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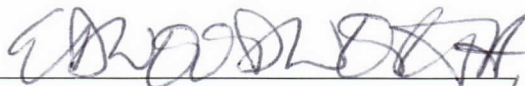**Middle-earth as Middle Ground between Author and Reader**
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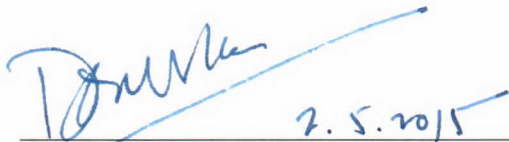Auburn University at Montgomery

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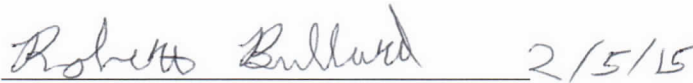
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Robert Bullard

Contents

Acknowledgments

These words are for the academics alone. If they went beyond that it would become a list, and that list would never be finished as a result. Also, these words are not intended to be systematic; organized lists are the worst.

First of all I would like to thank my thesis committee: Dr. Harris-Fain, Dr. Sterling, and Dr. Woodworth. They have seen me through more than they care to admit, especially Dr. Harris-Fain. His words of expertise guided me throughout the whole process of writing this thesis. These words argued with my central ideas when those thoughts emerged awkward and strange before I even tried to stretch them, but his conversation led to places that I would have never considered, making this a better thesis overall.

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Introduction

Myth plays a vital role in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. Along with language, it is foundational to his writing. However, language, whether invented or natural, will not be the central concern here. This thesis proposes to answer questions regarding the people in one of Tolkien's stories. Doing so involves delving into the metaphysics within myth given life by the author. Furthermore, this metaphysics can be broken down into space and time. These abstractions alter people, preventing stagnation. Tolkien's story "Of Beren and Lúthien" utilizes the metaphysics of mythology to develop characters, allowing them to have free will, and it gives the opportunity for negotiation between the author and reader.

"Of Beren and Lúthien" comes from a larger work known as *The Silmarillion*. Tolkien worked on this book his whole life, and it remained unfinished at his death. Subsequently, his son Christopher Tolkien edited the book and published it. "Of Beren and Lúthien" represents only a chapter from *The Silmarillion*. Here it will be treated as a short story, though. The reason this chapter can be treated as a short story is that *The Silmarillion* does not function as a novel but as a cycle of stories. Characters come and go, and the main driving force throughout much of the work comes from the Silmarils, the greatest gems formed by elvish hands.

Fundamentally, *The Silmarillion* eschews a coherent theme or plot (Kilby 11). This form allows for "Of Beren and Lúthien" to be considered separately from the larger work it is a part of. Speaking of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Mary R. Bowman says that "closure is always elusive and never absolute" (277). This sense of narrative comes from Tolkien attempting to have the last formal word on his fiction with the

publication of *The Hobbit*, but that could not be. Desire plays a role here: Tolkien lived for his fiction, and his hunger to see it go on led to more writing. This mentality makes its way into the fiction from the author. *The Silmarillion* acts as a beginning to Tolkien's fictional world, a sort of Genesis, and, like Genesis, it lacks a beginning fully in time, reaching back to what Ilúvatar, the God in *The Silmarillion*, was doing before creation. The people of Middle-earth form a sense of continuity from the different tales.

The topic of people brings up an important point for *The Silmarillion*. This book concerns itself with many races, not men exclusively. Thus, there are also dwarves, wizards, and orcs who play large roles throughout. Tolkien brought diversity to the peoples of his fictional land to explain his developing languages. Everything began with language for Tolkien, and one of Tolkien's biographers points this creative motivation out, saying that "mythology could not be separated from language and vice versa" (Duriez 147). However, the purpose of this thesis is to examine one side primarily of Tolkien's, that being mythology and authorship.

The story comes from some of the earliest days of Tolkien's writing. Along with "The Fall of Gondolin" and "Of Túrin Turambar," "Of Beren and Lúthien" was composed early in life (Chance 184). These three works are the beginning of Tolkien's prose writing in fiction. Before he only wrote poetry for private pleasure or essays for academic purposes. Furthermore, these new works were written around 1917, when he began to shift from poetry to prose (Chance 184). Tolkien's official biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, quotes a poem, calling it "the beginning of Tolkien's own mythology" (79). This poem, like much of Tolkien's work, originated from encounters

with language, this time being Anglo-Saxon. He takes the language and makes a myth from it. Here is the beginning of the poem:

Earendel sprang up from the Ocean's cup

In the gloom of the mid-world's rim;

From the door of Night as a ray of light

Leapt over the twilight brim,

And launching his bark like a silver spark

From the golden-fading sand

Down the sunlit breath of Day's fiery death

He sped from Westerland. (Carpenter 79)

Little of the excerpt of the poem holds anything of importance in terms of people being represented in the rest of Tolkien's mythology. However, it gives hints at things which would occupy him consciously or unconsciously. These hints include a strong sense of place and time. The sea figures prominently in anything involving elves, and time haunts all men as they are mortal. The poem represents the beginning of a lifelong project, essentially expanding on these lines.

These brief lines bring up the central concern or method of analysis to be used in this thesis, space and time. A person's identity wraps itself up in these concepts. For Tolkien time is "fluid and static, linear and circular, mortal and immortal" (Flieger 22). Space also plays an important role in his fiction. If time functions to estimate how one has changed (become stronger, become weaker, etc.), then space serves as the point where those inner or outer changes occur (Flieger 22). These ideas are inevitably bound up with considerations of free will and how people choose to change.

Tolkien wrote expansively, which is evident just by a survey of his works. Many people popularly think of his fiction as epic, but that consideration is too thin and undeveloped. However, he wrote in a sort of tragic mode as well. Mortality is the grand theme of all his fiction. Mortality is why people go on adventures. Furthermore, their choice to go on adventures makes it possible to see free will at play in "Of Beren and Lúthien." Free will becomes a central concern for how the reader can negotiate with the author.

It would not do much good to quibble over the genre of Tolkien's many writings, let alone *The Silmarillion*. As "Of Beren and Lúthien" represents only a fraction of *The Silmarillion*, it makes even less sense to be doing a genre study here. Then it might help to see "Of Beren and Lúthien" from its creator's perspective. That point will be taken up in Chapter 1.

Still, a certain level of objectivity is required here. Some authors make excellent critical commentaries on their works, and others do not. In either case, another critic can elucidate matters. To do this, Roland Barthes will serve as a second measuring stick, so to speak. His ideas form the core of Chapter 2.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with space and time, respectively. These chapters address "Of Beren and Lúthien" specifically. The preceding chapters function as the formula of what could be expected in Tolkien's fiction. The later chapters attempt to let the story speak for itself, believing that "the story does what no theorem can quite do" (Lewis 15). This method does not seek to discount theory but put it in its proper place. Without the story, there is no theory.

To see the overarching perspective of this thesis, one must consider that in Tolkien's case authorship implies myth. Subsequently, myth implies space and time within the story. The author gives form to the myth, and that myth orders the story by way of space and time. The example of the finished product of coherence is in the characters in "Of Beren and Lúthien" and how they change or stay the same in accordance with space and time.

Essentially, this thesis is a reaction to Benjamin Saxton's essay "J. R. R. Tolkien, Sub-Creation, and Theories of Authorship." In this essay, Saxton combats Barthes's theories of authorship without giving him much of a say. Chapter 2 attempts to correct this insignificant explanation of what Barthes is trying to accomplish. Barthes seeks to create a dilemma for postmodern people by forcing them to choose between the author or the reader as the delegator of meaning (Saxton 48). What will be argued is that Tolkien bypasses this false dilemma by allowing his characters to change according to space and time. This allowance is an act of authorship, rejecting Barthes's consideration that the death of the author must follow the death of God. In more simple terms, Tolkien gives his characters free will, something that Barthes's theory cannot account for. Free will creates a middle ground for any interpretation of the text. The author can intend for a text to mean something, and a reader can think otherwise. Also, what the text is itself can lend to meaning, forging this middle ground.

Finally, a short summary of "Of Beren and Lúthien" will be given now for the purpose of clarity. The story begins as the conflict between Morgoth and the creation of Ilúvatar, who is God throughout *The Silmarillion*. Morgoth, who was also created by Ilúvatar, rejects his creator and seeks to form his own music, for the world of creation

began as a symphony being played out before Ilúvatar. Hundreds of years later, elves enter the scene. They have a long and complex history. Even longer after that, men come into the world as the first mortals. Both men and elves hate Morgoth, who persistently tries to conquer all.

"Of Beren and Lúthien" picks up with the slaying of Beren's father by the minions of Morgoth. Beren, a mortal man, becomes distraught to the point that everything evil flees at his destructive presence, even though Morgoth wants him destroyed. After years of wandering, Beren meets the elf Lúthien. Her immortal beauty is more than he could have ever imagined, and he falls in love with her. Thingol, her father, rejects Beren as a suitor at first, but then he concocts a way to destroy Beren. If Beren can obtain one of the Silmarils, legendary gems which are the greatest things forged by elves, he says, then Beren can have Lúthien. Thus, Beren sets out to find a Silmaril, all three of which are contained in the crown of Morgoth. After Beren departs, Thingol imprisons his daughter to prevent her from aiding Beren. She escapes twice, through her own magic first and then by the aid of Huan, the great hound, after Huan's masters capture her and attempt to return her to Thingol for a reward. Lúthien and Huan journey to catch up with Beren. After a conflict with Sauron, a major servant of Morgoth, they make it to the fortress of Morgoth (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 162-79).

Here Beren and Lúthien wrest a Silmaril from the crown of Morgoth, but on their way out they are confronted by Carcharoth, the greatest of werewolves. This monster bites the hand of Beren off, the hand that held the Silmaril. The presence of the gem within Carcharoth's belly drives him mad, and he goes on a rampage (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 180-83).

Beren and Lúthien return to Thingol, who now has more respect for Beren but still refuses to give up his daughter. The last adventure involves the hunt of Carcharoth. The Silmaril is ultimately recovered at grave costs to Beren, and Lúthien chooses mortality to be with him as long as she can (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 183-87). This choice is just one of many that come from the story. It represents characters who have been given free will by their author: they act on their free will based on circumstances involving space and time.

Chapter 1

J. R. R. Tolkien on Myth and Authorship

In addition to writing a good deal of fiction, J. R. R. Tolkien also commented

frequently on literature. His comments illuminate what he thought about the writing

process and the origin of creativity. These thoughts often came in the form of letters to

friends and family. However, Tolkien also composed two major works discussing

literature. These are the essay "On Fairy Stories" (originally delivered as a lecture in

1938) and his lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, given in 1936. These works

will be the guiding sources for this chapter. They show that his idea of mythology is

bound up with the idea of authorship.

Tolkien warns in his lecture on *Beowulf* that "the significance of a myth is not

easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning" (12). The caution he displays in this

concern may seem excessive at first. Certainly, myth can be understood by the modern

mind. This mind has brought all the brilliant advances of science. It should be able

comprehend what looks to be primitive. The assumption made here is a mistake, though.

What Tolkien points out is where the mind ought to be. In other words, myth is too grand

to be known by the mind alone. Myth must be understood with everything a person has.

Thus, the reality of the myth will elude anyone who comes at it with the deficient

perspective of only the mind. Tolkien goes on to argue against poetry being interpreted

purely from a historical perspective. This concern manifests itself in the development of

Beowulf criticism. Tolkien argues that the epic cannot be seen from a purely factual

standpoint but must be encountered as poetry (3). He does not disparage history but

rather poetry mined as if it was only history. This argument becomes significant, guarding against criticism that fails to see Tolkien's work in the proper light.

The fallacy could be considered in terms of genre. Tolkien wrote fantasy, and he did so in the twentieth century. Historical fiction lies outside of the question. Yes, the First World War had an intense influence on him (Croft 18). World War I served to break any hesitation on writing. If a person thought he would die the next day, he wrote his heart out, whether it was a letter to family or friends, a poem lamenting the war, or in Tolkien's case a prose description of the battle turned into fantasy literature. Surely, World War I haunted him, but not in a realistic way.

In comparing him to some of his contemporaries, Janet Croft says that World War I allowed him "to write as meaningful commentary on the war as Graves or Sassoon did" (24). This judgment displaces the writer's intention, though. Tolkien may have started as a young writer in the trenches, but he hardly stayed there. The comparison remains unhelpful, as Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon are too different. These men all went through the war and had similar experiences. However, their writing stands far apart.

Tolkien has nationalistic tendencies within his mythology. In his letter to Milton Waldman (most likely written in 1951), he describes how he would write a great mythology and dedicate it to England (Carpenter and Tolkien 144). He descried England as being barren of anything as grand as myth and longed to solve the problem. This longing remained his intent throughout his life. Furthermore, *The Silmarillion* is how he attempted to create that myth. His intentions were dismissive of what had already been written and proud of what he thought he could do, but they helped him drive towards his goal. Furthermore, this letter to Waldman has become a standard way to interpret *The*

Silmarillion. It appears as a kind of introduction to any edition after the first edition of the book. In other words, *The Silmarillion* and Tolkien's letter have become integral to each other.

It would be better to understand how Tolkien transformed his thoughts about World War I into his fiction. In a letter dated 6 May 1944 to his son Christopher, Tolkien offered some advice on writing. The letter states that "I sense amongst all your pains (some merely physical) the desire to express your *feeling* about good, evil, fair, foul in some way: to rationalize it, and prevent it just festering" (Carpenter and Tolkien 78). This letter was written in 1944, well into World War II for England. Christopher Tolkien likely felt many feelings that his father experienced during this time. Tolkien presents his son with his method of dealing with the war: to write about it, to vent all the ways war works on the emotions and breaks individuals in many ways. Thus, writing for Tolkien is personal. He does not necessarily weave autobiography into everything he writes, but the author remains important for the work.

Tolkien speaks of "transforming experience into another form and symbol with Morgoth and Orcs and the Eldalie (representing beauty and grace and artefact)" in a letter dated 10 June 1944 (Carpenter and Tolkien 85). The author gives order to experience. The ugliness of life can be transformed by the work of the writer. In other words, Tolkien meant for the purpose of the author to be active. This intent contrasts with the view of Roland Barthes, which will be handled later. However, how Tolkien advances this idea remains to be seen. The assumption of authorial control is under attack in postmodern society, and deserves a defense from his perspective.

First of all, it must be admitted that *The Silmarillion* had a fluid composition (Crabbe 113). More specifically, it "evolved as he and the world outside his imagination evolved" (Crabbe 113). This statement shows that *The Silmarillion* functions without a linear construction of narrative but as a collection of tales building off of each other (Crabbe 113). This evidence allows for "Of Beren and Lúthien" to be treated as a separate entity of fiction, but it also shows that the work grew with the author and his intentions. In other words, the author's intentions are subject to change.

Overall, Tolkien's theory of authorship did not change as much as his fiction did. In an important letter (once again, likely written in 1951) to Milton Waldman, a publisher competing for the rights for his works, Tolkien explores some of the central themes of his writing, including the author. He says that the author can become excited in speaking of "what (he thinks) he means or is trying to represent by it all" (Carpenter and Tolkien 143). Thus, there is an ambivalence, an uncertainty, concerning if the writer can explain what he has put into art. Fiction supersedes what the author wants to say critically.

One of the more fascinating of his pronouncements discusses the use of allegory. Tolkien has many popular interpreters who attempt to symbolize what he has to say and connect it with some event or person from the past or present to satisfy that interpreter. This method fails by his own words: "I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional allegory – yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language" (Carpenter and Tolkien 145). He switches the role of description, so to speak. Where his fiction is often traditionally thought to be the place of allegory, Tolkien makes criticism the primary holder of interpretation.

This reversal significantly changes the understanding of fiction and criticism. In other words, his interpretation makes fiction the primary cause, and criticism something that can result from that cause. Traditionally, allegorical fiction is the lens to see the world. There is no point to allegory but what it points to. Now, under Tolkien's understanding, criticism can only point to fiction, not the other way around.

In terms of creativity, Tolkien connects man's artistic pursuits with the Fall. He speaks of how man is a sub-creator after the Fall. In Tolkien's letter to Waldman, he describes "mortality, especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say, sub-creative) desire which seems to have no biological function, with which, in our world, it is indeed usually at strife" where art serves without pragmatic purpose (Carpenter and Tolkien 145). This statement needs some unpacking. First of all, "the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation" (Carpenter and Tolkien 145). In other words, man has a natural desire to tell stories. This desire represents an attempt at control. The storyteller orders the fiction, not the other way around. Second, death perpetually causes the development of fiction. People oftentimes write stories to be remembered. They want their own personal life not to be forgotten. Finally, all creativity stems from and works under God. It imitates God. This event happens because, according to Tolkien as well as any other Catholic in his time, man is created in the image of God. As such, man too desires to create. Thus, creativity is inherently theological for Tolkien.

These ideas work together to combine the idea of authorship with the vision of mythology. In the simplest terms, the mythology cannot exist without the author. The process works like cause and effect. Also, Tolkien takes the Bible story of creation and applies it to his situation as a writer. He does not usurp God; he acts like God as the

Creator meant him to. This inherent tendency allows the author to express the reality around him. Furthermore, criticism stands at a distance from fiction. One consists of a higher order of creation than the other.

In "Of Fairy Stories" Tolkien speaks of his own experience with the genre and says that "fairy-stories were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability" (63). This statement connects "Of Beren and Lúthien" with Tolkien's life. He met Edith Bratt, his future wife, under difficult circumstances, and it would be years before they could marry. Furthermore, their marriage was not the easiest: it weathered World War II and two difficult pregnancies. Once again, the autobiographical element should not be stressed excessively, but it remains an element of the story. Autobiography is a way of giving order to experience, and Tolkien took hold of this chance. However, he let his characters live independently of himself.

Chapter 2

Roland Barthes on Myth and Authorship

At first glance, this chapter may seem out of place. J. R. R. Tolkien and Roland Barthes had little to nothing to do with each other even though their lives spanned the twentieth century. Tolkien lived from 1892 to 1973, and Barthes lived from 1915 to 1980. However, the point of this chapter is to bring a potentially fresh perspective to the writings of Tolkien. It will be argued that Barthes has important things to say for understanding "Of Beren and Lúthien." Like Tolkien's, Barthes's ideas of mythology and authorship are bound together.

In popular language, it is easy to disown something as false by referring to it as myth. Someone may say that a point in history is myth to disown what that historical moment stands for. Removing this prejudice helps to see the potency in myth for Barthes. Susan Sontag explains his perspective:

> Of course, "myth" doesn't mean that a concept (or argument or narrative)
>
> is false. Myths are not descriptions but rather models for description (or
>
> thinking) – according to the formula of Lévi-Strauss logical techniques for
>
> resolving basic antinomies in thought and social existence. (xx)

This quote richly answers the disownment of myth as useless. It contains echoes of Tolkien's ideas regarding allegory. Or more properly, the ideas resemble those of Tolkien. The two did not influence each other, either by writing or in person. However, these ideas pave the way for understanding "Of Beren and Lúthien" in mythological terms. Space and time are those unresolved antinomies in thought. They form structures by which people can interpret the world. A myth allows someone to have peace about an

event. Imagine an ancient primitive man who has just had his crops destroyed by a flood. He might seek understanding in his tragedy by resorting to a god who controls floods. Thus, myths are a built-in reaction to the world. More subtly, though, these ideas also concern the author and how he thinks through space and time. Whether it is Tolkien or Barthes, they are using myth as a reaction to the world around them. Tolkien creates a fictional topography replete with various people. This topography, known as Middle-earth, helps him to make sense of the world. Middle-earth is modeled on reality as man is created in the image of God, as Tolkien, a strong Catholic, would uphold. Barthes takes a different approach. He looks for the structure that is already there and ironizes it. He takes what should be grand themes and applies that thinking to trivial aspects of life.

Already there are severe splits between how Tolkien would approach a myth and how Barthes would do the same. They are looking at the twentieth century but with completely different eyes. What unites them is not a method, but a concern. This concern manifests itself in the question: can man have a meaningful existence? Much of what Tolkien writes basically follows a tragic mode. There may be a triumph, but it always comes at a cost. "Of Beren and Lúthien" exemplifies this theme with its insistence upon mortality.

Barthes, writing in the different genre that he did (essay), takes this question (can man have a meaningful existence) and applies his thought to it as a mathematician would to a problem. The goal is not to dramatize the issue but to provide a solution. What looms large for both of these writers is the idea of authorship. Writing is a way of responding and creating order where there seems to be none. Thus, the question becomes sharpened: what way does an author provide meaningful existence for man?

The primary work in which Barthes discusses the role of the author is "The Death of the Author," published in 1968. The essay comes from the collection *Image / Music / Text*. Here he declares that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 148). He says this for good reasons, but how does Barthes come to this conclusion? Do not think that this pronouncement is simply nihilistic. Barthes recognizes that meaning is necessary, and he wants to recreate how people formally read texts. The modern idea of the author has distorted how understanding a text can be accomplished, according to Barthes. This conclusion comes from the combined ideas of history and linguistics.

First, he gives the argument from history. The idea here is that

the author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the "human person." (Barthes 143)

In this first argument, the rise of the author is seen from the vantage point of history. Barthes argues that as it has not always been so, neither will it always be. In other words, the author has not always existed and will someday cease to exist. The author functions as a modern celebration of the individual. Once society no longer needs the individual, then the author will not be needed as well.

The second argument comes from the field of linguistics. Language speaks for itself. When the author speaks for language, he, in essence, says nothing. In "The Death of the Author," Barthes writes of how "it is language which speaks, not the author" (143). A person is not his own language, because it exists outside of him. It has lived before

him, and it will continue to live on after his death. In "The Death of the Author," our idea of the author can never be anything but words, or "linguistically, the author is never more than the instance of writing" (Barthes 145). For example, someone can read the works of Tolkien, but can that person know the mind of Tolkien? Is that not a superfluous question to begin with? Now that history has taken its course, Tolkien's writing exists independently of the man. There is no reason to know the man if his works are no interest in the first place.

These two arguments are used to leverage the reader into believing that the idea of authorship should be given up. The first fear someone may have regarding this loss of authorship is that it leads to no coherent message from the text. With the author, a text can mean something; without the author, a text can mean anything a reader needs it to mean, leading to a dizzying number of possible interpretations. According to Barthes, this loss of the author can only lead to good things, though. The "removal of the Author . . . utterly transforms the modern text" and allows meaning to be generated by the reader (Barthes 145). In other words, the idea of the author is too limiting for the time of the twentieth century. Authorship creates a sort of debilitating reliance.

The death of literary concepts is prominent in Barthes's works. In his first book *Writing Degree Zero* (originally published in 1953), he says that "literature is like phosphorus: it shines with its maximum brilliance when it attempts to die" (Barthes 38). These deaths are a way of resolving theoretical issues for Barthes. If something dies, then it can be replaced by something better. This pattern also serves the purpose of giving structure to experience. It may not be comforting to know that one's self will die one day, but it gives sanity by certainty.

How does this death of the author work for Tolkien's theory, though? For him, without the author, there would be no myth. He came into a world that needed structure. However, for Barthes, mythology breeds on this loss of authorship because he came into a world in which he already saw underlying structures. Trying to regulate order to one person would be nonsense. In his next work to be surveyed, Barthes takes a look at mythology, showing how it permeates modern life. Or as he thinks, mythology is the mundane in contemporary life.

In his book *Mythologies* (which was published in 1957), Barthes criticizes what he thinks is false and superficial in the society around him. This book is a collection of essays where he falls back on the idea of criticizing something as myth, but he does so with a twist. He says that "my claim is too live to the full contradiction of my time, which came make sarcasm the condition of truth" (Barthes xii). Imagine a conversation. A person's tone of voice gives just as much meaning to what is said as the dictionary definition agreed upon prior to the statement. Thus, while he seeks to demolish one perspective on the basis of being myth, he erects his own mythology. This mythology contains an ambivalent acceptance. Barthes wants the order of truth, but he realizes that the world he lives in only allows him to reach that point with a twist.

One of his mythologies is that of the actor. In an essay from *Mythologies* called "The Harcourt Actor," he discusses the role photography plays in building up the persona of the actor. There are two worlds for this actor. Onstage, he is "well built, bony, fleshy, thick-skinned under the greasepaint," but outside of that, he is "smooth sleek pumiced by the grace, and aerated by the Harcourt Studios glow" (Barthes 15). Thus, the actor is not the same in all places. He changes the image of himself by where he stands. Personal

identity is bound up in this phenomenon. A person must maintain his or her identity throughout different contradictions.

This function of the actor parallels that of kings from another essay known as "The 'Blue Blood' Cruise," where vacations cause another change in character: "the cruise of so many blue bloods afforded a diverting variation: kings playing at being men" (Barthes 26). These kings long to be the people that they are not. They fulfill this longing by changing where they are: the change in locale leads to a change in character. They do not do this of free will, though. These actions come from vacant desire. The royalty pictured in this essay are objects for the eyes. They long to be ordinary people, but the ordinary people will not allow them to be understood that way. The kings change themselves only to remain the same in their subjects' eyes.

There is also a sense of how time changes people in *Mythologies*. In an essay entitled "Conjugals," "the young spouses are here presented in the postnuptial phase of their union" (Barthes 45). People alter from the time they are single to the time they are married and beyond. Marriage can also be understood solely in terms of the future. Here "as for the marriage of the stars, it is presented chiefly under its aspects of futurity," not past or present (Barthes 46). Marriage, like the people involved in it, can be understood from different elements of time. These elements include past, present, and future to encapsulate the whole person. However, the myth as Barthes sees it distorts time by only looking at one aspect of time, the future, taking part of the person away.

As such, "Of Beren and Lúthien" will have to be understood in the fullness of space and time. As a myth, the story cannot be false. It is not a logical proposition that can be tested for truth value. Furthermore, the author has the liberty of being absent.

Tolkien's theory does not demand that authorship be excluded from the text, but it also does not necessitate the identity of the author to understand the text fully. From here on out, privilege will be given to the story itself. The author must make way to make sense of the story for the reader. Now the reader can allow the characters to unfold within the story and make a world out of space and time.

Chapter 3

Space in "Of Beren and Lúthien"

Space is a place of change and continuity in "Of Beren and Lúthien." Places like the forest are often seen in a good light, while other areas like Angband, the fortress of the dark lord known as Morgoth, are always evil and grim in nature. Throughout these geographic settings, people change or stay the same according to who they were previously and how they choose to alter themselves.

There is a preliminary observation to be made before handling the text itself. Brian Attebery states that "Tolkien's story requires as much active collaboration from the reader as any experimental novel, for it asks our continuous assent to what we know to be impossible" (22). One of the reasons Attebery argues this point is that he wants to bolster the general perception of fantasy literature. However, there remains the pragmatic side of his argument. Nothing to come in "Of Beren and Lúthien" could fit in a realistic novel. The internal mechanisms of fantasy literature are as distinct from other styles of writing as epics are to dramas. Considered with the previous ideas of authorship given by Tolkien and Barthes, this seems to be a good middle ground. The reader does not compete with the author; they work together to form a new whole.

To see this new whole, Beren as a character will be analyzed first. He represents the main human of the story. His mortality identifies him in a world full of immortals. Furthermore, he falls in love with the immortal elf Lúthien. This event causes grief to her father, who has no regard for those who will perish by years alone. In other words, he hates those who are not immortal. Her father, Thingol, addresses Beren with these words: "unhappy mortal, and for what cause have you left your own land to enter this, which is

forbidden to such as you" (Tolkien 166). Beren's defining feature causes the grief present throughout the story.

Humans have no choice in their mortality unlike elves, who can choose to go from one to the other. In other words, an elf can accept mortality but a human cannot ever accept immortality. This state of being locked in, so to speak, gives humans a hunger for long life. Humans fear death, and they fear the immemorial nature of death. They cannot linger as the elves do, creating envy and forging desire. This hunger might be part of the reason that Beren originally falls in love with Lúthien. Yes, there is her beauty, but her beauty takes the form of everything Beren lacks. This absence comes in the form of early tragedy for him.

His beginning is wrapped up in sorrow. While Beren goes away on a scouting mission, his father's company is assaulted and destroyed (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 163). This event leads to his personal pain, and the cause begins in space. If Beren had been with the camp, he could have helped defend it. Or he could have died by the sword in a noble way. Instead, he struggles with survivor's guilt. The absence that was meant to be brief and only extended by place becomes an absence in his heart. That space knows no bounds in terms of misery.

As a result, Beren "buried his father's bones, and raised a cairn of boulders above him, and swore upon it an oath of vengeance" (Tolkien 163). He cannot rest until the oath is fulfilled. Furthermore, this act gives pain a place that can embody it. Beren has to move on in space because his heart refuses to move on. This restlessness represents itself in travel: "thereafter for four years more Beren wandered still upon Dorthonion, a solitary outlaw" (Tolkien 164). His wandering encompasses time as well. The two serve to dig

into his heart even more thoroughly the pain he has experienced. Tolkien had his fair share of pain throughout life as anyone ever has. His writing takes into account human suffering as a major theme, but what is the reader to make of this problem?

There are a few ways of engaging a story. These ways can be seen as the basic viewpoints that are provided by a text: first person, second person, and third person. From biographical information, it is known that Tolkien wrote the "Of Beren and Lúthien" from a first-person perspective for himself, but for everyone else who comes to the story, they must see it from a third-person perspective. These are rival views essentially, because Tolkien should see his story differently from someone who just picks up *The Silmarillion* in the bookstore. He has many of the facts behind why "Of Beren and Lúthien" was written, at least in terms of his life. However, the reader should not feel the necessity to know Tolkien's life to experience his work. These angles should not be reconciled; the phenomenon creates a paradox of authority that has to be negotiated but not finalized.

A text cannot maintain meaning without tension, even a story. This problem can be seen as easily as asking the trite question "what is the story about?" When someone answers that question, what is important is not the finality of the answer but its stability. If someone thinks that the final say has been given on a text, then he or she can be shown wrong simply because a new interpretation will arise in a later generation. The idea of stability works in a different way. The stability of an interpretation of a story involves a growth of ideas external to the story. No one refers to a dictionary alone to understand a word. Rather, people reference other people, reality, and their perception of reality to understand what is being said in a conversation. Suppose someone describes a wall as

white. The richness of the "word" white lies not in one strict sense of the wall being white, but the word's ability to encompass all shades in reference to white.

One example of this kind of thinking can be seen in the concept of love portrayed "Of Beren and Lúthien." Not until Beren meets Lúthien does he begin to recover from his guilt. He finds her dancing in the woods during summer (Tolkien 165). The vision she inspires in him is one of complete love. Her immortal beauty outdoes anything he has ever seen. However, not until near "the eve of spring" where "Lúthien danced upon a green hill" can Beren approach her (Tolkien 165). They are frequently separated in spatial relations. He cannot keep up with her, but when they meet, they both change. Tolkien writes of how "in his fate Lúthien was caught, and being immortal she shared in his mortality, and being free received his chain" (165-66). The description pictures prisoners bound together in the tightest relationship. More than that, what if all Beren saw of her was her hair? If that was all he thought about and talked about, he would miss other aspects of her identity. Because identity is a multiplicity, loving one side of a person is inadequate. Beren could say that he loves Lúthien, and the richness of that idea is not its singularity alone, nor its multiplicity. The singularity refers to Lúthien as a whole person; multiplicity gives the sense of every aspect of her person. To love a text is to balance these two views in tension.

Another way tension enters the text comes in Lúthien's sense of space, which can be both restricting and filled with freedom. During Beren's quest to obtain a Silmaril (this adventure is to satisfy Thingol and convince him to allow Beren to marry Lúthien), he becomes trapped by Sauron, the servant of Morgoth (Tolkien 172). At this time, "a weight of horror came upon Lúthien's heart," causing her to seek him (Tolkien 172).

Thingol refuses to allow his daughter to go into the hands of the enemy just to pursue a lover he already does not approve of. Thus, Thingol builds a house to trap his daughter (Tolkien 172). This space represents love in contradictory ways. First, the love of Lúthien is not changed by her imprisonment. She still desires Beren, longing to be with him. Second, this space represents the persistence of Thingol and his unwillingness to allow his immortal daughter to love a mortal.

The space of the wooden house in the tree has no meaning. It is something that can be overcome by elvish art, for "Lúthien put forth her arts of enchantment, and caused her hair to grow to great length, and of it she wove a dark robe that wrapped her in beauty like shadow" (Tolkien 172). Her hair allows her to escape, as it is bound up with magic that causes sleep, and she eludes the guards. Thus, this space only reinforces what was already present in both characters, Lúthien and Thingol. As an environment, the house cannot hinder as it was meant to do.

A more potent space lies in the more subtle world of roads. These are everywhere in Tolkien's fiction, and they represent choices and dilemmas (Tolkien 177). People change on them inevitably. However, the change occurs from the beginning of the story to the end. One must survey the story in its entirety to grasp the change. Thus, when Beren makes his first appearance in his tale, he is broken by battle and evil lands, full of foul creatures (Tolkien 163-64). By the end of the story, Lúthien fully forsakes her mortality to live the rest of her life with Beren (Tolkien 187). Nothing is mentioned about Beren's emotional state at the time of the closing of the tale. In fact, they must live "without certitude of life or joy" (Tolkien 187). However, he has the light of his eyes, Lúthien. Her challenge comes at this point: "this doom she chose, forsaking the Blessed

Realm, and putting aside all claim to kinship with those who dwell there" (Tolkien 187).

Her complete altering comes now. She goes from the immortal to the mortal, all for her

love of one man. This alteration does not come immediately, though. It happens by the

long roads they go on together as man and woman.

Chapter 4

Time in "Of Beren and Lúthien"

Like space examined before, time changes some people and does not alter others

in Tolkien's fiction. However, unlike space, there is a limited sense of different times.

One may draw a map of the world and present many different features. These elements

could include mountains, seas, and deserts. Time only exists in the past, present, and

future. These three aspects force people either to change or stay the way they intend to

be. This continuing struggle lets the text maintain itself as a whole, while there are many

subcomponents to what happens within the text.

One of the ways time manifests itself in "Of Beren and Lúthien" is in the

character Huan. He is a hound from the Blessed Realm and has the intelligence of any

man. Also, he has the capacity to speak, but only in important moments of the narrative.

He lives by decrees; that is, he functions in the present aware of what the future holds by

certain unexplained prophecies. For example, "it was decreed that he should meet death,

but not until he encountered the mightiest wolf that ever walked the world" (Tolkien

173). Being from the Blessed Realm originally, Huan should not have to deal with what

death holds for mortals, but for some strange reason the narrative is designed so that his

mortality will be a major factor.

This is perhaps the greatest problem in "Of Beren and Lúthien." If elves and those

like Huan are meant to be immortal, and humans have the gift of mortality, then why do

the immortals ever have to experience death by combat? In other words, where does

immortality begin and end? What sustains elves through endless years but cannot bring

them through a battle? This flaw is an incoherency that cannot be resolved. The ability to

perceive this problem is a gift of the reader. The author may have never noticed this issue or cared about it, but a reader's ability to see it gives evidence to the practicality of this idea of middle ground between the author and the reader. An author can never anticipate every question from his or her critics. What remains more important is that there are questions. The easiest way to know that a work of art is good is to see if people argue over it. Misinterpretation comes and goes, but if interpretation remains, then the story stands on its own strength between author and reader.

To pick up back on the thread of Huan, other characters know of the proclaimed fate for him: "now Sauron knew well, as did all in that land, the fate that was decreed for the hound of Valinor" (Tolkien 175). Sauron sends out several creatures to stop Lúthien and Huan from entering his abode. Each fails, and Sauron decides to come himself as a werewolf (Tolkien 174-75). However, Sauron misinterpreted the decree and suffers defeat. His ability to change physical shape does not expedite the decree. Going back to the general theory of this thesis, Sauron acts as any bad reader might. He attempts to accelerate arbitrary decrees, and this problem resembles a reader who thinks he or she has the facts of the text. However, literary texts do not present facts; they offer music and stories for enjoyment. Going back to the idea of white being both itself and its shades, the text can only be itself. The shades of meaning within a text can elude characters within the text, a particular reader, or the author. However, they remain there nonetheless because another reader my come along and see the text from a different angle.

This angle that contradicts Sauron does not come until many adventures later when Huan encounters Carcharoth, a true and fearsome werewolf from Morgoth, the evil king over Sauron. Here he finds death as the poison from Carcharoth seeps into his veins

(Tolkien 186). This event also allows Huan to speak for the third time. Another decree was made that Huan could only speak three times in his life. Tolkien writes that "he comprehended the speech of all things with voice; but it was permitted thrice only ere his death to speak with words" (173). Once again, Huan lives in the present, but he continually anticipates the future by certain unexplained decrees made in the past.

Throughout all of this Huan remains a noble creature, persistent in all his ways. He does not falter like many would do in grave battle. In other words, "Huan was of true heart" (Tolkien 173). This element remains his character even in dark times. However, that is not the case with many characters in "Of Beren and Lúthien." The title characters suffer loss frequently. Midway through the story, Tolkien writes that "their love was less than before" (176). Thus, what was early bliss becomes challenged by the hardships of the world, especially Thingol's demand that Beren bring a Silmaril to him to allow the marriage between Beren and Lúthien to be legitimate.

Finally, the person most affected by time ironically turns out to be Lúthien. With Huan, the reader is aware of what is decreed for him despite his noble lineage. Beren comes from the race of man, and he will naturally fall to the power of the years. Lúthien chooses mortality, though (Tolkien 187). She goes from what she has always known, the great beauty of elves that never fades, to the world of men. Her choice ultimately means good for *The Silmarillion* as a whole. Tolkien ends his story on a note mixed with grief and wonder: "yet in her choice the Two Kindreds have been joined; and she is the forerunner of many in whom the Eldar see yet, though all the world is changed, the likeness of Lúthien the beloved, whom they have lost" (187).

In losing her immortal elvish beauty, she gained something different. Her offspring brought more beauty into the world. This would not have happened without the change that time brought upon her. In wrapping up the discussion of the different elements in "Of Beren and Lúthien," one could ask a simple question of expectation. What does the reader expect from Lúthien? Is that different from another reader or the author's expectations? It certainly contradicts a reader's interpretation if the logic of elves remaining immortal should be held up. However, that does not seem to have been a problem for Tolkien. Furthermore, it does not destroy the text with any finality. If Lúthien could not suffer through time, then the emotional appeal of the story as one of love and loss would be lost on the reader.

Conclusion

Thus, the development of characters can take on a couple of different meanings. First, a person may change his or her outward appearance, mind, or something else. Second, a character may or may not maintain those traits throughout the story. The change or lack thereof depends on the person but also the metaphysics of mythology.

This mythological metaphysics represents itself by space and time. Space serves as a place of change and continuity, and time becomes the reference point in another element for that alteration or immutability. People ultimately make choices, frequently represented by roads in Tolkien's fiction. These roads allow people to realize who they are in the world.

However, these concepts cannot be reached easily without reference to Tolkien's theories of authorship and mythology. These two ideas are entwined, and as Tolkien thought that he created because his Creator made him, his characters follow his path. "Of Beren and Lúthien" represents his own difficult journey with his wife. The fiction is fantasy, and not purely autobiographical. Yet he poured his feelings and thoughts into the story to make people who lived and suffered (even with some joy along the way) as he did. They do so in reference to space and time.

Finally, all of these things build up to a way of understanding the relation between the author and the reader. Describing Middle-earth as middle ground does not mean a total lack of absolutes, nor does it mean a single absolute. In other words, the author both has and lacks the final say in his creative work. To give one final example, creative writing is like the invention of the light bulb. When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, he surely had his own ideas about its use by other people, its function as a

technology, and the future of this kind of mechanism. The fact that light bulbs have served good purposes does not negate their abuse. To carry the example just a little bit further, a man can use the light in his room from this technology for good purposes: he can compose music by this light. On the other hand, he could abuse this technology by using the light to count drugs for selling. Both instances are likely beyond the scope of Edison's original intent, but one is clearly good and the other bad. Both involve free will. What Tolkien has done in his fiction as well as his critical writing is that he allowed for the ability of the reader to negotiate with the author by opening up that possibility of free will in the characters as well as the reader.

Appendix

This appendix serves the purpose of making this thesis resemble, however remotely, Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. A full-scale explanation of each picture will not be given. Instead, they are for the reader's contemplation. Some of the pictures may reveal direct relevance to what has been argued here; others may take more thinking or even research. In the end, the goal is not to leave the reader with any definitive answer. Otherwise, these pictures would have been incorporated throughout the thesis and expounded upon accordingly. No, their purpose gives another dimension to the life of J. R. R. Tolkien, to leave behind questions.

Inside Merton College

Merton College Tree

The Trout Inn

The Tolkien Grave 1

The Tolkien Grave 2

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