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# **The Creative Uses of Irish Literature in Works by J.R.R. Tolkien**

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Degree of PhD  
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May 2025

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the significant and sustained influence of Irish literature across the corpus of J.R.R. Tolkien's mythopoeic writings— what is frequently termed as his “legendarium” —and to analyse how he adapted and creatively revised Irish sources in his writings. Some of Tolkien's statements have given the impression that he did not like, nor was he influenced by, Irish language or literature, and yet scholars have long identified Irish elements in his writings and called for a deeper appreciation of them. This thesis presents the first book-length, systematic critical analysis of the role of Irish literature in Tolkien's legendarium. It includes the identification and critical analysis of specific works of Irish (and Irish-themed) literature and language study that Tolkien owned, read, is suspected to have read, and/or referenced, including his volumes donated to the Bodleian and English Faculty Libraries at the University of Oxford, and it presents a curated selection of new observations and findings on Irish influences in his writings. As the question of how Tolkien's work relates to Irish antecedents has been under-researched, this thesis breaks new ground by approaching Irish literature as a major category of Tolkien's sources and influences.

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Acknowledgements .....	viii
Declaration of Originality Form—Research Degrees .....	ix
Definitions, Conventions and Abbreviations.....	x
Definitions.....	x
Conventions.....	xiii
Abbreviations .....	xv
Chapter 1 Introduction and Literature Review .....	1
1.1 Project Overview .....	1
1.2 Background .....	4
1.3 Framework and Methodology.....	28
1.4 Literature Review.....	35
1.5 Organization of the Thesis.....	46
Chapter 2 “Exon. Oxon.” (1911–1915).....	48
2.1 <i>The Voyage of Bran</i> .....	52
2.2 “...the foundation of my library...” .....	59
2.3 The Voyage of Eärendel .....	80
2.4 Conclusions.....	85
Chapter 3 Lost Tales (1916–1919).....	87
3.1 Some Irish Roots of the Legendarium .....	87
3.2 <i>Acallam na senórach</i> (‘Dialogue of the ancients’) .....	94
3.3 The <i>Acallam</i> in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> .....	113
3.4 Conclusions.....	118
Chapter 4 Rover the Water-Baby (1920s).....	121
4.1 <i>The Water-Babies</i> .....	125
4.2 <i>Roverandom</i> .....	130
4.3 Dogs Days and Rabelais .....	140
4.4 Conclusions.....	144
Chapter 5 Travellers in Time (1930s).....	146
5.1 J.W. Dunne’s <i>An Experiment with Time</i> .....	149
5.2 C.S. Lewis: The ‘Toss-Up’ .....	153

5.3	Joseph O'Neill's <i>Wind from the North</i> .....	159
5.4	Conclusions.....	179
Chapter 6	Tom Bombadil and Goldberry (1930s–1960s) .....	182
6.1	In the House of Tom Bombadil .....	184
6.2	Eldest: Tom Bombadil and Fintan mac Bóchra as Memory-Keepers ..	188
6.3	The Wooing of Goldberry .....	199
6.4	Conclusions.....	209
Chapter 7	“Many matters concerning the Eldar, their fate in Arda, their death and re-birth and the nature of their marriage” (1950s-1970s) .....	212
7.1	Immortality .....	213
7.2	Rebirth .....	222
7.3	Marriage.....	236
7.4	Conclusions.....	247
Chapter 8	Conclusion: “The Shoreless Sea” .....	248
Appendices	.....	254
	Appendix A. Two Subsets of Tolkien’s “Celtic Library” .....	254
	Appendix B. Ten Words & Names Invented by Tolkien with Irish Associations .....	258
Bibliography	.....	260
	Works by J.R.R. Tolkien.....	260
	Other Works.....	262

## List of Tables

Table 1.3.1. Jason Fisher's tiers for Tolkien source studies. ....	30
Table 1.3.2. Adapting Peter S. Beidler's "New Terminology" for Chaucer to Tolkien studies. ....	32

## List of Figures

Figure 1.2.4. Honorius Philiponus, “St Brendan holding mass on the back of a whale,” Rare Book Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1621. © Public Domain image.....	25
Figure 2.1.1. “Camford and Oxbridge Examination Board (detail),” <i>King Edward’s School Chronicle</i> , Dec. 1911, p. 95. © The Governors of the Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham.....	54
Figure 2.2.3. Kuno Meyer, “ <i>Incipit do Imrum curaig Mældúin andso</i> (excerpt),” <i>Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts</i> , vol. 1, 1907, p.51. © Public Domain image .....	77
Figure 3.2.5. John Duncan, “The Riders of the Sidhe,” McManus Galleries, Dundee. 1911. © Public Domain image. Photo credit: Sevensaocean, 20 August 2017, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.....	112
Figure 4.1.1. Linley Sambourne, “Tom and a Fish,” in <i>The Water-Babies</i> by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 107. © Public Domain image .....	126
Figure 4.1.2. Linley Sambourne, “Bat with a Man’s Face” in <i>The Water-Babies</i> by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 194. © Public Domain image .....	129
Figure 4.2.1. Linley Sambourne, “The Dog” in <i>The Water-Babies</i> by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 295. © Public Domain image.....	133
Figure 4.2.2. Linley Sambourne, “Mother Carey’s Chickens” in <i>The Water-Babies</i> by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 297. © Public Domain image .....	136
Figure 4.3.1. “Detail of Canis Major” in <i>Urania’s Mirror; or, a View of the Heavens</i> , engraved by Sidney Hall, London: Samuel Leigh; illustrations based on Alexander Jamieson’s <i>A Celestial Atlas</i> . 1822. © Public Domain image .....	141
Figure 4.3.2. “Astronomy: A Star Map of the Night Sky in the Southern Hemisphere [detail of <i>Canicula</i> and <i>Canis Major</i> ].” Coloured engraving. Wellcome Collection. [n.d.] © Public Domain image.....	142
Figure 5.1.1. Kris Swank, “Artist and Picture.” AI image using Microsoft Copilot, 19 March 2025. CC-BY-4.0.....	151
Figure 5.3.2.a. “ <i>Land Under England</i> by Joseph O’Neill, Author of <i>Wind from the North</i> , 1935 [1st ed. title page]. Photo Credit: Temple Bar Bookshop, Dublin .....	163
Figure 5.3.2.b. Joseph O’Neill, <i>Wind from the North</i> [book jacket], 1 <sup>st</sup> ed., Jonathan Cape, 1934. Photo Credit: unknown .....	164
Figure 6.3.1. Kris Swank, “...combed her tresses yellow.” AI image using Microsoft Bing Creator, 18 May 2024. CC-BY-4.0 .....	204
Figure 7.1.1. Stephen Reid, “They rose up in the air” in <i>The High Deeds of Finn</i> by T.W. Rolleston, 1910, after p. 100. © Public Domain image.....	214



## Acknowledgements

I could not have gotten through these years without the wisdom, understanding and support of my wonderful doctoral supervisors at the University of Glasgow, Prof. Dimitra Fimi (English Literature) and Dr Geraldine Parsons (Celtic & Gaelic); and I am also deeply grateful for my master's thesis supervisor at Signum University who started me down this path, the inestimable Dr Verlyn Flieger. I also wish to thank my faculty readers from the University of Glasgow for their insightful comments on early drafts of my chapters: Dr Matthew Creasy (English Literature), Prof. Thomas Clancy (Celtic & Gaelic), Prof. Rob Maslen (School of Critical Studies, retired), Dr Lydia Zeldenrust (Language & Linguistics), and Prof. Matthew Sangster (English Literature).

Special thanks go to the following fine people: (I.) Dr Bart Jaski, the Utrecht University Library, Maartje Draak Archives curator, and the Tolkien Estate for allowing me to quote from unpublished correspondence in this thesis; (II.) the librarians and library staff who helped me access dozens of resources: Ms Catherine McIlwaine, Tolkien Archivist, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, and the special collections staff of the Weston Library; Dr William Fliss, Manuscripts Archivist, Raynor Memorial Libraries, Marquette University; the staff at the University of Glasgow and Pima Community College libraries; (III.) my friends and fellow Tolkien fans for research help: Gabriel Schenk; John Garth; Will Sherwood; Jessica Yates; Douglas A. Anderson; Robin Darwall-Smith, Jesus College Archivist, Oxford; and the late Simon Stacey, Teacher of English and Archivist at King Edward's School, Birmingham (U.K.); and, (IV.) my friends who speak in strange tongues for translation help: in Elvish, Carl Hostetter and Andrew Higgins; in Irish, Geraldine Parsons; and in Latin, Carl Hostetter and Emily Strand. (Any errors are my own. Please forgive me if I missed anyone!)

Most of all, I dedicate this work to my much loved and greatly missed parents, Gerald W. Swank, Jr (1934-2022) and Rebecca E. Swank (1938-2024) who gave me my first Tolkien books; to my dear funny father-in-law, Joseph L. Mazanec (1933-2024); and to my husband, Milo Mazanec, my Sam. Well, I'm done. ♥

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# Definitions, Conventions and Abbreviations

## Definitions

**Analogue:** a word or thing similar or parallel to another. As a literary term, it denotes a story for which one can find parallel examples in other languages and literatures, such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale*, whose basic plot and theme were widely distributed in Europe in the Middle Ages (Cuddon 34); for specific categories of analogues, e.g., "hard" and "soft," see **Section 1.3** and **Table 1.3.2** of this thesis.

**Celtic:** "The idea of Celtic countries [i.e., Ireland (Éire), Scotland (Alba), Wales (Cymru), Brittany (Breizh), the Isle of Man (Ellan Vannin), and Cornwall (Kernow)] is a modern one, growing out of the development of philological science from the Renaissance onwards, leading to the recognition of the six languages as forming a closely related family ... The extension of the term into non-linguistic matters of culture, such as costume, music, and national identity, gained impetus through Pan-Celticism and related intellectual movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the study of the history and literary texts belonging to these six lands, 'Celtic countries' remains a useful concept, in part justifiable by the fact that the geographic limits of Celtic-speaking territory remained remarkably stable between the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century CE and early modern times" (W. Davies 365-366; see also **Section 1.2.2** of this thesis on Tolkien's understanding of the term).

**"Celtic Library," Tolkien's:** a popular term for the collection of nearly 300 volumes once belonging to J.R.R. Tolkien and donated to the Bodleian and English Faculty Libraries at Oxford University following his death (and currently housed in the Bodleian) (see Fimi, *Celtic type* 51); this thesis focuses on approximately fifty of these volumes on Irish literature and/or language study, or on general studies of Celtic literature and/or

languages which include significant content on Irish subjects: in this thesis, I refer to this subset as “Tolkien’s Irish Library” (Swank).

**Influence:** a term in modern critical theory that offers a specific account of both the origin and nature of literary works in relation to an antecedent work, encompassing imitation, invention, citations, and many other modes of appropriation and creation (Cheney 703).

**Intertextuality:** a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 to denote the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it. *This is not connected with the study of sources* as Kristeva challenges traditional notions of literary influence, pointing to the way texts echo each other as well as the way that discourses or sign systems are transposed into one another, so that meanings in one kind of discourse are overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse (Cuddon 367).

**Irish (and Irish-themed) sources:** loosely-defined in this thesis to include works written in any period, in or about Irish language, works written by Irish authors, and/or works written by non-Irish authors but on Irish subjects (Swank).

**Legendarium:** a literary collection of legends; Tolkien described his works as a “legendarium” in four letters from 1951 to 1955 (*Letters* #131 p. 208, #153 p.283, #154 p. 293, and #163 p. 313), with his most expansive definition encompassing the *Kullervo* material through *The Lord of the Rings* (*Letters* #163 p.313); this thesis uses the term to refer to the entirety of Tolkien’s Middle-earth corpus, including tangential materials such as *Roverandom* and *The Lost Road* (Tolkien).

**Otherworld:** a minimal designation for any place inhabited by supernatural beings and itself exhibiting supernatural characteristics which seems to have many locations in Irish legend, and is described in contradictory and confusing terms (Carey, “Time, Space, and the Otherworld” 1).

**Source:** any work from which an author has borrowed an idea, plot or story; for example, *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1577) was a much-used source for Elizabethan dramatists (Cuddon 672); the term 'source' need not imply direct borrowing, but merely the stimulation or inflection of response (Risden 17); Jason Fisher ranks sources in tiers from the most to the least certain (*direct, probable, possible, circumstantial* and *speculative*) ("Tolkien and Source Criticism," 36-37); for specific category descriptions, see **Section 1.3**, and **Tables 1.3.1** and **1.3.2** of this thesis.

**Source criticism:** a concept which has eluded firm definition or specific theorization, but which at its most intuitively obvious is the search for sources which have influenced the book or author in question, and for other authors or works which have been alluded to, drawn from, or incorporated in the work at hand (Risden 17).

## Conventions

**Chapters:** Chapters in this thesis are designated in the text with bold font for ease of identification (e.g., “see **Chapter 3**”).

**Dating:** The dating of mediaeval texts in this thesis primarily follows *CODECS: Collaborative Online Database and e-Resources for Celtic Studies*, published by the A. G. van Hamel Foundation for Celtic Studies [<https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Home>], except where otherwise noted.

**Multiple volumes:** Titles published in multiple volumes are cited in-text by both volume (by Roman numerals) and page (by Arabic numbers); for example, an in-text citation of Fridtjof Nansen’s *In Northern Mists*, vol. I, page 317 is cited as: (Nansen I.317); exceptions to this include works where the volume number is part of the official title, for example, a quote on page 142 of *The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two* is cited as: (*Lost Tales II* 142).

**Notes or Footnotes** in the in-text citations are cited as “fn”: (*Lost Tales II* 277 fn12).

**Spelling, Irish:** Irish spelling represents conventions from different time periods, resulting in considerable variation (e.g., Finn/Find/Fionn). Where multiple spellings of Irish words could be used, I have primarily followed *CODECS: Collaborative Online Database and e-Resources for Celtic Studies*, published by the A. G. van Hamel Foundation for Celtic Studies [<https://codecs.vanhamel.nl/Home>], except in direct quotations, in the titles of published works, or as otherwise noted.

**Spelling, Tolkien:** Tolkien changed the spellings of his invented character and place names frequently throughout the development of his legendarium (e.g., Éarendel/Eärendel/Eärendil), nor was his capitalization of terms (such as *hobbit*) always consistent. Following Flieger’s practice (*Music* xi), I have tried to follow whatever form Tolkien used in the specific text under discussion, except in direct quotations, or as otherwise noted.

**“Tolkien’s Irish Library”:** the approximately fifty volumes on Irish subjects, or on general Celtic subjects which include significant content on Irish subjects, from Tolkien’s personal library which were studied for this thesis, and are currently held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, are identified in the text of this thesis by a preceding asterisk (\*) the first time they are mentioned in a chapter, for example, \**Altirische Grammatik* (1925) by Julius Pokorny. See **Appendix A, Part 1** for full citations.

**Tolkien’s works:** For ease of reading and identification, Tolkien’s poems, lectures, and essays are always rendered in *italics* in this thesis, rather than some other way, such as quotation marks (i.e., inverted commas): for example, the poem, *Once upon a Time*.

**Silmarillion:** Following Flieger’s practice (*Fairy Tale* xiv), *The Silmarillion* (italicized), is the title of the single book selected, arranged, and edited by Christopher Tolkien and published in 1977, while the Silmarillion (without italics) refers to Tolkien’s own inclusive term for his mythological project in all its stages, including *The Lord of the Rings* and *The History of Middle-earth*.

Due to the numerous editions and formats of some of Tolkien’s works, a special in-text citation style is used for the following—

- ***The Hobbit*** and ***The Silmarillion*** are cited by chapter (uppercase Roman numbers) and page (Arabic numbers) (e.g., Chapter 2, page 45 of *The Hobbit* is cited as “*Hobbit* II.45”; Chapter 19, page 178 of *The Silmarillion* is cited as “*Silmarillion* XIX.178”).
- ***The Lord of the Rings*** is cited by volume (*FR*, *TT*, or *RK*), Book (uppercase Roman numbers), book chapter (lowercase Roman numbers), and page (Arabic numbers) (e.g., Book I, chapter 12, page 227 of *The Fellowship of the Ring* is cited as: “*FR* I.xii.227”).
- ***The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (rev. and expanded edition, 2023)** is cited by letter number (#) and page number(s) (pp.) (e.g., a quote from page 203 in Letter #131 is cited as: “*Letters* #131, p.203”).

## Abbreviations

Due to the frequency of citations, several works are abbreviated in the text. The **Bibliography** at the end of this thesis has full publication details for each work. All works listed are by J.R.R. Tolkien unless otherwise noted.

<i>Aotrou</i>	<i>The Lay of Aotrou &amp; Itroun</i>
<i>Artist</i>	<i>J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator</i> (Wayne G. Hammond & Christina Scull)
<i>ATB</i>	<i>The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and other Verses from the Red Book</i> (rev. & expanded ed., 2014)
<i>Author</i>	<i>J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century</i> (Tom Shippey)
<i>Biography</i>	<i>Tolkien: A Biography</i> (Humphrey Carpenter)
<i>Bran</i>	<i>The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, to the Land of the Living; An Old Irish Saga</i> (Kuno Meyer)
<i>C&amp;G</i>	<i>J.R.R. Tolkien Companion &amp; Guide, vol. I: Chronology; vol. II: Reader's Guide, Part I: A-M; vol. III: Reader's Guide, Part II, N-Z</i> (Christina Scull & Wayne G. Hammond; revised & expanded ed., 2017)
<i>Celtic type</i>	"Tolkien's "'Celtic" type of legends': Merging Traditions" (Dimitra Fimi)
<i>Fairy Tale</i>	<i>There Would Always Be a Fairy Tale</i> (Verlyn Flieger)
<i>FCL</i>	<i>Letters from Father Christmas</i> (deluxe ed., 2019)
<i>FR</i>	<i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>
<i>Great War</i>	<i>Tolkien and the Great War</i> (John Garth)
<i>HH</i>	<i>The History of The Hobbit</i> (John D. Rateliff)
<i>Hobbit</i>	<i>The Hobbit</i>
<i>IT</i>	<i>Irische Texte</i> (Ernst Windisch & Whitley Stokes)
<i>Kullervo</i>	<i>The Story of Kullervo</i>
<i>Lays</i>	<i>The Lays of Beleriand</i>
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien</i> (rev. & expanded ed., 2023)
<i>Litt. Celtique</i>	<i>Introduction à l'Étude de la Littérature Celtique</i> (Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville)
<i>Lost Road</i>	<i>The Lost Road and Other Writings</i>
<i>Lost Tales I</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part One</i>
<i>Lost Tales II</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two</i>
<i>Mad Elves</i>	"'Mad' Elves and 'Elusive Beauty': Some Celtic Strands of Tolkien's Mythology" (Dimitra Fimi)
<i>Mael Dúin I</i>	"The Voyage of Mael Duin [part I]." (Whitley Stokes)
<i>Mael Dúin II</i>	"The Voyage of Mael Duin [part II]." (Whitley Stokes)



M&C	<i>The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays</i>
Morgoth	<i>Morgoth's Ring</i>
Music	<i>Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien's Mythology</i> (Verlyn Flieger)
Nature	<i>The Nature of Middle-earth</i>
Navigatio	<i>Navigatio sancti Brendani</i> (Denis O'Donoghue)
Peoples	<i>The Peoples of Middle-earth</i>
Poems	<i>The Collected Poems of J.R.R. Tolkien</i>
Question	<i>A Question of Time</i> (Verlyn Flieger)
RC	<i>The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion</i> (Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull)
Road	<i>The Road to Middle-earth</i> (Tom Shippey)
RK	<i>The Return of the King</i>
Sauron	<i>Sauron Defeated</i>
SG	<i>Silva Gadelica</i> (Standish Hayes O'Grady)
SGGK	<i>Sir Gawain &amp; the Green Knight</i> (corrected 1 <sup>st</sup> ed., 1936)
Shadow	<i>Return of the Shadow</i>
Shaping	<i>The Shaping of Middle-earth</i>
Silmarillion	<i>The Silmarillion</i>
TOFS	<i>Tolkien on Fairy-stories</i>
Treason	<i>The Treason of Isengard</i>
TT	<i>The Two Towers</i>
WB	<i>The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby</i> (Charles Kingsley, 1885 ed., illustrated by Linley Sambourne)
Worlds	<i>The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien: The Places that Inspired Middle-earth</i> (John Garth)
WN	<i>Wind from the North</i> (Joseph O'Neill)

# Chapter 1 Introduction and Literature Review

## 1.1 Project Overview

The aim of this project is to examine the significant and sustained influence of Irish literature across the corpus of J.R.R. Tolkien's mythopoeic writings— what is frequently termed his “legendarium” —and to analyse how he adapted and creatively revised Irish sources in his writings, by presenting a curated selection of significant examples and new findings.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have long called for a deeper appreciation of the Irish elements in Tolkien's writings. For example, in 1982 Gerald V. Gillespie observed that “[a] close study of the Eldar [i.e., High Elves] and their ‘history’ will show a similarity to Irish sources much closer and more extensive than any critic has heretofore remarked ... The comparisons between the matter of Tolkien's Eldar and early Irish literature ... seems to go deeper than a few allusions” (8).<sup>2</sup> Verlyn Flieger wrote in *A Question of Time* (1997), “There is a recognisable Irish strain in Tolkien's work, often overlooked in the search for sources and influences. We should not forget the knowledge of Irish myth shown” (155). Some previous studies have identified individual Irish (or Irish-themed) antecedents in Tolkien's work, such as the mediaeval Irish *Lebor gabála Érenn* or the Hiberno-Latin *Navigatio sancti Brendani*.<sup>3</sup> Other previous studies have analysed specific works of Tolkien's which were influenced by Irish material, for example, his poem *Imram*.<sup>4</sup> These, however, have been limited to article- or chapter-length treatments (see **Section 1.4 Literature Review**). Although excellent, this previous scholarship on Tolkien's

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<sup>1</sup> For definitions and use of terms as used in this thesis, see the **Definitions, Conventions & Abbreviations**.

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien's “Eldar” are those Elves (and their descendants) who heeded the call to leave Middle-earth and journey to Valinor, the Undying Land of the Valar, gods or angelic powers in Tolkien's legendarium; some of the Eldar later returned to Middle-earth in pursuit of Melkor/Morgoth, a Vala who stole the *silmarils*, jewels which contain the last primal light of the world.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Fimi, *Mad Elves*, Flieger, *Fairy Tale* 221-228, and Gillespie.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Kocher 204-212, and Roche.

Irish sources does not sufficiently convey the breadth and depth of Irish influence which pervades Tolkien's writings and, as such, scholars and fans alike have largely underestimated its import. Simply put, Tolkien's Irish sources and influences deserve more widespread recognition as one of the major foundations upon which Tolkien built his legendarium, next to Norse, Finnish, Old and Middle English, and Welsh sources and influences.

The rationale for this study is the present lack of a book-length systematic study on Tolkien's Irish sources and influences. Such studies exist on his Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Classical Greek and Roman, and Welsh sources.<sup>5</sup> This is, perhaps, due to a pervasive (although erroneous) notion that Tolkien did not have any Celtic influences (except perhaps for some Welsh influence on his language creation), and certainly not Irish ones, and anyway, if he did, they did not significantly affect the creation of his legendarium.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, as this thesis demonstrates, Tolkien can be linked to a wide selection of Irish literature and language study across the span of his long writing career: these include dictionaries, grammars, mythological texts and modern collections of Irish hero tales, Otherworld voyage literature, and scholarship on early Irish views of immortality, reincarnation and death. Even so, there is not enough space here to cover all aspects of Tolkien's Irish sources and influences. Within the limitations of its size and scope, specific objectives for the present study provide some focus.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Higgens (Anglo-Saxon), St Clair (Norse), H. Williams (Classical), Phelpsstead, and Hooker (Welsh); Burns's *Perilous Realms* is a source study of Tolkien's Norse and Celtic sources.

<sup>6</sup> For definitions of the terms "Celtic" and "Irish" as used in this thesis, see **Definitions, Conventions & Abbreviations**; for discussion on Tolkien's conceptions of the terms, see **Section 1.2.2**.

The objectives of this thesis are:

1. To assess the impact of Irish literature across the span of Tolkien's mythopoeic writings, with specific emphasis on new observations and findings; and
2. To identify and critically analyse the specific works of Irish (and Irish-themed) literature and language study that Tolkien owned, read, is suspected to have read, and/or referenced, including his volumes donated to the Bodleian and English Faculty libraries at Oxford University.<sup>7</sup>

In **Section 1.2 Background**, I examine (with an eye to disentangling) some of Tolkien's famous statements on his desire to restore a lost English mythology, on his understanding of and views upon "Celtic things," Ireland, and the Irish language, and some reasons why Tolkien might deny "Celtic" and more specifically "Irish" influence on his legendarium. This introductory chapter is then rounded out with **Section 1.3 Framework and Methodology** of the research study, **Section 1.4 Literature Review** of previous scholarship on Tolkien's Irish sources and influences, and **Section 1.5 Thesis Organisation**.

This thesis represents an important and original contribution to prior knowledge in that it presents the first book-length, systematic critical analysis of the role of Irish literature and language study in Tolkien's works. As specifically Irish antecedents have been lamentably under-researched within Tolkien studies, this thesis breaks new ground, treating Irish literature in its own right as a major category of Tolkien's source material and, thus, this thesis helps to rebalance conceptions of Tolkien's well-spring of inspiration and creativity.

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<sup>7</sup> For a list of these titles, see **Appendix A, Part 1 Tolkien's Books on Irish Subjects, Bodleian Library, Oxford**.

## 1.2 Background

### 1.2.1 “A Mythology for England”

It has been repeated often enough to have become a sort of scripture that Tolkien’s impetus to write the *Silmarillion*, his collection of mythopoeic stories set in “Middle-earth,” was to create “a mythology for England.” Anders Stenström observes that Tolkien never used that precise phrase (310), while Tom Shippey argues that Tolkien said something similar on more than one occasion (“Tolkien and Iceland” 187). In a letter to the publisher Milton Waldman written c.1951, when he was hoping Waldman would publish both the *Silmarillion* material and *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien wrote,

once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind 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: to England; to my country. (*Letters* #131, p.203)

In a 1956 letter to a Mr Thompson, Tolkien admitted to “[h]aving set myself a task, the arrogance of which I fully recognised and trembled at: being precisely to restore to the English an epic tradition and present them with a mythology of their own” (*Letters* #180, p.335).<sup>8</sup>

If Tolkien’s desire was to restore to the English “a mythology of their own” (a body of more or less connected legend), or to re-create one out of philological and historical remnants, it was a reaction to the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries’ Romantic quest for national mythologies and epics, characterised by such works as

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<sup>8</sup> Tolkien’s use of the terms *legend*, *epic tradition*, and *mythology* in these letters all relate to traditional stories that a group of people tells about their heroes and foundational events which preserve conceptions of cultural identity.

Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835) and Nikolai Grundtvig's *Nordens Mytologi* (1808 and 1832). Shippey observes, "every year must have seemed to bring a completely new literary treasure," including Russia's *Song of Igor* (1797), von der Hagen's *Nibelungenlied* (1810), the Grimm's edition of the Norse *Elder Edda* (1812), Thorkelin's *Beowulf* (1815), Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (1835), and the French *Chanson de Roland* (1837) ("Grimm, Grundtvig, Tolkien" 81-82). Flieger adds Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765), Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812), Villemarqué's *Barzaz-Breiz: Chants Populaires de la Bretagne* (1839), and Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1860), among others, as the sort of collections Tolkien desired for England, "to recover (or, in Tolkien's case, supply) a folk tradition that would contribute to and validate a cultural identity" (*Aotrou* xvi-xvii). Mark Williams observes, "any culture worth its salt had to have a large-scale narrative that would sum up the nation's legendary past and launch its present ambitions under the auspices of divine providence" (*Celtic Myths* 122-123). In his own words, Tolkien said that he was "grieved" by the poverty of England's legends:

... it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not 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. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalised, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. (*Letters* #131, p.203)

Irish and Scottish mythological texts traced the lineage of their people back to ancient kingdoms in existence prior to the Roman conquest of Britain, and both the Irish and the Scots "drew on these myths as a counteroffensive to English domination of their countries" (Gallant 29). Thus, as Dimitra Fimi asserts, "in the 'Celtic' parts of [Great] Britain a sense of separate national and cultural heritage was maintained" (*Mad Elves* 159). Among these products of Romantic nationalism were translations of mediaeval literature, literary constructions of oral material, and the creative retellings of literature from a variety of eras. Key Irish collections include Thomas Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*

(1825); William Butler Yeats's *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), and Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster* (1902) and *Gods and Fighting Men: The Story of the Tuatha de Danaan and of the Fianna of Ireland* (1904). A century earlier, James Macpherson had collected and embellished Scottish material to create the Ossian cycle of epic poems, immediately "a source of national pride" (Gallant 36).

England lacked a similar folk tradition or narrative. As Fimi observes, "since the dominant and leading role of the English in the creation and maintenance of the [British] Empire was never challenged or contested until the Irish successfully did so in the early twentieth century, there was no need for a specifically English national identity to emerge" (*Mad Elves* 159). There was also a lack of information on the pre-Christian beliefs of the English, that is, the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and other groups who migrated to Britain starting in the fifth century of the Common Era (CE). Tolkien, according to Shippey, "was jealous of the much better-preserved Welsh and Irish folk-traditions, as of the Norse. He did his best with scraps of native [English] lore that survived the post-Conquest 'defoliation'" (*Road* 306).

At times, Tolkien rejected the identification of "England" with "Britain." He wrote to his son Christopher in 1943, "I love England (not Great Britain and certainly not the British Commonwealth (grr!))" (*Letters* #53, p.92).<sup>9</sup> In a 1958 letter to Mrs L.M. Cutts, he wrote, "if *The Lord of the Rings* 'is 'English' — (not British, please) — that is because I am English'" (C&G II.339). He identified his family's ethnicity even more narrowly as "Mercian or Hwiccan (of Wychwood)," that is, modernly, as a "West-midlander" (*Letters* #95, p.156; #163, p.311; and #165, p.318). Thus, one impetus behind Tolkien's tales of Middle-earth was to create something specifically English (i.e., related to the pre-Norman Conquest peoples in England, the "*Englisc*" as they

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<sup>9</sup> Tolkien's conception of "England" is well-documented; see, for example, Hostetter and A. Smith, and Drout, "A Mythology."

described themselves),<sup>10</sup> something that would restore or replace the national mythology which, he felt, had certainly once existed but had been lost (e.g., to invasion, Christianisation, the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, industrialisation and loss of the English folk tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).<sup>11</sup> He was not the only one who yearned for an English epic: Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), and G. K. Chesterton's *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1911) all seek to re-mythologise English history (although, of the works listed, only Chesterton's can be considered specifically "*Englisc*"). Carl F. Hostetter and Arden R. Smith succinctly summarise, "By his own criteria, Tolkien could create a mythology for England only by setting it on English soil, writing it in Old English, and featuring figures from English or at least Germanic mythology; or at any rate by encompassing elements of English geography, language, and mythology within his own" (282).

At other times, Tolkien appeared to conceive of England as part of a larger, interconnected geographic region: "the North West" (i.e., northwestern Europe). For example, in the same letter to Waldman where Tolkien stated his desire was, "to make a body of more or less connected legend" which he could dedicate "to England," he immediately said those legends,

should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil 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). (*Letters* #131, p.203, italics added)

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<sup>10</sup> See Rambaran-Olm and Wade for a general discussion on the shifting designations of the "*Englisc*"— including the problematic term "Anglo-Saxon"—and the political ramifications of those designations.

<sup>11</sup> See Drout, "A Mythology."



In 1955, Tolkien wrote something similar about *The Lord of the Rings* to his friend W.H. Auden (1907-1973). Tolkien said he experienced, “the deep response to legends (for lack of a better word) that have what I would call the North-western temper and temperature,” and that *The Lord of the Rings* was set in an imaginary world, but one with the air of the west of the Old World (*Letters* #163, p.311).

And in 1967, he wrote it was not the “North” nor the “Nordic” which had his affection, but the “*North-west of Europe ... as a man’s home should. I love its atmosphere, and know more of its histories and languages than I do of other parts*” (*Letters* #294, pp.528-529, italics added). Accordingly, these statements claiming he desired the tone and quality of *Britain and the hither parts of Europe*, the *North-western temper and temperature*, the atmosphere of *the North-west of Europe*, complicate the idea that Tolkien’s legendarium was meant to be “a mythology for England” alone.

There were other complicating factors. Tolkien’s “body of more or less connected legend” was not focused solely on the heroic past, but was also concerned with the making of new meaning in response to a host of modern ills such as social disintegration, secularisation, and rapid industrialisation. Matthew Sterenberg identifies this approach as “mythic thinking,” that is, “the belief that myths—explanatory narratives of perennial relevance that deal with ultimate questions — were vital sources of meaning, indispensable frameworks for interpreting experience, and essential tools for coping with modernity” (2). In 1954, Auden lamented “the disappearance of a homogenous [European] society with a common cult, a common myth, common terms of reference” (69). Similarly, T.S. Eliot described modern European culture as “barren of myths,” and English myth as “pitifully diminished” (“The Romantic Englishman” 1). A wide range of British intellectuals were engaged in mythic thinking in the twentieth-century as their literature, art, cultural criticism, and philosophical, psychological, and theological treatises responded to ancient and newly created mythic narratives (Sterenberg 3-4). Among these were Tolkien and his friend C.S. Lewis whose myth-making was explicitly Christian as they both used myth “in an effort to redress what they saw as

the spiritual emptiness of a secular age” (Stereberg 14). Even as young men, Tolkien and his school friends sought to do something similar. His friend, Geoffrey Bache Smith (who will take centre stage in **Chapter 2**), wrote that the role of their art would be “to re-establish sanity, cleanliness, and the love of real and true beauty in everyone’s breast” (quoted in *Great War* 105). Another friend, Rob Gilson, told Tolkien that they could become “great moral reformer[s]” (quoted in *Great War* 105). Tolkien’s myth-making also seemed to embody a desire to recapture his idyllic English childhood. By the summer of 1896, Tolkien had moved with his mother and brother to rural Sarehole, at that time a hamlet a mile or so beyond the southern limits of urban Birmingham. His biographer Humphrey Carpenter calls the effect of this move, “deep and permanent. Just at the age when his imagination was opening out, [Tolkien] found himself in the English countryside” (*Biography* 27). The few years he spent there were among the happiest of his life, though short-lived. By the end of 1904, Tolkien’s mother had sickened and died, and the boys were living in rented lodgings in industrial Birmingham. In a diary entry on a 1933 car ride through his childhood haunts, Tolkien laments Sarehole’s subsequent development into “a huge tram-ridden meaningless suburb ... How I envy those whose precious early scenery has not been exposed to such violent and peculiarly hideous change” (*Biography* 129-130).

These statements paint a picture full of narrative tensions: Tolkien’s legendarium should be rooted in the heroic past, but also redress modern ills, and embody Tolkien’s personal idyll, as well; it should be English, but not British, but also northwestern European. As Verlyn Flieger says in “The Arch and the Keystone,” oppositions like these, “are the sources of Tolkien’s power and the tension between them is the energy that unites it” (16). Other such tensions exist in Tolkien’s views on “Celtic things.”

### 1.2.2 They “are not Celtic!”

Just as it has often been said that Tolkien wanted to write “a mythology for England,” it has also been frequently repeated that Tolkien created his Middle-

earth legendarium from the bones of “Northern” European material (i.e., Norse, Anglo-Saxon, and Finnish), and explicitly *not* from the “Celtic” (i.e., Irish, Scottish, Welsh, etc.). In 1937, one of his publisher’s outside readers, Edward Crankshaw, called Tolkien’s invented names “eye-splitting Celtic names” and his *Silmarillion* material “mad, bright-eyed ... Celtic art” (*Letters* #19, p.34, editorial note). Tolkien responded hotly that his names,

... are not Celtic! Neither are the tales. I do know Celtic things (many in their original languages Irish and Welsh), and feel for them a certain distaste: largely for their fundamental unreason. They have bright colour, but are like a broken stained glass window reassembled without design. They are in fact ‘mad’ as your reader says. (26)

“Taking this at face value,” Flieger writes, “we would not necessarily expect to find a strongly Celtic presence in Tolkien’s mythos” (*Music* 122). Fimi concurs that such antipathetic statements as these could “be taken as a definitive discouragement to research in Tolkien’s Celtic sources” (*Celtic type* 51).

The result of such perceived discouragement may be felt in the lack of studies on Celtic sources, and specifically Irish sources, in several recent source study collections on Tolkien’s works. The essays in George Clark and Daniel Timmons’s *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances: Views of Middle-earth* (2000) cover Old Norse and English sources (old, mediaeval and modern), but nothing Celtic. Jason Fisher’s *Tolkien and the Study of his Sources* (2011) includes essays on Biblical, Latin, and English sources (old, mediaeval and modern), but again, nothing Celtic. The essays in Jane Chance’s collection, *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader* (2004), examine the sources of Tolkien’s mythology in four categories: the Classics, Old Norse, Old English, and the Finnish *Kalevala*, but Celtic material is summarily excluded from consideration, as she writes in her introduction:

What is still uncertain is what Tolkien may have meant in creating a ‘mythology for England,’ and where he turned for models. Generally he appeared to be looking for some uniquely British (probably Celtic) paradigm that might be celebrated as a national myth. But however

one might strive to identify some system of Celtic supernatural for the British, particularly one associated with Wales and the myth of King Arthur, it was nearly impossible to differentiate Arthurian legend from the French contamination of chivalry, an institution Tolkien loathed ... As much as Tolkien wished to incorporate a system of *faërie* and perilous realm in his own fiction, and as much as he realised the counterpart to it existed in Celtic mythology, it was impossible for him to accept Arthurian legend as indubitably English. (1)

Flieger similarly notes that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one of the great “sparse remnants of early English mythic poetry” could not be “England’s *Kalevala*”; Sir Gawain “is directly connected to Arthur and his court, therefore Celtic or British rather than English” (Flieger, “A Mythology for Finland” 281, 282).<sup>12</sup> Both of these statements may lead readers to believe that for Tolkien there was no Celtic mythology *but* the Arthurian, and since the Arthurian would not serve his desire for something genuinely “English,” he therefore did not model his legendarium on anything Celtic.

But Celtic sources have long been accepted as influential on Tolkien’s mythopoeic creations. In his list of “Tolkien’s Sources: The True Tradition,” Shippey includes the Irish *Voyage of Bran* (Road 343-352). The *Mabinogion* and Arthurian romance also make Shippey’s list, yet Shippey states elsewhere that Croker’s *Irish Fairy Legends* were no help in Tolkien’s search for “English myths, and English legends, and English fairy-stories,” and that Tolkien “refused to borrow from Celtic tradition, which he regarded as alien” (Shippey, “Tolkien and Iceland” 188). On the other hand (as previously quoted), Tolkien wanted his body of legend to possess “the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things)” (*Letters* #131, p.203). On 28 January 1929, after taking up the chair in Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford, Tolkien delivered a lecture at his

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<sup>12</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* also has a Middle Irish precursor in *Fled Bricrenn* (“The Feast of Bricriu”), preserved in a twelfth-century manuscript which likewise features a beheading game, a point which Tolkien and Gordon discuss in their “Introduction” to the 1936 corrected 1<sup>st</sup> edition of *Sir Gawain* (SGGK xii).

former institution, the University of Leeds, entitled, *Celts and Teutons in the Early World*. Carl Phelpstead found among Tolkien's manuscripts preserved in the Bodleian Library some draft material for that lecture in which Tolkien states, "I will mark myself as a Celtophile—if not a genuine Celt" (Phelpstead 15).<sup>13</sup> In the more famous *English and Welsh*, the inaugural lecture for the O'Donnell Lectures series which Tolkien presented on 21 October 1955 at the University of Oxford, he stated that his "large 'work'" (i.e., *The Lord of the Rings*) contained "much of what I personally have received from the study of things Celtic" (M&C 162).

So, what did Tolkien mean by "genuine ancient Celtic things" and "Celtic things (many in their original languages Irish and Welsh)" (*Letters* #131, p.203; #19, p.26)? Tolkien was referring specifically to famous Irish and Welsh narratives like the *Táin bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle-Raid of Cooley') and the *Mabinogion*, respectively, both of which he owned in multiple editions. In *English and Welsh*, Tolkien said that the only useful purpose for a term like "Celtic" was "linguistic classification" (M&C 170)— in this case, referring to the family of languages which includes Brythonic/British (e.g., Welsh, Breton and Cornish) and Goidelic/Gaelic (e.g., Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx). But in the 1955 letter to Auden, Tolkien's reference to "the British type of Celtic" refers exclusively to the Welsh language (*Letters* #163, p.313).

What Tolkien objected to was the misapplication of the term to a single, homogeneous Celtic "race" (M&C 173). While the idea of "Celtic countries" remains a useful concept justified by the geographic limits of Celtic-speaking territories, the idea of a single Celtic "culture" composed of, among others, Welsh, Breton, Cornish, Irish, Scottish, and Manx peoples is a modern idea (W. Davies 365-366). Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), in his highly influential lecture series, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (published 1867), stoked up belief in the presence of two distinct "races" in the British Isles: the "steady-going Saxon" and the "sentimental" Celt

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<sup>13</sup> By "Celtophile," Tolkien may have simply meant a person with a keen interest in Celtic languages and literature; Phelpstead is quoting from MS Tolkien A19/3 fol. 111r.

(111). In his O'Donnell lecture, Tolkien opined, "To many ... 'Celtic' of any sort is, nonetheless, a magic bag into which anything may be put, and out of which almost anything can come" (M&C 185-186). And indeed, as Joep Leerson explains, the term "Celtic" has been used for

a wide range of connotations for all its lack of precise meaning. Vague and disparate as the 'Celtic' tradition in European culture may be, known almost exclusively from outside reports, its name, by virtue of its very imprecision, can attract all sorts of speculations and prejudice; the Celts can be disparaged as barbarians or praised as Noble Savages; they can fall under the shadow of ethnocentrism or be glorified in the spotlight of primitivism; they can be exoticized or identified with ... they can be made to fit any role. (3)<sup>14</sup>

Tolkien understood that Arnold's myth of the Celts as "wild incalculable poetic" and the Saxons as "solid and practical when not under the influence of beer" had "no value at all" (M&C 172). He objected to the idea of the "Celts" as mythic "immutable creatures" unchanging from antiquity and still observable in the modern Irish or Welsh (M&C 170). Tolkien was also critical of the more general application of the term "Celtic" to a single type of art or a standard of beauty (see *Letters* #19, p.35; #98, p.165; #124, p.193; and #131, p.203). Considering the multiplicity of Celtic languages, literatures, art, cultures, histories, etc., Tolkien was precisely correct in stating his *Silmarillion* names and tales "are not Celtic!": they are Tolkienian (although they may have been influenced by, more precisely, Irish or Welsh, or Breton literature).

As Fimi notes, "from the 1980s and on, the concept of a homogeneous 'Celtic' people in Britain begun to be challenged and deconstructed" ("Introduction" 2). Tolkien, then, was ahead of his time, for his statements reflect an understanding that the term "Celtic" has different meanings for different academic disciplines. As

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<sup>14</sup> For more discussion on modern constructions of Celtic identity, see also Patrick Sims-Williams's "Celtomania and Celtoscepticism" and "Visionary Celt."

Fimi notes, “Celtic studies” is itself a recognised academic category, and the fields of folklore studies and linguistics still use the term “Celtic” with some validity (see “Introduction” 1). Tolkien’s views, then, far from being anti-“Celtic,” were layered, nuanced, and based upon his scholarly understandings of that term as imprecise and stereotypical. So, when Tolkien writes that he wants his legends to possess “the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things),” this is not because he wants to exclude “Celtic things” (he specifically *wanted* to include them), but because the term “Celtic” itself was often misused (*Letters* #131, p.203).

### 1.2.3 An “unloving alien” of Gaelic

In spite of his nuanced understanding of the label “Celtic,” when Tolkien used it to refer to the Indo-European languages Welsh and Irish, he did not consider the two as equal. Phelpstead notes that “Tolkien himself had very different feelings towards the Welsh and Irish languages (indeed it would hardly be an exaggeration to say he had diametrically opposed feelings towards them)” (25-26). Tolkien found the Welsh language “beautiful” (*M&C* 189). He wrote Welsh was, “in some linguistic moods, very attractive ... because it seems to fit the rather ‘Celtic’ type of legends and stories told of its speakers” (*Letters* #144, p.265). The Welsh language gave him “an abiding linguistic-aesthetic satisfaction” (*Letters* #163, p.312). A prodigious linguist, Tolkien knew Latin, French, German, Middle and Old English, Finnish, Gothic, Greek, Icelandic, Norse, Spanish and Welsh (among others), and he invented several of his own languages and dialects. But the Irish language vexed him. In 1958, he wrote, “the Irish language I find wholly unattractive” (*Letters* #213, p.412). And in 1967, he claimed to have “no liking at all for Gaelic from Old Irish downwards, as a language, but it is of course of great historical and philological interest, and I have at various times studied it. (With alas! very little success),” and

he called himself “an unloving alien” of what he characterised as “a mushy language” (*Letters* #297, p.542).<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding, as Phelpstead muses, Tolkien’s collection of Irish books held by Oxford University, “certainly bears witness to the vigour and determination with which he attempted to learn Irish” (27). His books on Irish literature and language study currently in the Bodleian Library number some fifty volumes, some purchased early in his career, others later.<sup>16</sup> We can, in fact, trace some of Tolkien’s various attempts to teach himself Old and Modern Irish through this personal book collection. Tolkien’s earliest documented attempt to learn something of the Old Irish language occurred in early 1914 when, as an Oxford undergraduate, he acquired the first volumes of his “Celtic Library”: Rudolf Thurneysen’s hefty two-volume *\*Handbuch des Alt-Irischen: Grammatik, Texte und Wörterbuch* (Handbook of Old Irish: Grammar, Texts, and Dictionary, 1909). Here, he made hundreds of marks over, what were likely, multiple periods of engagement (see **Chapter 2. “Exon. Oxon.”**). Several of his books were acquired during his time on the English faculty at Leeds University (1920-1925), with most of them dated “1922,” as Fimi has noted (*Celtic type* 51). She writes, “that could be a reflection of the book-buying zeal of a young academic who finds himself in his first full-time job” (*Celtic type* 51). Tolkien’s last documented attempt to study the Irish language corresponds with his first year as an external examiner for the National University of Ireland. His first visit to Ireland was in June–July 1949 for the Summer Examinations; a second visit occurred later that year, in September–October for the Autumn Examinations (C&G

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<sup>15</sup> Tolkien’s use of the term “Gaelic” here is a bit unclear: is he referring to the totality of the Gaelic languages (i.e., Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx), or exclusively to Irish, to Scottish Gaelic, or (less likely) to Manx? He had books on and in all three languages in his “Celtic” library.

<sup>16</sup> Phelpstead estimated that there were approximately thirty volumes on Irish language and literature “including grammars, readers and editions of texts” (27); the present study considers approximately fifty volumes in the Bodleian and includes some titles Phelpstead may have excluded (for a list, see **Appendix A, Part 1**).



I.372, 373).<sup>17</sup> Being in Ireland was probably the catalyst for this late attempt at learning Irish, and on one of those two occasions, Tolkien acquired a copy of Eugene O’Growney’s *\*Ceačtanna simplide gaedilge / Simple lessons in Irish*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (1912) which he signed and dated, “JRR Tolkien, Dublin 1949.” Tolkien also engaged with this text on multiple occasions with markings and annotations in red crayon, grey pencil and a few stray blue ink marks. Tolkien was also working at this time on translating short stories or excerpts from Bergin’s *\*Sgéalaigheacht Chéitinn: Stories from Keating’s History of Ireland* (1930). His annotations and glosses of stories #12-31 are also in pencil and blue ink. Tolkien translated some words here and there, but he did not get very far, even on stories #19, 23 and 25 into which he put much effort. We can see a progression over December 1949 and January 1950 as he dates his work on a series of short stories:

- #19. “*Guaire agus Diarmaid*” (“Gúaire and Dermot”), dated in blue ink, “6·XII·49” (i.e., 6 December 1949)
- #22. “*Mo Chua agus a Thrí Seóide*” (“Mo Chua and his Three Jewels”), dated in blue ink, “13··12··’49” (i.e., 13 December 1949)
- #23. “*Mór-Dháil Droma Ceat*” (“The Great Muster at Drumcett”), dated in blue ink at line 148, “24-1-’50” (i.e., 24 January 1950)
- #30. “*Diarmaid na nGall*” (“Dermot of the Foreigners”), dated in pencil, “29-1-50” (i.e., 29 January 1950).

He stopped working in the book after story #31, so, maybe the end of January 1950 or soon after. Author Naomi Mitchison wrote to Tolkien in the autumn of 1949 to praise his new book, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, published that October (*Letters*

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<sup>17</sup> “From 1949, Tolkien travelled frequently to Ireland, largely on business but also for pleasure. In 1949–51, 1954, and 1958–9, typically in late June to early July and in late September or October ... [he served] as an external examiner for the National University of Ireland” (C&G II.578). See entry on “Ireland, Republic of (Eire) [sic.],” for more detail on Tolkien’s personal and professional travel in Ireland (C&G II.578-579).

#122, p.189, editorial note). Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond note that she “apparently asked him about some Icelandic and Irish names” (C&G I.375). Tolkien’s response to Mitchison, dated 18 December 1949 (in the middle of the four dates he marked in Bergin’s *Stories*), expresses his frustration and reveals the source of his famous lament, “in spite of my efforts I have always been rather heavily defeated by Old Irish, or indeed its modern descendants” (*Letters* #122, p.189).<sup>18</sup> Even so, Tolkien persisted, at least on some level. In August 1967— over fifty years after his first forays into Thurneysen’s *Handbuch* —Tolkien wrote he had been “recently looking for something in a Gaelic dictionary” (*Letters* #297, p.542).

Despite this lifelong interest in Old and Modern Irish, none of Tolkien’s invented languages are known to be based on them. Nevertheless, there may be some isolated aspects of his language development which employed elements of Irish. As far back as 1969, Cory Seidman Panshin argued that Tolkien had utilised some aspects of Irish phonetics, historical sound change, and poetic forms in *The Lord of the Rings* (7-8). There are several popular theories on the Internet claiming that individual words derive from Irish origins, for example, that the name “Gollum” derives from *Pollnagollum* in County Clare, the longest cave in Ireland (i.e., Poll na gColm, “the hole of the pigeons”) (Ó Séaghdha). Little credible evidence is offered to support most of these Internet claims, however there may still be a handful of Tolkien’s invented words which are legitimately associated with the Irish language, e.g., *arda*, *Forgoil*, *lintips*, *nazg*, and a very few others (see **Appendix B, “Ten Words and Names Invented by Tolkien with Irish Associations”**). But Irish does not appear to have been a major source of inspiration in Tolkien’s language invention. Fimi speculates that Tolkien’s continued lack of success in mastering Irish was probably the reason he found it so “unattractive” (*Mad Elves* 158). Phelpstead concurs, “Could it be that the difficulties of the [Irish] language created Tolkien’s dislike of

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<sup>18</sup> e.g., Modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Tolkien has examples of both languages in his “Celtic” library.

it?” (27). Nevertheless, he continued to work at Irish language learning periodically over his lifetime.

In addition to his negative statements about the Irish language, Tolkien made, or is credited with making, some negative statements about Ireland itself. In a 1979 conversation between Tolkien’s biographer Humphrey Carpenter, Prof. George Sayer and Dr Clyde S. Kilby, Sayer recalled a conversation where Tolkien described Ireland itself as “naturally evil,” and that “he said he could feel evil coming up from the earth, from the peat bogs, from the clumps of trees, even from the cliffs, and this evil was only held in check by the great devotion of the southern Irish to their religion” (“A Dialogue” 16). In notes written to his American publisher Houghton Mifflin in 1955, Tolkien wrote, “I have spent a good deal of time in Ireland, and am since last July actually a D. Litt. of University College Dublin; but be it noted I first set foot in ‘Eire’ in 1949 after *The Lord of the Rings* was finished, and find both Gaelic and the air of Ireland wholly alien— though the latter (not the language) is attractive” (*Letters* #165, pp.318-319).<sup>19</sup>

Yet, as with many of Tolkien’s statements, we have contradictory evidence which shows that he was not necessarily monolithic in his opinions. Carpenter writes that Tolkien found Ireland “much to his taste” (*Biography* 141). During a 1952 holiday, he made nine drawings of the Kerry landscape. Hammond and Scull write, “He was particularly moved by the sky and the varying weather” (*Artist* 32). In the same 1958 letter where Tolkien claimed to find the Irish language “wholly unattractive,” he admitted to being fond of “Ireland (Eire: Southern Ireland [sic.]) . . . and of (most of) its people” (*Letters* #213, p.412). He told his grandson, Michael George, in 1965, “I enjoyed my holiday (or high-speed raid) in Ireland, where I have a good many friends, and am treated as sort of Irish-by-adoption sealed by the possession of a Dublin degree” (C&G II.578). And in 1971, he wrote, “I am always happy when I am

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<sup>19</sup> Tolkien was awarded an honorary doctorate degree by University College Dublin in 1954.

in Eire [sic.] (except, of course, the North, where I have never been) and am now suffering from acute Eire-starvation" (C&G II.579). In 2012, Dr Tom Hogan reminisced about the times that Tolkien had stayed with his family in Dublin in the 1950s. Tolkien wrote a number of letters to the Hogan family expressing "his enjoyment of Ireland and his regrets at not being able to visit more often" (15). Doubtless, Tolkien appreciated the lack of mass industrialisation which had plagued his own childhood home of Sarehole, but how could these expressions of joy in visiting Ireland be from the same man who claimed the Irish landscape was "naturally evil," oozing evil from its peat bogs, trees, and cliffs? Of that incident, we actually have no direct statement by Tolkien of such feelings; we only have Prof. Sayer's recollection transcribed from a missing audio tape of a conversation held by three men some years after Tolkien's death. John D. Rateliff observes, "So there it is: a striking statement, entirely devoid of context, which we only have by a somewhat indirect route. No way to tell how serious Tolkien was when he said it, or how accurately our third-hand record of it represents his thought" ("Evil Emanating"). Rateliff argues that the statement in question may even have been made by C.S. Lewis's brother, Warnie (Warren Hamilton Lewis, 1895-1973), and misremembered and misattributed to Tolkien ("Evil in Ireland").

Additionally, would Tolkien's dislike of the Irish language mean that he necessarily disliked Irish stories? Or, that there is no Irish literary influence on his legendarium at all? According to Flieger, Tolkien's writing, "seems to toggle between diametrically opposite positions" ("Arch and the Keystone" 7). His dislike for French fairy stories, for example, "does not preclude influence— indeed, it can sometimes foster it" (*Fairy Tale* 203). By the same token, Tolkien's frustrations to teach himself the Irish language may have spurred on the purchase of more Irish grammars and readers over the years. Tolkien certainly owned or was at least familiar with more Celtic and specifically Irish volumes than are currently in the Bodleian's Tolkien

collection.<sup>20</sup> His writings refer to Magnus Maclean's *The Literature of the Celts: Its History and Romance* (1902), Kuno Meyer's *The Voyage of Bran*, the Hiberno-Latin *Navigatio sancti Brendani* ('The Voyage of St. Brendan') and Benedeit's Anglo-Norman *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan* (c.1121), as well as *Immram curaig Mail Dúin* ("The Voyage of Mael Dúin's Coracle") (see *Lost Road* 80, 82 & 99, and *Sauron* 261-265). In any case, as Terry Gunnell observes,

There is no question that Tolkien knew his Old Irish literature, as one can see from his references to the one-handed god Nuadu, to the land of eternal youth called Tír na Nóg [sic.], to vanishing islands, to the Imram voyages of Bran and Brendan, and to the magical world of Hy Breasail that was supposed to exist across the sea in the far west. (10-11)

Tolkien's repeated work to understand Old and Modern Irish suggests he may have had a better understanding of them than is revealed by the self-deprecatory statements in his letters. He frequently rated his own skills modestly as in his 1936 lecture, *On Fairy-stories*, where he claimed, "though I have been a lover of fairy-stories since I learned to read ... I have not studied them professionally. I have been hardly more than a wandering explorer (or trespasser) in the land" (*TOFS* 27). Or, when he wrote to Rayner Unwin in 1956 on translations of his works and said, "my linguistic knowledge seldom extends, beyond the detection of obvious errors and liberties, to the criticism of the niceties required" (*Letters* #188, p.358fn). In another letter to Unwin, he expressed concern that the title of "professor" gave people "a false impression of 'learning', especially in 'folklore' and all that" (*Letters* #281, p.511). Such claims were patently absurd by most people's standards, for Tolkien's remarkable knowledge of fairy-story, philology and folklore are on display in both his scholarly and mythopoeic writings. Consequently, his understanding of Irish

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that upon his death, "the bulk of Tolkien's books passed initially to his son Christopher, and that only a small part of these were donated to the two Oxford libraries mentioned above, while others were sold through an Oxford bookseller" (*Celtic type* 51).

language, literature, people and locations may not have been as paltry as is generally assumed.

### 1.2.4 Ireland “and its dwellers come not into these tales”

As with his interest in Old Irish language, Tolkien’s interest in mythopoeic literature, including Irish mythological texts, was germinated during his time as an Oxford undergraduate in the 1910s. There, he was exposed to the complex development of national legends. Chadwick’s *Origins of the English Nation* (1907) showed the young man how to repurpose Norse myths to serve an English national mythology (Cook 59-76 passim). Fridtjof Nansen’s *In Northern Mists* (1911) showed him how the Norse Vinland sagas had become “thoroughly mixed up” with the Irish *immrama* (Worlds 68; see also **Chapter 2**). In consequence, Tolkien became an early adopter of the theory that, “a broader range of Irish and Icelandic analogues are surely not simply chance common innovations ... we are presumably seeing Icelandic adoption of narrative ideas during a fairly intense period of oral, rather than literary, contact between the Western Scandinavian and Irish Sea cultural zones during the Viking Age and the ensuing century or so” (Hall, et al. 87).<sup>21</sup> On the philological landscape of the region, Tolkien himself said in *English and Welsh* (1955),

The north-west of Europe, in spite of its underlying differences of linguistic heritage— Goidelic, Brittonic, Gallic; its varieties of Germanic; and the powerful intrusion of spoken Latin —is as it were a single philological province, a region so interconnected in race,

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<sup>21</sup> Key post-Tolkien scholarship on Norse and Irish analogues includes, among others, work by Séamus Mac Mathúna (“Iceland and the Immrama” and “The Question of Irish Analogues in Old Norse”), and Rosemary Power (“Gaelic Love-tales in Iceland”; “Journeys to the Otherworld”; and “Njáls saga and the Battle of Clontarf”); on a related note is the theory that the Anglo-Saxon narrative poem *Beowulf* includes Irish analogues, on the subject of which see Martin Puhvel’s *Beowulf and the Celtic Tradition* (1981).

culture, history, and linguistic fusions that its departmental philologies cannot flourish in isolation. (M&C 188)

It is evident, even from his undergraduate days, that Tolkien enjoyed blending different mythological strands in order to (re-)construct the narrative tapestry of an interconnected North-western Europe. His early *Eärendel* poems demonstrate just such a mix of Germanic and Irish elements, as will be discussed in depth (see **Chapter 2**). Why, then, did he appear to deny Irish influence on his legendarium?

There may have been a variety of reasons why Tolkien never fully acknowledged the influence of Irish material on his legendarium. As I have already discussed above, Tolkien had an antipathy to the popular “Arnoldian” stereotypes attached to the term “Celt.” He was also frustrated over his failure to master the Irish language to his own exacting standards. He may have also been concerned with his work being compared to controversial Celtic projects like the poems attributed to Dafydd ap Gwilym by Iolo Morganwg in Wales or *The Poems of Ossian* by James Macpherson in Scotland, both of which were labelled as forgeries by some critics.<sup>22</sup>

Another reason he never fully acknowledged his debt to the influence of Irish material was likely to have been the intersection of the Irish Literary Revival and the campaign for Irish independence from Britain. Authors such as Standish James O'Grady (1846–1928), Lady Gregory (1852–1932), William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), George William Russell (who wrote under the pseudonym “Æ”, 1867–1935), James Stephens (c.1880–1950) and others reworked Irish mythological texts, fairy folklore, and other subjects of interest to Tolkien. For example, Tolkien shared with Yeats a harsh exile from an idyllic country youth and relocation to an unfamiliar and uncaring city. As Sarehole held a sacred place in Tolkien's memory, so did Sligo in Yeats's. Declan Kiberd writes, “The Sligo of [Yeats's] early childhood became a dream landscape, a never-never-land to which it was hopeless to expect to return”

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<sup>22</sup> On Morganwg, see Jenkins; on Macpherson, see Porter. For more discussion on Tolkien's reactions to the works of Macpherson, see **Chapter 2**.

(102). He argues that some of Yeats's early texts, "were attempts to deny civilisation and its discontents by escaping to the Happy Islands of Oisín and Tír na nÓg, the land of the forever young" (Kiberd 103). In their respective writings, then, can be seen a similar impulse to create a paradise from which Tolkien and Yeats could not be exiled. But Yeats and his cohort could not be openly acknowledged models for Tolkien as they "linked their aspirations for Irish independence to Irish folklore" (S. Sayers 278). Yeats wrote, for example, "Irish singers who are genuinely Irish in thought, subject and style must, whether they will or no, nourish the forces that make for the political liberties of Ireland" (qtd. in Marcus 7). And in an 1889 letter to Katharine Tynan, Yeats argued that the future of Ireland may depend on young writers writing for Ireland's use, and not England's (Marcus 61). Such sentiments would have been problematic for Tolkien. He had sympathy for the Irish cause, writing to his friend Christopher Wiseman in November 1914 that he was "a more & more convinced Home Ruler" (C&G III.1399).<sup>23</sup> And yet, Tolkien may have been leary of his legendarium becoming associated with Irish nationalism.

Additionally problematic was the neo-paganism which became attached to the Irish Revival. Mark Williams traces the efforts of Russell and Yeats "to fuse Irishness and occultism," including the redefinition of the Túatha Dé Danann as "Irish reflexes of Indian divinities," and the creation of a Celtic hermetic order along the lines of the Golden Dawn, complete with mysteries and rituals (*Ireland's Immortals*, 329, 332-335). Yeats biographer Phillip L. Marcus notes the lack of a clear boundary in Yeats's mind "between the 'real voice of Ireland' and the occult tradition and Eastern religions in which ancient beliefs were also preserved" (25). Mark Williams notes elsewhere, "[t]hey tended to think that pagan myth held the secret of a system of profound religious wisdom, corrective and *superior to Christianity*" (*Celtic Myths* 17, italics added). Tolkien, the devout Catholic, would not have wanted his

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<sup>23</sup> A "Home Ruler" was someone in support of the Irish campaign for limited self-governance within the United Kingdom (a dominant political movement from 1870 to the end of World War I), but someone who did not go as far as supporting Irish independence from Great Britain.



mythological project to have been associated with such alternative spiritual endeavours.<sup>24</sup> This was a conundrum for Tolkien. He desired “the fair elusive beauty” of early Irish mythological narratives, but without the Irish political or occultist baggage.

It is possible to visualise Tolkien’s anxiety about the place of Ireland in his legendarium by tracing the island’s physical location and status over time. In early iterations of the legendarium— *the Book of Lost Tales* (c.1917-1919) and *Ælfwine of England* (1920 or later) —a mortal mariner lands on the Elvish island of Tol Eressëa in the western Atlantic Ocean where he learns the stories of the fairies/Elves, and preserves them for posterity.<sup>25</sup> In one of these tales, the Elves are at war with dwarves, orcs and evil Men for supremacy of the “Great Lands” (Europe). Uin, the colossal primordial whale, uproots Tol Eressëa and uses it to ferry the Elves to the present-day location of England (in fact, Tol Eressëa *becomes* England) from where the Elves can launch their attack on the promontory of Rôs (i.e., perhaps Brittany; see *Lost Tales II* 285). But a jealous Maia (i.e., a spirit), Ossë, tries to wrench the island back to its original location and breaks it into two pieces (*Lost Tales II* 285). Tolkien wrote,

There was a land called England, and it was an island of the West, and before it was broken in the warfare of the Gods it was westernmost of all the Northern lands, and looked upon the Great Sea ... but that part that was broken was called Ireland and many names besides, and its dwellers come not into these tales. (*Lost Tales II* 312)

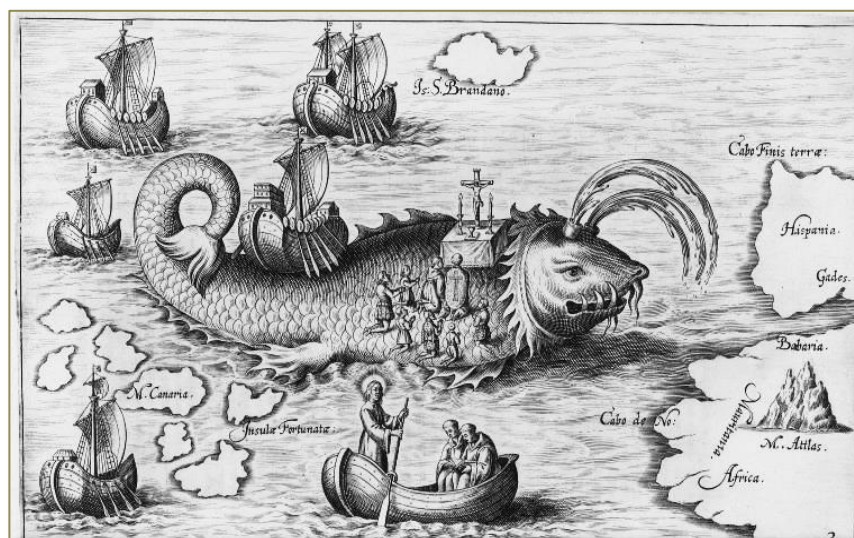
Ironically, Tolkien may have garnered the idea of dragging an island across the ocean from Irish sources. Tolkien’s Uin is reminiscent of the island-sized fish

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<sup>24</sup> It has been argued that Tolkien, himself, created a new pantheon of gods in *The Book of Lost Tales* and its later reimagining as *The Silmarillion*, but Burns (“Norse and Christian Gods”) and Houghton (“Augustine in the Cottage of Lost Play”) and others have countered that Tolkien’s Middle-earth cosmology is consonant with Catholic doctrine.

<sup>25</sup> Tolkien’s early legendarium used the terms “fairies” and “Elves” interchangeably.

Jasconius who ferries the Irish Saint Brendan and his brethren to the Promised Land in the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* ('The Voyage of St Brendan'), a text Tolkien mentioned several times in his writings (see **Chapters 2 & 4**, and see **Figure 1.2.4**, "St Brendan holding mass on the back of a whale").<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 1.2.4** Honorius Philiponus, "St Brendan holding mass on the back of a whale," Rare Book Division, New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1621. © Public Domain image

In the sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Early Modern Irish *Oidheadh chloinne Tuireann* ('The Violent death of the children of Tuireann'), summarised in Maclean's *Literature of the Celts* (another book Tolkien mentioned; see **Chapter 6**), the Fomorian King Balor, who is at war with the Túatha Dé Danann for the supremacy of Ireland, instructs his warriors, "put your cables round this island of Erin which

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<sup>26</sup> For more on Tolkien's Uin and Brendan's Jasconius, see Swank, "The Irish Otherworld Voyage."

gives us so much trouble, and tie it to the stems of your ships; then sail home, bringing the island with you" (141).<sup>27</sup>

But it was, ultimately, unworkable to gerrymander Ireland out of the story. As Marie Barnfield points out, "Ireland, Wales and Cornwall all lie between England and the Atlantic. A mythology based on westward voyages from England which had no reference to these Celtic areas would seem a little false" (Barnfield, "More Celtic Influences" 7). Later, in Tolkien's two unfinished time travel novels, *The Lost Road* (written c.1936) and *The Notion Club Papers* (written 1945), Tolkien accepts and embraces Ireland's location, viewing it, as the mediaeval English did, as a crossroads between the mundane and the magical.<sup>28</sup> In *The Lost Road*, Tolkien's ninth-century Anglo-Saxon sailors Éadwine and Ælfwine hear "strange tales from Ireland" of St Brendan, Mael Dúin and others who set out from the west coast for the "*Insula Deliciarum* [Island of Delights]—even Paradise" (*Lost Road* 80). The Anglo-Saxons have visions of Tol Eressëa and hear voices, but the west wind blows them back to Ireland before they can reach these otherworldly lands (*Lost Road* 80). In *The Notion Club Papers*, Saint Brendan (in a poem by Tolkien, but based on the *Navigatio*), is one of the rare few mortals who makes it to paradise and back again, but he dies soon after, "and his bones in Ireland lie" (*Sauron* 261-264). Thus, Ireland's physical location and function in the legendarium changed over time. Sometimes it was relegated to the margins, sometimes it served as a port or portal to the Otherworld, but Ireland was never absent from Tolkien's mental landscape of the legendarium.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In addition to Maclean, Tolkien may have known the scene from Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* (31) or her acknowledged source, Eugene O'Curry's English translation, *The Fate of the Children of Tuireann* (167 & 169).

<sup>28</sup> For discussion on the mediaeval view of Ireland as another world [*alter orbis*], see Byrne 42 & 149-176, as well as this thesis, **Chapter 5**.

<sup>29</sup> See also Barnfield's fascinating theories about the influence of Irish history, legend and geography on Tolkien's island nation of Númenor (Barnfield, "More Celtic Influences").

Again, for each of Tolkien's negative statements about Ireland or the broader category of "Celtic," there seem to have also been positive ones: he is an "unloving alien" of Gaelic, but he considers himself a "Celtophile"; his *Silmarillion* names and tales "are not Celtic!" but *The Lord of the Rings* contains much from his "study of things Celtic." Flieger writes, "in spite of (or perhaps because of) all that he himself has written, the essential J.R.R. Tolkien still eludes us. What he really thinks, what he really believes, is still and undoubtedly will continue to be a matter of conjecture and (of course) of lively debate" ("Arch and the Keystone" 6).

So, if looking at Tolkien's statements does not always give a clear idea of where he stands on an issue, then we should look at Tolkien's creations themselves to see what is actually there. For whether Tolkien's own tendency to downplay the significance of Irish influences on his mythopoeic writings was due to his inability to master the Irish language, his desire to avoid Arnoldian stereotypes, or his need to separate his legendarium from Irish nationalism and proto-New Age spiritualism (or all of these things), Tolkien's claim—that his tales "are not Celtic!"—simply does not hold up under the weight of the evidence. Marjorie Burns discovered in her study of Celtic and Norse influences in Tolkien's works that broadly "Celtic" influences comprise "a good half of what Tolkien had in mind" (*Perilous Realms* 13). Flieger similarly argues, "In spite of Tolkien's proclaimed distaste for things Celtic, the Celtic elements in his work are there for all to see. He placed them there intentionally and meant them to be a supporting buttress in his mythology" (*Music* 130).

This thesis takes an even more focused view by looking at the ways Tolkien used specifically *Irish* and *Irish-themed* material in his mythopoeic writings, and it offers robust counter-arguments to the conventional wisdom that Tolkien did not like or utilise Irish sources. In fact, we can see Irish sources just about everywhere in Tolkien's writings: the Otherworld voyage tales of Bran, Brendan, and Mael Dúin; mediaeval Irish narratives of the Túatha Dé Danann such as *Lebor gabála Érenn*, *Acallam na senórach*, and *Tochmarc Étaíne*; retellings and reshaping of Irish legends by modern authors Charles Kingsley, Lady Gregory and Joseph O'Neill; and

theoretical writings on Irish matters by Fridtjof Nansen, Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, Alfred Nutt, Kuno Meyer, and others. Yet, before embarking on the assessment of these and other works of Irish literature and language study associated with Tolkien's writings, we first need to look at how this thesis research was organised and conducted, and to survey prior scholarship in this area.

### 1.3 Framework and Methodology

In order to assess the impact of Irish literature across the span of Tolkien's mythopoeic writings (Objective 1), I selected *source criticism* as the theoretical framework for this thesis. While some areas of literary studies have been moving away from the concepts of *influence* and *source* in favour of Julia Kristeva's framework of *intertextuality* (cf. Mary Orr's *Intertextuality*, 2003), the practice of *source criticism* is still a robust theoretical approach in the field of Tolkien studies owing to the breadth and depth of Tolkien's personal and professional reading, and to his inspiration from mediaeval scholasticism, or mediaeval synthesis, which posited the interconnectedness of all things and attempted to systematise and harmonise different areas of knowledge (e.g., Christian theology with classical Greek philosophy) (cf. Diego Klautau's "Medieval Realism and Mythopoeia"). Understanding Tolkien's reading then, is key to understanding his analogies, comparisons and references, and thus, to understanding the aims and meanings of his mythopoeic writing. In order to identify and analyse Tolkien's sources (Objective 2), I identified and critically analysed specific works of Irish literature and language study that Tolkien owned, read, is suspected to have read and/or referenced, including, but not limited to, his volumes donated to the Bodleian and English Faculty libraries at Oxford University (see **Appendix A, Part 1** for the full list). This thesis also touches upon the discipline of the history of reading.

E.L. Ridsen notes that the concept of source criticism seems intuitively obvious: "what sources have influenced the book or author in question, and what other authors or works has he or she alluded to, drawn from, or incorporated in the work in hand?" (17). Tolkien himself discouraged source criticism of his works on multiple

occasions.<sup>30</sup> Famously, in *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien quotes George Dasent, “We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled ... By ‘the soup’ I mean the story as it is served up by its author or teller, and by ‘the bones’ its sources or material—even when (by rare luck) those can be with certainty discovered” (*TOFS* 39-40).<sup>31</sup> Despite this and other objections to using source criticism,<sup>32</sup> there is significant support for the practice from Shippey, Fisher, Ridsen, and Holly Ordway, particularly in Tolkien’s case.<sup>33</sup> Fisher writes, “No text stands entirely alone, and to ignore an author’s sources— particularly an author as richly allusive as Tolkien —is to risk stripping a text of its *context*” (“Tolkien and Source Criticism” 31, *italics original*). Shippey agrees, “All literary works bear some relation to the milieu in which they are composed and received, but we often do not realise how quickly elements of those milieux are forgotten ... Tolkien’s many contexts, personal, professional and cultural, now need a good deal of explanation for most contemporary readers” (“Introduction” 9). Even Tolkien himself tantalises would-be source-hunters by describing *The Lord of the Rings* as a seed grown “in the dark out of the leaf-mould of the mind: out of all that has been seen or thought or read, that has long ago been forgotten, descending into the deeps” (*Biography* 131). As a result, a specialist field of Tolkien source criticism has developed, as defined and modelled in Fisher’s *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources: Critical Essays* (2011). Fisher suggests two basic stages for testing a proposed source: (1.) determining the validity or plausibility of a source (i.e., did, or could, Tolkien have known it?), and (2.) discussing the use and consequences of a source (i.e., what did Tolkien do with it, and how does this

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<sup>30</sup> See “26 October 1958,” C&G I.563; and *Letters* #297, p.536; and #337, p.587.

<sup>31</sup> Tolkien quotes Dasent’s words, although Dasent was referring to comparative philology rather than fairy-stories.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, the discussion by Fisher, “Tolkien and Source Criticism,” 1, 29-30; Shippey, “Introduction” 10; and Ridsen 27.

<sup>33</sup> See Shippey, “Introduction” 9; Fisher “Tolkien and Source Criticism” 31; Ridsen 27; and Ordway 33.

knowledge affect the understanding and/or appreciation of his writings?) (“Tolkien and Source Criticism” 36).

As to the first of these stages— determining the validity or plausibility of a source — Fisher categorises Tolkien sources into four tiers, each with their own inherent considerations. The best sources, he says, are those which Tolkien admitted as *direct* influences (e.g., *Beowulf* or *Völuspá*), although these are “pretty rare” (“Tolkien and Source Criticism” 36). Lower tiers include sources which are *probable*, *possible*, *circumstantial* or *speculative*, at best. Fisher argues, “One must always keep in mind that source studies require a *causal* relationship, or at the least, the probability of one” (“Tolkien and Source Criticism” 37, italics original; see also **Table 1.3.1**).

**Table 1.3.1** Jason Fisher’s tiers for Tolkien source studies.

<b>1. Direct sources:</b> those Tolkien himself acknowledged
<b>2. Probable sources:</b> those Tolkien is known to have read, owned, enjoyed, or commented upon
<b>3. Possible sources:</b> those Tolkien never explicitly mentioned, but which are related to sources he is known to have read
<b>4. Circumstantial or speculative sources:</b> e.g., those known by one or more of Tolkien’s close associates, even if Tolkien himself never mentioned them

(Fisher, “Tolkien and Source Criticism” 36-37.)

Fisher’s framework can be useful when discussing specific published texts in the environment of modern print culture, but it may be of only limited value when analysing mediaeval, folkloric, and/or oral culture narratives because the frame privileges the concept of a specific written or printed *text* over the concept of a *narrative* which may be expressed in many different formats and languages. One example is the story of the Brendan voyage which survives in over 140 texts from the tenth-century onwards, and was adapted and translated from Latin into dozens of European vernaculars. Which specific edition, translation, or adaptation Tolkien read can be difficult to determine, and yet there has been some high-quality Tolkien source criticism which proceeds without the identification of a specific

published text and builds a case instead upon the closeness of narrative or verbal similarities, character names or descriptions, and/or plot sequences between Tolkien's writings and another work. For example, Fimi establishes *Lebor gabála Érenn*, a Middle and Early Modern Irish prosimetrum as an important antecedent for Tolkien due to the striking number of parallel situations between the Irish Túatha Dé Danann and Tolkien's Noldorin Elves. However, she does not seek to identify which of multiple possible recensions, editions, translations or adaptations of *Lebor gabála Érenn* that Tolkien might have read (*Mad Elves* 161-164; see **Chapter 3** for additional discussion of possible *Lebor gabála* textual sources). Additionally, Fisher's tiers can be overly-limiting in assessing the "leaf-mould" of Tolkien's memories.

Peter S. Beidler's work on establishing new terminology for Geoffrey Chaucer studies is useful in this regard and easily applicable to Tolkien studies, considering the deep- and wide-ranging "leaf-mould" of both authors. Beidler argued that updated terminology was needed because Chaucer scholars had become "sloppy in our use of the terms *source* and *analogue*," leading to wider disagreement on Chaucer's knowledge of Boccaccio's *Decameron* when he wrote *The Canterbury Tales* ("Just Say Yes" 41). Beidler initially proposed definitions for three terms ("Just Say Yes" 41-42) and later expanded that to five ("New Terminology" 226-227): *hard source*, *soft source*, *hard analogue*, *soft analogue*, and *lost source*. Beidler urged,

Chaucer scholars must consider the hard analogues if they wish to analyze the stories that Chaucer may well have known so that they can see in what way Chaucer may have transformed his originals. These hard analogues may or may not have been sources for Chaucer, but in the absence of a more definite source, they are the best that we have, and we must not ignore them. ("Just Say Yes" 42)

Tolkien scholars face similar challenges when writing about his literary antecedents, particularly premodern ones. I have adapted Beidler's terminology to Tolkien studies to provide a more inclusive framework when examining Tolkien's responses to characters, plots, settings, themes, tropes, and motifs from, for example,



mediaeval, folkloric, and/or oral culture works available in multiple editions, translations, and adaptations (see **Table 1.3.2**).<sup>34</sup>

**Table 1.3.2** Adapting Peter S. Beidler's "New Terminology" for Chaucer to Tolkien studies.

<b>Hard Source:</b> a specific work that we know Tolkien used
<b>Soft Source:</b> a work that Tolkien almost certainly knew and probably remembered (consciously or not) as he wrote and that provided at least a general or distant influence upon some elements in his own work
<b>Hard Analogue:</b> a work old enough in its extant form that Tolkien <i>could have known it</i> and that bears striking resemblances to a Tolkienian work, but that we are unsure whether Tolkien knew or used; a <i>hard analogue</i> is normally spoken of when there is no clearly identified <i>hard source</i> , but if it is an especially strong candidate, we might call it a <i>hard analogue with near-source status</i>
<b>Soft Analogue:</b> a work that, because of its late date or its remoteness from its Tolkienian counterpart, Tolkien almost certainly did not know; Tolkien scholars should be aware of the existence of soft analogues and consult them for general interest or when they reveal narrative parallels not available in either hard or soft sources, or hard analogues

(Adapted from Beidler, "Just Say Yes" and "New Terminology")

Fisher's and Beidler's schemata are not mutually exclusive and can be used together or with others. For example, during his introduction of Oronzo Cilli's book, *Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist* (2019) at the "Tolkien 2019" celebration in Birmingham, UK, Shippey proposed the term *inferred* source for a source which is deduced from evidence and reasoning rather than explicit statements by Tolkien. In this thesis, then, Fisher's and Beidler's schemata as well as Shippey's concept of *inferred* sources are all used to discuss the Irish and Irish-themed narratives which I propose influenced Tolkien's creative writings.

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<sup>34</sup> Beidler's concept of the *lost source* is not used in this thesis.

I also consider in this thesis the second of Fisher's stages, that is, the way in which Tolkien used his antecedents ("Tolkien and Source Criticism" 30-31). Ordway proposes,

It is not enough simply to identify a source or influence and stop there in foolish triumph. We must go further and be attentive to context, purpose, style, effect, and above all, meaning: we must ask [for example], 'How does Tolkien use it? What insight do we gain from having discerned this connection? What does this tell us about his writings and even about him and his own creative processes?' (41)

This is what Flieger calls the "So what?"— a question she frequently poses to students and seasoned scholars alike: What is the significance of a certain discovery or theory? What does it add to the appreciation of Tolkien's works?

Having defined what is meant by "sources" and "analogues" and established criteria by which to analyse their usage and significance in Tolkien's works, the next step was to gather a list of potential texts. First, I identified sources that Tolkien *directly* mentioned in his letters, essays, notes, and within his mythopoeic writings themselves. Second, over three research trips to Oxford in 2018, 2019, and 2023, I analysed the rich vein of untapped *probable* sources in Tolkien's "Celtic Library" held at the Bodleian, in particular those concerned (in part or whole) with Irish literature and language (for a list, see **Appendix A, Part 1**). Since these only represent a small portion of the books Tolkien owned upon his death (see this **Chapter**, fn20), additional *possible*, *circumstantial* and *speculative* Irish sources were sought among titles Tolkien could have read or known, that is, scholarly and popular editions which were in print at the time Tolkien is suspected to have used them, other works by authors Tolkien read, and works which his close associates are known to have read. Sometimes we can trace a direct connection from one of these books to Tolkien's mythopoeic writings, but more often we are left to speculate on the role they may have played in his mythmaking by piecing together textual and contextual clues. Together with Tolkien's lifetime of collecting books on Irish literature and language, these carefully gathered clues and evidence

demonstrate an enduring interest in Irish “things” which, as yet, has not been adequately recognised for its importance to Tolkien’s creative process.

This thesis also touches upon the discipline of the history of reading. In 2021, Katherine Halsey surveyed a multiplicity of approaches, methods, practices, and categories of evidence which may fall beneath the wide umbrella of the history of reading (Halsey 70-79). Here, I am interested in two specific approaches: (1.) reconstruction of the libraries of notable individuals and, (2.) surveys of the annotations, marginalia and ephemera those individuals left behind in their books (Halsey 71, 75). First, this thesis attempts to reconstruct (as best as may be done) books which deal with Irish and Irish-themed subjects which Tolkien owned, read, or referred to, including, but not limited to, those books held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Second, this thesis examines what Heather Jackson calls in her foundational work, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (2001), “potentially a goldmine for scholars ... [although] a contested goldmine” (6), that is, the annotations, marginalia and ephemera left behind in books by their owners. Tolkien was a great scribbler and annotator, and he often used scraps of whatever was at hand as bookmarks (e.g., envelopes, book catalogues, newspaper advertisements). Looking at his copy of Henri d’Arbois de Jubainville’s *\*Introduction à L’Étude de la Littérature Celtique* (1883), for example, one of the most marked up volumes in his “Celtic Library,” I found annotations and marginalia in grey pencil, blue pencil or crayon, and red crayon, suggesting multiple periods of engagement. He underlined the following (among many other) topics, suggesting his interest in them: Ireland’s *literature épique* (30); *druidisme* (32); Cathbad, Cûchulainn, and Tara the “*capitale de l’Irlande*” (33); *la bataille mythique de Mag-Tured* (57); *la doctrine celtique de l’immortalité de l’âme* (86); and *la legend d’Etain* (137). Critics disagree, “about the ways in which [marginalia] might legitimately be used to reconstruct either a reading environment or the mental experience of a particular reader” (Jackson 6). And while these markings are certainly not proof that the development of Middle-earth was influenced by the marked topics (nor can we even conclusively prove it was Tolkien who made the markings), the reconstruction of Tolkien’s library and

the study of its annotations, marginalia and ephemera can at least provide scholars with some clues, which can then be followed up with source studies approaches.

## 1.4 Literature Review

Only two years after *The Lord of the Rings* was published, American classicist Douglass Parker published a review highlighting the novel's embedded Arnoldian tensions between Teutonic (i.e., Germanic) and Celtic stereotypes. Despite Tolkien's stated antipathy toward Arnold's "racial" stereotypes (see **Subsection 1.2.2**), Tolkien's source material— e.g., the Old English *Beowulf*, the Old Norse *Völsungasaga*, the Welsh *Mabinogion* and the Irish *Lebor gabála Érenn* —was consciously selected to contribute to an interweaving of the Teutonic and Celtic elements he desired. As he told Waldman, Tolkien had sought to create a body of legend possessing *both* "the clime and soil" of Northwestern Europe and "the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic" (*Letters* #131, p.203). Even without access to Tolkien's letters, Parker perceived Tolkien's Elves as Celtic "in language and fate," and his Men as Teutonic in "fate and orientation" (606). He called the Ring-quest a fusion of Celtic Otherworld adventures (e.g., *The Voyage of Bran*) with doomed Teutonic heroes (e.g., Balder, Sigurd, and Sigfried), and the Elves's immortality in the West was, "very like the Gaelic *Tir na nOg*" or overseas Otherworld (Parker 606). But Parker's treatment of "Celtic" elements (i.e., Irish and Welsh) is brief and only one of several aspects he covers in a long and wide-ranging review (which also includes aspects of Old English, Old Norse, and contemporary fantasy). As noted above (**Section 1.2.4**), Burns argued that Tolkien sought to blend the Teutonic and Celtic tensions in his work, but that, "critics have tended to focus on the Teutonic influences," rather than the Celtic (*Perilous Realms* 13). Of course, Parker's and Burns's works illustrate a perennial issue with the scholarship on Tolkien's Irish sources and influences: authors frequently use the broader term "Celtic" without clearly defining what they mean by it and/or without clearly distinguishing between Irish, Welsh, Breton and other historical cultures and literary traditions. Another case in point is represented by Taryne Jade Taylor's article "Investigating the Role and Origin of Goldberry in Tolkien's Mythology," where she writes, "[t]he

description of the Celtic goddess Étain, a member of either the Tuatha De Danann or Sidhe, closely resembles that of Goldberry” (149). Now, the underlying argument that Goldberry shares a striking number of similarities with the Irish figure of Étaín from *Tochmarc Étaíne* is a good one (and one I myself make independently in **Chapter 6**), but Taylor identifies Étaín, the Túatha Dé Danann, the people of the *síd*-mounds as all “Celtic” when they should properly be called “Irish.” Tolkien quite clearly knew the difference between Irish and Welsh (and other Celtic) languages and texts, and so we should be aware of proper distinctions when examining Tolkien’s potential sources and influences.

A second issue with lumping Tolkien’s Irish influences together with other Celtic influences is that the Irish ones tend to get short shrift. The coverage of Irish topics is routinely minor or absent in broad surveys of Tolkien’s sources (see **Section 1.2.2**), or it is lumped together with more general “Celtic” topics. For example, J.C. Lyman-Thomas’s article “Celtic: ‘Celtic Things’ and ‘Things Celtic’ – Identity, Language, and Mythology” (2014) spends barely two out of its fourteen pages discussing “things” Irish rather than Welsh. In Michael D.C. Drout’s *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment* (2006), Irish topics comprise less than 2,000 words (see Anger 298; Lobdell, “Saint Brendan,” 584-585; Shippey, “Poems by Tolkien,” 532-535; and Spangenberg 447-449). Conversely, the entries on Welsh language, grammar, and legends amount to at least 4,500 words, while both Welsh and Irish topics are dwarfed by the coverage of Germanic topics.

Nevertheless, there is significant prior scholarship specifically on Tolkien’s Irish sources, influences, and analogues, including scholarship from several of the field’s leading voices. This body of research largely falls into one or the other (or both) of two major categories: (1.) the Túatha Dé Danann as models for Tolkien’s Eldar, and/or (2.) Tolkien’s adaptations of the Irish Otherworld voyage tale (e.g., the *immram*). Additionally, there is (3.) a modest amount of scholarship addressing a miscellany of other Irish subjects. Accordingly, the following literature review uses the same tripartite division, but due to the structure of this thesis (see **Section 1.5**

**Organization of the Thesis**), each individual chapter also discusses relevant precursors in scholarship.

### 1.4.1 Túatha Dé Danann

*Lebor gabála Éirenn* ('The Book of the Takings of Ireland') is a Middle and Early Modern Irish pseudohistory of Ireland which originated in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It brought "together a heterogeneous body of legends and speculations regarding the ancient history of the country and the origins of its people, and [fit] them into a single comprehensive framework" (Carey, *Irish National Origin-Legend* 1). *Lebor gabála* describes six successive invasions or "takings" in which Ireland is colonised by different peoples (these are roughly analogous to the "Six Ages of the World" as formulated by Augustine of Hippo). The first four groups of people are all either killed or expelled from Ireland (almost all, anyway; see **Chapter 6**). The final two invasions are by the otherworldly Túatha Dé Danann and the worldly Sons of Míl, or "Milesians," the ancestors of the present-day Gaels.<sup>35</sup> What Tolkien hoped to do for England, the compilers of *Lebor gabála* had done for Ireland, that is, they created a national origin myth from the time of Creation to the rise of Christianity which put Ireland on the same footing as Israel or Rome (Carey, *Irish National Origin-Legend* 1).

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<sup>35</sup> The Túatha Dé Danann have been interpreted differently in different texts and at different times. They have been variously called Irish gods, supernatural beings, immortals, *aes síde* (people of the *síd*), fairies, exiles from heaven (i.e, fallen angels, neutral angels, or devils following Lucifer's rebellion), Otherworld figures, magicians, etc. (see Carey, "Tuath Dé"). John Carey stresses, "that none of these identifications ever achieved exclusive acceptance" ("Tuath Dé" 1694). The Túatha Dé Danann generally look human—although they are much more beautiful than humans, stronger, immune to age and disease, and they possess certain powers—they are physically compatible with humans and can have children with humans. In a twenty-first century context, then, possible conceptualisations of the Túatha Dé Danann might be as transhumans, superhumans, or metahumans.

A number of popular and scholarly works have noted similarities between the Túatha Dé Danann as depicted in *Lebor gabála*, and Tolkien's Elves. Fimi writes, "[J.E.A.] Tyler (1976) was probably the first to point out this similarity, but he was writing a popular book and made some errors" (*Mad Elves* 161). This assertion, however does not prove to be true, as Parker had already raised the idea in 1957 of Tolkien's Elves having "Celtic" roots (606), and Tyler's observations do not appear in his 1976 *Tolkien Companion*, but rather its revisions, the 1979 *New Tolkien Companion* (179) and the 1986 or later *Complete Tolkien Companion* (199).<sup>36</sup> By that time, Ruth S. Noel had already proposed in her popular work, *The Mythology of Middle-earth* (1977), the origins of Tolkien's Elves in the Irish Sidhe or Túatha Dé Danann (113). However, the first detailed and somewhat academic investigation in this vein was Gillespie's "The Irish Mythological Cycle and Tolkien's Eldar" (1982) which asserts, "[t]he whole created history and nature of the Eldar echo the history and tales of the Tuatha De Danaan [sic.] in Irish literature and folklore" (8). The article is short by today's standards for a scholarly treatment, nevertheless, Gillespie's arguments remain seminal and are echoed or expanded upon by several other authors, both popular and academic, including Barnfield ("Celtic Influences"), Burns (*Perilous Realms*), Fimi (*Mad Elves*), Flieger (*Fairy Tale*), Jenny Graver, Gunnell, Leslie Ellen Jones, Annie Kinniburgh, and Swank ("A Recognizable Irish Strain"), with the most elucidating of these being the research of Fimi and Kinniburgh.

Gillespie notes that *Lebor gabála Érenn*, "deals with the origins and youth of the Túatha Dé Danann, as *The Silmarillion* deals with the origins and youth of the Eldar. In both their youths, they are lusty and powerful. *The Book of Invasions*, however, is also about the end of ages and the passing of peoples" (9). Likewise, *The Lord of the Rings* is about the "end of an age" and passing of the Elves (Parker 603). The final

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<sup>36</sup> Tyler's *Complete Tolkien Companion* is labelled on the verso of its title page as a 1976 book, but its publisher, the Macmillan imprint Thomas Dunne Books, was not established until 1986.

invasion of Ireland by the Milesians precipitates the waning of the Túatha Dé Danann. Fimi points out that there were two traditions concerning their departure: in one, they left Ireland for idyllic overseas realms such as *Magh Meall* (The Delightful Plain) or *Eamhain Ablach* (The Region of Apples); in the other, they retreated underground to ancient barrows or cairns (*Mad Elves* 163). Tolkien's Elves face the same choice. Galadriel tells Frodo that if his quest to destroy the One Ring proves successful, her people, "must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten" (*FR* II.vii.380). In Ireland, neolithic burial mounds, such as Newgrange, came to be thought of as the dwelling-places of the Túatha Dé Danann who remained in Ireland. In Tolkien's legendarium, the Elves in Middle-earth also live in underground caves, such as Nargothrond, Menegroth, and the caves of the elf-king in Mirkwood. Leslie Ellen Jones observes that Tolkien's drawing of the "Elvenking's Gate" in *The Hobbit* "is a perfect illustration of a Newgrange-like mound with a passage burrowing into it" (84). The rest of the Elves depart in ships to sail West over the sea to the idyllic realms of Tol Eressëa and Valinor, analogues of idyllic Irish Otherworlds. Gillespie notes, "in both tales [the Túatha Dé Danann and the Eldar] lose their power to mortals and wane, finally disappearing from mortal ken, to remain in the memory as figures of great beauty and nostalgia" (9).

Fimi considers not only *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but also the earliest version of Tolkien's legendarium, *The Book of Lost Tales* and related material from the second half of the 1910s, where the concept of the Elves' departure or "fading" from the realms of Men was already present. In the "Lost Tales"-era poem *Kortirion among the Trees* (written November 1915), the Elvish town of Kortirion (i.e., England's Warwick) becomes a "fading town" on a "fading isle" of "fading fairies" (*Lost Tales I*, 33-36; see also Forest-Hill). In the "Lost Tales," Fimi calls attention to three areas of similarity between the Túatha Dé Danann and Tolkien's Elves: (1.) the return of a native group from a mysterious sojourn over the sea, (2.) the burning of their own ships in which they arrive, and (3.) the maiming of their leader. Kinniburgh also considers Tolkien's abandoned *The Lost Road* and his



tantalising notes for the inclusion of a Túatha Dé Danann episode including the Irish character, Fintan mac Bóchra.

The scholarship on the sources and influences of Tolkien's Elves in Irish literature does not often move beyond *Lebor gabála Érenn*, although there are a few instances. Gillespie, for example, compares the fate of Arwen in *The Lord of the Rings* with two Irish tales: *Altram tige dá medar* ('The Fosterage of the house of two milk-vessels') and *Oidheadh chloinne Lir* ('The Violent death of the children of Lir') (10). Barnfield considers *Oidheadh chloinne Tuireann* ('The Violent death of the children of Tuireann') and *Longes mac nUislenn* ('The Exile of the sons of Uisliu,' aka 'Deirdre') (Barnfield "Celtic Influences" 4, 5). The narratives of the children of Lir, Tuireann, and Uisliu are often presented together from the sixteenth century onward as *Trí thruaighe na scéalaigheachta* ('The Three Sorrows of Storytelling'), although they originated separately. To my knowledge, however, no one has (until this thesis) published a comparison of Tolkien's Elves and their mortal allies as portrayed in *The Book of Lost Tales* and *The Silmarillion* with the Túatha Dé Danann and their mortal allies, the *fíán*, or warring and hunting band, of Finn mac Cumail, as portrayed in the *Acallam na senórach*, but this proves to be a fruitful area of investigation (see Chapter 3).

### 1.4.2 The Otherworld Voyage

The second major topic in the scholarship of Tolkien's Irish sources concerns Otherworld voyage literature and specifically its influence over Tolkien's 1955 poem *Imram*.<sup>37</sup> From his early poems and *The Book of Lost Tales* in the 1910s and 1920s to *Bilbo's Last Song*, discovered among his papers in 1968, Tolkien maintained a fascination with the image of a mortal mariner sailing to a fairy

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<sup>37</sup> The spelling of Tolkien's poem, "Imram"—with one initial "m"—aligns with the current standard orthography (see *eDIL - Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* [dil.ie/28025]), but a spelling with two initial "m"s (i.e., *sing. immram; pl. immrama*) is also common. This thesis prefers the alternative spelling to avoid confusion with Tolkien's poem.

Otherworld or Blessed Realm in the West.<sup>38</sup> At various times, Tolkien explicitly mentions the three most famous voyage tales— those of Brendan, Bran and Mael Dúin —but even when he does not openly acknowledge them, their influence is felt over a wide range of his writings (see **Chapter 2** and **Chapter 4**).

In 1957, Parker was again early in recognising the kinship between the voyage of the Ringbearers at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* and the mediaeval Irish *Voyage of Bran* (606). Yet, having no access to the Silmarillion stories set in, what would come to be known as, the “First Age” of Middle-earth, Parker could not have known just how fundamental the Otherworld voyage literature was to Tolkien’s legendarium. In 1972, Paul Kocher had a similar impediment in his analysis of Tolkien’s standalone poem, *Imram* (1955) which recapitulates St Brendan’s voyage, but with landmarks recognisable to both mediaeval and Tolkienian audiences.<sup>39</sup> Kocher notes significant similarities between the Christian Land of Promise and Tolkien’s Undying Lands (i.e., Tol Eressëa and Valinor), including their locations at the extreme western limits of their physical worlds, and similar curtains of shadow hiding them both (12).<sup>40</sup> He recognises in Brendan’s volcano and drowned lands oblique references to Tolkien’s inundated island of Númenor (Kocher 206). The island of the Tree refers to both Brendan’s Paradise of Birds and Tolkien’s Island of the Elves, Tol Eressëa (Kocher 208-209). But Kocher was not fully aware of the meaning and importance of the poem’s Star. He is “reminded of the one star seen by Sam shining high above Mordor” (Kocher 211). But Kocher does not understand

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<sup>38</sup> *Bilbo’s Last Song* was first published in Dutch translation in 1973, and in its original English in 1974; it is reprinted in *Poems* (II.885-889).

<sup>39</sup> *The Death of Saint Brendan* was written for inclusion in Tolkien’s unfinished *Notion Club Papers* (1945) and was later revised and published as *Imram* in *Time and Tide* (December 3, 1955, p. 1561); it is reprinted, along with variant versions, in *Sauron* (pp. 261–264) and in *Poems* (III.1265-1281).

<sup>40</sup> Actually, the location of Brendan’s Land of Promise of the Saints was not firmly established in the Middle Ages (see Cynthia Smith’s “Searching for Saint Brendan’s Island,” 2021).

that both Sam's and Brendan's stars in the poem refer to Eärendel, Tolkien's star-mariner and the hero of Middle-earth's First Age. Kocher analyses *Imram* on its own terms, as a poem about St Brendan and a "pilgrim's progress toward salvation" (212). But without access to *The Silmarillion* and other Middle-earth works not yet published in 1972, he is unable to see that *Imram* is actually situated within Tolkien's sacred geography (from mundane east to magical west): Europe, England, Ireland, then Númenor (the island of the volcano), Tol Eressëa (the island of the Tree), and finally, Valinor (the land of the Star) in the furthest (capital "W") West. Although readers may think of Middle-earth as a "secondary world" unrelated to our own, *Imram* illustrates, perhaps better than any other work, Tolkien's conception that Middle-earth was, in fact, our world in an imagined prehistory roughly 6,000 years ago (*Letters* #211, p.404fn).<sup>41</sup>

Shippey ties Tolkien's poem to the larger theme of Tolkien's lifelong search for the "lost road" that leads to the Earthly Paradise. As early as the first edition of *The Road to Middle-earth* (1983), Shippey notes the Otherworld voyage motif in Tolkien's early poems, *The Happy Mariners* (1920)<sup>42</sup> and *The Nameless Land* (1927)<sup>43</sup> (*Road* 1e, 212). Despite several more scholarly explorations of the Otherworld

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<sup>41</sup> For an overview of Tolkien's concept of Middle-earth's connections to our world over many years of worldbuilding, see Fimi, *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, 2008, pp.117–21, 160–88 and 189–94.

<sup>42</sup> In *The Happy Mariners*, the poet entices the mariners to "follow Earendel [sic.] through the West, / The shining mariner, to Islands blest" (*Lost Tales II* 274). *The Happy Mariners* was first published in *Stapeldon Magazine* (Exeter College, Oxford), vol. 5, no. 26, June 1920, pp. 69–70, and is reprinted with variants in *Lost Tales II* (pp. 273–276) and *Poems* (l.294-204).

<sup>43</sup> In *The Nameless Land*, Tolkien wrote, "Such loveliness to look upon / Nor Bran nor Brendan ever won, / Who foam beyond the furthest sea / Did dare, and dipped behind the sun / On winds unearthly wafted free. / Than Tir-nan-Og more fair and free, / Than Paradise more faint and far, / O! shore beyond the Shadowy Sea, / O! land forlorn where lost things are ..." *The Nameless Land* was first published in *Realities: An Anthology of Verse*, edited by G.S. Tancred, Leeds, Swan Press, 1927, pp. 24–25. It is reprinted with variants in *Lost Road* (pp. 98-104) and *Poems* (ll.537-556).

voyage theme in Tolkien's work since Kocher's and Shippey's discussions were originally published, these early identifications remain useful and are echoed in or expanded upon by several others, including Fimi (*Celtic type*), Graver, Charles A. Huttar ("Deep Lies"), Marion Kippers, Maria B. Kuteeva, Jared Lobdell, and Norma Roche. Enlightening examination of the motif in Tolkien's later poetry includes the work of Benvenuto, Bridgwater, Davidson, Hiley, and Slack. I myself have engaged with Tolkien's Irish Otherworld voyage influences multiple times, including, "The Irish Otherworld Voyage of Roverandom" (2015), "'A Recognizable Irish Strain in Tolkien's Work'" (2018), "The Child's Voyage and the *Immram* Tradition in Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman" (2019) and "The Poetry of Geoffrey Bache Smith with Special Note of Tolkienian Contexts" (2021), as well as in this thesis. Shippey also returns to the Otherworld voyage motif in Tolkien's writings with some regularity, for instance, among other examples, in a 2006 contribution to Drout's *Encyclopedia* ("Poems ... Uncollected" 534) and his 2022 essay on Tolkien's *King Sheave* poem (*The Great Tales Never End* 166-180).

Discussions by Fimi, Flieger, and Huttar are important for expanding the conversation and giving Tolkien's "otherworld obsession" valuable context. Flieger (*Question* 121-136 and *Fairy Tales* 221-228) and Fimi (*Celtic type* 54-58) primarily discuss Tolkien's use of the Otherworld voyage motif in his time-travel stories, *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. It was in the latter of these where Tolkien's *Immram* poem first appeared as *The Ballad of St Brendan's Death*, then as *The Death of Saint Brendan* (*Sauron* 261-264, 295-299). Huttar, in his article, "'Deep Lies the Sea-Longing': Inkling of Home," analyses the symbolic meaning of the sea and the West in the works of Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams. Although only about one-third of the article is focused specifically on Tolkien, Huttar does an excellent job of reaching beyond the *Immram* poem to several instances of the Western voyage in Tolkien's Middle-earth and non-Middle-earth writings and deciphering their symbolic/spiritual meaning for the author. The basics of this subject, however, have been sufficiently interrogated and further discussions should include new and original observations or unexpected readings, such the Otherworld voyage motifs in Tolkien's children's novella, *Roverandom* (Swank, "Irish Otherworld Voyage") or in

the tragic *Fall of Gondolin* (Danner). In **Chapter 2**, I trace the origins of Tolkien's *immram* obsession, while in **Chapter 4**, I continue to advance the conversation around Otherworld voyage motifs in Tolkien's *Roverandom* and in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1862-1863).

### 1.4.3 Miscellany

A few surveys attempt to capture the breadth of Tolkien's Irish influences beyond the Túatha Dé Danann in *Lebor gabála Érenn* and the Otherworld voyage literature of Brendan and Bran. These include Barnfield ("Celtic Influences" and "More Celtic Influences"), Burns (*Perilous Realms*), Fimi (*Mad Elves* and *Celtic type*), Spangenberg, Aurélie Brémont, J.S. Lyman-Thomas, and Swank ("Recognizable Irish Strain"). Barring the last item, which focuses solely on Irish sources and influences, all the publications in this list examine the broader category of Tolkien's "Celtic" sources and influences (i.e., including Welsh, Breton, etc., with Burns also discussing the "Teutonic," i.e., Germanic). Thus, by their modality (mostly article- or chapter-length studies) and/or their purpose to cover "Celtic" and not just Irish topics, these studies are limited in the space they have available to discuss Tolkien's specifically *Irish* and *Irish-themed* sources and influences.

There have been, however, a few scholarly investigations of note. In Justin T. Noetzel's wide-ranging article, "Beorn and Bombadil: Mythology, Place and Landscape in Middle-earth" (2014), he compares Tolkien's werebear Beorn from *The Hobbit* to the Irish Cuchulainn in *Táin bó Cúailnge* in terms of their respective bodily transmogrification, fighting styles, and mythic ancestry (169); and Tom Bombadil to the Túatha Dé Danann figure, Lug, in terms of their supernatural powers, agelessness, and willingness to fight for others (174). Noetzel offers little more than a general argument that Tolkien "knew" mediaeval Celtic literature, but, as a matter of fact, Tolkien owned two copies of the *Táin*: Joseph Dunn's English translation, *\*The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin bó Cúailnge, "The Cualnge Cattle-Raid"* (1914) (which Tolkien does not appear to have read, owing to the numerous uncut pages starting at page 25) and Ernst Windisch's dual Irish edition and German

translation, \**Die Altirische Heldensage, Táin bó Cúalnge* (1905) (which Tolkien most certainly *did* read, making occasional translation notes in the first 450 pages and on a blank page in the back of the book). Noetzel also compares the ancient barrows and Barrow-wight episode in *The Lord of the Rings* to the Irish *Echtra Nerai* ('The Adventure of Nera'), both of which feature reanimated corpses, creepy underground chambers, and anachronistic visions (173-174). There are other miscellaneous works of note. Matthew M. DeForrest weaves together etymology, biography, and new historicism in "J.R.R. Tolkien and the Irish Question" (2016) as he attempts to trace the origin of Tolkien's word *Forgoil* (see **Appendix B**). In "The Deer-Maid Motif in *The Children of Húrin*" (2023), I compare Sadb, mother of the Irish hero Oisín, with Niënor Níniel in Tolkien's *Narn i chîn Húrin: The Tale of the Children of Húrin*, relying primarily on modern English-language adaptations of the "Birth of Oisín" legend. Spangenberg's encyclopaedia entry on "Mythology, Celtic" (2007) and Flieger's "Celtic" chapters in *There Would Always Be a Fairy Tale* (2017 196-202, 213-228) discuss such Irish topics as *Compert Con Culainn* ('The Conception and birth of Cú Chulainn'), the Irish figure of "Fintan," and Tolkien's essay, *The Name 'Nodens,'* as well as the idiosyncratic operation of time in the Otherworld, and Celtic legends of drowned lands.

In sum, the previous studies tend (with some few exceptions) to be short, to focus on a limited number of topics (like the Túatha Dé Danann and the Otherworld voyage tales), to look at a limited number of Tolkien's Irish sources (such as *Lebor gabála Érenn* or the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*), and/or to conflate the study of Irish sources and influences with other Celtic sources and influences, and thus to minimise the focus on specifically Irish material. What has been lacking in the field, then, is a wide-ranging exploration of both the breadth (over time) and depth (the number of Irish sources known) of Tolkien's engagement with Irish material. This thesis aims to fill that lacuna by expanding the range of Irish topics analysed, by diving deeper into previous topics, by expanding the list of Irish and Irish-themed sources under consideration, and by narrowing the focus of the study to *only* Irish and Irish-themed texts. Fimi wrote that the purpose of her 2007 article was "to demonstrate ... how Tolkien's continuous involvement in Celtic Studies can account

for an unbroken sequence of Celtic elements sneaking into Middle-earth, whether intentionally or not" (*Celtic type* 53). The purpose of my thesis is to refine Fimi's premise: to demonstrate how Tolkien's continuous involvement with specifically *Irish* language, literature, and legends accounts for an unbroken sequence of Irish elements appearing in his writings. With the lack of space and scope of the previous studies, there is definitely room for and the need for such an in-depth scholarly investigation. Furthermore, it should dispel the persistent belief that Tolkien despised and therefore did not use Irish sources and influences; in fact, the reverse was true: Irish and Irish-themed sources and influences form a major pillar of Tolkien's legendarium.

## 1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter, there are six chapters in which I focus upon specific time periods in Tolkien's writing career and specific works from those time periods. I examine potential Irish and Irish-themed sources and influences in those works, and how these help Tolkien's readers understand and appreciate the depth and richness of his creation. The first three of these chapters examine Tolkien's exposure as a young writer to a number of traditional Irish mythological texts and the roles these texts played in the development of his early legendarium. **Chapter 2. 'Exon. Oxon.' (1911-1914)** examines the foundations of Tolkien's Irish Library during his years as a student at Exeter College, Oxford, and his early contact with Otherworld voyage literature, which in turn influenced his early Eärendel poems. **Chapter 3. Lost Tales (1916-1919)** considers the potential influence of the Irish story cycle, *Acallam na senórach* on the development of *The Book of Lost Tales*, Tolkien's first attempt at creating a legendarium, written shortly after he returned from service in France during the Great War. **Chapter 4. Rover the Water-Baby (1920s)** discusses the influences on Tolkien's *Roverandom* of Otherworld voyage literature and Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*. The next three chapters examine Tolkien's use of Irish material in his mid- and late writing career, including a variety of previously unrecognised modern and traditional sources. In **Chapter 5. Travellers in Time (1930s)**, I make the case that Joseph O'Neill's time-travel novel,

*Wind from the North* (1934), was a key source for Tolkien's unfinished time-travel novel, *The Lost Road* (c.1936). In **Chapter 6. Tom Bombadil and Goldberry (1930s-1960s)**, I propose that Tom Bombadil, as he is depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*, shares a number of characteristics and roles with Fintan mac Bóchra, the oldest surviving man in Ireland according to some mythological texts, and that Goldberry shares key similarities with the heroine of *Tochmarc Étaíne* ('The Wooing of Étaín'), and that together, Tom and Goldberry also resemble *briugaid*, mystical hospitallers in Irish literature. **Chapter 7. "Many matters concerning the Eldar, their fate in Arda, their death and re-birth and the nature of their marriage" (1950s-1970s)**, explores nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conceptions of reincarnation of the Túatha Dé Danann as recorded by Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville (1827-1910) and Alfred Nutt (1856-1910), and the apparent influence these had on Tolkien's Elves and his late debate, *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* ('The Debate of Finrod and Andreth'). The thesis then wraps with **Chapter 8. Conclusions: "The Shoreless Sea,"** including a brief resumé of the role and importance of Irish sources in Tolkien's legendarium and some suggestions for future research opportunities in this area.



## Chapter 2 “Exon. Oxon.” (1911–1915)<sup>44</sup>

Tolkien’s interest in Irish legends, literature and language appears to have begun when he was introduced to Irish matters from multiple directions during his undergraduate years at Exeter College, Oxford University (i.e., “Exon. Oxon.”). These sources include an Old Irish quatrain, a book on Arctic exploration, a collection of mediaeval tales, and a hefty grammar of the Irish language. From these, Tolkien began to explore mediaeval voyage literature, referred to as *immrama* (“voyages”) in Irish-language sources, in which a series of otherworldly places are reached by a sea voyage (Carey, “Voyage Literature” 1743). As will be discussed in this chapter, Tolkien was particularly interested in the Old Irish *Immram Brain maic Febail* (‘The Voyage of Bran mac Febail’) and the Hiberno-Latin *Navigatio sancti Brendani* (‘The Voyage of Saint Brendan’).

The origin of Tolkien’s interest in Irish matters has been, until now, something of a mystery. While we do not have a comprehensive list of Tolkien’s childhood reading, we do know several titles he read and nothing overtly Irish in origin comes to light.<sup>45</sup> When Mabel Tolkien died in 1904, she left her two sons John Ronald and Hilary under the guardianship of the Catholic priest Father Francis Xavier Morgan. The boys were sent to live with a relative, and later to a boarding house, but they spent much of their time with Father Francis where he served at the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri in Birmingham. According to the Oratory’s web site, “Increasingly, ‘home’ became the Oratory, where the day began serving Francis’s early Mass, followed by breakfast, including games with the cat in the serving ‘drum’ which connects the kitchen with the Fathers’ refectory, and then school” (“Tolkien and

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<sup>44</sup> Portions of this chapter were first presented as research-in-progress for this thesis at The Tolkien Symposium, 8 May 2021, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. See Swank, “The Poetry of Geoffrey Bache Smith” (2021).

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, *Biography* (30 & 55); *Great War* (13); Anderson, *Tales Before Tolkien* (*passim*); *Artist* (43–44); *Road* (351); Swank “Fairy-Stories”; and *Letters* (#319, p.571).

the Oratory”). In this environment, Tolkien might conceivably have encountered Brénainn of Clonfert (St Brendan) on his feast day of May 16<sup>th</sup>. However, the Irish Brendan was popularly and/or locally declared a saint “pre-congregation” (i.e., prior to the institution of the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints by Pope Sixtus V in 1588), and as such, it is unlikely that Brendan would have received formal notice by a church in Birmingham, England.

Also called “the Navigator,” Brendan was an historical and widely-travelled Christian abbot. He is also known as the protagonist of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, the early eighth- and late ninth-century voyage tale in which a fictionalised Brendan visits about a dozen miraculous islands as he searches for the Earthly Paradise, a land where the blessed await Judgement Day. Although written in Latin, the *Navigatio*, as we have it, is,

clearly the work of a single, immensely gifted and original author who would appear to have been a monk. That he was an Irishman is evident from his use of genealogical and topographical details, as well as from some words and names ... and the occasional instance where we suspect that the Latin syntax represents a calque on Old Irish sentence structure. (Wooding 15)

The *Navigatio* was extremely popular in the mediaeval era with over “[o]ne hundred twenty-five surviving copies ... located across most of the nation-states of modern Europe ... by medieval standards, a very wide readership” (Wooding 13). There are also several translations and adaptations into mediaeval vernaculars, including the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman *Voyage of Saint Brendan* by Benedeit, the version in the fourteenth-century *Early South English Legendary*, and the fifteenth-century prose version in Caxton’s *Golden Legend*. The enduring popularity of the Brendan legend is, “shown through the commissioning of [*Navigatio*] manuscripts as late as the seventeenth century” (Mackley 55).

As will be discussed in detail in **Chapter 4. Rover the Water-Baby**, Tolkien almost certainly encountered Saint Brendan as a character in Charles Kingsley’s children’s story, *The Water-babies* (1862-1863), although it is not clear whether Tolkien first

read the story as a child, or as a father reading to his own children. Tolkien also may have had contact with more scholarly editions of the Brendan legend through his formal schooling, although this is questionable. Several editions and translations appeared in the nineteenth century, including Cardinal Moran's *Acta Sancti Brendani* (1872). The curriculum established in 1906 at King Edward's School, Birmingham, included the study of classical Latin (with Greek and Modern Languages added when students were about fourteen years old) (Canzonieri 148). Nevertheless, as the late King Edward's School English Master Simon Stacey (1966-2022) explained,

Since the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* ... is a medieval Latin text, dating in its earliest extant form from perhaps the 9th, or more certainly, the 10<sup>th</sup> century, there is no way it would, surely, have ever figured in any of the classical Latin courses of Tolkien's education at King Edward's School up until 1911 (i.e. amongst the standard school classical curriculum of 'his Caesar, Cicero and Virgil'). (E-mail to the author)

Stacey added, "Tolkien was precocious and just might, conceivably, have encountered [the *Navigatio*] (or at least the tale) in independent study, in which he was, by any standards, fairly extraordinary in his youth, not least in his early exploration of mediaeval languages and texts" (E-mail to the author). The young Tolkien took an interest in Greek, Gothic, German, Old and Middle English, Old Norse, and Finnish. He began learning Greek at the age of ten. Garth opines, "Elysium and the westward Garden of the Hesperides were probably the first lands of bliss he visited" (*Worlds* 36).<sup>46</sup> Tolkien was encouraged to read Chaucer in the original and began learning Old English with the aid of a primer lent to him by Assistant School Master George Brewerton (C&G I.10). In 1908 or 1909, Tolkien discovered Joseph Wright's *Primer of the Gothic Language* (C&G I.16). In July 1910, he won the prize for German at King Edward's School (C&G I.24). He read the

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<sup>46</sup> In Greek mythology, Elysium is the home of the blessed after death, and the Hesperides are the daughters of Hesperus, the personification of the evening star (i.e. the planet Venus), who tend blissful gardens on an island at the western edge of the world-ocean.

Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*, as well as the story of Sigurd and the dragon Fafnir, “in Old Norse, reading line by line in the original words” (*Biography* 43). In 1910, Tolkien encountered the Finnish *Kalevala* in W.F. Kirby’s English translation (1907) (C&G I.24). According to Carpenter, Tolkien had

a range of linguistic knowledge that was remarkable in a schoolboy. He continued to search for the ‘bones’ behind all these languages, rummaging in the school library and exploring the remoter shelves of Cornish’s bookshop down the road. Eventually he began to find—and to scrape together enough money to buy—German books on philology that were ‘dry-as-dust’ but which could provide him with the answers to his questions. (*Biography* 43)

Indeed, Tolkien may have found books on St Brendan (or his literary “cousin” Bran) at the Birmingham Oratory, in the King Edward’s School library or at Cornish’s bookshop, but from the available evidence it seems that his interest in Otherworld voyage literature did not develop until he matriculated to Oxford University.

Tolkien’s first significant brush with the Old Irish language appears to have been *The Voyage of Bran*, and to have occurred while Tolkien was back visiting King Edward’s School from Oxford in December 1911, as detailed below in **Section 2.1 The Voyage of Bran**. As I explore in **Section 2.2 “...the foundation of my library...”**, Tolkien encountered Otherworld voyage literature and other Irish legends in his undergraduate courses at Oxford in 1913, and he made the first acquisitions for his “Celtic Library” in 1914. This all coalesces in **Section 2.3 The Voyage of Eärendel**, where the influence of these early contacts with Irish literature and language is identifiable in the earliest poems of Tolkien’s legendarium: the 1914-1915 poetry cycle on Eärendel the mariner. Thus, as this chapter shows, Irish influences were embedded in Tolkien’s Middle-earth writings from the very beginning. The chapter wraps up with **Section 2.4 Conclusions**.

## 2.1 *The Voyage of Bran*

The Old Irish *Immram Brain maic Febail* ('The Voyage of Bran mac Febail') survives in over half-a-dozen manuscripts, including the twelfth-century *Lebor na hUidre* ('The Book of the Dun Cow'). In the narrative, a mysterious lady invites Bran to sail to the Land of Women, an island without sickness or death, one of "thrice fifty distant isles / In the ocean to the west of [Ireland]" (*Bran* I.2-12 *passim*). While on the outward voyage, Bran encounters Manannán mac Lir, an Irish figure who is often interpreted as a sea god. Manannán is driving his chariot over the waves to Ireland in order to beget the future hero Mongán mac Fiachnai (*Bran* I.16-26 *passim*). Reaching the island, Bran and his crew delight in the company of the women for (what they believe is) one year (*Bran* I.30). Upon returning to Ireland, they discover they have been gone so long their voyage has become a legend, and when one of the crew steps foot on Irish soil, he crumbles to dust as if from extreme old age (*Bran* I.32).

Tolkien's first encounter with *Bran* appears to have occurred in December 1911. The nineteen-year-old Tolkien had just completed his first term at Oxford University and spent part of his holidays back at King Edward's School in Birmingham where he and his friends were rehearsing a performance of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775), presented by the school's Musical and Dramatic Society on 21 December 1911 (C&G I.36-37). During rehearsals for the play, Tolkien stayed with the Gilson family as he had on several occasions, having no family home of his own since he was orphaned at the age of twelve. Robert Quilter Gilson, the headmaster's son and Secretary of the Society that year, produced the play, perhaps inspired by recitations of two scenes from *The Rivals* at the Society's Annual Open Concert the previous year (C&G I.26 & III.1283). Tolkien and Gilson were close friends, part of an informal student group who called themselves the "Tea Club and Barrovian Society" (TCBS) for their practice of taking tea together at Barrow's Stores or (secretly) in the School library where Tolkien had served as the junior librarian along with Gilson and another close friend, Christopher Wiseman. A number of TCBS members were cast in *The Rivals*: Gilson

as Captain Absolute, Wiseman as Sir Anthony Absolute, T.K. Barnsley as Bob Acres, and Tolkien as Mrs Malaprop, the linguistically-challenged aunt. A new member of their group since Tolkien had left for Oxford, Geoffrey Bache Smith, was cast as Faulkland (C&G I.36-37). Born on 18 October 1894, Smith was nearly three years Tolkien's junior and had entered King Edward's School in January 1905, the same year as Tolkien's younger brother Hilary. Scull and Hammond write,

Like Tolkien, Smith earned distinction as a King Edward's Scholar and was the recipient of school prizes. By all evidence he was witty and intelligent, a promising poet, and enthusiastic about literature and history. He was not a founding member of the TCBS, but seems to have been taken up by R.Q. 'Rob' Gilson and Christopher Wiseman in Autumn term 1911, and became closely involved after performing with them in *The Rivals*. (C&G III.1210)

John Garth discovered that in that same month— December 1911 —the *King Edward's School Chronicle* [hereafter, *Chronicle*] published a mock university entrance exam, the "Camford and Oxbridge Examination Board, Examination Paper in Advanced Mathematics," a parodic version of the examinations that students took for admission to Oxford or Cambridge Universities ("Testing Time"). The *Chronicle* was "written and produced mainly by the boys themselves, [and carried] reports of school and sporting events, academic successes, and the activities of student societies" (C&G II.603). Activities of the TCBS were regularly featured: for example, the March 1912 issue praises the performances of Tolkien, Gilson, Wiseman and Smith in *The Rivals* (C&G I.37). Due to their content and humorous style, Tolkien is known or strongly suspected of penning a variety of reports for the *Chronicle* during his days at the School, and he served as its editor for the June and July 1911 issues (DBib 344-345).

Following in Tolkien's footsteps, Gilson and Wiseman became the *Chronicle's* editors after his departure for Oxford (*Great War* 27). The mock examination in the December 1911 issue was probably their doing, as Garth writes, it "seems to have their anarchic fingerprints all over it" ("Testing time"). Surely, they would have shown Tolkien a copy during his visit, for the entire exam is penned in the

exuberant and intelligent style characteristic of the TCBS, as illustrated by the exam's irregular completion time of 37 minutes and 1.005796 seconds (see **Figure 2.1.1** "Camford and Oxbridge Examination Board (detail)").

Image redacted. See Garth, "Testing time for Tolkien" (12 June 2021), <https://johngarth.wordpress.com/2021/06/12/testing-time-for-tolkien-the-inklings-and-the-t-c-b-s/>.

**Figure 2.1.1** "Camford and Oxbridge Examination Board (detail)," *King Edward's School Chronicle*, Dec. 1911, p. 95. © The Governors of the Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham.

Garth writes, "The TCBS revelled in a degree of outlandishness. Their humour was quickfire and often sophisticated; their interests and talents were many" (*Great War* 18). The questions on the mock exam are all impossible to answer, such as plotting the fictional El Dorado on a map, or writing a complete history of the world (see Garth, "Testing Time" for a copy of the exam). Wiseman's fingerprints are on Questions #5 and #6 requiring numerical calculations, for Wiseman's special areas of interest included mathematics (and music). Gilson's interests were in Renaissance painting and the eighteenth century (thus his production of Sheridan's *The Rivals*), and while none of these areas are featured on the mock exam, as the issue's co-editor, Gilson was likely involved with it, nevertheless. The exam also includes several references to Celtic matters. These are likely the contributions of the new TCBS member, G.B. Smith, who was interested in Celtic literature (e.g., Irish and Welsh). He spoke on George Bernard Shaw (with whom he shared his initials) at the school's debating society and read a paper on King Arthur to the school's Literary Society (C&G III.1210). Smith admired the early Welsh stories of King Arthur and "felt that the French troubadours had left these Celtic tales shorn of their native serenity and vigour" (*Great War* 32). Later, Smith would discover, "he shared [with Tolkien] a delight in Arthur and the Welsh cycle of legends, the

*Mabinogion*” (*Great War* 122). They also shared a love of the Welsh language and, when Smith died in the Great War (1916), he bequeathed to Tolkien a number of his Welsh books.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the Welsh elements on the *Chronicle*’s mock examination, including mentions of Llywarch Hen (one of the legendary four great bards of early Welsh poetry) and Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch (a Welsh village with the longest place-name in Europe), suggest Smith’s particular areas of interest. Smith was most-likely responsible for an Irish question, too, as he demonstrates familiarity with *The Voyage of Bran* in his own poetry (as detailed below). Question #3 of the mock exam asks for the name of the author of the following quatrain, and its translation into “Greek Hendecademi-semiquavers”:

*Fid co m-bláth ocus torud,  
forsmbí fine fírbolud,  
fid cen erchre, cen esbad,  
forsfil duilli co n-ordath.*

(“Camford and Oxbridge Examination Board,”  
*King Edward’s School Chronicle*, Dec. 1911, p.96)

The quatrain is in Old Irish, a direct quotation from Kuno Meyer’s (1858-1919) edition and English translation of *The Voyage of Bran*, published in a two-volume set with some essays by folklorist and Celticist, Alfred Trübner Nutt (1856–1910). Meyer’s was the only published edition and translation of *Bran* widely available in 1911. Question #3 is as unanswerable as the others exam questions since *Bran* is anonymous and there is no poetic metre called the “Greek Hendecademi-semiquavers.”<sup>48</sup> The quatrain is set during Bran’s encounter with Manannán mac Lir

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<sup>47</sup> The Welsh books that Smith bequeathed to Tolkien include *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* (Tolkien E16/20), *An English-Welsh Pronouncing Dictionary* by William Spurrell, *Hanes A Chan* (*Story and Song*) by J.M. Edwards; *Gwaith: Twm o’r Nant* by Thomas Edwards; *Gwaith* by Samuel Roberts; and *Essai sur la Compositions du Roman Gallois: Peredur* (Celtic type 67 n.6).

<sup>48</sup> The authors were playing off of the “hemidemisemiquaver,” a sixty-fourth note in music; music was one of Christopher Wiseman’s specialties.



on the ocean. Manannán says that what seems to Bran to be water is to Manannán like a flowery plain on which he can ride about. Manannán calls the plain *Mag Mell*, or the “Happy Plain” (*Bran* 18). This relativity of water to land is typical of mediaeval descriptions of Irish marine Otherworlds (Löffler I.22). Also, there is a “suspension of the usual laws of seasonal change associated with otherworld locations” (Byrne 161). The trees of the plain, as the quatrain shows, are in flower (as in the spring), in fruit (as in summer), and have golden leaves (as in autumn) all at the same time:

*Fid co m-bláth ocus torud,  
forsmbí fíne fírbolud,  
fid cen erchre, cen esbad,  
forsfil duilli co n-órdath.*

A wood with blossom and fruit,  
On which is the vine's veritable fragrance,  
A wood without decay, without defect,  
On which are leaves of golden hue.

(Meyer, *Bran*, Stanza #43 in Irish & English, pp. 20 & 21)

Although Smith died in the Great War, Tolkien and Wiseman published a posthumous collection of his poetry as *A Spring Harvest* (1918). The harvest in spring gathers unripe fruit, but even at his young age Smith left a number of surprisingly mature and stirring poems. Smith's poem “Wind over the Sea,” for instance, contains a number of strong echoes of the Manannán scene in *Bran*, as the following comparison shows:

*The Voyage of Bran*, trans. by K. Meyer

33. 'Bran deems it a marvellous beauty  
In his coracle across the clear sea:  
While to me in my chariot from afar  
It is a flowery plain on which he rides  
about.'

34. 'What is a clear sea  
For the prowed skiff in which Bran is,  
That is a happy plain with profusion of  
flowers  
To me from the chariot of two wheels.'

39. 'Though (but) one chariot-rider is  
seen  
In Mag Mell of many flowers,  
There are many steeds on its surface,  
Though them thou seest not.'

*"Wind over the Sea,"* by G.B. Smith

Out of the gathering darkness  
crashes a wind from the ocean,  
Rushing with league-long paces over  
the plain of the waters,  
Driving the clouds and the breakers  
before it in sudden commotion.

Who are these on the wind, riders  
and riderless horses?  
Riders the great ones that have been  
and are, and those to come shall be:  
These are the children of might, life's  
champions and history's forces.

(Left: Meyer, *Bran*, Stanzas #33, 34 & 39, pp. 16, 18 & 20;  
Right: G.B. Smith, "Wind over the Sea," p. 47; underlining added)

There are three key similarities between these two selections: (1.) both poems take place on the water; (2.) riding over water is related to riding over land—Bran's coracle rides over a "flowery plain" and Smith's wind rushes "over the plain of the waters"—and; (3.) both poems use the image of galloping horses as poetic descriptions of foam-whipped waves—Bran's "many steeds on its surface" and Smith's "riders and riderless horses" on the ocean wind.

Garth observes that Tolkien wrote relatively little poetry before the War (*Great War* 35). Most of it derives its themes from Classical literature or Romanticism.<sup>49</sup> And yet, his early Eärendel poems begin to show evidence of the influence of *Bran*

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<sup>49</sup> For example, *The Battle of the Eastern Field* (March 1911); *A Fragment of an Epic: Before Jerusalem Richard Makes an End of Speech* (June or July 1911); and *From Iffley* (From the Many-Willow'd Margin of the Immemorial Thames, October 1911).

and other Irish literature as early as 1914 (see **Section 2.3**, below). Looking farther ahead, however, the foam-horses of Manannán and Smith prefigure Tolkien's scene at the Ford of Bruinen in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Frodo crosses the ford, the Black Riders pursuing him urge their horses into the water, but they are washed away by a flash flood:

At that moment there came a roaring and a rushing: a noise of loud waters rolling many stones. Dimly Frodo saw the river below him rise, and down along its course there came a plumed cavalry of waves. White flames seemed to Frodo to flicker on their crests, and he half fancied that he saw amid the water white riders upon white horses with frothing manes. (FR I.xii.227)

Once again, we have (1.) a scene which takes place on water; (2.) where riding over water is related to riding over land—Tolkien's "plumed cavalry of waves" comes down the river course—and; (3.) the image of galloping horses poetically describes foam-whipped waves—the water as "white riders upon white horses with frothing manes." Tolkien's "roaring and rushing" matches Smith's "crashing" wind, and "rushing" water. A fourth echo of *Bran* in Smith's "Wind over the Sea" is the focus on future heroes, as the following shows:

*The Voyage of Bran*, trans. by K. Meyer

55. He will be throughout long ages  
An hundred years in fair kingship,  
He will cut down battalions, —a lasting  
grave—  
He will redden fields, a wheel around the  
track.

56. It will be about kings with a champion  
That he will be known as a valiant hero...

G.B. Smith, "Wind over the Sea"

Riders the great ones that have been  
and are, and those to come shall be:  
These are the children of might, life's  
champions and history's forces.

(Left: Meyer, *Bran*, Stanzas #55 & 56, p. 26;  
Right: G.B. Smith, "Wind over the Sea," p. 47; underlining added)

In *Bran*, Manannán is going to Ireland to beget the future hero, Mongán: he will be famous “throughout long ages”; he will be “a champion” and “a valiant hero” (24 & 26). Smith’s future riders will similarly be “great ones” and “the children of might, life’s champions and history’s forces” (47). It was a prediction for his generation that would prove true too soon. Tolkien recalls in his introduction to *A Spring Harvest* that Smith’s “Wind over the Sea” was written, “even as early as 1910” (G.B. Smith 7). If this was an accurate recollection, Smith and his generation were just a few years away from the forces of history and of reddening the fields of France with their blood. Smith’s poem would also have been written within a year or so of the mock university entrance exam published in the December 1911 *King Edward’s School Chronicle*. Since “Wind over the Sea” and Question #3 on the mock exam both derive from *The Voyage of Bran*, it is an educated guess based on the available evidence that Smith was the author of both.

*The Voyage of Bran* was not Tolkien’s only encounter with Irish literature and language during his undergraduate years at Oxford. In the following section, I discuss the foundation of Tolkien’s “Irish” library, the texts which would prove pivotal to the development of Tolkien’s lifelong interest in Irish matters.

## 2.2 “...the foundation of my library...”

Tolkien’s time as an Oxford undergraduate teemed with changes. On the personal side, he had been forcibly separated from his sweetheart, Edith Bratt. The two young orphans were lodgers at the same boarding house in Birmingham and had fallen in love by 1909 (*Great War* 12). Tolkien’s guardian, Father Francis, ordered Tolkien to call it off. A love affair could be a costly distraction for a poor young man needing a scholarship to attend university. But, after three years of separation, Tolkien wrote to Edith on 3 January 1913— his twenty-first birthday and the day Father Francis’ legal guardianship ended—in hopes of renewing their relationship. Edith replied that she was already engaged to another man. Tolkien took the train to Cheltenham where he spent the day convincing her to marry him instead. But if

their marriage was to be blessed by the Catholic Church, Edith would have to convert to Roman Catholicism. She agreed and, in advance of conversion, received instruction in the Catholic faith over the ensuing year (C&G I.42).

In early 1913, Tolkien's academic focus also changed. He had spent his first year and a half at Oxford studying *Literae Humaniores* or "Classics" comprising Greco-Roman history, Latin and Greek languages, and philosophy. He had already read most of the set texts for the curriculum while he was at King Edward's School, so at Oxford, he was bored. The Subrector's report card in 1912 judged Tolkien as "v[ery] Lazy" and the young man was warned that he might lose his scholarship, or "exhibition," of £60 per year (McIlwaine 144-145). Instead of devoting time to his classical studies, Tolkien spent his time engaged in personal pursuits such as learning Finnish, Welsh, and Germanic languages, and participating in various undergraduate societies, including the Stapeldon Debating Society, Exeter College Essay Club, Exeter College Dialectical Society, and the Oxford Union, among others (C&G III.1227-1231). But, reunited with Edith, Tolkien "determined to put all 'lawless and bachelorlike things' behind him," as he wrote in a 17 January 1913 letter to her (qtd. in McIlwaine 148). He started a diary to help him improve his study habits, and wrote to Edith on 15 January, "I am going to send you a 'bill' at the end of each week for amount of work done to be paid for at the rate of a kiss an hour" (qtd. in McIlwaine 148). As noted in the Bodleian Library's exhibition catalogue, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth* (2018), Tolkien inscribed his diary:

❖ JRRT ❖ John Reuel ❖ in acc/nt ❖ with ❖ Edith Mary ❖

The two arches of the "M" in "Mary" form the top of a heart (McIlwaine 149).<sup>50</sup> Scull and Hammond report a slightly different inscription: "JRRT and EMB in

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<sup>50</sup> Tolkien's idiosyncratic hand-inked symbol of four dots in a diamond formation resembles the Unicode computer character U+2756, otherwise known as the "Black Diamond Minus White X"; I have used that character to represent Tolkien's hand-writing here.

**account together, AMDG** (C&G I.43, bolding added). “AMDG” or *Ad maiorem Dei glóriam* (“For the greater glory of God”) is the Latin motto of the Jesuits, the religious order to which Tolkien’s guardian Father Francis belonged. These inscriptions portray a devout young man very much in love. Tolkien would leave similar inscriptions in the first volumes of his Irish library (see **Section 2.2.3**, below).

In order to pursue an academic career, Tolkien felt that he needed a “First” in the Honour Moderations exams he took at the end of Hilary Term (March 1913). Unfortunately, his lately-mended ways were only good enough to earn him a “Second”. His paper on Comparative Philology, however, earned an “alpha” (C&G I.44). One of his professors, Joseph Wright, “knowing of his interest in Germanic languages, [suggested] that Tolkien change from Classics to the English Honour School [...and] Exeter College very generously [allowed] Tolkien to keep his Classics exhibition” at the urging of his Classics tutor, Lewis Richard Farnell (C&G I.44).

Tolkien began Trinity Term (Spring 1913) in the English School with a new tutor, Kenneth Sisam (1887-1971). Sisam entered Merton College, Oxford in 1910 as a Rhodes Scholar from New Zealand, and in 1912 became the personal assistant to A.S. Napier, Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, Rawlinsonian Professor of Anglo-Saxon, and supervisor of Sisam’s *B. Litt.* thesis. Napier was in declining health, so Sisam taught some of his classes, which Tolkien attended. Carpenter writes that Sisam, “was an accurate and painstaking scholar, and Tolkien soon came to respect and like him” (*Biography* 64). Tolkien wrote of Sisam in 1970, “His teaching was ... spiced with a pungency, humour and practical wisdom which were his own. I owe him a great debt and have not forgotten it” (*Letters* #318, p.570). Under Sisam’s tutelage, as well as that of Napier, and his Old Norse professor William A. Craigie and others, Tolkien finally began to fulfil his academic promise. Also at this time, Tolkien was introduced to three key books which set the foundations of his lifelong interest in Irish language and literature: Fridtjof Nansen’s *In Northern Mists* (1911), Standish Hayes O’Grady’s *Silva Gadelica* (1892), and Rudolf Thurneysen’s *Handbuch des Alt-Irischen* (1909).

### 2.2.1 Nansen's *In Northern Mists*

As we have seen, Tolkien had already been introduced to the Old Irish *Voyage of Bran* in December 1911 with the mock examination in the *King Edward's School Chronicle*. He would soon meet *Bran* again, as well as other Irish voyage heroes, in the unexpected setting of undergraduate lectures on the Norse sagas. With his switch to the English School in 1913, Tolkien took up Scandinavian Philology as his Special Subject which included lectures by his Old Norse tutor, Prof. Craigie, on several Icelandic sagas (C&G I.47-48). According to these, when Leif Ericson sailed from Norway to Greenland in the year 999 CE, he was driven off course, and “for a long time drifted about in the sea, and came upon countries of which before he had no suspicion. There were self-sown wheat-fields, and vines grew there,” so the land was given the name *Vinland hit Góða* (Wineland the Good) (quoted in Nansen, *In Northern Mists* I.317). In the year 1003 CE, the Icelander Thorfinn Karlsefni set out to found a colony in the new western lands. His expedition, too, found “grapes and wheat” (*In Northern Mists* I.336).

The subject of Vinland was of great public interest during the time Tolkien was studying the Icelandic sagas with Prof. Craigie. Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930), a noted arctic explorer, had recently published the book, *In Northern Mists: Arctic Exploration in Early Times*.<sup>51</sup> Nansen held the controversial view that, “the Vinland saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni is partly fantasy and Vinland itself is a myth” (*Worlds* 67). Garth contends that Craigie, “can hardly have failed to mention the Nansen controversy” in his Scandinavian Philology lectures, for Craigie himself had just published his own book, *The Icelandic Sagas* (1913), in which he “defended the historical basis” of the Vinland sagas (*Worlds* 67 & 192 n34; Craigie 58). While Nansen agreed that the Greenlanders and Icelanders had reached the north-

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<sup>51</sup> For public reaction that demonstrates widespread public interest in Nansen's theories, see, for example, Nansen's “Norsemens in America,” Markham, and “Literature: Arctic Voyages”; Tolkien acquired his own copy of *In Northern Mists* in 1921 (Garth, *Worlds* 192 n36).

eastern coast of North America, he argued that various European “ideas of the Fortunate Isles or of the Promised Land and those of fairyland ... often coincide” (*In Northern Mists* I.312 & 372). And that, “statements about Wineland in the oldest Icelandic authorities were derived from Ireland” (*In Northern Mists* I.313).<sup>52</sup> Vinland’s self-sowing wheat and wild vines, Nansen opined, “reminds one forcibly of many of the old Irish legendary tales of wonderful voyages” (*In Northern Mists* I.336). In the *Navigatio*, for example, the Irish abbot Brendan visits an island with miraculous purple grapes, just one of which satisfies the hunger of all his companions for twelve days (O’Donoghue 153-154).<sup>53</sup> In *Immram curaig Mail Dúin* (‘The Voyage of Mael Dúin’s curach’), a Middle Irish text dated to the ninth century, there is also an island of intoxicating fruit, “wine-fruit” as P.W. Joyce translates it (156). Nansen writes, “the sure tokens of Wineland [are]: the self-sown wheat and the vine” (*In Northern Mists* I.336).<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the *Saga of Eric the Red* reports, “It is said of Wineland that ‘no snow at all fell there, and the cattle were out (in winter) and fed themselves’” (*In Northern Mists* I.347). The same was said of the Elysian Fields on the western borders of the earth, as depicted in Homer’s *Odyssey* [iv. 566]: ‘There is never snow, never winter nor storm, nor streaming rain’” (qtd. in Nansen, *In Northern Mists* I.347). According to Nansen, the resemblance between reports of

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<sup>52</sup> Nansen writes, “statements (in the *Landnámabók*) from the oldest Icelandic source, *Are Frode*, point directly to Ireland as the birthplace of the first reports of Wineland. We read in the *Landnámabók*: ‘Hvítramanna-land, which some call ‘*Irland hit Mikla*’ (Ireland the Great), lies westward in the ocean near Wineland (Vindland) the Good. It is reckoned six ‘*dægr’s*’ sail from Ireland” (I.353; see also Hall, et. al. 87).

<sup>53</sup> Despite more recent translations of the *Navigatio* being available today, I am using Denis O’Donoghue’s 1893 English translation as a text which was available to Tolkien during his active writing years; as Wooding notes, O’Donoghue’s *Brendaniana* might have been a likely source to find in a Catholic Presbytery (private correspondence, February 2025).

<sup>54</sup> Garth writes, “Nansen’s arguments seem largely forgotten these days, though not even the 1960 discovery of Norse relics at L’Anse-aux-Meadows, Newfoundland, proves that this was Vinland rather than one of the other, less fanciful regions named in the sagas, Helluland or Markland” (*Worlds* 192 n33); see *Lost Tales II* 290 for Tolkien’s adaptation of “the island of Heligoland in the North Sea”; see also Krappe.



the Norse Vinland and pre-existing legends, including Irish ones, are “so many, in fact, that they cannot be explained as coincidences” (*In Northern Mists* I.359).

The image of Vinland in Tolkien’s works owes something to Nansen’s characterisations. In brief notes for his unfinished novel *The Lost Road* (c.1936), Tolkien jotted down, “a Norse story of ship-burial (Vinland)” (*Lost Road* 77). Vinland is also associated with Tolkien’s mysterious land of “Dorwinion”.<sup>55</sup> In *The Lay of the Children of Húrin* (c.1926–30), “Dor-Winion” is a region in “the burning South” that produces a wine which dazes its drinkers and produces a sound sleep (*Lays* 11). In *The Quenta Silmarillion* (c.1937), “Dorwinion” was found in the Undying Lands of the West (*Lost Road* 334). In *The Hobbit* (1937), “Dorwinion” produced the “heady vintage” of wine that gives the Elf-king’s butler and chief guard “deep and pleasant dreams” (*Hobbit* IX.190,192). In the 1960s, Tolkien instructed Pauline Baynes to mark Dorwinion on her Map of Middle-earth beside the eastern Sea of Rhûn (*Lays* 26 fn\*). In the South, West, or East: Garth observes that Tolkien’s Dorwinion, “like the Earthly Paradise that appears in many real traditions, can be found at almost every point on the compass” (*Worlds* 69). Rateliff points out, the name “Dorwinion” can be glossed in Tolkien’s Elvish languages as either the “Land of Wine” or the “Land of Youth,” that is, having the same meanings as either the Norse Vinland or the Irish *Tír na nÓg* (*HH* 418-419). If Nansen was correct, they are essentially the same place.

The roots of these enduring images of Vinland in Tolkien’s works can be traced to that time-period when he was studying the Norse sagas with Prof. Craigie. In Michaelmas Term (Autumn 1913), Geoffrey Bache Smith joined Tolkien at Oxford, having won an exhibition to Corpus Christi College to read English (C&G I.53).<sup>56</sup> Other members of the TCBS, including Wiseman and Gilson, had gone to Cambridge in 1912. Wiseman wrote to Tolkien, “I envy you Smith ... he is the pick

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<sup>55</sup> See Rateliff (*HH* 417-420); Echo-Hawk (8-13); and Garth (*Worlds* 66-69).

<sup>56</sup> Garth states that Smith read History at Oxford (*Great War* 7).

of the bunch” (qtd. in *Great War* 32). Smith and Tolkien soon developed a close friendship. In the grand tradition of university hijinks, Tolkien and Smith once “captured” a bus and drove it up to Cornmarket in central Oxford amid one of those notorious town versus gown skirmishes. Tolkien reported, “[The bus] was chockfull of undergrads before it reached the Carfax. There I addressed a few stirring words to a huge mob before descending, and removing to the ‘magers memugger’ or the Martyrs’ Memorial where I addressed the crowd again” (qtd. in *Biography* 54). But Smith also had a serious side. Garth writes, he “considers himself a poet and has voracious and wide-ranging literary tastes, from W.B. Yeats to early English ballads, and from the Georgians to the Welsh *Mabinogion*” (*Great War* 7). Smith’s Celtic interests extended to the Irish *Voyage of Bran*, as I’ve argued from the mock examination from the *King Edward’s School Chronicle* of December 1911 and his poem, “Wind over the Sea.” At Oxford, Smith invited Tolkien to address the Corpus Christi College’s Sundial Society, 22 November 1914, on the subject of the Finnish *Kalevala*.<sup>57</sup> In his talk, Tolkien declared that discovering the *Kalevala* felt “like Columbus on a new Continent or Thorfinn in Vinland the good” (*Kullervo* 68).

Smith’s own poetry includes frequent references to otherworldly islands. In “The Wind of the Darkness,” Smith describes,

... the far isle that neither knoweth  
 Change of season, nor time’s increase,  
 Where is plenty, and no man soweth:  
 Calling to strife that shall end in peace. (45)

Like Manannán’s Happy Plain in *Bran*, Smith’s “far isle” is a fairy isle where the seasons do not change, and time stands still. In his “plenty, and no man soweth,” Smith also clearly illustrates his familiarity with the Norse Vinland, its “self-sown”

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<sup>57</sup> Smith was a member of the Sundial Society and was, in fact, elected its president for the coming year at that very meeting (C&G I.64). However, by December 1914, Smith had enlisted in the Army. He served in the Great War in France where he died on 3 December 1916.

wheat and, perhaps, plentiful wild grapes. He and Tolkien may have discussed the Nansen controversy. This is no wonder, since Smith and Tolkien had many deep discussions while they were together at Oxford, as Tolkien describes in his memorial poem, *G.B.S.*, written after Smith's death in the Great War:

... Here our ways did once draw near,  
 And many a time together, when night came,  
 We pondered o'er the great constellate streams  
 Or told old histories, old questionings  
 Of lore well nigh forgotten, dreaming dreams  
 Of the Earth's deep places and its deepest things.  
 (*Poems* I.386)

In another instance of Otherworld voyage imagery in Smith's poetry, a monk in the numinous poem "Legend" stops to listen to the divine music of a sweet bird in the wood who,

Sang of blessed shores and golden  
 Where the old, dim heroes be,  
 Distant isles of sunset glory,  
 Set beyond the western sea. (22)

When the monk returns to his monastery he recognises none of the brothers, and none of them recognise him, despite his claim to have left from there merely an hour earlier. He is taken to a cell to pray. The eldest of the brothers wonders if the strange monk was the same one he heard about in his youth who had disappeared from the monastery five-score years earlier. Later, a brother visits the stranger's cell and finds only a tattered habit and dust, "as of a body crumbled in the grave" (G.B. Smith 22). Smith's "Legend" closely follows the inset story of the Monk Felix in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Golden Legend* (1851). Felix similarly strays in a wood to hear a bird singing, only to return to his convent decades later. Smith's poem also mirrors the Welsh legend of "Shon ap Shenkin," a man who crumbles to dust when he steps across the threshold of his old farmhouse after he inadvertently spent decades in the woods enchanted by a bird's song (J.C. Davies 119-120). But there are also echoes in Smith's poem from *The Voyage of Bran* in the

disjunction of time, distant islands in the western sea, and the turning to dust of Bran's crewman when he steps foot again on Irish soil.

Smith's "beyond the western sea" would later be echoed by Tolkien, for example, in his Elvish hymn to Elbereth Gilthoniel: "O Queen beyond the Western Seas!" (*FR* I.iii.88), and in Gimli's paean to Durin and the kings of the Elder Days, "who now beyond The Western Seas have passed away" (*FR* II.iv.330). Both passages refer to Tolkien's Undying Lands which lay West across the sea from Middle-earth. Blessed western islands were conventional images at the time Smith wrote his poems. For example, years before C.S. Lewis met Tolkien, he employed just such imagery based on the Greek mythological Fortunate Isles. In his 1919 poem, "Hesperus," Lewis (under the pseudonym "Clive Hamilton") writes, "I would follow / follow Hesperus the bright, / To seek beyond the western wave / His garden of delight" (Lewis, "Hesperus," 93). Lewis imagines the island of Hesperus (i.e., the evening star) "beyond the waters / Of the outer sea" (Lewis, "Hesperus," 94).<sup>58</sup> Thus, Tolkien did not necessarily lift the phrase "beyond the western sea" directly from Smith, but their use of parallel imagery underscores my unfolding argument that Tolkien's undergraduate encounters with Irish themes and texts were significant in the development of his legendarium, and that such imagery carried on into his later writings. Nansen and Smith were just two of the key catalysts bringing Irish themes to Tolkien's attention during his undergraduate years.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Of course, Lewis also had an enduring interest in the concept of the overseas paradise as shown in his 1952 children's book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (see Huttar, Lawyer, and Swank, "Child's Voyage").

<sup>59</sup> For more on Smith as a catalyst for Tolkien's Irish turn, including Tolkien's analogues of the "Monk & Bird" motif, see Swank ("The Poetry of Geoffrey Bache Smith" and "The Monk and the Bird's Song").

### 2.2.2 O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica*

Also during Michaelmas Term (Autumn 1913), Tolkien attended a series of lectures given by the Scottish scholar David Nichol Smith (1875-1962), Goldsmiths' Reader in English, on the subject of "(Samuel) Johnson and His Friends" (C&G I.53). On 22 October, Nichol Smith lectured on Johnson's criticism of James Macpherson (1736-1796) and his Ossian cycle of epic poems. In 1761, Macpherson published the first volume in a series of epic poetry purported to be the work of a third-century Scottish bard named "Ossian, the son of Fingal," translated into English from ancient Scottish Gaelic sources. Wildly popular among luminaries such as Thomas Jefferson, Napoleon, and Diderot, the poems played a profoundly significant role in the development of European Romantic nationalism and in popularising romantic notions of the Highlands in international literature and culture. However, the poems also had their critics, with some calling them forgeries.<sup>60</sup> Alfred Nutt acknowledged Macpherson's apparent knowledge of Scottish Highland ballad literature as well as his "flashes of genuine inspiration, and the importance of his work in preparing the romantic movement of the nineteenth century," but Nutt claimed the poems— related thematically to the Irish *fíanaigecht* tradition featuring Finn mac Cumhaill and his son Oisín —were worthless for students of Celtic myth and saga because "they disregard the traditional versions of the legends, they depart from the traditional representation of the material life depicted in the old and genuine texts, and they utterly ignore the traditional conventions of Gaelic style" (Nutt, *Ossian* 2). Nutt's evocation of "old and genuine texts" surely included *Acallam na senórach* ('Dialogue of the ancients'), an important late Middle Irish (or very early Classical Irish) prosimetric narrative in which Oisín mac Finn and Caílte mac Rónáin, son and kinsman to Finn mac Cumhaill, are inexplicably the last surviving warriors from Finn's third-century *fíán* (warring and hunting band). They accompany the fifth-century Saint Patrick around Ireland, sharing various stories

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<sup>60</sup> See Nigel Leask's *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour, c.1720-1830* (2020) for a recent appraisal on the impact of Macpherson's Ossian poems.

and knowledge of the now-bygone days of the *fíán*. In his Macpherson lecture, Nichol Smith mentioned *Silva Gadelica* (1892), a two-volume compilation of mediaeval Irish literature and lore edited from Irish manuscripts and translated into English by Standish Hayes O'Grady (1832-1915). *Silva Gadelica* includes substantial portions of the *Acallam* and Nichol Smith likely made comparisons between these and Macpherson's Ossian poems. Tolkien jotted down the title of the Irish source in his lecture notes, misspelling it as "Sylva Gadhelica" (Sherwood "Age of Forgery" 7; and Sherwood "'Romantic Faëry'" 85).<sup>61</sup> Nichol Smith's lecture must have left a deep impression on the young Tolkien, for years later he recalled the controversy over Macpherson's poems. Sometime between 1919 and 1924, Tolkien made a revised typescript of the *Kalevala* talk he had delivered at Corpus Christi College, and again at his own Exeter College, in 1914 and 1915, respectively.<sup>62</sup> In the typescript, Tolkien appears to draw a comparison between Macpherson's Ossian poems and the *Acallam*, writing that "Bogus archaism and the pseudo-primitive is as different from [*Kalevala*] as Ossian is from Middle Irish romance" (*Kullervo* 112).<sup>63</sup>

Thematic connections between Tolkien's legendarium and Macpherson's Scottish Ossian poems have generated a noteworthy amount of scholarship.<sup>64</sup> However, the Irish *Acallam* has gone essentially unnoticed by Tolkien scholars prior to this thesis (a key exception being Celtic specialist Mark Williams who makes several insightful observations in his book, *Ireland's Immortals*, 2018). Much more is said about the

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<sup>61</sup> Tolkien's notes for this lecture are in the Bodleian Library, MS. Tolkien A 21/4: General Literature /General Miscellaneous, Fols. 10-11.

<sup>62</sup> Tolkien delivered his talk, "'The Kalevala' or Land of Heroes" again in February 1915 for the Exeter College Essay Club (*Kullervo* 63); the manuscript and typescript of the *Kalevala* talk are catalogued together as Bodleian Library MS Tolkien B 61, folios 126-60; see *Kullervo* (64) for scholars' estimated dating of the *Kalevala* talk typescript to 1919-1924.

<sup>63</sup> Tolkien's statement on the Ossian controversy only appears in the typescript from the early 1920s, not in the original 1914-1915 manuscript.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Bugajska, Dawson, Hunter, and Sherwood's "'Romantic Faëry'" and "Age of Forgery."

*Acallam* stories of the Túatha Dé Danann and Finn mac Cumail as models for Tolkien's Elves and noble Men in **Chapter 3. Lost Tales**. Here, however, it is relevant to note references in *Silva Gadelica* to "the west" as an Otherworld location. In *Tochmarc Becfola* ('The Wooing of Becfola'), a late ninth- or early tenth-century text, Diarmait encounters "a lone woman in a chariot come *out of the west* and across the ford. Fairer she was than any one of the whole world's women" (SG II.91, italics added). Since she is fairer than the women of this world, she must come from an Otherworld. Elsewhere in the *Acallam*, a giant woman visits Finn, claiming to have come "Out of the land of Lasses *in the west ... where the sun sets*: of which country's king I am daughter" (SG II.238, italics added). The land of Lasses is a cognate of *Bran's Land of Women*.

As an Oxford undergraduate, Tolkien encountered repeated images of immortal lands in the west: Nansen's theories of the Irish influences on Norse concepts of Vinland, O'Grady's fairy women from the sunset lands, and not to mention G.B. Smith's own "Distant isles of sunset glory, / Set beyond the western sea" (22). These all, undoubtedly, had some bearing on the location of Tolkien's paradisiacal land of Valinor in the utter West of the world. In Fisher's terms, we should consider both Nansen's *In Northern Mists* and O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* as *probable sources*, that is, works we do not explicitly know if Tolkien used as sources, but ones he is known to have read, owned, enjoyed, or commented upon. In Beidler's terms, these are *hard analogues*: works Tolkien *could* have known and which bear striking resemblances to his work. But Irish mythological texts were not all that would capture Tolkien's attention at this time: he was also about to make his first foray into Irish language study.

### 2.2.3 Thurneysen's *Handbook of Old Irish*

By 1914, things were finally falling into place for Tolkien. His fiancée Edith had been taking instruction for a year and was received into the Catholic Church on the anniversary of their reunion, January 8<sup>th</sup>. The two became formally betrothed the same day (C&G I.56). Tolkien had discovered in G.B. Smith a kindred spirit,

someone who shared his interests in writing poetry, Celtic legends, and distant fairy isles. And, he had finally developed his avocation for languages into a prospective vocation in English and Comparative Philology.

In the spring, Tolkien won the Exeter College Skeat Prize, named after English language philologist Walter W. Skeat (1835-1912), for “knowledge of a portion of English literature prescribed annually by the College” (*Historical Register* 533). The Exeter College Library holds the book presented to Tolkien at the prize-giving, *Some Hints on Pattern Designing* by William Morris, another Exeter College alumnus (“JRR Tolkien at Exeter College”). Tolkien spent the £5 prize money on three of Morris’s romances— *The Story of the Volsungs*, *The House of the Wolfings*, and *The Life and Death of Jason* —as well as John Morris-Jones’s *A Welsh Grammar: Historical and Comparative* (C&G I.58, and Garth, *Tolkien at Exeter* 30-31). As was his habit during this period, Tolkien decoratively initialled and inscribed the Morris-Jones volume, here in blue crayon, on the front flyleaf: “**Coll. Exon. Oxon. | 1914.**” In pencil, he added “**Skeat Prize | Vol. 3**” and autographed it, also in pencil. Later in his 1955 O’Donnell lecture, *English and Welsh*, Tolkien joked, “My college, I know, and the shade of Walter Skeat, I surmise, was shocked when the only prize I ever won (there was only one other competitor), the Skeat Prize for English at Exeter College, was spent on Welsh” (M&C 192). So, here we see the young Tolkien selecting his own books for his personal library, choosing Morris’s historical romances and a Welsh grammar, and much has been made in scholarship of those choices.<sup>65</sup>

About this same time (and perhaps slightly earlier), Tolkien chose some other books for himself. In February 1914, Tolkien acquired a copy of William Langland’s *Piers the Plowman* (edited by Walter Skeat, 1906) as well as the first known volumes in his “Irish” library, Rudolf Thurneysen’s hefty two-volume *\*Handbuch des Alt-*

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<sup>65</sup> On Morris-Jones and Celtic influences see, for example, C&G II.214-218, 626-628; on William Morris see C&G II.796-803, including a survey of scholarship on Morris and Tolkien; see also Ordway 163-183.



*Irishen: Grammatik, Texte und Wörterbuch* ('Handbook of Old Irish: Grammar, Texts, and Dictionary,' 1909). He inscribed both volumes with highly decorative signatures and dates. Volume 1 of Thurneysen is inscribed as follows:

**J.R.R. Tolkien / e coll. exon. oxon / feb. mcmxiv**

—in other words, "J.R.R. Tolkien, Exeter College, Oxford, February 1914." Volume 2 is inscribed,

**JRR Tolkien/ Exeter College: Oxford February 1914. AMDG ♦ EMB.**

As in the account book of study hours Tolkien kept for Edith (see above), this volume includes the abbreviated Jesuit motto, "AMDG" (*Ad maiorem Dei glóriam*), and the "M" in "EMB" (i.e., Edith Mary Bratt) is stylistically drawn as a heart. He inscribed his copy of Langland in a similar, decorative manner:

**"Exeter College. Feb. 1914 / ex. libris / coll/ de litt / et phil / germ(?) / etc."**

These inscription styles are highly similar to those in the account book for Edith, supporting the dating of these volumes. The Langland volume is an understandable purchase, for it was a set text in Tolkien's Middle English studies, and the "*ex libris*" in Tolkien's ownership inscription suggests the book was withdrawn from one of the Oxford libraries. Acquiring discarded library books would have been a frugal way for Tolkien, a young orphan always short of funds, to begin building his own scholarly collection of large and costly books.<sup>66</sup> His copy of the Welsh *Black Book of Carmarthen* is clearly a library discard. It contains a bookplate identifying it as the property of Meyricke Library, Jesus College, overprinted with a notice "sold by authority, Librarian, Jesus College." His studies with Prof. Craigie explain Tolkien's desire for a copy of Holthausen's *Altisländisches Elementarbuch* (Elementary Old

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<sup>66</sup> John Garth discusses Tolkien's poverty during his undergraduate years (*Great War* 43-44, 129; and "Tolkien at Exeter College" 14, 18, 38-39).

Icelandic), which bears a similar inscription, “**e/coll: exon: oxon: mcmxiii [i.e., 1913].**” Holger Pedersen’s two-volume *\*Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* (Comparative Grammar of Celtic Languages) (1909-1913) is also likely to have been a library discard that Tolkien acquired for a good price, for the volumes are elegantly bound with sewn-bindings, red leather corners and spines, and gold-embossed covers with the emblem of “Coll. Exon. Oxon.” Both volumes are autographed— “John Reuel Tolkien”—although he did not date them. Volume I of the Pedersen set bears a second ownership signature— “**ex libris ♦ Johannis Tolkien**”—in the same ornate style and with similar decorative capitals as those Tolkien used in his 1925-1929 *Letters from Father Christmas*.<sup>67</sup> This is suggestive (though certainly not proof) that Tolkien acquired the Pedersen volumes around 1925, after he returned to Oxford University to take up the position of Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon.

The Thurneysen set may seem a bit of an outlier for Tolkien’s interests at this time, and yet Tolkien demonstrated a need for an Old Irish grammar and dictionary. In 1914, Tolkien is known or suspected to have studied Old and Middle English with Kenneth Sisam, historical grammar with A.S. Napier, Old Norse with William A. Craigie, the Welsh *Mabinogion* with Sir John Rhŷs, and Chaucer with Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh (C&G I.46-62, *passim*). Garth describes a paper Tolkien wrote for Sisam in the spring of 1914 demonstrating the sound shifts of common words in Gothic, Old Norse, Old English, and related languages and dialects (*Great War* 34). Garth writes, “As well as copious notes on the regular descent of English from Germanic, he also examined the influence of its *Celtic neighbours* and linguistic impact of Scandinavian and Norman invasions” (*Great War* 34, italics added). This is just about the time that Tolkien acquired the Thurneysen volumes, perhaps to examine the influence of Celtic languages on English, and perhaps even at Sisam’s

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, the envelopes from Christmas 1925 (FCL 28), 20 Dec. 1926 (FCL 36), 21 Dec. 1927 (FCL 39) and 22 Dec. 1929 (FCL 59); I am grateful to John Garth for his assistance in these identifications.

urging, for Tolkien once wrote that “the foundation of my library was laid by Sisam. He taught me not only to read texts, but to study second-hand book catalogues, of which I was not even aware. Some he marked for me” (*Letters* #318, p.570).

Tucked inside Tolkien’s copy of Stokes’s and Windisch’s *\*Irische Texte*, Vol. III (1891) is just such a book catalogue: *Katalog Nr. 260. Angelsächsisch, Englisch, Keltische Sprachen* (54 S.8) from the German booksellers Mayer & Müller of Berlin. Although the catalogue features books on German, Anglo Saxon (Old English) and Celtic languages and literature, Tolkien only showed an interest in the books on Celtic languages (i.e., Irish, Welsh, Breton, Cornish, etc.). With characteristic blue crayon, he underlined the heading, “*Keltische Sprachen*” and the entry for Connellan’s *Grammar of the Irish Language* (1844). Then, he made several vertical lines with the blue crayon down the margins of the entire Celtic section of the catalogue (pp. 54-55) marking all forty-three titles listed.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, small horizontal pencil ticks were made next to four of the titles: *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, Connellan’s *Grammar*, Stokes’s and Windisch’s *Irische Texte*, and Zimmer’s *Keltische Studien*. A few of the titles in the list (*Irische Texte*, Kuno Meyer’s *\*Cath Finntrága*, and Diefenbach’s *\*Celtica*) are, in fact, present in Tolkien’s Irish Library at the Bodleian, however, it is unknown whether or not he acquired them through this catalogue. And yet, the catalogue itself demonstrates the veracity of Tolkien’s recollections of studying second-hand book catalogues as Sisam had taught him, and of Tolkien’s keen interest in books on various Celtic languages, including Irish.

The Thurneysen set is among Tolkien’s works on the Irish language that he engaged with the most. Whether in 1914 or later, Tolkien made hundreds of annotations, underlines, check marks, and Xs in *Vol. I: Grammar*, and these are fairly consistent through page 572 (and especially from pages 126-140). There are

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<sup>68</sup> Tolkien annotated several of his books with blue crayon including his personal copies of the Celtic titles Feist’s *\*Germanen und Kelten in der Antiken Überlieferung*, Arbois de Jubainville’s *\*Les Celtes depuis les Temps les plus Anciens* and *\*Litt. Celtique*, as well as Morris-Jones’s *\*A Welsh Grammar: Historical and Comparative*, noted above.

multiple layers of notes with marks in both pencil (the most numerous) and ink (a few). Having chosen Comparative Philology as his Special Subject in Michaelmas Term, October 1911 (C&G I.34-35), it is not surprising that the young man was interested in learning about Old Irish, long cited as a foundational element in the study of Indo-European languages. In Thurneysen's *Grammar*, he made several comparisons between Irish words and Greek, Latin, German, Gothic, and Welsh, just as one would expect for the sort of comparative philology project Garth describes above. Tolkien also repeatedly scribbled references in the Thurneysen to Morris-Jones's *Welsh Grammar*, which he had purchased about the same time with his Skeat Prize money. Several references to "Pedersen"—most likely Holger Pedersen's comparative grammar mentioned above—could indicate a second period of engagement with the Thurneysen set in the second-half of the 1920s.

Another period of engagement with Thurneysen's *Grammar* may have been in or after 20 August 1934, the postmark date of an empty envelope tucked into the back cover and addressed to "Professor J.R.R. Tolkien, 20 Northmoor Road, Oxford." Tolkien perhaps used the envelope as a bookmark. Another bookmark, torn from an unidentified government publications order form, was tucked into Vol. I, between pages 248-249, a section on Old Irish pronouns.<sup>69</sup> Two long sheets of paper were also placed inside the back cover. These were folded into twenty-four narrow columns (six columns per side on two sides of two sheets of paper) containing Irish vocabulary translated into German, English, or French in Tolkien's closely-scrawled handwriting. The folded sheets are written mostly in pencil, although some ink has been added later in-between the pencilled lines. The first sheet includes the Irish words *ac(c)allam/acallam*, *tuirenn*, and *Cúailnge*, i.e., title words from famous Irish texts, *Acallam na senórach* ('Dialogue of the ancients'),

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<sup>69</sup> The text on this fragment of a government publications catalogue includes instructions for ordering publications from "His Majesty's Sta" (Stationery Office) in London, Manchester or Cardiff, or from the British Library in the U.S.; the reference to "His Majesty" indicates the page was printed prior to the start of Queen Elizabeth's reign in 1952.

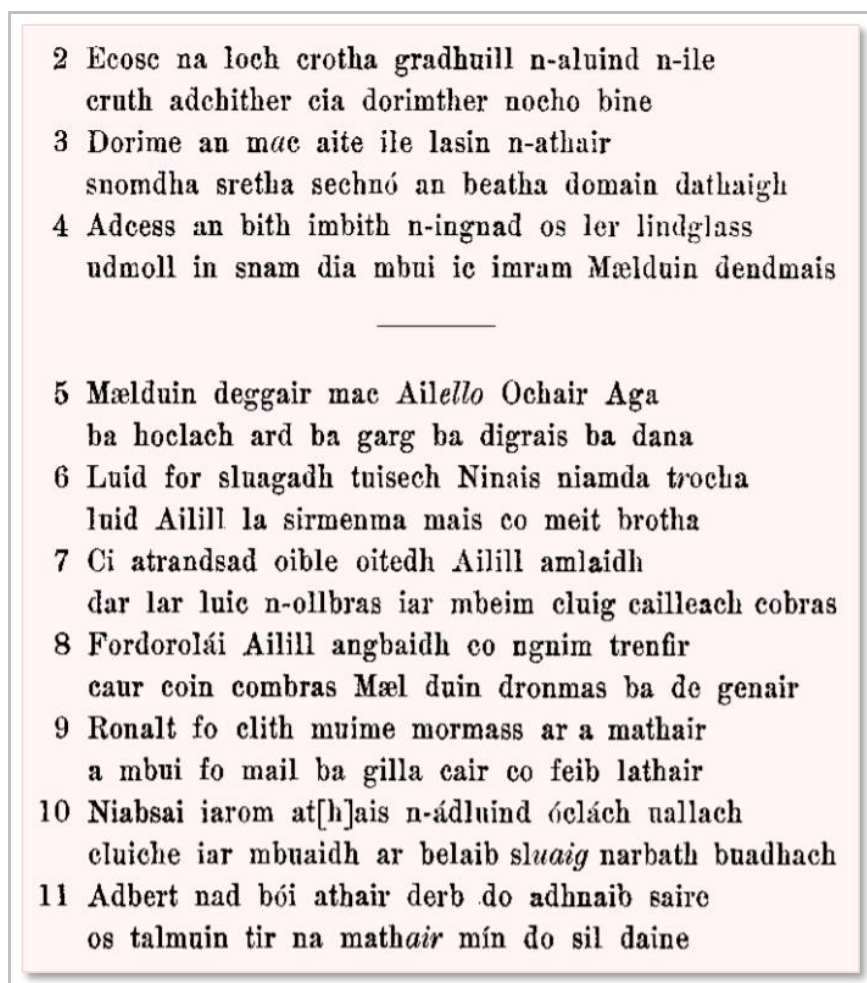
*Oidheadh chloinne Tuireann* ('The Violent death of the children of Tuireann'), and *Táin bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle raid of Cooley'), all three of which are potential sources of Tolkien's, as argued in this thesis. The second sheet is headed,

Saltair na Rann	Strophen Psalter
Leabhar	book                      [=book, leaves]
Laighneach of Leinster	[=Leinster] <sup>70</sup>

It shows Tolkien making a concerted effort to translate, using Thurneysen's *Grammar*, portions of Whitley Stokes's \**Saltair na Rann*, a collection of 150 Middle Irish religious cantos and a book which Tolkien also owned. In addition to his attempts to translate parts of the *Saltair* on the two folded sheets of paper tucked inside Thurneysen's Vol. I, Tolkien also heavily annotated a few pages of the *Saltair* itself: pages 18 & 19 containing cantos on Eve in the Garden of Eden, and on page 118 containing cantos on the creation of the world (i.e., cantos CLIII, CLIV, and CLV which Tolkien translated as "Sunday of Doom," "Monday" and "Tuesday," respectively). Tolkien also made several notes in pencil on the back flyleaf of his copy of the *Saltair* which are not from the *Saltair* at all, nor from Thurneysen's *Grammar*, nor from any other book currently held in the Bodleian's Tolkien collection. In fact, they come from a source not previously associated with Tolkien: Kuno Meyer's "*Incipit do Imrum Curaig Mældúin andso*" ('The beginning of the voyage of Mael Dúin's curach here') from the *Yellow Book of Lecan* (col. 370-399, facs. pp. 1-15, collated with Harleian 5280, fo. 1ff) and published in Bergin, et. al., *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. I (1907) (see **Figure 2.2.3** "*Incipit do Imrum Curaig Mældúin andso* (excerpt)").

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<sup>70</sup> i.e., Laighneach of Leinster = *The Book of Leinster*, a mediaeval Irish manuscript compiled c.1160, Trinity College Dublin, shelf mark MS H 2.18 (cat. 1339).



**Figure 2.2.3** Kuno Meyer, “*Incipit do Imrum curaig Mældúin andso* (excerpt),” *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. 1, 1907, p.51. © Public Domain image

*Immram curaig Mail Dúin* is known in manuscripts from the twelfth century, although Liam Breatnach pinpoints its composition in the Old Irish period (c.600-900) with modifications made in the Middle Irish (c.900-1200) (55). In the narrative, Mael Dúin is a warrior seeking to avenge his father’s death. However, as Mael Dúin’s ship sails in sight of the enemy’s island forts, “a great wind came upon them, so that they were driven (over the sea, all) that night until morning. And even after morning they saw nor earth nor land, and they knew not whither they were going” (*Mael Dúin I* 463). Mael Dúin and his crew then wander the ocean for three years and seven months, visiting nearly three dozen strange and marvellous islands, and losing three of their company, before they once again sight the forts of the enemy. By this time, however, passions have cooled on both sides, and Mael Dúin and the

men who killed his father agree to set aside vengeance and practise Christian forgiveness and reconciliation instead.

On the back flyleaf of his copy of the *Saltair*, Tolkien translates “*Mælduin*” (as he spells it here) as “slave of the fort” and “*deggair*” as “fair-voiced.” He pieces together parts of Mael Dúin’s conception story which echoes, in many respects, traditional Irish heroic biographies like those of Cú Chulainn or Finn. Mael Dúin’s mother, a nun, is ravished by a “champion” who is killed before the baby is born. She raises her son in secret, placing him with a foster-mother, and he grows to be “a fair lad with excellence of strength,” as Tolkien translates the text. He does not get much further than that, but it is interesting to see Tolkien’s work in progress, and it is easy to understand the frustrations with Irish languages he expressed in his letters (see **Chapter 1**).

Tolkien’s copy of *Saltair na Rann* is undated, so we have no idea *when* these translation efforts occurred. Tolkien did not mention Mael Dúin in his 1924 poem *The Nameless Land* where he named other Irish voyagers, Bran and Brendan, as well as “Tir-nan-Og,” the Land of the Youth. Tolkien *did* mention Mael Dúin later in both of his unfinished time-travel novels, *The Lost Road* (c.1936) and *The Notion Club Papers* (1945), as “Maelduin,” the spelling Nansen had used. None of this establishes with certainty *when* Tolkien attempted these translations, however, this may be the first time a firm connection has been made between Tolkien and the *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, a five-volume series (1907-1913) containing several transcriptions of Irish texts of potential interest to Tolkien (and Tolkien scholars) (see Bergin, O. J., et. al.).

Tolkien owned another version of the Mael Dúin story, as well, one also not part of his Irish Library in the Bodleian. Ordway identifies *The Irish Fairy Book* (1909) edited by Alfred Percival Graves on a bookshelf behind Tolkien in a 1966 photograph taken in Tolkien’s office (Ordway 267, 336 n94). The book’s contributors include a who’s who of Irish nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature and scholarship: Standish James O’Grady, Patrick Kennedy, William Allingham, T.

Crofton Croker, Lady Gregory, P.W. Joyce, Douglas Hyde, and Eleanor Hull, among others. The book also includes Alfred, Lord Tennyson's English-language ballad, "The Voyage of Maeldune" (Graves 346-355). While it is not known when Tolkien acquired *The Irish Fairy Book*, its presence on his bookshelf in a 1966 photograph demonstrates an enduring interest in Irish "things," including the voyage tale of Mael Dúin.

What we *can* deduce from the evidence of Tolkien's fragmented Irish translations is a sense of how he worked. With his copy of Thurneysen's *Grammar* open before him, he scribbled some translated words from *Saltair na Rann* on paper and inside the *Saltair* itself. When he needed paper to work on translating from Meyer's "Incipit" (probably with the use of Thurneysen's *Grammar*), Tolkien grabbed the *Saltair* and used a blank page at the back. Thurneysen's *Grammar* was clearly a foundational work in Tolkien's Irish library and it leads us to other Irish works Tolkien used. In addition to the *Saltair* and the "Incipit," on pages 13-15 of the *Grammar*, under the heading "Wichtigere Hilfsmittel" ("More Important Tools"), Tolkien marked a number of recommended books on the Irish language, including several which ended up in his Irish Library: Stokes's and Windische's *Irische Texte*, Patrick Dinneen's *\*Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*, Windisch's *\*Die Altirische Heldensage*, *\*Táin bó Cúalnge*, and Johann Kaspar Zeuss's two-volume *\*Grammatica Celtica*.

Thurneysen's *Vol. II: Texts and Dictionary* is only one-fifth the size of the first volume, the *Grammar*, and there are only about two dozen pencilled annotations or translations of Irish into English or Latin throughout. These include scattered attempts to translate a few individual words in each, "Die Glossen zum Brief des Paulus an die Ephesier" ('Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians') and the Old Irish poem "Der Gelehrte und sein Kater" ('The Scholar and his Cat' also known as "*Pangur Bán*") (Thurneysen, II.2-12, 40-41). But there is no sustained attempt to translate either one, a fact which also supports Tolkien's contention that he felt "rather heavily defeated by Old Irish" (*Letters* #122, p.189). But we see with the Thurneysen set the sort of "goldmine for scholars" that Heather Jackson predicted. Tolkien's



numerous annotations and marginalia, and the ephemera he left inside, give us ideas about titles in which he was interested, as well as how he worked in multiple volumes at once and returned to favourite volumes repeatedly, before ceasing his work in apparent frustration.

Despite that frustration, Tolkien's lifelong interest in Irish literature and language began here with his exposure to Irish Otherworld voyage literature in his friend G.B. Smith's poetry and Nansen's *In Northern Mists*, with his introduction to Middle Irish romance in O'Grady's translations of *Acallam na senórach* in *Silva Gadelica*, and with his acquisition of Thurneysen's *Grammar*. Together, these texts mark the foundations of what would become his "Irish" library. Around this time, Tolkien also began to create the first experimental pieces of his legendarium. Considering the multiple vectors from which he learned about Irish language, legend, and literature, it should be no surprise to find the marked influence of his Irish sources in these early forays into mythopoeia.

## 2.3 The Voyage of Eärendel

During Trinity Term (Spring 1913), as part of his studies, Tolkien read the eighth-century Old English poem *Crist* attributed to the poet Cynewulf. Tolkien was struck by the beauty of the word (or name), Éarendel: "*Eala Éarendel! engla beorhtast / ofer middangeard monnim sende*" ("Hail Éarendel! brightest of angels, above the middle-earth sent unto men") (*Biography* 72). Three decades later, speaking through his *Notion Club Papers* character Arundel Lowdham, Tolkien wrote, "When I came across that citation in the dictionary, I felt a curious thrill, as if something had stirred in me, half wakened from sleep. There was something very remote and strange and beautiful behind those words, if I could grasp it, far beyond ancient English" (*Sauron* 236). According to Carpenter, when Tolkien showed "the original Earendel lines" to G.B. Smith, his friend asked him what they were about. Tolkien said he didn't know but would "try to find out" (*Biography* 75). As he sought out more information, Tolkien discovered several cognates, including "Orendel," a mythological German seafaring hero, and "Aurvandil" from Norse mythology whose

frozen toe was hurled into the sky to become a star (Hostetter, “Over Middle-earth” 7 & 6). It was as if each cognate represented a small piece from an older, larger mythology which Tolkien could stitch back together. Flieger said, “out of a name and a question a mythology was born” (“Lost Tale” 93-94).

But Tolkien had picked up more scraps in his studies than just those about a Germanic star mariner: there was also the evening star Hesperus (Vesper), the Norse Vinland sagas, and the Irish voyage tales of Brendan and Bran. In 1914 and 1915, Tolkien stitched together various elements from all of these (and more) into a cycle of four poems in which the mortal mariner Eärendel plies the oceans and sails over the world’s western edge to become the brightest star in the heavens. In addition to being one of the first works of Tolkien’s Middle-earth legendarium, I argue here that these poems also contain the first identifiable Irish influences in his writings, especially the motif of the Otherworld voyage, which would prove to be an enduring fascination for Tolkien.

The first of the four poems is *The Voyage of Éarendel the Evening Star* (in Old English, *Scipfæreld Earendeles Áfensteorran*), originally written in September 1914 at the Nottinghamshire house of Tolkien’s aunt, Jane Neave (*Lost Tales II* 267). It was followed by a poem alternately entitled *The Minstrel Renounces the Song*, *The Lay of Eärendel*, and *The Bidding of the Minstrel* for its subject of a reluctant minstrel called to recount old tales of Eärendel’s voyages (*Lost Tales II* 269-270). This was written at Tolkien’s new lodgings in St John’s Street, Oxford, in the winter of 1914. Tolkien wrote the third poem, *The Shores of Faëry*, around 8-9 July 1915 in a notebook opposite a painting he had made in May with the same title (*Lost Tales II* 271-272). The earliest extant version of the fourth poem, *The Happy Mariners*, was written about the same time on the back of an unsent letter dated 11 July 1915 from Moseley (Birmingham) (*Lost Tales II* 277 fn12). Christopher Tolkien examines these poems in the context of his father’s nascent legendarium in *The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*, “Section V. ‘The Tale of Eärendel.’” John Garth examines them through biographical and source criticism lenses in *The Great War* (see his Chapters 2-4), in the article “‘The Road from Adaptation to Invention’” (2014), and elsewhere. Here, I

will focus on the evidence of *Irish* influence in the Eärendel poetry cycle and related writings.

In *The Voyage of Éarendel*, the mariner departs from “Westerland,” before sailing out over “the margin of the world” and into the heavens (*Lost Tales II* 268). Westerland is an overseas Otherworld analogous to Vinland, *Tír na nÓg*, the Land of Women, the Promised Land of the Saints, even G.B. Smith’s “Distant isles of sunset glory.” By the time Tolkien penned *The Shores of Faëry*, Westerland had been renamed “Valinor,” the land of Tolkien’s demiurgic Valar (*sing.* Vala), but its role as an analogue of the overseas Otherworld remained unchanged.

In *The Bidding of the Minstrel*, an audience calls for “a tale of immortal sea-yearning” like those the Eldar once made (*Lost Tales II* 270). Such songs of blessed golden shores beyond the western sea were sung by G.B. Smith’s sweet bird (22). Specifically, the listeners want a tale of Eärendel who plies the seas of the world in his white-oared ship: such tales weave “a winelike spell” (*Lost Tales II* 270). Invoked in this context, such a spell calls to mind the “heady vintage” from Dorwinion/Vinland that causes “deep and pleasant dreams” (*Hobbit*, IX.190,192). Only, the minstrel demurs, “the music is broken, the words half-forgotten,” and the “Elven ships” have foundered and lie rotting (*Lost Tales II* 270). Unlike the monk’s divine birdsong, the minstrel’s music can no longer summon the magic of the Otherworld.

The wine-like spell in *The Bidding of the Minstrel* is accompanied by “the odours of night” on the sea-spray (*Lost Tales II* 270). Likewise, in *The Happy Mariners*, from “beyond the West” the wind blows sometimes “with perfume laden of unearthly trees” (*Lost Tales II* 276). A heady fragrance is an Otherworld motif: just such trees are found in the *Navigatio* when, for example, St Brendan lands on an island covered with heavily laden trees weighed down to the ground by their abundant grapes. Brendan walks around the island, “where the fragrance was like that of a house stored with pomegranates; the brethren [all] the while remaining in the boat awaited his return, and the wind laden with those odours blew towards them, and so regaled them with its fragrance, that they heeded not their long fast”

(O'Donoghue 155). Notably, Tolkien's description of otherworldly winds as "perfume laden" is distinctly similar to the "wind laden ... odours" in Denis O'Donoghue's *Navigatio* translation.<sup>71</sup> Tolkien employs the same imagery again to describe "Elfinesse"—an early name for Tol Eressëa, the land of the Elves—in his memorial poem to G.B. Smith: "...the shore of Elfinesse / Where laden winds bear song and perfumed sound / of infinite delight" (*Poems* I.388). Aisling Byrne lists "fruitfulness, beauty, sweet smells, and greenness" as conventional mediaeval descriptions of Otherworlds (161). This, of course, is also the source of Bilbo's odd exclamation upon entering Rivendell for the first time in *The Hobbit* (1937)—"Hmmm! it smells like elves!" he exclaims (*Hobbit* III.58): Bilbo is not sensing Elvish body odour, but the perfume-laden trees from where the Elves laugh and sing.

On the back of one of the draft sheets of *The Bidding of the Minstrel*, Tolkien sketched the earliest account of Eärendel's great voyage, which would end with his apotheosis as a star (see *Lost Tales II* 261, 269-271):

Eärendel's boat goes through North [*sic.*] Iceland. [*Added in margin:* back of North Wind.] Greenland, and the wild islands: a mighty wind and crest of great wave carry him to hotter climes, to back of West Wind ... sees a great mountain island and a golden city [*added in margin:* Kôr] – wind blows him southward ... Sails west again to the lip of the world, just as the Sun is diving into the sea. He sets sail upon the sky and returns no more to earth. (*Lost Tales II* 261)

Garth observes that Eärendel's journey is reminiscent of those in the Norse sagas:

Iceland, Greenland and a strange, magical land beyond certainly recalls Thorfinn's journey from Iceland to Greenland and then Vinland. The great wind that blows Éarendel into warmer climes is

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<sup>71</sup> By comparison, O'Meara's more recent version translates the same passage as, "the breeze bore in on them a sweet perfume" (Wooding & O'Meara 51).

reminiscent of the one in the saga that blows Leif Ericksson off course and leads to the discovery of Vinland. (*Worlds* 68)

Tolkien had learned from Nansen how reports of magical lands in the west may have first reached Iceland from Irish sources (*In Northern Mists* I.353). In any case, the “mighty wind” is another stock voyage tale motif. Its mysterious intervention at key moments represents the numinous, and aid or hindrance to the protagonists. In the mediaeval *Immram curaig Ua Corra* (‘The Voyage of the boat of the Uí Chorra’), three bandit brothers set out on a penitential voyage. They give themselves up to God, willing to go, “Whithersoever the wind shall take us”; when they board their boat, “a mighty wind drove them due westward into the ocean of the great sea” (Stokes, *Húi Corra* 41). In *Immram Mail Dúin*, the protagonist attempts to raid the forts of his enemies, but his ships are driven out to sea by “a great wind,” thus postponing the battle (*Mael Dúin I* 463). In the *Navigatio*, Brendan’s boat is becalmed, and he advises his brethren, “Take in your oars, and cast loose the sails, for the Lord will guide our boat whithersoever He willeth”; they row for twenty days until “God sent a favourable wind” (O’Donoghue 143). G.B. Smith’s poems are replete with images of otherworldly winds, and he captures the sense of surrendering to the divine in his poem “Pure Virginia: York River Returns” where he writes, “This way or that way, as the great winds please” (28). Tolkien, too, makes use of this divine wind motif in these earliest notes on Eärendel’s great voyage: denied passage to the Undying Lands, the mariner is twice driven back by “a mighty wind” (*Lost Tales II* 261).

*The Shores of Faëry* is preceded by a short prose preface which, Christopher Tolkien writes, “if not as old as the first composition of the poem itself (July 1915) is certainly not much later” (*Lost Tales II* 262). The preface summarises how “Eärendel the Wanderer who beat about the Oceans of the World in his white ship Wingelot sat long while in his old age upon the Isle of Seabirds in the Northern Waters ere he set forth upon a last voyage” (*Lost Tales II* 262). In later notes for the prose *Tale of Eärendel*, Tolkien states that Eärendel’s wife, Elwing, is transformed into a seamew and he waits for her on the Isle of Seabirds where, “all the birds of all

waters come at whiles" (*Lost Tales II* 260, 264, 253). Tolkien's Isle of Seabirds is an analogue of the *Navigatio*'s "Paradise of Birds," an island where a large tree stands, "covered over with snow-white birds, so that it hid its boughs and leaves entirely" (O'Donoghue 129). One of the birds, a messenger from God, tells Brendan that these are the spirits of neutral angels who fell in Lucifer's rebellion. Having taken neither the side of Heaven nor of Hell, they must abide on Earth as birds, singing praises to God, until Judgment Day. John Carey calls them, "half-fallen angels": although they are "excluded from the fellowship of celestial angels, they are still wise, benevolent, and blessed beings" (*Single Ray* 23). The motif of the human or angel transformed into a bird occurs in nearly all the extant mediaeval voyage tales (Swank, "Irish Otherworld Voyage" 49). Tolkien's Elwing, transformed into a seamew, is analogous these. Tolkien continued to develop the motif further, as he adapted the Brendan story in his own writings (see **Chapter 4**).

It is, then, by Tolkien's own notes, jottings, and poems comprising the earliest Eärendel cycle (1914-1915) that he demonstrates his familiarity with several specific motifs from Irish voyage literature, especially from the *Navigatio sancti Brendani*. But more than simply copying his sources, Tolkien blends multiple sources as the Norse saga writers had done before him: he stitches together scraps of pre-existing Irish legends of lands of bliss in the West with fragments about a Germanic seafarer who became the Evening Star in order to (re)create a "lost" mythology.

## 2.4 Conclusions

It is apparent that Irish material in Tolkien's legendarium is coeval with Germanic and other influences. For the first time, however, through original archival research and the piecing together of disparate data, I have created a meaningful picture of when and by what means Tolkien first developed his interest in Irish language and literature. In 1911-1915, with Tolkien's befriending of G.B. Smith, his change to the English School and the assignment of Kenneth Sisam as his tutor, Tolkien's interest in Irish literature and language began to manifest. The apparent exposure to

*Immram Brain*, *Navigatio sancti Brendani* and other voyage literature would define the shape of Tolkien's secondary world with its axis firmly pointed West. Tolkien's introduction to Middle Irish romance in O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* fired the young Tolkien's imagination with possibilities for (re)constructing a national "mythology" (even if what he eventually achieved developed into something quite different). Although we do not have, at present, evidence that Tolkien read or acquired a copy of *Silva Gadelica*, he did record the title in his lecture notes, so it must have stood out as an important work, at least at that moment. John Garth confirms that Tolkien acquired a copy of Nansen's *In Northern Mists* in November 1921 and kept it the rest of his life (*Worlds* 192 fn36). Tolkien also retained his first Irish grammar by Thurneysen for the rest of his life, and referred to it repeatedly. Tolkien's "Irish" library eventually grew to at least fifty volumes (and more not held in the Bodleian) related to Irish literature and language study which he acquired over the next fifty years (see **Appendix A, Part 1**). Additionally, he owned at least nine titles in or relating to Scottish Gaelic (see **Appendix A, Part 2**). Thus, I argue, these influences were embedded in Tolkien's Middle-earth legendarium from its very foundation. The proof is in his inaugural Eärendel poems with their wine-like spells, otherworldly music, perfume-laden divine winds, and sunset islands of supernatural birds: all elements derived from the Irish Otherworld voyage literature of Saint Brendan and others. The western voyage became one of Tolkien's most frequent motifs, and we will return to it in **Chapter 4. Rover the Water-baby (1920s)**. Before that, however, in **Chapter 3. Lost Tales (1916-1919)**, we will examine Tolkien's first sustained attempt to create a legendarium. This, too, is deeply-rooted in Irish legend.

## Chapter 3 Lost Tales (1916–1919)

From his first mythographic efforts as a university student, Tolkien moved significantly toward the creation of a body of legend during the later years of the 1910s. His sources, analogues, and influences during this period inform the very genesis of the Middle-earth we know today. This chapter argues that one of the most important (but essentially unrecognised) sources of inspiration for Tolkien's *Book of Lost Tales*—as he called his legendarium at this time—was the Irish *Acallam na senórach*, a mediaeval collection of tales and place-name lore coalescing around legends of Finn mac Cumail and his *fían*. Major presentations of *Acallam* material available in the early twentieth century, and thus available to Tolkien by the time he wrote *The Book of Lost Tales*, include the editions and translations in Standish Hayes O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* and Whitley Stokes's *\*Irische Texte* (see **Chapter 2**), along with a handful of imaginative retellings in English like those by Lady Gregory (among others), whose *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904) in turn, relied on O'Grady and Stokes as major sources. There are numerous textual and narrative similarities between Tolkien's legendarium and the *Acallam*, which this chapter will begin to explore: **Section 3.1 Some Irish Roots of the Legendarium** traces Tolkien's early Irish inspirations; **Section 3.2 *Acallam na senórach* ('Dialogue of the ancients')** examines key analogues from the *Acallam* in Tolkien's *The Book of Lost Tales*; and **Section 3.3 The *Acallam* in *The Lord of the Rings*** looks at some *Acallam* analogues in Tolkien's later work, especially in relation to the character of Aragorn and his family. The chapter closes with **Section 3.4 Conclusions**.

### 3.1 Some Irish Roots of the Legendarium

During the summer of 1914, just as the poetry cycle concerning Eärendel the star mariner was germinating in Tolkien's mind, the Great War broke out in Europe. The young men of his generation rushed to volunteer for service, however Tolkien delayed enlisting just long enough to finish his Oxford degree. Tolkien wrote to his son Michael in a 1941 letter, "In those days chaps joined up, or were scorned



publicly. It was a nasty cleft to be in for a young man with too much imagination and little physical courage" (*Letters* #43 p.73). But he passed his university exams and duly joined the army, beginning his military training in July 1915 (C&G I.76 & 78). He married Edith Bratt on 22 March 1916 (C&G I.86), and in June he was ordered to France. Later Tolkien told an interviewer, "One didn't expect to survive, you know. Junior officers were being killed off, a dozen a minute. Parting from my wife then—we were only just married—it was like a death" (Cater 23). From July 1916, the twenty-four-year-old Second Lieutenant Tolkien found himself in and out of the water-logged trenches of the Battle of the Somme.<sup>72</sup> In late October, he reported to a medical officer with a temperature of 103°F and "trench fever," a bacterium passed into the bloodstream by "the inescapable lice that had bred in the seams of his clothes and fed on him," and which could cause anything from a rash to persistent fever or even heart failure (*Great War* 200). Tolkien was evacuated from France and "spent the rest of the war in and out of hospital and convalescence, or training fresh troops in Staffordshire and Yorkshire" (Garth, "Battle of the Somme"). At the same time, he was grieving over the war deaths of several friends from King Edward's School and Oxford, including Rob Gilson and Geoffrey Bache Smith, both members of the close-knit "TCBS." It was during this itinerant period from 1916-1919 when Tolkien created the first version of his Elvish legendarium, *The Book of Lost Tales*, a series of interlinked stories set within a narrative frame.<sup>73</sup>

The first chapter—entitled, *The Cottage of Lost Play*—was first written down in a battered "High School Exercise Book" in which some of the "Lost Tales" were composed and dated in Edith Tolkien's hand, "February 12, 1917" (*Lost Tales* I 13). Christopher Tolkien observes, "the date of the actual composition of this tale could

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<sup>72</sup> The best account of Tolkien's war experience remains John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War* (2003).

<sup>73</sup> For a chronology of Tolkien's movements during this period, see Phil Mathison, *Tolkien in East Yorkshire, 1917-1918*.

have been, but probably was not, earlier than the winter of 1916-17,” that is, soon after Tolkien’s return from France (*Lost Tales I* 13). *The Cottage of Lost Play* sets out the frame narrative of the “Lost Tales” in which a traveller named Eriol (later, Ælfwine), arrives on the island of Tol Eressëa after a long voyage in the Western ocean. He turns down a winding lane, “as if by chance,” and happens upon “a tiny dwelling” called *Mar Vanwa Tyaliéva* (The Cottage of Lost Play) (*Lost Tales I* 14). Eriol begs lodgings for the night, but he wonders at the small size of the cottage. The door-ward tells him, “Small is the dwelling, but smaller still are they that dwell here— for all who enter must be very small indeed, or of their own good wish become as very little folk even as they stand upon the threshold” (*Lost Tales I* 14). And, indeed, as soon as Eriol steps across the threshold, the house no longer seems small, but “of great spaciousness and very great delight, and the lord of it, Lindo, and his wife, Vairë, came forth to greet him” (*Lost Tales I* 14-15). The host and hostess, who are also sheltering a group of exiled fairies— or Elves —welcome Eriol and feast him: “Even as he gazed all arose and with one voice sang the song of the Bringing in of the Meats. Then was the food brought in and set before them, and thereafter the bearers and those that served and those that waited, host and hostess, children and guest, sat down: but Lindo first blessed both food and company” (*Lost Tales I* 16). Eriol is invited to stay at the Cottage, and over the course of several nights (and days) he is regaled with Elvish tales of the creation of the Universe, the history of the gods (i.e., the Valar) and the rebellion of one of their number, Melko (later Melkor/Morgoth) who stole the *silmarils*— three jewels which contain all that remains of the primal light —and of the Elves who fled from paradisiacal Valinor in pursuit of them, and their subsequent exile from that land. Eriol hears the three great tragedies— *The Tale of Tinúviel* (later, *Of Beren and Lúthien*), *Turambar and the Foalókë* (the germ of the later *Children of Húrin*), and *Tuor and the Exiles of Gondolin* (later, *The Fall of Gondolin*) —as well as the eucatastrophic, though unfinished, *Tale of Eärendel*, which brought Tolkien’s star mariner into the legendarium as a saviour figure. Eriol’s own life becomes part of the story as he eventually serves as the conduit through which the Elvish tales are preserved and transmitted to humankind.

According to Christopher Tolkien, *The Book of Lost Tales*, “never reached or even approached a form in which my father could have considered them for publication before he abandoned them; they were experimental and provisional, and the tattered notebooks in which they were written were bundled away and left unlooked at as the years passed” (*Lost Tales I* 9). Once Tolkien had begun his academic career at the Universities of Leeds and Oxford, *The Book of Lost Tales* was superseded by work on long poetic (and also unfinished) versions of the *Lay of the Children of Húrin* (1920–1925) and the *Lay of Leithian* (i.e., *Beren and Lúthien*, 1925–1931) (*Lays* 1). His evolving conceptions of the history of the Elves— in the “Sketch” of the mythology (1926), various “side branches and subordinate texts” (1930s), and successive versions of (what would become) *The Silmarillion* (beginning in 1937) —left the “Lost Tales” obsolete (*Lost Tales I* 8–9). And yet, *The Book of Lost Tales* forever represents the inception of Tolkien’s “mythology,” and several of its fundamental elements remained largely unchanged throughout the legendarium’s many versions and revisionings.

If, as now seems likely, the bulk of *The Book of Lost Tales* was written in 1917–1919, before Tolkien began to work on the great Oxford *Dictionary*, he would not have had at his disposal the vast resources of the Bodleian Library, nor is it to be expected that he took with him all the heavy tomes of his burgeoning scholarly library as he and Edith moved peripatetically with the army from post to post during this period.<sup>74</sup> Rather, his sources would have been the few books they packed along with their personal possessions, or whatever material was to be found in the various hospitals and army camps where he convalesced and served on light duty. Of course, Tolkien also had in his prodigious memory the various

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<sup>74</sup> The traditional chronology for Tolkien’s writing of the “Lost Tales” was set in Carpenter’s *Biography*, Christopher Tolkien’s commentary in *Lost Tales I* and *Lost Tales II*, and Scull and Hammond’s C&G; an important reappraisal of the chronology is presented by Garth in “Ilú’s Music”; on Tolkien’s time at the Oxford *Dictionary*, see Gilliver, who reckons Tolkien may have begun work in late 1918; the first bundle of definitions to which he contributed was sent to press on 3 April 1919 (“At the Wordface” 174).

stories and poems he was exposed to during his student days. He drew upon his familiarity with the Finnish *Kalevala*, legends of the Germanic star mariner, and the Old and Middle English texts he had studied. The “Lost Tales” have also been previously linked to Irish tales and mythological texts. Lisa L. Spangenberg finds the feasting in Tolkien’s *The Cottage of Lost Play* similar to the Celtic motif of the otherworldly feast, and also the eponymous “cottage” is reminiscent of a small house in the mediaeval Irish *Compert Con Culainn* (‘The Conception and birth of Cú Chulainn’) (448). When Conchobar mac Nessa, the legendary king of Ulster, is out hunting a great flock of birds with his companions, they are overtaken by nightfall. Looking for shelter, the party finds a small, plain-looking house which seems to have been newly built on the spot. The man and woman of the house invite them to stay, and when Conchobar and his warriors enter, “the mean little house seemed to grow bigger and bigger. Within was place not only for them, but for their arms and horses, their chariots and charioteers also. Meats of every kind, most plentiful and most pleasant to taste, were set before them” (Arbois de Jubainville, *Irish Mythological Cycle* 167-168). The similarities between *Compert Con Culainn*’s small house and Tolkien’s *Cottage of Lost Play* are noteworthy. In both tales, weary travellers seek lodgings as night falls and, as if by chance, come upon small houses which turn out to be (like Doctor Who’s TARDIS) inexplicably more spacious on the inside.<sup>75</sup> In both tales, the travellers are greeted by a gracious host and hostess who provide “lavish and so unexpected hospitality” (Arbois de Jubainville, *Irish Mythological Cycle* 168). Explicitly, a plentiful variety of “meats” is set before them in both works. Even after Tolkien abandoned *The Book of Lost Tales*, he employed the Irish motif of the hosts and hostel in both the Last Homely House of Rivendell and the House of Tom Bombadil (see **Chapter 6**).

The summary of *Compert Con Culainn* above comes from the *Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology* (1903), Richard I. Best’s English translation of Henri d’Arbois

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<sup>75</sup> In Tolkien’s text, there is the idea that guests must be willing to become small (i.e., humble) to enter, however the imagery of the “small house” is similar in both narratives.

de Jubainville's French-language *Le Cycle Mythologie Celtique* (1884). Arbois de Jubainville was an important influence on Tolkien's legendarium (see, for example, **Chapters 6 & 7**), and Tolkien owned at least three other books by the French scholar, although neither *Le Cycle Mythologie Celtique* nor Best's English translation are known to have been in Tolkien's personal library.<sup>76</sup> Tolkien did own at least two books that included *Compert Con Culainn*: Rudolf Thurneysen's *\*Zu Irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälern* (Irish Manuscripts and Monumental Literature, 1912) which includes an Irish edition with translation into German, and Ernst Windisch's and Whitley Stokes's *Irische Texte* (1880; I.134-145) which includes editions in Irish. However, Tolkien acquired the Thurneysen volume in 1922, after his work on the "Lost Tales" had ceased. There is no acquisition date on the four-volume *Irische Texte* but, as discussed in **Chapter 1**, the Irish language would have proved difficult for Tolkien. Nevertheless, we cannot discount Tolkien having encountered *Compert Con Culainn* elsewhere, such as Louis Duvau's French translation in the journal *Revue Celtique* (1888) or its reprinting in another volume by Arbois de Jubainville, *L'Épopée Celtique en Irlande* (1892), or one of the popular English-language retellings of Irish mythological texts which proliferated during the Irish Literary Revival, such as Lady Gregory's *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne* (1902). Although a specific source text has proven elusive, *Compert Con Culainn* should be considered a *hard analogue* (in Beidler's terminology) considering its availability in several forms at the time Tolkien wrote his narrative, and for its "striking resemblances" to Tolkien's *Cottage of Lost Play*.

As discussed in **Chapter 1**, several scholars have convincingly argued that Tolkien's Elves were influenced by the Túatha Dé Dannan, the immortal race in Irish mythological literature, and particularly by stories of them found in *Lebor gabála*

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<sup>76</sup> The books by Arbois de Jubainville in the Bodleian's Tolkien collection are *\*Les Celtes depuis les Temps les Plus Anciens jusqu'en l'an 100 avant Notre Ère* (1904), a title mentioned by Tolkien in *The Name 'Nodens'* (182); *\*Introduction à L'Étude de la Littérature Celtique* (1883), which Tolkien acquired in 1923; and *\*Glossaire Moyen-Breton* (1895-96). For more information, see **Appendix A, Part 1**.

Érenn. It is apparent that by 1917-1918, when the “Lost Tales” were taking shape, Tolkien had encountered some version of *Lebor gabála* for there are a significant number of close parallels between the two works. In the exile of Tolkien’s Elves from the paradisiacal Valinor in the West, their arrival in mortal lands and the burning of their own ships to prevent their return to those lands, Fimi sees analogues of the arrival of the Túatha Dé Danann in Ireland from four mysterious northern islands in ships which they burn so they would not fall into enemy hands (*Mad Elves* 162). Fimi also relates the loss of a hand in the later Silmarillion by Maedhros, one of the princes of the Noldorin Elves, to the loss of a hand in *Lebor gabála* by Nuada, the first king of the Túatha Dé Danann (*Mad Elves* 163). *Lebor gabála* was a popular source of Irish mythological narratives in the age of cultural nationalism when such luminaries as Yeats, Russell and Lady Gregory advocated for the reclamation and/or (re)construction of those narratives. And yet, while a number of analogues are apparent, Tolkien’s precise source(s) for *Lebor gabála* has not been determined. Again, a possible source was Thurneysen’s *Zu Irischen Handschriften*. While Tolkien did not acquire his own copy until 1922, he could have read another copy prior to the War. Another candidate is Lady Gregory’s *Gods and Fighting Men* which, along with her earlier *Cuchulainn*, represented some of the earliest popular retellings of Irish mythological narratives for a general audience. The loss of Nuada’s hand is the subject of the second story in *Gods and Fighting Men* which also describes the coming of the Túatha Dé Danann to Ireland, however, Lady Gregory does not include the story of the burning of the ships. I propose, for perhaps the first time in scholarship, Whitley Stokes’s “The Second Battle of Moytura” published in the journal *Revue Celtique* (1891). This was the first English translation of the story, and it shares several key narrative elements with Tolkien’s “Lost Tales,” including the departure of the Túatha Dé Danann over the sea where they receive an education in arts and magic, their return to Ireland in ships which they burn upon arrival, and the loss of a leader’s hand.

Another source with several analogues to Tolkien’s Elves and their human allies is *Acallam na senórach*. In the remainder of this chapter and using both internal and

external evidence, I make the case that the *Acallam* and some related works are greatly under-appreciated wellsprings for Tolkien's imagination.

### 3.2 *Acallam na senórach* ('Dialogue of the ancients')

*Acallam na senórach* is an approximately eight-thousand-line late Middle Irish (or very early Classical Irish) prosimetrum. It has been called "the lynchpin of *féanaigeacht* tradition and one of the longest literary works in the Irish language to survive from the Middle Ages" (Parsons, "Whitley Stokes" 185). It survives in five late manuscripts: the fifteenth-century Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 610; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 487; the *Book of Lismore*; the sixteenth-century "Franciscan" MS, that is, Dublin, University College, OFM-A4; and in a copy of OFM-A4, namely Dublin, University College, OFM-A20(a). As discussed in **Chapter 2**, Tolkien had been introduced to Standish Hayes O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* as an undergraduate, although it is not clear if he ever acquired or read the book.<sup>77</sup> At some time, Tolkien *did* acquire and heavily use the massive multi-volume *Irische Texte* which includes Whitley Stokes's Irish edition and partial English translation of the *Acallam* (1900), particularly parts which O'Grady did not translate. *Irische Texte* could have been one of those titles Tolkien purchased as a young academic in the early 1920s at Leeds University (see *Celtic type* 52). As with *Lebor gabála*, the two-volume *Silva Gadelica* and the five-volume *Irische Texte* seem unwieldy and unlikely choices for Tolkien and Edith to carry from posting to posting during those itinerant years when he worked on *The Book of Lost Tales*. Alternatively, Tolkien could have read from either or both before the war, or he could have encountered stories from the *Acallam* in one of the many popular summaries or retellings available at the time, possibly as part of the reading

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<sup>77</sup> Some short selections and summaries from the *Acallam* were in print before O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica*; see, for example, Eugene O'Curry's *Lectures* (1861; pp. 308-311, 594-597); see also Hyde's *A Literary History of Ireland* (1899) on "The Colloquy of the Ancients" (116, 130, 383 ff., 507).

material available in army hospitals or camps. These include (but are not limited to) John Hawkins Simpson's *Poems of Oisín, Bard of Erin* (1857), Patrick Kennedy's *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* (1866), Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* (1902), Charles Squires's *Mythology of the British Islands* (1905), and T.W. Rolleston's *The High Deeds of Finn and Other Bardic Romances of Ancient Ireland* (1910). It is unknown whether Tolkien ever owned or read any of these popular treatments either. Nonetheless, the significant number of parallels between Tolkien's "Lost Tales" and the *Acallam* warrants serious consideration when analysing the origins of Tolkien's legendarium.

First among these parallels is that both the *Acallam* and Tolkien's "Lost Tales" are presented as frame narratives with a number of inset stories recounting a lost era and waning cultures. Both narratives also centre on relationships between two civilisations with distinct natures— one mortal, the other immortal —living side-by-side with established customs for guesting, fostering, intermarriage, parenting, and military alliances. In the *Acallam* it is stated, "there are in Ireland but two tribes that are equal: the sons of Milesius [i.e., mortal humans], and the Túatha Dé Danann" (SG II.110).<sup>78</sup> Among the Milesians, or Gaels, the *Acallam* gives special status to the *fián* of Finn mac Cumail, who are the neighbours, allies, lovers, and also descendants of the Túatha Dé Danann. The two groups are similar in appearance, though one group remains young and beautiful while the other ages and dies. This is also an apt characterisation of Tolkien's Eldar and Edain (noble allies of the Eldar among Men). Mark Williams observes, "Like the people of the *síd*-mounds, Tolkien's elves are also immortal and preternaturally beautiful, immune to aging and natural death but capable of being slain in battle, and they can under exceptional circumstances intermarry with mortals" (*Ireland's Immortals* 475). The Old Irish verse ascribed to Máel Muru of Othan (d.887), *Can a mbunadus na nGáedel?* ("Whence the origin of the Gaels (Goídil)?"), describes how the incoming Milesians

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<sup>78</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the version of the *Acallam* referred to here is O'Grady's English translation in Volume 2 of *Silva Gadelica*: "The Colloquy with the Ancients" (pp. 101-264).



took wives from among the Túatha Dé Danann. The practice was imagined as having persisted into the present-day of the *Acallam*, that is, the c.5th CE (M. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals* 205). While intermarriage between the two groups is less-frequent in Tolkien, it is an important theme throughout his legendarium. Key parallels between the *Acallam na senórach* and *The Book of Lost Tales* deserve further examination, including the frame narrative, hosting and guesting practices, marriage practices, child fosterage, and military alliances.

### 3.2.1 Frame Narrative

*The Cottage of Lost Play* establishes the premise of *The Book of Lost Tales'* framework narrative in which Eriol arrives on Tol Eressëa, meets the exiled Elves, and hears their history and lore as a series of tales. In early drafts, Eriol was a fifth-century Germanic mariner, and the island of the Elves was prehistoric England. (Tolkien later removed Tol Eressëa to an otherworldly realm and restyled the mortal mariner as Ælfwine, a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon.) While several of the "Lost Tales" were substantially written down, Tolkien left behind various contradictory and incomplete notes and outlines for the culmination of the frame story. Tolkien's son, Christopher, attempted to shape these writings into a coherent narrative in which Eriol preserves, for future generations, the tales of the Elves in the fictive *Golden Book* (*Lost Tales II* 293). Christopher comments (likely quoting or paraphrasing his father's terminology), "Thus it is that through Eriol and his sons the Engle (i.e. the English) have the true tradition of the fairies, of whom the *Iras* and the *Wéalas* (the Irish and Welsh) tell garbled things. Thus, a specifically English fairy-lore is born, and one more true than anything to be found in Celtic lands" (*Lost Tales II* 289-290). As the Elves gradually realise their hegemony over Tol Eressëa is coming to an end, a few of the exiles return to Valinor (see *Lost Tales II* 280), but most are denied permission to re-enter that blessed land, or their deep love for Tol Eressëa causes them to remain even as the island transforms under the dominion of Men into England.

The impulse to embed the histories of the Elves within a narrative frame may have had multiple influences, including Boccaccio's *Decameron* and *The Thousand and One Nights*, both examples of a narrative form the "Germans call a *rahmenerzählung*, that is to say, it consists of a number of stories enclosed in a framework of a single narrative" (IT IV.i.ix). Flieger and Burns separately propose Snorri Sturluson's fourteenth-century Old Norse *Prose Edda*. Flieger points out that King Gylfi travels under the name "Gangleri"—that is, "the Wanderer" (Flieger, "Footsteps" 186). Tolkien's Eriol also "called himself Wæfre," an Old English word meaning "restless, wandering" (*Lost Tales I* 23). Burns comments that Eriol and Gylfi are both travellers who find lodgings in strange cottages and pose questions to their hosts about the gods, creation, and the end of the world ("Norse and Christian Gods" 165). Alternately, Garth argues, "The structure [of the "Lost Tales"] owes much to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*— although a more immediate precursor was William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise*, in which Norse seafarers swap stories with the sequestered descendants of ancient Greeks whom they encounter on a remote island" (*Great War* 224). While serving in France in 1916, Tolkien received the gift of a volume of Morris's *Earthly Paradise* from Captain Henry Wade-Gery, a former Oxford don, and Tolkien carried it with him in camp along the Somme (*Great War* 185, 296). Douglas A. Anderson affirms, "[Morris's] frame story was clearly an influence on Tolkien," and he notes that while Wade-Gery gave Tolkien Part Five ("June and July"), Tolkien would eventually own five of the twelve volumes of *The Earthly Paradise* (E-mails to the author). Part Five is interesting beyond merely its framing device, for it contains classical stories with themes echoed in *The Book of Lost Tales*: sacrificial love ("The Love of Alcestis"), evading fate ("The Son of Croesus"), tragic encounters between mortals and faërie ("Watching of the Falcon"), and a mariner who explores an enchanted island ("The Lady of the Land").

But in its framework structure and theme of preserving the history of a waning, though immortal, race, *The Book of Lost Tales* also parallels major aspects of the Irish *Acallam na senórach*. Set about two hundred years after the death of Finn mac Cumhaill, in fifth-century Ireland, the *Acallam* is structured as a frame narrative in which two of Finn's best warriors— his son Oisín and his kinsman Cailte mac Rónáin

—survive into the Christian era to meet the evangelising Saint Patrick. Throughout much of the narrative frame, Caílte accompanies Patrick around Ireland regaling him with tales of the adventures of Finn, his *fíán*, and their allies among the Túatha Dé Danann. Caílte also explains the lore of various place-names in the manner of Irish *dindshenchas* texts, collections of lore on placenames. When Patrick wonders whether it is appropriate for him to be listening to stories of the pagan *fíán*, his two guardian angels answer that the agèd Oisín and Caílte have already forgotten two-thirds of their memories and that the remainder should be written down and preserved for the people of future generations (SG II.108). Patrick orders his scribes to set down Caílte's tales. As they proceed around Ireland, Caílte "is frequently overcome with nostalgia and grief, bemoaning the passing of a Golden Age" (Parsons, "Whitley Stokes" 195).

Near the end of O'Grady's translation of the *Acallam*, the twenty-seven *fíán* warriors who accompanied Caílte and Oisín fall down and die on the way to Temair (Tara), the ceremonial centre of ancient Ireland. They are buried where they fall, beneath a hill. Oisín laments, "A miserable thing indeed is this ... that was the last surviving residue of the great and gallant band which Finn had, and ourselves" (SG II.262).<sup>79</sup> The rise of Christianity in Ireland also marks the end of the dominion of the immortal Túatha Dé Danann. Caílte admits that Saint Patrick will soon hold mastery over all of Ireland, and Caílte's friend, the Túatha Dé musician Cas Corach, submits to Patrick's authority. The rest of the Túatha Dé Danann are fated to be relegated to "'the foreheads' of hills and of rocks [i.e., to their wildest steep], unless that now and again thou see some poor one of them appear as transiently he revisits earth [i.e., the haunts of men]" (SG II.260). Fimi discusses the correspondence between "the final defeat of the Túatha Dé Danann by the Sons of Míl" in *Lebor gabála Érenn*, and Tolkien's Elves making way for the Age of Men in *The Lord of Rings*: both will have to choose between returning West over the sea to

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<sup>79</sup> The Lismore text that O'Grady was using ends earlier than Stokes's base text (Laud MS), but none of the extant witnesses convey a satisfactory conclusion to the tale or cycle.

live in idyllic realms or stay in the realms of Men to dwell underground in ancient barrows or cairns (“‘Mad’ Elves” 163). Both the Túatha Dé Danann in the *Acallam* and Tolkien’s Elves in *The Book of Lost Tales* will be displaced by mortal men and consigned to the wild hills, appearing transient or “fading” to men’s eyes (*Lost Tales II* 283). All that will remain into the modern era from these two ancient cultures will be the stories recorded by their human successors. Of the *Acallam*, Joseph Falaky Nagy laments, “The stories Caílte tells of heroic success and ancient triumph over adversity are tellingly punctuated— in some cases overshadowed, even —by stories of disappointment, disaster and sudden, seemingly unmerited, reversal in heroic fortunes” (119). Mark Williams concurs, “Though the inset stories may be comic, tragic, or uncanny, the prevailing atmosphere might best be called autumnal: a new dispensation takes over and an era of material splendour and martial valour fades forever from human recollection” (*Ireland’s Immortals* 200). Tolkien’s “Lost Tales,” too, contain instances of heroic success, but their overall tone is likewise that of calamity and autumnal grief. As the splendour and valour of the Túatha Dé Danann and their human allies in the *fíán* will only be preserved in the stories penned by Patrick’s scribes, the age of Tolkien’s Elves and their allies among the noble houses of Men will also soon fade from human recollection barring only as the “Lost Tales” preserved in Eriol’s *Golden Book*.

### 3.2.2 Hosting and Healing

Key cultural practices in both the *Acallam* and *The Book of Lost Tales* include reciprocal hosting and guesting agreements. In the *Acallam*, in a tale which begins much like *Compert Con Culainn*, Caílte tells St Patrick of a time when Finn and a small hunting party were caught in the snow. Caílte was sent to find protection for the night and discovered a well-appointed *síd* (Otherworld dwelling) where he was invited inside by a damsel and a warrior of the *síd*. They tell Caílte, “go to fetch Finn; for he in his own house never refused a man, neither with us shall he meet with denial’ (SG II.222-223). Finn’s own hospitality is widely known, and in return he and his men are welcomed to feast and pass the night in the *síd*. There, Finn hears that his hosts, the sons of Midir, will be attacked the next day by Midir’s rival,

Bodb Derg, king of the Túatha Dé Danann. Reciprocity demands that Finn help defend his hosts, even though the odds are against them and at other times Finn is an ally of Bodb Derg. Finn tells his men, “the necessity and the oppression, the extremity and distress of these whose guests we find ourselves are great indeed; ourselves too have chanced into a strait pass, and unless that in our own defence we play the men it is odds whether ever again we see one of our Fianna [*sic.*] and followers” (SG II.225). Similarly in *The Book of Lost Tales*, Eriol seeks lodging at the Cottage of Lost Play, is feasted and entertained with stories of the Elves’ history. Like Finn, Eriol opts to remain and ally himself with his hosts in a coming battle. Their fate becomes his own, for in a prefatory note to a hastily-pencilled Epilogue, Tolkien wrote, “Eriol flees with the fading Elves from the Battle of the High Heath (*Ladwen-na-Dhaideloth*)” (*Lost Tales II* 287).

Another service that hosts and guests render one another is that of medical attention, and the theme of healing is ubiquitous in the legends of Finn and the *fían*. In one famous example, when Caílte is wounded by a poisoned spear, he travels to the *síd* of Ess Rúaid (Assaroe), to see the famous Túatha Dé Danann healer, Bé Binn:

It was in a battle at Beinn Edair in the east that Mane, son of the King of Lochlann, made a cast at [Caílte] in the middle of the battle with a deadly spear ... it struck into his thigh, and left its poison in it, so that he had to go in search of healing. And it is where he went, to the hill of the Sidhe at Ess Ruadh, to ask help of Bebind, daughter of Elcmar of Brugh na Bóinne, that had the drink of healing of the Tuatha Dé Danann, and all that was left of the ale of Goibniu that she used to be giving out to them. (Gregory, *Gods* 188)

Tolkien underlined the same character— “*Béfind* ou la Belle-Femme” (i.e., Bé Binn, Bebind, etc.) —in his copy of Arbois de Jubainville’s *Litt. Celtique* (p.58)

The *síd*-folk offer to give Caílte “a change of form and feature ... so that again thou mayest enjoy vigour and full activity” (i.e., return him to his youth) (SG II.249). Caílte declines and asks only to be healed; in exchange, the *síd*-folk ask him to rid them of

predatory ravens and the king of Ulidia's three marauding sons. That accomplished, Caílte is given an herbal draught by Bé Binn which expels the poison from his body.

Bebhionn (and her two sons with her) proceeded to *teach na narm* or 'the house of arms,' where a rich bed in which to be cured was decked out for Caeilte, and a basin of white gold containing its fill of water was brought to the lady. She took to her a mash-tub of crystal into which she had put certain herbs; these she comminuted in the water, handed the basin to Caeilte, and out of the same he drank a great draught [which, along with four other draughts, act emetically ... then] the woman gave him a can of new milk and he drank it but, as a consequence of all that retching, was for three days and three nights debilitated and out of sorts. (SG II.252)

His thigh-wound cured, Caílte now has a headache. A head-washing by Flann, daughter of Flidais, cures that and prevents him from ever being affected by another one, "nor by baldness, nor by defect of sight" (SG II.252). Both baldness and blindness are associated with the natural ageing process, so their absence signals the prolongation of Caílte's youth which allows him to live into the age of St Patrick. In Lady Gregory's retelling of the *Acallam*, she mentions "the ale of Goibniu," a libation granting longevity or immortality; the same or a similar drink to the "great draught" Bé Binn administers to Caílte. Following the defeat in battle of the Túatha Dé Danann by Men, Manannán mac Lir created an enchanted, never-ending "Feast of Age" where, "they drank the ale of Goibniu the Smith, that kept whoever tasted it from age and from sickness and from death" (Gregory, *Gods* 62).<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, Tolkien's *Book of Lost Tales* also features a magical drink, *limpë*, "the wine of song," which the Elves consume at their nightly banquets in the Cottage of Lost Play (*Lost Tales I* 97). *Limpë* will return the drinker to youth (*Lost Tales II* 290) and

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<sup>80</sup> O'Grady mentions "Goibniu's banquet," which prevents pain or sickness (SG II.243); Stokes refers to the event as "Goibniu's feast" (IT IV.1.327 ¶6402); in any case, it would have been understood that a banquet/feast would include such fermented beverages as Lady Gregory describes.

stave off death until the Great End of the world (*Lost Tales I* 97). Eriol, the mortal mariner, begs the elven queen Meril-i-Turinqui, an analogue of the Túatha Dé Danann lady Bé Binn (and precursor to *The Lord of the Rings*'s Galadriel), to let him drink the *limpë*. Meril warns Eriol that he could "claim our cup of youth and poesy," but then he "never may ... fare away home though longings gnaw you" (*Lost Tales I* 97, 98). She prophesies, "on a day of autumn will come the winds and a driven gull, maybe, will wail overhead, and lo! you will be filled with desire, remembering the black coasts of your home" (*Lost Tales I* 96). Later, Eriol is allowed to drink *limpë*, "but in his last days is consumed with longing for the black cliffs of his shores, even as Meril said" (*Lost Tales II* 283). When Tolkien revised his mariner figure as Ælfwine the Anglo-Saxon, he too drinks "*limpë* but thirsted for his home, and went back to Luthany (i.e., England); and thirsted unquenchably for the Elves and went back to Tavrobél (i.e., on Tol Eressëa)" where he wrote the *Golden Book*, which is *The Book of Lost Tales* (*Lost Tales II* 310). In at least one version of Tolkien's many notes and outlines for the completion of the "Lost Tales," the mariner character, here Eriol, "wedded, being made young again by *limpë*, Naimi (Éadgifu), niece of Vairë, and they had a son named Heorrenda" (*Lost Tales II* 290). But he dies, having defied Meril's ban on returning to England (*Lost Tales II* 293, 294). The Elves, defeated by Men, begin to fade.

### 3.2.3 Fairy Wives and Widows

The motif of the fairy lover is widespread in European literature and lore, and Tolkien's possible sources and influences for his own fairy brides have been previously examined in scholarship.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the *Acallam* has not generally been considered a source for Tolkien's mortal/immortal marriages, even though it is rife with instances of marriage between (primarily) the men of Finn's *fíán* and (primarily) the women of the Túatha Dé Danann. Sadb [aka "Sabia"], for example, a daughter of the Túatha Dé Danann king, Bodb Derg, is said in the *Acallam* to be

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<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Costabile, Filonenko, and Lakowski.

one of Finn's wives (SG II.172). Another wife (or at least a sexual partner) is Blái, daughter of Derc (i.e., Derg) and the mother of Oisín (SG II.102).<sup>82</sup> Aillenn Fíalchorcra, another of Bodb Derg's numerous daughters, marries Áed mac Muiredaig, the mortal king of Connacht (SG II.242-243; IT IV.i.245-247, 266-270). Saint Patrick even performs their wedding (see **Chapter 7**). Cáilte himself may have once been betrothed to a Túatha Dé Danann woman (see **Chapter 7**). In Stokes's translations from the *Acallam*, Cáilte sanctions the betrothal of the mortal woman Échna to his friend, Cas Corach, the Túatha Dé Danann minstrel and harper (IT IV.i.260-261).

Tolkien knew well the motif of the "fairy lover." In *The Hobbit* (1937), there is a local rumour concerning Bilbo's heritage: "It was often said (in other families) that long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife" (*Hobbit* I.10-11).<sup>83</sup> Rateliff notes, this adds, "yet another example to the long list of faerie brides in Tolkien's works," including Lúthien, Idril, Mithrellas (Nimrodel's handmaiden), and Arwen (*HH* 59, n5).

The story of Cáel and Créide is one of the more significant mortal/immortal marriages portrayed in the *Acallam*. On the march to Ventry Harbour, where a legendary battle will take place between Finn's *fíán* and a massive force of invading Northmen, Finn encounters Cáel úa Nemnainn, a warrior in his household who has been visiting his foster-mother Muirenn (another of Bodb Derg's daughters) for her advice on wooing the Túatha Dé Danann woman, Créide. Finn turns aside from the battle to help Cáel court this demanding woman, and Cáel wins her heart by virtue

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<sup>82</sup> There is no indication that Sabia and Blái of the *Acallam* are the same as Sadb and Blái who, in other versions of the "Oisín's Mother" legend, are transformed into deer (see Swank, "Deer-Maid").

<sup>83</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of *The Hobbit* (1937), Tolkien was more emphatic, "It had *always* been said that long ago one or other of the Tookes had married into a fairy family (the less friendly said a goblin family); certainly there was still something not entirely hobbitlike about them ..." (*Hobbit*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. I.12-13, italics added).



of his superior song-making skills (SG II.119-121). Cáel and Créide are wed and, as a model helpmate, she accompanies the *fíán* to the battle where she feeds and tends to the sick and injured. But, on the last day of the battle when the *fíán* has all but defeated the Northmen, Cáel drowns in the sea (SG II.121). His body is recovered and Créide weeps and wails, ““why should not I ... die of grief for my mate, when even the restless wild creatures die there of sorrowing after him!”” (SG II.122). There, she “stretched herself out by Cael's side and, for grief that he was gone, died. In the one grave they both were buried” (SG II.122). In an episode from the *Acallam* translated in *Irische Texte* (although only mentioned in an endnote to *Silva Gadelica*), the death of Oisín's son, Oscar, at the Battle of Howth, causes the grief-death of his Túatha Dé Danann wife Étaín “Fairhair” (not the same character from *Tochmarc Étaíne*, discussed in **Chapters 6 & 7**) (IT IV.i.227-229). At the Hill of Howth, Oscar is gravely wounded,

And one night Etain Fairhair came upon the bed into Oscar's Company, and saw that the great and kingly form that he wore had departed: so greenness and darkness came to her, and the damsel raised aloft her mournful cries and her high lamentable wail, and she went to her (own) bed, and (there) her heart in her breast broke like a nut, and she died of grief for her husband and her first-love, as she beheld him. And she was taken to her own elfmound, to the Elf mound of Benn Etair [the Hill of Howth], and was laid in earthen hollows. So that Fert Étaíne ('Étaín's Grave') is its name. She left three noble sons with Oscar. Luath and Indell and Oscar were their names. (IT IV.i.229-230; see also SG II.521, *fnXII*)

The most-famous love-story in Tolkien's legendarium is that of Beren and Lúthien Tinúviel, and while this story is examined in depth in relation to Elvish immortality and rebirth in **Chapter 7**, Tinúviel's death in *The Book of Lost Tales* is also analogous to the Irish grief-deaths of Créide and Étaín Fairhair. Tinúviel is the immortal daughter of King Tinwelint (later, Thingol), one of the Eldar, and of Gwendeling (later, Melian), a fay or primordial spirit (*Lost Tales II* 8). Although the Beren of the later *Silmarillion* is a human, in the *Tale of Tinúviel*, he is a Gnome, a type of Elf suspected by other Elves of being under the will of the evil Melko and, therefore,

untrustworthy (*Lost Tales II* 65). Créide and Tinúviel are both like and unlike. Unlike Tinúviel, Créide begins as deceitful and materialistic, although after her marriage she becomes generous, gifting each member of the *fían* with special armour, bringing her own cattle to feed them, and offering her skills to heal the wounded. Tinúviel, on the other hand, has never been described as materialistic, but she is strong-willed like Créide, and somewhat cunning (e.g., Tinúviel escapes from her father's prison by deceiving her guards). Créide and Tinúviel are both the daughters of immortal kings. Both are brave, accompany their husbands into danger and aid them. Créide follows the *fían* into battle while Tinúviel helps Beren escape from Tevildo, the Prince of Cats. Together, Beren and Tinúviel penetrate Melko's fortress, lull him to sleep with Tinúviel's hypnotic dance, and prise a *silmaril* out of his crown. Sadly, both Créide and Tinúviel lose their husbands in violent deaths soon after the main objective of their adventure is successfully completed. Cael drowns in the sea after the Northmen are all but defeated at the Battle of Ventry. Beren is killed by the great wolf, Karakaras (later, Carcaroth) after their successful escape from Melko's fortress. Eriol is told that in one version of the tale, Beren's "spirit fled in that hour to the margin of the world, and Tinúviel's tender kisses called him not back" (*Lost Tales II* 40). But others counter this version of the tale:

'Lo, I have heard that the magic of Tinúviel's tender kisses healed Beren, and recalled his spirit from the gates of Mandos, and long time he dwelt among the Lost Elves wandering the glades in love with sweet Tinúviel.' But another said: 'Nay, that was not so, O Ausir, and if thou wilt listen I will tell the true and wondrous tale; for Beren died there in Tinúviel's arms even as Vëannë has said, and Tinúviel crushed with sorrow and finding no comfort or light in all the world followed him swiftly down those dark ways that all must tread alone. (*Lost Tales II* 40)<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Mandos: Tolkien's underworld Vala whose realm resembles the Greek Hades; not to be confused with Din Djarin of the Star Wars universe.

Although immortal, these women— Créide, Étaín Fairhair, and Tinúviel —all lay down and spontaneously die of grief, sacrificing their own immortality for love. However, Tolkien goes further and dabbles with the idea of resurrection. In the Underworld, Tinúviel's "beauty and tender loveliness" convince Mandos to let the couple live again, although this has never "been done since to Man or Elf" (*Lost Tales II* 40; for more on marriage, immortality and Elven rebirth, see **Chapter 7**).

Another pair of stories deals with the perils of unions between mortals and immortals as two mortal husbands abandon paradise and their immortal wives when they are overwhelmed by nostalgia for their homelands. The popular modern narrative poem *Laoi Oisín ar Thír na n-Óg* ('The Lay of Oisín in the Land of Youth') is set in the same cultural milieu as the *Acallam*.<sup>85</sup> Here, it is Oisín who relates his story to St Patrick just as Caílte relates his stories to Patrick in the *Acallam na senórach*. One day, Oisín and his father Finn are greeted by Niam, the golden-haired daughter of the king of the Land of Youth who has come out of the west to proclaim her love for Oisín. Niam invites him to the Land of Youth where she promises he will receive a long list of luxuries and, "There will not come decline on thee with lapse of time, / Death or decay thou wilt not see" (O'Looney 243). She promises him, "beauty, strength, and power, / And I myself will be thy wife" (O'Looney 245). Oisín consents and takes leave of his father.

In the Land of Youth, the couple marry, have children and Oisín enjoys all that Niam had promised, but after three hundred years he becomes consumed with desire to see Finn and Ireland again, and he asks permission to return. Niam reluctantly gives him a white steed to ride to Ireland but warns him that if his foot so much as touches level ground, he will never return to the Land of Youth, and he will instantly become "an old man, withered, and blind" (O'Looney 267). Of course,

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<sup>85</sup> The poem was long ascribed to Micheál Coimín (1676-1760), although his authorship has been questioned (see Morley); Lady Gregory retells the tale in *Gods and Fighting Men* (289-291, 294-297), as does Yeats in "The Wanderings of Oisín" (1889).

after three hundred years, Finn and the *fíán* are gone and only remembered in legends, the girth of the white steed breaks, and Oisín falls to the ground. He tells Patrick, "No sooner did I come down, / Than the white steed took fright, / He went then on his way, / And I, in sorrow, both weak and feeble. / I lost the sight of my eyes, / My form, my countenance, and my vigour, / I was an old man, poor and blind, / Without strength, understanding, or esteem" (O'Looney 279).

As previously mentioned, in one prospective ending for Tolkien's *Book of Lost Tales*, the human mariner Eriol drank the *limpë* against Meril's warning, wedded an Elf named Naimi (or, Éadgifu) and had a son with her named Heorrenda (*Lost Tales II* 290). Eriol leaves Tol Eressëa with Heorrenda (but leaves Naimi) as he has become consumed with longing to see England again, and there he dies. It is tempting to compare the names of Eriol's wife, Naimi, with Oisín's wife, Niam, for the two names look remarkably similar.<sup>86</sup> The stories, too, bear several similarities. Eriol and Oisín marry immortal women in paradisiacal lands west over the sea and have children with them. Both men enjoy renewed youth and vigour there, but they are eventually beset by powerful homesickness and return to mortal lands despite dire warnings. Back in mortal lands, both men lose all that they had gained in the west, and their return marks the beginning of a new age. Patrick's coming to Ireland heralds the ascendancy of Men in the Christian Age. Similarly, Eriol's coming to Tol Eressëa presages the great Battle of Rôs, the defeat and fading of the Elves, and the ascendancy of Men. And yet, Eriol and Oisín each become responsible for transmitting the history of their respective immortal in-laws to humankind and the new age. Oisín relates his history of the *fíán* in Ireland and of the Land of Youth to St Patrick. Eriol's *Golden Book* survives into the new age of Men and becomes the

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<sup>86</sup> The Old Irish *Niam* means "bright" or "radiant"; Christopher Tolkien glosses Naimi's Anglo-Saxon name, Éadgifu, as "blessed gift" (éad "blessedness" + gifu "gift"), though he does not gloss "Naimi" (*Lost Tales II* 323).

conduit through which Elvish history and lore is preserved in England. There is no indication that either Eriol or Oisín ever see their wives again.

Marriages between mortals and immortals remained a topic of interest to Tolkien throughout his long career as is illustrated by the successful relationship of Aragorn and Arwen in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) and the failed relationship of Aegnor and Andreth in *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* (c.1959). These relationships and their Irish analogues are discussed in **Chapter 7**, but in this chapter, discussions of marriage naturally turn to children and child-rearing practices.

### 3.2.4 Child Fosterage

Fostering children in another household was a common practice across Northern Europe, including in mediaeval Irish society where the upper classes “were expected to send their children to another family, usually before age seven, to be raised. The child would learn the skills most important to their future role in society alongside the children of their foster parents before returning to their natal family,” sometime during their teenage years (O'Donnell 14-15, 18). The seventh-century *Cáin Íarraith* ('Law of the Fostering Fee') describes two types of fosterage in mediaeval Ireland: *altram íarraith* (fosterage for a fee) and *altram serce* (fosterage for love), for which no fee was paid (O'Donnell 16). Peter Parkes classifies both as *alliance fosterage* employed to cement reciprocal claims for loyalty and support between two families (“Fostering Fealty” 742). This, in turn, can be broken down into *clientele allegiance fosterage*, the raising of a lord's or a king's child by status inferiors as an investment in the vassal's social advancement, and *patronal allegiance fosterage*, the raising of a social inferior's child by its superiors as a way of consolidating clientship (Parkes, “Celtic Fosterage” 359 n2 & 365). The desired outcome in most cases was the development of mutually-beneficial and enduring bonds between fosterling and foster family.

The fostering of mortal children by immortals is a particular feature of both the *Acallam na senórach* and Tolkien's legendarium, exemplifying *patronal allegiance*

*fosterage*, for the immortals rank above the mortals in both societies and are depicted as raising foster children from mortal families (while the opposite is not depicted). Mark Williams writes of the Irish legends, “We hear constantly of the children of mortal grandees fostered by the people of the *síd*” (*Ireland’s Immortals* 204). The *fíán*-warrior Cáel, for example, has a Túatha Dé Danann foster-mother, Muirenn, a daughter of Bodb Derg. On his way to fight in the Battle of Ventry, Cáel stops in to ask her advice on wooing his “fairy sweetheart,” Créide (SG II.119). Directly analogous is the fostering of mortal children by the immortal Elves in *The Book of Lost Tales*. Túrin Turambar is fostered (for love) by the elf-lord, Tinwelint. He assures Túrin, “thou shalt dwell sweetly in my woodland court, nor even so as a retainer, but behold as a second child of mine shalt thou be, and all the wisdoms of Gwedheling and of myself shalt thou be taught” (*Lost Tales II* 73). Similarly, Lindo and Vairë, master and mistress of the Cottage of Lost Play, foster lost mortal children who stray too far in their dreams to find their homes again (*Lost Tales I* 20).

There is also a dark side to child fosterage which includes *abduction*, *crisis fosterage* and *hostage-taking*. In the *Acallam*, Áed, son of the king of Leinster, was playing a game of hurling near the entrance to a *síd*. Two daughters of Bodb Derg came out of the *síd* and took Áed by the hand and led him inside where they cared for him for three years until he saw the chance to escape (SG II.204). Mark Williams calls Áed’s internment, “a kind of enforced fosterage, and one of the earliest examples in Irish tradition of the theme of the child stolen away by otherworld-folk” (*Ireland’s Immortals* 204). However, the situation is complex, for even Áed describes their treatment of him as “caring” (SG II.204). Later, he falls in love with and eventually marries another immortal daughter of Bodb Derg, Aillenn, in what Mark Williams describes as a “one of the literary models for Tolkien’s Aragorn and Arwen (475). Crisis fosterage occurs when orphaned children are fostered for their protection (Parkes, “Celtic Fosterage” 359-360). This type includes the fosterage of Túrin by King Tinwelint. Although it was an arrangement born out of love and respect for Túrin’s kinsman, Tinwelint also agreed to hide Túrin from the vengeful Vala, Melko, who had cursed Túrin’s family (*Lost Tales II* 71-73, *passim*). Another purpose of fosterage is hostage-taking to ensure peace or to settle a feud. Parkes describes

the Irish tendency to use a foster son as a “substitute hostage (*gíall*) for their lords, rendered as personal pledges in pacts of submission, and not infrequently executed or maimed in the event of broken alliances” (“Celtic Fosterage” 367). Kristine Larsen argues that hostage fostering “could also include a magnanimous victor adopting the orphaned sons of his vanquished enemy” (“Medieval Fostering I” 12). She reminds readers that in *The Silmarillion*, “Elrond himself was fostered, along with his twin brother, Elros . . . [by] one of the sworn enemies of his family, the sons of Fëanor” (Larsen, “Medieval Fostering I” 11). As a child, Elrond’s parents departed Middle-earth and all their people were killed or scattered. Elrond and Elros were “carried off by the sons of Fëanor, in the last act of the feud between the high-elven houses of the Noldorin princes concerning the Silmarils” (*Letters* #211, p.402). One of Fëanor’s sons, Maglor, “took pity upon Elros and Elrond, and he cherished them, and love grew after between them, as little might be thought, but Maglor’s heart was sick and weary with the burden of the dreadful oath” which had made him an enemy of Elrond’s folk (*Silmarillion* XXIV.247). As in the case of the Irish princeling Áed, Elrond’s and Elros’s fosterage began, basically, as a kidnapping, but developed into something more familial.

### 3.2.5 Military Alliances

Additionally, military alliances play critical roles in the *Acallam* and *The Book of Lost Tales*. These alliances often require great sacrifice. When four hundred *fían* warriors, led by the king of Connacht’s sons, Art and Éogan, defend an Irish beach from the night-attack of eight hundred Northmen, they fight to the last. Finn and his men arrive the next morning,

... of their own they found but the king of Connacht’s two sons alive, and they with the slings of their shields about their necks; nor of the allmarachs [i.e., foreigners] lived there a man at all. Here is the plight in which the king of Connacht’s sons were found: their bodies full of bloody gashes, their shields and spears propping them in standing posture still. No two of the Fianna had ever maintained personal conflict thus. (SG II.183)

Tolkien portrays a strikingly parallel scene of bravery and valour in outlines for the unfinished *Gilfanon's Tale* for *The Book of Lost Tales*. Where many Men were tricked into aiding the dark lord Melko, one group stayed faithful to the Elves at the *Nirnaeth Arnoediad* ('The Battle of Unnumbered Tears'): "The Children of Úrin (Sons of Úrin ... ) alone of Men fought to the last, and none (save two messengers) came out of the fray" (*Lost Tales I* 239).<sup>87</sup> The two messengers later evolved into the brothers Húrin and Huor, fathers, respectively, of Túrin and Tuor, all great heroes and elf-friends in the First Age of Middle-earth. In a later outline, only one of the brothers survives: "Men fled, and the sons of Úrin alone stood fast until they were slain; but Úrin was taken" (*Lost Tales I* 241). The image of two brothers, the last survivors of a bitter battle, is piteous and eerily similar in *The Book of Lost Tales* and the *Acallam*. The faithfulness of the Sons of Úrin to their allies the Elves is also reminiscent of Finn's defence of the sons of Midir (discussed in **Section 3.2.2** above) against his sometime ally Bodb Derg, king of the Túatha Dé Danann.

This complex web of alliances is also at issue in *Cath Finntrága* ('The Battle of Ventry'). Tolkien owned a copy of Kuno Meyer's *\*Cath Finntrága*, an Early Modern Irish edition and English translation derived from a fifteenth-century text, although it is based on older material. Unfortunately, Tolkien did not date his acquisition of this volume but, as we have seen, the Battle of Ventry is also a key event in the *Acallam* where the newly-wed Cáel drowns. In *Cath Finntrága*, Finn sends his messenger, Dolb, to ask Bodb Derg for his aid in the battle, but Bodb Derg initially refuses:

'O youth,' said Bodb Derg, 'not we are bound to help the men of Erinn out of that strait.'

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<sup>87</sup> The "Children" or "Sons of Úrin" refers, at this stage in the legendarium, to a warrior band similar to Finn's *fian*; not to be confused with the latter tale of *The Children of Húrin* where the title refers to Túrin Turambar and his sister Niënor.



‘Do not say so,’ said Dolb, ‘for there is not the son of a king or a prince or a leader of the fianns of Erin, whose wife, or whose mother or fostermother, or whose leman is not from the Tuatha De Danand [sic.], and great help have they given you whenever you were in need.’

‘We pledge our faith forsooth,’ said Bodb Derg.  
(Meyer, *Cath Finntrága* 14)

The king then calls together the Túatha Dé Danann host:

... and they rose early on the morrow, and put on their costly silk shirts and their curling much-embroidered jubilee tunics, and their stout long-sided glittering coats of mail, and their ornamented helmets of gems and gold, and their sheltering green shields, and their heavy broad-sided strong swords, and their sharp-pointed tile-broad spears. (Meyer, *Cath Finntrága* 14)

John Duncan’s famous Celtic Revival painting, *The Riders of the Sidhe* (1911), captures the grandeur of a Túatha Dé Danann host proceeding to battle, like the one described in *Cath Finntrága* (see **Figure 3.2.5** “The Riders of the Sidhe” by John Duncan).



**Figure 3.2.5** John Duncan, “The Riders of the Sidhe,” McManus Galleries, Dundee. 1911. © Public Domain image. Photo credit: Sevenseaocean, 20 August 2017, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

There is an analogous scene in Tolkien's later *Silmarillion* when the reluctant Elf-king Turgon marches his host to the *Nirnaeth Arnoediad*. There, the Eldar, Edain, and Dwarves join forces as the "Union of Maedhros" against Morgoth's armies. At a pivotal moment in the battle, Turgon, king of the hidden elven kingdom of Gondolin, unexpectedly comes to their aid, "with an army ten thousand strong, with bright mail and long swords and spears like a forest" (*Silmarillion* XX.190). They were "clad in mail, and their ranks shone like a river of steel in the sun" (*Silmarillion* XX.192). There are some clear similarities: the glittering/bright mail, the fearsome swords and spears, and the unexpected arrival of military troops (i.e., Bodb Derg's and Turgon's) sweeping in to turn the tide of a losing battle. Sadly, only the Irish and the Túatha Dé Danann armies are victorious on their day, while the Union of Maedhros are routed by Morgoth's forces.

While Finn's messenger intimates a long history of military alliances between the *fían* and the Túatha Dé Danann, it is the fact of the multiple and complex interrelationships of guesting agreements, love, marriage, child-bearing and child fostering between the mortals and immortals which compels Bodb Derg to call up the Túatha Dé Danann forces and come to the aid of Finn's *fían* at the Battle of Ventry. Likewise, it is the complex interrelationships between the mortals and immortals in Tolkien's writings which compel Tinwelint/Thingol to foster Túrin, and the usually circumspect Turgon to join the Union of Maedhros.

### 3.3 The *Acallam* in *The Lord of the Rings*

Although this chapter focuses primarily on analogues from *Acallam na senórach* in Tolkien's *Book of Lost Tales*, several of these carry into *The Lord of the Rings*, especially in relation to Aragorn and his family. Aragorn is actually a distant descendant of the Elvish kings, Turgon and Thingol, whose characters first appear in *The Book of Lost Tales*, just as Finn mac Cumail is a distant descendant of the Túatha Dé Danann king, Nuada (SG II.245). The fathers of both Finn and Aragorn were murdered by enemies, and the sons they left behind were sent away to be fostered in secret, both maturing into leaders of wilderness-based warrior-hunter

bands. *Macgnímartha Find* ('The Boyhood Deeds of Finn') is a late Middle Irish narrative available at the time Tolkien worked on the "Lost Tales" in an edition (1882) and English translation (1904) both by Kuno Meyer, and in a retelling by Lady Gregory in *Gods and Fighting Men*. There it is told that by the time Finn was born, his father Cumall mac Trénmóir, leader of the *fián* of Ireland, had been slain in battle by Goll (i.e., the One-Eyed) who had previously lost his eye in battle (see Gregory, *Gods*, 117; Meyer, "Boyish Exploits" 180-181). Finn's mother, Muirne, sent him away in secret to be fostered by two women druid warriors, Bodmall and Liath Luachra. While still a youth, Finn became the leader of his father's *fián*, defeating Goll as his father had been defeated. Finn's *fián* eventually grows to include his own sons and grandsons, and at least one member of the Túatha Dé Danann, the harper Cas Corach.

There are several analogues from the legend of Finn mac Cumall in the story of Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*. Aragorn was two years old when his father Arathorn, Heir of Isildur and Chieftain of the Dúnedain, was "slain by an orc-arrow that pierced his eye" (RK, Appendix A.v.338).<sup>88</sup> It is interesting that, as in Finn's tale, there is a leader who loses an eye (although the two men are not analogous to one another, one being the perpetrator and the other the victim). Aragorn's mother Gilraen took her son to be fostered in secret in Rivendell by the Elf-lord Elrond. The sons of the Dúnedain chieftains were routinely fostered in Rivendell (RK, Appendix A.iii.323). However, Aragorn's fosterage was for love as well as duty, and "Elrond took the place of his father and came to love him as a son of his own" (RK, Appendix A.v.338). Like his father before him, Aragorn became leader of the Dúnedain Rangers, wilderness-dwelling hunter-warriors, the descendants of noble Men and the allies of Elves. The Grey Company in *The Lord of the Rings* consists of thirty Rangers and Aragorn's foster-brothers, Elrond's twin sons, Elladan and

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<sup>88</sup> Isildur was an ancient king of Men in Middle-earth.

Elrohir.<sup>89</sup> As a result of these relationships, Aragorn is welcome in the Elven communities of Middle-earth, just as members of Finn's *fián* are welcome in the *síd* of Ireland. In the *Acallam*, for example, Caílte spends at least two extended visits at the *síd* of Ess Rúaid (once when he is gravely injured). Meanwhile in *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn's name opens the way for the Fellowship to take refuge with the Elves of Lothlórien (FR II.vi. 358).

As mentioned previously, healing and healers are frequent topics in the *Acallam*. Middle-earth also has its share of skilled healers. Elrond is "a master of healing" (FR II.i.233), the equivalent of Bé Binn among the Túatha Dé Danann. Just as Bé Binn draws out the toxin from Caílte's thigh after he is wounded by a poisoned spear, Elrond draws out a poisoned metallic splinter from Frodo's shoulder after he is wounded by the Morgul blade on Weathertop (FR II.i.234). Aragorn also demonstrates his skills in the Houses of Healing following the Battle of Pelennor Fields. A piece of lore repeatedly stated in *The Lord of the Rings* is that "the hands of the king are the hands of a healer" (RK V.viii.136). Aragorn, the king in waiting, exemplifies this at Faramir's bedside when he calls for the herb *athelas*, or "kingsfoil":

Then taking two leaves, he laid them on his hands and breathed on them, and then he crushed them, and straightway a living freshness filled the room, as if the air itself awoke and tingled, sparkling with joy. And then he cast the leaves into the bowls of steaming water that were brought to him, and at once all hearts were lightened. For the fragrance that came to each was like a memory of dewy mornings of unshadowed sun in some land of which the fair world in spring is itself but a fleeting memory. But Aragorn stood up as one refreshed, and his eyes smiled as he held a bowl before Faramir's dreaming face

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<sup>89</sup> Elsewhere, I have compared Tolkien's Túrin Turambar with the Irish Finn, particularly in relation to the motif of the captain of a wilderness-dwelling warring and hunting band (see Swank, "Deer-Maid" 11).

... Suddenly Faramir stirred, and he opened his eyes ... (RK V.viii.141-142)

Coming next to Éowyn, Aragorn once more “bruised two leaves of *athelas* and cast them into steaming water; and he laved her brow with it, and her right arm lying cold and nerveless on the coverlet” (RK V.viii.144). The narrator remarks that Aragorn may indeed have “some forgotten power of Westernesse (Númenor),” for the “sweet influence” of the herb turns the air fresh, clean and young, and Éowyn awakes, as does Merry when Aragorn next repeats the process at his bedside (RK V.viii.145). Shippey compares Aragorn’s healing touch to that of King Edward the Confessor who, as reported in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, can heal “through his sacred power of royalty” (Author 192-193). However, the bruising and steeping of *athelas* in bowls of water, the wound-washing, and rapid recovery are all reminiscent of Cailte’s healing by Bé Binn and head washing by Flann (discussed in **Section 3.2.2**) (SG II.252).

Like Aragorn, Finn mac Cumail is also a reputed healer. Lady Gregory recounts the story of the handsome *fíán* warrior, Díarmait úa Duibne, who elopes with the ageing Finn’s young bride, Grania (i.e., Gráinne). Finn famously pursues them across the length and breadth of Ireland, but when Díarmait is gored by a wild boar, Finn finally catches up to him. Díarmait begs Finn to heal him, reminding him that when, as a boy, Finn was given the gift of knowledge from the Salmon of Wisdom, he was also given the gift of healing, and “any one you would give a drink to out of the palms of your hands would be young and well again from any sickness after it” (Gregory 263). The jealous Finn withholds his gift from Díarmait who dies from his wounds. There is not much that is similar between the scenes of Aragorn in the Houses of Healing and Finn with Díarmait, except that both focus particularly on the hands of the leaders, the hands of healers whose ministrations have the power to repair grievous illness and injury and bestow a revivifying effect. However, Finn withholds his power out of vengeance, while Aragorn bestows his willingly.

The concept of the reviving cordial (e.g., the elf-queen’s *limpë* in *The Book of Lost Tales*) is also carried into *The Lord of the Rings* in the liquor *miruvor* of Rivendell.

When the Fellowship attempts to climb the mountain Caradhras in a blizzard, Gandalf produces a leather flask and instructs Boromir—

‘Just a mouthful each—for all of us. It is very precious. It is *miruvor*, the cordial of Imladris. Elrond gave it to me at our parting. Pass it round!’ As soon as Frodo had swallowed a little of the warm and fragrant liquor he felt a new strength of heart, and the heavy drowsiness left his limbs. The others also revived and found fresh hope and vigour. (FR II.iii.304)

*Miruvor* imparts vitality and fortitude, although it lacks *limpë*’s ability to confer immortality upon mortals. However, *miruvor*’s first appearance is not in *The Lord of the Rings*, but in Tolkien’s first ‘lexicons’ of Elvish languages contemporaneous with the “Lost Tales.” In the *Qenya Lexicon*, *miruvóre* is defined as “nectar, drink of the Valar” (*miru*: wine) and in the *Gnomish Lexicon*, *mirofor* (or *gurmír*) is “drink of the Gods” (*mîr*, *miros*: wine) (*Lost Tales I* 246). In Galadriel’s song, *Namárië*, from *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien translated *lisse-miruvóreva* as “sweet mead” (FR II.viii.394). In notes for the song cycle based on Tolkien’s poetry, *The Road Goes Ever On*, Tolkien translated *miruvóre-va* as “sweet nectar,” that is, “the drink poured at [the Valar’s] festivals. Its making and the meaning of its name were not known for certain, but the Eldar believed it to be made from the honey of undying flowers in the gardens of [Valinor]” and he compared it to the nectar of the Olympian Gods [νέκταρ] which also conferred immortality and magical powers (*Road Goes Ever On* 69). Christopher Tolkien notes, “The motif of the healing herb is a common one, the centre for instance of the Breton *lai of Eliduc*” (*Lost Tales II* 57 n\*). And yet, despite *Eliduc* and Greek mythology being evoked in regard to *athelas* and *miruvor*, it cannot be discounted that the healing herb and the great draught play important roles in the *Acallam* as well, and that they are of a piece with Aragorn’s role as the healing king and Elrond’s as the master healer.

Aragorn shares with Finn the motifs of immortal lineage, orphaning at a young age and protective fosterage with magic-wielders, welcome in the communities of immortals, healing hands, and military alliances between mortals and immortals.

While there are numerous *Acallam* analogues in *The Book of Lost Tales*, the life of Aragorn suggests Tolkien's continued engagement with several key *Acallam* motifs into *The Lord of the Rings*. In a final set of analogues to note here, Finn and Aragorn both have fairy lovers and sire children with them. Finn has a son, Oisín, with Blái the daughter of the Túatha Dé Danann king "Derc," while Aragorn has daughters and a son, Eldarion, with Arwen, daughter of Lord Elrond (himself the son of Eärendil [earlier, "Eärendel"], the star mariner). Thus, the union of Aragorn and Arwen, like that of the Áed and Aillenn, closes the loop, as it were, when the two ancient aristocratic lineages are reunited as one (see M. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals* 208).

### 3.4 Conclusions

After Cailte is healed by Bé Binn, he and his friend Cas Corach depart the *síd* of Ess Rúaid for the last time:

They bade good-bye to the *sídh*-people and came out to *cnoc an nuail* or 'the hill of outcry,' where the *tuatha dé danann* at their parting from Caeilte made great *nuall* or 'outcry,' whence the hill's name from that day to this. Quoth Caeilte: "until the Judgment come, and the world's last day, this town I will not revisit." (SG II.255, italics original)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn similarly takes his last farewell of the beloved hill of Cerin Amroth in the forest of Lothlórien:

At the hill's foot Frodo found Aragorn, standing still and silent as a tree; but in his hand was a small golden bloom of *elanor*, and a light was in his eyes. He was wrapped in some fair memory ... 'Here is the heart of Elvendom on earth,' [Aragorn] said, 'and here my heart dwells ever, unless there be a light beyond the dark roads that we still must tread, you and I. Come with me!' And taking Frodo's hand in his, he left the hill of Cerin Amroth and came there never again as living man. (FR II.vi.366-367)

The bittersweet tone of the two passages matches the endings of both narratives, for although there is joy in *The Lord of the Rings* at the defeat of the Dark Lord Sauron, there is also sorrow at the exile or fading of the Elves from Middle-earth, just as the joyous ascension of Patrick's Christianity in Ireland marks the sorrowful exile or fading of the Túatha Dé Danann in the *Acallam*. In each case, once the immortals are displaced, a new Age of Men can begin. Although Tolkien never finished the narrative frame of *The Book of Lost Tales*, a draft "Epilogue" makes clear that we readers have only discovered Tol Eressëa once it is irretrievably gone, and the Elves have turned into the wispy fairies of folklore. Eriol, writing his last words in the *Golden Book of Tavrobel*, knows that he will never come there again and, in fact, that Tavrobel of the Elves no longer exists:

So fade the Elves ... still are they among us, but in Autumn most of all do they come out, for Autumn is their season, fallen as they are upon the Autumn of their days. What shall the dreamers of the earth be like when their winter come. Hark O my brothers, they shall say, the little trumpets blow; we hear a sound of instruments unimagined small. Like strands of wind, like mystic half-transparencies, Gilfanon Lord of Tavrobel rides out tonight amid his folk, and hunts the elfin deer beneath the paling sky. A music of forgotten feet, a gleam of leaves, a sudden bending of the grass, and wistful voices murmuring on the bridge, and they are gone. But behold, Tavrobel shall not know its name, and all the land be changed, and even these written words of mine belike will all be lost; and so I lay down the pen, and so of the fairies cease to tell. (*Lost Tales II* 288-289)

As has increasingly become clear, *The Book of Lost Tales* was heavily influenced by the corpus of mediaeval Irish literature: *Lebor gabála Érenn*, *Compert Con Culainn* and *The Voyage of Bran* have been previously proposed as sources and analogues. *Acallam na senórach* must be added to that list, for Tolkien certainly *knew of it*, as he noted O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* (an important text and translation of the *Acallam*) in his undergraduate lecture notes, and, at some point, he owned Stokes's *Irische Texte*, which also contains editions and translations of some of the *Acallam* tales. While I cannot at this point say with certainty that Tolkien read, used, or was influenced by any specific text of the *Acallam*, the aggregate of analogues in *The*



*Book of Lost Tales* (and, later, in *The Lord of the Rings*)— including the frame narrative, hosting and healing customs, fairy wives, child fosterage, and military alliances —is strongly suggestive that he was familiar with the *Acallam* narrative in general. Under Beidler’s terminology, then, the *Acallam* might be considered a *hard analogue with near-source status*. As this chapter suggests, the stories in Lady Gregory’s *Gods and Fighting Men* align surprisingly well with Tolkien’s “Lost Tales.” A small sampling of this includes her depiction of the boyhood deeds of Finn (“The Coming of Finn”), the drink of immortality (“Bodb Dearg”; “Ibrec of Ess Ruadh”), mystical healing (“Ibrec of Ess Ruadh”; “The Boar of Beinn Gulbain”), marriages between mortals and immortals (“Cael and Credhe”; “The Help of the Men of Dea”), child fosterage (“The Help of the Men of Dea”; “The Great Fight” and “The Pigs of Angus”), and military alliances (“The Help of the Men of Dea”; “Donn Son of Midhir”). There are even more, some of which are discussed in this thesis (see **Chapters 6 & 7**, for example).

We will revisit some of the marriages discussed here in **Chapter 7** when we consider Tolkien’s evolving conceptions of Elvish immortality and intermarriage. For the present, however, we move from fairies and *fíán* warriors to saints and sailing, as **Chapter 4** returns to Irish Otherworlds, and discovers surprising connections between Tolkien’s beloved *Roverandom* and a children’s story by an English clergyman who Tolkien had no cause to love.

## Chapter 4 Rover the Water-Baby (1920s)

As discussed in **Chapter 2**, the earliest Eärendel cycle of poems (1914-1915) demonstrates Tolkien's familiarity with Otherworld voyage motifs such as those found in *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, the popular mediaeval Hiberno-Latin text: the earthly paradise and its guardian wind, the otherworldly perfume, the island of snow-white angel-birds and their prodigious tree. Tolkien's fascination with these is apparent throughout his fiction and poetry. Indeed, Flieger claims that Tolkien "never gave up an idea. Again and again in his fiction the same ideas appear— as motifs, as episodes, sometimes as individual speeches. These are the leitmotifs of his philosophy, the recurring figurations that give shape to the pattern" (*Question* 21). She sees in Tolkien's first attempt at creating a cohesive framework for his "fairy" history, *The Book of Lost Tales* (1917-1919), the shape and substance of an Irish *immram* (*Music* 122). William Flint Thrall defined the *immram* as "a sea-voyage tale in which a hero, accompanied by a few companions, wanders about from island to island, meets Otherworld wonders everywhere, and finally returns to his native land" (quoted in Mac Mathúna, "*Immram Brain*" 276). Yet, *immrama* are more than adventure tales; they are also Christian spiritual quests. Thomas Owen Clancy writes they are "tales about the saving of souls which use a voyage on the sea as the means of redemption" (197). There are two Otherworld voyages at play in *The Book of Lost Tales*: Eriol's/Ælfwine's voyage to the island of Tol Eressëa, where the mortal mariner hears tales of the exiled Elves; and the unfinished prose *Tale of Eärendel* developed from Tolkien's early poetry about the immortal mariner who sails to Valinor in the farthest West, and then out into the heavens. Tolkien continued to use Otherworld voyage themes frequently in his writings: *Ælfwine of England* (1920 or later); his 1920s-30s poetry like *The Nameless Land* (1924), *Fastitocalon* (1927), *Vestr um Haf* (c.1931), *Errantry* (c.1931), *Looney* (c.1932), and *Firiël* (1933); the prose fragments of *The Fall of Arthur* (c.1934), *The Lost Road* (c.1936), and *The Notion Club Papers* (1945); his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55); and his later poetry like *The Sea-Bell* and *The Last Ship*, updated from *Looney* and *Firiël*, respectively, for inclusion in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* and

*Other Verses from the Red Book* (1962), and *Bilbo's Last Song* (1973), Tolkien's final published poem set in Middle-earth, revised from the earlier *Vestr um haf* no later than 1968 in order to fit within a Middle-earth context (see *Poems* 885-889). While this list is not comprehensive, it illustrates the centrality of the Otherworld voyage motif in Tolkien's writings from his earliest mythopoeic impulses to his final elegiac poetry. Shippey declared that one of the most persistent "images which had been with [Tolkien] for close on fifty years ... is that of the land far across the sea, Westernesse, the Blessed Lands, the Earthly Paradise, the Land of the Undying" (*Author* 283). Flieger contends, "it is not stretching the argument beyond the evidence to see a major structural element in Tolkien's mythology as immediately derived from and directly modelled on the mediaeval Irish *imramm* [*sic.*]" (*Music* 136). The importance of the Otherworld voyage motif on Tolkien's oeuvre can hardly be overestimated.

Where in **Chapter 1**, I reviewed previous scholarly engagement with Tolkien and the Irish Otherworld voyage motif, and in **Chapter 2**, I argued that Tolkien's early Eärendel poetry contained his first identifiable uses of Otherworld voyage motifs, here I reconsider Tolkien's use of the Otherworld voyage in his children's novella, *Roverandom* (1998). I first argued in 2015 that *Roverandom* was profoundly influenced by mediaeval Otherworld voyage literature (Swank, "Irish Otherworld Voyage"). In 2019, I compared *Roverandom* with other contemporary Otherworld voyage stories written for children: C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952) and Philip Pullman's *La Belle Sauvage* (2017). This time, I discuss another (and surprising) vector of the Otherworld voyage motif in *Roverandom*: Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1862-1863).

Tolkien reportedly created *Roverandom* to console his son Michael, who lost a beloved toy dog on the beach during a family holiday in September 1925, and Tolkien likely first wrote the story down during the Christmas holidays of 1927 (*Roverandom* xii-xiii). The novella's editors, Scull and Hammond, suspect that a second typescript of the full story was prepared for submission to Tolkien's publishers, George Allen & Unwin on 28 November 1936 (C&G I.201). Despite the

good report of Stanley Unwin's young son Rayner— "well written and amusing" — *Roverandom* was rejected for publication, and Tolkien seems never to have revisited the story (*Roverandom* xv). It was finally published posthumously in 1998.

In *Roverandom*, a puppy named Rover is transformed into a toy dog by the wizard Artaxerxes in retaliation for biting the wizard's trousers. Rover is then sold in a shop to a human family with three sons (just like the Tolkien family at the time). Although the family is nice, especially little boy Two (an avatar of Michael Tolkien), Rover craves freedom and wriggles out of the little boy's pocket one day while the family is visiting the beach. Now free (and lost), Rover meets the sand-sorcerer, Psamathos Psamathides, who promises to protect him from the persistent wrath of Artaxerxes. Rover, still the size of a toy, is sent on a series of adventures to the moon, the bottom of the sea, and within sight of Elvenhome (i.e., the homeland of Tolkien's Elves in Valinor). On his peripatetic adventures, the roguish Rover is dubbed "Roverandom." He makes friends, faces challenges, learns valuable lessons about the consequences of his actions, and develops empathy for others. When tempers have cooled, and he finally makes amends with Artaxerxes, Rover is restored to his original puppy size and is returned home to little boy Two and his family.

*Roverandom* is a product of its time. Full of witticisms, private family jokes and cultural references, a considerable amount of the context embedded in Tolkien's text would be lost on readers a hundred years later if not for the excellent introduction and notes by Scull and Hammond. They discuss the "wide range" and "diverse materials combined well in Tolkien's hands":

a wealth of references to myth and fairy-story, to Norse sagas, and to traditional and contemporary children's literature: to the Red and White Dragons of British legend, to Arthur and Merlin, to mythical sea-dwellers (mermaids, Niord, and the Old Man of the Sea among many), and to the Midgard serpent, alongside borrowings from, or at least echoes of, the 'Psammead' books of E. Nesbit, Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-glass* and *Sylvie and Bruno*, even Gilbert and Sullivan. (*Roverandom* xvii)

In my 2015 article, I pointed out previously overlooked references to the *Navigatio*, *Immram Brain*, *Immram Mail Dúin* and other voyage literature. I mentioned in passing a modern children's story which depicted St Brendan himself: *The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby* (1862-1963) by Charles Kingsley (1819-1875). I made a few brief comparisons to illustrate that Tolkien and Kingsley were both tapping into the Irish Otherworld voyage tradition. However, new research for this thesis reveals an even deeper relationship between the two narratives: while Tolkien modelled major elements of *Roverandom* on the *Navigatio* and other voyage literature, he also borrowed directly from Kingsley's *Water-Babies*.

Kingsley is an odd choice to propose as a source for the staunchly Catholic Tolkien. Kingsley was a Victorian Church of England clergyman with infamously anti-Catholic and anti-Irish views. By way of illustration, Kingsley felt that Catholic men were “dishonest, physically unimpressive, and celibate” (Herringer 155). He considered the poor Irish of the potato famine as “white chimpanzees” (Kingsley, *Letters*, 125).<sup>90</sup> In *The Water-Babies*, Kingsley repeated a litany of negative stereotypes, claiming the Irish “would not learn to be peaceable Christians” and would rather “brew potheen, and dance the pater o’pee, and knock each other over the head with shillelaghs, and shoot each other from behind turf-dykes, and steal each other’s cattle, and burn each other’s homes” (Kingsley, *The Water-Babies* [1865 ed.] 172).<sup>91</sup> Such behaviour, in Kingsley’s estimation, would lead to de-evolution like that of the Doasyoulukes, a culture he invented in *The Water-Babies* who were too lazy to flee from an erupting volcano (*The Water-Babies* [1885 ed.] 258-262, *passim*; hereafter, this edition is cited as “WB”). Even so, both Tolkien and Kingsley shared an admiration for St Brendan of the *Navigatio*. As previously

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<sup>90</sup> Kingsley wrote to his wife, Fanny, “...I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along those hundred miles of horrible country [Ireland]. I don't believe they are our fault [i.e., the English] ... But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much ...” (Kingsley, *Letters*, 111-112).

<sup>91</sup> *potheen*: illegal potato alcohol; the quoted passage and other racist statements are routinely edited out of later editions.

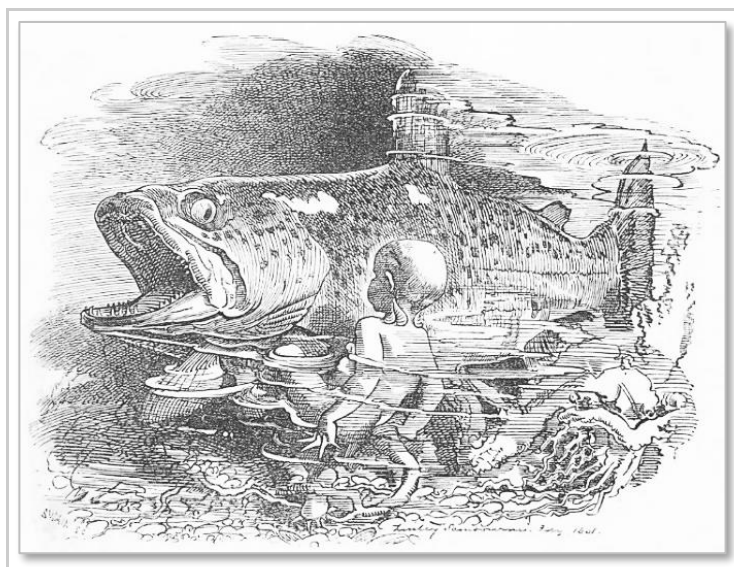
discussed, Brénainn of Clonfert was one of Tolkien's most important literary touchstones. The same could be said of Kingsley, for "[t]he only things he liked about the Irish— 'the poor Paddies who eat potatoes' —were their fishing and Brendan's voyages" (Donoghue). In **Section 4.1 *The Water-Babies***, I will discuss the place of Kingsley's book in English children's literature as well as point out Tolkien's connections to the book. In **Section 4.2 *Roverandom***, I will discuss the numerous narrative structures, motifs and character arcs shared by *The Water-Babies* and *Roverandom*, and how both stories draw heavily upon the *Navigatio*. In **Section 4.3 *Dog Days and Rabelais***, I will examine evidence which suggests Tolkien also drew directly from Kingsley in his use of child protagonists, physical adaptations of visitors to the Otherworld, key situations and characters, and Rabelaisian encyclopedism. Consequently, Kingsley's *Water-Babies* shares with Tolkien's *Roverandom* an inheritance from the *Navigatio*, while it also serves as one of *Roverandom*'s primary sources. The chapter ends with **Section 4.4 Conclusions**.

## 4.1 *The Water-Babies*<sup>92</sup>

Charles Kingsley's Victorian-era story, *The Water-Babies*, revolves around the accidental drowning, afterlife, and eventual rebirth of child chimney sweep, Tom. Tom's (first) life is hard as he clambers down stifling chimneys, is perpetually covered with soot, and endures frequent beatings from the master sweep, Mr Grimes. One day, Grimes takes Tom out to clean the chimneys of a grand country house, but after Tom is falsely accused of theft, he flees from the house and accidentally drowns in a river. Leaving his body behind, Tom wakes up as a "water-baby," an aquatic creature resembling a newt, about four inches long and with a set of external gills (see **Figure 4.1.1 "Tom and a Fish"**). Tom journeys down the river to the sea where he is eventually taken to "St Brandan's Isle" for his moral education.

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<sup>92</sup> Portions of this section rely on Swank, "*The Water Babies*" (2021), written as research-in-process for this thesis.



**Figure 4.1.1** Linley Sambourne, “Tom and a Fish,” in *The Water-Babies* by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 107. © Public Domain image

Long ago, Kingsley writes, St Brandan saw “far away, before the setting sun ... a blue fairy sea, and golden fairy islands, and he said, ‘Those are the islands of the blest’” (WB 212). He and five hermits sailed to one of those islands where they preached to the birds in the air and the fishes in the sea and the water-babies who live in the caves under the island, “[a]nd there he taught the water-babies for a great many hundred years” (WB 213). Tom and other water-babies, including Ellie (a girl from the grand country house who dies after a fall) are now instructed by the fairies, Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby and Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid. While Ellie excels at her lessons and moves on swiftly toward being reborn into the “land-world,” Tom has trouble letting go of the selfish habits he learned on the streets as a chimney sweep. He is sent away to see more of the world and after additional instructive adventures in which he becomes more concerned with the welfare of others, Tom is allowed to advance toward rebirth in the land-world where he will one day rejoin Ellie.

*The Water-Babies* was first serialised in *Macmillan's Magazine* from August 1862 through March 1863. It was then published as a children's book by Macmillan in May 1863, “one of the earliest books marketed for children about nine years of

age” (Harper 120). *The Water-Babies* was an instant classic, and it was still listed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* as the sixth most-popular children’s book in England at the turn of the twentieth century, thirty-five years after its initial publication (Harper 118). It also captured the adult imagination with its exploration of natural science and Darwin’s recently-published theories on evolution. And, while not the first publication to publicly-decry the dangers of employing young boys as chimney sweeps (see Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, originally published in serial form in the 1840s), *The Water-Babies*, “probably had some influence in persuading the House of Lords” to pass the Chimney Sweepers Regulation Act of 1864 which banned the use of children under the age of sixteen for cleaning chimneys (Donoghue).

Although *The Water-Babies* is not a twenty-first century American staple, it remains something of a cultural touchstone in Britain, even though its popularity waned considerably by the 1950s, and its lengthy digressions, condescending narrative voice, and offensive stereotypes of Africans, Jews, the Irish and British working-class poor have been routinely edited out of later editions (Wallace 181-182). Nevertheless, the book has never been out of print since its original publication and it celebrated its 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022 (Harper 188, 120). There have been numerous adaptations of and intertextual references to *The Water-Babies* over that time. Musical theatre productions were mounted regularly from 1902, and it was adapted into one of the earliest works in film in 1907. Colin Manlove identifies literary antecedents of *The Water-Babies*: the playful encyclopedism of François Rabelais (c.1494-c.1553) (discussed more, below); the spiritual journey of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678); William Wordsworth’s supernaturalism (1770-1850); William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* (1789) (which includes a poem about a chimney sweep named “Tom”); and George MacDonald’s Christian aspects in *Phantastes* (1858) (Manlove 207). *The Water-Babies*’s influence, in turn, can be detected in two notable underwater children’s fantasies of the early twentieth century: *The Sea Fairies* (1911) by Oz-author L. Frank Baum and *Wet Magic* (1913) by prolific children’s author Edith Nesbit. In both books, children are invited to undersea adventures by mermaids/fairies (the terms are used fairly



interchangeably). Baum shares an interest in marine biology with Kingsley. Nesbit explicitly refers to Kingsley and *The Water-Babies* on multiple occasions. As Kingsley was one of Nesbit's sources, so has Nesbit been identified as a source for *Roverandom* (*Roverandom* 93). Some interesting comparisons might be made among this group of children's sea-fantasies. However, since *Wet Magic* and *The Sea Fairies* lack typical Otherworld voyage motifs (see Mac Mathúna, "Immram Brain" 277), including the sea voyage as a metaphor for spiritual atonement, further comparison here lies outside the scope of this thesis. On the other hand, there is substantial evidence that *Roverandom* was directly influenced by *The Water-Babies*.

Tolkien may have been introduced to Kingsley's works at the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri in Birmingham where he spent much of his childhood with his guardian, Father Francis Morgan (see **Chapter 2**). The Oratory was founded in 1848 by John Henry Newman, the prominent English cardinal who converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. Kingsley, "hated Newman, as many Anglicans did; they never forgave him for leading the Oxford Movement on the path to Rome" (Donoghue). When Kingsley implied that Newman was a liar in an 1864 article for *Macmillan's Magazine*, Newman demanded an apology. The argument escalated into the publication of rival pamphlets, and then Newman answered Kingsley definitively in the seven-part *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864). Kingsley's "repute never survived the blunder ... Kingsley disgraced himself in scholarship and truth by calling Newman a liar and failing to bring up a single instance of his lying" (Donoghue). Although Newman died two years before Tolkien's birth, Father Francis had served as Newman's secretary. In this environment, Tolkien would almost-certainly have heard of Kingsley even if his books were not exactly on the Oratory's recommended reading list.

Tolkien may have read *The Water-Babies* by the time he matriculated to Exeter College, Oxford. There is an odd similarity between a poster drawn by Tolkien in November 1913 and one of Linley Sambourne's illustrations for an 1885 edition of *The Water-Babies*. Both artists created flying creatures with human heads. Sambourne's illustration has the black wings of a bat and the head of a grey-haired

man with spectacles on top of his head (see **Figure 4.1.2** “Bat with a Man’s Face”). Tolkien’s multiple creatures have the wings of large black birds and the heads of men in bowler hats, with one wearing an Oxford don’s mortar board (see Garth, *Tolkien at Exeter College* 18).



**Figure 4.1.2** Linley Sambourne, “Bat with a Man’s Face” in *The Water-Babies* by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 194. © Public Domain image

But, if Tolkien did not read *The Water-Babies* in his own youth, then he very likely did as the father of three young sons who shared “winter ‘reads’ after tea in the evening” in the 1920s (C. Tolkien, *Hobbit*, “Foreword,” vii). He was, at the latest, familiar with *The Water-Babies* by the time he wrote his 1939 *On Fairy-stories* lecture. Tolkien promoted himself as “a lover of fairy-stories since I learned to read” (TOFS 27). In notes for the lecture, he lists Kingsley with other authors of “modern fairy-stories” (TOFS 249). Holly Ordway notes that Kingsley’s only fairy-story is *The Water-Babies* (43 fn¶). She writes that Tolkien’s inclusion of Kingsley in *On Fairy-stories*, “underscores his tolerance toward those whose views differed from his own” (Ordway 43 fn¶). In any case, he was certainly familiar with the story by 1939, but had likely read it by the time he penned *Roverandom* in the mid-1920s, for both books share numerous narrative elements and imagery.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Peter Gilliver, et.al., see thematic similarities and distinctive verbal echoes from another Kingsley novel, *Hereward the Wake* (1865), in a few of Tolkien’s word choices associated with *The Lord of the Rings* (*Ring of Words* 67).

## 4.2 *Roverandom*<sup>94</sup>

In 2015, I asserted, “The framework structure, plot, and numerous motifs in *Roverandom* can be traced to the mediaeval Irish *immrama*” (“Irish Otherworld Voyage” 32). *Roverandom* shares the narrative arc of the *immram* with Kingsley’s *Water-Babies*: transgression, exile, and a series of moral lessons followed by contrition, redemption and return. *Immrama* have a two-part structure that frames the Otherworld sea-journey with opening and concluding episodes in the mundane world. In the *Navigatio*, Brendan begins and ends his voyage in Ireland, with visits to several Otherworld islands in between. Tom and Rover each visit several otherworldly settings between their respective beginning and ending episodes in England.

The commencing motive for an *immram* is exile, “whether as an exile for real crimes, or as a metaphor for the penitential element in monastic *peregrinatio*” (Wooding xv). The voyage is characteristically initiated or sanctioned by magical beings. In the *Navigatio*, Brendan is inspired to undertake a voyage after hearing about Father Barinthus’s journey to the Promised Land of the Saints where the righteous await Judgment Day. His voyage is initiated by Barinthus who is both an Irish holy man and, in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*, the supernatural ferryman who takes the wounded Arthur to Avalon. Mael Dúin seeks his father’s killers in order to take revenge. He seeks “a charm and a blessing of the wizard,” Nuca for his voyage (*Mael Dúin I* 459). In *The Water-Babies* and *Roverandom*, Tom and Rover are launched into otherworldly voyages when they are each accused of offences. Tom runs away from the grand country house where he is cleaning chimneys when he is (falsely) accused of theft. He is followed to the riverside by the mysterious Irish washerwoman (i.e., the Fairy Queen in disguise) who urges him

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<sup>94</sup> Portions of this section rely on Swank, “The Irish Otherworld Voyage of *Roverandom*” (2015), the published version of my MA thesis at Signum University.

to wash himself clean.<sup>95</sup> Rover is turned into a toy dog in retribution for biting the wizard Artaxerxes; the sand-sorcerer, Psamathos Psamathides, sends him on a series of adventures to the moon and under the sea. Thus, each of these journeys begins when the protagonist moves from the mundane (i.e., Ireland or England) into the magical realm as the result of self-exile— either in search of wonder or escape from a predicament —and embarks on a journey initiated by a magical figure.

Metamorphosis is another characteristic aspect of the Otherworld voyage. In her study of Otherworld-island voyage tales in early Irish literature, Christa Maria Löffler found, “[t]ransformations into animal-shapes, mainly bird forms are frequent. The visitor of the otherworld usually is to adopt its characteristics” (l.22). This can be seen in the transformation of the neutral angels into birds on Brendan’s Paradise of Birds, and in Tolkien’s *Book of Lost Tales* in the transformation of Eärendel’s wife, Elwing, into a bird on the Isle of Seabirds. Both *The Water-Babies* and *Roverandom* depict multiple transformations. When Tom falls asleep in the river and drowns, he awakes to find he has left his old body behind and has been transformed into a “water-baby,” a gilled baby about four-inches long. He argues with a “wicked old otter” as to whether or not he is an eft [i.e., a newt] (WB 119-120). As Tom journeys down the river toward the sea, he interacts with the aquatic-life— salmon, trout, otters and lobsters —who impart a variety of instructive episodes (most of which he fails to grasp). But he watches the caddis fly larvae turn into adults and “began to long to change his skin, and have wings like them someday” (WB 112). After performing the selfless deed of helping a lobster escape from a trap, Tom is allowed to follow other water-babies like himself to “St. Brandan’s Isle” where he will receive moral instruction. Rover also undergoes physical transformation. First, he is transformed into a toy about the size of a mouse (or a water-baby) and sold for sixpence in a shop to the mother of three nice

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<sup>95</sup> Every supernatural woman in *The Water-Babies* is actually an avatar of The Queen of the water-fairies: the Irish washerwoman, Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby, Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid, and Mother Carey.

boys, one who was particularly fond of little black and white dogs (*Roverandom* 4-6, *passim*). He is wrapped up in paper and placed in a shopping basket with the shrimp she has also purchased for her children's tea. Rover argues with the shrimp as to whether it is worse to be turned into a toy or to be boiled (*Roverandom* 7). After Rover runs away from the nice family, he meets the sympathetic sand-sorcerer, Psamathos Psamathides, who sends him on a series of instructive episodes (most of which he fails to grasp) to the moon and under the Deep Blue Sea. Rover meets both a moon-dog and a mer-dog. On the moon, The Man in the Moon gives Rover "a beautiful pair of white wings with black spots" to fly around the moon (*Roverandom* 24). Under the sea, Rover is transformed for *that* environment: "Rover's tail began to get fishy and his feet to get webby, and his coat to get more and more like a mackintosh" (*Roverandom* 64). Later in Tom's adventures, he adopts a dog he finds protecting a human baby aboard an abandoned ship. They are all swept over the side of the ship by a large wave, but the sea-fairies, "carry baby and cradle gently down in their soft arms; and then [Tom] knew it was all right, and that there would be a new water-baby in St. Brandan's Isle" (*WB* 295). The little dog, on the other hand, "kicked and coughed a little, [and] sneezed so hard, that he sneezed himself clean out of his skin, and turned into a water-dog" (*WB* 295). In a very similar scene recounted in *Roverandom*, Rover's friend the mer-dog tells his own story of transformation. Long ago when he was a land-dog sailing in his master's longship from the Orkney Islands, they both jumped overboard after losing a sea-battle. His master, "went to the bottom quicker than I did, and the mermaids caught him ... and lifted him up, and bore him away" (*Roverandom* 66). The little land-dog, on the other hand, "turned slowly into a sea-dog" (*Roverandom* 66). In both stories, loyal dogs and their human companions go overboard into the sea. While the drowned human in each case is borne away by sea-fairies/mermaids, both dogs transform into water-dogs/sea-dogs. Sambourne depicts Kingsley's water-dog with webbed feet, and it could just as easily be a picture of *Roverandom* or the mer-dog turning from a land-dog into a sea-dog (see **Figure 4.2.1** "The Dog").



**Figure 4.2.1** Linley Sambourne, “The Dog” in *The Water-Babies* by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 295. © Public Domain image

Tom and Rover are transformed. Tom is turned into a four-inch-long water-baby while Rover is turned into a small toy. Tom longs to have wings like the caddis flies; Rover receives a pair of wings on the moon. Tom receives gills like a fish; Rover gets “a fishy tale” and “webby” feet. Both Tom and Rover have arguments with other sea-life: Tom with the wicked otter and Rover with the indignant shrimp. Finally, both make friends with dogs who began as land-dogs, fell into the sea from shipboard and turned into sea-dogs.

Rover and the mer-dog spend several weeks playing together in the Mer-king’s palace at the “the bottom of the Deep Blue Sea,” a setting which Tolkien likely developed from several well-known works for children, including *The Water-babies*. In their introduction to *Roverandom*, editors Scull and Hammond observe in Tolkien’s watercolour illustration, “The Gardens of the Merking’s Palace,” that the whale Uin is “much like the leviathan in one of Rudyard Kipling’s illustrations for ‘How the Whale Got His Throat’ in his *Just So Stories* (1902)” (xxi). In her 1998 book review of *Roverandom* for *Books for Keeps* magazine, Jessica Yates notes the

underwater setting has “shades of Hans Andersen [i.e. “The Little Mermaid”] and *The Water Babies*” (23). In her unpublished “Notes on ‘*Roverandom*,’” an abandoned 2012 typescript (now partially referenced on Scull and Hammond’s “Addenda and Corrigenda to *Roverandom*” [1998]” website), Yates proposes that Tolkien derived the phrase “the bottom of the Deep Blue Sea” – repeated several times in *Roverandom* – from the last line of the chorus of the traditional song, “The Mermaid.” Tolkien translated “the bottom of the Deep Blue Sea” into Old English as “*déopan grunde néah*” in the poem, *Ofer Wídne Gársecg* (1936).<sup>96</sup> Yates recounts that Michael George Tolkien told her “The Mermaid” appeared in his grandmother Edith’s copy of *The Scottish Students’ Song Book* (Yates, “Notes on ‘*Roverandom*’”). But we may also consider an underwater inheritance from Irish literature as well. The colourful *Aidedh Ferghusa meic Léide* (‘The Violent Death of Fergus mac Léiti’), a thirteenth-century burlesque and Rabelaisian version of the seventh- or eighth-century *Echtra Fergusa maic Léiti* (‘The Adventure of Fergus mac Léiti’) from MS Egerton 1782, includes several analogues of Rover’s undersea adventures: a hero who is given the power to breathe underwater, a magical king, a *lupracán* [leprechaun] who avenges a perceived affront by Fergus (similar to Tolkien’s Artaxerxes, who avenges a perceived affront by Rover), and battles with a marine monster who roils the water (i.e., Fergus’s sea-monster, the *muidris*; *Roverandom*’s great Sea-serpent). The tale is found in O’Grady’s *Silva Gadelica* (SG II.269-285), a collection I have proposed as a possible source for Tolkien’s *Book of Lost Tales* (see Chapter 2).

Another analogue to *The Water-Babies* and *Roverandom* can be found in Edith Nesbit’s *Five Children and It* (1902). All three stories have characters whose names derive from the Greek root *psammos*, literally “sand.” Tolkien has the sand-sorcerer,

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<sup>96</sup> *Ofer Wídne Gársecg* (‘Across the Broad Ocean’) is a poem Tolkien wrote in Old English c.1924; it was later printed privately in *Songs for the Philologists* (1936), and is reprinted with an English translation by Tom Shippey in *The Road to Middle-earth* (pp. 359-361) and *Poems* (II.585-591). In the poem, a Norse sailor falls into the sea, meets “the mermen near the deep sea-bottom” and marries a mermaid (*Road* 360).

Psamathos Psamathides the chief of all Psamathists. Nesbit has a “sand-fairy,” or *psammead*, who like Tolkien’s Psamathos “has a gruff but whimsical personality and likes nothing better than to sleep in the warm sand” (*Roverandom* 93 fn11). But Kingsley’s influence cannot be ruled out. Nesbit knew *The Water-Babies*: as I have already mentioned, she referred to Kingsley and *The Water-Babies* in her book *Wet Magic*. And Kingsley also has a character whose names derives from the Greek root *psammos*. Among the sea-fairies who instruct the water-babies on St Brandan’s Isle, Kingsley named four of them, “Eunice and Polynoe, Phyllodoce and *Psamathe*” (WB 215, italics added). All four names are attested as Nereids, or sea-nymphs in Greek mythology (“Nereids (Nereides)”).<sup>97</sup> The name *Psamathe* means “the goddess of Sand.” Kingsley is, then, a possible direct or indirect source for Nesbit’s sand-fairy—the *psammead*—and Tolkien’s sand-sorcerer, Psamathos.

All three stories have multiple analogues regarding birds, or humans/angels transformed into birds. One analogue involves locations which are blanketed by white birds. In the *Navigatio*, Brendan arrives at the Paradise of Birds where a large tree stands, “covered over with snow-white birds, so that it hid its boughs and leaves entirely” (O'Donoghue 129). Tolkien’s Rover is flown on the back of Mew the seagull to his home-cliffs which “were covered with white things, pale in the dusk. Hundreds of sea-birds were sitting there on narrow ledges” (*Roverandom* 18). In *The Water-Babies*, a flock of petrels—nicknamed “Mother Carey’s own chickens”—flies Tom to Allfowlsness, “the great gathering of all the sea-birds, before they start for their summer breeding-places far away in the Northern Isles” (WB 286; see **Figure 4.2.2** “Mother Carey’s Chickens”).<sup>98</sup> The birds begin to gather there,

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<sup>97</sup> These are also the names given to the water-snakes who protect the water-babies as they sleep.

<sup>98</sup> This is echoed in Tolkien’s *Book of Lost Tales* and the Isle of Seabirds, “whither do all the birds of all waters come at whiles” (*Lost Tales II* 253).



in thousands and tens of thousands, blackening all the air; swans and brant geese, harlequins and eiders, harolds and garganeys, smews and goosanders, divers and loons, grebes and dovebies, auks and razor-bills, gannets and petrels, skuas and terns, with gulls beyond all naming or numbering; and they paddled and washed and splashed and combed and brushed themselves on the sand, till the shore was white with feathers. (WB 290-291)



**Figure 4.2.2** Linley Sambourne, “Mother Carey’s Chickens” in *The Water-Babies* by Charles Kingsley, 1885, p. 297. © Public Domain image

Jessica Yates believes the sea-birds on Mew’s home-cliffs may derive from Kingsley’s Allfowlsness (Yates, “Notes on ‘*Roverandom*’”). Another possibility is that both *Roverandom* and *The Water-Babies*, with their hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of birds meeting together in a small space, covering the area with their white feathers, are analogues of Brendan’s Paradise of Birds in the *Navigatio*.

Other analogues include transportation by birds, birds as messengers, and humans/angels put into the form of birds as penance. Tolkien’s *Roverandom* flies to the moon on the back of Mew the seagull. Mew is called, “the old sand-sorcerer’s postman,” because he carries messages from Psamathos to The Man-in-the-Moon (*Roverandom* 26). In the *Navigatio*, one of the birds on the Paradise of Birds is a messenger from God who informs Brendan that they are the spirits of

neutral angels who fell in Lucifer's rebellion. Having taken neither the side of Heaven nor of Hell, they must abide on Earth as birds, singing praises to God until Judgment Day (O'Donoghue 146). In *The Water-Babies*, Tom flies to Shiny Wall at the North Pole on the backs of mollymucks (i.e. albatrosses). The mollies tell Tom, "We are the spirits of the old Greenland skippers (as every sailor knows), who hunted here, right whales and horse-whales, full hundreds of years ago. But, because we were saucy and greedy, we were all turned into mollies, to eat whales blubber all our days" (WB 297-298). Tom meets the "king of all the mollies," the cruel Hendrick Hudson— an historical English sea explorer who disappeared 23 June 1611 —imagined by Kingsley to be fated to remain a molly until he has worked out his penance (WB 298). Rover's acquisition of wings on the moon also places him in this category of penitents transformed into birds, as he abides on the moon (then under the sea) until he matures enough to reconcile with the wizard Artaxerxes. The overlapping images of birds as pack animals, messengers, and purgatorial penitents are more signs that both Tolkien and Kingsley were consciously adapting motifs from the *Navigatio*.

In another analogue, Brendan, Tom, and Rover all meet sage old men who help them on their path to grace. In the *Navigatio*, Brendan encounters an ancient hermit who is "covered all over from head to foot with the hair of his body, which was white as snow from old age" (O'Donoghue 169). Brendan and his crew can all benefit from the insights of the hermit's fidelity and faith as he prophesies on the final stages of their seven-year voyage to find the Promised Land, and he provides them with sustenance for the next forty days (i.e., water from a spring) (Ó Carragáin 28). St Brendan himself appears as just such a hermit in Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* who, along with five other hermits, settles on one of "the islands of the blest" (WB 212). There, Brandan (as Kingsley calls him) instructs the water-babies for hundreds of years—

till his eyes grew too dim to see, and his beard grew so long that he dared not walk for fear of treading on it, and then he might have tumbled down. And at last he and the five hermits fell fast asleep ...

and there they sleep until this day. But the fairies took to the water-babies, and taught them their lessons themselves. (WB 213)

Rover is hosted on the moon by the Man-in-the-Moon, “an old man with a long silvery beard” who lives alone on the moon (with his dog, the moon-dog) (*Roverandom* 22). The Man takes Roverandom to the dark side of the moon where he once again meets and plays with the little boy Two who has journeyed to the moon in his dreams. This meeting plants a seed in Rover’s heart which will one day lead him to miss the little boy and to want to go live with him again. All of the old men—the ancient hermit, St Brandan, and the Man in the Moon—have long silver or white beards and serve as mentors to their respective protagonists.

There are several additional analogues. The three protagonists learn from a series of instructive episodes: Brendan is appointed to a seven-year pilgrimage, voyaging on the ocean to learn about its holy marvels and faithful supplicants. Both Tom and Rover undergo a series of instructive episodes, too, although they both persist with their “naughty tricks.” Tom was, “like some other little boys, very fond of hunting and tormenting creatures for mere sport” (WB 104). And, “he tickled the madrepores, to make them shut up; and frightened the crabs, to make them hide in the sand and peep out at him with the tips of their eyes; and put stones into the anemones’ mouths to make them fancy that their dinner was coming,” but he left off tormenting the water-snakes, “for they would stand no nonsense” (WB 217-218). Similarly, Rover (with the moon-dog), “put broken glass and tintacks outside the lairs of some of the lesser dragons (while they were asleep), and lay awake till the middle of the night to hear them roar with rage” (*Roverandom* 49). Rover is especially fond of baiting his nemesis, the wizard Artaxerxes, whom he meets again under the sea. Artaxerxes drives a carriage made of “a gigantic shell shaped like a cockle and drawn by seven sharks” (*Roverandom* 75).<sup>99</sup> Rover (with the mer-dog),

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<sup>99</sup> In the Irish *Immram Brain/Voyage of Bran*, Manannán drives his chariot over the waves; similarly in *The Water-Babies*, Queen Amphitrite drives a car of cameo shell (WB 215); in

“dropped pieces of rock into the carriage whenever it passed under cliffs . . . and pushed anything loose they could find over the edge” (*Roverandom* 75). At the cave of the most ancient Sea-serpent, Rover “crept up and bit one of [Artaxerxes’s] sharks’ tails, for fun” (*Roverandom* 76). Unfortunately, this results in six of the sharks biting each other on the tail, with the seventh shark biting the sleeping Sea-serpent, who causes a tsunami as it thrashes around. As Tom’s water-snakes “stand no nonsense,” so does Rover’s ancient Sea-serpent call for the dogs to, “Stop this NONSENSE!” (*Roverandom* 79). Tom also sees “the great sea-serpent himself” although it lies dead, rather than asleep, at the bottom of the ocean (WB 318).

After seven years and through many perils, St Brendan at last finds the Promised Land, but he is directed by God to return to Ireland. Rover, too, catches sight of Elvenhome (in Valinor) when Uin the whale takes him sightseeing. But, Rover, too, must turn back, for Uin says, “I should catch it, if this was found out! ... No one from the Outer Lands is supposed ever to come here; and few ever do now. Mum’s the word!” (*Roverandom* 74). Kingsley’s Shiny Wall at the North Pole is also an analogue of a blessed land, for it includes, “Peacepool, and Mother Carey’s Haven, where the good whales go when they die” (WB 272). Both Tolkien’s Uin and Kingsley’s “good whales” may be nods to Jasconius, the great island-fish of the *Navigatio* who ferries Saint Brendan to the Promised Land (see **Chapter 1**).

The Christian *immram* concludes, “with the reconciliation of the wrongdoer with either the victim, the victim’s surrogate, or/and God” (Mac Mathúna, “*Immram Brain*” 278). Mael Dúin has a change of heart and forgives his father’s killers. In *Immram curaig Ua Corra*, a trio of former church-burning ruffians become monks and establish a new church (see Carey, “Voyage Literature” 1745). Tom’s heart also changes toward his old master, Grimes, who he tries to help out of chimney-sweep purgatory. Tom’s actions prove that he has become a moral creature, “because he

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*Roverandom* the sea-fairies also “drive in shell-carriages harnessed to the tiniest fishes (73).

has done the thing he did not like" (WB 367). Tom is then allowed to return to the "land-world" and reunite with his best friend, Ellie. He eventually becomes "a great man of science ... and knows everything about everything ... And all this from what he learnt when he was a water-baby, underneath the sea" (WB 367-368). When Rover's prank with the ancient Sea-serpent gets Artaxerxes fired from his position as the Pacific and Atlantic Magician, Rover finally comprehends the consequences of his actions, and he too experiences a change of heart. Rover and Artaxerxes reconcile, and the wizard transforms Rover back to his original size, sending him home to the nice family and little boy Two. In an echo of Tom's fate, Rover grows up to be "a large and dignified dog" and he "grew to be very wise, and had an immense local reputation" (*Roverandom* 89). Thus, both Tom and Rover complete the entire penitential cycle of the mediaeval *immrama*: transgression, exile, and moral lessons followed by redemption and return. Both acquire wisdom as a result of their journeys and become important elders in their second lives. Clearly, both Kingsley and Tolkien were influenced by the *Navigatio* and other mediaeval voyage literature, but they are also closely-related to one another.

### 4.3 Dogs Days and Rabelais

Several similarities point to the direct influence of *The Water-Babies* on *Roverandom*, things that both books share but which are not features of the mediaeval literature: *psammeads*, physical metamorphosis of the protagonist, bird-rides, and a focus on child- (or puppy-) protagonists whose character arc from transgression to redemption is depicted as a journey from heathen ignorance to educated maturity. There are enough unique commonalities between the two works which do not appear in the *Navigatio* or other Otherworld voyage literature to suspect more than a generic similarity between *The Water-Babies* and *Roverandom*.

In addition to these, both Kingsley and Tolkien delighted in linguistic playfulness. Kingsley quips of Tom's water-dog, "the old dog-star was so worn out by the last three hot summers that there have been no dog-days since; so that they had to

take him down and put Tom's dog up in his place" (WB 368). This joke refers to the "dog days" of summer, the period from July 3<sup>rd</sup> through August 11<sup>th</sup> in the northern hemisphere when Sirius, the brightest star in the sky and the nose of the Roman constellation *Canis Major* ("Greater Dog"), rose and set in conjunction with the sun (see **Figure 4.3.1** "Detail of Canis Major"). The ancient Greeks noticed that summer's most intense heat occurred during this same period (Klein).



**Figure 4.3.1** "Detail of Canis Major" in *Urania's Mirror; or, a View of the Heavens*, engraved by Sidney Hall, London: Samuel Leigh; illustrations based on Alexander Jamieson's *A Celestial Atlas*. 1822. © Public Domain image

Scull and Hammond draw attention to Tolkien's "unrestrained delight with which its author indulged in wordplay" (*Roverandom* xvi). I will illustrate, by way of example, an astronomical joke in the same vein as Kingsley's "dog days of summer." During *Roverandom's* stay on the moon, he and the moon-dog inadvertently disturbed the moon dragon, who chased them back to the Man-in-the-Moon's white tower. The Man shot off some firework-type spells and "hit the dragon splosh on the stomach (where all dragons are peculiarly tender)" (*Roverandom* 35). The injured "dragon slowly made his lopsided way home, where he rubbed his nose for months. The next eclipse was a failure, for the dragon was too busy licking his tummy to attend

to it" (*Roverandom* 36). Scull and Hammond, identify this as a reference to "the total lunar eclipse that occurred on 8 December 1927 but was hidden from observers in England by clouds" (*Roverandom* xiii). Tolkien refers to the same lunar eclipse in his 21 December 1927 "Father Christmas letter" written for his children (*FCL* 45).



**Figure 4.3.2** "Astronomy: A Star Map of the Night Sky in the Southern Hemisphere [detail of *Canicula* and *Canis Major*]." Coloured engraving. Wellcome Collection. [n.d.] © Public Domain image

*Roverandom* and the moon-dog might also be immortalised in the heavens as *Canis Major* and *Canis Minor* (i.e., *Canicula*) as the "Minor" is much smaller than the "Major" just as *Roverandom* is only a "tiny tot" compared to the moon-dog (see **Figure 4.3.2** "Astronomy: A Star Map of the Night Sky") (*Roverandom* 24).

Another similarity is a shared penchant for comical lists. Kingsley was influenced by François Rabelais (1494-1553), the French Renaissance scholar, physician and author of the *Gargantua and Pantagruel* series who delighted in amassing long and humorous lists. Kingsley was a "devoted re-reader of Rabelais," and employs "Rabelaisian encyclopedism" at several points in *The Water-Babies* (Cunningham 121, 144). Dorothy Coleman compares Kingsley's list of birds from Allfowlsness (see above) to Rabelais's list from Ringing Island, where all the people are birds

(Coleman 519). Rabelais has, “Clerghawks, Monkhawks, Priesthawks, Abbothawks, Bishhawks, Cardinhawks, and one Popehawk,” as well as “clergkites, nunkites, priestkites, abbesskites, bishkites, cardinkites, and popekites” (Rabelais 142).

Kingsley also lists aquatic flora and fauna in *The Water-Babies*:

There are land-babies—then why not water-babies? Are there not water-rats, water-flies, water-crickets, water-crabs, water-tortoises, water-scorpions, water-tigers and water-hogs, water-cats and water-dogs, sea-lions and sea-bears, sea-horses and sea-elephants, sea-mice and sea-urchins, sea-razors and sea-pens, sea-combs and sea-fans; and of plants, are there not water-grass, and water-crowfoot, water-milfoil, and so on, without end? (WB 84-85)

A later list of sweet treats includes, “sea-cakes, sea-apples, sea-oranges, sea-bullseyes, sea-toffee ... sea-ices, made out of sea-cows’ cream” (WB 219). These might have inspired a list in *Roverandom* where the fish who ate the spells that Artaxerxes dumped out in his back garden, “were turned into sea-worms, sea-cats, sea-cows, sea-lions, sea-tigers, sea-devils, porpoises, dugongs, cephalopods, manatees, and calamities, or merely poisoned” (*Roverandom* 81). Kingsley has a list of items from a cutler’s shop in *The Water-Babies*: “Scythes, Javelins, Billhooks, Lances, Pickaxes, [etc.]” (WB 216). Tolkien has a list of items from Artaxerxes’s workshop in *Roverandom*: “paraphernalia, insignia, symbols, memoranda, books of recipes, arcana, apparatus, and bags and bottles of miscellaneous spells” (*Roverandom* 81). There are more comical lists in both books, and Yates writes, “I think it is more likely that Tolkien was imitating Kingsley than Rabelais!” (Yates, “Notes on ‘*Roverandom*’”). I whole-heartedly agree with Yates.

As I argued in 2015, *Roverandom* is an *immram*, incorporating numerous elements directly from the voyage tales of Brendan, Bran, and Mael Dúin, but with this new examination it seems highly probable that *Roverandom* is also a clever reimagining of Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies*.



## 4.4 Conclusions

We know that Tolkien's friend C.S. Lewis had read Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* shortly before 07 June 1930, and found it "not very good" (*Collected Letters* I 901). And, we know that Tolkien was familiar with *The Water-Babies* when he mentioned it in notes for his December 1939 *On Fairy-stories* lecture. But we can only guess whether Tolkien read or knew of the book by the time he invented the story of *Roverandom*. Under Fisher's tiers, we can consider *The Water-Babies* as a *circumstantial* source (one known by a close associate) or a *probable* source (one Tolkien is known to have read or commented on, but for which we lack direct acknowledgement by Tolkien of its source status). There are several significant internal similarities between the two works: both stories are reimaginings of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* adapted for a child audience; both have child/puppy protagonists who run away and have adventures under the sea, both protagonists undergo physical transformations, and have arguments with and torment various sea-life, and both undergo a change of heart and reconcile with someone who transgressed against them. Both authors also repeatedly employ Rabelaisian comical lists. These numerous parallels make a strong case that Tolkien had indeed read *The Water-Babies* by the time he first wrote down *Roverandom* in around 1927. In Beidler's terminology, then, we can consider *The Water-Babies* as a *hard analogue with near-source status*: an especially strong candidate that bears striking resemblances to a Tolkienian work, but one which lacks definitive evidence of being a *hard source*. Tom Shippey might consider *The Water-Babies* as an *inferred* source which can be deduced from evidence and reasoning rather than from an explicit statement by Tolkien. Despite Kingsley's anti-Catholic views and his problematic relationship with Cardinal Newman, Tolkien discovered things in *The Water-Babies* that he wished to replicate in a story he created for his own children: the clever wordplay, the education and maturation of the child protagonist, and the magic and adventure of the Irish Otherworld voyage tale, a story form which meant so much to Tolkien personally, and which he wanted to share with his own young sons.

Although Charles Kingsley is an English author and was, himself, hostile to Ireland and the Irish, *The Water-Babies* may be categorised as “Irish-themed” for its reimagining of the St Brendan legend. Reimagining Brendan’s voyage was an impulse shared by Tolkien in several of his own writings, for example, his “excursionary ‘Thriller,’” *The Lost Road*, likewise a reimagining of the Brendan voyage. It was also Tolkien’s first attempt at a time-travel novel, an aspect of which will be examined next in **Chapter 5**.

## Chapter 5 Travellers in Time (1930s)<sup>100</sup>

As I argued in **Chapter 4**, Tolkien's *Roverandom* incorporates numerous motifs and situations directly from the Otherworld voyage tales of Brendan, Bran, and Mael Dúin.<sup>101</sup> One of these is the Otherworld disjunction of time. In *Immram Mail Dúin*, the sailors stay on the Island of Women for what they believe is three months, but it is actually three years (*Mael Dúin II* 67). In *Immram Brain*, Bran and his crew stay in the Land of Women for what they believe is a year, but it is actually hundreds of years (*Bran* 32). When Rover's adventures on the moon and under the Deep Blue Sea are over and he returns to his own garden gate, he is uncertain how long his journey has lasted, "weeks or months since the tale began (he could not have told you which)" (*Roverandom* 88). Sam Gamgee notices something similar in *The Lord of the Rings* when the Fellowship departs from the Elvish realm of Lothlórien—

'It's very strange,' [Sam] murmured. 'The Moon's the same in the Shire and in Wilderland, or it ought to be. But either it's out of its running, or I'm all wrong in my reckoning. You'll remember, Mr. Frodo, the Moon was waning as we lay on the flet up in that tree: a week from the full, I reckon. And we'd been a week on the way last night, when up pops a New Moon as thin as a nail-paring, as if we had never stayed no time in the Elvish country ... Anyone would think that time did not count in there!'

'And perhaps that was the way of it,' said Frodo. 'In that land, maybe, we were in a time that has elsewhere long gone by ...'

Legolas stirred in his boat. 'Nay, time does not tarry ever,' he said; 'but change and growth is not in all things and places alike. (*FR II.ix.404*)

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<sup>100</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was presented as research-in-progress for this thesis on 10 August 2019 at "Tolkien 2019" in Birmingham, U.K. I am indebted to the work of Dr Verlyn Flieger, as well as her feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter. Any errors representing Dr Flieger's theories or publications are entirely my own.

<sup>101</sup> See also Swank, "Irish Otherworld Voyage" (2015) and "The Child's Voyage" (2019).

For Sam, the time that the Fellowship spent in Lothlórien feels like just a few days, but in the outer world of Middle-earth an entire month had passed. In each of these cases, what seems to be a short time in the Otherworld is equivalent to a longer span in the mortal world. John Carey observes, “The widespread idea that a brief sojourn ‘there’ corresponds to a far longer interval ‘here’ is well represented in Ireland” (“Time, Space, and the Otherworld” 7). Carey also identifies examples of the opposite phenomenon:

After some days in the Otherworld, Nera [in *Echtra Nerai*] returns to the court at Cruachu only a few minutes after leaving it; Becfhola [in *Tochmarc Becfola*] leaves her husband early one Sunday morning, spends a day, a night, and a morning on her preternatural journey, and returns to find the king still in bed on the same Sunday. One of the poems in *Duanaire Finn* describes a protracted Otherworld adventure from which Finn returns to find that only a few hours have passed for his followers. (“Time, Space, and the Otherworld” 7)

C.S. Lewis uses time in this manner when the Pevensie siblings return through the magic wardrobe after spending decades in Narnia. Once back, “they were no longer Kings and Queens in their hunting array but just Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy in their old clothes. It was the same day and the same hour of the day on which they had all gone into the wardrobe to hide. Mrs Macready and the visitors were still talking in the passage” (*Lion, Witch, Wardrobe* 185).

These are examples of time moving at different rates in different “worlds,” but the modern sense of time travel— of observers moving backwards and forwards along the chronological history of their own world —became a literary phenomenon in the nineteenth century. Paul Alkon claims that before the eighteenth century, “the future was reserved in Western literature for prophets, astrologers, and practitioners of deliberative rhetoric,” so that only a couple of older works (both from the seventeenth century) were known to have attempted to chronicle the future (184). However, the nineteenth century became a golden age for time-travel fiction with the production of such classics as Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843, time travel visions), Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward from 2000 to 1887* (1888, time travel through hypnosis), Mark Twain’s *A Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*

(1889, time travel initiated by a blow to the head), and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895, time travel in a mechanical device). There are several lesser-known examples which are nevertheless interesting because of their supernatural catalysts: Samuel Madden's *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century* (1733, letters transported back in time by an angel); Johan Hermann Wessel's *Anno 7603* (1785, time travel facilitated by a fairy); Émile Souvestre's *Le Monde tel qu'il sera* (1846, time travel facilitated by a god); and Pierre Boitard's *Paris avant les Hommes* (1861, time travel facilitated by a devil).

Irish-born authors made important contributions to this genre as well. Samuel Madden, for example, was an Irish Anglican clergyman (1686–1765), though he inexplicably destroyed almost all the copies of his *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century* as soon as they arrived from the press. A later entrant to the field was Standish James O'Grady—the so-called “Father of the Celtic Revival” and cousin to Standish Hayes O'Grady, editor of *Silva Gadelica*—whose works on Irish myth and legend influenced the likes of Yeats and Russell. At the turn of the twentieth century, S.J. O'Grady published an authoritarian dystopia, *The Queen of the World, or Under the Tyranny* (1900), under the pseudonym “Luke Netterville,” in which a young Irishman, Gerard Pierce de Lacy, is sent to the year 2179 A.D. by the mysterious figure, Bohemian, to help defeat tyrannical Chinese overlords and install Gerard's love interest, Lenore, on the throne of the world (“The Queen of the World”). While neither Madden's nor S.J. O'Grady's time-travel fiction rank among the classics of the field, these authors establish a modern Irish interest in time-travel literature that predates (in Madden's case, by two hundred years) better-known works by Irish playwrights Denis Johnston (1901–1984) and Flann O'Brien (1911–1966).

Three other Irish-born writers exerted significant influence on Tolkien's own forays into time-travel literature, *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*, both of which rely heavily on mediaeval Irish motifs. The three writers examined are, in **Section 5.1**, J. W. Dunne, in **Section 5.2**, C.S. Lewis, and in **Section 5.3**, Joseph O'Neill. Not all of Tolkien's sources and influences were mediaeval, as these three modern authors show. And, despite that O'Neill is the most obscure of the three today, his

work is critically important for understanding the development of Tolkien's *The Lost Road*. Written within the space of a few years, O'Neill's *Wind from the North* (1934) and *Land Under England* (1935), and Tolkien's *The Lost Road* (written c.1936) all explore father/son relationships, altered consciousness, ancestral memory, and the poignancy of doomed civilisations. O'Neill and Tolkien also encapsulated in these works the twentieth century interwar period's anxieties over rising totalitarianism and dystopia, religious conflict, and the destruction of the past. The means of time travel in both authors' novels— travel through the unconscious mind —was based on the contemporary theories of J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927). Yet, the similarities between O'Neill's and Tolkien's novels extend beyond Dunne's theories to parallel settings, characters, and situations, and thus inviting comparison and even speculation of influence. This speculation is bolstered further when comparing Tolkien's time-travel fiction to that of his friend, C.S. Lewis, as Tolkien's work appears to be closer in harmony with O'Neill's writings than Lewis's. Ultimately, however, whether or not O'Neill directly influenced Tolkien's *The Lost Road*, the similarities between their works effectively illustrate the *zeitgeist* of intellectual thought on precognitive dreaming and the cultural anxieties of the 1930s.

## 5.1 J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*

During the 1930s and 1940s in Britain and Ireland, 'Time' seemed to be on everyone's mind, or rather, the mystery of time and human perception was of great interest to the intellectuals and artists of the era. The Victorians had also previously grappled with time and its relationship to the human mind, particularly the unconscious mind, thus setting the stage for much of what was written about time in the 1930s and 1940s. In George Du Maurier's novel, *Peter Ibbetson* (1891), two lovers meet in their dreams, revisit their childhood haunts, and even travel beyond the boundaries of their own lifetimes into their ancestral pasts. H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) concerns a Victorian gentleman-scientist who invents a machine which can move backwards and forwards through time. Sigmund Freud published his non-fiction book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), and Albert

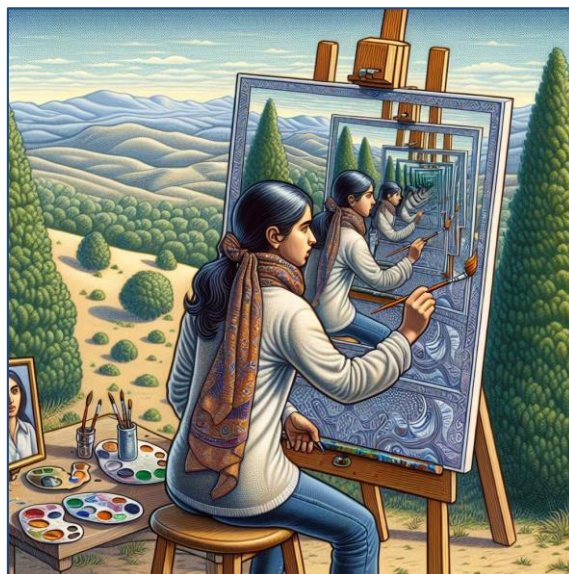
Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity (1905) postulated that time and space were relative to the position of the observer (*Question 38*). In his 1916 essay, "The Structure of the Unconscious," Carl Jung first used the term, the "collective unconscious," to refer to the universal symbols or archetypes he believed were hard-wired into the human brain. He explained,

in dreams, fantasies, and other exceptional states of mind the most far-fetched mythological motifs and symbols can appear autochthonously at any time, often, apparently, as the result of particular influences, traditions, and excitations working on the individual, but more often without any sign of them. These 'primordial images,' or 'archetypes,' as I have called them, belong to the basic stock of the unconscious psyche and cannot be explained as personal acquisitions. (Jung VIII.111 ¶229)

Flieger notes that as, "the new century loomed, the impulse to inquire into the hidden, unrealised potential of mind and soul gave rise to a proliferation of individual and concerted experiments in the occult whose practitioners included" (among others), Yeats, A.E. Waite, Aleister Crowley, Madame Blavatsky, Rudolph Steiner, and others (*Question 36*). It was one of the most turbulent times in history, with "[i]ts wars, its use of technology in its most destructive aspect, its material progress and spiritual confusion, its avowedly 'modern' ethos" (*Question 3*). After the first World War, and with indications of the second one looming, many in Tolkien's generation became dissatisfied with the present-day, and began dreaming of travelling somewhere else in time. Tolkien himself developed a nostalgia for a lost past that was impossible to recapture.

In 1927, J.W. [John William] Dunne (1875–1949) published the first edition of *An Experiment with Time* (revised in 1929 and 1934), a widely-read theory of time and precognitive dreaming which he later referred to as "Serialism." Dunne was born on a British Army base in County Kildare, Ireland, to an Irish father and an English mother, though he spent most of his childhood and subsequent career in England. He fought in the Second South African War, or Boer War (1899-1902), and was invalided to Britain, twice: first, with typhoid fever, and second, with heart disease. Dunne then went to work for the British War Office developing gliders and

monoplanes. His innovative designs were fired by the imaginative works of Jules Verne and Dunne's friend, H.G. Wells. After noticing that he would sometimes dream of events which occurred weeks or months later, Dunne began keeping a dream journal to corroborate his recollections. This led him to propose that time was not linear, but, rather, a field. Flieger writes, "Dunne's major point was that Time is not, as generally supposed, divided into discrete categories of past, present, and future. Rather, it is, like space, a continuous field that can be perceived and moved into, most often through dreams" ("Time" 648-649). Dunne explained his theory with the example of an artist who attempts to paint a complete picture of the universe. He begins by painting the landscape as he sees it, however, the artist cannot observe himself within that landscape, so a second artist is needed to stand a little way behind the first in order to observe and paint both the landscape and the first artist. Of course, this leads to an infinite regression of artists who capture increasingly larger (but never complete) pictures of the universe until one reaches an Ultimate Observer who can perceive the entire universe and everything in it (Dunne, *Serial Universe* 29-37; see also **Figure 5.1.1** "Artist and Picture").



**Figure 5.1.1** Kris Swank, "Artist and Picture." AI image using Microsoft Copilot, 19 March 2025. CC-BY-4.0



Dunne proposed that in our waking state, we are like the first artist with a limited perspective of the present moment. Yet, in impressionable states of mind— such as dreaming, under hypnosis, or knocked unconscious —we might be able to perceive the more expanded perspective of the Ultimate Observer. On waking, it would seem to a dreamer as if they had seen glimpses of their own future.

Flieger observes that Dunne's *Experiment with Time*, "had a terrific impact when it appeared, though its influence was perhaps greater on literature than on science" (Question 46). The wide range of British authors and works influenced by Dunne's theories include E.R. Eddison's *Zimiamvia Trilogy* (1922-1958); H.G. Wells's "The Queer Story of Brownlow's Newspaper" (1932) and *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933); John Buchan's *The Gap in the Curtain* (1932); J.B. Priestley's plays, *Dangerous Corner* (1932), *Time and the Conways* (1937), and *An Inspector Calls* (1947), as well as his nonfiction *Man and Time* (1964) and *Over the Long High Wall* (1972); James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1933) and *Random Harvest* (1941); and T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" (1935) among many others (Question 46; Clute; O'Connell 224; and Stewart 69, 70, 73, & 76-78). In Ireland, Yeats, James Joyce and others "were all aware of, and to varying degrees influenced by" Dunne's theories on "the multidimensional nature of time" (O'Connell 224). Johnston's *A Bride for the Unicorn* (1933) and O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (1967) are prime Irish examples (see Maxwell 221 fn7.7; and O'Connell). Mark O'Connell maintains that writers "were open to Dunne's theories in a way that physicists and psychologists were not, for the obvious reason that the imaginative possibilities they suggested greatly outweighed their scientific value. In particular, Dunne's ideas had a conspicuous impact on writers of what might loosely be termed the literary fiction of the fantastic" (224). Victoria Stewart writes, "works such as Buchan's and Priestley's use Dunne's thinking about time as a means of expressing not only the numbed aftermath of the First World War but the anxious apprehension of what may be to come" (63). For example, "Buchan's novel [*The Gap in the Curtain*] reflects the political and economic uncertainties of the post-First World War and post-Wall Street Crash period ... J.B. Priestley's *Time and the Conways* ... had been supplemented by anxieties about a possible future conflict" (Stewart 73). Stewart

asserts, “By the 1940s, Dunne’s ideas were well-enough established for authors to assume a familiarity with his work on the part of their readers, and his name often appears as a passing reference point for disturbed perceptions of time” (76). Flieger concurs, “while it lasted, Dunne’s theory was so current and popular a topic that *not* to understand it was a mark of singularity” (*Question 46*, italics original).

Like many of their contemporaries, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were also intrigued by Dunne’s theories of time, as Flieger explains:

There would be little doubt, even without corroborating evidence, that Tolkien and his Inklings friends had read and discussed Dunne, for it is very much the kind of thing that would have engaged their intellects ... Both Tolkien and Lewis owned copies of the revised and enlarged third edition of *An Experiment with Time*. (*Question 47*)

Guy Inchbald agrees, “The nature of space and time featured among their discussions from time to time, and Dunne’s Serialism was given a good airing. It came to influence the ideas and fictional writings of them both” (80).

## 5.2 C.S. Lewis: The ‘Toss-Up’

Born in Belfast, C.S. [Clive Staples] Lewis (1898-1963)—called “Jack” by his family and friends—was J.R.R. Tolkien’s Oxford colleague and great friend. Lewis and Tolkien were intrigued by Dunne’s *An Experiment with Time* and, as noted by Flieger above, both owned the 1934 third edition.<sup>102</sup> Lewis had also read both Charles Williams’s *The Place of the Lion* (1931) and David Lindsay’s *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) sometime around February to April of 1936 (Ratcliff, “*Lost Road*” 204). The two books “had a tremendous impact on Lewis: they proved to him that contemporary authors could adopt a modern pulp genre, such as science fiction or mystery-thriller, and use it as the vehicle for sophisticated philosophical ideas” (Ratcliff, “*Lost Road*” 201). Like Charles Williams, Olaf Stapledon also wrote

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<sup>102</sup> Lewis’s copy is archived in the Wade Collection at Wheaton College Library, Illinois, US.

philosophical genre fiction, such as *Last and First Men* (1930) (Garth, “When JRR Tolkien bet CS Lewis”). But in general, Lewis and Tolkien found little of this type of writing in publication, and they wanted more. Tolkien wrote, “C.S. Lewis said to me long ago, more or less ... ‘if they won’t write the kind of books we want to read, we shall have to write them ourselves’” (*Letters* #159, p.306). Five times from 1938 to 1967, Tolkien’s letters mention an agreement the two men made to each write an “excursionary ‘Thriller’”—Lewis’s about a space-journey and Tolkien’s about a time-journey —“each discovering Myth” (*Letters* #24, p. 39).<sup>103</sup> While the agreement is not mentioned in Lewis’s published letters or memoirs, it is confirmed in his brother Warren Lewis’s diary entry for 24 May 1948. Warnie wrote that his brother “made a proposal to Tolkien, ‘We shall have to write books of the sort ourselves. Supposing you write a thriller that’s a time-journey—you have such a strong sense of time—and I write one that’s a space-journey’” (quoted in Sayer 254). Rateliff expands on the charge:

the hero of each book would undertake a journey through space or time, experiencing a series of adventures along the way, leading to his eventual discovery that some old myth or legend was actual fact— in Lewis’s case, the apocryphal legend of Lucifer’s rebellion; in Tolkien’s, the legend of the fall of Atlantis. Both books would have a contemporary setting. (“*Lost Road*” 202)

Although the exact date of this “toss up”— as it is popularly called —is unknown, Christopher Tolkien, Rateliff, and Garth agree that it most likely occurred in 1936, although Rateliff pegs it early in the year and Garth in December (*Lost Road* 10; Rateliff, “*Lost Road*” 204; Garth “When JRR Tolkien bet CS Lewis”).<sup>104</sup> In any case,

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<sup>103</sup> The five references to the agreement with Lewis appear in Tolkien’s *Letters* #24, #158, #252, #257, and #294.

<sup>104</sup> In a 1964 letter to Christopher Bretherton, Tolkien wrote, ‘When C. S. Lewis and I tossed up, and he was to write on space-travel and I on time-travel, I began an abortive book of time-travel of which the end was to be the presence of my hero in the drowning of Atlantis. This was to be called *Númenor*, the Land in the West’ (*Letters*

we can see the results by late 1937. Lewis wrote to his friend Owen Barfield on 2 September of that year, “The thriller is finished and called ‘Out of the Silent Planet’” (*Collected Letters* 2, 218). The book, submitted for publication in October or November, was published a year later, in September 1938 (Ratelif, “*Lost Road*” 204). Eventually, Lewis published three books in the series— his so-called “Space Trilogy” —also including *Perelandra* (1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (1945).

Lewis mentions Dunne in *That Hideous Strength*, when his character Mark Studdock quips that he is not able to see into the future, as he is “not living in Mr. Dunne’s sort of time nor in looking-glass land” (*That Hideous Strength* 130). Inchbald discusses several examples of Dunne’s theories depicted in Lewis’s Narnia novels, such as the phenomenon of time passing at different rates in Narnia and England (75). Also, in the last book of the series, *The Last Battle* (1956), the Pevensie children and Lewis’s readers learn that Narnia is only one of several *serial* worlds, a word Dunne used to describe his theories. The children are called to go “further up and... further in,” where each world is “more real and more beautiful than the Narnia down below”; it is “like an onion: except that as you continue to go in and in, each circle is larger than the last” (Lewis, *Last Battle* 180).

Lewis also considers Dunne’s Serialism in an unfinished novel related to his Space Trilogy which is commonly called *The Dark Tower* (1977).<sup>105</sup> Five academic gentlemen, not unlike the Inklings, gather in the college rooms of Cambridge University’s Professor Orfieu to observe the events of another timeline— or “Othertime” —through the “chronoscope” that Orfieu has invented.<sup>106</sup> Yet, rather than showing their past or future, the chronoscope appears to show them a parallel

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#257, p. 487). From this quotation their agreement is frequently referred to as the ‘toss up.’

<sup>105</sup> The provenance of *The Dark Tower* as a work by Lewis has been disputed, especially by Kathryn Lindskoog; Prof. Alastair Fowler claimed in 2003 to have seen portions of the work and discussed them with Lewis in 1952 (on the controversy, see Poe).

<sup>106</sup> Orfieu’s name derives from the mythic Greek Orpheus who travelled to the underworld.

timeline (think “multiverse”). In this “Othertime,” mysterious Stingingmen use protuberances growing out of their foreheads to inject poison into their followers and turn them into mindless automata controlled by a single “Big Brain” (*Dark Tower* 85). One of the Stingingmen is the doppelgänger of one of the Cambridge academics, young Scudamore, while one of the Stingingman’s followers is the doppelgänger of Scudamore’s fiancée, Camilla. When the chronoscope shows the Othertime-Camilla in danger, the Scudamore from our Cambridge leaps through the chronoscope in order to save her. In the Othertime, Scudamore discovers that his consciousness now resides in the body of his doppelgänger, while in Cambridge the consciousness of the Stingingman takes its place in Scudamore’s body. Lewis uses this mind-swap to avoid the problem of taking a body physically into another time, for, as Orfieu explains, “the same piece of matter can’t be in two different places at the same time” (*Dark Tower* 3). Thus, “any kind of ‘time machine’, anything that would take your body to another time, was intrinsically impossible” (*Dark Tower* 5). Later, Elwin Ransom, the character common to all of Lewis’s “Space” novels, contradicts this theory by proposing the two Scudamores do, in fact, share the same particles, but not the same time. He argues, “But there aren’t two bodies. There’s only one body existing at two different times” (*Dark Tower* 66, italics original). The consciousness exchange turns out to be more of a mind-meld than a mind-swap, for the knowledge possessed by the original *persona* remains with the body and is accessible by the new persona. For example, Scudamore later relates that as long as he lived in the Othertime, he could speak and understand the Stingingman language, “which was certainly not English” (*Dark Tower* 73). Walter Hooper, in his “Preface to *The Dark Tower*,” estimates that Lewis began writing this “time-travel” novel in 1938, almost immediately after completing *Out of the Silent Planet* (*Dark Tower* ix). Rateliff argues for 1944-46 (Rateliff, “*Lost Road*” 211-212). But all estimates place *The Dark Tower*’s composition after 1936, when Tolkien likely worked on (and abandoned) his half of the “toss-up” with Lewis, *The Lost Road*. So, while *The Dark Tower* was not a precursor to Tolkien’s “time-journey” novel, it illustrates Lewis’s and Tolkien’s shared interest in time-travel theories and applying those theories to their fiction.

Tolkien read Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* around Christmas 1934 (Flieger, "Tolkien's Experiment with Time" 39):

Tolkien's copy, in the possession of his son, Christopher, contains his interleaved notes and comments, jotted in the course of reading on Dunne's ideas and the theory he derived from them. Tolkien's comments are not always in complete agreement with Dunne; nevertheless, they show a clear relationship between Dunne's *Experiment* and the mechanism Tolkien used in two time-travel stories, *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. In addition, two unattached pieces of paper bearing diagrams remarkably similar to the kind drawn by Dunne are among Tolkien's notes and rough drafts from the early period composition of *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955]. (Question 47)

*The Lost Road*, Tolkien's first attempt at fulfilling his half of the "toss-up" agreement with Lewis, was submitted as an incomplete draft to his publishers, Allen & Unwin, on 15 November 1937, very close to the time that Lewis submitted *Out of the Silent Planet* for publication (Rateliff, "Lost Road" 205). Both *The Lost Road* and Tolkien's second attempt at a time-travel narrative, *The Notion Club Papers* (written in 1945), "are stories about twentieth-century men who travel back in time through their dreams" and both attest to the influence of Dunne's theories (Flieger, "Tolkien's Experiment with Time" 39). In *The Lost Road*, Alboin and Audoin, a modern English father and son surnamed Errol (cf. Eriol the Mariner from *The Book of Lost Tales*) travel by means of their dreams through serial ancestral identities. When Alboin Errol's "head fell back against the chair," his son Audoin notes that his father is dreaming. Audoin, then, "went out, and stepped into sudden darkness" (*Lost Road* 53). Flieger, piecing together the unfinished fragments of the novel, says, "Audoin's step into darkness, is clearly intended as the transition from one world and time into another" ("Tolkien's Experiment with Time" 41). Tolkien's Alboin and Audoin awake in the bodies of other father/son pairs in different time periods. These serial identities were present at key episodes in early English history, prehistory, and myth, finally arriving at the island of Númenor to witness its destruction in the fictive prehistory of Tolkien's "mythology" (Flieger, "Lost Road" 393). Flieger argues,

Tolkien found in *An Experiment with Time* a principle through whose operation the mind could dream through time in any direction. This psychic principle he combined with Carl Jung's wholly compatible psychological theory of the collective unconscious, the commonly shared, unconscious memories of the human community, and used both to effect a mode of travel through dreamed serial identities. ("Tolkien's Experiment with Time" 39-40)

Like Lewis, Tolkien thought a Wellsian time machine was "preposterous and incredible" (TOFS 96). His *Lost Road* character, Alboin, briefly remarks, "I wish there was a 'Time-machine' ... But Time is not to be conquered by machines. And I should go back, not forward; and I think backwards would be more possible." (*Lost Road* 47). Tolkien returns to the theme in *The Notion Club Papers* when his character, Nicholas Guildford, claims that time machines in stories are, "indefinitely less probable— as the carriers of living, undamaged, human bodies and minds —than the wilder things in fairy-stories" (*Sauron* 164). Like Lewis, then, Tolkien favoured a para-psychological approach to time-travel, although Tolkien's is accomplished through dreams and the sharing of consciousnesses between people connected by ancestral relationships, rather than Lewis's sharing of consciousnesses between doppelgängers from parallel Othertimes.

*The Lost Road* never progressed beyond four chapters (two concerning the present-day Errol family and two concerning their counterparts in the waning days of ancient Númenor), plus some fragments and notes for other proposed chapters. One of these was to have been set in tenth-century England and feature Tolkien's existing character, Ælfwine the Anglo-Saxon mariner from *The Book of Lost Tales* (see **Chapter 3**). Tolkien's publisher was not optimistic about the novel's commercial potential (*Lost Road* 98). In fact, the firm's reviewer called it "a hopeless proposition" (Rateliff, "Lost Road" 205). Rateliff argues that the combination of this discouraging review, Tolkien's need to ready *The Hobbit* (1937) for publication, his regular academic duties, his desire to greatly enlarge *The Lost Road* narrative, and the eventual distraction of writing *The Lord of the Rings*, all together doomed any chances Tolkien had of completing *The Lost Road* (Rateliff, "Lost Road" 205). What remains extant of the text, however, is indicative of both the "toss-up" agreement

with Lewis and the influence of Dunne's time-travel theories. I propose *The Lost Road* also reveals a close sympathy with the work of another contemporary Irish author, Joseph O'Neill.

### 5.3 Joseph O'Neill's *Wind from the North*

Biographer M. Kelly Lynch calls Celtic Revival novelist and playwright Joseph James O'Neill (1878-1953) a "complex and polymorphous man" ("Smiling Public Man" 4).<sup>107</sup> He had originally planned a career in the Catholic priesthood but abandoned that course after only two months' of study at Maynooth seminary. He instead became the protégé of Celtic scholar Kuno Meyer and a postgraduate student of Rudolf Thurneysen. Subsequently, O'Neill "showed more promise than his good friends and fellow scholars Osborn Bergin and Richard I. Best," but then he abandoned that specialised study after ten years for a stable career with the British civil service. For twenty-two years, he was the Permanent Secretary to the Department of Education, and he affected its transition from British to Irish governance. Yet, the steady civil servant occasionally sheltered Michael Collins during the Irish fight for independence. O'Neill was the husband of Mary Devenport O'Neill, a poet and dramatist in her own right, and both were celebrated members of the extended literary and artistic circle which included Yeats, Russell, T.F. O'Rahilly, and Padraig Colum (Lynch, "Smiling Public Man" 3-5 *passim*; O'Neill, *Black Shore* 10). O'Neill rubbed shoulders with some of the greatest literary, scholarly, and political minds of his day, and yet, "within a generation he had nearly been forgotten" (Lynch "Smiling Public Man" 4).

Aspects of O'Neill's biography have always been contested, mostly because he himself obscured his origins. He made romantic claims to be from the Aran Islands,

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<sup>107</sup> This Joseph [James] O'Neill (1886-1953) should not be confused with the present-day Irish novelist and author of *Netherland* (2008), Joseph O'Neill (1964- ).



writing in a letter to his publishers, which was reprinted on the book jacket for his novel, *Land Under England*,

Up to the age of seventeen, I lived (except for periods at school and college) on the Island of Aran off Galway Bay ... I am in fact a man of Aran, my childhood and boyhood were spent on the savage rocks, cliffs and seas that are Aran. My friends and companions were the fisher-folk who talk only Gaelic and my life amongst them, listening to the Gaelic stories, thousands of years old, round the peat fires of winter evenings, had a very important effect on the shaping of my imagination. (O'Neill, *Land Under England* book jacket)

In fact, O'Neill was born in the land-locked town of Tuam, over forty miles from Galway Bay. His father, whom he loathed, was a policeman and their family only moved to the Aran Islands for three years after his father transferred there when Joseph was aged nine (Lynch, "Smiling Public Man" 5). There is also confusion over O'Neill's birth year, variously given as "1878" (Lynch, "O'Neill, Joseph [James]" 535), "1883" (Crossley 94), "1884" (O'Neill, *Black Shore* 10) and "1886" (Howard 236). Even his biographer Lynch variously states O'Neill's death date as either "May 6, 1952" ("O'Neill, Joseph [James]" 535 & 537), when O'Neill suffered from a cerebral haemorrhage, or "May 3, 1953" ("Smiling Public Man" 59), the date on which he actually died. O'Neill's father had been a native Irish speaker and O'Neill Gaelicised his own name for a time (i.e., Seosamh Ó Néill). O'Neill himself gave up speaking Irish although he became a leading proponent of reviving its instruction in public schools (Lynch, "Smiling Public Man" 8-10 passim). He alternately argued that his own appearance as "a tall, rubicund, lanky man with huge hands and feet," proved his descent from the Hebrideans (Lynch, "Smiling Public Man" 5; O'Neill, *Black Shore* 12). Consequently, it is not surprising that O'Neill projected himself as both Gaelic and Norse. Lynch argues, "[l]ike Matthew Arnold, O'Neill sees himself and his country trapped between two worlds— the one dead, the other powerless to be reborn" ("Smiling Public Man" 10).

O'Neill's lifelong ambivalence concerning both Ireland's identity and his own is evident in his plays, poems, serialised fiction, and novels. His first creative work of any substance was the play, *The Kingdom Maker* (1917, as Seosamh Ó Néill), which

uses legendary Irish characters and situations— squabbling Irish chieftains insufficiently aware of the greater threat from the foreign Firbolgs on their doorstep— in a “barely veiled metaphor for O’Neill’s contemporary Ireland” (Lynch, “Smiling Public Man” 7). Ambivalence of identity is also key in his first two novels: *Wind from the North* (1934) and *Land under England* (1935). Considering his biography— his feelings about his father, the abandonment of a fulfilling career as a Celticist for stultifying civil service, his composite cultural identity, his longing for the heroic past— it is unsurprising that *Land under England* and *Wind from the North* are both “excursionary ‘Thrillers’” (as Tolkien’s might call them) centred on father/son conflicts, lost civilisations, foreign conquest and heroism.

### **5.3.1 *Land under England***

O’Neill’s reputation today rests almost solely upon his second novel, *Land Under England*. Only it and the posthumous (and pseudonymous) *The Black Shore* remain in print. *Land under England* is the story of Anthony Julian, the son of an archaeologist. As the protagonist’s name indicates, Julian and his father are descendants of the ancient Romans in Britain, a fact that turns to obsession for Julian Sr., who goes missing while exploring Hadrian’s Wall for information about the Roman legions once stationed there. In pursuit of his missing father, the younger Julian discovers a subterranean entrance beneath the Wall, through which he passes into a nightmarish world of darkness, bioluminescent plants, and giant, predatory insects. Finally, the younger Julian discovers the descendants of a lost Roman legion living far underground, and with them, his father. In the fifteen hundred years since the Roman Empire abandoned Britain, the survivors developed into a totalitarian society ruled by Master Minds who espouse a xenophobic doctrine that the upper world would invade and destroy their society if its presence were known. In exchange for security, the citizens willingly submit to telepathic mind-control which renders them benumbed automata.

Both Tolkien and Lewis read the novel. Shortly after its publication, Lewis wrote to his friend Arthur Greeves (23 April 1935): “The most interesting story I have read

recently is *Land Under England* by one O'Neill: you should try it" (*Collected Letters* 2, 160). Lewis may have also shared his enthusiasm with Tolkien. In any case, Tolkien read the book by early 1938 at the latest. On 18 February 1938, Tolkien had commended Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* to his publisher, Stanley Unwin (*Letters* #24, p. 39). When Unwin asked for commentary on Lewis's manuscript, Tolkien replied on 4 March 1938:

I realize of course that to be even moderately marketable such a story must pass muster on its surface value, as a *vera historia* of a journey to a strange land. I am extremely fond of the genre, even having read *Land under England* with some pleasure (though it was a weak example, and distasteful to me in many points). I thought *Out of the Silent Planet* did pass this test very successfully. (*Letters* #26, p. 43)

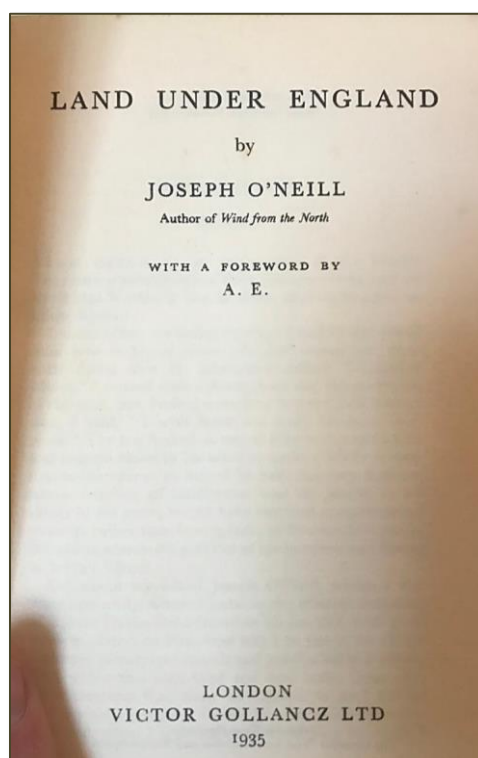
Marijane Osborn finds significant influence from *Land under England* in Lewis's *Perelandra* and *The Silver Chair* (1953) with their underground civilisations, mind control, and giant insects. She writes, "In both novels, Lewis makes significant use of Joseph O'Neill's *Land under England*, as he draws on contemporary anxieties, ancient literatures, and his own nightmares in ways that allude to and supplement O'Neill's already allusive story" (115). Osborn's essay does not address *The Dark Tower*, but here, too, can be found echoes of *Land under England*. *The Dark Tower* populace is under the mind-control of a "Big Brain," just as O'Neill's Roman descendants are under the mind-control of "Master Minds." The minions of both civilisations go about their labours as unthinking automata; both groups of peoples have been convinced that such an arrangement will protect them from imminent invasion: the world above in O'Neill; a ravaging hoard in Lewis.

Significant similarities may also be detected between O'Neill's *Land under England* and Tolkien's Númenórean chapters in *The Lost Road*. While a full comparison between these two works is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is a worthy topic for future study. Briefly, both stories revolve around father/son relationships, ancestral heritage, engagement with the distant past, and the poignancy of doomed civilisations. The theme of totalitarianism comes to the fore of Tolkien's work in the disappearances of dissidents, xenophobic fears of Valar oppression, and Tolkien's

Sauron who manipulates Númenor's King Tar-Calion/Ar-Pharazôn. Similarities with *Land under England* may even be felt later in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* where "The Paths of the Dead" depicts a legendary, subterranean civilisation lingering long past its downfall in history.

### 5.3.2 *Wind from the North*

When Lewis and Tolkien read their 1935 copies of *Land under England*, they would have seen on the title page, directly below the author's name, that O'Neill was also the "Author of *Wind from the North*" (see **Figure 5.3.2.** "*Land Under England* . . . 1935 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. Title page]").



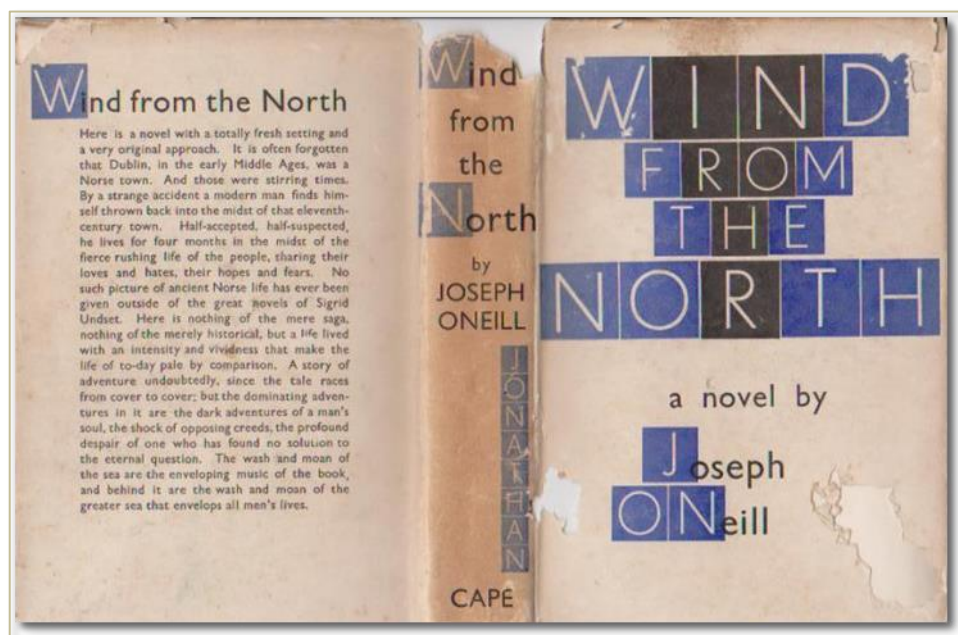
**Figure 5.3.2.a.** "*Land Under England* by Joseph O'Neill, Author of *Wind from the North*, 1935 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. title page]."

Photo Credit: Temple Bar Bookshop, Dublin, ABE Books Website,  
[www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=30600146447](http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=30600146447).

Published in October 1934, *Wind from the North* was O'Neill's first novel and it won the Harmsworth Prize from the Irish Academy of Letters for the best work in

English prose on exclusively Irish subject matter (“Books” 42; Lynch, “Smiling Public Man” 12). In addition to the original 1934 edition published by Jonathan Cape, there was also a 1940 Irish translation, *Gaoth Adtuaidh*, and a school edition widely used as a standard Irish primary school text in the 1950s.

Despite Tolkien’s estimation that *Land under England* was “weak” and “distasteful,” he did report reading it with “some pleasure” and may have sought out O’Neill’s previous book. The attractions for Tolkien are immediately apparent from the original 1934 book jacket: time travel to the ancient past, Norse adventurers, and the tension between Christian and pagan religions (see **Figure 5.3.2.b** “*Wind from the North* [book jacket]”).



**Figure 5.3.2.b** Joseph O’Neill, *Wind from the North* [book jacket], 1st ed., Jonathan Cape, 1934. Photo credit: unknown.

The jacket blurb reads, in part,

It is often forgotten that Dublin, in the early Middle Ages, was a Norse town. And those were stirring times. By strange accident a modern man finds himself thrown back into the midst of that eleventh-century town ... A story of adventure undoubtedly ... but the dominating adventures in it are the dark adventures of a man’s soul,

the shock of opposing creeds, the profound despair of one who has found no solution to the eternal question. (O'Neill, *Wind* book jacket)

Additionally, the book contains other things to pique Tolkien's interest: two maps of Norse Dublin, vivid depictions of a Viking-age society, engagement with the issues of colonialism and nationalism, a focus on father/son relationships, and a clear example of how to employ Dunne's theories of serial lives in historical fiction. Although there is no *direct* evidence that Tolkien ever read O'Neill's first novel, there are, as will be seen, extraordinarily similar characters, situations, and philosophies in *Wind from the North* and *The Lost Road*. The two works are near-contemporaries, with *Wind from the North* published just two years before work on *The Lost Road* is thought to have occurred. *Wind from the North*'s theme is a combination of "Karl Jung's doctrine of man's search for his Ancestral Self and on Æ's [i.e., George Russell's] belief that every man lives through repeated reincarnations" (Lynch, "O'Neill, Joseph [James]" 536). Thus, even if Tolkien had never heard of *Wind from the North*, the two works still share similar theoretical approaches and shed valuable light on the times and philosophical environments in which they were both created.

In *Wind from the North*, a nameless twentieth-century clerk is knocked unconscious by a lorry on a busy Dublin street. He awakes in the mind and body of Olaf Ulfson, scion of a powerful Norse family in eleventh-century Dyflin (Dublin) during the events leading up to the Battle of Clontarf (1014 CE), which marked the end of Norse power in Ireland. In the same way that Lewis's Scudamore inhabits a different body in *The Dark Tower*, but retains some of the original inhabitant's memories, the nameless clerk inhabits the body of Olaf but retains some of Olaf's memories of the language and customs of Norse Dyflin. O'Neill wrote, "The novel, in so far as it is historical, does not so much aim at a re-telling of actual events as at giving a picture of the everyday life of the Norsemen of Dyflin in the early years of the eleventh century" (WN 341). However, the book does contain some historical figures: Sigurd Hlodvirsson ("the Stout"), the Earl of Orkney (c. 960–1014); Sitric Olafsson ("Silkbeard") (c. 970–1042), the Hiberno-Norse king of Dublin; and Brian

Boru (c. 941–1014), an Irish king. Yet, the main narrative concerns the fictitious characters of Olaf and Gudrun Jarlsdottir, a daughter of Earl Sigurd, who still practices Odin-worship. O'Neill describes Gudrun as, "a woman greedy for power and high place, a woman whose only use for men was as stepping-stones for her pride" (WN 111). Lynch calls her "O'Neill's most remarkable creation" and "certainly one of the most compelling females in modern Irish fiction ... she storms throughout the novel, a lost Valkyrie" ("Smiling Public Man" 15). Olaf, King Sitric, and other men become Gudrun's playthings as she seeks to gain control of Norse Dyflin and restore its pagan practices. Above all, Gudrun hates Olaf's father, Ulf— a proud Christian and leader of Dyflin's *bóndi*, or landowners, and the one man she cannot control— so, she plots to have him killed. Olaf is caught between the warring sides:

I too was being sucked into the whirlpool, through my love for a heathen girl [Gudrun]. I was being forced into the position of being an enemy of the King's men, or of going over to the side of the heathens and deserting Ulf and Thangmar and everything I believed in. (WN 143)

And yet, in a situation similar to that in O'Neill's *The Kingdom Maker*, the Norse chieftains become distracted by their internecine squabbling away from the greater external threat, in this case from Brian Boru's Gaelic forces making their way toward Dyflin for what will be the definitive battle for possession of Ireland. Thangmar, a Christian priest, is murdered and Ulf is attacked under Gudrun's and Sitric's machinations. Many others on both sides of the internecine strife are killed and Dyflin's defences are weakened before Brian even arrives. As Dyflin prepares for Brian's attack, Odin's followers put several horses to the sword for a "heathen sacrifice"; Olaf is sickened by these "evil rites" and chooses his father's Christian faith (WN 295, 294). Soon enough, Olaf is barricaded in his father's *tún*, and at the moment of his certain death, he "seemed to fall through a cloud of darkness" (WN 339). He wakes up in a Dublin hospital, once again the twentieth-century clerk, only now he retains both sets of memories, his own and Olaf's.

*Wind from the North* originated as a series of 'dream visions' O'Neill purportedly experienced and recounted to Russell and publisher Jonathan Cape after a 1926 dinner party (Lynch, "Smiling Public Man" 12). O'Neill became "convinced that beneath the façade of his own 'modern self' lay several ancient and heroic pre-Christian souls" (O'Neill, *Black Shore* 11). He fantasised about being descended from both (as he conceived of them) romantic Gaels and rubicund Norse Hebrideans (O'Neill, *Black Shore* 11-12). The fictional Olaf, child of an unnamed Gaelic mother and the Norse Ulf, is just such a person. After eight years of historical research and writing, O'Neill finally published *Wind from the North* in 1934. Dunne's time-travel theories were consciously employed. Russell wrote in a review of Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, "we move through an Everliving in which past and future co-exist," which is usually accessible only through dreams, but which "may be found possible after a time to bring the waking consciousness, the traveller in time, into more intimate relation with that interior consciousness which has relations with a timeless universe" (132). It is this theory of "time travel" which Russell refers to in his congratulatory message to O'Neill:

I think your story of the Norse is a personal memory breaking through ... This is the Ancestral Wisdom Keats said was in every man ... You have doubtless killed and gone adventuring with the Vikings, and hunted ... and worshipped strange gods on the mountains. (quoted in O'Neill, *Black Shore* 12)

Thus, both Russell and O'Neill recognise in the novel's unnamed Dublin clerk an avatar of O'Neill himself, propelled backward in time into the body of the Norse/Gaelic Olaf.

This is the same "time travel" mechanism of ancestral memories passed down to serial father/son pairs which Tolkien employs in *The Lost Road*. For Tolkien, "unconscious memories were specifically ancestral" (Flieger, "Time Travel" 650). His recurring "Atlantis haunting" is the most famous example, in which Tolkien dreamed of being inundated by a massive wave (*Letters* #257, p. 486-487). He discovered his son Michael suffered from similar dreams (alluded to in *Letters* #163, p. 311). Flieger writes, Tolkien's "concept of inherited memory [is] a direct channel



to the past, not through song or story or proverb but through the operations of the unconscious mind in dreams. Tolkien uses memory as the psychic or psychological connection between characters of the narrative present and their inherited or ancestral past” (“Memory” 413). Thus, his “modern-day Englishmen travel back to Númenor at the time of its downfall via their own ancestral pasts, experiencing or inhabiting the memories of a succession of forebears” (Flieger, “Memory” 414).

Beyond the close similarities in their approaches to the theories of Dunne and Jung— specifically regarding serial identities, ancestral memory, and “time travel” through dreams —these two works by O’Neill and Tolkien also contain some closely reflective scenes. Two passages from each of the two works— O’Neill’s *Wind from the North* and Tolkien’s *The Lost Road* —will exemplify their close and specific echoes.

### 5.3.3 Comparison 1: Waking up in the Hall

In each scene of the first pair, a twentieth-century man falls unconscious and wakes up in a Viking-Age mead hall where forces are preparing for a significant battle. There is a sense of estrangement as each man discovers he is now someone else, in another time, speaking another language, although this other man’s memories and consciousness soon emerge.

O’Neill’s *Wind from the North* begins when an unnamed twentieth-century Dublin clerk is hit by a truck on Cork Hill. He awakes in the winter of 1013-1014 CE in Norse Dyflin where armies are gathering for the Battle of Clontarf, portrayed here not only as a struggle between Norse and Gaels for control of Ireland, but also as an internal struggle between Christian and pagan Norse factions vying for supremacy. O’Neill’s modern Dublin clerk narrates—

I remember a blow on the head, a headlong fall through gulfs of darkness and after that a blank. When I came to myself I was lying on my back and a man’s face was bending over me. As I looked up at him

he spoke to me 'How are you feeling, Olaf?' he asked. I stared back at him. His face was familiar to me, particularly his sea blue eyes under a mop of yellow hair. As he spoke I tried to rise. He helped me up. I staggered to my feet and looked round me in a sort of stupefaction. I was in a large dimly-lit hall. A crowd of men and women dressed in curious clothes were standing round me, looking at me and talking to me and to one another. I tried to remember what had happened to me but could not, nor could I remember the men nor the hall, for the moment, though both it and the men seemed familiar. (WN 10)

The great hall is described as long and smoky, a fire runs down its middle, and on each side a line of tables runs along the walls. This is an accurate description of a Viking-Age mead hall. Olaf is told that he was kicked in the head by his horse, Hviti, and he blacked out. He observes, "Even the language they were speaking was strange to my ears, although I understood it. That was the extraordinary thing about it. I understood it" (WN 11). Olaf is soon taken to speak with his father, Ulf, as they await the homecoming of Ragnal, Olaf's cousin who has just arrived on the dragon-ships from the Orkney Islands with Earl Sigurd and his daughter, Gudrun (WN 14).

Although Tolkien's *Lost Road* was originally planned with just two timelines— the modern and the proto-historical Númenorean —at some point, Tolkien decided to add a number of intervening chapters with additional father/son pairs from different eras whose names could always be defined as "bliss-friend" and "elf-friend," signalling their relationship to the other father/son pairs throughout time (*Letters* #257, p.487). Tolkien considered several historical eras, writing that the novel would "Work backwards to Númenor and make that last" (*Lost Road* 77). He jotted down ideas for the tales that should intervene between the twentieth century and ancient Númenor:

'Lombard story?'; 'a Norse story of ship-burial (Vinland)'; 'an English story-of the man who got onto the Straight Road?'; 'a Tuatha-de-Danaan story, or Tir-nan-Og' ... ; a story concerning 'painted caves'; 'the Ice Age – great figures in ice', and 'Before the Ice Age: the Galdor

story'; 'post-Beleriand and the Elendil and Gil-galad story of the assault on Thû'; and finally 'the Númenor story'. (*Lost Road* 77-78)

The "English story" features the Anglo-Saxon sailor, Ælfwine, the character Tolkien had previously developed for *The Book of Lost Tales* and related writings (see **Chapter 3**). Among "several pages of very rough notes and abandoned beginnings" is a scene fragment during the reign of King Edward the Elder, around the year 918 CE. Ahead of anticipated Danish assaults on Wæced (Watchet) and Portlocan (Porlock), the Anglo-Saxons gather to repel them. Ælfwine waits for his son Eadwine's homecoming with King Edward's fleet. Like O'Neill's Olaf, Ælfwine awakes in a mead hall. Flieger contends, "It seems probable that the awakening of this Ælfwine was to be coincident with the falling asleep of his Alboin counterpart [in the twentieth century] and that dream ... was to be the means of transition from one time to another" ("Tolkien's Experiment with Time" 41). Tolkien writes,

Ælfwine awoke with a start — he had been dozing on a bench with his back to a pillar. The voices poured in on him like a torrent. He felt he had been dreaming; and for a moment the English speech about him sounded strange ... He looked down the hall, looking for his son Eadwine. He was due on leave from the fleet, but had not yet come. There was a great crowd in the hall, for King Edward was here. The fleet was in the Severn sea, and the south shore was in arms ... There was a wind blowing, surging round the house; timbers creaked. The sound brought back old longings to him that he had thought were long buried. (*Lost Road* 83)

Tolkien's passage here and its surrounding text have a number of extraordinary similarities with the passage from O'Neill's *Wind from the North*, above. Both are framed by stories of twentieth-century men who travel into the distant past while unconscious. O'Neill's unnamed Dublin clerk undergoes "a trans-migratory experience" after being struck in a traffic accident (Lynch, "Smiling Public Man" 13). Tolkien's Alboin travels to the past in his dreams. Both O'Neill's unnamed clerk and Alboin wake up in Viking-age mead halls inhabiting the bodies of warriors, both of whom have

also just awakened: Olaf wakes after having been kicked unconscious by his horse; Ælfwine awakes after dozing off. Both authors note that the halls are crowded, as people wait for a ruler to arrive with reinforcements ahead of an expected battle: Earl Sigurd arrives with an army from the Orkneys to repulse the Gaels from Dyflin; King Edward arrives to repulse the Danes from Somerset. Olaf's cousin Ragnal is expected with Sigurd's fleet; Ælfwine's son Eadwine is expected with Edward's fleet. Olaf and Ælfwine are both surrounded by people and disoriented by their voices: Olaf calls their language "strange to my ears" (WN 11); Ælfwine finds "the English speech about him sounded strange" (*Lost Road* 83). Nevertheless, both Olaf and Ælfwine can understand the language. As with Scudamore in Lewis's *The Dark Tower*, language faculties remain with the host body. However, for Tolkien and O'Neill, the relationship between the mediaeval and modern bodies is ancestral rather than one of doppelgängers from an "Othertime." In his 1955 O'Donnell lecture, *English and Welsh*, Tolkien argued that each person has a native language, an inherent linguistic predilection which may be different from our cradle-tongue, the language we first learned as babies, and though this *native language* "may be buried, it is never wholly extinguished" (M&C 190). Tolkien described such an experience to W.H. Auden when he said that he "took to early west-midland Middle English as a known tongue as soon as I set eyes on it" (*Letters* #163, p. 311). In *The Lost Road* and its successor, *The Notion Club Papers*, Alboin Errol and Arry Lowdham, respectively, experience a "direct memory of languages they could not have known in waking life" (Flieger, "Memory" 414). Later in O'Neill's novel, Olaf has the same experience when he hears people speaking Irish (WN 241). These two scenes are so similar that the sheer number of parallels beggars belief they could have been developed wholly separate from one another: from the similarities of ancestral language faculties, depictions of transmigratory experiences from the twentieth-century back to the Viking Age, to waking in similar mead halls, the disorientation caused by the noise of people waiting for a war-leader and their loved ones to arrive ahead of impending battles.

Historically, the Danes were repulsed by Edward's forces and many of them died of hunger on Holms (Flat Holm) Island, where they retreated while the remainder of their fleet sailed away to Ireland. In Tolkien's notes associated with the scene fragment, above, Eadwine urges his father to follow the Danes. Eadwine has "heard strange tales from Ireland" and wants to sail West. Ælfwine has "Christian objections" to attempting to locate the earthly paradise, but Eadwine counters that the holy Brendan and Mael Dúin had done so, and they both returned alive (*Lost Road* 80). Later, in Tolkien's second attempt at a time-travel novel, *The Notion Club Papers*, Eadwine, now Ælfwine's father instead of his son, also told "strange tales" of "the west coasts, and far islands, and of the deep sea, and of a land there was far away, where there was peace and fruitfulness among a fair folk that did not wither" (*Sauron* 270). That is a description consonant with the Earthly Paradise or *Vínland hit Góða* with its self-sown wheat, grapevines, and mild winters with no snow (see Nansen, *In Northern Mists* I.336 & I.347). It is also consonant with Tolkien's Undying Lands of Tol Eressëa and Valinor.

Tolkien did not randomly select Ireland as the source of "strange tales". As mentioned briefly in **Chapter 1**, Ireland was a crossroads, a liminal space between the world of Men and the world of Faerie, both in Tolkien's imaginative geography and in mediaeval thought. Byrne explains, "Medieval English writers typically depict ... territories of the Celtic world either as areas of wildness and threat, or as realms of magical and otherworldly significance" (42). The mediaeval Celtic world included Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland, and Wales, as well as parts of Gaul and Iberia. In 2018, Fimi argued that Tolkien conceived of Wales in a similar manner, as a "queer border" between the mundane and the magical ("Queer' Border, 'Hidden Kingdom"). It is really all the Celtic lands that Tolkien colours this way. Ælfwine in *The Lost Road* has a Cornish wife (*Lost Road* 84). In *The Notion Club Papers*, it was his mother who was "West Welsh," that is, Cornish (*Sauron* 270, 293 fn95). This was an idea recycled

from the 1920 or later tale, *Ælfwine of England*, where Ælfwine's mother came "from the West, from Lionesse," a legendary drowned land which had once connected Cornwall with the Scilly Isles (*Lost Tales II* 313). In all three cases, Tolkien deliberately gives Ælfwine a dual Anglo-Saxon/Celtic connection through a wife or mother, and thus, affiliates him with otherworldliness.<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, all of these women are dead by the time these narratives take place. Ælfwine's Cornish wife or mother, and Alboin and Audoin Errols' mothers all died young. Tolkien wrote that Alboin "had lost his wife, as his father had done, and had been left with an only child, a boy, when he was only twenty-eight" (*Lost Road* 44).

In *Wind from the North*, Olaf, too, had a Gaelic mother who died in childbirth with him. She was said to be a Gaelic princess (WN 242). The dead mothers in both works are never named, and they seem to be included in their respective narratives solely to bestow upon their sons a Celtic ancestry. Of course, these men of dual-heritage are wish-fulfilment avatars of both of their authors. Olaf, a man of dual Gaelic and Norse heritage, fulfilled O'Neill's fantasy concerning his own ancestry. Ælfwine, a man of dual Cornish and Anglo-Saxon heritage, and the distant descendant of the Númenorean character, Elendil, fulfilled Tolkien's desires for a blended, and even aboriginal ancient northwestern European cultural zone.

In *The Lost Road*, Ælfwine and his son Eadwine gather ten men and the "[w]ind takes them out to sea" (*Lost Road* 80). On the voyage, Ælfwine has

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<sup>108</sup> The twentieth-century character Alwin Arundel Lowdham in *The Notion Club Papers* also has Celtic roots in Pembrokeshire, the mediaeval Welsh *cantref* of *Demed* (Dyfed), which was settled by Irish exiles as recounted in Kuno Meyer's edition and English translation of *Tucait Indarba na nDéssi* ('The Expulsion of the Dessi,' 1901) (*Question* 154; Meyer "Expulsion" 113). Meyer's transcription was published in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. I (1907), the self-same volume from which Tolkien, at some point, attempted some translations from *Incipit do Imrum curaig Mældúin andso* ('The Voyage of Mael Dúin's Coracle') (see **Chapter 2**).

a dream-vision of Tol Eressëa and hears mysterious voices. But, in another instance of divine intercession (see **Chapter 2**), the west wind blows the sailors back to Ireland where they decide to settle down (*Lost Road* 80). Perhaps it was a touch of Celtic magic which allowed Ælfwine to find Tol Eressëa, or perhaps it was a touch of Celtic madness which deluded him into thinking that he had. In a story fragment associated with *The Lost Road*, Tolkien wrote that Ælfwine was “driven out to sea from the coast of Erin” and by chance or grace found the Elvish Island of Tol Eressëa or dreamed that he did, for “[s]ome say that his ship was wrecked upon the west shores of Erin and there his body lies; others say that at the end of his life he went forth alone into the deeps again and never returned” (*Lost Road* 103).

### 5.3.4 Comparison 2: Walking down to the Sea

In the second pair of scenes, the two protagonists— here, O’Neill’s Olaf and Tolkien’s Numenórean, Elendil— each take a walk from their hilltop gardens down to the sea. Waking up the next morning after being kicked in the head by his horse, Olaf decides to take a look around at his father’s hall and *tún*.<sup>109</sup> He recounts, “I went down the hall and out into a porch. The porch opened into a sort of garden yard surrounded by a tall thickset hedge ... From the porch door I could see the sky flecked with hard brilliant scales of red” (WN 25). Later, he returns to explore more,

When I looked round me outside I found that I was in a town, on a hill, surrounded by wooden walls. On my right, over the quick-set hedge that separated our dwelling from the street, I could see a high tower ... From the height on which I was standing the garden sloped steeply down to the east. The eastern wall of the town rose over the lower hedge at the bottom of the garden, but not so high that I

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<sup>109</sup> O’Neill uses the Old Norse *tún*, from the Proto-Germanic *\*tūnq*, referring to a hedged plot, enclosure, courtyard, homestead, or a field or meadow around such a dwelling. Tolkien’s *Túna* (Q, pron. [‘tu:na]) was the green hill in Aman [i.e., Valinor] upon which was founded the city of Tirion (also called “Kôr”). In early versions of the legendarium, the hill was known as Tûn (see *Shaping*, 9, for example) (see also Appendix B).

couldn't see beyond it a bay that lay shining under the frosty morning light ... I went slowly down the garden ... When I went out through the hedge-gate I found myself in a narrow lane that ran between the hedge and a high wooden wall, which I knew was the outer wall of the town. A low door was open in this wall, and, when I went through this, I found myself in a sort of wooden quay. (WN *passim* 27-28)<sup>110</sup>

Tolkien's Elendil also walks in his hilltop garden, but in the beauty of the evening, rather than the morning. The white tower and golden roof of his house glow in the rays of the setting sun. Elendil approaches "the great hedge of *lavaralda* that fenced the garden at its lower, western end" (*Lost Road* 57).<sup>111</sup> Tolkien writes,

He passed under an arch of shining leaves, and walked swiftly down rock-hewn steps to a white beach ... Elendil stood and surveyed the cove and its rocky walls once more; and as he looked, his eyes rose by chance to his own house among trees and flowers upon the slopes above the shore, white and golden, shining in the sunset. (*Lost Road* 58)

The descriptions of both scenes evoke similar feelings of beauty and melancholy, as something precious will soon pass away. The two scenes also reverberate with similar settings, imagery, and mood. In fact, in this case, they operate like mirror images of one another. O'Neill's scene is set at sunrise; Tolkien's is at sunset, but both focus on the quality of the light. Olaf's garden faces east; Elendil's faces west, but both are situated on hilltops that slope down to great encircling hedges: the Norse quick-set hedge and the Númenorean great hedge of *lavaralda*. Openings in the hedges run along high walls— Olaf's wooden; Elendil's rocky —and lead down to a bay or cove. Both men spy high towers on the hilltops. They also experience similar senses of duality, a mental fog that their home is at once familiar and strange— the result of possessing two sets of memories simultaneously. Olaf finds that Ulf's *tún* "looked strange to me, yet extraordinarily familiar"; the twentieth

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<sup>110</sup> This scene is interspersed in O'Neill's novel with observations on the many out-buildings and labourers in Ulf's *tún*. Olaf's observations of the landscape are presented here significantly elided to form a more continuous narrative.

<sup>111</sup> *lavaralda*: a tree from Tol Eressëa brought to Númenor by the Elves (*Lost Road* 437).



century recedes like “some strange nightmare” (WN 25). Elendil’s house in Númenor appears as both a real thing and a vision. He thinks, “as a thing in some other time and story, beautiful, beloved, but strange” (*Lost Road* 58).

Following these similar scenes of walking down to the sea, Olaf finds his father, Ulf, along the quay, and Elendil finds his son, Herendil, on a spur of rock by the cove. Elendil and Herendil discuss Númenorean politics, as Sauron, a former lieutenant of the exiled Dark Lord Melkor (Morgoth), has come to Númenor and seduced the king and queen into coveting the immortality of the Elves. The Elves and the Valar are soon cast as villains by many of the Númenoreans for withholding immortality from Men (although only Ilúvatar the Allfather has the power to grant it), and anyone too closely-associated with the Elves is suspected of being in league with them. Herendil tells his father that his peers taunt him and call him “Terendul,” that is, slender and dark: “they say I have Eressëan blood, or that I am half-Noldo [i.e., Noldorin Elvish]. And that is not said with love in these days. It is but a step from being called half a Gnome to being called Godfearing; and that is dangerous” (*Lost Road* 60).<sup>112</sup> Although our image of Tolkien’s Elves is often that of tall, stately, ethereal beings, Tolkien described the Elves, at times, as smaller than Men as a way to account for the modern view of “fairies” as diminutive beings. In *The Cottage of Lost Play*, for example, the doorwarden, Ilverin or Littleheart, was described as “slender” and the Cottage as small (*Lost Tales I* 46, see also **Chapter 2**). In an outline from the same time period, Tolkien wrote, “Men were almost of a stature at first with Elves, the fairies being far greater and Men smaller than now. As the power of Men has grown the fairies have dwindled and Men waxed somewhat” (*Lost Tales I* 235). In the original *Fall of Gondolin*, the Gondoethlim (the Elves of the city of Gondolin) were said to be small and slender and lithe; Men are taller (*Lost Tales II* 198 n.18). The same tradition is at work here in *The Lost Road*, where to call Herendil “slender” is to insinuate that he is part-Elf. Herendil’s mother, like all the

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<sup>112</sup> “Terendul” is derived from *teren* (“slender”) + *nulla* (“dark, dusky, obscure”) (“TER-, TERES-” *Lost Road* 391-392).

mothers in *The Lost Road* (and *Wind from the North*), is absent from the story and something of a mystery that Tolkien does not address. But, *if* she is similar to her counterparts in the twentieth-century or Anglo-Saxon episodes, (or in O'Neill's Norse Dublin), then she *may* have been Celtic, Elvish or part-Elvish, and because of that, Herendil *may be* a man of dual-heritage like his counterparts, Alboin, Audoin, Ælfwine, Eadwine, and Olaf.

In *Wind from the North*, Olaf is also under suspicion for having a dual nature. His friend Ketil tells him, "They're saying that Olaf Ulfson died from the kick of Hviti [Olaf's horse] and that you are a troll that has taken over his body," but Ketil has seen Olaf at Christian mass since then, so he knows this is a false rumour (WN 218). Still, Ketil says, "Ulf always said that there were two men in your skin" (WN 218). Of course, Ketil is more right than he could possibly imagine, but Olaf is also a man of two contemporary peoples: his father's Norse and his mother's Gaelic kin. When Olaf is falsely accused of killing his cousin, Ragnal (a plot organised by Gudrun), his Gaelic relatives offer him refuge. Their chieftain's joy at Olaf's visit was said to be greater than his desire for peace with King Sitric of Dyflin, and they celebrate Olaf's arrival (WN 240). Olaf notes the Gaelic men dress in brightly-coloured clothes of silk and satin (WN 240). These descriptors match some of Matthew Arnold's "racial" stereotypes of the Celt as "sociable, hospitable ... He loves bright colours" and "He is sensual, as I have said, or at least sensuous; loves bright colours, company, and pleasure" (Arnold 101, 105). The Gaelic chieftain's daughters are described as "slim," "slender" and "soft"; "very unlike the solid heavy [Norse] women of Dyflin" (WN 243). And so, as with Tolkien's Herendil, these women are described in terms of a delicacy consonant with Arnold's description of the "fairy-like loveliness of Celtic nature" (Arnold 159). Olaf explicitly says that when he was with the Gaels, "I got the feeling I was in the Elf-mounds" (WN 243).

Religious strife is also present in both works. In *Wind from the North*, Ulf is a proud Christian; Olaf was also raised as a Christian, although he is tempted toward the worship of Odin by the pretty Gudrun Jarlsdottir. In *The Lost Road*, Ælfwine is also a devoted Christian as we see from his "Christian objections" to seeking the Earthly

Paradise (*Lost Road* 80). Although there can be no Christians in Númenor, because it existed before the birth of Christ, there can be noble pagans, and Tolkien's Elendil is one of these. Herendil cautions it is a time when it is dangerous for Númenoreans to be called "Godfearing," for they are being forced to "choose between Sauron and the Lords (or One Higher)" (*Lost Road* 60-61).<sup>113</sup> Herendil and his young peers are attracted to Sauron's philosophies, but Elendil reveals he is a leader of the 'anti-Saurians' and tells his son, "Thou must choose between thy father and Sauron" (*Lost Road* 70). Like Gudrun and the Odin-worshippers in Dyflin, Sauron and the Saurians have brought "evil rites" to Númenor (*Lost Road* 68). There is now a temple on the Mountain to Sauron's master, Morgoth, the Lucifer-figure in Tolkien's legendarium, and "even by day smoke riseth from the temple: flowers and grass are withered where it falleth" (*Lost Road* 68). Like Gudrun's machinations to kill her adversaries, there are similar disappearances of dissidents in Númenor. Elendil tells Herendil, "There is also a shadow of darker evil. We no longer see our king. His displeasure falleth on men, and they go out; they are in the evening, and in the morning they are not" (*Lost Road* 68). Both Elendil and Olaf land in grave peril. In *The Lost Road*, Elendil is overheard disparaging the king; he is informed upon, arrested and taken into custody (*Lost Road* 75-76). In *Wind from the North*, Olaf finally chooses his father's Christian side of the internecine strife, and he is mortally wounded defending their *tún* against attackers.

As before, these two rather compressed passages share a significant number of close parallels: the hilltop gardens and tall encircling hedges that slope down toward the shore, tall towers, the shining sunlight and the sight of the sea. Their context also corresponds notably as both feature father/son strife, absent wives and mothers, religious upheaval and the advent of "evil rites" and social oppression, sons with (or are accused of having) dual heritage— in Arnoldian terms, one sensible (e.g., Norse; Númenorean) and the other sensual (i.e., Gaelic; Elvish) — which threatens both sons with outsider status. Both narratives culminate in

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<sup>113</sup> "the Lords (or One Higher)" refers to the Valar (or the Creator/Alffather: Ilúvatar).

attacks or arrests of fathers and sons, and both narratives end with cataclysmic battles that topple civilisations: Norse Dyflin and Númenor, both island civilisations which are lost forever in their downfall.

## 5.4 Conclusions

Both *Wind from the North* and *The Lost Road* recount the end-times for two powerful civilisations. The Battle of Clontarf (1014 CE), depicted at the end of O'Neill's novel, marked the end of Norse power in Ireland.<sup>114</sup> In *The Lost Road*, the god-like Valar destroy the ships of the unfaithful Númenoreans and inundate their island like the classical Atlantis. The outcome of Elendil's arrest is not clear although Tolkien left some notes for possible and contradictory endings: Elendil and Herendil remain divided, or they reconcile and sail to Middle-earth in 'flying ships'; Herendil is arrested and imprisoned in the dungeons of Sauron; Elendil renounces the Gods to save his son; Elendil survives, or he drowns (*Lost Road* 76). At the moment of Elendil's death, would he step into sudden darkness and awaken as Alboin Errol in his twentieth-century armchair possessing both Elendil's memories and his own? As in Lewis's Narnia books and O'Neill's *Wind from the North*, will hardly any time have passed since he fell asleep? That seems a likely ending, but one which Tolkien did not leave us. Christopher Tolkien guesses, "that my father had then in mind some quite distinct solution, in which Elendil and his son remained united in the face of whatever events overtook them" (*Lost Road* 76).

In the end, there is a divide between what we know for certain, and what we do not know concerning any potential relationship between *Wind from the North* and *The Lost Road*. We know that O'Neill and Tolkien were both influenced by Dunne's

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<sup>114</sup> In O'Neill's novel, the Norse colonisers of Ireland may serve as stand-ins for the colonising English of O'Neill's own time; he had made a similar substitution of Romans for twentieth-century fascists in his novel *Land Under England* (Quigley 82, 90). Tolkien felt that Anglo-Saxon culture— what he considered his "true culture" — had similarly been colonised and crushed by the Norman Invasion of 1066 (see *Great War* 52).

theories of Serialism and time travel through unconscious states, and that these works were both crafted upon those theories. We know that Tolkien took the challenge to write about “time travel” when Lewis took “space travel” because, as Warnie Lewis recalls, Tolkien had “such a strong sense of time.” We know that Tolkien read O’Neill’s second book, *Land Under England*, which referenced *Wind from the North* on its title page. The award-winning *Wind from the North* was published just two years prior to Tolkien’s work on *The Lost Road*. And we also know that there are abundant parallels between the two works. Together, this set of circumstances strongly suggests that Joseph O’Neill’s *Wind from the North* was a conscious or unconscious source for Tolkien’s *The Lost Road*. However, we do not know empirically whether or not this is so. Tolkien never mentioned O’Neill’s first novel, as he mentioned the second one, nor is it part of his collections in the Bodleian Library. Accordingly, *Wind from the North* should be called a *possible* source in Fisher’s terms (a text Tolkien never explicitly mentioned, but one written by an author who we know Tolkien had read). In Beidler’s terms, it is a *hard analogue* (a work that is old enough in its extant form that Tolkien could have known it and that bears striking resemblances to a Tolkienian work). Using Shippey’s definition, *Wind from the North* might also be described as an *inferred* source for Tolkien: one deduced from evidence and reasoning rather than from explicit statements by Tolkien (see **Chapter 1**).

Regardless, a comparison between *Wind from the North* and *The Lost Road* is still a valuable exercise even if we cannot prove a direct link. Like Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-babies*, O’Neill’s *Wind from the North* was not a mediaeval text, but rather a modern one which relied on Irish legendary history. Patchen Mortimer, for example, underscores the importance of placing Tolkien’s work in conversation with modern works, “that it be regarded not as isolated or anachronistic, but as part of the literary current” (113). Indeed, O’Neill and Tolkien breathed the same intellectual air of the 1930s when Jungian concepts of ancestral memories and Dunne’s theories of precognition and Serialism held sway in literary circles. Both authors addressed similar anxieties such as rising totalitarianism in Europe, subjugation, religious conflict, and the destruction of the romantic heritage of their

respective ancestral cultures. They were far from the only authors who chose to travel imaginatively in time once they had encountered Dunne's theories, however, they are among the very few who chose to relive an imagined past rather than speculate about the future. Moreover, their interpretations of Dunne are particularly in harmony with one another. As such, to examine one of these texts is to shed critical light on the other. In particular, since *The Lost Road* was never completed, *Wind from the North* provides an example of how Tolkien might have resolved his father/son conflicts, closed the loop on his twentieth-century time travellers, and finished his novel had he continued working on it instead of turning to his "great 'Hobbit' sequel," *The Lord of the Rings* (*Letters* #98, p. 165), the very subject to which we turn in **Chapter 6**.

## Chapter 6 Tom Bombadil and Goldberry (1930s–1960s)

A few years before Tolkien worked on *The Lost Road*, he invented one of his most endearing couples, Tom Bombadil and Goldberry. He first enshrined the pair in poetry, and later included them as minor characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. The couple's origins in literature and fairy-story have garnered considerable speculation. Among many possibilities, Irish antecedents have been proposed, and yet the depth of their roots in Irish literature has barely been glimpsed. This chapter argues that the sources of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry can be traced to a rich stockpile of traditional motifs and archetypes found in early Irish narratives.

Tom and Goldberry made their first appearance in Tolkien's poem, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* which was begun c.1931 and published in *Oxford Magazine* in 1934 (ATB 123, 131).<sup>115</sup> In the poem, Tom is "a merry fellow" who walks about the meadows and sits by the waterside generally enjoying his natural surroundings. Several of the valley's residents— including Goldberry the River-woman's daughter, Old Man Willow, the Badger-folk, and a Barrow-wight —attempt to capture Tom, but he commands them all to release him (and they do). At the end of the poem, Tom turns the tables and captures Goldberry out of the river (ATB 129). The literary character of Tom Bombadil was originally inspired by the Tolkien children's

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<sup>115</sup> The poem, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, was first published in *Oxford Magazine* (Vol. LII, no. 13, 15 February 1934); it was revised to fit into the Middle-earth context of the 1962 poetry collection, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and other Verses from The Red Book*; the poem is reprinted along with notes and variant material in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary revised and expanded edition (ATB pp. 35-43; 123-137) and *Poems* (II.834-856).

Dutch doll with the same name (*Biography* 165).<sup>116</sup> Goldberry appears to be original to the 1934 poem.

In the wake of the success of *The Hobbit*, published on 21 September 1937, Tolkien's publisher, Stanley Unwin, hoped that Tolkien had a similar story that could be published. Tolkien sent in several stories for children, some Silmarillion material, and the unfinished *The Lost Road*, but none of these were deemed suitable for publication (*Biography* 187). On 16 December 1937, Tolkien wrote to Unwin, "Do you think Tom Bombadil, the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside, could be made into the hero of a story? Or is he, as I suspect, fully enshrined in the enclosed verses? Still I could enlarge the portrait" (*Letters* #19, p.36). Tolkien never completed a Bombadil prose narrative, but when he decided to start a "new *Hobbit*" sequel (i.e., *The Lord of the Rings*) in the winter of 1937, he included Tom and Goldberry as minor characters. By the late summer of 1938, Tolkien had drafted an episode of *The Lord of the Rings* where the hobbits are obstructed by the trees of the Old Forest, encounter the cunning "Willowman," and have a "Meeting with Tombombadil [*sic.*]" (*Shadow* 111). In the scene as eventually published, Tom rescues the hobbits from Old Man Willow, takes them to his home, and introduces them to his lady Goldberry. The couple provides the hobbits with much-needed food and rest, and Tom tells them about the history of the region. Tolkien wrote in a 1954 letter that he had included Tom Bombadil in *The Lord of the Rings* because he "had already 'invented' him independently ... and wanted an 'adventure' on the way" (*Letters* #153, p.287). In October 1961, Tolkien's aunt, Jane Neave, asked if he "wouldn't get out a small book with Tom Bombadil at the heart of it" (*Biography* 244). Tolkien and Unwin decided to publish a collection of light verse including the 1934 *Adventures of Tom Bombadil* poem, along with other "old half-forgotten things," lightly revised to fit within a Middle-earth context (*Letters*

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<sup>116</sup> A Dutch doll is a type of wooden doll with joints; for more on the history of Tom Bombadil within the Tolkien family, and his appearances in Tolkien's writings, see Reynolds; Scull, "Tom Bombadil and *The Lord of the Rings*"; and Swank, "Tom Bombadil's Last Song."



#234, pp.439-440). For example, Goldberry's nameless waters in the 1934 poem are dubbed the "Withywindle"—a river from *The Lord of the Rings*—in the 1962 poem. Tolkien's modifications may have helped the original poem feel more like it fit into Middle-earth, but Tom and Goldberry's roots as characters, at least in part, are to be found in various Irish mythological texts.

In **Section 6.1 In the House of Tom Bombadil**, I examine Tom and Goldberry as a couple analogous with the *briugaid*, hospitallers appearing in early Irish literature like *Compert Con Culainn* or *Togail bruidne Da Derga* and often imagined as supernatural figures providing food and shelter to benighted travellers. In **Section 6.2 Eldest: Tom Bombadil and Fintan mac Bóchra**, Tom Bombadil, as the self-proclaimed "Eldest" in Middle-earth, is closely compared to a similar character from *Lebor gabála Érenn* and other Irish texts, Fintan mac Bóchra. **Subsection 6.2.1 Other Ancients** briefly reads Tolkien's Treebeard the Ent as Tom's rival for the title of oldest creature in Middle-earth through Irish traditions which also present rival claimants for the title of "oldest" in the land. **Section 6.3 The Wooing of Goldberry**, compares Goldberry, the river-daughter, with the Irish Étaín, a woman also associated with pools and water in the Middle Irish *Tochmarc Étaíne* ('The Wooing of Étaín'). The material is summed up in **Section 6.4 Conclusions**.

## 6.1 In the House of Tom Bombadil

Tom Bombadil and Goldberry have been frequently analysed as a couple. Hargrove argued that they were the divine Valar Yavanna and Aulë. Startzman called them, "an Adam and Eve, free and unfallen, caretakers, left in the world as a reminder of man's true state" (8). Jones compares them to a type of couple known from Romano-Celtic sources and mediaeval Celtic literature: the king who marries the local goddess of the land. She writes, "When the king and the sovereignty goddess are happily married, cosmic balance reigns. The weather is fine, the crops are good, children are born easily and often, cows give copious amounts of milk" (54). Each of these is an interesting theory, but each has its defects. Tom never shows an interest in smithing like Aulë. Goldberry can be neither the primaeval demiurge,

Yavanna, nor Middle-earth's Eve, for Tolkien explicitly names her the "River-woman's daughter" or the "River-daughter," suggesting she was created/born *after* the River demiurge. And crucially, Jones qualifies her own theory, writing, "Tom Bombadil and Goldberry do not compare directly with the Celtic divine couples; their similarity to the archetype is on a more abstract level" (55).

On the other hand, Tom and Goldberry do fill the role of supernatural hosts who offer succour to benighted travellers as in Irish mythology and legend, like the man and woman of the small house in *Compert Con Culainn*. Tolkien had given that role in *The Book of Lost Tales* to Lindo and Vairë, the host and hostess of *Mar Vanwa Tyaliéva* ('The Cottage of Lost Play,' see **Chapter 3**). Lord Elrond is a similar figure as the host of "The Last Homely House" in *The Hobbit*. In early Irish law texts, the *briugu* (plural: *briugaid*) or hospitaller, "was a wealthy landowner who out of his great resources provided hospitality for all comers" (Mac Eoin 482). But in literature, both the host and hostel are frequently depicted as otherworldly. Gearóid Mac Eoin writes,

most of the *briugaid* found in narrative literature are of a superhuman stature, personages such as Buchet of the Laigin, Mac Datho, Blai Briugu, Da Derga, and many others, and so the accounts which we have of them and their functions belong as much to mythology as to social history. (482-483)

O'Rahilly "viewed these hospitallers with their hostels or guest-houses in the early literature as partially rationalised or 'euhemerised' manifestations of a mythical prototype: the god of the Otherworld presiding over the hall of the Otherworld feast" (McCone 7).<sup>117</sup> Certainly, in many depictions, the *briugaid* belong to the Túatha Dé Danann.

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. O'Rahilly's *Early Irish History and Myth* (1946), pp. 121-124.

Another relevant example is the story of the twenty-eight sons of Midir from *Acallam na Senórach* (previously discussed in **Chapter 3**). Similar to the story in *Compert Con Culainn* where Conchobar and his companions find shelter when they are out hunting mysterious geese and night falls, here it is Finn mac Cumail and his six companions who find shelter when they are out hunting a mysterious fawn and night and snow begin to fall. Although the narrative is available in several texts, the scene as told in O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* translation (II.222-224) and Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* (175) is closely comparable to Tolkien's scene in Book I, Chapter VII, "In House of Tom Bombadil" from *The Lord of the Rings*. In the Irish tale, it is Finn's kinsman, Caílte mac Rónáin, who is sent out to find shelter. He "went over the mountain's elbow to the southward where ... [he] perceived a well illuminated *sídh*" (SG II.222; see also Gregory 175). Caílte finds the *sídh* inhabited by Donn and his brothers and six yellow-haired damsels. In the middle of the room sits another yellow-haired woman on a chair, playing a harp, singing lays, and passing around a draft of something that makes everyone present merry (SG II.223). She sends Caílte out to bring Finn and his men back to the *sídh*. When they enter, she sits them down in the hall's centre and serves them "the freshest of all meats with the oldest of all liquors" (SG II.223; see also Gregory 176).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, after the hobbits are saved from Old Man Willow by the enigmatic Tom Bombadil, Tom invites them to his house. The hobbits follow Tom, "Down again ... then up again, up a long smooth hillside of turf, towards the light. Suddenly a wide yellow beam flowed out brightly from a door that was opened. There was Tom Bombadil's house before them, up, down, under hill" (FR I.vi.133). As the four hobbits approach Tom's house, they hear a clear voice singing (FR I.vii.134). Across the threshold, they find themselves in a long, low room, filled with the light of lamps and candles. The yellow-haired Goldberry is seated in a chair on the far side of the room, enthroned amidst earthenware vessels of water and water-lilies. As soon as she speaks, they know it was she who had been singing. Goldberry lays out a feast for them of "yellow cream and honeycomb, and white bread, and butter; milk, cheese, and green herbs and ripe berries gathered" (FR I.vii.135). They are also given a drink that "seemed to be clear cold water, yet it

went to their hearts like wine and set free their voices" (*FR* I.vii.136). In both scenes, benighted travellers are welcomed into a brightly-lit house nestled under a hill. Within, a yellow-haired hostess is enthroned in a prominent place in the room where she is singing. She provides a hearty meal and a special beverage which causes merriment. After dinner, the guests and their hosts discuss the history of the region and prepare for a coming conflict. Donn tells of his family's conflict with the Túatha Dé Danann king Bodb Derg and asks Finn to be his ally against Derg's forces. Tom tells the hobbits "many remarkable stories" of the history and conflicts of the region and warns them of present dangers while Goldberry, "sang many songs for them" (*FR* I.vii.140, 43).

The provision of stories and song are the function of the *briugu*. The Old or Middle Irish narrative *Esnada tige Buchet* ('The Songs of Buchet's house'), possibly originating in the tenth century or earlier, is preserved in five vellum manuscripts, including the *Book of Leinster* and the *Yellow Book of Lecan*. Buchet's house is filled with "the song of the fifty warriors," and "[t]he song, too, of the fifty maidens in the midst of the house, in their purple dresses, with their golden-yellow manes" (Stokes, "Songs of Buchet's House," 31, 33). As in the House of Tom Bombadil, Lindo and Vairë of the Cottage of Lost Play also provide music and storytelling, and Elrond's house in *The Hobbit* was said to be "perfect, whether you liked food, or sleep, or work, or storytelling, or singing, or just sitting and thinking best, or a pleasant mixture of them all" (*Hobbit* III.61). Arbois de Jubainville points out, "*Il est questions de ces palais [magiques] dans les contes gallois, bretons et français*" (*Cycle Mythologique* 298).<sup>118</sup> Similarly, Spangenberg cautions, "Whether or not Tolkien had [*The Conception of Cú Chulainn*] in mind is a different question. It is wise to remember that a Celtic motif may occur in a Celtic text, as well as an Old French or Middle English text, since all draw upon the common pool, and many motifs are part of a shared Indo-European heritage" (448). However, Tolkien's use of several

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<sup>118</sup> "These [magical] palaces are mentioned in Welsh, Breton and French tales" (author's translation).

motifs associated with otherworldly Irish hosts and hostels, and the closely similar scenes in the houses of Donn and Tom make compelling arguments that, even if Tolkien did not model his own examples on the specific Irish stories mentioned here, he was certainly familiar with the motif and explicitly recreated it in the House of Tom Bombadil.

## 6.2 Eldest: Tom Bombadil and Fintan mac Bóchra as Memory-Keepers<sup>119</sup>

Spending some enchanted days of rest in Bombadil's house in *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo inquires, "Who are you, Master?"— to which Tom replies,

"Eldest, that's what I am ... Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless— before the Dark Lord came from Outside." (FR I.vii.142)

Bombadil is a curious creature. He does not seem to fit into any of the known races of Middle-earth. And although he appears to be an ally of the Free Folk, he is neither Elf nor Man, neither Hobbit nor Dwarf. Speculation about his nature and function in Middle-earth began to appear soon after the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. Charles E. Noad collected about three dozen early theories on Bombadil's nature in 1989. These include, among other theories, a nature-sprite, a primaeval daimonic being, Nature itself, Väinämöinen from the *Kalevala*, Adam, Christ, God, a Maia "gone native," Ulmo, Aulë, Ilúvatar, an incarnation of Ilúvatar's Secret Fire, or

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<sup>119</sup> The material in this section was presented as research-in-progress for this thesis at the 25<sup>th</sup> International Medieval Congress in Leeds, July 03, 2018, and was first published in *Critical Insights: The Lord of the Rings*, edited by Robert C. Evans, Salem Press, 2022, pp. 181-195.

the spirit of Eä (i.e., creation) (Noad 79–83). Speculation has not abated as academic articles on the subject continue to appear regularly. Among the numerous post-Noad theories, a small sampling includes the following: Tulkas, the Vala of war (Pirson 33); a fairy guide (Jensen and MacDonald 37); and Tolkien himself: that is, Tom as the author participating in his own creation (Jenike 72). Although a consensus opinion has not emerged, a few common themes have, including Tom's closeness to Nature and his ancientness. Noad wrote, "Perhaps the word that best sums up the general feeling about Tom is his *primality*," that is, Tom's essential characteristic of being first in Time, original, *primaeval* (83, italics original).

Gay and Dettman, in separate essays, compare Tom Bombadil with the *primaeval* singer from the Finnish *Kalevala*, Väinämöinen. Tolkien discovered, and became fascinated with, the *Kalevala* during his last year at King Edwards' School, 1910–1911 (*Biography* 57). In 1912, he attempted to read it in the original Finnish, and, as mentioned in **Chapter 2**, he read a paper on the *Kalevala* to the Corpus Christi College's Sundial Society on 22 November 1914 (*Biography* 66, 67). By the autumn of 1914, Tolkien had decided to turn some episodes from the *Kalevala* concerning the hapless youth, Kullervo, "into a short story somewhat on the lines of [William] Morris' romances with chunks of poetry in between" (*Letters* #1, p.3). Dettman points out a number of similarities between Bombadil and Väinämöinen, such as the power inherent in their songs, the sing-song cadence of their speech, and the capture of their respective love interests from out of the water. Gay covers much the same ground, adding that Väinämöinen and Bombadil "are fearless because of their power" and both have been variously characterised as wizard, shaman, or nature god (297). But the key here is that both Bombadil and Väinämöinen are the "eldest" beings in their respective worlds.

Tolkien himself could be ambiguous concerning the nature and function of Tom Bombadil and discouraged such speculation. He wrote to Peter Hastings, "I don't think Tom needs philosophising about, and is not improved by it. But many have found him an odd or, indeed, discordant ingredient ... But I kept him in, and as he was, because he represents certain things otherwise left out" (*Letters* #153, p. 287).

In response to Hastings's inquiry as to whether Bombadil was supposed to be God, Tolkien replied, "I really do think you are being too serious, besides missing the point" (*Letters* #153, p.286). Tolkien told author Naomi Mitchison, "As a story, I think it is good that there should be a lot of things unexplained (especially if an explanation actually exists) ... And even in a mythical Age there must be some enigmas, as there always are. Tom Bombadil is one (intentionally)" (*Letters* #144, p.263). Later in the same letter, Tolkien added that Bombadil "represents something that I feel important, though I would not be prepared to analyse the feeling precisely. I would not, however, have left him in, if he did not have some kind of function" (*Letters* #144, p.268).

As mentioned above, Tolkien once referred to Bombadil as "the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside" (*Letters* #19, p. 36). He appears as such in the 1934 version of the poem, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*. While it contains several characters who would later be re-used in the Old Forest episode of *The Lord of the Rings*— Goldberry, Old Man Willow, and the Barrow-wight—it also mentions typical English wildlife such as badgers, herons, and water-rats. Christopher Tolkien reprinted the fragment of another Bombadil poem in *The Return of the Shadow* that Tolkien had labelled, "germ of Tom Bombadil so evidently [written] in mid 1930s" (*Shadow* 115).<sup>120</sup> The fragment mentions "Stoke Canonorum," noted by Christopher as the "[m]ediaeval name of what is now Stoke Canon in Devonshire" (*Shadow* 116, *fn*†). Together, the poem and poetry fragment from the 1930s illustrate that Tom had his origins in our world before he was written into Middle-earth. Tom Shippey calls Bombadil, "a *genius loci*" of the river and willow country in the English Midlands (*Author* 63, *italics original*). Yet, with the decision to re-use Bombadil in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien expanded his role from an English nature spirit into something more. As Noad suggests,

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<sup>120</sup> This "germ of Tom Bombadil" turns out to be an early version of *Bombadil Goes Boating*, another poem originally written in the 1930s and revised to fit into the Middle-earth context of *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book* (see *ATB*, rev. & exp. ed., pp. 138-153 for poem's history). It is reprinted in *Poems* (III.1310-1330).

Bombadil's nature and function in the novel are focused on his *primality*, that is, Tom's claim to be "Eldest."

In this regard, another possible source of influence on Tom Bombadil's nature and function in *The Lord of the Rings*, one which has not previously been explored, is the Irish legendary figure of Fintan mac Bóchra. Like Väinämöinen in the Finnish tales, Fintan is also accounted as the "eldest" in *his* land (i.e., Ireland). Furthermore, Tolkien had been reading about Fintan and considering him for inclusion in his time-travel novel, *The Lost Road*, a mere two years before he first drafted the Bombadil chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*. The timing, the similarities, and Tolkien's own stated interest in the character of Fintan make a compelling argument that Fintan is one of Bombadil's literary ancestors.

As discussed in **Chapter 5**, the various chapters of *The Lost Road* were to occur in different historical eras. Although the story never got very far, in a rough outline for the novel, Tolkien indicated that one of the unwritten chapters would focus on "the Irish legend of Tuatha-de-Danaan [*sic.*]*—and oldest man in the world*" (*Lost Road* 78). On an "isolated note elsewhere among these papers," Tolkien wrote, "See Lit. Celt. p. 137. Oldest man in the world *Finntan* [*sic.*]" (*Lost Road* 82, italics original). "Lit. Celt" refers to Magnus Maclean's *The Literature of the Celts*. Maclean was Lord Kelvin's assistant for many years before being appointed Lecturer on Electricity, and later Professor of Electrical Engineering, at the University of Glasgow. He was also the University's first Celtic Lecturer (1900-1903) and published collections of his lectures as monographs, including *Literature of the Celts*, what became a popular synopsis of Celtic mythology and legend. Although the book is not part of Tolkien's "Celtic Library" held by the Bodleian, it is apparent that Tolkien knew it, at least the part on "Finntan," that is, Fintan mac Bóchra, the legendary figure whose story is recounted in a complex web of ninth- to eighteenth-century material that presents a pseudo-history of Ireland. Maclean summarises Fintan's life story:



Forty days before the Flood, the Lady Cæsair, niece or granddaughter of Noah— it is immaterial which —with fifty girls and three men came to Ireland. This, we are to understand, was the first invasion or conquest of that country. All these were drowned in the Deluge, except Finntan [*sic.*], the husband of the lady, who escaped by being cast into a deep sleep ... he lived throughout many dynasties down to the sixth century of our era, when he appears for the last time ... engaged in settling a boundary dispute. Being the oldest man in the world, he was *ipso facto* the best informed regarding ancient landmarks.

After the Flood various peoples in succession stepped onto the platform of Irish history. First the Partholans, then the Nemedians, Firbolgs, Túatha Dé Danann, and last of all the Milesians [*i.e.*, the Gaels], thus carrying the chronology down to the time of Christ. (Maclean 137–38)

The chief text of the Fintan material is *Lebor gabála Érenn*, while another key text is *Suidiugud tellaig Temra* ('The Settling of the manor of Tara'). The portrayal of Fintan in these works reveals several parallels with Tom Bombadil: both are the oldest men in their respective worlds, both are survivors of global floods, and both are Otherworld figures and witnesses to history. They also function similarly in their respective narratives— as the memory keepers of their societies —suggesting a conscious relationship between the Irish Fintan and Tolkien's Tom Bombadil as he is portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Scull and Hammond describe an appearance of Tom Bombadil that likely predates both the 1934 *Oxford Magazine* poem and the 1930s poetic "germ" of Tom Bombadil. They write, "Among the Tolkien papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and partly printed in Humphrey Carpenter's *Biography*, is a fragment of a prose tale, entitled *Tom Bombadil*, written probably in the 1920s" (ATB 277). The surviving manuscript stops after only three paragraphs. A portion of that text reads—

It happened in the days of King Bonhedig, before the wild men came hither out of Ond, or the dark men out of Euskadi, or the fair haired warriors with long iron swords across the narrow water; in fact before

any one ever mentioned in fantastic history or sober legend had yet arrived in Britain (as it was called in those days) ... the island was full enough of peoples and other inhabitants, and had already suffered many invasions ... Tombombadil [sic.] was the name of one [of] the oldest inhabitants of the kingdom ... (ATB 277–78)

Of particular interest in comparison to Fintan mac Bóchra is this description of Tom as “one [of] the oldest inhabitants of the kingdom,” and of Britain having already “suffered many invasions” (ATB 277). Christopher Tolkien observes, “there were indeed few changes ever made” to “The House of Tom Bombadil” chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*, which Tolkien was working on in February 1938 (*Shadow* 303, 43). The most significant, however, is Tom’s initial response to the question posed by Bingo (as Frodo was then called): “Who are you, Master?” Originally, Tom replied, “I am an Aborigine, that’s what I am, the Aborigine of this land” (*Shadow* 121). Around August 1939, Tolkien struck that out and replaced “Aborigine, that’s what I am” with the familiar, “Eldest, that’s what I am” (*Treason* 36–37; see also *FR* I.vii.142). In the prose fragment of the 1920s, Tom was called “one [of] the oldest inhabitants” of Britain (ATB 278, italics added). But in *The Lord of the Rings*, he becomes *the* Eldest, the original, or aboriginal, inhabitant of Middle-earth. Tolkien reiterated, “if ‘in time’ Tom was *primaeval* he was Eldest in Time” (*Letters* #153, p.286). Great age is also one of Fintan mac Bóchra’s key characteristics.

Like Tom, Fintan is the oldest inhabitant of his country (he is over five-thousand years old), and in that time, he witnesses a succession of invasions, just as Tom does. The Nemedians, for example, entered Ireland from the East and later departed for a time to some magical cities across the sea, returning again in ships from the North and transformed into the supernaturally gifted Túatha Dé Danann. Similarly, Tom Bombadil watches the Elves cross Middle-earth from the East, depart for a time to Valinor across the sea, and later return again in ships from the North. Additionally, Tolkien scribbled several plot outlines on slips of paper or in the pages of a little notebook during the early “Lost Tales” era of his mythology that refer multiple times to the “Seven invasions of Luthany” (i.e., Tolkien’s early name for Britain; see, for example, *Lost Tales II* 307). These seven invasions directly

echo the six invasions of Ireland that Fintan witnesses, most famously recounted in *Lebor gabála Érenn*.

Both Fintan and Bombadil also survive deluge. *Lebor gabála* claims that Fintan survived Noah's Flood in a divine sleep in a cave in Munster: "God kept him waiting there alive, so that it was he who related the Takings of Ireland" (Macalister 195). Similarly, Bombadil remembers the world "before the seas were bent" (*FR* I.vii.142). This is a reference to the cataclysmic drowning of Númenor at the end of the Second Age of Middle-earth and the Changing of the World from a flat disc into a spherical planet. Additionally, if Tom remembers the first tree and river, then he also survived the inundation of Beleriand at the end of the First Age. Like Bombadil's, Fintan's origins and nature have been extensively debated by scholars. Fintan has been called "'the Otherworld god' ... a primordial human being ... a synthetic apocryphal being," among other labels (Bondarenko 129). Bombadil has been identified in similar terms: as an "otherworldly entity within the structure of [Middle-earth]" (Feist 18); as "a pre-existent spiritual being who became incarnated" (Noad 80); and, as "an enigma" (*Letters* #144, p.263). Tom's Old Forest has also been related to the Celtic Otherworld (Noetzel 172).

However, it is their role as the memory keepers of their respective societies that truly marks Tom Bombadil and Fintan mac Bóchra as complementary characters. Mark Williams maintains that a crucial dimension of mediaeval Irish histories was to legitimise Gaelic culture by tracing its descent back to the biblical *Genesis* (*Ireland's Immortals* 131). He writes, "The purpose of these stories was to explain and exemplify how the past related to the present, often by giving accounts of how peoples, places, and political institutions had come into being" (M. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals* 130). In *Suidiugud tellaig Temra*, Fintan is called to give evidence in a legal dispute over the boundaries of the royal seat of Tara. As the eldest man in Ireland, Fintan knows the history of all the ancient landmarks (see Maclean 138). When the king's auditors ask about the reliability of his memory, Fintan tells them the following story:

I passed one day through a wood in West Munster; I brought home with me a red berry of the yew tree, which I planted in the vegetable-garden of my mansion, and it grew there until it was as tall as a man. I then took it out of the garden and I planted it in the green lawn of my mansion, and it grew in the centre of that lawn until a hundred champions could fit under its foliage, and find shelter there from wind, and rain, and cold, and heat. I remained so and my yew remained so, spending our time alike, until at last all its leaves fell off from decay. When afterwards I thought of turning it to some profit, I went to it and cut it from its stem, and I made from it seven vats, seven keeves [tubs], and seven stans [canisters], and seven churns, and seven pitchers, and seven *milans* (i.e., an *urna*) [vessels for liquids], and seven *medars* [drinking vessels], with hoops for all. I remained still with my yew vessels until their hoops all fell off from decay and old age. After this I re-made them ... (Arbois de Jubainville, *Irish Mythological Cycle*, 44-45, italics original)

This story serves not only to illustrate Fintan's great age (for a yew tree can live 500 hundred years or more), but it also serves to demonstrate his precise powers of mental recall. Fintan can remember the exact number of vessels he made from the aged yew wood.

An incomplete early Irish tract contained in *Lebor na hUidre* ('The Book of the Dun Cow'), entitled *Cethri arda in domain* ('The Four quarters of the world'), describes four wise men who keep historical knowledge after the Flood in the four quarters of the world. Fintan's role is "to tell the traditions and wonders of the world to the seed of Adam" (quoted in Bondarenko 140), particularly, "the traditions of the West of the world" (quoted in Bondarenko 141). When all other witnesses are dead, it is Fintan's role to remember how the people of Ireland came to be, the origin of their laws, political institutions, and society. Grigory Bondarenko writes, "Ireland, as it were, comes into history from the primordial chaos thanks to Fintan's memory" (139).

Tom serves in a similar role for the hobbits. At the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien threw his innocent hobbits out into the wide world without knowledge of Middle-earth's history sufficient enough to appreciate the context

and gravity of their quest. Tolkien needed to provide them with a teacher. So, just as Fintan recalls the red berry that grew into a mighty yew tree, Tom remembers the first acorn, which likewise grew into a mighty tree. Tom remembers the history of the trees, of the Elf-sires, “of the Great Barrows, and the green mounds, and the stone-rings upon the hills and in the hollows among the hills” (FR I.vii.141). Out of the barrow-treasure, Tom chooses “a brooch set with blue stones, many-shaded like flax-flowers or the wings of blue butterflies. He looked long at it, as if stirred by some memory, shaking his head, and saying at last: ... ‘Fair was she who long ago wore this on her shoulder’” (FR I.viii.156–57). Tom tells the hobbits that the knives they take from the Barrows were forged long years ago by Men of Westemnet to use against evil forces. Tom says, “Few now remember them ... yet still some go wandering, sons of forgotten kings” (FR I.viii.157). The hobbits begin to understand the great chain of events in which they now find themselves when Tom’s words evoke a vision “of a great expanse of years behind them” (FR I.viii.157). Bombadil’s stories serve the same purpose here as the Irish pseudo-histories did in the Middle Ages, that is, they related the past to the present, to illustrate how the tides of history continued to ripple through the present age. Whether they appreciate it or not, Tom has just given the hobbits the history lesson they need for the next stage of their journey to Bree, where they will encounter Aragorn, one of those sons of forgotten kings who still go wandering.

Tom is clearly an amalgamation of several sources and influences, as the literature shows, but his function is the same as Fintan mac Bóichra’s: watching, knowing, and remembering. Tolkien once wrote that Tom Bombadil is “the spirit that desires *knowledge* of other things, their history and nature” (*Letters* #153, p. 287, italics added). Elsewhere Bombadil is described as taking “delight in things for themselves ... *watching, observing*, and to some extent *knowing*” (*Letters* #144, p. 268, italics added). When Frodo asks Bombadil to accompany them on their journey to Bree, he declines: “‘I’ve got things to do,’ he said: ‘my making and my singing, my talking and my walking, and my watching of the country’” (FR I.viii.156). Tom said, “Out east my knowledge fails” (FR I.viii.159). Exactly like Fintan mac Bóichra, Tom Bombadil’s function is to watch and remember the history of the *West* of the world.

### 6.2.1 Other Ancients

Aside from Tom Bombadil, there are other ancient memory keepers in Middle-earth who watch their specific parts of the world. At least one of these, Treebeard, will serve as a history teacher for Merry and Pippin. Treebeard the Ent, guardian of Fangorn Forest, is said by Gandalf to be “the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth” (*TT* III.v.102). Readers have long sought an explanation for the dilemma of how Treebeard could be the “oldest” if Tom Bombadil was “Eldest.”

A similar mystery exists in Irish literature. As described above, Fintan is only one of four ancient wise men who preserve Irish history in the early Irish tract *Cethri arda in domain*. Another Irish ancient is Tuán mac Cairill, an Ulsterman who is also said to be Ireland’s oldest man. The earliest text concerning him, *Scél Tuáin meic Cairill do Finnen Maige Bile* (‘Tuán mac Cairill’s story to Finnén of Mag Bile’), is preserved in *The Book of the Dun Cow* where Tuán claims to have settled Ireland with the Partholons three-hundred and twelve years after the Biblical Deluge. The Partholons all perished from a plague except for Tuán. Over time, his life was extended by transforming into a new animal shape each time he reached the limits of old age: a stag, a black boar, a hawk or sea-eagle, and a salmon, before he was reborn as a human again; each time, he retained his previous memories (Hull, “Hawk” 388). One day, as a salmon, he was caught by a fisherman and fed to the fisherman’s wife.<sup>121</sup> He passed into her womb and was born again as a human boy. Like Fintan, Tuán’s purpose was to preserve and transmit ancient Irish history down through the ages, what Carey refers to as “rememberer tales” (“Reincarnation and Shapeshifting” 1484). But Tuán and Fintan are associated with different parts of

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<sup>121</sup> In notes by the sixteenth-century antiquary Meredith Hanmer, Fintan mac Bóchra is also said to have been transformed into a salmon (see Bondarenko 143).

Ireland, and different legendary traditions: Tuán with Ulster in the north (Nutt, “The Irish Vision” 294-295); Fintan with Munster in the west (Bondarenko 141).

Other Irish legends of the oldest living things include the Middle Irish *Colloquy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill* and the related *Adventures of Léithin*. In the former, both Fintan and the hawk claim to be 6,515 years old and to have participated in, or at least witnessed, all of the major events of Irish history up to that point. An edition of *Fintan and the Hawk* published in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. 1 (1907), was, at some point, literally in Tolkien’s hands, for it is printed in the self-same volume from which he attempted to translate *Immram Mail Dúin* on the back flyleaf of his personal copy of *\*Saltair na Rann* (see **Chapter 2**). If Tolkien’s translations from *Immram Mail Dúin* are anything to go by, he may not have gotten very far with reading *Fintan and the Hawk* because it is presented in Irish without introduction, synopsis, or English translation. However, in 1932, Eleanor Hull produced a discussion of and partial English translation as “The Hawk of Achill or the Legend of the Oldest Animals” for the journal *Folklore*. Tolkien had reason to be interested in Hull’s publication, for it features the character of Fintan with whom Tolkien was certainly familiar. But, while there is a possibility, there is no evidence Tolkien ever saw this translation. The *Adventures of Léithin* was first translated into English by Douglas Hyde in 1915. It follows the she-eagle Léithin as she seeks information from Ireland’s most ancient creatures: Blackfoot the Stag of Ben Gulbain, the Blackbird of Clonfert, Goll the one-eyed Salmon of Easruadh (i.e., Assaroe) who is so old it remembers Fintan coming into Ireland as well as the biblical Deluge. The oldest animal, the Crow of Achill (i.e., the Hawk of Achill), was guilty of plucking out the salmon’s eye, an event also mentioned in *Fintan and the Hawk of Achill*. While Léithin is away from her nest on her errand, the wily crow eats the chicks she has left behind.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The eagle’s name, Léithin, is visually similar to Tolkien’s invented word “Leithian, or Leithien,” an early name for England in his legendarium, and also to *The Lay of Leithian*

Hull also notes that the Irish legends of the oldest living things are not limited to humans or even animals. She writes, “It may be a thorn bush, *or a tree*, that retains a memory of historical events,” as in the modern poem, *Seanchus na Sgeiche* (‘Old Lore of the Thornbush’) (“Hawk” 406, italics added). Written by “Raftery” (Antoine Ó Raifteirí, 1779-1835), the blind poet of County Mayo, an old thorn tree regales the poet with an account of the history of the world and of Ireland since it was created one thousand one hundred years before Noah’s Ark was made (Hull, “Hawk” 406). Hull describes a similar poem found in the British Museum (Eg. 178, Art. 35) where Séamus Ó Catháin (another *circa* eighteenth-century poet) made a rhyming history of Ireland in the form of a dialogue with a huge, withered oak in County Roscommon (Hull, “Hawk” 406-407).

Thus, it may be that Treebeard’s character was, in part, also shaped by Irish legend, for just as Fintan and Tuán are associated with specific regions of Ireland, Tom Bombadil is specifically associated with the Old Forest while Treebeard *is* Fangorn (i.e., the being who gives Fangorn Forest its name). Just as Fintan and Tuán are ancient watchers in different regions of Ireland, so are Tom and Treebeard ancient watchers in different regions of Middle-earth. Tolkien needed both at different points in his story when his hobbits were in different regions of Middle-earth and needed crucial historical information. Tolkien’s claims at different points in his narrative that one or the other character was “oldest” is, in fact, in line with the enigmas of multiple ancient beings in Irish tradition.

### 6.3 The Wooing of Goldberry

In the 1934 poem, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, fair Goldberry emerges from the waters of a quiet meadow and playfully pulls Tom in by his beard (ATB 123-124). Later, Tom returns, “and caught the River-daughter, / in green gown, flowing

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(“Release from Bondage”), an early metrical version of the Beren and Lúthien story; however, there is no apparent etymological connection between the words.



hair, sitting in the rushes" (ATB 129). Tom takes her to his home "under Hill" and they have "a merry wedding" where Goldberry is crowned "with forgetmenots and flaglilies for garland, / robed all in silver-green" (ATB 129). The morning after their wedding, Goldberry sits on the doorstep and "combed her tresses yellow" (ATB 130).<sup>123</sup> In *The Lord of the Rings*, she is introduced when Tom Bombadil invites the hobbits into his home:

Her long yellow hair rippled down her shoulders; her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew; and her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots. About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool. (FR I.vii.134)<sup>124</sup>

Like Bombadil's, Goldberry's origins have been sought by readers in a number of mythological and literary texts. She has been compared to, or identified as, among other models: a prelapsarian Eve (Startzman; Basso; B. Best); "a mystical washer-woman" (Hatcher 44); "a woodland goddess, loving wife, and devoted daughter" (Hesser 244); a primaeval singer (Taylor); an exemplar of a Victorian lady (Martsch); and Christ-like (B. Best). Within Tolkien's own legendarium, she has been associated with several figures as well: the Elven lady Galadriel, with whom she shares long, blonde hair and a deep affinity for the natural world (Startzman; Basso 143); Nessa, the Artemis-like Mistress of Animals and spouse of the war-Vala Tulkas (Pirson 33); Yavanna, the divine Vala associated with all growing things

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<sup>123</sup> The same wording is used in the 1962 version of the poem (*Bombadil* 43).

<sup>124</sup> From Tolkien's earliest notes for the Bombadil chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom was gathering white water-lilies for Goldberry, and she was described, as in the earlier poem, with "hair as yellow as the flag-lilies, her green gown and light feet" (*Shadow* 117). In the last Tom Bombadil poem to be published, *Once upon a Time* (1965), Goldberry wears, "a wild-rose crown" and "a lady-smock" (i.e., *cardamine pratensis*, also called the "cuckoo flower"); she is blowing "a dandelion clock" (i.e., a dandelion seed-head) and "stooping over a lily-pool": all of these floral varieties may be found growing near water sources (ATB 280-281, and *Poems* I.352-353); see also Swank, "Tom Bombadil's Last Song").

(Hargrove); and, a water-Maia related to the sea-Vala Ulmo (D. Simon). Goldberry has also been related to kidnapped brides from myth and legend: Aino from the Finnish *Kalevala* who is snatched out of the water by the primaeval singer, Väinämöinen (Dettman); and Proserpina/Persephone from Classical myth who, while picking flowers by a lake, is abducted by and forced to wed the underworld god Pluto/Hades (Taylor 148-149). Taryne Jade Taylor swiftly points out that Goldberry and Proserpina are both associated with lilies and the seasons (149). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Proserpina is "plucking white lilies and sweet violets" by a lake when Pluto sees her and carries her off (Ov. *Met.* 5.341). When the hobbits first meet Goldberry, she is seated among bowls of water-lilies (*FR* I.vii.134). Proserpina's mother, the goddess Ceres/Demeter, is associated with agriculture and the seasons, while Tolkien once wrote that Goldberry lived in "real river-lands in autumn" and that she "represents the actual seasonal changes in such lands" (*Letters* #210, p.391). I add that both Proserpina and Goldberry are closely-associated with their mothers, Ceres/Demeter and the River-woman, respectively.

At least one thing is certain: Goldberry is closely-associated with water. Ruth Noel observed in her 1977 book, *The Mythology of Middle-earth*, that Goldberry's hair-combing on the morning following her wedding, "is not the simple domestic action that it seems, but is the characteristic pose of all types of watersprites" (Noel 129). Goldberry is always described wearing a green or silver-green dress, which Noel connects with "the wet skirts and aprons by which nixies are traditionally recognised in Teutonic mythology" (Noel 129-130). But the section of Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology* which Noel references includes descriptions not only of Germanic nixies, or dangerous water-sprites, but also of Finnish, Romanian, Russian, etc. water-nymphs, some of whom are also noted for sitting near water and combing their hair (Grimm 492). Shippey associates Goldberry with English water-hags—

Goldberry is 'the Riverwoman's daughter', beautiful and charming herself, but connected with the hag who lurks like Grendel's mother 'in her deep weedy pool' ... R.W. Chambers, a patron and supporter of Tolkien in his early years, had pointed to beliefs about [child-eating]

Peg Powler, in the River Tees, and Jenny Greenteeth in the Ribble, as classic malignant water-hags. (Author 62)

John M. Bowers argues for the influence of the late-mediaeval lyric *The Maid of the Moor* which Tolkien knew from his tutor Kenneth Sisam's 1921 volume, *Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose* for which Tolkien had compiled the accompanying student glossary, *A Middle English Vocabulary* (1922) (26). Bowers writes, "Critics often take a leap of faith when claiming that Tolkien *must* have known such-and-such literary work, but in this case we are certain that Tolkien did know this lyric very well" (Bowers 26, italics original). The lyric tells of a maiden who lies in a marsh surrounded by lily-flowers ("*te lilie flour*"); Goldberry is similarly associated with water-lilies (Bowers 27). In addition to *The Maid of the Moor*, Bowers also associates Goldberry with Grendel's mother, Germanic water-sprites, and British "mermaids who lurked underwater to seize their victims" (29). Noel argues, "She had the allure of the Undine, the Lorelei, and the Siren to lead folk into the depths" (129). Indeed, these descriptions seem to apply to Tolkien's other beautiful and (ambiguously) dangerous mermaids in the poems *Glip* (c.1920s) and *Ofer Wídne Gársecg* (1936), as well as the children's novella *Roverandom* (see **Chapter 4**).<sup>125</sup>

Tolkien also used the hair-combing motif in *The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun*, written in 1930, a year prior to the writing of the original Bombadil poem. After the Corrigan, in the form of a white doe, lures a Breton lord into the forest, she apparently transforms into a woman seated at the entrance to her abode, next to a natural fountain, running her long hair through a golden comb, "like the fountain falling in the dell" (*Aotrou* 13). Flieger notes that the fairy-woman is depicted as she most often is in fairy-lore, "near water, seductively combing out her long hair" (*Aotrou* 54). Leslie Ellen Jones argues that the Celtic motif of "a woman standing by a river, combing her hair ... occurs so often in Irish myth that it is almost a set-piece" (52).

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<sup>125</sup> Carpenter writes that *Glip* was created in 1922 (*Biography* 113), while Scull and Hammond place the time of composition in c.1928 (C&G II.454; C&G III.1281); *Glip* was first published in *The Annotated Hobbit* (p. 119 fn6) and reprinted in *Poems* (II.721-722).

According to Rosalind Clark, the Morrígan is an example of an Irish goddess found near water, sometimes combing out her hair. In *Cath Maige Tuired* ('The [Second] battle of Mag Tuired'), an eleventh or twelfth-century text from ninth-century material, the Dagda, chief god of the Túatha Dé Danann, "meets the Morrígan on the bank of the river Unius. She stands straddling the river, with nine loosened tresses on her head. The two sleep together there" (R. Clark 229). However, Goldberry lacks most negative associations of the traditional water-hag, nixie or the Morrígan, although she does (playfully?) pull Tom into the water.

Another Irish figure associated with water and hair-combing (but lacking malignant intentions) is Étaín, the heroine of *Tochmarc Étaíne* ('The Wooing of Étaín'), a Middle Irish prose tale composed in the eleventh century which was a reworking of a ninth-century work. It is considered one of the most important works of early Irish literature, and at least part of it serves as a *remscél* ("fore-tale") for *Togail bruidne Da Derga* ('The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel') (Parsons, "*Tochmarc Étaíne*"). In *Tochmarc Étaíne*, the beautiful Étaín, a member of the immortal Túatha Dé Danann, is the lover or wife of the powerful Midir of Brí Léith until Midir's jealous first wife turns her into a pool of water out of which she emerges as a fly. After being buffeted around for 1,012 years, the fly is accidentally swallowed by the mortal wife of Étar, a warrior of the Ulaid in the time of Conchobar mac Nessa. Étar's wife becomes pregnant and thus is Étaín reborn as a mortal woman. A principal scene occurs when Eochaid Airem, the high-king of Ireland, sees Étaín bathing by a spring or a well, combing her long, blonde hair (see **Figure 6.3.1** "...combed her tresses yellow"). He falls in love with and marries her, but Midir tracks her down and steals her away again. Jones (52-53) and Taylor (149-151) separately note several similarities between descriptions of Goldberry and the golden-haired Étaín, including their respective hair-combing scenes.



**Figure 6.3.1** Kris Swank, "...combed her tresses yellow." AI image using Microsoft Bing Creator, 18 May 2024. CC-BY-4.0

Furthermore, Tolkien underlined the name "Étaín" three times in his copy of Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville's *\*Introduction à l'Étude de la Littérature Celtique* (1883) [hereafter, *Litt. Celtique*]. In the section recapitulating portions of *Tochmarc Étaíne*, Tolkien underlined in blue pencil or crayon "*la légende d'Etain*" (137) and "*Etain*" (137, which is followed immediately with the phrase "*est une déesse ou une fée*"). Later, he underlined "*Amours d'Etain*" (157). The front flyleaf of Tolkien's copy of *Litt. Celtique* is signed and dated, "JRR Tolkien :: 1923," which was during his tenure as Reader (later, Professor) in English Language at the University of Leeds, and before he wrote the original Bombadil poem. Tolkien's copy of *Litt. Celtique* is one of the most-heavily marked-up volumes among his Irish texts. It includes hundreds of underlines, X's, vertical lines, and small symbols in pencil, blue pencil, blue crayon, red crayon, and pen ink, sometimes on the same page, suggesting multiple periods of engagement with the text. Presuming all these markings were made by Tolkien himself, they reveal numerous clues to his specific interests in Irish literature including (but not limited to) the introductory essay on "*Celtes et Langues Celtique*" (pages 1-39), *Cath Maige Tuired*, the Túatha Dé Danann, and the Irish figure of Nuadu (the subject of Tolkien's 1932 report, *The Name 'Nodens'*). There is also heavy underlining and annotating in sections on the history of the legendary Irish royal seat of Tara, on discussions of druids (e.g., druidic medicine, divination,

incantations, and the druid Cathbad), and on the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology. Moreover, Arbois de Jubainville's writings on Celtic beliefs regarding immortality and reincarnation were fundamental to the development of Tolkien's own ideas on those topics (see **Chapter 7**). However, Arbois de Jubainville's brief summary of the Étaín narrative does not include the hair-combing scene. If Tolkien modelled Goldberry on Étaín, he must have had at least one other source.

A few editions, translations and retellings of *Tochmarc Étaíne* were available in 1931, when Tolkien wrote *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, but only Windisch's *\*Irische Texte* is part of his "Irish Library" at the Bodleian (I.113-133). Windisch's edition is in Irish without translation, and although it includes a summary in German (which Tolkien would have been able to read without difficulty), the part of the story that Windisch focuses upon is the wasting sickness of Eochaid's brother, Ailill, for love of Étaín, and *not* the hair-combing scene between Eochaid and Étaín. The hair-combing scene is included in other translations and popular retellings available at the time when Tolkien created Goldberry, including A.H. Leahy's *Heroic Romances of Ireland* (1905), Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904), and T.W. Rolleston's *Celtic Myths and Legends* (1911). The scene is also included in the Old Irish saga *Togail bruidne Da Derga* ('The Destruction of Da Derga's hostel') of which the major version available in 1931 was Whitley Stokes's 1901 edition with English translation. It is unknown if Tolkien ever owned or read any of these, but the number of significant parallels between the descriptions of the Irish Étaín and Tolkien's Goldberry makes it a distinct possibility. For example, Stokes's version of the hair-combing scene follows:

There was a famous and noble king over Erin, named Eochaid Feidlech.<sup>126</sup> Once upon a time he came over the fairgreen of Bri Léith, and he saw at the edge of a well a woman with a bright comb of silver adorned with gold, washing in a silver basin ... A kirtle she wore, long,

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<sup>126</sup> Eochaid Feidlech is a possible confusion for, or conflation with, his brother, Eochaid Airem, who ruled after him.

hooded, hard-smooth, of green silk, with red embroidery of gold. Marvellous clasps of gold and silver in the kirtle on her breasts and her shoulders and spaulds on every side. The sun kept shining upon her, so that the glistening of the gold against the sun from the green silk was manifest to men. On her head were two golden-yellow tresses, in each of which was a plait of four locks, with a bead at the point of each lock. The hue of that hair seemed to them like the flower of the iris in summer, or like red gold after the burnishing thereof. (Stokes, *Togail* 6)

On the next page, Stokes says, “Blue as a hyacinth were the eyes” (*Togail* 7). Leahy and Rolleston similarly describe Étaín’s eyes, “as blue as a hyacinth” (Leahy 13; Rolleston 158). Lady Gregory, however, describes them, “as blue as any blue flower” (73). The significance of this difference will be discussed shortly, but for the most part, the various versions describe Étaín in similar ways: she is discovered bathing at a water source (i.e., a well, a spring, a bay), combing out her yellow hair; she wears a green silk dress embellished with gold or silver which glisten in the sun; she has blue eyes.

Summarising and enlarging upon observations by Jones (52-53) and Taylor (149-151), there are a number of key characteristics shared between Étaín and Goldberry. Étaín is discovered by the edge of a well or a spring combing her golden-yellow hair. Goldberry is found in the waters of a meadow in the 1934 poem (ATB 123-124). When the hobbits enter the house of Tom Bombadil in *The Lord of the Rings*, Goldberry seems “to be enthroned in the midst of a pool,” as she is surrounded by vessels filled with water (FR I.vii.134). In the poem, Goldberry “combed her tresses yellow” (ATB 130). And, although in *The Lord of the Rings* Goldberry is not described as combing her hair, soon after she meets the hobbits, Tom suggests that *they* comb *theirs*, preserving the association between Goldberry and the act of hair-combing. Tom sings, “Come now, my merry friends, and Tom will refresh you! You shall clean grimy hands, and wash your weary faces; cast off your muddy cloaks and *comb out your tangles!*” (FR I.vii.136, italics added). Goldberry’s gown, like Étaín’s, is green embellished with silver and gold (ATB 129; FR I.vii.134). Both women are associated with light, the sun and moon. Lady

Gregory writes, for example, that the sunlight falls on Étaín, and “[t]he bright light of the moon was in her face” (73). In the poem, lamps gleam in Tom and Goldberry’s house, “in the bright honey-moon” of their wedding night (ATB 130). In *The Lord of the Rings*, Goldberry appears “framed in light” as the light from a candle shines through her hand “like sunlight through a white shell” (FR I.vii.142). Of course, both women are repeatedly described in terms of water. Etain’s body is described as “white as the foam of a wave,” with Gregory, Leahy and Rolleston adding that she is also “white as the snow” (Stokes 7; Gregory 73; Leahy 13; and Rolleston 158). Upon her introduction in *The Lord of the Rings* and within a single page of text, Goldberry is related to rippling water, young reeds, the dew, floating water-lilies, and a pool (FR I.vii.134).

Taylor writes, “Although the comparisons in the description of Goldberry and Etain are quite fruitful, comparing their love stories is even more rewarding” (150). Both women are enticed by suitors and taken to live with them underground. When Étaín’s first husband, Midir, finds her again, Gregory writes that he attempts to seduce her with gold to wear, fresh pork to eat and new milk to drink; Stokes does not mention this scene, but Leahy and Rolleston add mead to the list of inducements (Gregory 77; Leahy 27; Rolleston 161). In the poem, Tom Bombadil similarly promises Goldberry a feast: in this case, a table laden with “yellow cream, honeycomb, white bread and butter” (ATB 129).<sup>127</sup> Midir eventually takes Étaín from Eochaid’s palace to his fairy-mound or *síd*. Meanwhile, Tom Bombadil “caught her [Goldberry], held her fast” and took her to his house, “under Hill” (ATB 129). Tom’s house also lies in proximity to the Barrow-downs, where there are ancient burial mounds comparable to the Irish mounds of Newgrange.

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<sup>127</sup> In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil likewise invites the hobbits to his home promising, “[t]he table is all laden with yellow cream, honeycomb, and white bread and butter. Goldberry is waiting” (FR I.vi.131-132).



Of the several versions of the Étaín legend available to Tolkien in or before 1931, we may be able to make an educated guess as to which one(s) he may have read. Leahy and Rolleston (who depends on Leahy's account) describe Étaín's hair as "golden" (Leahy 12; Rolleston 157), but Lady Gregory crucially describes Étaín's hair, "like yellow flags in summer" (73). Stokes uses the similar image, "like the flower of the iris in summer" (*Togail* 6). Stokes and Lady Gregory are referring to the *iris pseudacorus*, also called the yellow flag, yellow iris, water flag, or flag-lily. Tolkien knew this flower well. In the draft of a letter on Middle-earth names he wrote, "*Gladden River, and the Gladden Fields*, which contains A.S. *glcedene* 'iris', in my book supposed to refer to the 'yellow flag' growing in streams and marshes: sc. *iris pseudacorus*" (*Letters* #297, p.538). At her wedding in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, Goldberry is crowned with "forgetmenots and flag-lilies for garland" (*ATB* 129). In *The Lord of the Rings*, she wears a belt "of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots" (*FR* I.vii.134). The specificity of the flag-lilies suggests that Tolkien had read either Stokes or Lady Gregory (or both). But additionally, Goldberry wears the "pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots," recalling Étaín's blue eyes. Leahy, Rolleston and Stokes all compare Étaín's eyes to the hyacinth; only Lady Gregory describes them generically, "as blue as any blue flower" (*FR* I.vii.134; Gregory 73).<sup>128</sup> If Tolkien's source was Leahy, Rolleston, or even Stokes, he might have described Goldberry in terms of blue hyacinths. But Lady Gregory does not specify any particular blue flower. If she was Tolkien's source, it was left up to him to decide that the blue flowers in Goldberry's wedding crown and on her belt were forget-me-nots. Together, the yellow flag-lilies and the blue forget-me-nots suggest that Lady Gregory's retelling of *Tochmarc Étaíne* in *Gods and Fighting Men* may have been one of Tolkien's sources, along with the

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<sup>128</sup> Interestingly, the vagueness of the flower-species may originate in the original Irish term used— *buga* —which the dictionary translates generically as "name of some bright-coloured flower, hyacinth (?), bluebell (?)" and "a kind of very green herb called blue-bell or bluebottle, a cyanus or hyacinth" (*eDIL* s.v. 1 *buga* or *dil.ie/7330*).

simple *précis* that we know he read in Arbois de Jubainville's *Litt. Celtique*.<sup>129</sup> This is not the first time in this thesis I have suggested *Gods and Fighting Men* as a possible source for Tolkien (see **Chapter 3**, for example, or above).

## 6.4 Conclusions

According to Fisher's criteria, the legend of Étaín, in general, should be considered a *probable* influence on Tolkien since he is known to have read about the character and to have repeatedly underlined her name in his copy of *Litt. Celtique*, however, we lack a *direct* acknowledgement by Tolkien of a link between Étaín and Goldberry (or, as will be discussed in **Chapter 7**, between Étaín and Lúthien Tinúviel). Using Beidler's terminology, we can identify *Tochmarc Étaíne*, and Lady Gregory's retelling in *Gods and Fighting Men*, as *hard analogues*, that is, works old enough that Tolkien could have known them and which bear striking resemblances to a Tolkienian work, in this instance, physical descriptions of Goldberry and her narrative in Tolkien's poems and *The Lord of the Rings*. None of this is to say that *Tochmarc Étaíne* or its afterlives were the *only* source(s) for or influence(s) on Goldberry; as this thesis shows, there are other possibilities with strong claims.<sup>130</sup> Yet, the uncommon use of yellow flag-lilies (*iris pseudacorus*) and blue flowers/forget-me-nots by both Lady Gregory and Tolkien, raises Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* to what Shippey might call an *inferred* source.

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<sup>129</sup> On Lady Gregory's acknowledged sources for the "Midhir and Etain" chapter of *Gods and Fighting Men* (317), more investigation is needed; although several of the titles she lists are also mentioned in this thesis (e.g., O'Curry's *Manners and Customs*, Nutt's essay in Meyer's *Voyage of Bran*, and Arbois de Jubainville's *Epopée Celtique*), among others, no source for her generic blue flowers was apparent.

<sup>130</sup> Among these, as Derek Simon notes for example, "we find in Goldberry echoes from a wide array of stylistic vocabularies such as the Breton / Finnish faërie writings; Anglo-Saxon forms of kenning, riddle and apposition; and the Norse / Germanic prosimetrical literary tradition. In addition, we encounter echoes of symbolic elements in the Hellenic nymph-naiads, graces and seasons; and the Germanic river-nixies, among others" (53).

It also seems probable that Tolkien was thinking of Fintan mac Bóchra when he expanded the role of Tom Bombadil from an English nature spirit in the early poetry and prose fragments into to the “Eldest” being in Middle-earth in *The Lord of the Rings*. The timing is very suggestive. Tolkien’s *Lost Road* outline mentioning Fintan, the oldest man in the world, was written in 1936. He sent *The Lost Road*, as far as it was written, to his publishers in the fall of 1937 and inquired in November of that year whether they thought Bombadil would make a good hero for his next story. In 1938, Tolkien began writing his “new *Hobbit*” sequel with Bombadil in a key supportive role (*Shadow* 42). Additionally, there are many similarities between Tom and Fintan: they are both the Eldest in their lands, survivors of Deluge, Otherworld beings, witnesses to many invasions, and the memory keepers for their societies, specifically, for the West of their worlds. Finally, both Fintan and Tom have rivals for the title of “Eldest” in their worlds. Yet, these are not so much rivals as fellow beings who serve similar functions in different geographical regions.

Like Goldberry, Tom Bombadil was likely born from a variety of sources, including in his case, among others, a doll belonging to the Tolkien children and the Finnish *Kalevala*. Yet, just as Tolkien modelled his Elves in part on the Túatha Dé Danann from *Lebor gabála Érenn* (see **Chapter 1**), there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Bombadil was also modelled— whether consciously or unconsciously—at least in part from another character in that same work: Fintan mac Bóchra, a character who, like Tom, was Eldest, fated to witness history and to remember it.

In the figures of both Tom Bombadil and Goldberry, Tolkien also shows his familiarity with a broad variety of Irish material, *Lebor gabála Érenn*, *Cethri arda in domain*, *Compert Con Culainn*, *Scél Tuáin meic Cairill*, and other narratives, either in English translation or from the imaginative retellings or summaries of such authors as Standish Hayes O’Grady, Lady Gregory, and Magnus Maclean. He was certainly interested in *Tochmarc Étaíne*, a story which serves as a foretale for the tragedy of *Togail bruidne Da Derga*, an important Irish narrative featuring a hostel and hostellers (*bríugaid*) like those we find somewhat reflected in Tolkien’s Tom Bombadil, Goldberry, and others. We return to *Tochmarc Étaíne* in **Chapter 7** as the

discussion moves from Étaín's physical characteristics to her metaphysical ones: her changing nature from immortal to mortal, her rebirth and its implications for her multiple marriages.

## Chapter 7 “Many matters concerning the Eldar, their fate in Arda, their death and re-birth and the nature of their marriage”<sup>131</sup> (1950s-1970s)

Tolkien set out basic parameters concerning Elvish immortality and reincarnation early in the development of his legendarium. Previously in **Chapter 3**, I analysed Tolkien’s early conceptions of Elvish immortality and its analogues in both the late Middle Irish *Acallam na senórach* and the eighteenth-century *Laoi Oisín ar Thír na n-Óg*. This chapter examines Tolkien’s further reflections on Elvish immortality, death, rebirth and marriage, as well as applicable Irish antecedents. **Section 7.1 Immortality** revisits the Irish figure of Étaín whose physical characteristics, in **Chapter 6**, were linked to Tolkien’s Goldberry. This time, Étaín is examined as an analogue for the metaphysical characteristics of Tolkien’s Lúthien Tinúviel, especially concerning the change in her nature from immortal to mortal. The section also considers Lúthien’s descendant, Arwen Evenstar and the Irish figure, Eithne, both of whom also lost their immortality. **Section 7.2 Rebirth** discusses late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conceptions of Túatha Dé Danann reincarnation as recorded by Henri d’Arbois de Jubainville and Alfred Nutt. I compare these conceptions to Tolkien’s own evolving ideas concerning Elvish reincarnation. **Section 7.3 Marriage** brings these ideas together as they apply to Elvish marriage, re-marriage, and Elvish inter-marriage with human beings. First, I compare and contrast Eugene O’Curry’s *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (1873) with Tolkien’s *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* (circa late 1950s). Then, the chapter culminates with a discussion of these topics and Tolkien’s *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*, a debate between an Elven king and a mortal woman on the disparate natures of Elves and Men (i.e., human beings). The chapter concludes with **Section 7.4 Conclusions**.

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<sup>131</sup> *Morgoth* 254.

## 7.1 Immortality

### 7.1.1 Étaín and Lúthien Tinúviel

As discussed in **Chapter 6**, Tolkien demonstrated an interest in the legend, loves, and immortality of Étaín, the heroine of the early Irish *Tochmarc Étaíne*. There are several points of comparison between Étaín and Tolkien's Goldberry, including their association with water and the combing of their yellow hair. Additionally, as an immortal who becomes mortal, Étaín is analogous to two other Tolkien characters: Lúthien Tinúviel and Arwen Evenstar.

Tolkien certainly knew of the Irish figure of Étaín, as previously mentioned, he underlined her name three times in his copy of Arbois de Jubainville's *\*Litt. Celtique* (i.e., “*la légende d’Etain*” and “*Etain*” 137; “*Amours d’Etain*,” 157). Unfortunately, the inscription date on Tolkien's copy of *Litt. Celtique*— “1923”—is problematic in any comparison of Étaín with Lúthien Tinúviel, for the *Tale of Tinúviel* dates back to 1917 and the “Lost Tales” period of the legendarium. Furthermore, Arbois de Jubainville's summary is brief and lacks some relevant details. If any argument about Étaín as a source for Tinúviel is to stand, then *Litt. Celtique* cannot be Tolkien's only source of the Étaín legend. This chapter uses a variety of English language sources where necessary to supplement *Litt. Celtique* (e.g., Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men*, 1904; A.H. Leahy's *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, 1905; and T.W. Rolleston's *The High Deeds of Finn and other Bardic Romances*, 1910). Nevertheless, Arbois de Jubainville's description of Étaín in *Litt. Celtique* is still germane, as the passage below illustrates:

*Etain est une déesse ou une fée qui, après être née et avoir vécu mille douze ans dans le monde des dieux, a une seconde naissance en Irlande; elle est mise au monde par la femme d'un des grands vassaux du roi d'Ulster Conchobar. Dans cette forme nouvelle elle atteint l'âge de vingt ans et devient la femme d'Echaid Erémon, roi suprême d'Irlande. Alors le dieu Mider, qui jadis l'aima dans le monde des dieux, sollicite de nouveau son amour en secret. Repoussé d'abord par la fierté de la reine, il gagne sur le roi une partie d'échecs dont Etain est l'enjeu; il enlève Etain et*

*disparaît avec elle sous les yeux du roi et des grands seigneurs de sa cour assemblés et tout aussi surpris qu'impuissants ... Le dieu Mider l'a transportée dans la caverne enchantée de Bregleith. (Litt. Celtique 137-138)<sup>132</sup>*



**Figure 7.1.1** Stephen Reid, “They rose up in the air” in *The High Deeds of Finn* by T.W. Rolleston, 1910, after p. 100. © Public Domain image.

When Midir disappears with Étaín— a scene depicted in Stephen Reid’s illustration “They rose up in the air” (see **Figure 7.1.1**), the Irish king, Eochaid, pursues them to the *síd* of Brí Léith and demands Midir return Étaín to him (*Litt. Celtique* 139). The

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<sup>132</sup> “Étaín is a goddess or fairy who, after being born and living one thousand and twelve years in the world of the gods, has a second birth in Ireland; she is brought into the world by the wife of Étar, one of the great vassals of the king of Ulster, Conchobar. In this new form she reaches the age of twenty, and becomes the wife of Eochaid Airem, high-king of Ireland. Then the god Midir, who once loved her in the world of the gods, again solicits her love in secret. Rebuffed at first by the queen's pride, he defeats the king over a board game in which Étaín is the stake; he abducts Étaín and disappears with her before the eyes of the king and the assembled great lords of his court, just as surprised as they are powerless ... The god Midir carried her to the enchanted cavern of Brí Léith.” (this author’s translation)

metrical *Dinnshenchas*, collections of placename lore, describe how Eochaid eventually won her back and destroyed Brí Léith (Stokes, “Prose Tales” 291, 464).

*The Tale of Tinúviel* (written in 1917) is one of the constituent stories from Tolkien’s *Book of Lost Tales*. Here, Tinúviel (later called, Lúthien Tinúviel) was the daughter of Tinwelint (later, Thingol) and Gwendeling, a “fay” (later, the Maia Melian), the king and queen of the Lost Elves. Tinúviel was raised in her father’s underground halls, “in a deep cavern of great size, and they were nonetheless a kingly and a fair abode” (*Beren and Lúthien* 39). Tinúviel falls in love with Beren, a Gnome (i.e., an Elf of a different lineage) and so her father does not deem him a worthy suitor. Tinwelint sets Beren the impossible task of retrieving one of the primordial jewels, the *silmarils*, from the crown of the Dark Lord Melko (later, Morgoth). He imprisons Tinúviel in a treehouse, but she escapes and joins Beren on the quest. Together, they trick their way into Melko’s stronghold and steal one of the *silmarils*, although Beren is mortally wounded in the process. As described in **Chapter 3**, Beren dies of his wounds. In alternating versions, “Tinúviel’s tender kisses called him not back,” or “the magic of Tinúviel’s tender kisses healed Beren, and recalled his spirit from the gates of Mandos,” or most famously, she follows him to the underworld halls of Mandos and pleads for Beren’s release and return to the mortal world (*Beren And Lúthien* 86-87). But, the price for Beren’s return is that Tinúviel “will become mortal even as Men” (*Beren And Lúthien* 87).

The story went through many changes over the years (including changes to the names of several main characters) and Beren was reconceived to be a mortal man, making his death even more tragic, for Elves and Men have different fates: “For the Elves die not till the world dies, unless they are slain or waste in grief ... and dying they are gathered to the halls of Mandos in Valinor, whence they may in time return. But the sons of Men die indeed, and leave the world” (*Silmarillion* 42). In the published *Silmarillion*, it is written that in her grief at Beren’s death, “the spirit of Lúthien (i.e., Tinúviel) fell down into darkness, and at the last it fled, and her body lay like a flower that is suddenly cut off and lies for a while unwithered on the grass” (*Silmarillion* 186). Coming to the halls of Mandos, this time she sings for the



lord of death, and “[t]he song of Lúthien before Mandos was the song most fair that ever in words was woven, and the song most sorrowful that ever the world shall hear” (*Silmarillion* 186-187). Mandos is moved to uncharacteristic pity and gives Lúthien two choices:

[S]he should be released from Mandos, and go to [Valinor], there to dwell until the world’s end among the Valar, forgetting all griefs that her life had known. Thither Beren could not come. For it was not permitted to the Valar to withhold Death from him, which is the gift of Ilúvatar [the Creator] to Men. But the other choice was this: that she might return to Middle-earth, and take with her Beren, there to dwell again, but without certitude of life or joy. Then she would become mortal, and subject to a second death, even as he; and ere long she would leave the world for ever, and her beauty become only a memory in song. (*Silmarillion* 187)

Lúthien chooses Beren and a mortal life.

Étaín and Lúthien Tinúviel share several traits. They are both daughters of fairy/elvish kings. Étaín is the daughter of the Túatha Dé Danann king Ailill mac Máta, while Lúthien is the daughter of the elf-king Tinwelint/Thingol. Both kings are married to queens of superior rank and power to their husbands: the Irish Medb and the Maia Melian, respectively. And both of these queens (i.e., Medb and Melian) have been associated with sovereignty goddesses.<sup>133</sup> Étaín and Lúthien are born as immortals and are considered the supreme beauties of their people. Of Étaín it is said, “Never a maid fairer than she, or more worthy of love, was till then seen by the eyes of men (Leahy 13). Lúthien was considered, “the most beautiful of all the Children of Ilúvatar (i.e., Elves and Men)” (*Silmarillion* 165). Both women are part of love triangles: Midir-Étaín-Eochaid and Daeron-Lúthien-Beren, although Daeron is only a minor character whose sole function in the *Silmarillion* is to betray Lúthien’s secret love for Beren to her father, Thingol. Étaín and Lúthien are each

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<sup>133</sup> See Barnfield, “Celtic Influences” and Filonenko.

“taken” by fairy/elvish kings who rule over subterranean realms. Midir abducts Étaín from Eochaid’s palace and takes her to his “enchanted cavern of Brí Léith” before Eochaid wins her back (*Litt. Celtique* 138, author’s translation). Thingol’s kingdom is also a subterranean realm, later called “Menegroth” the Thousand Caves, but Thingol imprisons his daughter Lúthien in the great tree, Hirilorn, to keep her away from Beren. She escapes and helps Beren retrieve a *silmaril* from Morgoth’s crown. In their respective stories, both Étaín and Lúthien experience second births as mortals and marry mortal men, but *as* mortals, they are both separated forever from their immortal kin. Étaín’s destiny is called, “a singular fate” among her people (Rolleston 156). Lúthien, “alone of the Eldalië [i.e., Elves] ... died indeed, and left the world long ago” (*Silmarillion* 187).

There are, however, also key differences. First, the circumstances of their rebirths vary. As a mortal baby, Étaín must endure childhood and adolescence again, and she does not retain memories of her previous, immortal life, including her relationship with Midir in what Arbois de Jubainville calls, “*le monde des dieux*” (i.e., the world of the gods). Lúthien, on the other hand, is “reborn” as an adult who retains her memories of Beren, and she chooses a mortal life expressly for the purpose of extending her time with him. Most importantly, perhaps, both women have different levels of personal autonomy. Étaín appears to have little agency, going wherever the winds buffet her, literally at times. There is no indication that she returns the love of either Midir or Eochaid. On the other hand, Lúthien insists on forging her own fate. Passionately in love with Beren, Lúthien pleads with Mandos to reunite them, and it is Lúthien who chooses to become mortal.

One additional similarity between Étaín and Lúthien, though, is that they have female descendants with whom they are closely identified: Étaín with her granddaughter, Étaín the younger, who is raised in the elf-mounds of Ireland, and Lúthien with her great-great granddaughter, Arwen Evenstar, who is raised in the Elven house of Rivendell and in her Grandmother Galadriel’s kingdom of Lothlórien, which has at its heart the mound of Amroth. Eventually, they each marry a mortal high king and engender legendary royal lines. From Étaín and Eochaid comes the

line of Conaire Mór, a legendary high-king of Ireland, “whom elves raised to the sovereignty” and whose descendants include the leaders of several kingdoms in Ireland and Scotland (Gwynn 140, 141). From Arwen and Aragorn comes the line of Eldarion which, Tolkien writes, “should endure for a hundred generations of Men after him ... and from him should come the kings of many realms in long days after” (*Peoples* 245).

Despite some differences of detail, the Lúthien story bears several close similarities of situation and plot with Étaín's. However, if Étaín was indeed an inspiration for Lúthien Tinúviel, it is clear that Tolkien's personal copy of *Litt. Celtique*— acquired several years after the initial versions of the Beren and Lúthien tale were written — could not have been Tolkien's sole source of the *Tochmarc Étaíne* narrative. There are other possibilities. Versions of the narrative available to Tolkien in 1917 or earlier include those in O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* (II.490-491) (see **Chapter 2**), and Windisch's *\*Irische Texte* [i.e., *IT*] (*IT* I.113-133), which Tolkien owned, and upon which Arbois de Jubainville based *his* summary (Arbois 138 n1 & 139 n1). However, these sources are both in Irish without English translation. Windisch summarises part of the story in German, which Tolkien would have been able to read, but this is primarily the section of *Tochmarc Étaíne* which relates to “Ailill's Sick-Bed” (an episode where Eochaid's brother falls mortally ill for love of Étaín) but not to the love triangle between Midir, Étaín, and Eochaid which interests us here. Of course, there were the very popular English-language collections of Irish stories by Lady Gregory, Leahy, Rolleston and others, although there is no direct evidence that Tolkien owned or read any of these. Thus, while we lack a specific text that we can currently identify as a *hard source* of the Étaín material for the Beren and Luthien story, there is enough similarity between the two narratives to label *Tochmarc Étaíne* as a *hard analogue*, that is, a *narrative* extant in several versions, at least some of which are old enough for Tolkien to have known when he wrote *The Tale of Tinúviel*, and which bears striking resemblances to a Tolkienian work.

But how can the identification of Étaín as a *hard analogue* help us to understand and appreciate Lúthien Tinúviel? In this case, while their similarities are important,

their differences are also key: Étaín lacks agency where Lúthien demands it; Étaín is buffeted by the winds of fate where Lúthien determines her own fate; Étaín's is an accidental mortality where Lúthien's is made with deliberate decision and for love. Because of this, when Tolkien developed his own immortal princess, he did not simply recreate the traditional passive Étaín. Tolkien allowed his fairy princess, locked in a tower, to (literally) break free. He granted Lúthien the agency that Étaín never had, and thus the sacrifice of Lúthien's immortality is all the more poignant, for it was given up by choice and not chance.

### 7.1.2 Eithne

Another tale of a fundamental change of nature applicable to the choices of Lúthien Tinúviel (and her descendant Arwen) is explored in the fourteenth-century *Altram tige dá medar* ('The Fosterage of the house of two milk-vessels'), a late Middle Irish narrative included in the fifteenth-century Book of Fermoy and set in the same imaginative milieu as *Acallam na senórach*. As in the *Acallam*, this tale features the never-ending "Feast of Goibniu and Manannan's Swine" (Dobs 193). Lady Gregory calls it "the ale of Goibniu the Smith" that keeps those who consume it from age, illness and death (see **Chapter 3**; and *Gods and Fighting Men* 62). Aengus Og, son of the Dagda, took his steward's daughter, Eithne, as his own foster-daughter and raised her in his home of Brug na Bóinne. All of the maidens of Aengus's house were beautiful, but of Eithne it was said, "[t]here was no one who saw her who did not fall in love with her" (Dobs 205). However, when Finnbarr of Meadha came to Brug na Bóinne because of the reputation of its maidens, he saw Eithne and called her the daughter of the "worthless steward" and gave her the nickname of "dirty mess" (Dobs 205).<sup>134</sup> Eithne was so embarrassed by the insult, "that she parted from her magic and an angelic spirit came in her heart's place"

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<sup>134</sup> Lillian Duncan translates Finnbarr's insult as "heel sitting" (213). Mark Williams notes, "the precise import of Finnbarr's remark is now unclear, but in the context it seems plain that it was a joke of astonishing crudity, made worse by the way he turns it—typical manoeuvre of the bully—into a nickname" (*Ireland's Immortals* 239).

(Dobs 215).<sup>135</sup> Eithne ceased to be Túatha Dé Danann and became human after which she could no longer eat the food of the *síd*, the Feast of Goibniu which prolongs youth, health and life. One day, after bathing in a river with her foster-sisters, Eithne could no longer see her companions nor find the *síd* of Brug na Bóinne again. Instead, she discovered a Christian church where she met Saint Patrick. He fed her food prepared by his own hands and taught her the Christian doctrine. Aengus, along with Eithne's foster-sisters, came in search of her and asked Patrick to let her come away with them. Patrick replied, "The maid is not thy ward ... but the ward of the God of creation though she was lent by her father to thee" (Dobs 223). Patrick invited Aengus to come and worship the Christian god as well, but Aengus declined and reluctantly departed from Eithne forever. Aengus sang, "Let us return in sorrow ... Eithne is no more my child ... oh host of the Land of Promise" (Dobs 223, 225). In his lament, Aengus called his people, a "host of the Land of Promise," that is, pointedly, not a host of Brug na Bóinne, suggesting their ultimate home was across the sea. This is the precise situation for Tolkien's Eldar: although they may live for millennia in Middle-earth, their ultimate home is across the sea in the Undying Lands of Valinor and Tol Eressëa.

Despite the similarities between Lúthien and Eithne, there is little chance that Tolkien knew *Altram tige dá medar* when he first penned *The Tale of Tinúviel* in the late 1910s. The earliest publication of material from the *Altram* was Kuno Meyer's "*Mitteilungen aus irischen Handschriften: Der Schluß von Altram Tige Dá Medar*" ('The Conclusion of *Altram tige dá medar*') (1921). The first editions and English translations were those by Dobs (1930) and Duncan (1932). This appears to be a case of a *soft analogue*, as Beidler calls it: a work that, because of its late date, Tolkien almost certainly did not know but which shares thematic and/or narrative parallels that may inform readings even if there is no direct link between two texts.

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<sup>135</sup> Duncan writes, "when Finnbarr gave the insult to that maiden, her accompanying demon went (from) her heart and an angel came in its stead, and that does not let our food into her body, and she will not revere magic or wizardry" (216).

Here, in the loss of immortality and the gaining of a mortal soul, readers may see analogues between Eithne, Lúthien and Arwen (see Gillespie 9). Aengus's despair is analogous to that of Tinwelint and Gwendeling in *The Book of Lost Tales* (i.e., Thingol and Melian in *The Silmarillion*) and to that of Elrond in *The Lord of the Rings*, as parents forced to confront eternal separation from beloved daughters. Elrond calls it "a bitter parting beyond the end of the world" (RK Appendix A.340). One can see in both the Irish and Tolkienian traditions deep anxiety about familial separation in the afterlife; there is no reunion between immortals and mortals beyond this life, in either the Irish context or in Tolkien's legendarium.

As in the Irish narratives, the separate natures of immortals and mortals are of keen interest in Tolkien's writings, especially when someone changes their fundamental nature. In Tolkien's *Book of Lost Tales*, the sailor Eriol eventually drinks *limpë*, becomes immortal and is compelled to remain on Tol Eressëa despite his desperate longing to return to the mortal realm of England. In another version, Tolkien's refigured character Ælfwine *does* return to mortal lands, but cannot abide there and soon returns to the Elvish land (see **Chapter 3**). The opposite occurs in the Irish *Altram tige dá medar* where Eithne develops an inability to consume Goibniu's ale (or feast), becomes mortal and is no longer able to abide in the immortal realm. Lúthien and Arwen, too, sacrifice their places in the immortal realm when they accept mortality for love. These are unique cases in Tolkien's legendarium, for most of the Eldar who may die of injury or grief, are given the change to be reborn.

## 7.2 Rebirth

Classical authors claimed that Celtic druids taught a doctrine of the transmigration of the soul. John Carey summarises some of the most prominent theories:

Caesar says cryptically that souls ‘pass after death from some to others’ (*ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios*), a statement which could be taken to refer to birth in a new body. This is surely what Diodorus Siculus has in mind when he attributes to the druids the belief that the soul ‘lives again after a certain number of years, the soul having entered another body.’ According to the poet Lucan, the druids denied that souls passed into a realm of the dead, claiming rather that ‘the spirit governs limbs [i.e. inhabits a body] in another region [*orbe alio*, which may also be translated as *otherworld*]; if you [the druids] know whereof you sing, death is the middle of a long life.’” (Carey, “Reincarnation and Shapeshifting” 1484)<sup>136</sup>

Beliefs about reincarnation were also of interest during the Celtic Revival as ancient texts were mined for clues about rebirth and metempsychosis by scholars and folklorists such as Arbois de Jubainville, Nutt, Hull, and W.Y. Evans-Wentz (1878-1965), among others. Arbois de Jubainville and Nutt are of special interest to Tolkien’s audience for their works were known to him, and their conclusions about Celtic “doctrines” of rebirth find echoes in Tolkien’s own philosophical explorations on the immortality, death and rebirth of the Elves.

### 7.2.1 “*La Doctrine Celtique de l’Immortalité de l’Âme*”

Arbois de Jubainville’s *Litt. Celtique* is one of the (if not *the*) most heavily marked-up books among Tolkien’s personal Celtic texts. It contains hundreds of hand-written annotations, symbols and underlines made with at least four different instruments (e.g., red crayon, blue pencil or crayon, black ink, and lead pencil). Sometimes there

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<sup>136</sup> *ab aliis post mortem transire ad alios* (i.e., “to migrate after death from one body to another”; this author’s translation)

are multiple instruments represented on the same page, suggesting multiple engagements with the text. From the heavy marking in “Book II: Druids” (pp. 83-203), Tolkien demonstrates a considerable interest in Celtic druids, medicine, immortality, and reincarnation. He marked the following in blue : “Dans l'ancienne Irlande, la croyance a l'immortalité de l'âme est aussi repandue qu'elle l'etait en Gaule, ou elle etait deveuee vulgaire (Litt. Celtique, 169; Tolkien's underlining).<sup>137</sup> He also marked the following passage in which Arbois de Jubainville compares Pythagorean and Celtic conceptions of rebirth:

*... quand nous étudierons la doctrine celtique de l'immortalité de l'âme, nous verrons qu'entre cette doctrine et celle de Pythagore il y a des différences assez grandes pour les faire considérer comme indépendantes l'une de l'autre. Ainsi l'âme du Celte mort trouve un corps nouveau dans un monde autre que celui-ci: suivant Pythagore, l'âme du mort trouve un corps nouveau dans le monde où nous vivons. Habiter un corps nouveau est l'espérance du Celte; cette espérance console et réjouit le guerrier qui succombe sur le champ de bataille: chez Pythagore, habiter un corps nouveau est une peine, une expiation; l'âme du juste y échappe, elle mènera dans les espaces aériens une vie purement spirituelle. (Litt. Celtique, 86; Tolkien's underlining)<sup>138</sup>*

Arbois de Jubainville notes two major differences. First, where Pythagoras believed the soul of the dead person found a new body in this world, the dead Celt found a

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<sup>137</sup> “In ancient Ireland, the belief in the immortality of the soul was as widespread as it was in Gaul, where it had become commonplace” (Tolkien's underlining, this author's translation).

<sup>138</sup> ... when we study the Celtic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, we will see that between this doctrine and that of Pythagoras there are great enough differences to consider them as independent from one another. Thus, the soul of the dead Celt finds a new body in a world other than this one: according to Pythagoras, the soul of the dead person finds a new body in the world where we live. To live in a new body is the hope of the Celt; this hope consoles and rejoices the warrior who succumbs on the battlefield: for Pythagoras, to inhabit a new body is a punishment, an expiation; for the soul of the just escapes [physical existence], it will lead a purely spiritual life in the air (Litt. Celtique, 86; Tolkien's underlining, this author's translation).



new body in a *different* world. Étaín is a prime example of this as she moves from her first life in “*le monde des dieux*”, to her second life in Ireland. In Tolkien’s legendarium, Lúthien Tinúviel provides a similar example, although in reverse: she is born into the mortal world of Middle-earth and restored to life in the halls of Mandos, located in the Undying Lands, before she returns with her restored husband Beren to Middle-earth. Arbois de Jubainville’s second major difference was that for the Celtic warrior, rebirth in a new physical body was a hope and a consolation for death on the battlefield. Arbois de Jubainville quotes the Roman Lucan in French, “*il serait lâche d’épargner une vie qui reviendra.*”<sup>139</sup> Tolkien, writing in ink in the margins of his book, translates this quote back again into Lucan’s Latin, “*ignavum rediturae parcere.*”<sup>140</sup> For Pythagoras, on the other hand, rebirth into a physical body was a disappointment, for it indicated that the soul was not yet ready to live a purely spiritual existence.

The dating inscription in Tolkien’s copy of *Litt. Celtique* of 1923 limits the possibilities for that specific copy of that specific text to have had a direct influence on the foundations of his legendarium in *The Book of Lost Tales* (c.1917-1919). Still, Tolkien could have read a different copy (for instance, as an Oxford undergraduate). But the marking up of his copy in 1923 or later on theories of reincarnation indicates his continued interest in these matters as he revised the Beren and Lúthien story over the years. In any case, Arbois de Jubainville was probably not Tolkien’s only source of information on Celtic reincarnation. Another strong possibility is Alfred Nutt.

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<sup>139</sup> “It would be cowardly to spare a life that will return [i.e., will be reborn]” (this author’s translation).

<sup>140</sup> The complete sentence runs, “This gives the warrior his eagerness to rush upon the steel, his courage to face death, and his conviction that it is cowardly to be careful of a life that will come back to him again” (grateful thanks to Carl Hostetter for the Latin translation).

### 7.2.2 “The Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth”

Alfred Trübner Nutt (1856-1910) was born into the publishing family of David Nutt. When Alfred took over control of the business, he promoted the publication of folklore and Celtic studies, working with significant scholars such as Whitley Stokes, Kuno Meyer, and Eleanor Hull. He was a founding member of the Folklore Society and wrote extensively on Celtic tradition as well as the Holy Grail.<sup>141</sup> In 1895, Nutt collaborated with Kuno Meyer on an influential two-volume edition of and commentary on *Immram Brain* (*The Voyage of Bran*), a work Tolkien was certainly familiar with. He mentions Bran in his poem, *The Nameless Land* (written May 1924). Other works suggest his deep familiarity with Meyer’s *Voyage of Bran*, and he likely discussed the text with his friend G.B. Smith at Oxford (see **Chapter 2**). While Meyer edited and annotated the *Bran* text, Nutt researched and wrote complementary material constituting part of the first and the entirety of the second volume. His extended essay on “The Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth” examines evidence for belief in metempsychosis— the transference of the human soul to another form—in Irish texts and folktales. His ground-breaking work established “the idea of transmigration of souls among the Celts as an academic argument for the first time” (Wood 7).

Nutt identified several “essential elements” he believed were common to Irish mythological texts which depicted rebirth. The first of these was that reincarnated figures had an “almost invariable association with the Túatha Dé Danann, that is, with the gods of ancient Ireland” (Nutt II.93):

Lug re-born as Cuchulinn, Étaín re-born as Étaín, are members of the god clan. Mongan, rebirth of Finn, by one account, is son of Manannan, another member of the god clan ... The Two Swineherds are trusted servants of two kings of the same clan. A feature common

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<sup>141</sup> See Wood’s biographical essay on Nutt.

to so many forms must be regarded as an essential element of the conception. (Nutt II.93)<sup>142</sup>

Hull similarly concludes, “There is no doubt that all the chief personages of [the Cú Chulainn] cycle were regarded as the direct descendants, or it would be more correct to say, as avatars or re-incarnations of the early gods,” and that the birth-stories of the principal personages, “are looked upon simply as divine beings reborn on the human plane of life” (“Old Irish Tabus” 64).

There were other “essential elements” according to Nutt: “the *persona incarnanda* has to actually enter the body of the [second] mother and is subject to her form and to his own sex. Personality may be assumed to continue” (II.71).<sup>143</sup> In *Tochmarc Étaíne*, Étar’s wife unknowingly drinks a cup of wine containing the spirit of Étaín (as a fly) and, nine-months later, she delivers a girl whom she names “Étaín.” In *Compert Con Culainn*, Deichtire, a close relative of the Ulster king Conchobar mac Nessa, unknowingly swallows the spirit of the divine Lug, a prominent member of the Túatha Dé Danann: “As she raised the vessel to her lips she felt a little beast come with it, and she drank it in” and conceived the Ulster hero, Cú Chulainn (Nutt II.42). The mortal mother does not necessarily need to be human: Rucht and Rune from “The Quarrel of the Two Swineherds,” one of the *remscela* of the *Táin bó Cúailnge*, take on a variety of shapes (i.e., birds, sea-beasts, champions and spectres). As worms, they are drunk down with some water by two different cows and are reborn as the two magnificent bulls at issue in the *Táin*. Yet, Nutt observes, while forms may change, the reborn retain their original gender: “Lug is re-born as a boy, Étaín as a girl” (II.55). Such rebirths also retain their original personalities. Lug retains his own “god personality” as Cú Chulainn (II.55-56). Étaín, although she has

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<sup>142</sup> Rucht and Rune are the two shapeshifting swineherds from “The Quarrel of the Two Swineherds.” Nutt observes, “It is apparently owing to their connection with this mysterious wizard folk [i.e., the Túatha Dé Danann] that the swineherds possess their superhuman attributes” (Nutt II.72).

<sup>143</sup> *persona incarnanda*, i.e., the person to be incarnated

no memory of her former life, retains the same passive personality. Nutt also noted some evidence from “the Mongán cycle” of Irish texts (i.e., concerning Mongán mac Fíachnai, the son of the Túatha Dé Danann figure Manannán mac Lir, and perhaps also a reincarnation of Finn mac Cumail). Nutt wrote,

Supernatural beings (e.g., Manannán), themselves deathless, have the power of begetting children with mortal women, of endowing their offspring with supernatural attributes and powers, in especial with that of shape-shifting. Heroes (e.g. Finn Mac Cumail) may, after a lapse of several centuries, be born again into the world, retaining the memory of their past existence. (Nutt II. 36-37)

Here, Nutt identified supernatural attributes, especially shape-shifting, retention of original memory, and rebirth after an extended period of time. He also discussed the long-lived Tuán mac Cairill and Fintan mac Bóchra who have been discussed in **Chapter 5**; Fintan is also a subject in **Section 7.3.2** below. Tolkien may have relied on Nutt’s ideas to codify his own thoughts on Elvish rebirth, at least he seems to have had some contact with Nutt’s essay, for his own rebirth criteria closely matches Nutt’s essential elements in almost all respects, as will be discussed in the next section.

### 7.2.3 The “Elvish Doctrine of Rebirth”

The nature of Elvish immortality, death, and rebirth goes back to the roots of Tolkien’s legendarium. In the original *Music of the Ainur* (c.1918-1920), he wrote that the Elves, “dying they are reborn in their children, so that their number minishes not, nor grows” (*Lost Tales I* 59). Elsewhere in *The Book of Lost Tales*, it is said that the Elves were immortal while Arda (i.e., the incarnate world) lasted. However, in rare cases a spirit would journey to the hall of Mandos which, in *The Book of Lost Tales*, was a great dark sable-hued subterranean cavern in the northern region of Valinor, “full of gloom, and filled with echoes” (*Lost Tales I*, 76):

Thither in after days fared the Elves of all the clans who were by illhap slain with weapons or did die of grief for those that were slain—

and only so might the Eldar die, and then it was only for a while. There Mandos spake their doom, and there they waited in the darkness, dreaming of their past deeds, until such time as he appointed when they might again be born into their children, and go forth to laugh and sing again. (*Lost Tales I* 76)

Men, on the other hand, only came to Mandos to hear their doom: either they were sent to work in the Hells of Iron, to wander the misty plains of Arvalin, or to feast in the halls of Valmar until the Great End (*Lost Tales I* 77). These afterlife destinations correspond to the Greek Tártaros, the Meadows of Asphodel, and Elysium, as well as the Norse Hel and Valhalla. Tolkien's ideas for the human afterlife eventually evolved away from Classical and Norse models to the more neutral idea that no one really knew what happened when Men died and left Arda, the world. In the *Ainulindalë* version D (written in 1951 or slightly before), Tolkien explains, "the children of Men dwell only a short space in the world alive, and are not bound to it, and depart soon whither the Elves know not" (*Silmarillion* 42).<sup>144</sup>

After the successful publication and reception of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), Tolkien turned once again to his *Silmarillion* materials, attempting to shape them into publishable form now that there was demand from his fans and publishers for more about Middle-earth. As he revisited his old tales, most of them having originated in the 1910s, Tolkien realised that his mind had changed about some of his earlier ideas. Christopher Tolkien noted, "Among the chief 'structural' conceptions of the mythology that [my father] pondered in those years were ... the immortality (and death) of the Elves [and] the mode of their reincarnation" (*Morgoth* viii). Tolkien wrote *The Story of Finwë and Míriel*, and *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* in conjunction with one another in order to elucidate issues of Elvish rebirth and marriage (*Morgoth* 300).<sup>145</sup> *Finwë and Míriel* was made in two successive

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<sup>144</sup> see *Morgoth* 265-267 for various iterations of this passage over time.

<sup>145</sup> The full title of the second work is, variably, *Of the Marriage Laws and Customs of the Eldar, their Children, and Other Matters Touching Thereon*; or, *Of the Laws and Customs Among the Eldar Pertaining to Marriage and Other Matters Related Thereto: Together with*

typescripts dated to c.1959 (*Morgoth* 205-207; 254-263). *Laws and Customs* is extant in two versions: a completed manuscript and a revision of this in a typescript, abandoned by Tolkien when he was somewhat less than halfway through (*Morgoth* 207). While *Laws and Customs* discusses the legal and moral issues of Elvish marriage and rebirth, *Finwë and Míriel* lays out the background story from which the legal decision arose. Set prior to the Rebellion of the Noldor in Valinor, the Noldorin king Finwë and his wife Míriel had a child:

Now it is told that in the bearing of her son Míriel was consumed in spirit and body; and that after his birth she yearned for rest from the labour of living. And she said to Finwë: 'Never again shall I bear a child; for strength that would have nourished the life of many has gone forth into Fëanáro [i.e., Fëanor].' Then Manwë granted the prayer of Míriel. And she went to Lorien, and laid her down to sleep upon a bed of flowers [> beneath a silver tree]; and there her fair body remained unwithered in the keeping of the maidens of Estë. But her spirit passed to rest in the halls of Mandos. (*Morgoth* 205-206)<sup>146</sup>

There, Míriel stayed, not wishing to be reborn. Finwë still loved her and their son Fëanor, but he wanted more children, and if Míriel would not be reborn, he wanted to be free to marry again. While the law of Ilúvatar commanded that Elves "shall take one spouse only and have no other in this life, while Arda endureth," the law failed to take into account the possibility of death and a subsequent refusal to be reborn (*Morgoth* 206). Finwë appealed to the Valar, and he was eventually allowed to marry Indis, sister of Ingwë, leader of the Vanyar Elves (one of three groups of Eldar who went to Valinor), and together Finwë and Indis had five children.

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*the Statute of Finwë and Míriel and the Debate of the Valar after its Making* (*Morgoth* 208-209), which is why I abbreviate it here to *Laws and Customs*.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Similarly, when Lúthien's spirit went to the halls of Mandos to plead for Beren, "the spirit of Lúthien fell down into darkness, and at the last it fled, and her body lay like a flower that is suddenly cut off and lies for a while *unwithered on the grass*" (*Silmarillion* 186, italics added).

We will return to the issue of Elvish marriage customs in the next section, but for now let us look at, what could be called, Tolkien's "Elvish Doctrine of Rebirth," in imitation of Nutt's "Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth." In typescript version "B" of *Laws and Customs*, Tolkien explains his thoughts on Elvish reincarnation as they stood at the time. Here, he introduces the concepts of *fëa* ("spirit"; *pl. fëar*) and *hröa* ("body"; *pl. hröar*) which he applied to his existing metaphysical construct. In the section entitled, *Of Death and the Severance of Fëa and Hröa*, Tolkien wrote, "... no living person incarnate may be without a *fëa*, nor without a *hröa*, yet *fëa* and *hröa* are not the same things" (*Morgoth* 218).<sup>147</sup> Both Elves and Men had both *fëa* and *hröa*, but the *hröar* of Men died and their *fëar* departed from Arda forever. The *hröa* of the Elves could be injured and cease to function, or they may die of grief, but, "[e]ach [Elvish] *fëa* was imperishable within the life of Arda," thus, the *fëa* might suffer an unnatural separation from the *hröa* (*Morgoth* 219). And yet, "[a] houseless *fëa* that chose or was permitted to return to life re-entered the incarnate world through child-birth. Only thus could it return" (*Morgoth* 221). The *fëa* re-born as a child would once more enjoy "all the wonder and newness of childhood" and only after some years would its memories awake and recall its former life (*Morgoth* 221). The length of time before rebirth was partly at the will of Mandos and partly at the will of the individual. In an earlier text, Tolkien had written that the Elvish spirit "waited, days or years, even a thousand, according to the will of Mandos and their deserts" (*Morgoth* 266). Some corrupted or severely damaged *fëar* were not allowed to return to life, but normally, those allowed to be reborn were happy to resume their natural course of life. *Míriel's* was a "rare and strange" case in that her *hröa* was whole and uncorrupted, but her *fëa* simply refused to re-house itself in the *hröa* (*Morgoth* 221 *fn*\*).

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<sup>147</sup> In *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*, Tolkien wrote that *hröa* and *fëa* were "roughly but not exactly equivalent to 'body' and 'soul'" (*Morgoth* 330 n.2); however, for our purposes here, the concepts of a bodily form and a soul (or spirit) will be sufficient. For clarity throughout this chapter, I use Tolkien's revised form of the word "*hröa*" rather than the superseded "*hrondo*," even in direct quotations.

Intriguingly, Tolkien's discussion of Elvish rebirth in *Laws and Customs* touches on all but one of Nutt's "essential elements" as laid out in his "Celtic Doctrine." In Tolkien, only immortals (e.g., Elves and Maiar)— but not Men —may be reborn. Glorfindel (an Elf), Mithrandir (i.e., Gandalf, a Maia), and Lúthien (a half-Maia/half-Elf) are all examples of characters in Tolkien's legendarium who are reborn. The sole exception is Beren (a human) who is closely associated with the immortal Lúthien and her parents, the Queen Melian and King Thingol of Doriath, just as in the Irish tradition, the Two Swineherds from the *Táin* are closely associated with Queen Medb and King Ailill of Connaught. Tolkien's concept of the "houseless" *fëa* is compatible with the Irish concept of the disembodied spirit or *persona incarnanda*: Étaín as a fly, Lug as a "little beast" or some other small creature. According to Nutt, the *persona incarnanda* has to actually enter the body of the new mother, as in acts of conception which occur when a woman consumes a disembodied spirit, becomes pregnant, and gives birth to a now re-embodied child. Tolkien is light on the details of exactly how this happens in his legendarium, but *Laws and Customs* confirms that rebirth must occur as an act of conception:

A houseless *fëa* that chose or was permitted to return to life re-entered the incarnate world through child-birth. Only thus could it return. For it is plain that the provision of a bodily house for a *fëa*, and the union of *fëa* with [*hröa*], was committed by Eru [i.e., Ilúvatar, the Creator] to the Children [i.e., Elves and Men], to be achieved in the act of begetting. (*Morgoth* 221)

Both the belief systems of Nutt and Tolkien are strongly reminiscent of the ancient European concept of the soul animal. According to Jan N. Bremmer, the "free soul was sometimes imagined in the shape of an animal" (63). This was not bound to the body and it represented the owner in his full identity (Bremmer 65). Among ancient European cultures who believed in soul animals, some souls were represented as small mammals such as mice, but many were depicted as flying insects: as a bee, wasp, dung-beetle, fly or, in Ireland, the butterfly (Bremmer 64).



As to gender, Nutt states the reborn retain their original gender. So does Tolkien in a sub-section of *Laws and Customs* entitled “Of Naming”:

According to the Eldar, the only ‘character’ of any person that was not subject to change was the difference of sex. For this they held to belong not only to the body (*hröa*) but also to the mind (*indo*) equally: that is, to the person as a whole ... Those who returned from Mandos, therefore, after the death of their first body, returned always to the same name and to the same sex as formerly. (*Morgoth* 216 n†)

As Tolkien writes in the quotation above, reborn Elves always had the same name. For example, Glorfindel of Gondolin, who died in defence of that city during the First Age, was re-embodied and returned to Middle-earth during the Second Age, eventually becoming known as Glorfindel of Rivendell (see *Peoples* 379-382, *passim*). This was not always the case in the Irish tradition, where Lug is reborn as Cú Chulainn, and Mongan is a rebirth of Finn (Nutt II.93). However, Étaín is reborn as Étaín, and we know that Tolkien was familiar with her narrative. Nutt also stated that the reborn retained their original personalities and memories and so too do Tolkien’s Elves retain their original personalities and memories:

Also the identity of person [*sic.*] resides wholly in the *fëa*, and the re-born is the same person as the one who died. It is the purpose of the grace of re-birth that the unnatural breach in the continuity of life should be redressed; and none of the Dead will be permitted to be re-born until and unless they desire to take up their former life and continue it. Indeed they cannot escape it, for the re-born soon recover full memory of all their past. (*Morgoth* 227)

Nutt believed the *persona incarnanda* was subject to the mother’s form: that is, a human mother would have a human baby; a cow would have a calf, etc., as in the “The Quarrel of the Two Swineherds.” Tolkien also considered this. In *Laws and Customs*, he wrote that some Elves believed both *fëa* and *hröa* (spirit and body) were derived from a child’s original parents, but others believed that only the *hröa* was, while a child’s *fëa* may be more independent. However, “[l]ater when the Elves became aware of re-birth this argument was added: ‘If the *fëar* of children were

normally derived from the [first] parents and akin to them, then re-birth would be unnatural and unjust. For it would deprive the second parents, without consent, of one half of their parentage, intruding into their kin a child half alien” (*Morgoth* 220). Yet, if the *fëa* might be alien, the *hröa* of the reincarnated child would certainly resemble the second parents, as in Nutt’s *Doctrine*. What concerned Tolkien was that a reborn Elf with its original name and personality and memories might be reborn into a new family—a situation that would not be fair to the second parents, who were expecting to rear a child akin to themselves, and not a cuckoo in the nest (that is, a child akin to its first parents).

The only one of Nutt’s “essential elements” that is not a standard element in Tolkien’s *Laws and Customs* is that of supernatural beings having the power to beget children with mortal women *and* endowing their offspring with supernatural attributes, especially that of shape-shifting (Nutt II.36). Of course, the Maia can have offspring with Elves (e.g., Lúthien), and Elves can have offspring with humans (e.g., Eärendil), but shapeshifting in Tolkien’s legendarium is primarily performed only by the immortal Valar and Maiar.<sup>148</sup> There is no indication that the mortal shapeshifter Beorn in *The Hobbit* is a Maiar.<sup>149</sup> However, these attributes are observable in at least one Tolkienian example: Beren’s and Lúthien’s granddaughter, Elwing, who appears in “the likeness of a great white bird” and “learned the tongues of birds, who herself had once worn their shape” (*Silmarillion* 247, 250).

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<sup>148</sup> The Valar may choose to take on the forms of Elves or other things, but they frequently go “unclad” as pure spirit (*Silmarillion* 21). The Maia Sauron shifted his shape to a werewolf, a serpent, and a vampire [bat] (*Silmarillion* 175). The Maia Melian, for love of Thingol, took on the form of the Eldar (*Silmarillion* 234).

<sup>149</sup> Beorn in *The Hobbit* is one of the few mortal shapeshifters in Tolkien’s legendarium: “sometimes he is a huge black bear, sometimes he is a great strong black-haired man with huge arms and a great beard ... Some say that he is a bear descended from the great and ancient bears ... Others say that he is a man descended from the first men” (VII.126).

On the whole, Tolkien's ideas on Elvish re-birth at this time are almost entirely consistent with and analogous to Nutt's doctrine for the Túatha Dé Danann: the limitation of rebirth to a certain immortal people, the physical re-housing of a disembodied spirit through an act of conception and child-birth, the new body's physical resemblance to the new mother, a consistency of gender, personality, and memory from the previous life, the possibility of an extended time before rebirth, and the ability of supernatural beings to beget children with mortals. Tolkien's *Laws and Customs among the Eldar* addresses all of Nutt's "essential elements" of Celtic rebirth save one, shapeshifting, although there is at least one example of that in Tolkien's legendarium. According to Fisher's criteria for determining the validity or plausibility of a source, Nutt's "Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth" should be considered a *possible* source, one which Tolkien never explicitly mentioned but which is no more than one step removed from a demonstrable source (i.e., Meyer's *Voyage of Bran*). In practice, however, it is highly *probable* that Tolkien had read Nutt's "Doctrine" since it was published together in a two-volume set with Meyer's *Bran*, and *Bran* is one of Tolkien's most important sources (see **Chapter 2**). Furthermore, these several striking resemblances to Tolkien's *Laws and Customs* makes Nutt's doctrine an especially strong candidate as a *hard analogue with near-source status*, or an *inferred* source deduced from evidence and reasoning.

Nevertheless, Tolkien's ideas on Elvish rebirth evolved away from the Irish models of Arbois de Jubainville and Nutt soon after Tolkien wrote *Laws and Customs*. He grew increasingly concerned with the difficulties that reborn Elves would experience in regaining memories from their first lives, and how that might diminish the joys of parenthood for the second set of parents. He had tried to mitigate this circumstance, noting, "In some cases a *fëa* re-born might have the same parents again. For instance, if its first body had died in early youth," but he had to admit to himself that, "this did not often happen; neither did a *fëa* necessarily re-enter its own former kin, for often a great length of time passed before it wished or was permitted to return" (*Morgoth* 222 fn\*). Tolkien eventually felt that rebirth through conception, "contradicts the fundamental notion that *fëa* and *hröa* were each fitted to the other: since *hröar* have a physical descent, the body of rebirth, having

different parents, must be different” (*Morgoth* 363). Tolkien came to believe the only viable solution was re-embodiment in a duplicate *hröa*, for “the *fëa* retains a memory, an imprint, of its *hröa*, its ‘former house’, so powerful and precise that the reconstruction of an identical body can proceed from it” (*Morgoth* 363). Readers can trace the evolution of Tolkien’s thoughts in several small, late, exploratory texts where he first adds re-embodiment as an alternative to rebirth, then designates re-embodiment as the preferred method, and finally rejects rebirth altogether.<sup>150</sup>

These texts are known as *The Converse of Manwë and Eru* (c.1959), *Reincarnation of Elves* (c.1959, with a June 1966 note) and *[Some Notes] On ‘Rebirth’, Reincarnation by Restoration, among Elves; with a Note on the Dwarves* (also known as *Some Notes on ‘Glorfindel’*) (1972-1973) ) (*Nature* 246-259, 259-262, 263-266). There are also the short texts known as *Glorfindel I* and *II* (1972-1973) (*Peoples* 377-382).

Having decided on re-embodiment as the most suitable form of reincarnation, Tolkien needed to create some retroactive continuity (i.e., “retcon”) to account for the long history of Elvish rebirth in his writings. He decided to blame Men. Tolkien wrote that rebirth through conception was,

a false notion, e.g. probably of Mannish origin, since nearly all the matter of *The Silmarillion* is contained in myths and legends that have passed through Men’s hands and minds, and are (in many points) plainly influenced by contact and confusion with the myths, theories, and legends of Men.” (*Peoples* 390 n17)

So, from the mimicking of mediaeval Irish myths and legends, Tolkien ended by blaming those same myths and legends for any misconceptions his readers might

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<sup>150</sup> For detailed background on and discussion of these later “Elvish reincarnation” texts, see C&G under the various text titles; see also Michaël Devaux’s French-language commentary in *J.R.R. Tolkien, L’Éffigie des Elfes* (2014); and most recently, Carl F. Hostetter’s English-language commentary in *Nature* (2021).

have about Elvish reincarnation. It was an elegant, if disingenuous, solution to account for his own changing ideas on the subject.

### 7.3 Marriage

At the same time, Tolkien also became preoccupied with the implications of immortality and rebirth on Elvish marriage, that is both marriage between two Elves and marriage between Elf and human. Such pairings were widespread in European literature, and several models for Tolkien's mortal/immortal unions have been proposed. Giovanni C. Costabile suggests the Middle English *Sir Launfal* or its Old French precursor, *Lanval*, one of the Breton *lais* of Marie de France (6). Oleksandra Filonenko compares characters from the Welsh *Mabinogion*, such as Rhiannon and Pwyll, with Middle-earth analogues. Additionally, there are the Old French Breton *lais* of *Desiré*, *Graelent*, and *Guingamor*, Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain*, Chaucer's *Wyfe of Bayths Tale*, and the anonymous *Marriage of Sir Gawain* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. While Tolkien knew all of these stories, they are love stories concerned (primarily) with one mortal man and one immortal woman. Tolkien was concerned with the comingling of two entire cultures—the Eldar (High Elves) and the Edain (noble Men of the First Age who fought alongside the Eldar in the Wars of Beleriand). This situation is most closely depicted in the Irish *Acallam na senórach* where the cultures of Túatha Dé Danann and the *fián* of Finn mac Cumail are depicted as intermarrying, bearing children with dual heritage, establishing fostering and guesting agreements and fulfilling military alliances (see Chapter 3).

Tolkien asserted that such mortal/immortal couplings must be rare. The elf-king Finrod tells the mortal wisewoman, Andreth, “if any marriage can be between our kindred and thine, then it shall be for some high purpose of Doom” (*Morgoth* 324). Tolkien wrote in 1954 that, “there are 2 cases only in my legends of such unions, and they are merged in the descendants of Eärendil ... so the problem of the Half-elven becomes united in one line” (*Letters*, #153, pp.283, 288). The intermarriage of the mortal Tuor and the immortal Idril results in the birth of Eärendil, the half-elven

saviour of Middle-earth. The mortal Beren and immortal Lúthien are the grandparents of Elwing, Eärendil's wife. Their twin sons, Elrond and Elros, establish separate lines of immortals and mortals, respectively, that eventually lead to the births of the Elvish Arwen and the human Aragorn, who reunite the two bloodlines in their own marriage and children.

As examined in **Chapter 3**, the relationship of Aillenn Fíalchorcra, one of Bodb Derg's immortal daughters, and Áed, the mortal king of Connacht, represents an analogous situation in *Acallam na senórach*. The two are in love but cannot be married for Áed is already married to a mortal woman. St Patrick agrees to marry Aillenn and Áed on two conditions: if Áed's wife dies before Aillenn does—although Aillenn, herself, is to do the lady no harm—and if Aillenn rejects her druidic beliefs and accepts the Christian gospel. Both conditions come to pass and Patrick fulfils his promise—in fact, it is the first marriage that Patrick performs in Ireland (O'Grady II.243; and *IT* IV.I pp.246-247, 269-270). The requirement that Aillenn reject her old life with the Túatha Dé Danann for eternal life in the Christian heaven is reminiscent of the choices given to Tolkien's Lúthien and Arwen. They must reject their places in the Undying Lands of the incarnate world in exchange for a place in the heavenly paradise of Ilúvatar (where mortals are assumed to go when they die). A further similarity is that the marriage of Aillenn and Áed—like that of Tolkien's Arwen and Aragorn—rejoins the key immortal and mortal aristocratic lines of Ireland (M. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals* 208).<sup>151</sup>

Tolkien's thoughts on *fëa* and *hröa*, death, reincarnation, rebirth and marriage led to, and culminated in two late writings on Elvish immortality and marriage: the previously-mentioned *Laws and Customs among the Eldar*, and Tolkien's late masterwork, *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* ('The Debate of Finrod and Andreth')

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<sup>151</sup> In **Chapter 3**, I discussed *Can a mbunadus na nGáedel?* ("Whence the origin of the Gaels (Goídil?)"), where the mortal Milesians took wives from among the immortal Túatha Dé Danann (M. Williams, *Ireland's Immortals* 205).

written sometime in autumn/winter of 1959-1960, after *Laws and Customs* and *The Converse of Manwë and Eru*, but before *Reincarnation of Elves* (although a commentary on the *Athrabeth* was penned later) (C&G I.578). The *Athrabeth*, in its turn, mimics mediaeval Irish dialog poems wherein ancient sages debate various philosophical issues.

### 7.3.1 *Manners and Laws and Customs*

On page 31 of his personal copy of *Litt. Celtique*, Tolkien underlined in blue pencil the names “O’Curry” and “O’Donovan.” John O’Donovan (Seán Ó Donnabháin; 1806-1861) and Eugene O’Curry (Eoghan Ó Comhraidhe, 1794-1862) were pioneering scholars of Irish manuscripts, native Irish speakers, close collaborators, and even family members (they married two sisters).<sup>152</sup> O’Curry was a self-taught man who in 1855 was appointed professor of Irish history and archæology in the recently founded Catholic University of Ireland. A footnote to O’Curry’s name at the bottom of the same page lists his major works, including *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, a seminal three-volume collection of thirty-eight lectures he delivered at the University between May 1857 and July 1862. The last lecture was delivered only two weeks before his death. *Manners and Customs* was published posthumously in 1873. O’Curry’s lectures comment upon topics as far-ranging as ancient Irish governance, burial customs, food and drink, clothing, music, education, druidism, weapons and warfare; they also discuss at some length ancient Irish marriage customs. We have no direct indication from Tolkien that he actually read *Manners and Customs*, but O’Curry’s work, especially those parts where he discusses ancient Irish marriage practices, makes an intriguing *hard analogue* for the sort of feigned legal text Tolkien wrote on Elvish marriage. Tolkien’s *Laws and Customs* purports to be a judgement of the Valar to the Elves primarily on the subject of marriage. Aligned in spirit with O’Curry’s *Manners and Customs*, Tolkien’s

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<sup>152</sup> For more information on O’Curry and O’Donovan, see Quinn.

*Laws and Customs* sometimes takes the opposite position from the Irish. Two examples of this concern wedding rings and divorce.

**Wedding Rings.** O'Curry's *Manners and Customs* is significantly concerned with the exchange of goods related to Irish marriage contracts. The *Tincur* was the marriage portion of land, clothing, furniture and other goods given to the bride by her father (O'Curry I.clxxii). The *Coibche*, which consisted of articles made of gold, silver or bronze, or of land, was "a legal gift which the bridegroom gave to the bride after her marriage" and a portion of which went to the bride's father (O'Curry I.clxxiii-clxxiv). Another marriage portion was the *Faine Maighdena*, the maiden's marriage ring (O'Curry I.ccxl). This was not to be confused with "the marriage ring put on the bride's finger at the marriage ceremony" (O'Curry I.ccxl, n439). Rather, the *Faine Maighdena* was a tribute due to the king on the marriage of every maiden within his territory (O'Curry I.ccxl, fn439). While O'Curry is primarily interested in the legal exchange of bridal goods, his discussion confirms the existence of wedding rings "put on the bride's finger at the marriage ceremony," like those which are still customary today.

In Tolkien's *Laws and Customs*, the Elvish exchange of betrothal and marriage rings (and other jewels) is also customary. Elvish betrothals typically lasted one year, during which time, "the betrothed gave silver rings one to another" as a symbol of the bond (*Morgoth* 210-211). During this period, the betrothal could be revoked simply by returning the rings (*Morgoth* 211). However, should the pair wed, "[t]he betrothed then received back one from the other their silver rings (and treasured them); but gave in exchange slender rings of gold, which were worn upon the index [finger] of the right hand" (*Morgoth* 211). Marriage gifts from one family to the other were also traditional: "Among the Noldor [Elves] also it was a custom that the bride's mother should give to the bridegroom a jewel upon a chain or collar; and the bridegroom's father should give a like gift to the bride" (*Morgoth* 211). Unlike the gold in ancient Ireland, the jewels in Elvish custom were specifically not a bride price, dowry, or any other medium of contractual exchange. Tolkien says, "these ceremonies were not rites necessary to marriage; they were only a gracious mode



by which the love of the parents was manifested" (*Morgoth* 211-212). Here, Tolkien takes pains to express the exact opposite of O'Curry's descriptions of ancient Irish marriage rings. Where O'Curry focuses on the exchange of rings as the fulfilment of legal contracts between families and the crown, Tolkien asserts that the exchange of rings and jewels between Elvish families is a "gracious" custom only, and not a legal rite.

**Divorce.** O'Curry's *Manners and Customs* also discusses the rights of women under ancient Irish law to legally separate from their husbands, to retain the whole or part of the *Coibche*, and to obtain damages for injury (O'Curry I.clxxv). The legal reasons for separation included slander, public ridicule, visible injury, abandonment, adultery, the administration of a love potion before marriage, and the failure to give the wife her full rights (O'Curry I.clxxv-clxxvi). O'Curry goes into much more detail regarding extenuating circumstances such as the length of the union, the existence of children, and the social ranks of the two parties, but the important point here is that there were legal options for the dissolution of ancient Irish marriages.

On the other hand, Tolkien considered Elvish marriages indissoluble, even after the death of one of the parties. In a sub-section of *Laws and Customs* entitled "Of the Severance of Marriage," Tolkien considers whether there are *any* reasons why Elves might wish to separate:

The Eldar wedded once only in life, and for love or at the least by free will upon either part. Even when in after days, as the histories reveal, many of the Eldar in Middle-earth became corrupted, and their hearts darkened by the shadow that lies upon Arda, seldom is any tale told of deeds of lust among them. Marriage, save for rare ill chances or strange fates, was the natural course of life for all the Eldar ... the right of revoking [a betrothal] was seldom used, for the Eldar do not err lightly in such choice. They are not easily deceived by their own kind; and their spirits being masters of their bodies, they are seldom swayed by the desires of the body only, but are by nature continent and steadfast. Nonetheless among the Eldar, even in Aman, the desire for marriage was not always fulfilled. Love was not always returned;

and more than one might desire one other for spouse ... (*Morgoth* 210-211).

Such unhappy situations were a rare cause of sorrow. What should happen, then, if one of the partners in a marriage were slain? Tolkien writes,

marriage is chiefly of the body, but it is nonetheless not of the body only but of the spirit and body together, for it begins and endures in the will of the *fëa*. Therefore, when one of the partners of a marriage dies the marriage is not yet ended, but is in abeyance. For those that were joined are now sundered; but their union remains still a union of will. (*Morgoth* 225-226)

What if, as with *Míriel*, the deceased partner did not wish to be reborn? Flatly refused to? A proclamation for this situation, called “The Doom of *Finwë* and *Míriel*,” resulted from the refusal of *Míriel*’s *fëa* to re-enter her *hröa* after she was diminished by the birth of her son, *Feänor*. Elves generally assume that both parties will always want to resume their marriage. In cases where the deceased spouse desired rebirth, the living spouse would wait for their mate to be reborn, mature, and regain their memories (what’s a few hundred years when both partners are immortal?). Only then would the spouses take up their marriage again. Tolkien wrote, “There will be no question of desiring this or not desiring it. For by the steadfastness of the *fëar* of the Eldar uncorrupted they will desire it” (*Morgoth* 233). In fact, “none of the Dead will be permitted by Mandos to be reborn, until and unless they desire to take up life again in continuity with their past” (*Morgoth* 233). But in the rare case of *Finwë* and *Míriel*, a former spouse could be free to remarry, but only if the deceased partner agreed to never again return to the lands of the living.

Here, as in the case of exchanging wedding rings, Tolkien takes the opposite position from the Irish. Where O’Curry enumerates several conditions whereby ancient Irish marriages could be legally dissolved (including slipping someone a love potion!), Tolkien asserts why Elvish marriages should *never* be dissolved. It was only the case of *Finwë* and *Míriel* which caused him to create a (very narrow) path for

Elvish separation and remarriage. What happens if a reborn Elf forms an attachment to someone else before memories of their former spouse return? Although Tolkien admitted that “love was not always returned; and more than one might desire one other for spouse,” he offered no remedy and quickly changed the topic (*Morgoth* 211).

The Irish *Tochmarc Étaíne* raises similar questions and Tolkien’s *Laws and Customs* so closely applies to Étaín’s case that it could have been written in response to it. Étaín is killed bodily by Midir’s jealous first wife, although Étaín’s spirit (e.g., to use the Tolkienian word, *fëa*) endures as a fly. When Étaín is reborn as a mortal woman, she does not possess her original memories. Despite that, her former spouse (or at least, lover) Midir, however, readily recognises Étaín, and in his eyes their relationship was not dissolved by her bodily death, metempsychosis, and subsequent rebirth. He believes she should desire to be with him again and take up their old life together. According to Tolkien’s *Laws and Customs*, Midir could expect to be reunited with Étaín after her rebirth, maturation, and the regaining of her memories. Thus, from the Tolkienian point of view, Midir seems justified in attempting to woo Étaín away from her mortal husband, Eochaid Airem.

Is the application of *Laws and Customs* to *Tochmarc Étaíne* a fair exercise? In his essay accompanying a collection of Tolkien’s later writings on Elvish reincarnation, Michaël Devaux quickly dismisses the Irish Túatha Dé Danann as appropriate models for Elvish reincarnation in Tolkien’s writings (*J.R.R. Tolkien, L’Effigies* 34). Devaux inexplicably states, “*puisque la réincarnation celtique est fondamentalement liée aux dieux, au sens où ce sont eux qui renaissent, alors il faut bien dire que Tolkien a peu à faire avec cette doctrine.*”<sup>153</sup> In this, Devaux fails to identify the “Celtic gods” as the self-same Túatha Dé Danann which have been recognised as foundational

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<sup>153</sup> “Since Celtic reincarnation is fundamentally linked to the gods, in the sense that it is they who are reborn, then it must be said that Tolkien had little to do with this doctrine” (author’s translation).

models for Tolkien's Elves (see **Chapter 1**). Devaux's quotation from Arbois de Jubainville— that “*ces dieux considérés comme des fées*” —rather proves my point than his own.<sup>154</sup> Henry Karlson in his blog post, “Tolkien, Myth, and the Flexibility of Catholic Thought,” arrives at the opposite conclusion from Devaux. Karlson finds, “The Elves ... have a Celtic aspect to them. And this then brings us to why Tolkien would have them reincarnate: because folklore studies indicated a similar notion concerning Celtic [i.e., Irish] fairies: that they, too, were known to reincarnate” (2020). After quoting at length from Evans-Wentz's *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* on Túatha Dé Danann reincarnation, Karlson opines, “It would be interesting to see how much, if any, of Evans-Wentz's work directly or indirectly influenced the development of Tolkien's lore” (2020).<sup>155</sup> He concludes, “Thus, by his inclination to include traditional mythic folklore into his own story, to help make for a myth for England [sic.], Tolkien's Elves take on aspects found in the greater tradition. It helped authenticate his story by connecting it with the greater, and more wide-spread understanding of the Elvish tradition” (Karlson 2020).

From the late 1950s and into his final years, Tolkien continued to explore the implications of his earlier suppositions regarding Elvish and human natures. Related to these thoughts are the implications of Elvish/human marriage, a feature of his legendarium from the very early days (e.g., Eriol and Naimi). The marriage of Tolkien's Beren and Lúthien, Tuor and Idril, and later Aragorn and Arwen all showed that happiness could be found in such unions. But around 1959 or 1960, Tolkien re-considered the wider implications of mortal/immortal marriages in his late masterwork, *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*, where the outcome was less than sanguine.

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<sup>154</sup> Devaux quotes Arbois de Jubainville (*J.R.R. Tolkien, L'Effigies* 34, n.145): “*Ces dieux sont cependant considérés comme des fées, c'est-à-dire des Elfes*” (*Le Cycle Mythologique* 346); i.e., “the [Irish] gods are considered fairies, that is to say, Elves: (*Irish Mythological Cycle*, translated by R. I. Best, 196).

<sup>155</sup> Evans-Wentz's sources included both Arbois de Jubainville and Nutt.

### 7.3.2 *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth*

Tolkien's later conceptions of Elvish death, rebirth, and marriage reach their apogee in *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* ('The Debate of Finrod and Andreth'), the fictional conversation held by two sages of the First Age of Middle-earth (*Morgoth* 303-366). The first is Finrod Felagund, "the wisest of the exiled Noldor, being more concerned than all others with matters of thought ... and he was eager moreover to discover all that he could concerning Mankind" (*Morgoth* 305). The other is Andreth, a mortal wise-woman learned in human lore. Written after *Laws and Customs*, the text of the *Athrabeth*, published in *Morgoth's Ring*, relies primarily on a finished manuscript likely dated to 1959-1960, with some edited notes from two, later typescripts (*Morgoth* 304).

While the *Athrabeth* is a wide-ranging discussion, its chief concern is the disparate natures of Elves and human beings. In a late 1940s-early 1950s revision of Tolkien's creation story, the *Ainulindalë*, Tolkien writes, "Death is [humankind's] fate, the gift of Ilúvatar unto them, which as Time wears even the Powers shall envy. But Melkor [i.e., Morgoth] hath cast his shadow upon it, and confounded it with darkness, and brought forth evil out of good, and fear out of hope" (*Morgoth* 21). This confounding is evident in the views of Andreth, the human woman who looks upon Death as a punishment rather than a gift, believing that immortality is the better fate. Finrod counters that immortality within the incarnate world is a sort of prison to which the Elves are bound until the end of time, and that humans are to be envied for their ability to leave Arda upon their deaths and, hopefully, (re-)join the Creator, Eru Ilúvatar. Finrod observes that the two peoples are "close akin, closer than any other creatures in the world," but they are divided by this perilous gulf between their separate natures and destinies (*Morgoth* 323).

Although it is not written in verse, Tolkien's *Athrabeth* is, in its conception, reminiscent of mediaeval Irish dialogue poems such as the Old Irish *King and Hermit: A Colloquy between King Guaire of Aidne and His Brother Marban* and, especially, *The Colloquy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill*, the Middle Irish

poem discussed in **Chapter 6**. These are philosophical debates between erudite discussants on issues of moral, religious, or political nature and, according to Kuno Meyer, were “written for purposes of instruction or as a *memoria technica* [i.e., a mnemonic aid] by learned professors” (*King and Hermit* 7). Like Tolkien’s *Athrabeth*, *Fintan and the Hawk* is a discussion between two ancient sages on the nature of immortality, death and rebirth. Fintan survived Noah’s flood and numerous other extinction events to become the legendary oldest man in Ireland. The hawk is similarly ancient, claiming, among other things, to have carried off the severed hand of Nuada, the first Túatha Dé Danann king, and to have plucked out the eye of Cú Chulainn.<sup>156</sup> Similar to Étaín in *Tochmarc Étaíne*, Fintan has experienced (according to some texts) transmigration of the soul into the shapes of a salmon, an eagle, a falcon, and a man again (Hull, “Hawk of Achill” 389-390).<sup>157</sup> Fintan complains that when he was a salmon, his eye was plucked out by the self-same hawk or crow, an offense corroborated in *The Adventures of Léithin*, also discussed in **Chapter 6**. While Fintan, the hawk, Tuán mac Cairill and other long-lived beings function to preserve and transmit Ireland’s prehistory down into historical times, they also serve as wise sages who can converse on the various sides of moral debates. Tolkien’s Andreth and Finrod serve in a similar role in the *Athrabeth*.

In the course of a wide-ranging debate, the mortal Andreth mentions that she had once had a love affair with Finrod’s brother, Aegnor, but he broke it off (*Morgoth* 323). Andreth believes Aegnor did not want a wife who would soon become old and grey next to his eternal youthfulness. She tells Finrod, “I would not have troubled him, when my short youth was spent. I would not have hobbled as a hag after his bright feet, when I could no longer run beside him!” But Finrod rebuts her, “He would not have run before thee. He would have stayed at thy side to uphold

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<sup>156</sup> Hull argues, “Though the bird is called a *Seabhac*, i.e. ‘a hawk’ or ‘falcon,’ its voracity and pursuit of corpses suggest rather a vulture or cormorant” (“Hawk” 392 n.15).

<sup>157</sup> As noted in **Chapter 6**, Tuán from *Scél Tuáin meic Cairill* has a very similar story (see Meyer, “The Transformations of Tuán mac Cairill,” 76-81).

thee. Then pity wouldst have had in every hour, pity inescapable" (*Morgoth* 324-325). Andreth wonders, "Why should we love you, and why should ye love us (if ye do), and yet set the gulf between?" Finrod counters that it was not the Elves but the Creator, Eru Ilúvatar, who gave the two kindred peoples their separate fates.

Here, the *Athrabeth* shares thematic connections with tales (or fragments of tales) in *Acallam na senórach* (perhaps not coincidentally, itself largely a dialogue between Caílte and St Patrick). In Stokes's translations from the *Acallam*, Caílte sanctions the betrothal of the mortal woman Échna ingen Muiredaig to his friend, Cas Corach, the Túatha Dé Danann minstrel and harper (*IT* IV.1 pp.260-261). In Lady Gregory's modern retelling, Caílte himself was beloved by Scathniamh, one of Bodb Derg's immortal daughters. Their romance was impeded by their different natures and the pair was forced to part, "and they never met again till the time Caílte was old and withered, and one of the last that was left of the [*fíán*]" (Gregory 64). When they were finally reunited, the people "wondered to see the girl so young and comely, and Caoilte [*sic.*] so grey and bent and withered" (Gregory 65). Gregory implies that there is a longer traditional narrative about the pair, but there is no such surviving text, rather there is just a short passage in the *Acallam* where the woman asks Caílte for her bride-price and only implies a previous love-affair (*SG* II.202-203). Nonetheless, there are obvious parallels here with Tolkien's tale of Andreth and Aegnor. Each pair is a mortal/immortal love-match that does not result in a happy marriage. The pathos of their situations in both narratives is evoked by images of age tottering beside youth. The mortal Caílte and Túatha Dé Danann lady, Scathniamh, are the subjects of scorn for their seemingly mismatched ages. Tolkien's Andreth fears it would have been the same for her with Aegnor. Neither couple can overcome the gulf set between them by their separate natures. It is bitterly ironic, then, when Aegnor dies in battle long before Andreth is overtaken by old age. According to Tolkien's premise on Elvish rebirth, Aegnor has the possibility of being reborn in Middle-earth, but by the time that would occur, Andreth would indeed be old and grey. Finrod tells Andreth that his brother truly loved her, and for her sake will, "never take the hand of any bride of his own kindred, but live alone to the end," and, in fact, he "will not wish to return" to

Middle-earth but remain in the Undying Lands (*Morgoth* 324). Since mortals do not go to the Undying Lands, there is no possibility for Andreth and Aegnor to be reunited. Tolkien's final word on mortal/immortal unions seems to have been one of impassable gulfs and irreconcilable fates.

## 7.4 Conclusions

The final decades of Tolkien's writing career show a profound interest in and familiarity with topics of immortality, death, reincarnation and marriage as also depicted in several Irish narratives such as *Tochmarc Étaíne*, *Acallam na senórach*, and *The Colloquy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill*, as well as the theories of famous Celticists Alfred Nutt and Eugene O'Curry. Tolkien had first dealt with these topics in *The Book of Lost Tales* back in the 1910s, but now, as an older man, he reconsidered and revised his views in many respects. On one subject, though, he never wavered: his desire to personally embark on a voyage to the Undying Lands, a subject we return to summarily in **Chapter 8 Conclusion: "The Shoreless Sea."**



## Chapter 8 Conclusion: “The Shoreless Sea”

On 11 October 1959, Tolkien wrote a postcard to the noted Celtic scholar Prof. Dr Maartje Draak (1907–1995) thanking her for sending him an offprint of a paper she had recently published. Tolkien and Draak shared a love for early Irish literature and its Hiberno-Latin counterparts. Her publications included papers on *Fled Bricrenn*, *Compert Con Culainn*, *Tochmarc Étaíne*, and *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, all topics of interest to Tolkien, especially the *Navigatio*. In 1949, Prof. Draak produced an edition, introduction, and commentary on the Dutch version of the *Navigatio*: *De Reis van Sinte Brandaan*. Tolkien himself had been writing Brendan-themed poetry and prose since 1914, and in 1945 had penned the poem *The Death of Saint Brendan* for inclusion in *The Notion Club Papers*. When he set that novel aside, unfinished, he revised and published the poem separately as *Imram* (1955), only a few years before he sent the postcard to Prof. Draak, where he wrote the following:

... I have just returned from Ireland. Somehow on the extreme West Shores of that island the Great Sea still looks ‘shoreless’, and yet, and yet invites the heart to an immram: one that might still find a route that did not lead to USA!”

(excerpted text from a postcard written by J.R.R. Tolkien to Prof. Dr Maartje Draak, 11 October 1959; Collection Maartje Draak, Universiteit Utrecht; © The Tolkien Estate Limited, 2024; Tolkien’s underlining)

That wistful, “and yet, and yet” catches in my breastbone every time I read it, as Tolkien holds out forlorn hope that he might still find his own “lost road” to an earthly paradise. The postcard was written less than two weeks after his retirement from Merton College, Oxford (30 September 1959), but he had addressed the same topic at the beginning of his career. Sometime, probably between 1919 and 1924, Tolkien made a revised typescript of his 1914 Corpus Christi College *Kalevala* essay (*Kullervo* 64; see also **Chapter 2**), adding this observation:

[I]t is no good saying that the sea is still poetically boundless, for to the very people who can appreciate the poetry of the sea the roundness of the earth and the unfortunate existence of America on the other side of a strictly limited Atlantic ocean is most constantly and vividly present in the imagination ... there are no magic islands in our Western sea. (*Kullervo* 113-114)

At both the beginning and end of his career, then, Tolkien lamented his inability to reach an earthly paradise as St Brendan had done. A substantial portion of the intervening years was spent trying to remedy that, imaginatively anyway, by creating literary voyages where “mariners and men forlorn upon the water who, by some fate or grace or favour of the Valar, had entered in upon the Straight Way,” the path to Tol Eressëa or even Valinor (*Silmarillion* 282). Eärendel, Eriol, Bran and Brendan, Rover and the mer-dog, Ælfwine and Eadwine, Mael Dúin, Frodo, Bilbo and Sam, all beheld the Undying Lands. And yet, Shippey characterises some of Tolkien’s final Middle-earth writings as, “full of resignation and bereavement” (*Road* 288). For as many times as Tolkien could send his literary characters on such marvellous voyages, he could not go himself. Shippey writes, “if [Tolkien] had an inner hope, it might possibly have been that he too could take ‘the secret gate’, ‘the hidden paths’, ‘the Lost Straight Road’, and find the Land of Promise which was still within ‘the circles of the world’” (*Road* 288).

But in October 1959, time for Tolkien to find his own “lost road” was running out: he had just retired; Edith was repeatedly unwell; he did not like to be away from her; and his visits to Ireland as an external examiner for the National University of Ireland had ceased (although he visited Ireland again for pleasure in 1965; see C&G II.578). However, Tolkien’s two quotations, above, are fitting brackets for a career filled with Irish interests and influences, especially the Otherworld sea voyage, which was present at the birth of Tolkien’s legendarium in his 1914-1915 Eärendel poetry, and still top of his mind as he revised and published his final Middle-earth poetry, *The Last Ship* and *The Sea-Bell* (both in 1962), and *Bilbo’s Last Song* (c.1965).

We know that Tolkien was familiar with Otherworld voyage literature, or *immrama*, in, at the least, Kuno Meyer's *The Voyage of Bran, Navigatio sancti Brendani*, Benedeit's *Le Voyage du de Saint Brendan*, as well as Meyer's "*Incipit do Imrum curaig Mældúin andso*" and Tennyson's "The Voyage of Maeldune" reprinted in *The Irish Fairy Book*. However, the influence of Irish and Irish-themed material on Tolkien's legendarium was more than just the Otherworld voyage. Notably, the sources and influences proposed in this thesis can still be organised into the same three categories identified in the Literature Review in **Chapter 1**: Otherworld voyage tales, the Túatha Dé Danann, and miscellaneous works. And yet, as the list of voyage tale sources above illustrates, the contents of each category have increased and solidified in this thesis, enlarging and deepening the picture of how Irish material impacts the legendarium.

On the Túatha Dé Danann, for example, *Lebor gabála Érenn*, *Altram tige dá medar*, and the "Three Sorrows of Storytelling" were previously proposed as sources for the origin and history of Tolkien's Elves (although the *Altram* was likely not a direct source for the reasons mentioned in **Chapter 7**). This thesis adds *Acallam na senórach* and other narratives set in the same imaginative milieu— *\*Cath Finntrága*, *Macgnímartha Find*, *Tochmarc Étaíne*, *Togail bruidne Da Derga* —as major narratives which Tolkien might have used in the development of his Elves. There is certainly plenty of internal and external evidence to suggest this, especially in the case of the *Acallam* where the relationships between the Túatha Dé Danann and their allies among Finn mac Cumail's *fíán* are echoed in several respects by the relationships between Tolkien's Eldar and Edain in, what would become, the First Age of Middle-earth. Tolkien evinced a keen interest in the figure of Étaín. Tolkien's familiarity with these narratives may have come from a variety of texts: he owned the partial English translations of the *Acallam* in Stokes' *\*Irische Texte*; he was aware of, and had noted, O'Grady's *Silva Gadelica* with its partial English translations of the *Acallam*; and, these stories were widely available in the early twentieth century in a variety of English-language popular retellings with, as this thesis has repeatedly demonstrated, Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* lining up especially well with Tolkien's "Lost Tales." Tolkien also owned Kuno Meyer's dual-language edition of

*Cath Finntrága*, and he clearly noted his interest in the Étaín narrative in his copy of Arbois de Jubainville's *\*Introduction a l'Étude de la Littérature Celtique*.

In the miscellaneous category, several of Tolkien's characters, genres, and plots align well with counterparts in Irish literature. Tom Bombadil aligns exceedingly well as the "Eldest" in his land with Fintan mac Bóchra from *Lebor gabála Érenn* and other texts, while his supernatural hostellers Lindo and Vairë, Lord Elrond, Tom Bombadil and Goldberry align well with the Irish *briugaid* such as Buchet, the host and hostess from *Compert Con Culainn*, and Donn and the yellow-haired woman, and others. Goldberry, Lúthien Tinúviel and Arwen also exhibit various aspects of the Irish Étaín (and Eithne, even if she is not a direct source). There are the Irish debates between sages and Irish law texts whose narrative form and function are echoed by texts from Tolkien's Middle-earth: *The Colloquy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill* by Tolkien's *Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth* (The Debate of Finrod and Andreth); and O'Curry's *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* by Tolkien's *Of the Laws and Customs Among the Eldar*. And of course, there are Tolkien's reimaginings of other author's reimaginings of Irish legend and history. Tolkien's *Roverandom* reimagines both the St Brendan narrative and Charles Kingsley's reimagining of the St Brendan narrative as a moral fable for Victorian English children in *The Water-Babies*. Tolkien's time-travel retelling of English history in *The Lost Road* (and, ultimately, in *The Notion Club Papers*) may be a reimagining of Joseph O'Neill's time-travel retelling of Irish history in *Wind from the North*. We also know that Tolkien read Nansen's *In Northern Mists*, Magnus Maclean's *Literature of the Celts*, Arbois de Jubainville's *\*Les Celtes depuis les Temps les Plus Anciens*, and Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*, and there are also the fifty books on Irish literature, legend and language (or books on "Celtic" subjects with substantial Irish content) that Tolkien retained throughout his life, and which are now housed in the Bodleian. Several of these show signs of being well-used, such as Thurneysen's *\*Handbuch des Alt-Irischen*, Stokes's and Windisch's *Irische Texte*, Arbois de Jubainville's *Litt. Celtique*, and O'Growney's *\*Ceaćtanna simplide gaedilge / Simple lessons in Irish*.

As this thesis exemplifies, in every era of Tolkien's mythopoeic writings, a variety of Irish and Irish-themed sources, analogues, and motifs were woven in. Yet, there remains ample future work possible. The space constraints of this thesis led me to abandon some threads of inquiry into *Acallam na senórach* and other works from the *féanaigeacht* tradition. Interesting comparisons might be made in the future between the Irish Manannán mac Lir and Tolkien's sea-Vala, Ulmo, or between the synthetic grouping of tales known as the "Three Sorrows of Irish Storytelling" and Tolkien's three "Great Tales" of Tinúviel, Túrin, and Tuor. More work needs to be done with Tolkien's annotations and marginalia, especially in Arbois de Jubainville's *Litt. Celtique* (for literature scholars) and Thurneysen's *Handbuch des Alt-Irischen* (for philologists). And there is a critical need for scholars of Irish (and Scottish Gaelic) to investigate possible Gaelic origins in Tolkien's invented languages.

For the present, however, this thesis represents an important and original contribution to prior knowledge as the first book-length, systematic examination of Irish and Irish-themed material in Tolkien's creative writings. I scoured not only his Irish literature and language texts held by the Bodleian Library, but also the annotations, marginalia, and ephemera in those texts, and I searched through his fiction, poetry, letters, essays, notes, drafts and outlines, etc. for additional clues. What emerges is an exciting series of evidence-supported revelations which reframes the role of Irish material in Tolkien's creative writings as significant and sustained. The broader implications of this research are that, far from Irish literature being a despised or merely disregarded genre, we can see Tolkien's knowledge of Irish literature and legend was extensive, his adaptation of Irish material was pervasive, and his desire to learn the Irish language, despite setbacks, was enduring.

In his *English and Welsh* lecture (1955), Tolkien said that northwestern Europe, "Goidelic, Brittonic, Gallic ... Germanic; and ... spoken Latin— is as it were a single philological province, a region so interconnected in race, culture, history, and linguistic fusions that its departmental philologies cannot flourish in isolation" (M&C 188). Neither can its literature, as Nansen discovered when he found the Norse

sagas were suffused with Irish legends of the Otherworld voyage. In the same year that Tolkien delivered his *English and Welsh* lecture, he wrote to W.H. Auden of his,

deep response to legends (for lack of a better word) that have what I would call the North-western temper and temperature. In any case if you want to write a tale of this sort [i.e., *The Lord of the Rings*], you must consult your roots, and a man of the North-west of the Old World will set his heart and the action of his tale in an imaginary world of that air, and that situation: with the Shoreless Sea of his innumerable ancestors to the West. (*Letters* #163, p.311)

Ireland, with its western shore looking out on the Great Sea was, to Tolkien, as much a part of northwestern Europe as Goidelic languages were part of his “single philological province.” After decades of scholarly calls to action, we are finally beginning to rebalance the way we conceive of the roots of Middle-earth, with Irish sources taking their rightful place next to Norse, Finnish, Old and Middle English, and Welsh sources. Irish literature is, in fact, one of the major foundations upon which Tolkien built his legendarium. He believed that northwestern Europe was a highly interconnected region, and his legendarium was intended to blend the traditions of the cultures that lived along the “Shoreless Sea,” with Ireland, westernmost of these, not the least among them.

— END —

## Appendices

### Appendix A. Two Subsets of Tolkien's "Celtic Library"

#### Part 1. Tolkien's Books on Irish Subjects, Bodleian Library, Oxford

Arbois de Jubainville, Henri d'. *Les Celtes Depuis les Temps les Plus Anciens Jusqu'en l'An 100 Avant Notre Ère: Étude Historique*. Paris, Ancienne Librairie Thorin & Fils, 1904.

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Bergin, Osborn, editor. *Sgéslaigheacht Chéitinn: Stories from Keating's History of Ireland*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Dublin, Hodges, Figgis; London, Williams & Norgate, 1930.

Calder, George, editor. *Auraicept na n-Éces: The Scholars' Primer; Being the Texts of the Ogham Tract from the Book of Ballymote and the Yellow Book of Lecan, and the Text of the Trefhocul from the Book of Leinster*. Edinburgh, John Grant, 1917.

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Diefenbach, Lor[enz]. *Celtica*. Stuttgart, Imle & Liesching, 1839. 3 vols. [bound together].

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<sup>158</sup> N.B. For a similar list of Tolkien's books on Welsh subjects in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, see Phelpstead (117-119).

## Appendix B. Ten Words & Names Invented by Tolkien with Irish Associations

Tolkien <sup>159</sup>	Irish <sup>160</sup>
<p><b>arda</b> [Quenya: <i>region, realm</i>]</p> <p>When used as a common noun, “any more or less bounded or defined place, a region” (<i>Jewels</i> 402); “a particular land or region” (<i>Jewels</i> 413 n25). When capitalized, “the name given to our world or earth (“Realm”)” (<i>Letters</i> #211, p.403)</p>	<p><b>arda</b> [<i>region, quarter</i>]</p> <p>(plural of <i>aird</i>) the points of the compass, directions; regions, districts, or the quarters of a place. An early Irish legendary history featuring the character Fintan mac Bóchra— <i>Cethri arda in domain</i>—can be translated as “The Four Quarters of the World”</p>
<p><b>Carn Dûm</b> [Noldorin: <i>caran (red) + tum (deep valley)</i>]</p> <p>original name for Dimrill-dale (<i>Shadow</i> 433 fn13); later, the Witch-king’s mountain fortress (<i>FR</i> I.viii.157), possibly afterwhich:</p> <p>[Noldorin: <i>caran (red) + tûn (hill city)</i>]</p> <p>Noldorin: <i>tûn</i> = <i>Hill City</i>, e.g., <i>Tûn</i>, <i>Túna</i>, the hill in Aman upon which was the city of Tirion (also called “Kôr”) (cf. <b>Chapter 5</b>, fn109 on the ON <i>tún</i>: “enclosure”).</p>	<p><b>carn + dún</b> [<i>hill</i>] + [<i>fortress</i>]</p> <p><i>carn</i>= heap, pile, cairn, mound or hillock + <i>dún</i>= frequently used as the Irish equivalent of <i>fortress</i></p> <p>Cf. Scott. Gael. Tolkien marked the entry “<b>Dun, duin</b> ... a heap, a hill, a fort” in his copy of Macbain and Whyte’s <i>How to Learn Gaelic</i>, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (p.8 in the vocab. section).</p>
<p><b>Carrock, The</b> [English: <i>great rock, hill of stone</i>]</p> <p>(<i>Hobbit</i> VII.87)</p>	<p><b>carrac</b> [<i>rock, large stone</i>]</p> <p>In several cognate languages: Old English <i>carr</i>, Welsh <i>carreg</i> (RC 207); Northumberland and Cumberland dialect <i>carrock</i> (HH 262); Old Irish <i>carrac</i>, Modern Irish <i>carraig</i></p>
<p><b>fin-</b> [Sindarin: <i>single hair, filament</i>]</p> <p>name element: <i>Fingon</i> [hair + shout], <i>Finwë</i>, <i>Finellach</i> [flame of hair &amp; eye], etc.; <i>Glorfindel</i> [golden-hair (see <i>Peoples</i> 379)]</p>	<p><b>finn-</b> [<i>fair, light-hued</i> (of complexion, hair, etc.)]</p> <p>name element: <i>Finn</i>, <i>Finnchas</i>, <i>Finndruine</i>, etc. (<i>Acallam na senórach</i>); <i>Fintan</i> [white fire or white ancient] (<i>Lebor gabála Érenn</i>)</p>

<sup>159</sup> The Elvish definitions and etymologies in this appendix were derived from *Parf Edhellen* (elfdict.com).

<sup>160</sup> The Irish definitions and etymologies were derived from *eDIL - Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* (dil.ie)

<p><b>Forgoil</b> [Dunlending: <i>Strawheads</i>]</p> <p>epithet for the Rohirrim (who are primarily blond) who usurped the lands of the Dunlendings (TT III.vii.142)</p>	<p><b>forghabháil</b> [capturing, seizing by force; in a legal sense, forcible or illegal seizure... (“forgabál, forngabál”)]</p> <p>(see DeForrest 169-170)</p>
<p><b>Iveriu</b> [Gnomish &amp; Early Quenya: <i>Ireland</i>]</p> <p>(<i>Lost Tales II</i> 312); alternates include <i>Aivrin</i>, <i>Aivrien</i>, <i>Íwerin</i>, <i>Íverin</i>, <i>Íverindor</i>, and <i>Íverind</i> (<i>Lost Tales II</i> 344); Latin <i>Hibernia</i>, Old English <i>Íras</i> and <i>Íraland</i>, and the Irish <i>Ériu</i> (accusative case <i>Eirinn</i>, <i>Erin</i>) (<i>Sauron</i> 294)</p>	<p><b>Ériu</b> [<i>Ireland</i>]</p>
<p><b>lîn</b> [Quenya: <i>pool, lake, mere</i>]</p> <p>element in <i>Teiglin</i> [boundary pool], <i>Linaewen</i> [Lake of Birds], <i>Luvailin</i> [Shadowmere], and <i>lintips</i> [small water creatures in the poem <i>Once upon a Time</i> (ATB 280-281, and <i>Poems I</i>.352-353)]</p>	<p><b>linn</b> [<i>pool, lake</i>]</p> <p>also an element in compound terms, e.g., <i>linn éisc</i> [fish-pond], <i>Dublin</i> [black pool]; derivatives, <i>linti</i> [pools] and <i>fo lintip</i> [under waves] both appear in the <i>Táin bó Cúailnge</i> (see lines 3886 &amp; 3916)</p>
<p><b>Malduin</b> [Sindarin. <i>golden river, yellow river</i>]</p> <p>tributary of the River Teiglin (<i>Silmarillion</i> 339).</p>	<p><b>Maelduin</b> [Tolkien’s customary spelling of “Mael Dúin” from Nansen’s <i>In Northern Mists</i>]</p> <p>Protagonist of <i>Immram curaig Mail Dúin</i>; Tolkien read at least two versions and translated the name “Mælduin” as “slave of the fort” in his copy of Stokes’s <i>Saltair</i> (see <b>Chapter 2</b>); cf. “carn + dún” (above).</p>
<p><b>nazg</b> [Black Speech of Mordor: <i>a (finger) ring</i>]</p> <p>element in <i>Nazgûl</i> [Ringwraiths] and the verse <i>Ash nazg durbatulûk</i> [“One Ring to rule them all”].</p>	<p><b>nasc/nasg</b> [Irish/Scottish Gaelic: a fastening, tie, spancel, ring; legal term: a bond, an obligation]</p> <p>Tolkien thought his <i>nazg</i> fit well with its multiple Gaelic meanings (see <i>Letters</i> #297, p.542)</p>
<p><b>orc</b> [Quenya: <i>monster, demon</i>]</p> <p>c.1920-25, Tolkien wrote these words on note paper: “orc (demon) <i>orku</i>. ?<i>orkîna</i>”; Tolkien thought the word might have had a Celtic derivation (it did); see “Tolkien A21/13” (loose leaves from A21 notebooks): #224 in the Bodleian Library</p>	<p><b>orc</b> [<i>young pig</i>]</p> <p>the word “orc” is an archaic and poetic early Irish term for a young pig (or other young animal), deriving from Latin <i>porcus</i>; an element in <i>Innsi Orc</i> [Orkney Islands; “Islands of the Young Pigs”] (see also Pokorny, <i>Indogermanisches Etymologisches</i>, III.841).</p>

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