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The Shire Post

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The Shire Post

The Shire Post

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I have an objection to make. Though I have one article in mind I have read others that attempted to do the same thing. That is to say that these writers have tried to take J. R. R. Tolkien's creation -- Middle-earth -- and write their own version of its history. The article I have in mind is Margaret M. Howes' "The Elder Ages and the Later Glaciations of the Pleistocene Epoch," (Tolkien Journal, Vol. III No. 2) In this article Mrs. Howes juxtaposes the history of Middle-earth to the glacial and interglacial periods of the Pleistocene Epoch in our geographical history. She has gone too far when she does this, but she goes even further to write her own ending to the story of Middle-earth. The only person with either the right or the ability to do this is John Ronald Reuel Tolkien and no one else. It reminds me of the Ace Books' Controversy in its flagrant non-recognition of the rights of Professor Tolkien. He alone has the right to add to his creation and I am sure he feels the same way. Peter Beagle says in the preface to the Tolkien Reader -- "... Knowing that I didn't write it [LotR], I feel that I did." This speaks well for the power and fascination of the book itself but does not give any other person the right to add his (or her) own ideas to what is exclusively the property of J. R. R. Tolkien. It is well and good to talk and write of this fascinating work but it is neither well nor good when one tries to take control of what is not theirs and steer it on a course that should be chosen by J. R. R. Tolkien and no one else. [Of course no one is trying to impinge on Professor Tolkien's rights of authorship. But when a reader has become involved in the LotR to the extent that the secondary universe it creates interacts with his own personality, it is then impossible to avoid intellectual speculations and extrapolations like Margaret Howes'. Although such speculative articles when published may in some aspects appear offensive because of deviations from the facts or spirit of Tolkien's writing, most readers seem to find them amusing in themselves and often, if only through a negative procedure, productive of new interpretive insights.]

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I was rather intrigued by Margaret Howes' article in the latest number. This presents a correlation between the geography of Middle Earth and that of the present day which I had already noticed, but which I didn't have the scientific background to develop to the depth which she has done. Some of the Atlantean writings refer to a subsidence of land in the area of the North Sea, English Channel, Bay of Biscay, and areas off the coast of England, Ireland, and France. This led me to a NGS map showing the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, and I discovered, lo and behold, that the continental shelf at that point corresponds almost exactly to the western shoreline of Middle Earth. So, having made this independent discovery (for what it's worth) I was more than happy to read Miss (Mrs. ?) Howes' scholarly development.

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I have the afteryule 1966 issue. The article by Boardman on heredity, while entertaining, seems to be of doubtful scientific value. As far as I can tell, he assumes facts to be consistent with his theory, and then states the facts as evidence. Thus there is no textual evidence, as far as I know, for the thesis that Dior and Elwing are mortal. On

the contrary, we know that Dior was Thingol's heir (I 206), and it seems unlikely that a mortal would be king over an elven people. It also seems a little unlikely that a Silmaril would be in the care of a mortal.

The evidence on Earendil is ambiguous: some lines in Bilbo's poem ("by paths that seldom mortal goes," for instance, I 247) suggest that he is a mortal. On the other hand, he's still up there. He went as the ambassador of both elves and men, which doesn't help.

The one inference we can legitimately make is that Elwing and Earendil are, if classified as elves or men (note that Arwen, for instance, is definitely described as an elf, in spite of her mixed parentage), both in the same classification. Otherwise they would be a fourth union of elves and men, and we are explicitly told that there were only three.

My conclusion is that we should accept the thesis stated in the primary source material, that the half-elves were given a choice between mortality and immortality, which choice was also given to the descendants of those who chose immortality. If we have to formulate a mendelian explanation, Mr. Boardman's should be reversed. Immortality is dominant, and the first known mortal to appear in the line was Elros, who got one recessive from each parent. This not only allows for Dior, Elwing, and Earendil being immortal, but also explains why the descendants of Elros never produced an immortal from inbreeding, as would have been predicted by Boardman's theory. The long life of the descendants of Elros cannot be explained in simple Mendelian terms, since it is stated to be something present to varying, and generally diminishing, degree, in all of the descendants near the main line. On Boardman's theory, it should have been an all or nothing effect, present in only half of the descendants of the first generation, a quarter of the second, and so on.



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Today I received Vol. III, number 2 of the Tolkien Journal, with a reminder on the envelope to renew my membership dues. That, I am sorry to say, I do not intend to do. Unhappily, I have decided to resign from the T.S.A. This is not a hasty decision, but one to which I've given a great deal of thought. My reasons for doing this will be given, and I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.

Actually, I have been increasingly disgruntled with the Society for quite awhile. The articles printed in the Journal are either repetitive, or meaningless. And those meetings -- hobbit food? And buttons?!? In other words, I'm afraid I find such pursuits as detailed studies of Middle Earth's glacial histories simply a lot of horse manure. If such histories must be recorded, surely the master himself is most competent to do it!

I find myself sounding like a complete defector. However, I am a great admirer of Professor Tolkien and his work. That is why I resent seeing, on the cover of the latest issue of the Journal, a Frodo dressed as an American revolutionary, and a Sam with a facial expression only a bit more intelligent than Winnie-the-Pooh's. Likewise a conception of the Last Homely House as a Victorian mansion reminiscent of Newport in its heyday. Despite loud protests by nearly the whole Society, the world of Middle Earth exists only in the mind, which is why I feel that it, unlike some fantasies, can not be illustrated. In any case, Tolkien was never over-meticulous in describing dress and architecture. So why not set your archaeologists to work at unearthing artifacts of Mordor or even Hobbiton? Then you can really be documented!

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In II:1, p. 2, Dick Plotz listed some of the many words used for prince in Beowulf -- beorn, brego, ceorl, eorl, thenge and theoden (I use the th instead of the OE thorn and eth for typing ease). I don't know where Dick got his information, but neither Franz Klaeber, whose authoritative edition of Beowulf was first published in 1922, nor J. R. Clark Hall in his Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary (Cambridge University Press, 1962) agree with several of his findings.

I have no possible quarrel with thenge and theoden, which most definitely mean prince. Thengel appears only once in Beowulf, according to Klaeber. What is significant is that the phrase is hringa thenge, and, using Hall's additional meanings (ruler, lord, king), we can translate this as lord of the rings. (The definite article is frequently omitted in OE.) Of course, the term obviously refers to Hrothgar here, and in the traditional sense. [I take it you mean in the sense of "giver of rings"]

Theoden also means "chief," "lord" and "king" and Clark Hall adds ruler. "As far as I know, the term is most frequently used as 'king,' from which we might infer, that Tolkien possibly regarded his King of the Mark as the essence of kingship. It is interesting to note that there is also an OE verb, theodan or getheodan, meaning 'to join, associate (with), attach or subject oneself to.' However, the verb is not used in Beowulf. It would be interesting to know whether the verb or the noun came first. [The basic form is actually theod, a very ancient word for 'people, tribe' with cognates occurring throughout the Germanic, Celtic, and Italic languages.]

Some of Dick's other words are more difficult to justify. I admit that OE words meaning "prince," "chief," "lord," or "king" often meant "prince" (just as the Anglo-Saxons rarely distinguished between man, hero and warrior.) I myself can see very little semantic difference between "prince" and "king" (except an age difference which the Anglo-Saxons apparently did not recognize), but Klaeber makes a definite distinction and, in common usage, there



certainly is one.

According to Klaeber, beorn means "man, hero, warrior." Beorn-cyning means (hero-) king. Hall adds that the simplex, to use Arthur Brodeur's term, may also mean noble, chief, or prince in a poetic context. (I wonder whether this masculine noun is related to the neuter bearn, "child, son.") [No. The latter is from beran "bear." The former is used outside of poetry only for the animal "bear" and is originally an euphemism meaning "the brown one."]

Brego, says Klaeber, means "chief, lord"; Hall adds "ruler" and "king" and indicates that the compound bregowearð, used in poetry, means ruler, prince, lord.

Moving on to eorl and ceorl we are on less firm ground. Eorl means man, warrior, or hero. Infrequently, it means nobleman or chief. It does not mean prince. Our own earl derives its meaning not from the OE eorl, but rather from the Old Norse jarl.

And Klaeber translates ceorl as "man (orig. freeman)." Hall also lists layman, peasant, husbandman and freeman of the lowest class. Nevertheless, he says that the word was sometimes used poetically to mean hero, or noble man, although he does not say whether it was so used in Beowulf. Ceorlboren means "low-born," not noble according to Hall and the word later evolved into "churl." On the other hand, OE thegn, meaning servant, retainer, vassal, freeman and poetically hero and warrior, had a similar compound, thegnboren, meaning "well-born." Curiouser and curiouser! [Not really. Ceorls were fairly low peasant types, although they fought in battles and are often found giving inspiring speeches in heroic poetry. Thegns on the other hand are the lower order of nobles, frequently depicted in descriptions of royal courts as serving as retainers to the king.]

I might add some other terms to Dick's list, although my additions are hardly exhaustive. The most common term is aetheling (noble, prince, hero, man). Others are frea and its compounds (lord, king), dryhten (lord, prince), wine (friend, (friendly) lord). [Isn't there a Goldwine in LotR?]

Naturally, Tolkien adopted many OE words. What follows is a very partial list. Ent (giant); maðum (treasure, precious thing); orc (demon); feax /Shadowfax/ (hair); deagol (secret, hidden); smeagan (think out, seek (opportunity)); orþanc (ingenuity, skill); eored (troop, band, company). Of course, only Professor Tolkien can really tell us how he derived his names and I hope, at some time, he will. [Most words and names of the Rohirrim are good Anglo-Saxon derivatives.]