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Seeing Double: Tolkien and the Indo-European Divine Twins

Abstract

The archetype of the Divine/Celestial/Heavenly Twins as described in Donald Ward's 1968 *The Divine Twins: An Indo-European Myth in Germanic Tradition* has been used to argue for Greco-Roman literary precedents for the sons of Elrond. However, the genesis of the mythological trope of the Divine Twins in Indo-European scholarship originated a century before, for example, in the work of Max Müller. This essay briefly reviews the history of the trope of the Divine Twins that was argued by some late 19th and early 20th century authors to exist within so-called Indo-European mythology before tracing parallels between the trope and nine sets of twins found within Tolkien's works. While it will be demonstrated that the characteristics of the sons of Elrond (as well as Elrond himself and his twin brother Elros) do align with many identifiable aspects, there are many other interesting connections among less well-known twins in the legendarium and other writings.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Twins; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Elrond; Twins in mythology, religion, and culture



SEEING DOUBLE: TOLKIEN AND THE INDO-EUROPEAN DIVINE TWINS

KRISTINE LARSEN

SHERRYLJN BRANCHAW BEGINS HER 2010 PAPER “Elladan and Elrohir: The Dioscuri in *The Lord of the Rings*” by acknowledging that references to the twin sons of Elrond are largely “mundane, describing who brings up the rear of a company, or who bears the torches,” and “the only way in which the sons of Elrond advance the plot is to bring a message from their father to Aragorn.” She argues that despite this limitation, the twins are provided “a mythological background [...] that is as rich and resonant as any in Middle-earth [...] supported by Tolkien’s posthumously published works” (Branchaw 137). Her argument utilizes the description of the Indo-European archetype of the Divine/Celestial/Heavenly Twins¹ as described in Donald Ward’s *The Divine Twins: An Indo-European Myth in Germanic Tradition* (published in 1968). Branchaw specifically focuses on Ward’s analysis of examples from Classical Greek and Roman mythology, in particular the legends of Castor and Pollux (Polydeuces), collectively called the Dioscuri or sons of Zeus, and Amphion and Zethos, which she believes to be the most likely literary precedents for the sons of Elrond (138-9).

Ward opines that a common mythology of what he terms the Divine Twins is “by no means limited to the Indo-European tradition; they are found throughout the world” due to the “feelings of awe” that twin births invoke (2-3). Yet he claims that there are specific traits that can be used to trace an “Indo-European tradition” (2) using examples from ancient Greece and Rome, the Sanskrit *Rig-Veda*, and traditions from northern Europe (including Baltic and Germanic cultures). Notably, Ward was not the first to make such claims; in fact, the first fully-fledged “theory of ‘universal Dioscurism’” (Norelius 291) is generally credited to the early 20th century biblical scholar J. Rendel Harris. I argue that it is therefore more logical to use Harris’s works rather than Ward’s as a foundation for a study of Tolkien’s possible use of the Dioscuri-like twins in his works.

¹ Various authors name the same mythological trope Dioscurism, Divine Twins, Celestial Twins, Heavenly Twins, and perhaps other names as well. The differences between the definitions used by each author are often not significant; we will therefore use the terms interchangeably.

While according to Tolkien twins are “a rare thing among the Eldar” (*Peoples of Middle-earth* [PoMe] 366), the youngest sons of Fëanor (Amrod and Amras) being the “only case recorded of the Eldar in the ancient histories” (Tolkien, *Nature of Middle-earth* [NoMe] 22), there are three sets among the Half-elven (including Elladan and Elrohir), two among humans (one a mixed-sex pair of fraternal twins), and, interestingly, three sets of mixed-sex fraternal twins among Tolkien’s early non-Middle-earth tales.² The question to be explored is whether there are any trends in Tolkien’s inclusion of twins in his writings, and to what extent is he mirroring (perhaps subconsciously) late 19th century/early 20th century popular literature depictions of twins in ‘Indo-European mythology.’ While Tolkien himself famously dismissed such source-criticism, as Tom Shippey countered in his introduction to Jason Fisher’s *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources*, Tolkien “made something of a habit of exaggerating in order to make a particular point,” for example in his often-cited dislike for allegory (“Introduction” 8). Furthermore, Shippey argues, such analysis provides a valuable reminder of “just how widely Tolkien read” including having “as much grasp of Greek and Latin as a modern Classics major [...] and a very good understanding of the Bible” (“Introduction” 14).

A close examination of Tolkien’s use of twins demonstrates that Branchaw’s paper represents the proverbial tip of the iceberg, not only in the number of instances of twins described, but the depth of the analysis. This paper therefore extends this earlier work in two central ways: analyzing in detail all of the sets of twins found in Tolkien’s writings as well as relying on primary texts that were both extant and widely read in mythology circles during Tolkien’s lifetime. The result is an understanding that in what Tom Shippey terms Tolkien’s “‘complex retellings’ continually reworked” (“Introduction” 14) of real-world mythology and legend, Tolkien’s twins reflect an enhanced archetype, especially in terms of an emphasis on tragic elements as well as the relation between oaths and “irrevocable choice[s]” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] App. A.1034) in keeping with the well-known emphasis on the tension between fate and free will in his writings (e.g., Dubs; Flieger, “The Music and the Task”; Fornet-Ponse; Shippey, *Road to Middle-earth*).³

² There is a tenth example in the earliest legendarium, but so little information is given concerning them that a meaningful analysis is impossible. Christopher Tolkien (*LTI* 93) explains that a “list of secondary names of the Valar” written on “blank pages” associated with the section “The Coming of the Valar” refers to two musicians originally counted among the Valar, Ómar (also named Amillo) and Salmar (also named Noldorin), as twins. They are called brothers in the main text (*LTI* 75), and very little is said of them before they fade from the pantheon.

³ This author agrees with the argument of Fornet-Ponse that the Elves/Half-elven have a definable free will, as noted in the cases of Finwë and Míriel, Fëanor, and the children of

TOLKIEN AND 'INDO-EUROPEAN MYTHOLOGY': "ON FAIRY-STORIES" AND THE MÜLLER-LANG DEBATE

William Jones (1746-94), Justice of the High Court of Bengal in Calcutta, is commonly credited with the discovery of what is now known as the Indo-European language family, a variety of contemporary and historical languages that are posited to share a common source in the no longer extant tongue dubbed proto-Indo-European (Csapo 15). Important work on the evolution of language (the understanding of which is central to comparative philology) was done by Jakob Grimm (1785-1863) of Brothers Grimm fame, in particular on the common pattern in consonant shifts within Indo-European languages. This 'Grimm's Law' was well-known to Tolkien, who not only lectured on it at Oxford in Trinity term 1935 (Cilli 364), but heavily annotated the section devoted to it in his personal copy of Hermann Hirt's seven-volume set *Indogermanische Grammatik* (Keyser). Tolkien even integrated the Elvish equivalents of Grimm's Law into the "invented history of phonological and grammatical change" of his created languages, because just as "all the Indo-European languages are descended from a common, prehistoric ancestor, so too are all the Elvish languages related to one another" (Hostetter). This can be most directly seen in three essays published in *The Lost Road—The Lammas* ("Account of Tongues"), *The Lhammas*, and *Lammasethen*—accompanied by various forms of a diagram termed "The Tree of Tongues" (Tolkien, *Lost Road* [LR] 167-98).

However, Tolkien understood that languages do not develop in a vacuum but are spoken by individuals of a particular culture who share a collection of beliefs that are articulated within their mythology. As a result, "the making of language and mythology are related functions (coeval and congenital)" and the construction of an invented language "will breed a mythology" (Tolkien, *A Secret Vice* 23-4; emphasis original). Tolkien was therefore not only interested in languages but mythology as well. As he noted in a late 1951 letter to Milton Waldman "I am *not* 'learned' in the matters of myth and fairy-story, however [...] I have always been seeking material, things of a certain tone and air, and not simple knowledge," which he qualified with "Though I have thought *about* them a good deal" (*Letters* 144n, #131). Therefore, as Philip Burton opines, we should look more broadly to "the ideas current in Edwardian Indo-European scholarship" for influences that could "indirectly shape his legendarium" (276).

While the links between language, culture, and mythology are undeniable, as Tom Shippey warns there does not exist a "science of comparative mythology capable of producing the same results as comparative

Elrond (78-9). See Scull and Hammond (408-20) for a summary of the debate among Tolkien scholars concerning fate/free will.

philology" (*Roots and Branches* 85). This certainly did not stop scholars from attempting to construct one in the 19th century (and beyond), as Tolkien himself recounts in his famous essay "On Fairy-stories" (based on a 1939 lecture and published in 1943). Indeed, Tolkien himself admits "I feel strongly, the fascination of the desire to unravel the intricately knotted and ramified history of the branches on the Tree of Tales. It is closely connected with the philologists' study of the tangled skein of Language" ("On Fairy-stories" [OFS] 39).

As noted by Flieger and Anderson in their commentary, Tolkien's essay begins with a summary of the vociferous debate in the late 19th and 20th centuries between two schools of thought, the comparative mythology or "solar" methodology of the first holder of the chair of Comparative Philology at Oxford, Friedrich Maximilian "Max" Müller (1823-1900), and the "anthropological" methodology developed by Oxford's first Anthropology professor, Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917), which was further developed by Müller critic, Oxford alumnus, and one-time Fellow, Andrew Lang (1844-1912) ("On Fairy-stories" 11). An expert in Sanskrit, Müller argued that the best hope of reconstructing the beliefs and traditions of a presumed root Indo-European culture lay in the second millennium B.C. collection of Sanskrit hymns called the *Rig-Veda*.⁴ Over the 1860s Müller set out his argument that the hodge-podge of curious myths found in both Classical Greece and Rome as well as across Central European countries can be explained as having derived from tales of ancient Indo-European deities. Through a complex process the supposedly metaphorical language lost its original meaning due to the passage of time and geographical migration, resulting in a literal interpretation of what now seemed strange tales (Carroll 268-9). Müller infamously noted that in this way "Mythology [...] is in truth a disease of language," in that the majority of the "heathen gods are nothing but poetical names, which were gradually allowed to assume a divine personality never contemplated by their original inventors" (Vol. I 12).⁵ In particular, Müller argued that the "whole theogony and philosophy of the ancient world centred in the Dawn, the mother of the bright gods, [and] of the sun in his various aspects" (Vol. II 546). In contrast to Müller's 'solar' basis for mythology, various German scholars adopted a meteorological (storms, thunder and lightning) basis for Indo-European myths.

⁴ As noted by Scull and Hammond (625) and Goering (9-10), while a basic knowledge of Sanskrit philology would have been expected of a philologist, there is no evidence that Tolkien was fluent in the language or read the *Rig-Veda*. Goering (10) instead makes the case that it was the "romanticized image of Sanskrit in the European imagination" of Tolkien's youth that could have served as one inspiration for the legendarium.

⁵ Müller elsewhere more generously explained that "Mythology is only a dialect, an ancient form of language" (*Selected* 451).

While Müller's views enjoyed wide popularity for a time, extreme applications by some of his followers provided ample fodder to his critics. Perhaps the most egregious liberties in finding solar deities behind every myth, legend, and fairy-tale were taken by one Rev. George W. Cox (1827-1902), author of the popular work *The Mythology of the Aryan Nations* (1870), who argued that such varied stories as those of "Sigurd, William Tell, Roland, the Biblical David [...] Beowulf and Hamlet [...] conform to the elemental pattern" (Dorson 406-7).⁶ Beginning in 1873 Andrew Lang published a series of critiques of the solar mythology, keying in on contradictions in Müller's analysis. For example, the seemingly universal nature of solar deities better supports a psychological/anthropological basis rather than a distinctly Indo-European philological tradition (Montenyohl 273). Regardless of the fact that modern reviews of Müller's ideas have ascertained that there remains a kernel of plausibility in some of them, by the 1890's his methodology had largely been abandoned (Carroll 272).⁷ In Tolkien's words, "Philology has been dethroned from the high place it once had in this court of inquiry" (OFS 41). However, Tolkien did not embrace Lang's methodology either, leading him to lay out his own process of sub-creation over the course of the body of "On Fairy-stories."⁸ As Flieger and Anderson observe, in Tolkien's view myths "take shape because human beings find words to describe and enshrine their experience" (11).

Among the most primal human experiences is witnessing the birth of a child; less frequently, multiple children emerge from a single pregnancy. Before the widespread advent of Assisted Reproductive Technology (such as *in vitro* fertilization), approximately one in every 53 births in the US resulted in twins (Martin and Osterman). In the centuries prior to the advent of modern medicine, the increased risks to both mother and children associated with multiple births (including premature birth, lower birth weight, postpartum hemorrhaging of the mother, and the need for a cesarean delivery) lowered the percentage of twin births that were successfully survived by the mother and both infants. It is therefore understandable that twins were considered with both awe and trepidation, and that myths reflecting these mixed emotions would

⁶ Cox's extremes led R.F. Littledale to publish an anonymous satirical essay entitled "The Oxford Solar Myth" in 1870 which proposed that Müller himself could be shown to be a solar deity.

⁷ For example, the equation Dyaus = Zeus = Jupiter = Tyr still holds, thought to derive "from a proto-Indo-European word for sky whose etymological root means shine" and "at least makes it plausible" that these gods owe their origin to some kind of solar deity (Carroll 272).

⁸ A third methodology, the "Myth-Ritual School" of James Frazer (1854-1941) as laid out in his popular work *The Golden Bough* is not referenced in Tolkien's essay.

spring up surrounding them. While the Christian fathers of the Medieval Period “attributed many miraculous properties to biblical and saintly twins,” folk beliefs from the same period often spoke of a twin birth as “an evil omen, indicative of an adulterous union” (Rowland and Jennings 108). Albertus Magnus both attributed unworldly powers over doors and locks to twins and tried to ascribe a scientific reason for their birth, including unusual amounts of “seminal ‘humors’” (Rowland and Jennings 110). As Ward (3) argued, twins have thus generally captured the imagination of numerous individuals over the past few millennia. Given his very intentional use of twins in his writings, even as supposedly rare events, it appears that Tolkien was among these individuals. In particular, we demonstrate that Tolkien’s twins often parallel a widely claimed archetype in myth, that of the ‘Divine Twins.’

THE TROPE OF THE ‘DIVINE TWINS’

SETTING THE STAGE: THE AŚVINS

Late 19th century mythologists including Müller found the twin Vedic deities called the Aśvins of particular interest. Associated with both celestial lights (especially the sun) and horses (in some interpretations literally the sun chariot itself), the pair is repeatedly referenced in the *Rig-Veda*. The Aśvins are frequently associated with a female solar deity named Sūryā or the daughter of Sūryā, who is their sister/wife/consort (Macdonell 51). Chief among the questions posed by scholars is why these deities are consistently depicted as twins, since they are always spoken of as a coherent pair and have no distinguishable characteristics. Secondary to this is the lack of a clear identification of the pair with one particular celestial light source. Writing in his *Vedic Mythology* (1897) two years before being appointed Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, Arthur A. Macdonell (1854-1930) pointed out that the confusion dates back at least as far as the 7th–5th century BCE commentaries of Yāska (53). Heaven and earth, day and night, sun and moon, morning/evening star, and even dawn itself (a time of twinned light and dark) are among the possible interpretations. Late 19th century sources also championed a widely quoted but now disputed interpretation of certain passages of the *Rig-Veda* as suggesting that the Aśvins have two biological fathers, one divine and the other mortal (Walker, *Twin Horse Gods* 40).⁹ Müller also drew attention to other solar-related pairs of characters in the *Rig-Veda* that were sometimes referred to as

⁹ This is biologically possible. In superfecundation two eggs released during a single menstrual cycle are fertilized within a few days of each other through separate coital events (involving the same or different fathers) (Jonczyk 33-4). Rare cases of superfetation (the fertilization and successful implantation of a second egg in a woman’s uterus well after the start of a pregnancy) have been reported as far back as the works of Aristotle and Hippocrates and are now confirmed with ultrasound (Tuppen et al. 219).

twins,¹⁰ opining that the “idea of twin powers is one of the most fertile ideas in ancient mythology. Many of the most striking phenomena of nature were comprehended by the ancients under that form” (Vol. II 532).

These late 19th century studies of the Ásvins and other twins in the *Rig-Veda* are the main source of the concept of the Divine/Celestial Twins, clear echoes of which are widely reported in both Greek and Lithuanian/Baltic mythology, among other traditions. For example, in his Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of St. Andrews, Lewis Richard Farnell, the Rector of Exeter College, Oxford, and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, the foremost scholar of Greek religion of his day, opined that the “study of these twin-personalities of cult present more perplexing problems than perhaps any other chapter of Greek religion” (175), especially in the Dioscuri, that is to say, the brothers Castor and Pollux. Multiple versions of the Dioscuri’s birth legend exist in classical literature. Their mother, Leda, is often said to have given birth to two sets of twins, the immortal Helen and mortal Clytemnestra, and the immortal Pollux (a famed boxer) and mortal Castor (a horseman of special note, although both brothers are frequently associated with horses). But in some versions the Dioscuri are either both mortal or both immortal, or they share their immortality (an important point that will be returned to). Their paternity is also fluid, ranging from being unknown, to solely Zeus, to Pollux as the son of Zeus and Castor as the son of Leda’s human husband (Walker, *Twin Horse Gods* 11-3). Walker speaks of the Dioscuri as “straddling the line between Olympian gods and chthonic heroes, and these stories were various attempts at defining their status” (*Twin Horse Gods* 11). The Dioscuri are invoked in the *Homeric Hymns*, where they are said to “allay the blasts of the cruel winds and still the waves upon the surface of the white sea: fair signs are they and deliverance from toil. And when the shipmen see them they are glad and have rest from their pain and labour” (Evelyn-White 463). Regardless of their problematic nature, the Dioscuri lend their collective name and many of their assumed characteristics to what J. Rendel Harris popularized as a universal ‘cult’ whose echo, he argued, can be seen in mythologies from around the globe.

HARRIS AND THE CULT OF THE HEAVENLY TWINS

Harris believed he had

found evidence of the existence of two dominant fears in the mind of primitive man, one the perfectly natural fear of thunder and lightning, the other, which at first sight seems as artificial as the other is natural, the fear of twins [... and] so much of religious practice and belief is traceable

¹⁰ See, for example, Müller, *Vol. II* 555-63.

to one or other of these forms of terror that we might almost say that on these two dreads hang nine-tenths of subsequent religion,

the most important exception being, of course, his own Christianity (*Boanerges* 30). Harris began collecting evidence of this 'Dioscurism' in *The Dioscuri in Christian Legends*, a 1903 study of twin saints in the Christian calendar that he argued shared many characteristics with the Dioscuri (e.g., Florus and Laurus, Protasius and Gervasius). He later extended his argument more broadly to myths from cultures around the world in *The Cult of the Heavenly Twins* (1906) and *Boanerges* (1913). By the completion of this trilogy Harris honed his description of what he considered to be "this great universal rival to Christianity" by reducing it to a "primitive Trinity, which consisted of the Thunder-God and his two 'Assessors', the divine twins" (Walker, *Twin Horse Gods* 4).¹¹

Harris posited that mythological twins often have the following characteristics:

- They are associated with some taboo due to their unnatural births (*Cult* 10);
- Because of this taboo, they are often exiled and afterwards establish sanctuaries. Therefore they are seen as founders of cities or states (*Cult* 135);
- They are often indistinguishable and either share a name or have names with common forms/rhyming (*Cult* 10; 58);
- One is immortal and the other mortal, largely due to their dual paternity (with both a divine and a human father) (*Cult* 4-5);
- They are frequently associated with the dawn or other celestial objects and in such cases "are known as the Children of the Sky" (*Cult* 24);
- They are often associated with horses (*Cult* 24) and sailors (*Cult* 134) and are often seen in the role of protectors (*Cult* 152);
- In particular, they are frequently the protectors of women, especially a female relative known as "the daughter of the Sun" (*Cult* 152; *Boanerges* 298-9);¹²
- They are skilled healers (*Cult* 50);

¹¹ Interestingly, among the examples that Harris includes of 'Divine Twins' are two related to the *New Testament*. First, he argues that the description of apostles James and John in Mark 3:17 as "Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder" is evidence that they were twins (*Boanerges* 2), and second, that references in the Gnostic text *The Acts of Thomas* to "Judas Thomas, i.e., Jude the [Lord's] twin-brother" is evidence that the author of this non-canonical text was drawing upon the legend of the Dioscuri (*Dioscuri* 21).

¹² Harris's two main examples for this characteristic are the Dioscuri's rescue of their sister, Helen, from Theseus, and the saints Sisinnius and Sisinnodorus and their sister, who had been trapped in a tower (*Cult* 84).

- They are “Guardians of Truthfulness [...] appealed to by those who make contracts and take oaths” (*Cult* 51).¹³

Harris openly admitted to deviations from his archetype, for example that the twins “are sometimes female, and that they are not always thought of as equal and similar,” for example in the case of the Greek deities Apollo and Artemis (*Cult* 43). It is therefore proper to include fraternal mixed-sex sets of twins in our analysis. In addition, as Harris himself noted, the “qualities, powers and actions ascribed to the Twins” are “so diversified that it is difficult to understand [...] how a single pair can be credited with the playing of so many and so varied parts as we find assigned to them” (*Cult* 1-2). Indeed, writing a century later Walker simply observes that “There is no such thing as Dioscurism or a single universal approach towards twins; there are hundreds of diverse attitudes, each one peculiar to its own society” (*Twin Horse Gods* 5).

Nevertheless, Harris’s works were widely read and highly influential during Tolkien’s formative years through the time of the writing of his own grand mythology, and are still cited in mythological studies in the 21st century despite a number of his central tenets being proven incorrect (Walker, *Twin Horse Gods* 4).¹⁴ Perhaps chief among these is the claim of double paternity and a division of the pair into one mortal and one immortal. For example, Walker notes that while there are numerous pairs of twins in the *Rig-Veda*, none of them has a dual paternity, and within each pair both twins are either mortal or both are immortal (*Twin Horse Gods* 6-7).

As part of his analysis Harris repeatedly noted that it is common for twins to have a shared name (e.g., the *Aśvins*), names with a similar meaning (eg., the Germanic Hengist “stallion” and Horsa “horse”), or similar-sounding names (e.g., Heracles and Iphicles, Yama and Yamī from the *Rig-Veda*, and Romulus and Remus). However, as Branchaw (141-2) points out, there is no “shared morpheme” in the names of Castor and Pollux,¹⁵ and Tolkien frequently uses the same strategy in the names of brothers who are not twins, including Boromir/Faramir and the dwarves Fili/Kili, and Dori/Nori/Ori. Therefore, while the names of twins will be a part of our analysis, we will keep in mind that similar names do not always denote twinship in Tolkien’s Secondary World.

¹³ Harris mentions additional characteristics that do not have any obvious parallel with Tolkien’s characters and will not be explored here, for example “as the patrons of fertility,” related to their connection with agriculture (*Cult* 32).

¹⁴ It is not the goal of this paper to opine on the veracity of the various views concerning Indo-European twin mythologies, but only to explore reflections of late 19th and early 20th century hypotheses in Tolkien’s work.

¹⁵ Likewise, the most famous twins in the Bible, Jacob and Esau (the fathers of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and the Edomites, respectively) also do not have similar names.

Regardless of the problems in his mythological template, Harris's archetype was widely adopted, and continues to be influential more than a century after its conception (O'Brien 161). Branchaw's preferred source of information on such Indo-European twin mythology, Donald Ward, opines in his 1968 *The Divine Twins* that while "[t]he worship of the divine twins is a universal phenomenon, and the religious concepts, the functions, and the mythological themes associated with such pairs reveal a remarkable similarity throughout the world," there exists a "clearly identifiable tradition" among Indo-European language speakers, that of the "sons of the Sky-God, brothers of the Sun Maiden" (89). Similarly, while the "celestial nature of the twins is evident in all the Indo-European traditions," there is "little agreement as to what celestial phenomena the Divine Twins are supposed to represent" (Ward 15).

Henry John Walker terms these limitations "the tragic flaw of Dioscurism, because what Harris and his followers are in fact describing is not a single, universal set of beliefs, but rather an extremely diverse variety of beliefs and practices relating to twins" (*Twin Horse Gods* 5). Walker does acknowledge the substantial similarities between the Aśvins and Castor/Pollux and posits that they do indeed represent the same mythical tradition. However, "scholars of the nineteenth century [...] simplified and indeed ruined the myths about these gods by reducing them to garbled accounts of celestial phenomena," reducing "lovely stories about lively gods into second-rate text-books on astronomy" (Walker, *The Greek Aśvins* 99-100). Clearly Tolkien would have actively sought to avoid such a trap in his 'complex retelling' of such a mythological trope. For example, while the cosmology of *The Silmarillion* involves a number of individuals associated with celestial bodies, including the drivers of the Sun and Moon (Arien and Tilion, respectively) and Eärendil sailing the heavens with a Silmaril as the Evening Star/Morning Star, he takes great care in balancing the larger significance of these characters within his mythology with what one would consider to be Primary World astronomical observations.¹⁶

Having demonstrated that the trope of the Celestial Twins was a common one in the popular literature of Tolkien's early decades of life, we next examine nine pairs of twins identified in Tolkien's mythological works. Not only will reflections of the tradition of Harris and his supporters be demonstrated, but evidence of Tolkien's reworking of the tropes in the image of his own imagination.

¹⁶ Nevertheless, many of Tolkien's astronomical allusions parallel actual astronomical observations quite well, if one discounts his well-known issues with some of his moon phases. For further discussion of his uses of the observed motions of the Sun, Moon, and Venus within his legendarium, see Larsen, "Carry on My Wayward Sonne (and Moon)" and "Cynewulf, Copernicus, and Conjunctions."

TOLKIEN'S TWINS*FRATERNAL TWINS IN EARLY NON-LEGENDARIUM WRITINGS*

Tolkien's earliest example of fictional twins is found in one of his adaptations of older real-world legends, the tale of Kullervo from the *Kalevala*. As Tolkien the philology student well knew at the time, Finnish is a Finno-Ugric rather than Indo-European tongue. Indeed, in a lecture on *The Kalevala*, he explained "It is a language practically isolated in modern Europe [...] except in a process of agelong borrowing that has filled it to the brim with old Slavonic, Lithuanian, and Germanic words" (*Story of Kullervo* [Kullervo] 115-6). Not only did the Finnish language appeal to Tolkien, but its related mythology as well. In particular, he felt that the *Kalevala* "crossed the gulf between the Indo-European-speaking peoples of Europe into this smaller realm of those who cling in queer corners to the forgotten tongues and memories of an elder day" (*Kullervo* 69). While it may seem counterintuitive to analyze a legend native to a non-Indo-European tongue using a rubric that is supposedly aligned with the beliefs of Indo-European-related cultures, Tolkien was certainly not above mixing up the ingredients in the "Cauldron of Story" (OFS 44). Tolkien's adaptation of the tragic story of Kullervo was written while he was a student at Oxford (around Autumn 1914),¹⁷ about the same time that he was writing the "The Voyage of Éarendel the Evening Star" (Flowers). As such it is not only one of his earliest extant works, but intimately tied to his legendarium. For example, the influence of the tale of Kullervo on Tolkien's tragic story of Túrin is well-known (Flieger, "Tolkien, *Kalevala*, and 'The Story of Kullervo'" ["Tolkien and Kullervo"] 134-6). Indeed, Flieger argues that it was the "tragic qualities as much as its mythic qualities" of the story of Kullervo in the *Kalevala* that "so powerfully attracted" Tolkien to the tale "that he felt the need to re-tell it" ("Introduction," *Kullervo* xiii).

Critics have long cited a structural problem with the original tale as told in the *Kalevala* story: Kullervo has two families and becomes an orphan twice. His father is murdered in Untamo's raid, leaving the newborn with no family besides his mother. However, later in the tale Kullervo is suddenly given a new family, including a brother and a sister with whom he unwittingly commits incest. Domenico Comparetti explains the confusion as due to compiler Elias Lönnrot's aggregating different oral traditions into a single version (Flieger, "Tolkien and Kullervo" 148). Tolkien streamlines the tale by shifting the older siblings to the original family and giving Kullervo ("wrath") a fraternal twin sister, Wanōna ("weeping"), his close childhood companion (*Kullervo* 7).

¹⁷ There is some debate as to this date; alternate sources vary from as early as 1912 to as late as 1916. See Flieger's "Introduction" to *The Story of Kullervo* (xii) for more discussion.

This important shift in the plot greatly magnifies the impact of the incest later in the tale.

In the original, Kullervo has a brief dalliance with a girl after paying his taxes; post-coital small talk about their families leads the unnamed sister to realize their relationship and commit suicide. As Verlyn Flieger remarks, the original scene is “handled so quickly and tersely that it’s over almost before you know it. Tolkien makes much more of the event, and builds up to it carefully” (“Tolkien and Kullervo” 154). In Tolkien’s revisioning, Kullervo is sidetracked from his mission of sworn vengeance against his uncle Untamo, his father’s murderer (an ill-fated oath sworn when just a child), by his brief dalliance with a woman in the forest. Afterwards they realize their relationship, and Wanōna jumps to her death at a waterfall. Kullervo is consumed with “red anger” and metes out his terrible vengeance upon Untamo and all who are with him, finally dying by his own sword (*Kullervo* 39-40).

From their very birth the lives of the twins are tainted with misfortune (to put it mildly). Both the infant twins and their mother lose their home and their lives come to evil and sorrow. In this first example of Tolkienian twins we see what I argue are the two decidedly Tolkienian twists to the Dioscuri template: (1) the transition of mere taboo to outright tragedy, closely aligned with (2) a modification of the role of the twins as the “Guardians of Truthfulness [...] appealed to by those who make contracts and take oaths” (*Cult* 51) to a more personal role as the maker and fulfiller of oaths (often, as in this case, an oath of vengeance) and/or irrevocable choices. Again, both of these reflect Tolkien’s complex use of larger issues of fate and free will within his writings. It is notable that Tolkien intentionally reworked a sibling relationship into a twinship in his “earliest attempt to write tragedy, as well as his earliest prose venture into myth-making” (Flieger, “Introduction,” *Kullervo* ix). The “Daughter of the Sun” trope is clearly subverted by Tolkien, such subversions another distinctive feature of Tolkien’s use of twins. In this case, rather than the twins saving the character of the “Daughter of the Sun” figure we have Kullervo’s inability to save his mother or sister (here his twin), as well as the character of the shadowy, blue-robed Lady of the Forest who tries unsuccessfully to save Kullervo from himself with her words of advice (*Kullervo* 34-5).¹⁸

Another ill-fated set of fraternal twins appears in Tolkien’s 1945 poem (based on an earlier Breton lay) “The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun.” Verlyn Flieger describes this work as “[c]oming from the darker side of J.R.R. Tolkien’s

¹⁸ One might also view the interactions of Kullervo and the Smith’s wife as another inversion of this trope. Elsewhere (Larsen, “Ladies of the Forest”) I argue that many of the characteristics of Tolkien’s version of the Lady of the Forest were later recycled in the character of Melian.

imagination” and argues that it should be “set alongside his other retellings of existing myth and legend, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, *The Fall of Arthur*, and *The Story of Kullervo*” (“Introduction,” *Lay of Aotrou & Itroun* [A&I] xv). Note that the first and third of these also include the use of twins. At the center of the tale is a childless lord who seeks out the aid of the sinister Corrigan, in the form of a fertility potion that garners him fraternal twins, “A manchild and an infant maid” (A&I 10). Tragically, the infants are orphaned when the Corrigan is afterwards spurned by the Lord and curses him to die in three days’ time, his grieving Lady wife joining him in death soon after.

The published lay evolved from a series of poems concerning the Corrigan (circa 1929-30), and as Verlyn Flieger explains, the revisions move the tale further and further from the original and “take the story into ever deeper and darker territory” (A&I 91). In the original Breton sources the Lord’s meeting with the Corrigan is an unfortunate accident, having come upon her while hunting a deer meant to feature in a celebratory meal after the birth of his twin son and daughter. As in Tolkien’s published poem, the Lord dutifully refuses the Corrigan’s attempt to seduce him and is cursed to die (A&I 45-6). Note that in Tolkien’s reworking the fraternal twins are not the joyous natural issue of the Lord and his wife, but instead the unnatural result of the Lord’s desperate dealings with the Corrigan and her ungodly magic. As Flieger notes, Tolkien’s final version of the tale “makes the lord’s childlessness the engine of his doom, his ‘mad and monstrous’ resolve to seek the fay a symptom of his darkening mind” (A&I 91).

The twins thus unwittingly act in the role of oathkeepers, their very existence the visible sign of the payment owed to the Corrigan due to their father’s irrevocable choice to seek heirs by whatever unnatural means necessary. When the Lord later refuses to give the Corrigan what she deems to be her due — an adulterous liaison — she feels justified in exacting the payment of his death. The ultimate fate of the orphaned twins is left to the reader’s imagination, but it is certainly steeped in tragedy (not unexpected given the taboos associated with their conception). We also identify an obvious subversion of the healer role; the twins are not healers, but rather represent the unnatural healing of their parents’ infertility. The Corrigan herself is the healer, albeit depicted as an ungodly/unnatural one (again a subversion of this same trope).

Our third example, from *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, is also an early 1930s adaptation of a pre-existing legend. Tolkien himself remarked of the poems that the

chief part is the tragedy of Sigurd and Brynhild, which is of interest for itself; but the whole is given unity as a study of the way in which a wilful deed of Loki, the purposeful slaying of Otr, and his ruthless method of

extricating Ódin and himself from the peril into which this deed has brought them sets into motion a curse that at the last brings Sigurd to his death. (*Legend of Sigurd and Guðrún* [S&G] 51)

Evident in Tolkien's description are the roles of irrevocable choices leading to a tragic fate. In Section II *Signý* we read of the twins Sigmund and Signý (alike in name), the eldest children of Völsung, a descendent of Ódin, and his Valkyrie wife. Signý is betrothed to Siggeir, king of Gautland, against her will. Her apprehension proves prescient, as her father is subsequently killed, and her ten brothers shackled in a forest, all but Sigmund being killed by a fierce wolf. For a time Sigmund hides from his murderous brother-in-law in a cavern, disguised as "a dwarvish smith" while by "Signý was a fierce vengeance devised and fulfilled" (S&G 72).

As in the case of "The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun" we have a subversion of the leitmotif of twins as healers by relating them in an unnatural conception, with Signý using magic to visit Sigmund in his cave in the shape of an "elvish maiden" and conceive a child, the act termed "brief love, bitter, / blent with loathing!" (S&G 82-3). Their son, Sinfjötli, brings Siggeir's sword to Sigmund, and together they mete out cruel vengeance against the Gauts. Afterwards, Signý reveals the loathsome details of how she fulfilled her oath of vengeance, proclaiming "Son Sinfjötli, / Sigmund father! Signý comes not [...]. / I lived in loathing, / now lief I die" and willingly burns to death with her hated husband (S&G 86). Sigmund becomes king and Sinfjötli is afterwards poisoned by his stepmother. Sigmund spends years alone until he weds the young Sigrlinn but once again comes to sorrow, being mortally wounded by Sigrlinn's unsuccessful suitors, so that he never meets the son he has recently conceived, the hero Sigurd (S&G 92-6).

Again, incest between twins is central to the story, related to a plan to achieve vengeance. Tolkien explicitly notes the loathing Signý feels for both the act and herself afterwards, when she kills herself. While oaths of vengeance are fulfilled on the part of both twins, in the end they and the illicit fruit of their relationship come to sorrow as well, commensurate with the tragic history of their entire clan. While the twinship itself is not Tolkien's original invention (as in the previous two cases), Tolkien still provides his own unique twist on the trope, an "invention of the present poet" of a special role for Sigurd as leader of the forces of Ódin in the final battle, in the "hopes that by his hand the Serpent shall in the end be slain, and a new world made possible" (S&G 53-54).

The only other set of fraternal twins in Tolkien's writings is the Lady Haleth and her brother Haldar, again a pair of twinned siblings with parallel names. In Christopher Tolkien's commentary on the Houses of the Edain in *The War of the Jewels* he notes that this house "underwent the greatest change," most

notably the abandonment of the founding father Haleth. The name is instead given to a “formidable Lady,” the daughter of Haldad (Tolkien, *War of the Jewels* [WotJ] 236). The “twin children” of Haldad are equally said to be “valiant in the defense,” with Haleth described as “a woman of great heart and strength” (*Silmarillion* [Silm.]146). Father and son are killed in an offensive against Orcs, Haleth making the fateful choice to rally her people and keep them safe for a week until reinforcements arrive in the form of Caranthir, son of Fëanor, and his host (*Silm.* 146).¹⁹ While Haleth is long remembered as a noble figure and effective leader, she dies childless, and from her twin’s son issues the tragic house of Húrin. Even within this brief vignette we also observe twins in the role of protector, and one of them playing an important role in the (re)founding of a people/state.

TWINS AMONG THE HALF-ELVEN

Of the nine pairs of twins we are analyzing within Tolkien’s works, one third are among siblings and descendants of Eärendil and Elwing—Elwing’s brothers, sons, and grandsons. Given Eärendil’s well-known role as both a mariner of note and, after his transformation, the Evening Star (and Morning Star), we assert that some level of marginal fulfillment of the celestial connection trope (echoing the Aśvins and their often-assumed connection with either the Dawn or the Evening/Morning star) is fulfilled by all three sets of Half-elven twins. Of interest is the fact that as Evening and Morning Star, Eärendil is his own twin, given the fact that, as Harris (*Cult* 8) notes, the two apparitions of Venus were considered to be “two distinct stars” in ancient mythology, for example the Greek Hesperus and Phosphorus, which Harris claims to have been twins. Their connection with Elwing is also celestial, both in her relationship with the Silmaril inherited from her father, Dior, and descriptions of her appearance when rising up to meet her husband in the twilight sky, reminiscent of the actual appearance of the planet Mercury (Larsen, “Sea Birds and Morning Stars” 79).²⁰ In addition, the sons and grandsons of Eärendil are descendants of a celestial sailor.

¹⁹ The published version in *The Silmarillion* is basically unchanged from that found in the post-*LOTR* “Later Quenta Silmarillion” (WotJ 221-2).

²⁰ Alain Lefèvre (215) argues for an identification of Mercury as Eärendil’s father, Tuor, another legendary mariner. Interestingly, Tolkien leaves open the possibility that Tuor “alone of mortal Men was numbered among the elder race”; in old age he and Idril sailed away and were never seen in Middle-earth again, afterwards being rumored to have “joined with the Noldor, whom he loved; and his fate is sundered from the fate of Men” (*Silm.* 245). While not a Half-elven himself, Tuor is, apparently, given a similar irrevocable choice.

Branchaw (142) observes that while the sons of Elrond do not have dual paternity, “they do have dual ancestry.” This can, of course, be extended to all of the Half-elven, as can Branchaw’s argument that choice of the sons of Elrond’s to be human or elfkind (essentially mortal or immortal) aligns with one version of the Castor/Pollux myth (in which Zeus gives his immortal son Pollux choice over his own immortality, which he ultimately decides to share with his mortal brother). Harris highlights this aspect of the Dioscuri, explaining that the

Greek mythologists have added a beautiful description of the discontent of the deified Polydeuces because his brother could not share his honours with him, and his determination not to enjoy Heaven alone, together with an account of the way in which Zeus rewarded the disinterested affection of Polydeuces, and divided immortality for one between the two, thus furnishing the Greek moralists with their classical instance of the higher forms of love in sacrifice. (*Cult* 4)

The irrevocable choices of all the Half-elven not only seal their ultimate individual fates, but set into motion important events that affect the lives of others—and Middle-earth as a whole—in significant ways.²¹ As Jane Chance argues, the “intermarriages and mixed blood progeny” of the Half-elven are modelled on “the classical prototype of the hero as half god, half human” (244). We will therefore consider any pairing with this dual ancestry as fulfilling the attribute of being mixed mortal/immortal. However, as we will later explore, in classic Tolkienian style this irrevocable choice of the Half-elven often leads them to be forever separated from each other rather than united (as in the case of the Dioscuri), beginning with Elrond and his twin brother Elros.

Elrond and Elros, sons of Eärendil and Elwing,²² are perhaps the best known of the Half-elven twins. In the earliest *Silmarillion* text, “Sketch of the Mythology” (circa 1926), Elrond appears as an only child (*Shaping of Middle-earth* [*SoMe*] 38), a trait that continues through the writing of the second version of “The Quenta” (c. 1930) (*SoMe* 155). Interestingly, the idea that he has an irrevocable choice to make that will forever determine his ultimate fate is present from his earliest appearance. As Christopher Tolkien notes, when the “Elves return into the west he [Elrond] elects to stay ‘on earth,’ being ‘bound by

²¹ Elwing’s father and brothers die before being faced with a conscious decision. One assumes that at their untimely deaths it fell to Mandos to sort it all out on behalf of Ilúvatar.

²² The uniting of the two parallel half-elven lines in Elrond and Elros arguably enhances the level of their ‘twinning.’ This symbolism is echoed in the marriage of Arwen, daughter of Elrond and sister to the twins Elladan and Elrohir, and Aragorn, descendent of Elros.

his mortal half'. It is remarkable that [...] the idea of a choice of fate for the Half-elven is already present" at such an early stage of the mythology (*SoMe* 70).

The first rendition of the legend of the Fall of Númenor (FN I) contains "no mention of a [...] founder king of Númenor" (*LR* 23). In the revision (FN II) the island was gift from the Gods to the "Men of the three faithful houses" (24) and Elrond is chosen as its first ruler by "the Gods and Elves" (*LR* 25). At some point before the writing of *The Lord of the Rings* the ruler of Númenor is changed to Elros as an amendment of the typescript of FN II and simultaneously in revisions to QII (*LR* 34; *SoMe* 196). The status of the brothers as twins is an early decision; Christopher Tolkien describes a "hastily pencilled change" to the "Later Annals of Beleriand" noting that in Year 325 "The Peringiul, the Half-elven, were born of Elwing wife of Eärendel, while Eärendel was at sea, the twin brethren Elrond and Elros" (*LR* 152). Note the single term used to denote them (later Pereldar and Peredhil [*PoMe* 364]), similar to the terms *Aśvins* in the *Rig-Veda* and the original use of *Dioscuri* (Sons of Zeus) to describe Castor and Pollux, although various forms of "Half-elven" are also used to describe Dior and Eärendil.

This twinned ruler of Númenor is perhaps a nod to Plato's description of Atlantis in his *Critias*, where Poseidon and the maiden Clito "begat five twin births of male offspring and divided the whole isle of Atlantis into ten parts" (Taylor 117). Branchaw (145) correctly notes that Elladan and Elrohir do not fulfill the role of city/state founders, but she neglects the fact that both Elrond and Elros *are* founders, of Imladris (Rivendell) and Númenor, respectively.

There are interesting similarities/symbolisms in the individual names of the twins. In an often-cited 1958 letter to Rhona Beare, Tolkien explains that "**rondo* was a prim[itive] Elvish word for 'cavern' [...] **rossë* meant 'dew, spray (of fall or fountain),' *Elrond* and *Elros*, children of Eärendil (sea-lover) and Elwing (Elf-foam)," were left in a cave with a fall of water over the entrance after the sacking of the Sirion settlement by the host of the sons of Fëanor, driven by their ill-fated oath to reclaim the Silmarils (*Letters* 282, #211). While Branchaw (145) explains that their abandonment in the wild recalls the legend of Amphiion and Zethos, she neglects to mention that Romulus and Remus were also abandoned in the wilderness (Cornell 112) and fostered by a wolf.²³ Their abandonment by their mother (who flung herself with the Silmaril into the ocean to prevent it from falling into the hands of the sons of Fëanor) can be seen as a subversion of the rescue of the daughter of the Sun; in this case, the twins

²³ The suckling of Romulus and Remus by a normally fierce wolf and the nurturing of Elrond and Elros by the rather wolflike sons of Fëanor is perhaps closer in symbolism than we have time to explore in this work.

are abandoned by both their celestial parents who, in their defense, believe them to be dead (*Silm.* 247).

However, there are other explanations for the names of the sons of Eärendil. For instance, in the essay “Quendi and Eldar” Tolkien explains that *rondo invokes a “vaulted or arched roof, as seen from below” and is “applied pictorially to the heavens after the Elves had obtained much greater knowledge of ‘Star-lore’.” Elrond’s name is therefore interpreted as “Star-dome” while Elros is simply noted to mean “Star-glitter” (*WotJ* 414). A late (c. 1968) writing, “The Problem of Ros,” confirms the celestial nature of Elwing’s name; because “she was born on a clear night of stars, the light of which glittered in the spray of the waterfall” her father joined the Bëorian *wing* “meaning fine rain or the spray from fountains and waterfalls blown by a wind” with the “Elvish *el-* ‘star’” (*PoMe* 369).²⁴

The celestial etymology of their names is certainly suggestive of the archetype of the Divine Twins, as does their phonetic similarity. It is therefore interesting that Tolkien does not stress the twinning of Elrond and Elros in most mentions of them, usually simply referring to them as brothers (e.g., *LR* 332), although they are apparently consistently considered twins throughout the post-*LOTR* revisions (e.g., *WotJ* 348). We therefore again see that twinhood is important to Tolkien, despite the fact that it is not central to the *action* in the story.

All of the examples we have discussed thus far had their genesis before the 1939 writing of his essay “On Fairy-stories” and its publication in 1943. Due to his work on the essay (concurrent with early work on *The Lord of the Rings*) the work of Müller, and thus the trope of the Divine Twins, would have been nearer to the forefront of his consciousness, and his knowledge of the topic would have certainly been enhanced beyond his earlier education. Therefore, any additions of twins made to the legendarium during this period of time would be of even greater interest. The sons of Elrond are one such example.

In *The Return of the King* Legolas makes note of the “brethren Elladan and Elrohir” (V.2.776), described as “So much alike [...] that few could tell them apart” (V.2.778). They make their first appearance circa 1946, in an outline to the chapter “Minas Tirith” (*War of the Ring* 274; 289). As previously noted, Branchaw admits that the direct actions of Elrond’s sons Elladan and Elrohir in *The Lord of the Rings* are mainly “mundane” (137), including such easily glossed over moments as giving Aragorn a silver horn with which to call to attention the Army of the Dead at the Stone of Erech (*LotR* V.2.789). But as witnesses to the re-swearing of the oath to the heir of Isildur, they do fulfill the role of

²⁴ Tolkien never managed to develop a consistent explanation for the etymology of *Elros*. See “The Problem of Ros” for more information (*PoMe* 367-76).

“Guardians of Truthfulness” (Harris, *Cult* 51). The twins themselves also take upon themselves an oath (unspoken), in their continual sorties “forgetting never their mother’s torment in the dens of the orcs” (*LotR* II.1.227). Celebrían’s capture and rescue is recounted in Appendix A of *The Return of the King* (1043); during a journey to visit her parents in Lórien “she was waylaid in the Redhorn Pass, and her escort being scattered by the sudden assault of Orcs, she was seized and carried off.” While she is rescued by her sons and healed by her husband, she had “suffered torment and had received a poisoned wound,” and having thus “lost all delight in Middle-earth” abandons Middle-earth and sails West a year later. Note that it is Elrond, not his sons, who is a “master of healing,” an important role of the Divine Twins that he also demonstrates when tending to Frodo’s morgul blade wound (*LotR* II.1.221).

Branchaw opines that their role in their rescue of their mother “is the most striking similarity between the sons of Elrond and the divine twins,” setting their mother in the role of the Daughter of the Sun (140). Elladan and Elrohir’s more general role as protectors is bolstered by Branchaw’s convincing comparison of Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s description of the battle of Lake Regillus with a rejected passage from *The Peoples of Middle-Earth* in which Elrond’s sons arrive unlooked for at the Field of Celebrant and help to turn the tide of the battle (273). The scene draws heavily upon their role as horsemen, another of the classic characteristics of the Divine Twins.

The frequent use of the patronymic “sons of Elrond” to refer to the twins as “a unit” is invoked by Branchaw (143) to connect these characters with the Aśvins and Dioscuri. She does caution that similar terms are applied by Tolkien to non-twins such as the “sons of Denethor” and the “sons of Fëanor,” so the use of patronyms is not definitive in and of itself. The individual names of Elrond’s sons are also used by Branchaw to connect them with the Divine Twin archetype. In the aforementioned 1958 letter to Rhona Beare Tolkien explains that their names “refer to the fact that they were ‘Half-elven’” and “signify *elf + man*. Elrohir might be translated ‘Elf-knight’ [...] Elladan might be translated ‘Elf-Númenórean’” (*Letters* 282, #211). Indeed, with the exception of one pair of fraternal twins among the Rohirrim, Elladan and Elrohir are the only set of Tolkien’s twins that are clearly associated with horses.

Branchaw also uses the previously noted translation of Elrond’s name as “star-dome” to argue that his sons are the “sons of the sky,” or the Tolkienian equivalent of Harris’s Children of the Sky (144). However, I argue that Elrond and Elros more clearly fulfill the role of the Children of the Sky, especially given

Elros's role as King of a star-shaped island, an island to which the first ships were guided by the light of Eärendil as the Morning/Evening Star (*Silm.* 260).²⁵

Branchaw (145) notes that Arwen is also named Evenstar (Undómiel), but only mentions in passing any connection of this name to the Indo-European tradition of the celestial female relative. This is interesting, as Tolkien explains in "The Calendar" (*LotR* App. D) that the "Eldar paid special attention to the 'twilight'" and "had many names for these periods, of which the most usual were *tindómë* and *undómë*, the former most often referred to the time near dawn, and *undómë* to the evening" (1111). Again, recall that many of the proponents of the Indo-European mythology associated the Aśvins (the prototype for the Heavenly Twins) with the dawn or twilight more generally, which would make Arwen's epithet especially symbolic.

Perhaps Branchaw's brief mention of this point is due to the fact that Tolkien did not apparently spend much time considering the relationship between the siblings with the exception of their relative ages. The gap between the birth of the twins and their sister is increased several times in his drafts, for example from 51 years in a "rejected version" of the Appendices to 102 years in the first edition of *The Return of the King* and to 111 years in the second (*PoMe* 249). The larger gap is commensurate with the statement in "Of the Laws and Customs Among the Eldar" that "In mortal count there was often a long interval [...] between child and child" (*Morgoth's Ring* [MR] 212), however even this was not satisfactory to Tolkien in hindsight. In the c. 1959 manuscript "Time-scales and 'rates of growth'," Tolkien admits that the published dates for the births of Arwen and the twins do not work in light of the rates of aging of the Eldar and "Half-elven that chose to join the Quendi" (such as Elrond). Specifically, there should be a much larger gap (Tolkien considering two centuries as appropriate) between "the births of twins, and in the begetting and bearing of a special child of high excellence," i.e., Arwen (*NoMe* 67).

Before leaving the children and grandchildren of Eärendil, we should further reflect on the irrevocable choices of the Half-elven as with which 'kind' (and therefore, which fate) they should be counted, especially in light of the important threads of tragedy, oaths, and fates reflected in the Tolkienian twin trope. Similar choices are a repeated refrain in the legendarium, as Jane Chance (72) notes, beginning with the Valar themselves, those Ainur who made the choice to go into the world and have their fates tied to it "for ever, until it is complete" (*Silm.* 20). Dimitra Fimi (143) reminds us that the first division of the Elves into the Eldar and the Avari is based on the latter's "irrevocable choice"

²⁵ This particular incident includes one of Tolkien's most egregious astronomical errors/greatest astronomical liberties—Eärendil/Venus being visible all night long and seemingly stationary in the Western sky (*Simarillion* 260).

to not embark on the journey from their birthplace in Cuiviénen to the Blessed Lands. The Eldar were afterwards further subdivided when a subset of the Teleri chose to remain in Middle-earth with their king Elwë (Thingol) and his queen, the Maia Melian, and became known as the Sindar. Melian also makes the choice to love one of the First Born Children of Ilúvatar, and her daughter, Lúthien, falls in love with Beren, one of the Second Born, eventually making her own irrevocable choice to become mortal. Through her son, Dior, and afterwards granddaughter, Elwing, Lúthien's choice sets into motion a chain of events that reverberates through the First, Second, and Third Ages down to the choice of Arwen.

Additionally, the decision of Elwing to jump into the sea with her family's heirloom Silmaril, and of she and her husband Eärendil to sail West to the Undying Lands seeking the aid of the Valar for the sake of Middle-earth, initiate the Valar's pronouncement of the fate of the irrevocable choice for the Half-elven. After losing their parents due to the actions of the sons of Fëanor (themselves driven by a family oath to reclaim the Silmarils at any cost), further tragedy awaits the twin sons of Elwing and Eärendil.²⁶ Their opposing choices (rather than predestination by birth) in terms of mortality/immortality sunder them forever (a subversion of the fate of the Dioscuri), and set them on individual roads filled with tragic events. While Elrond is famous for his creation of the Elven safehouse of Rivendell, not only was he forever sundered from his parents and his brother, but his brother-in-arms Gil-galad (after nearly 3500 years) and, at least for centuries, his wife, Celebrian, who passed over sea in Third Age 2509. As for Elrond's children, they were given their own irrevocable choice by the Valar, "to pass with him from the circles of the world; or if they remained, to become mortal and die in Middle-earth. For Elrond, therefore, all chances of the War of the Ring were fraught with sorrow" (*LotR* App. A 1035).

Elros's choice to remain with the Edain similarly cut him off from his family. Although he and the Edain were gifted with the island of Númenor and a "longer span of life [...] in the beginning thrice than of lesser Men" (even longer for Elros and his direct line), this, like most gifts, came at a cost: the previously noted "Ban of the Valar" which forbade them from sailing "west out of sight of their own shores or to attempt to set foot on the Undying Lands" (*LotR* App. A 1035). Elros must have sworn to this oath. Generations later, his descendants "begrudged the choice of their forefather, desiring the immortality

²⁶ It is therefore interesting that Elrond subverts the oath trope, in one sense. Gallant (40) notes that Elrond refuses to exact an oath from the Fellowship to complete the Ring quest precisely because his personal history with the Sons of Fëanor taught him the inherent dangers associated with blindly following "binding oaths."

within the life of the world that was the fate of the Eldar, and murmuring against the Ban. In this way began their rebellion which, under the evil teaching of Sauron, brought about the Downfall of Númenor and the ruin of the ancient world" (*LotR App. A 1035*).

Arwen's chosen fate is an important background event to *The Lord of the Rings*, and clearly brings with it great sorrows of its own, with "no comfort for such pain within the circles of the world" (*LotR App. A 1062*). The question of the fate of her twin brothers "is not told: they delay their choice, and remain for a while" (*Letters 193, #153*). This is bolstered by a rejected epilogue in which Sam explains to his daughter Elanor that "Elladan and Elrohir [...] still live in Rivendell" (*Sauron Defeated 127*). Regardless of their eventual choices, the twins are sundered from their sister by her choice to marry Aragorn and share his fate. They are long separated from their mother due to her injury and journey West, and after the destruction of the One Ring their father sails West with their grandmother, Galadriel. Depending on their inevitable individual choices they could even be sundered from each other, as Elrond was from his twin. Considering the characteristics of the sons of Elrond in their totality, we find that while Branchaw is right to stress their parallels to the Divine Twins trope, she has not recognized the uniquely Tolkienian enhancements of this archetype.

There is one final important pair of brothers among the Half-elven, dating to the post-*Lord of the Rings* revisions. After Dior inherits a Silmaril from his parents, Beren and Lúthien, Fëanor's sons attack Doriath in the hopes of seizing it, and Dior and his wife, Nimloth, are slain. While his daughter, Elwing, escapes to the Mouths of Sirion bearing the precious heirloom, his sons are carried off by "the cruel servants of Celegorm" and abandoned to "starve in the forest," a heinous act that causes Fëanor's eldest son, Maedhros, to search in vain for the children. In the end "of the fate of Eluréd and Elurín no tale tells" (*Silm. 236-7*).²⁷ The index of *The Silmarillion* names Eluréd the "elder" and Elurín the "younger" sons of Dior (*Silm. 327*). In the earliest versions of the legendarium Dior had a single son, Auredhir, who died alongside his father (*Book of Lost Tales [LT] II 240*). In the next iteration, the "Sketch of the Mythology" (c. 1926) Auredhir no longer appears, perhaps because of Dior's children only Elwing plays a significant role in the story. However, the sons reappear in the early versions of the "Annals of Beleriand," here named Elboron and Elbereth (*SoMe 307; 326*). The names that appear in *The Silmarillion*, Eluréd and Elurín, appear late, in the revisions published in *The Peoples of Middle-earth (372)*.²⁸

²⁷ In some of the various revisions of the legendarium it is clearly stated that the boys were murdered by either the sons of Fëanor or their host (e.g., *SoMe 307*).

²⁸ Note that the names originally given to the sons of Elrond, Elboron and Elbereth, were the same as the first iteration of the names of the sons of Dior, although by this point in

The similarities in all three sets of names leads one to wonder if, despite the vagaries in the details, the sons of Dior are also meant to be assumed to be twins. The answer is, not initially. The genealogies of the 1930s list their birth years as 192 and 195 respectively, making them fourteen and eleven years old at their deaths (*LR* 403). This is close to the age of Ronald and his younger brother, Hilary, at the death of their mother, Mabel (twelve and ten). In addition, Ronald and Hilary lost their father, Arthur, at even younger ages (four and two), while the sons of Eärendil were separated from their parents at the sacking of their settlement when they were four years of age (*LR* 143).²⁹ In the family tree of the House of Bëor, drawn circa 1958-9, Eldún and Elrún are, as before, three years different in age (*WotJ* 231). However, in the timeline associated with “The Wanderings of Húrin” (another post-*LOTR* work) it is said that “Elrún and Eldún twin sons of Dior are born” in the Year 500 (*WotJ* 257). Similarly, a “penciled entry” in stage D, the typescript of “The Tale of Years” (which Christopher Tolkien dates to about 1951-2) agrees with that year as the “Birth of the twin sons of Dior, Elrún and Eldún” (*WotJ* 349). But Christopher Tolkien notes that in “The Problem of Ros” (circa 1968) the story that Dior’s sons were twins had been abandoned, and it was these last writings that lead to the statements about their relative ages found in the Index of the published *Silmarillion* (*PoMe* 372).

Considering the sons of Dior as twins, we again observe the similarities of their names. Their lives are tragic and gravely affected by an oath, that sworn by the sons of Fëanor to retrieve the Silmarils. As with all the Half-elven, they are of mixed mortal/immortal heritage. Not only do they have a celestial connection to a Silmaril, but their sister is the wife of the Morning/Evening Star (and perhaps a celestial body in her own right). However, there is a subversion of the trope of the rescue of the female relative, as they are abandoned and she is saved without their aid.

While this set of twins was ultimately abandoned in the later writings, another was simultaneously created. According to Appendix A of *The Return of the King* Folcwine, one of the Kings of the Mark, lost “his twin sons Folcred and Fastred” when they led the host of Rohan in the aid of Gondor in the face of an assault by the Haradrim (1069). In the earlier drafts of the Appendices there is

the work on the legendarium their names had already changed to the intermediate forms Elrún and Eldún (*War of the Ring* 297).

²⁹ See Larsen, “The Problematic Perimeters of Elrond Half-elven and Ronald English-Catholic,” for an argument that, despite Tolkien’s musing that of all his characters the most similar to him is Faramir (*Letters* 232 #180), it is actually Elrond’s life experience that more closely parallels Ronald’s (as an orphan, fosterling, lore-master, as well as in his active choice to be of his mother’s “kind” — Catholic in this case rather than Elvish).

no mention of Folcred and Fastred (there called Folcwalda and Folcred) as twins (*PoMe* 271). Given the lack of detail in their story (their younger brother inherits the throne of Rohan), why did Tolkien take such care to identify them as twins? The sacrifice of twins in the service of one's allies is apparently of higher symbolic value than the sacrifice of a younger and older brother. Since the deaths of the sons of Dior was a murder rather than a sacrifice, there would be no reason to elevate it with such symbolism. Folcred and Fastred do align with several of the traits of the Divine Twins, being horsemen, and have similar-sounding names. They offer some protection to their allies in Gondor, but lose their lives in the process (a noble yet tragic fate). While an explicit oath is not mentioned in the Appendix, it is said that their father was eager to offer assistance in acknowledgement of the aid that Gondor had once provide them in recapturing the West-march from the Dunlendings (*LotR* App.A 1069). It is therefore true that Tolkien can make much hay out of the trope in a few meager sentences in an Appendix.

THE SONS OF FĒANOR

Finally we arrive at the sole example of twins among full-blooded Elves, the youngest two of Feānor's seven sons, "Amrod and Amras, who were twin brothers, alike in mood and face" (*Silm.* 60). In an endnote, Branchaw (145) observes that Feānor's sons "come in alliterating sets: Maedhros and Maglor, Celegorm, Caranthir, Curufin, and Amrod and Amras. The last set, Amrod and Amras, are twins, but the others are not." No further analysis of this pair is given in her paper.

At first glance, the inclusion of twins among Feānor's sons appears to be simply another of the characteristics that designate him as extraordinary. For example, not only are twins rare among the Eldar, but Tolkien notes that having seven children "was wholly exceptional, and indeed among the High-elves only the case of Feānor is recorded" (*NoMe* 21). However, numerous irrevocable choices play key roles in the great tragic tale of the Feānoreans: the choice of Míriel to give up her life, Finwë's desire to remarry, the resulting fateful decision of the Valar called the Statute of Finwë and Míriel³⁰ that allowed the marriage of Finwë and Indis to take place, the swearing of the oath to reclaim the Silmarils and the resulting kinslayings, and the Doom of the Noldor, with its correct prediction of "tears unnumbered" (*Silm.* 88).

The sons are first listed by name in the early "Tale of the Nauglafring," the names of the eldest five appearing in "the forms, or almost the forms, they were to retain" throughout the decades of revisions (*LTII* 250). Christopher

³⁰ For a detailed examination of the Statute of Finwë and Míriel by Tolkien himself, see *Morgoth's Ring*, 226-71.

Tolkien notes that the published names of the youngest two sons “in *The Silmarillion* were a late change,” dating to the *LQ II* manuscript circa 1958 (*MR* 181). The original names of the youngest two were Damrod and Dinithel or Durithel (*LTII* 251), the latter’s name changed to Díriel early on in the “The Lay of the Children of Húrin,” circa 1925 (*Lays of Beleriand* 86).

The pair share more than similar names in the earliest revisions, for example being aggregated as “great hunters” in an addition to the “Sketch of the Mythology” (*SoMe* 15). Christopher Tolkien notes that, while the pair had not yet been named twins at this point, the similarities drawn between them suggested that his father might have envisioned them as such already in his own mind (*SoMe* 46). Indeed, from early in the legendarium they share a fate, a trend that continues over the decades. For example, in “The Quenta” Damrod and Díriel are killed in the attack on Sirion, while in the earliest “Annals of Beleriand” they are also denoted the main instigators for this tragic, ill-fated mission to retrieve the Silmaril that eventually becomes a part of the heavens (*SoMe* 150; 326). The first description of them as twins appears in “The Quenta Silmarillion” (circa 1938) where they are called “twin brethren alike in mood and face” (*LR* 223). Christopher opines here that while this is the first overt statement of their twinning, given the evidence “it is possible that they had always been conceived to be so” (*LR* 226).

Among the latest writings is draft material on the etymology of the names of the sons of Fëanor, included with the work Christopher Tolkien named “The Shibboleth of Fëanor” and written on copies of an Allen and Unwin publication note from February 1968 (*PoMe* 331). Christopher notes that the specific “material concerning the names of the twin brothers is confused and confusing” because a “strange and sinister story emerged” while his father worked through it (*PoMe* 355). In a listing of the sons’ Eldarin names Tolkien has bracketed the names of the two youngest and added the words “Twins *Gwenyn*” (*PoMe* 365). Tolkien gives their very similar-sounding “mother-names” as *Ambarussa* and *Ambarto*, and develops a detailed mythology around them. The former name (“top-russet”) refers to the red hair that both twins inherited from their mother’s kin, although Tolkien made an addition at the top of one page that the “elder grew darker in hair, and was more dear to his father. After childhood they [?were not to be] confused” (*PoMe* 355). Nerdanel initially gives the name *Ambarussa* to both her youngest sons (an interesting similarity to the *Aśvins* and *Dioscuri*), and the aforementioned marginal note adds that this is how the twins afterwards referred to each other. Fëanor protests the unconventional naming and Nerdanel amends her decree, allowing that one should be named *Umbarto*, “Fated,” with the caveat that the identity of the fated twin “time will decide” (*PoMe* 353). Fëanor changes the name to *Ambarto*, and the couple are later estranged as Fëanor’s behavior becomes more openly hostile

against the Valar. Following Morgoth's theft of the Silmarils, Nerdanel begs Fëanor to leave at least one of the twins in Valinor with her rather than take them both on his oath-driven journey of vengeance to Middle-earth. "You will not keep all of them. One at least will never set foot on Middle-earth," she warns (*PoMe* 354). Her naming of the twins proves prescient indeed, as such Elvish mother names often are;³¹ the younger twin dies at his father's hand, burned in his sleep when Fëanor sets the Teleri's ships on fire to prevent his people from returning to Valinor (*PoMe* 354-5). While "a pencilled note on the typescript of the *Annals of Aman*" notes that one (later emended to two) of Fëanor's twin sons burned with the ships at Losgar, Christopher Tolkien observes that "no consequential alteration to any text was ever made" in this regard (*MR* 128; *WotJ* 329).³² It is clear that regardless of whether they died in the raid on Sirion or burned to death, these twins were the victims of a tragic, ill-fated oath initiated by their father but to which they themselves had sworn—an irrevocable choice, indeed.

Tolkien's tragic last version of the fate of Fëanor's twin sons should be considered in parallel with a contemporaneous document, a consideration of the etymology of the Quenya words *ambar* and *umbar* ('world' and 'fate' respectively) and their connection to fate and free will, written on Allen and Unwin reprint notices from January 1968 (*NoMe* 226). According to the Eldar, an individual could be "'fated' to meet an enemy of his at a certain time and place" but they were not "'fated' then to speak to him in terms of hatred, or to slay him" (*NoMe* 229). Similarly, the sons of Fëanor were 'fated' to suffer considerable tragedy in their lives due to their father's and their own irrevocable choices (especially where the Silmarils were concerned), but the fine details of those fates were still open, being, in the end, the result of myriad acts of free will (albeit largely motivated by prior irrevocable choices). Nerdanel's attempt to sway Fëanor's decision to take all seven sons to Middle-earth may seem to have been utterly futile from the start, but free will could still have stayed his hand, and changed Umbarto/Ambarto's fate, although perhaps only in some limited way. A eucatastrophe seems highly unlikely in the case of any relative of Fëanor, especially in the case of Tolkienian twins.

³¹ The section "Of Naming" in the "Later Quenta Silmarillion" explains that Elvish mothers often gave their children "'names of insight', *essi tercenyë*, or of 'foresight', *apacenyë*" at the time of their birth or later based on "some foresight of its special fate" (*MR* 216).

³² In the late essay "Maeglin" (emended through 1970) Fëanor's sons are said to only number five instead of seven, which Christopher Tolkien opines suggests that by this time his father had "come to believe that both Amrod and Amras [...] died in the burning of the ships" (*WotJ* 329).

Conclusion

Jane Chance calls Tolkien’s “often puzzling twin identities, professor and mythologist, a doubling that refracts into many of his own works” (12). While we can only speculate as to whether there are still undiscovered personal or professional reasons for his apparent interest in twins, his knowledge of philology and mythology, combined with his life experience as a brother, would have sufficed. Tolkien clearly takes considerable care in making certain characters twins, even in cases where the twinship itself has no obvious impact on their direct actions (as noted in the sons of Elrond). In the case of Tolkien’s twins, we have noted numerous parallels with Harris’s archetype of the Heavenly Twins, as noted in the following graphical summary of some of the more important points:

	Tragedy	Naming	Mixed kind	Celestial Body	Healer	Oaths/choices	Protectors
Kullervo & Wanōna	+					+	^
Children of Aotrou & Itroun	+				^	+	^
Sigmund & Signý	+	+			^	+	^
Haleth & Haldar	+	+				—	+
Elrond & Elos	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Elladan & Elrohir	+	+	+	—		+	+
Eluréd & Elurín	+	+	+	—		+	^
Folcwalda & Folcred	+	+				—	—
Amrod & Amras	+	+		—		+	^

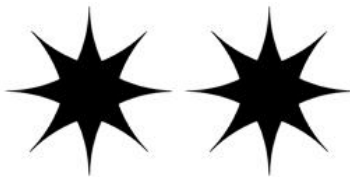
[+ = strong connection, — = weaker connection, ^ = subverts the trope]

Table 1. Analysis of twins’ alignment with the Tolkienian enhanced archetype of Harris

A familial connection with heavenly bodies can be argued to exist in some extent in roughly half of the cases, especially those related to Eärendil (i.e., the Half-elven). Interestingly, among elves, it is the Half-elven—those who already possess a twinned mortal/immortal nature—who are more likely to have twins. The similar naming of twins, a popular characteristic in Tolkien’s twins, is apparent in all but the unnamed twins of “The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun” and Kullervo’s twin Wanōna, although the latter’s name—“weeping”—

is symbolic in its own way. It is but one example of what has been shown to be two distinctive characteristics of Tolkienian twins, *tragic circumstances* and *irrevocable choices* (often either directly related to the swearing of oaths and/or the pronouncement of dooms, especially by the Valar, in the case of works in the legendarium). It is also apparent that Tolkien often actively subverts the protector role of the twins, having them fall victim to the oaths and choices of themselves and others.

In addition, the evidence demonstrates that the trope of the Divine Twin (as defined by Harris) does fit Elladan and Elrohir, but far more closely than suggested by Branchaw's earlier analysis based on the work of Donald Ward. However, it can be argued that Elrond and Elros are at least as good a fit to the classic Dioscuri, especially in clear mortal/immortal dichotomy of their fates. In the end they perhaps represent the truest parallel to Harris's version of the Heavenly Twins: sons of the Morning/Evening Star, one mortal and the other immortal, founders of great strongholds, one a great healer and protector and the other the king of a star-shaped island nation of sailors. But it is in his 'complex retellings' of this classic trope that Tolkien truly brings the tale of these characters to life, and in the case of Elrond, crafts one of his most unforgettable creations.



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