

Medievalism, the Lost Book, and Handicraft in *The Lord of the Rings*

by

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Abstract

This thesis considers medievalism and the lost book in J. R. R. Tolkien's text, *The Lord of the Rings*, and the effects of inventing textual history. *The Lord of the Rings* was chosen for this thesis as the Ur-text of fantasy and medievalism like *World of Warcraft*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Dungeons & Dragons*. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* is considered as an example of using the lost book motif to achieve sociopolitical advantages otherwise unavailable. *The Lord of the Rings* frequently associates handicraft with Good and industry (especially for the purpose of war) with Evil. These ideas are historicized through medievalism. The Middle Ages are made to be a convenient, pre-industrial, golden age of handicraft. While for some, medievalism can be a useful escape from the troubles of one's own time—for others, symbols of the medieval past can become dangerous icons of ethnonationalism and other hateful ideas.

Keywords:

Tolkien, Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Lord of the Rings*, Middle Ages, medieval, medievalism, fantasy, lost book, handicraft, anti-industrial, ethnonationalism, white supremacy

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	v
Introduction	vi
Medievalism in Contemporary Fantasy	1
Tolkien and Medievalism	18
<i>The Lord of the Rings and the Lost Book</i>	36
The Legacy of Handicraft in The Lord of the Rings	56
Conclusion	71
Works Cited	79

Introduction

Why have the Middle Ages become so popular? Over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries the Middle Ages have exploded into the popular consciousness with the growth of television and novel franchises, films, tabletop games, video games, and other diverse activities and media. I think that “fantasy” has become one of the primary vehicles for the proliferation of medievalism. At the root of modern fantasy lies J. R. R. Tolkien and his seminal text, *The Lord of the Rings*. One of the most interesting aspects of medievalism is how medieval iconography is injected into modern texts and the resulting associations between medieval and modern that this creates for the reader. The possible associations are many and varied. The fantasy shorthand, created in large part by *The Lord of the Rings* with reference to the Middle Ages, is propagated throughout much of the genre today. The associations of medievalism are reified through the repetition of medievalism in the popular consciousness. Of particular interest to me here, in addition to understanding medievalism and its processes, is understanding how *The Lord of the Rings* interacts with medieval tropes and genres—such as history and romance—to create its mythology and the broader association of the Middle Ages with handicraft in opposition to industry both in the text and beyond. I identify how Tolkien’s use of the lost book motif, among other practices, makes appeals to history and tradition which, in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, seem to borrow from histories like *Historia Regum Britanniae* to add to the depth and immersion of the fiction. This kind of practice, however, also creates at least an implicit appeal to history and tradition whereby other ideas in the text become conflated with the medieval past. The focus in my reading of *The Lord of the Rings* has been on the association of handicraft with Good and the work of industry with Evil (although those associations are only generalizations and both require further elaboration). My research further considers the potential deleterious effects of

medievalism including the persuasive power of appeals to history and tradition which can be especially harmful when medievalism is co-opted by ethnonationalists or others seeking a justification for their violence.

One of the challenges of writing this thesis has been balancing my work as a scholar with the enjoyment I have already gotten from *The Lord of the Rings* as a fan. I have endeavoured to be as rigorous as I could in my consideration of the text without letting go of my enjoyment completely. Indeed, the words of Gandalf to Saruman have often crossed my mind: “he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 258). I thought that by continuing this project it was possible for me to somehow exhaust my enjoyment of *The Lord of the Rings* and, in the pursuit of my degree, lose something precious. But I have not set out to “break” *The Lord of the Rings* nor to engage in a reductionist analysis that would miss the forest for the trees. Now, having completed my project, I see my enjoyment of *The Lord of the Rings* has only become more critical and multidimensional. For me, there is something enchanting about *The Lord of the Rings*, but at the same time I can recognize how potentially harmful medievalism can persist in the text, and flourish especially in subsequent medievalisms that forgo the nuance of their source material. In writing this, I feel like I have grown considerably in my understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of *The Lord of the Rings* and have only benefited from engaging in this academic process. My hope for readers of this thesis is twofold. First, that scholars consider some points made here worth further investigation, or otherwise that their general attention at least be drawn to the continued functions of medievalism in popular culture. Second, that fans of Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*, scholar or otherwise, might be delighted by some new insight into a favourite text. I hope that others find fruitful ground for their own inquiry in the broader academic questions being asked. Chapter one

first considers medievalism as a cultural phenomenon. My research remains focused on *The Lord of the Rings*, but chapter one also considers medievalism more broadly, especially in those areas of popular culture like fantasy most heavily influenced by *The Lord of the Rings*. The goal of my analysis in chapter one is twofold: 1) to come to a better understanding of medievalism generally by considering the work of other scholars and 2) to direct a refined understanding of medievalism towards *The Lord of the Rings* to better understand the relationship between *The Lord of the Rings* and the Middle Ages.

Many definitions of medievalism have been proposed in the last two decades. My first task in chapter one is to consider these various definitions and figure out which is most suitable for understanding *The Lord of the Rings*. One of the earliest and most often cited definitions (Fitzpatrick, Matthews, Verduin) of medievalism is given by Leslie J. Workman who founded the journal *Studies in Medievalism*. Curiously, Workman's original text is itself a kind of "lost book" and I have had trouble finding the original as has Fitzpatrick who notes in footnote 31 of "Producing Neomedievalism" how "although Workman's essay is often cited, it is notoriously difficult to find. I therefore follow a common practice in citing the essay via Verduin" (13). I will follow suit by citing Workman via Verduin here: "the study of the successive recreation of the Middle Ages by different generations, *is* the Middle Ages. And this of course is medievalism" (Verduin 20). Workman's definition is commonly cited for good reason, and I think it does well to explain how medievalism functions through "successive recreation". I hold this element of medievalism central to considering its influence on popular culture today. The rhetorical power of medievalism is also central to my analysis of medievalism and *The Lord of the Rings*. I am interested in the implicit and explicit associations between medieval and modern symbols, ideas, motifs, etc. and the rhetorical consequences of those associations. One of the ways I come to a

better understanding of medievalism is by understanding the historical context of the word medievalism and what it has come to represent.

The history of medievalism can be traced back roughly to the solidification of medieval studies as an academic discipline. Whatever was excluded from medieval studies effectively became medievalism (see Biddick). Without the boundaries of a discipline to guide practice, medievalism in the 19th and 20th centuries was the domain of hobbyists and artists. Given that medievalism could be defined against medieval studies as all those products of interactions with the Middle Ages that were not considered medieval studies, it is no surprise that medievalism appears in so many diverse ways today. Some examples of medievalism include table top games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, historical-fiction like the television show *Vikings*, fantasy television like *Game of Thrones*, much of the fantasy genre of books, historical fairs and reenactments, roleplaying groups, and even commercial advertisement.

Much of what is at stake in discussing medievalism and medievalist fantasy including *The Lord of the Rings* is the question of how a reimagined Middle Ages is portrayed and why. I think that much of the popular appeal of the Middle Ages has become bound up with ideas of what the Middle Ages represent and what might be desirable about that time. In *The Lord of the Rings* I think much of this affection is bound up with the idea of handicraft in opposition to industry along with the heroic elements of epic poetry, romance, and history. But as considered in chapter one, there is also room for harmful medievalisms that might justify the violence of ethnonationalists and others.

In chapter two I discuss the place of Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* within the broader context of medievalism that was addressed in chapter one. I think *The Lord of the Rings* is an important text to discuss when considering the influence of medievalism on popular culture in

the 20th and 21st centuries because it was essential to the popularization of fantasy in the 20th century. While early fantasy did exist independently of *The Lord of the Rings*, I think it is safe to say that without it the genre would look entirely different. *The Lord of the Rings* ultimately carved out a readership for the fantasy genre today and helped inspire millions of enthusiasts who would go on to popularize tabletop games like *Dungeons & Dragons* and eventually 21st century video games like *World of Warcraft*.

David Matthews notes how *The Lord of the Rings* became “central to libertarianism and the environmental movement” and that “this anti-technological Middle Ages of the little person has become one of the defining images of the Middle Ages around the world” (Matthews 32). “The little person” here being the individual or otherwise small organization in opposition to industry and large corporations, also, accurately enough in *The Lord of the Rings*, hobbits. This thread, the thread of an anti-industrial and anti-technological Middle Ages, is commonly identified in *The Lord of the Rings* (Curry, Matthews, Green) and is treated with more nuance in chapter four.

The Lord of the Rings is also particularly suitable as a focal point in a discussion of medievalism today because of Tolkien’s simultaneous positions as academic and author. While much of his professional work was concerned with the Middle Ages within the purview of academic disciplines such as medieval studies, linguistics, and philology, Tolkien is perhaps most well known for his works of fiction: *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. These latter texts are both examples of medievalism and Tolkien’s affection towards the Middle Ages in a non-professional or, as I discuss in chapter two with reference to Dinshaw, “amateur” capacity.

I have identified *The Lord of the Rings* as a romantic medievalism that taps into themes central to medieval romance. Romantic medievalisms depict the Middle Ages generally, or

certain elements of the medieval past, as desirable. My identification of *The Lord of the Rings* as a romantic medievalism is in part due to my reading of David Matthews and his discussion of gothic and romantic themes in contemporary medievalism. Matthews is also aware of the problems that romantic medievalisms can have today, especially when these stories become co-opted by ethnonationalists. “In medieval romances themselves, ideologies of race, blood, and faith are prominent. The true knight is the knight of the right blood; the monstrous other (a giant, Saracen, or simply a felon knight must be expelled or converted” (Matthews 33). *The Lord of the Rings*, borrowing much from medieval romance, is in some ways particularly susceptible to these kinds of readings. For example, Aragorn, the heir to the throne of Gondor, is the heir of the right blood. His lineage is blessed with a lifespan beyond that of other mortals. The king can *only* be Aragorn. Even so, Aragorn is written as the perfect king such that his character fits the position as well as his blood. There is no doubt about his suitability to govern. Other examples of this are discussed at length in chapter two with reference to Fitzpatrick and more recent fantasy such as George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* (adapted into HBO’s *Game of Thrones*). While *The Lord of the Rings*, and by extension other fantasy, are in ways playful and productive with how they interact with the past, there is also the potential for problematic myths to be essentialized and pass uncritically through successive generations of medievalism (blood purity and representations of race and gender for example).

One of the main ways I identify *The Lord of the Rings* as medievalism is through its association with medieval romances and histories. In chapter three I contrast Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, as an example of a medieval history, with *The Lord of the Rings*. Specifically, I am interested in the rhetorical significance of the lost book in each text. Perhaps the most obvious potential of the lost book is to produce an appeal to tradition based on

fake roots in history. The lost book is able to supplant material history in favour of a reimagined textual past that nevertheless feigns materiality.

Geoffrey's use of the lost book in *Historia Regum Britanniae* seems to me to be primarily a rhetorical device (see Howlett). Furthermore, whether or not Geoffrey actually had access to a physical source or not is irrelevant to the rhetorical weight of his *claim* to have access to such a source; so long as his access to the source remained exclusive, it would not matter whether he was bluffing. Geoffrey's claim to have access to a lost book enables him to play loose with history and empowers him over his contemporaries. The lost book provides Geoffrey with an opportunity to fabricate a cohesive history for a people for whom written records of the past are comparatively few. So powerful would Geoffrey's claims become that *Historia Regum Britanniae* would remain an important source for medieval English succession claims.

The Lord of the Rings is not completely analogous to *Historia Regum Britanniae* and in including the "Red Book of Westmarch", Tolkien's lost book, Tolkien could not have hoped to fabricate his source material in the same way as Geoffrey. It is clear to us that the "Red Book of Westmarch" is an invention of Tolkien, and it does not refer to an actual text. Insofar as it may exist, it is likely a compilation of Tolkien's own notes on his writing or something similar. Perhaps the myths and histories that inspired Tolkien could be counted as part of the "Red Book", but at this point I am constructing metaphors for what the "Red Book" might represent. Regardless, I think Tolkien's lost book has a fundamentally different meaning than Geoffrey's. Whereas Geoffrey's use of the lost book gave him an edge over his contemporaries and afforded him both flexibility and authority in preparing his text, Tolkien's use of the lost book strikes me as a stylistic element given that its inclusion in the text seems less likely to fool a contemporary audience engaging with fiction.. While it is unlikely that anyone today would mistake the "Red

Book” for an actual source, the inclusion of the “Red Book” works like a signpost back to medieval histories like *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

The inclusion of the lost book and the reference to medieval histories appear to lend some rhetorical weight to the implicit claims made in *The Lord of the Rings*. Umberto Eco describes one reimagining of the Middle Ages as the “Middle Ages of *national identities*, so powerful again during the last century, when the medieval model was taken as a political utopia, a celebration of past grandeur...” (70). Like I have already mentioned, this is particularly problematic when these visions of the Middle Ages are taken up by ethnonationalists as myths in an attempt to legitimize their claims. Despite this, I think there is still comparative “good” to be found in medievalism like *The Lord of the Rings* and much of modern fantasy. Tolkien himself considers fantasy a kind of escape: “why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home?” (Tolkien “On Fairy-Stories” 60). Tolkien argues that the escape of the prisoner has been confused for the flight of the deserter (“On Fairy-Stories” 60). Desertion has a much more negative connotation. Dinshaw too celebrates the kind of creative engagement with the Middle Ages that produces historical fiction and fantasy describing how this “can be a much-needed survival strategy for those for whom a relationship to ‘home’ is disrupted: those displaced from their homelands either literally or figuratively, including queers of all stripes” (Dinshaw *How Soon is Now?* 35). Medievalism and fantasy can be a place of rest and recovery for people dealing with problems they associate with their own time. Thus, they find escape in the past, at least temporarily. This escape need not be to a particular point in time so long as it is away from the present. Any alternate time might work.

In chapter four I discuss how *The Lord of the Rings* has become bound up with environmental, anti-technological, and anti-industrial movements by considering the text’s

relationship to technology. Tolkien's relationship to technology is more complicated than it might first appear in *The Lord of the Rings*. There are plenty of examples of technology that are not depicted as bad or Evil (toys, clothing, rope, and fireworks). Matt Green's presentation "Navigating Technology with Tolkien" was eye-opening for me in how Green discussed Tolkien's relationship with technology. I had long suspected that the environmentalism often associated with Tolkien was more complicated than it first appeared; the environments in Tolkien, while often respected, are also dangerous in their own right, more sublime than beautiful. The Old Forest, Caradhras, and the Mirkwood Marshes are all examples of inhospitable environments. Nature is not benevolent in Tolkien, it is often just *nature*. The fellowship is just as easily at the mercy of the elements as they are the orcs. In the case of the Old Forest, the forest is actually antagonistic to the hobbits of Buckland who have shut it out beyond a great hedge. That said, I still think there is some aspect of environmentalism in *The Lord of the Rings*, I only mean to point out how that association is more complicated than it first seems.

Much of Tolkien's acceptance or rejection of different technologies seems to be bound up in both the function of the machine itself and the will of its maker or user. Those things Tolkien considers tools are free from scorn. This is discussed at length in chapter four. Large-scale industry and technologies designed to dominate other wills seem to be the most problematic in *The Lord of the Rings*. In contrast, those things that bring joy and are the products of handcraft are frequently identified with care in the text. I conclude that much of this is bound up with the Arts and Crafts movement of the early twentieth century. One of the central figures of this movement was William Morris whose own writings provided some inspiration for Tolkien. The Arts and Crafts movement followed by the enduring popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* and the

growing popularity of subsequent fantasy medievalism has done much, I think, to cement the association of the Middle Ages with the little person against the alienating features of modernity: industrialization and corporatization.

It seems to me that this popular understanding of the Middle Ages and medievalist fantasy is partly to blame for some of the backlash against Amazon's recently revealed television series, *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*. The series takes place in Tolkien's invented world thousands of years before the events of *The Lord of the Rings* and is based on notes provided by Tolkien on this time located in the appendices to *The Lord of the Rings*. Significant backlash to early marketing material released by Amazon, especially a roughly minute long teaser trailer, has been felt across the internet. I spent some time listening to these dissenting voices and while I will not respond to anyone in particular here, my general understanding of the backlash can be roughly dissected into three parts: 1) there are those for whom, out of racism, sexism, or whatever other form of intolerance, are upset with casting decisions and character portrayal; 2) there are those for whom the Peter Jackson film trilogy has already established a visual language for *The Lord of the Rings* and thus differing artistic decisions make Amazon's series appear alien; and 3) there are those who feel, for whatever reason, that Amazon is too much of a corporate entity to rightly handle *The Lord of the Rings*. Obviously those in the first camp are problematic and perhaps a symptom of those ideologies of pure blood that have a habit of recurring in medievalism and fantasy. These voices should be shut out. Those in the second camp are comparatively unfamiliar with the primary source material, being the text, and instead (knowingly or not) are incorrectly considering the film trilogy to be primary source material. This is not really problematic, especially compared to the first camp, and many of these people might change their mind if presented with the primary source. Some will not, but they cannot be

made to appreciate a new visual language when one has already been established. The third camp is interesting to me because I think it relates to the contemporary popularity of the “Middle Ages of the little person”. Amazon is a corporate goliath and the antithesis of the sentiment that medievalism and fantasy are places where individual handicraft is loved. There have of course been uncountable corporate medievalisms before. Some of these, like HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, have been very popular. But it does not matter of course whether the company behind the production of these things is corporate or not; it only matters whether these companies *appear* corporate, large, industrial, or anything else that could be defined in opposition to the “little person”. Thus, it is a particularity of this series at this point in time under this studio that it should receive so much public backlash before it has even been released.

My discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* and medievalism works to both expose the problems of medievalism and the ideologies of fantasy that can pass uncritically through subsequent works and also to reveal the ways in which medievalism and fantasy can be positively escapist and productive and creative fun for those fascinated by times beyond our own. *The Lord of the Rings* is the perfect text to consider these problems and triumphs since it lies at the root of much of modern fantasy and medievalism. Furthermore, the significance of some of these problems extend beyond *The Lord of the Rings* in our time of fake news. The post-truth era is ripe with misinformation and it remains useful to consider how the past can be tampered with, and to what ends.

Medievalism in Contemporary Fantasy

During a lunchtime visit to my parents' house, my mother brings out a luggage case filled with old stuff. I pull out several *Dungeons & Dragons* books that my father had kept since he was a child. One of the covers depicts a knight and a wizard battling a towering demonic figure.

Another is of a man in a winged helmet riding on horseback with one hand on the reins and the other raising a sword. While eating lunch, we talk about what television we are watching. *Vikings* comes up, a show I am revisiting. A similar conversation only a few years ago might have been about the latest episode of *Game of Thrones*. *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Vikings*, and *Game of Thrones* are just a few examples of popular medievalism in Western culture.

I offer here a literary analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* through which I understand and explore the text as a work of medievalism. *The Lord of the Rings* is a post-medieval interpretation and recreation of the Middle Ages for continually changing post-medieval audiences. *The Lord of the Rings* is a suitable text for such an analysis because of its enduring influence on popular culture. In particular, *The Lord of the Rings* has had a strong influence on fantasy and historical fiction.

Beyond *The Lord of the Rings*, medievalism continues to shape some of the currents of popular culture. For example, the explosive popularity of *Game of Thrones* dominated the 2010s. And recreational activities like live action roleplaying, re-enactment, and historical fairs remain popular. These cultural currents sustain a large consumer audience interested in goods, ideas, and aesthetics that appear, or purport to be, medieval. See how Noëlle Phillips identifies how medievalism is used for marketing in craft beer culture (Phillips 1).

The goal of my analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* here is twofold: 1) to come to a better understanding of medievalism generally by reflecting on the work that other scholars have done on medievalism; and 2) to direct these perspectives towards *The Lord of the Rings* to better understand the relationship between *The Lord of the Rings* and the Middle Ages. What pieces of the Middle Ages are imagined in *The Lord of the Rings*? How might medievalism be interpreted by a reader? These are the kinds of questions I hope to address here.

Many definitions for medievalism have been proposed in the last two decades. Because so many definitions have been proposed, it is difficult to understand what exactly someone means by “medievalism”. I will consider a few of these definitions here.

One of, if not the most, cited definition of medievalism that I came across in my research was given by Leslie J. Workman who founded the journal *Studies in Medievalism*. While this definition was often referred to (Fitzpatrick, Verduin, Matthews), Workman’s original text has been extraordinarily difficult to locate. Therefore keep in mind that Workman’s definition is cited here how it appears in Verduin. Workman, as cited in Verduin, proposed, “the study of the successive recreation of the Middle Ages by different generations, *is* the Middle Ages. And this of course is medievalism” (Verduin 20). Workman’s definition is very broad. According to this definition, it seems impossible to connect to the Middle Ages as they were. Any attempt at looking backwards to that time is necessarily coloured by the different perspectives of future generations. Any looking-back done then by future generations is not a return to the Middle Ages as they were, but a recreation of the Middle Ages through the perspective of that generation. In addition to being broad, Workman’s definition describes medievalism as fluid. Medievalism is never static. Instead, it appears differently in different times and places.

The problem of the fluidity of medievalism is discussed by David Matthews. In his critical history of medievalism, Matthews questions whether “a discipline [can] base itself on something that emerges in such disparate modes and places” (120). Indeed, if the discipline must be built on the same positivist principles from which medieval studies—and other similar disciplines—first emerged in the 19th century, it would seem impossible to establish such a discipline. Medievalism itself is anathema to the positivism of the early 19th century if we accept that we cannot recover an objective Middle Ages because any evidence we recover can only be understood through a subjective framework. But there are more recent examples of academic disciplines that have flourished without necessarily having to pass themselves off as particularly scientific—notably those disciplines derived from critical theory such as postcolonialism and gender and sexuality studies. However, Workman’s journal, *Studies in Medievalism*, and other similar journals of medievalism have demonstrated a remarkable staying power given the breadth of medievalism (*SiM* is currently preparing its 30th volume). Even so, I think Matthew’s insight is fair that medievalism has struggled to crystallize itself as a singular discipline, especially when the materials it studies so often appear in other disciplines such as English literature, history, and cultural studies. Perhaps there is no need for the study of medievalism to exist independently from these other disciplines. Indeed, it may be that the present state of interdisciplinarity is ideal for the kind of work being done on medievalism.

As for medievalism in literature, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* refers to medievalism broadly in two senses. Firstly, “‘Medievalism’ now means, to some, the scholarly study of the Middle Ages and its theoretical and methodological bases.” Secondly, “To others, however, ‘medievalism’ is the name for the interpretation and imitation of medieval culture by artists and thinkers whose works reinterpret the conventions of the Middle Ages for the modern

world” (Frantzen). The first sense described here of course refers to medieval studies. A discipline for which there are theoretical and methodological tools used to address the difficulty of recovering an objective Middle Ages. The second sense is what I would call the popular sense, or medievalism outside of academia. Used in this second sense, medievalism describes those works which make liberal use of medieval motifs without necessarily attempting to recover an objective Middle Ages.

Notably, I think Workman’s definition covers both senses described by Frantzen in the *OEBL* definition. Workman asserts that “it is axiomatic that every generation has to write its own history of the past, and this is especially true in the case of the Middle Ages. It follows that medievalism, the study of the process, is a necessary part of the study of the Middle Ages” (Verduin 20). I think it is fair to accept Workman’s axiom that “every generation has to write its own history of the past” given that the past is constantly filtered through the shifting perspective of an ever-changing present. Workman’s description of medievalism as “the study of the process” seems to me to include both the work that goes into refining the methodologies of medieval studies as well as the work that goes into analyzing works of popular medievalism.

Some scholars, like Fitzpatrick, further differentiate medievalism from neomedievalism. Fitzpatrick proposes the following definition for neomedievalism: “the products of an ongoing process of re-evaluating what can be done with the Middle Ages in an ever-moving present” (28). This definition appears similar to Workman’s definition of medievalism wherein the past is constantly filtered through a changing present. However, Fitzpatrick’s use of the word “neomedievalism” helps differentiate it from medieval studies about which the terms “medievalist” and “medievalism” might still be used. Fitzpatrick further qualifies this definition with reference to Emery, “Workmanian medievalism is itself a plural concept [that] obviates the

need to speak of medievalism” (Emery 81) and Amy S. Kauffman, “while medievalism can exist perfectly independently at any point in time, neomedievalism despite its seeming ahistoricity, is historically contingent upon both medievalism itself and the postmodern condition” (Kauffman). Neomedievalism is thus a subcategory of medievalism. All examples of neomedievalism are also examples of medievalism, but neomedievalism, as Kauffman notes, is rooted in both medievalism and the postmodern condition. The kind of playful medievalism often found in fantasy games might be an example of neomedievalism. Neomedievalism is characterized by a playful disregard for the historicity of content, and perhaps as alluded to by Kauffman through the postmodern condition, a disregard for metanarratives and fixed, presupposed meaning derived metaphysically. While *The Lord of the Rings*, as fantasy, is playful, the author and the text both share deep attachments to history in both content and style. While I think there is room for others to argue that *The Lord of the Rings* is an early example of neomedievalism, I will refer to *The Lord of the Rings* as medievalism—it being the more obvious and inclusive term.

All of these definitions are useful for their own reasons described above; however, for my purposes here, I will propose my own definition. I think medievalism, as it pertains to this project, might best be defined as *the use of medieval motifs as symbols employed, knowingly or not, by postmedieval people to metaphorically connect them to a reimagined medieval past*. I think this definition helps to frame medievalism as something that not only recreates the past, but also affects the present through the stories we tell regardless of the historicity of those stories. As Noëlle Phillips notes in *Craft Beer Culture and Modern Medievalism*, “Any kind of storytelling and illustration [...] is a representation of reality that has been cultivated to evoke a desired response in the reader or viewer” (3). What does it mean to draw upon medieval motifs in a postmedieval world? What kinds of responses are evoked in readers and viewers? How do we

relate to the Middle Ages in the 21st century? Medievalism might draw from the past, but it remains active in the present. Phillips describes her experience of encountering medievalism in the liquor store: “my eye is caught by bright green rows of bomber bottles at eye level on the centre shelves—they are Driftwood Brewery’s Extra Special Bitter, Naughty Hildegard. On the label, the famous twelfth-century abbess is pictured in profile against an emerald green stained glass window, gazing contemplatively at a hop cone in her hand” (1). The decision to feature Naughty Hildegard on the label of the bomber bottles is an act of visual storytelling and an example of medievalism. What response does this label evoke in a viewer? Likewise, what response does *The Lord of the Rings* evoke in a reader? Both rely on medievalism to tell their stories. Medievalism is a discourse that permeates post-medieval culture to greater or lesser extents at different times and in different ways. A bottle of beer, whose brewers perhaps had not been born until after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, shares with *The Lord of the Rings* medieval motifs that are essential to its interpretation.

Medievalism is also distinct from medieval studies as some of the previously mentioned definitions note. The tension between popular medievalism and professional medieval studies has a continued presence in my study of medievalism and *The Lord of the Rings* given how Tolkien himself wrote both fiction and academic papers. Other scholars have noted the tension between medievalism and medieval studies (Fitzpatrick, Matthews). One of the consequences of medieval studies has been to fix the Middle Ages as a defined period in the past. “The Medieval Revival, by transforming the Middle Ages into a new object of study, in fact revived nothing, but rather secured the period as part of the dead past” (Matthews 47). Medieval studies, founded on the principles of scientific rationalism, has as its goal the objectification of the Middle Ages. Thus, a dead and static Middle Ages can be transformed into knowledge. In contrast,

medievalism is subjective. The telos of medievalism, in contrast to the singularity of medieval studies, is multiplicity. For example, Umberto Eco proposes “at least ten types of Middle Ages” (68). Medievalism is thus antithetic to medieval studies. Whereas medieval studies seek to collapse the Middle Ages into a singular, knowable truth, medievalism explodes the period into near infinite, playful possibilities. In this way, medievalism potentially appropriates for itself the discipline of medieval studies, “what is medieval studies itself, after all, but a set of responses to the Middle Ages?” (Matthews 9).

For example, Matthews writes:

In short, the allocation of Tyrwhitt to medieval studies and Percy to medievalism is a modern judgement, based on a retrospective understanding of their relative positions [...]. The principal criterion separating Tyrwhitt from the rest, then, is the idea that he went out as a scholar to discover the Middle Ages, while the others invented their Middle Ages. This is deeply problematic. It relies on a retrospective judgement which in effect sorts good medieval studies from bad: that which we still sanction as belonging to the lineage of modern medieval studies (Tyrwhitt) from the wrong turnings (Percy). (171)

On the one hand, medieval studies expel what it sees as unfit for the discipline. Medievalism is what has been rejected. Conversely, medievalism lays claim to medieval studies; what is medieval studies but a post-medieval response to the Middle Ages? That is to say that, broadly speaking, the output of medieval studies could be considered medievalism. Kathleen Biddick has also identified this tendency for medieval studies to expel that which it considers unfit for the discipline. Biddick describes how the positivist-inspired medievalists of the nineteenth century worked to “separate and elevate themselves from popular studies of medieval culture” (Biddick

1). These professional medievalists would then label the results of amateur study “medievalism”. Biddick’s work demonstrates how medievalism “inhabits medieval studies as [...] an abiding historical trauma” (2); however, Fitzpatrick argues, 21 years after Biddick, that “the growing trend of medievalists engaging in scholarship on medievalism and questioning the divide between the two – indicates a breakdown of the exclusionary practices critiqued by Biddick” (8). As I noted earlier in this chapter, many academic disciplines thrive in the academy today without relying on the principles of positivism to produce work. Nevertheless, it is important in the case of medievalism to recognize its shared history with medieval studies because it can help us better understand present medievalism. Biddick criticizes medieval studies for its failure to acknowledge controversy in a past it sees as immutable. The study of medievalism refutes that immutability by exploring precisely how the same past can be mobilized to diverse ends in a polysynchronous present.

One of the consequences of medievalism emerging at so many different times and places in the West is the potential for older medievalism to be mistaken for the Middle Ages themselves. This is especially true of popular medievalism which is relatively unbound in its interpretation of the Middle Ages compared to the discipline of medieval studies. For example, Fitzpatrick notes in *Neomedievalism: Popular Culture and the Academy* that:

While rhetorically bent constructions of the Middle Ages may have their roots in earlier forms of medievalism, they appear frequently in more recent forms of (neo)medievalism as well. Recognizing such rhetoric becomes all the more important in the light of the fact that forms of medievalism can, as is the case with Tolkien’s Middle-Earth, become artifacts that are held up as forms of authority per se. (68-69)

In this way, medievalism of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, for example, could be mistaken today as authorities on the Middle Ages, when in fact this medievalism may say more about the 18th, 19th, or 20th century than the Middle Ages. Given enough authority, these texts can historicize the values of postmedieval cultures merely by conflating them with a superficial Middle Ages. Such texts can make an appeal to authority or tradition in order to justify what are ultimately intentional decisions. Furthermore, I think there is a popular tendency to conflate different aspects of pre-industrial societies. For many, Shakespeare might as well be medieval. In fantasy fiction, this distinction is seldom made. Another tendency is to flatten the Middle Ages themselves so that the 8th century is indistinguishable from the 14th. Fantasy fiction frequently packages together tools, dress, customs, and architecture from disparate times and places in an ahistorical melange.

Given its inherent multiplicity, it is no wonder that medievalism appears so endemic in the West today. Consider, for example, the recent popular success of HBO's television series, *Game of Thrones*, based on the book series referenced earlier, George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Prior to this phenomenon in the 2010s, the 2000s saw the success of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the *Harry Potter* movies. Outside of pop culture media, common speech retains such idioms as "chivalry is dead" which laments a more romantic time when it was alive (regardless of whether there ever was such a time). Conversely, the idea of "getting medieval" as in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) refers to acting in a way so brutal that the behaviour belongs in the (barbaric) medieval past. These are examples of romantic and gothic medievalism respectively.

The distinction between romantic and gothic medievalism is important to my analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* because I identify *The Lord of the Rings* as a romantic medievalism.

Romantic medievalisms are those medievalisms that reflect positively on the Middle Ages or otherwise attempt to depict the Middle Age themselves or elements of the Middle Ages as desirable. Examples of romantic concepts in medievalism include chivalry, honour, adventure, virtue, and heroism. By romantic medievalism, I mean “romantic” in the sense of sprawling medieval romances like *Le Morte d’Arthur*. In contrast, gothic medievalisms depict the Middle Ages as a dark period in history. Gothic medievalisms are where we get our understanding of the Middle Ages as the “Dark Ages”. Gothic medievalisms depict the Middle Ages as backwards and brutal, a dark period between the decline of the Roman Empire and the Enlightenment. Examples of gothic concepts in medievalism are violence, torture, rape, brutality, gore, and disease. In fantasy, romantic medievalism can often be found in “high” fantasy which generally depicts a brighter, more magical world. In contrast, “low” fantasy depicts a darker, more brutal world.

Medievalism is also common in games, The RPG (roleplaying game) genre often makes liberal use of medieval motifs. Many of the tropes in these games were carried over from the earlier tabletop roleplaying games of the 70s and 80s, perhaps most popular among these being *Dungeons & Dragons*. Having released their 5th edition in 2014, *Dungeons & Dragons* still enjoys a substantial, perhaps even growing, following today. *Dungeons & Dragons* players imagine themselves as adventurers in a pseudo-medieval fantasy world complete with feudal lords and powerful dragons. The Orcs and Halflings of *Dungeons & Dragons* owe a particularly large debt to Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*, but *The Lord of the Rings* also helped popularize the fantasy genre overall.

Beyond tabletops, there have been many popular and more recent RPGs available on computers and gaming consoles. In 2011, Bethesda Softworks released *The Elder Scrolls V:*

Skyrim to critical acclaim. A Norse inspired epic, *Skyrim* casts the player as the Dragonborn, a hero destined to save Skyrim from the world-eating dragon, Alduin. In 2015, Polish studio CD Projekt Red released *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, again to critical acclaim. *Wild Hunt* casts players as a monster hunter, Geralt of Rivia. The game takes its namesake, “Wild Hunt”, from the Middle Ages. Walter Map refers to the Wild Hunt in *De Nugis Curialium* from the 12th century. In 2018, Czech Warhorse Studios released *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*. Rather than taking place in a fictional setting, *Deliverance* takes place in Bohemia, 1404. Above all its other features, *Deliverance* boasted about its “historical accuracy”. In fact, part of the promotional material on the *Deliverance* website informs potential players/buyers that “the game is based on a true story” and that they may “enjoy the detailed reconstruction of the 15th century landscape”, but rather than receiving the same critical success as *Skyrim* and *Wild Hunt*, *Deliverance*’s launch was rattled by controversy. Warhorse studios were lampooned by the press for what many see as a botched and ideologically driven representation of history. According to one rockpapershotgun (a popular source for gaming news) article:

It’s important to remember that the past is never presented to us on a silver tablet and we should be wary of any version of past events which claims to be the absolute truth [...] *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* [sic] isn’t propaganda, but there’s still a semi-coherent ideological framework at its core. *KCD* looks at medieval society through a lens of patriarchy, and the various -isms it’s associated with: sexism, classism, and chauvinism. We’re presented a world where men were [sic] still men, where peasants and women still know their places in society, where wise lords and knights protected their people from barbaric hordes threatening a well-ordered nation from without, and whose foreign ethnicity is conveniently marked by language and costumes. (Inderwildi)

Just as the use of Naughty Hildegard on a craft beer label tells a story that consumers buy into in addition to purchasing their beer, *Deliverance* delivers a particular kind of Middle Ages for players to experience. *Deliverance* isn't necessarily intentional propaganda, as Inderwildi notes; nevertheless, it participates in the construction of a particular kind of Middle Ages to attract a modern audience.

Medievalism is also prevalent in a popular sub-genre of RPGs, MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online roleplaying games). The longstanding industry titan of the genre is, by now, a household name. Blizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft* originally released in 2004 and has since seen seven expansions to the game. An eighth is due to be released this year in 2020. Expansions like these are an important part of the MMORPG sub-genre. MMORPGs feature a persistent world in which thousands interact with each other. Expansions are effectively additional game releases, but rather than existing as separate software, each expansion expands upon the existing game world to include new game content for players to interact with. Expanding the game rather than releasing a sequel allows the world to remain persistent and prevents players' previous achievements from being invalidated by migrating the player base to an entirely new game.

The basic gameplay loop involves players accepting tasks from NPCs (non-player character) and completing these tasks for rewards. A gameplay loop can be described as the mechanics through which the player progresses in the game. The gameplay loop in MMORPGs is often repetitive. Players collect items and experience to make their characters more powerful. This allows them to collect even more powerful items and experience which creates a positive feedback loop. Some player tasks are more difficult than others and require players to work together to succeed. The tasks that players accept in *World of Warcraft* are called quests; in turn,

players are stylized as heroes for completing these quests. The term quest itself is a medievalism common to the genre. By having players complete quests, *World of Warcraft* likens them, knowingly or not, to romantic tales of knights in service to a lord or lady. The medieval aesthetic is further cultivated by the setting. For example, playing as a human starts the player in the human kingdom of Stormwind. These players start the game in a place called Northshire Abbey located in Elwynn Forest. The abbey is complete with monks and priests as you might expect. Within Elwynn forest, players also visit an Inn, a number of farmsteads, several outposts, a logging camp, and the capital city: Stormwind. These locations are all vaguely medieval. Noëlle Phillips describes a similar vaguely medieval representation in animated films: “medieval historicity is discarded while the medieval aesthetic is embraced” (4). The purpose of this recreation is fete. It does not matter (not to say that it necessarily should matter) whether the medieval aspects of *World of Warcraft*’s aesthetic are historically accurate. The focus is placed on the narrative instead: castles and cathedrals dot the landscape; kings rule from high towers; peasants diligently work their fields; and you, the hero, are on an important quest.

Outside of gaming, medievalism can also be found in various fairs and re-enactment groups. I found out during my research that here in Sudbury Ontario I would belong to the Kingdom of Ealdormere were I to join the SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism). The “About” page on the SCA website entices prospective members with romantic medieval imagery:

Imagine yourself standing on a field surrounded by colorful pavilions as banners flutter and snap overhead. Around you, richly dressed lords and ladies are watching knights in armor who battle with sword and shield. Music fills the air as minstrels play lutes and

sing ballads of love and war. In the shadows of one especially grand tent, you see a King and Queen conferring with their advisors

Are you in a historical romance? No, it's the Society for Creative Anachronism! The SCA is an immersive history group where you, dressed in clothing of the period, can experience tournaments, royal courts, feasts, and dancing, and learn how to recreate crafts and skills of the pre-17th century world. (Society for Creative Anachronism)

Events like those hosted by the SCA seek to bring the Middle Ages, or perhaps more broadly the “pre-17th century world” to life in the present. Notice here too, the SCA conflates many periods of the pre-industrial past.

Carolyn Dinshaw in *How Soon is Now?* Discusses this amateur element of medievalism (see the above examples of popular movies, games, and recreational activities) in contrast to the institutionalized professional way of knowing represented by the discipline of medieval studies. Dinshaw notes how this distinction relates to the experience of time: “the nonmodern times of amateurs” against “time-as-measurement [which] suits a modernist view of the world” (17). Like Biddick, Dinshaw recognizes the historical division between medievalism and medieval studies. The Society for Creative Anachronism, for example, falls clearly into the camp of medievalism. “Amateur temporality starts and stops at will; tinkerers and dabblers can linger at moments of pleasure when the professionals must soldier duly onwards” (Dinshaw *How Soon is Now?* 22). Fair attendees participate in the recreation of pre-17th century life purely out of the desire to do so for its own sake. Thus, I think popular medievalism can rightly be described as the product of a position of attachment to the Middle Ages. Indeed, Tolkien, if he is to believe, writes in his letters that he wrote *The Lord of the Rings* out of desire:

But an equally basic passion of mine *ab initio* was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite. (Tolkien *Letters* 143)

One must ask then, what is desirable about the Middle Ages? In most medievalism, especially romantic medievalism, the interest appears not to be in the whole Middle Ages, but in certain (sometimes only imagined) qualities of the medieval past.

Consider Fitzpatrick's analysis of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959):

When Phillip instead escapes and slays Maleficent in her dragon form, he not only rewrites Maleficent's mockery of a fairy-tale narrative into the standard medieval/fairy-tale trope where the dragon is slain and the hero prevails; he also becomes the exceptional modern hero slaying the dangerous aspects of the medieval past. The medieval is thereby rendered into a sanitized version of itself, one fit for consumption by a modern Disney audience that has been conditioned to view the past through the lens of the exceptional – and always triumphant – modern hero and heroine. (Fitzpatrick 93)

The function of medievalism in *Sleeping Beauty* according to Fitzpatrick is thus twofold. The desirable medieval trope is preserved in that the monster/dragon is slain while the modern hero/heroine dispenses with the undesirable aspects of the medieval past. For example, Phillip and Aurora subvert the idea of arranged marriage.

In the blog post "Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy", Dorothy Kim writes that, "Our old-style position that objectivist neutrality is where medievalists should be no longer works, because it facilitates white supremacists/white nationalists/KKK/Nazis and

their horrific deployment of the Middle Ages as we saw in Charlottesville”. Medievalism can be mobilized to many ends, unfortunately including the ends of white supremacists and other hate groups. This is particularly true now in this time of fake news and post-truth.

Is it possible to immunize ourselves against this kind of toxic medievalism? It is not clear to me that such an immunization is possible, but as Kim notes, “neutrality is not optional”. At the very least, Kim suggests “overt signaling of how you are not a white supremacist and how your medieval studies is one that does not uphold white supremacy”. Kim is reaching out here to medieval studies professors, but I think this also applies to my thesis in the humanities. This thesis certainly interacts with the Middle Ages and various recreations and repurposing of that period. Others that read this should know where I stand. I am not a white supremacist, and none of my studies uphold white supremacy. I will try throughout this thesis to consider the toxic tropes of medievalism as they crop up in my analysis. While medievalism has the potential to be purposed to hateful ends, it also has the potential for playful and inclusive recreations. Inderwildi notes that “*KCD* looks at medieval society through a lens of patriarchy, and the various -isms it’s associated with: sexism, classism, and chauvinism”, but medievalism need not look through that particular lens. Indeed, part of the freedom and multiplicity of popular medievalism is to imagine a different Middle Ages. Take the more feminist perspective of Marion Zimmer Bradley’s retelling of Arthurian legend in *The Mists of Avalon* for example.

The work of this chapter has been to recognize the pervasiveness of medievalism today across a variety of mediums, and to consider the various definitions that have been given for medievalism. As discussed previously, medievalism occupies a variety of popular spaces: games, books, television, marketing, and more. Again, medievalism as I recognize it here is best described as *the use of medieval motifs as symbols employed, knowingly or not, by postmedieval*

people to metaphorically connect them to a reimagined medieval past. In the next chapter I intend to contextualize *The Lord of the Rings* within the broader landscape of medievalism. How has it been influential? Where does Tolkien fit amidst the tension between medievalism and medieval studies?

Tolkien and Medievalism

This chapter will discuss Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* within the broader context of medievalism that was discussed in chapter one. I will endeavour to explain here why I have chosen to address Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* and not some other example of medievalism, and I will consider how the text functions as medievalism. In writing this, I am conscious of a difficulty in how I ought to refer to medievalism in *The Lord of the Rings*. I consider the text itself an example of medievalism; however, I think individual elements of the text could also be described independently as medievalisms. For example, I consider the lost book motif to be a medievalism, and I will discuss this motif in chapter three. Considered this way, *The Lord of the Rings* contains many medievalisms. The lost book motif is not unique to *The Lord of the Rings*; it is a motif by virtue of its repeated mobilization in other texts like *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *The Castle of Otranto*. Rather than focusing on any one motif in this chapter, I will consider *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole.

As explained in chapter one, medievalism abounds in popular culture today (*Game of Thrones*, *World of Warcraft*, fairs, marketing, etc.). Medievalism (often a particular brand of Western medievalism) has been characteristic of fantasy fiction and *The Lord of the Rings* remains a seminal text of the genre. Publisher HarperCollins claims, “Well over 100 million copies of its many editions have been sold around the world”. *The Lord of the Rings* created a readership in the second half of the 20th century for the fantasy genre today. As Matthews notes:

In the 1960s, to his puzzlement, Tolkien found his work central to libertarianism and the environmental movement. *The Lord of the Rings* and hippies met where they shared antimodernist distrust of technology and love of nature. They shared little else. But this

anti-technological Middle Ages of the little person has become one of the defining images of the Middle Ages around the world. (Matthews 32)

The theme of the ‘anti-technological Middle Ages of the little person’ will continue to appear in my discussion of *The Lord of the Rings*. Recall from chapter one how medievalism might be found in craft beer marketing. Part of the allure of this advertisement is the separation of the craft beer of the little person, from the large, impersonal beer mega corporations that control so much of the market. *The Lord of the Rings* enjoyed increasing popularity in part due to its connection to the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. It would continue to influence *Dungeons & Dragons* in the 1970s (humans, elves, dwarves, halflings, orcs, and goblins are now staples of the game) as well as the video game successors to tabletop games like *Dungeons & Dragons*. As George R.R. Martin notes in a video for PBS’s series “The Great American Read”, “by the time I got to the Mines of Moria I had decided that this was the greatest book that I had ever read” (“THE GREAT AMERICAN READ | George R. R. Martin Discusses ‘The Lord of the Rings’ | PBS.” 1:06) and “to be on the same list as *The Lord of the Rings* is very exciting” (3:22). Martin also notes in another interview how “Tolkien did certain things that are different than what I would do and in the hands of some of the Tolkien imitators those things have become cliches that have ultimately harmed the genre...” (“George R.R. Martin on J.R.R. Tolkien and Cliché Fantasy.” 0:16). Whatever harm these cliches may or may not have inflicted upon the fantasy genre, Martin’s point helps demonstrate the lasting impact of *The Lord of the Rings* on the genre. The overall state of the fantasy genre is not my concern here, but these passages from Martin demonstrate how *The Lord of the Rings* has influenced the fantasy genre even beyond those “imitators” and “cliches” that Martin mentions. *The Lord of the Rings* has clearly been immensely influential for Martin’s own *A Song of Ice and Fire* novel series beginning in the

1990s and consequently the television adaptation of Martin's work in the 2010s, *A Game of Thrones*. In this way, *The Lord of the Rings* continues to be an influential example of medievalism because those other medievalisms, inspired by Tolkien, have only grown in popularity and might become influential themselves.

Besides the long-abiding influence of *The Lord of the Rings* on other recent examples of medievalism (most notably in the fantasy genre), I think *The Lord of the Rings* is an important example of medievalism to study because of Tolkien's position in both professional medieval studies and popular fiction. In "Whiteness, medievalism, immigration: rethinking Tolkien through Stuart Hall," Kathy Lavazzo argues

While Tolkien's epic fantasies—like any literary text—may be appropriated successfully by different groups for various ends, those works present unique challenges for a significant component of Tolkien's readership, medievalists who use both his scholarship and his fiction as a touchstone for their intellectual work. (Lavazzo)

Tolkien's work as both a fantasist and medievalist have both been critical to Tolkien scholarship. Lavazzo points out how Tolkien's texts can be appropriated by a variety of groups from the freedom-loving hippies of the 1960s to white nationalist organizations.

One of the ways the relationship between the professional field of medieval studies and the popular practice of medievalism (like the *Society for Creative Anachronism* and various fiction) can be problematized is through the idea of the canon. Especially true of literature, the canon has historically had enormous influence on the structure of academic studies, most obviously in undergraduate courses. Matthews describes Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* as "the last substantial, canonical work of anglophone literary medievalism" (132). This is interesting

given that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has arguably been vastly more influential than Tennyson's *Idylls* if one considers popular culture. The absence of *The Lord of the Rings* from the canon of English literature is at least partially explained by the structure of the discipline.

In her analyses of historical time and periodization, Dinshaw argues that “periodization is not only philosophically challenging but may be in fact impossible” (19). This puts Dinshaw into conflict with Matthews who writes, “My working assumption in this book will be that the Middle Ages was a chronological period which took place in the past, and to which we can assign temporal boundaries (even if these are subject to challenge and modification)” (41). Here I favour Dinshaw's position regarding the challenges of periodization. Matthews admits that temporal boundaries may be challenged, but Dinshaw's position I think better describes the way the past interacts with the present through medievalism.

Matthews further notes of medievalism in literature that, since Tennyson, “successful as a great deal of this writing has been, it is, self-evidently, almost entirely genre fiction” (127). Since Tennyson too, medieval studies have complicated the relationship between the modern and the medieval—producing, in effect, canonical interpretations. While Matthews does not mention *The Lord of the Rings* specifically here, I would push back against others who might suggest that *The Lord of the Rings* falls into this category of “self-evident” genre fiction. I think genre fiction is best understood as fiction tailored for particular market niches. Genre fiction is written with an established genre in mind because any established genre comes with its own readership and thus a pre-established share of the market. Genre fiction is more marketable than literary fiction since there already exists an established demand for precisely the conventions demanded of any genre. It is written with consumer expectations in mind. In contrast, *The Lord of the Rings* is genre-defining fiction. Popularity alone is not a good enough reason to label *The Lord of the*

Rings “genre fiction”. As already mentioned, it was hugely influential in carving out the readership that the fantasy genre enjoys today.

While *The Lord of the Rings* is more frequently discussed today, as evidenced by the number of sources I have access to while writing this, the critical dismissal of *The Lord of the Rings* was common in the 20th century. In 1956, writer and literary critic Edmund Wilson wrote an essay titled “Oo, Those Awful Orcs!” in response to *The Lord of the Rings* in which he wrote, “certain people – especially, perhaps, in Britain – have a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash” (Wilson). I think there is an implicit connection here between the idea of “juvenile trash” and medievalism when one considers the post-Enlightenment tendency to view the Middle Ages themselves as juvenile, the “Dark Ages,” a term now seldom used (see *The Bright Ages* by Matthew Gabriele and David M. Perry). In response to this and similar criticism, Patrick Curry writes, “being a Grown-Up is a recurring theme in modernism, with its teleological fantasy of collectively progressing towards the truth, and its mythoclasm as necessary destructiveness in order to get there” (83). The relatively tepid critical appreciation of *The Lord of the Rings*, especially among its contemporary reviewers, was not entirely due to a lack of merit of the text. Instead, I think the original reception of *The Lord of the Rings* was troubled by the difficulties of periodization in the English curriculum of the late 20th century. *The Lord of the Rings* had no place in the old canon of English literature.

But what about the new curriculum? My own undergraduate in English literature at Laurentian University from 2015 to 2019 was still largely structured historically. Students had three temporal categories to choose from covering various periods of time and one spatial category, Canadian literature. But English programs today are swiftly updating their curriculums. Many teach genre fiction, graphic novels, and oral stories alongside works from the more

traditional canon. Even so, *The Lord of the Rings* has made comparatively few inroads at the academy. Jennifer Summit noted in 2010 that “the English major is still structured historically” (142). The MLA *Report to the Teagle Foundation* describes how “literary studies have properly freed themselves from [...] a fixed, standard set of canonical or representative works” (9). The same report proposes that the aim of the English major “should be to develop students’ linguistic abilities, acquaint students with representative cultural examples through a designated body of works, and engage them with specific concepts, ideas, issues, cultural traditions, and traditions of inquiry” (5). But, as Summit notes, “How are the designated body of works, representative examples, and cultural traditions of the new English major different from the fixed and standard canon of the past?” (142-143). While Tolkien shares many critiques about modernity with his contemporaries, *The Lord of the Rings* departs radically from the form and style of many modernist writers. In this case, Tolkien is not representative of modernism and so cannot serve as a suitable representative example that more recent English curriculums might look for to demonstrate ideas to students. It is of course possible, and has been demonstrated, that Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* could be taught in an undergraduate setting, whether that be in a literature class or otherwise. I also admit that it may be that there simply is not enough Tolkien present for my own taste. Regardless, I think medievalism in the vein of *The Lord of the Rings* neither fits neatly into the old canon that relied heavily on periodization, nor does it work well as a more recent representative example of cultural traditions. *The Lord of the Rings*, as well as other works of medievalism are polysynchronous in that they represent “different time frames or temporal systems colliding in a single moment of *now*” (Dinshaw “All Kinds of Time” 5). Or, as Matthews puts it, “Medievalism characteristically evokes a time in the past but does so in an often contradictory way, by positing that the past is in some sense still alive and still with us, or

able to be with us” (41). There may still be lingering effects of the long standing periodization of the canon and the English curriculum, but the curriculum today looks very different from the curriculum of Tolkien’s time and the late 20th century. *The Lord of the Rings* was never part of the traditional literary canon of the past, perhaps partially because of the tendency exemplified by Wilson to dismiss it as juvenile trash. Neither can *The Lord of the Rings* serve as a representative cultural example because it breaks so radically from the expected form and style of modernism.

The Lord of the Rings remains relevant in its critique of modernity even if it is not entirely representative of modernism: “J. R. R. Tolkien is neither an escapist nor an antiquarian writer. On the contrary, his work addresses the most clamant question of our age” (Wood 39). While *The Lord of the Rings* might have often been seen as juvenile in the past, I think the growing amount of Tolkien scholarship represents a turn of the tide on this matter. In *Tolkien Among the Modern* Ralph C. Wood compiles several essays that explore Tolkien’s place among his contemporaries. Patrick Curry too writes, “For reasons that will, I hope, become clear, I am going to call the dominant intellectual reaction to Tolkien, and the values that drive it, ‘modernism’. There are other possible terms; one with considerable overlap is ‘humanism’ (79). This initial reaction against Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* is to be expected given both its inability to fit into the traditional canon and the “anti-modernism” (15) of *The Lord of the Rings* that Curry identifies in his book *Defending Middle-Earth*. An example of this anti-modernism, according to Curry, is how:

Middle-earth’s most distinctive places defy the separation, so beloved of modernist scientific reason, into ‘human or social and therefore conscious subjects’ and ‘natural therefore inert objects.’ They are both: the places themselves are animate subjects with

distinct personalities, while the peoples are inextricably in and of their natural geographical locales [...]. (18)

Indeed, Tolkien's world by contrast is brimming with other beings and nonliving animate subjects. For example, consider this scene:

There is a wholesome air about Hollin. Much evil must befall a country before it wholly forgets the Elves, if once they dwelt there.'

'That is true,' said Legolas. 'But the Elves of this land were of a race strange to us of the silvan folk, and the trees and grass do not now remember them. Only I hear the stones lament them: *deep they delved us, fair they wrought us, high they builded us; but they are gone.* (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 283)

These are the kinds of animate subjects that Curry identifies. But while Curry calls the dominant reaction to Tolkien and the values that drive it "modernism" a term that he describes as having considerable overlap with "humanism", I think Curry is instead identifying a kind of anthropocentricity; concern with the real, "Being a Grown-Up" (Curry 83); and acceptance of metanarratives. Curry's evaluation uses the word "modernism" to describe what might be called the zeitgeist of the early twentieth century in the West. However, that word is vague. Randall Stevenson describes it as tautological in *Modernist Fiction*:

"for example, the zeitgeist, is based upon observation of an age and then used to explain what is observed, a process close to tautology: a particular shape and character is ascribed to the zeitgeist on the basis of certain cultural phenomena, then these are said to owe their particular shape and character to the zeitgeist. (Randall 12)

In fact, contrary to Curry, many critics of literary modernism describe it as being too detached from social reality (Randall 207). This is a criticism that would certainly have applied to Tolkien, given that his chosen form, fantasy, seemed so detached from his own sociopolitical moment. It is clear that Tolkien's writing is ripe with the same kinds of anxiety about the new modern age that defined much of literary modernism, even if his style and form were markedly different. Tolkien saw a lot of the same problems as his contemporaries (see Wood, *Tolkien Among the Moderns*).

The heroes in *The Lord of the Rings* share much with heroes of the past. It may be that Tolkien found something he thought worth preserving in the past. Characters like Aragorn, Boromir, Theoden, and Eomer often have more in common with the heroes of epic poetry like Beowulf than modern heroes. Other characters, especially hobbits like Frodo, succeed not through strength of arms but through their virtue and desire to do good. In this way, the Hobbits might have more in common with medieval Christian heroes like Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the successful grail knights. This perspective strikes me as something that would be valuable when victory through strength of arms seems unlikely or even impossible—against the might of Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*, but also against the increasingly devastating threat of chemical and mechanical warfare in the trenches of the first world war.

Tolkien further threatens the established order of the modern zeitgeist with his position as both academic and popular writer, simultaneously operating “from positions of detachment [as suits the positivism of the time] but also [...] from positions of affect and attachment” (Dinshaw *How Soon is Now?* 6). Again, Tolkien is unable to be categorized neatly. In this case he is both academic and writer—medievalist and amateur—the two cannot be entirely separated. In this

way, Tolkien permeates the perceived boundary between medieval studies and medievalism and threatens.

To say that there is a strain of anti-modernism in *The Lord of the Rings* is not to say that the text is without flaws. There are critics of Tolkien who are not modernists and do not, at least I think, hold the same objections as Wilson (that *The Lord of the Rings* is juvenile trash).

Furthermore, these criticisms are not always limited to *The Lord of the Rings* and might also be levied at other medievalism. For example, Matthews writes of romantic medievalism:

In one minor strand, a romanticized medievalism is turned back into a Gothicism: this is Eco's Middle Ages no. 6, the medievalism of national identities. In medieval romances themselves, ideologies of race, blood, and faith are prominent. The true knight is the knight of the right blood; the monstrous other (a giant, Saracen, or simply a felon knight) must be expelled or converted. This discourse of racial and religious purity has lurked in modern romances like a virus [...]. (Matthews 33)

The Lord of the Rings certainly does not escape this problem. Aragorn, the heir to the throne of Gondor, is the heir of the right blood. More than this, the trueness of his blood manifests in a significantly longer lifespan. Furthermore, the "monstrous other" is apparent: the orcs.

While Tolkien might not have considered himself antisemitic (Tolkien *Letters* 47), antisemitism was a common feature of medieval romance. Matthews and Eco have suggested as much as quoted above regarding ideologies of race, blood, and faith. *The Lord of the Rings* participates in the discourse of medievalism, and these associations are unavoidable regardless of whether or not they were intended by the author, Tolkien. This is similar to Inderwildi's criticism of the game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* discussed in chapter one. These criticisms of Tolkien

and medievalism are more valid than the old criticisms that come from the modernist reaction against Tolkien. These more recent and valid criticisms of Tolkien consider the propensity for *The Lord of the Rings* and other medievalism to essentialize, historicize, or naturalize outmoded ideas of race, gender, class, inheritance, etc.

I will continue to contrast these criticisms of *The Lord of the Rings*, but first I think it would be helpful to my analysis to discuss some facets of medievalism that Matthews considers in his critical history: the gothic versus the romantic. The mobilization of gothic and romantic motifs in *The Lord of the Rings* is a rhetorical device important to understanding the function of medievalism. For Matthews, a “distinction between a gothicised and a romanticised medieval is [...] fundamental [...]. It is the chief dualism in contemporary understandings of the Middle Ages, whether scholarly or popular (15). Even so, there may exist elements of one in the other; “it must be immediately clarified that these two modes are not necessarily mutually exclusive” (Matthews 15). *The Lord of the Rings* has a strong association with medieval romances, but there exists too in *The Lord of the Rings* a strain of the gothic. A pair of eyes, for example, appears to Frodo through the gloom of Moria: “His watch was nearly over; when, far off, where he guessed that the western archway stood, he fancied her could see two pale points of light, almost like luminous eyes” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 318). This romantic-gothic dualism can also be found in medieval romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Orfeo*. Matthews points to the contrast between the romantic and the gothic in film: “Medievalist films often understand the Middle Ages in terms of a fundamental tension between the gothic-grotesque and the romantic, so that scenes of love and minstrelsy will alternate with gory battles or torture scenes” (15). I also identify this contrast in *Gawain* and *Orfeo*. In *Gawain*, the fete is interrupted by a game of beheadings. Afterwards, the mysterious stranger retrieves his own severed head and

departs. In *Orfeo*, the steward is told that his master was devoured by beasts shortly after his departure—a fate that seemed believable if not likely.

While the setting of *The Lord of the Rings* might explicitly be a non-Middle Ages, this otherworldliness is still found in some medieval literature. Consider the texts I have already mentioned here. Orfeo wanders into a land that is clearly not historical:

He com into a fair cuntray

As bright so sonne on somers day,

Smothe and plain and al grene –

Hille no dale nas ther non y-sene.

Riche and real and wonder heighe.

Al the utmast wal

Was clere and schine as cristal;

An hundred tours ther were about,

Degiselich and bataild stout.

The butras com out of the diche

Of rede gold y-arched riche. (*Sir Orfeo* 351-362)

The wonders Orfeo sees here are beyond the scope of the mortal world. Captured by the crystal walls and hundred towers, Orfeo thinks he has looked on “The proude court of Paradis” (376) as if he were glimpsing at heaven itself.

The Lord of the Rings has been mobilized as a romantic depiction of the Middle Ages in the counterculture of the 1960s where it became a popular text for those resistant to industrialization, urbanization, and even capitalism. In this way, *The Lord of the Rings* was able to influence a popular cultural understanding of the Middle Ages regardless of whether or not the inspired sentiment was historical. In this example of romantic medievalism there is a desire for a pre-technological, pre-industrial time. Again, the simpler Middle Ages of the little person. Only a decade later, however, *The Lord of the Rings* was accused of pastoralizing the real rural England by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* (1973):

There was an extra-ordinary development of country-based fantasy, from Barrie and Kenneth Grahame through J. C. Powys and T. H. White and now to Tolkien. [...] It is then not only that the real land and its people were falsified; a traditional and surviving rural England was scribbled over and almost hidden from sight by what is really a suburban and half-educated scrawl. (258)

While this criticism may be true of *The Lord of the Rings* within The Shire, Frodo and Sam’s experience really has very little to do with working class life (actual or imagined). Compare Frodo’s thoughts under the corrupting influence of the Ring (a product of the industrial designs of Sauron) to Sam’s thoughts: when Sam asks Frodo if he remembers the meal they had shared, Frodo replies,

I know that such things happened, but I cannot see them. No taste of food, no feel of water, no sound of wind, no memory of tree or grass or flower, no image of moon or star are left to me. I am naked in the dark, Sam, and there is no veil between me and the wheel of fire. (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 938)

Frodo is unable to recall food, water, wind, plant, sun, and star. The sensations of the world by this point are lost to him. Instead, he is completely exposed to “the wheel of fire”, a common device of tragedy. The bearing of the Ring is a tragedy in itself. In contrast, Sam—mostly free of the corrupting influence of the Ring—has a different experience:

Through all his thoughts there came the memory of water; and every brook or stream or fount that he had ever seen, under green willow-shades or twinkling in the sun, danced and rippled for his torment behind the blindness of his eyes. He felt the cool mud about his toes as he paddled in the Pool at Bywater with Jolly Cotton and Tom and Nibs, and their sister Rosie. (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 939)

Despite finding himself in the same wasteland as Frodo, Sam can imagine better days even though the thoughts only torment him.

The Shire itself is also situated within a fictional historical context. Frodo refers to The Shire as “our own Shire” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 83) professing some degree of ownership over the land. This sentiment is corrected by the elf Gildor: “But it is not your own Shire,’ said Gildor. ‘Others dwelt here before hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out’ (83). Thus, Frodo and Sam’s attachment to The Shire and their love

for rural country are tempered by the wisdom that their relationship with the land is not absolute. It is explicitly passing.

To return now to the more recent criticisms of *The Lord of the Rings*, Fitzpatrick describes how in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and in *Beowulf* (2007), “the explicit attempt to mask decidedly non-medieval gender constructs with the explicit incorporation of realistic medieval impulses exemplifies how the use of the ‘Middle Ages’ can naturalize or essentialize constructed concepts such as gender” (xix). Furthermore:

When Phillip instead escapes and slays Maleficent in her dragon form, he not only rewrites Maleficent’s mockery of a fairy-tale narrative into the standard medieval/fairy-tale trope where the dragon is slain and the hero prevails; he also becomes the exceptional modern hero slaying the dangerous aspects of the medieval past. (Fitzpatrick 93)

Likewise, *The Lord of the Rings* mobilizes a romantic Middle Ages against those aspects of modernity that Tolkien finds dangerous while simultaneously essentializing particular views on gender, race, and class that themselves would become tropes of the fantasy genre and be taken up again more recently by Martin and others (king of right blood, etc.). Fitzpatrick also points out how Martin’s fantasy essentializes the same myths of blood and lineage that are exemplified by Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings* (139). Jon and Daenerys rely on their Targaryen bloodline to control dragons and, as an extension of this control, wield power.

It can be particularly problematic when fantasy is marketed as more realistic. As Fitzpatrick notes:

The incorporation of medieval cultural references and details, together with the grittiness that we have been taught signifies a realistic Middle Ages, create a strong claim to historical accuracy, which claim can in turn be used to justify certain representations of gender and violence as themselves historically accurate, or just another component of “how it really was.” (122)

What compels Martin in this case to include certain representations of gendered violence under the banner of historical accuracy while simultaneously ignoring the most egregious examples of pure fiction like dragons? Fitzpatrick’s argument applies to *The Lord of the Rings* and other examples of medievalism too, even if not all these works make as strong of a claim to realism or grittiness as *A Song of Ice and Fire*. While *The Lord of the Rings* in most cases lacks the grittiness that we associate with realism, it does incorporate “medieval cultural references and details” that might alone make a weaker claim to historical accuracy.

Another example might be the dearth of female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, the consequences of which are outlined by Michael D. C. Drout in “The Influence of Tolkien’s Masculinist Medievalism”:

The attitude towards women in Tolkien’s work is generated, I believe, from anxieties intrinsic to masculine reproduction [...] Tolkien’s elves, although immortal, no longer produce new children to re-populate their kingdoms. Ents have no children because they have lost their Entwives. Female dwarves are so like males that non-dwarves cannot differentiate between them. Tolkien’s Middle Earth, though beautiful, is dying for lack of reproduction. (26)

Drout later notes how students of medieval literature are consequently often surprised to find women in the literature they read in their classes. In these ways, medievalism continues to shape the popular understanding of the Middle Ages.

Thus, it seems to me that *The Lord of the Rings* as medievalism is simultaneously progressive in some ways and conservative in others. It is no accident, for example, that *The Lord of the Rings* took off with the counterculture of the 1960s; there are antimodern sentiments in *The Lord of the Rings* that actively work to re-enchant a disenchanted modern world by mobilizing medieval romance. Conversely, decidedly conservative values are essentialized in *The Lord of the Rings*, especially in the case of Aragorn's *noblesse oblige* and right to rule. Tolkien's text participates in the work of recreating the Middle Ages, and for Dinshaw, "the dividing line between analyzing the 'real Middle Ages,' on the one hand, and creating or recreating a Middle Ages, on the other, blurs very quickly" (22). Furthermore, I think Dinshaw correctly states "In this work there is the unmistakable claim, if only implicitly sometimes, that the present is not a singular, fleeting moment, but comprises relations to other times, other people, other worlds" (4). Each generation's relationship to the Middle Ages is unique precisely because it is negotiated with the present. On the one hand, Tolkien was very much an academic, but on the other he was engaged with the popular recreation of the Middle Ages. Contrast, for example, his essay on *Beowulf* with the popular success of *The Lord of the Rings*. The former belongs to medieval studies, while the latter to medievalism. In this way, Tolkien operated simultaneously from positions of detachment and attachment to the Middle Ages. Tolkien's Middle Ages, following on the heels of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, was a much different Middle Ages than the popular Middle Ages today (which follows on the heels of Tolkien himself). The rest of this thesis will focus on the medieval motifs that appear in *The Lord of the*

Rings that give the text its medieval associations and how these motifs are rhetorically significant to the discourse of medievalism today. Were *The Lord of the Rings* to be written off as genre fiction, or a pseudo-medieval fantasy pastiche, the rhetorical work of the text's medieval motifs would go ignored. By understanding through the earlier examples of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Beowulf* how the *Lord of the Rings* remains an important participant in the discourse of medievalism, we may consider how and why certain medieval motifs in *The Lord of the Rings* continue to be rhetorically significant. *The Lord of the Rings* is thus both a romanticized response to modernity and a modern medievalism that continues to influence the popular perception of the Middle Ages today.

The Lord of the Rings and the Lost Book

In my introduction, I proposed that medievalism is best understood as *the use of medieval motifs as symbols employed, knowingly or not, by postmedieval people to metaphorically connect them to a reimagined medieval past*. I think “reimagined” is a good term to use here because the Middle Ages are not being imagined or dreamt up independent of any records or evidence. Rather, medievalism sometimes pretends to be based on the same kinds of evidence that underpin medieval studies. In actuality, medievalism does not rely on the same material-textual evidence that medieval studies does. Understood this way, medievalism is ripe for rhetorical use. Medievalisms share a set of common symbols that have come to represent the medieval period. In medievalism, these symbols can be included or discarded to achieve the desired reimagining of the period. In this way, the use of medieval symbols associates any accompanying post-medieval ideas with the medieval past. This practice makes an appeal to tradition based on fake roots in history, especially in the case of popular medievalism. Many of these implicit associations are passed down through successive works of medievalism reflexively. In contrast to medievalism, medieval studies continue to be based on an analysis of available material-textual evidence. This chapter will consider how the lost book motif is able to supplant material history for a reimagined textual past that nevertheless feigns materiality. In this way, the lost book pretends to be the necessary material-textual evidence that medieval studies are based on while actually belonging to the broader reimaginings of medievalism.

The Lord of the Rings and much of modern fantasy, make liberal use of medieval motifs. Popular medievalism plays a significant role in reimagining or *recreating* the Middle Ages for post-medieval audiences. The significance of the term “recreate” will be discussed later in this

chapter. The popular Middle Ages, including medievalist fantasy fiction, often reference a Middle Ages that never was. Either these popular medievalisms are referencing earlier works of medievalism, or they superficially employ medieval images. At the core of this process is the recreation of the Middle Ages.

The imaginative endeavour of recreation is a significant topic of this chapter. To begin my discussion of this topic, I turn first to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, paying attention to Geoffrey's (re)creation of a lost book that he claims has provided the information he relates. *Historia Regum Britanniae* is a well-known text in the history of medieval England. Written around 1136, *Historia Regum Britanniae* tells a mythical history of England from the founding of Britain by Brutus in antiquity to the legendary death of Arthur. *Historia Regum Britanniae* is considered an important part of the Matter of Britain, one of three great collections of Western stories; the other two being the Matter of France and the Matter of Rome. I contrast Geoffrey's lost book with the lost book on which Tolkien imagined *The Lord of the Rings* to be based. *Historia Regum Britanniae* turns to an invented source to empower it with perceived authority that is ultimately predicated on a fiction. Rhetorically, this move helps to historicize ideas in the text and simultaneously creates a shared identity for a nation. One interesting motif included in *The Lord of the Rings* is a fictional source like that in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the "Red Book of Westmarch" is a lost text named in the prologue. *The Lord of the Rings* uses another lost source though, this being the Middle Ages themselves. The lost source motif is emblematic of medievalism in that it represents not only the invention of imaginary texts, but also attempts to reshape the past. In this chapter, my comparison of *Historia Regum Britanniae* to *The Lord of the Rings* offers a case study of the

rhetorical significance of medieval motifs as symbols and images that work to recreate the past for a modern audience.

Geoffrey writes in the dedication to *Historia Regum Britanniae*:

At a time when I was giving a good deal of attention to such matters, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford a man skilled in the art of public speaking and well-informed about the history of foreign countries presented me with a certain very ancient book written in the British language. This book attractively composed to form a consecutive and orderly narrative, set out all the deeds of these men, from Brutus, the first King of the Britons, down to Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallo. (Geoffrey of Monmouth 51)

What exactly was this mysterious record? In the introduction of his translation of *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Lewis Thorpe proposes two simple solutions to this question: “that he took his material from a little book which a friend had given him; and alternatively, that he made his material up” (14). Rejecting the latter option, Thorpe maintains that at the very least Geoffrey had access to some material from which to draw his account: “it is now accepted that [Geoffrey] had at his disposal something closely related to MS. Harl. 3859 in the British Museum, the contents of which are Nennius’ *Historia Brittonum* with the *Cities and Marvels of Britain*, the *Annales Cambriae* and the medieval Welsh king-lists and genealogies” (15). However, other scholars have identified other sources (see Ashe 1981, 1995) including materials from Gildas and Nennius. Others have challenged the idea that an actual source underlies Geoffrey’s claims. Howlett (1995), for example, argues that Geoffrey fabricated his sources to succeed in a competitive literary environment. Other scholars have since commented on the theories of both Ashe and Howlett (see Hanning 1995; Wiseman 2011, 2015). My intention here is neither to

debate the source's identity, nor to debate its existence. For my own purposes, I will follow Howlett in that I take Geoffrey's source to be a rhetorical device. Whether or not Geoffrey actually had exclusive access to an ancient source does not diminish the rhetorical effect of his *claim* to have such access. I am interested in analyzing this rhetorical device as it appears in both *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Like Thorpe, I agree that it seems clear that Geoffrey had access to some sort of materials from which to draw his account at least in part if not in whole (Ashe 1981, 1995). Nevertheless, I find Howlett's argument that Geoffrey fabricated his sources in competition with his literary rivals to be compelling. Howlett describes how "Geoffrey's appeal to a secret source became a model for subsequent authors and translators" (25). I count Tolkien among those. Again, what matters to me here is Geoffrey's *claim* to have access to a secret source and the rhetorical weight of the claim alone regardless of whether or not the secret source actually existed and what it might have contained (an interesting discussion in its own right).

Geoffrey's reference to a lost source not only enables him to play loose with history, but also affords him some exclusivity over his contemporaries. In "The Literary Context of Geoffrey of Monmouth: An Essay on the Fabrication of Sources", Howlett describes how Geoffrey was able to carve out his own literary domain apart from his contemporaries, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, by claiming access to a source which William and Henry simply had no way to reference (43). In fact, that the source was invented only adds to its exclusivity; it could be copied, stolen, or destroyed if it existed. In this way, Geoffrey creates a niche for *Historia Regum Britanniae* outside the purview of William and Henry and the comparatively vast source materials from which they were able to draw. "Geoffrey by contrast had very little, and of that even less was glorious" (Howlett 44).

In describing this landscape of literary conflict, Howlett notes the productive ambiguity of the Latin verb *invenio*:

Remembering that Latin *inuenire* means both ‘to come upon, discover’ and ‘to devise, invent’ we need not beg any questions about what Geoffrey did to *inuenire* his sources. His *Historia Regum Britanniae* provides for a people destitute of information about their past two millennia of history. It addresses the very patrons to whom William and Henry dedicated their books and in the same places. It rebukes William’s disdain of stories about Geoffrey’s greatest hero and Henry’s astonishment as his book. It plays with William’s remarks at the end of *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. Finally, it ‘permits’ Caradog and William and Henry to write more, but ‘commands them to be silent’, denying them the ability to write without access to Geoffrey’s source. To Geoffrey the patriotic British historians William and Henry may have seemed enviable supplied with an undeserved richness of English historical sources. His response was to overwhelm the Welsh dullard and surpass the ablest English historians. (46)

The ambiguity of Geoffrey’s invention of – his discovery or imagination of – the lost book offers several rhetorical advantages. With *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey leverages the lost text that he takes to be his mysterious source as a rhetorical tool for Geoffrey’s personal gain. In Howlett’s account, the lost book works in Geoffrey’s writing to simultaneously elevate Geoffrey’s own literary status and to fabricate a past for a people seemingly deprived of written histories compared to their neighbours. Geoffrey’s invention solidifies the history of a nation by mythologizing its ancestry; an ancestry which would prove a useful tool to the kings of England. Succession claims relied on the tracing of ancestral lines into the past. As Scott William Dempsey notes,

The succession claim was a form of English historico-legal argument invented at the turn of the thirteenth century. It was predicated on the idea that the kings of England were the juristic successors to the king of Britain, and, as such, were entitled to preserve or recover – as the case may be – the rights and lands which had once been enjoyed by their eminent predecessors. (iii)

Central to the historical component of the succession claim was “the English appropriation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*” (iii). The English monarchs attached themselves to Geoffrey’s lengthy *History of the Kings of Britain*. In doing so, the English monarchs also appropriated the work that Geoffrey had already done to historicize the lineage of the kings of Britain all the way back to Brutus. This in turn provides the English monarchs with a powerful appeal to tradition to legitimize their claims.

Dempsey also describes a second constitutional component to the succession claim wherein the realm’s property, as opposed to the monarch’s property, could never truly be lost and would always belong to the realm *de jure* (iii). Thus, *Historia Regum Britanniae* is an important propaganda tool for the English monarchy. “It did not matter that the English were not the British, nor that decades, centuries, and even millennia might have passed since such rights or lands had last been possessed” (Dempsey iii). That the English were not the British is precisely why “appropriation” is an apt term, but these nuances are erased when history is created to retroactively justify actions in the present.

As a document proving the legitimacy of succession claims, *Historia Regum Britanniae* could be a useful tool, and it is no wonder that many copies of *Historia Regum Britanniae* manuscripts survive. *Historia Regum Britanniae* would again prove to be a critical ancestral

record during the Wars of the Roses. The monarchs on both sides of this English civil war claimed descent from the last of the kings of the Britons, Cadwallader. Geoffrey writes of Cadwallader that “at first he ruled the kingdom bravely and peacefully; but, twelve years after he had inherited the crown, he fell ill and civil war broke out among the Britons” (280). After this, the Saxons would become the dominant force on the island. By claiming descent from Cadwallader, last of the kings of the Britons, both Edward IV and Henry VII claimed descent from the legendary King Arthur. Edward IV “incorporated Arthurian and mythical histories from Geoffrey of Monmouth in his descent from Welsh princes [...] Edward IV legitimised his Welsh lineage by tracing it to Arthur and Brutus, by this claiming he must be the rightful heir of the throne of Britain and the returned saviour” (Flattun 149). Likewise, “In 1490, Henry commissioned the genealogy, London, British Library, Royal MS 18 A LXXV, it traces his grandfather, Owain Tudor descending from Brutus” (Flattun 150). As such, what Geoffrey did to *inuenire* his sources was far more than an act of fiction. *Historia Regum Britanniae* and its lost book would lend incredible and real rhetorical weight to the claims of the English monarchy for centuries to come. The myth-making central to *Historia Regum Britanniae* would play a significant role in the history of England.

While the medieval succession claims of the English monarchy are not directly analogous to popular medievalism today, I think the same kind of perceived authority that backed these claims is still present. In *The Lord of the Rings*, it may be vestigial; we have no doubt that Tolkien invented the “Red Book”, but the inclusion of a fictional source is still an attempt to capture some of the feeling of medieval historiography. In popular fantasy, medieval symbols have become the overdetermined tropes of genre fiction. Much of this is reflexive. Each successive imitation borrows from the last. The result of these successive imitations is that

popular perception of the Middle Ages becomes bound up with a handful of symbols that are able to stand in for the period more broadly. Consider some examples like the sword, the castle, the knight, the princess. These images are in no way unique to the Middle Ages, yet I think it has become common to associate them with the Middle Ages. These symbols become tangled with other ideas too. These are various imaginings of the Middle Ages: the Middle Ages of the little person or artisan, the Middle Ages of environmentalism, the romantic Middle Ages of honour and chivalry, and the gothic Middle Ages of torture and brutality. I consider Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* first below before considering other medievalism.

Like Geoffrey, Tolkien refers to a lost book, the “Red Book of Westmarch”, in the prologue of *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien claims this lost book is the source of both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*: “This account of the end of the Third Age is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch [*sic*]” (14). Furthermore, “The original Red Book [*sic*] has not been preserved, but many copies were made [...]” (14). While Tolkien does not make specific reference to the historical *Red Book of Hergest*, it is possible that he had it mind when naming his fictional manuscript the “Red Book of Westmarch”. The *Red Book of Hergest* is a 14th century manuscript written in Welsh. The reference appears intentional given that Tolkien had a great interest in what he described as “Celtic beauty”. Tolkien also based some of the structures of one his invented languages, Sindarin, on Welsh. Furthermore, the idea of the western marches calls to mind Wales and the west coast of the island of Great Britain. Other scholars have noted this connection between the *Red Book of Hergest* and the “Red Book of Westmarch” (see Phelpstead).

Whether or not the “Red Book of Westmarch” existed is a much less difficult question to answer for *The Lord of the Rings* than *Historia Regum Britanniae*. One of Thorpe’s simple

solutions to the problem of Geoffrey's lost book, "that he made his material up," is obvious here. Tolkien is obviously not engaged in solution 1) the transcription of the events of the War of the Ring as recorded in the the "Red Book of Westmarch"; but solution 2) makes more sense: he made it up. Even so, Tolkien goes so far as to represent *The Lord of the Rings* as the extant copy of the lost original "Red Book of Westmarch". Certainly, *The Lord of the Rings* is a dense text, filled with literary, historical, and mythological references. It also borrows from medieval historiographies like *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Even so, it is not itself a historical text.

One result of Tolkien's *inuenire* in *The Lord of the Rings* is the meta-justification of different published editions of the text. Since *The Lord of the Rings* is presented as the copy of a tale told in a lost book, editorial differences between editions are excused as different copies of the original "Red Book". Since the "Red Book" is also the source for Tolkien's second most popular and enduring work, *The Hobbit* (to which *The Lord of the Rings* is, in many ways, a sequel), it also reconciles any inconsistencies between the two within the given narrative. While the "Red Book" of Westmarch calls back to medieval manuscripts like *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Red Book of Hergest*, it is also a unique device of Tolkien's. Vincent Ferré describes how Tolkien uses the "Red Book of Westmarch" to play with readers. It was supposedly written long before recorded history and even the invention of writing. Tolkien would have been aware of this when describing the "Red Book", but this description demonstrate how "Tolkien plays with the tension between fiction and authenticity" (Ferré 33).

Furthermore, Ferré points out how Tolkien includes an excerpt from the "Red Book of Westmarch" in *The Lord of the Rings* showing discarded titles. For Ferré, the diversity of titles proves the text's "instability" given its resistance to a single name. "This diversity represents an opening towards a multiplicity of readings" (Ferré 28). I think the lost book itself is emblematic

of this kind of diversity and multiplicity of readings and interpretation. Like medieval manuscripts themselves which are often fragmentary and discovered in many different versions and worked on by scholars and enthusiasts, the lost book works to unfix meaning from a text, loosening it from its moorings, and opening the text to a multiplicity of editions. Again, Tolkien makes great use of this technique to reconcile inconsistencies between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and each of their many versions. We are only ever reading just one record of the tale being told. This process echoes the scribal work that went into the production of medieval manuscripts. Why someone in the Middle Ages decided to copy a manuscript and what alterations they saw fit to make demonstrates this kind of diversity.

Like Geoffrey's, Tolkien's reference to a lost book is not purely stylistic. Thorpe writes of Geoffrey that his "essential inspiration was a patriotic one" (9), a claim that alludes to the important connection between language, literature, and identity. *Historia Regum Britanniae* provides a glorious written history for a people lacking written records of their past. It is significant that Geoffrey's "very ancient book" was "written in the British language" (51) because it represents a vernacular source from which Geoffrey writes his Latin account. Language is an important identifying feature of populations. Claiming to source his history from the vernacular language lends the history more weight. The vernacular source connects the history more closely to the Britons. Not only does the history follow the lineage of the kings of that people, but it is also written from the Britons' perspective. A source from foreign people would not carry the same weight locally.

Howlett further identifies political and artistic inspirations for *Historia Regum Britanniae* in Geoffrey's competition with his contemporaries, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Caradoc of Llancarfan. In this way, the lost book becomes a tool Geoffrey

leverages to benefit his patronage. While I think Thorpe correctly identifies a patriotic inspiration for *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Howlett makes a strong case that the artistic and political motivations for *Historia Regum Britanniae* were equally essential.

Like *Historia Regum Britanniae*, *The Lord of the Rings* seems to have a patriotic motivation. In letter 131, Tolkien writes about a patriotic inspiration he had for *The Lord of the Rings*:

Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our ‘air’ (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be ‘high’, purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd. (144)

This letter was written three years before the first publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. Here there is a clear patriotic agenda being described. The dedication is “to England” which is further emphasized as “my country”. On the surface, the meaning of this statement is clear. Tolkien is

English. But, just as Gildor describes The Shire to Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, the country is not actually *his*. It cannot be. Others dwelt there before the English, and others might dwell there when the English are gone. This has already been demonstrated by the known history of the island. Through migration and invasion, many peoples have lived in England. Again, “It did not matter that the English were not the British, nor that decades, centuries, and even millennia might have passed since such rights or lands had last been possessed” (Dempsey iii). The English monarchy attached themselves to the kings of Britain, but they were a different people. This remains a problem today with the notion of the “Anglo-Saxon”. The Saxons are an extinct people, and the term “Anglo-Saxon” could at most be used to describe another extinct people living on the island a thousand years ago. Nobody alive today is Anglo-Saxon, and the term is often employed in racist ways by white people in English speaking countries. This is known as racial Anglo-Saxonism (see Horsman). More recently, what was previously known as the International Society for the Study of Anglo-Saxonism has changed its name to the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England to separate themselves from the racial Anglo-Saxonists.

Tolkien also expresses in this letter a desire for a certain “tone and quality” which he identifies geographically as belonging to England and Northwestern Europe. Notably, he excludes Italy, the Aegean, and the East (presumably Eastern Europe but almost certainly beyond too). In a way, Tolkien is looking for symbols that can convey the “tone and quality” that he associates with England and Northwestern Europe. Countries that this might include today are England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Perhaps Finland might be included; Tolkien refers to the Finnish *Kalevala* as an inspiration for his own writing three times in the letters (pages 87, 214, and 345). *The Kalevala* is

a 19th century epic poem constructed by Finnish philologist Elias Lönnrot from Finnish oral stories. *The Kalevala* was first published in 1835, over 100 years before *The Lord of the Rings* was published in 1954-55, but the similarities are clear. They are both concerned with national identity and mythology.

In some ways this is no surprise based on his linguistic career alone, having studied Germanic languages, Welsh, and Finnish. He goes on to describe how his desire to achieve this “tone and quality” might be unobtainable. Consider this passage again, “[...] possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things) [...]” (144). Paradoxically, the beauty with which Tolkien seeks to endow his work is described as Celtic even though Tolkien considers it rare for genuine Celtic artifacts to meet this standard. This claim does not seem to be made because no Celtic artifacts of the type have survived, but rather that the idea of ‘elusive Celtic beauty’ rarely ever manifests materially for Tolkien. Here, Tolkien breaks from history; his imagined Celtic beauty is beyond material expression. This imagination is the product of a romanticization of medieval Northwestern Europe. Tolkien’s beauty is perhaps only found in the symbols, language, and myths that he studied, not the archeological record. The final, “absurd”, punctuates the idea’s impossibility. Just as the *RBoW* works, the idea of an elusive Celtic beauty works as a lost source for Tolkien’s larger mythos, of which *The Lord of the Rings* might be one of the “great tales” that Tolkien would “draw [...] in fullness” (144). As an immaterial standard, the elusive Celtic beauty that Tolkien aims towards is unmoored from reality. Tolkien can shape this idea as he wishes and his knowledge of it is exclusive like Geoffrey’s.

Tolkien’s work on *The Lord of the Rings* insofar as it was removed from his professional work at Oxford was amateur in the sense used by Carolyn Dinshaw: “the time outside those

normative spheres is a different kind of time in which one labors, but labors for love” (5). The desire for a familiar and romanticized but unreachable time or place is nostalgic. “Amateur medievalists are routinely derided – by historical minded scholar or even by the general public, under the sway of modernist ideals of historical expertise – as merely nostalgic, naively, uncritically, and irresponsibly yearning for an idealized past as escape from a present felt to be dismal and unpromising” (Dinshaw *How Soon is Now?* 34). Dinshaw like Tolkien below recognizes that this kind of escape can be healing: “I want to join in a creative rethinking of nostalgia precisely because it can be a much-needed survival strategy for those for whom a relationship to ‘home’ is disrupted: those displaced from their homelands either literally or figuratively, including queers of all stripes” (34). In Tolkien’s case, one can imagine how a relationship to home could be disrupted by two world wars and increasing modernization. Indeed, Dinshaw’s account of nostalgia as a survival strategy is similar to Tolkien’s account of escape:

I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the ton of scorn or pity with which ‘Escape’ is now so often used [...] Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. (“On Fairy-Stories” 60)

Tolkien, like Geoffrey, is involved in the recreation of national literature. Here, however, “Recreation” expresses amateur work done with affection in time outside of normative spheres for the purposes of rest and recovery. It was Dinshaw that first brought this use of ‘recreation’ to

my attention: “If re-creation of the Middle Ages is not so distant from the study of the Middle Ages, neither is recreation. Here I pick up the terms that Lowell Duckert has elaborated” (24). Duckert describes how “‘Recreation’ and its variants are of Middle English origin via Old French and Latin: recreare means ‘to create anew or again, to restore, refresh, revive.’ Similarly, ‘re-creation’ comes from recreation, ‘the action or process of restoring’” (80).

I recognize *The Lord of the Rings* as a product of recreation. But what, in *The Lord of the Rings*, was Tolkien attempting to “restore” as per Duckert’s elaboration on “recreation” above? It seems to me that Tolkien desired to capture in writing a familiar and romanticized recreation of the medieval past for the purposes of escape, regardless of whether one considers that escape to be for good or ill. For Tolkien, “fairy-stories” could be a source of recovery through which “We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded by) blue and yellow and red” (“On Fairy-Stories” 57). In writing *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien was engaged in an amateur project in the sense that *The Lord of the Rings* was the product of his engagement with his medieval source materials (and almost certainly other post-medieval materials). It may be that medievalism was a natural place for Tolkien to find the familiarity necessary for recreation, given how he spent so much of his professional life engaging with the medieval period in northwestern Europe.

Even so, Tolkien writes in letter 143:

But an equally basic passion of mine ab initio was for myth (not allegory!) and for fairy-story, and above all for heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history, of which there is far too little in the world (accessible to me) for my appetite ... I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own

(bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legend of other lands.

Tolkien's desire here for his country to have stories of its own appears like the desire Howlett attributes to Geoffrey to *inuenire* a history when one was lacking. Geoffrey, in Howlett's account, did not have nearly the same wealth of sources to draw upon as William and Henry. England, of course, has a long and rich literary history, but Tolkien here expresses a desire for a specific kind of story that he finds lacking. The kind of story that Tolkien desires in this case is itself a kind of lost source. The lost source cannot be historical for Tolkien because, like elusive Celtic beauty, it belongs primarily to the imagination.

While I am not sure that *inuenire* is an exact parallel to *recreation*, recall that *inuenire* can mean both 'to come upon, discover' and 'to devise, invent'. Both senses of the term appear to be at work in medievalism and recreation. Much of Tolkien's content is invented, yet it is also clear that he had access to sources of inspiration like Geoffrey: Thorpe notes how "it is now accepted that [Geoffrey] had at his disposal something closely related to MS. Harl. 3859 in the British Museum, the contents of which are Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* with the *Cities and Marvels of Britain*, the *Annales Cambriae* and the medieval Welsh king-lists and genealogies" (15). Furthermore, it is not clear to me whether *inuenire*, like *recreation* in Dinshaw's sense, is always a labour of love (Dinshaw 5). I think the two terms, *inuenire* and *recreation*, share an idea of playfulness that is characteristic of medievalism. By describing medievalism as "playful" I do not mean to downplay the rhetorical power of medievalism. Rather, I think medievalism is "playful" in that it often does not seem concerned with faithfulness to material history beyond convenient imagery.

Tolkien's two main criteria for his story appear to be 1) "heroic legend on the brink of fairy-tale and history" and 2) "bound up with its tongue and soil". Examples of these kinds of stories with which Tolkien might contrast the dearth of his own country are Iceland's Prose Edda and Poetic Edda and Finland's Kalevala (the latter composed not long before Tolkien's own time). The second point is problematic in that it suggests English literature is somehow not bound up with "the soil" of England and the native tongue of that country. It suggests that a) the English language is polluted by foreign loanwords; or perhaps b) that there is no language truly native to England in the wake of the Roman occupation, Saxon migrations, and Norman conquest.

The first sentiment is problematic because it privileges Old English as a purer form of English. Old English is associated with the term "Anglo-Saxon" which has been heavily criticized in recent years as playing into the hands of white supremacists and racial Anglo-Saxonists. A Washington Post article from 2019 covering the resignation of Rambaran-Olm, the second vice president of The International Society of Anglo-Saxonists and a woman of colour, notes that:

Following multiple resignations and outraged statements from other medieval groups condemning its actions, ISAS formally voted to alter its name, bowing to critics who argue that 'Anglo-Saxon' is code for whiteness, a phrase that is co-opted today by white supremacists around the world to advance a false version of white-dominated history.

(Natanson)

The society has since been renamed to The Society for the Study of Early Medieval England. Advancing “a false version of white-dominated history” is a similar rhetorical move to the lost text used by both Geoffrey and Tolkien. It is the proliferation of an invented source.

As I have explored in Geoffrey and Tolkien, motifs like the lost book can carry a lot of rhetorical weight. Medieval motifs themselves can be powerful tools in recreating the Middle Ages. In her example of Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty*, Fitzpatrick notes how modern “ideals of gendered behaviour” can be made to seem “essential or natural” by locating them in a medieval setting (94). I would further suggest that the setting need not be entirely or accurately medieval so long as there are enough medieval-seeming elements that the reader associates the work with the Middle Ages.(94)

The source for *Sleeping Beauty* was invented like the lost book in that the Middle Ages shown in the film have been created to uphold twentieth-century ideals of gendered behaviour. Umberto Eco writes:

looking at the Middle Ages means looking at our infancy, in the same way that a doctor, to understand our present state of health, asks us about our childhood, or in the same way that a psychoanalyst, to understand our present neuroses, makes a careful investigation of the primal scene. Our return to the Middle Ages is a quest for our roots [...]. (65)

Eco’s identification of the Middle Ages as the “infancy” and “roots” of modernity helps explain why medievalism is so popular and how different depictions of the Middle Ages can be so effective at historicizing more recent ideals, as is the case with *Sleeping Beauty* covered by Fitzpatrick.

Eco notes that “since we want to come back to the real roots, we are looking for ‘reliable Middle Ages,’ not for romance and fantasy, though frequently this wish is misunderstood and, moved by a vague impulse, we indulge in a sort of escapism a la Tolkien” (65) Eco further suggests that “the Middle Ages have always been messed up in order to meet the vital requirements of different periods” (68). In this way, various invented Middle Ages are repeatedly employed as invented source material for different agendas. The Middle Ages have become a sort of lost book for popular culture medievalism. It is not clear to me that we are actually looking for, as Eco suggests, “reliable Middle Ages” rather than continuously recreating the Middle Ages to different ends. Eco proposes “to outline at least ten types of Middle Ages, to warn readers that every time one speaks of a dream of the Middle Ages, one should first ask which Middle Ages one is dreaming of” (68). The sixth of these is the “Middle Ages of *national identities*, so powerful again during the last century, when the medieval model was taken as a political utopia, a celebration of past grandeur, to be opposed to the miseries of national enslavement and foreign domination” (70). The Middle Ages of national identities that Eco proposes here that was “so powerful again during the last century” lines up well with the popularity of racial Anglo-Saxonism, admonished elsewhere in this chapter, in the 19th and 20th centuries.

There are patriotic motivations behind *The Lord of the Rings*, but there are other ‘little’ Middle Ages at work in *The Lord of the Rings* too: the Middle Ages of environmentalism, anti-modernism, and heroism. These are all dreams of the Middle Ages, as Eco puts it, rather than the Middle Ages themselves, but insofar as they have been propagated in popular culture, they have persisted. Tolkien’s account of the significance of home and escape as well as Dinshaw’s account of home and nostalgia differ markedly from Eco’s quip that romance and

fantasy indulge in a kind of Tolkienian escapism. Is the Society for Creative Anachronism really after the “reliable Middle Ages”? Is their recreation the misunderstanding of an impulse towards the Middle Ages? I think, in contrast to Eco, and more along the lines of Tolkien and Dinshaw, that kind of productive engagement with the invented Middle Ages and nostalgia “can be a much-needed survival strategy for those for whom a relationship to ‘home’ is disrupted: those displaced from their homelands either literally or figuratively, including queers of all stripes” (Dinshaw *How Soon is Now?* 35). At the heart of the lost book in both *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *The Lord of the Rings* is a playful productivity that bends source material (real and imagined) to its own ends. The process is productive because it inspires further medievalism. These further medievalisms, like *The Lord of the Rings*, become the source material for further spinoffs, more and more removed from any material conception of the Middle Ages, like the popular fantasy genre today. Sometimes only symbols remain, pointing towards a vague and distant materiality that becomes more difficult or perhaps impossible to recapture with every successive imitation. Medievalism like this can function as an escape, but can also rewrite history; the kings of England appropriated the history of the kings of Britain. More problematic today is the potential for white supremacists to appropriate for themselves an “Anglo-Saxon” identity as discussed earlier. The great irony of the WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) is that both the Angles and the Saxons are long extinct, and neither of those groups ever overlapped with Protestantism. Thus it seems to me that while the lost book, and medievalism more generally, can be a playful exercise of imagination and will, we run the risk of overwriting material history if invented sources remain unexamined.

The Legacy of Handicraft in *The Lord of the Rings*

Connections to the medieval past created by devices such as the lost book discussed in chapter three foster an implicit appeal to tradition that lends rhetorical weight to these associations. Phillips describes this as “essentializing” (7). Many symbols might act as a suitable connection to the medieval past. What matters is not whether these symbols of the Middle Ages are accurately medieval, but that they are associated with the Middle Ages by popular belief. The Middle Ages may be symbolized in many ways: motifs, setting, dress, language, tools, etc. Even though the setting of *The Lord of the Rings* is a non-Middle Ages (a fantasy), the popular medieval imagery of *The Lord of the Rings* nevertheless associates the fantasy with the real medieval past. This is by design. Tolkien was a medievalist and makes many explicit connections to the period in his writing. In this chapter I discuss the representation of technology and handicraft in *The Lord of the Rings*. There are many examples worth discussing in *The Lord of the Rings* so this chapter should not be considered exhaustive of the text. I am interested in how handicraft and Elvish technology are associated with Good in *The Lord of the Rings* while Goblin technology and large-scale industry are associated with Evil. Noëlle Phillips identifies a similar connection between handicraft and medieval imagery in her work on medievalism and craft beer (Phillips 1). As medievalism, *The Lord of the Rings* locates these associations in the medieval past regardless of their (a)historicity.

I consider three examples of handicraft in *The Lord of the Rings*: Gandalf’s fireworks, Narvi’s door, and Galadriel’s gifts. There are many other examples of handicraft in *The Lord of the Rings*, and there are even more examples of handicraft in Tolkien’s wider writings like *The Silmarillion*. The One Ring itself is one of these artifacts and is a central device in *The Lord of*

the Rings. Importantly, the One Ring does not adhere to my thesis that handicraft is associated with Good in *The Lord of the Rings*. In fact, handicraft is not always or unequivocally associated with Good; instead, the relationship between handicraft and Good is more nuanced and requires the consideration of technology, power, and corruption in *The Lord of the Rings*. Ultimately, I see a lot of these ideas in *The Lord of the Rings* as related to the work of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. The Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th and early 20th century sought to heighten the status of the decorative arts, especially in architecture and furnishing, in contrast to what adherents saw as the lesser, mass-produced, uninspired products of the industrial revolution. The figurehead of the movement, William Morris, founded Morris & Co. in 1861. Morris also wrote early fantasy, inspiring Tolkien. Tolkien's representation of handicraft, Good, technology, power, corruption, and the Middle Ages in *The Lord of the Rings* is complex. Much of this nuance in the relationship between handicraft and Good in Tolkien has been lost in popular perception as derivative medievalisms hyperfocus on medieval imagery. *The Lord of the Rings* is the progenitor of the fantasy genre today which has itself become a significant source of modern medievalism. Thus, I think a lot of ideas I consider here have been popularized in large part by *The Lord of the Rings*.

There are many examples in *The Lord of the Rings* of makers associated with a particular work of handicraft. To some extent of course it seems that everything in Middle-Earth is handmade given that there is no extensive industry or automation outside the black gates. This is a detail that I think says more about the setting than any one character's relationship to these products. However, there are cases of special significance in *The Lord of the Rings* that draw attention to particular characters and their crafts. Gandalf is one such character introduced early on in *The Lord of the Rings* as master of fireworks. Gandalf prepares a firework display at Bilbo

and Frodo's combined birthday party: "The fireworks were by Gandalf: they were not only brought by him but designed and made by him; and the special effects, set pieces, and flights of rockets were let off by him" (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 27). It is specified here that Gandalf not only procured and set up the fireworks display, but that he personally designed and made the fireworks. This describes a deep connection between the fireworks and the work of Gandalf's own hands that would otherwise be absent if they were generic (as if the hobbits had a fireworks factory). The description continues: "But there was also a generous distribution of squibs, crackers, backrappers, sparklers, torches, dwarf-candles, elf-fountains, goblin-barkers and thunderclaps. They were all superb. The art of Gandalf improved with age" (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 27). Thus, doubly describing the skill of Gandalf at this craft and noting how his art had only improved. The significance of Gandalf's art is its contrast to the work of Saruman which will be discussed later.

Descriptions of this kind of artisanry in the first part of the text are not unique to Gandalf but are also attributed more generally to hobbits and dwarves (although Gandalf seems to be particularly skilled). A description of hobbits notes that "they do not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows"). Tolkien's hobbits are not opposed to working with tools but are generally uninterested in using complex machinery to produce their goods. It is not clear from the text why exactly hobbits do not "like" more complicated machines other than that their culture, at the whim of Tolkien, simply rejects them. Hobbits are also described as having "a close friendship with the earth" (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 1). It might be implied here that complicated machines are less connected to the earth and by extension less attractive to hobbits. In fact, one of Tolkien's other texts, "On Fairy-Stories", suggests this might have been intended: "how real, how startlingly alive is a factory chimney compared with an elm tree..."

(63). The choice of words in describing the hobbits' relationship to the earth is interesting too. The relationship between the two is described here as a "friendship" which implies some reciprocity. Even the context in which the hobbits' friendship with the earth is described defines a kind of aid that the earth itself renders hobbits. Their friendship with the earth contributes to their "elusiveness" (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 1) as if the earth could play an active part in hiding the hobbits. The hobbits are further described as having "long and skillful fingers and could make many other useful and comely things" (Tolkien).

The gifts which are given out at Bilbo and Frodo's birthday include dwarf-made toys for the hobbit children which are described as "beautiful and some obviously magical" (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 26). It is not clear from this description alone whether the toys were made by individual craftspeople or mass produced but given that the description is sandwiched between the introduction of the hobbits' love of handicraft and Gandalf's handmade fireworks, as well as a general sense throughout the book (and in the next example) of dwarves taking particular pride in their work.

A notable example of dwarven artisanry is the door the fellowship takes to the abandoned dwarf city of Khazad-dum, Moria. While it is typical in *The Lord of the Rings* for places, people, and objects to be described according to their historical significance in Tolkien's mythos, The Doors of Durin are identified by their makers. The inclusion of the line "*I, Narvi made them. Celebrimbor of Hollin drew these signs*" (306) implies that the doors' makers are significant in some way. The doors were not made with magic or machines, but by the combined labour of a dwarf and an elf representative of the friendship in those days between the two peoples of Moria and Hollin. The passphrase that opens the door, "*Mellon!*" (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 308)

is the elvish word for friend. A password that was too obvious for Gandalf: “too simple for a learned lore-master in these suspicious days. Those were happier times” (Tolkien).

Beyond Moria, the fellowship (sans Gandalf) comes to Lorien, a sort of bastion of the elves in that part of Middle-Earth. The company rests for a time before preparing to depart once more and on their departure, they are given gifts by the Lady of Lorien, Galadriel. The first gift given to the fellowship by the elves of Lorien is *lembas*, a type of very effective traveller’s ration. While these cakes are undoubtedly baked in an artisanal fashion, the baker is not named. Instead, I would like to focus on the second gift given to the company by the elves, the cloaks. The Elves give the Company finely crafted cloaks. The cloaks are described as being simultaneously “grey with the hue of twilight under the trees [...] green as shadowed leaves, or brown as fallow fields by night, dusk-silver as water under the stars” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 370). Each cloak is fastened by an ornate silver brooch. Pippin is so enamoured by the craftsmanship that he asks if the cloaks are magic, but the Elves reply thus:

‘I do not know what you mean by that,’ answered the leader of the Elves. ‘They are fair garments, and the web is good, for it was made in this land. They are Elvish robes certainly, if that is what you mean. Leaf and branch, water and stone: they have the hue and beauty of all these things under the twilight of Lórien that we love; for we put the thought of all that we love into all that we make. Yet they are garments, not armour, and they will not turn shaft or blade. But they should serve you well: they are light to wear, and warm enough or cool enough at need. And you will find them a great aid in keeping out of the sight of unfriendly eyes, whether you walk among the stones or the trees. You are indeed high in the favour of the Lady! For she herself and her maidens wove this

stuff, and never before have we clad strangers in the garb of our own people.’ (Tolkien
The Lord of the Rings 370)

The cloaks are explicitly a labour of love. Each one is individually fitted and made of material that is both “light” and “warm” (370). Those qualities are noted twice. They are a cultural garb of the “Galadhrim” and appear, at least to some among the fellowship (note Pippin’s response), to be “magic” (370). As seen here, the text thoroughly describes the cloaks and their special properties. Of special note, and ending the description of the garments, the cloaks are described as having been made by Galadriel herself: “For she herself and her maidens wove this stuff” (370). The explicit connection of Galadriel and “her maidens” in the making of these cloaks suggests a special significance: “You are indeed high in the favour of the Lady!” Thus, the labour of Galadriel and her maidens has gone into the production of these handcrafted cloaks. The implication of the description is that the cloaks have been very carefully handmade to a very high standard, so much so that to a non-elf like Pippin they appear magical, but by the elves themselves they are described rather as “fair garments” with “good web” (370).

The handicraft of the elves sparks an interest in Sam who asks the elves: “I was wondering what these were made of, knowing a bit about rope-making: it’s in the family as you might say” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 371). An Elf replies to Sam, ““They are made of *hithlain*,’ said the Elf, ‘but there is no time now to instruct you in the art of their making. Had we known that this craft delighted you, we could have taught you much” (Tolkien). Recall again how hobbits are noted early in the text as “skilful with tools” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 1) and “they had long and skillful fingers and could make many other useful and comely things” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 2). Sam’s interest in the elven rope simultaneously draws attention again to hobbits’ apparent love of handicraft and the impressive handicraft of the elves,

see for example how they are compared to the elven cloaks which were also of seemingly high quality: “Slender they looked, but strong, silken to the touch, grey of hue like the elven-cloaks” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 371). Again, the generally good-natured peoples in *The Lord of the Rings* are here attracted to artisanal works of great skill.

Regarding the elves, Gyneth Hood argues that Tolkien’s “critique of modern science and technology, if there is one, is much more finely nuanced than he is given credit for” (6). I agree with Hood that Tolkien’s critique of technology is more nuanced for reasons that will be explored below. Hood notes of the Elves that “because the object they make are often deceptively simple, unobtrusive, and beautiful, they apparently have failed to attract the attention of the critics who believe that Tolkien’s message is anti-technological. However, when you examine them closely, you find that Elvish technological powers are rather remarkable” (7). Hood goes on to describe the *lembas* and cloaks I have already mentioned as well as elvish boats that were resistant to sinking (*Rings* 390) among other individual gifts given to the fellowship by the elves. I would say that while the technological capabilities of the elves are impressive, these feats are all achieved by the direct work of elven hands; recall the passage quoted earlier describing the elven cloaks and how the elves “put the thought of all that we love into all that we make” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 370). This is in contrast to the idea of factory labour and mass production which Tolkien seemed immensely critical of: “Labour-saving machinery only creates endless and worse labour” (Tolkien *Letters* 87).

In contrast to these artisanal goods that are associated with Good, there is a glaring example of individual handicraft associated with Evil; that is, the One Ring forged by the main antagonist of the novel, Sauron. I struggled with this example in my original conceptions of this chapter because I did not think that Sauron and the One Ring matched the association I identified

between handicraft and Good. *The Lord of the Rings*. While in most other cases it seems that artisanal work is associated with Good, the One Ring is associated with Evil and temptation in the text despite also being a product of significant handicraft, even beauty: “He thought the ring was very beautiful” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 46). I originally considered this case an outlier to an otherwise consistent pattern. Sauron’s story is one of corruption. Sauron was corrupted himself and works to corrupt others. The One Ring, in this way, is an example of the corruption of handicraft or perhaps more specifically a corruption of the kind of Elven technology described by Hood.

Matt Green provides a useful framework for considering this idea of corruption and technology as it appears in Tolkien’s writings. In the presentation “Navigating Technology with Tolkien” given at Urbana Theological Seminary’s 2021 Tolkien Conference, Green identifies a conundrum in Tolkien’s writing: technology is often associated with Evil in *The Lord of the Rings*, but there remains technology that is represented as neutral or even good (elven technology as described by Hood) in some cases. Tolkien himself also relied heavily on technology in his profession (technology like pen, paper, and typewriter for example). Tolkien begrudgingly used some technologies that he took issue with: “Well, I have got over 2 thousand words onto this little flimsy airletter; and I will forgive the Mordor-gadgets some of their sins, if they will bring it quickly to you...” (Tolkien *Letters* 87). Green’s proposed solution for this conundrum is that “Tolkien defined technology differently” (20:52). Green proposes a difference for Tolkien between “tools” and other sorts of technology: “I also believe there is another term that Tolkien doesn’t really use but is important if we’re going to look at how Tolkien viewed technology. I would call them tools. These are the things that Tolkien doesn’t think of as technology—is what I’m claiming. They’re just there. They’re not a machine. They’re not meant to gain power.

They're not meant to dominate or to suppress people's wills" (34:14). I find Green's work here compelling for my project because it helps deepen my understanding of the place of handicraft in Tolkien's writing. The One Ring, for example, while a work of great handicraft, is ultimately technology designed for the subjugation of Middle-Earth and the domination of all peoples and things under Sauron. In this way it might *look* beautiful—and the ring *is* beautiful (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 46)—but really it is more like the fires of Isengard and Mordor. Looks are sometimes deceiving in *The Lord of the Rings* as in the case of Aragorn's poem:

All that is gold does not glitter,

Not all those who wander are lost;

The old that is strong does not wither,

Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

From the ashes a fire shall be woken,

A light from the shadows shall spring;

Renewed shall be blade that was broken:

The crownless again shall be king.

(Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 170)

Aragorn might look rough but is on the side of Good in *The Lord of the Rings*. Conversely, in Tolkien's wider legendarium, Sauron can take on a "fair hue" (Tolkien *The Silmarillion* 341). He approaches the elves under the name "Annatar, Lord of Gifts" (Tolkien *The Silmarillion* 343).

The One Ring is Evil despite being a work of handicraft because its purpose is the domination of Middle-Earth:

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,

One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.

(Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 50)

The One Ring is a kind of weapon designed by Sauron to amplify his powers over the peoples of Middle-Earth. Faramir suspected something like the One Ring had been found: “some heirloom of power and peril it must be. A fell weapon, perchance, devised by the Dark Lord” (671). Faramir reassures Frodo that he would not take this weapon even in his greatest need and in doing so earns some measure of trust from Frodo and the reader. For William Blackburn,

All the characters who are tempted by power must choose between personal profit and the public good [...] Tolkien insists that all political decisions and policies follow from the individual’s struggle with the temptations of power. Those who succumb to these temptations (Saruman, Gollum, Boromir) undo themselves by their decision. Only those who can exercise power without being corrupted by it (Gandalf, Aragorn, Faramir) are permitted to survive that exercise. (65)

The industries of Saruman are the result of his succumbing to the promises of more and more power. I listed some examples of technologies used by Tolkien in his life and writing. Some of these technologies are used extensively in *The Lord of the Rings* and happen to be some of the popular symbols of the Middle Ages; these are tools of war: the sword and the arrow. But Faramir affirms that these tools of war are just that—tools: “I do not love the bright sword for its

sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 671).

The One Ring stands in contrast to the three elven rings held by Galadriel, Elrond, and Gandalf. In fact, the maker of the three elven rings, Celebrimbor, worked for a time alongside Sauron (whose malevolence was disguised). Celebrimbor was already mentioned here above as a participant in the creation of The Doors of Durin alongside Narvi. Sauron had no part in the creation of the elven ring, so they remained uncorrupted and demonstrations of the skill of Celebrimbor at his craft: “Therefore the Three remained unsullied, for they were forged by Celebrimbor alone, and the hand of Sauron had never touched them; yet they also were subject to the One (Tolkien *The Silmarillion* 345). Sauron, while also demonstrating great skill at the craft of ring-making (arguably the *greatest* skill), nevertheless creates only out of a selfish desire for power. In contrast, the hobbits are described as generally good-natured and sharing a close connection to the earth, the dwarves make toys for the amusement of hobbit children, Gandalf shares fireworks at Bilbo and Frodo’s birthday for amusement too, The Doors of Durin, made by Narvi and Celebrimbor, stand as a forgotten symbol of friendship between two estranged peoples from happier days (their two makers representing each people). The gifts of the elves (themselves always good-natured) are given freely to the fellowship to aid them on their journey and are made with “the thought of all that [they] love” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 370).

While the free peoples populating Middle-Earth are associated with skilled handicraft, their enemies are associated with industry. Saruman was originally one of the allies that stood against Sauron, but Saruman betrayed Gandalf and his former allies for power. See Gandalf’s description of Isengard under Saruman at the council of Elrond:

I looked on it and saw that, whereas it had once been green and fair, it was now filled with pits and forges. Wolves and orcs were housed in Isengard, for Saruman was mustering a great force on his own account, in rivalry of Sauron and not in his service, yet. Over all his works a dark smoke hung and wrapped itself about the sides of Orthanc. (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 260)

See how present Isengard is first compared to a past Isengard that was “green and fair” here. The vegetation has been replaced with “pits and forges”. Everything is covered in a “dark smoke” which implies that great fires must be burning to fuel Saruman’s industry. Saruman’s craft here is presented as corrupted in contrast to the crafts of the free peoples of Middle-Earth. Treebeard offers another description of Saruman: “I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment” (Tolkien). Saruman’s mind is described as if he were an automaton, full of “metal and wheels”. Furthermore, Saruman is careless of growing things. This is in stark contrast to Tolkien’s descriptions of elves and hobbits. Saruman is described as being deceived by Sauron. Saruman abandons his former wisdom for new “arts and subtle devices” (555) that he mistakes for his own. These new devices are based on the designs of Sauron, and the various pits, prisons, and bulwarks of Saruman’s new Isengard are but a pale shadow of the greater, more terrible fortress of Barad-dur (Sauron’s seat of power). Isengard becomes corrupted by Saruman, just as Saruman himself was corrupted by Sauron. The chief source of this corruption is Saruman’s desire for power. Gandalf, in his greater wisdom, fears power: “Do not tempt me! For I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good.

Do not tempt me!” (Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* 61). Like Faramir, Gandalf rejects the power of the One Ring.

Furthermore, I think the work done in *The Lord of the Rings*—the skills, crafts, and arts practiced by characters in the text—is at least tangentially connected the Arts and Crafts movement and the work of William Morris who directly predates Tolkien and also wrote his own fantasy medievalism:

The matter of the nature of art for Arts and Crafts is essentially about the manner of making: this is not a blanket rejection of ‘machines’ (although their alienating effects are significant when allied to the division of labor) in making but of a mechanized and narrow labor processes, which reduce the worker to a machine.

(Petts 36)

Note again how Saruman’s mind was changed to a mind of “metal and wheels” as though he too were becoming more like a machine. In this way, and through the associations that I have developed from the text, I think *The Lord of the Rings* naturalizes a Morrisian view of labour, art, and handicraft. Alan Crawford writes that:

Crafts people opposed the hierarchy in which the arts were arranged in late-Victorian Britain: painting and sculpture at the top as fine arts; architecture somewhere in the middle, less artistic but still with high professional status; and the decorative arts at the bottom, their status low both artistically and professionally. They argued that, in the Middle Ages, this hierarchy had not existed; and that in their own day, painters, sculptors, architects, and decorative artists should be on an equal footing again. (Crawford 16)

The objects in the text that are represented as art in *The Lord of the Rings* as everyday objects, not associated with the fine arts. My earlier examples included doors (architecture), clothing, rope, and fireworks.

This connection between a cultural narrative of the Middle Ages and handicraft extends beyond literature: “The subset of the craft beer industry that uses medievalism, or even a vaguely preindustrial theme, to market its product therefore taps into a powerful current in contemporary Western culture” (Phillips 18). These medievalisms imagine for themselves and the reader a non-modern space related to the anti-modern sentiment of the Arts and Crafts movement:

Medieval-themed craft beer invites its consumers to think of themselves as not just reaching back towards that tantalizing place of simplicity and origin, but as separate from modern society. Both modern and medieval become spaces of alterity for consumers of medievalism, and that tension offers unique possibilities for individuation. (Phillips 18)

The Lord of the Rings, I think, also creates a space apart from modern society. As do broader narratives of medievalisms that are to be found in literature, film, television, games, and more. *The Lord of the Rings*, in the ways described in this chapter, responds to modern working conditions and the alienation of workers from the products of their labour. The examples I have described here demonstrate clearly that there is in the text an association between Good and handicraft in opposition to increasing mechanization. Machines in *The Lord of the Rings* are tools that pull people to use them in evil ways—towards the domination of others.

Gandalf’s fireworks, Narvi’s door, and Galadriel’s gifts are all examples of Good handicraft in *The Lord of the Rings*. However, the association of these examples with Good does

not preclude the possibility of Evil handicraft or handicraft turned towards the wrong ends: for Tolkien, domination. It is not that handicraft turned towards this nefarious purpose is impossible, but rather that the designs of industry and mechanization, for Tolkien, lend themselves better towards domination whether that be the domination of the factory labourer or the domination of some enemy at war. The labour branch of this sentiment aligns with many of the goals of the Arts and Crafts movement in the early twentieth century. In fact, many of the examples I consider here of art and technology are relatively mundane, everyday objects: boats, rope, bread, doors (architecture), and clothing. For Tolkien and the arts and crafts movement, these things are best made without the work of machinery. The Arts and Crafts movement, disillusioned with the status of the decorative arts, saw “in the Middle Ages, this hierarchy had not existed” (Crawford 16). Whether historical or not, the movement co-opted the medieval conceptual space to make their point. Either by direct extension, or at least towards similar ends, *The Lord of the Rings* pushes back against the increasing mechanization of modernity and makes use of the same medieval conceptual space as the Arts and Crafts movement to do so. Clearly the association of handicraft and the Middle Ages exists before and beyond *The Lord of the Rings*, as evidenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, but the continued popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* and subsequent medievalisms have only heightened the association between handicraft and the Middle Ages.

Conclusion

My research here broadly attempts to answer three questions related to medievalism: How does *The Lord of the Rings* bridge the medieval and the modern? Why have the Middle Ages remained an inspiration for popular fantasy? And what is at stake in these popular fantastical representations of the past? I struggled somewhat during my research to balance my interests as a consumer of the materials that I am critiquing and my role as a researcher. It was never my intention for this project to be read as apologia for *The Lord of the Rings*, popular fantasy, and medievalism, and I hope this is clear in my writing. At the same time, I do think there is value in medievalism and similar forms of creative expression. This is discussed in more detail in chapter four. Any potential value in medievalism, however, does not preclude it from critique. Here, I will review my work in chapters one through four before considering my overall perspective on medievalism, *The Lord of the Rings*, fantasy, and their critiques.

In chapter one I consider medievalism broadly as a cultural phenomenon. *The Lord of the Rings* remains the focus of my research, but much of recent medievalism is in fantasy whether that be the popular fiction genre, games, television or other media. Examples from diverse media include *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Game of Thrones*, *World of Warcraft*, and *The Wheel of Time*. Besides fantasy, medievalism also includes the popular genre historical fiction including *The Last Kingdom* and *Pillars of the Earth* as well as games like *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*. In Tolkien's time, medievalism was mostly confined to text, but today (as the earlier examples demonstrate) medievalism has exploded into the many diverse mediums that capture the public. Chapter one considers this evolving landscape of medievalism and directs a refined understanding of medievalism (by considering the work of other scholars) onto *The Lord of the Rings* to better understand the relationship between *The Lord of the Rings* and the Middle Ages.

One of the earliest and most referenced definitions of medievalism was given by Leslie J. Workman, here cited through Verduin, who proposes “the study of the successive recreation of the Middle Ages by different generations, *is* the Middle Ages. And this of course is medievalism” (Verduin 20). The idea that medievalism involves the successive recreation of the Middle Ages is important to my research because it helps explain the enduring influence of *The Lord of the Rings* in popular fantasy. *The Lord of the Rings* has itself become a source to be successively recreated in the pursuit of an imagined Middle Ages. Furthermore, medievalism carries with it the rhetorical weight of implicit and explicit associations of varying values and ideologies with the medieval past, whether they be real or imagined. What is at stake then in discussing medievalism and popular fantasy is the question of how the Middle Ages is portrayed and why. With so many different imaginings of the Middle Ages popular with the public across diverse mediums, I think medievalism is a pressing issue for cultural studies. Why now? Why is medievalism so popular and widespread?

I think medievalism has become popular today because of a general desire to escape the present. There are two primary avenues for this in fiction: science fiction and fantasy. The former looks to the future while the latter looks to the past. I am most interested here in the latter, however, medievalism can still exist in variant forms in the former (*Star Wars* for example leans heavily into medievalism and fantasy and incorporates monks, religious orders, knights, and swords). My conclusion is based on my qualitative research into medievalism as well as my own reading of *The Lord of the Rings* and a general observation of the qualities of medievalism. I think that both further qualitative and quantitative research into the popularity of medievalism would be valuable. My research considers one of the roots of contemporary fantasy and digs into the themes and ideas that have populated the genre through this root, *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Lord of the Rings is, as I have argued, at the root of these questions since it exists at the root of contemporary western fantasy.

The Lord of the Rings is a particularly valuable resource for the study of medievalism. Not only is it now at the root of contemporary western fantasy, but it was also written by a man whose professional life was entirely academic. This is significant because medievalism can be traced back roughly to the solidification of medieval studies as an academic discipline. Whatever became excluded from universities as unfit to study (whether that be the object of study itself or the methodologies used in the study of the object) became the domain of medievalism. Medievalism was thus largely the domain of hobbyists and artists whose interests and methodologies would not align with the push for medieval studies to be pursued with objectivity and scientific rigour. It strikes me that this too might be a reason for the growing popularity of medievalism today; the internet has connected amateurs of all stripes in ways never before possible to share their interest in the Middle Ages. What is particularly dangerous about this widespread adoption is the potential for harmful medievalisms to justify the violence of ethnonationalists and undermine the creative integrity of hobbyists and artists genuinely interested in the Middle Ages.

Ethnonationalism is a problem that plagues some representations of the Middle Ages. White supremacy is often bound up with fictions about Anglo-Saxon bloodlines. These problems are discussed in detail in chapter one, but are also addressed as required throughout my research. Even so, I think it is important to repeat some things here. I am not a white supremacist. I say this because Dorothy Kim in her blog post “Teaching Medieval Studies in a Time of White Supremacy” calls for educators in medieval studies to signal that they are not a white

supremacist in their teaching. I am not writing this in the capacity of an educator in the same sense, and I hope that my research has already demonstrated how I am opposed to the weaponization and propagandization of the Middle Ages to justify the violence of ethnonationalists. Even so, I think it is important for me speak plainly here in saying that I am not a white supremacist and that none of my research should be used to uphold these views.

The weaponization and propagandization of the Middle Ages is not a distant threat; it is ever present. Only recently the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists changed its name to the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England to distance itself from ethnonationalists looking to redefine the term “Anglo-Saxon” for their own ends. This was in 2019. Only weeks ago from the time of writing this here in Canada there was a large protest in Ottawa dubbed the “Freedom Convoy”. Perhaps unbeknownst to some of the protestors, one of the organizers, Patrick King, has recordings of himself from 2019 talking about the depopulation of the “Anglo-Saxon” race. The conspiracy theory is, of course, ridiculous, but King’s use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” demonstrates how the word cannot be considered to be rooted solely in the early medieval history of England to denote a specific and extinct people. I think it was wise for the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England to change their name to separate themselves from people like Patrick King.

So what is at stake in discussing *The Lord of the Rings*, medievalism, and medievalist fantasy is the question of how the Middle Ages, or elements of the Middle Ages, are portrayed and why. Chapter two pays special attention to Tolkien and fantasy within the broader context of medievalism that was addressed in chapter one. *The Lord of the Rings* is a largely romantic medievalism that taps into the themes central to medieval romance. David Matthews points out some of the problems romantic medieval can have today, especially when stories and themes

become co-opted by ethnonationalist groups: “In medieval romances themselves, ideologies of race, blood, and faith are prominent. The true knight is the knight of the right blood; the monstrous other (a giant, Saracen, or simply a felon knight must be expelled or converted” (Matthews 33). Since *The Lord of the Rings* borrows much from medieval romance, it can be susceptible to these kinds of readings. For example, the right to rule in Middle-Earth is inherited by blood. Other examples of problems in contemporary fantasy are discussed in chapter two with reference to Fitzpatrick. These include other ideologies of race, blood, and gender which were perhaps most notable in the 2010s through *Game of Thrones*. These ideologies have the potential to pass uncritically through (recall Workman’s definition) the successive recreation of the Middle Ages for each new generation.

The actual mechanisms through which these ideologies can be passed and history may be propagandized are discussed in chapter three wherein I contrast *The Lord of the Rings* with *Historia Regum Britanniae*. I mentioned already how *The Lord of the Rings* contains elements of medieval romance, but it also contains elements of medieval histories like *Historia Regum Britanniae*. While Geoffrey’s use of the lost book in *Historia Regum Britanniae* seems to me like a rhetorical device (see Howlett), Tolkien’s use of the lost book is more complicated. In Tolkien’s case, *The Lord of the Rings* is explicitly fiction and there is little in rhetorical weight that lost book would add to *The Lord of the Rings* to make the text seem like something other than fiction. Instead, the lost book in *The Lord of the Rings* mimics the motif as it appears in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, perhaps making the text seem more medieval by borrowing these devices from medieval styles of writing.

Nevertheless, even by *seeming* more medieval, even if we still understand the text as fiction, *The Lord of the Rings* gains some rhetorical weight behind the implicit claims in the text.

Here we come to the work of chapter four which is to identify some of the associations or specific aspects of medievalism located in the text. Medievalism can function like an escape for the reader. This is a temporal escape, concerned primarily with escaping the present rather than some location. Tolkien himself considers fantasy a kind of escape and praises it: “why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home?” (Tolkien “On Fairy-Stories” 60). Tolkien argues that the escape of the prisoner has been confused for the flight of the deserter (“On Fairy-Stories” 60). The latter possesses a much more negative connotation. In the case of the prisoner, it seems obvious that the prisoner would try to escape their captors to find or return to a better place. Fantasy for Tolkien is an opportunity to escape bleak circumstances in the real world. He supposes that fantasy is scorned because this very natural escape from bad circumstance has been confounded with the flight of the deserter as if one has a duty to pay particular and constant attention to the present..

Dinshaw too celebrates medievalism for the kinds of creative engagement it can inspire. Medievalism and fantasy “can be a much-needed survival strategy for those for whom a relationship to ‘home’ is disrupted: those displaced from their homelands either literally or figuratively, including queers of all stripes” (Dinshaw 34). Whereas Tolkien describes engaging with fantasy as the escape of the prisoner in contrast to the flight of the deserter, Dinshaw describes creative engagement with the Middle Ages as a way to reconnect with ‘home’ for those for whom this relationship has been disrupted. I think these ideas from Tolkien and Dinshaw complement each other nicely. While Dinshaw does not use the prisoner metaphor, Dinshaw does consider the concept of “home”. Likewise, Tolkien describes how the prisoner in his analogy is attempting to return “home” (“On Fairy-Stories” 60). A feeling of “home” then is central to medievalism and fantasy. The idea of “home” carries with it the idea of “familiarity”

which when combined with “affection” results in a kind of nostalgia. The nostalgia in this case is not necessarily for a real time in the past, but a time other than the present that perhaps feels more familiar by lacking some of the alienating features of the present: big tech, big industry, and big corporation.

The Lord of the Rings pushes back against some of these features. It has become bound up with environmental, anti-technological, and anti-industrial movements in the past (see Matthews). Even so, Tolkien’s relationship to technology is complicated. Despite industry and technology being frequently associated with Evil in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien himself relied on technologies like pencil, pen, typewriter, and paper to prepare his text. His Good characters also frequently use technologies like clothing and rope and have the technology to craft great works. Matt Green’s presentation “Navigating Technology With Tolkien” was particularly helpful in deciphering this part of *The Lord of the Rings*. Ultimately, it seems like large-scale industry and technologies designed to dominate wills or otherwise alienate and take power away from individuals are bad. In contrast, those things that bring joy, are the product of careful handicraft, and do not alienate or hold power over individuals are treated with great respect and even reverence. I think much of this is bound up with the sentiments of the Arts and Crafts movement of the early twentieth century, just short decades before Tolkien penned *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The Arts and Crafts movement followed by the enduring popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* and subsequent medievalism has done much to cement this association of the Middle Ages with the little person against alienating features of modernity.

In some ways then, it seems to me that our present evolution of the alienating structures of modernity are to blame for the enduring popularity of medievalism in recent decades. The Middle Ages, being suitably removed from the industrial revolution, has captured the popular

consciousness as a time that was simpler and down-to-earth, regardless of whether this was true, and heedless of the period's own problems. Alone, this is not so bad; it is creative engagement with the medieval past through diverse mediums to produce entertaining and at times thought-provoking material that might comfort readers with a warm familiarity and provide the opportunity to rest and recover far away from the problems of today. However, medievalism also has the potential to host pernicious ideologies of race, blood, and gender that can sometimes be propagated in popular genres. It seems to me that fans of popular medievalism, I am thinking of the reaction against Amazon's new *Lord of the Rings* series, are often quick to lash out against criticism of their favourite franchises as if any criticisms of their beloved stories would require the story to be altered or for it to become forbidden or taboo in some way. This need not be the case. I think this is a particularly dangerous reaction to criticism because it silences deserved criticism that needs to be discussed rather than repressed. If we can at least acknowledge some of the potential problems of medievalism then we can better equip ourselves for a healthier, free, and inclusive creative engagement with the Middle Ages.

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