

THE VISUAL IMPETUS AND THE WRITINGS OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

ROBERT SCOTT GARBACZ

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs
& Academic Scholarships
Texas A&M University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE
RESEARCH FELLOWS

April 2006

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Approved as to style and content by:

Stephen Miller
(Fellows Advisor)

Edward A. Funkhouser
(Executive Director)

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ABSTRACT

The Visual Impetus and the Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien (April 2006)

Robert Scott Garbacz
Department of Liberal Arts
Texas A&M University

Fellows Advisor: Dr. Stephen Miller
Department of Hispanic Studies

Visual illustrations were critical to Tolkien's creativity—they preceded his creation of lexical texts, helped to define the world in which he set most of his literature, and continued to hold a great significance in the publication of Tolkien's texts. Yet the one essay Tolkien wrote in an attempt to bridge the gap between his career as a Medieval philologist and his hobby of creating fantasy stories, “On Fairy-stories”, actively condemned the illustrations that Tolkien was then creating. “In human art, Fantasy is a thing best left to words,” (Tolkien, *Reader* 70) and even when art is set in support of words, “illustrations do little good to fairy-stories.” (Tolkien, *Reader* 95) While Tolkien offers a small number of theoretical arguments against fantasy illustrations in “On Fairy-stories,” it is my assertion that such an opinion represents

Tolkien's particular personal and historical position rather than an authoritative understanding of the nature of his own art.

In my undergraduate honors thesis, I am proposing an alternative to Tolkien's conclusion about the value of his illustrations by showing that Tolkien's illustrations served a critical role in the formation of his literary creations of fantasy. My methodology is to combine a chronologically disciplined close reading of his illustrations with a brief overview of those of Tolkien's writings that intersect with his interest in illustration. I trace the evolution of Tolkien's visual work through: (1) childhood creation of realistic illustrations in which Tolkien developed his ability to comment upon the world; (2) early fantasy illustrations, which predated Tolkien's fantasy texts but themselves present one-image visual "stories" with philosophical implications and openness similar to his later fantasy texts; (3) illustrations for Tolkien's "legendary history," in which he created a geography of emotional landscapes through which he could move the characters of his fantasy texts; and (4) illustrations for children's stories, in which Tolkien reintroduced the humor, character, and satire from his childhood illustrations to his fantasy fiction. I not only argue that illustrations are a

significant companion to Tolkien's lexical texts, but also that they provide another perspective on the study of illustrations.

DEDICATION

I wish to thank my parents, for supporting me (despite misgivings) in my decision to pursue a career as an English professor, my high school teacher Charles Floyd for feeding my love of literature and teaching me the importance of finding and expressing my own views on art, and Dr. Stephen Miller for encouraging my interest in the study of “telling stories through words and pictures” and providing enough guidance to make this thesis possible while ensuring that it represents my views rather than his own.

Last, but certainly not least, I wish to thank my *carissime* and soon-to-be bride Hannah, to whom I dedicate this thesis, for all the support and encouragement she has given me.

In gloria dei.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without both the work of Humphrey Carpenter in collecting Tolkien's letters and Hammond and Skull, whose work *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator* not only provided my first glimpse into the world of Tolkien's illustrations but also gave me many important insights into those illustrations. Finally, I wish to acknowledge and thank the Tolkien estate for taking the time to consider my request for permissions to republish Tolkien's illustrations, without which this thesis would be far less comprehensible.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction¹

J.R.R Tolkien's works of fantasy fiction emerged, among other things, from a childhood penchant for creating visual representations of the world around him. However, Tolkien came to realize that his skills and inclinations as an author of fiction lead him towards fantasy texts and away from realistic illustrations. During World War II, his art moved beyond “a diary with portraits (some scathing, some comic, some commendatory) of persons and events seen” to fantasy stories capable of “really transforming experience into another form and symbol with Morgoth and Orcs and the Eldalie (representing beauty and grace of life and artifact) and so on” (Carpenter, *Letters* 85). During this transition period, Tolkien's visual art again preceded his literary art—Tolkien created a stream of expressive fantasy images in the years leading up to the first writings of the tales of “Middle Earth” (where Tolkien first developed “Morgoth and Orcs and the Eldalie”) that would dominate the remainder of his literary career.

¹ This thesis follows the style and format of *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

Furthermore, Tolkien's Middle Earth fantasy tales were written simultaneously with the creation of a large number of images of the events and (far more commonly) locations that his narrative texts described. In letters to his editor, Tolkien took great pains to ensure that the illustrations properly complimented each of his books, and bitterly resisted illustrations in styles that he felt too frivolous or ignorant of the central elements of his published fantasy texts. Visual illustrations, then, were critical to Tolkien's creativity—they preceded his creation of lexical texts, helped to define the world in which he set most of his literature, and continued to hold a great significance in the publication of Tolkien's texts.

The one essay Tolkien wrote in an attempt to bridge the gap between his career as a Medieval philologist and his hobby of creating fantasy stories, his 1938 “On Fairy-stories”, mentions visual illustrations, and indeed devotes an entire appendix to them. Yet here the author whose visually evocative fantasy texts arose out of visual illustrations takes time to condemn all fantasy images out of hand. “In human art, Fantasy is a thing best left to words” (Tolkien, *Reader* 70), and even when art is set in support of words, “illustrations do little good to fairy-stories” (Tolkien, *Reader* 95). While Tolkien offers a small number of theoretical arguments against fantasy

illustrations in “On Fairy-stories,” it is my assertion that such an opinion represents Tolkien's particular personal and historical position rather than an authoritative understanding of the nature of his own art.

So why would Tolkien disparage the hundreds of fantasy images he spent his life creating? The first reason is frequently encountered in Tolkien's collected letters: Tolkien had a very low opinion of his artistic skills and training. In January of 1937, merely one or two years before Tolkien was to claim that images are unsuitable for either telling fantasy stories on their own or supporting fantasy texts, he took a different line with the publishers of *The Hobbit* regarding his submitted illustrations. Illustrations such as his, his letter claimed, “on the whole ... might be an improvement” to the publication of a text-only *The Hobbit*; nevertheless, “it may be impossible, at this stage, and in any case they were not very good and may be technically unsuitable” (Carpenter, *Letters* 14). More significantly, when discussing the American edition of *The Hobbit* in May of the same year, Tolkien recognized that his illustrations could not bear comparison with those of a more skilled professional artist—but even so, he feared that the “better” American illustrations might run counter to the atmosphere in the lexical text of *The Hobbit* and thus harm the aesthetic experience of the book. Tolkien wrote, “I

am divided between knowledge of my own inability [to draw effective illustrations] and fear of what American artists (doubtless of admirable skill) might produce” (Carpenter, *Letters* 17).

Tolkien's situation was made more difficult by the fact that he had a very particular (and in many ways realist) conception of how a fantasy text should work. One of Tolkien's central qualities of fantasy literature is that it enables the reader to experience a suspension of disbelief through the creation of a world which, although unlike our own, has an essential believability due to “the inner consistency of reality” (Tolkien, *Reader* 69). If Tolkien's illustrations had the potential to make suspension of belief difficult because of their jarring amateurishness (a nervousness that seems implicit in many comments Tolkien made about their lack of skill), Tolkien feared that American artists would apply to the later-published American edition of *The Hobbit* the sort of freely inventive and inconsistent style he noted in plays where “disbelief had not so much to be suspended as hanged, drawn and quartered” if the readers were to appreciate his story (Tolkien, *Reader* 71).

In light of this recent extended struggle to ensure that the publications of *The Hobbit* contained illustrations that were neither distracting due to their amateurishness

nor misleading due to the influence of contrary American trends of fantasy illustration, Tolkien's anti-illustration comments begin to make more sense. Because Tolkien feared that illustrations of his works might potentially serve as the weak point that would undercut the believability of his carefully-constructed alternate reality, it was an easy next step to claim that illustrations were of no real use to fantasy literature as a whole.

Tolkien's distrust of visual fantasy images also had a second source—the society in which he lived. Such anti-illustration attitudes came from two opposing fronts. In the first place, the Modernist school of artistic expression was firmly entrenched as the primary “literary” authors of their time, and with it an increased focus on creating an intellectual “new consciousness” that had no interest in the representative illustrations which would allow them to serve Tolkien's “inner consistency of reality.” Lewis Carroll, Tolkien's predecessor as a popular author and Oxford professor, was following the traditions of his time in defining and closely overseeing the creation of illustrations for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. But the age of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, unlike the age of Lewis Carroll and Mark Twain, had much less interest in the association of images with narrative. An author who wants to “forge in the smithy of my soul the new consciousness of my race” (Joyce 276; ch. 5) has much less interest in creating visible

images of the situations he is describing than one who is interested in merely observing and relating the nature of the reality as he sees it. Henry James, for instance, took a stance whose summary seems a direct echo of Tolkien's reasoning. J. Hillis Miller describes James' view of illustrations as far simpler and less cerebral than texts: "The word evokes. The illustration presents" (67). The same idea is found in Tolkien's attack on fantasy illustrations: "The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a visible presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive" (*Reader*, 95).

Because Tolkien lived at a time when all "serious" literature was modernist, it was nearly inevitable that he would absorb these arguments that "serious" literature—literature, that is, that adults could take seriously, and experience with a full suspension of disbelief, and grapple with in their own minds—could not be accompanied by illustration. The illustrations that found their way into Tolkien's published works did so through the back door, as it were—either as diagrams of doors or maps of the geography for *The Lord of the Rings*, as book covers, or as stylized portraits that clearly indicated his heavily-illustrated works as children's stories.

Modernism also had another profound influence on Tolkien's conception of the power of fantasy images—it gave him numerous examples of unrealistic images which were equally contrary to Tolkien's representative mode of expression. Modernist painters, like modernist authors, wanted to create a new consciousness through their art, and the result was a number of bizarre images that in their own way presented a challenge to, rather than an examination of, normal life.

As a quiet, Roman-Catholic Englishman, it would be easy for Tolkien to see, for instance, “in surrealism ... a morbidity or un-ease rarely found in literary fantasy” (*Reader*, 95). Moreover, Tolkien's early (non-illustrative) fantasy-art itself, while almost always holding a central tension and ambiguity about the world, tended to share this darkness, leading Tolkien to blame the medium. “The mind that produced the depicted images may often be suspected to have been in fact already morbid; yet this is not a necessary explanation in all cases. A curious disturbance of the mind is often set up by the act of drawing images of this kind...” (Tolkien, *Reader*, 95) It is entirely possible that here, as in Tolkien's attitudes towards illustrations for his fantasy texts, Tolkien instinctively followed a modernist aesthetic that ran counter to the aims he was trying to attain.

Tolkien's critique of fantasy images in "On Fairy-Stories" was never recanted. Furthermore, late in Tolkien's life he ceased to draw most of his fantasy images and illustration. Instead, Tolkien drew decorative patterns until his death, and associated his decorative patterns with his legends of Middle Earth as the crests of major characters, as the blooming of his fictitious sacred tree, or as illustrations of various forms and types of dragons. Yet there are a number of reasons why Tolkien's anti-illustration views should not be accepted as an accurate assessment of the value of illustrations in his work.

First, illustrations were one of the primary means with which Tolkien created, filled, and understood his world. Many readers have noted that Tolkien's stories tend to be very visually evocative. The earliest of these texts, however, were composed after Tolkien had spent years observing, illustrating, and visually commenting upon both the world around him and (later) the evocative world of Tolkien's literarily-formed imagination. Whatever Tolkien may have said in support of fantasy texts and against fantasy images, his texts grew out of an impulse that was first expressed and developed in his works of visual art. Perhaps the most intense example of this impetus is Tolkien's tendency to use places and objects as central symbols to express his ideas in fiction more frequently than direct and abstract discussion. It could be wondered whether Tolkien

would have placed such an emphasis on broken swords, great citadels, gentle hill-villages, white trees, or even golden rings if his imagination had not first been conditioned by the iconographic world of visual art.

On a related note, the very manuscripts of Tolkien's texts seem to suggest that there are certain places that he could not describe in writing until he had created a visual image of them. Tolkien almost always created landscapes, largely because he had limited ability to draw human figures, but he nevertheless manages to evoke many scenes visually through shape and color in the margins of his texts immediately before translating the image into words.

The final proof of the importance of Tolkien's illustrations is their ability to lodge themselves in people's memory. The most memorable aspect of Tolkien's works for a reader is almost always his visual memory and sense of a place both real and fantastic. In the introduction to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, as published by all Ballantine Books editions since 1973, Peter Beagle states that “in the end it is Middle Earth and its dwellers that we love, not Tolkien's considerable gifts in showing it to us” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* iii).

These images appear in the reader's imagination in a vivid and visual manner, but they also appear in visual re-representations with an impressive degree of faithfulness to Tolkien's original visual illustrations. In Peter Jackson's recent (and immensely popular) cinematic adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, many liberties were taken with Tolkien's story, dialog, characters, and images—but the number of locations with visual interpretations that differ from Tolkien's illustrations are vastly outnumbered by the number of locations which are item-by-item recreations of the watercolors or sketches which Tolkien had considered “amateurish.” Even if Tolkien's fantasy illustrations lack the direct readership of Tolkien's fantasy texts, they continue to serve a role in informing and creating the places and atmosphere of Tolkien's narrative, just as they helped to form Tolkien's original text.

In the next pages, I will trace Tolkien's illustrations through the course of his life. Tolkien's illustrations went through five distinctive (but somewhat overlapping) periods as he struggled to tell stories through pictures as well as through words, and each captured somewhat different potentialities of visual story-telling, as follows: 1) Realistic illustrations, whose production began in 1904 and had slowed to a crawl by 1913; 2) Independent fantasy illustrations, which began to replace Tolkien's realistic illustrations

in 1911 and ceased entirely by 1914; 3) Illustrations for Tolkien's "legendary history," *The Silmarillion*, which began in 1914 and began to decrease in frequency by 1928; 4) Children's illustrations, which were created from 1920 to 1943—largely during the period of the illustrations for *The Silmarillion*—but which take on an artistic form far different than that of the *Silmarillion* illustrations; and 5) Patterns and symbols², which Tolkien created with increasing frequency as he ceased to create *Silmarillion* illustrations and continued to create until his death in 1973. Throughout each period can be seen an artist whose desire is to portray stories, but who does so largely through a visually-oriented method centering on places and objects both central to the world of Tolkien's fiction and significant to life as a whole.

² This late stage in Tolkien's art, however, is of far less significance than the early stages, and is only dealt with briefly in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER II

The Poetic and the Common:

Roots of Fantasy in Tolkien's Early Portraits of Life

In one short story, "Leaf, by Niggle," Tolkien presents himself allegorically as Niggle, a painter who is both seized by a desire to capture beauty on canvas and nearly overwhelmed by guilt at the amount of time and resources he devotes to his artistry that could, perhaps, be better spent helping his neighbors who seem constantly to be needing to ask a favor of him. But when he wrote (in 1942) to his son, then an Allied fighter pilot in World War II, he described a much more specific underlying motive and purpose in his works of art.

"I think if you could begin to *write*, and find your own mode, or even (for a start) imitate mine, you would find it a great relief. I sense amongst all your pains (some merely physical) the desire to express your *feelings* about good, evil, fair, foul (sic in some way: to rationalize it, and prevent it just festering. In my case it generated Morgoth and the History of the Gnomes." (Carpenter, *Letters* 78)

Tolkien's fiction, as he described it to his son, was gripping and time-consuming not because of some indefinable personal expression, but because it was central to Tolkien's life as a means to present personal commentary about the world—to express “feelings about good, evil, fair, foul.” Despite his successful career as a philologist and literary critic, these expressions were rarely literal, direct or emphatic. Instead, his artistic impulse was (as he wrote in a later letter) one that attempted the task of “really transforming experience into another form or symbol with Morgoth and Orcs and the Eldalie, (representing beauty and grace of life and artifact) and so on.” (Carpenter, *Letters* 85) The ability to comment lightly upon life and leave the reader with the ability to apply the abstract contemplations of literature to his or her individual life-experiences is, in fact, one of the hallmarks of Tolkien's artistry.

This open-ended speculative mode of expression did not itself spring full-formed from his head. Instead, Tolkien's art first found expression through the creation of images of his physical surroundings. As mentioned in the introduction, Tolkien claimed that a “diary with portraits (some scathing, some comic, some commendatory) of persons and events seen” preceded his works of

fantasy. These illustrations comprised Tolkien's first attempt to come to grips with the world around him through art, and as such are the predecessors of all of Tolkien's fantasy fiction.

In discussing the “roots” of any art, it is important to remember that rarely are monocausal explanations accurate. In the case of Tolkien, his letters and writings make it clear that there was at least another foundational element—his other childhood preoccupation of language creation. When speaking to less intimate audiences, Tolkien claimed that his fictitious world was merely a product of his formidable linguistic aptitudes. “It [his legends of Middle-Earth] is all a piece, and *fundamentally linguistic* in inspiration. ... The stories were made rather to find a world for the [invented] languages than the reverse.” (Carpenter, *Letters* 219, emphasis original) Both of the accounts of the origin are justified chronologically – an early version of Tolkien’s imaginary language is present in the first of his poems set in Middle-Earth, while the realistic childhood illustrations which Tolkien referred to are preserved in the Bodleian library – and probably both are equally true. As a philologist, Tolkien often argued that there was an inherent connection between a culture-group’s language and its literature, but an examination of Tolkien’s illustrations reveals that they too represent the first stage of

Tolkien's development as an author. Tolkien's fantasy works did not merely displace Tolkien's early illustrations, but (as Tolkien seems to claim) absorbed their themes and transformed their portrayals of Tolkien's experience into a fantasy-world at once escapist and fundamentally intended as a representative of the ideals of the real world.

The earliest of Tolkien's published illustrations (created in 1904), *They Slept in Beauty Side by Side* (fig. 1), serves as a rough thesis statement for much of Tolkien's art as a whole. It portrays a couple (probably his aunt and her husband, with whom Tolkien was staying at the time (Hammond & Skull 12)) lying in bed together, with the words "They slept in beauty side by side" appearing in quotes in the lower-right corner of the image. The graphical elements of the image all seem to speak of comfortable, idyllic, and mundane English family life. The picture places the couple in the left side of their bedroom, and focuses more on the domestic environment surrounding them than on the couple themselves. The couple's curly hair, and particularly the man's beard, makes the faces reminiscent of children's teddy-bears. A great number of everyday details are precisely recorded: the window-curtains held back loosely by a piece of drooping fabric; the doorknob and keyhole; the cord which holds the painting over the bed; the simple patterns in the metalwork at the head and foot of the bed; the folds of the fabric below

the bed's comforter; and even the carved posts at the stairway (each made up of eight geometric shapes.) Yet the title, which ought to be a summary of the image, is written in the language of a poetic celebration of love and "beauty:" "They slept in beauty, side by side."

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 1: *They Slept in Beauty, Side by Side* (Hammond and Scull 4)

Such juxtapositions of typically common, mundane, and British themes against a romantic idea of near-perfection is a common thread throughout Tolkien's writings. In fact, it could be seen as the central theme of Tolkien's conception of fantasy literature as a whole. When a much older Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, his hero expressed the exact same sentiment by stating that "the green earth ... is a mighty matter of legend, though you tread on it under the light of day." Indeed, *The Lord of the Rings* contains a character whose entire existence is largely an echo of this conflict: Samwise Gamgee the Hobbit. Repeatedly in *The Lord of the Rings*, locations are described through elaborate language as places of unearthly beauty, normally because they are

domains of elves and unapproachable by mere humans. In such circumstances, Samwise often takes on the role of mediator, whose “simple” life and common sense contain a wisdom that allows him to understand the beauties that no human can express. After two half-page explanations of the untouched beauty of Lothlorien in *The Fellowship of the Rings*, for instance, Sam's reaction is used to finalize Tolkien's sense of a place of abstract beauty and poetry:

'It's sunlight and bright day, right enough,' he [Samwise Gamgee] said. 'I thought Elves were all for moon and stars, but this is more elvish than anything I ever heard tell of. I feel as if I was *inside* a song, if you take my meaning.'

Haldir [the Elf] looked at them, and he seemed indeed to take the meaning of both thought and word. He smiled. 'You feel the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim,' he said. (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 394; ch. vi)

It might easily be that Tolkien would have still created the character of a simple Hobbit who holds within him understanding of poetic beauties that he can't express even if he hadn't drawn pictures such as the one portraying his aunt and uncle as cuddly teddy-bears with a subtitle that for the young Tolkien would be “high poetry.” But the

fact remains that Tolkien first turned to illustrations—rather than texts—in his attempt to figure out how the world works. The simple childhood illustrations were in a way the “first drafts” of much of his later fantasy writings, and their central theme was the juxtaposition of “high poetry” and adventure with simple comforts and normal life.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 2 – Alder by a Stream (Hammond & Scull 13)

The watercolor painting *Alder by a Stream* (Fig. 2), a much more mature but still early³ illustration of a tree by a river, presents one side of Tolkien’s developing “vision.” Here the tree, with dark branches that immediately draw the eye, is clearly the center of the image. The tree branches’ vivid bends and turns demonstrate that Tolkien had carefully studied his subject (and indeed, the study of trees was one of Tolkien’s lifelong passions). Like most of his early colored artwork, there is a relatively small amount of

³ The date is uncertain—See pp. 13-14 in Hammond & Scull for a more complete discussion of the possible time of composition.

contrast, enhancing the peaceful, idyllic sense of the picture. A large green field to the left of the tree leaves plenty of space for the eyes to rest, and the white house in a background eventually draws the eye up to it and leads the viewer to wonder what kind of town or place might be in the background⁴. The picture reflects the same themes of *They Slept in Beauty* – peace, normalcy, and yet a sense of the romantic and poetic (in this case, a sense that something unexplored and yet capable of being discovered lying just past the painting.) It also shows a exemplifies a single focus which became a major part of Tolkien's life – a focus on natural landscapes in general, and trees in particular.

A pencil sketch of the town of Whitby (Fig. 3), made in the summer of 1910, demonstrates the urban half of Tolkien's imagination of ideal life. At this point in Tolkien's life he showed a much greater interest in precisely labeling the subject of his illustrations (in the case of this painting, a sign announces the city's name, but many paintings were designated by more specific dates and locations.) Of course, few if any paintings are merely documentary, and this painting demonstrates Tolkien's aims just as well as the previous paintings.

⁴ Hammond and Scull describe this tendency for Tolkien to include a visual path away from the illustration's subject (13-14), and argue convincingly that it is a central element of most of Tolkien's best visual works.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 3 – *Whitby* (Hammond & Scull 15)

At least some degree of open space is visible both in both the bay and the ocean beyond it, and a distant landscape is hinted at in outline near the horizon. Yet the details primarily evoke not the romance but the domestic peacefulness of *They Slept in Beauty*. The painting creates interest largely through the use of commonplace icons of relaxed English life: a great pile of wooden beer-kegs await unloading at the dock; a solitary rower passes under the bridge; a fishing net rests casually over the railings by the side of the road; a solitary boy walks along the left side of the road followed by a woman carrying a cage. And even though the city itself may be crowded, the open water and relatively open street (echoed in the gentle use of light and dark that avoids strong

differences in shading) work together to create the feeling of peacefully functioning domestic life.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 4 – “*Quallington Carpenter*” *Eastbury Berkshire* (Hammond & Scull 17)

The final representative image is the 1912 pencil-and-ink sketch ‘*Quallington Carpenter*’ *Eastbury, Berkshire* (fig. 4). If *They Slept in Beauty* introduces Tolkien’s artistic impulse in its embryonic form, *Quallington Carpenter* represents the apex of its first stage. The subject, a Medieval-looking cottage, is one of the ideal images of the then-ending Romantic movement in poetry and art, and certainly the medieval elements would not have been lost on Tolkien, who one year later was to specialize in Old and Middle English literature (Hammond & Scull 17). Yet Tolkien did not paint an image of medieval family life. Instead, he painted the contemporary cottage as accurately and realistically as possible. The window shutters hang awkwardly at an unattractive angle, the border between grass and the dirt road is not clearly-defined, the roof sags, and some

chimney-stones are off kilter and in some places almost seem to be in the act of disintegrating. The whole image carries an atmosphere of clutter and confusion rarely found in paintings of cottages but often found in life. A final detail Tolkien noticed and replicated further enhances the modern and “lived-in” feel of the building – the windows themselves seem to have curtains that cover up the bottom panels. If Tolkien started his “portraits” with a peaceful image of domestic slumber framed aesthetically by a line of high-sounding poetry, his late “portraits” included a romantic subject framed pragmatically in the clutter, dilapidation, and signs of ownership it had collected in the ensuing hundreds of years.

This survey of Tolkien’s illustrations is far from a complete one – I was not able to gain access to anything more than a brief description of any of Tolkien’s early “scathing” or “comic” portraits, for example. Nevertheless, the illustrations that are available set the tone for discussion of Tolkien’s later illustrations. Before Tolkien began to show any inclination to create the fantasy-works for which he was known, he had produced a variety of images that capture the quiet and comfortable beauty of normal English life and try to somehow elevate that beauty so it can be viewed as something “poetic.” Furthermore, when Tolkien did begin to document his invented

world, he drew upon the same attitudes and techniques used in his documentation of the sights and sounds of his own place and time.

CHAPTER III

Symbols for the Reader:

Tolkien's Early Fantasy Illustrations

The untitled sketch of a house in a cold forest posthumously titled *Northern House* (fig. 5) underlines the next changes that occurred in Tolkien's art. Tolkien's 1913 portrait of a cottage, *Quallington Carpenter*, declared its position as one of his "realistic" illustrations by carefully and realistically detailing the dilapidation of a present-day cottage. *Northern House*, drawn less than one year later (Jan. 6, 1914 according to Tolkien's label), is entirely different. The building still contains details that are appropriate to its environment, such as bulging antechambers to keep out the surrounding snow, but everything seems to have been smoothed out to give the house an idealized fairy-tale look, and even the moonshine is a direct beam of light that penetrates the dense but hazy foliage. Such fairy-tale motifs are a distinctive mark of Tolkien's newly developing "visionary" images which he had begun drawing three years earlier, and out of which developed nearly all of Tolkien's later illustrations and works of fiction.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 5 – *Northern House* (Hammond & Scull 42)

By using idealized and iconic “fairy tale” elements (rather than realistic landscapes) to form his images, Tolkien's visual art moved sharply from the world of physical representation to the world of fantasy and storytelling. However, Tolkien's fantasy was not so much a wholesale departure from earlier works as a new approach to the representation of and commentary upon reality. Instead of directly portraying “persons and events seen,” Tolkien increasingly chose to set his ideas about the world onto paper through his visual illustrations.

The result of this process is a series of images that, in one way or another, presents a seeming paradox or tension. Each image seems to be at war with itself: struggling to say contradictory things, suggesting contradictory interpretations, and even creating contradictory emotions within the viewer. Since the images themselves don't seem to suggest any single interpretation or meaning, the reader is invited to enter into the artistic experience himself, and to expand the individual images into personally

created narratives wherein the paradoxes are justified. Tolkien's early fantasy illustrations therefore create a sort of visual "story-in-a-box" that involves the reader in the expansion of a single illustration into a fuller story.

In Tolkien's later literature, this creation of symbols that by combining opposites are open to individual interpretation (as opposed to strict "allegory," which allows only one "correct" life-application) was to become another central theme. As Tolkien wrote in the forward to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, when describing his purpose behind the creation of *The Lord of the Rings*,

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations ... I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.

(Tolkien, *Fellowship* xi)

This "applicability," such a central theme of Tolkien's fantasy literature, began not with his fantasy texts but with the first fantasy-images created as Tolkien's art began to shift away from a direct recreation of the physical reality surrounding him.

The first two of Tolkien's published fantasy images, *Before* and *Afterwards* (fig. 6 and fig. 7), demonstrate that while Tolkien's early fantasy-images may have undergone

something of an evolution, the tension and opposition that forces individual interpretations of Tolkien's texts is present in the very first of Tolkien's fantasy-images. *Before* shows a dark, man-made tunnel with two torches and a lighted entranceway at the end. The entire image is formed using only black and red pencil. The many lines streaking back from the entrance give the image a sense of inward movement, and the clear denotation of the lines where the walls meet the ceiling and the floor help to pull the viewer's eyes towards the lighted exit. Overall, the image carries with it a sort of sinister feeling. *Afterwards*, drawn in a dim, pale color scheme, continues the story.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 6 – <i>Before</i> (Hammond & Scull 34)
[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 7 – <i>Afterwards</i> (Hammond & Scull 36)

A stylized, dehumanized figure walks away from a stone entranceway which seems to be the one at the end of *Before*. The figure holds his hands directly out before him, almost as if he is blind, and walks down a brown path. The path itself is lined with torches that burn with white-and-blue flame, and the background of the path is merely four strips of color – blue, followed by dark brown, followed by tan, followed by grey. If the primary

sense of *Before* is one of dreadful anticipation, *After*'s pale colors and dehumanized figure suggest rather dreadful meaninglessness – the central event is no longer to be dreaded, but the normal world that Tolkien lovingly presented in his early illustrations has been left behind.

The dark sense of despair is relatively unprecedented in Tolkien's illustrations, and doesn't seem to reflect any great change in his life, though it is another common element in many of Tolkien's early fantasy illustrations. World War I was to start a few years later, but no hints of what is to come would have reached Tolkien by 1911. In his academic career, Tolkien continued to study with great success at King Edwards School in Birmingham. The largest personal disruption of that time concerned his romantic life – he had fallen in love with his future wife, Edith Bratt, three years before he began his fantasy works, but was forbidden any interaction with her until the age of 21 by his guardian, who felt that Tolkien ought to focus on his studies rather than on Edith. It is certain that the absence of Edith increased Tolkien's depression, but Tolkien's profound sense of sorrow preceded his meeting with Edith. Indeed, as Humphrey Carpenter points out, Tolkien's often strong sense of melancholy stemmed from a much earlier separation – the death of his mother.

[Tolkien] was by nature a cheerful almost irrepressible person with a great zest for life. ... But [after his mother's death] there was to be a second side, more private but predominant in his diaries and letters. This side of him was capable of bouts of profound despair. More precisely, and more closely related to his mother's death, when he was in this mood he had a deep sense of impending loss. Nothing was safe. Nothing would last. No battle would be won for ever. (Carpenter, *Biography* 39)

This new darkness in Tolkien's art was not merely the product of increased concerns over his separation from Edith, but also a product of his developing breadth of self-expression which allowed his latent fears and dread to find expression on paper. As the above quotation chronicles, Tolkien's darker side had been present long before he painted *Before* and *Afterwards*. The period of Tolkien's life in which he began his fantasy illustrations also happened to be the period in which he started a "Tea Club" that eventually became to be known as the T.C.B.S.--a group dedicated to the understanding and creation of literature. Furthermore, Tolkien himself was completing his undergraduate studies in literature, and simply growing up as a person. For the purposes

of understanding the relationship between Tolkien's illustrations and fantasy texts, however, it is perhaps enough to see that they emerged when external struggles converged with an internal desire to create art that was more reflective and abstract than his previous efforts—and that in the process Tolkien established a pattern of portraying struggles and contradictions that would continue to be a central element in his later fantasy texts.

Tolkien's mixture of pessimism and idealism found a much more self-reflexive expression in another early image, *Thought* (fig. 8). Tolkien's career in literature, his persistent hobby of creating imaginary worlds, and his production of haunting visual images could all be considered direct expression of his "thought," so an image to which he applied such a title could well be expected to serve as a celebration of the ideal to which he aspired. Indeed, the top half of the image would seem to give credence to such a view. Streams of alternating light and shadow fill the space above the central figure, converging in a sort of halo which encircles the head of the figure. On the figure's right and left can be seen two bright stars, each set on top of what appears to be a dark throne. Yet the androgynous central figure (presumably the title's "thinker") is far less glorious

than the area above its head would lead the reader to believe. The figure's head is bent over and cradled in its hands, which meet at the back of the palms, and its downward-turned face is entirely obscured. The figure could be bent either with anguish or mental effort, but in either case it seems that his "thought," despite the glorious rays of light, is not something that occurs naturally and easily, but rather something associated with deep effort and possibly even grief or pain. The struggle between the glory of the top of the illustration and the anguish or effort at the bottom is the central theme, but the reader is left to discover what exactly this says about the nature of "thought."

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 8 – <i>Thought</i> (Hammond & Scull 38)
[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 9 – <i>End of the World</i> (Hammond & Scull 40)

This bipolar tendency continues in even some of Tolkien's most colorful and whimsical images of the time such as *End of the World* (Fig. 9). Here the top of the image is more cheerful than glorious, with gently-curving lines of colored pencil depicting rolling hills of green glass, light blue sky, and golden sunbeams. A black

stick-figure with a jauntily-tilted hat and an energetic stride seems to be taking a joyful stroll along this happy path, yet his current step has taken him over the edge of a cliff. The figure's carefree attitude is utterly at variance with the idea that he may be committing suicide, and it seems that the figure's image has been captured at the last moment before he realizes that he has run out of earth and plunges into darkness. Yet the most intriguing part of the image is the bottom half – instead of falling into a black abyss, the figure is falling into a dark blue night containing clear images white stars and a crescent moon that evoke children's art far more than observed reality. Tolkien frequently associated stars and the moon with his "elves," who Tolkien associated with his conceptions of art. The image thus heightens the effect present in the other "visionary" illustrations by portraying not one central tension, but a tension nested within a tension. The man at first glance seems to be committing suicide in an exceedingly lively and joyful manner, yet even his apparent suicide seems likely to throw him to a blue evening sky (perhaps representing the artistic impulse?) rather than into darkness. Perhaps the transition is meant to represent Tolkien's fiction and its journey past the "end" of the physical world and into a new, aestheticized fantasy

world—but again, the meaning of the illustration is left to the reader’s interpretation, and multiple readings would seem equally valid.

Another of Tolkien’s most whimsical visual works, the pair of the watercolor *Undertenishness* and the black-inked *Grownupishness* (fig. 10 and fig. 11) (dated by Tolkien as created during the summer of 1913), not only serves as another example of Tolkien’s open-ended visual narratives, but also brings Tolkien’s fantasy artwork closest to his personal life. The titles are obviously in apposition, with the quality of being “under ten” juxtaposed against the quality of being “grown up.” Here it is significant to note that a younger Tolkien had been particularly moved by the play *Peter Pan*, with its idealization of the open-mindedness, acceptance, and faith of childhood. Yet even if the images are in some ways a reflection on the spirit of Peter Pan, the images themselves are presented on their own as independent portraits of life – even if it is hard to decide

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 10 – <i>Undertenishness</i> (Hammond & Scull 39)
[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 11 – <i>Grownupishness</i> (Hammond & Scull 39)

whether the pictures fit into Tolkien's earlier category of "scathing" satires or merely was drawn as a "humorous" portraits.

Undertenishness is an image of exceptional visual playfulness. Overall, the image is that of a colorful butterfly with spread wings, but in addition to the color-patterns of the outside of the wings, the image forms a coherent landscape. Two bright orange trees form the central spots of the wings, and frame a central road that disappears upward through surrounding foliage. A couple of brown lines in the center of the road emphasize the fact that it points upwards as well as off into the distance. Overall, the cheerful colors and symmetry give the painting a sense of simple childlike cheerfulness, while the road which winds into the distance suggests travel and movement.

Grownupishness replaces the imagination and color of *Undertenishness* with satirical humor. The center of the illustration is a bearded face that bears a remarkable resemblance to a carrot which is attached to two feet and the skirts of what might be a robe. Two hands (one particularly evocative of a tree limb) reach out from a cloud of dust, and the image as a whole resembles a decorative kitchen tile. Most interesting of all, Tolkien chooses to replace the free associations of *Undertenishness* with linguistic symbols. The top of the painting contains a pattern of large exclamation marks and

small question marks. Coupled with the dust-cloud, such symbols give the impression of great indignation and mild curiosity or confusion. But in case a viewer might miss the point of *Grownupishness*, the illustration also includes a decoratively placed series of three lexical descriptions: “sightless,” “blind” and “well-wrapped-up.”

If the negative impression of the closed-mindedness of adults is clear in *Grownupishness*, and if *Undertenishness* clearly evokes the pleasantness and playfulness of childhood, nevertheless the meaning of the series as a whole is left less clear, especially as it relates to Tolkien’s life. The illustrations were made in 1913 when Tolkien was 21, and thus seem to imply that Tolkien was seeing himself moving towards “grownupishness.” Yet the pictures themselves seem far too happy and playful to be the product of the sort of dark mood that longs for childhood as an escape from the tedium of adulthood. If the pictures take a cynical perspective on adulthood, yet they themselves, despite being the product of a “grown up” Tolkien, do so in a lighthearted and childlike manner. Since the pictures refuse to be easily made sense of, they call upon the reader to individually find their meaning.

The twin trees shown in *Undertenishness* gain a new significance in light of Tolkien’s mythology. When Tolkien first began to write a continuous history of his

invented world during World War I, he described two magnificent light-producing trees which serve instead of the sun and moon for the early Edenic land called Valinor until their destruction. These trees remain as iconic symbols through many drafts of Tolkien's legends; as the *Silmarillion* (written 1937) puts it, "about [the trees' fate] all the tales of Middle-Earth are woven" (33). For an author who is praised for the evocative imagery of his invented Middle-Earth, it is most interesting to note that the central image of two trees was first put on paper in an illustration that had not yet been expressed lexically in Tolkien's fantasy writings.

These "visionary" images are possibly the most difficult to chronicle and interpret, especially since they represent a relatively short period in Tolkien's life and I was forced to rely only on only the small subset of this relatively small group of images found in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*. Yet these images are from one perspective the most valuable in terms of understanding Tolkien's art as a whole. Deeply contradictory, simultaneously expressing childlike whimsy and intellectual horror, emotionally evocative yet only tangentially connected with mundane life, these images speak of an eruption of the creativity that was largely dormant in Tolkien's realistic illustrations. Before Tolkien had a Middle-Earth to draw illustrations for, he

had already created a number of illustrations that spoke for themselves and allowed him to explore the possibilities of his own imagination.

As his life progressed, Tolkien increasingly attempted to subjugate his drawings to his verbal descriptions of his imaginary worlds. In the years following his first burst of fantasy images, he began to create only illustrations that intersected with the larger world of his invented mythology—a world defined primarily lexically. By the time Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* (1937-8), he had (largely) turned that tendency into a personal dogma. In his 1938 *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien claimed that visual representations of fantasy are inferior to literary descriptions because they limit the mind to one visual interpretation, whereas with texts “each hearer will give to [objects referred to] a peculiar personal embodiment in his mind” (Tolkien, *Reader* 95). The illustrations of Tolkien’s mythology, as discussed in the next chapter, are not always as negligible as Tolkien implied, rather they do largely stand out as clear and concrete depictions of places.

Moreover, in his early fantasy illustrations Tolkien created images that work uniquely on the imagination in a manner comparable to the goals Tolkien defined for fantasy texts. Through the use of conjunction, cultural symbols, color-scheme and

(occasionally) included segments of lexical text, Tolkien's early fantasy images eloquently suggest metaphysical or emotional tensions. And because of their conflict, they allow the reader to draw meaning out himself; that is, they allow for nonallegorical “application” where each reader can give the image “a peculiar personal embodiment in his mind.”

In some ways, it seems unfortunate that Tolkien abandoned the independent visual fantasy expression of his early illustrations. However, in one sense such images were not so much abandoned as absorbed within Tolkien's later mythology of Middle-Earth. In Tolkien's mythology, as in Tolkien's early fantasy images, a strict refusal to include direct commentary on the world allowed the texts to grow in depth and meaning, and to work in a somewhat wider manner by opening themselves up to individual interpretation. Tolkien almost certainly did not intend consciously to transfer techniques from his illustrations to his texts—but nonetheless, when he first began to work out what sorts of fantasy stories he could tell, he did so using illustrations, and created images whose openness to interpretation links them with Tolkien's later statements defining the uses and virtues of such “Fairy-stories.”

CHAPTER IV

Strange Lands Documented:

Tolkien's Illustrations of his "Legendary History"

In September of 1914, Tolkien wrote the poem *The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star*, a story that takes place in an ancient, fantastical England. This poem was part of an imaginary history which Tolkien soon populated with many other interconnected stories and "heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite." (*Letters*, 144)

These early stories quickly became but one part of a much more ambitious literary project. In 1951, Tolkien looked back on his life and described his early excitement for the stories that later became known as *The Silmarillion*,

Once Upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the

vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. (*Letters* 144)

Tolkien traced his desire to create this “legendary history” back to his childhood hobby of creating languages, which converged with Tolkien's interest in “traditional tales (especially those concerning dragons); and writing ... verse and metrical devices” when he was an undergraduate at Oxford. (*Letters*, 345) But more interesting than the interconnected lexical texts is Tolkien's vision of a potential collaborative work which would be formed not only by Tolkien but by others, each using their individual skill in service to the overarching legend. “The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama.” (*Letters*, 145) Such a vision was described by the older Tolkien as “absurd” for its idealistic impracticality, yet the idea that Tolkien's legends were a matter to be depicted through many media other than words was an important component of Tolkien's developing fantasy world.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 12 – <i>The Land of Pohja</i> (Hammond & Scull, 44)

Three months later, Tolkien painted *The Land of Pohja* (fig. 12), an illustration of a poetic retelling of a Germanic legend that he was at that time composing. Although *The Land of Pohja* dealt with a legend not part of Tolkien's personal mythology, it brought together most of the elements that were to define Tolkien's *Silmarillion* illustrations⁵ – bright colors, clearly-defined color-boundaries, a vivid sense of altitude and geography, and a specifically ancillary role for images as clear depictions of an already-imagined “land of faerie.” This *Silmarillion* style of illustration did not entirely comprise the whole of Tolkien's fantasy graphical work.⁶ In 1921 he was to begin a

⁵ I will use the term *Silmarillion* illustrations to describe illustrations depicting locations and scenes from Tolkien's collection of 'legendary histories' eventually published as *The Silmarillion*. The name *The Silmarillion* itself was first applied by Tolkien to these texts during his first major rewriting of the legend, but as the texts and illustrations underwent no major change I feel it is more convenient to include them all in one large category.

⁶ It is important, however, to note that while Tolkien did not technically cease his production of realistic illustrations during this period, his production of realistic illustrations was so slow as to be almost negligible. The fantasy illustrations chronicled

series of more whimsical (and sometimes more realistic) children's illustrations, for example, but the advent of the *Silmarillion*-style illustrations did mark an irrevocable change in Tolkien's "serious" fantasy illustration (i.e. those fantasy illustrations not meant specifically for children's books.) From this point on, Tolkien's fantasy graphical works were to be, in the truest sense, illustrations. Tolkien ceased to create either disconnected graphical works that drew the viewer in with their mysterious symbolism and hints of comments about reality or specific depictions of characters and actions. Instead, Tolkien chose to portray geography (especially mountains), nature (especially trees) and occasionally dragons (which as an icon of fantasy virtually serve as yet another part of the landscape) so that he could allow his illustrations to aid in the telling of his great "legendary history" that required multiple media for fullest expression.

The bulk of Tolkien's *Silmarillion* illustrations were created between 1914 and 1923, but his production was far from even. He nearly ceased creating fantasy illustrations between 1916 and 1921, during which period he got married, fought in the World War, fathered two sons, and worked on the Oxford English dictionary.

in this chapter and the children's illustrations chronicled in the next are therefore an accurate representation of the types of illustrations that Tolkien steadily created; the straightforward landscapes but a sidenote.

With the images available, it seems that Tolkien's pre-1914 *Silmarillion* illustrations comprise a rather diverse group, but two images serve to underline both the overarching similarities and the degree of variation present in Tolkien's early work. These paintings, both watercolor portraits of “fairy” islands amidst the sea⁷, are *Tanaqui* and *The Shores of Faery*.

Tanaqui (fig. 13), painted early in 1915, uses a distinctively bright color scheme, even by Tolkien's standards. The center of the image is a black shape that emerges from a sea of color, with a white city perched atop it. The sea itself is represented by streaks of gold, green, blue, red, and purple, as was done to powerful (if somewhat confusing) effect in a slightly earlier *Silmarillion* illustration, *Water, Wind & Sand*. In *Tanaqui*,

⁷ Presumably not all of Tolkien's pre-1915 *Silmarillion* illustrations involved either seas or islands, but the only image available in *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author and Illustrator* that does not portray any actual sea is of a very island-like tower in the moon. In any case, it is a well-demonstrated fact that Tolkien had a fascination with the sea. Sea-motifs are prominently featured in a great number of Tolkien's stories, and thus it is not surprising that Tolkien would choose to feature the ocean equally prominently in his stories.

Humphrey Carpenter's biography of Tolkien also presents an autobiographical reason for Tolkien's obsession with islands and the sea. Tolkien had a lifelong recurring dream of “a great wave towering up and advancing ineluctably over the trees and green fields, poised to engulf him and all around him,” which Tolkien referred to as “my Atlantis complex.” (31)

however, these colors come together in odd ways so that while in some places they vividly evoke rolling waves, they meet in the center of the image to form a spire that kisses the base of the building. As if to add to the confusion, a peak that extends to the viewer's right from the black, central island-mass is topped with a rainbow of many of the same colors otherwise used to illustrate the seas. It is perhaps the inappropriate excess of colors that makes this image most specific to the pre-1916 *Silmarillion* illustrations. In later illustrations, Tolkien uses a color-scheme that merely exaggerates colors already present in real mountains and waters; here, he expresses the turbulence of waves through an artificial grouping of clashing colors.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 13 – <i>Tanaqui</i> (Hammond & Scull, 47)
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Other than the color-scheme, the painting contains an extraordinary number of elements that are present throughout Tolkien's *Silmarillion* illustrations: monochromatic

blocks of colors, almost like a mosaic or stained-glass window; elements that bring the viewer's attention to the idea of altitude, from the unnaturally tall wave in the center to the impossibly tall and leaning mountain at the far right of the image; a scale so large that no humans are visible; and an enduring landscape (albeit a rather turbulent one) as a subject rather than a momentary scene or action.

The Shores of Faery (fig. 14), painted later in the same year, demonstrates the swift changes in Tolkien's illustrations as well as the path his later fantasy illustrations follow. Once again can be seen the soaring tower, the clear horizon, and the crashing waves. However, the color-scheme is much more limited, a blend of light purples and blues towards the center of the image, a dark smudge of deep night on the left side, and a golden shine of sunrise or sunset on the right. The simultaneous presence of the sun, the moon, and a star in the sky could hearken back to the earlier *End of the World*, where the two items were inserted in order to make the illustration serve as a direct (if ambiguous) commentary on life, but here such is not the case. In fact, *The Shores of Faery* is present alongside a poem of the same name, which describes a magical place “East of the moon/west of the sun” where one star, the moon, and (presumably, considering the

accompanying image) the sun are all visible at once. (Hammond and Scull, 47) The entire image, therefore, is a “realistic” portrayal of the imaginary land described in the poem – so “realistic,” in fact, that powerful symbolic elements that would not be visible at this range are left out. The viewer can see the “pale green Sea” or the hilltop town whose “towers are white & still,” but he cannot see “two trees...that bear Night's silver bloom” of “the globed fruit of Noon in Valinor,” (47) despite the fact that such trees are possibly the most significant elements in terms of Tolkien's history of Middle Earth⁸.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 14 – <i>The Shores of Faery</i> (Hammond & Scull, 48)

⁸ The Two Trees of Valinor not only serve as one of the central icons holding together Tolkien's *Silmarillion* narrative, but also hold a large significance within Tolkien's illustrations. *Leaf by Niggle*, as has already been mentioned, features a central Tolkien-like character who obsesses over the creation of a single tree; later in life, Tolkien himself began a detailed, leaf-by-leaf drawing of the Two Trees of Valinor. Similarly, the one image (other than maps) that Tolkien included in the first publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, an illustration of the doors of Moria, contains as its central element the White Tree that was both the lesser descendant and a thematic echo of the Two Trees.

The Shores of Faerie, like all the other *Silmarillion* illustrations, demonstrates far less realism in detail than Tolkien's early illustrations showed him capable of— particularly in its solid masses of single colors and impossible geography. But the realism that is present, particularly the use of more realistic colors and the elimination of symbolic or narrative elements which would not normally be visible, underscores the central aim of Tolkien's early fantasy style and defines a new role for his *Silmarillion* illustrations. Graphical texts no longer tell stories – they reveal glimpses of the places that Tolkien's text had already filled with mythic significance.

Perhaps no more vivid (though by no means atypical) post-1921 example of this tendency is Tolkien's 1927 *Lake Mithrim* (fig. 15). In Tolkien's invented mythology, the lake was first mentioned as the place where the Elves made their initial semi-permanent encampments in Middle-Earth after their exile from the Edenic lands of Valinor. Although the elves' flight was caused by rash vows and the resultant catastrophic “kinslaying,” their arrival in Middle Earth was just the event needed to stave off the overwhelming forces of evil. The first group of fleeing elves encamped at Lake

Mithrim, where they were attacked by (and defeated) an army intended to wipe out humanity. After losing many significant characters, they returned to Lake Mithrim, where they found a second group of elves, who they had abandoned in the flight from Valinor. Lake Mithrim became the dividing line between the two groups until a spectacular rescue of a nobleman ended the strife.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 15 – <i>Lake Mithrim</i> (Hammond & Scull, 50)

Tolkien's illustration of the lake, though purely geographic and “non-narrative,” captures much of the essence of the story. The image shows a vast, open plain, largely in brown and tan color schemes, under a blue-grey sky. The openness and color-scheme bears a remarkable similarity to paintings of the American West, and for largely the same reason. The elves, like the American cowboy, were pioneers in a new and undiscovered land that offered hope away from the civilization that they had fled. Furthermore, despite the mountain ranges that appear at the extreme left and right areas of the image, the flatness of the region serves to differentiate it sharply from the

extremely mountainous Valinor (as portrayed in *The Halls of Faerie*, and later in *The Halls of Manwe*, where Valinor seems composed entirely only of impossibly steep mountains). The Elves, having turned their back on the high, piercing beauties of Valinor, now reside relatively quietly at Lake Mithrim. The adventurous mountains only exist to the East or West, which (throughout Tolkien's imaginary history) the Elves will later traverse in the course of their adventures.

Stylistically, the image continues to paint a picture in Tolkien's peculiar *Silmarillion* style of representing the literal reality of his emotionally expressive world. The image is almost perfectly symmetrical, with not only the elevations on the left and right mirroring each other, but with a central bush in the extreme foreground providing a near vertical reflection of the golden mountain in the most distant background. At top and bottom is bordered by a repeating, black-and-white decorative pattern, echoing Tolkien's ongoing preoccupation with creating illustrations that could be seen as ancient documents, created at a time when the decorative arts were more valued⁹. In the extreme foreground can be seen a small number of bushes as well as a green line that

⁹ An example of this preoccupation is Tolkien's illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings*, which, other than maps, are defended as being not illustrations proper but a "facsimile" of a burned book represented in the text and an image of a decorated door.

presumably represents grass; presumably to provide a sense of the lands to the south that are far more green and flourishing. The hills and mountains each use discrete, separate colors that are interrupted at the top (if appropriate) by a pure, white cone of snow.

Most significantly, the border Tolkien provides at the top and bottom of the page is the only indication that Tolkien wants anything more than a naturalistic landscape. No elves are shown, nor any fashioned artifacts. Instead, Tolkien wanted to show readers of his illustrations the landscape of his world—a landscape at once “real” (in the sense that he took great pains to associate it with details of his maps) and emotionally expressive, but also a landscape that invites the reader to consider along with Tolkien a world of imagination and “high adventure.” Tom Shippey describes the allusions to places and events unseen in *The Hobbit* by saying that “Tolkien had opened up a new imaginative continent, and the cry was to see more of it” (49). *Lake Mithrim* is just one example of a *Silmarillion* illustration that presents a literal image of that “imaginative continent,” but in which the lack of narrative details and openness of the image invites the reader to “see more” by imagining the stories of Middle Earth from the geography, just as the reader of Tolkien's fantasy texts is invited to “see more” by imagining the strange and beautiful lands in which the stories take place.

Tolkien's invitations to visual and imaginative explorations of his world through the creation of a “new imaginative continent” were not limited merely to illustrations and texts. The description of Tolkien's creation as a “continent” is very telling, for it touches upon one of the most important and remembered of Tolkien’s visual creations—his maps. *Lake Mithrim*, by showing an extremely wide view, already demonstrates Tolkien's preoccupation with showing the reader great landscapes which are simultaneously breathtakingly vast in scope and yet invite the reader to imaginatively enter into the world of imagination shown through his illustrations. With Tolkien's maps, he was able to show entire continents.

It is clear that map-making was a significant part of Tolkien's artistic vision. In the first place, Tolkien found them a necessary basis in order to plot the motions and travels of his characters (and every story Tolkien wrote involved a great deal of traveling.) “I wisely started [*The Lord of the Rings*] with a map, and made the story fit (generally with meticulous care for distances)” (*Letters* 177). Charting the lives of the characters and icons of Middle Earth on maps, Tolkien not only ensured a consistent

world but also created opportunities to weave his narrative and geography closer together.

For instance, a fundamental story behind *The Lord of the Rings* tells of Isildur, the man who could have destroyed the evil One Ring but chose instead to keep it for himself. Because it turned its user invisible, he was able to flee West into the river Anduin when his forces were overwhelmed by an ambush of evil orcs. In the river, the ring magically slipped from his finger, and Isildur was seen and killed.

Near the end of *The Fellowship of the Rings*, Frodo decides that the Ring is too much of a danger for his friends, and puts on the One Ring so that he can escape from his friends while invisible. Like Isildur, he abandons his companions to cross the river Anduin while wearing the ring—but Frodo crosses East into danger in order to protect his friends at the same river where Isildur crossed West in order to achieve his own safety. The compassion and quiet courage of Frodo, a major emphasis throughout the trilogy, is here specifically emphasized by the geography and movement of Tolkien's maps. Not only is Frodo moving from a place of safety (the Shire) to a place of death (Mordor), but as he does so he crosses the path of a great hero who, despite being far

more renowned for his courage, fled the dangers which Frodo loyally chooses to encounter.

Tolkien's maps not only played an important part in the weaving of his plots, but he specifically wanted readers to be able to have clear and inviting copies of the maps available to them when reading *The Lord of the Rings*—a far different sentiment from his normal skepticism about the use of illustrations in fantasy texts. In repeated letters to his publisher (after the publication of “On Fairy-stories”) he emphasized both the importance of including maps with the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and the difficulty of condensing such essential graphical components to an inexpensively-reproducible size.

They are essential; and urgent...I feel that the maps ought to be done properly...Even at a little cost there should be picturesque maps, providing more than a mere index to what is said in the text. I could do maps suitable to the text. It is the attempt to cut them down and omitting all their colour (verbal and otherwise) to reduce them to black and white bareness, on a scale so small that hardly any names can appear, that has stumped me. (Carpenter, *Letters* 171)

If the purpose of Tolkien's *Silmarillion* illustrations is to provide the readers of his texts with visual representations of the legendary geography central to his “legendary history,” then Tolkien's maps are the central and most important of the *Silmarillion* illustrations. These maps are, in fact the most consistent visual icon of Tolkien's world, remaining unchanged in the various movie adaptations, posters, illustrated maps, and even alternate-illustration editions. Peter Jackson, when creating a movie of “J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*,” found it easy to replace Tolkien's images of Minas Tirith and Isengard with differing interpretations of his conceptual artists, and even to change the dialog and many fundamental characters and story-elements. But when a map of Middle-Earth is seen in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*, it is a map identical in every geographical element of Tolkien's original (almost incomprehensible) sketches. Tolkien's maps, without the expressive color-schemes, the distinctive artistic style, and the evocative shapes and sense of composition, and a myriad of other elements that give an added emphasis to his other graphical texts, are nevertheless capable of encapsulating his fixation on presenting strange and imaginative landscapes that are intricately connected to his lexical texts—and as such, they form a

critical element of Tolkien's visual imagination. Tolkien's maps can be seen as overarching illustrations of Middle Earth—a guide full of interesting revelations and epic struggle, awaiting only the key of both Tolkien's fantasy texts and the smaller-scale *Silmarillion* illustrations to unlock it.

One final illustration, *Glórund Sets Forth to Seek Turin* (fig. 16) (painted 1924, as was *Lake Mithrim*), deserves consideration as one of the rare exceptions to the *Silmarillion* illustrations' avoidance of direct visual narration. Even so, through its geographic and archeologic elements, as well as an absence of any characters or creatures other than the massive and central dragon, it locates itself clearly within the geographically-centered mainstream of the *Silmarillion* illustrations and thus represents the exception that proves the rule.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 16 – *Glórund Sets Forth to Seek Turin* (Hammond & Scull, 51)

Glórund Sets Forth to Seek Turin sets forth a clear graphical text of a significant geographical area of Tolkien's mythology. Tolkien first described the place, in his writings of the time later collected as *Unfinished Tales*, as a cave in front of a low, flat, desolate land, that lead up to a rocky stream bordered with trees. In the graphical text, the land is recreated in greys and tans, with a number of old tree-stumps (cleared, as in the lexical text, by the dragon's earlier exploits) stretching from the mouth of the dragon's cave to the stream. When the dragon did depart, Tolkien described the scene using details also carefully repeated in the illustration: the dragon "drew slowly to the chasm's edge ... [and] sought to overcreep it and come thus [to] the homes of the woodsmen. ... the leaves ... of those trees that grew nigh were shrivelled in the serpent's breath, yet were [Turin and his fellow fighters] not hurt because of the shelter of the bank" (Tolkien, *Lost Tales I*, 107.) In the painting, four trees are clearly being exfoliated by the heat of the dragon's passage, and the sinuous curves of the dragon's tale as it fades back into the distant lair imply a sort of creeping departure. The dragon itself is untraditional in appearance, and adds meaning to the plan (mentioned in the lexical text) to ambush the dragon from below. Glórund resembles an armored worm with a green head reminiscent of an African mask. Since his rear legs seem largely vestigial, and

since he utterly lacks wings (two elements not explicitly mentioned in the lexical text but sharply in contrast to the traditional graphic representations of dragons), it makes sense for warriors to ambush him while hiding in a ditch. Moreover, the enlarged eyes in the illustration remind the reader of the dragon's hypnotic powers—powers mentioned earlier in the lexical text.

The mountains in the background, painted in Tolkien's traditional style using large, single-color shapes, is more cluttered with hills, peaks, and layers of mountains than most illustrations, giving an impression of a thicker-than-usual range of mountains. The thick mountains, once again, hold both a geographic and narrative significance. The scene (according to Tolkien's text and maps) takes place on the borderline between woods and the thickest range of mountains in Middle-Earth, which itself serves as the border of early Middle Earth's Hell. These mountains echo the heightened sense of existential struggle present in the depicted narrative and tie together themes from another related story. In that earlier story, the heroic Beren passed twice over the impossible pass of the mountains and simultaneously stole a Silmaril from the Satan-figure, won his beautiful lover as a bride, and set in motion the events that would lead to his death and miraculous resurrection. In this tale, however, the mountains are never crossed, and the

hero faces a far more tragic death: he kills the dragon, but the result is the suicide of his wife (who was unknowingly his sister) followed by his own suicide. In combination with the chaotically overcast sky (where the gleams of a round sun show through to the viewer, but only radiate outwards a short distance before being overcome by the dark grey clouds), the thick mountains produce a sense of chaos and tension that actually enhance the tension and sense of threat of the scene. Once again, then, Tolkien's geography serves a narrative function—the thick mountains in the background serve as symbols of tension and danger, just as the clearer, higher mountains of Valinor serve as indications of stark beauty and supernatural joys.

Finally, as is so frequently the case in both Tolkien's graphical and lexical texts, framing details are present to make sure the image can be seen by a reader as an actual artifact of a fantastic place and culture. Thus the title, *Glórund Sets Forth to Seek Turin*, is printed in Old English characters that are difficult for a modern reader to decipher, and the bottom of the image is denoted by a simple pattern of lines and dots. The pattern is not only a continuation of the motif of similar 'historical' framing devices found in graphical texts such as *The Shores of Faerie* and *Lake Mithrim*, but is also repeated in Tolkien's lexical texts. *The Book of Lost Tales* begins with a record of a “traveller from

far countries, a man of great curiosity,” who “was by desire of strange lands and the ways and dwellings of unaccustomed folk brought in a ship as far west even as the Lonely Island,” and who thus was able to hear the ancient tales of the history of Tolkien's Middle Earth. Similarly, in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, much is made of an ancient (fictitious) “Red Book” which contained the firsthand account that Tolkien translated into the published stories.

If Tolkien's *Silmarillion* illustrations can be described as a group, then, it is as illustrations that serve as realistic depictions of the geography which Tolkien's texts frequently describe. Some of the *Silmarillion* illustrations are pure illustrations, showing the curious reader a visual account of an event or (far more frequently) place that held great significance for Tolkien's overarching stories, while others also contain decorative details intended to indicate their status as artifacts of the imaginary times and places. But the visual geography of Middle Earth is not merely a strange land of fairy-tale, but a complex and tightly-woven net of images that stand alongside Tolkien's texts to form an integral part of the expression of the emotions, themes, and speculations that Tolkien called his “legendary history.” Indeed, while the images themselves rarely contain change, they present images of a geography that itself tells some of the most major

events of Middle Earth. When the Hobbits return home triumphant at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, they find that their Shire, a place Tolkien had lovingly illustrated with the colors of nature, is guarded by a new “spiked gate” and has instead of organic Hobbit-holes ugly houses that are “two-storyed with narrow straight-sided windows, bare and dimly lit, all very gloomy and unshirelike” (Tolkien, *Return* 975; viii). The mental image is shocking, but only because the reader already had been given a differing image of the Shire, both lexically in *The Lord of the Rings* and visually in the illustration for *The Hobbit* (an illustration that postdates the main body of *Silmarillion* illustrations, but exhibits all of their notable characteristics except for the presence of steep mountains.) In the formation of Tolkien's legends of Middle Earth, images and places were just as important elements of the story Tolkien wanted to tell as the more traditional story elements of character, dialog, and plot. Tolkien's adult fantasy stories may be written and popularized as texts, but they were created with illustrations, and those images (whether described in a book or visualized in a film) continue to work on the imagination of viewers over fifty years after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*.

CHAPTER V

Character, Intertextuality and Perspective:

Visual Narration in Tolkien's Literature for Children

Tolkien's illustrations of his legendary history began c. 1914 and continued in some form or other¹⁰ for the remainder of his life. Yet in 1920, Tolkien wrote the first of a series of illustrated Christmas letters to his children in the guise of Father Christmas. With these letters (now collected and published as *Letters from Father Christmas*) Tolkien started a parallel thread of both textual and illustrative style. From 1920 to 1943, Tolkien created a variety of stories and illustrations for his children, many of which he later offered for general publication. While the mythical fantasy-elements of Tolkien's legendary history were rarely entirely absent from any of Tolkien's fiction, Tolkien's children's literature tended to be: amusing rather than soaring; observational and satirical of real life rather than mystically separate from and yet “applicable” to

¹⁰ The form of Tolkien's later illustrations dealing with his legendary history is the subject of chapter 5.

reality; and frequently about contemporary society rather than timeless philosophical concepts.

This new children's literature also tended to feature illustrations in a manner different from Tolkien's *Silmarillion* illustrations. None of Tolkien's post-*Silmarillion* illustrated stories entirely omit *Silmarillion* style illustrations of landscapes, but all of them feature new elements of motion and character. Those elements that emerged new in Tolkien's illustrations of his children's literature and expanded Tolkien's repertoire beyond the *Silmarillion* style are thus the true focus of this chapter, and landscapes identical in style to *Silmarillion* illustrations are here only dealt with tangentially.

Even if many individual illustrations Tolkien intended for his children's books exhibit the *Silmarillion* style, a great distance between the *Silmarillion* illustrations and the children's illustrations is quite evident when Tolkien's body of children's illustrations is surveyed as a whole. Illustrations are often central to the narrative structure, referenced in the textual narratives, and more focused on characters and storytelling than on landscapes and location. Most importantly, Tolkien's children's literature binds illustrations much more closely to text. While the *Silmarillion* illustrations showed significant places and often formed an important part in the creation of Tolkien's fantasy

texts, the *Silmarillion* illustrations neither provided necessary narrative details nor were overtly referenced as pictures in the texts. Such new uses are common in both *Letters from Father Christmas* and *Mr. Bliss*.

Partially, the increased interaction between text and illustrations in Tolkien's children's literature derives from the fact that Tolkien's philosophical objections to fantasy illustrations did not pertain to any of the more whimsical and lighthearted fantasies he created for his children. As he wrote in a letter to his favored illustrator, Pauline Baynes,

I once (in a long essay on 'Fairy-Stories') ventured at greater length ... to say much the same [as that illustrations were unsuitable for certain fantasy-texts]. But there is a case for illustration (or decoration!) applied to small things such as these verses, which are light-hearted, and (I think) dexterous in words, but not very profound in intention. (Carpenter, *Letters* 311)

When it came to the illustration of “light-hearted” works that are “not profound in intention,” a category that contains all of Tolkien's children's literature, the self-imposed documentary limitations of *The Silmarillion* illustrations could be ignored and Tolkien

could allow himself to run free as a narrator. The result is stories in which the images form a coherent telling of the story parallel to the textual narratives they accompany.

Tolkien complimented Pauline Brynes' illustrations for his Medieval farce "Farmer Giles of Ham" by saying that "they are more than illustrations, they are a collateral theme. I showed them to my friends whose polite comment was that they reduced my text to a commentary upon the drawings" (Carpenter, *Letters* 133). Such a compliment applies equally well to Tolkien's children's illustrations themselves, where straightforward textual narratives are coupled with complex presentation of editorializing illustrations which encourage close reading in dialectic with the text.

Still, the genre of children's literature itself was not an unproblematic one for Tolkien. Tolkien was ever distrustful of literature that was not "serious," and this was especially true for fantasy literature. *The Hobbit*, for instance, has enjoyed an enduring popularity since its first publication, yet Tolkien viewed its beloved witty and self-conscious narration as a mistake. And while he presented a great amount of his children's literature to his publishers as possible sequels to *The Hobbit*, he often later viewed his submissions in a less positive light. Hammond and Skull describe his final opinion on a picture book he wrote. "In his later years he came to dislike *Mr. Bliss*

except as a private joke, and had resisted its publication” (88). The source of Tolkien's hesitance to emphasize the merits of his humorous and lighthearted children's literature seems rooted in his literary perfectionism. Tolkien described his sense of humor as “very simple”, and Humphrey Carpenter describes a representative habit in which Tolkien “delighted to offer inattentive shopkeepers his false teeth among a handful of change” (Carpenter, *Biography* 134), yet Tolkien always felt that his literature ought to serve a higher purpose than the perpetuation of his simple jokes on a larger readership. In any case, Tolkien's children's literature itself holds two significant justifications for a closer consideration. While the texts propose to simply offer amusement and interesting lighthearted editorialization of fictitious versions of life, its mode of presentation frequently brings words and images together in the joint pursuit of telling stories. In the broad scheme of Tolkien's art, his amusing and satirical children's literature was just as much a part of *The Lord of the Rings* (and a reason for its popularity and power) as the stories of *The Silmarillion*. *The Lord of the Rings* obviously contains the high sense of myth and adventure found in *The Silmarillion*, but it is also a true sequel to the children's story *The Hobbit* in its use of satire, comic character relationships, and interesting variation in tone.

Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas*, sent every year between 1920 and 1943, comprise chronologically both the first and the last of Tolkien's children's literature and illustrations. The letters were sent to his children as if directly from Father Christmas' (the English name for Santa Clause) house at the North Pole complete with elaborately decorated envelopes, fictitious stamps and postmarks, and false handwriting to represent (first) Santa's shaky hand and (later) the distinctive (and progressing) handwritings of the North Pole Bear and one of Santa's elves. Most years, a letter was sent to each child old enough to read and young enough to believe in Father Christmas, although some years only one letter was sent to the family with an accompanying explanation as to why Santa couldn't send individual letters this year.

Over the course of the various letters, Tolkien developed a continuous story of the various happenings at the North Pole, especially focusing on the ongoing tension between Father Christmas and the silly and mistake prone North Pole Bear (whose outraged comments are often found in the margins of Father Christmas' letters.) With the exceptions of four early letters (1921-1924) and two of the latest letters (1941-1942), each of these letters was extensively illustrated, normally by a large, multi-panel page (though a number of letters have only one illustration that fills the page, and one letter is

illustrated by a large number of in-text illustrations.) These illustrations commonly depicted the geography of the North Pole in the style of his *Silmarillion* illustrations. However, the North Pole is after all a very small place, and Tolkien illustrated not only the North Pole but Father Christmas, his various houses, the North Polar Bear, sleigh-wrecks, battles between elves and goblins, fireworks, explosions, and many more characters and events of a type that would never be included in the landscape-only *Silmarillion* illustrations. With these changes, Tolkien not only encouraged and entertained his children, but also experimented in techniques for weaving images and texts closely together in a single narrative.

The first letter (1920) includes a two-panel illustration on one sheet of paper (Fig. 17). The top panel is labeled “me” and bears a traditional picture of Father Christmas bearing a bag overstuffed with toys through the snow. The lower panel is labeled “my house,” and shows Santa's house—a house strongly reminiscent of Tolkien's earlier illustration “Northern House.” The use of illustrations merely to document specific people or locations (a rare purpose in the later letters) parallels Tolkien's *Silmarillion* illustrations, but the choice of subjects—a person and a house—is a clear departure from the *Silmarillion* illustrations' fixation on distant landscapes.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 17 – *Me and My House* (Hammond & Scull, 70)

The entire illustration conveys a sense of personality and warmth utterly absent in the *Silmarillion* illustrations. As Father Christmas walks with his hands in his pockets through the snow, his long beard is blown amusingly in front of him while a part of a red wheeled toy sticks out of a hole in the top of his bag. In the lower panel, red lights along the path to the house send out short, inviting rays of red light, while the door hangs slightly open, inviting the eye out of the cold and into the warmth of Santa's homelike fairy-tale dwelling. The pictures are far more expressive than the accompanying letter, which merely proclaims in Santa's shaky handwriting that Santa had heard John Tolkien “ask daddy what I was like & where I lived,” had drawn the illustration in response, and is now headed through thick snow “for Oxford with my bundle of toys—some for you.”

The second (1925) illustrated letter, following four years of letters explaining various details of Father Christmas' situation and life, moves the Father Christmas illustrations even more in the narrative direction representative of Tolkien's children's

literature's illustrations. The letter describes Santa's current troubles—the North Pole Bear climbed the North Pole, but it broke in half and crushed the roof of Santa's house—and then mentions that the illustration provided is of that event (not reprinted in this document). (A postscript by the North Pole Bear, calling himself the “Great (Polar) Bear,” also explains that a “wishing cracker” has been included at Father Christmas' request.)

The illustration to the 1925 letter is far more characteristic of Tolkien's children's literature illustrations than the 1920 illustration. It again has two panels, but in this case they are connected chronologically and by a cause-and-effect relationship. The top panel shows a chaotic scene of movement, featuring prominently the whimsical characters of Santa (who raises his hands in exasperation), the Polar Bear (who flies through the air above the top half of the North Pole with stiff arms and legs and Santa's hat on his nose), and even a laughing Man in the Moon. The North Pole (represented in a long-standing visual pun as a physical “pole” sticking out of the snow) itself is in two parts—a broken stump on the right, and the upper spire which has bashed through the house on the left. The house has an open door (as in the first letter's illustration), but since the scene is so chaotic (and the lanterns in front of the house no longer give off a

homely glow) the open door seems to represent Father Christmas' swift departure rather than the warmth of his arrival at home. In the bottom panel, a new North Pole is seen with a red section joining the upper and lower parts together, the ruins of Santa's house are visible in the distance, and a new Santa's house is visible on the top of a large cliff on the extreme right of the image. Textual comments in the margins point out the major details of the changes—a star went red during the disaster, but back to yellow when all went well, another note on the top panel tells the reader that “the moon laughed” (although the gentle crescent moon in the bottom illustration has no accompanying illustration), another pair of comments emphasize the fact that the North Pole is broken at top but that it was fixed by joining a new pole to the trunk of the old one “with red,” and even two personal comments reveal that the Santa figure has gone from “Me! annoy” to “Me! Busy.”

The letter and drawing claim to serve as an apology for the fact that the busy Father Christmas can only send one letter for two children, but it represents a turning point in the *Father Christmas Letters*. Before 1925, the letters were mainly just image-free notes of encouragement for the kids written by Father Christmas in order to accompany his presents. After 1925, however, it becomes apparent that Father

Christmas himself lives an interesting and exciting life, and the letters gain an additional purpose in chronicling a constant series of arctic misadventures featuring not just Santa but the other characters who live in and around the North Pole. The change, however, is documented not just in words but also in illustrations—and from 1925 until 1941, every Father Christmas letter includes an illustration of the amusing actions taking place at that time. During this period, both images and texts become more than documentary. Instead, they come to represent the perspectives of individual characters—perspectives which often directly contradict each other.

The 1926 letter makes clear this difference of opinion. The North Polar Bear in 1925 had already been portrayed by Father Christmas as a sort of bumbling, “silly” fool, but he had also been introduced as a character who writes his own thoughts in a distinctive handwriting. In 1926, Father Christmas blames the North Polar Bear for launching a firework and causing a great deal of havoc. Christmas says that he tried to illustrate the event, but is “too shaky to do it properly” and that moreover “the Polar Bear has spoilt the picture ... by going and putting a bit of his own about me chasing the reindeer and him laughing” because “of course he can't draw with those great fat paws.”

Directly below the comment in red ink can be found the Polar Bear's counter that Christmas is being “rude” because “I can—and write without shaking” (Tolkien, *Letters from Father Christmas* 27).

The difference between the two accounts carries over into the painting (fig. 18), in which the top and the bottom panels are colored with watercolors, but the middle with slightly-smearred crayons. While the top panel shows Father Christmas holding his hands up (again) in frustration over the explosion triggered by the “silly” North Polar Bear, the middle panel shows a far less dignified Santa chasing after his sleigh with his hat flying off his head and toys flying off his sleigh while the Bear laughs. The North Polar Bear's illustration offers a visual version of the world contradicting Father Christmas'—the atmosphere is much more in agreement with the Polar Bear's portion of the text, which focuses on the fun of the fireworks and portrays Father Christmas as an “old” man who “gets worried when funny things happen” (Tolkien, *Letters from Father Christmas* 28).

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 18 – 1926 (Tolkien, *Letters* 29)

The visual rivalry between the North Polar Bear and Father Christmas continues through later episodes. The primary 1928 illustration is of the Polar Bear at the bottom of the stairs with a load of toys he had been carrying trailing behind him. According to Santa's text, the "poor old bear...fell from top to bottom of the main stairs on Thursday." Again, the Bear counters in the margins, asking "who left the soap on the stairs? (sic) Not me!" (Tolkien, *Letters from Father Christmas* 39) The soap itself is possibly visible on the fifth stair from the top, but other than that the illustration takes Father Christmas' side: Father Christmas seems to be shrugging (again) in exasperation at the pitiable silliness of the Polar Bear while the Polar Bear is pitifully collapsed at the bottom of the stairs. The illustration seen by the children is not even the entirety of Father Christmas' version of the events, however. Father Christmas writes that the shorter panel at the bottom of the image was supposed to show the moon smiling in amusement while the Polar Bear shook his fist at it, but that the Polar Bear smudged his image away.

The endless attempts of the Great Polar Bear to be on an equal footing with Father Christmas in his ability to be taken seriously form a common thread throughout both the text and images, and illustrate one key element of the role of illustrations in both Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas* and his illustrations as a whole.

Illustrations are not just pictures of places and events, but also themselves serve as narrations that may be biased in order to show one character to be “silly” and the other to be more reasonable. When the Great Polar Bear draws a scene from a disaster he causes, it shows Father Christmas looking ridiculous; when Father Christmas draws a scene where the Great Polar Bear slipped on soap, the viewer sees only a silly Polar Bear who has fallen down the stairs and a laughing Father Christmas who is amused by the ridiculous antics of the Polar Bear. (Only an observant reader of both the illustration and the text would notice the object that may be the piece of soap left on the stairs carelessly by someone other than the Great Polar Bear.) The reader is invited to “read” the illustrations not just as whimsical accounts of events, but also critically in terms of which perspective the illustrations may represent and what purpose the illustrator may have had in portraying just that particular collection of characters and events. In the process, Tolkien's texts and illustrations form a symbiotic relationship in which they each comment upon each other and form a more vivid whole in the reader's mind.

In *Letters from Father Christmas*, as has already been noted, almost all of the illustrations follow a certain multi-panel format in which multiple distinct images share

one space in a manner similar to a modern graphic novel. Unique to the letters, however, is a certain ambiguity of relationship between the various images which makes the text even more important as an aid to understanding the images—and thus further ties the text and the illustrations together. While this use of illustrations is unique to Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas*, it is still an important segment of Tolkien's visual imagination, and a demonstration of the potential Tolkien saw for a close interaction between narrative illustrations and narrative texts.

The 1929 letter serves as an example of the most common relationship between images—that of a simple top-down chronology that often emphasizes cause-and-effect from the textual narrative. In the top panel, Father Christmas is calmly writing at his desk, surrounded by neat piles of paper and neat stacks of presents, with Polar Bear standing calmly on the opposite side of his desk. The next image shows a bonfire and various bursts of light, described more fully in the text as Father Christmas' attempt to portray the thousands of fireworks set off by the snow-elves. Father Christmas and North Polar Bear can both be seen outside, and at least Father Christmas seems to be rather agitated. In the bottom panel, the results (which Father Christmas says surprised everyone) are seen—blue streaks of cold wind stream in through the door, scattering

papers, spilling ink, and even blowing over Father Christmas and the North Polar Bear. In this case a brief glance at the three panels suggests the chronology, and all the text is really required for is to fill in details such as who is firing the fireworks and what happened afterwards. But sometimes the relationships are a bit more complicated.

The main 1932 illustration (fig. 19), for instance, creates a visual “story” quite different from the story told in the text. The text recounts the adventures of North Polar Bear, who got lost in the caves beneath the North Pole until Father Christmas rescued him. The central panel of the illustration is, in fact, the scene of the rescue of the starving (and thinner) North Polar Bear, with the ground, sky and North Pole visible above the caves. But panels above and below the cave-panel contain scenes found nowhere in the text itself—Father Christmas' sleigh flying over a cloudy, nighttime Oxford and a dancing celebration, presumably caused by the recovery of North Polar Bear. The very bottom panel is solely decorative, and bears in colorful and elaborate script the words “A merry Christmas.”

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 19 – <i>1932 A Merry Christmas</i> (Hammond & Scull, 68)

The composition of the illustration seems to make a point about the realm of Father Christmas as a whole rather than about the specific story being featured. The story starts with a dark and gloomy Oxford, continues with Santa's torch lighting up the North Polar Bear in the dark and gloomy caves beneath the North Pole, and ends with a bright celebration and a bright Christmas greeting. Conceptually, Father Christmas is associated with golden light and merrymaking, and the “merry Christmas” greeting sent to the children invites them to join in the celebration brought to them by Father Christmas through Christmas presents. The picture interprets a scene from the story and speaks its own message of Christmas cheer rather than merely paralleling the text.

The 1930 illustration, through its abandonment of the normal top-down chronological order, presents another example of an illustration whose composition comments upon the textual account. The image chronicles the central subject of the letter, the North Polar Bear's whooping cough. The first two panels chronologically are actually the middle panels, followed by the top and then the bottom panels. In the middle, Father Christmas is seen rescuing the bear from the snow at night on the left (the incident that caused the bear's whooping cough), and on the right the bear is resting his

feet in steaming water while wrapping himself in a blanket. The images of his recovery, on the other hand, are located at the top and the bottom of the page, reducing Polar Bear's central sickness to an almost parenthetical explanation for the importance of his recovery and its celebration. (The textual title of the illustration, "P.B. Recovers!", also helps with this effect.) The result is another commentary on the North Pole—it is a place of recovery, rest, and happiness where the suffering of coldness and a whooping cough is marginalized by the greater significance of the recovery.

Tolkien's *Letters from Father Christmas* established a style of children's literature parallel to his *Silmarillion* illustrations. His other writings took the style in two directions. Some works, such as *Roverandom* and *The Hobbit*, combine the children's illustrations' penchant for character and scene with an increased use of serious and lofty *Silmarillion* style backdrop landscapes. Other works, most notably Tolkien's only published picture-book, *Mr. Bliss*, abandon even those elements of the *Silmarillion* style present in *Letters from Father Christmas* and develop a production more specifically reflective of the children's literature illustration style. Illustrations for *Letters from Father Christmas* generally offered a large panoramic view of whatever scene it

presented; illustrations in *Mr. Bliss* show almost exclusively areas only large enough to fit the small number of central characters into the frame. The *Letters* offered a number of characters (mostly nonhuman) and artifacts of human labor in addition to the landscapes present in *Silmarillion* illustrations; *Mr. Bliss* illustrations depict far more images from everyday life such as people, bicycles, commercial buildings, and even automobiles (ostensibly the subject of *Mr. Bliss*.) The *Letters* continued to use largely the same color-palette of vivid contrasts as the *Silmarillion* illustrations; *Mr. Bliss* used a far gentler and more naturalistic pastel palette. Finally, and most significantly, only seven out of the 43 images in *Mr. Bliss* present natural landscapes, and only four of those illustrations lack a discernible sense of movement to draw the eye to the place where the story is happening. Illustrations for both the *Letters from Father Christmas* and *Mr. Bliss* narrate stories in cooperation with the texts they accompany (rather than merely showing locations mentioned in the text.) Illustrations in *Mr. Bliss*, however, tell a much longer, more event-centered, and therefore more “literary” narrative (in the strict sense of approximating the story-telling powers of books).

Mr. Bliss starts off simply, with a brief sketch of the protagonist's character through a presentation of his visual image and depictions (both textual and visual) of his

house. The title, *Mr. Bliss*, is followed by a whimsical-yet-dour portrait of Mr. Bliss himself in a strange, formal costume and a large hat. The reader is then presented with both an illustration and textual description of Mr. Bliss' house, a “white house with red roofs” and “tall rooms, and a very high front door, because Mr. Bliss wore such tall hats.” The introduction concludes with the comment that Mr. Bliss “had rows of them [hats] on rows of pegs in the hall,” (Tolkien, *Mr. Bliss* 4) and that hallway itself is the subject of the next illustration (which does, indeed, show many hats on two rows of pegs.) The illustrations present two overriding characteristics of Mr. Bliss—he lives in a world that conforms to his individual quirks, and his quirk of wearing very tall hats has stretched his world so that everything is a bit taller than normal.

In light of Mr. Bliss' character, it seems only fitting that if he had a pet it would equally conform to the general atmosphere of whimsical “tallness,” and indeed the next illustration shows his pet “girabbit” (a mixture between a giraffe and a rabbit that has lost none of the giraffe's elongated neck) leaning in to (according to the textual narrative) exchange pleasantries with Mr. Bliss. In the text, the arbitrary nature of Mr. Bliss' life is underlined eloquently by the fact that the blind and insulated girabbit agrees how good the day is without being in any way capable of experiencing the outside world. The

regularity of the girabbit's life, for whom “all days were fine” (Tolkien, *Mr. Bliss* 6), emphasizes the theme of regularity and comfort in the brief sketch of a man who has designed the structure of his entire house around his simple affection for tall hats.

The story itself follows the results of Mr. Bliss' purchase of a bright yellow car with red wheels for five shillings and sixpence—a series of adventures with the final episode taking place at Mr. Bliss' house. As soon as he decides to visit his friends in his new car, Mr. Bliss encounters the first of his many mishaps. “He turned sharp to the right at the next turning, and ran straight into Mr. Day, coming from his garden with a barrow-load of cabbages.” Although the event is chaotic and out of the ordinary, rather than offering a description the text merely points the reader to the illustration, saying “This shows what happened.”

The illustration (fig. 20), however, does live up to the expectations of a chaotic collision between an automobile and a wheelbarrow. Mr. Bliss is waving his hands in the air, his hat is flying off his head and backwards through the air, various cabbages are similarly flying every which way from a broken wheelbarrow, and Mr. Day is seen lying on his back with his beard, feet, arms and hat up in the air. Both men's faces show expressions of great surprise, and the entire situation seems to imply that things are

completely out of control. Furthermore, the illustration's lack of background provides no distraction from the motion and chaos of the picture. While the story may be told through the text, the scene, motion, characters and reactions are created in the illustration.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 20 – *Untitled (Mr. Bliss Collides with Mr. Day)* (Hammond & Scull, 85)

Such visual characterization carries on into the next illustration, which shows the car loaded up not only with Mr. Day and his produce, but also with Mrs. Knight and her bananas, which the text describes the car as having collided with. The text tells that “he had to pile the bananas on top of the cabbages, and Mrs. Knight on top of Mr. Day, and tie the donkey on behind the car” (11), but the illustration is the only source for the facial expressions and personalities of the four living creatures in the car. Mr. Bliss' and Mrs. Knight's long, pointed noses convey their dour irritation and frustration, Mr. Day

appears to be sleeping, and the donkey seems simultaneously to be pulling against and following behind the moving car.

While the text increases as the book moves on, it also continues to reference the illustrations and call upon them to provide a visual account of events that cannot be fully described in the books. Such images don't merely add interest and color to the text at individual points, but also work over time to add tension and interest to the narrative as a whole.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]
Fig. 21 – <i>Untitled (Mr Bliss on the Hillside)</i> (Hammond & Scull, 88)

On page 33, Mr. Bliss sees his house after a long night of misadventures. The illustration (fig. 21) is one of the rare landscapes in the book. Rolling hills, a sleepy village with the spire of a church, and many trees are visible—as well as, on the extreme right of the image, Mr. Bliss' house. The house, however, has a weird shape which Mr. Bliss comments upon in the text—“There is either a flag flying from my chimney or else the sweep has got in—though I never ordered him to come” (33). The reason behind

that shape, seen at a distance in the illustration, is not clarified for 4 pages which contain only images of the town itself, continuing to frustrate the reader's curiosity as to what that mysterious shape at the top of Mr. Bliss' house could be. Finally, Mr. Bliss comes close enough to the house that the secret is revealed. The illustration on page 38 shows the girabbit's head sticking out of the top of the house as Mr. Bliss comes around the corner and brings the house into sight. The humor of the image (and frustration for Mr. Bliss) continues on page 39, which shows the girabbit sitting on the floor on the inside of Mr. Bliss' house with the girabbit's neck poking through two ceilings. The joke is dependent on the reaction of pictures and text—it gains tension because of curiosity about a minor element of a picture that was specifically pointed out in the text, and the conclusion gains punch because of the ability of images to calmly depict the surreal image of the girabbit's neck stretching through gaping holes in two separate ceilings. Images are not only central to the storytelling of *Mr. Bliss*, but convey the story through extended interaction with each other in the reader's mind as well as through interaction with the texts they accompany.

Tolkien's longer works of children's literature, in contrast with *Letters from Father Christmas* and *Mr. Bliss*, exhibit both an increased focus on text (rather than illustration) as the primary carrier of narrative and an increased focus on *Silmarillion* style landscapes within the illustrations. The two examples of longest works demonstrate that this tendency was not determined by chronology alone— apart from *Letters from Father Christmas*, *Roverandom* is Tolkien's earliest recorded children's story (orally composed in 1925 by Tolkien for his son but first written down in 1927¹¹), while *The Hobbit* was written much later (1936). Both works have few illustrations, and neither text directly refers to any of its illustrations—but the illustrations for both still remain valuable as examples of an intermediate style of illustration in which whimsy, motion and characters are depicted within worlds far more “legendary” than those of the other children's literature.

¹¹ The evidence for this is not entirely conclusive, however, as the surviving *Roverandom* manuscript is not necessarily certainly Tolkien's first composition and is undated. For a more complete discussion of the dates of the composition of *Roverandom*, see the introduction to *Roverandom* (ix-xxii).

The illustrations for *Roverandom* are rather diverse, but the one, *Rover Arrives on the Moon* (fig. 22) is perhaps the most representative of its illustrations. The illustration not only reflects the *Silmarillion* illustration's use of outlined shapes, but also serves as a perfect example of the *Silmarillion*'s obsession with extreme heights. The center of interest is a spire that extends almost as far above a cliff-side as the cliff extends over the landscape, and even the lower plains carry not only the crater one would expect on the Moon but also three separate ranges of mountains. However, as the spire draws the viewer's eye up, it is seen to be the house of a small image of a man with a pointed hat and a long telescope which is itself pointed at a bird with the toy dog Roverandom on its back. The image may primarily show a landscape, but the viewer's eye is guided within the landscape towards individual characters, and thus towards a specific chronological connection with the story.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 22 – *Untitled (Rover Arrives on the Moon)* (Hammond & Scull, 80)

The rest of the illustrations form a group with a largely similar character. One shows an English landscape rendered in the *Silmarillion* style, but with people and farm animals taking a prominent place in the foreground; another adds the flying Rover and his flying-dog friend to an otherwise *Silmarillion*-like illustration of a dragon in front of mountains; a third violates all the characteristics of the *Silmarillion* style and shows a crowded cluster of places, monsters, foliage, and animals in watercolor. The only landscape that lacks narrative elements was drawn in 1925, 2 years before *Roverandom* was committed to text and the rest of the illustrations created. It is interesting to note the timeline—December of 1925 saw the first of the *Letters from Father Christmas* to have a narrative illustration. The remainder of the *Roverandom* illustrations, despite their physical resemblance to *Silmarillion* illustrations, exhibit narrative elements of character and motion which show the illustrations clearly to be a part of the newly-arising children’s illustrative style seen in the *Letters from Father Christmas*.

The Hobbit, Tolkien’s other children’s chapter book, continues the combination of *Silmarillion* and children’s styles in a more confident manner. One of the most popular illustrations, “The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the Water,” (fig. 23) is a simple landscape whose only human figures are seen as small stick-images barely visible in the

foreground. The prime elements of the landscape, however, are not steep silver-and-white mountains but rolling hills, cozy houses, a winding path, and various comfortable shades of green, brown and blue in the trees, bushes, fields, and houses of Tolkien's idyllic land of Hobbits. Color-shapes are still used instead of gradual shading effects, but the shapes are far smaller and the colors often far closer to accompanying colors. Overall, the tone of the illustration is a polar opposite from the tone of the *Silmarillion* illustrations—rather than showing a land of cold, high adventure it reveals a rural community of rustic comfort and homeliness. Still, the purpose of his illustration is the same as that of the *Silmarillion* illustrations even if it incorporates the comfort and humanity of the children's illustrations. The illustration creates a place which then works in *The Hobbit* as an emotional motif. All adventure and danger takes place away from Hobbiton, and when Bilbo dreams of peace amongst the discomforts of his travels, he dreams of the simple pleasures, comfort and beauty of Hobbiton. Nor was the illustration an idle fancy or the result of a quick sketch. In the creation of the simple and peaceful location, Tolkien created and discarded a number of sketches, each of which presents a different variant from the shape and geography of Hobbiton, before deciding on the most effective geography for his town of Hobbits.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 23 – *The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the Water* (Hammond & Scull, 106)

“The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the Water,” in its presentation of a character-free landscape, is an exception within the illustrations of *The Hobbit*. While most illustrations contain an elaborate background, most also contain a clear scene of characters and actions that indicates the exact scene the illustration is meant to illustrate.

“Conversation with Smaug,” one example of this technique, perhaps also serves as Tolkien’s single best example of a personality-filled visual capture of a single scene.

In the text of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo travels into the heart of the mountain of the dragon Smaug in order to spy out a means with which to regain his companions’ treasure. Although the ring he is wearing makes Bilbo invisible, the dragon nevertheless hears Bilbo and the two of them have a long conversation in which the clever and sarcastic dragon tries to figure out who Bilbo and his companions are while Bilbo tries to flatter the dragon and so avoid getting roasted by his fiery breath. Throughout the conversation, Smaug plants seeds of doubt about his companions goodwill in Bilbo’s

heart, but Bilbo sees the dragon's weak-point when the dragon shows off his armored carapace.

The illustration (fig. 24) shows a moment early on in the conversation when Bilbo introduces himself to the dragon with an invisible bow. Rather than leaving out Bilbo's image entirely in an attempt to show an approximation of what a camera would've seen, Tolkien illustrates Bilbo as a black silhouette within a white cloud so that the theatricality of Bilbo's attempt at flattering character comes through. Bilbo's hands are before him and downward pointing in a gesture of submission, but the hat he holds in his hand proves just the flair needed to show that Bilbo is keeping his fear under control. In the center of the image is the tail of Smaug's body, which curls around his mound of gold so that the face points at Bilbo. The dragon's eyelids are pinched together in concentration, but his mouth curls up at the sides to form a sly grin. The combination corroborates the text's characterization of Smaug's view of the conversation as a pleasant challenge and wonderful change of pace. Smoke drifting up from his nostrils and his forked tongue add hints of the threat constantly present in talking to as deceptive and powerful a creature as a dragon, elements also mentioned in the text.

[picture omitted from electronic publication]

Fig. 24 – <i>Conversation with Smaug</i> (Hammond & Scull, 140)

The image may not be referenced in the text, and it may not add a new story not previously present in the text, but it does manage captures the personalities and tensions present throughout the text in one single image. In effect, it recreates the textual narrative in the terms of a single image, and offers the viewer that image as an alternative view of the proceedings of text in order to create a more complicated bitextual narrative.

The illustrations and texts of Tolkien's children's literature have two major results. First of all, the illustrations and texts are brought more closely together than in any of Tolkien's other works. Illustrations depict specific scenes of motion, show emotions of individual characters, represent unique and editorializing points of view, and comment upon the texts in which they are buried in. Like Tolkien's early fantasy illustrations, Tolkien's children's illustrations tell stories visually. However, this association between stories and illustrations was something Tolkien only allowed

himself while creating children's stories. After Tolkien finished *Letters from Father Christmas*, however he also ceased this use of illustrations to tell stories and turned to the illustration of landscapes, dragons, symbols and patterns.

The second product of Tolkien's children's literature and illustrations was longer-lived.

Through both illustrations and texts, Tolkien broadened his narrative style beyond his

preferred stories of high and distant adventure. Tolkien's children's literature and

illustrations brought the world of satire and jokes and caricature and humor into his

literature, and it stayed there. Tolkien's illustration of Hobbiton is as much the antithesis

of his *Silmarillion* illustrations as his "plain-folk" Hobbits are dissimilar to his

beautifully tragic Elves. Without his children's stories—stories that grew and expanded

along with their colorful and whimsical illustrations—it would have been impossible for

Tolkien to conceive of *The Lord of the Rings*.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

The end of Tolkien's life was the one period in which Tolkien most fully abandoned his attempts to tell stories through his illustrations. Paradoxically, it was also the period in which Tolkien created the greatest number of illustrations. These illustrations, often drawn on the back of newspapers or mailed envelopes, most often took the form of elaborately complex geometric patterns. While they demonstrate a considerable degree of skill and are painstakingly designed, they also are primarily decorative rather than narrative. At the end of his life, Tolkien's illustrations took on a mode that truly separated them from his fantasy storytelling.

Yet even with his simple designs, Tolkien was unwilling to separate his patterns entirely from the mythology he had devoted his life creating. As a result, Tolkien's illustrations often related back to his legendary history as elaborate heraldic symbols for his most important characters, as well as other Middle-Earth related patterns such as elaborate decorative designs of dragons, and stylized images of his mythic two trees of Valinor. Thus even the illustrations that Tolkien created that were least appropriate for

the telling of a story were often linked to his fantasy texts as depictions of (most often previously undescribed) symbols for characters.

The link Tolkien drew between his patterns and his fantasy texts is, of course, merely the final and weakest example of the importance and centrality of illustrations in Tolkien's literary art. The significance was never fully acknowledged by Tolkien for a variety of powerful reasons, but none of the reasons were strong enough to truly cause Tolkien to abandon creating illustrations in tandem with his fantasy works.

First of all, Tolkien inherited the Modernist sense that illustrations, through their direct portrayal of images that in fantasy ought to be left to the individual's imagination, interfere with the ability of literature to foster communications directly from the author to the reader. Out of this stream of thought came Tolkien's statement that "literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive" (*Reader* 95), which exerted a heavy influence on Tolkien's work, and especially the publication (largely unillustrated) of Tolkien's adult literature.

The second, and related reason for Tolkien's resistance to fantasy illustrations was that Tolkien had no real contemporary culture of illustration compatible with his

own personal vision. Instead, the prime examples of contemporary fantasy illustrations available to Tolkien were to be found in surrealistic visual art of a type which repulsed Tolkien.

Finally, Tolkien lacked formal training in illustration, and found it generally harder to create illustrations whose level of precision satisfied him than texts (especially in a limited time). Tolkien included as a constant theme of his letters the fact that “I never could draw” (*Letters* 42-3), a pessimism that was not significantly echoed in his opinion of his textual works. Yet despite all of Tolkien's objections, Tolkien's illustrations are far more than a footnote in the creation of his fantasy stories.

Tolkien's pre-1913 realistic illustrations of the world he saw around him predate his fantasy texts, while simultaneously developing the themes and techniques Tolkien would later use in his creation of imaginary worlds. His illustrations juxtaposed the everyday and commonplace icons of contemporary British life with hints of more distant poetry, paving the way for his fantasy stories (and especially *The Lord of the Rings*) in which the common is praised within the context of a distant world of magnificent struggles. He also began to comment upon the world around him through these images, paving the way for the exploratory nature of his fantasy tales.

In 1911 Tolkien began to create visionary images in which he abandoned direct commentary upon or portrayal of the world in order to depict fantasy scenes which hint at several meanings but draw the reader particularly to none of them. These images were created before Tolkien created any fantasy texts, yet as Tolkien's first real experiment in fantasy storytelling they demonstrate one of the main aspects of Tolkien's literature—its open-ended “applicability,” where the text creates an abstract representation of life while leaving the reader to determine for himself much of the “meaning” of the text.

After 1914, when Tolkien created the first of his many tales detailing the long “legendary history” of Middle Earth (collected and edited in *The Silmarillion*), his fantasy illustrations began to deal almost solely with his fantasy texts. The distinctive *Silmarillion* style of illustration that developed focused on emotionally evocative landscapes and coincided with the tendency in his fantasy stories for characters to move physically in reflection of narrative themes. Tolkien's illustrations during this area developed emotion through geography, and showed the places where characters journeyed to. At the same time, his maps took on an increased importance as charts of

the various evocative places and as places where Tolkien could plan (and his readers could follow) the journeys of his protagonists.

From 1920 to 1943, concurrent with the height of Tolkien's production of *Silmarillion* illustrations, Tolkien created a number of children's illustrations. Because these works were more children's entertainment than what Tolkien considered “high poetry,” Tolkien allowed himself to create illustrations for these stories that incorporated a much fuller range of expression and interaction with the texts. Not only did Tolkien begin to show characters, action and expression in his illustrations, but he even used his illustrations to convey the perspective of their fictitious authors instead of an objective viewpoint. More significantly, Tolkien began to use his illustrations to create satire and amusing characters—two features that exist prominently in *The Hobbit* and (to a somewhat lesser extent) *The Lord of the Rings*.

The progression of Tolkien's illustrations—a progression that parallels and in many cases anticipates similar developments in his fantasy literature—bears witness to the significance of Tolkien's illustrations to his literary creation. Tolkien's most popular works of fiction may be the texts *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but these texts themselves are the product of a long process of artistic development often centered on

Tolkien's productions of images that themselves effectively evoke many aspects of Tolkien's fantasy stories. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words; in the case of Tolkien, the worth of his pictures is most revealed in the many thousands of words which began with a handful of illustrations of things that the young child Tolkien saw around him.

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APPENDIX A:
PERMISSIONS

Attached here are the e-mails in which the Tolkien Estate granted me permission for the use of Tolkien's illustrations in this thesis.



Robert Scott Garbacz <robertthescott@gmail.com>

One more request

Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com <Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com>

Fri, Apr 28, 2006

3:00

To: Robert Scott Garbacz <robertthescott@gmail.com>

Dear Mr Garbacz,

The Estate has no objection to these further uses.

Regards

Cathleen Blackburn

▼ "Robert Scott Garbacz" <robertthescott@gmail.com>

"Robert Scott
Garbacz"
<robertthescott@gmail.com>

To: "Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com"
<Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com>

CC

Sent at: 27/04/2006

22:13

SubjectRe: One more request

One more request. While I asked for permission for the reproduction of "a small number of illustrations" from the work *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author and Illustrator*, I have included in my final 131 page thesis 23 illustrations from that work in addition to one illustration from *Letters from Father Christmas*. Such a number may not be considered particularly "small" (though it is a relatively small fraction of the illustrations from the Hammond and Scull work), and so I would like permission to use those illustrations for *only* the following purposes:

- 1) Internal copies submitted to Texas A&M University faculty for the purpose of evaluating my work.
- 2) **One** physical copy for personal use, paid for by Texas A&M research funds but not to be kept in the Texas A&M University library or in any way publically distributed.

The change from two to one physical copies is the result of a change in the policy of Texas A&M thesis publication; in previous e-mails I was assuming that last year's policy of printing two physical copies was still in effect.

On 3/31/06, **Robert Scott Garbacz** <robertthescott@gmail.com> wrote:

I can show examples of every major thread in my thesis except for one -- the bias and commentary of texts in *Letters from Father Christmas* as most vividly illustrated by the difference between illustrations drawn by Father Christmas and illustrations drawn by the North Polar Bear. Could I have permission to use just one illustration from the *Letters from Father Christmas*, the 1926 illustration on page 29 of the hardback edition, in order to show an example of the larger thread that I discuss at length?

Kind regards,
Robert Garbacz

On 3/21/06, **Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com** <Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com>

wrote:

Dear Mr Garbacz,

As the illustrations will be for the purpose of identification only, I would suggest that you simply make colour photocopies from the Hammond and Scull work. You may take this email as confirmation of the permission of the Tolkien Estate to make two sets of such copies, one for each copy of your thesis.

Regards

Cathleen Blackburn

▼ "Robert Scott Garbacz" <robertthescott@gmail.com>

"Robert

Scott

Garbac

z"

<[robert](mailto:robertthescott@gmail.com)

[thescot](mailto:robertthescott@gmail.com)

[t@gmail](mailto:robertthescott@gmail.com)

[l.com](mailto:robertthescott@gmail.com)>

To" Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com" <

Cathleen.Blackburn@manches.com>

cc

SubjectUse of copyrighted Tolkien illustrations in Senior Ho

Sent

at:

15/03/2

006

18:49

Dear Ms. Blackburn,

I have continued work on my undergraduate Honors Thesis dealing with the relationship between Tolkien's graphical and lexical storytelling using only images already published, and am nearing the time of publication of the document. The document will have an exceedingly limited publication, with one copy on archives in the Texas A&M library and one copy for my personal use. However, since the document relies heavily on the close reading of a small number of illustrations from *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author and Illustrator, Pictures By J.R.R. Tolkien, Letters from Father Christmas , Mr. Bliss, and Roverandom*, inclusion of such images in the actual document would greatly aid in making the document comprehensible. Is it possible for me to receive permission to republish such images along with my thesis, and if so what steps should I take?

Kind Regards,

Robert Scott Garbacz

Cathleen Blackburn

Manches LLP

Tel: +44 (0)1865 722106

Fax: +44 (0)1865 201012

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Cathleen Blackburn

Manches LLP

Tel: +44 (0)1865 722106

Fax: +44 (0)1865 201012

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CIRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

Texas A&M University

- Bachelor of Arts (graduation: May 2006)
- English Major
- Classical Studies Minor
- Liberal Arts Honors

RESEARCH

Texas A&M University Undergraduate Research Fellows Program Class of 2005

- Thesis: *The Visual Impulse and the Writings of J. R. R. Tolkien*

Texas A&M University Undergraduate Research Opportunity

- Served as an undergraduate level critical reader for Blackwell's *A Companion to the Classical Tradition* edited by Dr. Craig Kallendorf.

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Texas A&M University Champe Fitzhugh International Honors Leadership Seminar

- Italy: Summer 2001
- A two-week, pre-freshman seminar intended to increase international awareness.

Oxford University, St. Peter's College, Summer Academic Programme

- Oxford, England: Summer 2005
- Course in Medieval Studies
 - Death Nature and Change in Medieval Literature
 - The Arthurian Tradition

HONORS AND AWARDS

- National Merit Scholar
- Undergraduate Research Fellow
- Texas A&M University President's Endowed Scholarship Recipient