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'Where many paths and errands meet': Travel Writing in The Lord of the Rings

Cover Page Footnote

This paper began life as my BA dissertation at Exeter College, Oxford. I would like to thank Dr. Stuart Lee for his invaluable help and kindness in supervising the project; my peers for their patient and diligent proof-reading; and Anna for giving me a much-needed push to dust off and re-work the essay into a publication.

‘I wonder what sort of a tale we’ve fallen into?’
‘I wonder,’ said Frodo. ‘But I don’t know. And that’s the way of a real tale.’ (*TT*, IV, viii, 932)¹

In this short but significant exchange on the steps of Cirith Ungol, Sam and Frodo ponder the question of ‘what sort of a tale’ they are in: the question of genre. As early as 1953, a friend of Tolkien’s wrote to him, praising *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5) but predicting that the critics would ‘not have a pigeon-hole neatly labelled for it’ (*Letters*, 414).² This has not prevented some from trying. In a newspaper review, W.H. Auden placed *The Lord of the Rings* firmly in the genre of the ‘Quest’.³ Paul Kocher, on the other hand, repeatedly characterises the work as an ‘epic’.⁴ Tolkien himself described the work as ‘an “heroic romance”’ (*Letters*, 210). Such differences in appellation matter – genre labels are powerful tools. As John Frow argues, they regulate and direct the hermeneutics of any text and, consequently, ‘create effects of reality and truth’.⁵ This paper aims to engage in a new generic approach to *The Lord of the Rings*. Firstly, it contends that the work is best approached as a novel, one that contains multiple genres. It then identifies and discusses a significant genre in the work: travel writing. Although previously overlooked, it is an essential building block of *The Lord of the Rings*, and an important tool employed by Tolkien in his artistic project of fictional world-building.

*

Tolkien wrote of *The Lord of the Rings*:

I have ... no interest at all in the history or present situation of the English ‘novel’. My work is *not* a ‘novel’, but an ‘heroic romance’, a much older and quite different variety of literature. (*Letters*, 414)

Despite this injunction, some critics have chosen to address *The Lord of the Rings* as a novel. Martin Simonson, for example, examines in the work the conversations

¹ Edition used is three-volume illustrated paperback (London, 2008). Quotations are referenced parenthetically in the text, with an abbreviation for the volume title, e.g. *TT* for *The Two Towers*. Pagination is continuous across the three volumes, and book and chapter numbers are also given.

² Edition used is *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London, 2006). Quotations are referenced parenthetically in the text.

³ W.H. Auden, ‘At the End of the Quest, Victory’, review of *Return of the King* in *The New York Times*, Jan. 22nd 1956. Accessed at <<http://www.nytimes.com/1956/01/22/books/tolkien-king.html>> on 29/02/16.

⁴ Paul Kocher, *Master of Middle-Earth: The Achievement of J.R.R. Tolkien* (London, 2002), 1.

⁵ John Frow, *Genre*, 2nd Edition (Abingdon, 2015), 20.

and intersections between ‘myth, epic, romance and the novel.’⁶ Although he correctly argues that there are ‘novelistic elements’ in the work, he concludes that ‘[q]uite obviously, given that *The Lord of the Rings* is not *exclusively* a novel, it would be misleading and absurd to read and judge it exclusively from a novel perspective.’⁷ This erroneous conclusion shares with Tolkien an overly restrictive definition of ‘the novel’, shackling it to the comparatively narrow thematic concerns of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century realism: ‘a Fielding-to-Flaubert model.’⁸ More modern theoretical approaches to the novel recognise the form’s evolution: although it may previously have been primarily associated with realistic description of quotidian content, this is manifestly no longer the case.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of the novel, for example, is reliant precisely upon the form’s very lack of generic constrictions: ‘it has no canon of its own ... It is plasticity itself.’⁹ Michael Holquist, commenting on Bakhtin, notes that the Bakhtinian novel is ‘best conceived as a supergenre, whose power consists in its ability to engulf and ingest all other genres’.¹⁰ It is, in fact, ‘not a genre in any strict, traditional sense at all’; rather, the novel is a capacious form that can be made up of multiple generic strands.¹¹ Bakhtin’s notion of ‘heteroglossia’ provides a useful model for their interaction: ‘[i]t is impossible to lay out the languages of the novel on a single plane, to stretch them along a single line. It is a system of intersecting planes’.¹² This seems to me the most productive way of approaching a text like *The Lord of the Rings*. It is an inclusive outlook; it recognises that multiple generic strands go into the making of a work, and allows for their presence to be teased out and their interplay examined. In this view, *The Lord of the Rings* is comprised of genres rather than defined by them. It is a text brought into being by a polyphony of traditions – epic and romance, certainly, as well as the subject of this paper: travel writing.

Before examining the workings of travel writing in *The Lord of the Rings*, however, we must attempt to define it, a task easier said than done. Just as the novel is a form that can encompass many genres, so travel writing is a genre that can be found in multiple forms, not all of which are seen by critics as fitting into the broad category of ‘travel literature’ *per se*. Paul Fussell, for example, restricts ‘travel writing’ to the ‘travel book’: a ‘sub-species of memoir’ composed mainly of a prose narrative.¹³ Other critics are less strict and include less ‘literary’ forms in their

⁶ Martin Simonson, *The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition* (Zurich, 2008), 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸ Brian Rosebury, *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon* (Basingstoke, 2003), 26.

⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin, 1981), 39.

¹⁰ Holquist, Introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, xxix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xxix.

¹² Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 48.

¹³ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British literary travelling between the Wars* (Oxford, 1980), 203.

definition. I am in agreement with Jonathan Raban, for example, when he argues that the genre of travel writing ‘accommodates the private diary, the essay, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished table talk with indiscriminate hospitality.’¹⁴ Within these forms can be found innumerable thematic sub-genres, each with its own interests, which might range from the description of foreign countries (Marco Polo’s *Travels*, c.1298) to an analysis of the domestic economy and trade (Daniel Defoe’s *A Tour through the whole island of Great Britain*, 1724-7) to aesthetically-minded landscape tourism (William Gilpin’s *Observations on the River Wye*, 1782).

A divisive issue when attempting to define travel writing is that of fact and fiction, a question all the more pertinent when discussing a text that incorporates fantastical elements such as Wizards, Orcs and Trolls. Peter Hulme’s definition of travel writing relies on the text being a factual account of an actual journey. As he puts it, there is an ‘ethical dimension’ to travel writing; it ‘involves an explicit or implicit truth claim: writers claim to have been in the places they describe’.¹⁵ Barbara Korte, however, disagrees. Given that any verification of fact must occur outside of the text, she argues that ‘there appears to be no essential distinction between the travel account proper and purely fictional forms of travel literature.’¹⁶ She also notes that the transformation of a journey into a written text inevitably involves a degree of fictionalisation: the factual journey is ‘translated ... into a travel plot’.¹⁷ Drawing a taxonomic divide between factual travel accounts and fictional ‘imaginary voyages’ (Hulme’s term for non-factual travel accounts), then, is problematic, as critics in the Hulme school of thought implicitly demonstrate.¹⁸ Tim Youngs, though agreeing with Hulme in his *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (2013), discusses at length John Mandeville’s *Travels*, a work that includes numerous fictions, such as the dog-headed inhabitants of ‘Natumeran’ (85), Ethiopians with ‘only one foot’ (72), and the men of ‘Hormuz’, whose ‘bollocks hang down to their shins’ (75).¹⁹

Despite this, Mandeville’s work remains a travel text – and a canonical one at that – because, crucially, the text *conceives of itself* as being factual. Although Mandeville makes a number of outlandish claims, he does so in a level-headed way, employing a number of strategies ‘to claim scientific, geographic, and personal

¹⁴ Jonathan Raban, *For Love & Money: Writing – Reading – Travelling 1968-1987* (London, 1988), 253-254.

¹⁵ Peter Hulme & Tim Youngs, *Talking about Travel Writing: a conversation between Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs* (Leicester, 2007), 3.

¹⁶ Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, trans. Catherine Matthias (Basingstoke, 2000), 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸ Hulme & Youngs, 3.

¹⁹ John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, ed. and trans. Anthony Bale (Oxford, 2012). Quotations are referenced parenthetically in the text.

authority.²⁰ The tone of the narrator, for example, is sober and sceptical, and ‘often remains aloof or noncommittal, refraining from evaluative judgements or emotional pronouncements.’²¹ Rather than breathlessly reporting all fantastical hear-say, he attempts to correct errors and bust myths, presenting himself as a curious but discerning observer. In Jerusalem, for example, he attempts to set the record straight on the exact material of Jesus’s punitive crown:

Whilst it’s true that people say that the crown is made of thorn, you must understand that it is actually made of rushes, from the sea, what we might call “sea-rushes”, which were white and they pricked as sharply as thorns. (10)

On another occasion, he cautiously reports a rumour without endorsing it:

Some people say that this balm grows in the deserts of Upper India, there where the Trees of the Sun and the Moon spoke to Alexander the Great. But I haven’t seen that place, because of the dangerous routes leading there, and so I cannot tell you the truth of it. (28)

This attitude emphasises the reliability of the narrator’s own first-hand reportage; throughout the *Travels*, Mandeville will ‘deny seeing some marvels in order to lend greater credence to his other assertions’.²² Such is the strength of Mandeville’s ‘precocious realism’ that some critics position him as an essential precursor of the detail-oriented empirical travel writing that has since become the norm. As Mary Campbell writes:

[t]hus, if we are naming fathers, we can call Mandeville not only the “father of English prose” but the father of modern travel writing. It is a felicity of history that the first such traveller did all (or most) of his travel in his head and that the first such account was essentially a fiction.²³

²⁰ Albrecht Classen, ‘Marco Polo and John Mandeville: The Traveler as Authority Figure, the Real and the Imaginary’, 229 - 248 in Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola and Tuija Ainonen (eds.), *Authorities in the Middle Ages: Influence, Legitimacy and Power in Medieval Society* (Berlin, 2013), 229.

²¹ Jean E. Jost, ‘The Exotic and Fabulous East in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*: Understated Authenticity’, 575-594 in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World* (Berlin, 2013), 577.

²² Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville’s Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville (1371-1550)*, (Surrey, 2003), 7.

²³ Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 123, 149.

The issue of truth, then, is indeed significant, but this truth can be internal or staged rather than externally verifiable. A travel text does not need to be a factual account of a genuine journey; but it must at least appear to be one.

The other principal marker of travel writing concerns the object of its narrative interest: what does the text give ‘air time’ to? After all, including in our definition texts which simply feature travel of some kind would widen the genre to contain almost all literature.²⁴ Travel writing interests itself heavily in the physical business of journeying: the minutiae of distances and equipment, and the obstacles and difficulties in getting from a to b. This sets it apart from other journey-centric genres such as ‘the quest’, though there is some overlap: both genres involve travel (a quest would not meet the requisite difficulty if it did not involve an arduous voyage) and travel writing often includes a quest as a motivating force for embarking upon or extending travel.²⁵ But a traditional quest narrative will usually pass over the nuts and bolts of travel in order to focus on moral or spiritual trials instead. Compare Mandeville’s exhaustive listing of the cities closest to Jerusalem, and their exact distances from it (40), with the almost breezy treatment of Gawain’s journey to Castle Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

He made non abode
Bot wyghtly went hys way.
Many wylsum way he rode,
þe bok as I herde say’.²⁶

The Lord of the Rings is often compared to medieval quest writing like *Gawain*; and certainly its plot is that of a quest. But, as Brian Rosebury argues,

the model of a quest narrative seems ... inadequate. ... Though the word “quest” is used ... it is scarcely emphasised [...] ... [W]e are above all aware of a journey *in the most physical sense*. Indeed it is the journey, rather than the quest, which serves as the unifying image.²⁷ (my emphasis)

This interest in the journey ‘in the most physical sense’ is responsible for the hundreds of pages Tolkien spends detailing the painstaking step-by-step journey to Mordor, an interest that brings the novel into close alignment with Mandeville and other examples of the travel genre. Frodo’s journey does have an important moral

²⁴ Hulme & Youngs, 3.

²⁵ Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington KY, 1983), 153.

²⁶ *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Liverpool, 2014), ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight’, lines 687-90.

²⁷ Rosebury, 28-9.

component to it, but this, along with other psychological or metaphorical journeys (such as Aragorn's from ranger to king), are outside the remit of this paper, focusing as it does on *The Lord of the Rings*'s interest in physical journeying.²⁸

To summarise: I define travel writing as a text that conceives of itself as being a factual account of a genuine journey. The actual veracity is irrelevant and, in any case, both real and fictional travelogues will employ similar 'thematic, rhetorical, and formal techniques' – the building blocks of genre.²⁹ The narrative of a travel text interests itself in the literal business of travel: its particularities, its problems – travel in the most physical sense rather than as a metaphor. I will be examining *The Lord of the Rings* alongside this definition, and will also draw on a range of travel texts (both real and fictional) for comparison. I have focused on well-known examples of the genre and have attempted to bring in a chronological range, from medieval texts like the *Travels* of John Mandeville or Marco Polo, to eighteenth-century travel fictions like *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), to popular modern writers like Bill Bryson and Patrick Leigh Fermor, in order to demonstrate certain constant features of the genre.

I. '[A] great big book with red and black letters': narrative frame and textual origin

The fairly impersonal title of *The Lord of the Rings* belies the fact that the work is presented to the modern reader as, in origin, a series of first-hand travel accounts. The published title is only a few words from a much longer version:

THE DOWNFALL
OF THE
LORD OF THE RINGS
AND THE
RETURN OF THE KING

²⁸ See Anna Caughey, 'The Hero's Journey', 404-417 in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Stuart D. Lee (Chichester, 2014) for analysis of the psychological journeys undergone by members of the Fellowship, primarily Frodo, Sam and Aragorn. See A. Keith Kelly & Michael Livingston, "'A Far Green Country": Tolkien, Paradise and the End of all Things in Medieval Literature', *Mythlore* 27:105/106 (2009), 83-102 for a discussion of Frodo's voyage into the West. See also Tolkien's poem 'Imram', 296-9 in Volume IX of the *History of Middle-earth* series, *Sauron Defeated*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London, 2015), based on St. Brendan's voyage to the 'Isle of the Blessed'; and *Smith of Wootton Major*, ed. Verlyn Flieger (London, 2005), for another a metaphorical journey, this one into the world of 'Faery'.

²⁹ Frow, 71.

(as seen by the Little People; being the memoirs of Bilbo and Frodo of the Shire, supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise.)

Together with extracts from Books of Lore translated by Bilbo in Rivendell. (*RK*, VI, ix, 1344)

This title is given by Frodo to the manuscript containing his and Sam's accounts of the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. Bilbo's record of the events of *The Hobbit* (1937) is also contained within its 'plain red leather covers' (*RK*, VI, ix, 1343). Appended to the 'Red Book' (*FR*, 1) are three volumes of Bilbo's 'Translations from the Elvish' and a fifth volume containing 'commentaries, genealogies, and various other matter concerning the hobbit members of the Fellowship' (*FR*, 19). To this series of foundational texts Tolkien gives an elaborate afterlife.

Although these original manuscripts were lost, 'many copies were made, especially of the first volume, for the use of the descendants of the children of Master Samwise' (*FR*, 19). One copy, the 'Thain's Book', is arguably the most important. Not only was it copied in Gondor by the King's scribe Findegil, but it 'received much annotation, and many corrections' (*FR*, 19) in Minas Tirith, and was the only copy to preserve the contents of the original five volumes. In short, it 'contained much that was later omitted or lost' (*FR*, 19), and represents the work not only of Bilbo and the hobbit members of the Fellowship, but also of scholars and historians in Minas Tirith. It is presumably this copy that is 'edited' and 'translated' by the Tolkien editor persona, and which leads to the publication of the printed edition of *The Lord of the Rings*.³⁰

This conceit is used elsewhere by Tolkien: *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949) is presented as an edited manuscript, while *The Notion Club Papers* presents itself as originating in the minutes of a fictional Oxford discussion group (reminiscent of the Inklings).³¹ *The Hobbit*, however, is part of the same frame as *The Lord of the Rings*. As the latter's Prologue states, the published version of *The Hobbit* was a 'selection from the Red Book of Westmarch' (*FR*, 1), a claim supported by a runic message on the dust-jacket of the first edition which, when translated, reads: 'The Hobbit, or There and Back Again, Being the Record of a Year's Journey made by Bilbo Baggins of Hobbiton, compiled from his memoirs by J.R.R. Tolkien and

³⁰ See Appendix F.II for a note on translating and 'presenting the matter of the 'Red Book' (*RK*, 1489).

³¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, ed. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond (London, 2014), 33. Though unpublished in Tolkien's lifetime, *The Notion Club Papers* can be found in *Sauron Defeated*.

published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd.’ (capitals and punctuation mine.)³² This elaborate conceit is undoubtedly rooted in Tolkien’s own experience and fascination with medieval manuscripts, and is also reminiscent of the aesthetics of eighteenth-century antiquarianism.³³ It is also worth noting here the formulaic similarity this lengthy title bears to real-life travel accounts, such as *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea ... by John Franklin, Captain R.N., F.R.S. ...* (1823); or indeed to works of fiction posing as them, like Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, more fully *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner*. The conceit of the frame narrative is crucial to this discussion as, through it, the printed novel of *The Lord of the Rings* sets out its origins as lying in first-hand travel ‘accounts’ and ‘memoirs’ (RK, VI, ix, 1344).

Verlyn Flieger argues of the frame:

It will not do to pursue too far the notion of *The Lord of the Rings* as serially written by Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam. Too many things will not fit comfortably into the concept—narrative voice, point of view, the amount of knowledge each of these “authors” could have had at any one time. If these are put together, the whole concept falls apart. It is best seen as an authorial conceit but not a substantial structural factor, an expedient way for Tolkien to collect his often narratively disparate material into one scheme.³⁴

But Flieger’s argument that Bilbo, Frodo and Sam would between them not have sufficient knowledge to produce the story we read ignores the fact that *The Lord of the Rings* is a product not just of their work, but also that of Merry and Pippin (both of whom were heavily involved in the events in Rohan and Gondor), and of the scholars of Minas Tirith working under the direction of Aragorn. To re-state the Prologue: ‘much that was later omitted or lost’ was recorded in the Thain’s Book (FR, 19). Flieger also ignores the importance of the Tolkien editor-persona. The various documents were supposedly edited and translated by Tolkien; this could explain shifts in narrative style, perhaps introduced for dramatic effect. More generally, it should be noted that the presence of an editor and the ensuing shift from a first-person account to a third-person narrative is a common feature in travel writing: ‘[o]ften a traveller did not record his own story but told it to someone else

³² Verlyn Flieger, ‘Frame Narrative’, 216-8 in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (Abingdon, 2007), 216.

³³ See chapters by Stuart D. Lee, 56-76 and Nick Groom, 286-302 in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* for discussions of: Tolkien’s treatment of manuscripts both academically and in his fiction (Lee); Tolkien and eighteenth-century antiquarian practice (Groom, 291-296).

³⁴ Verlyn Flieger, *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien’s Mythology* (Kent, Ohio, 2005), 79.

... who wrote it out in third or first person ... perhaps for publication.’³⁵ Marco Polo, for example, recounted his stories and had them written down by the romance writer Rustichello of Pisa when they were incarcerated together.³⁶ Moreover, a degree of imaginative reconstruction when it comes to things like dialogue is inevitable in all ‘real’ travel accounts written in the days before electronic recording.³⁷

Although Flieger argues that the frame of the narrative is ‘not a substantial structural factor’, it is better integrated with the main narrative body than it might appear. *The Lord of the Rings*’s alleged origin is referenced on several occasions throughout the text; the reader hears and sees the Red Book in construction. The narrator tells us, for example, that at the Council of Elrond, ‘[e]very step of [Frodo’s] journey from Hobbiton to the Ford of Bruinen was questioned and considered’ (*FR*, II, ii, 325). Bilbo is, however, unsatisfied with the level of detail: ‘we shall have to go over it all again some time, if I am to write it up. There are whole chapters of stuff before you ever got here!’, he says to Frodo (*FR*, II, ii, 325).

Later in the narrative, Pippin remarks that ‘Frodo will have to be locked up in a tower in Minas Tirith and write it all down. Otherwise he will forget half of it’ (*RK*, VI, iv, 1252). This raising of the issue of memory is a significant one. As the frame indicates, *The Lord of the Rings* is the result of the travellers writing up their accounts once the journey is over. The accounts have been collated and homogenised into a single narrative voice, yet small gaps in the narrative remind the reader that it originates in the fallible recollections of individuals. The text contains uncertainties of distance – ‘a mile, maybe’ (*TT*, III, i, 538) – and of time: ‘[t]his was the second, no, the third night since he had looked in the Stone’ (*RK*, V, i, 977). On two occasions there is a complete lack of memory: ‘Pippin became drowsy again and paid little attention to Gandalf telling him of the customs of Gondor’ (*RK*, V, i, 978); ‘[t]he remainder of that journey was a shadow of growing fear in which memory could find nothing to rest upon’ (*TT*, IV, ii, 825). Elsewhere, there is evidence of the re-drafting and perfecting of accounts, as seen in the first appearance of Treebeard. The narrator describes his eyes in fairly simple terms – ‘[t]hey were brown, shot with a green light’ – but is then interrupted by a far more eloquent descriptive paragraph from Pippin, reminiscing after the fact: ‘[o]ne felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking’ (*TT*, III, iv, 603). Flieger and Anderson characterise the narrator of *The Lord of the Rings* as a ‘self-effacing third-person story-teller’

³⁵ Adams, 43.

³⁶ Marco Polo, *The Travels*, ed. and trans. Nigel Cliff, (London, 2015), xii.

³⁷ Korte, 10.

(*OFS*, 17); yet it is not omniscient, but rather shows evidence of its origin in first-hand travel accounts.³⁸

II. ‘There is a laborious practical side even to high Romance’: focalisation, mapping and authentication

As noted earlier, quests and epics usually involve a great deal of travel, but such a laborious task is usually brushed over by the narrative; the protagonist undertakes it so that the reader does not have to. Travel writing, however, is interested in the literal business of travel, rather than necessarily as a metaphor for something else. *The Lord of the Rings* does not shy away from the unexciting but essential aspects of travel, such as the weight of Sam’s pack (*FR*, I, iii, 92), getting lost (*FR*, I, vi, 146; *TT*, IV, i, 787; *RK*, VI, ii, 1214), getting footsore (*FR*, II, vi, 441), and problems of food and supplies, (*FR*, I, xi, 249; *TT*, IV, ii, 811; *RK*, VI, iii, 1229), including how best to skin and cook a ‘brace of coney’s’ (*TT*, IV, iv, 854-6) in the wild, something Tolkien made a point of researching himself (*Letters*, 74). Such attention to the minutiae of travel supports the conceit of the frame; the narrative originates in the travellers’ experiences and so is focalised through them, and reflects their day-to-day concerns.

The narrative’s focalisation also becomes apparent when one observes its attitude towards the landscapes of Middle-earth. Critics have often argued for the centrality of landscape in *The Lord of the Rings*. The figures of the Ents and their antagonistic relationship with Saruman the industrialist, for example, has led some to argue that Tolkien should be viewed as an ecological writer.³⁹ But while such accounts pick up on the ‘wealth of narrative time’ and the impressive level of detail deployed in describing ‘landscapes, creatures, and plants’, they ignore that such descriptions are firmly focalised through the eyes of the traveller, and vary in content and style depending on the method of travel and the speed of movement.⁴⁰

A common stylistic feature in *The Lord of the Rings* is the panorama: the travellers reach a high point, halt, and observe the landscape around them. One such moment occurs when the hobbits summit a hill after leaving the house of Tom Bombadil. Precise descriptions (too long to cite in their entirety) are given of the landscape in all four cardinal directions (*FR*, I, viii, 177). The detail is exhaustive, yet the limits imposed by the travellers’ eyes are foregrounded: the valley of the

³⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories* (London, 2014), ed. Verlyn Flieger & Douglas A. Anderson. Quotations will be referenced parenthetically in the text.

³⁹ See Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth & Modernity* (London, 1998), especially chapter 3, 59-98, for a broad eco-critical approach to Tolkien; and Michael J. Brisbois, ‘Tolkien’s Imaginary Nature: An Analysis of the Structure of Middle-earth’, *Tolkien Studies* 2 (2005), 197-216 for a taxonomy of Tolkien’s natural world.

⁴⁰ Liam Campbell, ‘Nature’, 431-445 in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, 433.

Brandywine, though known of, is ‘hidden’; the river itself is a mere ‘distant glint’; and the view east, the most mysterious for the hobbits, vanishes into ‘no more than a guess of blue’. This meticulous level of detail appears when the travellers are stationary. When they are on the move (usually on foot), the shifting landscape and the passage of distance and time are foregrounded: ‘[o]n the third day out from Bree they came out of the Chetwood. The land had been falling steadily, ever since they turned aside from the Road, and they now entered a wide flat expanse of country, much more difficult to manage.’ (*FR*, I, xi, 238). There is in this final clause an awareness of the landscape as something that must be engaged with, rather than simply an eye-pleasing backdrop. As Robin Jarvis argues, ‘[t]he pedestrian’s experience of landscape is a *participatory* rather than [a] disinterested one’; the inevitable slow pace ‘allows for the lingering gaze and the backward look’.⁴¹ The abundance of detail in *The Lord of the Rings*, then, can partly be explained by the sheer amount of time the travellers spend on foot. One can compare the above to sections of the book in which the travellers are on horseback, where there is little detail or awareness of distance:

And so King Théoden departed from his own realm, and mile by mile the long road wound away, and the beacon hills marched past: Calenhad, Min-Rimmon, Erelas, Nardol. (*RK*, V, iii, 1053)

In such cases, progress is not measured by a sense of distance travelled, but through an awareness of specific places: the travellers (and, therefore, the narrative) locate themselves cartographically.

The importance of maps in Tolkien’s fiction is difficult to overstate. He thought them ‘essential’ (*Letters*, 171), and was painstaking in assuring their detail, geographical precision, and that they matched up accurately with the text itself. Although he claimed once, ‘I wisely started with a map, and made the story fit’ (*Letters*, 177), his letters show a process of composition in which map and narrative were carefully edited alongside each other to ensure that both aligned.⁴²

I have been struggling with the dislocated chronology of the Ring ... I think I have solved it all at last by small map alterations, and by inserting an extra day’s Entmoot, and extra days into Trotter’s [an earlier name

⁴¹ Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (London, 1997), 67-8. Jarvis draws on Eric J. Leed, particularly his conception of the ‘perceptual envelope’ through which the traveller views the world, and which varies according to the speed and mode of transport. See Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler* [sic]: *From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York, 1991), 74-80.

⁴² See Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, Revised Edition (London, 2005), 181-190 for a detailed examination of the chronology of *The Lord of the Rings* in relation to the plot structuring device of *entrelacement*.

for Strider] chase and Frodo's journey (a small alteration in the first chapter I have just sent: 2 days from Morannon to Ithilien). (*Letters*, 97)

In the spirit of accuracy he calculated distances on the working draft of the map with a square grid.⁴³ He even created a Shire-specific system of measurements, with the smallest unit 'based on a hobbit's toe-nail', in order to calculate how far a hobbit could plausibly walk in a day.⁴⁴ A reader can compare map and text and trace the various journeys of *The Lord of the Rings*; the 'truth' of the story is given additional weight through cartographical corroboration.⁴⁵

Maps are an important component of travel narratives more generally. As well as providing a visual representation of the journey in question, a map also helps support the truth claim of the text. As established, a travel text must claim veracity, yet real-life accounts were often 'received sceptically' and dis-believed; maps have long been employed defensively for the purposes of authentication.⁴⁶ Richard Hakluyt's compendium of American travel accounts, *Divers voyages touching the discoverie of America* (1582), for example, contains 'two mappes annexed hereunto for the plainer understanding of the whole matter'.⁴⁷ Isaac Weld, in his *Travels* (1799) through America and Canada, deploys maps of both regions, as well as more detailed plans of cities such as Washington and Québec.⁴⁸ A more recent 20th

⁴³ Alice Campbell, 'Maps', 405-8 in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 406.

⁴⁴ Catherine McIlwaine, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle Earth* (Oxford, 2018), 393.

⁴⁵ Some readers have taken this process a step further. Karen Wynn Fonstad's *The Atlas of Middle Earth, Revised Edition* (Boston, 1991), for example, contains a series of maps depicting the day-by-day journeys of the principal characters (162-175), together with a day-by-day record of mileage and travel speed, the locations of camp-sites and, occasionally, lunch breaks (151-161). Although these maps rely on some 'assumptions and estimates', they are primarily enabled by Tolkien's 'tremendous attention to detail' and the narrative's interest in the literal business of travel (150).

⁴⁶ Jaś Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel* (London, 1999), 14. Thompson, 65-6.

Zweder von Martels (ed.), *Introduction to Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery and Observation in Travel Writing* (Leiden, 1994), xi. See also John Wyatt, *The Use of Imaginary, Historical, and Actual Maps in Literature* (Lewiston, 2013).

⁴⁷ Richard Hakluyt, *Divers voyages concerning the discoverie of America and the Ilands adjacent unto the same* (London, 1582), accessed at EEBO, < http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2175/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:6277> on 10/03/16; 1.

⁴⁸ Isaac Weld, *Travels through the states of North America, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the years 1795, 1796, and 1797*, 2nd Edition, 2 volumes (London, 1799), accessed at ECCO, <<http://find.gale.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=bost84371&tabID=T001&docId=CW101380839&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOAr>>

century example can be found (ironically) in Graham Greene's *Journey without Maps*.⁴⁹ Maps are equally omnipresent in fictional travel accounts, and are employed similarly as a defensive strategy, albeit playfully when the contents of the travel account are obviously invented. *Gulliver's Travels* contains several, as does Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), albeit a heavily stylised one.⁵⁰

Tolkien's own maps are particularly diligent in their efforts to appear factual. The accuracy of distances vis-à-vis the story has already been mentioned; the design of the maps themselves is also important. Alice Campbell argues that, visually, their 'antique style' helps to maintain the fiction 'that the maps are fair copies of Bilbo's maps, which are fair copies of the Elves' maps.'⁵¹ In his book on fantasy maps, Stefan Ekman demonstrates various ways in which, like the narrative, the maps are presented as genuine documents that either were or could have been used by the travellers in the story. These include 'the presence of a scale', which 'announces that there is another space to which the map positions correspond, strengthening the impression that the map not only portrays but represents, that there is a measurable space to which the map refers.'⁵² He points out that the concerns of the map are not those of the story – 'Tharbad (mentioned a few times in passing) is [marked] more prominently than the Ford at Rivendell ... Lond Daer (which does not feature in the story) is as prominently marked as the Grey Havens', reinforcing the notion of this being a copy of a genuine world map created in the world of Middle-earth.⁵³ Similarly, the map of the Shire, created by some unnamed Hobbit cartographer, firmly demonstrates a hobbit-centric world view, with its marked farthing borders, 'bright-red road[s]', detailed labelling of topographical features, and narrow geographical range that proves so intriguing to Frodo before he sets out from the Shire (*FR*, I, ii, 57).⁵⁴ I agree with Ekman when he posits a material history for this map, hinted at in the positioning of the farthing names 'facing different ways [which] suggests, faintly, that this map did not originally belong in a book but was a loose sheet that could be turned in the hands of the user'.⁵⁵ The maps in *The Lord of the Rings*, then, support the attention to detail and truth claim of the narrative, all the while posing as genuine 'artefacts' from the world of the story, the deployment of which more generally is an important

[titles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE](#)> on 28/04/20; Vol. 1, 1 and 305 for regional maps, 81 for plan of Washington, 346 for Québec.

⁴⁹ Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps* (London, 2010), xxxii-xxxiii.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Claude Rawson & Ian Higgins (Oxford, 2005), 14, 74, 140, 156, 206.

Susan Bruce (ed.), *Three Early Modern Utopias* (Oxford, 1999), 130.

⁵¹ Campbell, 'Maps' in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 408.

⁵² Stefan Ekman, *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (Middleton, 2013), 35.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 50.

‘factualising strategy’ available to travel writers who wish to cement a sense of their account’s truthfulness.⁵⁶ Although Tolkien did not publish many artistic illustrations with *The Lord of the Rings*, he included several important pictorial ‘artefacts’ that serve to support the veracity of the text.

These are occasionally integrated within the narrative with no introduction, and merely serve as implicit evidence for the claims of the text. Examples include the writing on the Ring (*FR*, I, ii, 66) and a drawing of Durin’s Door (*FR*, II, iv, 398), complete with a transcription of the Elvish script that runs along the top of it, namely ‘the Feānorian characters according to the mode of Beleriand’. *The Lord of the Rings* also contains a representation of the ‘great slab of white stone’ (*FR*, II, iv, 416) that is Balin’s tomb in Moria. The drawing is explicitly foregrounded in the text; it is preceded by ‘[o]n the slab runes were deeply graven:’ (*FR*, II, iv, 416). The inscription serves as an attempt to re-assert and authenticate the rightful rule of the dwarves in the final days of their failed military expedition. Written in the ‘guarded’ (*RK*, Appendix F.I, 1488) Dwarvish tongue, the slab is a final attempt to confirm Balin’s rightful title, even in death:

BALIN SON OF FUNDIN
LORD OF MORIA
(*FR*, II, iv, 417)

But through its inclusion in the text, it also serves to commemorate the journey through Moria and to authenticate the travel account.

A similar strategy can be observed in, for instance, Daniel Defoe’s *Tour*. In his account he includes several drawings, including a diagrammatic representation of a mine-shaft, complete with ‘iron bars placed cross the angles for the workmen to set their feet on’, and a diagram of a generic New Forest farmstead.⁵⁷ Defoe also reproduces a drawing of the inscription of ‘King Arthur’s coffin’, supposedly found at ‘Glastenbury’ during the reign of Henry II.⁵⁸ Like Tolkien, he integrates the image within the narrative: ‘[t]he inscription on King Arthur’s coffin, is as follows:’. Defoe is, however, evasive as to whether or not he actually saw the inscription. While he is confident in proclaiming what it is – indicated by his use of the present tense – he cedes authority to previous writers, such as William Camden, who ‘makes no doubt of it’.⁵⁹ In fact, the drawing itself is also taken from Camden;

⁵⁶ Thompson, 87.

⁵⁷ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour through The Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed. Pat Rogers (London, 1986), 466; 203.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 256-7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 257.

here again the issue of actual fact and fiction is raised and discarded.⁶⁰ Whether Defoe actually saw the inscription is irrelevant; what matters is the *semblance* of reality and the rhetorical display of authority.⁶¹

Tolkien made further attempts at creating a sense of veracity with the literal forging of textual artefacts. One such example is a letter sent from King Elessar to Sam, ‘inviting [him] and his family to meet Aragorn’ during a trip to the North of his kingdom, of which Tolkien forged several versions.⁶² Another example concerns the Book of Mazarbul, the tome found ‘slashed and stabbed and partly burned’ (*FR*, II, v, 418) next to Balin’s tomb in the Chamber of Records, and read by Gandalf to the Fellowship. Tolkien forged several pages of it, the facsimiles of which were to be included within the published volume.⁶³ Humphrey Carpenter notes the painstaking care with which Tolkien approached the task, ‘copying out the pages in runes and elvish [sic] writing, and then deliberately damaging them, burning the edges and smearing the paper with substances that looked like dried blood’ (217).⁶⁴ The plan to include facsimiles of these documents, however, was unsuccessful due to the excessive cost:

Reluctantly also I had to abandon, under pressure from the ‘production department’, the ‘facsimiles’ of the three pages of the *Book of Mazarbul*, burned tattered and blood-stained, which I had spent much time on producing or forging. (*Letters*, 248)

As Flieger notes, ‘although the carefully damaged pages never made it into the published *Lord of the Rings*, their very creation suggests that Tolkien’s mind was already engaged in elaborating the conceit of book as object or artefact as well as text’ (*Music*, 77). Though not all of these artefacts were included within the published volume, they serve as evidence of *The Lord of the Rings* not only

⁶⁰ William Camden, *Britannia; or, a chorographical description of the flourishing kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the islands adjacent; from the earliest antiquity*, 2nd Edition, 3 volumes plus Atlas, trans. Richard Gough (London, 1789), Atlas, 68. Accessed online at <<http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2119/mome/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=MOME&userGroupName=oxford&tabID=T001&docId=U3609152298&type=multipage&contentSet=MOMEArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>> on 14/03/16.

⁶¹ It is thought that the ‘circuits’ that he embarks on are, in fact, composite accounts of the travelling he engaged in throughout his life, rather than linear journeys as he presents them; see Pat Rogers, Introduction to *A Tour*, 15.

⁶² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Art of The Lord of the Rings*, ed. Wayne G. Hammond & Christina Scull (London, 2015), 232-6.

⁶³ Groom in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, 295. See Michael D. C. Drout, ‘Manuscripts, Medieval’, 404-5 in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* for examples of specific medieval manuscripts that Tolkien may have drawn on for the ‘design’ of his forgery.

⁶⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London, 1977), 217.

conceiving of itself as a travel account, but providing visible evidence to support such a claim.

III. ‘Strange as News from Bree’: the ethnographic stance

An essential part of travel writing’s traditional remit is the description of foreign nations and customs, long foregrounded by the writers themselves as an important utilitarian *raison d’être* for the genre.⁶⁵ The prologue to Marco Polo’s *Travels*, for example, offers the book to ‘all who want to know about the various races of mankind and the peculiarities of the various regions of the world’, while John Mandeville justifies the colourful details of his narrative thus: ‘if all these things are not relevant to the journey, they are nevertheless relevant in so far as I have undertaken to show some of the customs and manners and differences of these countries ... for many people take great pleasure and comfort to hear talk of unfamiliar things’ (14).⁶⁶ Although it takes place in his native country, Daniel Defoe’s *Tour* takes a tone of perceptive observation: ‘[i]n every County something of the People is said, as well as of the Place, of their Customs, Speech, Employments, the Product of their Labour, and the Manner of their living’.⁶⁷ Even modern travelogues, usually more personal in tone, sometimes humorous, and certainly less prone to make claims for their utility, rely on conversations and descriptions of the people they come across; see, for example, Bill Bryson on the average Iowan town square,

‘scattered [with] benches full of old men in John Deere caps sitting around talking about the days when they had something else to do other than sit around and talk about the days when they had something else to do.’⁶⁸

Middle-earth, of course, is peopled with several different races, each in turn divided into distinct communities set apart by differences in architecture, dress, art, language, and style of speech. Although certain groups are only mentioned in passing, the narrative encounters several in detail; it, and sometimes the characters themselves, subject the cultures they encounter to the ethnographer’s gaze in a manner consistent with the conventions of traditional travel writing. A certain confident and generalising stylistic register heralds this particular mode. It can be seen in the Prologue, in which the Tolkien editor persona enumerates ‘the more

⁶⁵ Palmira Brummett (ed.), *The ‘Book’ of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250-1700* (Boston, 2009), 2.

⁶⁶ Polo, 3.

⁶⁷ Defoe, 45.

⁶⁸ Bill Bryson, *The Lost Continent: Travels in Small-Town America* (London, 2015), 30.

important points ... from Hobbit-lore' for readers unfamiliar with this 'unobtrusive but very ancient people' (*FR*, 1). He goes on to describe them with broad brush strokes, touching on their appearance ('[t]heir faces were as a rule good-natured rather than beautiful' (*FR*, 2)), their way of life ('they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth' (*FR*, 1)), their attitudes ('they were hospitable and delighted in parties' (*FR*, 2)), and dedicates an entire sub-section section to the smoking of pipe-weed (*FR*, 10-11).

Later in the novel, when the narrative encounters other unfamiliar peoples, attitudes conform to the tone set in the Prologue. Aragorn, for example, summarises the people of Rohan thus to Legolas and Gimli: '[t]hey are proud and wilful, but they are true-hearted, generous in thought and deed; bold but not cruel; wise but unlearned' (*TT*, III, ii, 560). Earlier in the tale, in a rare moment of unfocalised narrative, the narrator describes the people of Bree – '[t]he Men of Bree were brown-haired, broad, and rather short, cheerful and independent' (*FR*, I, ix, 195) – as well as the 'mysterious wanderers' of the Rangers, who 'were taller and darker than the Men of Bree' (*FR*, I, ix, 195). The authoritative generalisations and gender bias are reminiscent of the style of much real-world travel writing: 'the traveller's situation is always liable to produce inadvertent misperceptions and unwarranted extrapolations'.⁶⁹ Compare the above quotations with the writing of Isaac Weld, who published an account of his travels through the North American continent in 1799. He writes of German settlers:

The Germans are a quiet, sober, and industrious set of people, and are most valuable citizens ... The Germans are a plodding race of men, wholly intent upon their own business ... The Germans give themselves but little trouble about politics.⁷⁰

Or, to take a more modern (and self-aware) example from Patrick Leigh Fermor's *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986): 'spotting people with obligingly tow-coloured or raven hair, I thought – and perhaps wrongly – I could pick out a typical German from a typical Magyar.'⁷¹

Such generalisations are usually justified by the author claiming first-hand experience and observation. Weld claims to have crossed the Atlantic 'for the purpose of examining with his own eyes' the North American continent.⁷² Aragorn's assessment of the Rohirrim is prefaced with 'I have been among them' (*TT*, III, ii, 560). The summary of Bree may well be rooted in Frodo's use of the Underhill alias, a hobbit apparently interested in writing a book 'about hobbits

⁶⁹ Thompson, 71.

⁷⁰ Weld, Volume 1, 122-4; see previous access note.

⁷¹ Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Between the Woods and the Water* (New York, 1986), 25.

⁷² Weld, Volume 1, iii; see previous access note.

living outside the Shire' (*FR*, I, ix, 203). After giving this excuse, Frodo is immediately swamped with information given to him by the locals, information which he (perhaps jokingly) promises to write up when questioned on the matter after the defeat of Sauron (*RK*, VI, vii, 1303). But regardless, such stereotypes inevitably break down when the cultures themselves stray into the narrative. Bill Ferny and Harry the gatekeeper, for example, do not fit the model of cheerful Bree-landers, nor does Wormtongue fit the 'true-hearted' stereotype of a man of Rohan. Although there are occasional instances of direct cultural exchange, such as Merry's holding forth on pipe-weed to Théoden (*TT*, III, viii, 728), or Frodo and Faramir's discussion of pre-prandial rituals (*TT*, IV, v, 884), such moments are rare. Cultures tend to be described from an external point of view in the broad and authoritative tone often found in travel writing and anthropology, termed 'the ethnographic present'.⁷³

The broad field of disciplines termed 'postcolonial studies' is particularly interested in this aspect of travel writing, seen by many critics to be responsible for the creation and perpetuation of racial and cultural stereotypes.⁷⁴ Tolkien himself has been accused of racism in his depiction of the 'Easterlings' (*FR*, II, ii, 319), 'Southrons' (*TT*, IV, iv, 862) and 'Swertings' (*TT*, IV, iv, 865).⁷⁵ This paper does not have the scope for a nuanced reading of race in *The Lord of the Rings*, but it is certainly significant that, although the narrative extrapolates and generalises for all nations, only a select few are able to express their cultures directly. While the Rohirrim may indeed be, according to Aragorn, 'unlearned' – 'they '[write] no books but [sing] many songs' (*TT*, III, vi, 662) – the sheer complexity of their songs is made apparent to the reader when they appear. They are employed, for example, in battle (*RK*, V, v, 1097) and as a method for recording history (*RK*, V, iii, 1051),

⁷³ 'ethnographic present', entry in *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford, 2002), accessed online at <<https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.bu.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715-e-560>> on 29/04/20.

⁷⁴ See Thompson, Chapter 6, 130-67, for a discussion of the ethical implications and problems that are a feature of much travel writing.

⁷⁵ See Christine Chism, 'Race and Ethnicity in Tolkien's works' 555-6 in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* for a discussion of racial generalisations; and Christine Chism, 'Racism, charges of', 558 in the same volume. See Myles Balfe, 'Incredible Geographies? Orientalism and Genre Fantasy', *Social & Cultural Geography* 5:1 (2004), 75-90, for the orientalist tendencies of *The Lord of the Rings*, replicated in subsequent fantasy texts like *Dungeons and Dragons*. See Margaret Sinex, "'Monsterized Saracens," Tolkien's Haradrim, and Other Medieval "Fantasy Products"', *Tolkien Studies* 7 (2010), 175-196, for the argument that racial biases in *The Lord of the Rings* are rooted in medieval theories on race and morality rather than personal prejudice. Finally, see Part III of Dimitra Fimi's *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History* (Basingstoke, 2008) for discussions of Victorian/Edwardian beliefs on race, Tolkien's personal views, and the role of race in the construction of Middle-earth.

all in complex alliterative verse based on the Old English poetry that Tolkien knew so well.⁷⁶

Such moments work against the generalising tendencies of the ethnographic present, and are denied to the eastern nations. This could be attributed simply to the fact that the narrative is focalised through the travellers, and that their journey does not take them ‘into the far countries of Rhûn and Harad where the stars are strange’ (*FR*, II, ii, 323). But it cannot be denied that the so-called ‘wild folk of the East’ (*FR*, II, ii, 319) are denied any cultural autonomy and are viewed by the text predominantly as military antagonists; this is surely in part responsible for any accusations of implicit racism that Tolkien might face.

IV. ‘the inner consistency of reality’

The exact line of influence between travel writing and *The Lord of the Rings* may at first seem unclear. While Tolkien’s lack of interest towards most English literature post-Chaucer has been exaggerated, partly by Tolkien himself, it is unlikely that he would have read some of the more obscure travel texts mentioned above, such as Daniel Defoe’s *Tour* or Isaac Weld’s *Travels*.⁷⁷ As a scholar of medieval literature, however, he was certainly aware of John Mandeville. One of his earliest academic publications was *A Middle English Vocabulary* (1922), a detailed glossary designed to be used alongside *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (1921). This anthology, compiled by Tolkien’s former tutor, Kenneth Sisam, included excerpts from Mandeville’s *Travels*; Tolkien would have painstakingly parsed these in the creation of his glossary.⁷⁸ It is also likely that Tolkien knew of *The Wonders of the East*, a travel text located in the *Beowulf* Manuscript.⁷⁹ In addition, he was acquainted with some of the fictional travel texts discussed in this paper. He was familiar with the works of Jonathan Swift, a fellow ‘aficionado of invented languages [and] linguistic systems’ who, as we have seen, ‘append[ed] false maps and pseudonymous authorship’ to *Gulliver’s Travels*.⁸⁰ Tolkien also wrote in a letter that he had read several books on African exploration’ (*Letters*, 30).

Perhaps most importantly, he was ‘an avid reader of late Victorian and Edwardian popular romances’, many of which drew on the conventions of the

⁷⁶ Alexandra Bolintineanu, ‘Old English’, 465-7 in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 466-7.

⁷⁷ See Groom, 286-302 in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* for a discussion of Tolkien’s relationship with the English canon, e.g. his required undergraduate reading, 289.

⁷⁸ See Elizabeth Solopova, ‘Middle English’, 230-243 in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* for an account of Tolkien’s professional relationship with Middle English literature, as well as its influence on his fiction.

⁷⁹ See Jonathan Evans, ‘Monsters’, 433-4 in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, 433.

⁸⁰ Groom in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, 290.

‘fictional travelogue, or at least [the] travel story’.⁸¹ Michael Saler points out that a number of these novels share a common strategy of presenting a fantastical narrative ‘in a rigorously logical mode replete with “objective” details’, linking them together to form a loose movement known as the ‘New Romance.’⁸² Saler associates Tolkien with the movement, particularly in terms of the ‘appropriation of realist techniques’; his ‘genealogical charts, detailed chronologies and appendices, and scholarly discussions about nomenclature, geography, history, and languages’, for example, have immediate predecessors in the frequent use that H. Rider Haggard, Jules Verne, Arthur Conan Doyle and others made of ‘footnotes, glossaries, and appendices’.⁸³ The aforementioned forging of the Book of Mazarbul, while rooted partly in Tolkien’s interest in medieval manuscript culture, closely resembles a number of New Romantic efforts: the frontispiece of *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), the result of Haggard ‘commissioning Agnes Barber to fabricate a weathered map that looked as if it had been etched in blood on linen’; or the ‘Facsimile of the Sherd of Amenartas’ in *She* (1887); or the photograph of Professor Challenger in *The Lost World* – in fact a photo of a heavily disguised Conan Doyle.⁸⁴ Strategies of textual authentication, first used by much older travel texts (see, for example, Thomas More’s ‘Utopian alphabet’), were extended greatly by a series of ‘spectacular texts’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, forming an important part Tolkien’s cultural milieu and potential inspiration for his own efforts.⁸⁵

Leaving the very real possibility of intentional borrowing aside, however, I will conclude by arguing that the overlap between *The Lord of the Rings* and travel writing (both factual and fictional) was inevitable, given the artistic project that Tolkien saw his novel fulfilling, as expressed in the essay ‘On Fairy-Stories’.⁸⁶ In

⁸¹ Anna Vaninskaya, ‘Modernity: Tolkien and His Contemporaries’, 350-66 in *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, 357.

Jared Lobdell, *England and Always: Tolkien’s World of the Ring* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981), 3-25.

⁸² Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford, 2012), 7, 14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 60, 159, 15.

⁸⁴ H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines*, ed. Gerald Monsman (Peterborough, 2002), 36.

H. Rider Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure*, ed. Andrew M. Stauffer (Peterborough, 2006), 4. Saler, 78.

⁸⁵ *Three Early Modern Utopias*, 132.

Saler 70.

⁸⁶ Originally composed as the 1939 Andrew Lang lecture, delivered by Tolkien at St. Andrews University. Fliieger and Anderson view *The Lord of the Rings* as a ‘demonstration of the principles set forth’ (*OFS*, 15) in the essay, a claim corroborated by Tolkien himself: ‘I think the [lecture] was entirely beneficial to *The Lord of the Rings*, which was a practical demonstration of the views I expressed’ (*Letters*, 310). It should be noted that the term ‘fairy-story’ is used highly

it, Tolkien lays out certain essential qualities for a successful fairy-story, the most important of which is that it take place in a ‘Secondary World’ (*OFS*, 61), one with an ‘inner consistency of reality’ (*OFS*, 77). This should induce in the reader ‘Secondary Belief’ (*OFS*, 61), defined as an active and positive immersion in the secondary world, as opposed to Coleridge’s negatively inflected ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (*OFS*, 52). Significantly for this discussion, Tolkien attempts to divide this kind of elaborate ‘fairy-story’ from ‘travellers’ tales’, arguing that ‘[s]uch tales may report many marvels, but they are marvels to be seen in this mortal world in some region of our own time and space; distance alone conceals them’ (*OFS*, 34). As he later admits, however, ‘the borders of fairy-story are inevitably dubious’ (*OFS*, 34); genres are not monolithic constructs with hermetically sealed borders, and this particular division ignores the important shared history of invented fictional worlds and travel writing.

In his book *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2012), Mark J. P. Wolf traces the history of fictional worlds and demonstrates the important and long-standing relationship the literary technique has with travel writing.⁸⁷ Wolf views the so-called ‘Age of Exploration’ of the early modern period as a watershed moment; the increasing popularity and detail of real-life travel texts provided ‘new inspiration for the creation of secondary worlds’ and set the tone for ‘a greater degree of detail and verisimilitude’ within them.⁸⁸ The contribution of so-called ‘travel liars’ like Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe should also be noted, helping as they did to break down the division between genuine travel writing and fiction, all the while pushing both ‘in the direction of worlds that were richer and fuller than the mere glimpses and outrageous descriptions found in earlier works’.⁸⁹ The nineteenth century witnessed a further crucial development, namely that the bridge between the primary ‘real’ world and the invented secondary world became less necessary. William Morris, for example, was one of the earliest to write fantasy stories set from beginning to end in imaginary realms completely apart from our own world, like the land of Oakenrealm in *Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair* (1895).⁹⁰

As Wolf argues,

idiosyncratically by Tolkien, so much so that I will focus on the term as a stand-in for *The Lord of the Rings* rather than as making wider claims about the genre of the fairy story.

⁸⁷ Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (Abingdon, 2012); see Chapter 2: A History of Imaginary Worlds, 65-152.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹⁰ See Michael W. Perry, ‘William Morris’, 439-441 in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* for a summary of Morris’s influence on Tolkien. It is also worth mentioning that Morris also composed a travel text (though unpublished until the *Collected Works* in 1911) based on trips he had made to Iceland in 1871 and 1873.

the world itself ... was beginning to take centre stage as the location where most of the story took place. ... [T]he main character's journey of exploration could take place entirely within the world itself, as the character moves from the world's margins to its centre, learning about the world along with the audience.⁹¹

The Lord of the Rings fits this model; there is no initial journey from reality to fantasy, but the use of travel as a way of exploring the 'many marvels' (*OFS*, 34) of an imaginary world remains essential – the narrative is tethered to a central journey from the edge of the map to the centre and back again, undertaken by characters largely unfamiliar with the lands they are traversing.

For Tolkien, once the secondary world is established, it must maintain an 'inner consistency of reality'. He stresses how important it is for the story to be presented as "“true”" (*OFS*, 35), for it to have a 'knowledge and feeling for clay, stone and wood' (*OFS*, 68). What better way to achieve these aims than by deploying the techniques and resources of a genre whose central concern is to convey detailed impressions of unfamiliar places that will be taken for truth? The features of *The Lord of the Rings* examined in this paper – the elaborate frame, the narrative focalisation, the exhaustively detailed journey corroborated with maps and authenticated by artefacts, and the ethnographer's interest in expressing the characters of whole peoples and societies – are important constitutive elements of the novel. They are borrowed (deliberately or not) from the literature of travel, perhaps because they are so essential to Tolkien's attempt at fulfilling his own uniquely ambitious literary manifesto.

⁹¹ Wolf, 83.

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