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# Mapping Gender in Middle-earth

## **Abstract**

Examines the geography and both natural and created landscapes of Middle-earth in terms of what they reveal about gender and race, and how Tolkien used landscape to “[map] alternative masculinities onto [...] different races” and emphasize contrasting depictions of femininity through female characters and races that either “stay put” or wander.

## **Additional Keywords**

Race and racism in J.R.R. Tolkien; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Settings—Middle-earth—Geography; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Settings—Middle-earth—Landscape; Gender in J.R.R. Tolkien



## MAPPING GENDER IN MIDDLE-EARTH

JOHN MILLER

While one must always be wary of identifying authors too closely with their protagonists, J.R.R. Tolkien does seem to have shared certain affinities with Bilbo Baggins, the title character of *The Hobbit*: “He loved maps, as I have told you before; and he also liked runes and letters and cunning handwriting, though when he wrote himself it was a bit thin and spidery” (III.63). *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* have always been published with accompanying maps, some drawn by Tolkien himself in a hand that might indeed (like that of the drawings that have appeared in some editions) be described as thin and spidery, though neat (others in a firmer though derivative style were drawn by his son Christopher). In the early hardbound editions of *The Lord of the Rings*, these maps came in black and red ink and folded out from inside the back covers of the books. Bilbo first sees the map of the Lonely Mountain, where the dwarves’ treasure is guarded by the dragon Smaug, during the “Unexpected Party” held in his living room in the first chapter of *The Hobbit*. It affects him powerfully. He has been struggling with two conflicting influences: his hobbitish timidity, insularity, and common sense on the one hand, and his “Tookish” curiosity, pride, and latent yearning for adventure on the other. When the wizard Gandalf spreads out the map, Bilbo’s “Tookish” side is piqued: “He was getting excited and interested again, so that he forgot to keep his mouth shut. He loved maps and in his hall there hung a large one of the Country Round with all his favorite walks marked on it in red ink” (I.29).

Bilbo’s map of the “Country Round” suggests one of the cultural functions of maps: the assertion of mastery over a terrain through representation. But Gandalf’s map wields a different sort of power over Bilbo. This map allures him with what he does not know. Its effect is similar to the effect Marlow describes on looking at a map of the Congo in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a

map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, "When I grow up I will go there." (70-71)

It is easy—and correct, of course—to see in Marlow's infatuation the imperial impulse to master those "blank spaces," to fill them in and thus control them (and their resources: Marlow expresses no illusions about the nature of imperialism). But both Marlow and Bilbo respond as well to a desire to escape the familiar and the known, not merely to expand its borders. The "blank spaces" offer the possibility that the world holds things as yet unexperienced, even unimagined. Many of the adventures of both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* will in fact take place in or under such mysterious spaces on the maps: woods, secret caverns, hidden valleys. Even as they locate these places, the maps conceal rather than reveal their nature, their inhabitants, and the sorts of experiences to be had in them.

These maps also entice Tolkien's readers. While they certainly help orient readers as they read, the maps also help create in the reader a desire to explore Tolkien's heterocosm. There must have been few readers of those early editions of the books who did not first unfold that map before beginning to read the book. Bilbo's attraction to maps is associated with the allure of "runes and letters and cunning handwriting." Like maps, certain kinds of writing seem to invite exploration, to excite desire: specifically, writing that contains "blank spaces," that promises secret meanings, and thus requires interpretation. The maps in the books are thus a part of the mechanism of desire that is the mainspring of the experience of the literature of fantasy and magic. If the popularity of Tolkien's achievement demonstrates anything about his books, it is that they have been able to invoke and answer strong desires brought to them by their readers. One of these, I will argue, is a desire to escape from the limitations of modern gender roles, and specifically from the constraints of modern masculinity.

**FROM THE BEGINNING OF THEIR JOURNEY** across the enchanted and enchanting lands mapped by Tolkien, both the hobbits and the reader are repeatedly reminded that the wonders revealed to them in the course of the plot will be destroyed by the accomplishment of that plot. The elves, from their peculiar perspective on history, seem most tragically aware of this. At Rivendell, as the decision to destroy Sauron's Ring is debated, Elrond tells the assembled Council, "maybe when the One has gone, the Three will fail, and many fair things will fade and be forgotten. That is my belief" (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] II.2.269). In Lórien, Galadriel tells Frodo and Sam, "if you succeed, then our power is diminished, and Lothlórien will fade, and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We must depart into the West, or dwindle into a rustic folk of

dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten" (II.7.365). The third book spends a number of autumnal chapters after the climax of the main action reminding the reader of all that has been, or is soon to be, lost. As Gandalf tells Treebeard, the most ancient living thing in Middle-earth, in the chapter entitled "Many Partings," a "New Age begins [...] and in this age it may well prove that the kingdoms of Men shall outlast you" (VI.5.979). Later in the same chapter, the fallen wizard Saruman makes a similar, though more spiteful prediction to Gandalf, Galadriel, and Celeborn, three of the most powerfully magical creatures in the story: "You have doomed yourselves, and you know it. And it will afford me some comfort as I wander to think that you pulled down your own house when you destroyed mine" (VI.6.983).

This "New Age," Gandalf tells Treebeard, will be dominated by "Men." Earlier in the same book, Gandalf and Aragorn survey the kingdom newly won by Aragorn, the Man who will be the first King of this New Age:

[T]hey came to a high field below the snows that clad the lofty peaks, and it looked down over the precipice that stood behind the City. And standing there they surveyed the lands, for the morning was come; and they saw the towers of the City far below them like white pencils touched by the sunlight, and all the vale of Anduin was like a garden, and the Mountains of Shadow were veiled in a golden mist. Upon the one side their sight reached to the grey Eryn Muil, and the glint of Rauros was like a star twinkling far off; and upon the other side they saw the River like a ribbon laid down to Pelargir, and beyond that was a light on the hem of the sky that spoke of the Sea. (VI.5.970-71)

The Scriptural diction and paratactic sentence structure here suggest the foundational nature of the scene. The lands so carefully named are those which at the outset of the story had been only labels on a map to the reader, but which have now been traversed and revealed. As Gandalf goes on to tell Aragorn, the events of the preceding narrative, in revealing these mysteries, have also doomed them:

This is your realm, and the heart of the greater realm that shall be. The Third Age of the world is ended, and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved. For though much has been saved, much must now pass away; and the power of the Three Rings also is ended. And all the lands that you see, and those that lie round about them, shall be dwellings of Men. For the time comes of the Dominion of Men, and the Elder Kindred shall fade or depart. (VI.5.971)

The “Dominion of Men” signifies here the ascendance of one race—the reader’s—over the other fantastical races that populate and enchant Middle-earth: the elves, dwarves, hobbits, and other mythical and sometimes magical creatures. The elegaic note struck throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, but especially in its closing chapters, clearly expresses a sense of loss at the transformation of this magical world into the world the reader now inhabits.

As I have argued elsewhere, however, the “Dominion of Men” also signifies the hegemony of a particular gender, specifically, of a particular construction of masculinity (Miller). While Tolkien has been criticized for his apparent discomfort with or lack of interest in female characters, the very paucity of important female roles in the books helps draw the reader’s attention to the different ways of being masculine suggested by the characteristics of the different “races” of Middle-earth. Race thus becomes a way of inscribing gender. The other races of Middle-earth represent alternatives to the version of masculinity embodied in the race of Men, alternatives doomed to fade under the hegemony of Men. The existence of such alternative masculinities is one of the things that enchants Middle-earth, and both the books and the reader mourn their demise.

A number of other readers have used masculinity as a category through which to understand the books’ characters and recognize Tolkien’s inescapable engagement with gender issues: as one of these readers, Zoë Jaques, reminds us, “there can be no text(s) without gender” (90). In one of the first attempts to rehabilitate Tolkien’s representations of gender, Melanie Rawls finds the books embodying alternative gender possibilities in individual characters and argues that such possibilities offer a prescription for certain anxieties of modernity, though she does not suggest connections between the representations of gender and race. In a more recent essay, Holly Crocker argues that Aragorn’s success as the founding representative of the “Dominion of Men” requires him to “subsume” different aspects of masculinity into a new and more durable version (122). These different, and in different ways deficient, forms or aspects of masculinity are associated with different “kinds,” such as the Elves, or the different “lines” of Men (the descendants of Númenor, the Rohirrim, or the Easterlings, for example), as well as with different characters, such as Boromir, Faramir, and Denethor. As I do below, Crocker places the play of gender in the books in the context of their concern with time and history, though she focuses on how certain versions of masculinity have brought Middle-earth to the crisis it faces, rather than on how they enchant it for the reader. Jane Chance, through the close reading of a single scene (and its revision in Peter Jackson’s film), suggests how the trilogy might be read as valorizing certain “queerings” of the “rational (hetero)normativity” represented by the descendants of the Númenóreans (“In the Company” 90).

Jacques makes a fascinating and persuasive case for seeing the hobbits' stories as representative of the process of gender construction, facilitated by their encounters with different creatures and races representing "a range of gendered behaviours" (93). Though she refers to the races of Middle-earth as representing "different kinds of masculinities" (98), her argument does not explore these differences. Published in a collection that considers Tolkien's work as "children's literature," Jaques's essay is concerned with how the hobbits, often described as childlike themselves, might provide an encouraging model of gender construction for young readers. My own approach in some ways mirrors Jaques's: I am interested in showing how the gendering of the races of Middle-earth and their mapping onto its landscape shape the elegiac experience of the books, their evocation of loss rather than of possibility.

The forms of power to which of the "race" of Men aspire are represented in actions and symbols conventionally gendered as masculine. Men are the warriors who dirty their hands and give their lives in the cause of history, and their power is figured in traditional patriarchal symbols. Aragorn's return is announced and enabled by the reforging of "The Sword that was Broken." The might of Men is housed in towers and on mountains, as is that of their enemies, who aspire to the same sort of power: the War of the Ring is a war of phallic edifices. As the title of the second book in the trilogy, *The Two Towers*, suggests, that war is the final chapter in a struggle for particular kinds of power figured in such phalli: control of territory but also, and perhaps more importantly, control of the wills and actions of others. Men like Aragorn and Théoden demonstrate their power not only in battle but by inspiring others in defense of the territorial and moral integrity of their realms. Sauron's power, which in most respects mirrors darkly the power aspired to by Men, is exercised through his ability to control the wills of his minions and to twist the wills of even his enemies, such as Saruman and Denethor, to his uses, and such is the power of the Ring he forged.

The relationship of Men to the landscape figures this particular form of power, as well as the hubris and vulnerabilities of those who aspire to it. More than any of the other peoples of Middle-earth, Men live in made structures: towers, halls, fortresses, and buildings. Men build upon the earth, whereas elves, dwarves, and hobbits are more likely to live within it. (The power of Sauron, as usual taking the aspirations of Men a step further, expresses itself in the capacities both to build and to destroy such edifices. In a foreshadowing of the reader's moment in history, the forces of darkness are revealed during the climactic sieges of Helm's Deep and Minas Tirith to have invented the technologies of explosives.) The exceptions here demonstrate the rule. Faramir, who lives in and loves the forests of Ithilien, is one of two men able to resist the allure of power which the opportunity of the Ring presents; as

a result, he is scorned by his father, Denethor, who is seduced by visions of such power. To Frodo, Faramir has about him a whiff of the “air of Númenor,” where Men, before their fall, had aspired to the cultural values and achievements of another race, the Elves. The other Man who resists this temptation, Aragorn, has for years lived houseless or with the elves, and is descended from a union of Man and Elf.

Men move about the land exposed. Their armies inhabit the open plains on the maps of Middle-earth, just as Sauron’s forces cover the open waste of Mordor. They assert their power—as does their Enemy—on the field of battle, and the trilogy contains several set pieces in which the panorama of armies in the field is the setting for the mighty struggles of Men for power. In the passage quoted above, Gandalf and Aragorn survey just such an expanse of open space, now brought under the Dominion of Men as a result of these battles. When stealth or cover are needed, however, Men must rely on others, as when Théoden’s army accepts the assistance of an ancient race of “Wild Men” in finding a secret route through the Druadan Forest to relieve the siege of Minas Tirith. Men are typically apprehensive about the “blank spaces” of their world, particularly woods and caves (or, at the least, as in the case of the Glittering Caves of Helm’s Deep, they are unappreciative of their true worth and beauty). Both Boromir and Éomer, epitomes of Manly valor, express fear of the “perilous land” of Lothlórien, which they know only from maps and legends. The power to which Men aspire is unsubtle and assertive. At its worst, it involves the sorts of technologies of destruction that their enemies use indiscriminately against both the most recent erections of Men and the most ancient forests and landscapes.

By contrast, the peoples and creatures that make Middle-earth a fantastic and magical place tend to live in the concealed spaces that maps mark but don’t reveal. The woods and caves of Middle-earth, though populated primarily by male characters, are, through both conventional symbolism and specific features Tolkien attributes to them, gendered as feminine, or perhaps more accurately, in ways that challenge the gender norms of Men, and Men like Boromir tend to be wary of them. Much of the action of the *The Hobbit* and the trilogy takes place in these hidden, mysterious, often mythic places, where the reader is allowed to discover and explore alternatives to the “Dominion of Men.”

Woods in Middle-earth are not entered lightly; they are the hiding places of dangerous and magical beings. Woods are where the most ancient creatures live: Tom Bombadil, the Ents, and, of course, the Elves. Not only do these beings seem immune from the effects of time, but they remain largely aloof from history, the province of Men. Archetypal of this retreat is the tale of Gondolin, a secret, mountain-ringed city to which Elves retreated from the



world and remained sequestered from history for centuries. The oldest being in Middle-earth, Tom Bombadil, is the most rooted in his seclusion within the Old Forest and the most aloof: he seems to be the one creature over whom the Ring has absolutely no power, and by the same token he has no interest in it. Only slightly less old and out of touch with the history passing outside their realm are the Ents, who, long lost to legend, are roused for a final act before lapsing back into sterile senescence.

More than any other creatures, though, the Elves are a synecdoche for all that is magical in Middle-earth, and thus all that will be lost with the advent of Men. Elvish magic is particularly involved with the transcendence of time, not only in their personal immortality, but in their association with the enduring beauties of starlight and of song. Elven song wields the power of art to beguile time: travelers stopping at Rivendell lose track of the passing days and nights as they listen to stories and songs. Sam describes elven enchantment as a kind of aesthetic rapture: "I feel as if I was *inside* a song, if you take my meaning" (II.6.351). When Frodo experiences the "magic" of Lórien, "It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world" (II.6.350).

THE STRENGTH, FLEXIBILITY, AND SEASONAL RENEWAL of the woods figure the Elves' power over time. Like trees themselves, elves are feminine in appearance: slender, beautiful, and resilient. The seat of the Elves' greatest power is the wood of Lothlórien. Located between the confluence of two southerly flowing rivers, Lórien appears on Christopher Tolkien's map as an image of female sexuality, an inverted delta hidden under pubic growth. The power of Lórien is embodied in the Lady of the Wood, Galadriel, the most powerful female in Middle-earth. After escaping from Moria, where the first of their fellowship has died, the survivors find solace and healing in Lórien, where time and death do not intrude. In Lórien, Frodo "felt that he was in a timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness" (II.6.351). The woods represent the antithesis of Men's immersion in progressive linear history, and even the boldest Men—perhaps especially such Men as Boromir, who sees no greater good than the political survival of his city—tend to fear them. The geography of the other site of elvish power, Rivendell, a hidden valley with a river running through it, also uses the symbolism of female fertility to figure immortality.

Instead of residing in phallic swords, the power of the Elves is contained in rings; two would-be usurpers of that power, Sauron and Frodo, are symbolically emasculated when they lose the fingers that have penetrated those rings. The use of such symbolism is interesting in light of Tolkien's apparent discomfort with sexuality and reproduction. Elves represent an

alternative to the masculinity of Men, which includes among its conventionally feminine attributes the power over death. Yet, though figured in symbols of fertility, Elves accomplish this asexually, through art and immortality. (One of the effects of Sauron's Ring is a perversion of this power, as it grants its wearer a withering immortality.) Thus the Elves possess a creative power of which Men are incapable but which does not require the disturbing sexuality of women.

The creations of Men tend to be the tools of history: towers, swords, songs of war. Their exploits and artifacts may be impressive, awe-inspiring, even noble or tragic, but they require the context of history to give them these meanings. Elves represent a version of masculinity that rejects the worldly values of political power and historical progress in favor of the aesthetic and the transcendent. Tolkien himself once wrote (in a letter) that "Elves represent, as it were, the artistic, aesthetic and purely scientific aspects of the Humane nature raised to a higher level than is actually seen in Men" (*Letters* 236). In other words, Elvish masculinity might be described as an idealized evocation of the experience of the British university don, of the virtually all-male world Tolkien himself never really grew out of: aloof from the history passing outside the college walls, immersed in an aesthetic relationship to the starlike abstractions of words. Yet Tolkien's tale also suggests that such power as the Elves wield—or perhaps its sacrifice—is somehow necessary to the success of the endeavors of Men. James Williamson argues that Galadriel "represents the cross-bonding of cyclical time with chronological historical time" (141); her intervention in history in the climactic events of the Third Age is a compromise ultimately fatal to her timeless woods, which she must finally abandon. But even the sacrifice of the Elves is an act of asceticism: they do not actually die but rather forsake and transcend Middle-earth, renouncing the world of history to which Men are doomed.

**WHILE THE WOODS OF MIDDLE-EARTH CONCEAL** an alternative to the immersion in linear history that characterizes the Dominion of Men, a more complex set of alternatives to the dominant version of masculinity is hidden in another sort of space with conventionally feminine-gendered symbolic associations. The opening sentence of *The Hobbit* distinguishes hobbit holes from "nasty, dirty, wet hole[s], filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell" (I.9): more often, though, Tolkien's adventurers find themselves exploring the latter sort.

The nastiest hole in the book is Shelob's lair, which guards the pass into the land of death itself, Mordor. Both cloacal and vaginal, it emits "a stench, not the sickly odor of decay in the meads of Morgul, but a foul reek, as if filth unnameable were piled and hoarded in the dark within" (IV.9.717). At another entrance it is guarded by a web, "each thread as thick as a rope" (722),

that even Frodo's elvish light cannot illuminate, but which he manages to pierce with his elvish blade. Shelob herself is a bloated symbol of devouring female lust, "who only desired death" (723) and whose sexual (and maternal: with Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, nemesis of Bilbo and Frodo back in the Shire, she is the only mother who actually appears in the books before the final chapter of the trilogy) behavior gets described in more disgusted detail than those of any other character in the books: "Far and wide her lesser broods, bastards of the miserable mates, her own offspring, that she slew, spread from glen to glen" (723). As Williamson notes, she is "the sole female presence" in the trilogy described in "vivid biological and sensory detail" (146).

As earlier readers such as Stimpson and Partridge have noted, her battle with Sam over the body of Frodo is a perverse sequence of sexual assaults. First, we see her "bending over him, so intent upon her victim that she took no heed of Sam and his cries" (IV.10.728). Sam then rushes to the rescue, more fiercely than "some desperate small creature [...] that stands above its fallen mate" (711). In defense of his "mate," Sam works his way beneath Shelob's "vast belly," with which she attempts to smother him, only to have him pierce her with his sword as she descends. The associations of female sexuality with death and assault on the bonds of male friendship, all washed in imagery designed to evoke disgust, need little explication.

The vast caverns of Moria, another hidden place on the map of Middle-earth, are also places of death and horror, though they represent not female sexuality but the glory and the failure of a different alternative to the masculinity of Men. (Elves too, it should be noted, sometimes dwell in caves, such as those of the woodland elves in *The Hobbit* or those of Doriath and Nargothrond in the First Age; these, though, tend to be surrounded by woods and run through by rivers, more permeable and less deeply rooted in the earth than those of the Dwarves.) As their stature implies, Dwarves represent a sort of stunted form of the normative masculinity of Men; their psychology and values may be compared roughly to those of adolescent males: in some respects admirable and even enchanting, but also ultimately unsustainable under the Dominion of Men.

Like Elves, Dwarves have a different relation to history than do Men (as in the rest of this paper, the discussion that follows is grounded primarily on the representation of Dwarves in the trilogy; for a subtle and persuasive argument about how Tolkien's representation of Dwarves evolved over time, see Brackmann). Though not immortal, they are much longer-lived than Men, but unlike Men, who spread and build upon the surface of Middle-earth, and so create history, dwarves are generally insular, withdrawn, distrustful, and clannish. The plights of the Dwarves tend to involve being driven from their strongholds under the earth, first from Moria and then from "under the

Mountain,” and out into the open, where they never seem quite comfortable. They appear most comically ill at ease when removed from the ground, whether up in a tree or even just on a horse. Dwarves wage wars with other peoples, but less for material or political gain, or even for the more ephemeral yet politically meaningful sake of honor, than out of more emotional motives: a grim and myopic vengefulness or even, as when battling Orcs, something like racial hatred, oblivious to the social consequences or historical contexts of their battles. Though the Dwarves make an essential military contribution to the defeat of Sauron, such clannish, irrational violence would be disruptive and out of place in the new more orderly, more “grown-up,” Dominion of Men.

As with the elves, the dwarvish withdrawal from history is associated with an increased aesthetic sensibility specifically contrasted with the pragmatism of Men. After the battle of Helm’s Deep, Gimli tells Legolas of stumbling upon the Caverns there:

Strange are the ways of Men, Legolas! Here they have one of the marvels of the Northern World, and what do they say of it? Caves, they say! Caves! Holes to fly to in time of war, to store fodder in! My good Legolas, do you know that the caverns of Helm’s Deep are vast and beautiful? There would be an endless pilgrimage of Dwarves, merely to gaze at them, if such things were known to be. Aye indeed, they would pay pure gold for a brief glance! (III.8.547)

In addition to their beauty, Gimli’s description of the Caverns in the paragraphs that follow emphasizes their stillness, their abstraction from the history marching along outside. Though not especially magical, Dwarves do produce objects of beauty, as well as the tools of history, weapons and armor. Nevertheless, Dwarves’ aesthetic sensibility is distinctly material and, Gimli’s worshipful description of the Caverns notwithstanding, often seems to produce an obsessive lust for possession, especially in contrast with the more spiritualized beauties valued by Elves (Smaug’s useless hoarding of dwarf treasure in *The Hobbit* parodies the Dwarves’ own accumulation of the same pile of loot for its own sake). Unlike Elves, Dwarves are “lovers [...] of things that take shape under the hands of craftsmen rather than of things that live by their own life” (*LotR* App.E.1132).

Still, their materialism differs from that of Men. Dwarves immerse themselves, literally, in the earth itself and place the highest value on their plastic interaction with it, on their ability to shape matter to their will and vision, for both practical and aesthetic purposes. While Elves seem to resist history by rising above it, dwarves do so by being too firmly rooted in their own ways and values to be moved by it. If elvishness parallels the aloof asceticism of the university, the dwarvish appreciation of the well-executed

work of hands suggests the aesthetic of the pre-modern craftsman. Dwarvishness may also suggest an earlier stage of pre-adult development, the earthy rough and tumble of the public school rugby field (on which Tolkien played as a boy), the self-centered striving for mastery of the physical world characteristic of male adolescence. Dwarves could be described as immature in comparison to elves or Men, yet they represent a particular relation to the aesthetic and to the Earth itself that may be lost to the adult male as he matures into the sort of Man modernity demands. Thus, like hobbits, they represent certain forms of enchantment with the world that must be left behind with the advent of the Dominion of Men. The friendship of Legolas and Gimli in the trilogy, which ends with them leaving Middle-earth together, is emblematic of the inevitable eclipse of the different versions of masculinity represented by Elves and Dwarves.

Though “bred” of captive elves, “in envy and mockery” of them, by Melkor, the Ur-Enemy of Tolkien’s creation (*Silmarillion* 50), the Orcs seem to represent more closely a perversion of the culture of the Dwarves. Both share a distaste for elves, but a hatred for one another, based on a long bloody history. Like Dwarves, Orcs are at home underground and exhibit elemental powers of endurance and savagery consonant with their habitations in stone and earth. The trilogy, though, tells of transformations wrought upon and by the Orcs. As minions of Sauron, they wield the new technologies of battle he has devised to contest for power with Men, most notably the explosives that threaten the walls erected by Men. This glimpse of modern warfare foreshadows the world that will evolve from the events of the trilogy, the evolution of chivalry into industrialized destruction. The advent of orcish participation in history is also figured and foreshadowed by the Saruman’s Uruk-hai, who have cast off the Orcs’ former aversion to daylight. While the other hidden peoples of Middle-earth are in decline, the Orcs have come out of their caves. They inscribe their presence into the earth itself as they cross the fields of Rohan with their hobbit prisoners: “Nearly due west the broad swath of the marching Orcs tramped its ugly slot; the sweet grass of Rohan had been bruised and blackened as they passed” (*LotR* III.2.424). Their mark defaces Tolkien’s beloved and beautiful landscape; like the destruction of Fangorn or the scarring of the Shire, the transformation of Middle-earth into “the fields we know” (in Lord Dunsany’s phrase) is figured through such geographical changes.

THE MOST PROMINENT SUBTERRANEAN CREATURES in the story are also the best hidden, and they provide the most thoroughly explored alternative to the hegemonic masculinity of Men. Like the reader, many of the other characters in the story are introduced to Hobbits and enchanted by them over the course of the narrative. Many of the characters they encounter have either never heard

of Hobbits or, if they have, believe them to be mythical creatures. Even Sauron does not seem to know precisely where the Shire is and has to send his minions out to search for it.

Hobbits offer an example of a childlike innocence that inspires Men like Aragorn and the Rangers to acts of heroic self-sacrifice. It charms and temporarily rejuvenates old and jaded characters like Fangorn and Théoden. Even Denethor, cynical and enslaved to history, seems to find some comfort in Pippin's presence in his last days (and perhaps he finds a sour solace in disabusing Pippin of his innocence of history, as he seems to enjoy deflating Gandalf's hopes). The Hobbits represent an escape from worldly care that Men cannot enjoy. The Shire has known no war, no politics, and only the pettiest of jealousies. Hobbits embody a fantasy of childhood carelessness somehow extended into adulthood. Hobbits do not consider themselves to be adults until the age of thirty-three. In the final chapters of the trilogy, though, the outside world intrudes on the Shire. The meanings of this intrusion are ambiguous. On the one hand, the Hobbits band together to defeat the invasion of the physically stronger but outnumbered Men. On the other, the invasion reveals not only the Shire's vulnerability once its isolation is breached, but also the disturbing ease with which its citizens can be enrolled in the oppressive machinery of the modern state.

The strength of Hobbits, however, lies not just in their innocence. Rather, what allows them to rescue the world when the force of Men's arms cannot is the unique quality of their relationships to one another. Merry and Pippin are most admirable when kidnapped by the Orcs. Their mutual support and ability to sustain a degree of comradely good cheer in the darkest of hours contrast in juxtaposed chapters with the grim perseverance of their pursuing friends. At the same time, their asexual innocence is set off by the sexual connotations of the language used to describe their treatment by the orcs, who "grope" at them with "pawing hands" and "hot breath" (*LotR* III.9.564). This sort of friendship exists between none of the non-hobbit characters (although their adventures do create an unusual friendship between Legolas the Elf and Gimli the Dwarf, whose races have traditionally been on prickly terms).

As Frodo and Sam penetrate the Enemy's defenses, they rely as Hobbits always have on their ability to hide, to be missed by the Big Folk whose attention is consumed by larger concerns. But their most powerful weapon against death and despair is their relationship to one another, which becomes stronger as their plight becomes bleaker. On the stairs of Cirith Ungol, even Gollum, finding them asleep together, is affected by it:

Sam sat propped against the stone, his head dropping sideways and his breathing heavy. In his lap lay Frodo's head, drowned deep in sleep; upon his white forehead lay one of Sam's brown hands, and the other lay softly on his master's breast. Peace was in both their faces.

Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. [...] [S]lowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee—but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing. (*LotR* IV.8.714)

The scene recalls Gollum's primordial sin, the slaying of his own childhood friend, which transformed him from a hobbit-like creature. As noted above, when Sam defends Frodo from Shelob, we are told that "[n]o onslaught more fierce was ever seen in the savage world of beasts, where some desperate small creature armed with little teeth, alone, will spring upon a tower of horn and hide that stands above its fallen mate" (IV.9.728). Later, having crossed over into Mordor, they fall asleep together "hand in hand" and enjoy a brief "untroubled sleep" (VI.2.922).

One reason four Hobbits need to be included in the Fellowship of the Ring is to allow Tolkien to portray them in such relationships. Tolkien himself suggested that the character of Sam was inspired by the batmen he observed in the trenches of the Somme (*Letters* 81). The deep homosocial relationship between officer and batman had roots in relationships between older and younger boys in the British boarding schools that many of the officers had attended, which in turn received sanction from the model of ancient Greek pedagogy. They are thus distinguished from the battlefield camaraderies of Men, such as that between Aragorn and Eomer. In such relationships Hobbits are able—like Elves and Dwarves, but unlike Men—to transcend the concerns of secular history. These relationships give Hobbits power in history by giving them power over history. They are fostered in places that, like the Shire, are sheltered from the world of adult male responsibilities to modern society, predominant among which are fighting wars and reproducing heterosexually. But, as Hugh T. Keenan notes, Hobbits represent "the eternal child who must be sacrificed so that the man may live" (67). As do Elves and Dwarves, then, Hobbits offer an elegiac vision of a masculinity that does not survive history. Emerging from their comfortable, womblike holes in the first chapter of *The Hobbit*, by the end of the trilogy, Hobbits have irretrievably entered history. The Shire, so to speak, has been put on the map.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF MIDDLE-EARTH, THEN, CONCEALS a variety of alternatives to the version of masculinity that will come to dominate that geography in the changed world of the Fourth Age, the Age of the "Dominion of Men." Those alternatives represent critiques of that version of masculinity even as they fall before its seemingly inevitable advance. With that advance, the very landscape of the Middle-earth will be transformed into a lost topos, a geography of desire for alternative masculinities that no longer exist.

My argument to this point has focused on how Tolkien maps these alternative masculinities onto the different "races" or "peoples" of Middle-earth. But geography is also used to figure the roles and relationships of women and men—of whatever race. Because there are relatively few prominent female characters, it is fairly easy to draw a contrast between two different versions of femininity in *The Lord of the Rings*.

On the one hand are women who stay put. These include Galadriel, whose power is rooted like the *mallorn* trees in the woods of Lórien. She leaves these woods only twice in the tale, in both cases on errands that herald the decline of the power she wields: first to bless the wedding of Aragorn and Arwen, which will seal the doom of her realm, and then to leave Middle-earth altogether in the final pages. Even more rooted, if possible, than Galadriel is Goldberry, Tom Bombadil's "fair lady," apparently sprung parthenogenically from the River Withywindle in the Old Forest. When we are introduced to her she appears to be composed of the stuff of the forest itself:

In a chair [...] sat a woman. Her long yellow hair rippled down her shoulders; her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew; and her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots. About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool. (*LotR* I.7.123)

Both Galadriel and Goldberry wield conventionally feminine powers. Goldberry's is particularly domestic in nature: she keeps Tom's house, while Tom roves the Forest seeking sustenance for her. Together they create the ultimate refuge from the history passing outside the forbidding shadowy borders of the Old Forest.

Galadriel's power seems greater though more mysterious, hidden under the eaves of the woods of Lórien. She tells Frodo that "even as I speak to you, I perceive the Dark Lord and know his mind, or all of his mind that concerns the Elves. And he gropes ever to see me and my thought. But still the door is closed" (II.7.364-65). She offers Frodo and Sam visions of history, or of possible histories, but no advice about how to intervene in those histories. She



gives gifts of protection against the dangers of the world beyond the woods, as well as of beauty, light, and fertility. To Aragorn she gives a sheath for his sword (in one exception to her preference for protective gifts, she gives Legolas a bow and arrow, though this will, as it turns out, be used almost always as a defensive weapon). The gifts that seem most useful to the Fellowship in their subsequent adventures are those that sustain them, the elvish waybread, and those that allow them to blend into the landscape, the elven cloaks woven by "herself and her maidens" (*LotR* II.8.370).

In both cases, Goldberry's and Galadriel's powers are figured in the woods to which they seem properly tied. These woods are spaces on the map that are hidden from view and therefore feared, though as we learn, when the books take us into these spaces, this fear is largely misplaced. Perhaps significantly, it is the two main architects of the impending Dominion of Men, Gandalf and Aragorn, who seem least fearful of these feminine spaces and to best appreciate their power, but also the limitations of that power. These spaces on the map which hide sources of feminine power are sites of retreat and rejuvenation; the male characters are enchanted by them (as are we) but can stay there only temporarily before returning to roles in the history playing out beyond the woods (both in the Old Forest and Lothlórien, the hobbits lose track of how much time has passed "outside"). These woods are, in other words, domestic spaces, playing something like the idealized role of the Victorian home, in which feminine power presides in order to support the masculine engagement with history.

By contrast, when women refuse to stay put the results are invariably problematic. The representation of independent movement as a crime or failure in women is familiar from feminist critiques of the mechanisms of patriarchy. The clearest example in Tolkien is the Entwives, who leave the Ents to try to establish an agriculture, as opposed to the pastoral culture of the male Ents (ironically, since the Ents herd trees, it is they who stay in one place, while the Entwives wander off). The result is that the Ents and the Entwives lose each other, dooming their race by a long attrition. The most disturbing female in the books, Shelob, is also described as displaced, "flying from ruin" (IV.9.723) long ages ago. Frodo's aunt Lobelia pays a steep price for coveting and finally acquiring a home not truly her own.

The story of Éowyn presents a more complex case. The Rohirrim are a people characterized by their mobility: relatively recent immigrants ruling a vast grassland by their ability to travel rapidly over it. As a woman, though, Éowyn is condemned to the household, first as the unwilling attendant to her father's dotage and political manipulation, then as the defender of the homeland while the men ride off to war. Her impatience with this stationary role, one specifically predicated on her gender, is represented almost as a kind

of madness: seeing her disguised as a man heading off to battle, Merry “shivered, for it came suddenly to him that it was the face of one without hope who goes in search of death” (V.3.803). Gandalf suggests the psychological affliction that underlies her physical wounds after the battle of Pelennor Fields: “who knows what she spoke to the darkness, alone, in the bitter watches of the night, when all her life seemed shrinking, and the walls of her bower closing in about her, a hutch to trammel some wild thing in?” (V.8.867). Her despair is also a product of her unrequited love for Aragorn, though, as Faramir suggests, even this attraction arises from an unhealthy dissatisfaction with her conventional gender role: “as a great captain may to a young soldier he seemed to you admirable. [...] But when he gave you only understanding and pity, then you desired to have nothing [...]” (VI.5.964). Éowyn’s rejection of her assigned gender role turns out to be essential to the ultimate victory of the forces of Good, but Éowyn remains unhappy, looking longingly from the battlements of Minas Tirith to which she is confined towards the battlefields afar, until cured of this longing by her romance with Faramir: “Yet now that I have leave to depart, yet I would remain. For this House has become to me of all dwellings the most blessed” (965). Éowyn’s story is thus one of a woman who yearns to wander, does so, is gravely wounded as a result, and upon healing acquiesces to her conventional, stationary gender role, turning her attentions to more conventional feminine and stationary pursuits. Her final reward is something of a compromise: she leaves her native home to make a new home with Faramir in the idyllic semi-wilderness of Ithilien.

Like Goldberry and Galadriel, then, Éowyn seems to find her proper place in the woods, places associated on the maps of Middle-earth with hidden, secret power. A consequence of the tale of the Ring, though, is that these places will be abandoned (as in the case of Lórien) or domesticated (as in the case of Ithilien). The Dominion of Men thus promises to eliminate these enclaves of feminine mystery, rendering them, like the racially inscribed alternatives to conventional masculinity, objects of nostalgic longing.

The doom of the Elves is figured in the procession that leads Arwen out from the hidden seclusion of the elven retreats to her wedding with Aragorn in the city of Minas Tirith, the central symbol in the book of the new Dominion of Men over subsequent history. (Arwen’s own mother had been forced to leave Middle-earth as the result of injuries suffered while journeying beyond the sanctuaries of Lórien and Rivendell.) Forsaking her home means forsaking her immortality and succumbing to the “doom of Men.” Her death, narrated in an appendix at the end of the trilogy, suggests also the death of that place which is the source and symbol of the alternative represented by the Elves in general:

[S]he went out from the city of Minas Tirith and passed away to the land of Lórien, and dwelt there alone under the fading trees until winter came. Galadriel had passed away and Celeborn also was gone, and the land was silent.

There at last when the mallorn-leaves were falling, but spring had not yet come, she laid herself to rest upon Cerin Amroth; and there is her green grave, until the world is changed, and all the days of her life are utterly forgotten by men that come after, and elanor and niphredil bloom no more east of the Sea. (App.A.1063)

Thus, the books hint that, like the alternative masculinities that have been foreclosed by the Dominion of Men, conventional feminine roles, as figured by the feminine-gendered spaces on the map, may also be threatened by modernity, and thus become objects of nostalgic longing.

**THE MAPS OF MIDDLE-EARTH ARE INEXTRICABLE** from the plots of Tolkien's fiction, from their unique evocation of a fictional heterocosm and alternate history (though one that implicitly includes our own), and even from the physical books. They are also, I have argued, important ways in which the books represent and evoke a desire for alternatives to a version of masculinity that is felt to be limiting and restrictive, and an anxiety about modern threats to conventional gender roles. Such a reading of the maps of Middle-earth suggests interesting things about both the genesis and the reception of *The Lord of the Rings*.

On the one hand, the trilogy can be read as an allegory of a complex of challenges facing Western males in the 20th century, whose origins may be located in conflicts over masculinity that arose in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Claudia Nelson, in *Boys Will be Girls*, her study of representations of masculinity in Victorian children's literature, shows how the didactic children's literature of the era, particularly that of the generation prior to Tolkien's, valorized behavior and mores in boys which would later be considered effeminate. Purity, piety, and aesthetic sensibility were among the important components of the high moral tone that supported the ideology of empire. However, when men trained in these ideals confronted the dirty military work that needed to be done far from home to maintain that empire, the contradictions made those ideals harder to maintain. Nelson argues that this conflict led to the rise of a harder-nosed masculinity in the literature of the pre-war generation in which Tolkien was raised. Tolkien experienced that war as a soldier and the Second World War as the father of a soldier, during which he was writing *The Lord of the Rings* and sending installments to his son stationed in North Africa.

The versions of masculinity whose loss the trilogy elegizes are those being lost to realities of 20th century globalization and mechanized warfare, the latter represented in the trilogy by the pyrotechnic technologies of war developed by Sauron. Elvish masculinity, aestheticized and aloof from history, finds its analog in the life in which Tolkien sequestered himself, the all-male world of the English university, occupied with the transcendental abstractions of language and art. Dwarvish masculinity has affinities with both pre-capitalist craftsmanship, of the sort valorized by the arts and craft revivalists such as William Morris in the generation before Tolkien's, and with the pre-modern ethos of the apolitical warrior. David Funk argues that "If Hobbits embody the English farmer then surely Dwarves represent the English craftsman" (331), and that "as Middle-earth began a new age, the need for craftsmen, appreciation of beauty, willingness and patience for hard labour—all the best equalities of Dwarves—still had a place" (333). But the larger narrative within which the trilogy exists belies this claim: the farmer and the craftsman are both doomed anachronisms in the modern world figured as the "Dominion of Men." And Hobbits combine a yearning for innocence, a hesitancy towards both heterosexual relations and the immersion in society and history that attend such relations, with a desire to try to extend the rarified homosocial relationships of the boy's public school into adult life. Parallels may be drawn, then, between the rise of the Dominion of Men in Middle-earth and the decline of alternatives to the version of masculinity that seemed to accompany the advent of the modern world into which Tolkien himself grew up.

A desire for alternatives to the construction of masculinity privileged by late 20th century Western culture may also help explain Tolkien's unique popularity. The core readership of fantasy fiction, adolescent males, have often found in such fictions models of masculinity by which the uncertainties and constraints they face as they emerge into adulthood may be mediated or escaped: the narrative of an initially unpromising adolescent growing into an unlikely hero is a paradigmatic staple of such fiction. Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* incorporate this paradigm, of course (though in place of "adolescents" we have comfortable, innocent, unworldly, middle-aged Hobbits). Tolkien's fictions, however, frame this heroic narrative within a larger tragic narrative of loss, in response to which they offer not aspirational heroic fantasy, but something more like the consolation of elegy for a lost world in which modern masculinity does—or did—not wield hegemony. "Consolation," according to Tolkien, is one of the "values and functions" of "fairy-stories" ("On Fairy-Stories," 45-46). According to Rosemary Jackson, "fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural restraints: it is a literature of desire, which [...] traces the unsaid and

the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (3-4), though she dismisses Tolkien as having betrayed an "original impulse" to such a critique by lapsing into "religious longing and nostalgia" (9). Jane Chance invokes Bilbo's and Frodo's "queer" status in arguing that the popularity of the trilogy arises from "Tolkien's genius in providing a voice for the dispossessed in the modern world" (*Lord of the Rings* 2) and in devising a hopeful myth in which difference is valued.

While both readings correctly identify a desire to transcend modernity as an important component of the unique response to Tolkien's work, neither fully recognizes the continuity posited in the trilogy between the dawning Fourth Age of Middle-earth and the world the reader inhabits, or the complex tragic awareness of both loss and possibility which that continuity makes available to the reader. The historical continuity between Middle-earth and our own requires that these alternatives be relegated to the past, but also holds out the comforting fiction that they are at least possible—and perhaps still hidden away somewhere—in our own world. The explosion of the books' popularity among a wider readership in the 1960's and 70's may attest to the wider cultural interest in such alternatives at the time. The popularity not only of the books themselves but of posters of the map of Middle-earth and others declaring "Frodo Lives!" suggest that Tolkien's myth seemed to respond to widely held desires for the alternatives concealed on that map. If the map of Middle-earth represents both the existence and the secure concealment of the objects of such desires, reading allows the reader to enact (and re-enact) their discovery.

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