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Niggle's Leaves: The Red Book of Westmarch and Related Minor Poetry of J.R.R. Tolkien

Abstract

Examines all the minor, early poems that relate to (or seem to relate to) Middle-earth. Compares different versions of the poems and relates them to Tolkien's overall mythology.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R. "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil"; Tolkien, J.R.R. Poetry

Niggle's Leaves

The Red Book of Westmarch and Related Minor Poetry of J.R.R. Tolkien Steven M. Deyo

A! Elbereth Gilthoniel!
silivren penna miriel
o menel aglar elenath,
Gilthoniel, A! Elbereth!

Only an Orc could fail to appreciate such lissom lines of Elvish poetry as these. J.R.R. Tolkien had "broken the veil" into language when he created the Elvish tongues and the "mythology for England" they inspired. Tolkien knew words -- their beauty and their bite -- and how to use them for literary effect, how they moved the reader with the magic of their sound. Whether an Elvish incantation --

Naur an edraith ammen! Naur dan i
ngaurhoth!

-- a curse from Mordor--

Ash nazg durbatuluk, ash nazg gimbatul...

-- or a dirge for the Riddermark's fallen --

Death in the morning and at day's ending
lords took and lowly. Long now they sleep
under grass in Gondor by the Great River.

--Tolkien painted with language as an artist daubs
canvas with ochres, russets and golds.

If language formed the roots of Niggle's tree, the sheensome leaves were poetry. (Tolkien even put forth his cherished creed of Sub-creation to Lewis in the poem "Mythopoeia.") Tolkien's success at mythopoeia was inspired by glossopoeia (my own term), but it was enhanced by the poetry which readers so often praise as the "icing on the cake" of his thrilling narratives. The concentrated imagery in his tales owes to Tolkien's keen eye for the poetic phrase: Niggles working to catch the exact sheen of each leaf. Tolkien spent a lot of time polishing his mythology by casting prose versions of The Silmarillion into poetry and back again to prose -- particularly the tales of Turin, of Earendil, and of Beren and Luthien.

Like Lewis, Tolkien dreamed in his youth of becoming a successfully published poet. Neither man quite achieved the level of critical acclaim he sought, but each gained some degree of regular exposure in their early careers -- Tolkien in college publications such as The Gryphon, The Stapeldon Magazine, and The Oxford Magazine as well as the Leeds volume Songs for Philologists. Both men had anthologies of poems published after retirement based on their popular literary reputations. In fact, based on Tolkien's Rings fame his The Adventures of Tom Bombadil sold nearly 8000 copies before publication -- inciting a hasty reprint and Tolkien's gleeful remark: "[...] and that, even on a minute initial royalty, means more than is at all usual for anyone but Betjeman to make on verse!" (Letters, p. 322).

It's worth studying Tolkien's early (pre-Hobbit) poems because, though lesser known, they often presaged

his mythology as popularly recognized in The Lord of the Rings. More importantly, he revised many of them for inclusion in his mythology, publishing some in Rings and others in the Bombadil cycle. Shippey (Road, p. 27; cf. pp. 235n6, 241-242n2) makes the observation:

Much of his inner life did find its way into the twenty or thirty poems contibuted to various periodicals or collections between 1920 and 1937; Tolkien's habit of thriftily rewriting them and using them in The Hobbit or The Lord of the Rings shows how important some of them were to him.

Tolkien even went so far as to deliberately connect all the poems appearing in The Adventures of Tom Bombadil to Middle-earth by the fictive device of Hobbit authorship with his academic-sounding preface. He is not likely to have done this to boost sales of the tome, and we will examine his possible motives below.

This paper has attempted to study what I believe are all the poems relating to, or seeming to relate to, Tolkien's mythology of Middle-earth. I speak of poems which first appeared in obscure or hard-to-obtain publications. (This excludes major poetic works which would require whole papers or more in themselves, such as "Namarie" or "The Lay of Earendil".) While fearing the outline for this paper may resemble a Hobbit's grocery list, I therefore include: all known minor poems published before 1937; all poems from The Adventures of Tom Bombadil, with their early versions; and the Bimble Bay poems. Due to space limitations I have been forced to exclude three relevant poems from Songs for Philologists: "Bagme Bloma," "Ides Aelfscvne," and "Ofer Widne Garsecg" (cf. Road, Appendix B, pp. 227-233); "Once Upon a Time"; and "Imram."

Early Minor Poems (Pre-Hobbit)

"The Happy Mariners" (appearing in Exeter College's The Stapeldon Magazine 5:26, June 1920, pp. 69-70) is Tolkien's first published work of moment, mythopoeically speaking. It mentions Earendel, a character he had been developing in his own mythology since discovering the name in Cynewulf's Crist in late 1913:

Eala Earendel engla beorhtast
Ofer middangeard monnum sendeð.

Hail Earenel of angels brightest
Over Middle-earth to men sent.

Tolkien found cognates for Earendel in other Germanic tongues hinting at a mythological sailor-figure who became a star in the heavens (cf. Shippey, Road, pp. 183-184). Carpenter relays Tolkien's reaction on first reading these lines, as described years later (Biography, p. 64; cf. Letters, pp. 385-387):

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.

The character Earendel became the seed for his entire mythology. In September 1914 Tolkien began a poem entitled "The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star" (BLT, II:267-269), followed by continuous revisions of the tale of Earendil's voyages to the twilight shores of Valinor before his ship became a star.

"The Happy Mariners," written in July 1915 (BLT, II:273-274, 277), describes a glimmering white tower on ever-twilight shores "that opens on celestial seas." Fairy boats pass by "twinkling in the gloom / With hoarded sparks of orient fire" from "the unknown sun." Sailors "chanting snatches of a secret tune" will end their long voyage through shadows and under stars "on Western shores / Where, far away, constellate fountains leap." The narrator intones:

Ye follow Earendel through the West --
The Shining Mariner -- to islands blest

with a murmur of "golden rains." Much of this alludes to language and imagery in Tolkien's Earendel Poems, "The Shores of Faery," and The Hiding of Valinor (cf. BLT, I:122, 215-216; II: 268-274).

The poem was reprinted in 1923 with very minor revisions in spelling and punctuation as "The Eadigan Saelidan" (appearing in the Leeds volume A Northern Venture, pp. 15-16) and held Tolkien's interest at least till about 1940, as he revised it twice more (BLT, II:274-276).

Fourteen lines long, "The City of the Gods" (appearing in Leeds University's The Microcosm 8:1, Spring 1923, p. 8) describes a "sable hill" crowned by silent temples with "dazzling halls" of ivory-white marble, striped by shadows of massive trees like "chiselled pillars of the vault." Forgotten by time, "all the marble towers [...] ever burd and sleep." I think the poem describes the desolation of Kôr as found by Earendil (cf. BLT, II:253-265; 271-272; in II:307-308, C. Tolkien equates Kortirion with Tavrobel, cf. below). Thus when Shippey says the poem is "a forerunner of Pippin's sight of Gondor" (Road, p. 212) he is wrong but, due to his earlier publication date, bears no fault -- though Pippin's dream may rather have been of Taniquetil (Rings, III:20).

Missing from Carpenter's listing in Appendix C of Tolkien: A Biography are three poems (appearing in Leeds University Verse 1914-24): "An Evening in Tavrobel," "The Lonely Isle," and "The Princess Ni." (This last one will be discussed with the poems of The Red Book of Westmarch.)

The first poem, "An Evening in Tavrobel" (p. 56), is fascinating; not just for its imagery. It speaks of sunshine on the ripening of spring in the metaphor of golden vine brimmed into buttercups. The first stanza ends in the vaguely suggestive: "And gleaming spirits did there dance / And sip those goblets' radiance." On moonrise, described in the second (and last) stanza, "tiny faces peer and laugh / At glassy fragments of the stars / About them mirrored" in the dewfall on the grass. The fairies are thirsty for this ... moonshine, as it were ... from dancing all day. (Tolkien calls the refreshment "essence of plenilune," a word he seems to have liked. He used it in "The Man in the Moon Came Down Too Soon" and other early writings, and with other trisyllabic words in the unique "Errantry" rhyme scheme.)

Considered so far and on its surface, the poem would seem to hark back to Tolkien's early "Goblin Feet" notion of tiny fairies, which he later came to hate (cf. BLT, I:32). but the Tavrobel of the title is Elvish for Woodham, or better Warwick (cf. BLT, I:24-25, 267; II:292), and ties in intimately with the earliest mythic cycles. Tavrobel figures prominently in the tales of Eriol, a "son of Earendil" who traveled to Tol Eressea, the Lonely Isle. In Tavrobel Eriol heard the tale of the overrunning of the Elves' forest home after the Battle of Dor-na-Dhaideloth (BLT, II:288; cf. I:32):

[...] and those of the after days shall scoff,
saying Who are the fairies -- lies told to the
children by women or foolish men -- who are
these fairies? And some few shall answer:
Memories faded dim, a wraith of vanishing
loveliness in the trees, a rustle of the
grass, a glint of dew, some subtle intonation
of the wind; and others yet fewer shall say
... 'Very small and delicate are the fairies
now [...].'

After the Fall of Numenor, Eressea was "removed, remaining only in the memory of the Earth" (Letters, p. 156). Since the above quote seems to date to 1916-17 (BLT, II:254), "An Evening in Tavrobel" could be a private explanation of the modern concept of fairies/elves, diminished from their original grandeur as Tolkien saw it.

Imagery similar to that of "The City of the Gods," "The Happy Mariners," and "Goblin Feet" can be found in the First, Second, and Third Verses respectively of Tolkien's November 1915 version of "Kortirion Among the Trees" (BLT, I:33-35). The poem was revised in 1937 (BLT, I:36-39), and again in time for Tolkien to submit it with the poems later published in The Red Book of Westmarch (BLT, I:32, 39-43).

"The Lonely Isle" (p. 57) appears opposite "Tavrobel," and presents a coherent concept of Tol Eressea (save that Elves are also here called "fairies").

O glimmering island set sea-girdled and alone

A gleam of white rock through a sunny haze:
O all ye hoary caverns ringing with the moan
Of long green waters in the southern bays;
Ye murmurous never-ceasing voices of the tide;
Ye plumed foams wherein the shoreland spirits
ride...

This seems inspired by Tolkien's 1914 visit to the Cornish seashore, of which he wrote to Edith (Biography, p. 70):

Nothing I could say in a dull old letter would describe it to you. The sun beats down on you and a huge Atlantic swell smashes and spouts over the snags and reefs. The sea has carved weird wind-holes and spouts into the cliffs which blow with trumpety noises or spout foam like a whale, and everywhere you see black and red rock and white foam against violet and transparent seagreen.

Before he must leave the isle -- hearing "through the lighted elms at eve" a bell pealing from "a high inland tower" -- the narrator laments:

For me for ever thy forbidden marge appears
A gleam of white rock over sundering seas,

And thou art crowned in glory through a mist
of tears,
Thy shores all full of music, and thy lands of
ease --

All the bittersweet wistfulness of the Elvenfold is here, with the "sea-voiced" call of the gulls.

"Light as Leaf on Lindentree" (appearing in Leeds University's The Gryphon n.s. 6:6, June 1925, p. 217) is an early version of the tale of Tinuviel as told by Strider on Weathertop (Rings, I:258-260), though there it is much revised. Each version has nine stanzas of eight lines each, in the mode of ann-thennath (abacbab in iambic tetrameter). "Lindentree" carries an extra stanza in alliterative mode by way of prologue.

While the revisions do not change the poems' central plot, there are significant differences in certain details, as there are between the story versions in The Book of Lost Tales and The Silmarillion (cf. esp. BLT, II:52-53; TS, pp. 197-203). But here I must restrict myself mainly to the differences of the poetic versions.

To begin, "Lindentree" mentions Dairon, the minstrel who loved Luthien, while the Rings version does not (but speaks of "music of a pipe unseen" at Beren's first glimpse of her). In "Lindentree" Dairon's presence, and his later flight from Doriath, are only implied by his piping of its absence (and his rivalry, in both poems, goes unmentioned). Furthermore, in "Lindentree" it is unclear whether Beren catches Luthien when she is separated from Dairon as they flee Beren, whereas in Rings and Tales she has been dancing alone. In "Lindentree" Beren dances with Luthien (and in Tales she flirtatiously teaches him to dance and laughs at his stumbling); in Rings he catches her in his arms as they join in love and doom. Rings' last stanza glimpses their future (I:260):

Long was the way that fate them bore,
O'er stony mountains cold and grey,
Through halls of iron and darkling door,
And woods of nightshade morrowless.
The Sundering Seas between them lay,
And yet at last they met once more,
And long ago they passed away
In the forest singing sorrowless.

"Lindentree" seems to imply that Beren is an Elf like Luthien, since nothing beyond their perpetual bliss together seems allowed. Yet in Tales' early versions Beren is a Gnome. In The Silmarillion he is a Man, as he is in the Rings poem.

Though less sophisticated than Rings, the "Lindentree" version succeeds in hinting at some deeper mythological setting. Who is Dairon (seemingly a Pan-figure)? What means "Tinuviel" (for by it Beren "enchants" Luthien in return)? Where is Doriath (amid the "tangled woods of Elfiness")? And how came Beren Ermabwed to be broken-hearted (as the prologue prepares yet the poem, like a partial chord, never resolves)? The uninitiate might hunger to learn more.

"The Nameless Land" (appearing in the 1927 Leeds volume Realities: An Anthology of Verse edited by G.S. Tancred, pp. 24-25) describes a land of "ageless afternoons," fiery golden lights upon gardens more green than ours, immortal silver-leaved trees, with a sheer encircling shore across a vast virgin ocean "Where voices move in veiled choir."

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,
O! mountains where no man may be!

"Beyond the world's edge" the narrator envisions Earendil as "a wayward star, / Than beacon towers in Gondobar / More fair."

Since we will address the Bombadil cycle poems as a group, we now arrive at the three Bimble Bay poems. "Progress in Bimble Town" (appearing in The Oxford Magazine, October 15, 1931, p. 22) has few connections to Tolkien's mythology but plenty with his beliefs. It ridicules the tourism industry which has shoddied the fictional area of Bimble Bay with noise and litter. After sampling a passage like:

...sometimes late, when motor-bikes
are not passing with a screech,
one hears faintly (if one likes)
the sea still at it on the beach.
At what? At churning orange-rind,
piling up banana-skins,
gnawing paper, trying to grind
a broth of bottles, packets, tins,
before a new day comes with more,

one may recall an instance where a motorcycle ripped past Tolkien and C.S. Kilby. "That," growled Tolkien, "is an Orc" (Jan Johnson interview with Kilby, September 27, 1980).

Another Bimble poem, "Glip" (unavailable to me at this time), tells of "a strange slimy creature who lives beneath the floor of a cave and has pale luminous eyes" (Biography, p. 106). Who else but an early Gollum?

And in "The Dragon's Visit" (appearing in The Oxford Magazine, February 4, 1937, p. 342), hobbit-like middle-class types battle a dragon perched in their own back yards and are eaten for their efforts. In a substantially revised version (appearing in the 1965 St. Martin's volume edited by Caroline Hillier, Winter's Tales for Children: 1, pp. 84-87), one character survives to kill the dragon: Miss Biggins.

Poems of The Red Book of Westmarch and Their Early Versions

The Preface

Many of the poems in the Bombadil cycle are nonsensical, and Tolkien blames this on their authorship by Hobbits. In his preface to the poems (selected from an ancient manuscript, The Red Book of Westmarch), he mildly lampoons the "editorial prologue" so customary to this academic genre (cf. Foster, Guide, p. 420) as well as his own tastes in poetry (cf. Helms, Tolkien's World, pp. 128, 132-133, 136). Discussing marginal glosses, criticizing pseudo-Elvish constructions, and characterizing the Hobbits' literary tastes are all devices to further this fiction of scholarship which took seed in the Rings appendices.

In the Red Book preface, Tolkien writes (p. 9):

The verses, of hobbit origin, he generally two features in common. They are fond of strange words, and of rhyming and metrical tricks -- in their simplicity Hobbits evidently regarded such things as virtues or graces, though they were, no doubt, mere imitations of Elvish practices.

It's as if Tolkien were saying, "I didn't write this doggerel; I'm just editing the manuscript."

Helms (Tolkien's World, p. 127), notes that "Tolkien modelled his own Red Book after the Welsh volume [the Red Book of Hergest], partly, it would seem, as a parody of [William F.] Skene's poor work." (It is the only English Hergest translation in existence.)

The Poems

"The Adventures of Tom Bombadil" first appeared in The Oxford Magazine 52:13, February 15, 1934, pp. 464-465; "Bombadil Goes A-Boating" was written especially for the Bombadil book (Biography, p. 244). Carpenter tell us (*ibid.*, p. 162) that

Tom Bombadil was a well-known figure in the Tolkien family, for the character was based on a Dutch doll that belonged to Michael. The doll looked very splendid with the feather in its hat, but John did not like it and one day stuffed it down the lavatory. Tom was rescued, and survived

to become the hero of "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil." In the poem, Tom encounters "Goldberry, the Riverwoman's daughter" who pulls him into the water; Old Man Willow, who catches him in a bole-crack; the Badgerfolk, who trap him in their tunnels; and a Barrow-wight, cold spirit such as of the ancient graves near Oxford. In 1937 Tolkien in fact called Tom "the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside" (Letters, p. 26). Lighthearted Tom escapes each encounter and captures Goldberry for his bride. Tolkien later wrote him into The Lord of the Rings at Michael's request, though he left him an intentional enigma (*ibid.*, p. 174; cf. Road, pp. 80-83), a figure essentially independent of good and evil (*ibid.*, pp. 178-179; cf. p. 192 and Foster's Guide, pp. 496-497).

As Adventures was preparing for publication, Tolkien admitted, "There have been a number of minor changes made at various times in the process of assimilating Tom B. to the Lord of the Rings world" (Letters, p. 318). The peacock feather worn by the Dutch doll, as described in Rings (I:168), was changed in poem 1 to a "swan-wing feather: to increase the riverishness, and to allow for the incident in the second poem, the gift of a blue feather by the king's fisher" (Letters, p. 318). None of the other moderate changes alter the poem's sense.

Tolkien confessed to his publisher the pleasure he took in poem 2 because the line about an otter's whisker referred to the Volungasaga, and because he lifted the line about "queer tales" from Bree "straight" from The Ancrene Wisse (Letters, pp. 315, 449).

By "analysis" of poems 1 and 2, Tolkien deduced that both Bombadil poems were written in Buckland. Poem 1 is a Hobbitic version of events long before Rings. Poem 2 describes Tom's friendship with Farmer Maggot; therefore it "refers to the days of growing shadow, before Frodo set out" for Mordor (Letters, pp. 318-319; cf. Rings, I:184).

Poem 3, "Errantry," was read to the Inklings and published soon afterwards (appearing in The Oxford Magazine 52:5, November 9, 1933, p. 180). Warnie Lewis called it "a real discovery," marvelling at its meter,

interlinear rhymes and assonances as well as its vocabulary and general feel (Diaries, 30 November 1933 entry, p. 126; cf. Road, pp. 145-147). To his publisher Tolkien called it "the most attractive" of his collection. It was in a meter of his own invention but "so difficult that except in this one example I have never been able to use it again -- it just blew out in a single impulse" (Letters, pp. 162-163; cf. p. 443).

Helms suggests Tolkien was here caricaturing the end-line/mid-line rhyme scheme found in Charles Williams' Taliessin poems (Tolkien's World, p. 138). He is probably right, for Tolkien didn't care for Williams' style and said so from time to time. Carpenter relates Tolkien's good humor even in this matter (cf. Inklings, pp. 123-126).

In his preface (p. 8), Tolkien calls poem 3 "much the longest and most elaborate" of the Hobbits' whimsical poetry of the kind that "returns to its own beginning, and so may be recited until the hearers revolt" (p. 7). It was apparently written by Bilbo sometime after his return in T.A. 2942, when his grasp of Elvish was less keen; Tolkien labels the names used in it as "mere inventions in the Elvish style" (p. 8). Its quaint allusions to historical elements of the First and Second Ages of Middle-earth are similarly spurious; Tolkien speaks of the poem as being "applied, somewhat incongruously, to the High-elvish and Numenorean legends of Earendil" (p. 8). This should explain the minor textual variants occurring between the Oxford Magazine version and the Adventures recension -- which Tolkien calls "the older form," belonging to "the early days after Bilbo's return" (p. 8). (The Oxford version mentions plundering the Attercops besides wooing a butterfly, fighting "the dragon-flies of Paradise," and battling Honeybees.)

Tolkien's early notion of the gossamere-winged inhabitants of Faerie, then, here seems fitting. He is perpetuating the myth himself, but under guise of being a mere editor of Hobbit poems.

Poem 4 is "Princess Mee" (first appearing as "Princess Ni" in Leeds University Verse 1914-1924, p. 58). Thoroughly revised for the Bombadil cycle, much of the feathery-fairy imagery in the 24-line "Ni" is intact here and reinforced by additions. For instance, where "Ni" reads "While her silver slippers, curdled / With opals pale, / Are of fishes' mail -- / How they slide on the coral floor!" in "Mee," the Princess is clearly dancing on a glassy mirror "of windless water."

Looking down, Mee sees her reflection as Princess Shee (Irish for "fairy"):

Only their feet
Could ever meet;
For where the ways might lie
To find a land
Where they do not stand
But hang down in the sky
No one could tell
Nor learn in spell
In all the elven-lore.

Thus Tolkien gives us, as it were, a Faerie's Faerie.

Poem 5, "The Man in the Moon Stayed Up Too Late" (first appearing as "The Cat and the Fiddle: A Nursery-Rhyme Undone and the Scandalous Secret Unlocked" in Leeds's Yorkshire Poetry 2:19, October-November 1923, pp. 1-3), took minor revisions for its form in The Lord of the Rings (I:216-218). It

contains a few lines more about the cat's and dog's antics; the cow also dances on the turves instead of roofs, and the dish dances on the table instead of makes love with the spoon. Tolkien tells us Bilbo wrote it. Poem 6, "The Man in the Moon Came Down Too Soon" (first appearing in the 1923 A Northern Venture, pp. 17-19), "must be derived ultimately from Gondor [...] based on the traditions of Men" (Adventures, p. 8).

"Based on the traditions of Men" is right: Tolkien wrote the poem based on the Harley Ms. No. 2253 "Man in the Moon" poem, "perhaps the best medieval English lyric surviving, and certainly one of the hardest" to interpret (Road, p. 29). Tolkien wrote these two as "asterisk-poems," plausible reconstructions of time-worn nursery rhymes. Shippey puts it well (*ibid*, p. 29):

If one assumes a long tradition of 'idle children' repeating 'thoughtless tales' in increasing confusion, one might think that poems like Tolkien's were the remote ancestors of the modern rhymes.

The first line of poem 6 in fact tips us off to its medieval origin: "The Man in the Moon had silver shoon" (Adventures, p. 34; BLT, I:204).

In the Mankato Studies G.B. Johnston notes that, since At the Back of the North Wind was a rewrite of the "Hey Diddle Diddle" rhyme, Tolkien here basically one-ups George MacDonald ("Poetry," pp. 66-68).

These Hobbitic connections are however much later than Tolkien's early references to Tilion, Ainu pilot of the Moon, in The Silmarillion (p. 114). Furthermore, Tolkien wrote a poem about the Man in the Moon in March 1915, possibly connected with notes about a song (unwritten) to be sung by Eriol about a legend regarding Uole Mikumi, The King of the Moon, "as Men have it" (BLT, I:202). This is the same character as Uole Kuvion, The Man in the Moon, whose aged form inhabited that vessel (BLT, I:193, 202, 206).

The perceptive reader can surely sympathize with how the Elven tales became so bowdlerized by the beer-loving Hobbits. Poem 6 appears with moderate to heavy revisions from the early version, and with two added stanzas; only two changes to the poem's sense are substantial.

"The Root of the Boot" (appearing in Songs for Philologists, published in 1936) was revised for Sam's recitation in The Lord of the Rings (I:276-278), and appears so as poem 7, "The Stone Troll," in Adventures. As such it is much improved. Besides adding one stanza and improving on the meter and rhymes, Tolkien has made the humor more sophisticated while retaining the dialects and "flavor" of the poem (cf. Road, p. 241nl).

I know of no early version of poem 8, "Perry-the-Winkle." The poem bears a hobbit's whimsy but no first-hand (and little second-hand) knowledge of trolls. Tolkien says the Red Book's margin marks the poem SG, denoting authorship by Sam Gamgee, "and the ascription may be accepted" (p. 7). Foster (Guide, p. 408) says the character of Winkle "may have been based on a real Hobbit"; certainly the name fits Tolkien's schemes for Hobbit nomenclature.

Poem 9, "The Mewlips," appears slightly altered from its early form, published (in The Oxford Magazine 55:13, February 18, 1937, p. 403) under the title "Knocking at the Door: Lines induced by sensations when

waiting at the door of an Exalted Academic Person." While the older title makes amusing reading, it doesn't really fit the poem; as such the whole key to interpretation is too self-contained. Rather (since humor was never beneath Tolkien) this was probably a device to get such a dark poem past an editor without hinting at any mythological connections.

Foster accepts Hobbit authorship of the poem, conjecturing intimations of the Misty Mountains in "Merlock Mountains" (Morlock in the older version) and of Mirkwood in the phrases "the spider-shadows" and "the wood of hanging trees and the gallowweed" (Guide, p. 338). He also suggests that the "marsh of Tode" is "patterned on the marsh at the eastern end of the Old Forest Road" (*ibid*, p. 494). Foster thinks the poem is based on vague reports of Orcs; perhaps the Barrow Downs, the Withywindle, and rumors of a flooded Isengard figure in, too.

The more substantial "Mewlips" alterations include: "gloomily the gorcrows stand" for "grey the glooming gargoyles stand" in stanza 3 ("grinning gargoyles" appearing in stanza 2); disappearance of the fireworks and sparks; "there they count their gold" for "wet the walls of gold"; and "Their feeling fingers creep" for the penultimate stanza's line which originally read "All cased like armadilloes."

Interestingly, J.S. Ryan (writing in The Minas Tirith Evening-Star 14:1, Winter 1985, pp. 6-10) notes a reference in a book by E.M. Wright, wife of Tolkien's tutor Joseph Wright, who was "expert in [her] husband's work" (Biography, p. 154). In her 1913 Rustic Speech and Folk-lore, "Lizzie" Wright describes a local belief in creatures called "knockers" who "haunt the tinmines of Cornwall [...] mining on their own account, out of sight" (p. 199). The realm of the Mewlips bears some resemblance to an abandoned mine, and this tradition may have influenced Tolkien.

Poem 10, "Oliphant," appears identically as in The Lord of the Rings. The poem was traditional in the Shire, according to Sam (Adventures, p. 7; cf. Rings, II:322). Tolkien seems to have written it especially for Rings, as he says it was a "Hobbit nursery-rhyme (though it was commonly supposed to be mythical)" (Letters, p. 77). It is a tailored Hobbit version of the bestiary poem such as the two that follow.

Still, Tolkien published an extended parody of the classical bestiary poem, called "Iumbo, or Ye Kinde of Ye Oliphant" (appearing in The Stapeldon Magazine, June 1927, pp. 125-127). It begins on a tone similar to the Hobbit bestiary verses, though in a more padded meter:

The Indic oliphant's a burly lump,
A moving mountain, a majestic mammal
(But those that fancy that he wears a hump
Confuse him incorrectly with the camel).

The bestiary poem typically draws moral lessons from Nature, and so does this one (while remaining true to its ironic vein). After a comical description of the beast we learn that the oliphant has a vice, "one convivial flaw": he relishes the mandrake root. Intoxicated by the drug,

He blindly blunders thumping o'er the ground,
And villages invades with thunderous sound.

If any house oppose his brutish bump,
Then woe betide -- it crumbles in a heap,

Its inmates jumbled in a jellied lump
Pulped unexpected in imprudent sleep.

Afterwards he is trapped by hunters in a pit. The moral of the Story? Wine is the fluid for feast, fun and frolic; so humans "whose frenzy's root is drugs not drink / Should promptly be suppressed and popped in clink."

Poem 11, "Fastitocalon" was (like "princess Mee") found in the margins of the Red Book. There it was "carelessly written," a "half-remembered fragment" of the bestiary genre (p. 7). Tolkien thus punctures the extended debate on the origin of the Exeter Book's Anglo-Saxon poem, Physiologus, supposedly corrupted from the Greek bestiary of the same name. His contribution to the editorial fray is that this "unintelligible" Hobbit scrawling is the true source -- and that the author was "not Nearchus, but a nameless Hobbit of the Shire" (Helms, Tolkien's World, p. 147).

Tolkien makes several comments on the poem in Letters (pp. 343-344), but says chiefly:

The poem on Fastitocalon is not like Cat and Oliphaunt my own invention entirely but a reduced and rewritten form, to suit Hobbit fancy, of an item in old "bestiaries." [... I used the Anglo-Saxon Physiologus], thinking that it sounded comic and absurd enough to serve as a Hobbit alteration of something more learned and Elvish [...]. The learned name in this case seems to have been Aspido-chelone "turtle with a round shield (of hide)." Of that astitocalon is a corruption no worse than many of the time; but I am afraid the F was put on by the vesifier simply to make the name alliterate, as was compulsory for poets in his day, with the other words in his line. Shocking, or charming freedom, according to taste.

An early version of the poem, "Adventures in Unnatural History and Medieval Metres, Being The Freaks of Fisiologus" (appearing in The Stapeldon Magazine, June 1927, pp. 123-125) doesn't compare with the Hobbitic fragment till halfway through. After describing the beast and his habitat, the version gives two-and-a-half stanzas largely retained in "Fastitocalon" about the foolishness of landing and camping on the creature's floating hide. The verse ends with the humorous moral significacio:

This mighty monster teaches us
That trespassing is dangerous,
And perils lurk in wait
For curious folk who peep in doors
Of other folk, or dance on floors
Too early or too late
with jazz;
[...]
That many noises loud and strong
Are neither music nor a song
But only just a band.

Poem 12, "Cat," was written in 1956 to amuse a granddaughter (Biography, p. 244), and included in the Bombadil volume for its Hobbitish flavor. It resembles "Oliphaunt" in tone, and being evidently touched up by Sam.

I haven't found an early published version of poem 13, "Shadow-Bride." In this poem, the "man who dwelt

alone / as day and night went past" sitting "still as carven stone, / and yet no shadow cast" can be seen as outside of time, just as Lothlorien was outside of time under the rule of the Grey Lady, Galadriel. Now an Elvish "lady clad in grey" appears; the man awakens "and broke the spell that bound him." Then grasping her firmly he "wrapped her shadow round him," trading his deathlike enchantment for her own. Thenceforth she joins him in a realm "where neither days / not any nights" are. The poem ends:

But once a year when caverns yawn
and hidden things awake,
they dance together then till dawn
and a single shadow make.

This somewhat eerie tale combines elements of Beren's enchanting of Luthien and hers of him, as well as their mortal fate together.

Poem 14, "The Hoard" (first appearing as "Iumonna Gold Galdre Bewunden" in Leeds' The Gryphon n.s. 4:4, January 1923, p. 130 and later in The Oxford Magazine 55:15, March 4, 1937, p. 473), is based on line 3052 of Beowulf. Tolkien renders the line as "the gold of men long ago enmeshed in enchantment" (Letters, p. 312). The poem effectively characterizes Tolkien's concept of Elves, Dwarves, dragons and Men in its episodic tale of a hand-me-down hoard (on the curse of gold, cf. esp. Road, pp. 67-72).

The Elves "sang as they wrouht many fair things"; yet came "Greed that sang not," and "over Elvenhome the shadow rolled." The Dwarf, clinging in goldlust to his riches, grew heedless of a young dragon and was slain. The old dragon brooded over his hoard very much like Smaug:

To his belly's slime gems stuck thick,
silver and gold he would snuff and lick:
he knew the place of the least ring [...].

But amid thoughts of bloody vengeance against thieves, the ailing dragon succumbed to a young knight. Similarly, the king who gained the hoard only wasted away from its curse.

The swords of his thanes were dull with rust,
his glory fallen, his rule unjust,
his halls hollow, and his bowers cold,
but he was king of elvish gold.

The above-quoted Oxford Magazine version is identical to that in Adventures. It differs substantially (in words, not in sense) from the Gryphon version. The latter names "Elfinesse" instead of "Elvenhome"; it asserts "the dwarves had stolen from men and elves" their gold rather than digging it on their own account; it claims the earth shall hide the hoard "till those return / Who wrought the treasure, till again burn / the lights of Faery."

Tolkien's preface says the poem depends on Elvish and Numenorean lore from Riverdell, and draws on heroic tales of the First Age. He suggests that "it seems to contain echoes of the Numenorean tale of Turin and Mim the Dwarf." The types fit loosely, if models must be sought. Foster (Guide, p. 258) adds that Glaurung may be the dragon's model; this seems plausible only for Glaurung's greed, not for the dragon's decrepitude.

"The Sea-Bell," poem 15 (first appearing as "Looney" in The Oxford Magazine 52:9, January 8, 1934,

p. 340), has received the most critical attention, probably since Tolkien says it is labelled in the Red Book by the rubric Frodo's Dreme. The editor's fiction is thus used in an obvious attempt to tie Frodo to the poem even while Tolkien "objectively" criticizes the possibility. As Tolkien writes in his preface (Adventures, p. 9):

It is the latest piece and belongs to the Fourth Age [...] and though [...] most unlikely to have been written by Frodo himself, the title shows that it was associated with the dark and despairing dreams which visited him in March and October during his last three years. But there were certainly other traditions concerning Hobbits that were taken by the "wandering-madness," and if they ever returned, were afterwards queer and incommunicable.

Tolkien adds that distrust of the Sea and of Elven lore were in vogue in the Shire at the end of the Third Age.

While W.H. Auden praised "The Sea-Bell" as "wonderful" (Letters, p. 378), Tolkien regarded it as "the poorest" of all the collection and didn't even want to include it (*ibid.*, p. 312). Yet Flieger rightly suggests that, whatever the poem's meaning, Tolkien's decision to publish it under the rubric Frodo's Dreme says something of his feelings about Frodo's eventual end, and should be examined with this in mind (Light, p. 147). Though perhaps attaching too much importance to Tolkien's role as airon for Frodo, Flieger sensitively explores the author-character relationship (*ibid.*, pp. 148-150; cf. Road, pp. 211-214) and the significance of speech for Tolkien (*ibid.*, pp. 151-158). Tolkien was ever averse to identifying the themes or characters of his fiction with his own beliefs. Perhaps he was so using caution; at times he would later change or recant a standoffishness in such matters. In any event, Shippey notes that, in Tolkien's poetry, "The longing for Paradise on Earth [...] was compelling and repeated and there before Tolkien took to fiction" (Road, p. 212).

While I can hardly improve on Shippey's comparison of the versions (*ibid.*, pp. 210-211). "The Sea-Bell" is the longer and more somber of the two.

In "Looney," the narrator ferries himself alone to a Faerie-land inhabited by birds and animals (and winged dancers -- only hinted at). On his return after "a year and a day" he bears only "withering leaves and pebbles" and "a single shell, where I hear still the spell / Echoing far" from his mundane surroundings. Since "seldom they speak, men that I meet," it seems the enchantment has made the narrator a ragged, crazy outcast who can only speak to himself.

Substantial changes transform the updated version. In "The Sea-Bell," the narrator finds a conch or seashell which faintly echoes Faerie seas from afar. When an empty boat appears, he hastily boards it with the words:

'It is later than late! Why do we wait?'
I leapt in and cried: 'Bear me away!'

He is borne to cold and dim Faerie shores of "glooming caves" and shadowed meads. Finding only animals and faint "pipes, voices, horns on the hill," he asserts kingship over them; but a vast shadow appears and bows him down. He flees to a wood, sitting still in the mold, under bidding of his words "For a year and a day

there I must stay." At last light returns; he revives and runs to the shore, hounded by the shadow and by nature. On his return to mortal lands, the sea-shell he yet clutches is "silent and dead." The enchantment is spent. He is left an outcast among the society of men.

"The Sea-Bell" is definitely of darker tone than "Looney." The careful reader may suspect Flieger and Shippey are right: Tolkien meant to say something by the Frodo's Dreme association. If he had only wanted a rustic Hobbit verse he could have kept the title "Looney," with its connotations of a "queer" and Tookish Hobbit adventurer enchanted by wanderlust. As the Hobbit composition it represents, "The Sea-Bell" was probably so written because no Hobbit knew of Frodo's passage into Paradise, as told elsewhere (Rings, III:384):

And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain tuned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise.

"The Last Ship" was unknown to Carpenter under its first appearance (under the title "Firiël" in the obscure The Chronicle [of the Coventry of the Sacred Heart, Roehampton] 4, 1934, pp. 30-32) (cf. Road, pp. 241-242n2).

Writing at full editorial tilt, Tolkien uses logic to deduce that the Red Book poem "must ultimately be derived from Gondor" (p. 8), since its tradition reflects a knowledge of the coastlands and sea-going rivers of the South. The poem mentions the Seven Rivers to further support this view (pp. 8, 64). Tolkien implies the poem pre-dates the birth of Sam's granddaughter Firiël since "her name, if not connected with the rhyme, must be derived from it; it could not have arisen in Westmarch" being a "Gondorian name, of High-Elvish form" (p.8). The name means "mortal woman" -- most fitting, though possibly invented for the character, whose "evermortal" quality is reinforced by the epithets "Earth-maiden" and "Earth's daughter." Tolkien calls the poem a "rehandling" of Southern matter, though he concedes the idea that Bilbo may have acquired it in Rivendell.

It is interesting to note that the artwork of "Firiël" depicts a girl of ten or twelve, whereas we see in Baynes' final illustration for "The Last Ship" a tall woman of perhaps 16 or 18.

From the first stanzas of the 1934 version only minor alterations occur within the present version. The fourth stanza's last line, which compared Elven voices to the wind "in green leaves swinging," employs the new image "and far bells ringing." In the later version, two changes are made to suggest the Elves' dreamlike and almost leisurely pace downriver.

Beginning with the fifth stanza, changes become substantial. In the Chronicle version the Elves' appeal to Firiël appears in the sixth stanza, preceding their dialogue; in the Red Book version it is delayed until the tenth stanza, is most persuasively put, and includes an extra stanza of pleading. Answering the Elves, Firiël in the early version dares one step when "her heart misgave and shrank"; the enchantment fades

and the Elves pass on. In contrast, the present version reads "then deep in clay her feet sank"; Firiël cries, "I cannot come! [...] / I was born Earth's daughter!" So in the 1934 version Firiël falters and remains behind; in the present version the clay symbolizes and reminds her (and us) of the mortal nature which holds her to the circles of a greater blessedness than the Elves'.

The last three stanzas of "Firiël" tell of her return to the workaday world of chores and breakfast. These are telescoped to two stanzas in "The Last Ship" which emphasize that the Elves have passed on from Middle-earth for good.

Closing Remarks

This paper has tried to call attention to and compare the early and later published versions of Tolkien's minor poems and those of The Red Book of Westmarch. This is the first known collation and comparison of these poems as they relate to his larger mythology. As Niggle's great tree and his panoramic vision grew out of efforts to paint one single leaf, it is my hope this paper attaches some twigs to the leaves of Tolkien's poetry so that others working in the scholarly landscape may extend the view — revealing branches, limbs, a trunk ... and beyond.

Key to Minor Poems

1. "The Happy Mariners": The Stapeldon Magazine 5:26, June 1920, pp.69-70
"The Eadigan Saelidan": A Northern Venture (Leeds, 1923), pp. 15-16
2. "The City of the Gods": The Microcosm 8:1, Spring 1923, p. 8
3. "An Evening in Tavrobel": Leeds University Verse 1914-1924 (Leeds, 1924), p. 56
4. "The Lonely Isle": Leeds University Verse 1914-1924 (Leeds, 1924), p. 57
5. "Light as Leaf on Lindentree": The Gryphon n.s. 6:6, June 1925, p. 217
6. "The Nameless Land": Realities: An Anthology of Verse (Leeds, 1927), pp. 24-25
7. "Progress in Bimble Town": The Oxford Magazine, October 15, 1931, p. 22
8. "Glip": no known published antecedent
9. "The Dragon's Visit": The Oxford Magazine, February 4, 1937, p. 342; Winter's Tales for Children: 1 (St. Martin's, 1965), pp. 84-87

Key to Bombadil-cycle Poems

1. "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil": The Oxford Magazine 52:13, February 15, 1934, pp. 464-465
2. "Bombadil Goes A-Boating": no antecedent
3. "Errantry": The Oxford Magazine 52:5, November 9, 1933, p. 180
4. "Princess Mee": ("Princess Ni") Leeds University Verse 1914-1924 (Leeds, 1924), p. 58
5. "The Man in the Moon Stayed Up Too Late": ("The Cat and the Fiddle...") Yorkshire Poetry 2:19, October-November 1923, pp. 1-3
6. "The Man in the Moon Came Down Too Soon": A Northern Venture (Leeds, 1923), pp. 15-16
7. "The Stone Troll": ("The Root of the Boot") Songs for Philologists (Leeds, 1936)
8. "Perry-the-Winkle": no known published antecedent
9. "The Mewlips": ("Knocking at the Door...") The Oxford Magazine 55:13, February 18, 1937, p. 403
10. "Oliphant": (Tumbo, or Ye Kind of Ye Oliphant") The Stapeldon Magazine June 1927, pp. 125-127
11. "Fastitocalon": ("The Freaks of Fisiologus") The Stapeldon Magazine June 1927, pp. 123-125

12. "Cat": no antecedent
13. "Shadow-Bride": no known published antecedent
14. "The Hoard": ("Iumonna Gold Galdre Bewunden") The Gryphon n.s. 4:4, January 1923, p. 130; The Oxford Magazine 55:15, March 4, 1937, p. 473
15. "The Sea-Bell": ("Looney") The Oxford Magazine 52:9, January 8, 1934, p. 340
16. "The Last Ship": ("Firiël") The Chronicle 4, 1934, pp. 30-32

Other Relevant Poems

"Bagme Bloma," "Ides Aelfscyne," "Ofer Widne Garsecg": Songs for Philologists (Leeds, 1936) (cf. Road, Appendix B, pp. 227-233)

"Imram": Time and Tide, December 3, 1955, p. 1561

"Once Upon a Time": Winter's Tales for Children: 1 (St. Martin's, 1965), pp. 44-45

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J.R.R. Tolkien

The Hobbit (1937); "Leaf by Niggle" (1945); "On Fairy-Stories" (1945); *The Lord of the Rings: Vol. 1, The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954); Vol. II, *The Two Towers* (1954); Vol. III, *The Return of the King* (1955); *The Silmarillion* (1977); *Unfinished Tales* (1980).

C.S. Lewis

Out of the Silent Planet (1938); *Perelandra* (1943); *That Hideous Strength* (1945); *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950); *Prince Caspian* (1951); *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952); *The Silver Chair* (1953); *The Horse and His Boy* (1954); *The Magician's Nephew* (1955); *The Last Battle* (1956); *Till We Have Faces* (1956).

Charles Williams

War in Heaven (1930); *Many Dimensions* (1931); *The Place of the Lion* (1931); *The Greater Trumps* (1932); *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933); *Descent into Hell* (1937); *All Hallow's Eve* (1945); *Taliessin through Logres* (1938); and *The Region of the Summer Stars* (1944) (printed together in 1954).