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“Pearls” of *Pearl*: Medieval Appropriations in Tolkien’s Mythology

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- *A beautiful woman in white, and a precious gem that is lost;*
- *An island and a tower, with jeweled beaches and byways;*
- *Blessed Lands with a ban against trespassing by mere mortals, enforced by watery boundaries;*
- *The power of sleep, dreams, enchantment, and visions;*
- *Choices, and giving oneself over to divine design*

In short, a story of grief, loss, and desire for reunion, tempered by supernatural mercy.

While this adequately summarizes *Pearl*, the fourteenth-century Middle English alliterative poem composed by the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I would argue that this also describes aspects of the life of one of Tolkien’s earliest Middle-earth characters, Eärendel the Mariner. A close parallel reading of Tolkien’s translation of *Pearl* alongside his early mythology (writings prior to *The Lord of the Rings*) was motivated by the possibility that one of his mysterious minor original characters, the Sleeper in the Tower of Pearl,¹ was possibly an homage to *Pearl*. But as this paper will describe, additional “pearls” of *Pearl* can be found throughout Tolkien’s story of Eärendel² the Mariner, literary breadcrumbs that will lead us to a possible identification of the Sleeper.

The 1212-line poem *Pearl* is an elegy and dream vision in which a father, sometimes referred to as the jeweler, has lost a precious pearl. He falls asleep on the grave of his two-year-old daughter and awakens in a beautiful land. To his surprise and joy, his daughter, now a maiden, appears before him, dressed in white and adorned with pearls. However, they are separated by a river that he is forbidden to cross. His daughter urges him to release his grief, as she has become a bride of the Lord and a queen in heaven. By the mercy of God, her father is granted a vision of New Jerusalem; however, he attempts to cross the river and immediately awakens.

Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond note that Tolkien first read *Pearl* while attending King Edward’s School, Birmingham, in the first years of the

¹ This is the first of two papers to discuss the Sleeper in the Tower of Pearl.

² While the eventual spelling of the character’s name became *Eärendil*, since I will be referring mainly to early texts, I will consistently use the earlier spelling *Eärendel*.

twentieth century. The poem was part of the required curriculum of his undergraduate studies at Oxford, as well as during his time teaching at Leeds and Oxford (Scull and Hammond 974-5). His May 1924 poem *The Nameless Land* was “inspired by reading *Pearl* for examination purposes” (LR 98) and written in a similar style. While he and colleague E.V. Gordon planned to collaborate on an edition of *Pearl* after the 1925 publication of their edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Tolkien became occupied by other projects, including *The Lord of the Rings*. He penned a Modern English translation of the poem c.1926 (Carpenter 145), which was published posthumously (1975) alongside his Modern English translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Orfeo*.

It is therefore not surprising that we should find echoes of *Pearl* in Middle-earth. Some of these resonances are overt, while others are more subtle. Perhaps the most obvious relates to Tolkien’s use of dreams and dream visions in his writings, especially in *The Lord of the Rings* (Amendt-Raduege 45; Bowers 114-5; Flieger 1997, 165, 175; Lindsay 7; Schorr 21), for as Tolkien opined in his essay *On Fairy-stories* “In dreams strange powers of the mind may be unlocked” (OFS 35). The trope of awakening from sleep into a new world is central to the legendarium from its earliest iterations, as the legend of the awakening of the Eldar and humans goes all the way back to the *Book of Lost Tales* (BOLT I 98; 233). In the published *Silmarillion* we are told that the Eldar awoke “from the sleep of Ilúvatar” by the “starlit mere of Cuiviénen, Water of Awakening” (*Sil* 48), while “At the first rising of the Sun the Younger Children of Ilúvatar awoke in the land of Hildórien in the eastward regions of Middle-earth” (*Sil* 103). Aulë’s dwarves, illicitly crafted by the engineer of the Valar, are adopted by Eru, but set to “sleep now in the darkness under stone” until after the awakening of the Elves (*Sil* 44).

A close reading of the poem reveals numerous other interesting points that will be germane to our analysis in due time. Within his dream-vision, the jeweler walks on gravel made of pearls (Stanza 7, lines 9-10, *SG&GK* 101) and describes the riverbed as covered in “beryl bright” and “dazzling stones aheap” (Stanza 10, lines 2 and 5, *SG&GK* 102). He admits that, despite the fact that the water – obviously set as a “bounds between pleasancess” (line 5) – was too deep to wade, “ever I longed to, more and more” (line 12) (Stanza 12, *SG&GK* 103). His daughter, the so-called Pearl-maiden, is adorned in a “linen robe of glistening white” adorned with pearls (Stanza 17, line 5, *SG&GK* 104), with a crown of pearls upon her golden hair and a “wondrous pearl unstained and bright” upon her breast (Stanza 19, line 5, *SG&GK* 105).

The maiden gives the advice that if the dreamer gives himself to the Lord, his grief may be assuaged through divine mercy, for “Tis His to ordain what He right may deem” (Stanza 30, line 12, *SG&GK* 109). As an example, the jeweler is granted the rare favor of a vision of New Jerusalem, described as a “lovely island” on which there is a “noble tower” (Stanza 58, lines 2 and 9, *SG&GK* 118). This

final section of the poem, which describes New Jerusalem in detail, greatly pulls from and openly references *The Apocalypse of St. John [Revelation]* Chapter 21, for example, in the adornment of the architecture with precious stones, gates “mounted with pearls” and a street is “covered in gold” (verses 19 and 21). The jeweler greatly desires to enter the blessed land, but the Pearl-maiden warns that “His tower to enter you may not dare.... Unless clean you be without a spot” (Stanza 81, lines 6 and 12, *SG&GK* 126). She explains that he can only cross over the river by God’s grace, after death, if he is worthy and if God decrees, allowing for the opportunity of a heavenly reunion if the jeweler chooses to embrace God’s will and be counted among the righteous. Instead, the jeweler tries to cross the stream and the vision is ripped from him as he rudely awakens in the garden.

Various authors have drawn general connections between the jeweler and the Pearl-maiden and characters in Tolkien’s writings, as well as between the vision land in the poem and various settings in the legendarium. For example, Barbara Kowalik (47) points out the similarities between the Pearl-maiden and the vision of Gandalf the White that Frodo spies in the mirror of Galadriel. Amy Amendt-Raduege (49), Stefan Ekman (59), and Tom Shippey (2002, 197-99; 2003, 217-9) draw parallels between the dream setting of *Pearl* and Lothlórien, while Ekman argues for an even closer analogue to the gardens of the Vala of Dreams, Lórien, in Valinor (64). In this paper we will look at specific details in the poem and connect them with the life of Eärendel.

We begin with the “noble tower” on the “lovely island.” The poem *Kôr*, written on April 30, 1915 and published as *The City of the Gods* in 1923, describes the Elvish city’s white marble towers (*BOLT I* 136). In the initial prose of the legendarium, “The Cottage of Lost Play” (written about eighteen months after the poem [*BOLT I* 13]), Lindo explains the environment to the voyager Eriol (whose name means “one who dreams alone” [*BOLT I* 14]). Eriol has found himself in *Kôr*, aka Kortirion, the city at the heart of the Lonely Isle, Tol Eressëa, where Ingil son of Inwë had long before built a “great tower” that gave the city its name, Kortirion (*BOLT I* 16). According to Christopher Tolkien, in the original mythos Tol Eressëa was to become England and Kortirion, Warwick (*BOLT I* 24-5). So while *Pearl* may have been influential in many aspects of Tolkien’s descriptions of the Blessed Lands (as we shall see), we must admit that, as Christopher Tolkien explains, “it is certain that Koromas [Kortirion] had a great tower because Warwick has one” (*BOLT I* 25).

Vairë explains to Eriol that in an earlier time there existed the Cottage of Lost Play, and at dusk visitors would arrive from “the lane called Olórë Mallë or the Path of Dreams” (*BOLT I* 18). Of the cottage it is said of “what it was built, nor when, no one knew, nor now knows, but it was said to me that it shone with a pale light, as it was of pearl, and its roof was a thatch, but a thatch of gold” (*BOLT I* 18). But when the Elves abandoned *Kôr* “that lane was blocked for ever with great

impassable rocks, and there stands of a surety the cottage empty and the garden bare to this day” (*BOLT I* 19), an early example of a boundary meant to keep out the unworthy.³ The existence of the boundary, the connection with dreams, the coloration of white/pearl and gold, all bring to mind the dreamscape of *Pearl*.

In “The Coming of the Elves” (according to Christopher Tolkien among the collection of tales written around late 1918-20 [*BOLT I* 45]) we first see the introduction of jewels strewn across Kôr. Aulë donated the “dust of magic metals that his great works had made,” mainly of gold, creating a vast golden sand (*BOLT I* 122). The Elves built dwellings of “shining white – of marbles and stones quarried from the Mountains of Valinor that glistened wondrously, silver and gold and a substance of great hardness and white lucency that they contrived of shells melted in the dew of Silpion, and white streets” (*BOLT I* 122). To this scenery the Noldor add many multicolored gems they made, including opals invented from a mixture of pearls and gems (*BOLT I* 127-8). The result is a city that is “lit with this wealth of gems and sparkles most marvelously,” including “pebbles of diamonds” and crystals that were cast “about the margin of the seas” (*BoLT I* 129). Afterwards the Solosimpi (Teleri) “dredged the sea-beds and won... uncounted store of pearls of a most pure and starry lustre” (*BoLT I* 127). The connection between the Teleri and pearls is an enduring one; in the next iteration of the legendarium (the so-called “Sketch of the Mythology”) it is said that the Teleri invented pearls (*SOME* 14). In the published *Silmarillion* it is said that “their halls were of pearl, and of pearl were the mansions of Olwë at Alqualondë” (*Sil* 61), text adapted from *The Quenta* and *Quenta Silmarillion* of the 1930s (*SOME* 88; *LR* 224). For these reasons the Teleri are also known as the “Pearl-gatherers” (*LR* 215). Stefan Ekman (63-4) has pointed out the obvious similarities between the description of Kôr with its gemmed and pearled waterways and the dreamscape of *Pearl*. Ekman also notes that in his Rivendell poem “Song of Eärendil” Bilbo describes the Mariner as journeying “until he heard on strands of pearl / where ends the world the music long, / where ever-foaming billows roll / the yellow gold and jewels wan” (*FOTR* 228).

While several authors (Kelly and Livingston 93; Koubenec 123-4; Kowalik 46) have drawn connections between the rude awakening of the stream-crossing dreamer in *Pearl* and the fall of Númenor – both caused by a forbidden attempt to trespass into the Blessed Lands – this setting of a watery boundary between the mortal world and Blessed Realms exists from the early stages of the legendarium. In “The Coming of the Elves” it is explained that

³ There also exists an earlier (April 1915) poem, “You and Me and the Cottage of Lost Play” (*BOLT I* 27), which describes it as “very very old / White, and thatched with straws of gold” (lines 29-30, *BOLT I* 28).

beyond Tol Eressëa is the misty wall and those great sea glooms beneath which lie the Shadowy Seas, and thereon float the Twilit Isles But in the westernmost of these stood the Tower of Pearl⁴ built in after days and much sung in song; but the Twilit Isles are held the first of the Outer Lands, which are these and Arvalin and Valinor, and Tol Eressëa is held neither of the Outer Lands or of the Great Lands where Men after roamed. (*BOLT I* 125)

In the aftermath of the theft of the silmarils and the kinslaying of the Teleri (the banning of the Noldor from the Blessed Lands another relevant example), the Valar fortified their lands, as from “North to South marched the enchantments and inaccessible magic of the Gods, yet were they not content,” and thus caused “all the paths that fare to Valinor both known and secret to fade utterly from the world, or wander treacherously into blind confusion” (*BOLT I* 210). Note the references to states of reduced consciousness, similar to sleeping. Tom Shippey (2002, 279; 2003, 286-7) and Stefan Ekman (61) detail how the narrator of the Tolkien’s 1924 *Pearl*-inspired poem *The Nameless Land* (again, written in the same medieval form) is denied access to Paradise by a watery barrier. Shippey (2002, 279) also draws connections with the 1916 composition *The Lonely Isle* (written as he crossed the English Channel on his way to war in June 1916). A later iteration of the legendarium, the *Quenta* (c. 1930 [*SOME* 76]) expands on the Valar’s actions in setting the Magic Isles “filled with enchantment, and strung across the confines of the Shadowy Seas, before the Lonely Isle is reached sailing West, there to entrap mariners and wind them in everlasting sleep.” Because of this “many emissaries of the Gnomes in after days came never back to Valinor – save one, and he came too late” (*SOME* 98). In the *Quenta Silmarillion* of the late 1930s (*LR* 200) this is changed to “save one, the mightiest mariner of song or tale” (*LR* 243), language that continues with only minor modification to *The Silmarillion* (102).

Said mariner is, of course, Eärendel, first introduced in the September 1914 poem *The Voyage of Éarendel the Evening Star* (*BOLT II* 267), a brief description of his voyages in the heavens without context. Humphrey Carpenter (82) recounted how Tolkien returned to the poem in 1915 and began to integrate the character into his nascent mythology. Around the same time Tolkien also penned a series of related poems, including what became known as *The Shores of Faëry*. The realm of Faëry features white towers and shores that have moonlit pebbled strand / Whose foam is silver music / On the opalescent floor” (lines 14-6, Carpenter 84-5). Note the motifs of the white tower and the shining stone beds of the shorelines.

Returning to “The Cottage of Lost Play,” written roughly a year later, we read how Eriol the voyager hears Tombo, the Gong of the Children, being struck,

⁴ Another mention of the Twilit Isles notes that “the Tower of Pearl rises pale upon their most western cape” (*BOLT I* 68).

the signal that story time is about to begin. Littleheart, the ancient Gong-warden, is said to have sailed with Eärendel himself on his final voyage in search of Kôr, and it was “the ringing of this Gong on the Shadowy Seas that awoke the Sleeper in the Tower of Pearl that stands far out to west in the Twilit Isles” (*BOLT I* 15). The most direct description of the Tower of Pearl and its resident is found in the July 1915 poem *The Happy Mariners*, first published in the *Stapeldon Magazine* (Oxford) in 1920 and with only minute changes at Leeds in 1923 (Scull and Hammond 480; *BOLT* 273). The narrator – presumably the so-called “Sleeper” – forlornly speaks of a “window in a western tower / That opens on celestial seas,” a white tower that “glimmers like a spike of lonely pearl” (lines 1-2, 7, Garth 90). The similarities to aspects of *Pearl* are fairly clear (i.e., the tower, sense of isolation, water, and pearl-like appearance). Christopher Tolkien (*BOLT I* 221) argues that this poem is “virtually certainly” the “song of the Sleeper in the Tower of Pearl” mentioned in the tale “The Hiding of Valinor” (*BOLT I* 215), due to the poem’s mention of “hoarded sparks of orient fire / That divers won in waters of the unknown sun” (lines 12-3, Garth 90). This is a reference to the spilled sunlight secreted away in ocean caverns after an aborted attempt to make the Sun and Moon pass beneath the Earth in their diurnal journeys (*BOLT I* 215). Another piece of corroborating evidence is the poem’s reference to a “trembling gong” (line 19, Garth 90). Equally important is the second half of the poem, where we learn of the narrator’s yearning and grief at his inability to leave the tower and join the eponymous “happy mariners” as they “follow Eärendel through the West... to islands blest” (lines 20, 33-4, Garth 90-1), similar to the jeweler’s inability to cross the river and reunite with his daughter in New Jerusalem.⁵

Christopher Tolkien notes that a detailed *Tale of Eärendel* as such was never written⁶ by his father, and instead all we have to go on in the early legendarium is a series of outlines, disjointed notes, and related poems (*BOLT II* 252). In particular, two outlines that Christopher names Scheme ‘B’ and Scheme ‘C’ are “in fair harmony” (*BOLT II* 254) and taken as a whole set out the main events of Eärendel’s life after the fall of Gondolin. After arriving in Sirion with his parents, Tuor and Idril, he marries Elwing, Dior’s heir, the holder of the cursed necklace the Nauglafring (later the Nauglamir) in which is set the silmaril recovered by Beren and Lúthien. As Tuor grows older, he hears the call of Ulmo’s conch shells, and sets sail, causing his son and wife “grief” (*BOLT II* 254). At Idril’s urging, Eärendel builds a ship and sails in search of his father. When the ship is wrecked, Ulmo rescues Eärendel, directing him to find Kôr “for for this hast thou been brought out

⁵ Garth (92) argues that the fate of the narrator in this poem reflects Tolkien’s anxieties about going off to war.

⁶ Flieger (2022) ponders this obvious lacuna in the legendarium, and comes to the conclusion that it might be intentional rather than an oversight, comparing it to “a Middle-earth version of the lost tale of Wade” (Flieger 2022, 97).

of the Wrack of Gondolin" (*BOLT II* 253).⁷ He returns to Sirion and finds his mother has vanished. He heeds the directive of Ulmo, much to the "grief" of Elwing, who knows that "no man may tread the streets of Kôr or look upon the places of the Gods and dwell in the Outer Lands in peace again" (*BOLT II* 254). In the more detailed Scheme 'C' he is said to sail with Voronwë and Littleheart, Voronwë's son. Among their many adventures (which are largely only hinted at) is arriving at the Twilit Isle, where "Littleheart's gong awakes the Sleeper in the Tower of Pearl" (*BOLT II* 254).

Meanwhile Sirion is attacked by the minions of Melkor, or Melko as he was then known, rather than the sons of Fëanor, and Elwing is captured. While the Eldar and Gods (Valar) eventually vanquish Melko, Elwing dies and the silmaril is lost. Eärendel reaches an abandoned Kôr where the diamond dust of its streets causes his shoes to "shine brightly" before he sails home "in sorrow" (*BOLT II* 253). Discovering his wife's fate, Eärendel's "grief is very great" (*BOLT II* 255). In Scheme 'C' it is said that Elwing has become a seabird who searches for her husband, "wailing along all the shores," while her husband dwells on the Isle of Seabirds, hoping that Elwing will return to him (*BOLT II* 255). He eventually sails the firmament, and cannot "return to the world or he will die,"⁸ but Scheme 'C' ends with two hopeful notes: that Eärendel will "find Elwing at the Faring Forth" and that "some say" that Tuor and Idril "sail now in Swanwing and may be seen going swift down the wind at dawn and dusk" (*BOLT II* 255).

We see numerous similarities to the *Pearl* poem in this earliest framework. These include:

- A jeweled landscape
- A sleeper (in this case in the Tower of Pearl)
- Separation from a beloved, death, and deep grief
- Loss of a jewel
- Mortals banned from entering the blessed lands
- Those who dare to try are manipulated through dreams and enchantments
- Heeding divine wishes (those of Ulmo)
- Receiving divine mercy (from Ulmo, at the very least)
- Hope of being reunited in the future (with perhaps divine intervention)

⁷ Christopher Tolkien notes that it "is unfortunately never made clear in the earliest writings what was Ulmo's purpose in bidding Eärendel sail to Kôr" (*BOLT II* 257).

⁸ In the name-list to *The Fall of Gondolin* it is said that Eärendel "rideth now with Voronwë upon the winds of the firmament nor comes ever further back than Kôr, else he would die like other Men, so much of the mortal is in him" (*BOLT II* 215).

A series of separate notes written by Tolkien and listed by his son provide additional alignment between the two tales. For example, in one it is said that Eärendel's family dwells in a "house of snow-white stone" (*BOLT II* 262), while another describes his ship, Wingilot, as "shaped as a swan of pearls" (*BOLT II* 263).⁹

Perhaps the most tantalizing aside is a note that Tolkien crossed out: "The Sleeper is Idril but he does not know" (*BOLT II* 276). We will forgive Tolkien the vague pronoun *he* here, and assume a reference to Eärendel, otherwise it would lose much of its impact. In pondering why Tolkien thought to possibly have Idril fulfil this role, we should remember that, like the sleeper in *Pearl*, she is separated from those she loved (son and husband) and suffers much grief. In Scheme 'B' it is said that "Idril has vanished (she set sail at night)" (*BOLT II* 253) while Scheme 'C' simply notes that she "has vanished" (*BOLT II* 254). Another, incomplete version, Scheme 'D', has Idril see Tuor set sail and "swam after him," although it is not said if she was reunited with him (*BOLT II* 260). However, she also has aspects more similar to the Pearl-maiden. From the very first version of *The Fall of Gondolin*, it is said that Idril "had a great power of piercing with her thought the darkness of the hearts of Elves and Men, and the glooms of the future thereto," leading her to mistrust her cousin Maeglin and ask for a secret passage to be delved in the walls of the fortified city (*BOLT II* 167). While she is early known in the legendarium for her white, bare feet, by the post-*LOTR* revisions she was also explicitly said to have golden hair, like the Pearl-maiden (*WOJ* 200). However, there are at least two good reasons for Tolkien to reject Idril as the sleeper. Firstly, as Tolkien clearly states, Idril "is immortal" (*BOLT II* 254), and hence should not be banned from the Blessed Lands as Tuor or Eärendel would normally be. Secondly, if Tuor and Idril are reunited (as is hinted at the end of Scheme 'C' and as is adopted in all subsequent revisions of the tale) then she cannot be the Sleeper.¹⁰

But if Idril is not the Sleeper, who might Tolkien have had in mind? A revision of *The Happy Mariners* tentatively dated by Tolkien himself to 1940 (*BOLT II* 274) provides a reasonable possibility. The reference to the gong has been removed, as Littleheart had long since been removed from the mythology. But an important addition has been made, noting that the mariners journey "beyond the grey islands and past Gondobar" (*BOLT II* 275). Christopher Tolkien notes that he "cannot explain" the Gondobar reference, as it was "one of the seven names of Gondolin," a landlocked Elvish enclave (*BOLT II* 276). However, returning to the

⁹ The early Schemes note that Eärendel was willing to search for Tuor "even to Mandos" (*BOLT II* 253; 254). While a comparison could be made to the jeweler seeking his daughter in heaven, my interpretation is that this is instead an Orphic analogy reminiscent of the contemporaneous tale of Beren and Lúthien. See Beal (2014) for a survey of the Orphic myth in the legendarium.

¹⁰ Another one of the isolated notes on the tale has the tantalizing statement "Death of Idril? – follows secretly after Tuor" (*BOLT II* 263).

isolated notes related to the original Eärendel schemes we find one that states “The Sleeper in the Tower of Pearl awakened by Littleheart’s gong: a messenger that was despatched [sic] years ago by Turgon and enmeshed in magics. Even now he cannot leave the Tower and warns them of the magic” (*BOLT II* 263). The reference to Turgon connects this note to *The Fall of Gondolin*. Tuor brings Turgon a message from Ulmo that he should take arms against Melko’s Orcs, which Turgon refuses to do. It is then suggested that messengers from Gondolin should sail for Valinor and urge the Valar to rise up against Melko. Turgon refuses, noting that too many of his people have sailed away never to return (*BOLT II* 161-2). It therefore seems possible that the Sleeper might simply be one of these lost messengers from Gondolin. However, I argue that Elwing may be the most reasonable answer, or, rather that the Sleeper may have evolved into or was subsumed by Elwing (and to an extent, Eärendel himself). To investigate these possibilities, as well as the persistence of *Pearl*-like aspects in the tale, let us continue with the evolution of the Eärendel mythos through the various revisions of the legendarium.

In the next iteration, the “Sketch of the Mythology” (c. 1926-30 [*SOME* 11]) it is established that Tuor and Idril sail from Sirion together, assuaging *her* grief but not Eärendel’s, a change that remains throughout the rest of the legendarium’s lengthy revisions and appears in the published *Silmarillion* (*Sil* 246). Christopher Tolkien notes that Eärendel’s adventures are greatly reduced and simplified starting in the “Sketch,” including his sailing in search of his father. However, I argue some *Pearl*-like aspects are enhanced. For example, it is explained that as he walks through the empty streets of Kôr “his raiment becomes encrusted with the dust of diamonds and of jewels. He dares not go further into Valinor” (*SOME* 38). Not only do we have a clearer connection with the jeweled landscape, but a cognizance of the ban he faces concerning the Blessed Lands. Eärendel and Elwing are still sundered (a source of continued grief) when she casts both herself and the Nauglafring into the sea to escape the sons of Fëanor and is changed into a seabird. The Tower of Pearl and its Sleeper are no longer mentioned. Instead, Eärendel builds “a tower on an isle in the northern seas, to which all the seabirds of the world repair. He sails by the aid of their wings even over the airs in search of Elwing” (*SOME* 38). The lonely tower of seabirds, as the Tower of Pearl before it, bring to mind Tolkien’s 1916 poem *The Lonely Isle*, a “glimmering island set sea-girdled and alone – A gleam of white rock” around which white birds fly (lines 1-2, Garth 145). It should also be noted that Elwing morphs into a white seabird, echoing the transition of the jeweler’s dead infant into the Pearl-maiden. The mercy of the Gods (the Valar) towards the obedient and the worthy is also on display in the “Sketch,” as they “adjudged the last Silmaril to Eärendel . . . and with the aid of the Silmaril Elwing is found and restored” (*SOME* 41). However, the couple is still sundered from the rest of humanity (and elvenkind), instead sailing the heavens together on the Gods’ business, keeping watch for Morgoth’s eventual

return. Interestingly, this is the only iteration in which Elwing accompanies Eärendel on his celestial voyage,¹¹ therefore some modicum of separation is soon restored to the mythos.

In the 1930s extension and revision *The Quenta* it is explicitly stated for the first time that Eärendel's sailing was motivated by twinned goals, to seek his parents and perhaps bring "a message to the Gods and Elves of the West, that should move their hearts to pity on the world and the sorrows of Mankind" even at the risk of his own life (*SOME* 150). He is initially unsuccessful, and returns to Sirion to find "tidings were filled with new woe" (*SOME* 149). Upon learning of the fate of his wife from Bronweg, he is "overcome with sorrow" and sets sail seeking Elwing and Valinor. Tolkien clearly details how Eärendel barely escapes the enchantment of the Magic Isles, landing on "the immortal shore alone of living Men," not only making much of his apparent violation of the ban but making it clear that he "ventured not into Valinor," clearly knowing how far he dare to push it (*SOME* 150). As in the "Sketch" he builds the tower visited by sea-birds "and ever he grieved for fair Elwing looking for her return to him," sailing the sky to search for her (*SOME* 150). A revised manuscript (called QII) contains several important changes that remain throughout the later evolution of the mythology. First, a "sudden fear was fallen on him out of dreams," causing Eärendel to hurry home to Sirion. It is for this reason that he arrives at nearly the same time that Elwing jumps into sea. However now the description of Elwing is more clearly reminiscent of the Pearl-maiden, as

Ulmo bore her up and he gave unto her the likeness of a great white bird, and upon her breast there shone as a star the shining Silmaril, as she flew over the water to seek Eärendel her beloved. And on a time of night Eärendel at the helm saw her come towards him, as a white cloud under moon exceeding swift, as a star over the sea moving in strange course, a pale flame on winds of storm. (*SOME* 153)

Similar language is retained through to the published *Silmarillion* (*Sil* 247).

Eärendel's custody of the silmaril and early reunion with Elwing initially seem a reversal of two central plot points of *Pearl*, however it is more complicated than that. First, compare the description of Elwing with the silmaril on her breast to the Pearl-maiden with the "wondrous pearl unstained and bright" upon her own (Stanza 19, line 5, *SG&GK* 105). It is suggested that it is only by the "puissance of that holy jewel" – made possible by the mercy and grace of Ulmo – that Eärendel and Elwing "came unto the Magic Isles and escaped their magic" (*SOME* 153), again similar to persistent language found in the published *Silmarillion* (*Sil* 248).

¹¹ In the next iteration in *The Quenta* a mention of Elwing sailing the void "at his side" is crossed out (*SOME* 164; 166).

There is also a greater cognizance of the weight of the ban itself; upon reaching the “immortal shores alone of living Men” Eärendel does not allow any of his companions to set foot alongside him, “lest they fell beneath the wrath of the Gods” (*SOME* 153). For the first time Eärendel is successful in his mission to move the Valar into action against Melkor, although “the Gods would not suffer him to return again,” leading to the construction of the white, sea-bird attracting tower (*SOME* 154). Elwing constructs wings for his ship, allowing Eärendel to sail the skies bearing the silmaril.

Christopher Tolkien notes that there is an alternate version of this ending in which Eärendel and his ship are permanently lifted into the airs by the Valar. Thus “Elwing mourned for Eärendel yet found him never again, and they are sundered till the world endeth,” leading her to build the white tower and a set of wings, attempting to fly to her husband, but failing (*SOME* 156).¹² Note that this ultimately rejected revision has a number of clear parallels with the Sleeper in the Tower, especially in the desire to sail the skies with Eärendel (like the happy mariners). Also note that the grief has been shifted from Eärendel to Elwing, again, connecting her with the Sleeper in the Tower and hence, the sleeper in *Pearl*, who is prevented from entering the heavens (rather literally in this case).

While the silmaril has been saved from the depths of the ocean floor in this and all later versions of the tale, Elwing is sundered from her precious family heirloom, as it is apparently decreed by the Gods that it be in Eärendel’s hands rather than hers, whether or not they are allowed to regularly reunite at the white tower. Elwing’s relinquishing her claim on the jewel mirrors what Leigh Smith (25) terms the use of the Arkenstone in *The Hobbit* and the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* “in the same way as the Pearl poet to make the same point about love and loss: the more precious treasure is, the more we must resist laying claim to it.” Eärendel is deemed worthy to be a bearer of the silmaril because of the purity of his motive, allowing him to share its light with the world. He has obeyed the will of the Valar, and embraced his fate and, thus, the will of Eru.

The final version of the Eärendel mythos is found in a late pre-*LOTR* revision designated *QS* ‘E’ (*LR* 323-34), which merges parts of the different *Quenta* versions. Importantly, it also introduces the choice of the half-elven in the form we know from *The Silmarillion*.¹³ After Eärendel brings his plea to the Valar to take up arms against Melkor, Mandos notes to his brethren that Eärendel “shall surely die, for he has trodden the forbidden shores.” However, Manwë passes judgment (as is his right as regent of Eru) and proclaims

¹² See *SOME* 204 for a table comparing some of the differences in the fates of Eärendel and Elwing in the “Sketch” and different versions of *The Quenta*.

¹³ Prior to that we read of Elrond’s choice, at first framed in a choice to remain “on earth” when the Elves return to the West in the “Sketch” (*SOME* 70) and the *Quenta* (*SOME* 158).

To Eärendel I remit the ban, and the peril that he took upon himself out of love for the Two Kindreds shall not fall on him; neither shall it fall upon Elwing who entered into peril for love of Eärendel: save only in this: they shall not ever walk again among Elves or Men in the Outer Lands. (*LR* 326)

As in the case of *Pearl*, we have a clear ban that can only be subverted by the decree and mercy of God. Recall that the jeweler is given the special right to glimpse New Jerusalem from afar but is forbidden from fording the river in his current mortal (and underserving) state; likewise Eärendel and Elwing are given some unusual dispensation, yet despite being counted among the Eldar after their choice are still deemed ineligible to freely walk in either the Blessed Lands or the mortal ones. While their actions are deemed worthy of Eru's mercy, they initially transgressed the boundary of the Blessed Lands, for which there are consequences.

Elwing and Eärendel are not permanently sundered from each other, although they are forever separated from their children, reminiscent of the jeweler in *Pearl*, so grief is never far from their hearts. Like the Sleeper in the Tower Elwing does not accompany him on his celestial voyages, explained as due to her lacking the "strength to endure the cold and pathless voids" (*LR* 327). The white tower is built for her and she crafts "white and silver-grey" wings which she uses to fly to meet Eärendel as he returns from his journeys (*LR* 327). It should be noted that beginning with *The Earliest Annals of Beleriand* (*SOME* 30) we find references to Elwing as "Elwing the White, fairest of women save Lúthien," another descriptive similarity with the Pearl-maiden. Therefore in Elwing we have an amalgam of both the jeweler and the Pearl-maiden.

As Tolkien reflects in a draft essay on *Pearl* published by his son as the posthumous introduction to the Modern English translation,

The final consolation of the father was not to be found in the recovery of a beloved daughter... but in the knowledge that she was redeemed and saved and had become a queen in Heaven. Only by resignation to the will of God, and through death, could he rejoin her. (*SG&GK* 14-5)

The jeweler is rudely awakened from his dream, while Eärendel and Elwing are remanded to their tower (and his journeys in the skies). Although they have been given the choice whether to be counted among the Elves or Humans, they have largely given themselves to the will of Eru. While they have not died, they exist in a kind of limbo, and only through their acceptance of their fate do they remain reunited, but must still suffer being separated from their sons and their people. Tolkien notes of *Pearl* that "the doctrinal theme is, in fact, inseparable from the literary form of the poem and its occasion; for it arises directly from the grief, which

imparts deep feeling and urgency to the whole discussion" (*SG&GK* 15). Cannot the same be said of the hope-filled, yet still poignant, story of Eärendel and Elwing?

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