

## The Legends of the *Trojan War* in J.R.R. Tolkien

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In 1990, the Colombian Ministry of Culture set up a system of itinerant libraries to take books to the inhabitants of distant rural regions. For this purpose, carrier book bags with capacious pockets were transported on donkey's backs up into the jungle and the sierra. Here the books were left for several weeks in the hands of a teacher or village elder who became, de facto, the librarian in charge. Most of the books were technical works, agricultural handbooks and the like, but a few literary works were also included. According to one librarian, the books were always safely accounted for. 'I know of a single instance in which a book was not returned', she said. 'We had taken, along with the usual practical titles, a Spanish translation of the *Iliad*. When the time came to exchange the book, the villagers refused to give it back. We decided to make them a present of it, but asked them why they wished to keep that particular title. They explained that Homer's story reflected their own: it told of a war-torn country in which mad gods mix with men and women who never know exactly what the fighting is about, or when they will be happy, or why they will be killed.' (Manguel 6)

Only someone who has suffered through war, injustice, misfortune, someone who has learned how far 'the domination of force' extends 'and knows how *not* to respect it, is capable', according to Simone Weil, 'of love and justice' (Manguel 222; Weil). 'When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy / And blind oblivion swallowed cities up' – wrote Shakespeare – (*Troilus and Cressida* (III, 2, 197).

Indeed, the city of Troy was lost, its location forgotten, faded into misty golden legends, alive only in memory through literature and tales. In 1873, using the *Iliad* as his travel guide, Schliemann unearthed at Hisarlik the fabled city of Troy. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, readers had imagined that it was possible to find 'Priam's six-gated city', as Shakespeare called it. Once again it was easier to believe, with the words of Doris Lessing, that 'Myth does not mean something untrue, but a concentration of truth' (Manguel 208). Troy in the *Iliad* is both a city and an emblem for the story of a war whose beginning and end are not chronicled in the poem. It seems to be an everlasting conflict, providing a useful mirror for all future anguished centuries.

## 1. Status Quaestionis: 'classic' against 'northern'?

Raymond Queneau, in his Preface to Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, states that 'every great work of literature is either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*', a statement which goes far beyond Thomas Howard's on C.S. Lewis' *Till We have faces*: 'There is really no such thing as making up a whole new story in any event: we are told that there are only ten or a dozen possible plots in the whole world. Every narrative presents some variation on these few, basic patterns' (Howard 207f). Perhaps it even goes beyond Jorge Luis Borges' bold assertion in *Los cuatro siclos*, where he says that

Four are the stories. One, the oldest, is that of a strong city whom valiant men surround and defend. The defenders know that the city will be given up to iron and fire and that their battle is useless... Centuries have been adding elements of magic... Other, linked with the first, is that of a return... The third is that of a quest... We can see in it a variation of the former... The last story is that of the sacrifice of a god... Four are the stories. All the time that remains to us we shall keep telling them, transformed. (Borges 1128)

Homer (the overwhelming presence we call 'Homer') is a shadowy figure whose first biographers (or inventors) believed had been born not long after the Sack of Troy. But we don't know anything about Homer, although it is otherwise with Homer's books. Two of our old metaphors tell us that all life is a battle and that all life is a journey; whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* drew on this knowledge or whether this knowledge was drawn from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is, in the final count, unimportant, since a book and its readers are both mirrors that reflect one another endlessly.

Whatever their nebulous origin, most scholars now assume that the poems ascribed to Homer began as scattered compositions of various kinds that eventually coalesced and became perfectly interwoven to form the two stories we now know – one describing the tragedy of a single place, Troy, which is fought over by many men; the other telling the homecoming adventures of a single man, who makes his way back from Troy through many dangerous places. Troy came to stand for all cities and Ulysses for every man (cf. Manguel 2; Nagy, *Questions*).

If this is true, Tolkien's work should be no exception, as his 'classical' education would suggest. 'I cannot agree with you', says Hippias to Socrates in one of Plato's *Dialogues* – and some Tolkienist scholars with him. Socrates answers: 'Nor can I agree with myself, Hippias, and yet that seems to be the conclusion which, as

far as we can see at present, must follow from our argument'. There speaks a man not afraid of allowing his thoughts absolute freedom to explore.

'The west must stop *hectoring* China over human rights, the Olympics chief has warned' – was written in the *Financial Times* on April 27 2008. 'Hectoring' seems to be slang for 'a blustering turbulent fellow', in allusion to the provocative character of *Hector*, the Trojan hero. Well, I hope that no one shall need to label 'hectoring' what we are about to discuss.

## 2. 'Homer' (& 'Classics') in Tolkien: what we already know

It is commonly said that Tolkien based most of his *Legendarium* on Northern literature, favouring above all Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, Germanic and Finish sources. While it cannot be any serious scholar's purpose to contest the general truth of this assessment, the undeniably pervasive influence of Northern literature should not be allowed to drive out, on principle and without careful case-by-case examination, each and every possible competing source from other mythologies (Stevens 120-1). There is a great deal of Greek mythology assimilated and transformed within the *Legendarium*, albeit unacknowledged.

(Libran-Moreno, *Lives* 15)

We are already in 'Trojan matter' here. Tolkien's reticence for source-hunting (cf. L 418) seems natural enough, for he was not so much – borrowing a term from G.W. Dasent – interested in the 'bones' as he was in the 'soup' (cf. Libran-Moreno, *Lives* 50; Flieger 123). Even Verlyn Flieger mentions the 'bitter ending typical of the *Iliad*', while speaking of the defeat and disillusionment which come on Frodo (125; see also Chance 8 and Slack 115). 'Homer and Virgil (together with some other authors) as sources and analogues to Tolkien have already been studied at some length', says Gergely Nagy (*Myths* 81), and he named David Greenman, Mac Fenwick, John W. Houghton, James Obertino, Donald Morse. 'Traditions are an integral part of the present, and old stories lie behind our new ones' (86.96). We should add David Paul Pace, Kenneth Reckford, Robert Morse, Martin Simonson, Alex Lewis and Elizabeth Currie, Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond.

I thought it not necessary to report or repeat here most of their documentation and conclusions.

### 3. Other 'Homers': 'post-homeric' and 'non-homeric' Epics. The 'Trojan Genre'

The author of the *Iliad* seems to have had two distinct aims that were not strictly compatible. One was to construct an epic around a gripping personal drama, and that was a stroke of pure genius. The other was to incorporate as much traditional material as possible in order to create a wider panorama of the *Trojan War*, even at the cost of some loss of overall cohesion. That, however, is the justification for the title *Iliad*, from Ilion the old name of Troy, rather than *Achilleid*. The legends of the *Trojan War* were actually preserved by a wider tradition than the Homeric epics themselves. Some are lost, for of the six Cyclic epics dealing with the *Trojan War* (*Kypria*, *Aithiopsis*, *Little Iliad*, *Sack of Ilion*, *Returns*, *Telegony*) only a few quotations survive (Quintus xii-xiii; Burgess). Virgil's *Aeneid* gave the Romans a national Epic and a place in the mythical past of the *Trojan War*, making of Rome a daughter of Troy (cf. Erskine).

Long before, and after, 'Homer' became the inspiration for Alexandrians and Romans until the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Saint Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, for example, begins with a long analysis of the various ways in which the ancient authors described and commented on the fall of Troy. But soon, after the beginning of the long barbaric wars that devastated the Italian peninsula, books became objects and relics rather than vessels for stories, and even the tale of the archetypal siege vanished into the obscure past. Homer became a monument in the West, known by hearsay to exist somewhere and respected from afar. In the Eastern half of the Empire, however, Homer continued to be read and was part of the social imagination.

A number of Byzantine writers based their stories on Dictys of Crete's *A journal of the Trojan War* (*Ephemeris belli troiani*) and Dares the Phrygian's *The History of the Fall of Troy* (*De excidio Troiae historia*), who were thought to give first-hand accounts on the war in which they had taken part. Far from being authentic records of the events, both accounts were probably composed in the first century AD. Both stories were translated into Latin and, in this new version, Dares' account, since it narrated the events from the point of view of Aeneas' people – the Trojans –, now became more popular than his Greek colleague's. Dares' text was quoted as the primary source by all those who retold the history of Troy, overtaking the popularity of the *Iliad*. Towards 1165, a clerk from Normandy, Benoit de Sainte-Maure, based his account of the *Trojan War*, *Le Roman de Troie*, on the chronicle of Dares. And here starts the medieval version of the history (cf. Benoit; Manguel 76f). It was followed by the *Iliad*, a Latin epic written between 1183 and 1190 by an English clerk, Joseph of Exeter (cf. Mora).

## 4. Singing of Troy and 'Trojanness'

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus in his *Christus Patiens* inspired by Euripides used Hecuba's voice to express Mary's sorrow. While adopting dozens of Homeric and Classical *exempla*, nevertheless in his *Poems* he says that he will *not* sing of Troy (cf. Gregorio 144). Unlike him, here I *do* choose to sing of Troy, although I recognize some risks in doing it.

To some degree the very familiarity of the texts gets in our way. We *think* we know 'Homer' and the 'homeric tradition' and its classical boundaries, and of course, we believe we know Tolkien even better. We may have to set these texts at some distance before we can recover them in a wider way, after discovering how narrow our view easily becomes. This is an area which has led to some miscomprehension as if 'northern' and 'southern' – or 'Vikings' and 'Greeks' –, were somehow mutually exclusive. Even very serious and deep scholars – such as Verlyn Flieger and Tom Shippey – seem to have been vulnerable to feel such temptation. Burns notes that

By 1892, when Tolkien was born, English popular thought had for some time been turning from the classical world. Southern tastes and southern considerations, particularly from mid-century onward, had been increasingly replaced by Northern ideals. Britain's Nordic ancestry was taken up like a banner and pointed to as indicative of all that the nation should hold in highest esteem... The English, who had previously played down their Northern ties, now chose to deny their Southern past, to see the South as un-English, as decadent, feeble, and lacking in vigour or will... Neither position is just, of course. Culturally, linguistically, racially, England's heritage is mixed; but Northern Romanticism, and that human knack of ignoring what doesn't appeal, now allowed the English to see themselves basically as Norsemen only slightly diluted in race, as Vikings only slightly tempered by time.

(Scull/Hammond, *Guide* 650)

Nevertheless, the Gallipoli campaign, with its battlefield opposite the road – and the site of Troy –, produced a good number of 'war poets' that got inspiration from good old Homer. For instance, Charles Sorley's poem (Lewis/Currie 84):

*Of clash of arms. Of council's brawl,  
Of beauty that must early fall,  
Of battle hate and battle joy  
By the old windy walls of Troy...*

In the words of one commentator, 'As the long, prosperous years of the Pax Britannica succeeded one another, the truth about war was forgotten, and in 1914 young officers went into the battle with the *Iliad* in their backpacks and the names of Achilles and Patroclus engraved upon their hearts.' But the names on Tolkien's heart now were Beowulf and Beorhtnoth...Homer's *Iliad* is in part a catalogue of violent deaths, but it is set in a warm world where seas are sunlit, heroes become demigods, and the rule of the Olympians is unending. The Germanic world was chillier and greyer. It carried a burden of pessimism, and final annihilation awaited *Middangeard* (Middle-earth) and its gods. (Garth 42f)

John Garth's point is of course valid, if we assume that the 'Iliad' that Tolkien knew was only the 'homeric one'; once the medieval Trojan legends enter the picture the situation may become quite different.

At this point, being *politically incorrect*, I may need to disappoint both 'parties' – the 'northern' and the 'southern'. While I recognize easily the incompleteness of overstressing the 'northernness', I shall not overstate the 'Greekness' either, not only because of the evidence of a misbalanced weight in favour of the first, but because I sustain – if anything –, more the 'Trojanness' than the 'Greekness' of some of these sources. And even more: I dare suspect that this 'Trojanness' *include and contains threads of both 'northernness' and 'southernness', waved in a elaborate and colourful pattern of 'Trojan' pigments*. Perhaps this risk of conflict belongs itself to the logic of the *Iliad*: there is not complete manhood without war, although war is terrible, as Hector forcefully said, with a sensibility closer to Faramir's than to Boromir's (cf. Redfield xii). Indeed, the *Iliad* 'is the greatest war story ever told, but it's not fundamentally about war...but rather about how great men confront tragedy, learn moderation and become wise' (Thomas 84). Perhaps the 'Troy genre' should become a sort of (honest) *Trojan Horse* to overcome the defensiveness of those involved in the debate?

## 5. The Transmission of the Tale: 'from Saxon Stories and Tudor Myths to the First-War Poets'<sup>1</sup>

The medieval fascination with Troy, and particularly the cult of 'Trojanness' in late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century England is one of these Stories and Myths. Until Schliemann exposed its ruined foundations, Troy was

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1 Wood 41.

a phenomenon of the imagination, a kind of aperture through which fantasies of the past might be glimpsed darkly. The symbolic appropriation of Troy is at once a means of creating a past, present, and future in accord with specific ideals and also a means of mobilizing that imagined historicity in gestures of self-invention and self-definition. As is true for Schliemann, medieval claimants to Trojanness invent not just Troy but also themselves in the process of imagining the ancient city. Not only Schliemann, but also Sigmund Freud. He elaborates on this metaphor in the course of describing a recent analytic success: 'I still scarcely dare to believe it properly. It is as if Schliemann had dug up Troy, considered legendary, once again' (Federico X).

Scores of European states and their rulers claimed Trojan origins, following the popular medieval belief that after the fall of Troy, its handful of survivors were dispersed to the several corners of Europe to found individual new Trojan settlements. The appropriation of the Trojan past was always a sort of imperial gesture for the European present. Cities and rulers were linked to Troy through mythic genealogies that often claimed Aeneas as their common forefather. The medieval 'Trojan matter', through different streams, is widespread in France, Spain, and Italy (cf. D'Agostino). In England, Geoffrey of Monmouth made popular the idea that London had ancestral ties to Troy. In Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Diana appears to Brutus, a great-grandson of Aeneas, and explains that the *translatio imperii* from the ancient world to the modern one will be achieved through him and his heirs:

Brute, past the realms of Gaul, beneath the sunset lieth an island,  
girt about by ocean... Seek it! For there is thine abode for ever.  
There by thy sons again shall Troy be builded; there of thy blood  
shall Kings be born, hereafter Sovran in every land the wide world  
over... When he came to the river Thames, he walked along the  
banks till he found the very spot best fitted to his pure pose. He  
therefore founded his city there and called it New Troy...

(Federico XIV)

After Geoffrey, it was also widely repeated – though not universally accepted – that King Arthur was descended from Brutus, and through him, from Aeneas (cf. Brandsma). The fantasised quality of Troy as an empire permits equally fantastic visions of new Trojan greatness and specifically encourages the creation of the idea of England as a nation. The writers of this period, in turning collectively to Trojan stories, help create the canon of the medieval matter of Troy and, more broadly, English literary history in the later Middle Ages. But Geoffrey's vision is balanced by the 'other' book of Troy – that is Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae*, which does not have such a strong 'Virgilian perspective'. Copying and adapting Benoit de Saint-Maure's 1160 *Le*

*Roman de Troie* from French verse into Latin prose, while claiming faithfully to follow Dares and Dictys, Guido's 1287 *Historia* must be seen as one of the initiators of the propagandistic tradition of Trojan interpretation. Guido's three Middle English translations are part of a tradition which includes John Lydgate's *Troy Book*, *The Laud Troy Book* and the alliterative *Destruction of Troy*.

We may say that 'insofar as the process of remembering or renarrating is a process of becoming... representations of the matter of Troy were vital to authorial, regnal, and national identity formation in late-medieval England.' (Federico XIX). As Michael Foucault writes, placeless places of this kind – like Troy – are like a mirror, insofar as the play between the real and the not real, as exists in a mirror (or in a narrative), describes identity formation:

Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me,  
from the round of this virtual space that is on the other side of  
the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my  
eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.

(Federico XX)

Chaucer's *House of Fame* and the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, each embeds an ancient myth within a frame that explores how narratives of the past – imagined to have a past in Troy – are transmitted into the present scene in new Troy. And – for the *Gawain* poet – destined to self-destruct in the future.

*Troilus and Criseyde* revisits the matter of Troy as it was explored in *House of Fame*. The physical setting is situated almost entirely within the walls of war-time Troy. The text retells what had to happen; but it also imagines the city before its fall and considers what may have happened in a different future. It is concerned especially with how the past interacts with the future: old Troy is pretendedly present in the poem; it is not yet fallen. Likewise, the new Troy of the 1380s is not yet gone. This moment – the reign of Richard II – is a moment of national self-definition, and Troy – new and old –, serve as a crucial symbol (cf. Federico 66).

The perpetually lost quality of Troy in the late medieval period is essential to its structuring power. Troy's absence, or lack, in other words, is precisely its strength. Paradoxically the writers, while claiming Trojan precedents, contribute to Troy's disappearance in the process of producing its significance. These authors relate the structures, characters, and themes already familiar in the Trojan narrative, creating themselves through replication rather than remembering Troy itself. Aeneas creates Chaucer in his image: he is the 'father of English poetry' just as Aeneas is the father of Western Europe. Both, in their own way, were like actors in a drama or epic which is always progressive, always heading for the world it only appears to have left behind. A claim to a particu-

lar past, such as Troy, involves, alongside the attempt to arrest the present, a journey through the past, creating and recreating itself, hardly a 'claim' since it is always in process, of necessity incomplete. Troy and new Troy leave behind themselves texts as witnesses to a creation of an empire of English letters: *Troilus and Criseyde* inspired the Scottish poet Robert Henryson to produce a sequel, *The Testament of Cresseid*. In 1474 William Caxton included the story in his *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*. Finally William Shakespeare, who famously had 'small Latin, and less Greek', made use of these various versions as sources for his *Troilus and Cressida* (cf. Manguel 79).<sup>2</sup>

Keats, or at least so he said, had come to Homer through Chapman's 1598 translation of the *Iliad* in opulent fourteen-syllable lines. 'The Classics!' Blake raged. 'It is the Classics, & not Goths nor Monks, that Desolate Europe with Wars' (Manguel 138ff). How far Homer's poems – or the Trojan legends – travelled is a matter of conjecture but, for instance, scholars have recognized in an Icelandic saga composed about 1300, *The Story of Egill One-hand and Asmundr the Berserks' Killer*, the influence of the *Odyssey*, in particular the story of the encounter between Ulysses and the Cyclops, which latter, in English folklore, became 'Jack and the Beanstalk' (cf. Manguel 87). Dante and his contemporaries, in the southern part of Europe, accepted the time-honoured glorification of Homer as an undisputed fact, and read him, if at all, in Latin translations such as the popular anonymous paraphrase of the *Iliad* known as the *Ilias latina*, probably written in the first century AD (cf. D'Agostino 21-27.121-128).

Petrarch kept, with devotional care, a Greek manuscript of Homer which he didn't know how to read. To the friend who sent it to him from Constantinople, he wrote: 'Your Homer lies mute by my side, while I am deaf by his, and often I have kissed him saying: 'Great man, how I wish I could hear your words!'. At Petrarch's suggestion, and with the help of Boccaccio, a Calabrian monk of Greek origin, their friend, translated the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* into Latin, both very badly (Manguel 94). Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, who became Pope Pius II, having a good knowledge of Greek, found an exquisite reason for studying the ancient authors: 'The commerce of language', he wrote, 'is the intermediary of love' (Manguel 108).

Greek was almost lost in the South and survived in the North: from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Homer was being rigorously studied in English, German and Scandinavian universities, while in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France he was neglected for the sake of Virgil. However it is true what Battista Guarino wrote, that 'the *Aeneid* is like a mirror of Homer's works, and there is almost nothing in Virgil that does not have an analogue in Homer' (Manguel 108ff; cf. Erskine).

2 Simonson gives a good synthesis of the western Trojan tradition (43f). Instead, for a 'Ioreth's lengh answer' we have two omnicomprehensive studies (Behr; Latacz, *Homer*).

## 6. Tolkien's 'Trojan' explicit Texts

For Tolkien, translation not only made a work of the past available to modern readers who could not read the older language, it was also a means by which the translator could study the text and get closer to the thought of its author. His translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was published by his son Christopher in 1975, but at least from the 20's he was familiar with it. His translation was rebroadcasted by the BBC in 1953 (Scull/Hammond, *Guide* 771; *Chronology* 141.420).

The noblest knight of the highest order of Chivalry refuses adultery, places hatred of sin in the last resort above all other motives, and escapes from a temptation that attacks him in the guise of courtesy through grace obtained by prayer. That is what the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was mainly thinking about, and with that thought he shaped the poem as we have it.

It was a matter of contemporary concern, for the English. *Sir Gawain* presents in its own way, more explicitly moral and religious, one facet of this movement of thought out of which also grew Chaucer's greatest poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Those who read *Sir Gawain* are likely to read the last stanzas of Chaucer's work with a renewed interest.

But if Chaucer's poem is much altered in tone and import from its immediate source in Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, it is utterly removed from the sentiments or ideas in the Homeric Greek poems on the fall of Troy, and still further removed (we may guess) from those of the ancient Aegean world. Research into these things has very little to do with Chaucer. The same is certainly true of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for which no immediate source has been discovered. For that reason, since I am speaking of this poem and this author, and not of ancient rituals, nor of pagan divinities of the Sun, nor of Fertility, nor of the Dark and the Underworld, in the almost wholly lost antiquity of the North and of the Western Isles – as remote from Sir Gawain of Camelot as the gods of the Aegean are from Troilus and Pandarus in Chaucer – for that reason I have not said anything about the story, or stories, that the author used... Chaucer was a great poet, and by the power of his poetry he tends to dominate the view of his time taken by readers of literature. But he was not the only mood or temper of mind in those days. There were others, such as this author, who while he may have lacked Chaucer's subtlety and flexibility, had, what shall we say? – A nobility to which Chaucer scarcely reached. (GPO 6f)

Troy is mentioned at the beginning of the translated text:

When the siege and the assault had ceased at  
 Troy, and the fortress fell in flame to firebrands  
 and ashes, the traitor who the contrivance of  
 treason there fashioned was tried for his treachery, the  
 most true upon earth - it was Aeneas the noble and his  
 renowned kindred who then laid under them lands, and  
 lords became of well-nigh all the wealth in the Western Isles.  
 (GPO 17)

Beside Tolkien's formation in 'classics' (cf. L 172), his performance at Exeter (Scull/Hammond, *Chronology* 22, 28-39) and his mentioning of a 'Homeric' patriarchal state for men from Númenor and heroic horsemen from Rohan (cf. L 154.159), he himself recognizes that his work is founded on an earlier matter which includes, as it were, Homer – and Virgil:

There are, I suppose, always defects in any large-scale work of art; and especially in those of literary form that are founded on an earlier matter which is put to new uses – like Homer, or Beowulf, or Virgil, or Greek and Shakespearean tragedy! (L 201)

To Stanley Unwin he wrote 'I have received one postcard... containing just the words: *sic hobbitur ad astra*' (L 23) which is an allusion to *Aeneid* IX. 641 (cf. L 435). He also mentions to Christopher the unpublished C.S. Lewis' 'new translation in rhymed alexandrines of the Aeneid' (L 93.440). He explicitly mentioned Troy: 'The Mouths of Anduin and the ancient city of Pelargir are at about the latitude of ancient Troy' (L 376). And adds: 'I was recently engaged in the books of Mary Renault; especially the two about Theseus, *The King Must Die*, and *The Bull from the Sea*.' Here, in *The Bull from the Sea*, by the way, Troy is mentioned briefly:

So we went on, and rounded Mount Athos safely, and sighted Thasos where they mine the gold of Troy. A Trojan flet was there, loading, and must have had a king's ransom aboard. But one does not bite the gryphon's tail, where the head can reach so quickly. (79)<sup>3</sup>

3 Towards the bitter end, young Achilles appears, and old Theseus, guest as Skyros, says: 'As we sat in the window, Lykomedes showed him to me, climbing up the long stairs of the rock. Up he came, out of the evening shadow into the last kiss of the sun, as springy and brisk as noonday, his arm around a dark-haired friend. The god who sent him that blazing pride should not have added love to be burned upon it. His mother will lose her pains, for he carries his doom within him. He did not see me; and yet his eyes spoke to mine...' (236)

In *The Book of Lost Tales* (II 196.203): ‘Nor Bablon, nor Ninwi, nor the towers of Trui...’ Christopher notes that ‘the original text of *Tuor A* had *Babylon, Niniveh, Troy*’.

In *On Fairy-Stories* is mentioned Iphigeneia, daughter of Agamemnon, and the legend of her sacrifice at Aulis (FS 49.80) as a significant example for literary critics of making useful – and intelligent – questions to receive useful answers. *Agamemnon*, by Aeschylus, among other Greek plays was used by Tolkien as back as 1913, together with Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* (cf. Scull/Hammond, *Chronology* 37.40; Garth 63).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, we have ‘the beacons of Gondor alight, calling for aid’ (731); for Hammond and Scull the reference to the *Iliad* is spontaneous (*Companion* 509). ‘And so the companies came’ (LotR 753) – Tolkien wrote on a working synopsis for *The Lord of the Rings*: ‘Homeric catalogue. Forlong the Fat. The folk of Lebennin’ (WR 229), thus comparing the arrival of the reinforcements at Minas Tirith to the catalogue of ships and the list of Trojan leaders in Homer’s *Iliad*. Todd Jensen adds that when Aeneas has to fight to ensure the preservation of the Trojan kingdom that he has founded in Italy, there is a similar catalogue of the leaders in the stories of both sides. (Cf. *Companion* 524)

In one of the early versions of his famous paper *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics*, Tolkien makes this remark:

This is not a military judgment – we are not asserting that, if the Trojans had employed a Northern king and his warriors, they would have driven Agamemnon and Achilles and all the Achaeans into the sea more decisively than the Greek hexameter routs the alliterative line (though this is highly probable). (Drout 119)

I would like to add a detail, small perhaps and rather personal, but eloquent in my view. Priscilla Tolkien sent me a card from Oxford on 23-07-2006: ‘The card shows a favourite view of my father’s with his room in Merton College looking out over Christchurch Meadows. He called it the Walls of TROY!’

## 7. Trojan medieval Narrative: an unexpected Guest?

David Bratman, commenting Libran-Moreno assertions, puts her among those ‘sober writers which attempt humbler classical or post-classical parallels’, and says that ‘she declares that Tolkien was more familiar with classical literature than the common stereotype would have it, but she does not get hot and bothered about this’ (288). Not so sober seems to be for the critic *The*

*Forsaken Real of Tolkien: Tolkien and the Medieval Tradition* by Alex Lewis and Elizabeth Currie, although Bratman recognized that they ‘make some interesting comparisons of the *Silmarillion*, in particular, with the little known medieval legends of Troy which are their subject’ (288); Minas Tirith, for them, as Gondolin, ‘is Troy’. While I agree with critical remarks on their book, nevertheless I am deeply grateful to Alex Lewis, for his intuitions worked as a *sting* on me, urging me to rediscover the medieval Trojan legendarium: and was indeed a merry meeting.

I think it is proper to recall here some points about the medieval legends on the *Trojan War*, as they ‘offered a distinctive version of the longest lived story in Europe’ (Lewis/Currie 21):

- They were very popular and widespread.
- They existed alongside and intertwined with most of medieval storytelling to an astonishing degree, and became a symbolic element of the *imaginarium* in the configuration of England as a nation (and of English letters).
- They shaped the perception of the ‘true tradition’ of Troy – opposite to the old ‘Greek’ one –, in which the Trojans are the heroes and the Greeks the villains.
- We may be certain that Tolkien knew these legends rather well.

In the pro-Trojan medieval narrative, as in Tolkien’s tales of Gondolin and Gondor, it is the besieged people inside Troy who are the heroes, and the besiegers outside Troy who are the villains. Indeed, the common saying ‘beware of Greeks bearing gifts’ translates Virgil’s *Aeneid*: ‘Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes’ (II, 49), and was taken as a pejorative statement about Greeks in general based on the sentiments of that pro-Trojan stance (Lewis/Currie 6). Also William Morris worked with the Trojan material in a way which was much influenced by the medieval versions of the story (Cf. Lewis/Currie 22).

Probably, the most important instance of Trojan legends being linked with seemingly unrelated material appears in Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*. What is not usually noticed is that Snorri makes skilful use of the Trojan legends. He presents the Norse ‘gods’ as descendants or refugees from Troy, who were able to rule over the primitive North by reason of their superior skills; in time, the real story was forgotten; history became myth and men became gods. This material appears in Snorri’s *Prologue*, in *Gylfaginning* and in *Skaldskaparmal*. He makes a more daring equation between principal characters in the tale of Troy and the Aesir of Scandinavian myth. In this account Ragnarök becomes the *Trojan War*, Hector is Thor, Neoptolemus son of Achilles is the Fenris-wolf because of his behaviour, etc. (Lewis/Currie 12).

If all this is true, then how may we not recall (for the sake of ‘Trojanness’) Tolkien’s old and consistent fascination for Icelandic, *Edda* and *Saga*? (Scull/Hammond, *Guide* 273.468.650f; *Chronology* 40.141)

## 8. Towards a new Possibility – Hints of more Trojan Material in Tolkien’s Works

- The alliterative Guido delle Colonne’s *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, Lydgate’s *Troy Book* and the *Laud Troy Book* describe a golden-silvery tree that the Greeks’ ambassadors see at Troy (XII, 57; Lewis/Currie 48.76-77), which resembles the depiction of the trees in Gondolin: ‘On either side of the doors of the palace were two trees, one that bore blossom of gold and the other of Silver, nor did they ever fade...’ (LT 2 160). In *Unfinished Tales* and *The Silmarillion*, as is known, we have them too.
- The epithet ‘silver-footed’ – or Celebrindal –, belongs to Idril, Turgon’s daughter, of Gondolin. But before that to Thetis, Achilles’ mother (cf. *Iliad*, XVIII, 52-55).
- ‘...in a flash leapt into midstream from the arching bank / but he, the river, surged upon the man/ with all his currents in a roaring flood...’ (*Iliad*, XXI, 237-240) – It recalls the flood at Bruinen’s Ford?
- ‘Forty black ships had crossed the sea with these / who now drew up their companies on the flank’ (*Iliad*, II, 530). – May we recall the black ships of the Corsars, that Aragorn used for the rescue of Minas Tirith?
- ‘We shall be themes of song for men of the future’ (*Iliad* VII, 430-432). – As in Helm’s Deep and The stairs of Cirith Ungol?
- Guido delle Colonne’s *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (III, 13-14) mentions a ring of invisibility (given by Medea to Jason). It is also present in Lydgate’s *Troy Book* (I, 2987-3200). He who carried the ring ‘would immediately become invisible, with the result that while he was carrying it in his hand, the means of seeing him would appear to no-one’ (Lydgate 69; Lewis/Currie 199). – Remembering Bilbo’s Ring, it should appear rather obvious to speak of a surprising coincidence?
- The water-loving willow, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, has a deadly secret for it stands at the gate of Hades, and is bringer of death. This was richly elaborated in later patristic tradition (Rahner 289-297). – May we think on the Old Man Willow?
- Ulysses said ‘...the dead came surging round me, / hordes of them, thousands raising unearthly cries, / and blanching terror gripped me...’ (*Odyssey* XI, 723-726). A similar throng of souls confronts Virgil’s Aeneas in the Underworld. The ghosts ‘crowd the shore in front of him, forced to

wait one hundred years before they are allowed to cross over (*Aeneid*, VI, 306-314). – Does not The Paths of the Dead come to mind?

- Faramir, we know, was Tolkien's favourite, as that the Trojan Hector was the character Homer loved most (Zoja 138). In Faramir it may seem that Hector is still alive, after all. In Chaucer, Hector makes Criseyde part of the community – 'ye yourself in joie / Dwelleth with us, while yow good list, in Troie' (I, 118-119; Federico 78). - They remind us of Faramir's words to Éowyn? Both – Faramir and Hector –, live through intolerable pressure, but they keep their dignity and nobility, despite everything. Both fight a war they have not chosen, but they fight it to defend the relationships in which they believe and in which they are grounded: their city, their family, their people. And for that they face fate – and doom – sacrificing themselves. Both are capable of feeling the sorrow of others, one with Frodo and Éowyn; the other with Helen. Hector – as Faramir – is hero *à la mesure de l'homme* (Romilly 38). Indeed, in both shines a *mélange* of heroism and sufferance, courage and tenderness. In fact, Hector – not Achilles – is presented consistently in the Trojan medieval legends as *the* perfect model of chivalrous hero – as Faramir was –, with a pre-eminent place among the Nine Worthies, and he is portrayed in manuscripts, sculptures, vitraux and tapestries in all western Europe, including England (cf. Engels).
- Achilles was warned by his olympian horse, who spoke briefly before dying, as the valinorian brave dog Huan did (*Iliad* XVIII, 59-60; 88-93; 329-332).
- Ulysses, in Sophocles' *Ajax*, spoke with pity when he see his humiliated adversary, not unlike Frodo – and later Sam – seeing the poor wretched Gollum (Romilly 245.280; it is a well documented feeling in Greek texts).
- Last but not least, we should not forget two famous Trojans: *Ganimede* and *Tithonus* (cf. Woodford 38-45; Lefkowitz 36-41; Davidson 169-200). Their fate speaks about the risks, fears and bitterness that come as doom upon mortals involved in love with immortals. It has an inspiring similarity with the same theme in *Athrabeth Finrod ah andreth* (MR 303-366, cf. Spirito).

## 9. Conclusion

At the end of our little *odyssey* through texts, we can't boast – as Schlie-mann did – of a fabulous discovery of a fabled long lost City, or that we discovered *Priam's golden Treasure* (in fact, Troy's Gold is lost again, except a very tiny part, kept now at Moscow's Pushkin Museum). Perhaps some little dust of that gold had nevertheless remained in our fingers, after searching Trojan

footprints in J.R.R. Tolkien's work. It seems to me that some glittering allows us to think so; at least, I hope it is so.

By being able to draw some hints of the link with the *Trojan War* legends, Tolkien can be seen as fitting into the great literary tradition of Europe also under this prospective. The line stretches from Homer, the Classics ('southern') and Dares and Dycitis, through the medieval ('northern') recasting of the Trojan story – 'from Saxon Stories and Tudor Myths' – until the Professor.

Shortly before his death in 1832, Goethe finished the last section of his autobiography, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. In it, he hails his century as one fortunate enough to have witnessed the rebirth of Homer (cf. Manguel 167). 'Even Goethe shrank from tackling this material (of the *Trojan War*) and reinterpreting it – but not Tolkien' (Lewis/Currie 254). Fyodor Dostoyevsky goes much further:

...Homer (a legendary man, he was perhaps like Christ, an incarnation of God sent to us) can be compared only to Christ and not to Goethe. Try to understand him, brother, try to grasp the meaning of the *Iliad* (admit it – you haven't really read it, have you?). Don't you realize that in the *Iliad* Homer gave to the whole ancient world a scheme for spiritual and earthly life with the same force as Christ gave it to the modern world?... (38)

A Greek author who called himself, after the philosopher, 'Heraclitus', composed in the first century AD a series of commentaries on Homer. The first of these reads:

From the very earliest infancy young children are nursed in their learning by Homer, and swaddled in his verses. We water our souls with them as though they were nourishing milk. He stands beside each of us as we start out and gradually grown into men, he blossoms as we do, and until old age we never grow tired of him, for as soon as we set him aside we thirst for him again; it may be said that the same limit is set to both Homer and life.

(Manguel 236f)

We dare to say, the same thing – or more – on Tolkien's account ...

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Tolkien served in World War I. The foreword to *The Lord of the Rings* contains references to the horrors of war. "One has indeed personally to come under the shadow of war to feel fully its oppression; but as the years go by it seems now often forgotten that to be caught in youth by 1914 was no less hideous an experience than to be involved in 1939 and the following years," he wrote. "By 1918, all but one of my close friends were dead." A younger version of Star Wars creator George Lucas appeared in an earlier Season 2 episode of *Legends of Tomorrow*. In the episode, Lucas drops out of film school after a run-in with the Legion of Doom and never goes on to create Star Wars and Indiana Jones. In other news, multiple J.R.R. biopics are in the works. J.R.R. Tolkien is of course known for writing "The Hobbit" and the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, spawning an expansive universe that has inspired countless sagas and stories since its initial release. Tolkien was born in 1892 and passed away in 1973, meaning the *Legends* could be traveling to any point in-between those two years. Notably, Tolkien served in the British Army during World War I. The cast list also includes a few other surprise names. Wentworth Miller and Katie Cassidy will reprise their roles as Leonard Snart and Laurel Lance, respectively. This is potentially a big deal, as both characters are currently dead. Miller's Captain Cold died in the "Legends" season one finale, and Cassidy's Black Canary was killed in "Arrow." Tolkien enlisted as a lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers and served in World War I, making sure to continue writing as well. He fought in the Battle of the Somme, in which there were severe casualties, and was eventually released from duty due to illness. In the midst of his military service, he married Edith Bratt in 1916. Continuing his linguistic studies, Tolkien joined the faculty of the University of Leeds in 1920 and a few years later became a professor at Oxford University. While there he started a writing group called *The Inklings*, which counted among its members C.S. Lewis and Owe Inspired by the First World War, the changes of industrialization and its effects on the English countryside and the myths and legends of Faerie and the Anglo Saxons, Tolkien's most famous Middle Earth sagas are *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. However, the inspiration for the very first of his tales, Luthien and Beren, lies buried within the grave with him: his wife, Edith Bratt. It's never called Edith Luthien, Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher in 1972, a year after Edith's death, but she was the source of the story that in time became the chief part of the *Silmarillion*. This seems to suggest that the *Legends of Tomorrow* team will be meeting Tolkien during a period of his life prior to the writing of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It is also unclear how the Aruba, the episode's title and the name of a Caribbean island, connect with the British fantasy icon, but *Legends of Tomorrow* does have a few episodes to go yet that may hint at where things are going. More DC's *Legends of Tomorrow*: Excalibur Appears In "Camelot/3000" Featurette / *Legends* Heading To The Land Of The Lost / Season 2 Finale Date Moved. Tolkien's appearance will follow one by Star Wars c