

## Rings and Rationalism: Tolkien's Tales Against Domination

Nathanael Blake, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center

### Introduction

As a young man at King Edward's School, J.R.R. Tolkien and three friends formed a close-knit group with the unwieldy name of the Tea Club and Barrovian Society. After member Rob Gilson was killed in the Battle of the Somme, Tolkien, himself serving in the trenches at the time, wrote that he thought that "the TCBS had been granted some spark of fire – certainly as a body if not singly – that was destined to kindle a new light, or, what is the same thing, rekindle an old light in the world; that the TCBS was destined to testify for God and Truth in a more direct way even than by laying down its several lives in this war." He added that its work might be "done by three or two or one survivor...To this I now pin my hopes."<sup>1</sup>

The hope voiced in this forlorn letter would seem to have been fulfilled by Tolkien becoming one of the best-selling and most-beloved authors of the last century. *The Lord of the Rings* and its prequel, *The Hobbit*, have sold hundreds of millions of copies,<sup>2</sup> been made into blockbuster films (with *The Return of the King* winning the Academy Award for best picture), and inspired readers as disparate as the conservative intellectual Russell Kirk and the rock stars of Led Zeppelin and Rush. But when everyone from Christian conservative homeschoolers to socialist Greenpeace activists views Tolkien's work as an inspiration, can he really be said to have testified "for God and Truth"—or did he just write a crowd-pleaser?

Tolkien claimed that "*The Lord of the Rings* is, of course, a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision."<sup>3</sup> But it was only posthumously that the theology of Middle-earth found in *The Silmarillion* and other fragments was published, and these works have never attained the popularity of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's popular influence is based on these famous works, and in the forward to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, he insisted that his "prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers." He added that "as for any meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical."<sup>4</sup>

If Tolkien had no message for his readers, then it would seem that they may read into the work what they will, including ideas that would have horrified him. For instance, the Tolkien Society, of which he was the honorary first president, has recently given platforms to scholars eager to adapt and critique his works according to the latest intellectual and social fashions—for example, a paper titled "Gondor in Transition: A Brief Introduction to Transgender Realities in *The Lord of the Rings*."<sup>5</sup>

But this treatment of Tolkien's work as an empty vessel for current agendas goes too far. The passage in which he disclaimed having a message was written against the notion that the Lord of the Rings was an allegory or commentary on the Second World War. Tolkien did not believe that the reader was free to assign any meaning whatsoever to his work. *The Lord of the Rings* is not obvious allegory or commentary such as C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* or Orwell's *Animal Farm*, but it was still written from a Christian, specifically Catholic, perspective. When Tolkien wrote to, in his words, amuse, delight, excite and deeply move his readers, he did so according to his own moral and imaginative vision.

Thus, we may reconcile Tolkien's claim that *The Lord of the Rings* is a religious and specifically Catholic work with his disavowal of it having a meaning or message. Tolkien did not write to make a topical point, but he still had a vision and theme. In the long run, this approach may do much more to testify for his ideals and beliefs than a more didactic story would have. The diversity and breadth of Tolkien's fans is a sign of his success—it is not that his work is open to any interpretation, or that it lacks depth, but that its depth speaks to something in many readers, even if it is sometimes inchoate.

An important source of this resonance is that Tolkien's work provided a compelling counternarrative to the scientism and rationalism that dominated much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This goes beyond Tolkien's obvious fondness for forests and distaste for mechanization. It also extends beyond form, though it is no coincidence that he wrote a high fantasy epic, with many readers finding, "its chief appeal lay...in its unabashed return to heroic romance."<sup>6</sup> *The Lord of the Rings* is a bracing sea-breeze amidst the dreariness of much twentieth century literature, but Tolkien's imaginative vision also arms readers against rationalist philosophies and their schemes of political and social control.

The rationalist is confident that reason has revealed, or soon will reveal, the one true form of just government, which it is the duty of the rationalist to implement against all opposition. Political rationalists have, of course, disagreed (often violently) as to what this form of government is. Thus, the rationalist project has taken different forms over the centuries, but its core has been the desire to dominate the world. This ideal of understanding the world fully, in order to order it perfectly, is diabolical, insofar as it attempts to usurp the divine perspective and place. It may speak of reason and understanding, but these are tools for the will to power.

Thus, rationalism is an inducement to tyranny, as seen in Tolkien's villains from Morgoth to Sauron to Saruman. It is an attempt by the intellect to grasp the whole of reality, and thereby bring it under one's power. This may begin from a desire to do good, but this is perverted by the arrogant assumption of control that reduces persons to puppets to be manipulated, used and discarded. The great evils of Tolkien's stories are distinguished by their desire to dominate and subjugate the weak to their ends. Thus, the chief moral struggle in his work is not the physical war against the unabashed evil of the Dark Lord and his monsters. Rather it is in the hearts of those who are tempted to join with that evil, or to adopt its mindset and methods.

### **The Alien Politics of Middle-earth**

Tolkien did not provide an alternative political blueprint for his readers. The good regimes in Middle-earth vary greatly, from monarchies such as Rohan to the Shire's mix of hereditary gentry and minimalist democracy, and this diversity is presented as the just and natural result of circumstances. Furthermore, as Tolkien reminded his readers, the events of Middle-earth are not representative of our world. *The Lord of the Rings* portrays an enchanted world of heroes and monsters, oaths and magic. The politics of Middle-earth are alien to us, and not readily compatible with any of our ordinary political categories. We might describe the politics of Tolkien's work with some unwieldy formulation such as reactionary anarcho-monarchy, and that would still be wrong.

This does not mean that Tolkien had no affinities. There is some truth to Bradley J. Birzer's claim that Tolkien fits "clearly and neatly into the mold of a number of twentieth-century Christian humanist and antimodern writers and thinkers."<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, in his zeal, Birzer persistently overreaches his

evidence (such as in the parallels he suggest between Sam and St. John, and between Gandalf and St. Boniface) and he flirts with treating Tolkien's Christian inspirations and influences as representational.

Politically, Tolkien, like Treebeard, was not altogether on anyone's side because no one was entirely on his side. His comments on politics tended to be sardonic or gloomy. In a 1943 letter to his son Christopher, he wrote "my political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs)—or to 'unconstitutional' Monarchy."<sup>8</sup> In the next missive, he added, "I wonder (if we survive this war) if there will be any niche, even of sufferance, left for reactionary back numbers like me (and you). The bigger things get the smaller and duller or flatter the globe gets. It is getting to be all one blasted little provincial suburb."<sup>9</sup>

Though Tolkien was no man of the Left, if the Right is represented by free-market capitalist ideologues, then Tolkien was not a man of the Right either. He was perhaps most closely aligned with traditionalist conservatives such as Russell Kirk, but there are many on the Left who also find inspiration in his work. For example, in *Defending Middle-Earth*, Patrick Curry, a progressive postmodern environmentalist, argues that his ideological allies have reasons to sympathize with and learn from Tolkien's works.<sup>10</sup>

Despite Tolkien's literary conceit that he was narrating a legendary pre-history, Middle-Earth really is a different world, inhabited by different people, and its politics do not readily transfer over. Consider the Shire, the longstanding home of the hobbits and "Tolkien's representation of all that he loved best about England."<sup>11</sup> In setting the stage for his story, Tolkien noted that 'the Shire at this time had hardly any 'government.' Families for the most part managed their own affairs."<sup>12</sup> There was a gentry of prominent families and hereditary clan leaders, such as the Thain of the Took, with limited powers. The Mayor was the only elected official, and his chief responsibility was presiding at banquets. Other than that he manages the postal service and the Shirriffs, who "were in practice rather haywards than policemen, more concerned with the straying of beasts than people."<sup>13</sup>

Tolkien sympathized with this sort of minimalist and localist government. In a letter to Christopher, he wrote that, "the most improper job of any man, even saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling to take it on), is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity."<sup>14</sup> But in evaluating the Shire we must remember that hobbits are not human. Though they have their vices, they are not warlike, except in great need. We are told that no hobbit in the Shire had ever intentionally killed another, an unlikely claim for even the most idyllic English shire. The minimalism of hobbit government, therefore, owes much to the peaceful inclinations of hobbits themselves—and to the forgotten protection of the Shire by the Rangers.

A peaceable people with external protectors is not a model for human government. And even Tolkien's human kingdoms are not obviously meant for us to emulate, though they may be more realistic about the human capacity for violence—Gondor, for example, has capital punishment, though Aragorn chose not to inflict it in the (extraordinary) case of Beregond.<sup>15</sup> But Gondor was a hereditary monarchy with a divinely (or at least angelically) sanctioned king whose right to the throne is undimmed by centuries of absent kings and rule by stewards. Indeed, the (partially) democratic Shire is an anomaly in the political landscape of Middle-earth, which is one of dynastic kings, lords and chieftains. Tolkien delighted in tracing the lineages of his characters, and these bloodlines legitimated claims to rule. Even *The Hobbit* had Thorin as an heir in exile. He was not a "splendid figure as King under the Mountain"<sup>16</sup> for most of his brief claim to the title, but his right to the throne was unquestioned.

Though there was an element of popular acclamation at Aragorn's coronation, when the people of Gondor were asked whether he should be their king, the prelude to the question made clear that his right to the throne was established by lineage and confirmed by personal greatness, rather than by democratic approval.<sup>17</sup> Though he claimed the throne with the universal consent of the governed, this was in a world, and under conditions, where it was unthinkable for that consent to be withheld. But our world lacks such conditions and clear right to rule.

The governments of Gondor and the Shire are the most detailed in Middle-earth, and neither is a practicable model for us. *The Lord of the Rings* does not provide its fans with political answers. However, it may form the moral imagination to reject the allure of political and intellectual domination, which is more valuable than drawing up pretend constitutions.

### **Power Without Domination**

Aragorn is a king, but he is not a tyrant. This ancient distinction is essential to understanding Tolkien's work. It is not that Tolkien's heroes such as Aragorn are powerless. Far from it. They have great power, and this is no bad thing. When Aragorn challenges Sauron through the *palantir*, it is necessary that he have mighty strength and mastery of will. Likewise, when Gandalf confronted the treacherous Saruman and broke his staff, it was necessary that he have immense power. Indeed, Gandalf declares himself to be "more dangerous than anything you will ever meet, unless you are brought alive before the seat of the Dark Lord."<sup>18</sup> Good does not consist of abdicating power.

In Tolkien's mythology, God is the creator and supreme ruler of the universe, and the Valar (angels given the task of watching over the world) are stronger than the forces of evil. To be sure, most readers of *The Lord of the Rings* may not read the external material that explain this.<sup>19</sup> Tolkien wrote that he "purposely kept all allusions to the highest matters down to mere hints...So God and the 'angelic' gods, the Lords or Powers of the West, only peep through in places such as Gandalf's conversation with Frodo."<sup>20</sup> Attentive readers of *The Lord of the Rings* will notice these hints, such as the comment that Sauron is only "a servant or emissary,"<sup>21</sup> and that Gandalf was "sent back"<sup>22</sup> after his duel with the Balrog, presumably by superiors with the power to reincarnate his spirit, and thereby realize that great powers for good remain veiled in the story.

Tolkien did not object to power itself, but to domination. After victory, Aragorn restores Gondor to power and glory, and, rather than centralizing power, he parcels it out. It is not just that he appoints men to govern under him, such as Faramir who is given the rule of Ithilien. Rather, Aragorn in some cases restricts his own territorial sway. In a particularly notable instance, because of their service as guides to Rohan during the war, the wildmen are given the Forest of Druadan, and no man is to enter without their permission.<sup>23</sup> This portion of Gondor's territory is to be left alone, rather than colonized or used for industry, and the primitive (by modern, or even Middle-earth standards) people in it are left free and in peace.

Furthermore, though small agriculture areas and townships will be under the king's protection, they will be free to manage their own affairs. The Shire is reserved for hobbits. In Bree, when Butterbur is told that there is a king again, he is pleased that ruffians and other evil will be held in check, but worries that Bree will be interfered with. Gandalf and Sam reassure him that the town will be able to manage its own business as before while Aragorn rebuilds the Northern Kingdom of Arnor. The return of the King

thereby fulfilled the wish of Faramir, who wanted Minas Tirith to be “high and fair, beautiful as a queen among other queens, not a mistress of many slaves, nay, not even a kind mistress of willing slaves.”<sup>24</sup>

In *The Lord of the Rings*, a wise and just government is marked by an acceptance, even encouragement, of localism and diversity. But for the most part, Tolkien was not interested in the details of governmental arrangements. Though he could be obsessive on some points, such as checking that the phases of the moon align at different points in the story,<sup>25</sup> he also consciously left large parts of life in Middle-earth undeveloped, for he knew that the “game of inventing a country” is “endless.”<sup>26</sup>

Tolkien gave us songs and stories, not economic and governmental systems. But the songs and stories may judge and instruct the latter. Tolkien’s mythos gives us visions of courage and beauty. He shows us greatness that does not dominate, and smallness that matters. His heart was in Thorin’s dying words to Bilbo, “if more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The Temptation to Domination**

Aragorn’s rule contrasts with Sauron and Saruman, who sought to dominate Middle-earth. The fall of Saruman in particular shows the seduction of the desire to dominate. Saruman possessed great power and subtlety of mind, and he was the head of the wizards sent to confront Sauron. But unlike Gandalf, he was not content with using his abilities to persuade and rally resistance to the Dark Lord. Abandoning hope of victory without domination, Saruman concluded that what was needed was a more benevolent Ring-Lord to rule Middle-earth.

To Gandalf he declared, “our time is at hand: the world of Men, which we must rule. But we must have power, power to order all things as we will, for that good which only the wise can see.”<sup>28</sup> To this end, he was willing even to ally with Sauron, whose victory seemed assured.

We may join with that Power. It would be wise, Gandalf. There is hope that way. Its victory is at hand; and there will be rich rewards for those that aided it. As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it. We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends.<sup>29</sup>

Saruman’s pride and contempt for those weaker than himself led him to betray the purpose for which he had been sent to Middle-earth. He was discontented despite his place as head of the White Council, for he desired not merely to lead, instruct, and encourage but to rule and dominate, to order the weak according to his own wisdom. As Treebeard observed, “He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels, and does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment.”<sup>30</sup> And this disregard for things that did not serve his immediate purposes inevitably extended to people, who were treated as mere material in his schemes. Those schemes were undone, largely by those whom he had overlooked or disdained, and Theoden justly rebuked the cornered wizard: “were you ten times as wise you would have no right to rule me and mine for your own profit as you desired.”<sup>31</sup>

Tolkien showed that the temptation to domination rarely begins with the conscious desire for evil ends. Rather, it is the desire to order the world for good that makes the Ring, which gives power according to the measure of its possessor, so alluring to the great. The Ring offers them the ability to compel others to their ends.

In this way, the weakness of hobbits becomes a strength, for as Galadriel tells Frodo, “Before you could use that power you would need to become far stronger and to train your will to the domination of others.”<sup>32</sup> This may also be seen in the temptation of Sam when he briefly assumes the burden of the Ring. “Wild fantasies arose in his mind” of defeating Sauron and then “at his command the vale of Gorgoroth became a garden of flowers and trees and brought forth fruit.”<sup>33</sup> He was able to resist, in part, through the knowledge that “the one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command.”<sup>34</sup> Humility protects him.

The temptation is more potent for those who could wield the power of the Ring. Thus, when Frodo offers the Ring to Gandalf, rightly telling him that he is “wise and powerful,”<sup>35</sup> Gandalf rebuffs him vehemently, “Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good.”<sup>36</sup> These initial good intentions would be little guarantee of goodness, however. In a letter Tolkien wrote that, “Gandalf as Ring-Lord would have been far worse than Sauron. He would have remained ‘righteous’, but self-righteous. He would have continued to rule and order things for ‘good’, and the benefit of his subjects according to his wisdom (which was and would have remained great)...Gandalf would have made good detestable and seem evil.”<sup>37</sup>

Galadriel likewise refused to take the Ring. When Sam responded by saying, “I wish you’d take his Ring. You’d put things to rights...You’d make some folk pay for their dirty work,” she replies, “That is how it would begin. But it would not stop with that, alas!”<sup>38</sup> It is not that power corrupts so much as that domination corrupts. Both Gandalf and Galadriel were already great and powerful. What Ring offered them was a shortcut to victory by taking control of other wills, and thence the ability to order the world as they saw fit.

Defeating Sauron by his own methods would mean taking his place of domination. Tolkien wrote that Sauron “desired to be a God-King, and was held to be this by his servants.”<sup>39</sup> And in this attempt to usurp the place of God, Sauron sought to extinguish the free will that God has given to persons. Sauron therefore represented

as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible. He had gone the way of all tyrants: beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to order all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of the Earth. But he went further than human tyrants in pride and the lust for domination...In *The Lord of the Rings* the conflict is not basically about ‘freedom’, though that is naturally involved. It is about God and his sole right to divine honour.<sup>40</sup>

### **Rationalism and the Nature of Domination**

The Dark Lords of Middle-earth sought to extinguish the free will of their subjects. Tolkien wrote that “The Enemy in successive forms is always ‘naturally’ concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord

of magic and machines...this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others—speedily and according to the benefactor’s own plans.”<sup>41</sup> But despite ostensible good motives, the desire for domination is never pure, for it always contains within itself pride and rebellion against God. Thus, in *The Silmarillion*, the original Dark Lord, Melkor (later renamed Morgoth) “feigned, even to himself at first, that he desired to go thither and order all things for the good...But he desired rather to subdue to his will both Elves and Men...and he wished himself to have subjects and servants, and to be called Lord, and to be a master over other wills.”<sup>42</sup>

The extent of this domination is illustrated in the downfall of Sauron at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. When Sauron realized that the Ring was on the verge of destruction, “throughout his realm a tremor ran, his slaves quailed and his armies halted, and his captains suddenly steerless, bereft of will, wavered and despaired. For they were forgotten.”<sup>43</sup> The minions of the Dark Lord had little will apart from that of their master, and when he withdrew it from them “all the hosts of Mordor trembled, doubt clutched their hearts...The Power that drove them on and filled them with hate and fury was wavering, its will was removed from them.”<sup>44</sup> Then, when the Ring was destroyed, and Sauron’s power broken forever, “the creatures of Sauron, orc or troll or beast spell-enslaved ran hither and thither mindless; and some slew themselves, or cast themselves in pits or fled wailing back to hide in holes and dark lightless places far from hope.”<sup>45</sup> Only the men in the Dark Lord’s service had sufficient free will left to choose whether to fight, flee or surrender.

This extinguishing of free will is the power of domination that the Ring confers upon those able to wield it. This is why the Ring could not be used to defeat Sauron without establishing another Dark Lord in turn. Domination reduces persons to puppet-like slaves. Tolkien wrote that in his stories, “Power—when it dominates or seeks to dominate other wills and minds (except by the consent of their reason)—is evil.”<sup>46</sup> Domination seeks to replace the world and those in it with a unipolar universe ruled by a single will. The world and its people become mere material; domination therefore extinguishes love and virtue, which require free will.

Those bent on domination attempt to govern the world and its people according to their schemes, which come in turn to rule them as the lust for domination becomes compulsive. Sauron could no longer even imagine that his opponents could reason other than he, so consumed was he by the desire for dominion. In Gandalf’s words, “the only measure that he knows is desire, desire for power; and so he judges all hearts. Into his heart the thought will not enter that any will refuse it.”<sup>47</sup> He later reiterates the point, declaring of Sauron that “That we should wish to cast him down and have *no* one in his place is not a thought that occurs to his mind.”<sup>48</sup>

Tolkien thereby illustrates the relationship between schemes of intellectual rationalism and the domination of their political counterparts. Rationalism posits a world that can be dominated, at least by those of sufficient intellectual attainment and strength of will. It thereby sanctions the will to power, which is expressed in intellectual schemes to control the world. But to grasp and order all of existence this way is more than any created being is capable of, and the attempt thus inevitably turns to evil as it tries to impose itself on the world. Our finitude means that attempts to grasp the whole world, either in mind or in politics, are invariably deforming and damaging, rather than illuminating or beneficial.

## **Humility and Mercy**

Tolkien's anti-rationalism is unmistakable, though he did not spell it out in such direct terms in his work. This does not mean that Tolkien endorsed irrationalism or relativism. His heroes seek wisdom, and Aragorn declares that "Good and ill have not changed since yesterday, nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house."<sup>49</sup> This line both affirms the reality of truth, and, by directing us toward the task of discernment, our own limitations in apprehending and applying it. We are fallible and finite, and our knowledge and capabilities are limited. Even the very wise, Gandalf tells us, cannot see all ends, and sometimes all paths may run ill. Thus, the tasks of intellectual understanding, moral discernment and just government require humility that rationalist schemes and methods lack.

We are obligated to judge and act as wisely and justly as we can, but we must not attempt to bring the world under the control of our intellect and will. Thus, Gandalf does not wish to rule the will of others. Rather, he persuades and encourages them in the war against the Dark Lord. Instead of supplanting the wills of other persons, he strengthens them. He does not even wish to dominate those he must defeat. For instance, regarding Saruman, Gandalf says that in victory "I will do nothing to him. I do not wish for mastery."<sup>50</sup>

Instead of the apparent efficacy of domination, Tolkien shows that we must rely on humility, courage and hope as we trust in Providence. Though overt religion was deliberately left out of *The Lord of the Rings*, the idea of providence is persistent. In a letter to his son, Tolkien presented this theme explicitly, writing that "no man can estimate what is really happening at the present *sub specie aeternitatis*. All we do know, and that to a large extent by direct experience, is that evil labours with vast power and perpetual success—in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in...there is still some hope that things may be better for us, even on the temporal plane, in the mercy of God."<sup>51</sup>

And it was mercy that proved to be the salvation of Middle-earth. It began with Bilbo's choice to spare the wretched Gollum as "a sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart."<sup>52</sup> This was the vehicle by which the mercy of divine providence worked. Reason and expedience called for Gollum's death, but the merciful heart that spared him also spared itself, though it did not know it at the time. Gandalf tells Frodo that Bilbo was largely preserved from the evil of the Ring because "he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity."<sup>53</sup> Frodo, in turn, also pitied Gollum and spared him. Tolkien commented that, "the 'salvation' of the world and Frodo's own 'salvation' is achieved by his previous *pity* and forgiveness of injury"<sup>54</sup> for though Gollum was not redeemed, he caused the destruction of the Ring when Frodo was finally overcome.

In contrast to those who would calculate and control the world (for, in their minds at least, good purposes), Tolkien urges us to do what is right, so far as we can discern it, in the knowledge that though the ends of our actions are unknowable, our labor is not in vain. In his tales, the virtues of the small and the weak, rather than the schemes of the great and the strong, may govern the fate of the world. Tolkien thought that *The Lord of the Rings* exemplified the "place in 'world politics' of the unforeseen and unforeseeable acts of will, and deeds of virtue of the apparently small."<sup>55</sup>

Rationalism fails, and often turns to evil, because, despite its grandiose claims, it is still the product of finite minds that cannot account for everything. The limits of rationalist schemers mean that they overlook the seemingly little things and little people that may turn out to matter the most.

## Conclusion



Tolkien was not a leader of any political or social movement; he was a philologist and storyteller who described himself as “a Hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food...I like, and even dare to wear in these days, ornamental waistcoats.”<sup>56</sup> But his themes: the evils of domination; the necessity of courage, hope, and trust in providence; and the recognition of sacrifice as unavoidable if anything good is to be salvaged, have great resonance in the minds of men. They may, of course, be missed by some readers and disliked by others. But to the extent that his readers’ sensibilities are formed by his stories, they will be suspicious of schemes of domination. Thus, in the world of literature, Tolkien’s tales have been a citadel standing against rationalism.

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<sup>1</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000). 10 (Letter 5). (Henceforth *Letters*).

<sup>2</sup> Bradley J. Birzer, *J.R.R. Tolkien’s Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-Earth*, (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003). (131). (Henceforth *Sanctifying*).

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, 172 (Letter 142).

<sup>4</sup> LOTR, XXIV-XXV.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.tolkienociety.org/2021/06/seminar-speakers-announced-tolkien-and-diversity/> Accessed 8/6/21

<sup>6</sup> Tolkien, Humphrey Carpenter, 230.

<sup>7</sup> *Sanctifying*, xvi.

<sup>8</sup> *Letters*, 63. (Letter 52).

<sup>9</sup> *Letters*, 65. (Letter 53).

<sup>10</sup> Curry, Patrick. *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Tolkien, Humphrey Carpenter, 189.

<sup>12</sup> LOTR, 12.

<sup>13</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1965). 31. (Henceforth *Fellowship*).

<sup>14</sup> *Letters* 64 (Letter 52).

<sup>15</sup> LOTR, 1208.

<sup>16</sup> *Hobbit*, 262.

<sup>17</sup> LOTR, 1205.

<sup>18</sup> J.R.R Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973). 131. (Henceforth *King*).

<sup>19</sup> *The Silmarillion*, various other posthumous works edited and published by Christopher Tolkien, and the appendixes at the end of *The Return of the King*, as well as various letters of Tolkien’s.

<sup>20</sup> *Letters*, 201. (Letter 156)

<sup>21</sup> *King*, 190.

<sup>22</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1965). 135. (Henceforth *Towers*).

<sup>23</sup> LOTR, 1216-1217.

<sup>24</sup> LOTR, 835.

<sup>25</sup> *Letters*, 80. (Letter 69)

<sup>26</sup> *Letters*, 196. (Letter 154)

<sup>27</sup> *Hobbit*, 273.

<sup>28</sup> *Fellowship*, 340.

<sup>29</sup> *Fellowship*, 340.

<sup>30</sup> LOTR, 586

<sup>31</sup> LOTR, 721

<sup>32</sup> LOTR, 454.

<sup>33</sup> LOTR, 1122.

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- <sup>34</sup> *King*, 216.
- <sup>35</sup> *Fellowship*, 95.
- <sup>36</sup> *Fellowship*, 95.
- <sup>37</sup> *Letters*, 333 (Letter 246).
- <sup>38</sup> LOTR, 455.
- <sup>39</sup> *Letters*, 243 (Letter 183).
- <sup>40</sup> *Letters*, 243 (Letter 183).
- <sup>41</sup> *Letters*, 146 Letter 131).
- <sup>42</sup> Silmarillion, 18.
- <sup>43</sup> LOTR, 1178.
- <sup>44</sup> LOTR 1182.
- <sup>45</sup> LOTR 1183.
- <sup>46</sup> *Letters*, 237.(Letter 181)
- <sup>47</sup> *Fellowship*, 353.
- <sup>48</sup> *Towers*, 127.
- <sup>49</sup> LOTR, 543.
- <sup>50</sup> LOTR, 726.
- <sup>51</sup> *Letters*, 76 (Letter 64).
- <sup>52</sup> Hobbit, 92.
- <sup>53</sup> LOTR, 74.
- <sup>54</sup> *Letters*, 234 (Letter 181).
- <sup>55</sup> *Letters*, 160 (Letter 131).
- <sup>56</sup> *Letters*, 288-289. (Letter 213).