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**Teaching Tolkien's Translations of Medieval Literature:
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo and Pearl.***

By Jane Beal

J.R.R. Tolkien, the medievalist who became the father of modern fantasy literature, translated many poems out of Old English, Old Norse and Middle English into carefully versified modern English. Today, many English professors use his texts to teach medieval poetry in survey courses of British literature and medieval literature – and when teaching the works of Tolkien himself.^[1] Recently, I had the pleasure of teaching an author course, “The Mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien,” as an upper division seminar for English majors at a private, Christian liberal arts college, and in it, teaching three of Tolkien’s translations of medieval poems in relationship to Tolkien’s legendarium: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Sir Orfeo*, and *Pearl*. For my students and me, this learning experience led to new understanding about the influence of medieval literature on Tolkien’s fertile imagination.^[2] Specifically, his ideas about fantasy, recovery, escape, consolation, and eucatastrophe, expressed in his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” appear to be concepts he derived in part from his reading of medieval poetry and later developed in his own works of fantasy literature. In order to explore how my students and I gained new insight into Tolkien’s creative process, this essay will first

give an overview of the organization of my course, “The Mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien,” then consider approaches to teaching Tolkien’s three modern English verse translations of Middle English poetry. By sharing these ideas, I hope other teachers will also gain inspiration for their own teaching of the original works of Tolkien and Tolkien’s translations of medieval literature.

The Mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien

In teaching the “Mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien,” I have several specific learning objectives in mind for students. I clearly articulate these in the syllabus:

- 1) to learn about the life of J.R.R. Tolkien and how it shaped his mythology,
- 2) to read the major works of J.R.R. Tolkien and understand them,
- 3) to use biographical, historical, psychological, philological, literary, and possibly other critical paradigms to write about the works of Tolkien,
- 4) to craft a critical research paper or creative project (short story or a series of poems) in response to the mythology of Tolkien,
- 5) to appreciate Tolkien as a poet,
- 6) to witness the impact of Tolkien’s mythology on culture,
- 7) to remember what you have learned and apply it in the future, and
- 8) to integrate faith and learning (as Tolkien himself did).

These learning objectives determine how I shape the assignments and assessments in my course.

I begin the course by assigning a biography of Tolkien. I assign John Garth’s *Tolkien and the Great War*, rather than Humphrey Carpenter’s standard biography, because Garth emphasizes Tolkien’s youthful friendships and experiences in World War I, which provide particularly meaningful contexts for interpreting Tolkien’s epic,

The Lord of the Rings. As this is an author course in the English major, I explain that biographical criticism will be used to help us understand and interpret Tolkien's corpus of literature and that we must understand Tolkien's life well in order to understand its relationship to his fiction. I tell my students that this biographical paradigm for interpretation will shift – as when a person looking through a kaleidoscope turns the wheel and so changes the image perceived – to encompass historical (outer events) and psychological (inner events) paradigms for interpretation as well. Because Tolkien was a philologist and a medievalist, I encourage the students to plan to use philological and literary critical approaches to interpretation as well.

There are five units in the course, which correspond to Tolkien's professional roles and the development of his creative oeuvre: fairy-story writer, philologist and mythologist, medievalist and translator, father of modern fantasy, and poet and legend. At the beginning of each unit, we usually read a critical or reflective work by Tolkien himself in order to gain insight into subsequent readings in the major creative works of the author. I assign a series of papers, of increasing complexity, to verify student understanding of our studies together. The course culminates in a final presentation and a critical or creative project, which may be a research paper, a series of poems imitative of Tolkien's own forms (an alliterative poem, a riddle poem, a prose-poem allegory, a lay, a strictly metered and rhymed narrative poem [either romance or elegy], a bestiary poem, a narrative, descriptive or nursery-rhyme styled poem about

Faery-land, and a free-choice poem), or a piece of fan-fiction: a short-story set in Middle-earth. Students choose their project based upon their own preferences, which usually relate to their emphasis in the English major, either literature or creative writing.

When considering Tolkien as a fairy-story writer, we read Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy-Stories" before reading *The Hobbit*. We are then able to see how Tolkien realizes his ideals of fantasy, recovery, escape, consolation, and eucatastrophe in his first fantasy novel of Middle-earth, *The Hobbit*, which, although originally marketed to children, looks generically very much like a medieval episodic quest. During one class session, I make use of a clip from Peter Jackson's first installment of his *Hobbit* trilogy, which features the riddling-game between Gollum and Bilbo.^[3] This gives me the opportunity to note major differences between Tolkien's book and Jackson's films, a process that must be repeated when we arrive at *The Lord of the Rings* later in the course.^[4] At the end of the first unit, students write a reflection paper on how one or more concepts from "On Fairy-Stories" is realized in *The Hobbit*.

When considering Tolkien as philologist and mythologist, we take seriously Tolkien's claim that he created Middle-earth as a place for his invented languages and that his stories grew out of the languages he made up. Last spring, when several of my "Mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien" students were taking my course "History and Structure of the English Language" (HSEL) concurrently, we studied the historical development

of the discipline of philology in the nineteenth-century. We learned of the creation of the “tree of languages” chart / metaphor, which is one way of representing how modern languages are descended from originary languages (or perhaps one “ur”-language) and are related to one another in language families.^[5] This helped students in my “Mythology” course to see how Tolkien thought about languages and how he developed his own.

Tolkien’s philology and mythology are, of course, related. Tolkien’s love of language certainly inspired the invention of his own pantheon for Middle-earth, but so did his early study of the Greco-Roman gods and later study of Norse gods. While Eru-Iluvatar bears a striking resemblance to the Creator-God of Judeo-Christian belief, the Valar of Middle-earth have characteristics from Mediterranean and Scandinavian mythologies. It is interesting to recognize that the pantheon of Middle-earth emerges from Tolkien’s imagination whereas Greco-Roman and Norse mythologies emerge from ancient religious beliefs and practices of specific cultures. In order to facilitate a full discussion of these matters, I prepare a comparative chart naming the major divinities in all three pantheons, and I assign the *Ainulindalë* and *Valaquenta* from *The Silmarillion*. The *Ainulindalë* and *Valaquenta*, the first two sections of *The Silmarillion*, describe the musical creation of Middle-earth and the origins of its creatures, including Elves, dwarves, and men; these sections are the Middle-earth functional equivalent of Genesis 1-3 in the Bible.

In this second unit on Tolkien as philologist and mythologist, I also assign Tolkien's letter to Milton Waldman of 1951, which appears as a preface in some editions of *The Silmarillion*. This gives students insight into how Tolkien conceived of the contents of *The Silmarillion* before his son and literary executor, Christopher Tolkien, edited and published the book posthumously. Following the trajectory Tolkien outlines in the letter, we read selected stories from *The Silmarillion*, including the love story of Beren and Lúthien, the tragedy of Turin Turambar, and the legend of the voyage of Eärendel.

We transition to the third unit on Tolkien as medievalist and translator by reading his famous essay, "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*." We take special note of Tolkien's allegory of the tower by the sea:

A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends coming perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, and in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man's distant forefathers had obtained their building material.

Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: "This tower is most interesting." But they also said (after pushing it over): "What a muddle it is in!" And even the man's own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: "He is such an odd fellow! Imagine using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no

sense of proportion." But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea. (*Tolkien Reader* 105-106)

This is, of course, a cautionary tale. Tolkien notoriously opposed the "hunt-and-peck approach" (to apply a phrase) to analyzing *Beowulf*; no more did he approve of reading *The Lord of the Rings* primarily to discover its literary sources and influences. Yet just as there is a vital relationship between the stones and the tower, so too is there a relationship between Scandinavian sources and *Beowulf* – and between medieval English literature and Tolkien's fantasy fiction.

Students can see this vital relationship, at least in part, in the poems Tolkien translated from Middle English into modern English and their connections to some shorter works that Tolkien wrote: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in relation to Tolkien's satire, "Farmer Giles of Ham";⁶¹ *Sir Orfeo* in relation to Tolkien's fairy-story, "Smith of Wootton Major"; and *Pearl* in relation to the legend of Beren and Lúthien. At the end of the second and third units, students write another paper, one which requires them to do additional reading and make use of both primary and secondary sources. They are free to choose from among several topics:

Paper 2: The Influence of Medieval Literature on Tolkien's Mythology

Length: 3-5 typed, double-spaced pages

Weight: 20% of the course grade

Workshop and/or Writing Center: Friday of Week 9

Due: _____ of Week 10 by 3:15 PM in the Blackboard dropbox (online)

As our recent studies of Tolkien's critical and creative work have shown, Tolkien's roles as a philologist, a comparative mythologist, and a translator of medieval Scandinavian and English literature influenced the development of *The Silmarillion* and his pieces of shorter fiction as well. Thus, for example:

- Tolkien's understanding of the *Beowulf*-poet, articulated in "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," sheds light on his own practices as a sub-creator at multiple levels in *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit* and/or the LOTR
- his translations in the *Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, along with such additional acknowledged influences as Oedipus and Kullervo, shed light on his tragedy of Turin Turambar
- his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (with its prefatory essay) sheds light on his satire, "Farmer Giles of Ham," and/or his tragedy, *Fall of Arthur*
- his translation of Sir Orfeo sheds light on his fairy-tale, "Smith of Wootton Major"
- his translations of *Sir Orfeo* and *Pearl* (with its prefatory essay) shed light on his romance of Beren and Lúthien (and indeed the whole Silmaril cycle, including the story of Feanor and Eärendil the Evening Star)

To demonstrate your understanding of the complex interplay in Tolkien's imagination between his "sources" and his original creative work, **choose one of the topics identified above** and **answer the following questions in relation to it**:

- What in Tolkien's own life experience might have attracted him to translating the works of medieval literature that he did?
- What themes, characters, plots, settings, and symbols in Tolkien's original tales appear to be influenced by the works of medieval literature that Tolkien translated?
- How do Tolkien's original works and his translations reveal his beliefs about sub-creation, fate and free-will, and/or eucatastrophe? (In the case of the romance of Turin Turambar, ask: why did Tolkien write tragedy? What do we learn from it that we don't learn from a eucatastrophic ending?)

This paper should use a minimum of three primary sources (one of Tolkien's tales, translations, and critical essays, such as those on *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, and/or his letter to Milton of 1951) and two secondary sources by literary critics of Tolkien's mythology and/or medieval literature.

As I will show in greater detail later in this pedagogical essay, our work in class well prepares students to write this paper.

With the fourth unit on Tolkien as the father of modern fantasy, we undertake the study of *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR). Students are assigned to six small groups; they must generate discussion questions for Books I, II, III, IV, V, and VI of Tolkien's epic, one set of questions for each day that we discuss LOTR. These questions are shared online with all students before the class period in which they are to be discussed. I begin each day of our LOTR study with a short lecture emphasizing a particular character, relationship, setting, theme, symbol, or aspect of Tolkien's style, and then students discuss the questions in class that they have previously shared online, with a student discussion leader helping to facilitate the conversation in class, before I bring the discussion back to the large group format. As part of this unit, students write a paper on *The Lord of the Rings* examining its canonical status in the tradition of great literary epics.

The final unit focuses on Tolkien as a poet and a legend. On "poetry day," we spend some time discussing how Tolkien's earliest works set in Middle-earth were written in the form of poetry, not prose, and that Tolkien's youthful ambition was to be a poet, not a novelist, and why that might be and why it is significant. Students bring their favorite poems by Tolkien and read them aloud, then give a short explanation of why the poem is meaningful to them along with a brief literary analysis. This exercise in

public speaking sets up the rest of the week, during which students give group presentations on one of six topics: Tolkien and the Inklings, Tolkien and Medieval Literature, Tolkien and Fantasy, Tolkien and Languages, Tolkien and Art, or Tolkien and Film. These topics allow us to review many things we have learned throughout the course; together with the final critical or creative project, the presentation is essentially the first part of a two-part final.

We conclude our class time by reading Tolkien's story, "Leaf by Niggle," and discussing the importance of trees to Tolkien, in nature, philology, and faith. We conclude our semester by completing and turning in the final projects. For both my students and me, "Mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien" turns out to be one of the most enjoyable courses we have ever had.

Between the beginning and the end of the semester, the third unit of the course on Tolkien as medievalist and translator, is particularly important. Teaching Tolkien's translations of medieval literature gives students insight into Tolkien's creative process: how he integrated the life he lived with the medieval stories he read when he created his mythology. With my students, I explore this connection by assigning paired readings: Tolkien's translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with "Farmer Giles of Ham," his translation of *Sir Orfeo* with "Smith of Wootton Major," and his translation of *Pearl* with a re-reading of the legend of Beren and Lúthien.

Teaching Tolkien's Translations of Medieval Literature

We follow a pattern throughout this unit, reading a Tolkien translation (together with his prefatory remarks on it) for one or two days and then reading a related work of Tolkien's short fiction:

Week 7 – Medievalist & Translator

- SGGK I-II
- SGGK III-IV (w/ prefatory essay) (trans. JRRT)

Week 8

- "Farmer Giles of Ham"
- *Sir Orfeo* (trans. JRRT)

Week 9

- "Smith of Wootton Major"
 - *Pearl* (w/ prefatory essay) (trans. JRRT) & **Assign Paper 2**
- *F: *Writing Center & Workshop Paper 2*

Week 10 - Poet

- *Pearl*
- **DUE: Paper 2** Beren & Lúthien (revisited)

We begin the unit by reading Tolkien's essay, "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*," at the end of the sixth week. By exploring Tolkien's view of the *Beowulf*-poet, students gradually get some idea of how Tolkien may have viewed himself as a poet and "sub-creator." Students are prepared through this practice to read Tolkien's easier prefatory essays to his translations and to analyze his translations in Tolkien's own terms.

***Fantasy: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and "Farmer Giles of Ham"**

I typically like to begin our first class on Tolkien's modern English version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by asking students about their own experiences as

translators: have they studied a foreign language? Have they translated it, either verbally or in writing? Have they studied Middle English and modernized it? What were those translating experiences like? Were there any differences between translating Latin, for example, into modern English and translating Middle English into modern English? About half the class has usually taken my British literature survey course, so certainly some of them can discuss what modernizing Middle English is like.

We transition from their experience of translation to Tolkien's by examining his introductory remarks to his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which he begins by giving a basic overview of the anonymous poet, the Pearl Manuscript (Cotton Nero A.x), fourteenth-century England, the alliterative revival, and the reasons why translation is necessary "if these poems are not to remain the literary pleasure only of medieval specialists" (3). Tolkien's specifies his own two motives, which govern the style of his translation:

The main object of the present translations is to preserve the meters, which are essential to the poems as wholes, and to present the language and style, nonetheless, not as they may appear at a superficial glance, archaic, queer, crabbed and rustic, but as they were for the people to whom they were addressed: if English and conservative, yet courtly, wise, and well bred – educated, indeed learned ("Introduction" 3-4, emphasis added).

In the remainder of his introduction, Tolkien discusses the genre of the poem, "a romance, a fairytale for adults" (4), with a clear moral to its story: "the rejection of unchastity and adulterous love" (5). He takes note of the artistry of the interlaced

hunting and temptation scenes in the third part of the poem, as the Exchange of Winnings game plays out, and notes how Gawain's commitment to perfection – symbolized by the perfection of the pentangle on Gawain's shield – emphasizes the poet's faith in an ideal Christian knighthood. Tolkien also comments on Gawain's credibility as a character, his courtesy, and his shame at breaking his rash promise to his host. We see Tolkien's literary critical interpretation of the story (which differs from that of other critics in some respects), his emphasis on medieval readers' focus on the *sentence*, the wisdom of the inner meaning, as opposed to modern scholars' interest in sources and analogues, and his conclusion: that the Gawain-Poet may have lacked Chaucer's subtlety, but he exceeded him in nobility.

Knowing Tolkien's view of translation – the necessity of loyalty to meter and style – and his interpretation of the poem generically and morally can help us to understand how he will translate it. As we turn to the discussion of the narrative poem, we do so with an interest not only in the story and the character, but with an interest in how the translator did what he did and how it may have influenced his imagination and later creation of the mythology of Middle-earth. Our discussion of the story is guided by four key questions:

- What **codes** govern Gawain's life, and how do they come into conflict in this poem?
- What **games** are played in this poem, and how do they test Gawain's character?
- When Gawain makes each of his **confessions** in the poem (there are three), what level of self-awareness of his choices does he show, especially in relation to the codes governing his actions? What does he confess, what level of responsibility does

he take for his actions, and why (and how much) does it matter within the world of the poem?

- How might we, as readers, interpret the **conclusion** of this poem, and what might be its relevance for a medieval audience and for us.

As we discuss, my students and I generally come to some conclusions and additional questions. In the simplest terms, Gawain's life is governed by three interrelated codes: chivalry, courtly love, and Christianity. Tolkien argues in his preface that Gawain chooses fidelity to Christianity over an adulterous courtly love, that he "escapes from a temptation that attacks him in the guise of courtesy through grace obtained by prayer" (8). Do the students agree with Tolkien's moral gloss? Why or why not? The games include the "beheading" game at the beginning and the "exchange of winnings" at the end; the first tests Gawain's courage and the second tests, it appears, only his courtesy – but by the end, when the green girdle with its supposed ability to preserve life is at issue, it also tests his truthfulness.

The confessions to the priest, the Green Knight, and King Arthur's court gradually show Gawain becoming more aware of the faulty nature of his actions. While he blames women when he confesses to the Green Knight, he blames himself when he confesses to the court, even excessively so. Tolkien says the laughter of the court is probably sufficient answer to Gawain's extreme feelings (7), but do we agree? How do we interpret the conclusion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*? Throughout, our discussion naturally includes reference to many specific passages for literary analysis,

including the description of Gawain's shield, the Exchange of Winnings and concluding scenes in Arthur's court, all of which Tolkien highlights for readers as significant.

I point out that Tolkien identifies with *Gawain*-poet because they both share a geographical loyalty to the West Midlands of England, where Tolkien was raised, and they share a common linguistic heritage. This explains, in part, Tolkien's particular interest in this poet. I also ask students if they see any connections between the poem and the ideas Tolkien expressed in "On Fairy-Stories." Inevitably, they notice that this story is a *fantasy*, with many "terrible and wonderful" aspects of Faërie, including a Green Knight, the dragons in the wilderness Gawain wanders through on his journey to the Green Chapel, and the witchery of Morgan le Fay, which is revealed in the end.

When we read Tolkien's "Farmer Giles of Ham," Giles is quite a contrast to Gawain! My first task with this work of fiction is to get the students to determine the genre. It is not, actually, a fairy-story in the sense that Tolkien celebrates; it is a satire, a mock epic. It has elements of the fantastic in it, including a hero, a dragon, and a famous sword ("Tailbiter" in the vulgar tongue), but these elements are used for different effect than in a fantasy that the author intends his readers to take seriously. Though many critics see this satire as lighthearted and cheerful, I myself have a somewhat darker view of it that I want my students to consider.

Tolkien wrote the story in the 1920s for his own children, but he rewrote it substantially in 1937 in order to read it for the Lovelace Society in 1938; he hoped to

publish it shortly thereafter, but it did not see print until 1949. The story can be interpreted as literary parody: it imitates the plot structure of *Beowulf* in that Giles fights a giant and a dragon just as Beowulf fights Grendel and a dragon; it imitates the opening lines of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,^[7] and it borrows characters (types) from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, including a good parson and a despicable miller, as well as an important motif: the way a character's steed reflects an aspect of the character. (Notably, the mock-heroic Giles rides a gray mare.) The story even seems to poke fun at Tolkien's own *Hobbit*, which Tolkien had seen published in September of 1937; both feature a "Little Kingdom." It parodies other minor matters, too, such as those who worked at the Oxford English Dictionary, false etymologies, and the aggrandizement of Latin over "the vulgar tongue," English. But Tolkien's underlying instance in the story that dragons really are evil, and his consistently harsh critique of the greedy king who fails to protect his people, suggests that Tolkien might be making a much sharper point.

When Tolkien read his story in 1938, Hitler's power was growing in Germany. Just a few months before, in September of 1937, Hitler had demanded that the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia be ceded to Germany; by the end of the month, Chamberlain and other world leaders had agreed to this demand in an act of capitulation that would have profound consequences. Germany invaded Czechoslovakia on October 1, 1938. *Kristallnacht* followed on November 9-10, 1938.

Unaccompanied Jewish children began to stream into England beginning in December 1938 as their parents sent them away from Europe to protect them from Nazi aggression.^[8] By January 5th, Hitler was already publically insisting that Poland “return” the port of Gdansk / Danzig to Germany, a prelude to the Nazi invasion of Poland the next year, which finally compelled England to enter World War II.

Tolkien, as a veteran of World War I, was well aware of international developments; his own son, Christopher, also served in the Royal Air Force in defense of the country during WWII, which caused Tolkien great anxiety.^[9] His story of “Farmer Giles,” which insists that dragons really are evil and portrays a king that does not fulfill his responsibility to protect his people while the “Little Kingdom” is ravaged, looks a lot more pointed in light of contemporary historical events. It looks like not only a literary parody, but also a satire with political implications.^[10]

Escape and Recovery: Sir Orfeo and “The Smith of Wooten Major”

In contrast, turning to *Sir Orfeo* gives us the opportunity to consider good kingship and true fantasy, meant to be taken seriously, once again. Tolkien did not write any prefatory remarks to his translation of this poem, so I introduce students to the legend of Orpheus from Roman sources, Virgil’s *Georgics* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, via a PowerPoint presentation so that we can discuss how the medieval poet transforms the classical story. Our discussion focuses on the following questions:

- How does the *Sir Orfeo* poet transform the Orpheus legend? Identify several changes.
- How does the realm of *faërie* compare or contrast with Hades?
- Who is Herodis? What is her experience like with Orpheus, with the Faerie King, in Faerie itself, and when reunited with her husband? If medieval fantasy is acting as “psychological allegory,” what underlying social, psychological and spiritual realities might Herodis’ story be revealing?
- What are the effects of the *Sir Orfeo* poet borrowing from the homecoming of Odysseus and the testing of the loyal steward to re-write the ending of the Orpheus legend?

We also consider the romance in light of Tolkien’s “On Fairy-Stories”: how are

Tolkien’s ideals of fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation present in *Sir Orfeo*? Could

Sir Orfeo be described as possessing eucatastrophe? Why or why not?

In large group, we discuss the questions. Students identify at least eight changes that the medieval poet makes to the classical legend of Orpheus:

- Orpheus becomes Sir Orfeo, a courtly knight and king of Winchester,
- Eurydice becomes Heurodis, a courtly lady and Sir Orfeo’s queen,
- the role of the snake becomes the role of the “ympe-tree” (grafted tree),
- Mercury becomes Heurodis’ Faërie kidnappers,
- Hades (the place) becomes Faërie, the Celtic otherworld,
- Hades (the god) becomes the Faërie King,
- the loss of Eurydice becomes the redemption of Heurodis, and
- the new poem concludes with the testing of the loyal steward.

One of the key differences between Hades and Faërie, students eventually observe, is

location. Hades is essentially imagined to be under the ground while Faërie is imagined

to be somehow part of this world: a Celtic otherworld, yes, but a fantastic one

overlapping the realistic one. While the dead go down to Hades, the living can enter

Faërie and come out again alive. Herodis is one of these.

As Sir Orfeo's queen, she is apparently chosen by the fair folk to be taken away with them from under a grafted tree. The grafted tree seems to symbolize the intersection of this world and Faërie. I suggest to students that the fantasy poems of the Middle Ages act as a kind of "psychological allegory," with events correlating to the hopes and fears of poets and their audiences. In this sense, Herodis' experiences have social, psychological and spiritual implications.

Socially, in the Middle Ages, a king might give his daughter to another against her will, another king might take captive the wife of a conquered king or noble, and still other English lords perpetuated the injustice of *prima nocte*, taking a bride on her wedding night before returning her to her shamed husband, a practice some students know from Mel Gibson's film, "Braveheart." Psychologically, Herodis' experience may be a thin veil for these experiences that medieval women had. But the Orphic story was also connected to allegorical interpretation in the Middle Ages. Spiritually, Orpheus sometimes stood for Christ and Eurydice for his Bride, the soul he rescued.^[11] In this way, Sir Orfeo and Herodis can represent a story much larger than their own: the story of Christ's redemption of humanity from sin, death, and the grave. So there are rich possibilities for discussion and interpretation when examining the experience of Herodis from a variety of perspectives.

By adding the testing of the loyal steward by Sir Orfeo when he returns from Faërie with his queen, the medieval poet makes the point that the restoration of love

between two individuals is neither the end of the story nor even the main goal. Instead, to be truly meaningful for a medieval audience, the story must include the restoration of the social order. The king is restored to his throne and his subjects are rewarded for their loyalty.

Students generally agree that *Sir Orfeo* is a fantasy that encourages the readers to experience a sense of escape, recovery, and consolation by identifying with Sir Orfeo, who escapes the responsibilities of his kingdom in order to recover his wife; he is finally consoled by both her return and the restoration of the social order when he finds his loyal steward has well kept his kingdom. The poem does indeed contain a *eucaastrophe*, a sudden joyous turn of events, when the Faërie King allows Herodis to go free with Sir Orfeo – a dramatic change from the classical legend of Orpheus, in which Orpheus looks back at his wife and loses her to death for a second time.

Like *Sir Orfeo*, J.R.R. Tolkien's short story, "Smith of Wootton Major," is a fantasy. It particularly emphasizes the elements of escape and recovery. It is the story of a Smith who, as a young boy, gains a passport to Faërie by swallowing a star hidden in a cake – and has many extraordinary experiences in Faërie thereafter. Smith is constantly escaping, and readers escape with him, from the prison of the ordinary world. His recovery of joy and wonder in the otherworld is shared by readers of the story.

The story also features a critique of a succession of cooks, who live in a house attached to the town of Wootton Major's great Hall, where feasts are held. The first Master Cook is good but later leaves on holiday, never to return; his apprentice, Alf, is not allowed to take up his responsibilities fully, but is instead displaced by a failed apprentice, Nokes. This third cook, Nokes, is clearly bad-hearted. For he steals recipes and credit from the apprentice, demonstrates little understanding of Faërie, and becomes grossly fat. But when he retires, the apprentice does after all become Master Cook – and he also later turns out to be the King of Faërie in disguise. He gives the role of Master Cook to a fourth cook who is, again, good-hearted.

What was the genesis of this fairy-tale? Naturally, the inspiration was, at least in part, philological. In January 1965, Tolkien agreed to write a preface to a new addition of George MacDonald's *Golden Key*, and started work on little narrative about a cook and a cake in order to explain the word "faërie." The little narrative grew to become the fairy-story, "Smith of Wootton Major," but the promised preface was never completed.

Tolkien himself remarked that there are allegorical elements to this fairy-story – perhaps unexpected ones at that. Students are sometimes surprised to learn that Tolkien said, specifically, that "the great Hall is evidently an 'allegory' of the village church," and "the Master Cook is plainly the Parson and the priesthood" (qtd. in Shippey, *Author of the Century* 297). This is at least one area in which the story of Smith is like the story of Sir Orfeo: both have Christian allegorical interpretations. Yet there are other similarities,

elements that Tolkien's imagination may have transformed from *Sir Orfeo* to "Smith of Wootton Major," and I ask my students to brainstorm, comparing and contrasting the two narratives, to discover what these might be.

In the first story, the queen Herodis is taken against her will into Faërie; in the second, Smith is compelled by means of the strange experience of swallowing a star in a cake, made by the king of Faërie in disguise, to enter Faërie. Yet while Herodis goes once only, and stays long, Smith willingly goes back many times on comparatively short visits, and even dances once with the Faërie Queen, and brings back a flower that never dies to his family. The eucatastrophe of *Sir Orfeo* is the release of Herodis from Faërie and her return to Winchester in England; for Smith, in contrast, there is only a profound sense of loss and bereavement at leaving Faërie permanently as he is required to do when he has grown old. Yet both stories have a restoration of order in the end. Sir Orfeo's kingdom is restored while Smith passes on the star to a young family member, who will now travel in and out of Faërie himself. The narratives share similar characters, motifs, landscapes, symbols, and, as already mentioned, potential for Christian allegorical interpretation.

Tolkien's Smith may share some things in common with Herodis, but he shares even more in common with Orfeo. Orfeo makes music with his harp, and Smith too is an artist, making things both practical and beautiful in his smithy. So Tolkien's interest in sub-creation is further revealed in Smith.^[12] T.A. Shippey has called Tolkien's "Smith

of Wootton Major” an “autobiographical allegory” (*Author of the Century* 296), and to the extent we can identify Tolkien with Smith, we see Orphic powers in both author and character: the ability to create, the ability to enter Faërie, the ability to invite others in and out of the otherworld. As Shippey observes, in “Smith of Wootton Major,” Tolkien:

... lays aside his star; defends the real world utility of fantasy; insists that fantasy and faith are in harmony as visions of a higher world; hopes for a revival of both in the future in which the Nokeses of the world (the materialists, the misologists) will have less power ... (303)

Consolation: Pearl and the Legend of Beren and Lúthien

The transition from J.R.R. Tolkien’s translation of *Sir Orfeo* to his translation of *Pearl* is a natural, logical next step, for both medieval poems deal with love and loss. *Sir Orfeo* presents the wish-fulfillment fantasy that a king may rescue his beloved queen from a death-like fate in Faërie. In contrast, *Pearl*, a Christian dream vision, presents the hope of life after death in heaven with God.

Interpretation of *Pearl* was widely debated among philologists, medievalists, and literary scholars of Tolkien’s day (as it continues to be today). Interpreters debated the poem’s genre (allegory or elegy?), the nature of the relationship between the two main characters, the Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden (father/daughter or something else?), and the potentially autobiographical character of the poem (was the poet writing about his own personal loss or someone else’s?). Tolkien’s prefatory essay on *Pearl* gives his own view of these matters, so I ask students to read it, just as they did the prefatory essay on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, so that they may understand Tolkien’s perspective.

Students soon discover that, in terms of genre, Tolkien viewed *Pearl* as an elegy containing minor allegories (such as the parable of the workers in the vineyard) within it, but he viewed it particularly as a symbolic narrative (and pearl is the primary symbol) as well as a consolation. He considered the main characters to be a father and a daughter, but he granted that the Pearl -Maiden represented much more than a daughter; within the world of the poem, she comes to stand for the “spirit of celestial charity” (“Introduction” 8). He compares *Pearl* with Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and especially Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* to suggest of *Pearl* that “it is overwhelmingly more probable that it too was founded on a real sorrow, and drew its sweetness from a real bitterness” (16).

But Tolkien moves beyond these scholarly debates to assert that “a feigned elegy remains an elegy; and feigned or unfeigned, it must stand or fall by its art” (16). To Tolkien, the poem is exemplary art, “a much greater poem” (16) than Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, which furthermore has a clear didactic purpose: “This is the main purpose of the poem as distinct from its genesis or literary form: the doctrinal theme, in the form of an argument on salvation, in which the father is at last convinced that his Pearl, as a baptized infant and innocent, is undoubtedly saved, and even more, admitted to the blessed company of the 144,000 that follow the Lamb” (18). This, then, is the true consolation that the Dreamer receives – the knowledge of salvation and redemption of the loved one who has died – a knowledge that the poet offers to readers as well.

At this point, just when students are grasping Tolkien's perspective of *Pearl*, I am compelled to complicate things by reminding them that Tolkien is not the sole authority on the interpretation of *Pearl* and that scholarship on *Pearl* has continued to develop since Tolkien penned his views. As about half of the students have taken British Literature I survey with me prior to our "Mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien" seminar, I am able to remind them of our discussion questions on *Pearl* from that course, and all of us make use of those questions to consider Tolkien's translation of poem.

- How might we interpret *Pearl* literally, allegorically, morally, and anagogically?
- What is the nature of the relationship between the Pearl-Maiden and the Dreamer?
- How is the symbol of the pearl transformed throughout the poem?
- Is the Dreamer consoled at the end of the poem? If not, why not? If so, how?

Tolkien's view of the poem's genre is indeed complex, but it is also possible to view the dream vision literally as an elegy, spiritually as an allegory, morally as a consolation, and anagogically as a revelation (Beal "Signifying"). Although most scholars today concur with Tolkien that the Dreamer is a father and the Pearl-Maiden is his daughter, still, there are many other possible interpretations.

Literally, they have been interpreted as a lover and his beloved, who was a young woman who died before their love was consummated (Carson; Beal "Two Lovers"), as godfather and godchild or grandfather and grandchild or even brother and younger sister (Bishop), as a poet sympathizing with a patron who is father to a young girl (Staley), as a poet of the Ricardian court honoring Anne of Bohemia (Bowers), and a

jeweler in relationship to an infant-transformed-into-a-woman who is like the virgin martyr Saint Margaret of Antioch (Earl). Allegorically, the Pearl-Maiden has been seen as a figure of maidenhood or virginity (Schofield), the Dreamer's own soul (Madeleva), the Dreamer's own soul in mystical union with Christ (Hillmann), the Dreamer's regenerate soul, eternal life, and/or beatitude (Hamilton), the Dreamer's lost innocence or the innocence of childhood (Cawley and Anderson; Robertson), and even the Dreamer's "alleluia" or his joy in salvation (Beal "Signifying").

The symbol of the pearl itself, as Tolkien agrees, undergoes transformation throughout the poem. In 1962, A.C. Spearing made an excellent case for this in "Dramatic and Symbolic Development in *Pearl*" in *Modern Philology*; he later developed the case in *Readings in Medieval Poetry*, arguing that the pearl undergoes multiple symbolic transformations: from the lost pearl in the garden (literal pearl) to the Pearl-Maiden (the beloved) to the Pearl of Great Price (salvation) to the Lamb himself (Jesus), who is called a Jewel and associated with pearlescent qualities of whiteness and shining brightness (*Readings* 210-11). Other pearls abound in the poem, including the pearls that form the sand the Dreamer walks on in the dreamscape and the pearls that form the gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem. The garments of the Lamb are directly compared to "praysed perlez" (line 1112).^[13]

The conclusion of the poem, again as Tolkien would agree, does show that the Dreamer is consoled. Although there has been some debate about this point in the

scholarship, students generally agree that the Dreamer receives consolation, especially after we have discussed how the Dreamer actually laughs aloud in his dream at one point and continues to meditate on the iconic image of the bleeding Lamb, whose visage is full of joy despite the suffering the Lamb has experienced, long after he has awoken. Like the central symbol, the Dreamer himself undergoes a process of transformation and renewal in the course of his dream vision. If he did not, Tolkien says in his prefatory essay, at the conclusion of the poem he would not be in a state of “gentle and serene resignation” but rather “still as he is first seen, looking only backward, his mind filled with the horror of decay” (“Introduction” 19).

We spend two full days on *Pearl*, considering it closely, because it is an exquisitely beautiful poem that deeply influenced Tolkien’s imagination.^[14] When we turn to compare Tolkien’s translation of this medieval dream vision to his own legend of Beren and Lúthien, we have already read the legend once, closely, in our study of Tolkien’s *Silmarillion* earlier in the semester.^[15] We have considered, and so can briefly re-visit, the interwoven strands of influence evident in the story: biographical, faërie-like, and classical as well as Christian.

Considering the story from a biographical perspective, it is well-known that Tolkien had the names “Beren” and “Lúthien” inscribed on the tombstone he shares his wife, Edith, and that Tolkien wrote to his son, Christopher, after Edith’s death, saying, “... she was (and she knew she was) my Lúthien” (*Letters* 420). Just as Beren sees Lúthien

dancing in a wood, so too Tolkien once saw Edith dancing for him in a wood, and the moment becomes iconic in his fantasy fiction.

We can see, too, that the story owes something to the German fairy-tale of Rapunzel for, at one point in the unfolding plot, Lúthien grows her hair long in order to escape imprisonment in a house built in an elevated tree as tall as any tower. Classical influence is also evident: Proteus pinned down and transforming to try to escape from Menelaus in Homer's *Odyssey* or Aristaeus in Virgil's *Georgics* is much like Sauron pinned down and transforming to try to escape Huan, the hound of Valinor; the wolves and werewolves of the story harken back to the Ovidian tale of Lycaon, a name that means "wolf," and a character who was transformed into a bird of prey pursuing a woman he injured who is also transformed, but into a nightingale (which is especially relevant when we consider that Beren's name for Lúthien is 'nightingale'); and the Orphic powers of calming animals and singing songs of power are divided between Beren and Lúthien. Christian symbolism is subtly incorporated when the hellish wolf Carcharoth is called a devil, and the Silmarils themselves may relate to the pearl from the Parable of Pearl of Great Price.

Once we have read both *Sir Orfeo* and *Pearl*, students have the opportunity to see how Tolkien's understanding of these poems, which (among other things) mediate the Orphic legend and the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, was transformed in his imaginative process to help him create the legend of Beren and Lúthien. Tolkien himself

wrote that the legend was “a kind of Orpheus-legend in reverse” (*Letters* 193), and in addition to the Orphic powers that Beren and Lúthien share, we can see that they both come back from near-death experiences, just as in the medieval *Sir Orfeo* (though not the classical story). Furthermore, it is the female Lúthien who has the power to sing back/bring back Beren, not the male Beren, whom we might otherwise expect to play the Orphic role because of his gender.

The construction of Lúthien’s character is influenced not only by *Sir Orfeo*, but by *Pearl* as well. She is also directly compared to a Jewel, to a Silmaril, when her possessive father refuses to let Beren marry her unless he obtains a Silmaril from the Iron Crown of Morgoth, the enemy of Men and Elves and everything good made by Eru-Iluvatar, the Creator-God of Tolkien’s mythology. Here my students and I are reminded of Tolkien’s interpretation of the Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden as father and daughter; we recall the struggle the Dreamer had to release his Pearl and accept her death. Lúthien, as an elf, is immortal, but by loving Beren, she chooses mortality, so that she can be with him forever in life and after death. So her father, and all elves, lose her. Tolkien’s legend magnifies the grief of *Pearl* to legendary proportions in his own love-story.

It is very interesting to consider the Silmaril that Beren obtains in light of the transformations of the pearl symbol in the medieval poem, *Pearl*. For the Silmaril is at first a literal jewel (Silmaril) and then is closely linked to Lúthien (the beloved), who is called a Jewel and whose value is equated to a Silmaril as bride-price, and then, when

eaten by the wolf Carcharoth, the Silmaril miraculously preserves Beren's severed hand from decay. When placed in his living hand by the elf Mablung, the Silmaril briefly rouses Beren from death-like slumber, saving him from death temporarily (a kind of salvation). The whole Quest for the Simaril only deepens Lúthien's love for Beren, whose spirit she commands to wait for her as he dies, and eventually, by the will of the Valar, they are reunited. Lúthien herself eventually chooses to die with Beren and is granted that gift of Iluvatar, death, which had been reserved to men. As in *Pearl*, the ending of the legend of Beren and Lúthien offers consolation and solace.

But the Silmaril stolen by Beren and Lúthien will, in another tale, eventually be set in the heavens and shine as a star, bound on the brow of Eärendil, and be called the Morning Star. Could it be, that in this final translocation of the Silmaril, we see a veiled reference to the Morning Star of Christian symbolism (Rev. 22:16), the Lamb of *Pearl* (Jesus)? In class, I find that it is worthwhile to note to my students at this point that Tolkien's philological inspiration for the tale of the Voyage of Eärendil came from two lines in an Anglo-Saxon poem: *éala éarendel engla beorhtast / ofer middangeard monnum sended* ("Hail Earendel, brightest of angels, over Middle-earth to men sent"). (line 104)

Which poem do these lines come from? They come from the Old English poet Cynewulf's poem called *Christ*.

Conclusions

Overall, our reading of Tolkien's translations of three Middle English poems, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Sir Orfeo*, and *Pearl* is both enjoyable and instructive. It helps my students and me to meet the course objectives, especially the first, third, and eighth: to learn about the life of J.R.R. Tolkien and how it shaped his mythology; to use biographical, historical, psychological, philological, literary, and possibly other critical paradigms to write about the works of Tolkien; and to integrate faith and learning (as Tolkien himself did). At the conclusion of the seminar, when I read the course reviews, I am pleased to realize that none of my efforts has been wasted. For several students stated that they experienced specific emotional and spiritual insights as a result of their reading and reflection in our course. My hope is that, in the future, many more students will have this positive experience with me as well as with other teachers of Tolkien's translations of medieval literature.

Appendix: Questions on *Pearl*

Pearl, I-X (ll. 1-768)

1. Where does the poem begin? Think of Eden, the Song of Songs, and Mary's womb, all considered to be types of the *hortus conclusus* ("enclosed garden") in the Middle Ages. What did these gardens contain? What grew in them? What does the garden at the beginning of this poem contain? What is growing in it?
2. The speaker grieves over his lost pearl in the opening lines of the poem. He says, "Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere" (alas, I lost her in a garden); she is "clad in clot" (dressed in dirt); he observes, "For vch gresse mot grow of graynez dede" (for each grass must grow of dead grains). What do these lines suggest has happened?
3. The speaker falls asleep in the garden and has a dream-vision. What is the landscape like in his dream? See section II. How does his vision of this paradise affect the Dreamer emotionally? (lines 121-32). Whom does the Dreamer see here, and what does she look like? (lines 160ff)
4. How does the Dreamer feel when he sees the Pearl-Maiden? (lines 181ff) Read lines 230-35. What is the relationship between the Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden? Notice the Dreamer's description of feelings he has suffered since his separation from the Pearl-Maiden (lines 241ff). Is this love-sickness? Why does he call himself a "joyless jeweler"? What is the significance of such a self-identification? What is the role of a jeweler?
5. How does the Pearl-Maiden see/identify the Dreamer? Allegorically or symbolically or metaphorically, then, what is the relationship between the Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden? The Pearl-Maiden says: "For what you lost was but a rose / That flowered and finally failed in time" (trans. Finch). What does a rose often stand for? Is this a (courtly) love story? (Think of the French allegory, the *Roman de la Rose*.)
6. The Pearl-Maiden reproves the Dreamer for calling Fate ("Wyrde") a "thief" (line 273) and calls into question the Dreamer's perception of reality (lines 295ff). Why? What do her words suggest about her intentions in coming to meet the Dreamer in this vision? (Think of Boethius and Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation of Philosophy*.)
7. At line 325, the Dreamer asks, "Do you judge me ... my sweetheart, to sorrow again?" What does the Dreamer fear may happen next? Why might he feel that way? To whom does the Pearl-Maiden advise the Dreamer to look? At this rebuke, the

Dreamer speaks once more of his intense feelings (lines 361-84). What are those feelings? What kind of relationship does he want to have with the Pearl-Maiden?

8. The Dreamer says the Pearl-Maiden is the ground of all his bliss, but who does the Pearl-Maiden say is the ground of hers? At the end of section VII, the Pearl-Maiden describes her spiritual marriage to her "Lord the Lamb." Think of the description in the Bible of the marital relationship between God and Israel as well as Jesus and the Church, Origen's reading of the *Song of Songs* as an epithalamion describing God's relationship to the individual Christian soul, Bernard of Clairvaux's commentaries on the Song of Songs, and the tradition of mysticism, especially among women like Birgitta of Sweden (or, later, Margery Kempe and Teresa of Avila) who experienced visions in their souls of being married to Christ. What kind of intimacy, what kind of authority, does such an experience imply?

9. How does the Dreamer react to the news that the Pearl-Maiden is married? (lines 420ff). Whom does he call the "Phoenix of Arabia"? Why? Who is the "queen of courtesy" and the "empress of heaven"? What is the Dreamer really arguing about here?

10. Sections IX-X re-tell Jesus' Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard from the New Testament. What is that parable about, and what is its point? Why does the Pearl-Maiden re-tell it here? How does the Dreamer respond to the parable? (lines 590ff) Is the Pearl-Maiden unworthy of her penny? Why not (in her estimation)? What is "great enough" for her to have a place in heaven as a queen?

Pearl, XI-XX

11. Notice the example of the baptized infants. What makes a soul innocent? (lines 637ff) What is the significance of the blood and the water that sprang from Christ's side here?

12. In section XII, what two types of people does the Pearl-Maiden discuss with interest? Is there a relationship between righteousness and innocence? Why do you think the Pearl-Maiden remembers the stories from scripture of how people brought their children to Jesus to be blessed by him? (lines 709ff).

13. In section XIII, the Pearl-Maiden remembers the Parable of the Merchant. What is that parable about, and what is its point? This parable is the obvious subtext for the entire poem, *Pearl*. In an allegorical reading that takes this parable into account, what might the Pearl-Maiden stand for? Notice how the Pearl-Maiden describes the pearl on her breast given to her by her Lord the Lamb. What idea does this image reinforce?

14. In the second-to-last stanza of section XIII, the Pearl-Maiden again describes her spiritual marriage to Christ. What language does she use to describe her Bridegroom? How does she understand herself in relationship to him?

15. In section XIV, the Pearl-Maiden makes several allusions to the book of Revelation / Apocalypse. What keyword is repeated at the end of every stanza in the section? In the second stanza, what are the names that the Pearl-Maiden gives to her lover (“my lemman”)? What key event in the life of Jesus is described?

16. The Pearl-Maiden describes how “each soul” can be the Lamb’s “worthy wife” (lines 845-46). Again, we see the potential for spiritual marriage not only for the Pearl-Maiden but also for the Dreamer (and even the readers of the poem!). How does this relate to the allegorical sense of the poem? Discuss the “old” and the “new” Jerusalem ... If the Pearl-Maiden’s soul is with the Lamb, where is her body? (see line 856) ... What is the music like in heaven? (see lines 877ff) How does the Dreamer respond to these revelations? (lines 901ff) How does he see himself? How does he see her?

17. What does the Dreamer ask for from the Pearl-Maiden? What does he want to see? Where does he want to go? (line 963) Whom does he wish to see there? (line 964) Where is the focus of his gaze? What does the Pearl-Maiden say in response?

18. The Dreamer calls himself a jeweler. At line 985ff, he begins to describe the gems of the foundations of the New Jerusalem. Who else is a Jewel/Jeweler? In section XVIII, what are the gates of the city made of? Where does the light in the city come from? What tree grows there and how many kinds of fruit does it bear? Compare these lines to Revelation 21.

19. The Dreamer sees a procession of virgins crowned, arrayed in pearls, and dressed in white, which includes his “blyful.” Then he sees the Lamb. How many horns does he have and what are their colors? What kind of clothes does he wear? What kind of wound does he have? The Dreamer’s gaze is filled with this wounded Lamb, a Lamb who responds to his pain with joy. How might this speak to the traumas that Dreamer has experienced? What ecstatic emotion does the Dreamer experience in response to what he is seeing? (Notice the keyword repeated at the beginning and end of each stanza!)

20. In section XX, where does the Dreamer most want to be? What happens when he attempts to cross the water? What is the Dreamer’s explanation for what happens? What adjectives does the Dreamer use to describe his actions? He calls his dream a “veray avysyoun” (a true vision). What does that suggest about his understanding of

his experience? The relationship between his dream and reality? Between earthly and heavenly experience?

21. What has the Dreamer found the “Prince” to be both day and night? What are the names the Dreamer gives to the Lover? How has the dream apparently changed his view of God and his loss of his beloved? Has he reached the stage of grief in which he can relinquish and still remember peacefully?

22. Why does the Dreamer allude to the bread and the wine of the Eucharist in the last stanza of the poem? What is the purpose of the Eucharistic rite? What permission might the Eucharist give the Dreamer to remember?

23. What invitation is given in the last two lines of the poem to the readers of the poem? How are we included in the Dreamer’s experience? Having read this poem, what range of meanings might be signified in the image/signifier “precious pearls”?

24. How might we characterize the genre of this poem?

DREAM VISION

Literal sense	Allegorical sense	Moral sense	Anagogical sense
elegy	allegory	consolation	revelation

Endnotes

[1] A partial list of courses taught on Tolkien in the U.S. and Britain is organized by the Tolkien Society. See “The Tolkien Society: Courses”

(<http://www.tolkiensociety.org/ed/courses.html> - accessed 21 February 2014). Professor Corey Olson and his colleagues also offer online courses on Tolkien through Mythgard and Signum University (<http://www.mythgard.org> - accessed 21 February 2014).

[2] Many writers have explored the influence of medieval literature on Tolkien’s mythology, including such notable scholars as Douglas Anderson, Jane Chance, Michael Drout, Verlyn Flieger, and T.A. Shippey, among others. One introduction to the subject is the book *The Keys of Middle-earth: Discovering Medieval Literature through the Fiction of J.R.R. Tolkien* by Stuart Lee and Elizabeth Solopova.

[3] Before Jackson’s film, I used the Rankin and Bass animated version, which has an equally compelling (though different) version of the riddling game.

[4] It would be irresponsible not to address the differences between the books and the films as students often come to the books now through the films first. Fortunately, differences have been enumerated by fans on key websites. See, for example: “Tolkien vs. Jackson: Differences between Story and Screenplay / Major Differences”

(http://lotr.wikia.com/wiki/Movie_vs._Book:Major_Differences - accessed 19 February 2014).

[5] For an example of this chart, see C.M. Millward’s outstanding textbook, *A Biography of the English Language* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2011), 58-59.

[6] If time permitted, we would consider Tolkien’s Arthurian interests in general by examining Tolkien’s poem, *The Fall of Arthur*, as well, alongside the Gawain and Giles material, but fifteen weeks does not allow for the inclusion of everything that Tolkien wrote and translated. Instead, I give students the option of doing additional reading when they research and write their second paper for the course. Some choose to read *The Fall of Arthur*.

[7] Tolkien alludes to the wording that prefaces *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in his preface to his own story of Giles, writing, “Since Brutus came to Britain ...” (*Tolkien Reader* 123).

[8] For an overview of the *Kindertransporten* movement, as well as the particular involvement of Nicolas Winton in a related rescue effort, see “Nicholas Winton: The Power of Good,” (<http://www.powerofgood.net/story.php> - accessed 5 May 2014), a

website providing additional educational support for the documentary of the same name.

[9] Toward the end of the war, Tolkien wrote to Stanley Unwin concerning his son Christopher's "in transit" status, coming home to England after a year and a half away serving in the Royal Air Force during WWII: "My heart is gnawed out with anxiety" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 112).

[10] In a letter of 24 July 1938, Tolkien wrote to C.A. Furth of "Farmer Giles" that "I re-wrote that to about 50% longer, last January, and read it to the Lovelace Society in lieu of a paper 'on' fairy stories. I was very much surprised at the result. It took nearly twice as long as a proper 'paper' to read aloud, and the audience was apparently not bored – indeed they were generally convulsed with mirth. But I am afraid that means it has taken on a *rather more adult and satiric flavor*" (*Letters* 39), emphasis added.

[11] For discussion, see John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

[12] This can be a good point in the course to bring in some of Tolkien's work as an artist and illustrator. A fine resource for this the book *J.R.R. Tolkien: Artist & Illustrator* by Wayne Hammond and Christina Schull.

[13] It is interesting to note that these transformations of the central symbol of the pearl correspond to the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical senses of meaning.

[14] I include the more detailed list of questions we use for this seminar discussion as an appendix to this essay.

[15] In class, we focus on the prose version of the legend of Beren and Lúthien included in *The Silmarillion* as edited by Christopher Tolkien. However, I do note that this version of the story began as the *Lay of Leithian (Release from Bondage)*, a long poem J.R.R. Tolkien wrote in 1925 that his son, Christopher, edited and published posthumously in *The Lays of Beleriand*. A still earlier prose version of Beren and Lúthien's story by J.R.R. Tolkien also exists, composed in 1917, more a fairy-tale than a high fantasy, "The Tale of Tinúviel," which Christopher Tolkien similarly edited and published posthumously in *The Book of Lost Tales, Part II*.

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