

Presentation Details

Keynotes

Christopher Gilson

Christopher Gilson is an independent scholar of art languages. He has edited the journal *Parma Eldalamberon* 'the Book of Elven-tongues' since 1983 and published editions of J. R. R. Tolkien's writings about his invented languages in this journal starting with *The Gnomish Grammar and Lexicon* in 1995, the latest issue being *The Feanorian Alphabet, Part 2, and Eldarin Pronouns* in 2024. Gilson writes poetry and translates popular songs into Quenya.

Bret Devereaux

Dr. Bret C. Devereaux is an ancient and military historian and is currently a Teaching Assistant Professor at North Carolina State University. He holds a PhD in ancient history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and an MA in classical civilizations from Florida State University.

More than that, though, Bret is really "one of us": a phenomenal fantasy nerd, sci-fi fan, accomplished gamer, and teller of bad jokes. He's been a guest on The Prancing Pony Podcast on several occasions but still too few for our liking. Finally he is the author of one of our favorite sites on the internet: A Collection of Unmitigated Pedantry.

Shawn Marchese

Shawn E. Marchese went down the hobbit hole in his teens and has been in love with Middle-earth ever since. From 2016 to 2022 he co-hosted The Prancing Pony Podcast every week, and he co-authored *Why We Love Middle-earth* with Alan Sisto. A native of New Orleans, he lives in Austin with his wife and two children, who *still* tolerate his dinner table retellings of stories from *The Silmarillion*.

Presentations

“Sacred Kingship, Moses and Noah: The Role of Amandil and Elendil Revisited”

Annamaria Kovacs

This paper will aim to discuss one particular aspect of how Kingship is portrayed in the Second Age Edain realm of Númenor, its transference from one branch of the Line of Elros to the distaff line and from the island to Middle-earth. I chose this time period and location as Númenor in particular is my chosen field of study amongst Tolkien's far ranging Legendarium.

It is inevitable to start with touching on Tolkien's faith and how it influenced his portrayal of Kingship. As a former medievalist (does one really ever recover anyway?), I will try to sketch up possible influences of ancient and medieval concepts of royal power and sacred kingship on how Tolkien portrays the role of Númenorean kings and queens, and how this concept evolved and culminated in the last Lords of Andúnië contrasting with Armenelos' royal line.

Sacred kingship as a concept underwent significant historical evolution from ancient times in history, but as Tolkien admittedly drew on Egyptian and other ancient Mediterranean cultures in portraying Númenor, these parallels will not be without merit. The Biblical figures of Moses and Noah as a direct influence on the story of the Exiles, Amandil and Elendil will be used to touch upon faith, sacredness and the role of a sacred ruler. These concepts of myth, cultural influence, and echoes of ages past, I believe can still hold relevance and possibly place the figures of Amandil and Elendil in a light of historical depth relevant to our age and time.

“Connections in Religion and Myth: An Exploration of Religious and Mythical Parallels in Tolkien's Works”

Matthew Schadou

In one of Tolkien's letters he speaks of his mythology being distinctly “pre-Christian” while in another he states it as being a distinctly Catholic work. Many have pointed out the letters must be taken in context of who they were written to, and how things may be exaggerated or altered to appeal to the audience he is speaking to. However, I believe that on a fundamental level that both of these distinct statements are true.

Therefore the purpose of this paper is to examine how Tolkien's "pre-Christian" mythology relates to Biblical themes and stories as well as various other ancient faiths, mythological themes, and stories. These will include Ancient Rome, Norse mythology, and other predominately Western faiths. For the sake of time I will only focus on six stories or themes for this presentation, namely the creation of the world, the expelling of "evil" from heaven, the fall of created beings, stories of death and resurrection, the ultimate overthrow of "evil", and paradisaal settings. I will go into the similarities and differences between Tolkien's stories on or about these and the Christian stories. Then I will connect it to stories in other ancient faiths.

"The Inner Consistency of Reality: Fantasy and Sub-creation in J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium"

Graeme Cheadle

"J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium is well known and beloved by millions of readers the world over both for the brilliance and intensity of its (sub-)creative power and for the "inner consistency of reality" upon which its fantastical elements depend, so important to the professor himself that he spent great effort to build and maintain the secondary belief he thought necessary for fantasy to be effective. Yet all fantasy necessarily involves the fantastic and the impossible. Tolkien calculated dates, phases of the moon, elvish population growth rates, linguistic drift over millennia, distance travelable by horse or man (or hobbit) in a given time period over a particular type of terrain, and many other plot elements many other authors never would have bothered to attempt. And yet he also included fire-breathing dragons, functionally immortal beings, a sun and moon that were drawn under the earth in time for the next sunrise over a flat, disc-shaped world, horns that could be heard hundreds of miles away, and elven eyes that can see over the (later) curvature of the earth.

Do the inevitable "inaccuracies" of the secondary world vis a vis the primary world interrupt the secondary belief upon which Tolkien built his mythology, or do they even matter? Is it all, ultimately, "just a story?" This paper seeks to explore the inherent tension between the "realistic" and the fantastic in Tolkien's worlds."

“Get Lost! – How We Lose Ourselves In Fairie – A Psychological Perspective”

Dori Acampora

When reading fantasy literature, there is a distinct experiential difference between being “IN” a secondary world, as opposed to being conscious of it and looking at that secondary world from the outside. In *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien describes this experience as becoming “enchanted.” He says, “You believe it while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken. The MAGIC, or rather the ART has failed.” (OFS – Children) To incite this level of enchantment, a sub-creator uses various techniques, such as depth and complexity of language, historical allusion (aka textual ruins), and countless layers of mythology and history, to trigger the psychological mechanisms that change how a reader engages with the fantasy. In this paper/presentation I will highlight three of these mechanisms, demonstrate how sub-creators engage them, and how these engagements benefit a person’s overall mental health.

“Creating Historical Depth in Middle-earth with a Green Stone”

John McHenry

This paper looks at “historical depth” and “inner consistency of reality” in Middle-earth, drawing upon Tolkien's own words from *On Fairy Stories*. It examines the relationship between historical depth and inner consistency of reality. It also examines how Tolkien's “great care for detail” was a key part of his “Art” that enabled him to create historical depth and inner consistency of reality, which in turn induces Secondary Belief in the reader. Finally, I attempt to explain how Legolas can see beyond the curvature of the earth.

“Creating Historical Depth: From Ossian to the Red Book”

Louis Keiner

This paper explores how two very different writers, James Macpherson in 18th century Scotland and J.R.R. Tolkien in 20th century England, used the idea of a found and translated manuscript to give their stories the feeling of historical depth. Even though they lived centuries apart, both understood that a story wrapped in layers of older voices, lost books, and long traditions feels richer and more ‘real.’

In the 1760s, Macpherson published what he claimed were translations of ancient Gaelic epics from a bard named Ossian. His 'translations' gave the Gaelic Highlanders a dramatic, heroic past at a time when their culture was being erased. The poems were wildly popular across Europe, but Macpherson's claims about ancient manuscripts eventually fell apart under scrutiny.

Tolkien knew this history well. As a young man at Oxford, he heard lectures describing Macpherson as a literary fraud. He also knew, though, how powerful that technique could be, from the examples of Macpherson and other literary worldbuilders through the centuries. In the process of building his sub-creation, Tolkien created fictional layers of storytellers, scribes, and translators inside Middle-earth, making it feel like a world with millennia of memory behind it.

By comparing Macpherson's attempt to prove a national myth with Tolkien's effort to build one, this paper shows how the "translated manuscript" framework can be used to enrich storytelling, and how Tolkien turned it into one of the great tools of modern fantasy worldbuilding.

"The Elves' New Year: The Calendar of Imladris in Relation to that of the Shire"

Beregond, Anders Stenström

In *The Lord of the Rings* our calendarical homeground is the Shire-reckoning, the dates in which are cited using our familiar Latin month-names, though we learn that the reference is not the same, and the story's 25 March falls a week or so before our 25 March. That relation can be worked out satisfactorily. The Shire-reckoning historically derives from the King's Reckoning, and its relation to that system and to the Stewards' Reckoning seems clear. However, Appendix D also describes the Calendar of Imladris, but does not specify how it connects to the Shire-reckoning. I will first tease out the possibilities and show that there are indeed very many of them. By considering the implications of some more general statements and circumstances I will then gradually limit them and substantially reduce the number, even when not managing to bring it down to a final solution. I expect that this investigation will be appreciated by the mathsy portion of the participants.

“Give Appendix C Some Love or, What Do All Those Cousins Mean?”

Holli Hartman

A look at genealogy in the "real" world and Middle-Earth through the lens of the Hobbit family trees in Appendix C. We will look at some of the genealogical publications that would have been known in the noble and landed classes of the UK in the late 1800's and early 1900's and speculate how those might have influenced that Hobbit enthusiasm for family trees. We will also learn how to figure out the various degrees of relations in a family tree, concentrating on all of those different kinds of cousins. Then we will look at the published family trees as well as the family trees from within a one genealogy program to allow us to manipulate the views and information.

“Motives Behind Middle Earth: Tolkien’s Stewardship of the Fields He Knew”

Chris Thompson

Tolkien’s world is built on more than mere historicity. Stroll through the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, The Life of Charlemagne, Herodotus’ Histories, and you’ll find much that is noteworthy and interesting. You’d be hard-pressed, though, to sense a living, breathing world like Middle Earth. So too are there many fantasy authors whose works have historical depth—whether due to elaborate detail or depth of imagined time—that produce some realistic characteristics. Yet these too (usually) lack the profound sense of reality, of authenticity, that infuses Tolkien’s world. For what finds its way onto the page is often, as Hemingway knew, no more important than what is omitted: what dwells under the surface, like the greater bulk of an iceberg, determines the cohesion and gravity of a work. Tolkien’s depths delve far below the page itself.

No single thing sets Tolkien apart from the majority of authors. His is a sum of many parts. Yet in trying to look underwater, so to speak, one can trace three interwoven commitments that illuminate what made Tolkien tick—and why his world resonates still with us:

1. He believed in the truthfulness behind his work: his fantasy’s splintered light sprung from a true source.
2. He valued the character of his work, displaying no shame in elevating what he felt worthy of honor.

3. He embraced both joy and sorrow, believing that they were indeed reconcilable.

We will consider his own words in order to understand how these commitments motivated him into a long, slow obedience in the same direction—as a steward of the world he delivered us. We'll consider his declarations in *Mythopoeia*, certain of his Letters, *Leaf by Niggle*, and passages in *The Lord of the Rings*, to better glimpse how and why his historical tales transmuted into vital myth.

“Tolkien’s Words: Leaping to Conclusions”

Sarah Jamieson

"In the (in)famous Letter 131, J.R.R. Tolkien wrote of *The Lord of the Rings*: “Hardly a word in its 600,000 or more has been unconsidered.”

Tolkien’s care and craft in his word choice becomes apparent to those of us who enjoy and study his writings. Two years ago, I was searching Tolkien’s works in an attempt to craft a good QAN question for The Prancing Pony Podcast when I noticed an English word that Tolkien appears to use inconsistently. This word has two accepted forms; Tolkien uses them both. What? This from a writer who insisted on the exclusive use of ‘dwarves’ and ‘elves’? I have expanded my research to include 18 such word pairs. My current research shows that Tolkien’s use of these forms runs the gamut from:

- Consistent use of one form at all times.
- Consistent, or mostly consistent, use of form dependent on the part of speech or context.
- Use of both forms in each word pair.

I find Tolkien’s use of both forms of this last set of word pairs deliciously intriguing. For my research, I’m using the texts of *The Silmarillion*, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien (Revised and Expanded)*, and *Unfinished Tales*. In this talk, I’m going to introduce this set of words and quickly show those that Tolkien uses consistently.

Further, I intend to show and discuss sample sentences from Tolkien’s works of the word pairs for which Tolkien uses both forms and offer some observations and hypotheses."

“They are sailing, sailing, sailing’: Migration in Middle-earth”

Marilyn R. Pukkila

My inspiration for this talk was visual: not a single leaf, as in Niggle’s imagination, but an entire painting, and then a single form within that painting. It tied into my family history, which then connected with that of the artist’s — and suddenly, I was seeing the elves through entirely new eyes: the eyes of a great-great-grandchild of Irish immigrants, and the grandchild of Finnish immigrants. I was seeing Elves as migrants, as refugees, as immigrants leaving or losing a home and returning to a home that was no longer home, and of the children of immigrants, confused about just where their home truly lay. I will consider some examples of different groups of Elves with varying migration stories, as well as a few familiar individual Elves, and ponder how those stories might give us new perspectives on their histories, as well as on our own.

“Pirates of Umbar? The Likely Historic Inspiration Behind Tolkien’s Sea-Raiders”

Scott DeAmicis

"The Corsairs of Umbar are pirates, at least according to most visual representations and popular adaptations; however, the two terms are not synonymous and Tolkien’s deliberate use of the term “corsair” rather than “pirate” draws upon a rich and complex history in our primary world with implications for Middle-earth. The likely inspiration for the Corsairs of Umbar are not pirates, but rather the Barbary Corsairs of the early modern period.

In this paper, I will explore how Tolkien drew upon these real-world corsairs to inspire the Corsairs of Umbar and create a threat that inspired fears in the hearts of all Gondorians. This presentation will include a linguistic analysis of corsairs and related terms, a description of the primary world corsairs, an examination of the drafts of *The Lord of the Rings* found in *The History of Middle-Earth*, and an overview of depictions of corsairs in histories written in the first half of the 20th century. By understanding the meaning of corsairs within the context of when *The Lord of the Rings* was published, I will be able to show the complexity of the relationship between Gondor and Mordor, and uncover backstories of characters, showing the depth of world-building that Tolkien created through the use of only a few words.

“Tis Glorfindel and the Balrog!: How a happy little accident served to “improve the story””

Elizabeth Perico

In his Glorfindel I and Glorfindel II essays, Tolkien discusses how the duplication of the name Glorfindel “escaped consideration” when writing the Lord of the Rings, and was too unique a name just to be duplicated for a different character. In those essays, he not only worked out the meaning of his name, and how it could not work as two different characters both linguistically and historically, but Tolkien also gave us some interesting insights on this fan-favourite character, whose humble heroics stretched from the Years of the Trees all the way up to the beginning of the 4th Age. As he is my absolute favourite character of the Legendarium, I thought it befitting to use my first time submitting a paper for consideration to talk about him as much as I can! I will discuss how, despite having less space on the page as other characters, he is nonetheless historical depth personified (thanks Katie!), and the fulcrum of many pivotal moments in Middle-earth: with his timely presence in dark moments and selfless sacrifices, enacting rescues and last stands that permitted hope for Arda to persevere.

“The Sanctity of Samwise”

Erin Plagerman

Religious rituals or practices are not frequently depicted in Middle-earth, but Tolkien’s own spiritual beliefs manifest themselves in myriad ways throughout the Legendarium. In Letter #142, Tolkien labels Lord of the Rings as a “fundamentally religious and Catholic work,” describing his real-world spirituality as being absorbed into the story rather than overtly represented. Focusing then on his portrayal of the “chief hero” of the story, Samwise Gamgee, how does this character represent a Catholic depiction of heroism and holiness? While there are many easily identifiable examples of this in Sam’s story arc (like his self-sacrificial love for Frodo), this talk instead focuses on some of the more nuanced ways that Sam demonstrates sanctity and virtue, from the tables of the Green Dragon to the stairs of Cirth Ungol. We will learn about some aspects of Catholic spirituality that Tolkien may have practiced in real life, such as studying scripture, singing hymns, or reading the lives of the saints, and identify how these practices are subtly integrated into his depiction of Sam and portrayed as lending him crucial strength during

pivotal moments of the Quest. Audiences of all backgrounds are welcome and invited to join in this character study of Samwise Gamgee, one of the most excellent and admirable figures in Middle-earth.