Middle-earth and Beyond

Middle-earth and Beyond:
Essays on the World of J. R. R. Tolkien

Edited by

Kathleen Dubs and Janka Kaščáková

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Middle-earth and Beyond: Essays on the World of J. R. R. Tolkien,
Edited by Kathleen Dubs and Janka Kaščáková

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2558-1, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2558-0

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations vii

Acknowledgments viii

Introduction ix
Kathleen Dubs

Sourcing Tolkien's "Circles of the World":
Speculations on the Heimskringla, the Latin Vulgate Bible,
and the Hereford Mappa Mundi 1
Jason Fisher

Staying Home and Travelling: Stasis Versus Movement in Tolkien's Mythos 19
Sue Bridgwater

The Enigmatic Mr. Bombadil: Tom Bombadil's Role as a Representation of Nature in *The Lord of the Rings* 41
Liam Campbell

Tom Bombadil – Man of Mystery 67
Kinga Jenike

Grotesque Characters in Tolkien's Novels *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* 75
Silvia Pokrivčáková and Anton Pokrivčák

"It Snowed Food and Rained Drink" in *The Lord of the Rings* 91
Janka Kaščáková

"No Laughing Matter" 105
Kathleen Dubs

"Lit.", "Lang.", "Ling.", and the Company They Keep: The Case of *The Lay of the Children of Húrin* Seen from a Gricean Perspective ... 125
Roberto Di Scala

Contributors ... 143

List of Abbreviations

Biography	Humphrey Carpenter. *Tolkien: A Biography*
H	J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Hobbit; or There and Back Again*
"Leaf"	J.R.R. Tolkien. "Leaf by Niggle"
Letters	J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien.* Edited by Humphrey Carpenter
LR	J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings*
Monsters	J.R.R. Tolkien. *"The Monsters and the Critics" and Other Essays*
"OFS"	J.R.R. Tolkien. "On Fairy Stories"
Silm	J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Silmarillion*
Smith	J.R.R. Tolkien. *Smith of Wootton Major*
TL	J.R.R. Tolkien. *Tree and Leaf*
UT	J.R.R. Tolkien. *Unfinished Tales*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors would gratefully like to acknowledge the kindness of Ted Nasmith, Tolkien illustrator extraordinaire, in permitting us to use his unpublished “Bilbo and the Eagles” picture for the cover of this volume. The editors and he agreed that this choice captured the theme of the collection. Thank you, again, Ted.

Further thanks belongs to Eva Kaščáková for her invaluable help with the technical side of this volume.

INTRODUCTION

KATHLEEN DUBS

One wonders whether there really is a need for another volume of essays on the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Clearly there is. Especially when the volume takes new directions, employs new approaches, focuses on different texts, or reviews and then challenges received wisdom. This volume intends to do all that. The subjects of the essays are not restricted to *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, or *The Silmarillion* – the most commonly studied texts – but consider the vast range of Tolkien's works. Thus they provide comparative and comprehensive approaches to much of Tolkien's prose as well as his poetry.

Jason Fisher's essay looks at analogies and sources, including one which might be surprising. He admits that source-hunting is a kind of literary archaeology in which one turns over first one stone and then another, using hints from the author as well as one's own research and critical acumen, gradually piecing together what one hopes is a relatively complete explanation for the sources and origins of some object of study. Unfortunately for scholars – but fortunately for readers – it seems that Tolkien source-hunting has left very few stones unturned over the last quarter-century or so. Fortunately, however, there are still a handful of these literary fossils left to unearth, and the one which Fisher has uncovered, and which becomes the focus of his essay, is "The Circles of the World" – one of Tolkien's most evocative and best-known tropes, woven throughout the backcloth of *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, and other writings.

Sue Bridgwater's essay investigates the significance of making choices to travel or to stay where metaphorical and actual movement and stasis are recurrent motifs. Thus the essay looks at selected instances of decisions to stay and to go. A wider concern is the various stresses acting upon Tolkien's characters; thus the essay also attempts to demonstrate that within the many states of apparent stasis he depicts, there may be a number of impulses to transition – to movement away from the stasis. These may be drives to go and return; to leave, to depart, to be elsewhere; or to be different forever. How far Tolkien's characters succeed in their

striving is closely related to the nature of their inner motivation and/or their ability to respond to and deal with both the external influences that disrupt their state, as well as the experience of being elsewhere than the familiar. Journeys lead to transitions between locations and between states of mind; they lead the traveler across physical boundaries; indeed, they may lead, in Tolkien's evocative phrase, *over the edge of the wild.*

Liam Campbell proposes that in *The Lord of the Rings* the struggle of the free peoples of Middle-earth against the rising shadows in Mordor and Isengard may be read as more than a struggle against tyranny and enslavement as behind the fight for freedom lies a struggle to resist powers which threaten the very land itself. And Tolkien's most extraordinary creation and his most noteworthy representation of nature, or natural forces, is Tom Bombadil. The essay thus considers Bombadil's role in and evocation of nature, and considers him in terms of his portrayal as a positive environmental model who delights in other life forms and seeks no mastery over any part of Middle-earth. It also examines Bombadil's character in terms of how he may represent not just nature, but nature under threat – or nature in retreat when facing the destructive force of power hungry, machine–wielding, technocratic enemies – exemplified by such characters as Sauron and Saruman. Finally, it addresses the question of Tom's origins and proffers a theory related to the much-touted enquiry: "who is Tom Bombadil?"

Kinga Jenike quite simply and provocatively argues that Bombadil is quite a different, but equally familiar, person altogether: Tolkien himself.

The essay by Pokrivčáková and Pokrivčák considers various aspects of archetype. They acknowledge that Tolkien's fixed interest and inspiration in myths of various origins is a widely discussed fact. They also point out that, in opposition to numerous critics, Tolkien considered myths to be more realistic and "true" than any other realistic literature. Their essay, in focusing on the role of the grotesque in Tolkien's work, draws attention to his lecture on *Beowulf* in which he identified the importance of monsters for an appropriate understanding of the literary value as well as ethical meaning of the myth, claiming that monsters, as distinguishing characters of *Beowulf* and other ancient myths, are "essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the problem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness" (Tolkien 1983, 7). The aim of their paper, then, is to identify the meaning(s) of those monsters and other literary characters in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* which can be easily recognized by their various types and degrees of grotesqueness.

Janka Kaščáková and Kathleen Dubs analyze *The Lord of the Rings* from a literary perspective. Kaščáková reminds us that when Tolkien

compared himself to a hobbit, one of the most important features he mentioned was his love of "plain ordinary food" and mushrooms from a field, thus in part basing the identity of a hobbit on his own fondness for eating and drinking. In *The Lord of the Rings*, however, this love of food goes beyond the ordinary desire to satisfy hunger, and extends to the passions and tastes of other nations of Middle-earth. But food is not only a means of distinguishing among races and individuals, but as a prevailing and often repeated element it is a source for many comic situations. Further, Kaščáková demonstrates the use of the desire for eating as a structural device, the different attitudes toward food as expressed in linguistic terms, and points out the importance of food and eating to the narrator as well as the characters.

In looking at humor and laughter, Dubs notes Michael Drout's entry on humor in the *Tolkien Encyclopedia*, but argues that, correct as far as it goes, it overlooks a considerable amount of humor and laughter in *The Lord of the Rings*. Further, she argues, humor extends beyond type. Humor is also used as a structural device, for characterization, most obviously perhaps in the names (and nicknames) of the various hobbits, but less obviously in connection with who uses humor, of what sort, when and under what circumstances, and why. And humor is, of course, tucked into the narrative in terms of puns, witty remarks, and observations. Finally, of perhaps more interest is the question laughter: who laughs, and why, when, and how. For Tolkien seems to be using laughter, often not connected to humor at all, for various purposes, both positive and negative. Her essay discusses these different uses of both humor and laughter, and reaches some insightful conclusions.

The essay by Roberto Di Scala addresses the problem of showing to what extent Tolkien's fictional art is imbued with "linguistics," whereby is meant the scientific study of human language, of how it works, and of the relationship between human language and thought. As a framework, Di Scala makes recourse to the Gricean concepts of speaker meaning *vs.* utterance meaning. As a case text, he uses *The Lay of the Children of Húrin* (ca. 1918) to prove that principles from Grice's theory of communication can be adapted to the poem. He shows how Tolkien's poetic fragment acts as an intentional, rational, and transparent token of communication, thus remarking how "linguistics" (and, more specifically, "general linguistics"), and not "philology", is the right perspective from which to prove that the author's production comprises the linguistic and literary aspects pertaining to any human work of art, thus bridging the gap between such disciplines as philology, literature, and linguistics.

In sum, this volume covers new ground, and treads some well-worn paths; but here the well-worn path takes a new turn, taking not only scholars but general readers further into the complex and provocative world of Middle-earth, and beyond.

References

Tolkien, J.R.R. 1983. "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics." In *Tolkien, J.R.R. The Monsters and the Critics*. London: George Allen & Unwin. Available online at http://www.scribd.com/doc/11790039/JRR-Tolkien-Beowulf-The-Monsters-and-the-Critics [Accessed January, 2010]

SOURCING TOLKIEN'S "CIRCLES OF THE WORLD:" SPECULATIONS ON THE HEIMSKRINGLA, THE LATIN VULGATE BIBLE, AND THE HEREFORD MAPPA MUNDI

JASON FISHER

Source-hunting is a kind of literary archaeology in which one turns over first one stone and then another, using hints from the author as well as one's own research and critical acumen, gradually piecing together what one hopes is a relatively complete explanation for the sources and origins of some object of study. Unfortunately for scholars – but fortunately for readers – it seems that Tolkien source-hunting has left very few stones unturned over the last, and very productive, quarter-century or so. A wide range of scholars, among them Tom Shippey, Marjorie Burns, Verlyn Flieger, and many others, has effectively excavated the great majority of Tolkien's many and varied sources already. But, though they may be few, there are still a handful of these literary fossils left to unearth, and it is one of these I would like to discuss in this paper.

Tolkien once wrote that he preferred to "wring the juice out of a single sentence, or explore the implications of one word" (*Monsters*, 224), and it is a short phrase of just this sort that I would like to make the focus for this paper. "The Circles of the World" – is one of Tolkien's most evocative and best-known tropes, woven throughout the backcloth of *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, and other writings. New readers are likely to encounter it first in the appendices at the end of *The Return of the King*. Here, in the "Tale of Aragorn and Arwen," which Tolkien called "the most important of the Appendices" (*Letters*, 237), Tolkien's trope emerges as an eloquent and moving metaphor for the boundaries and limits of mortal lives within Arda. In his final living words, Aragorn says: "But let us not be overthrown at the final test, who of old renounced the Shadow and the Ring. In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound for ever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory,

Farewell!" (*LR*, app. v, 344) We also see a more Elven perspective on the Circles of the World in the appendices. Earlier, in Appendix A, we are told that "to the children of Elrond a choice was also appointed: to pass with him from the circles of the world; or if they remained, to become mortal and die in Middle-earth" (*LR*, app. A. v, 315). And also in Appendix A, we learn that the pride and greed of Ar-Pharazôn brought about the ultimate cataclysm for his people and that "Númenor was thrown down and swallowed in the Sea, and the Undying Lands were removed for ever from the circles of the world" (*LR*, app. A.v, 317). Then, much later, in Appendix F, in literally the final words of *The Lord of the Rings*, we are told of the Elves that "their dominion passed long ago, and they dwell now beyond the circles of the world, and do not return" (*LR*, app. F, 416).

In its essence, then, the Circles of the World is an image overflowing with nostalgia and loss.[1] The character of this loss flows throughout Tolkien's fiction, and forms an essential part of the nature of Middle-earth. Humphrey Carpenter speculates on the source of this sense of tragedy, loss, and nostalgia in his discussion of the death of Tolkien's mother and Ronald's subsequent separation from the West Midlands of his youth, writing that "his feelings towards the rural landscape, already sharp from the earlier severance that had taken him from Sarehole, now became emotionally charged with personal bereavement" (*Biography*, 40). That sense of loss would go on to pervade all of Middle-earth in Tolkien's future world-making.

When we press on into *The Silmarillion* we encounter the phrase again. In the *Quenta Silmarillion*, as Maedhros and Maglor, the last two surviving sons of Fëanor, plot to seize by force the last two Silmarils in Middle-earth, Maedhros exclaims, "But how shall our voices reach to Ilúvatar beyond the Circles of the World? And by Ilúvatar we swore in our madness, and called the Everlasting Darkness upon us, if we kept not our word. Who shall release us?" (*Silm*, 253) Here again, the Circles of the World are associated with what lies outside the material world of Arda. They come to stand for something like the great unknown beyond, where one finds God. Later, in the short "Akallabêth," Tolkien uses the trope again,[2] writing that the "home [of Men] is not here, neither in the Land of Aman nor anywhere within the Circles of the World. And the Doom of

[1] See Richard West's "'Her Choice Was Made and Her Doom Appointed': Tragedy and Divine Comedy in the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen."

[2] In his account of the writing of "Akallabêth," Christopher Tolkien points out that his father first wrote "the girdle of the Earth," but later changed this to "the Circles of the World" (*Peoples of Middle-earth*, 150). Perhaps what we are seeing here is the emergence of a consistent image for Tolkien.

Men, that they should depart, was at first a gift of Ilúvatar. It became a grief to them only because coming under the shadow of Morgoth it seemed to them that they were surrounded by a great darkness, of which they were afraid" (*Silm,* 265). Then, a few pages later, Ar-Pharazôn's rebellion is described as the attempt "to wrest from [the Valar] everlasting life within the Circles of the World" (*Silm,* 278). In the end, what emerges in the metaphor of the Circles of the Word is a picture of the limits of the material existence in which both Men and Elves dwell. Prior to the Drowning of Númenor, after which the shape of the world was fundamentally changed, the Circles of the World included the Land of the Valar; however, after the world was changed and made round, the Circles of the World no longer included the Blessed Realm – although a Straight Road still remained, for those permitted to find it. Thus, over time, the Circles of the World diminished to those narrow material borders beyond which living Men cannot go, reinforcing the connection between mortality and the world, with the unknown Gift of Ilúvatar somewhere beyond them.

But for all their evocative appeal, Tolkien's Circles of the World appear to have escaped serious critical study. Yet I feel it may be possible to unravel some of the origins of this trope, if we are willing to chart a more speculative course. I have already touched on the immense tinge of loss and nostalgia Tolkien came to associate with the West Midlands where he grew up. But there are other sources to be tapped as well. Describing his creative process, Tolkien wrote that:

> One writes such a story not out of the leaves of trees still to be observed, nor by means of botany and soil-science; but it grows like a seed in the dark out of the leaf-mould of mind: out of all that has been seen or thought or read, that has long ago been forgotten, descending into the deeps. No doubt there is much selection, as with a gardener: what one throws on one's personal compost-heap; and my mould is evidently made largely of linguistic matter. (*Biography,* 131)[3]

We can think of this "leaf-mould of the mind" as that place where sources and images, echoes of mythology, and snatches of tales mingle and coalesce into new ideas, and I will attempt to show how Tolkien's figurative Circles of the World may have emerged from three such disparate sources: the *Ynglinga Saga*, the opening of Snorri Sturluson's great work, the *Heimskringla*; St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate Bible, with a

[3] Tolkien also used the metaphor of the "pot of soup" to describe the same mingling of sources, the soup's ingredients, or "the bones," as Tolkien refers to them, into altogether new tales (See "OFS", in *TL*, 19-20, 26-27).

particular emphasis on the deuterocanonical *Book of Wisdom*; and the Hereford Mappa Mundi, a widely-known medieval map of the world, produced and still housed in the West Midlands of Tolkien's youth.

In order to make such speculative connections convincingly, one needs to establish, with reasonable certainly, either that the sources in question *were*, in fact, somewhere in the leaf-mould of Tolkien's mind – or at least, that they could likely have been. To do this, I will attempt to link each of these three sources to Tolkien as directly as possible, drawing inferences from his letters and writings (as well as those of C.S. Lewis, Tolkien's closest confidant among the Inklings), his academic career, literary predilections, and religious faith.

I. The *Heimskringla*

The *Heimskringla*, written in the early decades of the 13th century by that preeminent Icelandic historian and storyteller Snorri Sturluson, is a series of prose sagas, interspersed here and there with verse, that traces the history of the kings of Norway from those almost contemporary with the author, going all the way back to the dynastic House of the Ynglings, reputed by Sturluson to have descended directly from the Æsir, the Norse Pantheon of Gods. Its more than a dozen individual sagas would certainly have been of much interest to Tolkien, both personally and professionally; however, he does not appear to have mentioned the work explicitly anywhere in his publicly accessible writings. This is in contrast to other Old Norse literary works, such as the *Völsungsaga* and the *Völuspá*, from which he has explicitly acknowledged his borrowings and inspirations.

Be that as it may, we can nevertheless be certain that Tolkien was well versed in the *Heimskringla*, as he would have been with all of Sturluson's writings. If C.S. Lewis, far from the biggest admirer of Germanic language and literature,[4] wrote about the *Heimskringla* in both *The Discarded Image* and *Studies and Words* (*Discarded Image*, 141, *Studies in Words* 217, *et passim*), then it seems a virtual certainty that Tolkien knew the work, and most likely knew it far better than Lewis. We know that Tolkien formed the Viking Club while teaching at Leeds (*Biography*, 112) in the middle 1920's, and that this club was the precursor to the Coalbiters at Oxford during the later 1920's. As Carpenter explains:

[4] Philip Frankley, Tolkien's thinly disguised caricature of Lewis in *The Notion Club Papers*, "suffers from *horror borealis* (as he calls it) and is intolerant of all things Northern or Germanic" (*Sauron Defeated*, 159). On the other hand, we know that one of Lewis's favorite traditional myths was the Old Norse story of Balder's death.

> The Kolbítar, to give it the Icelandic title (meaning those who lounge so close to the fire in winter that they "bite the coal"), [was] an informal reading club founded by Tolkien somewhat on the model of the Viking Club in Leeds, except that its members are all dons. They [met] for an evening several times each term to read Icelandic sagas … Tolkien started the club to persuade his friends that Icelandic literature is worth reading in the original language. (*Biography*, 125)

In fact, Carpenter proceeds to describe a typical evening meeting of the Coalbiters, effectively recapturing the mood of such gatherings and describing the way in which each member would take turns – usually started off by Tolkien – reading from an Old Norse text in the original language, and then making an extemporaneous translation of the passage. The only element of the description lacking in Carpenter is a text, though Carpenter mentions the *Grettis Saga* as an example. But even without a sample text, it is not difficult to imagine something that sounded a little like this:

> Kringla heimsins, sú er mannfólkit byggir, er mjök vágskorin; ganga höf stór or útsjánum inn í jörðina. Er þat kunnigt, at haf gengr frá Nörvasundum ok alt út til Jórsalalands.[5]

These are the opening lines of the *Ynglinga Saga*, the first of the sagas of the *Heimskringla*. But as beautiful as the Old Norse is, too few today are fluent enough to read it in the original language, so allow me to continue in translation:

> It is said that the earth's circle which the human race inhabits is torn across into many bights, so that great seas run into the land from the out-ocean. Thus it is known that a great sea goes in at Narvesund, and up to the land of Jerusalem. From the same sea a long sea-bight stretches towards the north-east, and is called the Black Sea, and divides the three parts of the earth; of which the eastern part is called Asia, and the western is called by some Europa, by some Enea. Northward of the Black Sea lies Swithiod the Great, or the Cold. The Great Swithiod is reckoned by some as not less than the Great Serkland; others compare it to the Great Blueland. The northern part of Swithiod lies uninhabited on account of frost and cold, as likewise the southern parts of Blueland are waste from the burning of the sun. In Swithiod are many great domains, and many races of men, and many kinds of languages. There are giants, and there are dwarfs, and there

[5] The intrepid may read the entire *Heimskringla* in the original Old Norse on the world wide web at http://www.heimskringla.no/original/heimskringla/index.php.

> are also blue men, and there are many kinds of stranger creatures. There are huge wild beasts, and dreadful dragons. (Sturluson, 7)

In addition to the mention of dwarfs, giants, many languages – and perhaps, I may say, tongue in cheek, even an allusion to the Ithryn Luin (*UT*, 390) as "blue men" – and so forth, something stands out right from the beginning: "the earth's circle." This sounds remarkably like Tolkien's Circles of the World, and in fact, one might just as easily translate the Old Norse *kringla heimsins* as "the circle of the world," leaving literally only the difference of a plural. It is, in fact, from these opening two words of the *Ynglinga Saga*, *kringla heimsins*, that the entire *Heimskringla* takes its name; as Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson put it, "The vastness of its scope and conception is implicit in the very first words: […] 'The orb of the world, on which mankind dwells […].' It starts far back in the remotest past, in a world of mythology peopled by shadowy legendary figures" (Magnusson 11). One can be sure that this would have attracted Tolkien's attention at some time, whether at the Oxford English School, at Leeds, or during his later professorship at Oxford.[6] A little later in their introduction to *King Harald's Saga*, a part of the *Heimskringla*, Magnusson and Pálsson go on to say that the

> Heimskringla is not a work of history at all, in the modern sense of the term. It is a series of saga-histories, and the distinction is a vital one. Snorri Sturluson saw history as a continual flow, and in Heimskringla he tried to convey this to his readers; but it was not so much a matter of historical evolution as [it was] a long chain of events, and these events he saw in terms, almost exclusively, of individual personalities. (Magnusson, 13-4)

This should sound familiar, *mutatis mutandis*, to anyone with more than a passing acquaintance with the structure of *The Silmarillion*.

And in addition to the ear-catching collocation, *kringla heimsins*, we can hear something of a geographical echo in Tolkien's conception of the landscape of Arda here. Narvesund means "narrow sound" – one thinks of Tolkien's Helcaraxë, where Aman drew near to the outstretched arms of Beleriand and the waters of the Great Sea, Belegaer, froze into the Grinding Ice. And in addition to the freezing north, there is the burning heat of the south in Far Harad. In a letter to Rhona Beare Tolkien

[6] One need hardly belabor the well-established importance of Old Norse mythology and literature to Tolkien, as many scholars have connected these dots for us already. Interested readers are referred especially to Tom Shippey's "Tolkien and Iceland: The Philology of Envy" and to all of Part III of Jane Chance's *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth*, among many other examples.

described Middle-earth in this way: "*Middle-earth* is … not my own invention. It is a modernization or alteration … of an old word for the inhabited world of Men, the *oikoumenē*: middle because thought of vaguely as set amidst the encircling Seas and (*in the northern-imagination*) between the ice of the North and the fire of the South" (*Letters*, 283, emphasis added). This sounds, to my ear at least, more than superficially similar to the opening of the *Ynglinga Saga*. And there are other geographical elements in this passage to which I will return in my discussion of the Hereford Mappa Mundi.

As a side note, it is worth pointing out that there are more than merely geographical links between Tolkien and the *Heimskringla*. For example, although Tolkien demonstrably took the names of Gandalf and the thirteen Dwarves from Snorri's *Völuspá* (*Letters*, 383), Gandalf also appears in the *Ynglinga Saga*. We also find there a mention of *Álfheim*, which became Tolkien's Elvenhome, and of one of its inhabitants *Yngvi*, who may have become the Elf, Ingwë, King of the Vanyar in Valinor.

But next, let us take a moment to delve just a little bit deeper into the saga's two opening words – "wring[ing] the juice out of a single sentence, or explor[ing] the implications of one word," as Tolkien himself would have been wont to do. First, *heimsins* is the genitive singular of the masculine noun, *heimr*, "region, world, land," with the addition of the definite article – therefore, "of the world." The Old Norse *heimr* has cognates in the German *Heimat* ("homeland"), Old English *hám* ("home, region, dwelling," whence the Modern English *hamlet*, and Tolkien's hobbit-name, Hamfast), and of course in the familiar Modern English *home*.

The other word, *kringla*, is a feminine noun, declined in the nominative singular case, meaning "disc, circle, orb." The noun carries an obvious connection to the world-disc of Norse mythology, as Lewis points out in *The Discarded Image* (141). Its cognates include Greek *kyklos*, Latin *circus* (whence Old English *circul*), and German *Kreis*. But there is another word apparently closely related to *kringla*, and central to Tolkien studies: *hringr*, which means "ring," but which is also given a secondary meaning of "circle." This makes sense, of course, given the logical relationship between a circle and a ring (which is itself circular). Indeed, there is another Old Norse form of *kringla*, *kringr*, which seems to bring both *kringla* and *hringr* together in a single word! Tolkien's Circles of the World, therefore, carries an ironic connection to the Rings of such importance to his mythos. Surely, a philological point like this would have been known to Tolkien, or if not, I am confident he would nevertheless have appreciated it.

Before I close my discussion of the *Heimskringla*, I think a side note on the "Ambarkanta" would help to drive home the significance of such seemingly minor linguistic points as I have just been making. The "Ambarkanta" is a short essay published in *The Shaping of Middle-earth* (the name of which volume is itself quite *à propos*). The word *ambarkanta* itself means "the shape of the world," and, as such, immediately reminds one of the trope I have been talking about. Parts of this short essay remind us strongly of the opening of the *Ynglinga Saga*, but there is an even more interesting linguistic parallel to be teased out. Peering into the Elvish Etymologies, as published in *The Lost Road*, for the origins of the word *ambar* "earth," one finds the root √MBAR, but one is immediately struck by a neighboring root, √MBARAT "doom" (*Lost Road*, 372). One sees this root in the second element of Túrin's sobriquet Turambar, which means "Master of Doom." Was it an accident of memory on Tolkien's part that the Elvish word *ambar* appears to mean both "earth" and "doom"? It seems no great leap to assume not, and to extrapolate some kind of purposeful relationship between the world, its shape, and both its and its inhabitants' final doom. Perhaps it is even possible that Turambar might be taken to mean "Master of the *World*;" after all, in the prophecy of the Dagor Dagorath, as only partially adumbrated in *The Shaping of Middle-earth*, we learn that Túrin will one day return from the dead to destroy Morgoth – who himself was the cause of the refashioning of the world (*Shaping of Middle-earth*, 40-41, 73-74). [7]

I would like to make one other philological connection. Just as I pointed out that there are two related words in Old Norse, *kringla* "circle" and *hringr* "ring," so too we find a pair of interesting roots in Tolkien's Elvish Etymologies. The first is √KOR, which means "round," but which is also connected to the meanings "circle" and "ring" (*Lost Road*, 365). We see this element in the Field of Cormallen, the word *cormalindor*, meaning "ring-bearers," and even in Tolkien's "Kortirion among the Trees". The second root, √RIN, is given the explicit meaning of "circle" (*Lost Road*, 383). But this looks very close to English "ring." And in fact, if we boil Tolkien's roots down to only their consonants, they look almost *exactly* like our two Old Norse words. Coincidence? Knowing Tolkien's predilections, probably not. But let us move on. From the Old Norse collocation, *kringla heimsins*, I would like to turn next to an even older, but equivalent one, in Latin: *orbis terrarum*.

[7] "Carl Hostetter has recently discussed these roots in the light of previously unpublished notes by Tolkien; these notes and Hostetter's commentary were published in *Tolkien Studies* 6 (2009)."

II. Saint Jerome and the Latin Vulgate Bible

The term *orbis terrarum* is at least two thousand years old, and means essentially the same thing as *kringla heimsins*: "circle of the world." The term is first attested in a surviving fragment of the Roman consul, P. Rutilius Rufus, around the first century BCE. According to Michael Weiss, a linguist at Cornell University, "[i]t rarely refers to a sphere, never to my knowledge in Republican Latin, and in fact is explicitly contrasted with the word *globus* "sphere" by Cicero" (Weiss, 2). The collocation *orbis terrarum* (and the synonymous *orbis terrae*), indeed, is woven throughout the literature of antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and well into the Renaissance. Perhaps the most famous use of the term is in the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Abraham Ortelius, widely considered to be the first modern atlas. However, though Tolkien would surely have been familiar with this source, there are many others that were probably much more influential to his thinking. The *Germania* and *Agricola* of Tacitus, for example, which take as their subjects the history of the early Germanic tribes and of Roman Britain. Also, the term appears in letters of Saint Aurelius, an early Christian saint from the late third and early fourth centuries.

And I have already alluded to another possible source in my paper: the Latin Vulgate Bible of Saint Jerome. Jerome's text is still the official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church, and as such, we know that Tolkien was very familiar with it. Jerome would also have appealed to Tolkien on a professional level. Jerome was unhappy with the older Latin translation of the Bible, and so, around the year 390, took upon himself the gargantuan (and largely thankless) task of executing an entirely fresh translation of the Bible from what were believed to be the earliest extant texts in their original languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (Kelly, 159-67). As I have discussed elsewhere (Fisher 2007), this desire to return to the source, as it were, would have appealed to Tolkien, and indeed, Tolkien himself was a part of the new translation into English of the Jerusalem Bible, translating Jonah from the Hebrew, just as Jerome himself had done centuries earlier.[8]

Given the Vulgate's importance to Roman Catholicism, then, we may be positive that Tolkien knew it well. Moreover, given Tolkien's linguistic

[8] He translated Jonah and "consulted on one or two points of style," as discussed in *Letters* 378. Tolkien's translation of Jonah, substantively different from the version actually published in the Jerusalem Bible, had been scheduled for publication in 2010; however, as of this writing, the publication has been placed on indefinite hold.

predilections, it seems very probable that he read the Vulgate in its original Latin, where he would have encountered the collocation *orbis terrarum* over and over again. An important distinction between the Vulgate and other Bibles is the inclusion of the so-called deuterocanonical books (often referred to, not quite accurately, as the Apocrypha): ten or so additional books not generally read in Protestant denominations. One of these books is particularly interesting in light of the term *orbis terrarum*. *Sapientia*, or *The Book of Wisdom*, sometimes referred to as *The Wisdom of Solomon*, is a concise book, consisting of only nineteen short chapters. Yet for all of its brevity, *orbis terrarum* occurs ten times in these nineteen chapters, something that should have caught Tolkien's eye. In English translation, the phrase is usually glossed simply as "the world," so we have to read the Vulgate in the original Latin in order to notice the pattern – a pattern which would already have been familiar to Tolkien through his wide reading of the Classics, and reinforced by its echo in the *Heimskringla*.

A couple of examples from the *Book of Wisdom* may help to illuminate the point. I include the original Latin in footnotes and present here only the English translations; as I have said, in most translations, *orbis terrarum* is simply translated as "the world" or in some cases, "the whole world;" however, I will be using the correct literal translation of the term here. In one verse, for example, we find: "For the circle of the world was enlightened with a clear light, and none were hindered in their labors."[9] This sounds almost as if it could have been written by Tolkien, describing the light of the Two Trees of Valinor. In another verse we read: "But they have imagined either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and moon, to be the gods that rule the circle of the world."[10] In these words we cannot help but hear an echo of the pantheon of the Valar, each with his or her elemental association – Manwë with the air, Varda with the stars, Ulmo with the waters, and so on. And finally, my personal favorite: "And from the beginning also, when the proud giants perished, the hope of the world fleeing in a vessel, which was governed by thy hand, left to the circle of the world the seed of a generation."[11] This, to my ears, sounds very much like the Voyage of

[9] Wisdom 17:19 : *Omnis enim orbis terrarum limpido luminabatur lumine et non inpeditis operibus continebatur.*

[10] Wisdom 13:2 : *Sed aut ignem aut spiritum aut citatum aerem aut gyrum stellarum aut nimiam aquam aut solem et lunam rectores orbis terrarum deos putaverunt.*

[11] Wisdom 14:6 : *Sed ab initio cum perirent superbi gigantes spes orbis terrarum ad ratem confugiens remisit saeculo semen nativitatis quae manu tua erat gubernata.*

Eärendil, and the "seeding of a generation" certainly seems to capture Tolkien's leaf-mould metaphor very nicely.

III. The Hereford Mappa Mundi[12]

Which brings us to what may be the final piece of the puzzle. As we know already, maps were of great use to Tolkien in the writing of *The Lord of the Rings* (as well as the Lost Tales, *The Silmarillion*, and other works).[13] Without them, the author would have quickly become more lost than the Hobbits in the Old Forest, and I believe we may safely take Bilbo's love of maps for Tolkien's. It would seem, then, to make sense that Tolkien might have been interested in maps outside his fictive world also. Many of his early Silmarillion maps, in fact, resemble medieval maps of the known world. Most of these were what are called T-O maps. The term refers to two key aspects of such maps: the map looks like a capital T (sometimes a Y) inside a circle, the O. This divided the circle into three distinct regions – Asia, Europe, and Africa – as we saw in the opening to the *Ynglinga Saga*. The second reason is that the T-O may be taken to represent the words *orbis terrarum*, which I have discussed in detail already.

As it happens, one of the most famous surviving medieval maps of the world happened to have been drawn, housed, and displayed in Hereford, just over the county line from Sarehole and Birmingham, where Tolkien grew up. As I mentioned above, Tolkien felt very strong connections to the West Midlands; moreover, he made them both the locus of his professional study as well as the model for key locations in Middle-earth. He once famously wrote: "I am a West-midlander by blood (and took to early west-midland Middle English as a known tongue as soon as I set eyes on it)" (*Letters*, 213). In fact, it is perhaps a little bit more than mere coincidence that the West Midlands and Middle-earth share a common "middleness" in the mind of Tolkien.

First, I would like to offer a bit more information on the Hereford Mappa Mundi. This map is one of the most impressive and largest surviving world maps from the Middle Ages (another aspect of "middleness" which we should not be too quick to dismiss as coincidence). It is believed

[12] The phrase *mappa mundi*, literally "cloth of the world," originated in the ninth century and was in common use by the time of the Hereford Mappa Mundi (Harvey 26).

[13] Tolkien wrote that he "wisely started with a map, and made the story fit (generally with meticulous care for distances). The other way about lands one in confusions and impossibilities, and in any case it is weary work to compose a map from a story" (*Letters*, 177).

that the artifact was produced in the West Midlands during the thirteenth century (Harvey, 1). This is the same century which produced many of the literary works around which Tolkien made his academic reputation. Scholars think the map was made in nearby Lincoln; however, it was quickly brought to Hereford Cathedral, where it has remained for the ensuing seven hundred years (Harvey, 7). It was certainly at Hereford throughout Tolkien's life, with two minor exceptions: during World War II, the map was removed from Hereford for safekeeping, and after the war, in 1948, the British Library carried out a conservation and restoration project on the map (Harvey, 17). It seems not altogether unlikely that Tolkien could have been aware of either of these events. In addition, the map is closely related to the history of the West Midlands and stands as an enormously important document of the thirteenth century. Though he never mentions the map explicitly in any writings I am aware of, it seems highly plausible that Tolkien was not only acquainted with the map, but that he may have even seen it firsthand. It is well known that some of the most important literary works of interest to Tolkien were produced in the West Midlands and written in the West Midland dialect. Moreover, that dialect emerged from the Old Mercian dialect of Old English, which we also know was of paramount interest to Tolkien.[14] And there are even closer connections to Hereford and Herefordshire. For example, one of Tolkien's contributions to the study of Middle English was his theory about the origins of the so-called AB language, the dialect in which the *Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine Group* of poems are composed. And of particular interest to us, Arne Zettersten writes that "Tolkien placed the AB language in the West Midlands, more specifically in Herefordshire" (Zettersten, 16). Tom Shippey reinforces the same connection when he writes that "Tolkien had made a very considerable mark on Middle English studies with a 1929 article on the dialect of a group of early texts from Herefordshire (another of Tolkien's favorite West Midland counties)" (Shippey, *Author of the Century*, 270).[15]

[14] It seems unnecessary to offer a full accounting of Tolkien's academic career here, but his professional and personal interest in the Old Mercian dialect of Old English and in the West Midland dialect of Middle English can be quite well substantiated. The majority of his professional work in Middle English – *Sir Gawain*, *Pearl*, *Sir Orfeo*, the *Ancrene Wisse*, and so on – were focused on Midland dialects. Refer to the excellent literary map in Sisam viii for a partial list. For just one example of how Tolkien worked these Midland as well as Old Mercian forms into his own fictive world, see Shippey *Road to Middle-earth* 123.

[15] See also Shippey *Road to Middle-earth* 42, 72n for additional connections between Hereford and Tolkien's fictive Shire.

It seems, then, that there can be little doubt of the importance of Herefordshire (as with all the counties of the West Midlands) to Tolkien. It also seems probable, or at the very least, plausible, that Tolkien would have been familiar with the Mappa Mundi at Hereford Cathedral. We do know that Lewis was acquainted with it, as he writes about it at some length in *The Discarded Image* (142-4.). But why is the Hereford Mappa Mundi important to the unraveling of Tolkien's Circles of the World? As it happens, there are a number of important similarities between the map's conception of our world and Tolkien's vision for his own fictive world of Arda.

Even the first and most superficial glance at the Hereford map is enough to reveal similarities. For example, the map, like most medieval mappae mundi, is surrounded by water (Harvey, 3), an obvious corollary to the *ekkaia*, the Encircling Sea, of Tolkien's geography. Moreover, in roundels outside the outer circle of the map, we find the letters M-O-R-S, a rather ominous acknowledgment that "the world was God's creation, a point brought home by the letters MORS, *death*, spaced out beyond its bounds" (*loc.cit.*). This echoes Tolkien's Circles of the World, beyond which mortal "flesh unaided cannot endure" (*Silm*, 282). Also, unlike today's maps, the Hereford Mappa Mundi shows east to be at the top, rather than north. The reason for this is that medieval maps were generally oriented toward Asia and the presumed location of the Garden of Eden, or earthly paradise. Tolkien's Map of Thrór, from *The Hobbit*, likewise has east at the top, though this is probably coincidence, dictated by the requirements of publishing rather than any intention to recall the medieval mappa mundi tradition. Certainly *not* coincidental, however, is the fact that, in Tolkien's fictive world, the Elves oriented their maps toward their own earthly paradise, in the West. In addition, on the Hereford Mappa Mundi, England is situated on the left-hand side of the map; allowing for a ninety-degree reorientation between the Mappa Mundi and Tolkien's geographical conception of Arda, this places England in approximately the correct location for Tol Eressëa – which, as we know from the Lost Tales, was originally Luthany and was intended to correspond literally with England (*Book of Lost Tales II*, 301). In addition, to the right of England we see the Fortunate Isles, connected with the legend of Saint Brendan (Harvey, 48-9); these, it has been shown (Lobdell), are bound up in the leaf-mould of Tolkien's conception of the Enchanted Islands in the Great Sea, Belegaer, between Middle-earth and Elevenhome. In addition,

Tolkien also touched on the legend of Saint Brendan in his poem "Imram."[16]

The late Karen Wynn Fonstad, in her indispensable *Atlas of Middle-earth*, helps us to see the connection between this medieval map and Tolkien's own geography of Arda:

> Tolkien was envisioning a world much as our medieval cartographers viewed our own. They showed the earth as a disk, with oceans around the circumference. The top was oriented toward "Paradise" in the east. Conversely, Tolkien stated that in Middle-earth the compass points began with and faced west – apparently toward Valinor, their Paradise. (ix)

And the connection is more than merely geographical. The *purpose* of medieval mappae mundi went far beyond simple cartography. "Their aim," we are told by Peter Turchi in *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*, "was, arguably, more ambitious: to diagram history and anthropology, myth and scripture" (130). The Hereford Mappa Mundi is a perfect case in point: ranging from Biblical elements, such as the Tower of Babel, the Exodus, and the Crucifixion; to historical sources, such as Isadore, Aethicus, Martianus, and others; to mythological elements, for example the myriad of legendary creatures supposed to have peopled the exotic expanses of Africa and India (Harvey, 41-53). And this, I would venture to say, is very much what Tolkien has accomplished in the creation of Middle-earth as a feigned history, built out of the bones of his own mythological studies and religious beliefs.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

Can we ever be completely certain about the precise evolution of Tolkien's evocative Circles of the World? Not unless further unpublished material should come to light. But can we feel reasonably confident in connecting this trope with the sources I have presented? I think so. Tolkien would have been extremely familiar with the *Heimskringla*, as he was with the entire surviving corpus of Old Norse literature, and as we know that he borrowed elements of the Old Norse mythological tradition for his fictive world, I think that the present speculations on the *Ynglinga Saga* are on firm ground. Likewise, we can be positive that the Latin Vulgate Bible would have been well known to Tolkien, both from a philological as well as from a religious perspective. And both of these sources contain a

[16] First published in *Time and Tide*, December 1955 (see *Biography*, 174), the poem has been reprinted in *Sauron Defeated* 261-4.

conspicuous and essentially *literal* version of Tolkien's trope. The possible influence of the Hereford Mappa Mundi is more tentative. But the map was one of the most important artifacts of the period and region out of which Tolkien made his primary academic reputation, and moreover, its home was Tolkien's home: the West Midlands. It seems unlikely to me that he would not have been aware of it, and I deem it quite likely that he had seen it, either during his early years at King Edward's School, or perhaps during a return visit to the West Midlands, of which we know he made several. And what is more, the map has many observable similarities with Tolkien's own fictive geography, and it captures in a very real sense the same mixture of religious, historical, and mythological tradition. Each of the three sources I have adduced in this article, then, can be linked, to one degree or another, to Tolkien. In addition, they can be linked or likened each to the other. Together, it seems to me that they may very well have fertilized the leaf-mould of Tolkien's mind, out of which grew the seed of this beautiful and moving metaphor for mortality, for the passing of time, for change, and for nostalgia and loss.

References

Ancrene Wisse: The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle: Ancrene Wisse. 1962. Edited by J.R.R. Tolkien. London: Published for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford University Press, (Early English Text Society; 249)

The Book of Wisdom. In the Douay-Rheims text of the Latin Vulgate Bible. Available at http://www.drbo.org/lvb/chapter/25001.htm. [Accessed October, 2010]

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. 1925. Edited by J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon. London: Oxford University Press. (Reprinted with corrections, 1946).

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo. 1975. Translated by J.R.R. Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Carpenter, Humphrey. 2000. *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Chance, Jane. 2004. *Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader*. Lexington (Kentucky): University Press of Kentucky.

Drout, Michael, ed. 2006. *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. New York: Routledge.

Fisher, Jason. 2007. "From Mythopoeia to Mythography: Tolkien, Lönnrot, And Jerome." In *The Silmarillion*: *Thirty Years On***,** edited by Allan Turner, 111–38**.** Zollikofen: Walking Tree Publishers.

Fonstad, Karen Wynn. 1991. *The Atlas of Middle-earth*. Revised Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Harvey, P.D.A. 1996. *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford World Map*. London: The British Library.

Kelly, J.N.D. 1998. *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*. Peabody (Massachusetts): Hendrickson.

Lewis, C.S. 2005. *The Discarded Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lobdel, Jared. 2006. "Saint Brendan." In *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, edited by Michael Drout, 584-5. New York: Routledge.

—. 2002. *Studies in Words*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sisam, Kenneth and J.R.R. Tolkien. 1921. *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*. London: Oxford University Press. (Reprinted with corrections, 1964).

Shippey, Tom. 2002. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

—. 2007. "Tolkien and Iceland: The Philology of Envy." In *Roots and Branches: Selected Papers on Tolkien*, 187-202**.** Zurich: Walking Tree Publishers.

—. 2003. *The Road to Middle-earth*. Third Revised Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Sturluson, Snorri. *Heimskringla* (in Old Norse). Available at http://www.heimskringla.no/wiki/Heimskringla [Accessed October, 2010].

—. 1961. *Heimskringla: Part Two: Sagas of the Norse Kings*. Translated by Samuel Laing. Revised with Introduction and Notes by Peter Foote. Revised Everyman Edition. London: Dent.

—. 1966. *King Harald's Saga*. Edited by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson. London: Penguin Books.

Tolkien, J.R.R. 2009. "Fate and Free Will." Edited by Carl Hostetter. Tolkien Studies 6.

—. 1981. *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

—. 1987. *The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before 'The Lord of the Rings'*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

—. 1983. *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

—. 1996. *The Peoples of Middle-earth*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

—. 1965. *The Return of the King*. Second Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
—. 1986. *The Shaping of Middle-earth: The Quenta, the Ambarkanta, and the Annals*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
—. 1992. *Sauron Defeated: The End of the Third Age: (The History of The Lord of the Rings, Part Four); The Notion Club Papers and The Drowning of Anadûnê*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
—. 1977. *The Silmarillion*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
—. 1965. *Tree and Leaf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
—. 1980. *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and of Middle-earth*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Turchi, Peter. 2004. *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*. San Antonio (Texas): Trinity University Press.
Weiss, Michael. 2006. "Latin *Orbis* and its Cognates." *Historische Sprachforschung* 119: 250–72**.**
West, Richard C. 2006. "'Her Choice Was Made and Her Doom Appointed:' Tragedy and Divine Comedy in the Tale or Aragorn and Arwen." In *The Lord of the Rings 1954-2004: Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder*. Milwaukee (Wisconsin): Marquette University Press.
Zettersten, Arne. 2006. "The AB Language Lives." In *The Lord of the Rings 1954-2004: Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder*. Milwaukee (Wisconsin): Marquette University Press.