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Additional Keywords

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A Mythology for England

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Abstract: As J.R.R. Tolkien developed a mythology for his invented languages to dwell and grow in, he found himself increasingly drawn to satisfy for himself his desire for a true English epic. Tolkien thus encompassed elements of English geography, language, and mythology within his geography, languages, and mythology, as demonstrated through an examination of five figures of Tolkien's mythology, Eärendil, Ermon and Elmir, Ælfwine, and Ingwë.

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Sometime late in 1951 J.R.R. Tolkien wrote a letter to Milton Waldman, an editor with the London publisher Collins, whom Tolkien hoped would publish *The Silmarillion* in conjunction with *The Lord of the Rings*. In the course of this remarkable letter, the full text of which is said to be some ten thousand words long, Tolkien wrote:

> I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing.
> (Tolkien, 1981, p. 144).

The distinction that Tolkien draws between things British and things English is important. While there is a considerable body of legend concerning Britain, the Land of the Britons, there is virtually nothing of the proper quality that expresses the genius of England, *Englalond* of the Anglo-Saxons, "the Land of the people of the Angle". There is no English epic associated with both the soil *and* the tongue of England, no Anglo-Saxon *Mabinogion*, no *Iliad* or *Táin* or *Aeneid*, no *Nibelungenlied* or *Edda* or *Kalevala*.

It may be surprising at first that Tolkien excludes from this discussion the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, whose study he had revolutionized some fifteen years earlier with his essay *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*[1]. To be sure, *Beowulf* comes very close to the sort of epic that Tolkien desired for England. Tolkien notes at the conclusion of *Monsters and the Critics* that the English poet of *Beowulf* achieves an individual character for the poem by

> using the materials (then still plentiful) preserved from a day already changing and passing, a time that has now for ever vanished, swallowed in oblivion; using them for a new purpose, with a wider sweep of imagination, if with a less bitter and concentrated force.
> (Tolkien, 1984c, p. 33).

Thus the *Beowulf*-poet took the "materials" of an inherited Germanic mythology and used "for a new purpose, with a wider sweep of imagination", the mythology of the mysterious Scēaf and his son Scyld, the *gōd cyning*; of Eormenrīc, king of the Goths; and of Frōda and his fortunate son Ingeld. And certainly Tolkien finds the poem's individual character to be unmistakably English, for:

> it is in fact written in a language that after many centuries has still essential kinship with our own, it was made in this land, and moves in our northern world beneath our northern sky, and for those who are native to that tongue and land, it must ever call with a profound appeal – until the dragon comes.
> (Tolkien, 1984c, pp. 33-4)

Yet even *Beowulf* fails to meet Tolkien's criteria for a truly English epic, for though it was composed in Old English, and makes a new and characteristically English use of Germanic mythological elements, nevertheless no part of it is set in England; and so though the poem moves beneath northern skies, those skies are nevertheless not English. But while *Beowulf* is thus not a true English epic, English in both "tongue and soil", it does demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxons had a mythology from which such an epic could be formed. If anything, this hint of what might have been, this tantalizing near-satisfaction that *Beowulf* provides, must have served only to make Tolkien's longing more intense.

It is certainly no surprise then that as Tolkien developed a mythology for his invented languages to dwell and grow in,[2]

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[1] Reprinted in Tolkien, 1984c, pp. 5-48.

[2] As Tolkienian linguists, we are compelled to point out that Tolkien's invention of languages did indeed precede his invention of a

he found himself increasingly drawn to satisfy for himself his desire for a true English epic. After explaining this desire to Milton Waldman, Tolkien continues:

> Do not laugh! But once upon a time (my crest has long since fallen) I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country.
> (Tolkien, 1981, p. 144)

By his own criteria, Tolkien could create a mythology for England only by setting it on English soil, writing it in Old English, and featuring figures from English or at least Germanic mythology; or at any rate by encompassing elements of English geography, language, and mythology within his own. And that is exactly what he did. Through an examination of five figures of Tolkien's mythology, Eärendil, Ermon and Elmir, Ælfwine, and Ingwë, we will see that English geography, language, and mythology are all incorporated into Tolkien's creation. Thus even as Tolkien developed a mythology for his Elvish languages, he encompassed in it a mythology for England.

Eärendil

We will begin with Eärendil, who was in fact the first figure of English mythology that Tolkien incorporated into his own. It has long been recognized that Tolkien's mariner and messenger is derived from English and Germanic mythology, in particular from the Anglo-Saxon poem *Crist*:

> Ēalā Ēarendel   engla beorhtast,
> ofer middangeard   monnum sended
> ond sōðfæsta   sunnan lēoma,
> torht ofer tunglas
> "Hail Earendel, brightest of angels,
> over middle-earth sent unto men,
> and true gleam of the sun,
> radiant above the stars"[3]

In fact, in a letter from 1967, Tolkien describes how, upon encountering the Anglo-Saxon *Ēarendel* in 1913, he was "struck by the great beauty of this word (or name), entirely coherent with the normal style of [Anglo-Saxon], but euphonic to a peculiar degree in that pleasing but not 'delectable' language," and that he "adopted" him into his mythology, which he had already been forming for some years (Tolkien, 1981, p. 385). So taken was Tolkien with this figure of English mythology, in fact, that by the end of 1915 he had written no less than fourteen versions of four different poems concerning Eärendel, each of which contains explicit references to his mythology (Tolkien, 1984b, pp. 267-76).

One of the authors of this paper has elsewhere examined at some length the philological puzzle that the Anglo-Saxon *Ēarendel* presents (Hostetter, 1991), and shown that the

major aspects of Tolkien's Eärendil, the Star, the Messenger, the Eagle, the Mariner, and the Herald, were all suggested to Tolkien either by the role of the remarkably wide-spread mythological "cognates" of *Ēarendel* in the various Germanic traditions, or by an exploration of the linguistic cognates of Eärendel in the various Germanic languages. Thus for example the aspects of Star, Messenger, and Herald are found in the *Crist*, among other sources, while those of Eagle and Mariner were perhaps suggested by Old English *earn* "eagle" and *ēar* "sea, ocean" respectively.

In adopting Eärendel into his mythology, the Anglo-Saxon word exerted an influence on Tolkien's own languages, since as he points out:

> the name [Eärendel] could not be adopted just like that: it had to be accommodated to the Elvish linguistic situation, at the same time as a place for this person was made in legend. From this, far back in the history of "Elvish", which was beginning, after many tentative starts in boyhood, to take definite shape at the time of the name's adoption, arose eventually (a) the [Common Eldarin] stem *AYAR "Sea" . . . and (b) the element, or verbal base (N)DIL, "to love, be devoted to" . . .
> (Tolkien, 1981, pp. 385-6)

Thus Tolkien's own languages were shaped by an Old English word, in order to provide a fictional origin and explanation for the name of a figure taken from the mythology of England. In the same way, Tolkien's mythology was shaped by the aspects of Eärendel that he found in his philological inquiries, in order to recover for England something of the great Story of Eärendel that must once have been told, a story that already by the time of the *Crist* was, in the words of Tolkien's minstrel

> . . . but shreds one remembers
> Of golden imaginings fashioned in sleep,
> A whispered tale told by the withering embers
> Of old things far off that but few hearts keep.
> (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 271)

Ermon and Elmir

Like most mythologies, Tolkien's mythology gives accounts of the creation of the universe and the creatures living therein. A most interesting, albeit subtle, link between Tolkien's mythology and that of the English and Germanic peoples, indeed of all the Indo-Europeans, can be seen in an early version of the tale of the awakening of Men appearing in the outlines to "Gilfanon's Tale" in *The Book of Lost Tales*:

> The wizard Túvo told Nuin that the sleepers he had found were the new Children of Ilúvatar, and that they were waiting for light. He forbade any of the Elves to wake them or to visit those places, being frightened of the wrath of Ilúvatar; but despite this Nuin went there often and watched, sitting on a rock. Once he stumbled against a sleeper, who stirred but did not wake. At last,

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mythology. Tolkien notes in a letter from 1967 (Tolkien, 1981, p. 375) that he created his "imaginary histories" because he "discovered, as others have who carry out [the invention of languages] to any degree of completion, that a language requires a suitable habitation, and a history in which it can develop."

[3] Lines 104-7; my translation – CFH.

overcome by curiosity, he awakened two, named Ermon and Elmir; they were dumb and very much afraid, but he taught them much of the Ilkorin tongue, for which reason he is called Nuin Father of Speech. Then came the First Dawn; and Ermon and Elmir alone of Men saw the first Sun rise in the West and come over to the Eastward Haven.

(Tolkien, 1984a, pp. 235-6 and cf. p. 237).

The most striking aspect of this version of the tale is the inclusion of the names of the first Men, which appear nowhere else. The only further textual information we have concerning Ermon and Elmir is that the people of Ermon alone of Men fought beside the fairies in the Battle of Palisor (Tolkien, 1984a, pp. 236-7), that an embassy was sent by Melko to Túvo, Tinwelint, and Ermon before the Battle of Unnumbered Tears (Tolkien, 1984a, pp. 238-9), and that Ermon (or both Ermon and Elmir) was the ancestor of Ing, King of Luthany (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 305).

Although Christopher Tolkien does not give etymologies for the names, he does give a very informative note:

> Above *Ermon* is written, to all appearance, the Old English word *Æsc* ("ash"). It seems conceivable that this is an anglicizing of Old Norse *Askr* ("ash"), in the northern mythology the name of the first man, who with the first woman (*Embla*) were made by the Gods out of two trees that they found on the seashore
> (Tolkien, 1984a, p. 245, n. 9).

The story of Askr and Embla is told in strophes 17 and 18 of *Vǫluspá*:

> *Unz þrí(a)r kvámu   ór því liði*
> *ǫflgir ok ástgir   Æsir at húsi;*
> *fundu á landi   lítt megandi*
> *Ask ok Emblu,   ørlǫglausa.*
> *Ǫnd þau né áttu,   óð þau né hǫfðu,*
> *lá né læti   né litu góða;*
> *ond gaf Óðinn,   óð gaf Hænir,*
> *lá gaf Lóðurr   ok litu góða.*

> To the coast then came, kind and mighty,
> from the gathered gods three great Æsir;
> on the land they found, of little strength,
> Ask and Embla, unfated yet.
> Sense they possessed not, soul they had not,
> being nor bearing, nor blooming hue;
> soul gave Óthin, sense gave Hœnir,
> being, Lóthur, and blooming hue.
> (Nordal, 1980, pp. 32-5; translation Hollander, 1962, p. 3)

Askr and Embla are apparently names of trees. Askr at any rate denotes the ash tree (*Fraxinus excelsior*) or something made from its wood, such as a spear, a small ship, or a small wooden vessel (Loewenthal, 1922, p. 275, Jóhannesson, 1956, pp. 90-1, Cleasby/Vigfusson, 1957, p. 25, de Vries,

1962, p. 15), and furthermore has the poetic meanings "leader, man" and also "horse" (Holthausen, 1948, p. 3)[4]. OE *æsc* and its Germanic cognates are derived from the Indo-European root *ōsi-s* "ash"[5]. All scholars appear to agree on the connection between the name of the first man in *Vǫluspá* and this root.

The meaning of the name *Embla*, however, has been the topic of much debate. Jacob Grimm states that *embla* denotes a "busy woman"[6], and thus does not connect it to a plant name of any kind. Sophus Bugge notes, however, that "The man's name, 'ash,' shows that the woman's must also be that of a tree. I believe *Embla* to have arisen from Danish *Elmbla*, a diminutive of *almr*, 'elm.'" (1899, p. xxviii). Hans Sperber disagrees with Bugge on the basis of the loss of *l* in stressed position and his inadequate explanation of the epenthetic *b*, and suggests instead that it comes from a Germanic *ambilōn* related to Gk. ἄμπελος "vine" and perhaps also to Gallic *amella* "honeysuckle" (Sperber, 1910, pp. 219-22). He gives as supporting evidence the manner in which the Indo-Europeans made fire, namely by boring a stick of a hardwood such as ash into a piece of softer wood, preferably that of some sort of climbing plant (pp. 220-1). The sexual connotations of this are clear, and the name "vine" for the first woman is thus appropriate. Loewenthal variously derives it from IE *āmliiā*, which he interprets as denoting some species of rowan (mountain-ash, genus *Sorbus*) (1922, pp. 275-8), or from IE *améla* "yellow-wood" via Gmc. *amilōn* "alder" (1924, pp. 80-1). The various etymological dictionaries tend to be noncommittal (e.g. Holthausen, 1948, p. 3; Jóhannesson, 1956, pp. 22, 88; de Vries, 1962, pp. 101-2), whereas translators of the Eddas tend to prefer "elm" (e.g. Bray, 1908, p. 283, Auden/Taylor, 1981, p. 247) or "vine"(e.g. Hollander, 1962, p. 3).

Now that we have examined the etymologies of *Askr* and *Embla*, what can we say about the etymologies of *Ermon* and *Elmir*? No derivations are given in *The Book of Lost Tales*, but the name *Elmir* is remarkably similar to *elm*, one of the candidates for the meaning of *Embla*. It should also be noted that when Tolkien was writing this version of the creation myth, Bugge's hypothesis that *Embla* means "elm" had been around for about a decade and a half in a book published in England in an English translation, whereas the other theories mentioned above, if in existence by that time at all, appeared in German in German journals. We might assume, therefore, that "elm" was the prevailing interpretation of *Embla* in England at that time and thus the meaning that Tolkien intended for *Elmir*. Not only does the name resemble the English word *elm*, but also Elvish words with that meaning: Qenya *alalmë* (whence *Alalminórë* "Land of Elms"), Gnomish *lalm* or *larm*, and *lalmir* (Tolkien, 1984a, p. 249).

On the other hand, while *Ermon*, as indicated by Tolkien's gloss, is clearly equivalent to *Æsc*, the first man of English

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[4] This is most likely due to metonymy, with the material of the warrior's weapon or vehicle being used to denote the warrior, cf. ON *askmaðr* "viking, pirate", OE *æscmann*, both literally "ash-man" (Cleasby/Vigfusson, 1957, p. 25, de Vries, 1962, p. 15).

[5] Whence also a number of cognates in other Indo-European languages, including Lat. *ornus* "mountain ash, spear", Gk. ὀξύη "copper-beech, lance", OSl. *jasenu* "beech", OIr. *uinnius* "ash", Lith. *úosis* "ash", Alb. *ah* "beech", and Arm. *haçi* "ash" (Jóhannesson, 1956, pp. 90-1, de Vries, 1962, p. 15).

[6] "Ein geschäftiges weib", from *am(b)r, am(b)l* "labor assiduus", whence also the heroic name *Amala* (Grimm, 1875, p. I, 475).

mythology, his name bears no similarity to *ash* or its cognates. Furthermore, there do not appear to be any tree names in the Elvish languages with a form similar to this name. How then does *Ermon* fit into this schema and correspond to *Askr*? In strophe 19 of *Vǫluspá*, immediately following the Askr and Embla story, we have another occurrence of the word *askr*:

> *Ask veit ek standa,*   *heitir Yggdrasill,*
> *hár baðmr, ausinn*   *hvíta auri;*
> *þaðan koma dǫggvar,*   *þærs í dala falla,*
> *stendr æ yfir grœnn*   *Urðarbrunni.*
> "An ash I know, hight Yggdrasil,
> the mighty tree moist with white dews;
> thence come the floods that fall adown;
> evergreen o'ertops Urth's well this tree."
> (Nordal, 1980, p. 36; translation Hollander, 1962, p.4)

This ash, Yggdrasill, is the World Tree of Norse mythology, the center of the universe, linking the nine worlds (Davidson, 1964, pp. 190-6). This notion of a World Tree was widespread among the Indo-European and Finno-Ugric peoples, by whom such a tree was revered. Sacred trees and (similarly) sacred posts and pillars were not uncommon among these peoples (Meringer, 1904, pp. 165-6 and 1907, pp. 296-306, de Vries, 1952, pp. 19-20, Turville-Petre, 1962, p. 242, Davidson, 1964, pp. 190-1). In fact, Old Norse *áss, ǫss* means both "beam, girder" and "god, one of the Æsir", and Meringer gives numerous examples of the widespread worship of wooden blocks, stakes, and pillars among the various branches of the Indo-European family (Meringer, 1907, pp. 296-306). Among the revered posts that he mentions is the Greek *Herme* (anglicized as *herm*) (Fox, 1916), which he derives from ἔρμα "Balken" ("beam, girder") and regards as something of an intermediate stage between a bare pole and an anthropomorphic idol (Meringer, 1904, pp. 165-6 and 1907, p. 299). The herm, according to Fox, is a "developed fetish-form of Hermes" which "consists of a tall square column with stumps of arms and a phallos, and is surmounted by a bearded head . . ." (Fox, 1916, p. 195) Is *Ermon* then connected with *Hermes*? We will return to this question shortly.

Another venerated pillar mentioned by Meringer is the *Irminsûl* (Meringer, 1907, p. 300). In his *Translatio S. Alexandri* (A.D. 851) (Pertz, 1976ff., p. II.676), Ruodolf of Fulda writes that the Saxons worshipped a wooden pillar which they called *Irminsul*, meaning "column of the

universe, supporting all things". A pillar with this name, a center of the religion of the Saxons, was located near Heresburg (modern-day Stadtbergen) in Westphalia[7]. As noted by Grimm, the idea of such a World Pillar is very closely related to the Yggdrasill of the Scandinavian myths (Grimm, 1875, p. II.667). For example, Yggdrasill's roots stretched out in three directions, whereas the *Irminsûl* was the hub from which three or four roads emanated. There is also the obvious parallel in their common function of supporting the universe.

The element *irmin-* in *Irminsûl* is certainly nearer in form to Tolkien's *Ermon* than is *Herme(s)*, since it shares all three consonants. That the vowels do not show an exact correspondence is not surprising, since the vocalism of this element within the Germanic cognates is rather variable; the word *Irminsûl* alone has a number of variant spellings in the old documents, including *irmansûl, yrmensûl, ermensul,* and *hirmensul* (Grimm, 1875, pp. I.95-8). The first element *irmin* and its cognates in other Germanic dialects display an even wider variety of vowels. (Voltaire is said to have observed that etymology is a science in which the consonants count for very little, and the vowels for nothing at all.)

But what does *Irminsûl* mean? The element *sûl*[8] is the predecessor of modern German *Säule* "pillar"[9] and *irmansûl* is rendered as *colossus* or *altissima columna* "very high column" in various Old High German glosses (Grimm, 1875, pp. I.95-6). The element *irmin* is therefore taken by Grimm to have an augmentative effect on the nouns with which it is compounded (Grimm, 1875, p. I.97); thus *irmingot* (the highest god, the god of all), *irminman* (an elevated term for "man"), *irminthiod* (the human race), and so on.

This element is present in all the old Germanic languages. Holthausen gives the reconstructed Gothic forms **aírman-s, *aírmin-s* = "great, mighty" for the element, present in such personal names *Ermanaricus* (*Erminaricus*) and *Ermanagildus* (*Erminagildus*), and relates this vocable to Old Icelandic *jǫrmun-*, seen in such forms as *Jǫrmunrekr*, the cognate form of *Ermanaricus*, king of the Goths, *jǫrmungrund* "the wide earth", and *Jǫrmungandr*, the name of the serpent that surrounds the world (Holthausen, 1934, p. 4, 1963, p. 92). He also relates it to Anglo-Saxon *eormen-*, seen in such forms as *eormencyn(n)* "mankind", which occurs in *Beowulf*; and to Old Saxon *irmin-*, seen in such forms as *irminthiod* "the people of the earth", which occurs in the *Hêliand*[10]. Cleasby

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[7] According to numerous chronicle entries for the year 772, Charlemagne, in the course of converting the Saxons to Christianity, destroyed this symbol of heathendom (Grimm, 1875, p. I.96, Davidson, 1964, p. 196). Thus we have in the Annals written by Einhard of Fulda in the early ninth century (Pertz, 1976ff., p. I.348), for example: "Karolus Saxoniam bello aggressus, Eresburgum castrum cepit, et idolum Saxonum quod vocabitur Irminsul destruit" (see Grimm, 1875, pp. I.96-7; cf. Pertz, 1976ff., pp. I.16, I.30, I.88, I.117, I.150-1, I.228, I.295, I.557, II.376, III.37, etc.).

[8] Which we may note here is remarkably similar to the Adûnaic word *sulum* "mast" (Tolkien, 1992, p. 419).

[9] Grimm (1875, pp. I.98, II.667, III.45) in fact uses the modernized forms *Irmanseul* and *Irmenseule*.

[10] Holthausen (1934, p. 4, 1963, p. 92) further lists as cognates Greek ὄρμενο-ς "hoch" [="high"]; Old Slavic *raměnŭ* "stark, gewaltig" [="strong, mighty"]; Lithuanian *ermã-s* "Ungeheuer" [="monster"], *ermi-s* "übergroß" [="overlarge"], *erminga-s* "unförmlich" [="informal"]; Albanian *jerm* "rasend" [="raving"]; Armenian *arman* "Wunder" [="wonder"]. He later (1948, p. 146) relates these to the copulative stem seen in Old English *eart* "art" (2. sg. pres.) and *earon* "are" (pl. pres.) and to the stem seen in Latin *orior* "I rise", and in this connection it is interesting to note the Eldarin base ORO- "up; rise; high", whence Old Noldorin *orie*, Noldorin *erio* "rise", and the related base ÓR-NI- "high tree". Walde (1927-32, pp. I.136-9) gives Germanic **ermana-, *irmino-* = "great" as a derivative of an Indo-European

and Vigfusson define Old Icelandic *jǫrmun-* as "a prefix in a few old mythical words, implying something huge, vast, superhuman" (Cleasby/Vigfusson, 1957, p. 328). Bosworth defines the Old English forms *eormen, eorman* as "Universal, immense, whole, general" and *irmen* as "A word occurring mostly as a prefix with the idea of greatness, universality" (Bosworth, 1882, pp. 254, 599). Bearing this aspect of universality in mind, it is quite interesting to note that a word *irmin* with a similar sense appears in Tolkien's *Qenya Lexicon*, which is contemporary with the *Lost Tales* and thus with the story of Ermon and Elmir. *Irmin* is listed in the *Qenya Lexicon* under the root IRI "dwell ?" and is glossed "the inhabited world – the whole of the created world not only earth."[11]

This explains how the Germanic element *irmin* links with the Elvish word *irmin*, but how do these connect with our primordial man, *Ermon*? We have already seen how Germanic *irmin-* could be used as an augmentative prefix. But *Irmin* also appears in a proper name in its own right.

In chapter 12 of his *Res Gestae Saxonicae* (c.968), the monk Widukind wrote that the Saxons, after having triumphed over the Thuringians in the year 830, erected an altar at the eastern gateway of the town they had captured. This altar, according to Widukind, was in the form of a column imitating Hercules, positioned with respect to the sun (Apollo) and bearing the name of the god Mars, which appeared as *Hirmin*, a form of the Greek name *Hermis* (*Hermes*): "quia Hirmin vel Hermis graece Mars dicitur" (Pertz, 1976ff, p. III.423, de Vries, 1952, p. 18, Grimm, 1875, pp. I.292-3). The column is thus clearly an *Irminsûl*, but Widukind has the Greco-Roman gods confused: Mars corresponds to Ares, and Mercury corresponds to Hermes. Grimm believes that this is an indication that the Saxon *Hirmin* was a mixture of both Mars and Mercury, who is equated with the Germanic god **Wōðanaz* (Old Saxon *Wôdan*, Old Norse *Óðinn*; cf. Old English *Wôdnesdæg* for *Dies Mercurii*) (Grimm, 1875, p. I.293 and Dumézil, 1973, p. 19). Further evidence of a correlation between (H)irmin and Mercury/Wôdan can be seen in a twelfth-century chronicle: "*ûf einer yrmensûle stuont ein abgot ungehiure, den hiezen sie ir koufman*" ("upon an *irminsûl* stood a monstrous idol, whom they called their merchant"), since Mercury/Wôdan was the patron god of merchants (Fox, 1916, pp. 194-5, Davidson, 1964, pp. 56, 140-1). Perhaps the most telling evidence can be seen in the name *Jǫrmunr*, which is a

sobriquet of the Norse god Óðinn (Jóhannesson, 1956, p. 64, Cleasby/Vigfusson, 1957, p. 328, de Vries, 1962, p. 295), whom many Germanic tribes claimed as their progenitor.

The name of *Irmin* also appears in the name of specific Germanic peoples. Tacitus tells us in his *Germania* that the three main branches of the Germanic people, the *Ingaevones*, *Herminones*, and *Istaevones*, were named after the three sons of *Mannus* "man" (Much, 1967, pp. 44, 51-60, also Much, 1900, pp. 72-3 and Grimm, 1875, pp. I.285-94, III.398-401). Grimm connects *Herminones* with a progenitor *Irmin*, saying: "The ancestor of the Herminones was without a doubt named *Hermin*, i.e. *Irmin*, whom later legend knows as a divine hero" (Grimm, 1875, pp. I.291-5, III.399)[12]. Grimm further claims that *Istaevones* should be read as *Iscaevones* (Grimm, 1875, pp. I.289-90, III.399), with its eponymous founder, *Iscvio* or *Isco*, corresponding to the Old Norse *Askr* and Old English *Æsc*, whom as we have seen Tolkien equates with Ermon. *Irmin* may even be present in the name *Germani* itself. According to one of the several etymologies for this name listed by Elston, it is a compound of a prefix **ga-* and the Germanic stem **ermena-*, and thus the name *Germani* may indicate some such idea as "the members of a great people" (Elston, 1934, p. 24).

It is clear then that English and Germanic mythology maintained a tradition of a progenitor whose name was a cognate of *Irmin*, which was also used adjectively to mean "great, large" or "universal". But in fact this tradition is far older than the common Germanic period, extending in all likelihood back to the proto-Indo-Europeans. There is, for instance, an Indo-Iranian god *Aryaman* whom Georges Dumézil, in *Le Troisième Souverain* (1949), interprets as a god of the "third function", i.e. of the agricultural class, as opposed to priests and warriors, and thus connected with the well-being of the common people, their crops, and their livestock[13]. Dumézil also demonstrates the correspondences in name, function, and mythical deeds between the Indic *Aryaman* and a figure of Irish mythology, *Eremon*, who became the first king of Ireland after its conquest by the sons of Mile (Dumézil, 1949, pp. 163-85 and d'Arbois de Jubainville, 1903, p. 147). According to Dumézil:

> [Eremon] is king with the same title as those of Mitra and Varuna; he joins them functionally since he plays the same role, that of *introducing a new peopling . . .* Finally, jointly and separately without doubt from the word *aire* (**aryak-*), this Eremon is the *chief of the*

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root 3. *er-* = "set into motion, excite, exalt", whence also such words as those mentioned by Holthausen, as well as Old English *rinnan* "flow, run" and *ears* "arse".

[11] In the *Gnomish Lexicon* from the same time appear the related forms *Idhru, Isbar*, and *Idhrubar*, all glossed as "the world, all the regions inhab[ited] by Men, Elves and Gods. (Cp. Qenya *irmin*)" (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 343). Citations from the *Qenya Lexicon* and the *Gnomish Lexicon* are taken from correspondence with Christopher Tolkien, and differ somewhat from those published in *The Book of Lost Tales*.

[12] My translation – ARS.

[13] See Dumézil, 1973, pp. ix-xviii for an overview of the Dumézilian tripartite framework. Jan de Vries (1952, pp. 26-7, my translation – ARS) provides a useful summary of Dumézil's argument:

> Aryaman is a derivation from *arya-*, the designation of the Aryan people, or more exactly of the people as a "social corps". Aryaman would have been the god of that body, in which the mutual, social bonds existing between the members of an Aryan community are concentrated and sublimated . . . Thus *arya* "is applied to each man, god, or thing belonging to that community or corresponding to that type, above all in opposition to the barbarians." The protector-god of that community, Aryaman, the third sovereign according to Georges Dumézil's expression, is the associate of the other gods of sovereignty: Mitra and Varuna.

ancestors of the present-day airig, *of the present-day Irish masses* and not of those prehistoric Irish, which were the gods, the Tuatha dê Danann.
(Dumézil, 1949, pp. 170-1)[14]

The Irish Eremon's connection with Tolkien's Ermon is thus clear: both mark the beginning of a new race, the race of Men[15].

We are not claiming that all of these figures and concepts were in Tolkien's mind when he decided to name his first human Ermon. Nevertheless, it can hardly be a mere coincidence that Tolkien's name for the first human should resemble so many names of founders of dynasties and eponymous gods and heroes. It is clear that Tolkien consciously chose the names *Ermon* and *Elmir* for the first Men in order to connect his mythology with English and Germanic tradition.

Ælfwine

No discussion of Tolkien's creation of a mythology for England would be complete without at least a cursory discussion of the story of Ælfwine, which is without a doubt its fullest, most complex, and most remarkable expression. Though the details of the role and significance of Ælfwine varied considerably as Tolkien developed and refined his mythology (in fact, in the earliest version, he was not even named Ælfwine), he serves throughout as an ambassador between Tolkien's mythology and English legend, the agent through whom the English receive, in Anglo-Saxon, what Tolkien calls "the true tradition of the fairies", a tradition "more true than anything to be found in Celtic lands" (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 290). Ælfwine's ambassadorship spans the whole *History of Middle-earth* series to date, from the earliest workings in *The Book of Lost Tales* of c.1916 through *The Lost Road* of 1937 to the *Notion Club Papers* of c.1945 in the most recent volume, *Sauron Defeated*.

Unfortunately, for us to fully explore the significance of Ælfwine to Tolkien's creation of a mythology for England would require an examination many times the length of the present discussion. In any event, the significance is so manifest and so thoroughly discussed by Christopher Tolkien in the course of the various volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*, in particular in *The History of Eriol or Ælfwine* in *The Book of Lost Tales Part II* (pp. 278-334), that it would be pointless here to do more than merely summarize the

most important features of the story of Ælfwine, and add a few observations of our own along the way.

In the earliest version of what would become the story of Ælfwine (esp. Tolkien, 1984a, pp. 23-4, Tolkien, 1984b, pp. 289-94), the mortal mariner who comes to Tol Eressëa, the Lonely Isle of the Elves in the middle of the Great Sea, is named Ottor Wæfre "Ottor the Restless". Ottor, whom the Gnomes name *Eriol* "One who dreams alone", is the compiler of the *Parma Kuluinen*, the "Golden Book", whose tales he records in the Eressëan village of Tavrobel, the "Great Haywood", after hearing them recited by the Gnomes in *Mar Vanwa Tyaliéva*, the "Cottage of Lost Play" in Kortirion, the chief town of Alalminórë, the "Land of Elms". The most remarkable fact of this stage of the mythology is that Tol Eressëa *is* Britain; that is, Tol Eressëa is drawn east by the Vala Ulmo and the great whale Uin into the geographical position of England, and Ireland is formed when the god Ossë attempts to thwart Ulmo's efforts and breaks off the western half of the island. Thus Kortirion is not simply *modelled* on Tolkien's beloved Warwick, it *is* Warwick, both geographically and etymologically; and Tavrobel is the village of Great Haywood in Staffordshire (Tolkien, 1984b, pp. 291-2).

Of course, since Ottor Wæfre is thus in effect the first mortal "discoverer" of England, he could not himself be English. This is indeed the case, as we learn from the fact that Ottor took the name *Angol* "after the regions of his home" which, as Christopher Tolkien notes, "certainly refers to the ancient homeland of the 'English' before their migration across the North Sea to Britain: Old English *Angel* . . . the region of the Danish peninsula between the Flensburg fjord and the river Schlei, south of the modern Danish frontier" (Tolkien, 1984a, p. 24). We learn more about the pre-Eressëan life of Ottor in jottings by Tolkien titled "Story of Eriol's Life" (1984b, pp. 289-90), where it is told that "Ottor Wæfre settled on the island of Heligoland in the North Sea, and wedded a woman named Cwén; they had two sons named Hengest and Horsa . . ."

We see here the forging of an explicit link between Tolkien's legends and English history, for Hengest and Horsa are of course the first Saxon chieftains to wrest a solid foothold in England from the Britons. According to Gildas' *De Exicidio Britanniae* ("On the Ruin of Britain") about the year 450 the British king Vortigern invited Saxons, led by

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[14] My translation – ARS. Jan de Vries, in his 1952 article "La valeur religieuse du mot germanique *Irmin*", extends Dumézil's hypothesis into the Germanic realm, arguing against the meaning "large" normally assigned to the element *irmin* and drawing instead on an idea that it implied a sense of affinity, similar to that in the Sanskrit *arya*: "The prefix *ermuna-, ermina-* . . . corresponds to a completely different idea than that of 'great, universal', it circumscribes in a very special manner the community of one people" (de Vries, 1952, p. 24, my translation – ARS). Thus, according to de Vries (1952, pp. 24-5), *irmintheod* does not merely designate "people of the world", but rather "our people", Ermanarik is not only "the mighty king" but also "our own king". Similarly, "the idea of affinity can be condensed into that of a divinity, a guarantor of the order of life, into which we find ourselves placed. A god **Erminaz* seems to be the quasi-necessary complement of the word *ermenaz* that we just defined" (de Vries, 1952, p. 26).

[15] The analogues of *irmin* among various Indo-European peoples may be even more widespread. This element may even be present in the name of the Armenian people. Ananikian (1964, p. 66) says of the legendary hero Armenak, the son of Hayk, that he is undoubtedly an eponymous hero of the Armenians and adds, "It is quite possible that Armenak is the same as the Teutonic Irmin and the Vedic Aryaman." He notes further (1964, p. 389) that "Patrubani explains *Armenus* [a Latinized form of the name] as *Arya-Manah*, 'Aryan (noble?)-minded.' The Vedic Aryaman seems to mean 'friend,' 'comrade.'" Thus we see again de Vries' notion of affinity and Dumézil's *Aryan* element in the name.

Hengest and Horsa, to cross the North Sea and settle in Britain as auxiliary troops. When Vortigern was unable to provide adequate supplies for the unexpectedly large host that accepted his invitation, the Saxons revolted and eventually established a kingdom in Kent under Hengest's rule.

There may also be an historical basis for Ottor Wǽfre himself. Incorporated by King Ælfred (A.D. 849-99) into his translation of Paulus Orosius' *Historiae adversum paganos* is an eyewitness account of the lands and peoples of Scandinavia and the Baltic regions by an intrepid Norse mariner named *Ōhthere*. The name *Ōhthere* is an Old English adaptation from Old Norse *Óttarr*, and thus is simply a variant of the attested Old English name *Ottor*. Ōhthere tells Ælfred that he dwells *ealra Norðmonna norþmest* "northmost of all Northmen" in a district called *Hālgoland* corresponding to the modern Norwegian Helgeland on the northwest coast of the Scandinavian peninsula. Ōhthere also gives a brief description of the *Cwēnas*, who harried the Norwegians from their homeland directly eastward across the Scandinavian peninsula from Hālgoland. The *Cwēnas* were a Lappish people, known in their own tongue as the *Kainulaiset*, whose name as rendered into Old English was equivalent to the word for "woman", and indeed Gwyn Jones notes that *Cwēnaland* "acquired notes of a *terra feminarum*", and was thus a sort of northern Amazonia (Jones, 1986, p. 253). It would of course be difficult to assert that Tolkien's Ottor is the same person as Ōhthere: Ottor's home is said to be the island Heligoland, which is not the same as the Norwegian district of Hālgoland; that his wife is named *Cwén* may indeed have no more significance than that it is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "woman"; and since Ottor is the father of Hengest and Horsa, who invaded England c.A.D. 450, he lived some four centuries before Ōhthere, who would have flourished c.A.D. 875. But by noting that Ottor's draught of *limpë* is said to have made him young again (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 290), and may have granted him an extraordinary lifespan, as it did for Ing of Luthany (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 306), we can at least remove time's objection to equating Ottor with Ōhthere. In any event, the correspondence of Ōhthere – Hālgoland – Cwēnas with Ottor – Heligoland – Cwén is remarkable, and must have some significance in Tolkien's creation of the character and history of Ottor.

As Christopher Tolkien notes, the name *Ælfwine*, replacing the earlier Ottor Wǽfre, enters with "a new conception" of the mythology, "*subsequent to* the writing of the *Lost Tales*" (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 301). In this new conception, Tolkien abandons the identification of Tol Eressëa with England, which instead exists in its own right as a land named *Luthany* by the Elves who for a time dwelt there under the rule of Ing, a mysterious figure about whom we will have much more to say momentarily. Because England has a separate existence from Tol Eressëa, Ælfwine is now made a man of eleventh-century Wessex who is driven from England over the sea to Tol Eressëa in flight from the Norman invaders.

Little more need be said here of the subsequent course of the figure of Ælfwine Eriol in the volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* published to date, since, although he plays a role in all of the subsequent material of the Elder Days (except for the brief gap of *The Lays of Beleriand*), his role is simply that of the chronicler or, in the case of *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*, the *receiver* of the legends of the Elves. Thus he appears in *The Shaping of Middle-earth* only as the author or translator of the *Qenta Noldorinwa* (Tolkien, 1986, pp. 76-218), Tolkien's 1930 version of his mythology, and of the various attendant *Annals* of Valinor (pp. 262-93) and Beleriand (pp. 294-341), portions of which are also given in Ælfwine's "original" Anglo-Saxon versions (pp. 205-8, 337-41). The Elven-sage Rúmil of Tûn recites the earliest version of the *Ainulindalë* to Ælfwine (Tolkien, 1987, pp. 155-66), and Ælfwine attests to various statements of the *Lhammas*, the "Account of Tongues" which he learned in Tol Eressëa (pp. 167-98); and he is the faithful translator of the first version of the *Quenta Silmarillion* (pp. 199-338). In both *The Lost Road* (Tolkien, 1987, pp. 36-104) and *The Notion Club Papers* (Tolkien, 1992, pp. 269-82) he is the son of Éadwine, just one of several father-son pairs throughout time – such as the present-day Edwin and Alwin, or Oswin and Alboin, and the Númenóreans Amandil and Elendil – whose names mean "Bliss-friend" and "Elf-friend", and who witness, either in person or through a vision, the Downfall of Númenor.

But simply because Ælfwine's role in Tolkien's subsequent mythology becomes less prominent than in *The Book of Lost Tales* is not to say that Ælfwine's significance to an examination of Tolkien's development of a mythology for England was ended. The mere fact that it is a man of Anglo-Saxon England who throughout receives the "true tradition" of the Elves demonstrates that Tolkien did not completely abandon his ambition of creating a mythology for England. Moreover, while English geographical and mythological elements are manifest in the story of Ælfwine, the role of Ælfwine as translator into Old English of the Elvish legends shows that the crucial third element of Tolkien's criteria for a true English mythology, the linguistic element, is also present, since it demonstrates that Old English and the Elvish tongues coexisted in Tolkien's mythology.

But in incorporating Old English into his mythology, one would expect Tolkien to explain how it and other languages of the Primary World fit in with his invented languages; and in fact he does just that. In §10 of the *Lhammas*, the "Account of Tongues" that was learned and, presumably, translated by Ælfwine in Tol Eressëa, we are told that:

> The languages of Men . . . were for the most part derived remotely from the language of the Valar. For the Dark-elves . . . befriended wandering Men in sundry times and places in the most ancient days, and taught them such things as they knew . . . Now the language of [the folk of Bëor and Haleth and Hádor] was greatly influenced by the Green-elves, and it was of old named *Taliska* . . . Yet other Men there were, it seems, that remained east of Eredlindon, who held to their speech, and from this, closely akin to Taliska, are come after many ages of change languages that live still

in the North of the earth.
(Tolkien, 1987, pp. 179).

The significance of this passage cannot be overstated. Here Ælfwine, an Anglo-Saxon mariner, reports that "languages that live still in the North of the earth", which can hardly be other than the Indo-European languages, and which must surely include Ælfwine's own language, are ultimately descended from the languages of the Dark-elves. Thus Ælfwine himself makes it clear that Old English and the Elvish tongues not only coexisted but, far more importantly, that they are cognate languages; that is, they are sprung from a common source[16].

Ingwë

We conclude with a discussion of Ingwë, or rather, of the *two* Ingwës, for there are two seemingly distinct figures of Tolkien's mythology that bear this name. We will first discuss Ingwë King of Luthany, who appears in *The History of Eriol* or *Ælfwine* in *The Book of Lost Tales, Part II*, and who is often called by the Gnomish form of his name, Ing, as we shall call him here in order to distinguish the pair.

From *The History of Ælfwine* (Tolkien, 1984b, pp. 300-310) we learn that Ing, apparently a mortal man, was the ruler of Luthany (that is, England) when the Elves retreated there from the Great Lands on their way back to Tol Eressëa. At this time, Ing was given a draught of *limpë*, the Elvish nectar, which endowed him with great longevity, if not immortality. After many ages of rule in Luthany, Ing set sail to rejoin the Elves in Tol Eressëa, but his ship was driven far east by Ossë and wrecked on the shores of the East Danes, where he became a "half-divine king" of the peoples collectively named the *Ingwaiwar*. After a sojourn among the Ingwaiwar, Ing departs once again for Tol Eressëa. Meanwhile, Luthany was made into an island by the remaining Elves for their defence, but they are nonetheless subjected to seven successive invasions, including that of the *Rúmhoth*, which is the Gnomish name for the Romans. The final invasion is by the *Ingwaiwar*, who because they have been instructed by Ing, are kindly disposed to the remaining Elves. After many years, Ælfwine, a descendant of Ing, is born and when grown sails to Tol Eressëa.

We have already mentioned Tacitus' threefold division of the Germanic tribes into *Ingaevones*, (properly the *Inguaeones*), *Herminones*, and *Istaevones* (*Germania* 2). Tacitus describes the Inguaeones as dwelling "nearest the Ocean", indicating the Baltic maritime peoples that were the parent nations of the Anglo-Saxons, including the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes, and the Frisians. There can be no doubt that Tolkien's *Ingwaiwar* are to be identified with the Inguaeones, a fact made manifest by the apparently Quenya names for the peoples that the Ingwaiwar comprised: the *Angali*, *Saksani*, *Euti*, and *Firisandi*.

It will certainly come as no surprise, then, that the Inguaeones are named for a semi-divine figure of Germanic legend known to the Anglo-Saxons as Ing. As Christopher Tolkien notes (Tolkien, 1984b, p. 305), there is a very brief story of Ing in the Anglo-Saxon *Rune Poem*:

> [Ing] wæs ærest   mid Eastdenum
> gesewen secgun,   oþ he siðð an eft
> ofer wæg gewat,   wæn æfter ran;
> ðus heardingas   ðone hæle nemdun.

> Ing was first among the East-danes
> seen by men, until he afterwards again
> departed over the waves, the wagon ran after;
> thus the brave-ones named that hero.[17]

It can be seen that Tolkien's account of the sojourn of his Ing among the East Danes agrees in all particulars with that of the Ing of the *Rune Poem*, which is, notably, unique to the Anglo-Saxons. It should also be noted that a name for the Danes in Anglo-Saxon poetry, notably in *Beowulf*, is *Ingwine*, literally the "friends of Ing".

The identity of Tolkien's Ing or Ingwë of Luthany with the Ing of the Anglo-Saxon *Rune Poem* is obvious, and in fact would not even require discussion here beyond Christopher Tolkien's own treatment, were it not for the fact that there is another figure of Tolkien's mythology named Ingwë, who also shares a remarkable association with a figure of Germanic mythology.

In his commentary in *Sauron Defeated* on the various versions of *The Drowning of Anadûnê*, Christopher Tolkien includes a remarkable set of notes by his father titled *The theory of the work*. In these notes are among the most explicit statements made by Tolkien demonstrating the intended geographical, historical, and mythological unity of Middle-earth with "our" earth. He states, for instance, that "Men 'awoke' first in the midst of the Great Middle Earth (Europe and Asia), and Asia was first thinly inhabited, before the Dark Ages of great cold" (Tolkien, 1992, p. 398). In fact, in the first sketch of this passage he was even more specific, writing that "Men awoke in Mesopotamia" (Tolkien, 1992, p. 410 n. 2).

In this same passage, Tolkien continues with an explanation of the relationship of Men and Elves, who are here called the *Eledāi*:

> Even before that time Men had spread westward (and eastward) as far as the shores of the Sea. The Eledāi withdrew into waste places or retreated westward.

> The Men who journeyed westward were in general those who remained in closest touch with the true Eledāi, and for the most part they were drawn west by the rumour of a land in or beyond the Western Sea which was beautiful, and was the home of the Eledāi where all things were fair and ordered to beauty . . .

> Thus it is that the more beautiful legends (containing truths) arose, of oreads, dryads, and nymphs; and of the *Ljós-alfar*.
> (Tolkien, 1992, p. 398)

As Christopher Tolkien notes, *Ljós-alfar* is an Old Norse

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[16] The ramifications of this for the study of Tolkien's invented languages are enormous, and form the basis of the column *Words and Devices* by Carl Hostetter and Patrick Wynne that appears regularly in *Vinyar Tengwar*, a journal of the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship, to which interested persons are directed.

[17] My translation – CFH.

word meaning "Light-elves". (Tolkien, 1992, p. 410 n.3) The *Ljós-alfar* "Light-elves" are named in the Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson, where they are described as "fairer than the sun to look upon", and they are said to dwell in a land named *Álfheim* "Elf-home" (Young, 1954, p. 46). The lord of Álfheim is Freyr of the Vanir, an elder race of gods, who was given Álfheim as a "tooth-fee", a custom in which an infant was given a gift upon cutting his first tooth (Hollander, 1962, p. 55).

It is clear from this passage that the *Ljós-alfar* of Norse myth are to be seen as a legend of Western Men inspired by their close contact with the Eledāi, the Elves of Tolkien's mythology. And when it is remarked that the name *Freyr* is literally "Lord", and thus simply a title of the deity who is also named *Yngvi-Freyr* or simply *Yngvi*, it becomes equally clear that Yngvi-Freyr of the Vanir, Lord of the *Ljós-alfar* "Light-elves", who dwells in *Álfheim* "Elf-home", is to be seen as a memory of *Ingwë* of the *Vanyar*, Lord of the *Calaquendi* "Light-elves", who dwells in *Eldamar* "Elvenhome". Thus just as Tolkien incorporated Irmin and Embla into his mythology as the first Men, so too did he incorporate a figure of Germanic mythology as the first and foremost of the Elves.

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We have shown that several significant figures of Tolkien's mythology – Eärendil, the saviour of Elves and Men and bearer of the only surviving Silmaril; Ermon and Elmir, the first Men; Ælfwine, the Anglo-Saxon chronicler of Elvish mythology; and Ingwë, both the Lord of the Light-elves and the King of Luthany – are all derived from English and Germanic mythology, so that Tolkien could in some measure satisfy his desire for a mythology for England, a mythology that is English in both tongue and soil. By incorporating elements of English and Germanic mythology into his own mythology, Tolkien enriched both, providing a fictive unified background for the former, a continuity and heightened relevance for the latter, and a deepened significance for both. The effect of this on Tolkien's works is expressed best by Tolkien himself, though he was speaking of *Beowulf*:

> its maker was telling of things already old and weighted with regret, and he expended his art in making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have that are both poignant and remote. If the funeral of Beowulf moved once like the echo of an ancient dirge, far-off and hopeless, it is to us as a memory brought over the hills, an echo of an echo. There is not much poetry in the world like this . . .
> (Tolkien, 1984c, p. 33).

Indeed, there is not.

In describing to Milton Waldman his ambition to create a vast, unified mythology for England, Tolkien concluded that he had wanted to

> draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. Absurd.
> (Tolkien, 1981, p. 145)

Absurd? To us who have come together from around the world to celebrate in England the Centenary of its greatest mythologer, Tolkien's ambition is far from absurd. Indeed, it is realized in us, for we are those other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama, and words, within a majestic whole.

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