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## Building Middle-earth: an Exploration into the uses of Architecture in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien

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# Building Middle-earth: an Exploration into the uses of Architecture in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien

## **Cover Page Footnote**

I would like to thank Dr Matthew Townend for all his comments and suggestions which helped shape this piece, and for the module he taught on Tolkien which showed me that Tolkien could be as academic as Proust. I would also like to thank my mother and father who gave up much of their time reading my many drafts.

A general overview of architecture has not been a singular discussion of Tolkien studies before, but scholars such as Dimitra Fimi have recognised it as part of the material culture in Middle-earth. Others, like Michael Drout and Karl Kinsella, have looked at particular aspects of architecture, such as ruins or the influence of the Arts & Crafts Movement, respectively. There has been a general consensus among Tolkien scholars that certain peoples in Middle-earth are predominantly based on inspirations from historical periods and cultures, such as the Romans and Gondorians<sup>1</sup>, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian influences on the Rohirrim<sup>2</sup>, and a Celtic air to the elves<sup>3</sup>. What has not necessarily been examined in these studies is how architecture shapes the inhabitants', and readers', experience of Middle-earth. Architecture is used as a means of introducing Middle-earth and its inhabitants, relating the unfamiliar to the reader in recognisable terms. Architecture is culturally loaded and Tolkien appears to draw on this, using their architectural choices to help express the different principles of Middle-earth's races. Architectural theory and philosophy can be applied to Middle-earth to help unearth Tolkien's environmental anxieties, as well as suggest his resolutions for them. As this journey through Middle-earth will show, architecture actually echoes one of the resounding messages of *The Lord of the Rings*, that of heterogeneity and homogeneity.

*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (abbreviated to *TH* and *LotR*) are the primary texts used to locate this exploration of architecture in Tolkien's fantasy world. Despite its absence as a term in *TH*, 'Middle-earth' best covers the range of regions that Tolkien presents and, though he develops and expands this world in *LotR*, the locations discussed in *TH* have not been altered in Tolkien's revisions. Though *The Silmarillion* is an enlightening text as a historical guide to Middle-earth, it has a tendency to be general in its description of architecture (barring that of Gondolin) and consequently will be used to explain origins and illuminate the critical discussion. Earlier drafts of the primary texts, and annotations by Christopher Tolkien<sup>4</sup>, will be referred to in order to follow Tolkien's creative process regarding architecture. While desirable, it would be on the whole a rather ambitious task to take on all architecture in Middle-earth, which is why this essay will focus on the works of the hobbits, men and elves.

In his lecture 'Gothic Architecture', William Morris describes architecture as "the art of ornamental building" (475) but Jonathan Hale believes architecture is "a cultural, not merely technical, activity" (47). Though seemingly opposed to each other, what these opinions really highlight is that architecture and culture are in a conflict to define each other. While people may design and construct buildings, in turn, the buildings become integral in a society's perception of itself and its history. By observing such aspects as material choice, location, and purpose, architecture gives an indication of the development of a culture, its principles and temperament. In this interpretation, architecture also includes interior design, such as decor and furnishings, because Tolkien often richly describes these and they contribute to the atmospheric quality and cultural tone of his buildings.

Tolkien's theory of 'sub-creation' is also worth exploring in relation to architecture. In his lecture 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien quarrels with the presumption that fairy-tales require the 'suspension of disbelief'. Instead, Tolkien believed the

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Shippey's essay 'Goths and Romans', and Judy Ann Ford, have both explored this subject.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne G. Hammond & Christina Scull's *A Reader's Companion*, Shippey's *Author of the Century* and Marjorie Burns have all researched these historical sources as thematic inspirations for Tolkien.

<sup>3</sup> Marjorie Burns also deals with this topic in her book.

<sup>4</sup> Differentiated from his father with 'C. Tolkien'.

story-maker “makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside” (*Tree & Leaf* 36). He calls this art ‘Fantasy’ or ‘Enchantment’, and acknowledges the difficulty that lies in the process of sub-creation: “‘the inner consistency of reality’ is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World” (*Tree & Leaf* 45). The feeling of realism in Middle-earth lies in Tolkien’s ability to balance fantasy and reality, and architecture is a facet of this sub-creative process. We recognise immediately that buildings are buildings but such features as the underground nature of hobbit holes inform the reader this is not a building from the ‘Primary world’. Tolkien’s theory relies on blurring worlds and recognition of this assimilation, in order for the reader to interpret what is in Middle-earth from knowledge of their own world. Given Tolkien’s own admittance on the emphasis that ‘sub-creation’ should play in creating a fantasy world, an extended exploration of architecture will reveal how architecture shapes the characters’, and readers’, journey.

## I

Bag End is the reader’s first glimpse of Middle-earth and their first encounter with hobbits. The first lines of *TH* give, through architecture, an important feature of hobbit culture: they live “in...hole[s] in the ground” (3), with the historical reason finally revealed in the prologue of *LotR*. Tolkien’s philological interpretation of ‘hobbit’ suggests how deeply ingrained the hole is within hobbit culture, referring in Appendix F of *LotR* to the linguistic parallel with the Rohirric “*holbylta* ‘hole-builder’” (1104). This desire to hide in holes is perhaps linked to the secretive nature of hobbits, who have the “art of disappearing swiftly and silently” (*LotR* 1). Tolkien makes evident part of this gift is due to hobbits’ “close friendship with the earth” (*LotR* 1), and this is present in their architecture. Hobbit-holes blur the boundaries between natural and man-made, embodying the “rejected ...modern... assumption that civilization is ... built *on top of* the natural world” (Chester Scoville 98, italics mine), for hobbits could certainly be ranked highly on the list of civilised species in Middle-earth. In his essay on hobbit-holes, Karl Kinsella (2013) discusses how Shire architecture shares the ethos of the Arts and Crafts Movement, as “the landscape has become an integral part of the architecture, being essentially indistinguishable from the surrounding environment” (96), showing the architect’s empathy with nature. While originally “all Hobbits...lived in holes” (*LotR* 6), in drafts of the *LotR*, Tolkien discusses how hobbits living near “no good hills or convenient banks...began making artificial holes of mud (and later of brick)” (Tolkien, *Return* 92). These “new-fashioned brick houses” are described as “naked” with “no decent turf-covering” (Tolkien, *Return* 92), showing nature is integral to hobbit architecture. Homes underground and houses “roofed with thatch in imitation of natural grass” (Tolkien, *Return* 92) help to blend constructions into the local setting. Even when hobbits can no longer live a subterranean life, they construct homes that align with nature.

As general characteristics of hobbits can be interpreted from architecture, the same technique can be applied to individuals. Bag End could be considered an ‘Arts and Crafts’ home, for alongside its integration within the natural landscape, the “panelled walls”, the “tile[s]” and “carpet” (*TH* 3) are all examples of craftsmanship

that Morris and Co.<sup>5</sup> might have produced. What is also obvious from Tolkien's description is how the cultural representation and rooms in Bag End indicate Bilbo's middle-class status. Kinsella's remark, that "hobbits associate the hole...with their historical character, but one which may only be adopted by those with certain economic classes" (91), is supported by the Prologue to *LotR*. Bag End's location atop The Hill, as seen in Tolkien's sketches<sup>6</sup>, demonstrates a physical and social elevation above other hole-owners as "suitable sites for these large and ramifying tunnels...were not everywhere to be found" (*LotR* 6) meaning only the wealthy could own a home like Bilbo's. "Only the richest and poorest" continued hole-dwelling, the poor living in "burrows of the most primitive kind...with only one window or none" (*LotR* 6). The "best rooms" in Bilbo's hole have "deep-set round windows" (*TH* 3). Versions of Tolkien's illustration *The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the-Water* all give Bag End more windows than holes further down, these having a smaller frontage for windows. Those regarded as "well-to-do" (*TH* 4) often had houses with many windows, such as Brandy Hall, which has "at least fifty windows" (Tolkien, *Return* 99). Windows have historically been an expression of wealth in architecture<sup>7</sup>, but they are not the only indicators of Bilbo's class; in fact "Bag End is filled with spaces associated with a Victorian middle-class home, with separate spaces for pantries, wardrobes, and dining-rooms" (Kinsella 92). To afford to build and decorate a house to this extent is an indicator of class, and a point of tension for Morris, regarding his own wares, who felt that "the working man cannot afford to live in anything that an architect could design; moderate-sized rabbit-warrens for rich middle-class men" (Morris, *Revival* 15). Morris extends the branching nature of warrens to the vast network of rooms found in the typical Victorian middle-class house. Though it is unlikely Tolkien knew this exact quote, the descriptive choice of 'rabbit-warrens' aptly suits Bag End<sup>8</sup>. Its spread of rooms dedicated to eating, like "cellars, pantries (lots of these)...kitchens, dining-rooms" (*TH* 3), indicate the inhabitant is someone who enjoys food and can afford a large quantity, and the "whole rooms devoted to clothes" (*TH* 3) also suggest a lucrative situation, to dedicate such space to material belongings. Details like the "polished chairs" (*TH* 3) and the "clock on the mantelpiece" (*TH* 16) add to the materiality becoming a strong presence in Bag End, and it is precisely this materialistic focus amongst the wealthy that Morris & Co. depended on for business. As Peter Davey (1995) comments, "the Arts and Crafts movement was of and for the Victorian upper middle class. The inhabitants of William Morris' visionary world have all the nice characteristics of Victorian gentlefolk: they are kind, generous, polite, energetic, moral, nationalistic (in the best sense), intellectual, practical, comfort loving and fond of 'beauty'" (10) - all characteristics that also belong to hobbits.

The audience can infer characteristics about Bilbo from his home because Bag End is furnished to Bilbo's tastes and designed around his needs, and Tolkien explicitly states one such requirement: "a hobbit-hole...means comfort" (*TH* 3). As Tolkien describes Bag End he is also narrating his protagonist, creating expectations

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<sup>5</sup> William Morris was highly influential in the Arts & Crafts Movement, setting up an artisan's company based on its principles.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of *The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the-Water* can be found in Hammond & Scull's *Art of The Hobbit*, which should be referred to for further reading.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Charleston remarks that, in the early modern period, "when you moved house, you took your glass windows with you" (41) indicating glass was a precious commodity.

<sup>8</sup> This connection has also been discussed regarding the origins of the name 'hobbit' but is one that Tolkien explicitly refuted in his letters (Letter 25, To the Editor of the 'Observer'). Shippey discusses this link in *Author*, page 3.

for him as a character, and perhaps a flawed one at that. Bag End suggests Bilbo is indulgent, overly-luxurious, too comfortable, a tad vain even, but the many “pegs for hats and coats” and making sure his “best rooms” (*TH* 3) are ones with windows shows he is welcoming and regards guest-kindliness<sup>9</sup> as a priority. *The Hobbit* is not simply an adventure tale, but a narrative of Bilbo’s transformation, embodying Richard Redgrave’s (2008) belief that we must “rid ourselves of all the useless luxuries (by some called comforts) that make our art-stifling houses more truly savage” (9). By leaving the comforts of Bag End and joining Thorin and Company on their journey into the perceived ‘savage’ wilderness, Bilbo encounters situations that test his ingenuity and reveal his bravery. Bilbo’s self-realisation is a crucial aspect of the tone in *The Hobbit*, which is arguably more child-orientated than *LotR*. As a protagonist, Bilbo is an encouraging figure for children, showing that even the smallest of people can affect change. By removing Bilbo from the domestic space, somewhere familiar to children and an integral part of childhood, and placing him into the unfamiliar Middle-earth, the reader also accompanies Bilbo on his journey and experiences his revelations.

The tone of Tolkien’s writing changes between *TH* and *LotR*, the latter being a more historically authoritative text, with prologues and appendices. While *TH* uses architecture as a technique to explain what a hobbit is, by *LotR* this is no longer needed. Instead, the Shire and Hobbit culture has expanded and architecture is used to explain this wider setting. Building types are more diverse, with two-storey buildings generally preferred by “millers, smiths, ropers, and cartwrights, and others of that sort” (*LotR* 6), demonstrating that the different requirements from domestic and economic spaces are shaping architectural designs. Tolkien creates more cohesive characteristics for hobbit architecture, as can be seen by the sketches and developments made to *The Hill: Hobbiton-across-the-Water*, where “most of the rectangular windows shown in the ink version, notably in the Mill, are now round as at Bag-End” (Hammond and Scull, *Art* 31). By *LotR* the reader has expectations for Shire architecture, such as round windows and doors and low-rise structures, which the reader of *TH* did not have.

Despite the recognisable features and rooms inside Bag End, from the outside it is a disorientating form of architecture, unfamiliar to the reader. Though distinguishable as windows and doors, their roundness is unusual compared to our fenestration, which is often angular. With this unexpected feature comes a balancing of the familiar and unfamiliar, a reorientation from the Primary to Secondary world, but this does not end in the Shire. Marjorie Burns (2005) also recognises the importance of Bilbo’s door as “both commonplace and remarkable” but what is perhaps most significant is her observation that “Middle-earth is framed by Bilbo’s door” (50). The cover of the 2012 reprint makes use of the visual frame, but Burns’ comment shows how architecture is a framing technique, revealing parts of Middle-earth to both readers and characters. She argues, “bridges, gates, and doors...serve both to mark the moment of change and to indicate what shifts in perception, attitude or place are likely to occur” (50). Burns’ theory can be extended to architecture in general. As with Bag End, moments of encounter with other cultures are often marked by first impressions of their architecture, having a similar reorienting effect. These encounters frequently use similar semantic fields of strangeness and incongruity. Frodo finds the glimpses of dwarven architecture in Moria “*bewildering* beyond hope of remembering” (*LotR* 303); the floor of King Theoden’s hall has “branching runes

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<sup>9</sup> For a more in depth discussion of ‘guest-kindliness’, see Marcus Waithe.

and *strange* devices intertwined” (*LotR* 501), and Pippin finds carved in the capitals of Denethor’s hall “*strange* figures of beasts and leaves” (*LotR* 737, italics mine). As the reader felt entering Bag End, so too do the less-travelled members of the Fellowship at points on their journey, and in the same way that the reader gathers clues from Bag End to reorient themselves in the Secondary world, the Fellowship uses architecture to negotiate through this new cultural space.

## II

It has been well established in Tolkien studies that the Rohirrim are modelled on the Anglo-Saxons<sup>10</sup>, and this choice of cultural parallel is interesting when we consider the theory that Tolkien’s works were attempts to devise “‘A Mythology for Anglo-Saxon England’” (Fimi quoting Drout, 54). In order for the reader to have the right cultural associations to understand the Rohirrim, it was important to make the Rohirrim identifiably Anglo-Saxon and architecture is an obvious method to achieve this. Their historical lineage as “close kin of the Beornings” (Tolkien, *Peoples* 272), suggests a Northern influence and is seen architecturally in the illustration of Beorn’s house, which was “modelled...very closely on an illustration of a Norse Mead-hall” (John Rateliff 260), and shares similar features to Theoden’s hall Meduseld, such as the timber framing and central fire pit. The Rohirrim share ancestry with the Gondorians who “come from those same Three Houses of Men” (*LotR* 663) but their ancestry divides between the Númenóreans<sup>11</sup> who crossed the sea and those who didn’t, placing the Gondorians in relation, and contrast, to the Rohirrim. Gondor was one of the kingdoms established by the surviving Númenóreans who escaped the sinking of Númenór<sup>12</sup>. The Númenóreans were “an advanced human civilisation”, especially “in terms of ships and shipbuilding” (Fimi 166), perhaps giving rise to the description of Gondorians as “sea-kings” (Hammond & Scull, *Illustrator* 169). By *LotR*, Gondor is in a state of decline. Comparisons have been drawn between Gondor’s dwindling empire and historical examples like Byzantium, Rome and Egypt, even by Tolkien himself<sup>13</sup>. In fact, scattered about Middle-earth are ruins of this civilisation, such as Weathertop and Amon-Hen<sup>14</sup>, indicating the magnitude of its descent. The headless statue, found on the journey to Cirith Ungol, reflects Gondor’s state: “a once great nation led by strong rulers...has fallen into decay and lost its predestined leaders” (Cynthia Cohen 98). A critical comparison of the architecture of these two cultures of men will help to uncover cultural diversity within a race. When real world architecture, loaded with historical associations, is integrated into a fantastical setting, cultural expectations are created. Examining how a culture presents itself through architecture reveals its principles and preoccupations, which differ dramatically within the race of Men. These cultural expectations of architecture are an important facet of Tolkien’s philosophy of ‘sub-creation’, helping to create a cultural background that is realistic and consequently ensuring Middle-earth is believable.

To an onlooker, Meduseld’s architecture proclaims not only the influence of Anglo-Saxon culture on its design, but within the Secondary world it indicates its

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<sup>10</sup> Hammond & Scull in *Companion* notice etymological connections; Christopher Tolkien believes Meduseld has a Beowulfian feel (*Treason*), and Fimi has observed social and aesthetic similarities.

<sup>11</sup> The line Gondorians are descended from.

<sup>12</sup> *The Silmarillion*, pg. 315-317.

<sup>13</sup> For further reading on Tolkien’s sources and influences see Jason Fisher, Fimi and Hammond & Scull’s *Companion*.

<sup>14</sup> For further discussions on ruins in Middle-earth, see Michael Drout.

inhabitant's royal status, as well as celebrating the society's equine culture. The hall's position on "a green hill before the feet of the White Mountains" (*LotR* 1039) with "a dike and mighty wall and thorny fence" around it (*LotR* 495) signifies defensive and ideological motivations. If attacked, its elevation gives those in the hall an advantage, but also allows the king to survey his kingdom. The location also aligns Meduseld with Anglo-Saxon strongholds like Yeavinger, located "on the low hill overlooking the Milfield-basin" (John Moreland 185). Moments of elevation also occur inside the hall, with the placement of the dais "facing north towards the doors... with three steps; and in the middle of the dais ... a great gilded chair" (*LotR* 501), making the king recognisable and indicating the hall is his seat of power. Tolkien imagined Meduseld as where "[Theoden] received guests or emissaries, seated on the dais in his royal hall" (Fimi, quoting Tolkien 177), much in the same way the hall Heorot is used in *Beowulf*, "where the high king waited" (62) to hear the pleas of his folk.

Meduseld is also described in a similar fashion to Heorot, as other Tolkien scholars have identified<sup>15</sup>, with "pillars... gleaming dully with gold and half-seen colours" (*LotR* 501) echoing the colour of the "steep roof / plated with gold" (*Beowulf* 81). Meduseld's roof is also golden, seen in Legolas' observation, "it seems to my eyes that [the roof] is thatched with gold" (*LotR* 496). The reference to gold continues Meduseld's association with Heorot but the thatch itself is interesting. Considering the Rohirrim's decision to construct Meduseld in timber, it can be assumed that timber is not a material in short supply. The "main materials [most popular for roofing in Anglo-Saxon architecture] were wooden shingles...or thatch" (Stephen Pollington 73), suggesting that in choosing thatch over shingle, the Rohirrim have made a cultural choice. Tom Shippey (2000) has observed some inconsistency with the parallels between the Rohirrim and Anglo-Saxons, noting that England has no "cavalry country" (*Author* 92), but in Middle-earth the locations Eastemnet and Westemnet in the Riddermark use the suffix 'emnet' which Shippey believes is a derivative of the "Old English \**emn-mæþ*, or in modern English 'even meadow'" (*Author* 93). These textual details provide evidence that grasslands were present in Middle-earth, and when we consider that thatch is dried vegetation, which is vital bedding for the horses so integral to Rohirric identity, the architectural preference for thatch appears to have equine connotations. Whether you read it allegorically or not, it cannot be denied that the horse motif is pervasive in Rohirric architecture, such as the fountain "carved in the likeness of a horse's head" (*LotR* 498), but also subtly prevalent in details like the thatched roof. These details are significant because they show how integral the horse is to the perception the Rohirrim have of themselves, and how important it is to display to outsiders their equestrian culture.

A further archaeological reading of golden colours can be traced when Tolkien describes how "here and there bright sun beams fell in glimmering shafts" (*LotR* 500), suggesting the limited light penetrating "under the deep eaves" (*LotR* 500) is catching on something reflective. When we consider Hammond and Scull's (2005) note, "on special occasions ... 'gold colour shone in the woven wall-hangings'" (*Companion* 402), it becomes apparent that the hangings in the hall have an atmospheric effect, scattering the snatches of sunlight about the hall, reinforcing all the golden elements that pervade Meduseld. Upon entering, the hall's royal and equine associations cannot go unnoticed.

By comparing the architecture of the Tower of Ecthelion to Meduseld we can visually demonstrate the differences between these two cultures of men. Immediately

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<sup>15</sup> See Hammond & Scull's *Companion* and Christopher Tolkien's *Treason*.

obvious are the different structures, with the Rohirrim preferring the long hall and the Gondorians the tall tower. Rowland Mainstone (1998) describes how the purpose of towers was frequently defensive, “for observation or communication” (287), but Ecthelion’s communication is also symbolic. Where Meduseld is primarily wooden, the Tower is described as “tall and fair and shapely, and its pinnacle glittered as if it were wrought of crystals” (*LotR* 735). As Charles Rennie Mackintosh (2008) said, “if we have architecture excite an interest... we must have a symbolism immediately comprehensible by the great majority of spectators” (20), which the Tower achieves. Its whiteness reflects the enlightened Gondorian society, and the tower form expresses architectural skill.

The comparison continues with their interiors. The description is from Pippin’s perspective, but Judy Ann Ford (2005) notes he does “not have the proper [architectural] vocabulary” (61) to describe the Tower’s features. He likens the “tall pillars” to “monoliths” (*LotR* 737), which rise “to great capitals carved in many strange figures of beasts and leaves” (*LotR* 737). Ford has successfully argued that the architecture in the Tower of Ecthelion mimics a classical style, using decorative and complicated features to express their cultural magnanimity, but John Ruskin (1985), who will be discussed in detail later, believed that Classical architecture’s stylised perfection produced “foliage... growing out of lifeless rods instead of stems” (100) with an alien quality. As established, hobbits are nature-loving creatures and Pippin’s description of the capitals as “strange” (*LotR* 737) suggests he recognises this ornamentation but it is incongruous, even unnatural, to him. This strangeness continues with the lack of “hangings nor storied webs, nor anything of woven stuff or of wood” and instead “tall images graven in cold stone” (*LotR* 737). The atmosphere in the Tower lacks the warmth of Meduseld. Pippin grasps for comprehensible terms, such as monolith, defined as “a single block of stone, *esp.* a large one shaped ... into a pillar” (“monolith” n. def. B. 1a), unwittingly integrating the mountain into the interior space and signifying the importance of stone as a building material. When we compare the purposes of the pillars in each setting, aside from their structural necessity, they guide the eye to a point of central focus: the dais. Unlike in Meduseld, they only serve to emphasise that the throne is “empty” (*LotR* 738), for the line of Kings has been lost. For all its skill and knowledge, this is a culture in the throes of decline.

In Meduseld, the “many woven cloths...hung upon the walls” depicting “figures of ancient legend” (*LotR* 501) illustrate a fundamental difference between these cultures: impermanence. Compared with immortal elves and long-living dwarves, Tolkien emphasises man’s transience, describing some hangings as “dim with years” (*LotR* 501). Recording deeds in tapestries attempts to preserve cultural history, but these hangings show that true permanence in man-made items is impossible. Aragorn and Eowyn’s conversation in ‘The Passing of the Grey Company’ gives an insight into Rohirric principles. Eowyn claims that she does “not fear either pain or death” but does fear when the “chance of doing great deeds is gone beyond recall” (*LotR* 767). The Rohirrim appear comfortable with mortality, fearing only an inglorious death, and their building materials reflect this ethos. Stephen Pollington (2003) identifies that, for Anglo-Saxons, “finding suitable timbers of sufficient strength and height may have been a limiting factor in construction, since the ideal wood types for this purpose, such as oak, will take more than one human generation to reach the necessary proportions” (87). Building with timber forces the artisan to recognise the material’s lifecycle in a way stone does not, as wood “is a living material” (Michael Bintley & Michael Shapland ‘Introduction’ 5). Shapland (2013) explains the

dichotomy between materials in Anglo-Saxon culture, describing the domestic sphere as “invariably timber” but graves and “monuments to the ancestors of these family units...were invariably of stone”, arguing “the permanence of stone linked it with the eternal world of ancestors, while the cycle of human lives was linked with the perishability of timber” (‘Meanings’ 34). The continuing practise of building with timber, when some Anglo-Saxons could have used stone, implies timber was preferred not simply because “trees were prominent...in the landscape” (Bintley & Shapland, 6), but because they best expressed their culture. The Rohirrim’s similar use of timber suggests this too is a cultural trait borrowed from their historical counterparts. The importance of Rohirric architecture lies in how it conveys cultural values, values that align the Rohirrim historically with the “Germanic ideal of the northern heroic spirit” (Honneger 128). Tolkien’s assimilation of the various historical attributes of the Anglo-Saxons has created a new culture: the courageous and noble Rohirrim.

Minas Tirith uses the mountain Mindolluin as a natural defence, but stone is not simply used for defensive purposes, or even convenience. As with the Rohirrim, their material choice is deeply rooted in cultural interpretations of materials. Jeffery Jerome Cohen’s (2015) exploration of stone describes it as “the material that endures” (81). He believes “it compels us to ponder our brevity” (86) in comparison with its longevity, a feeling that preoccupies the minds of Gondorian leaders. In Minas Tirith, the use of stone extends beyond monuments to the dead as it does for the Rohirrim, though buildings honoring the dead are still significant. When Denethor conveys Faramir’s bier to the House of Stewards, they pass “between pale domes and empty halls and images of men long dead” (*LotR* 808). Despite the permanence of the stone used to build these mausoleums, the adjectives show they are ghostly and spectral nonetheless. Tolkien seems to suggest, through Faramir, that in counting “old names in the rolls of their descent dearer than the names of sons” (*LotR* 663), and building “tombs more splendid than the houses of the living” (*LotR* 662), the old Kings of Gondor lost sight of what was important – not the heritage of their past, but the legacy to leave for future generations. Faramir argues that Gondorians “can scarce claim any longer the title High” (*LotR* 663), admitting how over the years the knowledge taught in Númenór has degenerated. This “obsession with death” (C. Tolkien, *War* 154), or mortality complex, is pervasive in Gondorian culture, and Faramir lays this entirely on the Gondorians who “still...hungered after endless life” (*LotR* 662), despite losing their kingdom before to this greed.

Minas Tirith’s architecture reflects this preoccupation with heritage over legacy, and also exposes the deterioration of legacy. The citadel is arranged in seven layers of rings with a “vast pier of rock whose huge out-thrust bulk divided in two all the circles of the city save the first” (*LotR* 735). This jutting rock exists partly because of “the primeval shaping of the hills, partly by the mighty craft and labour of old” (*LotR* 735) and is “crowned by a battlement” (*LotR* 735). What makes this focal point of the citadel noteworthy is the particular lexical field Tolkien uses. Its edges are “sharp as a ship-keel” (*LotR* 735) and the view from the top of the battlement is likened to those experienced by “mariners in a mountainous ship” (*LotR* 735). Ships have a great significance for the Gondorians because the Númenórean prowess at sea separated them from other cultures of men, and because a ship facilitated the founding of Gondor<sup>16</sup>. Splitting Minas Tirith is, in effect, the bow of a ship and making this a

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<sup>16</sup> The founders of Gondor and Arnor, Elendil and his sons, fled from Númenór before the sinking, fearing their civilization’s lust for immortality would be their ruin, (*Silmarillion* 317).

central point in their architecture reiterates their tendency to prioritise heritage over legacy. We see the consequences of this blindness as Pippin rides through Minas Tirith up its levels. He notices, “in every street they passed some great house or court over whose doors and arched gates were carved many fair letters of strange and ancient shapes: names, Pippin guessed of great men and kindreds that had once dwelt there” (*LotR* 736). Without realising, Pippin touches on a pressing social issue, as the appendices note how “the high men of the South married late, and their children were few” (Ford 62). Ford likens this to the Roman emperor Augustus’ fears over the societal trend of childlessness and its impact on the Roman legacy. The inscriptions serve as a marker of the permanence stone can achieve, but the semantic field of unfamiliarity, and the emptiness of the abodes they proudly proclaim, makes them markers of the citadel’s declining population and legacy, as astutely remarked by Legolas upon entering Minas Tirith: “The houses are dead, and there is too little here that grows and is glad” (*LotR* Guild Publishing 906).

Unlike its historical counterparts, restoration is achieved in Gondor. With the fall of Sauron comes the rise of Aragorn, the Númenórean bloodline restored to the throne, and “during [Aragorn’s] reign as king, Gondor is restored to its earlier grandeur” (Ford 70). Ford argues this “renewed” Gondor “was ... more inclusive” (70) and we see this architecturally. The citadel is:

“filled with trees and with fountains, and its gates were wrought of mithril and steel, and its streets were paved with white marble; and the Folk of the Mountain laboured in it, and the Folk of the Wood rejoiced to come there; and all was healed and made good, and the houses were filled with men and women and the laughter of children” (*LotR* 947).

Gondor is rebuilt by man, dwarf and elf, and each race leaves impressions of their culture: be it the water and trees of the elves, the worked metal of the dwarves, or the white stone of the men, all are united in Minas Tirith. With this unity is peace, and with peace comes the stability needed for Gondor’s social and cultural regeneration.

### III

With many different forms of Elvish architecture present in Middle-earth, their variety and diversity cannot all be addressed in this exploration; however a brief summary of their main features is useful to locate the focus of this section’s architectural exploration: Lothlórien. The underlying purpose of architecture is protection, but how a culture approaches this can suggest a lot about it. Like hobbits, some Elvish kings sought safety underground, seeking help from the designs and skills of the dwarves to build cavernous strongholds like King Thingol’s Menegroth, which both Finrod and Thranduil imitate<sup>17</sup>, making use of strategic hills within a forest realm, adding layers of protection with rivers, bridges and trees. As its name suggests, Rivendell’s protection lies in its being riven into a valley, with a complex entrance as well as Elrond’s protective magic, which is similar to the protective ‘girdle of Melian’<sup>18</sup> in Doriath. As well as guarding their borders, Lothlórien’s protection comes from the elves’ integration with nature, remaining inconspicuous

<sup>17</sup> Finrod was Lord of Nargothrond and Thingol is the King of Doriath, married to Melian, all characters in *The Silmarillion*, while Thranduil is the King of Mirkwood met in *TH*.

<sup>18</sup> *The Silmarillion*, pg. 110.

amongst the foliage. This integration will be the focus of this section, examining why this architectural mode also best resolves Tolkien's environmental anxieties regarding man's coexistence with nature.

To fully appreciate Tolkien's achievement with Lothlórien, an understanding of architectural history is needed. This trajectory starts with John Ruskin, a Victorian art critic who wrote the treatise 'On the Nature of Gothic', which established Gothic architecture as rugged, clearly marking out Scandinavian and Germanic influences as preferable to the lackadaisical Mediterranean. He observed that in such countries as Greece, Rome and Egypt, architecture follows a "servile" (82) and reductive principle "in which the execution or power of the inferior workman is entirely subjected to the intellect of the higher" (82). Ruskin differentiates between Egyptian and Classical, finding that Egyptian architecture, like the pyramids, expresses a hierarchical attitude towards construction. Building the pyramids and Sphinx required a huge labour force; the manpower to make such a quantity of stone blocks is staggeringly high and only possible because of the slave population established by Egyptian imperialism. The Classical slave labourer did have skill, but only in one aspect of the whole design, and Ruskin argued this halted the sculptor's progression, as an artisan and person. Ruskin claimed gothic architecture is liberating, prioritising the creativity of the artisan. As argued in the discussion of Classical architecture's influence in Minas Tirith, the Ancients' desire for perfection was all that was wrong with the style for Ruskin, whereas the gothic artisan "is left free to represent what subjects he chooses... and will endeavor to represent it as he sees it" (99). They will be inspired and influenced directly from nature, borrowing what they see in all its deficiencies, rather than trying to impose an artificial façade of perfection. All these principles make Gothic architecture a superior mode to Classical forms.

Ruskin's work links to the social anxiety surrounding the Industrial Revolution. Ruskin comments how making men work in production lines is dehumanising, stripping away agency and therefore creativity. William Morris sympathised with this interpretation of production. As mentioned in the discussion on Hobbit architecture, Morris and Co. were the forerunners of the Arts and Crafts movement. They took their inspiration from the medieval, preferring a holistic mode of production, and prioritised natural forms in designs, as can be seen in Morris' wallpaper collections. Mark Atherton (2012) comments, "such ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement surely influenced Tolkien, for instance, in his descriptions of the artistry and craftsmanship of the inhabitants of Rivendell or Lothlórien" (108). Despite its relatively small circle of influence at the time, the movement has been credited as the fundamental inspiration for the widespread architectural mode known as Art Nouveau, which "paid tribute to Ruskin, and Morris's designs were well known on the Continent" (Davey 219). Within Art Nouveau, "there were various uses of nature at work" (Paul Greenhalgh 20), seen in the "characteristic semi-naturalistic forms" prominent in designs (Henry-Russell Hitchcock 285). The crucial distinction between Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau is their philosophy. Art Nouveau championed industrially-produced steel and glass which has "a delicacy, even fragility, in its static perfection" (Gabriele Fahr-Becker 136), which Gothic and Arts and Crafts rejected as an unnatural quality. Ruskin believed, though "we are to desire perfection... we are nevertheless not to set the meaner thing... above the nobler thing" (84), suggesting "the principal admirableness" of Gothic is its admittance of "the labour of inferior minds", as these "fragments full of imperfection... raise up a stately and unaccusable whole" (83). Imperfection was the truest state of beauty, "for the finer the nature, the more flaws it will show" (Ruskin 83). If something is mass-

produced, molded and perfected each time, it becomes part of homogenous mass and all uniqueness is lost.

Emerging from this architectural progression are distinctively different philosophies, and when applied to Lothlórien and Rivendell, help to illustrate Lothlórien's natural inclinations. To claim Rivendell is *the* example of Art Nouveau style in Middle-earth is difficult as Tolkien rarely describes Rivendell in detail, but what can be gathered is its adherence to Art Nouveau principles. While it is surrounded by natural formations, such as the valley and river, Rivendell is the least organic form of Elven architecture. Its protection comes from typical fortification methods, such as a strategic position "hidden almost anywhere between them and the mountains" (*TH* 55), "a narrow bridge... without a parapet" (*TH* 60), and the strength of stone. These features do not obviously adhere to Art Nouveau principles, but an analysis of Greenhalgh's (2000) lexical choices is illuminating:

"many designers conventionalised [nature] by *breaking* it into *abstracted, flattened* forms ... Others celebrated nature by *transposing* plants, animals and insects directly and realistically into their work" (20).

The italicised words indicate that Art Nouveau, far from being integrating and natural, is imposing, forcing nature into unnatural formations. Realistic representations of nature are not at its forefront. Rivendell is highly fabricated, composed of stone that must be quarried and processed, then constructed, and finally embellished with design. Though beautiful, Rivendell has an alien quality within the landscape which can be deciphered from its name, with Tolkien's *Nomenclature* loosely translating it as "cloven-dell" (Hammond & Scull, *Companion* 15). 'Cloven' fits Greenhalgh's semantic field, showing that imposition is a unifying principle of Rivendell and Art Nouveau.

Unlike Rivendell, Lothlórien considers locality. *Unfinished Tales* mentions how there is "no good stone" near Lothlórien, "except what might be quarried in the mountains westward and brought with difficulty down the Silverlode..." (Hammond & Scull, *Companion* 311). This passing reference reveals the elves' awareness and appreciation of materials. By dismissing stone, Lothlórien follows Ruskin's principles of gothic architecture, as stone is not part of the local landscape and building with it would require a large source of manpower. Instead, the elves look at what is around them: trees. To truly embody Ruskin's gothic principles requires an integrated relationship with nature, which Lothlórien achieves through its architecture. To paraphrase Ruskin, the sylvan city of Lothlórien is "the expression by [elves] of [their] own rest in the statutes of the lands" (81).

Marjorie Burns observes, "Elves live with nature and augment nature far more than they devise or construct" (66). In Lothlórien homes are nestled within trees like "living towers" (*LotR* 344). These trees are a variety called *mallorn*, and their conception is perhaps the product of a long creative process. Tolkien observes in *TH* that "the beeches were [the wood-elves'] favourite trees" (195), and they also appear in *The Silmarillion*, where "the pillars of Menegroth were hewn into the likeness of the beeches of Oromë" (106). Beeches appear to be an important species to Tolkien, and their key botanical features manifest in the *mallorn* tree, as Cynthia Cohen (2016) has considered. Earlier drafts describe mallorn bark as "silver and smooth, and its boughs somewhat upswept after the manner of the beech" and the "leaves, like those of the beech but greater" (Hammond & Scull, *Companion* 300). Cohen explains the

mallorn's distinctive branch shape, as "beeches growing near one another in a group are likely to grow tall and have straight trunks" (103). Cohen converts this botanical detail into a structural one, suggesting that the "mallorn structure provides the literal, physical foundation for Lothlórien's cultural landscape" so supporting "Lothlórien's dominant architectural form" (103). The way the trees grow provides the foundations for Lothlórien's *telain*<sup>19</sup>, allowing the elves to co-exist with nature.

Another instance of integration between architecture and nature are the colours used in the interior of Galadriel's hall. As the Fellowship passes through Lothlórien, certain colours are remarked upon. The *mallorn* "stems were grey" (*LotR* 328) and their leaves have "a hint of fallow gold" (*LotR* 328). As they approach the Naith of Lórien, Frodo describes the formation of two circles, the inner trees "arrayed in pale gold" and the outer trees with "bark of snowy white" (*LotR* 341). Hammond and Scull note that the name 'Golden Wood' is often used interchangeably with Lothlórien, and accounts this to the presence of the *mallorn*, which is Sindarin for "golden tree" (*Companion*, 300). The continuous colouring of grey-silver and gold could be a gesture to the golden fruit of Laurelin and the silver flower of Telperion, from the days of the Two Trees of Valinor<sup>20</sup>, a reminder of their heritage and culture. These colours recur in Galadriel and Celeborn's hall, where the "walls were green and silver and its roof gold" (*LotR* 345). The specifically selected colours blend the boundaries between nature and architecture in Lothlórien.

Integration can also be seen in the hall's furnishings. The room features "two chairs beneath the bole of the tree and canopied by a living bough" (*LotR* 345), which echoes the layout at Elrond's feast where Arwen is placed "in the middle of the table...under a canopy" (*LotR* 220). However, a closer reading reveals a crucial lexical difference. In Arwen's passage 'canopy' is a noun, which she sits under, whereas in Lothlórien 'canopied' is an adjective, explaining how the tree bough works as an architectural focal point for the dais. Tolkien plays with the interchange of the tree canopy and the dais canopy, showing how in this particular example the two are entwined together. Such lexical choices pepper the descriptions of Lothlórien, mixing lexical fields, such as how the "grove of *mállinorni* ... [are] carpeted and roofed with gold" (Hammond & Scull, *Companion* 300). Sam's comment about the elves, "whether they've made the land, or the land's made them, it's hard to say" (*LotR* 351) is perceptive, showing awareness that in Lothlórien nature and architecture are intertwined.

Lothlórien is a clear example of what Tolkien described himself as his "wonder and delight in the earth as it is" (Lin Carter 8), while also providing a model solution to man's "mindless modern humanism" (Patrick Curry, *Defending* 73). Andrew Hoffman and Lloyd Sandelands' (2016) work on attitudes towards environmentalism is helpful in explaining this. They identify three different attitudes mankind uses to position itself towards nature. An anthropocentric view regards nature as under man's dominion, stemming from interpretative readings of the Book of Genesis, whereas an ecocentric view emphasises nature's place above man<sup>21</sup>. Though differing in approach, Hoffman and Sandelands believe these two attitudes are bound by the same tension: dominion. They propose a third attitude – theocentrism - which depends on Catholicism, specifically "the older and pre-Cartesian metaphysics of The Church before the Reformation" (Hoffman and Sandelands 149). As Hoffman and Sandelands explain, a theocentric view prioritises

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<sup>19</sup> The Sindarin name for 'flet', their floors or platforms.

<sup>20</sup> *The Silmarillion*, pg. 42-3.

<sup>21</sup> For further reading on these subjects, see Eccy de Jonge and Rob Boddice.

the “dogmatic Magisterium” (149), which is regarded as the “living word of God...defin[ing the]...relations between God, man and nature that are to be accepted in faith, without question, and without recourse or appeal to personal interpretation” (149). When “individual reason” (Hoffman and Sandelands 149) is placed subservient to God’s word all that is left is God’s word, which is what theocentrism relies upon: that “Man and nature are related in God...There are no grounds to suppose one includes or dominates the other...God lords over both” (Hoffman and Sandelands 151). Theocentrism depends on equality between nature and man. As a devout Catholic<sup>22</sup>, Tolkien’s personal inclination towards a theocentric understanding of nature can be assumed, making theocentrism, and the underlying point of equality, an important position to consider when exploring Tolkien’s feelings to nature. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, Tolkien wrote that “Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved” (*Letters* 419), which Cynthia Cohen has argued “impl[ies] that the relationship between Elves and mallorn trees is more than close—it is symbiotic... For residents of Lothlórien, the trees are a metonym for their notion of home” (104). Lothlórien is clearly an environment where respect is felt in equal measure between elves and trees, and this respect manifests architecturally with the integration of nature and home. This respect for materials, locations and desire for integration and unity between the living and the leafy makes Lothlórien the embodiment of gothic principles, for “cautiously, a little at a time, [the elves] put more of nature into [their] work, until at last it was all true” (Ruskin 100). This is apparent even to outsiders. When Frodo touches one of the *mallorn* trees, “he felt delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as forester nor as a carpenter; it was the delight of the living tree itself” (*LotR* 342). Lothlórien is peaceful because it is, architecturally, in harmonious balance with nature.

To summarise our architectural journey through Middle-earth we began, like the reader, in a hole. Tolkien allowed us to wander around his protagonist’s home before even introducing Bilbo. While the rooms and furnishings were all recognisable, when such features as the doors and windows were examined it became apparent we were no longer in the ‘Primary World’. Dwelling on the windows again reminds us of their reorienting power between the Primary world and the Secondary world of Middle-earth.

We meandered onwards to the race of men and their architecture. Here a more historical reworking of architecture in Middle-earth was encountered, in the forms of Meduseld and Minas Tirith. The architectural features of these buildings helped us to identify the culture’s historical parallels, as Anglo-Saxon for the Rohirrim, and a more classical legacy for the Gondorians. This act of detection worked, as the windows did in the Shire, as a reorientation between the ‘Primary’ and ‘Secondary’ worlds. Their architecture also suggested certain cultural principles and attitudes not found in their parallels, such as the equine appreciation in Rohirric society, and the mortality complex that has plagued Gondorians since the Fall of Númenór.

Finally, we sought the shelter of the forest and began to appreciate how, in creating Lothlórien, Tolkien had managed to reconcile a personal preoccupation about man’s attitude to, and coexistence with, nature. By reading Lothlórien in dialogue with Ruskin’s principles of Gothic architecture, real world theory helped show that Lothlórien is the embodiment of Gothic. By analysing the importance of the

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<sup>22</sup> For a biographical account of Tolkien, see Daniel Grotta.

*mallinorni* as the architectural foundations of the Sindar, it became difficult to differentiate between nature and architecture, suggesting Lothlórien is integrated wholly into the surrounding environment.

What architecture demonstrates are the similarities and differences between cultures, which is an integral philosophy of *TH* and *LotR*, an opinion shared by Curry (2014). He too noticed the importance of the “multiculturalism” (*Deep Roots* 15) and pluralism in Middle-earth, using the friendship between Gimli and Legolas, and the marriage between Arwen and Aragorn as examples. Throughout Bilbo’s journey - and the Fellowship’s later on - different peoples are encountered and interacted with. If we consider Jane Chance’s (2005) observation, “the agenda of both Sauron and ... Saruman is to erase...all difference, by installing one point of view – theirs” (180), then Middle-earth would be in a reductive state, diversity replaced with uniformity. Though the hobbits are scared at first by the Ents, and daunted by the lofty halls of great men, this vision of homogeneity is truly terrifying. By encountering architecture, expressing elegantly new cultural principles, we learn to identify and reconcile differences and see the beauty of individuality. Buildings have their own lives and ideologies, acting as a substitute for a culture. The vandalised “huge sitting figure” of a past king with “its head...gone...[and] in its place...in mockery a round rough-hewn stone, rudely painted by savage hands in the likeness of a grinning face with one large red eye in the midst of its forehead” (*LotR* 687) is an example of the iconoclasm that can occur when cultures clash without resolution. Iconoclasm in the Primary world, such as the destruction of the World Trade Centre in 2001 and the Palmyra Temple in 2015, allows for its inclusion in the Secondary world. However, Tolkien offers hope in this moment of potential despair: “a trailing plant with flowers like small white stars bound itself across the [statue’s] brows...and in the crevices of his stony hair yellow stoncrop gleamed” (*LotR* 687). Stone and plant combine together to form, once again, the king’s crown, giving Frodo hope that perhaps unity, despite difference, is still possible.

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