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Abstract

Examines two examples of J.R.R. Tolkien's story-telling art: one an experiment in omission, the other in commission. The Tale of Earendel is established through poems about him, by references to the tale in other tales, by outlines, and by what seem to be consciously contrived omissions where it ought to have been. That there ought to be a Tale of Earendel to go with the other three now seems obvious, yet Christopher commented more than once that it "was never written." Of the many attempts at the Beren and Lúthien story that Tolkien made over the years, "The Tale of Tinúviel" is the only one to be what Tolkien described as "drawn in fullness," that is, having a consecutive beginning, middle, and end. The naïve voice and the direct address of the narrator point to a specific influence on Tolkien that has been hitherto overlooked: the *lais* of Marie de France.

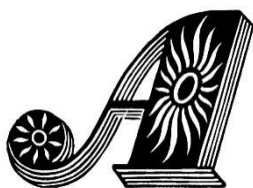
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LOST TALE, A FOUND INFLUENCE: EARENDEL AND TINÚVIEL

VERLYN FLIEGER

IN THIS ESSAY I PROPOSE TO FIT TOGETHER two examples of J.R.R. Tolkien's story-telling art. United chiefly by their difference, each is a trial venture into the art of mythmaking: one an experiment in omission, the other in commission. Each offers a different window into the workshop where the artist practiced his craft.

In his 1951 letter to Milton Waldman, J.R.R. Tolkien mourned what in light of his knowledge of other cultures he saw as England's lost pre-Christian mythology. "There was Greek," he wrote, "and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish [...] but nothing English" (*Letters* #131, 144). He went on to describe his ambition to fill in the gap.

[O]nce upon a time [...] I had in mind to make a body of more or less connected legend [...] which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. [...] I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole [...]. (*Letters* #131, 144-145)

A point to remember is that Tolkien was writing with hindsight. The long perspective of "once upon a time" gives the impression of a *fait accompli*, whereas the "more or less connected legend" he referred to was actually in a constant flux of revision, and was still unfinished when he died in 1973. Christopher Tolkien's 1977 *The Silmarillion* was a condensation of this unfinished opus that compressed the arc of the overall narrative into one volume. While this gave the world its first view of the "majestic whole" it nevertheless blurred Tolkien's explicit distinction between tales drawn "in fullness" and tales "only placed [...]" and sketched" by appearing to give equal weight to all the tales.

Christopher Tolkien's 1983-1996 *History of Middle-Earth*, with its painstaking unpacking of his father's constantly revised material, did much to undo this impression, and his publication in separate volumes of *The Children of Húrin*, *Beren and Lúthien*, and *The Fall of Gondolin*, presenting from 2007 to 2018 the great tales from earliest to latest, also illustrated what Tolkien meant by

“placed” and “sketched.” The following discussion will examine an example of each separate treatment, the “only placed” tale of Earendel and the very early and drawn in full “Tale of Tinúviel.” I’ll start with Earendel.¹

THE “LOST” TALE OF EARENDEL

Braided into his work on the great tales Christopher has given us evidence for a tale that cannot be found, the only evidence for which is the empty spaces where it should have been. The Tale of Earendel is established through poems about him, by references to the tale in other tales, by outlines, and by what seem to be consciously contrived omissions where it ought to have been. Just as the excavators of the ship burial at Sutton Hoo were able to infer the presence of the ship by the impression it left in the earth, or those at Pompeii could reconstruct from the hollows in hardened ash the shapes of bodies once entombed therein, so references in other narratives to the Tale of Earendel create the impression of a “great tale” outlined by the tales that surround the empty spot where it ought to have been. It is “placed,” but the “place” is empty.

That there ought to be a Tale of Earendel to go with the other three now seems obvious, yet Christopher commented more than once that it “was never written” (*Book of Lost Tales* [LT] II 252; *The Fall of Gondolin* [FG] 241). Tolkien’s description to Waldman of a “majestic whole” containing tales “only placed in the scheme and sketched” suggests a conscious contrivance of loose ends, a mythology with built-in gaps. That concept may have had its beginning even before the tales, when Tolkien first came across Earendel. This was at Exeter College in Oxford back in 1913, where Tolkien encountered *Crist*, a poem by the medieval Anglo-Saxon poet, Cynewulf (*Letters* #297, 385). Two lines in particular stood out to him.

*Eala Earendel engla beorhtast
ofer middangeard monnum sended.*

Hail Earendel, brightest of angels
above middle-earth sent unto men. (Carpenter 64)

“When I came across that citation,” he wrote many years later, “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

¹ Let me make clear here my rather arbitrary distinction between “tale” in the sense I take Tolkien to be using it—that is with a capital ‘T’, a “great” tale on a par with those of Beren and Lúthien and The Children of Húrin—and the more generic and general sense of a story told. We have the general outline of the story of Earendel in its various poetic versions from Tolkien’s earliest attempt to Bilbo’s recitation in the Hall of Fire at Rivendell. We do not have a Tale comparable to the other three.

grasp it, far beyond ancient English" (*Sauron Defeated* 236). Although he gave this speech to Alwyn Lowdham, his 1944 time-traveler in "The Notion Club Papers," the vividness of the description suggests that Tolkien was drawing on personal experience. The key words are "if I could grasp it," for as we will see, he didn't; at least not right away.

He tried first by writing his own Earendel lines, "The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star," in 1914.

Earendel sprang up from the Ocean's cup
In the gloom of the mid-world's rim:
From the door of Night as a ray of light
Leapt over the twilight brim,
And launching his bark like a silver spark
From the golden-fading sand
Down the sunlit breath of Day's fiery Death
He sped from Westerland. (Carpenter 71)

The poem has been tagged by Tolkien's biographer Humphrey Carpenter as "the beginning of Tolkien's own mythology" (Carpenter 71), and by John Garth as "the very first beginning of the matter of Middle-earth" (Garth *Exeter* 33). While this seems obvious in hindsight, it was not so apparent in 1914, even to its author. According to Carpenter, when Tolkien showed "the original Earendel lines" to G.B. Smith, Smith asked him what they were about. Tolkien said he didn't know but would "try to find out" (Carpenter 75). From this, Carpenter concluded that Tolkien saw himself as a "discoverer of legend" rather than as an inventor. But here is where confusion begins. It isn't clear whether by "original Earendel lines" Carpenter was referring to Cynewulf's inspirational couplet—"original" in that it got the whole thing going—or Tolkien's own "original" Earendel poem.

The ambiguity complicates both Smith's question and Tolkien's answer. If we don't know which "lines" Smith was asking about, we cannot be sure what Tolkien thought he might "find out." He had already found out from his studies that Earendel's Old Norse name was Aurvandil and his Danish name was Horvendil; that various versions of his story went back to proto-Germanic myth so old it was untraceable; that whatever his name he had a ship called Vingilot in which he voyaged through the skies.² Those were answers, but clearly not the one he was hoping to find. Smith's question in all its ambiguity remains: what was it *about*? Tolkien's poem seems to contradict itself. Earendel sprang "up" but sped "down." Where was he going? And how did he get there?

² For more on this see Hostetter.

Tolkien had still to find out. Thus out of a name and a question a mythology was born.³

The poem's first words, "Earendel sprang up," imply that he is rising, but everything else we know about it suggests that he is not rising, but setting. Tolkien was trying to say without saying that as the Evening Star follows the sun into the west to reappear as the Morning Star ahead of the rising sun in the east, so Earendel's voyage carries him below the western horizon⁴ beneath the earth to follow the same trajectory. Tolkien wrote later that "the [Anglo-Saxon] uses seem plainly to indicate that it was a star presaging the dawn [...]: that is what we now call *Venus*: the morning star as it may be seen shining brilliantly in the dawn, before the actual rising of the Sun" (*Letters* #297, 385). In subsequent versions he tried to clarify this by showing how Earendel "arose where the shadow flows," while "thread[ing] his path o'er the aftermath / Of the splendour of the Sun" (*LTII* 267-68). But this is a complicated image, difficult to convey poetically and without laborious explanation of orbits and retrograde movement. Furthermore, celestial mechanics aside, what is the point? What is the reason for this perpetual, repetitive journey? Nothing in the names or the literature behind them answered Smith's question, but Tolkien "found" his own answer in "The Shores of Faery," a poem he wrote in 1915 wherein Earendel goes "West of the Moon, East of the Sun / [...] Beyond Taniquetil / In Valinor" where are "the shores of Faery / [...] the Haven of the Star" (Carpenter 76-77).

This is some help, but not much. At least there are place-names to tie the action to, though the reason for the journey is still obscure. One could well ask whether Tolkien's entire legendarium might have grown out of his desire to 'find out' about Earendel. As readers now know, Tolkien's Earendel—aka Eärendil and other variant spellings—was within the legendarium the half-elven son of a human, Tuor of the House of Beor, and an Elf, Idril, daughter of Turgon, Lord of Gondolin. Tolkien made Earendel thematically important to the story by placing him in Gondolin so that he could escape when the city fell, meet

³ In an interesting circularity the myth that came from this star-name has given rise to another star-name that came from the myth. A star recently discovered at the edge of the known universe has been named Earendel by its Tolkien-knowledgeable discoverers (Gohd).

⁴ One of the earliest known (or at least earliest-published) maps of the earth, titled *I Vene Kemen*, "The Shape of the Earth" or "The Vessel of the Earth" is reproduced in *The Book of Lost Tales I*, p. 84. According to Christopher it is "closely associated with the cosmology of the *Lost Tales*." It is Tolkien's drawing of the earth as a ship, and represents a (more or less) flat plane floating on water. The much later bending of the earth in Tolkien's Númenorean cataclysm assumes that it was originally flat, in which case the quickest way for Earendel to get from West to East would be like the bottom tread of an escalator loop: to double under and reverse his path to come out again at the top.

Elwing, receive from her the one remaining Silmaril (the other two being buried in earth and sea), and become its bearer in an endless journey across the skies as a sign of hope to Men.

None of the foregoing was widely known in the days when only *The Lord of the Rings* had been published. Eärendil was a name linked to the starlight Galadriel caught in her Mirror. It was associated with the Silmaril in the story Sam Gamgee suddenly realizes he is part of, sitting on the stairs of Cirith Ungol. Aragorn's prose retelling on Weathertop of the tale of Tinúviel alluded to "Eärendel [...] that sailed his ship out of the mists of the world [...] with the Silmaril upon his brow" (I.11.194) as did Bilbo's poem at Rivendell (II.1.233-236). The few entries under Eärendil in the original index in the third volume informed but did not explain. Not till the 1977 *Silmarillion* was hard information about Earendel available, after which he seemed to pop up everywhere: in *Unfinished Tales* and *The Book of Lost Tales II*, and *The Shaping of Middle-earth* and *Lays of Beleriand* and *The Lost Road*. Like Woody Allen's Zelig, he appears in other characters' stories, but never in his own.

It is at this point that Christopher's comment that the tale "was never written"—most notably in *The Book of Lost Tales II* (LTII 252; FG 241)—invites attention and provokes speculation. Was the fact that the tale was never written the result of inadvertent omission, a sad accident of external circumstances—procrastination, insufficient time, the press of other obligations? Or was it intentional—a planned disruption, a built-in lacuna? A case can be made for the latter. We have Tolkien's own statement that he intended some tales to be "only placed in the scheme and sketched." It would not be difficult to see the Tale of Earendel as one such, a tale whose place in the scheme is everywhere sketched but nowhere "drawn in fulness." Examples of such schematic placement are not hard to find. Christopher references a "Tale of Earendel" in his "Prologue" to *The Fall of Gondolin*, citing the original title, *Tuor and the Exiles of Gondolin* as followed by the words: "which bringeth in the Great Tale of Eärendel" (FG 23). After which no tale is brought in. The same bait-and-switch is recorded in *Beren and Lúthien*, where Christopher repeats what amounts to a soundbite from *The Book of Lost Tales II*: "And thus did all the fates of the fairies weave then to one strand, and that strand is the great tale of Eärendel, and to that tale's true beginning are we now come" (B&L 246). And the *Lost Tales* version: "Then said Ailos: 'And methinks that is tale enow for this time of telling'" (LTII 242). Once again expectations are raised only to be disappointed, as after writing what amounts to a trumpet fanfare, Tolkien inserts an interruption, making sure that the great tale of Earendel is once again prevented from being told.

These are not the only such instances. Christopher also cites "highly condensed and often contradictory outlines" of such a tale (LTII 252). For example what he calls Scheme B refers to "a mighty tale, and seven times shall

folk fare to the Tale-fire ere it be rightly told" (LTII 252). This "mighty" tale was to open with the *Tale of the Nauglafring*, with Earendel making his entrance in the second part of the outline and continuing in the following numbered segments corresponding to the projected seven visits to the Tale-fire. Christopher comments that if "the six parts following [the *Nauglafring*] were each to be of comparable length, the whole *Tale of Eärendel* would have been somewhere near half the length of all the tales that were in fact written." Nevertheless, he concludes that his father "never afterward returned to [the tale] on any ample scale" (253). The result of this hide-and-seek is an absent presence, never written but *written about* in the other great tales. Which is in itself a circumstance worth noting; Earendel is there but not there. Now you see him, now you don't. He is the ghost in the photograph.

Tolkien's description of his stratagem (if such it is) has parallels in real-world myth. There is the great lacuna in the Poetic Edda, the four leaves torn out of the middle of the Codex Regius, creating a hole in the story of Sigurd that must be sketched in from the Völsunga Saga. Tolkien himself had a stab at filling in the gap, as Tom Shippey puts it, in his "New Lay of the Volsungs" published by Christopher as part of *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun*. Another parallel is "the lost *Tale of Wade*," cited by John Garth and R.W. Chambers as one of the many fragments of "old Teutonic epic" that haunts Germanic studies (Garth, *Great War* 86-7, 229). The Tale of Wade *per se* does not exist. It is inferred from Wade's appearances in other peoples' stories. Garth suggests an association between the "lost" tale of Wade and Tolkien's early title for his legendarium "The Book of Lost Tales." "Wade, like Éarendel," says Garth, "crops up all over Germanic legend" (86). Wade crops up in Tolkienian legend as well, and may in fact have given Tolkien the model for his "lost" tale of Earendel.

The *Lays of Beleriand* devotes Section II to "Poems Early Abandoned." The second of these Christopher calls *Fragment of an alliterative Lay of Eärendel* though it has no title and Earendel nowhere appears. He dates it to Tolkien's time at Leeds, 1920-25. The opening lines cover the fall of Gondolin, the escape from the city, and the exiles' wandering. The name Earendel is nowhere found, but at the end of the text is written "several times in different scripts 'Earendel', Earendel son of Fengel', 'Earendel Fengelsson,'" leading to Christopher's conclusion that the poem was intended to be "a Lay of Eärendel" (LB 141). Christopher calls particular attention to line 7, "But Wade of the Helsings wearyhearted," to which is added in the margin "*Tûr* [Tuor] *the earthborn was tried in battle*." He cites Chambers's note on Wade (or Wada) that he "had no story of his own" (144) and notes the resemblance between Wade's boat Guingelot and Earendel's boat Wingelot. To this should be added Christopher's further comment in *The Peoples of Middle-Earth*, that the name Wingalótë [sic] "is connected with the name *Elwing*," the element *wing* being adopted from her

name (371). Christopher's further comments are worth noting: that the association between Wade and Tuor was "not casual" (LB 143), his deliberate understatement used to emphasize the point. In the suspicious resemblance of the boat-names, "coincidence" he declares, "is ruled out" (LB 144). These negations seem to be addressing a question that has not been asked. I will ask it.

Could Tolkien have intended—even in the early stages of his work on the legendarium—to build into it instances of apparent loss to attrition and the ravages of time? It would fit his own description of the mythology he envisioned. Could the never-achieved but often alluded-to Tale of Earendel be a Middle-earth version of the lost tale of Wade? Even to the point of explicit association of the one with the other? If the association was not "casual," then it was deliberate. If coincidence is ruled out, what is left must be intention. Other evidence supports this view. *Parma Eldalamberon* XV, a journal devoted to Tolkien's invented languages, has a section titled "Early Runic Documents" which shows on page 97 the following equivalence: "Wade = Earendel."⁵ The algebraic economy of this equation leaves no room for doubt.

In this regard it is well to remember that Tolkien's ambition was to fill in gaps in English mythology. One way of doing this would be to find ways of attaching his invented mythos to what was left of the English one. In an early draft of *The Lost Tales* he inserted Heorrenda, the poet mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon "Deor's Lament," into his mythos as the son of Eriol and the compiler of the Golden Book of Tavrobel (LTII 290-94). Connecting the fictive Tale of Earendel to the historically attested tale of Wade itself—if something nonexistent can have a self—is another example. The popular saying applies: evidence of absence is not absence of evidence; indeed in this case it may in fact be the best testimony in favor. The Tale of Earendel is the missing tile in the mosaic, the gap in the pattern outlined by the stories that surround it. It is the story we are always trying to find but never do. Tolkien's association of Earendel with Wade has the effect of making the two figures into one, and the two "lost" tales into variants of one another, thus combining the "fragments"—one real and Germanic, the other imaginary and Tolkienian—into one single mythology for England.

Another factor can be brought into play here of a decidedly unscholarly kind. That is Tolkien's known propensity for putting one over on unsuspecting victims. His biographer Humphrey Carpenter was the first but certainly not the last to repeat the story of Tolkien handing to "inattentive shopkeepers his false teeth amongst a handful of change" (130). This is not to say that Tolkien confused his false teeth with coin of the realm, but that he delighted in practical jokes of a fairly simple kind, and particularly in the impact

⁵ I am indebted to Andrew Higgins for pointing this out to me.

of surprise, the effect of the unexpected in bringing people up short. His biographers agree with his own assessment of himself—that he had “a very simple sense of humor,” one which, he ruefully confessed, “even my appreciative critics find tiresome” (Carpenter 130). Examples include his dressing up as a polar bear in a sheepskin and whiteface to attend what was not a costume party, or his response to an undergraduate question about the reality of dragons—pulling out of his pocket “a small green shoe, thin and pointed in the toe, made of a leathery substance that felt like reptile skin, and declared it [...] to be a leprechaun’s shoe” (Zaleski and Zaleski 370, Scull & Hammond *Chronology* 227n845).

If such behavior seems an awkward match with the grandfatherly, pipe-puffing professor of his late photographs, all the more we should pay attention. These episodes were not anomalies but the reverse of the medal, the puckish side of a strait-laced character type. There seems to have been an element of the Trickster mixed in with the archetypal Wise Old Man, an element that would be in harmony with the elaborate stratagems by which he could convince readers of the existence of a tale that never was, identified repeatedly through its absence.

Without explicit documentation, the question of whether Tolkien intentionally made the Tale of Earendel into Middle-earth’s lost tale of Wade, or just allowed it to become that through inattention, must remain a question, one we are beholden to Christopher for raising if not answering. It is an unprovable, purely hypothetical conjecture but one that I submit is at least worthy of consideration. Nevertheless—and this is important for what it says about the process of myth-making—at the end of the day hypothesis is finally of less importance than fact, and the fact is that the hypothesis has now become the fact, defining what the Tale of Earendel actually is and will be forevermore. That is to say, an Untold Tale. And for that too we are beholden to Christopher.

THE TALE OF TINÚVIEL

So much for tales, told or untold. But what of the tellers? The Book of Lost Tales, Tolkien’s earliest foray into feigned mythology, began with an imagined history “as told to” the mariner Eriol/Ælfwine, who hears the stories in a place variously called the Hall of Play or the Hall of Fire on the island of Tol Eresseä. The storytelling was envisioned as an informal but more or less regular gathering not unlike the Gaelic *ceilidh*, but used by Tolkien as the starting-place for the unfolding of the vast pre-English mythology he was bent on dedicating “to England.” For this he made a point of including a variety of storytellers and transmitters—from ancient authorities like Pengolod̥ to poets like Dirhavel to collectors like Bilbo to scribes like Findegil to translators like Aragorn. The narrative voices, forms, and styles vary from story to story, and the character of

the teller affects the tone of the content. At the height of his powers he could change and/or interpolate distinct and distinguishable narrative voices—ranging from the intrusive, slightly patronizing narrator of *The Hobbit* to the omniscient narrator of *The Lord of the Rings* to the many interior storytellers within that tale—so seamlessly that the reader is largely unaware of the shift. Merry and Pippin narrate the Entmoot and the Battle of Isengard. Gandalf narrates his fight with the Balrog and the Battle of the Peak. At the Council of Elrond it takes Aragorn, Legolas, and Gandalf combined to sequentially narrate the story of Gollum's capture, imprisonment, and subsequent escape.

Of the many attempts at the Beren and Lúthien story that Tolkien made over the years, "The Tale of Tinúviel" is the only one to be what Tolkien described to Milton Waldman as "drawn in fullness," that is, having a consecutive beginning, middle, and end. This arc of completion is just the beginning of the several ways in which it differs from other, more fragmentary versions of the Tale, the other ways being tone, style, and diction. The earliest manuscript, dated by Christopher to 1917, is in ink written over an erased pencil original. Christopher suggests that the ink "rewriting [emphasis in original] was considerably later" (LTI 203) and was "one of the latest elements in the composition of the *Lost Tales*" (204). The exact date of the ink version is not known, but the words "considerably later" allow some leeway. In addition to voice and tone, the ink manuscript has marked differences from the considerably later and more familiar *Silmarillion* version. Here *Tinúviel* is not an epithet with secondary meaning, but the proper name of the protagonist, while the better-known name *Lúthien* nowhere appears. Here Tinúviel's father is not called Thingol but Tinwelint, and her mother's name is not Melian but Gwendeling. More important, in this version Beren is not a mortal man but a Gnome, a fairy.⁶ He thus does not conform to Tolkien's later definition of fairy-stories as not about fairies but about the *aventures* of men in *Faërie*. The word *aventure* does not so much denote "adventure" (though that meaning is contained within it) as "chance," "happening," "the unexpected." Since he already inhabits *Faërie*, Beren's *aventure*, then, must be something more than *Faërie* itself, and indeed it is. It is the unexpected sight of Lúthien dancing. As it should in a fairy tale, this casts a spell, love at first sight, described as a "strange thing" that "befell" (B&L 41). In a word, an *aventure*.

This diction is typical of what Christopher calls this version's "archaisms of word and construction" as well as its "undertone of sardonic

⁶ Tolkien recognized the anomaly, and when he changed narrators to the unnamed bard of the rhymed "Lay of Leithian," he also changed Beren's lineage from Elf to human, recasting him as a Man the better to conform to his model. But see LTI 139, where Christopher cites a marginal note on a rejected passage in *Turambar and the Fóalokë* suggesting that Beren was even earlier a Man.

humor” and the “extremely individual style” that he finds to be “at times deeply ‘elvish-mysterious’” (B&L 31). In *The Book of Lost Tales II* he observed that the tone of “The Tale of Tinúviel” was “altogether lighter and less grave” than the later versions from which it differs (LTII 53). Narrative voice is always of importance in Tolkien’s work, from the playful, albeit slightly condescending narrator of *The Hobbit* to the scholarly editorial voice of the Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings* to the bardic voice that narrates the Battle of the Pelennor Field. So it is important to note that the narrator of “The Tale of Tinúviel” is not only a rare female among Tolkien’s narrators, but a rare child as well, one Vëannë, who sits on Eriol’s knee (LTII 4), and whose diction and manner of speech manifest the unpolished candor of the very young. Vëannë’s audience also is largely children, and the ages of both narrator and audience are what lead to the shift of tone and style that Christopher has noted.

The naïve voice and the direct address point to a specific influence on Tolkien that as far as I can tell has been hitherto overlooked. This is Marie de France, a 12th-century noblewoman and court poet whose *lais*,⁷ drawn from Breton folklore, were notable for their direct address, their sly humor, and their feminine voice. Marie is an unlikely inspiration for the *Beowulf*-loving, Eddic-imitative Tolkien we are more familiar with, and it is unknown exactly when Tolkien might have first encountered her work. An English translation of her *lais* in prose was published by J.M. Dent in 1911⁸ and while it was the sort of book that would have attracted Tolkien’s interest at the time, there is no direct evidence that he read this edition. There is, however, later evidence of an edition he did read, Karl Warnke’s *Lais der Marie de France* published in 1900, in French with notes in German by Reinhold Kohler. We may speculate that acquaintance with the Dent translation might have encouraged Tolkien to look for the original. It was listed in the *Catalogue of Books From Tolkien’s Library* issued by the English Faculty Library in Oxford, and also in Oronzo Cilli’s recent *Tolkien’s Library: An Annotated Checklist*.⁹ Both the *Catalogue* and Cilli’s *Library* describe the Warnke edition as “autographed [by Tolkien] and dated ‘Sept. 1920’ at first in pencil, later inked in, on the front flyleaf” (*Catalogue* vc 56; Cilli #1515, 183). The 1920 date is worth noticing, for it is within the range of what Christopher calls the “considerably later [than 1917]” ink manuscript of “The Tale of Tinúviel” (referred to above). Further evidence that Tolkien was familiar with Marie appears among his notes for a lecture on Old Norse poetry, where he

⁷ Tolkien himself wrote a *lai* retold from Breton folklore and using its motifs, *The Lay of Aotrou & Itroun*, but its relentless emphasis on evil and transgressive behavior shows it to be a long way from Marie’s light-hearted comedies

⁸ I am indebted to John Garth for this information.

⁹ *Catalogue* vc 168-169; Cilli # 1246 and 1247). Cilli’s book relies heavily on the *Catalogue*, but is easier to access, since the *Catalogue* is currently out of print.

wrote, “the gods and heroes go down into their Ragnarök, vanquished, not by the World-girdling serpent or Fenris-wolf [...] but by Marie de France [...] and the small change of French courtesy” (*Sigurd & Gudrún* 26). It is precisely that “small change” with which Tolkien is so concerned in “The Tale of Tinúviel.”

Marie is credited with twelve *lais*: *Guigemar*, *Equitan*, *Le Fresne*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, *Les Deus Amanz*, *Yonec*, *Laüstic*, *Milun*, *Chaitivel*, *Chevrefoil*, and *Eliduc*. They are short, several under 300 lines and only one over 1000. The form is rhymed octosyllabic couplets.¹⁰ Marie’s plots often feature a symbolic object or item around which the action revolves. Her plots revolve around thwarted lovers, mistaken identity, disguise, animal characters, and shape-changing. One of her characters, Bisclavret, turns into a werewolf, a possible forerunner of Beren’s werewolf disguise in a later version of Beren and Lúthien. Her direct address is written to be read as if spoken aloud, a textual replication of oral tradition. She is also, in a Tolkienian context, what Paul Thomas describes as an “intrusive” narrator (162), not quite with the patronizing tone of the narrator of *The Hobbit*, but as a participant in an immediate oral situation nonetheless:

mes tant vos di, “I’ll tell you this much,” (*Guigemar* l. 178),
Cest afaire les ore ester, “But that’s enough of this for now” (*Bisclavret* l. 14),
Oëz après cument avint, “Now listen to what happened next” (*Bisclavret* l. 185),
Ceo m’est a vis, *meïsmes* “it seems to me” (*Lanval* l. 221).¹¹

In his Foreword to an English translation of the *Lais*, John Fowles points out Marie’s “surface naïvety” (*Lais* xi) that covers hidden depth with an ingenue delivery. Vëannë’s asides to her child audience are very much like Marie’s: “Yet have I never heard” (*B&L* 66), “as thou shalt hear” (41), they did not blame him “and neither do I” (66), “they did more than dance” (87).

In both cases, behind the surface naïvety of the narrators hides an adult author who expects the audience to know irony when they meet it. Vëannë’s treatment of Tevildo Prince of Cats is a case in point. He may be, as Christopher asserts, a precursor of Sauron (he was superseded by Thû who was then replaced by Sauron), but as Vëannë depicts him he is less an avatar than a caricature a cartoon villain in primary colors. His eyes gleam “both red and green” (*B&L* 49) his whiskers are as sharp as needles, his purr is a drumroll, and when he yells, small birds and beasts fall lifeless at the sound. His ears twitch, catlike, to hear the message he thinks Lúthien brings him. When she announces her name knowing it will be heard by Beren in the kitchen, and a crash follows

¹⁰ Compare Tolkien’s Lay of Leithian.

¹¹ All quotations of Marie are from the Warnke edition of her *Lais*, the edition that Tolkien bought in 1920. The English translations are from the Dutton edition.

as of someone dropping a loaded tray, Tevildo berates Beren for his clumsiness, but Vëannë's audience is listening on a different level and appreciates the dramatic subtext implied by the sound effects.

Equally cartoonish is her treatment of Tevildo's "thanes." Their names, *Umuiyan* and *Oikeroi* and *Miaulë*, meant to replicate the yowling of cats, suggest oral performance. They are in sharp contrast to the word *thanes* with its clannish, warrior connotations. When Lúthien sews Beren into the dead Oikeroi's catskin to disguise him from Melko we have a mental picture of the incongruity, and likewise when she shows him how to move like a cat, but laments that he can't make the dead eyes gleam. In turn, Beren is angry when she pulls his tail and he cannot lash it as fiercely as he would like. His inner and outer cats are not in sync. It is hard not to read this as satire, a sendup of the fairy tale genre told in the voice of a child. Only in the treatment of Tinúviel's hair is the "elvish-mysterious" quality taken seriously—the gold and silver bowls needed for its washing, the song that makes it grow, and its weaving into a robe "of misty black soaked with drowsiness" (*B&L* 56) that covers her escape. It also echoes Marie's detailed, painstaking descriptions of color and texture that make her world so real.

When she arrives at the moment of Beren's death Vëannë is overcome by tears, and declares that she knows no more. One Ausir attempts to add the happy ending that Beren lived, followed by an unidentified but contradictory voice that closes the story with a brief account of Beren's death and Mandos's judgment. Though Tolkien's text replicates oral performance, Vëannë validates her authority by assuring her listeners that she learned it "by heart" from the "great books"¹² despite, she confesses, not comprehending "all that is set therein" (*B&L* 88). Apparently Vëannë can read beyond her grade level, but does not always grasp deeper or wider meanings. "She gives the effect of building with a substance the significance of which she does not completely realise. She may be likened to a child playing with symbols which, in the hand of the enchanter, would be of tremendous import."

While this could easily be a description of Vëannë, it is in fact a description of Marie from the Introduction to the Everyman edition (xi). Not again to my knowledge did Tolkien so consciously adopt a particular style or employ such a distinctively naïve voice, such sardonic humor, or "elvish-mysterious" aspect, all of which do so much to distinguish "The Tale of Tinúviel" from all the other versions of the Beren and Lúthien story.

¹² It is interesting to note that even at this early stage Tolkien was proposing a manuscript tradition such as Sam envisions in his conversation with Frodo on the stairs of Cirith Ungol in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The two examples I have chosen, one of mythmaking strategy, the other of a narrator persona tried out and discarded, are only part of what Christopher has shown to the world of Tolkien fans and scholars in the years since his father's death. The years since his own death have deepened our appreciation of his work. It has taken two Tolkiens to show to the world the depth and breadth and range of what one Tolkien has created.



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