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Eotenas and Hobbits: Finn and Hengest, and Tolkien's Speculation About Origins

1. Monsters at Heorot, Histories in Finnsburg

This essay concerns Tolkien's *Finn and Hengest* and how it sheds light on his shifting representations of early English origins in the history in his philological work and, by analogy, in the fantasy of his legendarium.

Tolkien's 1936 essay "Beowulf: The Monsters and The Critics" is a scrupulous and discerning reading of the Beowulf poem. Tolkien argues that it is the primal encounter with the monsters, not the poem's fragmented registering of sixth-century Germanic and Scandinavian history, that is at the heart of *Beowulf's* meaning. This analysis not only made good sense when applied to the text but fit into a twentieth-century formalism that was less interested in source-study and more concerned with valuing what made truly great art in itself. Tolkien's demurrer from Archibald Strong's characterization of *Beowulf* as a "historical document" (Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics," 2) and his skepticism about whether it was right to read any poem in that way was notable. Moreover, Tolkien's discussion of the relation of central mythic theme to peripheral historical context could be applied to his own pseudo-historical worldbuilding in his legendarium. When Tolkien insisted on the importance of "stories and plots" ("The Monsters and the Critics," 2) to practical creators, even if those things seemed trivial, he was speaking as a creative artist as well as a scholar. However fascinating the details are in his tableaux of Middle-earth and Númenor, Tolkien would not have thought his own stories compelling without a primal, foregrounded sense of peril, courage, and sacrifice which gave the works an emotional thrill beyond mere worldbuilding. The uncanny threat symbolized by Grendel, Grendel's mother and the dragon in *Beowulf* epitomized this thrill.

Thus it is striking to find a very different perspective in Tolkien's other extended scholarly treatment of the historical narrative poetry of the early English. These are the lectures posthumously published in 1982 as *Finn and Hengest*. Here, Tolkien gives his views on the Finnsburg episode in the Beowulf poem (ll. 1063-1160), as well as on the separate Finnsburg fragment. This Finnsburg fragment, as editor Alan Bliss relates in his introduction to *Finn and Hengest*, were printed in 1705 by the nonjuring clergyman George Hickes. As Bliss relates, the story is of Hnaef the Healfdene, "a 'young king' and his defenders" (FH 2) who are "besieged in a hall, which they vigorously defend; a conspicuous member of the defending force is called Hengest" (FH 2). We know from the episode in

Beowulf that, after the death of Hnaef, brother of the princess Hildeburh who had been married to the Frisian king Finn, his men, led by Hengest, reside in ambiguous peace with Finn and his Frisian court during a long, hard winter “which locked the waters in icy bond” (FH 155). At the end of the winter, Hengest and his men (or henchmen, OE *hengistmen*) kill Finn and return the Danish princess to her people. The Finnsburg fragment lacks this denouement, ending with an ambiguous standoff after the remnants of Hnaef’s men had barricaded themselves in Finn’s hall.

In this essay, I will examine Tolkien’s speculations about origins in both English history and his own legendarium in the light of Tolkien’s historical reconstruction of Finn and Hengest. Reference is made in the strife at Finnsburg to people called *eotenas*, fighting both with Hnaef and with Finn. The conventional reading—still supported by such post-Tolkien readers as John Vickrey—was to read *eotenas* as it is read in *Beowulf*, as giants or monsters. Both Tolkien and Bliss differ, seeing *eotenas* as Jutes. Jutes, on the continent, were a people who lived between the Danes and the Frisians, and one of the three peoples who infiltrated Britain in the fifth century—the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Tolkien also believed that “Jutes were on both sides of the quarrel,” (FH 5). This is so although neither Finn the Frisian nor Hnaef the Healfdene (Dane, although there is some speculation that the Healfdenes were a slightly different people) were Jutes. Yet many of their soldiers were. What Bliss calls the “Jutes-on-both-sides theory” (FH 6) sees the Jutes as a divided soldierly proletariat, with Hengest emerging as their champion.

This essay will analyze why these positions matters in Tolkien’s wider oeuvre. Tolkien’s argument in “The Monsters and the Critics” relies on foregrounding monsters over history. Yet in *Finn and Hengest* he says “everything is for” (FH 60) the reading of *eotenas* as Jutes—except that it is not linguistically or metrically justified. Whereas in “The Monsters and the Critics” Tolkien champions the fantastic, in *Finn and Hengest* he sidelines the possibility of monsters in favor of the historical and ethnographic. Moreover, Tolkien seems to want to praise Hengest. This is not easy to do. Hengest provides strong leadership in organizing a band of stranded and desperate warriors to keep them at par with their menacing hosts, Yet the narrative shows him breaking his side of the bargain by murdering Finn once winter has broken. The story is, as Mary Kate Hurley puts it, one of “the failure of human community” (Hurley 148). Yet Tolkien sees Hengest as a positive version of a *wrecca*, not a hapless exile but as a “masterless man” (FH 71) who achieved a “success” at Finnsberg which helped him be an effective conqueror of Britain. This willingness “to break an alliance” (Hurley 154) is hardly what *Beowulf*, scrupulously deferential to both his

permanent and temporary liege-lords, Hygelac and Hrothgar, would have done if he had found himself face to face with this admittedly more difficult Frisian potentate Finn. In *Finn and Hengest*, Tolkien seems less concerned with personal valor, and more with proto-national pride.

Tolkien could riposte that this was justified by the material—that Beowulf’s legendary overtones permit monsters, whereas the more mundane strife of the *Freswael* or Frisian-quarrel between Finn and Hengest adheres to more realistic conventions. Bliss observes that while monsters were “quite essential” (*FH* 4) for the *Beowulf* poem’s concern for “the destiny of man,” the Finnsburg episode emphasized “fallible human beings” (*FH* 4) with “conflicting loyalties” and thus had no need for “supernatural beings.” Tolkien himself said the old Northern world could embrace “myth or heroic legend, or blends of these” (“The Monsters and The Critics,” 6). Yet critics such as Vickrey still maintain that *eotenas* could be referring to giants. One could also resort to a readerly maneuver like seeing ‘giants’ as the sobriquet of a mercenary band employed by Hnaef in his assault on his Frisian brother-in-law. Certainly the Finnsburg fragment and episode, though sanguinary, do not contain any overt elements of the supernatural.

The *dramatis personae* in the Finnsburg episode are less in the vein of the represented world of the *Beowulf* poet than that of the sixth-century historian, Gregory of Tours, who wrote in Latin and was based in a Gaul by that time ruled by the Frankish Merovingian dynasty. Although those who are only familiar with Gregory of Tours from his role in Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis* will tend to see Gregory as prone to colorful exaggeration, as compared to what Tolkien saw as the essentially ahistorical Beowulf material, Gregory seems on the order of Thucydides. Gregory does not chronicle the Finn episode as such. He records instead the other point in *Beowulf*, six decades later, where the action moves towards the continent: when Hygelac raided the Frisian coast. But Frisia as such is well within Gregory’s compass. Unlike the ‘there be dragons’ aura of Scandinavia in the sixth century AD, the more chronicled Frisia was not the kind of place where monsters generally occurred, even in stories. Thus one can see why Tolkien and Bliss did not see *eotenas* as monsters, even though doing so would follow the textual-scholarship principle of *lectio difficilior*.

By viewing the Hengest in the fragment as the founder of early England, Tolkien understands “Finn and Hengest” as an *Ur*-document of English history. That in the early versions of Tolkien’s legendarium, Eriol/Aelfwine, the mediatorial figure between the real England and the fictional Elven lands, is said to be the father of Hengest bolsters this proto-Englishness. But in “The Monsters and the Critics” Tolkien does *not* see

Beowulf as proto-English in any direct way. Tolkien argues in “The Monsters and the Critics” that not just Grendel, his mother and the dragon but even Beowulf and Wiglaf are fictional characters placed in a plausible historical setting. In his *Beowulf* commentary, on a single page, speaking of Beowulf’s nameless mother, Ecgtheow’s wife, Tolkien uses the words “legend,” “fairy-tale,” and “fictitious” (Tolkien, *Beowulf*, 215).

Tolkien certainly was willing, in his *Beowulf* scholarship, to accept a liminal interposition between myth and history. But in *Finn and Hengest* the historicity of Hengest is central to his argument. Beowulf is seen as a paradigmatic hero precisely because he is not constrained by historical context in his standing for heroic virtue against fear, terror, and mortality, as well as the more human infelicities represented by the jealousies of Unferth and Breca. Even if not directly or overtly Christian, *Beowulf*’s heroic behavior is compatible with some practice of Christian conduct. Hengest’s behavior is bloody and vengeful, and is justifiable only in the most brutal of contexts. Hengest does liberate Hildeburh to her people, but this sees her first as princess, not as Finn’s queen. Hengest, like Beowulf, champions Danes without wielding political authority over them. But there the resemblance ends.

The story of Hengest is violent and brutal. It is not remotely Christian. Indeed, if Hengest’s revenge is to be seen as a charter myth for the English, it is one that, after conversion, should have been totally swept under the Christian rug as Alcuin suggested was appropriate in the case of Ingeld (Tolkien, “The Monsters and the Critics,” 22). There are pitfalls to reading the Finnsburg story as intended to be nationalistically inspirational. Tolkien himself admits that the only way to read *eotenas* as Jutes was that, for the tenth-century scribes who copied the original, the “actual form” (*FH* 63) *eoten* for Jutes was so obscure, and the Jutes, even before the year 1000, so relegated to obscurity, that the consequential mis-transcription was made. Indeed the Old English word for Jutes, the Anglian word *eoten* (not the incorrect *eotenas*) is “only evidenced” (*FH* 71) in *Beowulf*, the other mentions of Jutes being all in other Saxon or Northumbrian dialects or in Latin.

These are different solutions to a vexing immediate question in the *Beowulf* poem: the insignificance of the Geats for English and world history and their implied “national failure” (Gwara 242) in the poem. One could argue that the poem is transhistorical in its meaning, and thus all the better to have an obscure, long-faded group. Alternatively, one could argue that the Geats are somehow significant, or to say that they are actually another people who are of more significance to the English. Michael Drout suggests that Tolkien wanted to “identity the Geats as Goths” (Drout 237).

By seeing the marginal and historically inconsequential Geats as being identical with the far more central and important Goths, this would associate Beowulf's folk with what Drout calls "a great barbarian people of early Europe" (Drout 237). If we add to the pot the idea that the Geats "were the Jutes" (Drout 234) we get to a situation where Hengest could at least be Beowulf's distant cousin. As Drout concedes, these connections are not historically or linguistically viable. Yet it seems that at times Tolkien yearned for this direct link. This yearning is also evident in *Finn and Hengest*.

The distinction here is between a world where Goths, Geats, and Jutes are the same and one in which they are all different. This is a distinction between what Nelson Goodman labeled the autographic or the allographic, whether an identity is one's own or comes from elsewhere. The Tolkien of "The Monsters and the Critics" is content for identity in *Beowulf* to be allographic, for the Geats to not be the Jutes and therefore not the English, and for the metaphysical threat of dragons and monsters to make the entire issue of ethnicity somewhat moot. In *Finn and Hengest* identity is more autographic, because there are Jutes on both sides.

Of Tolkien's three versions of *Beowulf*, the most reminiscent of his work in the legendarium is the Lay of Heorot. The use of the word 'lay,' and, as SHipepy rmeind sus, the stress on "heroic lays" (Shiipey 171) in "The Monsters and the Critics," reminds us of the Lay of Leithian, the tale of love and the 'release from bondage' that solicited the absolute core of Tolkien's being. Tolkien's "Sellic Spell" was a distillation of the poem away from history and into myth. The lay boils the poem down even more, to what Tolkien saw as its essence: the radiance of fragile but radiant light in the face of monstrosity and fear. *Eotenas* occurs in *The Lord of the Rings* in the Ettenmoors. The Ettenmoors are a region in the far north that is only referred to sparingly (*FR* 268, *RK* 458) in the texts, although the name does recall the "moor" that Grendel the *eoten* "strode in might" in the Lay of Heorot (Tolkien, *Beowulf*, 417). That Tolkien distilled the *Beowulf* poem into an abstract, mythic core shows how strongly he must have felt about the Hengest material to distinctly pull it in the other direction.

2. Mr. Bliss, or, the Anglian Hengest

Alan Bliss's commentary sometimes sounds like the Tolkien of "The Monsters and the Critics" critiquing the Tolkien of *Finn and Hengest*. At other times, the double-voiced quality reminds us of a more polite version of the contention within Finnsburg itself. In his Appendix C to *Finn and Hengest*, Bliss undertakes the task of editing *Finn and Hengest* with the verve of Tolkien's Mr. Bliss (whose eponymous text was, "by design or

chance” (*TT* 174), also published posthumously in 1982) driving his new car. One assumes that Christopher Tolkien “encouraged” (Burdge and Burke 67) Bliss as he was too busy engaging in his work on *Unfinished Tales* and *The History of Middle-earth* (not out of any lack of philological competence himself). Christopher may well have seen the *Finn and Hengest* material as peripheral to researching the backstory of Tolkien’s legendarium, which had become Christopher’s major editorial aim. Peripheral it may be, but *Finn and Hengest*—published by Tolkien’s primary publisher, and, in the design of its paperback edition resembling the individual volumes of the legendarium in appearance—is not irrelevant to Tolkien’s oeuvre.

I would argue, though, that the most connective aspect is actually Alan Bliss’s Appendix C. Bliss contends that Hengest was not, as Tolkien supposed, a “Jutish nobleman” (Honegger 210) but “an Angle of royal stock” (*FH* 180). This takes the discussion of the Hengest material into the hypothetical and conjectural arena that is analogous to Tolkien’s secondary world.

Bliss’s contention that Hengest was Anglian is extraordinary, and in direct conflict with the thrust of Tolkien’s argument, that Hengest was Jutish, Bliss’s Appendix C accepts Tolkien’s reading of *eotenas*. Yet it brings the Hengest story more into the mode of Tolkien’s treatment of *Beowulf* by insisting that Hengest was Anglian in ancestry. Scott Gwara’s contention that it is “impossible” to “know Hengest’s nationality” (Gwara 163) comes to the same conclusion as Bliss: that the material as we have it does not lay stress on Hengest’s nationality. This contrasts to Tolkien’s reading. Tolkien saw Hengest’s experience in Finnsburg as “a success that changed the course of things” (*FH* 71) and led specifically to “the early establishment of the Jutish kingdom” (*FH* 71)

But does not seeing Hengest as Anglian make him even more a core culture hero of the English, and his role in the Finn story even more redolent of what Honegger calls an English identity “*avant la lettre*” (Honegger 210)? I would argue precisely not. England, and Scandinavia were so far north as to be removed from the identity-cauldron constituted by any linkage between Jutes/Geats/Goths. It is the Goths’ role in the destruction of Rome that is privileged by ethnically anchored readings of *Beowulf* and the Finnsburg material. Bliss, by keeping Hengest Anglian and thereby on the periphery of all this, keeps Hengest in more of a story-world and less of a politics-world, just as Tolkien does with *Beowulf* in *The Monsters and The Critics*. The impetuous, sanguinary, highly un-Christian and not especially dignified behavior of Hengest hardly matches the integrity and bravery of *Beowulf*. Bliss’s rendering of Hengest as an

Anglian, even though as conjectural as Tolkien's conclusion that Hengest was a Jute, fits better with the Hengest of fragment and episode: resourceful, charismatic, able to find a footing in a context where he had no natural rights.

Bliss's performance in Appendix C is bravura. He touches on matters both small (the conjecture that Octa is not the name of Hengest's son, but Hengest's own nickname) and great (making intriguing links to the Horwendil/Feng material of Saxo Grammaticus, of course very famous as the ultimate source material for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) that could well be the subject for another essay. Far from simply filling in the gaps in Tolkien's work, Bliss daringly goes beyond it and revises it. Part of this may stem from, as Anthony Burdge and Jessica Burke note, Bliss already having his own ideas on the subject when he discovered Tolkien's work on the Finnsburg fragment in 1966. Bliss agreed with Tolkien on the referent of *eotenas*. But he was not animated by Tolkien's specific desire to anchor the interpretation in Jutish, and thus possibly Gothic, identity. Bliss used scrupulous scholarly observation to get at the imaginative core of an archival text.

Although Bliss's view of Hengest as Anglian might make the story seem *more* nationalistic, by linking Hengest to the very name from which "England" derives, it is the Jutes/Geats/Goths connection that has the potential to tether the story to a racist, Teutonic essentialism. Bliss's distancing of Hengest from being a Jute, and thus perhaps a Geat, and thus perhaps a Goth, makes him 'merely' English, and denuded of larger racial overtones.

Unlike the stress on abstract drama of Tolkien's legendarium and *Beowulf*, *Finn and Hengest* privileges the minutiae of history over the abstract thrill of facing evil at its core. If one were to distill anything abstract out of the Finnsburg fragment and episode, it would only be a point about treachery, rancor, and acrimony and the brittleness of alliances forged amid desperation. But, in its desire to animate history imaginatively, Tolkien's work in *Finn and Hengest* was closer to the legendarium than to the scholarship of "The Monsters and the Critics." As Thomas Honegger has pointed out, in his early *Book of Lost Tales* material, Tolkien included Hengest, as Eriol's son, in the "framework intended to provide the explanation for the transmission of the legendarium" (Honegger 210) from the fictional worlds of the *Silmarillion* to England. Hengest thus bore the burden of being the link between lore and legend, fact and fantasy. To do this, Tolkien has to render Hengest as a Jute as Jutes are plausible as a mystical link between England and the Continent. Bliss, by making Hengest

an Anglian, casts him, notwithstanding his undoubted charisma, as prosaically English.

As Burdge and Burke say, Tolkien, while agreeing to hand over his notes to Bliss as early as 1966, wished to “organize” (Burdge and Burke 67) his notes, and had not done so by his death in 1973. This suggests that Tolkien wanted to revise the work, but lacked time or scope (especially given the pressure to complete the *Silmarillion*) to do so. Whether or not this is so, and grating that Tolkien taught this material as late as 1963 when he substituted for C. L. Wrenn at Oxford, the *Finn and Hengest* material at its core significantly preserves a residue of early Tolkien, “from the years between 1928 and 1937” (Burdge and Burke 67) and not the Tolkien of the later work. Alan Bliss’s intervention, via Appendix C, in *Finn and Hengest* can be said to save this early Tolkien from himself. Bliss gives us a tableau where links to the English and more remote Germanic past are cherished but which is content with tantalizing and at times ironic hints. Bliss’s editorial works gives us something akin to the fascinating, tantalizing, but hardly univocal world of Tolkien’s legendarium, and his “sellic” reading of Beowulf.

3. Geats, Jutes, Goths—Rohirrim?

Christine Chism has seen Tolkien’s work in the late 1940s as turning away from nationalist mythology in the wake of Nazi Germany’s “mobilizing and recasting” (Chism 64) of Germanic origins. There is nothing in Tolkien’s Finnsburg lectures that is racist, Aryanist, or even Teutonic. There is simply a sense of latent pride in English origins. But the way *Finn and Hengest* parades of a link between England and to the continental Germanic exudes a different mien than Tolkien’s other scholarly and fictional work. Tolkien in “The Monsters and the Critics,” and in the legendarium, suggests a more indirect English, relation to Germanic origins, one shorn of any idea of a transnational master race that overly associative comparisons to the Goths tended to conjure.

Tolkien valued the few traces scholars could find about these early histories. But he did not idealize them beyond reason, and he had precedent for this. The nineteenth century writer who knew the most about the Goths, and was very important to Tolkien, William Morris, knew enough about the Goths *not* to lionize them or see them as proto-English. Indeed, Morris referred to the Goths more than once as ‘dastards’ (e. g. Morris 85, 137, 180) in his *House of the Wolfings*.

Nor do the Rohirrim just stand as fictional analogues for a direct Gothic/English linkage. The Rohirrim, in their distinct yet friendly cultural

relation to Gondor, are more Lombards, in that Lombards were more permanently Southern, and converted to Catholicism on their own, and somewhat, as Tolkien put it, “on Byzantine principles” (Murray 879). The history of the Rohirrim with respect to Gondor is more out of Paul the Deacon, the historian of the Lombards, than Jordanes, the historian of the Goths. In other words, the Rohirrim do not have a tragic ending after Gondor defeats them, rather gradually becoming more like Gondor over the centuries, enacting the convergence between what Faramir calls “Middle Peoples” (IT 323t and their higher counterparts. But this convergence is very gradual and has not yet occurred around the time of the action of the war of the Ring. This is so even if one sees Éowyn’s marriage to Faramir as a unifying marriage, a “history with a happy ending” (Goffart 68) such as Jordanes, overoptimistically, saw in the marriage of Matasuntha and Germanus at the end of his *Getica*. Gothic origins might inform the depiction of the Rohirrim, but are not at the absolute base of them. Tolkien leaves it far more open in terms of relation to actual early European history. This is reflected in how primordial Hobbit and Rohirric origins are left remote and indefinite.

What Tolkien called the “disaster” (Murray 879) of the Ostrogoths remaining Arian, chronicled by Jordanes, meant that the Gothic language would never be crystallized into Tolkien called a “vernacular liturgy” (Murray 879) outside of Latin. The Ostrogoths took a Southern road. This sundered them from their putative Northern relatives, the Geats, into a contact with the Greco-Roman world that devoured them. English culture, conversely, began with only a memory of *eald enta geweorc* (Shippey 25) and a fresh relationship with a very different Rome, that of Catholic Christianity.

This lack of a single origin is reflected in Tolkien’s legendarium. Tolkien maintained silence about Hobbit origins, other than there being a connection with the East. That the Rohirrim knew of the Hobbits in some way does indicate a link. But it is a remote link. Théoden did not know of *Holbyltan* because his ancestors of the House of Eorl had encountered them in Rohan; they were the “folk of legend” (TT 177) that the Éothéod had brought *with them* to Calenardhon. The mature Meriadoc Brandybuck may have researched Hobbit-lore in Rohan. Yet if anything concrete was found by him it did not enter between the covers of the Red Book of Westmarch.

As Thomas Honegger points out, when Tolkien first thought of Rohan, he had not fully decided “who the Rohirrim were and on what side they stood” (Honegger 120). Tolkien eventually arrived at a very positive, indeed exemplary valuation of the Rohirrim. But they remained an “archetype” (Honegger 127) of “different and different manifestations”

(Honegger 127) of actual Germanic people. They were not deliberately implanted as a real-world analogue. One size did not fit all in historical terms, and Tolkien knew that in considering historical bases for the Rohirrim.

Drout says that Tolkien wanted, for aesthetic reasons, to identify Jutes, Geats, and Goths, even though it was not a historical reality. Earlier commentators went as far (see Scott 5) as to identify the Goths with the *Getae* attested to by imperial Roman historians, although as Christensen points out (Christensen 51) St. Augustine of Hippo was rightly skeptical of this attribution. Even more of a stretch is identifying the Goths with the Guti referred to in ancient Mesopotamian records (see Oppert 9, 12). This was a clearly racialized gesture, as the Guti were invaders for a brief interval who brought down Akkadian and Sumerian civilization, just as the Goths did for the Romans. But these occasions were separated by over two millennia. Thus there were no grounds for equations such as Oppert's beyond the merely phonic and a Eurocentric desire to find white master races all over space and time.

What Jacqueline Stuhmiller calls the desire to turn an "incomprehensible jumble of allusions and free-floating pronouns into a story which is neat and compact" (Stuhmiller 10) is a natural interpretive urge. But this urge turns sour when harnessed to racial or nationalist agendas. After a point, these speculations about *eotenas*, Jutes, Geats, Goths, *Getae*, and even Guti become more about sonic resemblance and not historical identity or lineage. They turn into a game of linguistic happenstance and racial wish-fulfillment. Jutes, Goths, Geats, *Getae*, Guti bounce around like billiard balls of desired signification, as European racialists "tried desperately...to equate similar-sounding names without full empirical warrant" (Birns 15). Tolkien, writing amid the skepticism about Teutonic energies and general epistemic chastening of twentieth-century modernity, was not wont to succumb to these heedless speculations even as potential galvanizing connections intrigued him. The closest he came was in the link that identifying the *eotenas* as Jutes made between English and continental invaders.

It must be emphasized that it is not necessarily tendentious, although speculative and racially idealizing, to identify the Geats with the Goths, as the sixth-century historian Jordanes (Jordanes 55-57) did link the Goths to a primeval Scandinavian origin. But the Jutes, on the other side of the Danes than the Geats, are differentiated from them both by geography and by the different name, *eotenas* as compared to *geatas*, used for them in *Beowulf*. Tolkien, in his legendarium, felt free to calque the Goths when he needed them, as in the forerunners of the Rohirrim in Rhovanion who have Gothic

names. But he did not base any genealogies of identity on a deep substrate of Gothic origins.

Christopher Tolkien observed in *Unfinished Tales* that names such as Vidugavia and Vidumavi are Gothic. But Christopher connected the Gothic to early Englishness only in the most cautious of terms. Christopher simply referred to Gothic as "the earliest recorded Germanic language" (*UT* 311) without claiming any closer lineal or ancestral relation between the two tongues. It is notable in this respect that it was Christopher's hypothesis, in a 1955 talk attended by his father, that 'Attila' was Gothic for 'little father' and thus the name of Attila the Hun was Gothic—a quite consequential conjecture to anyone who is interested in the Goths and the Huns, that occasioned one of his father's more salient professional self-delineations. J. R. R. Tolkien defines himself as a "pure philologist" who values history the most for how it "throws light on words and names" (*Letters* 264). Christopher's intriguing conjecture foregrounded how much Gothic culture and language even colored the world of the Goths' Hunnic opponents, overlords, and oppressors, and made both the Gothic and Hunnic interaction with the Romans more complex. Yet his father was more fascinated by a purely linguistic effect. This is not to say that the migrations and invasions of the Goths in the fifth century did not intrigue the senior Tolkien, and influenced the fictional political tableau of *The Lord of the Rings*. Judy Ann Ford and Sandra Straubhaar have argued for the profound relevance of continental barbarian history and the fall of the Roman Empire in the West to Tolkien's narrative tableau, building in some respects on the brilliant conjectures of T. A. Shippey.

Yet Tolkien, when listening to Christopher's talk just after *The Lord of the Rings* was published, felt tracking histories meant less than hearkening to language. This is very much the Tolkien of "The Monsters and The Critics." But it is not so much the Tolkien of *Finn and Hengest*, who seems to have a far more positive investment in primordial English history. Christopher used very cautious language about the Gothic names of the Rhovanion forerunners of the Rohirrim. He discerned an intriguing parallel pattern. But he was not positing an absolute or primal origin.

If Tolkien had wished to make the Rhovanian kings the unequivocal linear ancestors of the Rohirrim, as the Arthedain kings are the unequivocally direct ancestors of Aragorn, he could have. But he interposed the intermediate kingdom of Éothéod between them. He thus imposes a scrim of temporal change and demographic and historical variation between the Rhovanion folk and the Rohirrim. This mirrored the way his reading of *Beowulf* ended up putting between the Goths and the English. The Rohirrim resemble early English, with the "obvious difference"

(Shippey 123) of being horse-people and, consequently, of living on a totally un-English terrain. But they do not particularly resemble Goths.

By the time he created the Rohirrim, Tolkien had given up a search for cathartic connections between insular and continental. This meant a tacit acknowledgment that Geats and Goths were now (as Tolkien might have put it) sundered, and the Jutes who became English were never Geats or Goths. What Lobdell called the “Coleridgean feeling intellect” (Lobdell 65) of Tolkien’s, when applied to Northern, Germanic themes, can be nourishing and aesthetically moving. But it also has the potential to lapse into what Helen Young calls “essentializing logics of racial difference” (Young 23). Tolkien knew this. In declaring, to his anti-Semitic German publisher, that it was in England that the “noble northern spirit” (*Letters* 56) was earliest “sanctified and Christianized,” Tolkien was stressing his own distance from such racialist views.

By the time he created the Rohirrim in the 1940s, Tolkien felt that 1) Nazi ideology had misappropriated the Germanic past, and 2) that this past was best appreciated in its specifically English manifestation, sealed off from more portentous continental misinterpretations. Even if Geats, Goths, and, more tendentiously, Jutes, were once identical, the working of history and migration subjected them to a process that worked, to adopt the linguistic model proposed by that same Coleridge, “progressively to desynonymize” (Coleridge 201).

As much as some might desire history to be direct and clear-cut, it is far more often granular and hard to stitch together. One of the reasons Tolkien’s feigned history is so effective is that this granularity is acknowledged. Tolkien could observe this principle as well in the history that was the background for his philological work. The most convincing date for the historical setting of the Finnsburg fragment is 452 AD. This is just one year after the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, between Goths, Romans, and Attila’s Huns, The Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, as Shippey has so eloquently shown (Shippey 12), informs the Battle of the Pelennor Fields in *The Return of the King*. But the two battles of Finnsburg and the Catalaunian Plains, seem however temporally close, worlds apart. The Finnsburg strife is minor and peripheral, distanced from the world-historical significance of the larger battle to the southeast. Alan Bliss’s seeing Hengest as an Angle means that Hengest would not have had a dynastic pedigree stemming from renowned continental barbarians. Hengest would instead be, as portrayed in the Finnsburg episode and fragment, a man who worked his way up into power: charismatic, opportunistic, more than capable of seizing authority among men not originally his kin.

Bliss's Hengest maintains a distinction between Northern cultures, England, Frisia, and Scandinavia, which solidified in the aftermath of Rome's collapse but had no direct hand in it, and the barbarian invaders such as the Goths who became far more explicitly involved with the dissolving Roman state. There are important consequences of to this distinction. There are other circumstances in Tolkien where a connection between England and the Continent is cosmopolitan or even liberalizing. This is seen in how the Hobbits of the Shire have grown attitudinally after they have been exposed to Rohan or Gondor. But with respect to the Goths, to tie early English history to the continental barbarians is to court the danger of Aryanism and the erection of a master-race narrative. In "The Monsters and the Critics" and the depiction of Rohirric and Hobbit origins in the legendarium, Tolkien crucially shied away from any master-race narrative. This shying-away was in tandem with Tolkien's later demurrer from what Miryam Librán-Moreno calls his early, *Lost Tales*-era belief that the "Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians" (Librán-Moreno 108) had "a direct knowledge and perception of the Elves."

This direct knowledge became portentous and organicist when linked to the Goths who invaded Rome and became figures in Roman history. So if these links are downplayed, the tableau of both *Beowulf* and the Finnsburg material becomes, however paradoxically, liberated into the periphery. This would, for the Tolkien of "The Monsters and the Critics," open the door for the moving, primal and archetypal. Far from being a master race who conquered famous southern peoples, the Germanic tribes portrayed in these works were weak and fractious. Hengest eventually leads an invasion of Celtic Britain. But if he behaved in as sanguinary and underhanded a way towards the Celts as he did in the *Freswael*, he is no conquering hero. He is not even a warrior with integrity of the caliber of Beowulf.

Indeed, in the wake of what ensued at Finnsburg, one can see why the likely-unhistorical King Arthur is so much more famous than the likely-historical Hengest. Moreover, whereas King Arthur fights off Saxons, Beowulf monsters and dragons, Hengest only kills Hnaef, a being "of the same sort" (*UT* 357) as Tolkien has Gandalf say of Gollum's relation to Bilbo. Leonard Neidorf cogently observes that the fragment assumes "familiarity" (Neidorf 1) with Hengest as a quasi-legendary figure. But it certainly does not lionize him as a culture hero. Tolkien's early sense of Hengest as a culture hero led him to solidify Hengest's identity as a Jute by his reading of *eotenas* as Jutes. But Bliss's more skeptical sense of Hengest is corollary with his ability to accept a not-Jutish, less organic, Anglian ancestry for Hengest.

There is a temptation to stretch the signification of the Goths beyond where it actually occurs on the historical record. In a sparsely documented and obscure, yet vitally important era, one replete with fragmentary testimony and what Anna Smol has called “riddling voices,” (Smol 239) the Goths operate as a convenient metonym for a lot of other groups, as the Goths are far better known than many of them. In other words, there is a tendency in *Finn and Hengest* for reasons of aesthetic idealization to forge connections between peoples that in historical reality may not have been that closely connected. Conversely, the anthesis of this, an admission of the disconnection of Goths, Geats, and Jutes, constitutes aesthetic de-idealization. In “The Monsters and the Critics” and in the tracings of Hobbit origins in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien was engaging in this manner of aesthetic de-idealization, although not without some haunting by anterior idealizations.

Tolkien did not idealize in *Finn and Hengest*. This was despite his defense of the “gallant defense” (*FH* 66) Hengest exhibited at Finnsburg and of the ‘heroic traditions’ (*FH* 66) that arose from them. But Tolkien nonetheless fossicked through the Hengest material to try to find a meaningful, enabling ethnic identity. If we accept the dating proposed by Bliss, the original core *Finn and Hengest* comes from the 1920s, the decade where Tolkien had a greater organic and palpable sense of Englishness in his works, and, even though Tolkien revised his thoughts later, precedes the Tolkien of “The Monsters and the Critics” and *The Lord of the Rings*. But even in the translation/commentary on *Beowulf*, also from the 1920s, we see skepticism about the poem’s historicity. This is not evident in Tolkien’s contemporaneous approach to the Finnsburg material. Drout suggests there are two different strains in Tolkien’s makeup. There is Tolkien the dreamer who wished for a closer connection between peoples, stories, and events. But there is also what Drout terms Tolkien the “hard-nosed scholar” (Drout 238) who knew he would be veering away from the truth.

This latter, ‘hard-nosed’ Tolkien is quite evident in his own fictional worlds. In his account of the proto-history of the Rohirrim, Tolkien, in his fictional analogue of the Germanic past, shows a willingness to accept some disjuncture. Marhwini, King of the Éothéod, is said to have been a descendant of the Rhovanion king, Vidugavia. Fram, the last attested King of the Éothéod before Leod, father of Eorl, is a descendant of Marhwini. Yet Leod is never said to have certifiably been a descendant of Fram, even though they are both kings of the Éothéod. Tolkien’s carefully chosen phrase is that the “forefathers of Eorl claimed descent” (*RK* 379) from the Rhovanion kings. The same phrase “claimed descent” is used two pages later (*RK* 381) to describe the decidedly dubious descent of Freca from

King Fréawine. In a narrative that has no compunction about depicting the certifiable descent of Aragorn even in dispossession from Arvedui, the lack of a direct Fram-Leod link is suggestive of Tolkien's desire to leave the direct descent of Aragorn unrivaled among men. But it also makes the links between crypto-Goths and crypto-English slightly less direct, and thus less organic.

One suspects that the Rhovanion pedigree of the House of Eorl is much like Tolkien's speculation (*Letters* 347), along a roughly similar timescale, that Shield Sheafing was the ancestor of Queen Elizabeth II. This testifies to a fundamental idea of continuity. But it is hardly a firm matter of historical record. It is notable that the *Sindarin* word, Rhovanion, is used of Vidugavia's land, and he is said to have "called himself... king of Rhovanion" (*RK* 357). In other words, even Vidugavia used the *Sindarin* name Rhovanion, and not the name 'translated' to us as Wilderland. "Wilderland" is not just very English but very Teutonic, which, given that the '-der' in that word is cognate with Swedish *djur*, modern German *tier*, Gothic *dius*, all denoting wild animals. The use of the *Sindarin* "Rhovanion" distances the Wilderland terrain from a directly available, pan-Germanic and organic past.

The revelation of Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings* that the early-European names of the Hobbits, dwarves, and Rohirrim are just analogous substitutes for the real thing(s), is, as Drout points out, a surprise to the reader. It is not likely that the main reason for the revelation of Appendix F was to distance the text from a search for Teutonic origins. By the time he wrote the Appendix, Tolkien had come to see the world of the legendarium as far more connected to what John Rateliff calls "mythic prehistory" (Rateliff 67) than the linear connection, through mediatorial figures such as Aelfwine/Eriol, that, as Verlyn Flieger has suggested, he had, years before, decided to shelve. One could say, though, that the radical disidentification from the real (Germanic, proto-English) world made by Appendix F might have said to begin, in its shying-away from ethnic affirmation or identity, in 1936 with "The Monsters and the Critics." It is far more in that vein than the culture-hero of *Finn and Hengest*, whose links to anterior continental barbarians make him somewhat of a magnet for ideologically loaded ethnic affirmations.

4. The Angles of Hobbit Origin

How does Tolkien's sense of English origins to the internal origin of the Hobbits as chronicled in *The Lord of the Rings*? Gandalf finds a "warm place" (*UT* 335) in his heart for Hobbits in the wake of the Long Winter of Third Age 2758-9 in Middle-earth. One can conjecture that the Finnsburg

winter, with adversaries penned up together in uneasy truce, lies behind the Long Winter, which like the Finnsburg one was far more than a “quadripartite” (*FH* 118) winter. More specifically, there is the episode in Helm’s Deep during the Long Winter. Here, Helm Hammerhand withstanding and perishing against the *faux*-Rohirric “dark-haired” (*RK* 429) Freca who in fact identified as a Dunlending, owes a more specific debt to the Hengest of the *Freswael*, Suggestively, the treacherous Freca us cast in the role of Hengest as instigator of “the human drama of feud” (Hurley 157). Thus, as so often with Tolkien, small textual borrowings can have massive import.

Shippey, in 1982, likened the two Hobbit-founders, Marcho and Blanco, to Hengest and Horsa, in that both sets of brothers have horse-names. Shippey further noted that both Hobbits and early English “came from somewhere else, namely the Angle, in Europe between Finnsburg Fjord and the Schlei, in Middle-earth between Hoarwell and Ludwater” (Shippey 102). The image of Hengest in Marcho the Hobbit (one assumes Marcho is Hengest, Blanco his brother Horsa) and the fainter echo of Hengest in the underhanded Freca, makes Hengest far less of a proto-nationalist culture hero than he emerges in *Finn and Hengest*. The Marcho-Blanco dyad also brings up the absence of Hengest’s brother Horsa in the *Finn and Hengest* material. As Christopher Vaccaro argues, though, one need not nail Tolkien’s material down to “formal, source-specific interpretations” (Vaccaro 1). Thus these comparisons are not proof of a distillable attitude towards early European history in the legendarium. Rather, they express a general stance against an excessive hankering for determinate origins.

When Merry and Pippin meet Théoden in *The Two Towers*, they recognize a striking affinity between Hobbits and Rohirrim, despite their different sizes and long-sundered tongues. What *exactly* this relation is, we never find out. There is no sense of an ethnogenesis (to use the term popularized with respect to the Goths by Herwig Wolfram) of the Hobbits. They are a people who do not have an explicit origin-story: no Cuiviénen, Hildórien, or Aulë’s workshop. But Hobbit-origins are there only in general patterns of migration, transit, and difference. But these are nearly emptied of a historical meaning. They are visible only in glimpses. It is a far cry from Eriol/Aelfwine of the *Lost Tales* material and his hinge role between English and Elvish pasts.

Tolkien renders the Stoors the least “shy of Men” (*FR* 13), the Harfoots having much to do with Dwarves” (*FR* 13), and the Fallohides “friendly with elves” (*FR* 13) This speaks to how Hobbits are hybrid forms of other races Tolkien had already invented. They are always-already hybrid. As Sonali Chunodkar has observed, the Harfoots are “browner of

skin, darker, shorter” (*FR* 4). There is also a vague analogy to the three Germanic peoples who manifested themselves in Britain in the fifth century. The Fallohides are most like Jutes in their small number of associations with the highest cultural influence (as the Jutes being the first to receive Christianity from Rome made them). The Stoors are most like Saxons in having a notable component left behind (the Saxons of German Saxony, the Stoors of Gollum’s people). The Harfoots are the basic staple of the new people just as the Angles—certainly so in the west Midlander Tolkien’s estimation—were of England.

The Anglians, as Shippey notes, came from the continental Angle. But there are *two* Angles in Middle-earth. There is the Angle between Hoarwell and Loudwater from which the Hobbits hailed. There is, though, also Egladil, the Angle which is the heart of Lórien. The term is used twice in a cartographic (Shippey 96-103) frame generally concerned to avoid doubling. Furthermore, “Angle” is a word that has the seed of “England” in it. This conjunction is suggestive. The later Tolkien has eschewed the figure of Eriol as a mediatorial figure between the English and the Eldar. The Hobbits, equally, are mainly distant from Elves, as is shown by the awe and/or fear that non-Fallohide Hobbits have of the remaining Eldar. But that the name ‘Angle’ is used for both the Hobbits’ old home *and* the Elvish fairyland of Lórien is suggestive. The most aristocratic strain among the Hobbits, the Fallohides, is said to be like the Elves. This may be a fugitive vestige of a closer connection that the text manifestly renounces but is tantalizingly hinted at in the name “Angle.” Two sets of Jutes at Finnsburg threatens to overly yoke island and continent, England and the Germanic. Yet, conversely, the two Angles in *The Lord of the Rings* tear away from this organic linkage, even while they also distantly image it as an object of desire.

The three Hobbit peoples also parallel the three houses of the Eldar. The Fallohides are like the Vanyar. They are prestigious, few, rare, and remote. The Noldor are like the Stoors. They are curious and ingenious, but they probe around where they perhaps should not. The Teleri are like the Harfoots. They are the default expression of the conventional opinion with respect to the overall group. The Jutes in early English history are, analogously, like the Vanyar in the history of the Eldar, revered, remote, primordial, and not actually seen much. In this analogy, the Saxons and Angles slide rather easily into the roles of Noldor and Teleri. This analogy, intended as illustrative rather than probative, does show how, when Tolkien sees Jutes on both sides in the battle between the king of Denmark and Frisia, he is thinking not just of continental Jutes as the ancestors of the people who later settled Kent. He is conceiving Jutes as the highest, and

most remote of a triad of peoples. They might not be giants. But they do represent a hankering on the author's part for a concrete link to a past that, elsewhere, he accepts as more fragmented and discontinuous.

This alignment of the Jutes, Fallohides, and Vanyar is perhaps what Tolkien was aiming at in his mythology-for-England model. This model, as Michael Martinez has pointed out, is only seen in Tolkien's "earlier work" (Martinez n. p.). The wish for alignment also occurs in the 'eotenas on both sides model' and what Drout sees as Tolkien's furtive wish that the Jutes were Geats and maybe even Goths. But the later Tolkien elevates monsters over Geats, Danes, and Swedes. As foregrounded by Flieger's title, he dropped the Eriol saga for Atlantis. There emerged a divergence, a pluralism. This is heightened in *The Lord of the Rings* by there being two Angles in the geography of the Anduin valley, and the fairy Angle of Lórien not in fact being the source of the Hobbits. These two Angles, in their anti-nationalism, atone for the proto-nationalism of two sets of eotenas in *Finn and Hengest*. Alan Bliss's gesture in making Hengest an Anglian contributes to this possibility of disidentification. That a ruler can be "of a different stock" (FH 169) than their people, contributes to what Bliss calls the "ambiguous" (FH 178) testimony of the historical record on Hengest. It underlies the plausible "hypothesis that Hengest was an Angle" (FH 178).

Though we have no direct evidence that Alan Bliss read *The Lord of the Rings*, a sly wink to the legendarium reader can be discerned in Bliss's conjecture that the "most striking link of all" between the horse-nicknames of Hengest and Horsa and Anglian (rather than Jutish) dynasts "is to be found in the name of *Eomaer*. Hengest's Mercian contemporary, *Eomaer* means "famous horse" (FH 178). The link to the famous horse-name of Éomer, Théoden's sister-son in Tolkien's legendarium, is evident. Indeed, Bliss's observation that, in both Hengest and Eomaer, there was "a temporary fashion in the royal families of the Angles for horse-nicknames" (FH 178) is a waggish nod at this manifest intertextuality.

For Bliss, Hengest is an important historical figure, but not a culture hero as he is for the Tolkien of *Finn and Hengest*. But by the time he wrote *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien seems to align himself with the position later taken by Bliss. Marcho and Blanco are parodic figures, more out of Seller and Yeatman's *1066 And All That* than out of a heroic charter myth. They do not seem to play a role in the life of the Shire folk other than as a quaint genealogical *mathom*. As founders, their profile is far lower and more marginal than the Eorl who is mentioned nearly continuously by the Rohirrim or the Elendil who is an object of awe and reverence in Gondor even in the days of the Stewards. The relationship of Hobbits to English people is often to poke fun at, or to regard in jest, histories and core traits of

the English. Paradoxically, this practice puts Hobbits into the realm of the fey, the charming, and the curious—in other words, if quite indirectly, more in the world of the Celt than of the Anglo-Saxon. They certainly do not buttress a direct rhetoric of national origin.

I do not want to be over-insistent here. It might be satisfying to see a post-1939 Tolkien, chastened by the exploitation of the rhetoric of Teutonic origins by Nazi Germany, dedicating himself to building a high wall of formal distancing between his own legendarium and any cathected story of the Germanic past. Yet the fairly evident desire for origins displayed by *Finn and Hengest*, manifesting what Maria Sachiko Cecire calls an “investment” (Cecire 62) in a vision of the storied past, continues in a more subtle and filtered way through his later oeuvre. The Hobbits have Rohirric (and therefore quasi-early English) connections on the one side but, in territorial terms, Sindar (and therefore quasi- Welsh) connections on the other. If Bliss is right about Hengest, the Kent-ruling Oiscingas were an Anglian dynasty ruling over Jutes much like the Fallohides “found as leaders of chieftains among clans of Harfoots or Stools” (FR 14). To see the ancestors of the English as fairy people is in operative terms less likely to hallow the English than it is to foreground their Celtic cultural inheritance. Thus, as Dimitra Fimi suggests (Fimi 156), Edward Crankshaw’s discernment of a Celtic strand in the *Silmarillion* material was not wrong, and indeed is avowed by Tolkien in his comparison of Sindarin to Welsh.

But the connection, through the two Angles in the geography of Middle-earth, that the Hobbits might have not just to Rhovanion and the Rohirrim but to Lórien, has, within Tolkien’s represented world, the danger of elevating English origins to the high and reverend level of the Eldar. That there are two different Angles leaves the Hobbits as prosaic and “fallible” (FH 4). By distancing the Hoarwell Angle from the Silverlode Angle, Tolkien splits off the Hobbits from the Elves, in a very different mien than that of the *Book of Lost Tales*-era material where a connection between Elvishness and proto-Englishness was palpable. But by having two places called the Angle, Tolkien did raise the specter of that proximity to high-faerie. The Hobbits are mostly prosaic analogues of ordinary people, but not always. Christopher Clausen sees Théoden’s recognition of the Hobbits as shaking *Théoden* “out of his provinciality” (Clausen 94) as Théoden recognizes the Hobbits as figures from ancient folk tales even as the Hobbits seem to the reader more modern than Théoden’s own Rohirrim. There is a shade of the cultural pull of Hengest here. But only a shade.

Conclusion

To sum up: in Bliss's emendation of Tolkien's views on Hengest, and in the Hobbits of Tolkien's invented worlds, we find the following parallels: The Hobbits are not overly associated with a more prestigious master race. Similarly, the English are not overly associated with a more prestigious master race.' The Hobbits are "fallible human beings" (*FH* 4) for whom Tolkien might have "affection" (*Letters* 376) but are really no better than anyone else. Similarly, the English are "fallible human beings" for whom Tolkien might have "affection" but are really no better than anyone else. There are no claims that they are better or more major than they are beyond the author's own predilection.

The peoples described as most like the English at different strategies of history—the Hobbits and Rohirrim—have pasts that sometimes seem directly accessible, and (in Goodman's term) autographic. But at other times they are more opaque and lost in the mists of time. Tolkien's deployment of the angles of Hobbit origins solicit both these aspects. But ultimately they tend towards the opaque, the indirect, the (in Goodman's term) allographic: in the end being the more human and fallible.

Whether or not Jutes were on both sides in the fight at Finnsburg, in Tolkien's legendarium, the qualities associated with their leader Hengest are on both sides of an constitutive divide between history and fantasy. Tolkien recognized that the same person could both produce and discern history and fantasy in texts. He believed that both history and fantasy were of value. But, in both his creative and philological work, he mostly avoided the mistake of conflating them.

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