



Abstracts and bionotes for “Tolkien’s Elvish Mirror” Roundtable

1) Tolkien, Language, and the Outsourcing of Cultural Memory – Myron Ellul

This contribution argues that 21st-century Europe is quietly outsourcing its cultural memory to dominant languages, digital infrastructures, and algorithmic gatekeepers – and that Tolkien’s philosophy of language, grounded in philology, myth-making, and aesthetic intent, offers a prescient framework for resisting this drift.

For Tolkien, language is never mere utility but a vault of memory and myth – what Roman Jakobson might call a culture’s “semantic horizon.” His invented languages, shaped by sound-symbolism, historical stratification, and mythic time, embody Sapirian insight that languages encode distinct worldviews, echoing the notion that the Volksgeist resides in speech. This Inklings-inflected view of language as “fossilised consciousness” contrasts sharply with our present condition, in which meaning is increasingly mediated by English-first interfaces and minority languages are reduced to sentimental, decorative curiosities, sidelined from serious epistemic labour.

Extending Max Weinreich’s dictum, Tolkien’s anxieties recur in a world where languages become dialects with algorithms and datasets. Those without digital presence are quietly archived – excluded from the “market of symbolic capital.” Simone de Beauvoir’s notion of the Other illuminates how smaller languages are feminised or provincialised beside a supposedly “universal” global tongue, while semioticians from Saussure to Barthes warn how “unity in diversity” becomes a floating signifier when not anchored in lived plurality.

Using Maltese – a Semitic-Romance hybrid increasingly displaced from high-prestige domains – I trace outsourcing at three levels: locally (domain loss, toponymic erasure, digital marginalisation), at the EU level (working-language hierarchies), and globally (AI-driven linguistic monocultures). Comparative cases – Welsh, Basque, Frisian, Breton, Māori, Hebrew – illustrate divergent paths of resistance and revitalisation.

I close by outlining a framework for “repatriation”:

- (1) legal instruments strengthening minority-language rights in education, administration, and AI governance;
- (2) semiotic interventions – restored toponyms, multilingual signage, narrative visibility;

(3) Tolkien-inspired mythopoetic strategies that treat languages as living vessels of meaning, capable of generating new cultural myths.

This interdisciplinary approach envisions a European future in which cultural memory remains embedded in lived language, not outsourced to platforms that merely accommodate it.

Keywords: Tolkien; philology; cultural memory; semiotics; linguistic anthropology; Europe.

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Myron is a writer, actor, and multidisciplinary creative with a deep fascination for myth, language, and cultural history. Alongside his artistic work, he brings a legal background, specialising in international and commercial law, and works in regulatory leadership, where questions of governance, identity, and policy inform his research interests. He is co-founder and Artistic Director of Nephilim Creations, an immersive entertainment collective exploring how participatory storytelling engages cultural history and shapes narrative experience. His creative and academic work focuses on how stories shape identity, how languages foster belonging and encode worldviews, and how cultural memory is preserved or displaced through modern infrastructures. He is particularly interested in approaches that connect philology, semiotics, law, and performance to understand how societies imagine themselves in the evolving landscape of contemporary Europe.

2) Conquerors and Conquered: The Irony of Invasion and Re-evaluating Anglo-Saxon Identity in Tolkien's *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* – James Moffett

This paper examines J.R.R. Tolkien's dramatic verse-dialogue, *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, as a crucial vehicle for exploring the complex, ironic, and ethically conflicted nature of English identity rooted in its Anglo-Saxon heritage. The study focuses on the dialectic between the older, Christian-pragmatist Tídwald (Tída) and the younger, pagan-idealist Torhthelm (Totta), whose clash represents the nation's struggle to reconcile its brutal past with its moral consciousness.

The central tension rests upon the historical irony of the Anglo-Saxons as a former invading force, and now in opposition to Viking incursions. This cyclical violence provides the grim context and framework for the critique of Beorhtnoth's *ofermod* ("overmastering pride").

While Totta idealises this pride as necessary for heroic fame, Tída condemns it as a moral and practical failure.

Tolkien employs Modern English alliterative verse to linguistically anchor this moral debate in the very sound-world of the Anglo-Saxon past, creating a continuity that is simultaneously celebrated and scrutinised. The merger of Totta's poetic zeal with Tída's grim realism, culminating in a Christian framework, signifies a necessary act of ethical purification. This process defines the mature English self as one that must reject the reckless, self-serving elements of the pagan heroic code while preserving the core virtue of selfless loyalty.

Ultimately, *The Homecoming* may reveal Tolkien's philological and mythopoeic project to forge a robust national identity: one that is wise enough to honour its foundational myths, yet critically astute enough to redeem them from the destructive flaw of pride.

Keywords: Poetry, Anglo-Saxon, Tolkien, Language, Maldon, Identity, past, present, Christian, Pagan

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James Moffett is currently a PhD student with the Department of English at the University of Malta. His research aims to provide a full-scale study of Tolkien's *The Fall of Arthur*, placing it as a significant contribution to Arthurian literature within the interwar years. He holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Communications (Hons) and Digital Arts respectively from the University of Malta, as well as a Master's degree in Professional Writing from Falmouth University (UK).

As a writer, he has published a number of Sherlock Holmes books, including a novella and a collection of short stories, and contributed to two anthologies featuring the iconic detective. He has also published a poetic retelling of the Battle of Hastings, and a short poetry book on time and space. James runs a Tolkien-themed YouTube channel *Brewing Books*. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, tea-drinking, and contemplating the big things.

3) The Middle Ground of Tolkienian Myth: Tolkien and Barfield after Taylor – Rev. Robert Falzon

Abstract

This paper examines the role of myth in modernity through a Tolkien-centred dialogue with Owen Barfield and Charles Taylor, arguing that myth remains a vital imaginative resource for the future rather than a relic of the past. Focusing on Tolkien's concept of sub-creation and his construction of secondary worlds, the paper shows how myth functions as a participatory mode of meaning-making that resists both allegory and ideological instrumentalisation. Barfield's philosophy of participation and the evolution of consciousness provides a conceptual background for understanding how Tolkien's mythopoeia enables readers to encounter meaning as something discovered rather than projected.

At the same time, Barfield's metaphysical commitments raise challenges for contemporary interpretation. To address these, the paper reads Tolkien and Barfield "after" Charles Taylor, drawing on Taylor's hermeneutic and interpretive analysis of the immanent frame and modern cross-pressure in order to translate participatory myth into a pluralistic, post-secular context. Taylor's framework allows myth to be understood not as metaphysical authorisation or cultural destiny, but as a formative and experiential practice that shapes ethical imagination and cultural orientation.

The paper argues that Tolkien's mythopoeic imagination occupies a productive middle ground between metaphysics and interpretation, enchantment and disenchantment, nostalgia and instrumentalisation. In doing so, it suggests that Tolkien, read alongside Barfield and Taylor, offers a model of myth oriented toward the future: not a blueprint for belief or identity, but an open horizon of imaginative participation capable of sustaining meaning in a fragmented modern world.

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Robert Falzon is a 2022 Master's graduate in Spirituality and is currently an MPhil student in view of becoming a PhD candidate. For three years (2023-2025) he was the Head of St. Francis de Sales Institute, an institute for non-formal education. He is the author of "Reading Tolkien through Buber: a Faërian Encounter with *Thou*," published in *Reimagining the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2022, edited by Prof. Ana Kechan and Foreword by Prof. Thomas Honegger.) He contributed papers in various seminars and conferences, amongst which "J.R.R. Tolkien's Method of Contrasts" and "Owen Barfield's Anthroposophical Anthropology: Humanity Received and Recapitulating." His research interests include spirituality, inter-spirituality, the link between spirituality and philosophy, and Tolkien studies.

4) "I Will Diminish": Renunciation and Moral Power in Lórien – Peter M. Farrugia

This paper examines Galadriel's stance of renunciative authority in *The Lord of the Rings* as Tolkien's most sophisticated articulation of ethical power expressed through limitation rather than domination. Rather than reading Galadriel as a simple moral exemplar, the paper analyses the mechanics of her refusal of the Ring, an act that exemplifies a custodial mode of power preserving the agency, speech, and future of others. Galadriel's "I will diminish" encapsulates a pattern of governance shaped not by imposition but by relinquishment, establishing a mode of authority grounded in transparency, discernment, and restraint.

The argument situates Galadriel within Tolkien's wider linguistic-mythic project. Her hidden queenship and custodial presence operate through clarity of sight and speech, echoing Tolkien's conviction that language is the bearer of memory and identity. In resisting the Ring's promise of strategic clarity and uniform command, she upholds a model of plurality and free response consonant with Tolkien's philological vision, where meaning emerges through fidelity to difference rather than subsumption. The Mirror episode becomes a site of linguistic discernment: a place where vision and speech are deliberately not instrumentalised, preserving interpretive freedom.

Engaging scholarship by Shippey, Flieger, and Tolkien's letters, the paper interprets Galadriel's renunciation as a mythic argument for ethical custodianship in a plural Europe. Tolkien's "unity in diversity" is not simply linguistic; it is moral, rooted in restrained sovereignty and refusal of possessive power. In an age pressured by both homogenising impulses and fragmenting distrust, Galadriel models a form of guardianship that protects plurality by limiting coercive authority. The paper concludes by suggesting that Tolkien's myth-language synthesis offers resources for contemporary reflections on trust, community, and the ethical stewardship of cultural memory.

Keywords: Tolkien; Galadriel; renunciative authority; custodial ethics; language & memory; plurality & trust

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Peter M. Farrugia is a theologian and practising psychotherapist whose work centres on trauma, symbolic theology, and the ethics of institutional care. He serves as Safeguarding Officer for Victim Care and Advocacy at the Safeguarding Commission (Church in Malta) and is a doctoral candidate in Theology at St Mary's University, London. His research examines memory, presence, and fidelity in ecclesial contexts, with wider interests in cultural repair and mythic forms of belonging. He lectures in the Faculty of Social Wellbeing (University of Malta) and leads trauma-informed safeguarding training through his professional work.

5) Symbolic Hunger and Sub-Creation: Tolkien, Jung, and the Question of Meaning – Mariana Debono

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In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Carl Jung diagnoses the condition of modern man as one marked by a profound loss of meaning, which he traces not to material deprivation but to the neglect of what he calls a “symbolic life.” Modern individuals, Jung argues, often live cut off from the deeper symbolic structures of the psyche, resulting in restlessness, fragmentation, and

sense of inner disorientation. While Jung empirically identifies this symbolic hunger as universal and rooted in the collective unconscious, his methodological commitments prevent him from naming its ultimate object.

Engaging this diagnosis through a Thomistic philosophical anthropology, the paper argues that Aquinas allows us to interpret Jung’s notion of a neglected symbolic life not merely as a psychological deficit but as an anthropological symptom: the human person desires more than the finite world can provide. This excess of desire—experienced as restlessness, longing, or symbolic hunger—points to a natural orientation beyond immanence, one grounded in the intellect’s and will’s openness to truth and goodness as such.

It is at this juncture that Tolkien becomes philosophically significant. Tolkien’s understanding of myth and language, particularly his notion of “sub-creation,” can be read as a form of philosophical praxis that gives imaginative and linguistic expression to this excess of desire. For Tolkien, myth is neither escapist nor merely aesthetic; it reflects fractured truths oriented toward a transcendent fullness, what he famously calls the “true harbour.” His invented languages and narratives thus function not as instruments of efficiency, but as bearers of meaning and, ultimately, orientation.

The paper concludes by arguing that Tolkien’s myth-making can be understood as a symptomatic response to an anthropological condition empirically diagnosed by Jung and metaphysically articulated by Aquinas centuries earlier; a restlessness born of the disproportion between human desire and finite reality. Might Tolkien also show us, alongside Jung, that the human person does indeed possess a natural desiderium for God after all?

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Mariana Debono is about to begin her doctoral research in philosophy, with a focus on philosophical anthropology, human flourishing, and the question of the human desire for God. Her work engages thinkers such as Aquinas, Augustine, Camus, Kierkegaard, William Desmond, and Carl Jung, with particular attention to the role of self-knowledge, symbol, and relationality in the human orientation toward transcendence. While not a specialist in Tolkien studies, her research engages J.R.R. Tolkien as a mythopoetic interlocutor whose reflections on language and sub-creation illuminate anthropological questions concerning desire, meaning, and identity. She is especially interested in the interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, psychology, and theology, and in how myth, ultimately, may be seen as a symptomatic expression of our deepest, most immortal longings.

6) The theological implications behind the Big and Small People – Martina Juričková

From the Hobbits' perspective, all the inhabitant of Middle-earth can be divided into two main groups: Big People — Men and Elves — and Small People — Hobbits and Dwarves. But while the Hobbits differentiate this based solely on height, Tolkien in his stories repeatedly plays with the subversion of the metaphorical theological meaning of these terms, whereby smallness refers to the humility and the state of being the last while bigness indicated boisterous pride and the state of being the first, in line with the Biblical proverb from Matthew's Evangelium (20:16). Consequently, in Middle-earth it is the hands of the Small people who turn the wheels

of the world when the Big people fail due to succumbing to their moral temptations. This paper analyses how the attributes "Big" and "Small" can connote both positive and negative moral qualities by analysing chosen characters from The Lord of the Rings. For example, in Hobbits their smallness can indicate both their down-to-earthiness, humility, and inambitiousness, as exemplified by Frodo and Sam, as well as their small-mindedness, pettiness, and ignorance of the outside world, like in other Shire-folk. In Men, their bigness can refer to their generosity, mercy, and self-suppression, as in Aragorn, or their pride, power greed, and belief in own superiority over anyone else, like in Denethor or Saruman. In turn, the humility and big deeds of the Small People often humble and even humiliate some of the Big People, while the bigness of the Big People can threaten but also elevate the Small People.

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Martina Juričková is a postdoctoral assistant at the Department of English and American studies at Constantine the Philosopher University at Nitra, where she teaches classes on

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7) Eä, El, Arda, and Varda: Tolkien's Gnostic Goddess – Giovanni Costabile

In Tolkien's mythology, Arda Marred represents the corruption inscribed in the very being of the world before its beginning, a concept already associated by scholars with Gnosticism and the notion of world creation as the evil work of the Demiurge, identifiable with Melkor, and whom the Gnostics identified with the Biblical God (Tekşen 2023; Fry 2015). However, Arda Unmarred represents the ultimate origin of the Demiurge, and so of the world, from the realm of light of pleroma that created his mother Sophia, the last emanation or aeon deriving from the Unknown Father who is the real God. As first suggested by Elaine Pagels in 1979, there is evidence that some of the Gnostics believed in the Supreme Goddess, identified with the Father as an androgynous being, or even standing above him as "the Mother of the Father" (from the Gnostic text *Thunder, Perfect Mind*), a concept also attested in the Hindu *Rig Veda* 10, Hymn 125, and in the Finnish *Kalevala* where the Supreme Being is the Air Maiden Ilmatar. In Tolkien's *Silmarillion*, the name Ilúvatar, meaning "All-Father", is evidently modelled on Finnish Ilmatar, thus supposed to mean "All-Mother". Eru creates the world by uttering the word "Eä". 'Ea' in Latin is the feminine personal pronoun, "She". The word creating the universe is thus the declaration of the feminine nature of both Divinity and Creation. Instead, the first word pronounced by the Elves upon their awakening is 'El', Quenya "Star", Hebrew "God". The first word spoken by God and the first word spoken by the Elves together mean "Star Goddess of Being". Tolkien indicates his belief in the Supreme Goddess and Creatrix identified with, or above, Eru himself, as further confirmed by the similarity between the name Arda and the name of the highest female deity, Varda.

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Italian into English and from English into Italian. Author of a 2025 article on the Hindu Goddess published in the Journal of Bengali Studies.

8 and 9) “Heavenly Tongues: The Music of Creation in Tolkien, Christian Mysticism, and the Sanskrit Tradition” – Prof. Charlò Camilleri and Prof. Michael Zammit

This study investigates the theology and mysticism of heavenly tongues, divine or primordial languages of creation, through a comparative reading of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Ainulindalë*, Christian mystical theology, and the Sanskrit doctrine of Śabda Brahman. In Tolkien’s cosmology, the world is sung into being by Ilúvatar and the Ainur, a vision of creation through music that parallels both the Johannine Logos theology (“In the beginning was the Word”) and the Vedic–Śaiva cosmology of sound (“Nāda ātmakam jagat”: the world is made of sound). The project will unfold in two complementary papers.

The first paper will focus on Christian traditions, examining how Tolkien’s theology of “sub-creation” echoes patristic and medieval notions of the Word as creative act, engaging writers such as Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Hildegard of Bingen, and Meister Eckhart, alongside Michel de Certeau’s reflections on mystical speech and the poetics of the unsayable. It will explore how Tolkien’s Music of the Ainur expresses a sacramental and liturgical imagination, where true language participates in divine order.

The second paper will develop the Sanskrit dimension, reading Tolkien’s cosmology in dialogue with the Māheśvarāṇī Sūtrāṇi, Bhartṛhari’s doctrine of Śabda Brahman, and the theory of the four levels of speech (vāk). It will argue that Tolkien’s mythopoesis reflects an ontology of sound akin to Śiva’s cosmic vibration, suggesting that Ilúvatar’s Music is a Western articulation of the same insight: that being itself is a mode of divine resonance.

Together, these two studies propose that Tolkien’s legendarium can be read as a cross-cultural theology of the Word, a vision in which Christian and Sanskrit mysticism converge around the idea that to speak truly is to participate in the music of creation.

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at the University of Malta and completed his doctorate in Sacred Theology, specialising in spirituality, at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. He also holds a postgraduate diploma in formation studies. Camilleri lectures in spiritual theology, consecrated life and gender studies, and strongly promotes interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. He served for a decade as Executive Director of the Carmelite Institute Malta and continues to contribute as a member of its Board of Directors. His research activity includes peer-reviewed academic publications, editorial work and projects on Carmelite spirituality, including the critical edition and translation of the works of Jean de Saint-Samson. He collaborates with the Carmelite Postulator's Office in Rome and serves as *Directeur des recherches* at the *Centre d'Études d'Histoire de la Spiritualité de Nantes*. He was recently appointed as member to the Council of the *Akkademja tal-Malti*.

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Michael Zammit, born in Valletta in 1954, pursued his studies in Philosophy at the University of Malta, earning a Bachelor's degree in 1976 and a Master's in 1993. His teaching journey began at various academic centers before he took up high school philosophy instruction in 1983. By 1988, he had joined the University of Malta's academic staff, contributing significantly to the creation of the "Systems of Knowledge" course and the advanced level matriculation exam in philosophy. Concurrently, he was an active member of the School of Practical Philosophy in Valletta. In 1989, Zammit founded the Philosophy Society within the University's Department of Philosophy. He lectured on diverse subjects, including Ancient Philosophy and Eastern and Western Comparative Philosophy, while also coordinating and administering "Systems of Knowledge" courses across Malta and Gozo. His philosophical engagement extended to radio, producing and presenting series such as *Platun*, *Philosophy Help-line*, and *Oħt il-Għerf?* on Campus FM. After teaching at Malta's Junior College, Zammit returned to the University of Malta in 2008 as a Senior Lecturer in the Departments of Philosophy and Theology. He teaches on topics including Plato, Plotinus, Marsilio Ficino, Far Eastern Philosophy, and Sanskrit Advaita Vedanta. His research delves into the use of poetic expression in philosophy and the analysis of Paninean Sanskrit grammar in relation to contemporary continental philosophical themes.
