

## COMMENTS ON "SOMETHING HAS GONE CRACK" FROM "BEYOND BREE"

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### Brief Comments on Select Papers in "Something Has Gone Crack"

by Bruce Leonard

There are some very interesting papers here that add to the detail of Tolkien's life and milieu as well as potentially to help unpack Tolkien. I enjoyed Janet Croft's introduction, helpful it was.

From my inadequate understanding of WWI, Shippey & Bourne's paper ("A Steep Learning Curve: Tolkien and the British Army on the Somme") may have overemphasized the progress made in decreasing casualties by 1918.

Rosegrant's paper ("Fault Lines Beneath the Crack") helps to explain some of the psychological background related to Tolkien's early life, without over interpreting the evidence as published. I have considerable trouble with psychological papers because of my over thought process in dealing with Tolkien's psychological life. As a psychiatrist I tend to demand evidence that comes directly from the patient. The written records we largely rely on present a slippery slope. For these kinds of papers I am always second-guessing what I would've heard from Tolkien. From experience I can rely on Rosegrant's professional insight, caution, and presentation of the evidence we do have.

The historical and geographical detail in Flowers' paper ("Tolkien in East Yorkshire, 1917-18: A Hemlock Glade, Two Towers, The Houses of Healing and a Beacon") I found fascinating, especially about the "hemlock glade".

Kuehs' paper ("Two Poets at War: J.R.R. Tolkien and Ernst Jünger in the Battle of the Somme, a Semiotic Approach") was new info but not enough quotes from Jünger for me to really get a feel for his texts.

Garth's paper ("Revenants and Angels: Tolkien, Machen, and Mons") was very interesting. I did not recall about the Angel of Mons [a legend that angel(s) had protected British soldiers in retreat] but certainly saw how it could impact Tolkien.

Tovy's "Aspects of Total War in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings" was educational for me regarding the development of total war though I wonder how chronocentric it may be. Total war in the sense that so many nations were involved but I was not convinced that the behavior of nations or their armies were so different in the 20th century. Certainly Tolkien commented on their "advanced" ways of killing others based on his experience in France but also as with World War II and the bomb. Interesting to date composition of those parts of the narrative in LOTR.

But I got stuck stuck on Hall's paper ("Narrating the Missed Encounter with the Loss of a World: The Lord of the Rings' Testimony to Modern Ecology"). I think the paper is correct about many things but it's hard to tell because of the evidence and the lingo. Her use of jargon is dense and particularly the term "ecology". (Probably my academic ignorance.) Also Hall's generalizations about Tolkien sometimes are too general and leave me to wonder if she utilized the same technique with other topics. For instance Hall excuses Frodo's lost finger ("No *presence* of physical scarring remains upon him..." (236, emphasis original), stating it is more an absence than a scar added. [A good point though still a very real scar. Imagine Frodo's reaction when he saw or felt what was left on that hand.] The irony of the missing/ invisible finger. However the Morgul knife wound is not mentioned nor the wound from Shelob (not sure the Troll spear thrust left a mark.)

Hall continues "the loss of the Ring does not bring to an end his suffering at its hands, but rather compounds all of his physical wounds gained under its spell of invisibility into a loss not merely of the body, but of the subjectivity it encloses." (247) The selection of only wounds gained while invisible and applied to loss is not clear. The loss does effect Frodo's reaction as the "demonic" element had by the end on Mt. Doom "broken" Frodo and he was tempted beyond his limits.

"Tolkien's fantastic prose instead takes loss as always already implicit to the readers' experience." (247) I believe this is true. However I do not see evidence in Hall's paper and I find evidence hard to find in my memory of Tolkien's "fantastic prose" that is applicable to the reader's experience of loss. I'd have loved some text of this fantastic prose that applies. However that Hall's statement is true is probably evidenced by the widespread popularity of The Lord of the Rings and the ubiquitous need to cope with loss which the book fulfills in an extremely satisfying manner.

[I believe the nature of the One Ring would be to tempt, with an angelic power, that would induce a potent irrational covetousness, possessiveness in Frodo (as it did in Ringbearers Bilbo, Gollum, Isildur, maybe Déagol, but failed to do in Sam). By the end no matter how Frodo came to part with the Ring he would have found the loss devastating, excruciatingly painful. And yet given the circumstances also so shameful. He chose not to do it, to throw the Ring into the fire. Yet to carry the Ring to the place of its semi-divine forging and then destroy it, was a set up for mere mortal Frodo. This circumstance required some Divine touch to effect the Ring's destruction.]

The thesis of Hall's paper can be partially summed up on page 250, with several quotes from Kate McLoughlin and Fussell. Later the text can be denser depending on who she quotes. Denser: Caruth, "It is this *unconsciousness of leaving* that bears the impact of history". Clearer: I could follow the argument when she quoted from Flieger on Frodo's failure. (257) But some very good points are made in this paper and I think it's worth trying to struggle through for some of the ideas as a

basis for dialogue and for some of the quotes.

Neubauer ("Worried by Silence: Some Possible Resonances of Combat-related Stress in The Lord of the Rings") questions Tolkien's statement that little of his experience, in either war, was portrayed in his fiction. (205) Neubauer particularly thinks in the "The Homecoming of Beornthoth Beornthelm's Son" (HBBS) that the nighttime search for a body on the battlefield must've been derived from a WWI experience. Reasonable question. I too have wondered about some passages being modeled on his wartime experience. A possible experiential example is the two arguing orcs hunting for Frodo and Sam in Mordor. I have always wondered if that was an experience of Tolkien's in the trenches. Could have been two soldiers, from either side, but different "classes". Likewise Neubauer presents many other elements as the title states. One I found convincing recalled Sam's experience of silence when taking "watch". (214) Some of the details of expression I think probably derived only from frontline experience. This paper was interesting and demonstrated something else to think about regarding the realism Tolkien included in LOTR and The Hobbit.

This trench experience is also explored in Wodzack's paper: "Tolkien Underground: The 'Troglodyte War' in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings". (223) Wodzack relates the underground experiences associated with trench warfare to those portrayed in the stories.

Smol's paper "Bodies in War: Medieval and Modern Tensions in 'The Homecoming'" explores HBBS referred to as "The Homecoming". (263) I think this breaks new ground: places the play in a more contemporary context of combat trauma. Compares Totta's dream vision half asleep in the wagon to similar scenes of dreaming: Bombadil's storytelling, Frodo listening in Rivendell and falling asleep, and Lowdham reading in "The Notion Club Papers". They all, to me, have qualities of faërian drama. Smol challenges Shippey's view (275-6) of young Totta, the seemingly naive poet and presents Tolkien's portrayal with more positive attributes, more balanced view of a young poet. The description of Totta (277) does sound like one of the self-deprecating comments Tolkien made about himself. ("Beyond Bree" Apr'20 pp 2-3)

PS: ...I should have said more about Garth's article ["Revenants and Angels: Tolkien, Machen, and Mons"] which I found very interesting as well as Costabile's "No Englander" paper with Farrell's Tolkien sketch. [*Farrell, the artist who painted "Surrender, Englander!", also drew a sketch of Tolkien, possibly from life. Nancy Martsch, Ed.*] Were Mons and "I am no Englander...!" part of his leaf mold? ("Beyond Bree" May'20 p 4)

### Comments on "Something Has Gone Crack"

by Nancy Martsch

Röttinger ("The Great War in Middle-earth - or: Where to Find Modern Warfare in The Lord of the Rings") does a good job of surveying influences of WWI in LOTR. Much of this is already known to old Tolkien hands, but may be useful to newer readers. Tovy does an excellent job of defining total war, then showing how society's attitude toward total war informs Tolkien's works. For my generation, the resonance would be with the Cold War. Tovy is a military historian and really knows his subject.

Peterson ("Strategic Blunders in the First Age Great Battles: Tolkien's Commentary on World War I") attempts to correlate failures in WWI with the Five Battles of Beleriand. An interesting concept, but some of the correlations seem forced; especially as Tolkien had far more military history to draw upon for military blunders than just WWI, from the Classical period through the Middle Ages and all of British history.

Kuehs' concept (is to compare two writers who fought at the Somme, one German, one English. Ernst Jünger, author of Storm of Steel, viewed war quite differently from Tolkien. Unfortunately Kuehs assumes a familiarity with Jünger's work which most English speakers lack. And he fails to give sufficient consideration to pre-war differences between the two men deriving from personality, upbringing, and culture. The "Semiotic Approach" is comparison of literary works.

Neubauer points out the neglected importance of *silence* in The Lord of the Rings. In warfare, when all is unnaturally silent, you could be in for trouble. Tolkien had entered some deep and heavily fortified German trenches, where fighting had taken place, so Wodzack thinks this may have influenced the underground scenes in both The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. [Also "the underground" is quite prominent in mythology, and especially in German folklore.]

Schlesinger ("Angels of Care and Houses of Healing in World War I: Their Possible Influence on Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings") gives a straightforward account of female nurses in WWI. And Fox-Lenz ("Contemporary Reflections of War: Soldier-Servant Relationships in The Lord of the Rings and Downton Abbey") does the same for the soldier-servant/ officer-batman relationship, such as Frodo and Sam. And we have Lúthien healing Beren, and the Houses of Healing in LOTR.

Gilbert ("Mighty Men of War: The Impact of Gender and War in the Work of J.R.R. Tolkien") asserts that gender roles of Tolkien's time, combined with Tolkien's experience of male wartime friendship, affect his writing.

Costabile ("No Englander May Hinder Me: Éowyn the Highland Pipe Major and Other Highlights of Tolkien's Awareness of Sexual, Class and Ethnic Divisions in Wartime") muses on class and gender roles in war, taking his cue from an incident when a German officer attacked a trench occupied by a Highland regiment, shouting "Surrender Englander!" Taking offense, a Scotsman flung an uncocked grenade at the German, killing him and preventing the attack. Costabile uses this as a possible influence for Éowyn's words to the Witch-king. Maybe. Surely there are other similar scenes in drama and in folklore. (Shakespeare's Macbeth comes to my mind.) Still, this brings up an incident which would have been known in England at the time.

There is some good material here. But the use of jargon: "Alterity", "A Semiotic Approach", and in particular Hall's nearly-unreadable essay, will restrict this book to the halls of academe. Which is a pity, because the Editors have missed an opportunity to create a book which could appeal to - and inform - a much wider audience. ("Beyond Bree" Apr'20 p 3)

### Comments on "No Englander May Hinder Me"

Mark Hooker:

Nancy Martsch's comment on the Costabile article ("No Englander May Hinder Me: Éowyn the Highland Pipe Major and Other Highlights of Tolkien's Awareness of Sexual, Class and Ethnic Divisions in Wartime") asks the question: "Surely there are other similar scenes in drama and in folklore. (Shakespeare's Macbeth comes to my mind.)"

In my triptych of articles under the heading "The Three Faces of Éowyn" in The Tolkienothēca, the section "Face II: Éowyn-Kali" (42-9) details the parallels between the now canonical version of the confrontation between Dernhelm (Éowyn), and the Lord of the Nazgûl at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields and a plot line that is familiar to those acquainted with Indian (Hindu) literature.

Tolkien's momentous clash was foretold in The Lord of the Rings when the Witch-king of Angmar fled the Elf-lord Glorfindel at the Battle of Fornost in T.A. 1975. (The Return of the King, Ballantine, 458) At that time, Glorfindel prophesied that the doom of the Witch-king was yet far off, and that "not by the hand of man will he fall." (412)

When the time of the Nazgûl Lord's doom arrived on the Pelennor Fields, a millennium later, Dernhelm (Éowyn) confronts the Witch-king, and warns him to stay away from the fallen Théoden, for she is prepared to hinder the Witch-king, if his intent is otherwise.

The Nazgûl replies, "No living man may hinder me!" echoing the prophesy of Glorfindel.

Éowyn, however counters that "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman... Begone, if you be not deathless!" (141)

This has resonances with a Indian (Hindu) tale, where there is a similar encounter between a demon and a goddess. The central story line is: a demon, threatening the World and the gods, can only be defeated by a woman; the demon's qualified invulnerability being a boon coerced from Brahma. The gods beseech Shiva for help, and Shiva, turning to his consort Parvati, requests that she dispatch the demon for the good of all. She agrees, takes on the aspect of Kali, and defeats the demon, because although the demon "could not be killed by either man or beast, [Parvati] being neither a man (but a woman) nor a beast (but divine) slew him without effort."

The parallels between Tolkien's tale of the Battle of the Pelennor Fields and the Indian (Hindu) tradition about the battle fought by Parvati (in her guise as Kali) with the demon are much stronger than the parallels with a battle field of WWI that Costabile hypothesizes, because the Indian (Hindu) story line already includes the gender markers seen in Tolkien's story line, while for Costabile's hypothesis of a parallel with a WWI battle field to work, the gender markers have to be inserted after the fact.

Tolkien's knowledge of "Sanskrit language and its descendant, the primary vehicle of Buddhist literature", the source for this legend, have become even more apparent with the publication of Tolkien's Lost Chaucer. ("Beyond Bree" May'20 pp4-5)

### Problems with Context in Rosegrant's "Fault Lines Beneath the Crack"

by Nancy Bunting

I read with interest Bruce Leonard's comments on Rosegrant's paper "Fault Lines Beneath the Crack" (in "Something Has Gone Crack"), in "Beyond Bree" Apr'20. Contrary to Leonard, I experienced disappointment.

Rosegrant writes, "the pattern of [Tolkien's] illness [i.e. trench fever] documented by these sources strongly indicates that Tolkien's physical suffering was in part caused by traumatic emotions expressed via the body". (103) Rosegrant argues this because according to the Merck manual Tolkien's case is an outlier in terms of the length of his "trench fever and its sequelae". (105) However, Rosegrant is citing a modern Merck manual that discusses cases that have had standard, modern, and generally effective antibiotic treatment, something unavailable in 1918. The Merck manual states that even with this treatment "relapses are common" and "recovery is usually complete in 1 to 2 months."

In World War I, trench fever was a new disease, being first reported in mid-1915. Within a few months, hundreds of cases had been identified clinically. Trench fever was a severe logistic problem for the armies that fought on both sides of the Western Front in WWI because it reached epidemic proportions and infected soldiers were too sick to fight. Doctors tried every promising pharmaceutical for the treatment of trench fever but without a positive result, e.g. quinine, Salvarsan (arsphenamine), etc. (Trench fever, kumc.edu) 80% of infected men remained unfit for duty for up to 3 months. That means 20% of the cases lasted longer than 3 months. (Trench fever, gwpda.org)

Consequently, without antibiotics in 1916-17, the expected length of disability for Tolkien was 3 months, not five to six weeks. This probably was why his followup appointment was scheduled for January 23, 1917, as that was around 3 months after Tolkien's initial symptoms. The doctors' clinical experience would have expected improvement by that time. The course of Tolkien's illness fell in the group of 20% of the soldiers with trench fever, and that is not at the 5% level needed to classify his case as an outlier. His first bout of the trench fever "and its sequelae" lasted from October 27, 1916 to June 1, 1917, i.e. just over 7 months, not the eighteen months ending April 10, 1918, as Rosegrant states. (105) He had what was an expectable relapse in mid-August, 1917, even according to the modern Merck manual. Therefore, there is no need to propose a psychological explanation for the relapse. That relapse lasted until April 10, 1918 when he was declared fit for duty. His hospitalization in 1918 was due to gastritis,

another illness that now would have been treated with an antibiotic. There is nothing to suggest that Tolkien's gastritis was a sequela to trench fever, except in the general sense that Tolkien's immune system had been impaired by Trench fever. His condition would have been compounded by the poor diet available in 1917-18 due to the German blockade.

Consequently, Rosegrant's claim that the "probable contribution of un verbalized emotional trauma" as an explanation for the "sheer length of Tolkien's suffering from trench fever and its sequelae", including his hospitalization in August, 1917 (sic, for 1917) with fever and a hospitalization in June, 1918 due to gastritis is unsupported, given that Tolkien's case fell in the 20% group, not 5%. (105) Also, Rosegrant does not state *how* this pattern of medical and military status, laid out in his table (103-4), is evidence for his position. He appears to be saying that correlation is causation.

As for Tolkien's gastritis of 1918, Rosegrant's hypothetical physiological and psychological stress is not the only probable cause. Equally, if not more, possible is poor food-handling, for example, in the incident of Tolkien's unit carving up a poached deer. (Guide 1258) If they had eaten improperly prepared meat, the enlisted men would have gone to one hospital and Tolkien would have been sent to an officers' hospital. Other alternate scenarios could be proposed that are as likely as unspecified, psychosomatic stress.

Rosegrant wants to present the unremarkable position that stress makes illness worse, but his presentation of such an unsurprising statement of fact ignores or minimizes other factors.

1. Rosegrant writes, "late in [Tolkien's] third year", the family went back to England. (Actually Tolkien was 3 years and 3 months old). Rosegrant says the complaints about Tolkien's health are "vague", but he ignores Tolkien's premature birth. Premies are not expected to catch up completely until the age of three. (Bayley Scales of Infant Development) Tolkien probably was still lagging in development and puny in comparison to other children his age. He may also have had native caregivers who pampered him and did not push him to do things on his own. (see Kipling in Shengold 235-6)

2. Rosegrant "suggests" that the illnesses that led to his missing school the first year after the family's move to a new house, which Tolkien recalled as "dreadful", "were influenced by the stress of the new school and home". (101) This is too simplistic a view. Except for intermittent contact with his Inledon and Mitton cousins, Ronald and Hilary Tolkien were isolated and had little to no contact with other children. Of course, stress worsened the impact of any illness(es), but the source of the problem was the lack of exposure to other children and their germs. Many modern parents confront this same problem when children first go to daycare or preschool or kindergarten.

3. Rosegrant writes, "the boys became sick in January, 1904" and "the unusually long duration of these illnesses, together with their co-occurrence with Mabel's sickness, suggests that they were influenced by the stress of his mother's illness". (102, italics added) First, while Scull and Hammond state the illness started in January (Chronology "1904"), Carpenter's paragraph on the date is a masterpiece of evasion and ambiguity. An alternative hypothesis to Rosegrant's now all-purpose explanation of stress, is that the family suffered from malnutrition. Since at least December 1903, Tolkien had been running errands, i.e. getting the groceries, and was now unable to do this. (Bunting, "Finding Tolkien" 82) There would be less food in the house. Further, Mabel Tolkien's debility due to her diabetes would have severely limited her ability to maintain prepare food, clean, and nurse the sick boys. She was already so weak that she was housebound by late November, 1903 and needed Tolkien's help with housework by December so she could rest. (Bio 28) These factors could certainly contribute to Tolkien's susceptibility to, and difficulty with recovering from, illness.

Rosegrant then lists (102), without citations, a variety of physical problems for Tolkien. Chronologically, they are: accidentally cutting his hand with a knife (July 27-August 4, 1909 - Chronology 18), cutting his nose *and* his tongue (November 5, 1910 - "tongue *or* nose" Chronology 26; tongue *only* Bio 48, my emphasis), injured foot of unknown severity (June, 1913, with Tolkien likely to be attending a tennis party which strongly indicates a minor injury - Chronology 49), and at age twenty-two was "briefly ill". For the last, the Chronology states, "Feb 9 1914 - gastric influenza contracted at a previous meeting". (57) While Rosegrant is comprehensive, he neglects to say how these incidents are evidence of psychosomatic processes or stress. The incident of Tolkien cutting his hand seems more likely to be evidence of teenage recklessness than stress.

Rosegrant argues that Tolkien's use of language, i.e. "I don't feel a member of a complete body now", contrasts with the more "abstract" language used by Wisemen and Smith, and reflects "the bodily insults of war" and "a blow to is body-self". (96) However, an alternative way to look at Tolkien's language is to note that he was a much better writer than his friends, and like other good writers, his writing draws on memories of perceptions and sensations. (Pamuk 30-1)

Rosegrant considers Tolkien's dream of the Great Wave or Atlantis dream. (100) Because this appeared before his mother's death, he writes this "suggests that [this is evidence that Tolkien's] father's death had a greater impact than was consciously apparent". (101) He does not explain what supports his conclusion and does not consider any competing evidence. Tolkien last saw his father at the age of 3 years 3 months and had only one conscious memory of him, i.e. his father writing on the packed to come to England in 1895. His father died when Tolkien was 4 years and one month-old.

While one can appreciate Rosegrant's psychoanalytic sensitivity, he does not address how the initial appearance of the wave during the time Tolkien and his family lived in Sarehole has any ties to Tolkien's father. It is equally, if not more likely, that the dream was related to Ronald Tolkien witnessing his brother Hilary's near drowning in the Sarehole mill pond in approximately 1900. Tolkien would have been 8 and his brother 6. (H Tolkien 6; Bunting, "Spiders" 206) The timing of the dream's start and the gasping for breath of a near-drowning seem a better fit. Rosegrant discounts any considerations other than the intrapsychic.

Rosegrant then argues that Tolkien's grief at the loss of friends and his wife is evidence of his lifelong "vulnerability to emotional loss". (106) However, it is not only people with lifelong "vulnerability to emotional loss" who express grief at the loss of

friends and loved ones. He also asserts that "Lúthien's (Edith's) love" could not prevent "the lapses and darkness that at times marred [their] lives" (107), but this phrase belongs to the last clause "the sufferings that we endured after our love began", and not the first clause "the dreadful sufferings of our childhoods".

Rosegrant presents as evidence of Tolkien's psychosomatic problems that "gastric pains that Tolkien began to suffer in 1969 were never medically explained". (108) On the contrary, Tolkien died of complications from a "bleeding gastric ulcer" in 1973. (Bio 256) Late in 1972, Tolkien began to suffer from severe indigestion, and an X-ray was inconclusive. (ibid.) His doctor most likely suspected an ulcer as a probable cause of Tolkien's symptoms as Tolkien was prescribed a restricted diet. Ulcers do not develop overnight, and it seems very probable that an ulcer that killed him in 1973 or a predecessor could have been the source of his stomach pain in 1969.

Finally, it is worth noting that Rosegrant, like Bratman (272-3) mischaracterizes the presentation of Mabel Tolkien's physical discipline of her children in Bunting's "1904". His dismissal of corporal punishment ignores historic and cultural factors. Physical discipline of children was common and acceptable in the 1890s and early 1900s, i.e. the Biblical injunction of "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Tolkien's fellow Inkling, CS Lewis, wrote that some of his childhood experiences were worse than the "front line trenches in World War I". (Jacobs 20) Rosegrant's objection to the possibility (as demonstrated by Tattersall 69) of Mabel Tolkien being abusive or attacking her children due to diabetic hypoglycemia, would be consistent with his underestimation and minimization of medical and biological factors seen in "Fault Lines Beneath the Crack". (101)

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