

TOLKIEN, RACE AND CULTURAL HISTORY

From Fairies to Hobbits

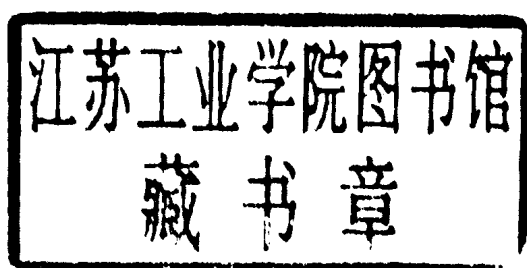
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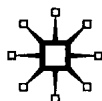
Tolkien, Race and Cultural History

From Fairies to Hobbits

Dimitra Fimi



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Conventions and Abbreviations

Previous Tolkien scholarship has established the convention of using ‘The Silmarillion’ within quotation marks to refer to the body of stories and poems that Tolkien developed during his lifetime, and *The Silmarillion* in italics to refer to the published volume of 1977, edited and published posthumously by his son, Christopher. Also, for Tolkien’s nomenclature I have preferred to adhere to Tolkien’s own spelling in the different stages of his ‘legendarium’ to which I am referring.

Abbreviations for Tolkien’s works are taken from the list established by the journal *Tolkien Studies*. In the case of Tolkien texts for which the *Tolkien Studies* journal does not provide an abbreviation, I have devised my own abbreviations. I have followed the abbreviations used in *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide (Chronology; Guide)* for a number of works about Tolkien frequently referenced in this book, and the abbreviations used in *The J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* (Drout 2006) for journals focusing on Tolkienian linguistics. I have also devised my own abbreviations for other journal titles, frequently referenced.

The dating of all of Tolkien’s works in this book is based on Volume II of *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide (Chronology)*, unless otherwise stated. I also follow the practice of *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide (Chronology; Guide)* in italicising all discrete works by Tolkien.

Lists of Abbreviations

Tolkien’s works

<i>Bombadil</i>	<i>The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and other verses from the Red Book</i> (1962)
<i>Farmer Giles</i>	<i>Farmer Giles of Ham</i> (1949)
<i>FCL</i>	<i>The Father Christmas Letters</i> (1976)
<i>FR</i>	<i>The Fellowship of the Ring: Being the First Part of The Lord of the Rings</i> (1954)
<i>GF</i>	‘Goblin Feet’, in <i>Oxford Poetry</i> , 1915 (1915)
<i>H</i>	<i>The Hobbit</i> (1937)
<i>Jewels</i>	<i>The War of the Jewels: The Later Silmarillion, Part Two: The Legends of Beleriand</i> (1994)
<i>Lays</i>	<i>The Lays of Beleriand</i> (1985)
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection</i> (1981)
<i>Lost Road</i>	<i>The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before The Lord of the Rings</i> (1987)

<i>Lost Tales I</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part One</i> (1983)
<i>Lost Tales II</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two</i> (1984)
LUV	'An Evening in Tavrobel', 'The Lonely Isle' and 'The Princess Ni', in <i>Leeds University Verse 1914–1924</i> (1924)
Mariners	'The Happy Mariners', <i>The Stapeldon Magazine</i> (1920)
MC	<i>The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays</i> (1983)
Morgoth	<i>Morgoth's Ring: The Later Silmarillion, Part One: The Legends of Aman</i> (1993)
Names	'Guide to the names in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> ' (1975)
Niekas Interview	'An Interview with Tolkien', <i>Niekas</i> (1967)
Peoples	<i>The Peoples of Middle-earth</i> (1996)
Pictures	<i>Pictures by J.R.R. Tolkien</i> (1979)
Road	<i>The Road Goes Ever On: A Song Cycle, Poems by J.R.R. Tolkien, music by Donald Swann</i> (1968).
Roverandom	<i>Roverandom</i> (1998)
RK	<i>The Return of the King: Being the Third Part of The Lord of the Rings</i> (1955)
S	<i>The Silmarillion</i> (1977)
Sauron	<i>Sauron Defeated: The End of the Third Age, The Notion Club Papers and The Drowning of Anadûnê</i> (1992)
Shadow	<i>The Return of the Shadow: The History of The Lord of the Rings, Part One</i> (1988)
Shaping	<i>The Shaping of Middle-earth: The Quenta, the Ambarkanta, and the Annals together with the earliest 'Silmarillion' and the first Map</i> (1986)
SWM	<i>Smith of Wootton Major</i> (1967)
SWM Essay	'Smith of Wootton Major' (essay) (2005)
TT	<i>The Two Towers: Being the Second Part of The Lord of the Rings</i> (1954)
Treason	<i>The Treason of Isengard: The History of The Lord of the Rings, Part Two</i> (1989)
UT	<i>Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth</i> (1980)
War	<i>The War of the Ring: The History of The Lord of the Rings, Part Three</i> (1990)

Works about Tolkien

Artist and Illustrator	Hammond, Wayne G. and Scull, Christina. <i>J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator</i> (London: HarperCollins, 1995).
Biography	Carpenter, Humphrey. <i>Tolkien: A Biography</i> (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977).

<i>Chronology</i>	Scull, Christina and Hammond, Wayne G. <i>The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide, Volume I: Chronology</i> (London: HarperCollins, 2006).
<i>Family Album</i>	Tolkien, John and Tolkien, Priscilla (eds). <i>The Tolkien Family Album</i> (London: HarperCollins, 1992).
<i>Film Portrait</i>	Dickinson, Helen (writer) and Bailey, Derek (dir.), <i>J.R.R.T.: A Film Portrait of J.R.R. Tolkien</i> (For the Tolkien Partnership: Landseer Film and Television Productions Ltd, 1996).
<i>Guide</i>	Scull, Christina and Hammond, Wayne G. <i>The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide, Volume II: Reader's Guide</i> (London: HarperCollins, 2006).

Journals

<i>KES</i>	<i>King Edward's School Chronicle</i>
<i>PE</i>	<i>Parma Eldalamberon</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vinyar Tengwar</i>
<i>YWES</i>	<i>The Year's Work in English Studies</i>

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1

Introduction

His 'private and beloved nonsense': *The Silmarillion* and the 'Silmarillion'

Contemporary critics of Tolkien's best-known work either loved or hated *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5). Both glorious eulogies and strongly worded dismissive comments were written about the three volumes that make up the work during the first few years after their staggered publication. Tolkien recognized this when he wrote:

The Lord of the Rings
Is one of those things:
If you like it you do:
If you don't, then you boo!

(quoted in *Biography*: 223)

Although this little rhyme seems like a very light-hearted and humorous comment on the popularity or infamy of *The Lord of the Rings*, it should be remembered that Tolkien was by this time a mature, successful writer. In contrast the younger Tolkien had taken criticism of the 'Silmarillion' – his unfinished personal mythology that pre-dated and informed the historical backgrounds of both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* – far more seriously. As an insecure venturer into the publishing industry, he first submitted the 'Silmarillion' to Allen and Unwin for publication in 1937. Even though Tolkien half-expected that the manuscript would be rejected, he felt relieved that it had not been 'rejected with scorn'. He wrote to his publishers: 'I have suffered a sense of fear and bereavement, quite ridiculous, since I let this private and beloved nonsense out; and I think if it had seemed to you to be nonsense I should have felt really crushed' (*Letters*: 26). Although these two statements were made in different phases of Tolkien's life, the difference they betray in his attitude towards criticism of his two main works also underline their personal significance for the author.

Most Tolkien fans would identify Tolkien's mythology with *The Silmarillion*, published four years after the author's death. Somewhat unusually, the unfinished manuscript for *The Silmarillion* was edited and 're-constructed' by Tolkien's son Christopher before its publication in 1977. However, the publication of this book was only the beginning of a phenomenon in twentieth-century literature. *The Silmarillion* was followed by the publication of thirteen volumes of Tolkien's other writings never finished or prepared for publication in his lifetime. The twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* (1983–96) together with the volume *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980) gradually unveiled the immense depth of Tolkien's 'private and beloved nonsense' and represent the vision of his mythology during a span of sixty years. During his lifetime Tolkien often referred to this vast personal mythology as the 'Silmarillion' or *legendarium*.

Perhaps it would be easier to tell the story from the beginning. Tolkien had started working on his *legendarium* nearly forty years before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. During that forty-year period he had failed twice to convince potential publishers that the 'Silmarillion' was worth publishing. But the great success of *The Lord of the Rings* changed everything: at last, his mythology had a chance of appearing in print. On many occasions during the last years of his life Tolkien referred to the 'Silmarillion' in both letters and interviews. He indicated that he was busy revising the 'prequel' to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* for publication. Large numbers of fans waited with great expectation for this book, hoping that it would provide the background mythology to the much-loved *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*. Although he continued to work on it throughout his life, Tolkien never saw his mythologies in print. *The Silmarillion* was finally published in 1977 after Tolkien's son and literary executor, Christopher, had undertaken the task of editing and preparing the work for publication. The book was presented as a coherent, finished narrative with no evidence of Christopher's intervention, except for his brief 'Foreword'.

However, the unfinished nature of Tolkien's mythology at the time of his death did raise some difficulties. To begin with there was no complete, single text that narrated all the myths and legends in a clearly structured and coherent way. The last version of the 'Silmarillion' that Tolkien left was missing its final chapters. Versions of the complete narrative had been written more than forty years earlier, but many elements of the mythology had changed in the intervening period. Consequently there were many different versions of the same story all from different times of Tolkien's life, with variations of names, plot elements and characters. The story of Beren and Lúthien serves as a good example: it is briefly mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings* (FR: 193–4), was first written in 1917 and exists in at least another eight versions, the latest written in the early 1950s. The illusion of a coherent and self-contained narrative in the published *Silmarillion* (1977) was achieved by cutting and pasting from a great wealth of material, along with

an imposed 'regularisation' of names and storylines. But this was soon to change.

In 1980 Christopher Tolkien published another volume of his father's writings related to *The Silmarillion*. In *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980) – which contained mainly pieces of the *legendarium* that Tolkien had written in his last years – Christopher undertook the role of editor. He provided commentaries and notes on the numerous fragments and 'unfinished tales' contained in the book, without intervening in the texts themselves. *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* raised doubts in the minds of some critics, making them question how much of *The Silmarillion* was Tolkien's own work and how much had been written afterwards by his son.¹ In order to answer these concerns, Christopher Tolkien embarked on the immense task of editing and publishing the whole corpus of fragments, unfinished stories, revisions and earlier versions of the Middle-earth saga. Clearly he also felt that study of the development of his father's invented world and mythology was valuable in its own right (see *Lost Tales 1*: 1–11). In the space of thirteen years the bulk of Tolkien's unpublished mythology appeared in print in twelve volumes under the general title *The History of Middle-earth* (1983–96). Mostly chronological, this monumental publication does not attempt to 'regularize' or homogenize Tolkien's writings, but rather celebrates the variations in style, nomenclature, plots, characters and ideas.

The *History of Middle-earth* series seems like a daunting task for the reader to face, but it becomes more accessible once it is structured into smaller units. The twelve volumes can be divided in three parts: Part 1: volumes I–V, Part 2: volumes VI–IX, and Part 3: volumes X–XII.

The first five volumes largely represent Tolkien's mythology before the writing and publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The first and second volumes (1983–4) present *The Book of Lost Tales* written in the 1910s and 1920s; they include many of Tolkien's early poems, written before and during the *Lost Tales*. One of the main differences between the *Lost Tales* and the published *Silmarillion* is in the presentation of the mythology through a 'framework': the character of Eriol (later called Ælfwine) is a traveller who hears the stories of the Elves and narrates them for mankind. The third volume, *The Lays of Beleriand* (1985), includes two long poems on the story of Túrin along with that of Béren and Lúthien, all written during 1921–32. These poems represent a period in Tolkien's creative expression of his mythology when he turned from prose to verse. But writing in verse proved to be temporary: both poems were left unfinished. The fourth volume, *The Shaping of Middle-earth* (1986), contains the *Sketch of the Mythology*, which is a prose synopsis of his mythology written in 1926. In this short piece, Tolkien tries to 'explain' how his vision of the long poem on the story of Túrin fitted within the whole *legendarium*. Tolkien then returns to prose for good in *Quenta Noldorinwa*, which also represents his next attempt to record his mythology. The *Sketch of the Mythology* and the *Quenta Noldorinwa* are the only complete accounts of the *legendarium*,

covering the whole of the First Age of Middle-earth from the arrival of the Valar in Arda to the overthrow of Morgoth. At that stage of the mythology's evolution, no Second or Third Ages had yet been conceived. The matter of Númenor along with the setting of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* had yet to be invented. The fifth volume, *The Lost Road and Other Writings* (1987), introduces the story of Númenor into the mythology. Written around 1936–7, it contains the first version of the legend of Númenor, *The Fall of Númenor*, and Tolkien's first abortive time-travel story, entitled *The Lost Road*. Closely associated with the Númenórean material, *The Lost Road* involved a series of fathers and sons re-living northern European myths and legends through dreams, concluding with the fall of Númenor from Tolkien's own mythology. Finally, the volume contains Tolkien's fourth attempt to record his mythology: the unfinished *Quenta Silmarillion*, written between the mid-1930s and 1938.

By 1937, Tolkien's story *The Hobbit*, originally created to amuse his children and initially totally independent from Middle-earth, was published. After its success his publishers asked for a 'sequel'. Instead, Tolkien offered them his 'private and beloved nonsense': the incomplete *Quenta Silmarillion* and a few other texts. The work was rejected, but Tolkien was still very much encouraged to write another story about hobbits. He started writing it reluctantly in the beginning, but soon realized that the story was growing into something different than a mere children's story. The next four volumes (VI–IX) of the *History of Middle-earth* record step by step how Tolkien created *The Lord of the Rings*, following his creative path from manuscript to manuscript during the period 1937–50, including rejected versions and revisions (*The Return of the Shadow*, published in 1988, *The Treason of Isengard*, 1989, *The War of the Ring*, 1990, and *Sauron Defeated*, 1992). During this time he stopped working on his mythology and devoted all his time to the 'New Hobbit' his publishers had requested. *The Notion Club Papers*, written between December 1945 and August 1946, represents the only period during which he deviated from his task. Tolkien wrote *The Notion Club Papers* as a time-travel story; it is included as the second part of the ninth volume of *The History of Middle-earth* entitled *Sauron Defeated*. Similar in theme to *The Lost Road*, this story was also left unfinished. In *The Notion Club Papers* the dreamers travelling to the past are Oxford dons belonging to a literary group called the 'Notion Club', similar to the Inklings group that C.S. Lewis and Tolkien belonged to. In this work the dreamers travel back in time, mainly to places from Tolkien's own mythology like Númenor and Valinor. *The Notion Club Papers* was not just another attempt to write a time-travel story, but also a narrative experiment to find a 'framework' for presenting his whole mythology. Instead of using a 'mediator', like Eriol/Elfwine in *The Book of Lost Tales*, Tolkien seems to have considered time travelling as a way of 'introducing' his *legendarium* to readers.

After the great success of *The Lord of the Rings*, the publication of *The Silmarillion* was finally a possibility. The Appendices of the former had wet