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Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist (2019) by Oronzo Cilli

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Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist by Oronzo Cilli. Edinburgh: Luna Press Publishing, 2019. xxxi, 432 pp. £40.00 (hardback) ISBN 9781911143901 and £30.00 (trade paperback) ISBN 9781911143673. Also available in ebook format.

Tolkien began to acquire books in earnest as an undergraduate, and built a large personal library during his years on the English faculties of Leeds and Oxford. This supported his scholarly interests, and more broadly his love of reading. His collection, however, changed with circumstance: he had to cull his books more than once, perhaps most seriously in 1959 when he retired from his Oxford chair and had to give up his rooms (and their bookshelves) at Merton. After his death in 1973, some of his remaining books went to his family, while others entered academic libraries or found their way to the secondhand market, where some still appear from time to time. Enthusiasts have long made a minor hobby of compiling lists of these titles, trying to reconstruct what Tolkien had on his shelves, if not necessarily all at the same time.

But a list of only those books Tolkien physically owned reveals only part of a larger picture. He may have owned books but not read them: he received, for instance, a large number of offprints of scholarly articles sent him by their authors in honor or gratitude (we ourselves own a few of these, only some of which contain evidence of reading, such as manuscript notes). There were also many books read by Tolkien which he did not own, but borrowed, or consulted in libraries. Nor can one know for sure if a work he cited in his writings was consulted directly or through another, unidentified source altogether. And then there were books owned by his children, which we know that Tolkien himself sometimes enjoyed.

Oronzo Cilli takes a broad view in *Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist*. The 2,599 entries in its main section comprise “books we know with absolute certainty Tolkien read, consulted, bought or borrowed,” to which are added those “he read as cited by scholars,” as well as “any text he read, studied, or simply was aware of” (p. xxiii). Cilli documents these by reference to holdings in institutional and private libraries, to what he calls “primary sources” (this and the following term have different meanings to librarians and historians), that is to mentions in Tolkien's letters and other writings, or to “secondary sources,” information gleaned from works such as our *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* and the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*. It is a remarkably long list. As Tom Shippey writes in his foreword to Cilli's book, “few among Oxford professors could match the range and volume of [Tolkien's] reading” (p. xiii), and casting such a wide net for the bibliography offers “many new insights into Tolkien's thoughts, his life-experience, and the way that experience expressed itself in his fiction” (p. xv). Even so—as Cilli admits—the checklist is not exhaustive, indeed it could not be:

one could never know of every work of which Tolkien was “aware.” And at the same time, the total of the numbered entries is misleading, as it indicates *volumes* rather than *titles*, a separate entry having been given to each volume in a work of multiple volumes.

Partly because it is so long and the materials it lists so diverse, *Tolkien’s Library* is a complex work to navigate. Each of its eight indexes is helpful, but because there are so many indexes, identifying their purposes and selecting which one to use can be cumbersome. The reader’s task is made more difficult by a lack of running heads, and Cilli’s statement of “research methodology” in his preface does not fully explain his rules for selection and presentation. His first seven entries, comprising the first page of the checklist, usefully illustrate some of the thorny issues involved in his work.

Cilli includes no. 1, *Norsk ordbog med dansk forklaring* by Ivar Andreas Aasen, 1873, because it was a source text for *wallop* in the *New English Dictionary* (*Oxford English Dictionary*), on which word (among others beginning with *w*) Tolkien worked as a member of staff. This is one of many sources Cilli cites from the *OED*, having felt it “correct, for the sake of completeness, to include the texts that are mentioned in the *OED* entries on which Tolkien worked” (p. xxvi). By way of caution, though, he quotes *OED* lexicographer Jeremy H. Marshall that Tolkien in his work on the dictionary “may have had no knowledge of the book [cited] beyond the excerpt that had been written on a dictionary slip and selected for quotation in the dictionary” (p. xxvi); and by this token, one could make an equally cogent argument *against* inclusion of *OED* sources in the checklist, absent any other uses by Tolkien.

Entry no. 2, the *Vita S. Columbae* of Saint Adamnan, published in 1920, is straightforward, as Tolkien’s personal copy is preserved in the English Faculty Library collection at Oxford. For no. 3, however, *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, published by the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1948, Cilli cites the bibliography in the 1967 edition of the Tolkien–Gordon *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which he considers a primary source. But the citation was written by Norman Davis when he revised the edition of 1925, not by Tolkien himself; and in fact, the work in question is not a complete volume, and not by Joseph Quincy Adams, as the entry has it, but an essay by Charles and Ruth Prouty in a volume published in Adams’s memory. However one may wish to err on the side of completeness, should one assume that Tolkien read this piece (which concerns an attribution) because it was cited in the second edition of *Gawain*? He had allowed Davis a free hand in the revision, and gave his colleague the use of his later notes, but did Tolkien himself reference the Proutys’ essay (“George Gascoigne, *The Noble Arte of Venerie*, and Queen Elizabeth at Kenilworth”) for his post-war lectures on *Sir Gawain*, or was the reference found by Davis, Tolkien’s successor as Merton Professor of English Language and Literature?

No. 4 in the checklist, *An Inheritance of Poetry*, edited by Gladys L. Adshead and Annis Duff and published in Boston in 1948, contains Tolkien's "Goblin Feet" and two poems as well as riddles from *The Hobbit*. Cilli evidently assumes that Tolkien knew of this collection because it includes some of his own work, as there is no other documentation. By no means can it be certain that Tolkien received a contributor's copy. Moreover, the inclusion of *An Inheritance of Poetry*, and likewise *The Book of Fairy Poetry*, 1920, edited by Dora Owen (no. 1824, also with "Goblin Feet"), would suggest by analogy that *Tolkien's Library* should include other anthologies with Tolkien's work published in his lifetime, such as two omitted here, *Fifty New Poems for Children* (Blackwell, 1922) and *The Open Door to Poetry*, edited by Anne Stokes (Scribners, 1931), both likewise with "Goblin Feet."

Entry no. 5, the *Catholic Homilies* by Ælfric in the Early English Text Society edition by Peter Clemoes, is in Cilli's list because R.W. Burchfield asked Tolkien in 1957 if he had had time to examine the work then in preparation. Tolkien seems not to have done so, however, due to the press of other business and because he could not find the copy of Clemoes's text sent him despite searching for it everywhere (see our *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide: Chronology*, 2017, p. 532). Of course he could not have seen the book cited here, as Clemoes's edition was not published until 1997, more than two decades after Tolkien's death.

Entries 6 and 7, the two volumes of *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* edited by W.W. Skeat, 1881 and 1900, are included partly by virtue of a 1913 manuscript note by Tolkien (then an undergraduate) stating that he found all of the Early English Text Society publications in the Exeter College library useful—did he refer to all that were published, or all of a subset of volumes then at Exeter?—and because he cited two of the saints' lives in his scholarship, though this was much later, in 1932 and 1934.

Following the checklist proper (Section A), Cilli includes five appendices, beginning with (as Section B) a list of Tolkien's published works between 1910 (a debating society report in the *King Edward's School Chronicle*) and 1972 (a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*). All of these titles would be, by definition, works read by Tolkien, and so theoretically candidates for the checklist proper, but only a few are included there, where Cilli records evidence of personal, presentation, and proof copies. By rights, a complete list of Tolkien's writings that he himself owned would be expanded with translations of those works into foreign languages, copies of at least some of which he owned—they may be seen in photographs of his study by Pamela Chandler—and some texts of which are referenced in his letters and in his *Nomenclature of The Lord of the Rings*.

Section C is a list of interviews conducted with Tolkien, and of reviews of his books which he is known to have read. Section D is a list of student theses

Tolkien supervised or examined, all but one at Oxford (the exception is to a thesis at University College, Dublin referred to in an unpublished letter). This includes works such as R.W. Burchfield's *Vocabulary and Phonology of the Ormulum*, which he did not complete, but not Simonne d'Ardenne's *Edition of the Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iuliene*, completed for an Oxford B.Litt. in 1933, though Cilli cites the latter in Section A, for its 1936 publication in Liège.

Section E is a bibliography of Early English Text Society publications from 1938, when Tolkien was appointed a member of the EETS Committee, to 1972 (he attended his last meeting in May 1973), all of which he could be presumed to have known about.

The final appendix, Section F, is presented as a list of Tolkien's lectures at Leeds and Oxford, though in the case of the University of Leeds it would be more accurate to say that these were lectures offered in the English courses, for only some of which Tolkien could have had time to bear responsibility. Cilli uses the descriptions of the English literature and language courses of study in the Leeds published calendars for Tolkien's years at the university to generate entries for Section A, some of which are specific editions of works mentioned as assigned (such as Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster* edited by Arber), but others raise a question of method. Why, for example, is the 1917 Ginn and Co. edition of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* cited (no. 279), when there is no edition specified in the Leeds calendar (at least, in the sheets from it we have in our files)? One could guess that the Leeds English student might have done as well with, say, the Oxford World's Classics edition, which was also available at that time. Presumably, Cilli includes in Section A entries for the assigned texts mentioned for the Leeds school, on the assumption that Tolkien would have needed to know them for teaching or advising—and there may be something to be said for this in his earliest years at Leeds, when the number of English school faculty members could be counted on one hand. Nor was Tolkien ignorant of the wider reaches of English literature. Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine him teaching, say, Fielding, or Goldsmith, or Richardson, and such authors were certainly outside his field of instruction at Leeds as he described it in his application for the Rawlinson and Bosworth chair at Oxford.

Cilli's decision to include "many works cited [by Tolkien scholars] that I suspected Tolkien might have read, as well as many others I did not suspect" (p. xxv), takes the checklist into debatable territory. However respected the scholars in question may be (and Cilli includes us among them), and however informed their reasoning, their opinions as to which works Tolkien may have read, and which influenced his writings, are still only speculation. Tom Shippey, one of those upon whose scholarship Cilli draws, suggests in his entry for John Buchan in the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* several of Buchan's works as possible influences on Tolkien, and Cilli includes these in Section A, in addition to the

novel *Greenmantle* to which Tolkien himself refers. In his foreword to *Tolkien's Library*, however, Shippey notes that although “one might ‘infer’ knowledge of several [other works by Buchan besides *Greenmantle*] . . . , the connection would be [only] a guess” (p. xv). Some titles by Buchan are put forward as suggestions also by other scholars whom Cilli does not cite, such as Marjorie Burns and Raymond Edwards (see our article on Buchan in *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide: Reader's Guide*, 2017); and Cilli seems to have overlooked *The Thirty-nine Steps*, which is also mentioned by Shippey in the *Encyclopedia* for its perceived connections with Tolkien. But what of *Greenmantle* (a sequel to *The Thirty-nine Steps* in Buchan's Richard Hannay series)? Tolkien does indeed mention it, as Cilli documents, in his review-essay “Philology: General Works” in *The Year's Work in English Studies* for 1925. But he does so with several degrees of separation, noting that it is cited by Dr. W. Last in his extensive word-directory in *Das Bahuvrîhi-Compositum im Alteng., Mittteleng., und Neuenglischen* (a study of possessive compounds), and that Last does not refer to *Greenmantle* itself but to a review of it in the *Daily Telegraph*. Tolkien thus was aware of the existence of Buchan's novel, but his mention of it in a disconnected context does not confirm that he knew the work at first hand.

Tolkien's Library is not a work for continuous reading, or at least not for easy continuous reading. It is a reference book, composed primarily of citations and short notes. It is a work of great labor, and used with care will be an aid to scholars, and generally will be found informative and perhaps illuminating. And yet, if read critically, it is also a book which invites many questions, even beyond those we raise above. Is there no evidence for Tolkien having read the later volumes of his friend C.S. Lewis's “Chronicles of Narnia,” despite having expressed a dislike for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (no. 1347)? (Yes, there is. Tolkien's granddaughter Joanna recalled, in an address to the Tolkien Society in 1994, that when she visited him in Oxford she was handed from his bookshelf the Narnia books—presumably he had the complete set.) Would it not be worth a note at no. 1368, for *The Splendid Century* by Warren Lewis, that Tolkien might have read his other books of history, having enjoyed the one Warnie read aloud to the Inklings in 1944? Did Tolkien truly read every one of the forty volumes of the *Cabinet des fées* (nos. 1537–76), and in the edition of 1785–88? Is there a reason why only the 1926 *Baron Munchhausen* is given (no. 1915) of the “Books for the Bairns” volumes to which Tolkien refers, as a series, in *On Fairy-stories*? And why is the 1926 *Munchhausen* given (Raspe's story was first published in 1785), when Tolkien does not cite a specific edition in his reference to the work in *On Fairy-stories*?

Cilli admits that although the material collected in his book “is quite abundant . . . I am aware that the research does not end here” (p. xxiii). He has already begun to post addenda and corrigenda to his website,

<https://tolkienslibrary.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>, and we would not be surprised to see a revised and corrected edition of *Tolkien's Library* published (as for the present edition, on demand) at some stage.

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