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## Weather in Middle-earth or Tolkien: The Weather-Master?

Jonas Mertens

*Independent Researcher*, [jonas.mertens@bioch.ox.ac.uk](mailto:jonas.mertens@bioch.ox.ac.uk)

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### Cover Page Footnote

This article arose from a much shorter paper that was originally presented at the 18th Tolkien Seminar of the Deutsche Tolkien Gesellschaft (German Tolkien Society) at the Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena in October 2022. I hereby would like to give my sincere thanks for all of the helpful comments and corrections that Detlef Rediker, Norbert Schürer, Allan Turner and Thomas Honegger and the anonymous editors of the Journal of Tolkien Research provided me with. In addition, I would like to thank the organisers of the Tolkien Seminar.

# Weather in Middle-earth or Tolkien: The Weather-Master?

## I. Introduction

In a short article for the Tolkien Estate Patrick Curry writes:

“Tolkien’s own love of nature cannot be doubted. His profound feeling for natural place, variety and detail permeates *The Lord of the Rings* especially, and is an important part of the reasons why it is so convincing. The story takes in geology, ecosystems and bioregions, flora and fauna, seasons and the weather, and the Sun, Moon, planets and stars. [...] Middle-earth is an actor, a character, itself, and so are all its important places and parts.” (Curry 2006)

The close intertwining of Tolkien’s work with nature and the role the natural world plays in his storytelling is well known and has been the subject of research many times by now. Additionally, the author has also been explored as a “romanticist”<sup>1</sup>, a movement for which the power of nature, climate and weather was essential – one only has to cast a quick glance at the Romantic masterpiece of Caspar David Friedrich’s “Wanderer above the Sea of Fog” to be reminded of it. Nevertheless, some of the features which Curry mentions and that are also staples of Romantic literature appear to remain – at least in part – underexplored. Among them is that of meteorology. Therefore, this article attempts to characterize the role the weather plays in the *Legendarium*, with particular regard to Tolkien’s arguably most popular work, *The Lord of the Rings*.

For the author, the weather that Middle-earth and its inhabitants experience was definitely of importance. In 1958, when a proposed animated film with a script by Morton G. Zimmerman was in its early stages of preparation, Tolkien wrote to Forest J. Ackermann, then the person in charge of the film treatment:

“Seasons are carefully regarded in the original. They are pictorial, and should be, and easily could be, made the main means by which the artists indicate

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Eilmann’s book *JRR Tolkien: Romanticist and Poet* (Vol. 36. Walking Tree Publishers, 2017) or *Tolkien and Romanticism* (Proceedings of the Cambridge Tolkien Workshop 1988).

time-passage. The main action begins in autumn and passes through winter to a brilliant spring: this is basic to the purport and tone of the tale. The contraction of time and space in [Zimmerman] destroys that. His arrangements would, for instance, land us in a snowstorm while summer was still in. The Lord of the Rings may be a ‘fairy-story’, but it takes place in the Northern hemisphere of this earth: miles are miles, days are days, and weather is weather.” (Carpenter 271 f.)

Moreover, the author seems to have possessed at least some degree of meteorological knowledge, as William S. Pike, author of the sole research paper that concerns itself with weather and Tolkien, points out with the following anecdote (Pike 440). Being exposed to the elements on his daily commute via bicycle in Oxford and experiencing a particularly dreary weather period, Tolkien noted the following in one of his correspondences with his son Christopher:

“Nothing much has happened here since I wrote on Thursday. Weather foul. Cold, windy; roads littered with torn leaves, and broken blossom. It has veered from SW > W > NW > NE. Buchan is at it (as usual).“ (Carpenter 78)

This Alexander Buchan, a British meteorologist, came to some fame in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when he was the first to describe unseasonal weather changes and is today still remembered for these so-called ‘Buchan spells’ of cold and warm weather<sup>2</sup>. Tolkien might have been familiar with Buchan’s work.

*Per definitionem*, there is a clear distinction between the meteorological terms of weather, seasons and climate. While the expression ‘weather’ in essence represents the way our atmosphere is behaving at this very moment, and can change from day to day, month to month or season to season, ‘climate’ is a more long-term measure and usually referred to as the average weather over a period of thirty years (NASA, online article, “What’s the Difference Between Weather and Climate?”).

Pertaining to climate, Karen W. Fonstad’s *Atlas of Middle-earth* provides an insight into this part of meteorology. Fonstad locates and equates Third Age Middle-earth to the same latitude as today’s Europe, since both lie in a west wind

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<sup>2</sup> It was formerly supposed that these spells return at the same time each year. Today they are believed to be random events.

zone (Fonstad 182). In addition, she gives examples of climate characteristics in some of Middle-earth's regions: the climate of the Shire was presumably similar to the climate of England, whereas Gondor's resembled more the conditions found in the Mediterranean regions (ibid.). Before mountain ranges, rainfall would have been more prevalent than behind them. With westerly winds most common, this would mean a lot of precipitation west of the Misty Mountains, for instance, thus making Rohan lie in the somewhat drier rain shadow (ibid.).

Whereas Fonstad's claims are at times not necessarily evidence-based, Dan Lunt, a climate researcher writing under the pseudonym of "Radagast the Brown"<sup>3</sup> at the University of Bristol, came to quite similar conclusions when inputting geographical data from a three-dimensional Second Age Arda (mixed with data from the real world, like the tilt of Earth's axis and its spinning speed) into a simulation software and analysing the part of the fictional world known as Middle-earth (Lunt 3). To legitimize his findings, he let the same model run for both the modern world of preindustrial times as well as the late Cretaceous period, about 65 million years ago, shortly before the great extinction event in which most of the dinosaur species perished.

The results are quite interesting (Lunt 4 f.): Middle-earth overall would have had a climate similar to modern Western Europe or North Africa, with temperature mainly depending on the latitude, the North being of course colder, while the highest temperatures would be experienced in Mordor and Haradwaith. Mordor is described as inhospitable, with a very dry and hot climate. Fonstad's assumptions about the rain shadows behind the big mountain ranges are confirmed, moreover Middle-earth would have been densely forested (at least if you do not account for alterations due to orc logging or dragon fire, as the author underlines). In southern parts of the land a west wind would blow, with easterly winds being more prevalent in the North, leading to ideal sailing conditions for elves when leaving the Grey Havens for the West. Interestingly, the author also overlaid the generated data with the real world and could therefore show that Leicester- and Lincolnshire in the United Kingdom or Dunedin on New Zealand's South Island have a climate where both precipitation as well as temperature most closely match

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<sup>3</sup> Lunt is identified as "Radagast" for instance in the following article by Ian Randall in *Science: ScienceShot: The Climate of Middle-Earth* (available under <https://www.science.org/content/article/scienceshot-climate-middle-earth> [online article accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2023]).

the Shire; the same is true for Los Angeles and Western Texas in the United States or Alice Springs in Australia.

According to the difference between climate and weather established earlier, both Fonstad's atlas as well as the Bristol meteorologist's research article would be considered evaluations of the climate. There is, however, one paper published in a quite prestigious meteorological journal, written by aforementioned Pike, which concerns itself chiefly with the weather. In his "Appreciation of the Weather in the *Lord of the Rings*", the author makes interesting observations, but mainly focuses on certain scenes in the book, analysing and retrofitting real world weather phenomena into the story.

The departure of the hobbits from Bag End, for example, appears to have taken place during the so-called "old wives' summer", with comfortably high temperatures due to the Azores High (Pike 440). On the subsequent journey, the book describes a characteristic weather pattern of a katafront with less precipitation, followed by "ridge conditions" and a subsequent anafront<sup>4</sup> (Pike 441). The fog that our protagonists experience when heading for the Bucklebury ferry, which also causes them to get lost on the Barrow-downs, could be considered as "post-frontal radiation fog" (Pike 441 f.), while the conditions during the Battle of Helm's Deep represent a typical example of a wintertime cold front with stormy conditions (Pike 444 f.). The flash flood at the Ford of Bruinen as well as the snowstorm that hampered the crossing of the Redhorn Gate below Caradhras do not seem entirely unreasonable to occur from a meteorologist's point of view (Pike 443 f.); Pike also goes into detail about the frosts on Weathertop (ibid.), how there is a storm triggered by the eruption of Orodruin, and references the good weather on the return journey and in the subsequent year 1420 S. R. (Pike 445).

## II. Frequency of Weather Terms in *The Lord of the Rings*

To assess the weather terms in Tolkien's most prominent publication, *The Lord of the Rings*, the frequency within the work was evaluated. First, text passages with mentions of general weather terminology or temperature were counted by going

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<sup>4</sup> Both kata- and anafront are types of cold fronts. Whereas colder air moves over warmer air with the katafront, an anafront is shaped by warmer air under colder air. This leads to different patterns in precipitation, with a katafront typically having less clouds and rain and the anafront having a lot of both.

through the text ‘by hand’, then these results were checked using the web-based open-source application Voyant Tools<sup>5</sup> and if necessary, corrected. This was done using the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of the book (HarperCollinsPublishers e-books, London, 2005), excluding the *Notes on the Text* and *Foreword to the Second Edition* written in Tolkien’s own voice, the *Note on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* by Hammond and Scull, and also the appendices (i.e. counting starts with the first page of the “Prologue” (p. 1) and ends with the last page of “The Grey Havens” (p. 1032)).

On these 1,032 pages, more than 2,000 mentions of thirty-four weather expressions were found. The expressions had previously been selected from various meteorological glossaries<sup>6</sup>; the terms as well as the number of times they could be counted throughout the text can be found in Table 1, with the values visualized in a pie chart in Figure 1. Counting included the original term as well as all of its variations (chill also included chilling, chilly, cloud included clouds, dry included dryness, etc.) and excluded words that only contained the same sequence of letters (e. g. dew → **sid**eways) or when the word was not used in a weather context (e. g. “hail” in greetings).

Most frequently mentioned were the words ‘sun’ and ‘wind’, with the former narrowly beating the latter. For the term cold, two separate counts were done: A first count, where the word is strictly used in a weather context or where weather conditions can be inferred from its use (e. g. “cold lake” probably means that the ambient temperature is not particularly high) and a second count that included the literal as well as the figurative use of references to weather (e. g. when Saruman is described as having a “cold voice”). Interestingly, the term ‘cold’ is generally employed in a weather or temperature context, while a little less than nine percent of the overall mentions were in a figurative context.

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<sup>5</sup> Available under <http://voyant-tools.org>. The tool reached its limitations with expressions containing hyphens (e. g. “weather-beaten”), these were counted manually.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the words were taken from the *Full Weather Glossary* provided by the National Weather Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States (accessible online under [https://www.weather.gov/otx/Full\\_Weather\\_Glossary](https://www.weather.gov/otx/Full_Weather_Glossary), accessed 03/10/2023).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Mentions</b>
<b>Sun</b>	<b>467</b> Including: sun (335), sunlight (47), sunset (27), sunrise (17), sunshine (14), sundown (10), sunlit (10), sunless (6), sunbeam (1) Not including: sung, sunk etc.
<b>Wind</b>	<b>336</b> Including: wind (304), winds <sup>7</sup> (10), windless (6), windy (5), Windlord (5), wind-swept (1), wind-blown (1), wind-drift (1), wind-writhen (1), whirlwind (1), weather-wind (1) <sup>8</sup> Not including: window, dwindle, winding, etc.
<b>Cold</b>	<b>237</b> Including: cold (227), colder (8), coldly (1), coldest (1) Note: 28 figurative mentions, among them cold voice (8)
<b>Cloud</b>	<b>184</b> Including: clouds (85), cloud (79) clouded (7), cloudy (7), cloudless (4), mist-clouded (1) <sup>9</sup> , unclouded (1), Cloudyhead (1) Not including: clouds of midges
<b>Mist</b>	<b>184</b> Including: mist (93), misty (46, incl. Misty Mountains <sup>10</sup> (29), Mountains of Mist), mists (42), mist-enshrouded (1), mist-clouded (1), river-mists (1) Not including: mistake, mistaken, mistress, mister
<b>Snow</b>	<b>114</b> Including: snow (71), Snowmane (14), snows (8), Snowbourne (5), snowy (5), snow-white (5) <sup>11</sup> , snow-capped (1), snow-clad (1), snow-mountain (1), snowstorm (1), snowstorms (1), snow's (1)
<b>Weather</b>	<b>92</b> Including: weather (46) <sup>12</sup> , Weathertop (29), weathered (8), weather-stained (2), weathering (1), weatherstained (1), weatherworn (1), weathers (1), weather-beaten (1), weather-master (1), weather-worn (1)
<b>Rain</b>	<b>90</b> Including: rain (76), rain-washed (3), rainy (2), rain-curtain (2), raindrop (1), rain-drop (1), rained (1), raining (1), rain-song (1), rain-water (1), rain's (1) Not including: restrain, grain, brain, rainbow etc. Note: Rainbow is counted as its own expression

<sup>7</sup> Not the verb, only plural

<sup>8</sup> 'Weather-wind' is included both in the counts of wind as well as weather

<sup>9</sup> 'Mist-clouded' is included both in the counts of mist as well as cloud

<sup>10</sup> Note: 'Misty Mountains' (29) is counted under misty, there is also one mention of 'Mountains of Mist' (LotR 429)

<sup>11</sup> 'Snow-white' is found four times in the Elven song heard by Frodo during "Three is Company"

<sup>12</sup> This includes the verb as well (to weather sth.)



Term	Mentions
<b>Storm</b>	<b>66</b> Including: storm (58), Stormcrow (4), storms (2), storming (2), stormy (1), storm-wrack (1) Not including: “couldn’t storm the Dark Tower“
<b>Chill</b>	<b>60</b> Including: chill (46), chilled (7), chilly (4), chilling (3)
<b>Clear<sup>13</sup></b>	<b>53</b> Including: clear sky (4), mist-cleared, stars shone clear, air cleared, in windy fields now bright and clear etc. Not including: clearly, it is clear, clear feelings, clearing, clear path, clear water
<b>Dry</b>	<b>46</b> Including: dry (40), drier (4), driest (1) dried (2) etc. Not including: sundry, wizardry, heraldry, dry-nurse, dry-footed, “Frodo drying his hair”, “hair is dry”, dryad, dried fruits/meat/blood/grass <sup>14</sup>
<b>Thunder</b>	<b>46</b> Including: thunder (37), thundered (2), thunderstorm (2), thunderbolt (1), thundering (1), thunderous (1), thunder-cloud (1), earth-thunder (1) <sup>15</sup>
<b>Mirk</b>	<b>46</b> Including: Mirkwood (42), mirk (3), mirky (1)
<b>Fog</b>	<b>39</b> Including: fog (30) <sup>16</sup> , foggy (5), fogs (3), fog-bound (1).
<b>Lightning</b>	<b>33</b> Including: lightning (26), lightnings (4), lightning-blast (1), lightning-crowned (1), lightning-strike (1)
<b>Wet<sup>17</sup></b>	<b>33</b> Including: wet (31), wetter (1), Wetwang (1) Not including: wet with blood, wet eyes, wet as a water rat <sup>18</sup> , wetting their beards, draweth

<sup>13</sup> The numbers for clear were generated mostly manually, as the word is not only strictly in a weather context

<sup>14</sup> Also, not “After which, I may say, he seemed to regard himself as on parole, and dried up.” (LotR 105). Dried fruit is mentioned four times. “Dried grass” does not pertain to weather in this context (“[...] Bed [...] covered deep in dried grass” (LotR 471).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ghân-bhuri-Ghân: “Walls stand up no longer: *gorgûn* knock them down with earth-thunder and with clubs of black iron” (LotR 834).

<sup>16</sup> The word ‘fog’ is counted once in the chapter title “Fog on the Barrow-downs”, but not in the headers of the e-book version, where it is encountered six times.

<sup>17</sup> Similar to ‘clear’, this only pertains to where ‘wet’ is used in a weather context, i.e. where it implies that it has rained, for instance, or where it is used figuratively.

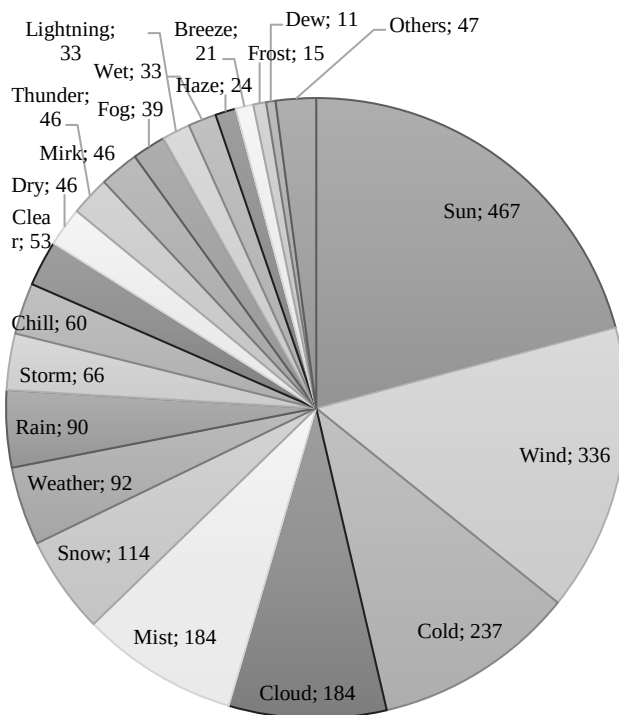
Term	Mentions
<b>Hot</b> <sup>19</sup>	<b>32</b> Not including: shot, Bagshot, when used with food/water (made water hot/hottest part of the fire), fury burned hotter/hottest (used in battle contexts) , hundred hot snakes, hotly (in speech)
<b>Haze</b>	<b>24</b> Including: haze (17), hazy (6), hazes (1) Not including: hazel
<b>Breeze</b>	<b>21</b> Including: breeze (20), breezy (1)
<b>Frost</b>	<b>15</b> Including: frost (12), frosty (3)
<b>Dew</b>	<b>11</b> Including: dew (8), dewy (2), bedewed (1) Not including: sideways
<b>Heat</b>	<b>9</b> Not including: heather, heathertoos, heathen, heathland, sheath, unsheathed, heat of orc-drink, fire was heating his toes, heated water
<b>Freeze</b>	<b>6</b> Including: howls freeze blood
<b>Gale</b>	<b>6</b> Not including: <i>galenas</i> , Nightingale, Parth Galen
<b>Hail</b>	<b>6</b> Including: hail of stones (1), hail of darts (1) (Helm’s Deep) Not including: hail in greetings (“Hail, Frodo!”), hailing the king
<b>Gust</b>	<b>5</b> Including: gust (4), gusts of fire and explosions (1), gusts of fear and horror (1) Not including: August, disgust
<b>Moist</b>	<b>5</b> Including: moisture (1), moisty (1) Not including: “moisten their dry mouths”
<b>Rainbow</b>	<b>3</b> Note: Rainbow is not counted under rain
<b>Clime</b>	<b>2</b> “Friendly clime”, “change of clime”

<sup>18</sup> Excluded, because no wetness through e. g. rain, but because Sam wades into the Anduin (cf. LotR 406)

<sup>19</sup> Also counted mostly manually, because a lot of terms had to be excluded; included are e. g. “Pippin/Orodruin grew hot”, air was hot, hot ash etc.

Term	Mentions
Drizzle	2
Tempest	2 Including: “tempest of war”
Arid	1
Calm	1 “weather grew calmer” Not including: calmly sitting, said calmly etc.

**Table 1.** Frequency of weather terms in *The Lord of the Rings* excluding “Notes on the Text”, “Notes on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition” “Foreword to the Second Edition” and appendices. Terms are ordered by number of mentions in the text. Counting included the original term as well as all of its variations (see below original term) and excluded words that only contained the same sequence of letters (e. g. dew → *sideways*) or when the word was not used in a weather context (e. g. “hail” in greetings). Counting was done by hand and with the Voyant Tools application (<http://voyant-tools.org>).



**Figure 1.** Pie chart of the frequency of weather terms in *The Lord of the Rings* excluding “Notes on the Text”, “Notes on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition” “Foreword to the Second Edition” and appendices. Values given in raw numbers of overall mentions. “Others” includes terms mentioned below ten times in the whole text (heat, freeze, gale, hail, gust, moist, rainbow, rainbow, clime drizzle, tempest, arid, calm). Counting was done by hand and with the Voyant Tools application (<http://voyant-tools.org>).

### III. Positioning of Weather Terms within the Text

When these weather terms are encountered within the text, they are often found grouped: This might apply to the respective paragraph, the chapter, or to an association with certain characters.

Regarding the grouping in paragraphs, meteorological terminology can be found regularly along with related nature and time descriptions, thereby greatly deepening the reader's immersion into the narrative. A good example of this is the following section during the fellowship's journey down the Anduin in the chapter "The Great River":

"The eighth night of their journey came. It was silent and windless; the grey east wind had passed away. The thin crescent of the Moon had fallen early into the pale sunset, but the sky was clear above, and though far away in the South there were great ranges of cloud that still shone faintly, in the West stars glinted bright." (LotR 385)

Certain chapters in *The Lord of the Rings* also contain distinctly more weather expressions than others. Naturally this holds true especially in chapters where the action mainly takes place outside or where nature itself plays a crucial part.

Chapters eight to eleven of Book I illustrate this well. In the eighth one, "Fog on the Barrow-downs", where a meteorological expression is already found in the title of the chapter, there are thirty-one passages with multiple mentions of weather terminology. This chapter is one of the most weather-driven<sup>20</sup> ones in the whole book. The plot can be surmised as follows: The four hobbits, after their stay with Tom Bombadil (who himself is closely associated with weather, as shall be demonstrated below) in the Old Forest, find themselves being 'put to sleep' by the sun. After awakening, our protagonists get lost due to the dense fog they encounter, leading them to an unhappy meeting with the barrow-wight until Tom comes to their rescue. With Bombadil's appearance, the weather turns fair again. Here, weather is clearly used by Tolkien instrumentally, i.e. in a manner to support and enhance the narrative.

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<sup>20</sup> A term that Tolkien himself employed in the closing line of his poem *Errantry*, first published in 1933 (cf. "A weather-driven mariner").

The following chapter, “At the Sign of the Prancing Pony”, which takes place mostly inside, has four short mentions of weather only; with two of those being in a figurative context, that is to say in a metaphor and in a poem, while the other two are adjectives (“Misty Mountains” (LotR 149) and “weather-beaten man” (LotR 156) when describing Strider). Both chapters are of an equal length of twenty-four pages, rendering the difference even more pronounced.

Chapter ten, “Strider”, continues the story within the inn of the Prancing Pony, therefore once again very few weather mentions are found, with three over the course of thirteen pages, one of those in a poetic context.

After this, the company sets out with Aragorn as a guide from Bree and manages to reach Weathertop, where they encounter the Black Riders, with Frodo thereafter being stabbed by the Witch-king. The action once more moves outside and, naturally, references to weather are more common: There are twelve passages with multiple expressions in chapter eleven, “A Knife in the Dark”, which is twenty pages long.

Moreover, weather is closely associated with characters: This especially pertains to individuals like Tom Bombadil and Goldberry<sup>21</sup>, or servants of Sauron, particularly the Black Riders. Interestingly, Sam does not mention weather that often, which comes as a surprise, given that for gardeners like him one of the most basic aspects of their craft is a thorough understanding of the impacting environmental forces above ground (Bonine/Campion 13).

Another principal aspect of the use of weather in *The Lord of the Rings* is its importance in setting the scene, thereby improving the narrative. Furthermore, this leads again to a distinct increase in the engagement of the reader and helping them empathize with the protagonists.

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<sup>21</sup> Bombadil often uses weather expressions, especially in his songs (for instance LotR 126, 128, 131); he and his wife appear in two of the chapters with the most weather terms (“In the House of Tom Bombadil” and “Fog on the Barrow-downs”). Goldberry is frequently associated with the sun and its light (e. g. LotR 131, 135), Tom also has the “wind in his hair” (LotR 143), and his voice comes “floating back down the wind” (LotR 144). Most indicative is the appearance of his silhouette in the rising sun that falls on Frodo just as Tom saves the hobbits from the barrow-wight when also suddenly the cold and damp of the barrow is replaced by much brighter weather and sunshine (LotR 142).

Often, weather terms enhance the introduction of new text sequences, answering the inherent question of how the reader should feel when he or she puts him- or herself into the character's shoes who is experiencing a certain situation in the story. The following is only one example of the many passages which illustrate this pattern well, located right after a break in the text in the aforementioned "Fog on the Barrow-downs":

"There was no reply. He stood listening. He was suddenly aware that it was getting very cold, and that up here a wind was beginning to blow, an icy wind. A change was coming in the weather. The mist was flowing past him now in shreds and tatters. His breath was smoking, and the darkness was less near and thick. He looked up and saw with surprise that faint stars were appearing overhead amid the strands of hurrying cloud and fog. The wind began to hiss over the grass.

He imagined suddenly that he caught a muffled cry, and he made towards it; and even as he went forward the mist was rolled up and thrust aside, and the starry sky was unveiled. A glance showed him that he was now facing southwards and was on a round hill-top, which he must have climbed from the north. Out of the east the biting wind was blowing." (LotR 139)

To analyse the number of weather expressions found after breaks in the text, the beginning of each new chapter was investigated. This was done since chapter beginnings represent one of the easiest and most natural ways to find an "interruption" in the narrative, i.e. a place in the story where (usually) a new setting will be introduced. The chapter "A Knife in the Dark" for instance begins with the following:

"As they prepared for sleep in the inn at Bree, darkness lay on Buckland; a mist strayed in the dells and along the river-bank." (LotR 176)

*The Lord of the Rings* contains sixty-two chapters over its six books. Of these sixty-two, if strictly counted, thirty-five (or more than half) begin with weather terminology or references to temperature. Table 2 provides an overview of all chapter beginnings. If the beginning of the second paragraph of a chapter, which is still on the same page in the edition used, is included, this number rises to a total of thirty-nine out of sixty-two.

<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i> Book One (12 Chapters)	<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i> Book Two (10 Chapters)
<b>A Long-expected Party</b>	<b>Many Meetings</b>
<b>The Shadow of the Past</b>	<b>The Council of Elrond</b>
<b>Three is Company</b>	The Ring Goes South
A Short Cut to Mushrooms	<b>A Journey in the Dark</b>
A Conspiracy Unmasked	The Bridge of Khazad-dûm
The Old Forest	Lothlórien
<b>In the House of Tom Bombadil</b>	<b>The Mirror of Galadriel</b>
Fog on the Barrow-downs	Farewell to Lórien
<b>At the Sign of the Prancing Pony</b>	The Great River
<b>Strider</b>	<b>(The Breaking of the Fellowship)</b>
A Knife in the Dark	
<b>Flight to the Ford</b>	

*Table 2A.* Chapter beginnings in *The Fellowship of the Ring* containing references to weather and temperature. Chapters to which this applies in bold, chapters where the term is found in the second paragraph (but still on the same page) in bold and in brackets.

<i>The Two Towers</i> Book Three (11 Chapters)	<i>The Two Towers</i> Book Four (10 Chapters)
The Departure of Boromir	<b>(The Taming of Sméagol)</b>
The Shadow of the Past	<b>The Passage of the Marshes</b>
The Riders of Rohan	<b>The Black Gate is Closed</b>
The Uruk-hai	Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit
Treebeard	<b>The Window on the West</b>
The White Rider	The Forbidden Pool
The King of the Golden Hall	Journey to the Cross-Roads
Helm's Deep	<b>The Stairs of Cirith Ungol</b>
The Road to Isengard	<b>Shelob's Lair</b>
<b>Flotsam and Jetsam</b>	The Choices of Master Samwise
<b>The Voice of Saruman</b>	
The Palantír	

*Table 2B.* Chapter beginnings in *The Two Towers* containing references to weather and temperature. Chapters to which this applies in bold, chapters where the term is found in the second paragraph (but still on the same page) in bold and in brackets.

<i>The Return of the King</i> Book Five (10 Chapters)	<i>The Return of the King</i> Book Six (9 Chapters)
<b>Minas Tirith</b>	<b>The Tower of Cirith Ungol</b>
The Passing of the Grey Company	The Land of Shadow
<b>The Muster of Rohan</b>	<b>Mount Doom</b>
<b>The Siege of Gondor</b>	<b>The Field of Cormallen</b>
<b>The Ride of the Rohirrim</b>	<b>The Steward and the King</b>
The Battle of the Pelennor Fields	Many Partings
The Pyre of Denethor	<b>(Homeward Bound)</b>
<b>The Houses of Healing</b>	<b>The Scouring of the Shire</b>
<b>The Last Debate</b>	The Grey Havens
<b>(The Black Gate Opens)</b>	

*Table 2C. Chapter beginnings in The Return of the King containing references to weather and temperature. Chapters to which this applies in bold, chapters where the term is found in the second paragraph (but still on the same page) in bold and in brackets.*

#### IV. Functions of Weather and Temperature in *The Lord of the Rings*

In his article “The Shape of Water in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*”, Norbert Schürer nicely analyses the different functions fulfilled by the element of water in the narrative of the book. To achieve this, he comes up with six different categories of representations in the story (Schürer 24): Instrumental (where water solely serves a practical purpose), geographical (water as a demarcation), figurative (use of water in metaphors and similes), mystical (water having characteristics that go beyond what is possible in the real world), pathetic (the projection of human feelings onto natural phenomena, reflecting a previously established mood) and intentional (water having a strong symbolic significance).

With water and weather being closely intertwined parts of environmental storytelling, this article shall make use of a very similar but, at least in part, slightly different classification system.

Firstly, weather and temperature will be analysed from a plot device point of view (partly matching the instrumental and geographical representations outlined in Schürer’s paper), secondly, we shall consider the figurative use of these elements (mostly in similes and poems), and lastly, weather will be examined in its function as an immersive tool, i.e. where it corresponds to Schürer’s magical and/or pathetic category.



A geographical or instrumental use – and probably one of the best-known examples of weather as a plot device – is employed in the chapter “The Ring Goes South”, where the crossing of Caradhras by the intended way of the Redhorn Gate becomes impossible for the freshly formed Fellowship due to a heavy snowstorm.

“While they were halted, the wind died down, and the snow slackened until it almost ceased. They tramped on again. But they had not gone more than a furlong when the storm returned with fresh fury. The wind whistled and the snow became a blinding blizzard. Soon even Boromir found it hard to keep going. The hobbits, bent nearly double, toiled along behind the taller folk, but it was plain that they could not go much further, if the snow continued.” (LotR 288 f.)

With regard to geography, weather is also used to distinguish between different regions in Middle-earth. Large bodies of water, landmasses, mountain ranges and valleys have an effect on the specific weather in an area, just as they would in real life. The Shire has conditions befitting its English inspirations; Gondor’s harbours more Mediterranean elements and the contrast between the harsher weather in the Emyn Muil and that in Ithilien, which is felt by Frodo and Sam during a later stage of their journey, is often emphasized in the story.

As mentioned before, “Fog on the Barrow-downs” is an immensely weather-driven chapter. Weather serves as a plot device here once again, fulfilling a more instrumental purpose: The warm sun makes the hobbits sleepy, but when they awake, the sun is gone and instead a heavy fog causes them to get lost and ultimately end up in one of the barrows. There, they encounter a barrow wight and only narrowly escape through being saved by Tom Bombadil.

“Riding over the hills, and eating their fill, the warm sun and the scent of turf, lying a little too long, stretching out their legs and looking at the sky above their noses: these things are, perhaps, enough to explain what happened. However that may be: they woke suddenly and uncomfortably from a sleep they had never meant to take. The standing stone was cold, and it cast a long pale shadow that stretched eastward over them. The sun, a pale and watery yellow, was gleaming through the mist just above the west wall of the hollow in which they lay; north, south, and east, beyond the wall the fog was thick, cold and white. The air was silent, heavy and chill.” (LotR 137)

A more pathetic use of weather can furthermore be found in the same scene. Mirroring the passing of the danger, as soon as the hobbits are freed from the barrow, the fog is gone and the air is “[growing] hot again” (LotR 144); the hobbits lie “basking in the sun with the delight of those that have been wafted suddenly from bitter winter to a friendly clime” (ibid.).

Weather or expressions closely related to it are also employed as plot devices, when, on multiple occasions, the wet earth helps Aragorn in tracking, as wet ground naturally shows footprints more clearly than dry ground does<sup>22</sup>.

Norbert Schürer mentions Frodo “blessing the kindly weather, because it delayed them from departing” (LotR 129) when rain is falling during their stay at Tom Bombadil’s as an instrumental use of water (Schürer 25), this of course is an instrumental use of weather just as well.

While it is not strictly a “weather occurrence”, abovementioned meteorologist William S. Pike goes into detail about why the flash flood at the Ford of Bruinen that cuts off Frodo from the pursuing Nazgûl is not unreasonable from a meteorological standpoint (Pike 443 f.), and therefore I will also include it here, as there is “great vigour in the waters that come down from the snows of the Misty Mountains” (LotR 224)<sup>23</sup>.

Casting a quick glance at other moments in the *Legendarium* where weather is of instrumental use or acts as a “geographical” barrier, Karen W. Fonstad has assembled an appropriate collection: Among them are the snows that make Beren leave Dorthonion, thunderstorms which scare the orcs in Turín Turambar’s story and cause Thorin and Company to search for shelter in a cave in the Misty Mountains in *The Hobbit*, eventually resulting in their capture; fog that engulfs the lands of the Grinding Ice and also hides the portaging at Sarn Gebir, as well as “Sauron’s fume-filled east winds [...] [sending] storms travelling in an abnormal direction” (Fonstad 179).

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. “Aragorn sped on up the hill. Every now and again he bent to the ground. Hobbits go light, and their footprints are not easy even for a Ranger to read, but not far from the top a spring crossed the path, and in the wet earth he saw what he was seeking.” (LotR 413)

<sup>23</sup> Schürer also mentions this scene as well as the attempted Redhorn crossing under his “intentional representations” category (Schürer 33).

Another purpose weather serves in the story is in helping readers orient themselves in the diverging plotlines after the Breaking of the Fellowship. As Frodo and Sam head towards Mordor, the rest of the company becomes scattered, with Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas pursuing the band of Uruk-hai and orcs that took Merry and Pippin hostage at Amon Hen. Then Gandalf comes into the narrative again in Fangorn, while Merry and Pippin make for Isengard with Treebeard. Some of them meet again at Isengard after the Battle of Helm's Deep (except Frodo and Sam), after which the party splits up once more: three take the Paths of the Dead, while Merry stays with the Rohirrim and Gandalf and Pippin make for Minas Tirith. This all can become quite confusing for the first-time reader, not only regarding locations, but also timewise. Therefore, Tolkien employs weather in a very carefully devised way to show where the characters are at a certain point in time. When Frodo and Sam arrive in Ithilien, they notice a statue of an old king, with a trailing growth of flowers around its head which – due to the sunlight falling on it in a certain manner – resembles a crown:

“Suddenly, caught by the level beams, Frodo saw the old king's head: it was lying rolled away by the roadside. ‘Look, Sam!’ he cried, startled into speech. ‘Look! The king has got a crown again!’

The eyes were hollow and the carven beard was broken, but about the high stern forehead there was a coronal of silver and gold. A trailing plant with flowers like small white stars had bound itself across the brows as if in reverence for the fallen king, and in the crevices of his stony hair yellow stonecrop gleamed.

‘They cannot conquer forever!’ said Frodo. And then suddenly the brief glimpse was gone. The Sun dipped and vanished, and as if at the shuttering of a lamp, black night fell.” (LotR 702)

The same sunset on the same day is mentioned about one-hundred pages later in the story, when Pippin and Beregonid walk along the walls of Minas Tirith and glance eastward through an embrasure:

“It was the sunset-hour, but the great pall had now stretched far into the West, and only as it sank at last into the Sea did the Sun escape to send out a brief farewell gleam before the night, even as Frodo saw it at the Cross-roads touching the head of the fallen king. But to the fields of the Pelennor, under the shadow of Mindolluin, there came no gleam: they were brown and drear” (LotR 808)

Thus, the reader knows at what point in time the narrative currently stands regarding the divergent storylines. Another example of this comes right around the climax during *The Return of the King*, when Frodo and Sam feel the wind “shifted from the West” (LotR 940) and now “[coming] from the North” (ibid.). Shortly after the fall of Barad-Dûr, Gwaihir the Windlord tells Gandalf that “the North Wind blows” (LotR 940) when they set out for the rescue of the hobbits. Likewise, in Minas Tirith, Éowyn and Faramir stand on the walls at the same time and notice a wind blowing “keenly from the North” (LotR 961).

Weather terms have another prominent function in the books: The use in a figurative way. This is particularly outstanding in poems. The overwhelming majority of poetry in *The Lord of the Rings* contains at least one reference to weather. Expressions employed especially often are wind, sun, and moon, for instance in the first lines of the *Lament for Boromir*, sung by Aragorn:

*“Through Rohan over fen and field where the long grass grows  
The West Wind comes walking, and about the walls it goes.  
‘What news from the West, O wandering wind, do you bring to me tonight?  
Have you seen Boromir the Tall by moon or by starlight?’”* (LotR 417)

Naturally, meteorological terminology also features very heavily in similes, metaphors and personifications, and this figurative representation is perhaps the most common use of these words throughout the story. Overall they are too numerous to count and therefore I will limit myself to giving only a handful of examples here: In the Old Forest, the “sky spoke of rain to come” (LotR 128), later, Gandalf is “stooping like a cloud” (LotR 299), for Sam “cold water on the neck’s like rain on wilted lettuce” (LotR 676), the Rohirrim ride with “a rush like the sudden onset of a great wind” (LotR 525) and the frequently weather-associated Bombadil threatens Old Man Willow to “freeze his marrow cold” (LotR 120). A metaphor used quite commonly (at least seven times) is also the one of “cold voice” (cf. for instance LotR 199, 514, 583, 755, 788, 841).

Similarly, another very obvious occurrence of where weather expressions are placed in the text is in names, both of characters and of places. The word ‘weather’ itself can be found in locations like Weathertop or the Weather Hills. Moreover, the expression often enables the reader to deduce a certain

characteristic from it. Places like the Misty Mountains or Mirkwood<sup>24</sup> are thus imbued with an impression of being enshrouded in fog and figuratively speaking in mystery or suspense. When Greenwood the Great began to be called Mirkwood due to the influence of the Necromancer of Dol Guldur, this clearly indicates a shift to a more mysterious, perhaps even “unfriendly” atmosphere. For the Misty Mountains this might hold true as well, alternatively the use of ‘mist’ could be intended to point out the sheer altitude of the summits (mist as in covered by clouds due to the height of the mountains). The mountain Fanuidhol, one of the three that Khazad-dûm is constructed under, and thus a peak in the Misty Mountains, is appropriately called ‘Cloudyhead’ in the common tongue. A river like the Snowbourne on the other hand is most likely quite cold, coming down from the White Mountains.

Often, these terms are also used for referencing colour, such as with Snowmane, Théoden’s regal steed, presumably aptly named for its white coat.

Other examples of names that fit well with the character’s role in the legendarium include Gandalf being labelled as Stormcrow, Gwaihir, the Windlord (as lord of the Great Eagles) or Windfola<sup>25</sup>, Éowyn’s horse during the War of the Ring – the list does not end there and would be too long for all of these examples to be covered.

As established earlier, mystical representations are those where weather exhibits functions that extend over its usual “capabilities” in real life or where weather expressions are used in conjunction with magical, mystic, or fantastical elements of the narrative.

Two previously mentioned portions of the text fit this criterion well: The attempted passage of the Redhorn Gate, prevented by the blizzard, is accompanied by “eerie noises in the darkness” (LotR 289) and it “may have been only a trick of the wind in the cracks and gullies of the rocky wall, but the sounds were those of shrill cries, and wild howls of laughter” (ibid.). Boulders are falling around the company and Boromir concludes: “‘Let those call it the wind who will; there are fell voices on the air; and these stones are aimed at us’” (ibid.). During this

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<sup>24</sup> Regarding the classification of ‘Mirkwood’ as a weather term, one must note that it is a name already found in the works of Walter Scott and William Morris, with especially the latter’s literary and artistic oeuvre having an influence on Tolkien. Moreover, the Old English origin of ‘mirc’ or ‘myrc’ was not a weather, but rather a colour expression, with ‘myrcappul’ being a dark-coloured apple, for instance. The ‘myrcwudu’ therefore is a dark forest due to the dense tree canopy.

<sup>25</sup> The literal translation from Old English is ‘wind-foal’ (Hammond/Scull 967).

passage, similar to the hobbits' journey through the Barrow-downs, nature appears to be sentient, indeed to a certain degree even malevolent, clearly extending its features found in the real world by exerting these "fantastic" capabilities through meteorological events<sup>26</sup>.

The other example is of course the flash flood at the Ford of Bruinen, where the mystical element comes in the form not only of the unexpected appearance of such an event itself, but also of the "great white horses with shining riders" (LotR 224) that form in the water, an intensifying touch by Gandalf.

Another instance where we see the wizard involved with unusual happenings in the novel comes with his role in the release of Théoden from Saruman's influences<sup>27</sup>. This liberation is accompanied by unforeseen changes in weather or sudden, unusual occurrences of meteorological phenomena when Gandalf raises his staff:

"There was a roll of thunder. The sunlight was blotted out from the eastern windows; the whole wall became suddenly dark as night. The fire faded to sullen embers. Only Gandalf could be seen, standing white and tall before the blackened hearth.

In the gloom they heard the hiss of Wormtongue's voice: 'Did I not counsel you, lord, to forbid his staff? That fool, Hama, has betrayed us!' There was a flash as if lightning had cloven the roof" (LotR 514).

The weather also influences characters in a meaningful way. While – just as in real life – it appears as a conversation starter among characters<sup>28</sup>, it can unsurprisingly also make a great impression on the mood or constitution of persons in the story. For instance, the good weather during their journey in Ithilien significantly enhances the mood of Frodo and Sam; while the sun, or in a broader sense, light, has an even more peculiar effect on the "foes" in the narrative, with all works of the *Legendarium* containing beings that simply cannot cope with it. This characteristic of non-tolerance of sunlight is shared by the orcs, trolls, goblins, and most of Sauron's servants. Therefore, Sauron covers his lands in

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<sup>26</sup> Another well-known example of malevolent nature in Tolkien is Old Man Willow in the Old Forest, even though this is not weather-related.

<sup>27</sup> While Gandalf appears to be channelling the weather and therefore, at least implicitly, seems to perform a kind of magic, the text itself is much more oblique.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. "After a few remarks about the weather and the agricultural prospects (which were no worse than usual), Farmer Maggot put down his mug [...]" (LotR 93)

shadow and darkness<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, it is an important aspect of the plot during the *The Two Towers* that Saruman has been able to make use of the Uruk-hai, one of their characteristics being their resistance to sunlight<sup>30</sup>. Also, one could imagine that Shelob, who is incapacitated by the starlight encased in the Phial of Galadriel, would be just as vulnerable to light of the sun. The morally at least ambiguous character of Gollum is noted for fearing and hating “light, light of sun and moon” (LotR 57). When Gandalf opposes the Nazgûl and saves Faramir on the fields of the Pelennor, he does so as a “flash of white and silver” with a “pale white light” around him and the “heavy shadows [giving] way” (LotR 809). Generally, as Fonstad concludes in her writings, it can be stated that “good powers [are] living in unusually warm, gentle climates (notably in Valinor and Lórien); and the evil powers of Morgoth, Sauron, and Angmar [are] producing cold, bitter climates.” (Fonstad 184). Therefore, this mostly holds true for the weather as well.

Casting a further glance at the enemies in *The Lord of the Rings*, one can notice that immersion is further enhanced by the use of meteorological expressions when it comes to the Black Riders. Here it is very apparent that, once more, the scene is usually set by the weather. The appearance of the Black Riders is always associated with weather or temperature changes to cold, the sun or moon is usually blotted out by a shadow. People experiencing their cries are standing “as if suddenly frozen” (LotR 90) or “shiver” (LotR 173, 645, 842) and “shudder” (LotR 766, 809), additionally, these cries are “chilling to the blood” (LotR 90).

Generally, it becomes evident that the darker or more frightening<sup>31</sup> powers in the novel are almost always associated with unpleasant weather: terms like ‘cold’, ‘shadow’, ‘chill’, but also ‘clouds’, ‘darkness’ or ‘black’ (as in ‘black skies’), i.e. the dimming of light (of sun and stars) are found commonly.

Furthermore, changes in weather often foreshadow a significant event in the story, chiefly in a figurative way. The day “comes like fire and smoke” (LotR 395) before the skirmish at Amon Hen. When things “brew”, often the metaphor of a

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. for instance chapter two of Book Six, “The Land of Shadow”.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. “But these creatures of Isengard, these half-orcs and goblin-men that the foul craft of Saruman has bred, they will not quail at the sun,” said Gamling.” (LotR 536) or cf. Treebeard uttering that “[it] is a mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun; but Saruman’s Orcs can endure it, even if they hate it.” (LotR 473).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the journey of Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas along the Paths of the Dead: The dwarf’s blood “runs chill” (LotR 786) and they experience a “chill wind like the breath of ghosts” (LotR 789).

gathering or “great storm [...] coming” (LotR 495) is employed<sup>32</sup>. But there are also mystical representations of this sense of foreboding, for instance in the following passage during the “Siege of Gondor”:

“Indeed what is the good even of food and drink under this creeping shadow? What does it mean? The very air seems thick and brown! Do you often have such glooms when the wind is in the East?”

‘Nay,’ said Beregon, ‘this is no weather of the world. This is some device of his malice; some broil of fume from the Mountain of Fire that he sends to darken hearts and counsel.’ (LotR 808)

While we shall examine the second most frequently occurring term ‘wind’ more closely in the coming paragraphs, it must also be mentioned here. Wind may equally function as a harbinger in the story and is repeatedly employed in this capacity, too. For instance, shortly after the crossing of the Drúadan forest by the Rohirrim, the outrider Wídfara declares the following:

“I live upon the open Wold in days of peace; Wídfara is my name, and to me also the air brings messages. Already the wind is turning. There comes a breath out of the South; there is a sea-tang in it, faint though it be. The morning will bring new things. Above the reek it will be dawn when you pass the wall.” (LotR 836)

In Mordor on the other hand, usually easterly winds blow. Yet when Frodo and Sam approach Mount Doom, the wind suddenly turns and starts blowing from the West, as previously mentioned.

Tolkien allegedly drew from a number of myths, among them classical and northern tales and the Saint Brendan story, with all of them harbouring a “paradise” to the West of their worlds (Roche 17). This cardinal direction therefore might also be – painted with a broad brush – considered Arda’s “good and moral side”, with the Blessed Realm of Valinor lying far in the West. The obvious symbolism of a wind swing to the West would fit very well into Schürer’s intentional category. Gandalf highlights this when he says the following during *The Last Debate*:

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Gandalf being labelled as Stormcrow, i.e. a harbinger of bad news.



“[Sauron] studies the signs: the Sword that robbed him of his treasure re-made; the winds of fortune turning in our favour, and the defeat unlooked-for of his first assault; the fall of his great Captain.” (LotR 880)

The metaphorical expression of “winds of fortune” is used here ambiguously to link it to the actual wind that blew the darkness away. Ultimately, the “power of Mordor [is] scattering like dust in the wind” (LotR 949).

In short, functions of weather references in *The Lord of the Rings* are quite diverse and can be broken down into several categories, among them Schürer’s instrumental, (very commonly found) figurative, pathetic and mystical representations.

## **V. Wind, Sun, Mist and Fog as Recurring Motifs**

### **V.I. Wind**

Regarding frequency, ‘wind’ was trumped only by ‘sun’ for the meteorological term most mentioned. It features very prominently throughout the whole narrative, and naturally words like ‘gale’ or ‘gust’ are in essence wind as well.

Not surprisingly, ‘wind’ is often found in a noise or sound context, a “noise of cheering [...] like a gathering wind” (LotR 770) is heard as the army of Lossarnach rolls into Minas Tirith before the Battle of the Pelennor Fields.

Another facet regarding the use of meteorological terms by Tolkien is their use in a thematic context. Not unexpectedly, wind is commonly used in passages pertaining to naval voyaging and seafaring, during which air movements are naturally of critical importance for propulsion; or if the sea in general is concerned, where very often the wind blows stronger than in the hinterland. Intriguingly, the iconograph of storm-tossed boats is one frequently employed in romanticism (Eitner 287), bringing back to mind explorations of Tolkien as a romanticist writer.

Apart from these functions, wind is often utilized to emphasize velocity in the books. Very often, when something or someone is supposed to be ‘quick’ or ‘fast’, the idea is conveyed by a simile, e. g. “like the wind” (LotR 210) or “swift as the flowing wind” (LotR 262)<sup>33</sup>. The unusually hasty Ent Quickbeam can move

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. The first quote pertains to Glorfindel talking about the pursuing Black Riders during “Flight to the Ford”: “There are five behind us, and when they find your trail upon the Road they will ride after us like the wind” (LotR 210). The second quote is Gandalf illustrating the following during

“like a wind when he is roused” (LotR 568) and the Nazgûl are “flying at a speed greater than any wind of Middle-earth” (LotR 595) or “faster than the winds” (LotR 946). This practice becomes even more apparent where horses and particularly Shadowfax are concerned. Almost every time the horse is mentioned, there will be an allusion to its speed, usually realized with a metaphor or simile regarding wind. In the following, only a few examples are listed: When Shadowfax is first introduced, “his mane is flowing in the wind of his speed” (LotR 504); he is “swift as the wind” (LotR 820), Gandalf is described as “an old man in white upon a horse, passing hither and thither over the plains like wind in the grass” (LotR 529) and later “Shadowfax [comes] like a wind out of the West” (LotR 793) or “like the north wind from the mountains” (LotR 596). When Pippin is riding with Gandalf on Shadowfax, he feels it “[springing away, and the night [flowing] over him like a roaring wind” (LotR 748). A horse-wind connection comes also in the name of previously mentioned Windfofa, the horse of Éowyn during the War of the Ring.

Additionally, wind is often personified: It “howls” (LotR 297), is “sighing” (LotR 418, 605), “whispering” (LotR 349) and “hissing” (LotR 635); it also “lulls” Frodo to sleep (LotR 344).

As we have seen, wind can bear good tidings and blow as a “warm and gentle breeze” (LotR 115), but it is used just as well to convey unpleasant feelings in the appropriate situation. It can be uncomfortably “savage” (LotR 607), “bitter” (LotR 709) and cold, e. g. at the Redhorn Gate (LotR 294, 295) or when Éowyn shivers on the walls of Minas Tirith (LotR 962).

Reverting back to what was said earlier, one can state that the North wind blowing serves as a time stamp to synchronize the narratives during the climax of *The Return of the King*. In addition, this sudden wind helps to dispel the darkness Sauron uses to cover his lands. In classical literature the “divine wind” is a common trope, therefore it could be argued that the sudden shift in its direction may be due to an intervention by either the Vala Manwë, since he is known to be the master of the wind, birds and airs, or even by Ilúvatar himself.

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the Council of Elrond: “And there is one among them that might have been foaled in the morning of the world. The horses of the Nine cannot vie with him; tireless, swift as the flowing wind. Shadowfax they called him” (LotR 262).

## V.II. Sun

The most used expression in the text, ‘sun’, can – similar to ‘wind’ – convey a good as well as a bad feeling: It can be too warm and stifling, for instance when the hobbits first enter the Old Forest, where they feel “very hot [...] and the afternoon sun was burning on their backs” (LotR 116). On the other hand, just shortly before this scene, the sunshine was experienced as pleasant<sup>34</sup> and Tom Bombadil wants the hobbits to “let the warm sunlight heat now heart and limb” after their confinement in the Barrow-downs (LotR 144).

Interestingly, my edition of *The Lord of the Rings* sometimes capitalizes the noun as ‘Sun’, Hammond and Scull in their *Note on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* surmise that this variance was chosen to underline where Tolkien intended personification, poetry or emphasis (LotR xvi)<sup>35</sup>.

Often, sun is used in conjunction with certain colours or colour palettes: It features in “pale sunlight” (LotR 300, 555) or “pale sunset” (LotR 385) as well as in “red sunset” (LotR 860) or sinks as a “red sun” (LotR 184, 771). Tolkien moreover often describes objects or geographical features looking different in the sunlight: Often things or people “glitter” (LotR 53, 358, 424, 873, 882, 953), “glint” (LotR 146, 371, 966), “gleam” (LotR 961), “twinkle (LotR 939), “shine” (LotR 119), “flash” (LotR 510), and even “flame” (LotR 847) in the sun; Gandalf’s hair is “white as snow in the sunlight” (LotR 494) and his “white robes [shine] dazzling in the sun” (LotR 525), Éowyn wearing armour shines “like silver in the sun” (LotR 523).

In addition to positive forms of sun imagery, Tolkien also uses a negative one: a loss of the celestial orb or a blotting out of its light usually heralds danger and can be seen as a bad omen. Corresponding to earlier observations about wind, when Merry remarks in Fangorn that “the wind’s changing” and that “it feels cool”, Pippin answers:

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. “A golden afternoon of late sunshine lay warm and drowsy upon the hidden land between” (LotR 115).

<sup>35</sup> It is worth mentioning that while this notion is probably true in some cases, it may be a bit rash to claim that this is always done systemically. Traditionally, inconsistencies in English capitalization are found quite often, despite systematization efforts of editors and textbook writers.

“I’m afraid this is only a passing gleam, and it will all go grey again. What a pity! This shaggy old forest looked so different in the sunlight. I almost felt I liked the place.” (LotR 463)

This quotation illustrates well the alteration of mood through colour that the sun can evoke while also underlining the foreshadowing effects of both sun and wind in the narrative.

To add to that, sun has another critical function in *The Lord of the Rings*: telling the time. The words ‘sundown’ and ‘sunrise’ are commonly employed by Tolkien to orient the reader time-wise. Interestingly (and as far as I know not yet researched), there appear to be clocks in Middle-earth; in the first chapter of the story, Bilbo sets an envelope “by the clock” (LotR 35) in his home and on multiple occasions the hobbits refer to hours of the day in the manner we do in the real world. However, this seems to be strictly limited to parts of the story where Shire-folk are involved, either when they voice the time directly<sup>36</sup> or when the narrator does so<sup>37</sup>. This fits well with the image of the Shire as being based on a rural England of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>38</sup>, whereas a clock would feel much more out of place in Anglo-Saxon inspired Rohan. Only once a non-hobbit character uses the adverb ‘o’clock’; Gandalf replies to the disoriented Frodo during the chapter “Many Meetings” that he is “in the house of Elrond, and it is ten o’clock in the morning” (LotR 219). How the hobbits or Gandalf tell the time so exactly is never revealed in the story, particularly when on the road. Nevertheless, the lack of a specific device does not mean that telling the time was impossible. Naturally, measures for timekeeping existed long before the invention of the clocks we know today and followed an “evolution” via the sundial and other astronomical clocks, the water clock, and several mechanical models up to the modern quartz or even atomic ones. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that the characters in Middle-earth were able to have a quite exact understanding of time even without the use of (modern) clocks.

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. the following examples: Sam mentions “half past eight by Shire clocks” (LotR 655), Pippin thinks about breakfast even though “[it] cannot be more than nine o’clock” (LotR 757) and shortly afterwards says “Nine o’clock we’d call it in the Shire” (LotR 760).

<sup>37</sup> This strictly happens during chapters that pertain to the Shire or the hobbit’s journey, cf. for instance “[...] it was after ten o’clock, and the day was beginning to turn fine and hot” (LotR 73) in “Three is Company”, “The Old Forest” and “The Scouring of the Shire”. Other chapters do not have the narrator using the adverb “o’clock”.

<sup>38</sup> Tolkien specifically mentions the Shire’s inspirational roots as “a Warwickshire village of about the period of the Diamond Jubilee [of Queen Victoria in 1897]” (Carpenter 230).

Notwithstanding, the following is much more common to show the time of day: The author mentions the sun “beginning to get low and the light of afternoon was on the land as they went down the hill” (LotR 74) or “[the] sun [having] now risen high enough to look over the high hedge” (LotR 482)<sup>39</sup>. Another good example is the following passage:

“When the light of day was come into the sky but the sun was not yet risen above the high ridges in the East, Aragorn made ready to depart.” (LotR 785)

### V.III. Mist and Fog

Both ‘mist’ as well as ‘fog’ feature prominently throughout the book and are used in a figurative as well as a poetic context<sup>40</sup>. ‘Fog’ is, unsurprisingly, a principal driver of the story in the “Fog on the Barrow-downs” chapter. ‘Mist’ – if one only looks at the numbers – is even more commonly found, partly due to its inclusion in place names like Misty Mountains. While ‘fog’ is mostly employed in a strict weather context, ‘mist’ tends to harbour more mystical qualities than its counterpart: Tom Bombadil suggests that, among other things, the hobbits “are still afraid, perhaps, of mist and tree-shadows and deep water and untame things” (LotR 99), and Aragorn characterizes Eärendil as “he that sailed his ship out of the mists of the world into the seas of heaven” (LotR 194). In Rivendell, “the firelit hall [becomes] a golden mist above seas of foam that sighed upon the margins of the world” (LotR 233), a space on the mountain Celebdil is described as a “dizzy eyrie above the mists of the world” (LotR 502) and years are “lost in the mist of time” (LotR 507).

In general, the expression is employed figuratively to convey suspense or a sense of uncertainty and even anxiousness. Mists “[shroud]” many a thing (LotR 391, 440), objects, geographical features or people are “hidden” (LotR 391, 427, 759) or “wreathed” (LotR 767) within it and Gimli can see “nothing away north or west but grass dwindling into mist” (LotR 428). Characters often have mists in or “before [their] eyes” (LotR 206, 210, 729, 834) when in confusion or in difficult

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<sup>39</sup> As a side note, the same can be said for the moon, whose waxing, waning and phases are employed frequently in this regard, for instance in “the late Moon is riding westward and the middle-night has passed” (LotR 312).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. for instance “[...] the ancient halls / of the Mark-wardens mist-enshrouded” (LotR 803) in the song “From dark Dunharrow in the dim morning” or the “fog still rose like steam or wisps of white smoke” (LotR 113).

situations. Importantly, mist also appears initially when Frodo puts on the One Ring at Amon Hen<sup>41</sup> and as he is stabbed while wearing the Ring on Weathertop he sees “as through a swirling mist a glimpse of Strider leaping out of the darkness” (LotR 196). Similarly, when Sam decides to wear the One during the latter parts of the story, things are “as seen through a mist” (LotR 898).

Tolkien sometimes employs both expressions together, as in “[the] fogs and mists were gone” (LotR 392)<sup>42</sup>. Of course, these terms are very similar, and most readers probably are not aware of the meteorological differences between the words. According to the United Kingdom’s national weather service, the Meteorological Office, fog is defined as “obscurity in the surface layers of the atmosphere, which is caused by a suspension of water droplets”, resulting in visibility of “less than 1 km [sic]”, whereas mist pertains to weather where “there is such obscurity and the associated visibility is equal to or exceeds 1000 m [sic].” with the phenomenon still being a “result of the suspension of water droplets, but simply at a lower density.” (Met Office, online article, “What is the difference between mist, fog and haze?”). Additionally, “mist typically is quicker to dissipate and can rapidly disappear with even slight winds” (ibid.). Interestingly, within *The Lord of the Rings*, the terms are actually used in a meteorologically correct manner when they pertain strictly to weather. Characters are generally more capable of seeing through mist, while that is not necessarily the case for fog. Fog is described as “thick” (LotR 137) and “dense” (LotR 572), the air might be “heavy with fog” (LotR 553) and in one passage there is “mist on the River; and white fog swathed the shore” (LotR 389). On the other hand, mist “is driven back by a sudden wind” (LotR 877) or through “some shift of airs all the mist was drawn away like a veil” (LotR 81); “thin strands of river-mist” (LotR 96) and “thin silver mist” (LotR 215) are also mentioned. The best example of Tolkien’s adept use of these two expressions is the following: in Shelob’s tunnel, Sam feels “as if he had stepped out of a thin mist into a heavier fog” (LotR 736).

If this meteorological difference between the terms was known to Tolkien is of course a subject for speculation, especially as it is predated by the distinct linguistic origins of the words, with ‘fog’ (as in “a thick or obscuring mist”) only emerging in the 1540s (OED 2023a) from an uncertain, but most likely

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<sup>41</sup> “He seemed to be in a world of mist in which there were only shadows: the Ring was upon him. Then here and there the mist gave way and he saw many visions: small and clear as if they were under his eyes upon a table, and yet remote.” (LotR 400)

<sup>42</sup> Another example of this can be found below (LotR 389).

Scandinavian origin (ibid.)<sup>43</sup>, whereas ‘mist’ has Germanic roots and can already be found in several Old English texts (OED 2023c), where it usually refers more to darkness or dimness of eyesight<sup>44</sup>.

## VI. Outlook and Conclusion

After having completed an initial “manual count” by simply going through the text and noting every time a weather term occurred, the later use of an application like Voyant Tools greatly simplified the task of counting. With novel digital tools like this, analysis of long texts is certainly easier to achieve. Given enough spare time - and utilizing software - one could look for certain “word trends” within the text as well; it would be interesting to see if certain terms are more frequently found at, for instance, the beginning or end of the book, where the story darkens, or to see if my observations regarding certain weather-driven chapters can be corroborated (Figure 2). This concept could of course be extended to all other complexes of expressions, not just the weather.

In conclusion, it can be surmised that the weather and temperature play an important part in the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*. The story is rich with a multitude of over 2,000 references to meteorological concepts, with the most common terms encountered by far being ‘sun’, ‘wind’ and ‘cold’. All weather expressions are closely associated with the storytelling.

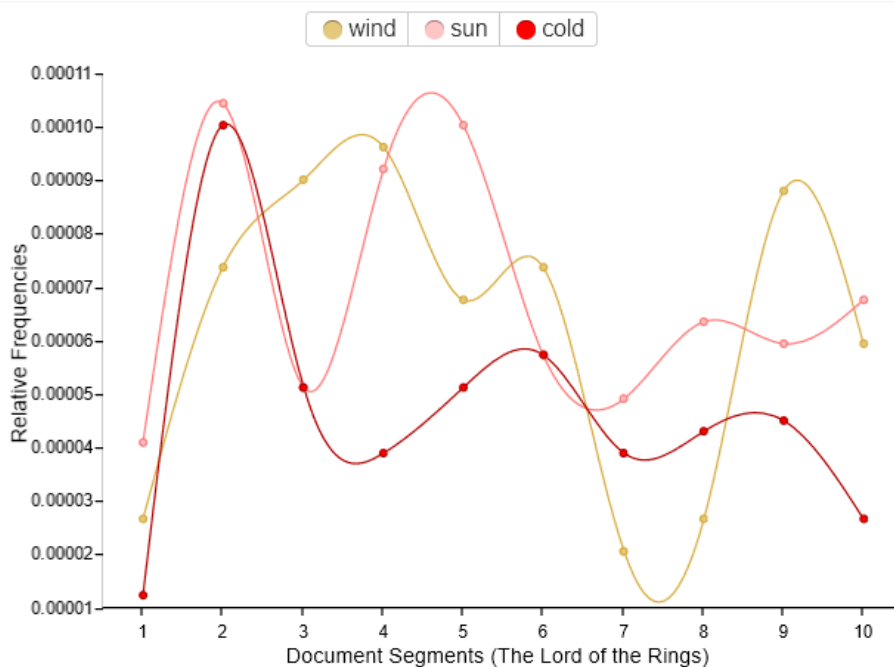
This occurs in the weather being used instrumentally as a plot device, in figures of speech, metaphors, similes, personification and in poems. It serves not only in setting the stage for new passages, strongly deepening immersion, but also in orienting the reader. Moreover, weather often shows mystical qualities, with its ordinary patterns being enhanced by additional supernatural characteristics which are imbued into it.

Regarding their positioning in the text, weather terms are most often found grouped with certain characters, at the beginning of new passages and within chapters taking place or pertaining to the outside. A certain expression might be used to convey both pleasant and unpleasant feelings, with worse weather (or alternatively disappearance of weather considered “nice”), cold and darkness more often associated with the “enemies” of the story.

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<sup>43</sup> Before that, fog referred to long, uncut grass or moss/lichen (OED 2023b).

<sup>44</sup> Quite similar to how ‘mirk’ was a colour expression rather than a meteorological one.



**Figure 2.** Relative frequency (Y axis) of the search terms ‘wind’, ‘sun’, and ‘cold’ in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, excluding Notes and Appendices. The application Voyant Tools breaks the book down into ten sections (X axis). Given enough time and utilizing digital analysis softwares like this one, a thorough analysis over the course of the whole book could be performed. This concept is naturally expandable to every other search term imaginable. Adaptation of a figure generated with Voyant Tools (<http://voyant-tools.org>).

Tolkien was familiar with different meteorological expressions and used them skilfully within their correct definitions. Indeed, even though Tom Bombadil can be quoted as declaring “I am no weather-master” (LotR 133), J. R. R. Tolkien certainly was.



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