Mythmoot XII, Presentation Abstracts

<u>Friday, 4:30-6 PM</u>

Tol Eressëa

Pride and Prejudice: The Children of Húrin edition

In a recent Silmarillion Film Project broadcast, Professor Corey Olsen mused on what the story of Túrin Turambar might look like if Túrin was never a point of view character, and the story was told from the perspectives of those who interact with him. Such an approach draws Túrin to the edge of his own story, with implications for how a hypothetical viewer might engage with his character and his choices.

In this paper I examine the textual warrant for this approach through an analysis of narrative perspective in the Children of Húrin story, as it was told in the 1977 'The Silmarillion', and in the 2007 'Children of Húrin'. I will be particularly focused on where and how Túrin's own perspective is represented, and where and how we come to understand Túrin as others saw him. I will then explore implications of this approach for adapting the Children of Húrin story from text to screen.

Ilana Mushin is a professional linguist and amateur Tolkien scholar, and a member of the Silmarillion Film Project script team. A long time Silmarillion fan, she has been surprised at how the story of the Children of Húrin has drawn her further in as she gets older.

"I have seen my share:" Elrond's Journey Through Grief in Valinor

Grief lies at the heart of Tolkien's legendarium, yet for Elrond Half-elven, an important character who suffers so deeply, more of his story is alluded to than told plainly in the text. So many moments vital to his experience in Middle-Earth are relegated to synoptic sentences embedded in larger parts of the narrative, or entries into the Tale of Years: twice-orphaned, being sundered from his twin brother, seeing the rise and decline of Elven and mortal realms (including his own), and, hardest of all, the loss of his daughter (and maybe all three of his children). When he takes the ship to Valinor, he departs the narrative, but his story does not end there.

Though counted among the Quendi and given life to the end of Arda by his own choice, Elrond remains by nature one-third mortal. Upon arriving in Aman, burdened by the

memory of his unique losses, how would his dual nature, particularly his mortal side, cope? Where would he find peace and from whom would he gain wisdom and healing?

John Caldwell is the political papers archivist at the University of Delaware.

The Hunt for Alliterative Melody

At Mythmoot XI, Corey Olsen hypothesized a two-layered structure to Gimli's Khazad-dúm poem, with couplets of iambic tetrameter forming a rhythm section over which a free-form melody of alliteration was superposed. A regular structure of alliteration is not obvious, but perhaps it can be identified quantitatively. This talk describes the development of a statistical method for identifying such freely alliterative melodies in verse and applies it to a variety of twentieth- and twenty-first-century texts. Alliteration in modern English prose is at one end of the spectrum, statistically indistinguishable from random phonemes. Poems that reproduce strict Old English meter are at the other end. The alliteration in Tolkien's own "Song of the Mounds of Mundburg" is nearly mathematically perfect. Poems from the modern alliterative revival fill in the middle. There is no clean break between alliterative and non-alliterative poems; modern verse lies on a continuum of alliterative content.

Joe Hoffman is a long-time Mythgard Academy lurker and an occasional Signum U. student. He has published in the Encyclopedia of Aerospace, the Physical Review, the Encyclopèdie Collaborative Translation Project and blogs on imaginative literature at Idiosophy.com.

Labyrinth

Mapping "Fanffection" at the Cultural Border: A Study of Mexican Tolkien Fandom

This paper presents preliminary findings of an ongoing investigation into how fans in Mexico perceive textual strategies that seem to address them directly or indirectly. The concept at the center of this research is "fanffection", a neologism I propose to describe the affective and interpretive relationship fans develop with their "text-objects of love." Moving beyond obvious forms of textual address—such as fan service, baiting, or the inclusion of fans as incidental characters—the project investigates how narratives encode a fan-narratee, implicitly positioning the fan as an interlocutor within the text.

The theoretical framework combines perspectives from affect theory and cultural reception. From the Hispanic world, I draw on Fernando Ángel Moreno's proposition that affective responses are central to how we engage with popular narratives, and on Latin American cultural theories (notably García Canclini) regarding how peripheral

audiences appropriate cultural products that originate in hegemonic centers. In contrast to complete reappropriation, however, fan interpretations often remain tied to the canon, generating a tension between local identity and textual fidelity.

The current phase of the project involves a survey and a series of interviews with members of Sociedad Tolkiendili México. These are intended to map how fans perceive their relationship to Tolkien's work and to identify the textual passages that resonate with them emotionally and intellectually. A third stage will include group workshops to develop a collaborative mapping of fanffection across specific Tolkien texts.

The hypothesis proposed is that the fan-text relationship in the Mexican context operates within a baroque attitude, as defined by Bolívar Echeverría: one in which aesthetic solemnity toward the imported cultural object coexists with practices of local reinterpretation. This produces a "baroque tension" that may help to explain the specific modes of fan negotiation and attachment found in the region.

Héctor Sapiña holds a Master's degree in Literature from UNAM and is currently pursuing a Master's in Communication at Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua. He writes literary essays, is a member of Sociedad Tolkiendili México, and a fan of both Tolkien and the Avatar: Aang / Korra universe.

A Comparative Analysis of Linguistic Complexity between Transgender and Cisgender Fanfiction Representation in Queer Spaces

It has been established that fandom spaces are deeply intertwined with LGBTQ+ communities, providing a community to those normally isolated from queer spaces. Previous studies that focus on queer identity and their relationship within fandom spaces (Floegel, 2020 & Jackson, 2023) show that members use fanfiction as a form of escapism, exploration, and representation. Several studies show that gender exploration often stems from fanfiction themes and transgender representation within the work (Duggan, 2021 & Alen Llanca, 2019). To understand how primarily LBGTQ+ fandom spaces portray transgender characters, we may explore fanfiction, where the authors can freely dictate their transgender representation through specific characters. I will expand on previous research and compare transgender representation to cisgender representation in fanfiction. I will examine the fanfiction from the TV show Arcane, focusing on six members of the ensemble cast. I will make a direct comparison between fanfiction with transgender representation and cisgender representation, selecting 15 pieces from each variable. This comparison is facilitated through integrative complexity, which will assign a score based on linguistic complexity in each fanfiction work. I hypothesize that the results between the two will show that the integrative complexity of

transgender representation will score higher, due to tackling themes intertwined with complex identities and perspectives.

Jaden Baca is a graduate student at New Mexico Tech studying Public Engagement. They are currently researching social engagement in media and communications, and have been an active participant in online creative communities for 10+ years.

Weapon Shops and Worms: Why You Don't Want to be the Real-World Person in the Science-Fiction Story

Frame narrators (like the Grandfather and Grandson in “Princess Bride”) and portal characters (a “real world” character who becomes directly involved in the story, as in the Harold Shea stories) are frequently seen in fantasy and science fiction, especially in the movies. But there is an older concept: the outsider who is inserted into the story to represent the reader’s point of view. We all dream of being present in a story, but this is not always wise. I plan to explore two examples of characters who may be considered to fulfill this role (who I will refer for the time being as “Sarah Janes” in honor of the Doctor Who Companion, a contemporary person who travels with the Doctor) in pre-Tolkien fantasy and science fiction who, for lack of a better word, fell off the edge of the knife and met unexpected fates, whether it is to disappear without an explanation (as in E.R. Eddison’s “The Worm Ouroboros”) or to have a tragic fate that has nothing to do with the story at hand (as in A.E. Van Vogt’s “The Weapon Shops of Isher”). It is a cautionary tale for those who see themselves as becoming part of a story as an outside observer.

Arthur Harrow is a physician in Baltimore who has been enjoying fantastic literature for over fifty years. His interests include musical theater, comedy (especially Tolkien-related) and defeating the Moon Knight.

Mirror, Mirror

Edgy Identity: An EPIC Perspective

Within “The Odyssey”, Homer delivers a sordid tale of trickery, pride and vengeance; adverse circumstances and Odysseus’s selfish pride bring him repeatedly to the edge of despair even as his relentless will urges him homeward. These characteristics may seem antithetical to heroism, but they are actually what qualify Odysseus as a mythic hero. They enable him to stand at the intersection of human, divine and monstrous natures. The story is an ancient one, but through translation and adaptation its universal themes continue to speak to audiences far removed from the language and culture of

ancient Greece. Composer Jorge Rivera-Herrans' "EPIC: The Musical" retells the story of Odysseus, or Ody. In his version of the Odyssey, Rivera-Herrans restores musical performance to the retelling, utilizing the language of human emotion to mediate the differences of time, culture and worldview between ancients and moderns. The liminal spaces and fantastic events of the Odyssey are skillfully explored through Ody's complicated character development and shifting sense of personal and moral identity. Ody inhabits three major identities, with his instrumental leitmotif symbolically altered for each: human (acoustic guitar), divine (electric guitar) and monstrous (distorted electric guitar). Contemporary heroic tropes lead an audience to expect that an internal motivation would reinforce Ody's humanity as his true self and lead him to reject identifying with gods and monsters. Musical themes and leitmotifs used by Rivera-Herrans create subtext associated with each identity, symbolizing the conflict and fluidity between them. For example, in the final song Ody's vocals are backed by acoustic guitar, yet Penelope reprises another motif which has accompanied Ody's most monstrous actions. "EPIC" mediates the conflicting expectations of ancient and modern art by leaving the final condition of Ody's identity open to interpretation, inviting the audience to question if it is possible to return from the edge.

Bethany Bonzo is a student at Signum University, a full-time mom and a freelance fiber artist. She holds a Bachelors in Social Sciences from CSU Stanislaus and regularly inflicts educational fun facts on her defenseless husband and three sons.

Exploring the Abyss: Folk Horror as Journey to Society's Nightmares

The genre known as Folk Horror has continued to gain traction and attention as the 21st century continues forward. As our world continues to shift, challenging long held assumptions of social progress and national idealism, the return to the woods, and explorations of the brutal realities of human nature are now chronicling the unease of a whole generation. Finding roots in turn of the 19th century angst over visions of a dark future, and finding roots in the disillusionment of the 1970's, Folk Horror continues in our day in diverse media to a hungry populace. What is it that Folk Horror facilitates for those who engage it? What edge does this genre seek to take society to and for what purpose?

Rev. Dr. Jay Moses is a Pastor/Professor in the Maryland area. He enjoys reading/watching Gothic, Dark Fantasy and Folk Horror as long as the night is not too long and a light is always kept on.

Beowulf is a Loser: Rethinking the Heroic Code in Beowulf

Students often enter a British Literature survey hating “Beowulf” often for the perceived “toxic masculinity” in the presentation of the eponymous hero. In popular culture we have Gaimanwulf presenting the hero in Dark Wing Duck fashion proclaiming himself: “I am ripper, tearer, slasher, gouger. I am the teeth in the darkness, the talons in the night. Mine is strength, and lust, and power. I AM BEOWULF.” These lines and the entire scene is not in the poem but has certainly colored how many perceive the character in the poem. Likewise, Headley’s recent adaptation/retelling of the poem presents the culture as “bro culture” which is characterized by toxic masculinity, misogyny, and excessive partying. Reading the poem from this point of view is a significant misreading of the text. Rather the poem celebrates failure, not toxicity. Beowulf the warrior is a loser. His people did not think he would amount to much as a child. He certainly lost the swimming contest with Brecca, Unferth was not wrong about that, and Beowulf offers no evidence or trophies of his great swimming feat or of the sea-beasties he slew in frigid waters. Beowulf does not succeed in his boasts concerning Grendel, as Beowulf’s own speech afterwards points out; nor is it Beowulf who succeeds in ripping Grendel’s arm from his body---that is Grendel himself who chose a costly strategy. Beowulf almost dies battling Grendel’s Mother and were it not for the providential mail shirt and “work of giants” he would have. And of course, his death by dragon which results not in just his death but the later deaths of his people from the Swedes. Beowulf is a loser, and this forces us to reconsider just what the Heroic Code in the poem is since it cannot be “bro-culture” or toxic masculinity.

Larry Swain, worker of wyrd, reader, lorboc heordman, teacher of things

Saturday, 9-10:30 AM

Tol Eressëa

The Knife's Edge: Imperial Politics in the Epigraphs of "Dune"

The main narrative of "Dune", by Frank Herbert, is driven by the dynastic struggle of House Atreides for control over the planet Arrakis and rule of the broader imperium. The often-overlooked chapter epigraphs lie on the edge of the narrative. They provide intriguing detail about the wider imperial context, illuminating the shadowy world of elite power brokers at heart of the empire. The epigraphs present snippets of in-universe historical texts, focusing especially on the characters of Princess Irulan, Emperor Shaddam IV and Duke Leto. Indeed, some of these characters are all but absent from the main narrative. The epigraphs provide the reader's only real chance to know them. The epigraphs also provide unique insight into the interior life of the novel's protagonist, Paul Muad'Dib, and his reign after the main narrative. Though they enjoy lives of unimaginable wealth, the ruling elite of the imperium live always on the edge, where a wrong step may prove lethal and even children receive education on poisons. Our presentation will offer a close-reading approach to the ruling elite of the empire and the broader context of imperial politics as portrayed in the epigraphs.

Julian Barr completed his PhD in Classics at the University of Queensland. A novelist and academic, he teaches creative writing and literature classes in Signum University's adult education program.

Trevor Brierly has a background in literature with an MLIS from the University of Texas at Austin and a BA in English from George Mason University. He is co-editor of "Discovering Dune" from McFarland Press and has presented working papers about "Dune", "The Lord of the Rings", Shakespeare, and worldbuilding at academic conferences.

Lauren Petronaci obtained her double BA in Geography and Anthropology from the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs in 2009. Since then, she has been a railway tour guide, zoo tour guide, and for a month, she followed ring-tailed lemurs through the dwarf forest in Madagascar for lemur conservation (watch out, Dr. Kynes)!

Lynne Darga double majored in Economics & Management and Literature at Albion College and earned an MBA from the University of Michigan. While working in automotive finance she furthers her passion for literary study through leadership on the board of a non-profit focused on mythopoeic literature and with regular work on the

Sisyphean task of trying to finish an ever growing 'to read' list.

Labyrinth

The Forgotten Days : G.B. Smith's Elegies of an Old Light

Many know G.B. Smith as Tolkien's friend who died in World War I, but few are aware of Smith's literary journey to reignite an Old Light. Fellow member of the T.C.B.S., he offers—at an impressively young age—the richness of longing that comes to fruition in his peer's Middle-earth. Smith seeks out a tale that he believes "shod itself in ancient shoon/ and wandered from the West." His inspiration for stories comes not from within the mind—but from the world just beyond the hills: a rare stance against the Modernist poets and a literary movement characterized by psychology's emergence.

I will take a deeper dive into Smith's singular poetry collection, "A Spring Harvest", and the distinctive Anglo-Saxon yearning that unites his and Tolkien's works. Moreover, through close readings of poems like "A Preface for a Tale I have never told," "Rime," and "The House of Eld," I will exhibit that he should not just be read as a piece of the Middle-earth puzzle, but as a poet with notable longings for—and writings about—the storied past.

Kevin Waldron is a Signum MA student with a background in Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance Literature with some Germanic Philology experience as well. He spoke at Mythmoot last year on G.B. Smith (a front-running thesis focus). He has an upcoming chapter in a book on Tolkien and Medievalism, and has been invited to speak at the Leeds International Medieval Congress this summer.

The Quest Already Failed? Backward-looking Liminality in James Fenimore Cooper's "The Pioneers"

In James Fennimore Cooper's novel "The Pioneers", the first of the Leatherstocking tales, the world is changing: settlers are moving into the wilderness of New York and the new village of Templeton is rapidly growing, to the dismay of the old hunters like Natty Bumppo. In fact, "The Pioneers" features a strange, backward-looking liminality. Templeton is based on Cooperstown, which was founded by Cooper's father, and while he recognizes that change is inevitable, he also recognizes that the new ways are a mixed good, at best. Marmaduke Temple, owner of the land the town sits on, questions the profligate cutting down of trees, longs for a coal mine in the midst of a forest, and feels uneasy at the wholesale slaughter of migrating pigeons. To the setters, it seems like the plenty will never end, but Temple recognizes the finitude of it all, to the gentle

mockery of his friends. Cooper, writing thirty years after the book is set, knows Temple is right—there are now no forests in Cooperstown. But what is the purpose of this conscious liminality when the moment has already passed in real life? The quest to preserve the wilderness's natural resources is past and failed, the knife's point missed. Why warn about it at all? I argue that it is a warning to the new line of settlement, to the new pioneers of Cooper's time, and indeed, a warning to readers even today, that when we are drawn to the edge we must not mock those who hold on to the old ways, or who urge caution in the new. The liminal moment in our own stories may be upon us before we realize it, and so we must be alert, and willing to slow down and recognize that with progress always comes loss.

Erin Rhodes is a PhD candidate and mother to two small hobbits. When she is not wrangling babies or debating philosophy with her husband, she is thinking about the relationship between academia and motherhood and writing about the ways that old novels educate us in virtue.

Being Hnau in the Age of AI: A View from Hogwarts

The move from the Information Age to something like the Age of AI has, like all fundamental cultural changes, caused us to reflect on what it means to be human. This is old turf for science fiction readers. While making a survival kit out of Charles Stross's 2005 exponential apocalypse, *Accelerando*, is a bit premature, science fiction always asks fundamental human questions. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a Promethean tale as much as it is an Edenic one, going to the core of what it means to be human.

Darko Suvin's "cognitive estrangement" theory of science fiction argues that SF disturbs readers' worldview, inviting them to turn a prophetic lens upon their own society. In the 1930s, three wise species caused C.S. Lewis's hapless protagonist to face the folly of his Eurocentric colonial instincts and renegotiate his understanding of what it means to be human. Lewis coined the term *hnau* to describe sapient, sentient, spiritually capacious, art- and artisan-making, storytelling beings of whatever form.

Though Suvin would resist the parallel, J.R.R. Tolkien's "escape and recovery" in fairy stories has a similar effect. So, I turned to a fantasy world, Harry Potter, to think about the blurred edges of what it means to be *hnau* in the Age of AI. Although we have not yet seen human-like Artificial Intelligence, we have begun interacting with AI bots and other sentient-like tools as if they were people—an anthropomorphizing instinct I call the "Wall-E Effect." Like Lewis's Malacandria, the Potterverse has other races of *hnau*, like centaurs or merpeople. But there is also a spectrum of magical somethings that show human-like sentience, from mandrake roots or the Weasleys' Ford Anglia all the way to the Sorting Hat and the paintings on Hogwart's walls. Read as a recovery of cognitive estrangement, the Harry Potter chronicles offer guidance, warnings, and wisdom for human interaction in the Age of AI.

Brenton Dickieson (PhD, University of Chester) is a teacher, writer, and podcaster from Prince Edward Island. Brenton is a faculty coach, lecturer, and preceptor in the MA program at Signum University, and teaches occasionally in SPACE. He also teaches in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Prince Edward Island and is a founding member of the Curiosity and Inquiry Research and Collaboration Lab (CIRCL). Brenton is the curator of the literature and culture blog, www.aPilgrimInNarnia.com, and the host and founding producer of the MaudCast: The Official Podcast of the Lucy Maud Montgomery Institute. In the almost-fantastical land of Prince Edward Island, he shares his home with his wife Kerry, a superstar kindergarten teacher, and Nicolas, a songwriter and critic who uses the Spare Oom for his recording studio, while Brenton's office is in a damp corner in the basement.

Mirror, Mirror

Not All Those Who Ponder Have Lost: On Why the One Ring Could Only Be Made of Gold and the Evergreenness of the Legendarium

Sara Brown's article in the Tolkien Society's journal "Mallorn" entitled "'All that glisters is not gold': The Ring of Power and the Deception of Simile" argues that the One Ring is not made of gold but only appears so, using alchemical and linguistic analysis to support this claim. I offer a respectful rebuttal to Dr. Brown's well-written and researched article. My presentation will contend that the former Maia of Aulë would have only considered gold for his One Ring, based on textual evidence, symbolic significance, and narrative consistency. Gold, rather than the pure metal as Brown's article contends, is, in Tolkien's legendarium, a far more spiritually impure substance. Tolkien tells us as much as he states that gold, more than other metals and substances, had a particularly evil trend to it. Brown's conclusion that the One Ring was not made of gold also begs the question as to what metal or material Sauron did use to create the One Ring if not gold. Eliminating other possibilities, such as mithril or silver, leads us back to the logical conclusion of gold. Tolkien's legendarium blends myth and materiality, as seen in the Silmarils, making the Ring's gold nature essential to its role. While Brown's analysis highlights Tolkien's use of distancing language, in my opinion it overextends this observation, neglecting the Ring's literal and metaphorical duality. Ultimately, the One Ring's gold is not an illusion or simile but a metaphor of our corrupted reality, central to the Ring's thematic and narrative power. Its destruction signifies the defeat of evil's perversion of value, a concept that loses potency if the Ring is merely a false imitation. Finally, I will offer the idea that having the ability to debate and discuss aspects as central to Tolkien's writing as The One Ring makes his legendarium evergreen through being open to different interpretations. By showing that, in shorthand, questions are

more interesting than answers, it allows for spirited discourse on a myriad of topics, thus ensuring that, while the author may have moved on from the confines of Eä, his sub-creation will endure until the end of time.

Adam Beaton is the Director of Outreach and the Regional Moot Coordinator for Signum University.

On the Edge of Greatness: Gondor Beyond the House of Stewards

Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" is a tale chock full of names, but the vast majority remain on the edge of the story, peripheral to those few primary characters who occupy the center stage. Likewise, Gondor is a kingdom on the edge, perched on the frontier between civilization and desolation, teetering on the very brink of doom. It is an edge-place populated by edge-characters. How many Gondorians can you even name beyond the Ruling Steward and his famous sons? A kingdom of that size would have many thousands of citizens but the text identifies barely one score, requiring a few to stand in for the many. I propose to look closely at the Gondorian figures we have been given, to better understand their roles in the text and in their society, hoping to illuminate the value of tertiary characters - those who are on the edge of great events but not central to the grand story. Special attention will be given to Beregond of Minas Tirith and Imrahil of Dol Amroth, who share remarkable similarities despite the markedly different circumstances of the soldier and the prince. Both make valuable contributions to the story while interacting with other characters in unexpectedly consequential ways. By studying these "edge" characters we may uncover their obscured significance and might even discover that none of us are as isolated as we believe ourselves to be.

Jason Troutman is a retired Air Force officer and amateur fantasy scholar investigating the intersection of philosophy, leadership, and mental health. He resides in Eastern Massachusetts with his collaborator-wife and their two delightfully hobbit-like children.

The Ruined Margin of the Sea: Sea-longing and the Song of Maglor in the Silmarillion

Tolkien had a penchant for crafting images that sear themselves into readers' minds: the Charge of the Rohirrim, the last stand of Fingolfin, Feanor slamming the door in Morgoth's face. One of those most enduring images is of the fate of Maglor: a lonely figure roaming the seas of Middle-earth until the end of days, singing his lonely song to the empty sea. But why exactly is that image so effective? As the theme of the conference is "Drawn to the Edge," there is a great deal to be made of the elvish "Sea-longing" characteristic of so much of Tolkien's legendarium. In this instance, the music of Maglor strikes perhaps an even deeper chord. This presentation explores the

further implications of the fate of Maglor, suggesting, ultimately, that the significance of the music of Maglor is intertwined with the significance of the Music of the Ainur itself.

Patrick Lyon is a graduate of the Signum University Masters Program, a high school literature teacher, and a Signum SPACE preceptor. He enjoys Beowulf, gardening, and tilting at windmills with his lovely wife and four rambunctious children.

Sunday, 9-10:30 AM

Tol Eressëa

Tolkien Calligraphy

Tolkien was interested in all aspects of language, and so naturally he also invented several alphabets to go along with his constructed languages. This workshop will take a look at both Tengwar and Cirth and go over the basics of how to use these alphabets to write English words (and perhaps some Elvish words as well!)

Marie Prosser read *The Lord of the Rings* when I was 12, and you can see what has happened since. The Silmarillion has become my favorite book, and I spend entirely too much time thinking about elves.

Chad Bornholdt was originally exposed to Tolkien in 1977 by Rankin & Bass, but upon learning that Peter Jackson was filming, he went from 0-Lightspeed, reading “The Lord of the Rings” & “The Silmarillion” several times before Jackson’s "Fellowship" film debuted. Legendarium timestamps, maps, writing systems, genealogies, & languages are Chad's focus, but his primary goal is making learning easier for the next person & he has therefore tested & tweaked several tools to aid in Legendarium comprehension. Chad has many crazy non-Tolkien hobbies: racecars, difficult music, day trading, racing drones, collecting guitars & vintage Star Wars toys, real estate investing, & American football. He works as a Distributive Control System Process Automation & Engineering Programmer in Houston, TX.

Matt Cannon has been a life-long Tolkien enthusiast with his first exposure to the Legendarium coming in the form of the children’s read-along audiobook of the Rankin/Bass production of *The Hobbit*. He has been a regular attendee at Signum events since his first Texmoot in 2019 and has frequently taught Tengwar at various moots. Known in online forums as ‘Evil Dr. Cannon’, Matt holds a Ph.D. in Physics from Rice University and has recently moved, trading the Midgewater Marshes of the Texas Gulf coast for the Misty Mountains of Colorado. He is an avid hiker and can often be found exploring the beautiful landscape surrounding his new home. Matt is a passable musician and loves to unwind by playing piano and guitar.

Labyrinth

Understanding the Call – Lothlórien and Its Lady

Both Frodo's growing sense of isolation and his deepening understanding of the Quest and his role in it are the focus of this paper, which explores the Ringbearer's experiences in Lothlórien, particularly his spiritual interactions with Galadriel. His deepening insight and psychic acuity upon entering Lothlórien will be examined fully with special attention given to: the Temptation of Galadriel; the revelations of her Mirror; the significance of her farewell to Frodo in the novel's Lament of Galadriel; and the kiss of blessing as a Mark of the Chosen given him in the film FOTR.

Deeper discussion of the foreshadowing inherent in her comment that Frodo would need to "train his will" to more freely access the power of the Ring is also presented here. The dominant argument is made that the Fellowship's time in Lothlórien is essential to the Quest in that it is here that Frodo truly begins to understand the Call he answered at the Council of Elrond.

Constance G.J. Wagner, writer, editor, poet, playwright, and Tolkien scholar, speaks regularly and passionately on all things Middle-earth at both academic and fan-friendly events nationally and internationally.

The Last Word: Tolkien, the Romans, and Female Speech

It is a common perception that women's voices represent a lacuna in ancient history, but it is easy to generalize that statement in a way that erases the plethora of women's words that do survive. Roman texts contain a multitude of historical and mythological women who speak their own opinions, perspectives, and desires, but these women's voices are complicated by the fact that they are nearly always conveyed by a male writer, translator, and interpreter. Yet the impact of the female voice in Roman texts is undeniable, and the presence of women's words raises questions other than ones of historical accuracy.

Both the power and complication of female speech in Roman texts is exemplified by the historian Tacitus, but similar uses of women's words appear in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien nearly two thousand years later. Tolkien, another male author, uses female speech towards his own narrative ends in writings from across his legendarium.

Drawing on the work of classicists Emma Southon and Daisy Dunn, and the work of Tolkien scholars Nancy Enright and Edith Crowe, this paper analyzes short monologues of female characters in both Tolkien and Tacitus to demonstrate the necessity of female voices in these authors' works, the agency female characters demonstrate through

speech, and the complicated ways female speech survives throughout history and fiction. This paper focuses on the voices of women on the edge of these texts, rather than central figures, to reflect the marginalization of women in history and fiction and to heighten the dramatic impact these marginal figures have on their narratives. This paper will also engage the audience by soliciting participation to read a small selection of short monologues from Tolkien and Tacitus' texts.

Clare Moore is a Ph.D. student at the University of Glasgow studying Tolkien's representation of disability. Her research also focuses on Tolkien's depiction of gender, particularly in the First Age of Middle-earth.

The Tides of Time, The Tides of Fate, and The Power of Song

"[T]his I will say to you: your Quest stands upon the edge of a knife. Stray but a little and it will fail, to the ruin of all. Yet hope remains while all the Company is true…. [W]ith that word she held them with her eyes, and in silence looked searchingly at each of them in turn" (357). And so Galadriel tests the members of the Company at their first meeting, balancing their hearts on the edge of their desires and of her own, which are put to the proof only when Frodo unwittingly draws her to the edge of her own desire for the Ring.

The Company's sojourn in Lothlórien is transitional throughout, and significantly so. Like the edge of a knife that cuts a whole into parts, the real and metaphorical borders the Company pass in Lothlórien sever Faërie from Middle-earth, present time from times past, the mortal perception of time from the immortal, natural change from embalmed permanence, and story from song. The Elves' gift is the power of song and art, and fading is their fate. They cannot fully possess the one without choosing the other. By using song to make Lothlórien a fortress against both time and Sauron, has Galadriel has limited the power of song everywhere else?

Her renunciation of the Ring embodies the willingness of the Elves to sacrifice everything rather than submit to Sauron. Her choice sets the "tides of fate" flowing and the "tides of time" begin to sweep Lothlórien away (FR 2.vii.365-66). The Great Tales become more than stories again. Sometimes subtly, sometimes openly, they will offer powerful guidance to Aragorn and help Frodo and Sam to breach the walls of Mordor.

Thomas Hillman is the author of "Pity, Power, and Tolkien's Ring: To Rule the Fate of Many." He has retired to Brooklyn, where he reads and eats bagels.

Mirror, Mirror

Haruki Murakami's Literature: Reality and Subconsciousness in a Dreamlike Landscape

You never know what to expect when reading the work of Haruki Murakami: his narratives blend the elements of everyday life with the surreal and subconscious mind to create dreamlike landscapes to which the reader is irrevocably drawn. Spirits roaming about, talking cats, and dreams that transcend the realms of illusion are not unusual in his narratives. Through the stylistic analysis of different fragments from some of Murakami's most famous works, we will look at how linguistic devices of figure and ground catch our attention and immerse us in Murakami's fascinating worlds.

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Drawn to the Edge of Monstrosity: Sweet Home's Special Infectees/Neo-Humans and the Human/Monster Divide

Among the most popular recent horror series streamed on Netflix is the three-season Korean offering "Sweet Home" (2020-24). Known for its extreme body horror, this series also treads an interesting line between scientific and spiritual explanations for its apocalyptic events. In portraying an apparently permeable membrane between what is normally considered to be an "either/or" in Western works (for example, the scientific explanation of zombies in World War Z versus the supernatural explanation for the Cenobites in the Hellraiser series) such works facilitate a discussion on the nature of not only cultural science but as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, the inherently cultural nature of definitions of monstrosity. As in the case of another Korean horror series, "All of Us Are Dead" (2022-), the most interesting characters defy simplistic boundaries, the "special infectees" (later termed Neo-humans), who retain their spiritual/ethical "humanity" after infection. In contrast, the actions of many of the uninfected "humans" (military and scientists) are portrayed as decidedly monstrous in nature. This paper is a close reading of the (re)definition of monstrosity in the series, drawing from Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," Barbara Creed's "The Monstrous Feminine", Mary Douglas's "Purity and Danger", and Julia Kristeva's "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection".

Dr. Kristine Larsen is distinguished Connecticut State University Professor of Earth and Space Sciences at Central Connecticut State University, where she has taught since 1989. Her teaching and research focus on the intersections between science and society, including science in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Her Tolkien-related work has appeared in numerous journals and collections of essays.

From Rebellion to Resistance: Star Wars and Politics in the Disney Era

Although fans disagree about the extent to which Star Wars should engage with politics, George Lucas himself clearly positioned the saga at least in part as political commentary. Lucas' two trilogies showed the collapse of democracy and rebellion against dictatorship. Yet, the films only partially explain why democracy failed. In the 2006 book "Star Wars on Trial," science fiction author David Brin claims that Star Wars glorifies the role of elites in politics and suppresses demands for more inclusive government. Indeed, Lucas' films overlook the importance of institutions, ideologies, and civil society in achieving good governance.

My presentation reexamines Brin's critiques in light of the Disney-era Star Wars projects, which hint at a more democratic vision of politics in which ordinary citizens join the struggle for political change. For example, the film "Solo" features a droid uprising, while "The Rise of Skywalker" ends with a citizen militia coming to support the Resistance fleet. The television series "Andor" shows the residents of Ferrix using what political anthropologist James C. Scott called "weapons of the weak" against the Empire. Other Star Wars stories more thoroughly document the strengths and weaknesses of galactic government institutions than Lucas did. The novel "Bloodlines" contains the first reference to political parties in the Galactic Senate and shows how fascist ideologies fueled the rise of the First Order. Meanwhile, the High Republic multimedia project is one of the first Star Wars stories to depict democracy as a thriving ideal rather than inherently corrupt and weak.

Taken together, these newer Star Wars projects have collectively expanded the scope of the political storytelling beyond elites and raised the possibility of future Star Wars stories more focused on institutions, social justice, and citizen activism.

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