Over Middle-earth Sent Unto Men: On the Philological Origins of Tolkien's Eärendel Myth

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Abstract
Goes beyond Carpenter’s well-known reference to Cynewulf’s Christ as Tolkien’s “primary inspiration” for Eärendel. Seeks out the philological roots of various aspects of Eärendel (star, messenger, mariner, eagle, herald).

Additional Keywords
Cynewulf. Christ; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Eärendel—Sources
One of the most striking and memorable of Tolkien's myths is that of Eärendil.¹ Humphrey Carpenter (Biography, p. 64) long ago pointed out that Tolkien's primary inspiration for the figure of Eärendil was his 1913 discovery of lines 104-5 of Cynewulf's Crist, an Anglo-Saxon (AS) poem found only in the Exeter Book:

Eala Earendel, engla beorhtast,
ofer middangeard monnum sended
Hall Earendel, brightest of angels,
over middle-earth sent unto men

Still, Tolkien critics have made little endeavor to explore beyond the now comfortable familiarity of these two lines, either within the Crist² or further into the philological tangle in which the "historical" Earendil is enmeshed.³ While these two lines show the "precise kindling point of imagination" for Tolkien's Eärendil,⁴ careful study of the larger body of philological lore surrounding the "historical" Earendil reveals several interesting and illuminating parallels with Tolkien's Eärendil myth which demonstrate that its broader origins are philological, the result of Tolkien's own discovery and exploration of Eärendil beyond this "kindling point".

As the following is an examination of the "sources" for Tolkien's Eärendil, I feel that I should offer some brief justification for disregarding Tolkien's own "clear warnings as to the dangers" (Shippey, p. ix) of engaging in such studies. To do so I need only note that Tolkien himself allowed that "only in one case Eärendil will reference to its source cast any light on the legends or their 'meaning' — and even in this case the light is little." (Letters, p. 387) While through this study I take issue with the last part of this statement, I have taken the first to heart as leave (if unenthusiastic) to delve into the philological lore of the "historical" Earendil, and to ponder its role in the origins and development of Tolkien's Eärendil.

(Note: The two most important, though by no means the only, texts for an exploration of Tolkien's Eärendil, the Crist and the Blickling Homilies, are also among the least accessible. Thus, I have given a full citation and translation of the relevant portions of these texts as an appendix.)

The only certain knowledge we have regarding the history and meaning of the word Earendel is that is nothing is known with certainty about it. Of the numerous etymologies offered for it and its plethora of related forms — e.g. Lombardic (Lomb.) Auríuandalús (Gollancz, p. 34); Old Norse (ON) Óravandil (Grimm, p. 375), Aurvandil (Stürlison, p. 105); AS earendil, eorwendil (Sweet, p. 72, line 545), eorwandil (ibid., p. 73, line 1161), eorwendil (Morris, p. 163, line 30); Old High German (OHG) Orendil, Orentil (Grimm, p. 374-5); Old Danish (OD) Hørvedillus (in a Latinized form due to Saxo; Müller, p. 135) — those of Jacob Grimm and Israel Gollancz are most representative of the thoughts contemporary to Tolkien's own discovery and exploration. Grimm declares (p. 375):

I am only in doubt as to the right spelling and interpretation of the word; an OHG. òr entil implies AS. earendel, and the two would demand ON. orvendill, eorwendill; but if we start with ON. orw dell, then AS. earendel, OHG. orvendil seem preferable. The latter part of the compound certainly contains entil = wendil.⁵ The first part should be either ðra, eare (aurís [Lat. = 'ear']), or else ON. ör, gen. örvar (sagitta [Lat. = 'arrow']).⁷

Gollancz (p. 34) proposes that it is related to Sanskrit ursa 'the morning-red', Latin aurora and Greek ηώς = 'dawn', citing the similarity between "the old Germanic spring-goddess 'Austrô'," reconstructed from Bede's Eastre = West Saxon Eastre, whence our own Easter, asserting thus that "Earendel and 'Easter' have evidently the same root." Gollancz mentions too the then-current theory that ear is to be equated with "the root signifying 'to burn' in Greek υβόμ, Latin urs, Ves-uvius, etc." Gollancz also discusses a theory that the earliest recorded form of the name, Lomb. Auríuandalus, is connected with ON orr 'moisture', and thus with AS ear 'sea'; Earendel should then be interpreted as "the wanderer on the sea, the seafarer."⁸ But, Gollancz protests, "It is certainly difficult from this standpoint to explain the Anglo-Saxon use of eorwendel', i.e. the sōstefsa sunnan lóma (Crist, line 106).

Just such an explanation proved not to be difficult, however, for Tolkien. Through careful study of the major manuscript sources for Earendel and of the various legends associated with him, and through a deep consideration of the philological possibilities represented in the word Earendel (both those presented above as well as others peculiar to Tolkien), and by means of characteristic philological synthesis, Tolkien would in fact "deduce" five aspects of Earendel — the Star, the Messenger, the Eagle, the Mariner, and the Herald, — and incorporate these aspects into his own Eärendil myth.

I. Earendel as Star

Tolkien's first and most vivid image of Eärendil, derived even from the "kindling point" of line 104 of the Crist, was that of a star, in particular the planet Venus, the
Morning- (or Evening-) star. Indeed, Tolkien’s earliest treatment of Earendel, the 1914 poem originally titled ‘The Voyage of Eärendel the Evening Star’ (BoLT II, pp. 267-9) is a dramatic (and somewhat morose) account of Eärendel’s celestial course. As with many of Tolkien’s images and themes, the nature and significance of Eärendel as Morning-star and of the source of his brilliant light (at first, merely his ship; later, the Silmaril upon his brow) would expand and deepen. Nevertheless, the single clear image, derived from the Crist, of Eärendel as a brilliant light poised above the middle-earth would remain, a powerful catalyst for the formation of Tolkien’s mythology.

There is indeed a primary myth explicitly equating Eärendel with a star. Snorri Sturluson, in the so-called Prose Edda, relates a tale in which Thor must carry the giant Aurvandil in a basket on his back across the rivers Elívagå. One of Aurvandil’s toes, sticking out of the basket, becomes frozen. Thor breaks the toe off and throws it into the sky, whence the star called Aurvandil-ôë, ‘Aurvandil’s toe’. It is not clear exactly what celestial object is indicated here; it has been variously postulated to be Sirius, the brightest of the fixed stars;10 or Rigel, a prominent blue-white star in the constellation of Orion;11 or, as Tolkien interpreted it, Venus.

There are persuasive philological reasons for Tolkien to have made this interpretation. It is clear from the light-imagery of the Crist that Cynewulf intended eorendel as a bright heavenly object. This is supported by the Epinal-Erfurt glosses (Sweet, pp. 7273) of eorendel as iubar = Latin ‘a beaming light, radiance, esp. of the morning star and other heavenly bodies’ (Simpson), and the equation there and in the Crist and the Blickling Homilies of Eorendel with AS’s òroma = ‘learn’ (OED: “Light, flame; a flash, ray, or gleam of light”). All of this in turn naturally recalls Latin lúcifer, Greek φωστήρ = ‘light-bearing, light-bringing’, used substantively of Venus as the Morning-star.12

II. Eärendel as Messenger

Another major aspect of Tolkien’s Eärendil is that of the Messenger. That Tolkien thought of Eärendel as a messenger can perhaps be glimpsed even in ‘The Voyage of Eärendel the Evening Star’: ‘And he heard the mirth of the folk of earth / And the falling of their tears’ (lines 37-38); but the greatest expression of this concept would come with the development of Tolkien’s mythology from The Book of Lost Tales to The Silmarillion, where Eärendil seeks “to bring ere he died the message of Elves and Men to the Valar in the West, that should move their hearts to pity for the sorrows of Middle-earth.”13

While a clear Messenger aspect of Eärendel can be derived from the Blickling Homilies, where the eorendel is explicitly John the Baptist, this aspect is not so immediately clear in the Eärendel of the Crist, as Cook’s own interpretive survey (pp. 89-91) shows. There are, however, important philological markers contained in both the Crist and the Blickling Homilies which led Tolkien to make this association.

It is well known that Tolkien was acutely aware of the original and precise meanings of words, an awareness which he exercised scrupulously and to great effect in his own writings (one need only consult Verlyn Flieger’s Splintered Light or Tom Shippey’s Road to Middle-earth to obtain an appreciation for this). Given this, the close association of Eärendel with engel = ‘messenger, angel’ in both the Crist (line 104, in the genitive form engla) and the Blickling Homilies (line 21, in the dative form englan, and line 35) must have struck Tolkien as significant. Engel is of course the ancestor of our own word ‘angel’; its form in Gothic is aggelis ‘angel, messenger’ (Wright, p. 303), from Greek ἀγγελός (or perhaps from Latin angelus; ibid., p. 303), which originally had only its primary meaning ‘messenger’, but which then also acquired its religious significance as a translation for the Hebrew maš’îk-yêwâ withhold ‘messenger of Jehovah’ (OED).14 This serves of course to emphasize the role of Eärendel as Messenger in these poems (a nuance lost to most moderns in the use of the word ‘angel’), and Tolkien’s perception of Eärendel as Messenger.

But Tolkien would also have known that Gothic had another word for ‘messenger’, árús, of obscure origins (Lehmann, p. 19), cognate with AS’s own alternate form for ‘messenger’, ðær, and widely held (OED to be etymologically related to AS ërendes (itself of obscure origins); this is of course our word ‘errand’, but retaining also its original, now obsolete, sense of “A message, a verbal communication to be repeated to a third party” or “In religious language: A petition or prayer presented through another (the Virgin Mary)” (OED); that is, ërendes is both the task of a messenger and the message itself. Now, while it would be imprudent of me to even hint that Eärendel and ërendes might be etymologically related, I will observe that they are so phonologically similar (/earendel/ vs. /earendes/) that an AS speaker might well have supposed a relationship between the two. That is, to an Anglo-Saxon, the very word earendel may have suggested both message and messenger. It is not unlikely that Tolkien, who delighted in such juxtapositions of sound and meaning, would have made a similar observation. Certainly the close correspondence of the role of Tolkien’s Eärendil with the original meaning (and particularly with the religious meaning) of ‘errand’ suggests that he did. Whether through engel or ërendes (though most likely through both), Tolkien came to see Eärendel as Messenger.

III. Eärendel as Eagle

Tolkien’s Eärendel is, in The Book of Lost Tales, somewhat opaque in its associations with eagles. Indeed, Tolkien’s earliest (extant) explanation of the name Eärendel (BoLT II, p. 267) notes that it “has some kinship to the Elfin ea and earen ‘eagle’ and ‘cryn’ (whenceforth cometh to mind the passage of Cristorn [= ‘Cleft of the Eagle’, through which the survivors of the fall of Gondolin escaped; see BoLT II, p. 193 and the use of the sign of the Eagle by Idril [Eärendel’s mother; ibid.])”, and that, echoing the situation of the “historical” Eärendel, “there are many interpreta-
tions both among Elves and Men” of the name Eärendel (BoLT II, p. 165), with a suggestion that it is a word of “some secret tongue” spoken by the people of Gondolin “that has perished with them from the dwellings of the Earth” (ibid.). In the Qenya Lexicon, ea and earen, here both meaning ‘eagle’, are found together with Eärendel (BoLT I, p. 251, entry Eärendel). Names based on the Qenya ea, earen ‘eagle’ are found also in BoLT II: e.g. Eäramë ‘Eagle-feeding’, a name of Eärendel’s ship. And Eärendel, as Messenger, shares a role with the Eagles of Manwë who, like Öthin’s ravens Hugin and Munin, already in The Book of Lost Tales serve as messengers and news-gatherers.

But surely the inspiration for this relationship, and for Tolkien’s Elvish etymology, resides firmly with the AS eærn = ‘eagle’, a fact which Tolkien himself let slip in a gloss, struck out, of Eäramë as Earnama, AS ‘Eagle-coat, Eagle-dress’ (BoLT II, p. 276, note 9). As with Eärendel above, while (I think) Tolkien would not offer eærn ‘eagle’ as in fact etymologically related to Eärendel, it is a phonologically plausible connection for an Anglo-Saxon to have made.

IV. Eärendel as Mariner

Though Tolkien initially explains the name Eärendel as containing the element ea ‘eagle’, by the time The Etymologies (LR, pp. 341-400) were written, Tolkien’s etymology for Eärendel had changed: rather than being explained as containing the Qenya word ea ‘eagle’, it was now formed from Qenya e’ar ‘sea’ (ibid., p. 349, bases AYAR-, AIR-). This process would eventually culminate in Qenya Eärendël ‘Sea-lover’, the Mariner. But even before this change, in fact from the earliest poems, Tolkien’s Eärendel is depicted as a Mariner. This aspect of Tolkien’s Eärendel, together with that of the Star, is the most pervasive, and can be traced from the earliest poem to Tolkien’s final writings on this myth.

A full discussion of the significance of the Sea and Mariners to Tolkien lies beyond the scope of this paper. It may be briefly noted that everywhere in Tolkien’s fictional writing, and often in his professional writing, the sea serves as a metaphor of longing for, and separation from, a lost, unfallen state that has perished with them from the dwellings of the Earth” (BoLT I, p. 66). To be sure, as Ruth S. Noel notes (p. 117), Breide (‘Bright’) “corresponds well with Elwing, the bright bearer of the Silmaril.” But these similarities are broad at best, and are certainly to be found widely in tales of nautical mishap.

However, as with the Eagle aspect of Eärendel, a clear source of Tolkien’s association of Eärendel with the sea lies in etymology. For even as Tolkien turned away from an aquiline explanation of Eärendel, with its related AS word eærn, he turned towards yet another AS form, the word bar ‘wave, sea, ocean’ (Hall). As discussed above, this AS form is related to ON aur ‘moisture’, which perhaps accounts for the ON form Aurvandil. Indeed, this association, much more so than with AS eærn ‘eagle’, seems to be on firm etymological footing, in addition to being phonologically evocative.

V. Eärendel as Herald

Tolkien’s interpretation of Eärendel as a herald is certainly consonant with the equation of Eärendel with Venus as the Morning-star, which physically heralds the rising of the sun. Moreover, this figurative use of Eärendel as a herald of the sun is paralleled by a literal use in both the Crist and the Blickling Homilies, where Eärendel is a herald of the “True Sun,” Christ.

Lines 104-19 of the Crist occur in a section of the poem known as the Advent Lyrics, which comprise a series of meditations on the coming of Christ. Cook asserts (p. 88) that these lines are “based upon the Antiphon of the Magnificat for December 21: O Oriens, Splendor Lucis Aeternae, et Sol Justitiae: Veni, et Illumina Sedentes in Tenebris et Umbra Mortis” (‘O Rising Sun, splendor of the Light Eternal, and Sun of Justice: come, and illuminate those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death’). Just as does this antiphon, the Crist (lines 109-19) too depicts the righteous pre-Christians as sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, awaiting the illumination of not the sun, but of Christ, the Bright Sun, just as bright Eärendel heralds the greater brilliance of the sun.

These images and themes are repeated in the Blickling Homilies, where however the niwa earendel ‘new dawn’ (line 31) is explicitly Christ’s herald, John the Baptist. John is “the messenger of God’s Son, the standard-bearer of the Supreme King, and the forgiveness of sins and the setting right of heathen nations” (lines 22-23), the messenger who
goes before God, who is the “True Sun” of which Christ is “the gleam” (line 32).

The image in the Crist of an expectant people biding illuminating salvation in darkness is reflected in the plight of those peoples who, after the ruin of Doriath and the fall of Gondolin, gather at the mouths of Sirion under Eärendil’s lordship. The very words of the Crist are echoed in Fionwé’s greeting of Eärendil (SoMe, p. 154):

‘Hail Eärendil, radiant star, messenger most fair! Hail thou bearer of light before the Sun and Moon, the looked-for that comest unawares, the longed-for that comest beyond hope! Hail thou splendour of the children of the world, thou slayer of the dark! Star of the sunset hail! Hail herald of the morn! ’

And having achieved their salvation, Eärendil, as does Eärendil, heralds that salvation to those dwelling in Middle-earth (S, p. 250):

Now when first Vingilot was set to sail in the seas of heaven, it rose unlooked for, glistering and bright; and the people of Middle-earth beheld it from afar and wondered, and they took it for a sign, and called it Gil-Estel, the Star of High Hope.

Through his exploration of the philological lore surrounding the “historical” Eärendil, Tolkien “deduced” the five major aspects of Eärendil explored here — the Star, the Messenger, the Eagle, the Mariner, and the Herald — and incorporated them into his own figure of Eärendil. In doing so, Tolkien synthesized a powerful myth for his Middle-earth. Indeed, one could argue that much of Tolkien’s mythology ultimately springs from this philological source; for while Tolkien wrote of Eärendil that he “adopted him into my mythology” (Letters, p. 387), Tolkien’s earliest mythological writings (BoLT II, pp. 26776) show that it would perhaps be more accurate to say that his mythology was shaped around, and grew from, his vision of Eärendil: “And thus did all the fates of the fairies weave then to one strand, and that strand is the great tale of Eärendil” (BoLT II, p. 252). Through philological inquiry and synthesis, Tolkien labored to recover something of the form and significance of “the great tale” that was perhaps once told of Eärendil, now lost together with so much else of the literature of the North. For having surveyed the jumbled and disparate fragments of legend which have by chance reached us, Tolkien must have longed to hear this “great tale” told complete. It is this longing in the knowledge of old tales that causes Tolkien’s world-weary minstrel to renounce his song of Eärendil:

The song I can sing is but shreds one remembers Of golden imaginings fashioned in sleep, A whispered tale told by the withering embers Of old things far off that but few hearts keep. — from The Lay of Eärendil (BoLT II, p. 271)  

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Notes

1 Throughout this paper, I use Earendil to denote the “historical” figure, and variously Earendel or Eredel to discuss Tolkien’s Sub-created figure, in accordance with Tolkien’s own spellings of the name at the period under question: nowhere is no distinction necessary, I use Estel, Tolkien’s final form of the name.

2 With the notable exceptions of Randel Helms (pp. 3740) and Tom Shippey (pp. 183-4)

3 Again, excepting Shippey, and also Ruth S. Noel (pp. 117-8) who has at least read Grimm’s Teutonic Mythology.

4 Shippey, p. 37. Tolkien as much as states this in a letter from 1967 (Letters, p. 385):

The most important name in this connexion is Eärendil. This name is in fact (as is obvious) derived from Anglo-Saxon earendel. When first studying AS professionally (1913) ...I was struck by the great beauty of this word (or name), entirely coherent with the normal style of AS, but euphonic to a peculiar degree in that pleasing but not ‘delectable’ language ... Before 1914 I wrote a ‘poem’ upon Eärendil who launched his ship like a bright spark from the heavens of the Sun. I adopted him into my mythology in which he became a prime figure as a mariner, and eventually as a herald star, and a sign of hope to men. Aya Eärendil Elenion Ancalima (II 329) ‘Hail Eärendil! brightest of Stars!’ described at long removed from Eäla Eärendil engla beorhtost.

5 Grimm here inserts a not-uncharacteristically obtuse footnote: Whence did Matthesius (in Frisch 2, 439) get his “Pan is the heathens’ Wendel and head bagpiper”? Can the word refer to the metamorphoses of the flute-playing demigod? In trials of Witches, Wendel is a name for the devil, Moses an, 8, 124.

6 A seemingly ridiculous etymology, until it is remarked that AS ear can refer not only to the organ of hearing, but also as in Modern English to “the part of a cereal plant which contains its flowers or seeds” (OED, Earsh.), as in “an ear of corn” (Bosworth, p. 231). Is it possible then that in Eärendil we have King Sheaf, the Corn God, who interestingly also has strong nautical associations (e.g. “id est filius Noe se was geboren on òere earce Noes’ [the son of Noah; he was born on Noah’s ark’], according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles for A.D. 855 [Owen, p. 33]; I can hardly improve upon the discussion of the Sheaf found in LR, pp. 85-7, 89-97?) Or perhaps a northern Personage, whose departure to and return from the Underworld heralds the change of seasons, just as Venus, an inner planet, through the months cyclically appears at morning, is eclipsed by the sun, and then reappears in the evening?

7 Throughout this paper, I use Earendel to denote the “historical” figure, and variously Earendel or Eredel to discuss Tolkien’s Sub-created figure, in accordance with Tolkien’s own spellings of the name at the period under question: nowhere is no distinction necessary, I use Estel, Tolkien’s final form of the name.

8 Ceasby and Vigfusson offer no etymology for urvundil in their Icelandic-English Dictionary, but its proximity to the prominent entry AUKR ‘the part of a cereal plant which contains its flowers or seeds’ (OED, Earsh.) is suggestive. De Vries’ Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch is vastly more helpful, though necessarily only tentative, on this point, noting a possible relationship under aur 2 with various words connoting ‘water’ and under auar 2 with ‘east’, as well as under urvad ‘branch, stick [or wand]’.

9 So called because, as an inner planet, it never achieves an apparent separation from the sun of more than about 46°, so that its appearance in the sky either closely precedes sunrise, or closely follows sunset. When visible, Venus is a brilliant and prominent object, indeed the third brightest of all heavenly objects as seen from the earth. For a full discussion of the possible relationship of Auvundil with Sirius, see de Santillana and von Dechend, pp. 357-9. It is also interesting to note here a further stellar association: that AS ear ‘ear of corn’ is a translation of Latin spēs (Bosworth, p. 231), which is a name for
the brilliant, first magnitude star in the constellation Virgo; see note 6 above.

11. The constellation of Orion is in the figure of a man, on which Riged could indeed be viewed as marking a foot. It has been suggested that Earendel in fact represents the entire constellation of Orion: e.g. Gollancz (in a note quoted by Cook, pp. 9091) offers that “the spelling in the Erfurt Gloss ‘oerendil’ is noteworthy. It seems probable that ‘Earendel’ = ‘Orion,’ the constellation brightest at winter time.” When the possible connections with ON or = ‘arrow,’ ON aur (with various watery connotations), and AS far ‘sea,’ alluded to above, are compared with the Greco-Roman myth of Orion — who according to some accounts is beloved of Aurora, the Dawn-goddess, and is slain by Apollo, the Sun-god, with an arrow while wading the ocean — this interpretation seems all the more intriguing.

12. The OED explains the equation of Lucifer with Satan as first performed by overzealous Christian interpreters of Isaiah xiv, 12 in the Vulgate, and declares it “now rare in serious use”.

13. A task which, remarkably, Earendel fails to complete in the earlier versions of his tale; indeed, in all renditions of the tale before the 1930 Quenta (given in SoMe; see especially p. 154), Earendel arrives in Valinor too late; he finds the streets of Kort deserted, not because the inhabitants are attending a festival, as in The Silmarillion, but because Fionwé’s army is already departed. Thus while the desired salvation is achieved, it is not through the embassy of Earendel.

14. There is no Indo-European root corresponding to Ægeló (Liddell & Scott inform us (p. 4) that Ægeló is itself a borrowing, from Persian, as is the related Greek word Αγέλος = ‘mounted courier’.

15. No explanation is offered for the element - (n)del, which however would later become neddil, signifying ‘friend’ or ‘devotion’.

16. Or rather, by the time Tolkien completed his reworking of the ‘A’ entries; see LX, pp. 343-44.

17. Here are also given the Noldorin cognates oer, oer; these are particularly interesting in light of the form oerndil in the Erfurt glosses (Sweet, p. 72, line 545), and indeed seem deliberate. See note 11 above.

18. After this reinterpretation, Æarendel’s ship Ælfrêd ‘Eagle-pinion’ became his father Tuor’s ship Ælfrêd ‘Sea-wing’ (S, p. 245).

19. Where he is, ironically enough, Hamlet’s father; ironic, that is, in light of Tolkien’s avowed distaste for the character of Hamlet as drawn by Shakespeare: cf. Tolkien’s remark on Hamlet, as represented by Humphrey Carpenter [Inklings, p. 136]: “...the son being a chip of the old blockhead, and quite as conceited as papa”.

20. In this same fragment appear the Hælingsings, a tribe which, as Christopher Tolkien notes, “is supposed to have left its name in Hælingsborg (Elasone),” which of course is the site of Hamlet’s castle.


22. Compare Cwrtin with Noldorin oar, oer, as the AS form oerendil; see note 17 above.

23. Tolkien noted (Letters, p. 285, footnote) that Earendel is “[often] supposed to refer to Christ (or Mary), but comparison with Blickling Homilies suggests that it refers to the Baptist. The lines refer to a herald, and divine messenger, clearly not the sôfaste sunnan leoma [Crist, line 106] = Christ.” This careful distinction between Christ and John, between the Heralded and the herald, should be observed by anyone who would argue that Æarendil is to be seen as a Christ-figure (as does Helms, pp. 37-40).

24. In this regard it is interesting to consider Tolkien’s early and mysterious allusions to the rekindling of a “Magic Sun” after the Elves have been delivered by the Faring Forth from their desolate wanderings in the Great Lands (and distinct from the revivification of the Two Trees [BoLT I, p. 28]; and especially p. 179, where “the Gods knew not what [Yavanna] meant, speaking of the Magic Sun, nor did for a long while after.”); note especially that “Æarendil returns from the firmament ever and anon with Vornowé to Kûr to see if the Magic Sun has been lit and the fairies have come back.” (BoLT II, p. 264). See the indices to BoLT I & II for further references.

25. This is particularly clear in Túrin’s grim prophecy: “A pitiable remnant will fly south and west, to cower on the shores of the Sea, caught between Morgoth [the Dark Enemy] and Ossë [the Wraithful Sea].” (UT, p. 156). Shippey (p. 184) notes that “This [image] ...is the lyric core’, the flashpoint of the imagination. It is the vision of people looking up from the depths, de profundis, from the ‘dark shadow of death’ and of despair, and seeing a new light....”

### Appendix

I give here, for ease of reference, the two sources for the Æarendil myth which Tolkien mentions specifically (Letters 385). In doing so, I have employed editions which would have been current to Tolkien’s period of inspiration and early development of the Æarendil myth. However, it must be noted that Tolkien himself makes no explicit mention of particular editions,† and that, as Shippey points out (p. x), he often knew these texts “a good deal better than most of their editors.”

#### I. The Crist of Cynewulf

The most important passage, lines 10419, is given from Cook’s edition of 1900 (p. 5);† the translation is my own:

> Eaal Earendel, engla beorhtast,
> ofer middangeard monnum sendend
> ond sôfaste sunnan leoma,
> toht ofer tumlas,— þu tida gehwane
> of sylfum þe symle inhtes.
> Swâ þu, God of Code géaro acenned,
> Sunu sôpan Fæder,
> swegles in wuldroð
> butan anginne æfre wære,
> swâ þu næf for pearum
> min ægen geweorc
> bideð þurh byldo,
> þæt þu þæt beorhtan ðus
> sunnan onsende, ðe þe sylf cyrne,
> þæt þu inleðe þæt þe læne ær
> prosme beæhtæ, ond in þeostrum, her
> sæton sinneahesyn numnum bifealde,
> deorc deapæ sceadu drægan sceoldæn.

Hail Earendel, brightest of angels, over middle-earth sent unto men, and soothfast gleam of the sun, radiant above the stars, thou every season of thyself ever enlighten.

As Thou, God from God of yore begotten, Son of the true Father, in the glory of heaven without beginning ever were, so Thee now of need Thine own handiwork bides through boldness, that Thou the bright sun to us might send forth, and Thyself come, that Thou might enlighten those who since long before by mists covered, and in darkness, here have sat in continual night by sins enfolded, dark death’s shadow must endure.

† However, the form of Tolkien’s citation of The Blickling Homilies (Letters, p. 387, footnote) shows that he knew Morris’ edition, and his discussion there seems to echo Cook’s accounting in his edition of the Crist.

‡ With the following modifications: line 109: Cook reads géaro (adv. = ‘truly, verily’), but notes that “[t]he context seems rather to require géara (adv. = ‘of yore’),” with which I concur and have so rendered in the equivalent form géaro (Hall, p. 149, entry géara); line 113: Cook reads bides (from
biddan) = ‘beseeches, implore, treats’, while I (and others, e.g. Thorpe, Codex Exoniensis, 1842) prefer bide (from biddan) = ‘bides’. It is also interesting to note that byldo (line 113) has been changed on the MS from the equally-likely byldo = ‘favour, grace, kindness, protection: allegiance loyalty, reverence’ (Hall, p. 201).

II. The Blickling Homilies:

The important passage is here given from Morris’ edition of 1880 (p. 163, lines 19-23 and 30-35), together with Morris’ translation (p. 162):

\[ \begin{align*}
19 & \text{þa was acynned se mon Sancte lohannes, se} \\
23 & \text{cundan Kyninges, & A rena forgifnes, & gerihtnes haep enra p eoda.} \\
30 & \text{... onf nu seo Cristes gebyrd set his} \\
35 & \text{cuman wile,—gange se engel beforan him Sanctus Iohannes; ...} \\
\end{align*} \]

Then was born the man Saint John, who was greater and more excellent than all other men; and he was like the angels of God; and he was the trumpet, Christ’s crier in this world, and the messenger of God’s Son, the standard-bearer like the angels of God; and he was the trumpet, Christ’s crier in his right of heathen nations.

...and now the birth of Christ [was] at his appearing, and the new day-spring (or dawn) was John the Baptist. And now the gleam of the true Sun, God himself, shall come; let the crier give out his voice. And because that the Lord Christ is now the Judge, Saint John will be the trumpet, and will therefore come with God himself upon this earth; — let the messenger i.e. Saint John go before him.

Works Cited

I. The “historical” Earendil:

A. Sources:


B. Etymology:


II. Tolkien’s Eärendil:


Works by J.R.R. Tolkien

(abbreviations in parenthesis):


