

A black and white photograph of J.R.R. Tolkien, an elderly man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, looking down at an open book. The background is a blurred bookshelf.

CLASSICAL
RECEPTIONS
IN **20TH**
CENTURY
WRITING

**J.R.R.
TOLKIEN'S
UTOPIANISM
AND THE
CLASSICS**

Hamish Williams

BLOOMSBURY

J.R.R. Tolkien's Utopianism and the Classics

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations are followed by the full title of the work and a short citation referring to reference list.

<i>BLT2</i>	<i>The Book of Lost Tales Part II</i> (Tolkien 1984)
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music</i> (Nietzsche [1872] 2003)
<i>CM</i>	<i>The Colossus of Maroussi</i> (Miller [1941] 2016)
<i>FR</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i> (Tolkien [1954] 2001a)
<i>GI</i>	<i>The Greek Islands</i> (Durrell [1978] 2002)
<i>Hobbit</i>	<i>The Hobbit</i> (Tolkien [1937] 2006a)
<i>KMD</i>	<i>The King Must Die</i> (Renault [1958] 1961)
<i>Knossos</i>	<i>The Palace of Minos at Knossos</i> (Evans 1921)
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien</i> (Tolkien [1981] 2006b)
<i>LfgrE</i>	<i>Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos</i> (2004)
<i>MC</i>	<i>The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays</i> (Tolkien [1983] 2006c)
<i>OFS</i>	<i>Tolkien On Fairy Stories</i> (Tolkien [1947] 2014a)
<i>OH</i>	<i>Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond</i> (Derrida [1998] 2000)
<i>PESB</i>	<i>A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful</i> (Burke [1757] 2015)
<i>PK</i>	<i>At the Palaces of Knossos</i> (Kazantzakis [1981] 1988)
<i>PME</i>	<i>The Peoples of Middle-Earth</i> (Tolkien [1996] 1997)
<i>RK</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i> (Tolkien [1955] 2001c)
<i>S</i>	<i>The Silmarillion</i> (Tolkien [1977] 2002b)
<i>SD</i>	<i>Sauron Defeated: The History of The Lord of the Rings Part 4</i> (Tolkien [1992] 2002a)
<i>SL</i>	‘Sigelwara Land’ (Tolkien 1932)

<i>TT</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers</i> (Tolkien [1954] 2001b)
<i>UT</i>	<i>Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-Earth</i> (Tolkien [1980] 2014b)
<i>WR</i>	<i>The War of the Ring</i> (Tolkien [1990] 2000)
<i>ZG</i>	<i>Zorba the Greek</i> (Kazantzakis [1946] 2008)

Series' Editor Preface

The present volume marks the sixth innovative contribution to the series *Classical Receptions in Twentieth-Century Writing* (CRTW), a project that seeks to explore the modalities and textures of modern classicisms in the works of writers recognized for their global impact on modern philosophy, poetics, politics and the arts. CRTW approaches this aim from two distinct yet interrelated perspectives: it asks how modern authors' dialogue with the classical past paves the way to new understandings of their oeuvres and contexts, and it considers how this process in turn renders new insights into the classical world and its sense of impact on our modernity. In plotting twentieth-century receptions of Graeco-Roman antiquity from this two-way perspective, the series aims to promote dynamic, highly interdisciplinary discussions for readers of Classics and Literary and Classical Studies. Indeed, a key feature of the series is its extensive range and scope. It looks at both Anglophone and non-Anglophone writers from modernities around the globe, as well as writers still or until recently active in their field, such as Tony Harrison in the fourth volume of the series, or our forthcoming studies in Wole Soyinka and Simon Armitage. Each of these authors is considered primarily as a writer whose interest in antiquity has contributed to a significant revision of philosophical and political thought, aesthetics, identity studies, gender studies, translation studies, visual culture, performance studies, urban studies, and cultural criticism, amongst other areas of knowledge. In this sense, CRTW aspires to promote a new intellectual space and critical direction for those producing research on Twentieth-Century Studies with a focus on Classics and vice versa.

The series furthermore aims to re-energize aspects of reception premises and practice. Over the last two decades, Classical Reception has developed broadly into four main fruitful areas of investigation: periods and/or movements (e.g. Humanism; the Enlightenment; the Victorians), media (e.g. film; sculpture; painting; the stage; musicology; comics), theory and criticism

(e.g. psychoanalysis; gender studies; deconstruction; postcolonialism); and geopolitical regions (e.g. Africa; the Caribbean; Latin America; Eastern Europe; Australasia). These lines of enquiry have been instrumental in shaping methodological agenda and directions, as well as offering tremendous insights into discourses of Graeco-Roman antiquity in space and time. Yet, within the histories of classical receptions focusing on periods and regions, the twentieth century has been underexamined as a thematic unit. On the one hand, there has been a preponderance of focus in studies in English on Anglophone, Francophone and Germanophone receptions. This has been in part corrected by postcolonial reception studies with a focus on geopolitical regions outside of Western Europe. What has been missing is a perspective that combines not only an appreciation of Western and non-Western receptions, but also an understanding of these reception phenomena within a global, and not merely regional, framework. *CRTW* seeks to address this tangible gap, moving beyond isolated treatments and into full-scale investigations of authors recognized both for radical re-readings of the classical past and for challenging received ideas about the identity and cultural mobility of antiquity in the Western tradition. Interdisciplinarity is at the heart of such a reconsideration of reception in the series. Instead of treating reception as a sub-discipline of Classics, or as an expansion of the disciplinary boundaries of Classics, *CRTW* conceives it as a hub for knowledge exchange amongst multiple subjects, disciplinary practices and scholarly expertise. It addresses some of the most profound shifts in practices of reading, writing and thinking in recent years within the arts and humanities, as well as in the strategies of reading the classics that one finds in twentieth-century writing itself.

Beyond matters of reception, each individual study in the series draws attention to the specific quality of a modern author's classicism, as well as the ways in which that author negotiates classical ideals and values. Such is the case with English writer, poet and scholar J.R.R. Tolkien (Bloemfontein, Orange Free State 1892–Bournemouth, Hampshire 1973), best known for his novels *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5). During his lifetime, Tolkien maintained an ongoing dialogue with the classics. At a young age, while home-schooled by his mother, he acquired Latin, then to perfect on his knowledge of classical languages at King Edward's School in Birmingham and Exeter College, Oxford. In his academic career, classical antiquity

continued to inform his main interests in Anglo-Saxon literature, amongst other subjects, while in his fictional writings, he actively drew on ancient Graeco-Roman themes to recreate his high fantasy narratives, principally, those informing the utopia of Middle-earth. How, and to what effects, Tolkien's classicism interacts with his utopian thought is the focus of the present volume. In *J.R.R. Tolkien's Utopianism and the Classics*, Hamish Williams offers a distinctive reading of how Homeric/Odyssean, Platonic, and Ovidian ideals and motifs substantiate Tolkien's utopian world. At the heart of Tolkien's regard for antiquity is what Williams terms 'retrotopianism', a process by which the author looks back into the classics to familiarise his readers with the hidden, unknown fictional aspects of his utopian environments – most prominently, those of cities, homes and forests. These three themes form the backbone of Williams' analysis, which charts the allusive and/or symbolic role that narratives of Platonic moderation, Augustan restoration, Homeric hospitality and the Ovidian material sublime play in Tolkien's utopian poetics and design. Each chapter explores retrotopianism as a strategy that allows Tolkien to insert a series of broader classical concepts into three accounts of Middle-earth: 'lapsarian' narratives of decline and fall of the kind that mark ancient Rome, which temporally frame the ancient paradisaical island or the city (Chapter 1); the hospitality narratives of Homer's *Odyssey* which occur in the home-settings of *The Hobbit* (Chapter 2); and the sublime narratives of voyages into the old, dense forest, the *silva vetus*, in *The Lord of the Rings* (Chapter 3). Williams' discussion also stresses the ethical, political and spiritual implications of Tolkien's retrotopian classicism. Thus Chapter 1 examines how utopian narratives of the decline and fall of distinctly 'classical' communities provide Tolkien with a blueprint for future political restorations. Chapter 2 considers the Homeric narrative of home as a model where an ethical reciprocity between host and guest can be sought in Middle-earth, while the focus of Chapter 3 is on Tolkien's transformation of Ovid's ancient forests into ambiguous, unsettling sites where his utopian characters can experience forms of awakening. A look back into the classical-as-blueprint is but one facet of Tolkien's engagement with antiquity. Williams further shows how Tolkien's classical knowledge opens his utopian experiments to stimulating intellectual enquiry about how past and present interact, and how older, well-known narratives, once strategically reworked, can speak powerfully to the modern *imaginaire* about

ideal urban, domestic and natural environments. In the closing pages of his study, Williams sheds more intimate light on the significance of Tolkien's classicism for his branch of utopianism. Tolkien does not simply rethink antiquity to invest his utopian world with a steady paragon of 'Platonic' virtue. Instead, he makes certain epistemic demands on the classical tradition itself, recasting classical cities, home and forest in all their perfect and imperfect aspects. It is at this intersection that both Classical and Utopian Studies align productively to draw attention to this author's awareness of the (ins)stabilities that equally mark the classical and the Western modern world, as well as demystifying his utopian poetics and thought. Tolkien's utopianism, often regarded as unfashionably conservative and hermetically sealed from the real world (Epilogue), here seems refreshingly permeable to a fuller spectrum of classical and modern realities – utopian and otherwise – than one might at first suspect.

Laura Jansen, University of Bristol

Introduction

Utopianism and Classicism: Tolkien's New–Old Continent

Between strangeness and familiarity

A literary genre is essentially a pragmatic, ever-evolving category that is assigned to a large group of literary works within which readers expect the fulfilment (or occasionally, within reason, some deviation from) a number of codes, the recurring signposts that are stock characteristics of the genre.¹ For the codes of the horror genre, for example, one might expect claustrophobic spaces, supernatural intrusions, a concentration on the vulnerability of the body in all its corporeality, inverted hospitality rites, villains who personify the primitive, irrational side of the human psyche and so on.² For science fiction, one could anticipate voyages through outer space, a fascination with technology and its potentials, interactions with the non-human and temporal disorientation. For the fantasy genre, one expects J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth:³

[The fantasy genre] existed before Tolkien [...] and it is possible to say that it would have existed, and would have developed into the genre it has become, without the lead of *The Lord of the Rings*. This seems, however, rather doubtful. [...] One of the things that Tolkien did was to open up a new continent of imaginative space for many millions of readers, and hundreds of writers – though he himself would have said [...] that it was an old continent which he was merely rediscovering.⁴

Shippey astutely points to a key principle in the aesthetic appeal of Tolkien's works for modern readers: a delightful tension between the strange and the

familiar, between the unknown and the known. The spatial, continental metaphor which Shippey uses to help us visualize the aesthetic reasons for Tolkien's hugely successful reception, from roughly the mid-twentieth century to the present era, aptly introduces the two intersecting schools of thought which inform the present study, and which revolve around this aesthetic tension between strangeness and familiarity in Tolkien's writings: *utopianism* (opening up a 'new continent of imaginative space') and *classicism* (an 'old continent which he was merely rediscovering').

Utopianism

Utopianism, if one breaks down the three etymological components of the term – two of them hidden in a verbal pun (*u* = *ou* (no); *u* = *eu* (good))⁵ – might be defined as a form of thinking which generally triangulates around: (i) space, thinking in terms of place (*topos* (place) in Greek), thus distinguishing it from the more general, but related, 'a-topical' notion of idealism; (ii) alterity, imagining a strangeness, newness or foreignness to place, which gives it its distinct quality of 'nowhere-ness' (*ou-topos* (no place)); and (iii) idealism, speculating on the perfection (or imperfection) of place (*eu-topos* (a good place)).⁶ To paraphrase with a working definition, *utopianism is a form of thinking which defamiliarizes physical space for the sake of exploring and evaluating an ideal.*

This is both similar to and quite different from the prevailing vernacular definition of 'utopianism' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED): 'The belief in or pursuit of a state in which everything is perfect, typically regarded as unrealistic or idealistic.'⁷ The reasons for definitional disputes regarding 'utopianism' and its concrete (positive) realization of 'utopia' in the burgeoning, interdisciplinary academic field of utopian studies are primarily discipline-related:⁸ literary studies, political studies, philosophy, psychology, sociology and history all adopt discipline-specific discourse and norms to understand this important concept. In particular, the OED definition above is coloured by a pervasive analysis of twentieth-century social and state history on the part of many liberal-minded, realist critics in political or historical studies, who have regarded this period as marked by ambitious, failed utopian projects⁹ – hence,

the definitional reference to pejorative terms such as 'belief', which denotes an irrational, religious form of thought, and 'unrealistic', as well as the focus on the pragmatic idea of a 'pursuit' and on the 'state' as a unit of analysis. This is truly a discourse of political studies which has invaded the popular vernacular, such that the average person defines the 'utopian', in vernacular terms, as 'referring in almost all cases to an idea or scheme far beyond the range of possibility, though perhaps intriguing in theory [... often] used without precision to denigrate any idea the user finds implausible if not ridiculous.'¹⁰ Alternatively, for instance, scholars from psychological and philosophical-cognitive perspectives may be more interested in defining 'utopianism' in terms of drives such as 'desires' and 'hopes'.¹¹ For scholars from sociological and socio-historical perspectives, the focus is far more on the possible realization or actualization of utopias in society than on the speculative wanderings of literature.¹²

Now with all due respect given to different academic disciplines and their objects of study (and to the popular usurpation and denigration of the term), literature has long been recognized in academic scholarship as an important avenue of utopian thinking and expression, at least since the time of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516),¹³ although the roots of modern explorations of these imagined realms go back to ancient thought.¹⁴ At any rate, it is worth starting with More since he has become central to modern critical understandings and discourses of what utopian literature is,¹⁵ which often entails the formal question of genre in structuralist analyses, as well as what *utopianism is in literature*, which is a more exploratory, ambiguous, conceptual question on literary thought, and which is the focus of this book. More's early-sixteenth-century literary treatise is spatially rich in its topographic descriptions of different regions of the world, of the cities and the rural countryside, and of course in the detailed description of his eponymous island community called Utopia,¹⁶ which is a wholly imagined, constructed place, seemingly nowhere on our maps (*Ou-topia*), and which is, apparently, far better (*Eu-topia*) than the real world of More's represented European societies of England, Holland, Portugal and so on. More's utopian text has important implications for how utopianism in literature is defined in terms of spatial richness, defamiliarization ('nowhereness') and perfection. But it also raises certain ambiguities in defining utopianism in literature, which can help us appreciate the nuances of utopianism in Tolkien's writings.¹⁷

The first ambiguity lies in the *eu* of utopianism. One significant distinction between utopianism in a literary text such as More's and, for example, in a political pamphlet lies in the ambiguity of representations of the utopian in the former and the positivism in the latter (absolute eu-topias) – a tendentious positivism to which modern political and historical realism reacts unfavourably, and which it often unfairly attributes to literature as well.¹⁸ To be clear, More's Platonic dialogue called *Utopia* includes *both* imperfect societies in the form of early sixteenth-century European feudal communities, beset by social inequalities, princely abuses, warring armies and religious intolerance, among other ills, *and* the apparently ideal society of Utopia, which provides a critique of, and perhaps a solution to, contemporary ills.¹⁹ However, even within the generally perfective description, many critics have noticed apparent scepticism or satire on the part of More.²⁰ Furthermore, as a sidenote, if one wanted to explore the history and reception of the idea of the utopian rather than More's own literary interrogations, one would have to concede that many modern, particularly female readers have found More's island to be especially dystopic.²¹ In short, in most literary texts which are concerned with 'utopianism' (again, a term which is not understood in this book in the political or vernacular senses),²² there is an explicit or implied comparison in the representations of perfect and imperfect societies, whether this contrasting is spatial (utopia to be found across the ocean away from an imperfect society) or temporal (utopia, or *uchronias*, to be found in the distant past or future, away from a corrupted present).²³ And, furthermore, however perfect the spatially or temporally removed utopias seem to be, 'contradictions are betrayed in the utopia in the form of ruptures underlying its apparently smooth and seamless surface'.²⁴ Likewise, in Tolkien's creative fiction, which is teeming with both eu-topian constructs (the Shire, Rivendell, Lothlórien) and dystopian constructs (Moria, Isengard, Mordor), the oscillation both in space and in time between positive, negative and ambiguous places renders his literary eu-topianism as a form of critique, an exploration of ideas, rather than an attempt to promote an actual vision of absolute utopia, which for Tolkien – as a Christian – lay outside of time, history and human space.

The second ambiguity lies in the *topos* of utopianism. One notable bias which More's *Utopia* introduced in scholarly studies on literary utopias is a topographic bias towards understanding the place of 'utopia' in macro-social,

even civilizational, terms, in particular as a condensed sociopolitical ‘community’ or ‘state’²⁵ that often resides on a faraway island or some other remote terrain such as a mountain valley or in the middle of a jungle.²⁶ This is indeed a common trope in utopian literature in the early modern period, but it is not necessary to restrict the analysis of utopianism as a general form of literary thought to such a *topos*. For instance, the environmental turn of the 1960s and the more recent post-humanist turn of the past decade have been reflected in many creative works of literature and film which provide us with distinctly non-human ecotopias. In Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* (1972), the freedom-seeking rabbits manage to find a peaceful, animals-only paradise atop a country hill in rural England, not completely isolated but sufficiently removed from the cruel machinations of men as well as humanized rabbits, who display forms of social utopianism in the form of fascism (General Woundwort’s Efrafa) and communism (Cowslip’s warren).²⁷ Certainly, in recent films such as *The Happening* (2008), the existence of human agents is problematized as the very dystopian element which needs to be destroyed within beautiful natural idylls. Aside from de-emphasizing the anthropological structure of the *topos*, literature concerned with utopianism can also focus less on the discovery of a perfectly running community than on an individual’s quest to find some kind of personal utopia: for example, the cognitive peace or ontological bliss within the ideal mountainous interior of Crete which the Truman couple discover in Lawrence Durrell’s *The Dark Labyrinth* (1947);²⁸ or the personal *plutotopia* which Daniel (Sean Connery) and Peachy (Michael Cane) mistakenly try to find in John Huston’s *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975). Lastly, in contemporary works, the colonial desire to find or found utopia in distant, isolated places (islands and mountain vales) can be inverted,²⁹ and an idealization of the mundane, of the everyday is an image which can be endorsed.³⁰ One recent example is Alexander Payne’s film *Downsizing* (2017), with its humorous emphasis on the desirability of the small, the local and the mundane for modern human or consumer happiness (utopia is to live in a kind of doll’s house).

There is, in short, no need to be too essentialist when deciding what the *topos* of utopianist thought can be in fiction; likewise, when this study examines forms of ‘utopias’ in Tolkien’s writing, the focus is on a diverse range of idealized *topoi*: sociopolitical communities, the individual, mundane home and vistas of

the natural world. To be very clear to literary critics coming from a tradition of reading certain literary texts in generic harmony, however, it must be emphasized that this book does not understand Tolkien's *utopianism* or *utopian literary thought* as lying within the very specific, post-Morean genre of so-called 'utopian fiction' or as only being concerned with the intratextual *topos* of utopia itself.³¹ Strictly speaking, his narratives in Middle-earth generally do not meet the formal requirements of the 'utopian novel' or the 'utopian narrative', with the focus on, for example, a traveller from our real world who comes across the utopian society (among other generic characteristics).³² It is, therefore, not the purpose of this book to compare and contrast Tolkien's imagined world with those in the writings of More, Bacon, Butler, Bellamy, Morris, Wells, Orwell, and other writers.

Yet J.R.R. Tolkien's creative fiction, particularly his works which focus on Middle-earth such as *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5), and *The Silmarillion* (1977), still deserve an important place within the *canon of literature which explores utopianism* because, like More's seminal text and its ancient predecessors, his writing triangulates over the defining components of spatial richness in narrative, of imaginative defamiliarization (nowhereness) and of (im)perfectionism or idealism; in other words, to return to my earlier working definition, as a literary thinker Tolkien 'defamiliarizes physical space for the sake of exploring and evaluating an ideal'. This is his 'utopianism'. The proof is in the pudding, of course. Nevertheless, Tom Shippey's astute observation – 'one of the things that Tolkien did was to open up a new continent of imaginative space for many millions of readers' – provides a tantalizing opener to this project since it implicitly presents the appeal of Middle-earth for modern readers as an extension of utopian representations in literary history, stemming from that of More's *Utopia*. More's utopian text was immensely exciting for his own readers in the so-called Age of Exploration precisely because just some twenty years prior the *new* continent of America had been opened up for imaginative adventurers (colonial ambitions aside). Such early modern utopian literature, like that of More and Bacon, offered the reading public the food they desired – an exploration of newness, of an otherness beyond the known European world, of a *genus* of land hitherto unknown (No-place, *Ou-topia*).³³ Conceived around the start of the twentieth century, when there were no more physical frontiers to be found in the western

or the southern hemisphere,³⁴ Tolkien's Middle-earth was one of a number of important 'genre-fiction' places in the twentieth century which allowed readers to explore *new*, alternative, constructed spatial-temporal worlds in science fiction and fantasy, from H.G. Wells to Isaac Asimov, from C.S. Lewis to J.K. Rowling and George R.R. Martin.³⁵ 'If travellers' tales brought audiences to imaginary worlds and utopias gave them some sense of how their inhabitants lived, the genres of science fiction and fantasy invited audiences to live in them vicariously.'³⁶

Tolkien's constructed world is an exciting *topos* of desire for many modern readers, who will stick a map of Middle-earth onto their walls³⁷ and traverse this new continent with the help of the third-person narrator. This imaginative adventure is a genuine ou-topian exploration of the strange, of the unknown, of the other, which is aptly aided by the author's near-unrivalled expertise in spatial worldbuilding, in constructing a secondary world seemingly divorced from our own known world, and which has its own hermetic system or internal logic of 'maps, timelines, genealogies, nature, culture, language, mythology, and philosophy'.³⁸ In his discussions of Tolkien's exemplary worldbuilding as a modern speculative fiction writer,³⁹ Wolf mentions the degrees of otherness or strangeness which are possible in a new (subcreated, secondary) literary world such as that of Middle-earth⁴⁰ – and thus, implicitly, the disorientation or defamiliarization which a reader experiences when entering such a realm. Wolf argues for hierarchical levels of invention in terms of 'the nominal, cultural, natural, and ontological':⁴¹ for instance, strange place names, strange social customs, strange plants and strange physics. One might add that the breadth and depth of Middle-earth seemingly have no bounds and are currently still under construction, given that the continued fan fiction as well as filmic and gaming receptions only add to this sense of an ever-expanding universe, which goes beyond the limits of Tolkien's narratives.⁴²

Such a reader-reception-based approach to the world of Middle-earth might make Tolkien's utopianism appear almost colonial or colonizing; alternatively, it might also remind us of Dutch historian Rutger Bregman's claim that utopias are at best always horizontal imaginaries, landscapes (literal or metaphorical) to be continually discovered at the edge of sight, and that utopianism is at best always an investigation into the perfect, a search for alternate worlds.⁴³ The search for new horizons is undoubtedly part of the

persisting appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* for new readers. However, the appeal of newness in Middle-earth should not blind the reader to the processes of re-familiarization which coexist with those of defamiliarization in Tolkien's complex worldbuilding.⁴⁴ As the next section identifies, his utopianism is, in large part, a kind of retrotopianism, a rediscovery and rewriting of an older continent. Such a retrotopianism intersects, furthermore, with another defining feature of Tolkien's utopianism: his eu-topianism, the exploration of space on the level of ideals and ethics.

Classicism

The second part of Shippey's dualistic statement – 'it was an old continent which he was merely rediscovering' – leads onto this book's second category of analysis for the aesthetic appeal of Tolkien's works: *classicism*. In a straightforward geographic sense, the 'old continent' is what ancient and early modern cartographers have called 'the old world', in other words, Eurasia and northern Africa. What was Tolkien 'rediscovering' while hovering over this old continent? A sizeable part of the scholarship in Tolkien studies has been devoted to studying the different ways in which the writer's inherited cultural, literary, mythic and (not least) philological histories shaped his thought and were manifested in his literary creations.⁴⁵ Depending on the methods employed by the individual scholar and their disciplinary background, such scholarship may variously be called source studies, reception studies, comparative literature studies, comparative mythology, folklore, religious studies, comparative philology or historical linguistics.

By sheer weight of critical studies, it would appear that the greatest influence on the fantasy writer can be ascribed to two domains: (i) medieval language, with a particular focus on Germanic languages (Old English, Middle English, Old Norse), and medieval literature (heroic epics such as *Beowulf* and romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*),⁴⁶ and (ii) Christian or Catholic writings, particularly the Old and New Testaments and the works of theologians from the times of St Paul and Augustine to the present.⁴⁷ Both of these fields of influence make perfect biographic sense, given that Tolkien was, firstly, a medievalist by academic profession and an expert researcher of Old English