

ANOR

The background of the cover is a black and white line drawing in an Art Nouveau style. It features two tall, slender columns on either side, each topped with a decorative scrollwork finial. The columns are connected by a central, symmetrical floral and scrollwork design that forms a large, open archway. At the top center of this archway is a four-pointed starburst or compass star with radiating lines. The overall composition is balanced and ornate.

Issue

58

Lent

2022

The Biology Issue

EDITORIAL

The river is silver, the shadows are fleeting; merry is May-time, and merry our meeting. It makes me exceedingly merry, this May-time, to announce that Anor is back! And with a bumper crop of articles to make up for lost time.

This is, as the front page declares, a Biology Issue,¹ and every article in it relates in some way – however tangential – to that theme. Read on for discussion of Elf population tables; the scientific argument for Meat-Ents;² the secret of orc longevity; shapeshifting; a cameo by a famous Cambridge biologist; and, inescapably, the Worb.

Wonders and horrors in equal measure. May they comfort you in the depths of Easter term! Happy reading!

Daeron (Eleanor Smith)

¹ Blame the NatScis.

² Dan Kent – along with all who enabled them at the Lent 2020 Eagle Debate – has much to answer for.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>The Nature of The Nature of Middle-earth</i>	5
by Samuel Cook	
<i>Review on the biological nature of Ents</i>	12
by Alex Colesmith	
<i>The Immortal Orc</i>	23
by Samuel Cook	
<i>Fashioned like a Swan</i>	27
by Eleanor Smith	
<i>On the Work and the Creation of Hobbits</i>	42
by Rosalind Mackey	
<i>A Selection of Consequences</i>	48
by various members of the Society	

THE NATURE OF THE NATURE OF MIDDLE-EARTH

Samuel Cook

(Editor's note: this review first appeared on Samuel's blog, which can be found at <https://aiyahelcarda.wordpress.com/>.)

As the society's resident obscurantist and trivia buff, I took upon myself the burden of reading *The Nature of Middle-earth*. Here then are my thoughts on it:

At the start of September, *The Nature of Middle-earth* was released. Although not officially called as such, this is to all intents and purposes volume XIII of *The History of Middle-earth (HoME)* series, though, with Christopher Tolkien having died, it's edited by Carl F. Hofstetter instead.¹ The book promises to deliver more insight into J. R. R. Tolkien's creative processes and reveal more unpublished details about Middle-earth. In particular, it expands on material already published in volumes X–XII of *HoME*, and in *Unfinished Tales*, so having those books

¹ Presumably, your name has to begin with C to edit J. R. R. Tolkien's unpublished notes.

to hand, or a good working knowledge of them, is extremely helpful. Otherwise you may get a bit lost.²

In terms of the book itself, the first thing to say is that fans of Christopher's style in *HoME*³ will not be disappointed: complete textual histories involving various versions of the same note labelled alphabetically are given. We are told what pen or typewriter everything was written with and when it dates from. There are notes galore at the end of each text, detailing textual variants, editorial decisions and other things so recondite you wonder why they were worth noting. The formatting is similar to *HoME* too. From a purely stylistic point of view, then, *TNOME*⁴ is solid.

With regards to the actual content, the book is divided into three loose parts, called 'Time and Ageing', 'Body, Mind and Spirit', and 'The World, Its Lands and Its Inhabitants', but which I prefer to think of as 'How many Elf Babies?', 'What sort of Elf Babies?' and 'Where were the Elf Babies?'. The first part is largely a lot of population

² You will get a bit lost. A lot of the discussion depends on a good knowledge of *Laws and Customs*, *Myths Transformed* and *Galadriel and Celeborn* in particular, but most of the other bits of those books get namechecked at some point.

³ I assume they exist.

⁴ As no one apart from me is calling it.

tables of Elves and Tolkien trying to work out exactly what level of Elvish procreation, and therefore exactly how quickly Elves aged, he needed to get the right population numbers when. Also, exactly how long a Valian year was compared to a normal solar year, because that's what Elves age in. My main impression after this part, as with a lot of *HoME*, was that I was glad Tolkien had thought about this, but I wish he'd made up his mind and that I also really didn't need that much detail. Part I also has incredibly disturbing things that you never really wanted to know about Elves having sex⁵ and an actual interesting bit where Tolkien decides Ingwë,

⁵ *Laws and Customs* already told us Elves gestate for exactly one year, so conception and birth date are identical, and that Elves are really good Catholics and only have sex a few times to procreate, then they've got it out of their systems and aren't interested any more.

Well, now, we're told that maybe Elves gestated for 9 years or 108 YEARS. And that the reason Elves don't have much sex is because it's so intense for them and takes so much out of them that they would otherwise be in serious danger of shagging themselves to death – after all, their sex memories apparently remain some of their happiest FOR THE REST OF TIME. Oh, and that the first generations of Elves made up a large part of those who refused to go to Valinor – the Avari – precisely because they were shagged out and couldn't be bothered to go hiking. But it's fine, because Elves feel no pain in childbirth, because they never fell so there's no original sin. OH THE CATHOLICISM.

Finwë and Elwë were later-generation Elves, not first-generation ones. Though quite which generation he never settled on, because he never picked a definitive Elvish population scheme.

Part II calms down a bit. There's a nice poetic treatment of the challenge of Fingolfin to Morgoth, and some interesting stuff about Elvish numeral systems, the main takeaway from which, in what I'm 99% certain is a deliberate linguistic joke, is that the Quenya for the little finger is *lepinka*. And that Tolkien decided all Elves are ambidextrous, because, well, Elves. We also find out Galad had unusual silver hair, possibly, and that none of Aragorn, Boromir, Faramir, Denethor or Imrahil had a beard.⁶

Part III was, for me, the most interesting part, because it chiefly dealt with Middle-earth itself, rather than metaphysical considerations of Elvish life cycles. Perhaps more interestingly, we find out that Tolkien's conception of Legolas was as a bit of a buff, stacked action hero and that Gollum actually wore a 'dark garment', but had very pale skin. Gollum is now, canonically therefore, a goth.

⁶ OK, so this is interesting in a very very niche manner. But, I mean, if you've got this far, you've realised this is an incredibly niche post.

Gothum.⁷ There is also some more consideration of the motives of the Valar in bringing the Eldar to Valinor and how that represented a failure on their part in several ways⁸ and another definitely-not-a-joke that the Quenya word for spirits in general was *fairë*.

Most excitingly though, for a given value of ‘excitingly’, we finally get confirmation that both Dwarves and Elves actually practised agriculture, rather than mysteriously subsisting on mushrooms, sunlight or air. Elves liked it and did both arable and livestock; Dwarves disliked it and only did arable. For the Finrod fans out there, ‘Felagund’ is also stated to be able to be glossed as ‘badger’, which casts a whole new light on Finrod. The final remarkable revelation was that, in Númenor, there were quite a few bears and they did regular dances that the humans were allowed to watch. Bears. Dancing. Tolkien came up with some strange stuff, it’s fair to say.

⁷ PUNZ.

⁸ They showed insufficient faith in Eru; they made the revolt of some of the Elves almost inevitable, because the Elves weren’t designed to be in Valinor; and they deprived Men of a lot of help and teaching. Not a great result for the Valar. On the other hand, Eru kind of comes across as a bit of a dick too here, by setting everything up to fall apart.

But, anyway, those were my personal highlights. Overall, my feeling is that I understand why Christopher hadn't already published most of this. A lot of it is very dry, conjectural or contradictory, or all three. Most of it is only really interesting if you're fascinated by Tolkien's mental processes and the nitty-gritty of what went into creating Middle-earth,⁹ or are looking for very specific details on a particular topic. And I think that's where the book's value lies: it brings together some texts that had previously only been published in specialist, difficult-to-find journals, along with much unpublished material, and collects it together thematically in a handy reference volume. In terms of actual canonical novelties about Middle-earth, though, one feels the bottom of the barrel is being reached and that any remaining material in the archives or that the Estate might have lying around is likely to be of more interest to psychologists who really want to understand how Tolkien's mind works, rather than being particularly revelatory about Middle-earth. I'm glad I bought the book – there was enough of interest for me in there in the end – but I suspect this is the last book that can be published from Tolkien's notes that might be able to be classified as 'of general interest (to the Tolkien nerd reader)' rather than 'of interest to literally

⁹ Let's put it this way: I quite like Tolkien and Middle-earth and even I got a bit bored with some of it.

only two people in the world'. If you read and enjoyed *HoME*, especially volumes X–XII, and *Unfinished Tales*, I'd suggest you buy it. Otherwise, I wouldn't bother, because most of it will be meaningless to you.

Unless you really really want to know about Elvish sex.

REVIEW ON THE BIOLOGICAL NATURE OF ENTS (ONODRIM) AND CALL FOR FURTHER STUDY

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5th May Fourth Age 62 (Shire Reckoning 1483)

Abstract

Most of the peoples of Middle-earth are roughly similar to one another; we are clearly made of flesh and bone, with relatively soft skins and with keratinised hair resembling that of other mammals. This goes for elves, dwarves, hobbits, humans, and orcs and goblins. It is known that orcs and goblins are descended from modified elves; we may return to this point later. This paper summarises what we know of the only people who do not fit these characteristics, the Ents; there is little data to go on, but what we have can allow us to make several inferences. Hence we shall demonstrate both the animal-like and plant-like features of the Ents.

Introduction

Ents, also known as the Onodrim by the elves, regard themselves as 'tree-herds'. It is generally accepted¹ that they were created by the Vala Yavanna, and given the role to protect the forests; what is less well known is from what original stock she created them. However, more recent observations by two intrepid researchers, as well as information gathered from the wizard Mithrandir (aka Gandalf, aka Olórin), have been chronicled, though not inferred from, in a recently published source.² The Ents are able to control some trees, and even to speak to them, and some of the Ents eventually become like trees, though the oldest, Fangorn as he is known, has never undergone this process, suggesting it is not a normal stage of the lifecycle. Entwives, the female Ents, were created by Yavanna at the same time and are thought to have stayed with the Ents until the middle of the Second Age or so, whereupon they were 'lost'. Some tantalising reports from north of the Shire suggest that they may have moved to there, perhaps passing through the Old Forest area on their way, but these may be nothing more than cryptids or hoaxes.

¹ Elrond Halfelven, *Quenta Silmarillion* (Second Age 1332).

² Gamgee, Baggins and Baggins, *The Red Book* (Fourth Age 60).

Discussion

The most obvious question that is asked about Ents is what they look like. Much misinformation has been spread on the subject³ so it is wise to go over these points again. Here is the Red Book, the most reliable source, on the subject: 'at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head and hardly any neck... stuff like green and grey bark [may have been] its hide [or perhaps merely clothing; Brandybuck and Took are unclear on this point]... the arms were covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each [this number is variable among Ents].' Later we are also told that they walk without much bending of the knees, and that their appearance seems to mimic certain trees, typically those with which they associate. The beard for which Fangorn is named is 'bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends'. It is not fixed in place, but stands out 'like a besom' in times of strong emotion.

From even these most basic facts we can infer a good deal. In the first place, we can see that the Ents have a similar overall shape to other peoples, with two arms, two legs and a head; the number of fingers and toes is very variable, ranging from three to nine, and this suggests that they do not have a fixed skeleton; the tough bark-like substance that could have been either hide or

³ Jackson *et al.*, *The Lord of the Rings*.

clothing mimics a certain type of tree, and is neither the true skin (which is the brownish tissue found on the arms) nor clothing which can be donned and doffed. Instead it is a kind of tough, lignified exoskeleton; it resembles bark because it is bark, but it is bark grown by an animal-like organism, not a plant-like one. This helps to support the weight of the Ent's body, but even so, they need a tough, sturdy frame; even the fir-mimics, while tall, are hardly slender. The legs are also coated in this exoskeleton, though the feet are bare of it. Weaker joints in the exoskeleton, similar to those between the chitinous segments of an insect, are present at the hips but are barely noticeable at the knees, which explains why the Ents do not bend them while walking.

The parts of an Ent not covered in this exoskeleton – the arms and possibly the head (Brandybuck and Took are again unclear) – have instead a tough brownish skin, smooth and unwrinkled; accounts of the destruction of Isengard by the Ents describe it as being able to 'freeze onto rock and tear it up like bread-crust'. This suggests the presence of a proteinous matrix in the extracellular tissue and in the skin which, in response to neural enervation, is able to 'lock' once a grip has been formed, so that the Ent physically cannot let go unless it wishes to (or its fingers are removed from its body). A similar kind of mechanism is used to harden the skin when punching,

so that 'a punch from an Ent-fist crumples up iron like thin tin'.

Beneath this skin or the exoskeleton, the internal organs of Ents are practically unknown. No specimens have ever been dissected, and given that Ents do not appear to die of natural causes, it may not be possible to obtain a body; the one Ent we have records of being killed, Beechbone, was burned due to the woody nature of the exoskeleton. However, the obvious high levels of intelligence, though slow nature, suggest an ectothermic creature with a well-developed brain, perhaps similar to a cephalopod mollusc such as an octopus.

Fangorn's beard is also worth consideration before we move on to a discussion of the Ent lifecycle. It is likely that it is made up of outgrowths of the exoskeleton, but since it is able to move they must be very thin-walled, with narrow tendrils of his internal body running down the centres. They act, as well as emotional expressors, rather like barbels or whiskers, perhaps being able to sense the environment; no nose is mentioned on his face, so it is plausible that he uses them to smell or even to taste the waters of Ent-draught.

Ent-draught: the waters which Ents appear to subsist entirely upon. The researchers Brandybuck and Took report it as having a kind of rich, earthy flavour and giving a sensation of growth and energy; it is probable

that it has a high concentration of dissolved nutrients in, either absorbed from the forest floor that the water filters through to reach the river (see later for a further hypothesis on this point) or added by the Ents in some kind of fermentation process. What exactly they are fermenting is unknown, but given the low levels of animal life in Fangorn Forest, there would appear to be little option for nutrient sources; Ents are probably not able to photosynthesise, since to do so would require far more surface area and adaptation to stand in sunlight than they have. This again backs up the hypothesis I will put forth when Huorns have been discussed fully.

The likely explanations for Huorns, Entwives and Ent-draught are all tied up together, but I will try to unpick them as best I can. Firstly, we need to distinguish between two major types of Huorns, only one of which is actually relevant to this. One is a case of a tree becoming more Entish, becoming able to respond, move and react on timescales that are more appreciable, as well as to speak in Entish to some extent (or at least to understand it). According to Took and Brandybuck, 'Treebeard won't say much about them' and the existence of these forms is inferred from the awakening of trees (including reports of a willow in the Old Forest, and other awakened trees in there, which suggest that perhaps the Entwives did indeed pass through). The other (which is not relevant to the explanation for Entwives and Ent-draught) is when

an Ent settles down into a long senescent sleep – there is no particular age when this occurs, as we can see given that Fangorn himself has not done so but many younger Ents have. They lay down additional layers of exoskeleton and cause that around the legs to partially fuse until they resemble a tree entirely, spending most of their time asleep and living off fat reserves built up in the more mobile stage of life. In most Ent-Huorns, this is a precursor to death, though they can survive in near suspended-animation for several centuries. The arms often retract into the main body, leaving knotholes near the top of what appears to be a trunk, but may re-emerge as tentacles of great strength if the Ent-Huorn is roused. (The transformation of tissue into wood is one of the features mimicked by trolls, generally considered to have been made as mockeries of Ents, which is why all varieties have tough semi-crystalline deposits of stony nodules in their skin and some may turn permanently to stone as a fatal reaction to sunlight.)

The tree-Huorn variety of Huorn is far more interesting for our purposes of understanding the Ent lifecycle. It is initiated by an Ent interacting with normal, unawakened trees in some manner; what this manner is has never been entirely stated, but it is hypothesised that the Ent must apply some kind of spores to the tree. The spores then burrow inside to the heartwood and begin to feed, sending out nerve and muscle tissues as they hollow out

the inside of the tree. (This doesn't damage the life of the tree, which is held in the outer layers.) Eventually, one of these spore-grown organisms becomes strong enough to devour the others and to wrap itself entirely around the inside of the tree's bark, running tubes of cells through the wood; it lives off the sugars made in the tree's leaves, and grows a great bulge of tissue just above ground-level, as well as around any knotholes or down the inside of flexible branches. A brain develops, but not on a par with an Ent's brain, more like that of a slow-thinking wild beast. It will respond to Ent-calls, but to few other stimuli save for pain or the presence of unwanted intruders.

The Huorn thus formed is able to uproot itself and spread out the muscular bulge of flesh normally stored within the trunk beneath it, rather like the foot of a snail; it can travel surprisingly fast on this when it wants to, enough to cross Rohan swiftly. It can also lash out with tendrils of flesh protruding from knotholes or with the branches it has muscular control over, powerfully enough to kill even an armoured orc. (Such was the wood of the Deeping-Coomb.) Ents have been observed herding these Huorns around, but for the most part they allow them to remain in the ground.

Why? The answer lies in those Huorns found above rivers that the Ent-draught is harvested from; they break down dead organisms in the ground saprobiontically and, as well as taking some of the nutrients for

themselves and their host tree, release it in concentrated form towards the river, along with sugars taken from the tree. This explains the highly nutritional properties of Ent-draught; in effect, it is liquid animal-digestible compost. It may also contain some kind of hormone that accounts for its heightening effect in hobbits, though this has not been proven. (It is also possible that the pseudo-Huorns formed from old Ents carry out a similar process, although this has, again, not been proven, and they wouldn't be able to release sugars anyway since they don't photosynthesise.)

So the Ents farm the trees using the Huorns they make out of spores. But the Huorns thus created have more than one purpose; as well as food-makers, they also act as gametozoans.

Plants exhibit alternation of generations – a plant produces spores, which grow into gametophytes, which produce gametes, which fuse to create a sporophytic plant. This is more noticeable in mosses and in ferns than in flowering plants, where the gametophyte generation is largely hidden within the flower itself, but it still happens. Along with the ability to create lignified, woody tissues, Yavanna also gave this ability to Ents; Ents and Entwives are sporozoan generations, while the Huorns that they grow on trees are their gametozoans (the -zoan ending, rather than the -phyte ending, is used here because Ents bear more resemblance to animals than

plants, being made of flesh, though they have features from both). Without Ent-made Huorns and Entwife-made Huorns in the same area, however, none of the gametes produced by the Huorns can fuse; in Fangorn, with no Entwives, they are all male gametes and do not fuse to form viable offspring. If Entwives and Ents live in the same wood, or in a wood and garden close together, the gametes produced are fused and grow into an Enting (male or female) which is raised by its Ent and Entwife 'parents'. Ents and Entwives are therefore diploid organisms, Huorns haploid organisms (again, excluding the pseudo-Huorns formed from senescing Ents; it is not at all clear whether Entwives ever underwent a similar process). It is not known whether Ents are entirely aware of what is happening to the trees, or whether they genuinely believe themselves to be awakening the trees' own consciousnesses. The issue is confused by having old-Ent Huorns and spore-formed Huorns. The Entings, should any be produced, mimic the tree parasitised by one of their Huorn parents, which accounts for the tendency of Ents to resemble one kind of tree more than another.

Conclusion

Ents are of primarily animal stock, probably initially based on a mollusc or perhaps arthropod, and have soft,

fleshy interiors; however, they have plant-like features, such as the ability to lignify and retain dead tissue and the alternation of generations. Much of their nutrients are obtained by the gametophyte generation's parasitic relationship with trees and ability to break down carcasses in the soil. Both senile Ents and the gametophyte generation resemble walking trees, rather than the normal form of an Ent, which may have caused some confusion in one of the more garbled accounts of events occurring in the War of the Ring and has led to the belief that all Ents look like this. The lifecycle is complicated and unless Entwives return, the Ent population will likely go extinct, though this may take several thousand years.

As always, further research is needed – are Ents more like molluscs or arthropods? Where are the Entwives now? Does the Ent-draught actually contain hormones, and if not, what happened to Brandybuck and Took? – but for safety reasons, I appreciate that this may be very difficult. Ents, and Huorns, can be extremely fierce when roused.

THE IMMORTAL ORC

Or: Cultural Memory Isn't That Good

Samuel Cook

The origins of the Orcs is a topic that Tolkien himself never really came to a settled conclusion on. In the published *Silmarillion* (p. 50), we're told they're definitely corrupted Elves. In *The History of Middle-earth*, though, we're presented with later writings of Tolkien that show him questioning this and deciding that they're made from Men, no Elves, no rocks, no aaarrggghh; which position he seemed to retain until he died.

But, I've had a thought that might help solve this debacle. One thing that would give us some idea is what the longevity of Orcs is. They're certainly prolific breeders, but there's very little indication of how long an Orc might live if left to its own devices. There is a clue, however, in *The Hobbit*: when Thorin and Company are captured by the goblins of the Misty Mountains, they all seem to recognise Orcrist, or Biter as they call it, which Thorin is carrying, and consequently get rather angry, forcing Gandalf to step in and save everyone. Again.

But, how do they all recognise Orcrist? It can't be that they're able to read the runes on it – even Gandalf seems unable to do that and requires Elrond's wisdom to uncover the lineage of the swords they take from the

trolls.¹ I find it unlikely that a load of random goblins are better at palaeography than an incarnate Maia known for his general intelligence. Sure, the goblins would probably immediately recognise that it's an Elvish sword of some kind, but I can't see how they could instantly peg it as Biter, unless Orcrist was really distinctive in some way that we're not told about.²

Equally, I can't imagine there's some sort of Orcish educational system where young Orcs are taught to remember the appearance of all the famous weapons that

¹ Which is something else I've always found puzzling. These swords were made in Gondolin, so the lettering on them must be either in Quenya or Sindarin, written in either the Fëanorian tengwar, or in the Cirth. The use of 'runes' to describe the letters would seem to indicate the Cirth, but, given Gondolin was the least Sindarised of the Noldorin realms in Beleriand and the Cirth were a Sindarin invention, it's more likely they were actually tengwar – Tolkien's use of 'runes' here is probably to be taken as a generic term for mystic old writing that Thorin and Company couldn't read. Regardless, though, Gandalf should have no problem reading anything in Quenya or Sindarin, written in either Cirth or tengwar. Either Gondolin had a very specific mode of tengwar and/or Cirth that Gandalf just didn't have time to interpret before the company arrived at Rivendell, or he's actually much less wise than he claims.

² It's certainly not the glowing thing – all Elvish swords seem to do that, possibly – so maybe it had a particularly ornate tang that made a rude sign or something.

have been used against them.³ For a start, who was taking accurate drawings of these things in the First Age? And then how did they get accurately transmitted over more than 6000 years to the closing century of the Third Age? I can imagine a general injunction about being distrustful of anyone who turns up with a sword that falls within these vague stylistic parameters making it through the millennia,⁴ but a detailed description of a specific sword that no one had seen since the Fall of Gondolin? Come off it. Also remember that these goblins had probably been more-or-less existing independently for 3000 years at this point – Sauron had been pretty quiet since his unfortunate disincorporation by Isildur and was only just getting back into the whole Dark Lord thing in a big way at the time of *The Hobbit*, so it's not as if Head Office could have given everyone a refresher course on I Spy Elvish Swords, as it were. Sauron was probably starting to exert some influence on the Orcs and goblins of the Misty Mountains – they're not that far from Dol Guldur – but the goblins in *The Hobbit* do still seem to have been acting independently and pursuing their own business and

³ In Middle-earth, this is identical to the category of 'all the famous weapons'.

⁴ Especially seeing as there were plenty of opportunities for Orcs to be reminded of it with the ongoing fighting against Elves of the Second and Third Ages.

quarrels, rather than having been drawn into the Master World Domination Plan again.

No, the only way I can see to explain the fact that Orcrist was instantly recognisable to the goblins was that some of them had been around in the First Age and had seen it in action. And that what I'm sure were some very vivid memories were relayed round the campfire to everyone else. The talent of the Elves lies in memory, as Finrod says to Andreth in the *Athrabeth*, so, if Orcs are corrupted Elves, there's no reason to think they wouldn't have quite good memories either. And, if some of them are over 6000 years old, that would also suggest Elvishness. Of course, it's perhaps unlikely that any one Orc managed to survive all the massive defeats Morgoth and Sauron endured over the years, but it's not impossible. It certainly seems less impossible than the alternatives for how a load of provincial goblins manage to recognise a sword that's been lying in various hoards for 6000 years.

Orcs are Elves. Fact. For my next trick, I solve Tom Bombadil.

FASHIONED LIKE A SWAN

Elves and Bird Transformation in Tolkien

Eleanor Smith

Some time ago at one of the Society's regular meetings, the idea which I shall call the Bird-Elf Hypothesis took shape, collaboratively. I wish to thank all members who contributed to it at that meeting: I hope they will take this article as a fitting tribute. Any inaccuracy or outright absurdity it contains can be attributed in equal part to the vagaries of my own brain and to the Society's collective affinity for chaos.

Tolkien's Elves have a long history of association with water-birds within his Legendarium. Swans, of course, stand out as the oldest friends to the Eldar, particularly the Teleri, whose first ships they draw to Valinor at Ossë's command and whose ships are fashioned in their likeness ever after. But their relevance is not limited to the Teleri alone. Swans appear to Tuor, a human, as a sign that he must seek out Gondolin, a Noldorin city; Eärendil, in his part-Noldor, part-Sindar haven, builds Vingilot in swan-shape; Tom Bombadil wears a swan's feather in his hat.¹ Nor are swans the only bird to have Elvish resonances. The cries of seagulls trigger the sea-longing in the Elves of Middle-earth (most notably in

¹ All right, not an Elf, but you have to admit this shows Tolkien had swans on the brain.

Legolas), while Elwing, when she plunges into the sea with the Silmaril, is transformed into a 'great white bird' of unspecified species.

All of this can be attributed to the close relationship the Elves have with Ulmo, the Maia of water.² Ulmo has a particular care for the Elves, never fully abandoning those in Middle-earth even when all other Valar hold to a policy of non-intervention. It is Ulmo's Maia Ossë who sends the swans to the Teleri; it is Ulmo himself who – presumably – sends the swans to Tuor, and later appears to him in person; it is Ulmo who transforms Elwing into a bird so that she may live to reunite with her husband and bring him the Silmaril. In a more general sense, the Elves' association with water and the birds who live on it points to their affinity with the divinity inherent in the created world.³ The wonder and longing in the music of the water, Ulmo's music, reads like a reflection of the Song of the Ainur:

In the deep places he gives thought to music great and terrible; and the echo of that music runs through all the veins of the world in sorrow and in joy; for if joyful is the fountain that rises in the sun, its springs are in the

² Who presumably has dominion over sea-birds through some sort of time-share arrangement with Manwë.

³ As opposed to the divinity outside it, which is the domain of Men.

wells of sorrow unfathomed at the foundations of the Earth.

This music is Ulmo's way of communicating with the Eldar, and hearing it is what draws many of them to reunite with the Valar, ultimately, in Valinor. Water, and the longing to cross it, is their connection with the divine.

Tolkien's repeated sea-bird motifs and emphasis on sea-longing as a form of connection with divinity probably say something about his personal relationship with the sea.⁴ But they also have precedents in early medieval literature. In the Old English poem *The Seafarer*, a poem Tolkien had undoubtedly read,⁵ the eponymous seafarer has eschewed the company of men in favour of that of gannets, seagulls, and – of course – swans. This begins, seemingly, as an unwilling exile, in which the company of the birds serves to emphasise the seafarer's loneliness:

Hwīlum ylfete song

dyde ic mē tō gomene, ganetes hlēoþor
ond huilpan swēg fore hleahtre wera,
mæw⁶ singende fore medodrince.

⁴ And also possibly his enjoyment of John Masefield's poetry.

⁵ Source: trust me, I'm an ASNaC. There is no way any Old English enthusiast who went to Oxbridge in Tolkien's time escaped *without* reading *The Seafarer*.

⁶ I'm told that this is also an Elvish word for seagull in HoME 5, which should come as a surprise to precisely no-one.

[‘At times the swan’s song | I took for my joy, the gannet’s voice | and the curlew’s cry for the laughter of men, | the seagull’s singing, for mead-drinking.’]⁷

But soon enough the seafarer begins to experience sea-longing: this (he quickly makes clear) is in fact a longing for God and the divine, which separates him from the world on land and makes the beauties of summer and the cry of the cuckoo a cause of sorrow to him. His soul longs to fly over the waves in distinctly birdlike fashion:

*Forþon nū mīn hyge hweorfeð ofer hreþerlocan,
mīn mōdsefa mid mereflōde
ofer hwæles ēþel hweorfeð wīde,
eorþan scēatas, cymeð eft tō mē
gīfre ond grædig, gielleð ānfloga,
hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu.*

[‘Therefore now my heart journeys beyond my breast, | my inner soul amid the flood | over the whale’s-homeland turns far and wide, | the earth’s corners, comes back to me | ravenous and greedy, the lone-flier shrieks, | whets the heart for the whale-way without denial | over the waters’ expanse.’]⁸

⁷ *The Seafarer*, ll. 19b–22.

⁸ *The Seafarer*, ll. 58–64a.

The connection with Legolas' sea-longing, brought on by the cries of seagulls, should be obvious. It would be simple enough to suggest that in this poem lies the origin of Tolkien's linkage of the sea-voyage with the divine, and of sea-longing with birds (and swans in particular).⁹

But why leave it there when you could do what one delightfully unhinged 1960s article does and suggest that the seafarer's soul is on some level Actually Turning Into A Goddamn Bird? 'In the Old Icelandic sagas there commonly occurs the idea of a spirit or "external soul" which can leave the body, in either animal or human shape, and travel vast distances to perform errands or obtain information for the body, or even to fight the souls of others... the free-ranging soul can appear as a bear, a wolf or a whale, but one of the most common guises was that of a bird,' quoth Vivian Salmon, back in 1960.¹⁰ And

⁹ In fact, I'm sure somebody has. Don't anybody tell me if Jane Chance did in *Tolkien's Art*, on account of I haven't got round to reading it yet.

¹⁰ Salmon, V., 'The Wanderer and The Seafarer, and the Old English Conception of the Soul', *Modern Language Review* 55 (1960), 1–10 (p. 3). This article is *painfully* of its time and much of its methodology would not be used now, but it does actually make a pretty intriguing case for Old English Astral Projection In Bird Form! If you read it, though, be aware that the author deploys a pretty typical 1960s white English attitude towards other cultures, particularly indigenous ones. There's a lot of the word 'shamanism' being thrown around.

thus we arrive at the Bird-Elf Hypothesis: why should Elves cross the sea to Valinor in ships when it would be so much cooler – and in keeping with the origin of the trope – for them to transform into birds and fly there?

It should be noted that this isn't actually as unlikely as it sounds!¹¹ Not only is there pretty good medieval precedent for the idea of a spiritual *and bodily* transformation into a seabird, *Tolkien knew the precedent in question*. I refer, naturally, to the bird-angels in the *Navigatio Brendani*.¹²

The *Navigatio Brendani*, or Voyage of Brendan, was a medieval bestseller, preserved in an absolutely dizzying array of manuscripts.¹³ An Irish Latin text, it depicts the fictional voyage of St Brendan over seven years, accompanied by his monks, to various real or supernatural islands, and finally to Paradise, from which he ultimately returns to Ireland. One such island, known as the Paradise of Birds,¹⁴ is inhabited only by – you

¹¹ Don your tinfoil hats here, folks.

¹² I am indebted to Roan Runge for reminding me that these exist.

¹³ So many that trying to construct a stemma for them makes you look like Charlie from *It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia* trying to explain Pepe Silvia.

¹⁴ Now generally thought to be one of the Faroe Islands, I believe. Another is the Island of Sheep, and if you think that sounds familiar from C. S. Lewis' Felimath in *Voyage of the*

guessed it – birds, who chant praises to God in human voices. One of these birds explains that they are in fact semi-fallen angels, who cannot dwell in heaven but are nonetheless still on good terms with God: six days out of seven they roam the world as spirits doing his bidding, and on Sundays he gives them bird-bodies so that they may dwell on this island and chant the hours.

These ‘neutral’ angels have a strong flavour of the Elves of Middle-earth, whether those of the Sindar and Avari who ultimately chose not to cross to Valinor, or those of the Noldor who left Valinor in pursuit of Morgoth in the first age. Like the bird-angels, they cannot claim to be completely sinless, but they are not on bad terms with the divine: the way is still open for them to return in the end.¹⁵ But I don’t have to restrict myself to drawing

Dawn Treader, go and read the *Navigatio* (trans. J. J. O’Meara) and *many* things about that book will become clear.

¹⁵ Half-fallen angels were one device used by the early medieval Irish to explain the existence of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the folk of the hollow hills, in a Christian framework (another option was unfallen humans, which is very funny to anyone who knows any of the Tuatha Dé’s exploits). John Carey has pointed out the parallels between the *Navigatio*’s bird-spirit-angels and these generally-invisible, sometimes-bird-shaped hill-dwellers, and I wouldn’t be surprised if the same had occurred to Tolkien – in short, Weird Angels = Fairies = Elves Probably. I am grateful to Finn Longman for letting me read their *Weird Irish Birds* essay, from which I am stealing this.

parallels and pointing you at them! I can let Tolkien do that himself!¹⁶ In *The Notion Club Papers*, Tolkien's self-insert fanfic of himself and his social circle in which he is an Oxford don in the 80s and also Aragorn reincarnated,¹⁷ one of the Notion Club members writes a poem inspired by the *Navigatio* which includes the Paradise of Birds... sort of:

*Then trembled the tree from crown to stem;
from the limbs the leaves in air
as white birds fled in wheeling flight,
and left the branches bare.
From the sky came dropping down on high
a music not of bird,
not voice of man, nor angel's voice;
but maybe there is a third
fair kindred in the world yet lingers
beyond the foundered land.
Yet steep are the seas and the waters deep
beyond the White-tree Strand.*

¹⁶ I am grateful to Rachel Fletcher for reminding me of this fact.

¹⁷ Yes, really. If you think this sounds like a fantastic time, go read HoME 9. Tolkien is very rude about spaceships and also the *Navigatio* in it.

The other members immediately and helpfully point out the links with Middle-earth, which of course in this universe is the very real past:

'Still that seems to be where you got your Volcano and Tree from. But you've given them a twist that's not in your source. You've put them in a different order, I think, making the Tree further west; and your Volcano is not a hell-smithy, but apparently a last peak of some Atlantis. And the Tree in St. Brendan was covered with white birds that were fallen angels. The one really interesting idea in the whole thing, I thought: they were angels that lived in a kind of limbo, because they were only lesser spirits that followed Satan only as their feudal overlord, and had no real part, by will or design, in the Great Rebellion.¹⁸ But you make them a third fair race.'

'And that bit about the "round world" and the "old road",' said Jeremy, 'where did you get that from?'

'I don't know,' said Frankley. 'It came in the writing. I got a fleeting picture, but it's faded now.'

¹⁸ I am not sure this is actually the current scholarly consensus on the bird-angels – I've seen them described instead as angels who neither opposed nor sided with Lucifer but just sat the whole conflict out. It is, however, the most Tolkien way of interpreting this possible. Does this make Fëanor Satan? Debatable.

If you don't think that the bird-angels are Elves and the Tree-island is Valinor by now, I can't help you.¹⁹

So there you have it. Elves are as good as birds already, and Tolkien was drawing on images of bird-transformation (whether physical or spiritual) when he conceived of their sea-longing in the first place. It therefore only makes *sense* to suggest that Elves turn into birds in order to reach Valinor! Also, more importantly, it is much more fun than the alternative. Let us now turn our focus to the consequences of this hypothesis for crucial Bird-Elf Moments in the legendarium as a whole.

The essential takeaway from this hypothesis is that there is no such thing as a Swan-ship; there is only an Elf-swan. In fact, the association between swans and successful journeys to Valinor is so powerful that I would suggest Elves must transform into swans, specifically, in order to reach Valinor successfully. Any other bird is a sign that you have failed, or at least are not destined to reach Valinor on this voyage (as I shall show later).

If we take references to swans and Swan-ships as being, in fact, references to transformed Elves, then we can conclude that this was not always a requirement for entry into Valinor; rather, it began as a particular skill of the Teleri, learned either from real swans or from Ulmo

¹⁹ Also, the Volcano is clearly Númenor, and the Star Eärendil. Just while we're stating the obvious here.

himself, and handed down among them in Valinor. But if there are no Swan-ships – if the Teleri are, and always have been, the swans – then the First Kinslaying and the burning of the boats by Fëanor and co. are synonymous. Presumably, those Teleri who refused to transform and take the Noldor to Middle-earth were killed, and once in Middle-earth those who had acquiesced were killed to prevent rebellion or betrayal from within. In response, one can well imagine Manwë instituting a law that the Elves of Middle-earth may travel to Valinor in swan-shape or not at all.

This is the point at which Swan-ships enter the narrative:²⁰ not the ships of the Teleri at all, but rather imitations of the Teleri themselves, built by the exiled Noldor. Their swan-shape memorialises the dead Teleri – perhaps out of guilt; perhaps because the Noldor are in some way aware of the form of Manwë’s ban; or perhaps simply in an almost superstitious attempt to recreate the conditions of the original voyage. Galadriel’s Swan-ships in Lothlorien bear a particularly poignant significance, made in the image of her murdered kinsmen. We can imagine that her choice of the swan-shape represents grief, guilt that she ultimately left Middle-earth despite the murder of her maternal people, and a longing for the

²⁰ Okay, yes, I lied when I said “there is no such thing as a Swan-ship”.

swan-transformation she can no longer perform, despite her heritage.

We see the same hopeful impulse that moves the Noldor in Eärendil's choice to build Vingilot in swan-shape. Moreover, if swan-transformation is associated with successful voyages – to Valinor in particular – then the swan-image in the *Song of Nimrodel* suggests a kind of forlorn hope:

*The wind was in his flowing hair,
The foam about him shone;
Afar they saw him strong and fair
Go riding like a swan.*

Amroth's likeness to a swan suggests that his companions, watching him, are hoping against hope that his impromptu voyage will be successful and that he may even join them in Valinor one day. But the ambiguity of the simile tells us that Amroth is most likely doomed.

How, then, do the Elves of Middle-earth learn (or re-learn) the art of swan-transformation in order to reach Valinor once more? Most likely from the Valar themselves, directly after the War of Wrath – either from Ulmo himself, or from Eönwë, who delivered the Valar's summons and who, as Manwë's herald, inevitably has

something birdy about him.²¹ Upon departing, the Valar leave Círdan to continue their work: once the ‘shipwright’ who built boats in the likeness of his brethren, he will now become known as the Elf who teaches swan-transformation to others, but has yet to get a chance to use it himself.²²

But there are, of course, other Elves who never reach Valinor, and other birds associated with them. What of the seagulls who spark sea-longing in Legolas and other Elves of Middle-earth? We could simply say that their cries are representative of the *idea* of the sea, but that would be far too easy. Instead let us consider that Ulmo has a history of turning Elves into birds (Elwing, for instance); that he keeps track of the mariners who set out for Valinor (he saves Voronwë and sets him aside for later); and that the seagull is associated even more strongly with the sea than the swan is, but far *less* with havens and journeys’ end – or with dignity. The seagulls must be the mariners who set out for Valinor in ships, saved from drowning only to be left in a kind of gentle, *Navigatio Brendani*-esque purgatory. Their cries provoke the sea-longing because it is their *own* longing, longing

²¹ I wasn’t kidding about that Manwë—Ulmo sea-bird time-share arrangement.

²² Poor guy. Always picking up the Valar’s slack despite having the worst case of sea-longing in the entire legendarium.

for a destination they will not reach while the world endures.

As for Elwing, her own bird form is never specified on-page:²³ we know only that it is large and white. But if we assume from Tolkien's swans and seagulls that a bird-shape reflects something about the destiny and circumstances of the person in question – in particular, whether they will reach Valinor or not – then we can make some guesses. Elwing does reach Valinor, but she does not remain there. She and her husband are both destined to spend their lives aloft, he journeying in Vingilot, she flying to meet him. And unlike the seagull-Elves, Valinor is not her initial motivation for plunging into the waves; it seems rather to be keeping the Silmaril from the sons of Fëanor, whether by escape or death. To me, this suggests a clear answer. Large, white, able to glide for long periods of time, and associated with the souls of the drowned, Elwing's bird is the albatross.

The most important message of the Bird-Elf Hypothesis, however, is not Elwing's bird form. Nor is it the increased horror of the First Kinslaying – nor even Ulmo's penchant for helping Elves to achieve flight. The *most* important

²³ In the *Silmarillion*; in HoME 7 she is 'like a mew', so probably a seagull, but this is a Vibes Only article so we're ignoring that. Hey, an albatross is *like* a mew, right? (I am once again grateful to Rachel Fletcher for spotting this.)

message of the Bird-Elf Hypothesis is that Gimli does not reach Valinor in a boat. Gimli arrives in Valinor riding a Fuckoff Massive Swan.

ON THE WORB AND THE CREATION OF HOBBITS

Rosalind Mackey

(Editor's note: The origins of the Worb are shrouded in mystery, but it first became a Society meme at the Tolkien & History meeting, 3rd November 2021. The uninitiated should picture – or Google – the stuffed walrus at the Horniman Museum.)

While excavating the library at the recently discovered site of Númenor, my colleagues and I came across this rather curious document. It seems to be a pseudo-historical document, written in the Númenoreans' own tongue but supposedly translated from Elvish. However, due to the many inaccuracies (the Calacirya was made long before the Elves existed, let alone built Tirion), not to mention problematic physics and the general absurdity of the story, one can only assume it was more of a joke than an attempt at recording real history. Nonetheless, it still reveals much about the people who wrote it: for one thing that they had already travelled far enough North to encounter walruses, and explored enough of Middle-earth to have at least heard of Hobbits.

Here we present the first translation into English of this unusual text.

*

While Yavanna was in Middle-earth a messenger came to her from the Ents: Larchspur he was called, tall and dark. He entreated her thus: "Wise Lady, all other living creatures have maids of their kind to keep them company. Why is it that we whom you love most should be doomed to walk alone?"

At this Yavanna was troubled, for she knew that Eru Ilúvatar himself had made the Ents and it was not for her to imitate his designs. Yet she could not refuse such a request from her beloved tree-shepherds. So she retired to Valinor, musing on what was to be done.

At last, as she meditated atop a great hill in the Pelóri, the answer came to her: as if from a dream she remembered the image of a creature, one that existed in Eru's vision of the world but had been neglected in the making of Eä, a creature that was brown, with tough and wrinkled skin and great tusks of ivory. But what had it been called? *Walrus*? No, for that was far too ungainly a name for such a majestic creature. *Worb*, that was it.

Yavanna began to sing, a rich and complex melody, and the mountains echoed in deep harmony. And from her song there came the spark of life, growing before her eyes from a half-remembered shape into a magnificent being. Rich brown fur covered a vast and spherical body

suspended in the air. Protruding from its mouth were brilliant tusks, each several feet in length.

Yavanna finished her song and stopped to admire her work. But without her music supporting it, the Worb began to sink downwards, slowly at first and then faster and faster, until it was plummeting towards the ground far below. Quickly, Yavanna began to sing again: it was too late to catch the Worb, but at least she could afford it some protection from the landing. And her song was not in vain. Instead of crashing onto the rocks, the Worb bounced, its soft round body absorbing the impact before it sprang into the air once more.

But it bounced even higher than the hill it had fallen from, so high in fact that it disappeared above the hazy clouds. And when it came back down, it was with such speed as had never been seen before in all Arda, so fast in fact that the creature left a trail of mist behind it as it hurtled past Yavanna towards a nearby mountain. It is said that the shaking from its impact could be felt even as far as Middle-Earth. But the mountain where it landed was razed to the ground, forming a great pass in the chain of the Pelóri, that was later called the Calacirya.

But the Worb was not slowed by this impact, rather the opposite, and it flew into the air with even more force than before, this time heading far to the north-east. Seeing what had happened where the creature last

landed, Yavanna was appalled, and even more so when she saw where next it was to land. For the Worb's bounce was taking it right towards the Elven-City of Tirion!

In a desperate attempt to save the Elves from her wayward creation, Yavanna began to sing once more. This time she lessened the weight of the Worb, so that it would land with less force. But the Worb kept falling. The Elves, when they saw this gigantic creature bearing down from the sky, were afraid and ran into their houses. And still it came, in spite of Yavanna's singing.

But at the last, the Worb slowed, so that it was barely moving. Down the creature drifted, blocking out the light of the Trees until half the City was shaded. Nearer and nearer it came to the roofs under which the frightened Elves sheltered. But as soon as the Worb touched one of the many gleaming spires, a change came about its movement. For in order to make the Worb more buoyant, Yavanna's singing had filled it with a curious sort of light air. The spire had punctured this reserve, and now the air was rushing out.

The Worb began to move once more, this time up and away from the city. As it flew, the brown creature picked up speed, until it was rushing wildly northwards, swerving from side to side and shrinking all the while. And when it eventually landed on the ice sheets far to the north, no longer was it the glorious round Worb. Now it

was small and wrinkled, keeping only its long tusks as a relic of its former magnificence. And it is said that Yavanna in her mind began calling it *Walrus*, for it was no longer the Worb she had created.

Clearly this shrivelled creature was not appropriate as a companion for the Ents, so Yavanna returned once more to her meditation, this time choosing a seat beneath the spreading boughs of Laurelin. There she stayed for many cycles of the Trees, until once more a vision came to her. It was of a being that looked nothing like the Ents at first sight: small, stout and hairy-footed but in all other respects like to the Children of Ilúvatar. And yet she knew that it, like the Ents, would love soil and all growing things, and the bounties of the Earth.

So once again Yavanna began to sing, and this time the melody was simple but delightful to hear, and all living things around her came and listened, spellbound. And at last, the beings she had envisaged took shape before her, and she called them Hobbits.

But the Hobbits were afraid in the light of the Trees and the presence of Yavanna, and they cowered, for these were things fair and powerful beyond their reasoning. And Yavanna saw that she had not entirely forgotten the Worb in the making of these Hobbits, for in their fear they began to expand about the middle until they were twice

their original girth, and they began rising swiftly into the air.

Yavanna cried out to the Hobbits, "Wait! Do not fly away!" On hearing her kindly voice, the Hobbits were no longer afraid, and they grasped at the air around them in vain, desiring to come back down and speak with her. But alas! a sudden wind took them and blew them swiftly away eastwards over the Pelóri, until they dwindled into the distance over the sea.

Then Yavanna wept, for she had lost two creations precious to her and still the Ents had no companion. But in her despair, she heard the voice of Eru in her head, and he said, "Do not be sad, for all that you have done was my design. And while the Hobbits, as you call them, are partly my children, they are also in part yours, and will have great fondness for the other things of your creation. But do not worry any longer about the Ents, for when the time is right I myself shall provide them with Ent-wives."

And Yavanna sought out Larchspur and told him of the news she had received from Eru Ilúvatar, and he was glad. But she did not tell him about the Walrus and the Hobbits, for she was ashamed that she had lost them, and they remained her secret for many an age of the World.

A SELECTION OF CONSEQUENCES

Various members of the society

Stephen Toope met Pippin's sister who committed murder that one time [Pearl Took] at the local brewery.

Stephen Toope said, "Who do you think you are, walking in here like you own the place?"

Pearl Took replied, "Never repeat that cursed sentence in my hearing, or I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger, and you will know that my name is the Lord!"

They ended up in the King's porter's lodge, and as a consequence, Melkor "reformed" again.

Ar-Pharazôn met Smaug at the Green Dragon.

Ar-Pharazôn said, "Crikey, that's big."

Smaug responded, "Hell no."

Ar-Pharazôn hurled Smaug through a closed window, and the result was that the world ended rather sooner than Eru expected.

C. S. Lewis met Fëanor in Moria.

C. S. Lewis said, "Size doesn't matter."

Fëanor answered, "Lose the clothes while pursuing foes."

They decided to retrieve the Silmarils from their resting places. Consequently, they became close friends.

David Attenborough met Aragorn on Lesbos.

David Attenborough said, "I would like you to kiss me."

Aragorn replied, "Well, I just needed somewhere to rest my weary feet."

They lived through their children, and as a result they ended up in the hospital.

Andwise Gamgee the Ropemaker met the Queen in a shady old pub.

Andwise Gamgee said, "Some of my best friends are geochemists, but they're a bit simple-minded."

The Queen said, "I'm sorry, but your opinion is wrong."

Andwise Gamgee melted the Queen using a pot of molten metal. As a consequence, a hole formed in the

ozone layer, but this didn't affect the elves, as their earth is flat.

Published by the Cambridge Tolkien Society

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