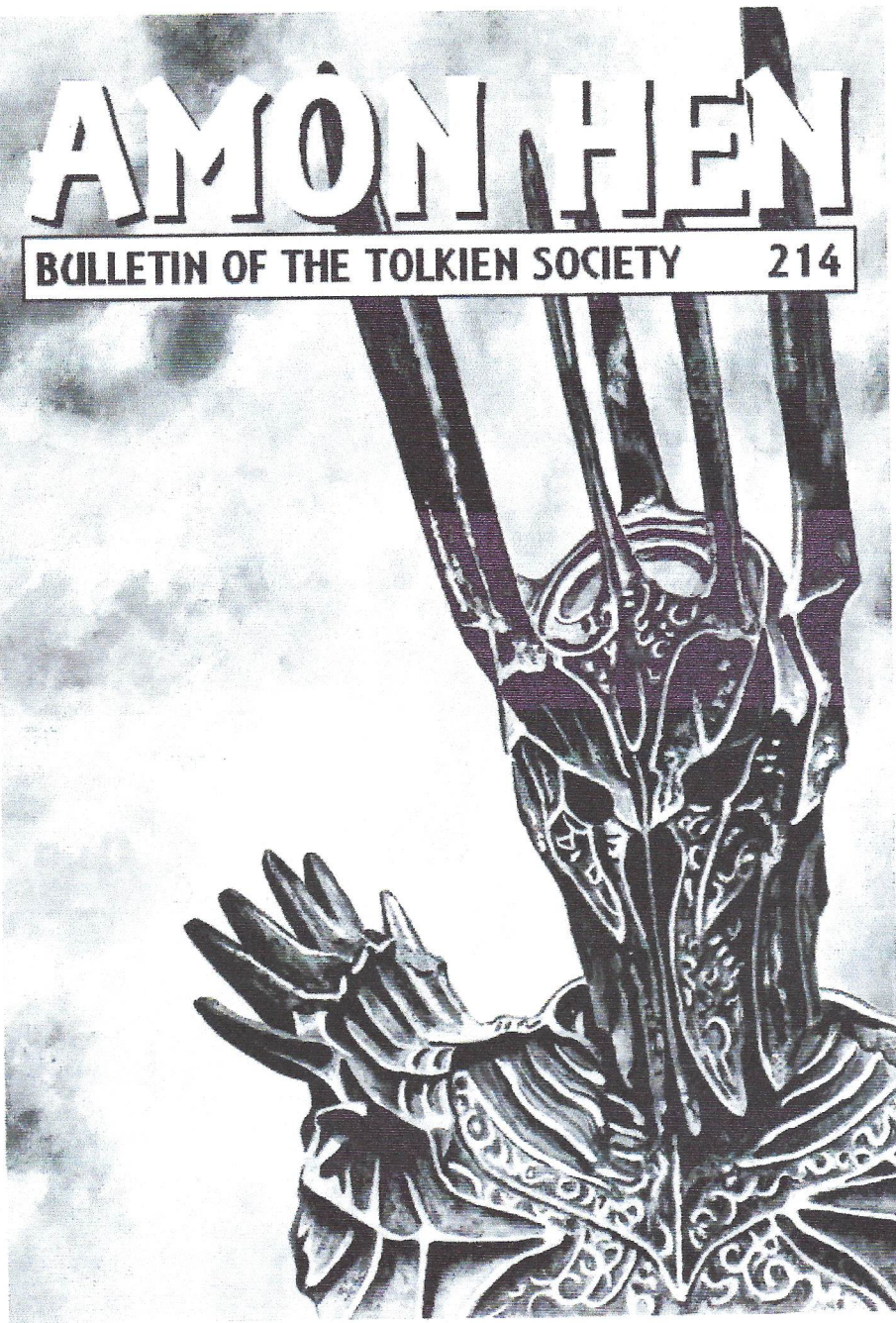


AMON HEN

BULLETIN OF THE TOLKIEN SOCIETY

214



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6.7.2 AGM Chris Crawshaw reported that the contract has been signed and sent to Durham. Accommodation has to be booked through the Society in the same way as Oxonmoot accommodation is.

6.7.3 Seminar No firm plans as yet, but suggestions of July in Aberystwyth or a stream at Aethrica, the Fantasy Convention, have been made.

6.7.4 Oxonmoot Helen sent a report. The committee wished to express its gratitude to Helen Armstrong for the excellent job she had been doing as Acting Sub-Comm chair. They also wished to thank Chris Kreuzer and Alison Davidson for their hard work on the Progress Report.

6.7.5 2005 The 2005 Proceedings had been sent to the printers. Due to the large size of the publication, we will be providing all contributors with a PDF on CD-ROM rather than the paper version. We are considering a formal presentation of a copy to the City of Birmingham, in recognition of the event.

6.7.6 2012 There were going to be adverts at Oxonmoot and a booking form in the next AH. Richard is the Trustee liaison to the 2012 committee.

6.8 Publications

6.8.1 Amon Hen Chris Crawshaw agreed to continue doing Dates for your Diary.

6.8.2 Mallorn Henry sent a report.

6.8.3 Peter Roe

6.9 Technical There had been some discussion onlist about making PDF versions of *Mallorn* available on the web site. It was agreed to lock the PDF against editing, with no other restrictions on the file.

Z A.O.B It was agreed that the Birmingham Central Library was an excellent location for future meetings. We may have to pay a charge if the Shakespeare Memorial Room isn't available, but it is very reasonable and moving meetings to Birmingham reduces travel costs for almost everyone on the committee.

TELEVISION IN MIDDLE-EARTH

The Palantiri and the Mirror of Galadriel

by Dr. Larry L. Burriss, Ph.D., J.D.

When my son Justin was little he once asked, "Is Luke Skywalker real?" I told him, "No, he's just a movie character." But his next question set me back a few steps: "Well, if he isn't real, how does he do all of that stuff?"

Tolkien was, as we know, extremely careful to make Middle-earth "real" both internally and externally. For example, unlike some fantasy products, he did not try to combine ordinary objects, such as swords, with blasters and atomic disintegrators. Nevertheless, although Tolkien created an ancient, pre-history, through the Palantiri and the Mirror of Galadriel he seems to have been remarkably prescient about the structure and function of a mainstay of 21st century life: television.

In our world, "media" are seen as devices (radio, television, newspapers, etc.) used to deliver messages over a long distance. Given this perspective, are not the Palantiri and Mirror "media" in that they transmit images and ideas? True, the technologies which drive a television and a Palantir may be different, but content is not the technology itself. As Marshall McLuhan said, "The medium is the message."

If we stop to think about it, few people really know and understand the details of how their television works. Likewise, as someone who was distrustful of technology, Tolkien gives absolutely no hint as to the "how" of the Seeing Stones and the Mirror. Were they magic? Only in the same sense that television is magic. As Arthur C. Clarke famously stated, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (1984, p. 36). Writer Larry Niven (2008), however, is often credited with turning that aphorism on its head, and, for our purposes, making it more appropriate: "any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology."

Magic or technology, television, the Mirror and the Palantiri all work: they project a message over a distance with no apparent connection between the distant reality and the image of that reality.

Physical Similarities of Television and the Palantiri

The most detailed explanation of what might be called the "structure and function" of the Palantiri is found in *Unfinished Tales*, Part IV, Section III, where it is stated, "they were kept in guarded rooms, high in strong towers, only... their appointed wardens had access to them, and they were never consulted or exhibited publicly." (p. 404). If we look on the Stones as transmitters, we see an eerily similar description of television: the control rooms and transmitters are kept in guarded rooms, the actual radiators are located high on strong towers. Only the licensee (appointed by the government) is allowed full access to the transmitters, and the inner workings of both the technical aspects and the content are rarely, if ever, discussed publicly.

This duty to the Stones is referenced with the words,

They could be used lawfully by anyone authorized by... a lawful King. ...Each Stone had its own warden, one of whose duties was to "survey the stone" at regular intervals, or when commanded, or in times of need. Other persons also were appointed to visit the Stones, and... [make] regular and special inspections of them, reporting the information so gained to the King and Council... (p. 408)

In the American broadcasting community, station officials, who must, at some levels, be approved by the government, are required to make regular inspections and keep a log of what transpires in terms of both the technical and programming aspects of the station. In addition, officials from a wide variety of government agencies routinely prepare reports on station activity, and make these reports available to the President, members of the President's cabinet, Congress and other interested government agencies.

In today's world is it necessary to learn how to use television? Most emphatically yes! Again, we return to *Unfinished Tales*: "Denethor could, after he had acquired the skill, learn much of distant events by use of the Anor-stone..." (p. 407). In our world, when we see distant events on television, do we have the skill to really understand what we are seeing? Like Denethor, it takes an acquired skill to really understand what we are seeing on television, and why we are seeing it that particular way. But Petty (2007) proposes that Denethor is not able to effectively control the device, and that it does, in fact, control him: "Filling the Steward's mind with visions of doom and destruction, Sauron is able to confuse Denethor's perception of reality." (p. 167)

Similarly, Kraus (2003) has speculated that both Denethor's and Saruman's use of the Palantiri gave them distorted views of the world (p. 142), and Wiggins (2007, p. 102-103) specifically says the Palantiri directly control people and events in Middle-earth.

Later, in regards to Denethor's skills, Tolkien writes, "[T]he Steward was strengthened... by the fact that the Stones were far more amenable to legitimate users..." (pp. 407-409). Today, those who use television to provide truth and balance are looked upon more favorably than those who use the media to distort and lie.

What of the physical characteristics of the Stones? They are described thusly:

- "[M]ade of... glass or crystal, deep black in hue." (p. 409). Television sets today: mostly glass and crystal that are deep black when turned off.
- "At smallest they were about a foot in diameter, but some... were much larger and could not be lifted by one man." (p. 409). Sound familiar?
- "[T]hey were placed in sites suitable to their size and intended use." (p. 409). Old console television sets were placed along one wall of a room so the family could all sit in a "suitable" place across from the set. Smaller sets today are strategically placed in kitchens and bathrooms.
- Tolkien takes great pains to describe how the Stones had to be oriented in a particular direction. Television sets in his day had an antenna that had to be oriented very precisely in order for the set to work properly. Some of these antennae, external ones generally had a fixed orientation, and could not be moved, just like some of the stones had a "fixed orientation."

- "If a Stone became... disturbed it could be re-set by observation, and it was then useful to revolve it." (p. 410) If the old-fashioned antenna mentioned above became disturbed, it had to be rotated back to its optimal position, which was determined by looking at the screen to see when the best picture was achieved.
- "Alone the Palantiri could only 'see': they did not transmit sound." (p. 410) The very name "television" means "distant vision." And what does *Palantir* mean: "far seer" (*Lost Road*, p. 396). (Perhaps "far see-er" would be more appropriate so as to avoid confusion with the term word "seer" in the sense of psychic or mystic). In *The Two Towers*, "The Palantir," Gandalf says the name means, "that which looks far away." But notice that in all of the references, both words (television and Palantir) make no reference to sound, only vision. A television camera itself does not transmit sound; it transmits a picture, an image. A similar description (*Unfinished Tales*, p. 415, note 21) says the Stones could not transmit sound, but rather, transmitted thought. Likewise, a television transmitter does not emit "sound" in the sense of physical molecular motion. What it actually transmits is more akin to "thought" or what Tolkien refers to as "silent speech" (ibid), which is then "immediately transformed into 'speech'" (ibid).
- "From a high place... [they] would look to vast distance..." (p. 410). The higher a television transmitter, the further its reach.
- "The greater *Palantiri* could look much further than the lesser..." (p. 414, note 18). In the United States "larger" or greater television stations or networks have a much further "reach" than smaller stations.

Effects of the Palantiri Upon the User

Beyond their physical attributes, what impact do these devices have on the viewers, beyond the immediate sensation of seeing? Unlike his detailed physical description of the Palantiri, Tolkien, in *Unfinished Tales*, spends little time discussing the effects of the stones upon the viewer. For our purposes, only three short sections relevant: First, "A viewer could, by his will, cause the vision of the Stone to *concentrate* [italics in original]... But this 'concentration' was very tiring and might become exhausting. Consequently it was undertaken when information was urgently desired..." (pp. 410-411).

Second, he says "the use of the Palantiri was a mental strain." (p. 413, note 13)

The third reference, however, is far more sinister: "By themselves the Stones could only *see* [italics in original]... without explanation... These powers were originally used mainly in consultation, for the purpose of exchanging news... It was only Sauron who used a Stone for the transference of his superior will, dominating the weaker [viewer]..." (p. 412, note 5)

In *The Silmarillion* Tolkien reiterates the Stones could reveal more to those whose minds were strong: "[T]hose who possessed great strength of will and of mind might learn to direct their gaze whether they would. Thus the Númenóreans were aware of many things that their enemies wished to conceal..." (p. 292).

It is in *The Two Towers*, however, that the actual working and impact of the Palantiri are demonstrated. In the chapter titled "The Palantir", Tolkien gives this description of the few minutes Pippin spends with the Stone:

Pippin sat with his knees drawn up... At first the globe was dark, black as jet... Then there came a faint glow and stir in the heart of it, and it held his eyes, so that he could not look away... Then with a strangled cry he fell back and lay still.

Does this not perfectly describe a child, sitting with arms clasped around knees, watching as the dark screen of a television set slowly begins to glow and assume a life of its own? And Pippin is immediately affected by both the device and the message he is receiving.

But not everyone is affected the same way, by either television or a Palantir. When Gandalf asks Aragorn to guard the stone he tells the future king, "It is a dangerous charge." But Aragorn

replies, "Dangerous indeed, but not to all..." thus demonstrating his "spiritual depth" (Wiggins, 2007, p. 97).

Gandalf also says the Stones themselves do not lie, but "He [Sauron] can, maybe by his will choose what things shall be seen by weaker minds, or cause them to mistake the meaning of what they see." (*Return of the King*, "The Last Debate"). This is the heart of what is known as "cultivation theory": People see something on television, and then interpret the "vision" they see based on any number of internal and external factors.

The Mirror of Galadriel

Another form of media in *The Lord of the Rings* is the Mirror of Galadriel, and it, too, bears a striking resemblance to television, in both its operation and in its effects on the viewer.

In terms of the "how" of the Mirror, Galadriel seems to imply that it functions not through magic, but through a natural process of the natural world: Sam has said he would like to see "some Elf-magic" (*Fellowship of the Ring*, "The Mirror of Galadriel"), and Galadriel tells him, "[T]his is what your folk would call magic," seeming to say that although some people call it magic, it is, in actuality something else.

As Sam looked, the mirror "looked dark and hard [then] grew grey, and then clear," much like a television set coming on.

Before Sam and Frodo look in the Mirror, Galadriel is careful to point out:

"Many things I can command the Mirror to reveal," she answered, "and to some I can show what they desire to see. But the mirror will also show things unbidden, and those are often stranger and more profitable than things which we wish to behold. What you will see, if you leave the Mirror free to work, I cannot tell. For it shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be. But which it is that he sees, even the wisest cannot always tell."

This is what is known as agenda setting theory: the mirror does not recommend a course of action, but merely presents a series of options: Sam can return home in response to the vision, or he can continue on the journey. The choice is his, although there will be consequences for whatever path he chooses. Says the Lady, "Some [visions] never come to be, unless those that behold the visions turn aside from their paths to prevent them. The Mirror is dangerous as a guide of deeds."

Much like television, when using the Mirror, "Vision is no substitute for decision, and decision must come from intelligence and feeling" (Stanton, 2001, p. 42). In other words, the user has control over the medium (i.e. can change the channel), yet the medium will also deliver messages unbidden by the viewer. At times it seems the message is being controlled by the viewer, yet at other times, unseen forces (television executives) are controlling what we see and hear. This is the essence of what is known as the projective/reflective theory of media: is television projecting perhaps unbidden or unwanted views upon society and audiences, or are the media merely reflecting what society is doing or wants? It is a question scholars ("even the wisest") cannot discern.

Conclusion

Does Tolkien intend the Palantiri and Mirror to represent television? Of course not. Although his dislike of allegory was legendary, "absence of allegory does not equal lack of relevance" (Swanwick, 2001, p. 36), nor does it indicate a lack of connection. Indeed, other writers have found numerous relationships between Tolkien's created world and the real world (see, for example, Bassham & Bronson, 2003; Brunner & Ware, 2001; Croft, 2007).

All fiction must have at least a patina of verisimilitude, and the reader must be able to relate the story to the real world. In creating fiction, the author must blend both real and fictional worlds, and studying this overlap can provide insights into the author's creation, thus expanding our enjoyment of the created world, and our understanding of the real.

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Letters



Dear Andrew,

As a new member (June 2008) I first want to say how much I am enjoying the Society and its publications. Good job!

In issue 213 Henry Gee mentioned that "Tolkien Studies" publications should be available "through one's local library". I have had the joy of reading some volumes obtained through the library system here in Massachusetts which enables lending from all State, City, University and College libraries in MA. I agree that *Mallorn* may not be the place for lengthy works when other publications cover that area already.

Also I found very interesting the letters in 213 about artwork used in *Amon Hen*. After some thought I come down on the side of inspiration as verses copying, as put forth by Jeff Murray in his letter. I feel that Peter Jackson was inspired by the written word in LotR and am thankful, as without his work I may never have read Tolkien. However, that was his vision, his casting, etc. and copying that, to my mind, is not art as inspiration.

Truly yours,

Lynda Scicolone

The art debate is certainly getting quite a response from some of you:

Dear editor,

If we must have drawings of actors and scenes as imagined by Jackson & Co., could we at least have a break from them for a while? I really like Marion Kershaw's suggestion that your reprint some of the best and/or most interesting art from *Amon Hen* from past years. While you are showcasing this art, you could stockpile the Jacksonian stuff and, a year later, print just the best of it. If that seems like something that would discourage artists (a delay in their seeing their work), well, maybe it would give them a reason to go back and read what Tolkien wrote and try to depict that.

Dale Nelson