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## J.R.R. Tolkien and the 1954 Nomination of E.M. Forster for the Nobel Prize in Literature

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### J.R.R. Tolkien and the 1954 Nomination of E.M. Forster for the Nobel Prize in Literature

#### Abstract

Wise speculates on the involvement of J.R.R. Tolkien in the group nomination of E.M. Forster for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954; he discusses not only the politics behind the nomination but reads Forster's *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* in the light of the tension between Tolkien's interests in nationalism and inter-racial cooperation.

#### Additional Keywords

Forster, E.M.—Nobel Prize nomination; Forster, E.M. *Howards End*; Forster, E.M. *A Passage to India*; Lewis, C.S.—Career; Lewis, C.S.—Friends and associates; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Friends and associates; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Relation to C.S. Lewis



# J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND THE 1954 NOMINATION OF E.M. FORSTER FOR THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

DENNIS WILSON WISE

## INTRODUCTION

BACK IN 2012, THE BRITISH NEWSPAPER *THE GUARDIAN* broke the news that, fifty years prior, J.R.R. Tolkien had been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature. The news created something of a stir in Tolkien circles. On one hand, Tolkien's nominator was his old friend C.S. Lewis, indicating the esteem in which he still held Tolkien despite their growing distance in later years. On the other hand, Tolkien's nomination was rejected by the Swedish Academy for "poor prose" and a failure to maintain "storytelling of the highest quality" (Flood), a sign of the old disdain with which mainstream literary critics have often treated him. Lost in this story, however, was the following tidbit: the year 1962 was not Tolkien's first association with the Nobel. In 2004, when the Nobel Committee unsealed its 1954 records, we learned that Tolkien himself had nominated someone for literature's highest prize. Surprisingly, his candidate was E.M. Forster. Although Forster certainly had the requisite reputation, receiving 29 nominations in 17 different years, that he was nominated by *Tolkien* of all people caused some head-scratching.<sup>1</sup> Nothing in Tolkien's published writings or interviews ever indicated that he ever read Forster, much less admired him.

Digging deeper, however, uncovers something much more interesting about that 1954 nomination. Tolkien's effort on Forster's behalf did not come unassisted. Joining his nomination were those by two of his Oxford colleagues, Lord David Cecil, occasional Inklings and Goldsmiths' Professor of English Literature, and F.P. Wilson, Renaissance scholar and one of Oxford's two Merton Professors of literature (Tolkien being the other). Unfortunately, there is no concrete evidence that explains why three friends and colleagues should combine to nominate Forster for the Nobel, and no explanation has ever been offered as to why Tolkien would have selected someone like Forster. Only two

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<sup>1</sup> Doing a search in the Nobel database, Forster comes up as both "E. Forster" and "Edward Morgan Forster" (Nobelprize.org). The nine nominations for "E. Forster" all appear in 1959 and 1962; several of the nominators being associated with the University of Liverpool suggests some level of coordination for those years.

online blog posts to my knowledge even mention Tolkien in conjunction with the 1954 nomination.<sup>2</sup> My intention, then, is to offer one possible explanation for Tolkien's choice of nominee. The first half of this article notes some general resonances between Tolkien and Forster, and in particular I discuss Verlyn Flieger's claim that *Howards End* may have influenced Tolkien. Nonetheless, while largely agreeing with Flieger, I wish to suggest that *A Passage to India* could have been equally, if not even more, instrumental as Tolkien's justification for Forster's nomination. This point is taken up in Part II. My guiding assumption will be that active writers like Tolkien tend to read other authors in light of their own literary or thematic concerns. Admittedly, considering that Tolkien never discusses Forster directly, my argument is a speculative one. As Raymond Edwards, though, remarks in an admirable recent biography, such speculation can be permitted so long as "we admit we are guessing" (16). Although I doubt Tolkien borrowed anything in literary terms from Forster, Forster's work nonetheless articulates several colonial, racial, and ethical themes that would have captured Tolkien's attention and garnered his esteem.

The appendix to my main argument takes up the question of one possible non-literary influence on the 1954 triple nomination. Considering that the Nobel website lists the 1954 nomination as one nomination signed by three different professors, all of whom were friendly with one another, it seems clear that Tolkien, Wilson, and Cecil were working together. The question, then, is why? My hypothesis is that they collaborated in order to help secure their friend C.S. Lewis a professorship at the University of Cambridge. During the same time that the triumvirate submitted their 1954 nomination, Lewis's friends and allies—frustrated that his career seemed blocked at Oxford—orchestrated the creation of a new chair in Medieval and Renaissance English at Cambridge. Most discussions of this episode in Inklings' history focus on the coaxing Lewis needed to accept this prestigious promotion, but nobody knows anything about the behind-the-scenes efforts needed to create the professorship in the first place. For my part, I think it likely that some normal academic politicking might have been involved. As a means to mollify any potential resistance in Cambridge to adding Lewis to its professorial ranks, three Oxford dons—the triumvirate of Tolkien, Wilson, and Cecil—promised to nominate one of

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<sup>2</sup> Both bloggers are respected Tolkien scholars, Jason Fisher and John Rateliff. To my knowledge, Fisher deserves credit for being the first to discuss the 1954 nominations. Tellingly, since he notes that Forster was nominated by "two Oxford dons" (emphasis mine), fellow Inklings J.R.R. Tolkien and David Cecil, Fisher probably—and understandably—did not know who Wilson was. Rateliff's blog post on the issue takes off from Fisher. Rateliff suggests that Tolkien may have been thinking primarily of *Howards End* and maybe *A Room with a View* when he made the 1954 nomination. My suggestion in this article is that Tolkien may have been thinking primarily of *A Passage to India*.

Cambridge's most famous writers for the Nobel Prize in Literature. All three nominators had ample reason to help Lewis; furthermore, Tolkien and Wilson were even chosen, alongside several Cambridge-based allies of Lewis, as electors for the new professorship. No ethical qualms would have been raised over this evident bit of *quid pro quo*: Lewis's body of work certainly merited a prestigious academic position, and Forster was certainly a legitimate Nobel candidate (and my main argument presents several reasons why Tolkien might have admired Forster's work). Without a smoking gun, alas, my hypothesis must remain a hypothesis. Still, my hope simply is to lay out the most plausible explanation that fits the few facts we have at our disposal.

## PART I

### TOLKIEN AND FORSTER: GENERAL CONVERGENCES

Given that Forster's two best novels are *Howards End* and *A Passage to India*, it makes sense that these works might have served as Tolkien's primary justification for nominating Forster. Several themes or topics in Forster's entire corpus, though, probably resonated with Tolkien: the dislike of class snobbishness, the tension between Christianity and paganism, the environmental impact of industrialization (motor cars especially), and the interest in *genii loci*, the spirit or "genius" of a place.<sup>3</sup> The danger in the "similarities" game, of course, is the risk of speaking in generalities. Examined from a sufficient distance, any two writers are bound to converge at spots and diverge at others. Margaret Hiley's monograph, *The Loss and the Silence*, occasionally succumbs to this trap when she compares Tolkien with William Butler Yeats. Neither writer has any direct or obvious connection with the other, but Hiley discovers that both effectively attempt to erase the colonial history of their respective countries—the English conquest of Ireland for Yeats, the Norman conquest of England for Tolkien (127). While Hiley's analysis has some positive value, similar observations could have been made between Tolkien and most other writers of the Irish Literary Revival.

An example of the comparative approach at its best comes from Verlyn Flieger, and she deserves special credit, several years prior to the Swedish Academy unsealing its 1954 records, for making the intuitive leap from Tolkien to Forster. As is well known, Tolkien originally conceived of his legendarium as a mythology he could dedicate "to England; to my country," something rooted in its soil and climate (Tolkien, *Letters* 144). The likeness between that grandiose

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<sup>3</sup> The most famous example of a *genius loci* in Tolkien's work is Tom Bombadil. Forster, too, used the figure multiple times. Two of his short stories, "The Story of a Panic" and "The Road from Colonus" in *The Collected Tales of E.M. Forster*, as well as the beginning of *The Longest Journey*, all explore the idea.

early literary ambition, which Tolkien nearly blushes to recall in his letter to Milton Waldman, with a single but telling passage in Forster's *Howards End* motivates Flieger's insightful connection. In that novel, Forster has his main character, Margaret Schlegel, ponder why England has no national mythology as other countries do:

Why has not England a great mythology? Our folklore has never advanced beyond daintiness, and the greater melodies about our country-side have all issued through the pipes of Greece. Deep and true as the native imagination can be, it seems to have failed here. It has stopped with the witches and the fairies. It cannot vivify one fraction of a summer field, or give names to half a dozen stars. England still waits for the supreme moment of her literature—for the great poet who shall voice her, or, better still, for the thousand little poets whose voices shall pass into our common talk. (228)

Margaret's clarion call for a "great poet who shall voice" England, Flieger hazards, could have made a great impression on Tolkien during a very impressionable time in his life, and she constructs a timeline situating *Howards End* into this period:

In 1907 W.F. Kirby's English translation of *Kalevala* was published in the Everyman edition, which Tolkien read. In 1910 *Howards End*, with Margaret Schlegel's lament for an English mythology, appeared and was widely read. In 1912 Tolkien had said he wanted something of the same sort as *Kalevala* "for the English." In 1914 Tolkien's first effort at intentional mythmaking, "The Voyage of Eärendil," was written. (28)

Flieger admits that we have no concrete proof that Tolkien read *Howards End* at that time. Still, I agree that her conjecture seems sound; Tolkien's later Nobel nomination of Forster simply adds support to an already inspired scholarly guess. Where I depart from Flieger is in how she seems to isolate a single passage from *Howards End* from the rest of the novel. Although Flieger correctly observes that Forster's passage recalls the oft "perceived connection, current in their day, between mythology and nationalism" (7), she seems to overlook how *Howards End*, even Forster's entire literary career, criticizes the nationalistic spirit. Like all forms of exclusivity in Forster, nationalism is a dangerous force. It erects boundaries that inhibit the realization of Forster's essential moral imperative, "only connect" — the phrase that forms the epigraph to *Howards End*. One cannot connect with a fellow human being while engaged in furious nationalistic partisanship. Insofar as Forster praises a national mythology, as indeed Margaret Schlegel does, he seems to do so for the spiritual and aesthetic benefits

such a mythology provides. A mythology connects a land's inhabitants to the land. Like many other people after the Industrial Revolution, Forster keenly felt the potential alienation implied by modernity, the perceived soullessness of a modern science, all of which has summarily banished the sprites and fairies that once gave pre-modern life its unique character. Forster's praise of mythology, therefore, owes more to romanticism than to cultural nationalism (for all that the two movements have their links), and I read him as actively resisting the implications of the latter. A great English mythology would resuscitate the Englishman's connection with the earth but need not, Forster strives to tell us in *Howards End*, support an exclusivity that supports one's nation over a common humanity.

Of course, Tolkien—still a young reader in the 1910s—might have misread Forster or, just as likely, rejected Forster's critique of nationalism while accepting the rest: the lessons Tolkien learned from *Howards End* may have been quite different from the lessons Forster wished to impart. Nonetheless, the novel examines many themes besides mythology. Tolkien, I think, would have readily felt a certain kinship to Margaret and Helen Schlegel: born in England, identifying as English, but in possession of a German surname. The consequence of such a birthright is a certain liminality, an almost-but-not-quite acceptance by families with greater tenure in England. The Schlegels, in fact, are seen as only quasi-English, even cosmopolitan. Indeed, the Wilcoxes instantly attack this alleged cosmopolitanism once a conflict arises between them. Discovering that the recently deceased Mrs. Wilcox seems to have willed *Howards End* to Margaret, Evie Wilcox wails that Margaret "isn't really English," and her brother Charles quickly affirms this point, adding that Margaret is "a cosmopolitan" (86). Ironically, the Schlegels do not see themselves as cosmopolitan at all. Margaret's sister Helen accuses her of lapsing often into an "honest-English vein" of speech, a vein Margaret considers much superior to the cosmopolitan (135). Even more to the point, Margaret cannot imagine how her father could bear to have left his native Germany for a new country. He had fought in Germany's wars, and "all his feelings and friends were Prussian[.] How could he break loose with patriotism and begin aiming at something else?" (135). Such questions about national identity could have resonated as greatly with young Tolkien as anything else in the novel—perhaps even overwhelming, for him, the novel's anti-nationalism implications. Michael T. Saler observes, in fact, that Tolkien's first imaginary world was "England" rather than Middle-earth, requiring the creation of "an imaginary prehistory of England to authorize his English identity" (168). Tolkien forged a literary English mythology to authenticate his national identity and erase his own liminality.

Nonetheless, Tolkien would have viewed matters quite differently in 1954 than he would have in 1910. It is commonly accepted that his nationalistic

impulses waned as he matured, as can be seen from the changing nature of his own legendarium. According to Dimitra Fimi, although some of Tolkien's romanticism remained "in the new idea of a 'proto-prehistoric' united Europe fighting against Sauron," such as we see in *The Lord of the Rings*, that kind of romanticism differs greatly from "the aggressive nationalism of *The Book of Lost Tales*" (130). After witnessing two world wars, fervent claims of national superiority struck Tolkien as increasingly problematic. Had Tolkien re-read or reconsidered *Howards End* later in life, his understanding of Forster's themes might have evolved quite drastically, even leading him to re-prioritize some of his own youthful intuitions. Writing to his son Michael during the Second World War, Tolkien relates his disquiet about anti-German British propaganda during the First. "People in this land," he writes, "seem not even yet to realize that in the Germans we have enemies whose virtues [...] of obedience and patriotism are greater than ours in the mass. [...] There is a great deal more force (and truth) than ignorant people imagine in the 'Germanic' ideal" (*Letters* 55). It is possible that, as a youth, Tolkien had not seen any potential conflict between admiring post-Bismarck Germans and his own literary project of English nationalism. That conflict, however, is apparent throughout *Howards End*, and Forster advocates an ethics of human connection that runs roughshod over artificially created human divisions like national belonging.

Even if Tolkien grew wary of nationalism, though, that hardly means that he embraced cosmopolitanism, the other half of the binary examined by *Howards End*. Some scholars, such as Helen Young, have attempted to read *The Lord of the Rings* as a cosmopolitan work, but true instances of "global consciousness" (Young 352) are limited to Gandalf, some of the Wise, and those under their direct tutelage; the Nine Walkers of the Fellowship may form "a microcosm of this broader [cosmopolitan] situation" (355), but Young fails to note how quickly the Fellowship disintegrates following Gandalf's disappearance. In general, attachment to a cultural, historical, or linguistic identity tends to be the norm in Middle-earth. Given the importance of cultural or linguistic identity to most characters other than Gandalf, I suspect Tolkien would have agreed with Forster's critique of cosmopolitanism. On Forster's view, cosmopolitanism disassociates people from their land, impoverishing their aesthetic quality of life. The life of the peasant is superior to the life of the citizen-of-the-world. For example, during a trip to Oniton Grange (located along the Welsh border, itself a symbol of geographic and hence national liminality), the Wilcoxes run over a cat with their car. The only member of their party upset by this is Margaret Schlegel. She reflects that their whole journey from London—the cosmopolitan city—had "been unreal. They had no part with the earth and its emotions. They were dust, and a stink, and cosmopolitan chatter, and the girl whose cat had been killed had lived more deeply than they"



(*Howards End* 183). Tolkien, who identified closely with the West Midlands of England, would have recognized that sentiment; indeed, *genius loci* figures like Tom Bombadil derive their significance *because* of their connection to a particular parcel of land. Tolkien once griped, only half-jokingly, that he wished for “the curse of Babel” to descend upon all those who had made English a global language (*Letters* 65)—a wish that powerfully contradicts a desire for cosmopolitan global citizenship.

If Tolkien later grew ambivalent about his youthful nationalistic sentiments, and if he shared Forster’s opinions on cosmopolitanism, then what remains? Instead of the national and the cosmopolitan, I contend that Tolkien’s mature views can be better expressed through the binary of the universal and the particular. More so than in *Howards End*, this binary forms the backbone of events in *A Passage to India*. That novel, furthermore, depicts a colonial situation readily recognizable to Tolkien. If so, then Forster’s final novel may have been the work that earned Tolkien’s greatest admiration and justified his nomination of Forster for the Nobel.

## PART II

### TOLKIEN AND *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*: THE PARTICULAR AND THE UNIVERSAL

The argument of the following section, admittedly, is speculative. As such, it might strike some as strange: why *might* Tolkien have admired *A Passage to India* if he read it at all? Complicating this argument is the problem that any one reader can read a text in different ways at different times, places, or contexts. The previous section, for example, suggests that Tolkien’s evolving views could have easily made him understand *Howards End* differently in the 1940s and 1950s than in the 1910s. In this section, my method is to examine *Passage* alongside *The Lord of the Rings* on the assumption that active writers tend to read other writers in light of their own on-going literary concerns. I argue that, first, Tolkien had reason to be sympathetic to the basic colonial situation described in *Passage*. Second, I argue that Forster’s handling of the particular-universal binary (a less restricted binary than the national and the cosmopolitan) contains echoes within *The Lord of the Rings*. The evidential bar being set here is actually lower than in an argument for direct influence; instead, my suggestion is that some of the themes foremost in Tolkien’s mind during the writing and publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, a period extending through the late 1930s to the early 1950s, resonate with themes found in Forster’s *A Passage to India*. As with many of us, a prime factor that leads to respect or admiration is simply seeing a writer powerfully articulate themes or ideas which we think important.

Biographically speaking, we have at least one particularly beguiling excerpt from Tolkien’s letters that, though it never references Forster, provides a tantalizing glimpse of how *Passage* might have resonated with Tolkien. The

letter was written to Christopher Tolkien during his WWII service in South Africa. We do not have Christopher's original letter, but Tolkien—who had been born in South Africa—responds thus:

As for what you say or hint of 'local' conditions: I knew of them. I don't think they have much changed (even for the worse). I used to hear them discussed by my mother; and have ever since taken a special interest in that part of the world. The treatment of colour nearly always horrifies anyone going out from Britain, & not only in South Africa. Unfort. not many retain that generous sentiment for long. (*Letters* 73)

Taken out of context, this excerpt could serve as a partial synopsis of *A Passage to India*. Tolkien's "local conditions" reference, of course, alludes to apartheid, the hatred of which Tolkien elsewhere describes as being "in my bones" ("Valedictory Address" 238). While the colonial situation of two entirely different countries should not be conflated, Tolkien's letter to Christopher seems to recognize a major point also made by Forster in *Passage*: colonialism has a detrimental effect on the colonizer (to say nothing of the colonized). English men and women might initially be horrified at the treatment of race when leaving home for a particular part of the empire, but such "generous sentiments" do not last long. Forster's Dr. Aziz, an Indian, instantly recognizes Mrs. Moore as freshly arrived by her willingness to treat him politely. Even more bluntly, Hamidullah articulates Tolkien's insight in the novel's very first conversation: the English all originally come to India "intending to be gentlemen, and are told it will not do"; the men "all become exactly the same" within two years, the women in six months (*A Passage to India* [*Passage*] 10-11).

The corollary of such racial (and cultural) contempt is the parallel between the brutal segregation of apartheid and *de facto* segregation in British India. Indians and English, the newly arrived Adela Quested is told, never mix socially, as it only causes problems. Undaunted, Adela persists in wishing to meet the local Indian community, so a Bridge party is formed—but the prediction of "problems" ends up being a self-fulfilling prophecy due to how rudely the British treat their Indian guests. Adela is "perfectly ashamed" of their behavior and, when Mrs. Moore confronts her son Ronnie about that rudeness, he cries out impatiently, "[W]hat do you and Adela want me to do? Go against my class, against all the people I respect and admire out here?" (50)—as if the practice of good manners meant rejecting class and country. Even beyond Tolkien's life-long "special interest" in his country of birth, he probably had some intimations at Oxford of the attitudes described by Forster. Even though Tolkien himself never discusses the social treatment of Indian students in his university, Forster does. In an intriguing 1914 letter to Syed Ross Masood (an

inspiration for Dr. Aziz), Forster's rails against the social insularity between English and Indian. Universities, Forster writes,

grow more & more concerned about your compatriots; it is indeed a problem. We have lost the art of digesting you that we had in your father's time. I can hardly hear of any cases in which an Englishman & Indian have become real friends. (*Letters* 1:216)

An undergraduate at this time, Tolkien of course had his own tight-knit circle of (ethnically homogenous) friends in the TCBS; also, as a young man, he may also have simply been oblivious to the atmosphere Forster describes.<sup>4</sup> But as Tolkien grew older and more experienced, the possibility for drawing parallels might have made him more sympathetic to the basic premises of Forster's last novel.

Nonetheless, such biographical hints, tantalizing as they may be, constitute slight evidence. As readily as Tolkien would have assented to *A Passage to India's* basic premises, racial or postcolonial themes simply never constituted Tolkien's primary literary interests. As such, I suspect Forster might have captivated Tolkien through his theme of the universal and the particular. Despite sharing a kinship, the universal-particular binary carries a different set of implications than the national-cosmopolitan binary. The latter, exemplified by *Howards End*, focuses on the concept of nationhood, whether one nation (nationalism) or many (cosmopolitan). Although the marriage between Margaret and Henry symbolically marks human unity, *Howards End* does seem to sympathize with a quasi-nationalism, at least regarding the aesthetic or mythological experience of life. The universal-particular binary, however, is both more general and more flexible as a category of thought. The particular can be understood as one's allegiance to a group, one's participation in an identity that includes some but excludes others. Put another way, the particular requires the love of one's own. We have a greater natural attachment to what we view as particularly *ours*: our country, ethnicity, class, occupation, family, language, religion, customs, or traditions—anything, in short, that draws the individual into a group. Universality, in contrast, can be understood as the suspicion that what is good cannot be simply equated with one's own. To be born a particular nationality, whether British or Indian or whatever, is a mere historical accident. Only human nature is essential. One's humanity is the only comprehensive identity available to us all; as such, it forms the ideal basis for a universal ethics.

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Forster was much better situated to see such things. He was older for one thing, and his Oxford visit to Masood came after having spent six months in India. Furthermore, his friendship with Masood—which was not entirely platonic on Forster's part—made him keenly aware of the social pressures faced by Masood.

Allegiance to less inclusive—and hence more divisive—identities is therefore suspect. Universality, then, is the universal connection of all human beings *qua* human beings regardless of “accidental” qualities such as race, class, nationality, geography, gender, or culture.

*A Passage to India*, much more clearly than *Howards End*, best exemplifies the universal-particular binary in Forster’s work. David Cecil captures the general thrust of this binary when he describes the unique qualities behind Forster’s moral vision. Forster “feels himself part of no corporate unit,” and he “seems temperamentally unresponsive to those instinctive, irrational, magnetic forces that draw the individual into a group: national feeling, class feeling, family feeling, comradely feeling” (*Poets and Storytellers* [Poets] 182). Although Forster might praise one’s attachment to a particular soil or climate, his praise is quite limited; such minor attachments never supersede the most comprehensive attachment of all—the group that includes every human, everywhere, regardless of accidental qualities of history or culture or language.

Forster’s views are a product of his liberal humanism: the association of free individual human subjects who all participate equally in an essential human nature. Tolkien himself, of course, would have disliked Forster’s secular standpoint; instead, he would have sympathized with C.S. Lewis’s remark that Forster was one of the “silliest” of Cambridge’s “Orthodox Atheists” (Lewis, *Letters* 3.578, 577). Nonetheless, in a way the universalism of Forster’s liberal humanism resembles the universalism of Tolkien’s Catholicism. Catholicism presents itself as a universal doctrine. Although the Church organizes itself hierarchically, the doctrinal premises of Catholicism are aggressively egalitarian: regardless of rank or country, anyone can receive God’s grace. Even more to the point, I think, Tolkien understood and accepted the precariousness underlying Forster’s brand of universalism. Forster achieves universality through his ideal of friendship—perhaps the single greatest virtue in Forster’s moral outlook. Friendship, even more so than romantic love, draws individuals to connect with one another. Such an ideal, however, has a shaky foundation. As Cecil observes, any “jarring note—an error of taste, a failure of sympathy—can destroy it completely” (*Poets* 182). That is to say, ardent friendships fail just as often as ardent friendships arise—and on much less provocation. Both Forster and Tolkien accepted the basic truth of that fragility, although whereas Forster saw that precariousness as inevitable, Tolkien saw it as demonstrating the necessity for God’s intervention, since mortal efforts alone would never suffice.

Both *A Passage to India* and *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrate this fragility despite the many successful cross-boundary friendships. In *Passage*, the core friendship is between an Englishman, Cyril Fielding, and an Indian, Dr. Aziz. Their friendship forms within a period of stability during British colonial rule. Once Aziz is mistakenly accused of assaulting an English woman,

however, a tense situation develops that pits Indian against English. Fielding shows his loyalty to a friend by supporting Aziz, which greatly angers his English compatriots—and Forster shows his subtlety by portraying the special circumstances that permit Fielding to defy “all his own people for the sake of a stray Indian” (*Passage* 319). Fielding is a man adept at “travelling light” (273). He has no wife or children, at least not initially. He is free from all ideological partisanship. Fielding owes his position in India to no reason other than his requirement for a job; certainly, demonstrating British “superiority” or the justness of empire never matters to him. Such wonderful independence as Fielding’s does not come easily or even naturally. Aristotle once remarked that the man who refuses to participate in the life of his city is either a beast or a god (1253a), and suffice to say that most people are neither. Fielding, as Forster tells us, has simply “matured in a different atmosphere, where the herd-instinct does not flourish” (*Passage* 62). His bachelorhood and lack of family ties mean that he has no fears about losing his job—a legitimate worry considering the unpopularity of his belief in Aziz’s innocence. Because of Fielding’s perfect (and unusual) freedom to follow his conscience, he is liberal humanism’s perfect representative.

Nonetheless, despite all that Fielding risks for Aziz, the “jarring note” cited by Cecil undermines their friendship. Although Aziz is acquitted, a series of unfounded rumors lead to an iciness in Aziz’s feeling for Fielding. Forster reconciles the two in the end, but the damage has been done: each has hardened in their political attitudes. Each has retreated into their respective nationalism—the damage done to Aziz’s reputation draws him to virulently assert Indian independence, and Fielding, who after marrying no longer travels “as lightly as in the past” (*Passage* 317), is more thoroughly *English* than he has ever been before. When he asks Aziz, with some naivety, if their friendship might regain some of its former closeness, Forster seems to deny the possibility of such cross-cultural connection in the novel’s famous ending:

But the horses didn’t want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, “No, not yet,” and the sky said, “No, not there.” (322)

Under my reading of *Passage*, this bleakest of Forster’s novels, Forster simultaneously upholds the goodness of universality, achieved through personal friendship, while despairing of the inevitability of those forces that irresistibly draw individuals into exclusive group identities.

Tolkien, I think, was well attuned to such themes of universalism and particularism. On one hand, *The Lord of the Rings* is more optimistic about personal friendship than *Passage*—Gimli and Legolas transcend the racial divide, Sam and Frodo transcend the class one. Such friendships, it should be stressed, exemplify the Forsterian ideal. On the other hand, the forces of particularism are quite strong in Middle-earth. Nearly every major society in Middle-earth is a particularist or “closed” society (to use Karl Popper’s phrase). Participation is limited by birth into a certain ethnicity, a certain historical tradition, or a certain set of customs. Although the hand of friendship may extend across such boundaries, the boundaries themselves remain undeconstructed. Legolas may visit the homeland of the Dwarves as a guest, just as Gimli may visit the homeland of the Elves, but neither can achieve (nor desires to achieve) full assimilation or acceptance into the other society. Likewise, Bilbo spends many decades in Rivendell as Elrond’s honored guest, but he never becomes a true citizen of Rivendell. A difference remains; the story of Eärendil, which Bilbo has the “cheek” to compose verses about, is a story that does not belong to him (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] II.1.237). Even a symbolic joining of races, such as Aragorn’s marriage to Arwen, does not wholly erase difference: the time of the Elves is over, and what remains of them in Middle-earth, through the marriage’s children, is a shadow of Elvish existence as it was in the first three ages of Middle-earth. Although Helen Young sees the international cooperation in Middle-earth to defeat Sauron as a key feature of a “cosmopolitan” *Lord of the Rings*, particularly the cultural regeneration undergone by Gondor in its contact with other cultures, particularist or closed societies need not be isolationist. Rohan may ally with Gondor, but the Rohirrim never become Gondorians, nor do the two realms ever form a new national identity that includes both nations equally.<sup>5</sup>

In most cases, the particularism of Middle-earth’s closed societies brings no harm. Indeed, participation in a shared history or culture often plays an integral and beneficial aspect to personal identity, and we might think of the aesthetic virtues of national mythology as highlighted by *Howards End*. Nonetheless, *The Lord of the Rings* shows a keen awareness, just as *Passage* does, of the dangers brought by particularism. Calling Denethor and Boromir “nationalistic” would be an anachronism considering that Middle-earth predates the modern concept of the nation-state, but they clearly favor their own

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<sup>5</sup> The only ethnically heterogenous society in Middle-earth, in fact, is Bree, where Men and Hobbits, rightly “regarding themselves as necessary parts of the Bree-folk,” live together in a “peculiar (but excellent) arrangement” (LotR I.9.149-50). Even this, however, simply substitutes the particularism of racial identity for the particularism of geographical rootedness. All those who live outside their boundaries are considered “Outsiders” (150), and so Bree hardly constitute a universal or inclusive polity.

country to the exclusion of all other countries. Denethor states this viewpoint clearly: there “is no purpose higher in the world as it now stands than the good of Gondor” (*LotR* V.1.758). He rates Boromir higher than Faramir precisely because Faramir, admiring the foreign Gandalf, lacks the same love of one’s own possessed by his eldest son. Gandalf, indeed, is Tolkien’s representative of universalism—the steward of all Middle-earth rather than the steward of one small portion of it. Like Cyril Fielding, Gandalf “travels light.” He has no wife, no job upon which his livelihood depends. He has no kin drawing him into an exclusive group (his fellow *Istari* do not quite count). Unlike Saruman, he belongs to no city and no geographic region. Absolutely unrooted, he mimics Cyril Fielding prior to Fielding’s marriage: perfectly free to follow universal principles of right or wrong without regard for the traditional loyalties to kin or city that complicate such matters. Had Gandalf found himself in Fielding’s situation, he too would have no trouble forsaking “all his own people for the sake of a stray Indian.” Aragorn, who learned from Gandalf, has internalized this principle well. He follows Pippin and Merry after their capture by orcs because they are friends of his in need; as such, he de-prioritizes other claims on his loyalty, such as Gondor’s.

Yet Tolkien, no less than Forster, understood the fragility behind an ideal of friendship that crosses traditional social and cultural chasms. For all the friendships that succeed in *The Lord of the Rings* on the personal level, the novel’s major attempt to instantiate that ideal more universally on the social level falls drastically short. Of all the closed societies in Middle-earth, only the Fellowship of the Ring constitutes a truly open society. Although limited in number, inclusion within the Fellowship requires only the consent of the individual, an assent to a common purpose. Free choice, not an accident of birth, guides the criteria for membership. Headed by Tolkien’s representative of universality, Gandalf, the Fellowship instantiates a model of social belonging that would have earned Forster’s respect. Indeed, the term “fellowship” works as a close synonym for “friendship.” Diversity is not the goal of the Fellowship, but it comes about as a fortuitous byproduct. Nonetheless, as far as social models go, the Fellowship offers more warning than model. Once Gandalf disappears in the Mines of Moria, the Fellowship begins to disintegrate—a process accelerated by an irreconcilable disagreement (i.e., if the Ring should be used to defend Gondor) between its members.

To blame Boromir for the breaking of the Fellowship, as many readers tend to do, misses the larger point about the essential instability of the Fellowship. As a society that forsakes the traditional ties of group identity, kinship and such, the Fellowship is founded on relatively weak bonds of social cohesion. Common purpose and friendship are noble ideals, but no one in the Fellowship has the same independence of position that Gandalf does. Boromir

is simply the first to succumb to his particular overriding attachments; he cannot help but let his loyalty to Gondor, in a moment of Ring-induced weakness, overwhelm the loyalty he feels toward Frodo, his companion and friend. This decision makes sense in a way; friends come and go, but family or country cannot be replaced so easily. Had the dangers that imminently threatened Gondor also imminently threatened the Shire, it remains an open question how long hobbits like Merry and Pippin could have resisted; a threat to the Shire would have reinforced their communal identity. Indeed, a sort of hobbit nationalism does actually develop in response to Sharkey's takeover of the Shire. Ultimately, the love of one's own, as well as the fear that it might be destroyed by outsiders, is a powerful force. Tolkien understood this, and so does Forster—thus Dr. Aziz becomes fiercely nationalistic once he realizes the damage being done to his country by British colonialism. When danger threatens, people tend to protect the group with which they most closely identify. Gimli and Legolas may have had the personal strength to remain true to the Fellowship despite all, but it is telling that the Elves and Dwarfs, involved in concerns about the safety of their own communities, send so few representatives outside their homelands.

None of this is to say that particularist ties are the *only* form of social and political organization possible. Experiments in political nationalism (where the nation is understood as composed of individuals freely giving their consent to be ruled as part of a social contract) have been tried, and the most successful of these experiments have been instantiated in many nations of the post-Enlightenment Western world: France, England, and the United States. The American regime, in fact, is one example of universalism instituted at the political level. At least in theory, membership in the American polity depends, not on birth into the polity or a certain cultural heritage, but on the free assent of individuals to certain principles of political liberty as articulated by a written constitution. This is the liberal tradition that Forster quite consciously places himself. Even if Tolkien's own leanings forced him to distance himself from that political tradition, he nonetheless recognized the resonance between Forster's greatest themes and his own. Both he and Forster agreed that particularism, such as that instantiated through national mythologies, can have certain aesthetic virtues, but both also recognized that morality should be universal in nature: it must apply equally to all without regard to ersatz distinctions of country or class or color. That is the meaning of Aragorn's statement to Éomer: "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men" (*LotR* III.2.438). Gandalf and his mentee Aragorn are the representatives of a universal ethic, and the practice of this ethic must not be undermined by attachments that privilege one's own tiny corner of the globe or one's own partisan group.



Tolkien believed in history as a “long defeat” (*Letters* 255)—purely human endeavors, unaccompanied by God’s grace, must inevitably fail on their own. As such, he had a conspicuous lack of faith in social engineering. Much as he may have admired the ideals of the Fellowship, incorporating the great virtue of friendship on the socio-political level, he remained skeptical that such an association of individuals could successfully last for long. He as well as Forster shared a fundamental agreement about the fragility of such relations. Universality is desirable in moral matters, whether Catholic or liberal humanist in orientation, but the pull of the particular is one that cannot be ignored.<sup>6</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, there are few hard facts to explain why Tolkien nominated E.M. Forster for the Nobel Prize in Literature. This article has been an attempt to provide one possible explanation of that mystery, and my method has been to read Forster in light of Tolkien’s own literary concerns, emphasizing those aspects of Forster’s work that would have garnered enough of Tolkien’s approval or interest to justify the Nobel nomination. I doubt that Tolkien borrowed anything directly from Forster; certainly, nothing along the lines of his borrowings from *Beowulf* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Still, insofar as a genuine admiration for Forster motivated Tolkien’s 1954 nomination, Forster’s last novel may have been most on Tolkien’s mind. Not only does it powerfully articulate the colonizer’s experience as Tolkien understood it, but it also examines an important theme that echoes throughout *The Lord of the Rings*: the perpetual conflict between universal and particular. In this regard, incidentally,

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<sup>6</sup> Although both Tolkien and Forster, as I have been arguing, felt the pull of the universal, there are certainly those who defend the virtues of particularism. One powerful articulation of this view comes in George Bernard Shaw’s masterful play *Saint Joan*. The rise of French nationalism, represented by Joan of Arc, is a major theme of the play, and this nationalism is starkly opposed to the concept of “Christendom,” the old medieval name for all of Europe as headed by the Catholic Church. Joan centers her nationalism on language—the French nation is constituted by the speakers of the French language. She is mocked by the bishop of Beauvais, Pierre Cauchon, when he exclaims, “France for the French, England for the English, Italy for the Italians, [...] it surprises me that this country girl can rise above the idea of her village for its villagers”; he can find no other name for Joan’s heresy than “nationalism,” and he views it as “essentially anti-Catholic and anti-Christian; for the Catholic Church knows only one realm, and that is the realm of Christ’s kingdom” (1087, emphasis mine). Although Shaw deviates from historical consensus by sympathetically portraying Cauchon, the man most responsible for Joan of Arc’s execution, the plausibility of Joan’s “anti-Christian” arguments in favor of nationalism shows how easy it can be to view the love of one’s own with admiration. Cauchon’s brilliant speech also helps highlight the tension inherent between Tolkien’s own Catholicism and the fervent English nationalism of his youth.

Tolkien may have read Forster better than vice versa; reportedly, Forster disapproved of *The Lord of the Ring* because he disliked “whimsicality and I cannot bear ‘good’ and ‘evil’ on such a scale” (Craft 255). However the case may be, Tolkien could easily have adapted many of Forster’s concerns to his own general worldview. Catholic universalism, in certain respects, differs little from the universalism of liberal humanism. Nationalistic particularism constitutes a danger for both; even if both regarded a connection to one’s land and climate as partially beneficial, they also regarded morality as being universal in nature, best practiced when unhampered by particularist concerns. Forster’s work, in short, validated many of the themes Tolkien himself was trying to examine. In the end, despite clear intellectual differences, Tolkien’s nomination of Forster may have rested on the sense of understanding he felt toward Forsterian morality as articulated in the novels.



#### APPENDIX: THE NOMINATING TRIUMVIRATE

In addition to Tolkien’s literary reasons for nominating Forster, outlined in the main argument, it may be worthwhile to posit one additional possible explanation for the 1954 nomination—namely, that Forster’s triple nomination could be linked to the professorship created specifically for C.S. Lewis in 1954. By necessity, my case must be circumstantial. We do know some things for certain. First, the triumvirate of Tolkien, Wilson, and Cecil all put their names to the same nomination letter rather than sending in each nomination separately; at least, the Nobel database counts their nomination as only one nomination. Hence, coincidence can be ruled out. They also need not have waited on a formal invitation to nominate Forster. Although the Nobel Committee *does* send out formal invitations each September, persons “who are qualified to nominate but have not received invitations may also submit nominations”; such qualified persons include professors of “literature and of linguistics at universities and university colleges” (Nobelprize.org). Second, the announcement for the creation of the Chair for Medieval and Renaissance English came in the same month as Nobel nominations were due. No one doubts that Lewis’s friends and allies—a category that includes Tolkien, Cecil, and Wilson—orchestrated the creation of this professorship specially for Lewis, and two of Forster’s 1954 nominators, Tolkien and Wilson, were also chosen as electors for that professorship. It also seems like a reasonable inference that some of the obstacles blocking Lewis’s promotion at Oxford would have worked against him at Cambridge; the triumvirate’s triple nomination of Forster, a Cambridge fixture, would have gone a long way towards mollifying potential resistance. In what follows, I lay out this argument in more detail.

The logical starting point for uncovering why the triumvirate nominated Forster, of course, would lay in their nomination form; unfortunately, these forms (currently in the Swedish Academy's Nobel Library in Stockholm, Sweden) have not been digitized. In any event, nomination letters need not include supporting rationale. The second best starting point for clues, then, would be to examine any published commentary by Tolkien, Wilson, or Cecil that might provide a hint of their opinions. Such an examination does not take long. Neither Tolkien nor Wilson seem to have ever discussed Forster publicly. Lord David Cecil, however, is another matter. In 1949, the same year he was elected Oxford's Goldsmiths' professor, Cecil also published *Poets and Storytellers*, a series of essays on four canonical and two contemporary writers. His account of Forster, one of the two contemporaries, is scrupulously objective but highly positive. Although I suggest that creating a Cambridge professorship for C.S. Lewis was the immediate motivation for Forster's 1954 triple nomination, Cecil's evaluation of Forster deserves special attention.

What Cecil admires most about Forster is his sense of humor, his well-wrought plots, and a universalist moral vision "at once tender-hearted and unattached" (*Poets* 181). He balances this list with a series of perceived faults, particularly Forster's consistent failure to portray believable romantic attachments—a truism in Forster studies. Cecil believes this failure to stem from Forster's difficulty in harmonizing the "realism" of human relations with the thematic symbolization required by his moral vision (194).<sup>7</sup> That is Cecil's main criticism in *Poets and Storytellers*, but his other works contain a few scattered criticisms as well. For example, Forster's paganism comes under censure in *The Fine Art of Reading*. Although Forster portrays "Italian peasants" and "English on their holidays abroad" believably enough, he dismally fails to render mythological creatures like panics and sirens—i.e., the "faded puppets from the poetry books of the nineties, and exuding a faint stale smell of that languid

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<sup>7</sup> The best example of the conflict between realism and symbolism in Forster's novels might be the marriage between Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox in *Howards End*. Their marriage symbolizes the joining of Margaret's idealism with Henry's economic materialism, but Forster presents Henry Wilcox so blackly that few readers accept Margaret's sincere attachment to him. I.e., Forster "dislikes the Wilcox vices so much that he cannot do any effective justice to their virtues" (*Poets* 199). It is tempting to think that Forster's issue may have been his lack of experience in romantic heterosexual relationships. In my view, however, Cecil's criticism applies equally as well to Forster's posthumously published homosexual novel, *Maurice*. In *Maurice*, Forster applies his great theme of "only connect" to homosexual love and friendship by showing the developing relationship between a lower-class gamekeeper, Alec Scudder, and the novel's protagonist, Maurice Hall. Strive as Forster might, though, the believability of their love is fatally undermined by Alec's early threat of life-ruining blackmail against Maurice.

period" (227). Along the same lines, Cecil heartily dislikes the "dreadful whimsical little fantasy in *Howard's End* [sic] about sinister goblins and dancing elephants" that Forster means to represent one personal response to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (*Library Looking-Glass* 164). Curiously enough, C.S. Lewis also has little sympathy with Forster's employment of myth and fantasy, declaring in a letter that he doubted "high-minded old twaddlers" like Forster could honestly face "Paganism as it was" (589). Such criticisms, though, do not detract from the positive overall portrait of Forster in *Poets and Storytellers*. He "tells a story as well as anyone who ever lived" (187) and presents a highly innovative moral vision (181).

A slight personal connection probably also reinforced Cecil's high esteem for Forster's works. Although they met only once, that meeting—coming when Cecil was only twenty years old—suggests that Cecil may have held the famous author in some awe. It came about during a society gathering hosted by famed socialite Lady Ottoline Morrell at Garsington Manor near Oxford. The two of them "got on quite well," and Forster describes Cecil as "very intelligent and polite." More significantly, it was intimated to Forster that Cecil hoped to meet him especially (*Selected Letters of E.M. Forster* [Letters] 2:27). Their next documented interaction came eight years later when Cecil received a letter from Forster praising his recently published *The Stricken Deer: Or, the Life of Cowper*. The letter came, so far as I can tell, entirely out of the blue.<sup>8</sup> As Cecil recalls decades later, "I need not say how excited I was to get" Forster's letter, particularly as Cecil "barely knew" Forster (qtd. in Forster, *Letters* 2:90). Even without any other direct interaction, Cecil had every reason for being positively disposed toward Forster and other Bloomsbury writers. For example, Cecil's father-in-law, the literary reviewer Sir Desmond MacCarthy, was a founding member of Bloomsbury. MacCarthy had a direct relationship with Forster and spoke well of him. Both attended Cambridge together (Forster was slightly junior), and both shared membership in the Cambridge Apostles, a famous undergraduate intellectual society. Although neither MacCarthy nor Forster saw Bloomsbury as a movement *per se*, MacCarthy characterized them as a "mutual-admiration society" of "old friends" (Rosenbaum 27)—something not unlike the Inklings. Forster himself partly credited MacCarthy for Bloomsbury's intellectual and social climate (Rosenbaum 157), and it seems reasonable to believe that Cecil would have shared such views as well.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Forster and Cecil, coincidentally, both won the James Tait Black Prize—Cecil in 1929 for *The Stricken Deer*, Forster in 1924 for *A Passage to India*.

<sup>9</sup> Forster's full phrase for MacCarthy is "affable hawk," and he apparently did not mind when MacCarthy turned his hawkishness upon him. The Bloomsbury writers generally did not care for Forster's first novel, *The Longest Journey*, and MacCarthy thought that, of the many things wrong with the novel, there were at least two, he said, "so bad that it is

Given such connections, it might be supposed that Cecil took the initiative in organizing the triumvirate—that is, corralling two colleagues in support of a writer whom he admired. Nonetheless, this seems unlikely for three reasons. First, as much as Cecil appreciated Forster’s virtues, he still considered him less “revolutionary” than Virginia Woolf, the other contemporary writer discussed in *Poets and Storytellers* (181). If he based his nomination decision on literary merit alone, why privilege Forster over Woolf, whom he also knew? Second, had Cecil been determined to see a personal favorite win the Nobel, he could have nominated Forster in multiple years, just as did Simeon Potter (4 times) or Pierre Legouis (4 times); as it was, Cecil nominated Forster just the once. Third, after becoming Goldsmiths’ Professor in 1949, Cecil could have nominated Forster at any time. Why wait five years until 1954? My suspicion, complicating the notion of Cecil as the triumvirate’s ringleader, is that an outside factor arose in 1954 to spur Cecil’s nomination. Since we know that 1954 is the year Cambridge created the chair in Medieval and Renaissance English, the question then becomes, were the two situations linked?

The timing certainly checks out. Although Lewis’s professorship formally came into existence on October 1<sup>st</sup>, the announcement for that new chair actually came months earlier—January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1954 (Lewis, *Letters* 3.469). Nobel letters of nomination, coincidentally, must be received by the Swedish Academy by January 31<sup>st</sup>. The timeline that emerges is as follows. Sometime in 1953, realizing that Lewis’s options at Oxford were blocked (having already been passed over for several promotions), the triumvirate sounded out certain sympathetic colleagues at Cambridge. The immediate hurdle would have been obvious: academic politics. Many Oxford faculty opposed promoting Lewis because of his Christianity and his predilection for non-academic writing, and an unspecified number of Cambridge faculty would have resisted Lewis for similar reasons. The Oxford-based triumvirate therefore needed a carrot to sway recalcitrant faculty, and that carrot was Forster. That settled, the Council of the Senate of Cambridge University took the unusual step of combining Medieval and Renaissance studies into one professorship, thereby ensuring that Lewis would be uniquely qualified for the position. In addition, it selected electors highly sympathetic to Lewis. These included two members of the triumvirate, Tolkien and Wilson, and a number of Cambridge dons: Basil Willey, E.M.F. Tillyard, Henry Stanley Bennett, and David Knowles.<sup>10</sup> Given the universal

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only common friendliness to let you know.” He did add that Forster “hit off those miserable muffs the Cambridge Apostles pretty well” (qtd. in Furbank 150).

<sup>10</sup> All the electors, significantly, were Christian. For example, Knowles (Cambridge’s Regius Professor of Modern History) was also a Benedictine monk and a Catholic priest. Moreover, many of the electors had known one another for many years. Tolkien has a particularly interesting tie with Bennett—Bennett’s children had, a decade earlier, read

truth about academics and deadlines, everything—the triple nomination and the creation of the professorship—would have come together at nearly the last minute. In other words: January 1954.

As one of Cambridge's favored sons, Forster would have had immense value as a bargaining chip. He attended the university as an undergraduate, praised it in *The Longest Journey* and, in 1945, returned to the university as an Honorary Fellow at King's College—basically, a writer-in-residence position lasting the last twenty-five years of Forster's life. Despite his lack of literary production after 1924, Cambridge remained quite proud of him. Forster had no academic or administrative responsibilities at the university, but Cambridge literary historian Graham Chainey claims (perhaps a touch defensively) that Forster was "a quintessential ingredient" of the Cambridge spirit. More importantly, Forster's residence "reflected literary prestige onto the host college" (Chainey 226). Had Forster won the Nobel, he would have become only the second Nobel Laureate in Literature associated with the university, Bertrand Russell having won the honor five years previously (later winners would include Patrick White in 1974 and Wole Soyinka in 1986). Indeed, Cambridge seems to have consistently lobbied on Forster's behalf. One year after the triumvirate's efforts, its Regius Professor of Greek, Sir Denys Page, also submitted Forster's name for the Nobel—his one and only nomination effort. Forster also received nominations in 1950, 1952, 1953, and 1957 by groups or persons affiliated with PEN-International. Given that PEN was originally a London-based organization, it seems likely that at least some of those nominations were instigated by individuals affiliated with or sympathetic to Cambridge.

All three members of the triumvirate, moreover, were well-positioned to coordinate among themselves. All three had high respect for Lewis. Tolkien's friendship with him needs no elaboration. Wilson had tutored Lewis as an undergraduate, writing him letters of recommendation, and he may have felt guilty for beating out Lewis for the Merton Chair of English Literature in 1947. Cecil certainly felt guilty about beating out Lewis for the Goldsmiths' professorship in 1949; according to Walter Hooper, Cecil frequently remarked that the "chair *should* have gone to Lewis" (qtd. in Hooper xiv, emphasis original). What seems to have hit Lewis's friends hardest, however, was his loss

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and enjoyed Tolkien's *Farmer Giles of Ham* when still in manuscript form (Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* [Letters] 44).

Incidentally, Basil Willey remarks that, during the decade following World War II, some attempt had been made to "start a Christian school of literary criticism" at Cambridge. That he characterized this attempt as "half-hearted," though, suggests that the efforts to bring in Lewis were unrelated. In any event, Cambridge had so few Christians dons at the time that "the debate died of inanition" (34).

to Cecil Day-Lewis for the Professor of Poetry position in 1951. Lewis himself took the situation in good humor, much better than his backers—his brother Warren Lewis, for example, blamed Lewis’s loss on “the virulence of the anti-Xtian [Christian] feeling” in Oxford (W. Lewis 239). Furthermore, all three members of the triumvirate had worked together before. They all served in Oxford Faculty Board meetings. Tolkien had a further relationship with Cecil through the Inklings, and he had a further relationship with Wilson as a co-general editor for *Oxford English Monographs*, a publication dedicated to publishing outstanding B.Litt theses. Despite their differing areas of research, Wilson and Tolkien even had a major intellectual interest in common: proverbs. Wilson edited *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, and Tolkien—as Tom Shippey notes—had a lifelong interest in “survivor genres” like proverbs that conventional scholarship often ignored (303).

Thus, having the trifecta of means, opportunity, and motive, it stands to reason that sometime in 1953 the triumvirate decided to take matters into their own hands. I doubt they ever informed Lewis about their behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Perhaps they worried that Lewis would object to the evident *quid pro quo* aspect of academic politics; just as likely, they knew Lewis would object to his friends and allies expending so much effort on his behalf. As it was, the triumvirate certainly did not secure Lewis’s consent prior to their endeavors—otherwise, Lewis would never have *twice* refused the position when offered. Instead, Lewis had to be coaxed into accepting the professorship. One can only imagine Tolkien’s exasperation when, in May 1954, he had to ask if they could sweeten the deal by electing Lewis to a fellowship as well, so that Lewis could have rooms in Cambridge similar to his rooms at Oxford (see Scull & Hammond 432).<sup>11</sup>

If this hypothesis about the connection between Forster’s nomination and Lewis’s professorship is correct, it must nevertheless be added that Tolkien, Wilson, and Cecil probably believed in the worthiness of Forster’s Nobel candidacy quite sincerely. As has been indicated earlier, although Forster never ultimately won the Nobel, his many nominations indicate the wide level of support he enjoyed. The triumvirate, furthermore, all took their professorial

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<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, if Lewis *had* known about Forster’s triple nomination, it might be asked why the triumvirate did not ask Lewis to add a nomination as well. After all, Lewis several times states in his letters that he admired Forster’s novels (*Letters* 3.578, 594). Also, although he personally considered Forster an “ass” (594), he only formed this opinion after accepting the Cambridge position. The simple explanation seems to be that Lewis simply was not eligible in 1954 to nominate anyone for the Nobel. Wilson, Tolkien, and Cecil were all professors, Lewis was not—which was the whole point of the triumvirate. Ironically, after accepting the Cambridge professorship, Lewis would put his new privileges to good use. He nominated Tolkien in 1961, Robert Frost in 1962.

responsibilities seriously, and I doubt they would have nominated anyone in bad faith for literature's most prestigious award. What seems more likely, though, is that creating a professorship for Lewis urged them to an action—i.e., nominating Forster—that they might not have undertaken otherwise. While their admiration or affinity for Forster's work may have justified their nomination, Lewis's predicament was the immediate inspiration. Ultimately, the situation worked out well for everyone involved—Lewis got his professorship, Cambridge acquired a renowned academic, and Forster had one extra chance at the Nobel.

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