Tolkien in the 21st Century

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Reading, Reception, and Reinterpretation

Edited by

Jorge Luis Bueno-Alonso

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-8395-3
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8395-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Producing a book of this sort is always an *enta geweorc,* a work of giants, as it was very well defined by the poet of the Old English poem *The Wanderer*. Or a task fit for the Ents, if we follow Tolkien's own interpretation of the word *ent.* It has been a gigantic task indeed, especially in our post-pandemic time and age, when things have not been easy in the academic world. That is why I have to give my heartfelt thanks to several people who helped me in turning the pain of a cancelled research seminar into the joy of a wonderful book. I would like to thank:

- All the contributors for submitting great work despite the circumstances, always on time despite the tight deadlines we had to meet at the end of the process.
- Clementine Joly (Author Liaison) and Rebecca Gladders (Senior Commissioning Editor), from Cambridge Scholars, who embraced the project of this book and always made things easy to me in every step of the way.
- Miguel A. Gomes Gargamala (University of Sunderland), former student of mine *in gear dagum* and now friend and colleague, for sharing comments and discussions about Tolkien *et al* all through the process of compiling these materials. I would have been delighted to count you in as a contributor, but sometimes seafaring through troubled waters can complicate the journey. I am sure that there will be future shared projects in fairer weather.

I want to dedicate this volume to my daughter, Helena, and my son, Carlos Camilo. I read to them, as bedtime stories, many of the tales written by Tolkien. Their laughter when I voiced some characters (especially Gollum) gave me the adequate doses of strength and joy. We also had the chance of experiencing together the movies in their 20th anniversary re-release in 2021. Looking at both their faces, in bewildered awe, when the big silver screen reflected all the wonder of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* was a great personal moment. My reading aloud of Tolkien to them and the way they reacted towards both the written tales and the movies, provided me with the chance of re-interpreting some areas of Tolkien's works with a

fresh gaze. The ‘reading, reception, (re)interpretation’ of the title was undoubtedly fueled by them.

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INTRODUCTION

JORGE L. BUENO ALONSO

"Hwæt". Not the average word you would find in newspapers or magazines. But in recent years it did appear on the press opening some brief accounts of the sort journalists love: out of context academia-shattering, new-fangled scientific interpretations and massive bookselling gossip around a huge box-office author. In 2013, the former was presented in headlines like "Listen! *Beowulf* opening line misinterpreted for 200 years", which appeared on the British press (Brown 2013) introducing George Walkden's (2013) theory of *hwaet* not being "an interjection or an adverb but rather [a] parallel to modern English *how* as used in exclamative clauses such as 'How you've changed!'. The latter had its time in 2014 when the publication of J. R. R. Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* was announced. Just to quote an example, Alison Flood's piece for *The Guardian* (2014) began precisely "Hwæt! Almost 90 years after JRR Tolkien translated the 11th century poem *Beowulf*, *The Lord of the Rings* author's version of the epic story is to be published for the first time". In both cases "hwæt", *Beowulf* and Tolkien are connected with the audience, whether they are listeners of the poem's contemporary transmission or modern readers getting at *Beowulf* through the previous filter of Middle-earth and of a wide interest in things medieval.

In the first two concepts ("hwæt" and *Beowulf)* translations are seen as the only way to approach such old texts, whether through a re-interpretation of a key word that could cast some new light on how the Anglo-Saxons understood poetry –hence, on our own understanding on the text– or through a new text by a huge box-office author that, although not intended for publication, could reboot the interest on the text or on related texts for those Middle-earth driven modern audiences. Simon Armitage set it quite comically in the aforementioned article in *The Guardian* (Flood 2014):

> "Given the current taste for [Tolkien's] work and the film versions of his books, it will be interesting to see if it gives Heaney's *Beowulf* a run for its money, which was a huge bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic and seems to be regarded at the moment as the definitive contemporary version. I can already see it in Waterstones – the leather-bound, illustrated gift edition, filed next to *The Hobbit* and the boxed DVD *Game of Thrones*".

And this leads us to the third aforementioned concept: Tolkien himself, his "huge box-office" status as author currently sitting among the ranks of those writers engulfed by this "neomedieval" conception in the arts that places in the same basket things as diverse as *Beowulf* (both the OE text and the myriad translations published up to this very moment), Peter Jackson's movie versions of *The Lord of the Rings*, George R. R. Martin's multiformat works or, just to quote a recent example, Ridley Scott's *The Last Duel*, based on an academic book written by a medievalist (Jager 2005).

To enjoy successfully the items in that basket readers and/or viewers need to be equipped with different tools guiding them towards a better understanding of the poem, translation, movie or narrative of their own personal interest. It is undeniable that the works of J. R. R. Tolkien –in his triple status as medievalist, writer and translator- tend to be signalled more often than not among the most influential fictional works that have given general readers access to such a neomedieval *Weltanschauung*. That is what the book you are holding in your hands -whether physically or digitally- wants to tackle. Tolkien's works have shaped the fantasy genre since they were first published. In our media-saturated 21st Century his influence keeps on being as important as it has always been. New unpublished works and visual products have appeared, films have been released and new visual materials are on the making to be presented on 2022. In the abundant ever-growing bibliography on Tolkien, this volume tries to make a pause to take a breath and (re)address some analytical issues concerning such influence from the threefold perspective signalled in the title: reading, reception, (re)interpretation. At least that was the idea behind my mind when at the end of 2019 I organized an academic event at the University of Vigo to discuss these issues under the title of *Un(Middle-)earthing Tolkien: International Research Seminar on J. R. R. Tolkien's Fiction*. My idea was to gather a variety of speakers from all walks of the academic life to spend a day engaging in fruitful academic conversation and debate, open also to undergraduate and postgraduate students who could benefit from such exchange of ideas. The seminar was planned for 29th April 2020.

Then, 2020 came and you know all too well what happened. We entered in a lockdown situation and the seminar -as much as everything else in the world around that time- had to be cancelled due the Covid19 pandemic outburst; but, fortunately enough, as I wanted to expand that concept into a book, I had presented a project of a volume that could derive from the seminar to Cambridge Scholars Publishers. They embraced it enthusiastically and green-lighted it in almost no time; we signed the contract on 13th March 2020. Next day, Spain entered into lockdown, and it was precisely during

that time, while struggling with online teaching and adjusting to that nightmarish situation, that I dived into this project with outmost energy. What had begun as a face-to-face seminar was changed into a book, which was shaped, planned and executed while we moved through this new situation all through 2020 and 2021.

The nine chapters you are about to read and their authors respond to the same idea I had for the cancelled seminar. I wanted to listen to a variety of voices: from leading scholars in the field of Tolkien Studies to early-career researchers; from independent scholars pursuing work on their own to PhD candidates in the final stages of their research. I also requested a variety of themes and methodologies that could be used by readers of all sorts (students, scholars, general readers, Middle-earth driven modern audiences) to have informed introductions to Tolkien or to dive deeply into specific in-depth issues related to how we read and understand Tolkien's works in our 21st Century.

The collection begins with Adriana Taboada's piece on art and illustrations based on Tolkien's works. Our contemporary reception of his *Legendarium* is by no means filtered these days by pictorial representations; although it is true that the last few years have seen the publication of many works studying this, Adriana Taboada offers a fresh insight on the topic by examining Tolkien's ideas on his own artistic pictorial work, on illustration as a (worthy or unworthy) companion to literature, and on the work of the very many leading artists who have illustrated Tolkien's stories, paying special critical attention to Alan Lee. Her reappraisal on Tolkien and the Visual Arts is thus completed with a deep analysis on Lee's style and its evolution in order to offer a better understanding of why his view of Middle-earth has become somehow the "standard" when Tolkien's work has been visually represented.

The interface between the written page and the pictorial idea lies also at the heart of Tom Birkett's chapter on Tolkien's use of Runes. Runic systems were a historical writing tradition that Tolkien would have known well as a scholar of Old English and Old Norse literature. Birkett's take on this issue revises Tolkien's use of invented alphabets based on the historical runic script, both as a key component of his legendary history, and as a literary motif in his works of fiction. As an interesting contemporary *addendum* Birkett also considers the expansion of this runic 'index of fantasy' in the recent films based on Tolkien's works.

Chapter three discusses another interface directly related to two standard key issues on Tolkien Studies: his own understanding of the creative process (the scholar vs. the writer) and the way other academics addressed similar philological/creative issues, especially in translation. My own piece considers Tolkien's *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* (1953) as his academic attempt to explain the meaning of *The Battle of Maldon*'s 'ofermod', a piece that established a classic critical referent on this Old English epic. Although critics have always revisited the meaning of 'ofermod', very few attempts have been made –or hardly any– to evaluate how translators of Old English poetry have dealt with interpreting 'ofermod' in Maldon. To fill this gap I revise how such a task has been accomplished by the main English and Spanish translations of the *The Battle of Maldon* in the light of the interpretative difficulties of 'ofermod' established by Tolkien and by the critical tradition that followed his seminal essay, arguing as a conclusion that the only way of presenting *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* to the reading audience of any language is by offering them a joint edition/translation that includes both Tolkien's text and *The Battle of Maldon*.

Since we have entered the realm of literary analysis the next chapter by Stuart Lee, a reference in the field, provides a close reading of a single scene in *The Lord of the Rings* to consider Tolkien's writing and in so doing illustrating how, at his best, he was a master of narrative. Stuart Lee's written masterclass on literary examination uses two pages from the ending of 'The Siege of Gondor' (RK V, iv), notably one of Tolkien's favourite pieces, to provide an in-depth analysis of Tolkien's style that allows for multiple explorations of themes, motifs, and tropes. What is happening from stylistic and thematic perspectives that makes the scene so powerful? That is the question Stuart Lee masterly answers in his contribution to this volume.

The next piece deals with controversial topics that have affected the way many readers approach Tolkien's narrative in our modern world: race, empathy and alterity. Jonathan Lench offers a modern re-interpretation of the issue of racism in Tolkien's fiction. To do so, it presents an analysis of Tolkien's life and how Tolkien included encounters with alterity (and their empathy producing effects) in his fiction. In a world in which we are constantly besieged by distorted ideologies, Lench demonstrates that, as he states, "Tolkien's fiction can be understood as hostile to white-supremacist ideologies, rather than a mouth-piece for them".

Although some scholars have already discussed the presence of epic poetry, revised the music/ poetry interface or highlighted the presence of certain

types of oral features, the niche of a specific and concrete study of orality in Middle-earth has remained unfilled. Andoni Cossio's chapter aims to demonstrate the presence of oral literature in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In order to fulfil that task, a definition of oral literature including its characteristics (mutability, antiquity, didacticism, unknown authorship, generational alternations and the use of animals and monsters) is proposed by the author, followed by a section, which provides practical examples in *The Lord of the Rings* of those oral features, offering a few more: the presence of 'fairy tale formulae', epithets, moral extremes and personification of landscapes. Lastly, to round up, three different cultures representative of oral tradition (the Hobbits, the Elves and the Rohirrim) are analysed indicating their differences mainly in diction. Andoni Cossio concludes quite convincingly that orality is an intrinsic part of the narrative and bestows a characteristic literary hallmark on each culture inhabiting Middle-earth, and that, on a structural level, the furthering of the plot wholly depends on oral transmission.

After race and orality, the next chapter suggests a stop in our walk to embrace life and mythology as two sides of the same Tolkienian experience. Sergio López presents in his chapter a comparison of Tolkien's own experiences and the mythological world he created. Some key elements from his books are analysed in order to find biographical and academic elements that may have influenced their creation. The challenge of conveying those connections in contemporary representations is also explored as a re-evaluation of sorts of a topic present in Tolkien studies almost since the very beginning of the discipline. The general reader will benefit a great deal from this chapter, as well as the most experienced scholar. A pause for breath to remember the topics we are all interested in.

With our academic lungs filled with biography, mythology and sources, Ibai Adrián Goldaraz reminds us how J. R. R. Tolkien is accountable for the prominence the dragon reached in twentieth–century literature. The presence of dragons in his work is significant from his early stories, as is the case with *The Fall of Gondolin*, for example. In his chapter, Goldaraz analyses various traits from the dragons of Tolkien's literature, demonstrating that Tolkien considered the dragons of medieval narrative poetic works, such as *Beowulf* or the *Völsunga Saga,* essential both to the machinery and the ideas of a poem or tale. The depiction and characterization of Tolkien's most famous dragon, Smaug, in the different adaptations in the media are also scrutinized by the author as independent texts following Gérard Genette's notion of 'Transtextuality'. Although the analysis of Smaug in Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* film trilogy has identified a desire to maintain

certain features of the medieval dragon, the director sought to develop a far more dramatic character than Tolkien's in order to reach an audience eager for spectacle. Additionally, the author also deals with the analysis of Inevitable Entertainment's 2003 video game adaptation, which has proven that Smaug is presented as a threat to the player, and thus his originally violent attitude is enhanced through the mechanics of the game. In observing the obvious differences in the transformation of the principal text into different media, Ibai Adrián Goldaraz concludes that to a greater or lesser degree both manage to depict the dragon as a symbol of greed and power and, thereby, both keep alive the essence of Tolkien's dragon, and by extension, that of the dragons in the aforementioned medieval texts.

The volume closes with Laura Gálvez's chapter, which aims to explain and to explore the influence of the medieval figure of the fairy maiden on *The Lord of the Rings*. As a medievalist, it is well-known that Tolkien included many elements from medieval literature and culture in his works. One of these elements is the medieval archetype of the fairy lady, the fairy queen and the fairy mistress. Tolkien's fairy women –Goldberry, Galadriel, and Arwen– do not only have in common with Arthurian fairies their representations as supernatural ladies, extremely beautiful and connected with nature; they also echo some of the most famous fairy ladies from Arthurian literature such as Morgan Le Fay or the Lady of the Lake, among others. Goldberry does not only echo the Arthurian ladies of the forest but, according to Gálvez, it is likely that Tolkien inspired himself on a Celtic fairy, Olwen, in order to describe Goldberry. Gálvez also proposes that Galadriel in turn is deeply shaped and influenced by Arthurian fairies such as Morgan Le Fay or the Lady of the Lake, especially in her role as an enchantress, ruler of a fairy realm (Lothlórien) or in her bond with water by means of her mirror and her Ring of Waters. As for Arwen, Galvez defends that she embodies the fairy mistress from medieval romance, the unreachable fairy lover whom the hero falls in love with and who plays a relevant role in the hero's quest. An interesting way to bring the collection to a close.

The elements of this collection conform a volume that opens paths and new avenues to venture, but also treads through old ones too as a healthy reminder of the important topics we have to keep on revising when considering Tolkien in the 21st Century. As Brian Rosebury (2003: 1) stated in his own introduction, "we are now in the twenty-first century and popular awareness of Tolkien has risen to unprecedented heights". Almost twenty years have passed since this statement, and I think that the popular awareness and critical consideration and appreciation of Tolkien has never

ceased to rise. The contents of this volume are great proof of that. As an academic, I do not enjoy excessively long introductions in collective volumes like the one you have in your hands. A few words are enough to state the initial whys and wherefores. The book should speak for itself and the work of the contributors should be read eagerly with no spoiler alerts made by the editor. It is time, then, gentle reader, to "speak, friend, and enter" the collection at ease. It is a road you will enjoy to go through.

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CHAPTER ONE

"ONE VISIBLE FORM": ILLUSTRATING MIDDLE-EARTH

ADRIANA TABOADA GONZÁLEZ

Living in the era of screens – and memes – *par excellence*, it might be tempting to forget that our present interest in visual practices is not but an echo of a past when images would, more often than not, serve as the sole means of knowledge transmission. At the same time as the oral tradition would have its texts accompanied by gestures to catch the audience's eye and different intonations to "catch their hearing", written texts brought in the art of illustration. Whereas the purpose of the former's extras was to make a text easier to swallow, learn, and understand by the listeners, the latter enabled the expansion of the comprehension and mental image of what had been written down for the literate readership. Tolkien's artistic interpretations of his own works must not come, therefore, as a surprise. Acquainted as he was with medieval literature, his perception of the relevance of illuminations is obvious from the very moment in which he starts creating his own world and is already apparent in his first writings, where it is possible to see the "recursive interplay between visual and verbal drafting."[1]

In the last few years, many have been the works studying J. R. R. Tolkien's pictorial art: beginning with Hammond and Scull's *Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*,[2] their two individual analyses of the art in *The Hobbit*[3] and *The*

[1] Jeffrey J. Macleod and Anna Smol. "Visualizing the Word: Tolkien as Artist and Writer," *Tolkien Studies*, 14 (2017): 116.
[2] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull eds., *J. R. R. Tolkien Artist & Illustrator,* (Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin, (1995) 2000).
[3] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull eds., *The Art of The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien,* (HarperCollins, London, 2011).

Lord of the Rings,[4] and finally getting to McIlwaine's latest work that reunites the vastest collection of Tolkien's art,[5] published as the catalogue for the exhibition *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth* that included not only the author's drawings but also letters, drafts, maps, and photographs.[6] These works have undoubtedly served the purpose of making the readership more familiar with Tolkien's creative process, and of understanding the true depth of his lifelong work.[7] What is curious about these volumes is that they all coincide in one thought: the poor idea Tolkien had of his own art, even though, as it can be perfectly proven throughout the art books, he would keep drawing and doodling almost everywhere he could – one of the most remarkable pieces of both the books and the exhibition is indeed a compilation of newspaper cuttings full of "intricate designs and patterns."[8]

An apparent suitable explanation for this might be the fact that, up until the publication of the first edition of *The Hobbit* in 1937, Tolkien's art had been mainly private, "amateur illustrations"[9] that were not initially drawn to be included in his books – it goes without saying that the newspaper doodles, as stunning as they might come across, never made it into any of his works. However, it was himself the one who decided to redraw some of those illustrations in order to send them to George Allen and Unwin "conceiving that they might serve as endpapers, frontispiece or what not."[10] What is more, after seeing the success his drawings had among the publishers, he enclosed 6 other illustrations in his following letter, and gladly provided

[4] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull eds., *The Art of The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien,* (HarperCollins, London, 2015).
[5] Catherine McIlwaine ed., *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth,* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2018).
[6] See Joel Merriner, "Intertextuality and Iconography in Sergei Iukhimov's Illustrations for The Lord of the Rings: Five Case Studies" for an exhaustive account of all the publications devoted to the analysis of both Tolkien's art and artistic interpretations of Tolkien's works.
[7] To this list of works that cover the art of Tolkien we must add the recent publication of a *The Lord of the Rings* edition that includes the author's own illustrations (Tolkien, 2021). Although, as it has been noted, the said illustrations are far from unknown to the readership, the highlight of this new one volume print is the fact that it is the first time in which these drawings accompany the text.
[8] Ibid., 188.
[9] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 14.
[10] Ibid.

some others for "one of the outstanding firms of American publishers," the Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston.[11]

Taking all of this into account, one might wonder why did Tolkien state on his essay "On Fairy Stories", presented for the first time in 1939 – not much later than the publication of *The Hobbit* – that "however good in themselves, illustrations do little good to fairy-stories."[12] Basing this idea on the fact that literature works "from mind to mind," Tolkien was convinced that any drawings accompanying a text could only give the reader one version of any specific scene exclusively seen from the eyes of the artist, thus limiting the readership's imagination by imposing just "one visible form."[13] It seems then that avoiding any too specific representations of what is being described with words would suffice, or at least would do less harm. Indeed, if the reader were to take a closer look to Tolkien's illustrations, they would notice that most of them depict landscapes ("Rivendell"[14]) or architecture distinctive from Middle-earth ("Barad-dûr: The Fortress of Sauron"[15]). Few are the cases in which the author ventures himself into drawing characters, and when he does so, they tend to appear in the background of the image, or at a reduced size, as in "Bilbo comes to the Huts of the Raft-elves"[16], or "The Hall at Bag End"[17] in which, even though Bilbo appears at the centre of the picture, we can only see his profile.[18]

As Hammond and Scull put it in "Tolkien's Visual Art", Tolkien's statement might have been just "a good excuse," since the writer found some difficulties in the drawing of certain scenes. [19] For instance, as the authors explain in their aforementioned *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, the

[11] Ibid, 16-18.
[12] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories". In *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Cristopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006), 159.
[13] Ibid.
[14] McIlwaine, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth*, 302.
[15] Ibid, 361.
[16] Ibid, 308.
[17] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* (London: HarperCollins, (1937) 2016), 307.
[18] It is worth noting at this point that Alan Lee shares this point of view with the author, although perhaps motivated by different reasons. Whereas Tolkien seemed particularly concerned about his abilities at the time of drawing characters, Lee focuses on the importance of not influencing the imagination of the readership, therefore trying to "concentrate on creating the settings for the action, rather than detailed views of the characters" (email message to author, July 22, 2018).
[19] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, "Tolkien's Visual Art". In *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth*, ed. Catherine McIlwaine (Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2018), 78.

illustration "The Forest of Lothlorien in Spring"[20] made Tolkien particularly struggle with the representation of his own descriptions of the land when he was writing about it, "probably around late 1940,"[21] the time when he started to work on *The Lord of the Rings*. Another example of his troubles as a visual artist is what Hammond and Scull called his "greatest weakness", that is, his inability to successfully draw "the human figure."[22] On the other hand, Tolkien's apparent reluctance to include illustrations in fairy stories might have also been closely related to his disinclination to the use of any drawings "from or influenced by the Disney studios (for all whose works [he had] a heartfelt loathing)"[23] and which in fact he preventively vetoed from the American edition of *The Hobbit* as soon as he was notified about their interest in including some illustrations by "some good American artists" yet to be selected.[24]

The reason behind this distaste for anything Disney-esque (that is, anything that would caricature his works to supposedly make them more visually attractive for children) is no other than his eternal battle against those that put children literature and fairy-stories at the same level, who "tend to think of children as a special kind of creature, almost a different race."[25] For Tolkien what truly matters is the capability of the writer as a subcreator of what he calls the Secondary World rather than the age of the readership. If the story maker is "good enough," then the readers enter into the state of "willing suspension of disbelief" that can be explained as that moment in which they *believe* that everything they are reading is true, at least for as long as they are taken to that other world through the very act of reading.[26] On top of that, as it happens with *The Lord of the Rings*, even though it may contain "childish" elements, as some might say, it was not written specifically for children – Tolkien never worried, for example, if children would understand all the vocabulary in it – but "for itself."[27] The difference between children and adults thus lies in the easiness with which they fall under the writer's spell, and how that particular enchantment is carried out. Therefore, any kind of visual representation that accompanies his texts must

[20] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, 163.
[21] Ibid, 164.
[22] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, "Tolkiens Visual Art", 75.
[23] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 17.
[24] Ibid.
[25] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", 130.
[26] Ibid.
[27] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 310.

follow the same path as they do and put special care not to misinterpret its purpose.

If there is something that characterised Tolkien as an author, it would certainly be his preoccupation for seeing his works rightly represented. For instance, many are the letters filled with corrections to the different and numerous translations of his works. This was, of course, extrapolated to the illustrations and his concern over the pictures being "true to the text."[28] A good example of this is a letter sent to Allen and Unwin in which he strongly criticized some drawings sent by Milein Cosman to illustrate *Farmer Giles of Ham*[29]. He was specially troubled with the failure in representing the location of the story ("Oxfordshire and Bucks, with a brief excursion into Wales"[30]); however, what seemed to perplex him the most (apart from the apparently excessive time she took to provide the illustrations), was her depiction of the dragon, to which the author referred to as "absurd," since it was "fatuously looking over his right shoulder SE when an obvious if sketchy dog is going off NW."[31] Needless to say, Cosman's illustrations were not accepted, and the editors found another artist to do the job, someone that did actually meet Tolkien's expectations: Pauline Baynes, whose works were described by the writer not only as measuring up but also as being a "collateral theme"[32] rather than mere drawings.

Baynes's work with *Farmer Giles of Ham* was of such quality for Tolkien that she ended up in charge of the illustrations of *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book*[33]. In the letter Tolkien sent to her after knowing of her interest in illustrating the story, Tolkien explains that something he particularly enjoyed about her art is the "touch of fantasy" she gives to her works at the same time as making them plausible, or at least,

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[28] Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hamond, *The J. R. R. Tolkien's Companion and Guide: Reader's Guide Part I.* (London: HaperCollins, (2006) 2017), 560.
[29] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham: Aegidii Ahenobarbi Julii Agricole de Hammo, Domini de Domito, Aule Draconarie Comitis, Regni Minimi Regis et Basilei mira facinora et mirablis exortus, or in the vulgar tongue, The Rise and Wonderful Adventures of Farmer Giles, Lord of Tame, Count of Worminghall and King of the Little Kingdom,* ill. Pauline Baynes (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949).
[30] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 130.
[31] Ibid, 131.
[32] Ibid, 133.
[33] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book*, ill. Pauline Baynes (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962).

"not dreamlike."[34] He then continues by responding to a comment made by her, which, even though it is not explicitly stated, we can assume has to do with her thoughts about illustrations and how they can shape the readers' imagination since Tolkien recognizes he greatly agrees with her and mentions his own comment about the topic in "On Fairy Stories". However, the key point of this letter resides in the fact that the author describes Tom Bombadil's poems as being "light-hearted […] dexterous in words, but not very profound in intentions."[35] Tolkien's idea for the illustrations of this book was to have some adornments added to the text in the line of the illuminations used in medieval manuscripts. Conversely, although he expressed his wish of having Baynes illustrating *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* in a letter sent to her in 1949,[36] about two decades later he changed his mind and did not think Baynes's art was suitable for his masterpiece since it would require of a "more noble and awe-inspiring" style than what she could offer to match the book's tone.[37]

Many other artists have since been chosen to illustrate the world of Tolkien, such as Mary Fairburn, Ted Nasmith, or Jemima Catlin, with one specific illustrator that seems to be the new official "brush" of things Tolkenian, that is, Alan Lee. Proof of this is the vast list of works he has been commissioned to do: *The Lord of the Rings*[38] illustrated edition published in 1991, the 1997's *The Hobbit*[39], *The Children of Húrin*[40] (2007), *Tales of the Perilous Realms*[41] (2008), *Beren and Lúthien*[42] (2017), *The Fall of Gondolin*[43] (2018), or *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*[44] (2018; 2020, together with Ted Naismith and John Howe), apart from his job as Art

[34] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 312.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Catherine McIlwaine, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth*, 384.
[37] Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *The J. R. R. Tolkien's Companion and Guide*, 565.
[38] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, ill. Alan Lee (London: HarperCollins, (1991) 2005)
[39] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, ill. Alan Lee (London: HarperCollins, 1997)
[40] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Children of Húrin*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, ill. Alan Lee (London: HarperCollins, 2007)
[41] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tales of the Perilous Realm*, ill. Alan Lee (London: HarperCollins, 2008)
[42] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beren and Lúthien*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, ill. Alan Lee (London: HarperCollins, 2017)
[43] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fall of Gondolin*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, ill. Alan Lee (London: HarperCollins, 2019)
[44] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, ill. Alan Lee, Ted Nasmith and John Howe (London: HarperCollins, 2020).

Director in Peter Jackson's adaptions of both *The Lord of the Rings*[45] and *The Hobbit*[46]. In this chapter, attention will be mainly paid to his illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, comparing his perspective to that of Tolkien both in the writer's texts and illustrations. However, in order to provide a deeper analysis on Lee's style and its evolution, and for a better understanding of why his view of Middle-earth has become somehow the "standard", his visual art for the Great Tales will be also considered, even if to a lesser extent.[47]

As it has been mentioned before, one of the key elements when it comes to illustrating a book is to match the text's tone and perspective; hence, it is fundamental for the artist to be familiar with the author's work. In the case of Alan Lee, he had first read *The Lord of the Rings* at the age of seventeen, having already developed a taste for "myths and legends" that seemed to be "distilled and refined and forged into this totally compelling narrative."[48] His interest in art and his painting skills led him to the career of illustrator, taking the chance of drawing those works he had been more keen on, namely myths, folklore and fantasy, thus developing a very particular style that makes his drawings quite recognizable for the not-so-much experimented eye. Two of his contributions, *Faeries*[49] and *Castles*[50], put him in the right place at the right time, and gave him the opportunity to be seen, specially the latter, by the right people. Since he had drawn some of the Middle-earth architecture in *Castles*, that was published by Unwin Hyman in the United Kingdom, his works were saved by one of the editors for possible projects.[51] The first one was the special one-volume edition of *The Lord of the Rings* edited in honour of Tolkien's centenary; such was the success of Lee's

[45] Peter Jackson dir, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring,* New Line Cinema, 2001; *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, New Line Cinema, 2002; *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, New Line Cinema, 2003.
[46] Peter Jackson dir, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, Warner Bros Pictures, 2012; *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, Warner Bros Pictures, 2013; *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, Warner Bros Pictures, 2014.
[47] See Adriana Taboada González, "The Art of the Great Tales: Alen Lee's Illustrations of *The Children of Húrin* (2007) and *The Fall of Gondolin* (2018) as a Visual Translation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *middangeard*" for a deeper analysis on the art of the Great Tales from a medievalist point of view.
[48] Alan Lee, *The Lord of the Rings Sketchbook* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 10.
[49] Briand Froud & Alan Lee, *Faeries,* (London: Abrams & Chronicle Books, (1978) 2010).
[50] Alan Lee & David Day, *Castles,* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984).
[51] Alan Lee, *The Hobbit Sketchbook* (London: HarperCollins, 2019).

illustrations that 5 years later he was offered to work on *The Hobbit*, and the rest, as they say, is history.

By means of technique, Lee's inclination is to use watercolours, since the "mutability" of the medium allows for the drawings to "suggest possibilities rather than exact definitions,"[52] thus avoiding any constraints for the readers' imagination. Compared to Pauline Baynes, for example, he uses duller colours, with greyish tones being more predominant, consequently achieving that "more noble" style that Tolkien was looking for.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the art of Alan Lee is the way in which he manages to depict one of the most complex aspects of Tolkien's works, which is at the same time a widely used feature in medieval literature: the interlace.[53] This structure type "seeks to mirror the perception of the flux of events in the world around us, where everything is happening at once," therefore including a numerous amount of characters, places and stories whose role varies all through the narrative, but that are normally related to each other and to the final resolution.[54] A rather clear example of Tolkien's use of the interlace structure can be found in the organization of the narration in *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, since they are both divided into two books, each of them dedicated either to Frodo, Sam and Gollum's journey or to the rest of the company's. Nevertheless, this separation of the events does not mean they can be read independently; on the contrary, the reader needs to understand the specific events that take place in order to reach a better understanding of the whole.

The frontispiece[55] of *The Lord of the Rings*, is perhaps the best example to illustrate this medieval structure. Distributed on the paper almost as if it were a tryptic, this is the largest picture of the book. As if it had been made on purpose, each of the places in which the page bends to be kept inside the book marks the distinction between three different scenarios. On the left, there is a path running along a mountain that finalizes in the entrance of a cave. At the centre, the figure of a Nazgûl taking up the sky, and some ruins at the bottom. On the right side, almost left to the background, Minas Tirith. Evidently, one needs to go a bit further into the details to understand what

[52] Ibid, 28.
[53] For further information on this matter see Emily E. Auger, "The Lord of the Rings Interlace: Tolkien's Narrative and Lee's Illustration," in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 19, no. 1 (2008): 70-93, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24352406
[54] Richard C. West, "The Interlace Structure in The Lord of the Rings," in *A Tolkien Compass*, ed. Jared Lobdell (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1975), 80.
[55] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 1.

is really happening in this scene. If the reader pays special attention, they will be able to see a small creature climbing up the mountain on the left side of the page. It almost looks like a part of the rock, however, once the reader takes a close look at it, the identity of that living thing will be obvious: Gollum. It is true that throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, many are the times in which Gollum is said to be climbing rocks, but in this case, there are far many clues for the readership to identify the specific moment in which this is taking place: Gollum is guiding Frodo and Sam into Shelob's lair. The ruins at the bottom of the image are not but Minas Morgul, the fortress of the Witch King, who, in the picture, is facing Minas Tirith because he is headed to Osgiliath in order to battle the soldiers of Gondor that are defending the ruins. What makes this illustration a true work of art, and a remarkable representation of Tolkien's words, is how he manages to visually link three settings which are not described together in the books, giving them a sense of fluidity and naturality. Whereas in the process of reading one needs to go back and forth to understand the whole, Lee's work offers that whole picture in just one glance. Furthermore, the way in which the different elements are located within the image is also worth analysing. For instance, the viewer's sight is guided through the composition of the drawing from left to right by playing not only with the location of the vanquishing point (on the right), but also with the items that lead the viewer's vision to that specific spot. These are not but the mountains and the winged creature, two recurrent features which serve the author as a link between characters (after all, Frodo, Sam and Gollum see the Nazgûl various times on their way to Mount Doom before it leads the battle against Gondor, where the rest of the company will fight; being specially relevant the moment in which they are so close to Minas Morgul that the Witch King at first is able to sense the presence of the Ring). Lee's way of representing this link between events is by placing the winged creature at the very top of the image, also facing to the right, but with the particularity of it being the only element that covers all the three sections of this tryptic.

Another salient characteristic of both Tolkien and Lee is the importance they give to the representation of nature through words and pictures. Of the various drawings made by the former – some of them serving as an inspiration for Lee – there are a few that the latter replicated in the 1991 edition, one of which is "Old Man Willow"[56]. Tolkien describes this tree in a very particular way by conferring it human-like attributes ("its sprawling branches going up like reaching *arms* with many *long-fingered hands*"[57])

[56] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, facing page 117.
[57] Ibid, 121, my italics.

and the use of sound related terms ("fluttering", "creaking", "singing"[58]…) which help build up the ambience in the reader's imagination. Moreover, as explained by McIlwaine, while describing the forest, Tolkien's repetition of the "word 'willows' and the use of numerous descriptive phrases builds into a chant, creating a soporific and slightly oppressive effect" similar to the one Old Man Willow has over the hobbits.[59] The writer's own illustration of the scene puts the focus on the willow tree, by drawing it on its own in the same shore from which the viewer witnesses the scene. It must be considered that Tolkien's drawings for *The Lord of the Rings* were made while he was writing the book, therefore "for the most part are quick, rough sketches."[60] That explains why, even though the dull colours and the shaping of the roots and branches transmit a feeling of fear and desolation, the drawing has almost no detail compared to, for example, his representation of "The Trolls"[61].

Lee's own vision of these two scenes is clearly influenced by Tolkien's drawings,[62] although he offers a slightly different perspective. First, his vision of Old Man Willow is even more frightening than that of Tolkien, since even though it *is* the protagonist of the picture, it hides behind other smaller trees, wrapping them with its own branches. While on Tolkien's illustration one could even see a face drawn on the tree's outline, Lee chooses to cover any possibility of a clear sight. By doing so, he increases the mystery around the willow tree, and invites the viewer to look a bit further into it. The perspective from which both pictures are drawn is also different: in Lee's illustration, we are placed almost on the river, between both shores. Moreover, the way in which Lee draws Nature makes it look like it is alive, as when Tolkien describes it: in this case, the movement comes from the river and the contrast between the yellow of the leaves and

[58] Ibid.
[59] Catherine McIlwaine, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth*, 336.
[60] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, 154.
[61] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (1937), 49.
[62] Tolkien's academic interest in medieval literature has influenced his texts in such a way that in order to successfully illustrate them, the artist must at least become acquainted with the author's inspiration. In a short video promoting his latest work (The Folio Society, "Alan Lee on Illustrating the Folio Limited Edition of The Wanderer"), *The Wanderer and Other Old English Poems*, Lee explains that he particularly enjoyed the opportunity of reviewing the materials that had originally influenced Tolkien. As it could not be otherwise, this has also proven to work the other way around: Lee's work illustrating medieval literature has a clear imprint of the said Tolkenian style.

the darker tones used for the branches. However, what they both have in common is the lack of representation of any of the hobbits in the scene, which might be their way of being true to the story: after all, the hobbits were attacked by the willow by making them disappear in different ways (something Lee repeats later on in his representation of the barrels going down the river, where the dwarves are known to be hiding, although we cannot see them, almost as Schrödinger's cat).

In the case of "The Trolls", Tolkien's black and white illustration done with an ink pen is one of the most surprising for the amount of work behind it; as Hammond and Scull put it, "it is a technically brilliant illustration"[63] that depicts the moment in which one of the dwarves arrives to the trolls' lair. Lee's illustration, on the other hand, is a portrayal of the sunrise, when the trolls are turned into stone. In fact, Tolkien had also illustrated this same scene ("The Three Trolls are Turned to Stone"[64]) but preferred the other one to be included in the first (illustrated) edition of *The Hobbit*. Curiously enough, the perspective from which both authors depict the trolls is the same: they are at the centre of the image, the three of them facing the viewer. The difference lies in the degree of detail in the portrayal of the trolls, since Lee's creatures take almost all the page, thus remarking their immense size compared to that of the hobbit and the dwarves.[65] The facial expression of the troll standing on the right perfectly reflects the anguish produced by the realization of their fate; furthermore, the brightness of the colours used for his face compared to the dull blue tones used for the troll on the left, makes his face look completely static, forever immovable after being turned into stone.

An obvious difference between the illustrated editions of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* is the fact that the latter includes some pencil sketches placed almost exclusively at the beginning and end of each chapter. These drawings differ with the watercolour plates not only in the technique used but also in their function: while the full-page illustrations are always placed as near as they can be to the text describing them, these smaller images portray scenes that are not necessarily at the beginning nor at the end of the chapters, normally depicting the most salient moments of each section, thus serving as a complement to the illustrations rather than just a mere embellishment. Some of them are even as complex as the watercolours

[63] Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, 109.
[64] Ibid.
[65] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, ill. Alan Lee, 41.

depicting whole landscapes at a very limited size. This is something Lee really enjoys when it comes to illustrating fantasy fiction. His view on the use of illustrations is very similar to that of Tolkien, since both agree that the visual artist should not impose their vision of the text on the readers, as difficult as it may sound. Lee's way of avoiding any conflict is to represent the wider picture whenever he can, adding the main "action" of the scene to the background of the image. He had already started to do this in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, although most of the watercolours and sketches in these books do provide close-ups of the main characters. However, once he began drawing the Great Tales this style became the norm, especially in *Beren and Lúthien* (2017) and *The Fall of Gondolin* (2018). Let us use as an example the watercolour entitled "Swanhaven"[66]. At first glance, what the viewers see is a city that looks almost like a holiday destination, but a closer look will slowly reveal the dark details behind this bucolic image. My proposal for this illustration is to start looking at it from the top to the bottom, from the sky to the sea, since that way the impact between the general view and the details is higher. The first thing one can notice is the darkness of the clouds compared to the clarity of the buildings, and a group of swans flying in what seems to be a rather chaotic way, working already as a prediction of the reality of the scene. If the viewers venture themselves into an even closer look, they will notice that the sea is quite rough, and the boats are not arriving to the city but leaving it. Finally, the revelation is complete: what the viewers are witnessing is the killing of the Teleri, whose corpses cover the harbour. This event is crucial for the story narrated not only in *The Fall of Gondolin* but in the rest of Tolkien's works since it represents the moment in which the Valar, terrified and hurt after seeing what their own creation had done, decide to curse them and punish them for hundreds of years, thus influencing most of the tragedies for the Ages to come.

Even though J. R. R. Tolkien could never see (and check) Lee's works, it is well known the appreciation his son, Christopher, had for the illustrator's art. In his last job as an editor of one of his father's tales, *The Fall of Gondolin*, Christopher Tolkien recognized that Lee brought with his sketches and watercolours "a deep perception of the inner nature of scene and event that he has chosen from the great range of the Elder Days,"[67] deeper, perhaps, than the one offered by an all-text book. Illustrations then work – when used not as an embellishment but as an artistic tool – as a visual translation of the texts, which at the same time work as the necessary

[66] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fall of Gondolin*, 32.
[67] Ibid, 18.