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Sailing West: Tolkien, the Saint Brendan Story, and the Idea of Paradise in the West

Abstract

Discusses the idea of a paradise in the West—its mythological and literary sources, its relationship to history, and Tolkien's use of it in the poem "Imram."

Additional Keywords

Brendan, St.—Voyages of; Cardinal Directions—Symbolism; Paradise; Tolkien, J.R.R. "Imram" (poem); Western paradise

Sailing West

Tolkien, the Saint Brendan Story, and the Idea of Paradise in the West

Norma Roche

In 1955, J. R. R. Tolkien published a poem called *Imram*, based on the story of the voyage of Saint Brendan, an Irish monk who sailed to a marvelous land far in the West. Published in *Time and Tide* (3 December 1955, p. 1561), it was originally part of an unfinished work called *The Notion Club Papers*, and, to my knowledge, has not yet been published elsewhere.¹ *Imram* expresses an idea that is important throughout Tolkien's works, that of a deathless land in the West. I would like to take a look at this idea, first as it is expressed in the Saint Brendan story itself, one of the best-known and most popular tales of the European Middle Ages; then at Tolkien's use of it, in *Imram* and elsewhere, its sources in European myth and literature, and its interesting relationship to historical fact.

The word *imram* means "rowing about."² There is in Irish literature a tradition of *imrama*, stories of sea voyages, of which the Saint Brendan story is the best known. Saint Brendan was a historical figure, an Irish monk who lived from about 486 to 575 A.D., during the time Ireland was in transition to Christianity. The *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* was first written down in the ninth or early tenth century by an unknown Irish monk, possibly one living in Europe as a refugee from the attacks of the Vikings.³ The earliest surviving manuscript is dated late 10th century.⁴ Brendan's voyage was a much-loved tale in Europe right up until the time of the actual western discoveries. There are over 120 known manuscripts of the story in Latin from all over Europe, and more in translation, even a popular printed book from the 15th century (Selmer, vii, xxxi).

To tell the bare bones of the story: Saint Brendan hears of the Land of Promise of the Saints, a green and fruitful country where it is always light and "the very stones beneath one's feet are precious." Consumed with the desire to visit this place, Brendan chooses 14 monks and prepares a leather curragh, the traditional Irish boat. Three other monks join the voyage at the last minute, but Brendan predicts that they will not return. They sail into the west, and come to an island where they find a great hall where food is set out for them, but they see no one. One of the extra monks tries to steal a silver bridle, Brendan casts a devil from him, and he dies. On Holy Thursday, they reach the Island of Sheep, where they meet a man they call the Steward. On Holy Saturday, they leave there and come to a small, bare island. When they light a fire to cook their

dinner, the island begins to shake and move, and Brendan explains that the island is actually a whale, named Jasconius. Next the monks land at the Paradise of Birds, where they find a great tree filled with a multitude of white birds singing hymns. One of the birds explains that they are fallen angels, banished from heaven and deprived of the vision of God for approving the sin of Lucifer.

After sailing about for a long time, they come an island where dwells a community of silent monks, whose lamps are lit every night by a fiery arrow that comes through the window. Brendan and his crew spend Christmas there and set out after Epiphany. On the next Holy Thursday they find themselves back at the Island of Sheep, and again they spend Holy Saturday on the back of Jasconius, and Easter at the Paradise of Birds. The talking bird predicts that they will repeat this cycle from Christmas through Pentecost for a total of seven years.

During the long voyage the monks' boat is attacked by a sea monster, but another sea monster arrives and kills it. They come to an island, lush with fruit, where lives a community of monks. One of the extra monks decides to join the community and stays behind.

One day they sail through water so clear they can see fish going about far below. Another day they come upon a great crystal column surrounded by a silver canopy. Eight days later the wind drives them toward the Island of Smiths, a barren place dotted with slag heaps. The swarthy inhabitants throw pieces of blazing slag at them. The next day they see a mountain with smoke belching from its peak. One of the extra monks leaps overboard and is drawn toward the island, and the others see him being led away by devils and set afire. Seven days later they meet Judas Iscariot perched on a rock, battered by the waves. He is allowed to sit there every Sunday as a vacation from his torment in hell. Three days later they reach the island of Paul the Hermit, who lived for 30 years on fish brought to him by an otter.

When they return to the Island of Sheep for the last time, the Steward joins the voyage to guide them to the Land of Promise. After 40 days' journey, they are enveloped in darkness. An hour later they reach shore and a brilliant light shines around them. They wander through

this land for 40 days, eating from trees laden with fruit. They come to a great river, and while they are pondering how to cross it, a young man appears and says to them, "Now, at last, you have found the land you have been seeking all these years. The Lord Jesus Christ did not allow you to find it immediately, because first he wished to show you the richness of His wonders in the deep." He says they must now return to Ireland and be laid to rest there. He tells them that after many more years, the island will be revealed at a time when Christians are undergoing persecution. The monks gather fruit and gems and set sail for home. Brendan tells the story of his voyage to his community, puts his affairs in order, and dies soon after.

Tolkien's *Imram* was part of an unfinished work called *The Notion Club Papers*, begun in 1945, in which he planned to portray the Inklings time-travelling. T. A. Shippey calls it "an extremely private poem."⁵ Humphrey Carpenter says of it, "On its own it is a little bare, a forlorn memorial to an unfinished and promising story."⁶ In *Imram*, Brendan has returned to Ireland, and is replying to a brother monk's questions about his journey. He remembers three things: "a Cloud, a Tree, a Star." He first came to a great mountain belching a cloud, the peak of the Meneltarma, all that is left of downfallen Numenor — "it stands, I guess, on the foundered land where the kings of kings lie low." His Tree is that of the Paradise of Birds — it seems to be covered with white blossoms until the birds fly up and reveal themselves. Brendan's birds are fallen angels banished from heaven and deprived of the vision of God. Tolkien's birds represent the Elves — "neither noise of man nor angel's voice, but maybe there is a third/Fair kindred in the world yet lingers." The Elves, of course, were exiled from the Blessed Realm after they rebelled against the Valar. The Tree itself echoes the White Tree, image of Telperion. The island probably represents Tol Eressëa. It lies between the volcano and the Star, and there are gems on its shore. Brendan is reluctant to speak of the Star, and will say only that it shines over "the parting of the ways/Where the round world plunges steeply down, but on the old road goes/as an unseen bridge that on arches runs to coasts that no man knows." This description matches closely Tolkien's description in the *Akallabeth*, which tells that since the fall of Numenor, the world is bent and the Blessed Land lies outside the circles of the world, but that somewhere in the west, a Straight Road can be found that still goes there, "as it were a mighty bridge invisible that passed through the air of breath and of flight" (*Silmarillion*, p. 281-281). Brendan describes a sweet smell of flowers coming from afar, but will say no more.

Obviously, Tolkien has chosen material from the Brendan story out of which to create a picture of his own vision of what lies West. There are many elements important to the *Navigatio* that Tolkien chose not to use in *Imram*, such as the three extra travelers who do not return home. Some he uses quite differently, such as the volcano, which doesn't represent a place of divine punishment in the afterlife here. The sea itself is not very important in *Imram*.

Although Tolkien tells a story similar to that of Jasconius the whale in his poem *Fastitocalon* (*Tolkien Reader*, p. 48-49), he doesn't mention Jasconius, or any other sea creature, here, nor does he mention the crystal column, which is probably a description of an iceberg (Selmer 90). Most times when Tolkien speaks of the pull of the Sea, it is not so much the sea itself, but what lies over it, that is drawing one. In contrast, the *Navigatio*'s author seems to love the sea and spends time describing the ocean voyages, on the "wonders of the deep" for their own sake.

Something of the mood of the *Navigatio* reminds me of the unspecific, but pervasive, feel of religion in most of Tolkien's works. The *Navigatio* is full of religion — after all, it concerns monks — and it may be a description of the monastic life as it should be lived.⁷ But its main motives are not specifically religious at all. Brendan makes the journey simply because he has a great desire to see the place, and God lets him come there simply to show him "the richness of his wonders in the deep," and let him know that the island is there against future need. In Tolkien's *Imram*, again the main character is a monk, but the symbolism is that of Tolkien's own cosmology. In neither work is there a specific promise of a Christian afterlife.

The idea of a Paradise in the West seems to be a very old one, and, like so many sources that Tolkien drew on, largely a Northern idea. I am referring here to a deathless land that can be visited by mortals, not simply a place of the dead or of reward or punishment in the afterlife. There are of course many myths that represent stages in the development of today's Christian conceptions of heaven and hell, but the idea of a happy land where time stands still, that exists in some sense on this earth, which mortals are occasionally allowed by the gods to enter or visit, may be even older than those ideas. This place may be over the sea, in some other distant region, or underground. It may be a place where gods live, although it is not the main home of the gods like Olympus or Asgard. It may particularly be the home of the Sun god, and the idea of its location in the West, across the sea, may have started as its being the place to which the Sun returns to rest⁸ — as she does to Valinor.

Earliest classical literature refers to such places. There are several references in ancient Greek literature to Elysium, a beautiful deathless land to which some few fortunate mortals may be transported. In the *Odyssey*, Proteus prophesies that Menelaus will not die, but will be conveyed to "the Elysian plain and the world's end" (*VB* I, 258-59). In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod says that some heroes did not die, but were sent to the world's end, "where reigneth Kronos," where they "dwell ever more, with minds untroubled. . . in the isles of the blessed" (*VB* I, 261).

In spite of Tolkien's avowed dislike of things Celtic (*Letters*, p. 26, 144), it is in Ireland that we find the strongest tradition of stories of travel to a deathless land. There are

several stories of mortals traveling over the sea to such a place, although in other tales it is found under the hills or entered through a barrow. If over the sea, it may be the home of the sea god Manannan. It is not a place where the dead go, but it is a land where there is no death, and where the passing of time brings no decay, where the earth is fruitful and the inhabitants are free to enjoy eating, drinking, and other fleshly pleasures (VB I, 239). It is sometimes called *Tir-nan-Og*, "the land of youth." A mortal may be invited there by an immortal being — a beautiful woman invites the hero to go there with her and become her lover, or a warrior enlists the mortal's help in a fight. Usually the mortal cannot return to ordinary lands (VB I, 229). In the best-known such tale, *The Voyage of Bran*, a beautiful woman appears to the hero and tells him of a deathless isle full of delights, and leaves him a branch of apple blossoms. He gathers a crew and sails west, comes to the Island of Women, and stays with the queen of the island for what seems like a year. One of the crew grows homesick and convinces them to return to Ireland, but they are warned against setting foot on shore. They find they have been gone for centuries, and when the homesick sailor steps on shore, he disintegrates into ashes.

Ireland is unique as a source of such pre-Christian myths because of the character of the transition to Christianity there. Ireland's Christianity was much more tolerant of the indigenous religion than that in the rest of Europe, and destroyed much less of what went before it. Irish monasteries were repositories of culture, full of beautiful books as well as rich church furnishings (which unfortunately attracted Viking raids). These monasteries were not the reclusive communities inhabited by celibate religious that we think of today; they were entire villages like other medieval estates, and were the homes of laypeople and married clergy as well as of people committed to an ascetic life. Monasteries interacted freely with surrounding communities, serving as their school, bank, and hotel as well as their religious center. Monks wrote down tales they heard from their students or from the traveling bards that visited — or that they knew before they themselves converted to the new religion. Tales were recorded much as they had been told, relatively free from Christian influence. Those tales in turn had a great influence on the developing new religion, and traditional beliefs were often incorporated into Christian saints and symbols.⁹

The Irish *imrama*, tales of ocean voyages written down during the Christian period, are different from the happy-otherworld tales that went before them in that the voyage itself, not just the marvelous destination, is focused on, and in that some involve monks. The known *imrama* contain many similar incidents, but scholars disagree on their dates and find it difficult to trace their pattern of borrowings from one another. These stories of ocean voyages may have served for their audience the role science fiction serves for us, in that they are adventure stories set in an unfamiliar world, just beginning to be explored, where the

ordinary rules of life on land don't apply, and anything can happen.¹⁰ *The Voyage of Mael Duin* is an *imram* that takes its hero to 33 separate islands, and into adventures much more fantastical than Brendan's, although it shares some incidents with the *Naigatio*, including the three latecomers who do not return, the crystal column (although here it is silver), and the hermit fed by an otter.

What about the tradition that Tolkien most often drew on, the tales of the Norse? In the ninth century, the Vikings were a great seafaring people, raiding and trading as far as Byzantium. Norse outlaws, and people seeking freedom from kings that wanted to Christianize them, settled in Iceland, and it is there that many of their myths and tales were written down and preserved. And, as we know, they travelled beyond Iceland, to Greenland and Newfoundland. Were these explorations at all inspired by the hope of finding a deathless land, or just by the desire for more booty?

I could find no clear evidence of belief in a deathless land across the sea among the Norse, but the custom of ship burial, and the story of King Sheaf, or Shield Sheafing, would seem to suggest it. The story of King Sheaf, which is told in *Beowulf*, tells of a richly laden ship that comes ashore, bearing a little child whose head is pillowed on a sheaf of wheat. He grows up to become king of the Danes and founds a great line. When he dies, he is again placed in a ship laden with treasure and set adrift. And, as *Beowulf* says, "None can report with truth, nor lords in their halls, nor mighty men beneath the sky, who received that load" (*The Lost Road*, 93). Professor Tolkien himself wondered about this. In a lecture, quoted in *The Lost Road*, he says that in those lines of *Beowulf* about King Sheaf, "we catch an echo of the 'mood' of pagan times in which ship-burial was practised. A mood in which the symbolism (what we should call the *ritual*) of a departure over sea whose further shore was unknown; and an actual belief in a magical land or otherworld located 'over the sea,' can hardly be distinguished — and for neither of these elements is conscious symbolism, or real belief, a true description." (LR, 95-96)

In some of his earlier writings, Tolkien makes specific mention of these myths. About 10 years before writing *Imram*, Tolkien began another time-travel story, *The Lost Road*. This story was to be about a father and son who travel back through several historical periods, finally ending up in Numinor. One of the episodes, sketched in notes but never written, was to be set in Anglo-Saxon times. The son wants to sail West as Brendan and Mael Duin did, see lands about which they have heard strange tales from Ireland, and maybe even find Paradise. He says that the story of King Sheaf shows that there is such a place and that it can be reached by ship. Father and son try to sail West, and get onto the Straight Road, but are blown back (LR, 80). Other notes for *The Lost Road* suggest that Tolkien intended "a Norse story of ship burial (Vinland)," and a story of Tir-nan-Og (LR, 77). *The Notion Club Papers*, source of the poem *Imram*, also include a prose and a poem version of the legend of King Sheaf (LR, 85).

In the *Book of Lost Tales*, there is an *imram* of sorts — *Aelfwine of England*. The device of a mariner who was to come to Tol Eressea and hear the Lost Tales evolved through many stages and was eventually discarded, but in about 1920, possibly meaning to make a new beginning to his cycle, Tolkien cast it as the tale of an Anglo-Saxon enslaved by Vikings, whose sea-longing prompts him escape and sail West. The ancient Man of the Sea rescues the shipwrecked Aelfwine and brings him to an island of shipbuilders. In his new ship Aelfwine makes a long voyage with many adventures (although these are not described), and finally approaches the Lonely Isle. The ship is blown back, but Aelfwine leaps overboard and thus reaches its shore (*BOLT II*, 312-34).

Tolkien of course incorporated the idea of a deathless land in the West in his portrayals of Valinor, the Blessed Realm; it was a vital part of his mythology and seems to have been important to him personally as well. As he aged, it may have become all the more compelling. “The Sea-Bell” and “The Last Ship,” the last two poems in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, revised in 1961-62, are full of regret of the loss of the Blessed Land (*Tolkien Reader*, 57-64; Shippey, 208-211). A poem he revised several times, entitled variously “The Nameless Land” and “The Song of Aelfwine,” ends, in its latest version, with the words, “Little doth any man understand what the yearning may be of one whom old age cutteth off from returning thither” (*LR*, 98-104). Perhaps what moved him most deeply in the Brendan story, although it isn’t made explicit in *Imram*, was its promise that the Land of the Blessed might be found again in the future — the idea that some chosen few, “by some fate or grace or favour of the Valar,” might come there (*Silmarillion*, p. 282; Shippey, p. 212-214).

The historical Saint Brendan is known to have done a great deal of traveling by sea around Britain, but there is no good historical evidence that he went any further than the Shetland Islands (Selmer, xix). So where did the story of his voyage come from? Stories about Brendan, drawing on *Bran* and other old tales, may have begun to develop right after his death, and may have developed further when the Norse discoveries of Iceland, Greenland, and beyond brought new knowledge about, and reawakened interest in, ocean voyages. In addition to the *Navigatio*, there exists a written *Life of Saint Brendan*, which includes two separate voyages with adventures somewhat different from, and more fanciful than, the *Navigatio*’s. Later European scribes made various combinations of the two stories and changed them in various ways (Selmer, xx). An Anglo-Norman version, for example, written by Benedeit in the early twelfth century, makes the voyage an explicitly religious trial of faith, and punches up the marvels — the crystal column is here a pillar of jacinth under a golden, jeweled canopy (*ANV* 17).

Obviously Benedeit had never seen an iceberg, but the Irish monks who wrote the earliest versions of the *Navigatio* were not unfamiliar with sea voyaging. The

monks had access to some of the best libraries in Europe, and would have been familiar with maps and writings that existed from earlier times. Sea pilgrimage was a well-known monastic custom in their time — some monks set sail seeking isolated islands where they could live as hermits (Selmer, xxii-iii). When the Vikings first arrived in Iceland, they found Irish settlers there, who had probably gone there to escape Viking raids on Ireland and its outlying islands, and who fled again shortly thereafter. Irish settlers almost certainly reached Greenland.¹¹ It’s possible that the Vikings discovered Vinland while on the trail of the monks, knowing that where there were monks there was likely to be treasure. In Shutesbury, Massachusetts, not far from my home, there is a beehive-shaped, underground structure made of stones, just large enough for three people to stand in. No one knows what it is, but one of the popular theories is that it is an Irish monk’s cell, although arguments are also made that it’s a colonial root cellar.

Geoffrey Ashe, in his book *Land to the West*, makes much of the *Navigatio*’s feeling of authenticity and sense of the sea itself (*Land*, pp. 66-67, 74). Dates, compass points, numbers of days’ sail, and other measurements are given frequently, and while some of these numbers obviously have religious symbolism (*ANV* 19), many can be fit more or less into a real map — the fiery Island of Smiths could be in the south of volcanic Iceland (Selmer, 90); the Paradise of Birds could be Vagar or Mykines, islands in the Faeroes where sea birds breed in great numbers (*Land*, 88). In 1977, explorer Tim Severin built a leather curragh and sailed from Ireland through the North Atlantic to Newfoundland, stopping at the Faeroes and in Iceland, tracing a route Brendan could have taken and proving that such a boat could make the trip. His crew’s encounters with towering icebergs, friendly whales, and “sea monsters” in the form of killer whales gave him a feeling that the *Navigatio* originated with someone who knew sea voyaging first-hand.¹²

So the author of the earliest version of the *Navigatio* would have had access to the best available information about the geography of the North Atlantic, and to people who had travelled it — perhaps he had done so himself. But if some of the places Brendan visited were known to him, why didn’t the author use the names he knew them by? Perhaps it was merely a storyteller’s device — the story is told through Brendan’s eyes, and Brendan would be discovering these islands for the first time (*Land* 30). Maybe it was so that the monks reading the story would have the fun of using their specialized knowledge to guess what places were meant, as readers today enjoy guessing celebrities in a *roman à clef*. But remember that Brendan was told that the Land of Promise of the Saints would be revealed at a time when Christians are undergoing persecution. Maybe the manuscript was a map for monks fleeing the Vikings, a puzzle that monks, with their knowledge of geography and of Christian symbolism, could decipher, but the non-Christian, non-literate Vikings could not.

Throughout recorded history, seafaring has waxed and waned, depending upon cultural and climatic conditions. Archeological discoveries suggest that the Greek epics like the *Odyssey* look back to much earlier times, to the Cretan and Mycenaean civilizations that once dominated the Mediterranean and sailed as far as Britain, and that the epics were based on this ancient history (*Land* 160-162). Maybe the marvelous islands of the *Odyssey* represent real islands that the Mycenaeans had been to. Pytheas, a Greek mathematician, traveled to Britain, learned from its inhabitants about Iceland, and visited it in about 330 BC. The Celts and Picts seemed then to have known about it all along. The Carthaginians, who probably sailed to Madeira and the Canaries and possibly to the Azores (*Land* 212-213), may have gone even further. Plutarch, writing in 75 A.D., tells a tale, attributed to a Carthaginian, of a wonderful island where Cronus sleeps, another tale in which Geoffrey Ashe can trace a reasonable map across the North Atlantic (*Land*, 176-181). But the Carthaginians, wishing to keep their monopoly on Atlantic trade, spread rumors of "clouds and darkness and dangerous shoals" (*Land*, p. 137) and the Greeks and Romans explored little outside the pillars of Hercules. Portuguese, Basque, and British fishing folk may have had fishing camps in Newfoundland through most of the 15th century, long before America's official "discovery" (Mowat, 303).

In spite of the scrambling of the Brendan story as it spread through Europe, and the loss of any useful geographical information from later versions, the story remained to inspire those who, when weather and knowledge of navigation permitted, finally did set sail in the late 15th century. Christopher Columbus studied carefully all the tales of amazing lands across the sea that he could find; surely the Brendan story must have been among them. In this historical context, Land to the West is a myth that is true—an idea that has faded out of knowledge and into myth and back again from time to time, a place that in some ages was a mystery to scholars but common knowledge to fisherfolk, a place that remained elusive and magical until Europeans finally conquered and charted it and made it well known that it is of course a mortal land like any other.

It seems unlikely now that Europe will ever forget America and let it fade into myth again, but the "discovery" hasn't spoiled the myth, as the appeal of Tolkien's works shows. In "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien argues that the Beowulf poet, although a Christian, has taken material from the myths of the past he knew and has made a new thing, a look back to a time when mortality was final and the courage of mortal humans standing against it tragic in its hopelessness; and that the poet and his audience, although Christian, could, being by their beliefs one step removed from that tragedy, find it all the more compelling. What Tolkien created for himself in *Imram*, and more fully for a wider audience in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, is not dissimilar. Using Brendan, Bran, King Sheaf, and others as building blocks,

he has created a body of work that looks back to the idea of a deathless land in the West, and has made an audience who "knows better," through geography, religion, or both, share his dream of finding it. He has adapted the myth to 20th-century geography by bending the world, throwing up "new lands like to the old," and creating a Straight Road that rises above the Earth — yet still that road must be found by sailing West.

Notes

1. *The Notion Club Papers* are expected to be included in a forthcoming volume of *The History of Middle-earth*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, due to be published in time for the 1992 Tolkien Centennial Conference (per David Bratman, "News Notes," *Mythprint*, April 1991, p. 7).
2. Benedeit, *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St. Brendan*, ed. Ian Short and Brian Merrilees (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 3. Hereafter cited as ANV.
3. Carl Selmer, ed., *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: from Early Latin Manuscripts, Publications in Medieval Studies, Volume XVI* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), p. xxvii. Hereafter cited as Selmer.
4. J.F. Webb, trans., *The Age of Bede*, ed. with introductions by D.H. Farmer (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1983, 1965), p. 11. This work contains a complete translation of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*. Hereafter cited as AB.
5. T.A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), p. 212. Hereafter cited as Shippey.
6. Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1977), pp. 171-72.
7. H.P. A. Oskamp, *The Voyage of Maol Duin: A Study in Early Irish Voyage Literature* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff Publishing), pp. 16-17. Hereafter cited as MD. (The opening quotation of this work is Legolas' song, "To the Sea, to the Sea! From The Lord of the Rings.")
8. Juno Meyer, ed., *The Voyage of Bran Son of Febal to the Land of the Living*, with an essay upon the Irish vision of the happy otherworld and the Celtic doctrine of rebirth by Alfred Nutt (New York: AMS Press, 1973, 1895), I, 271. Hereafter cited as VB I.
9. MD, 8; Kathleen Hughes and Ann Hamlin, *Celtic Monasticism: The Modern Traveler to the Early Irish Church* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981) 6-7, 12; Lisa Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 4.
10. MD, 70; Geoffrey Ashe, *Land to the West: St. Brendan's Voyage to America* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), p. 54. Hereafter cited as *Land*. (If you enjoy speculation about who reached where when, this is the book for you.)
11. Farley Mowat, *Westwinds: the Ancient Norse in Greenland and North America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1965), pp. 12-18.
12. Tim Severin, *The Brendan Voyage* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).
13. *Land*, pp. 126-28; Vilhjálmur Stefánsson, *Ultima Thule: Further Mysteries of the Arctic* (New York: Macmillan, 1940).
14. Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (New York: Knopf, 1990).
15. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen and Unwin 1983), p. 23. (Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who pointed me to this direction; if I have missed the mark the responsibility is my own.)

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- Ashe, Geoffrey. *Land to the West: St. Brendan's Voyage to America*. NY: The Viking Press, 1962.
- Benedeit. *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St. Brendan*. Edited by Ian Short and Brian Merrilees. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1979.

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Theology," since it has not been published before. To what degree it can be used to explain Williams's works — beyond some of his early marital lyrics, as noticed by Hadfield — doubtless will be explored. But the essay is interesting outside of the Williams context, both as a period piece tied to the Patmore/late Victorian celebration of domestic eros, and as a particular type of the Way of Affirmation of Images. [JRC]

Yates, Jessica. "The Source of 'The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun.'" *Leaves from the Tree: J.R.R. Tolkien's Shorter Fiction*. London: The Tolkien Society, 1991. 63-71.

Yates argues that Tolkien did not decide to write a poem in the form of a Breton lay, then cast about for a subject; rather, he wanted to write a version of the "Clerk Colvill" story (about a young man and a water-nymph), was intrigued by the translations he found of the analogous Breton "Lord Nann" ballad in F.J. Child's *Ballads*, and used them as the source for his poem "The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun," which he wrote in the octosyllabic form of a Breton lay. Yates shows how Tolkien reshaped the versions of "Lord Nann," in particular "Lord Nann and the Corrigar" in a collection by Hersart de la Villemarqué), to suit his own ends. [WGH]

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