



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

# **Tolkien and the Faerie Tale**

*Cliché or Trope*

**B.A. Essay**

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**September 2013**

**University of Iceland**

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## Abstract

The author John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's contributions to fantasy in literature have been subject to a variety of critical and academic discussions for decades, with conflicting opinions as to whether or not his writing deserved praise as an original approach to the fairy tale, as a genre suitable for adults and not children. In particular, Tolkien has been accused of dealing in cliché and a black-and-white morality, lacking subtle insight into human nature. His supporters cite the deeper aspects and intentions behind Tolkien's method of writing: The use of resonant mythological tropes within a unique internally-coherent world, the creation of a consistent mythology intertwined with languages, cultures and histories, and, contrary to the prevalent criticisms, a subtle understanding of the human capacity for evil. This thesis argues that Tolkien's major works (*The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*) do not involve the crude use of cliché or the artless borrowing of mythological materials but rather that he exploits mythological tropes within an individual and distinctive world of his own to explore deeper issues concerning human nature. This exploitation of universal themes within a unique internally-coherent creation is called by Tolkien the art of subcreation. Through his understanding of the manner in which language and discourse functions, Tolkien sought to both revive old ideas regarding the nature of the fairy tale, and to introduce new stories that adhered to that same nature – a goal which many would say he had accomplished, as the influence of his writing has created an entire new movement in the world of fantasy in modern literature.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction: The Century of Clichés .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. The Parameters for Criticism.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Of Clichés and Critics .....	9
2.2 Tolkien's View of Artistic Creation .....	16
<b>3. Analysing the Tolkienian Discourse.....</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1 Writing What You Know .....	26
3.2 Trope or Cliché, Original or Rehash .....	30
<b>4. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>36</b>

## 1. Introduction: The Century of Clichés

Whenever the topic of a particular book, or a film, a TV series, or even a comic book – and, in more recent years, a videogame – comes up in a conversation between two or more individuals, be they friends, peers of an academic or occupational sort, or even outright strangers who happen to share a common interest as enthusiasts, it is almost inevitable that someone amongst this, quite broad and varied, group of individuals is going to mention the word ‘cliché’. Whether it be in reference to a particular plot twist that arises in the penultimate act of the narrative of a drama, the nature or design of a major character or protagonist and the role that they might happen to play in the story, or perhaps just the entire body of work as a whole, someone, in some way, is going to take these attributes and place them up against other things that we have seen, heard, or been exposed to. In my experience this is simply something that we, as consumers of a wide variety of media, literary and otherwise, have grown accustomed to, especially in this last decade when the availability of this content has grown exponentially, with digital sharing via the internet, widespread translation efforts and so on. With so many more people having access to so much content, inevitably there is going to be an increased forming of criticisms, both based on academic views, and those of personal opinion.

In a way it is fairly unavoidable, when dealing with a form of media, that as we find ourselves exposed to more and more content, we find ourselves relying more on the term *cliché* as a critical means to summarize an element which we have seen before. In a strictly critical sense it is only natural to designate a single word to a theme, or a concept as a kind of shorthand for those that we share our views with. We label things

in general; when we create a word it becomes the label stamped across the object it designates because it makes it easier to say “apple” rather than “green, sweet-tasting fruit that grows from a tree” every single time. And we do this for media as well. We design labels dependent on the scope, and the implications that a body of work carries for itself, and for the potential experience that the one being entertained by the media might derive from it. We use words such as ‘epic’ to define something that is grandiose and larger than life in scale, or possibly a journey of thought-provoking or exhilarating proportions. The word ‘innovative’ has been used in a descriptive manner to describe something which is interesting and new to us as an approach, though in a positive way, rather than alien and disorienting. Even now I’m using labels with which to characterize the very labels themselves. In a way, one could perhaps say that we are bound to the notion of assigning labels, no matter what we do.

The problem with labels is that sometimes two separate labels might describe something in much the same manner, but with separate intention or connotations. Based purely on personal preference and appreciation, a piece of Blue Stilton cheese might have its smell characterized as a stench or stink by someone who doesn’t take well to it, whereas someone who does would describe the smell as an aroma. In a similar fashion, certain critical labels and terms can sum up the same thing, but do so in completely different ways, such as the difference between a cliché and a trope. While a cliché is almost unanimously viewed as something detrimental to a creative work, a trope – literary tropes in particular – bears all the same properties of using established ideas, narrative direction and more, but is treated as separate and different from the cliché, usually because there is some deeper intent or meaning behind the use of tropes – possibly as a

form of social or creative commentary, a potentially affectionate or respectful reference to another work of a previous author, or as per a design choice – which then in turn makes the use of the things which we would normally condemn clichés for a matter of artistic approach, rather than a case for unoriginal writing. The differentiation of trope versus cliché is a vague and blurry line at best to try and navigate, but one that exists nonetheless, and understanding, as well as being able to identify, the differences can make all of the difference when one is applying these labels in the first place. What is valuable to know, however, is that there is in fact more to clichés than the simplified and negative portrayal that they commonly receive, such as the role which they play in literary discourse (*The Cliché in the Reading Process*), and when a better understanding of them is achieved, one can begin appropriately defining whether or not something is an actual cliché.

One author in particular has had a variety of labels placed upon both his work, and himself as a creative mind. While many of these labels may be considered as positives, not all of the criticisms share the same outlook. J.R.R. Tolkien's work has featured in many shapes and forms, in fact his work has featured in every one of the media forms that was listed earlier: to say nothing of the actual literary pieces themselves, there are videogames based on his works, comic books and films have been adapted from them and documentaries on television have been dedicated to investigating the man and the writing alike. While not in the slightest sense alone in this accomplishment, Tolkien and his writing has been one of the major influences on both our creative and literary culture in the past century, with his stories *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* both having an impact on the idea of telling a fairy story in a way that

both applies, and in turn appeals, to the adult reader, as well as the development of other fantasy-based works following in its wake. Tom Shippey's book, *J.R.R Tolkien: Author of the Century*, takes the time to highlight the contributions that Tolkien had made to the literary scene, especially in terms of the fantasy genre.

The dominant literary mode of the twentieth century has been the fantastic. This may appear a surprising claim, which would not have seemed even remotely conceivable at the start of the century and which is bound to encounter fierce resistance even now. However, when the time comes to look back at the century, it seems very likely that future literary historians, detached from the squabbles of our present, will see as its most representative and distinctive works books like J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*[...] (Shippey, location 17)

However, as stated, for all of these accomplishments Tolkien's work is not without its critics and those who have a low opinion in regards to the author's literature. While some are simply not inclined towards the fantasy genre as a whole, others take issue with the manner in which Tolkien presents his work, how some of its cast are characterized or the style in which it is written. Chief amongst these criticisms is the one spoken of at the start, that of clichés. There are a number of features in Tolkien's writing – such as the mythology, explorations of the nature of good and evil, and the roles that certain characters play, as martyrs, heroes and even that of villain – that may come across in a manner that would seem clichéd, even to someone who critiques and works with literature quite often. However, as a fairy story, set in a world that in many



ways mirrors the myths and fairy tales that we do not normally consider deserving of the same critical perspective that we do other, more realistic works, some might argue that Tolkien's writing is deserving of similar treatment as the fairy story does when judging it.

What's worthy of consideration is that because of this increased frequency of media that we are experiencing there are certain ideas and certain trends that often find themselves grouped together within the same definitions, or labels, if we were to be particular in this case. While this is, once again, unavoidable, it does not in actuality make it the intrinsic value of all forms of criticism – particularly when we are dealing with such things as literature or some other form of expression through media. When we are making in-depth observations of a creative work, such as those being made of Tolkien's, then there are other factors to consider and to explore: What was the origin of the work in terms of creative process, or the vision behind it? Was there an ulterior motive, or perhaps a message that the author had wanted to convey through his writing? While it is quite easy – and at times not incorrect, even after due investigation of whatever subject is being critiqued – to apply a standard label, when something like Tolkien's work persists in the manner in which it does, it becomes telling that there is something about the writing that sets it apart, and makes it endure in the first place.

This is perhaps why J.R.R. Tolkien is such an interesting case for study when it comes to breaking down those traits which stand the most under criticism. As stated, even if his writing seems derivative, or referential of previous mythologies and fairy stories, there must nevertheless come a decision as to which label to attribute to this: Is it a

cliché, or is it an intuitive utilization of tropes? While the themes found in mythology and folklore certainly did exist before Tolkien had written his works (this being self-explanatory simply based on the criticism that his writing was referential in the first place), Tolkien was the first to make use of those themes in this fashion, something which may very well have played a part in the popularity of his works. But with the consistent popularity of his work, his lingering presence in the literary world, and the subsequent revival of his writing's fame through adaptation into film in recent years, J.R.R. Tolkien's work increases in its readership and critiques, at times even resulting in comparison with much more recent works than his own. And as we've established, the frequency in exposure will lend to a greater variety of things to compare and contrast to, and subsequently an increase in fast-tracking to the use of labels. As such it isn't uncommon to hear the word 'cliché' being used to describe Tolkien's works in some manner, or for the originality of his writing to be called into question somehow, even without much formal thought to when it was written, or why. Salman Rushdie writes a review of the film adaptation for *The Lord of the Rings* in his article *Arms and the men and hobbits*, wherein he rather grossly undervalues the manner in which Tolkien presented the story, as well as how the author's intentions made their way onto the screen, using blunt generalization to describe the themes within *The Two Towers*:

The Two Towers [...] follows Tolkien in creating a universe of moral absolutes. Tolkien didn't like people calling his great work an allegory of the battle against Adolf Hitler, but the echoes of the second world war, the last just war, are everywhere.

The Dark Lord Sauron is the incarnation of evil, and his most potent (and very Wagnerian) weapon, the One or Ruling Ring, is made of and perfects that evil. All who come under Sauron's baleful influence become as thoroughly, homogeneously evil as their lord. The forces of good that stand against him - and this explains much of Tolkien's appeal - are, by contrast, extremely various: from Gandalf the wizard (the powerful good guy), Aragorn the ranger (the heroic good guy), Legolas the elf (the cool good guy), Gimli the grumpy dwarf (the uncool good guy), all the way down to the little people, the hobbits or halflings, who will in the end save the day. (Rushdie)

The problem with Rushdie's description of Tolkien's writing and characterizations is that it is, in essence, a complete and total diminishment of the narrative. The characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are rarely purely evil and just as rarely purely good in turn, as they are all guided by their own personal stories, ambitions and faults. Aragorn isn't as heroic or good as he ultimately ends up being simply because he is written and devised to be that way, but he is so because he rises to the occasion despite his own fears and concerns as to his own limitations and weaknesses as a mortal Man. Similarly, the hobbits, Frodo specifically, isn't wholly good either – nor does he in fact save the day, instead falling under the sway of the One Ring and surrendering to its power. Reading further into things, Sauron himself is merely one incarnation of evil, who was corrupted by another, even greater evil, as is revealed in Tolkien's *Silmarillion* and also mentioned in his letters (Tolkien 207). While there is certainly no denying the fact that the events of the Second World War played a part in Tolkien's descriptions of the suffering created by war that does not necessitate that the story itself is an allegory of it.

The truth is, speaking plainly, that with literature as critically acclaimed and heavily debated as Tolkien's, simply slapping a label on it will not do. There are many layers to Tolkien's work, a great number of them directly interwoven with the author's own personal life and philosophies as a writer, and as an avid admirer of the type of fantasy fiction which he himself is now so closely associated with. These factors require considerable study, and have been the focus of such for many academics for years now, with essays, books and articles authored by the likes of the aforementioned Tom Shippey, but also Robert Eaglestone, Michael D. C. Drout and more, all investigating the premises, the themes and contexts found within the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, and his interactions with others. The distinct mark left on the literary world by Tolkien is one that is difficult to ignore, after all, especially when his work has inspired so many future generations of fantasy writers in turn – and this accomplishment is deserving of the numerous academics sitting down to scratch their heads over just what it was about this author's writing that had made it so special.

Whether or not Tolkien's work truly is deserving of being called a cliché, or if there is a greater premise at work within the literature that employs certain kinds of tropes which may simply be reminiscent of, or akin to, its kindred label-cousins, the clichés, is the matter at hand, and by looking further at the author's intent, his own commentary on both his own literature and that of others, it seems clear that the latter is the more astute description of Tolkien's work.

## 2. The Parameters for Criticism

### 2.1 Of Clichés and Critics

So then what, in actuality, is a cliché? Oxford's dictionary describes it as French in origin, derived from *clicher*, or "to stereotype." (*Oxford Dictionary of English*) It is defined as a word, or phrase which is overused to the point of losing both its originally intended meaning as well as any actual rhetorical force, attributing it to other such concepts like that of the stereotypical or the trite and obvious. It is expounded upon further in reference to its role in literature as something related to the plot or the characters which degrades the overall quality of the literary piece through its unoriginal nature. This definition is as good as any, at least towards forming a basic and direct premise of opinion, as it certainly carries the most familiar of criteria for describing the word, and the manner in which it is most commonly used within literary discourse in standard expression of criticism. It is also particularly appropriate when taken in context with the more rudimentary manner in which much of Tolkien's work is treated, as well as its perceived nature as the focus of said discourse. As much of Tolkien's work may be viewed as featuring certain presentations as to the designs and portrayal of fantasy, the use of certain words or names from pre-existent languages and mythologies, as well as his conceptions and forms of evil and its nature, if one were to base a critique of Tolkien's writing upon all of these things, and then place them alongside of what Webster's dictionary defines a cliché as being, then that person would very likely draw upon such conclusions that his works should fall into such a category to a certain degree.

In order to appropriately use the word cliché in critiquing a work of fiction, one must understand the implications which accompany using it. Ruth Amossy states in *The Cliché in the Reading Process* that:

Although regarded as the height of stereotype and the very mark of triteness, clichés play an important role in the most varied kinds of textual strategies. So-called “literary” discourse makes extensive use of clichés. A threadbare figure can help direct the reading; it shapes the receiver’s attitude towards the text it belongs to, as well as towards the social discourse it exemplifies. Its ability to condition a text’s reception provides a necessary complement to the cliché’s essential precariousness. Indeed, the cliché, with its “*déjà-vu*” effect, cannot exist outside of the reading process: it must always be recognized by the reader. (Amossy, 34)

In this statement we already have a distinct exploration on what it means to use the word cliché when judging a literary piece: as a general factor, it triggers the reader’s associative thinking. That is to say that by invoking familiar ideas or themes, then the reader will begin contextualizing what they have read with what they may have seen or heard before, creating an effective shorthand for certain literary discourses or memes. However, at the same time, this shorthand comes with its own detriments when it is utilized poorly or without the correct form given to these clichés. When this happens, instead of creating context within the reader’s process, it colours the reader’s opinion as it always does, though this time with a negative perspective in which the reader might begin ignoring the other qualities in which an otherwise clichéd character stands apart as an individual. Indeed, the moment someone encounters this manner of cliché, it becomes more than a little difficult to not, if at least to a minor degree, begin perceiving

a piece of writing differently. The reader begins actively looking for the clichés, rather than allowing for the basic cliché of the character to take on natural characteristics that would define him as more than a simplistic design (and in turn perhaps uncovering which attributes of the writing were in fact truly clichéd in the first place). Rather than allowing the individual to notice actual imperfections, by marking something as clichéd, then the critique has already attuned them towards seeking out the natural imperfections, of which there will always be, and treating them as those that had perhaps been made in poverty of skill instead.

If taken into consideration, then this would mean that a cliché is only something which holds back a literary piece when it is forced, or ill-conceived, and does not belong to the image that the writing is attempting to show the reader. This is an important thing to consider when considering the notion that the increased frequency in using the word cliché to describe creative works, as well as the open forums for which criticisms and opinions to be shared also increasing in scope and number, essentially serve to create an environment wherein opinions may begin to be skewed before they are even given the opportunity to form natural conclusions, when in fact clichés could prove to be a far more beneficial tool in the right hands – such as Tolkien's, as an example, as the author shows an awareness of the problems that a mishandled cliché could create when designing a new environment for fiction, and instead approaches this through a use of world-creation within his writing, as by organically growing them within this created world rather than inserting them separately, including all the intricate and unique developments that come about through a character's decisions and the paths that they take before they are even ultimately introduced to the story, Tolkien instead succeeds in

taking the more basic clichés to a higher level of being familiar tropes that are integrated and immersive to the narrative structure of the work through what Tolkien himself refers to as “sub-creation”, as opposed to a jarring stereotype that takes the reader out of the world.

The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) “the inner consistency of reality,” is indeed another thing, or aspect, needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. (Tolkien, 5-6)

Amossy’s exploration of the meaning and the definition of a cliché, however, goes further still beyond simply explaining the manner in which it affects the discourse of a work of literature. She notes that one cannot simply define the cliché by its strict terms of formality (such as that of how the Webster’s dictionary might choose to keep a concise and formal definition), as “clichés are based not only on a spatial arrangement (figures of speech, structures), but on a temporal dimension as well” (Amossy 34). What this refers to is that clichés, in the first place, exist as part of repetition. They are not so much in the way of directly lifting something word for word, but rather in the way in which an idea or a concept is passed along, gradually losing the aspects which individualized it until the base principle is left, concrete enough that it can continue to be passed around, self-replicating and circulating indefinitely – by which time, the originator of the idea may in fact be long-forgotten, as only the principle itself remains. Amossy describes this as being an “anonymous voice” with which the reader identifies things that are both his own, common and shared ideas and those that would be foreign



(Amossy 35) – in essence that of the familiarity of the aforementioned base principle, on the premise of being shared with others on a common level, and the fact that at the same time this principle is beyond the reader's control, both acting in unison to allow the reader to identify the cliché with an evaluative perspective. What this means, simply, is that a cliché is identified as much by the structure and figure of speech, as it is by the way in which those same attributes feature in commonality. The degrees in which something may be judged as cliché should be evaluated alongside of how commonplace and publically shared its principles and concepts were at the time.

How this plays in with the critical response to Tolkien's writing is a little telling, as a result, on account of the fact that many of the ideas that the writer presents in his work make use of exactly these kinds of common and shared attributes that Amossy speaks of. For example, Tolkien's ideas and his writing in regards to the nature of evil, such as its role as a force within the world that influences and inhabits the people of said world, are not what someone would expressly call new and ground-breaking, and neither are they any kind of unexplored territory that other writers, both before and after Tolkien's time, haven't offered their own creative insights into. There is a commonality in these exploratory themes and ideas with which a person may begin to identify and evaluate Tolkien's writing, as Amossy's explanation of the cliché shows us to be progressively more relevant to the critical assessment of his work. Alongside of this, Tom Shippey points out in his book, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, that Tolkien's explorations of these ideas were in fact neither isolated nor unique, even amongst his contemporaries, furthering the commonality factor:

Six years before *The Lord of the Rings* started to be published, George Orwell had published his fable *Animal Farm*, which ends, as everyone knows, with the animals' revolution failing completely, because the pigs had become farmers [...] Meanwhile, at exactly the same time as the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* William Golding was bringing out his fables, *Lord of the Flies* (1954), and *The Inheritors* (1955), the meaning of which Golding conveniently summarized for commentators in a later essay, 'Fable', in his collection *The Hot Gates*. (Shippey, 115-116)

In these works, as well as Tolkien's own, there are explorations of the idea that it is inherent in humanity's nature to seek destruction in some way. Common ideas that have been explored and considered a great many number of times, falling into that categorization of being clichéd through parroting or repeating attributes which should be identifiable by the similarly common reader. And there have been many critics who express exactly those views of Tolkien and his writing; that he was an unoriginal author, with clichéd ideas, or that his work was lacking in some manner, be it in fluidity or a difficulty in being able to be understood appropriately, sometimes resulting in assessments by mainstream critics that are "embarrassingly bad" or worse (Drout 16).

In spite of these criticisms, however, there have been just as many critics, scholars – and on occasion just something as simple as literary fans of Tolkien – that have risen to the defence of the author, some to the point of outright attacking his detractors by utilizing their own in-depth knowledge of Tolkien's works to point out the

ways in which mainstream criticism fails to understand or appropriately view his writing. While certainly more adept and accurate in their explanation and assessment of Tolkien's writing, to the point of no doubt making far more detailed and precise criticisms than a mainstream critic would, Michael D. C. Drout in *Reading The Lord of the Rings* makes the argument for there being a distinct divide between the manner in which those who have "devoted significant intellectual energy" to studying and researching the author – both from the part Tolkien plays in his own writing, and to the literary facets of the writing itself – and in the way that they approach literary scholarship in the mainstream form, establishing:

Tolkien scholarship of both categories has in general been signally uninterested in mainstream literary theory and criticism (beyond taking great and justified enjoyment in demonstrating the errors, logical fallacies, bad predictions and simple stupidity in the works of those critics who have most vocally and intemperately attacked Tolkien).  
(Drout, 16)

On the other hand, Drout also makes note of the fact that while the aforementioned two categories at the very least acknowledge each other, and are capable of working in tandem to properly and efficiently provide a well-constructed and reasoned case for critiquing Tolkien's works, the mainstream scholarship does not share this mentality, instead choosing to ignore the contributions of Tolkien scholars on both sides outright and simply push onward with its own devised definitions, based on the pre-existent context of critical assessment. While this is perhaps acceptable, to a certain degree, it is

however not the best manner in which to form a definitive opinion of a work on such a grand scale as the Middle-Earth which Tolkien had constructed – both in regards to criticism of it as a standalone work, as well as its ability to challenge some of the fundamentals of the mainstream (Drout 16). And it is this lack of interaction between the two which creates the divide in which the ability to effectively break down Tolkien's work in an appropriately detailed manner, whilst still retaining a sincere inclusion of the numerous other aspects which should be taken into consideration, is lost. Essentially, that is the limitation which is brought on by trying to remain completely faithful to Tolkien's writing without being willing to step back and critically judge it for what it is, as well as the equally crippling limitation of attempting to critique the author without using all that there is on offer to create a complete picture.

## 2.2 Tolkien's View of Artistic Creation

Before we can fully, and with due understanding, begin to judge Tolkien's works in a proper light, though, we need to see how the man himself judged or perceived his own work. Simply knowing how others viewed him and his writing, and the conclusions that they had drawn is one thing, but to comprehend exactly what it was that made Tolkien decide to write a fairy story when his peers – both in writing, and in their shared history as sufferers of war – had decided to do other things, is another thing in its entirety. What motivated and drove him, and exactly what was his particular philosophy behind these things? Even from a critical standpoint, these things are important as the whole of Tolkien's works is the sum of its parts, tied to both literary and personal factors, and therefore the study and analysis on the world of Tolkien's design is as much reliant on the exterior world which influenced him, as the exterior

itself draws on that design to base its analysis. The manner in which Drout expresses his thoughts on the matter of how these two things are important to one another is shown, quite clearly, during *Reading The Lord of the Rings*, with his view being that:

Without Middle-earth Studies to explicate the internal relationships in Tolkien's works, particularly the connections between Tolkien's invented languages and his literature, Tolkien Studies would be immeasurably impoverished. Without Tolkien Studies to generate 'clean' texts, explain connections between Tolkien's works and other literature, and link the author's life and scholarship to his writing, Middle-earth Studies would be missing evidence with great explanatory power.

(Drout, 15-16)

There was a clear link between the writing and the author, in other words, being a work that was more than just putting words to paper and imagining some fantasy world, it was something that Tolkien put parts of himself into – his views and his feelings on certain matters. By figuring out Tolkien's own intent, then one can begin to form a clearer picture of the original features of the work, by the grace of Tolkien's own creative mind.

In this, the definition of a fairy story comes into play, or to be more specific: Tolkien's definition of a fairy story. Why this matters is because Tolkien himself, when writing his essay *On Fairy-Stories*, had expressed a different opinion on what makes for a fairy story rather than what most academic definitions would present.

Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole. Yet I hope that what I have later to say about the other questions will give some glimpses of my own imperfect vision of it. For the moment I will say only this: a “fairy-story” is one which touches on or uses Faerie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faerie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician. (Tolkien, 2-3)

Rather than isolate the meaning of a fairy story to being that of ‘a story about fairies’, Tolkien instead chose to expand upon this notion by defining it as ‘a story about Faerie’; that is to say that the term Faerie, in Tolkien’s mind, referred more to the nature or the experience of fairies being what is more commonly called “Elves” in today’s literature and depictions, as opposed to the small, diminutive creatures of the fey world usually associated with the term. By expanding upon the premise of such a story, by making it about more than simply the strange creatures, and the tales spun around them, but rather then to focus on the way that these creatures play a part in the world that they inhabit (Tolkien 2), Tolkien essentially makes the point for the importance of a role for the supernatural and magical to play in the overall function of a fictional world, rather than simply being set pieces within it.

In turn, he viewed these fairy stories as being part of a greater, complex whole that dates back as far as human remembrance might possibly go, citing invention as the key to the creation of these stories, while diffusion and inheritance serving as its accomplices in the act of fleshing them out (Tolkien 3). The significance here is that in this same exploration, Tolkien himself outright acknowledges the value and importance of inherited ideas, and of echoing the previous works of an ‘ancestral inventor’ when making use of diffusion and inheritance in order to borrow from the works that have been established, while at the same time laying an emphasis on the importance of these same ideas, though inherited, still carrying a touch of the teller’s own creative spark. That while a story or idea is being retold and passed down from an older source, the embellishments, the new twists, the new approaches and ideas are all equally important to the story-teller as a symbol of his own creativity and contribution to an ongoing story, not held together by the details of that story, but rather by the sentiment and ideas that it would invoke in, and deliver to, the reader or listener.

At the same time, this all corresponds with Tolkien’s ideas on sub-creation, the idea of converging the things which we know and take as simple realities and the things that we find fantastical, and creating a world that we are able to find believable. It is the valued inherited idea and the creativity of the new storyteller that meet to create something new and to deliver it unto the reader’s imagination for their own creative minds to interpret and to build with:

The mind that thought of light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift, also  
conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly,

turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other; it inevitably did both. When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter's power—upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes. It does not follow that we shall use that power well upon any plane. We may put a deadly green upon a man's face and produce a horror; we may make the rare and terrible blue moon to shine; or we may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such “fantasy,” as it is called, new form is made; Faerie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator. (Tolkien, 3-4)

Alongside of these views, though, Tolkien had also professed the importance of philology toward fairy stories, and that there was a close bond between that of mythology and language, part of a greater whole that is to be considered human thought and sentience. In his own statement that “[T]he incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval,” (Tolkien 3) Tolkien is expressing his views that through the exploration of language and its long, historical complexities, one might also begin to find some degree of truth, perhaps, or just simple understanding of the fairy stories which we have, in some ways more than others, since come to treat as relics of a bygone age. As Shippey tells us of Tolkien, he relates that the author “refused to distinguish the two” when it came to defining his literature as work or hobby. To him, it was a passion, something that he enjoyed and sought out as part of his love of languages, considering



them to be equal or synonymous with his literary and academic pursuits in the first place:

Tolkien said, in many ways, as forcefully as he could, and perhaps with a certain defensiveness (for writing fairy-stories was certainly seen by some in authority as a distraction from his proper job of being a language professor), that all his work was ‘fundamentally linguistic in inspiration’ (his emphasis). (Shippey, 230)

This, combined with his own views on the importance of originality and creativity, begins to create a more defined picture of what the author sought to create with his world of Middle-Earth and its mythology. The intention was to create a piece of literature which both a display of his academic views on sub-creation and a utilization of his passion for languages, to the point of devising an entire language for the fictitious Elven race, and then crafting a world, and a history, and even a mythology for that world – wherein the creator deity of that world, the supreme being known as Eru Ilúvatar, does so in a manner that is akin to the Christian God’s means of creation through ‘the Word’, though this deity did so by having his own ‘Word’ delivered through the artistic medium of music, thus attesting to Tolkien’s views of utilizing that which is known and an old, familiar idea, and then adding a new and creative approach to that idea.

Tolkien, while acknowledging that philology had somewhat been displaced during his time, chose to push against the notion of dismissing the inherent importance which

language carried in terms of culture and myth. He showed an appreciation for the idea that humans crafted fairy stories using their own sense of invention and creativity, utilizing the language and the words which they had crafted and developed in their own time, adapted no doubt from the long histories and tongues of their own predecessors. To Tolkien, just as language itself was an evolution by adapting one's tongue through the changing tides of culture, society and the passage of history, so too was mythology an adaptation of that which had come before – reinvented and repurposed, taking the things which were prominent and relevant to the times and the people, and applying them accordingly.

While this perhaps lends strength to the views that some would have; that Tolkien's work is thus largely derivative or in no way unique, such as Rusdhie's commentary on *The Two Towers* and Tolkien's portrayal of what he considers black-and-white ideologies, what is also important is to consider the ways in which Tolkien tackles these subjects in ways that are unique and original. And more importantly, it is vital that we consider why Tolkien chose the particular methods and ideas that he did when writing his fiction. As it is clear that in his passion for creating a world for his languages to belong to, Tolkien must have wanted that world to stand on its own; to have a history, an origin to explain all of these developments, to create relationships between the inhabitants and to enrich the whole thing, much in the same way that our own world is rich with cultural divides and unions, international relations that mark out how we view and speak with one another, and, similarly, how our own mythologies and fairy tales carry their own reflections of those relationships and developments as a people. Tolkien's work, after all, is more than just the creation of fiction to support a

language. It is the construction of a pantheon, and a mythos, all unto itself. *The Silmarillion* tells of the creation myth of an entire world, and does so with the same kind of involved detail that one would expect from reading a mythological text from our own world. There is a level of involvement that shows the desire to create something substantial and lasting.

Essentially then, Tolkien applied his own views on the importance of the bond between philology and mythology to his writing. In his mind, there could not have been any other way to write a fairy story: it simply would have to be able to stand on its own, self-contained, yet accessible. For there to be a story about Faerie, there would surely have to be a language of the Faerie within this tale; and if there was a language, then there was no doubt, in Tolkien's mind, that there would have to be a history. And where there is a history, there is a world that "holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it" (Tolkien 2). Because to Tolkien the Faerie world was just that: a world unto itself, separate from ours, but connected, and with the same complexities and questions in its histories and its peoples as our own world, and with its own mythologies. It was a reflection of the human condition in some ways, the ideals and the psyche of humanity given a physical, representative form with which we might interact with and better understand ourselves, spiritually and otherwise. Alongside of this, there is Tolkien's own acknowledgement in his letters (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*) that for a great deal of his work, it came down to the necessity to build a world for the languages he had created to exist in. And this passion, this great involvement that Tolkien placed upon that work, shows to no small amount. The various languages that he created, the Elvish ones in particular, are much akin to our own when it comes to

defining commonalities and relationships between such factors such as nationality, location and history for the races in question. There are variations in dialect and in style between the different Elven subtypes, whilst also maintaining a familiarity that signifies a common origin – much like with our own languages.

This acknowledgement of the relevance that ancestry, both creative and linguistic, presides over the creation of what Tolkien chose to call Faerie, shows that the author had a certain degree of respect for the works of fantasy and myth – even going so far as to express the opinion that, no matter whether a fairy story was meant as satire or serious prose, then the magic of the tale, the essence of the Faerie, should be taken seriously, as it would be the very core and centre of that world into which the reader was being invited (Tolkien 3). Without the acknowledgement of the reader that the magic in the story is to be viewed with the same importance as one would, shall we say, perceive the presence of gravity and a place of great height, then the whole thing quickly loses its footing and falls short of reaching its audience.

The reason why this is relevant and how it ties in with Tolkien's own views comes from the manner in which Tolkien respected and admired the Norse mythologies, far more so than the modernized English fairy stories which featured those same diminutive fey with colourful wings and effeminate appeal that were mentioned before – which Tolkien had expressed a distaste for; the myths, that is to say the Faerie world of the Norse, were ones that treated its magic as equal to the rest of its normal-world parallel's dangers and wonders. Its Elves were a people of mystery and danger, both beautiful and yet potentially deadly at the same time – worthy of admiration, but not of frolicking

alongside in childish abandon. Its Gods were mighty and awe-inspiring, but not without their flaws and tempers that warned mortals of the dangers that they would find, should they be found trespassing and lacking in respect. The world of the Norse mythologies is a dark one, but accompanied by wonders that serve to reward those brave enough to venture into its depths and come out changed by the experience. In turn, the language of the myths was largely tied up with the languages of the people that had written and abided by them – its culture woven directly into the lives of those who knew and read the tales. In essence, what Tolkien saw as fairy stories was something not limited to the previous capacity of being aimed solely at children, but something far greater.

The value of fairy-stories is thus not, in my opinion, to be found by considering children in particular. Collections of fairy-stories are, in fact, by nature attics and lumber-rooms, only by temporary and local custom play-rooms. Their contents are disordered, and often battered, a jumble of different dates, purposes, and tastes; but among them may occasionally be found a thing of permanent virtue: an old work of art, not too much damaged, that only stupidity would ever have stuffed away.

(Tolkien, 5)

That is no doubt what Tolkien saw as a true expression of the fairy story, in the end. A story of wonder and of darkness, worthy of awe, fantastical and separate, and yet close enough to us that we would be able to acknowledge it as both relatable and at once a part of our own perspective and experiences. That a mythology would be so wholly ingrained in a people's community and way of living must have seemed wholly

appealing to Tolkien, particularly when contrasted by the manner in which fairy stories in his own country had begun to be perceived and interpreted. And thus, with Tolkien's acknowledging of the act of borrowing for the purpose of invention, his own work follows that precise philosophy-driven method of adapting and evolving its ancestral inventors' creation into something new for a more current generation.

### 3. Analysing the Tolkienian Discourse

#### 3.1 Writing What You Know

The design of Tolkien's writing of the Middle-Earth mythology is essentially two-fold: firstly there is his sub-creation, the use of familiar concepts and ideas, organically woven into the construct and history of that creation, and then there is the implementation of his own personal tastes as an author. One of the reasons these two traits work in a synergetic fashion comes from the previously acknowledged fact that Tolkien did not view these things as being mutually exclusive to one another. In his letters, Tolkien himself acknowledges that he 'took his models like anyone else – from 'life' as he knew'. (Tolkien 253) This would include his ideologies, his favourite works of literature as well as his own preferred mythologies – namely in this last case the use of Nordic mythology's races, and the manner in which the Faerie world was portrayed in those stories. Tolkien made no secret that he both admired and respected these stories, and in one of his letters even confessed his great pleasure upon hearing that *The Hobbit* had received a translation into Icelandic, expressing the sentiment that he felt it was the most suitable language for his work. (Tolkien 477)

One of the things that tends to stand out about Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, especially to those who are familiar with the Norse myths, as a result, is the naming of its characters, particularly the heroes supporting cast, the dwarves and the wizard, Gandalf – all of whom are named after the dwarves of Norse mythology, their names derived from such works as the *Edda*, *Dvergatal*, and the *Völuspá*, the dwarven names in particular Tolkien confirms in his letters as to their origin being found in the Icelandic myths (Tolkien 27). The similarities do not end there, either, with other parts of Nordic myth that influence *The Lord of the Rings* making an appearance, such as the presence of a cursed and magical ring that brings misfortune to the bearer, and that of a broken sword of significant heritage needing to be repaired, whilst simultaneously serving as a symbol of choosing the true and rightful heir of some kind – both of which present themselves in *Völsungasaga* and characterize themselves through tales wherein mortal Men succumb to their baser greed and fall to the corruptions of dark forces that are beyond their grasp, it falling to the next generation to rise up and redeem their kin, both through facing their own weakness of character, overcoming great adversity and eventually realizing their potential.

In both these stories and others there is the metaphysical idea that sin is passed down through a family line. Just as Fáfñir's family was cursed in *Völsungasaga*, Aragorn's line is treated as being tainted by the curse of succumbing to the One Ring's power, and so too Frodo is in the same sense cursed by his very literal inheritance of the One Ring from Bilbo. The ideas of inherited sin and judgement appear frequently, such as in *The Silmarillion*, with the exile of the Elves who had chosen to defy their makers, and with the struggles of against such inheritances in *The Lord of the Rings*, when faced with the

failures of his own ancestor, Isildur, it is Aragorn, in particular, who stands out as a character that acknowledges the sin of his predecessor, all the while actively fighting to redeem himself and his family line by rising to the station of king for the sake of uniting the Men of Middle-Earth in defence against Sauron's rise. It should be noted, however, that even with these many similarities, Tolkien himself never specifically intended to directly base his writing on anything other than his own imaginings and interests – there was no intentional measure of direct reference in his works, save for his own *Silmarillion*. (Tolkien 39)

Alongside of this is Tolkien's inclusion of the more visually and socially familiar premises, such as his designing of the Shire based on his place of upbringing in a Warwickshire village. While acknowledging that he drew on such experiences and memories in creating the feel and atmosphere of the Shire, Tolkien did, however, specify that there was never meant to be an outright link between the two places. As mentioned before, he took what he knew from his own life, and used it to model his ideas upon. In this same context, he drew on many other attributes, such as his religion, and the social conducts of his upbringing. The hobbits of the Shire reflect that English way of life as experienced in small, rural villages, with a close sense of familiarity with one another, the taking of tea and breakfast, and lunch, and so on. There is a very definite and intimate kind of description of the way in which Bilbo Baggins goes about his life in the beginning of *The Hobbit* which shows a fondness for that comfortable lifestyle. Similarly, the manner in which both Bilbo and Frodo Baggins are thrust from this warm atmosphere and into new and often frightening experiences rings true of



Tolkien's own experiences, from his travel to the more industrial parts of Birmingham, which no doubt inspired much of his imagery of the dark towers of Mordor.

A more interesting factor of what made its way into Tolkien's works, however, was that of his ideals, both those formed from religion, and from personal experience. In particular, there is the manner in which Tolkien perceived evil – especially when contrasted against the portrayals of his peers. While others saw evil and corruption as either a result of having the pillars of social stability taken away from others, such as in *Lord of the Flies*, or the end result of power corrupting, as occurred when the pigs in *Animal Farm* becoming no different from their human masters once they themselves were in that same seat of power, Tolkien had different views on the nature of evil. In a combination of both his Catholic upbringing's context of original sin, as well as his own perspective, Tolkien's writing displayed the concept that evil was in fact something with which Man was born – a natural and more basic aspect of his identity that usually went unnoticed until darker thoughts began to feed into those aspects. We see this particularly in the characters portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings*: Bilbo, Boromir, Frodo and Gollum are all corrupted by the One Ring to varying degrees, as it preys upon the darkness found in every mortal's heart – while Boromir succumbs quickly to the One Ring, due to his desperation and willingness to do anything to save his people from the threat of Sauron, the more simple, but pure-hearted hobbits portray a greater resistance to the ring, no doubt attributed to their exclusion from the troubles of the much greater world beyond the Shire. (Tolkien 121)

At the same time, however, we are also faced with the existences of both Sauron and Saruman – both of which existed originally as angelic spirits, but submitted to the corrupting agent of a greater evil, in Sauron's case Melchor. In the case of Saruman, his corruption sprouts from jealousy and fear of his fellow Valar, Gandalf, which Sauron then preys upon in order to sway him to his side. This is both a Fall of angels, a reference in itself to Christianity, but at the same time, through the use of Tolkien's own mythology, and his own ideas of the manner in which a Fall takes place, it extends beyond merely mirroring another faith, and instead becomes its own, new cosmogonical myth. (Tolkien 169) As it is through the submission to one's darker instincts and desires – even if the initial submission was brought about through the corrupting efforts of another – that the root of evil is to be found. In turn, however, Tolkien's writing also strives to show that just as through submitting to those instincts begets evil; it is through acts of kindness and sympathy that begets the goodness in a mortal's fragile heart to ward itself from such evils. Through the kindness of Sam, Frodo is able to resist the One Ring for great extensions of time. Through Frodo's own kindness and empathy towards Gollum, the evil of Sauron is vanquished as a result of an act of mercy. In this, Tolkien creates an internal morality for his writing to find both motivations for his characters, as well as believable cause for their downfalls.

### 3.2 Trope or Cliché, Original or Rehash

So then knowing that Tolkien himself admitted to the concept of borrowing from those he would perceive as ancestors in creative storymaking as being one that is integral to the telling of the type of literature he wrote, what does that ultimately say of his work? Is it wholly original? No, it is not. But is it an explicit and outright cliché?

That is also not the case here. In essence, what it comes down to with Tolkien's writing is less the origins of the words and the themes that he is using, but the manner in which they are utilized to construct his works. And while there are some things, such as the premise of the magical ring and the broken sword being taken from *Völsungasaga*, that are played straight and without any kind of new interpretation or spin to them, there are numerous others to which Tolkien approaches them with new ideas and different perspectives from what might be the standard. For example there is the interpretation of evil spoken of in the previous section; though not a premise or a theme that is in the least unexplored by writers and critics alike, particularly when placed beside his peers at the time of being written, there are some things that Tolkien did apply to it that his fellow authors did not, such as his definitions and ideas on the nature and cause of evil in the world.

To him the idea of evil was something that lay within each and every person, if not possibly every living creature, as a figurative seed that would be allowed to grow and to thrive, should it be nourished on the darker traits of human behaviour, and granted an environment that would reward its existence. In this context, those scenes of war and bloodshed, such as the ones that Tolkien had been exposed to in his younger years were not the cause of the evils of his fellow man, but simply a place where they were allowed to fester and grow within their hearts. That it is not so much that we are a people to be corrupted, but that the corruption is already there and that it is therefore our struggle to seek out our better qualities in spite of this fact, to become better people and in turn redeem ourselves of this fatal flaw that we all carry with us. This, to a great degree, mirrors Tolkien's religious upbringing as a Catholic, with the ideas of Original Sin and

the crimes of one's ancestors being passed down from father to child in later generations. Within Tolkien's own works, once more, we see these ideas and themes, a part of his personal philosophies and his beliefs, being applied by adopting them to function within the world he has created, themes such as being cast out from paradise and inherited sin which are well-known in most religious circles, redesigned and approached with Tolkien's own original direction.

Similarly, there are themes of self-sacrifice, both for the greater good, and in order to repent for former ills, and of redemption, or atonement, for those same ills. With the latter, it is Boromir who does so, and with the former, it is Frodo Baggins – though in another example of Tolkien not playing the martyr card in a straightforward manner, nor indeed the heroic card in such a fashion either, as Frodo fails rather than live up to the role thrust upon him, of the heroic protagonist that would sacrifice everything for a worthy cause, and instead giving into the temptation of the Ring – albeit a result of finally succumbing to a spiritual torment that others would not have been able to withstand before falling under its sway – and it is rather his previous good deeds and acts of mercy which allow those to whom he had shown kindness to accomplish his original goal. These are not new ideas, again, but the manner in which they are woven into the narrative and the history of Tolkien's Middle-Earth is done in a manner which is so akin to the manner in which those same ideas are woven into our own history is what sets them apart from being mere cliché. Tolkien used them for the same reasons we had used them, because they resonated with the people reading about them.

Without the usage of relatable mythology, of fables and fairy stories with which the reader can find a link, a fantasy world has nothing with which to appeal to that reader. A world that is ultimately foreign in all ways, without anything to anchor you to it – if through nothing more than simple familiarity – is one that does not hold a person's attentions. Tolkien understood this, having identified the close ties that language and culture had with their corresponding myths, and seeing how those same myths altered and were reshaped with the evolution of society, and the tongue in which they would speak – each iteration becoming one that the people experiencing it would be able to identify with and draw a parallel with their own, modern existence. It would not serve his means to create a world so completely foreign and beyond approach that his readers could not feel some connectivity to that otherworldly place, although he did not condemn the idea of attempting to create such fantastically different and alien worlds either:

Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough – though it may already be a more potent thing than many a “thumbnail sketch” or “transcript of life” that receives literary praise.

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed

narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode.

(Tolkien, 6)

This was Tolkien's ultimate goal then, the attempt to create this kind of narrative art, though, through the use of the familiar aspects of storymaking and world-crafting, drawing on that which he knew and identified in his own world, and implementing it, and using those identifiable ideas in a new and inventive fashion (such as the importance of song in his universe, where not only was history and legend immortalized and shared with song, but the very history of the world, and indeed the world itself was crafted from music itself). And Tolkien's work does indeed reflect exactly those same parallels between his created world, and his then-modern existence as he had intended them to. Tolkien was not the only one to suffer the hardships of war, and to endure dark times, and those same dark times surely were understood by his readers at the time of publishing, which also bore the physical and emotional scars left by the war. He wrote of good men dying, of all seemingly lost, or in vain, but he also wrote of hope and of the possibility of a return to better times once the darkness had passed – all of which are common themes in any fairy tale where the heroes must face darkness and hardships before they can once again find the light. But he also wrote of scars that could not heal: much like the irreparable physical scars which Frodo Baggins bore from his journey to Mount Doom, and the emotional ones from the burden he carried with the One Ring, there were soldiers after the war who would never be the same again. To say that Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* was a fairy tale in contemporary reflection of the world before, during, and then finally after, the war wouldn't be a case of guesswork, but rather it would be a matter of certainty.

By these themes, and based upon Tolkien's views on the importance of philology and the correlation that myth has with it, and his perception of the Faerie story being one of adapting one ancestral storyteller's invention into that of a new story for the present, one can perhaps begin to surmise the nature of Tolkien's work better, especially when taking into account Tolkien's appreciation for the culture and language tied to the Norse mythologies. Taking into further consideration the dislike which the author had for the state of affairs for his own country's fairy stories, Tolkien had intended for his writing to become the new mythology for England.

Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story-the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I would dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. (Tolkien, 168)

Using events that paralleled his own world's recent hardships, themes which they would be able to identify with: a fabled sword being used to guide a wayward king to achieve his destiny and bring a new time of peace to his people, with its being broken mirroring the *Völsungasaga* which Tolkien admired, and yet at the same time also mirroring that of the legend of King Arthur, which would be more familiar to the people of England, thus crafting the homely and warm environment of the British countryside with the creation of the Shire – yet another example of Tolkien creating an anchor to the world

of the reader, in order for them to acclimate themselves prior to the fantasy that lay ahead. Adding then to it that adult nature which he had felt previous fairy stories could not accomplish by their design, Tolkien's creation was less of an unintentional string of clichés created by an uninspired writer and more of a checklist for how to create the optimal modern-day mythology for a people who, in his opinion, were sorely lacking in such a thing. Everything that he would need in order to achieve this is present, from the Hobbits, happy to live their lives unbothered and unadventurously, simply drinking tea and eating jam on toast, to the parallels and familiar myths and themes which his readers would be able to identify with, but still perceive their form as being something new and belonging to the world of Middle-Earth.

#### 4. Conclusion

The matter of Tolkien's originality, then, takes on a whole new perspective when it is put to this perspective of the author's intended audience, and the intended purpose that he had for his work. In essence, Tolkien's writing defies the normal constraints of being treated as 'just another fairy tale' and instead attempts to assert itself as a genuine mythology, with all of the fables, cautionary tales and aspects that such a body of work would normally carry within itself. It goes the extra mile of creating its own original premises and makes a few new additions of its own, but ultimately it makes sure that it has all the bearings and similarities to that of a mythological text. And this is exactly what makes it interesting, particularly as mythologies tend to be almost universally exempt from the normal criticisms that any other work of fiction would be. Because we perceive them as cultural in nature, as a representation of our history, our development as a community and a people, rather than



perhaps an exercise in writing talent, we do not judge them for whatever ideas we see in them that we might have seen in another culture's myths and stories – quite the opposite, in fact, in that we might even see this as something that unites us with other cultures by a shared perspective, ironically echoing Tolkien's own philological sentiments that myth and language is tied to one another, and thus just as some languages may trace themselves back to a common ancestor, then so too can our Faerie stories be found to have a common basis. And if we were to give Tolkien's work this same treatment, we would find ourselves not looking at a work of clichés and unoriginal ideas, but a series of myths that we can identify with in the same way that we would our own, or those of a neighbouring culture. What this means for Tolkien, then, is that his work, rather than being just another piece of literature, saddled with borrowed stereotypes, may very well just be intentionally unoriginal instead, as by Amossy's definition of a cliché as something which repeats an idea and passes it around indefinitely as part of common identification of its themes, Tolkien's own pursuit of creating precisely that – a common mythology to be shared and familiar amongst the reader – is a success simply through effectively making the author's work clichéd, or unoriginal, by design.

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