

Spring 4-15-1966

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Recommended Citation

Plotz, John (1966) "*The Great Chronicle of Middle-World*," *Tolkien Journal*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 1.
Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/tolkien_journal/vol2/iss2/1

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The Great Chronicle of Middle-World

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The Great Chronicle of Middle-World
by John Plotz

The most delightful part of Harvard University's immense library is the Houghton Library, the rare book collection. There, among manifold manuscripts and first editions, pistol-packing guards, and suspicious librarians, I spend many enjoyable hours in the Middle-Earth section. The Mannish collection is second in the world only to Oxford's. The Dwarf section is weak and the Halfling section is, of course, only fragmentary. The works of Elves, however, are unbelievably well-represented. In this part Harvard's library is surely the finest one anywhere. It is so large that scores of crates of Elvish material lie still unopened in the basement.

I am a modest Middle-Earth scholar, my first passion being Upper Magyar literature of the late third century A.D.; but my good friend Dr. Gardner, curator of Third Age manuscripts, asked me recently to help him open some of those mysterious crates. You can imagine how eagerly I accepted. We started work late one afternoon last month.

Dr. Gardner is preparing a revolutionary monograph on our discovery, to be published in the Houghton Quarterly of Learned Studies late this year. It is my great pleasure to announce the discovery first in the Tolkien Journal.

We opened the first crate. The top layer was not very exciting, mostly rather poor illuminated manuscripts of Elessar Elvish lays. But halfway through the crate we found an old piece of parchment, burned at the edges and practically falling apart, covered with a writing completely unknown to either me or Dr. Gardner. Attached to it was an Elvish trot, written, apparently, by an Elf scholar sometime in the middle of the Third Age. Here is an English translation from the Elvish:

"...and if this darkness comes to Middle-World, will the men of Ostrigoth pass away like the leaves in autumn, and the eagles cease to circle in their power?"

And Telstar Powerman, wanderer of the North, and heir to the house of Philistan, answered him saying, "Yea, old man, the danger is great. But yet this darkness may be overcome if our hearts are stout and the nineteen rings, with the power of the seven trees in them, are joined with the ten sceptres, which were made in the days of Enovid the Great when he went out into the West and drank of the four streams of the Wesson and found great strength. If these are joined and the eight great tribes stand side by side as in the days of the Purple Council in the time of Geysir, who was king over all the tribes that dwelt to the south of the Muddy Mountains, then, perhaps, the power of the Evil Three may be broken and they will pass from the face of Middle-World for ever."

Then Telstar Powerman, wanderer of the North, and heir to the House of Philistan, grasped his sword Selfoss and brandished it and shouted "Keflavik" and leapt on his horse and rode toward the land of the Rasputins with the speed of the wind...

Far into the land of the howling winds there is a land called Upper-Middle-World. We of Middle-Earth know little of this place, but the Wanderer brought these pages to Imladris recently. It is called The Great Chronicle of Upper-Middle-World, or, Round and Round We Go Again. The first pages are lost.

The fragment ends here. At least the Elvish trot ends here. Probably the Upper-Middle-World page does not go too much further. Though we searched for other evidence of this whole new world, we searched in vain. It's the only piece of Upper-Middle-World extant. Think though what areas of scholarship are opened by it! I look forward expectantly to the mountains of speculation and controversy which it will generate

Social Philosophy in The Lord of the Rings by Barry Tunick

A liberal, democratic would-be pacifist, I enjoyed LotR in spite of my convictions. For Tolkien's trilogy is conservative and authoritarian and glorifies violence. Consider:

Conservative: The emphasis is on traditions, tales, legends and the restoration of a previous era. Our heroes are feudal kings, princes and knights. The Hobbits are of the landed, leisured gentry. Seldom do we hear of the common person--the farmer, the soldier, the serf.

Authoritarian: The world is seen as good vs. bad. Boromir and Denethor are the only bad-good guys. Everyone else wears (figuratively) black hats or white hats. Even Gandalf is gray only temporarily.

Violent: As in the Scandinavian sagas and myths (to which I was turned on by the trilogy), glory in battle is the highest goal. True, the violence is mitigated in that only un-human orcs and monsters are usually killed (just as currently we kill not human beings but only Viet-Cong or Communists).

LotR shows a romantic idealism. The pomp is perfect. The speeches, pageantry and ceremony always go off without a hitch. No flies bother the horses and no one ever hiccups or forgets his lines.

Don't get me wrong. I realize that Tolkien was writing escape fantasy, not socialist realism, and that a morality story must contrast good and evil. The above are just afterthoughts; I delighted in LotR.

But I prefer to think that my enjoyment despite the above conflicts with my idealism reflects less upon the depth or sincerity of my convictions than upon Tolkien's marvelous abilities as storyteller.