

THE ROLE OF WONDER IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

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ABSTRACT

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Wonder is given a role as a primary feature of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954). This emotion deeply affects the protagonists, and helps them in their efforts to accomplish the Eucatastrophe, or 'sudden joyous turn,' upon which the story hinges. The many instances of this dynamic can be seen as offerings—as invitations to readers—to participate in the tale through their own responses to wonder. This thesis will consider the theme of wonder, paying specific attention to its powerful influences on Tolkien's characters. These effects are an important part of Tolkien's purpose, which includes his desire for *The Lord of the Rings* to help readers in every era to recover a vibrant sense of wonder.

ABBREVIATIONS

An emerging standard in Tolkien scholarship is the use of abbreviated titles for frequently-cited works, especially those of Tolkien himself. In this project, I'll adhere to this standard by following the pattern given in *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader* (Jane Chance, ed, 2004). Also, I will use the abbreviated form "LotR" when making general references to *The Lord of the Rings*, it being the single volume containing the so-called "trilogy" of *The Fellowship of the Rings*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. Because I refer frequently to Quinn's *Iris Exiled*, it is also included in this list:

FR	J. R. R. Tolkien. <i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i> .
IE	Dennis Quinn. <i>Iris Exiled: A Synoptic History of Wonder</i> .
L	Humphrey Carpenter (ed.). <i>The Letters of J. .R. R. Tolkien</i> .
LotR	J. R. R. Tolkien. <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> .
RK	J. R. .R. Tolkien. <i>The Return of the King</i> .
Sil	J. R. R. Tolkien. <i>The Silmarillion</i> .
TR	J. R. .R. Tolkien. <i>The Tolkien Reader</i> .
TT	J. .R. .R. Tolkien. <i>The Two Towers</i> .
UT	J. R. .R. Tolkien. <i>Unfinished tales</i> .

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ABBREVIATIONS	vi
FOREWORD: HOBBIT STEPS.....	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I. WONDER IN THE FELLOWSHIP	
A. On Definitions: Should we ask what it is...or what it's like?.....	3
B. A Working Definition	5
C. Gandalf, Messenger of Wonder	6
D. Aragorn the Steadfast.....	9
E. Frodo's Journey	11
F. Merry and Pippin	14
G. Sea-Longing; the Calling of Legolas	17
H. Boromir the Hapless.....	20
CHAPTER II. THE ENNOBLEMENT OF THE IGNOBLE	
A. Reverence and Admiration.....	22
B. Sam's Vision of the Elves	23
C. Gimli's Wound.....	27
CHAPTER III. THE EUCATASTROPHE AND THE RECOVERY OF WONDER	
A. The Sudden Joyous Turn	30
B. The Recovery of Wonder	31
C. Wonder 'For such a time as this'	34
REFERENCES	36

FOREWORD

HOBBIT STEPS

In 1973, Peter S. Beagle wrote in his introduction to the sixty-fourth printing (1978: 3) of *The Hobbit*, “Long before *Frodo Lives!* began to appear in the New York subways, J. R. R. Tolkien was the magus of my secret knowledge.” The graceful imagery of this phrase has always appealed to me. He said it much as I envision it, and this is due not only to my own sensibilities, but to Tolkien’s gifts as a storyteller. With this gift, he has opened to me a realm of “knowledge”—both secret and sacred—which has enriched the landscape of my imagination. My attempts to describe this place and this feeling are sometimes met with disinterest, or quizzical looks, or with suspicion, and occasionally with gleams of recognition. I thought I had a treasure known only to a few, but the more I read concerning Tolkien and his mythology, the more I see that my “secret knowledge” is but one treasure among millions.

The flame of this knowledge has burned, sometimes waxing or waning, since my youth. It may’ve been kindled in the fourth grade, when Mr. Stone read C. S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) to our class. Lewis found his way easily into my heart of wonder and imagination as I eagerly devoured the following Narnia stories. There was something in them—something they did in me—that I sensed to be both real

and good. In 1977, when I read *The Lord of the Rings* (1954, 1955; hereafter, LotR) for the first time, I recognized the effect once again. In retrospect, I can empathize with Catherine Madsen's youthful response when, during a conversation about religion, her parents asked her: "...what *do* you believe?"¹ Her answer was like mine, in that she held aloft her copies of Tolkien and declared: "I believe *this*" (in Chance, 2004: 35). When I began my studies of Charismatic Christian theology in 1977, I interacted with some who loved his work, and others who viewed Tolkien with suspicion. But I share what is perhaps the essence of Madsen's emphatic belief, as does a growing throng the world over, and so have persisted in devotion to my "secret knowledge".

Part of the enduring worth of Tolkien's epic arises from his background in philology, medieval philosophy, and mythology. His mythmaking reflects his ability to weave elements from these disciplines into a compelling story. For fifty years (and counting), scholars in many disciplines have been fruitfully engaged in research in these, and other areas concerning Tolkien and his art. This collective endeavor shows no signs of abating, and the term; "Tolkien Studies" is gaining a place in academe. This, then, is the "rub" for me: this corpus of inquiry is an important avenue of research, and offers a growing wealth of insight that is both stimulating and rewarding. On the other hand, the erudition and depth of knowledge demonstrated by these scholars is, for me, intimidating. The more I read, the more I see deficiencies in my own fund of knowledge. I find myself saying: "if Chance, Flieger, Shippey, *et al.* were to actually read my work, they might

¹ See Catherine Madsen's article: "Light from an Invisible Lamp": Natural Religion in *The Lord of the Rings* in *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: a Reader*, ed. Jane Chance (Lexington: the University Press of Kentucky). Madsen's fine article notes with approval the lack of overt liturgical religion in Tolkien's story. For her, and for me, this absence highlights the presence of something which feels very real and very spiritual, but without the particulars of theology.

smile—approving my love for Tolkien’s myth—but may also shake their heads, seeing little more than well-meaning naïveté.”²

I expect this is a common problem in every area of human endeavor. We may want to be numbered among the *cognoscenti*—especially in that field so dear to our hearts—but we have to begin at the beginning, and be willing to pay the price that mastery requires. Moreover, the virtues Tolkien embodies in his myth argue against the pursuit of recognition as a primary goal. Rather, he urges us to humility, through the example of his heroes’ willingness to pursue the *summum bonum* with little or no prospect of reward. Joe Kraus (2003) suggests this in his sensitive discussion of the scholar’s vocation as Tolkien saw it. Kraus supports this notion by citing a letter from Tolkien to his son Michael: “The devotion to ‘learning’ as such and without reference to one’s own repute, is a high and even in a sense spiritual vocation” (L: 337). He then accents the qualitative difference between scholars “humbly engaged” in their subject and those who “adorn” theirs. For Tolkien, the motivating force ought to be one of genuine devotion to the discipline, as distinct from one’s reputation. Even in this case, he recognizes that “this devotion is generally degraded and smirched in universities. But it is *still* there” (L: 337). What begins as a high calling to advance one’s field can descend to an undue sense of one’s own merit, but I expect most scholars consciously resist its gravitational pull.

² Jane Chance, Verlyn Fliegler and Tom Shippey are highly respected Tolkien scholars of the present day. The growing scholarly attention to Tolkien’s work has been noted in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 4, 2004; Scott McLemee, “Reaching for the Ring”). In his article, McLemee discusses the arrival of *Tolkien Studies*, an annual journal edited by Dr. Michael Drought, Associate Professor of English at Wheaton College (Mass.). The inclusion of McLemee’s observations in the *Chronicle* may imply a well-deserved legitimization of Tolkien scholarship.

I mention this fall from humility for two reasons: First that its consequences serve as a warning not to take myself too seriously, both now and many years hence, when I'll look back on this fledgling work. Secondly, and more to the point, that it is one of the major themes in the story of Middle-earth. It seems that Tolkien's own sense of wonder is seen throughout LotR, and that this emotion is intentionally placed in opposition to the march of pride. Since this is a feature of Tolkien's work that deserves further exploration, I will set out on this Quest, not with the bold strides of a Ranger, but with small, yet hopeful Hobbit steps.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in this subject began with my own sense of wonder that seemed to intensify every time I read Tolkien and Lewis. As Tolkien had wished in the prologue to LotR, I was often ‘deeply moved’ every time I read or listened to it.³ This experience has always been quite real for me—as real as anything I call real—but has also been subjective and difficult to describe. As I’ve thought of the meaning of this experience, it has become clear that though I’ve often tried to express this meaning through language, these attempts are, like Sam’s efforts to describe Galadriel, “a lot o’ nonsense, and all wide of my mark”(TT: 664). In the spirituality of the West and the East the term “ineffable” is often used in descriptions of God, the One, or the Absolute—a tacit admission that all that has yet been said is insufficient to the task.

A similar descriptive gulf exists with regard to wonder. As a feature of this emotion, there seems to be an awareness that ultimately, the nature of the wondrous thing, and of our response to it, outruns our ability to comprehend and define. Those who’ve experienced an emotion so powerful as to render them “speechless”, demonstrate this same inadequacy, whether by “stunned silence,” or by realizing that the thing ultimately goes beyond language. This silence is an aspect of the kind of wonder I examine in this project. It’s only a bit ironic that I’m trying to speak at length about a

³ I strongly recommend the Recorded Books unabridged reading of LotR by Robert Inglis (1990). His voicings are sensitive and thoughtful, and sound much the way I imagine the characters to be.

thing that can take one's breath and speech away! Since libraries could be filled with all that's been written or spoken about "the ineffable," I know I'm in good company.

To illustrate the centrality of wonder in LotR, I examine some of its meanings as discussed in Dennis Quinn's study; "*Iris Exiled, a Synoptic History of Wonder*" (2002). As I considered Quinn's ideas, particular events and characters with a strong connection to wonder came immediately to mind. These connections soon began to arrange themselves into patterns as I thought through the careers of the protagonists. Some of these patterns are also brought into high relief by Clyde Kilby's discussion (1964) of *Sehnsucht*, which refers to an experience similar in many ways to that of wonder. In the first chapter, I will discuss how these patterns are displayed within the Fellowship. My primary interest is in the emergent idea of ennoblement, or the raising up of the lowly to a place of esteem and high honor. Chapter Two will follow the path of this ennoblement in the lives of Sam and Gimli, the two characters in whom this elevation is most dramatic and with whom I identify most closely. I conclude with an examination of how these individual experiences of wonder culminate in the *Eucatastrophe*, or the "surprise happy ending." I also suggest that Tolkien meant for us to embrace this ennoblement-via-wonder, and to allow it to aid us amidst our own present darkness.

CHAPTER I

WONDER IN THE FELLOWSHIP

On Definitions: Should we ask what it is...or what it's like?

If the sense of wonder is a gateway to mystery—to a thing that seems unknowable—then it may be easier to say what wonder is like, rather than to say what it is. This isn't an attempt to justify a vague or superficial understanding. Rather, it is an approach which allows for elusive meaning while relying both on a variety of linguistic points of reference and on the degree of subjectivity which necessarily informs textual interpretation. This is a fledgling work—a messy text—open ended and openly subjective. Tolkien's fiction has been analyzed and critiqued by legions of scholars, many of whom have made substantial contributions to the field.⁴ Some, however, may have fallen into the trap of putting too fine a point on their conclusions, positing that "Tolkien clearly meant such-and-so," the Professor's own statements to the contrary notwithstanding. Tom Shippey recounts, for example, the misconception that Tolkien gleaned much of his thematic material from Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*

⁴ A metasearch of five Humanities databases in the UWF library system on February 25, 2007 yielded 14,378 results. Even allowing for redundancy, this is a significant number.

2003: 343).⁵ Feeling perhaps justifiably wary of such pitfalls, Shippey admits to reservations about his own published interpretations, some of which Tolkien himself read. Commenting on the appearance of such posthumous works as the twelve-volume *History of Middle-earth* (1983-1996), Shippey notes that they presented “some trepidation to the writer who has committed himself to explaining ‘how Tolkien worked’ or ‘what Tolkien must have been thinking’” (Ibid: xvi). With a note of relief, Shippey relates that some of his ideas were confirmed by the “new” material, while other assertions had to be retracted (2003: xvi-xviii).

Given these factors of elusive meaning, of the inevitable shading of subjectivity, and of scholarly trepidation, I could retreat to safety, saying little or nothing of any substance. But I see a difference between the flight of the timid and the choice to argue from a defensible position. This means my efforts to describe wonder, its effects on the Nine, and its contribution the denouement are best expressed in terms of how I respond to what I see, rather than what must be. The open-ended nature of wonder and the sense of humility mentioned above seem to favor such an attitude. Having said this, I do suggest that this emotion is placed in the tale as an offering to the reader. We are invited to take it up. Wonder isn't the only treasure in the field, but we were meant to find it!

Tolkien entrusts this wealth to his characters, and through them, to us. Sam experiences awe and joy in the presence of the Elves. Aragorn is strengthened in his quest both by his longing for the beauty of the Uttermost West and by his reverential love for Arwen. Legolas feels the pangs of desire for the Undying Lands, and Gimli finds the

⁵ Shippey notes Tolkien's agitation on this particular point: “‘Both rings were round’, he snarled, ‘and there the resemblance ceases’” (citing L: 306). Shippey adds, however, that both men used common sources in their work, which may have led some critics astray on this point.

High and the Holy in Galadriel. Each is a living metaphor, and a way for me to live the story through them in vicarious wonder. Through the language of metaphor I am beckoned to a state of awe, and in that speech I describe the journey. I'm reminded of one ancient sage who often began his discourses with the phrase, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like..." (e.g. Mt 13: 24 *passim*, NIV). My intention is that this project should reflect the essence of wonder itself, which sees knowledge and understanding as things to pursue rather than to possess. If the joy of the pursuit is lost through dispassionate dissection, the phenomenon is reduced to an array of lifeless fragments.⁶ But this emotion is a gestalt, a living thing; it has blood and breath and a voice. With this in mind, I will link the abstractions of definition with their living expressions in the Quest.

A Working Definition

I begin with Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (Second Edition, 1979), which provides some useful introductory ideas:

Wonder, *n.* [M E. *wunder*, *wonder*; AS. *wundor*, a portent. The original sense is *awe*, lit. *that from which one turns aside*.]

1. a person, thing, or event that excites surprise; a strange thing; a cause of astonishment or admiration; a prodigy or miracle.
2. the feeling of surprise, admiration, and awe which is excited by something new, unusual, strange, great, extraordinary, or not well understood
3. A miracle.
4. **Syn.**—admiration, appreciation, astonishment, reverence, surprise, amazement, prodigy.

⁶ Fittingly relevant is Gandalf's warning to Saruman (FR: 252): "...he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom." In Saruman, we see a brilliant and powerful being whose intellect has fallen into darkness. As Treebeard sadly notes, "He has a mind of metal and wheels" (TT: 462).

Several of these entries practically shout to be recognized in Tolkien's art. The story is replete, for example, with descriptions of a "person, thing, or event" that gives rise to a powerful emotional response. In general terms, this infusion of wonder is (of course) found throughout the wealth of human *poesis*. I suggest, however, that Tolkien's oeuvre is unique because of the way he mingles language, myth and wonder, captivating the hearts and minds of his readers.

Webster's definition also mentions a "feeling." In his preliminary comments, Quinn (2002) cites a passage from Plato's *Theaetetus* (391/360BC: 155d),⁷ in which the young pupil seems overcome by a powerful sensation. Socrates assures him that "this feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy." (IE: ix, emphasis added). Quinn goes on to observe that the boy's new awareness of his own ignorance causes him to experience an emotion which is both visceral and cerebral; he is experiencing the "*pathos* of wonder." This is much more than an idea or a concept; it is an actual phenomenon, as Quinn strongly asserts (Ibid: xii). It is experienced through intellectual awareness, sense perception, and the passions.

Gandalf, Messenger of Wonder

Each of the nine walkers experiences an ennoblement in keeping with his fundamental character and nature. It seems appropriate to begin with Gandalf, leader of the Fellowship, whose transformation from a wandering sage to White Rider can almost be seen as an apotheosis. In *The Hobbit* (1937) he is somewhat of a comical figure. The

⁷ After Deely 2001:53, n.6

first chapter of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) retains certain elements of this image; the Shirefolk know him as an old grey conjurer specializing in fireworks. In the War of the Ring, however, he is transformed and even transfigured⁸, and is revealed as a being of surpassing potency. Indeed, he is the prime-mover in the outcome. During this process, his companions (except perhaps Aragorn, who knew him well) come to marvel increasingly as his power and wisdom come to the fore. When Gandalf's might is displayed in the attack of the wolves, Sam exclaims to Pippin, "That was an eye-opener, and no mistake!" (FR: 291) After the wizard casts Saruman from the White Council, Merry says of Gandalf: "He has grown, or something. He can be both kinder and more alarming, merrier and more solemn than before" (TT: 576). The young hobbit's impressions form part of a growing current of praise and admiration for this remarkable person.

Quinn develops the idea that such praise arises from the experience of wonder (IE: 2-10 *passim*). He notes that the Latin *admirare* supplies the root of the English words; *marvel*, *miracle*, *mirror* and *mirage* (Ibid: 4). All these words involve seeing, whether it be through the physical eye or the imagination. He also relates that *Iris*, Greek goddess of the rainbow, is seen as a theophany of her father, *Thaumas*, whose name means "wonder." When the ancients saw a rainbow, they were filled with "a desire for and fear of the mysteries of the heavens, both material and sacred" (Ibid: ix).

⁸ After his return from death, Gandalf meets Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli in the Entwood. This scene bears more than a passing resemblance to Christ's transfiguration on the Mount (Matthew 17). Gandalf's three companions see him standing on a high place above them: "His hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand. Between wonder, joy, and fear they stood and found no words to say" (TT: 483-484).

So it is that in Rivendell, Frodo sees Gandalf, “whom he thought he knew so well” in a new way. He loved the old wizard, and knew he was wise and strong and good, but in Imladris, he beholds Mithrandir and Elrond “revealed as lords of dignity and power” (FR: 220). Frodo’s impression here is one of reverence and admiration for an exalted figure:

His long white hair, his sweeping silver beard, and his broad shoulders, made him look like some wise king of ancient legend. In his aged face under great snowy brows his dark eyes were set like coals that could leap suddenly into fire.

(Ibid: 220)

The kind of wonder I see here is expressed in the esteem and admiration of many for Mithrandir. These feelings intensify as his inner nature is gradually revealed. Indeed, Gandalf’s primary role is to inspire and encourage his companions, strengthening them to meet the tests that await them. Interestingly, his Valinorean name, Olórin (derived from *olos*, a word meaning “dream,” or “vision”), was given to him by the Elves because of “the fair visions or the promptings of wisdom that he put into their hearts” (UT: 402). When Gandalf first came to the shores of Middle-earth, he appeared to be the least of the Wizards. But Círdan, the Elven lord of the Grey Havens, “who saw further and deeper than any other in Middle-earth,” (Ibid: 397) perceived his true nature. Perhaps because of his elvish foresight, Círdan gave him Narya the Red—with its fiery jewel—one of the three Elven rings of power (Ibid: 394). His prophetic words to Gandalf at their meeting express both the essence of who the Grey Pilgrim was and the defining purpose of his mission (Ibid: 394):

For...great labours and perils lie before you, and lest your task prove too great and wearisome, take this Ring for your aid and comfort. It was entrusted to me only to keep secret, and here upon the West-shores it is idle; but I deem that in days ere long to come it should be in nobler hands than mine, that may wield it for the kindling of all hearts to courage (emphasis added).

A moving portrayal of this kindling is seen through Pippin's eyes, during the siege of Minas Tirith. As the smoke from Mount Doom darkens the city, winged Nazgul darken the hearts of its people, filling them with horror, and with crushing despair. Pippin feels their terror, his will sputtering like a spent candle, but his courage returns when Mithrandir rides out to rescue Faramir from the Black Riders of the air (RK: 791-792):

'Gandalf!' he cried. 'Gandalf! He always turns up when things are darkest! Go on! Go on, White Rider! Gandalf, Gandalf!' he shouted wildly, like an onlooker at a great race urging on a runner who is far beyond encouragement.'

In this instance, as in many others, Cirdan's words are sooth. So it is that we see Mithrandir in the fullness of his earthly mission—messenger of wonder and “kindler of all hearts to courage.”

Aragorn the Steadfast

At the outset of LotR, the Ranger Aragorn is described unflatteringly as “a strange-looking weather-beaten man” (FR: 153). Echoing perhaps the sentiments of the Breelanders who knew him only as Strider, he refers to himself as “a mysterious vagabond” who has “rather a rascally look” (Ibid: 161). But we learn from Gandalf's letter that he is the “gold (that) does not glitter,” “the crownless” that one day “shall be king” (Ibid: 167). Aragorn exemplifies a nobility of spirit that enables him to endure

great hardship and to dwell in obscurity, a great force for good, yet unthanked and unpraised—even “despised and rejected.” How is he able to bear up under such duress? The son of Arathorn knew well his lineage, and maintained hope that he would one day be king. Thus in obscurity and hardship Aragorn held steadfastly to this hope. This solitary hero is strengthened in several ways, one of which is by a prevailing sense of wonder which I see arising from two major sources.

The first of these is an abiding awareness of and desire for the Blessed Realm, which lay beyond the sea and outside the circles of the world. As evidence, I cite several instances which suggest that this awareness was ever-present in Aragorn’s mind. At Weathertop, he chants a lengthy passage from the Lay of Beren and Luthien, his ancestors of old. This ancient song tells of the enchantment that fell on Beren as he saw Luthien dancing in a midnight glade. It relates how this man and Elven maid retrieve a Silmaril from Morgoth’s crown, setting the stage for the obtaining of the grace of the Valar for both Elves and Men. Aragorn is fully aware of his role in this continuing story, of his kinship with Beren and Luthien, and with Earendil, who went to Aman to obtain this grace. The fact that he knows this tale (and many others like it) by heart shows that his place in this cosmic drama is ever-present in his mind. This weather-beaten Ranger also knows that if he survives and is victorious in the impending war, he will be wed with Arwen and will rise to the throne. Yet this future king doesn’t seek dominion and power. Rather, he is energized by an intense desire not only for the goodness and holiness of the Uttermost West, but for the restoration of these virtues in Middle-earth. Clyde Kilby (1964) refers to this kind of desire as *Sehnsucht*—a joyful “longing which haunts every

man and entices him toward God” (Ibid: 36). Kilby goes on to suggest that this yearning, while it may enrich this present life, is fully realized only in the return to “the rhapsodic joy of heaven” (Ibid: 187). For Aragorn, this is not an earthly throne, or even Numenor, his ancestral home. It is the place of beauty and bliss to which he’ll go after his span of years is over.

The second source of wonder for this king in exile is bound up with the first. Aragorn carries within him always the vision of his betrothed, Arwen, daughter of Elrond, Evenstar of her people. In Lothlorien, after the horror of Moria, and the (supposed) loss of Gandalf, we find Aragorn in meditative reverie upon Cerin Amroth, where he first beheld the lovely elf-maid (FR: 343):

At the hill’s foot Frodo found Aragorn, standing still and silent as a tree; but in his hand was a small golden bloom of *elanor*, and a light was in his eyes. He was wrapped in some fair memory: and as Frodo looked at him he knew that he beheld things as they once had been in this same place. For the grim years were removed from the face of Aragorn, and he seemed clothed in white, a young lord tall and fair; and he spoke with words in the Elvish tongue to one whom Frodo could not see. *Arwen vanimelda, namarië!*⁹ he said, and then he drew a breath, and returning out of his thought he looked at Frodo and smiled.

‘Here is the heart of Elvendom on earth,’ he said, ‘and here my heart dwells ever, unless there be a light beyond the dark roads that we still must tread, you and I.’

I gladly admit that romance plays as great a role as wonder in this passage, but I argue that this in no way diminishes the influence of awe. Indeed, these two emotions seem to be bound together, for Arwen and Aragorn, for Beren and Luthien, and for the great loves of our own world that move and inspire us. Our poets have ever celebrated

⁹ “Beloved lady Arwen, farewell!” (<http://valarguild.org/varda/Tolkien/encyc/lang/HandyQuenyaTable.htm>)

this wondrous synergy, as is seen in the words of Solomon (Proverbs 30: 18-19, KJV):
“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.”

Frodo’s Journey

There is another side to wonder that Quinn highlights in his study that is central to my purpose. In discussing possible sources, he notes that some scholars think the Old English, *wendan* should be considered (IE: 2). It suggests a winding pathway, or a turning, “...because those who wonder turn this way and that in search of an explanation” (Ibid: 2). This echoes both the entry in Webster’s (“That from which one turns aside”) and in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (“...they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance” [Book I, part 2]). Those in the Judeo Christian tradition may recall Moses’ reaction to the bush that burned and was not consumed: “And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.” (Exodus 3:3, KJV; emphasis added). The thing that is encountered is so mysterious, enchanting, or striking, that we alter our course dramatically—even drastically—in an attempt to see it more clearly and to understand it. To find this illustrated in Middle-earth, I turn now to a rustic lane, and will follow it as it joins a larger way.

Frodo’s state of mind is uneasy and pensive at this point in the tale, because his safe, comfortable world is coming undone. As if in answer to a summons, he is leaving the familiar and walking into uncertainty and danger. Fear is present in his mind, but also

a desire to be carried along—to be swept away—into a journey of mystery and discovery. He tells his cousin what Bilbo had said (FR: 72), “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door... You step into the road and if you don’t keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.” Soon after Frodo Baggins left his home in the Shire, he softly recited his uncle Bilbo’s walking song. As he gazes down the road, the words come to him, sparked by his cousin’s offhand remark: “The road goes on forever...but I can’t without a rest” (Ibid: 72):

*The Road goes ever on and on
Down from the door where it began
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
And I must follow, if I can,
Pursuing it with weary feet,
Until it joins some larger way,
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.*

This desire for the unknown speaks again at the very end of the tale, when Frodo adds new lines to the old song (RK: 1005):

*Still round a corner there may wait
A new road or a secret gate;
And though I oft have passed them by,
A day will come at last when I
Shall take the hidden paths that run*

West of the Moon, East of the Sun.

The idea that a newly discovered “secret gate” can lead to “hidden paths” of mystery is often the siren call that breaks through our complacency and beckons us onto the path. This seems to be the case with Frodo, and with Sam. It was also true of Bilbo, and, it appears to be a common element (though perhaps not common enough) in human experience. This desire is one of the factors that stirred Frodo from his comfortable life. The other is his newly acquired knowledge that the ring he inherited from Bilbo has sinister powers, and could be used to bring about a great catastrophe. At Gandalf’s urging, he is leaving the Shire, knowing he may never return. It is “...exile, a flight from danger into danger (FR: 61).” Granted, Frodo has yet to actually face real danger. In fact, as it turns out, he meets the first of these perils after he sets out. It is true that had he not left the Shire, the Black Riders would surely have found him—indeed, one was in the Shire the very evening Frodo set out—and this was also a motivation for him. But his “longing to see the wider world (Ibid: 61)” is an equally forceful impetus by which Frodo is drawn into and beyond the first of many turns in his life.

The entire mission of the Fellowship is, of course, one great “turning aside.” Frodo’s place in the Quest is a series of turnings; from the horror of Weathertop to the Healing of Rivendell, from the darkness and fear of Moria to the light and joy of Lorien, from the Dead Marshes to herbs and stewed rabbit in lovely Ithilien. The burden of the Ring, together with wounds of blade, sting, and teeth mar him with perennial pain, and only in the final turning aside from Middle-earth to Aman is he finally healed. For me,

this bitter-sweet departure is one of the most tragic events in LotR. While the other hobbits experience personal ennoblement, and are acclaimed as heroes in the Shire, Frodo is ignored and unthanked for his Deed (RK: 1006): "...I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them."

Merry and Pippin

The two young hobbits, Meriadoc and Peregrin, are together throughout the narrative, with the brief exception of Pippin's journey with Gandalf and Merry's with the Rohirrim. Pippin also fights at the Morannon while Merry recovers in the Houses of Healing (Ibid,: 865). They begin the Quest as youngsters, not even fully come to adult status as recognized by the customs of the Shire-folk. Their worst cares are the fear of being caught stealing apples, or of not being able to find inns with good ale. They don't embark on the Quest out of a call to wonder and mystery. Rather, they set out because of their love for Frodo. Their conception of the beauties and terrors of the wider world grows however, as they move through Middle-earth.

The ever-cheerful Pippin begins to find a sense of wonder as he takes in the beauty of Rivendell. Even in late autumn, "The air was warm. The sound of running and falling water was loud and the evening was filled with a faint scent of trees and flowers, as if summer still lingered in Elrond's gardens" (FR: 220). Pippin tells Frodo: "...it

seems impossible, somehow, to feel gloomy or depressed in this place. I feel I could sing, if I knew the right song for the occasion” (Ibid: 220). Pippin’s description of Treebeard’s eyes also reflects genuine wonderment (TT: 452):

One felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was sparkling with the present; like sun shimmering on the outer leaves of a vast tree, or on the ripples of a very deep lake.

The poetry and fresh wisdom of Pippin’s impressions shows that he is being affected by the stream of wonder running through the story.

Though Pippin and Merry do gain an experiential appreciation of wonder in the narrative, they themselves are also a source of amazement to the diverse peoples they encounter. The Elves know a little about them, but as a race, Hobbits were utterly unknown by Treebeard, one of the oldest beings in the world. They were found only in vaguest legend and old wives’ tales of the *Eorlingas* and in the half-forgotten nursery rhymes of Gondor. When the Riders of Rohan first encounter hobbits, it is Merry and Pippin they see, casually lounging on the rubble of Isengard (Ibid: 543): “For a moment Théoden and Éomer and all his men stared at them in wonder. Amid all the wreck of Isengard this seemed to them the strangest sight.”¹⁰ Yet they are essential players in the story, helping to set into motion momentous events “...like the falling of small stones that starts an avalanche in the mountains” (Ibid: 485).

Of the two hobbits, Pippin often seems to be the *de facto* spokesman, and Tolkien gives much of the descriptive and narrative material to him. But when Merry sets out

¹⁰ I can’t resist the opportunity to simply say this is one of my favorite parts of the tale. The irony and comic relief of this scene make me laugh out loud every time I read or listen to it.

with Théoden, his reaction to the mountains of Rohan is tinged with the aspect of awe Quinn refers to as astonishment—or the state in which one is forcefully struck by wonder

(RK: 774):

Merry looked out in wonder upon this strange country...it was a skyless world, in which his eye, through the dim gulfs of shadowy air, saw only ever-mounting slopes, great walls of stone behind great walls, and frowning precipices wreathed with mist. He sat for a moment half dreaming, listening to the noise of water, the whisper of dark trees, the crack of stone, and the vast waiting silence that brooded behind all sound. He loved mountains, or he had loved the thought of them marching on the edge of stories brought from far away; but now he was borne down by the insupportable weight of Middle-earth.

Clearly, this is no pastoral reflection, or rhapsodic idyll upon distant peaks. Merry finds himself almost crushed inside by the ponderous reality of these mountains. He feels the weight of a stultifying awe, the sheer immensity of which renders him mute. Yet this solitary hobbit finds relief in the stirring songs of the Rohirrim, and in the company of kindly King Théoden, and his heart is strengthened for the next stage of the Quest.

At the outset of LotR, Merry and Pippin are of little consequence, even in the mundane affairs of the sleepy Shire. Yet through the many marvels they encounter, the battles they fight and the deeper wisdom they learn on their journey, they attain stature and maturity. They return to the Shire which lay under the oppression of Saruman, and find they have become strong—well able to lead a successful rebellion to oust the fallen wizard. The Shire-folk now hold them in high regard (Ibid: 1002): “‘Lordly’ folk called them, meaning nothing but good; for it warmed all hearts to see them go riding by with their mail shirts so bright and their shields so splendid...they were indeed more fair-spoken and more jovial and full of merriment than ever before.”

Sea-longing; the Calling of Legolas

The impression I have of the Elves is that they live in a constant state of wonder. This is shown throughout the narrative, from the Woody End, to Rivendell, and to Lothlorien. Yet it is clear that the time of the Elves in Middle-earth is waning. The Third Age is ending, and the Fourth Age will be the time of human hegemony. Sensing this, and being filled with a weariness of the world, the Elven-folk are answering the call of the Uttermost West and are leaving the shores of Middle-earth. But Legolas Greenleaf, elf of Mirkwood, doesn't seem to hear this call. He seems content to abide in his forest home, and to let the world carry on as it will. He is in awe of the natural order, and dwells in harmony with leaf, stream and star. But when he goes on an errand to Rivendell for his father—king of the Wood-elves—the world of Legolas begins to change.

As he journeys through Rohan with Aragorn and Gimli, he receives a message from Galadriel, which contains a warning (TT, 492):

*Legolas Greenleaf long under tree
In joy thou hast lived. Beware of the Sea!
If thou hearest the cry of the gull on the shore,
Thy heart shall rest in the forest no more.*

The Elven Lady presages a change in his heart, and in his vision. During his journey through the Paths of the Dead and into the coastlands with Aragorn, Legolas does indeed hear the siren song of the gulls, and is smitten with “sea-longing”—an ever intensifying desire for the sea, and for Elven-home beyond the seas (see his songs in RK: 857, 935).

Galadriel has known this feeling for three long ages, but it is an entirely new sensation for Legolas. He becomes enchanted by the call of the Sea—of Eressëa beyond the waves, and by Valinor itself. This is another instance of *Sehnsucht*—of the longing for one’s true home. The heart is pierced and wounded by this ‘homesickness’ more deeply than by any of the loves or griefs of the world. This call, which originates from Illúvatar himself, causes all other desires to pale by comparison, because it is a sacred sign, and it now resonates in the essential Legolas. The Elven harp and song beneath the boughs is now swept away by the haunting music of the Ulumúri, the great horns of Ulmo, Vala whose province is all the waters of the world.¹¹ Of his music, it is said that “those to whom that music comes hear it ever after in their hearts and the longing for the sea never leaves them again” (Sil: 27). In a warning to one of the Elven kings of the First Age, Ulmo cautions: “ ‘...love not too well the work of thy hands and the devices of thy heart; and remember that the true hope of the Noldor lieth in the West and cometh from the Sea”” (Ibid: 125, emphasis added). This is a reminder that the source of this desire is not the sea itself, but the bliss of Valinor, from which the Noldor were expelled, and to which they would finally return. The Quenta Silmarillion records that Ulmo “gives thought to music great and terrible; and the echo of that music runs through all the veins of the world in sorrow and in joy” (Sil: 40). Whether in the Great Sea, in rivers, streams, or in a drop of rain, their duet is heard. Galadriel had probably heard the Ulumúri, but was able to resist

¹¹ Ulmo was one of the great Valar, who sang the song of creation with Illúvatar (Sil: 25). He bears a strong resemblance to Poseidon, or Neptune. From Illúvatar, Ulmo learned music more fully than the other gods (Ibid: 19). This music was heard in all the waters of Ulmo, wherever they were found. When Melkor produced the extremes of heat and cold, mists and clouds appeared and rose into the air, thus linking the domain of Ulmo with that of Manwë, King of the Valar and Vice-regent of Illúvatar. This union effectively strengthened the hands of the Valar in their struggle against Morgoth. In contrast to the rebellion of Melkor, Manwë and Ulmo were faithful to each other in friendship, and “...in all things have served most faithfully the purpose of Illuvatar.” (Ibid: 19)

their attraction, so brightly burned the fire of independence within her. Yet she, too, one of the very highest and greatest of the Elves, finally yielded to their spell, forsook the ages of mingled joy and sorrow in Middle-earth, and sailed to the True West (RK: 1007). The Appendices of LotR also note that Legolas, and Gimli with him, also took the Straight Way to the West (Ibid: 1055).

It is noteworthy that Elf and Dwarf took this voyage because of wonder, but each came to this place through a unique response to wonder. For Legolas, it was an awakening of a desire for the sea that lies in the heart of every Elf. This passion was perhaps stirred by the music of the waters of the Nimrodel, still far from the sea (FR, 330-332). The sense one gets from Tolkien is that while the world was young, the voice of Ulmo could be heard in all the waters of Aman (Sil: 27), but that by the Third Age, this influence was weakened by the inevitable declining of creation. So, it is in Lebennin, where the waves of the Great Sea are heard, and the salt air is breathed every day—where Ulmo’s music still has great power, that the heart of Legolas is smitten.¹² So it was that Legolas told his companions (RK: 857), “Alas for the wailing of the gulls! Did not the Lady tell me to beware of them? And now I cannot forget them.” Yet in the song he sings in Ithilien, after the rescue of Frodo and Sam, Legolas reveals that there is a greater music behind the voices of the gulls (Ibid: 935):

I will leave, I will leave the woods that bore me;

For our days are ending and our years failing.

I will pass the wide waters lonely sailing.

¹² Lebennin is the green coastland of Gondor, through which Aragorn led Gimli, Legolas, the Rangers of the North and the ghostly army of the Dead. It was in this land that Legolas first heard the music of the waves and the gulls. As Galadriel had foretold, the sea-longing that lies in the heart of every Elf was awakened in Legolas.

*Long are the waves on the last shore falling,
Sweet are the voices in the Lost Isle calling,
In Eressëa, in Elvenhome that no man can discover,
Where the leaves fall not: Land of my people forever!*

Boromir the Hapless

Boromir's case is problematic with regard to his response to wonder. His attitude toward the Elves, for example, is markedly different from the other members of the Fellowship. For them, there is a feeling of high esteem, even reverence, for the Elven race, especially for High Elves such as Galadriel and Celeborn, Elrond, Arwen and Glorfindel. Sam's suspicions about Aragorn in the early going are set to rest when Glorfindel embraces the Ranger as a dear friend. In like manner, Sam's approval of Faramir rises when the Captain speaks reverentially of Galadriel. Boromir, however, deeply mistrusts the Elves. Even in Lorien, "...the heart of Elvendom on earth" (FR: 343), he warns the others, "...have a care! I do not feel too sure of this Elvish lady and her purposes" (Ibid: 349). While all in the company held Gandalf and Elrond in high honor, Boromir speaks scornfully of them in his debate with Frodo, calling them "...these elves and half-elves and wizards..." (Ibid: 389).¹³ He goes on to cast them further into an unfavorable light, "...often I doubt if they are wise and not merely timid. But each to his own kind. True-hearted Men, they will not be corrupted" (Ibid: 389, emphasis added).¹⁴

¹³ I think Tolkien's use of small-case letters here is intentional, indicating Boromir's disdain for the Wise.

¹⁴ Tolkien's capitalization of 'Men' seems to reinforce my point in n.13.

I can only speculate as to why Boromir's tragic flaw prevented him from opening his heart and mind to wonder as did his companions, and as did his brother, Faramir. At the Argonath (Ibid: 383-385) he is abashed by the menacing majesty of the giant stone kings, while Aragorn is so uplifted that he is briefly revealed as a mighty king returning from exile. It may be that Boromir wanted the kind of nobility and prestige that he could gain for himself through his mastery and strength of arms. The kind of wonder that evokes in the beholder a certain humility before a person or thing of great worth may have been *anathema* to this proud man. In any case, he died well, as Gandalf suggests (TT: 485), "Poor Boromir! I could not see what happened to him. It was a sore trial for such a man: a warrior, and lord of men. Galadriel told me that he was in peril. But he escaped in the end. I am glad." So it may be that Boromir's true ennoblement came through his redemptive act of defending Merry and Pippin at Parth Galen.

CHAPTER II

THE ENNOBLEMENT OF THE IGNOBLE

Reverence and Admiration

As I've shown in chapter one, there is strong support for the notion that wonder plays a role in the uplifting of the character and outlook of the protagonists. In the cases of Sam Gamgee and Gimli, Gloin's son, a combination of factors contributes to their ennoblement. In this chapter, I hope to emphasize the ways in which these factors bring forth an increasing flow of praise from the Hobbit and the Dwarf. The dignity and honor that attend these two at the end of the tale come partly through their openness to wonder.

There is a strong similarity between Sam and Gimli's experiences in Lorien and Frodo's response to Gandalf in Rivendell. Frodo sees his old friend with clearer sight than before, and catches a glimpse of the wizard's true nature. Recalling Quinn's suggestion that admiration is closely linked to wonder (IE: 2-10), I see this relationship illustrated emphatically in the way Gimli and Sam come to esteem the Lady Galadriel. The verb *thaomai* (to wonder, or to gaze upon with wonder), from which comes the name *Thaumas*, god of wonder, refers to the seeing component of wonder. For this emotion to arise at all in the subject, there must first be a beholding, or a perception, of the object of

wonder. Citing Timaeus (47a),¹⁵ Quinn shows how the investigations of philosophy are derived from the human ability to see the phenomenal world (IE: 5):

The vision of day and night and of months and circling years has created the art of number and has given us not only the notion of Time but also means of research into the nature of the Universe. From these we have procured Philosophy in all its range, than which no greater boon ever has come, or will come, by divine bestowal, unto the race of mortals.

So, if wonder is the beginning of philosophy, then vision—seeing—is the necessary antecedent, or gateway to wonder. Following Plato's lead, Quinn shows that praise arises from the realization that the quality of the wondrous thing becomes increasingly evident as the thing is more fully observed. This necessarily involves an inner dialectic of ever-closer observation and continued reflection upon the wonder perceived. Sam's praise is magnified through his observations of the Elves, and of Galadriel in particular. Gimli's praise also begins when he beholds the Lady Galadriel, and intensifies as he meditates upon her high and virtuous being.

Sam's Vision of the Elves

Quinn's discussion includes another idea that applies directly to Sam's experiences, and that works together with the notion of high admiration. The German *wonne*, meaning joy or delight, is particularly appropriate in Sam's case. Throughout LotR, Sam experiences great joy even at the thought of meeting Elves. When he is caught eavesdropping on an important conversation between Gandalf and Frodo, Sam explains (FR: 62):

¹⁵ In this citation, Quinn uses the translation by R.G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library, 1929

Well, sir...I heard a deal that I didn't rightly understand, about an enemy, and rings, and Mr. Bilbo, sir, and dragons, and a fiery mountain, and—and Elves, sir. I listened because I couldn't help myself, if you know what I mean. Lor' bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort...Elves, sir! I would dearly love to see them! Couldn't you take me to see Elves, sir, when you go?

Even when the threat of being turned into “something unnatural” (Ibid: 62) by Gandalf seems very real to Sam, his simple heart leaps at the thought of seeing the Elves. When he learns that he will indeed accompany his master, he is overcome with joy (Ibid: 63): “‘Me, sir!’ cried Sam, springing up like a dog invited for a walk. ‘Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!’ he shouted, and then burst into tears.” This is pure delight, unencumbered by the imposition of self-conscious restraint which the more refined value and develop with diligence. As he actually meets and interacts with the Fair Folk, this joy deepens, and is blended with awe—even reverence.

Sam's consuming desire “to see Elves” is fulfilled beyond his expectations, yet the reality he sees opens gradually to him and continues to deepen, eluding his grasp. Frodo asks him what he thinks after his first encounter with Elven-folk (Ibid: 85): “Do you like them still, now you've had a closer view?” (emphasis added) Sam's answer is simple, yet perceptive: “They seem a bit above my likes and dislikes, so to speak...It don't seem to matter what I think about them. They are quite different from what I expected—so old and so young, and so gay and so sad, as it were” A “closer view” leads to a heightened and more specific insight into those he has admired from afar. His admiration and understanding deepen as he comes to know the Elves better during the Quest. In the house of Elrond, where he has spent many days among the Elves, he

exclaims (Ibid: 219), “Elves, sir! Some like kings, terrible and splendid; and some as merry as children...” Later, in Lothlorien, Frodo again inquires of Sam (Ibid: 351):

‘What do you think of Elves now, Sam?’ he said. ‘I asked you the same question once before—it seems a very long while ago; but you have seem more of them since then’

‘I have indeed!’ said Sam. ‘And I reckon there’s Elves and Elves. They’re all elvish enough, but they’re not all the same. Now these folk aren’t wanderers or homeless, and seem a bit nearer to the likes of us: they seem to belong here, even more than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they’ve made the land, or the land’s made them, it’s hard to say, if you take my meaning. It’s wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to. If there’s any magic about, it’s right down deep, where I can’t lay my hands on it, in a manner of speaking’

Sam’s observations show an increasing appreciation for the complex and enigmatic features of the personalities of the Elves. It seems that through the reflective wonder and admiration arising from his closer observation—his clearer vision—Sam is now seeing the Elves in new ways which had previously been beyond the reach of his imagination. His new vision opened the way to greater awe, and in awe he pondered this new reality. His words reflect his attempts to incorporate this reality into his way of moving through the world. One final exuberant burst of praise comes when Sam is describing the Lady Galadriel to Faramir in Ithilien. Sam’s insights are profound and comical, reverential and joyful (TT: 664):

Beautiful she is, sir! Lovely! Sometimes like a great tree in flower, sometimes like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di’monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far off as a snow-mountain, and as merry as any lass I ever saw with daisies in her hair in springtime. But that’s a lot o’ nonsense, and all wide of my mark.

If we consider his praise of the Lady, we can see that his understanding of her has deepened, along with his admiration and reverence for her. As I mentioned earlier, there is also a strong awareness that his words are inadequate—that the reality far exceeds linguistic expression. Sam’s example also demonstrates the relationship Quinn identifies as closer investigation and reflection. The more closely the object is considered, the greater the sense of esteem and admiration, and the higher the praise.

Sam began his journey occupying the lowest social status of all the company. He was not only of the hobbits, an “inconsequential folk” of little worth outside the Shire and the Breelands, but he was a servant to Frodo. He was young, unmarried, and, for the most part, learned only in the art of gardening (and in his letters, which Bilbo taught him). Yet as the story progresses, we are given insights into a deeper side of his personality. His love of tales, of Elves, dragons and walking trees (FR: 43-44) sets him apart from ‘sensible hobbits,’ to begin with. Also, he surprises his friends on two occasions—at weathertop and in the Troll’s wood—with samples from his store of poetry. These endearing qualities notwithstanding, Sam is really just a good-natured country bumpkin.

In the return of Master Samwise to Hobbiton, however, we see a transformed character. Sam is Elven-wise, courteous, and well-spoken. He aids in the deliverance of the Shire, Marries the lovely Rosie Cotton, fathers many beautiful children, and uses Galadriel’s gift to greatly enrich and beautify the Shire. Sam inherits Bag End and is elected Mayor—serving seven consecutive terms. This noble hobbit is the honored friend of the High King Elessar (Aragorn) and, by Frodo’s account “...one of the most famous people in all the lands, and they are making songs about his deeds from here to the Sea

and beyond the Great River” (RK: 991). These accolades, coupled with the heartbreakingly beautiful panegyric he and Frodo received at the Field of Cormallen place him among the very highest of the Great.

Gimli’s Wound

Another shade of meaning discussed by Quinn is that of “the wounding” as derived from the Old English *wundian*. Though the connection remains speculative, there is a very real sensation of pain—of an aching, or palpable yearning—associated with wonder. In Lorien, Gimli meets Galadriel, one of the greatest and most beautiful of all the Elves.¹⁶ He is captivated by the fullness of her persona, and yet most of all by the bond of friendship and love that arose between them. At their first meeting, her words of understanding pierce the grief of Gandalf’s tragic fall in Moria, as well as the ages-long enmity between the Elves and the Dwarves (FR: 347):

‘Dark is the water of Kheled-zâram, and cold are the springs of Kibil-nâla, and fair were the many-pillared halls of Khazad-dûm in Elder Days before the fall of mighty kings beneath the stone’. She looked upon Gimli, who sat glowering and sad, and she smiled. And the Dwarf, hearing the names given in his own ancient tongue, looked up and met her eyes; and it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding. Wonder came into his face, and then he smiled in answer.

He rose clumsily and bowed in dwarf-fashion, saying: ‘yet more fair is the living land of Lorien, and the Lady Galadriel is above all the jewels that lie beneath the earth!’¹⁷

¹⁶ This is, of course, a debatable point. Tolkien seems to have placed the beauty of Arwen Evenstar alongside that of (her grandmother) Galadriel, and left it up to the eye of the beholder to choose. Indeed, this was a serious point of contention between Eomer, who stood for Arwen, and Gimli; “champion” of Galadriel. Beyond all doubt is the status of Luthien, of whom it was said that she was “...the most beautiful of all the children of Illúvatar.” (Sil: 165) To read the story of Beren and Luthien is also to learn that the virtue and strength of her character far exceeded her physical beauty.

¹⁷ It can reasonably be assumed here that Gimli understood quite clearly that Galadriel’s words were not only heartfelt, but born of actual experience. She, being one of the oldest of all living Elves, walked the earth even before Khazad-

In this meeting, the Dwarf is swept up into an epiphany—in this case an appearance of an almost supernatural being—and, as if for the first time, the eyes of his understanding are opened. Gimli’s wound actually begins at this meeting, but is not felt until he and the others must leave the Lady and continue their mission. As they float down the River Anduin, the pain of separation is like a physical blow to the dwarf (FR: 369):

The travelers now turned their faces to the journey; the sun was before them, and their eyes were dazzled, for all were filled with tears. Gimli wept openly.¹⁸

‘I have looked the last upon that which was fairest,’ he said to Legolas his companion. ‘Henceforth I will call nothing fair, unless it be her gift.’ He put his hand to his breast.

‘Tell me, Legolas, why did I come on this Quest? Little did I know where the chief peril lay! Truly Elrond spoke, saying that we could not foresee what we might meet upon our road. Torment in the dark was the danger that I feared, and it did not hold me back. But I would not have come, had I known the danger of light and joy. Now I have taken my worst wound in this parting, even if I were to go this night straight to the Dark Lord. Alas for Gimli son of Glóin!’ (emphasis added)

Gimli’s remark about the danger of light and joy speaks of the piercing beauty of the “perilous realm” of Faerie, as Tolkien saw it. The wound he felt came because after having known the virtue of Lorien, and of the Lady, he was leaving to continue the Quest. The focal point of wonder for him is found not in a thing, but in the person of Galadriel. Gimli’s growth in wonder is begun by her, and continues in the strength of her memory and high virtue as treasured by the Dwarf, who sees himself as her champion

dûm was delved. She knew the kings of the Dwarves and shared in the artistry of the dwarvish smiths many centuries before Gimli was born. Her words, therefore, were both intended and received as much more than a mere ‘olive-branch’ of courtesy.

¹⁸ This statement, for me, is evocative of the Apostle John’s terse comment in Jn 11:35; “Jesus wept.” The economy of phrasing casts in bold relief the *pathos* of the situation, as is likewise seen in Tolkien’s narrative.

and defender of her honor. True, all Elves love her, and Gandalf, Elrond and Aragorn also hold her in the highest honor. But Gimli, as much as any other character, admires and reveres her, consciously and actively serving as her knight. Even his title, “lock-bearer” (TT: 492), comes from Galadriel. The wonder he felt in her presence is admiration; that which esteems her above any and all other things. While Legolas was smitten with wonder characterized by Sea-longing, Gimli is captivated by the wonder that esteems the highest Lady in the world. This shared wonder also formed the basis of Gimli and Legolas’ friendship, ultimately leading them to take the journey to the West together.

Gimli’s ennoblement is seen in his reverence for the Lady, his friendship with Legolas, and in his transformation from a ‘grasping and unlovely’ Dwarf to one whose speech and thought were Elven-wise and fair. His description of the Glittering Caves of Aglarond is compelling evidence of this transformation (TT: 534-535) I won’t cite his description of these wondrous caverns, because it is as lengthy as they are beautiful. And this is the noteworthy thing—that a Dwarf would wax so eloquent on any subject, surpassing even the dwarvish praise of gold! Legolas’ response helps clarify the richness of Gimli’s description (Ibid: 535): “You move me, Gimli...I have never heard you speak like this before. Almost you make me regret that I have not seen these caves.” The two friends finally visited the “caves of wonder” (Ibid: 758) after the war: “And when they returned (Legolas) was silent, and would say only that Gimli alone could find fit words to speak of them (RK: 956). Fittingly, as Elf and Dwarf became inseparable in Middle-Earth, so the final stage of their ennoblement is realized as they take ship and sail for the Undying lands (RK: 1055).

CHAPTER III

THE *EUCATASTROPHE* AND THE RECOVERY OF WONDER

The Sudden Joyous Turn

There is a key element of Tolkien's art which ties together the individual aspects of awe discussed above. It is the culmination of the War of the Ring in which the fool's hope of Frodo's errand is achieved, the Dark Tower is thrown down, and "the realm of Sauron is ended" (RK: 928). It is the "sudden joyous turn," the *eucaastrophe*, in which the almost certain prospect of a disastrous turn of events is becomes unlooked-for victory—a surprise happy-ending—literally, a "good catastrophe" (TR: 86). Although the word isn't mentioned in *Iris Exiled*, there is a strong connection between Quinn's treatment of *strophe*—from *strephein*; "to turn," (IE: 2) and Tolkien's "sudden joyous turn." Tolkien refers to this as "the Consolation of the Happy Ending" (TR: 85) and it forms an essential part of his literary vision. This was the goal envisioned at the Council of Elrond. It was to this end that the Fellowship went forth. Yet without the strengthening and ennobling power of wonder in each member, the quest would have ended in disaster.

We are told that Frodo's mission was not guaranteed to succeed. Galadriel warns the company (FR: 348), "your Quest stands upon the edge of a knife. Stray but a little and

it will fail, to the ruin of all.” This ruin could certainly be considered a turn for the worst, which would’ve meant catastrophe for all of Middle-earth, yet it was not so.

Frodo’s journey was a “turning aside” and was part of a larger Quest upon which the future of Middle-earth turned. The wonder that led him out of the Shire helped him finish his course. He and the Fellowship knew their errand had no reasonable hope of success, yet “for the joy set before them” they still walked open-eyed into danger. They were energized in part by the inherent worth of their cause, and by a sense of wonder—of joy—at the great good they might achieve. The steadfast Aragorn endured through his reverence both for the virtues of the Blessed Realm and for the Lady Arwen. The “grasping and unlovely” Gimli rises to every occasion out of his reverence and admiration for Galadriel. Gandalf’s marvelous deeds and counsel are shown to be the true *sine qua non* of the entire adventure.

The Recovery of Wonder

There is a statement in Quinn’s preface which acts as a doorway into my final purpose for this project. In his explanation of his own purpose, he expresses the hope that his readers will: “apply, modify and adapt my findings to other works and authors” (IE: xiii). As I studied Quinn’s synopsis, I was reminded of Tolkien’s lecture of 1938, *On Fairy-stories*. Tolkienists have come to see this essay as a manifesto in which the Professor declares his overarching purposes for his *poesis*. In his remarks, Tolkien makes it clear he was motivated by a vibrant sense of wonder, and that he was consciously attempting to tell a tale which would, among other things, awaken wonder in those in

whom it slumbered, or fan its flame in the hearts of those in whom its light had waned.

To support this, I begin at the beginning of his comments (TR: 33):

The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords. In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of the traveller who would report them.

This is a pregnant statement, and it highlights some of the expressions of wonder I've discussed in chapters one and two. We see "beauty that is enchantment," and recall the effect of Galadriel and beautiful Lothlorien on the travelers. "Joy and sorrow as sharp as swords" are seen in Gimli's poignant lamentation. The "long and winding road" of the Fellowship is a great turning-aside into the "richness and strangeness" of Middle-earth. The tongue-tied traveler embodies the stunned-silence of the beholder, illustrating the ultimate ineffability of the wonders encountered by Tolkien's characters.

Tolkien has crafted a tale so inviting, so compelling, that we are drawn into the realm of Faërie. We see wanderers carried along in wonder, through toil and fear, hope and despair, and we find ourselves in common cause with them. The secondary creation of Middle-earth is really very much like this primary world of ours, but the sweet, wild scent of wonder permeates our senses, so that when we close the book, and return to the familiar, we realize that a hint of that pungency has lingered. As the smoke from a campfire finds its way into our woolen coat, so wonder is fixed in our minds, and so we see with renewed vision the heartbreaking beauty of our own lands. This, for me, is our debt to Tolkien and to those like him who heal us of our blindness and help us recover sight.

As a part of the notion of recovery, Tolkien muses that the problem of ‘the familiar’ can be a hindrance to our ability to see the world with a vital sense of wonder. He calls us “to clean our windows”—to wipe away the accretions of familiarity—in an attempt to recover clear sight (TR: 77). This vision can be dimmed, or lost, when potent realities which form a part of our everyday milieu are gradually relegated to ‘triteness.’ Trees, mountains, the sky and the stars—things which were at one time full of beauty and hidden meaning—have been stolen from us, and we ourselves are the thieves! Tolkien’s comments about the common features of the world are meant to awaken us to what we’ve done: “We laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard acquired them, and acquiring ceased to look at them.” (Ibid: 77)

In the year 2000, I wrote a meditation which touches on this kind of loss, and of the urgent need for recovery. In my musings, entitled “The Mountain and the Wood,” I compare a fleeting experience of wonder to the momentary glimpse of a distant peak which quickens our pulse and makes us long to see the beauty of the mountain more clearly. This kind of longing actually pierces, as though the joy we desire were a sword. The deepest wound, however, doesn’t come from the blade; it comes when we turn away in frustration because we can’t possess the wondrous thing. We stop looking...we stop anticipating the elusive vision because, in its otherness, its appearances seem to occur independently of our desire to see it. We allow our windows to gradually darken, or we stop turning to look through them. Eventually, we come to believe that the World is dull, and that the joy was fleeting because it arose in response to a chimera, like Ebenezer Scrooge’s insistence that Jacob Marley’s ghost was no more than “an undigested bit of

beef’ (Dickens 1843: 13). Quinn and Tolkien (and Dickens too) wrote to prevent such a tragedy, or at least to counteract its effects. This project is an attempt to participate in this process of Recovery; awakening, seeing, attending more closely, and returning to wonder.

Wonder ‘For such a time as this.’

The Book of Esther tells the story of a great threat upon the very existence of the Jewish nation. This threat was so imminent, that their annihilation seemed certain. There was, however, a Jewish maiden who had been taken into King Xerxes’ harem, and who was his favorite. Her uncle implored her to use her influence to cause the king to intervene, even though to petition Xerxes without being granted an official audience meant certain death. The maid hesitated, justly fearing for her life, but her uncle encouraged and reminded her of providential aid with these words: “And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14b; NIV) Esther was ideally placed to use her influence to avert this disaster.

My view is that this idea also applies to the role of Tolkien as storyteller in his own time and in the present day. A vital sense of wonder and restoration were desperately needed after the horror of the first two World wars, and are no less needed in this era of global conflict and uncertainty. It seems abundantly clear that the works of Tolkien have been embraced by many millions because of the way they open their readers to renewed wonder, and to the ennoblement of spirit that wonder inspires. It is also appropriate to

suggest that the releases of the Peter Jackson films (2001-2003) helped many in the United States to deal with the horror of the terrorist attacks of September, 11, 2001.

At the outset of this project, I characterized my work as a nascent and open-ended effort. This is reconfirmed each time I return to wander in Middle-earth. My peregrinations inevitably lead me to some “secret gate” or “hidden path” that I missed before. My “Hobbit-steps” lead into the grief and joy of wonder—the treasure I so covet and which I so desire to share.

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The Lord of the Rings is a film series of three epic fantasy adventure films directed by Peter Jackson, based on the novel written by J. R. R. Tolkien. The films are subtitled *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Two Towers* (2002), and *The Return of the King* (2003). Produced and distributed by New Line Cinema with the co-production of WingNut Films, it is an international venture between New Zealand and the United States. The films feature an ensemble cast including Elijah Wood, Ian McKellen, Liv Ullmann, and others. The enduring popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* has led to numerous references in popular culture, the founding of many societies by fans of Tolkien's works,[10] and the publication of many books about Tolkien and his works. The *Lord of the Rings* has inspired, and continues to inspire, artwork, music, films and television, video games, board games, and subsequent literature. Award-winning adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* have been made for radio, theatre, and film.[11] In 2003, it was named Britain's best novel of all time in the BBC's *The Big Read*.

Contents. 1 Plot summary.Â Some characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are unequivocal protagonists, and others are absolute antagonists. Featured photo credit: New Line Cinema *The Lord of the Rings* has a rich mythology that first exploded in popularity in the '60s before the series of.Â Of course, some fans have gone further and theorized that the small mentions of him in the book hint at a much larger role than people realize. Despite being barely mentioned, Radagast is in the same class of being as Saruman and Gandalf, but is known for his ability to transform himself, blend in with trees, talk to animals, and otherwise commune with nature. The writer of the theory notes that Gandalf makes a point of mentioning that Radagast has the ability to use animals as spies to find out what is happening over much of Middle-earth, and as such wonders if it was Radagast who helped Gandalf.

Related: Lord Of The Rings Characters Who Could Appear In Amazon's TV Show. Hopefully, the *Lord of the Rings* TV series on Amazon will prove to have found the best way to address *Lord of the Rings'* lack of diversity by inventing an all-new story in the existing world of Middle Earth and creating brand new characters.Â Henry Cavill is already busy with an epic fantasy role in *The Witcher*, but his portrayal of Geralt is so fantastic that it would be no-brainer to include him in a remake of *Lord of the Rings*. Before the show released, some were skeptical of Cavill's casting in *The Witcher* " he looked nothing like Geralt and had mostly starred in modern roles " but he's nailed the role and shown that he could absolutely handle another epic fantasy role like Boromir. The *Lord of the Rings* is a book written by J. R. R. Tolkien. It was first published in 1954. It is split in three parts (or volumes), which are named *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. The *Lord of the Rings* takes place in Tolkien's fictional world, called Middle-earth. Middle-earth has its own geography, several different races and peoples (elves, dwarves, humans, hobbits, ents), their languages, and a history that is thousands of years old.