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PROVERBIAL PLAY: J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S USE OF PROVERBS IN *THE HOBBIT* AND *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

Abstract: Proverbs are a significant part of the linguistic complexity that Tolkien created for Middle Earth: both Tolkien as narrator/author and many of his characters use them. This article discusses Tolkien's use of proverbs, including the question of how and why he indicates proverbiality when he creates new proverbs. Tolkien's use and creation of proverbs reminds readers that Middle Earth has a history that has affected (and been affected by) language and language use.

Keywords: proverbs, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien, proverbs in literature, invented proverbs, Middle Earth, anti-proverbs, Tolkien fans, Tolkien and language

The linguistic richness of J.R.R. Tolkien's beloved book *The Hobbit* (hereafter *H*) and the series that follows it, *The Lord of the Rings*[1] (hereafter *LotR*), is instrumental in creating the illusion that Middle Earth actually existed by providing readers with a sense of its history, traditions and cultural distinctiveness. It also allows Tolkien to play with language, as he tells the reader in his foreword to the second edition of *LotR*. "I desired to… [write *LotR*] for my own satisfaction, and I had little hope that other people would be interested in this work, especially since it was primarily linguistic in inspiration and was begun in order to provide the necessary background of 'history' for Elvish tongues" (J.R.R. Tolkien, "Foreword to the Second Edition" to Tolkien 2004 (1954), p. xiii).

Proverbs are a significant part of the linguistic complexity that Tolkien created for Middle Earth. Tolkien's use of proverbs is particularly rich; both he as narrator[2] and many of his characters use them. Many characters even use anti-proverbs (or what Obelkevich calls "perverted proverbs" [1987, 239]), a speak-

er/writer's reworking of traditional proverbs, often though not always for humorous effect (following W. Mieder, *Antisprichswörter* [Wiesbaden: Verlag für deutsche Sprache, 1982, 1985, and 1989]), and there are several conversations in which characters debate their future options primarily through the exchange of proverbs (called "proverb dueling" by Dundes [Arewa and Dundes 1964]). But how should scholars approach Tolkien's inclusion of proverbs, many of them invented and some of them anti-proverbs (some even invented anti-proverbs), in a fictional world populated by fictional characters? How do readers even recognize that a character is using proverbial language?

This article discusses the proverbs Tolkien uses in *H* and *LotR*, including the thorny question of how and why Tolkien indicates proverbiality in these texts. I am not the first scholar to address these issues; as early as 1969, George Boswell wrote about Tolkien's use of formulaic sayings, including proverbs. His seminal and important article primarily lists and categorizes proverbs in *LotR*. My work tries to take these ideas further, as I seek to understand how Tolkien and his characters use proverbs in conversation and the deeper implications of these proverbs to the overall story arc.

Many of the topics discussed in this article, particularly Tolkien's linguistic interests, *LotR* characters' use of proverbs in conversation, and textual indications of proverbiality in *LotR*, are deftly discussed by Michael N. Stanton in his important article "'Advice is a Dangerous Gift:'[3] (Psuedo)Proverbs in *The Lord of the Rings*." Stanton's article is thorough enough to make one question the need for this article. Although he and I consider some of the same proverbs, many of the proverbs I discussed are addressed only briefly, or not at all, by Stanton, who offers what is essentially an annotated list of proverbs found in *LotR*. I also, as will be clear in this article, disagree with Stanton on several important points, including whether morally compromised characters like Gollum or Orcs use proverbs and whether the use of generalized sayings in the mouths of the wise (such as Gandalf and Elrond) should be seen as proverbial. Finally, my article is not limited to *LotR* (as Stanton's is), which allows me to trace the use of certain proverbs in both *H* and *LotR* (for a consideration of proverbs in *H*, see Trokhimenko 2003, 368). In general, it is my contention that proverbs have been underappreciated by

Tolkien scholars and that Tolkien has been underappreciated by paremiologists and folklorists in general.

J.R.R. Tolkien and Language

Considering how a single author creates and represents proverbs provides a model for proverb production and use in real life. Ultimately proverbs allow Tolkien to remind readers without directly telling them that Middle Earth has a history, and a history that has affected (and been affected by) language and language use.

J.R.R. Tolkien's love and appreciation of language can be seen throughout his writings (scholarly, fictional and personal correspondence), and is particularly evident in *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*. Between 1918, when he finished his World War I military service, and 1920, Tolkien was, as he put it in 1964, "employed on the staff of the then still incomplete great [Oxford English] Dictionary" (Carpenter 345; see also Winchester xx, 206-208). Tolkien's facility with language eventually led to his career at Oxford University, first as Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon (Carpenter 13) and later as Merton Professor of English Language and Literature at Merton College (Oxford University is divided into multiple colleges, including Merton) (Carpenter 116). At Oxford his love for language was enriched by both his scholarly duties and his friends at the university (such as his fellow members of the Inklings[4]).

Tolkien's love of language is well illustrated by the various languages and linguistic forms that permeate *H* and *LotR*. Most races[5] have their own languages; some, such as Humans and Elves, have multiple languages. Many of these languages include examples of proverbs. The Hobbits speak English or, as Tolkien put it in an October 14, 1958 letter to Rhona Beare (who had written to him as the representative of an American Tolkien fan club), "hobbit[6] language is represented as English," though with some Old English influence (Carpenter 278, letter 211). The Hobbit tongue also seems to be related to the unique language (based almost exclusively on Old English) spoken by the Rohirrim (Carpenter 381), a point noted and discussed by Merry, Pippin, and Théoden (*The Two Towers*, hereafter *TT,* III, viii, 544; see also Appendices D, E and F). The majority of the human characters in Middle Earth speak standard English, but

some also or primarily speak other languages, such as the Elvish language used by the Númenórean elite (whose common tongue, Adunaic, was the precursor of common speech) (Carpenter 175) or the Wildmen's/Woses'/Púkel-men's rhythmic tongue (of which we catch glimpses in *Return of the King*, hereafter *RK,* V, v, 813-817; see also Appendix F Section I), depending on the speakers' ethnic background and where they live. The Dwarves[7] have a secret language that they share with no-one (noted by Gandalf in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, hereafter *FR* [*FR,* II, iv, 299]), though several examples are found in the text (mostly in place names such as Khazad-Dûm, Zirakzigil, Bundushathûr and Kheled-Zâram; but see also Appendix F I). The Elvish languages are particularly complex; the Elves who traveled across the sea to Valinor speak a different tongue than those who did not (Appendix F I; Carpenter 175-177), and there are also geographically distinct Elvish languages (implied by Gandalf *FR,* II, iv, 297; see also Carpenter 175-177). Specific details about these linguistic and historical relationships can be found in *LotR*'s extensive appendices, particularly Appendices E and F. Several different alphabets are also used in Middle Earth, as discussed in Appendix E II.

Even the parts of Tolkien's work that are written in "standard"[8] English (the majority, luckily for Tolkien's readers who have had little or no linguistic training) exhibit many different language styles. Individual characters also have their own voices (see Appendix F, p. 1107, where Tolkien discusses different characters' voices; see also Trokhimenko 2003, 367), a point illustrated by a comparison of the speech styles of three Hobbits: Sam's speech is plain and colloquial, Frodo's more intellectually adept speech is careful and deliberate, while Bilbo's is poetic and playful. Poetry and songs occur throughout *LotR*, some crafted by characters in the novels (including such unsympathetic races as the Goblins/Orcs), some apparently traditional, and others translated from languages such as one of the Elvish tongues. Readers also encounter Bilbo's neck-riddling session (a term used by folklorists to refer to situations, usually literary, wherein one character has to correctly answer a series of riddles or forfeit his or her life) with Gollum (a topic previously addressed by folklorists such as F.A. de Caro 1986, 175-177).

Tolkien's comments about the riddling session show us that he was interested not only in language play but also in literary/folklore forms such as riddles. In a personal letter to his publisher, Allen and Unwin, dated 20 September 1947, Tolkien describes the fact that he created most of the riddles in *The Hobbit*: "As for the Riddles: they are 'all my own work' except for 'Thirty White Horses' which is traditional, and 'No-legs.' The remainder, though their style and method is that of old literary (but not 'folk-lore'[9]) riddles, have *no models* as far as I am aware, save only the egg-riddle which is a reproduction to a couplet (my own) of a longer literary riddle which appears in some 'Nursery Rhyme' books, notably American ones…." (letter to Allen and Unwin, Sept 20, 1947, Carpenter 124 letter 110, italics in original). In this excerpt we have a glimpse of the many influences, both traditional and creative, that inspired Tolkien's composition. Although I am unable to find examples of Tolkien writing about his inclusion of proverbs in *LotR*, given his known love of language it seems likely that his use of proverbs was as careful and intentional as his use of riddles.

Scholarly Approaches to the Proverb

That proverbs are nearly impossible to define has been widely accepted ever since Archer Taylor's 1931 declaration that "the definition of a proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking"[10] (3). Archer Taylor was ultimately arguing, I think, that scholars shouldn't worry too much about the definition of proverbs; if they work with proverbs enough, they will be able to intuitively recognize them. This advice is both good and practical. However, scholars (being scholars) continue to try to define proverbs linguistically (Cram 1983; Norrick 1982), semiotically (see, for example, Grzybek 1987), structurally (Dundes 1975), sociologically (Messenger 1959), and in other ways (for example, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1973, Obelkevich 1987).

One approach to determining whether a phrase is a proverb or proverbial[11] is to determine whether the saying is traditional. This apparently simple exercise can actually be quite difficult. It would be simpler if scholars could agree as to such basic issues as the definition of tradition or the length of time in circulation required for a phrase (or chair design or ballad) to be considered traditional. As these issues are contentious, scholars are left to

demonstrate that a specific phrase has been in use for a sufficient amount of time to be considered "traditional." Several significant studies have shown us the linguistic fortitude this work requires (see, for example, Mieder 1983, 1987)

Currency is another central defining element of the proverb; in other words, a proverb has to be present in speech and/or writing in order to be considered a proverb. Early British scholar Richard Chenevix Trench indicated that currency was the defining characteristic of proverbs, even more important than traditionality (Trench 2003 [1853] 14-16). This defining element is also of limited value since folklorists argue about the precise meaning and nuance of most of the key words in this definition. Can a phrase be considered "current" if, for example, ten percent of the people in a community recognize it? How about twenty percent (Mieder 1992 discusses the paremiological minimum and its importance to cultural literacy; see also Hirsch 1987)? Is it enough that people recognize a phrase, or do they need to actively use it? Whether one is investigating proverbs in social interaction or in a work of literature, these definitions are problematic.

How, then, does the reader determine which sentences and phrases in *H* and *LotR* are proverbial? Tolkien himself seems to have created some of the phrases that he intended to appear proverbial. The answer appears to be that there are linguistic and contextual cues that point to a saying's traditionality (or, in the case of Tolkien's literary world, its diegetic traditionality) and currency, therefore marking it as a proverb.

Tolkien's Use of Traditional Proverbs

Tolkien's use of traditional proverbs does several things. First, it creates the appearance of a folksy/traditional world; following Susan Stewart, the use of proverbs makes the work seem to be "distressed," in other words, to appear older (and more traditional) than it actually is (Stewart 1991). Mieder has written about how Wilhelm Grimm added traditional proverbs to the *Kinder und Hausmärchen* in order to remind the reader of the (apparent) antiquity of these stories (Mieder 1988). In many ways Tolkien's work is a lament of the loss of what Warren Roberts would have called "the old traditional way of life" (this great folklorist used this phrase so often that it is the title of his

festschrift – see Walls and Shoemaker 1989), depicting a romanticized view of life before the industrial revolution (previous scholars have written about this focus in Tolkien's work; for a good overview, see Campbell 2011). The archaic language and phrases in *H* and *LotR* serve to reinforce both the story's apparent age and the romantic sense that something valuable is passing or has passed.

Tolkien's use of traditional proverbs also provides linguistic and social models of proverb structure and use for his audience. Sometimes Tolkien uses traditional proverbs, making it easy for readers to identify the phrases as proverbs (provided, of course, that they are familiar with English-language proverbs). Some examples of these include such classics as "All's well as ends well" (*FR,* I, iv, 95)[12], which is said by Farmer Maggot to Merry upon safe delivery of Frodo, Sam and Pippin. This proverb is used in Shakespeare's[13] *All's Well that Ends Well*; interestingly, in the entire quote from Shakespeare, the character Helena goes on to say, "Whate'er the course, the end is the renown" (Act IV, Scene 4), an interesting statement to make at the beginning of a fantasy novel that describes a long journey that ends both in renown and, for Frodo at least, in personal tragedy. At the end of the series Tolkien uses this proverb again; after the Gaffer (Sam's grandfather) has been restored to his home, he repeatedly says, "'It's an ill wind as blows nobody any good, as I always say. And All's well as ends Better!'" (*RK*, IV, ix, 999). The Gaffer actually references two proverbs in these two sentences: "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good" and "All's well as ends well." Notice that he also plays with the proverbs a bit – instead of "All's well that ends well," we get the stronger "All's well as ends better" (Boswell 1969, 63; Stanton 1996, 344). We also find the more colloquial and archaic "as" used instead of "that" (which also occurs in the ill-wind proverb). The Gaffer's use of this proverb serves to remind the reader of his lower socio-economic status and traditional values.

Another real-world proverb used in Middle Earth is an older variant of the familiar "When it rains it pours," now used to market Morton salt. When Frodo and company inquire about beds at the Prancing Pony Inn in Bree, the innkeeper Barliman Butterbur explains that they have a lot of guests by saying, "'It never rains but it pours,' we say in Bree" (*FR,* I, ix, 150; see also

Boswell 1969, 63 and Stanton 1996, 336). Notice that Tolkien uses the more archaic form of this proverb.

When the hobbits meet Aragorn at the same inn, Pippin tells him, in reference to his stern and grim appearance, "'But handsome is as handsome does, as we say in the Shire'" (*FR,* I, x, 167; see also Boswell 1969, 63). This proverb is from Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (Bartlett's 341:11). It is an interesting choice of proverbs, because it doesn't specify the nature of Aragorn's character; the openness of "Handsome is as handsome does" allows for the possibility that Aragorn will not behave handsomely (though readers know that he does). This proverb (like many used in *LotR*) shows up again in the text, long after Aragorn's character has been firmly established as upright and true. In *The Two Towers* (hereafter *TT*), Sam and Frodo are discovered in the wilderness near Mordor by Faramir and his men. Faramir takes them to his secret refuge and interrogates them about why they are traveling in this land. Frodo deftly manages to avoid telling Faramir about the Ring, but Sam, who is tired, worried about Frodo, and less agile with obfuscation, accidentally blurts out the truth. Aghast, Sam tells Faramir, "'Don't you go taking advantage of my master because his servant's no better than a fool. You've spoken very handsome all along, put me off my guard, talking of Elves and all. But *handsome is as handsome does* we say. Now's a chance to show your quality'" (*TT*, IV, v, 665, italics in the original). By using the same proverb that Pippin had earlier applied to Aragorn, Tolkien (through Sam) suggests to his readers that it is safe to trust Faramir (as it was to trust Aragorn before him) in spite of uncertain appearances.

Marking Phrases as Proverbs or Proverbial

Sometimes, though not always, proverbs in *H* and *LotR* are presented in italicized type, thereby marking them as somehow special or distinct. In the following example (italics in the original), Frodo tells Sam that they need to continue with their quest, even though they are comfortable and safe in Lothlórien. Sam replies "'*It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish*, as my old gaffer used to say'" (*FR*, II, vii, 352; see also Stanton 1996, 337). Even if a reader misses the attributive "as

my old gaffer used to say," he or she still might note that the phrase is somehow exceptional because it is presented in italics.

In one case from *The Hobbit*, Tolkien tells us that a specific phrase became a proverb ('"Never laugh at live dragons, Bilbo, you fool!' he [Bilbo, after taunting and being singed by an irate Smaug] said to himself, and it became a favourite saying of his later, and passed into a proverb") (*H,* 12, 216; listed Boswell 1969, 64; see also Trokhimenko 2003, 369-370). This is interesting because, in addition to telling us that this phrase became a proverb, it shows us (albeit in brief) how some Middle Earth proverbs developed. It also shows Tolkien's conception of how proverbs start; to paraphrase Lord Russell, "the wisdom of many, the wit of Bilbo" (Lord Russell's actual early 19th century statement, that a proverb is "one man's wit and all men's wisdom," and the later frequent inversion of the two parts of this saying, are referenced in Taylor 1985 [1931], 3).

Tolkien's inclusion of this phrase's passage into proverbiality is self-referential in that readers are reminded that they have suspended their disbelief. Notice that the proverb "Never laugh at live dragons," began life as a phrase intended to be interpreted literally in response to a real situation (Bilbo had laughed at the dragon Smaug who, in his rage, sent a jet of flame after Bilbo as the Hobbit retreated from Smaug's den) (*H*, 12, 216). When the phrase "Never laugh at live dragons" gained currency, it was probably used metaphorically, in which analogic form it would be more generally applicable to everyday life. As will be seen throughout this essay, Tolkien often played with the literal/metaphorical applicability of proverbs.

Tolkien (or one of his characters) often indicates that a phrase is intended to be a proverb or proverbial by using introductory formulas (verbal or linguistic framing devices used to draw attention to the proverb), such as "As we used to say…" (called a "tying phrase" by Briggs 1985)[14]. This frame alerts the reader to the fact that a proverb follows just as surely as the phrase "Once upon a time" alerts the audience that a wonder tale follows. We have already seen a few examples of the frames Tolkien uses ("as my father used to say," "as my old gaffer used to say," "as they say in Bree," and "as we say in the Shire"). The use of these tying phrases mirrors the use of proverbs in real social interaction; in order to appeal to the traditional wisdom and

authority of a proverb, speakers often use tying phrases to indicate that they are using a proverb.

Polysemanticism

One indication that a phrase is proverbial lies in its polysemanticism, the fact that the proverb is structured so that it can be used in many different linguistic contexts without compromising its meaning. This means that such proverbs must be sufficiently linguistically non-specific that they can be applied to various situations. Such proverbs frequently use general rather than specific pronouns, such as the general "you" accompanied by the passive voice (as in "There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something" [*H*, 4, 68], said by Thorin to the younger Dwarves). A proverb's polysemanticism can also be indicated by non-specific pronouns such as "one," "many," "some," "people," "he" and "men."[15] In the following exchange, Frodo has just told Gandalf that it's a pity that Bilbo didn't kill Gollum when he had a chance because Gollum deserved to die. Gandalf objects to the idea that Gollum should have been killed unnecessarily, arguing: "'Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement'" (*FR,* I, ii, 58; listed Stanton 1996, 336). This phrase's proverbiality is indicated not only by the polysemanticism facilitated by the pronouns "many" and "some," but also by the parallel structure of the two short sentences ("Many that live deserve death. Some that die deserve life").

Sometimes proverbs are polysemantic because they are stated as generalities, without offering any pronouns at all. When Gandalf tells the Council at Rivendell about Saruman's treachery, Elrond comments, "'It is perilous to study too deeply the arts of the Enemy, for good or for ill'" (*FR*, II, ii, 258). This phrase can be applied to many different enemies with many different arts, making it both generally applicable and linguistically flexible. Proverbs that are polysemantic because they are stated as generalities do not need to be complex; sometimes they are short and simple, as in the following case. Later at Elrond's Council, the Elf lord Glorfindel uses another proverb stated as a generality: "'Yet oft in lies truth is hidden'" (*FR*, II, ii, 259). Here Glorfindel is suggesting that the Council should throw the Ring into the sea (where Saruman had said it was hidden) "'and

so make the lies of Saruman come true.'" Glorfindel is both old and wise even for an Elf, and his wisdom informs this proverb. First, he uses the archaic qualifier "oft" (rather than the more familiar "often") to indicate that, although this proverb is appropriate in this situation, it would not necessarily apply to any situation. This proverb is also a model of linguistic efficiency in that it is made up of a mere seven words, all but one of which has only one syllable. The proverb also breaks neatly into two-syllable sets ("Yet oft"/ "in lies"/ "truth is"/ "hidden"); such consistent rhythm makes the proverb stand out in conversation and makes it easier to remember.

Stylistic Cues

Sometimes the reader's intuitive feeling that a phrase in *LotR* or *H* is proverbial is based on linguistic or stylistic cues. Many traditional proverbs use poetic devices such as metaphor, rhyme, rhythm and parallel structure. Tolkien uses these devices to invent and mark new proverbs. Because he follows standard proverbial linguistic cues, the reader is more likely to be able to recognize that the phrase is intended to be proverbial, even if Tolkien does not specifically mark the genre through framing or by italicizing it.

Rhyme

One of the most commonly recognized stylistic cues in proverbs is the use of rhyme. The traditional proverb "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," for example, repeats the long *ā* sound in "day" and the second syllable of "away." Often when proverbs use rhyme, they also repeat the syllabic rhythm, wherein the sections that end with the rhyming words have the same number of syllables (in the case of "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" five syllables on either side of the verb "keeps"). When Pippin and the Hobbits question the wisdom of traveling through the woods as Aragorn suggests, Aragorn offers an example of the simultaneous use of rhyme and syllabic rhythm with the expression with "My cuts, short or long, don't go wrong" (*FR*, I, xi, 177; see also Stanton 1996, 336). Here we have an introductory phrase ("my cuts") of two syllables, followed by a pair of rhyming three-syllable phrases ("short or long" and "don't go wrong"). Remember that, at this point in *LotR*, the Hobbits are still uncertain whether they should trust Aragorn and that the

rhyme scheme emphasizes the "rightness" (or safety/value) of Aragorn and his choices.

Alliteration

Proverbs often include alliteration, seen in examples such as "Many a mickle makes a muckle" and "Birds of a feather flock together." Alliteration probably appealed particularly strongly to Tolkien because alliteration, not rhyme, serves as the primary poetic device in Old English and Old Norse poetry. Not only was Tolkien a scholar of Old English and Old Norse, but he was also one of the few modern poets to use successfully the alliterative style in modern English, as he did in the poem "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" (Tolkien 1953).

When Aragorn and the Hobbits are threatened by the Nazgûl in *FR*, Aragorn lights a fire, explaining to Frodo that, "'Sauron can put it [fire] to his evil uses, as he can all things; but these Riders do not love it, and fear those who wield it. Fire is our friend in the wilderness'" (*FR*, I, xi, 185). This proverb ("Fire is our friend in the wilderness") is linguistically marked by the alliteration of the initial *f*-sound in "fire" and "friend." But interestingly, Tolkien extends the alliteration beyond the proverb to tie it more directly to the preceding sentence. The clause before the proverb also begins with the *f*-sound in "fear." The *w*-sound in "wield" and "wilderness" also alliterates, further tying the proverb stylistically to the preceding sentence.

At the Council of Elrond in Rivendell, where the current state of Middle Earth is discussed, a stranger from Gondor named Boromir uses an alliterative proverb to explain that he is not asking for military assistance but for information and advice. He says, "'The might of Elrond is in wisdom, not in weapons, it is said.'" (*FR*, II, ii, 239). Here we again find parallel structure: after the introductory "The might of Elrond," we get two clauses of three words and four syllables ("is in wisdom" and "not in weapons"). The first of these clauses is positive, the second negative (see Dundes 1975), the second word of each is "in," and the final words open with the alliterative *w*-sound.

Even morally compromised characters and/or those opposed to the heroes use proverbs[16]. Gollum, for example, uses an alliterative proverb in *TT* when he responds to one of the Nazgûl flying overhead. After the Nazgûl flies over Frodo, Sam and

Gollum a third time, Gollum says, "'Three times!' he whimpered. 'Three times is a threat'" (*TT*, IV, ii, 621)[17]. Later in *RK*, Frodo and Sam are found in Mordor by a company of Orcs marching to war. Since Frodo and Sam are disguised as Orcs, the Orc-leader assumes that they are Orcs trying to desert. When (because they're both sick and exhausted) the two Hobbits start to fall behind, the Orc-leader encourages them to keep up by hitting them with a whip and saying, "'Where there's a whip, there's a will, my slugs'" (*RK*, VI, ii, 909-910; see also Boswell 1969, 62; Stanton 1996, 341 and Trokhimenko 2003, 372-373[18]). Like the proverb used by Gollum, this proverb alliterates, though not perfectly – the *wh*-sound and *w*-sound are not identical, a fact of which Tolkien as a linguist was well aware. I suspect that Tolkien uses this phrase in part to linguistically reinforce the Orc-leader's uncouthness. But, since this is also an anti-proverb (a play on the traditional "Where there's a will there's a way"), we also see here an example of an Orc playing with a traditional proverb.[19]

Parallel Structure

As many scholars have observed (Trench 2003 [1853], De Caro 1986, Dundes 1975, Mieder 1983, Taylor 1983), proverbs often follow parallel structure; that is, they naturally fall into two parts. Many proverbs could easily be written in poetic line form, such as: "The early bird/ gets the worm." Often the two parts contain either the same number of syllables or a similar number – in the case of this proverb, four in the first part and three in the second. The two parts of a proverb with parallel structure are inevitably compared and/or contrasted (see Dundes 1975 for a detailed structuralist interpretation of the relationship between the two parts of a parallel proverb, although Dundes uses the term "dyadic" instead of the now more common "parallel"). Let's consider some of the dyadic proverbs in *LotR*; many of which are not only syllabically parallel but also alliterate.

When Sam and Frodo meet Faramir in Mordor in *TT*, they are uncertain as to whether they should trust him even though he is kind to them. Here we see Sam using a proverb with parallel structure to summarize their dilemma. "Sam struggled with himself, arguing this way and that. 'He [Faramir] may be all right,' he thought, 'and then he may not. Fair speech may hide a foul

heart'" (*TT*, IV, v, 660; see also Stanton 1996, 340). Alliteration of the *f*-sound (which also is the first sound in Faramir's name) stylistically reinforces the potential paradox of someone using "fair speech" in spite of having a "foul heart." This proverb also parallels a similar consideration of Aragorn's character when the Hobbits first meet him at the Prancing Pony. Although a different proverb is used in that case, the words "fair" and "foul" occur in both (see discussion above), suggesting to readers that Faramir is as trustworthy as Aragorn. Tolkien may also be playing with the traditional proverb "Faint heart never won fair lady,"[20] an interesting choice given that Faramir (whose heart is anything but faint; he shows great courage, particularly in *RK*) ultimately marries the fair lady Eowyn.

Metaphor

Folklorists have long observed that many proverbs are metaphorical (De Caro 1986, Dundes 1975, Seitel 1986, Taylor 1983), and (as already briefly noted in this article) Tolkien frequently plays with the tension between literal and metaphorical meaning in the use of proverbs. A good example of a straightforward use of a metaphorical proverb occurs when, after their encounter with the Barrow-wights (malicious undead creatures), the Hobbits tell their savior, Tom Bombadil, that they regret losing their clothing. He replies, "'Clothes are but little loss, if you escape from drowning'" (*FR*, I, viii, 140). Obviously the Hobbits weren't going to literally drown in the dusty barrow (a very old crypt that is not described as at all damp), but being overcome and losing control of one's consciousness, as implied by the drowning metaphor, is appropriate to their encounter with the Wights.

Sauron's Long Arm

Some proverbs and metaphors recur throughout *LotR*. For example, Sauron is described as "having a long arm" or people say, to indicate the growth of his influence and power, that "his arm has grown long" (for example, *FR*, II, iii, 281). This proverbial phrase is as old as Herodotus's *Histories*, wherein it is said that, "The king's might is greater than human, and his arm is very long" VIII, 98 (Bartlett 71: 25). The metaphor of Sauron having a long arm reminds readers of Sauron's unnatural corporeality (by the time of *LotR* he seems to exist as only a malevo-

lent, sentient presence and a huge lidless eye) and that, following the whole phrase from Herodotus, his might is greater than an ordinary human's. Subtly drawing attention to Sauron's unnaturalness, this proverbial phrase also serves to highlight his evil nature and the impossibility of compromise with or mercy from him.

Sometimes the long arm metaphor is indirectly referenced, as in the following case. When, in *TT,* Legolas, Gimli and Aragorn are searching for Pippin and Merry, who have been captured by Orcs, Tolkien as narrator describes the scene at the end of the day: "The sun sank. Shadows rose behind and reached out long arms from the East" (*TT*, III, ii, 414). By using a metaphor so often applied to Sauron, Tolkien reminds readers that the sun setting (which means that Aragorn can no longer track the Orcs) is the least of the trackers' concerns. Sauron's threatening power is also rising as the sun sets.

Another example of Tolkien indirectly applying the long arm metaphor occurs at the very end of *FR*. After being pressured by Boromir to surrender the Ring, Frodo runs to the ruins of Amon Hen while wearing the Ring and almost draws Sauron's attention. "He took the Ring off his finger. He was kneeling in clear sunlight before the high seat [of Amon Hen]. A black shadow seemed to pass like an arm above him; it missed Amon Hen" (*FR*, II, x, 392). This shadow which moves like an arm is more than just shade; it serves as a physical representation of Sauron's attention and influence.

In the following passage from *RK*, Pippin in Minas Tirith is looking east into Mordor, and Tolkien expands the metaphor of Sauron's long arm to include fingers:

> [Pippin]…looked at the great walls [of Minas Tirith], and the towers and brave banners, and the sun in the high sky, and then at the gathering gloom in the East; and he thought of the long fingers of that Shadow: of the orcs in the woods and the mountains, the treason of Isengard, the birds of evil eye, and the Black Riders even in the lanes of the Shire – and of the winged terror, the Nazgûl (*RK*, V, i, 749).

As Sauron's influence grows, Tolkien accentuates the "long arm" metaphor, moving beyond the simple reference of reach

and influence to the specific character of the long arm, now moving beyond the arm to the hand and fingers. Pippin also thinks of five examples of Sauron's meddling, just as hands typically include five fingers.

Then, as the story moves closer to its climax, Tolkien returns to the straight-forward long arm metaphor, as in the following quote, describing the scene the Lord of the Nazgûl sees at the beginning of the Battle of the Pellenor Fields. "The darkness was breaking too soon, before the date that his [the Lord of the Nazgûl's] Master [i.e., Sauron] had set for it:… victory was slipping from his grasp even as he stretched out his hand to seize it. But his arm was long" (*RK*, V, vi, 821). This quote is interesting because the long arm seems to belong simultaneously both to Sauron and the Lord of the Nazgûl (though of course this is physically impossible). Indeed, since Sauron is largely non-corporeal, he remains in the background of the action, menacing but remote. The Lord of the Nazgûl acts as Sauron's agent, the character who most closely follows Sauron's wishes, his proxy in the story.

While the Battle of the Pelennor Fields is raging, Gandalf urges Denethor, Steward of Gondor, to fight alongside his people. Denethor explains why he thinks all such actions are futile, "'….But against the Power that now arises [Sauron and his forces] there is no victory. To this City [Minas Tirith] only the first finger of its hand has yet been stretched….'" (*RK*, V, vi, 835). The use of this metaphor shows us that Denethor has imagined Sauron's arm as longer even than it perhaps is. Several pages later, Gandalf watches as Théoden's corpse is brought into the city and thinks about how he could have saved Théoden but for Denethor's attempt, in his madness, to immolate himself and his gravely wounded (but still living) son, Faramir. "'So long has the reach of our enemy become [that Sauron was able to influence Denethor in Minas Tirith]'" (*RK*, V, vi, 838).

Another, less direct reference to Sauron's long arm occurs after the Battle of the Pelennor Fields is won, when the leaders discuss what they should do about Sauron, who remains unharmed and in power in Mordor. After it is decided that the forces of Minas Tirith (and neighboring areas), led by Aragorn and Gandalf, should march into Mordor and threaten Sauron, Prince Imrahil asks Gandalf,

> "If the Dark Lord knows so much as you say, Mithrandir, will he not rather smile than fear, and with his little finger crush us like a fly that tries to sting him?"
>
> "No, he will try to trap the fly and take the sting," said Gandalf (*RK*, V, ix, 864).

Although Imrahil seems to be minimizing Sauron's threat, limiting his long arm to its "little finger," Gandalf turns the proverb and reminds those at the council (and readers) that Sauron is still strong, cruel enough to play with a mere fly, and arrogant enough to believe that he can take the fly's sting.

When Sauron is overthrown shortly thereafter (because the Ring has been destroyed), Tolkien describes what those who had marched to Mordor to challenge Sauron saw:

> And as the Captains [on the field of Cormallen] gazed south to the Land of Mordor, it seemed to them that, black against the pall of cloud, there rose a huge shape of shadow, impenetrable, lightning-crowned, filling all the sky. Enormous it reared above the world, and stretched out towards them a vast threatening hand, terrible but impotent: for even as it leaned over them, a great wind took it, and it was all blown away, and passed; and then a hush fell. (*RK*, VI, iv, 928).

Even in death, then, Sauron's arm is long and threatening (though, with his decease, ultimately impotent).

Tolkien liked the "long arm" metaphor so well that he used it not only in the text of the story but in the appendices as well. This is particularly interesting because the appendices are much less linguistically complete than the story itself; in fact, in many cases single words, tables, or sentence fragments are used. Yet in the description of the events of the year in which Sauron was forced out of Dol Guldur outside of Mirkwood (and, incidentally, the year that Bilbo and a company of Dwarves overcame the dragon, Smaug, in *H*), the reader finds the following statement:

> So it was that when war came at last the main assault was turned southwards; yet even so with his far-stretched right hand Sauron might have done great evil

> in the North, if King Dáin and King Brand had not stood in his path (Appendix A, 1052-1053).

The fact that this metaphor is repeated throughout the text serves to remind readers of Sauron's menace and power. It is also rather ironic, since readers do not at any point in *LotR* meet or even get a physical description of Sauron – although he is the one who plans the attempt to take over Middle Earth, actions are taken through others, such as the Mouth of Sauron or the Lord of the Nazgûl. But Sauron is a being of vast influence, power and unnatural threat, a fact that is reinforced by Tolkien's repeated references to Sauron's "long arm."

Proverb Dueling

Sometimes Tolkien's characters trade proverbs; in that case the social context (admittedly, their context within the story world) implies that the phrases are folkloric. The characters may even use proverbial language differently than ordinary speech. One of the best examples of this occurs when Frodo, early in his quest, on the run from Hobbiton with Sam and Pippin, and recently frightened by the Black Riders, meets the High Elf Gildor Inglorion. In addition to discussing the Black Riders (though Gildor tells Frodo little about them other than that they are dangerous, which he had already surmised), the two discuss their personal histories, the nature of wizards, and their respective racial identities (this passage is also addressed in Boswell 1969, 61-62).

In the following quote from *FR*, Frodo has just asked Gildor if he should leave the Shire or wait to hear from Gandalf. In this exchange the proverbs are also typographically marked by being italicized.

> Gildor: "'But it is said: *do not meddle in the affairs of Wizards, for they are subtle and quick to anger*. The choice is yours: to go or wait.
>
> "'And it is also said," answered Frodo, '*Go not to the Elves for counsel, for they will say both no and yes*.'
>
> "'Is it indeed?' laughed Gildor. 'Elves seldom give unguarded advice, for advice is a dangerous gift, and all courses may run ill…'" (*FR*, I, iii, 82-83).

When Gildor avoids answering Frodo's question by using a proverb about Wizards, Frodo responds by giving his own proverb, this one about Elves. Then Gildor offers commentary on the Hobbit's proverb: he addresses its truth and fairness, ultimately admitting its applicability.

The next two conversations, in which characters use proverbs to debate the most appropriate future action, show us that Tolkien was aware that proverbs are not universal but culturally and contextually variable. In the following exchange from *FR,* Gimli and Elrond have a disagreement in which their points of view are wholly expressed through proverbs (for a discussion of proverbs used to disambiguate complex situations, see Lieber 1984). The Fellowship is about to leave Rivendell, and Elrond has just said that he will not require oaths from anyone but Frodo, since the journey will be more difficult than any of them realize. Gimli objects, saying:

> "'Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens,'
>
> "…. 'Maybe,' said Elrond, 'but let him not vow to walk in the dark, who has not seen the nightfall.'"
>
> "'Yet sworn word may strengthen quaking heart,' said Gimli.
>
> "'Or break it,' said Elrond" (*FR*, II, iii, 274; listed Boswell 1969, 64, 65; see also Stanton 1996, 337).

This exchange also addresses the fact that proverbs can be contradictory. Various people have argued that since proverbial wisdom is often contradictory (does "absence make the heart grow fonder," or is someone who is "out of sight, out of mind"?), proverbs are not true (discussed in Rogers 1986). As Yankah (1984) has pointed out, this argument assumes that any given proverb must be applicable in all contexts. The truth is that, depending on the people involved, how long they are apart, the depth of their feelings, and many other variables, sometimes absence makes the heart grow fonder, and sometimes it causes the other person to be "out of mind." Tolkien is, essentially, making the point that proverbs are dependent on individual characters, situations, and circumstances. One proverb may be true in one

situation, and a contradictory proverb might be true in a different situation. This reflects not the applicability of the proverbs themselves, which rarely claim infallibility, but instead the ambiguity of different contexts. Note also that Gimli and Elrond are talking about future developments that neither can foresee (even Elrond, who seems to have some ability to predict the future) – they are arguing not about whether these proverbs are appropriate, but about the events to come and how the individuals in question might react.

Shortly after the Fellowship leaves Rivendell in *FR*, they come to an impasse – they cannot cross the mountain Caradhras in the snowstorm (which seems to be supernatural in origin), and they do not want to go through the Mines of Moria, an old Dwarven settlement that has probably been long abandoned. They are discussing this one night and unable to reach any consensus as to what to do when Frodo, to relieve the tension, comments that the wind is howling. Aragorn and Boromir, chief opponents in the disagreement, recognize that what they hear howling isn't the wind at all, but wolves. The following conversation ensues, in which Aragorn and Boromir continue their disagreement, though now it is as much about how to deal with the wolves that seem to be nearby as it is about their future route.

Boromir says, "'The wolf that one hears is worse than the orc[21] that one fears'" (*FR*, II, iv, 290). He is partially talking about the wolves themselves and the need to address immediate threats. But the proverb also applies to the question of whether to go through the Mines of Moria in that Boromir is reminding Aragorn (and the rest of the Fellowship) that their concerns about Moria are abstract, whereas they know that their current situation is untenable.

"'True!' said Aragorn, loosening his sword in its sheath. 'But where the warg howls, there also the orc prowls'" (*FR*, II, iv, 290; see also Stanton 1996, 337). Here Aragorn, although initially admitting the justice of the first proverb, essentially negates it by implying that Orcs are likely to be accompanying the wolves. He is also, it seems to me, arguing that the stories about the dangers of the Mines of Moria strongly suggest that the Mines really are dangerous (sort of the Middle Earth equivalent to "where there's smoke, there's fire"). In addition to continuing both the argument about their route and the subject matter of the

first proverb, the second also offers linguistic parallels, in this case including the repetition of rhyme ("hears"/"fears," "howls"/"prowls") and parallel structure. Aragorn's proverb concludes the proverbial duel/exchange and therefore appears to be the "winning" proverb, though in the case of the argument about the Mines of Moria, the larger argumentative context, it is not – the Fellowship decides against Aragorn's wishes and goes through the Mines. Aragorn's final, though perhaps not triumphant, proverb is not just the last one given, but also the shorter one – Boromir's proverb consists of two sets of five syllables balanced around the word "than." Aragorn's proverb could, and probably would outside of this speech event, consist of two sets of only four syllables without a verb or comparative word separating them ("where the warg howls, there the orc prowls"). However, in this case, because he is responding to Boromir's proverb, he adds the word "also," allowing him to accept Boromir's point (or appear to do so) before adding to it.

Proverbial Play

Tolkien (and his characters, as in the previous example of proverb dueling between Boromir and Aragorn) plays with both traditional proverbs and with his invented proverbs. By "play" I mean take standard proverbs and slightly but deliberately change them. There are many possible reasons a character, Tolkien himself, or anyone engaged in proverbial play, might want to make these slight adjustments. First, these new proverbs, much like parodies, simultaneously reference both the new and the old. So the anti-proverb "All that glitters is not dull" is only humorous in reference to the proverb on which it is based, "All that glitters is not gold." Sometimes anti-proverbs change the order of the words in a proverb in order to change the meaning. The poem about Aragorn in the letter left by Gandalf for Frodo, which consists of many proverbs and proverbial expression, begins with the anti-proverb "All that is gold does not glitter" (*FR*, I, x, 167), obviously an inversion of the well-known "All that glitters is not gold." But while the more familiar proverb means that some things look better than they actually are, the anti-proverb applied to Aragorn means that some things actually are much better than they look.

Play with traditional proverbs

First let us consider the play with traditional proverbs in Tolkien's Middle Earth. Frequently chapter titles reference proverbs, often by providing a slightly variant anti-proverb (a point observed by Trokhimenko 2003, 370, specifically in reference to *H*, chapter 14). Consider, for example, the title of Chapter III: "Three is Company" [*FR*], which plays with the traditional proverb "Two's company, three's a crowd." By referencing the proverb about three being too many, and then negating it by making three (instead of two) company, Tolkien reminds us how close the three Hobbits in question (Frodo, Sam and Pippin) are. It also highlights how alone they are (there are only three of them), which, since this chapter is where they first realize they are being hunted by the Black Riders, is important.

When the Hobbits are at Tom Bombadil's house, Tolkien describes their unusual and often eerie dreams (Frodo's is particularly significant, since he dreams about where Gandalf was and why he was unable to contact the Hobbits). Sam, however, is not troubled by dreams that night. Tolkien writes, "As far as he could remember, Sam slept through the night in deep content, if logs are contented" (*FR*, I, vii, 126). Here Tolkien plays with the well-known proverbial comparison "to sleep like a log" not by quoting it in its entirety but by referencing logs in the context of sleep. Note that, even though it is Tolkien as narrator who says this and not Sam himself, we still are reminded of Sam's rustic simplicity. It is hard to imagine the same phrase being applied to Aragorn or Gandalf, or even Frodo. Not only would it be too irreverent and earthy to apply to them, it would also be inappropriate because Aragorn, Gandalf and Frodo are all observant and usually on top of things. Sam's "sleeping like a log" reminds us that he is not the smartest or most observant member of the party.

The following example of proverbial play, on Gandalf's part this time, also references two different traditional proverbs. At the *FR* meeting in Rivendell various luminaries (and five Hobbits) discuss the history of the Ring and what should be done about it. After hearing the story of how the Ring was made, the first (and only somewhat successful) battle to overthrow Sauron in which the Ring was taken by the human Isildur, both the characters at the meeting and the readers could use some humor. And

they get it from a surprising place: from Gandalf the Wizard. Although Gandalf is given the place of honor and therefore the right to speak last (*FR*, II, ii, 243) at the meeting, and nearly everyone there (including kings and princes) defers to him, Gandalf takes this opportunity to make a self-deprecating reference to his temper. Later at this same meeting, Gandalf describes how he came to the Prancing Pony and was angry that the innkeeper hadn't sent the letter Gandalf had written to Frodo months before. Frodo, who liked the bartender, expresses concern about whether Gandalf was unpleasant to him. Gandalf says the following: "'I did not bite, and I barked very little'" (*FR*, II, ii, 257). This answer plays with two traditional proverbs: "His bark is much worse than his bite" and "Barking dogs don't bite." It also adds some much-needed humor to this long chapter in which much (not immediately exciting) back story is presented.

Interestingly, when Gandalf refers to himself, particularly in a critical manner, he frequently uses proverbial language. Gandalf is one of the most important characters in the series, and the only character to play major roles in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (Elrond, Bilbo, Gollum and Glóin also show up in both books, though their roles are significantly more minor in *The Hobbit*, in Elrond's and Gollum's cases, or *The Lord of the Rings*, in Bilbo's and Glóin's cases). In spite of Gandalf's frequent presence in the series, readers rarely get a sense of his personality. Proverbial play allows Gandalf to safely (and somewhat less obviously) share his personality with the other characters in the series and therefore also with us, the readers. In this case, by referencing two different proverbs that talk about barking, Gandalf likens himself to a dog (not the best respected of animals). This in no way leaves the characters at the table (or the reader) with a negative impression of Gandalf's intellect or status; instead, it serves as a reminder that even Gandalf makes mistakes, is imperfect, and that he is able to acknowledge it. But this comparison is not all negative – dogs are also known for their loyalty and their persistence (also called "doggedness"), both traits that Gandalf has in abundance.

Earlier, at the Prancing Pony Inn, when the Hobbits first meet Aragorn, they are hesitant to accept his help. In the inn's common room, Frodo is led, by Pippin's thoughtlessness, into telling a story and singing a song, which he does by standing on

top of a table (he is, after all, only as tall as a Hobbit, and at an inn that caters to both Hobbits and "big people"). He slips on the table and, as he falls off, manages to put his finger into the Ring which he had been handling in his pocket. Embarrassed and aware that he has made his situation worse, he crawls over to where Aragorn is sitting. The following conversation occurs between them: "'Well?' said Strider [Aragorn], when he [Frodo] had reappeared. 'Why did you do that? Worse than anything your friends could have said! You have put your foot in it! Or should I say your finger?'" (*FR*, I, ix, 157). Aragorn's words play with the proverbial phrase "to put one's foot in it," meaning to involve oneself in a specific situation while also making it worse. This play is quite intentional in that it allows Aragorn to tell Frodo that he knows what's going on while keeping his true meaning concealed from anyone else who might be listening. By changing "foot" to the alliterative "finger," Strider indicates that he knows it is a ring that Frodo is dealing with. Tolkien also references Bilbo here, because in *The Hobbit* Bilbo is repeatedly described as "having put his foot in it" when he agreed to go with the Dwarves (*H,*I, 27; *H*, XII, 205). So the reader is reminded that both Frodo and the Ring have long histories (though admittedly the Ring's is much longer) and connections to other people and places. The reader is also left with a glimpse of hope in one of the darkest chapters in *The Fellowship of the Ring*; since Bilbo survived, and indeed prospered after his journey, perhaps his nephew and heir Frodo will also be successful.

In the following passage we once again see Aragorn playing with a proverb in order to make a point. Aragorn and Merry are discussing their future route, and in response to Merry's plan to cross first one river and, later another, Aragorn says, "'One river at a time!'" (*FR*, I, xii, 195). This plays on two traditional proverbs: "One thing at a time!" and "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." It also places these traditional sayings in the Fellowship's immediate geographic context. Finally, it creates a specific type of anti-proverb by taking a usually metaphorical proverb and applying it literally, something that occurs frequently in Tolkien's work, often to humorous effect.

The next example also shows us how a proverb that is usually meant to be understood metaphorically can actually be applied literally. Before Frodo and company leave Rivendell, Bilbo gives

Frodo the Mithril coat that, years before, Thorin had given to him as part of his payment for helping to recover the Dwarves' treasure from the dragon Smaug. In *FR,* Frodo puts it on and worries that it looks too ostentatious, so Bilbo suggests that he wear it under his regular clothes – where it will be able to protect him without being visible. Frodo puts his clothes on over the Mithril coat and Bilbo tells him, "'Just a plain hobbit[22] you look,' said Bilbo. 'But there is more about you now than appears on the surface'" (*FR*, II, iii, 271). The reference to more than appears on the surface (reminiscent of proverbs such as "Don't judge a book by its cover" and "Still waters run deep") is usually meant to be understood metaphorically, to mean that someone is more intelligent or interesting than he or she first appears. But in this case the phrase is meant to be taken literally: there is a physical object hidden beneath Frodo's surface clothing.

The literal use of this typically metaphorical proverb is repeated many pages later in *FR* by Gandalf, who says, when Frodo is found to have inexplicably survived an Orc-chieftain's spear thrust, "'There is more about you than meets the eye, as I said of him [Bilbo] long ago'" (*FR*, II, v, 319, referring to *H,* 6, 104; *H,* 16, 257). Note that these two uses of the proverb offer slight variation in the phrasing (Bilbo's "There is more about you… than appears on the surface" and Gandalf's "There is more about you than meets the eye" [discussed Stanton 1996, 337]), much like proverbs in the real world, where multiple versions exist. Gandalf also, once again, equates Frodo and Bilbo. This ironically reminds us that the Ring is now evil, since what was more about Bilbo than met the eye was the Ring (and, of course, the hidden strength of his own character), but now the Ring is no longer an asset; instead, the secret Mithril coat is the wondrous asset that, as the Ring saved Bilbo years before in his escapes from Gollum and later the spiders, has saved Frodo's life.

When the Fellowship flees from the Orcs in the Mines of Moria, they encounter a group of Elves. The Elves are able to talk to Legolas (who is also an Elf) and accept that the members of the Fellowship are friends in need of help. The exhausted Hobbits are led to flets up in the trees where they are offered blankets and told to rest. Tolkien describes the scene and then presents the following exchange between Pippin and Sam:

> "…Pippin went on talking for a while. 'I hope, if I do get to sleep in this bed-loft, that I shan't roll off,' he said.
>
> "'Once I do get to sleep,' said Sam, 'I shall go on sleeping, whether I roll off or no. And the less said, the sooner I'll drop off, if you take my meaning'" (*FR*, II, vi, 335).

Here Sam, probably inadvertently (although if it is inadvertent he quickly catches it, as demonstrated by his adding, "if you take my meaning"), makes a pun out of the proverbial phrase "to drop off to sleep."

Some of the characters' linguistic play is carried from chapter to chapter or character to character. After Frodo, Sam and Pippin have left the Shire and encountered the Black Riders in *FR*, Frodo suggests that they should leave the road and cut across country, where perhaps they are less likely to be seen. "'*Short cuts make long delays*,' argued Pippin" (*FR*, I, iv, 86, italics in the original; listed Boswell 1969, 64). Pippin specifically laments missing the Golden Perch, an inn with "'the best beer in the Eastfarthing.'" "'That settles it!' said Frodo. 'Short cuts make delays, but inns make longer ones….'" (*FR*, I, iv, 86). Here Frodo's response, in adding a new clause to the proverb Pippin used earlier, shows how intertwined the Hobbits' language is and underscores their deep personal connection. Later in *FR*, when Sam sees a Black Rider at the top of a hill, Frodo references the same proverb again, "'…. The short cut has gone crooked already…'" (*FR*, I, iv, 87).

Irrepressible Pippin continues to reference this proverb and, with it, his deep connection to Frodo. Soon after Aragorn (at this point in the story using the name Strider) joins the Hobbits (who are still not certain that they should trust him) in *FR*, he tells them that he has chosen a special route for them. This particular quote has already been discussed in this paper, though in another context.

> "'Not a "short cut," I hope,' said Pippin. 'Our last short cut through woods nearly ended in disaster.'

> "'Ah, but you had not got me with you then,' laughed Strider. 'My cuts, short or long, don't go wrong'" (*FR*, I, xi, 177).

Pippin, by referencing both the experience that he, Sam and Frodo had and his linguistic banter with Frodo, reminds Aragorn that he is the new character here and that Pippin's connection to Frodo is stronger. In retrospect, the reader realizes that this exchange is ironic, since Strider's "cut" ultimately includes Weathertop, a large open hill on which Frodo is seen by the Black Riders, stabbed by their leader, and nearly dies. One could argue that any road Strider could have taken would have been dark, and that at least the "cut" he chose got all of the Hobbits and the Ring safely to Rivendell. But even if Strider's path was the best possible one, it clearly does "go wrong" for Frodo and, nearly, the whole of Middle Earth.

Why does Tolkien (and why do his characters) play with these proverbs? Such play draws attention to the original, traditional proverb, as well as the newly created anti-proverb. Such references are often used to make connections (such as between Frodo and Bilbo) without being too obvious. Many readers probably don't consciously recognize that, for example, the same proverb Gandalf applies to Frodo was also applied to Bilbo in *The Hobbit*. But some do (after all, many Tolkien fans reread *H* and *LotR* over and over again), and I suspect that even those who do not consciously remember that the same proverb was applied to Bilbo may be inexplicably reminded of Bilbo without realizing why.

Proverbial play also adds humor to an often dark plot. Tolkien's work has been criticized for being overly serious, but it in actuality includes a lot of linguistic play, much of which is humorous. Some examples of such humor have been described in this essay. For Tolkien, a great lover of language, linguistic humor was doubtless greatly revered.

Proverbial play can also help to illustrate specific characters' styles; for example, Frodo, Aragorn and Gandalf play with proverbs a lot. Sam rarely does (at least not on purpose); when he uses proverbs, he either uses them in a straightforward manner or, as we have seen in this article, he occasionally seems to use them without first thinking through their literal meaning. This

tells us something about their characters, comparative language skills, and their attitudes towards tradition and traditional authority. How they play with proverbs also tells us something about them. Gandalf is often slightly mocking ("as they say in Bree," "I didn't bite, and I barked very little"), Aragorn reassuring, while Frodo and particularly Bilbo seem to enjoy the play primarily in terms of humor and language.

Conclusions

When I began this project, I expected that the character who used the most proverbs would be Sam, thinking that it would fit his folk/working-class character and values. In assuming this I misjudged Tolkien's appreciation for proverbs, because although Sam does use proverbs throughout the series, both Aragorn and Gandalf use many more. It seems that, to Tolkien, proverbs are not just remnants of lost wisdom; they are still part of how the wise understand and explain the world around them. This fits the romantic, nostalgic style that is so prominent in Tolkien's fiction. In this I disagree with Stanton 1996 and Trokhimenko 2003, who seem to assume that when the wise use generalized terms they are not using proverbs and proverbial phrases.

Critics of Tolkien's fiction often accuse him of employing very little humor in his epic tales. This exploration of his use of proverbial phrases shows that there is in fact a great deal of humor in Tolkien's storytelling, particularly in his use of language. Tolkien uses proverbial language, both made-up and traditional, to flesh out characters, to illustrate relationships between characters, to describe plot developments, and to make his world more believable and to give it historical depth. In the next section we will see how some of his made up proverbial expressions have become proverbs in the real world, at least among avid readers of his fiction.

Ultimately Tolkien's use of proverbs addresses a question dear to many folklorists' hearts: what is the relationship between dynamism and conservatism, tradition and innovation? How much of any given speech event follows previous models, even to the point of the rote use of words without thinking about their meaning? We know that people sometimes use language without considering its literal meaning – lots of people use proverbial comparisons such as "black as pitch" without understanding

what "pitch" is (except, of course, that it is very dark). Yet even in using a phrase that has been used thousands of times before, the speaker (whether a "real" person or a character in a text) is using it in some unique context or style. Human creative expression is always both traditional and innovative. Proverbial play, in taking a familiar traditional text and updating it, draws attention to this continual tension. It does this in Tolkien's Middle Earth just as much as it does in everyday interactions.

Tolkien Fans' Proverbial Play

Tolkien fans have continued this play with proverbs, both old and new. One proverb that Tolkien fans have deliberately picked up is Gildor's phrase about Wizards: "Do not meddle in the affairs of Wizards, for they are subtle and quick to anger" (*FR*, I, iii, 82). This has been incorporated into bumper stickers, e-mail tag lines, and fan fiction. Here we have an example of a proverb invented by an author to give his world an apparent history being brought into real-world speech. Fans have even formed anti-proverbs around this proverb created by Tolkien (such as "Do not meddle in the affairs of wizards, for you are crunchy and taste good with ketchup"). This anti-proverb has moved beyond Middle Earth by being applied not only to wizards, but also to dragons ("do not meddle in the affairs of dragons, for you are crunchy and taste good with ketchup") and witches (I purchased a bumper sticker in Yellow Springs, Ohio, home of the progressive Antioch College, that says "Do not Meddle in the Affairs of Witches" – notice that this example omits the second half of the proverb, perhaps with the knowledge that most readers will be able to supply it themselves). Here we see a proverb that Tolkien invented for Middle Earth being used in real-world speech, being transformed into an anti-proverb, and even being applied to new subjects. So a fictional proverb has passed into real-world currency.

Notes:

[1] Although *LotR* is often referred to as a trilogy, Tolkien conceived of it as a single work with six sections. All *LotR* page numbers refer to Tolkien 2003 unless otherwise indicated.

[2] Tolkien also used proverbial language in personal situations; for example, in the summer of 1966 he wrote in his diary that, "So much time has been wasted in all

my work by this constant breaking of threads" (quoted in Anderson 1994, x). In using this proverb Tolkien explained why it took him so long to complete the series.

[3] Stanton uses the phrase "Advice is a dangerous gift" as part of the title of his excellent article, implicitly indicating that it is a proverb. However, within the text itself, Tolkien does *not* indicate, either through the use of italics or through direct spoken reference to the phrase's antiquity, that "Advice is a dangerous gift" is, in fact, a proverb. I mention this not to criticize Stanton (I agree with him that it does seem to be a proverb, or at least proverbial) but to illustrate the challenges inherent in determining which phrases are proverbial and which are not in a literary context. Such ambiguity has also prevented me from quantifying the number of proverbs in *H* and *LotR*, though it will be clear in this article that I think there are far more than previous estimates (see, for example, Boswell 1969 and Stanton 1996).

[4] The Inklings were a group of intellectual men, most of them associated with Oxford University, who shared interests in Medieval history and literature, the fantastic, and language. In addition to Tolkien, important members of the Inklings include Charles Williams and C.S. Lewis.

[5] Throughout this paper the term "race" is used as Tolkien used it: to distinguish different humanoids, such as Elves, Hobbits, Humans, Dwarves, Orcs, or Trolls. When different types of humans are indicated (such as the Rohirrim, the Númenóreans, or the wildmen/Woses/Púkel-men), I use the term "ethnicity."

[6] The word "Hobbit" is not capitalized in the letter, so I have left it in lowercase here.

[7] I have followed Tolkien in usually capitalizing race names, including "Elves," "Dwarves," and "Orcs."

[8] Tolkien's language can rarely if ever be considered "standard"; he deliberately used archaic vocabulary and sentence structure and many poetic devices. Also, each of his characters has a distinct "voice."

[9] When Tolkien was writing, folk-lore (then two words) was generally focused, especially in England, on oral forms. So when Tolkien contrasts literary and folk-lore versions, he is referring not to the phrase's traditionality, as most of us would now assume, but to its literariness or orality.

[10] This is not unique to proverbs; as Taylor notes (1985), most folklore genres are problematic to define.

[11] Throughout this paper I do not distinguish between proverbs and their close allies, proverbial phrases. I am specifically interested in traditional sayings and sayings that are designed to appear traditional, which would include both proverbs and proverbial phrases.

[12] Citations from Tolkien follow the style (title abbreviation, book, chapter, page) used in the journal *Tolkien Studies*. Pages are, as stated in Endnote 1, taken from Tolkien 2003, a single-volume version of *LotR*.

[13] Whether Shakespeare created the many proverbs he uses in his plays and poetry or merely used already existing traditional proverbs, though an interesting topic, is beyond the scope of this article.

[14] A point already made and discussed by Stanton 1996; see especially 333.

[15] Because proverbs are conservative, they often use gender-specific pronouns such as "he" assuming that "he" could apply to a female or a male subject. In the

conservative language frequently used in proverbs, this "he" serves as a synonym for "a person." The familiar "He who laughs last laughs best" also uses the gender-specific "he" as a general pronoun. However, many people using this proverb would expect that **she** who laughs last would laugh better than a he who laughed slightly earlier.

[16] Though both Boswell 1969 and Stanton 1996 argue that they don't, though Stanton admits (334) that "Where there's a whip, there's a way" is a proverb.

[17] Interestingly, Sam uses proverbs that talk about thirds at least twice (Stanton 1996 340), perhaps allowing Tolkien to reinforce Gollum's hobbit-like nature while also comparing two characters who are frequently antagonists, Sam and Gollum.

[18] Stanton 1996, 334, parenthetically notes that, "With one exception…, creatures like Orcs and Trolls do not figure in this census [of beings who use proverbial expressions], since they are only counterfeits of other races, perverted by uncreative Evil." It is true that there are few proverbs spoken by Orcs or Goblins (though some do occur in *H*), but we get so little direct speech from Orcs or Goblins that I think it isn't reasonable to argue that Orcs don't use proverbs. Our sample size is simply to small and (unsurprisingly given that Stanton's analysis is confined to *LotR*) doesn't account for the examples of Goblins using proverbs in *H*.

[19] Thanks to Dr. Jeremy Wallach for pointing this out.

[20] Thanks to Dr. Wolfgang Mieder for pointing this out.

[21] Tolkien 2003 doesn't capitalize this word, so neither have I.

[22] Tolkien does not capitalize this word, so neither have I.

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