

2023

Sam's Song in the Tower: The Significance of 'Merry Finches' in J.R.R. Tolkien's *_Lord of the Rings_*

Jane Beal PhD
University of California, Davis, janebeal@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/journaloftolkienresearch>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Medieval Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Beal, Jane PhD (2023) "Sam's Song in the Tower: The Significance of 'Merry Finches' in J.R.R. Tolkien's *_Lord of the Rings_*," *Journal of Tolkien Research*: Vol. 17: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/journaloftolkienresearch/vol17/iss2/4>

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Tolkien Research* by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

Sam's Song in the Tower: The Significance of 'Merry Finches' in J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings

Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Kris Swank, librarian and faculty member of Pima Community College and Signum University, for coordinating sessions on "Tolkien and the Medieval Animal" at the 57th International Congress on Medieval Studies (May 2021), which I attended and from which I learned so much. She made me aware of this planned, special issue of The Journal of Tolkien Research on the same theme. I am also thankful to my colleague, friend, and sister-birdwatcher, Dr. Deidre Dawson, Professor Emerita of Michigan State University, with whom I discussed and co-planned our respective essays on avian symbolism in Tolkien's legendarium. The two anonymous peer reviewers for this journal provided excellent feedback on an earlier draft of this essay, helping me to improve it, and senior editor Brad Eden facilitated the process, so I sincerely thank all three colleagues.

Sam's Song in the Tower: The Significance of "Merry Finches" in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*

One of the most poignant adventures in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* happens when Samwise Gamgee, an ordinary hobbit of the Shire, goes in desperate search of his master and friend, Frodo Baggins, who, after being attacked by the evil spider Shelob, was captured by Orcs and taken into the Tower of Cirith Ungol in Mordor. Yet when the orcs have a horrific battle amongst themselves, so that many are slain, Sam is able to ascend to the winding stairs of the Tower to look for Frodo. However, once he reaches what he believes to be the top, Sam cannot find his master. He smells death in the Tower. Feeling defeated and grieved, overwhelmed by darkness and the horrible silence, and moved by a thought in his heart that he does not fully understand, Sam begins to sing.¹

Tolkien writes that Sam sang many different songs: childhood tunes, Bilbo's rhymes, and even a song with lyrics of his own that came unbidden. Sam matches his words to a simple tune. Suddenly, he feels "new strength,"² and his voice rings out as he sings this new song, one that invokes the beauty of the natural world, recalling Spring flowers, budding trees, running waters, merry finches, swaying beeches, white stars, and steep mountains.

*In western lands beneath the Sun,
the flowers may rise in Spring,
the trees may bud, the waters run,
the merry finches sing.
Or there maybe 'tis cloudless night
and swaying beeches bear
the Elven-stars as jewels white
amid their branching hair.*³

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Kris Swank, librarian and faculty member of Pima Community College and Signum University, for coordinating sessions on "Tolkien and the Medieval Animal" at the 57th International Congress on Medieval Studies (May 2021), which I attended and from which I learned so much. She made me aware of this planned, special issue of *The Journal of Tolkien Research* on the same theme. I am also thankful to my colleague, friend, and sister-birdwatcher, Dr. Deidre Dawson, Professor (Emerita) of Michigan State University, with whom I discussed and co-planned our respective essays on avian symbolism in Tolkien's legendarium. The two anonymous peer reviewers for this journal provided excellent feedback on an earlier draft of this essay, helping me to improve it, and senior editor Brad Eden facilitated the process, so I sincerely thank all three colleagues.

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 50th Anniversary One Volume Edition. (Boston and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1954, repr. 1994), 908.

² *Ibid.*, *LOTR*, 908.

This is the first of two stanzas of Sam's song; each is eight lines. A key phrase, "merry finches," occurs in the fourth line. Tolkien alternates lines of eight syllables with lines of six syllables, keeping a regular meter. The rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd*, and many words begin with the letter "s," creating a pattern of alliteration in the song: a susurrating sound, as if the wind is moving through the landscape depicted. The vivid natural imagery of the song emerges by evoking a Spring-time, day-lit setting, so unlike Sam's present experience in the dark, a contrast Tolkien purposefully develops in the second, final stanza of the song:

*So here at journey's end I lie
in darkness buried deep,
beyond all towers strong and high,
beyond all mountain steep,
above all shadows rides the Sun
and Stars for ever dwell:
I will not say the Day is done,
nor bid the Stars farewell.⁴*

The song concludes with Sam's powerful self-affirmation, despite his fear and discouragement: "I will not say the Day is done / nor bid the Stars farewell."⁵ Tolkien's strategic use of capitalization throughout the song emphasizes key words as sources of Sam's encouragement in the midst of trial: *Sun, Spring, Elven-stars, Sun, Stars, Day, Stars*. "Spring" and "Day" occur once each (in lines 2 and 15), "Sun" is twice repeated (in lines 1 and 5), and "Stars" is thrice-repeated (in lines 7, 14, and 16). For some readers, the final repeated word may bring to mind Dante's *Divine Comedy*: each of its three parts – the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* – ends with the word "stars." Tolkien's depiction of the Tower of Cirith Ungol may darkly echo Dante's purgatorial mountain.⁶ A major theme of the *Purgatorio* is prayer

³ Ibid, *LOTR*, 888.

⁴ Ibid., *LOTR*, 888.

⁵ Ibid., *LOTR*, 909.

⁶ Compare Tolkien's original illustration of the Tower of Cirith Ungol, as a four-terraced (later, in revision, three-terraced) tower built into the side of a mountain, published and available for readers' consideration in J.R.R. Tolkien, *The History of the Lord of the Rings, Part 4: Sauron Defeated: The End of the Third Age* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992, repr. 1998), 19 with renderings of Dante's purgatorial mountain (and of course Minas Tirith). Dantean influence on Tolkien's writings is certainly plausible, though somewhat under-explored in scholarship to date. Some relatively recent work concerning Dante's influence on Tolkien includes Judith Caesar, "Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and Dante's *Inferno*," *the Explicator* 64:3 (2006), 167-70; Chiara Bertoglio, "Dante, Tolkien, and the Supreme Harmony," in *Tolkien and the Classics*, ed. Roberto Arduini, Giampaolo Canzonieri, and Claudio A. Testi (Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers,

because repentant souls seek to do penance so that they can move from the purgatorial mountain into the Heavenly Rose of the *Paradiso*. Sam's song can be characterized as having a prayer-like, psalm-like quality. Strikingly, there is an upward motion in the song, an up-springing of imagery: from flowers that rise in Spring, to trees and finches above the flowers, to stars above the flowers, trees, and finches. This upward trajectory raises the inward visualization of the reader from the earth toward the heavens, so that the song itself rises like a prayer. Sam is like a penitential pilgrim ascending the tower, as much as he is like a soldier, and his prayer-song is heard.

Indeed, when Sam is about to sing the song over again, he stops because he thinks that he hears a faint voice answering him. It is actually Frodo's voice, though Sam does not know it yet. As Antoine Louchart has observed, "it is the merry song of finches that enables Sam to locate his friend, and hope is reborn. Birdsong is synonymous with the joy that persists deep in the hearts of the hobbits, even in the most dire of circumstances."⁷ Sam is very close to being reunited with Frodo.

2019) and her subsequent book, *Musical Scores and the Eternal Present* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), which devotes space to comparing Dante and Tolkien again.

Note that Tolkien was a member of the Oxford Dante Society (ODS), and he and C.S. Lewis used to read Dante's poetry to one another. See J.R.R. Tolkien, Letter #294 "To Charlotte and Denis Plimmer (8 February 1967)," in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 377. Founded in 1876, the ODS was a group of fifteen Oxford dons, who met three times a year to have lunch in the college of a member presenting on a crux or aesthetic issue in Dante's poetry; Tolkien joined at the invitation of C.S. Lewis, and he participated in the group for ten years (1945-55). He gave a philological paper presentation to the group on November 11, 1947 on the word "lusinghe" (alternately, *lusinga*, meaning flattery, enticement, illusion or adulation) from *Purgatorio* Canto 1, line 92. Tolkien's ten-page manuscript is now in the archives of the Bodleian Library, which remains unpublished but which was transcribed by Oronzo Cilli in 2018 (Oronzo Cilli, Facebook Post - #TolkienReadingDay, 25 March 2023, 12:06 AM, <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/tolkienreadingday>).

On this, see also a brief note by Jim Stockton, "Inklings and Danteans Alike: C.S. Lewis, Colin Hardie, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien's Participation in the Oxford Dante Society," *Mythlore*, Vol. 38 (Spring 2020): Iss. 2, Art. 11, 133-38 and a detailed article by John R. Holmes, "How Tolkien Saved his Neck: A *lusinghe* Proposition to the Oxford Dante Society," *Mythlore*, Vol. 40 (Fall 2021 / Winter 2022): Iss. 139, Art. 12, 193-207. Among other useful points, Holmes notes Tolkien's discussion of birds from the Old English elegy, "The Seafarer" (an interesting literary connection to Tolkien's real-world avian interests) and that Tolkien observed Dante's influence on *Pearl*, a fourteenth-century Middle English poem that Tolkien himself translated into metrical, modern English.

⁷ Antoine Louchart, "Tolkien, the Ornithologist," in *The Science of Middle-earth: A New Understanding of Tolkien and his World*, ed. Roland Lehoucq, Loïc Mangin, and Arnaud Rafaëlian, trans. Tina Kover (London and New York, NY: Pegasus Books, 2021), 285. As Christopher Tolkien notes in *The History of the Lord of the Rings, Part 3: The War of the Ring*, his father was writing letters at the time of composing the chapters "Shelob's Lair" and "The Choices of Master Samwise," in which the elder Tolkien indicated that he had "got the hero into such a fix that not even an author will be able to extricate him without labour and difficulty" (218). By the time he wrote the next chapter, "The Tower of Cirith

Sam falls silent suddenly when he hears hinges creaking as a door opens. The risk of discovery is great, yet Sam goes undetected when the orc Snaga emerges from the creaking door. The orc brings a ladder to access a trapdoor in the roof of the passage to the topmost chamber of the Tower – thus inadvertently (and eucatastrophically) revealing to Sam that there is one more level – where Frodo is being held captive. Sam manages to climb up the ladder behind Snaga. At the top, Sam sees that the orc has begun to whip Frodo where he is lying naked on a pile of filthy rags. Sam flies to Frodo’s defense, slicing off the orc’s whip-arm, and Snaga falls through the trapdoor to the stone floor below. So the hobbits are reunited. After overcoming several more difficulties, Sam and Frodo manage escape the Tower together to continue their quest to destroy the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom.

It is clear from Tolkien’s description that there is something about Sam’s singing that gives him new strength – new hope inwardly, new courage outwardly – to be able to continue to look for Frodo and, once he realizes that the other hobbit is just above him, to defend his master and friend from an attacking orc. The act of singing catalyzes Sam’s renewal in the silence and the dark, and it gives him spiritual power for the next step he must take in order to keep moving forward – and in order for the quest not to fail. The lyrics of the song itself bring the light and beauty of springtime into a lonely, miserable, indeed, evil place, and the images invoked by the words of Sam’s song are meaningful and symbolic. In particular, Tolkien’s decision to have Sam refer to “merry finches” – of all the birds in the world that he could have mentioned – is neither casual nor accidental, but deliberate.

In order to explore the significance of Sam’s “merry finches” in his song in the Tower, it is worth considering the finches that Tolkien knew from his own personal experience of birdwatching in England and, by extension, the finches that Sam might have known in the Shire. It is useful to consider possible sources of Tolkien’s knowledge of finches from contemporary birding books, such as T.A. Coward’s *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs* (1919),⁸ as well as from medieval and early modern

Ungol,” Sam’s song of “merry finches” had become part of Tolkien’s eucatastrophic solution to extricate Frodo from the clutches of the orcs.

⁸ Tolkien used T.A. Coward’s *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs* (London and New York: Frederick Warne & Co, Ltd., 1919), illustrated by Archibald Thorburn, when painting a golden eagle and its eyrie as an illustration for *The Hobbit*. See John Garth, “Artists and Illustrators’ Influence on Tolkien,” in *The J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael DROUT (New York: Routledge, 2007), who notes that Tolkien’s golden eagle “is a close copy of an 1891 chromolithograph by Archibald Thorburn reprinted in T.A. Coward’s *The Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs* (1919)” (p. 37). Tolkien’s use of Coward’s birding guide is further discussed by Holly Ordway, *Tolkien’s Modern Reading:*

manuscripts, paintings, and sculptures featuring birds (among which the Sherborne missal is exemplary).⁹ The symbolic use of the goldfinch in the medieval and early modern periods is worth considering, particularly the legend of the goldfinch who tried to remove the crown of thorns from the head of Christ, because that story has thematic parallels to Sam's attempt to find and rescue Frodo from his suffering.

Tolkien and the Bullfinches in the Garden

J.R.R. Tolkien is well-known for his love of the natural landscape of England and the way that it inspired him to create the Shire of Middle-earth where hobbits live. He invented, or borrowed from life or mythology, many creatures who populate his sub-created, secondary world, among them, many different kinds of birds – including, notably, Manwë's enormous Eagles, which have received significant scholarly attention.¹⁰ Tolkien

Middle-earth beyond the Middle Ages (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021), 44, 478. Ordway identifies Priscilla Tolkien, Tolkien's daughter, as the source of the knowledge that Tolkien relied on Coward's book. Oronzo Cilli, drawing on Garth's article in Drou's encyclopedia, also lists this book as one that Tolkien knew; see Cilli's book, *Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Luna Press, 2023), location 17579 and 23232. To read Coward's birding guide and see Thorburn's illustrations, see the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/birdsofbritishis00cowa>.

⁹ For general context, see W.B. Yapp, "The Birds of English Medieval Manuscripts," *Journal of Medieval History* 5:4 (1979), 315-48. The digitized Sherborne Missal can be viewed here:

https://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_100104060212.0x000001?_ga=2.46185319.1559972641.1599112250-1812418730.1599112250#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=368&xywh=0%2C-1939%2C5376%2C10689

See also Janet Backhouse, *Medieval Birds in the Sherborne Missal*, 1st ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2001).

¹⁰ On Norse and Celtic influences on Tolkien's birds (including eagles, ravens and crows), as well as on wolves, wargs, horses, and spiders, see Marjorie Burns' chapter "Spiders and Evil Red Eyes: The Shadow Sides of Gandalf and Galadriel" in her book *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth* (University of Toronto, 2005), 93–127. On Christian influences on Tolkien's eagles, see Gregory Hartley, "A Wind from the West: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Tolkien's Middle-earth," *Christianity and Literature* 62 (Autumn 2012): 95-120, esp. 112-16. on the spiritual function of the Eagles, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44315248>. See also Łukasz Neubauer, "'The Eagles are coming!' Tolkien's Eucatastrophic Reinterpretation of the 'Beasts of Battle' Motif in *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of the Rings*," *Hither Shore: Interdisciplinary Journal on Modern Fantasy Literature* 12 (2015): 236-246; *ibid.*, "'The Eagles are coming!' A Pneumatological Reinterpretation of the Old Germanic 'Beasts of Battle' Motif in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien," *Journal of Inklings Studies* 11: 2 (October 2021): 169-192, <https://doi.org/10.3366/ink.2021.0113>; Guglielmo Spirito, "Wolves, Ravens, and Eagles: A Mythic Presence in *The Hobbit*," *Hither Shore: Interdisciplinary Journal on Modern Fantasy Literature* 5 (2008): 86-105. For a general overview of the influence of Tolkien's

mentions many bird species in his legendarium, such as crows (including the Crebain), doves, finches, gorcrows, gulls, hawks, kingfishers, kirinki (birds no bigger than wrens with bright, scarlet feathers and native only to Númenor), larks, the Nazgûl-birds, nightingales, owls, páne (a Quenya word for a small gull or petrel), sparrows, starlings, swans (including the Swans of Gorbogod), thrushes, and woodpeckers, many of which have Elven as well as English names.¹¹ Aside from the thrush that helped Bilbo to find the secret door into the Lonely Mountain, the smaller birds of Arda have achieved less notice in scholarship than the larger ones. Yet the phrase “merry finches” in Sam’s song begs the question of what type of finches Tolkien might have been familiar with and referring to – and why.

There were several finches native to or prevalent in England in the twentieth century when Tolkien lived, worked, and wrote *The Lord of the Rings* there – and, of course, finches are still flourishing in England today. Among these are the Brambling, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Common Crossbill, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Hawfinch, Lesser Redpoll, Linnets, Siskin, and Twite.¹² Tolkien could have readily spotted many of these when he was growing up in Sarehole village (outside of Birmingham) in the north Worcestershire countryside or when he was walking in the fields beside the River Cherwell in Oxford as a student and, later, a professor. He spent key

faith on *The Lord of the Rings*, cf. Paul E. Kerry, ed., *The Ring and the Cross: Christianity and the Lord of the Rings* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011).

¹¹ For more information about Tolkien’s avian species, search the Tolkien Gateway (<https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Category:Birds>) and Louchart, “Tolkien, the Ornithologist,” esp. 292, containing his discussion of the Tolkien’s invented kirinki. Jonathan Rice, an ornithologist, discusses Tolkien’s use of birds in his legendarium in an interview available at <https://www.tolkienroad.com/0252-the-birds-of-middle-earth-an-interview-with-jonathan-rice/>. See also Antje vom Lehn, “Animals in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*,” *Lembas Extra: Magazine of Dutch Tolkien Society Unquendor* (2015): 191-222, which gives an overview of animal species and their functions in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, with special reference to ponies, horses, and birds, and see J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Nature of Middle-earth*, ed. Carl Hostetter (Boston, MA and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2021). Part Three: “The World, Its Lands, and Its Inhabitants” especially provides helpful contexts for understanding Tolkien’s creation of his secondary world, the home of all of the avian life that he depicts.

¹² To see photographs of these British finches and to listen to examples of their songs, see the Woodland Trust: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/02/british-finches/>. In addition, as already noted, Tolkien had access to T.A. Coward’s *Birds of the British Isles*, illustrated by Archibald Thorburn. Coward’s book contains not only the image of the golden eagle and its eyrie that inspired Tolkien’s own painting for *The Hobbit*, but also several color plates depicting finches (listed here in order of appearance): Greenfinch or Green Linnets (color plate inserted after p. 46), Hawfinch and Goldfinch (after p. 50), Siskin and Serin (after p. 54), Chaffinch and Brambling (after p. 62), Linnets and Twite (after p. 66), Mealy Redpoll and Lesser Redpoll (after p. 68). In addition to these images, the author describes many more birds from the “Family FRINGILLIDAE: Finches.” See the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/birdsofbritishis00cowa/mode/2up>.

years teaching in Leeds, and he traveled north to Whitby, and south to London, so there were several natural settings in England in which he could have seen finches or listened to their songs. We should not forget that he was born in South Africa, where he lived until age three, and so may have had a distant memory of small birds there (as the example of the scarlet-feathered *kirinki* of Númenor suggests).¹³ Even more significantly, given the wartime setting of Sam's song in the enemy territory of Mordor, Tolkien's deployment to France during World War I is also relevant: there, he may have seen and heard various European finches as well.

It is clear from his published letters that Tolkien was attentive to the birds around him. For example, in a letter to his son Christopher Tolkien on July 7, 1944, written from his home at 20 Northmoor Road in Oxford, Tolkien noted:

There is a family of bullfinches, which must have nested in or near our garden, and they are very tame, and have been giving us entertainment lately by their antics feeding their young, often just outside the dining-room window. Insects on the trees and sow-thistle seeds seem their chief delight. I had no idea they behaved so much like goldfinches. Old fat father, pink waistcoat and all, hangs absolutely upside down on a thistle-spray, tinkling all the while. There are also a few wrens about. Otherwise, nothing of note, though all birds are vastly increased in numbers, after the mild winters, and in these relatively catless days. The garden is its usual wilderness self, all deep green again, and still with abundant roses ...¹⁴

This passage from the letter is notable for its (obvious) references to bullfinches, goldfinches, and wrens, which captured the elder Tolkien's attention in the summer of 1944. His poignant attention to the male bullfinch, helping to feed his young from a harvest obtained while hanging upside down, may be an image Tolkien conveyed to his son, serving overseas during World War II, in order to remind Christopher of his love for him and of times past when they birdwatched in the family garden together.¹⁵ The passage conveys the sense that birdwatching is a common

¹³ Louchart, 292.

¹⁴ J.R.R. Tolkien, Letter 75 "To Christopher Tolkien (July 7, 1944)" in *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 86-87.

¹⁵ The whole Tolkien family took an interest in birds and birdwatching. At 20 Northmoor Road, for example, "In a side garden, Edith had an aviary in which budgerigars, canaries, and other exotic birds lived during summer months, being taken indoors for the winter. In war-time, the aviary was turned into a hen house" (John and Priscilla Tolkien, *The Tolkien Family Album*,

and familiar thing to both men – it assumes that Christopher will know exactly which birds his father means when he mentions them, for example – and will furthermore appreciate his father’s reference to the bullfinch’s colorful, metaphorical “waistcoat.”

The word “waistcoat” may remind readers of Bilbo Baggins’ fondness for colorful waistcoats – and Tolkien’s own fondness for the same. Tolkien wrote the definition of “waistcoat,” along with many other “W” words, for the Oxford English Dictionary.¹⁶ The passage in which the word appears in Tolkien’s letter is worth comparing to T.A. Coward’s description of the bullfinch in *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs*, not because it is a source or analogue, but because it shows Tolkien has both a birdwatcher’s keen eye for the identifying details of the Bullfinch and a poetic way of describing him that contrasts with his more prosaic birding guide:

The short, stout bill of the bullfinch (Plate 31), and the rich color of the breast of the male, prevent confusion with any other bird, but it is so retiring at most times that it has a false reputation for rarity. In summer it is a woodland species, where the only sign of its presence is often the soft clear call “whib, whib,” or a fleeting vision of white on its back. In winter, it is more of a wanderer, and visits gardens, where its criminal attacks on fruit buds lead to its undoing. Almost certainly it pairs for life, for the male and female are usually together in winter, flitting along the hedgerows or crossing the open with undulating flight. The low, mellow song is accompanied by swagger on the part of the male, for both sexes are said to sing; he moves his big head from side to side, sways and puffs out the red feathers of his breast.¹⁷

Tolkien’s description disagrees with Coward’s in that Tolkien feels that “Insects on the trees and sow-thistle seeds seem their chief delight” while Coward says, later in his description, that “insects are seldom eaten, although Newman affirmed that the larvae of winter moths, which do serious damage to fruit trees, are taken.”¹⁸

Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992, 55). In addition, at another Tolkien family residence, 99 Holywell Street: “Its small garden contained a hawthorn tree that attracted nuthatches and tree creepers” (*Tolkien Family Album*, 74). I thank Kris Swank for drawing my attention to these instances of birdwatching, and of caring for birds, in the Tolkien family.

¹⁶ Peter Gilliver, “J.R.R. Tolkien and the OED,” *The Oxford English Dictionary Blog*, <https://public.oed.com/blog/jrr-tolkien-and-the-oed/>.

¹⁷ T.A. Coward, *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs*, 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs*, 71.



Bullfinches from
Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs

Later in the same letter to his son, which Tolkien recommenced writing on July 9, 1944, Tolkien discusses the role of the bullfinch in the *Kalevala*, the national epic of Finland. Apparently, it was a bullfinch that recommended to Osmo's daughter putting the beer she was brewing "in oak casks with hoops of copper and storing it in a cellar"¹⁹ – this, in order to avoid the beer foaming up and spilling out all over the place, which it had been doing when it was only brewed in birch tubs, and from which, as a result, it was lapped up by heroes, who became "mightily drunk" (as Tolkien says).²⁰ Notable in this part of the letter is the way that Tolkien connects a real bullfinch that he sees in his garden to the mythological activity of one that he knows from a narrative poem, the *Kalevala*, an epic that is largely medieval in its mythology and overall character, although it was first published in the mid-nineteenth century.

In the course of the letter, Tolkien asks Christopher how he is doing with his own solo flights: Christopher was in the Royal Air Force during World War II, and he was stationed in South Africa, where his father was born. After this question, his father immediately observes, recalling something Christopher had written in a previous letter, "I especially noted

¹⁹ Tolkien, *Letters*, 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Letters*, 87.

your observations on the skimming martins. This touches to the heart of things, doesn't it? There is the tragedy and despair of all machinery laid bare."²¹ These brief sentences directly refer to martins, a passerine bird and a type of swallow.²² Here he contrasts the beauty of the "skimming martins" and the "tragedy and despair" of their opposite: "machinery." This tragedy, as the elder Tolkien calls it, quickly leads Tolkien to deeper reflections on the difference between art and machinery, and then to invoke both the Fall (from Genesis) and the legend of Daedalus and Icarus (from classical mythology):

Unlike art, which is content to create a new secondary world in the mind, it [machinery] attempts to actualize desire, and so to create power in this World; and that cannot really be done with any real satisfaction. Labour-saving machinery only creates endless and worse labour. And in addition to this fundamental disability of a creature, is added the Fall, which makes our devices not only fail of their desire but turn to new and horrible evil. So we come inevitably from Daedalus and Icarus to the Giant Bomber. It is not an advance and wisdom! This is a terrible truth ...²³

As with the connection between the bullfinch in the garden and the *Kalevala*, here again Tolkien connects birds seen in the natural world – in this case, Christopher's observations of skimming martins in South Africa – to literature and legend.

In Tolkien's mind, the Fall into sin that took place in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, described in the Bible, is naturally connected to a more literal fall that takes place in the legend of Daedalus and Icarus. As depicted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Athenian inventor Icarus builds the Labyrinth on Crete to conceal King Minos' wife's bastard offspring, the Minotaur. After Theseus threads the Labyrinth with the help of the Princess Ariadne, and slays the Minotaur (which the king had been using to kill his enemies), Minos suspects Daedalus (not his daughter) of betraying the secret way through the maze. So the king exiles Daedalus and his son Icarus. Daedalus, however, invents wings, so that he and his son can fly away from their

²¹ Ibid., *Letters*, 87.

²² Perhaps these martins were the African River Martin or Rock Martin common in central and southern Africa, though there are five martin, eleven swift, and thirteen swallow species that occur in Southern Africa to which Christopher Tolkien could have been referring. He was not referring to the African Skimmer, which is a type of tern, very different from a martin.

²³ Tolkien, *Letters*, 88.

prison. He warns his son not to fly too high or too low, but Icarus does not listen. Flying too near the sun, the wax on his wings is melted, and Icarus plummets from the sky to his death in the ocean below.²⁴ For Tolkien, Daedalus' invention of wings, so deadly to his son Icarus, is a precursor to the "Giant Bomber." Tolkien's anxiety for his own son, Christopher, an RAF pilot, is evident in this allusion. But so too is Tolkien's way of thinking about birds: not only literally, but in terms of literature and myth.

Tolkien and the Many Meanings of the Goldfinch

In the same letter that he writes to his son about the bullfinches in the garden of the family home at 20 Northmoor Road in Oxford, Tolkien notes that bullfinches behave much like goldfinches. Tolkien's observation is that of a keen naturalist comparing two different types of finches.²⁵ It is an observation likely informed by his reading of his birding guide, T.A. Coward's *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs*, which describes the goldfinch thusly:

The striking red, white and black head, and the broad gold band on the wing, prevent confusion with any other finch. Though lively enough in captivity, its charms are lost when confined; in the open, it is a fairy bird, light and buoyant on the wing, active as a titmouse when feeding. Even in the nesting season, it is sociable; I have seen and heard a little party, singing delightfully whilst young, hard by, were still in the nest. The song, clear, sweet, and loud for so small bird, is a combination of its liquid call, "twit." It flies with a "drooping," jerky flight, and a charm, as a flock is aptly called, twitters conversationally on the wing; amongst its favorite food-plants – knapweeds, thistles, ragworts and

²⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses: A Complete English Translation and Mythological Index*, trans. A.S. Kline (2000), VIII: 152-235. Available online at <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Ovhome.htm>. The key incident is famously depicted in Pieter Brueghel's painting "The Fall of Icarus," and that painting is remarked upon by Tolkien's friend and correspondent, W.H. Auden, in his ekphrastic poem, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (published 1907), which in turn influenced William Carlos Williams' poem, "The Fall of Icarus" (published 1916).

²⁵ Tolkien was not only a naturalist and a birdwatcher, but a mentor-teacher in the field of bird observation: he passed on what he learned about birding to the next generation of his family, his son Christopher, and the next generation after that, his grandchildren, as well. His granddaughter, Joanna Tolkien, remembers "being encouraged and helped by Grandfather in my interest of different species of plants, trees, birds, and animals, particularly horses. He sent me to pocket-books of British birds, and an Encyclopedia of horses, so that I could study them further." See Joanna Tolkien, "Joanna Tolkien speaks at the Tolkien Society Annual Dinner, Shrewsbury, April 16, 1994," in *Digging Potatoes, Growing Trees*, vol. 2, ed. Helen Armstrong (Telford: The Tolkien Society, 1998), 31-36.

other weeds – it is restlessly, active, flitting from plant to plant like a butterfly ...²⁶



Goldfinch from
Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs

Tolkien was not only a birdwatcher and reader of birding guides. He was also familiar, as we have seen, with the symbolic significance of birds in literature, art, and culture. So what might his letter's reference to goldfinches mean to Tolkien, considered more broadly in cultural context, and how might that inform our understanding of Sam's "merry finches" in his song in the Tower?

In 1946, Herbert Friedmann published his book, *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in European Devotional Art* as the seventh volume in the Bollingen Series in New York. In it, he analyzes more than 450 paintings that depict the goldfinch, which most frequently appears in the hands of the infant Christ Child as he sits in the lap of his mother, the Virgin Mary. These primarily Renaissance paintings have their medieval precursors in the many medieval icons and statues of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus with a small bird in his hand, statues which began to

²⁶ T.A. Coward, *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs*, 49.

become common in the seventh decade of the thirteenth century in France and later spread to other European countries, including Italy and England.²⁷ As Friedmann explains in his second chapter in the book, "The Symbolism of the Goldfinch," goldfinches in devotional art had many meanings. Friedmann interpreted the goldfinch as being symbolic of 1) the Soul, 2) the Resurrection, 3) Sacrifice (especially Christ's Passion), and 4) Death.²⁸ In *Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism*, Beryl Rowland notes in her entry on the goldfinch that the bird had secular connotations as well.²⁹ As both a devout Catholic and a learned medievalist, J.R.R. Tolkien would have been familiar with both types of meanings.

Friedmann writes that the goldfinch stands for the soul, as opposed to the body, because the soul was "the loftier, more aspiring part ... early connected with the idea of being winged."³⁰ He observes that the idea derives from the oldest catacomb decorations and may go back even to Egyptian hieroglyphics. He compares the goldfinch to the two sparrows of the gospel, which St. Ambrose interpreted as symbols for the body and the soul. For Friedmann, the goldfinch symbolizes the soul Christ came to save. The goldfinch also stands for Resurrection. Friedmann recalls the apocryphal story of the clay birds that the Christ Child brought to life and made to fly, told in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. These clay birds were associated with swallows, signs of spring, rebirth, and resurrection: like the goldfinch, the swallow was often depicted in paintings of the Madonna and Child.³¹ Most notably, the goldfinch stands for sacrifice and Christ's Passion, because of another apocryphal legend that associates the red on the goldfinch's face with its ministry to Jesus on the *via dolorosa*.

The goldfinch (and certain other small birds, such as the robin and the bullfinch) symbolizes Sacrifice and especially, the Passion. Apparently the presence of even a spot of red in the plumage was sufficient to serve to connect any small bird with the theme of sacrifice and of martyrdom. This was based on the early legend to the effect that while Christ was carrying the cross, on the way to Calvary, a little bird fluttered down to his head and pulled out a thorn that was

²⁷ Herbert Friedmann, *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in European Devotional Art*, Bollingen Series 7 (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1946), 2-4.

²⁸ Friedmann, *Symbolic Goldfinch*, 7-9.

²⁹ Beryl Rowland, *Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 64-66.

³⁰ Friedmann, *Symbolic Goldfinch*, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, *Symbolic Goldfinch*, 8.

rankling in His brow. The sacred blood tinged the feathers of the little creature, who has worn the mark ever since.³²

The legend takes various forms, and in some of them, the goldfinch tries to take the whole crown of thorns from Jesus' brow in order to relieve him of some of his suffering. In the attempt, as Friedmann notes, a drop of Christ's blood splashed the bird's face: so this becomes the explanation for the bird's appearance and association with the infant Jesus seated with his mother Mary in sculptures and paintings, where the bird foreshadows the Passion. This legend is thematically relevant to Sam's song in the Tower and its effects on Frodo and the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* at the time when Sam sings of "merry finches."

Just as the goldfinch sought to relieve Jesus of a source of pain and suffering, so too does Sam seek to find, rescue, and relieve Frodo, his master and friend, from his suffering. As others have observed, Frodo has Christ-like qualities in his willingness to sacrifice himself in the quest to destroy the One Ring in Mordor in order to save the lives of others from death or enslavement to the power of the Sauron.³³ His suffering particularly parallels Christ's, especially in the Tower, where he, like Jesus during his Passion, is whipped. When Sam suddenly feels new strength and then sings a song in a voice that rings out clearly, the lyrics come unbidden – inspired, as it were. Sam sings of the "merry finches" and then acts specifically like the goldfinch of medieval legend when he takes away a thorn: the orc-arm wielding the whip. Sam's song actually does bring relief to Frodo, as Frodo tells him later: "Then I wasn't dreaming after all when I heard that singing down below, and I tried to answer? Was it you?" Then he lays back in Sam's

³² Ibid., *Symbolic Goldfinch*, 9.

³³ There is some consensus in Tolkien scholarship that Christ-like qualities are represented in Aragorn (as Christ the King), Gandalf (as Christ the High Priest), and Frodo (as Christ the Suffering Servant). See, for example, Verlyn Flieger, "Missing Person," *Mythlore*, Vol. 12 (1985-86): Iss. 4, Article 3, 12-15, which identifies Gandalf and Aragorn as "Savior" figures and Frodo as a "Redeemer" figure; Flieger's views in this essay are contextualized by her book, *Splintered Light: Tolkien's World, Revised Edition: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2002). See also Ralph C. Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003); Craig Bernthal, *Tolkien's Sacramental Vision: Discerning the Holy in Middle-earth* (Oxford: Second Spring Books, 2014); Joseph Pearce, *Frodo's Journey: Discover the Hidden Meaning of the Lord of the Rings* (Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, 2015); Phil Ryken, *The Messiah Comes to Middle-earth: Images of Christ's Threefold Office in the Lord of the Rings* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2017); and, *caveat lector*, N. Ravikumar and Dr. R. Chandrasekar, "Frodo Baggins: Representative of the Human Aspects of Jesus Christ in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," *Language in India* 18:10 (2018): 1-7, who do not cite any secondary sources to acknowledge prior scholarship in this area (available at <http://www.languageinindia.com/oct2018/ravikumarhumanaspectstolkienfinal.pdf>); and Philip Kosloski and John Tuttle, eds., *Tolkien and Faith: Essays on Christian Truth in Middle-earth* (Wisconsin Rapids, WI: Voyage Comics and Publishing, LLC, 2021).

arms and closes his eyes “like a child at rest when night-fears are driven away by some loved voice or hand.”³⁴

Also meaningful is the adjective Tolkien uses to describe the finches in Sam’s song: “merry.” This adjective may be significant in more than one way. It is certainly an apt word to describe the appearance, activity, and song of finches, meaning, as it does, “full of cheerfulness or gaiety; joyous in disposition or spirit”; “laughingly happy; mirthful; festively joyous; hilarious”; or “causing happiness; pleasant; delightful.”³⁵ (In informal British English, it can also mean “slightly drunk.”) Originally recorded before 900 A.D., it has both Old English forms (*myrige*, *merige*) and Middle English forms (*merie*, *myrie*, *murie*). It is also one way of spelling a female name, one that is more commonly spelled “Mary.”

Are the finches in Sam’s song simply “merry” or are they also “Mary’s finches,” in a kind of homonymic pun that invokes the primary world sanctity, divine intervention, and supernatural aid of the Virgin Mary in Tolkien’s secondary, sub-created world at a moment when it is most desperately needed?³⁶ If Tolkien consciously or subconsciously intended to make such a connection, it is certainly consonant with the many extant medieval and Renaissance icons, images, and paintings of the Madonna and Child shown with a goldfinch. His use of them in this sense in Sam’s song in the Tower could certainly add to the prayer-like, psalm-like quality of the lyrics.

Tolkien and the Eucatastrophe of Sam’s “Merry Finches” in Mordor

Near the end of his essay, “On Fairy-stories,” J.R.R. Tolkien famously invents a new word, “eucatastrophe.” He uses the term to encapsulate his idea of “the Consolation of the Happy Ending,” and he argues that “the *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function.”³⁷ He defines his new word as “the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous ‘turn’ ... joy ... Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.”³⁸

³⁴ Tolkien, *LOTR*, 909.

³⁵ See “Merry,” in Dictionary.com. Available at: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/merry>.

³⁶ As Louchart has observed, in Tolkien’s legendarium, “Larks, nightingales, and other songbirds are closely associated with femininity” (“Tolkien, the Ornithologist,” 288).

³⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” in J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tales from the Perilous Realm*, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 384.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, “On Fairy-stories,” 384.

This powerful principle of eucatastrophe informed much of Tolkien's re-writing, re-imagining, and re-creation of medieval literature in his legendarium.³⁹ Furthermore, Tolkien found ways to interweave the principle with the works of his legendarium by using avian symbolism as a motif highlighting it. This is particularly obvious in the case of Eagles, who swoop in and save the day not once, but twice – at the Battle of Five Armies in *The Hobbit* and in the Battle of the Black Gate in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Eagles make “a sudden joyous turn” possible: they help to defeat the enemy and save the lives of those fighting for what is right.⁴⁰ But Tolkien's principle of eucatastrophe is also evident on a smaller scale: in Sam's song in the Tower when he remembers the beauty of nature and sings in the dark about “merry finches.”

Tolkien developed the eucatastrophic theme overall in the chapter, “The Tower of Cirith Ungol,” and in miniature within the chapter, in Sam's song. This can be seen from an examination of Tolkien's process in writing and revising the song. Originally, Tolkien planned for Sam to sing the Elvish hymn, “O Elbereth,” which Galadriel sings in the Company's hearing in Lothlorien.⁴¹ Later, Tolkien changed his mind about having Sam sing Galadriel's song. He instead wrote a three-stanza version of Sam's song, which has been published by Christopher Tolkien in *The History of the Lord of the Rings*.⁴²

The longer, earlier version of Sam's song introduces the lyric “I” voicing the poem in the very first stanza (not the second stanza, as in the later version), and the original lyric speaker is more ponderous and thoughtful, repeating at the beginning of each of the three stanzas some version of “I sit and think”: “I sit upon the stones alone,” “But here I sit

³⁹ See Jane Beal, “J.R.R. Tolkien, Eucatastrophe, and the Re-creation of Medieval Legend,” *Journal of Tolkien Research* Vol. 4 (2018): Iss. 1, Art. 8, 1-18.

⁴⁰ For further discussion, see Deidre Dawson's article on eagles in this Special Issue of *The Journal of Tolkien Research* on Tolkien and the Medieval Animal.

⁴¹ On the significance of this song as a form of intercessory prayer, see Jane Beal, “Saint Galadriel? J.R.R. Tolkien as the Hagiographer of Middle-earth,” *Journal of Tolkien Research* Vol. 10 (2020): Iss. 2, Art. 2, p. 16. The Marian qualities discussed in that article are also relevant context for understanding Tolkien's “merry finches” or “Mary's finches.” Although Tolkien chose not to have Sam sing the hymn to Elbereth in the Tower, Sam does cry out “*Gilthoniel, A Elbereth!*” when he and Frodo use Galadriel's Phial to defeat and escape the Watchers of the Tower of Cirith Ungol. (See Beal, “Saint Galadriel?,” 21ff. for further discussion.) Tolkien describes the Two Watchers as having “vulture-faces” and “clawlike hands” (*LOTR*, 909). In a sense, Sam's little “merry finches” directly contrast with the huge, demonic, vulture-like Watchers.

⁴² Tolkien, *The History of the Lord of the Rings, Part 4: Sauron Defeated: The End of the Third Age*, 18-30, esp. 27.

alone and think,” and “But still I sit and think of you.”⁴³ The earlier draft contains many direct addresses to “you,” which the latter version does not. The “you” in the earlier version is identified in the last line as “O master dear,”⁴⁴ that is, Frodo. In revision, the “you” and the reference to “master” disappears. The original possible song that Tolkien contemplated for Sam to sing, “O Elbereth,” is directed to Varda, Queen of the Stars, while the three-stanza version of Sam’s song is directed to Frodo, but the two-stanza, later version of Sam’s song has no apostrophe – no direct address to queen or master. The audience is only implied, not specified. The rising imagery of the lyrics of the later version give the song a prayer-like, psalm-like quality that seems directed toward the Divine, and readers learn in due course that Frodo, Sam’s master and friend, has actually heard Sam’s song as if in a dream while he is still held prisoner by orcs.

A somber tone pervades the entire earlier draft, from the very first stanza, which includes the dolorous lines “the tower is tall, the mountains dark; / all living things are dead.”⁴⁵ In contrast, the second version is much more hopeful: Tolkien develops the contrast between a hopeful Spring in the first stanza with the dreary darkness of the second stanza, but that darkness is ultimately rejected by Sam’s affirmation, “I will not say the Day is done / nor bid the Stars farewell.”⁴⁶ In the earlier draft, there is no reference to stars, and although the finches appear, they are not “merry.”

In the later version, there are three references to “Stars” (all capitalized), which in Tolkien’s sub-created world of Arda, Queen Varda made.⁴⁷ The triple reference to the stars may also be an allusion to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. If Tolkien’s representation of the Tower of Cirith Ungol does darkly echo Dante’s Purgatorial mountain, it is worth noting that when Dante the pilgrim reaches the top, he is depicted in an Edenic setting and converses with Matilda, and later, his beloved Beatrice, who is divinely-sent to lead him onward into the Heavenly Rose. When Sam reaches the top of the Tower, his song (the later version) recalls the beauty of the natural world in Edenic terms, and the hope and empowerment that he experiences emotionally from his inspired song does seem to be divinely-sent as well.⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid., *Sauron Defeated*, 27, lines 1, 9, 17.

⁴⁴ Ibid., *Sauron Defeated*, 27, line 28.

⁴⁵ Ibid., *Sauron Defeated*, 27, lines 3-4.

⁴⁶ Tolkien, *LOTR*, 909.

⁴⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1977), 27, 37.

⁴⁸ To contextualize this suggestion of mine, see Alison Millbank, “Tolkien and Dante’s Earthly Paradise: Enculturing Nature,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Forest and the City*, ed. Helen

Notably, Tolkien retains the references to “finches” in the later version of Sam’s song and, significantly, he adds the adjective “merry” to describe them.

Small and delightful in their pied beauty, finches are merry songbirds, with many admirable qualities that Tolkien directly observed and wrote about to his son and fellow-birdwatcher, Christopher. Tolkien was, in general, well-aware of the symbolic significance of finches because of his upbringing as a Catholic and his education as a medievalist. He specifically showed his medieval literary knowledge of the bullfinch in his letter of July 7, 1944 to Christopher, but he implied his knowledge of the goldfinch as well. The legendary role of the goldfinch in trying to relieve the suffering of Christ at his Passion, by attempting to remove a thorn or the entire crown of thorns from his brow and so acquiring a splash of Christ’s blood on its face, is thematically parallel to Samwise Gamgee’s efforts to relieve the suffering of his master and friend, Frodo Baggins, who was tortured and whipped by orcs in the Tower of Cirith Ungol. That Tolkien calls the finches “merry” also may be a kind of homonymic pun, a reference to the many extant European paintings and sculptures of the Virgin and Child pictured with a goldfinch. An auspicious bird, associated with divine intervention, help, and aid, Tolkien wove a reference to “merry finches” into Sam’s song as a way to foreshadow a sudden turn toward joy: Sam’s finding of Frodo, when he had been lost, and his ability to rescue him alive when he was almost dead. They escaped together and continued their quest, which was providentially achieved, and the merry finches foreshadowed their victory.

Conrad-O’Briain and Gerard Hynes, foreword by Darryl Jones (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), 154-66.



Vittore Carlo Crivelli,
Madonna and Child with Two Angels and Goldfinch (1435-1495)

References:

Auden, W.H.. "Musée des Beaux Arts" (published 1907). Available at <http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/auden.html>.

Backhouse, Janet. *Medieval Birds in the Sherborne Missal*. 1st ed.. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2001.

Beal, Jane. "Saint Galadriel? J.R.R. Tolkien as the Hagiographer of Middle-earth." *Journal of Tolkien Research* Vol. 10 (2020): Iss. 2, Art. 2, 1-34.

----- "J.R.R. Tolkien, Eucatastrophe, and the Re-creation of Medieval Legend." *Journal of Tolkien Research* Vol. 4 (2018): Iss. 1, Art. 8, 1-34.

Bernthal, Craig. *Tolkien's Sacramental Vision: Discerning the Holy in Middle-earth*. Oxford: Second Spring Books, 2014.

Bertoglio, Chiara. *Musical Scores and the Eternal Present*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021.

----- . "Dante, Tolkien, and the Supreme Harmony." In *Tolkien and the Classics*. Ed. Roberto Arduini, Giampaolo Canzonieri, and Claudio A. Testi. Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2019.

"Birds." In The Tolkien Gateway. Available at <https://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Category:Birds>.

Burns, Marjorie. *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005.

Caesar, Judith. "Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and Dante's *Inferno*," *The Explicator* 64:3 (2006): 167-70.

Cilli, Oronzo. *Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist*, 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Luna Press, 2023.

----- . Facebook Post - #TolkienReadingDay, 25 March 2023, 12:06 AM. <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/tolkienreadingday>.

Coward, T.A.. *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs*. London and New York: Frederick Warne & Co, Ltd., 1919.

Dawson, Deidre. "Tolkien's Eagles: *Aves ex machina*." *Journal of Tolkien Research*, Special Issue on Tolkien and the Medieval Animal (under consideration).

Gilliver, Peter. "J.R.R. Tolkien and the OED," *The Oxford English Dictionary* Blog, <https://public.oed.com/blog/jrr-tolkien-and-the-oed/>.

Hartley, Gregory. "A Wind from the West: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Tolkien's Middle-earth." *Christianity and Literature* 62 (Autumn 2012): 95-120.

Holmes, John R.. "How Tolkien Saved his Neck: A *lusinghe* Proposition to the Oxford Dante Society." *Mythlore*, Vol. 40 (Fall 2021 / Winter 2022): Iss. 139, Art. 12, 193-207.

Flieger, Verlyn. *Splintered Light: Tolkien's World, Revised Edition: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2002.

----- . "Missing Person." *Mythlore*, Vol. 12 (1985-86): Iss. 4, Art. 3, 12-15.

Friedmann, Herbert. *The Symbolic Goldfinch: Its History and Significance in European Devotional Art*. Bollingen Series 7. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1946.

Garth, John. "Artists and Illustrators' Influence on Tolkien." In *The J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Drout. New York: Routledge, 2007. 36-37.

Kerry, Paul E., ed.. *The Ring and the Cross: Christianity and the Lord of the Rings*. Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011.

Kosloski, Philip and John Tuttle, eds.. *Tolkien and Faith: Essays on Christian Truth in Middle-earth*. Wisconsin Rapids, WI: Voyage Comics and Publishing, LLC, 2021.

vom Lehn, Antje. "Animals in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*." *Lembas Extra: Magazine of Dutch Tolkien Society Unquendor* (2015): 191-222.

Louchart, Antoine. "Tolkien, the Ornithologist." In *The Science of Middle-earth: A New Understanding of Tolkien and his World*. Ed. Roland Lehoucq, Loïc Mangin, and Arnaud Rafaelian. Trans. Tina Kover. New York and London: Pegasus Books, 2021.

"Merry." In Dictionary.com. Available at <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/merry/>.

Millbank, Alison. "Tolkien and Dante's Earthly Paradise: Enculturing Nature." In *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Forest and the City*. Ed. Helen Conrad-O'Briain and Gerard Hynes. Foreword by Darryl Jones. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013. 154-66.

Neubauer, Łukasz. "'The Eagles are coming!' Tolkien's Eucatastrophic Reinterpretation of the 'Beasts of Battle' Motif in *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of The Rings*." *Hither Shore: Interdisciplinary Journal on Modern Fantasy Literature* 12 (2015): 236-246.

----- . "'The Eagles are coming!' A Pneumatological Reinterpretation of the Old Germanic 'Beasts of Battle' Motif in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien." *Journal of Inklings Studies* 11: 2 (October 2021): 169-192. <https://doi.org/10.3366/ink.2021.0113>

Ordway, Holly. *Tolkien's Modern Reading: Middle-earth beyond the Middle Ages*. Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, VIII: 152-235. Trans. A.S. Kline. Available online at <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph8.htm>.

Pearce, Joseph. *Frodo's Journey: Discover the Hidden Meaning of the Lord of the Rings*. Charlotte, NC: Saint Benedict Press, 2015.

Ravikumar, N. and Dr. R. Chandrasekar. "Frodo Baggins: Representative of the Human Aspects of Jesus Christ in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*." *Language in India* 18:10 (2018): 1-7. Available at <http://www.languageinindia.com/oct2018/ravikumarhumanaspectstolkien.pdf>

Rice, Jonathan. Interview. August 16, 2021. Available at <https://www.tolkienroad.com/0252-the-birds-of-middle-earth-an-interview-with-jonathan-rice/>.

Rowland, Beryl. *Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1978.

Ryken, Phil. *The Messiah Comes to Middle-earth: Images of Christ's Threefold Office in the Lord of the Rings*. Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2017.

Spirito, Guglielmo. "Wolves, Ravens, and Eagles: A Mythic Presence in *The Hobbit*." *Hither Shore: Interdisciplinary Journal on Modern Fantasy Literature* 5 (2008): 86-105.

Stockton, Jim. "Inklings and Danteans Alike: C.S. Lewis, Colin Hardie, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien's Participation in the Oxford Dante Society," *Mythlore*, Vol. 38 (Spring 2020): Iss. 2, Art. 11, 133-38.

Tolkien, Joanna. "Joanna Tolkien speaks at the Tolkien Society Annual Dinner, Shrewsbury, April 16, 1994." In *Digging Potatoes, Growing Trees*, vol. 2, ed. Helen Armstrong. Telford: The Tolkien Society, 1998. 31-36.

Tolkien, John and Priscilla Tolkien. *The Tolkien Family Album*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992.

Tolkien, J.R.R.. *The Nature of Middle-earth*, ed. Carl F. Hostetter. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021.

----- "On Fairy-stories." In *Tales from the Perilous Realm*. New York and Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008. 313-400.

-----. *The History of the Lord of the Rings, Part 4: Sauron Defeated: The End of the Third Age*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992, repr. 1998.

-----. *The History of the Lord of the Rings, Part 3: The War of the Ring*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

-----. *The History of the Lord of the Rings, Part 2: The Treason of Isengard*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.

-----. *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter with Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.

-----. *The Silmarillion*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1977.

-----. *The Lord of the Rings, 50th Anniversary One Volume Edition*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1954, repr. 1994.

Williams, Carlos Williams. "The Fall of Icarus" (published 1916). Available at <http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/williams.html>.

Wood, Ralph C.. *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Woodland Trust. Blog. Available at <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/02/british-finches/>.

Yapp, W.B.. "The Birds of English Medieval Manuscripts," *Journal of Medieval History* 5:4 (1979): 315-48.

Illustration Credits

Thorburn, Archibald. "Bullfinch." In *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs* by T.A. Coward. London: Frederick Warne, 1919, plate 31. Public Domain Mark 1.0 by the Biodiversity Heritage Library, <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/7583040#page/120/mode/1up>.

Thorburn, Archibald. "Goldfinch." In *Birds of the British Isles and their Eggs* by T.A. Coward. London: Frederick Warne, 1919, plate 18. Public Domain Mark 1.0 by the Biodiversity Heritage Library, <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/7582990#page/81/mode/1up>.

Crivelli, Vittore. Madonna and Child with Two Angels. ca. 1481–82. Public Domain, reused under the Metropolitan Museum of Art [New York, NY] Open Access Policy, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436056>.