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“Things That Were, and Things That Are, and Things That Yet May Be”: The J.R.R. Tolkien Manuscript Collection at Marquette University

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“THINGS THAT WERE, AND THINGS THAT ARE,
AND THINGS THAT YET MAY BE”:
THE J.R.R. TOLKIEN MANUSCRIPT
COLLECTION AT
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

WILLIAM D. FLISS¹

GOOD EVENING. I FEEL VERY PRIVILEGED to be a guest of honor speaker at Mythcon 48, as the Mythopoeic Society finishes celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. I want to thank the organizers for inviting me. I think it is wonderful that MythSoc has chosen archives and the gold to be discovered within them as a central theme for this anniversary celebration.

Marquette University is home to the renowned J.R.R. Tolkien manuscript collection, and it is no stranger to the Mythopoeic Society. Thirty years ago, Marquette hosted Mythcon 18 on its campus in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The guest of honor in 1987 was Christopher Tolkien, who spoke multiple times throughout the weekend and held a highly popular book signing in Marquette’s student union. Several of you in this room were present for Mythcon 18. Most of us were not. Some of you have visited Marquette over the years, others have not; but I suspect everybody has heard of us. This evening I would like to talk to you about the Tolkien manuscript collection at Marquette, to speak in the words of Galadriel of “things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be” (*The Lord of the Rings* [LotR] II.7.362)

This is my first Mythcon, and some of you may still be looking at me and thinking, “Who is this guy?” I feel obliged to begin with a few words about myself if for no other reason than to establish my Tolkien *bona fides*. I have worked as an archivist at Marquette University for fourteen years now, although I have been curator of the Tolkien Collection for only five of those years. As chance would have it (a very Tolkienian phrase), I inherited the role when the previous curator, Matt Blessing, left unexpectedly to become the State Archivist of Wisconsin. That was Matt’s dream job. Mine was now staring me in the face. I welcomed the opportunity, not least because I had been a fan of Tolkien’s works since childhood. I first came to Tolkien through the 1977 Rankin Bass animated production of *The Hobbit*. I must admit that, dreadful as it is in some ways, the Rankin Bass *Hobbit* holds a special place in my heart to this day, evoking fond memories of childhood. It led me to read *The Hobbit* and then

¹ Sunday banquet Guest of Honor Speech, Mythcon 48, Champaign IL, 2017.

onward at the age of eleven to *The Lord of the Rings*. When I was twelve, I tried to read *The Silmarillion*, but like Caradhras, it defeated me—I could not push through the blizzard of names. I tried again when I was fourteen, while on a long automobile ride during a family vacation, and this time the genealogies and the relationships among the characters clicked, and the riveting saga drew me in and never let go.

In my teenaged years, I was very much taken with MERP—the Middle-earth Role Playing Game from Iron Crown Enterprises. Some of you will remember it. The game provided me with many hours of enjoyment. I remember poring over passages in *The Silmarillion* trying to puzzle out why the designers did what they did; why, for example, they made Fingon 120th level with an Offensive Bonus of 495 and his cousin Maedhros only 105th level with an Offensive Bonus of 460? I did not go out on a lot of dates in high school.

I mention all of this to make the point that I had acquired a firm grounding in Tolkien’s Legendarium before I became curator of Marquette’s manuscript collection; but after assuming the role five years ago, I have had so much to learn. I find that the more I learn about J.R.R. Tolkien, the more I realize how much I do not know. I enjoy learning from others. My favorite part of the job has been speaking with researchers who visit Marquette and finding out what interests them and what questions drive them. Tolkien has inspired an amazing corpus of high quality scholarship produced by a diverse array of scholars, both academic and independent. I am in awe of the Tolkien scholarship that has been produced over the past fifty years, some of it by members of the Mythopoeic Society. To paraphrase Abbot Suger from the Church of Saint-Denis in the 12th century, if I can see anything it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants. Some are in the room this evening. Helping people to navigate Marquette’s collection and to find what they seek is intensely rewarding. Last fall a researcher told me I was like Elrond at Imladris. My immediate reaction was “If only!” At this point, an encounter with me at our little Rivendell up in Milwaukee is much more like chatting with Bilbo than basking in Elrond’s counsel.

For a few minutes now, I have been referring to the Tolkien manuscripts at Marquette, but I have not defined them. I feel like the narrator in the fourth paragraph of *The Hobbit* when he stops short and turns rhetorically to the reader with, “What is a hobbit?” In my case, “What are the Tolkien manuscripts?” Marquette University owns the manuscripts for four of Tolkien’s published works of fiction:

- (1) *The Hobbit*, his first published work of fiction, which appeared in September 1937;
- (2) *Farmer Giles of Ham*, written in the 1930s but published in 1949;
- (3) *Mr. Bliss*, an illustrated children's book probably created in the early 1930s but not published until 1982; and
- (4) *The Lord of the Rings*, begun at the end of 1937 as an unpremeditated sequel to *The Hobbit* but not published in England until 1954 and 1955 when it appeared in three volumes.

Rings is far and away the work that draws the most interest at Marquette, and it is the one I will focus upon in these remarks.

We use the term manuscript broadly to include both handwritten (or holograph) material as well as typewritten material. The collection for *The Lord of the Rings* includes holograph plot notes, holograph drafts of chapters, typewritten drafts of chapters, typewritten chapters with holograph corrections, and the galley sheets. It is an enormous collection. The published book is perhaps 1,200 pages. There are over 9,000 pages of manuscript material for *The Lord of the Rings*. It is a remarkably comprehensive collection. Tolkien kept much of what he wrote, and most of it found its way to Marquette, making it one of the outstanding literary collections in the world.

THINGS THAT WERE . . .

How is it that all these wonderful manuscripts ended up at Marquette University near the shore of Lake Michigan? After all, Tolkien was English, and he never set foot in the United States.

This leads us to our first glance into the Mirror of Galadriel. I do not wish to spend all my time with you discussing the acquisition of the Tolkien manuscripts. For a more in-depth account, I would refer you to the article by Marquette alumnus John Rateliff, "How *The Hobbit* Came to Milwaukee" in the recently released *Orcrist* No. 9, produced by Richard West and the Tolkien fan group in Madison, which celebrated its own 50th anniversary last year; or else to the essay titled "Marquette's Acquisition of the Tolkien Manuscripts" by the late Taum Santoski, with whom some of you were once acquainted. Taum was the unofficial Tolkien scholar-in-residence at Marquette for about a decade until his untimely death in 1991. Taum wrote this essay on the manuscripts for the Tolkien conference held at Marquette in 1983. It will appear in the upcoming festschrift *A Wilderness of Dragons: Essays in Honor of Verlyn Flieger*.

Here I will give the fascinating tale in brief. The Tolkien manuscripts are at Marquette because of the perspicacity of William B. Ready, the wiles of Bertram Rota, and the fairness of Christopher Tolkien.

The Welshman William Ready was Marquette’s library director, hired away from Stanford University in 1956, to stock the new Memorial Library with books and manuscripts. The recently constructed Memorial Library was a state of the art facility, representing the first time in Marquette’s history that the library had its very own building; up to that point the library had always been combined in a structure with other campus units. Ready was hired to make this new library worthy of an aspiring first-class research and teaching university. Within a few months of his arrival, Ready had identified Tolkien as somebody whose literary manuscripts he wanted to acquire.

To fill Marquette’s new and relatively vast Memorial Library with books and manuscripts, Ready relied heavily on his good friend, London bookseller Bertram Rota. Ready hired Bertram Rota to be Marquette’s agent. In late 1956 Rota wrote to Tolkien on Ready’s behalf, broaching the idea of Tolkien selling his manuscripts to Marquette. To Rota’s delight, Tolkien showed interest. Correspondence continued through the spring of 1957, Rota trying to ascertain the extent of the manuscripts and to puzzle out a fair offer. He kept Ready informed of what was happening, sounding him out about a possible offer price and discussing tax issues. Rota’s efforts culminated with a visit to see Tolkien in Oxford on Sunday, May 5, 1957. They met first in Tolkien’s rooms at Merton College, lunched in Oxford, and then spent a long afternoon at Tolkien’s home on Sandfield Road in Headington. Of Tolkien, Rota said,

I liked him immensely and we got on splendidly together. He’s 65, bluff, hearty, jolly, a pipe-smoker, quite un-academic but obviously very learned, about philology in particular. Thick-set, about 5’8” or 5’9”, shaggy eyebrows; very direct and frank, full of humour; unpretentious.
(Rota, May 5, 1957)

Rota’s visit proved a victory for Marquette. When he returned home late that Sunday night he penned a long and excited air mail letter to Will Ready, opening with the line, “SUCCESS! Tolkein [sic] accepts your offer of £1,250 for the ‘Hobbit’ and ‘Lord of the Rings’ original material” (Rota, May 5, 1957). I must note that throughout the letter Rota consistently misspells Tolkien’s name, with an ‘ein’, a common gaffe that has probably made all of us shudder at some point in our lives. I find it remarkable, however, that having corresponded with Tolkien all spring and having just spent an entire day with the man, Rota could misspell his name. Before all was said and done, Tolkien would accept an additional £250 for the *Farmer Giles of Ham* and *Mr. Bliss* material, making the total sale price £1,500, an amount that may seem miniscule today but one that Tolkien admitted to Rota was a good offer.

What influenced Tolkien to sell his manuscripts to Marquette? A common belief in circulation is that Tolkien was desperate for money at the time.

It is true that as *paterfamilias* of a relatively large family with more than its share of health issues, Tolkien struggled financially through most of his adult life. But Taum Santoski was the first to point out that Tolkien had received a royalty check for the equivalent of about \$10,000 shortly before Rota visited Tolkien on May 5th, a development that undermines the argument about immediate financial pressure (Rota, May 5, 1957).

Was Tolkien influenced to sell the manuscripts by the fact that Marquette is a Catholic university? Perhaps. I have been told, and some people in the room may be able to confirm it, that Christopher Tolkien, when he addressed Mythcon 18 in 1987, cited Marquette's Catholic identity as a factor in his father's sale of the manuscripts. The Ready-Rota correspondence alludes to the religious influence only indirectly. When Rota reported on his initial exchange with Tolkien, the bookseller told Ready,

I used all my wiles, mentioned you by name, told him what you were doing for the Library at Marquette and how you had bought, lent, given and introduced his books to a wide circle of readers with infectious enthusiasm. I added that you could use any original material of his to great effect at the University. (Rota, January 10, 1957)

When Rota announced the successful sale to Ready, he declared, "Incidentally [Tolkien] said he'd like to help Marquette, and an oblique reference showed that he wasn't too impressed by Notre Dame" (Rota, May 5, 1957). Tolkien's obliquely negative reference to Notre Dame suggests Catholicism was somewhere on the author's mind as he considered the sort of place where he would prefer his manuscripts to reside.

As an aside, being from Marquette I just couldn't resist working in Tolkien's dig at Notre Dame. Some people may not know this, but Marquette used to play football against Notre Dame early in the last century when Marquette still had a football team. We managed to tie Notre Dame three times, but we never beat them. The games sometimes resembled the *Silmarillion's* Fifth Battle of Beleriand, called *Nirnaeth Arnoediad*, or Unnumbered Tears. One year the score was 69-0. Echoing the death of Fingon, on that day Marquette's banners, blue and gold, were trodden into the mire of the quarterback's blood!

As I reflect upon the sale of the manuscripts, I personally believe that Tolkien, in addition to responding to a good offer price, was genuinely touched by the story of Marquette as relayed by Bertram Rota. To me it illustrates something we all know: J.R.R. Tolkien was a good-hearted man, a generous man—generous with his time for others, generous with his ideas for his graduate students, and thankfully for Marquette, generous with his

manuscripts, being willing to sell them to a solid but at the time relatively obscure university in the middle western United States.

Let us command the mirror to linger a little longer on Will Ready. He produced the first book-length critical treatment of Tolkien, *The Tolkien Relation*, with which many of you are familiar. It was published in 1968, and Ready sent Tolkien an autographed copy. Tolkien had gotten wind of the book beforehand and expressed his foreboding in a letter to a friend in January 1968:

I know about Mr. William B. Ready. [...] He is a most intelligent and amusing person. But I do not remember either encouraging him or assenting to his writing about me I do not expect that if ever such a book appears it will much delight me, or be worth my friends 'looking forward.' But one never knows. Anyway he is not easily abashed. (Tolkien, January 7, 1968) ²

After seeing the book, Tolkien's view of Ready did not improve. In another letter to the same friend Tolkien wrote "Though ill-written, it is not entirely without value, since the man is intelligent. But he is a rogue" (Tolkien, June 4, 1968).

It turned out that Ready had claimed the book was based on hours of interviews with Tolkien, interviews that never happened. "Ready paid me a short visit," wrote Tolkien;

A large part of the time he was with me he was talking about himself. I can now see his difficulty. If he had brought out a notebook and informed me of his object, I should have shown him out. He therefore had to rely on his own memory of the few remarks I made about my personal history. These he appears to have embroidered with wholly illegitimate deductions of his own and the addition of baseless fictions. (Tolkien, June 4, 1968)

It was William Ready who led Tolkien to declare, "I have now made up my mind not to see anybody from your country whom I do not already know, nor anybody from any press in any country" (Tolkien, June 4, 1968). So, Will Ready was a rogue. But from 1956-1963 he was our rogue, and we honor his memory at Marquette.

Coincidentally, the American friend to whom Tolkien wrote these letters was Clyde Kilby, who later founded the Wade Center at Wheaton College in Illinois. I sometimes wonder if Dr. Kilby, in the bitter watches of the night, ever ruminated upon the rogue Will Ready and Marquette and the Tolkien

² This and following quotations reproduced with the permission of the Tolkien Estate.

manuscripts and (in his heart of hearts) had a Boromir moment: “They’re not yours save by unhappy chance. They might have been mine; they should be mine. Give them to me!”³ From what I know about Clyde Kilby, Christian gentleman and one in whom the blood of Númenor ran true, I doubt that happened.

Will Ready’s perspicacity and Bertram Rota’s wiliness combined to bring the manuscripts to Marquette; however, it was thanks to Christopher Tolkien that the collection achieved its present state. When his father, in the midst of preparing the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, wrote to Marquette with a question about the manuscripts, Tolkien commented that,

According to my recollection the arrangement made with your agent was to transfer to you versions of the text written or typewritten and certain other adjuncts, but not pictorial matter. On looking through material still in my hands I think that in that case a certain amount of written matter should belong to you (without, of course, further payment). When I have completed the revision, I will look into the point. (Tolkien, August 3, 1965)

Tolkien appears never to have addressed the point before his death in 1973, and this “certain amount of written matter” passed to his son and literary executor, Christopher. In the mid-1980s, when Christopher Tolkien decided he would shift the focus of his *History of Middle-earth* series from the legends of the First and Second Ages to the composition of *The Lord of the Rings*, he wrote to Marquette, offering these papers, in his words, “not as a gift, but in fulfillment of a contract which in this particular went unfulfilled entirely by accident” (C. Tolkien). Marquette, of course, received these papers with pleasure, and they arrived in four installments, each on the eve of or in the wake of the publication of one of Christopher Tolkien’s *History of Middle-earth* volumes. In fact, the first installment arrived in Milwaukee borne by Christopher when he visited for Mythcon 18. Christopher warned that the papers were very substantial; and they proved to be, amounting to nearly 3,300 pages, increasing the size of *The Lord of the Rings* collection by over fifty percent. Interestingly, most of these later additions represented the earliest drafts of chapters and so predated the manuscripts that had arrived at Marquette some three decades earlier.

THINGS THAT ARE . . .

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Marquette’s purchase of the manuscripts. To paraphrase Elendil the Tall (and later Elessar), “From across the Great Sea to Milwaukee they have come. In this place will they abide unto the

³ *LotR* II.10.399.

ending of the world.”⁴ Each year we have over a thousand visitors to the Raynor Library to see the collection. When Tolkien sold the manuscripts sixty years ago he could not have imagined that their presence would turn Marquette into a kind of medieval pilgrimage site. We keep a permanent exhibit of reproductions from the collection on display in our reading room. Most visitors are content to connect with the manuscripts through this exhibit, but a few dozen arrive each year wishing to go deeper and engage with the manuscripts as researchers, sometimes in the service of scholarship, other times to satisfy a curiosity or personal interest. Over thirty years ago, Marquette decided to remove the originals from general use, and researchers ever since have studied microfilm or photocopy surrogates. On a bi-monthly basis, I host a public showing of selected original manuscripts. Due to the size of the room, I must limit each event to the first twenty-five people who register. I refer to these showings as the coolest free thing to do in the city of Milwaukee.

All who come into contact with the manuscripts have to abide by the rules of the archives, which brings me to the issue of copyright. Following Tolkien's death in 1973, Marquette's office of the general counsel and the Tolkien Estate agreed that while Marquette purchased the physical manuscripts in 1957 it did not acquire the intellectual property. There was no contract granting copyright to Marquette and therefore copyright remained with the Estate, meaning that people wishing to acquire facsimiles of the manuscripts or to quote from them in their work needed permission from the Estate.

To some extent this has limited Marquette's ability to publicize the collection over the years. It is not as if we can publish at will images from the manuscripts on the Internet, put them on billboards, or plaster them across university publications. Hopefully it has not led to a perception that Marquette sits like Smaug atop his treasure hoard. We always have been, and always shall be, pleased to see the manuscripts used in scholarship; but Marquette respects the rights of the Tolkien Estate and has enjoyed a good relationship with it over the years. My advice to researchers who wish to make use of the manuscripts in their work is to be as specific as possible in their requests to the Estate and to emphasize the scholarly use being made of the manuscripts. To the researchers who email me blithely seeking photocopies of all the drafts of a specific chapter, my advice is not to waste their time contacting the Estate. It is not going to happen.

I want to spend a little time talking about the manuscripts themselves, what they reveal to us about Tolkien as a writer, and to refer to a small few of the many gems in the collection. The size of Marquette's collection speaks to Tolkien's reputation as a fanatical reviser. As Christopher Tolkien stated so

⁴ *LotR* VI.5.967.

aptly in his introduction to *The Fall of Arthur*, “As a rule, indeed, no manuscript of my father’s could be regarded as ‘final’ until it had safely left his hands” (172). In part this was due to Tolkien’s perfectionism. As he told Charles Furth at Allen & Unwin in February 1939, “The writing of *The Lord of the Rings* is laborious, because I have been doing it as well as I know how, and considering every word” (*Letters* 42).

The immense volume of manuscripts for *The Lord of the Rings* can also be attributed to how Tolkien wrote. He did not outline the entire story in advance. Only in the broadest sense did he sketch out the story arc. From time to time Tolkien jotted notes on where he saw the story going, but as he told an American fan in a letter donated to Marquette in 2014, “But though I at times wrote or sketched crucial chapters away ahead of the point I had reached, they proved of no use. They proved quite ‘untrue’ when one came to it” (Tolkien, December 21, 1955).⁵ Tolkien’s lack of premeditation in writing *The Lord of the Rings* is captured best perhaps in his words to W.H. Auden in 1955,

I met a lot of things on the way that astonished me. Tom Bombadil I knew already; but I had never been to Bree. Strider sitting in the corner at the inn was a shock, and I had no more idea who he was than had Frodo. The Mines of Moria had been a mere name; and of Lothlórien no word had reached my mortal ears till I came there. (*Letters* 216)

His stories grew in the telling, but when an author like Tolkien is writing a heroic romance of epic scale it means he will inevitably have to do a lot of re-writing along the way, producing thousands of pages of manuscript.

I do not wish to portray Tolkien as being unusual in his writing method. Many authors figure out their stories as they go, in the arduous process of composition. Author Anne Lamott, in her bestseller, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, tells us,

You write a shitty first draft of it and you sound it out, and you leave in those lines that ring true and take out the rest. I wish there were an easier, softer way, a shortcut, but this is the nature of most good writing: that you find out things as you go along. Then you go back and rewrite. Remember: no one is reading your first drafts. (Lamott 71)

Well, in Tolkien’s case we are. Lamott’s insights about the writing process ring true for Tolkien, except that thanks to the manuscript collection at Marquette, people can read Tolkien’s first drafts, and his second, and in the case of some

⁵ Quotations from Tolkien’s manuscripts included with the permission of the Tolkien Estate.

chapters—“A Long Expected Party,” “The Shadow of the Past,” and “The Council of Elrond,” being the most reworked—versions seven, eight, nine, and beyond.

The sheer number of drafts can intimidate researchers approaching the manuscripts. Equally daunting is the penmanship. Tolkien’s friend George Sayer said of Tolkien’s speech after a walking outing with the man in 1947: “He talked so well that I was happy to do nothing but listen, though even if one was by his side, it was not always easy to hear all that he said. He talked faster than anyone of his age that I have known, and in a curious fluttering way” (qtd. in Scull and Hammond 1.320). These same comments might also be applied to Tolkien’s penmanship. If his speech was often difficult to follow, so too his writing can be very difficult, if not impossible, to read. Tolkien often wrote rapidly, the words pouring out from him and, like his speech, fluttering across the page. At times his writing resembles the EKG of a highly erratic heartbeat, or appears—as Mike Foster first commented in the 1980s—more like Arabic than English (Foster 1). Tolkien’s penmanship is all the more remarkable because he could write beautifully when he wished. Marquette’s manuscript collection is filled with instances of exquisite calligraphy, worthy of a medieval scribe. Placing a page of the good alongside the bad can make a person wonder how the same author could possibly produce both pages of handwriting.

In a notable public address in 1979, English poet Philip Larkin spoke of the meaningful and the magical values of manuscripts. Both are evident in Marquette’s Tolkien collection. By meaningful value, Larkin meant the ways in which the manuscripts “enlarge our understanding of a writer’s life and work,” showing “the cancellations, substitutions, the shifting toward ultimate form and the final meaning” (Larkin 34).

I could cite many instances of meaningful value to be found in Marquette’s manuscripts. A wonderful set of plot notes from late 1938 capture Tolkien’s internal dialogue and demonstrate how thinking and writing went together for him. Tolkien labored on Book I at this point in the composition. He had settled on the Ring as the loose end tying the published *Hobbit* with this “New *Hobbit*.” The Black Riders had entered the story unexpectedly as the hobbits journeyed to Rivendell, and Tolkien had established the Riders as servants of the Dark Lord, but he was not certain why the Ring was so important to the Dark Lord. He asked himself, “Why did Dark Lord desire it so [?]” (Tolkien MS. Mss-1/2/2). On the manuscript page the question has been written in fountain pen and subsequently underlined in pencil and punctuated with an exclamation point. Then Tolkien seems to have answered himself in faint pencil at the bottom of the page, “Because if he had it he could see where all the others were, and would be master of their masters—control all the dwarf-hoards, and the dragons, and know the secrets of the Elf-kings, and the secret [?]plans] of evil

men" (Tolkien MS. Mss-1/2/2). Here the manuscript reveals a step in the evolution of Tolkien's concept of the Rings of Power; and with this epiphany, the meaning of the story is transformed.

Meaningful value is present in the adjunct materials produced in support of the tale. As Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* he became preoccupied with time and distance, resulting in some archival gems. Among the manuscripts are synoptic time-schemes where Tolkien tracked the movements of different characters in the story. Resembling a spreadsheet in an age before Microsoft Excel, these schemes contain columns representing characters or groups of characters and rows representing days. Tolkien strove to synchronize the movements of characters on every day for much of the story. Tolkien seems to have created the final version of the time-scheme in the late 1940s as he completed the manuscript. This time-scheme is fifteen pages in length, but only nine of the pages have the spreadsheet format. The first two pages comprise a single listing of important dates, from the birthday party at Bag End on September 22nd until January 15th. Before I saw this time-scheme I never fully appreciated the importance of January 15th to the course of events. On that day Gandalf the Grey fought the Balrog on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm and fell into the shadow of Moria. It was also the day when, to use an anachronism, the clock started ticking on the Fellowship. We learn from the time-scheme that when night fell on January 15th messages were sent forth from Moria to Isengard and to Mordor, setting evil forces in motion. Suddenly questions confronted Tolkien such as how long would it take for the message to reach Barad-dûr? How exactly would it get there? When would Grishnákh and company be sent from Mordor? How quickly would they travel? The need for such a day-by-day reckoning intensified on February 26th with the Breaking of the Fellowship. Suddenly this tight group of characters that had moved together through Book II splinters in different directions, and Tolkien must track their every move.

The time-scheme is a gem because it includes information that does not appear anywhere in the published story. For those of you wondering about the fate of Shagrat, Orc Captain of the Tower of Cirith Ungol, the scheme states that on Saturday March 17th, "Shagrat brings the mithril coat and other spoils to Barad-dûr; but is slain by Sauron" (Tolkien MS. Mss-4/2/18). Another hidden fact appears earlier on this time-scheme. While the Fellowship is resting in Lothlórien on Tuesday, January 24th, Gollum lurks on the borders of that country; and there he is captured by Uglúk and the Isengarders. The time-scheme entry reads under the heading Gollum: "Gollum captured by Uglúk, but escapes after revealing that Hobbits of Shire were with Gandalf, and enough is said to make Uglúk certain that Ring was with the Company." Under the heading of Enemies it reads: "Isengarders capture Gollum, and torment him for

news. Uglúk sends news to Isengard of Hobbits; but not of the Ring” (Tolkien MS. Mss-4/2/18). To my knowledge, Gollum's capture here is not mentioned anywhere in the published text.⁶

Manuscripts have meaningful value, but they also enjoy what Philip Larkin termed a magical value. At the risk of sounding too dualistic, I would suggest that the meaningful value is appreciated more by the head, while the magical value finds expression through the heart. The magic is experienced when we realize just what we are looking at, witnessing words as the author wrote them, emerging for the first time, as Larkin put it, “in this particular miraculous combination” (Larkin 34). Magical value then is like the “Wow factor” of manuscripts, and it can take the breath away. An outstanding example is a page of doodles from late summer 1938 while Tolkien and his family visited Sidmouth in Devonshire. The doodles provide a magical glimpse into Tolkien's stream of consciousness. He is reveling in language, literally riffing on words. The manuscript puts us in the presence of a man relaxing on holiday with his family, and yet part of his mind is considering the broad story arc of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the midst of the doodles are penciled words that capture Tolkien's vision of the story arc: “Consultation. Over MM. Down Great River. To Mordor. Dark Tower. Beyond which is the Fiery Hill” (Tolkien MS. Mss-1/2/1).⁷

Magical value can be found on the backsides, or versos, of Tolkien's chapter drafts. Many pages reveal fragments of student exams, the leaves having been torn from examination books because the opposite side was left blank and could be used for other things. Paper was in short supply, not surprising when you consider that Tolkien wrote much of *The Lord of the Rings* during the war years. He acquired paper wherever he could get it. The Inklings were one source. A page from an early draft of the chapter “The Riders of Rohan” reveals a student exam with commentary by Tolkien's friends C.S. Lewis and Neville Coghill (Tolkien MS. Mss-2/1/19). Evidently both men had to grade the same exam. Lewis liked this unknown student's essay, believing it showed “One very interesting, quite new idea—plenty of knowledge—and excellently expressed.” Beneath, Coghill replied “I agree, but if this is the ‘new idea’ I do not find it to be true. P.R. temptations wouldn't lift me out of a chair.”⁸ Seeing this page makes me want to search through the collection for other pages from the same exam in the hope of discovering the new idea that Lewis lauded and to understand the meaning of Coghill's curious rejoinder. It is magical that this intellectual exchange between two Oxford dons can be found captured on

⁶ Hammond and Scull made use of the time-scheme in their wonderful *Reader's Companion*. See especially pp. 344-345, 360-361, 608.

⁷ Christopher Tolkien alludes to this page of doodles briefly in *The Return of the Shadow*, p. 214.

⁸ Extract by C.S. Lewis © copyright C.S. Lewis Pte Ltd.

a manuscript verso within the collection of a third author in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

For magical value, nothing perhaps exceeds a page of early plot notes where Tolkien scribbled a name in pencil in the left margin: Sam Gamgee (Tolkien MS. Mss-1/2/2). It seems to be the earliest appearance of Sam's name in the manuscripts (*The Return of the Shadow* 221). When I look at this scratching of lead on a tattered scrap of paper it gives me chills to think that I am, in a sense, witnessing the birth of Sam Gamgee, that iconic character whom some fans believe to be the real hero of *The Lord of the Rings*.

THINGS THAT YET MAY BE . . .

Here we come to the most challenging aspect of the Mirror's sight. After becoming curator of the collection, I immersed myself in the relevant volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*, and I came to realize what many of you have known for years: Christopher Tolkien's work is amazing. He seems to understand his father's mind as well as it may be possible for one person to plumb the depths of another, and he possesses an uncanny ability to read his father's notoriously difficult penmanship. Researchers who approach the manuscripts at Marquette do so with the relevant volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* in hand; and if they don't, I recommend they do so. A researcher's first engagement with the manuscripts is often an exercise in simply admiring what Christopher Tolkien accomplished in laying out the narrative of how his father wrote *The Lord of the Rings*.

After becoming curator and reflecting a bit upon Christopher Tolkien's work, a disturbing question arose in my mind: Has *The History of Middle-earth* reduced Marquette's manuscript collection for *The Lord of the Rings* to the archival equivalent of Bilbo's mithril coat, consigned to the Mathom-house at Michel Delving? Or to put it another way, after Christopher Tolkien has been through the manuscripts, how much more soup can we get from these ox-bones? Hopefully some of the gems I have shown you suggest that the manuscripts are worth a closer look. But you don't have to take my word for it. In his Foreword to *The Return of the Shadow*, Christopher wrote "I do not suppose for one moment that I have succeeded in determining the history correctly at every point. [...] The nature of the manuscripts is such that they will probably always admit of differing interpretations" (*The Return of the Shadow* 3).

I would add that in *The History of Middle-earth* Christopher Tolkien is acting as historian, and historians are by necessity selective. As the French novelist Flaubert once stated, crudely but accurately, writing history is like drinking an ocean and pissing a cupful. Christopher Tolkien drank in the enormous extent of the manuscripts like no one else, but he did not make or publish transcriptions of everything. Things were left out of the account, either

because he did not believe they contributed to the narrative he was telling or perhaps they did not interest him. It seems to me that the invented languages of his father’s secondary world have not been Christopher’s chief interest, and so scholars such as Carl Hostetter and Christopher Gilson have visited Marquette to mine the manuscripts for philological material and insights. Visitors have studied the collection from a variety of angles. How did Tolkien’s use of the passive voice evolve? Do the manuscripts provide any insights into Celtic or Anglo-Saxon influences upon Tolkien? What is written on the versos of the manuscripts? When exactly do certain words and phrases enter the story? What did he cross out, and what might that tell us about his thought process?

I hope there is more gold to be mined in these manuscripts, and I see my job as helping people to do so. The collection has always been accessible to researchers, but that accessibility can be improved. The unusual history of the collection, with two-thirds of it arriving in 1958 and a third more coming to Milwaukee in later years, presented the archives staff with a problem, one people at Marquette have been talking about since at least 1990; that is, how to integrate all of *The Lord of the Rings* manuscripts into a cohesive, comprehensible whole.

Since the late 1980s the manuscripts have been kept in five individual groupings. There are the initial manuscripts received in 1958, and then each of the four later installments. Two different arrangement schemes exist among them. Marquette arranged the *Rings* manuscripts it acquired in 1958 by Book: All the holograph versions of chapters within one of the six books, followed by its typescript/holograph hybrids, followed by the typescripts, and then the typescripts for the printer, and finally the galley sheets, any of which could show changes. In contrast, Christopher arranged the *Rings* manuscripts that remained in England in the order he perceived his father to have written them, from Hobbiton to Rivendell in Phase I and then back to Hobbiton again to begin Phase II and so forth.

Delivery to the researcher of these groups of materials has also been different. To preserve the originals, Head of Archives Chuck Elston microfilmed the 1958 manuscripts in the early 1980s, and researchers have been restricted to using the microfilm ever since, the originals being brought out only if something is unclear on the microfilm. While writing *The History of Middle-earth*, Christopher Tolkien created annotated photocopies of the manuscripts still in his possession. These came to Marquette with the originals, and researchers studying the four later installments have been consulting his photocopies ever since.

The overall process for working with the Marquette manuscripts is not broken, but the collection can be cumbersome to use. Sometimes researchers must jump back and forth between microfilm and photocopy. As a security

measure, the archives staff issues only one microfilm reel or folder at a time and this must be returned before the next will be given out. These rules, while sensible precautions, impede the researcher who wants to navigate rapidly from one spot to another within the collection and make quick connections across its contents.

Since the 1980s, therefore, a daunting task has taken shape at Marquette: To reprocess the *Rings* manuscripts into a new arrangement scheme that integrates the 1958 manuscripts with Christopher Tolkien's later additions and then to establish a single means of delivery. But how is this to be done exactly? Two separate arrangement schemes are in operation, Christopher's and the one adopted by Marquette. How are they to be reconciled? Which one wins out? I blanched at the prospect of moving manuscripts around and relabeling folders that have been cited in scholarship for decades. In sum, this task of reprocessing resembled the countless swords, strong bars, and unassailable walls of Thangorodrim.

We do not possess the arts of Lúthien to make the impossible possible, but we do have digitization. My solution has been to photograph the entire collection, front and back, and then reprocess it by rearranging the digital surrogates, leaving the manuscripts in their original boxes and folders. In the future, researchers visiting Marquette will consult the digital images. The microfilms will be retired from service. (Microfilm was cutting edge technology in 1928, but I think it can step aside now.) Digitization eliminates the need to choose between arrangement schemes. Both can be presented. The researcher can choose to study the manuscripts in the order of their creation or instead follow the evolution of a specific chapter.

At the heart of the project is an enormous map, currently under development. I have hired John Rateliff (no stranger to the Mythopoeic Society) as a consultant on the mapping project, and his help has been essential. With the exception of Christopher Tolkien and the late Taum Santoski, John Rateliff has logged the most hours in his lifetime poring over the manuscripts at Marquette. The map consists of one horizontal axis and many vertical axes. The horizontal axis mirrors Christopher's schema, with the various drafts and plot notes arranged along it in the order that Tolkien created them. The vertical axes consist of different drafts of the same chapter. Ultimately, it is my hope that the scans will be delivered to the patron through an electronic version of the map on an unnetworked kiosk in our reading room. The researcher will be able to navigate across the map. Each entry will be a node providing access to the manuscript images in that version. Researchers can mine down electronically and study the component images.

The librarians in the audience will be happy to hear that we have metadata. Each scan will have multiple metadata fields associated with it. One

field will note the corresponding page in the published book. Another field will cite pages from *The History of Middle-earth* where Christopher Tolkien references the manuscript page. A third field will be an “also appears in” field for those instances where a manuscript page must appear in more than one place in the reprocessed collection. And, of course, there will be a metadata field identifying the manuscript’s physical location (box, folder) in the collection. Other functionalities to be developed include the ability to have two manuscript images from different parts of the collection open at the same time for comparison, the power to enlarge or rotate a scan to better study it, and the means to adjust the brightness and contrast of the digital image, helping the researcher to decipher especially difficult patches of handwriting. Perhaps even sections that confounded Christopher Tolkien will be made legible.

When I first conceived this project in 2015 I expected to be almost finished by now. I absurdly underestimated how long it will take to complete the project. My own unrealistic expectation now reminds me of Tolkien’s when he wrote to Allen & Unwin on December 7, 1942, announcing that he had reached Chapter 31 of *The Lord of the Rings* and expected it would take at least six more chapters to finish and should be completed in early 1943 (*Letters* 58). We know how that turned out. Close to seven more years would elapse and thirty-one additional chapters before he completed the manuscript. In my own folly, I thought that this reprocessing project would take a couple years at most. It is proving to be far more difficult to complete. With good fortune, however, it will lead to many more helpings of ox-bone soup.

In closing, I think the desire of any curator of an archival collection—and I suspect my co-guest of honor Laura Schmidt, archivist at the Wade Center, would agree with me⁹—is to leave the collection in better shape than he or she found it. The manuscript collection came to me in very good shape. I have former Marquette archivists Chuck Elston and Matt Blessing to thank—my earlier reference to Abbot Suger applies to them as well. Each labored to improve the collection. A year after Chuck became the collection’s curator in 1977 he undertook a reprocessing of the manuscripts and microfilmed them for a generation of researchers to use. Chuck also created a finding aid that remains largely intact to the present day. When Matt Blessing became curator in 2000, he finished publishing the inventories online, giving the public an opportunity to examine the arrangement and description of the collection in advance of contacting the archives for a research visit. During his tenure, Matt made frugal use of the Tolkien Archives Fund established by the late Dick Blackwelder, thus saving up money for the eventual reprocessing of the manuscripts. With this digital reprocessing project, I am trying to leave the manuscript collection in

⁹ See her guest of honor speech in this issue.

better shape than I found it. Just as Galadriel's Mirror could not pierce the mist that covered the jewels of Calacirya, I cannot see the project's outcome clearly, but I have hope—a most Tolkienian virtue—that the collection will be made more accessible and easier to navigate.

Shortly after I became curator of the Tolkien Collection in 2012, I encountered a colleague who had recently retired from our library. She greeted me with, "So, you're the reigning Tolkien person now at Marquette." I replied, "Don't say reigning. I am the steward, and not the king."

Thank you very much.

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MYTHIC CIRCLE

The Mythic Circle is a small literary magazine published annually by the Mythopoeic Society which celebrates the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. These adventuresome writers saw themselves as contributors to a rich imaginative tradition encompassing authors as different as Homer and H.G. Wells. *The Mythic Circle* is on the lookout for original stories and poems. We are also looking for artists interested in illustrating poems and stories.

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