
J.R.R. Tolkien's Riddles

International Traditions, The *Exeter Book* Riddles, and *The Hobbit*

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Abstract

This dissertation analyses the riddles Tolkien composed for his novel *The Hobbit*. It examines in which ways the function of the chapter ‘Riddles in the Dark’ coincides with the use of riddles in a narrative context in other cultures. To accomplish this, a basic sketch is made of the functions of riddles in Chinese and African cultures. The language of the *Exeter Book* riddles is considered and analysed and some major strategies that create ambiguous language are identified. This dissertation analyses the different influences of the *Exeter Book* riddles on Tolkien’s riddles. The language of the riddles of *The Hobbit* is compared to that of the *Exeter Book*. The different strategies that are used to create ambiguity in both works is then examined and set out against each other. It also considers Tolkien’s riddles as independent and analyses them as an independent unit. It explains how the solutions to the riddles of *The Hobbit* are paradoxical and how they exemplify the major theme of the work and Tolkien’s other works. Finally, it creates an image of the way in which Tolkien uses riddles to create a unique, deeply metaphorical work.

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Introduction

Every culture has its own unique riddling tradition, which often reflects the society in which the riddles were composed (Hamnett). Some customs are incredibly elaborate, well-developed and literary, as in the Latin, Greek and Old English cultures (Baum, Bitterli, Blauner, Krapp & Dobbie, Williamson). In contrast, other cultures build upon an oral tradition in the form of riddle gatherings or riddle contests, such as the African and Native American cultures (Cook, Harries, Köngäs Maranda, Rudolph, Taylor, Thomas Scott, Williams). Although the traditions differ, the purpose and function of the riddles is similar in many cultures. Williams even gives seven functions of riddles in society. Not all of these are, however, relevant to this paper, and Williams fails to identify some crucial functions. Firstly, many cultures use the riddle sessions as a way of bonding within a community because the riddles are often asked in the context of large gathering or even a contest. Secondly, the riddle is an important part of folk-tale and myth. In this context, either a traveller is asked to solve a riddle to earn his rights of passage, or riddles are used as a means of communication between God's and mortals. The final aspect in which riddles are crucial to societies is riddles are often used as an educational tool. Solving a riddle requires the ability to analyse the riddle in great detail. However, this paper does not discuss this last aspect in much detail due to lack of space.

The *Exeter Book* is a tenth century manuscript, written in Old English. It seems to be an anthology of poetry and it includes ninety-five to a hundred riddles, often written in the typical Old English alliterative verse (Williamson). The solutions to these riddles are almost always simple, everyday objects. However, the language the riddles use is often so obscure that the solution is still hard to deduce from the hints given. For example, a riddle will aim to describe an object by giving a number of its characteristics. Nevertheless, the characteristics would suit (at least) two different objects and often only a single hint brings one to the

solution. The art is then, of course, to find this clue in the poem. Another way in which the Old English riddle fools its reader is by using paradox. They compare two things that at first seem completely different and the reader is challenged to find the similarities between the two objects that are described to come to the solution of the riddle. Blauner argues that the Old English riddles are “important to the student of cultural and technological history for they preserve details of Old English life that cannot easily be found elsewhere, such as the description of cooking utensils, the treatment of salt” (53). This paper aims to explain in what ways the riddles in the *Exeter Book* are coherent with the larger, international tradition of riddling in terms of theme, function and language.

J.R.R. Tolkien’s children’s novel *The Hobbit* contains a unique scene in which a riddle contest takes place. Tolkien utilises similar language strategies that are used in the *Exeter Book* riddles to challenge his characters and his readers in the chapter ‘Riddles in the Dark’. This is perhaps not surprising, because it is well-known that Tolkien was a scholar of Old English and Anglo-Saxon literature. There is, of course, a difference in the way the riddles of the *Exeter Book* and those of *The Hobbit* function: the riddles in the latter work are part of a larger literary work. They have a longer story as a framework, while the *Exeter Book* is more of an anthology, as mentioned above. However, having a literary framework is not unique for riddles. As noted before, riddles are used in stories in different cultures. This paper aims to look at how the riddles are used in *The Hobbit* and whether that ties in with the bigger tradition of using riddles in literary frameworks. It will also examine the language of the riddles in *The Hobbit* and compare the results to the way the Anglo-Saxon riddles are written.

The International Riddling Tradition

There is a general pattern to be discerned in riddling traditions throughout different cultures from all over the world. This chapter will examine that pattern by exploring the riddling tradition of the Venda (northeast of South Africa) and Dusun (Malaysia) cultures, both of which are small communities. Then, more generally, the riddling customs of Africa and China will be discussed. The key aspects of Latin literary riddles and those written in the Old English vernacular are then analysed. It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss riddling in other cultures. As a result of this, some generalisation are assumed for the purpose of this paper.

The Chinese Tradition

The Chinese people have a riddling tradition that goes back to ancient times, though riddles have often been considered as a secondary form of art by scholars. Consequently, not much attention has been given to the studying and collecting of these riddles up until recent times (Rudolph). That there is indeed a large body of Chinese riddles is, at least partly, due to the great ambiguity of the Chinese Mandarin language. Rudolph gives three reasons for this.

First, the Chinese language is monosyllabic, and the resultant paucity of *sounds* leaves the so-called “standard” Mandarin dialect with only about 420 different syllables for the entire range of spoken thought. As a result, there is naturally a very large number of homophones which readily lend themselves to riddle making by punning on sound (68).

He goes on to argue that the meaning of individual characters are often many and diverse. This suggests that authors, riddle composers in particular, can depend on the duality of meaning of each character to compose an ambiguous text. For example, the word for riddle in the Mandarin Chinese language, as spelled in the Latin alphabet, *yin yü*, or abbreviated as *yin*, which literally means “concealed, hidden, abstruse language” (72). As can be seen, the very

label for the word 'riddle' in Chinese demonstrates the ambiguity of the Mandarin language and portrays the aim of the thing itself: riddles aim to conceal certain things from their readers. Finally, "the *forms* of Chinese characters must be taken into consideration since one group of riddles deals with the description of a character or of its component parts" (68). Again, the riddler can use this to create puzzling language in their enigmas. It is, for these reasons, not surprising that the riddling tradition has adopted quite an important role in Chinese society throughout the ages.

As can be seen later when African riddle culture is discussed, the Chinese customs regarding riddles were at least partly based on an oral tradition. Rudolph notes that "there were riddle schools and riddle masters" (79) where pupils would learn how to compose and solve riddles. These institutions were important because of the impact they had on the community. Besides this, they highlight the high regard in which the Chinese held their riddling tradition. It was mainly a social activity in the early society where, every day, people came together to enjoy the art, at least during the late Middle Ages (around the thirteenth century). These gatherings, then, had a bonding function, designed not only to create a learning environment where people could practice rhetoric by solving the riddles, but also an atmosphere to strengthen social connections. The riddling tradition in China came to a climax during the Festival of Lanterns which is celebrated on the fifteenth of the first month of the lunar calendar ("Lantern").

During this period everyone, rich and poor, bought lanterns of various size, ingenuity, and beauty according to his station and wealth, and exhibited them. Later on, the literati practiced custom of writing riddles on slips of paper and pasting them on lanterns which hung by their doors where passers-by could guess at them (Rudolph 76).

Though it is not specified who exactly these “literati” are, this is the only instance Rudolph mentions, apart from the riddle collections composed by Western authors, of the Chinese riddles being written down. Because these lantern riddles were written down, they allowed for more complicated metaphors since the reader could read it as many times as he or she would like. When a riddle is told to a person there is only a single chance to pick up on the hints the riddler poses the solver. When one succeeded in solving the riddle, there would be a reward, such as paper, ink, or eatables (Rudolph).

In addition to these examples, Chinese riddles “also appear in folk tales of the contest of which a poor man wins a rich or noble wife by solving a particularly difficult problem” (Rudolph 66-67). Similar practices in other cultures are discussed below. Here, again, the riddles were transmitted orally, as these folk tales were indeed passed on from generation to generation by reciting them out loud until, at one point, a scribe collected them and wrote them down.

The topics of the Chinese riddles differed greatly. They were taken “at pleasure from classics, biographies, poetry, the various philosophers, well-known stories and novels, proverbs (the names of) all kinds of birds, animals, and insects as well as flowers, grasses, vegetables and herbs” (Rudolph 77). The riddles were often written in the form of an enigma thus comparable to a short but complicated poem. They describe their topic by playing with the riddle’s components, making sure that the particular features the riddle uses apply to one or more solutions. Usually, the specific Mandarin characters used provided hints to the solution, as mentioned above. Rudolph’s analyses of the literal translation of a Chinese riddle sheds some light upon the character riddle.

- 1) Two appearances, one body.
- 2) Four limbs, eight heads.
- 3) Four eights, one eight.

4) Flying streams flow to meet it. (69)

In this riddle, which has the answer ‘Well,’ Rudolph explains that the first line hints at the “character *ching*, meaning “a well,” looks very much like two parallel horizontal lines crossed by two parallel vertical lines. Consequently, line 2 refers to the four lines of strokes and the eight ends of the lines” (69). Thus the description of the well simultaneously refers to the well itself and the Chinese character for it – an example of the polysomy of the language. There were also riddles that combined the three aspects mentioned previously that make the Chinese Mandarin language cryptic and suitable for riddling, and the poetic form to create the most complicated and longest riddles (Rudolph).

The African Tradition

In African culture, similar as in China, the art of riddling also had an important role in society. According to Harries, it was one of the most important forms of oral art in Africa. Every day, people would gather around and attend riddling sessions where a large audience would be asked to work together to solve a particular riddle. Harries attempts to examine and categorise the African riddles that appear in these riddle gatherings and sessions. He states that the riddle occasions are

not necessarily a contest in which the audience is expected to provide answers.

Accounts show, from the rules of the game when the audience is unable to provide the answer, that in many instances, of course, there is such a contest, but it cannot be stated empirically that the intention of the riddler is to confuse or baffle his audience (387).

As these sessions were oral, and because there is a large audience working to solve the riddles, Harries argues that to analyse the riddles themselves, one also has to examine the situational context, not only the textual context. One feature of African riddles derives directly from this context, namely an opening and closing frame that the African riddle tends

to have. This could either be an opening line to the riddle itself, or an opening phrase to commence the riddling session as a whole. The same is true for the closing frames. Harries does not give a specific example of a closing frame in African riddles because he does not discuss the technical language of the riddles. However, an example of a closing frame can be found in Anglo-Saxon riddle number ten: the short poem closes with “Saga hwæt ic hatte” (Say what I am called), and it can be imagined that African riddles have a similar kind of closing frame. More on this topic below.

The themes of African riddles, according to Harries’ examination, are somewhat different from the themes of Mandarin Chinese riddles. This is mainly because in African riddles “the answer is not an object but a statement” (379), such as a proverb. To illustrate this he gives an example of a Nyanga (Zimbabwe) riddle with translation:

Proverb: Uhunáa mongó umwambicanga.

Who desires a beauty clothes her.

Response: Ngí ériéba mbu émunína, nákiro wemá búni ná kúti umwambîca nti bâmwisane.

That is to say, however plain she may be, they will desire the woman whom you clothe. (389).

Here, the opening phrase of the riddle (Ngi erieba mbu) translates to “that is to say”. As can be seen as well, these riddles are not so much about simple, everyday objects, but the answer is often a longer sentence or phrase. Harries does not discuss if these solutions are well-known or commonplace phrases or if they are randomly selected by the riddler. It is therefore also unknown if there is more similarity with the Mandarin Chinese riddles regarding the solutions of both sets of riddles. For example, Harries could have considered if there may be some form of intertextuality in the solution of African riddles as can be found in the Chinese riddles. Or perhaps the answers are connected to old folk-tales that are well known

throughout the community. Because of a lack of studies on this topic, no further conclusions can at this point be drawn about the solutions of African riddles.

Hamnett argues that to do research on riddles, one is obliged to also examine the context, the society and community in which these riddles appear. He observes that in Venda culture (northeast of South Africa), “Riddling emerges as a competitive game for young people, in which what matters is the number of riddles a contestant knows. It has no importance as an intellectual or cognitive exercise, and no weight is given to understanding the meaning of riddles” (380). Taylor ties into this observation by arguing that, even though he believes that Native Americans took the riddling tradition from their colonisers, there are traces of native culture and local conditions. If indeed there was no Native American riddling before the colonisation, the art of the riddle was adapted to suit the local culture and environment. Therefore, to be able to properly understand and perhaps also solve the riddles, one must know about the context and understand the culture in which these riddles are composed. This is comparable to the conclusions Harries has drawn about the riddling sessions, except that in Venda culture, the sessions are always a contest. Because Venda riddling is mainly an exercise in memory, Hamnett, as Harries, does not look into specific examples of riddles. Köngäs Maranda, in her article about Finnish riddles contradicts Hamnett’s observations and argues that “Whatever other functions riddles and riddling may have in various cultures, there is a basic, perhaps universal function, which is cognitive” (131). Furthermore, in Williams’ discussion of riddles in the Dusun (Malaysia) community, he shows that “riddling is a fundamental part of the structure and functioning of this society” (96). As riddling in these cultures is always a group activity, it creates a bonding environment for community members. Nevertheless, though there are different opinions about the grounds of interest these communities show in riddling, all of these scholars agree that the riddling tradition has an important role in the society that have been studied.

The Latin Tradition

An unmissable tradition to consider when examining the *Exeter Book* riddles is the Latin tradition. Blauner argues that “All of the development of Latin riddling is based on an author who we think is named Symphosius, who lived in the fifth century. He has been the model for riddles for over a thousand years, maintaining his sovereignty till the Renaissance” (52-53). And indeed, many have argued that Symphosius has been the inspiration for later riddlers, for example Anglo-Saxon riddlers Tatwine, Eusibius, and Aldhelm (Williamson, Baum). As it is well-known that Symphosius’ work was popular in Anglo-Saxon times it is not surprising that Anglo-Saxon authors were inspired by these riddles. By adapting and using the Latin riddles in their vernacular Old English language, these churchmen portrayed “the transitional middle-world between pagan Christian, [where] those men who were sufficiently trained to write English verse could look both ways and feel no hesitation in mingling the sacred and the profane” (Baum xi-xii). Thus, the riddles combine pagan and Christian ideas, as can be seen in the solutions to the riddles. They tie in with themes from medieval English literature in general such as “the emulation of the ideals of Christianity [and] the need to be aware of sin” (Treharne 12).

It seems that the Latin and Greek people were the first to write down and collect their riddles (the Chinese people did write their riddles on lanterns but did not collect them in anthologies). Though “literary riddles”, as Blauner describes them, are seen throughout Symphosius’ collection of riddles, he notes that this is not the first time such a technique has been employed. He states that “Greece has a tradition of riddling which has flourished from the beginning of its literary history” (51), implying that the Greek people wrote down their riddles as soon as they started writing. At the same time, riddles attached to narratives, and thus riddles that are incorporated into stories and tales, also dates back to ancient times in the Latin and Greek traditions. The example given by Cook is the story in which an unearthly

creature, such as a sphinx in case of the famous sphinx riddle, challenges a traveller to solve a riddle in order to receive his rights of passage. She emphasises that riddles also appear in numerous other works which vary widely in genre, and in which the function of the riddle therefore also differs: texts such as “sacred writings (epistolary etc.), tragedy, comedy, romance, lyric kinds, even the novel” (110-111) are all known to use riddles. If the traveller fails to solve the riddle, he will be killed or eaten. Such stories “have arisen in various forms and at various times in the early Middle Ages ... and have often been carried westward in later centuries” (Blauner 51). The medieval Scandinavian peoples also had this tradition of riddles in myth and folk-tales. In their stories, the Gods adored riddling and riddle contests. In these contests, “a supernatural creature asks a riddle to be solved by a mortal on pain of death” (Roberts 46). Consequently, because the Gods enjoyed composing riddles, the Scandinavian people showed great love for riddles. Riddling, then, was also a way to understand the complicated nature of the relationship between divine and mortal beings. Interaction between humanity and their deities was often in the form of a riddling contest as the ones that appear in Scandinavian tradition.

Indeed, riddle contests were an important part of Dark Age culture. This might be by way of passing the time and having fun; but they also had a deeper significance ...

Dark Age culture closely connected legal process and riddles. Perhaps this had to do with a sense that the law was rarely simple or straightforward; for the law, after all, tends to highlight puzzling or counter-intuitive aspects of human existence (45).

Thus, medieval riddling is connected to both oral and literary tradition, with riddling contests taking different forms with different functions, and with medieval law.

There is other evidence for the popularity of Latin riddles such as Symphosius' *Aenigmata* (4th-5th century) (Leary). Firstly, his riddles “survive in more than twenty medieval manuscripts and,” as mentioned before, “provide the model for most later

collections of metrical riddles” (Bitterli 14). Some of the most famous medieval texts, for example *Beowulf*, only survive in a single manuscript (“Beowulf”), thus the appearance of these riddles in so many surviving manuscripts indicates at least some kind of popularity with contemporary readers. Bitterli illustrates that Aldhelm’s *Aenigmata* (d. 709/710) which are based on Symphosius’ work, “were widely disseminated both in early England and on the continent, often circulating independently from his metrical treatise” (24). He goes on to state that these riddles began the widespread art of riddle-making. Furthermore, in Anglo-Saxon England, a large body of riddles was composed for educational and monastic purposes and readings (Bitterli). In addition to these uses of riddles, there is evidence that Welsh and Irish law schools used the riddle and the riddle form as an instructional tool (Roberts). Therefore, these riddles were mostly composed, collected, read, and used by the clergy because they were the class that took upon themselves the education of the next generation (Cook).

Old English society had a great wealth of riddles and a range of other puzzles and enigmas, metaphors, and mystifying charms. The Anglo-Saxon fascination with riddles can, according to Roberts, also be explained by the general view the Anglo-Saxons took on life. They believed life itself to be a riddle “not because it can be in some sense ‘solved’, but because there is an ironic relationship between what is presented and what is meant – between what is to-hand and how things really are” (23). If this conclusion can be deduced from the popularity of riddles in Anglo-Saxon society, then, indeed, riddling seems a playful, light-hearted manner to approach the unsolvable question of life.

In later times, when riddles were written in Old English, a categorisation of literary works into genres began. In this time, the riddle was considered “a low genre on the social scale” (Cook 127) as it was not nearly as prestigious as the elegy, the epic or the ode as a literary form. Even the Latin enigmas were considered much more esteemed than riddles written in Old English. Cook argues most modern people are not particularly interested in

riddles. They consider a riddle as “a trivial joke, momentarily amusing” (127). However, she goes on to state that it is precisely the relatively simple and innocent nature of riddles that makes them an incredibly interesting subject for studies. “The riddle is unable to pretend to be more than it is, in contrast to the dramatic nature of epics or elegies – There is something to be said for a genre and mode that are hard to fool or fool around with” (127). Though elegies, such as *Wulf and Eadwacer* are, as Treharne explains, extremely mysterious themselves and have a riddling quality about them. They even refer to themselves as riddles: *þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad was, / uncer giedd geador* (ll. 18-19) “That may easily be separated which was never bound, the riddle of us two together”. Cook also states that modern collectors often mention mental exercise as a benefit of both composing and solving riddles by applying logic and rhetoric to everyday language. Indeed, this function of riddles seemed self-evident long before modern research of brain activity confirmed these suspicions. The most common motive given for reading, collecting, and attempting to solve riddles, though, is still amusement. This can be seen in the riddling sessions in the African and Malaysian cultures, but also in western cultures in modern times, where riddles were sometimes used to entertain one’s visitors in the evening (Cook). Chapman Stacey points out that, considering all the different cultures and all the different ways in which riddles are used in society, there appears to be a larger function of riddles is widely applicable: “Riddles function, in almost every culture in which they appear, as a means by which one person lays claim to power over another” (153).

The *Exeter Book* Riddles

Scholars have often examined the *Exeter Book* riddles and have concluded that there are certain themes that are present throughout all of the riddles. As mentioned above, Treharne notes that there are key topics, especially regarding religion, that come back throughout the entire body of medieval literature written in Old and Middle English. Some of these are “the emulation of the ideals of Christianity (as evinced in the lives of Christ and his saints), the need to beware of sin, to be alert to the imminence of Judgement Day and the transience of earthly life, to search persistently for salvation, and to meditate upon the great act of Christ’s Passion to redeem mankind” (12). The riddles sometimes combine these religious ideas with simpler themes (Baum). The influence of other riddle collections on the choice of topics and themes in the *Exeter Book* riddles has also been extensively examined – Symphosius’ enigmas in particular. Bitterli comes to the conclusion that, indeed, there are some Old English riddles that are influenced by Symphosius’ collection but “Of the ninety-five *Riddles* in the *Exeter Book*, no more than a handful can actually be said to rephrase Symphosian tristichs, and even if they do, they always expand upon their Latin source” (18). Thus it cannot be said that the Old English riddles all derive from the Latin riddles. This is supported by Williamson who argues “that the Old English *Riddles* derived from a Latin literary tradition but ... they assumed distinct Old English qualities, namely imaginative portrayal and projection and the power of a dramatic, literary game” (24). Consequently, Old English riddles are indeed very different from their Latin predecessors. There is a literary device that reappears throughout the riddles time and again. In fact, only a handful of the Old English riddles do not utilise the device called prosopopoeia. This means that the riddle is written in the first person. It is an inanimate object or non-human subject speaking and describing itself (Nelson). Another reason why the riddles are ambiguous in language is the polysemous nature of the Old English language. Treharne illustrates this in her introduction to the elegy

Wulf and Eadwacer. She points out that scholars are still uncertain of the meaning of the work because there are so many different readings of it. The reason for this is “the polysemous nature of the text” (*Old and Middle English* 76). She points out that in the first line of the poem, the word *lac* can mean three different things, and in the same line, the word *giefan* can, in turn, mean five different things. This strategy is also apparent in the *Exeter Book* riddles. This chapter illustrates several ways in which uncertainty of meaning is created in the riddles of the *Exeter Book* using rhetorical devices.

Paradox

There are several techniques that create ambiguity in the Old English riddles. These approaches are used throughout the whole manuscript. The first is paradox. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following as a definition for paradox: “A statement or proposition which, despite sound (or apparently sound) reasoning from acceptable premises, leads to a conclusion that seems logically unacceptable or self-contradictory” (“Paradox”). Thus, through paradox, the riddles combine two mundane entities that at first perhaps seem entirely unrelated. Gibson Geller investigates the pedagogical aspect of riddles that are used in the modern classroom and states that “The riddle form, depending on the manipulation [of language]; ... the frequent use of metaphor for its paradoxical constructions, is a complex form of language activity” (669). She goes on to argue that the surprise element of the riddles lies in the discovery of similarities where, before, only differences were thought to exist. When applying this idea to the *Exeter Book* riddles, a deeper and more complex use of paradox in combination with metaphor can be seen. The riddles themselves are indeed in some way paradoxical in that they “enact a form of reversal by the very act of making some humble object central to the poetic imagination” (Wilcox 47-48). A temporary inversion in world-view takes place, exactly because “The riddle moves the hearer’s universe by making

such a humble and downturned utilitarian object briefly glorious, upright, and morally upstanding” (50).

Riddles 33 and 37 both use a striking, out-spoken paradox which is, at the same time, also chiasmus. In Riddle 33, which has Iceberg as a proposed solution, the paradox states: *Is min modor mæða cynnes / þæs deorestan, þæt is dohtor min*¹ (ll. 9-10), “My mother, one of the beloved maidens, is my daughter also”. In these lines, the mother and daughter are water and ice as it freezes into the iceberg and melts into water again. Another suggestion is that the daughter is the iceberg breaking off from the mother, the glacier. However, as glaciers would not have been a common sight to Anglo-Saxons, the first suggestion seems more probable. In Riddle 37, which has the solution Bellows, the paradox is more complicated. The Old English riddle reads *he sunu wyrceð, bið hym sylfa fæder* (l. 8). Crossley-Holland explains the paradox as follows: “The last line means that the bellows gives birth to air (as it pumps it out), yet also gives itself air and life (as it draws air in)” (101). In both examples, the paradox is used to confuse the reader once again in the last few lines of the poem yet when the solution to the poem is known, these lines seem composed not to confuse the reader but to help them.

An example in which paradox is the main source of ambiguity is Riddle 7, which has the proposed solution of Swan. The entire riddle is threaded with smaller paradoxes which reach their climax when they are all considered at the same time. For example, the poem begins with the question of place. This creature dwells in at least three different places:

Hrægl min swigað, þonne ic hrusan trede, / oþpe þa wic buge, oþpe wado drefe (ll.1-2),

“Silent is my dress when I step across the earth, / reside in my house, or ruffle the waters”.

Thus, the creature moves around between the ground, its dwelling, and the water. While it

¹ When referring to the Old English version of the Exeter Book riddles, I refer to Krapp and Dobbie’s *The Anglo-Saxon Poetical Records III*. When referring to the Modern English translation of the Exeter Book riddles, I refer to Kevin Crossley-Holland’s 1993 translation.

withdraws into its house, the air lifts it “over the livings of men” (l. 4), *Hwilum mec ahebbað ofer hælleþa byht* (l. 3), so it is close to humans but withdrawn at the same time. Then there is the opposition of sound; the creature’s dress is silent, yet *Frætwe mine / swogað hlude ond swinsiað, / torhte singað* (ll. 6b-8a), “My white pinions / resound very loudly, ring with a melody, / sing out clearly”. (The modern translation gives a slightly easier hint towards the nature of the Swan because it gives away that the creature has wings and that it is white of colour. The Old English uses literally “ornaments” instead of “pinions” and there is no mention of the colour of the creature at all.) When the reader considers these three smaller paradoxes in the light of the basic knowledge on the nature of swans, they will eventually reach the solution.

The obscene riddles carry a whole new paradox in the form of their *double entendre* and they show that the woman, who is an important part of the obscene riddles, is often of a high social position. Wilcox argues that “Within the sexualized solution, the status of the woman adds an additional paradox through the implication that even those with the dignity of an elevated status resort to the same basic bodily functions when it comes to satisfying sexual desires” (53). Thus, in addition to using humour to create ambiguity, the obscene riddles illustrate that no matter a person’s status, there are basic human intuitions all people have. An example of an obscene riddle is Riddle 61 which has Helmet or Shirt as its innocent solution, and Penis as its humorous solution. The Riddle opens with *Oft mec fæste bileac freolicu meowle, / ides on earce hwilum up ateah* (ll. 1-2), “A lovely woman, a lady, often locked me in a chest; at times she took me out”. The woman in the poem is a lady, a woman of higher status. In the light of the sexual answer, the lady handles a penis, indicating that even she, this creature of high stature and dignity, has sexual needs. An obscene riddle that does not contain the paradox of social status is Riddle 25 (Onion or Penis). Here, the riddler uses the approach that Honegger describes: “[the riddler] carefully constructs the text so that even the longest

list of elements matches two (or more) solutions, or (radically) reduces the number of elements to be matched thus allowing almost automatically a wider range of possible answers” (95). Riddle 25, then, is a riddle of the first type. Its elements are that *wifum on hyhte* (l. 1) “I satisfy women,” *Stapol min is steapheah, stonde ic on bedde* (l. 4) “I grow very tall, erect in a bed,” *neoþan ruh nathwær* (l. 5a) “I’m hairy underneath,” *Nepeð hwilum / ful cyrtenu ceorles dohtor / ... Wæt bið þæt eage* (ll. 5b-11b) and that it moistens the eye of the girl who dares to hold it. All of these elements could be applied to both the Onion and Penis, leaving the solution open to interpretation and imagination of the reader. Consequently, sexual riddles broaden the range of paradoxes since all this otherwise undescribed activity proves to be mappable onto such a wide range of inanimate objects” (Wilcox 53).

Paradox of Manufacture

A theme that resurfaces throughout the Riddles is the process of forming and making. This theme appears for a reason as it creates the “paradox of manufacture” (Wilcox 51). A clear example of this can be found in Riddle 12, which has the solution Leather. It describes the different stages in which leather can be found. Leather is made out of the skin of oxen, thus the first lines of the poem describe the live ox: *Fotum ic fere, foldan slite, / grene wongas, þenden ic gæst bere*. (ll. 1-2), “I travel by foot, trample the ground, / the green fields, for as long as I live”. The last half-line indicates that the animal works as long as it lives, and that it also has a use when it is no longer alive. This quickly leads to the solution of ox as these animals were often used for labour until they were too old and then they were killed for their meat, bones, horns, and skins. The poem goes on to state that *Gif me feorh losað, fæste binde / swearte Wealas, hwilum sellan men* (ll. 3-4), “Lifeless I fetter dark Welshmen, / sometimes their betters too,” indicating the earlier mentioned use of the ox after the its death. And again, *Hwilum ic deorum drincan sella* (l. 5), “At times / I give a warrior liquor from within me,” as the horn is also used as a drinking vessel. Leather in its use for shoes is also

described. The final lines of the poem support the paradox of manufacture, giving a summary and a final clue to the solution: *Saga hwæt ic hatte, / þe ic lifgende lond reafige / ond æfter deaþe dryhtum þeowige.* (ll. 13b-15b), “What am I called who, alive, lay waste / the land, and, dead, serve humankind?”.

Another example is Riddle 26, which has been given the solution Book. Here, the paradox is perhaps slightly more obvious, since the actual process of creating a book is described. First, an animal is killed and skinned to be used as hide. Then the creature describes how

[...] *Heard mec sibþan,*

Snað seaxses ecg, sindrum begrunden;

Fingras feoldan, ond mec fugles wyn

Geond speddropum spyrede geneahhe,

Ofer brunne brerd, [...]

[...] *Mec sibþan wraþ*

Hæleð hleobordum, hyde beþenede,

Gierede mec mid golde (ll. 5b-13a).

[...] he dipped me

in water and drew me out again,

and put me in the sun where I soon shed

all my hair. The knife’s sharp edge

bit into me once my blemishes had been scraped away;

fingers folded me and the bird’s feather

often moved across my brown surface, [...]

[...] Then a man bound me,

He stretched skin over me and adorned me,

With gold.

The adorning with gold and the fact that *Nama min is mære, / hæleþum gifre ond halig sylf* (ll. 27b-28b), “My name is famous, / of service to men and sacred in itself” indicates that the book is an important one, known to many people and sacred. Crossley Holland suggests that it is, perhaps, a copy of the gospels. Riddle 83 (Ore) uses the theme of manufacture in a slightly different manner, as it uses the process of creation as a tool to show the trauma the ore endures. First, it is *fyre gefælsad* (l. 4a) “purged by fire,” melted down by those people that extracted it from the earth. Then the ore explains that *Nu me fah warað / eorþan broþor, se me ærest wearð / gumena to gyrne* (ll. 4b-6a), “Now, the brother of earth, / my enemy, who from the first brought me / sorrow, imprisons me”. These lines indicate that from the very start, the ore has been hurt and imprisoned. The poem then states that the ore remembers well those who have hurt it but that *ic him ylfe ne mot, / ac ic hæftnyd hwilum arære / wide geond wongas* (ll. 8b-10a), “I can do him no evil / but at times I’m an instrument of bondage / the whole world over”. The instrument of bondage (the image of fetters comes to mind) is made out of the ore, thus the ore has undergone a process of fabrication. This description of manufacturing helps create the ambiguity of the riddle; the ore has undergone a transformation, thus it is not a single thing that the reader is trying to guess but several, which all lead back to the one object that began the riddle. Wilcox also suggests that Riddle 35 (Sword) as one that carries the paradox of manufacture, since it shows the sword as it “enters into human vengeance structures and emblemizes human masculinity yet laments that it will not have heirs and that no one will take vengeance for the violence of its production” (51). Riddles 94 and 40 could also be categorised into this group, since their solutions are Creation, the creation of the world by God out of nothing. Riddle 92 (Beech), though severely damaged can be seen as carrying the paradox as a poem in itself, not so much in what it describes. It is a short poem that changes its shape and form and thus “seeks to

confuse by being so many different things [at once]" (Crossley Holland 120). Wilcox states that "Riddles are slanted to reveal the paradoxes that prove to lie almost everywhere." (51), as well as in the process of fabricating everyday objects.

kennings

Another tactic to enforce the central paradox of the Old English riddles is the use of kennings: "A compound expression in Old English and Old Norse poetry with metaphorical meaning, e.g. oar-stead = ship" ("Kenning"). Roberts explains the effect of kennings in Old English poetry as a trope that utilises circumlocutionary and figurative language in order to create metaphor where the use of a simple indicative could have sufficed. The use of kennings ties in with Wilcox's idea of temporarily making something ordinary seem as though it is vastly important since "The kenning mimics the process by which the mundane thing and the mundane thing" (in the example given by the Oxford dictionary the combination of the terms 'oar' and 'stead') "can combine together to make something transcendent: meaning" (42). While the author of *Beowulf* is known to use many kennings, their function in the riddles have not been discussed yet. In *Exeter Book* Riddle 2 (Storm at Sea), the poet uses the word *hwælmere* (l. 5a), "whale-mere," for sea. The use of the word whale in connection to the sea occurs in kennings in *The Seafarer* and *Beowulf* as well, so this might not be a complicated kenning to solve for contemporaries. Riddle 8 (Jay or Jackdaw), has a kenning that is slightly harder to solve. In line 5a, the poet mentions *æfensceop*, which Crossley Holland translates as "evening-songster". However, in this translation he gives away an extra clue. The kenning consists of the words *æfen* "even" or "evening," and *sceop* from *scop* which means "poet". From the context of the poem, the reader can solve the kenning to be a metaphor for "nightingale". Line 6b of Riddle 14 (Horn), has the word *merehengest*. The compound exists of *mere* "sea" and *hengest* "steed", though Crossley Holland translates the word as "sea-horses". While one may first think of the animal

when reading this kenning, medieval people may not have known about seahorses. Thus, one must look for another meaning, here that of ship. The Old English riddler did not only enjoy the compounding of kennings, but also combined words so that the resultant would have a more literal meaning. For example in Riddle 1 (Storm), line 13a, the poet uses the word *foldbuendra*. Crossley Holland does not give a direct translation for this word, though it combines the words *fold* “earth” and *buendra* (which derives from *buende*) “inhabitants”. The word, then, means “earth-dwellers”. This compound is also used in different inflections in *Beowulf* (lines 309, 1355 and 2274). Another example is the word *fromcynn* in Riddle 83: (Ore) lines 1a and 7a. The first instance is translated as “age-old”, the second instance remains untranslated. Krapp and Dobbie note that it is possible that the manuscript scribe has made a mistake here, and that the word was supposed to be *fromcym*, made out of *from* “from” and *cym* “come”. Consequently, the compound may mean something along the lines of “a coming from”. These examples show that kennings and compound words were frequently used by the riddle poet and that they force the reader to take a moment and solve a tiny puzzle within the larger riddle. They create ambiguity by combining two words to create metaphor.²

² When translating the Old English myself, I have used the Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary where necessary.

The Riddles of *The Hobbit*

The riddles in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* adhere to the larger riddling tradition in many different ways, and yet are still unique in themselves. First, this chapter examines the ways in which Tolkien's riddles agree with the patterns of international riddling. Subsequently, the language of the riddles in *The Hobbit* is compared with that of the *Exeter Book* riddles.

The International Riddling Tradition

While the manner in which Tolkien uses riddles in 'Riddles in the Dark' may at first seem completely different from the use of riddles in other cultures, there are some striking similarities to be found. As previously mentioned, the African riddles often have a statement or a proverb as a solution. Though most of Tolkien's riddles have simple objects or ideas as solutions, two of them have a more complicated answer. The first of these is "Fish on a little table, man at table sitting on a stool, the cat has the bones" (*The Hobbit* 88). The answer, as the riddle, consists of three parts; the fish, the man, and the cat. Those three parts are in themselves more complicated because they are not simply an object, but an object performing an action (in the case of the man the action would be sitting on a stool). The solution to the second riddle – the Daisy riddle – has a statement as a solution, rather than an object. While Gollum simply gives "Daisy" as an answer (and Bilbo accepts), the proper solution is actually "Sun shining on a Daisy". This solution is indicated in the first two lines of the riddle: "An eye in a blue face / Saw an eye in a green face" (85). The "blue face" is in this case the sky, and the "green face" is presumably a meadow or grassland. The verb "saw," then, insinuates "shine," and the eyes are the yellow sun, and the daisy (which has a yellow centre), respectively. The remaining riddles, which bear simple answers, can be compared to the riddles of the *Exeter Book*, most of which have uncomplicated, everyday objects or ideas as solutions. As the riddles of *The Hobbit* are written in Modern English, they do not have the natural ambiguity that the Chinese and Old English riddles possess due to the polysemous

qualities of these languages. The Modern English language is, compared to Mandarin Chinese and Old English, relatively precise, unless the technique of metaphor is used. The use of figurative language in Tolkien's riddles is examined later in this chapter.

The riddles in *The Hobbit* are composed for a riddling contest, a literary tradition which dates to ancient times and is not only used in Western culture, but in other parts of the world. In his analysis of Tolkien's riddles, Honegger states that "The idea to solve a conflict or to establish the status of the protagonist by means of an opposite of wits in the form of a riddle-competition is ancient" (90). As mentioned in the first chapter, the Greek and Scandinavian peoples had stories in which a road side dweller posed a riddle or question to the traveller to earn his or her passage. Indeed, not only in these cultures, but generally in riddles within a literary framework or narrative, often a character on the road appears to ask the protagonist a riddle. The situation is, then, that either the protagonist solves the riddle and earns his rights of passage, or the protagonist fails and is killed or eaten (Cook). These narratives can also be found in Middle Eastern cultures, in which the bodily form of the road side dweller is different from the stories in Western cultures.

Gollum can, in a way, be seen as a variation of this road side dweller. Bilbo does not meet Gollum on a road in a literal sense – they meet in Gollum's cave – Bilbo is travelling on a journey to reunite with his travelling companions, and eventually to the Lonely Mountain, which can be seen as a metaphorical road. Though travelling through Gollum's cave is in a sense a detour for Bilbo, he is still making his way to his destination, as one learns when the book is finished. However, the riddling contest is a somewhat more complicated situation than this. Indeed, the contest does not begin as such, but as a simple game. When Bilbo and Gollum first meet, they are both eager to find out more about the other creature. Gollum "was anxious to appear friendly, at any rate for the moment, and until he found out more about the sword and the hobbit, whether he was quite alone really, whether he was good to eat, and

whether Gollum was really hungry” (*The Hobbit* 83). Bilbo, in turn, “was anxious to agree, until he found out more about the creature, whether he was quite alone, whether he was fierce or hungry, and whether he was a friend of the goblins” (83-84). After Bilbo easily solves the first riddle, and Gollum realises winning the game will not be an easy task, Gollum proposes to make the game more serious: “It must have a competition with us, my precious! If precious asks, and it doesn’t answer, we eats if, my precious. If it asks us, and we doesn’t answer, then we does what it wants eh? We shows it the way out, yes!” (84). Thus it is only after the first riddle is asked that the competition truly begins, and the scene fits into the tradition of the riddle contest. At the same time, the stakes are set, and the contest turns into a so-called “neck-riddle” situation. ““Neck-riddles” were named thus because they provided the accused or convicted person with the chance to save his or her neck by answering a riddle or by winning the riddling contest against the opponent respectively” (Honegger 91). Most of the road side dweller riddle competitions are also “neck-riddles”, since the dweller threatens to kill the traveller if he or she fails to solve the riddle. The narrator of *The Hobbit* states, after Bilbo wins, that the hobbit “knew, of course, that the riddle-game was sacred and of immense antiquity, and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat when they played at it” (90-91). Roberts also notes that “The conversation between Bilbo and Gollum that follows is predicated upon that ancient courtesy by which not even a troll, or a sphinx, will devour a person until a riddle has been asked and answered” (57). However, Bilbo, appears to cheat – or at least bend the rules of the contest – when he asks the final riddle finishes the competition: “What have I got in my pocket?” (*The Hobbit* 89). The narrator, too, realises that this is more of a question Bilbo poses than a riddle, and he notes that this would be a reason for Gollum not to honour his pact with Bilbo. Honegger, nevertheless, shows that there is a “tradition of the “unanswerable final question”” (90) in Scandinavian literature. In that case, Bilbo would not have cheated at all. Still, Gollum feels cheated and he tricks Bilbo

by going off to his island in the middle of the underground lake that makes up a large part of the cave. Bilbo initially thinks that Gollum is leaving not to return but Gollum is looking for the ring that Bilbo found in the cave, previous to their meeting. Gollum knows that this ring will make him invisible and that it will give him the chance to kill Bilbo, as he has killed Goblins to eat so many times before that. Thus, Gollum fully intends to break his agreement to show Bilbo the way out of the cave. One might say, therefore, that the consequences of the riddle contest between Bilbo and Gollum are graver than those of regular ‘neck-riddle’ contests in ancient literature.

Finally, as mentioned before, Chapman Stacey points out that riddle contests in a literary context such as this, almost always function as a way in which one person claims power over another person. That is indeed the case in ‘Riddles in the Dark’. Bilbo wins the contest, and in this way wins his life and freedom, and takes away Gollum’s prospect of a juicy meal. Furthermore, Bilbo claims power over Gollum in another way – he steals the Ring from him, taking away the one thing that Gollum treasures and what keeps him alive. Thus, even though Bilbo has mercy for Gollum and spares his life out of pity, he has indeed killed him in a sense.

As in the Chinese and African cultures, Tolkien’s riddles can be seen as a means of creating and strengthening a bond. The scene in Gollum’s cave is an intimate one: there are only two creatures present and they are surrounded by darkness. This means a fair amount of trust is required for the riddle contest to have taken place at all. Consequently, the bond between the two characters starts to form. Furthermore, though these two creatures seem incomparable, it appears that they have more in common than initially suggested. In *The Lord of the Rings*, it is told that Bilbo has had the Ring for decades and that, when the time comes, he has an incredibly difficult time parting with it, as did Gollum. It is even the case that when, eventually, the Ring perishes, so do Gollum and Bilbo. Roberts also argues that

“Riddling is a bringing-together; and in the ‘Riddles in the Dark’ chapter of *The Hobbit*, riddles bring together two creatures, seemingly very different, but (we eventually discover) very alike” (55). Thus in this respect, the riddling contest in *The Hobbit* coincides with the international oral riddling traditions, as they have a similar function.

The Language of ‘Riddles in the Dark’

Tolkien’s riddles bear some striking similarities to the *Exeter Book* riddles. Scholars have examined the possible sources and influences of Tolkien’s riddles, and have sometimes come to the conclusion that at least some of his riddles are based on or influenced by the Old English riddles. Roberts, for example, notes that “It is certainly possible that Tolkien had the *Exeter Book* riddles at the back of his mind when writing [*The Hobbit*]” (40). This comes as no surprise, since Tolkien was himself a professor of Anglo-Saxon literature. However, Tolkien himself has never been clear about the inspiration for his riddles. In a letter to Allen & Unwin, the publishers of *The Hobbit*, on September 20th 1947, he writes

As for the Riddles: they are ‘all my own work’ except for ‘Thirty White Horses’ which is traditional, and ‘No-legs’. The remainder, though their style and method is that of old literary (but not ‘folk-lore’) riddles, have *no models* as far as I am aware, save only the egg-riddle which is a reduction to a couplet (of my own) of a longer literary riddle which appears in some ‘Nursery Rhyme’ books, notably American ones”. (*Letters* 123).

Thus no clear conclusion can be drawn about the origin of the other riddles, except that they are the product of Tolkien’s creative imagination. Riddles were important to him, as he saw that “the connection between words and the world is a deep one, not to be gainsaid or ignored. Riddles are a truer representation of the nature of reality than simple declarative statements” (Roberts 20). It is, therefore, no surprise that Tolkien enjoyed composing these clever poems himself. Nelson also argues that “whatever Tolkien’s sources and inspiration,

this striking scene and the riddles it is built around are almost entirely of Tolkien's own creation" (69), even if they were based on other riddles.

Nevertheless, Tolkien utilises some of the same strategies to create ambiguity that the poet of the *Exeter Book* uses. Some examples are discussed below. The riddle that has the solution Wind is a paradox through and through. Though each line only consists of three words at most, each contains a paradox.

Voiceless it cries,

Wingless flutters,

Toothless bites,

Mouthless mutters (*The Hobbit* 85)

How can something cry when it does not have a voice or mutter when it has no mouth? How can something bite without teeth, or flutter without wings? The same is true for the Fish riddle: how can a creature be alive without breath, or always drink if it is never thirsty, or be clad in mail yet never make clinking noises? These paradoxes are clear-cut and similar to those used in the Old English riddles. In the Fish riddle, they are even more emphasised, as some of the words used immediately oppose each other: "alive" (l. 1) is set out against "death" (l. 2). In the remaining riddles, the paradoxes found are perhaps more subtle. In the Dark riddle, Bilbo asks Gollum what it is that

Cannot be seen, cannot be felt,

Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt.

It lies behind starts and under hills,

And empty holes it fills.

It comes first and follows after,

Ends life, kills laughter (86).

From the first two lines, it becomes clear that the object in question appears to bypass all the senses – it does not seem to exist. How can the solution to the riddle be something that does not exist? It is ironic, if not paradoxical, how this riddle about darkness follows a riddle about light, about the Sun, and about colour. Another paradox can be found which is also found in Old English Riddle 7 (Swan) – the paradox of place. Another paradox can be found which is also found in Old English Riddle 7 (Swan). The animal here seems to reside in many different places, as does the Dark: “It lies behind stars and under hills, / and empty holes it fills” (ll. 3-4). For the Egg riddle, the word “yet,” that starts line 2, already hints at the paradoxical nature of the poem. How can something have no lid, hinges, or key yet contain a golden treasure? The classic image that is often used for an object containing treasure is a wooden chest. This object, of course, indeed has a lid, hinges, and often needs a key to be opened. The solution to this riddle is something that has none of these characteristics, except that it does contain treasure. The riddle Bilbo has particular difficulty in solving has the solution Time. This thing, Gollum explains, devours all other things, even those that seem indestructible and ever-lasting.

This thing all things devours:

Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;

Gnaws iron, bites steel;

Grinds hard stones to meal;

Slays king, ruins town,

And beats high mountain down. (88)

Amongst these are “iron”, “steel”, and “hard stones”, which the thing respectively “gnaws”, “bites”, and “grinds ... to meal” (ll. 3-4). As is revealed in the final line of the poem, the object of the riddle can even break down a mountain. Thus, it can be seen that the riddles in

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* very often use the riddling technique of paradox, which was very common in the Old English riddles.

The second riddle, with the answer Teeth, is not an example of paradox, but instead reflects an important aspect of Anglo-Saxon society. Roberts points out that

Teeth were important to the Anglo-Saxons; which is to say, they were important when they went wrong. The three *Leechbooks of Bald* ... were written in Old English at Winchester, possibly in the ninth century, making them our oldest extant vernacular medical works. The third volume contains a variety of remedies for dental malaises (59).

Another influence of the *Exeter Book* riddles on Tolkien's works can be seen when comparing the solutions of the riddles. Most of Tolkien's riddles, much like the Old English riddles, have simple, everyday objects or ideas as solutions. Some even have (at least partly) the exact same solutions as the *Exeter Book* riddles. *The Hobbit's* Wind, Time, Dark, and Sun Shining on Daisy riddles can be easily compared to the Old English Storm, Time, Dark, and Sun solutions. Roberts even suggests that the riddles do not have set solutions at all. He admits that when he first examined Gollum's Mountain riddle, he was tempted to propose The Dragon Smaug, a villainous character from *The Hobbit*, as an answer. Yet, that answer is based on the knowledge the reader has of the ending of the book. Of course, considering the chronology of the story and the knowledge Bilbo has of Smaug (which is relatively limited), Mountain is for him the more logical guess. And either way, Gollum accepts it as a solution without further discussion. In this manner, then, Tolkien's riddles are similar to the *Exeter Book* riddles, as their solutions may not be set in stone.

The riddles themselves, when viewed as a collection, separated from the rest of the novel, are somewhat of a mystery. The solutions to the riddles, in order, are *Mountain, Teeth, Wind, Sun Shining on Daisy, Dark, Egg, A Fish, A Fish Being Eaten, Time, The Ring*. When

considered as an isolated, independent entity, the answers give an incredibly short summary of *The Hobbit*. On a superficial level, this means that the solutions work

As a string of rebuses encapsulating the narrative of the novel itself: the Misty Mountains, the teeth of the various creatures that seek to devour our heroes (trolls, Gollum, orcs, wolves and dragons); the day's-eye of the sun revealing Bilbo's invisibility; the dark under the mountains, or within Mirkwood, both standing for the evil against which good must fight; the box and its treasures that is the subject of this quest; the various times Bilbo and the dwarves fell into water; the time of the narrative itself; the ring – and its larger significances (Roberts 66).

The metaphorical meaning of the riddle solutions when seen as an independent unit might not at first seem very clear. The story as a whole represents the division between Good and Evil, or between things of Darkness and things of Light, as does the trilogy that continues the story of Middle Earth. The solutions reflect this idea, as one part represents those things found in the Light, where another represents those things hidden away and found in Darkness. For example, Wind, Daisies and Eggs are all found out in the open. In contrast, Teeth are found inside a mouth, and Fish in water. Darkness itself is found within the caves in a Mountain. Time in itself represents Evil because it, eventually, devours all things, a sad thought indeed. The Fish Being Eaten is a tricky one. It combines Teeth and Fish, so it likely represents Darkness too. The final answer, The Ring, clearly reflects Darkness – as we learn later on, it “unites all that is dark, and hidden, and [is] destructive” (66). Thus, when examined in the same way as the *Exeter Book* riddles are – unconnected to a story – the riddles of *The Hobbit* reveal an underlying metaphor.

Conclusion

Many cultures have an ancient and elaborate riddling tradition. Though many of these are based on oral transmission of the ambiguous poems, some also depend on written sources. Furthermore, different cultures use different themes and solutions in their riddling traditions. For example, in the African tradition, the solution to a riddle is more often a proverb than a simple object, statement, or idea, as is the case in the Latin, Chinese, and Old English traditions. In some cultures, the riddles also appear more often in narrative contexts within a story, rather than as an independent entity. A reappearing feature of Scandinavian folk tales, for example, is the road side dweller who asks the protagonist to solve a riddle in exchange for safe passage. This feature also reappears in the Middle Eastern cultures. The traditions also share a great number of features, despite appearing in cultures from all over the globe. The first of these is the cognitive advantages of solving riddles. In many cultures, riddles are used to practice rhetoric and logic and are sometimes even used in the formal setting of a school, despite the genre often having been considered one of lower status. In oral traditions, riddling also functions as a bonding activity. Because the solving of riddles often took place in large gatherings or as a contest, people in a community would come together and compete or work together to solve riddles. Whatever the context, however, scholars have agreed that riddling often plays an important role in society. A final function of riddling traditions is that solving riddles is almost always a means by which one person lays a claim of power over another person.

The *Exeter Book* riddles use many of the classic Anglo-Saxon themes. Often, Christianity plays an important role in the short poems. For example, there are several Old English riddles that have the proposed solution Creation. Scholars have argued both for and against the influence of Symphosius' Latin *Eanigmata* on the Old English riddle collection. Some of the riddles seem to be direct translations of Symphosius' creation, while others seem

to be unique compositions of the *Exeter Book* poet. What all Old English riddles share, however, is the devices that are used to create ambiguous language. One of these is prosopopoeia. Only a few of the Old English riddles are not written as though the object itself is speaking. Another device used throughout the collection is paradox. Two mundane, everyday objects that, initially, seem completely different are described and compared. The fact that it is almost always a mundane object that is glorified in these short poems is in itself paradoxical. Some poems use the paradox of place, describing the object as residing in several places at once. Others utilise *double entendre*: the so-called obscene riddles. They use sexual puns to describe two objects at the same time – an innocent one such as an onion and a sexual one, such as a penis. Another major device used by the *Exeter Book* poet is the paradox of manufacture. When this is used, the riddle describes an object in several phases of its life. For example, a hide that is made into vellum, then written upon and then bound into a book. Finally, as in other Old English works, the poet uses kennings in his riddles. The compounds made out of two words pose a tiny puzzle within the riddle itself. For example, the word *hwælmere* is used in several instances in Old English literature. It literally translates to whale-mere but its metaphorical meaning is sea.

In his children's novel *The Hobbit*, Tolkien composed a unique scene in which he utilised the idea of the road side dweller to create a riddling contest between two of his characters. This contests functions in a similar way to those in Scandinavian literature: the protagonist either solves the riddles, wins the contests and obtains his safety, or he loses the contest and his life. At the same time, it functions as a bonding activity. The scene brings together two seemingly completely different characters and binds them for the remainder of their days. This function of the scene, then, is similar to the bonding function of the African riddling tradition. Furthermore, the solutions to the riddles in *The Hobbit* are comparable to those of the Chinese and African riddles. Some have short, simple answers, much like the

Chinese riddles, and others have longer, more complicated statements as a solution, similar to the African riddles. The devices that Tolkien uses in his riddles to create ambiguity are similar to those the poet of the *Exeter Book* uses. While Tolkien does not utilise prosopopoeia, paradox of manufacture, or kennings, he relies heavily on paradox in his riddles. Furthermore, the riddles themselves are somewhat of a mystery, and not just because their creator has always been vague about them. The riddles seem, sometimes, to be based or at least influenced by the Old English riddles and by Symphosius' collection, yet Tolkien himself has always denied this. The solutions to the riddles, when written down in chronological order, function an incredibly short summary of the plot of the novel. Furthermore, they even stretch their influence to the sequel of *The Hobbit: the Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In these works, as in the children's novel, the themes of Good versus Evil and Darkness versus Light, are hugely important and reoccur many times throughout the work. The solutions to the riddles, again, represent this as they are divided into those that have to do with Light, and those that have to do with Darkness.

It can be concluded, then, that the riddles of *The Hobbit* adhere to the larger, international riddling tradition in many ways. They have similar themes and solutions. They utilise comparable strategies to create ambiguous language, and adopt a function that coincides with the functions of riddles in other cultures. However, the influence of these riddling traditions is not limitless. Tolkien has succeeded in creating a unique scene in which he has constructed his own function of riddles within the narrative context. He simultaneously uses riddles as a bonding force for the characters in the book, but also as a description of the novel itself, as the solutions to the riddles summarise the book. The influence of 'Riddles in the Dark' even stretches to the stories he would publish years later. This unique combination of tradition and innovation make the Tolkien's riddling scene truly exceptional.

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Appendix A

Riddle 2: Storm at Sea

*Hwylum ic gewite, swa ne wenaþ men,
 under yþa geþræc eorþan secan,
 garsecges grund. Gifen biþ gewregeð,
 fam gewealcen;
 hwælmere hlimmeð, hlude grimmeð,
 streamas staþu beatað, stundum weorpaþ
 on stealc hleoþa, stane ond sonde,
 ware on wæge, þonne ic winnende,
 holmmægne biþeaht, hrusan styrge,
 side sægrundas. Sundhelme ne mæg
 losian ær mec læte se þe min latteow bið
 on siþa gehwam. Saga, þoncol mon,
 hwa mec bregde of brimes fæþmum,
 þonne streamas eft stille weorþað,
 yþa geþwære, þe mec ær wrugon.*

Sometimes I plunge through the press of waves,
 surprising men, delving to the earth,
 the ocean bed. The waters ferment,
 sea-horses foaming ...
 The whale-mere roars, fiercely rages,
 waves beat upon the shore; stones
 and sand, seaweed and saltspray, are flung

against the dunes when, wrestling
 far beneath the waves, I disturb the earth,
 the vast depths of the sea. Nor can I escape
 my ocean bed before he permits me who is my pilot
 on every journey. Tell me, wise man:
 who separates me from the sea's embrace,
 when the waters become quiet once more,
 the waves calm which before had covered me?

Riddle 7: Swan

*Hrægl min swigað, þonne ic hrusan trede,
 oþþe þa wic bugge, oþþe wado drefe.
 Hwilum mec ahebbað ofer hæleþa byht.
 Hyrste mine, ond þeos hea lyft,
 ond mec þonne wide wolcna strengu
 ofer fol byreð. Frætwe mine
 swogað hlude on swinsiað,
 torhte singað, þonne ic getenge ne beom
 flode on foldan, ferende gæst.*

Silent is my dress when I step across the earth,
 reside in my house, or ruffle the waters.
 Sometimes my adornments and this high windy air
 lift me over the livings of men,

the power of the cloud carries me far
 over all people. My white pinions
 resound very loudly, ring with melody,
 sing out clearly, when I sleep not on
 the soil or settle on grey waters – a travelling spirit.

Riddle 8: Jay or Jackdaw

*Ic þurh muþ sprece mongum reordum,
 Wrencum singe, wrixle geneahhe
 Heafodwoþe, hlude cirme,
 Healed mine wisan, hleopre ne miþe,
 Eald æfensceop, eorlum bringe
 Blisse in Burgum, þonne ic bugendre
 Stefne styrme stille on wicum
 Sittað nigende. Saga hwæt ic hatte,
 Þe swa scirenige sceawendwisan
 Hlude onhyrge, hælepum bodige
 Wilcumena fela woþe minre.*

I've one mouth but many voices;
 I dissemble and often change my tune;
 I declaim my deathless melodies
 and don't refrain from my refrain.
 Aged evening-songster, I entertain

men in their homes by rehearsing
 my whole repertoire; they sit, bowed down,
 quiet in their houses. Guess my name,
 I who mimic the jester's japes
 as loudly as I can, and rejoice men
 with choicest songs in various voices.

Riddle 12: Leather

*Fotum ic fere, foldan slite,
 grene wongas, þenden ic gæst bere.
 Gif me feorh losað, fæste binde
 swearte Wealas, hwilum sellan men.
 Hwilum ic deorum drincan selle
 beorne of bosme, hwilum mec bryd triedeð
 felawolonc fotum, hwilum feorran broht
 wonfeax Wale wegeð on þyð,
 dol druncmennen deorcum nihtum,
 wæteð in wætre, wyrmeð hwilum
 fægre to fyre; me on fæðme sticap
 hygegalan hond, hwyrfeð geneahhe,
 swifeð me geon sweartne. Saga hwæt ic hatte,
 þe ic lifgende lond reafige
 ond æfter deape dryhtum þeowige.*

I travel by foot, trample the ground,
 the green fields, for as long as I live.
 Lifeless, I fetter dark Welshmen,
 sometimes their betters too. At times
 I give a warrior liquor from within me,
 at times a stately bride steps on me;
 sometimes a slave-girl, raven-haired,
 brought far from Wales, cradles and presses me –
 some stupid, sozzled maidservant fills me
 with water on dark nights, warms me
 by the gleaming fire; on my breast
 she places a wanton hand and writhes about,
 then sweeps me against her dark declivity.
 What am I called who, alive, lay waste
 the land, and, dead, serve humankind?

Riddle 14: Horn

Ic wæs wæpenwiga. Nu mec wlonc þeceð
geong hagostealdmon golde on sylfore,
woum wirbogum. Hwilum weras cyssað,
hwilum ic to hilde hleopre bonne
wilgehleþan, hwilum wycg byreþ
mec over mearce, hwilum merehengest
fereð ofer flodas frætwum beorhtne,

hwilum mægða sum minne gefylleð
bosm beaghroden; hwilum ic bordum sceal,
heard, heafodleas; behlywed licgan,
hwilum hongige hyrstum frætwed,
wlitif on wage, þær weras drincað,
freolic fyrdsceorp. Hwilum folcwigan
on wicge wegað, þonne ic winde sceal
sincfag swelgan of sumes bosme;
hwilum ic gereordum rincas laðige
wlonce to wine; hwilum wrapum sceal
stefne minre forstolen hreddan,
flyman feondsceaþan. Frige hwæt ic hatte.

I was once a warrior's weapon.
 Now a noble young retainer
 dresses me in threads of twisted gold
 and silver. At times men kiss me,
 at times I summon close friends
 to do battle; a horse sometimes bears me
 over the earth, sea-horses sometimes
 sweep me, gleaming, over the ocean;
 now and then a maiden, ring-adorned,
 replenishes my paunch. I must lie on planks
 at times, plundered, hard and headless;
 often gold-garbed, I hang on the wall

above drinking warriors, a splendid sight,
 instrument of war. Covered in riches,
 I draw in breath from brave man's lungs
 when retainers ride towards battle.
 At times I tell proud warriors
 that wine is served; at times rally them,
 save booty from hostile men, drive off
 the enemy. Now ask me my name.

Riddle 25: Onion or Penis

*Ice om wunderlicu with, wifum on hyhte,
 neahbuendum nyt; nængum sceþþe
 burgensittendra, nymþe bonan anum.
 Stapol min is steapheah, stoned ic on bedde,
 neoþan ruh nathwær. Neþeð hwilum
 ful cyrtenu ceorles dohtor,
 modwlonc meowle, þæt heo on mec gripeð,
 ræseð mec on redone, reafað min heafod,
 fegeð mec on fæsten. Feleþ sona
 mines gemotes, seo þe mec nearwað,
 wif wundenlocc. Wæt bið þæt eage.*

I'm a strange creature, for I satisfy women,
 a service to the neighbours! No one suffers

at my hands except for my slayer.
 I grow very tall, erect in a bed,
 I'm hairy underneath. From time to time
 a good-looking girl, the doughty daughter
 of some churl dares to hold me,
 grips my russet skin, robes me of my head
 and puts me in the pantry. At once that girl
 with plaited hair who has confined me
 remembers our meeting. Her eye moistens.

Riddle 26: Book

*Mec feonda sum feore besnyþede,
 woruldstrenga binom, wætte siþþan,
 dyfde on wætre, dyde eft þonan,
 sette on sunnan, þær ic swiþe beleas
 herum þam þe ic hæfde. Hærd mec siþþan
 snað seaxses ecg, sindrum begrunden;
 fingras feoldan, ond mec fugles wyn
 geond speddropum spyrede geneahhe,
 ofer brunne brerd, beamtelge swealg,
 streames dæle, stop eft on mec,
 siþade sweartlast. Mec siþþan wrah
 hæleð hleobordum, hyde beþenede,
 gierede mec mid golde; forþon me gliwedon*

weætlic weorc smiþa, wire bifongen.
Nu þa gereno ond se reada telg
ond þa wuldorgesteald wide mære
dryhtfolca helm, nales dol wite.
Gif min bearn wera brucan willað,
hy beoð þy gesundran ond þy sigefæstran,
heortum þy hwætran ond þy hygebliþran,
ferþe þy frodran, habbaþ freonda þy ma,
swæsra ond gesibbra, sopra ond godra,
tilra ond getreowra, þa hyra tyr on dead
estum ycað ond hy arastafum
lissum bilecgað ond hi lufan fæþmum
fæste clyppað. Frige hwæt ic hatte,
nipum to nytte. Nama min is mære,
hælepum gifre ond halig sylf.

An enemy ended my life, took away
 my bodily strength; then he dipped me
 in water and drew me out again,
 and put me in the sun where I soon shed
 all my hair. The knife's sharp edge
 bit into me once my blemishes had been scraped away;
 fingers folded me and the bird's feather
 often moved across my brown surface,
 sprinkling useful drops; it swallowed the wood-dye

(part of the stream) and again travelled over me,
 he stretched skin over me and adorned me
 with gold; thus I am enriched by the wonderous work
 of smiths, wound about with shining metal.
 Now my clasp and my red dye
 and these glorious adornments bring fame far and wide
 to the Protector of Men, and not to the pains of hell.
 If the sons of men would make use of me
 they would be safer and more sure of victory,
 their hearts would be bolder, their minds more at ease,
 their thoughts wiser; they would have more friends,
 companions and kinsmen (true and honourable,
 brave and kind) who would gladly increase
 their honour and prosperity, and heap
 benefits upon them, holding them fast
 in love's embraces. Ask what I am called,
 of such use to men. My name is famous,
 of service to men and sacred in itself.

Riddle 33: Iceberg

With cwom æfter wege wrætlicu liþan,
cymlic from ceole cleopode to londe,
hlinsande hlude; hleahtor wæs gryrelic,
egesful on eared, ecge wæron sceanpe.

*Wæs hio hetegrim, hilde to sǣne,
 biter beadoweorca; ordweallas grof,
 heardhiþende. Heterune bond,
 sǣgde searocræftig ymb hyre sylfre gesceaft:
 “Is min modor mægða cynnes
 þæs deorestan, þæt is dohtor min
 eacen up liden, swa þæt is ældum cup,
 firum on folce, þæt seo on foldan sceal
 on ealra londa gehwam lissum stonan.”*

A strange creature came floating over the waves,
 she cried her beauty from ship to shore,
 resounded loudly; her laughter was terrible
 and fearsome to all; her edges were sharp.
 She was so fierce – slow to engage,
 savage in the fight; she stove in ships’ sides.
 She bound them with a baleful charm,
 and spoke with native cunning:
 ‘My mother, one of the beloved maidens,
 is my daughter also, swollen on the earth,
 she stands in joy in every land.’

Riddle 35: Coat of Mail

Mec se wæte wong, wundrum freorig,

of his innape ærist cende.

Ne wat ic mec beworhtne wulle flysum,

hærum þurh heahcræft, hygeþoncum min.

Wundene me ne beoð welfe, ne ic wearp hafu,

ne þurh þreata geþræcu þræd me ne hlimmeð,

ne æt me hrutende hrisil scribeð,

ne mec ohwonan sceal am cnyssan.

Wyrmas mec ne awæfan wyrda cræftum,

þa þe geolo godwebb geatwum frætwað.

Wile mec mon hwæpre seþeah wide ofer eorþan

hatan for hæleþum hyhtlic gewæde.

Saga soðcwidum, searoðoncum gleaw,

wordum wisfæst, hwæt þis gewæde sy.

The dank earth, wondrously cold,

first delivered me from her womb

I know in my mind I wasn't made

from wool, skillfully fashioned with skeins.

Neither warp or weft wind about me,

no thread thrums for me in the thrashing loom,

nor does a shuttle rattle for me,

nor does the weaver's rod bang and beat me.

Worms that decorate the yellow web

never spun for me with the skills of the Fates.

Yet all over the earth one man will tell

another that I'm an excellent garment.

O wise man, weigh your words

well, and say what this object is.

Riddle 37: Bellows

*Ic þa wihte geseah; womb wæs on hindan
 þriþum aþrunten. Þegn folgade,
 mægenrofa man, ond micel hæfde
 gefered þæt hit felde, fleah þurh his eage.
 Ne swylteð he symle, þonne syllan sceal
 innað þam oþrum, ac him eft cymeð
 bot in bosme, blæd biþ aræred;
 he sunu wyrceð, bið him sylfa fæder.*

I saw the creature: his stomach stuck out behind him,

enormously swollen. A strong servant

waited upon him. What filled up his stomach

had travelled from far, and flew through his eye.

He does not always die in giving life

to others, but new strength revives

in the pit of his stomach; he breathes again.

He fathers a son; he's his own father.

Riddle 40: Creation

*Ece is se scyppend, se þas eorþan nu
wreðstufum ond þas world healdeð.
Ric is se reccend ond on ryht cyning
ealra anwalda, eorþan ond heofones,
healdeð ond wealdeð, swa he ymb þas utan hweorfeð.
He mec wrætlice worhte æt frymþe,
þa he þisne ymbhwyrft ærest sette,
heht mec wæccende wunian longe,
þæt ic ne slepe siþþan æfre,
ond mec semninga slæp ofergongeþ,
beoð eagan mīn ofestum betyned.
þisne middangeard mehtig dryhten
mid his onwalde æghwær styreþ;
swa ic mid waldenes worde ealne
þisne ymbhwyrft utan ymbclyppe.
Ic eom to þon bleað, þæt mec bealdlice mæg
gearu gongende grima abregan,
ond eofore eom æghwær cenra,
þōn he gebolgen bidsteal giefed;
nemæg mec oferswiþan segnberendra
ænig ofer eorþan, nymþe se ana god
se þisne hean heofon healdeþ ond wealdeþ.
Ic eom on stence strengre
þōn ricels oþþe rose sy,*

. . . . on eorþan tyrf
 wynlic weaxeð; ic eom wræstre þōn heo.
 Beah þe lilie sy leof moncynne,
 beorht on blostman, ic eom betre þonne heo;
 swylce ic nardes stenc nyde oferswiþe
 mid minre swetnesse symle æghwær,
 ond ic fulre eom þonne þis fen swearte
 þæt her yfle adelan stinceð.
 Eal ic under heofones hwearfte recce,
 swa me leof fæder lærde æt frymþe,
 þæt ic þa mid ryhte reccan moste
 þicce ond þynne; þinga gehwylces
 onlicnesse æghwær heald.
 Hyrre ic eom heofone, hateþ mec heahcyning
 his deagol þing dyre bihealdan;
 eac ic under eorþan eal sceawige
 wom wraðscrafu wraþra gesta.
 Ic eom micle yldra þōn ymbhwyrft þæs
 oþþe þes middangeard meahthe geweorþan,
 ond ic giestron wæs geong acenned
 mære to monnum þurh minre modor hrif.
 Ic eom fægerre frætsum goldes,
 þeah hit mon awerge wirum utan;
 Ic eom wyrsligre þōn þes wudu fula
 oððe þis waroð þe her aworpen ligeð.

Ic eorþan eom æghwær brædre,
 ond widgielra þōn þes wong grena;
 folm mec mæg bifon ond fingras þry
 utan eaþe ealle ymbclyppan.

Heardra ic eom ond caldra þōn se hearda forst,
 hrim heorugrimma, þōn he to hrusan cymeð;
 ic eom Ulcanus up irnendan
 leohtan leoman lege hatra.

Ic eom on goman gena swetra
 þonne þu beobread blende mid hunige;
 swylce Ic eom wrapre þōn wermod sy,
 her on hyrstum heasewe stondeþ.

Ic mesan mæ mehtelicor
 ond efnetan ealdum þyrse,
 ond Ic gesælig mæg symle lifgan
 þeah ic ætes ne sy æfre to feore.

Ic mæ fromlicor fleogan þonne þernex
 oþþe earn oþþe hafoc æfre mehte,
 nis zefferus, se swiftra wind,
 þæt swa fromlice mæg feran æghwær;
 me is snægl swiftra, snel ro regnwurm
 ond fenyce fore hreþre;
 is þæs gores sunu gonge hrædra,
 þone we wifel wordum nemnað.

Hefigere ic eom micle þōn se hara stan

opþe unlytel leades clympre,
leohtre ic eom micle þō þes lytla wurm
þe her onflonde gæð fotum dryge.
flinte Ic eom heardre þe þis fyr drifeþ
of þissum strongan style heardan,
hnescre ic eom micle halsrefeþre,
seo her on winde wæweð on lyfte.
Ic eorþan eom æghwær brædre
 □ *widgelra þō þes wong grena;*
ic uttor eal ymbwinde,
wrætlice gewefen wundorcræfte.
Nis under me ænig oþer
wiht waldendre on worldlife;
ic eom ufor ealra gesceafta,
þara þe worhte waldend user,
se mec ana mæg ecan meahtum,
geþeon þrymme, þæt ic onrinnan ne sceal.
Mara ic eom ond strengra þonne se micla hwæl,
se þe garsecgas grund bihealdeð
sweart an syne; ic eom swiþre þonne he,
swylce ic eom on mægene minum læsse
þonne se hondwurm, se þe hæleþa bearn,
secgas searoþoncle, seaxe delfað.
ne hafu Ic in heafde hwite loccas
wræste gewundne, ac ic eom wide calu;

*ne ic breaga ne bruna brucan moste,
 ac mec bescyrede scyppend eallum;
 nu me wrætlice weaxað on heafde
 þæt me on gescyldrū scinan motan
 ful wrætlice wundne loccas.
 Mara ic eom ond fættra þonne amæsted swin.
 Bearg bellende, þe on bocwuda,
 won wrotende wynnnum lifde
 þæt he*

Enduring the Creator, He who now guides
 this earth on its foundations and governs this world.
 Powerful is the Ruler, and rightly King
 and Sovereign over all; He governs and guides
 earth and heaven, and they are encompassed by Him.
 He made me – a marvel – at the beginning,
 when He first fashioned this circle of earth;
 he ordained that I should stay awake
 and never sleep again, and sleep suddenly
 overtakes me, my eyes quickly close.
 With His power the mighty Creator rules
 this middle-earth in every respect;
 so that I, at my Lord's leave,
 embrace this circle of earth entire.
 I'm so timid that a drifting ghost

can frighten me terribly, and from end
to end when I'm bolder than a wild boar
when, bristling with fury, it stands at bay;
no warrior on earth can overcome me,
but only God, who governs and guides
this high heaven. My fragrance
is much fairer than frankincense or rose
... grows in the greensward,
a delight; but I'm the more delicate;
although men love the lily of the field,
with its shining flower, I'm the finer;
so too with my sweetness, always and everywhere,
I overpower the aroma of spikenard,
and I'm more foul than this murky fen
that, festering there, reeks of filth.
I govern one and all under the circle
of heaven for, at the beginning, the beloved
father enjoined me to be just
to thick and thin; I assume everywhere
the form and feature of each thing.
I'm higher than heaven and the High King
bids me behold His secret nature;
I also see everything under the world,
the dismal pits of depraved spirits.
I am much older than this circle of earth

or this middle-world could ever be,
and I was born yesterday – a baby
from my mother’s womb, acclaimed by men.
I’m fairer than gold ornaments,
even if filigree work adorns them;
I’m more foul than this mouldering timber
or this slob of seaweed spewed up here.
I’m broader than the earth entire,
and more wide than this green world;
a hand can enclose me, and all that I am
can easily be held between three fingers.
I’m harsher and more biting than sharp frost,
the fierce rime that settles on the soil;
I’m hotter than the fire, the flames
surging and flickering at Vulcan’s forge.
I am, besides, sweeter to the palate
than the honeycomb mingled with honey;
I’m more bitter than wormwood, too,
that stands, ashen, on this hillside.
I can gorge more greedily than an old giant,
holding my own in an eating match,
and I can always live content
if I see no food for as long as I live.
I can fly faster than the pernex,
the hawk or the eagle could ever do;

no Zephyr – that restless wind – ranges
as I do, riffling through every quarter;
the snail is swifter than I, the earthworm
more spry, and the fen frog outstrips me;
the song of dung (we call him
a weevil) crawls about more quickly.
I weigh much more than a grey boulder
or a hunk of lead, I'm much lighter
than this little insect that skitters
over the surface of the water with dry feet.
I'm tougher than flint, that strikes these sparks
from this adamant scrap of steel,
I'm much softer than this down, that here
in the wind wafts high into the air.
I'm broader than the earth entire
and more wide than this green world;
wondrously made with miraculous skill,
I embrace everything – and quite easily!
There's no creature below me
in this wondrous world; I'm exalted
above every one of our Lord's creations,
who alone, with His eternal might, can forcefully
stop me from swelling up. I'm more massive
and mighty than the huge whale who peers
dimly at the ocean bed, stronger than he

and yet I've less muscle than a mere tick
 which sensible men dig out with a knife.
 No white locks, delicately curled, cover
 my head, but I'm bald all over;
 nor do I have eyelids or lashes,
 they were all cut off by the Creator;
 now, lovely to see, curled locks
 spring from my scalp, and grow until they
 shine on my shoulders – an utter marvel.
 I'm greater and more gross than the fattened pig,
 the grunting hog, who lives happily
 in the beech-wood, muddy and rooting,
 so that he ...

Riddle 61: Helmet, Shirt or Penis

*Oft mec fæste bileac freolicu meowle,
 ides on earce, hwilum up ateah
 holdum þeodne, swa hio haten wæs.
 Siðþan me on hreþre heafod sticade,
 niopān upweardne, on nearo fegde.
 Gif þæs ondfengan ellen dohte,
 mec frætwedne fyllan sceolde
 ruwes nathwæt. Ræd hwæt ic mæne.*

A lovely woman, a lady, often locked me
 in a chest; at times she took me out
 with her fingers, and gave me to her lord
 and loyal master, just as he asked.
 Then he poked his head inside me,
 pushed it up until it fitted tightly.
 I, adorned, was bound to be filled
 with something rough if the loyal lord
 could keep it up. Guess what I mean.

Riddle 83: Ore

Frod wæs min fromcynn [.....]
biden in Burgum, sibþan bæles weard
[.....] wera life bewunden,
fyre gefælsad. Nu me fah warað
eorþan broþor, se me ærest wearð
gumena to gyrne. Ic ful gearwe gemon
hwa min fromcynn fruman agette
eall of eared; ic him yfle ne mot,
ac ic hæfnyd hwilum arære
wide geond wongas. Hæbbe ic wundra fela,
middangeardes mægen unlytel,
ac ic miþan sceal monna gehwylcum
degolfulne dom dyran cræftes,

siðfæt minne. Saga hwæt ic hatte.

My origin was age-old [I endured many winters];
 I lived in towns after the keeper of fire
 [unlocked the lives] of men encircled by flame,
 purged by fire. Now the brother of earth,
 my enemy, who from the first brought me
 sorrow, imprisons me. I well remember
 who drew me and my like from our first
 abode; I can do him no evil
 but at times I'm an instrument of bondage
 the whole world over. I've many talents,
 on middle-earth I've vast strength,
 but I must conceal from all men
 the secret source of my precious skill
 and my extraction. Guess what I am called.

Riddle 92: Beech

*Ic wæs brunra beot, beam on holte,
 freolic feorhbora ond foldan wæstm,
 weres wunnstapol ond wifes sond,
 gold on geardum. Nu eom guðwigan
 hyhtlic hildewæpen, hringe beg [.....
 ...] e [.....] byreð,*

Oprum [.....]

I was the boast of brown ones; a tree in the forest,
 lofty life-bearer; earth's offspring;
 man's cause of joy and woman's message;
 treasure in your home. Now I'm the happy
 weapon of a warrior, with a ring ...

Riddle 94: Creation

*Smeþr [.....]ad,
 Hyrre þonne heofon [.....
] glædre þonne sunne,
 [.....] style,
 Smeare þonne sealtry [.....]
 Leofre þonne þis leoht eall, leohtræ þon w[.....]*

[I am the] shaper ...
 Higher than heaven ...
 ... more brilliant than the sun,
 ... [stronger than] steel,
 Sharper than salt ...
 Loved more than all this light, brighter than [a fleece].

Appendix B

Gollum: Mountain

What has roots that nobody sees,

Is taller than trees,

Up, up it goes,

And yet never grows? (84)

Bilbo: Teeth

Thirty white horses on a red hill

First they champ,

Then they stamp,

Then they stand still. (84)

Gollum: Wind

Voiceless it cries,

Wingless flutters,

Toothless bites,

Mouthless mutters (85)

Bilbo: Sun shining on Daisy

An eye in a blue face

Saw an eye in a green face,

“That eye is like to this eye”

Said the first eye,

“But in low place

Not in high place. (85)

Gollum: Dark

It cannot be seen, cannot be felt,

Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt.

It lies behind starts and under hills,

And empty holes it fills.

It comes first and follows after,

Ends life, kills laughter. (86).

Bilbo: Egg

A box without hinges, key or lid,

Yet golden treasure inside is hid.

Gollum: Fish

Alive without breath,

As cold as death,

Never thirsty, ever drinking,

All in mail never clinking. (87).

Bilbo: "Fish on a little table, man at table sitting on a stool, the cat has the bones" (88)

No-legs lay on one-leg, two-legs sat near on three-legs, four-legs got some. (88)

Gollum: Time

This thing all things devours:

Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;

Gnaws iron, bites steel;

Grinds hard stones to meal;

Slays king, ruins town,

And beats high mountain down. (88)

Bilbo: The Ring

What have I got in my pocket? (89)