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### Doubles at Work: The Three Rovers in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Roverandom*.

#### Abstract

In this essay, I explore the protagonist's two doubles in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Roverandom*, concluding that they serve as companions, representations of alternative selves or lives, and catalysts to his spiritual development.

#### Additional Keywords

spiritual quest; doubles in literature; *Roverandom*



## DOUBLES AT WORK: THE THREE ROVERS IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S *ROVERANDOM*

JENNIFER MARCHANT

J.R.R. Tolkien's *ROVERANDOM*, published posthumously in 1998, was based on a real-life incident from 1925. The Tolkien family was staying in Filey, a seaside town in Yorkshire, when four-year-old Michael, the middle child, lost his favorite toy, a little black-and-white dog, on the beach (Scull and Hammond, "Introduction," ix). And so Tolkien wrote the story of a churlish puppy named Rover who bites a wizard, Artaxerxes, for having picked up the ball he is playing with. As punishment, Artaxerxes changes the puppy into a miniature toy. In toy-form, he is bought and given to little boy "Two," but Rover is annoyed at his transformation, refuses to play with Two, and makes his escape when the child goes to a beach.

Here he makes the acquaintance of Psamathos (a sand-wizard),<sup>1</sup> who is able to turn Rover back into a real dog, but not restore his size. So Psamathos sends Rover to the moon, where he encounters yet another wizard, the Man-in-the-Moon, and his dog, also named Rover, and receives the name "Roverandom," so as to distinguish the two dogs. The Man-in-the-Moon helps Roverandom become a more mature and thoughtful person (dog?), but is not able to fix his small size. Instead, he sends him to the undersea mer-kingdom. Here, he again encounters Artaxerxes, now married to a mer-princess (61). Again, Roverandom meets another "Rover," this time a mer-dog. Eventually, he manages to appease Artaxerxes, is turned back into a regular-size dog, and reunites with Two.

As can be seen from even this short summary, *Roverandom* makes heavy use of doubles and doubling, both in plot and characters: two wizards, two Otherworldly places, two Rovers in addition to the protagonist. This is nothing new for anyone familiar with Tolkien's work. Michael N. Stanton claims that "[t]he idea of doubling, the doppelgänger [...] fascinated the age Tolkien

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<sup>1</sup> Scull and Hammond observe that "in the earliest (manuscript) text the sand sorcerer is called a *Psammead*, a word borrowed directly from the 'sand-fairy' of E. Nesbit's *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Story of the Amulet* (1906)." They also suggest that Tolkien's character bears a strong resemblance to Nesbit's in terms of personality (93n11).

grew up in" and that Tolkien was no exception to this fascination (63). In *The Lord of the Rings*, the most well-known double is undoubtedly Frodo/Gollum, but Aragorn/The Black Riders, Gandalf/Saruman, Sam Gamgee/Ted Sandyman, and Galadriel/Shelob have also been identified as doubles (see, for example, Le Guin 68 and Honegger). However, this essay concentrates on the two main doubles for the protagonist, the moon-dog and the mer-dog. Not only do these dogs share Rover's name, but he is magically changed to physically resemble first one, then the other. Much of *Roverandom*'s time is spent in the company of his doubles, and Tolkien has each double give a full account of his previous history. All these details suggest that Tolkien considered the dog doubles especially important in the protagonist's development, and may offer insight into use of doubles in Tolkien's oeuvre.

Tolkien records that the story "got done" in 1925, although it is not clear if he wrote it down then or just told it to his children (Scull and Hammond, "Introduction," x). During subsequent years, however, he produced several copies of *Roverandom*, revising it in each version (xiii). In 1936, he sent a manuscript to his publishers, George Allen & Unwin (xiv). Although they viewed the story favorably, it was eclipsed by publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937. The publishers were eager for a sequel and both they and Tolkien seem to have lost interest in *Roverandom* (xv).

*Roverandom* did not get much literary acclaim when it was published: reviewers tended to dismiss it as a mere children's story, notable only because Tolkien had written it (Swank 31). While Karleen Bradford suggests it "wouldn't be a Tolkien tale if there were not a lot going on beneath the surface" (qtd. in Swank 31), few scholars discuss it at length. Emma Hawkins observes that "Tolkien depends on dogs to achieve a variety of literary goals" (143), and lists canine characters in his works. However, Hawkins's main focus is the use of dogs in *The Lord of the Rings*, where they help establish the "ordinary, everyday life in the rural communities of the Shire and Bree" (143). Hawkins only briefly discusses *Roverandom*, describing the protagonist as "[t]he most lovable and personable of Tolkien's dogs" (146), and giving a short plot summary. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, who edited *Roverandom* and wrote the introduction and notes, hardly mention the protagonist's doubles, saying only that the mer-dog was probably based on Vige, a dog in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*, "who died of grief when his master disappeared" (102n65). Kris Swank makes a fascinating and convincing case that *Roverandom* is based on the Irish *immrama*, "which are more than adventure tales; they are also Christian quests" (33).<sup>2</sup> She mentions *Roverandom*'s doubles as examples of the "dualism,

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<sup>2</sup> The name "Roverandom" may refer to Toby Smollett's Roderick Random (Bratman). If so, it might further support that Tolkien intended this as a story of Christian development.

ambivalence, [and] paradox" typical of Otherworlds in the *immrama* (49), but leaves further exploration of their roles open to future scholars.<sup>3</sup>

### CRITICAL APPROACH(ES)

*Roverandom* shows an eclectic collection of influences, including "English, Greek, Norse, Roman and Welsh mythologies, Shakespeare, *The Arabian Nights*, the Bible, [and] Tolkien's own legendarium" (Swank 31). It seems fitting, then, not to insist on a single theoretical approach to explore it. Rather, this essay puts together elements from different critical lenses, using those aspects that seem applicable and useful, but ignoring others.<sup>4</sup> The following discussion explains how this essay uses the concepts of literary doubles and the spiritual quest story as described by Joseph Campbell (*Hero* 238-9).

The concept of a second self is widespread in folk belief and appears in ancient myths and fairy tales all over the world (Hallam 5-6). But, as Heather Duerre Humann points out, the double, "rather than going out of fashion, has proven to be malleable as well as inexhaustible" in literature (22). We see many doubles in modern fiction, whether realistic or fantasy. It is not strange, then, that there are different ways to interpret them. Perhaps the most common way to read doubles in modern literature is through psychoanalytic theory, which interprets doubles in dreams, fantasy, and art as unconscious aspects of the analysand/protagonist: those thoughts and feelings that are terrifyingly primitive to the conscious self, such as forbidden sexual desires or murderous anger (see, for example, Freud 73-4 and Jung 481).

However, in his study of the *Mabinogion*, Andrew Welsh distinguishes between the psychological double and the literary double. While the first is the protagonist's projection, the second is "neither a completely subjective aspect of the personality [...] nor a completely objective independent being" (348). That is, literary doubles function simultaneously as autonomous characters *and* as the protagonists' other selves, to whom they feel "the magnetic attraction of opposite poles, the inexplicable antagonism of like against like, or (of course) both" (348).

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Jerry C. Beasley suggests that, though *The Adventures of Roderick Random* may seem to be a "picaresque satire," Smollett "[affirms] the enduring value of Christian love and virtue as the means to happiness" (219).

<sup>3</sup> See also Kris Swank's paper in this issue of *Mythlore*. (Ed.)

<sup>4</sup> James Baird suggests it is "critically dishonest" for a critic not to acknowledge that the writer "shapes his symbol from multiple feeling." He feels it is only useful to stick to one specific theory if the writer states that s/he deliberately intended the text to be read through, say, a Freudian lens (39).

Literary doubles, unlike psychological doubles, are not limited to representing the protagonists' primitive aspects. For example, in Welsh's analysis of *The Four Branches*, the protagonist's doubles actually represent morally advanced selves, whom he needs to emulate. Lucia Opreanu brings further insight to this kind of relationship between doubles in her comment that Tolkien "systematically focuses on paired characters that share a common ground of moral choices and challenges yet react in opposite ways" (152). Especially important in this context is that she draws attention to a defining moment that separates one moral trajectory from another, a motif that is also important in *Roverandom*.<sup>5</sup>

Tolkien's works have often been explored through Jungian archetypes (see, for example, Honegger, Le Guin, and O'Neill). Indeed, as Northrop Frye observes, most of Tolkien's heroes follow the archetypal journey pattern, in which the hero descends into darkness and danger, and is renewed/transformed as a result (26-7). According to psychoanalytic theory, the mythological hero's journey represents the human exploration of his/her unconscious, the better to understand, integrate, and control those hidden desires, fears, and conflicts (Campbell, *Hero* 237).

But Campbell suggests this approach doesn't take an important factor into account. Myths, and, by extension, literary spiritual quests, are not only the products of the unconscious, but are consciously shaped "for the communication of traditional wisdom" (*Hero* 238). He concludes that we must thus understand myths as not only "symptoms of the unconscious (as indeed are all human thoughts and acts) but also controlled and intended statements of certain spiritual principles" (*Hero* 239). Tolkien himself described *The Lord of the Rings* as "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work," although the "religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism" (*Letters* #142, p.172). Swank suggests a similar reading for *Roverandom*, that "where *Roverandom* lacks an overt Christian context," it contains "underlying Christian themes of forgiveness and reconciliation" (46). As this essay will discuss below, *Roverandom* also promotes Christian values of love, obedience, and self-sacrifice. In particular, this essay discusses the roles of the protagonist's doubles in helping him accomplish his spiritual quest. I suggest that these doubles have several functions: they are companions, representations of alternative selves or lives, and catalysts to the protagonist's spiritual growth.

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<sup>5</sup> Although Opreanu does not label Tolkien's doubles as "literary" vs. "psychological," she describes the Gollum/Frodo pairing as consistent with Welsh's definition of the literary double, while her discussion of the Sméagol/Gollum pairing uses the concept of psychological doubles. The first pair is linked, but also function as separate characters. While Sméagol and Gollum differ significantly in terms of personality, they do share the same body, suggesting they are meant to be read as different aspects of the same person.

### THE MOON-DOG

Roverandom's first encounter with the winged moon-dog<sup>6</sup> recalls Welsh's observation that doubles may be simultaneously attracted to, and repulsed by, the life/self the other represents. The two immediately begin to insult each other, "[f]rom which you can see that they were going to be very friendly before long. That is the way, anyhow, that little dogs usually talk to strangers of their own kind" (*Roverandom* 23). The two dogs do become fast friends, and the moon-dog shares his story.

Ralph C. Wood suggests that "Tolkien's adherence to the classical Christian understanding of education as 'training in virtue'" explains why characters in *The Lord of the Rings* spend a good deal of time listening "to the stories and legends that give moral and spiritual shape to their lives" (79). In *Roverandom*, these stories from the protagonist's doubles take the form of their life histories, and each has something to teach Roverandom. The moon-dog's story is relatively brief. He explains that his name of "Rover" suited him well: "I was a Rover too" he confesses (25). "I never would stop anywhere, or belong to anyone before I came here. I did nothing but run away from the time I was a puppy" (25). This is the moon-dog's moral choice as described by Opreanu. He refuses to care about anyone or anything, and this is why he ends up on the Moon. On one of his jaunts from home, he carelessly falls off the edge of the earth and lands in one of the moon-spiders' webs. He is only saved by the Man-in-the-Moon, who then adopts him.

In spite of this sobering experience, the moon-dog retains his feckless nature. He has little relationship with the Man. The Man leaves food for the moon-dog and rescues him when necessary. But he "seldom [sees] or [hears] the Man about," as the Man is busy with his work, which the moon-dog doesn't know much about (30). In other words, though the moon-dog now has an owner, the bond between them seems both limited and one-sided. Further, the moon-dog has little moral compass. He obeys the Man's orders not to chase the moon-sheep because he, like Roverandom, is "much too well brought-up (and afraid of the Man) to do so" (29). The narrator's emphasis on the Man's authority and the moon-dog's fear of punishment implies that he follows orders, but has no internalized sense of right and wrong. There is no suggestion the moon-dog

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<sup>6</sup> One of the first events after Roverandom's arrival is the Man-in-the-Moon giving him wings like the moon-dog's. Similarly, when Roverandom reaches the undersea kingdom, he gets gills and a fish tail like the mer-dog's. In each instance, he loses the new appendages when he leaves. On a practical level, the transformations allow Roverandom to live comfortably in the Otherworlds of Moon and Sea. In a metaphoric sense, they help him walk the walk of his doubles. The moon-dog and mer-dog come to their Otherworlds as a direct result of their moral choices, and Roverandom gets a first-hand experience of what their lives are now like.

thinks about his obligation to the sheep's owner or cares about the well-being of the sheep.

Tolkien makes it clear that the moon-dog is not merely a projection for the protagonist. While *Roverandom* instinctively dislikes the dust, smell, and rush of modern industrialization (87), the moon-dog has "low tastes," and rhapsodizes about the beauties of smog and furnace-fires (31). Still, he does suggest what *Roverandom* is likely to become if he keeps his secular moral values and self-centered life. As mentioned above, the dogs are similar in their moral codes of following rules and avoiding punishment.

Moreover, *Roverandom*, like the moon-dog, cares little for anyone. He originally belonged to an old lady who bought him and gave him the name "Rover," but he never thinks about her. Nor does he feel any affection for Two, though, when he is a toy, Two plays with him and takes him everywhere. When *Roverandom* thinks of his home, he misses only his yellow ball (44).<sup>7</sup> Ironically, one gets the feeling that, in spite of the undemanding relationship with his owner and freedom to have adventures, the moon-dog is not truly happy. He seems lonely. When *Roverandom* finally leaves, the moon-dog sadly watches him out of sight and later begs the Man for permission to visit (53). It seems fitting, then, that the moon-dog not only serves as a warning, but plays a part in the chain of events that results in the first of *Roverandom*'s spiritual epiphanies/deaths/rebirths.

The moon-dog leads *Roverandom* on a long exploration, and they eventually take refuge in a warm cave. However, the cave turns out to be inhabited by a dragon that "was only half-afraid of the Man (and scarcely that when he was angry)" (33). He immediately pursues the dogs, determined to kill them. The dogs are only saved when the Man uncorks a spell and shoots it out his window at the dragon (35). The dragon-confrontation is a watershed moment for *Roverandom*, even though he flees.

In most of Tolkien's legendarium, dragons are cruel, cunning, and greedy ("Dragons"), and their deaths seem both necessary and deserved (see, for example, Glaurung and Ancalagon in *The Silmarillion*, and Smaug in *The Hobbit*). But though the "enormously bad" moon-dragon (33) fits this pattern in some ways, he does not in others.<sup>8</sup> In *Roverandom*, the moon-dragon seems a

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<sup>7</sup> *Roverandom*'s attachment to his ball seems a relatively mild case of what Opreanu would call "simple materialism," but she suggests such possessiveness is also at the root of "domination, enslavement, and arbitrary control" in *The Lord of the Rings* and that it is "arguably the greatest evil in Tolkien's view" (157). Again, this implies that *Roverandom* is heading towards an ignoble life.

<sup>8</sup> The narrator identifies him as the White Dragon from the legend of Merlin, in which the dragon represents the Saxons and their victory over the British (Scull and Hammond 97, n. 33). Tolkien's admiration of the Saxons is well-known: he felt their "naked will and



necessary part of ecology. He is responsible for lunar eclipses, which are part of the “schedule” overseen by the Man (Tolkien 35, Scull and Hammond 99n36), and thus presumably part of the cosmic plan. We see a similar pattern in the Sea-Serpent Roverandom meets when he goes to the Sea: the Serpent is “enormous and strong and old and idiotic [...] (primordial, prehistoric, autothalassic, fabulous, mythical, and silly are other adjectives applied to him)” (76). His stirrings cause tidal waves and one of his upheavals drowned Atlantis (76), but he seems more a force of nature (and, like the moon-dragon, part of the larger order) than deliberately evil.

In each of his encounters with a dragon, Roverandom disturbs the animal out of impulse and ignorance, and this results in a disruption of the natural order (the moon-dragon is thrown off schedule for the next eclipse and the Sea-Serpent raises far-reaching “terrible tides” that cause huge commotion in the mer-kingdom [77]). Tolkien, then, uses the dragon-encounters to parallel Roverandom’s moral actions. Just as he annoys the dragons with no idea of the possible consequences, so he bites Artaxerxes, rejects Two, and later gets Artaxerxes exiled by the mer-folk. Tolkien’s lesson here seems to be that even an individual’s apparently minor decisions can have far-reaching and serious effects on others.

Consistently with this interpretation, Roverandom’s encounter with the dragon makes the Man decide to take him onto the dark side of the moon, which will bring about his first significant death/rebirth.<sup>9</sup> “You seem to have explored the white side [of the moon] pretty well for a young dog. I think, when you have got your breath back, it will be time for you to visit the other side,” the Man proclaims (37). Significantly, the moon-dog is not allowed to come, even though he asks, implying that, even if he had once been able to transform, it is too late for him to do so now. At this point, the Man explains, the journey would only make the dog homesick (37).

The Man and Roverandom descend through the Man’s tower, going lower and lower until the Man opens a trapdoor, “and as it was lifted darkness seemed to well up out of the opening like a fog, so that Roverandom could no longer see even the faint glimmering of the Man through it” (38). Nevertheless, the Man picks the dog up and drops him through the door, then “he fell and fell and fell into nothing” (38). He lands at the bottom “of a deep dark valley, ringed round with low dark hills” (39). Although the Man does call for Roverandom to

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courage” was needed to energize Christianity (Birzer, “Anglo-Saxon England”). This suggests that, even though the moon-dragon is destructive and dangerous, he is a more nuanced character than many of Tolkien’s dragons.

<sup>9</sup> It could argued that Roverandom’s change from real dog to toy and then from toy to live (though tiny) dog also represent deaths/rebirths. However, these transformations are on the outside only: Roverandom’s self-centeredness and shallow morality remain the same.

wait for him at the other end, and "[t]hat ought to have comforted him," it does not (38). He later remembers the terrifying fall as "the nastiest part of all his adventures," and, years later, it still gives him nightmares (38).

The descent, the welling darkness, the fall into emptiness, and Roverandom's helplessness all suggest death, an impression which becomes even stronger when he finds himself in the dark valley, which may reference the well-known Valley of the Shadow of Death in the Bible (ps. 23). But, if Biblical valleys suggest physical/spiritual death, they also represent transformation and rebirth (Goldstein 153). In Roverandom's case, the Man may prepare him for transformation by first showing the little dog his vulnerability when he lacks faith. The old, arrogant Roverandom, who bites Artaxerxes and runs away from Two, undergoes his first "death" here. The new, chastened Roverandom waits "obediently, and anxiously" for the Man (39). When the Man does emerge, Roverandom realizes he can trust the Man's promises. If we read the Man as a mediator between a divine Being and mortals,<sup>10</sup> Tolkien thus emphasizes the Christian emphasis on faith even when one feels forsaken. In this context, Tolkien's word choice is significant when he states that Roverandom "ought" to have been reassured when the Man tells the dog to wait at the other side (38, emphasis mine).

The Man leads Roverandom down a steep cliff, where he finds a softly-lit garden, with fountains and long lawns (42). Unlike the rest of the dark side of the Moon, this valley is a protected place, where darkness and light come together in harmony. Here, the Man exercises complete control, and here the children asleep on Earth come to dream the dreams the Man creates for them. As in the Garden of Eden, it is a place of peace, where humans and animals speak the same language. Roverandom hears "a voice he knew," and little boy Two rushes up to pat him and tell him how he has searched and called for him every day since his disappearance (44). He also reproves him for having ignored him on Earth, "although I did my best to bark-talk for you. And I don't believe you tried to say much to me either; you seemed to be thinking about something else" (44). Roverandom apologizes (the first time in the book he does this), telling Two "how sorry he was" (44). As Swank notes, this is a vital element of Roverandom's spiritual development: he must feel remorse and make amends to those he has wronged (46). Two immediately forgives him and they spend a long time playing together, "and got to like one another better and better" (45), so much so that Roverandom is downcast when Two wakes out of his dream and he is left alone with the Man.

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<sup>10</sup> In Tolkien's legendarium, wizards (or Istari) are followers of the Valar, angelic servants of Eru Ilúvatar, the divine creator of all. The wizards' role is to help the people of Middle-earth fight against the forces of darkness ("Wizards").

Back on the white side of the Moon, it is apparent that Roverandom has changed as a result of his visit. He cannot now enjoy his adventures with the Moon-dog “as much as he ought to have done” (45)<sup>11</sup>.

It was not Roverandom’s fault, and he did his best not to show it, but somehow none of the adventures or explorations seemed so exciting to him as they had done before, and he was always thinking of the fun he had in the garden with little boy Two. (48-9)

In short, Roverandom has outgrown the frivolous moon-dog. Finally, he goes to the Man and confesses, “I’ve got a pain in my inside. I want to go back to the little boy, so that his dream [of owning me] can come true” (49).

Roverandom’s pain is significant, for it suggests the beginning of love for others. Hitherto, he has mourned his own inconveniences and enjoyed the company of the moon-dog, but he has not experienced either the joy or suffering that come with loving someone else. The Man immediately agrees to Roverandom’s return, suggesting that he notices and approves of Roverandom’s new growth (52). He advises him to go back to Psamathos, so the little dog can be returned to his normal size and then find Two.

But Roverandom takes yet another step in moral development when he shares his plan with Psamathos. “I shouldn’t run away [from Two] now; and really I belong to him, don’t I? So I ought to go back to him,” he pleads (56). But Psamathos reproves him: “You belong to the old lady that bought you first, and back you’ll have to go to her. You can’t buy stolen goods, or bewitched ones, either, as you would know, if you knew the Law” (56). The narrator’s capitalization of “law” is significant, for it implies that Psamathos is not talking about human-made rules, but divine law. Christian theorist Dave Henning suggests that “Law [with a capital “L”] comes from God and is found in the 10 [sic] Commandments,” but “law [with a lower-case “l”] is any voice that makes us feel we must do something or be something to merit the approval of another.” The lower-case law is that followed by the moon-dog and by Roverandom when he is on the Moon. The dogs want to please the Man (or, at least, avoid his wrath), but they do not feel a moral imperative.

But, in this case, Roverandom has no special wish to please Psamathos, nor does he fear the sand-wizard’s retribution. Instead, he seems to be respecting a Law out of moral principle, perhaps specifically the command to

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<sup>11</sup> In this instance, the word “ought” implies a contrast between the old Roverandom and the new, rather than the narrator’s moral values. The Man’s delight when Roverandom confides his pain suggests the new Roverandom is spiritually superior to the old one and to the moon-dog. Only the old Roverandom can be satisfied with the aimless, careless life led by the moon-dog.

not steal. Although Psamathos's "huge wink" (56) as he speaks suggests to the reader that Roverandom will eventually get his wish, the dog reluctantly accepts the Law. Thus, in addition to his new capacity for love, he demonstrates a responsibility and morality that go beyond personal relationships, even when the outcome is against his wishes. Patrick Grant suggests that in *The Lord of the Rings* "heroic obedience based on love of God [...] must also involve faith in God's Providence, so that events that may appear undeserved or random can be accepted as part of a greater design" (181). While Roverandom has yet to realize the "greater design" in his story, his obedience to the Law may also suggest he is taking his first steps towards such a faith.

But, as if to underscore that Roverandom still has a way to go, Psamathos is not able to change him back to his normal size. Spluttering with rage at being "[d]one by a seaweed wizard," all he can suggest is that Roverandom go to the mer-kingdom, where Artaxerxes has just married the king's daughter and been given the post of Pacific and Atlantic Magician (57). "You have got to go and find him and beg his pardon," Psamathos tells the dog (57). And so Psamathos calls up a whale that carries Roverandom in his mouth to his next destination.<sup>12</sup>

### THE MER-DOG

There is an ominous note in the narrator's description of the sea: "the deeps are not such a jolly place as the moon for little dogs, being full of dark and awful places where light has never been and never will be, because they will never be uncovered till light has all gone out" (63). Although the dark side of the Moon is frightening and Roverandom is hunted by the moon-dragon, the Man is always in the background, ready to rescue the little dog when necessary (even when Roverandom does not realize that). But the darkness of the Sea and the presence of a Sea-Serpent beyond even the Man's control suggest a place of genuine danger. Here, Roverandom will be tested and forced to make a decision that will reveal his spiritual development (or lack of it).

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<sup>12</sup> Tolkien's choice of whale as means of transportation is worth noting. In "'The Great Fish' in Ancient and Medieval Story," Cornelia Catlin Coulter observes that "[t]he 'swallow' type of tale (with a giant, a cow, a huge fish or dragon as the swallower) is found all over the world and was probably old even in the days when the *Book of Jonah* was written" (41). Campbell sees the story pattern as a rite of initiation ("Episode 1"), and the Jonah story is often read as Jonah's realization "of God's extravagant mercy and forgiveness" ("Jonah" 1321). Both interpretations apply to Roverandom. The whale foreshadows another transformation in Roverandom's journey, in which he will learn to receive and give mercy.

Yet it is in the Sea that Roverandom travels to the other side of the world, from which he sights the Mountains of Elvenhome “and the light of Faery upon the waves” (74). Later, as an “older and wiser dog,” he realizes that, of all the things he has seen in his adventure, this is “the most marvellous of all” (73). Although Tolkien does not discuss exactly how this experience is significant to Roverandom, a quick look at the Elves and Elvenhome in his legendarium can give us some hints. Tolkien sees the Elves as “[h]umane nature raised to a higher level than is actually seen in Men.” The critical difference is that Elves love the natural world both for its own sake and as “a reality derived from God in the same degree as themselves” (*Letters* #181, p.236). For the Elves, then, the “earthly” paradise (*Letters* #154, p.198) of Elvenhome is a means of getting closer to God.

This motif echoes the Irish *immrama*, in which earthly beauty and abundance serve spiritual ends. For example, in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, St. Brendan visits several paradisaic islands, but these are not meant to be seen as places for physical indulgence. Instead, the islands impress the travelers with God’s grace and thus help them prepare for the ultimate spiritual transformation and transition to heaven (Moylan 313). I suggest that Roverandom’s sighting of Elvenhome serves a similar function. His brief glimpse is not a direct encounter with God or experience of heaven, but it is a presentiment and few mortals in Tolkien’s legendarium are fortunate (or blessed) enough to get that (*Roverandom* 74).

Oddly enough (or perhaps not oddly at all), Roverandom gets his glimpse of grace not as a reward for good behavior, but as preparation for a spiritual fall. It is only *after* he has seen Elvenhome that he is capable of truly understanding and repenting his sin. In his previous life, he is ill-mannered and self-centered, as when he bites the wizard and ignores Two, but presumably he is too immature at that point to realize he is doing wrong. Now, however, he has met and loves Two, he has felt remorse and apologized, he has agreed to follow the Law, and he has glimpsed the sacred. He has moral responsibility, whether he fulfills it or not.

Soon after arriving at the bottom of the sea, Roverandom meets a small dog similar to himself (although this dog has gills and a fish-tail). Again, he exchanges friendly insults with his double, again they become companions, and again, the double shares his story. But, if the moon-dog reflects what may happen to Roverandom if he persists in his light-hearted self-centeredness, the mer-dog represents two further trajectories. The first reflects a life of love, loyalty and self-sacrifice. As he tells Roverandom:

I expect I'm the first of all dog Rovers. My first master was a Rover, a real one, a sea-rover who sailed his ship in the northern waters; it was a long ship with red sails, and it was carved like a dragon in the prow, and he called it the Red Worm and loved it. I loved him, though I was only a puppy, and he did not notice me much; for I wasn't big enough to go hunting, and he didn't take dogs to sail with him. (65)

Determined to stay with his master, the puppy sneaks aboard the ship and stays until the Red Worm is defeated in a sea-battle and the man leaps overboard to avoid the humiliation of defeat. The faithful dog follows his master into the sea, where he begs the mermaids to return the man to his grieving family. And so the man leaves, while the dog remains and gradually transforms into a sea-animal (65-6).

The dragon-headed ship, the occupation of sea-roving (pirating), and the mer-dog's references to colonies in the Orkneys all suggest the Nordic Viking culture. We know Tolkien admired Norse loyalty and bravery (St. Clair 65), and the mer-dog and his master exemplify both (as do many characters in *The Lord of the Rings*). However, as Gloriana St. Clair points out, Tolkien's heroes are different from the Norse heroes in one crucial respect. While "[c]ompassion is not common in the hard, cold world of Northern sagas and Eddas," Tolkien emphasizes its importance (66).<sup>13</sup> According to Ralph C. Wood, "[n]owhere is *The Lord of the Rings* made more manifestly Christian than in its privileging of pity—mercy and forgiveness—as its central value" (149). The mer-dog does show compassion for those he loves—his master and master's family—but, as we will see, it ends there.

The Sea-Serpent that lives at the bottom of the Sea is restless and Artaxerxes, in his role as Pacific and Atlantic Magician, reluctantly goes to investigate. Roverandom is still annoyed with Artaxerxes, who has not only ignored his pleas to transform him back, but actually thrown a rock at him. As the narrator says,

[Dogs] don't forget ill-tempered lumps of rock. Well then, in spite of all these varied sight-seeings and these astonishing journeys, Roverandom kept it in his underneath mind all the time. And it came back into his upper mind, as soon as ever he got home. (74)

The narrator's contrast between Roverandom's marvelous experiences and his determination to remember a grudge implies that he *should* have reacted

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<sup>13</sup> If anything, the Vikings gloried in revenge and this motivates much of the action in the sagas (St. Clair 65).

differently. And so the narrator explains that when they see Artaxerxes, in a shark-pulled carriage, “the two *bad* dogs dropped pieces of rock into the carriage whenever it passed under cliffs” (75, emphasis mine). It is significant that here for the first time, Tolkien actually labels Roverandom as “bad,” i.e. morally corrupt, as opposed to ignorant. Nor is this the end of Roverandom’s maliciousness. To further bait Artaxerxes, he sneaks up and bites one of the carriage shark’s tails, causing pandemonium. The sharks begin a biting frenzy that culminates in one of them chomping the tail of the Sea-Serpent and the furious Serpent creating a huge wave that washes Roverandom far away (77). When he finally makes his way back to the mer-king’s palace, Roverandom finds the Serpent has threatened to “knock everything to dripping smithereens” if the wizard is not exiled from the sea (79). The mer-people, who have not been satisfied with his magic, are happy to send Artaxerxes away, making him feel “very small and unimportant altogether [...] Even the mer-dog laughed at him” (80).

The mer-dog’s jeering at Artaxerxes embodies his second moral choice and the results that come with it. His first choice brings him to the undersea kingdom, where he is rewarded with the glimpse of Elvenhaven. The second choice gives the mer-dog the opportunity to be compassionate towards an enemy, and accordingly become more Christian in his values.<sup>14</sup> However, he rejects this chance. Even though he is noble in a pagan Norse sense, the mer-dog has yet to step beyond that to what Tolkien would have seen as the ultimate enlightenment of Christianity. As a consequence, the mer-dog remains in his Otherworld, pursuing his adventures and enjoying the attentions of the mer-children, who, though “not as jolly as real, two-legged children,” are able to keep mer-dogs happy (72).<sup>15</sup> The mer-dog thus lives in a kind of Valhalla, full of adventures and pleasant company. But he does not have the union with a loving and merciful God that the Catholic Catechism describes as “the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness” (“Heaven”).

However, the narrator tells us,

funnily enough, Roverandom was quite upset. After all, he had his own reasons for knowing that Artaxerxes’ magic was not without effect. And he had bitten the shark’s tail, too, hadn’t he? And he had started the

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<sup>14</sup> Although the mer-dog doesn’t have a particular quarrel with Artaxes, he seems to resent him on Roverandom’s behalf, which is consistent with Viking loyalty to friends and duty to avenge their wrongs.

<sup>15</sup> Since the mer-dog, like Roverandom, originally is a land-dweller, it would presumably have been possible for him to return to land with Artaxerxes and Roverandom, if he had chosen according to Christian values.

whole thing with that trouser-bite. And he belonged to the Land himself, and felt it was a bit hard on a poor land-wizard being baited by all these sea-folk. (80)

Tolkien's relatively long description of Roverandom's thoughts and feelings differs from that of his reaction to being reproved by Two. On that occasion, we are told only "Roverandom said how sorry he was" (44). But here, Roverandom's feelings suggest a stronger feeling of responsibility and of empathy (even, or especially, though he does not like the wizard). For Roverandom, it is no longer enough to be happy. He needs to be *good*.

Tolkien emphasizes these points even more strongly when Roverandom takes action. The little dog goes to Artaxerxes and tells him, "I beg your pardon. I do really. Awfully sorry, I mean. I never meant to damage your reputation" (80). In this speech, Roverandom asks for forgiveness, expresses his remorse, and acknowledges how he has hurt the wizard. Each of these points expresses a slightly different aspect of apology and reconciliation, and, together, they imply that Roverandom finally realizes the true seriousness of his crime. Artaxerxes immediately forgives Roverandom, and suggests, "I think we had both better go back home again together" (80). It is only now that Roverandom thinks to ask again whether the wizard would be willing to restore him to his normal size, demonstrating that his apology is not motivated by self-interest. It is also important to note returning to the land (and to full size) are connected with Roverandom's respect for the Law, rather than with personal pleasure. At this point, he thinks he is going to return to the old lady that owns him, rather than the little boy he loves.

Roverandom's restoration involves further death/rebirth imagery. This time, it involves Artaxerxes shoving the dog into a magic bag.<sup>16</sup> There is a "loud bang, and lo and behold! there was no bag, only Rover," restored to his old self, but "a bit bigger, as he was now some months older" (85). Roverandom's physical growth is a significant point, for it distinguishes him from his doubles. In spite of his claims to be thousands of years old (24), the moon-dog seems to be frozen in puppyhood.<sup>17</sup> When annoyed with the dogs, the Man-in-the-Moon

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, even though Roverandom begs for this transformation and has no reason to doubt Artaxerxes's good will at this point, he has to be grabbed by the scruff and shoved, "kicking and yapping," into the wizard's magic bag (85). Tolkien thus suggests that Roverandom's growth is an ongoing process: he has not yet arrived at a place of complete faith in the larger design. He also emphasizes a theme repeated many times in *The Lord of the Rings*, that transformation is frightening and *hard*. Even the wise Gandalf suffers terror and despair in his transformation into Gandalf the White (*LotR* III.V.505).

<sup>17</sup> The narrator comments dryly that the moon-dog "exaggerated a lot," further undercutting his claim about age (67).



exclaims, "Drat those *puppies!*" (35, emphasis mine), implying that they are equally immature. In Tolkien's illustration, Roverandom and the moon-dog are identical in size, which further suggests they are metaphorically at least about the same age.

Tolkien never mentions or illustrates the mer-dog's size in comparison to Roverandom. However, the mer-dog does explain that, since his heroic leap into the sea, he has grown "much older—and wiser," but "never grown any *bigger*" (66, emphasis mine). In a symbolic sense, the mer-dog reaches his peak in spiritual development with the sea-plunge, and never progresses beyond that. To sum up, then, Roverandom is the only one of the three Rovers that *grows* during the story and this matches his change from self-centeredness (puppy) to loving and compassionate (larger, though still young, dog).<sup>18</sup> (We know Roverandom's journey towards spiritual wisdom is still not complete when, in spite of his empathy for Artaxerxes and his restoration to full size, he "looks longingly at the wizard's trousers" for "just one moment" before he thinks better of it [86]).

When Roverandom finally returns to the old lady's garden, "there was the little boy playing on the lawn with the yellow ball! And the dream had come true, just as he had never expected!!" (88). In "On Fairy-stories," Tolkien describes "the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn'" in fairy tales as "a sudden and miraculous grace," "a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world" (75). For Tolkien, such a turn is a metaphor for the Christian promise of eternal life, a reality that transcends the everyday world (15). With this in mind, we gain further insight into the ending of *Roverandom*. The little dog's reunion with Two, the dream unexpectedly coming true for both of them, is not just a classic dog-finds-boy story. It is the promise of life and joy everlasting for those that learn the Christian cornerstones of love, obedience, and forgiveness.

## CONCLUSIONS

*Roverandom* provides evidence of Tolkien's creative flexibility. While, as Swank demonstrates, Tolkien structures his novel on the Irish *immram*, he adds the motif of the literary double, and makes it serve multiple functions. The doubles act as the protagonist's companions and mentors in his explorations of Otherworlds, but they also show the limitations of relationships based solely in a shared love of adventure. In each case, Roverandom likes the other dog and

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<sup>18</sup> Tolkien uses a similar connection between physical and moral growth in *The Lord of the Rings*, when Merry and Pippin not only get taller, but "increase from comic sprites to novelistic figures capable of moral growth" (Birns 89).

enjoys his travels with him, but ultimately chooses to leave. He would rather have genuine, if sometimes painful, love, and moral growth than rove with a fun-loving pal. The doubles' moral decisions regarding love, self-sacrifice, and forgiveness also warn and inspire *Roverandom* when he must make his own choices. *Roverandom* thus demonstrates that Tolkien's doubles are *not* inevitably meant to be read as projections of main characters. This, in turn, supports Opreanu's suggestion that Tolkien critics explore "the similarities and differences between the [doubles] while also emphasizing the importance of both and the ways in which they interact and define one another" (154).

Although the story is written for a child audience, Tolkien explores the fear and pain of spiritual development as well as the joys and rewards. He also places heavy emphasis on individual agency even for the young. As with the child-reader, *Roverandom* is often under the control of adult authorities. He is confined to the old lady's yard, he is punished by Artaxerxes, he is bought by Two's mother and given to her son, he is sent off first to the Moon and then the Sea by Psamathos, and he is dragged into the dark side of the Moon. But even *Roverandom* has the power to make the crucial moral decisions that ultimately determine his fate. Tolkien thus suggests that children also have access to such power. No matter how physically weak, no matter how lacking in political or economic power, children have the ability to determine their moral lives.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I am speaking here of an ideal world. *Roverandom* is able to freely choose his course in a way that real-life children are, tragically, not always able to do (as in the case of child-soldiers forced to participate in murder).

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