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## Bazz Childress

Fire Eater! Writer

### Man the Machine: A Conversation with Bazz Childress and MacDonald King Aston

## Part IV: Rounding of the Circle

1 March 2006

Mac,

I have pondered long and hard about how to take up the points you make in your prior piece. I have finally decided to begin by sharing what it made me recall, that being a section of some correspondence I exchanged some years ago with a fellow SCV brother, about 25 years in age (who shall remain unidentified). I excerpt:

"What society has conditioned you [the young SCV brother] to believe about tolerance and openness (in order to attain particular political goals) is now so much the air we breathe that when that stance (and the philosophy which founds it) is challenged, the reaction is vehement and emotional. It is particularly so for you because the land whose heritage you claim and the lessons that tradition has taught you, is in conflict with that agenda."

The South has never believed in rationalism or the critique of rationalism that in the intervening years since the South lost its fight to separate itself from these poisons, has become what is now called the revolutionary secular left or Cultural Marxism.

...The left's view has come to so dominate, that even those we call "conservative", including Southern politicians who wish to have a political career, have by in large adopted all the basic assumptions of the "liberals". No where is this more true than matters relating to race (which is not really about race, but about culture or put differently the "system of sentiments" that found a given human society's assumptions about how the world works. I refer you to a book by Richard Weaver called *The Southern Tradition at Bay*).

But the left's view has proven extremely naïve and rather than providing heaven on earth has resulted in some of the worst slaughters in the history of the world. In fact, with great irony, the utopia sought has simply resulted in a return to paganism."

So you see, I could hardly agree more strongly that the intellectual stream of the last few hundred years has simply been a rounding of the circle.

Having said that, I must remark that I think we've become so confused that for most, the word pagan has no meaning and certainly, therefore most have no ability to understand how much modern paganism shares, but more importantly how much it differs so dangerously from its ancient cousin. Indeed, we've become so separated from the broader human experience by as you say, '[The] attempt to refute the message of the Christ, as the humanists sought to do, is to assert the possibility of existence as no-order (for

even chaos is only known through contrast with order). And that attempt is the suicide of reason, for reason itself is of the creature, limited, and a wisp in the winds of all things. To use reason to grasp what is beyond reason is the great failure of Humanism and explains why it has no possible chance of success. This is not to say that Christianity is set against reason; quite the opposite. It is, however, to say that the limits of reason are found in the reasoner. To extrapolate the extra-experiential from experience is not only absurd, but impossible. But that is the mission of the humanist: to locate what is outside of experience within experience. Whether evolutionism (philosophical naturalism) or the evanescent ghost of a hypostasized Progress, the humanist must confront the impossibility of his own enterprise in attempting to think beyond thought, to experience beyond experience. Montaigne's first-person of his Essais has nought other to turn to than a self-referential self, and is, therefore, incarcerated within a hopeless tautological prison of reason.'....

I am reminded of a series of Sunday School lessons I did back in late 1989 and early 1990. I had been asked to make sense of Alan Bloom's, *The Closing of the American Mind* that had been on the New York Times Best Seller list for many months at that time. I excerpt (out of the order in which they were presented) from that series:

"...The transformation in view between that of the ancients, indeed not just them but between us and those living only a couple centuries removed, is astonishing. (Even that word is not sufficient to express the revolution [and that word itself is part of that revolution] in humankind's place in the world). ..... If one does not "blindly accept" authority, what establishes such? [Today] An individual's reason. If one desires freedom from natural forces (i.e., seeks to control them) how must "the different spheres of life" (i.e., reality/nature) be viewed? We have the ancient's preoccupation with nature without his respect. We have lost our piety and a sense of the transcendent. We have put off tradition and faith for the useful and rational. We have become materialists. To put it succinctly, the world we inhabit is liberal. (And largely, as things have developed, even those we call conservative are so within the defining context of Liberalism as I hope becomes clear. As I have said before in this class, with some skepticism from some of you, there are no longer very many, if any, true conservatives around anymore)...."

But to begin to see how the modern world came to this point we must go back to roughly 500 BC and attempt to trace how the interplay between reason and revelation brought us to our current condition.

Keep in mind these opposites when concerning the deep human past against the recent:

<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Liberal</b>
Traditional	Modern
Revelation/Romance	Reason
Mythic	Rationalistic
Community	Individual
Agrarian	Industrial
Desire for Belonging	Desire for Knowledge
Need for Meaning (Why?)	Need to Analyze (How?)

To find the roots of humanity's march to liberality one must go back to a couple sources. The first is one from which almost all the

tools of science by which the modern world has constructed itself are obtained. I refer to the contribution of the Greeks. The modern world is simply not conceivable without the developments arising out of classical Greece a couple centuries either side of 500 BC.

The founding science, the origin of which we owe to the Greeks, is philosophy. For the Western world (i.e., those resting on the Greek foundation), the father of that science is Socrates. That science's preserver and furtherer is Plato, the educator whose works recorded Socrates' contributions. Plato's own contributions had not a little impact on us through his influence, along with other Greek philosophers, on the early theologians of Christianity. (Notice that word, theology, the study of God, itself a result of a liberal mindset). Again we jump too quickly ahead, but perhaps while we're at it we should mention Plato's student, Aristotle, teacher of Alexander the Great, whose impact on the Christianity of Europe in the Middle Ages has much to do with our tale.

The dictionary defines philosophy as "The study or science of the truths or principles underlying all knowledge; the study or science of the principles of a particular branch of knowledge; a system of philosophical doctrine; a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs; wise composure in dealing with problems."

The ancient thinkers began asking "Why" questions and developing the systems of logic to answer them. Why are things as they are? Indeed, what are things themselves? What is living about? What is a good life? What is good government? What is the nature of man and how does it result in the human society by which, at that time, these philosophers were surrounded.

The very act, however, of asking why things are as they are creates a tension. Asking the Why question implies that one's own way may not be the right way. Knowledge of the true nature of things can be subversive if it runs contrary to the beliefs held by the community. The search for knowledge becomes an acid eating at the base of blood ties to family and the divinely established order. It is just that tension that puts into context the charge of impiety against Socrates and his eventual death at the hands of Athenian society. Those things that were held to be unquestionably true by society were being questioned. So it can be said that one of the first problems encountered by those ancient scientists was the *status of knowledge* (the search for the true nature of things) as opposed to the *beliefs of the society*. And for the ancient original philosophers, this tension was unresolvable. Warrior, priest, and peasant were opposed to his pursuit. Their (i.e., society's) opposition made the pursuit of knowledge through reason a difficult one. Thinkers existed on the fringes of society, privately seeking knowledge for themselves, while publicly towing the "party line."

The explanation for the knower's vulnerability is that the knowledge of the philosophers' truth deprived the people of the myths by which they found solace and salvation from the fate that awaited them (death), and the meaning in life that those myths afforded. Knowledge seekers also threatened, by calling into question the existence and authority of the gods, the position of the clerics and warriors who exercised that authority on the gods' behalf.

But as we have already developed, it was the warrior class empowered by the gods and their representatives, the clerics and priests, who formed the bulwark upon which the waves of disorder were dissipated. The maintenance of civil society depended on them. Their position, through the heroic deeds of the warrior in protecting the community and the mediation of the priests to gain favor of the gods, was a "natural" one founded on the benefit they provided society. Their place in the order had developed over 3000 years of human experience in society. The philosopher had to fight for his place, and offered not something of benefit to win that place in the order, but something destructive of it.

How did these incipient thinkers move to protect themselves in this circumstance? The preferable solution, of course, was that the *demos* (the people) be wise (i.e., be made reasoners, be educated). We have seen above why these thinkers thought the people could never be educated. The people's concerns were about simple survival, understandably so. The priests were the philosophers'

natural enemies. They were the protectors of the public morals founded on mythic tradition. That left only the warrior kings and aristocrats.

We have now arrived at the point where the fact that political science was the next science to be established is understandable. These ancient thinkers had to make a case for their protection with those who upheld the law (where myth and beliefs coerced humankind). The aristocrats had the authority, wealth and time. They also had the motivation. Remember, these warriors were rulers. They were interested in how best to rule. The philosophers forged a link with the ruling class on this basis. They were freed for rational investigation (within appropriate constraints) in exchange for education of the aristocrats, especially toward bettering the latter's rule. This relationship began to be severed only around AD 1800.

How did the ancient philosophers view the problem of politics? They believed that people were basically good with a natural tendency toward society. (Aristotle's assertion that humans are "political animals.") Yet political life exhibited a difficulty with a man's private and public interests. His selfishness caused him to act on behalf of his own. For a man to act in the public (the community) interest, thereby making the political enterprise work, it was necessary to overcome that selfish side to devote oneself to the public good. So, under the influence of the early philosophers, the aristocratic leadership, placing such enormous power in the hands of mere men, began to require not just the possible sacrifice of life in time of war, but also the sacrifice and conquest of the self. I refer to the eventual development (full blown by the end of Classical civilization) of the gentleman, centering on acquiring selflessness, that was basic to the aristocratic societies influenced by these early thinkers. This education of the ruling elite helped to mute the authoritarian nature of these systems.

This selflessness of character the Romans called *Virtus* (whence our word *virtue*) and the Greeks called *Arete*. The idea behind both was the same, excellence of character, the squelching of individual need and petty behavior to properly lead the community. In a word, the aim was the creation of a noble spirit. The figure perhaps most representative of this ideal is Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor from AD 161 to 180, (the middle of the period that Edward Gibbon, chronicler of Rome, called "the most happy and prosperous in the history of the world"), who is known to history as the epitome of the philosopher king. Yet reading bits of M. Aurelius' memoirs reveals the prison this ideal could become.

The use of the word prison to describe these ancient conservative societies is perhaps apt. The individuals comprising the various classes in these societies, high or low born, rich or poor, were all trapped in their own private fates dictated by the near totalitarian demands of the community. The ancient reasoners who set about observing and critiquing the existing arrangements were, by their own admission, powerless to change the situation. Reason had to fight to barely cling to life away from the center of human communal life. It could not be the sole agent by which the door out of the prison could come, or the sole light by which to find the way out of the cave. Affecting the rulers, making them more wise was about all that could be hoped. Such is why we can say they considered the political equation we've discussed as unresolvable, immutable, permanent.

Yet history is full of ironies, and we confront one here. We have already seen that these civilizations' dependence on obtaining ever more land for food production was at odds with their keen interest in security and order. These ancient civilizations worked toward bringing their neighbors under control to gain the land upon which their wealth was based and to remove the like threat their neighbors represented to them. The perverse and paradoxical result was not security and order, but near constant warfare. That these cultures viewed themselves as favored by the gods exacerbated this dynamic.

The genuine superiority achieved by the Greeks added a new dimension to these cultures' interrelationships. Along with the need for land and security, and the sense of one's inherent superiority, there developed the desire to force these (in fact superior, measured

by intellectual and literary) advances onto one's neighbors. This desire added a new motivation for conquest.

It was exactly such a grouping of motivations (old and new), that prompted Alexander (eventually to win the sobriquet, the Great), to conquer ancient Persia (modern Iran), a perennial Greek enemy, spreading Greek culture and learning across the entire eastern Mediterranean. (Alexander was the son of Macedonian King Philip II, who brought to an end almost three centuries of internecine war on the Greek Peninsula between various alliances of Greek city-states by making Macedonia the dominant Greek power and enforcer of the peace).

But Alexander died not long after completing his conquests. The attempts to establish dominance over the whole of the former Alexandrian Empire over the next two centuries by the descendents of the Greek generals who inherited that empire would eventually allow the Romans, who had not long before won control of the western half of the Mediterranean world from Carthage, to swallow the eastern half as well.

The morsel the Romans swallowed, however, proved to be one which produced not a little indigestion. There was much division as to how to incorporate the superior Greek culture into Roman life. This debate coincided with the bitter class warfare that eventually ended with the creation of the Roman Empire from the ruins of the Roman Republic. This empire was one where government and administration would be along Roman lines, conducted in Latin. But also one where, to be considered educated, since Greek learning was the educational base of the ancient world, one would have to know Greek philosophy and literature and therefore would have to know the Greek language. This fact made Greek the common language of the time, and is the reason that the New Testament is written in Greek.

This Greek dominance was not only a problem for the Romans, however. One of the cultures Alexander's army swept into the Greek realm and therefore into the exposure to Greek influence, which it was Alexander's express purpose to spread, was that of the Hebrews. The friction between these two mindsets, as these peoples began living among one another and as each group's literature began to be translated into the other's language between 300 and 200 BC, produced and worsened divisions within both the Greek and Hebrew orbits that would eventually result in Hebrew revolt and the recreation of the Hebrew kingdom of Judah.

Jewish independence would be short-lived though, because the Jewish community's resistance to Greek influence, which was the basis of their revolt leading to independence, did not end the pervasive Greek influence by which they were surrounded. We have already described that Greek dominance. In fact, the divisions in Jewish life were worsened by independence, the common fight against the Greek master a prime source of unity. After independence, these divisions created a political climate that the Romans used to move further into eastern Mediterranean political affairs, coming not long thereafter into total control.

Of course, the Romans would fair no better than the Greeks in handling the Hebrews, facing three revolts of their Jewish subjects over the next two centuries. It was this political context of Jewish division over foreign influence, Greek or Roman (of which we have some hint of in the New Testament in the Saducees and Pharisees), into which Jesus Christ, known also as Joshua bar Joseph, was born. It was the constantly simmering revolt against Rome as complicated by these Jewish political and religious divisions that resulted in his execution by the Romans. The religion (Christianity) growing from this historical event provided the means by which the Western World would tap into the other great root of the modern development of Liberalism, the Jewish religious tradition of God's revealing himself by acting in human history. It is to it we next turn.

We are familiar, having heard the Jewish stories in Sunday School classes for so many years, with the Hebrew tradition. We are probably unfamiliar, though, with the origin of the friction between the Greek and Hebrew traditions, having seldom if ever looked at

each up against the other. Let's do that and see if from such a juxtaposition the root of Liberalism springing from revelation might be made more visible.

What we are seeking in particular is the source of the respect for the individual in the liberal mindset. We have seen how individuals in these conservative systems were trapped by the demands of the community. To repeat, the community that entrapped them was founded on mythical belief structures that found God in nature, in the elemental forces of the Cosmos. These forces were reflected in the endless cycles of creation, destruction, and recreation, and were most evident in sexual activity. Indeed, the temple prostitution involved with the fertility cults that were associated with ancient agriculture, ritualized sexual activity to magically ensure the continuation of these natural cycles by joining them with the creative source of nature. This joining was impersonal, humans being just one of the many related forms springing from this creative source. From this source, out of the death of each preceding generation, sprang the next. It is this vision of life feeding off death in endless cycles that stands behind ancient mythology (across cultural boundaries) identifying the god of creation as identical with the god of the underworld and death: Hades-Pluto-Poseidon, Shiva, the Sumerian serpent-god Ningizzida.

This vision also stands behind the ritual of sacrifice, the ending of a life in honor of the creative force who can restore life from death. This god, usually equipped with a hammer or trident to beat or sift chaotic matter into organized forms, is the selfsame god who ushers these forms to their destruction so the cycle can repeat itself. The Greeks even named the underworld in which the dead reside Hades (from whence English gets *hell*, from the New Testament so translating the Greek word *Hades*.) This god is associated with the watery abyss whence all life springs, and is usually accompanied by a serpent or sea creature, (the Chinese dragon) who is symbolic of wisdom, the ability to discern from the created order the nature of things. The basis for this use of the snake as symbol of the creative force may be that it sheds its skin, its old dying self, thereby coming to new transformed existence.

We have also seen that the advent of an incipient scientific mindset could identify this entrapment, but not solve it. In fact, the application of reason to this circumstance, i.e., searching for God within the created order, could be said to have worsened the problem. For example, Plato saw in nature three eternal: 1) preexistent matter, 2) intelligence (organizing force), which Plato views as God, and 3) a blueprint (eternal forms that the organized physical world reflects.) Human beings have a physical part and an intellectual part, which if not God, is a reflection of that organizing power. So the material part of existence is unimportant. The self (the part reflecting God) is preeminent. Thus the superior existence is to escape material existence to exist at one with this force. This existence is not individual, since what can be known by one intellect is identical to what another intellect can know.

The escape to this existence though would mean the collapse of the world, since without the presence of an organizing force the world would revert back to chaos. These intellects are not infinite, otherwise this reversion would not be an issue. So souls (intellects) must be reborn—their impersonal "salvation" is not permanent. This cycle of reincarnation reflects the divine in that it reflects the organizing force's preference for order over chaos, cyclic patterns, stable yet changing—the stars and planets exemplifying such motion.

The entrapment then, from whatever angle one chooses to view it, has to do with a state of being. The problem that develops from viewing things thus is: For what is there to hope?

Chester Starr in his classic textbook, *A History of the Ancient World*, quotes a couple of Roman Emperors to illustrate the state of mind coming to prevail in these ancient systems. Hadrian, Emperor from 117 to 138 a.d., who, unable to find a firm foundation for life, was led to melancholy, expressed this state of mind in his only surviving poem:

O blithe little soul, thou, flitting away, Guest and comrade of this my clay. Whither now goest thou, to what place Bare and ghastly and without grace? Nor, as thy wont was, joke and play.

And also Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180), writing in his *Meditations*,

"...everything above and below is ever the same, and the result of the same things. How long then?

The loneliness and seemingly purposeless cycles of existence within these systems led to the development of what are called the mystery religions, or cults. The three major ones were the Eleusinian, Dionysian, and Orphic. A fourth was the Mithraic cult popular with Roman soldiers. These cults' appeal was that they provided the initiate a method (one involving the acquiring of secret knowledge of the gods' true natures) by which one could draw close to the gods, accomplishing the merging we've mentioned and sharing in that divine nature. This pursuit was more emotionally satisfying than the public rituals. The origin of Greek philosophy owes much to these cults, Plato and Pythagoras both holding them in high regard.

But the central issue in all these developments is where does one look for the creative source of all things. If that source is in or is the cosmos itself, one is lead inexorably to the mystical stance of all ancient religions (the search for escape from the cycle of finite existence into a different state of being). Reason alone does not provide escape. Here we find part of why I've said Bloom is half right. He focuses our attention on the dilemma, but doesn't give a satisfactory answer to it. That dilemma grows from the fact that reason destroys myth. It questions belief. Reason waits for data to analyze. It cannot assign meaning. Only myth through story can interpret and give meaning. If unrestrained reason destroys the beliefs holding together a community, what will be the replacement "belief" system that holds the community together?"

As an example of such confusion, the difficulty of the above question (and a foreshadowing of where I'm headed) see [Today's new girlie men](#). Excerpt:

Now we get to the crux of the issue: the desire to overthrow all social, religious and cultural boundaries in order to live however one chooses to live. In the year 2000, a European magazine published an article about the politics of men's fashion. The three authors wrote, "The great prize of bachelorhood is...a life where one has little responsibility for others and where one is truly free to do as one chooses...living a life of consumption and sexual freedom." Two years later, the term "metrosexual" was coined to describe a man who has "clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference."

And its counterpoise from a recent Gary North investment email service, *The Daily Reckoning*, from Bill Bonnor (co-author of *New York Times* Best seller, *Empire of Debt: The Rise of an Epic Financial Crisis*) remarking on his pastor's sermon:

"We live in a decadent age," said the reverend doctor Peter Mullen in Sunday's sermon. "It is decadent not because people sin; people have always sinned. It is decadent because they don't believe in sin; they don't believe there is a difference between doing something right and something wrong."

[BB: We weren't supposed to think of the economy. But it is our *métier*—the ball and chain we drag around with us like a condemned man].

"The devil loves lies," Mullen continued. "They keep people from seeing the truth of God's world. They falsely believe that they can do whatever they want without paying the price for it—neither in this world, nor in the next. Who does

God think he is, anyway, to interfere with our lifestyle choices?"

"You know, the Ten Commandments are not called the Ten Suggestions. And for good reason...."

Mr. Mullen believes the contemporary approach to the Ten Commandments is little different than the Fed's approach to monetary policy—both are part of today's obsession with making things E-Z. Taking one example, he looks at one commandment: Thou shalt worship no graven images.

"Now there's a commandment that everyone believes is kept. But whom do we think we are kidding? Our whole domestic economy is based on envy and covetousness. Everyone lusts after so many graven images; they go into debt trying to keep up with them. Just look at the tabloids."

So how have we been deceived? What is the true story of humanity? Perhaps it is time to review the matter. (A task which I took up first in that Sunday School series now so long ago and recently in the B Childress Archive—perhaps it should be taken up here in these conversations).

To move forward, again citing a portion of *Conversation: Mac Aston & Bazz Childress*.

**BDC:** ... folks are becoming aware of the fact that something (they're not quite sure what) is wrong. (The blockbuster success of the Lord of the Rings movies may have something to do with the sense that something is wrong. See Tolkien and Power and Tolkien's Libertarian Vision).

**MKA:** I had been thinking about the ramifications of the success of the Tolkien movies. Remember that Tolkien, like C.S. Lewis, was a professor of Classics (philology) as well as a Christian. In Tolkien's words: "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first but consciously in the revision. I have cut out practically all references to anything like 'religion,' to cults and practices in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism. However that is very clumsily put, and sounds more self-important than I feel. I should chiefly be grateful for having been brought up since I was eight in a faith that has nourished me and taught me all the little that I know..." There is little doubt that the Tolkien Trilogy is a work whose central thesis concerns the battle between Good and Evil, which, as you know, goes directly against the secularist "mainstream" of the empire which insists that both Good and Evil are relativistic notions, with Evil trotted out as an "absence of good".

BDC I have a little different take on the matter that we can discuss subsequently perhaps. Have you seen *The Last Samurai*—remarkably similar as to theme, which is my different take—to wit: Power, its legitimacy and its exercise (which in practical terms is where good and evil clash). But to continue, they feel something is wrong, because the social utopians, whose philosophy has become the national religion and has been swallowed almost entirely by our entire political leadership, I believe, have overreached. Recall that nearly 2000 years ago, Roman imperial persecution of Christianity actually strengthened the young religion's growth and that new religion became an important component, eventually, of the downfall of at least the western half of that empire. Likewise, the overreach of which I speak (the renewed attacks on the South being part of same), is strengthening that sense that something is wrong. It seems to me that it is our job to explain what is wrong. To be able to do that accurately, we ourselves have got to better understand and be able to communicate that understanding much better than we are able to do at the moment. Because nothing can be explained without a story—let me leave with the *Prologue* that opens Jackson's cinematic interpretation of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Perhaps it can frame how we continue: "The World has changed, I feel it in the water—I feel it in the earth, I

smell it in the air. Much that once was is lost, for none now live who remember it."

*It began with the forging of the Great Rings—three were given to the Elves Immortal; wisest and fairest of all beings. Seven to the Dwarf Lords, great miners and craftsmen of the Mountain Halls. And nine, nine Rings were given to the Race of Men, who above all else desire power. For within these Rings was bound the strength and will to govern each race.*

*But they were all of them deceived. For another Ring was made. In the land of Mordor, in the fires of Mount Doom the Dark Lord Sauron forged in secret a Master Ring to control all others and into this Ring he poured his cruelty, his malice and his will to dominate all life. One Ring to Rule them all.*

*One by one, free lives were felled by the Power of the Ring. But there were some who resisted. A last alliance of Men and Elves marched against the armies of Mordor—and on the slopes of Mount Doom they fought for the freedom of Middle Earth.*

*The end was near, but the Power of the Ring couldn't be undone. It was in this moment when all hope had faded—that Isildur, son of the King took up his father's sword—Sauron the enemy of the free peoples of Middle Earth was defeated.*

*The Ring passed to Isildur who had this one chance to destroy evil forever—but the Hearts of Men are easily corrupted—and the Ring of Power has a will of its own. It betrayed Isildur to his death and some things that should not have been forgotten were lost.*

*History became Legend, Legend became Myth and for two and a half thousand years the ring passed out of all knowledge. Until when chance came it ensnared a new bearer.*

*The Ring came to the creature Gollum who took it deep into the tunnels of the Misty Mountains—and there it consumed him.*

*The Ring brought to Gollum unnatural long life. For five hundred years it poisoned his mind and in the gloom of Gollum's cave it waited. Darkness crept back into the forest and the world. Rumor grew of a shadow in the East. Whispers of a nameless fear—and the Ring of Power could see its time had now come.*

*It abandoned Gollum—but something happened then the Ring did not intend. It was picked up by the most unlikely creature imaginable: a Hobbit—Bilbo Baggins of the Shire. For the time will soon come when Hobbits will shape the Fortunes of All.*

Bazz