Tolkien the Medievalist

Edited by Jane Chance

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL RELIGION AND CULTURE

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Tolkien the Medievalist

Tolkien the Medievalist explores how Tolkien's creative worlds were shaped by his own scholarship on medieval literature. In trying to create a "mythology for England" in the space of his fiction, Tolkien inevitably drew upon extant medieval languages and literatures.

This is the first recent collection to examine anew the question of Tolkien's medievalness. Interdisciplinary in approach, the essays explore Tolkien's position within the context of twentieth-century medieval scholarship and religious movements and his use of various works of medieval literature as a palimpsest for the development of his own ideas.

In the first section, essays focus on how Professor Tolkien invested his professional interests in his writing and how those works and the movements of his day may have affected his fiction. The second and third sections focus on specific episodes, characters, concepts, and images and how they correspond to medieval literary antecedents, in Old Norse, Old and Middle English, medieval Latin, and in medieval Catholicism. In the fourth section, essays explain how mythological retextualization in his fiction assumes a medieval form.

Essential reading for all scholars interested in J. R. R Tolkien, this work will also be of vital interest to those working in the fields of medieval history and literature, literary history, and literature in the early twentieth century.

Jane Chance, Professor of English, teaches medieval literature and J. R. R. Tolkien at Rice University, Houston, Texas. Among her seventeen books are *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power*, and two guest-edited issues of *Studies in Medievalism*. She also edits two series, the Library of Medieval Women and the Greenwood Guides to Historic Events in the Medieval World.

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Thanks to Paul Szarmach and Timothy Graham for allowing us to organize three sessions on Tolkien at the Thirty-Sixth Annual International Congress on Medieval Studies held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 2001, from which the nucleus of this volume of new readings sprang. In the audience for our sessions were a *New York Times* journalist, Stephen Kinzer, who interviewed panelists for an article about Harry Potter and *The Lord of the Rings*, and an editor of the Routledge series on Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture, George Ferzoco, Director of Italian Studies at the University of Leicester, who urged us to send the completed volume to him and his co-editor, Carolyn Muessig, for consideration. What a delight now after thirty years of patient waiting to see that the popular has become the canon – that the mythology of J. R. R. Tolkien, far from incurring the critics' opprobrium, as it did for so much of Tolkien's professional career, has in fact become the critics' subject.

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Abbreviations

"Beowulf"	"*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics"
Biography	*Tolkien: A Biography* by Humphrey Carpenter
BLT 1	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part 1*
BLT 2	*The Book of Lost Tales, Part 2*
EPCW	*Essays Presented to Charles Williams*
FGH	*Farmer Giles of Ham*
FR	*The Fellowship of the Ring*
H	*The Hobbit*
"Homecoming"	"The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son"
"Leaf"	"Leaf by Niggle"
Letters	*The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*
LR	*The Lord of the Rings*
Monsters	*"The Monsters and the Critics" and Other Essays*
"OFS"	"On Fairy-Stories"
RK	*The Return of the King*
Shadow	*The Return of the Shadow*
Shaping	*The Shaping of Middle-earth*
Silm	*The Silmarillion*
"Smith"	"Smith of Wootton Major"
TL	*Tree and Leaf*
TR	*The Tolkien Reader*
Treason	*The Treason of Isengard*
TT	*The Two Towers*
UT	*Unfinished Tales*

1 Introduction

Jane Chance

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was recently named "Book of the Century" in a survey of 25,000 British readers. The trilogy has sold over a hundred million copies worldwide since its publication in 1954 and has been translated into twenty-five different languages (most recently, Chinese). Tapping into Tolkien's enormous popularity, producer Saul Zaentz (*The English Patient*) and director Peter Jackson (*The Frighteners*) launched a $400-million film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*; shooting began in 1999 on location in New Zealand. With the growing interest in the filming of Tolkien's epic – the first of three full-length features that appeared in Christmas of 2001, to be followed by the next two on consecutive Christmases – there has been a parallel rise in interest in his writings and books about his writings. Copies of the 1955 British first edition, first printing, of the trilogy (with dust-jackets) recently sold on eBay for over $19,000, for example.

What is it that makes this "fairy-tale" appeal to readers of all ages in so many different countries? Why has its reputation increased in the years since Tolkien's death? And what information does one need to appreciate the fantastical world that Tolkien created – with its own history, geography, and mythology – inhabited by peoples speaking fourteen different languages, all elaborately constructed by this medievalist scholar who taught at Oxford?

Although various critical studies of Tolkien appeared in the 1970s, in the past few years there has been only one new collection of essays about Tolkien's writing and literary sources, both fiction and nonfiction: *J. R. R. Tolkien and his Literary Resonances: Views of Middle-earth*, edited by George Clark and Daniel Timmons (2000). The recent hard-cover collection of scholarly essays by Tolkien scholars, *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on "The History of Middle-earth"* (2000), about the British medievalist's background mythology – the twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* compiled by Christopher Tolkien from his father's unpublished drafts – has just been published by Verlyn Flieger and Carl F. Hostetter. The very important *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Descriptive Bibliography*, by Wayne G. Hammond and Douglas A. Anderson, appeared in hard cover in 1993 through Oak Knoll Books (significant because of the many reprintings and revisions published during Tolkien's lifetime and thereafter, and therefore valuable to book collectors). New editions and reprintings of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* have been produced by HarperCollins in Great Britain, the press to which Allen

& Unwin (Tolkien's original press) was sold: a millennial *The Lord of the Rings*, with CD-ROM, published in seven small volumes (with the seventh being the appendices), in 1999; and, in 2000, a one-volume, leather-bound *The Lord of the Rings*, following the success last year of a similar leather-bound *The Hobbit* (the first printing of the former sold out in two months this year and has just been reprinted).[1] Harold Bloom compiled a collection, *Modern Critical Interpretations: J. R. R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings*, for Chelsea House in 2000, reprinting previously published and now canonical essays on Tolkien, a collection similar in intention (but superior in quality) to Katie de Koster's *Readings on J. R. R. Tolkien* (2000).

That this commercial and popular interest in Tolkien has been propelled by popular interest in the trailer on the film of *The Lord of the Rings* – the most downloaded internet film trailer in history – is obvious. In addition, Tolkien has come to be accepted by high academic culture in varying ways: through the journal *Seven*, dedicated to the writings of the Inklings (see Hood, 59–71); through the 1992 conference on Tolkien held at Oxford, whose proceedings have been published (see Reynolds and GoodKnight); and through the acceptance at the International Congress on Medieval Studies for 2001 at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo of three sessions on Tolkien.[2]

One way to understand Tolkien's popularity that has emerged, slowly, over the forty-five years since the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* is to acknowledge the indebtedness of his creative work to the medieval languages and literatures he professed at Oxford and other universities over his lifetime. In the interval since his death, scholars have come to embrace the view that Tolkien was attempting to create what his biographer Humphrey Carpenter has termed a "mythology for England" in the space of his fiction by creating an imaginary world with its own languages, history, cultures, origin, and peoples.[3] Tolkien achieved this aim, scholars believe, by drawing not only on the extant languages and literatures in Old and Middle English, but also on those languages that influenced the cultural and historical development of Great Britain, namely, Finnish, Welsh, Old Norse, and Old High and Middle German – as a "tribute to England." Tolkien's desire to attempt this in *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion* has been most fully expressed in Tolkien's letter to the publisher Milton Waldman, letter 131, written in response to the Collins editor's request to explain how *The Lord of the Rings* relates to *The Silmarillion*. The text of the long letter (over ten thousand words) was published in full when Humphrey Carpenter's edition of Tolkien's *Letters* appeared (1980–81), although it had also been published in excerpted form in Carpenter's *Biography* (1977) (Tolkien, *Letters*, 143–61). In this circa-1951 letter, Tolkien expresses his desire to

> make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply: to England; to my country.
>
> (*Letters*, 144)

This "mythology for England" (his biographer's words) was necessary because of what Tolkien understood as

> the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), nor of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff.
>
> (*Letters*, 144)

Where Tolkien turned to find the stuff and fabric of this "mythology for England" was clearly the medieval world he knew so well from his scholarly studies: he had labeled an early notebook on which he began the work now known as *The Silmarillion* "The Book of Lost Tales" (*Biography*, 90). Later, in his description of the criteria he sought to match in his creation of this lost world as described in the letter to Waldman – those of "tone" and "quality" – he invoked British and Celtic "beauty":

> It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our "air" (the clime and quality of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe; not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be "high," purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long steeped in poetry.
>
> (*Letters*, 144)

By "Celtic" Tolkien meant what made up that body of faërie mythology common to Great Britain and its outposts and suggests at first glance those Elves so dear to Tolkien.

Over the past twenty-five years, Tolkien scholars have argued in various ways about the meaning and scope of Carpenter's phrase "mythology for England" – that is, whether it refers to the specifically Old and Middle English works of literature Tolkien himself discussed in his nonfiction prose, to his work as a tribute to his nation (with all that means in the 1930s and 1940s), or to his desire to write a "true English epic" (meaning Anglo-Saxon epic) – and about its origins in what was apparently Carpenter's conflation of Tolkien letter 131 (to Waldman) and letter 180, to someone named "Mr. Thompson," but not actually a phrase written by Tolkien.[4]

Despite the recurrence of this phrase in such previous studies, the implications of Tolkien's medievalness has only been touched on. Three previous books from the late 1970s and early 1980s have focused on Tolkien as a professor of Anglo-Saxon and a teacher of Old and Middle English Language and Literature. First, Mary Salu and Robert Farrell's *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam* (1979) in three sections examines Tolkien's life, the study

of Old and Middle English (that is, essays on medieval English subjects by his former students, colleagues, and friends), and Tolkien's use of the romance, philology, and the New Testament. Second, *Tolkien's Art: A "Mythology for England"* (1979; 2001) by Jane Chance (Nitzsche) sketches Tolkien's interest in medieval literature in his minor works, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Third and last, Thomas A. Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* (1982; 1992) examines Tolkien's use of individual medieval words and his philology as a means of accessing his medievalized literature.

No other collection or single monograph has examined anew the question of Tolkien's medievalness, his capturing of that medieval form or theme or symbol for his own mythologized fiction.[5] On the other hand, since Tolkien's death a collection of his letters has appeared (1980), and his long-languishing *The Silmarillion* has been completed and published by his son Christopher Tolkien (1977). In addition, other works Tolkien did not succeed in completing during his lifetime – earlier drafts or alternate recensions, including *Unfinished Tales* (1979; 1980) and the twelve-volume *History of Middle-earth* (1983–95; 1984–96) – have subsequently appeared in print, thanks to Christopher. Two additional children's stories have also been recovered – *Mr. Bliss* (1982) and *Roverandom* (1998) – as well as several editions and translations of Old and Middle English poems, completed by Tolkien's own former students (Tolkien, *The Old English Exodus* [1981]; *Finn and Hengest* [1982; 1983]; and *"The Monsters and the Critics" and Other Essays* [1983; 1984]).

With this fuller knowledge about Tolkien's life and thinking about his own work, of which we now have everything of value, it is time to reconsider the question of Tolkien's medievalness and to offer new and more informed ways of reading Tolkien. Within this fuller context of posthumous works by and about Tolkien's mythology, *Tolkien the Medievalist* will demonstrate in varied fashion how Tolkien from the beginning responded to his modern contexts by retelling his medieval sources and adapting his medieval scholarship to his own voice. Tolkien was, over time, influenced by his own personal medievalism, his profession as a medievalist, his relationships with other medievalists, and his own mythologizing in constructing his major fiction. Interdisciplinary in approach, the essays in the collection will explore Tolkien's position within the context of twentieth-century medieval scholarship and religious movements such as the Oxford movement in Britain, and his use of various works of medieval literature as a palimpsest for the development of his own ideas. In the first section, chapters focus on how Professor Tolkien, as a philologist, fairy-story writer, editor of Old and Middle English poems, citizen and Roman Catholic, and friend of C. S. Lewis (a fellow Inkling), invested his professional interests in his writing, and how those works and the movements of his day may have affected his fiction. In the second section, chapters focus on specific episodes and how they correspond to medieval literary antecedents, in Old Norse, Old and Middle English, medieval Latin, and medieval Catholicism. In the third section, the chapters discuss how his mythological retextualization in his fiction assumes a most medievalized form.

The concluding section involves computer technology as a form of "recontextualization" to indicate some ways in which Tolkien's intentions as a mythmaker can be more fully understood.

In the first part, on the modern contexts of Tolkien's medievalism and scholarship, Douglas A. Anderson – in " 'An industrious little devil': E. V. Gordon as friend and collaborator with Tolkien" – examines Tolkien's collaboration with Eric Valentine Gordon (1896–1938) on their edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1925). The two philologists also worked together on several other editions, including *The Pearl*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*, but with the early death of Gordon these projects were left uncompleted or were finished posthumously by Gordon's widow. Gordon's precise scholarship and graceful style, as manifested in his solo work – namely, *An Introduction to Old Norse* (1927) and an edition of *The Battle of Maldon* (1937) – and his friendship with Tolkien both motivated and influenced Tolkien's own scholarship and creativity, especially in Tolkien's "sequel" to "The Battle of Maldon," "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son" (1953).

In chapter 3, Verlyn Flieger, in " 'There would always be a fairy-tale': J. R. R. Tolkien and the folklore controversy," investigates Tolkien's key essay "On Fairy-Stories" in the context of folklore studies and its various schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all of which contended for hegemony within this new and just-formed discipline. Tolkien's terminology in his essay – "nature myth," "disease of language," and "Comparative Philology" – resonates with the identifying hallmarks of early folklorists such as Müller, Dasent, Lang, and others. His citation of their work in philology, anthropology, and mythology is set against his own personalized disagreement with their theories, one connected to his emerging, still developing creative mythology. In large part, his reaction to the folklore controversies can be used to read his own fiction as an illustration in practice of his theory in "On Fairy-Stories."

In chapter 4, "A kind of mid-wife: J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis – sharing influence," Andrew Lazo examines the interinfluence of Tolkien and his friend and fellow medievalist C. S. Lewis by focusing on an unpublished letter by Lewis about Tolkien and his influence on him and by isolating one night (11 May 1926) when they had a row about the differences between religion and mythology and their appropriateness in their fiction. Tolkien's subsequent writing of the poem "Mythopoeia" served to mark the turning point in their literary relationship and friendship. Although the two British scholars shared interests, professions, and a field, and spent much of their lives talking about books (their own and others') and enjoying social experiences, their real bond lay in their writing and reading of each other's work and the influence each had on the creative function.

In chapter 5, " 'I wish to speak': Tolkien's voice in his *Beowulf* essay," Mary Faraci argues that – despite the fame of Tolkien's 1937 essay, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," for its pivotal role in directing Anglo-Saxon studies to the study of the literary text itself and away from its historical and anthropological contexts – it remains relatively unknown as a work of linguistic artistry,

particularly speech-act theory. In his rescue of *Beowulf* the poem from *Beowulf*iana – that is, scholarly study that ignores the poem's artistry – Tolkien uses several voices to construct his argument. His second nature in his dramatization is that of storyteller: by using the ancient Greek distinction between the active voice and the middle voice, Tolkien removes himself, the "I" in the essay, from the critics blind to its artistry. The "I" functions in the ancient middle voice inflection to perform the difficult task of perceiving the poem's art previously hidden from *Beowulf*'s "experts." That is, Tolkien's "I," as the subject in relation to the criticism process, acts as effected "inside the process" of the action of the verb (this volume, p. 58). In contrast, the critics occupy the role of the ancient active-voice inflection: the subject acts as agent outside the process of the action of the verb. The result is the dramatic projection of the "I" as questor of permission to release the monsters from their mistaken representation in *Beowulf*iana by these critics, who then assume the position (relative to the hero Beowulf) of the adversarial dragon.

Chapter 6, by Christine Chism, "Middle-earth, the Middle Ages, and the Aryan nation: myth and history in World War II," places Tolkien as professional medievalist within the historical context of the period before and during World War II, when Tolkien wrote the *The Lord of the Rings*. During this period the "Germanic" medieval sources that Tolkien loved – medieval languages, legends, and sagas in Icelandic, Germanic, Gothic, and Anglo-Saxon – were (mis)appropriated by the German Aryan movement, which created a conflict in his writing. In "ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making forever accursed" (this volume, p. 63) these legends, Aryanism made it impossible for Tolkien to ignore the ethical dilemma of his own imaginative inspiration from such legends and their effect on his sense of morality, religion, and nationalism. Because Tolkien casts the subcreator in "On Fairy-Stories" (1939) as an analogue to God when he endows humanity with his own image, when humanity's sub-creating replaces devotion to God with an obsession to the imagination, does humanity then take the place of Lucifer? Chism argues that Tolkien rehearses this question in the actual extended writing of *The Lord of the Rings*, itself "a tale of renunciation," specifically, Frodo's renunciation of the Ring when he returns it to its origin, which takes on the additional symbolism of Tolkien's own renunciation of the act of writing this epic, the last extended narrative he completed. Thus are justified those structural narrative (and generic) flaws in *The Lord of the Rings* – structural delays, deferrals of ending, doublings and reduplications of narrative artistry – so criticized by Christine Brooke-Rose. "Middle-earth unfolds, grows more intricate, more peopled, more culturally diverse, more deep as we wander through it, but it blooms forth only in the shadow of its own immanent destruction," Chism notes.

> The Ring – that weirdly empty, weirdly powerful object around which the narrative assembles itself – interrogates the imaginative capacity for world-creation itself. ... The loss of the Ring consigns Middle-earth to the joys and depredations of history – and this consignment to history is costly. It is no accident that the loss of the Ring maims Frodo forever and disenchants

> Middle-earth. ... And, finally, I argue, it is no accident that the writing of this renunciatory narrative occupies dark night after dark night, during a time when Germany was mobilizing and recasting heroic '"Germanic' ideals" to articulate and impose its own terrifying new world.
>
> (This volume, p. 64)

In the next part – on the medieval texts and contexts Tolkien appropriated as models in his mythological fiction – Verlyn Flieger begins chapter 7, "Tolkien's Wild Men: from medieval to modern," by considering the archetypal outsider, the figure of the Wild Man drawn from the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, the biblical Nebuchadnezzar, European folklore, Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romance *Yvain*, the *wodwos* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Sir Thomas Malory's Lancelot, and elsewhere in medieval literature to understand how Tolkien reshapes this topos in his own fiction. Among the many manifestations of the outlaw Wild Man is Beorn in *The Hobbit*, Ghân-Buri-Ghân in *The Return of the King*, Strider (Aragorn in rough disguise), Túrin Turambar in "The Tale of the Children of Húrin," and even Gollum, Tolkien's most brilliant creation. Also participating in the typology of the Wild Man, at least in his struggles with madness, is Frodo Baggins himself.

In chapter 8, "The valkyrie reflex in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*: Galadriel, Shelob, Éowyn, and Arwen," Leslie A. Donovan works with Old Norse and Old English types for Tolkien's women in the trilogy. Often criticized for his paucity of female characters and presumably, therefore, his latent misogyny, Tolkien has also been defended for appropriately reweaving medieval epic materials that do not emphasize women in their thematic or structural conventions. However, Donovan contends that the few women in Tolkien's epic derive their especial importance from the "valkyrie reflex" found in Germanic heroic literature and Scandinavian myth and heroic legend. Deriving from these valkyrie traditions, Old English women characters function as heroic, cultural, and moral models for the women in Tolkien's texts. Thus, Tolkien pairs Galadriel and Shelob, Arwen and Éowyn, and Rosie Cotton and Lobelia Sackville-Baggins to transcend the conventional medieval moral polarities between generosity and selfishness, hope and despair, and loyalty and treachery.

Chapter 9, by Miranda Wilcox, "Exilic imagining in *The Seafarer* and *The Lord of the Rings*," traces the Old English elegiac theme of exile articulated in those works. Wilcox argues that Frodo, the primary exiled character, is coupled with the voluntary exiles of the Elves; in addition, despite the mortality of the Seafarer and the immortality of the Elves, similarities in theme, imagery, symbolism, and characterization exist between the Old English poem *The Seafarer* and Elvish poems in the *The Lord of the Rings*. Both the Seafarer, the speaker in the elegy, and the Elves, especially Legolas, reveal a longing for the sea; it functions as a source of imagery and background in both accounts. Both the Seafarer and the Elves regret the departure from their comfortable present life to an unknown future life and death, and to the afterlife in the case of the Seafarer. In *The Seafarer* the

glorious arrival of spring signals the time of man's departure from this world and, simultaneously, his ambivalence toward this change; so also Frodo must depart Lothlórien on his quest, and the Elves, fated to diminish, must leave Middle-earth. The sea, then, represents a "transcendent bridge" between the mortal and the immortal. Because the sailors in both narratives are not depicted as arriving at their final ports, both remain fixed eternally in the text between the misery of mortality and the hope of future joy. This moment of simultaneity records a glimpse of the experience of exile in both medieval and Tolkienian worlds.

In chapter 10, " 'Oathbreakers, why have ye come?': Tolkien's 'Passing of the Grey Company' and the twelfth-century *Exercitus mortuorum*," Margaret A. Sinex demonstrates Tolkien's indebtedness to medieval Latin sources in the construction of a group and their political history in *The Lord of the Rings*. Aragorn's command of the "Sleepless Dead" in Tolkien's *The Return of the King* can be contextualized within several twelfth-century Latin narratives, some of which stress the threatening military might of Hellequin's hunt, and others, the penitential purpose of the troop of wandering dead. These prescholastic treatments of the *Exercitus mortuorum* have particular relevance to Tolkien's episode in several key ways. In Tolkien, we see a creative version of the crucial relationship of exchange between the dead and the living, in which the living perform suffrages (prayers, masses) for the spiritual peace of the wandering penitents. The relationship of exchange is present, as is the spiritual purpose, but the direction of the service is reversed (as the dead serve the living). In Aragorn's demand for military aid, we also find the binding nature of vassalic ties that transcends death and obligates the living to fulfill the requests of the dead so often stressed in the twelfth century. (The transcendent tie is present, but again, the dead serve the living.)

Further, as Jean-Claude Schmitt and others have noted, certain twelfth-century texts used the theme of the furious army to criticize the second estate for misdirecting its war-making potential, thereby dooming its members to their agonized, penitential roaming. Readers of Tolkien learn that the King of the Mountains once misused his own military might by withholding it during Isildur's war against Sauron. And finally, the *Exercitus mortuorum* participated in twelfth-century political ideology in another way as well. For often, the service the dead perform for the living (frequently in the form of crucial information) helps to found a dynasty or ensure its survival and protect its possessions. While members of the "Shadow Host" render military service (rather than give information), their decisive aid ensures the survival of Isildur's line and the protection of all Aragorn's possessions (most notably Minas Tirith).

In the third part, we turn to the texts and contexts of medieval patristics, theology, and iconography, and a sampling of the ways in which Tolkien incorporated cosmogony and religion from patristic and scholastic commentaries and the artistic representation of theological issues from the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In chapter 11, "Augustine in the cottage of lost play: the *Ainulindalë* as asterisk cosmogony," John William Houghton examines the relationship between Tolkien's *Ainulindalë* in *The Silmarillion* and Augustine's commentary on Genesis. In "asterisk" Houghton borrows a term used by T. A.

Shippey to mean the understanding of a world-view conveyed by the philologists' use of a prefixed asterisk to denote lost words (or languages) they have reconstructed. In this sense Tolkien's *Ainulindalë* – the first tale of *The Silmarillion* – represents neither of the models of cosmogony inherited by the early Middle Ages – the hexameron with its six days of creation found in Genesis, the Old English *Hexameron*, and the *Timaeus* of Plato – but instead, a third account of creation, an asterisk cosmogony in the Elvish creation myth told by Eriol, an Angle who lived before the historical Angles migrated to Britain, and Ælwine, an Anglo-Saxon seafarer. Houghton's point is that this fictional myth of creation actually fits easily into a Christian-Neoplatonist synthesis of the two major models of cosmogony as demonstrated by Augustine's commentary on Genesis.

Bradford Lee Eden, in chapter 12, "The 'music of the spheres': relationships between Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* and medieval cosmological and religious theory," explores the medieval concept of the "music of the spheres" as it relates to Tolkien's work on Middle-earth, specifically, with the creation scenes given in *The Silmarillion,* as well as with continuing lines of relationships that appear throughout this work, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's use and reuse of ancient and medieval mythology from a number of traditions is well known, but his use of medieval cosmological and mathematical concepts surrounding music and its relationship to creation, life, and the unfolding drama throughout the history of Middle-earth has not been explored in depth. This chapter provides introductory background and insight on just how thorough Tolkien was in his use of the "quadrivium" concept in the creation of Middle-earth in relation to the Boethian and Neoplatonist traditions in particular.

Jonathan Evans, in chapter 13, "The anthropology of Arda: creation, theology, and the race of Men," analyzes the early history of Men and posits a theory of "Man" that isolates this category as an idea of the human in Middle-earth divorced from whatever assumptions we may have about humankind as a species common to earth. In Evans's consideration, "Man" represents a separate race and not "the 'default' category of sentient beings." Drawing on philology, theology, and literature – Tolkien's and Milton's, most specifically – Evans dramatizes by contrast the special relationship between the creator and the created in Tolkien's theological anthropology, and by analogy, the relationship between Tolkien as author and the nature and role of the species of Man in his mythological fiction. Man's fall becomes one of several in Middle-earth rather than the focal point, as it is in traditional Christianity.

Chapter 14, "'A land without stain': medieval images of Mary and their use in the characterization of Galadriel" by Michael W. Maher, S. J., explores the attributions given to the character of Galadriel, particularly those that are similar to the representations and attributes of the Virgin Mary. Although Marian imagery and piety embrace nearly two thousand years, this work limits itself to a small part of the imagery particular to the Middle Ages and its subsequent resurgence in the Gothic revival and the Oxford movement of the mid-nineteenth century.

For modern Christians, the received vocabulary of Marian piety has been reduced to images approved by the post-Tridentine church filtered through such devotions as Lourdes and Fatima and then reconfigured by the norms of devotion established by the Second Vatican Council. During the Middle Ages, a far greater body of literature existed that fueled popular images and stories concerning the Blessed Virgin, not all of which found its way into the orthodox canon of the post-Tridentine church or the experience of contemporary devotion. Such works and images include prayers to the Virgin, litanies, seasonal antiphons, and artistic representation and texts by theologians such as Bonaventure and Thomas, as well as popular texts such as the *Golden Legend*.

Maher does not argue that Galadriel is an allegorical figure pointing to the Blessed Virgin. Tolkien himself states his dislike for allegory in his introduction to his trilogy. Rather, Maher demonstrates how knowledge of medieval imagery of Mary and what that imagery represents creates a better understanding of the character of Galadriel and Tolkien's relationship with the other characters in his trilogy.

In the last part – on Tolkien's *Silmarillion* mythology and medieval retextualization and theory, primarily in *The Silmarillion* – Gergely Nagy, in "The great chain of reading: (inter-)textual relations and the technique of mythopoesis in the Túrin story," examines the peculiar interconnectedness of several Tolkien texts, using the story of Túrin as a guideline. The allusions to this story in *The Lord of the Rings* give rise to both readerly and critical considerations: to understand the allusions, the reader needs another text to serve as a context. From the critical point of view, the question concerns the status of the allusions (genuine allusions to an existing (con)text/"pseudo"-allusions, cited to supply depth and perspective).

The context is provided in *The Silmarillion*; but the *Silmarillion* story becoming a primary text in its own right, the same critical question of genuine versus "effectual" depth remains standing with the text's claim of the existence of sources. These "sources" are to be found in other treatments of the story (in *Unfinished Tales*, *The Book of Lost Tales*, etc.); however, all claim to be founded on others, to be retextualizations of other texts. These retextualizations in various genres also represent the stages of the story's development. The perspective and depth (which our critical question examines) seem to be produced by the very linkage of texts, as each establishes itself as a context or a retextualization of another one.

Interpreted in terms of Tolkien's textual world, these interconnected texts represent the development of the tradition of the Túrin story *within* the secondary world; in a critical interpretation, however, they show the artistic creation of that development in literary texts. Within his secondary world, Tolkien "simulates" the evolution of mythical/legendary material and the emergence of several retextualizations, in various genres, resulting from it. This understanding of myth as continual retextualization shows that all texts in the Tolkien corpus and the interrelations between them are essentially important to the critical appreciation of his artistic methods to achieve the complex effect of the depth of mythology and mythological text.

Finally, Richard C. West, in chapter 16, "Real-world myth in a secondary world: mythological aspects in the story of Beren and Lúthien," focuses on Tolkien's use of the gods and heroes of world mythology, legend, and folklore in relation to the story of Beren and Lúthien. A tale especially important to Tolkien – the names of the two lovers are etched on the shared tombstone of Tolkien and his wife – exists in several recensions, none of which can be singled out as his preferred version. Among the various myths and legends recalled by the tale are the *Volsunga Saga*, the Calydonian Boar Hunt, Robin Hood, Rapunzel, Orpheus, and Ishtar. Within these tales appear common themes: the disapproving father, the rival lover, the quest, the bride-price, the magical animal ally, the tragic victory of death over love, and the triumph of love over death. Despite the apparent patchwork-quilt nature of the tale as it appears in Christopher Tolkien's publication of *The Silmarillion*, it is deeply moving and carefully crafted.

What this volume can do, ultimately, is to suggest new ways in which Tolkien's medievalness and his medievalism informed and shaped his fantasy, through the collaborations he enjoyed professionally and the academic debates in which he participated at a particular moment in contemporary history, through the actual literary and mythological contexts he spent most of his life understanding, and through the modes and genres he revitalized – retextualized – in the fantastic histories of Middle-earth he created.

Notes

1 See the Millennium edition for the seven-volume format (London: HarperCollins, 1999). For the single-volume format, see *The Lord of the Rings* in the original "India paper" deluxe edition, with slipcase, published by Allen & Unwin (London, 1968); and again, but without a slipcase and printed on regular paper, in 1991 (London: HarperCollins); and with a slipcase and in limited numbers, in quarter-leather (London: HarperCollins, 1997).

2 About half of the chapters in this volume were first delivered as papers in shortened form at this annual international conference. The three sessions were also organized by Jane Chance. We are grateful to Medieval Institute director Paul Szarmach at Western Michigan University for allowing us to assemble in dialogue about Tolkien.

3 See *Biography*, 89. Carpenter sees a hint of this desire as early as in his undergraduate years in comments he wrote about the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*.

4 See especially, for a treatment of the specifically Old and Middle English works of literature Tolkien himself discussed in his nonfiction prose, Chance, *Tolkien's Art*; for Tolkien's work as a tribute to his nation, see Lobdell (*England and Always*); and for his desire for a "true English epic" (meaning Anglo-Saxon) as manifested in five figures of his mythology, Eärmendil, Ermon and Elmir, Ælfwine, and Ingwë, see Carl F. Hostetter and Arden Smith, "A Mythology for England," in Reynolds and GoodKnight, 281–90. For the origin of Carpenter's phrase "mythology for England" from a conflation of letter 131 and letter 180, see Anders Stenström's discussion of "mythology" in "A Mythology? For England?" in Reynolds and GoodKnight, 310–14.

5 See the annotated bibliography of items up to 1990 in Chance and Day, 375–88. See also the more recent essays by Bruce Mitchell, Tom Shippey, Andy Orchard,

Jonathan Evans, George Clark, and others: Mitchell's "J. R. R. Tolkien and Old English Studies: An Appreciation," in Reynolds and GoodKnight, 206–11; Shippey's "Tolkien and the *Gawain*-Poet," in Reynolds and GoodKnight, 213–20; Orchard's "Tolkien, the Monsters, and the Critics: Back to *Beowulf*," in Battarbee, 73–84; Evans's "The Dragon-lore of Middle-earth: Tolkien and Old English and Old Norse Traditions," in Clark and Timmons, 21–38; and Clark's "J. R. R. Tolkien and the True Hero," in Clark and Timmons, 39–52.

Part I

J. R. R. Tolkien as a medieval scholar

Modern contexts

2 "An industrious little devil"

E. V. Gordon as friend and collaborator with Tolkien

Douglas A. Anderson

In early 1922, E. V. Gordon was hired as a lecturer at the English department of Leeds University. J. R. R. Tolkien had been at Leeds since the autumn of 1920 as Reader in English Language (from July 1924, as Professor of English Language), and not long after Gordon's arrival, Tolkien recorded in his diary that "Eric Valentine Gordon has come and got firmly established and is my devoted friend and pal" (*Biography*, 104). They soon began to work together on what would be their only collaboration to reach print, a major edition of the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Tolkien found Gordon to be "an industrious little devil" (105), and, as Tolkien's biographer Humphrey Carpenter has observed, Tolkien had to work fast to keep up with Gordon.

In the summer of 1925, Tolkien was elected to the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, and though he taught at both Leeds and Oxford for the autumn term, by early 1926 he had left Leeds and moved on to Oxford. The simple fact of geographical distance made collaborating with Gordon less easy, though the two men did work extensively on several projects. Gordon's early and unexpected death in 1938 robbed Tolkien of a close friend and collaborator. Humphrey Carpenter has suggested that Gordon was in fact Tolkien's "ideal professional collaborator" (*Biography*, 140) – that is, someone who could not only work with Tolkien but also make him surrender material to the printer. Gordon's friendship with Tolkien lasted for the better part of two decades, and a study of that friendship and of Gordon's own life and achievements is overdue. Here, in a short space, I can give only a general outline and delve into a few of the specifics.

Eric Valentine Gordon was born on Valentine's Day, 14 February 1896, in Salmon Arm, British Columbia. He was educated at Victoria College and at McGill University College, both in Victoria, British Columbia. He was elected one of the eight Rhodes scholars from Canada in 1915 and went to University College, Oxford, where he was tutored by Kenneth Sisam, who would soon become one of the central figures at Oxford University Press, and Percy Simpson, who is now remembered mainly for his Oxford edition of Ben Jonson's works.

In 1916, Gordon joined the Canadian Field Artillery in order to serve in World War I, but he was discharged as medically unfit. He spent the remainder

of the war working for the Ministries of National Service and of Food. He returned to University College in 1919, where in the following year he was tutored by J. R. R. Tolkien. In 1919–20, C. S. Lewis was also at University College, and Gordon and Lewis certainly knew each other at the time. Through Tolkien, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, they came to know each other well. Gordon got his B.A., a second, in 1920.[1] He remained in Oxford and began working on a B.Litt., which he left uncompleted when he accepted the position at Leeds.

Two Oxford figures were important to both Gordon and Tolkien: C. T. Onions, the great lexicographer of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and Kenneth Sisam, the scholar and publisher.

In 1919, Onions, in his role as an adviser to the Oxford University Press, offered Tolkien the chance to do a short book, "The English Language before the Conquest." Tolkien was then working on the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and probably he found that he didn't have the time for such a project. He did accept a second opportunity, this being to compile *A Middle-English Vocabulary* to accompany an anthology, *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, already being compiled by Sisam. Years later (in 1932) Onions would found the journal *Medium Ævum*, which he edited for many years. Its many distinguished contributors would include Gordon, Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and several other members of the Inklings, the circle of Lewis's and Tolkien's friends that began meeting in the 1930s to read aloud to each other their own compositions.

Kenneth Sisam's relationship to both Gordon and Tolkien was complex. Like Gordon, Tolkien had also been tutored by Sisam, and years later Tolkien would say that he counted himself fortunate to have attended Sisam's Old English lectures as an undergraduate. But when Tolkien was late in delivering the manuscript of his glossary, Sisam's anthology was published without it in October 1921. This was the first of several disappointments between the two men.

Onions and Sisam seem to occupy, in Tolkien's life at least, almost antithetical positions. On Onions's death in 1965 at the age of 91, Tolkien referred to him in a letter as "my dear old protector, backer and friend" (*Letters*, 353). Sisam, however, was Tolkien's rival in 1925 for the Anglo-Saxon Chair, and in the election process itself both candidates had tied in votes for the position. The vice-chancellor of the university cast the deciding vote for Tolkien. Openings for Oxford chairs were not frequent, and this proved to be Sisam's only chance at such a position. There was possibly some resentment. Some other colleagues felt similarly, like Eugène Vinaver, who wrote on Sisam's death in 1971 that "everyone knows what a terrible mistake Oxford made when they by-passed him for the Chair of Anglo-Saxon" (Sutcliffe, 270).

Peter Sutcliffe's informal history of the Oxford University Press gives an interesting picture of Sisam:

> To some of [his] contemporaries, … Sisam seemed a hard man …. He was certainly unyielding, often stubborn, and on the rare occasions when he was

> persuaded to change his mind there was a rumbling and creaking of machinery unaccustomed to shifts of gear.
>
> (Sutcliffe, 270)

Sisam had strong opinions about press policies, preferring books with a minimal amount of editorial apparatus. Both Gordon and Tolkien, on the other hand, wanted space for large glossaries and more notes. They desired to compile major editions rather than junior university textbooks. In the end, Gordon found ways to work with Sisam. Tolkien did not. After *Sir Gawain* appeared in April 1925, Gordon published two further books with Oxford University Press – *An Introduction to Old Norse* (1927) and *Scandinavian Archaeology* (1937) – whereas from 1925 through the end of Sisam's tenure in 1948, Tolkien published almost nothing more with Oxford.[2]

Both Tolkien and Gordon enjoyed Leeds immensely. They worked hard to build up the English department and found pleasure in the work. They formed a Viking Club for undergraduates, which met to drink beer, read the sagas, and sing drinking songs in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse. A number of these songs were distributed as stenciled sheets. One of their most promising students was A. H. Smith, who, soon after earning his Ph.D. at Leeds in 1926, became known as a distinguished scholar of place-names and, from 1930, a professor at University College, London.

While at Leeds, Gordon's papers began to appear in print. When Tolkien became seriously ill with pneumonia in 1923, Gordon was allowed to take over Tolkien's responsibility for the review chapter on philology for *The Year's Work in English Studies 1922*, thereby earning the right to contribute the chapters on Old English and Middle English in the annual in subsequent years. Both Gordon and Tolkien published poems and translations in local Leeds magazines and anthologies.

Gordon and Smith collaborated on an extensive article, "The River Names of Yorkshire." Gordon wrote solo articles on the Scandinavian influence in Yorkshire dialects, and in the years afterwards he would cover other topics, such as place-names and their origins, the historical dating of certain events in poems, and the backgrounds to various Icelandic sagas.

Gordon visited Iceland twice, and his interest in the Icelandic language led him to try the experiment of inviting Icelandic students to study English at Leeds, while they at the same time provided opportunities for their fellow students to learn Icelandic. The response led to the founding of an Icelandic honors course.

Gordon and Tolkien were also active locally with the Yorkshire Dialect Society. Gordon, in particular, assisted with their Dialect Gramophone Recording Scheme, an attempt to preserve a record of local dialects. Gordon also lectured to the society on 30 November 1930. His paper, "The Vikings in Yorkshire," was very popular and provoked a lively discussion.[3]

Gordon's first book had been his and Tolkien's edition of *Sir Gawain*, which was published in April 1925. Tolkien had been primarily responsible

for the text and glossary, while Gordon contributed the greater part of the notes. Soon after its publication they began work on an edition of *Pearl*, which went through several nearly finished versions but remained unpublished for more than a decade after Gordon's death. A few offshoots of this work on *Pearl* did reach print. In 1932–33, Gordon and C. T. Onions collaborated on a series of two articles in *Medium Ævum* on textual points and the interpretation of *Pearl*.

Tolkien left his Leeds post at the end of 1925, and in January 1926 Gordon was named as his successor to the Professorship of English Language. In 1927 Oxford University Press published Gordon's hefty anthology, *An Introduction to Old Norse*. It contains a long introduction, a grammar, and a moderate glossary (Tolkien is thanked for reading proofs of the grammar, and for making valuable suggestions and corrections), along with a wide-ranging selection of extracts from the *Elder Edda* and a large number of the sagas.

In 1929, Gordon arranged, for the Leeds University Library, the acquisition of the private library of the late author and historian of Copenhagen, Bogi Thorarensen Melsteð (1860–1929). This purchase of some seven thousand volumes formed the basis of the Leeds University Icelandic collection, which to this day remains one of the best Icelandic collections outside of Iceland and Scandinavia. In 1930, for his services to Icelandic studies, Gordon was awarded the Knighthood of the Royal Icelandic Order of the Falcon by Christian X, the King of Iceland and Denmark. Soon afterwards he was elected Honorary Fellow of the Icelandic Society of Letters.

On 30 July 1930, Eric Valentine Gordon married one of his students, Ida Lilian Pickles, a local girl from West Yorkshire (she was born in 1907 in Wakefield, just south of Leeds). The marriage took place at a parish church in nearby Liversedge. Ida Pickles had come to Leeds University around the time of Tolkien's departure and earned a B.A. (with honors) in 1928. She continued at Leeds and earned a Ph.D. in 1930 for her thesis, "A Topographical Study of the Sagas of the Vestfirðir." The couple would have four children, three daughters and one son.[4]

In February 1931, Gordon was appointed Smith Professor of English Language and Germanic Philology at the University of Manchester. He took up the post in September of that year and held it until his death. The Arthurian scholar Eugène Vinaver followed Gordon to Manchester in 1933; a few years later he and Gordon would collaborate on a comparison of the text of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the Winchester manuscript of Malory, the latter of which was discovered in 1934.

Like many other academics of the time, Gordon supplemented his income as an examiner in English literature for many universities. Around 1933, after a *viva voce* examination at Oxford where Gordon, Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis were examiners, Lewis poked fun at his two philologist friends in a short verse in alliterative meter: "Two at table in their talk borrowed / Gargantua's mouth. Gordon and Tolkien / Had will to repeat well-nigh the whole / That they of Verner's law… / Heard by hearsay. / Never at board I heard / Viler