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## The Great Tales Never End: Essays in Memory of Christopher Tolkien (2022), edited by Richard Ovenden and Catherine McIlwaine

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*The Great Tales Never End: Essays in Memory of Christopher Tolkien*, edited by Richard Ovenden and Catherine McIlwaine. Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022. 232 pages. £40 (hardcover, published 24 June 2022); \$65 (distributed in the US by the University of Chicago Press, published 2 September 2022) ISBN 9781851245659.

Christopher Tolkien stands alone in the pantheon of Tolkien scholarship. Indeed, one cannot really refer to Christopher as a “Tolkien scholar” because he was so much more than that: without his immense efforts only a small fraction of his father’s works would be known to us, and even the material published during his lifetime, including his great masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings* has been brought into greater focus as a result of Christopher’s efforts (as one of the essays discussed below does a masterful job of showing). As such, a book dedicated to his memory is an important milestone in Tolkien studies, and the expectation is that such a book would meet extremely high standards. To a large extent, *The Great Tales Never End* meets those lofty expectations. However, in some ways it falls short.

Edited by Richard Ovenden (Bodley’s Librarian—i.e., the head of the Bodleian Library, the main library at the University of Oxford, which was named in honor of its founder, Sir Thomas Bodley) and Catherine McIlwaine, the Tolkien Archivist at the Bodleian, *Great Tales* contains essays by some of the most prominent Tolkien scholars: Tom Shippey, Verlyn Flieger, Carl F. Hostetter, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, John Garth, Brian Sibley, Stuart D. Lee and Vincent Ferré. Also included is the eulogy given at Christopher’s funeral by poet and longtime friend Maxime H. Pascal, translated from the French into English by Christopher’s widow, Baillie Tolkien, and a short but lovely remembrance by his sister, Priscilla Tolkien. The book is also full of numerous illustrations and photographs, many never seen before, though some are recycled from other previously published works.

When examining a book of this nature, it is necessary to look through at least two different prisms: both how it fares generally as Tolkien scholarship and specifically as a book in honor of and in memory of the great Christopher Tolkien. Because of the nature of the book, it can also be seen as a third way: as an art book in the tradition of *Pictures by J.R.R Tolkien*, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, *The Art of The Hobbit*, and *The Art of The Lord of the Rings* (the former edited by Christopher and the latter three all edited by Hammond and Scull). Viewed through each of these prisms, *Great Tales* reaches great heights, but also falls short in some ways. The quality of the essays included in the book is somewhat variable, though the highs are very high indeed (as would be expected from the contributors

included), and the new artwork and photographs included are a joy to see. The overall production is of a very high level. However, the amount of new content included in the book is relatively sparse for such an important publication.

By way of comparison, the previous festschrift produced in Christopher's honor, *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on the History of Middle-earth* (edited by Flieger and Hostetter) had a total of fourteen essays, plus a bibliography by Douglas A. Anderson and the Introduction written by the editors. In contrast, *Great Tales* has only eight, plus McIlwaine's Introduction and the Bibliography credited to her (which largely tracks Anderson's previous bibliography up to the point that that book had been produced), in addition to the eulogy, and Priscilla's short remembrance. I would imagine that some of the other individuals who contributed to *Tolkien's Legendarium* would have been happy to contribute to a new volume in Christopher's honor. Those contributors include Charles E. Noad (who is thanked by Christopher in almost every volume of *The History of Middle-earth*), John D. Rateliff (who is also thanked by Christopher in several of those volumes), David Bratman, Marjorie Burns, Joe R. Christopher, Christopher Gilson, Arden R. Smith, Patrick Wynne, and several others. There are also numerous other prominent scholars such as Michael D.C. Drout, Dimitra Fimi, Janet Brennan Croft, John Wm. Houghton, and Jason Fisher (just to name a few) who could have provided valuable contributions. The recent festschrift for Shippey, *Tolkien in the New Century* (co-edited by Houghton, Croft, Rateliff, Nancy Martsch and Robin Anne Reid), has 21 essays, and the one edited in honor of Flieger, *A Wilderness of Dragons* (edited by Rateliff), has 22 essays and remembrances. I understand why the essays in a book of this nature would be by invitation only, rather than putting out a general call for papers, but I would have liked to have seen a wider net cast. In addition, by all accounts that I have heard from those who knew him, Christopher was a man of immense wit, humor and generosity, and it would have been nice to have had more remembrances of those qualities included in the book. Other than some material included in the Introduction, the eulogy and Priscilla's short remembrance, the only other content of that nature is a very brief but welcome note at the end of Hostetter's fine essay.

If one places the hard cover volumes of *Tolkien's Legendarium* and *Great Tales* side-by-side, they appear to be the same size, but that is a false impression. A calculation of the total word count of *Great Tales* would likely be not much more than half that of its predecessor. Between the extraordinarily wide and unjustified right margins and the reprints (some quite large) of artwork already published in other works (at least three from the *Father Christmas Letters*, four from *The Hobbit*, one from *The Lord of the Rings*, four from *The Tolkien Family Album*, and a number

from *Artist and illustrator*), *Great Tales* gives the impression of being, to quote Bilbo, “sort of stretched ... like butter that has been scraped over too much bread” (*Lord of the Rings*, I.1.37).

McIlwaine states in her Introduction that “This volume was planned as a festschrift, a collection of essays in honour of Christopher Tolkien” (22). She goes on to note that “Sadly events overtook us and the volume is now published in memory of Christopher and in appreciation of his immensely valuable work on his father’s literary papers over many decades” (*ibid.*). As such, it is likely that (other than the eulogy and perhaps Priscilla’s remembrance) the contributions were written while Christopher was still alive. As McIlwaine says, “the main intention was always that Christopher himself would enjoy reading them” (*ibid.*).

McIlwaine states of the essays in the book “Many chose to explore Christopher’s contribution to our understanding of the whole legendarium while others took the opportunity to illuminate previously dark corners in the field of Tolkien studies” (*ibid.*). Setting aside the fact that “many” is a bit of a misnomer when the total number of essays is relatively few, this statement does provide a convenient way of classifying the contributions in the book. Hostetter’s and Ferré’s papers are firmly in the former category, and Hammond and Scull’s piece also has a significant focus on Christopher’s contribution regarding his map-making efforts that were so invaluable to his father’s completion of *The Lord of the Rings*. While the essays of Flieger, Shippey, Lee and Sibley unambiguously fall into the latter category, as alluded to above, Flieger’s piece serves to help show how important Christopher’s labors have been to understanding the enormous scope of his father’s achievement, and Shippey’s feels very much like something that Christopher would have enjoyed reading, written as it is from a perspective that Shippey has in common with both Christopher Tolkien and his father. The essay by Garth falls into a separate category all to its own but could be seen as working to continue Christopher’s work. With the eulogy and Priscilla’s remembrance included, the book is roughly equally divided between material dedicated more to general Tolkien scholarship and matter specifically targeted to be in memory of Christopher Tolkien. While it has value as both, more material bringing Christopher’s vibrant personality to life would have been welcome.

**INTRODUCTION (Catherine McIlwaine), EULOGY (Maxime H. Pascal, Translated from the French by Baillie Tolkien) and A PERSONAL MEMORY (Priscilla Tolkien)**

The book begins very well with McIlwaine's excellent Introduction, in which she gives a clear and detailed summary of Christopher's life, before giving a brief description of the other material included in the book. Particularly moving are the photographs included with this Introduction, beginning with a shot of the three-year-old Christopher asleep with his father in the garden. McIlwaine does a good job of showing the special sympathy shared between J.R.R. and Christopher Tolkien, and the extraordinary care and skill Christopher brought to the daunting task of acting as his father's literary executor of the extraordinarily vast and even more extraordinarily disorganized body of work left behind. As McIlwaine notes, "Alarm was a natural response from a devoted son and a conscientious editor but in fact Christopher was undoubtedly the only person who could have brought his father's legacy to publication so successfully and so faithfully. He had not only the critical academic training in ancient languages and literature but he had inhabited his father's fictional world from his earliest childhood onwards" (8). Appropriately, she ends by quoting "the original hobbit," Rayner Unwin, who stated "'no other author has ever had the advantage of a literary executor with the sympathy, the scholarship, and the humility to devote half a lifetime to the task of unobtrusively giving shape to his own father's creativity. In effect one man's imaginative genius has had the benefit of two lifetimes' work'" (24).

Like any work of poetry, the highly personal eulogy written by poet and longtime family friend Maxime H. Pascal and delivered by her at Christopher's funeral, suffers in translation. Nonetheless, it provides a lovely paean in celebration of a long and very successful life. A nice touch is the inclusion of a photo of a "page from one of Christopher's botanical notebooks, kept meticulously throughout his life, recording 'a particularly fine year for Orchids' in Oxfordshire. July 1964" (28–29). Even more than the words of the poem, this image does a good job of capturing an aspect of Christopher's life and personality not otherwise apparent to readers of the many books of his father's work that he edited.

The inclusion of a full two-page reproduction of the map of Gondor, Rohan and Mordor that Christopher drafted for inclusion in *The Lord of the Rings* between Pascal's eulogy and Priscilla's remembrance of her brother is, frankly, puzzling. It just seems like filler to add to the page count as it is already so familiar to virtually any reader of this book. Moreover, if it were to be included, it would have made more sense to include it along with Hammond and Scull's discussion of that very map, later in the book. More welcome is the lovely photograph of Priscilla and Christopher on her first birthday, when he was five years old, another one of the two of them with their brother Michael in April 1940, and one of his Christopher in his black and gold Fleet Air Arm uniform taken in 1945 (which his father kept

framed on his mantelpiece). As for the remembrance itself, it is lovely to read, but extremely short, though of course Priscilla herself was already in her 90s when she wrote this “Personal Memory” and sadly passed away before the book was published.

### **THE SON BEHIND THE FATHER Christopher Tolkien as a Writer (Vincent Ferré)**

I very much appreciate the spirit of Ferré’s piece, and particularly his attempt to define just how important Christopher’s efforts were to his father’s legacy. However, his description of Christopher as a “writer” does not accurately describes the tasks that Christopher performed, and actually serves to underestimate the true scope of what he accomplished.

One thing that I particularly welcomed was Ferré’s discussion of Christopher’s “voice” in the volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* and the stand-alone editions of the Great Tales *Beren and Luthien* and *The Fall of Gondolin* (59–62). Having that “voice” has always felt to me like having a trusted and familiar guide through the deeply-forested labyrinth that is the history of Tolkien’s legendarium. Much as I appreciate other similar books edited by others such as Hostetter in *The Nature of Middle-earth*, having a different voice guiding through those paths is jarring. I think Ferré does a good job of demonstrating that.

However, Ferré’s characterization of Christopher as a co-writer of *The Silmarillion* is misleading. He begins by noting Christopher’s correction in the Foreword of the first volume of *The History of Middle-earth* of Randal Helm’s statement in *Tolkien and the Silmarils* that “‘*The Silmarillion* in the shape that we have it is the invention of the son not the father” (Helms, 94). That statement was based on Christopher’s simple statement of fact in the Foreword of the published *Silmarillion* that “I set myself therefore to work out a single text, selecting and arranging in such a way as seemed to me to produce the most coherent and internally self-consistent narrative” (*Silmarillion* 7–8). Ferré then pivots to a statement that Christopher made almost forty years later in an interview in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, in which he stated that he thought the book was good “but a little false, in the sense that I had had to invent some passages,” and then described a dream in which he saw his father reading the book and was terrified that his father would see what he had done (55). But I think that Ferré both makes too much and too little of this: too much in that he significantly overstates the amount of actual writing that Christopher did, but too little in that he fails to capture

the astounding task that Christopher (with the help of Guy Kay) accomplished in compiling *The Silmarillion* from almost entirely his father's own words, but from a array of different sources combined together with dizzying complexity.

Ferré first notes Christopher's own words in talking about changes that he made to the "Akallabeth," the "Valaquenta" and elsewhere in the published book. But those changes, which include things like changing tenses, replacing "thou" with "you," or transplanting the order of some words, all into the category of editing, not rewriting (see 56-57). Then he moves on to talk about Chapter 22, "The Ruin of Doriath," and he cites my own statement in *Arda Reconstructed* that the paragraphs "which tell of Húrin's coming to Nargothrond, his slaying of Mím the petty-dwarf . . . are complete editorial inventions"; and that the following paragraphs are respectively 'mostly editorial invention' and 'almost entirely editorial inventions' and that I note "the difference between the plot in J.R.R. Tolkien's manuscript and Christopher [Tolkien]'s solution—to eliminate the gold altogether . . . and to create a whole new history for the Nauglamîr" (64-65). Ferré correctly concludes from this that "Not only one of the key scenes of *The Silmarillion*, but whole sections of this chapter, have been written by Christopher Tolkien" (65; see also Kane 214–15). However, Ferré implies that this is just one of several examples of this type of thing, when in fact it is the only example in the book. The only other portion of the published book that does not almost entirely consist of J.R.R. Tolkien's own words is the first few paragraphs of the next chapter, "Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin" in which Christopher included a brief summary of the abandoned tale that Tolkien wrote in the early 1950s which stops abruptly at the coming of Tuor to Gondolin (see *Silmarillion* 238–39; Kane 221–22).

By overstating how much actual rewriting Christopher did, Ferré misses an opportunity to highlight the complexity of what Christopher did accomplish in creating the one single continuous text that is the published *Silmarillion*. As I write in the Introduction to *Arda Reconstructed*, "One of the most remarkable things that I have noted is how much of the published text really does come from Tolkien's own writings, with inserts that seemed initially to have been inventions of the editors often turning out to have come from some remote other portion of Tolkien's vast body of work. Indeed, as will be seen, there is only one chapter that consists mostly of editorial invention. The tapestry that was woven by Christopher Tolkien and Guy Kay from different portions of Tolkien's work is often quite mindboggling" (Kane 24-25).

As noted in that passage, Christopher was assisted in this task by Guy Kay, who went on to become a celebrated fantasy writer in his own right (as Guy Gavriel

Kay), but Ferré fails to even mention Kay in his essay<sup>1</sup>. Neither Christopher nor Kay have talked much about what Kay's role in editing *The Silmarillion* was, but it can be speculated that to the extent that there was rewriting he had a significant role with that, given his later success as a fantasy writer. Moreover, one of the few specific things that Kay has stated is that it was his suggestion to compile a single continuous text, rather than the more scholarly approach that Christopher was considering (see Noad 4 and Kane 263.) Ferré's failure to even acknowledge that Kay had any role at all is unfortunate.

Ferré cites a statement that Christopher made in the pamphlet "A Brief Account of the Book and Its Making" that was released in the U.S. some months before *The Silmarillion* was published that "essentially what I have done has been a work of organization, not of completion." He then cites a private correspondence with Douglas A. Anderson noting that Christopher originally used the word "composition" instead of "organization" (the change had been suggested by American publisher Austin Olney), but also points out that the former "in American English, 'mainly implies creation', while it is more polysemic in Great Britain (68).<sup>2</sup> I would argue that neither word really captures what Christopher did. Another private correspondence that Ferré cites does a better job of doing so. In a private letter to Hostetter, Christopher wrote "As I see it, I have called myself a "literary archeologist". I have never been more than a discoverer, and interpreter of what I discovered"" (67). That comes closer to capturing the extraordinary work that Christopher accomplished over the course of five decades, bringing to us the true scope of his father's work.

### **LISTENING TO THE MUSIC (Verlyn Flieger)**

Flieger's contribution is consistent with her extensive body of work over the past forty years as one of the most insightful commentators about Tolkien's writings. This essay is particularly helpful in shining new light on Tolkien's best-known and most-beloved masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings* by placing it in greater context within Tolkien's full legendarium.

Flieger points out that as *The Lord of the Rings* grew from being a sequel to *The Hobbit* to a continuation (and culmination) of his already existing mythology (and thus partly bringing *The Hobbit* into that world as well), it grew "to become something unlike anything that had gone before" (71). She also notes that Tolkien

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<sup>1</sup> There is one very brief mention of Kay in McIlwaine's Introduction (17).

<sup>2</sup> The footnotes in this section are confusing, but it appears that footnotes 74 and 75 are reversed.

himself describes the book as “bitter” and that in the book “there lies a deep stratum of pain, of sorrow for loss. . . . It is more than anything a lament, a cry of grief for a lost and unrecovered world, re-created only so that it may be lost again, and lost so that it can be mourned” (75–76). She praises one early reviewer, Douglass Parker<sup>3</sup>, for recognizing “the long defeat in Tolkien’s story before he or anyone had knowledge of its larger but equally defeatist parent mythology” (76), but notes that thanks to Christopher’s efforts that larger framework is now available, “thereby putting *The Lord of the Rings* in longer perspective to show it as something more than itself” (*ibid.*).

Flieger shows that the bittersweet ending of *The Lord of the Rings*, which represents the conclusion of the legendarium, reflects the beginning of the mythology, creating a fine symmetry. She notes that Christopher assigned the earliest version of the creation story, the “Ainulindalë” or “Singing of the Ainur” (79), to the period of Tolkien’s work on the OED (at that time called *The New English Dictionary*), between the years 1918 and 1920, that is to say after but not long after “The Fall of Gondolin,” suggesting that Tolkien may have had the arc of the story already sketched out” (*ibid.*).<sup>4</sup> Turning to the ending, she reveals that while Tolkien was convinced to omit the epilogue that he had written to conclude *The Lord of the Rings* there was one important element from that epilogue that he preserved by inserting into the remaining ending scene, and that the importance of that element can be seen in how the reflects the creation story of the “Ainulindale.”

I won’t reveal the details as it is worth reading Flieger’s moving description without preconceptions, but I will say that it is telling that after reading and thinking about *The Lord of the Rings* for more than 45 years I was able to obtain a profound new insight into the book that I had never perceived before. It is credit both to Flieger’s ability to illuminate Tolkien’s work in new and different ways and to Christopher’s massive effort to make the full scope of that work as available as possible.

### **THE CHRONOLOGY OF CREATION How J.R.R. Tolkien Misremembered the Beginnings of his Mythology (John Garth)**

Garth’s paper is a difficult one to judge. On the one hand, it is a meticulously rigorous (almost to the point of tedium) example of, as Garth puts it, pressing

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<sup>3</sup> A professor of classics at the University of California, Riverside, who wrote an article about *The Lord of the Rings* in the *Hudson Review* in 1957.

<sup>4</sup> Flieger acknowledges that in his own paper published in *Great Tales* John Garth proposes an even earlier date of composition, as discussed just below.

forward with the process of literary archaeology where Christopher was not able to go. Specifically, the subject of his inquiry is the accuracy of Tolkien's recollection in a 1964 letter that he wrote "The Music of the Ainur" "after escaping from the army: during a short time in Oxford, employed on the staff of the then still incomplete great Dictionary"—which Garth clarifies as meaning "December 1918 or later, but let us call it 1919 for brevity's sake" (91). Garth notes that Christopher found "no evidence to set against" his father's memory of writing the "Music" in Oxford after leaving the army (92; *Book of Lost Tales Part 1*, 45). But Garth then adds that after Christopher allowed him the opportunity to review the "Book of Lost Tales" manuscripts himself, and he was able to compare them with certain linguistic manuscripts that had been published in the period since Christopher published *The Book of Lost Tales*, he was able to determine that "The Music of the Ainur" was written considerably earlier than Tolkien had recalled.

This gives rise to two questions. The first is whether Garth's evidence is really all that conclusive? The second is, does it really matter all that much? My answer to the first question is: "perhaps." My answer to the second is: "perhaps not," but it is always nice to have as accurate information as possible.

The first set of evidence that Garth points to is that "in the pencil draft [of 'The Music of the Ainur'], several names differ from the forms that they take in other *Lost Tales* and that were to endure" (94). Garth concludes that the "simplest explanation for all this would be that the draft 'Music' predated the first writing of 'Tuor A' and belonged in the same phase as 'The Cottage of Lost Play'" (95), which would place it in 1917, not 1919, as Tolkien recollected 45 years later. Garth adds that "All the data mentioned above can indeed be squared with Tolkien's recollection, but not straightforwardly. It demands that we picture him repeatedly making creative decisions in 1917 and then undoing them in 1919, only to revert to his first position thereafter" (*ibid.*). It actually is not very difficult to picture Tolkien doing that, but Garth then states conclusively that "Tolkien's recollection of writing the 'Music' in Oxford comes under decisive challenge from the linguistic texts in *Parma Eldalamberon*, published since Christopher finished his work on *The Book of Lost Tales*" (95).

Garth next launches into a detailed and painstaking comparison of forms and omission between the "Gnomish lexicon" published in *Parma Eldalamberon* and name-lists included with the *Lost Tales* (specifically the "Official Name List" ["ONL"] and "Namelist to 'The Fall of Gondolin'" ["NFG"]). The most specific conclusion that he makes is that "If the 'Music' were not written until 1919, we would be forced to imagine Tolkien planning the tale two years in advance; indeed, planning both of its successive versions! We would have to suppose that in 1917

he looked that far ahead and (in ONL) foresaw a draft of that tale naming *Ilu* that speaks of the *Ainu* in the plural; and also (in NFG) foresaw a fair copy naming *Ilúvatar* and the *Ainur*. The idea does not stand up to the kind of close scrutiny that the published linguistic papers now make possible” (98).

The final piece of evidence that Garth cites to date “The Music of the Ainur” to 1917 is “a small lion-and-unicorn crest on the second and sixth sides of Tolkien’s text” (99). This same crest can be found on the opening page of the first draft of “The Fall of Gondolin” (referred to as “Tuor A”). Similarly, Garth notes that other paper used for manuscript of the “Music” was also used for “The Cottage of Lost Play,” the other Tale that can be conclusively dated to 1917. Garth acknowledges that a “supply of various paper or notebook brands might be used over any number of years” but concludes that it fully supports “the linguistic evidence that all three tales belong in 1917” (*ibid.*).

I am still not convinced that this is so conclusive that no other possibility is viable, given Tolkien’s documented propensity to repeatedly explore and re-explore different possibilities, but Garth does make a strong and rigorous case. That brings us to the second question of how important it really is. Garth notes that “Previously, when ‘The Fall of Gondolin’ appeared to predate all the other tales, it seemed that Tolkien was driven primarily by impulse. With the revised chronology, it can be seen that he made three parallel beginnings” (104). He adds, “Looking beyond the opening phase and these three earliest tales, the rearranged chronology has profound ramifications. It has always been clear that the majority of the tales, most notably those of Valinor, were written after the ‘Music’; but the notion that this cosmogonic myth belonged to 1919 has artificially corralled all those tales into an almost unfeasibly busy six months or so. Now we know the ‘Music’ was written in 1917, it is as if a dam has been removed. It may take a while for the waters to settle; it has certainly taken me painstaking work to begin to see how they will lie. But I think we can now make the working assumption that Tolkien was most productive when he had most time: in 1917–18 during his long, enforced gaps between military duties” (*ibid.*).

Assuming that Garth is correct, and his evidence is conclusive, it is certainly helpful in providing a clear and accurate timeline of earliest work on Tolkien’s legendarium. But does it really make much difference in understanding the significance of what Tolkien wrote? As noted above, in her own fine paper included in *Great Tales*, Flieger makes a point about the original drafting of “The Music of the Ainur” and the profound implications that it has on the ending of Tolkien’s opus, *The Lord of the Rings*. She states that “Tolkien’s world also had its own interior timeline, one that began with creation” and then references Christopher’s

dating of the “Music” to 1919, concluding it after but not long after “The Fall of Gondolin,” suggesting that Tolkien may have had the arc of the story already sketched out” (79.) She then casually notes in a footnote that Garth dates it even earlier. But does it have any real impact on the profound conclusions that she reaches? Not really. But it is still helpful to have as accurate a dating as possible.

### **‘I WISELY STARTED WITH A MAP’ J.R.R. Tolkien as Cartographer (Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull)**

Hammond and Scull are justly known for providing the most detailed reference sources in Tolkien studies, particularly *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* and *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader’s Companion*)<sup>5</sup>. As noted above, they also have edited several volumes of Tolkien’s artwork (*J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator*, *The Art of The Hobbit*, and *The Art of The Lord of the Rings*). Their contribution to *Great Tales* combines these skills to present a valuable summary of the history of map-making in Tolkien’s work. Here, the high-quality reproductions of the maps really shine. Hammond and Scull do a good job highlighting where the texts followed the maps, and where the maps followed the text. But what makes this offering particularly notable in this collection is that it highlights one of the areas in which Christopher collaborated directing with his father during his lifetime. Hammond and Scull describe several occasions where Tolkien was stuck, and Christopher “stepped into the breach.” On one such memorable occasion, “in the nick of time, by working continuously for twenty-four hours” (123). The image of Christopher pulling an all-nighter to rescue his father, presented in Scull and Hammond’s dry, straight-forward, scholarly prose, is one of the nicest lasting impressions left by *Great Tales*.

### **EDITING THE TOLKIENIAN MANUSCRIPT (Carl F. Hostetter)**

Viewed through the dual lens of general Tolkien scholarship and specifically in honor of Christopher Tolkien, Hostetter’s piece may be the most successful one in the book. Only a comparatively few Tolkien scholars have had the opportunity to work directly with Tolkien’s manuscripts, and with one obvious exception, Hostetter might have had the most experience doing so, between his work as the leader of the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship that was entrusted by Christopher to edit

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<sup>5</sup> The expanded index that they produced for the second edition of *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien is also of particularly great value.

and publish Tolkien's linguistic papers and editing *The Nature of Middle-earth*. The latter task involved editing dozens of scraps of texts (mostly taken from handwritten manuscripts written in black or blue nib-pen, though a few come from typescripts), ranging in length from a single paragraph to a dozen or more pages.

The obvious exception, of course, is Christopher, who spent countless hours combing through the often almost impenetrable thicket of the manuscripts left behind by his father. Hostetter's clear and concise description of the process of deciphering the four manuscript examples that he provides (complete with reproductions of the originals, provide a welcome glimpse into what Christopher's efforts involved. As Hostetter puts it, "To express and encourage further and fuller appreciation of Christopher's efforts and achievement as editor of his father's voluminous manuscript legacy, I offer here by way of practical example a little *vade mecum* of the task of editing the Tolkienian manuscript" (129). This little guide that Hostetter provides is welcome indeed.

### **A MILESTONE IN BBC HISTORY? The 1955–56 Radio Dramatization of The Lord of the Rings (Stuart Lee)**

When news of the pending publication of *Great Tales* first started to seep into the media, it was Lee's piece that received the most attention. As is often the case, however, the publicity generated was misleading at best. As an example of the typical statements made at the time, in an article in *The Guardian* entitled "Hoard of the rings: 'lost' scripts for BBC Tolkien drama discovered," McIlwaine is quoted as stating about Tolkien, "Not only did he agree to the adaptation of his book soon after publication, but he was willing to work with the scriptwriters, to abridge the text and adjust the balance of narration and dialogue, so that it fitted the requirements of radio and the limited time available. It's a very exciting and timely discovery." This implies that Tolkien was deeply involved in the scriptwriting, almost as a co-collaborator. In reality, his involvement was much less than the quote implies.

It is interesting to see snippets of Tolkien's correspondence with producer Terence Tiller, and to see the process that Tiller went through in this first-ever adaptation of Tolkien's best-known work, so soon after its original publication. Perhaps most telling is how Tiller (and Tolkien) dealt with the increasingly truncated project in which originally *The Fellowship of the Ring* was to be adapted in six episodes of 45 minutes each, which soon were to be reduced to 30 minutes each, and then both *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* covered in just six similarly-lengthed episodes. Perhaps most interesting is the contrast between

Tolkien's fairly tolerant attitude expressed in his correspondence with Tiller and the much more disparaging comments that he made about the production elsewhere. As for his working with the scriptwriters to abridge the text and adjust the balance of narration and dialogue, the reality is much more limited than what was implied. The only specific example given is "relating to the attack on Weathertop. 'Suggestion for alteration of Script' shows that Tolkien offered two solutions (A and B), with 'A' preferred 'because F[rodo] was in no condition to give a detailed description, and because Narrator can do it better anyway' (150-151). Someone has written 'Please Type' across version A ('giving description of Wraiths to Narrator') and the revised script (note the director's timings) confirms that Tolkien's suggestions were used" (151). Lee suggests that there was one other specific suggestion made by Tolkien that was not preserved. Otherwise, Tolkien noted that, with two exceptions, the songs in the book did not have any special music in mind (and acknowledged that many of them would likely need to be cut) and made a suggestion about the accents that should be used (146-147). Lee notes that Tiller responded to Tolkien by acknowledging that cutting had been painful "but with an odd disregard for Tolkien's letter of 10 September (above) suggested that Sam, Merry and Pippin would have strong 'West-country accents'" (151).

Overall, Lee's presentation is interesting, but perhaps not quite as momentous as the advance publicity suggested that it might be. As to how much it contributes to the books value in honoring and memorializing Christopher Tolkien, the answer is, sadly, not much.

### **'KING SHEAVE' AND 'THE LOST ROAD' (Tom Shippey)**

Tom Shippey justifiably holds a special place in Tolkien scholarship. He has an academic background like that of both J.R.R. and Christopher Tolkien, having occupied Tolkien's professorial chair at the University of Leeds, and having taught Old English at the University of Oxford using the syllabus that Tolkien had devised. This gives him a perspective on Tolkien's work that few others can match. His contribution to *Great Tales* provides a fine example of this.

The subject that Shippey addresses is the vexing question of what Tolkien's real intentions were behind his "time travel" stories, which first manifested as "The Lost Road" in 1936-37 (during the time that he was finalizing *The Hobbit* for publication) and then as "The Notion Club Papers" in the mid-1940s, during a break in the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*. As Shippey points out, "neither 'The Lost Road' nor 'The Notion Club Papers' ever achieved what one might call escape velocity. Tolkien remained stalled on (especially) the issue of transmission: he

worked on the frame of his narratives rather than the narratives themselves. He did however give two accounts of his overall plan for the projected book. His idea was to write a collection of some ten stories from very different periods, extending from the present day back through Anglo-Saxon history and the Ice Age to the far and fictional prehistory of Númenor. The connecting thread would be ‘the occurrence time and again in human families . . . of a father and son called by names that could be interpreted as Bliss-friend and Elf-friend’ (in modern English, Edwin and Alwin, in Anglo-Saxon, Eadwine and Ælfwine, in Lombardic legend, Audoin and Alboin, in Númenor, Herendil and Elendil)” (167).

Shippey first speculates that Tolkien may have been influenced by a 1921 collection of stories by John Buchan called *The Path of the King* “ that traces the descendants of a Viking king through to Abraham Lincoln (167–68). Shippey turns to the meat of his thesis, which is that significant insight into what Tolkien was trying to accomplish with his time travel tale can be found in his poem “King Sheave,” “printed for us, with the prose version which might have formed part of a completed Anglo-Saxon story of Ælfwine, and with Christopher Tolkien’s accompanying notes, in *The Lost Road*” (168). He then adds, in typical Shippey-ian fashion, “The inspiration for this, as so often with Tolkien, is quite clearly a philological crux, or rather a whole string of such cruxes, in the opening section of the poem Beowulf” (*ibid.*).

Shippey then launches into an analysis of that opening section, which describes the funeral of Danish king Scyld (accompanied by some lovely and fitting illustrations from the Bodleian archives), before turning back to Tolkien’s poem “King Sheave” and “where the ‘Sheave’ story, as told in King Alfred’s hall by the singer Ælfwine, might have fitted in with Tolkien’s plan for ‘The Lost Road’” (173). Shippey’s analysis, while interesting and apt as always, seems to be more about opening doors to new paths rather than making final conclusions. Which does seem a fitting way of celebrating the legacy of Christopher Tolkien.

### **‘DOWN FROM THE DOOR WHERE IT BEGAN . . .’ Portal images in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (Brian Sibley)**

Sibley’s paper is somewhat disappointing and fails to live up to the promise implied in his opening section. He writes “Writing in his essay ‘On Fairy-Stories’, Tolkien commented that while a man might wander into the realm of Faërie it would be dangerous for him, while there, ‘to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys lost’” (181). Yet little of his discussion evokes the otherworldliness of Faërie. This is particularly stark in comparison to a previous

discussion of the same subject. The third chapter of Marjorie Burns's book *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth* is entitled "Bridges, Gates and Doors" (Burns, 44–74) and covers much the same territory, though with a particular focus on portals to Otherworldly realms that are influenced by Norse and/or Celtic traditions. Not only does Sibley's discussion pale in comparison, it is also odd that he does not mention that the subject has been covered before. Moreover, Sibley's contribution fails to offer much in terms of addressing Christopher's legacy. All in all, a disappointing final contribution, particularly considering the relatively sparse collection of papers included in the book.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR CHRISTOPHER TOLKIEN**

The bibliography, credited to McIlwaine, closely tracks the bibliography that Douglas A. Anderson prepared for *Tolkien's Legendarium* up to the point that that book was published, with subsequent publications added in.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Despite the overly large margins, recycled artwork, relatively small number of essays included, and the variable quality of those essays, there is much to like about *Great Tales*. It is a beautiful book with very high production values, many never-seen-before photos and other illustrations, including some very moving pictures of Christopher Tolkien documenting his long life. Most importantly, most of the essays included are worthy contributions, both to general Tolkien scholarship and as to the specific purpose of the book: celebrating and honoring Christopher Tolkien. Fittingly, the book closes with a lovely reproduction of an inscription in Quenya by J.R.R. Tolkien in Christopher's copy of *The Return of the King*, which translates roughly in English: "With this the long tale ends and my extended long day is complete; dear of sons, to you I give it to be read with love." I can think of no better coda than that.

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