Reshaping the Germanic economy of honour: gift giving in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings

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The female element is also present in 'Unhappily Ever After: The Many Woes of Tolkien's Lovers' by Renée Vink, an array of unfortunate couples in Tolkien's legendarium that turns out to be surprisingly broad for the inventor of the term 'eucatastrophe'. Next, Jan van Breda discusses in depth how the problematic case of one such couple is resolved by the Valar in 'The Statute of Finwë and Míriel: Justice, Pity and the Irrevocable Free Will of the Dead'.

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Renée Vink

Reshaping the Germanic Economy of Honour

Gift Giving in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

Thijs Porck

"One cannot attach conditions to a gift", J.R.R. Tolkien wrote in a letter to Jane Neave, dated 18 July 1966 (ed. Carpenter, no. 238). This personal sentiment is in stark contrast to what Tolkien would have found in some of the Old English texts he studied as a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at the Universities of Leeds and Oxford. One of the eleventh-century *Durham Proverbs*, for instance, reads: "*[ʒ]yfena gehwilc underbæc besihþ*" ("each gift looks back over its shoulder"). In other words, each gift is given in expectation of a gift in return: "*do ut des*" ("I give so that you give"). This reciprocal nature of gift giving is central to the heroic society described in some of Tolkien's favourite Anglo-Saxon sources, such as the poems *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*. In Tolkien's Legendarium, too, gift giving plays an important role: Bilbo Baggins, Galadriel, Théoden and Sauron all engage in acts of gift giving, to name but a few. In fact, *The Lord of the Rings* owes its title to an Old English phrase used in *Beowulf* to denote the expected generosity of an Anglo-Saxon king: "*hringa fengel*" ("lord of rings"; *Beowulf* line 2345b).[1] This poetic epithet refers to the kingly act of rewarding one's followers with treasures so as to ensure their allegiance. In this paper, I argue that Tolkien found fault with some aspects of the role of gifts in Anglo-Saxon heroic literature and that his objections influenced the way gift giving is described in *The Lord of the Rings*. As such, Tolkien's treatment of gift exchange in *The Lord of the Rings* can be linked to his critical stance towards other aspects of Germanic heroism (cf. Shippey, 'Heroes and Heroism').

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1) All citations and translation from *Beowulf* in this article have been taken from Fulk.

1. TOLKIEN, OLD ENGLISH SOURCES AND GERMANIC HEROISM

As various scholars have demonstrated, Tolkien's fiction was heavily influenced by the Anglo-Saxon texts he read and studied during his academic career (e.g., Shippey, *Road to Middle-earth*; Honegger, 'Rohirrim: "Anglo-Saxons on horseback"?'; Porck, 'Bones in the Soup'; Porck, 'New Roads and Secret Gates'; Bossenbroek). The Old English poem *Beowulf*, in particular, was an important source, as Tolkien himself admitted in a letter to the editor of the *Observer*, dated 20 February 1938: "*Beowulf* is among my most valued sources" (ed. Carpenter, no. 25). This poem, which centres on the heroic exploits of Beowulf and his fights against the monster Grendel, Grendel's mother, and, more than fifty years later, a fierce dragon, played an important role in Tolkien's academic life: his famous lecture '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics' is considered one of the most important articles in *Beowulf* scholarship (see Bremmer, 'Tolkien and *Beowulf*'). For his Legendarium, Tolkien drew on *Beowulf* in a variety of ways, ranging from the copying of scenes (like the theft of a cup from a dragon; Christensen) to his initial description of Gollum (Porck, 'Bones in the Soup'; see also Marchetti in this volume), as well as various narrative strategies (Shippey, *Road to Middle-Earth*; Bolintineanu). Another important source for Tolkien was the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, a heroic poem depicting the crushing defeat against Vikings in the year 991 suffered by an Anglo-Saxon force led by the ealdorman Byrhtnoth. Tolkien wrote a fictional continuation to this poem, along with a critical essay on one of the poem's crucial terms, *ofermōd* 'extreme courage, pride'; these pieces were published together as 'The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son' in the academic journal *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association* in 1953.[2] In Tolkien's works set in Middle-earth, too, the influence of *The Battle of Maldon* is clearly present, as Alexander Bruce and Mary Bowman have shown. Reading Tolkien's fiction through his sources has become one of the dominant modes of Tolkien scholarship (see, e.g., Fisher) and rightly so: not only does this approach allow for the identification of where Tolkien got his ideas from, but we can also see how his own fiction was written in reaction to his medieval sources.

Shippey ('Heroes and Heroism'), Honegger ('We don't need another hero') and Bowman have all shown how Tolkien's fiction critically engages with the Germanic heroism found in texts such as *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*. Central elements of the Germanic heroic ethos include extreme courage in battle, a great concern for reputation, honour and the acquisition of glory, as well as the loyalty between a lord and his retainers, established through gifts and oaths (see Bremmer, 'Old English Heroic Literature'). Tom Shippey summed up Tolkien's attitude towards Germanic heroism as follows:

> Tolkien's problem as regards the heroic literature of antiquity was, I would say, on the one hand great professional liking, and on the other extreme ideological aversion. ('Heroes and Heroism' 282)

That is, there were elements in heroes like Beowulf that Tolkien appreciated, but he was also aware of the dangerous excesses of the kind of heroism he found in Old English and Old Norse literature.

In his 'Homecoming of Beorhtnoth', Tolkien commented on the dire consequences a hero's desire for glory could ultimately have. In particular, he denounced the behaviour of the Anglo-Saxon leader Byrhtnoth in the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*. The *Maldon* poet had described how the Anglo-Saxons enjoyed a great strategic advantage in their battle against the Vikings: the latter could only reach the shore via a narrow causeway that was easily defendable. Byrhtnoth gave up this defensive position, after which the Vikings, who greatly outnumbered the Anglo-Saxons, won the day. The poet attributed this decision to Byrhtnoth's *ofermōd*, an enigmatic term that, according to Tolkien, is best translated as 'overmastering pride' rather than the more neutral 'extreme courage'. In his critical essay on *ofermōd*, Tolkien comments as follows on this character weakness that many Germanic heroes exhibit:

> … this element of pride, in the form of the desire for honour and glory, in life and after death, tends to grow, to become a chief motive, driving a man beyond the bleak heroic necessity to excess. ('Homecoming of Beorhtnoth' 144)

In his fictional continuation of *The Battle of Maldon*, Tolkien has one of his characters explicitly reject Byrhtnoth's actions:

> "Alas, my friend, our lord was at fault
> …
> let them cross the causeway, so keen was he to

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2) In this article, I will cite from the version republished in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf: including the poem Mythopoeia and The Homecoming of Beohtnoth Beorhthelm's Son*, HarperCollins, 2001.

give minstrels matter for mighty songs.
Needlessly noble. It should never have been."

<div align="right">('Homecoming of Beorhtnoth' 137)</div>

As such, Tolkien ascribed Byrhtnoth's decision to a fault in the latter's character: an unnecessary desire for glory that made him forget about his 'responsibility downwards' (that is, for the welfare of his men). The Anglo-Saxon poet of *The Battle of Maldon*, Tolkien argued, was also critical of Byrhtnoth's behaviour, since he had labelled the ealdorman's motivation with the negative term *ofermōd*. Tolkien further suggested that the *Beowulf* poet also held similar views: after all, Beowulf's decision to fight a dragon in his old age had dire consequences for his people, whose impending doom as they were left leaderless is spelled out in the last part of the poem. One character, as Tolkien points out, is openly critical of Beowulf's behaviour:

> There could be no more pungent criticism in a few words of 'chivalry' in one of responsibility than Wiglaf's exclamation: *"oft sceall eorl monig anes willan wræc adreogan"*, "by one man's will many must woe endure". These words the poet of Maldon might have inscribed at the head of his work. ('Homecoming of Beorhtnoth' 150)

In sum, Tolkien, in his readings of these Old English poems, identified in the Anglo-Saxon poets a critical stance against a leader's excessive desire for glory – a view that, according to Shippey ('Heroes and Heroism') and Bowman, Tolkien shared and that greatly influenced the heroes of his own fiction.

A second element of Germanic heroism that Tolkien had severe problems with was the suicidal loyalty shown by those warriors in *The Battle of Maldon* who desired to die alongside their leader on the battlefield. One after the other, Byrhtnoth's retainers proclaim that it would be an affront to leave the battlefield after their lord had fallen. The words of the old veteran Byrhtwold are a case in point:

> *Ic eom frod feores: fram ic ne wille,*
> *ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde,*
> *be swa leofan men, licgan þence*

> I am advanced in years,
> I do not intend to leave, but I beside my own lord,

beside that well beloved man, intend to lie

<div align="right">(*The Battle of Maldon*, ed. and trans. Scragg, ll. 317-19)</div>

As Shippey has shown, Tolkien struggled with this sentiment, since it represented a lack of hope and was therefore decidedly un-Christian:

> The true heroic spirit, Tolkien knew, was founded on "the creed of unyielding will" [...] and on a fundamental lack of hope, and was unavailable, at least in theory, to the Christian, who is not allowed to lose hope. ('Heroes and Heroism' 280)

As such, throwing away one's life unnecessarily, out of despair, was another aspect of Germanic heroism that Tolkien viewed with unease. In creating his own heroes, Tolkien addressed some of the issues he had with the Germanic heroic ethos. As Mary Bowman has aptly observed:

> Tolkien managed to rewrite the heroism of *The Battle of Maldon* so that we can have the qualities he so admired and could not entirely give up on on – that indomitable will – without the alloy of pride or the contamination of despair. (106)

These new heroes are people like Samwise Gamgee: courageous, selfless, without a concern for their own stature and hopeful even within Mordor itself. Aragorn and Gandalf, too, can hardly be accused of pride nor do they fall prey to despair. Like Bowman, Thomas Honegger has pointed out that Tolkien's own heroes should be seen as a reaction against the Germanic heroes he encountered in his medieval sources:

> His professional liking for and admiration of these heroes stood in opposition to his moral-religious reservations about their often cruel and immoral behavior. Tolkien's solution to this problem was to re-create in his own fiction pagan heroes who are *naturaliter christiani* in the manner of the Old Testament *iusti*, i.e. without the revelation of the Christian truth. ('We don't need another hero' 7)

Honegger further demonstrates that Tolkien would "intentionally create parallels and similarities between exemplary figures of the European Middle Ages and his own protagonists" ('We don't need another hero' 7). In doing so, Tolkien on occasion clearly reveals his own alternatives for Germanic heroism. Bruce, for instance, has pointed out how the scene of Gandalf fighting the Balrog on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm

has a clear parallel in the rather similar situation in *The Battle of Maldon*, where the leader Byrhtnoth allowed the Vikings to cross an easily defendable causeway for the sake of his own pride. Unlike Byrhtnoth, Gandalf does not allow the enemy safe passage and, in doing so, "Gandalf acts as Byrhtnoth should have acted – to save his loyal companions, not to jeopardize them" (Bruce 157). Bruce interprets the wizard's final shout towards the fellowship – "fly, you fools!" – as an attempt to prevent Boromir and Aragorn from giving in to the Germanic heroic ideal of dying alongside a fallen leader. Sometimes, it is better to flee in hopes of coming back to fight another day.

To sum up, several scholars have noted how Tolkien in his Legendarium has given shape to new forms of heroism which retain some of the positive qualities of the protagonists of medieval heroic poetry but forego such excesses as overmastering pride and suicidal despair. As I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of this article, Tolkien did something similar to another central aspect of Germanic heroism: gift giving.

2. GIFT GIVING AND THE GERMANIC ECONOMY OF HONOUR IN *BEOWULF*

> ᚷ *[gyfu] gumena byþ   gleng and herenys,*
> *wraþu and wyrþscype,   and wræcna gehwam*
> *ar and ætwist   ðe byþ oþra leas.*

> The liberality of men is an adornment and praise, a help and a glory, and the grace and sustenance for every wretch who is bereft of others. (*The Old English Rune Poem*, ed. and trans. Bjork, ll. 19-21)

Gift giving played an important role in Germanic warrior culture. Through the generous bestowal of treasure and weapons, a lord could gain a loyal band of retainers, who would repay him with military service. This practice among the Germanic peoples was already observed by the Roman historian Tacitus (56-120 AD) in his Germania:

> ... to defend and protect him, to devote one's own feats even to his glorification, this is the gist of their allegiance: the chief fights for victory, but the retainers for the chief. [...] you cannot keep up a great retinue except by war and violence, for it is from their leader's bounty that they demand that glorious war-horse, and that murderous and masterful spear: banquetings and a certain rude but lavish outfit are equivalent to salary. (trans. Hutton 153)

This reciprocal relationship between the chief, or lord, and his retainers is also a common trope in Old Germanic literature. Various Old English poems and Icelandic sagas, for instance, refer to rulers as the bestowers of gifts. This royal generosity served two purposes: to ensure the loyalty of the retainers and to enhance the reputations of the parties involved. As William Ian Miller observed with regard to medieval Iceland:

> Gift-giving ... gave rise to social relations and adjusted the status of the parties in relation to each other. The giver gained prestige and power from the exchange. He exacted deference from the receiver and obliged him to reciprocate. (82)

In any gift exchange, especially those which took place in public ceremonies, the two parties involved had as much to gain as to lose: giving and receiving gifts gave a boost to one's reputation, but a failure to reciprocate the gift would lead to hostilities and public shame. In the words of John Hill: "[t]he distribution, sharing, and bestowal of these treasures create something we might call a social economy of honour, worth, status, and loyalties" (106).[3]

Scholarship on gift giving is dominated by the views of French anthropologist Marcel Mauss and his influential Essai sur le don, first published in 1923-1924. Describing archaic societies and explicitly referring to medieval Scandinavian culture, Mauss notes that gifts in these societies are never free. Gift giving, in Mauss's view, revolves around three obligations: the obligation to give gifts in order to create ties between two groups or individuals; the requirement to receive gifts, since refusing a gift would lead to hostilities; and, lastly, the obligation of reciprocity: a gift needs to be repaid in order to avoid a loss of stature and honour. Central to the obligatory nature of the gift giving practices described by Mauss is the concept of the 'inalienability of the gift':

> What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary. (15)

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3) The term 'Economy of Honour' is also used by Peter Baker: "In this system, which I call the Economy of Honour..., treasure and honour, indissolubly bonded, are traded up and down the social hierarchy in such a way that the participants gain (and occasionally lose) honour with each transaction" (37).

That is, the original owner of the gift is still connected to the item that is exchanged and, thus, the gift connects the giver to the recipient. A reciprocal gift economy is not a foolproof system, as the Old English poem *Beowulf* amply illustrates.[4] Sure enough, kings are praised for their public liberality, including King Hrothgar, who distributes treasures in his newly-built hall Heorot, and the poet explicitly notes that gifts are intended to establish lasting bonds of loyalty:

> *Swa sceal geong guma   gode gewyrcean,*
> *fromum feohgiftum   on fæder bearme,*
> *þæt hine on ylde   eft gewunigen*
> *wilgesiþas,   þonne wig cume,*
> *leode gelæsten.*

So ought a young man to ensure by his liberality, by ready largess, while in his father's care, that close companions will in turn stand by him in his later years, his men be true when war comes. (*Beowulf*, lines 20-24a)

This notion of gifts ensuring loyalty in future conflicts at the start of the poem is in stark contrast to what happens at the end of the poem, when Beowulf, in his old age, is deserted by the same followers who had previously enjoyed his generosity (*Beowulf*, lines 2864–91). Indeed, the *Beowulf* poet consistently undermines the notion that gifts will lead to future assistance. Queen Wealhtheow's speech in the hall Heorot is a case in point. The queen publicly announces that she expects her nephew Hrothulf to repay her and her husband's generosity:

> *"wene ic þæt he mid gode   gyldan wille*
> *uncran eaferan,   gif he þæt eal gemon,*
> *hwæt wit to willan   ond to worðmyndum*
> *umborwesendum ær   arna gefremedon."*

I expect he will repay our sons with good if he remembers everything, what favors we did to his contentment and to his dignity before, when he was a child. (Beowulf, lines 1184-7)

This sentiment is undercut by the poet's constant reminders that the hall

Heorot would soon burn as a result of hostilities between Hrothgar and his rebellious nephew (see, e.g., *Beowulf*, lines 1013–19, 1162–65). Thus, while gift giving, in theory, could lead to peace and close bonds, the poet does not fail to highlight examples of the opposite.

Similarly, the poem illustrates how gifts may raise an individual's status, but at the same time it demonstrates how rewards resulting from loot may cause ancient grudges to flare up. A good example of the glorifying effect of a gift on the beneficiary is the sword Beowulf presents to the man who had watched over his ship:

> *He þæm batwearde   bunden golde*
> *swurd gesealde   þæt he syðþan wæs*
> *on meodu-bence   maþme þy weorþra,*
> *yrfe-lafe.*

He gave the boat-watch a sword bound with gold, so that after that on the mead-bench he was the worthier for that precious thing, that rich legacy. (*Beowulf*, lines 1900-03a)

Beowulf himself also rises in status thanks to the gifts bestowed upon him by Hrothgar in return for defeating Grendel and his mother. After Beowulf brings back a share of these gifts to his own lord Hygelac, this act is once more reciprocated with more gifts and a higher status.[5] These gift giving ceremonies take place in a public settings and, thus, add to the reputations of both the benefactor and the beneficiary. Peter Baker has called attention to the fact that gifts such as weapons, horses and lands, enter the gift economy as loot and, thus, gift giving is closely linked to a system of violence:

> The killing of a foe introduces both wealth and honour into the heroic economy, and as these goods circulate, the violent act circulates with them. Wealth, honour and violence are fungibles in the Economy of Honour. (76)

The gift's origin in loot could lead to dangerous situations. For instance, Beowulf himself anticipates that a peace treaty between Danes and

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4) The role of gifts in *Beowulf* is a complex issue that warrants a fuller treatment than is possible here. See, e.g., Bazelmans; Hill, pp. 85-107, and Baker.

5) Donahue has noted how this chain of gifts resembles Mauss's definition of the 'potlatch': a competitive, ceremonial and often hostile form of gift exchange among North American tribes.

Heathobards will not last long once some of the Heathobards spot their own heirlooms in the hands of Danish warriors (*Beowulf*, lines 2041-57). While some gifts in *Beowulf*, thus, cause more harm than good, others are simply useless. Unferth's gift of the sword Hrunting to Beowulf, for instance, fails completely in the fight against Grendel's mother (*Beowulf*, lines 1518-28). Gifts, then, do not always play a positive role in *Beowulf* and the poem's ambivalent portrayal of gifts may be contrasted to the outright positive representation of gifts in the *Old English Rune Poem* cited at the start of this section.

In all, the nature of gift exchange in Beowulf may be summed up in three general statements. (1) Theoretically, gifts are binding, in that each gift is expected to be reciprocated with a more expensive gift or loyalty in future conflicts; in practice this does not always happen, with detrimental effects. (2) Gift giving ceremonies are public affairs, intended to glorify both the giver and the recipient. (3) The material gifts exchanged may be worn as tokens of honour, but can also prove useless or an affront to former owners. In describing a pagan heroic society where "the wages of heroism is death" (Tolkien, 'Monster and the Critics' 26), the Christian poet of *Beowulf* clearly sets out the pitfalls and dire consequences of an imperfect gift economy.

The Anglo-Saxon poet's unease with the Germanic economy of honour likely stemmed from his own Christian faith. Indeed, a conflict between Germanic and Christian notions of gift giving can already be traced in the eighth-century *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by the Anglo-Saxon monk and scholar Bede (d. 735). Bede describes how King Oswin of Deira (d. 651) had given a princely horse to Bishop Aidan (d. 651), who, in turn, had given the horse to a beggar. After word of Aidan's generosity had reached King Oswin, the latter confronted the bishop:

> "Why would you, my lord bishop, give the poor man that royal horse, which was necessary for your use? Had not we many other horses of less value, and of other sorts, which would have been good enough to give to the poor, and not to give that horse, which I had particularly chosen for yourself?" (bk. 3, ch. 14)

Oswin's ire clearly stemmed from the "inalienability of the gift" as identified by Mauss: this was still the king's horse and the fact that a beggar now owned it was an affront to the king and a blemish on his honour. After a strong reprimand by Bishop Aidan, the newly converted king

comes to his senses and repents: "For from this time forward, […] I will never speak any more of this, nor will I judge of what, or how much of our money you shall give to the sons of God." (bk. 3, ch. 14). The tension between Oswin and Aidan demonstrates a contrast between Germanic and Christian notions of gift giving. In his own way, the Christian poet of *Beowulf*, too, sought to illustrate the problematic nature of reciprocal gift giving in pagan heroic society. As a devout Christian, Tolkien would have felt a similar unease; this unease becomes clear from his preference in *The Lord of the Rings* for useful, non-reciprocal gifts, given in private settings.

3. GIFT GIVING IN *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*

The Lord of the Rings is a long and complex work and there are many references to gifts of all sorts. An all-encompassing analysis of every gift in the trilogy goes well beyond the scope of this article and I will therefore focus on a number of representative cases of gift exchange in Middle-earth. I will first discuss Sauron, whose act of gift giving clearly demonstrates Tolkien's unease with reciprocal gifts,[6] before moving on to the gift exchange practices of Hobbits (notably Bilbo), Galadriel and Celeborn, as well as the Rohirrim. Each demonstrates alternative forms of gift giving that might be regarded as an attempt by Tolkien to reshape the Germanic economy of honour.

SAURON, THE LORD OF GIFTS

The story of how Sauron tried to use the Rings of Power to gain control over Elves, Dwarves and Men may be regarded as a perverted parody of the Germanic ruler as a 'giver of rings'. After having tried to trick the Elves into making the Rings of Power under the guise of Annatar, 'Lord of Gifts', Sauron gave rings to Dwarves and Men. The latter, in particular, proved easy to 'ensnare', as Tolkien describes in his *Silmarillion*:

> And one by one, sooner or later, according to their native strength and to the good or evil of their wills in the beginning, they fell under the thraldom of the ring that they bore and under the domination of the One, which was Sauron's. (289)

In other words, like the Germanic rulers of Old English and Old Norse literature, Sauron ensures the loyalty of his followers through the ex-

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6) For the sake of brevity, I exclude, here, the 'birthday present' of Sméagol, which, at the very least, shows the problematic nature of obligatory gifts.

change of gifts. In the terms of Marcel Mauss, the Rings of Power are inalienable gifts of such magnitude that they can never be reciprocated; therefore, the kings of Men are left with no other choice but to become Sauron's most loyal servants. The choice of rings as the kind of gift that enforces this loyalty certainly finds its origin in the common trope in Anglo-Saxon poetry of the ruler handing out rings: "*Cyning sceal on healle / beagas dælan*" ["a king must share out rings in the hall"] (Maxims II, ll. 28b–9a).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron also offers gifts that he expects to be reciprocated. At the Council of Elrond, Glóin narrates how a messenger of Sauron had offered the Dwarves rings in return for their friendship: "Rings he would give for it, such as he gave of old" (bk. 2, ch. 2).[7] Failing to accept Sauron's offer, the messenger reminds them, would have dire consequences:

> "Find it, and three rings that the Dwarf sires possessed of old shall be returned to you, and the realm of Moria shall be yours for ever. Find only news of the thief, whether he still lives and where, and you shall have great reward and lasting friendship from the Lord. Refuse, and things will not seem so well." (bk. 2, ch. 2)

While the Dwarves are not easily swayed by Sauron's veiled threats, the Wizard Saruman does seem to have fallen for Sauron's promise of gifts and rewards. In his attempt to convince Gandalf to join him, Saruman states: "[t]here is hope that way. Its victory is at hand; and there will be rich rewards for those that aided it" (bk. 2, ch. 2). As such, Sauron's modus operandi appears to be using gifts as a means to bind people to him, in a way not unlike that of a Germanic ruler gathering followers.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron represents the dark side of gift giving, also recognized by Marcel Mauss. Noting that in Germanic languages the word for *gift* is related to poison (see, e.g., Dutch *gif* 'poison' and gift 'present'), Mauss identified the "theme of the fatal gift, the present or item of property that is changed into poison is fundamental in Germanic folklore". The gifts offered by Sauron certainly fall into this fatal category.

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7) Since *The Lord of the Rings* is available in so many varying editions and formats, I will refer to books and chapters, rather than page numbers.

HOBBITS

The gifts habitually exchanged by Hobbits are of a wholly different sort than Sauron's. In his prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien described how Hobbits "were hospitable and delighted in parties, and in presents, which they gave away freely and eagerly accepted". In a draft letter to A. C. Nun, dated to the late 1958-early 1959, Tolkien expanded considerably on his description of Hobbit gift giving practices. While it is unknown to the author of the present paper whether Tolkien had read Marcel Mauss's influential essay on gift exchange, the system Tolkien described for Hobbits is almost the exact opposite of what Mauss ascribed to archaic societies.[8] For instance, on their birthdays, Hobbits would typically receive presents in private, rather than engage in public ceremonies, so as to avoid any embarrassment that might otherwise occur:

> They were received privately by the 'byrding'; and it was very improper to exhibit them separately or as a collection ... The giver could thus accommodate his gift to his purse and his affections without incurring public comment or offending if anyone) any other than the recipient. (ed. Carpenter, no. 214)

While Hobbits, like members of Mauss's archaic society, were expected to give gifts, even (or: especially) on their birthdays, these gifts were not supposed to be costly – they were "a form of 'thanksgiving', and taken as a recognition of services, benefits, and friendship shown" (ed. Carpenter, no. 214). Another important aspect of Hobbit gift giving was that the gifts did not require the beneficiaries to reciprocate, as Tolkien explicitly makes clear in his letter:

> All those invited were given presents by the host, and expected them, as part of the entertainment (if secondary to the fare provided). But they did *not* bring presents with them. Shirefolk would have thought that very improper. [...] it was a thing 'not done' – it looked like paying for the party or matching the party-gift, and was most embarrassing. (ed. Carpenter, no. 214)

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8) In this letter, Tolkien also discusses the case of Sméagol, who does not follow the general Hobbit gift giving etiquette and notes that his "brief account of 'presents' opens yet more anthropological matters implicit to such terms as kinship, family, clan, and so on" (ed. Carpenter, no. 214).

As such, with their cheap, non-reciprocal gifts, some received in private, Hobbits, though an 'archaic society' in other respects (see Porck, 'Medieval in Middle-earth'), do not follow the system of gift giving described by Marcel Mauss.

Aside from his famous birthday party, Bilbo Baggins also engages in acts of gift giving in Rivendell. Here, the gifts are given in private and are explicitly non-reciprocal. This much becomes clear from the exchange between him and Frodo, after he has presented the latter with the sword Sting and his mithril-coat:

> "I cannot thank you as I should, Bilbo, for this, and for all our past kindnesses", said Frodo. "Don't try!" said the old hobbit, [...] "Hobbits must stick together, and especially Bagginses. All I ask in return is: take as much care of yourself as you can, and bring back all the news you can, and any old songs and tales you can come by." (bk. 2, ch. 3)

That Bilbo, indeed, did not expect these gifts to be reciprocated becomes clear from their reunion in Rivendell following the destruction of the Ring: Bilbo wants to give Frodo the mithril-coat and Sting again, "forgetting that he had already done so" (bk. 6, ch. 6).[9] All this is not to say that Bilbo's gifts are entirely 'alienable'; rather, some of his presents are mementos, such as the bejeweled pipes he gives to Merry and Pippin:

> Bilbo laughed, and he produced out of a pocket two beautiful pipes with pearl mouth-pieces and bound with fine-wrought silver. "Think of me when you smoke them!" he said. (bk. 6, ch. 6)

Bilbo's gifts, then, are private tokens of friendship, given out of generosity rather than as a way to bind others to him - they may be inalienable as keepsakes, but they are not reciprocal. As such, his gifts, like the Hobbitic gifts in general, have no place in such heroic economies of honour as found in *Beowulf*.

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9) The mithril-coat itself, as Gandalf discloses, was a gift to Bilbo by Thorin Oakenshield and the Hobbit was never aware of its value (bk. 2 , ch. 4). Frodo, too, hides the "kingly gift", as Gimli calls it (bk. 2, ch. 4), under his plain clothes rather than wear it proudly as a status symbol, as would have been the expected behaviour of a hero in the Germanic economy of honour.

GIFTS IN LOTHLÓRIEN

Deborah A. Higgens has noted how the farewell feast in Lothlórien closely resembles the gift giving ceremonies in the mead halls of Germanic legend (107). Indeed, Celeborn, "a giver of gifts beyond the power of kings" (bk. 2, ch. 7), and Lady Galadriel, who passes round a cup of "sweet mead" (bk. 2, ch. 8), call to mind the generous King Hrothgar and his cup-bearing queen Wealhtheow entertaining their guests in *Beowulf's* Heorot. Moreover, like Beowulf's gift of a sword to the boatswain, Galadriel's gift of the Elfstone to Aragorn has the effect of elevating the latter's status: "those who saw him wondered; for they had not marked before how tall and kingly he stood, and it seemed to them that many years of toil had fallen from his shoulders" (bk. 2, ch. 8). Yet, Celeborn and Galadriel's gifts do not fully fit the economy of honour found in *Beowulf*.

Crucially, like Bilbo, Celeborn and Galadriel do not demand their gifts to be reciprocated. Instead, most gifts – boats, belts, ropes – are only intended to aid the fellowship in the tasks that lay ahead,[10] while others are offered "in memory of Lothlórien" (bk. 4, ch. 8). An example of the latter kind of gift is the box of earth for Samwise Gamgee, branded with the rune G for Galadriel, which will allow him to plant a mallorn tree: "Then you may remember Galadriel, and catch a glimpse far off of Lórien" (bk. 4, ch. 8). Galadriel's gift of three strands of hair for Gimli, too, is a memento to be treasured rather than a binding gift that demands a *quid pro quo*. These Elven gifts are inalienable only to the extent that they call to mind the benefactors and serve to leave a lasting impression of Lothlórien.

THE ROHIRRIM

The Rohirrim most clearly resemble the heroic society described in *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon poems. Clive Tolley has demonstrated that Tolkien's chapter 'The King of the Golden Hall' (bk. 3, ch. 6) is clearly modelled on Beowulf's arrival in Denmark in *Beowulf*. Indeed, in Meduseld, we witness a gift giving ceremony not unlike the ones in Hrothgar's hall Heorot. Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli are all rewarded with gifts of ancestral war-gear for their roles in freeing King Théoden from the influence of Gríma Wormtongue. The gift of Shadowfax to Gandalf also ties in well with Germanic warrior culture, resembling as it does King

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10) One notes that, unlike Unferth's gift of the useless sword Hrunting to Beowulf, each and every gift of Lothlórien proves its worth.

Oswin's gift of a horse to Bishop Aidan, referred to above.[11] In the history of the relationship between Rohan and Gondor, too, gifts play an important role. Eorl, the first king of Rohan, had received Rohan as a reward from Cirion, steward of Gondor, in return for military services rendered in the Battle of the Field of Celebrant (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales*), not unlike how King Hygelac had offered Beowulf sizeable areas of land and a throne after he had returned victorious from Denmark. In crafting the Rohirrim, then, Tolkien comes closes to recreating the Germanic economy of honour he found in his Anglo-Saxon sources.

Yet, even among the Rohirrim, the gift economy appears to be shifting towards non-reciprocity. For instance, Éomer, upon parting from the Hobbits, notes how in the olden days Merry would have been amply rewarded for his military service, but that the Hobbit refuses all such gifts. However, Merry does accept a memento of Éowyn, a gift given out of friendship:

> And Éomer said: "Kings of old would have laden you with gifts that a wain could not bear for your deeds upon the fields of Mundburg; and yet you will take naught, you say, but the arms that were given to you. This I suffer, for indeed I have no gift that is worthy; but my sister begs you to receive this small thing, as a memorial of Dernhelm and of the horns of the Mark at the coming of the morning." (bk. 6, ch. 6)

The move away from social bonds based on reciprocity is also clear from the exchange between Aragorn and Éomer following the fall of Sauron. Here, Aragorn explicitly tells Éomer that they shall have a lasting relationship that requires neither gifts nor rewards:

> And last of all Aragorn greeted Éomer of Rohan, and they embraced, and Aragorn said: "Between us there can be no word of giving or taking, nor of reward; for we are brethren. In happy hour did Eorl ride from the North, and never has any league of peoples been more blessed, so that neither has ever failed the other, nor shall fail." (bk. 6, ch. 5)

True friendship, it seems, cannot be based on reciprocal gifts.

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11) For horses as typically Anglo-Saxon rewards, see Porck, 'Anglo-Saxon Gift Horses'.

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4. CONCLUSION

Tolkien's intensive study of Germanic heroic literature did not lead him to outright copy his medieval sources. Rather, Tolkien critically engaged with his material and sought to reshape Germanic heroism into forms of heroism that retained the qualities he liked but that omitted those aspects he deemed problematic. Consequently, as others have shown, his own heroes are devoid of the overmastering pride and suicidal despair that are central to the northern heroic courage found in Old English poems such as *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*. Another aspect of Germanic heroism that Tolkien sought to omit, I have argued here, is the deeply un-Christian obligatory reciprocity that lies at the heart of the Germanic economy of honour.[12]

The excesses of the Germanic economy of honour are represented by the enslaving nature of Sauron's gifts: gifts that force beneficiaries into doing something they would not do voluntarily. Tolkien's Hobbits show a completely alternative system of non-reciprocal, private gifts that cement relationships without demanding a *quid pro quo*. The utilitarian gifts offered by Bilbo, Celeborn and Galadriel are still inalienable, but only in the sense that they are mementos, intended to keep the memories of the benefactors alive, rather than indebt their beneficiaries. Even in Rohan, where something of a heroic gift economy can be discerned, there is a move towards non-reciprocal gifts. Indeed, the exchanges between Aragorn and Éomer, as well as between Éowyn and Merry, demonstrate that meaningful relationships are established only when you can give something and expect nothing in return.[13]

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12) Of course, the analysis I have offered in this article could be expanded by looking at the whole range of Tolkien's Legendarium and extending the objects of analysis from mere material gifts, which is what I have mostly covered here, to military services, oaths and banquets that together form, as Marcel Mauss called it, "the system of total services" (7). Be that as it may, I believe my general observations hold some merit.
13) Cf. Luke 6:30-36.

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Tolkien's Medieval Monsters

Grendel, Gollum and Boromir

Chiara Marchetti

T he frightening creatures populating Middle-earth owe much to medieval monsters. In particular, Tolkien appears to have drawn on features of *Beowulf's* Grendel in his descriptions of Gollum and such creatures as Shelob and the orcs. Tolkien uses these 'monsters' to exemplify evil, which he sees both as an external force to be fought and as a corrupting power working from within. Those who succumb to evil become 'monsters', like the Ringwraiths. Characters who are tempted by the Ring undergo an inner struggle against evil and temporarily seem monstrous: their inner conflict is described in physical terms that they share with Grendel and other medieval monsters.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides a multifaceted definition of the word monster: "any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening, extraordinary or unnatural, malformed", or "a person [...] exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman" (*OED*, s.v. monster). Monstrosity thus describes something different from what is considered normal, not only physically or psychologically but also in terms of acceptable social behaviour (Hensel 44). Medieval monsters certainly fall under this definition and Grendel in the Old English poem *Beowulf* is a case in point. Grendel is a mysterious creature that ravages the court of the Danish king Hrothgar until the Geat Beowulf defeats him, thus 'cleaning up' Hrothgar's hall. Grendel is a semi-giant with shining eyes, a cannibal isolated from society and devoid of language. Not only is he frightening in appearance, he also does not accept the laws and conventions of the Danes: he lives in isolation, does not communicate and has no moral restraint in killing and eating people.