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A Thank You From the Conference Organizers

Dear Readers,

This journal issue commemorates the “Conflict and Culture” Conference held at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign last November. Included in this issue are three papers submitted for additional consideration for our journal after the conclusion of the conference.

The conference, the first of its kind on campus since the 1970s, was developed by undergraduate students within the Department of History, many of whom were also a part of the department’s associated student organizations, the Undergraduate History Journal at Illinois (UHJI), the Epsilon Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta (PAT), and the Society of Minority Students in History (SMSIH). We are incredibly grateful to have had these organizations’ support.

After seeing a lack of Illinois Regional Conferences planned for fall 2024 on the website of the national PAT organization, we began our work that March soliciting papers and sponsorships alongside help from both students and University staff that would make things run smoothly. Our supporting cast included eighteen student volunteers, twelve academic unit sponsors, the University’s Conference and Event Services team, as well as the Illini Union’s facilities and catering staff. Their help was vital to the success of our undergraduate-run conference.

The “Conflict and Culture” Conference could not have been such a success without its speakers. Following a submissions process in the early fall, we selected twenty-one authors to become panelists, participating in seven ninety-minute panels that took place over a day and a half. It was additionally remarkable that almost half of these speakers were from other universities, showcasing how this conference allowed for a truly wide range of historical research to be shared and discussed at the conference. While we cannot list all of our featured speakers or share all of their work in one journal issue, readers can follow this [link](#) to the conference’s webpage for more information.

We were delighted by our attendance numbers that exceeded expectations, and included other regional PAT chapters who participated. This enabled us to produce lively discussions during each and every panel. We are hopeful that future conferences will see just as much, if not more, spirited discussions of historical research.

We appreciate being able to print these articles in the journal as well as having the chance to recognize the work that so many people put into this conference.

Thank you,

Will Doty and Justin Wytmar

The “Conflict and Culture” Conference Organizing Committee

About the Journal

The Undergraduate History Journal at Illinois is a peer-reviewed, double-blind, historical research publication, run by students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, that strives to provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to share their research and gain exposure for their writing. The journal is committed to high standards of writing, a broad sampling of areas of research, and the integrity of academic research.

The journal is double-blind peer-reviewed by a group of student editors. Once submissions are chosen, they are reviewed multiple times by our teams of editors, before being published in one of our issues.

Acknowledgements

The journal would like to thank its authors for their work, our hard working editors for their tireless efforts to continue to push the journal towards higher standards of quality and output, the University of Illinois history professors and faculty for their advice and dedication to academic study, our undergraduate advisor Stefan Djordjevic for his plentiful advice and support, and librarian and professor Merinda Hensley for her enthusiasm towards the journal and her efforts to support the journal's publication.

The Executive Board

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Conference Support and Volunteers

We also thank the many people who provided logistical support for the conference:

Anthony Frasca - *Undergraduate Coordinator for the Department of History*

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Heather Gernenz - *Communications Coordinator for the Department of History*

Krystal Grace - *Conference and Events Services Director*

Annessa Parisi - *Lead Program Coordinator for Conference and Events Services*

Additionally, we recognize the hard work and dedication of the following students for their work as part of our organizing committee and as additional volunteers for conference logistics:

Will Doty	Justin Wytmar	Katelyn Barbour
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We furthermore thank the members of the UHJI's Student Editorial Staff for their work:

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Tolkien and the Forging of Middle-Earth

Maddox De La Cruz - University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.”¹ This was the line that started one of the most famous fantasy series ever written and forever changed the genre. J.R.R. Tolkien constructed the world of Middle-Earth based on his experiences before, during, and after the Great War. Through the utilization of medievalism, Tolkien weaves together characters and world-building as a way to express his many beliefs on the war. Tolkien’s life and writing process have been examined extensively in a number of different biographies, books, journal articles, and other mediums. One specific example is Humphrey Carpenter’s *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*: a massive collection of letters provided by J.R.R. Tolkien’s son, Christopher Tolkien. These letters span over almost his entire life and are directed towards family, editors, and fans.² Most importantly, Tolkien’s letters cover a vast array of topics, ranging from his creative processes to his thoughts on contemporary world politics as expressed through his ongoing worries over the events of World War Two. In this paper, I will analyze how these experiences and beliefs influenced the creation of his stories. Doing so will help future readers and scholars understand Tolkien’s medievalism and how his stories were constructed.

Historiography

Numerous sources have explored the relationship between the World Wars and their influence on Tolkien as an author. However, to address and analyze every single source would be a needlessly arduous task; I, therefore, will focus on just two scholars that I feel best represent some of the most significant conclusions made about his work.

Scholars like Janet Croft argue that while World War I had a profound effect on Tolkien’s life and creative process, World War II had little impact. According to Croft, Tolkien used his experiences from the Great War to create certain characters like Sam Gamgee or locations like the Dead Marshes, which reflected Tolkien’s emphasis on themes like heroism and the natural world in his works.³ World War II, Croft argues, did not have as much of an effect on the creation process of *The Lord of the Rings*—beyond a few character attitudes reflecting similar pessimisms about the futility of war—because Tolkien started planning the book during World War I and began writing in 1936.⁴ Even after the book’s release in the 1950s, she noted how many of the

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Great Britain: George Allen & Unwin, 1937), 3.

² Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 1.

³ Janet Croft, “The Great War and Tolkien’s Memory: An Examination of World War I Themes in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*” *Mythlore* 23, no. 4 (Fall-Winter 2002): 6.

⁴ Janet Croft, “‘The young perish and the old linger, withering’: J.R.R. Tolkien on World War Two,” *Mythlore* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 59.

themes in *The Lord of the Rings* did not align with common themes of World War Two literature, such as cynicism in human nature seen in books like *Animal Farm* and *The Lord of the Flies*.⁵ Croft argues, in contrast, that his works actually celebrate humanity's capacity for greatness with themes like courage.⁶

While Croft argues that Tolkien engages more with the Great War, she also notes that Tolkien did not necessarily come out of it like other authors who served. For example, authors like Graves obsessed over modernity coming out of the war as a way to grapple with their experiences.⁷ In contrast, Croft finds that Tolkien embraces the past, describing it as a "nostalgic longing" or "an escape." She writes, "At once reactionary and avant-garde, turning [his back] on the modernism that had turned its back on the past,"⁸ Croft, therefore, argues that Tolkien's beliefs, stemming from his experiences with both World Wars, stand in contrast to the beliefs of both generations of post-war authors. Croft ultimately concludes that this unique perspective derives itself from Tolkien's life prior to the Great War, where he developed his firm belief in humanity's capacity for good through Catholicism and his mother.

Where some scholars like Croft rely on his literature as a way to understand Tolkien, other scholars like Theresa Nicolay in her book *Tolkien and the Modernists* rely more on direct accounts of Tolkien's life, such as his letters and biographies, to understand him. Despite this different approach, Nicolay comes to a similar conclusion that Tolkien as a writer was different from other authors in both post-war times because of his unique perspective on the world. She writes, "Modernists' thinking rejects traditional morality, and so we find in its literature a number of amoral characters. Many modernist writers depict characters that cannot or will not choose...Tolkien, on the other hand, created characters for whom choice is crucial and ongoing."⁹ From this, Nicolay finds that Tolkien adheres to the positive belief of humanity's capacity for good and ability to change the world for the better. Like Croft, Nicolay concludes that these optimistic beliefs about humanity must stem from his deep connection to the beliefs he developed prior to the Great War.

With Croft's and Nicolay's arguments in mind, there is an overall consensus that World War I profoundly impacted Tolkien and his beliefs. However, unlike other post-war authors who abandoned the past to make sense of what happened, he embraced it to understand his experiences. Those experiences and beliefs then, in turn, heavily influenced the creation of his books. Yet, what truly defines Tolkien is that these values he drew upon after the Great War carried over even in the face of a Second World War. Where other authors saw only darkness in

⁵ Janet Croft, "'The young perish and the old linger, withering': J.R.R. Tolkien on World War Two," 60.

⁶ Janet Croft, "'The young perish and the old linger, withering': J.R.R. Tolkien on World War Two," 62.

⁷ Janet Croft, "The Great War and Tolkien's Memory: An Examination of World War I Themes in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*," 8.

⁸ Janet Croft, "The Great War and Tolkien's Memory: An Examination of World War I Themes in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*," 8.

⁹ Theresa Nicolay, *Tolkien and the Modernists* (North Carolina: Mcfarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014), 21.

human nature, Tolkien remained faithful to his romantic beliefs in the human capacity for courage, hope, and friendship.

Looking ahead, I want to meld these two approaches of analyzing both his literature and his life to provide more evidence to Nicolay's and Croft's claim that Tolkien remained unwavering to the beliefs he developed from the Great War. In terms of evidence, I believe that using his World War Two letters in Carpenter's *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* provides a valuable historical framework; however, I also believe that there is one glaring flaw in both of their claims. Their claims are limited by their heavy focus on *The Lord of the Rings* and barely touch upon his earlier work, *The Hobbit*. While *The Lord of the Rings* is his most popular book, I think there is a missed opportunity to understand Tolkien more by looking at where he started in his values and themes in his first book. Identifying the values that built his first book and showing readers how persistent these ideas were between then and World War II will help future scholars better understand what was important to Tolkien throughout his life. Going forward, I will achieve this by analyzing the historical context of four key letters written during World War II and exploring the connections his responses have to different themes found throughout *The Hobbit*. By comparing and understanding what Tolkien's beliefs were between these two points in time, this new approach will add to the already well-explored scholarship of J.R.R. Tolkien's medievalism.

Main Evidence—Preface

One of the longest and most fascinating sections of the *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* is the collection of World War II letters Tolkien wrote. As explained by Humphrey Carpenter's book *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, World War II ushered in a period of great anxiety for Tolkien. This was due to him being both a veteran of the Great War and a father of two sons, Christopher and Michael, who were both volunteering to serve the British military. Whilst serving as an air raid warden in Oxford, Tolkien was also deep into writing *The Lord of the Rings* and rewriting *The Hobbit*.¹⁰ These letters were a way for Tolkien to voice his many thoughts about his children and his books, offering readers a unique chance to understand the core beliefs of J.R.R. Tolkien.

This main evidence section will be split into two major subsections. The first subsection will be focused on placing two of his letters within the larger historical context of major events in World War II that he directly refers to in his letters. As for the other subsection, these letters will be connected to smaller events that were happening in his daily life during these times. That does not mean these two letters are duller in any way; in fact, they are rich with Tolkien's values and deeply rooted in key moments throughout his life.

¹⁰ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 197.

The First Letter—Tolkien on War

The first letter that I will analyze is Tolkien's letter on December 9, 1943, to his son Christopher. In this letter, he directly refers to the Tehran Conference, as seen in the line, "Nothing to read—and even the papers with nothing but Teheran Ballyhoo."¹¹ Connecting this letter to history, the Tehran Conference in Iran was a meeting between Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill to discuss both current and post-war plans.¹² However, Tolkien did not hear about these plans during the war because they would be classified for civilians. Based on the *Daily Mirror's* archived newspapers, what Tolkien likely did hear on December 4th, 1943, was, "At the conference, questions on the conduct of the war against Germany were discussed, as well as a number of political questions."¹³ This was followed by, "Granting air bases in Russia to the RAF and the American Air Force is expected to be one of the first results of the conference...."¹⁴ Based on this newspaper, it can be assumed that what Tolkien read regarding the Tehran Conference was an escalation of violence and the promise to force Germany to surrender, and this news of violence concerned Tolkien greatly.

Throughout the letter, Tolkien expressed his concern about the Tehran Conference because of his worries about what kind of future would follow once the war ended. These concerns were most apparent in his letter when he discussed the issue of America's role in the war, stating that, "I do find this Americo-cosmopolitanism very terrifying. Quâ mind and spirit, neglecting the piddling fears of timid flesh...I am not really sure that its victory is going to be so much better for the world as a whole in the long run than the victory of——."¹⁵ Through this quote, Tolkien equated the victory of the Allies as no better than the victory of Nazi Germany for two main reasons: the means of achieving that victory and the promises for the future to come by those in power.

For the means of victory, Tolkien believed that the Allies' eagerness, especially America's, to blindly send soldiers to invade Germany would only bring about grotesque levels of violence and destruction for both sides. To Tolkien, victory was meaningless if it was accomplished through answering violence with even more violence, as it would not bring the world to a safer future. Regarding future promises, at the beginning of the letter, Tolkien pointed out the irony of the Tehran conference's promises to abolish tyranny while the conference was being led by two tyrants, Stalin and Roosevelt.¹⁶ In the case of Stalin, the irony there is self-explanatory, but in Tolkien's eyes, Roosevelt's promises of freedom for the future were no

¹¹ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 65.

¹² "The Tehran Conference, 1943." *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, accessed 12 Apr. 2024.

¹³ Archive, The British Newspaper. "Daily Mirror- Saturday 04 December 1943." Register | British Newspaper Archive. Accessed April 13, 2024.

¹⁴ Archive, The British Newspaper. "Daily Mirror- Saturday 04 December 1943." Register | British Newspaper Archive. Accessed April 13, 2024.

¹⁵ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 65.

¹⁶ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 65.

better. He believed that Roosevelt would bring his own kind of cultural tyranny through the globalization of American systems like mass production, suburbs, and the universal English language.¹⁷ With these issues in mind, Tolkien held no hope that World War II would change anything for the better. However, this was not to say that Tolkien believed that America should not have gotten involved or that he hoped that Germany would win the war. As he clarified at the end of the letter, he still loved Britain and hoped for the Allies' victory; however, before his love for his nation, his morals came first, and he stood against the existence of war, for it was both pointless and self-perpetuating.

This was not the only time that Tolkien expressed these beliefs. Years before this letter, Tolkien had expressed a similar viewpoint on the meaninglessness of war during the climactic final battle of his first book, *The Hobbit*. In the final battle dubbed the “Battle of Five Armies,” the races of men, dwarves, and elves put aside their differences to fend off a horde of goblins. Despite their efforts and the rallying cry of a reawakened King Thorin, the goblins slowly gain the upper hand and threaten the annihilation of all life in the lands. It was in this moment of desperation that the main character, Bilbo, commented, “Misery me! I have heard songs of many battles, and I have always understood that defeat may be glorious. It seems very uncomfortable, not to say distressing. I wish I was well out of it.”¹⁸ Prior to this moment, the story often compared Bilbo’s unheroic traits to the classic heroism represented by Thorin. For example, Bilbo is described as meek, cowardly, and a thief. In contrast, Thorin is courageous, honorable, and a natural leader, all features of the traditional hero. Coming into the final battle with Thorin leading the charge, Tolkien flips this narrative comparison of looking down on Bilbo’s unheroic traits. While Bilbo was hiding in fear of his demise, Thorin died unceremoniously off-page, and it took several pages later for Bilbo to find his body left out in the battlefield. By highlighting Bilbo’s cowardly survival and Thorin’s unceremonious death, Tolkien criticizes the idea of the righteous war, as it is a classic fantasy trope for the hero to die in a glorious last stand for the greater good. In comparison, Bilbo’s direct rejection of this trope by calling it “uncomfortable” and “distressing” allowed him to stay alive and return home. Through this contrasting image of Bilbo and Thorin, Tolkien questions the meaning of war and dispels the illusion that there is glory and honor in participating in it.

Like the Tehran Conference’s promises to bring down tyranny and restore everything good in the world, this idea of a glorious last stand in *The Hobbit* evokes the idea of a righteous war. A war of pure good versus pure evil. However, like Bilbo, Tolkien knew the truth about war and how that promise of glory was nothing but a sham. This desensitization to the righteousness of war comes from his experiences in World War I. He experienced firsthand the absolute devastation war brought to all sides, recognizing in his letters that mishandling of peace after the first World War led to continued bloodshed now. That is why he expressed such great concern upon hearing the news about the Tehran Conference, as the same promises were being made again. No matter the justification, to Tolkien, there was nothing more appalling and meaningless

¹⁷ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 65.

¹⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 266.

than war. It is this belief that aided in the construction of the narrative of *The Hobbit* and the main fear he expressed to his son a few years later. To quote a later letter from Tolkien, “The utter stupid waste of war, not only material but moral and spiritual, is so staggering to those who have to endure it. And always was, and always be.”¹⁹

The Second Letter—Tolkien on Technology

Tolkien’s letter, written on August 9th, 1945, which is addressed to his son, Christopher, refers to the dropping of the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. He writes, “The news today about ‘atomic bombs’ is so horrifying one is stunned.”²⁰ Focusing on the news Tolkien heard, the details of the bombing were limited, as the exact death toll would not have been determined at this time, nor did Japan directly surrender till a month later. Based on what was known at the time, the *Daily Mirror*’s archived newspaper reads, “Japan trembles under shock of another atomic bomb.”²¹ Followed by, “American airmen have dropped their second atomic bomb, this time on the Japanese port of Nagasaki. No further details will be available until the mission returns.”²² From the newspaper article, it can be determined that the true devastation of the atomic bombs was not made clear to the public beyond the fact that it was a powerful new weapon detonated in a largely populated city.

Even with this limited information, it was enough to horrify Tolkien, as he expressed in the rest of the letter that “Such explosives in men’s hands, while their moral and intellectual status is declining, is about as useful as giving out firearms to all inmates of a gaol and then saying that you hope this will ‘this will ensure peace’.”²³ While the overarching message is clear that Tolkien disliked the use of atomic bombs, what is more interesting to note is how he directly blamed physicists for creating such technology. For Tolkien, as terrible as the technology of the atomic bomb itself was, what truly horrified him was that it was given so easily to corruptible hands.

To understand Tolkien’s viewpoint on technology, it is best to refer to other letters he wrote to Christopher during the war. Addressing Christopher’s letter on April 18th, 1944, about his experiences in the war so far, Tolkien wrote, “How it reminds me of my own experience! Only in one way I was better off: wireless was not invented. I daresay it had some potential for good, but it has in fact in the main become a weapon for the fool, the savage, and the villain.”²⁴ As for the other letter, written on December 18th, 1944, Tolkien once again wrote about his son’s experiences in the war, but this time on the use of airplane warfare. He wrote, “As long as war is

¹⁹ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 75.

²⁰ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 116.

²¹ Archive, The British Newspaper. “Hull Daily Mail- Thursday 09 August 1945.” Register | British Newspaper Archive. Accessed April 15, 2024.

²² Archive, The British Newspaper. “Hull Daily Mail- Thursday 09 August 1945.” Register | British Newspaper Archive. Accessed April 15, 2024.

²³ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 116.

²⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 71.

fought with such weapons, and one accepts any profits that may accrue (such as preservation of one's skin and even 'victory') it is merely shirking the issue to hold war aircraft in special horror."²⁵ What is shown in all three of these letters is that Tolkien understood the capacity for good that technology has in the right hands, as seen with the wireless. However, he also understood the dangers technology poses with the destructive power it grants humans in ever-increasing levels, as seen with the airplane and the atomic bomb. The underlying theme that connects these letters is human nature. Essentially, Tolkien believed that human nature, when tempted with power to achieve their goals, is what ultimately turns technology cruel. Putting together a weapon like the atomic bomb under the pretext of peace is why Tolkien is both enraged and horrified by the physicists.

This pessimistic viewpoint on the relationship between human nature and the power technology offers stems from Tolkien's experiences in World War I. In Carpenter's *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, he described Tolkien's experiences in World War I, which Tolkien simply explained as "animal horror."²⁶ In Carpenter's account, Tolkien was deployed in June 1916, and over the next couple of months, he would face total carnage. Whether it be former fields and villages turned into barren wastelands, the news of friends passing in a battle, or the sight of his battalions being slaughtered by machine gun fire, Tolkien was constantly faced with the destruction caused by technology.²⁷ Based on this account of Tolkien's experiences, Tolkien has seen technology at its absolute worst during this war. He saw the destruction it can wreak on nature and humans alike. So coming into World War II, Tolkien understood the dangers that technology poses, and the war only reaffirmed his distrust in technology. The persistence of this belief stretching from World War One to World War Two is further demonstrated by how he expressed this viewpoint earlier in *The Hobbit*.

In *The Hobbit*, Tolkien best exemplified his viewpoint on the corrupting nature of technology with the Arkenstone. The Arkenstone is described as a beautiful white gem that was dug up by dwarves and, since then, became a symbol of birthright for the dwarf kings to rule the kingdom of Erebor.²⁸ While it is not technology, it is this promise of power and control that echoes similarities to the temptations of technology that Tolkien refers to in his World War Two letters. Furthermore, like how technology can be twisted and can divide people, the beauty and power of the Arkenstone push the dwarves, elves, and humans closer to war with one another as the climactic final battle approaches.²⁹ With this war, the once-beloved gem has transformed into a source of corruption and evil. While there isn't a one-to-one allegorical connection between the Arkenstone and the technology Tolkien saw in World War One, there is a considerable similarity in the beliefs that Tolkien has around both. This idea is that technology cannot be trusted because of the corrupting nature that stems from the power it offers.

²⁵ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 105.

²⁶ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 91.

²⁷ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 91-93.

²⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 218.

²⁹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 257.

The Third Letter—Tolkien and Anti-Modernity

Tolkien's third letter, written on April 3rd, 1944, which he addressed to his son Christopher, recounts his trip to Birmingham to meet the headmaster of a school. In the letter, he takes particular issue with the architecture. He wrote, "Except for one patch of ghastly wreckage (opp. My old school's site), it does not look much damaged, not by the enemy. The chief damage has been the growth of the great flat featureless modern buildings. The worst of all is the ghastly multiple-store erection on the old site."³⁰ There is an emphasis placed on his dislike for these modern buildings, equating them to an enemy attack. The strong negative connotations he used to describe the buildings (such as ghastly, damaged, and featureless) highlight another important value to Tolkien: his anti-modernism.

Tolkien's anti-modern viewpoint can be traced back to his childhood. According to Carpenter in *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, Tolkien's childhood was difficult, as his mom struggled to care for Tolkien and his brother after the passing of Tolkien's father when he was very young. These financial struggles pushed his mother to move to Sarehole, in the Birmingham countryside.³¹ Here, where he would spend much of his early childhood, Tolkien would be homeschooled by his mother and go on adventures with his brother. From these experiences, he formed a deep connection with the countryside and his mother. Carpenter further explained that Tolkien, from a young age, understood the many sacrifices his mother made to give him and his brother a normal life.³² It is this love for his mother, the sacrifices she made, and the pleasant childhood memories of the countryside that greatly influenced Tolkien throughout his life.

Thus, when he returned to Birmingham, he could express nothing but disdain for the town. The cold and uniform buildings that filled Birmingham's streets stood in complete contrast to the lively and warm countryside fields that Tolkien saw in his childhood. To Tolkien, the modernization of Birmingham was a sign that the ever-expanding industrial movements around the world would rob it of all its natural beauty and diversity of life. This sentiment is echoed in other letters he wrote during the war. For example, in his earlier letter on November 29, 1943, to Christopher, he wrote, "Even the unlucky little Samoyedes, I suspect, have tinned food and the village loudspeaker telling Stalin's bed-time stories about Democracy and the wicked Fascists... there is only one bright spot and that is the growing habit of disgruntled men dynamiting factories and power stations."³³ Through this letter, Tolkien clearly expresses his disdain towards industrialization; however, looking past his disgust, there are also traces of nostalgia within it. In his wish for the destruction of factories and power stations, there is a level of longing he expresses for the natural world he used to live in. It is this wish to return to that childhood home that works its way into his book *The Hobbit*.

³⁰ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 70.

³¹ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 27.

³² Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 25-38.

³³ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 64.

Tolkien's nostalgia for his childhood is best found in the opening setting of the story: the town of Hobbiton. The town (Figure 1 in the appendix) bears many similarities to the Birmingham countryside as described by Carpenter's description of Tolkien's childhood. Similar to Hobbiton, Sarehole had a singular dividing river, an accompanying watermill, and cottages scattered about. Most importantly, like Hobbiton, there was a notable hill that Tolkien and his brothers used to play on, revealing further the physical similarities between Sarehole and Hobbiton.³⁴ However, looking beyond the visual similarities, the town also holds a symbolic value in two ways. The first is a symbol of natural purity as seen with the vast open fields, the lack of factories, and the coexistence between homes and nature. All of these features are ways that Tolkien's anti-modernity influences the story, as the town of Hobbiton is for the most part untouched by the conflicts and changes of the outside world.

The other symbolic value of Hobbiton is nostalgia. Similar to how Tolkien expressed longing to return to the simpler times in his letters to Christopher, Bilbo experiences homesickness throughout his adventure. One such example is when the narrator states, "...and just at that moment [Bilbo] felt more tired than he ever remembered feeling before. He was thinking once again of his comfortable chair before the fire in his favorite sitting-room in his hobbit hole."³⁵ At this moment, Bilbo is struggling to adapt to the rough life of an adventurer, for moments prior to this scene, Bilbo narrowly survived being eaten by trolls and traveled through mountain passes. Dangerous experiences and landscapes do not exist in Hobbiton, since it is a fairly isolated region from the rest of the world. Thus, Bilbo uses these memories of Hobbiton to cope with these experiences and frame his understanding of the world. Likewise, Tolkien's childhood memories laid the foundation for his values and his engagement with the ever-changing world around him. This love and longing for his life in Sarehole led Tolkien to reject the modernized world as a whole.

The Fourth Letter—Tolkien and Self-Denial

Finally, Tolkien's letter on March 6th, 1941, to his son Michael discusses marriage and the relationship between genders. The exact context behind this letter is unclear because Michael's initial letter is not shared anywhere. The contents of this letter are nonetheless deeply fascinating since Tolkien mentions the idea of a "fallen world" and its antidote is self-denial. Regarding the first idea, Tolkien believed that the world has fallen into dark times because of rampant lust. He wrote, "This is a fallen world. The dislocation of sex-instinct is one of the chief symptoms of the Fall. The world has been 'going to the bad' all down the ages."³⁶ Tolkien, then later in the letter, wrote, "The devil is endlessly ingenious and sex is his favourite subject."³⁷ This utilization of the devil as evil seems to draw inspiration from his Catholic upbringing. Humphrey Carpenter notes

³⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 28-29.

³⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 44-45.

³⁶ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 48.

³⁷ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 48.

in his biography that Tolkien became fully devoted to Catholicism soon after his mother died as a way to cope with losing her at such a young age. This continued to play a massive role for the rest of Tolkien's life, acting as a moral guide.³⁸

With this in mind in regard to the idea of self-denial, this belief is not just a Christian doctrine, as it comes up in numerous other ideologies and religions. However, in the case of Tolkien, it does seem to play a large role in his adherence to it. As he states, "However, the essence of a *fallen* world is that the *best* cannot be attained by free enjoyment or by what is called 'self-realization'; but by denial, by suffering."³⁹ Similar to how Tolkien associates the issues of sex culture with his Catholic beliefs, his practice of self-denial is rooted in it as well. Looking beyond the topics of sex culture and Catholicism, I want to focus primarily on Tolkien's belief in self-denial, as it comes up as a crucial theme in the narrative of his book *The Hobbit* to contrast the theme of greed.

In *The Hobbit*, greed serves as the main source of conflict in the story, but it does not make its presence known until the climax of the story, following the death of the dragon Smaug. Although dubbed dragon sickness by the dwarves, it acts more like a mental illness than a biological one, with the victims experiencing a violent and uncontrollable lust for gold. This is evident in the case of Bilbo's group leader, Thorin, after he reclaims the dwarven castle Erebor. Driven mad, he refuses to give any gold to the refugees of Smaug's attack and threatens war with them and the elves.⁴⁰ Thorin only frees himself from the curse after having a sudden epiphany and being fatally wounded. Lying in the battlefield, Thorin says to Bilbo, "If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world."⁴¹ Through this quote and Thorin's downfall, Tolkien directly tells readers the true danger of greed and the importance of resisting it. In contrast to Thorin's tragic end, Bilbo represents Tolkien's ideal practice of self-denial.

There are numerous instances in which Bilbo's choice of self-denial protects him from the dragon sickness in the final acts of the book. However, the best example is at the end of the book when he must decide his reward for reclaiming the dwarves' home. Despite the dwarves' pleas that he take one-fourteenth of the gold of Erebor, Bilbo refuses and requests only two small chests of silver and a pony for the journey home.⁴² Despite all the hardship Bilbo went through on his adventure, he only wanted a small reward because he feared it would only cause more war and bloodshed, as he saw in the final battle. This foresight would save his life because when he finally returns to Hobbiton, he finds the whole town auctioning off his home and property since they presumed that he had died. Even worse, some of the hobbits seemed to have hoped he actually died, like his aunt, who wanted the deeds to his home.⁴³ Although unfortunate, Bilbo's decision to not bring more gold back prevented an even worse outcome. As Corey Olsen points

³⁸ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 39.

³⁹ Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 51.

⁴⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 247-248.

⁴¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 269.

⁴² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 272.

⁴³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 281.

out in her book *Exploring J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit*, if the hobbits are this cruel to Bilbo over some furniture and a house, one can only imagine the chaos that would envelop Hobbiton if Bilbo brought back his originally planned reward of one-fourteenth of Erebor's gold.⁴⁴ Bilbo's decision to reject riches to spare Hobbiton from dragon sickness is the embodiment of Tolkien's idea of self-denial. While the idea of self-denial is one of many examples of the influence Catholicism had on Tolkien's life, it stands out here as a crucial lesson he sought to impart, both to his readers and his children.

Conclusion

Humphrey Carpenter's *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* is a vast collection of hundreds of letters that Tolkien wrote throughout his life. Tolkien expressed four major beliefs in the selected sources: the pointlessness of war, the dangers of technology, the rejection of modernity, and the practice of self-denial. By tying these beliefs back to his first book, *The Hobbit*, and demonstrating their prevalence throughout his life, more evidence is available for scholars like Nicolay and Croft to support their claim that Tolkien remained unwavering in his beliefs, which only grew stronger following the Great War.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates the importance these letters have in understanding the life of J.R.R. Tolkien and the writing process of his books. I hope to inspire further discussion and analysis among scholars for the many other letters that are within this collection. Studies on Tolkien's life and creative process remain relevant today, as many of the details and themes Tolkien used lay the foundation for many other high fantasy medieval stories in all types of media. Whether it be games like *Dungeons and Dragons* or books like *Game of Thrones*, high fantasy stories adopt a lot of Tolkien's ideas and designs into their fictional world. These are not limited to the ones just discussed in the paper, either. There are many other details and themes, both big and small, that work their way into the writing of other high fantasy medieval media, like designs of different races, race relations, and ideas of biological determinism. This has especially become the case following the explosions in popularity that Tolkien's works have gained thanks to Peter Jackson's films. By further analyzing Tolkien's medievalism, its origins, and its influence on the creation of the fictional world of Middle-Earth, scholars will be able to better understand how similar stories were constructed and what themes and tropes continue to endure to this day.

⁴⁴ Corey Olsen, *Exploring J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012) 278-279.

Appendix



Figure 1: A colored drawing of Hobbiton provided by J.R.R. Tolkien on page 7 of *The Hobbit* and colored by MuseoTeco, which was accessed April 22, 2024.

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Common Scottish Fairy Beliefs: An Examination of *The Secret Commonwealth* and Witch Trial Transcripts

Susan Hardy - Missouri State University

Introduction

THESE Siths, or FAIRIES, they call Slah Mah, or the Good People, it would seem, to prevent the Dint of their ill Attempts, (for the Irish use to bless all they fear Harme of;) and are said to be of a midle Nature betuixt Man and Angel, as were Day-mons thought to be of old[...].¹

- Robert Kirk, Minister at Aberfoill, 1691.

The emergence of witch hunts in Scotland during the early modern period posed a danger to the sanctity of fairy belief. Fairies existed outside of the bounds of Christian cosmology, or the Christian understanding of the world. Some Christians were able to reconcile this in their minds, but others pushed against it. Those who aligned more strictly with Christian belief—typically, wealthy political and religious authorities—might have seen similarities between fairies and both witches and demons. Fairies were able to shapeshift and fly through the air; they kidnapped children and hosted revels at night.² These were traits also attributed to witches, and, while fairies might have not been witches themselves, they might have empowered witches much like demons did. To religious authorities spearheading the hunt for malevolent forces, spirits fit into one of two categories: angelic or demonic. In their perspective, fairies did not fit into the angelic mold—due to the aforementioned traits—so they must be demons.

Religious and political elites explained the belief in fairies among the common people as the work of the Devil, a notorious trickster feared for his ability to lead people astray. One of the few elites who consciously sought to document the beliefs of the common people was Robert Kirk. A theologian looking to incorporate fairies into the Christian cosmos without demonizing them, Kirk traveled the Scottish Highlands collecting the stories and ideas people shared with him.³

The Scottish sources regarding fairy belief during the early modern period differ by region and the manner in which they describe the common beliefs. Kirk, who focused solely on

¹ Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth Of Elves, Fauns And Fairies*, (London: David Nutt, 1893), 25.

² J.A. MacCulloch, "The Mingling of Fairy and Witch Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland," *Folklore* 32, no. 4 (Dec 1921), 229.

³ Julian Goodare, *Between Humans and Angels: Scientific Uses for Fairies in Early Modern Scotland*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 179.

the Scottish Highlands, emphasized two key aspects of fairies. The first was that fairies were a secretive and underground-dwelling race. The second was that fairies were almost human in their nature, succumbing to the same vices to which the Scots were susceptible. In the Scottish Lowlands and Midlands, the witch trials abounded,⁴ dominating any narrative related to fairies. The ideas discussed by Kirk were present but not as prominent in these regions. The trials were documented through an elite perspective that opposed certain aspects of common fairy belief. The elites believed fully that fairies were demons, and thus not a secret commonwealth of supernatural almost-humans. Because of the dissonance between the views of the common lay people and the religious and political authorities in Scotland, the elites who were running the trials altered and influenced the testimonies of the accused to fit within their own understanding of the world. This paper separates elite interpretations from common perspectives to better understand fairy belief in the Midlands and Lowlands, where witch hunts were prevalent. A cross-analysis of witch trial transcripts and Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* reveals that salient aspects of fairy belief in the Highlands—namely, the idea of fairies living in secret underground societies and their nature as both sinful and humanlike—were also present in the Midlands and Lowlands, pointing towards a universal conception of fairies across Scotland.

Historiography

Scottish witch hunt scholars have focused primarily on elite perspectives, due to the ready availability of such sources. Those writing demonologies and conducting the trials did not set out to create an unbiased and accurate documentation of fairy beliefs in Scotland. “Educated people did not usually believe in fairies,” observed historian Julian Goodare, “but they certainly believed in demons, and knew that demons were deceptive and dangerous.”⁵ The elites drew on a cosmology that categorized behavior as Godly or demonic. Scottish Christian elites establish control over errant regions, and witch trials were a way to do that. The elites would see the presence of fairy belief as a threat to Christian dominance or evidence that the common people were being tricked by demons. The witch trials were a way to stamp out this apparent demonic influence and non-Christian belief. By relying solely on elite sources, scholars limit their understanding of Scottish folklore. This paper seeks to broaden the understanding of fairy belief in Scotland by focusing on the perspective most historians have chosen to disregard: that of the common people. By using the trial transcripts of three convicted “witches” from the Scottish Midlands and Lowlands—Bessie Dunlop (1576) from Ayrshire, Andro Man (1597) from Aberdeen, and Isobel Gowdie (1662) from Auldearn, as well as Robert Kirk's

⁴ Witch trials were more common in the Scottish Lowlands and Midlands because of a higher population and increased English influence. Trials would occur in areas with a stronger judicial and Christian presence, meaning that they occurred more commonly in the lower regions of Scotland, where the government and church had more of a foothold. The Highlands had a more well-preserved semblance of Celtic culture, which is where fairy beliefs originated from.

⁵ Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London: Routledge, 2016), 123.

Highlands-centered *The Secret Commonwealth*—I will identify commonalities and determine the existence of a universal conception of fairies amongst the common people of Scotland.

This paper reads the trial transcripts not at face value but against the grain. Although prosecutors may not have adequately pursued lines of questioning related to fairy belief, bits of common belief remain hidden in the text. A thorough understanding of the beliefs of Scottish commoners—whether in the Highlands or the Midlands and Lowlands—requires an analysis of two folkloric themes: fairies as a secretive, subterranean society and the sins of fairies.

Fairies as a Secret Underground Commonwealth

The Subterraneans

To Robert Kirk, the most important aspect of fairies was their secret and underground-dwelling existence. He opened his piece, “The Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and, for the most Part,) Invifible People, heretofore going under the name of elves, faunes, and fairies[...].” In fact, when referring to what was conceptualized to be a fairy, Kirk largely preferred to use the word “Subterranean” rather than “fairy.”⁶ Kirk believed that the underground nature of fairies was definitive to their existence.

It is important to identify where exactly the Scots believed fairies lived. Commoners and the elite agreed that fairies did not dwell in the same plane of reality as humans. Instead, they occupied an “otherworld,” an in-between realm through which fairies, and sometimes humans, could cross.⁷ This was sometimes called “fairyland” or “Elphame” and served almost as a mirroring of human society. Fairies, according to Kirk, had “ariftocraticall Rulers and Laws,” and their “Apparell and Speech is like that of the People and Countrey under which they live.”⁸

Fairies lived in what the Scots called “fairy hills.”⁹ Frequently across accounts of fairies, elites and commoners alike referenced hills as a place of meeting, a sort of gateway to the otherworld. Humans could be brought through this gateway into fairyland, but more frequently, it was fairies who crossed the border. This was mostly due to the physical nature of the fairies: their “Bodies of congealled Air” allowed them to “enter into any Cranie or Clift” they chose.¹⁰ It was far easier, therefore, for fairies to cross the boundary between worlds than for a human, unless the human was accompanied by a fairy. This was the view of Robert Kirk and the Scottish Highlanders. However, the elites of the Midlands and Lowlands took this concept a step further. If a supposed witch were to attempt to connect with a fairy, they would go to the place where a fairy is most likely to appear: the gateway between worlds.

⁶ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*.

⁷ Emma Wilby, *The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 200), 291.

⁸ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 28.

⁹ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 30.

¹⁰ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 25.

This notion is evident in the trial of Isobel Gowdie, an accused witch who stood trial in the early 1660s. In her third confession in 1662, Gowdie described a moment in one of the gatherings of her coven: “We went in to the Dovmie-hillis ; the hill opened, and we cam to an fair and lairge brow rowme, in the day tym.”¹¹ The hill mentioned here is a fairy hill, and demonstrates the gateway into fairyland, through which Gowdie and those with her were able to pass. On the other side of the hill, she met the King and Queen of the Fairies.¹² The confessions of Andro Man and Bessie Dunlop also make similar mention of fairy hills as places of meeting. Based on repeated mentions across different sets of trials, it stands to reason that the idea of fairies living underground was a commonly accepted one.

The Secret Commonwealth and the trial transcripts are in agreement on the subterranean nature of fairies, meaning this was a key aspect of common belief. This is supported by the fact that witches did not elaborate on the underground-dwelling nature of fairies, simply mentioning it with no further explanation. Additionally, these brief mentions hint that the elite did not question the accused on this concept further. The idea of fairies living underground was not treated with gravity by either the accused or those questioning them. It was a notion that was commonly understood and relatively accepted.

The Secret Nature of Fairies

To Kirk, fairies were meant to live in near secrecy. “If invited and earneftly required,” he wrote, “theſe Companions make themſelves knowne and familiar to Men.”¹³ If Kirk’s interpretation of Highland fairy beliefs was correct, Scottish people of that region did not expect to interact with fairies on a daily basis. If they wanted to contact a fairy, humans had to initiate it. Additionally, a fairy did not have to reciprocate this interaction and could instead deny the human. Because they would have to seek out the fairy themselves and might not receive any response upon doing so, most people did not attempt to communicate or deal with fairies.

In the transcripts of the witch trials, on the other hand, fairies were active initiators. Across the three selected trials, as well as the larger database, it was the fairy who approached the human. The Bessie Dunlop case is the clearest display of the complexity of human-fairy relations in the Scottish witch hunts. In her confession, Dunlop shared that Tom Reid, the familiar spirit who would become her gateway into the supernatural world, had appeared to her three times during a vulnerable point in her life.¹⁴ Dunlop had a sick husband, a sick baby, and a sick cow; on all three occasions Reid claimed that each would die, unless Dunlop were to “mend to [God].”¹⁵ Dunlop provided no details regarding the exact nature of Reid, though he is considered by scholars to be a ghost, due to the fact that Dunlop claims he died in a battle prior

¹¹ Robert Pitcairn, “Confessions of Issobell Gowdie, Spouse to John Gilbert, in Lochloy,” in *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1833), 611.

¹² Pitcairn, “Confessions of Issobell Gowdie,” 604.

¹³ Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth*, 27.

¹⁴ Wilby, “Walking with Spirits,” X.

¹⁵ Wilby, “Walking with Spirits,” X.

to their meeting.¹⁶ Whatever his supernatural form, he played an important role as Dunlop's familiar, her companion in her magical endeavors, and as the bridge between Dunlop and the broader supernatural world. Even if Reid was not a fairy himself, Dunlop's testimony suggests Reid was in cahoots with them. Eventually, the third time "he appeared in her own house to her," Reid introduced her to the fairies.¹⁷ The fairies asked Dunlop to go with them, to which she refused and they left her.¹⁸ She asked Reid who they were, as they appeared in the form of regular men and women, and Reid referred to them as "gude wychtis that dwelt in the Court of Elfame."¹⁹

In Dunlop's account, the "gude wychtis," or fairies had the human brought before them rather than the human approaching on their own. Additionally, it is Dunlop who denied the fairies and not the other way around. This is a reverse of the human-fairy relationship described by Kirk. One might conclude that Dunlop only portrayed her interactions with supernatural spirits in this way to avoid harsher judgment, but a similar scenario played out in both the Andro Man and Isobel Gowdie cases.

The Man and Gowdie cases are interesting in the way they portray their fairy characters in an almost mediary role. Andro Man testified that the Queen of Elhame approached him when Man was a child, and the two continued to have dealings for decades.²⁰ The Fairy Queen served as Man's bridge to Christsonday, her consort, and Man's true master. Man claimed, "the Quene of Elphame hea a grip of all the craft, hot Christsondy is the gudeman, and hes all power vnder God."²¹ It was the Fairy Queen who brought Man into service of Christsonday, her consort, and was the catalyst for Man's venture into witchcraft.

Isobel Gowdie's case was a reverse of Andro Man's. According to Gowdie, it was the Devil that approached Gowdie, struck a deal with her, and brought her to the Queen of the Fairies on occasion.²² A supernatural entity still instigated the interaction, though.

Kirk claimed that fairies "nather can nor will eafily converfe with [humans]."²³ Across the Scottish witch trials, however, we see that was not the case. Fairies were frequently shown to easily and willingly interact with humans and set them on the path of maleficium. The origin of this disagreement between Kirk and the trial transcripts might lie in the possible stronger retention of the original Celtic belief in the Highlands, where Kirk collected the folklore that informed his writings.²⁴ The Lowlands and Highlands, on the other hand, had a greater blending

¹⁶ Julian Goodare, "Scottish Witchcraft in its European Context," in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller, (London: Palgrave MacMillan), 33.

¹⁷ Wilby, "Walking with Spirits," X.

¹⁸ Wilby, "Walking with Spirits," X.

¹⁹ Wilby, "Walking with Spirits," X.

²⁰ Edward J. Cowan, "Witch Persecution and Folk Belief in Lowland Scotland: The Devil's Decade," in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, and Joyce Miller, (London: Palgrave MacMillan), 84.

²¹ John Stuart, "Precepts for the Summoning of Ane Assise Upon Andro Man," 121.

²² Pitcairn, "Confessions of Issobell Gowdie, 604.

²³ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 25.

²⁴ Ronald Hutton, "Global Context of the Scottish Witch-Hunt," *The Scottish Witch-Hunts in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

of belief systems, with the incorporation of more elements of Christian cosmology. As established previously, the elites believed all spirits, including fairies, that were not clearly angels were demons. A key trait of a demon is their tricking and tempting of humans, something that could have been ascribed to fairies. A demon would draw in humans and actively interfere in their lives. Kirk's "secret commonwealth" does not fit this narrative, and so, may have been changed to better suit Christian ideology.

Vices and Sins of Fairies

When Kirk set out to document the beliefs of the Highlands, he did so intending to find a place for fairies in the Christian cosmology. To establish some sort of connection between fairies and Christian belief that did not disregard or demonize fairies, he might have more success in establishing a positive Christian foothold in the Highlands. Thus, Kirk believed that fairies held moral complexity and could not be simply categorized as good or evil. His portrayal of fairies likens them more to humans than any other form of spirit. Fairies were something "betwixt Man and Angel."²⁵ They were classified as spirits, but their vices made them more akin to humans than to the alternatives of angels and demons. Their ways of life were quite similar to humans: "They are distributed in Tribes and Orders, and have Children, Nurfs, Mariages, Deaths, and Buriall."²⁶ Only a few things separate fairies from humans: their airy bodies and magical qualities. The parallels between fairies and humans extended into the vices fairies fell prey to. On the sins of fairies, Kirk writes that they had "Contentions, Doubts, Disputes, Feuds, and Siding of Parties."²⁷ Fairies, as intelligent creatures, were bound to fall to sin. This prevented them from being viewed as angels, who were meant to be without sin, but it did not equate them to demons. As noted previously, the fairies Kirk researched did not seek out humans, a notable trait of demons. While they committed sins, they did not look to corrupt others, and they fit the role of a mirrored version of humans rather than of evil spirits serving the Devil.

The trial transcripts, however, show a demonized version of fairies. In Bessie Dunlop's case, Tom Reid, her familiar, asked her to renounce Christianity in favor of serving the Fairy Queen, which Dunlop refused to do.²⁸ When examined more closely, however, Dunlop's admittance that she was asked to reject Christianity seems out of place. It is just one line in a larger confession full of examples of Dunlop proclaiming that she was given the ability to heal the sick by Reid in service of the Fairy Queen.²⁹ Dunlop was never encouraged to act in a wicked way, which a demon likely would have done. Reid, and by proxy, the Queen of the Fairies, continued to help her and give her herbs for healing after her initial refusal to renounce Christianity, never asking her to renounce it again.³⁰ Coupled with Dunlop's continued dealings

²⁵ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 25.

²⁶ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 26.

²⁷ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 27.

²⁸ Wilby, "Walking with Spirits," X.

²⁹ Wilby, "Walking with Spirits," XI.

³⁰ Wilby, "Walking with Spirits," XI.

with Reid and fairies, this confession likely arose from the elites asking questions aimed at discovering demonic dealings. Dunlop seems not to have hesitated in accepting the help of fairies, which, based on her rejection of Reid's request to abandon Christianity, would not follow if she believed them to be demonic in some way. So, based on Bessie Dunlop's case, it is possible that others like her had views of fairies that aligned more with Kirk's than with those of the elites who tried them.

Kirk did address the relationship between fairies and Christianity. Fairies had "no difcernible Religion, Love, or Devotion towards God."³¹ Instead, they reportedly disappeared when they heard God's name invoked.³² Perhaps this is why Tom Reid asked Bessie Dunlop to renounce Christianity—the very name of God would cause his mistress, the Fairy Queen, to disappear. This also would suggest why Dunlop admitted to being asked to renounce her baptism, as she knew fairies had no love of God. However, Kirk still distinctly separates fairies from demons and does not seem to completely villainize the fairies for this. Fairies' relationship to God as lined out by Kirk adds another interesting layer to their morals and could potentially have allowed elites a jumping off point for the demonization of fairies.

Andro Man's case was similar to Bessie Dunlop's. Man was also a healer and was never described as harming anyone with magic.³³ Man's primary dealings were with the Queen of the Fairies, with whom he claimed to have had sex and several children, and Christsonday, her consort. Christsonday is an especially interesting aspect of these trials. The precepts for summoning Man read "the Devill, thy maister, quhom thow termes Christsonday, and supponis to be ane engell, and Goddis godsone[...] is rasis be the speking of the word Benedicite[...]."³⁴ The elite author of the precepts equated Christsonday with the Devil. However, in his confession Man never made that connection himself. He described Christsonday in an angelic fashion and called him God's grandson. This could be interpreted as the Devil tricking Man in an angelic form, but even then, it does not seem like Man assumed that was associated with demonic forces. With Man only ever calling Christsonday by his name and the greater emphasis on his own relationship with the Fairy Queen, it is likely that Man gave a confession emanating from a set of beliefs differing from the beliefs of those who were interpreting it. The elites saw Christsonday as the Devil, and thus, Man as engaging in satanic practices. Man saw Christsonday as the consort of the Fairy Queen, and thus himself as interacting with fairies, not demonic powers.

Isobel Gowdie's case is especially striking. Unlike the other two cases, she willingly made a deal with the Devil before she had any dealings with fairies. She mentioned feasting with "the Qwein of Fearrie" in "the Downie hillis" but did not mention receiving any power from her.³⁵ Not only was Gowdie different in that she got her power more explicitly from the Devil, but she was also a far more malevolent force. In her confession, Gowdie stated she was "killing

³¹ Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 28.

³² Kirk, *Secret Commonwealth*, 28.

³³ Stuart, "Precepts for the Summoning of Ane Assise Upon Andro Man," 120.

³⁴ Stuart, "Precepts for the Summoning of Ane Assise Upon Andro Man," 120.

³⁵ Pitcairn, "Confessions of Issobell Gowdie," 604.

persons with the arrowes which I gott from the Divell.”³⁶ These arrows that Gowdie shot were elf-arrows, a concept rooted in fairy lore.³⁷ It was believed that humans could serve as archers for fairies, much like Gowdie did.³⁸ Fairies were involved in the process of making the elf arrows: Gowdie claimed “Elf-boyes” were the ones who whittled them.³⁹ However, it was the Devil who directed all the shots. In Gowdie’s confession, fairies were portrayed as servants, or at the very least, compatriots, of the Devil. Her frequent mentions of hill-dwelling fairies and elf shots show that she had an understanding of the common belief, even though her testimony suffered from the extreme demonization of fairies.

Transcripts of the three trials illustrate the theme of the demonization of fairies. Scholars agree that elites viewed fairies as servants of the Devil. Elites likely carried this perspective into the interrogations and trials they ran. They asked questions from which lines could be drawn between fairies and demons. While the accused relayed information based on common belief, the elites overlaid it with their own views. In the case of the moral nature of fairies, it is likely that the average person did not view the spirits to be demonic. If put on trial, however, commoners could be pressured into making such a connection.

Succubi and Changelings

While Scots may not have viewed fairies as demonic, they assumed that fairies sinned. One such sin Kirk mentions is the habits of the succubi, “who tryft with Men.”⁴⁰ Andro Man may have been one such man, as he confessed that “he lay with the Quen of Elphen.”⁴¹ Bessie Dunlop and Isobel Gowdie made no claims of having intercourse with a fairy, though Gowdie did lie with the Devil. Sex with the Devil was a common theme in witch trial transcripts, and so sex with fairies was seen as an imitation of that.

Outside of sex, the other vices ascribed to fairies, as Kirk described it, is “ftealling of Nurfes to their Children, and that other fort of Plaginifm in catching our Children away.”⁴² Because human milk was supposedly better at nurturing fairy young, fairies kidnapped young human women or stole a human baby and switched it with a fairy.⁴³ In some cases, the kidnappee survived, and in others, they were killed.⁴⁵ Kidnapping is the fairy vice that Kirk discusses most. However, it is not mentioned extensively in the Scottish witch trials. Never once does it come up in the transcripts of Dunlop, Man, or Gowdie’s cases, and it is only mentioned nine times out of 113 trials dealing with fairies in the University of Edinburgh’s database.⁴⁶

³⁶ Pitcairn, “Confessions of Issobell Gowdie,” 611.

³⁷ In fairy lore, fairies would shoot elf-arrows that caused illness or pain.

³⁸ Wilby, “Walking with Spirits,” 143.

³⁹ Pitcairn, “Confessions of Issobell Gowdie,” 615.

⁴⁰ Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth*, 31.

⁴¹ Stuart, “Confession of Andro Man,” 124.

⁴² Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth*, 31.

⁴³ Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth*, 31.

⁴⁴ That is to say, a changeling

⁴⁵ Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth*, 34.

⁴⁶ Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller, and Louise Yeoman, *The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft*. University of Edinburgh, 2003).

A possible reason for the scarce mentions of changelings in the witch trial transcripts is that they did not conform to the narrative the elites attempted to tell. Sexual relations with fairies aligned a lot better with sexual relations with the Devil or demons. When a witch swore an oath to serve the Devil, she slept with him and received her powers. Babies and women getting kidnapped and replaced did not have any similar counterpart in demonology; consequently, the elites conducting the interrogation did not push for the degree of information they may have in other areas of fairy sin. Regardless of the beliefs of the person on trial, fairy vices highlighted in each trial were those that aided the narrative pushed by the elite, the narrative equating fairies with demons due to apparent similarities in their wicked practices.

Conclusion

In a comparison of Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* with the Scottish witch trial transcripts, the differences far outweigh the similarities. These differences can be explained through an understanding of the elite perspective on fairies and their goals in the Scottish witch hunts, which also provides a clearer understanding of how interrogation and transcription warped the beliefs of common Scots. The elites believed that fairies were demonic, and they may have attempted to warp the narrative of the accused to prove these alleged demonic qualities. Additionally, the elite often ignored or failed to explore bits of commoner folklore, like the hills fairies lived in. This means these are perhaps the purest parts of the transcripts.

Reading the transcripts against the grain illuminates the connections between Kirk's descriptions of fairies and the confessions of accused witches. There were salient similarities in both the Highland and Midland/Lowland accounts. These common trends potentially point toward an almost universal system of folkloric belief regarding fairies across Scotland.

The discrepancy between the apparent strength of fairy belief across the regions of Scotland could possibly be tied to the settlement of the Gaelic people, with higher concentrations of ancient Celtic belief hanging on in the upper parts of Scotland and tapering off in the Midlands and Lowlands, where English influence was greater.⁴⁷ Potentially, the lack of strong English presence in the Highlands allowed for the original fairy beliefs of Scotland to perservere. In the Midlands and Lowlands, the more rigid laws, customs, and religious beliefs of the English minimized or covered up the preexisting fairy folklore. The connection between regions and the strength of Celtic folklore necessitates further exploration before a definitive answer can be found, but the evidence is enough to provide a basis for investigation. Until then, continued exploration and acknowledgement of the importance of common belief will continue to reveal the truth about fairies hidden beneath the surface in the Scottish witch trials.

⁴⁷ Ronald Hutton, "Global Context of the Scottish Witch-Hunt," *The Scottish Witch-Hunts in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

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“Man-Dig those crazy Los Angeles Freeways”: The Changing Image of Southern California Freeways in The Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection

Laura Haushalter - Loyola Marymount University



Los Angeles Freeway System, Mitock & Sons, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California.

The Lore of Los Angeles Freeways¹

Los Angeles Times journalist Patt Morrison writes in her forward to the 2021 book *Freewaytopia*, “It’s Los Angeles, not Rome. Here, all roads lead to ... more roads. Our lore and stories speak of the beach, of Hollywood, and of that other constant on our landscape - freeways.”² The lore of Southern California freeways is present in everything from movie sets like *Speed* and *La La Land*, noir fiction, memes about the 405, lyrics in Lana Del Rey’s music, to the series of *Saturday Night Live* skits, “The Californians,” which mock the way Angelenos talk about freeways, drama, and traffic.³ The “City of Angels” is synonymous with sprawling highways and the accompanying record levels of pollution and environmental harm from the accompanying automobile traffic. The lore of freeways is a constant part of how Angelenos market the city and understand their relationship with the urban environment. One unexpected place this lore manifests is postcards from the mid-20th century.

This paper explores the history and image of Southern California freeways as seen on postcards located in the Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection. Freeway-themed postcards demonstrate the perceived and produced novelty of freeways in Los Angeles and the ways in which these massive structures dominate the urban landscape. Through an exploration of thousands of postcards in the Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, I uncovered a manufactured portrayal of freeways as wonderful, novel, efficient, and a magnificent feat of man-made engineering.⁴ At the same time, the freeway postcards’ personal messages also show the frustration and dissatisfaction experienced by some mid-twentieth-century drivers. Each postcard could individually tell its own history of development, conflict, and change; however, this paper is concerned with how examining the collection of cards together shows the interactions between freeways, Angelenos, and the Southern California basin. Freeway-themed postcards from the 20th and 21st centuries depict freeways as a novel, efficient, and a magnificent achievement of man-made engineering in Southern California. This portrayal contradicts the reality of freeways as an environmental hazard and physical barrier.

¹ I would like to acknowledge and thank my research mentor Dr. Amy Woodson-Boulton, the Department of History at Loyola Marymount University, and the University Honors Program for their support of my research. I would also like to thank the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the William H. Hannon Library, including support from Cynthia Becht, Head of Archives and Special Collections, and Jessica Guardado, Library Assistant.

² Paul Haddad, *Freewaytopia* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2021), 10.

³ The opening scene of *La La Land* was shot in one take on the interchange between the 105 and the 110 freeway. My favorite examples of memes about Los Angeles freeways are created by @americanatbrandmemes. Lana Del Rey sings in the song *The Next Best American Record*, “It’s true-all the roads lead to you, like the 405 I drive through.” SNL’s, “The Californians” was a series of skits produced in 2012 through 2018 that turned driving directions into a soap opera parody.

⁴ Over summer 2024, I went through more than fifteen different postcard boxes in the archive, each containing approximately 500-800 cards.

Why Postcards? Why Freeways?

The Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection is part of the Department of Archives and Special Collections in the William H. Hannon Library at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. The collection, named after the primary benefactor, Werner Von Boltensern, contains more than one million postcards from across the 155-year history of postcards.⁵ Boltensern spent decades collecting postcards from all over the world and produced an impressive and vast personal collection. Boltensern achieved this massive undertaking through personal and professional travel as well as connections with postcard clubs. Boltensern was a member of the Southern California Postcard Club before he dropped out and formed his own club, the International Postcard Collectors Association, in 1969.⁶ His involvement with postcard clubs allowed him the ability to trade and buy postcards from other deltiologists. After failing to create a postcard museum, Boltensern donated his personal collection to Loyola Marymount University in 1967, so students and researchers could have access to continue postcard exploration and research.⁷ The collection has continued to grow through donations, even after Boltensern's passing in 1978. Now the collection is one of the largest publicly accessible postcard collections in the world.⁸ Since Boltensern spent the second half of his career in Los Angeles, one of the strengths of the collection is the quantity of cards related to Southern California.⁹ This makes the collection a valuable resource in my own research due to the depth and reputation of the archive.

Postcards offer extraordinary views of the ordinary and everyday occurrences of a place. Postcards preserve specific images that were captured with the sole intention of being shared and bought. Each card can offer a visual, and if you are lucky, a written record of a place. Collections of postcards show how a place was marketed, but also how that location evolved over time.¹⁰ In a 1972 interview with journalist Nancy Smith from the Santa Monica *Evening Outlook*, Boltensern said "You can find anything and everything that can be illustrated on a postcard."¹¹

The history of postcards began in the late 1800s; however postcard production took off in 1901 in the United States when the words "Post card" could be on the back instead of "Private Mailing Card."¹² This was one of the first legislative changes that increased the usability of postcards. The history of postcards includes the white border period from 1915-1930, the linen

⁵ "Collections," Loyola Marymount University, accessed June 2024, <https://library.lmu.edu/archivesandspecialcollections/collections/>.

⁶ Lewis Baer, "Having a Great Time with Postcards," *Barr's News* (Lansing, Iowa), July 29, 1996.

⁷ Baer, "Having a Great Time with Postcards."

⁸ "Collections," Loyola Marymount University.

⁹ Peter Fish, "Wish you were here," *Western Wanderings*, August 8, 1996.

¹⁰ "Using Postcards as Historical Evidence," Eastern Illinois University, accessed July 2024, <https://www.eiu.edu/localite/postcardshisthome.php>.

¹¹ Nancy Smith, "Post Card," *Evening Outlook* (Santa Monica, California), October 21, 1972.

¹² "Greetings from the Smithsonian, A Postcard History," Smithsonian Institution Archives, accessed March 2024, <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/postcard/postcard-history>.

period from 1930-1945, and lastly the photochrom period from 1945 to present day.¹³ The majority of freeway-themed postcards are from the later linen and photochrome periods.

Postcards follow a standard format that separates them from other forms of mail. The image goes on the front, and the back of the postcard often includes a short description of the photo, a place to write a personal message, the stamp, the publisher, occasionally some clipart, and a place for the address of the person who is going to receive the postcard.¹⁴ The back of card descriptions help show what the producer thinks is important to highlight. The postcard is sent without an envelope. One of the limitations of postcards is determining the exact date of production. However, postcards follow certain production trends that one can use to approximate the date including location and stamp cost, size, and linen material.

Author Monica Cure in her book, *Picturing the Postcard: A New Media Crisis at the Turn of the Century*, explains how postcards became places for shorter, less dense messages than letters.¹⁵ Several of the postcards I explored in the collection contain short messages, often about the weather, simple activities, and get straight to the point. Other cards in the Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection contain no message, and might have been purchased just for collecting, which Cure explains was a common practice during the 20th century.¹⁶

In the Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, there are plenty of typical postcards of beaches and piers, Hollywood movie stars and palm trees, everything that one might expect to find in a box about Southern California. Additionally there are dozens of cards in which the sole focus of the image are freeways. One of the main goals of postcards is to depict landscapes, and part of the landscape of Southern California is the man-made sprawling freeways that cover the basin and criss-cross around the county. Author and Los Angeles freeway expert, Paul Haddad, writes “they [the freeways] seem to exist merely as fixed parts of the local landscape, like the Santa Monica Mountains, the marine layer, or taco trucks- just always there, taken for granted and inviting little scrutiny.”¹⁷ Driving on freeways is such a fixed part of daily Los Angeles life that it is easy to miss how truly wild and weird these structures are, when you are constantly exposed to them. When driving on a freeway, you are cutting through communities on your own separate paved road for staggering amounts of time isolated from other drivers. INRIX, a transportation firm responsible for creating a Global Traffic Scorecard reports that Los Angeles drivers lost over eighty-nine hours during 2023 just from sitting in traffic congestion.¹⁸ In 2023, Los Angeles placed 7th in global cities with the worst congestion city worldwide.¹⁹ The amount of time drivers spend sitting in traffic has huge economic, environmental, and social costs.

¹³ “Greetings from the Smithsonian, A Postcard History,” Smithsonian Institution Archives.

¹⁴ “Anatomy of Postcards,” Eastern Illinois University, accessed July 2024, <https://www.eiu.edu/localite/postcardsanat.php>.

¹⁵ Monica Cure, “Introduction: The Frankenstein Postcard,” in *Picturing the Postcard: A New Media Crisis at the Turn of the Century* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 11.

¹⁶ Cure, *Picturing the Postcard*, 20.

¹⁷ Haddad, *Freewaytopia*, 15.

¹⁸ “Los Angeles CA #7 Inrix 2023 Traffic Scorecard Report,” Inrix, accessed September 2024, <https://inrix.com/scorecard-city-2023/?city=Los%20Angeles%20CA&index=6#form-download-t%20he-full-report>.

¹⁹ “Los Angeles CA #7 Inrix 2023 Traffic Scorecard Report,” Inrix.

Romanticization of the Potential of Freeways



Arroyo Seco Parkway, Western Publishing & Novelty CO., postcard, Box P-6, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

Several postcards in the Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection focus on the possibility of Los Angeles Freeways to provide easy access across the city, while also depicting an image of freeways as integrated with nature. These types of cards romanticize the relationship between the infrastructure, the driver, and the Southern California Environment. One example includes the postcard, “Arroyo Seco Parkway” distributed by Western Publishing & Novelty CO. This card shows off the beautification of early freeways, including the addition of a median strip between lanes filled with plants and trees.²⁰ The rest of the freeway is surrounded by greenery. These design principles, and the attempt to integrate the infrastructure with nature, were quickly

²⁰ *Arroyo Seco Parkway, Western Publishing & Novelty CO., postcard, Box P-6, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.*

replaced by a priority of speed and efficiency as planners strived to add more lanes and move more cars through.²¹

The card “Arroyo Seco Parkway” from Western Publishing & Novelty CO contains a spot on the back for a one cent stamp. Therefore, this card was presumably produced before August 1958, before postage rates changed from one cent to three.²² Additionally, the card is made from linen material and has a border around the image, suggesting that this card was produced during the linen period of 1930-1945.²³ However, since the freeway on this card was not opened until December 1940, I can conclude that this postcard was produced between approximately 1940 and 1945.

In addition to the postcard images, the back of the card description chronicles the message the postcard sender was supposed to share. The back of the “Parkway System near Civic Center Los Angeles,” manufactured for Longshaw Card Co, read, “Fascinating curves and ramps of part of the 630 miles of parkways, locally called ‘freeways,’ to be built in the metropolitan Los Angeles area. The four lanes each way speed three times the traffic with much less accident risk.”²⁴ The photo of the freeway on the front shows very few cars driving. The freeway is surrounded by greenery, an image inconsistent with today’s modern freeways. This postcard promises less traffic and easy movement; however, Los Angeles freeways will instead be known for the opposite.

The focus of these types of freeway-related cards is possibility, because the freeways were still a new phenomenon. These postcards show the freeways as aesthetically and socially valuable. The emphasis on these cards is what the freeway will provide and how it will improve transportation.

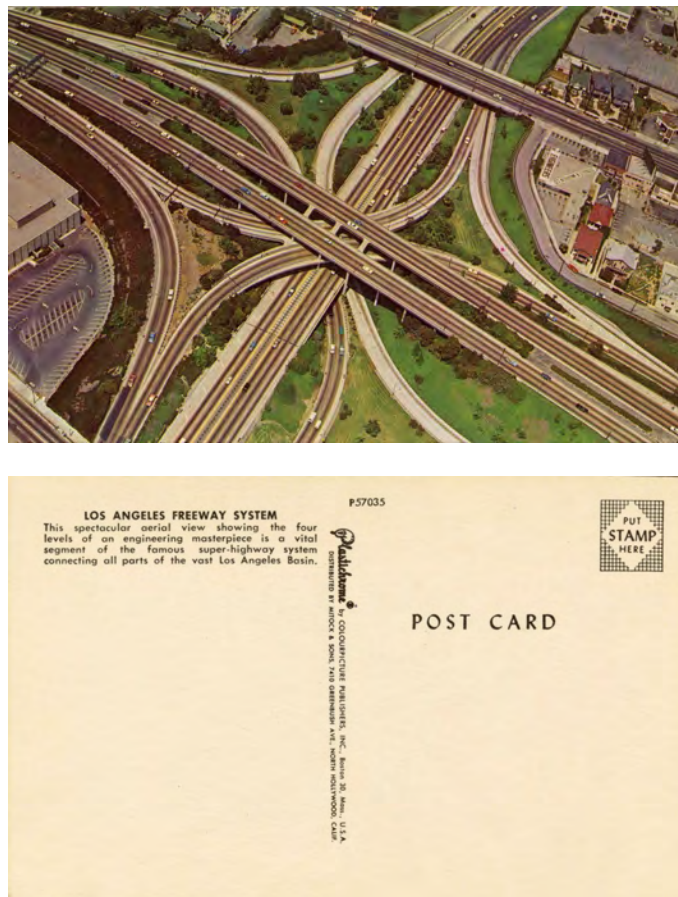
²¹ Haddad, Freewaytopia, 38.

²² “Dating Postcards,” Smithsonian Institution Archives, accessed August, 2024. <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/postcard/dating-postcards>.

²³ “Dating Postcards,” Smithsonian Institution Archive.

²⁴ *Parkway System near Civic Center Los Angeles*, Longshaw Card Co., postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

Celebration of Man-Made Infrastructure



Los Angeles Freeway System, Mitock & Sons, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

The majority of the freeway-related cards in the Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection focus on freeway interchanges and overpasses. These massive junctions are displayed on the postcards as impressive accomplishments of human engineering. In these postcards, the freeway takes up the entire front image; there is no longer any sort of attempt to integrate the freeways with the natural environment. The descriptions on the back of these cards boost the Los Angeles Freeways. Again, using examples of stamped cards as guides, this genre of freeway related cards was produced roughly between the late 1950s to the 1970s.²⁵

²⁵ *Los Angeles, California, Mitock & Sons*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

One card produced by Columbia Wholesale Supply showcases “The Stack,” an area that has over four freeway overpasses on top of one another. The description on the back of the postcard reads, “An outstanding job of modern highway engineering. Located near Civic Center in Los Angeles, this hub of major Freeways permits the steady flow of traffic.”²⁶ The emphasis on “outstanding” and “modern highway engineering” further displays the attitude and excitement around the novelty of freeways. There only appears to be one car on the postcard, creating the illusion that this area is easy, carefree, and fast to drive through. Today, these freeway junctions are places of huge amounts of traffic and congestion, with hazardous environmental consequences for the residents who live in their shadow. The creation of a county wide freeway system required the destruction of communities, especially targeting poor communities of color.

In the card, “Los Angeles Freeway System” distributed by Mitock & Sons, the front image gives an impressive aerial view of the interchange between the Harbor, Hollywood, Pasadena, and Santa Anna freeways. The description on the back of the card says, “This spectacular aerial view showing the four levels of an engineering masterpiece is a vital segment of the famous super-highway system connecting all parts of the vast Los Angeles Basin.”²⁷ Once again, this card emphasizes the freeways as an “engineering masterpiece.” These types of cards are consistent with an overall excitement for freeways as a form of man-made brilliance. The construction of freeways boomed post-World War II and created employment in a changing economy.²⁸ The freeways served as a statement of superiority for the city of Los Angeles, embracing the auto culture that boomed, as well as increasing the oil economy, despite the physical consequences to less fortunate Angelenos.

²⁶ *The Stack, Columbia Wholesale Supply*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

²⁷ *Los Angeles Freeway System, Mitock & Sons*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

²⁸ The Regional Planning Commission. *Freeways for the Region*. (Los Angeles, CA), 1943, 11. This report served as the blueprint for the Los Angeles Freeway system. This more than 60 page report outlined the entire goals of the freeways and the proposed plans that would later be enacted by city planners.

Images of Constant Movement



Los Angeles, California, Western Publ. & Nov. CO., postcard, Box L-22, Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

The last type of freeway-related postcards in the Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection feature aerial time lapse photos that aim to show the constant movement of freeways. These images are different than the previous types of postcards that had a lack of cars, and only promoted travel on freeways instead of showing it.

In the card "Harbor Freeway at Dusk" distributed by Mitock & Sons and stamped in March of 1970, the image shows cars traveling and all lanes are full of lights of lines across the freeways.²⁹ Another example includes the "Night view of the Harbor Freeway Los Angeles, California," published by Mitock & Sons. This card also shows the movement of one of the

²⁹ *Harbor Freeway at Dusk, Mitock & Sons*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

busiest freeways through a time lapse image.³⁰ These types of cards are very different from their predecessors, given the explicit view of cars driving. These postcards closely relate to the reality of freeways in 2024.

³⁰ *Night view of the Harbor Freeway Los Angeles, California, Mitock & Sons*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

Messages of Dissatisfaction



Freeway Interchange, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

The intended use of postcards is to invite the sender to promote and advertise the image on the front. Postcards are a “visual promotion of tourism” and can even serve as a promotion of new infrastructure and modern cities.³¹ For example, when you send a postcard you are in essence sending a message of encouragement to visit the place from the card. However, the postcards I studied contained messages of dissatisfaction and frustration that explicitly contradicted the image on the front. I found no positive messages about freeways on postcard messages. Instead the selection of personal messages focused on the burdens, challenges, and overwhelming nature of freeways.

³¹ Jordan Girardin, “Rise and fall of the postcard: a history of visual culture in modern tourism,” The University of Edinburgh Centre for the Study of Modern and Contemporary History Blog, October 15, 2017, <https://research.shca.ed.ac.uk/csmch/2017/10/15/rise-and-fall-of-the-postcard-a-history-of-visual-culture-in-modern-tourism/>.

Buried on the backs of some freeway-themed cards are messages of dissatisfaction and frustration with the freeways themselves. These written messages question the practicality of freeways and the validity of images on the front of the postcard themselves. One card stamped in 1964 of the interchange of the Hollywood, Pasadena, and Harbor freeways has a typed message that reads, “I can't guess what time of day they took this picture. Each time I saw this section it was the scene of a rat race which gave me the shivers. I much prefer taking a road with a slower pace.”³² This author shows that even in 1964, the image of the empty quiet freeway on the postcard is inaccurate, instead he describes it as a “rat race,” implying chaos and an activity that creates exhaustion. The author also expresses their support for slower paces, arguing that the freeways are moving too fast, despite that being a prominent and important feature of them, and a feature that city and regional planners regularly emphasized. Another message on a postcard stamped in 1970 of freeways by Union Station distributed by Mitock & Sons asks, “Did you think we got lost in this maze? It's easy to do.”³³ This driver is showing that the freeways are a maze and are not following through on the idea of ease and uninterrupted travel. Similarly in a card stamped on the “Harbor Freeway Looking North From Sixth Street, Los Angeles California” distributed by Western Publishing & Novelty Co, the author writes, “Do you think you could drive here?”³⁴ This message acknowledges that it is not easy to drive on these roads, and instead is something that requires effort. These personal messages show that driving on the freeway itself can be a confusing hassle, not the carefree experience that was advertised. Additionally, these individual messages support my argument that the portal of freeways in postcards contradicts reality.

Finding Freeways in Unexpected Places

In addition to the postcards explicitly about freeways, it is easy to see the impact these structures had on Southern California through other, non-freeway-related postcards. Postcards of Dodger Stadium emphasize its location relative to the newly built freeway system. In a Dodger Stadium postcard distributed by Mitock & Son's the description on the back says, “The magnificent \$18,000,000 structure features 56,000 unobstructed view seats, seven multi-colored levels, and terraced easy access parking for 16,000 cars - and just freeway minutes from everywhere.”³⁵ This is an example of how locations began advertising themselves in relation to the freeways, something that is now common practice.

³² *Freeway Interchange*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

³³ *Los Angeles, California, Mitock & Sons*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

³⁴ *Harbor Freeway Looking North From Sixth Street, Los Angeles California, Western Publishing & Novelty Com.*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

³⁵ *Dodger Stadium - Los Angeles, Calif, Mitock & Sons*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

Another example includes the clipart on the back of a Union Station postcard. The card includes a small icon of the Hollywood Bowl, a woman on a beach, a baseball stadium, city hall, and a freeway interchange.³⁶ These icons show how freeways are seen as an important and unique part of Los Angeles. Postcards from Disneyland show the ride Autopia and the excitement around having a freeway-themed attraction that allows young drivers to experience the thrill of a freeway.

Lastly, postcards advertising for restaurants, hotels, and destinations in Southern California include on the back the location of the place in relation to the freeways one would travel on to visit that business. An example from the “Holloway Motel” distributed by Dexter Color California, Inc, even has a map showing the Golden State, Ventura, and Hollywood freeways with a description reading, “Close to Freeways leading to the many attractions of Southern California.”³⁷ These additional postcards show how freeways start to impact and emerge in the everyday life of Angelenos.

Los Angeles Postcards in 2024

It is difficult to find souvenir postcards in Southern California in 2024. Preliminary research shows that postcards are just not being used or collected as much as they had been in the past. This is consistent with an overall decline in the quantity of postcards that are being sent in the United States.³⁸ It appears that postcards have disappeared from the places that used to sell them such as drugstores, convenience stores, and tourist shops.³⁹

The postcards I encountered in Southern California are cheaper looking photochrom postcards, slightly more blurry and poorer quality images, than their predecessors located in the Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection. In Hollywood souvenir shops in July 2024, it was difficult to find postcards. Some tourist shops, like Hollywood Souvenir Land and Paradise Hollywood did not even sell any postcards. These shops are located on the corner of Hollywood and Highland, one of the most tourist-heavy spots in Los Angeles. La La Land Souvenirs, which has over 30,000 ft of retail space filled with every imaginable plastic souvenir (fake oscars, mugs, shot glasses, cowboy hats, movie posters, etc) only had two postcard racks.⁴⁰ There is an overall lack of variety in shops across Southern California and I would often encounter many shops selling the same mediocre cards. Occasionally, I would encounter postcards for places as far away as Las Vegas. Barnes and Noble in Manhattan Beach off of Rosecrans Ave has one

³⁶ *Union Station*, *Western Publishing & Novelty Com.*, postcard, Box L-27, Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

³⁷ *Holloway Motel*, *Dexter Color California, Inc.*, postcard, Box H-8, Werner von Boltensstern Postcard Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

³⁸ Mark Jenkins, “Are postcards obsolete?,” *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2015.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/are-postcards-a-thing-of-the-past/2015/02/26/a243909a-b945-11e4-aa05-1ce812b3fdd2_story.html.

³⁹ Mark Jenkins, “Are postcards obsolete?”

⁴⁰ “La La Land,” The Hollywood Partnership, accessed July 2024, <https://hollywoodpartnership.com/go/la-la-land>.

postcard stand located in a back corner that was easy to miss, and that I was surprised to find at all. Stores along the Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, and Manhattan Beach Piers sell the same unaesthetic cards. At The Original Farmers Market, the shop Sheltam's Fine Periodicals, sells the same repetitive cards seen at other locations. Copies of "vintage" postcards are sold at LAX's Tom Bradley International Terminal. These cards are poor quality reproductions of mid-20th century postcards of Dodger Stadium, University of Southern California, and Union Station. These "vintage" cards aim to sell a nostalgic image of Southern California.

Despite the lack of new high quality and creative postcards, there are still postcards that emphasize Los Angeles freeways. Some modern postcards that have maps highlighting important freeway routes, like the 405 and the 10. However, these cards are different from the ones found in the boxes which emphasize the freeway as the whole landscape rather than just a part.

Additionally, a couple of modern postcards highlight the freeways through physical techniques. On a modern photochrome card of Hollywood produced by Smith Novelty Company, the freeway is slightly elevated and covered in a glitter texture. This immediately brings the viewer to the freeway by being visualizing and physically appealing. In an overall limited collection of LA postcards, freeways are still a part of the sale and creation of the landscape. Tourists can still buy postcards that celebrate the novelty of freeways.

Significance

Freeways are a huge environmental problem that disproportionately harm marginalized communities, an issue that was not brought up in a single freeway themed postcard I encountered. While all Angelenos live with the negative effects of pollution and poor air quality, communities of color have experienced the consequences of Los Angeles's sprawling highways system even more significantly. Boyle Heights, a primarily Latino neighborhood in East LA, has a disproportionately high amount of land covered by freeways. Professor of History, Dr. Gilbert Estrada writes "within the City of Los Angeles, freeways account for about 4 percent of the total land surface of streets and highways ... In Boyle Heights, over 50 percent of the area is utilized for freeways and industrial zoning."⁴¹ The overwhelming burden of freeway-covered land means that residents are more exposed to the physical consequences of freeways, such as smog and noise pollution. This is one of many examples of how freeways continue to be an environmental justice problem.

These postcards romanticize freeways as modern, man-made, famous, and efficient, when they would be better described as places of hazard. People bought, collected, sold, and sent these freeway-related images, and continue to do so. This research fits into a larger historical narrative on freeways as part of the built environment and shows one example of the cultural work that

⁴¹ Gilbert Estrada, "If You Build It, They Will Move: The Los Angeles Freeway System and the Displacement of Mexican East Los Angeles, 1944-1972." *Southern California Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2005): 287-315.

promoted freeways. Freeways do not provide ease and uninterrupted travel, like these postcards suggest but instead continue to be places of traffic, pollution, and injustice.

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