "comedy" is not lessened because we know it may end in a wedding (99). He concludes that art, in the Tolkienian sense, is "the product of sub-creation" which allows humans to "bear responsibility" in the real world "with grace" (100). Thus, Bisenieks implies that anyone is free to discount or reject Tolkien's work; but, as the widespread appeal of LR indicates, many readers find it "heartening" when an author speaks "well of the Universe" (100).

In 1968, Ruth-Elizabeth McLellan provided a well-argued and researched analysis of the Christian philosophical essence of LR. By proceeding from the ideas in Tolkien's scholarship, and alluding to relevant views from Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Sidney, Coleridge, Lewis, Eliade, Auerbach, and Frye, McLellan argues in her thesis that Tolkien's "form" and "content" not only complement each other but are inextricably related:

The ordering of reality by and through human understanding finds in the work of art a plenitude of content achieving its destined form. ... [F]inite Man perceives Central Reality with its dancing inter-weavings, he may dimly comprehend its unchanging meaning. The wise of Middle-Earth (and Tellus, the Primary World) are aware of a Providence that sees the completed fabric even while they scan the tangled threads below. (21)

She notes that Tolkien uses "legend, romance, and epic, within the vehicle of fairy story" to foster an "almost god-like" satisfaction "in grasping the overall pattern of this Secondary World and its beings" that exhibit "a dignity and purpose to
exist" (20). McLellan's study really deserves closer analysis than is possible here. But the very fact a scholar can examine LR intelligently in the context of such complicated matters suggests that Tolkien's work indeed has literary depths.

Certainly one of the most controversial studies of Tolkien came from William Ready in 1968. Tolkien heatedly denounced Ready's book, declaring that it was "bogus," "a piece of word-spinning" which was "published in spite of my strong disapproval." Tolkien's readers also condemned Ready; the title of Paul Cresco's review may express a widely-held opinion: "William Ready is Cunning, Devious, Relentless, Ruthless (and Sneaky)." But critics do not usually mention that Ready's book was the first published on Tolkien's works alone. Certainly Ready's general tone and approach are questionable, especially in remarks like "Tolkien is a bluff and hearty know-nothing when it comes to blacks" (1968a, 6-7); this view has no basis in fact or logic. But Ready's format does have merits because he discusses Tolkien's life, career, critical comments, and possible thematic concerns.

Actually, Ready's speech given in June 1968 summarizes much of his main interest in Tolkien without disturbing statements, like the one quoted above. In the shorter piece, Ready concentrates on how the Middle-earth tales reflect the human condition, both in historical and contemporary terms: "The theme of The Lord of the Rings is of the shadow that hangs over the world, now, yesterday, and forever. It is the problem of power, the power that is thrusting us, today, whether we will it or not, into an age of reason" (1968b, 132). The value of Ready's perspective is that he considers Tolkien to be not only a great fantasy writer (132) but an important modern author; Ready thinks that Tolkien wants us to shun both "the welfare state Saruman" and "the board member Sauron" (135). Perhaps Ready over-emphasizes these possible modern analogues, but he seems to point towards Tolkien's concern for the world and for humanity's place within it:

Tolkien projects his relation through wisdom and lore out of literature and
legend. It is a relation so complete that it is new, refreshing creation—he calls it a subcreation. There is revelation everywhere in Tolkien, a relation of myriad of details, comic, straight, tragic, and workaday, that form what we must seek to obtain or fail in the attempt. (136)

In 1969, a year when Tolkien criticism seemed to expand exponentially, Mark Hillegas edited a collection of essays on Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams that has received far less regard than the Isaacs/Zimbardo anthologies. Charles Moorman, Clyde Kilby, and Gunnar Urang provided papers on Tolkien and developed their ideas in later studies (see further on in this chapter). Daniel Hughes, like Jan Wojcik (137), suggests that Tolkien’s concepts of "fantasy" or "sub-creation" complement, rather than counter, some of the ideas of Coleridge (Hillegas 81-2). Hughes also thinks that Tolkien has rejuvenated traditional literary forms (epic, saga, fable, etc.) "by putting the hobbit in the midst of them, in a mood where the creature is not overblown to carry an impossible burden nor Man lowered to meet him" (83-4). Hughes claims that Tolkien’s brilliance lies in his ability to use the tone and structure of ancient texts, a departure from contemporary literary vogue (e.g. the presentation of an "antihero"), while still, perhaps unexpectedly, appealing to a modern audience (84-91). Unlike some of the derogatory opinions noted in chapter 3 (e.g. Wilson’s, Roberts’s), Hughes presents his ideas through explanation and textual citations that include a knowledge of Tolkien’s comments in "OFS" and "Foreword-2nd." And, most significant of all, Hughes, along with the other critics in this collection, never adopts a defensive or apologetic tone with regard to the intrinsic value of Tolkien’s work. Hughes alludes to some possible critical misapprehension; however, he discusses Tolkien in the company of Wordsworth, Blake, and, Milton, and concludes:

[The aspects of Tolkien’s world] are—we have known it all the time—the great modes and methods of English literature
itself which here, indirectly, finds one of its finest tributes. The trilogy is a triumph and riot of a deep traditional learning well lived and well wrought. (95)

Two dissertations in 1969 examined Tolkien's works in the context of this "deep traditional learning," though with mixed and even dubious results. In these cases there is no tone of "popular" adulation (or hostility) towards Tolkien's work to mar the criticism, but rather simply weak analysis. William Green focuses on many of the ancient texts and fairy-stories that Tolkien obviously knew well, and then proceeds to relate specific motifs and images from the "sources" to Hobbit and LR (1969, iii). While Green displays a wide knowledge of Old Norse, Old English, and Celtic literature, he does not emphasize Tolkien's particular use of these possible literary archetypes. Green seems content to point out (or speculate on) certain details, such as the names of the dwarves, which were drawn from Prose Edda, rather than analyze the implications of Tolkien's borrowings (48-9). And when faced with a name or aspect that seems untraceable to a known source, Green does not develop the point:

Of all the dwarfs named in The Hobbit, only Balin does not appear in any Old Norse dwarf list, and he is the one most warmly characterized, the dwarfs' watchman and Bilbo's closest friend. It is not clear why Tolkien chose the name, except that it rhymes with Dwalin, the most famous of dwarfs, and the two are seen regularly together. (50)

Could there not be something vital, or at least interesting, in the fact that Tolkien deliberately diverges from his sources, both when naming and personalizing his characters? As I noted before (p. 135), the critical fixation on literary models could deflect attention from, to use Tolkien's words, "precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot" (TL 21-2). Green, however unintentionally, often gives the impression that Tolkien was a raider or pillager of ancient texts, rather than
a literary "craftsman" who "loves his materials, and has a knowledge and feeling ... which only the art of making can give" (TL 55).

Bonniejean Christensen goes to a further extreme. She not only cites and discusses the aspects of Beowulf which appear in The Hobbit, but actually maintains that Tolkien set out to transform the heroic poem into a children's fantasy:

A closer examination of passages followed to determine the rhetorical devices Tolkien used to convert Beowulf to The Hobbit. I compared the Old English passages with their counterparts in The Hobbit, and saw that Tolkien's major devices are expansion, transposition, and statement of the contrary, and his less frequent but also important devices are omission, compression, duplication, substitution, reorganization, and literal interpretation of Old English phrases. (1969a, 10)

It seems this all comes down to the view that Tolkien sliced up the Beowulf tapestry, rearranged or altered the sections, and then proceeded to design the Hobbit rug. Certainly some incidents, such as Bilbo's stealthy entries and exits within Smaug's lair and the dragon's devastation of Laketown, recall similar events in Beowulf. But to claim Bilbo's encounter with the trolls functions like Beowulf's battle with Grendel, or the hobbit's lengthy fight against the spiders parallels Beowulf's brief clash with the "nicors" (22), clearly distorts the general purport of each text. Both Green and Christensen show a good knowledge of Tolkien's scholarship and literary concepts; however, in a dogged effort to prove their theses, they gloss over or misrepresent the uniqueness of Tolkien's fictions.

There has been much commentary in Tolkien studies, most of it negative, on Lin Carter's book and Catharine Stimpson's pamphlet. Yet J.S. Ryan's Tolkien: Cult or Culture has received much less notice, which is strange because it is vastly superior to the other two works. In 1969, Ryan and Crago organized a seminar, and later compiled and published the papers, on many aspects of Tolkien's writings, which include
his scholarly essays, his use of literary models, the influence of the Inklings, the popular response, minor writings, mythic motifs, traditional themes (e.g. the quest), and the author's "artistic achievement" (vii-xi, 3-5). It is not possible here to do full justice to all the book's interesting and eloquent views of the Middle-earth tales, and, of course, some analyses inevitably have flaws. But clearly the book stands as one of finest studies of Tolkien, showing sound scholarly practices and critical acumen.

Near the end of the book, Ryan attempts to summarize some of the issues raised throughout and proposes reasons why Tolkien's work stands above, in both popularity and quality, his predecessors' or contemporaries'. Ryan concludes that it is not one or two aspects, the literary tradition or modern appeal, that explain LR's success but rather a unique combination of many factors:

Thus the trilogy is to be seen as "fairy story," quest, secondary prose epic, heroic journey and romance, fantasy, historic pageant with cyclic movement, myth with universal application, vast tapestry of life, all achieved with extreme narrative progression, the characterization of a novel and a style that is remarkably rich, despite its apparent directness and simplicity. (1969, 192)

It would be difficult to find higher words of praise for Tolkien. And Ryan's view is not merely a "laudatory" opinion, but a scholarly conclusion based on lengthy analyses of the literary context, authorial writings, and critical reception of Tolkien. Stimpson's poorly-argued declaration that "some critical awareness" reveals that Tolkien displays "weak prose and pernicious thought" (44) simply cannot overshadow, or compete with, Ryan's valuable book.

By 1970, Tolkien's widespread and even "cult" appeal, despite the concerns of Isaacs (1968, 1) and Ryan (1969, 78), did not prevent serious respect for his books. In Modern English Literature, W.W. Robson states that LR is "the strongest possible challenge to those who regard the work of writers like Joyce or Lawrence as what the twentieth century
means by greatness" (147). Robson recognizes Tolkien's use of traditional literary forms and depiction of "a complete imaginary world," and observes that "many readers have found it [LR] relevant to the spiritual struggles of our time" (147). Rather than proceed from a personal view of what are "the profound needs" of contemporary life, with a bold prediction that "Frodo lives, on borrowed time" (Stimpson 45), Robson values the enthusiastic response to Tolkien and proposes that LR offers a "challenging criticism of that unthinking loyalty to 'the modern world' which may be replacing for many contemporaries the more ancient loyalties to country or family or religious faith" (147).

Gerald Monsman also considers how Tolkien's "imaginative world" reflects certain values, "the reconciliation of beauty and holiness, culture and religion," and "its relation to the literary currents of its time" (265). Unlike Fifield, Monsman does not claim Tolkien presents a kind of socio-cultural allegory or symbolism, but rather states that readers may seek (or apply) meanings from the "feigned" history of Middle-earth:

If Tolkien sees fantasy as assisting in the "effoliation" or leafing out of creation, the practice of his art is no light matter, though he does not disown those who enjoy fantasy merely in the spirit of a game. Art complements the cause of religion, and as metaphor of that relation, Tolkien has chosen the iconographically rich image of the tree ... [which] is an image of the dependence of all fantasy upon the redemptive act. (276-7)

Monsman concludes that Tolkien's artistic impulses counter those of "the aestheticists and Symbolists," who "flee to the subjectivity of a vision of beauty alien to this cultural wasteland" (278).

In 1971, Jerry DeSpain discussed Tolkien's rhetorical techniques in LR and stated that the book "is the product of a rich and powerful imagination" (89). He cites Tolkien's disavowal of any "intention" in the work, yet thinks that through the process of "applicability," "inner meanings" rise
To the surface:

To read the story as nothing more than an exciting adventure is to miss a great deal. Implied statements about human life are found through the work. An anagogical approach (one that reflects the moral or idealistic striving of the unconscious) is part of LR's structure. (90-1)

DeSpain supports his view by citing various passages, such as momentous words from Haldir, Gandalf, Elrond, and Frodo, which seem to resonant with religious significance (91-4). In the Resnik interview, Tolkien states that Frodo's words about having to "give up" something for others should not be taken as specifically Christian (1967, 43). DeSpain avoids labels, such as Catholic or Christian, and observes that readers "react positively to the Tolkien ethos" and, "above all, this sub-created world offers dignity to man" (95).

Elizabeth Kirk discusses the language of LR in the context of Tolkien's statements on these matters, such as the unusual remark, "I would rather have written in Elvish" ("T on T" 39). She thinks that Tolkien wishes to evoke a wholly imaginary setting, complete with its own languages and history, even if he inevitably faces the limitations imposed by modern English and the human experience of it:

Short of writing a story in a series of distinct actual languages--what Tolkien presumably meant by saying he would have preferred to write in "Elvish"--it will be necessary to divorce the physical and stylistic ones by variations of English, while introducing proper names and quotations of translatable size to give a sense of the language as a physical medium for thought. This Tolkien achieves by presenting his book as a translation and correlation of material from various languages. (13)

Kirk also notes that negative opinions of Tolkien's style usually proceed from some assumed (and unstated) modern standard of what is "original" writing or "proper to poetry" (9,16). She observes that Tolkien adroitly employs a variety
of stylistic devices, ranging from the "low" for hobbit talk to the "high" for alliterative epic verse, which are juxtaposed "to strike a certain balance of tone" (13-16). Kirk's analysis certainly counters dismissive comments on Tolkien's style, such as that it is "juvenile" or "childish."

Andrzej Zgorzelski focuses on the time setting in _LR_, stating that its chronology "cannot be explained by any, even the most daring, historical hypothesis" (91). While the narrator/translator implies the events of _LR_ took place in a forgotten epoch of our own prehistory, Zgorzelski notes that neither the history nor geography corresponds directly to "empiric reality" (92). Still, Zgorzelski does not counter Tolkien's view in "T on T," which declares that Middle-earth is not a "never-never land" (39); Zgorzelski observes that _LR_ has its own time structure, minutely designed, which exhibits effective verisimilitude (94). He thinks that Tolkien has presented a "hybrid" of the fairy-tale and epic because his work employs a "fictional time" that transcends the vague conventional opening, "Once upon a time," yet still retains the "fairy story illusion" without a "return to empiric reality" (95-9). Zgorzelski observes that Tolkien's use of the translator as narrator displays the work's own "fable time," which relates to one of the fundamental concerns in _LR_:

> Time loses the fairy story meaning of "never" and acquires the symbolic meaning of "always" as the passage of time becomes one of the main thematic centres of interest in the novel. (98)

Zgorzelski sees no discontinuity between the "fantastic" and "realistic" aspects: "The strangeness of the realistic elements and the realistic treatment of fantasy co-operate with the consistency in the planes of time and space in strengthening the plausibility" of the tale (94). Zgorzelski does not cite "OFS," but his assessment of _LR_ seems to echo Tolkien's view of "creative Fantasy" (_TL_ 51).

Robert Reilly and Gunner Urang both published books on the religious nature of the works of the Inklings in 1971. Reilly
is not much concerned about the debate as to \textit{LR}'s genre, stating that to call it a combination of fairy-story, epic, and quest tale sufficiently ends "the whole argument;" he concentrates on "OFS" and how it "throws much light on the trilogy and, what is much more important, that the essay indicates a view of literature and life that is both romantic and religious" (1971, 200). Reilly (with reference to Wellek) calls Tolkien's work "romantic" because it reflects a "'rootedness in a sense of the continuity between man and nature and the presence of God'" (7); furthermore, the "second truth" of "the fairy story" (which is separate from the story being "true" just as a tale) means that the work "ceases to be merely literature, and becomes explicitly a vehicle of religious truth"—"a far-off gleam or echo of \textit{evangelium} in the real world" (208).

Gunner Urang discusses the particulars of \textit{LR} at much more length than Reilly, while also asserting that the work reflects important religious values. He thinks that the trilogy operates on three levels: 1) "the dimension of \textit{wonder}, the effect of authentic fantasy," 2) "a dimension of \textit{import} or meaningfulness, the allegorical thrust of the fantasy," and 3) "a dimension of incipient \textit{belief}, a function of the 'rhetoric' of this fiction" (93). Urang observes Tolkien's style complements, rather than undermines, his major artistic concerns. Urang borrows Lewis's remarks on the epic style and suggests that Tolkien's use of invented tongues, nature imagery, and "stock" phrases exhibit the "'art of enriching a response without making it eccentric, and of being normal without being vulgar'" (125). Urang concludes that "the enthusiastic response to Tolkien's parable of hope" is a "fact"—whether "one attributes this to persistent wishful dreaming, or to residual Christianity, or (as Edmund Wilson does) to 'a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash'" (130). Once again, Tolkien's comments the "applicability" of a literary work are applicable here.

In 1972, Douglas Barbour discussed Tolkien's theme of "'The Shadow of the Past'." He notes that while \textit{LR}'s has
affinities with Beowulf's elegiac sense of the history, Tolkien goes beyond "the Northern imagination" which "accepts defeat as an inevitable outcome, for both gods and heroes" (36). Barbour states that the various "eucatastrophic" moments, such as when Frodo and Sam are honoured in the Field of Cormallen (RR 279-80), "offer true consolation as Tolkien has defined it" (38). Furthermore, Barbour notes that as the characters journey through various lands, they "are drenched in lived history, and that history touches them, and us, because they are living out its consequences" (39). And thus, the various inset stories and the appendices reinforce the importance and poignancy of history, both of the distant past and in the present sense, as Frodo and Sam's dialogue on the stairs of Cirith Ungol demonstrates (Barbour 36-41). Barbour cites some views of Tolkien's fiction by Parker, Auden, Bradley, and Spacks, and observes that LR is a "sufficiently complex ... work of literature" because it invites a variety of "carefully considered literary responses" (40-1). Barbour concludes that "to create the world, Middle Earth, where his story could happen with all its historical depth," Tolkien "learned his lessons so well" from literature such as Beowulf that "as a sub-creator, he stands nearly alone" (41).

Charles Moorman also considers Tolkien's use of the themes of Northern literature, yet, interestingly, he diverges from his prior views on the depiction of heroism in LR. Here, Moorman states that at one time he was satisfied that Tolkien's concept of heroism paralleled that which is found in texts like the Norse sagas and Beowulf; but now he thinks differently (1972, 30). There may be a sense of Nordic fatalism or "foreshadowing" in LR, but Moorman observes that Frodo "himself must decide his own fate at every turn and is in fact totally responsible for his own actions" (32). Some critics, like Parker, stress the Northern essence of LR, and others, like Reinken, emphasize the Christian; Moorman thinks that in depicting Frodo's harrowing experience, Tolkien offers "a mixture of pagan spirit and Christian ethos, of despair and hope, of doubt and confidence" (38). The relative
"proportions" of this "mixture" seem to "defy measurement;" yet Moorman concludes this uncertainty indicates "much of the work's greatness" because it is "impossible to abstract from The Lord of the Rings a clear cut definition of heroism" (38-9).

The dissertations on Tolkien in 1972 exemplify Barbour's observation about the variety of critical responses to Middle-earth. Briefly, Mary Vance Henze used Hobbit in an educational study on sixth graders in order to discover whether the pupils would respond more favourably to the book after being taught aspects of literary style (e.g. simile, alliteration). Deborah Rogers examines the characters (e.g. heroes, ladies, villains) in Lewis's and Tolkien's books in relation to their medieval "sources." Anne Petty contextualizes her analysis of Tolkien using the theories of "myth" and "folktale" from Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp, and Claude Levi-Strauss.12 Petty discusses certain motifs, such as "Trial, Death, Transfiguration," and concludes that "Tolkien's consciousness is Middle-earth;" he "successfully dramatizes rather than explicates the age-old patterns of mythic thought and knowledge" (1979, 103-4). Lastly, Joseph Sanders discusses Tolkien as an author of twentieth-century British fantasy. Sanders argues that Tolkien's "skill as a writer is greater than sometimes supposed" (117); he adroitly combines a vast "feigned history" (or "sub-creation") with effective characterization (119). In short, while critics can debate about the merits of these approaches, the dissertation studies show that Tolkien inspires a range of academic interests.

Paul Kocher's Master of Middle-earth is one of the few critical books that has received general approval in Tolkien scholarship. It is considered to be the first full-length study that examines Tolkien's work based mainly on its own internal structure, rather than comparing it with the works of the Inklings, possible sources, or Christian philosophy. But far less attention has been given to Robley Evan's book on Tolkien in the Writers for the Seventies series; Evan's study was actually first published a year before Kocher's (see West
Evans' and Kocher's books have the same merits; both discuss the way Tolkien's scholarly writings illuminate his fiction and evaluate the brilliance of his fantasy tales without apology or equivocation. Kocher does not offer a general introduction or conclusion, though Evans' final comments also reflect the spirit of Kocher's book; Evans notes that Tolkien is not just a writer "for the seventies" but rather touches on ancient and, possibly, eternal impulses:

"Behind Tolkien's work, in other words, we can find a deeply religious commitment to Western culture and its values, ragged and unsatisfactory as they may seem to some of us. But Tolkien's use, in his major work, of our most pervasive myths—the Quest, the sacrifice of the god for the renewal of life, the battle of good and evil—suggests that he does not feel we have come so far from our origins that art and life, fantasy and human needs, are far apart. (201-2)"

Judith Johnson has stated that just after Tolkien's death in September 1973, "arguments and analyses were suspended for a time" (51) and the "pieces of literary criticism that appeared in the two years after Tolkien's death sounded like the hushed, respectful whispers of mourners at a memorial service" (133). But neither Johnson's listings nor the scholarship bears out her contention. There were virtually the same number of commentaries in the two years before Tolkien's death as there were two years after (Johnson 108-142); critical studies were certainly deferential towards Tolkien, but they usually retained an analytical tone. Perhaps Johnson was more struck by the obvious eulogies in newspapers or fanzines than the criticism that continued to appear in academic journals, dissertations, and books. In any case, there was no lull or decline in Tolkien criticism.

In fact, during 1973 and 1974 numerous studies exhibited a range of topics on Middle-earth. Barton Friedman analyzes the fusion between "history" and "myth" in LR (1973, 126-130); Colman O'Hare discusses the key differences among the works of the Inklings (e.g. 2-3); Lin Carter considers Tolkien's works
in relation to other imaginary worlds (1973, 124-5); Roger Sale argues that Tolkien is concerned with heroism in our modern age, as opposed to mere epic bravado (1973, 237); Christopher Clausen proposes that Tolkien was influenced by Chesterton's "The Ballad of the White Horse" (10); Mary-Lou Patterson draws attention to the evocative imagery of both "good" and "evil" in Tolkien's works (15-24); William Dowie discusses the "Gospel of Middle-earth," noting that Tolkien's world evinces a wondrous and even mystical essence (1974, 43-51); and, finally, Kenneth Reckford maintains that Tolkien's tree symbolism both parallels Virgil's in The Aeneid and is vividly distinctive (90). While all these critics, and many others, approach Tolkien in different ways, they all probably would agree with Mary Sirridge:

[T]o read a fairy tale as an allegory is to refuse to accept it as a 'practice world', thus to undercut its cognitive force. ... Many traditional fairy tales are trite, simplistic, implausible and unresolved. ... The problems of The Lord of the Rings are not beautifully and simply resolved. ... But introducing this sort of complexity into the fairy-tale format involves an artistic risk. ... Tolkien's success places his work far above even the best of his competitors. (90)

To conclude this overview of the criticism in this period, it is important to take note of some landmark studies in the history of Tolkien scholarship. By 1975, fantasy literature had become increasingly acknowledged as worthy of serious study. Yet in his first book on the genre, C.N. Manlove curiously opposes those who would argue for Tolkien's brilliance. Manlove considers LR to be "facile and weak" (1975, 206), and he ranks Tolkien "at the bottom" on his "hierarchy of value" of fantasy writers (260-1). Shippey has refuted a number of Manlove's dismissive and "imperceptive" views, especially the remarks on Tolkien's supposed superficial treatment of evil and his embarrassing, sentimental style. As with other hostile commentators, Manlove exhibits a dislike for his subject when offering "reasons for Tolkien's success"
In brief, he thinks Americans have enjoyed LR because it reflects their social upheaval during the Vietnam war or "perennial ... longing for roots;" the British have read it because they a) want to claim Tolkien for their "own," b) are "following the fashion," or c) admire "the pastoral ideal" (157). (Manlove does not try to "guess" why Polish, Italian, or Japanese people read LR.) Yet Manlove fails to note the obvious reason why people may read and enjoy LR: It is a moving story, well-told. No one needed to engage in "armchair" philosophy (157) in 1975 about Tolkien’s stature when many readers and astute critics had been admiring his works for almost 40 years.

Manlove’s criteria for an effective "fantasy" are so stringent that they seem insensitive to the nature of the genre, including Tolkien’s views of it. Manlove does discuss "OFS" at length (159-169) and while he is aware of the content, he appears unable to grasp the spirit of Tolkien’s ideas. As one example out of many, Manlove claims that the story in LR offers so many "hairsbreadth escapes" and contrived coincidences that though Tolkien "intends a picture of evil as continuous and no victory final, he gives us an absolute happy ending; though meant as a true elegy The Lord of the Rings gives only portable woes" (181-90). Thus, according to Manlove, Tolkien does not offer "Consolation" because "nothing is at risk" (206). But close calls and near escapes are time-honoured plot devices in the heroic literary tradition from Homer through Sidney to Morris; Manlove is on dubious ground in claiming Tolkien’s remarkable happenstances are more implausible than, for instance, those in Malory’s Morte d’Arthur—which Manlove thinks is vastly superior to LR (189,206).

More significantly, Tolkien clearly states in "OFS" (TL 62) that the "consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending" involves "a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur." Gandalf says "'Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. ... What weather they [i.e. future generations] shall have is not ours to rule’" (RK 185). Therefore, since the quest in LR
is achieved by a "sudden" turn (RK 270-1) and the ending, while joyful, leaves open the possibility for future evil, Tolkien indeed has followed his own concepts. Manlove may think that LR has not encouraged "Secondary Belief" (206); yet he should not assert his view as a fact, but rather acknowledge that it is his assessment of Tolkien's efforts. Ultimately, only readers can decide whether or not LR offers "Recovery," "Escape," or "Consolation" for them.

Alternatively, in 1976 other critics of fantasy discussed Tolkien in quite favourable terms. W.R. Irwin thinks that Tolkien's work is the paradigm and best exemplar of that kind of fantasy (1976, 161). Irwin focuses on Tolkien's "unbroken sobriety" in presenting the "feigned" history as "real," which contributes to the work's effectiveness (163). Irwin states that LR's myriad details and ethical resonances, while having their roots in Northern and Christian culture, exhibit their own subtleties and complexities:

Thus Tolkien throughout takes account of the ambiguities that attention to experience always reveals in moral reality before this has been transformed into abstraction or figuration. This, as much as anything else, elevates The Lord of the Rings above the level of learned melodrama and contributes to the pretended historical veracity that is the central rhetorical strategy of the work. (165)

Irwin concludes his discussion of Tolkien by reviewing Douglass Parker's article (see chapter 3, p. 92), stating that it is "the most perceptive and cogent piece of Tolkien criticism yet published" (166). While this claim is rather bold, especially since Irwin does not refer to the many other studies, he observes that the presence of such fine criticism on LR "demonstrates that it is a work to take seriously" (166).

L. Sprague de Camp appears less convinced than Irwin that Tolkien's depiction of some aspects, such as the nature of evil or divine intervention, is always intricate. Since Gollum's end (RK 270) seemed to be envisioned by Gandalf (FR 89) and
Frodo (TT 308), de Camp thinks that Tolkien has taken "the edge off the suspense" and worked "the long arm of coincidence to the point of bursitis" (246). But Tolkien's references are more subtle and adroit than de Camp (or Manlove) represent. Readers may sense that Gollum has a major role in the denouement of the story, but how this plays out (as Gandalf remarks) is not clear until after the event, when "suspense" is no longer an issue. And as noted above, Tolkien's use of "coincidence" befits his literary mode; whether it is too contrived is open to debate, not to firm declaration. But even given de Camp's reservations on some details, he observes that Tolkien should be judged for what he has done—not for what he might have failed to do:

But one need not, while reading a heroic fantasy, worry about a few inconsistencies or philosophical contradictions. In this genre, few have equaled and none has surpassed LR in vividness, grandeur, and sheer readability. And that is accomplishment enough for any one man. (251)

Finally, Clyde Kilby, an avid critic of Tolkien, had the opportunity to visit with the author at length in the mid-sixties. Kilby describes his experience in a short book (1976, 15-33), which offers unique insight into Tolkien's process of the writing Sil.: "It was my task to read the typescripts which he handed me and give him my judgement of them. ... What I actually did was ... endeavour to judge them individually and in relation to each other" (44). As Christopher Tolkien has noted (e.g. Sil. 7), there exist multiple and "many-layered" versions of Tolkien's mytho-history; thus, since it is not possible to know which materials Kilby actually read, his comments may not elucidate the published text. Nonetheless, Kilby provides an interesting view of Tolkien's compositional methods that highlights the complexity of his "sub-creation:"

Something of the enormity of his intention is apparent in his plan for a whole series of languages, any one of which might require decades to work out. ... We know of Tolkien's relish for genealogies, chron-
ologies and maps, and of course all these were to accompany all three ages. (44)

So intent on getting everything just right, Tolkien laboured for years over the vast details in order that his mytho-history would indeed reflect the "inner consistency of reality" (TL 45).

There are other points of interest in Kilby's book, which include Tolkien's intention to offer an analogue to the Christian idea of the apocalypse (64-5); this concept is curiously absent in the published text of Sil., though a version of Tolkien's eschatology existed as late 1958 (WJ 245-7). Kilby offers adulation to Tolkien, which might seem to go beyond objective, literary analysis. Still, he appears to reflect the feeling of many Tolkien critics, even if such sincerity makes some scholars uneasy: "Whether Tolkien will survive as a significant literary figure is a question no man can presently answer. What many of us know now with great assurance is that he survives deeply and joyously in us" (81).

This period of Tolkien criticism shows again that the "hostile" vs. "laudatory" and "popular" vs. "serious" paradigms are both unhelpful and misleading. Of the numerous studies between 1966 and 1976, only two noteworthy critics are starkly negative towards Tolkien: Stimpson and Manlove. And they have provided quite poorly-developed discussions. Furthermore, if critics consider only the most visible commentary on Tolkien, in popular books or fanzines, then they might mistakenly surmise that little of the criticism is insightful or well-articulated. As this chapter exhibits, in many diverse studies Tolkien's work has been treated with respect, percipience, and, clearly, admiration. While objectivity is necessary for good criticism, scholars need not disguise, or be apologetic, that they enjoyed Tolkien's work. If nothing else, the many words of praise at least de-legitimize the odd cry of condemnation. It is a plain fact—and not a mere opinion—that Tolkien has been highly regarded and extensively studied. Readers are free to dislike or reject Tolkien's work; but the dissenting voices should not overshadow the many affirmative views. Whatever
stand one wishes to take on Tolkien's work, Donald Wollheim proposed in 1971 a credible and positive perspective on the reason for Tolkien's widespread appeal:

So, then, what did it mean when thousands of college students, young people of our day and our age, suddenly started chalking on walls and penning on posters and putting on lapel buttons the slogan: "Frodo Lives." What could it mean but that Good lives? Good lives! ... For, if Frodo lives, we shall not despair. However dark the clouds of the twentieth century, the shadow of Evil was equally dark--and, though it may take peril and pain, humanity shall overcome. (110-11)

Having stated the above, I should acknowledge (as is the case for any author) that there are limitations or problems in Tolkien scholarship. One that has emerged here is that all too often critics display very little awareness of the critical history. Almost none of the books on Tolkien in this period offers a comprehensive critical bibliography. (Richard West's annotated "checklist" in 1970 is the key exception.) The dissertations and academic journal articles usually cite prior criticism; however, since these studies have remained widely-unknown, misconceptions of the critical history continue to exist.

Another problem is that Tolkien's comments on his own work are mostly taken at face value or neglected altogether. Few commentators actually evaluate his words or acknowledge that some do counter their own approaches. For instance, the "source" scholars avoid Tolkien's strong statements against such a method of literary analysis. Critics need not be bound by the author's views, but they should consider how the authorial remarks might relate to their own perspectives--especially if they plan to use them at all. Further, the inconsistencies in some of Tolkien's statements, such as that there are no direct references to "religion" ("T on T") and yet many exist (1968, 65), have gone unrecognized. It is difficult to reconcile Tolkien's view that his work does not specifically reflect a "Christian" ethos ("T on T" and Resnik interview
[43]) with his words to Father Murray that LR is "fundamentally" Catholic (880). In the next block of Tolkien's self-criticism, these incongruities become even more apparent.
Notes

1 Resnik's magazine article alludes to some of the comments in his interview with Tolkien (1966, 90-2,94).

2 On Shakespeare's popularity, see Robert Wamann; on Bunyan's, see W.R. Owen; on Dickens', Paul Schlicke.

3 Throughout this period, Tolkien critics have noted the "hostile" and "popular" labels merely out of habit, rather than after a discussion of the many studies available. Even in 1975, after 20 years of critical history, Jared Lobdell simply declared "it seems to me that in general those who have written about Tolkien have been too concerned with attacking or defending him, or else too concerned about the Tolkien craze to do his work justice" (2). Lobdell offers only a few examples, hardly any explanation, and no critical bibliography to support his view. As this chapter shows, while some might allude to the "hostile" or "popular" voices, the better critics offer an analysis of Tolkien's work, not just simple statements of support or dislike.

4 For Tolkien's disapproval of analyses of the "sources" of literary works (his included), see "Monsters" (Essays 6-9), "OFS" (TL 21-32), "Foreword-2nd" (FR 12), and Resnik interview (1967, 38-9).

5 In The Road Goes Ever On, Tolkien remarks: "As a 'divine' or 'angelic' person Varda/Elbereth could be said to be 'looking afar from heaven' (as in Sam's invocation); ... (These and other references to religion in The Lord of the Rings are frequently overlooked.)" (1965, 65).

6 In Anatomy of Criticism, Frye comments on the nature of allegory: "When a work of fiction is written or interpreted thematically, it becomes a parable or illustrative fable. All formal allegories have ipso facto, a strong thematic interest, though it does not follow, as is often said, that any thematic criticism of a work of fiction will turn it into an allegory (though it may and does allegorize ...). Genuine allegory is a structural element in literature: it has to be there, and cannot be added by critical interpretation alone" (1971, 53-4). Critics may find allegorical meanings in Tolkien, but no one should claim Hobbit or LR is structured by allegory.


8 See Beowulf, lines 2221-35 and 2287-2335b; there are parallel (but not identical) passages in Hobbit (205-10,220-1,233-5).

9 Shippey offers a representative view of Carter's 1969 book: "Lin Carter ... prepared for his commentary on Tolkien by looking up 'philology' in 'the dictionary', to little profit--
maybe it was the wrong dictionary" (1992, 23); Colebatch declares
that much of Stimpson’s "criticism is not only abusive but
misleading, and can in some instances be called intellectually
dishonest" (61).

10 As Kirk notes (9), Burton Raffel offers these rather
poorly-argued views of Tolkien’s style (Isaacs 1968, 222).

11 Moorman comments on heroism in LR in his book (discussed
early in the chapter) and in his contribution to Mark Hillegas’s
essay collection (59-69).

12 Petty’s dissertation was completed in 1972 and then

13 Shippey uses some of Manlove’s negative comments on
Tolkien as his points of departure in his analyses (1992, 2-3,
130,160-1); in an endnote, Shippey remarks: "These accusations
[i.e. LR’s portrayal of good and bad is simply arbitrary] are
made most clearly in C.N. Manlove’s Modern Fantasy, pp.173-84--
a book I find often imperceptive and almost always unreflective,
but certainly written with energy" (314).

14 Other notable criticism on Tolkien between 1966 and 1976:
"The Interlace and Professor Tolkien: Medieval Narrative
Technique in The Lord of the Rings - Richard West; "The Wizard
and History: Saurman’s Vision of a New Order" - James Robson;
"Good and Evil in ‘The Lord of the Rings’" - W.H. Auden; "Sion
and Parnassus: Three Approaches to Myth" - Nan Braude; "Worlds as
they should be: Middle-earth, Narnia, and Prydain" - Mary Lou
Colbath; "The Hobbits and the Critics" - J.R. Watson; "On the
Reading of an Old Book" - Colman O’Hare; "Funeral Customs in
Tolkien’s Trilogy" - Karen Rockow; "The Apologists of
Eucatastrophe" - John Warwick Montgomery; Linguistics and
Languages in Science-Fiction and Fantasy - Myra Edwards Barnes;
"A Jungian View of Tolkien’s ‘Gandalf’: An Investigation of
Enabling and Exploitative Power in Counseling and Psycho Therapy
from the Viewpoint of Analytical Psychology" - Wilma Spice. The
above titles indicate the wide range of interesting responses to
Tolkien’s works.
Chapter Six: The Impulses of Middle-earth: Tolkien's Letters and Other Essays

The genealogical trees at end of the Red Book of Westmarch are a small book in themselves, and all but Hobbits would find them exceedingly dull. Hobbits delighted in such things, if they were accurate: they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions. ("Prologue" to FR 26)

I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size). (L 288)

Tolkien's scholarly work, as discussed in chapter 2, exhibits a marked consistency with regard to his literary interests and emphases. Many of the critics considered in chapters 3 and 5 show an awareness of these aspects, though they sometimes neglect key views, such as Tolkien's dislike of studies of the sources or origins of tales. A full awareness of Tolkien's views is not always required for a critical analysis of his fiction. But when authors comment extensively on their own writings, scholars are well-served to consider such remarks in relation to the published works. Many critics have alluded to Tolkien's self-criticism, such as "Foreword-2nd" and "Tolkien on Tolkien." With the appearance of the volume of Tolkien's letters in 1981, critics were presented with a wellspring of authorial remarks. These letters, as well as some previously unavailable essays, have given scholars the opportunity to assess (or re-assess) their perspectives on Tolkien's work.¹

Tolkien's comments on his own works, and the creative impulses behind them, often complement the views expressed in the scholarly writings: his profound interest in the ancient past (both its history and literature), his delight with the aesthetics of languages, his contemplation of "fairy-stories," and his belief in the power of artistic "sub-creation." However, there are other aspects of Tolkien's self-criticism that are not so consistent. At times, he seems to have had clear views on certain issues, such as the relationship between
his invented languages and the inception of his stories, the value of "allegory" as a literary concept, and the meanings or messages of his work, which he would later complicate or even contravene. Shippey thinks that "Tolkien's mind was one of unmatchable subtlety, not without a streak of deliberate guile" (1992, 5). Whether or not one agrees with this, Tolkien's authorial remarks, especially in the letters, often exhibit an obvious modesty, a subtle irony, and even disingenuousness. Critics, then, should always pay close attention to the context and tone of Tolkien's remarks before they readily seize on them to prove (or structure) their views, or to dismiss contrary critical perspectives.

To begin with the essay "A Secret Vice," C. Tolkien states that this paper was originally a talk given to a philological society, written around 1931 and revised many years later (Essays 3). In this paper Tolkien uses a personal and lively tone when discussing language invention; he thinks this process might start with a child-like "linguistic faculty" for word creation and then lead to the "final fruition: verse" (201-12). Tolkien claims that language invention is not merely a delightful pastime or a set of codes for some "secret and persecuted society" (201) but is "allied to a higher art:"

An art for which life is not long enough, indeed: the construction of imaginary languages in full or outline for amusement, for the pleasure of the constructor or even conceivably of any critic that might occur .... Though like this or any other society of philologists they may be aware that their goods have not a wide popular appeal or market, they would not be averse to a competent and unbiased hearing in camera. (202)

While Tolkien speaks in general terms here, below the surface he displays his own activities and desires for a learned appreciation of them. Tolkien's preoccupation with responses to his language invention would remain all his life. Tolkien emphasizes the point that "'linguistic invention' ... is rational, and not perverted," and "capable of developing
into an art" (206). At first he subtly alludes to his own work and then provides examples of his invented language. Wry irony is evident when he comments on the "'pleasure' or 'instruction'" from this "useless hobby" (210); for Tolkien, it was anything but useless. Further, he laconically notes, as "one suggestion, I might fling out the view that for perfect construction of an art-language it is found necessary to construct at least in outline a mythology concomitant" (210). Tolkien's humility is significant because he had already devised his mythological framework about 15 years earlier (see BLT1 1,13,45). If he openly admits to his "secret vice" of language invention, then it would seem fitting to mention his mythology, especially since he offers poems related to it (213-17). Tolkien, though, maintains a general perspective:

[T]o give your language an individual flavour, it must have woven into it the threads of an individual mythology, individual while working within the scheme of natural human mythopoeia, as your word-form may be individual while working within the hackneyed limits of human, even European, phonetics. The converse indeed is true, your language construction will breed a mythology. (210-11)

Tolkien repeatedly uses "your," rather than "my," yet still indirectly reveals his own creative process. One may well wonder how many in his audience would have ever considered inventing a language and co-dependent mythology. Tolkien strangely seems to speak as if anybody could do this. There might be an underlying sense of self-justification in Tolkien's remarks.

When Tolkien offers the "shame-faced revelation" (212) of his own language and poetic forms, he continues to show some reticence about his creative work: "Just as the construction of a mythology expresses at first one's taste, and later conditions one's imagination, and becomes inescapable, so with this language" (212-13). Perhaps Tolkien thought he would have more chance of converts if he kept his own mythology in the background and belittled the value of his language constructions:
A consequent weakness is therefore their tendency, too free as they were from cold exterior criticism, to be 'over-pretty', to be phonetically and semantically sentimental—while their bare meaning is probably trivial, not full of red blood or the heat of the world such as critics demand. Be kindly. (213)

Taken at face value, this seems odd because if any group of people should be openly appreciative of Tolkien's invention it would be philologists. Tolkien is quite apologetic, which indicates either comic irony or serious concern; perhaps he thinks that his peers would find it all a waste of an academic's time. Critics should, of course, be careful not read too much into Tolkien's choice of rhetorical strategy. Still, this paper exhibits both Tolkien's use of varying tones and his circuitous way of revealing private interests in a public forum.²

In a lecture on Gawain, which was given in 1953 but not published until 1983 (Essays 2), Tolkien again uses his own work to contextualize a scholarly analysis. In "Vice," Tolkien mentions the concept of a "green sun," which can "set the imagination leaping" (219); in this Gawain lecture he also draws on ideas from "OFS" and applies them to the medieval poem:

Behind our poem stalks the figures of elder myth, and through the lines are heard the echoes of ancient cults, beliefs and symbols remote from the consciousness of an educated moralist (but also a poet) of the late fourteenth century. His story is not about those old things, but it receives part of its life, its vividness, its tension from them. That is the way with the greater fairy-stories--of which this is one. (Essays 73)

The general ideas expressed here are consistent with Tolkien's other academic work; he believes that an ancient setting and mythic aura can impressively animate a work of literary art (see chapter 2). Moreover, Tolkien foregrounds the term "fairy-story" rather than "romance," the label he adopts in the
introduction to his edition of *Gawain* (xi); in that work, Tolkien emphasizes the historical context of the poem and its especially English character (xi–xxiii). In "OFS," Tolkien uses the terms "fairy-story" and "romance" interchangeably, and so these perspectives on *Gawain* may reflect his creative interests. This would appear natural because Tolkien gave this lecture only four days after he had submitted the "revision for press" of part one of *LR* (L 167).

Tolkien continues to draw on issues from "OFS" in this *Gawain* commentary. He focuses on the presence of magic and the characters’ use of it to test human morality. He claims that there "is indeed no better medium for moral teaching than the good fairy-story (by which I mean a deep-rooted tale, told as a tale, and not a thinly disguised moral allegory)" (73). Tolkien thinks that while "the author of *Sir Gawain* ... inherited 'faerie', rather turned deliberately to it" (73), he specifically designed Gawain’s dilemma to examine moral behaviour:

> He [Gawain] is involved therefore in the business, as far as it was possible to make the fairy-story go, as a matter of duty and humility and self-sacrifice. And since ..., that is, if the story to be conducted on a serious moral plane, in which every action of the hero, Gawain, is to be scrutinized and morally assessed--the king himself is criticized, both by the author as narrator, and by the lords of the court. (75)

Part of this criticism of Arthur, Tolkien thinks, involves the king’s inability to recognize the trap laid for Gawain, given the fact that "a green man" should have been expected to display some sort of "‘magic’" (75). But Gawain, though tricked, promises to receive a return blow; at this point such a blow would seem to mean certain death; and thus the moral implied is that if one gives one’s word, even without further scrutiny of the bargain, then one is bound--magic or no (76). As Tolkien notes in "OFS," the magic “must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away" (TL 15). For the 1964 version of "OFS," Tolkien interestingly
added one point that was not in the 1947 text: "Of this seriousness the medieval Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an admirable example" (TL 15).

There are many other points of interest in this Gawain paper. However, for the present I will just briefly suggest that since Tolkien had his own fiction in mind when he wrote the lecture, it highlights concerns of his creative work. The temptation of Gawain, while different from that of Galadriel, Boromir, or even Frodo, provides a test of moral fibre which has implications beyond a single person's fate:

The temptation is real and perilous in the extreme on the moral plane (for Gawain's one view of the circumstances is all that matters on that plane); yet hanging in the background, for those able to receive the air of 'faerie' in a romance, is a terrible threat of disaster and destruction. The struggle becomes intense to a degree which a merely realistic story of how a pious knight resisted a temptation to adultery (when a guest) could hardly attain. It is one of the properties of Fairy Story thus to enlarge the scene and the actors. (83)

It appears appropriate in this context to think of Frodo's great temptation scene at the end of FR, especially since Tolkien had just finished a revision of it before writing this lecture: "The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again. Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose and with one remaining instant in which to do so. He took the Ring off his finger" (521).

When Tolkien states that for an appreciation of Gawain as it is, "much depends on what you want, or think that you want" (90), he could have been anticipating reactions to his creative work. The series of rhetorical questions that Tolkien presents here can easily be applied to his own fiction. For example: "Or that he [the author] should simply devote himself to telling an exciting fairy-story well, in such a way to produce literary credibility sufficient for entertainment?" (90). LR
attempts to give "new life to old tales;" and, probably, some critics--including Tolkien--think that when "pouring new wine into old bottles," there are the "inevitable cracks and leaks" (90).

In Tolkien's "Valedictory Address," he discusses some grave deficiencies within his university. First, there was the research degree process, which often resulted in "the erection of a pyramid with the sweat of degree-slaves," since "research time is stuffed into more or less standard skins and turned out in sausages of a size and shape approved by our own little printed cookery book" (Essays 227). Second, there was the "party-breach" between adherents of "Lit." and of "Lang.," which had caused a faction fight to the general detriment of the School of English (230-7). While Tolkien makes only one brief reference to his creative work (239), it seems that in 1959, on the verge of retirement, he was still concerned (or resentful) about Oxford's suspicious response to his fiction. There appear to have been doubts as to whether Tolkien's time as an academic was all well-spent:

But I am, as I say, an amateur. And if that means that I have neglected parts of my large field, devoting myself mainly to those things that I personally like, it does also mean that I have tried to awake liking, to communicate delight in those things that I find enjoyable. And that without suggesting that they were the only source of profit, or pleasure, for students of English. (226)

When Tolkien calls himself an "amateur," one wonders if he is being over modest. (He said that he was "a professional philologist" to Milton Waldman of Collins publishing in 1951 [L 143].) Tolkien had noted that during a leave in 1958, he had worked on "'learned'" projects (note the inverted commas), which he had "neglected during my preoccupation with unprofessional trifles (such as The Lord of the Rings): I record the tone of many of my colleagues" (L 278). Tolkien's creative work and its cool reception at Oxford seem to lie beneath the comments in his valedictory speech.
This possible animosity (or guilt?) Tolkien had towards his colleagues re-surfaces at the end of this address. When he defends the learning of languages, this could also be a subtle dig at those who disliked his creative work: "If you cannot learn, or find the stuff distasteful, then keep humbly quiet. You are a deaf man at a concert" (237). More directly, when Tolkien cites The Seafarer, he remarks "But this is 'Language';" when he quotes Galadriel’s lament in Lorien, sung in Elvish (239), he states "But that is 'Nonsense'." So, either he is mocking his detractors at Oxford or he is being genuinely modest about his invented language and its poetry. In any case, Tolkien’s elusive tone should put critics on their guard.

Tolkien’s letters provide a daunting task. They are filled with many interesting comments, both of a personal and critical nature. I have already referred to the letters many times, mainly to highlight Tolkien’s comments on the inception of his stories; often, later accounts contradict earlier remarks. In general, critics do not stress that this massive amount of Tolkien self-commentary constitutes, in fact, letters—and not essays or published lectures. While this sounds self-evident, it is remarkable that so few scholars actually take this into account. The nature of letters entails that comments could be hasty, ill-considered, emotional, and even bizarre. What a writer affirms as the unshakable truth in one year may be completely overturned or forgotten in the next. Furthermore, letters exhibit varying tones and diction depending on the subject and recipient. Lectures and essays tend to have more or less certain guidelines. In letters, almost any approach is possible and, therefore, the context and the tone must be considered closely. I will concentrate here on the immensely interesting and important account of Tolkien’s compositional processes. The subtleties, ambiguities, and incongruities found in Tolkien’s prefatory remarks to editions of his works are even more apparent in the letters.

Tolkien’s early correspondence alludes to the relationship between his languages and stories, but the relative importance
of each is far from clear. In the first published letter, dated 1914, Tolkien refers to his creative transformation of a Finnish ballad from Kalevala:

Amongst other work I am trying to turn one of the stories—which is really a very great story and most tragic—into a short story somewhat on the lines of Morris’ romances with chunks of poetry in between. (L 7)

In the notes, Carpenter states that "Tolkien’s reworking of one of the Kalevala stories, "'The Story of Kullervo',' was never finished, but proved to be the germ of the story of Turin Turambar in The Silmarillion" (L 434). Thus one of the most important stories in Middle-earth’s history was inspired by a known heroic tale.

In the next letter, Tolkien refers to his poem "'Earendel'" (L 8), which apparently was composed in both in his invented language and a translation (Carpenter 1992, 83-5). When at a war service training camp, Tolkien writes about another early poem, "Kortirion" (L 8), which would later become part of his mytho-history (BLT1 32-43); a few months later, he comments on his invented language: "I have done some touches to my nonsense fairy language—to its improvement. I often long to work at it and don’t let myself 'cause though I love it so it does seem such a mad hobby" (L 8). Again, one wonders if Tolkien really thought his languages were "nonsense" or a "mad hobby;" perhaps he felt some guilt about spending so much time on them to the detriment of other duties. In any case, it seems that the impulses to write stories and poems of his mythology, and to develop his languages were concurrent and equally significant. To state that the languages were foremost and the stories were secondary misrepresents Tolkien’s compositional methods. Tolkien used each creative impulse to the enhancement of the other. Finally, as noted earlier, in "Vice" Tolkien himself emphasizes the intertwined nature of these artistic processes; for him, language invention and mythological tales were necessarily "concomitant" (Essays 210).

Carpenter notes that few letters survive from the period
between 1918 and 1937 when Tolkien was working on versions of Sil. (L 1). C. Tolkien has published these earlier incarnations and states that the tales go back as far as 1916 (BLT1 13); at various intervals, Tolkien worked on the stories before, during, and after Hobbit was written. Despite this concurrent composition of parts of Sil. and Hobbit, Tolkien seems to distinguish between the literary nature of each work:

I am afraid my professional knowledge [i.e. of ancient languages] is not directly used [in Hobbit]. The magic and mythology and assumed 'history' and most of the names (e.g. the epic of the Fall of Gondolin) are, alas!, drawn from unpublished inventions .... I believe they give the narrative an air of 'reality' and have a northern atmosphere. But I wonder whether one should lead the unsuspecting to imagine it all comes out of the 'old books', or to tempt the knowing to point out that it does not? (L 21)

Tolkien wrote these remarks as "a commentary on the jacket-flap words" on Hobbit, which he appears to have disliked, though he retains a good-natured tone in wanting "the pleasure of explaining things (the professor will out)" (L 20-1). Even before his book is published, Tolkien critiques statements about his fiction with the apparent wish to set the record straight—in his terms. He notes that "Mr Baggins intrudes" in the prior-conceived mythology, and there is only one "philological remark (I think) in The Hobbit" (L 21-2). Tolkien shows a firm desire to dismiss any comments that are either mistaken or unwelcome.

When Hobbit was generally well-received, Tolkien expressed both pleasure at its success and annoyance that "'a large public' would be "clamouring next year to hear more" about hobbits (L 23). Again, Tolkien is quick to distinguish the creative desires of Hobbit and those of his mythology: "All the same I am a little perturbed. I cannot think of anything more to say about hobbits ... [b]ut I have only too much to say, and much already written, about the world into which the hobbit intruded" (L 24). He recognizes that his mythology helps to give "this imagined world its verisimilitude," since a
"safe fairyland is untrue to all worlds," but retains doubt as to whether he is taking himself "too seriously" (L 24). Clearly, the artistic impulse to write further about hobbits was initially lacking. However, a more practical incentive gives him "a faint hope:"

Writing stories in prose or verse has been stolen, often guiltily, from time already mortgaged, and has been broken and ineffective. I may perhaps now do what I much desire to do, and not fail of financial duty. Perhaps! (L 24)

At this point, in 1937, Tolkien had been composing Sil. for over 20 years without monetary gain or prospects for publication. Hobbit’s financial success then encouraged Tolkien to concentrate on story-writing for a wider audience. Thus Hobbit and Sil., though related in "northern atmosphere" and a few common plot details, were the products of separate creative inspirations.

In the Tolkien biography, Carpenter has dealt with the above matter at some length (1992, 164-75). However, it is important to re-examine this here because in the letters, as the years went on, Tolkien portrayed the relationship between Sil. and Hobbit in different lights. After failing to receive an encouraging response to a submission of Sil., Tolkien rather mournfully considers a Hobbit "sequel:"

But I am sure you will sympathize when I say that the construction of elaborate and consistent mythology (and two languages) rather occupies the mind, and the Silmarils are at my heart. So that goodness knows what will happen. Mr Baggins began as a comic tale among conventional and inconsistent Grimm’s fairy-tale dwarves, and got drawn into the edge of it--so that even Sauron the terrible peeped over the edge. (L 26)

(There could be some subtle irony in the line "But I am sure you will sympathize." Tolkien, always shrewdly aware of money matters, likely knew that publishers mainly "sympathize" with profitable projects.) Tolkien wishes to stress here the inherent differences of the two works with the plot details being few and incidental.
However, in a letter published in *The Observer*, Tolkien takes exception to someone's remarks about the sources of *Hobbit*. In responding to the writer's inquiry about information to save research students a lot of effort, Tolkien comically responds: "But would not that be rather unfair to the research students? To save them trouble is to rob them of any excuse for existing" (L 30). It is difficult to discern when Tolkien is being serious in this letter; he begins in a light-hearted manner, "I am susceptible as a dragon to flattery," and closes with commenting on his invented characters as if they really existed: "The language of hobbits was remarkably like English, as one would expect" (L 30-1). In the middle of the piece, Tolkien refers to *Hobbit's* main "source:"

My tale is not consciously based on any other book—save one, and that is unpublished: the 'Silmarillion,' a history of the Elves, to which frequent allusion is made. I had not thought of the future researchers; and as there is only one manuscript there seems at the moment small chance of this reference proving useful. (L 31)

Strictly speaking, *Hobbit* is not "based" on *Sil* because *Hobbit* had a different creative impulse and there are not "frequent" references to the "history of the Elves" in the story. Tolkien's wry irony at the end of this quote indicates he wishes to foil or derail any attempts at "research" into his book. A couple of months later, Tolkien apologizes for this letter to his publisher when it appeared in print, perhaps fearing it would harm sales. Tolkien states that he had sent in both "this jesting reply" and a "fairly sane reply for publication," but then one day "woke up to find my ill-considered joke occupying nearly a column" (L 35). Clearly, critics must tread carefully when they consider Tolkien's remarks on his own work.

During the early stages of Tolkien's composition of *LR*, he expressed difficulties in summoning the creative energy for the "sequel." He lamented to his publisher that he would prefer to
focus on the *Sil.* because its creative inspirations are superior to any "amusing" hobbit tale:

For a last: my mind on the 'story' side is really preoccupied with the 'pure' fairy stories or mythologies of the *Silmarillion,* into which even Mr Baggins got dragged against my original will, and I do not think I shall be able to move much outside it--unless it is finished (and perhaps published)--which has a releasing effect. (L 38)

Here, Tolkien seems so intent on publishing *Sil.* first that it resulted in writer's block on "the sequel." But since his publisher did not show any signs of reconsidering *Sil.*, Tolkien was forced to return to the initial work on LR (L 40). The nature of this early correspondence suggests that Tolkien almost begrudgingly went on with the hobbit stories because his main interest resided with *Sil.*

As LR was nearing completion, Tolkien began, much in the manner of his retrospective account of "Niggle"'s composition (see chapter 4, p. 110), to consider that *Hobbit* and its "sequel" actually form cohesive parts of his mythological conception. While Tolkien drew on *Sil.* for atmosphere and some plot details, in the early letters he always stressed a distinction between the older legends and newer hobbit tales. However, in a notable letter to Milton Waldman in 1951, which was composed in large part because of Tolkien's eagerness to publish both *Sil.* and LR together (something Allen & Unwin did not wish to do), Tolkien re-envisioned his account of *Hobbit*'s inception. In this letter, he reiterates that language invention was a vital ingredient for his imagination, but notes "an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history" (L 143-4). Tolkien implies that *Hobbit* reflects these dual impulses:

The Hobbit ... was quite independently conceived [i.e. from his mythology]: I did not know as I began it that it belonged. But it proved to be the discovery of the completion of the whole, its mode of descent to earth, and merging into 'history'. As
the high Legends of the beginning are supposed to look at things through Elvish minds, so the middle tale of the Hobbit takes a virtually human point of view—and the last tale blends them. (L 145)

This account varies markedly from the early letters where Tolkien found *Hobbit* and its sequel to be intrusive to his creative desires and were "dragged" in against "his original will." Tolkien acknowledges that *Hobbit* was "independently conceived," but ingeniously--and retrospectively--claims it was key in the "completion of the whole" of his artistic vision.

Moreover, Tolkien here engages in the kind of literary (self-) criticism that he dismisses in the "Foreword-2nd." There, he denounces attempts to "define the process" in which "a story-germ uses the soil of experience" (FR 12); in this Waldman letter, Tolkien actually states that *Hobbit* was a vital piece to the overall concept—upon reflection. No doubt Tolkien truly came to think that these hobbit tales were a necessary part of the development of his mythology; he then subsequently drew on the previously composed material to provide narrative depth and a "noble and heroic tone" for both *Hobbit* and *LR* (L 159). But it is interesting to see that Tolkien, when looking back years later, conceived a unity in his artistic visions while earlier remarks highlighted their separateness. Tolkien used self-criticism to blend together the different, though sometimes concurrent, creative movements of his work.

In chapter 4, I discussed Tolkien's inaccurate account of the inception date and initial work of *LR* in the "Foreword-2nd" (p. 112). In the letter to Waldman, Tolkien also misrepresents his own compositional process. After describing at some length his desire to create a series of "more or less connected legends," which he "could dedicate simply" to England, "to my country" (L 144), he recognizes that his grand conception took a long time to coalesce:

> Of course, such an overweening purpose did not develop all at once. The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as
'given' things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew. An absorbing, though, continually interrupted labour (especially since, even apart from the necessities of life, the mind would wing to the other pole and spend itself on the linguistics): yet always I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'. (L 145)

So, which "mere stories" does Tolkien refer to here? The various versions of Sil., or Hobbit and LR as well? Actually, in any case, one could hardly describe the creative process as "'given' things" arising in Tolkien's mind. On LR's composition, the letters from 1938 to 1948 (L 32-129) chronicle an almost unbroken series of doubts, "unpremeditated" turns, writing halts, dashed expectations, and emotional agonies; and, most significant of all, Tolkien himself recognizes that an exhaustive metamorphosis had taken place from a "Hobbit sequel" to a massively more detailed and complex work (e.g. L 58). Indeed, C. Tolkien's editions of the initial drafts of LR (volumes 6 to 9 of HOME series) show that his "father bestowed immense pains on the creation of The Lord of the Rings, and my intention has been that this record of his first years of work on it should reflect those pains" (RS 5). And later in the Waldman letter, Tolkien plainly states that very few of the "600,000 or more [words] ha[ve] been unconsidered" and that "the labour has been colossal" (L 160). Tolkien, then, in retrospect intricately drew together the distinctive creative processes of Sil., Hobbit, LR and placed them into an overall artistic vision. Tolkien composed and markedly altered the Sil. material during all of his adult life; he took 17 years to transform radically the Hobbit "sequel" before he completed and published LR. None of the Middle-earth tales seemed to come easy or "given" to Tolkien.

This is not to imply that Tolkien is wholly misleading in the Waldman letter. Upon reflection, Tolkien likely saw that there was some sort of creative middle-ground between the complex and grim Sil. and the accessible and lively Hobbit which LR attempts to occupy. Tolkien mentions this in the "Foreword-2nd:" "But the story was drawn irresistibly towards
the older world, and became an account, as it were, of its end and passing away before its beginning and middle [i.e. tales of Sil.] had been told" (FR 9). Still, Tolkien's general view of his creative process smoothes over the facts that LR "arose" out of his disappointment in the rejection of Sil., his desires for financial success, and his constant uncertainties regarding its eventual shape. Tolkien situates Hobbit and its "sequel" into his overall conception long after each individual creative process had been started and finished. In this remarkably self-analytical account in the Waldman letter, Tolkien shows that despite his suspicions of "lit. crit.," and doubts about his own abilities as a critic (L 126), he was more than capable--and willing--to engage in literary commentary on Middle-earth.

The Waldman letter perhaps provides the most direct and sustained evidence of Tolkien as self-critic. While in the "Foreword-2nd" (FR 11-12) and "T on T" (39), Tolkien states that he dislikes all forms of allegory and that he had no authorial intentions, the Waldman letter complicates or even counters these general remarks:

I dislike Allegory--the conscious and intentional allegory--yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language. ... Anyway, this stuff is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine. With Fall inevitably, and that motive occurs in several modes. With Mortality, especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say sub-creative) desire which seems to have no biological life, with which, in our world, it is indeed usually at strife. ... Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective, --and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents—or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised. (L 145-6)

I have quoted rather extensively here to show that critics
should not always take Tolkien’s comments at face value. The subtleties and complexities of his self-commentary prove that he had many intentions, both conscious and sub-conscious, at the time of composition, which he often mentioned upon later reflection. In the 1954 letter to Father Robert Murray, Tolkien states: "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" (L 172). It appears that Tolkien in fact did intend some inner meanings or messages.

In the Waldman letter, Tolkien further displays his willingness to alter his work according to unavoidable circumstances. Tolkien apparently wrote this letter to convince Waldman that LR and Sil. "were interdependent and indivisible" (L 143). With the opportunity to assess his artistic vision, Tolkien probably realized that when he began to draw heavily on the Sil. material, LR started to take shape and move away from being just a Hobbit sequel. More specifically, once the conception of the magic ring in Hobbit was transformed into the "Ruling Ring" of LR, Tolkien both revised Hobbit to accommodate Gollum’s wrathful despair at losing the ring (L 141) and devised a section for Sil. on "The Rings of Power" (L 151-4).

However, when Waldman declined to publish either book, Tolkien wrote to Rayner Unwin in mid-1952 that other considerations must take precedence:

But I have rather modified my views. Better something than nothing! Although to me all are one, and the 'L of the Rings' would be better far (and eased) as part of the whole, I would gladly consider the publication of any part of the stuff. Years are becoming precious. And retirement (not far off) will, as far as I can see, bring not leisure but poverty that will necessitate scraping a living by 'examining' and such like tasks. (L 163)

The key word here is "modified." Given the circumstances, both practical concerns and creative developments, Tolkien usually
would try to refashion his work accordingly. In the process, he would reflect upon the whole and comment in various ways. In the time between Waldman's rejection and Unwin's renewed interest, Tolkien was "downhearted" about the work (L 163); when Unwin asked to see Tolkien's writings and indicated they would like to publish them, Tolkien responded: "The situation is this: I am anxious to publish The Lord of the Rings as soon as possible. I believe it to be a great (though not flawless) work. Let other things [e.g. Sil.] follow as they may" (L 164). In short, it seems that necessity often dictated both Tolkien's composition and evaluation of his work.

To round out this discussion of Tolkien's comments on his creative process, I should remark further on the particularly elusive point about his "inspiration" for his "invention." In the "Foreword-2nd," Tolkien states that the "mythology and legends of the Elder Days" were "primarily linguistic in inspiration" (FR 9); he also notes that his "prime motive" of LR was to present an effective story for a reader's enjoyment (10). These remarks are compatible to the extent that, as the early letters (L 7-8) and the Waldman correspondence (L 143-4) show, language invention and story-telling were for Tolkien "equally basic" passions (L 144). These dual emphases appear in Tolkien's letter to Naomi Mitchison, who had read page-proofs of LR before publication; Tolkien comments on the way his language knowledge enhanced the story:

There is of course a clash between 'literary' technique, and the fascination of elaborating in detail an imaginary mythical Age (mythical, not allegorical: my mind does not work allegorically). As a story, I think it is good that there should be a lot of things unexplained (especially if an explanation actually exists) ... But then I am a philologist, and much though I should like to be more precise on other cultural aspects and features, that is not within my competence. Anyway 'language' is the most important for the story has to be told, and dialogue conducted in a language; but English cannot have been the language of any people at that time. (L 174-5)
Such comments provide interesting insight into Tolkien's creative process. Language, of course, must be used to tell a story; but as Tolkien also suggests here, language inventions can augment the attraction of "imaginary worlds" (L 174). Further, although "English," for a modern English writer, should be used as the medium, Tolkien considered what kind of language that imaginary characters might use in an imaginary time. Tolkien obviously enjoyed discussing issues of languages, and certainly these reflect key aspects of his work; but whether or not his "linguistic inspiration" is more important than his story-telling is unclear. In general, both parts of a literary conception, the creative impulses behind a work and the final product, would seem at least to be equally significant.

After LR appeared and responses began to circulate, Tolkien specifically--and adroitly--addressed this matter of his "inspiration" and "invention." In a long letter to Auden, Tolkien states that though his story is not a "simple allegory," it is "allegorical" on some level:

> In a larger sense, it is I suppose impossible to write any 'story' that is not allegorical in proportion as it as it 'comes to life'; since each of us is an allegory, embodying in a particular tale and clothed in the garments of time and place, universal truth and everlasting life. Anyway most people that have enjoyed The Lord of the Rings have been affected primarily by it as an exciting story; and that is how it was written. (L 212)

Further on, he comments on his "linguistic conditioning" (L 214), noting that it was all "only as background to the stories, though languages and names are for me inextricable from the stories;" he also remarks that as a child he had a sensitivity to "linguistic taste" and the "stories were comparatively late in coming." Nothing here conflicts with other evidence in the letters, especially the long disquisition to Waldman. Language aesthetics animated his imagination, and he used this profound interest to create "exciting" stories.
When responding to a reader's comments on LR, Tolkien wonders if his reply is "dreary and "'pomposer';" however, he states that "[n]aturally the stories come first," though "it is some test of the consistency of a mythology as such, if it is capable of some sort of rational or rationalized explanation" (L 260). Does this mean that while the stories were "comparatively late in coming" they "come first"—i.e. they are more important than the language "inspiration?" It is not easy to state for certain.

For it is clear that Tolkien was a very self-conscious and ultra-sensitive writer. He regarded his work much as uneasy parents cherish their children. He was always quick to discount, or try to undercut, any view that bothered him. Near the end of a letter to Father Murray, which was written not long before FR was first published, Tolkien expresses his concerns:

I am dreading publication, for it will be impossible not to mind what is said. I have exposed my heart to be shot at. I think the publishers are very anxious too; and they are very keen that as many people as possible should read advance copies, and form a sort of opinion before the hack critics get busy. (L 172)

Only a year and half later, after LR had been generally well-received (as outlined in chapter 3), Tolkien wrote to Auden in a much calmer mood: "[The] ... story was finished so long ago now that I can take a largely impersonal view of it, and find 'interpretations' quite amusing; even those that I might make myself, which are mostly post scriptum" (L 211). (Tolkien was aware of his tendency towards retrospective self-criticism.) And yet, in a different letter, composed during the same month and year as this Auden note, Tolkien wrote heated remarks to Harvey Breit in response to questions about the development of his stories: "My work did not 'evolve' into a serious work. It started like that. ... I avoid hobbies because I am a very serious person and cannot distinguish between private amusement and duty" (L 218). Tolkien rarely took an "impersonal view" of
Throughout the letters, especially those where Tolkien responds to readers’ comments and queries, he becomes deeply and emotionally involved in explicating his work. Whether he had conscious intentions on specific matters, such as the "inner" meaning of the Ents, is subject to exegesis and debate. But there can be no question that Tolkien profoundly cared about the way his work was perceived and critiqued. In just one example among many, Tolkien in 1967 denounced certain attempts at literary criticism:

But I remain puzzled, and indeed sometimes irritated, by many of the guesses at the 'sources' of the nomenclature, and theories or fancies concerning hidden meanings. These seem to me no more than private amusements, and such I have no right or power to object to them, though they are, I think, valueless for the elucidation or interpretation of my fiction. If published, I do object to them, when (as they usually do) they appear to be unauthentic embroideries on my work, throwing light only on the state of mind of their contrivers, not on me or on my actual intention or procedure. (L 379-80)

Tolkien displays an extraordinarily possessive attitude towards his work. Efforts at criticism, especially those approaches he disliked, were some sort of infringement. For instance, he went so far as to submit a revised text of an interview of himself! After Charlotte and Denis Plimmer met with Tolkien in 1967, and later sent a copy of their article for his perusal, he wrote extensively on all points he objected to (L 372-8). Tolkien acknowledges that his comments on his "invention of Language" can be confusing (L 374), and thus he writes, "I think the passage would be more intelligible if it ran more or less so: 'The imaginary histories grew out of Tolkien's predilection for inventing languages ...'" (L 375). This letter aptly represents Tolkien's obsession with analyzing comments on Middle-earth, and his constant desire to correct them.

However, suspicion of almost everything in Tolkien's self-
commentary is not necessary. Many of the remarks are wholly consistent with his scholarly work and creative writings. His fascination with the distant past, his delight in language aesthetics, his interest in "fairy-stories," and his belief in the power and importance of artistic "sub-creation," permeate all his tales. As well, many of the specific comments on certain aspects are supported by the published work. For example:

You cannot press the One Ring too hard, for it is of course a mythical feature, even though the world of the tales is conceived in more or less historical terms. The Ring of Sauron is only one of the various mythical treatments of the placing of one's life, or power, in some external object, which is thus exposed to capture or destruction with disastrous results to oneself. (L 279)

At the "Cracks of Doom" when Frodo chooses to keep the Ring, Sauron suddenly becomes aware of the danger: "... and the magnitude of his own folly was revealed to him in a blinding flash, and all the devices of his enemies were at last laid bare" (RK 269). The "Ring" functions powerfully in an imaginative context, but its inherent nature is elusive when viewed in merely practical terms.

Still, even with something so fundamental to the Middle-earth tales as the concept of an "imaginary world" or "sub-creation," Tolkien offered curious and even conflicting views. In 1937, he called the setting of Hobbit "this imagined world (L 24);" in 1951, he offered Waldman "a brief sketch" of "my imaginary world" (L 143); in 1954, he wrote to Peter Hastings that his work is related to his concept of "sub-creation," and so certain details "cannot be wrong inside this imaginary world, since that is how it is made" (L 188). However, in notes made to his American publisher in 1955, Tolkien firmly states that his Middle-earth is not a "never-never land" but rather "imaginatively this 'history' is supposed to take place in a period of the actual Old World of this planet" (L 220).

In a letter to Michael Straight of New Republic in 1956,
Tolkien simply says his work reflects his views in "OFS" about literary belief in an "imagined world" (L 233), and then in a letter to Auden Tolkien bluntly states, "Middle-earth is not an imaginary world" but rather an "imaginary" history of our world, which distinguishes it from other "imaginary worlds (as Fairyland)" (L 239). He wrote to Rhona Beare in 1958 that many "reviewers seem to assume that Middle-earth is another planet!" (L 283). Nine years later, he re-emphasized the fact Middle-earth means "the habitable lands of our world, amid the surrounding Ocean" and claims that the story takes place in areas "equivalent in latitude to the coastlands of Europe and the north shores of the Mediterranean" (L 376)—even though in 1955, he had stated, "I have not attempted to relate the shape of the mountains and land-masses to what geologists may say or surmise about the nearer past" (L 220). It can be bewildering to try and follow the shifts in Tolkien's views.

Finally, in 1971 (L 412), Tolkien returned to the point that the world of LR attempts to induce "Secondary Belief;" this relates, of course, to his notion of a "Secondary World" in "OFS." The upshot of all of this? Middle-earth is an "imaginary world," since the time period and inhabitants of its setting do not correspond to our known history and geography; however, it is not a "never-never" or nonsensical "wonderland." Tolkien was determined to distinguish his invented realm from any other possible parallel.

Thus vigilance is needed with Tolkien's self-criticism. The various tones and contexts are all-important factors. It seems that Tolkien has misrepresented, perhaps even deliberately, some perspectives, such as the compositional history of his works and their possible "inner" meaning or message. Tolkien's views can potentially elucidate and support a given scholarly approach. But critics should always objectively examine Tolkien's self-commentaries before they casually dismiss or unequivocally avow them. Throughout the scholarship on Middle-earth, Tolkien's self-criticism has remained both very visible and mostly unchallenged.
Notes

1 The three Tolkien essays discussed in this chapter were written at various times, but "A Secret Vice" and "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" only became available to critics in 1983 (Essays 1). A version of the "Valedictory Address" first appeared in 1979 in J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam, edited by Salu and Farrell (16-35); C. Tolkien states that the selection in Essays incorporates some later revisions (4), and so I use that text.

2 There are other examples of Tolkien’s lively and even humourous tone in "Vice" (207,213,218).

3 For other remarks on Gawain by Tolkien, see the introduction to his translation (1-6).

4 C. Tolkien’s editions of the various versions of Sil. indicate certain parts were being revised during the same period when Hobbit was being written (SM 1-11; LR 1).

5 To be fair to Tolkien, as he was composing LR, practical matters, such as publishing arrangements and monetary gain, did not prevent him from expressing his creative desires in his work. He worked doggedly on all his Middle-earth tales, even without firm prospects for their eventual publication. While he feared in the beginning LR was "growing too large" (L 44) and wondered in the end "who is to read it" (L 121), he proved that "the chief thing is to complete one’s work, as far as completion has any real sense" (L 122-3).
And yet their labour was not all in vain; and though nowhere and in no work was their will and purpose wholly fulfilled, and all things were in hue and shape other than the Valar had at first intended, slowly nonetheless the Earth was fashioned and made firm. And thus was the habitation of the Children of Iluvatar established at the last in the Deeps of Time and amidst the innumerable stars. (Sil. 24)

The present state of this period of Tolkien criticism is not easy to describe. After the initial reviews of The Silmarillion, scholarship on that work and the other Middle-earth tales continued to expand. Even if critics set aside the massive amount of pop-cult materials (posters, club announcements, fanzines, picture books, games, etc.), the response to Tolkien is immense and broad. There are discernible themes and approaches, such as the influence of Northern literature, Christian philosophy, and the "fantastic" elements in Tolkien's writings. As well, some critics have considered the relevance of classical literature and contemporary culture.¹ These distinctive (albeit complementary) analyses reflect favourably on the literary value of Tolkien's work.

However, to propose a general label for the body of Tolkien scholarship could result in more uncertainty than clarity. The "hostile" vs. "laudatory" and "popular" vs. "serious" paradigms are unhelpful, if not counter-productive. Other designations are also prone to misconception. Although the amount of Tolkien criticism continues to grow, the increase in quantity does not necessarily parallel quality. Some commentators show little or no awareness of Tolkien's Sil., letters, and other essays, or the critical history on Middle-earth. As for literary "antipathies," Shippey's view that the "malignant" or imperceptive commentaries stem from the biases of "'Lit.'" critics (1992, 1-3,22-3) does not account for the fact that there are far fewer "Lang." studies of Tolkien than valuable "Lit." analyses; Colebatch thinks that the hostility
of some critics derives from a political or ideological agenda, rather than a given literary approach (58-9). D.M. Greene's four "schools of thought" on Tolkien (2), "escapist," "struggle between moral values," "allegorical or archetypal," and "reviving medievalism," are vaguely described. For instance, do all allegorical discussions avoid an analysis of moral values? Could not the aspect of escapism largely depend on an aura of medievalism? And what about the many studies that do not follow these themes? Rather than clarifying the state of Tolkien commentary, all the above ways to categorize the scholarship could bemuse or mislead critics.

As may occur in the criticism on any author, for every weak discussion of Tolkien's work there are other valuable studies available. Humphrey Carpenter's fine biography of Tolkien supersedes Daniel Grotta's flawed one. Jim Allan's learned introduction to "Elvish" surpasses Ruth Noel's simplistic guide to Tolkien's invented languages. Neil Isaacs' and Rose Zimbardo's second collection of essays on Tolkien is far more edifying than Robert Giddings' imperceptive anthology. Ann Swinfen's insightful approach to Tolkienian fantasy is superior to Christine Brooke-Rose's error-riddled analysis. And T.A. Shippey's book and articles on Tolkien arguably stand above all others. In Shippey's writings alone, the literary depths and appeal of Tolkien's work are evident. Even a selective and representative overview of the articles, dissertations, and critical books on Middle-earth shows wide variances in accessibility and usefulness.

In short, then, the current body of Tolkien criticism could be called, as Hammond notes, "an ever-expanding country with many camps" (1995, 226). Yet "camps" might suggest oppositions or factions, or fragmented and scattered groups. A clearer metaphor is that Tolkien criticism is an established state with demarcated regions that seem self-reliant, yet not always mutually exclusive. Often Tolkien scholars do not show a broad knowledge of the critical history, and so many views of their colleagues do not appear in their studies. Given that the amount of the Tolkien commentary is so vast and diverse,
this might not be surprising; still, an awareness of the critical history on an author is part of sound criticism. However, one critic on Middle-earth is often invoked: J.R.R. Tolkien. When the author’s statements are used, they are seldom opposed or evaluated. In the main, this critical allegiance to Tolkien’s perspectives continues today.

While the individual members of this "state" of Tolkien criticism are various and seemingly uncountable, the general regions or areas of the scholarship are apparent. First, criticism exists in specialty journals devoted to Tolkien’s works; second, academic journals and theses; third, fantasy literature studies; and fourth, critical books. Again, these regions are not all wholly independent; a number of critics have published work in two of the areas; several scholars have appeared in three. There could be debate as to who are the major or great Tolkien critics, but commentators should note that the writings of Humphrey Carpenter, Randel Helms, Jane Chance, Paul Kocher, J.S. Ryan, Verlyn Flieger, and T.A. Shippey are essential reading. Shippey, in addition to his other merits, appears to be the only Tolkien critic to publish work in all four regions. While they vary in their accessibility to scholars (the Tolkien journals are probably the least available and the critical books, the most), these areas do not constitute a ranking of the quality of the respective criticism. Within each group of scholarship are both unreliable and valuable approaches to the Middle-earth tales. Therefore, it is prudent that critics avoid labels that may reflect prejudice. Studies should be considered and assessed as to their potential relevance to Tolkien’s works, and not be disregarded or avowed due to biases towards the critical source.

The initial reviews of Sil. should be considered here first. As chapter 3 detailed, the reviews of Hobbit generally praised the book, while LR received strong support and some severe, dissenting voices. In general, the reviews of Tolkien’s posthumously published Sil. were unfavourable. Christopher Tolkien, perhaps foreseeing that the tone and
structure of Sil. might bewilder or disconcert readers, provided a commentary in 1977 to explain the composition and his editing of the extant manuscripts of the history of his father's "great imagined country" (1-4). C. Tolkien notes how Sil. is "very different" from Hobbit and LR:

... not the least of the differences is the absence from The Silmarillion of the Hobbits and their cheerful, pipe-smoking provinciality, to whom the realities, and the history, of the great world into which they are caught up come as a perpetual surprise and enlargement of their horizons.

(1)

As early as 1963, Tolkien himself was "doubtful" that the materials of Sil. would be as attractive as Hobbit or LR because in addition to the daunting compositional problems, "there are no hobbits" (Ì 333).

It seems that C. Tolkien has wished to prepare readers of Sil. for a literary experience which is much different from that gained from his father's other published writings. C. Tolkien notes that "whereas the entire action of the story of The Lord of the Rings takes place within a span of twenty years and possesses great narrative urgency," Sil. "traverses long ages" and reflects an "elegiac air and tone" similar to that which his father had observed of Beowulf (2). In the "Foreword" to Sil., C. Tolkien stresses the fact that due to the "great diversity" of the unfinished materials used to compile the book, there were inevitably "serious" disharmonies that show "some differences in tone and portrayal, some obscurities, and, here and there, some lack of cohesion" (8). In short, since Sil. is distinctive from, though obviously related to, Hobbit and LR, C. Tolkien implies that readers ought to approach the book on its own terms.

Reviewers mainly paid little or no attention to C. Tolkien's prefatory remarks. When Sil. appeared, it was usually compared to the other Middle-earth tales and found wanting. Joseph McLellan is among the few critics to receive it favourably, boldly declaring that as "to its importance in
the Tolkien canon, even those (misguided, I believe) who prefer the hobbit books to this newly published material must recognize that the myths of the Elder Days are what make their favourite author unique" (Isaacs 1981, 166). In contrast, Christopher Booker bluntly asserts: "I must now make an admission ..., [and] not for want of trying, I have found the new Tolkien epic ... literally unreadable. ... There is no hint of a real story, based on a real hero and a real cast of clearly defined characters, as in The Lord of the Rings" (17-18). In his review, Shippey calls Sil. "The Oddest Tolkien Yet" (1977, 4) and surmises that the book will likely disappoint those looking for another LR. Peter Conrad condemns Sil. as "nonsense" and "[p]ara-scholarship" which "camouflages Tolkien's imaginative deficiencies," since "he can't actually write" (408). And Eric Korn, after briefly alluding to C. Tolkien's introductory comments, states: "Quite simply, what is admirable or enjoyable in the trilogy is absent from The Silmarillion: what is bad is magnified" (1097).

While the above views are representative of the initial response to Sil., some critics recognized that the new book was plainly not meant to be another LR and so tried to appreciate its special nature. John Gardner (novelist, creative writing teacher, medieval scholar) is perhaps the most notable of Sil.'s early supporters. While Gardner thinks that the book "stands below the trilogy" because much of it contains "only high seriousness," and it lacks strong characterization, he observes that Tolkien's concepts in Sil. are "philosophically and morally powerful" (1,39). Gardner thinks that the prose leaves something to be desired, but "Tolkien's vision transforms and redeems it;" even if some of the "clothes" of that vision are "bargain-basement," Tolkien "has greatly elevated it by his art" (39). Gardner gives attention to what Sil. offers, not only what it might lack. He states that Tolkien has drawn on the cosmological "organizing principles" found in Boethius and "the scholastic philosophers" (39). Moreover, Gardner thinks that Tolkien has modified his literary sources and has presented something startling:
Strange man! Strange mind! Why would anyone do it, we keep asking as we read. Why create a whole Christianlike religion, a whole new creation myth to set beside those of the Greeks, the Jews, the Northmen and the rest? Why write a mythic history, a Bible? ... In the Ring trilogy, Tolkien went after reality through philosophy-laden adventure. In "The Silmarillion," for better or worse, he has sought to mine deeper.

(40)

Unlike some of the negative reviewers, Gardner has accepted the fact that Sil. involves literary matters distinctive from the more accessible (and, apparently, more acceptable) Middle-earth tales. Gardner observes that one may question the method of presentation in Sil., but there is something profound about the conception.

The first region of Tolkien criticism, the specialty journals devoted to Middle-earth studies, is the most extensive and diverse of all. The title "fanzines" not only has pejorative connotations, it is also misleading. While the titles of some organizations, such as "The Burrahobbits" or "The Prancing Pony" (Hunnewell 83) indicate "fan" clubs, the publications from other associations are intended to be scholarly. The articles in Beyond Bree are often "fan" discussion of the latest "Tolkienalia;" however, Vinyar Tengwar is a linguistic journal that discusses aspects of Tolkien's invented languages, such as "the Gnomish and Quenya Lexicons," "draft workings of Adunaic," and "A Preliminary Analysis of the Tengwar of Rumil" (Hunnewell 83,91). In The United States alone, there over 35 Tolkien organizations, many of which provide regular publications. And given the existence of Tolkien journals around the world, the breadth and scope of response to Middle-earth are truly remarkable.

Here, two key journals will be discussed, both of which are listed by the MLA bibliography and have been in existence since 1970: Mallorn (journal of The Tolkien Society in England) and Mythlore (journal of The Mythopoeic Society in U.S.A.). Hammond correctly notes that such journals are the
"most ready outlet" for Tolkien studies and have become increasingly sophisticated" (1995, 230). The first Mallorn journal in 1970 has all the signs of cult or "fannish" activity with its slipshod printing and whimsical discussions. Yet recent issues are well-edited and professionally published; the same holds true for Mythlore.

Still, within these two journals the quality of content varies dramatically. In the same issue of Mallorn are both simple "fan" fluff (e.g. "How to Bake a Hobbit Cake") and complex analyses of Tolkien's "elvish" poetry (Allan 1977, 29-31); in comparable issues of Mythlore are articles on topics ranging from a visit to someone's gathering called "Bilbo's and Frodo's Birthday Party" (Peredhil 21-2) to a well-researched overview of "The Ecology of Middle Earth" (Juhren 4-6). In the 1995 issue of Mallorn, Ruth Lacon seems to treat Tolkien's invented "Easterlings" as if they were actual people who have been unfairly represented by the "flagrantly biased ... scholar of Gondor" (28-35); in contrast, Len Sanford considers that the major events in LR and Sil. reflect Nordic and Christian metaphors of "the Fall" (15-20). In a recent issue of Mythlore, James Cutsinger begins his article with a distracting personal and casual tone (e.g. "What I have up my sleeve is ... [57]"), whereas Paul Zimmer concentrates on a fine analysis of the poetics of Tolkien's verse (16-23). Certainly many poor scholars and earnest "fans" have written articles in Mallorn and Mythlore. But major Tolkien critics, such as Kocher, Ryan, Flieger, and Shippey have published work in them as well.

Studies in Mallorn and Mythlore should, therefore, be neither wholly adopted nor readily dismissed.

As in any source of criticism, weak and sound discussions of Tolkien's works appear in these specialty journals. In a 1986 issue of Mallorn, Kathleen Jones' apparent religious biases dominate her discussion of Tolkien's works: "Like all orthodox Christians, Tolkien had been taught religion through fantasy, and incredible as it may seem today, evidently he really believed that God was male and that Jesus of Nazareth was his incarnation" (5). Tolkien critics may adopt their
preferred ideological stance, but all must properly represent
the content of the primary texts; Jones states: "There is no
female equivalent to Iluvatar. There are, apparently, no
female Istari, or healers, or orcs, or ringwraiths, or any
inhabitants of Mordor" (7). While the "One" is referred to as
"he" (Sil. 15) and evil female figures are rare in Tolkien
(with Shelob as one example), Jones completely ignores the
powerful and important females of the Valar (Varda, Yavanna),
the Maiar (Uinen, Melian), and the Elves (Luthien, Galadriel)--
who are among the greatest healers of all. And at the end of
LR, Frodo is not forced to "retire, defeated and broken, ailing
and suffering until released by death" (9); he is wounded by
his trials but will receive healing and rejuvenation in Valinor
(RK 378). Jones might be uncomfortable with the particular
religious aura of Tolkien's work; yet she should acknowledge
key details that complicate or contravene her views.

In the same Mallorn issue, John Ellison provides a more
cogent piece of criticism. He proposes that Schiller's
distinction between "naive" and "sentimental" poetry might help
to explain the reasons for the antipathetic remarks on Tolkien
evident in the Giddings' essay anthology. Ellison states that
the "naive artist is the type who engages in creative work as an
end in itself, and does not look towards achieving any sort of
external aim or ideal by means of it" (1986, 10). Thus,
according to Ellison, when someone like Donald McLeish claims
Tolkien's work should never be viewed as "any kind of answer to
the world's problems" (Giddings 1983, 136), the critic is
engaging in a "pointless exercise" because the "last thing that
Tolkien wanted was to have it so treated" (11). Ellison notes
that when negative critics of Tolkien's work call it
"dangerous" (e.g. Jones 5), this is not a label that has a
fixed or standard meaning but simply a view conceived in the
eye of the beholder: "There can be very few authors of
significance who cannot be thought of as 'dangerous', on some
or other terms" (12). Critics might question Ellison's
application of Schiller's ideas, but it is a valid point that
since there are many things Tolkien did not do (through design
or naiveté), his work may be judged on its own terms and not by critical bias.

In Mythlore, too, there are flawed approaches as well as fine ones. Not all weak criticism on Tolkien is evidently hostile towards the author. Alan McComas might put off his readers by beginning with a personal memoir (without humour or irony) of his reading of LR: "It has long since become one of the most important books of my personal reading experience" (4). (One should avoid being caustic, but an apt reply to McComas' remark could be "Who cares?") Also, it is a dubious scholarly method to state that one's critical thoughts parallel those of Tolkien's characters: "I find the image of the Ring as potent and irresistible as Gollum and Frodo find it" (4).

Finally, while McComas touches on a number of pertinent topics in Tolkien's studies, such as the inter-relationships among his languages, characters, and story, he fails to offer a cohesive argument or insightful conclusion.

On the other hand, Dominic Manganiello provides a well-researched and eloquent essay that considers Tolkien's scholarship and how his works reflect ideas from Aristotle, Boethius, Donne, Auerbach, Bakhtin, and Barthes (5-14). He notes that Tolkien's narrative moves towards an end or "closure" of a kind similar in a traditional epic—and unlike a modernist or post-modern text (5); still, Manganiello observes (13) that Frodo's giving of the Red Book to Sam (who will pass it on to his daughter, Elanor) reflects Tolkien's idea of the endless "Tree of Tales:" "... you will read things out of the Red Book, and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, ... as long as your part of the Story goes on" (RK 376). As all the above examples show, any given issue of Mallorn or Mythlore may have either questionable or valuable approaches to Tolkien.

In the second region of Tolkien criticism, academic journals, theses, and dissertations, there are clearly some differences from the first area, despite Hammond's view that distinctions between the "fan" journals and other sources of criticism are "artificial and even insulting" (1995, 230).
First, the specialty journals, however well-edited, are still devoted to Tolkien's works, whereas general academia accommodates a wide range of subjects and disfavours an aura of fandom (e.g. colourful illustrations, commentaries from the author's idolizers, listings of merchandise, etc.). Second, academic publications are more widely circulated and available to scholars than the Tolkien journals.  

Lastly, academic journal and thesis writers have stricter guidelines for their tone and methods of presentation, and are potentially subject to more critical scrutiny, than may be the norm for Mythlore and Mallorn commentators. These three factors do not predetermine that the criticism in an academic article or thesis will be inherently superior to that in a Tolkien journal. But the distinctions are valid, especially since critics in each region often appear to function independently of the others.

Furthermore, one enduring view in Tolkien criticism is that the academic establishment has either passively ignored or actively shunned studies on the Middle-earth tales. It is evident that Tolkien has not received the attention given to other 20th-century literary figures, such as Lawrence, Joyce, or Eliot. However, articles in academic journals, as well as Master's theses and Doctoral dissertations, have appeared regularly in the history of Tolkien criticism. Certainly Tolkien has not been studied to the extent that many canonical writers have. Still, hundreds of academic articles and many theses on Tolkien exist; Tolkien appears to have inspired more advanced studies than William Golding (the last Englishman to win The Nobel Prize for literature), Charles Williams, Evelyn Waugh, and George Orwell.

The range of topics in academic journals, theses, and dissertations indicates that Tolkien's work appeals to a broad spectrum of interests. Robert Hall argues that Hobbit and LR are "a kind of 'anti-Nibelungen'" (353); Marion Montgomery thinks that Tolkien is a "prophetic poet" (in a manner similar to Hawthorne or Lawrence) because he "feels forced to the extremes of his art" due to ideological forces which try to
deny the value of that "territory of the imagination" (68); Constance Hieatt discusses important editing issues with regard to the various editions of *Hobbit* (212); John Algeo analyzes "the system of toponymy with generics and specifics and patterns in naming" of the places in Middle-earth (82). As for Master's theses, approaches range from David Phillips' examination of Tolkien's possible use of Celtic Legend and Arthurian Romance to D.M. Greene's study on Tolkien's treatment of moral, ontological, teleological, and eschatological questions in human history. Among the many dissertations, there are Paul Hyde's 1200-page linguistic study and Margaret Syme's analysis of "Tolkien as Gospel Writer."

Dubious and fine studies exist in this second region also. For example, H.C. Mack attempts a structural analysis of *LR* using the theories devised by Louis Heller and James Macris (121). Mack rigidly applies these models to the point where he obscures or misrepresents plot details. In one instance, he states:

> Whereas it is certainly true that to control Middle Earth it is necessary to have absolute power (archistructure), the characters are under the misconception that possessing the One Ring of Sauron will give them this power (pseudoststructure); and misconception it is, for to have the One Ring is to have neither power—of your own—nor control (alethestructure). (128)

Which "characters" is Mack referring to? Gandalf, Aragorn, Elrond, and Galadriel all rejected the Ring when it came within their grasps and so never operated under a "misconception" about its corrupting influence. Boromir's behaviour may reflect Mack's schema (see *FR* 516-19), but if Sauron had obtained his Ring he indeed would have seized both "power" and "control" (FR 78,348-9). Further, Mack describes Frodo's behaviour towards Gollum as "callous," "cold," and "calculating" (140); Frodo, while stern with Gollum at times (especially when Gollum tried to regain the Ring), mainly showed kindness and mercy—a fact that even the depraved creature himself acknowledged (TT 298,406). The general
approach of this article might have potential; but Mack should accurately represent the content of Tolkien’s work when doing this kind of structural analysis.

Alternatively, in the journal *History of European Ideas*, Maria do Rosario Monteiro does not seek to impose a literary model on Tolkien’s work but rather considers the ways his imaginary "Numenor" both reflects and diverges from traditional concepts of "utopia." She observes that in recent times scholars increasingly have found fantasy literature to be a worthy subject of study, and that Tolkien’s fiction has "opened the doors to a whole new mode ... in world literature and the arts" (633). While Numenor may bear some kinship with Plato’s Atlantis, Monteiro observes that Tolkien’s concept is a "unique compromise between Antiquity and Modernity" (634). Numenor had a glorious rise and cataclysmic fall, and so its history exhibits both a warning and an ideal:

Through the ages the memory of Numenor will be kept and altered until it becomes a myth for men in Middle-earth. Numenor will then stand for that short moment men lived in harmony with the gods, before the fall. But it will be also a stimulus for men to try to build new states, new Utopias. Within man lies the ability to endlessly hope and aspire for perfection.

(637)

Although Tolkien’s eschatology as reflected in *Sil.* avoids a clear plan for the ultimate existence of a Paradise within the confines of the world (307), Monteiro observes (637) there is a glimpse of the greatness of Numenor at the end of Middle-earth’s Third Age: "Thus peace came again, and a new Spring opened on earth; and the Heir of Isildur was crowned King of Gondor and Arnor, and the might of the Dunedain was lifted up and their glory renewed" (*Sil.* 366).

The dissertations in this period of Tolkien criticism also show marked differences in quality and usefulness. For instance, in the 1990s both Fredrick Walker and Diana Pavlac consider Tolkien’s work in relation to Lewis and Williams; in the process, each critic makes generalizations that neglect the
individual nature of the Middle-earth tales. Walker claims that these three Inklings are all similar in that they use a stylized diction to emphasize "not theme, not high seriousness, not character revelation and not cosmic import, but story" (19). Certainly an effective plot is important to fantasy writers, but the length and complexity of LR's story clearly distinguishes it from any of the tales by Lewis or Williams. Furthermore, why should Tolkien's use of an intricate tale supersede the significance of his "high seriousness," "character revelation," or "cosmic import?" Walker's analysis is so reductive that he ignores the uniqueness of Tolkien's work in relation to Lewis and Williams.10

Palvac also focuses on the relationships among the major Inklings. Her approach broadens the scope of "influence" to de-emphasize literary "imitation" and to stress "interaction," such as the mutual criticism and editing of texts (27-8). Pavlac recognizes that the close acquaintances and exchange of ideas among Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams would naturally have had some sort of "influence" on how their individual works evolved (117).11 But this is an obvious point, though the extent of this type of "influence" is extremely hard—if not impossible—to measure accurately. Moreover, Pavlac appears intent on rooting out (or devising) obscure commonalties among Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams (e.g. 73-4), whereas the stark differences are evident and similarities have been examined for over 30 years. Lewis has described the approach to find mutual influences among himself, Tolkien, and Williams as "chasing a fox that isn't there" (1988, 481). By now, these comparative studies of Tolkien and the other Inklings—at least the ones currently available—can be seen as repetitive or even redundant.

Gwenyth Hood and Ronald Sarti in their dissertations provide more pertinent and well-argued approaches to Tolkien. Hood considers the author's scholarship and letters in order to demonstrate that his creative writings reflect key ideas of his non-fiction work. She notes Tolkien's view that the fantasist desires to conceive art which may have links to "'real world'"
philosophy, politics, or religion, yet still allows for "an expression of the sub-creator's freedom" to reflect imaginative systems of thought (17). Hood observes that the struggle between Good and Evil in LR (as represented by the Fellowship and Sauron's "Lidless Eye") is a conflict between opposing ideological principles, the "Vision of Harmony" vs. the "Vision of Domination;" she suggests that this seemingly eternal struggle in Middle-earth could be relevant "to our times" (41). Sarti proposes that LR's central concern "is man in a mortal world, a world lacking permanence, where all things fade and pass" (2). Sarti also discusses the author's scholarship and letters, especially those comments that concern the blend of Nordic and Christian ideas in Tolkien's work:

In a mortal world, the quality of resistance, of courage, is important. But the motives for our struggle, the values by which we resist, are even more important. The Nordic values allow one to endure the world's despair; the Christian allow one to conquer it. (119)

While both Hood's and Sarti's approaches focus mainly on themes that can also be found in Lewis's and Williams' work, the aspects of "sub-creation" and a "Nordic" aura are more central to Tolkien's writings than to those of the other Inklings.

Criticism of fantasy literature, as discussed in chapter 1, exhibits a broad range of approaches. Still, one recurring view is that the prominence of Tolkien's work is largely responsible for the dramatic increase in scholarship on "fantasy" texts. However, if there is an area where the negative vs. positive paradigm of response to Tolkien is somewhat apt it is in the commentaries of fantasy critics. The reasons for the hostility from certain individuals (e.g. Manlove, Jackson, Brooke-Rose, Hume, Hunter) are hard to discern, though Shippey's succinct suggestion seems pertinent: "ideological reluctance" (1992, 143). Clearly, Tolkien's work appeals to some commentators and not to others. Still, it is strange that fantasy critics who dislike Tolkien's work would not be content merely to state their view and then concentrate on work they do favour, rather than devise arguments as to why
Tolkien's work is supposedly bad or "dangerous." Sidney's comment on philosophers who disparage poets appears applicable here:

... in all that kind of people who seek a praise by dispraising others, that they do prodigally spend a great many wandering words in quips and scoffs, carping and taunting at each thing which by stirring the spleen, may stay the brain from a thorough-beholding the worthiness of the subject. (49)

The negative views on Tolkien from some fantasy critics should not distract scholars from the fact that there have been many supportive and interesting studies.

Scholars of fantasy literature have discussed the merits and importance of Tolkien's work throughout the years 1977 to the present. Diana Waggoner bases her study of fantasy on Tolkienian principles, recognizing his "influence and importance" have brought about the large increase in "critical attention" of the genre (36). Jack Zipes observes that the "religious glorification of fantasy is not strange, and Tolkien unconsciously places his finger on what is missing or being distorted in contemporary Western society" (144). Isaac Asimov discusses the possible inner meanings of the One Ring (e.g. a symbol of heedless power that causes modern, Mordor-like industrial devastation), and states that LR is "endlessly suspenseful" and "fascinating" (290-4). Douglas Burger observes that even in something as seemingly peripheral as Frodo's mithril coat, readers can see "Tolkien's artistry" and "complex interconnections between images, plot, characterization, and theme in the trilogy as a whole" (262). Douglas Barbour considers Tolkien to be "the creator of one of the greatest, if not the greatest, subcreated Other World in contemporary literature" (1985, 681); Barbour concludes that Tolkien's books "are more than just adventure tales; they are richly textured, linguistically complex palimpsests expressing a profound moral vision of the cosmos" (681).

Charles Nelson draws attention to Tolkien's re-working of
Arthurian motifs, specifically the portrayal of Sam as squire (1989, 54). Charles Huttar recognizes the great literary resonances of LR, calling it "unquestionably heir to Western epic tradition, both classical and medieval-vernacular" (92). After reviewing (and refuting) some of the views of Jackson and Brooke-Rose, Brian Attebery concludes that Tolkien as a writer, far from being obtuse or mundane, has been "if anything, more conscious of the fundamental operations of narrative than are the critics who accept as absolutes such concepts as plot, character, point of view, and the separation of text and world" (1992, 35). Robert Waugh discusses Tolkien's concept of "sub-creation" and how his ideas parallel the philosophical perspectives of St. Augustine and Descartes (22). W.A. Senior examines Tolkien's influence on Stephen Donaldson and notes it "could reasonably be said that no serious modern fantasy would be possible without Tolkien's accomplishment" (62). And, lastly, C.W. Sullivan thinks that, in general, literary criticism "has privileged novel over narrative, privileged writer over teller, and (most recently) privileged criticism over fiction" (77); Sullivan states that critics should adapt their methodologies "to evaluate what I increasingly feel was Tolkien's eminently successful attempt to create a traditional narrative in print" (82). Despite the presence of some negative commentaries, fantasy critics have continued to recognize and appreciate Tolkien's central place in the genre.

For her part, Christine Brooke-Rose appears too antipathetic towards Tolkien to do his work justice. She offers barely disguised sneers at the author's work; for instance, she states it is "embarrassingly modalised, ... especially in its biblico-epic style for solemn moments, and in its often execrable verse" (251), and "the story advances, or rather ambles in travelogue, stumbles in delays and spreads out in reduplications" (255). Even more telling is the "plethora" (to use one of Brooke-Rose's terms) of content errors in her analysis. First, she states: "they are not heroes, the Gollum, the orks and dwarves of Tolkien" (my emphasis; 57). Gollum is a character's name, not a designation for a species,
"orcs" are spelt with a "c," and in both Hobbit and LR, dwarves are heroes.

While such mistakes may seem minor, the sheer number of them indicates that Brooke-Rose has not read the work closely enough; she spells Sam's last name as "Gamjee" (237), not "Gamgee;" she denotes the Fellowship of the Ring as "the Grey Company" (238), yet this name refers specifically to Aragorn and his companions who went underground in the Ered Nimrais mountains to summon the Dead at the Stone at Erech (TT 60-70); she calls Denethor an evil king (238), when in fact it is a key part of plot that he is not the "king" of Gondor but the "steward" (RK 152-3); she spells name of the dwarf, "Balin" as "Belin" (244); and, perhaps most curious of all, she refers to Arwen's appearance at "her brother Elrond's side" (252); even a hasty reading of the text should be enough for a critic to know that the marriage between Arwen and her beloved Aragorn depends on the firm guidance of Elrond, her father (RK 304,417-26). Whatever else may be said against Brooke-Rose's discussion, such careless errors indicate poor criticism.

On the other hand, Ann Swinfen develops her approach from a deep knowledge of and interest in Tolkien's work. Swinfen's ideas on "fantasy" appear based on the author's concepts in "OFS;" briefly, Swinfen states that "Tolkien made fantasy 'respectable'" (1), and thus "an understanding of Tolkien's conception of fantasy becomes indispensable for an understanding of the genre" (4). Swinfen then focuses on a key aspect of Tolkien's work, his Secondary World. She notes, using Tolkien's views, that an imaginative realm must be detailed enough to be both credible and enchanting (75). She discusses many of the most prominent examples of alternative realms, such as those in the fiction of Lewis, Le Guin and Alexander (75-90), and positions Tolkien's work as the great standard:

Tolkien's Middle-earth has the most complex topography of all secondary worlds. ... It ... is inhabited by a great variety of peoples --men, hobbits, elves, dwarfs, orcs, wargs, wizards, ents and others. ... The history of
Middle-earth is a vast subject in itself, [since] ... more than in any other of these secondary worlds every acre of ground is rich in history. ... Middle-earth, being larger and more varied than most of the other secondary worlds, also has more varied cultures.

Brooke-Rose calls the myriad details in LR "overcoded," exhibiting a "'hypertrophic' redundancy" in which the "marvellous and the realistic are not so much blended as bathetically juxtaposed" (247,255). Conversely, Swinfen observes (again, alluding to a Tolkienian concept) that the "secondary world must have considerable common ground with the primary world in order to provide a basis of understanding for the reader; there must be large areas of realism, and characters with whom he can identify" (99). Commentators may prefer to adopt either of these views; but the choice depends on a critical perception of Tolkien's fantasy and not solely on the inherent nature of his tales.

Other discussions of Tolkien by fantasy critics can also be either unhelpful or edifying. Lynette Hunter, like Kathleen Jones, disparages Tolkien's work because it does not accommodate her preferences: "The positive presentation of hierarchy, power and racial discrimination in The Lord of the Rings is, from my context, dangerous" (33). First, Tolkien's fictional world is an imaginary realm, and so he may choose not to follow a given critical preference for modern realism or socio-political allegory; second, Middle-earth's hierarchy, though structured, is not immutable since Wormtongue, Saruman, and Denethor all lose lofty positions because of their vile actions, while Sam, Eowyn, and Faramir achieve higher stations due to their valiant deeds. Power, of itself, is not presented positively in LR but indeed the Ring is the symbol of the corrupting nature of domination and control. Tolkien, like many fantasists before and after him, presents different types of beings and cultures; however, he continually promotes tolerance and co-operation (as the composition of the Fellowship demonstrates), rather than encourages ethno-centric
suspicion. Hunter may choose her own "context" and think Tolkien’s work is "dangerous," but she still needs to properly represent the author’s text.

Alternatively, Don Elgin considers the relevance of Tolkien’s scholarship to his fantasy and discusses what his work reflects (e.g. themes of ecology), rather than what it might fail to depict. Elgin observes:

"[T]he voluminous detail and the enormous scope of the work present a complexity so vast that it threatens to overwhelm the critic, thereby inviting the adoption of any theory or approach that will simplify the task and categorize the critic’s response. (37)"

Elgin chooses to concentrate on the various attitudes towards Nature in LR (37-43), such as the hobbits’ semi-pastoral behaviour or the Ents’ adapting to the changes in their environment (e.g. loss of "Ent-wives"). LR, then, demonstrates the belief that "humanity’s behaviour and social structure must be based on the natural laws of the universe" (59). Elgin concludes that Tolkien’s fantasy, whatever else it may show, presents positive values, such as "a richness of art, a renewal of faith in the possibilities of life, and an enhanced understanding" of our potential places in "an incredibly more complex whole" (59).

The last region of the scholarship, critical books on Tolkien, would require a very long study to evaluate all the material. The Tolkien journals have a multitude of articles, but the critical books constitute a large block of commentary that displays both diverse and similar approaches. These books reflect some variety: The Biography of J.R.R. Tolkien; Architect of Middle-Earth; The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien, and the Archetypes of Middle-earth; The Road to Middle-earth; Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien’s World; Evocation of Virgil in Tolkien’s Art; J.R.R. Tolkien: Man of Fantasy; Hobbits and Hippos; and J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator. As well, several books deal with common themes and motifs: The Mythology of Middle-earth; Tolkien’s
Art: 'A Mythology for England'; One Ring to Rule Them All: Tolkien’s Mythology; J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion; The Song of Middle-earth: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Themes, Symbols and Myths; The Lord of the Rings: A Mythology of Power; and J.R.R. Tolkien: The Art of the Myth-Maker. Other books on Tolkien from Charles Noad, Deborah and Ivor Rogers, Kathryn Crabbe, and Anne Neimark also discuss mythic aspects, such as Nature symbolism and the Quest.

In addition to common themes and emphases, these Tolkien critical books (unlike some of the materials in the other areas) almost all show strong support and respect for the author. Critics might think this should be natural; to research and write a book is a large undertaking, and so it is hard to imagine that scholars would extensively study a subject that they fundamentally disliked. Still, the impression that a massive amount of negative commentary on Tolkien exists is not supported by the facts. This respect for Tolkien’s creative writings also extends to his authorial statements. In these critical books, Tolkien’s scholarship and letters are often cited as evidence to prove certain points. However, Tolkien’s comments are rarely questioned or scrutinized at length. While certain critics diverge from Tolkien’s firm statements on the non-allegorical nature of his work, few directly confront or counter remarks on the linguistic "inspiration" or compositional history of the Middle-earth tales.

But even given these commonalities among Tolkien critical books, not all the critics agree with each other or adopt the same approach. For instance, in his short book Richard Mathews focuses on close readings of Hobbit and LR, with brief remarks on Sil. Mathews uses Lewis’s comment on FR ("This book is like lightning from a clear sky" [1954, 1083]) to consider the significance and impact of Tolkien’s work:

Lightning is an appropriate metaphor for the surreal precision and the spiritual power of Tolkien’s fiction. It is an ancient symbol, a power recognized and mythologized by primitive peoples and intellectuals alike, and serves well to
indicate the startling mythic vision of Tolkien, an imaginative approach nearly lost to man in the technological age. (3)

While Mathews alludes to certain motifs in myth, such as the desire for a "restoration of order" (42), his close readings highlight other key aspects of Tolkien's work, which include the "elevated" or "high style" (47) and "sustained coherence" or "integrity" (57) of Middle-earth. He refers to Tolkien's scholarship to support his views (e.g. 27), yet cites few critics. Mathews concludes firmly: "Tolkien's restraint in not rendering a commanding God, the range of his fiction from children's story to Bible, and his skill at achieving human intimacy in the macro-cosmic tale, are further reasons for the success of his fantasy" (61).

Jared Lobdell, on the other hand, proceeds from historical and biographical factors with regard to Tolkien. Lobdell thinks that most previous critics (though he cites no examples) have ignored key aspects that should shape the response to Tolkien's work:

Plainly stated, the four facts are (1) that Tolkien was born on January 3, 1892, and therefore grew to manhood in the years before the Great War; (2) that he was a philologist, ... ; (3) that he was a Roman Catholic; and (4) that his magnum opus is one of the most successful works of modern times. (1981, vii)

Lobdell dismisses descriptions for LR (which Mathews and many others have used), such as a "quest" or "medieval" or "fantasy" tale (ix). Lobdell thinks that the most accurate definition is "an adventure story in the Edwardian mode," largely due to Tolkien's childhood reading of Haggard, Chesterton, and Blackwood (25). Also, he notes Tolkien's remark that the languages provide the foundation for the mythology (34), though Lobdell does not consider the complications of this view (see chapter 6, p. 183). Further, while he observes there are no formalized rites and temples of worship in LR (59), Lobdell asserts Catholicism underlies the tale (e.g. 61, 67) and that it is "a godly book, if not a 'religious' one" (69). And, lastly,
Lobdell suggests various reasons why LR is so prominent and successful (he prefers to avoid discussing Sil. [89]); these mainly relate to his views of the book's supposed Edwardian, linguistic, and theological essence (73-88). Like Mathews, Lobdell strongly promotes the "genius" of Tolkien, yet does so using a different approach and perspective. Lobdell concludes with (to borrow Rosebury's phrase [3]) "excerpts from the autobiography of a devotee": "I would like to give here some idea of the effect that work has had on me, serving as specimen where I may fail as a literary critic" (90). Lobdell here might have transgressed the line between literary criticism and "fan" adulation.

David Harvey also begins his study with a personal account of his reading and enjoyment of Tolkien's works (xi). (The jacket-flap comments note that Harvey's "enthusiasm" about Tolkien "culminated in his winning the 1981 International Mastermind title.") Despite the fannish aura of Harvey's book, he manages to provide interesting and pertinent comments on the mythic essence of the Middle-earth tales. Harvey structures his study on general concepts of myth, noting the views of Robert Graves, Mircea Eliade, and K.K. Ruthven (4-6); he also considers "Myth as Literature" (10-24) before applying these general concepts to Tolkien's "Mythology for England" (25). Experts in myth criticism may think that Harvey's analysis lacks sophistication, yet his general approach has potential. Harvey is suspicious of the hunt for "sources," literary or biographical:

With great respect to the authors who have followed such a course [e.g. Ruth Noel], it is a simplistic one and unflattering to the creator. ... I decided to eschew the derivative approach and avoid, as much as I could, comparisons with other works and examine and analyse the Middle-earth works as they stood -- alone. ... [I]t became clear that the approach should be thematic. (xii)

Harvey here over-generalizes matters; people who study "sources" do not necessarily ignore Tolkien's originality--
though it did and can happen (see chapter 5, p. 146). Also, if a critic focuses mainly on themes, the significance of other literary features, such as tone, narrative structure, or characterization --fundamental and strong aspects of Tolkien’s works--could be simplified or neglected. Further, Harvey uses trite puns to introduce central tales in Tolkien’s fiction: "The Importance of Being Earendil" (94) and "A Fanfare for the Common Hobbit" (114). Still, Harvey attempts to analyze *Sil.* extensively, something both Tolkien critics earlier (e.g. Mathews, Lobdell) and later (e.g. Chance, Rosebury) have not done. Harvey observes that Tolkien uses nature and light imagery to denote the grandeur of existence: "The light of the Trees is the light of nature--symbolically the light of artistic creation--and has a purity that is connected with the perfection of nature. ... The pure light of essential creativity is beyond our understanding and too dazzling to comprehend" (30-1).

Brian Rosebury offers a different approach from those of Mathews, Lobdell, Harvey, and most critics considered in this study. Rosebury dislikes the fannish nature of Tolkien commentary and its certain flaws (3), such as "coy puns" or "devotee" comments (which Mathews, Lobdell, and Harvey occasionally include). Rosebury thinks that Shippey and Carpenter are the only Tolkien critics worthy of interest, yet still disfavours or subordinates philological and biographical approaches (3-5). Rosebury states that Tolkien’s place in literature stands apart from his sources and genre:

... this augmentation [of traditional approaches in criticism] must be harmonized with a coherent overall view of literature, and of literary history, which holds good for Tolkien’s contemporaries as well as himself. Tolkien belongs to the same century as Proust, Joyce and Eliot, and is read with pleasure by many of the same readers. Criticism needs to confront this fact and make sense of it. (4)

It is certainly a refreshing (and, perhaps, daring) approach to compare Tolkien with some of the major names in literary
studies. However, Rosebury makes a subtle leap of logic here. It is a "fact" that Tolkien lived and wrote in the twentieth century; yet, where is Rosebury's source for the "fact" that many Tolkien readers also enjoy Proust or Joyce? He might be correct but without citing a source, his view is a "proposition" or "speculation" -- not a "fact."

In an effort to prove Tolkien's "modernity" (a term he does not explain precisely), Rosebury confuses or misrepresents key aspects of the author's work. For instance, Rosebury goes to great lengths to describe how LR is not like a traditional "romance," "epic," or "allegory" but more like a "novel" (7-29). This is reasonable, though not particularly enlightening; the book is obviously written in modern prose, yet it has a tone and structure not found in the works of other mid-20th-century writers (e.g. Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, Joyce Cary). When Rosebury discusses the "realistic" impression of the details (15), he merely draws attention to what Tolkien (and many others) have noted as a requirement for effective fantasy: "'the inner consistency of reality'." Furthermore, consider the first lines of the story: "When Mr Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party ..." (FR 39); this tone and content are much different from a "realist" novel. (How many such works contain characters named "Bilbo Baggins" who have "eleventy-first" birthdays?) LR is a work of "fantasy" in modern prose, which stands apart from the "realist" novel tradition.

It is a viable enterprise to try and argue that Tolkien's stature should be as significant as Eliot's. But Rosebury should not attempt to elevate Tolkien by positioning him in the modernist or "modern" movement (152). The literary resonances (e.g. mythic or epic traditions) of the Middle-earth tales are valuable in their own right. Moreover, Rosebury states that Tolkien did not really deplore industry beyond its polluting tendencies, as is evident from the fact that Niggle rode on "'a pleasant little local train'" (151); Rosebury seems to be grasping at straws here. Many times in LR Tolkien refers to
the depravity of minds that love "metal and wheels" (TT 90), and the devastation they cause: "And here [in Mordor] things still grew, harsh, twisted, bitter, struggling for life" (RK 237). Rosebury attempts to offer an innovative approach to Tolkien’s work, which is admirable; yet the final result (despite some valuable views) appears puzzling or doubtful.

Before summarizing the present state of Tolkien criticism, I should give special regard to the most prominent and influential critics in Tolkien studies. While scholars often display a limited knowledge of the critical history, several names have appeared regularly in numerous discussions. These particular critics all provide interesting perspectives that exhibit a fine knowledge of Tolkien’s scholarship, major and minor creative writings (both poetry and fiction), and self-criticism. As well, these scholars often appear in a few of the "regions" of Tolkien criticism and so are widely accessible. There are, of course, limitations and flaws in these pieces of criticism. However, this group of critics, displaying scholarly methods and insight, have shown a firm and prolific commitment to Tolkien studies.

Humphrey Carpenter is probably the most frequently quoted Tolkien critic. His biography of the author is considered to be the standard work, and scholars have used it extensively and unhesitatingly. Even Isaacs, who has been suspicious of commentary from Tolkien insiders (i.e. his son, publisher, or close acquaintances), observes that by "not presuming to analyze the Tolkien opera, Carpenter has provided more insights to the works than he might have had he indulged in detailed critical exegesis" (1981, 4). Carpenter presents not only a chronological account of the author’s life, but attempts to evaluate Tolkien’s scholarly and creative development. His sections entitled "Lost Tales" (1992, 97-106), "'He had been inside language"' (136-46), and "The storyteller" (164-76) are particularly interesting. While he evidently admires Tolkien, Carpenter avoids fan adulation and shows humility about his own efforts:
Where did it come from, this imagination that peopled Middle-earth with elves, orcs, and hobbits? What was the source of the literary vision that changed the life of this obscure scholar? ... Tolkien would have thought that these were unanswerable questions, certainly unanswerable in a book of this sort. ... His real biography is *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*; for the truth about him lies within their pages. (260)

Carpenter also has provided a book on the Inklings in which he chronicles the relationships among Tolkien, Lewis, Williams, and others close to them. Carpenter considers that Lewis was the hub of the group (1978, xiii,171) and so structures his discussion around Lewis's dominant presence (e.g. 172-199). Carpenter thinks that to assess the "'influence'" these three writers had on each other "makes little sense," most especially because "Tolkien and Williams owed nothing to the other Inklings, and would have written everything they wrote had they never heard of the group" (160). Finally, Carpenter edited Tolkien's letters, which have been quite influential in the scholarship. Whatever can be argued against certain views of Carpenter, his efforts and insights are valuable.

Randel Helms and Jane Chance (formerly Chance Nitzsche) have both published two books and other articles on Tolkien. Helms' *Tolkien's World* was among the first books on the author; in this period of Tolkien criticism, Helms' article in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* discusses the disparity between Tolkien's and Lewis's views on the Bible as "literature" (31-2). Helms thinks that while Lewis preferred to keep "secular" and "sacred" texts separate, Tolkien modified fundamental aspects of the Bible, accounts of "creation" and the "fall of rational earthly beings" in order to strengthen his "secondary-world pattern" (44). In his *Tolkien and the Silmarils*, Helms provides one of the first book length studies on *Sil.*. He discusses the origins of the work (e.g. significance of the name "Earendel" [3]) and major themes (e.g. redemption [39]); as well, he looks closely at central parts of "Quenta
Silmarillion" and "Akallabeth." Some of Helms' views could have used re-thinking, yet his book stands as an intelligent approach to a difficult (and, seemingly, under-appreciated) text.\textsuperscript{14}

In her first book, Chance examines most of Tolkien's writings and attempts "to show how his creative works reflect his interest in medieval English literature, especially Old English, as expressed through his scholarship on and critical studies of such works" (1979, 2). She discusses the presence of the "Monster" and the "King" in each of Tolkien's works of fiction and considers that the various incarnations of these opposing archetypes appear in \textit{LR} (126). She states:

Thus all of Tolkien's work manifests a unity, with understanding of its double and triple levels, in this respect like the distinct dual levels, Germanic and Christian, of \textit{Beowulf} first perceived in Tolkien's own \textit{Beowulf} article. (127)

In another study, Chance comments on \textit{Gawain} as a "source" of \textit{LR} and thinks that after students read each work, they "find the three-decker novel as aesthetically rich and rewarding to analyze, in a different way, as the medieval poem" (1986, 155). Lastly, Chance's second book considers the literary and historical context of Tolkien's work (including a brief review of the "Critical Reception" [1992, 11-18]). Her focus is the theme of "Power" in \textit{LR}, as reflected in language (22), character self-awareness (39), social institutions (45), geopolitical states (60), and war (83). She concludes that the "ability to understand the cyclical nature of heroic adventure, then, is the ability to understand the necessity for locating a 'paradise within.' For Tolkien that ability is the greatest power of all" (116). While Chance sometimes tends to over-generalize certain issues, she shows a deep knowledge of Tolkien's writings and a good awareness of the critical history.\textsuperscript{15}

Like Helms, Paul Kocher has published two books on Tolkien. Kocher's first book is considered to be one of best works of criticism on Middle-earth (see chapter 5, p. 154). In
his second book, *A Reader's Guide to The Silmarillion*, Kocher discusses the various mythic archetypes and tales that Tolkien's work draws on or parallels in some way (2-13). Kocher then summarizes the stories of the book and tries to explicate passages that might be particularly difficult for readers (e.g. the purviews of knowledge and authority among Iluvatar, Manwe, and Mandos [19-20]). As the title suggests, this book is often mainly a "guide" to rather than an in-depth analysis of *Sil*. Still, Kocher has provided an accessible account of a potentially intimidating (or, some might think, alienating) work. Furthermore, in two articles Kocher examines specific aspects of Tolkien's mytho-history. First, Kocher speculates on the nature of Tolkien's invented primitive people, the "Druedain", from details found in *LR* and *Unfinished Tales* (1984, 23). Kocher thinks that although this race of Men is not mentioned in *Sil.*, as sentient beings they still must have been part of plan of Eru (25). Second, Kocher considers the account of the "Flame Imperishable" in *Sil.* and proposes that this parallels Catholic doctrine: "Surely the 'Secret Fire' ... which 'giveth Life and Reality' is very much like the Holy Spirit which works in the New Testament miracles underlying the whole Christian faith" (1985, 37). Other critics may disagree with Kocher, perhaps thinking that Tolkien would not deliberately re-express a Catholic perspective but rather offer a complementary, yet distinct, "sub-creative" concept. In any case, Kocher's ideas in general are salient and interesting.

While J.S. Ryan has not published a book in this period of criticism on Middle-earth, his first book (see chapter 5, p. 147) remains notable, especially since Isaacs and Zimbardo reprinted a chapter of it in 1981 (19-39). Moreover, Ryan has written many articles in Tolkien specialty journals on various aspects of the author's work. The titles alone indicate Ryan's eclectic topics: "Homo Ludens: Amusement, Play and Seeking in Tolkien's Earliest Romantic Thought," "Ancient Mosaic Tiles from Out of the West: Some Romano-British 'Traditional' Motifs," "Another Warrior Woman Who Gave Up Thoughts of Battle
and Heroism: Greta the Strong," and "Tolkien's Concept of Philology as Mythology." As well, Ryan has discussed the influence of "Parzival romance" in Tolkien's depiction of "modern heroism" (1984, 13), the "Eastern" analogies to the character Saruman (1985, 57), and the possibility that the author's imagination was "fired" by an actual "archaeological/antiquarian survey" of a real mine, which might parallel LR's "Mines of Moria" (1990, 27). Lastly, Ryan echoes Shippey in thinking that it is "very clear that Tolkien's story came from pivotal words, enigmatic names, descriptions and an urge to fill complex omissions in the inherited texts" (e.g. Beowulf) (1991, 48). Unfortunately, Ryan's articles are short and available only in Tolkien specialty journals; thus their impact on the critical history has been less than it should be. Still, it is impressive that Ryan has been a Tolkien critic for 30 years.16

Verlyn Flieger began her critical career on Tolkien with a dissertation; in "Medieval Epic and Romance Motifs in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings," she cites possible sources of Tolkien and considers how "he has re-formed and synthesized the familiar motifs and figures of the old material" in order to "find and hold a responsive modern audience" (159).17 Unlike other Tolkien critics, Flieger has examined Sil. in depth and has considered its philosophical and theological essence. In "Naming the Unnameable: The Neoplatonic 'One' in Tolkien's Silmarillion," Flieger discusses the role of Tolkien's monotheistic figure and concludes that he "remains throughout the Unknown God, unknowable and unreachable in his oneness, perceivable and approachable only to the extent by which the part can represent the whole" (1986a, 132). (Flieger's view seems to echo Tolkien's from a long letter to Father Robert Murray [L 200-7].) As well, she has explored the reasons why there is no direct parallel to Christ in Tolkien's mytho-history (1986b, 12) and suggests that "by not retelling the Christian story, Tolkien leaves readers free to find [it] at will, free to make associations, apply interpretations, bring to bear on the story whatever seems personally most vital and
immediate" (15). And in another article, Flieger examines Tolkien's treatment of "Time" and notes that the plight of the Elves reflects the dangers of arresting time, while his "Men (and Hobbits) illustrate with the consequent pain and loss of all that seems most precious, the necessity of letting go, of trusting in the unknown future, in God" (1990, 18).

In her thought-provoking book on Tolkien, Flieger uses Barfield's "theory of the interdependence of myth and language" to show "that the polarities of light and dark, perceived through and expressed in language, define one another and develop in Tolkien's world" (1983, xix-x). She examines particular incidents in Sil., such the stories of "Thingol and Melian" (83-5) and "Beren and Luthien" (118-130), and surmises that the "blending of the best of both races in the half-elven race is itself a light in the darkness" (131). Her work is not a summary of Sil, or a comparative study of myths but rather an analysis of how the imagery and philosophy of Tolkien's myth-history constitute a profound, though familiar, religious perspective:

And Tolkien, Christian, Roman Catholic, knew that history will never be anything but a long defeat. Still, he had faith that through darkness one might come to light. ... And in the making of poetry, in sub-creating of a world man may re-make himself, may carry himself beyond words to the Word and so become the architect, in collaboration with God, of his own redemption. (156-7)

In most of her writings, Flieger has proven Gardner's view (see p. 193) that Sil., while not as accessible or perhaps compelling as Hobbit and LR, can reward close readings and inspire intricate analyses.

And last, but certainly not least, there is T.A. Shippey. As is evidenced throughout this study, it is hardly possible to comment on an important issue in Tolkien criticism without citing or acknowledging Shippey's views. Even Rosebury, who positions his approach to Tolkien in opposition to Shippey's (4-6), recognizes that the scholar's work "displays with
exceptional knowledge and penetration the relation of Tolkien's creativity to his learning" (4). Shippey has brought to his studies on Middle-earth a broad and deep understanding of not only ancient languages and literature, but of literary history, in general, and fantasy and science fiction, in particular. In his writings, whether or not they reflect a philological or linguistic emphasis, Shippey draws on relevant materials from the Bible, St. Augustine, Bede, Malory, Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, Eliot, and many others. He has provided commentaries and reviews in publications ranging from the Tolkien Society newsletter, Amon Hen (1989, 18-22), to The Medieval Legacy: A Symposium (1982, 51-69). As well, he has edited the Oxford University Press's collections of fantasy and science fiction stories. William Green's view of Shippey's contributions to criticism on Hobbit can be applied to his writings on every one of the author's works: "Shippey eradicates all doubt that Tolkien the storyteller was informed by Tolkien the scholar and removes any reasonable suspicion that the juvenile book is child's play" (1995, 19).

It is not possible here to do full justice to all of Shippey's learned and insightful perspectives on Tolkien. Thus, I will focus on some of Shippey's important views in his centenary paper and landmark book. In "Tolkien as Post-War Writer," Shippey discusses the author in the context of his contemporaries, Orwell, Golding, White, and Lewis, all of whom wrote works that are not those which "critical orthodoxy would then or now accept" (1995, 84). In addition to similarities in literary approach (i.e. writing "fantastic" fiction), Shippey thinks that the books of Tolkien and the other four writers are "marked by war" and "all have as their major theme the nature of evil" (85). Shippey states that these writers deliberately isolated themselves from "the views of official culture" and used "non-realistic modes essentially because they felt they were writing about subjects too great and too general to tie down to particular and recognisable settings" (92). While his views are important, Shippey somewhat over-states his case here; there evidently has been strong opposition or "antipathy"
towards Tolkien, but the possible "Sonnenkinder and their heirs" (91-2) have not prevented general readers and literary critics, both within and outside the academic community, from exploring Tolkien's works. Still, Shippey draws attention to how the author can be evaluated within literary tradition, as well as the central (yet under-studied) influence of war on Tolkien's writings.

Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* stands as an intriguing and engaging--and probably the best--critical work on Tolkien. First published in 1982, and revised and expanded in 1992, Shippey's book appears to be second only to Carpenter's biography in its influence on successive critics. Even Hunter, who is mainly negative towards Tolkien's work, admits that Shippey's book is "an excellent study" that has affected her assessments of the literary value of LR (32-4,185). Shippey proceeds from the view that critics in general have either ignored or denied the value of using a philological approach to Tolkien's work, which is most peculiar considering the author's profession and interests (1992, 1-25). Shippey applies the principles of this scholarly method with great learning, while still remaining accessible and interesting; this feat should not be under-estimated because without awareness of or training in ancient literature and languages, a reader could become lost in some of the technical details. Yet Shippey brings his vast and intricate knowledge to bear on specific passages in order to show how "Tolkien's imagination surpasses that of most fantasy-writers;" in the myriad details, such as the nature of the Rohirrim, the author uses "'reconstruction' to 'calquing' and produces fantasy, a people and culture that never were, but that press closer and closer to the edge of might-have-been" (1992, 114-15). Examples of this kind could be detailed at great length. While certain perspectives are obviously open to question or challenge, Shippey provides so many well-articulated and strongly supported perspectives that "only the most biased critical mind could miss" the literary depths of Tolkien's work (1992, 119). Shippey concludes his study by borrowing a reference to Câdmon and applying it to Tolkien.
Here, not only is Shippey's deep knowledge evident but so are the reasons for Tolkien's profound appeal:

... 'whatever he [Câldmon] learned from scholars, he brought forth adorned with the greatest and sweetness and inspiration, in poetry and well-made in the English language. ... And many others following him began also to make songs of virtue among the English people.' ... At the end of it all the translator wrote, [sic] ... 'But just the same, none of them could do it like him.' (1992, 290)

The state of Tolkien criticism as a whole exhibits discernible regions occupied by many points of view. While all areas continue to publish work on the mythic, Nordic, Christian, fantasy, and modern cultural aspects of the Middle-earth tales, each region functions on its own, often unconcerned with what the others are doing. Critics in Tolkien specialty journals show awareness of the critical books (especially those of Carpenter and Shippey), yet academic journal articles and dissertations remain generally under-acknowledged. Dissertations and listings of Tolkien criticism (e.g. West's and Johnson's) usually consider much of the key scholarship, yet fantasy literature scholars and many critical books on Tolkien do not. This is not to state that critics must always know (or cite) the bulk of Tolkien criticism before they proceed with their own analyses. Still, by being aware of a significant cross-section of the scholarship, critics can avoid redundancy and repetition. This seems especially notable in studies of the influences of Christianity, the other Inklings, and general mythology on Tolkien's works. Whether or not a given critical work offers fresh insight into Tolkien's works, over and above prior scholarship, is open to individual interpretation. But a broad knowledge of the critical history at least offers scholars the ability to contextualize their own particular approach.

Still, it would be a mistake to assume that most of Tolkien commentary follows well-trodden paths. As the overviews of this chapter and those of chapters 3 and 5 indicate, there have been many insightful approaches within the
general regions of scholarship on Tolkien. Close studies of particular details of Middle-earth, analyses of the theological implications, or linguistic and philological issues have provided hundreds of valuable discussions. The 56 papers in the Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference (edited by Patricia Reynolds and Glen Good Knight) are proof alone that Tolkien's works inspire interesting perspectives. Articles such as "Tolkien as Reviser: A Case Study," "Tolkien the Anti-totalitarian," and "The Geology of Middle-earth" highlight the various ways that scholars approach Tolkien's works. There is certainly flawed or weak criticism, which I have noted throughout this study. However, it is doubtful that Tolkien is somehow different from any other writer, canonical or otherwise, in this respect. The diversity of responses, which range from "fan" adulation to philosophical exegesis, might be wider for Tolkien than for other notable authors. But there is clearly more than enough sound and "serious" criticism on Tolkien to offset the "hostile" or "popular" commentary.

One issue, however, remains essentially unacknowledged or under-considered in the scholarship on Middle-earth: the impact of Tolkien's authorial statements on the critical history. Even the fine studies on Tolkien do not address this concern at length. In all areas of the scholarship, many critics cite the author's views but rarely scrutinize or question them. For instance, Manganiello states that Tolkien "did not privilege his own post scriptum interpretations," citing a 1955 letter as proof (14), yet he ignores other letters and commentaries where Tolkien claims that he "holds the key;" Hood plainly notes that her study will consider LR "in a manner, it is to be hoped, congruent with Tolkien's views" (2), though she does not mention that many of the author's "views" are not "congruent" with each other; Sarti admits that he is not concerned with the "correctness" of Tolkien's literary interpretations, but only how they reflect his "approach and concerns" (122); Huttar structures his article on Tolkien's fantasy around the author's views, drawing on his letters numerous times; Harvey's book is intrinsically
dependant on Tolkien's perspectives. And even Shippey, while noting a few of the inconsistencies in the author's self-criticism (e.g. 1992, 62, 106, 112), has attempted to provide readings of Tolkien's works "'with an appreciation as far as possible of the sort which its author may be supposed to have desired'" (1992, 5; 1995, 92).

Tolkien himself, then, appears to be the most widely-regarded critic of his works. Whatever literary theorists may argue for or against the author's views or "intentions," it remains a fact of the scholarship on Middle-earth that Tolkien's perspectives are ever-present and, at times, dominant. Wimsatt thinks that critical inquiries "are not settled by consulting the oracle"—i.e. the writer (18), and Barthes would like to eradicate and bury the author altogether (170–2). Still, as Tolkien criticism exhibits in place after place, the creator (and sub-creator) of Middle-earth is often consulted and very much alive.
Notes

1 With regard to Tolkien and classical literature, see Robert Morse's "Evocation of Virgil in Tolkien's Art: Geritol for the Classics" and Kenneth Reckford's "Some Trees in Virgil and Tolkien"; on contemporary culture, see Merle Fifield's "Fantasy in and for the Sixties" and Ean Bagg's The Lord of the Rings and the Sign of the Times.

2 To be fair to Grotta, for the 1976 edition of his Tolkien biography he did not have the advantage of access to Tolkien's letters, diaries, notes, or the willing cooperation of Tolkien's family and friends (which Carpenter was given); in the 1992 edition, Grotta rather testily comments on this: "Such a practice is ethically tenuous, but economically practical" (175). Still, with all the information available in 1992 in the public domain, Grotta does not revise old materials, does not include a list of Tolkien's writings (which should be standard for a biography of an author), and does not update his list of secondary works on Tolkien (which contains only five titles).

3 Other notable reviews that comment unfavourably on Sil. include those from Margo Jefferson, Timothy Foote, Robert Adams, and Richard Brookhiser.

4 Hunnewell provides a good overview of the Tolkien journals and organizations from around the world.

5 Mythlore was established to print articles on Lewis and Williams as well. Some issues concentrate on the works of these two authors and exclude Tolkien. Other Tolkien-related publications listed in the MLA bibliography include Inklings, Seven, Minas Tirith Evening Star, Vinyar Tengwar, and Amon Hen.

6 While Jones seems to regret that Tolkien did not provide "evil" female characters, Catharine Stimpson and Brenda Partridge each condemn him for supposedly demeaning women in the Shelob episode; Stimpson states: "This scene which has a narrative energy far greater than its function, oozes a distasteful, vengeful quality as the small, but brave, male figure really gets the enormous, stenching bitch-castrator" (19); Partridge claims that the "description of Sam's battle with Shelob is not only a life and death struggle of man and monster, good against evil but represents a violent sexual struggle between man and woman. ... Shelob then crawls away in agony as Sam in a final gesture holds up the phial, once more asserting male supremacy, brandishing the phallic, male symbol of power" (Giddings 1983, 191).

7 West's and Johnson's views of the availability of Tolkien journals (stated in 1981 and 1986, respectively) remain applicable today; West notes: "There are still many of them (though some titles have ceased publication, others have taken their places), and they are still unindexed" (1981, xiii); Johnson observes: "Many of these are no longer published. In fact some of them have disappeared completely" (237). Even the
Tolkien archive at Marquette University does not have a complete collection of these specialty journals.

8 Shippey declares that Tolkien has not "been accepted into the unstated but well-known 'canon' of academic texts" (1995, 92); in 1996, Sullivan maintained that the popular appeal of Tolkien's books has caused them to be "looked down upon and generally considered unworthy of serious study" (77).

9 Recent searches of the Modern Language Association and Dissertation Abstracts International CD ROM disks for the period 1977 to the present displayed the number of entries on certain 20th-century writers. While the results are not wholly conclusive, since there are limits to the databases, they give an indication of how the amount of Tolkien scholarship compares with other authors in this century; for Lawrence, approximately 4500 MLA entries and 340 DAI; for Eliot, 2800 and 360; Joyce, 3800 and 280; C.S. Lewis, 1500 and 110; Charles Williams, 550 and 60; Golding, 290 and 30; Orwell, 540 and 55; Waugh, 400 and 145; and, lastly, for Tolkien, 850 MLA entries and 45 DAI. For sheer number of entries, Tolkien is far behind the major writers, yet ahead of Williams, Waugh, Orwell, and Golding. (My forthcoming article in The Tolkien Collector [July 1997] provides a listing of Tolkien theses compiled from a number of sources in addition to DAI.)

10 John Rateliff states that while there were common interests (e.g. literature, myth, Christian theology) among Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams, the differences are more striking: "But their expressions of those interests were profoundly different, as were their styles (it would be hard to mistake any passage from Williams' writing for Tolkien's or vice versa, whether poetry, criticism, or fiction)" (277).

11 Tolkien knew Williams for only about 6 years (Carpenter 1992, 154,203) and said in the Resnik interview that he disliked Williams' work (1967, 40). Lewis stated bluntly: "No one ever influenced Tolkien--you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch" (1988, 481).

12 With regard to the flaws in Brooke-Rose's analysis, Shippey observes: "[T]he 'megatext', we are told, is 'wholly invented and unfamiliar' (a save-all footnote declares that even if there are sources in 'Old Norse and other materials', these have nothing to do with 'ultimate "truth"', a concept apparently securely in the critic's possession. ... Much of the rest is just plain wrong, with the usual inference that the critic has been too angry or self-confident to read the book" (1992, 283). Attebery also notes: "Like Jackson, Brooke-Rose is unwilling to follow up the implications of her own methodology when it comes to Tolkien. Both writers seem incapable of paying close attention to the text" (1992, 27).

13 For more discussion of Tolkien's support for racial tolerance, see my article in Mallorn (9-11).
Helms states that Tolkien's "Apocalypse" parallels Revelations since Melkor/Morgoth is first chained and then ages later "thrust through the Door of Night beyond the Walls of the World, into the Timeless Void" (1981, 40). But Sil. does not explicitly outline the details of the End to Tolkien's sub-created world; these cataclysmic disasters happened to Morgoth and, at those times, they did not bring about the total destruction of Middle-earth or Valinor.

For instance, Chance states that chapter 1 of FR shows that "intellectual heroism, in Tolkien's world, is achieved through social involvement, service to others, the disappearance of self-indulgence," which is reflected by Bilbo's giving the Ring to Frodo (1992, 116). While it is true Tolkien depicts the value of "service to others," the first chapter illustrates the degree to which Bilbo and Frodo feel separated from their "social" milieu; by distancing themselves from the pettiness of Hobbiton (though they still love their hometown), both Bilbo and Frodo take steps towards serving the wider world (FR 39-65).


Flieger adapted a part of her dissertation and published it in Isaacs and Zimbardo's essay collection (1981, 40-62).

These examples reflect Shippey's learning and perceptiveness; on the relevance of Shakespeare to Tolkien, Shippey observes: "Besides Macbeth and Lear Tolkien was probably struck by The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream (the two 'fairy' plays whose plots were not borrowed but made up by Shakespeare). But he remembered less likely plays too. As the Fellowship leaves Rivendell Bilbo says: 'When winter first begins to bite ...'. In rhythm and theme he echoes the magnificent coda to Love's Labour Lost: When icicles hang by the wall .... Shakespeare's piece is better, but Bilbo's is good enough" (1992, 166). With regard to Milton, Shippey notes: "Possibly the most important scene added to the Narn, and not present in The Silmarillion, is the one in which Morgoth debates with his captive Hurin on top of the 'Hill of Tears,' looking out over the kingdoms of the world like Christ and Satan in Paradise Regained (1992, 232).

At the 1996 conference of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, Shippey was honoured as the "Guest Scholar;" according to the president of IAFA, W.A. Senior, Shippey's presence helped to make that conference one of the most successful and well-attended of all.
Conclusion:

'Old man', he said, 'you are at least not my elder. As to my better you often sneered at me behind my back. Do you challenge me now openly?'...

'No sir!' he croaked. 'Don't do me a harm! I'm only a poor old man'.
The King's face softened. 'Alas, yes! You speak the truth. Do not be afraid! Be at ease! But will you not expect the King of Faery to do something for you before he leaves?'

"It is not easy, therefore, to expose the fallacy by which a false classification is created to swamp a unique thing, when it really is a unique thing." Chesterton makes this remark when considering the methods of comparative religion commentators, who often disregard the special essence of Christianity as they seek out (or devise) commonalties among world religions (7:217). Tolkien offers parallel comments in "OFS;" he opposes those who would regard all children as a single "class" or all tales as representations of specific "root" myths or motifs from folklore (TL 21-44). The main point of both authors is that if people focus only on similar aspects of particular phenomena, they might neglect or suppress the vital and predominant distinctive features. This seems to be the current problem in "fantasy" criticism and a potential concern for Tolkien studies.

Whether or not certain fantasy critics have devised their models and theories partly in order to "swamp" Tolkien's uniqueness is open to debate. It may be coincidental that theorists of "fantasy" or the "fantastic" (which is now the more visible term), such as Rabkin, Brooke-Rose, Jackson, Apter, Hunter, Yuan, both have diverged from prior critics on the literary concept and have neglected or belittled Tolkien's fiction. Other critics, such as Lewis, Alexander, Carter, Mobley, Irwin, Swinfen, Attebery, have developed their views using Tolkien's ideas and have greatly admired his creative work. If it were only a matter of literary preference or, to quote Shippey again, "mere ideological reluctance" (1992, 143),
then the differing perspectives could merely be acknowledged and even valued. However, when certain individuals call Tolkien's work "dangerous" and state, like Hume (195), or imply, like Hunter (33), that readers should not "accept" or even read his fiction, then such thinking requires close scrutiny. In these cases, the commentators seem to have gone beyond mere preference and have tried to promote a bias. Besides swamping the special nature of Tolkien's work, these critics might want to bury it.

Still, as I have noted from the outset, the presence of negative views on Tolkien has not prevented the widespread reading of or extensive scholarship on his works. Furthermore, critics may think it is worthwhile that even after many years of theoretical discussions, there remains no generally-accepted definition of "fantasy" literature. Critical disagreement need not create futile dissension, but could, rather, foster a valuable examination of the subject.

Unfortunately, the present state of criticism on the literary form may have rendered the term "fantasy" virtually useless. As Carter, Todorov, Irwin, and Shippey have noted (in their own ways), if the views of "fantasy" can accommodate texts ranging from The Odyssey to Winnie-the-Pooh, and give little heed to "current practice and common usage" (Shippey 1994, xxii), the literary concept loses its both distinction and use. And, curiously, certain perspectives on "fantasy" (e.g. Manlove's, Jackson's, Apter's, Moorcock's, Yuan's) seem to marginalize the writer whose work and stature animated the entire literary field: Tolkien. Sidney's observation appears applicable here:

For indeed, after the philosophers had picked out of the sweet mysteries of poetry the right discerning true points of knowledge, they forthwith putting it in method, and making a school-art of that which the poets did only teach by a divine delightfulfulness, beginning to spurn at their guides, like ungrateful prentices, were not content to set up shops for themselves, but sought by all means to discredit their masters; which
Whatever opinion one wishes to offer on Tolkien's work, his importance and predominance in the field of "fantasy" should be re-affirmed and maintained. It is clear that Tolkien's ideas on fantasy literature are both widely influential and generally consistent. To reiterate briefly, "fantasy" is a tale set in an imaginary realm of a pre-technological era, where supernatural beings, creatures, and materials function among ordinary people, animals, and things; furthermore, such stories should have an elevated and eloquent tone and diction (somewhat similar to that of traditional myths, epics, romances, sagas, and fairy-tales); lastly, the work should try to inspire "wonder" and "enchantment" in the reader with the potential for an experience of religious "joy." Some "fantasy" critics have diverged from or disagreed with Tolkien's views; but it appears no one has been able to refute or dismiss them. "Tolkienian" fantasy remains very visible in the general field of speculative fiction. Therefore, critics should be aware of the premises of Tolkien's fantasy in order to attend judiciously to his texts.

Turning now to the core of this dissertation--the corpus of critical perspectives on Middle-earth--I should first address the notion that there have been perennial and numerous obstructive forces in the history of Tolkien scholarship. From Parker in 1956 to Reilly in 1963 to Ryan in 1969 to Purtil in 1974 to Ellison 1986 to Colebatch in 1990 to Curry 1997, many critics have discussed (sometimes extensively) the negative or "hostile" responses to Tolkien's works. There remains the perspective that the Middle-earth tales have received "extreme praise from one faction, total contempt from the other" (Carpenter 1992, 226). However, this view could give the impression, even unintentionally, that the supposed factions are equally represented. This is simply not the case. Beyond the unfavourable commentaries on Tolkien from Wilson, Roberts,
Stimpson, Manlove, Giddings and some others, there is relatively little criticism which disparages the author. A massive block of silent hostility towards Tolkien is possible, though highly untraceable. The multitude of supportive voices is plainly evident.

The question remains why Tolkien critics have been preoccupied with these severe remarks. There is, of course, the ever-useful critical approach of presenting a contrary view and then proceeding to refute it. No doubt some Tolkien scholars have found it convenient to place Wilson, Stimpson, or Manlove as the opponent in order to argue for their own positions. But there might be a less obvious reason for the continual invoking of harsh comments. While many critics, such as Lewis, Auden, Ryan, Kocher, Irwin, Carpenter, Flieger, Shippey, have presented insightful views without over earnest or embarrassing laurels, the profound nature of Tolkien's work has touched them deeply. Thus caustic and ill-considered commentary has struck an emotional chord, as well as an intellectual one. In any case, after so many years and studies of Tolkien criticism, critics should now de-emphasize or, in some instances, discount the dissenting views.

For the objections to Tolkien's work appear to reveal much about the literary preferences of the critics and little about the intrinsic nature of the Middle-earth tales. The severe criticisms, such as that the work is "juvenile," stylistically poor, simplistic in its portrayal of Good and Evil, sexist, metaphysically obscure, "execrable," and "dangerous" (offered by Wilson, Roberts, Toynbee, Stimpson, Manlove, Brooke-Rose, Hunter) display a dislike or obtuseness towards the nature of Tolkienian fantasy. Moreover, these condemnations (as discussed in chapters 3, 5, and 7) have been refuted by critics including Lewis, Auden, Blisset, Fuller, Bradley, Ryan, Beatie, Kirk, Irwin, Kilby, Le Guin, Swinfen, Colebatch, Attebery, Shippey, and many, many others. It appears that the basic features of Tolkien's fantasy, the aura of past ages, the tone and structure of heroic literature, or the sense of religious joy, are not amenable to certain individuals; if someone
disfavours tales of beings like hobbits, prefers stories of humans in modern situations, values a style that is dense (e.g. Joyce's), or wishes to foster moral relativism, then Tolkien's work would be unappealing or repulsive. But critical antipathy is not necessarily the same as negative criticism; the former can prevent a scholarly approach to a given work; the latter, depending on the quality of its argument, may be plausible or valid. Still, as Attebery has noted, critical approaches that might question the literary value of Tolkien's work "must be applied impartially and with full attention to the text, or they will reveal less than do the unsystematic intuitions of careful and sympathetic readers" (1992, 35).

The "popular" responses to Tolkien are certainly more prevalent and extensive than the "hostile" views. Some critics, from Isaacs in 1968 (1) to Rosebury in 1992 (2), have thought this fact has adversely affected "serious" criticism on Tolkien's works. But, again, the results of the present study do not support this contention. The campus craze, fan clubs, colourful books, or board games inspired by Tolkien's works have not prevented the appearance of scholarly articles, theses, and books. Certainly, the illustrated encyclopedias, guide volumes, or computer games based on the Middle-earth tales are more visible than the academic writings. As well, the needs of commercial publishers might have impinged on some studies (e.g. the books by Noel, Harvey, or Grotta), allowing an aura of fandom to mar the scholarship. Still, general beliefs about the sources of criticism can be misleading. For example, university presses have published the poor studies of Stimpson, Manlove, and Brooke-Rose, while commercial publishers have produced the fine books by Kocher, Carpenter, and Shippey. Every piece of criticism must be evaluated on its own merits, not by the assumptions of any literary group.

To return to the four assessments of the state of Tolkien scholarship outlined in the introduction (p.p. 5-7), these all offer a strain of accuracy, yet present misleading views. First, Hammond is right that there is much "serious criticism" that ranges over many subjects (1995, 226). Further, to imply
that the Tolkien journals contain mere fannish adulation neglects the fact that many fine critical perspectives have appeared in them. However, Hammond seems to display his own preferences when stating that most "good criticism being produced is by fans," and it is in these Tolkien journals, "I think, that new ground is most likely to be broken" (230). It is true that a "fan" and a "scholar" can be one and the same; but "good" work is also "produced" in academic institutions. There are more opportunities for "new ground ... to be broken" in Tolkien studies if scholars strive to foster criticism in all possible forms of publication. Tolkien critics should continually face the scrutiny of the wider literary community. As many articles and theses have shown, Tolkien has received sound and sensible readings.

For his part, Rosebury has a point that often in Tolkien commentary "coy puns" or "excerpts from the autobiography of a devotee" (3) may disturb or irritate the reader of the critical piece, thereby offering disservice rather than support to the author's literary stature. And there are many "shallow and silly" (2) views of Tolkien, given that his appeal is far-ranging and diffuse. However, critics (e.g. Toynbee) who imply that Tolkien is "an anathema on modern literature" have not explained adequately their reasons for thinking so; as well, Tolkien supporters do not always wish to worship him "in a temple in which he is the solitary idol" (Rosebury 2).

Scholars have noted that Tolkien's works are refreshingly distinctive and unique in "modern" literature; the Middle-earth tales, while bearing relationship to prior heroic texts, are in many ways unlike anything published previously and have been imitated (often poorly) by many successive writers (e.g. Terry Brooks). As well, to state that the corpus of Tolkien commentary is virtually useless disregards the facts. In study after study, Tolkien (contrary to Rosebury's view) has been "assessed as a literary artist rather than [only] an event in contemporary culture" (1). It is certainly worthwhile to argue that Tolkien should be evaluated and appreciated as much as any author, "modern" or otherwise. Still, Tolkien probably will
not be granted a higher stature merely because he might have some vague similarities to the acknowledged great writers of the twentieth century.

In fact, Shippey maintains that Tolkien is condemned or disparaged for the very reason that he does not follow "'correct and sober taste', ... the great but one-sided traditions of later English literature, ... those 'higher literary aspirations'" (1992, 5). It seems that the severe remarks from Wilson (314), Roberts (459), or Toynbee (19) have displayed a bias which considers that stories depicting "Good People and Goblins" are "close to Common Room joke" or "whimsical and childish." However, given that these views are not representative of Tolkien commentary as a whole, perhaps Shippey has over-stated his main perspective. The problem is not that individuals like Wilson are "Lit." critics, thereby dismissing or ignoring the value of "Lang." works--which, due to Tolkien's profession, includes LR (1992, 22-5). Clearly, there is much more valuable Lit. criticism on Tolkien than Lang..

The negative views that Shippey cites, as noted earlier (p. 226), appear to stem from basic antipathy, whether it be based on a dislike of ancient languages and literature, "fantastic" stories, or the author's ideological preferences. Tolkien scholars might have to go to great lengths to root out, or speculate on, the psychological factors that give rise to negative criticism. But it is clear that critics who are derisive of Tolkien usually misconstrue or disfavour his mode of "fantasy," display a faulty knowledge of his texts, have stark weaknesses of argument, and mainly disregard the prior scholarship. Actually, Shippey's phrases "critical rage" or "hostile criticism" (1992, 5,25) may be considered as contradictions in terms; if one feels "rage" or hostility, it is hard to be scholarly or "critical" towards a literary work; emotive bias can disrupt analytical thought. In any case, as Shippey suggests, perhaps critics cannot judge at the moment whether "hostile criticism directed" at LR is "right or wrong" (1992, 25); yet, due to the flaws noted above, these examples
of "critical rage" are poor scholarship.\textsuperscript{2}

In contrast to Shippey, Chance proposes that while "Tolkien's entry into the canon of twentieth-century writers within the academy" was "delayed" because of the "cult celebration" of his works, his "academic reputation has been ensured" (1992, 11,17). Chance properly observes that there have been many valuable studies of Tolkien both within and outside academia; critics have considered a range of topics on the Middle-earth tales, including the religious elements, the author's contemporaries (e.g. Lewis), "fantasy" conventions, medieval sources, philological aspects, as well as issues of modern society and classical literature. While Chance mentions the strong points in Tolkien criticism, she does not note the problems (see further on). Chance boldly declares that at last Tolkien "is being studied as important in himself, as one of the world's greatest writers" (18).

And yet, while Shippey maintains that "the literary Establishment" has excluded Tolkien from "the unstated but well-known 'canon' of academic texts" (1995, 91-2), Chance thinks that the author is a part of "the canon ... within the academy." Are there objective criteria to settle this matter? As I noted in chapter 7 (p. 225), searches of the MLA and DAI CD ROMs indicate that Tolkien has not received the regard afforded to other notable 20th-century writers, such as Lawrence, Joyce, or Eliot. Still, Chance states Tolkien is considered to be "one of the world's greatest writers." I shall come back to this point because its resolution remains an on-going concern in Tolkien studies.

As for other strains or strands in the history of Tolkien criticism, I think that one should be careful about certain characterizations. Some moments have been significant, such as the publication of the enigmatic \textit{Sil}, which inspired more analyses of Tolkien's cosmological concepts of Middle-earth. But to distinguish the criticism according to criteria like country of origin, age and professional situation of the critics, or shifts in literary movements (e.g. post-modernism) could obscure rather than clarify the most important concerns;
the key questions are (or should be): Is the available Tolkien commentary sound criticism? Does it show a knowledge of the premises of Tolkienian fantasy? Does it have a clearly developed analytical perspective, which displays a necessary awareness of the primary texts and other critical views relevant to the topic? In short, critics should try to avoid literary bias and concentrate on the intrinsic value of the argument and evidence of any given critical view.

Still, the corpus of Tolkien scholarship does exhibit three facts: 1) When the Middle-earth tales appeared, they were generally well-received and considered to be superior to comparable writings available at the time; 2) Tolkien's works became widely popular and have inspired hundreds of scholarly articles, theses and books; 3) Tolkien has greatly influenced successive "fantasy" writers and, in the kind of literature he wrote, to this day it seems no one has supplanted him. Even some of the most notable "fantasy" authors, such as Ursula Le Guin, Stephen Donaldson, or Guy Gavriel Kay, acknowledge Tolkien's preeminence. Whether there has been as much excellent scholarship on Tolkien as that on other 20th-century writers can be matter for other studies. Yet from 1937 and in each year up to the present time, Tolkien's works have continued to inspire interesting criticism.

However, there are some peculiarities in the general response to the Middle-earth tales, as well as some evident deficiencies. First, it is strange that a single author's works have motivated individuals to cry "Frodo Lives!", as well as to offer complex analyses:

[I]n story and the place-name one can hear the echo of a hopeless resistance from the Darkest of Dark Ages, pagan to Christian, pagan to pagan, Welsh to English, all ending in forgetfulness with even the memory of the resisters blurred, till recovered by archaeology -- and by philology. (Shippey 1992, 33)

Why have both school children and university professors enthusiastically responded to Tolkien? Further, why has *Hobbit* been quite favourably regarded, whereas *Sil,* much less so? And
why has LR remained the most widely and closely studied of all of Tolkien's works? These questions are not easy to answer, but the critical perspectives on Middle-earth offer some explanations.

Hobbit has been generally free from censure because in addition to its intrinsic high quality, it has been designated as "children's literature:" tales of little people, dwarves, goblins, or elves are native and natural to that field. Conversely, Sil. has been subject to disfavour probably because its difficult and often grim nature seems to have disappointed expectations or countered certain literary sensibilities; the mytho-historical account and quasi-Biblical tone make the book a challenge. With regard to LR, the "Mirror" on Middle-earth shows many desirable and "unbidden" things; and one of them seems to be a monster.

Or, rather, to be more precise, it is "monstrous" in Chesterton's sense. Like Frankenstein's creature, LR appears to have been assembled with various recognizable parts and brought to life by an elusive (and perhaps unknowable) creative spark. Yet unlike Victor's monstrosity, Tolkien's work has been cherished by its creator and very many others, despite its evident defects. From the early praising comments, through the enthusiastic popular response, to the present established state of criticism, one view of Tolkien is indeed perennial: His work evokes the eternal desires for wonder and self-fulfilment, as well as reflects an essence that may alleviate, even through a "brief vision," the inherent sorrows and "self-made misery" of human life.

Bruce Beatie's remarks in 1970 on the "Tolkien phenomenon" still seem relevant; rather than pose a hypothetical reader, he observes that admirers of Tolkien range from housewives to lawyers (691), which suggests that the "great aesthetic quality" (696) of the Middle-earth tales may appeal to anyone. It is always precarious to speculate on the reasons why readers react as they do to certain works. However, the widespread and various responses to LR indicate it is a very remarkable work, which stands as one of the major achievements of this century.
Still, the scholarship on Tolkien, while strong in many instances, has notable shortcomings. There are simplistic or textually-flawed responses, though naturally all authors have been subject to poor criticism. More significantly, there are areas in Tolkien scholarship that have been over-studied, under-analyzed, or mainly neglected. Since many critics, even the better ones, have not shown a broad awareness of the critical history, certain approaches could use re-consideration. Discussions of the possible themes of the Middle-earth tales (mythic, religious, or Nature), the search for literary sources (medieval or modern), the comparisons to the works of the other Inklings (Lewis or Williams) need fresh perspectives to avoid the repetition and redundancy that seems to be creeping into such studies. Alternatively, much more work is required on Tolkien’s invented languages, whether it be linguistic or philological analyses; as well, critics should consider further the special nature of his “fantasy” in relation to other such writers (instead of merely noting similarities), including those who deliberately or indirectly depart from the Tolkienian mode.

And, clearly, there could be far more studies of Tolkien as story-teller, literary stylist, and “sub-creator.” The concept of Middle-earth itself needs continual and extensive analysis. While the Tolkien journals and discussion groups usually explore the myriad details involved in Tolkien’s vast mytho-historical invention, work still needs to be done on its cosmological postulates and sub-creative details. In addition to *Hobbit, LR, and Sil.*, there are *Unfinished Tales* and the 12 volumes of Tolkien’s manuscripts, *The History of Middle-earth* series, edited by Christopher Tolkien; in-depth textual analyses of these materials are severely lacking. Furthermore, the tales themselves, despite the hundreds of available studies, still could use re-readings and more contemplation. The narrative structure, inner psychology of the characters, representations of women and love, ruminations on war, trials of earthly life, essence of the divine, all could use more extensive study. Tolkien scholars can both find new approaches
and re-invigorate time-honoured ones. Eliot's view in "Four Quartets" (145) is apt here:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

One of the most important tasks of this "exploration" is an awareness of the critical allegiance to Tolkien's self-criticism. From the "Foreword" in the first edition of _LR_ of 1954 through interviews in the 1960s to essays and letters published in the 1980s, these authorial statements have been used both briefly and extensively in many of the major studies. While Tolkien may have described himself as a humble recorder of divine inspiration (e.g. _L_ 145), he also has stated "I hold the key" (Resnik 1967, 38). And many critics have accepted that Tolkien holds "the key;" they have cited his remarks either to confirm their own views or to provide the fundamental structure for their commentary. The "oracle" (Wimsatt 18) among the perspectives on Middle-earth is indeed the author, Tolkien.

Therefore, the significant problem or deficiency in Tolkien criticism is not the presence of critical foes, "hostile" or "popular;" these labels could distract scholars from genuine concerns. There has been the tendency in Tolkien criticism, even from fine scholars such as Kocher and Flieger, to accept Tolkien's views on his own work at face value. However, many of Tolkien's remarks, while enlightening, are sometimes elusive or inconsistent. Given the predominance of these authorial views, Tolkien scholars should be aware of them; however, critics also need to evaluate carefully this self-criticism.

For whatever critical view that one may choose on the significance of "authorial intention," there are potential problems in adhering to Tolkien's comments on his own works. First, critics might slip into becoming mere mouthpieces for the author; if the self-commentaries are used without analysis or qualification, these remarks could overshadow the insights
of the critic. Second, if scholars simply seize on certain views to prove their points, they might not consider how authorial inconsistencies could complicate or counter their ideas. For example, Tolkien's statement that World War Two had no effect on the composition of LR (FR 11) contradicts an earlier view that the "darkness" of the impending war did have "some effect" on the writing of the work (L 41); critics, then, might have avoided considering the impact of the war on Tolkien's work because the author dismissed it in one place, even though he affirmed it in another. Lastly, if critics become too reliant on Tolkien's authorial views, and too preoccupied by biographical facts (e.g. his expertise in languages, his religion), they might not judiciously attend to his texts. Tolkien's self-criticism might be used to constrain critical response; the author himself could overshadow the literary creations.

At present, it appears that Tolkien's authorial comments have not dramatically undermined the criticism. Many of Tolkien's views are insightful, consistent with his scholarly work, and supported by the texts. But the hazard is there, especially since remarks from Tolkien's letters are becoming increasingly visible in the scholarship. The main concern is not that Tolkien's comments will invariably mislead critics; the problem is that critics might allow themselves to be led mainly by Tolkien. Because the author has garnered profound admiration, which ranges from wild enthusiasm to sober respect, he has attained an honoured status. This reverence may have caused critics to avoid questioning some of Tolkien's ideas; as well, they might be concerned that this type of scrutiny could give the antipathic commentators reason to disparage the author.

However, it does not diminish Tolkien to point out that he was human: prone to biases and inconsistencies, like anyone. It is my contention here that critics should take into account Tolkien's views, but should also carefully consider them in the context of all available evidence, which includes other authorial writings and, of course, the published works
themselves. It is precarious, and some would argue inappropriate, to try to give a study that the author "may be supposed to have desired."\textsuperscript{10} With an awareness of the extensive and perceptive critical history, scholars can develop sound criticism that recognizes the significance of Tolkien's scholarship and authorial remarks, yet remains unconcerned whether the author would have approved.

The final point to consider concerns the irreconcilable views of Shippey and Chance on Tolkien's status in the "literary Establishment" or "the academy." This issue continues to cast a shadow over Middle-earth studies because critics often assume that Tolkien is held in disregard, disrespect, or even contempt by general academia. Consequently, the relatively few "hostile" voices are usually cited, which sometimes results in an unrepresentative view of Tolkien scholarship as a whole or, unfortunately, an apologetic or overly-defensive approach. The general feeling is that critics of Tolkien's works need to constantly justify their pursuits; apparently, such justification may not be the case for studies on canonical authors or other literary preferences.

The evidence to support this possible discrimination towards Tolkien seems slippery. In the critical history, there have been many articles, dissertations, and other studies produced on Tolkien's works within the academic community. However, there have been few books devoted solely to Tolkien from university presses, though commercial and trade firms (e.g. HarperCollins, Twayne) have filled some of the gap. Further, it appears that there has not been a dissertation in English literature on Tolkien's works alone since 1984. While articles on Tolkien listed by the MLA bibliography continue to appear steadily, many of them are in the specialty journals, such as \textit{Minas Tirith-Evening Star}, \textit{Mythlore}, or \textit{Seven}, and genre specific publications, such as \textit{Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts} or \textit{Studies in Weird Fiction}. Tolkien scholars do not seem to have been barred from general academia; yet there is a lingering impression that they continue to be confronted with some opposition, however elusive it may be.\textsuperscript{11}
George Orwell's approach to Tolstoy's famous (and infamous) condemnations of Shakespeare appears relevant here. Tolstoy declared that the Bard was not even an average writer, his reputation as a genius was a great "evil," and the general civilized world has suffered some sort of "epidemic suggestion" about the dramatist's brilliance, much like the frenzied pursuit for the Philosopher's Stone or tulips in Holland (Orwell 101-5). Orwell observes:

One's first feeling is that in describing Shakespeare as a bad writer he [Tolstoy] is saying something demonstrably untrue. But this is not the case. In reality there is no kind of evidence or argument by which one can show that Shakespeare, or any other writer, is 'good'. Nor is there any way of definitely proving that -- for instance -- Warwick Deeping is 'bad'. Ultimately there is no test of literary merit except survival, which is itself an index to majority opinion. Artistic theories such as Tolstoy's are quite worthless, because they not only start out with arbitrary assumptions, but depend on vague terms ('sincere', 'important' and so forth) which can be interpreted in any way one chooses. (105)

Orwell goes on to point out the many "weak and dishonest" arguments of Tolstoy, such as that Lear has no reason for his abdication when in fact it is stated clearly at the beginning: rest and respite from the cares of the state (105); as well, Orwell speculates that Tolstoy particularly condemns Lear because he sees in him an undesirable reflection of himself (112-119). But whatever Tolstoy's motivations were, Orwell's basic idea remains insightful. After any individual attempt to elevate or diminish the status of an author, the response of readers over the years is a viable criterion to determine literary worth.

It will be likely a long time before it is known whether Tolkien shall match Shakespeare's widespread and enduring appeal. But there are some interesting indications. It is a major accomplishment that Tolkien has fostered a literary form which remains prominent today. It is also significant that his
works are still in print and in wide circulation after 60 years. Further, it is extraordinary that he is read and studied in over 33 languages around the world, while writers, artists, illustrators, musicians have offered works inspired by his creative endeavours. And, finally, the fact that LR was voted in 1996 to be the "greatest" book of the twentieth century clearly signifies something special. No one can say for certain that Tolkien is excluded from "the unstated but well-known 'canon' of academic texts," or whether he is widely considered to be "one of the world’s greatest writers." Still, after six decades of extensive readership and critical analysis of the Middle-earth tales, Tolkien’s works seem set to endure for many years to come.
Notes

1 From Tolkien's *Smith of Wootton Major* (68-9).

2 Colebatch extensively examines the flaws in the "attacks" on the LR, most especially in the writings from Stimpson and the Giddings' essay collection (58-81). Colebatch's basic thesis is that the popularity of LR and other fantasy works (e.g. "Star Wars") has been subject to derision because they counter the progressivist and moral relativistic thinking of certain socio-political ideologies (10, 58-9). While Colebatch tends to overstate the effects of these "attacks" on Tolkien, he methodically exposes the textual errors and inherent bias in "hostile" views. Patrick Curry has written a long essay (currently unpublished) called "Tolkien and His Critics: A Post-Axiological Critique," in it he endeavours to refute the negative views on Tolkien and to disturb, by writing with "animus," a "cozy and fraudulent orthodoxy." Curry's recently published book, *Defending Middle-earth*, explores the above issues at greater length.

3 Le Guin's comments on Tolkien's excellence are in *The Language of the Night* (e.g. 42, 81, 149-50); Donaldson's views appear in *The Sound of Wonder: Interviews from "The Science Fiction Radio Show,"* edited by Daryl Lane et al (4-21); Kay's perspective is quoted by David Pringle in *Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels* (252).

4 Chesterton observes that certain arguments which claim that a human is essentially a type of animal do not account for the staggering differences between them: "If you leave off looking at books about beasts and men, if you begin to look at beasts and men then (if you have any humour or imagination, any sense of the frantic or the farcical) you will observe that the startling thing is not how like man is to the brutes, but how unlike he is. It is the monstrous scale of his divergence that requires an explanation. That man and brute are like is, in a sense, a truism; but that being so like they should then be so insanely unlike, that is the shock and the enigma" (1:348-9). By analogy, then, LR can be seen a "monstrous" distinction from the literature of its time.

5 In 1986, Johnson provided a useful summary of some the critical approaches to Tolkien (234-5); in her list, though, she does not point out which areas of study need re-thinking or fresh perspectives, or which topics have been generally under-considered or mainly neglected.

6 While the present study focuses on the criticism of the most significant creative works of Tolkien, that is, the completed Middle-earth tales, his lesser-known works, such as *Farmer Giles of Ham*, "The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun," *Smith of Wootton Major* require more close and extensive study as well.

7 In "The Critic as Artist," Wilde has Gilbert declare: "Indeed, so far from its being true that the artist is the best
judge of art, a really great artist can never judge of other people's work at all, and can hardly, in fact, judge of his own" (290-1). Many Tolkien critics have considered that the author is the best judge of his art.

There have been a few, brief discussions of Tolkien and war from Barton Friedman (1982, 115-136), John Ellison (1989, 17-20), and Hugh Brogan (351-367).

In *The Personal Heresy*, Lewis states that if we become too focused on Eliot the "man," and "surrender" ourselves to "the 'feel' of his 'personality," then we could be "carried into realms of thought and feeling which are fatal to the reception of poetry" (Tillyard 63-4); in other words, if critics regard, either favourably or otherwise, writers' personal views, this might cloud or block an objective analysis of their art.

In their edition of *Gawain*, Tolkien and Gordon state that one of their main purposes was "to provide a sufficient apparatus for reading this remarkable poem with an appreciation as far as possible of the sort which its author may be supposed to have desired" (v).

Verlyn Flieger has written a book on Tolkien, soon to be published by Kent State University Press; Charles Nelson has a forthcoming book on Tolkien from Greenwood Press. Charles Moseley recently published a book on the author; he also is too attentive to negative criticism of Tolkien. The latest dissertations on Tolkien's works are from Lucas Paul Niiler and Trevor James Morgan; both scholars use other fantasy writers (e.g. Lewis, Beagle) to contextualize their response to Tolkien.

Hammond has noted the various translations of Tolkien's works (1993, 389-410). Hunnewell's pamphlet summarizes the details of Tolkien organizations that exist all over the world. In music, there is G.A. Buhr's original composition "'Beren and Luthien'", which was granted the AMUSD at Michigan University in 1981. During 1987, there was a stage production of LR that used ingenious marionettes. Notable film makers Ralph Bashki and Rankin/Bass have presented productions of both *Hobbit* and LR. Illustrations, posters, and paintings inspired by Tolkien's works are widely available.

Last year, Waterstone's bookshop chain and Channel 4 in Britain asked their readers/viewers to nominate the "greatest 20th-century book." LR was the decisive winner with 31% of the vote; 1984, *Animal Farm*, *Ulysses* came 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, respectively; *Hobbit* came in 19th. The results have been published widely (e.g. *The Independent* - Jan.26/97, *New Statesman* - Jan.31/97), and some apparently have reacted with dismay (e.g. Germaine Greer) while others, such as Malcolm Bradbury, have offered support for Tolkien. (I am indebted to Hartley Patterson, Debbie Sly, and Patrick Curry for this information obtained through personal correspondence.)
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