

SNOWFLAKES OUT OF FIRE:
J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S ANATOMY OF JOY

by

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SNOWFLAKES OUT OF FIRE:

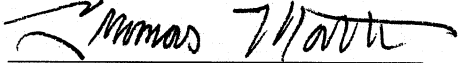
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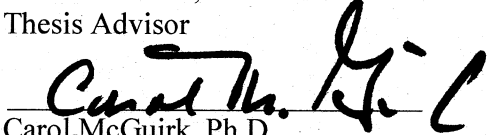
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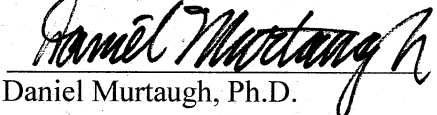


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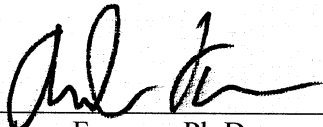
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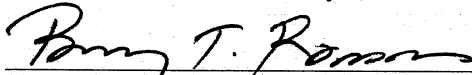
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ABSTRACT

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In "On Fairy Stories" J.R.R. Tolkien writes that joy is the "mark of the true fairy-story." Tolkien believed that joy was the defining characteristic of the genre. This joy is not just apparent in the happy ending of the fairy tale, but also in the manner in which the plot and characters show theories of joy, and the way the text itself creates joy in the reader. This paper will explore Tolkien's creation of brightness, hope, and wonder, and how these instances express a theory of joy. First I will look at the different types of joy in Tolkien's work, then the more general theories that these types express, and finally the effect the joy in the story has on the reader.

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INTRODUCTION

In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the fellowship is engaged on a quest not to recover a treasure but to destroy one. They travel not towards light but ever increasing darkness. Even the ending is not entirely happy, but stained with hints of sadness. Yet although darkness spreads through much of the story, it only makes the few, bright moments of joy that much more precious and profound.

Be that as it may, some critics cannot seem to acknowledge the joy in Tolkien's work. Some say that Tolkien merely goes through the motions of taking delight in elves and scenery and is drawn with more strength to descriptions of darkness, horror, and despair. In "Tolkien Fails to Achieve his Artistic Goals," C.N. Manlove writes that the evil forces and the dark characters mean more to Tolkien than the good forces. He says that "one gets the impression that he has not really experienced what he is describing, or else that it does not really matter to him" (150). When Tolkien describes evil characters his skill increases, Manlove explains, as in the description of Shelob. Manlove writes that "Tolkien may have found that the good, the beautiful and the age-old did not excite him so much or so plainly as he liked to believe" (151).

In "The Lord of the Rings as Literature," Burton Raffel dismisses Tolkien's concepts of joy in a different manner than Manlove does. He does not say that Tolkien is attracted more towards the darkness, but bases his critique of Tolkien in part on his lack

of darkness. He dismisses Sam Gamgee as “virtually meaningless” because Sam is too positive and hopeful. He dislikes the portrayal of Bilbo Baggins for the same reason: “What significant aspects of human reality ... are portrayed for us by the Hobbit Bilbo?” (29). He concludes that there is “no universal joy in gift-giving and receiving,” an apparently random comment as he never explains what gift-giving has to do with *The Hobbit*.

The one thing Raffel thinks that Tolkien succeeds at is his portrayal of Frodo: “It is in Frodo and in Frodo only, that I think Tolkien achieves something of what one can call the characterization of literature” (30). Raffel admires Frodo’s character because he “grows much more impressively” than the other characters. This growth, however, is a process of becoming “larger and wiser and sadder” (30). It is this that is “realistic,” this that Sam and Bilbo lack; the “growth,” learning, and awareness that would bring them sadness. Raffel views sadness as realistic, while the growth of any other character trait is one-dimensional and circular. This is apparent in the examples of what he considers real “literature,” such as the characterization of Jay Gatsby: “With his hands plunged like weights in his coat pockets ... standing in a puddle of water glaring tragically into my eyes” (30). “Tragic” characters appeal to him, not the bright, somewhat foolish nature of characters like Bilbo.

Like Raffel, Kenneth McLeish disparages Tolkien’s lack of realistic confusion, turmoil, and sadness, and also the underlying simplicity of his message. He thinks that Tolkien does write wonderful descriptions, but also that his story is a “very poor

allegory” and that “unless we abandon it right now, will quite possibly cost us this planet and everything in it” (101).

Critics like Raffel and McLeish dismiss Tolkien for not being realistically dark, while Manlove says that he is drawn too much to the dark. Others, like Derek Robinson, critique his lack of humor and refusal of heroic triumph. Those that do not dismiss his descriptions of joy ignore it altogether. They may focus on abstract concepts as reality, power, irony, myth, magic, death, morality, sin, and even uncertainty or the unknown, without mentioning any form of joy, happiness or the sublime, except, of course, for the obligatory, token reference to Tolkien’s concept of eucatastrophe, usually analyzed solely in the light of his religious beliefs.

Yet Tolkien’s epic fantasy seems to express a broad theory of joy that even goes beyond his philosophy of eucatastrophe. This paper will explore Tolkien’s creation of brightness, hope, and wonder, and how these instances express a theory of joy. First I will look at the different types of joy in Tolkien’s work, then the more general theories that these types express, and finally the effect the joy in the story has on the reader.

PART ONE: TYPES OF JOY

I see nine main types of joy in Tolkien's work. As the instances of joy are many and various, they cannot be forced into rigid categories or descriptions. The nine kinds of joy I describe are those that seem to be the most evident and most often exemplified in the work. Each of these categories I propound can be further divided into different subcategories. The nine types of joy I will explore are: joy in happiness, joy in humor, joy in communication, joy in order, joy in the unexpected, time-based joy, joy in nature, joy in others, and joy in the transcendent.

1. Joy in Happiness

The first type of joy is that of happiness. Happiness describes simple pleasures, what could be called creature comforts, though it can also go beyond them and pass into a more spiritual joy. This joy can be broken into three subcategories in *The Lord of the Rings*: the happiness of food, comfort, and home.

A) Joy in Food

The Hobbits, more than any other race, take a simple pleasure from food, drink, and pipe-weed. They have dinner twice a day. Each race of beings eats different foods;

the Hobbits have their tea, cakes, breads and mushrooms, while Goldberry and Tom eat “yellow cream and honeycomb, and” “green herbs and ripe berries” (123). The Elves eat “bread” and “fruits sweet as wildberries” (81), while the Orcs eat meat and Gollum delights in fish. The food that each race enjoys reflects their natures; the Elves and Tom and Goldberry eat what is natural, the kind of food that brings memories to the Hobbits of golden summers and clear fountains. The Hobbits’ own food is simple and comfortable, while the darker races like the Orcs eat meat.

Food is more than just nourishment to the Hobbits. The Elven *lembas* and the water of the Ents are often described as remarkably sustaining; they “keep you on your legs.” Yet they also do not “satisfy the innards proper,” or satisfy “feelings, anyway.” The Hobbits need something else from food besides energy. Sam thinks that *lembas* does not “satisfy desire” (915). The Ent water and *lembas* may be sustaining, but do not provide the feeling that food creates, at least the feeling the Hobbits are accustomed to, the satisfaction of taste and solidity.

Although they do not fulfill the same role as food, *lembas* and Ent water do provide sustenance to the spirit as well as to the body. In Tolkien’s letters he writes that *lembas* has two functions. The first is that “it is a ‘machine’ or device for making creditable the long marches with little provision.” Thematically, this function is “relatively unimportant.” “It also has a much larger significance, of what one might hesitatingly call a ‘religious’ kind” (*Letters* 210). Though it may not be as physically satisfying to the Hobbits, it eases their spirits and brings them wonder. There are many examples of food fulfilling a joyous emotional or spiritual role in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Elves give the Hobbits a “clear drink, pale gold in color,” “wonderfully refreshing,” and “very soon they were all laughing, and snapping their fingers at the rain, and at Black Riders” (88). In this instance it is the drink that allows them to forget their troubles and laugh. When Pippin and Merry have been captured by the Orcs, the taste of the *lembas* “brought back to them memories of fair faces, and laughter, and wholesome food in quiet days now far away” (447). Later in the story, “The wine coursed in their veins and tired limbs, and they felt glad and easy of heart as they had not done since they left the land of Lórien” (661). In the depths of Mordor, the *lembas* “fed the will” and gave Frodo and Sam the “strength to endure” (915).

B) Joy in Home

A comfortable home is another joy in the story, one which the Hobbits constantly look back on wistfully. The Shire is a cozy, lovely place to which they long to return. Each of the other characters has a home to return to, but they do not seem to think constantly of their land the way the Hobbits do of theirs. Though they were reluctant to leave it, their home does give them what could be called “ground to stand on” even when they are far away. Frodo says that “as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable,” he shall “find wandering more bearable” (61). Just the knowledge that there is a “firm foothold” somewhere in the world gives him strength, even if he “cannot stand there again” (61). The memory of home gives Sam wistful comfort even in hellish Mordor, where a great sign of Frodo’s final weakening is that he can no longer recall the Shire.

2. Joy in Humor

A sense of humor... is needed armor. Joy in one's heart and some laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person down deep has a pretty good grasp of life. - Hugh Sidey

Another type of joy is the joy found in humor. Tolkien critic Derek Robinson is not only confused by the randomness of the laughter in *the Lord of the Rings* but also sees no humor at all in the laughter. He says that this is primarily because all the characters get along so well: “without bad feeling it is difficult to generate humor” (112). Yet even without the characters insulting each other to create humor, I find *The Lord of the Rings* filled with moments that make me smile or laugh. There are instances of wordplay, such as Sam’s statement when they are sleeping in the wood elves’ trees: “I shall go on sleeping, whether I roll off or no. And the less said, the sooner I’ll drop off, if you take my meaning” (335). There is also the wonderful speech in the beginning at Bilbo’s birthday party; “*I don’t know half of you as well as I should like; and I like less than half of you half as well as you deserve*” (29).

There are also small jokes, such as Eomer telling Gimli that he would cut his head from him if he stood but a little higher from the ground; or Legolas and Gimli keeping tally of all their kills in the battle of Helm’s Deep. The humor can be admittedly much more subtle at times than those more obvious examples, as when the key to open the door to Moria turns out simply to be to speak the word “friend,” but subtlety does not lessen the joy of such instances.

The different races also find things funny that other races normally would not. When Merry and Pippin bowed to the tree-like Ents in thanks, “this feat seemed to amuse the Ents very much” (470). The reason it amused them is perhaps because the Ents cannot bend far. It may be hard for a reader to see why bowing could be amusing, but it also allows the reader to temporarily see a simple bow as something strange and noteworthy. The humor within the story allows us to see ordinary acts in an extraordinary way.

Robinson’s view that Tolkien’s work is essentially humorless continues even into recent years. Peter Bradshaw, in a review of the film “The Fellowship of the Ring,” says that “jokes are basically antipathetic to the Lord of the Rings experience.” He seems to believe that any work that uses the sort of grand, “stuffy,” “stolid” language that appears in *The Lord of the Rings* cannot also have any lightness or “buoyancy,” only “heaviness.” He says that “it is sometimes a pretty serious – not to say humourless – world” (*Guardian* Dec. 2001).

Reading *The Lord of the Rings* does create a feeling of darkness, even of heaviness, at times, but that does not exclude times of lightheartedness. Robinson argues that Tolkien’s characters do not have enough conflict, enough darkness, to make a contrast with humor, and Bradshaw writes that there is too much serious darkness for humor. Yet the two feelings can reside together. In my analysis, the darkness of the story is what makes the jokes valuable, and its seriousness makes the moments of humor stand out.

Instances of humor are sometimes used to describe evil. Anne Petty writes that she has “always found the two episodes of extended ‘orc-talk’ to be some of the most

humorous lines Tolkien ever wrote” (134). Because their conversation is presented in a funny manner does not mean that they are any less evil, however. Petty says that this contrast makes the Orcs sound like “modern humans arguing over their lot in life,” and that these “everyday grouings” bring the cruelty of their actions “entirely too close to home” (134). It is possible to be both “sad and funny,” and sometimes that contrast can be a powerful literary device.

3. Joy in Communication

The third type of joy is that of communication. This is not just the joy of talking to another person, but of connecting with their personality, emotions, and even their life itself. Communication is a broad category that can be divided into two subcategories: communication with people through language and music.

A) Language

Language is one form of joy through communication. When the Hobbits listen to Tom Bombadil’s tales, they “sat still before him, enchanted,” and Frodo “did not feel either hungry or tired, only filled with wonder” (129). In “On Fairy Stories,” Tolkien writes that one of the desires a fairy story fulfills in the reader is the desire of “communion with other living things.” This desire is more than satisfied as the characters talk not only to other groups, but also other species, such as the tree-like Ents. The story shows that communication is possible across large gaps of culture and species. The characters can understand aspects of a song or story even without understanding the

language itself. When the Hobbits listen to Tom Bombadil, they “did not understand his words, but as he spoke they had a vision” (142). They feel that his “words were mainly those of wonder and delight,” even though they were of a strange language and thus “chiefly nonsense” (143). The same thing happens when they listen to the song of the riders: “The slow voices of the riders stirred the hearts even of those who did not know the speech of that people” (954). Yet the voices of the riders are even more powerful to those who do understand their speech: “the words of the song brought a light to the eyes of the folk of the Mark as they heard again afar the thunder of the hooves of the north” (954).

In his letters, Tolkien writes that some words are “beautiful words *before* they are understood” and that people might even stop listening to the sound at all when they think that they know the meaning of the word. It is possible to like a word “for itself,” though it is also important to appreciate the particular meanings and overtones that it has (*Letters* 234). Tolkien views words as something capable of giving wonder, beauty, and joy “in a living context,” and not just simple meanings, as in the case of “dried flowers” (*Letters* 234).

B) Music

“Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent” - Victor Hugo

The second form, similar to the joy in language, is that of music. In fact, music is often described as a language, and language as a music, throughout the story: “In the

distance the voices of the Ents at moot still rose and fell, sometimes loud and strong, sometimes low and solemn as a dirge” (473). Speech is described in the same terms as music even in our everyday descriptions, but in Middle Earth it is even more common. In the Entmoot “every now and again one great voice would rise in a high and quickening language” (472).

Music is also a sort of magic. In Rivendell, the “beauty of the melodies and of the interwoven words” held Frodo “in a spell” (227). Later, Frodo “stood still enchanted, while the sweet syllables of the elvish song fell like clear jewels of blended word and melody,” and “swiftly he sank under its shining weight” (232). In *The Silmarillion* we find that the world of Arda itself was created through music. Bradford Lee Eden compares this creation of the world through music with the medieval concept of “the music of the spheres.” He says that Tolkien’s world “is so much more alive and magical” for the presence of this philosophy of creation (183). C.S. Lewis describes the beauty of a world view based on music in *The Discarded Image*, a beauty that finds music even in the moving of the planets. Music is at the heart of Tolkien’s world and contains a magical power even in the form of human song. Music allows the characters to experience a power almost beyond words, a power at the center of their world.

Music is stronger than language because it blends the words with melody. Language is rational to some degree, and more restrictive than the direct emotional communication of music. In Tom Bombadil’s house, the Hobbits “became suddenly aware that they were singing merrily, as if it was easier and more natural than talking”

(123). In moments of peril the characters will often sing. Sam finds himself singing when he has given up the hope of finding Frodo, and the song is what shows him the way.

Raffel writes that Tolkien's songs are forced, trite, and almost painful to read. However, he also says the songs do "serve a purpose: the song within the tale is recognized convention, breaking into a narrative where a break is needed" (26). If this is what Raffel finds as the purpose of songs in a story, then it is unsurprising that he judges the simple songs purely by their artistry and form. In Tolkien's world, music is a magic in its own right, and its purposes can be to create joy as well as communicate the stories of past times and different cultures.

4. Joy in Order

The fourth type of joy is that of order, which can be divided into comforting order and the order of proper places. When speaking of the Hobbit's record books, Tolkien writes that "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" (7). The Hobbits do not look to take new knowledge from their records; they just enjoy seeing facts set out with clarity and order. They like this sort of order in every aspect of their lives: "A well ordered and well farmed countryside was their favorite haunt" (1).

Another sort of joy in order is that of finding or taking one's proper place in the world, as when Aragorn takes his true place as king, Théoden ignores the councils of Wormtongue and becomes a leader again, and the Shire returns to its proper state.

Part of the joy of taking one's proper place is the joy of "being a man," though in this story it should perhaps be called the joy of "being a being," since Men are only one group among many. Gandalf tells Théoden that "your fingers would remember their old strength better, if they grasped a sword-hilt" (506). When Théoden confronts Wormtongue, he tells him that his "leechcraft ere long would have me walking on all fours like a beast" (508). By going into battle and taking his place as king, Théoden becomes more human, leaving behind his passive, animal state.

This is why battle is a joy for Théoden. Manlove writes that this joy "hits a false note; this 'joy of battle' is the joy of someone who has never been in this kind of battle" (148). Leaving aside the fact that Tolkien had in fact served in the first World War, the joy of battle in *The Lord of the Rings* is not in killing other beings, or in the danger and terror, but in doing what is right, in fighting for something that you believe in despite danger or even certainty of death. That is why Théoden's hands remember their strength when grasping a sword hilt, and why he finds joy again in fighting: "For as the Rohirrim do, we now love war and valour as things good in themselves, both a sport and as an end; and though we still hold that a warrior should have more skills and knowledge than only the craft of weapons and slaying, we esteem a warrior, nonetheless, above men of other crafts" (663). Heroes that fight for their humanity, such as Theoden, are contrasted with the enemy, who is often made to seem inhuman. Eugene Startzman points out that the black riders are described almost as animals. They have "a hint of the inhuman, the bestial" (5). One rider "sniffs," "hisses," and wails like an "evil and lonely creature" (5). The Orcs are far more bestial than the Elves that they were twisted from.

The effects of the ring on Gollum also turn him into something more animal than Hobbit. Verlyn Flieger describes Gollum as a “degenerate, feral figure, constantly associated with animal images” (103). He is compared to a “spider, squirrel, frog” and “maggot” (103). Tolkien even uses the word “it” instead of “him,” to suggest that Gollum might have lost his humanity.

That evil is portrayed as animal does not mean that animals are evil in Tolkien’s world. There are many noble animals: the great eagles, the Elven horses, and even Sam’s pony. The animal metaphors of the Ring Wraiths and Orcs, rather than pointing to the evilness of animals, seems to suggest that by ignoring their place in the world of Middle Earth these beings lose a bit of their humanity.

5. Joy in the Unexpected

All of us have had the experience of a sudden joy that came when nothing in the world had forewarned us of its coming -- a joy so thrilling that if it was born of misery we remembered even the misery with tenderness. -Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The fifth type of joy is finding something good where it is not expected. The element of surprise adds to the joy of the experience. Gandalf says that “many folk like to know beforehand what is to be set on the table; but those who have laboured to prepare the feast like to keep their secret; for wonder makes the words of praise louder” (949). Yet he does not mean that something must always be a completely unknown in order to be unexpected. In *The Silmarillion*, although the Valar have taken part in the music that creates the elves, “looking upon the elves” they “were filled with wonder, as though they

were beings sudden and marvelous and unforeseen; for so it shall ever be with the Valar” (49). It is marvelous to be able to take part in a creation and still see it as new and unexpected.

One aspect of joy in the unexpected is finding an ally where an enemy is expected. Frodo finds an ally in Farmer Maggot, who had previously terrified him. Gimli fears Galadriel as an evil, powerful sorceress, but hearing her speak names in his own tongue, he “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” (347). Elrond says “that I should find friendship upon the way, secret and unlooked for. Certainly I looked for no such friendship as you have shown. To have found it turns evil to great good” (679).

Eucatastrophe

Aristotle writes that “dramatic turns of fortune and hairbreadth escapes from peril are pleasant, because we feel all such things are wonderful” (69). Tolkien creates a name for this unexpected joy: “eucatastrophe.” This is the sudden turn to the good when it seems as though disaster is certain. When the Hobbits are rescued from the Barrow Wights in *The Lord of the Rings*, they “lay basking in the sun with the delight of those that have been wafted suddenly from a bitter winter to a friendly clime, or of people that, after being long ill and bedridden, wake one day to find that they are unexpectedly well and the day is again full of promise” (141). There are countless examples of eucatastrophe in *The Lord of the Rings*: when Frodo and Sam are about to die in Mordor,

the eagles rescue them, Sam thinks that Frodo has been killed by Shelob when Frodo is only poisoned and recovers, and when Frodo gives in to the power of the ring, Gollum steals it and falls with it into Mount Doom.

Although eucatastrophe is a sudden turn to the good, it is different from serendipity, or an unexpected, fortunate accident. Eucatastrophe connects to something beyond this world, to an underlying truth. When Gollum takes the ring from Frodo and falls into Mount Doom with it, it is not just a fortunate accident that he was there. Bilbo spares his life in *The Hobbit*, as do Frodo and Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*. If it were not for the mercy or pity of the good characters in the past, then Sauron would have triumphed. Eucatastrophe is not an accident but a result of the deeds of the characters. This result could perhaps be termed *fate*. Yet in a sense it is different from fate, because the mercy and pity of the characters cause the good results and not necessarily or solely a higher power.

6. Time-Based Joys

The sixth type of joy is the joy that is created out of the present; this includes joy towards the future, and to the past.

A) Joy Towards the Future

One who has health has hope, and one who has hope has everything. ~ Arabic proverb

. One kind of future joy is hope, closely related to eucatastrophe, because eucatastrophe is the answer to a hope, the sudden, unexpected event that fulfills it. Hope

looks towards a eucatastrophe, towards something, perhaps unspecified, that would change events for the better. Eucatastrophe, however, can go beyond hope. The fellowship does not even imagine that Gandalf might still be living, so cannot hope for it.

Hope is an emotion that looks to future joy; it is never reached in the present, because then it would stop being a hope and become a reality. Although hope is a wish for some happiness in the future, that wish creates joy in the present by combating despair. The desired outcome may not yet be, but it influences the view of the present. Hope does not so much exist in the future as stretches towards the future from the present.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *hope* as a verb that means “to entertain expectation of something desired; to look ... with expectation.” Yet in Tolkien it is not always an “expectation.” Hope can persist even in the face of complete defeat, but that does not mean that this hope necessarily has any expectation of fulfillment. Tom Shippey writes that “only those who need hope to keep going will fall prey to despair when their hope is withdrawn” (153). He uses this to describe why the Hobbits can continue their quest even when they think that it is impossible. I do not think that Sam gives up hope, however. He constantly looks to the sun rising through the clouds, or a star in the sky, or even a memory of home to give him hope. Frodo, perhaps, loses his hope. Yet he says that although he has lost his own hope, it is enough to borrow Sam’s. Saruman, by contrast, refuses to share hope with another when he loses his own. When Galadriel offers him a “last chance,” he says that “all my hopes are ruined, but I would not share

yours” (961). This is why Saruman falls; not only does he give in to despair, but he will not take hope offered to him.

B) Despair

Sorrow as well as joy looks towards the future. The opposite of joy might be considered sorrow, as the opposite of hope is usually cited as despair. If joy reaching towards the future is hope, then sorrow reaching towards the future is despair. Despair is the worry that something you do not wish to happen will occur in the future, whether that future is a minute away or years ahead. It almost never applies to a present moment, as hope rarely applies to any occurring present. Despair is tied closely to hope in *The Lord of the Rings*. In some cases, hope creates a certain type of despair: “then hope unlooked-for came so suddenly to Eomer’s heart, and with it the bite of care and fear renewed” (844). He cannot worry about Eowyn when he thinks that she is dead, but begins to hope and thus fear again when he learns that she might live.

At other times, the characters feel that hope and despair are almost the same thing. When Gandalf says that they must attack the Black Gates to give Frodo a chance, he says they must fight with courage, though they have “but small hope” for themselves. Aragorn replies that he “will go on,” because “we come now to the very brink, where hope and despair are akin” (862). They cannot hope in the normal sense of the word because they know that they have no chance against Mordor. Sam says something similar, that he has transformed into a creature beyond hope and despair, and that this somehow makes him

stronger. Without depending on hope alone, he can continue going even in the face of despair.

Denethor falls to madness and despair, attempting to kill his son with him in a funeral pyre and abandoning his city in the midst of battle. Gandalf tells the other characters of Denethor's last words: "*against the power that has now arisen there is no victory.*" Yet he tells the fellowship not to fall into despair as Denethor did, but to "ponder the truth in these words," because their war truly is "without final hope" (860). They must do their "duty," because if they do not, they will "perish nonetheless" (862). They must do what they think is right, whether or not they have hope that they will survive. Shippey compares this view of courage to the role of courage in Norse mythology. Although the Norse gods know that they will eventually be defeated by their enemies, they still fight. The final victory does not matter as much as the battle itself.

C) Longing

"It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are still alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger for them."

-George Eliot

Another form of joy that stretches towards the future is longing. Hope involves sadness; if a character is hoping for something they are aware of the sadness or despair of current events and times. Longing has a different kind of sadness, however. When Frodo stands in Lothlórien and looks out beyond it, he sees "a city of green towers" and "out of it, it seemed to him that the power and light came that held all the land in sway. He

longed suddenly to fly like a bird to rest in the green city” (342). This longing is not a hope because Frodo knows that it is impossible to fly to the trees. Instead, it is a sudden glimpse of great joy that creates a yearning towards the truth or beauty just revealed, the “power and light” that holds “all the land in sway,” a glimpse that soon disappears as Frodo sees again the “world he knew” (342).

The elves also experience this form of longing. Legolas, when he sees gulls for the first time, says: “A wonder they are to me and a trouble to my heart,” because “deep in the hearts of my kindred lies the sea-longing, which is perilous to stir. Alas! For the gulls. No peace shall I have again under beech or elm” (855). This longing, once again, is simultaneously a trouble and a wonder, a perilous stirring of the heart.

Longing is a desire that can perhaps never be fulfilled, and never sought. In *Tolkien in the Land of Heroes* Anne C. Petty writes that for Tolkien the theme of longing “helped define his concept of the legitimate fairy-story, which is concerned with desire rather than possibility” (179). This desire does not need to be possible or probable, but perhaps because of this can allow a glimpse of something beyond the (relatively) ordinary world of the characters. Wayne Martindale says that for C.S. Lewis joy “is an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction” (“Romantics” 235). It is different from pleasure because “it must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing” (231). Tolkien holds the same view as Lewis, that this joyful longing is a desire that may never be satisfied, and thus is accompanied by a feeling of sorrow. He says that if fairy stories “awakened *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded” (“On Fairy Stories” 62). Joy responds to a basic yearning,

but not necessarily by satisfying it. Joy awakens a longing for something beyond the world.

D) Joy Towards the Past

Joy also stretches from the present to the past and from the past to the present. It can reside in a love or appreciation of older things, nostalgia, archaism, or even feelings of satisfaction or contentment for tasks completed. Sorrow also looks to the past in the form of regret, mourning, remorse, or repentance. The forms of joy that look to the past also affect the present. After the Hobbits finish eating a gigantic meal, they can then take a different kind of joy in their satisfaction. Bilbo and Frodo both take joy in writing of their former adventures, as well as looking back to what has already happened.

Tolkien himself seems to take great joy in the past. He says that there is no shame in “the ‘escape’ of archaism: of preferring not dragons but horses, castles, sailing-ships, bows and arrows” (“On Fairy Stories” 78). This joy in past things also contains a touch of sadness, a longing for what is no longer within our world. Longing for the past is seen in *The Lord of the Rings* in the beauty of the golden age that is past and the gradual disappearance of the elves. There is the sense that everything was once greater: men, kings, buildings, even magic. The characters pass many ruins in their travels, grand monuments of a different age. C.S. Lewis writes that for Medieval writers the present was described as worse than the past, yet the reader still does “not get any impression of gloom,” just delight at looking at the “majestic spectacle” of the past (*Discarded Image* 184).

In a sense, there is not much difference between the opposite desires of longing for joy in the past and for the future. They both create a sense of joy in the present: by combating despair, making our world more wondrous, giving it the grandeur of ancient days, or connecting our spirits to something outside of our world and time. Tolkien says that the joy of the “Great Eucatastrophe,” the Christian “story,” “looks forward (or backward: the direction in this regard is unimportant)” (84). It is interesting that Tolkien sees no real difference whether the direction is to the past or future. It is the “peculiar excitement and joy” that one feels at finding a story to be primarily true. The joy of finding truth, whether in the past or future, is what creates present joy; the longing, and reaching, for something beyond the realm of the ordinary world.

7. Joy in Others

Friendship improves happiness, and abates misery, by doubling our joys, and dividing our grief. -Joseph Addison

The Lord of the Rings also expresses the joy found in other people, whether through love, friendship, or companionship. These bonds between people play a large role in the story. Frodo is part of the “fellowship” of the ring, after all; he is not the lone hero of his quest. The one moment he wishes to go alone on his quest, Sam follows him, and it is Sam’s loyalty and steadfastness that make their journey possible at all. Frodo could not have made it alone. Gandalf says that “the storm comes, and now all friends should gather together, lest each singly be destroyed” (501).

Friendship allows the characters to support each other in many ways, but also to give each other joy. When one person laughs, it cheers the souls of the others. Gimli says that “heavy would my heart have been ... if Legolas had not laughed suddenly” (859). He does not know why Legolas laughs, because “what hope he saw from afar he would not tell” (859). Because he does not know the reason behind it, the laugh itself lightens his heart. Frodo also says that although he is full of despair, he can keep going as long as Sam has hope. Even Gandalf, who is usually the one giving hope to the others, takes strength from them: “Good, Gimli!” Gandalf says, “You encourage me. We will seek the hidden doors together” (289). Alone, the characters could not draw on the strength of each other’s hopes and joys.

Friendship allows character to share joys, but also to experience new ones. Gimli and Legolas find friendship, though they start out as mild enemies, and this brings them both strength. Because of their friendship they experience aspects of life that they would never have alone; Legolas learns to appreciate the beauty of Gimli’s caves, while Gimli also journeys with Legolas to the forests that he loves. They can find joy in new things because of the bond that they have created.

Love also creates joy within the characters. Faramir says that “hope and joy” have come to him because of Eowyn. Eowyn also awakens from her own darkness because of this love: “suddenly her winter passed, and the sun shone on her” (943). The beauty of the ending of the story is partially created through their love, as well as the love between Aragorn and Arwen and Sam and Rose.

8. Joy in Nature

"In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous." - Aristotle

One of the most common kinds of joy in *The Lord of the Rings* is that found in nature. Nature can affect the characters' emotions. In one part the Hobbits are feeling depressed, but then "they stepped onto grass, and the spirits of the Hobbits rose" (439). Their experience is not just a joy in a lovely landscape or a beautiful waterfall, however. Frodo says that "he felt a delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as forester nor as carpenter; it was the delight of the living tree itself" (342). It is the life in the tree as well as the touch and sight of it that creates delight. The spirits of the characters rise when they step on grass not simply because of the feel of it or the beauty, but because of the life in it. C.S. Lewis, in *The Four Loves*, says that our love of nature "cannot be adequately classified simply as an instance of our love for beauty" (34). "What really matters is what Wordsworth calls the "spirit" of the place. We want to "absorb it" into ourselves, to connect with its mood, with its spirit" (35).

The spirit of nature is most evident in Fangorn; it literally comes to life in the tree-like Ents. They are natural themselves, but also take joy in the forest around them. Treebeard is full of laughter: "Treebeard stood under the rain of the falling spring, and took a deep breath; then he laughed" (459). When the Hobbits were falling asleep, Treebeard went outside, and he "laughed and shook himself, and wherever the drops of water fell glittering from him to the ground they glinted like red and green sparks" (463).

Critics such as Derek Robinson are confused by scenes like this. In his essay "The Hasty Stroke Goes Off Astray: Tolkien and Humour," he says that such scenes "leave me

wondering about all the references to laughter in the book. Are we meant to take them literally?" (111). They cannot be taken literally, because, as he points out, nothing funny has happened. The Ent Quickbeam often laughs for no apparent reason: "He laughed if the sun came out from behind a cloud, he laughed if they came upon a stream or spring; then he stooped and splashed his head and feet with water; he laughed sometimes at some sound or whisper in the trees" (471). Robinson does not see the point of this laughter, because it does not follow a joke. Yet laughing at something funny is only one aspect or cause of laughter. Quickbeam and Treebeard laugh with delight, a delight in the living world around them.

The characters' spirits may be affected by their natural surroundings, but nature also takes on the characteristics of the people that dwell in it. Near Mordor, Frodo says: "I don't like anything here at all," "step or stone, breath or bone. Earth air and water all seem accursed" (696). The land itself can be gloomy, accursed, or twisted, yet this only reflects the character of those that live upon it.

9. Joy in the Transcendent

"Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt" - Longinus

Tolkien writes in his letters that "even in age I think we are only really moved by what is at least in some point or aspect above us, above our measure" (298). In a story this could be what is outside the character's experience, but also seems to be something outside the normal experiences of their world. In *The Silmarillion*, Iluvatar "willed that

the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world” (41). Martindale quotes C.S. Lewis, who says that “witches may evoke dread if really believed in, but they cannot then evoke something beyond and bigger than themselves, that *nameless* dread we all feel. Such feelings cannot, by definition, attach to images of the known” (244). The greatest joys might come the same way, through something other than the known and familiar, something that escapes the boundaries of what we know and believe. Longinus, in his essay “On the Sublime,” writes that “nature has implanted in our souls an unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we” (113).

This joy in the transcendent is perhaps one of the strongest forms of joy that the characters experience, yet also the hardest to describe or analyze. It might be different to each person, and ultimately impossible to explain. When I read a moment in a story that touches me in a particular way, it feels to me as if I am on a swing. It is a childish comparison, perhaps, but it feels like the moment when your swing flies as high as it can go, right before it starts to drop back down again, and your heart feels as though it will leave you and continue soaring past you into the sky.

Sometimes it strikes me when I read a triumphant battle scene, or even a simple description of a candle or a spider web, sometimes at a moment of eucatastrophe, and at others at the last sentence of the book. I can read the same passage over again and not experience the same feeling, or find it in places that I have read thousands of times before. In *The Lord of the Rings* the characters experience it in the same way, as something sudden and unlooked for, like the crowing of the cock at dawn, a sudden view

of the landscape, the flowers that deck the broken head of the king, or the starlight in the depths of Mordor.

It seems as though the most powerful moments that Tolkien's characters experience are not always related simply to joy alone, but to something that goes beyond joy and beyond sorrow. One of the most beautiful moments in the story is when Frodo and Sam have finished their quest and listen to the minstrel of Gondor tell their tale: "all the host laughed and wept," and he sang "until their hearts, wounded with sweet words, overflowed, and their joy was like swords, and they passed in thought out to regions where pain and delight flow together and tears are the very wine of blessedness" (933). There is both joy and sorrow in this description of the song, and both combined together are more powerful than either joy or sorrow alone. Throughout the story sorrow and joy are combined, as are hope and despair, to create a feeling that seems to go beyond either. Sometimes the feeling is found through song and music, at others through nature, longing, hope, or eucatastrophe.

PART TWO: THEORIES OF JOY

These types of joy each individually explain something about Tolkien's classes of joy, but collectively they can be seen as broader theories. Some of these theories relate more to one type of joy than another, and others refer to joy in a rather general sense.

Joy as Health

Cheerfulness is the very flower of health. - Proverb

One idea that can be abstracted is that just as nature can affect the spirit as well as the body, joy affects physical well-being as well as spiritual. Gimli says that "My legs must forget the miles. They would be more willing, if my heart were less heavy" (418). Later, he says "give me a row of orc-necks and room to swing and all my weariness will fall from me!" (520). The story also makes it clear that joy can heal the characters. When Eowyn and Merry lie near death after attacking the ring wraith, Aragorn uses a healing plant and "straightway a living freshness filled the room, as if the air awoke and tingled, sparkling with joy" and "at once all heart were lightened" (847). The plant may have medicinal qualities, but its main essence is bound up in the joy and lightness in the characters' hearts.

Even after Aragorn heals Eowyn's body with the plant, he is not sure that she shall live: "to what she will awake: hope, or forgetfulness, or despair, I do not know. And if to despair, then she will die" (849). Hope is necessary to her cure. When she does awake, she herself says that she may have come back to "health, 'but to hope? I do not know'" (850). Merry, on the other hand, is cured with greater ease. Gandalf says that "these evils can be amended, so strong and gay a spirit is in him" (851). It is his joy that saves him, and Eowyn's despair that puts her healing in doubt. Yet when Merry starts to forget his joy, the wound returns: "As if recalled by his mood of despair, the pain in his arm returned, and he felt weak and old, and the sunlight seemed thin" (865).

Placement of Joy

Joy is not in things, it is in us. - Richard Wagner

Though joy can affect the characters physically, it is not located in any particular part of the body. Tolkien writes that the characters' "spirits" were lifted by joy. By contrast, gladness does seem to be located mostly in one particular area: the heart. Legolas says that his "heart would be glad if I were beneath the eaves of that wood, and it were springtime!" (326). Aragorn tells Frodo that his "heart is glad to know that you have such a coat" (327). Joy knows no such bounds in the way characters experience it, but can permeate all levels of their being. Each character's own joy also affects the other characters. It might start out as personal, but then spreads outwards. That is why the characters can share joys, and what allows Frodo to continue with Sam's hope even after he lost his own.

C.S. Lewis believes that there is no joy in the actual objects that arouse those feelings, only in our minds. He says that it is not enough to simply admire a garden; we must also reflect on the feelings that it inspired in us. Tolkien shares this view to an extent. There is nothing evil or good in a landscape except what humans bring to it. He says that magic is not inherently good or evil, but it is the way of men to twist anything to fit their own desires.

Contrast of Joy

The nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy – Yeats

Hobbits find joy in comfort and food, but they “were, perhaps, so unwearingly fond of good things not the least because they could, when put to it, do without them” (5). They are only so comfortable because they do not need the comfort. Joy apparently needs the contrast to sorrow in order for us to know what it is. In his letters, Tolkien writes that “we were born in a dark age out of due time (for us). But there is this comfort: otherwise we should not *know*, or so much love, what we do love. I imagine that the fish out of water is the only fish to have an inkling of water” (64). The definition that contrast creates is shown in many of the descriptions in the story: Aragorn’s “eyes gleamed like stars that shine the brighter as the night deepens” (927). The brightness of the stars would not stand out without the darkness of the night.

Though they can be contrasted, sorrow and joy are also not so different from each other. Tolkien often does not cleanly distinguish between sorrow and joy. He writes of

“both sorrow and joy as sharp as swords” (“On Fairy Stories”) and “with an expression on his face half of fear and half of astonished joy” (80). Sam describes the elves as “so old and young, and so gay and sad, as it were” (85). Tolkien does not neatly divide “sorrow and joy,” “gay and sad,” and fear and hope. The joy of eucatastrophe is partly created through its ties to complete despair and fear, so that even sorrow can be poignant and beautiful.

Danger of Joy

Another important principle that arises from the story is that joy itself can be dangerous. If characters become lost in joy, then they might forget their purpose. Legolas says that they have not spoken of Gandalf’s death because “we almost forgot our grief for a time, as we walked in gladness on the fair paths of Lórien” (368). It is a good thing to forget grief for a while, but it must be remembered again. Startzman agrees that the characters cannot stay in Lórien: “The heart’s desire is real, light and joy are possible, but one achieves them only by pursuing the task at hand” (11). Gimli says that “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” (369).

Augustine also writes of the danger of joy in “On Christian Doctrine”: if we “wish to enjoy those things which should be used, our course will be impeded” (141). This will keep us from obtaining what we should enjoy, “shackled by an inferior love” (141). This is the problem that faces Gimli. The course of his quest would be deterred if he focused

only on his joy of the moment. Yet this does not mean that he should guard his heart against his joy, as Augustine suggests, that he should not love what will be lost, only that he should not let his joy influence his progress. It is the joy, after all, that allows the fellowship to progress; the memory of the Shire, the joy of Bombadil and Goldberry, the inspiration of Lothlórien and the sudden brilliance of the stars.

Yet though joy is what allows the characters to continue their journey, they must let it inspire them to hope without getting lost in it. Even relatively early in the story, we see a “bright morning” described “from Frodo’s mind” as “treacherously bright.” Yet in that instance, he does not let the brightness of the morning banish the “fear of pursuit” (84). Later on, however, when he thinks that he has escaped Shelob, he does allow his joy to blind him to his danger. “Wild joy at their escape from the very mouth of despair suddenly filled all his mind” (706), and although he knows he is still in dangerous territory, “yet it seemed to Frodo that he looked upon a morning of sudden hope.” Sam, in contrast, keeps his wariness: “as glad as he was to be free, he was uneasy, and as he ran, he kept glancing back” (707). He does not allow excitement and hope to cloud his mind, and thus is more prepared than Frodo when Shelob returns.

The characters need to keep, to some degree, their fear, grief, and pain, because those emotions motivate them to complete their tasks. They cannot live too much in the brightness of the moment, but must anticipate future dangers and sorrows, whether it is pursuit behind them or danger ahead. Yet they also cannot look too far ahead, and to a degree must live moment by moment. Galadriel tells the travelers not to “trouble your hearts overmuch with thought of the road tonight” (359). She also tells them that some

visions of the future “never come to be, unless those that behold the visions turn aside from their path to prevent them” (354). Saruman turns to the Dark Lord precisely because he looked too far into the future and took its despair as a certainty. Denethor also looks too far, and this leads him into hopelessness.

Tom Shippey writes that the Hobbits’ image of courage is “centered, unexpectedly, on laughter, cheerfulness, an attitude which far from speculating about its chances on Doomsday refuses ever to look into the future at all” (151). When in Mordor, Frodo thinks that “the terrors of the land beyond, and the deed to be done there, seemed remote, too far off yet to trouble him.” Yet he does not refuse to “ever look into the future,” as Shippey describes it, only to look at it a bit at a time. He ignores the terror of the land of Mordor to concentrate on “getting through or over this impenetrable wall and guard” (695). If he thought of the entire journey, and not just stages of it, it would be all too easy to fall into hopelessness. Shippey also writes that “those who, like Sam and Pippin, felt from the start that the whole thing was going to be a disaster remain immune, even cheerful, when their expectations are confirmed” (153). He cites the example of Pippin, who when close to death simply feels lighthearted, as if all his fears and doubts were leaving him, and Sam, who remains cheerful as Mount Doom crumbles around him. This seems to contradict what Shippey says earlier, that the Hobbits never look into the future. Instead, he now says, they know the future, but just ignore it.

I agree that the Hobbits’ cheerfulness even in the very midst of despair is remarkable, but not because they are “cheerful” when their “expectations are confirmed.” Who would be happy to know that they were right that they would die, or that the world

is falling apart? Instead, I feel that Sam and Pippin are simply happy to have done the best that they could, no matter if they are about to die, and are perhaps relieved to have finished the task they set out for. What matters is that they have tried to the limits of their abilities, not whether they fail or succeed. Even if they looked far enough into the future, as Frodo does, to realize that they will not survive, I think that they live enough from moment to moment to maintain their hope until the end. For Tolkien's characters, it is dangerous to look too far back into the past as well as to look too far into the future. When Gandalf dies, "they had not yet the heart to look further back" (348). Their "grief was still too near, a matter for tears and not yet for songs" (350). The fellowship cannot yet sing about their grief, but neither should they dwell too strongly in it.

Joy After Darkness: Snowflakes from Fire

Denethor and Saruman look too much into what will be, but in a sense also do not look far enough. In Tolkien's world, darkness almost always creates something wonderful in the end. Saruman's treachery ends up helping the fellowship. Gandalf says that "the enemy has failed – so far. Thanks to Saruman" (468). Later, he says that "a traitor may betray himself and do good that he does not intend" (797). It is not just good that the traitor does not mean to occur, but good that cannot but occur even through evil or darkness. W.H. Auden writes in "The Quest Hero" that one of Tolkien's most "impressive achievements is that he convinces the reader that the mistakes which Sauron makes to his undoing are the kind of mistakes which Evil, however powerful, cannot help making" (57).

Tolkien writes in his letters that a divine punishment is also a gift, because “the supreme inventiveness of the Creator will make ‘punishments’ (that is changes of design) produce a good not otherwise to be attained” (286). He also says that humans know, directly from experience, “that evil labors with vast power and perpetual success – in vain; preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in” (76). In *The Silmarillion*, the evil Melkor creates a “bitter cold immoderate” and “fire without restraint.” Yet these evil powers end up creating something lovely. “Truly, Water is become fairer now than my heart imagined, neither had my secret thought conceived the snowflake, nor in all my music was contained the falling of the rain” (19). The theme of evil design creating good is repeated throughout *The Lord of the Rings*: “Strange and wonderful I thought it that the designs of Mordor should be overthrown by such wraiths of fear and darkness. With its own weapons was it worsted!” (858) and “even in this gloom hope gleams again. Our Enemy’s devices oft serve us in his despite. The accursed darkness itself has been a cloak to us” (816).

The actions of the greater agents of darkness in the story, such as Melkor and Saruman, end up turning to the good, but this is seen even in smaller forms. By coveting the ring so desperately and attacking Frodo, Gollum actually sends the ring into the fires of Mount Doom, just when Frodo’s own will has collapsed. This idea is even seen in nature: the flowers *simbelmyne* “blossom in all the seasons of the year and grow where dead men rest” (496). Frodo and Sam find a statue of an ancient king that has been desecrated and beheaded by Orcs, but “A trailing plant with white flowers like small stars

had bound itself across the brows as if in reverence for the fallen king.” “They cannot conquer forever!” Frodo exclaims. Flowers bloom even in the remains of evil.

Though joy and brightness always return after evil, they also never last continuously, nor are they all powerful. After Frodo sees the return of the king’s crown, “suddenly the brief glimpse was gone. The sun dipped and vanished, and as if at the shuttering of a lamp, black night fell” (687). Later, Aragorn even says that “Hither shall the flowers of *simbelmyne* come never unto world’s end” (770). There are places where even flowers shall never grow, because, as Gandalf says, “the evil of Sauron cannot be wholly cured, nor made as if it had not been” (537).

Gimli remarks to Legolas that “It is ever so with the things that Men begin: there is a frost in Spring, or a blight in Summer, and they fail of their promise.” Legolas replies: “Yet seldom do they fail of their seed . . . and that will lie in the dust and rot to spring up again in times and places unlooked-for. The deeds of Men will outlast us, Gimli” (855). Once again, the characters speak of small bits of seemingly defeated goodness growing again, like the flowers, in unexpected places. Yet Tolkien does not allow this message to remain completely hopeful. Gimli replies to Legolas by saying that these deeds might “yet come to naught in the end but might-have-beens, I guess.” Legolas can only answer “to that the Elves know not the answer” (855).

Laughter

Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face. - Victor Hugo

Joy can have power, however, even if it is simply power over the characters' emotions. One type of power in joy is the power of laughter. When Saruman tries to persuade Gandalf and those with him to join his side with his beautiful, destructive voice, everyone present is swayed by its power. But "then Gandalf laughed: the fantasy vanished like a puff of smoke" (586). Once again, Robinson is confused by this laugh. He says that if "Gandalf laughs it is pure stage-effect, like snapping his fingers: a politician's laugh." Robinson sees Gandalf's laugh as pointless, accomplishing nothing because he has already won.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes *laugh* as "to have the emotion (of mirth, amusement, scorn) which is expressed through laughing." Throughout the different quotes and definitions, mirth, amusement, and scorn seem to be the only characteristics of a laugh. Many writers follow this basic definition. Sir Philip Sidney, in "An Apology for Poetry," says that "though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight, as though delight should be the cause of laughter" (204). To Sidney, delight is full of joy, while laughter is only a "scornful tickling" (204). We can be moved to delight by that which is beautiful, fair, or happy, but only laugh at the "deformed," "mischances," and sin. This basic definition of laughter as an expression of scorn is expanded in Tolkien's world. The characters laugh for varied reasons, and not just for expression of mirth and amusement. Treebeard, Goldberry, and Tom Bombadil continually laugh simply for delight.

Robinson does not see a reason for the laughs in the story because he thinks that laughs can only refer to its denotative meaning: mirth or scorn. This is why Saruman's wild laugh has more power for him than Gandalf's "politician's laugh," because Saruman's laugh has the purpose of derision and scorn, while Gandalf's is apparently empty. Yet it is the laughter that allows Gandalf to win, the ability to stare in the face of evil and dismiss it as unimportant. Robinson sees Gandalf's laughter as a stage effect because he does not see that even if there is no reason for a laugh, the laugh could be a reason in and of itself.

When Frodo gives Tom Bombadil the ring, Tom puts it against his eye and laughs. Then he puts on the ring, and the Hobbits find that it has no effect on him. His ability to laugh at the ring is what allows him to deny its power. Eomer also laughs when he faces battle, and it is the act of laughing "at despair" that gives him the strength to "lift his sword and defy" the enemy (829). In Tolkien's world, laughter does express the joy in humor, but it also expresses relief, encouragement, hope, comfort, and defiance.

Inappropriate Laughter

There is a kind of happiness and wonder that makes you serious. It is too good to waste on jokes. – C.S. Lewis

Though laughter holds power, there are times when laughter is inappropriate. Robinson says that not only does Tolkien fail to create any humor in his world, but he also crushes any humor that starts to show itself. He cites the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring*; Gandalf tells Frodo that the Ring left Gollum, and Frodo asks

“What, just in time to meet Bilbo?” “Wouldn’t an Orc have suited it better?” Gandalf replies that “it is no laughing matter. Not for you” (54). There are other instances that Robinson does not mention: when Merry says that after finding Saruman’s supply of pipe-weed they “feel less ill-disposed towards Saruman”; Gandalf adds to the end of his reply “And do not jest! This is not the time for it” (563). A bit later Pippin jestingly asks what danger the captured Saruman could pose: “Will he shoot at us, and pour fire out of the windows; or can he put a spell on us from a distance?” Gandalf says that “the last is most likely, if you ride to his door with a light heart” (563).

Laughter has power, but must be held in check by knowledge of the danger it faces. It would be dangerous to face Saruman and Mordor without taking seriously the threat they pose. The laughter that Gandalf quenches is the ridiculing, cynical kind that is usually used by the evil characters. Even Merry ends up saying that it “is the way of my people to use light words at such times and say less than they mean. We fear to say too much. It robs us of the right words when a jest is out of place” (852). Aragorn also says that “often I must put mirth aside” (227).

Robinson thinks that all jokes are good because they question hierarchy and traditional structures but he fails to distinguish between different kinds of laughs that might have different effects. Not every laugh in *The Lord of the Rings* accomplishes the same purpose. Sometimes it seems to be for reassurance, as when Gimli’s heart would have failed if Legolas had not laughed. At other times, it is for defiance, as when Eowyn, disguised as Dernhelm, faces the Ring Wraith. This seems strange even to Merry at first: “Facing the wraith: Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that

Dernhelm laughed” (823). Laughter holds power over evil, if it also keeps the knowledge of what it faces. There is a long tradition of laughing at danger in fairy tales, at turning away temptation, fear, despair or malice with confidence, defiance, and joy.

Evil Laughter

The heroic characters in the Fellowship laugh for many different reasons, but they are not the only ones who express themselves through laughter. The evil characters laugh as well: Saruman laughs from his tower at Isengard while the Ents are being burned, the Orcs laugh as they torment Merry and Pippin, and even miserable Gollum laughs on occasion. Gandalf says that if they fail, the “laughter of Mordor will be our only reward” (500). Is this laughter qualitatively the same as when Gandalf laughs at Pippin, or Frodo laughs for joy?

When Gandalf confronts Saruman in his tower, Saruman’s “face grew livid, twisted with rage, and a red light was kindled in his eyes. He laughed wildly” (569). This scene, and that where he laughs at the burning Ents, seems vastly different from Gandalf’s laugh that destroys the power of Saruman’s words. It expresses the third item in *the Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of a laugh: scorn. The evil characters do not laugh for joy, comfort, relief, or inspiration, but for scorn and anger. Gollum occasionally laughs for joy or delight, but only when his Sméagol personality gains a momentary predominance. Saruman laughs to gloat, mock, or express his rage, and “the laughter of Mordor” seems to express similar ideas rather than any feelings of joy.

We do not always distinguish between happiness and joy, but they seem to be rather different in Tolkien's descriptions. *The Oxford English Dictionary* describes *happy* as "having a feeling of great pleasure or content of mind, arising from satisfaction with one's circumstances or condition." Even though this is a "great pleasure," it seems weak compared to the definition of *joy*: "A vivid emotion of pleasure arising from a sense of well-being or satisfaction; the feeling or state of being highly pleased or delighted; exultation of the spirit; gladness, delight." *Happy* originally meant "having good 'hap' or fortune; luck, fortunate, favored by lot, position, or other external circumstance." It was related to external circumstances more than an "exultation of the spirit" as joy was. Even though the meaning of *happy* has changed to mean more than just lucky, it still carries the connotations of the original meaning. The dark characters may be capable of happiness, such as comfort, satisfaction, pride, glee, and triumph, but they do not seem to be capable of joy.

Knowledge of Joy: Are the Happy Innocent?

"Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know." - Ernest Hemingway

Light knows the darkness, but darkness does not know the light. The good characters can guess what the enemy will do. Gandalf says that the Enemy "does not yet perceive our purpose clearly. He supposes that we were all going to Minas Tirith; for that is what he would himself have done in our place" (485). This is the Enemy's greatest weakness; his lack of imagination. Sauron assumes that everyone is like him. He holds vast power but is defeated because he cannot imagine that anyone would actually destroy

the ring instead of using it for power. Sauron cannot guess that the fellowship would think of destroying the ring, but Gandalf can predict the fact that Sauron will not guess it. He has more of an insight into the mind of darkness than the darkness could have of him. This idea, that the light can understand the darkness, goes against the idea that seems to be common in our society: in order to be happy a person must be naïve or innocent, and with knowledge comes a certain distant cynicism. We also tend to link innocence and goodness with childishness, and experience, and with it all the bad and ugly things that must follow, with adulthood. Yet Tolkien believes that growing older is “not necessarily allied to growing wicked.” “Children are meant to grow up [...] not to lose innocence and wonder, but to proceed on the appointed journey: that journey upon which it is certainly not better to travel hopefully than to arrive, though we must travel hopefully if we are to arrive” (“On Fairy Stories” 65).

The idea that happiness is related to innocence and innocence to foolishness, is surprisingly pervasive in our world, if somewhat inconspicuous. The words themselves are intertwined. *Silly* originally meant *happy*. The word’s sense development moved from blessed and pious to innocent, harmless, pitiable, weak, and finally foolish. This change in meaning, though perhaps arbitrary, mirrors the thought process of our society. If you are happy then you must be innocent, if you are innocent you are harmless, weak, and ultimately silly. *The Lord of the Rings* shows a different view, that happiness and hope are, in some ways, more real than despair. Saruman and Denethor both despair because they learn too much and take the visions of the future they receive to be fact. Denethor says to Gandalf: “For thy hope is but ignorance” (835). Gandalf replies that “such

counsels will make the Enemy's victory certain indeed" (835), but Denethor merely laughs at Gandalf's reply.

Hope is not necessarily ignorance. Sometimes, ignoring what seems to be a certain outcome is the only way to avoid it. The Hobbits know that the future of their quest is bleak, yet refuse to dwell on it. Sam says that he "knew all the arguments of despair and would not listen to them" (919). It is better for him to ignore rational argument in order to keep going. Hope is a matter of faith, it has no "arguments." By purposefully disregarding the darkness of the world, by refusing to take it as fact, Sam can hope to conquer it. Eomer also says that the "reason of my waking mind tells me that great evil has befallen and we stand at the end of days. But my heart says nay; and all my limbs are light, and a hope and a joy are come to me that no reason can deny ... in this hour I do not believe that any darkness will endure!" (941). Once again, only by denying "reason" can he experience hope and joy. Tolkien wrote in his letters that "the greater part of the truth is always hidden, in regions out of the reach of cynicism" (336).

In some senses, the darkness is more unknown than the light. The Ring Wraiths are hidden by dark cloaks, and we never actually see Sauron. Saruman, though not dressed in darkness, wears a white that confuses the eye: "But whereas the light perceives the very heart of darkness, its own secret has yet to be discovered" (343).

A Progression of Joy

Though joy takes on an almost universal power in *The Lord of the Rings*, each race in Middle Earth finds joy in different things and to different degrees. Most of these

groups seem to feel a joy in and through nature. Yet a different aspect of nature affects each character differently. Sam remembers his gardens with fondness, while Legolas finds beauty in the strangeness of Mirkwood, which frightens the other characters. When the characters are reunited, Sam hears tales of all the wonders that they experienced; “glittering caves, and white towers, and golden halls, and battles, and tall ships sailing” (934). Yet Sam is only “bewildered” by all these marvels, and “amidst all these wonders he returned always to his astonishment at the size of Merry and Pippin” (934). The height of Merry and Pippin, though remarkable, should not be the most astonishing of all these experiences. Yet the change in stature is what amazes Sam most because it relates directly to his life and experiences in the Shire with Hobbits.

Merry says that “It is best to love first what you are fitted to love, I suppose: you must start somewhere and have some roots, and the soil of the Shire is deep. Still there are things deeper and higher; and not a gaffer could tend his garden in what he calls peace but for them” (852). Aragorn also says that “the tree grows best in the land of its sires” (952). Each race in the story grows best in their land, and loves best what they are “fitted to.” Yet this is just a start, not a limitation. There are things “deeper and higher” than what a person can find simply in their own land. Thus although Gimli starts out loving caves and Legolas loving trees, through their friendship they each learn to see the beauty in the things that the other loves. When Legolas returns from the Glittering Caves, he “would say only that Gimli alone could find words to speak of them,” “And never before has a Dwarf claimed victory over an Elf in a contest of words” (956). He is touched by their beauty, but they are still far enough outside his experience that he cannot

describe them, unlike Gimli, who gives an incredibly beautiful description of the caves earlier in the story.

The story itself appears to progress in joy. The characters experience more and more forms of it as they journey on their quest, things that they never could have found if they had stayed in their homes. Although they also come across greater evils, despairs, and troubles, these lead to even greater joys. When Frodo and Sam are in the heart of Mordor they are in a dark, bleak, terrible place, but because of that, they can experience the near impossible eucatastrophe of their triumph and rescue. Aragorn says that “If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be” (242). The Shire is tainted by Saruman’s presence, but it is not ruined. If anything, the Shire is rebuilt even stronger than before.

Metaphors of Joy

Tolkien creates several different metaphors for joy in *The Lord of the Rings*. One of these metaphors is expressed through a connection between water and joy. The delight of the Ents is largely connected to water. They laugh in rain or puddles, and survive on “Ent water.” Perhaps such great joy can be found in the water of Middle Earth because in Tolkien’s myth it carries a bit of the original melody of Eru that created the world: “in water there lives yet the echo of the music of the Ainur more than in any substance else that is in this Earth” (*Silmarillion* 19). Eugene Startzman, in “Goldberry and Galadriel: the Quality of Joy,” argues that throughout the story joy is presented in terms of water. He cites a few examples; for instance, “in all houses of the city men sang for the joy that

welled up in their hearts from what source they could not tell” and Goldberry’s strong connection to water and joy. Metaphors of joy as water are seen throughout the story. When Gandalf laughs, the sound is “like water in a parched land” (931). Sam cries in response, but his tears are like a “sweet rain” that “will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer,” and soon his own “laughter welled up” (931). If joy is like water, then it only makes sense that tears are often described as cleansing or overflowing joy. There are “torrents of laughter,” and laughter “wells” and “springs.”

There are many examples of joy being connected to water in *The Lord of the Rings*, yet there are also instances of joy described as a light. Hope “gleams,” laughter “sparkles,” and joy “shines.” Starlight and sunlight are constant signals of hope above the shadows of darkness. It seems that these are the two most consistent metaphors that Tolkien uses to describe joy; water and light. These metaphors are separate, joy as water and joy as light, but they are often combined in *The Lord of the Rings*. When Tolkien describes the two trees of Valinor, Telperion and Laurelin, he combines metaphors of both water and light: from Telperion, a “dew of silver light was ever falling,” and from Laurelin “spilled a golden rain upon the ground” (39). The light that the trees give is described in terms similar to water: “the light that was spilled from the trees endured long, ere it was taken up into the airs or sank down into the earth; and the dews of Telperion and the rain that fell from Laurelin Varda hoarded in great vats like shining lakes, that were to all the Valar as wells of water and of light” (39).

In the Elves there is also a combination of water and light. They “hearken still to the voices of the Sea, and yet know not for what they listen” (19). Legolas speaks of his

longing for the sea in *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet Elves also have a strong connection to light, starlight in particular. When they first appeared on earth, their “eyes beheld first of all things the stars of heaven” (48). Yet “the first sound that was heard by the elves was the sound of water flowing, and the sound of water falling over stone” (49). Once again, both water and light are combined and given a place of importance as the first sight and sound the elves experience: “Long they dwelt in their first home by the water under stars” (49). Metaphors of water and light are also combined in the description of Frodo’s mithril coat. The mithril “glittered like stars” but also makes a sound “like the tinkle of rain on a pool” (327).

The combination of the metaphors of water and light is also seen in the frequent references in the story to reflections. The reflections are often of light upon water. The phial that Galadriel gives to Frodo is the light of “Eärendil’s star, set amidst the waters” of her fountain. This reflection of light on water is almost a double reflection, as even the light of the stars was created from water: “Varda “took the silver dew from the vats of Telperion, and therewith she made new stars and brighter” (48).

Metaphors of Evil

If joy is described in terms of light and water, it seems that by contrast evil is often described as a fire and shadow. The spirits that serve Melkor, known as the Balrogs in *The Lord of the Rings*, are described in *The Silmarillion* as beings whose “hearts were of fire,” but “were cloaked in darkness” (47). Melkor’s change to evil is described as a descent “through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness” (31).

Theoden's death is described as an opposite journey: "King Theoden arose and rode through the Shadow to the fire" (954). Sauron, like Melkor, cloaks himself in shadow and darkness, but has at the same time a great burning eye of fire. Petty writes that evil is "most frequently depicted in imagery that relies on two loaded words: *shadow* and *flame*. On the surface, these two words would seem to represent opposing elements – darkness and light" (99). As Petty points out, the ideas of fire and shadow do seem to oppose each other, though they are connected throughout the story. Petty never quite explains why it is only on the "surface" that they are opposed, but this is because she looks only at the metaphors of evil and darkness. If we simply contrast shadow and flame, they appear to be opposites. But those two terms can be set against the elements used to describe joy: fire against water, and shadow against light.

Forces of Joy and Evil

"Illusory joy is often worth more than genuine sorrow." - Rene Descartes

Shadow is an interesting word to apply to the forces of evil. *Shadow* makes evil seem as though it is not entirely real. In *The Silmarillion* Tolkien writes that "those who listened to" Olorin "awoke from despair and put away the imaginations of darkness" (31). Despair is something that a person can wake *from*, as opposed to joy or hope, which the characters awaken *to* throughout the story. This word-choice makes despair seem false, something that temporarily clouds a mind like a nightmare, but that ultimately is not real, as does the phrase "the imaginations of darkness."

When the two main evil characters die, Sauron and Saruman, their deaths are described in similar terms. For Sauron “there rose a huge shape of a shadow” which “stretched out towards them a vast threatening hand, terrible but impotent; for even as it leaned over them, a great wind took it, and it was all blown away, and passed” (928). For Saruman “a grey mist gathered, and rising slowly to a great height like smoke from a fire,” “but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing” (997). Their evil is nothing but a shadowy mist after their deaths, one that is simply blown away. Edmund Wilson writes that this robs the terrors of any “concrete reality,” because they disappear just by “pushing them or puffing them away” (131). Yet this is not a fault, as Wilson says, in Tolkien’s writing, not because of an “impotence of the imagination” (131). Tolkien shows his evil as shadowy perhaps because he wishes to portray it as unreal, because he wants to rob it of “concrete” reality.

In Tom Bombadil’s house, Frodo hears a “song that seemed to come like a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain, and growing stronger to turn the veil all to glass and silver, until at last it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise” (132). When Frodo is about to depart for the Grey Havens at the conclusion of *The Lord of the Rings*, he sees the same thing again: “the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise” (1007). This vision creates the image that all the sorrows that he has experienced in the world of Middle Earth are nothing but a curtain or a veil that can be pulled back, revealing something true and lovely.

Shadow is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “comparative darkness, esp. that caused by interception of light; a tract of partial darkness produced by a body intercepting the direct rays of the sun or other luminary.” A shadow is not a creative force of darkness so much as an interference with light. Certain aspects of this view can be compared to medieval cosmological theory. Writers such as Dante, Milton, and Isidore saw the cosmos as filled with light. As C.S. Lewis describes it, there is no “abyss of darkness”; the sun illuminates all, even the stars. Night is “merely the conical shadow cast by our Earth” (*The Discarded Image* 112). Beyond Earth’s shadow there is no night at all, only light. This is repeatedly echoed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Even when the characters are in the heart of despair, and everything seems dark, small reminders show how shadowy the darkness really is. When Eomer asks the time, Théoden answers “Who knows?” “All is night now.” Yet the Wild Man, Ghan, replies that “It is all dark, but it is not all night ... When Sun comes we feel her, even when she is hidden. Already she climbs over East-mountains. It is the opening of day in the sky-fields” (815). Even if the sky is dark and the sun is hidden, it rises and brings the day, and he can still feel its light even if it is unseen. The darkness has not destroyed the light, merely obscured it.

Similarly, when the battle in Gondor looks hopeless, a rooster crows “shrill and clear,” “recking nothing of wizardry or war, welcoming only the morning that in the sky far above the shadows of death was coming with the dawn.” The “shadows of death” may be all that the characters can see, but far above them the rising of the sun can still be felt by the rooster. Startzman notes that Tolkien’s choice of words is important. Even at the final scene of triumph, the sun “doesn’t just emerge from behind the clouds: it is

‘unveiled’” (12). This shows that the “Sun and Stars are always there behind the Darkness; they are permanent and have their ultimate origin in the Flame Imperishable of Iluvatar” (11).

Joy is occasionally described as a force, unlike evil or despair. In *The Silmarillion* Middle Earth is in part created through joy and love. Tolkien describes the Valar as the ones who “had ‘fallen in love’ with the vision,” and thus played “the most ‘sub-creative’ part in the music” (*Letters* 284). Each Vala’s special provinces are not described so much as their “powers,” as they would be in many fantasy tales, but as their “joys”: in *The Silmarillion* Tolkien writes of Varda that “in light is her power and her joy,” Manwë’s “delight is in the winds and the clouds,” and Yavanna is “the lover of all things that grow in the earth” (27). Their powers are attributed to their particular loves and joys, not to their strengths or to what falls under their control.

Yet even the darkness is occasionally described as an actual force instead of a shadow. In *The Silmarillion*, after Ungoliant sucks the light from the Trees of Valinor, “the Darkness that followed was more than a loss of light. In that hour it was made a Darkness that seemed not a lack but a thing with a being of its own: for it was indeed made by malice out of Light” (76). Yet the state of this darkness is still ambiguous, because it only “seemed” to have a being of its own, while still made “out of Light.” In the world of Middle Earth, darkness is often described as a twisting or perversion of light, rather than a force in itself. The Orcs are not created evil, but are originally twisted from the Elves. “The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make real new things of its own.” The Shadow did not create the lives of the Orcs, only “ruined them and twisted

them.” Tolkien also writes that Sauron was “not ‘evil’ in origin. He was a ‘spirit’ corrupted by the Prime Dark Lord” Morgoth (*Letters* 190). Tolkien says that he does “not deal in Absolute Evil.” He does not “think there is such a thing,” because no “‘rational being’ is wholly evil.” Satan and Morgoth are “fallen” but not originally evil. (*Letters* 243). This does not mean that evil holds no power, only that the origin of the world is in light, in the “flame eternal” of Illuvatar, and every evil in the world, though a twisting of the good, remains part of the whole.

PART THREE: REFLECTIONS OF JOY TO THE READER

These broader ideas on the nature of joy express what could be called Tolkien's beliefs on joy, as seen in the plot, characters, and descriptions in the secondary world, but they can be applied to this world as well. These story-based joys also create joy for the reader in our own world; Tolkien's world reflects back to ours, and creates joy for us. As he explains in "On Fairy Stories," such stories touch us in a variety of ways: through the nature of fantasy, such as language, freedom from fact, escape and consolation, recovery, and eucatastrophe. If joy in Middle Earth is compared to water, then this water not only delights us with its otherworldly beauty but reflects our image back to us as well.

Joy Removed

Manlove writes that the scene where Éomer sees the rescuing fleet is overdone. Tolkien's description of joy is "an obstruction to the reader's response. Tolkien gets so in the way with these excited cries that he becomes the sole audience of what he describes" (148). I disagree; the reader could possibly take as much joy in the descriptions if Tolkien did not supply these "excited cries." As the characters all experience various kinds of joy,

whether it be from food, relief, beauty, or companionship, the reader also experiences the same joy to varying degrees. The reader's sense of joy comes both directly through the action and vicariously through the character's sense of joy or wonder. We see the rescuing fleet through Éomer's point of view: "and then wonder took him, and a great joy; and he cast his sword up in the sunlight and sang as he caught it" (829). When Tolkien describes the beauty of Lothlórien, it is mostly from the point of view of the characters. We see Lothlórien from Aragorn's perspective and from Frodo's while he is "lost in wonder."

Seeing things from the character's perspective allows the reader to see joy and wonder in things that to us might be familiar. Sam is fascinated by the "Oliphants," which are not miraculous to readers, being simply rather large elephants. The reader's joy comes from Sam's excitement. Sometimes, the reader does not even "see" something directly at all. When Sam peers into the marshes, we do not see what he is looking at, only his reaction: "'There are dead things, dead faces in the water,' he said with horror. 'dead faces!'" This allows access to the most important part of the description, the emotions of the characters, instead of just the picture of the scene.

Tolkien not only shows things familiar to our world as new through the characters' wonder, but also keeps new things in the story from becoming too ordinary. Théoden says "the days are fated to be filled with marvels," because "here before my eyes stand yet another folk of legend" (544). The Hobbits are the ones staring wonderingly most of the time, and yet even they are a strange marvel to some of the other characters. Pippin, on the other hand, says of Théoden "so this is the king of Rohan. A

fine old fellow. Very polite” (545). This view has the opposite effect of Théoden’s. Pippin takes something marvelous, a king, and describes it in terms that are far more fitting to someone in our world. His treatment of Théoden, if anything, only makes him seem more wondrous, because it shocks the reader into seeing how different Théoden really is from anyone in our experiences.

Seeing the story from the view of the characters helps to give us distance from the story, which forces us to see normal things in new ways. In a way, fantasy needs a sense of distance. Tolkien says that *The Lord of the Rings* “emerged as a frameless picture,” a “brief episode in History” “surrounded by the glimmer of limitless extensions” (*Letters* 412). Part of the joy of the story is “due to the glimpses of a large history in the background: an attraction like that of viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist. To go there is to destroy the magic, unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed” (*Letters* 333). The reader does not know everything about the world of Middle Earth, and does not need to. The threads of the story that can only be seen in glimpses let our imaginations roam beyond the bounds of the written tale. This sense of distance, of turning ordinary things to the extraordinary, does not in fact distance us from the story, but draws us closer to it by making it new to us. The very act of estrangement gives the reader a clearer vision. Tolkien called this “Recovery.”

Joy in Language

Raffel says that “descriptions strain Tolkien’s power” (30). But little detail lets the imagination roam further, gives the impression that some things are too wondrous to describe. In a realistic novel new, original descriptions can help to estrange the reader. In fantasy, the reader is already estranged from the world they know, and clichés and simple descriptions keep the world from turning too strange and unfamiliar. It lets us see the world, the adventures, without losing focus in the words. The magic of the words are in the entire spell they create, not in a single line. Tolkien writes that Faerie “cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible” (“On Fairy Stories” 42).

Though the world of faery cannot be described simply by words, the words within the secondary world are shown to have great power. Tolkien’s own deep knowledge and love of language reveals itself throughout the story. The songs and stories that the characters experience are described as “spells” and “enchantments.” Tolkien wrote that “incantations might indeed be said to be only another view of adjectives” (“On Fairy Stories” 50).

Joy in Metafantasy

The reader’s joy also comes from things outside the main story. If words are shown as magical and joyful, then the reader can take an even greater joy in reading the story itself. When characters describe the spell that words create over them, then this

magic is also bestowed upon the very words of the story. We are no longer just reading a “book,” but caught in a spell.

Tolkien believes that a reader of fantasy is in an enchanted state: “To the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires, and when it is successful of all human forms of human art most nearly approaches” (“On Fairy Stories” 71). Many other writers have similar thoughts. Longinus writes that the effect of “elevated language” upon an audience “is not persuasion but transport” (95). Like Tolkien, he sees writing as a “spell” thrown over the reader. This spell means that readers do not suspend belief, because they do not have to: they believe in the secondary world of the fairy tale. As soon as belief needs to be suspended, then the spell is already broken, and the reader is thrown back to the primary world. This is why Tolkien says that “One thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself” (43). The magic in a fairy tale or fantasy must always be presented as true, as must the story itself. Tolkien says that fairy stories “cannot tolerate any frame or machinery suggesting that the whole story in which they occur is a fragment or illusion” (“On Fairy Stories” 45).

Thus Tolkien argues that fantasy stories that use the frame of a dream to explain their wonders are not really fantasy. If a writer tells that his story was only a dream, he destroys the “primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder” (45). The realization of a frame destroys the power of the picture.

This is why postmodern metafiction, to me, breaks the spell of the story and confines me to my world. By showing the story as a creation, it forces a suspension of

disbelief. I know that it is only a tale, and can still take from it all the wonder and marvels that it has to offer. Yet I cannot believe it, cannot see the language, the work, the world itself as an unbroken magic, as I can with metafantasy in an author like Tolkien. The metafantastical element, the part that reflects upon the nature of fantasy itself, does not distance the reader from the text as metafiction sometimes does, by showing that the text is only a creation, but brings the reader closer to the created fantasy world by showing that this creation itself can be magic, as can our own world.

Human Desires

Reading and finding joy in *The Lord of the Rings* also satisfies basic human desires. The largest benefit to me would be, as Tolkien says in “On Fairy Stories,” the “freedom from the domination of observed fact.” Tied to this, I think, is the satisfaction of a reader’s desire to “survey the depths of time and space” (44), only it is not necessarily our time and space that we are directly surveying. We survey our world by surveying different possible worlds. Otherwise, we would be caught only in the “observed fact” of this world and not be able to see anything beyond it.

Escape

Another desire is that for “Escape and Consolation.” This is what most critics of fantasy would see as a negative escape. Yet there can be joy in escape, and to take joy in it is not a cowardly crime. Kenneth McLeish writes that “to put it bluntly, we live in a nasty, dangerous, and brutal world, and dressing up in elven-cloaks, baking lembas, and

writing poems in Entish, though a commendable and delightful game, is a way of avoiding, not finding the truth to life” (102). Although Tolkien is, to him, “one of the finest writers of escapist fantasy in any language and of any time,” this is only “providing we never take it as any kind of answer to the world’s problems” (101). Yet I do not believe that escaping into fantasy is escaping out of our world. Reading a fantasy takes us away from our world at first, but always brings us back to it. Reading *The Lord of the Rings* creates joy for the reader in the primary world as well as in enjoyment of the secondary through “Recovery.” Recovery is a “re-gaining -- regaining of a clear view” (“On Fairy Stories” 74). In a sense, it is the glimpse of a further truth, although it ought to be stronger than a glimpse. It allows us to see familiar things in a new light. Reading about “Oliphants” made me re-view elephants. It allowed me to see them as something grand and strange, perhaps even distantly related to Sam’s Oliphants.

Tolkien says that “it was in fairy-stories that I first divined the potency of words, and the wonder of things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; trees and grass; house and fire; bread and wine.” Even simplicities are made “all the more luminous by their setting” (74). Simple, everyday, ordinary things stop being unnoticed and forgotten when they are set in Middle Earth. The fantastic elements in the secondary world allow the reader to see the wonder in the normal, mundane objects of our world. Tolkien demonstrates this even within the story itself. The Hobbits find new ways to see the world around them as they progress away from the Shire. In Lothlorien, Frodo “saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful” (341).

Truth

Recovery is part of the glimpses of joy that fantasy can give a reader. Fantasy can also give a glimpse of truth. Tolkien says that “this ‘joy’ which I have selected as the mark of the true fairy-story” is a “sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth” (“On Fairy Stories” 83). Fantasy allows us to see truths that maybe we could not see otherwise. Wonderfully, it is the joy in fantasy that allows us to do this, joy beyond the boundaries of this world. This glimpse of truth is not something that can be pointed to in a particular phrase or scene, however, because it would probably occur in a different place for each reader, and might express a different truth. It is also something that might be difficult to put into words.

Tolkien believes that the joy that arises from a glimpse of truth is largely created through eucatastrophe, which is perhaps the easiest aspect for Tolkien to describe: “It can give to child or man that hears it, when the ‘turn’ comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and a lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears” (81). This complete joy can still exist alongside tears because eucatastrophe does not, as Tolkien writes, “deny existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance” (81).

Tolkien says that eucatastrophe carries a “gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world” (83). The good news of the birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of man, a “story that begins and ends in joy,” and to Tolkien there is “no tale ever told that men would rather find was true” (83). Yet even if a reader is not Christian, the effect of eucatastrophe

is still that of a lifting of the heart and a glimpse of “Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (81).

The Happy Ending

In “On Fairy Stories,” Tolkien calls the happy ending the true mark of a fairy story. When Bilbo asks Frodo “Have you thought of an ending?” he says, “yes, several, and all are dark and unpleasant.” Bilbo replies, “that won’t do! ... Books ought to have good endings. How would this do: *and they all settled down and lived together happily ever after?*” (266). Bilbo also says something similar earlier about his own book, that he “had thought of putting: *and he lived happily ever afterwards to the end of his days*. It is a good ending, and none the worse for having been used before” (263).

Yet many people seem to think that Frodo’s tale does not end as happily as Bilbo’s, that the ending of *The Lord of the Rings* is somehow lacking in true happiness. Some critics argue that this is because Frodo does not achieve recognition within the Shire itself; others because he must leave the very home that he fought for. A good case can be made that *The Lord of the Rings* does have a happy ending. Gandalf says that “other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set” (861). Even if terrible things come in the years after the story, it is enough of a triumph for the characters to have each done what they could, for their time, to the best of their abilities: “follow what may, great deeds are not lessened in worth” (859). Readers may be disappointed that the shire does not recognize Frodo’s

heroic deeds, but he himself says that “what he had to do, he had to do, if he could,” and whether “anyone ever knew about it was beside the purpose” (692).

It does not destroy the joy of the ending if there are also moments of sadness. Aragorn says of the song he recites for the Hobbits, “It is a fair tale, though it is sad, as are all tales of Middle-earth, and yet it may lift up your hearts” (187). The song can still lift their spirits, although it is sad, and the sadness is perhaps what allows their spirits to rise. In a way, every story is sad, because if everything went smoothly and perfectly there would be no story to tell.

Why do we enjoy reading works that have darkness in them at all? Edmund Burke, in “A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,” says that “Torments” are “much greater in their effect on the body and mind” than pleasures (340). This makes “whatever is in any sort terrible ... a source of the sublime” (340). Yet I do not believe it is the torment or darkness that creates the feeling of the sublime, no matter how powerful the feelings it evokes. It is not because we are necessarily attracted to darkness, but to the few moments of light and hope that pierce it. We need the contrast of the surrounding hardships and despair to make the moments of heroism and hope stand out. Tolkien wrote that “of bliss and glad life there is little to be said, before it ends; as works fair and wonderful, while still they endure for eyes to see, are their own record, and only when they are in peril or broken forever do they pass into song” (*Letters* 95).

Reading about the ways in which the characters brave their battles may help us find the strength to fight our own problems in ways that reading about a weak, “normal”

human might not. I find myself wanting to be as strong, as brave, as determined as characters like Aragorn and Frodo, as trustworthy and loyal as Sam and as capable of laughter as Tom Bombadil. This brings me joy by showing me how wonderful the human spirit can be, and by giving me hope to apply to my own life. If small Hobbits can brave Mordor, then surely I can stand up to the minor problems that plague me. It is not the darkness that I enjoy so much as the conquering of it. The joy that I take in the story would not be nearly as strong without the danger and despair that threaten it.

I have heard countless people argue for pessimism by saying that every story only *seems* to end happily, but that if you follow after the “happily ever after,” something is bound to go wrong: the husband and wife start to hate each other and divorce, a new evil sprouts up as soon as the last evil is conquered, or people grow bored with their new paradise and start causing trouble. Yet you could just as easily claim that all sad endings are equally false, that something must come after: the husband and wife find new lives after their divorce, a new hero vanquishes the next evil, and the people create a paradise even lovelier than the last. Whether or not the story has a “happy” ending depends on where you decide to stop the story.

Tolkien writes that a happy ending is an “artificial device” that does not “deceive anybody” (89). It is not meant to. Tolkien compares the arbitrary ending of “happily ever after” to a picture frame. We know that the image caught in a picture does not end with the frame, but continues past its borders. Still, there is something beautiful about a frame, even if it is arbitrary, as there is something particularly beautiful about a happy ending. I do not pretend that I can explain why, or what causes it, but it seems to make the rest of

the story so much more powerful, stronger, clearer and brighter. It provides an end to the story while also providing a sense of timelessness.

Tolkien says that such beginnings as “once upon a time” are not “poverty stricken” as we tend to think, not meaningless or tired clichés. They provide a sense of “timelessness,” of a “great uncharted world of time” (89). Classic fairy story phrases do not end the tale with artificial, unrealistic happiness. These formulas connect the tale to all the other stories and myths that started with the same magical “once upon a time.” The happy ending shows the “endlessness of the World of Story,” as Tolkien calls it. Instead of confining a story, it frees it, reflecting its joy to the rest of the tale and the rest of time. R.J. Reilly, in “Tolkien and the Fairy Story,” writes that Tolkien “creates Joy – or creates what gives Joy – as Good, in the purposeful drama of creation, has created what also gives Joy, the world with the Christian happy ending” (104). To Tolkien, that happy ending is the ultimate eucatastrophe

CONCLUSION: MY OWN HAPPY ENDING

Some critics do not see that joy can exist alongside sorrow, and joy and sorrow together can create something as sharp as swords and as lovely as jewels. This joy goes beyond the “walls of the world,” but does not necessarily mean a complete escape from this world, or a lack of realism. Raffel and McLeish only see grief and tragedy as real, a depressing view that I imagine must just create more cynicism and sorrow for them with each book that they read. Books can express joy without being unrealistic, and this expression can create even further joy in the reader. Tolkien’s work is not a humorless depiction of darkness and despair, because that darkness is pierced by tiny, wonderful glimpses of joy.

Joy is compared to water in Tolkien’s world: it may recede, but will always flow back again; it may be buried underground, but will well up in sudden springs and subtle puddles; it might evaporate beyond our sight, but always rains back. The consolation of the happy ending is the epitome of this recurring joy, the distinguishing characteristic of a fairy story and the wonder that reflects back on the rest of the tale. Though there may be sorrows in this world, they are like Melkor’s fire and cold; they do not destroy the joy of water, but create the snowflake.

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