

2017

# There and Back Again; Tolkien's Recovery of Englishness Through Walking

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There and Back Again; Tolkien's Recovery of Englishness Through Walking

By

Christopher Cameron

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of English Language, Literature, and Creative Writing  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2017

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There and Back Again; Tolkien's Recovery of Englishness through Walking

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May 4, 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the complex representation of walking in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In his 1951 letter to his close associate Milton Waldman, Tolkien lamented the lack of a specifically English (as opposed to British) myth, and expressed his desire to create a mythology that he could dedicate to England. Tolkien's novels, which are primarily structured around hobbits undertaking quests on foot, are an attempt to create this mythology. Through representing walking in all of its diversity, Tolkien engages with the politics and philosophy associated with the pedestrian mode. The genre of fantasy and Tolkien's goal of creating a myth for England are closely tied to concepts that Tolkien calls "escape" and "recovery." As in fantasy, walking involves a removal, or escape, from society in order to recover a truth. This study explores the interplay between the genre of fantasy and various modes of walking, and concludes with the assertion that the intersection between the two provides a space for Tolkien to create a mythology for the English.

## DEDICATION

To Sharon Burgess for our block walks, and Paul Wright Sr. for our walks around the ponds of Kentucky.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my family for their patience and support. Thank you for listening to me. I would like to acknowledge my readers Dr. Robert Nelson of the History Department and Dr. Joanna Luft of the English Department. Thank you for taking the time to review this project. I wish to recognize the University of Windsor English Department for mentoring me and providing me with advice and guidance throughout my time here. Thank you for accepting me into your community and thank you for not throwing me out when I said I wanted to write about hobbits. Thank you to Zach Amlin for never missing an opportunity to talk about *The Lord of the Rings* with me, and for watching the films with me over and over again for years. Lastly, I wish to thank my advisor Dr. C.S. Matheson. Thank you for guiding me through this project. No matter how I felt going in, I always left our meetings smiling. Thank you.

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## Introduction: The Walk Between Romanticism and Fantasy

What is the purpose of fantasy? Fantasy literature provides a space outside of reality. This space creates an opportunity for escape from the terrible. J.R.R. Tolkien, in his seminal 1947 essay: *On Fairy-Stories*, claims that this escape is vital for fantasy:

There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death. And even when men are not facing hard things such as these, there are ancient limitations from which fairy-stories offer a sort of escape, and old ambitions and desires (touching the very roots of fantasy) to which they offer a kind of satisfaction and consolation. Some are pardonable weaknesses or curiosities: such as the desire to visit, free as a fish, the deep sea; or the longing for the noiseless, gracious, economical flight of a bird, that longing which the aeroplane cheats. (Tolkien 22)

The goal of escape has continued into contemporary fantasy literature. J.K. Rowling's Professor Dumbledore wants to let Harry Potter escape the troubles of his life. He refuses to let anyone wake a sleeping Harry to warn him of danger: "For in dreams we enter a world that is entirely our own. Let him swim in the deepest ocean or glide over the highest cloud" (Cuarón).

In addition to respite from the slings and arrows of life, Tolkien goes on to explain that fantasy offers access to ideas that simply cannot exist in a world bound by natural law. Fantasy also offers the reader a chance to fulfil their desires in an imagined space when they cannot be achieved in the real world. The most common criticism of fantasy is that such means of escape are trivial. Escape for escape's sake is not ideal; to

bury one's head in the sand, or imagined universe, and ignore reality, is not the goal. For Tolkien, the essential function of fantasy is recovery.

In fantasy, Tolkien explains, "Recovery...is a regaining—regaining of a clear view. I do not say 'seeing things as they are'...though I might venture to say 'seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them'" (Tolkien 19). Tolkien's statement implies that we have lost something, culturally and collectively, and fantasy is our means of getting it back. This concept serves fittingly as the opening for Peter Jackson's 2001 film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*: "Much that once was is lost, for none now live that remember it" (Jackson). Fantasy is concerned primarily with the recovery of a lost knowledge. The most obvious example of this type of fantasy is "portal fantasy," where characters from the real world enter the fantasy world, have an adventure, then return to reality changed for the better by their time away. C.S. Lewis, who was a contemporary of Tolkien, wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56) which follows this model. Tolkien denies his readers this connection to the real world, and instead asks them to occupy the position of the person from the real world thrown into the fantasy themselves; it is the reader that travels to Middle-Earth to recover what once was lost, rather than a character from the 20<sup>th</sup> century world. Tolkien repositions the reader by removing an intermediary character between worlds, and instead asks his readers to identify and sympathize with the hobbits of the Shire. The reader is asked to associate themselves with the hobbits, especially Bilbo, who reluctantly leaves the Shire. Bilbo escapes (begrudgingly), and rediscovers a more Tookish identity that has a deeper appreciation for the Shire as his home, but is no longer concerned with the snobbery of the social hierarchy. Asking the reader to identify with the hobbits is an advantageous strategy for Tolkien as he sets out

to create a myth for “my country-England,” in his fiction. Through his expertise in Anglo-Saxon languages, Tolkien was aware of the lack of a national myth for England. England, he lamented, had no stories of its own, and its national identity was shared with the rest of Britain. Tolkien encourages the reader to escape from this shared British identity, and recover, through the reading of his myth for England, an English identity. This identity includes the “old ambitions and desires” that predate the act of union in Great Britain. Walking functions as a bridge between escapism and realism because, though the reader may be unfamiliar with fantastic modes of travel, every reader can identify with the corporeal experience of walking. Every culture walks, not just the English, but the taste for walking for pleasure in England that began with the Romantic movement creates a link between English identity and walking. Walking tours through rural and wilder landscapes in England are very popular amongst the English, so much that the traditional rights of way to the countryside have been preserved for centuries. The political and ideological fight for the preservation of these rights of way and for the right of the Englishman to walk where he pleases, has bound walking to the identity of the English.

Though Tolkien, Lewis, Charles Williams, and other contemporary fantastics choose to write in various modes of fantasy, such as portal, contemporary, Gaslamp, and high fantasy, the most common mode of travel for their fantastic protagonists is walking. Why? Fantasy frees the author from the burden of adhering to the laws of science; the “ancient limitations” of the natural world. Any mode of travel, no matter how bizarre or impossible, is fair game in an imagined world. Despite these seemingly infinite options,

writers of fantasy nearly always choose humanity's first and most direct form of transportation. Why is fantastic travel bound up with walking?

The answer comes from understanding several influences on the fantasy genre. First, the medieval romance. Of course, myths involving gods, like Zeus and Thor, influence modern fantasy, but medieval romances, like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Beowulf*, give modern fantasy its most common setting (fantasy worlds most often resemble medieval Europe). Though these stories often feature sailing and riding as modes of travel as often than walking, these romances frequently focus on the knight-errant, or wandering knight. The wanderer is sent on a quest and returns changed usually because of some physical trial in which suffering is an agent of transformation. The literary popularity of the quest, or pursuit of a spiritual goal and the physical trials necessary to attain it, parallels the medieval appetite for pilgrimage to holy places. While fictional knights sought the Holy Grail, real people walked to the holy land. This created a culture that bound walking to spiritual enrichment through the holy journey. Thus, modern fantasy shares this preoccupation with walking, because as pilgrims seek to recover a divine truth, or enlightenment, the reader of fantasy is meant to recover something that betters them as well. This "something" is a spiritual enlightenment, which Tolkien suggests is available through fantasy as, through recovery, we can once again "see things as we are meant to see them." It is this shared purpose that ensures the earliest fantastic heroes walked on their journeys.

Fantasy continued from the Medieval period in the form of fairy tales, but they were not well received in the Enlightenment, when fairy tales were regarded as vulgar and popular entertainment. The genre of fantasy did, however, experience a renaissance

in the Romantic movement, for instance in the gothic novel. Late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic writers reacted against the Enlightenment notion of the supremacy of reason. The Enlightenment repositioned reason, over the divine right of monarchs, as the source of authority in the world. This was also a time of great scientific development and the scientific method of investigation became the primary means of determining the legitimacy of ideas. For writers like Wordsworth and Blake, what is lost in this period of intense rationalism is the spiritual experience. The scientific method might be good for scientific disciplines, but it is not a very useful way of discussing the beauty of a piece of art or literature. The Romantics resisted Enlightenment ideals because they wanted to reclaim an emotional and aesthetic experience that existed outside the realm of reason. Romantics sought to recover a primary sense of the imagination unmediated by social convention. As Wordsworth claims in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, “Low and rustic life was general chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language” (Wordsworth 295). Wordsworth argues for the artistic necessity of escape from societal constraints. To where did the Romantics retreat? The natural world. In resisting the cultural shift of post-enlightenment society, the Romantics began an aesthetic movement that was preoccupied with landscape. To recover the imagination, one embarks on a pilgrimage into the landscape. And, of course, one walks.

With the goal of resisting many rigid constraints of Enlightenment thought and re-establishing the role of aesthetic experience and the supernatural, the Romantics found walking both an advantageous activity and literary subject. First, it was simply the

easiest, if most laborious, way to travel a wild landscape. Travelling on foot was a most practical way to experience the landscape and it was suited to the income of many poets and artists. Second, walking possesses the same philosophical potential for spiritual transformation that made it appealing to medieval authors. The idea that one rediscovers elemental truths by escaping the constraints of society, leading ideally to a transformation of the self, was an idea many Romantics found engaging. This was because they too sought to rediscover something essential they felt the world was beginning to forget. Walking aligns with the goals of rediscovery or recovery because of this transformative quality. For Wordsworth, walking was a means by which he encountered the socially marginal characters that formed the basis of many poems. Finally, walking where one pleases rather than where one ought to is an act of quiet political rebellion. This is of historical importance for English Romantics at home with the Enclosure Acts aimed at imposing an unnatural logic upon the landscape by separating properties more uniformly. Walking is an expression of dissenting from authority, especially when that authority tries to rationalize particular landscapes for particular uses. The walker simply refuses to recognize that authority by walking where s/he likes.

This political climate of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, coupled with a new taste for celebrating and representing landscape, gave rise to a Romantic Nationalism. This was the idea that a nation is a nation because the people unite to form it, rather than because of a divine right of a king to govern over a group of people. This was also part of the people's resistance to the Enlightenment, as Miroslav Hroch claims, as the shift towards a more rational understanding of the world called into question the legitimacy of a traditional worldview. "The turn to national identity...grew out of the crisis of identity,

which was brought about by changes at the dawn of the modern era: the loss of religious legitimacy and also therefore the loss of axiomatically formulated principles, the weakening of the old traditional feudal and patriarchal bonds, and, from that, the loss of security” (Hroch 6). Faced with challenges to religious identity and even many markers of cultural identity, people sought to redefine their identity on nationalist terms by uniting with their countrymen. This shared unity of the people was often held together by a shared folklore; for example, the German nation came together, at least in part, because German people were able to bond over shared folk-stories. National folklore helped form a brotherhood upon which the nations of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe were formed. While this philosophy was initially a movement that delegitimized monarchies by relocating the source of nationhood identity, it came with some nasty side-effects. Some of the folklore about the origins of a nation became entangled with the origins of particular races. A shift from national pride to racial pride was especially evident in 1920’s and 1930’s Germany. What once was a story about how the German people came to be became a story about why the German people were best. This inevitably led to the privileging of certain races over others, a trend that reached its horrifying climax under the Nazi regime. Outside of Germany, pride in nationhood led to mistrust of those outside of one’s own nation. This caused a wave of conservatism to sweep over Europe and allow toxic, protectionist nationalism to play a major role in the outbreak of the World Wars. While Tolkien does seek to create a common folk-tale or myth for the English nation, it is not fair to view him as participating in the same far-right ideology that characterizes the Romantic Nationalist movement in Europe. Besides Tolkien’s strong condemnation of Nazi Germany and ultra-conservatism, both *The Hobbit* (1937)



and *The Lord of the Rings* (1957) are stories about cooperation between different peoples and races, even and especially peoples and races that initially mistrust one another. While I am not suggesting that Tolkien is completely free from prejudice, it would be unfair to view him in the same vein 1930's far-right movements.

Despite these complex influences, Tolkien is considered the father of modern fantasy. A scholar of Anglo-Saxon languages at Oxford, Tolkien was dismayed that a side effect of the influence of Nordic, Scandinavian, Celtic, Germanic, Roman, and Norman cultures on England, especially in terms of folk-lore, was the loss of a definitively English story. In a late 1951 letter to his friend Milton Waldman he stated, "I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found...in the legends of other lands" (Letter 131, 144). Tolkien noticed a vacuum at the centre of the English culture: there was no unifying folklore that bound the English together as a nation. This is not to say that legends do not originate within the British Isles, but as Tolkien noted, "There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian and Finnish...but nothing English...Of course, there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English" (Letter 131, 144). Just as Britain is a country made up of several nations and successive colonizers, Britain's mythology is mixed. The result is a British folk-lore to which all nations of Britain can lay some kind of claim, leaving nothing specifically of or for the nation of England. Tolkien saw this "imperfect naturalization" and tried to create a story that would provide England with the myth it had been lacking.

His endeavor of creating a myth for England that allows for a rediscovery of English identity necessitated an act of recovery, of finding, once again, what he “and we are...meant to see.” The Kingdom of England predates that of Britain, but because of the political landscape of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the sheer size and influence of the British Empire, many Englishman would have identified as British without acknowledging their Englishness. Recovering Englishness requires at least temporary escape from Britishness. George Orwell, in his 1941 essay “England your England,” demonstrated that though the British might rise as one against a common enemy, the individual peoples of Britain are very distinct from each other: “It is quite true that the so-called races of Britain feel themselves to be very different from one another. A Scotsman, for instance, does not thank you if you call him an Englishman. You can see the hesitation we feel on this point by the fact that we call our islands by no less than six different names, England, Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles, the United Kingdom and, in very exalted moments, Albion” (Orwell 5). The nations of Britain feel distinct from each other, but at some point, defining nationhood negatively is insufficient; it is not enough to say that being English is simply *not* being Irish, Welsh, or Scottish. How the English will choose to define themselves is something that Tolkien implicitly engages with when writing a myth for England. In my discussion of Englishness, I will show how Tolkien engages with conceptions of English identity during the time of the composition of his novels, and how these ideas manifest themselves in his work.

While Tolkien’s desire to create a myth is an established idea in Tolkien scholarship, this thesis will prove that the representation of walking is a vital part of Tolkien’s myth for England. Tolkien asks his readers to escape the constraints of their

British national identities and rediscover the elemental truth of what it means to be English. The act of walking is essential to this goal because the political and philosophical associations of walking, as understood through the critical lens of Romantic literature, align with the theory of fantasy. Both function similarly when the goal is rediscovery. This will be demonstrated through an analysis of instances of walking throughout Tolkien's novels, and the application of recent walking theory to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

The first chapter of this thesis, "The Road Goes Ever On," will be biographical, focusing on some formative walks in Tolkien's life. Understanding these walks and their influence on Tolkien's work is important to understanding that he is not just a writer of fantasy, but a writer of walking literature, a genre that develops in England from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as well. This section will include accounts of Tolkien's walks as a child, during his service in World War One, and through his academic and professional life. Tolkien was an accomplished walker and discussion of both his marches and strolls will help demonstrate the influence of pedestrianism on his work. Chapter One will also begin a discussion of the various modes of walking that Tolkien enacted, and examples of these modes of walking in his novels will be examined in later chapters. This section will establish Tolkien not only as a fantastic, but as a walker himself. This dual status highlights the overlap between the fantasy and walking, and establishing this link in the author himself strengthens the case for this overlap in his novels.

The second chapter, "It's a Dangerous Business Going Out Your Front Door; The Fantastic Pedestrian," will explore the pertinent fantasy criticism and recent walking theory and demonstrate the connection between them. The critical material on the genre

of fantasy spans the decades from the 1970's, when fantasy was very popular, to the 2000's when the genre experienced a revival brought on by Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*. Expanding on some of the concepts that have been discussed in this introduction, this chapter will examine the operation of fantasy and how fantasy is a political genre. Chapter Two will then compare these theories to Romantic and contemporary walking theories, demonstrating the similar functions, goals, and political aims of walking and fantasy. Walking, as demonstrated in this section, is key to the sense of liberty that defines English culture. This section will also explain the walking theory to be used in the analysis of Tolkien's novels in later chapters. This section forms the theoretical framework of the thesis.

The third chapter, "Under Hills and over the Hills," will examine the prevalence and diversity of walking in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The chapter will analyze four particular modes of walking. I will first investigate excursionary walking. This is the mode of walking that has a fixed start and end point, usually involving the walker following familiar routes and returning on the same day they depart. These kinds of walks take place in the Shire and this chapter will show how this mode of walking reinforces one's own conception of home. The second mode is marching, which is the antithesis of the spontaneous, individual, autonomous walking more aligned with a Romantic sensibility. This is a regimented walk, often in a group in formation, over a long distance with a definitive goal. Often marches are for the purposes of defense or conquest. These walks are usually in a military context. In the novels, marches are walks mechanized for warfare, and are often the enemy's response to the walk of the heroes. Mountain walking, the focus of the next section of the chapter, will be divided into the

motions of ascent and descent. Mountains in Tolkien's novels are sites of spiritual importance and the struggles of characters to climb, or navigate through or under mountains, is closely tied to their self-development. The final section of Chapter Three will focus on pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are walks with an express spiritual purpose, often for the walker to achieve some sort of spiritual transformation or enlightenment, or for the walker to atone for their sins. In this section, I will discuss examples in the novels that mark the walks as pilgrimages. Discussion of the spiritual function of pilgrimage will lead into my discussion of the fantastic walkers.

Chapter Four, "Concerning Walkers," will focus on five individual characters; specifically, Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, and Aragorn. These five are the main pedestrians in Middle-Earth and each participate in different modes of walking. They are all examples of characters profoundly changed by their walks in the novels. Their respective transformations are of great importance to the primary goal of Tolkien's myth; namely, the rediscovery of a more distinct English identity. Bilbo and Frodo are important because they are the main hobbit protagonists with whom the reader is asked to identify. Both hobbits evolve from comfortable homebodies to heroic adventurers. Bilbo begins this process and then passes the torch to Frodo, who completes the story through fulfilment of a quest. In the end, both hobbits finish their journey by leaving Middle-Earth. Gandalf and Aragorn are examined in this chapter because they are both examples of pilgrims who are transformed profoundly by walking; Aragorn even steps into his identity as King. Both fantasy and walking function as a means of escape and recovery, a movement of "there and back again," for the reader. For Tolkien's reader, this process allows the possibility of an escape from Britishness and a recovery of the elemental truth

of what it means to be English. Bilbo, Frodo, Gandalf and Aragorn are also characters involved with the transmission of history from one generation to the next; the passing of the Ring and the passing of kingship. Walking, in each case, is a means of recovering and reconciling the past, present, and future.

The genre of fantasy provides the ideal space for this escape and, with no character from the real world to perform recovery, the reader is forced into the role of primary recoverer. Fantasy's goals of recovery and Romanticism's role in rediscovery of nation made this the ideal narrative space for Tolkien to set his unifying English myth. As walking literature and fantasy collide in Tolkien's work, the common factor between them is the mutual usefulness of the mode of walking for their goals. Thus, the path to rediscovering Englishness is walked by the barefooted hobbit.

## Chapter 1: The Road Goes Ever On

*There and back again*, the title of Bilbo Baggins' autobiographical account of his travels in *The Hobbit*, implies that the journey is only completed upon one's return home. After his adventures with wizards, dwarves, and dragons, Bilbo comes to the top of a hill and sees his homeland again for the first time since his departure fourteen months earlier.

As all things come to an end, even this story, a day came at last when they were in sight of the country where Bilbo had been born and bred, where the shapes of the land and of the trees were as well known to him as his hands and toes. Coming to a rise he could see his own Hill in the distance, and he stopped suddenly and said: *Roads go ever ever on*, (Tolkien 211)

From this phrase, Bilbo composes a walking song called "The Road Goes Ever On." At the moment of sighting his home again, Bilbo expresses a knowledge of place, what is "well-known" to him is seen anew after his walking journey. Bilbo sights the country where he had been "born and bred," which links the Shire to his sense of identity. This song appears at the end of *The Hobbit* and three times in *The Lord of the Rings* with slight variations in each rendition. This contradiction between the title of Bilbo's book and the never-ending road suggests that, though the journey may end for an individual pedestrian, the road and the walk go ever on. This moment of song also provides imaginative space for the reader to continue the journey, since the frame of the story is broken by the reminder of the narrator's presence. In this instance, the never-ending road is a metaphor for death and what comes after. Though an individual may die, life goes on and another walker may pick up when one finally comes to rest, just as Frodo takes the torch from Bilbo. The metaphor also evokes the afterlife, as the road is constant and goes

on despite the death of the walker. This is supported by Rebecca Solnit's claim in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* that the walk is a metaphor for the journey of life. Given Tolkien's Catholic faith, this concept, which evokes both the idea of life after death and a spiritual growth through pilgrimage, would have been very important to the author. This may be why Tolkien gave these lines to Bilbo, an "everyman" character that the audience is meant to relate to throughout the fantasy. In fantasy, often the author will make the protagonist a character who is not at home in the fantastic world. For example, the Pevensie children in C.S. Lewis' series come from the real world of World War Two London to visit Narnia, and Harry Potter was raised without a knowledge of magic. This is a useful tactic for exposition, as the protagonists are new to the fantasy world as well, and are therefore more accessible to the reader who, of course, exists in the real world. This also means that what is explained to the protagonists is taught to the reader. As an everyman, Bilbo is also fills a conventional role within a fantastic narrative.

The fact that Tolkien chooses to communicate one of his own key spiritual conceptions through Bilbo's walking song is interesting because, though Tolkien is not a walker in the same league as Wordsworth, whose legendary legs covered "180,000 English miles" (Solnit 104), walking played a prominent role in Tolkien's life and work. In fact, the stout legs of Hobbits may have been inspired by Tolkien's own pedestrian wanderings in Africa, England, and Europe. Tolkien as a walker himself partook of many modes of walking, such as excursionary walks, trespassing, mountaineering, and marching, that feature heavily in his novels.

Tolkien was born in 1892 in South Africa to English parents; his father, Arthur, was a bank manager in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State and his mother, Mabel,



had left her home in Birmingham a year earlier to marry. It was in South Africa that the first walk noted by Tolkien's biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, took place. "When Ronald was just beginning to walk, he stumbled on a tarantula. It bit him, and he ran in terror across the garden until the nurse snatched him up and sucked the poison out" (Carpenter 13). While it is tempting to claim that this event inspired the monstrous spiders that exist in each major story of Middle-Earth, Tolkien played down this idea saying of the event, "I can only say that I remember nothing about it, should not know it if I had not been told; and I do not dislike spiders particularly, and have no urge to kill them. I usually rescue those whom I find in the bath!" (Letter 163). He instead suggests that the spiders were placed in the stories to frighten his son Michael, who was afraid of them. Still, it is hard to believe that the encounter with the tarantula had no effect on his work, even if it was not the direct inspiration for the likes of Shelob and Ungoliant. This childhood walk also demonstrates that Tolkien was socialized in the tradition of walking within the precincts of his family's residence. Presumably too, this walk was also Tolkien's first experience with the dangers of the world. Even within the geographical bounds of the familiar, there is the possibility of harm. This scenario of danger existing within the bounds of the familiar is repeated as the hobbits leave and return to the Shire in Tolkien's novels.

In 1895, Tolkien and his mother, Mabel, moved back to England. Tolkien never saw his father again, as he died of fever the following year before he could join the family in Birmingham. In 1896, Mabel moved the family to a hamlet called Sarehole outside of Birmingham, where her parents lived. According to Carpenter, "the effect of this move on Ronald was deep and permanent. Just at the age when his imagination was

opening up, he found himself in the English countryside” (20). Sarehole was a small hamlet on the bank of the River Cole made of mostly farmland; it also contained a brick mill used for grinding corn that was built in 1771 that was only three-hundred yards away from the Tolkien house. This mill may have inspired the Old Mill in Hobbiton, which was destroyed during the War of the Ring in *The Return of the King* and rebuilt as the New Mill, just as the Sarehole Mill was rebuilt on the same site as an older mill. In this village, Ronald and his brother Hilary explored the surrounding fields, which were peaceful and green, home to several farms along the river. There were several bridges that spanned the River Cole, as well as many pools that Ronald and Hilary enjoyed. Sarehole resembles Hobbiton, as they are both rural settlements containing many farms, with a centralized river and mill.

These walks had an undeniable influence on Tolkien’s writing. Most obviously, Tolkien takes the name of “Bag End” from his aunt Jane’s farm. Farmer Maggot was perhaps inspired by an old farmer who once chased Ronald for picking mushrooms. Many have supposed that the surrounding hills and nature preserves were the inspirations for many Middle-Earth landscapes; one nature sanctuary called “The Dell” by locals was noted by Tolkien for its natural beauty and may have been the inspiration for Rivendell and the Old Forest. The Dell was a “great mill pond...ringed with willows...densely grown, wild and solitary” (Ezard 4). In the nearby meadow stood nineteen great oaks.

The influence of Tolkien’s walks in Sarehole are also felt linguistically, as the boys picked up many dialect words, most notably “gamgee” for cotton wool, that would serve as the surname for one of his Hobbits. His time in Sarehole, and his walks in the English countryside, clearly played a profound role in shaping Tolkien’s mythology and

sense of place. Michel de Certeau notes the similarities between walking and speech. “[walking] has a triple ‘enunciative’ function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a special acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language)” (de Certeau 97-98). Just as creating an utterance allows a speaker to embody language, de Certeau suggests that walking allows the pedestrian to embody or “act-out” a place. When one wants to embody a language, one speaks it. When one wants to embody a place, they walk there; one embodies Englishness in part by walking in England. This makes walking particularly useful to the construction of a national myth, as the walker acts out a place by walking in that place. Therefore, the act of walking is vital to a myth in pursuit of the recovery of a national identity.

In Sarehole, Tolkien busied himself with schoolwork, and his next walk of note would not come until the summer of 1911 during a summer holiday from King Edward’s School. As young man of 19, Tolkien and 11 companions toured Switzerland on foot, walking from Interlaken to Lauterbrunnen by “mountain paths” and on to the morains in Mürren. Tolkien and his companions, his brother Hilary and the Brookes-Smith family on whose farm Hilary worked, spent weeks traveling throughout the Swiss Alps, going on several hikes on the Aletsch glacier and traveling an estimated 175 miles on foot: “We slept rough—the men-folk—often in hayloft or cowbyre, since we were walking by map and avoided roads.” The landscape left a deep impression on Tolkien, as he remarked to his son 56 years later: “I left the view of *Jungfrau* with deep regret: eternal snow, etched as it seemed against eternal sunshine, and the *Silverhorn* sharp against dark blue: the *Silvertine (Celebdil)* of my dreams” (Letter 306). At first glance, it is significant that

Tolkien and his companions are of the same number as the company of dwarves that serve under the command of Thorin Oakenshield in *The Hobbit*. The effect of the journey and the landscape of the Swiss mountains is noted by Tolkien in his letter to his son Michael: “The hobbit’s (Bilbo’s) journey from Rivendell to the other side of the Misty Mountains, including the glissade down the slithering stones into the pine woods, is based on my adventures in 1911” (Letter 306). Mountains are ever-present in Tolkien’s mythology, as both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* describe journeys over the Misty Mountains. His mountains are always obstacles for the heroes to conquer, which they usually cannot do without great cost to the group and some personal reckoning. Furthermore, the mountains of Middle-Earth are sinister in that they are home to goblins and monsters. Both journeys in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* feature mountain destinations: the Lonely Mountain for Bilbo and Mount Doom for Frodo. Both mountains represent the climax of the task. The 1911 Alpine tour had a profound influence on Tolkien’s writing as it provided direct inspiration for the Misty Mountains, and provided Tolkien with the experience of mountaineering that he would later draw upon in the novels.

Tolkien returned from Switzerland in September of 1911 and began studying at Exeter College, Oxford. After the outbreak of World War One, Tolkien elected to delay enlistment until the completion of his degree in English Language and Literature with First Class honours. Upon completion of his finals, Tolkien enlisted as a second lieutenant in the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers. Tolkien married Edith Bratt the following year before being deployed to France in 1916. Tolkien was taken to the base camp at Etaples and after three weeks of waiting with the rest of the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion,

he took a train the Front. While in Etaples, Tolkien composed a poem called “The Lonely Isle.” The poem is obviously a farewell to the “white rock” of England, but the many references to the “Sea-voiced, sea-winged” soldiers on their way to battle will later appear in the Numenorean civilization of Middle-Earth (Tolkien 9). This seafaring people was the oldest and most powerful civilization of men before their island’s destruction. Their descendants became the men of Gondor, who live in the white city of Minas Tirith, carved in the side of a white cliff. Aragorn is the lost king of this country, and the link to Tolkien’s poetry suggests a connection to England in their culture. Tolkien’s verse reflection on England at this critical moment of departure offers an idealized, mythological view of the nation. There is a sense that Tolkien is joining a heroic lineage in his own fight for England.

Tolkien and his battalion disembarked in Amiens and proceeded on foot, marching through the French countryside. He and his schoolboy friends from King Edward’s School, Birmingham, who called themselves the “Tea Club and Barrovian Society,” were all enlisted and would exchange letters in the trenches. In these letters, the T.C.B.S. would exchange thoughts about poetry and literature, in addition to relaying personal experiences of the war. In one letter to his friend G.B. Smith in August 1916 during battle, Tolkien describes pondering an idea raised by fellow Society member Christopher Wiseman: “I went out into the wood [probably the small forest near the village of Acheux] ...last night and also the night before and sat and thought” (Letter 5). Indeed, Tolkien often stole away to wooded areas for respite from the war to think. These meditative walks represented a retreat into the natural world, which allowed Tolkien brief escape from the “animal horror” of the trenches and may have reminded him of his time as

a boy in the countryside. These moments proved precious as he would soon see his first action of the War.

On June 30, 1916, Tolkien's battalion moved from Amiens into a hamlet called Rubempre near the front lines; the Battle of the Somme began at 7:30 a.m. the next day. Though Tolkien's battalion remained in reserve that day, Rob Gilson of the T.C.B.S. was one of the first British troops to go over the top and was killed on July 1<sup>st</sup>. In the days following, Tolkien's battalion was involved in several attacks in the trenches, followed by a march back to the hamlets to rest before heading back to the trenches. The 11<sup>th</sup> battalion participated in an unsuccessful attack on the German controlled hamlet of Ovillers, where many men were killed by machine-gun fire. They later provided support for the storming of the German fortification: the Schwaben Redoubt. In August, Tolkien met with G.B. Smith in Acheux before returning to the trenches. He and G.B. Smith managed to survive the most intense fighting of the battle, and on October 27<sup>th</sup> Tolkien was struck with trench fever and was taken from the battle to hospital several miles away. The fever did not abate and on November 8<sup>th</sup>, ten days before the end of the battle, Tolkien was sent back to England. Once back home, Tolkien received a letter from Wiseman informing him that G.B. Smith had been killed by an artillery shell. Days before his death, Smith had written to Tolkien: "May God bless you, my dear John Ronald, and may you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them, if such be my lot" (86). Tolkien experienced extreme guilt knowing that he had been taken away early from a battle that claimed the lives of two of his closest friends. Tolkien would later express this feeling through Eowyn in *The Lord of the Rings*. Eowyn was wounded at the Battle of Pelennor Fields, leaving her unable to march on the Black

Gate with the forces of the West. She laments, “But I cannot lie in sloth, idle, caged. I looked for death in battle. But I have not died, and battle still goes on...But I do not desire healing...I wish to ride to war like my brother Eomer, or better like Theoden the king, for he died and has both honour and peace” (Tolkien 230-231). Eowyn would rather have died in battle than bear the thought of her brother and friends marching to war without her. Tolkien must have experienced a similar feeling knowing his friends were in battle when he could not be. He took Smith’s final words to heart and resolved to pursue his poetry and fiction, as the T.C.B.S had often encouraged him to do. The events of the war, traveling to and from and in the trenches and the physical experience of marching, clearly affected Tolkien’s depiction of mythological warfare. Indeed, Tolkien’s chapter “The Breaking of the Fellowship” is almost certainly a reference to the breaking of the T.C.B.S. at the Somme and a tribute to his fallen friends.

Once well, Tolkien returned to duty, but was deemed medically unfit for general service. Instead, he did home service at numerous camps throughout England. In 1917, he was stationed in Kingston-upon-Hill, where Tolkien and Edith walked into a “woodland glade filled with hemlocks” where she danced and sang for him. Tolkien directly acknowledges this walk as the inspiration for the story of Luthien in the *Silmarillion*. He wrote to his son, Christopher, about his desire to have “Luthien” inscribed on Edith’s grave: “I never called Edith *Luthien*—but she was the source of the story that in time became the chief part of the *Silmarillion*...In those days her hair was raven, her skin clear, her eyes brighter than you have seen them” (Letter 340). After Tolkien’s death, his children had his grave inscribed with “Beren,” who was Luthien’s lover. Tolkien saw his love with Edith as the inspiration for the story of Beren and Luthien, which is important

as the story of Aragorn and Arwen draws heavily on the tale of the two lovers from the *Silmarillion*. It was on this walk with Edith that Tolkien came up with his central love story.

In the years after the war, Tolkien pursued his studies further, becoming a professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Leeds specializing in Old and Middle English. In 1925, Tolkien returned to Oxford, taking up the post of Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College. He published *The Hobbit* in 1937 and gained widespread acclaim as a children's novelist. Too old for active duty, he was asked to serve as a codebreaker during World War Two. Tolkien agreed but was told his services would not be required after taking a cryptography course in London. Puzzles, riddles, and maps would go on to feature as plot devices in each of Tolkien's novels.

During and after World War Two, Tolkien was engaged in the writing of the sequel to *The Hobbit*. During the composition of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), Tolkien stayed often at the guesthouse of Stonyhurst College in Lancashire while his son John attended the school. Tolkien would often walk the grounds, which were private, well-manicured lawns surrounded by trees on the border of the property; many of his paintings and sketches were done on the grounds as he would take a respite from his work to enjoy the scenery. These green, rolling lawns, as well as the nearby river and forest, may have influenced his creation of the landscape of the Shire. The path to the front of the main building of the college is a causeway with ponds on either side. This provides a picturesque approach to the school, especially with the forest framing the grounds. The grounds also contain monuments to Cromwell, an Anglo-Saxon cross, and a Jesuit college (Stonyhurst College 1). This walk through the grounds would also have been a



walk through the different conceptions of Englishness. The grounds represent different moments chosen throughout English history embodied in monuments. Tolkien does something similar with his characters, as the hobbits, the riders of Rohan, and the men of Gondor: each represents a different historical idea of an Englishman. The locals claim Tolkien's time here provided several inspirations for *The Lord of the Rings*. For example, nearby Shire Lane and the Shirebourn river seem to be influential, although one does not have to go far in England to encounter any number of Shires, and the name is probably meant to show that the Hobbits' homeland is representative of the English countryside. What is most significant about Lancashire for Tolkien is the landscape, rather than the names of landmarks. The region is home to a variety of landscapes, lowland and highland, farmland, uncultivated moorland, and a mountain called Green Hill. The view from the house where Tolkien stayed is the basis for the view from Tom Bombadil's house described by Frodo in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and the nearby ferry at Hacking seems to reappear in Middle-Earth as the Buckleberry Ferry. Today, there is a walking tour in Lancashire that retraces Tolkien's steps through the grounds of the college and the surrounding area (The Guardian 1). Though not directly acknowledged by Tolkien, his time spent walking this quintessentially English region seems to have provided the inspiration for several aspects of Middle-Earth.

As Tolkien grew older, he began to walk less. He would occasionally walk as a respite from his professorial duties, but never near the hundreds of miles at a time as when he walked as a young man. Much like his heroes of Bilbo and Frodo, while Tolkien may have been inspired to write while walking, the act of composition took place at home in his study. It seems the literal walks of Tolkien's youth were replaced by metaphorical

walks later in life. Humphrey Carpenter describes a visit to Tolkien's home in 1967, in which Tolkien invited him into his office (garage) and told him about a new edition of *The Lord of the Rings* which would correct an error in the story pointed out by a reader. Carpenter notes that, "the body may be pacing this shabby little suburban room, but the mind is far away, roaming the plains and mountains of Middle-earth" (6). Tolkien was an accomplished walker, experiencing all kinds of walks, from garden walking in South Africa, excursionary walks in England, mountaineering in Switzerland, marching in France, and contemplative walks that proved a break from work and stimulate thinking. Even as his body failed him, Tolkien left his readers countless stories of walks that were influenced and inspired by the walks of his youth so that they may share in this experience unique to the pedestrian. It is through these works that Tolkien's road goes ever on.

## Chapter 2: It's a Dangerous Business Going Out Your Front Door; The Fantastic Pedestrian

Why do the fellowship not just fly to Mordor on the backs of the eagles? The giant birds appear to help whenever the heroes find themselves in a tight spot, so why not help with the entire quest? Obviously, such ease and speed of travel would not have made for a very interesting or sustained story; but the presence of alternative methods of transportation like the eagles in Middle-Earth, and even conventional methods like sailboat and horse, make it clear that Tolkien deliberately chooses to have the fellowship walk. Tolkien is not the only author of fantasy to make this decision, as nearly every fantastic writer from Lewis to Pullman elects to have his/her protagonists walk. What is it about walking that makes it an appropriate mode for fantastic protagonists to conquer evil? Pedestrianism means more to fantasy than simply a means of transportation in a narrative of an epic journey. In fact, fantastic literature and walking share many philosophical and political goals, and the marriage between the two is so perfect, that no other method of transportation, even by magical eagle, would be appropriate for the fellowship's journey.

To understand the alignment of fantasy and walking, we must first understand the goals and purposes of fantasy. The most obvious purpose of fantasy, as Tolkien himself points out, is escapism. We read the fantastic to get out of our mundane and sometimes depressing realities. While it might be tempting to view this goal as frivolous, it would be a mistake to think there is no value in escapism. As Don Adrian Davidson writes:

In this world of hard reality and often passionless daily existence which we find ourselves sharing more and more with cold, emotionless

machines, it is important to be able to find a place or a time where we can give ourselves over to our imaginations. In this world of our imagination we can battle against grim demons with Conan or we can walk the paths of Middle-Earth with the gentle Hobbits. In this world we can be the people of fantasy, the dreamers of adventures and places that can only exist in our minds. Such journeys into the imagination are not without their value in the real world, however, for from the minds and the imaginations of men who learned to dream came much of the reality of the world we live in.

(Davidson 43)

For Davidson, though fantasy does permit an escape from present reality, the true purpose of that escapism is to return to reality with a new perspective which will be directly applicable to actual problems. Just as the Pevensie children are returned to World War Two England after their time in Narnia, when the reader journeys into Middle-Earth with the fellowship they must come back through the proverbial wardrobe able to apply the lessons they learned in the real world. This is what Tolkien calls "recovery," essentially the idea that removal from reality grants the reader a chance to see the world in the proper way again, to rediscover a truth that had been forgotten. This truth, for Tolkien, is the national identity of England. Ford Maddox Ford, in *Spirit of the People* (1907), defines Englishness:

Modern Englishness manifests itself primarily as a "Historic Spirit," the expression of a "schoolboy" knowledge of the English past, which, over the course of generations, has evolved into a naturalized mode of understanding English history, culture, and nationhood. To be English is,

above all, to know; it is to be conscious of England's historical continuity and to recognize one's place in a community of Englishmen who share this consciousness. (Ford 35)

Englishness is more than fervent support for the local cricket or football club.

Englishness is a desire to know about England as its own nation and how that nation both fits within and is distinct from the cultural history of Britain. George Orwell explains this “shared English consciousness” in a more intimate metaphor:

England is not the jewelled isle of Shakespeare's much-quoted message, nor is it the inferno depicted by Dr. Goebbels. More than either it resembles a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family. It has its private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control – that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase. (Orwell 7)

While this speaks to the unity of the English people bound together through bonds as strong as (slightly dysfunctional) familial ties, it does not describe any specific traits of what it means to be English except a “private language and its common memories.” This is part of the problem that Tolkien was trying to engage: Englishness is more of a feeling

than a tangible quality. For example, one may feel their national pride fiercely, yet not be able to point to which parts of themselves make them part of their nation. Tolkien's contribution is to build on a sense of loyalty and common memories to offer a new mythology. Orwell attempts to resolve some of this confusion by describing some shared traits of the English. He starts by saying that the English are not at all gifted artistically (except in literature) compared to the other nations of Europe, but he does point out some other shared qualities:

Here it is worth noting a minor English trait which is extremely well marked though not often commented on, and that is a love of flowers. This is one of the first things that one notices when one reaches England from abroad, especially if one is coming from southern Europe. Does it not contradict the English indifference to the arts? Not really, because it is found in people who have no aesthetic feelings whatever. What it does link up with, however, is another English characteristic which is so much a part of us that we barely notice it, and that is the addiction to hobbies and spare-time occupations, the *privateness* of English life. We are a nation of flower-lovers, but also a nation of stamp-collectors, pigeon-fanciers, amateur carpenters, coupon-snippers, darts-players, crossword-puzzle fans. All the culture that is most truly native centres round things which even when they are communal are not official – the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'. The liberty of the individual is still believed in, almost as in the nineteenth century. But this has nothing to do with economic liberty, the right to exploit others

for profit. It is the liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time, to choose your own amusements instead of having them chosen for you from above. The most hateful of all names in an English ear is Nosey Parker. It is obvious, of course, that even this purely private liberty is a lost cause. Like all other modern people, the English are in process of being numbered, labelled, conscripted, 'co-ordinated'. But the pull of their impulses is in the other direction, and the kind of regimentation that can be imposed on them will be modified in consequence. No party rallies, no Youth Movements, no coloured shirts, no Jew-baiting or 'spontaneous' demonstrations. No Gestapo either, in all probability. (Orwell 2)

This description of the Englishman as one who wishes to keep to himself and live his private, hobby-filled life without the intrusion of others, is very similar to how Tolkien describes the Shire-folk: "Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today; for they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt" (Tolkien 1). The Hobbits busy themselves with hobbies that involve their "friendship with the earth," and the Shire recalls England before the Industrial Revolution. As for the desire to keep out of the business of others, Sam's father, the Gaffer, provides similar advice: "'Elves and Dragons' I says to him. 'Cabbages and potatoes are better for me and you. Don't go getting mixed up in the business of your betters, or you'll land in trouble too big for you'" (3). The Gaffer warns Sam to keep out of the Baggins' business to no avail, as Sam cannot help "dropping eaves" on Frodo and Gandalf as they discuss the Ring. This is not

to say that Tolkien is criticizing the privateness of Englishmen, but rather the snobbery that often comes with it, a part of the British identity that is a legacy of Imperial arrogance. Tolkien instead wants his readers to rediscover an English identity that allows for privacy, but also collective action in times of crisis: in Orwell's terms, a social body that is "communal but not official." One that "closes ranks" at the approach of an enemy. This is part of the liberty of the English spirit that Tolkien aims to foster through fantasy.

National identity is related to the genre of fantasy, for Tolkien, through the concept of myth. Myths are stories that become part of the identity of a nation, often functioning as a unifying origin story for a country, its "common memories." Myths play an important role in creating the communal, as we grow closer to people who share the same stories as us. Another key function of myth is the moral: the truth included in the myth that the reader is meant to learn from. The moral in myth functions similarly to the "thing" that is to be recovered in fantasy; "the truth once known but now forgotten" highlighted by the opening voice-over of Jackson's film. Myth engages with these truths to teach the reader so that they may apply that lesson to the real world. Thus, myth and fantasy are aligned in their shared goal for engaging with reality.

While the goal of fantasy might be for the protagonists (and the reader) to return to reality ready to change it for the better, the genre appears to be fighting an uphill battle as it sets its real application in the unreal, the fantastic. Why remove the real "moral" from reality? Surely, it would be more effective and accessible if it was not masked in the impossible. To answer this question, Gron examines the "paradox of fiction." That is, we feel real feelings for fictional characters even though they are not real: "We have emotions, such as sadness, pity, and fear, for fictional characters. We believe that to have



such emotions, the objects of our emotions must exist. For example, my fear of sharks seems to require the existence of at least one shark. But most of us believe there is no sense in which fictional characters actually exist. So how can we have emotions for them?" (Gron 81). This problem is twofold for fantasy, as not only is the narrative fictional, but also the fictional events are of a kind that could not possibly exist. For example, Jay Gatsby is fictional, but there is nothing about him that suggests he *could not* exist in our understanding of reality. Gandalf the wizard, on the other hand, is both fictional and magical, and therefore is twice removed from our reality. This, however, does not hinder fantasy in terms of generating a real response from the reader. This is because, as Norman Krietman theorizes, our emotional responses are to images or ideas, rather than currently unfolding events (Krietman 267). In this sense, it does not matter how "imaginary" or removed from reality an image is, it remains an image and therefore generates a valid emotional response from the reader. While some readers may avoid fantasy because they feel it cannot teach them anything about reality, an application to reality is in fact fantasy's goal, and despite appearing to be a disadvantage for the genre, there is nothing that prevents fantasy from engaging with reality.

As fantasy therefore participates in reality, the question becomes: to what end? What is the point of affecting the real from the perspective of the unreal? Tolkien would suggest that the purpose is to improve reality; the real world is missing something, so we must go into the fantasy world to find it again and bring it back. This characterization of fantasy as a genre interested in the unreal for the purposes of bettering reality suggests that fantasy is critical of contemporary society and that it seeks to inspire readers to make a positive change, even if just in themselves, to make that society better. The centrality of

walking in Tolkien's work is one way in which his political challenge is enacted and codified within a particularly English cultural practice.

Walking plays a large role in English culture. It one of the most popular leisure activities in the United Kingdom, and there are many walking tours and well-preserved paths to the countryside to walk on. Today, walking is a respectable, middle-class recreational activity in England, but this was not always the case. There was a time when walking was associated with vagrancy and poverty. The only people who walked in public were people who did not have access to more refined methods of transportation. Those who had enough money to avoid walking out of necessity walked in private gardens so as to enjoy the activity but avoid being associated with poor vagrants. This attitude towards leisure walking shifted in the Romantic period, however, as the English began to rediscover a taste for the wider landscape. A number of influential artists and poets undertook walking tours in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that provided subjects for their work. Tourists followed where the artists led, and walking holidays became respectable and popular. The legacy of this persists in the contemporary culture of walking in England.

Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge (both dedicated pedestrians) were trying to resist an extreme imposition of reason, specifically the imposition of reason upon the spiritual and aesthetic experience. This resistance went far further than merely protesting artistic trends, as walking allowed for pedestrians to resist government policy as well. In addition to ideological resistance, walking by a Romantic poet like John Clare was quite literally a subversion of the government's rationalization of landscape through the Enclosure Acts. Anne Wallace explains, "Enclosure undermined

contemporary English models of Virgil's metaphor [the ideal cultivator/prosperous farmer], appropriating small freeholds and common lands that sustained the independent farmer and agricultural labourer and so disassociating these cultivators from their lands and their means of livelihood" (Wallace 69). Prior to the Enclosure Acts (fifteen different laws passed between 1845 and 1882), common land to which everyone had uninhibited access made up a third of the land in England (Clark & Clark 1009). As England became more industrialized, farmers tried to find more efficient ways to work the land and make a profit. Enclosure was accelerated by a protracted period of war, which increased anxiety about food security. This anxious atmosphere led to the privatization of the land in many districts, and later the physical enclosing of private property with barriers, like fences, hedges, and walls, as landowners began charging rent for occupants of these rural spaces (Mesbah et al. 4). Rural, working class Englishmen were the most affected economically by enclosure, but there was also a side-effect for pedestrians all classes. New barriers to movement were put into place. Fences and hedges enclosed properties instead of agreed upon landmarks. Enclosure laws imposed a greater restriction on pedestrians, making it more difficult to walk ancient ways, and altered existing footpaths. Thus, walkers were faced with a choice: accept the post-enclosure landscape as legitimate and walk the roads between private properties, or resist this attempt to rationalize the English landscape and walk the footpaths as they always had. De Certeau points out the relationship between walker and path as one in which the walker provides legitimacy to a path simply by walking on it. Walkers are making a statement through where they choose to tread. Each particular path is accorded "a truth value...an epistemological value...or finally an ethical or legal value...Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses,

respects, etc. the trajectories it 'speaks'" (de Certeau 99). By abiding by the paths created by enclosure, the walker recognizes and affirms the legitimacy or truth of these paths. If the walker chooses to disregard the path, s/he rejects withholds legitimacy, and ultimately transgresses those boundaries in what amounts to a challenge of a government's authority over a landscape.

The subversive qualities of walking seem to compliment a central concern of the fantastic: the improvement of the real world. Fantasy suggests an escape from reality to rediscover that which might improve it, while walking suggests a resistance to those who would impose a rationalized worldview on the natural experience of landscape. Both suggest that to better the world now, we must retreat, either into fantasy or landscape, or both for Tolkien. This space between subversive walking and educational fantasy provides an interesting avenue for Tolkien.

Some critics have argued that fantasy, specifically escapist fantasy, uses the departure and return to reality to enforce the dominant ideology of the time rather than subvert it. Daniel Baker criticizes Tolkien for participating in this tradition-bound fantastic genre:

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien realized a vision of a world beyond (or behind) the mechanized, war torn reality he knew. Though his stance is "much closer to 'wouldn't it be nice if this were true' or 'I would rather find this true than what I see everyday'" (Hume 47), his medieval, honor-bound, deathless Middle-earth is not therefore less Utopian, but a specifically nostalgic, golden-age, and reactionary Utopian form. It becomes dangerously naive. The impulse behind it becomes not so much a

desire to create a "better" world but to escape into a pre-industrial landscape: it turns aside from the deep-rooted structural problems of post global conflict modernity in favor of the perceived simplicity of pastoral Hobbiton, colonial Gondor, and immortal Valinor. This impulse is reactionary and therefore problematic. As the progenitor of "sword-and-sorcery," Tolkien set the great majority of the genre on a seductive path, a path to the status quo (Baker 439).

Baker not only accuses Tolkien of writing conservative reactionary fantasy, but of steering the genre towards what he considered to be a useless politic for literature; one that does not advocate for change, but reinforces the "norm." On the surface, Baker's assessment seems correct, as Tolkien is indeed guilty of revering a time before the industrialization of the landscape and mechanized war, even showing signs of technophobia. It is easy to see that Tolkien's decision to set Middle-Earth in an imagined past might be viewed as an act of nostalgia; a request for the reader to revere simpler times and desire to preserve a vision of society that they have always known and found comforting. This is an incomplete reading given the central place of pedestrianism within the novels' events and aesthetics. Walking is not an affirmation of nostalgia, but is by its nature exploratory and transgressive; in a pre-industrial world, walking is an activity that tests and challenges the conventions of contemporary society. Walking, in a sense, *saves* Tolkien from falling into a nostalgic pining for a glorious past because he has chosen a mode of travel that reacts against fixity and seeks to create a new space for the walker. Baker's reading of Tolkien as reactionary is, therefore, an incomplete reading of the text because it takes one aspect, Tolkien's resistance to mechanized war, out of the context of

the rest of the story. Baker ignores the fact that this resistance to industrialization is only one element that takes place on a massive imagined landscape. He ignores all the other elements at play in the novels which suggest that Tolkien is interested in the criticism of the limitations of a British identity, in order to allow for a rediscovery of Englishness. Yes, Tolkien associates technological innovation with destruction, but he suggests replacements for everything he resists. Tolkien does not simply denounce war machines, but he replaces them with marching Ents. This means that Tolkien's reaction is not one that stops at removing problematic elements of the world, but one that proceeds to suggest more effective replacements. An idyllic past? Perhaps, but not one that enforces a continuation of societal conventions, but rather challenges them. This idea is enacted by Bilbo as he leaves the Shire as a well-to-do, aristocratic hobbit, but returns with a much different attitude, no longer having any use for the Shire's rules of decorum. In order to provide readers with a space to rediscover a forgotten national identity, Tolkien must challenge the reader's relationship between self and space (or home). Walking suits this aim, and allows Tolkien to have his English reader enter the fantasy world and recover their Englishness.

Baker's charge that Tolkien creates a "reactionary utopianism" in his work does not take the pedagogical dimension of fantasy into account. Susan Poskanzer once described her experience in teaching the arts to ten-year-old students. She found that they had not been exposed to the fantastic, and so their own artistic representations, be it written or visual art, did not stray far from traditional aesthetic expectations, sometimes producing work nearly identical to that of their peers. The children never deviated from what they had been told was "good art" and often imitated pieces they had already seen.

Poskanzer theorized that this was because of a lack of exposure to the literature of the imagination and the absurd, the result of a lack of exposure to fantasy. She argues that children learn the difference between reality and the absurd through a study of the fantastic, and that knowledge of the absurd reaffirms reality (Poskanzer 472-475). Fantasy, at its most basic level, is concerned with making analyzing, critiquing, and improving reality. Often, that recommendation is one of non-conformity because the exploration of the unreal allows us to change what we think is real and allow new possibilities for improving the real world; fantasy fosters ideas that may not have occurred to us without an unreal space to explore them in.

Though Daniel Baker's reading of Tolkien is narrow, it is interesting that he aligns fantasy with the conservative. Even when arguing against the "real-world" applications of the genre, like the rediscovery of a truth to improve society, the language Baker uses acknowledges that fantasy is political in that it is concerned with criticizing certain political agendas and, when necessary, subverting the time's dominant political ideology to improve society. This is another alignment with walking theory, for most walks are, as de Certeau notes, inherently political because where and when we walk either affirms or withholds affirmation of the legitimacy of our path. When one walks, one makes a statement, either with their location, pace, attire, or reasons for walking. De Certeau claims that the walker makes a choice when confronted with a path: to walk it and accept its legitimacy or to refuse and withhold the designation of "truth" from the world-view the path attempts to define. On any path, the walker must either consent or resist. When an administration sets up boundaries, like a government constructs roads and paths, the individual's choice of where to walk, either on or off the prescribed road, is an

expression of their sense of the legitimacy of the government's authority to set up roads and paths. One either conforms to the worldview of the architect of paths and boundaries, or one refuses to do so, and walks where they please. Even this small act of civil disobedience was important to great walkers, like Henry David Thoreau, who also refused to pay taxes while his government supported slavery and the U.S.-Mexican War. Walking was a performance of his separation from the state. Thus, the disobedient walk is a reaction to an attempt by a governing force to impose a particular image of the world onto the walker.

Fantasy also partakes of this reaction. As W.A. Senior notes, "Fairy tales... are inherently political, reactions to forms of authority or to social ideas and ideals. Politics and fantasy form a symbiotic pairing in which the latter seeks to expatiate upon the former through a representative or symbolic depiction of real events or issues" (Senior 1). Senior recognizes fantasy as a genre that necessarily deals with the political, especially questions of the legitimacy of political authority and whether an authority has acted ethically. The method of fantastic commentary on the real is through the removal, or rather, the representation of the real within the imagined landscape. Tolkien does this most obviously as he represents a war-torn, 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe as Middle-Earth during the War of the Ring. Tolkien, and other contemporary writers of fantasy, do not create imaginary problems for their characters and worlds, but rather transfigure real problems into the fantasy world. Representing the real through metaphor allows narrative distance for the reader to deal with problems indirectly, which plays into the purposeful escapism that fantasy provides. This separation is useful because narrative distance allows for civil discussion of often contentious issues. People are more willing to consider ideas and



opposing worldviews if they appear in an abstract way, veiled in an imaginary space. Walking this imagined space allows the reader to confront issues of identity, as de Certeau suggests. If how and why we walk makes a statement about our thoughts on political authority, then surely how and why we walk makes a statement about who we are. Walking, “opens up clearings; it ‘allows’ a certain play within a system of defined places. It ‘authorizes’ the production of an area of free play...on a checkerboard that analyzes and classifies identities” (de Certeau 106). What we walk for and who we walk with suggests an identity, especially a shared identity if one walks in a group. A group of walkers often walk for similar reasons and therefore identify with similar ideologies (at least in the context of the walk). Examples include protest marches or the picket line. Just as walking provides this space to enact one’s identity, so fantasy allows for a new context; a safe space to experiment with identities. Senior also rejects Baker’s reading of reactionary fantasy. Though Baker argues reactionary escapism conforms to establishment authority rather than subverting or challenging that authority, Senior differs:

what fantasy reacts to most aggressively - and therefore most threateningly to the establishment - is the imposition of some construct of rigid authoritarian control, whether it is Tolkien's Saruman, the quisling voice of mordantly cynical realpolitik, or Rowling's comic Umbridge, another factotum bloated with temporary power and using it to bludgeon others who disagree with her limited understanding (2).

While Baker claims that Tolkien resists progressivism or social reform in order to see the political ideology that fantasy reacts against, we must look at the representations of

officialdom that the characters resist. Saruman and Umbridge both represent “rigid authoritarianism” or a hyper right-wing extreme conservatism. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* is written in the wake of World War One, and *The Lord of the Rings* was written during and after World War Two. For this reason, it is not difficult to understand why Tolkien would choose to represent hyper-conservatism, even fascism, in antagonists such as Sauron, who behaves like a tyrant of a far-right movement such as Hitler or Mussolini. While Tolkien cautions against a direct comparison to these contemporary figures, as he dislikes allegory “wherever I smell it,” the influence of the political and military tactics of these 20<sup>th</sup> century leaders are present in his novels. If fantasy engages with politics through representation of real problems, then we must be sure to recognize which people and ideas the characters are resisting. In Tolkien’s work, at least, the members of the fellowship attempt to prevent authoritarian conformity, as Sauron would have all of Middle-Earth under his absolute rule. Gandalf is offered the opportunity to join the enemy and become a privileged member of Sauron’s ranks. Gandalf resists Saruman, who wants to become a lieutenant of Sauron and find a place in the new world order characterized by unquestioning submission to Sauron as ruler over all Middle-Earth. Aragorn resists the traditional conceptions of royalty by humbling and exiling himself. Even Frodo resists the social expectations of being a respectable hobbit of the Shire by engaging in adventurous walks. Therefore, the politics of Tolkien’s fantasy are actually progressive, even challenging established social and institutional hierarchies.

In addition to engaging with 20<sup>th</sup> century European politics, Tolkien is concerned with English mythmaking. This renewed interest in English myth by Tolkien is interestingly timed, as England emerged from World War II a changed nation, no longer

the British empire. For hundreds of years, the English took pride in being men of the British Empire, in their eyes the greatest and most influential global power the world had ever seen. Tolkien himself is a partial product of the empire's colonialism, as a South African transplanted to England. As this image of imperial greatness dissolved after World War One, Tolkien aimed to restore pride in Englishness as distinct from Britishness. Tolkien not only set out to create myths and stories for England, but to also unify extant legends from Anglo-Saxon, Arthurian and Shakespearean sources. As noted above, Tolkien wrote in a letter to Waldman, "There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian and Finnish[legends]...but nothing English...Of course, there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English" (Letter 131, 144). The problem, for Tolkien, was that English myth was set in Britain and well-known to all as "British myth," but there was nothing within them that explained the idea of Englishness, as other national myths did for their respective countries. English legends, he felt, were derived from other nations and cultures of the empire; there is nothing just for the English. The physical landscape of the country and an idea of Englishness or national identity was not properly represented in the myths of England as it was in other countries; for instance, in the Scandinavian literature Tolkien examined as a scholar. Tolkien's fantasy attempts to evoke a specific type of story within the genre that goes back to the ancients: myth. Myth and fantasy are distinct, as myth is a story that explains a belief, like ancient mythology explained ancient religious beliefs, while fantasy is always understood to be fiction. Tolkien cannot go back in time to make the English forget that they do not have a myth, but fantasy is the most useful of the tools available as

it allows Tolkien access to the supernatural, an essential part of myth. In this way, fantasy is a kind of “future” myth.

Walking, as the oldest and most universal mode of travel, naturally plays a role in myth, usually as the hero needs to walk somewhere to achieve his goal. One of the oldest walking myths is the tale of the Labyrinth. The labyrinth is a special space because it involves the blending of the real and unreal. The story of Theseus slaying the Minotaur walks this line as a real man does battle with a mythical beast in the imaginative space of the labyrinth; a real creature [Theseus] in symbolic space. This literary concept of placing the real in an imaginary space is continued in fantastic tales and children’s books: “These books [fantasy] suggested that the boundaries between the real and represented were not particularly fixed, and magic happened when one crossed over” (Solnit 70). Fantasy and walking are closely aligned in their purposes. Indeed, the act of writing, of composition, is closely bound up with walking as Romantic literature demonstrated. Wordsworth himself composed most of his poetry while walking and the metaphorical significance of the act of writing closely resembles the literal act of walking. As Solnit explains, “To write is to carve a new path through the terrain of the imagination, or to point out new features on a familiar route. To read is to travel through that terrain with the author as guide...the story is a map, the landscape a narrative” (72). These metaphors set Tolkien up as a discoverer of English myth. He creates a path through writing, a path that points out the features of Englishness on the familiar route of British culture. Through narrative, the reader walks the path Tolkien has carved to view the imagined landscape. To have this metaphorical walk of the reader occur simultaneously with the literal walk of the characters doubles the effectiveness of the work. The walk is both necessary within the

narrative and *as* the narrative. Bilbo's song demonstrates this as his journey ends, but the road continues in his poem and later on in his memoir as well.

As Tolkien attempts to make a myth for England, it is important to consider why he thought that myth was so important as to make its creation his most massive undertaking as a writer. We know that most western societies have some sort of formative myth, from the wolves of Rome to the *Kavela* in Norway, although the most famous of the west are from Greece. Classical myths are so pervasive that many people today know more about ancient Greece than contemporary Greece. Indeed, the study of many societies begins with the study of its myths. Why? Brian Attebery supposes that "the role of myth in codifying a society's sense of itself and its institutions" is important to understanding why we teach and read myth (Attebery 407). For Attebery, myth is our way into seeing how a society viewed itself. It is telling that the Romans, who would conquer much of the known world and wage war on an unprecedented scale, located their origins in the apex predator wolf. Tolkien bemoaned that there was no English myth, only (fragments) borrowed from Scandinavia, Germany, and neighbouring Celtic nations. There was nothing naturalized that "codified" England's sense of itself or its institutions. As Tolkien sets out to create a myth for England in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, he necessarily attempts to codify the English, to paint a picture of the country as it would appear to most English people. This means Tolkien attempts to take that vague, indescribable "feeling" of Englishness and provide a demonstration of what Englishness looks like in practice. If someone were to ask: "is there a story that explains what it means to be English?", Tolkien would have liked to be able to point to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The attempt at describing Englishness engages in the sort of

“political unrealism” that makes fantasy so useful as a genre. Tolkien does not just remove his story for England from the real place of England. He also complicates the process of removal by allowing different temporal periods to exist simultaneously in Middle-Earth; the hobbits, the riders of Rohan, and the men of Gondor, each represent a different historical idea of an Englishman. Attebery suggests that temporal fluidity is also good political strategy: “The more important function—dare I say political function—of creative anachronism occurs when you take a little bit of the middle ages and plop it down in the midst of freeways and shopping malls. The contrast, the disjunction, transforms the present” (15-16). Having multiple time periods occupying the same physical and social spaces in Middle-Earth creates the contrast and disjunction that Attebery claims is both jarring and politically necessary for the reader. Since the setting of Middle-Earth is obviously removed from reality in Middle-Earth, the English reader is made aware of the different versions of Englishness across history coming together in the story. De Certeau claims that legend is important to making a place habitable, and so to truly inhabit England, the place must have a legend in which the inhabitant can locate him or herself (de Certeau 106). Tolkien asks his reader to imagine what Englishness means in the 1930s and 1940s. How would the English codify a sense of their own society and institutions?

Is the answer to that question not obvious? All the contemporary English reader would have to do would be to walk to a mirror and see himself, think of his own daily routine and societal experience, to find what the Englishman looks like today. A key concept to understand, however, is the difference between Britishness and Englishness. Britishness, the colonial amalgamation of many different culture, myths, and uncoded

institutions under the Union Jack, is precisely what Tolkien is reacting against; “Britishness” robbed England of its own legends and myths by forcing England to share with the other nations of the empire and partake of their nations’ legends and myths as well. Again, what is lost is what is naturalized (that which explains the nature of a place its people) and necessary to the place of England. Tolkien’s fantasy is subversive, because before it can establish Englishness, it must first dispel Britishness. This is not to say that Tolkien is “anti-union”; rather he saw that, while a united Britain had many advantageous, one disadvantage was a loss of the individual nations of Britain. The Scots, Welsh, and Irish would have felt even more keenly than the English. Tolkien means not to do away with Britishness altogether, but rather prove that it should not come at the expense of Englishness. This also provides space for the other nations of Britain to reclaim their own national identities. Fantasy seems particularly suited to the task of asking a culture to forget everything it currently understands about itself and remember a forgotten past because, in fantasy, “we have the ability to envisage states of the world other than the one immediately present or identical with those previously encountered” (Krietman 611). Fantasy allows the reader to imagine a new sense of his/her own society, and the evocation of “common memories” also allows for new allegiances. Just as Poskanzer’s young students could not avoid artistic conformity without study of the absurd, the Englishman cannot avoid his Britishness and embrace his Englishness without a story that adequately allows him to explore all realms of possibility through a representation of the obscured or unremembered.

When one looks at just the aspects of fantasy that are subversive, it can be easy to forget that Baker’s charge of fantasy as a genre that has a conservative desire for the past

seems, at least on the surface, to be a fair criticism of fantasy. Are these two opinions of fantasy not irreconcilable? Perhaps not. Sandner tries to explain this paradox:

Is the fantastic primarily a literature of fragmentation, a subversive literature that reveals our desires in a funhouse mirror, opening an abyss of meaning, questioning the limits of self and society? Or is the fantastic primarily a literature of belatedness, unmoored from reality, innocent, the repository of exploded supernatural beliefs, expressing a yearning for a lost wholeness, promising transcendence? The answer is yes (Sandner 278).

Tolkien attempts to satisfy this yearning for a lost wholeness in his creation of a myth. While Sandner concedes, that fantasy does engage in some conservative conventions like the desire to go back to an idyllic past, he also maintains that the progressive aspects are just as, if not more, pronounced. How can it be both? The seeming contradiction of how fantasy can both yearn for transcendence and express a desire to go back to an idealized past, comes from what many readers regard as a cliché: the happy ending. The happy ending in fantasy seemingly signals the end of the adventure and that all will return to what is in place already. This invites the criticism that fantasy wants to go backwards. The heroes only get involved in the adventure because the obstacle of the quest is preventing them from living their normal life, so they participate in order to re-establish normalcy. For Tolkien, however, the happy ending is a little more complex. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the heroes get lucky at the end. The eagles come out of nowhere to change the tide of the Battle at the Black Gate, and Gollum conveniently slips and falls into the Cracks of Doom after biting the ring from Frodo's hand. This seems unbelievable, even



in a world comprised of the impossible. Tolkien himself described the latter not as a clichéd, last-second rescue for the heroes, but rather as “eucatastrophe.” By this, Tolkien means the opposite of catastrophe. Catastrophe is when everything is going well but suddenly turns for the worse. Eucatastrophe is when things are going wrong and then suddenly turn for the better. Again, it might seem unlikely, but Tolkien argues that eucatastrophe is just as likely as catastrophe if we are only ready to recognize it. Catholic Tolkien would argue for God’s hand in the turn to the good in the plot of *The Lord of the Rings*, but even if it were just chance, it is hard to argue that a turn for the bad is more likely than good; chance cuts both ways. For Tolkien, though fantasy may appear to walk this tightrope between utility and frivolity, it is because of the possibility of eucatastrophe that fantasy becomes all the more real. Pessimists often claim to be “realists,” but Tolkien argues that the real allows for an unexpected turn for either good or ill.

Understanding the relationship between how Tolkien sets up his myth and the uses of different modes of walking requires looking back to the origins of the genre of fantasy. Here, the similarities between the goals of fantasy and walking are noticeable. Fantasy, as a genre, began as an 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century shift in conceptions of the imagination:

In the now almost too-classic *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), M.H. Abrams famously describes a shift in the eighteenth century and the Romantic era from the notion of the imagination as a "mirror" of the external world to its conception as an inward directed "lamp" - a creative faculty that can illuminate the invisible world beyond perceived reality. The shift in attitudes toward the imagination has a profound effect on the writing of non-realistic literature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth

centuries. As Wolfe remarks, a "new view was already in evidence by the mid- eighteenth century" (xv). Wolfe continues: Several literary historians have identified this shift in the theory of the imagination as a revolution, a fundamental break in the history of critical thought. It led, predictably enough, to a new attitude toward the fantastic. (xvi) The fantastic becomes increasingly identified in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the literature of the creative imagination alone, a move possible only after the imagination is viewed as creative and as a separate and self-directed faculty of the newly emerging subjective self (Sandner 284).

There are three things to note from Sandner's summary. First, that fantasy arises from a shift in thought that conceives of an imaginative capability that can show us the real world through the unreal. Fantasy provides the opportunity to look at the real with the advantage of narrative distance provided by an unreal setting. Second, that this shift includes a new conception of identity, which sets fantasy up well to deal with identity politics, specifically allowing for the concept of national identity as an extension of the subjective self. Third, that this shift occurred around the same time that English Romantic poets and essayists began to write about walking.

Though the literature of walking begins only a few centuries ago courtesy of the Romantics, the philosophy of the walker dates back to the ancients. The first walkers in the western Europe were the Cynics. These wandering philosophers were known for their rough nature and manner of speaking, barking, ranting in public squares. It is not surprising the first of the walkers were also the most primal:

The Cynic's coarse, boorish lifestyle featured a primary experience of the elemental. Remember that he was confronted by the elements in all their power and even brutality—freezing wind, lashing rain, burning sun. He was exposed to them by walking, and by his destitution, devoid of a dwelling place and possessions alike. But by the same token he could rediscover a *truth* in that primitive condition. The elemental is the truth of what holds fast, resists, is unmoved by passing circumstance. Elemental truth is wild, and shares in the energy of the elements (Gros 132).

For the Cynics, truth was not found for man in civilization, but rather in his most primal condition exposed to the elements. The elemental truth of this experience transcends the truth of civilized man because, while civilizations rise and fall, the natural world is eternal for the Cynics. Society, for the Cynics, inhibits man from coming to know the truth, as comforts like regular dwellings and personal possessions disconnect man from his natural state. These things corrupt man into a parody of his true self, which he can rediscover only by abandoning these comforts and returning to his elemental state. The Cynics' abandonment of society to rediscover elemental truth closely resembles Tolkien's sense of the functions of fantasy: escape and recovery. First, one gets away from society/reality and then one rediscovers the truth once forgotten. Tolkien wants the English to rediscover, an elemental truth as well: Englishness. In order to facilitate this rediscovery, Tolkien first had to provide a method of escape through walking fantasy. This resembles the Cynics' desire to leave society, as Tolkien asks his readers to leave Britishness for a while in hopes of allowing the possibility for recovering Englishness. The truth of national identity lay not in the passing civilization of the British Empire, but

rather in a primal, elemental construction of the place of England; its people, stories, and landscape, not its empire. Dwelling in and enjoying the benefits of imperialism brought the English further from their true, elemental identity. The function of escape necessitates Tolkien's removal of the English myth from England to Middle-Earth. Not only do his protagonists have to walk to deconstruct and then rebuild their own identities, but the reader must also escape from Britishness before rediscovering the elemental truth of what it means to be English. Tolkien seeks to restore this by having his protagonists walk. The cynics took this philosophy to the extreme:

The second experience raised by the nomad condition is that of the *raw*. Writers of the time often mentioned the scandalous behaviour of the Cynics in devouring raw meat... That rawness, that rusticity in their behaviour and condition, is again a battering ram against another great classical opposition. The sedentary philosopher liked to distinguish between the natural and artificial. What Cynics called Nature was the marshalling of each thing to its essence, each being coinciding with its definition. And that transparent identity with the self can be shuffled through artifice: the artifice of discourse, of social arrangements, of political law (134).

Tolkien regarded the cultural reliance on British myths as an attempt to disguise the lack of an authentic English myth. He saw them for what they were, a collection of Celtic, Germanic and Scandinavian myth, over-writing English myth. To expose this lack, Tolkien, like the Cynics, asks his readers to step back from their society so they may see it more clearly.

The marriage of walking and philosophy does not stop at the Cynics. To start his school, Athens gave Aristotle a plot of land with a covered colonnade on it. “This colonnade or walk (*peripatos*) gave the school its name...The philosophers who came from it were called the Peripatetic philosophers or the Peripatetic school, and in English the word *peripatetic* means ‘one who walks habitually and extensively.’” Before Aristotle, the grove was occupied by Sophists, who were famously mobile and wanderers (Solnit 15). Walking and thinking have been linked since humanity started writing thoughts down. This suggests that the link could be elemental; that thought and walking are biological necessities to us, as Jefferey Robinson suggests: “a person walking is as elemental as a person breathing or eating, a fact and principle of biology and mind” (Robinson 16).

As we move from the ancients towards the Romantic image of the walker that Tolkien engages with most directly, it is important to consider the purposes of that walker. Frederic Gros argues that the walker is interested in three freedoms: suspensive freedom, the call of the wild freedom, and the freedom of renunciation (Gros 3, 5-6). Suspensive freedom comes from walking in order to abandon the burdens of society. William Hazlitt expresses this in his seminal 1822 walking essay “On Going a Journey.” “I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room and fewer encumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it for the sake of solitude” (Hazlitt 1). We feel suspensive freedom every time we take a vacation because we leave the troubles of work, school, and all societal constraints behind us. The idea of “getting away from it all” is the first sort of freedom that the walker enjoys.

The second of Gros' freedoms, though not written of by Hazlitt, is that of the call of the wild. This is the freedom of immersing oneself in nature and existing outside the constraints of society. It is the freedom that comes from a desire to embrace the raw, the elemental. The final freedom is that of renunciation. This comes from the idea that to truly walk, one must be prepared to never return. As Thoreau claims, "we should go forth on the shortest walk, perchance, in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return—prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms" (Thoreau 130). One completely renounces existence in a society of city-dwelling men with all its attendant complexities, and in doing so, rediscovers the simple, the joyous and the true. As we will see, Tolkien represents all three types of freedom in Middle-Earth, especially in Bilbo's change in attitude towards walking as he embraces Gros' freedoms in order.

The Romantic period also saw the shift in terms of priorities of travel. As travel to various destinations became easier, focus shifted away from the pleasure of travel and more towards the pleasure of destination; you travel to get there, rather than for the experience of traveling. Travel is removed from its roots in the word "travail," which means "work." Wallace explains that the pains of travel get in the way of the intellectual benefits of the destination. However, "when walking is practised and/or represented as true travel, then, its extraordinary degree of legibility resists the usual suppression of process with far more vigour and success than other modes of travel" (Wallace 51). The qualities of walking, particularly those that can be read and are indicators of specific modes of walking, allow for an appreciation of the process of travel without an overemphasis on negative aspects of travel that would otherwise spoil the destination. In

this sense, walking, particularly in a literary context, is the best way to make a statement by and about traveling.

Just as fantasy does not end with an escape from reality but always involves a reader's return to the real world, the walk does not end with the decision to step out of society. What happens to the walker who has renounced his society? How can Tolkien create a national identity for a society if the walker accesses freedom by abandoning society? This answer is because the walker does not just leave his home, he discovers a new one, even becoming a small embodiment of an individual nation:

You have looked at the map, chosen your route, said your goodbyes, packed your rucksack, identified the right path, checked its direction. It seems like a kind of hesitation, trampling about slightly, back and forth, as if it were punctuations: stopping, checking the direction, turning around on the spot. Then the path opens, you head off, pick up the rhythm. You lift your head, you're on your way, but really just to be walking, to be out of doors. That's it, that's all, and you're there. Outdoors is our element: the exact sensation of living there. You leave one lodging for another, but continuity, what lasts and persists, comes from the surrounding landscapes, the chain of hills that are always there. And it is I who wind through them, I stroll there as if at home: by walking, I take the measure of my dwelling. (Gros 33)

The new element is the outdoors. Tolkien's adventurers travel almost exclusively in foreign lands, which extends this idea from abandonment of society to removal from nation. If we throw off our imagined society, Britain, we might be able to reclaim our

identity and home in the landscape of our country. England itself, not the idea of Britishness, becomes the source, in Gros' words, of "continuity, what lasts and persists." Tolkien encourages those who would draw national pride from a sense of Britishness to remove themselves from that and experience the English landscape; finding the sensation of having a home in the English landscape will help the reader make this distinction between Britishness and Englishness.

The choice to renounce society is not an easy choice to make, nor is it without large consequences. What motivates the walker to do so? The allure of the freedoms Gros enumerates could be a partial answer, but more importantly, there needs to be strong emotional motivation to walk. Gros reflects, "Anger is needed to leave, to walk. That doesn't come from outside. In the hollow of the belly the pain of being here, the impossibility of being here, of being buried alive, of simply staying" (Gros 48). Dissatisfaction with one's current circumstance, anger to the point that one can no longer stand to stay put for another second, to remain where s/he is any longer, can motivate the walker. This is also what motivates a walk for a demonstration or a charity walk-a-thon: the unwillingness to accept the current set of circumstances and perhaps even a righteous anger. We walk because we are compelled to. Though Bilbo is not initially enthusiastic about his adventure, as he turns down Gandalf's invitation at first, he does walk to honour the Tookish side of his family; a compulsion of sorts. Bilbo's choice to walk is the result of "something Tookish" awakening in him a desire to express his dissatisfaction with his circumstances in the Shire which echoes the tradition of quiet subversiveness of pedestrianism in English culture.



Given an understanding of the reasons why we walk, it is important to understand examples of how walking is enacted through individual walkers in Tolkien's myth. There are several types of walker that Tolkien engages with. The first is the pilgrim. "The primary meaning of *peregrinus* is foreigner or exile. The pilgrim, originally, is not the one who is heading somewhere (Rome, Jerusalem, etc.) but essentially one who *is not at home where he is walking*" (Gros 107). Tolkien names Gandalf the "Grey Pilgrim" and makes Aragorn an exile from Gondor displaced to the northern kingdoms. The hobbits are all foreigners from the moment they leave the Shire. Central to the idea of pilgrimage is Eternal Pilgrimage (*Peregrinatio perpetua*), which "emphasizes the wish to leave, tear oneself away, renounce" (109). The bond between pilgrimage and myth is strong, as Gros explains: "behind every pilgrimage we find a utopia and a myth: the myth of regeneration and the utopia of presence. I like to think that St. James embodies the virtues of pilgrimage so well because he is identified as the first witness to the Transfiguration of Christ. Internal transformation remains the pilgrim's mystical ideal: he hopes to be absolutely *altered* on his return" (121). The pilgrim is interested in self-transformation, with the redefinition of one's self and embrace of a new identity. The fictional pilgrim allows a narrative treatment of transformation, and so provides the opportunity for the reader to witness and experience that transformation too. By representing pilgrims in his characters, Tolkien provides a model for his readers to go on a metaphorical pilgrimage through reading the novels. The transformative goal of this metaphorical pilgrimage is the rediscovery of Englishness. While rediscovery seems not to align with transformation, it is important to note that Tolkien seeks to reconcile Englishness with contemporary society, not literally go back to a time when Englishness was felt and

understood by every Englishman, but rather to bring the idea of Englishness into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and make it accessible to his countrymen. This is tied up with pilgrimage's first function: to forget, because one must tear down the false myth to create a new one, as we must tear down the false self to create the transformed self. As Jeffrey Robinson notes in *The Walk: Notes on a Romantic Image*, "The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory and to do something without knowing how or why, in short to draw a new circle" (Robinson 285). Again, the freedoms and the concept of renunciation that characterize walking also suggest that Tolkien's work must first tear down Britishness to rediscover an "naturalized" Englishness.

Another distinct aspect of this mode of walking is why the pilgrim chooses to walk in the first place. There must be a desire to remove oneself from the current situation, as Gros suggests, but undertaking a pilgrimage is much different from going on a stroll to clear one's head or to remove one's self temporarily from a stressful situation. The pilgrim's goal is a permanent transformation of self, and s/he acknowledges, with the concept of *Peregrinatio perpetua*, that this transformation is a process that will likely last forever. Indeed, it may even be considered the life's work of the pilgrim. Solnit explains that, "Pilgrimage is work, or rather a labour in a spiritual economy" (Solnit 46). The pilgrim is motivated by a "spiritual debt" s/he owes and sets out on an everlasting journey of self-transformation to pay that debt, to balance the spiritual economy. Spiritual indebtedness takes many forms in Tolkien's characters, such as divine purpose (Gandalf), duty (Boromir), shame over ancestral failure (Aragorn), inherited responsibility (Frodo). Each of these characters acknowledges that he owes the world something. Tolkien uses

the mode of pilgrimage as the method of labour for his characters to alleviate their spiritual debts.

The second type of walking that Tolkien depicts is walking as a form of civil disobedience. Walking means embracing personal and collective freedoms and no walker in history better encapsulates this embrace than American Romantic Henry David Thoreau (1843-1916). Thoreau refused to pay his taxes in protest of war and slavery and suffered a night in jail for it. In his 1849 essay “Resistance to the Government (Civil Disobedience)” Thoreau claims that he is not obligated to uphold to the law, but that his true duty, and the duty of all “honest men” is to do what is right, regardless of what the law says: “It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right...Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice” (Thoreau 4). During the time of his protest, Thoreau was living in a house he had built in a forest near Walden Pond as part of his experiment of simple living. This escape into nature meant that walking became Thoreau’s mode of travel, and his escape from society doubtless played a role in his decision to boycott taxation. Though Thoreau is in the generation before Tolkien, he is arguably one of the most famous models for walking as a form of protest or civil disobedience in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is considered an influence on subsequent pedestrian demonstration. The walk or march has resonance for those seeking to change the world through protest or civil disobedience. In the decade in which Tolkien began *The Hobbit*, Gandhi organized the Salt March to resist British rule in India and help start the path towards Indian independence and nationhood. Another famous example of this is

the protest marches of Martin Luther King Jr in 1963 and 1965. King's theological background supports Solnit's claim that the modern walks of resistance are closely related to the "more ancient" mode of spiritual pilgrimage. Solnit, in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, writes of her experience on a protest walk in deserts of southwestern America: "I began to discover...the history not only of the development of the West but of the Romantic taste for walking and landscape, the democratic tradition of resistance and revolution, the more ancient history of pilgrimage and walking to achieve spiritual goals" (8). While Tolkien does not advocate for civil rights on this scale, the walk as a form of resistance to, or subversion of the status-quo, would be of great interest to someone looking to tear down Britishness to rebuild Englishness.

As much as protest walks call attention to sweeping and universal social issues, they have a secondary, more personal, function too. Protest walking is meant to induce change, not only in society, but in the walker. Solnit observes: "Travel has its rogue and rebel aspects—straying, going out of bounds, escaping—but this journey was as much a quest for an alternative identity as an escapade" (107). The search for an alternative identity Solnit mentions is the walker's attempt to redefine themselves, a reaction against their current identity which the walker can no longer stand to inhabit. The motivation for walking is still anger, but it is an anger at being defined or viewed a certain way; anger because of one's perceived identity. Therefore, the goal or purpose of this walk is to seek an alternate identity, to redefine one's self as different from the current identity. This idea of self-transformation aligns this mode of walking with pilgrimage, and highlights why this mode is of interest to Tolkien. In the myth for England, Tolkien provides an

alternative identity for those, like him, who felt Britishness was no longer emblematic of who they are. A walk is the perfect method of demonstration.

If Romantic authors, like Wordsworth and Thoreau, walked as a form of rebellion, what were they rebelling against? For the British Romantics, walking as a form of resistance was crucial, as they were on one level resisting restrictions on where they could and could not walk. The enclosure movement of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century claimed open fields and common lands. Between 1845 and 1882, Parliament passed fifteen Enclosure Acts. By 1914, 6.8 million acres of previously common land had been enclosed and privatised (Parliament of the United Kingdom 1). What is a natural response to an attempt to restrict the space of one's walking? To walk as much and as far as possible. The resulting tradition of walking literature was one of Tolkien's major influences, as demonstrated by the similar purposes of resistance through civil disobedience and the representations of walking in his novels.

The description of both pilgrimage and walking for civil disobedience illustrates why walking theory is aligned with the goals of fantasy and why these modes would have appealed to Tolkien in his quest to write a new national myth. But why is walking important to the English in particular? The rise of walking literature in England begins with the Romantics. English poetry underwent a revolutionary transformation under poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Robert Southey. As Solnit explains, "The old order had been shaken by the revolutions and insurrections in France, America, and Ireland, and the poor were being displaced by the changing rural scene and dawning industrial revolution. The modern world of people cast adrift, unanchored by the securities of place, work, family, had dawned" (Solnit 112). The political landscape of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was one

of deep division between social and economic classes, often ending in armed conflict. Though the aristocracy of England tried to differentiate between their walks for pleasure in the garden and what Jarvis calls the “involuntary pedestrianism” of the working class, walking out of necessity, the attempt was rather futile because the act of walking was available to everyone; the poor man can walk just as well as the rich man. Per Solnit, it is this classless element of walking that makes it so essential to the English identity. This idea has survived into modernity: “even now English people tell me that walking plays such a profound role in English culture in part because it is one of the rare classless arenas in which everyone is roughly equal and welcome” (112). Walking was a universal activity that brought English citizens of all kinds together and this is a quality that would have made it very appealing to Tolkien for his unifying national myth.

Walkers engage in imaginative travel even when they are not reading. This is because when one is walking, one is not usually mindlessly placing one foot in front of the other and thinking about nothing but that repeated action. As the body wanders through landscape, so too does the mind wander through imaginative landscape. We ponder, suppose, and fantasize on our walks: “Sometimes walkers overlay their surroundings with their imaginings and tread truly invented terrain” (Solnit 76). As the mind creates and traverses an imagined landscape of the walker’s own creation, the lines between the real and the imagined are blurred, just as in fantasy. The walker does not just exist in the real anymore. They exist in a double-state. This double traversal influences how and why we walk. In our created landscapes, we find meaning. Bilbo does this, as he builds an image of the Shire with his regular excursionary walks. Through his repeated walks along the same routes in the Shire, Bilbo forges an imagined space he calls “home”

that is laid over top of the actual Shire. Bilbo carries this with him during his subsequent journey.

What sorts of landscapes do we create? The possibilities are endless, but the most powerful imagined landscapes are those which tap into a cultural memory. Indeed, as Solnit notes, “the most profound influences soak into the cultural landscape like rain and nourish everyday consciousness” (85). This cultural landscape is precisely the kind of landscape that Tolkien wanted to create and have a reader/traveler walk through. Middle-Earth serves to “nourish the everyday consciousness” of the English; to provide an alternative cultural landscape.

Gros’ freedoms visit themselves in narrative form as well. The suspensive freedom of leaving the structured world behind is one that can be experienced metaphorically through reading fantasy by embracing the departure from reality and wholeheartedly inhabiting the imagined landscape. Like reading, as Jeffrey Robinson notes, “the walk is an occasion of limited vulnerability. I offer myself to the unpredictable occurrences and impingements. The world flows past my body, which may block, pleasurably or uncomfortably, some sudden cometary intrusion and create a *situation*” (Robinson 4). All else fades except the landscapes, either real or imagined, and thus all interruption is eliminated. The “situation” Robinson alludes to is that interesting “something” that occurs within the walker that would not be possible anywhere outside the pedestrian; the world is too busy. Only on the walk can we inhabit a *situation* because of suspensive freedom.

One of the most influential pieces of walking literature, at least in the Romantic tradition, is with William Hazlitt’s *On Going a Journey* (1822). The walking essay, apart

from poetry, was the dominant form for the discussion of walking and walkers. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, a shift occurred: “just as the walking essay seems to have been the dominant form of writing about walking in the nineteenth century, so the lengthy tale of the very long walk is for the twentieth century” (Solnit 126). Tolkien himself acknowledged that *The Lord of the Rings* was an incredibly long story when he sarcastically remarked that he could ignore his own criticisms of the book “except one that has been noted by others: the book is too short” (Tolkien 6). These remarks are a response to the criticism of Tolkien’s manuscript, which was an unpublishable length in the 1950’s, and required distribution in three volumes. What better description for it than “the lengthy tale of the very long walk”? The politics of the fantastic match up well with the purposes of walking literature, and the literary functions of walking in fiction match well with Tolkien’s stated goals for his myth for England. Finally, the structure of Tolkien’s novels follows a pattern in walking literature, moving from essay to lengthy tale. Through the use of the walk in a fantastic setting, Tolkien asks his readers to step onto the road in an imagined landscape and, just as it is for the hobbits, “if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no telling where you’ll be swept off to.”



## Chapter 3: Under Hills and Over Hills

## EXCURSIONS

*The Road Goes Ever On* is a walking song composed by Bilbo Baggins upon his return to the Shire after his 14-month long adventure with the dwarves:

As all things come to an end, even this story, a day came at last when they were in sight of the country where Bilbo had been born and bred, where the shapes of the land and of the trees were as well known to him as his hands and toes. Coming to a rise he could see his own Hill in the distance, and he stopped suddenly and said:

*Roads go ever ever on,*

*Over rock and under tree,*

*By caves where never sun has shone,*

*By streams that never find the sea;*

*Over snow by winter sown,*

*And through the merry flowers of June,*

*Over grass and over stone,*

*And under mountains in the moon.*

*Roads go ever ever on*

*Under cloud and under star,*

*Yet feet that wandering have gone*

*Turn at last to home afar.*

*Eyes that fire and sword have seen*

*And horror in the halls of stone*

*Look at last on meadows green*

*And trees and hills they long have known. (Tolkien 211-212)*

At the moment of his return, Bilbo is overcome with emotion (both a longing for home and an appreciation for his experiences on his adventure) and he expresses these feelings in the form of poetic composition. Bilbo's poetic reverie is set after the quest narrative and represents a self-conscious intrusion of the narrator in reference to "this story" coming to an end. The intrusion of the narrator also ties the story to reality, as the reader is made aware that, although the narrator is telling the story, Bilbo's song demonstrates that the hobbit is telling a story as well. This interplay within a fantasy world helps blur the boundaries between real and unreal, and allows the reader to more easily accept the fantasy world, or at least, Bilbo's tale of it. This interplay is also present in the song, as the road spans both the probable and improbable. The poem is immediately followed by Gandalf's declaration: "You are not the hobbit that you were" (212). Indeed, after his return from his journey, Bilbo had "lost his reputation" and was "no longer quite

respectable. He was in fact held by all the hobbits of the neighbourhood to be ‘queer’” (212). This moment of composition represents a change in Bilbo, which marks his journey as heroic and the song as a distillation of his experiences. Once one has become a walker, an adventurer, one can never really be the same. Indeed, though he goes there and back again, Bilbo’s conception of his home changes, as he reveres it even more for having seen the other parts of the world. The journey instills in him a greater appreciation of “home,” but also an awareness of “home’s” limitations that the untraveled cannot possibly feel. “Home” itself changes too, as the Shire never regards Bilbo in the same way as it had before they left. This is also true of Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, when they return later from their travels. They find the Shire occupied by enemies and “very gloomy and un-Shirelike” (271). They must fight to liberate their home, which is something the hobbits who never left the Shire had not been able to do.

Bilbo’s composition of his song as he nears home is an expression of Gros’ “suspensive freedom” of the walker. This freedom is revisited at the crucial moment when he sights his home again, which suggests that suspensive freedom will have a large impact on his life even after the journey is over. His regard for the politics and social hierarchies of the Shire has changed, as he is no longer interested in participating in these societal constructs. This becomes evident in his bachelor lifestyle, his continued association with Gandalf, Elves, and Dwarves despite the poor reflection this makes upon his character, and his breaches of decorum especially with his loathed cousins, the Sackville-Bagginses. He suspends his former role in the society of the Shire and becomes happier. Bilbo is no longer the hobbit he was before, but he is a more free and happy hobbit because of it, until the pressure of the ring mounts and the “old ambitions and

desires” at the roots of fantasy reassert themselves. Bilbo also becomes something of a local legend for his adventures, though the details are often muddled and Shire-folk often make the adventure out to be more profitable than it actually was: “The riches he had brought back from his travels had now become a local legend, and it was popularly believed, whatever the old folk might say, that the Hill at Bag end was full of tunnels stuffed with treasure” (1). In truth, Bilbo returned with only two small chests of gold and silver. Enough to make him very wealthy, but not enough to stuff tunnels full of treasure like a dragon. Accounts of Bilbo’s adventure with the dwarves that exaggerate or stretch the truth blur the lines between real and myth. This is an example of myth-making in Tolkien’s narrative.

De Certeau’s description of the interaction between walking and language as a means to embody place suggests that a walking poem, like Bilbo’s, is the best way to represent a place, in this case, home. If we embody a language by speaking it and embody a place by walking it, then a linguistic exploration of walking a place is the perfect intersection of these embodiments of place. This walking poem is crucial to Tolkien’s goal for the recovery of English national identity because the poem is part of Bilbo’s conscious recovery of the Shire. Though Bilbo had an appreciation of the Shire through his previous excursionary walks, this moment after his adventure demonstrates a far profounder appreciation. This new vision is juxtaposed to existing knowledge, as Bilbo turns his eyes to “trees and hills they long have known.” Excursionary walks are walks with a fixed start and end-point that take place within “that circle of a day’s walk” (Wallace 62). These are different from the walking of a pedestrian journey as they start and end in the same place and take place in during the span of a single day, whereas other

kinds of walks can span months and have start and end-points separated by thousands of miles. Through an escape from the snobbery of the Shire, Bilbo recovers the “Tookish” part of his identity. This inherited identity is far older and far more spiritually fulfilling than anything “Bagginsish” because it allows for Bilbo to adventure with the dwarves rather than restricting him to the expectations of a narrow society like the Shire.

Similarly, Tolkien asks English readers to rediscover an English identity that will fulfil readers in a way that Britishness does not.

Bilbo’s poem, “The Road Goes Ever On,” defies a neat classification in terms of metre, with eleven lines containing an extra half-foot, or lines that are a half-foot short of the iambic tetrameter that will appear in later forms of the song. This irregularity adds an element of authenticity, as it is unlikely Bilbo would have been able to have composed a metrically perfect poem on a hilltop on his first attempt. Similarly, the rhyme scheme fails to fall neatly into a single classification. Thomas Percy, in the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1762), notes a similar issue in English bardic material: “the old minstrel ballads are in the northern dialect, abound with antique words and phrases, are extremely incorrect, and run into the utmost licence of metre; they have also a romantic wildness, and are in the true spirit of chivalry” (Percy 29). Bilbo’s newfound disregard for convention and embrace of the wild and organic is demonstrated here. Bilbo’s verse in *The Hobbit* initiates a sequence of performances that show a gradual refinement of the poem in the course of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the later trilogy, the poem is edited and revised subtly, eventually to appear in perfect English iambic tetrameter. The imperfect and variable metre and rhyme scheme of Bilbo’s original suggests that walking, the activity that generates the poem, is also full of irregularities and nonconformities. While a

march is uniform and rigid, other forms of walking allow for variation in pace and gait; the metre of walking is subject to abrupt, unexplainable change based on the whims of the walker.

Bilbo's song also contains generalized descriptions of the landscapes from his journey. The landscapes described in the songs are, for the most part, sinister, physically threatening, and raw. This allows Bilbo to reflect on the beauty of his homeland by contrast. Bilbo characterizes the landscape based on his own experiences there. Describing his journey through violent and frightening metaphors, almost as if he was a war veteran, Bilbo suddenly appreciates what it meant for the dwarves to reclaim their homeland. This is his own moment of repatriation. Bilbo has walked the sublime landscapes abroad and come home with a new valuation of the pastoral landscape of his own country. The focus on eyes in the last stanza emphasizes that this is also a transformation of perception.

The song next appears in the first chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*. Bilbo has decided, on his eleventy-first (111) birthday, that he is leaving the Shire permanently. During his speech at his birthday party, he slips on his magic ring and disappears, never to be seen or heard from again by most of the hobbits of the Shire. This is an escape from social ritual and community. Bilbo sneaks back to Bag End to say his goodbyes to his old friend Gandalf, who tells the hobbit to take care of himself. Bilbo responds:

“Take care! I don't care. Don't you worry about me! I am as happy now as I have ever been, and that is saying a great deal. But the time has come. I am being swept off my feet at last,” he added, and then in a low voice, as if to himself, he sang softly in the dark:

*The Road goes ever on and on*

*Down from the door where it began.*

*Now far ahead the Road has gone,*

*And I must follow, if I can,*

*Pursuing it with eager feet,*

*Until it joins some larger way*

*Where many paths and errands meet.*

*And whither then? I cannot say. (16)*

Bilbo's excitement at being swept off his feet "at last" suggests that he has long wanted to permanently embrace the freedoms of the walk and finality as far as his life goes. It also suggests that part of his motivation for walking is that he can no longer stand to stay put in the Shire. Bilbo's desires are in line with Gros' theories on the motivations of the walker. Specifically, the fact that "he cannot say" where he will end up indicates an embrace of the unknown. Bilbo does not know, or care, where he will go, he only knows that he must go. By leaving for good, Bilbo transitions to the final iteration of himself; his last identity.

This time, the song is written in perfect iambic tetrameter. After iambic pentameter, this metre is the most common metre in English poetry. Whether Tolkien writes in this traditional metre to make a point, or if it is simply most familiar to him as an English scholar and folklorist, this metre suggests that there is something quintessentially English about the old walking song.

While the first version of the song in *The Hobbit* recounts the adventures of the novel, this second version is sung at the beginning of his journey and anticipates the unpredictable nature of pedestrian travel. This complicated little poem represents Bilbo's full embrace of the second of Gros' freedoms: the call of the wild. Bilbo says that the primary motivation for his escape is that "I want to see mountains again, Gandalf, *mountains*" (13). In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo was reluctant to embrace the more dangerous side of nature personified in the Lonely Mountain, but now, it is precisely this rugged and dangerous sublime symbol he seeks out in his old age. On his first adventure, he was a reluctant recruit, but now he leads the charge into the wild. Bilbo also admits the possibility of not returning from the walk, which Gros describes as the freedom of renunciation. Bilbo explains to Gandalf, "I feel I need a holiday, a very long holiday, as I have told you before. Probably a permanent holiday: I don't expect I shall return. In fact, I don't mean to" (12). Bilbo does not truly cast off all ties to the past and society; he means to visit his friend Elrond in Rivendell and to find a quiet place to finish his book. The act of writing here is tied to escape from established identity and social mores of Shire society. Bilbo demonstrates that walking is also an act of rewriting self. When he says he means not to return, he is speaking of a literal return to the Shire; he will, in fact, return from the wild to civilization. The final line of the poem: "And wither then? I cannot say," is another expression of renunciation. The excitement at the unknown and at "being swept of my feet at last" is an essential part of the walk. Bilbo is truly ready to leave the Shire for good.

The titular hobbit was not always this way, though. Bilbo Baggins, and all the Bagginses for that matter, were once the most respectable hobbits in all the Shire; they



never had any adventures or did anything unexpected. Bilbo always upheld the highest standard of decorum and Bag End was a hobbit hole so perfect that it was the envy of all. This is not to say that Bilbo did not enjoy the outdoors. Indeed, “he loved maps, and in his hall there hung a large one of the Country Road with all his favourite walks marked on it in red ink” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* 13). Maps are a representation or abstraction of knowledge, not always a rendering, of terrain. This love of maps suggests distance between Bilbo and the actual experience of the world; the map is an intermediary. Bilbo’s walks are notable because they are unremarkable, as he walks the same paths over and over with his house as a fixed point of departure and return. Fixed points and familiar paths are part of a mode of walking called excursionary walking. Bilbo’s carefully mapped out walks, all within the confines of the Shire, represent an enclosed walk, a walk that does not deviate from the expected path. Indeed, as they are Bilbo’s favourite walks, they are occasions where Bilbo sees what he wants to see, as opposed to discovering something new. Bilbo will not see landscapes he does not expect to see. Unfamiliar terrain would force Bilbo to confront landscape in a way different from his usual walks. Rather, he will see things that comfort him because they are part of a routine; the unexpected is to be avoided.

Bilbo’s map is later supplanted by Thorin’s map, which contains elements that are invisible unless viewed under light from a specific phase of the moon. The map is a device of abstraction, a code for rendering space and time. The map of Thorin is what initially grabs Bilbo’s attention at the unexpected party, as it explains space in a way that makes sense to Bilbo, even if that foreign space is unfamiliar to him. Bilbo leaves his familiar, excursionary walks behind and embraces unpredictability and the possibility of

adventure. Bilbo's departure also allows for the possibility of a recovery as well, as he leaves the Shire and forgets its rules of decorum, but returns having gained a greater appreciation of home and ultimately a more complete understanding of the Shire. Walking allows Bilbo to recover a greater appreciation for his home, which makes walking advantageous for Tolkien in his myth for recovering Englishness.

Tolkien, like his character Bilbo, began with excursionary walks in South Africa and later in Birmingham, but then graduated to more demanding pedestrian modes like mountaineering in Switzerland. This passage from walking for pleasure and local knowledge, to seeking out the dangers and trials of mountain walking mirrors a cultural shift around walking that took place in the Romantic era. Before Wordsworth and his friend, Robert Jones, skipped studying for their Cambridge exams to walk across the Alps in 1790, "the privileged seeking pleasure and aesthetic experience did indeed walk only in a garden or mall" (Solnit 85). The garden is a cultivated place where people can walk and be sure that their surroundings will be aesthetically pleasing. Walkers will not meet vagrants, nor be confused with vagrants themselves. In short, the walk within the garden is safe in every sense of the word. It is both familiar and comfortable. While the Shire is not a garden in the sense of an exotic landscape curated within the walls of a rich aristocrat, it is an enclosed space. The Shire is a cultivated, privately owned countryside that its inhabitants guard fiercely against non-conformity, strangeness, and change. It is perfectly acceptable for Bilbo to walk his familiar paths marked in red ink on the Shire map, but the thought of tearing off into the blue in the company of thirteen homeless dwarves is unimaginable. Bilbo's repeated walks serve as a way for the hobbit to assert and reaffirm his worldview. His walks within the Shire shows that he participates in that

society and the repeated routine shows that he seeks to make this place (or his idea of it) a part of himself. The red ink, traditionally reserved for an editor of a text, shows Bilbo revising the Shire for himself with the walks. It is a false, or at least weak expression of individuality though, as the walk is for the sake of the routine, not for any growth in Bilbo. This all changed at the unexpected party, and after his journey, Bilbo produces his memoirs in “the Red Book,” which connects his excursionary walks to his walking adventure through colour. Walking and writing are linked clearly in Bilbo’s account. Just like the walk, where the “road goes ever on,” the act of writing is carried on by Frodo, and later Sam as the Red Book is passed down.

After a vagrant wizard, and later thirteen vagrant dwarves show up at Bilbo’s door and invite themselves in for an unruly dinner that offends every refined instinct in their host, something happens that changes Bilbo’s attitude towards distant journeys: “The Song of the Lonely Mountain” performed by the dwarves of Thorin’s company. This song tells the story of how the mighty Dwarf kingdom of Erebor was destroyed by a dragon. The song has a profound effect on Bilbo. “Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* 10). The Tookes are one of the oldest families in the Shire. From the Westfarthing of the Shire, the Tookes were known to be more adventurous than other hobbits, and Bilbo is related to them through his mother. Bilbo is inspired by the song and wants to “see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls.” He expresses a desire not only to adventure, but to walk in a challenging landscape; to leave the cultivated, conservative Shire and walk in the wild.

This shift in Bilbo reflects a shift in English culture towards a deeper appreciation of landscape. As Rebecca Solnit explains:

The eighteenth century created a taste for nature without which William and Dorothy Wordsworth would not have chosen to walk long distances in midwinter and to detour from their already arduous course to admire waterfalls. This is not to say that no one felt a tender passion or admired a body of water before...it is instead to say that a cultural framework arose that would inculcate such tendencies in the wider public, give them certain conventional avenues of expression, attribute to them certain redemptive values, and alter the surrounding world to enhance those tendencies.

(Solnit 85)

Bilbo exhibits here a Romantic sensibility. Like the Romantics, Bilbo acquires a taste for nature and begins to long for a different, less comfortable type of landscape. Also, like Wordsworth's abandonment of academic responsibility to take his trip through the Alps, Bilbo enacts this rebellion through walking. Bilbo is no longer interested in the carefully marked walks within the Shire which reaffirm his place within the local aristocracy, but rather longs for beauty, sublimity, and adventure beyond its borders. Bilbo describes this change through weapon imagery. He will, "wear a sword instead of a walking-stick." When Bilbo decides to leave the Shire (garden), he embodies a rebellious shift from tradition and conventional ideas of class and beauty that resembles aesthetic movements of 18<sup>th</sup> century England. Bilbo leaves routine, and therefore the decorum that makes him so respectable among Shire folk. This shows an abandonment of his concern for class, as

conceived in Middle-Earth. The switch from excursionary walks to walks of adventure completes the aesthetic shift.

Bilbo passes the Ring to Frodo when he leaves the Shire, and so the protagonist of the story changes. Like Bilbo, Frodo's first, formative walks are within the Shire, but unlike Bilbo, he is never considered a respectable, unadventurous hobbit. Frodo, having lost his parents at a young age, was raised by his cousin Bilbo and was therefore influenced by a post-adventure, transformed father-figure, and it shows through Frodo's walks: "Frodo went tramping all over the Shire with them[Merry and Pippin]; but more often he wandered by himself, and to the amazement of sensible folk he was sometimes seen far from home walking in the hills and woods under the starlight. Merry and Pippin suspected that he visited the Elves at times, as Bilbo had done" (24). This is not the kind of walk on paths marked carefully in red ink that Bilbo made in his youth. The word "tramp" is telling here because, in addition to meaning heavy footfalls, it is also a synonym for "vagrant." The fact that Frodo wanders "far from home" and in "hills and woods under the starlight," much to the amazement of "sensible folk," shows that there are two kinds of walking in the Shire: acceptable and unacceptable. Frodo walks all over the Shire as if a vagrant, unlike Bilbo who walked specific routes repeatedly. Frodo walks far from home, unlike Bilbo who was a notorious homebody. Frodo walks in hill and woods unlike Bilbo who walked marked paths. Frodo walks alone under the starlight while Bilbo would have never missed his supper at Bag End. In all the ways that Bilbo's walks adhered to the rules of the garden (Shire) and confirmed his placement within the social hierarchy of the Shire, Frodo's walks defy that tradition, and are therefore taken as evidence of eccentricity. The nighttime walk is also more elemental, and allows Frodo to

avoid scrutiny. Walking at night is considered transgressive by the Shire community. This is not Frodo's first transgressive walk, as he often raided nearby farms for mushrooms as a boy. Frodo walks where and when he should not, and this marks him as eccentric and "other."

Frodo later fully embraces the walk out of the garden by actually leaving the Shire. Much like the young Tolkien, Frodo's first experiences of walking beyond the boundaries of his homeland are not always pleasant. The hobbits are temporarily entrapped by an enchanted tree called Old Man Willow, attacked by a barrow-wight on the Barrow Downs, and briefly intimidated by Farmer Maggot. This foray outside of the Shire and the discovery that leaving home means leaving safety is important because it allows Frodo to break down his imagined construction of the world; the world is not as safe as the Shire made it seem. Rather than becoming disheartened by this, Frodo and his friends embrace the danger as an essential quality of adventure. Though they draw danger out of the Shire by removing the Ring, Frodo is still embracing this danger in adventure because dangerous things, like the Black Riders, are drawn to the Ring itself. Sauron sends hostile agents into the Shire, but Frodo and his friends are not escaping that danger by leaving their home, as they take the object that the Nazgul seek with them; as long as Frodo bears the Ring he is in mortal danger, no matter where he is geographically. Frodo not only removes the danger from his home, but carries it with him.

As Wallace explains, excursionary walking is a two-step process, "both the idea of breaking bounds and the idea of returning to them are contained in the same term" (Wallace 119). This idea suggests that leaving and coming back are tied up together. Conceiving of these two steps as one process strengthens the connection between walking

and fantasy, as recovery is necessarily bound up with escape. For this reason, understanding how Tolkien uses the mode of walking in his stories is crucial to understanding how he achieves his goal of creating a unifying national myth that recovers Englishness.

The characters in the novels graduate from excursionary walks to adventurous walks. The adventures that Tolkien writes involve variously the traversal of mountains, marching in hostile lands, and the lonely walking of the pilgrim. Each of these categories allows for a different aspect of transformation to take place for the walker, and for Tolkien, the reader. Mountain walking and marching are both modes of walking that Tolkien himself experienced, and the effects of those walks are felt keenly in the novels. Marching and mountain walking, though necessary in certain situations, both demonstrate the price (spiritual or physical) of the walk. The walks inside mountains represent places where “the spirit world comes close” and the characters’ interaction with the supernatural leaves them altered in some way, while pilgrimage is the ultimate form of spiritually transformative walking. The diversity of the types of walking represented in Tolkien’s novels emphasize that different walks have different goals. All of these walks work together to form one journey, but each mode provides a unique insight into how the process of transformation works at each step.

#### MOUNTAIN ASCENT

The action of ascent occurs at decisive moments throughout the novels. Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* have ascents as part of their climax, and they are transformative moments for the characters; they never come down quite the same character who climbed upward. Climbing is often a prelude to crisis, as terrifying things

happen on the mountains; someone is wounded, killed, or challenged dangerously both by the ascent itself and the spiritual trials and tests that occur when the characters ascend.

In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo and the dwarves climb up the side of the Lonely Mountain to find a secret door to enter the lair of the dragon. On the mountain, Bilbo undergoes a transformation as he becomes one of the leaders of the company, even more so than Thorin at this stage of the journey. It is Bilbo who finds the path up the mountain to the door. He is also the one who finds the door and keeps faith long enough for the entrance to reveal itself, even after the dwarves begin to give up hope (145). Bilbo is the one pouring over the maps, navigating for the company. He is responsible for the success of this stage of the journey. Thorin recognizes this by saying, “now is the time for our esteemed Mr. Baggins, who has proved himself a good companion on our long road, and a hobbit full of courage and resource far exceeding his size” (149). Thorin is preparing to call on Bilbo to go into Smaug’s lair, but he begins by acknowledging the hobbit’s contributions to the company. As Bilbo leads the company on this ascent, it marks the ascent as a place of transformation. Bilbo is also about to enter into a confrontation with a dragon, which marks the ascent as a precursor to crisis.

The first ascent in *The Lord of the Rings* occurs when Strider and the hobbits climb up Weathertop, the old watchtower. They climb up to get a better look at their surroundings, but are attacked by the Nazgul at night. The Witch-King stabs Frodo, who carries the painful wound for the rest of his life as the magic of the blade never allows it to fully heal. The first thing to note is that ascent is dangerous. Climbing up has many advantages, but it is always a risk trying to find higher ground. The second is that this process is transformative for Frodo, as the wound causes him to slowly become more like



the wraiths who exist in a state between life and death. That crisis is averted by the healing of Elrond, but the wound changes Frodo as its occasional twinges remind him of his stabbing; he will never be fully healed of the wound. This is also a transformative moment for Aragorn, as he is able to fend off the Nazgul and rescue Frodo from the Witch-King. Aragorn successfully confronts one of his worst fears: the corruption of men by power. Aragorn exiled himself to serve as a ranger in penance for the sin of his ancestor, Isildur, who failed to destroy the One Ring after being corrupted by its power. Aragorn refuses to claim his rightful throne because he fears he will fail similarly if exposed to power. The Nazgul, servants of Sauron, were originally men who were given nine rings of power to govern their race. This was, of course, a trick by Sauron, who used the rings to enslave the nine men and transform them into deadly wraiths. On Weathertop, Aragorn confronts nine former men who were corrupted by the power of magic rings and defeats them in combat. This exchange is the first indication that Aragorn will be able to conquer his fear of suffering the same fate as Isildur. This the first step on his journey from ranger to king, and this moment comes during an ascent.

After setting out from Elrond's house, the Fellowship tries to climb the mountain Carhadras to pass the Misty Mountains. They are unsuccessful as Saruman causes a storm on the mountain that makes it impassible. This is a failed ascent that results in the fellowship going under the mountain through Moria. Failure results in inversion, and inside the mountain Gandalf dies. Rather than conquering the mountain in some spiritual transformation, they are defeated and forced to pay a terrible price to descend through it.

The fellowship's descent into Moria is the result of failure. Inside the mountain, there is a demonic monster called a Balrog that kills Gandalf. The Balrog is an older

power than elves, men, and wizards. Not only is the fellowship deep beneath the ground, but the encounter with the Balrog suggests that they are also deep into the realm of ancient myth. Demons and monsters that live in mountains, like Smaug, goblins, Golem, the Balrog, and Shelob, all suggest that Tolkien partakes of the sinister mountain tradition, and a descent into the mountain is a descent into a hellish place.

Hellish landscapes are not just found in mountains, but also in Mordor where the destination is the volcano: Mount Doom. Sam and Frodo, finally in Mordor, face a journey across wasteland to Mount Doom that, as Sam reflects, “looks every step of fifty miles...that’ll take a week, if it takes a day” (200). Again, the focal point of the journey is a terrifying mountain; this time, the volcanic Mount Doom. Tolkien refers to Frodo and Sam as the “two wanderers” throughout this stage of the journey. This is curious because this segment of their journey involves the least amount of uncertain wandering; for the first time, they have a clear line of sight on their goal and need only walk towards the mountain across the plain. This is not the first time this contradiction comes up. The prophetic poem about Aragorn, the rightful King of Gondor, claims “not all those who wander are lost” (181). Aragorn wanders, not because he is lost, but because of a self-imposed exile for the sins of his ancestors. This penitent walk is a mark of pilgrimage. Calling Frodo and Sam “wanderers” highlights the link between pilgrimage and vagrancy. Gros claims that “The primary meaning of *peregrinus* is foreigner or exile. The pilgrim, originally, is not the one who is heading somewhere (Rome, Jerusalem, etc.) but essentially one who *is not at home where he is walking*” (Gros 107). Although Frodo and Sam left their home long before they entered Mordor, the plateau of Gorgoroth is a terrain in which the hobbits are most out of place. The black, rocky, desolate landscape is

the antithesis of the idealized, pastoral, green Shire. “For the hobbits each day, each mile, was more bitter than the one before, as their strength lessened and the land became more evil” (202). Clearly, this is the part of Middle-Earth where one would be least likely to find a hobbit, and yet two wander here. This sets the hobbits up as the essential kind of pilgrim, according to Solnit: one that is walking where they should not be. The mountain destination and the quest’s spiritual goal to destroy evil marries the hobbits’ walk in Mordor to the later conception of pilgrimage. Thus, the title of “wanderer,” while initially confusing, is accurate for Frodo and Sam at this stage of the quest. Wandering also implies a movement that is unpredictable, not liable to control. The illogic of the gesture is what gives wandering power, as Sauron will not anticipate the action.

These mountain ascents provide spaces between worlds, which allows for identity to become more fluid; one can try multiple identities in a liminal space. In the same way that fantasy’s removal from reality makes possible a transformative recovery of Englishness, the space of the mountain allows for spiritual transformation as well. Tolkien wanted to provide his readers with this opportunity for transformation, which is why he places so much importance on mountains in the novels. As a terrain that is often the site for spiritual transformation, mountaineering is a mode ideal to include in Tolkien’s myth for England.

Though ascent is a common mode for Tolkien’s walkers, it is not the only way of walking the mountain. These ascents are often followed by descents. Before entering Mordor, Frodo, Sam, and Gollum climb the stair of Cirith Ungol to use the secret passage into the Black Land. They climb for days on the steep steps, but it is not a traditional

ascent because the passage that they reach is a tunnel through the mountain. The three companions' ascend, only to descend into the labyrinthian lair of Shelob.

#### DESCENT; INTO THE LABYRINTH

Like the labyrinth, Shelob's lair is a confusing set of passages that are difficult to navigate. The monster within the maze is another similarity: Shelob is a gigantic evil spider. Gollum, an untrustworthy guide and a previous owner of the Ring, conspires with Shelob to kill Frodo and Sam in order to take back the ring, but this plan is thwarted when Sam is able to kill Shelob. This descent is similar to other descents in Tolkien's novels because it offers an alternate route to a necessary goal; Frodo and Sam first tried to enter Mordor through the Black Gate before attempting to use the Pass of the Spider on the advice of Gollum. The descents into the Misty Mountains in *The Hobbit* and *The Fellowship of the Ring* are the result of failed ascents by the respective companies. Heroes never leave the underworld without paying a severe price for their descent. Shelob paralyzes Frodo with her sting and he is subsequently captured by the enemy. Frodo and Sam enter Mordor, but the cost of the descent is the incapacitation and capture of the ring bearer. For all the spiritual benefits of climbing a mountain, there are just as many dangers to be encountered going through mountains in Tolkien's narrative.

Before Frodo's journey, Bilbo endured his own descent during his adventures. The company of Thorin Oakenshield leaves the Shire on ponies, which they keep until they reach the Misty Mountains. Here, while they take shelter from a storm, they are surprised by goblins who steal the ponies. In the confusion, Bilbo finds himself alone in the dark in the heart of the mountain. In this moment, Bilbo is not a walker by choice, but rather of necessity. He is alone and wandering in the dark with no other choice but to

walk. These are classic traits of vagrancy which also inadvertently push Bilbo into burglary, which he was hired by the dwarves to do. “On and on he went, and down and down; and still he heard no sound of anything except the occasional whirr of a bat by his ears...Suddenly without any warning he trotted splash into water! Ugh! It was icy cold” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* 48). His journey steadily downwards past the whirring of bats suggests a journey into hell. This is reinforced by his arrival at an icy lake, just like Dante, as well as his encounter with Gollum, who is a betrayer who killed his relative to acquire the Ring. Bilbo finds the Ring in these tunnels, which is fitting because the Ring is a representation of sin in Middle-Earth accumulated through the flawed choices of Isildur. It is the beginning of Bilbo’s successful career as a burglar (aided by the Ring’s power of invisibility), but also the beginning of his dishonesty towards his companions, as he decides not to explain the source of his newfound success. His defeat of Gollum in the game of riddles is also through deceit. This labyrinthian walk enacts a moral cycle and a test of Bilbo’s principles. Bilbo journeys under the mountain and enters a metaphorical hell before coming out of it morally compromised. This path under the mountain is an inversion of the romantic concept of the expedition to ascend to the top of a mountain.

*The Prelude* is perhaps the most famous Romantic mountain poem, as at the climax of one book it “leaves Wordsworth atop the mountain [Mount Snowdon] in a sudden flood of moonlight, scenery, and revelation. Climbing a mountain has become a way to understand self, world, and art. It is no longer a sortie from but an act of culture” (Solnit 113). The mountain obviously embodies the romantic sublime, but it is also the site of revelation; an agent of deep, spiritual change within the mountaineer. This is

because, in almost every culture, mountains are places of spiritual importance. Mountains can be the home of the gods, as in Mount Olympus, or a place where one can speak to a god, such as Mount Sinai where God gave Moses the commandments, or the Mount of Beatitudes where Christ delivered the Sermon on the Mount. In many indigenous cultures, the mountains themselves were deities, and in some Asian cultures mountains are important sites for worship in pursuit of enlightenment: “Mountains have been seen around the world as thresholds between this world and the next, as places where the spirit world comes close” (135). While the spiritual world has positive connotations for many cultures, in western European culture, “dragons, the souls of the unhappy dead, and the Wandering Jew were supposed to haunt the heights” (135). Tolkien’s mountains are in this tradition, as the Lonely Mountain houses Smaug the dragon, and Dwimorberg houses an army of the dead. Though Tolkien is not guilty of direct or conscious anti-Semitism, having written a strong letter to German publishers rebuking them for their views of the Jewish people, Gollum does embody some aspects of the Wandering Jew. He is certainly a wanderer, outcast from society for dishonesty and doomed to live well beyond his natural life span; even the name *Gollum* reminds us of the Jewish legend of the Golem.

Despite a cultural shift towards greater appreciation of landscape, the old conception of the frightening mountain was still present in the English consciousness during Tolkien’s day (Solnit 135). Tolkien keeps the older, more sinister type of mountain, but he adds the spiritually transformative qualities of mountaineering that become prominent in Romantic poetry. Bilbo enters the hellish mountain and comes out a changed hobbit, but it is the inverse: he has not climbed to the peak, but walked to the dark heart in the centre. Bilbo’s revelation is not one of spiritual enlightenment, but rather

a discovery of the utility of deceit. This foreshadows Frodo's failure at the Cracks of Doom inside Mount Doom when he claims the Ring for himself. Before entering the mountain, Bilbo is an honest hobbit, admitting to the dwarves that he is no burglar, but "tell me what you want done, and I will try it" (13). On the shores of the icy lake in the heart of the mountain, Bilbo finds himself in a riddle game with Gollum that he is in real danger of losing. To get out of this situation, Bilbo cheats by asking Gollum "What have I got in my pocket?" Gollum, of course, cannot guess and loses the game. Bilbo is aware of his deceit and the seriousness of his offense: "He knew, of course, that the riddle-game was sacred and of immense antiquity, and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat...after all that last question had not been a genuine riddle according to the ancient laws" (55). Bilbo goes through with the lie to save himself, but he starts a trend of dishonesty that he carries with him beyond the mountain. He becomes an expert burglar because of the Ring's power of invisibility, but lies to Gandalf and the dwarves about the source of his newfound prowess. Bilbo is the reverse-mountaineer in this sense, as he journeys down the mountain resulting in the decay of his character, rather than ascending to a spiritual revelation. Descent also provides a space for transformation, but these descents in Middle-Earth serve as a warning to what might happen if one descends too far where one should not. In the process of escape, it is important not to replace your abandoned identity with one that is dishonest; it must still be an accurate representation of self.

#### MARCHING

Marching is a militarized form of walking. Marching is done by more than one person, walking in enforced unison, often to the beat of a drum to help preserve uniformity. The

purposes of marching are either destructive, in terms of conquest, or extreme necessity, as some destinations can only be reached on foot because of their remoteness. Bilbo and the dwarves engage in the latter type of marching in *The Hobbit*. After the escape from the goblins, Bilbo and the dwarves race down the slopes of the mountain in a scene inspired by Tolkien's own walking tour in Switzerland, and are rescued by giant eagles. The eagles carry them to safety and they set out again on foot, this time through the forest of Mirkwood. Gandalf does not enter the forest with the company as he leaves to attend another matter. He shouts a final piece of advice at the dwarves and Bilbo: "DON'T LEAVE THE PATH!" He says this because the forest is confusing and they are sure to get lost if they do not keep to the marked pathway; the wood is also enchanted and the magic affects the ability to perceive time and space properly, thus inhibiting navigation. The dwarves and hobbit have entered a labyrinth. This means that the terrain is confusing, and the enchantments are designed to keep them lost. They will also encounter monsters in the form of giant spiders in this labyrinth. Naturally, the company loses the path, but the reasons why are telling.

Jeffrey Robinson writes "'to walk' is an affirmative-intransitive verb, implying no object or destination, the manifestation of human elemental energy...a person walking is as elemental as a person breathing or eating, a fact and principle of biology and mind" (Robinson 16). When the company enters the forest, they have a clear objective of using the forest as a shortcut to lessen the distance to their destination, the Lonely Mountain. What happens once they enter, however, is a reduction of purpose and a descent into the primal. Due to the confusing nature of the forest, they end up spending far longer there than they intended to the point of completely diminishing their food supply. Hunger,



perhaps the most primal need, leads the dwarves to make decisions with their stomachs rather than their heads. Some deer appear on the path before them, and:

Before Thorin could cry out three of the dwarves had leaped to their feet and loosed off arrows from their bows. None seemed to find their mark. The deer turned and vanished in the trees as silently as they had had come, and in vain the dwarves shot their arrows after them.

“Stop! Stop!” shouted Thorin; but it was too late, the excited dwarves had wasted their last arrows, and now the bows that Beorn had given them were useless. (Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* 102)

These dwarves are on a journey to reclaim their homeland from a fire-breathing dragon; surely, they know that they will need weapons once they arrive at the Lonely Mountain. Distracted by hunger, these dwarves react instinctually to a potential food source. In this moment, object and destination do not matter to the company; all that matters, in this moment, is elemental hunger. The next day, they see a light off the path which Bombur supposes is the light of a feast: “In the end, in spite of warnings, hunger decided them, because Bombur kept on describing all the good things that were being eaten, according to his dream, in the woodland feast; so, they all left the path and plunged into the forest together” (107). Again, the elemental motivator of hunger has caused them to forget why they are in the forest and where they are going; food is all that matters. They are pulled into a liminal space and follow a dream rather than reality. This time, the elemental is manifested in a walk as they leave the path, defying the advice of their guide, Gandalf, and abandon the marker of their quest (and the surest way of keeping on track). With this

decision, the dwarves and Bilbo embody the elemental, primitive walker that Robinson describes, and the result is transformative as they change inside the labyrinth.

The hero's journey, the return with a difference, is dependant on the walk. "Internal transformation remains the pilgrim's mystical ideal: he hopes to be absolutely *altered* on his return" (Gros 121). Indeed, Bilbo is altered by this departure from the path as the company is punished for their divergence with a swift capture by giant spiders. Bilbo manages to kill the spider attempting to wrap him up, and he is changed: "He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach" (Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* 109). He names his sword "Sting" and sets out to explore the forest on his own before pulling off a daring rescue of the dwarves from the rest of the spiders. Bilbo has changed from a timid, frightened, and homesick hobbit; he has acquired courage. He is by no means a Hollywood action hero, but he now has the courage to handle himself in a fight if it comes to it and the means to help when his friends are in danger. This is through an embrace of another elemental motivator: self-preservation/survival. Through leaving the path and embracing the elemental, Bilbo is transformed and strengthened into a better person.

After traveling by barrel, boat, and pony, the company prepares to make its final approach to the Lonely Mountain. There are no paths, and there is a decidedly somber mood within the company:

It was a weary journey, and a quiet and stealthy one. There was no laughter or song or sound of harps, and the pride and hopes which had stirred in their hearts at the singing of old songs by the lake died away to a plodding gloom. They knew that they were drawing closer to the end of

their journey, and that it might be a very horrible end. The land about them grew bleak and barren, though once, as Thorin told them, it had been green and fair. There was little grass, and before long there was neither bush nor tree, and only broken and blackened stumps to speak of ones long vanished. They were come to the Desolation of the Dragon. (141)

Smaug has burned the area surrounding the mountain and transformed the once beautiful landscape into a wasteland. This desolation on the edge of the dragon's lair echoes Tolkien's experiences of the World War One battlefields. Before his removal from the war at the Somme, Tolkien spent much of his time in trenches, but a reasonable distance from the front lines. He lived in the desolation of war for weeks, as trench warfare demanded the removal of trees and greenery from previously beautiful, cultivated, and productive landscapes. The battlefield carved by bombs and shells replaced the countryside with a field of desolation. The company's somber walk in the landscape of desolation that has been brutalized by violence is the final stage of the journey before the encounter with the dragon and the climactic battle. This march engages both kinds of marching, as they march to battle with the Dragon, and they march because the desolation cannot be travelled any other way.

Just as one can march to a battle, one can march away from one. After a skirmish with Nazgul at Weathertop in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Strider and the Hobbits make for Rivendell in great haste because Frodo has been gravely wounded in the fight. Though he gives no specific account, it would have been impossible for Tolkien to spend weeks at the Somme and not see wounded men and their companions marching back from battle. Marches to and from battle represent the reduction of men to machinery in

war; soldiers were marched to the Front and fought until they died or needed rest, then they marched back, replaced by the next shift to keep the war machine firing. Tolkien resists this pattern in his account of Frodo's stabbing. Rather than having Frodo replaced on the battlefield, all of his companions drop all other concerns and focus on getting Frodo to Elrond for medical attention. Aragorn and the hobbits' behaviour emphasizes humanity over machinery or utility, and the disciplined marching to Rivendell is proven to be insufficient to save Frodo, who eventually rides a borrowed horse and is saved from the pursuing Nazgul by the magic of Elrond and Gandalf. A purely mechanized walk is not enough to preserve the humanity of the walker, although Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli will later march in pursuit of orcs who have taken their friends captive.

After the Council of Elrond decides the Ring must be destroyed, the Fellowship of the Ring is formed: "The Company of the Ring shall be Nine; and the Nine Walkers shall be set against the Nine Riders that are evil" (Tolkien 275). The number of the company was chosen to counter the number of the enemy. This sets up a motif of the enemy parodying the efforts of the heroes and vice versa; for every form of heroic walking, there is an evil, corrupted counterpart. Nine Riders are set against Nine Walkers, Ents battle war machines, and Gandalf supplants Saruman. Even Gollum and Frodo are mirror images of each other, with Gollum representing what Frodo will become should he give in to the power of the Ring (which he does eventually, but only for a moment). As the heroes travel off the road and through natural paths and of their own free will, the enemy responds with rigid, enforced, involuntary marching. In this case, the forces of good employ the mode of wandering against the enemy's purposeful marching.

Later, in *The Two Towers*, Aragorn and Company hunt for the hobbits who were captured at the breaking of the fellowship. While the Elf, Man, and Dwarf, search for Merry and Pippin in the plains of Rohan, the hobbits have actually escaped their captors and fled into Fangorn forest. There they meet Treebeard. Treebeard is an Ent, a large creature that looks like a tree, but with many human characteristics. Ents have faces, arms, and legs. They have the human skill of speech, but most importantly, they walk. Ents are shepherds of the forest, which links them to the Rangers of which Aragorn is chief. Both groups walk as part of their vocation and charge to protect certain places. Treebeard says “we do what we can. We keep off strangers and the foolhardy; and we train and we teach, we walk and we weed” (59). In addition to protecting the forest from physical damage, the Ents’ responsibilities include training and teaching, for their species is also a repository of cultural memory. For Treebeard, both duties are bound up in walking. This marriage between teaching and walking goes back to the ancients and Aristotle. To start his school, Athens gave Aristotle a plot of land with a covered colonnade on it called “peripatos.” This linked the mode of walking, the peripatetic, with profession of teaching. Even Wordsworth evokes this tradition, with his character of the Wanderer in *The Excursion*. In Wordsworth’s poem, The Wanderer calls a young man to a natural space to tell a story in order to instruct and help the growth of his pupil. Treebeard walks with the hobbits in the forest and teaches them about the history of the world; he even brings them to his Ent-house, as the Wanderer brought the poet to his hut. Teaching and walking, specifically in natural space, are bound up together. Treebeard represents both of these ideas; he is both tree and teacher/walker.

The hobbits tell Treebeard about the War of the Ring, and he calls an Entmoot: a counsel of all the different Ents to decide if they should go to war. The Ents, roused by Saruman's deforestation to fuel the building of his army, decide to march on Isengard.

Before long they [Merry and Pippin] saw the marching line approaching: the Ents were swinging along with great strides down the slope towards them. Treebeard was at their head, and some fifty followers were behind them, two abreast, keeping step with their feet and beating time with their hands upon their flanks. As they drew near the flash and flicker of their eyes could be seen. (Tolkien , *The Lord of the Rings* 76-77)

Treebeard calls it “the last march of the Ents.” This march of trees evokes a scene in *Macbeth*. In Act Five, a messenger enters and says, “As I did stand my watch upon the hill, / I looked toward Birnam, and anon methought/ The wood began to move” (5.5.33-35). This “moving grove” turns out to be the men of Malcom's army carrying branches to disguise their numbers. Tolkien reimagines this iconic scene from Shakespeare with the last march of the Ents. The comparison does not just stop at moving trees but extends to the characterization of Saruman. Saruman, like Macbeth, was once a respected lord who betrayed his principles to seize power. Just like the pathetic fallacy during Macbeth's rule when the weather of Scotland becomes bleaker and bleaker, the environment is adversely affected by Saruman's rule, as he burns parts of the forest and uses his magic to create storms to hinder the fellowship. The nation of Scotland rebels to overthrow Macbeth, but Tolkien takes this a step further. The natural world, the trees themselves, rise to depose Saruman. The evocation of *Macbeth* suggests that, for Tolkien, the nature or environment of a country is closely related to its identity as a nation. His Ents reject Saruman's

machines, fires, and unnatural rule, and overthrowing the tyrant. The Ents' uprising begins with their walk. The march of the Ents is also a counterstrike to the marching of Sauron's forces. The agents of the enemy march in a rationalized and coordinated way, as opposed to the natural, organic quality of the march of the Ents. The later march of the orcs under Sauron is the counterbalance of the march of the western forces. The juxtaposition of these two ideologically opposing walks in combat demonstrates a clash of worldviews; the mechanical versus the natural, and also old Ents versus new orcs.

Frodo and Sam, guided by Gollum, are taken through the Dead Marshes. Once a great battlefield during the first war against Sauron thousands of years ago, the marshes have engulfed the landscape, preserving the corpses from the battle within its pools. Frodo and Sam must follow Gollum in a single file march, because the marshes are treacherously difficult to navigate; one wrong footfall and the hobbits could find themselves amongst the corpses. The march through the Dead Marshes is a situation where uniformity is essential to survival. As in real-world warfare, disciplined marching allows for survival, as the hobbits follow Gollum safely through this treacherous bog. Interestingly, this representation of the practical usefulness of marching comes in a place that also demonstrates the cost of marching in warfare. The hobbits must step over the corpses from the old battle; marching granted these fallen warriors no such safety. Here, Tolkien seems to suggest that there are contexts in which marching is necessary for keeping the walkers safe, but that marching is also a mode of walking that can result in death. Tolkien would have learned both of these truths about marching on the battlefield at the Somme.

## PILGRIMAGE

Frodo and the other hobbits first meet Aragorn as “Strider” in Bree. Pursued by the terrifying Black Riders, Frodo and company allow Strider to be their guide as far as Rivendell. A Ranger later revealed to be the exiled heir to the throne of Gondor, Strider’s name reveals him to be a walker. He is also derisively called “Longshanks” by some citizens of Bree. He insists that the party travel on foot to Rivendell, as his knowledge of the terrain will allow them to travel faster and more secretly. Frodo is initially skeptical of this plan: “how could they hope to reach Rivendell on foot, pursued by mounted enemies?” Strider explains, “‘Ponies would not help us to escape horseman,’ he said at last, thoughtfully, as if he had guessed what Frodo had in mind. ‘We should not go much slower on foot, not on the roads I mean to take. I was going to walk in any case’” (Tolkien 171). Strider understands the advantage of secrecy in walking off the expected path. “Wandering” has the advantage of being unpredictable as opposed to conscripted, organized movement: “‘I shall try to get lost as soon as possible. I know one or two ways out of Bree-land other than the main road’” (164). Aragorn leads the hobbits through forests, hills, and marshes, and despite an inevitable clash with the Black Riders that wounds Frodo, he successfully delivers the Ring to Rivendell. Along the way, the hobbits remark of Strider, “it seemed that he was learned in old lore, as well as in the ways of the wild” (175). He knows so much about the wild because of his self-imposed exile and job as a Ranger and his tutoring by nature. As a Ranger, Aragorn walks the boundaries of the Shire, providing protection for the land unbeknownst to the hobbits. In this way, the walks of Aragorn help affirm and protect the hobbits’ version of the Shire because he protects it from outside influence, just as Bilbo’s excursionary walks represent an attempt



to compose a sense of home. Living in self-imposed exile, Strider is ashamed of his heritage, as he is the descendant of Isildur who committed one of Middle-Earth's original sins when he refused to destroy the One Ring. Aragorn feels responsible for the current state of Middle-Earth as all the current conflict would have never happened had Isildur destroyed the Ring thousands of years ago. The blood of Isildur flows through his veins, and therefore, Strider supposes, the same "weakness." He exiles himself as a form of atonement for the sins of his ancestor, and chooses to work to better the world that Isildur refused to save. Solnit explains that, "Pilgrimage is work, or rather a labour in a spiritual economy" (Solnit 46). The pilgrim is motivated by a "spiritual debt" s/he owes, and sets out on an everlasting journey of self-transformation to pay that debt, to balance the spiritual economy. For Strider, he takes on the debt of Isildur and walks the earth, working until he repays that debt. Tolkien uses the mode of pilgrimage as the method of labour for Strider to alleviate his spiritual debts. In Rivendell, when the Council of Elrond decides that the Ring must be destroyed, Strider quickly volunteers to be part of the Fellowship of the Ring because he feels that, in destroying the Ring, he will have paid off Isildur's debt with his own and can reclaim his ancestral throne.

In Book Four (*The Ring Goes East*), the narrative returns to Frodo and Sam, who have set out on their own to take the Ring to Mordor. They get lost in the confusing, rocky landscape of Eryn Muil, but also discover that they are being followed by Gollum. The pair set a trap for Gollum and allow him to keep his life on the condition that he be their guide. This journey becomes an opportunity for redemption for Gollum as well. Though he is ultimately unable to break free of the influence of the Ring, Gollum has an opportunity to repay his debt and transform back into Sméagol by helping Frodo on his

pilgrimage to destroy the Ring. Gollum reluctantly agrees and leads them out of the rocks to the Dead Marshes. The hobbits traverse this landscape barefoot, with the task of destroying the evillest object in the world. This is, as Solnit claims, “labour in a spiritual economy.” The hobbits embody many aspects of this pilgrimage:

Pilgrimage is one of the fundamental structures a journey can take—the quest in search of something, if only one’s own transformation, the journey towards a goal—and for pilgrims, walking is work. Secular walking is often imagined as play, however competitive and rigorous that play, and uses gear and techniques to make the body more comfortable and more efficient. Pilgrims, on the other hand, often try to make their journey harder, recalling the origin of the word travel in travail, which also means work, suffering, and the pangs of childbirth. Since the Middle Ages, some pilgrims have traveled barefoot or with stones in their shoes, or fasting, or in special penitential garments. (46-45)

Frodo and Sam choose to strike out on their own, towards the road that includes rock labyrinths, marshes, and a staircase carved into the side of a mountain, rather than follow the rest of the company to Gondor (Frodo was faced with this decision before the breaking of the fellowship). They have undoubtedly chosen the harder road, which reflects the labour or work required to destroy the ring; they even travel barefoot, as many other pilgrims do.

## Chapter 4: Concerning Walkers

After the examination of the different kinds of walks that Tolkien writes in order to tell his myth, it is important to examine the kinds of walkers that he represents in the novels as well. Understanding not just the modes of walking, but the characters through which these modes are enacted, is crucial to understanding how walking functions in Tolkien's myth. The graduation from one mode of walking to the next leads the reader on a transformative journey, but the characters that the reader is asked to identify with, the protagonists, are the examples of this change in action. Bilbo and Frodo are obviously the main protagonists in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* respectively, but Gandalf is also present in both stories and plays the crucial role of guide for both. The Grey Pilgrim, because of his resurrection and divine purpose, is one of the three Christ figures in *The Lord of the Rings*, along with Frodo and Aragorn, who complete the list of walkers to be examined. Aragorn, in addition to being a Christ figure, is also the titular King who returns, which evokes the famous British legend of King Arthur. His transformation from ranger to king, as well as his alias of "Strider," makes him a crucial walking character in *The Lord of the Rings*.

### GANDALF

After the breaking of the fellowship at the end of Book One of *The Lord of the Rings*, Merry and Pippin are captured by the enemy. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli give chase in what is a four-day long pursuit that covers 150 miles. That is an incredible pace of almost forty miles per day as the elf, man, and dwarf attempt to rescue their companions in a pursuit that would have taken a devastating toll on their bodies. This chase, a refusal to abandon their companions to suffering, is an expression of heroism through walking. The

trio are intercepted by Eomer, nephew of King Théoden of Rohan, who has been exiled for speaking out against the King when Théoden is under the influence of Saruman. Walking brings the pursuers into contact with rebel loyalists—men on the fringes of power. These loyalists are expelled from court, pushed into the wilderness in an attempt by Grima and Saruman to discredit them; men in the wild will not be trusted over the refined men at Meduseld. This is, of course, ironic because the riders are loyal to the legitimate power of the realm, while Grima and Saruman corrupt that power for their own purposes. Eomer tells the trio about the current political situation in Rohan. When he learns that they are trying to rescue Merry and Pippin from Saruman's orcs, he warns them about crossing the wizard. "It is ill dealing with such a foe: he is a wizard both cunning and dwimmer-crafty, having many guises. He walks here and there, they say, as an old man hooded and cloaked, very like to Gandalf, as many now recall" (Tolkien 25). Eomer distrusts Saruman not only because he feels he is influencing his Uncle, but also because he takes the disguise of a vagrant. Interestingly, he compares Saruman to Gandalf in this regard. Although he is right to fear Saruman, the reader knows that Gandalf is good and trustworthy. Eomer does not make this distinction between the two wizards, as he sees their similarities in both garb and tendency to wander. Vagrancy is an effective disguise as a vagrant is often overlooked, or not regarded closely. It is this attitude towards vagrancy that allows Eomer to place Gandalf and Saruman in the same category. Interestingly, Gandalf meets the description of "vagrant" far better than Saruman. Gandalf is homeless, with no fixed abode, and is in a constant state of mobility. Saruman lives in the tower of Orthanc, his established seat of power. Gandalf, though appearing to be a vagrant, is far more virtuous than Saruman. Through Eomer's

comparison of the two wizards, Tolkien calls into question conventional attitudes about vagrancy. The title of pilgrim, however, fits Gandalf much better than vagrant, though. Both vagrancy and pilgrimage involve renunciation, but the pilgrim's goal is spiritual transformation, while the vagrant walks because he has no fixed home. For the vagrant, the loss of home does not come with the goal of spiritual recovery like it does for the pilgrim. Gandalf is homeless by choice, as he has the never-ending task of going on quests to protect Middle-Earth.

Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, unaware that their friends are safe with Treebeard, track the hobbits into Fangorn. There, they are surprised by stranger. "It looked like an old-beggar man, walking wearily, leaning on a rough staff. His head was bowed, and he did not look towards them. In other lands, they would have greeted him with kind words; but now they stood silent" (85). Most notable is the change in attitude of the heroes; normally, they would greet the strangers kindly, but after Eomer's warning them about the vagrant Saruman, they are immediately suspicious of the old-beggar man. This suspicion turns out to be unwarranted, as the old man is in fact Gandalf returned from the dead. Gandalf the grey, as he was called before his death, was also known as the "Grey Pilgrim." He was called this, presumably, because of his wandering lifestyle and his connection to the spiritual world (Gandalf is an angel of sorts in Middle-Earth). His return, however, also fulfils an important aspect of pilgrimage. As Gros writes, "behind every pilgrimage we find a utopia and a myth: the myth of regeneration and the utopia of presence. I like to think that St. James embodies the virtues of pilgrimage so well because he is identified as the first witness to the Transfiguration of Christ. Internal transformation remains the pilgrim's mystical ideal: he hopes to be absolutely *altered* on

his return” (Gros 121). Gandalf’s resurrection signals that he is a Christ figure, but this moment also invokes the transfiguration itself. Gandalf climbs up to the heroes before revealing himself, clad all in radiantly bright white robes. He does this before a group of three, just as Christ transfigures before three disciples. He is also hailed as “Mithrandir!” which is a name for Gandalf that comes from the Land of the Undying. Reborn as Gandalf the White, this character embodies the pilgrim’s goal of spiritual transformation, to be changed upon return. Gandalf the white ceases to be a subordinate of Saruman and becomes “Saruman as he should have been.” He transcends that hierarchy through his journey to death and back. Gandalf embodies Tolkien’s concept of recovery, as he recovers the identity of wizard from Saruman, who had warped it through his evil. He is Saruman as we “were meant to see him.” In this moment, Gandalf becomes the ultimate pilgrim.

#### STRIDER

Strider’s own journey from death to rebirth is associated with walking in book 5. With Minas Tirith under siege, Aragorn and the armies of Rohan rush to the aid of their allies. On their way, Aragorn speaks to a fellow ranger who says to him: “the days are short. If thou art in haste, remember the Paths of the Dead” (Tolkien 31). The Paths of the Dead is a mountain pass inhabited by the ghost oath breakers, cursed to never rest until they honour their pledge to fight for Gondor centuries before. Aragorn hopes to command this army of the dead and use the shortcut through the mountains to reach Minas Tirith and lift the siege. Dwimorberg, the Haunted Mountain, aligns closely with the Christian European conception of mountains as hellish realms, sometimes haunted by spirits of the unhappy dead. Mountains are almost universally seen as “thresholds between this world

and the next” (Solnit 135). Aragorn’s journey through the mountain to the realm of the dead is part a Katabasis; a journey to the underworld. He enters the mountain as the ranger called Strider, but exits it claiming: “I am Elessar” (Tolkien 47). This is his Elvish name, and the name that he will formally assume when he claims the throne of Gondor. Aragorn’s companions also undergo a change as they walk the paths of the dead. Aragorn enters accompanied voluntarily by his friends, as he emphasizes that no oath compels them to continue with him. Elessar exits the mountain with a great host who are bound by oath to obey him. This change is also echoed by Pippin, who later asks “Where has Strider, I mean the Lord Aragorn...gone?” (57). Aragorn’s journey through the hellish mountain is his first step towards becoming King. His fitness to be king is affirmed by walking a dangerous path of death and rebirth. Though he acquires a new name, Aragorn is so amused by Pippin’s continued preference for calling him “Strider” that he takes the second name of “Telcontar” which means “Strider” in Elvish. Thus naming his house line, he ensures that the throne of Gondor will always be someone associated with walking.

Aragorn’s companionship with Frodo binds the two forever, as the act of walking together is an expression of linked destiny. Aragorn could not have become King of Gondor if Frodo had not destroyed the Ring, and Frodo could not have destroyed the Ring without the guidance of Strider and the heroism of Aragorn at the Battle of the Black Gate. They shared the road together, and the lowborn hobbit is equated with the king through walking. This is ritualized during Aragorn’s coronation through the formal walk toward the dais that symbolizes a re-enactment of the journey he shared with the hobbits.

## FRODO & SAM

Frodo and Sam begin their journey in Mordor with Sam's heroic rescue after Frodo had been captured by the enemy. The hobbits escape the tower of Cirith Ungol, themselves in orc clothing, and begin their journey to Mount Doom. On this journey, Frodo and Sam perform marching, ascent, descent, and pilgrimage, and they enter their most elemental states. This walk is the culmination of all the walks in Tolkien's novels.

The hobbits begin by fleeing the tower and quickly need to get off the road. To avoid being seen, they jump off the side of the road and fall in to a thick, thorny growth. This has an effect on their clothing: "They had a struggle to get out of the thicket. The thorns and briars were as tough as wire and as clinging as claws. Their cloaks were rent and tattered before they broke free at last" (183). Frodo and Sam were already clothed in the garb of the cultureless orcs, and now their clothing is damaged, reduced to tatters. This suggests that Frodo and Sam will have to embrace vagrancy during their journey, as the orcs are nomadic and have no fixed cities in which to take refuge, and their clothing now resembles the rags of the vagrant. This is fitting, as the hobbits are repeatedly described in the narrative as "the wanderers" during their trek across Mordor. It is also significant that the hobbits become entangled in thorns. Thorns are associated with suffering in Christian myth, and suffering for the sake of spiritual gain is a key element of pilgrimage.

Once out of the thicket, Frodo and Sam must climb down onto the plains of Mordor, as they entered the country through a mountain pass. This marks another mode: descent. "Slowly and painfully they clambered down, groping, stumbling, scrambling among rock and briar and dead wood in the blind shadows, down and down until they



could go no further” (183). This descent is not like the others in the novels as they are not within a mountain, but the hobbits do descend into the hellish landscape of Mordor, and the effect on Frodo is severe as the Ring grows heavier with each step. This leads the wanderers to cast off some unnecessary weight: “The ring is enough. The extra weight is killing me. It must go’...Frodo laid aside his cloak and took off the orc-mail and flung it away” (184). Aside from the practical motivation of this action, it is a stripping away of non-essential items; part of their orc-ish disguises (though they retain some of the weaponry and rags). They are reduced to a more natural state with the reduction of their disguises and begin embracing a freedom of leaving markers of belonging to a particular group, like the orcs.

They next engage in two marches. The first march is on their own, and they use it as an efficient way to traverse the warlike terrain of Mordor; it is a place where armies reside, so naturally the military mode of walking would be best to walk there: “So now they crossed the stony bed and took to the orc-path, and for some time they marched along it” (186). It is also interesting to note that they travel by the “orc-path” as opposed to a different road. They will use the older roads, routes that predate the occupation of Mordor by Sauron, later in the march, and they will also later simply cut across the pathless land. They start on the orc-path because it is useful, as they need to go north before turning east to the mountain, but the progression from orc-path, to older road, to unmarked routes through the plain, suggests that Frodo and Sam find that the path, and later the road, are no longer useful to their journey. As de Certeau suggests, they revoke the legitimacy of those paths by abandoning them, refusing to walk by orc-path or even man-made path, trusting only to the legitimacy of the straight route to the volcano which

they must chart for themselves. Their march on the orc-path eventually leads to their capture by a group of marching orcs, though their disguises hold up long enough for them to escape. This suggests that it is dangerous to take up the modes of walking and paths of the enemy.

Frodo and Sam escape the orcs by taking advantage of convoluted intersection in the path. In the confusion, Frodo and Sam drop to their hands and knees and crawl away unseen: “Slowly on hand and knee the hobbits crawled away out of the turmoil...’Come on, Mr. Frodo!’ he[Sam] whispered. ‘One more crawl, and then you can lie still.’ With a last despairing effort Frodo raised himself on his hands and struggled on for maybe twenty yards. Then he pitched down into a shallow pit that opened unexpectedly before them, and there he lay like a dead thing” (199). This escape costs nearly all of Frodo’s energy, and represents a reversion to the earliest predecessor to the walk: crawling. To escape the orcs, the walk is not enough. The hobbits have to resort to crawling, which is a more bestial, elemental mode. They are abandoning more and more markers of civilization as they journey deeper into Mordor.

After Frodo’s collapse, Sam begins to lose hope of ever reaching Mount Doom, but something changes in Sam on this walk: “But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam’s plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue” (200). In this moment of despair, Sam transforms and becomes the strength upon which Frodo will rely for the rest of the journey. He turns into “some creature,” which is again, a marker of the elemental quality of the walk. The change is

also linked to his “plain hobbit-face,” which suggests that this newfound strength is hidden within the people of the Shire if they can only recover it. Sam taps into this strength again when he carries Frodo:

“I can’t carry it for you, but I can carry you” ...He[Sam] had feared that he would have barely strength to lift his master alone, and beyond that he had expected to share in the dreadful dragging weight of the accursed Ring. But it was not so. Whether because Frodo was so worn by his long pains, wound of knife, and venomous sting, and sorrow, fear, and homeless wandering, or because some gift of final strength was given to him, Sam lifted Frodo with no more difficulty than if he were carrying a hobbit-child pig-a-back in some romp on the lawns or hayfields of the Shire.” (208-209)

Again, Sam’s new strength as a walker is linked to his roots in the Shire, suggesting that the strength was there all along, he needed only to recover it. The Warden of the Houses of Healing observes this quality: “They are a remarkable race... Very tough in fibre, I deem” (136). Sam’s recovery of his strength drawn from the Shire, his home, supports the idea that Tolkien is asking his readers to recover a similar strength drawn from their home.

By this stage of their journey, Frodo and Sam have abandoned all roads and begin “crawling from hollow to hollow, flitting behind such cover as they could find” (201). This dashing from cover to cover in the barren landscape evokes the movement of soldiers on the battlefield in trench warfare, as Tolkien would have experienced in World

War One. During a period of rest, Frodo and Sam again decide that they can do without some of the things they carry:

“There’s other things we might do without. Why not lighten the load a bit?...Frodo....picking up his orc-shield he flung it away and threw his helmet after it. Then pulling off the grey cloak he undid the heavy belt and let it fall to the ground, and the sheathed sword with it. The shreds of the black cloak he tore off and scattered.

“There, I’ll be an orc no more,” he cried, “and I’ll bear no weapon fair or foul. Let them take me, if they will!”

Sam did likewise, and put aside his orc-gear; and he took out all the things in his pack. Somehow each of them had become dear to him, if only because he had borne them so far with so much toil. Hardest of all it was to part with his cooking-gear. Tears welled in his eyes at the thought of casting it away.” (204-205)

Frodo and Sam abandon almost all of their possessions and disguises, save their clothing and the Ring. Frodo’s cry of “I’ll be an orc no more” represents a renunciation of his assumed identity. His orc identity, or disguise, kept him safe on the road, but now on the rugged plains of Mordor, he has no use for any identity. Sam embraces the freedom of renunciation when he abandons his cooking gear, which is an essential part of his identity as caretaker to Frodo. This moment also suggests that the hobbits embrace the idea that they will not be coming back, as they leave behind their means to prepare food. Here, crawling through the barren terrain, far from the road, without any possession or tools for

survival, Frodo and Sam are at their most elemental. This is the climax of not just the plot, but for walking in the novel as well.

The recovery, or seeing again, as Tolkien suggests, is completed with Frodo's confrontation with Gollum on the slopes of Mount Doom. Gollum attacks Frodo and tries to steal back the Ring, but before Sam can intervene, Frodo throws off Gollum with surprising strength given his struggles on the march. As Frodo stands over Gollum, Sam notices a change in both of them. "Sam saw these two rivals with other vision. A crouching shape, scarcely more than the shadow of a living thing, a creature now wholly ruined and defeated, yet filled with a hideous lust and rage; before it stood stern, untouchable now by pity, a figure robed in white, but at its breast it held a wheel of fire. Out of the fire there spoke a commanding voice" (211). Frodo's white robe is reminiscent of Gandalf's transformation, and the mountain setting also evokes the transfiguration of Christ; this is the climax of Frodo's pilgrimage. The moment is tainted, however, by the Ring. The "wheel of fire" of Frodo's chest is the source from which he draws his strength in this moment. This ill-gotten strength contrasts with Sam's strength as discovered on the journey; Frodo draws from external power, which is evil, while Sam recovers a pure strength from within. This foreshadows Frodo's ultimate failure at the Cracks of Doom.

Though Frodo's journey takes him to the walking climax in Mordor, the journey was first begun through his taking up of Bilbo's walking mantle. Frodo carries on Bilbo's walking tradition, emphasized by his repetition of "The Road Goes Ever On." The next time the song appears is many years after Bilbo has last been seen in the Shire. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, are walking down a road near the Old Forest. Frodo thinks he has tricked his friends into thinking the purpose of their journey is to move him into a

new house, but Sam and the others know the true mission is to leave the Shire to bring the Ring to meet Gandalf:

“The road goes on for ever,” said Pippin; “but I can’t without a rest. It is high time for lunch.” He sat down on the bank at the side of the road and looked away east into the haze, beyond which lay the River, and the end of the Shire in which he had spent all of his life. Sam stood by him. His round eyes were wide open—for he was looking across lands he had never seen to a new horizon.

“Do elves live in those woods?” he asked.

“Not that I ever heard,” said Pippin. Frodo was silent. He too was gazing eastward along the road, as if he had never seen it before. Suddenly he spoke, aloud but as if to himself, saying slowly:

*The Road goes ever on and on*

*Down from the door where it began.*

*Now far ahead the Road has gone,*

*And I must follow, if I can,*

*Pursuing it with weary feet,*

*Until it joins some larger way*

*Where many paths and errands meet.*

*And whither then? I cannot say.*

“That sounds like a bit of old Bilbo’s rhyming,” said Pippin. “Or is it one of your imitations? It does not sound altogether encouraging.”

“I don’t know,” said Frodo. “It came to me then, as if I was making it up; but I may have heard it long ago.” (57)

The poem is identical to the version Bilbo sang upon his departure except for one word. Where Bilbo sang “Pursuing it with *eager* feet,” Frodo sings “Pursuing it with *weary* feet.” The difference is key because it highlights the different attitudes about their walks that Frodo and Bilbo have. Bilbo is leaving responsibility behind and embracing a wild freedom; he walks without a care. Frodo is leaving on a mission to save the world carrying the evillest object in existence around his neck. Frodo’s burden makes his reluctant walk more difficult, and thus his feet wearier, rather than eager. Bilbo walks for pleasure, while Frodo has just begun a long and difficult pilgrimage to save the world. The change of just one word illustrates the difference.

### Conclusion: A Far Green Country

The old walking song appears a second last time in *The Lord of the Rings*, by Bilbo in Rivendell after the Fellowship has returned from their adventure. Bilbo is old and frail now, finally feeling his age, and bids farewell to Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, as they prepare to leave Rivendell and return home to the Shire. Bilbo declares himself a content hobbit staying amongst the elves and says:

*The Road goes ever on and on*

*Out from the door where it began.*

*Now far ahead the Road has gone,*

*Let others follow it who can!*

*Let them a journey new begin,*

*But I at last with weary feet*

*Will turn towards the lighted inn,*

*My evening-rest and sleep to meet. (260)*

This much sadder rendition signals that Bilbo is ready to die soon. Instead of following the road, now Bilbo lets others follow if they can. His walking days are almost over; he will only take one more journey, a ship across the sea to share in metaphorical death with Frodo. He leaves behind his writing, the red book in which he has recorded all his adventures, for Frodo and later Sam, to continue. This poem implies a life after death, a continuation of the journey, through others following in Bilbo's footsteps. Frodo and Sam fulfill this by continuing to write in the book. On that journey across the sea, Bilbo fully



embraces the freedom of renunciation because he rules out the possibility of return with this symbolic death. This is a freedom shared by Frodo and Gandalf as they travel to the undying lands, the far green country, never to return. On the journey to the ship that takes him across the sea, Frodo sings the old walking-song again “but the words were not quite the same” (303). Frodo marks this moment of departure with the final rendition of the old walking song. Years later, Sam, and later still, Legolas and Gimli, also sail across the sea to experience the freedom of renunciation. The old walking song appears five times in the novels and represents the unifying themes of walking, composition, and freedoms of the pedestrian.

Tolkien aimed to provide a means of recovering a lost Englishness through the construction of a unifying myth. To do this, Tolkien employs the element of escapism inherent in fantasy, but does not stop there. By employing the mode of walking, Tolkien forces the reader to go there *and back again* with his protagonists. To embrace the freedoms of exiting the constraints of society, the hobbits walk, and the reader comes along on this journey. This allows the space to regain the Englishness that Tolkien desired to see in his countrymen. After the recovery, the Englishman can return home with a newfound appreciation for his nation and home as something more than a mighty empire. After an adventure, one can return home and be satisfied with saying “I’m back.”

Walking means something special for English culture. Ever since William Wordsworth wrote about the Lake District, the English have walked into nature to experience their homeland. The many walking tours in England today prove that the English have never stopped walking the countryside to come to know their island. The right to walk the countryside was threatened by enclosure, but the Romantics resisted

these laws and established walking a subversive mode and a means of expressing identity. The English have preserved the rights of way to the countryside into the 21<sup>st</sup> century because they feel that walking that terrain is an essential way to express their identity: Englishness.

Tolkien, writing after World War One, was seeing the end of the British Empire as Britain began to shrink to its four home nations. This, along with the lack of a national myth for England, provoked him to write a myth for England. Tolkien chose to have his characters walk on their quests. This choice was wise because the functions of fantasy, escape and recovery, are similar to functions of walking. English readers must “escape” British identity to rediscover their Englishness, and walking accomplishes this goal nicely in the novel because of its transformative qualities. The embrace of the freedom of renunciation is walking’s version of escape, and the transformation of the pilgrim and of mountaineering is walking’s version of recovery. In the novels, walking works with fantasy as a vehicle for the temporary escape from British society to provide the possibility for the reader to rediscover their Englishness.

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