The Deeper Magic: Christ-like Figures and Faith in the Fantasy of J.K. Rowling and J.R.R. Tolkien

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Introduction

Two chapters of C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* make the author's intent of accentuating his Christian allegory especially clear. Chapter 13, "Deep Magic from the Dawn of Time," and Chapter 15, "Deeper Magic from Before the Dawn of Time," contain the moments in his narrative where the great and gentle golden lion, Aslan, sacrifices himself to atone for a traitor's wrongs before miraculously returning to life. Lewis does not leave the reader to even pretend to guess which Christian phenomenon he emulates within these chapters. In essence, Lewis' style of "deeper magic" is an explicit portrayal of the Christ-story, just in an alternative world linked to our own, with characters who bear different names. However, other fantasy writers, like J.K. Rowling and J.R.R. Tolkien, have succeeded in employing a form of magic, deeper still, that requires the reader to do more legwork in deciphering the Christian resonances of their work.

Upon first blush, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* perhaps seem vastly different from each other. One was published at the turn of the twenty-first century by a first-time female author who was struggling to make ends meet. In stark contrast, a male professor of philology at the University of Oxford produced the other series in the early to mid-twentieth century, after multiple gatherings of draft readings and feedback with his chummy literary group of fellow Oxford dons and scholars, who called themselves the Inklings.[1] *Harry Potter* is almost entirely focused on teenage protagonists and intended (at least originally) for an

[1] Beyond writing a biography for Tolkien himself, simply entitled *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, writer and Oxford native Humphrey Carpenter also wrote a "collective biography" for the Inklings group, titled *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends*. In a review of *The Inklings* published in *Christianity and Literature*, Margaret P. Hannay writes that Carpenter's conclusion in the book is that "the coherence of [the Inklings] was not based primarily on their Christianity nor on their interest in myth, literature, the magic and the occult. Rather, the group was held together by their friendship with C.S. Lewis" (72). Be that as it may, the fact remains that, for a period of about six years, this group of men met in Oxford's The Eagle and Child pub (which Tolkien affectionately referred to in his letters as "The Bird and Baby," see *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 92, 102, 109) to discuss, among other subjects, literature and their own writings (Hannay, 72).

audience of children, while *The Lord of the Rings* is centered on adults (albeit mostly adults of unfamiliar races like hobbits, elves, and dwarves), and, according to Tolkien's critical essay, "On Fairy Stories," meant for an audience beyond just children. Additionally, Rowling's series is set in a world that seems to be a part of, or at the very least, adjacent to, our own, with references to familiar British landmarks like London and King's Cross Station, whereas Tolkien invents an alternative world as the setting for his legendarium, replete with its own carefully imagined landscape, languages, and mythology that has no overt connection to our world, except for the word "earth" in "Middle-earth."

Yet, despite all the differences between the two series, there are commonalities—and while some similarities are immediately apparent, others are less so. Most obviously, both works are rooted firmly in a tradition of fantasy; magical spells and mythical creatures make up the lifeblood of Rowling's wizarding world, and a mythological reimagining of the world as we know it infuses the landscape of Tolkien's Middle-earth. In addition, as anyone who has carved out the time to read the books or even perused the fiction aisles of a bookstore knows, both series have dauntingly long page counts: the seven books in the *Harry Potter* series are estimated to reach 4,224 pages in length,[2] while *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (which Tolkien actually originally intended to be published as one complete volume), is approximately 1,241 pages long.[3] As for the contents of the books, beyond even the fantastical connection, the series are linked by the presence of fundamental idealized qualities that reflect the two authors' British

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[2] This number is estimated in a *New York Times* ArtsBeat article called "Potter's Magic Numbers." The *Times* cites Scholastic, the Harry Potter series publisher, as its source.

[3] This number was provided by a *Forbes* staff writer, who counted the pages in each of his paperback versions of the books, excluding the appendices. See: https://www.forbes.com/sites/briansolomon/2012/07/26/the-hobbit-as-a-trilogy-hollywood-has-jumped-the-shark/#702f15cd31be. Note also that this approximation excludes Tolkien's other books related to Middle-earth, which include *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*, in addition to other books of Tolkien's writings (like *The Children of Húrin*), which were published posthumously by the author's son, Christopher Tolkien.

roots. In other words, both series contain an idealization of some aspect of British culture. In *Harry Potter*, this idealization manifests itself in a reverence for British boarding schools that is projected onto Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the agricultural, homey Shire functions as an idyllic representation of rural life in the British countryside.

From a critical standpoint, both *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* have been subjected to ridicule by those who claim that the two series are too lowbrow to be considered part of the literary canon;[4] Rowling's is too childlike, filled with elementary language and predictable plot structures, and Tolkien's is viewed by some as "stylistically poor, simplistic in its portrayal of Good and Evil" (Timmons, 230).[5] In spite of such critical disdain, both series are beloved by a vast array of readers, and therefore have been heavily franchised: Tolkien's most notably by the Peter Jackson films that have continued into the twenty-first century,[6] and Rowling's by films,[7] fan fiction websites that churn out alternative storylines, and an entire

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[4] In an effort to collect a list of the most substantial criticisms of Tolkien's work, Richard C. West prefaced his "A Tolkien Checklist: Selected Criticism 1981-2004," published in *Modern Fiction Studies*, by admitting that "In the state of extant scholarship, Tolkien as author has stood, at best, a little outside the main canon of English literature and, at worst, been excluded from it and that often with some hostility" (1016). As for *Harry Potter*, literary editor Robert McCrum wrote for *The Observer* in 2000 that Rowling's "work teems with exotic personnel and it has the reader by the throat from page to page, but her prose is as flat (and as English) as old beer." See: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/jul/09/books.booksforchildrenandteenagers.

[5] In his article exploring the sharp divide in Tolkien criticism (between those who view his work as having literary qualities and those who disregard it), Daniel Timmons offers a slew of examples of the "severe criticisms" Tolkien's fantasy has suffered, saying insults "such as that the work is 'juvenile,' stylistically poor, simplistic in its portrayal of Good and Evil, sexist, metaphysically obscure, 'execrable,' and 'dangerous,' offered by Wilson (314), Roberts (455), Toynbee (19), Stimpson (19), Manlove (190-193), Brook-Rose (251), Kathleen Jones (5), respectively, display a dislike of or obtuseness toward the nature of Tolkien's fantasy" (230-31).

[6] Jackson's most recent *Lord of the Rings* film, *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, was released in 2014.

[7] Interestingly enough, the early films for both series were often pitted against each other. A *New York Times* article from 2002 recaps how the holiday season in 2001 had been "dominated by *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*,' and explains that the next film installments for both fantasy series were scheduled to be released around the same time in 2002. Although the *Times* acknowledges that the initial films were targeted to different audiences (describing *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* as a family movie and *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* as catered more to teenage and young adult males), the article goes on to predict that "many expect *Lord of the Rings* to beat *Harry Potter* this year." See: https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/21/movies/harry-potter-to-battle-lord-of-the-rings-again.html. (Indeed, data collected by The-Numbers.com show that *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*

wizarding world at the Universal Studios Florida theme park that features its own wand shop and butterbeer. Perhaps least salient of all, though, the works are connected by the fact that both are threaded with an underlying theme of Christian principles that, though not explicitly introduced in either series, both authors nevertheless intended to stitch into the fabric of their respective stories. This Christian element is the theme I have chosen to explore in both *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

In examining the Christian influences in these two authors' series, it is first useful to construct a sort of framework of literary theory that explains how Rowling and Tolkien's works can be placed on a similar plane. For such a task, the critical works of C.S. Lewis and Northrop Frye provide a useful theoretical lens through which to view the two series. Although Lewis' criticisms are now regarded as "dated" by some in the literary community, his work is relevant in this circumstance because both Rowling and Tolkien's series are imbued with a sense of nostalgia for certain aspects of British culture and place. This nostalgia will be dealt with in further detail later in the paper, but for now, it is sufficient to assert that due to both authors' reliance on a channeling of nostalgia, Lewis' critical work becomes a worthy pillar of this theoretical framework. (Lewis' work is a worthy pillar both in the sense that his own criticism is viewed now with a fondly nostalgic quality, and because his particular work that I am referencing, *The Discarded Image*, is dedicated to reconstructing and explicating the model of medieval literature,[8] which is inherently a nostalgic undertaking.) In *The Discarded Image*, Lewis explains that the medieval understanding of the Earth was, in a not-quite-scientific view of

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earned $934,699,645 in worldwide box office sales, while *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* only produced $879,225,135 in worldwide box office sales.)

[8] Lewis wrote: "I hope to persuade the reader not only that this Model of the Universe is a supreme medieval work of art but that it is in a sense the central work, that in which most particular works were embedded, to which they constantly referred, from which they drew a great deal of their strength" (*Discarded Image*, 12).

astronomy, that of being encapsulated in a *Primum Mobile*, a sphere which controlled the movement of its interior universe. The predominant opinion among the medieval world, Lewis explains, was that "The *Primum Mobile* is moved by its love for God, and, being moved, communicates motion to the rest of the universe" (113). In essence, much like many Christian children are raised today with the explanation that God has "the whole world in His hands,"[9] the medieval world relied upon this notion of the universe being literally controlled and moved by a relationship of love with its Creator. Put simply, in the medieval understanding, God and love controlled the world—spiritually and physically.

Perhaps applying Lewis' explanation of the concept of the *Primum Mobile* to *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* seems illogical. Admittedly, neither fantastical series is placed in the medieval world; in fact, neither series is truly placed in *our* world at all. And yet, theorist Northrop Frye explains in *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, just why comparing literature (particularly fantasy imbued with a resonance of myth, like Rowling and Tolkien's) to a Christian perspective is not only reasonable, but revealing of further richness within the text. Frye writes:

> If there is so little in the Bible for which some analogy cannot be found somewhere else, there is correspondingly little to be found anywhere else that cannot be found in some form in the Bible. If we take the Bible as a key to mythology, instead of taking mythology in general as a key to the Bible, we should at least have a definite starting point, wherever we end. (111)

Here, Frye is positing that all literature carries with it some elements of the Great Code, or features of the Bible. Such a theory is more "current" than Lewis' in both a chronological and a

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[9] See the lyrics for "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" at https://hymnary.org/text/hes_got_the_whole_world_in_his_hands.

scholarly sense. Frye's stance is also subtler and more malleable than Lewis', making it more applicable to work like Rowling and Tolkien's, which themselves rely on subtlety in their Christian qualities. In some cases, like Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, a series that the author has made well-known to be intentionally anti-Christian in nature, the application of Frye's theory might not seem as immediately apparent. Yet, in taking such an argumentative stance on the Bible and Christianity, Pullman inherently brings both into his work. (Indeed, the end of the first book of the series, *The Golden Compass*, includes a passage from Genesis that Pullman alters.[10])

Yet even beyond such an explicit engagement with the contents of the Bible as Pullman's, Frye explains in *The Great Code* that the Bible is filled with a rhetorical device known as typology, or "a figure of speech that moves in time," which can then be translated to other works of literature (99). Furthermore, Frye defines typology as "a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously" (99). In essence, Frye is describing typology as a sort of looking forward or longing for the future, an uncertainty, and yet a hope for what the next phase of life will contain and the ways in which it will rationalize the current phase. According to Frye, the Bible can be divided into seven distinct types and anti-types—creation, revolution or exodus, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse—and variations of those very same types and anti-types continue to be implemented in all literature (126). Finally, Frye writes that "typology relates to the future, and is

[10] Pullman's version of Genesis 3 includes: "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 'For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and your daemons shall assume their true forms, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil…'" (*The Golden Compass*, 372).

consequently related primarily to faith, hope, and vision" (100-01). In other words, Frye asserts that even implicitly, literature, including Rowling and Tolkien's, is infused with elements of typology, or that faith and hope that the future will make sense of the present, which point back to the Bible—supporting the idea that analyzing the resonances of Christianity within two works of fantasy like *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* will yield fruitful results.

Of course, the aforementioned question of nostalgia still remains. First, establishing a definition of nostalgia seems necessary. In his introduction to *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*, John J. Su asserts that nostalgia is more than simply an expression of homesickness. Su writes that "Nostalgia, in other words, encourages an imaginative exploration of how present systems of social relations fail to address human needs, and the specific objects of nostalgia—lost or imagined homelands—represent efforts to articulate alternatives" (5). Applying Su's theory of nostalgia to Rowling and Tolkien, then, requires that both series identify an element of modern life that is deplorable, followed by a reimagined situation where the undesirable conditions are bettered. Arguably, *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* both fit Su's model. As previously stated, both Rowling and Tolkien's series contain idealized elements of British culture, which inherently rely upon nostalgic qualities in creating their wistful representations. Rowling's work, for example, contains nostalgia for the vaunted British school story tradition, which began with Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and has been reincarnated in various forms since Hughes first published his book in 1857. Similarly, Tolkien draws upon his own nostalgic consideration of the British countryside with his descriptions of the community and landscape of the hobbits' homeland, the Shire. Tolkien's representation of the Shire is similar to William Morris' descriptions of the agricultural community in *The House of the Wolfings*. Morris, one of the novelists Tolkien both admired and admitted to emulating,

was a novelist in the Victorian era, a period that was engrossed with nostalgia.[11] The nostalgically British qualities of both series merit more attention, and my second chapter will duly delve into these sentimental idylls and their implications in more detail.

An essential quality of nostalgic writing is a sort of wistfulness that elicits an emotional response from the reader. Although his book is dedicated specifically to analyzing the nostalgia poem of the eighteenth century, Aaron Santesso says as much about the emotional qualities of nostalgia in the conclusion of his *A Careful Longing: The Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia*. In the conclusion, where he reflects on how the nostalgia of eighteenth-century poetry has been reshaped in modern literature, Santesso concludes that "nostalgia, as a mode of idealization that aims to be 'realistic,' must always fail: that sense of inevitable failure manufactures its own emotion" (182). In other words, Santesso claims that there must always be a sense of intangibility to any literary setting or quality imbued with nostalgia; at some point, the reader and author both must reluctantly realize that, no matter how wonderful this dreamed-up place sounds, it is not real or realistic—and that realization in and of itself is how nostalgia elicits its most powerful emotions.

Tolkien critic Patrick Curry writes in a section of *Defending Middle-earth* dedicated to nostalgia: "The fact is that Middle-earth is more real to me than many 'actual' places…I would have a better feeling for it, and a better idea of how to find my way about, than if I had been dropped in, say, central Asia or South America" (60). What implicitly underlines Curry's words, or what he leaves unsaid, is that he does at some point realize that Middle-earth is, of course, not

[11] In the introduction to *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture*, Ann C. Colley explains that the particular focus of her criticism was "not concerned with the Victorians' attempts to resuscitate Camelot and their championing of a distant past—phenomena already meticulously documented" (1). With such a broad statement about Victorian culture on the opening page of her book, as well as her choice of the word "meticulous," Colley seems to imply the sheer pervasiveness of nostalgia in the period, which subsequently necessitates her focus on a particular strand of Victorian nostalgia. (Colley goes on to clarify that she instead concentrates "upon [Victorian] longing for a past that is confined to their own lifetime—not an era they have never personally known" (1).)

real. Yet Tolkien has infused his created world with so much detailed imagery that readers, like Curry, desperately want to believe that Middle-earth is, or can be, real—even at the same time that they realize it is not—and therein lies the manufacturing of emotion that Santesso identifies. Curry actually speaks more to the lack of realism of Tolkien's nostalgia earlier in his book: "Now Tolkien gives us to understand, as strongly as possible while still writing a story and not a tract, that nostalgia pure-and-simple will not suffice. In Middle-earth, it is the Elves whose nostalgia is the strongest—both in the sense of yearning for the past and attempting to maintain that past now…" (54). Curry goes on to finish his thought by explaining that it is partially the Elves' longing for the unobtainable past that necessitates their passage out of Middle-earth and into the West at the ending of *The Lord of the Rings*. The Elves have become so caught up in their past glory that the present state of Middle-earth has no place for them, and they have no choice but to depart. Therefore, Curry's conclusion seems to be that, while nostalgia is potent in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien is not necessarily condoning such longing for an unattainable world—yet the author finds nostalgia a powerful tool for enchanting readers with his story and the vividly detailed alternative world where it takes place.

Having established the nostalgic qualities of both series and turning now to examine both *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* from the combined understanding of Lewis and Frye's theory, one can argue that both Rowling and Tolkien place their works in alternative worlds not unlike that of *The Discarded Image's Primum Mobile*, where love and God literally control the world. In the two series, both love and an unknown, unnamed force are present and intervening in the fantastical worlds, allowing unexplainable events to occur, like Harry's returning from the dead and the ultimate destruction of the Ring, despite Frodo's failure. In order for these fantastical worlds to be viewed as a sort of *Primum Mobile*, the reader must put faith in Frye's

subtler position of taking "the Bible as a key to mythology." Relying on Frye's concept of the Bible as a "key" functions as the vital element in allowing the reader to unlock the underlying religious aspects of these fantastical series.

In an effort to prove that both the *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* series contain worlds that are modeled after Lewis' descriptions of the medieval *Primum Mobile*, I begin my first chapter by exploring both authors' stated intentions about conveying Christian themes implicitly in their works, through interviews in Rowling's case and letters in Tolkien's. I then examine how both series develop their protagonists, Harry Potter and Frodo Baggins, into characters who can be considered Christ-like, or behaving in ways similarly to Christ's assumption of other's burdens and His subsequent self-sacrifice. I then bolster my claim of these characters as Christ-like figures with close readings of scenes where they display these Christ-like qualities, albeit in nuanced and imperfect ways that disqualify either Harry or Frodo from being considered "Christ-figures" in totality. (Rowling and Tolkien's representations of imperfect Christ-figures contrasts sharply with Lewis' Aslan, the allegorical Christ-figure in his *Chronicles of Narnia*.) After examining Harry and Frodo separately, I conclude the chapter by bringing the two protagonists into conversation with each other, assessing the two authors' contrasting constructions of Christ-like figures and exploring some of the reasons behind their different approaches.

Expanding my focus to the macroscopic level, I shift in my second chapter to exploring the two series' fantastical worlds, analyzing both Rowling and Tolkien's devotion to world-building. More specifically, I explore the settings in both series that the authors have chosen to instill with nostalgic qualities reminiscent of British culture. For *Harry Potter*, this necessitates an examination of the British school story, with a comparison of the parallels between Rowling's

series and *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in matters of school bullies, an emphasis on sports, and students' connections with headmasters. At the forefront of this analysis is the idea that, in Rowling's series, she works to create a community at Hogwarts where the students subsist by placing faith in each other. With *The Lord of the Rings*, I consider Tolkien's depiction of the Shire as compared to the setting of William Morris' *The House of the Wolfings*. As part of this comparison, I evaluate Tolkien's glorification of simplicity in a pastoral lifestyle, concluding that he indirectly champions the uncomplicatedness of the Shire because it allows for a more stalwart community of faith.

Ultimately, my intention in exploring the Christ-like figures and nostalgically idyllic communities of faith in both *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* can be distilled into three parts. My first objective is to suggest that Rowling and Tolkien deserve more scholarly attention specifically focused on their similar commitments to producing an element of underlying Christianity in their work. Secondly, I aim to better understand why the two authors embedded their religious convictions in such implicit manners throughout their series, rather than following Lewis' more overt, allegorical tactics. Primarily, though, I hope to demonstrate that, just as both authors ask their readers to entrust them with belief in their fantastical worlds, Rowling and Tolkien duly reward such leaps of faith by encouraging their readers, indirectly, toward belief in what Tolkien would call the "story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy stories."[12] I hope to demonstrate that it is almost as if Rowling and Tolkien, though half a century apart, have collaborated to both ask their respective readers: if you could put your faith in this fictional story, where else might you be willing to place your faith?

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[12] From Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy Stories." He also wrote of Christianity in "On Fairy Stories" that "there is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many skeptical men have accepted as true on its own merits" (23).

Chapter I. *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*: Differing Depictions of Christ-like Figures

Introduction

Featuring elements of magic, unlikely heroes, and quests to overcome seemingly insurmountable forces of evil, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are both world-building works of fantasy that have delighted millions of readers worldwide.[13] As a result of their similarities, *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* are logically often brought into conversation with each other. Both are considered emblematic examples of fantasy literature, and the two series are frequently grouped synonymously and compared under the umbrella of children's literature[14]—yet Rowling's classification in children's literature is perhaps the more justified of the two, especially considering Tolkien's fervent, oft-articulated distaste for the condescending connotations of genres viewed as relegated solely to child readers.[15] Nevertheless, millions of children and adults alike have found

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[13] In 2017, twenty years after *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* was first published, Scholastic reported that over 400 million copies of *Harry Potter* titles had been sold worldwide. The series has also been translated into 68 languages. (See: "Harry Potter at 20: Billions in Box Office Revenue, Millions of Books Sold." *Fortune*, 26 June 2017, fortune.com/2017/06/26/harry-potter-20th-anniversary/.) As for Tolkien, in 2003, the BBC conducted a survey called "The Big Read" to determine the most beloved book in the United Kingdom. After receiving over 750,000 votes, the top spot was claimed by *The Lord of the Rings*. (See: "The Big Read." *BBC*, April 2003, www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/vote/.) Also, Amazon customers named *The Lord of the Rings* their "favorite of the millennium" in 1999. (See: "Amazon Makes Multi-Season Deal to Adapt 'The Lord of the Rings' For TV." *Forbes*, 13 November 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/danafeldman/2017/11/13/amazon-makes-multi-season-deal-to-adapt-the-lord-of-the-rings-for-tv/#145eaf573acb.)

[14] The two series' broad cultural importance and similarities, including the influence, whether intentional or not, of Tolkien's fiction upon Rowling's, is often noted by critics. Writing from the lens of exploring the role of technology in the *Harry Potter* series, Nicholas Sheltrown prefaces his thesis with: "Often, J.K. Rowling's work is compared to other famous British children's authors, including J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. On some level, one can see the influence of these two authors on Rowling. Knowingly or not, Rowling employs many of the strategies Tolkien and Lewis used when writing for children. Tolkien enjoyed creating immersive, internally consistent worlds (much like Harry's world)…" (*Critical Perspectives*, 53). Further, Emily Griesinger posits in an article on the presence of hope in children's literature that "The art of true fantasy, according to Tolkien, is the ability to create a secondary world in such elaborate detail as to compel belief…Rowling has this special skill and employs it to create a compelling secondary world full of humor, suspense, and elvishly crafted imaginative skill" (462-463).

[15] In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien wrote: "Actually, the association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history… But in fact only some children, and some adults, have any special taste for [fairy stories]; and when they have it, it is not exclusive, nor even necessarily dominant. It is a taste, too, that would not

themselves enthralled by the two series. Regardless of the reader's age, in both cases, it is difficult to read the books through in their entirety without gleaning lessons, morals, or instances of symbolic systems along the way. One such representation present in both *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* that has not received as much scholarly attention is the authors' identification as Christians and, accordingly, how their personal religious ideologies have inherently informed and shaped their fictional works in differing ways.[16]

While Christianity is never explicitly addressed in either author's fictional works, (of the two, its glaring absence is most intriguing in the *Harry Potter* series, which is set in "our" world), both Tolkien and Rowling are documented as acknowledging and affirming their Christianity, albeit with varying levels of evidence and reservations of faith. Tolkien, a devout Roman Catholic for the entirety of his life, was very outspoken about the impact of Christianity on his life and its subsequent influence on his writing. In fact, in a letter posted in December 1953, Tolkien wrote: "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision…For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism" (*Letters*, 172). In the same letter, Tolkien goes on to note that he was grateful to have been brought up, since he was eight years old, "in a Faith that has nourished me and taught me all the little that I know," further emphasizing the importance of faith in his personal life and his fiction (*Letters*, 172). Tolkien felt that by crafting fantasy fiction in a manner he called "sub-creation" and setting his fictional creation in a "secondary" world,

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appear, I think, very early in childhood without artificial stimulus; it is certainly one that does not decrease but increases with age, if it is innate" (*M&C*, 130).

[16] Nevertheless, several scholars have analyzed the two series' engagement with Christianity in tandem, with varying levels of thoroughness. For further reading, see: John Granger's *Looking for God in Harry Potter* (which briefly engages with Tolkien at various points in its chapters); Brian Horne's, "On the representation of evil in modern literature" (which speaks of both series' relationships with Christianity, but not necessarily in conjunction with each other); Kate Behr's "Philosopher's Stone to Resurrection Stone"; Sylvia Kelso's "The God in the Pentagram: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Fantasy"; and Susan Johnston's "*Harry Potter*, Eucatastrophe, and Christian Hope."

like that of Middle-earth, he could not help but inherently hearken back to the Primary World, and thus the Primary Creator, God. According to the theory Tolkien develops in "On Fairy Stories," no matter how peculiar the Secondary World might be, it inherently rings with truths from the Primary World. In his words, "We make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker" (*The Monsters and the Critics*, 145).

However, Tolkien believed that these subtle, intrinsic elements of the text were the extent to which Christianity could be artfully conveyed in fiction. He was particularly adamant about his detestation of allegory.[17] Colin Duriez writes in an analysis of Tolkien's approach to creating fiction, entitled "Sub-creation and Tolkien's Theology of Story" that "[Tolkien] didn't deliberately try to insert Christian meaning into his work—a point over which he disagreed with his colleague and friend, C.S. Lewis, in whose fantasy he felt the Christianity was too explicit" (148). Indeed, Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, especially *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* and *The Last Battle*, draw very direct, purposeful parallels to the Christian Gospel. Tolkien, it seems, felt that the overtly Christian approach Lewis favored might limit the appeal of the literature to his own audience. As scholar T.A. Shippey notes in *The Road to Middle-earth*, Tolkien's employment of allegory would have necessitated that *The Lord of the Rings* had only one meaning throughout the text—a thought that Tolkien was not at all pleased with. "Tolkien was not writing to a thesis," Shippey reminds readers eager to over-simplify the themes of Frodo's quest and the nature of the Ring (*Road to Middle-earth* 130). Instead, Tolkien was comfortable with the idea of his work and the images therein as *symbolic*, rather than allegorical.

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[17] Tolkien writes in his foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*: "I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence" (xxiv).

In the looser definition of symbolism, an object like the Ring could represent evil in its purest form, or the perverse, corruptive forces of total power, or the ensnaring nature of addiction; the point is in the ambiguity, leaving interpretation open to the individual reader's analysis. Ultimately, Tolkien seemed to feel that simply by virtue of being sub-created with godly reverence in mind, his work was imbued with a purposeful echoing of Christian thinking—and that was Christian enough.

While, from all public accounts, Tolkien's faith seems to have been a solidly constant aspect of his life, Rowling has readily admitted that her own faith falters at times. In fact, Rowling acknowledged that the latter books of the Harry Potter series (specifically *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*) served as a sort of means for her to flesh out her struggles with her faith, particularly regarding the concepts of death and the afterlife. "The truth is that, like Graham Greene, my faith is sometimes that my faith will return. It's something I struggle with a lot," Rowling confessed during a press conference kicking off her Open Book Tour in 2007.[18] In other words, Rowling utilized the death of multiple beloved characters in her books as a means of coming to terms with her own difficulties with death. In an earlier interview with *Newsweek*[19] in 2000, Rowling admitted that upon reading back over "The Mirror of Erised"[20] chapter in *The Sorcerer's Stone,* she realized: "That [chapter] had been taken entirely—entirely—from how I

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[18] For the full interview, see: "'Harry Potter' Author J.K. Rowling Opens Up About Books' Christian Imagery." *MTV News*, 17 October 2007, www.mtv.com/news/1572107/harry-potter-author-jk-rowling-opens-up-about-books-christian-imagery/.
[19] For the full article, see: "Why Harry's Hot." *Newsweek*, 16 July 2000, www.newsweek.com/why-harrys-hot-162001.
[20] In the Mirror of Erised, the viewer is treated to an image of his heart's greatest desire. (Note that "Erised" is literally "desire" spelled backwards.) When gazing into the mirror, 11-year-old Harry, who was orphaned as an infant, eagerly drinks in the sight of his parents and entire distant family smiling and waving back at him. As Dumbledore gravely informs Harry, the mirror "shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 213).

felt about my mother's death…In fact, death and bereavement and what death means, I would say, is one of the central themes in all seven books."

Later in the series, the symbolic depiction of Harry's godfather Sirius Black's death, in which Sirius' body falls away behind a literal veil, seems especially evident of Rowling's own struggle in coming to terms with death. Even after watching a deadly spell hit Sirius "squarely on the chest," and watching his body fall away, Harry cannot grasp the gravity of what has happened. "'Get him, save him, he's only just gone through!'" Harry cries for his godfather, unable to comprehend the totality of death that exists behind such a seemingly thin layer of gossamer (*Order of the Phoenix*, 806). Harry's confused attitude toward death is continued in the final book of the series via multiple channels, including Harry and Hermione's discussion about the epitaph inscribed on his parents' graves: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (*Deathly Hallows*, 328). In one of the rare near-explicit mentions of Christianity Rowling allows throughout the series, this is a direct quotation from the New King James Version of 1 Corinthians 15:26. (With her final book, Rowling likely felt comfortable taking a more heavy-handed approach in guiding her readers toward deciphering the Christian undertones she had constantly been developing throughout the series.) Harry is at first appalled by the etching, interpreting it as a phrase attributable to Voldemort's followers, intent on defying death. Hermione tries to soothe Harry by shedding new light on the phrase, construing it as meaning "living beyond death. Living after death" (*Deathly Hallows*, 328). Of course, Hermione's interpretation of the phrase aligns with a Christian understanding of the eternal afterlife. Further complicating Rowling's treatment of the afterlife is the fact that the series' villain assumes a name for himself, Voldemort, which literally translates to "Flight of death."[21] His name becomes

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[21] A simple translation from French makes this interpretation evident: "vol" translates to "flight," "de" translates to "of/from," and "mort" translates to "death."

increasingly more fitting as the reader discovers that Voldemort has essentially thwarted death by practicing terrible, deplorably dark magic that requires rending his soul apart. With such a negative association attributed to someone who seeks immortality and wishes to avoid death at all costs, it is clear that Rowling believes death is a necessary, positive human function[22]—but that does not necessarily make accepting a loved one's death any easier.

Though Rowling's books have been banned and denigrated by bands of devoutly conservative Christians claiming that *Harry Potter* introduces children to the dangerous pagan art of witchcraft,[23] Rowling herself associates Christian themes with the series. In fact, Rowling admitted to tracing and integrating quite obvious Christian parallels in the *Harry Potter* series, as reported by MTV.com.[24] Rowling acknowledged, in language reminiscent of Tolkien's rejection of the directness of allegory, "To me [the religious parallels have] always been obvious…But I never wanted to talk too openly about it because I thought it might show people who just wanted the story where we are going." Indeed, Rowling's surmising was astute, for several readers more attuned to the resonances of the Christian story in *Harry Potter* likely did foresee the inevitability of Harry's self-sacrifice—including John Granger, who predicted in his 2004 book,

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[22] In fact, as Dumbledore gently instructs an 11-year-old Harry in *The Sorcerer's Stone*, "To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure" (297).

[23] According to the American Library Association website, the *Harry Potter* series claimed the #1 spot in "Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books" from 2000-2009 in the United States. (See: "Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books: 2000-2009." *American Library Association*, www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/top-100-bannedchallenged-books-2000-2009. Accessed 19 November 2018.) But America is not the only country with parents striving to protect their children from the "normalization of magic" in the books. One example is detailed in an article by *The Independent*, detailing how some British parents strongly recoiled against the "occult" nature of the books after teachers instructed their students to read portions of the *Harry Potter* series for class. "*Harry Potter* deals with the occult. There are many, many parents who are uncomfortable with their children discussing or looking at or reading anything at all do with the occult," school behaviorist Tom Bennett is quoted as saying at an event at London's City Hall. For the full article, see: "Religious parents offended by Harry Potter on school syllabus as it 'trivialises magic.'" *The Independent*, 16 December 2015, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/religious-parents-offended-by-harry-potter-on-school-syllabus-as-it-trivialises-magic-a6775516.html.

[24] Again, see: "'Harry Potter' Author J.K. Rowling Opens Up About Books' Christian Imagery." *MTV News*, 17 October 2007, www.mtv.com/news/1572107/harry-potter-author-jk-rowling-opens-up-about-books-christian-imagery/.

Looking For God in Harry Potter (published before the final two installments in Rowling's series):

> Harry's death is a probable end for the series….it jibes with what I think is becoming increasingly clear with each book: Harry's adventures, if not allegories, are at least an Everyman morality story about our life in Christ. I expect the books' finale will make this relatively obvious even to those who have persisted as long as they have in denying the Christian imagery and themes of the series. (Granger, 180-181)

In an effort to protect the less observant reader from drawing this conclusion too far in advance, Rowling avoided being blatantly obvious with the direction of her plot, in a similar vein to Tolkien's eschewing of allegory for its open and predictable qualities. Essentially, Rowling wished to prevent her readers from discerning too soon the climactic moment of the series, which she delays until Chapter 33 of *Deathly Hallows*, when Harry discovers he has no choice but to die, if the wizarding world is to be saved from Voldemort's clutches. Besides Rowling's own admission of the prevalence of Christian themes in her stories, many readers of faith have enthusiastically taken up the cause of further proving the Christian resonances of *Harry Potter*, resulting in a wide variety of materials from books like Granger's[25] to pamphlets earnestly instructing youth how to bring their peers around to Christianity through the means of *Harry Potter*.[26]

Despite their similarities in identifying with branches of the Christian religion and their admittance of a subsequent Christian influence on their fantastical literature, Rowling and

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[25] Granger, a devout Christian father, first took up the *Harry Potter* books in order to demonstrate to his children why the series was *not* acceptable for Christians to read—but soon found himself enthralled by the way "these stories resonate with the Great Story for which we all are designed" (Granger xvii).

[26] See: "Use Harry Potter to Spread Christian Message." *The Telegraph*, 17 July 2007, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1557693/Use-Harry-Potter-to-spread-Christian-message.html.

Tolkien develop the plot surrounding the final triumph of their most "Christ-like" characters in differing manners. Of course, it is crucial to emphasize the caveat that neither Harry nor Frodo, with their inherently human (or hobbit) flaws and failings, function as systematic, allegorical representations of Christ. Rather, the characters' likenesses to Christ may be drawn from their willing acceptances of the burden of self-sacrifice and the psychological implications inherent therein—although the protagonists' levels of success in carrying out their individual tasks are radically different. With this distinction in mind, I will explore scenes from both series in which the implicit religious element has the clearest opportunity to come through—and how the two authors responded in different ways to that challenge. I will first examine Harry's sacrifice in *Deathly Hallows*, analyzing the moments when he discovers he must die at Voldemort's hand, offers himself up, and returns to life, in relation to the Christ-story. Next, I will assess the moments in *The Lord of the Rings* where Frodo knowingly accepts the terrible burden of bearing the Ring along the treacherous path to Mount Doom, as well as Frodo's actions upon finally reaching the precipice and facing the decision to destroy the source of Sauron's power, once and for all. Finally, I will discuss these instances in conversation with each other, evaluating how Rowling and Tolkien differ in their willingness to create overt Christ-like parallels in the crucial climactic moments of their series, and the resulting effects of their respective moralistic narrative decisions on the thematic nature of their works and their resonances with Christianity.

Harry's Sacrifice

In the final chapters of the seventh installment of the *Harry Potter* series, Harry jerks back to the present, painfully aware of the dreadful truth. Finally, he has reached the moment of realization that every one of the books has been leading up to: the key to defeating Voldemort is Harry's sacrifice of himself. Put clearly: Harry must die at Voldemort's hand. With this solemn

realization, as "terror washed over him," the comparison of Harry's self-sacrifice to that of Christ's own sacrifice seems especially clear (692). As Christ died to atone for the sins of the world so that His believers might have the hope of eternal life, so must Harry perish in order for his friends to continue living in the present world. In addition, similarly to how Christ had never committed any sins and did not, in this sense, "deserve" to die, Harry has not done anything or chosen any particular path that caused him to be nominated as the sacrificial lamb. It is merely a cruel twist of fate, nothing more, that adjoined a portion of Voldemort's soul to Harry's when he was but an infant, necessitating his sacrifice in the present. And, similar to how no one but Christ could have shouldered the phenomenal burden of the sins of the world, no wizard but Harry is in the unique situation of being fundamentally fused with Lord Voldemort. No one has the ability to step in and sacrifice himself in Harry's place.[27]

Especially in his final moments in *Deathly Hallows*, Harry shares quite a few similarities with Christ. In fact, John Granger goes so far as to argue (in a book written prior to the release of *Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows*) that Rowling continually subscribes to a model where Harry "dies a figurative death" in every book, incurring an almost cyclical "Resurrection reference" throughout the series (21).[28] Harry could never be accused of being prone to

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[27] It is perhaps possible to argue that Harry "accepts" a burden of sorts when he finally learns, in *Order of the Phoenix*, of the prophecy that connects himself and Voldemort. The prophecy states that "Neither can live while the other survives," and Dumbledore confirms that ultimately, one of the two archenemies is destined to kill the other (844). However, it seems that Voldemort effectively forced Harry into this arrangement, when he chose Harry as the child he would kill, "believing he was fulfilling the terms of the prophecy" (839). At the point when 15-year-old Harry learns of the prophecy in *Order of the Phoenix*, he must either kill or be killed—which strikes me as less of a choice of accepting a burden, and more of a necessity of self-preservation. (Of course, this revelation in *Order of the Phoenix* occurs prior to the final blow in *Deathly Hallows*, where Harry must, indeed, accept the burden of self-sacrifice.)

[28] Granger explains further: "Harry doesn't just die in these stories, of course; he rises from the dead. And in case you think this is just a "great comeback" rather than a Resurrection reference, please note that Harry never saves himself but is always saved by a symbol of Christ or by love…in *Sorcerer's Stone*, it is his mother's sacrificial love and the Stone; in *Chamber of Secrets*, it is Fawkes the phoenix; in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, it is the white stag Patronus; in *Goblet of Fire*, it is the phoenix song; and in *Order of the Phoenix*, it is Harry's love for Sirius, Ron, and Hermione that defeats the Dark Lord" (22-23).

selfishness or cowardliness, and the situation in *Deathly Hallows* is no different. In coming to terms with the fact that he must, indeed, die, Harry reflects that, "His will to live had always been so much stronger than his fear of death. Yet it did not occur to him now to try to escape, to outrun Voldemort. It was over, he knew it, and all that was left was the thing itself: dying" (692). Kate Behr emphasizes in her essay, "Philosopher's Stone to Resurrection Stone: Narrative Transformations and Intersecting Cultures across the *Harry Potter* Series," which outlines the connections that are brought full circle from the first book to the last, that "Choosing death is the only way [Harry] can win…Rowling, therefore closes her series by referring not to a classical understanding of life without death but to the Christian one of *death* overcoming death" (269, emphasis added). In this way, Harry's acceptance of the course laid out before him mirrors Christ's own acknowledgement, in the Garden of Gethsemane, of the necessity of His own death: "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will"* (*New King James Version*, Matthew 26:39). As Mike Cadden notes, "Harry's final decision to face and likely be killed by Voldemort pushes what might simply have been irony toward the ironic tragedy of Jesus allowing Pilate to do what must be done to fulfill prophecy and make things right" (352). Neither Jesus nor Harry were eager to give themselves over to death, but they both recognized that this was their cruel, yet necessary task, an obligation they alone owed to the rest of the world.

Another way in which Harry's situation leading up to his death emulates that of Christ's is his conference with his loved ones, through the aid of the Resurrection Stone. After turning the stone over thrice, Harry opens his eyes to reveal a group of those already departed to the "other side," come to guide him through his own transition to death. His father and mother are in

attendance, as are Sirius, his godfather, and Lupin, his mentor. “Does it hurt?” he asks them. They reassure him that it won’t. As he gathers his resolve, he entreats them to stay by his side:

> “You’ll stay with me?”
>
> “Until the very end,” said James…
>
> “We are part of you,” said Sirius. “Invisible to anyone else.”
>
> Harry looked at his mother. “Stay close to me,” he said quietly. (700)

This tender moment parallels Christ’s period of contemplation and prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. While He communicates with God, His Father, through prayer about the necessity of death, He also communes with His earthly disciples, His friends, for solace and strength. The Gospel of Matthew narrates, “Then He said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” (Matthew 26: 38). In these heartbreaking final moments, both Harry and Jesus seem to attempt to draw support and steadying determination from some of their dearest companions, in order to have the strength necessary to follow through with their sacrifices.[29]

After drawing strength from his dearest, deceased loved ones, Harry enters, accompanied by the strength of this ghostly entourage, the clearing where Voldemort and his followers are encamped. Unarmed, making no effort at defending himself, Harry offers himself up to Voldemort’s wand. Rowling affords the reader one last glimpse of Harry’s psychology as he draws his last breaths: “Harry looked back into [Voldemort’s] red eyes, and wanted it to happen now, quickly, while he could still stand, before he lost control, before he betrayed fear—” (704).

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[29] It is important to note an important divergence from Christ here, though: while Harry is surrounded by the apparitions of his loved ones through to the very end, Christ was abandoned by His disciples. Not only did they fall asleep when He beseeched them to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:45), they could not accompany Him in the same way that Harry’s cadre bunched around him, up until the final moments when he drew his last breath. Further, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, Simon Peter, denied Him three times, as He lay dying on the cross (Luke 22:55-62).

Notably, this moment draws quite the parallel with Jesus' appeal to His disciples to pray with Him and for Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus implored His friends to support Him, saying, "The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak" (Matthew 26:41). Indeed, in one of the most moving passages that sheds rare insight into the emotional psychology of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of Luke narrates that, as Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, "being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). An actual, extremely rare medical condition called hematohidrosis results in "blood oozing from intact skin and mucosa," according to the National Institute for Health. The cause of this condition is unknown, but theories relate hematohidrosis to "high blood pressure, fear and intense emotional distress." It seems reasonable to assume Jesus Christ experienced these intense stressors in the excruciating moments leading up to His crucifixion. In acknowledging Harry's underlying sense of a trepidation that borders on absolute fear in his final moments, Rowling seems to be, at the very least, giving a nod to the emotions Christ not only expressed in His words, but physically displayed, demonstrating that a human's internal resolve can only be upheld so long against the natural self-preservation inclinations of the body.

But then, in "a flash of green light…everything was gone" (704). Voldemort utters the deadly words of the Killing Curse and points his wand, and Harry is no more. Through his sacrifice, Harry ensures that Voldemort inadvertently demolishes another portion of the evil wizard's own soul. In a manner similar to Christ drawing His final breaths on the cross, Harry still willingly gives himself over to his persecutors, dying to fulfill the lot that is solely his to undertake—and the Christian parallels in Harry's story do not end there. Harry regains consciousness in a ghostly "between" place highly reminiscent of King's Cross Station, but ethereal, swathed in mist.

Suddenly, his deceased mentor, the venerated wizard Albus Dumbledore, appears to Harry, trying to help him make sense of this "between place" and the state he has found himself in:

> "But you're dead," said Harry.
>
> "Oh yes," said Dumbledore matter-of-factly.
>
> "Then…I'm dead too?"
>
> "Ah," said Dumbledore, smiling still more broadly. "That is the question, isn't it? On the whole, dear boy, I think not." (707)

Dumbledore goes on to explain that, as an effect of being not entirely dead and not fully alive, Harry now finds himself at a crossroads. Harry faces a choice: to "board a train," as it were, and go "on" into the afterlife, or to return back to life (722). Emphasizing that the decision is entirely Harry's, Dumbledore gently instructs him: "Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love" (722). In many ways, Dumbledore's wisdom in this moment seems to echo Christ's own teachings about the paramount importance of love, with verses like: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength…Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31). Dumbledore continues to address Harry: "By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart. If that seems to you a worthy goal, then we say good-bye for the present" (722). And of course, Harry, acknowledging the danger, pain, and sorrow he is bound to re-encounter by rejoining the fray of the battle, yet ever cognizant of his loved ones counting on him for the salvation of the wizarding world, chooses the course Dumbledore is nudging him toward: Harry performs another sort of self-sacrifice, and returns to the uncertainty of life.

Naturally, Harry's return to life is far from an exact replication of Christ's own resurrection to his flesh-and-blood body. Harry's encounter with Dumbledore in the shadowy King's Cross Station lasts but a matter of moments—scarcely enough time for him to have been prepared for burial and entombed, as Christ was. Yet the fact remains that Harry, too, again finds his heart beating and his lungs drawing breath. In the final face-off, Harry triumphs over his cruel, evil archenemy, in a manner reminiscent of Christ's conquering over Satan, forcing him to relinquish his clutches on the world and obliterating the certainty of eternal death for those who believe in Christ's sacrifice. This equating of Voldemort's defeat with the Christian triumph over sin is supported by Susan Johnston's claims in her article, "*Harry Potter*, Eucatastrophe, and Christian Hope," in which she states that "Voldemort occupies a hell of his own making, in that he has anticipated his own final end; taking physical life as the end—purpose, goal—of all life, he hopes only that death may be averted, and thus does not hope at all" (79).[30] In his own personal hell, Voldemort has fallen prey to the great untruth which, according to Christian tradition, Satan would have human beings believe: the bleak resignation that there is nothing else to be hoped for beyond this mortal life, so it should be clung to forcefully and jealously. Rowling describes the fall of her villain: "Tom Riddle hit the floor with a mundane finality…Voldemort was dead, killed by his own rebounding curse, and Harry stood with two wands in his hand, staring down at his enemy's shell" (744). Calling Voldemort by his true, given name, Tom Riddle, and emphasizing the "mundane" impact of his limp body falling to the floor, Rowling

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[30] It seems only fair to note here that Johnston does *not* view Harry as a Christ-figure (68, 88). Instead, she sees the greatest signifier of Christian hope (and even Tolkien's eucatastrophe), in the character of Severus Snape. Johnston roots her claim in Snape's discovery that, though he has been striving all along to protect Harry's life (due to the enduring strength of his love for Lily, Harry's mother), all of Snape's discreet protective actions have actually been leading up to the inevitability of Harry's death. "…[Snape continues to protect Harry] no longer in the hope of keeping Lily-in-Harry alive, nor even Harry, but in the hope that good may triumph, that 'the long defeat' may be arrested…Snape's renunciation of this little hope, in service of the greater, is in fact, painful as it is, the final consolation…that expresses both the fullness of his hope and the fullness of his humanity" (77).

underscores her point that the solipsistic Dark Lord has truly been defeated, reduced back to a human being who no longer holds any greater power of terror over the rest of the world.

Of note is the detail that Voldemort essentially dies at his own hand; Harry is never actually required to perform the Killing Curse. Through careful plot maneuvering, an intricacy in the details of wand ownership and allegiance has led the powerful wand in Voldemort's hand to owe its loyalty to Harry. Rowling's hero may perform the awesome deed of defeating the Dark Lord with the use of *Expelliarmus*, a simple Disarming spell he learned at the age of twelve,[31] and Voldemort's own deadly exclamation of *Avada Kedavra* rebounds upon himself. In this regard, at least, Harry remains pure, his soul unsoiled by the exacting toll of taking another human life—even one as marred and evil as Voldemort's. Ultimately, Harry is returned, very much alive, to the full capacities of his earthly body, the Dark Lord is vanquished, good wins the day with a resounding victory that restores peace and the hope of life not lived in fear to the wizarding world—all only possible because Harry selflessly gave himself up to die the necessary hero's death. In constructing the climax and denouement of the entire series, Rowling appears to dare to equate Harry with the death and subsequent resurrection of Christ in a way that Tolkien, with his reverence for the divine, was much more hesitant about.

Frodo's Burden

Up until the moment of Harry's death and subsequent resurrection in *Deathly Hallows*, the scenes of Harry grappling with the terrible burden he must bear parallel quite neatly with Tolkien's depiction of Frodo at his own critical moment of decision that the entirety of *The Lord of the Rings* ominously builds up to: casting the dark, powerful Ring into Mount Doom, ensuring the evil object's destruction once and for all. In his duties as Ringbearer, Frodo has always

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[31] See "The Dueling Club" in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

known it would fall upon him to destroy the accursed Ring—and yet, Frodo, unlike Harry in his final moments, is far from successful, actually failing to remove the Ring from his own finger. In fact, T.A. Shippey, a scholar with several volumes of critical work devoted to Tolkien, argues that "it would be wrong to suggest that [Frodo] is a Christ-figure, an allegory of Christ…Yet he represents something related: perhaps, an image of natural humanity trying to do its best in native decency" (*Author of the Century*, 187). (I disagree with Shippey, up to a point—I recognize that Frodo is not, of course, a true allegorical Christ-figure, but I believe there is still value in exploring the ways his journey points back to that of Christ. Frodo is Christ-like insofar as he's put into a position in which only Christ could succeed—and thus he fails. Frodo is in Christ's position, but he is not Christ, nor an allegory of Christ. Of critical distinction here is the word "like," in Christ-*like*, qualifying our understanding that Frodo is not to be perceived as a complete Christ-figure.) Ultimately, Tolkien and Rowling's portrayals of their characters at the pivotal points of their series diverge when Harry steels himself, and then actually carries out the terrible action he finds himself tasked with. Frodo, on the other hand, actually falters—and not just falters, but fails.

One moment where Frodo's likening to Christ is actually very strong is his volunteering, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, to bear the burden of the Ring. His acceptance, with the knowledge of the full weight of the task he is consigning himself to undertake, occurs when the half-elven Lord of Rivendell, Elrond, gathers representatives from across Middle-earth for a council. Although Frodo technically carries the Ring for several harrowing adventures prior to the Council of Elrond, it is after learning of the Ring's dark and troubled history and immense power that he finds himself still offering to continue bearing it on to Mordor. Indeed, he volunteers himself even after listening to Gandalf solemnly weigh whether the task will encroach on the

territories of despair or folly: "It is not despair, for despair is only for those who see the end beyond all doubt. We do not…though as folly it may appear to those who cling to false hope" (*Lord of the Rings*, 269). Gandalf does allow for some sliver of hope that this tremendous task might be completed with his negation of the conviction "beyond all doubt," but it is clear that even the wizard believes the chances of the quest succeeding are slim and dependent on the enemy's miscalculation of their motives. The reader is under no uncertain impression that for Frodo to venture into Mordor and go up against Sauron, against evil, is risking almost certain doom. In an article for *The Critical Quarterly*, W.H. Auden emphasizes this idea: "Sauron's opponents are a formidable lot but, in sheer strength, Sauron is, even without the Ring, their superior" (140). In other words, Frodo and the others on the side of good do not quite expect themselves to be successful—which makes Frodo's decision to volunteer himself, not to mention his continual grim courage in the face of evil, near sacrificial and especially Christ-like.

In spite of being at least somewhat cognizant that the odds are stacked against him, Frodo offers to serve as the Ringbearer. Wordlessly, he listens to Elrond's reflective remarks that "neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far…This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong" (269). He watches as his father-like figure, Bilbo, obligatorily, almost resignedly, presents himself for the job and is thanked for his offer of service, but denied. Somehow, Frodo feels called to put himself forward, although certainly by no pressures of the council themselves, none of whom were even looking in his direction. Tolkien is explicitly clear that the council "sat with downcast eyes, as if in deep thought" (270). After experiencing a wash of emotions, Frodo finds himself speaking, offering to be the person responsible for carrying the Ring to its doom. In analyzing the hobbit's decision to volunteer, the entire passage where Frodo

notes his inner turmoil and ultimately voices his decision is worth examining, as it contains language especially evocative of Christ's own emotions about His self-sacrifice:

> A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken. An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice. (*Lord of the Rings*, 270)

As theological scholars are aware, the Bible never offers any insight into the private discussion or understanding that passed between God the Father, and Christ, His Son, upon deciding that Christ should descend to Earth and die for the innumerable sins of the entire world. Therefore, in comparing how Frodo's moment of acceptance might mirror Christ's, it is useful to consult Book III of Milton's renowned *Paradise Lost*, in which "The Son of God freely offers himself a ransom for man" (62). First, the moment where Christ offers himself to atone for human sin parallels Frodo's offering up of himself:

> He asked, but all the heav'nly choir stood mute,
> And silence was in heav'n on man's behalf…
> And now without redemption all mankind
> Must have been lost, adjudged to death and hell
> By doom severe, had not the Son of God,
> In whom the fullness dwells of love divine,
> His dearest mediation thus renewed. (69)

Strikingly, in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Paradise* Lost, out of unwilling, uncomfortable silence comes the voice of the one individual willing to offer himself to accept the terrible

burden. The implications for *The Lord of the Rings* are just as grim as those in *Paradise Lost*: in both cases, the doom (the literal word "doom" appears in both texts) and redemption of the world rested upon the one being who was willing to volunteer himself.

Furthermore, in Milton's envisioning of the emotions surrounding Christ's volunteering to descend to Earth and bear the sins of the world, it is the idea of forsaking Paradise, more so than the filial relationship with His Father, that most stirs the Son's heart. Milton describes Christ's offering of himself:

> I offer, on me let thine anger fall;
> Account me man; I for his sake will leave
> Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
> Freely put off, and for him lastly die
> Well pleased, on me let Death wreck all his rage…
> [I] Shall enter heaven long absent, and return,
> Father, to see thy face, wherein no cloud
> Of anger shall remain, but peace assured (70-71)

With phrases like "Thy bosom," "this glory," and "heaven long absent," Milton emphasizes the rapturous safety and bliss of Paradise that Christ knowingly forsook—much like Frodo's "longing to rest and remain at peace" in the elven sanctuary (270). Christ most certainly longed to remain in Heaven, at the right hand of His own Father, a position He had held since "the beginning."[32] Indeed, we *do* know from the biblical text that once Jesus Christ had become fully man and yet fully God, He *did* experience the human emotions of trepidation and even reluctance as the moment of his crucifixion drew nigh, as mentioned in the prior discussion of Christ in the

[32] As evidenced by John 1:1-5, interpreting the intentionally capitalized "Word" as a representation of Jesus.

Garden of Gethsemane. In other words, the emotions Frodo displays upon accepting the burden of the Ring could also feasibly be attributed to Christ, strengthening the argument that the hobbit can be viewed as a Christ-like figure.

The ominous quality of the passage where Frodo offers himself up certainly does evoke a Christ-like sacrificial resonance of shouldering a heavy burden—the usage of the word "doom" and the phrase "long foreseen" both highlight the gravity of the situation. Frodo's conception of his own "doom" is similar to the Son's fate in *Paradise Lost*: when no angels or other heavenly beings volunteered, it is the Son, and Him alone, destined to carry out the terrible sacrifice on Earth. Furthermore, Frodo's yearning to remain in the elven sanctuary of Rivendell, with the comforting presence of his father-figure, Bilbo, might be read as mirroring the Son's own reluctance to depart from the peace and assurance of his godly station. And yet, both Frodo and Christ overcome their desires to remain ensconced in the protection of others, instead setting out from their respective strongholds to face head-on the certainty of pain and difficulty, with the slight comfort of the knowledge that they were carrying out the hope of the greater good. Akin to how, when Christ first entered the world, the eternal salvation of mankind unknowingly rested with a mere child born out of wedlock, the hopes of Middle-earth were placed upon the shoulders of a simple hobbit.

After volunteering to bear this burden and undergoing a series of hardships and heroic adventures, Frodo finally treks across the last hard, dangerous stretch of Middle-earth.[33] At some level, the final moments of Frodo's journey are comparable to Christ's final moments prior to His crucifixion, during which He was in the midst of His own version of "enemy territory"

[33] It is worth noting that yet another manner in which Tolkien's depiction of his hero differs from Rowling's is that Frodo's moment of knowingly accepting his burden and then carrying out the final element of his task is staggered entire books apart, whereas Harry learns about the necessity of his self-sacrifice and then carries it out within hours.

among the Romans, made to bear the physical burden of His own cross,[34] and berated, both physically and verbally, by scorning masses of both soldiers and priests.[35] In Frodo's case, the hobbit, carrying the immense physical burden of the Ring, arrives at the heart of Sauron's lair, the precipice of Mount Doom. This is the climactic moment he has been anticipating his entire journey: he has reached Sauron's stronghold, the sole location where the Ring and all its evil power may finally be destroyed. The entire series has been leading up to this pivotal moment, and Frodo himself feels the weight of the occasion, ominously remarking: "This is the end at last. On Mount Doom doom shall fall" (944).

The path to the edge is surprisingly clear; all that remains is for Frodo to pick up the Ring and toss it into the pit. At last, Frodo is mere moments away from being free of his terrible burden. Unlike Harry, Frodo does not even have to wrestle with the difficult knowledge of facing certain death. Though traveling to Mount Doom was unquestionably a terrible journey, fraught with peril, in this crucial moment, Frodo is not obliged to lay down his life in order for his task to be completed—it is only the Ring that he must relinquish. But still, at the precipice of Mount Doom, Frodo hesitates. He is near the precipice when he announces his terrible choice: "'I have come,' he said. 'But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!'" (945). With this terrible proclamation, he places the Ring on his own finger. Although Frodo has, arguably, made many good decisions throughout the course of his life and along his journey through Middle-earth, he cannot help but be allured by the Ring's power in the moment when his decision matters most. For a terrible pause after Frodo succumbs to the power of the Ring, it seems that evil will triumph. Then Gollum appears, besieged by a fervent desire to

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[34] That is, Jesus was made to bear His own cross until the Roman soldiers ordered Simon of Cyrene to bear Jesus' cross for Him, because He was too weak from their torture to bear it on His own (Mark 27:32).

[35] Mark 27:27-30 denotes the soldiers' abuse of Jesus, while Mark 27:39-44 relates the priests' mockery.

take back the Ring he perceives as rightfully his. Crazed and incensed, Gollum bites off Frodo's finger bearing the Ring and falls into the fiery pit, leading to his own demise. Gollum's foolhardy attempt to regain the Ring leads to its destruction only inadvertently. The fact remains that, in the moment of paramount importance, Frodo faltered, and chose to claim the Ring for himself. In this way, Frodo displays the incompetency of hobbitkind (or humankind, if you will,) and his inability to carry his burden through to completion, clear evidence that he is ultimately not meant to be compared to the Savior of the universe. Only Christ can redeem original sin and overcome evil—and Frodo is not Christ.

Conclusion: Harry's Success and Frodo's Failure

Viewing Rowling's and Tolkien's series in conjunction with each other, it is certainly worth exploring that, despite her own honest admission that her faith is tenuous at times, Rowling is the most overt of the two in drawing the Christian parallel in her story to its full completion.[36] Harry follows through on his self-sacrifice, experiences physical death, and then triumphantly returns from the dead to conquer Voldemort, once and for all. Notably, numerous writers searching for Christian resonances have defended the inherent Christianity in Rowling's work beyond even this basic parallel, noting everything from her inclusion of Fawkes, the phoenix, as evoking a Middle-Age Christian symbol,[37] the idea of individual Christian *charismata*, or spiritual gifts, echoed in the four Hogwarts houses,[38] and the Christian meaning[39]

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[36] Although it is still important to bear in mind what Sylvia Kelso underscores in "The God in the Pentagram: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Fantasy," in that these two "texts that might most often be cited as epitomizing fantasy as of 2008…firmly exclude any form of gods, and of established religions as well" (62).
[37] See: "Harry Potter Rich With Christian Allusion, Says Baylor Philosophy Prof." *Baylor Media and Public Relations*, 15 July 2005, www.baylor.edu/mediacommunications/news.php?action=story&story=34796.
[38] See "Chapter Two: Harry Potter and Christian Theology," contributed by Peter Ciaccio to *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*. (Pages 35-37 are specifically devoted to *charismata*.)
[39] See "Chapter 10: Fun with Names," in John Granger's *Looking For God in Harry Potter*.

in the names of Rowling's characters.[40] Nevertheless, her Christian themes in the *Harry Potter* series are not so absolute and explicit that the reader notices them without a bit of reading between the lines.[41] In a 2010 *New Yorker* article, Macy Halford draws attention to the fact that, despite the slew of books devoted to revealing the Christian resonances in Rowling's work, the widespread appeal of the series is the fact that it does not make these Christian undertones so apparent as to smother the pleasurably relatable aspects of the plot for readers of all backgrounds and convictions:

> It follows that [Rowling] wrote the books in a way that obscures their underlying religiosity, that the Christianity in *Harry Potter* is buried so deep that a whole host of books has had to be published to dig it up. It follows that readers who aren't looking for Christian parallels, which is to say the vast majority of *Harry Potter* readers (kids never read in this way), won't even know they're there. (Halford)

There is certainly room to take issue with various aspects of Halford's claims, including her position that children never notice subtle themes layered throughout the text (Tolkien himself would have particularly bristled at this demeaning of children readers)[42] and her later comparison

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[40] Of course, many claims about the abundant references to Christianity cropping up throughout the minutiae of the series are likely to meet with pushback from readers more skeptical of the idea that religious references appear so liberally throughout Rowling's work. In comparison, the claim that the basic events of Christ's sacrifice are paralleled through Harry's is sure to meet with less resistance, as the deployment relies on subtlety, and is supported with direct evidence (in the form of interviews) of Rowling's stated intentions to evoke resonances of the Christ-story.

[41] Even Baylor University Philosophy Professor Scott H. Moore, who defends the "Christian virtues" of *Harry Potter*, acknowledged that not all children are likely to notice the rich Christian symbolism he himself observes in the series through his article, "Why I Am Looking Forward to Harry Potter," republished by Baylor Media Communications. Moore provided an anecdote of trying to explain to his 14-year-old son the link between the magical game of "quidditch" and the concept of "quiddity," which Moore describes as "the essence or 'whatness' that makes a thing what it is." After Moore made an elaborate attempt at excitedly explaining the connection, his son merely rolled his eyes.

[42] Tolkien wrote in "On Fairy Stories": "But humility and innocence—these things 'the heart of a child' must mean in such a context—do not necessarily imply an uncritical wonder, nor indeed an uncritical tenderness" (136). In other words, it seems quite clear that Tolkien attributes a critical curiosity to children readers, who may in fact, depending upon their age and background, be up to the task of deducing Christian themes on their own in works like Rowling's.

of the *Harry Potter* series to Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, equating their "religious elements" as being comparably "subtle." As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, a substantial argument can be made that the religious themes of C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles* are much more explicit than Rowling's. Lewis constructs a clear-cut analogy of a Christ-figure in Aslan, the great, golden lion who is pure, powerful, majestic and awe-inspiring, and who sacrifices himself to the evil White Witch and then returns back to life in order to secure redemption for all of Narnia. Further refuting Halford, it is of note that Christian resonances do not necessarily drastically reduce a fantastical work's readership—Lewis' *Chronicles* have gained support from Christians and non-Christians alike. As an example, Meghan O'Rourke writes in an article for *Slate* that beyond the Christian allegory, "The real genius of Narnia is the way Lewis built, out of a hodgepodge of literary traditions and predecessors, a patchwork world of unconventional characters who understand and instruct children without seeking to domesticate or indoctrinate them. The result is indelible, and anything but strictly allegorical." O'Rourke points out that a reader can and should admire and enjoy Lewis' *Chronicles* for the literary qualities of his work. In a similar vein, even a fantastical work's repudiation of Christian principles does not bar it from becoming popular—one only has to look at the success of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy[43] to ascertain that fact. Nevertheless, Halford's underlying point is valuable in her recognition that audiences of all backgrounds and faiths can find enjoyment in reading *Harry Potter*, without necessarily identifying the elements of Christianity potentially discernible in the series.

Beyond the pervasive hope of the series appealing to the universal community of readers, for those viewing the books from a Christian perspective, Rowling exercises little caution in

[43] The "The Books" page of Pullman's website lists his literary accolades as including: "the 2001 Whitbread Book of the Year prize, won by The Amber Spyglass. Northern Lights won the Carnegie Medal for children's fiction in the UK in 1995. The trilogy took third place in the BBC's Big Read poll in 2003." See: http://www.philip-pullman.com/hdm.

developing the full Christ-like parallel with Harry. Yet the argument for Tolkien's construction of a Christ-figure ultimately breaks down when Frodo succumbs to temptation and slips the Ring onto his own finger. The circumstance begs a nuanced question: If Tolkien is, indeed, perceived as the more steadfastly faithful of the two authors, evidenced by his musings on his own faith and his exhortations to his own children to remain faithful[44] (both documented in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*), his successful conversion of his literary companion, C.S. Lewis, to Christianity, and his articulated system for incorporating Christianity into his fiction via his theory of "sub-creation," then why is he more reluctant than Rowling to allow this illustration of the Christ-story in his work to reach its full completion?

There are, of course, many plausible explanations for Tolkien constructing Frodo's final moment of failure in the way that he did, including the simple explanation that this arrangement was what worked most cohesively with the plot the author had envisioned all along. However, perhaps the case most aligned with Christian views for Tolkien's construction of the plot includes the author's eschewing of allegory and his affection for his self-coined concept of the "eucatastrophe." Examining first Tolkien's distaste for allegory in his work, it is useful to consider his view of the literary device on a similar plane to a poet and literary critic whose work he would have been well acquainted with: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, particularly his writings on Imagination and Fancy. Similar to Tolkien's distinction between Primary and Secondary Creation, Coleridge outlined an idea of the imagination as either primary or secondary, seemingly also rooted in his personal religious perspective. Coleridge held that the Primary

[44] One such example of Tolkien contemplating the religiosity of his work in correspondence with his son occurs in a letter he sent Christopher in 1944: "I concluded by saying that the Resurrection…produces that essential emotion: Christian joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow…Of course I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is *only* a fairy-story; but I do mean very strongly that they do tell a fairy-story: the greatest" (*Letters*, 100).

Imagination was "the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind to the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (126). Secondary Imagination, on the other hand, Coleridge deemed "an echo of the former…it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create….it is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (126). One cannot help but notice the similarities in Coleridge's musings to Tolkien's own theory of sub-creation as subordinate to God's Primary work, drawing inspiration from and ultimately praising the Primary World.

Additionally, Coleridge seems to equate the idea of Fancy with that of allegory, noting that in order for Fancy to function, it relies on associating one object with another. Coleridge writes in his "Extract 33-F: Biographia Literaria," "But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association" (127). In much the same way, Tolkien also viewed the limitations of allegory, as a strict 1:1 interpretation where one object or idea unquestionably represents another, as not allowing his work to be as living or free as he envisioned. Corresponding with the publisher, Stanley Unwin, as he began writing *The Lord of the Rings,* Tolkien expressed concerns that his new writing was "becoming more terrifying than *The Hobbit*," and that "the darkness of the present days has had some effect on it" (*Letters*, 41). Writing from England in October 1938, it is hardly surprising that Tolkien found himself influenced by the darkness and uncertainty of the year preceding the outbreak of World War II. Yet, despite acknowledging that current events were likely having an impact on his writing, Tolkien was quick to follow those worries with a firm declaration about the work that was shaping up to be *The Lord of the Rings*: "It is not an 'allegory'" (*Letters*, 41).[45] Tolkien

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[45] Tolkien himself points out that, had he been crafting a direct allegory of World War II in *The Lord of the Rings*, the fate of Middle-Earth would have been very different. "If [World War II] had inspired or directed the development of the legend [referring to *LOTR*], then certainly the Ring would have been seized and used against Sauron; he would not have been annihilated but enslaved, and Barad-dûr would not have been destroyed but

scholar T.A. Shippey presents a theory in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* on why Tolkien might so adamantly oppose allegory: "One of the differences between applicability and allegory, between myth and legend, must be that myth and applicability are timeless, allegory and legend time-constrained" (188). Essentially, Shippey argues that by crafting the objects in his fiction to be symbolic, or allowing multiple derivations or interpretations of their meanings, Tolkien was packaging his work so that it might be applicable and relatable across a larger span of time, not solely to those readers who had lived through the horrors of one particular world-rending war.

In a summarization of the historical view of allegory from the lens of literary criticism, Edward A. Bloom offers the following:

> With increasing maturity of critical judgment, with growing recognition that a literary form is more than a mere framework for the superficial support and subordination of a secondary moral notion, allegory began to fall into disfavor even in the receptive climate of eighteenth-century didacticism…Coleridge likewise holds allegory in low regard. Although he devotes much attention to allegory, his primary purpose is to distinguish it from symbol, a superior form. As an esthetic conveyance, allegory holds no charms for Coleridge… (181-82, 185)

Bloom goes on to write that Coleridge's views came to represent the dominant view of nineteenth-century literary criticism, namely, that the allegory had fallen out of vogue, and was now viewed a less sophisticated form of writing, as, "on the whole, esthetic judgment is beginning seriously to supplant the didactic, and such a patently didactic form as allegory is

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occupied. Saruman, failing to get possession of the Ring, would in the confusion and treacheries of the time have found in Mordor the missing links in his own researches into Ring-lore, and before long he would have made a Great Ring of his own with which to challenge the self-styled Ruler of Middle-earth. In that conflict both sides would have held hobbits in hatred and contempt: they would not long have survived even as slaves," Tolkien writes in his Foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (xxiv).

inevitably doomed to condemnation" (186). Duriez, an aforementioned Tolkien critic, seems to summarize this concept in relation to Tolkien, conjecturing that the author disliked allegory because it is "too conscious, with not enough imaginative making" (140). In other words, Tolkien was well aware of the standing of allegory by the twentieth century—whether for aesthetic or critical intentions (or a hybrid of both), he sharply objected to the term being associated with his fiction. Tolkien's stance on allegory lends further support to the idea that the author would not have felt it wise to create a direct Christ-story parallel in *The Lord of the Rings*, based on how he knew such a directly didactic tale would be received among both everyday readers and his peers in the literary world.

Furthermore, Tolkien's portrayal in *The Lord of the Rings* of evil as fundamentally insurmountable and as, for the briefest moment, having won the day, sets the stage for one of the author's favorite literary devices: his self-termed "eucatastrophe." Arguably the most direct way in which Tolkien chose to portray elements of Christianity in his fiction was via inclusion of the eucatastrophe, a term he personally coined in his essay, "On Fairy-Stories," to refer to "a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur" (*M&C,* 153). In Tolkien's view, the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, assumed human form and sacrificed himself for the redemption of all believers when all seemed lost and the sins of the world were beyond atonement was, itself, the greatest, truest Eucatastrophe the world has ever known, the "substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Naturally, Tolkien himself best explains the essence at which he was aiming to grasp with the term eucatastrophe:

> And all of a sudden I realized what it was: the very thing that I have been trying to write about and explain—in that fairy-story essay…For it I coined the word 'eucatastrophe':

> the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears….and I was there led to the view that it produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb out of joint had suddenly snapped back…(*Letters*, 100)

In this letter to his then-20-year-old son, Christopher, in 1944, Tolkien relates the epiphanic moment when he realized the nature of eucatastrophe and the role it could, and did, play in his fiction: a means of pointing back, for just a brief moment, to what Tolkien perceived as the fundamental truth and joy of the universe. As such, small eucatastrophes are evident throughout *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy as echoes of the promise of the Great Eucatastrophe, such as Gandalf seemingly returning from the dead as Gandalf the White,[46] Eowyn triumphing over the Witch-King,[47] and, of course, the Ring ultimately being destroyed, even after Frodo has chosen to keep it for himself at the precipice of Mount Doom.[48]

Considering Frodo's failure, then, from the lens of creating a moment of eucatastrophe, it is obvious that Frodo must fail in order for the sudden upturn of good to occur—because ultimately, Tolkien knew that Frodo cannot literally *be* Christ, without sin. Nevertheless, in examining the structure of the plot, Frodo *has* had a hand in ultimately bringing about the fortuitous occurrence of the Ring's destruction, because of the steadfast pity and mercy he had shown to Gollum. Even prior to Frodo leaving the Shire, Gandalf had sternly guided the hobbit toward eliciting pity for Gollum, prophesying that, "I have not much hope that Gollum can be

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[46] Gandalf is first revealed to his friends as Gandalf the White in the chapter "The White Rider." "His hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand. Between wonder, joy, and fear they stood and found no words to say…'Yes, I am white now,' said Gandalf…"'I have passed through fire and deep water, since we parted'" (494-495).
[47] See the chapter entitled "The Battle of the Pelennor Fields," in *The Return of the King*, particularly pages 841-842. "A swift stroke she dealt, skilled and deadly…A light fell about her, and her hair shone in the sunrise" (842).
[48] See the "Mount Doom" chapter in *The Return of the King*, particularly pages 946-947.

cured before he dies, but there is a chance of it…My heart tells me that [Gollum] has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not least" (*Fellowship*, 59). As the plot progressed, if Frodo had not experienced a welling of pity[49] and allowed Gollum not only to live, but to accompany them on their journey, then Gollum would not have been present at Mount Doom at the exact moment in time necessary to bring the eucatastrophe into effect (albeit unintentionally). At the conclusion of the "Mount Doom" chapter, Frodo draws this conjecture for Sam (and the reader), explaining that, "But for [Gollum], Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over" (947). Frodo's emphasis on forgiveness here is striking, especially considering that, after succumbing to the power of the Ring, Frodo is in need of forgiveness, too. Through Frodo, Tolkien tries to subtly guide the reader toward realizing that the hobbits' prior interactions with Gollum, up until that final climactic scene, were all instrumental to the successful carrying out of the eucatastrophe. In other words, the miraculous upturn for good hinged upon the actions, both merciful and disastrous, of imperfect characters.

Tolkien's steadfast conviction that his work should be subordinate to that of the Primary Creator's perhaps entails, in his mind, that he will not even attempt to mirror Christ's sacrifice or suggest that his characters may be compared to Christ. In a letter discussing the fundamental issue he took with the Arthurian myth, Tolkien wrote, "[the Arthurian myth] is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion…that seems to me fatal. Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth…but not explicit, not

[49] "'But still I am afraid. And yet, as you see, I will not touch the creature. For now that I see him, I do pity him,'" Frodo remarks to himself, upon re-hearing Gandalf's remonstrations in his head (615). After allowing Gollum to continue with them, "…a change, which lasted for some time, came over [Gollum]…he was friendly, and indeed pitifully anxious to please" (618-619).

in the known form of the primary 'real' world" (*Letters*, 144). From an artist's perspective, Tolkien found beauty in discretion. But beyond literary art, from a purely theological standpoint, it deeply resonated with Tolkien that nothing he created would ever measure up to the actions of Christ; he was fundamentally aware that there could be no direct imitation of the divine.[50] He effectively says as much, this time in relation to his own work, in a later letter clarifying that from the outset of the trilogy, Frodo was destined to fail:

> …Not only was it quite impossible for [Frodo] to surrender the Ring, in act or will, especially at its point of maximum power, but that this failure was adumbrated from far back. He was honored because he had accepted the burden voluntarily, and had then done all that was within his utmost physical and mental strength to do. He (and the Cause) were saved—by Mercy: by the supreme value and efficacy of Pity and forgiveness of injury…No, Frodo "failed"…one must face the fact: the power of Evil in the world is not finally resistible by incarnate creatures, however 'good': and the Writer of the Story is not one of us…" (*Letters*, 251-252)

By the attention Tolkien pays to the capitalization of the "Writer of the Story," and emphasizing that he, also, is part of the "us" that is separated from the Writer, it is evident that he is referring in this instance to the Primary Creator, God. Tolkien leaves no doubt that, in his mind, Frodo

[50] Perhaps another means of arguing this point might be found in Tolkien's views on "good" enchantment and "dark" magic, articulated in "On Fairy-Stories." Tolkien's idea of sub-creation is that an imaginary creation should not attempt to capture its readers in such a way that it moves too far into the Primary world. Akin to the way elvish enchantment is meant to exist and shape the world without exerting authoritative control over those it affects, so should the ideal sub-creation enrich, rather than constrict. The opposite of the effect Tolkien would have intended would be a didactical script analogous to the magic Saruman practices, which is pervasive and all-consuming, trying to fool and assume too much control over those it holds sway. Tolkien distinguishes between the two as "Enchantment," which is "good," and "Magic," which is "bad," in his essay. "Magic produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World….it is not an art but a technique; its desire is power in this world, domination of things and wills…To the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires, and when it is successful of all forms of human art most nearly approaches. At the heart of many man-made stories of the elves lies, open or concealed, pure or alloyed, the desire for a living, realized sub-creative art, which…is inwardly wholly different from the greed for self-centred power which is the mark of the mere Magician" (*Monsters and the Critics*, 143).

was not intended to perfectly imitate Christ—instead, his actions merely served to set up for the eucatastrophe, described in this particular letter as "Mercy," as a means of subtly pointing back to the artistry and incomparable, redeeming grace of the Writer of the Great Story.

Ultimately, Tolkien preferred for his Christianity, and even more specifically, his Catholicism, to surface in minute ways throughout the books, including in the unexplainable sensation of joy that floods the reader in the incredible moments of eucatastrophe. Rowling, on the other hand, exhibits no such hesitation to err on the side of replicating a fairly explicit Christ-like parallel, actually intending for the Christian story, and her subsequent wrestling with the implications of mortal death and eternal life, to triumphantly surface in the conclusion of the series. Despite the differing clarities and strengths of the parallels of Tolkien and Rowling's Christ-like figures, perhaps the idea of the underlying theme supporting and inherent in both authors' work is best surmised in Griesinger's conclusion about hope in the *Harry Potter* series: "A skillful work of fantasy that does not openly confirm Christianity or a Christian world view, *Harry Potter* still offers a truthful articulation of hope. From such fantasies, all people, including Christians, can derive strength to meet the trials and difficulties of life" (478). I believe her claim, though specifically targeted toward Rowling's series, can be extended to encompass Tolkien's, as well. Of course, the case is not so simple as to merely understand "hope" to be the assurance that good will consistently triumph over evil—neither series, and especially not Tolkien's, offers that as a confirmed guarantee. Rather, if we interpret the "hope" Griesinger references as the resonances of the "deeper magic," or the assurance that there is something greater at work in the universe, then all readers, regardless of their religious beliefs, can indeed glean hope from Rowling's and Tolkien's novels—as a result of an intrinsic yearning human beings feel for a story that supports the idea of a higher power working for the greater good, a

yearning that is fulfilled, at least in part, through both fantastical series’ subtle parallels to the story of Christ.

Chapter II. Creating Communities of Faith in *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*

Introduction

One of the outstanding, and perhaps the preeminent feature shared by both J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series is their attention to carefully developing the unique worlds the characters inhabit. A pillar of the fantasy genre, worldbuilding is essential to captivating readers' interests and making the emotions, actions, and interactions of the characters both believable and sympathetic. In his essay, "On Fairy Stories," Tolkien stressed the importance of an author maintaining a sort of consistency or logicality in the world he fashions, in order to convince the reader to wholeheartedly *believe* in the experiences they are reading about in an alternative setting. Tolkien wrote that an author of fairy stories "makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside" (*The Monsters and the Critics*, 132). While *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* are clearly devoted to evoking Tolkien's recommended sense of internal consistency in their imaginative worlds, both authors' British identities are readily apparent as influences upon the worlds of their books. Indeed, both authors strive to evoke classic elements of British nostalgia in their work, though it is imperative to acknowledge the distinction that Rowling's wizarding world seems to exist parallel to ours, while Tolkien's Middle-earth is entirely another world. For his part, Tolkien depicts an idealization of rural British village life with his description of the Shire, where the hobbits dwell. Rowling, on the other hand, draws upon the British fondness for the country's public schools, with Hogwarts serving as a sort of revival of the beloved "school story" genre. In summary, while Tolkien and Rowling pour enormous amounts of effort into crafting

their fantastical worlds, they also both draw upon and evoke familiar stalwarts of British culture and literature in their fiction; an idyllic form of rural England is at the heart of Tolkien's world, whereas an idealized version of the British public school experience is at the heart of Rowling's.

Considering this phenomenon in light of both authors' articulated aim of embedding Christian themes in their work raises the question: in what ways do the elements of Rowling and Tolkien's fantastical worlds either strengthen or counteract the underlying Christianity of their work? I begin to address this question by exploring several of the strategies of Rowling's worldbuilding, quickly focusing in on her attentiveness to developing the community at Hogwarts. Drawing upon the initial model of the British school story, Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, I describe the elements of Hogwarts that parallel the nostalgic qualities of the beloved British public schools, scrutinizing how these aspects work to develop a bond of trust among both pupils and mentors. Then, I move into an overview of Tolkien's detail-oriented approach to worldbuilding, taking into account his longing to create a mythology for England, as well as his admiration for the work of William Morris. From there, I examine how Tolkien's Shire, in particular, mirrors with strong nostalgia the rural British countryside that Tolkien himself held so dear. I also draw attention to the Shire's strong similarities to village life in Morris' *The House of the Wolfings* as a means of exploring the heart of such communities and their resilient hold on longstanding traditions, including dependency on each other. Lastly, I conclude with a brief juxtaposition and comparison of Hogwarts and the Shire, arguing that despite their nuances, the trust that the members of each community place in each other and the chief traditions of their settings is a crucial key to unlocking the authors' nods to a deeper, richer faith.

***Harry Potter*: Nostalgia for the British School Story**

Rowling's world, which includes reference points like London and King's Cross Station, is easily identifiable as England of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (the period when the books were written and set). In recent years, the larger *Harry Potter* franchise has expanded into other areas of the recognizable world with the *Fantastic Beasts* films, the first of which, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, takes place in 1930s New York City. Yet the fact remains that in the *Harry Potter* series itself, Rowling largely constrains herself to a tight focus on developing the wizarding world of Britain. Of course, Rowling does occasionally nod to the European wizarding community in *Harry Potter*, especially as the series progresses. The existence of the wizarding community in other countries begins to burgeon with the fourth book, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, with the appearance of the French wizarding school, Beauxbatons, and the Eastern European school, Durmstrang, for the revival of the Triwizard Tournament competition. Additionally, the larger wizarding world is hinted at with international quidditch matches, like the Quidditch World Cup between Bulgaria and Ireland that Harry attends in the early pages of *The Goblet of Fire*.[51] The fact remains, however, that Rowling's narrative remains exclusively set in Britain. Other countries, though mentioned, are not visited in the *Harry Potter* series; instead, their characters travel to Britain to interact with the world Rowling has already painstakingly fashioned there.

One of Rowling's cleverest worldbuilding decisions was to have Harry enter into and discover the wizarding world along with the reader. In an article striving to produce a "taxonomy" of fantastical genres, Farah Mendlesohn categorizes *Harry Potter* as "intrusive fantasy," or the sort of worldbuilding where "the fantastic enters the fictional world," and "magic is contrasted with the mundanity and paralysis of suburbia" (171, 177). Mendlesohn explains that

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[51] Yet, in the *Harry Potter* books at least, this "international" community seems to be confined to Europe. South American, Asian, or African wizarding communities never come into play in the text of Rowling's seven books.

because such fantastical worlds are so multifaceted, they "rely heavily on explanation;" so heavily, in fact, that "the protagonists, and we, are never expected to become accustomed to the fantastic" (177). In other words, as Harry is introduced, first through the preparative portal of Diagon Alley, and then through Hogwarts itself, to the concepts of magic, quidditch, and all the other paraphernalia of the wizarding world, from the currency to the candies, the reader is delightedly encountering all of this information for the first time along with the protagonist. Mendlesohn distinguishes the intrusive fantasy construction from other similar fantasy installments, like C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which she terms a "portal fantasy." In Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children literally stumble, unawares, through an old wardrobe in England and find themselves in the world of Narnia, where beavers talk and timid fauns lead them through the forest. In Lewis' book, the wardrobe serves as the portal, or the means by which the author can "invite us [the readers] through into the fantastic" (171).

As with other fantastical series that make use of extensive worldbuilding, part of the appeal of Rowling's wizarding world lies in its completely unpredictable nature. In *The Sorcerer's Stone*, readers are just as clueless as Harry about how he should navigate to platform nine and three-quarters (which admittedly does function as a literal portal into the wizarding community) at King's Cross Station in order to catch the Hogwarts Express. Harry's helplessness builds: "He had ten minutes left to get on the train to Hogwarts and he had no idea how to do it; he was stranded in the middle of a station with a trunk he could hardly lift, a pocket full of wizard money, and a large owl" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 91). As Harry is steadily losing confidence in the existence of platform nine and three-quarters, the Weasley family arrives, and Mrs. Weasley good-naturedly instructs a slightly embarrassed Harry to aim "straight at the barrier between

platforms nine and ten" (93). Rather than having to play a frustrating game of catch-up and deliver such vast amounts of made-up information in explanatory paragraphs throughout *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling instead utilizes dialogue with different characters to reveal different layers and details of the wizarding world. As the series progresses, Harry learns more information about his world with each installment, and this system feels quite natural to the reader—rather than feeling bamboozled by the mysteries of the magical world, the reader comes to develop a sense of faith anchored in these explanations.

A centrally defining aspect of this new world that Harry quickly encounters is Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which introduces and embodies the logic of slowly "learning" about a new place and world. The primary setting for the majority of the series, Hogwarts is a massive castle in a mysterious corner of the British countryside, where all the British wizarding children ages 11-17 are trained in subjects from Potions to Defense Against the Dark Arts. With the sorting of the children into different Houses, or "families" that they belong to for the entirety of their school years, the reliance on the guidance of prefects, and the attention to communal mealtimes and sporting events, Hogwarts, as a school, is prototypically British in how it functions. In fact, Rowling's evoking of this British school story is a large part of the initial thrill of the series for readers, especially American children.[52] Several reviewers noted, upon the release of *The Sorcerer's Stone* and the fervent readership it quickly gained, the parallels of Rowling's book to Thomas Hughes' novel, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, which was published in the 1850s and is set at an elite British public school for boys in the 1830s. Hughes'

[52] In an opinion piece for *The Atlantic*, Colleen Gillard explains part of the American readership's fascination with *Harry Potter* by arguing that the British simply "tell better children's stories" than Americans, noting that British tales are steeped more in fantasy, while American stories, like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, tend more toward "moral realism." See: https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/01/why-the-british-tell-better-childrens-stories/422859/.

novel relays the tale of young boy named Tom Brown as he embarks on a series of adventures at Rugby, a school that instills a fierce pride in him from the very first moment he "tried to take in at once the long line of gray buildings, beginning with the chapel, and ending with the School-house" (89). The narrator recounts that in that moment, Tom "began already to be proud of being a Rugby boy," emphasizing the immense attachment the British (both youths and adults) felt toward their schools, and thereby identifying the first moment Tom began to feel the twinges of building his faith in the school (89). With its regaling of sporting feats and standing up to school bullies, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is often considered by literary critics to be the "debut" of the school story,[53] which functions as a more specified version of the bildungsroman, or "coming of age" genre of children's literature[54] (Puccio, 58). After receiving critical acclaim and becoming a bestseller in the mid-nineteenth century, *Tom Brown's School Days* set the tone for a number of novels that would follow Hughes' precedent and contribute to an overall sense of fascination with and idealization of the British public school experience.[55]

In a review titled "Harry Potter's Schooldays," Alexandra Mullen claims that, "With some clever and wholly delightful twists, Rowling plants her story firmly in the conventional appurtenances of the school story," citing examples like the tuneless piping of the school song and the slew of school pets that students are allowed to keep in their dormitories (131-32).

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[53] In an article entitled "At the Heart of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*: Thomas Arnold and Christian Friendship," Paul M. Puccio joins other critics in identifying *Tom Brown's Schooldays* as the "debut" novel for the school story genre. Puccio relies on Hughes' book to pinpoint key "narrative conventions" of the school story, in addition to "other *bildungsromane* that include events set in English boarding schools" (58).

[54] Literary critic J.H. Buckley is among those who dubbed the "coming of age story" as bildungsroman. In a review of Buckley's book, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, David Lodge writes that Buckley defines the bildungsroman as "the novel of youth and apprenticeship" (860).

[55] It is worthwhile to note that the British "public schools" are viewed with the same esteem with which American *private* schools are viewed. British public schools charge steep tuition fees. The United Kingdom's Good Schools Guide explains in article on its website, "Independent school system in a nutshell", that British public schools are "historically the most exclusive—and expensive—of boy's private (mainly boarding) schools." American public schools, or school systems funded by the government, would be equivalent to British state schools. See: https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/choosing-a-school/independent-schools/uk-independent-schools-explained.

Beyond these nostalgic token items of a British school experience, though, Mullen posits that the true connection of Hughes' and Rowling's school stories lies in the fact that "Tom Brown and Harry Potter share more than their ordinary names; they also share the burdens of representing what a culture expects an education to do" (129). In other words, Tom Brown and Harry Potter both embody the expectation that, while it is important for a student to learn the primary subjects in school, that goal is almost secondary to the less measurable objective of shaping children into adults. Elizabeth A. Galway effectively says as much in "Reminders of Rugby in the Halls of Hogwarts," another article drawing parallels between *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and the *Harry Potter* series: "Rugby and Hogwarts function less as places where the characters absorb the lessons of a traditional academic curriculum, than as the means by which they gain the traits necessary for them to become 'good future citizens' in their respective societies."

Certainly, this idea was central to the actual Dr. Thomas Arnold's (whom Hughes' fictional headmaster, also named Dr. Thomas Arnold and also charged with running a boarding school called Rugby, is obviously strongly based upon) philosophy about the fundamental work of schools. In Lytton Strachey's biography of four impactful figures from Arnold's era, *Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold, General Gordon*, Strachey reveals that Arnold's "'most earnest wish,' he wrote to a friend when he first became headmaster [of Rugby]" was "to introduce 'a religious principle into education.'" (188). In other words, Arnold focused in his actual Rugby, first and foremost, on training his pupils on matters of morality; "in the school chapel the center of Dr. Arnold's system of education was inevitably fixed" (Strachey, 194). Eager as readers are to drink in every aspect of the wizarding world, including the magical subjects Harry learns at Hogwarts, Rowling's books would admittedly be quite dull if the extent of the conflict was only ever that he could never remember how many

porcupine quills to add to a particular potion. Ultimately, it is imperative to the functioning of the school story that not only are the protagonists learning and growing as students in the classroom, they are consistently pressed to develop their character and sense of self through a set of challenges outside of the classroom.

Mullen concludes her article by pondering how later books in the *Harry Potter* series would continue to progress in shaping Harry toward adulthood. (At the time, Rowling had only completed the first three books.) As Mullen considers the possibility of Harry facing more "morally arduous adventures" in the following books, Mullen states: "With God out of the picture in Rowling's world, human love alone is the strongest magic, able even to transcend the grave" (134). With no prior references to religion in the article, this statement, which serves as part of Mullen's concluding thoughts, is rather unexpected. While much of what Mullen argues about the existence of the school story in Rowling's series is certainly true, her assumption that God is absent from the fantastical series seems to counter what has already been established about Rowling's intent on developing a Christian parallel within her books. Mullen is correct in noting that there is never any reference to God as a deity or religion as a concept throughout any of the *Harry Potter* books, which could skew a reader in favor of declaring the series to be entirely secularized. (That said, the *Harry Potter* series is certainly not aggressively, intentionally atheistic like Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, which includes a foundational basis of tweaking passages from the Bible and undermining the existence of religion as an institution.)[56]

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[56] Pullman has, on multiple occasions, expressed his distaste for organized religion and for the expression of religion in children's fantasy literature. He has made especially scornful remarks about C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia.* In a 1998 essay published by *The Guardian*, Pullman expounds upon "the misogyny, the racism, the sado-masochistic relish for violence that permeates the whole cycle." Critics often highlight the fact that Pullman's trilogy serves as a sort of antithesis to Lewis' series; see also: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/12/26/far-from-narnia.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the prevailing moments where the Christian theme is most transparently obvious in *Harry Potter* are in the final chapters of the *Deathly Hallows*, where Harry voluntarily sacrifices his life out of love for and a deep sense of obligation to the Hogwarts community. Leading up to these moments in the final book, though, Mullen's matter-of-fact assertion about the absence of God in the series (at least through the third book) elicits the question: does Rowling's focus on worldbuilding in a strictly secular world, where the children are trained in an idealized version of the British school system, still allow for an element of Christianity to permeate? In order to engage with this question, it will be useful to first examine the specific elements of the traditional school story genre that Rowling chooses to accentuate in her own series, in order to evaluate how these narrative devices do or do not serve as vehicles to bring Harry (and the reader) into closer contact with the Christian message underlining the series.

In scrutinizing the traditional school story elements of *Harry Potter*, it is useful to begin with the fact that the novels of this genre inevitably include the social struggles of these children. Some of the most emotionally interesting and gripping aspects of the plot of *The Sorcerer's Stone* are when Harry stands up to his school nemesis, Draco Malfoy, situations that mimics the rivalry in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* between the eponymous protagonist and his antagonist, Flashman. Tom Brown and his friend, East, suffer at the hands of the older Flashman, who is often described with language evoking cruelty; the character is first introduced as "Flashman the School-house bully" (106). In one episode, Tom and East "were seized upon by Flashman, and made to carry down his books and furniture…from this time they began to feel the weight of the tyranny of Flashman and his friends" (169). The words "seized" and "tyranny" emphasize the dictator-like contempt with which Flashman sneered down upon the younger boys. Flashman's

most wounding skill, though, was the sharpness of his tongue. The narrator explains that "Flashman was an adept in all ways, but above all in the power of saying cutting and cruel things, and could often bring tears to the eyes of boys in this way" (176). Simply put, Flashman mercilessly bullied Tom Brown and his companions.

Malfoy performs a similar function throughout Harry's schoolyears. While Malfoy is the same age as Harry, which creates a more competitive dynamic, his demeanor is no less scathing or degrading. Malfoy is descended from a long line of "pureblood" wizards, a fact that he prides himself upon and refers to from his first meeting with Harry.[57] Malfoy mocks Ron for his lack of wealth, hurls slurs of "mudblood" at Hermione for her non-magical heritage, and comes up with a host of insults and jeers to shoot in Harry's direction. The narrator notes that "Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he hated more than Dudley [his bullying cousin], but that was before he met Draco Malfoy" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 143). In both Harry's and Tom Brown's case, their bullies often incite them to angry acts of retaliation. Fed up with Flashman's tyranny, Tom Brown and his friend finally fight back against Flashman, relentlessly "pummeling at all of him which they could reach," though only being "about up to his shoulder" (191). Eventually, Flashman is so sorely beaten that he skulks away, and "never laid finger on either of them again" (193). Likewise, Harry and his peers stand up to Malfoy. They do not always resort to the same sort of physical scuffles as Tom Brown (though Hermione does land a satisfyingly solid slap on Malfoy in Chapter 15 of *The Prisoner of Azkaban*), but they do continue to undermine Malfoy. Such undermining happens directly, like when Harry chases after him on a broomstick to force him to return a classmate's stolen possession (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 148-49), and indirectly, with the

[57] During Harry and Malfoy's first meeting in Diagon Alley, Malfoy remarks: "I really don't think they should let the other sort (non-purebloods) in, do you? They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways…I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 78).

ways Harry and his friends are continually rewarded for their positive actions[58] throughout the series—thereby building their sense of loyalty to and dependence upon each other. Even Neville Longbottom, the forgetful boy in Harry's class who becomes the butt of several of Malfoy's jokes, musters the courage to stand up to Malfoy, stammering, "I'm worth twelve of you, Malfoy"—repeating a line Harry had previously used to encourage him (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 223). Ultimately, Tom Brown, Harry, and their respective friends confront their bullies and learn the all-important lesson of asserting and standing up for oneself—an important aspect of the school story genre, no matter the century of publication.

As Rowling's school story has the benefit of being extended over the course of several books, she has more pages (and more years) to devote to fleshing out the rivalry between Harry and Malfoy. Whereas in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, Flashman's fate is to finally be whisked away from Rugby, expelled for the disgrace of returning to the school intoxicated (193-94), Harry and Malfoy attain a sort of civilized respect for each other, as the reader sees in the glimpse of their adulthood Rowling volunteers in the epilogue of *Deathly Hallows*. Both have arrived at platform nine and three-quarters to see their sons off to Hogwarts; when Malfoy sees Harry and his family looking over at him, he "nodded curtly, and turned away again" (*Deathly Hallows*, 756). Harry and Malfoy have, in a sense, come full circle, with the epilogue providing a tidy way for Rowling to tie off a number of relationships, including their longstanding rivalry. That said, Thomas Hughes utilizes Tom's interactions with Flashman, too, as an exercise for teaching forgiveness. Years after Flashman's expulsion, Tom confides to East, as his friend is preparing to take the Sacrament, how he came to terms with his hatred for Flashman:

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[58] Perhaps one of the most satisfying moments for readers invested in the Potter-Malfoy feud occurs in the final chapter of *The Sorcerer's Stone*. Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Neville secure enough points for Gryffindor to steal the once-secure House Cup from Slytherin, resulting in Malfoy being so shocked that he "couldn't have looked more stunned and horrified if he'd just had the Body-Bind Curse put on him" (306).

> "Well, when I came to take the Sacrament, I had a great struggle about that. I tried to put [Flashman] out of my head; and when I couldn't do that, I tried to think of him as evil, as something that the Lord who was loving me hated, and which I might hate too. But it wouldn't do. I broke down: I believe Christ himself broke me down…I prayed for poor Flashman, as if it had been you or Arthur." (339)

While Tom's feud with Flashman had long since ended, the memory of his bullying had continued to torment Tom. Eventually, though, Tom learned to set aside his hatred for the bully, and the true tragedy lies with Flashman, who ejected himself from the community of faith and acceptance he could have taken part in at Rugby—in a similar fashion to Voldemort, who himself rejected the community at Hogwarts and suffered his own set of negative repercussions (namely, his eventual death) as a result. Ultimately, Tom's interactions with Flashman in his school years taught him a difficult, but necessary lesson in the value of Christian forgiveness, serving as excellent evidence of the value Rugby placed on educating its students on the importance of placing their faith in Christianity.

Even prior to the conclusion of her series, though, Rowling complicates Harry and Malfoy's relationship by the latter's involvement with the death of Dumbledore, Harry's longstanding mentor. Voldemort tasked Malfoy with the terrible responsibility of murdering Dumbledore, often referred to throughout the series as the greatest and most powerful wizard who ever lived. Unsurprisingly, when Malfoy reaches the decisive moment when Dumbledore is weak and vulnerable, Malfoy is unable to seize his chance and perform the Killing Curse. He is struck by the gravity of the situation, "his wand hand still trembling" (*Half-Blood Prince*, 592). Reflecting upon this scene after Dumbledore dies by another's hand, Harry realizes:

> Harry had not spared Malfoy much thought. His animosity was all for Snape, but he had not forgotten the fear in Malfoy's voice on that tower top, nor the fact that he had lowered his wand before the other Death Eaters arrived. Harry did not believe that Malfoy would have killed Dumbledore. He despised Malfoy still for his infatuation with the Dark Arts, but now the tiniest drop of pity mingled with his dislike. Where, Harry wondered, was Malfoy now, and what was Voldemort making him do under threat of killing him and his parents? (*Half-Blood Prince*, 640)

In this excerpt from the sixth book, Harry reveals an empathy for Malfoy that is not present earlier in the series. Harry, who has no family of his own, musters sympathy for his rival, explicitly noted by the narrator as "the tiniest drop of pity." Harry's own position as an orphan enables him to feel a sort of understanding for Malfoy's difficult position, where he is made to succumb to Voldemort's will in order to preserve his family's lives. As demonstrated in Harry's reflection, the books' progression allows Rowling to develop Malfoy into more than a stuck-up, two-dimensional foil for Harry. Rather, Malfoy becomes a real human, with love for both his family and Hogwarts to balance in consideration with his propensity for the Dark Arts. Harry, while continuing to adamantly "despise" Malfoy, can still, to some extent, appreciate the gravity of his situation.

While Flashman, even if forgiven, continues to live on in Tom Brown's memory as the cruel bully who derived enjoyment from tormenting the younger boys, Harry and Malfoy's relationship matures with the characters as they enter into their adolescent and adult years. Rowling's treatment of the social conflict aspect of the school story, therefore, allows for situations where the characters learn, if not full-blown forgiveness, a sense of understanding for the other's differences. Harry and Malfoy will certainly never be friends, but they do reach the

point where they can accept each other and coexist as adults in the wizarding world that extends beyond Hogwarts. This coming-to-terms denouement that Rowling designs for Harry and Malfoy homes in on one of the crucial elements of the school story: children learning to jostle for position with others in a secluded school environment, which then equips the children to handle similar and larger social issues in the "real" world. The claim that Harry's learning to establish a sense of mutual, if curt, respect for his school nemesis is exclusively evidentiary of a Christian theme of loving one's enemy would likely be dismissed as far-fetched.[59] However, the rivalry between Harry and Malfoy, even in the hateful early years, where Rowling lays the groundwork for a more three-dimensionally strained relationship to emerge between them, assists, in part, in relaying her burgeoning theme of developing the idea of a community of trust in others at Hogwarts.

In a more cynical approach to Rowling's revival of the British school story, Elizabeth A. Galway suggests that the *Harry Potter* series heavily relies upon other standard tropes of the genre, such as the emphasis on the shaping power of sports and the guidance of an astute headmaster. Galway illustrates these common themes to support her belief that revering such a school as Hogwarts continues to promote some of the demeaning stereotypes inherent to the school story, claiming that the *Harry Potter* books "propagate elitist notions of class, gender, and masculine heroism that are integral to the school story tradition." While readers and scholars might disagree with Galway about the prevalence of such an "insidious influence" in Rowling's work,[60] the parallels Galway draws between elements of the *Harry Potter* series and *Tom*

[59] Matthew 5:43-44 instructs: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'[44] But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

[60] Indeed, Galway notes in her introduction to the article that when she presented such an idea at a conference, she was met by a "minor uproar" of protests breaking out in the room.

Brown's Schooldays are irrefutable. Galway illustrates the prominence of sports in both iterations of the school story:

> Just as football helps the students at Rugby learn to defend the British Empire, Quidditch helps Harry to become a valuable defender of the wizarding world…Both suggest that physical strength is important and that school sports prepare children for future challenges by developing strength of mind and body.

Indeed, Harry's skill and speed on a broomstick make a number of his feats possible, from bypassing an enchantment in *The Sorcerer's Stone* that required identifying and chasing down an evasive flying key[61] to escaping from Gringotts on the back of a dragon in *The Deathly Hallows*.[62]

In a similar vein, Tom Brown discovers the reverence sports are accorded at his school. Indeed, the rules of football are among the preeminent pieces of information Tom's chum, East, schools him in as soon as he arrives at Rugby (98-100). The introduction to the novel notes that the author, Thomas Hughes, was "firmly trusting in the virtues of sport as a character builder and as an inspirer of co-operative effort" (xiii). As Hughes' narrator frankly explains about British schools: "The object of all schools is not to ram Latin and Greek into boys, but to make them good English boys, good future citizens; and by far the most important part of that work must be done, or not done, out of school hours" (63). Such after school-hours discipline, it seems, occurs chiefly on the sports field, where the boys are taught the merits of discipline and teamwork. During Tom's last year at Rugby, by which time he has become captain of the cricket team, an

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[61] "Not for nothing, though, was Harry the youngest Seeker [position on the quidditch team] in a century. He had a knack for spotting things other people didn't…Harry leaned forward and with a nasty, crunching noise, pinned [the key] against the stone with one hand" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 280-81).

[62] "[Harry] stretched out an arm; Hermione hoisted herself up; Ron climbed on behind them, and a second later the dragon became aware that it was untethered. With a roar it reared: Harry dug in his knees, clutching as tightly as he could to the jagged scales…" (*Deathly Hallows*, 542)

observant teacher remarks to him that he is learning the benefits of "such an unselfish game," which "merges the individual in the eleven; he doesn't play that he may win, but that his side may" (355).

In a similar manner to the prevalence of sports in Rowling's version of the school story, Harry learns the most about himself and his destiny under the tutelage of Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore, just as Tom Brown learns from the mentorship of Dr. Thomas Arnold. For his part, Dumbledore enlightens Harry on the protective nature of his mother's sacrificial love (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 299), the prophecy that neither Harry nor Voldemort "can live while the other survives" (*Order of the Phoenix* 841-42), and the existence of Voldemort's horcruxes, which are the key to the villain's immortality and also his destruction (*Half-Blood Prince*, 492-512). While giving Harry these crucial nuggets of information, though, Dumbledore also understands the balance of letting his pupil learn certain things for himself. Herein lies Harry's ability to be at the forefront of all the books' most climactic moments, from discovering Voldemort under Professor Quirrell's turban in *Sorcerer's Stone*, to destroying Tom Riddle's diary in *Chamber of Secrets*, to confronting the traitor responsible for his parents' deaths, Peter Pettigrew, in *Prisoner of Azkaban*.

Turning to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the character of the Rugby headmaster, Dr. Thomas Arnold, is directly modeled after his eponymous namesake, a real figure who became something of a legend for his approach to the British public school environment. The introduction to Hughes' novel characterizes Arnold as a headmaster who aimed to give "the nineteenth-century middle-classes what they thought they wanted, an education for their children based on moral principles as well as intellectual excellence" (viii). Arnold exists in the same manner in Hughes' novelistic portrayal of him, a wise headmaster who "had found time in those busy years to watch

over the career even of him, Tom Brown, and his particular friends" (366). Known to the students as "the Doctor," Arnold is far more attuned to the goings on in the boys' lives than the youngsters, consumed with their own affairs, realize. Early in Tom's school career, Arnold encourages a friendship between Tom and the "reserved, scholarly" George Arthur, a relationship that eventually gives Arthur "a sense of companionship and community which he has lacked before, while Tom learns a fresh respect for learning, for religion, and for individual moral strength" (xiv, xv). Through similar interactions, Arnold continues to keep a watchful eye on all of his students, occasionally inserting himself, when necessary, to foster friendships or administer words of wisdom. Arnold's effect upon all of Rugby[63] was likely best summarized by one of the teachers, who exclaims to Tom: "Perhaps ours is the only little corner of the British Empire which is thoroughly, wisely, and strongly ruled just now. I'm more and more thankful every day of my life that I came here to be under [Arnold]" (355). With language like "little corner," Hughes underscores the idea that, thanks to Arnold, Rugby exists as its own sort of faith-based refuge, tucked away from the influences of the outside world. In a similarly commending manner, the novel concludes with Tom visiting his old mentor's grave and mournfully musing: "If he could only have seen the Doctor again for one five minutes; have told him all that was in his heart, what he owed to him, how he loved and reverenced him, and would by God's help follow his steps in life and death, he could have borne it all without a murmur" (374-75).

[63] Strachey's biography of the actual Arnold contains several anecdotes emphasizing how much the headmaster was respected and revered by his students at Rugby. One such anecdote noted that "Whenever two of his old pupils met they joined in [Arnold's] praises; and the sight of his picture had been known to call forth, from one who had not even reached the Sixth, exclamations of rapture lasting for ten minutes and filling with astonishment the young men from other schools who happened to be present" (208).

Likewise, through all of Harry's adventures, Dumbledore serves as an astute father figure, a possessor of wisdom who also feels an immense love for Harry, whom he has protected since he was first orphaned.[64] Harry exhibits a fierce allegiance to, and faith in, Dumbledore and his goodness, even when the rest of the wizarding world seems to be turning against him, as evidenced in the following exchange between the two:

> "[The Minister of Magic] accused me of being 'Dumbledore's man through and through.'"
>
> "How very rude of him."
>
> "I told him I was."
>
> Dumbledore opened his mouth to speak and then closed it again…To Harry's intense embarrassment, he suddenly realized that Dumbledore's bright blue eyes looked rather watery, and stared hastily at his own knees… (*Half-Blood Prince*, 357-58)

Much of the wisdom overtly imparted throughout the series is delivered from Dumbledore, usually at the conclusion of each book where he reflects with Harry, in his office, on the events that have just transpired. It is Dumbledore who teaches Harry (and subsequently, the reader,) that "to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 297), that "it is our choices…that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (*Chamber of Secrets*, 333), and the importance that he "…not pity the dead…Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love" (*Deathly Hallows*, 722). This final lesson is important, because it emphasizes the lesson that Voldemort failed to learn himself while a student at Hogwarts. The villain

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[64] The first chapter of *The Sorcerer's Stone* recounts how Dumbledore purposefully left a just-orphaned Harry on the Dursley's front step, so that he could grow up away from the influences of the wizarding world: "'Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won't even remember! Can't you see how much better off he'll be, growing up away from all that until he's ready to take it?'" (13). Later, Harry and the reader also learn that Dumbledore had the forethought to establish Harry's home with the Dursleys as an extension of the protection of his mother's love: "Her blood became your refuge. You need return there only once a year, but as long as you can still call it home, there [Voldemort] cannot hurt you" (*Order of the Phoenix*, 836).

rejected the promise of faith and the strength that comes from depending upon and loving others, and instead sought to idolize his own life in his quest for immortality. In fact, Voldemort arrives at a point where, through the Horcruxes, he retains his mortal life through the practice of literally destroying his soul—the ultimate display of not only selfishness, but faithlessness.

Returning again to Dumbledore, though, the headmaster's expounding of wisdom is such a staple part of Rowling's formula that it has led some critics to consider Dumbledore to be something of a "God figure" in the series. In her article that examines the concepts of authority in the *Harry Potter* series, Farah Mendlesohn turns a critical lens on Dumbledore's role as an authority figure:

> Because Dumbledore is all wise, these books, for all that they are presented as children's books in the school tradition, actually limit childhood autonomy, cutting across the tradition that the school story trope offers space for children to test the boundaries and exert independence. Although Dumbledore is often passive in deeds, he is the individual who outlines the nature of the moral battle which is taking place. ("Crowning the King" 301)

While Mendlesohn is correct in assessing that Dumbledore often does appear (even after his death) to offer Harry words of sage advice and reveal pieces of information crucial to the plot, she goes too far in suggesting that he limits Harry's autonomy. Rather, Dumbledore equips Harry with the necessary tools to make his own decisions. Harry exhibits autonomy from his first night at Hogwarts in *Sorcerer's Stone*, when he reasons with the Sorting Hat not to put him in the Slytherin house and subsequently ends up in Gryffindor. Even leading up to the climactic moment in *Deathly Hallows*, when Dumbledore informs Harry that he must choose whether to return to life or continue on in death, Dumbledore merely presents Harry with his options, then

quietly waits for Harry to make his decision. Dumbledore serves as a guide rather than a dictator, shaping Harry and his decision-making, yet still allowing the young protagonist to learn lessons for himself and forge his own path.

Perhaps most importantly to proving Rowling's reliance on the school story genre, though, the *Harry Potter* series provides insight into the world of elite boarding schools, which is unavailable to most readers in reality and thereby heightens the series' appeal. The caliber of British public schools, reserved for children of the wealthiest elite, has already been discussed, but, as Galway points out, Hogwarts is actually also quite exclusive: a student must have the ability to perform magic in order to be invited to attend. While this fact seems quite obvious, given that Hogwarts is a school of "witchcraft and wizardry," the implications of such exclusivity become more evident when the reader considers the fate of Squibs, or children who are born into wizarding families, yet are unable to perform magic.[65] The reader can imagine the sort of ostracization that a Squib is bound to experience as they maneuver between belonging to neither the wizarding nor the non-magic Muggle world, beginning with the inability to attend Hogwarts—and yet, despite how one might deplore the Squibs' situation, Hogwarts is still not available to them. With this situation in mind, Galway asserts that Rowling is in keeping with her school story predecessors by choosing to "embrace the exclusivity" inherent to the genre. Galway acknowledges that rather than working as a deterrent, the exclusivity of such schools actually entices the reader into the genre: "Part of the appeal of school stories is that they provide young readers with a means of entering, if only imaginatively, into an exclusive environment." For children across the globe who will not experience a form of boarding school themselves, it is

[65] The reader meets several Squibs in the *Harry Potter* series, including Argus Filch, the Hogwarts caretaker, who is notoriously hateful in his interactions with the students. Perhaps Filch's actions and demeanor, though, become slightly more understandable when the reader considers his life: he is constantly surrounded by people who are able to perform magic, yet is unable himself to do the same.

actually quite exciting to envision leaving their parents and attending school in an entirely different place where a series of adventures befall them, even if these readers truly cannot quite picture themselves in such an environment. In this way, by promoting the elite and selective nature of Hogwarts, Galway argues that Rowling joins other authors in the school story genre to "present an upper-middle-class existence as normative." Such a decision on Rowling's part is certainly interesting, considering that this was not her own school experience, nor the class level she inhabited prior to earning her fame and fortune through the *Harry Potter* books.[66]

Although Rowling paints Hogwarts as a magically positive place, her own school experiences as both a student and teacher were not nearly as glamorous. Neither of Rowling's parents attended college. According to the biography on Rowling's official website, JKRowling.com, her father worked as an aircraft engineer and her mother as a science technician at Wyedean Comprehensive, where Rowling attended school.[67] In her younger years, Rowling attended the Tutshill Church of England school, a state school that did not require tuition. An article for DailyMail.com says that Rowling was bullied during her childhood, with fellow students calling her "Rowling Pin."[68] At some point before beginning to write the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling worked as a teacher in a city school in Edinburgh. Taking her biography into account, the novel Rowling would go on to publish in 2012, five years after the conclusion of the *Harry Potter* series, seems much more illustrative of her own experiences with schooling than her depictions of Hogwarts. In an interview with Steve Inskeep of National Public Radio, Rowling admits that her adult novel, *The Casual Vacancy*, draws in part upon her time as a

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[66] Rowling was a single mother relying on government benefits during the time she wrote *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. See: https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/jk-rowling-people-defined-me-as-a-single-mother-on-benefits-and-assumed-i-wasnt-fit-to-raise-my-8824498.html.
[67] See: https://www.jkrowling.com/about/.
[68] See: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2015519/Harry-Potter-author-J-K-Rowling-Cruel-school-bullies-branded-Rowling-Pin.html.

teacher.[69] "When people are very damaged, they can often meet the world with a kind of defiance…and I saw that a lot when I was teaching," Rowling explained to Inskeep.

The world encapsulated in Hogwarts is certainly not perfect, filled with the duels of young wizards and the ever-looming threat of Voldemort. That said, the series avoids delving too deeply into psychologically traumatizing experiences that affect how characters interact with others in the same way that *The Casual Vacancy* does. In the *Harry Potter* series, the most "damaged" child that the reader encounters (at least in the first three books before Hogwarts is affected by the murder of the idolized, athletic Cedric Diggory in *The Goblet of Fire*) is likely Harry himself, with his status as an orphan. Even Hogwarts students who belong to the school's "cunning" house, Slytherin, which produces the likes of Harry's school rival, Malfoy, and the series' villain, Voldemort himself, are not presented as "damaged." Malfoy belongs to a wealthy wizarding family and is always receiving "packages of sweets from home" (*Sorcerer's Stone*, 143). Despite undeniably difficult situations like Hermione learning to cope with being a "Muggle-born" witch, and Ron's struggle to claim his own identity under the weight of his older brothers, the reality is that Hogwarts students are portrayed as, for the most part, cared for and watched over, creating a nostalgic world of both comfort and faith. Whether the students are under Dumbledore's observant eye, invited to Hagrid's hut, or scolded by the figures who live in the portraits on the walls, they are being shepherded and molded, for the most part.[70] Such is simply not the case in the stark portrayal of teenage schoolchildren in *The Casual Vacancy*, whose lives are rife with drug-addicted mothers, thoughts of self-harm, and the threat of rape.

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[69] See: https://www.npr.org/2012/09/28/161835702/rowling-draws-on-personal-experience-in-vacancy.

[70] Although the tables do turn when people like malicious Dolores Umbridge or Snape, who appears to be in Voldemort's servitude, gain control as headmistress or headmaster of Hogwarts (*Order of the Phoenix*, *Deathly Hallows*). Despite these characters' tyrannous rules, though, characters like Professor McGonagall and Hagrid continue to hold a vested interest in the wellbeing of the students at the school; Hogwarts is not left entirely devoid of adults who care about protecting the students.

The fact remains that, despite her personal experience, Rowling chose to construct Hogwarts in such a way that it recalled privileged school experiences dissimilar to her own. Hogwarts is an environment where students do learn to develop their morality and distinguish between good and evil, but not with the harshly realistic situations of the twenty-first century that Rowling employs in her adult novel. One explanation for this glossed-over distinction is that Hogwarts is intended to function as a world that not only allows for, but rewards faith and trust in others. With this argument in mind, I would refute Mullen's claim that "With God out of the picture in Rowling's world, human love alone is the strongest magic, able even to transcend the grave" (134). The impact of God is present, albeit not explicitly, in Rowling's world, and the emphasis on the necessity that the characters put their faith in human love and trust only exacerbates, rather than eclipses His presence. Ultimately, the idea of faith is exemplified by the lessons Harry and his friends continue to draw from interactions with Malfoy, quidditch, Dumbledore's mentorship, and battles with Voldemort. As Dumbledore himself instructs Harry in the *Chamber of Secrets*: "Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it" (264), therefore solidifying Hogwarts as a school that teaches, above all, the importance of placing faith in fellow members of the community and their ability so support one through the most difficult of ordeals—a setting ideal for allowing in the suggestion of a larger faith.

***The Lord of the Rings*: The Nostalgically Idyllic Shire**

In her article "Crowning the King," Mendelsohn draws the connection of an almost plaintive longing for old English heritage in both Rowling's wizarding world and Tolkien's Middle-earth. Mendelsohn writes:

> J.K. Rowling's books have received praise precisely because they are compounded of anachronisms. The old Englishness of wizardry is a source of humor…this old

> Englishness places Rowling in the company of Tolkien and Lewis in constructing their fantasy worlds as a lament for old England, for the values of the shires and for a 'greener' and simpler world." (292)

Mendelsohn is correct in asserting that in both Hogwarts and the Shire, the two series' most idyllic locations, the simplicity of old English life seems to be preserved. Beyond the obvious observation that neither of these settings implement technology[71] that was contemporary at the time of their writings (such as cell phones for Rowling or motorcars for Tolkien), at Hogwarts, the reverence for the British public school system looms large over any typical teenage psychological trauma, while in the Shire, a blissful focus on family, celebrations, and meals supersedes the faintest perception of the perils of the outside world.

With those connections established, while Rowling's envisioning of the world of the *Harry Potter* series is easily recognizable as a sort of alternative community existing within the familiarity of our own world, Tolkien's Middle-Earth is quite apparently existing in a different reality. However, Tolkien was interested, for quite some time, in the idea of developing a mythology for England. A professor of philology (officially the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon of Pembroke College at the University of Oxford), Tolkien avidly studied other countries' mythologies, envying the fact that they were endowed with a legendarium of their own. Notably, Tolkien referred to his own stories of Middle-Earth as "myths," as seen in his notes on W.H. Auden's review of *The Return of the King*: "In my *myth*

[71] In contrast, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series is rife with technology, albeit technology that depends on a different form of energy than the technology of our world. (Pullman's Oxford in *The Golden Compass* seems to be adjacent to our world, as one of the premises in his books is that there are multiple worlds coexisting at once, independently of each other. In his reimagined Oxford, the energy is "anbaric" rather than electric.) As previously mentioned, Pullman's series is atheistic in nature, which sets up an interesting contrast between his championing of technology and the Christian narratives' settings where advanced, modern technology is conspicuously absent. This situation elicits the question: does Pullman implicitly suggest that with the increase of technology, there is less room for religion or even faith in God?

Morgoth fell before Creation of the physical world. In my story Sauron represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible…" (*Letters*, 243, emphasis added). Essentially, Tolkien's Middle-earth exists as an alternate reimagining of the mythology of our own world, always with the understanding, of course, that it is ultimately fictional.

William Morris, a nineteenth-century poet and author, is among the writers Tolkien's own mythmaking is indebted to. Tolkien himself is recorded as saying as much in documents collected in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. In fact, the first letter of the book, which Tolkien wrote to his future wife while he was still an undergraduate student at Oxford in 1914, includes: "Amongst other work I am trying to turn one of the stories—which is really a very great story and most tragic—into a short story somewhat on the lines of Morris' romances with chunks of poetry in between" (*Letters*, 7). Even before he started to truly work on *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien acknowledged that his personal creative writing style was like that of Morris'. Tolkien's peers noticed his similarities to Morris, too. An excerpt from the minutes of the Exeter College Essay Club, where Tolkien read a piece of his own writing entitled "The Fall of Gondolin"[72] in 1920, describes Tolkien's writing: "As a discovery of a new mythological background Mr. Tolkien's matter was exceedingly illuminating and marked him as a staunch follower of tradition, a treatment indeed in the manner of such typical romantics as William Morris…" (*Letters*, 445).

In an article that explores Tolkien's relationship to Morris' writings, Anne Amison posits that Tolkien drew inspiration for his own experimentation with alternative worlds from Morris' *The House of the Wolfings.* Amison writes that Morris' novels are "devoid of the childish or twee approaches that beset so many other early 'fantasy' novels…without rabbit holes or fairy dust the

[72] A version of which would later appear in Tolkien's mythology of Middle-earth, *The Silmarillion*.

reader is immersed within an *actual* world" (128, emphasis added). Essentially, Amison holds that Morris' work encouraged Tolkien to develop his own theory of sub-creation, wherein a fantasy world exists with logicality, without the childish associations of unbelievable "make-believe." Further, within the worlds themselves, Amison notes that Morris' "Utopian revolutionary novel," *News from Nowhere*, embodies a landscape and lifestyle that are evident influencers on Tolkien's depiction of the Shire in Middle-Earth (132). Specifically, Amison argues, "The Shire is Nowhere [the setting of Morris' novel] seen through the lens of Tolkien's natural conservatism," or Tolkien's beliefs that the natural world should be preserved in its raw form, untainted by industrialization (132). She draws upon the emphasis on agricultural work, hearty meals, and lack of governmental oversight in both novels to claim that Morris' setting and the lifestyles of his characters served as one of the important influences for Tolkien's envisioning of the Shire as a picturesque reconstruction of idyllic rural England (133-34).

As further evidence of Morris' influence, Tolkien noted in a letter to a professor in 1960 that, rather than drawing upon the World Wars as many people assumed him to have done, *The Lord of the Rings*, "owe more to William Morris and his Huns and Romans, as in *The House of the Wolfings* or *The Roots of the Mountains*" (*Letters*, 303). Nearly a half-century after writing the previously mentioned letter to his future wife, Tolkien re-confirmed with this letter that Morris' novels played an integral role in shaping *The Lord of the Rings*. In Michael D.C. Drout's *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, the entry for William Morris notes the similarity of the "matter-of-factness" with which both authors describe the landscapes in their respective novels (440). In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, for example, Tolkien displays this matter-of-factness as he explains the movement of Elrond's scouts as they traverse Middle-earth and report back to Rivendell:

> Some had gone north beyond the springs of the Hoarwell into the Ettenmoors; and others had gone west, and…had searched the lands far down the Greyflood, as far as Tharbad, where the old North Road crossed the river by a ruined town. Many had gone east and south; and some of these had crossed the Mountains and entered Mirkwood, while others had climbed the pass at the sources of the Gladden River, and had come down into Wilderland and over the Gladden Fields… (274)

The slew of geographical features that Tolkien reels off in the above quotation are mostly unfamiliar territories to the reader and locations that the protagonists themselves have not yet traversed. Rather than taking the time to orient the reader, though, Tolkien rattles off the routes in this narrative section and then progresses forward with the plot. The assumption, then, is that Tolkien viewed such geographical descriptions as commonplace and understandable to anyone familiar with Middle-earth. Therefore, to maintain the "internal consistency" he lauded as so necessary to a sub-creation, geographical features like the Ettenmoors and the Gladden River did not warrant any further description; such locations tangibly existed, and that was that. With similar descriptions of the Middle-earth landscape recurring throughout the series, it is evident that Tolkien has painstakingly plotted out and can easily envision the precise geography of his world. One has only to turn to the maps that are included in the appendices of his novels (or, as in the hardcover version of the second edition of *The Return of the King*, unfold directly from the back cover of the book) to see how seriously he took the landscape of Middle-earth.

In viewing *The Lord of the Rings* through her aforementioned lens of fantastical taxonomy, Mendelsohn argues that Tolkien's work is, like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a "portal fantasy." While this classification seems counterintuitive for the world of Middle-earth, which is distinctly its own entity with its own creation myths and history, as detailed in *The Silmarillion*,

and with no connections ever drawn in the books to "our" world, Mendelsohn aptly explains her reasoning behind terming Tolkien's work a "portal fantasy." She writes: "When we think of portal fantasies we commonly assume that the portal is from 'our' world to the fantastic, but the portal fantasy is about entry, transition, and negotiation; and much quest fantasy, for all we might initially assume that it is immersive, fits better with the portal fantasy" (174). From Mendelsohn's point of view, then, the Shire, or the section of Middle-earth belonging to the Hobbits in which both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* begins, is the portal through which the reader is gradually introduced to the fantastical world that awaits once the adventure truly begins.

Although not analyzed by Mendelsohn, she would likely also consider Morris' *The House of the Wolfings* to be a portal fantasy. Indeed, Morris' influences upon Tolkien's introductory chapters to *The Lord of the Rings* are especially evident. In Morris' work, the reader is first introduced to this colony of the Wolfings that lives in harmony in a man-made clearing in the forest. Their clearing is focused around a great hall where all of the Wolfing people can gather. Morris' world-building is on full display with phrases like, "Merry was the folk with that fair tide, and the promise of the harvest, and the joy of life, and there was no weapon among them so close to the houses, save here and there the boar-spear of some herdman or herdwoman late come from the meadow" (9). However, the novel quickly progresses to the peace of the Wolfings community being shattered by the attacks of the invading Romans. The Wolfings must go to war, leaving the sanctity of their sacred land of peace and plenty behind.

Comparing these descriptions to Tolkien's depictions of Frodo's community at the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the similar shaping of the Shire and the Wolfings community is evident. Though Tolkien takes more time to elaborate on the peculiar traditions of

the quaint, agricultural community in his opening chapters, noting that they are the sort of folk who "give presents to other people on their own birthdays" (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 27) and value a simple existence constituted of (many) meals together, he provides a more succinct summary of the hobbit community in the prologue to *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Tolkien writes that, "The Shire at this time had hardly any 'government.' Families for the most part managed their own affairs. Growing food and eating it occupied most of their time. In other matters they were, as a rule, generous and not greedy, but contented and moderate, so that estates, farms, workshops, and small trades tended to remain unchanged for generations" (9). Here, Tolkien seems to be constructing an image of complacency; the Shire was a place where a simple, rural life, like the life the author himself had valued in rural England, was prized for decade after decade. Essentially, in both Morris and Tolkien's fantastical novels, the peace of that homeland "portal" must be protected and preserved.

Despite the fact that Tolkien's Middle-earth is not our own Earth, there is an ample amount of English-ness in his envisioning of the Shire. In fact, the term "Shire" is derived from an Old English word, which is tacked onto the end of the names of several of England's counties, such as "Oxfordshire" and "Gloucestershire." According to the *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, "Shire" is: "Used in reference to parts of England regarded as strongholds of traditional rural culture, especially the rural Midlands."[73] At times, as in a 1956 letter to then-editor of the *New Republic*, Michael Straight, Tolkien was adamant that: "There is no special reference to England in the 'Shire'—except of course that as an Englishman brought up in an 'almost rural' village of Warwickshire on the edge of the prosperous bourgeoisie of Birmingham…I take my models like anyone else—from such 'life' as I know" (*Letters*, 235). As evidenced in this letter where he

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[73] See: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/_shire.

almost seems to contradict himself, Tolkien wished to make the keen distinction that his Shire was *not* an explicit reimagining of rural England, but rather a fictional location merely bearing the *influences* of his own experiences with rural England. As an example of influences in Tolkien's personal life, Sandyman's Mill in the Shire is often connected to Sarehole Mill, the quaint watermill near Tolkien's childhood home.[74] However, the obvious counterpoint remains that Tolkien did not have much of a "model" in his personal life as to what an Elvish retreat like Rivendell or even a medieval-esque kingdom like Gondor should be like (beyond the information that he devotedly studied as a student and professor of Anglo-Saxon literature and philology). The Shire, then, is the most obvious part of Middle-earth that hearkens back to a place in Tolkien's Primary World that his readership would (and often, did) recognize.

In fact, in another letter he wrote in the same year, Tolkien himself attributed the influence of English names, places, and cultures to his [creation] and naming of the Shire. The author posted a particularly heated letter to Rayner Unwin in 1956 regarding the Dutch translations of place-names in *The Lord of the Rings*:[75] "But, of course, if we drop the 'fiction' of long ago, 'The Shire' is based on rural England and not any other country in the world…The toponymy of *The Shire*, to take the first list, is a 'parody' of that of rural England, in much the same sense as are its inhabitants: they go together and are meant to. After all the book is English, and by an Englishman…" (*Letters*, 250). Essentially, Tolkien was flabbergasted that the translator would have attempted to take his carefully developed place-names, with their expertly crafted philological roots, and attempt to present them with some sort of Dutch translation;

[74] Tolkien wrote in a 1968 letter to Nicholas Thomas: "As for knowing Sarehole Mill, it dominated my childhood. I lived in a small cottage almost immediately beside it…" (*Letters*, 390). An endnote explains that "Tolkien lived with his mother and younger brother in a cottage opposite this mill, in a hamlet outside Birmingham, during his early childhood" (*Letters*, 452).

[75] An enraged Tolkien wrote: "That this is an 'imaginary' world does not give [the translator] any right to remodel it according to his fancy, even if he could in a few months create a new coherent structure which it took me years to work out" (*Letters*, 250).

Tolkien's point, to put it plainly, was *why not leave the Shire simply as "the Shire"*? Beyond Tolkien's frustration, though, the important part of this letter for the current argument is the author's ready admittance, now, that rural England played a crucial role in his imagining and creation of the Shire.

Tolkien presents this "parody" of rural England with the hobbits, who, for all their trivial squabbles among themselves, are really a good-natured lot. The author provides the most thorough exposition of the Shire and its life in his prologue to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where he explains, as best he can, the origins of the hobbits and their way of life in the Shire. He emphasizes that the hobbits are contented with their modest lives, sparing little thought for happenings beyond the Shire's borders:

> …and there in that pleasant corner of the world they plied their well-ordered business of living, and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk…They were, in fact, sheltered, but they had ceased to remember it. (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 5)

As Tolkien illustrates in this passage, the hobbits as a people became entirely self-consumed with the business of their own affairs in the Shire. Indeed, before he sets out for his journey, Frodo ponders what lands could exist in Middle-earth beyond the Shire, because "maps made in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders" (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 43). Tolkien is not clear about whether he is casting judgment on this ignorance about life beyond the Shire. On one hand, the majority of his hundreds of pages of narrative takes place *outside* the Shire—the books would be quite tedious if the only goings-on were birthday parties and spats

over which Baggins could live in Bag End. However, Tolkien cannot help but continue to display a fondness for the hobbits and their way of life.

And yet, for all the endearing qualities of the Shire, Tolkien does not take the stance, at least not explicitly, that the hobbits' lifestyle is one that he espouses above all others. Tolkien writes that "hobbits are not a Utopian vision, or recommended as an ideal in their own or any age. They, as all peoples and their situation, are an historical accident—as the Elves point out to Frodo—and an impermanent one in the long view" (*Letters*, 197). In this letter, Tolkien seems to be applying a more critical lens to his creation; perhaps he does not, after all, think it prudent to become oblivious to the movement of the "dark things" beyond one's own cozy neighborhood. Living through both World Wars, fighting in the first one himself and having his son, Christopher, fighting in the second, Tolkien likely saw the necessity of nations being watchful of those around them, careful not to let acts of evil go unchecked. Nevertheless, despite his resolute denial that the Shire is no aspirational Utopia, Tolkien does dedicate a certain amount of care in the final chapters of *The Lord of the Rings* to describing how the Shire, after being dismantled and upended by the defected wizard Saruman, is restored back to peace and order.

When Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin return at last from their adventures across Middle-earth, they are dismayed to find their comfortable, beloved Shire overrun by ruffians who lock the gates of the cities by night, enforce strict rules, and erect massive, ugly smokestacks. This band of ruffians is led by a ringleader named Sharkey, who is later revealed to be the traitorous wizard Saruman. In this penultimate chapter of *The Return of the King*, titled "The Scouring of the Shire," there are several paragraphs that demonstrate the means by which the hobbits' homeland has been transformed into a scarcely recognizable place that is "bare and dimly lit, all very gloomy and un-Shirelike" (277). Perhaps the passage that best demonstrates the pain the

hobbits felt at seeing their Shire in such shambles describes Frodo and Sam's disbelief that their home has been reduced to such a miserable state:

> This was Frodo and Sam's own country, and they found out now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world. Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank on the north side of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water's edge were ran with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of the ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air. (*The Return of the King*, 283)

The tidiness that the hobbits associated with the Shire, its neat gardens and charming hobbit-holes, have all been disrupted and left in chaotic disarray. Worst of all, though, is the loss of the natural environment, with the overrun gardens and missing trail of trees, and its replacement with an industrial chimney that belches out "black smoke" into the previously untainted organic environment.

As a shocked Pippin notes, this is "the very last" end the hobbits expected to encounter (*Return of the King*, 285). After all, Frodo has by this point, inadvertently or not, destroyed the evil Ring, significantly diminishing Sauron's power in the process. Perhaps, then, the hobbits' return to find their once peaceful world turned askew is a subtle nod to the fact that in the Bible, when Jesus made His sacrifice and the veil was torn[76]—even after He was resurrected from the

[76] Matthew 27:50-53: "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many." (New King James Version, biblegateway.com)

dead—our world was not immediately made right. Believers in Christ were persecuted, and many of His apostles were imprisoned and died as martyrs for refusing to continue spreading the Gospel. Since Christ's resurrection, the world has been rife with wars, diseases, hatred, starvation, greed, and suffering. The concept that the supreme being of the universe has already descended to earth and performed a divine act meant to save all of humanity in another life remains a difficult concept to swallow. Indeed, this is one of the critical questions believers and non-believers alike struggle with: if God exists, and if He is good, and if He did sacrifice Himself on the cross for the sins of the world, then why do we continue to suffer in this life? Try as they might, theologians can produce no concrete answer for this existential question; no verse in the Bible provides a clear-cut answer that can set minds and hearts at ease. For Christians, the matter must come down to belief, or more specifically, faith—faith that He is good, and the embodiment of love itself,[77] and that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

Theological arguments about the fallen state of the Earth aside, Tolkien does allow his own Shire to ostensibly return to its position as a sort of pinnacle of peace and prosperity. After combating orcs and the rest of Sauron's evil army, Frodo and his friends are not to be cowed by the sneering ruffians. They band the hobbits together and make short work of dispatching the ruffians (although the hobbits do make an effort to do as little killing as possible), before marching to the mayor's home that Saruman has overtaken, ousting the wizard from his deleterious rule over the Shire. Despite the turmoil that the Shire suffered at the hands of Saruman, it is, through the hobbits' cheerful labor, restored back to a seemingly even more paradisiacal version of its former glory:

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[77] 1 John 4:7: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." (New King James version, biblegateway.com)

> Altogether 1420 in the Shire was a marvelous year. Not only was there wonderful sunshine and delicious rain, in due times and perfect measure, but there seemed something more: an air of richness and growth, and a gleam of a beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth…And no one was ill, and everyone was pleased, except those who had to mow the grass. (*The Return of the King*, 303)

And yet, this revitalized version of the Shire is not meant for everyone to enjoy. In a poetically heroic manner, Frodo explains to Sam why he must now depart Middle-earth and travel toward the uncharted West, thereby underscoring that Tolkien's fantasy concludes on a much more bittersweet note than many readers acknowledge.[78] Frodo describes the burden that carrying the Ring as Ringbearer has placed upon him by saying that he has been "too deeply hurt" (309). Frodo continues, "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them'" (*The Return of the King*, 309). In other words, Frodo has been too marked by the Ring for him to be able to fully enjoy the bliss that his hobbithole in Bag End once afforded him. His heart remains heavy; he knows it is time for him to pass on into the West, and leave the security of the Shire to those who can still find rest in the peace of its simple way of life.

Reflecting again on Tolkien's emphasis on the idyllic qualities of the Shire, it is important to note that in his personal life, too, the author valued the simplicity of the countryside and a basic existence. In fact, he seemed to attribute a near-magical quality to Oxford that would be disturbed as soon as motors and other forms of machinery were allowed to penetrate the

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[78] In an article analyzing the narrative theory of Tolkien's work, Mary R. Bowman refutes an earlier assertion by critic Rosemary Jackson that Tolkien's work belongs to a category with a "minimal functional narrative" and a "formulaic ending" (cited in Bowman, 288). Instead, Bowman argues, Tolkien's "critique of 'happily ever after'" in *The Lord of the Rings* "could not be more explicit" (288).

academic city's walls. He was all too adamant about this stance in his essay, "On Fairy Stories," where he recounts:

> Not long ago—incredible though it may seem—I heard a clerk of Oxenford declare that he "welcomed" the proximity of mass-production robot factories, and the roar of self-obstructive mechanical traffic, because it brought his university into "contact with real life." He may have meant that the way men were living and working in the twentieth century was increasing in barbarity at an alarming rate, and that the loud demonstration of this in the streets of Oxford might serve as a warning that it is not possible to preserve for long an oasis of sanity in a desert of unreason by mere fences, without actual offensive action (practical and intellectual). I fear he did not. In any case the expression "real life" in this context seems to fall short of academic standards. The notion that motor-cars are more "alive" than, say, centaurs or dragons is curious; that they are more "real" than, say, horses is pathetically absurd. How real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm-tree: poor obsolete thing, insubstantial dream of an escapist! ("On Fairy Stories," 20-21)

Tolkien's angry response to the prospect that Oxford might be bettered by the intrusion of motor-cars is apparent. He assigns the qualities of "life" and being "more alive" as belonging more to mythical, nonexistent creatures like centaurs (creatures that he does not even include in his fantastical series) than the soon-to-become-omnipresent motorized industry. Tolkien's stance, then, in both his fiction and his actual life, seems clear: machinery and motors are associated with negativity, serving as distractors from the beauty of the simple "real life."

Taking all of this into account, it seems clear that Tolkien is making a statement with his nostalgic emphasis on the peace and bounteous prosperity that exists in the rural countryside of

the Shire, the portal where his protagonists begin and end their journeys. One potential answer is that with the Shire, Tolkien was prescribing the model for his ideal of a well-lived, humble life. This explanation, while tempting, does not seem to be the surest answer. One only has to consider the hobbits' naivete about their surroundings in Middle-earth, as well as their seeming lack of gumption to undertake intellectual challenges or place themselves beyond a life of comfort, to feel that this theory of the Shire as utopia falls flat. Tolkien himself, as a University of Oxford don, lived a scholarly life of learning, letters, and academic stimulation; he gathered regularly with a group of other intellectuals, who called themselves the Inklings, to exchange and discuss their literary work. In other words, Tolkien valued a well-informed, stimulating life far too much for him to promote as the utmost archetype a community where that pursuit of and thirst for learning is decidedly absent.

The second, and more likely, explanation for Tolkien's nostalgic idealizing of the Shire is that he wanted the hobbits' homeland to function as a setting in which the inhabitants continue to cling to their roots—including a lack of industrialization, but also, perhaps, a strong sense of faith in the traditions of their community. In a sense, Tolkien's Shire might be considered an incarnation of the classical meaning of the word, "paganism." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "paganism" takes its roots from the Christianization of the Roman Empire, emerging from the Latin word *paganus*, which means "of the country, rustic." The etymology section goes on to note that the word arguably originally connoted "the fact that the ancient idolatry lingered on in the rural villages and hamlets after Christianity had been generally accepted in the towns and cities of the Roman Empire." In an article entitled "The Demise of Paganism," James J. O'Donnell further clarifies the etymology of the term, writing that "[*paganus*] was first introduced by the Christians themselves, who had axes to grind" (48). In

essence, the original meaning of paganism was reserved for those communities that, removed from the urban, progressive areas of the Roman Empire, continued in their ancient, polytheistic worship well after the majority of their countrymen had converted to Christianity.

Applying this concept to Middle-earth, the Shire could be viewed as Tolkien's interpretation of a pagan community that holds firm to its traditions, rather than succumbing to the sweep of industrialization or other evils. Furthermore, with the established link between the Shire and the rural British countryside, Tolkien might be projecting his implied hopes that the agricultural tradition and, as part of that tradition, the Christian faith, might continue to be preserved in the British countryside, even as the British cities became more modern and urbanized—and "faithless." With his studies of Anglo-Saxon literature, Tolkien readily admitted to his admiration of pagan myths, particularly the tales of the Norse gods and Northern Courage. With this in mind, Patrick Curry argues in *Defending Middle-earth* that *The Lord of the Rings* exists as a conglomeration of Christianity and pagan myth: "Thus, Tolkien's story combines Christian humility and mercy—pre-eminently, Frodo—with a pagan appreciation of places and powers—Gandalf, Lothlorien, and many others—and humanist virtue, in the hobbits: ordinary, small people whose contribution becomes crucial" (119).

The nostalgic quality of traditionalism in Tolkien's Shire can perhaps be best illuminated with a final comparison to the community in Morris' *The House of the Wolfings*. Barbara J. Bono writes of the Wolfings and their community, where each person relied on the greater whole and was attuned to the larger society's needs, that "The organic continuity of history and of the fellowship of man within it forms the *faith* of these works…" (59, emphasis added). The fellowship of man in the House of the Wolfings, the camaraderie of hobbits in the Shire: both communities are built upon the concept of communing with and relying upon each other. Bono's

choice of the word "faith" in this context is worth scrutinizing. While in her article, Bono does not explicitly connect this sort of "faith" in man as a parallel to religious faith, she certainly leaves that interpretation as a possibility—which is exactly how I am suggesting Tolkien himself intended the Shire to function, as a setting where, removed from the influences of the rest of Middle-earth, the hobbits' relied upon their longstanding "faith" in each other and their local tradition. Further, this sort of removed community of faith echoes a deeper, stauncher faith, one that, rooted as it is in a tradition of fellowship with its fellow man (or hobbits), makes itself more open to placing its trust in a fellowship with the invisible, omnipotent being who controls the universe.

Of course, the reader must keep in mind the caveat that the Shire, and on a larger scale, Middle-earth itself, was never intended to be allegorical. This idea is strongly evidenced by Tolkien's explicit dismissal of allegory as far too overtly heavy-handed. Tolkien writes in his foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*: "I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence" (xxiv). Religion in any form is strikingly nonexistent in Middle-earth. There are, of course, the Valar in the West, whose existence are explained in more detail in Tolkien's mythological *Silmarillion*, and Ilúvatar, who never makes a direct appearance, but seems to be the creator of the Middle-earth universe and the supreme being over the angelic Valar. That said, never at any point in *The Lord of the Rings* do the characters engage in a form of organized worship or even a semblance of prayer, nor are there structures resembling churches. This studied lack of religion seems intentional on Tolkien's part. The author wanted the religiosity of his series, imbued with eucatastrophe and a trust in community, to speak for itself—he did not dare run the risk of being too overtly Christian in his fantasy, both to avoid dissuading readers,

and also because he believed anything verging too close to the allegorical was akin to tarnishing his art—and, perhaps, his faith as well.

In essence, it seems that, in his descriptions of the Shire, Tolkien was engaging in a not uncritical appreciation of the countryside and the simple lifestyle it afforded, including the opportunity of remaining steeped in tradition. He highlighted the drawbacks of such a life, with the hobbits' cheerful ignorance about the realm outside the Shire, yet he also accentuated the comfort and sense of peacefulness that such a place can and does afford. Of course, the Shire, even after being restored to a better version of its former glory after Saruman's industrial invasion, was not truly an impenetrable paradise, in the purest sense—if the Shire had been a paradise, then Frodo, scarred from the burden of bearing the Ring, would not have had to leave it in order to venture into the West for a chance at relief. And yet, the Shire still exists, for the other hobbits, as a land of abundance and blissful happiness. In some ways, the Shire, with its nostalgic qualities, seems reminiscent of the nature of childhood—perhaps even Tolkien's own personal childhood. We cannot all hold onto that period of life indefinitely, but while we are enveloped in it, we are, in an ideal scenario (derived from a Romantic-Victorian myth of childhood), protected from the trials and fatigues of the outside, "adult" world; children trust more openly and believe more fervently. Perhaps this likening to childhood, then, is the ultimate point. While Tolkien acknowledges its limited qualities and, at times, the precarious nature of naivete it promotes, the Shire remains as the author's nostalgic celebration of the rural and its associated lifestyle of simplicity and tradition of long-lasting faith in other members of the community.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Rowling and Tolkien distinctly differ in the methods they employ to construct their nostalgic communities of faith. One of the most glaring differences is the fact that Rowling's world is linked to our own, while Tolkien's is decidedly placed in an unrecognizable alternative world, complete with its own mythological history. For Rowling's part, the students' faith in Hogwarts and their friends and mentors there is constantly being drilled through a series of lessons (both in the classroom and outside of it) that instill in the characters the necessity of relying upon and draw strength and solace from each other. On the other hand, in Tolkien's Shire, the hobbits turn a much blinder eye than the inhabitants of Hogwarts to the goings-on in the outside world. Indeed, the residents of the Shire take a lackadaisical approach to coaching the hobbits toward depending upon each other, instead relying upon tradition to continue to bind the community together in their shared humble lifestyles.

Despite these contrasts, Hogwarts and the Shire are more alike than they are different. Both communities are isolated, in their own way, from the influences and evils of the outside world. (Of course, both communities are penetrated by evil toward the conclusion of their respective series—Voldemort invades Hogwarts and Saruman industrializes the Shire—but both authors make an effort to focus on the restoration of these communities.) Tradition rules both communities, from institutions like the Sorting Hat and the competition for the House Cup at Hogwarts to the emphasis on many meals and lavish birthday celebrations in the Shire. Perhaps most importantly, both communities are variations of archetypes that are viewed with fond nostalgia in British culture. Hogwarts evokes nostalgia for the classic British public school, and the Shire elicits nostalgia for the simplicity of life in the British countryside—both of which are traditionally associated with being strongholds of faith, in the religious sense. Ultimately, at Hogwarts, Rowling displays the idea that the perseverance of "good" relies upon developing a

faith in each other—and once you are outside that faith, as Voldemort was, the consequences are terrible and severe. Meanwhile, in Tolkien's Shire, shielded from the corruptions and distractions of the outside world, the inhabitants may coexist in a community of trust—trust not only in each other, but also in the fact that, as long as they internally maintain the humble standards of their own community, the outside world cannot bring them too much harm. The greatest connecting factor between Hogwarts and the Shire is this network of trust the authors construct as a subtle emphasis on the importance of placing hope in an encompassing entity that is greater than any individual, thereby pointing, indirectly, toward Rowling and Tolkien's own reliance on Christian faith.

Conclusion

Both J.K. Rowling and J.R.R. Tolkien draw many readers to their series through the appeal of delving into a world very different from our own. Fans of either series are typically enthralled by the magic of the worlds, by the excitement of a game that involves flying broomsticks and the endearing habits of hobbits. Yet, for all the fantastical worlds' obvious differences from our own, readers are just as enchanted by those qualities of "realness" and relatability that also pervade *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, making readers believe that such a school as Hogwarts or such a world as Middle-earth *does* exist in the collective, informed imagination of readers. Elements like the thorough detail of the settings and the humanistic relatability of the characters and their emotions contribute to the "internal consistency" that Tolkien championed in his theoretical essay on fantastical sub-creation as the essential backbone of any successful fairy story ("On Fairy Stories," 15).

In this regard, Rowling and Tolkien bring themselves into conversation with C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, and, for that matter, with any work of fantasy that features worldbuilding. However, Rowling and Tolkien sharply diverge from Lewis when it comes to the thematic material of their works. With Lewis, Christian parallelism is quite apparent as the core purpose of the *Narnia* books, especially *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Last Battle*. As David Downing asserts in his introduction to *Into the Wardrobe*, "When Lewis took up children's fiction, he did not cease to be Lewis the Christian, Lewis the medieval and Renaissance scholar, or Lewis the literary artist" (xv). Naturally, the medieval concept of the *Primum Mobile*, one of Lewis' chief areas of study, likely loomed large in the author's mind as he constructed the story of the powerful yet gentle Aslan, sent by the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea to die, atone for Edmund's sins, be resurrected, and rescue Narnia. Such overt allegory restricts

readers from fully engaging with the “reality” of the fantastical world. Put another way, the reader is never able to push far enough past the structures of Lewis’ allegory to immerse themselves fully in believing in the world of Narnia existing separately from the allegory.

Contrastingly, in their own works of fantasy, Rowling and Tolkien eschew developing a Christian allegory. This authorial decision allows for their thematic material to range broadly, giving readers more leeway to directly experience otherworldly reality through the wizarding world and Middle-earth. And yet, if we apply Northrop Frye’s theory that the Bible can be utilized as a sort of key for unlocking depths within all literature, the idea that both Rowling and Tolkien’s fantastical worlds exist in their own shrouded, but still supportive, version of the *Primum Mobile* is plausible. Certainly, both series include moments where evidence of underlying Christianity seems to rise toward, and nearly permeate, the surface of their stories. The authors intimate their faiths not only through the plot structures of Harry’s resurrection and the eucatastrophe that saves Middle-earth from Frodo’s failure to destroy the Ring, but also in exchanges between the characters as they speculate on the unexplainable parts of their worlds.

Dumbledore, for example, gives credence to the reality of the intangible and things unseen when he assures Harry in *Deathly Hallows*, before sending the protagonist back to life from the “between-place,”: "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?” (*Deathly Hallows*, 723). Gandalf, in turn, cannot quite articulate what higher power, being, or entity allowed the Ring to fall into Bilbo’s care, and thus into Frodo’s hands, but the wizard is certain that it was some work on the side of *good*. “Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought” (*Fellowship of the*

Ring, 56). Tolkien would have broken his abstinence from allegory if he dared to allow Gandalf to say any more directly that a real, nameable force of good (or God himself) was controlling the events that brought the Ring to Frodo, a fact the author was certainly cognizant of. Nevertheless, in that particular scene, Tolkien pressed up abnormally close, for his taste, against the boundary between allowing his personal faith to noticeably spill over into the fantasy.

While Lewis' strategy of overt Christianity has its place and its set of admirers, the deeper magic within Rowling and Tolkien's work is rooted in the fact that they appeal to a broader, more secular audience, yet retain a fundamental sense of Christianity in their work. The evidence of the authors' faith is buried beneath the surface of *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, yet still discernible for those who care to look for it, or for those who feel compelled to find a similar source of hope in our world when they reluctantly put the book down. Rowling and Tolkien cast their spells of the deeper magic primarily through their development of Christ-like figures in Harry and Frodo, and also by their careful construction of communities, within their worlds, that cultivate a sense of faith in tradition and in each other. Evident in the settings of both series is a fondness for the nostalgic aspects of British culture, with Rowling's indebtedness to the celebrated school story genre and the idealization of British public schools, and Tolkien's complementary reshaping and preservation of the comfortable camaraderie attributed to the idyllic British countryside. With their reliance upon realistic nostalgia in their creations of Hogwarts and the Shire, Rowling and Tolkien appear to display a wistful longing for these parts of British culture that once clung so strongly, particularly in the Victorian era, to a tradition of Christianity. In essence, the independent reality of Rowling and Tolkien's fantasy worlds allows for a deeper, subtler advocacy of faith.

Of course, Rowling and Tolkien's literary legacies are still being defined, and not only through the films, television series, and Broadway plays that continue to be developed from their work. Perhaps even more so, the two authors' legacies are still being shaped by the readers who take up, for the first time or the fiftieth time, their books, discovering within the pages a spark of something new, something exciting, something that strikes a chord within the reader, reminding them of a deeply recognizable feeling of urgent hope in the greater good that extends well beyond the fantasy of the wizarding world or Middle-earth. In other words, Rowling and Tolkien's legacies lie within the essences of their series that continue to resonate with readers on a deeper level, reminding them of what Tolkien would call the Primary World, our world ("On Fairy Stories," 19).

Bearing all of this in mind, a final quote from Gandalf seems an appropriate conclusion. The wizard offers Frodo this advice as solace after informing him of his responsibilities as Ring-bearer: "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us" (*Fellowship of the Ring*, 51). Put that way, life and its burdens seem reduced to such simplicity. With their time, Rowling and Tolkien devoted themselves to creating rich fantastical worlds that are carefully structured so as to not overtly reference their Christian faiths, but still are intended to contain resonances of Christ-like sacrifice and triumph. Further, by choosing to write in the fantasy genre, the authors required their readers to stretch the limits of what they were willing to believe in. In order to be truly immersed in *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings*, readers must suspend their beliefs of what they know to be true and practical and provable, allowing themselves to put their faith wholeheartedly in the fantasy. Then, upon closing the book, it is up to us, the readers, to decide whether to choose, with the time given us, to then explore and apply Rowling and

Tolkien's deeper magic and Northrop Frye's "Great Code" outside the realms of fantasy, to test the limits of our faith in something deeper and greater and richer in our own world.

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