As Tolkien readers and scholars have long noted, nature holds a special place in Tolkien's primary and secondary worlds. As such, nature is constantly on the central stage, even when it is not the primary narrative plot. Intertwined with the centrality of the natural world, brought to life on numerous occasion by Tolkien, we find an ever-present but veiled hope for a renewed natural environment. The thesis of this paper is that this very hope is central to Tolkien's works, as particularly seen in The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit, but also in The Silmarillion and other lesser works. However, hope for such a renewal of nature always seem so distant as to be merely a dream. Songs and stories assume this, but only on rare occasions is this hope clearly expressed.

This paper aims to demonstrate that Tolkien's hope for a future restoration of nature rests upon a fundamentally Catholic understanding of nature and history, and more precisely Thomistic. To do so, the paper will first look at central aspects of this future «natural hope» in Tolkien's works. References to Christopher Tolkien's History of Middle-Earth will serve to underline Tolkien's conception of what theologians call «eschatological hope.» References to other mythological works, particularly those well-known to Tolkien, will serve to enhance the specifics of Tolkien's mythpoeic vision. Secondly, this paper will argue that the future dignity, integrity, and beauty of nature is determined by a specific vision of time and history. Only because history moves towards its fulfillment, can hope in a final and glorious restoration of nature be truly held.

Biographical sketch

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