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Nature and Technology: Angelic and Sacrificial Strategies in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

Gwenyth Hood

Marshall University, hood@marshall.edu

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olkien is often lightly accused of having a romantic view of nature, in that he portrays the natural environment as an embodiment of goodness, while technology is evil. Indeed, more than one critic has seen *The Lord of the Rings* as an attack on modern science and technology. This view is more commonly expressed word-of-the-mouth than in print, but it can be found even there, with Lee Donald Rossi, in his dissertation, classing Tolkien and Lewis as "reactionary fantasists" who would "get rid of most of the machines and return to a primarily agrarian economy" (2-3) and Walter Scheps noting that *The Lord of the Rings* sends an insidious message if taken seriously on the moral level since "evil creatures [Sauron and Saruman] . . . . display an insatiable thirst for knowledge" (43).[1] As analysis of Tolkien's portrayal of nature and science within the context of the struggle between good and evil, this is, of course, vastly oversimplied. Actually, Tolkien's portrayal of natural environments and the ways in which rational creatures interact with them is quite complex, and the critique of modern science and technology, if there is one, is much more finely nuanced than he is given credit for. Some of these complexities can be grasped through a close reading of the trilogy itself, but they can be seen still more clearly when the trilogy is examined in relation to some of the posthumously published material, especially in the short accounts of the *Ainulindalë and the Valaquenta*, published with *The Silmarillion*. Through these works we can see that *The Lord of the Rings* portrays not one, but several patterns of nature, and within each of these patterns, rational creatures have different modes of shaping the environment. Their relationship with their environment to some degree shapes their strategy against evil, with those in the paradise-like Elven enviroments resorting to what might be called the "angelic" strategy, and those in the commonplace mortal environments choosing the "sacrificial." The evil beings do not have remarkably different *means* of manipulating their environment; they differ, rather, in the *spirit* with which they do so.

Of course, the statement that there are several patterns of nature within the trilogy needs to be qualified. Ultimately, in Tolkien's universe, there is only one pattern of nature. This is the pattern which the One, or Ilúvatar — the Creator in Tolkien's mythology — has designed. It will not be completed until the Second Music of the Ainur, which will be made "after the end of days." Then finally, "the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright and take Being in the moment of their utterance . . . . and Ilúvatar shall give

to their thoughts the secret fire, being well pleased" (*Silmarillion* 15-16). At the Second Music, all created beings including Melkor, will learn, as Ilúvatar says, that "no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me" (*Silmarillion* 17).

However, this Second Music lies in the distant future. In the Third Age (the time of *The Lord of the Rings*), there are still several patterns of nature coexisting, related to several themes in the Primal Symphony, working together at once and sometimes seeming dissonant. These patterns can be related pretty exactly to the patterns described in the *Ainulindalë*.

As the story is told in *The Music of the Ainur*, the One or Ilúvatar first creates the Ainur or Holy Ones, some of whom will later become Valar or Powers of the Earth. To those angelic beings Ilúvatar teaches music, or a first theme. Then he asks them to play before him, elaborating upon the theme as they choose. They do so, and all goes well for a while, until Melkor decides to "interweave matters of his own imagining which were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself" (*Silmarillion* 16). The effect of this is, of course, disastrous; some Ainur, on hearing Melkor's discords, lose touch with the harmony they were supposed to sing and fall silent. Others "began to attune their music to his [Melkor's] rather than to the thought which they had at first." Some Ainur keep on singing in accordance with the original plan, so that the music became "an endless wrath that would not be assuaged" (*Silmarillion* 16).

Not willing to let his creation be ruined, Ilúvatar counters by interpolating a "new theme" which was "like and unlike" the other. But Melkor and his new allies only become louder and more persistent with their discord until "there was a war of sound more violent than before" leading once more to the despair and silence of many Ainur.

Then Ilúvatar responds with a third theme which is "unlike the others." It did not challenge Melkor's volume with more volume but was "soft" and "delicate" though it gradually "took to itself power and profundity." It was "deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came." Melkor's discord continued, loud but monotonous, "a clamorous unison as of many trumpets braying upon a few notes." In the end, Ilúvatar's third theme overcame Melkor's because the "most triumphant notes" of Melkor's theme "were taken by the other and woven into its own

solemn pattern." Victorious, Ilúvatar brought the music to an end.

The Music having concluded, Ilúvatar showed the Ainur in a vision what the Music had meant. This was a vision of the history of Middle-earth, and here it was revealed that the First Theme had to do with lands and environments and animals, (which were in part disrupted by Melkor's discords). The Ainu called Manwë (or the Elder King in Bilbo's poem) was the chief instrument of the Second Theme (*Silmarillion* 21). This was apparently resistance to Melkor's discord, which was overcome by still more discord. The Third theme had to do with the Children of Ilúvatar — that is, with Elves and Men — who were a new creation of Ilúvatar, unforeseen by the Ainur. Human and Elven destiny was also presumably distorted and obstructed by Melkor's disharmonies, but they would, in unexpected fashion, ultimately triumph over him.

The Vision was interrupted before its end and then made real. The Ainur became Valar or Powers of the Earth to help achieve it, and so began the actual history of Middle-earth. In the Third Age, the time when *The Lord of the Rings* is set, there are several patterns of nature, from near-paradisal to utterly degraded. Near-paradisal nature is found in Elvish-Valinorean habitats, which are closest to Ilúvatar's original pattern.[2] But since Melkor's disharmonies entered the world, the first theme (innocence of evil) no longer exists in isolation from the second theme (resistence to evil), of which Manwë or the Elder King is the major instrument. And since the Elves and Men have come, nothing exists completely untouched by that gentle, sad third theme of which they are the chief instruments.

The Elves are, as is explicitly stated in *The Silmarillion*, the firstborn children of Ilúvatar and as such are part of the third theme; however, despite this, Tolkien also declares that they are closer in nature to the original Ainur (*Silmarillion* 41). Hence in the Elvish environments, we could expect a combination of Ilúvatar's first, second and third themes, but with emphasis on the first two.

Thus, as might be expected, the environments which strongly reflect the first two themes in the primal harmony, the Elvish-Valinorean environments, are harmonious. Environments which have been preserved from near the beginning by Elvish care still have a kind of numinousity which sympathizes with the elves and cooperates with them. Thus, Gandalf says that Elrond's river will "rise in anger" against the Nazgûl (*Fellowship* 296) should they cross into Rivendell; it is also Gandalf who later speaks of a place called Hollin (371) where Elves once lived and says that "much evil must befall a country before it wholly forgets the Elves, if they once dwelt there." Elvish sympathy for all living things is well established. So firm is their link to their environment that they have no concept of magic as anything unusual. Galadriel uses the word only with hesitation, remarking that Hobbits make no distinction between Elvish arts and "the deceits of the Enemy," (*Fellowship* 468). For the Elves it is simply, as one of Galadriel's folk puts it, "we put the thought of all we love into all that we make" (479).

Obviously the Elves, objectively speaking, do a lot of controling of their environments, (or perhaps, under the circumstances, we should call it "influence") and they do a great deal of crafting and making. But because the objects they make are often deceptively simple, unobstrusive and beautiful, they apparently have failed to attract the attention of the critics who believe that Tolkien's message is anti-technological. However, when you examine them closely, you find that Elvish technological powers are rather remarkable. Among the objects made by the elves are the three elven rings whose bearers and natures are revealed at the end of the story; food (the *lembas*) which lasts almost indefinitely while keeping its flavor (*Fellowship* 478-9), grey elven cloaks which help the company to walk, not quite invisibly but very unobstrusively all the same (*Fellowship* 479), boats with a resistence to sinking even when sailing unguided through in rapids (*Towers* 348-49), ropes that apparently come when called (*Two Towers* 274), a star phial which seems to draw its power from need rather than fuel (*Two Towers* 418) and breaks evil spells (*Return* 218), and garden soil that causes the Shire to bloom with wonderful fertility after Saruman is cast out. Call it artistry, call it technology, call it magic; it is certainly not crude.

It is true that for modern man to make artifacts which accomplish half of these marvels, he would produce unwieldly objects that cause ten times the trouble while producing unpleasant and unforeseen side effects. Still, if we *could* make objects which were so effective at the same time they were beautiful and harmonious with the environment, surely we would *wish* to do so?

The Elvish harmonious environments and their well-adapted, unobtrusive and harmonious magic or technology are associated with a strategy against evil which could be called "angelic." Since Paradisal environments have resistance to evil built into them, for the Elves, the struggle against evil is mostly a struggle of continuing to be themselves and maintaining their habitats. Hence Tolkien's Elves, at this stage in their existence, prefer a defensive and enduring strategy rather than an aggressive one. There is logic in this, for in Tolkien's model, goodness is by nature stronger than evil. Therefore the Elves suppose that they have done enough when they have seen to it that the nature around them is kept in this Paradisal state, and their chief role should be to guard it from impurities and fend off attackers. Lórien is a bewilderment to Sauron, and Rivendell also resists him. This Elvish strategy, indeed, is not enough to win the war against Sauron, just as Ilúvatar's second theme could not prevail over Morgoth's discord. Reinforcing what was good in the beginning and even repairing the earth in places where the elves happen to be strong is not enough to restore the original harmony; such victories are only local and temporary. As Gandalf says, "Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow

takes another shape and grows again," (*Fellowship* 82). Meanwhile, these clashes between the prelapsarian powers and the forces of evil gradually use up the world's numinous strength, and nothing replaces it. Some of the Ainur, after all, have fallen silent. As Elrond explains, when asked whether he and the other great Elf-lords have the power to fend off Sauron in direct attack, "I have not the strength . . .; neither have they" (*Fellowship* 348).

Very little of Middle-earth is still in this paradisal state which resists evil of itself. What of the environments which are not so blessed? These environments can lapse into ordinary nature, or they can become further degraded. In fact, since Morgoth's discord is monotonous and persistent, one would naturally suppose that its results would be similarly uniform, and this is so in the end; ultimately, enviroments dominated by evil loose all their vitality and are incapable of supporting life. Before they reach this stage, however, they go through transitions, of which several can be identified in the story.

The first is seduced nature. When nature of the Elvish-Valinorean kind has not been confirmed to resist evil in the second theme, its numinous side is susceptible to both good and evil influences. (This corresponds, perhaps, to the stage at which some Ainur fall silent and some attune themselves to Morgoth's discords). Fangorn speaks of "shadows" and pieces of the "Great Darkness" Morgoth had brought, and these cause trees to come awake with "bad hearts" — by which he does not mean hollow, as Treebeard points out (*Two Towers* 89). Such, apparently, was the nature of Old Man Willow in the Old Forest (*Fellowship* 169). Both these places have the distinction of being places of power closer to human environments than Elvish ones, still full of nature's old numinous powers, not paradisal and yet not wholly corrupted.

The trilogy makes it clear, however, that as evil advances, it destroys even this evil vitality. There is an intermediate stage during which degraded environments have numinous powers and are made more ghastly by the allure of their decayed beauty, as in the vision of the Dead Marshes. However, in its final stages, degraded nature has less numinous power than ordinary nature and is incapable of supporting life. Thus Tolkien writes,

> Even to the Mere of Dead Faces, some haggard phantom of Spring would come; but here, neither spring nor summer would ever come again. Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths and feed on rottenness. . . . They had come to the desolation that lay before Mordor . . . . a land defiled, diseased beyond all healing — unless the Great Sea should enter it and wash it with oblivion. (*Two Towers* 302).

Obviously, in lands were the numinous has been largely put to sleep or killed, rational beings, if they are going to exert power at all, must resort to the merely mechanical, rather than the magical which draws on numinous powers. Saruman, in particular, seems well prepared to do this, and Fangorn complains of his mechanical

bent, saying that he has lost interest in living things and "has a mind of metal and wheels" (*Towers* 96). This really is, however, an adaptation to the kind of environment Saruman mostly had to work with at this stage of Middle-earth's history. It can hardly be said that in the trilogy as a whole evil prefers mechanical devices while good prefers unchanged nature. When nature has numinous powers, both good and evil can draw upon those powers in their magic. Sauron's most powerful servants are the Nazgûl and their chief weapon is psychic terror. But when he lacks the power to inflict terror directly, Sauron will resort to more subtle means which are at least partly aesthetic, such as in the illusions of the Dead Marshes (296-98). When these powers fail, he will indeed use merely physical force. Likewise the good side uses like force in resisting him, when they can get it. Good and evil sides fight with roughly the same kind of weapons: mail-coats, bows and arrows, swords. It is true that Sauron once uses a battering ram, which the forces of Gondor are not seen using, but this is probably due to lack of opportunity rather than technical incompetence; the defenders of Gondor recognise at once what the weapon is (*Return* 124) which shows that it is not an innovation. Indeed, the battering ram depends for its effect as much on terror produced by aesthetic laws (the design in the form of a ravening wolf) and by unknown "spells of ruin" (appealing to the numinous). Likewise the darkness which is sent from Orodruin in the days of the battles is apparently simply mechanical. It has a coincidental resemblence to modern smog, but there is no real suggestion that it is an industrial by-product. Rather, it seems to have been sent deliberately for a purpose which was is much psychological (to discourage the enemy) as it was strategic (to move Sauron's armies under the cover of darkness). In attacking the Elvish-Numenorean coalition, Sauron and Saruman make as much use of living creatures as does the good side; if anything, they make use of more kinds of creatures, with the great winged mounts for the Nazgûl (to which, however, eagles can be countered), black horses stolen from the Rohirrim, and elephants. No, the evil side is not made evil by the use of technology but rather by its ruthless pursuit of the conquest of Middle-earth by whatever means it can devise.

But between the Paradisal environment which Elves create and the utterly degraded environment, leeched of its vitality, which Sauron produces, there is the ordinary mortal environment. Mortal nature is much like the human beings who inhabit it. For one thing, it is mortal. It is *not* paradisal, *not* obviously numinous, *not* naturally resistent to evil, *not* in spontaneous sympathy with its inhabitants. In order to support life, mortal nature requires conscious care and cultivation, and even then it is subject to blight and death in its season. Still, ordinary nature is vibrant and fertile and wholesome and fruitful, if properly cultivated and tamed. In the *The Lord of the Rings* it has the further merit of being associated with the supernatural and with the sacrificial strategy against evil.

Just as Ilúvatar's third theme seemed weaker than his first two, so this ordinary or mortal nature seems inferior to the Elvish-Valinorean habitats. In both cases, though, this inferiority is only apparent. Mortal beings are greater than the environment in which they live. This is the sense in which Tolkien insists, in his famous essay "On Fairy Stories," that humans not faeries, are supernatural. He writes,

> *Supernatural* is a dangerous and difficult word in any of its senses, looser or stricter. But to fairies it can hardly be applied, unless *super* is taken merely as a superlative prefix. For it is man who is, in contrast to fairies, supernatural . . . .; whereas they are natural, far more natural than he. ("On Fairy Stories" 39)

By this he means that faeries are natural in that they are in harmony with the original pattern of nature, while human beings are supernatural in being intended for something beyond it. As Ilúvatar makes on the Elves in the *Ainulindalë*, "[T]o the Atani [Men] I will give a new gift." And:

> Therefore he willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life . . . beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all else . . . (*Silmarillion* 41)

In short, human beings are not in harmony with their environment or their bodies, because they must struggle with them, and for their ultimate victory they must look outward beyond their world, beyond nature, even the paradisal nature of Valinor. They must look to the One. That is where their rescue must come from to complete the new pattern. In the Christian mythology which Tolkien follows, rescue comes in the form of a sacrifice, an outpouring of divine love which is beyond the understanding of any merely natural wisdom. This correlates with the Third Theme in the Music of the Ainur, with its strange sad sweetness.

There is, of course, more than one kind of mortal and one kind of sacrifice in *The Lord of the Rings*, each adding its own unique variation on Ilúvatar's third theme. Mortals are not by any means cut off from Ilúvatar's first and second themes. Mortals can appreciate Elvish harmony with nature and even learn some of their magic. The long-lived Númenoreans (who had intermarried with Elves long ago) once had great powers of this kind, as we are constantly reminded in the skills of Aragorn and through various other means. For example, the ancient knives from the Barrow, which Merry and Pippin carry, are dropped by the Orcs, because they perceive them to be "work of Westernesse, wound about with spells for the bane of Mordor" (*Towers* 20). Indeed, one of the blades becomes the bane of the chief Nazgûl (*Return* 146).

Other mortals, even Hobbits, can learn Elvish ways and Elvish magic to a degree, as is made clear when Samwise expresses regret that he had not learned more ropemaking of the Elves while he was at Lórien. In general, however, the ordinary mortals do not understand the numinous link between Elves and their environment. They call it magic and they fear it. Bilbo's association with Elves and magical events makes him an object of suspicion to the other hobbits, even to the relatively benevolent Gaffer Gamgee. "'*Elves and Dragons!*'" the latter says to his son. "*Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you.*'" (*Fellowship* 47). And Hobbits are not alone in incomprehension of magic; the heroic Rohirrim are also deeply suspicious of magic and of Galadriel (*Two Towers* 42). The ordinary people of Gondor are somewhat more tolerant of "magic" on account of their Númenorean rulers, but they do not understand it much better. Beregond has heard that "the Lord [Denethor] would at times wrestle in thought with his Enemy" (*Return* 162) but does not know how he does it. That is the best sense he can make of Denethor's link to the Palantír. After Barad-dúr has been destroyed, Ioreth from the Houses of Healing describes Frodo's exploits to a kinswoman in rather misleading terms:

> 'Why, cousin, one of them [the Hobbits] went with only his esquire into the Black Country and fought with the Dark Lord all by himself, and set fire to his Tower, if you can believe it. At least that is the tale in the City.' (*Return* 302)

So in taming their environments, mortals must rely upon ordinary work and mechanical arts for their success. What kind of environments *do* they create, then, when they are doing well? We enter several human enviroments in the course of the trilogy, expecially Rohan and Gondor. Actually, however, the quintessential *human* environment is the hobbit environment, the *Shire*.

Though very different from the Elven lands, the Shire is in its own ways highly idealized, though also caricatured. The Hobbits share some Elvish attitudes toward nature without having the same wisdom, power, or imagination. They are in their own fashion at harmony with nature, their community being close to the earth. They prefer simple tools (*Fellowship* 20). They cannot generally communicate with animals as Elves do, but they kill "nothing that lived" for sport (*Fellowship* 26). Though their closeness to nature is remarked upon, artifact for artifact the Shire might also seem the most technologically advanced of the human cultures which are portrayed in the trilogy. No doubt this is partly because the portrayal is more detailed and because the artifacts which Hobbits produce are most like those with which we are familiar — here, though not elsewhere, we encounter mills, umbrellas, fireworks (though these are imported by Gandalf the Hobbits seem familiar with them and not unduly frightened), and waistcoats. Certainly the hobbits are not averse to machines in themselves. Although it is seen as a piece of madness when Lotho first brings in a mill larger than the one the Shire needs, they make a distinction between that kind of madness and the destruction of last days of Saruman's domination, when it spews out filth deliberately (*Return* 360-61). Hobbits are not anti-technological; they simply desire rational and responsible use of the tools they have.

Human or hobbit, magical or not, the mortals rely in their struggle for evil upon the supernatural, in Tolkien's sense, and their strategy is sacrificial. And that is ultimately the winning strategy. Apparently, therefore, the very beauty, ease and harmony which the Elves enjoy in their Paradisal environments also limits them. The dissonance between human beings and their environment is caused in part because of their closeness to the third theme, whose object is to *change* that original pattern of nature into something that can transform the symphony with its distortions into something beautiful. They are not as well in harmony with the first pattern because they are in the process of creating, along with Ilúvatar, a new pattern. Hence though the humans in *The Lord of the Rings* admire and desire a link with nature like the one they see the Elves possess, they are perhaps susceptible to a love out of proportion with the Primal Harmony of the Earthly Paradise, since they are instruments of a greater, ultimate harmony which is not yet fully revealed or fulfilled. Men must, like Aragorn, learn to give up desire for immediate possession of Elvish immortality and to accept death as a rite of passage to a greater but still hidden fulfillment. The mortal characters struggle against evil by offering their whole selves to the enterprise, in the knowledge that it will change them, and they do not know what the outcome will be. Indeed, they have good reason to believe it will be death.

Still, the angelic strategy and the sacrificial one cannot be completely separated in *The Lord of the Rings* any more than Ilúvatar's first, second and third themes can be separated in his great symphony. The elves help the human characters and in doing so destroy part of their own power in Middle-earth — the three rings. In the trilogy's terms it is the Men, more loosely joined to nature but more directed toward eternity, who are able to feel sacrificial love more intensely and fully than do the elves. The two strategies are bound together most closely in Gandalf the wizard. Gandalf, like the other wizards is, strictly speaking, neither a human nor an elf. In fact, as *The Silmarillion*, and the *Unfinished Tales* reveal, wizards are Maiar or lesser angels sent to Middle-earth to aid the struggle against Sauron. As a Maia, Gandalf, (or Olorin, as he was called in Valinor), would seem to be more properly speaking a power of the Earth, as fully bound up with primal nature (and thus with Ilúvatar's first and second themes) as the Elves. Indeed he is held in high esteem by the Elves and cooperates with their "magic" at times. At the end of the story he is found to be the wielder of one of the Three Elven Rings (*Return* 383).

Still Gandalf is remarkably unlike the Elves, and like mortal men in some ways. *The Unfinished Tales* states:

> [W]ith the consent of Eru they [the Valar] sent members of their own high order, but clad in bodies as of Men, real and not feigned, but subject to the fears and pains and weariness of earth, able to hunger and thirst and be slain; though because of their noble spirits they did not die, and aged only by the cares and labours of many long years. . . . [N]ow their emissaries were

forbidden to reveal themselves in forms of majesty or to seek to rule the wills of men or Elves by open display of power, but coming in shapes weak and humble were bidden to advise and persuade Men and Elves to good . . . " (*Unfinished Tales* 394)

The very words of Tolkien's description here suggest a sacrificial role which hardly needs further elucidation.

Even, in fact, as a Power of Nature, Gandalf was among those most apt to understand the limits of nature's original pattern. For it is recounted that Olorin's "ways took him often to the house of [the Valar] Nienna" (*Silmarillion* 31) whose dwelling is "west of the West, upon the borders of the world" and the windows of whose house "look outward from the walls of the world" (*Silmarillion* 28).

Gandalf the incarnate Maia is physically and psychologically different from the Elves. Despite his immortality and his physical vigor, he does not appear youthful as do the Elves, but old and bent, leaning on a staff. Perhaps this aged appearance expresses a tension with nature, as if a love too great for the present earthly harmony impelled him to drive both body and mind beyond their strength. Frodo, in his song of mourning, describes Gandalf as a "pilgrim" and burden-bearer combining several apparently opposite capacities in tension.

> A deadly sword, a healing hand,
> a back that bent beneath its load;
> a trumpet-voice, a burning brand,
> a weary pilgrim on the road. (*Fellowship* 465)

Gandalf, as a greater Valinorean spirit, comprehends the Elvish within him but also has insight into the greater divine intentions interwoven with mortal destiny. Though the mortals Frodo and Sam give themselves to the cause without understanding it clearly, it is Gandalf's role to know much and to explain to them as clearly as he can what is happening. Understanding, as he does, the primal harmonies and having looked out beyond the walls of the world, Gandalf can perceive the providential patterns which show Ilúvatar's specific interventions which correspond to the third theme. For as the Ainulindalë reads, "in every age there came forth things that are new and have no foretelling, for they do not proceed from the past" (*Silmarillion* 18). Gandalf is more sharply aware of Ilúvatar's role in shaping such random things as his own unusual interest in Hobbit-lore (*Fellowship* 78-9) and the Ring's decision to leave Gollum just as Bilbo happened by (*Fellowship* 87-8). It is he who instinctively chooses the sacrificial strategy of the war and who selects the Hobbits and therefore Frodo for the leading parts. It is he who urges Elrond to let Merry and Pippin come instead of two other Elves, saying, "it would be well to trust rather to their friendship than to great wisdom"(*Fellowship* 361).

Gandalf did not, of course, foresee either his own death or his own return. As Tolkien writes in a draft to Robert Murray

> [I]t was for [Gandalf] a *sacrifice* to perish on the Bridge in defence of his companions, less perhaps than for a

mortal Man or Hobbit, since he had a far greater inner power than they; but also more, since it was a humbling and abnegation of himself in conformity to 'the Rules' for all he could know at that moment he was the *only* person who could direct the resistance to Sauron successfully, and all *his* mission was in vain. He was handing over to the Authority that ordained the rules and giving up personal hope of success. (*Letters* 202)

In sending Gandalf back, Ilúvatar enters and does something not clearly foretold in the vision which the Valar saw. As Tolkien puts it, "He was sent by a mere prudent plan or the angelic Valar or goverors; but Authority had taken up this plan and enlarged it in the moment of its failure," (*Letters* 203). By this account he has been sent back by Ilúvatar. Returning from beyond the world he has become supernatural in its strictest sense.

Though Gandalf links the angelic and the sacrificial strategies more fully than any of the Elves, the Hobbits, and especially Frodo, specialize in the sacrificial strategy. As Tolkien writes in his case,

> . . . I think it can be observed in history and experience that some individuals seem to be placed in 'sacrificial' positions: situations or tasks that for perfection of solution demand powers beyond their utmost limit, even beyond all possible limits for an incarnate creature in a physical world — in which a body can be destroyed or a mind so maimed that it affects mind and will. (*Letters* 327)

Frodo entered such a situation when he chose to keep the Ring, knowing that it would change him and the power to resist it successfully to the end was not in him. He does it, however, for the sake of the others. As he says to Gandalf: "I should like to save the Shire, if I could . . . . I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again," (*Fellowship* 96). In the end, when he finds that the "even if" is true, he says, "It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them," (*Return* 382).

Yet, though none of the other Hobbits sacrifice as much, Frodo's motives are not utterly unlike theirs. The Hobbits, within a human context, do specialize more in the social virtues. Their small size correlates with a lack of heroic or political ambition, which in turn contributes to the uniquely peaceful and egalitarian atmosphere of the Shire. The hobbits share leadership instead of expecting one family of kings to take it, and therefore they alone have a (partially) elective government. As a special measure of their intense concern for one another, three hobbits follow one (Frodo) into perils they cannot imagine simply because he is burdened with the Ring and they cannot leave him to face his troubles alone. The Hobbits are the key to the plot against Sauron, and four of the Nine Walkers who set out toward Mordor are drawn from this apparently insignificant culture. This is the hour when "the Halfling

forth shall stand" (*Fellowship* 323). The particular excellence in which Hobbit protagonists (especially Frodo and Samwise) "stand forth" as opposed to Elves is in love and sacrifice. Their manner of attaining excellence is not in recovering a prelapsarian relationship with nature (though it is necessary for them to gain a sense of it), but in being willing to give up everything they do have in order to help their friends. Frodo's willingness to sacrifice is a particularly intense and therefore somewhat unusual form of the community feeling all the hobbits have for one another, but it is rooted in the Shire.

In the last analysis, there is no tidy separation between the angelic and the sacrificial strategies in the quest. They are polar opposites, the Elves representing the angelic pole while Gandalf and the Hobbits (chiefly Frodo) represent the sacrificial one. The Elves are saved from Sauron by the deeds of Gandalf, Frodo, and many others, but Gandalf and Frodo accomplish their parts with Elvish aid and the help of Elvish crafts. The Elves help, even knowing that the success of the quest will destroy the power of their own Elven rings (although their fate, should the quest fail, would be worse). The other three hobbits, Sam, Merry and Pippin, all risk their lives for others at times, but survive nevertheless and are able to return home to live out long, happy and prosperous lives in a Shire made more beautiful by Galadriel's "blessing." Sacrifice, after all, is meaningless out of context. Without Lórien, Rivendell and even the Shire in the background, Frodo's agonies would seem to be merely an extension of Mordor. The beauty and benevolence of the good side is expressed most fully in the Elvish relationship with Paradisal nature, but the good side's devotion to it is expressed most fully in the sacrifices of Gandalf and Frodo. The sheltered existence of the Shire and the prosperity of the other three returning Hobbits justifies Frodo's sacrifice, because it was for the sake of other Hobbits like them that he undertook the quest. Samwise bids Frodo farewell at the Grey Havens and returns to greet Rose. With a sense of great things both lost and won, and of hope of a greater fulfillment, the trilogy ends. Thus the angelic and sacrificial themes are blended into a symphony which can only suggest, fleetingly, the ultimate harmony of Ilúvatar's final music.

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Endnotes

1. As I will not have time to deal with these charges in detail, I can only point out that it would be more accurate to say that Tokien displays a distress with some of the unfortunate excesses of technological civilization and their unsightly by-products, but it is unfair to turn this into a political movement dedicated to the destruction of machines; and Sauron and Saruman display an insatiable desire for *intelligence* of a military sort, which isn't quite the same thing as knowledge.

2. I discuss these environments in more detail in my paper, "The Earthly Paradise in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*" which is to be published with the Proceedings of the Tolkien Centenary Conference.

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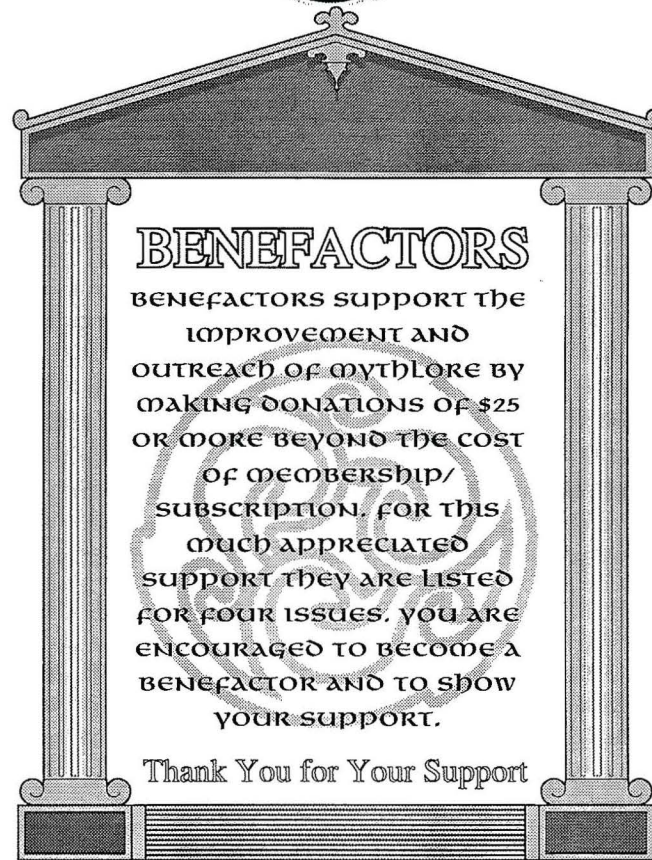
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