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Sir Orfeo as the Source for the Medieval Romance Topoi of Abduction and Otherworld Rampant within The Hobbit’s Mirkwood

Andoni Cossio^{a*} ORCID: [0000-0003-2745-5104](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2745-5104)

^aDepartment of English, German and Translation and Interpretation, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

*Postal address:

c/ Paseo de la Universidad, 5
01006 Vitoria-Gasteiz
Álava, Spain

Email address:

andoni.cossio@ehu.eus

Andoni Cossio (UPV/EHU) is working on a PhD dissertation entitled *The Evolution of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Ecological Perspective through the Portrayal of Trees and Forests: From The Hobbit to The Lord of the Rings*. He is sponsored by the Pre-doctoral Funding (PRE_2017_1_0210 MOD.:A), financed by the Basque Government, and by the research group REWEST (IT-1026-16), funded by the Basque Government and the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). His publications focus on nature in Tolkien’s oeuvre and he has organized seven international conferences on the Inklings in Spain. ORCID: [0000-0003-2745-5104](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2745-5104), ehu.academia.edu/AndoniCossio.

***Sir Orfeo* as the Source for the Medieval Romance *Topoi* of Abduction and Otherworld Rampant within *The Hobbit*'s Mirkwood**

In view of Jason Fisher's (2011) principles for a rigorous study of J. R. R. Tolkien's sources, this paper aims to demonstrate that the relationship between *Sir Orfeo* (c.1330) and *The Hobbit* (1937) is of influence and not of mere similarity. Firstly, by showing that twenty-one years (1915-36) of devotion passed since Tolkien encountered *Sir Orfeo* in Oxford, till the finished typescript of *The Hobbit* was sent to the publisher Allen & Unwin. Secondly, by taking earlier source studies further (Anderson, Atherton, Bowers, Hillman, Honegger, Lee, Rateliff, Shippey, Solopova and Wickham-Crowley) and unravelling how the themes of abduction and otherworld, as taken from *Sir Orfeo*, are incorporated into Mirkwood. This analysis reveals important details on the way Tolkien borrowed material to craft his stories. He exploited the consistencies and contradictions in older sources to weave new seamless tales that cloak their legacy and achieve a new authorial purpose at the same time. With a practical example, the study explores more broadly the important discoveries source criticism yields about the influence of previous literature on the creative process of writing.

Keywords: *Sir Orfeo*; *The Hobbit*; source study; forests; medieval literature; Middle English; J. R. R. Tolkien

Introduction

In an auctioned and now privately-owned letter J. R. R. Tolkien writes: "no one of us can really invent or 'create' in a void, we can only reconstruct and perhaps impress a personal pattern on 'ancestral' material" (Sotheby's 297). Regardless of whether he consciously or unconsciously was referring to himself, Tolkien appears to be the epitome of this claim owing to his well-attested tendency to blend and adapt older works. Thus, it is always revealing to locate the sources from which he fed in order to weave his own stories, and one may not only learn to appreciate his fiction in a new light but also the original material. It also reveals much about Tolkien's process of composition when writing his novels, borrowing elements from innumerable sources that were afterwards integrated into seamless stories.

No wonder then, as Rebecca Merkelbach asserts, that these kinds of studies are in vogue at the moment in Tolkien criticism owing to the remaining number of hidden sources still undetected (57). Yet, it is not wise to join the emerging field of the study of Tolkien's sources without some reliable foundations. For that reason, I will employ Jason Fisher's fundamental principles for a rigorous study of Tolkien's sources (37-39), initially by certifying the access to the source (37), followed by a possible and reasonable account of the incorporation of the material into his fiction (39). It is necessary to demonstrate if the influence is chronologically viable as well by considering the publication dates and, more importantly, the time when the work was completed by the author.

Among the deeply influential medieval literature that Tolkien taught and studied, the pervasive prominence of M(iddle) E(nglish) works, greater than those in O(ld) E(nglish), are steadily being recognized (See Cossio, "Tolkien's" 3).

¹ There are many literary pieces which could fall under this category, but there is a clear example which remains understudied. *Sir Orfeo* (c. 1330), in its complete reconstructed version, is a 604-line Breton lay which belongs to the genre of medieval romance. It tells the story of how the king of Faërie² kidnaps Heurodis, the wife of Sir Orfeo, and Orfeo's adventure to recover his beloved and the kingdom he forsakes to find her. The earliest discovered version of *Sir Orfeo* is that contained in the Auchinleck MS (c. 1330), preserved in the National Library of Scotland. *Sir Orfeo* underwent such intensive scrutiny and appears to have left a deep imprint on Tolkien's imagination which therefore led to the inclusion of some reworked elements of this poem in *The Hobbit* (1937).

This idea is initially proposed by Tom Shippey, who ventures to explore the possible influences of *Sir Orfeo* in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Namely on how the Faërie hunting party in *Sir Orfeo* inspired the inclusion of the hunting Elves in Mirkwood (Shippey, *Road* 73), for which they were the main source of influence (71), a belief also held by Douglas A.

Anderson (199) and John D. Rateliff (398). Shippey suggests how the bond between the Elves, the forest and the elf-king's persona may be another borrowing from *Sir Orfeo* (Road 73). All these views are shared as well by Mark Atherton (213), Stuart D. Lee and Elizabeth Solopova (202) and John M. Bowers (55) who postulate that the Faërie in *Sir Orfeo* provided certain elements, episodes and representations for *The Hobbit*. Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley's is a more conservative analysis, which explores how *Sir Orfeo*, as a representative instance of Faërian drama, shaped "On Fairy-Stories" (1947, hereinafter "OFS")³ and the fiction he published afterwards (1-29).⁴ I label Wickham-Crowley's study as conservative because the influence of *Sir Orfeo* can be more solidly proven than in works published after 1944, since the dates of completion of "OFS" and later works are posterior to Tolkien's edition and translation of the poem that will be discussed below. However, Thomas Hillman clearly demonstrates how *Sir Orfeo* did influence *The Hobbit*, and skillfully pinpoints the manner in which Tolkien reworked some of the original material to shape the traits of the different Elves, not only in this earlier work, but also in later ones of his mythology (33-38).

Tolkien's Strong Connection with *Sir Orfeo*

Thomas Honegger suggest the possibility of Tolkien being exposed to *Sir Orfeo* while a student in Oxford (127), which is confirmed by Anderson: "Tolkien had a very long association with the poem. He studied 'Sir Orfeo' as an undergraduate at Oxford, for it was a specified topic of his degree course and was also part of his final public examinations in the summer of 1915" (199; Ryan, *Shaping* 21). *A Middle English Vocabulary* (1922, hereinafter *MEV*, presumably commenced in the summer/autumn of 1919 [Scull and Hammond, *Chronology* 116]) testifies to Tolkien's first recorded professional academic contact with *Sir Orfeo*. In *MEV*, compiled to be used in conjunction with Kenneth Sisam's *Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose* (1921), Tolkien glossed the complete *Sir Orfeo*.⁵ *MEV* makes evident

the painstaking attention Tolkien paid to *Sir Orfeo*, which must have led to a detailed knowledge of the poem.⁶ Although previously unnoted, it is also likely that Tolkien lectured on the work during his years at the University of Leeds (1920-25) as part of the OE and ME Texts course.⁷ This is suggested by *The University of Leeds Calendar* which shows that Albert Cook's *Literary Middle English Reader* (1915), containing *Sir Orfeo*, was a compulsory reading for students of English Language and Literature for their Final Examination (*Calendar 1920-1921* 147; *Calendar 1921-1922* 153). For the academic year 1923-24 Cook's reader had been replaced by Sisam's and *Sir Orfeo* was among those texts especially recommended for study (*Calendar 1923-1924* 94). This led to *Sir Orfeo*'s appearance in the Final English Language and Literature Examination Summer papers in 1924. Question 12 of the paper *Old & Middle English Texts A* reads: "Compare *Sir Orfeo* and *Havelock the Dane* as types of Middle English romance" (U of Leeds 7). It is included as well in the paper *Middle English Texts (B)* question 12: "Write an appreciation of the literary art of ONE of the following: *Sir Orfeo*, *The Lay of Havelock*, *The Pearl*, the lyrics of Harleian MS.2253, the *Ancren Riwle*" (unpaginated).

A few years after leaving Leeds, Tolkien began writing *The Hobbit*. As Catherine McIlwaine reasonably proves, *The Hobbit* started to be composed no later than 1929 (290), may have been completed by January 1933 (Rateliff xxii),⁸ and its finished typescript was sent to the publisher Allen & Unwin on 3 October 1936 (Tolkien, *Letters* 14). Humphrey Carpenter's account of an abandoned unfinished narrative concluding with Smaug being slain by 1932 and not completed until right before the work was submitted to the publisher in 1936 is contested by Rateliff, who suggests that the story was finished by 1933 (xviii-xx). Although the 1933-1936 story almost solely differs from the finished typescript in the particulars and wording, the Mirkwood episode was the single one to undergo important alterations (335). This extends the influence *Sir Orfeo* exerted until 1936.⁹

From 1925 until 1945 Tolkien stopped teaching ME literature, and he became the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon, but the earlier influence must have remained. As the *Oxford University Gazette* LVI-LXVII (1925-37) attests, Tolkien at the time only lectured on Germanic languages and the language and literature of OE, Old Norse, and, less frequently, Gothic.¹⁰ During that same time frame, the *Examination Statutes* certify that English Language and Literature students were examined on *Sir Orfeo*, as Sisam's *Fourteenth Century Verse & Prose* was labelled as "special study" (*Statutes 1924-1925* 135). More relevant is the shift that took place in 1932, and under "Candidates will be expected to have made a detailed study of the following" (*Statutes 1932-1933* 145) in the "Middle English Texts" section, *Sir Orfeo* appears for the first time, together with a more varied range of texts. This change was maintained from 1932 till the publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937.¹¹ As a member of the English Faculty Board, Tolkien was possibly behind this particular change in the syllabus among many others debated during Faculty meetings in 1931 (see Scull and Hammond *Reader's Guide, Part II* 954-55). The solidest proof of his intervention is "The Oxford English School" article Tolkien published in 1930 (778-82), which shows he was deeply involved in the discussions regarding the compulsory reading list, with direct allusions to ME literature (779-80). In fact, his concerns did make a difference, as John S. Ryan states: "the changes to the English School proposed by Tolkien in his 1930 manifesto were carried out in 1932"¹² ("Lecturing" 50) and therefore first applied to examinations in 1933.

From January 1943 to March 1944, Tolkien was the coordinator and teaching staff of a study program at the Oxford English School for the Royal Navy and Air Force Cadets. For one of the courses, he designed an attributable edition of *Sir Orfeo* printed in very small numbers later in 1944 (Hammond and Anderson 299-300; Scull and Hammond, *Reader's Guide, Part II* 968-69, 1204). The authorship is decisively proven by Carl F. Hostetter by

drawing the existing parallels between the accompanying notes, punctuation and arrangement choices of the edition and the posthumously published translation of *Sir Orfeo*,¹³ and by identifying the points where both texts deviate correspondingly from the Auchinleck MS and MS Harley 3810 [early 15th century], which provides the missing lines in the Auchinleck for Tolkien's edition and translation ("Sir" 85-87).¹⁴ However, the time devoted to the edition and translation cannot be considered influential in the writing of *The Hobbit* owing to the dates' mismatch. Even if the start date for the translation is unknown, its demonstrable relationship to the edition could only mean it was begun at the earliest in 1943, as the edition constituted the source text.

Therefore, in spite of the aforementioned proposed syllabus changes, a tangible gap can be identified from 1925, the last time Tolkien was professionally involved with *Sir Orfeo*, until the first draft of *The Hobbit* was written (c. 1929-36). But the vast time-consuming attention paid to *Sir Orfeo* before this hiatus is likely to have influenced Tolkien's later works. In fact, *The Lay of Aotrou & Itroun* (1945), first version finished by 23 September 1930 (Christopher Tolkien, "Note" xi), confirms his continued interest, during and after the writing of *The Hobbit*, in the Breton lay genre, to which *Sir Orfeo* belongs.¹⁵

Moreover, Tolkien was enthralled by the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice on which the author of *Sir Orfeo* based his poem and described his own tale of *Beren and Lúthien* (2017)¹⁶ as "a kind of Orpheus-legend in reverse, but one of Pity not of Inexorability" (*Letters* 193). Hillman posits that *Sir Orfeo* transforms the original material of that myth in a way Tolkien may have found appealing (38). Firstly, by the use of the enchanted realm of the king of Faërie instead of the land of the dead, terminating the poem, unlike in the myth, with Orfeo's triumph and not defeat (38). Secondly, by the poem's connection with the English past reflected in the setting (Winchester) and the *topos* of banishment shared with the OE elegies (38). Additionally, in both *Sir Orfeo* and *The Hobbit*, the forest is a crucial setting for the

development of the plot.¹⁷ Solopova also highlights that the relationship of the Faërie of *Sir Orfeo* with trees/woods is comparable to the bond of the Elves of *The Hobbit* with these life forms/ecosystems (238). Tolkien had a well-known passion for trees and therefore forests, ubiquitous in his works, and being so keen on reshaping material from the past why not choose to incorporate a work set in part in a favorite location of his?

Therefore, considering the early and intensive academic influence, his love for Breton lays and his timely attempt to write a work within that genre, appreciation of the original myth and of its adaptation in *Sir Orfeo*, and the appeal of forests for Tolkien, I consider *Sir Orfeo*, among all the other medieval romances, particularly influential in the Mirkwood episode of *The Hobbit*. In order to locate the features and explain their integration into *The Hobbit*, Sisam's ME source text¹⁸ will be complemented by Tolkien's translation for the lines, which, though a later production, reflects his careful understanding of the work.¹⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the translations of individual or clusters of words are my own, but always with Tolkien's interpretation in mind. Although the first edition may be thought to be closer to the original influence, I will be using a modern edition of *The Hobbit*, because the episode of Mirkwood has barely changed from that first published in 1937. Hopefully, this study will prove once again how Tolkien the scholar and the writer are not divisible, but rather a single mind which knew how to make the most of its own expertise.

The Traces of the Forest of Faërie in *The Hobbit's* Mirkwood

As Shippey explains, "Most of *The Hobbit* suggests strongly that Tolkien did not work from ideas, but from words, names, consistencies and contradictions" (*Road* 105). Tolkien's process of creation was certainly complex and unorthodox, and a lot has been published about the inception of his stories being words and names, but I am more interested in looking at consistencies and contradictions in this paper. However, Tolkien did not simply

incorporate consistent elements he liked from other works or addressed his displeasures in a straightforward manner. *The Hobbit* harbors a great deal of what Harold Bloom names “creative correction” (30), which entails pervasive cloaking and re-interpretation rather than direct correspondence, making source research laborious. Hillman provides a very good example when he declares that Tolkien did not borrow unaltered the Faërie of *Sir Orfeo* and placed them in Middle-earth under the name of Elves (41). Tolkien never operated in such a way, and he explicitly addressed the issue of origins in “OFS” (38-49), where the study of sources and their unlikely discovery is regarded as not so revealing and fascinating as the scholarship on the tale itself (39-40). That is why the analysis of consistencies and contradictions would constitute an acceptable object of study for Tolkien, since he believed the impact of the elements that compose a story on its tale is more worthy of attention than encyclopedic knowledge about the constituents (40n1).

When looking at the inspiration he drew from *Sir Orfeo* some caution is necessary. We are looking at two works six-hundred years apart, the oldest being a Breton lay with a single-strand narrative only 604-verses-long. The most recent is a fantasy novel of the twentieth century written after fairy tradition was fully-fledged, which in great part displeased Tolkien (“OFS” 29-30). Moreover, what in *Sir Orfeo* is the central action, namely the abduction of Heurodis followed by Sir Orfeo’s relinquishment of their kingdom to later rescue her from the otherworld, it is a side-story which complicates the plot in *The Hobbit*. It must also be considered that the conscious or subconscious influence on the creative powers entails that the materials are in many cases rescued from memory, rather than from the original work, further transforming the source. Therefore, considering all the above, the borrowed material is some cases quite distant from the original. This is why I aim to study themes or *topoi*, since abstract ideas tend to be better preserved in their generalities than specific instances in their details.

About *Sir Orfeo*, Corinne J. Saunders writes that the *topoi* of abduction, hunt, otherworld²⁰ and madness are bound together in its narrative (133). A quick mental survey of the Mirkwood episode in *The Hobbit* will tick most of the boxes. Among those, I will not discuss the hunt, as the aforementioned scholars in the introductory section have thoroughly covered it. Regarding madness, I disagree with Saunders and I do not consider it to be prominent at all. It is rather an isolated comment of Heurodis' reaction after her abduction is announced "And was reuey<se>d out of hir witt"²¹ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 16; l. 82)", followed by what some may catalogue as a brief 'mad' reaction (16; ll. 78-96). However, I believe that instead of using the adjective mad, distress is a better choice, which is understandable if one considers she is about to lose every single part of her full life, forcefully, with no possible opposition. The same can be said about Sir Orfeo. His 'mad' decision of forsaking his kingdom seems rational after understanding his court life has lost all meaning without Heurodis. More so if one recalls some of the initial lines describing the queen (15; ll. 51-56). Her "fairnese" 'beauty' (15; l. 56) is beyond measure, as none can match it (15; l. 53), and she is full of "godenisse" 'goodness' and "loue" 'love' (15; l. 55). Thus, after Sir Orfeo's loss of the perfect irreplaceable consort, he finds no other 'therapy' to alleviate his loss than his self-imposed banishment to the forest, which is not a 'mad' attempt to search for his lady, though it turns out to be the appropriate decision.

As the two consecutive entries in Tolkien's *MEV* for the words "Wod(e), n. wood(land)" ("Wod(e)" unpaginated) and "Wode, Woode (XVI), adj. mad" ("Wode" unpaginated) show, he must have been as well-aware of the implications of the homograph as the author of *Sir Orfeo* was. However, Tolkien also knew that the OE words from which they stem are different: *wudu* for 'wood' and *wōd* for 'mad.' Thus, Tolkien does not seem to extrapolate this point any further to *The Hobbit* from *Sir Orfeo*, because I believe he did not consider madness to play a central role in the plot of the latter. Nor is there any word play or

contrast intended as the two words occur more than 120 lines apart in different settings and contexts.²² The *topos* of banishment that may have pleased Tolkien and that *Sir Orfeo* shares with the OE elegies (Hillman 38) imposed by blindly-ruling fate (OE *wyrd*), seems a more plausible explanation of how Tolkien understood Sir Orfeo's decision. Madness in the forest is also hard to find in Tolkien's later works. It is briefly portrayed in the story of Túrin Turambar in the posthumous *Silmarillion* (1977), and in the wooded area surrounding the long oval lake Nen Hithoel in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55, hereinafter *LotR*), where Boromir suddenly goes mad and attacks Frodo (399-400). Though after close scrutiny, it must be acknowledged that the insanity in *LotR* is caused by the One Ring, a totally external element to the forest.

With regard to the other two themes identified by Saunders, abduction and otherworld I intend to explain their incorporation into Mirkwood in *The Hobbit*. One may think Tolkien was influenced by other works of medieval romance, but Honegger provides a sound reason for selecting *Sir Orfeo* over others from this blurry genre, since he believes Tolkien's tenets of fantasy employed in *The Hobbit* are better encapsulated in this ME work (119). What is more, besides the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1400), no other romance has been so thoroughly studied by Tolkien. My intention is to demonstrate that Tolkien was consciously following *Sir Orfeo*, rather than being subliminally influenced broadly by medieval romances.

Abduction

While abduction is a setback in both *Sir Orfeo* and *The Hobbit* for the protagonists, it is the ultimate driving force that allows the story to move forward in an interesting direction. Abduction is the mechanism that gives way to the otherwise impossible interaction with the evasive Faërie and Elves, fittingly set in the forest. This is supported by Saunders' words:

“The forest, as the place of supernatural encounter and the locus of sudden attack, appears to be the logical setting for the otherworldly abduction” (134).

Hillman believes that the abduction scene has a different tone in *The Hobbit*, as the traces of ruthless kidnapping are further transformed, and the dwarves are not threatened with the possibility of death (42). He argues that the response on behalf of the Elves is an act of self-defense, and that there are worse threats in Mirkwood such as the spiders (42-43). Tolkien seems to have, overall, softened the tone and made the capture more humane and justified, describing the Elves as “Good People” (*The Hobbit* 157) and “reasonably well-behaved” (158).²³ This starkly contrasts with the violent threats issued by the despotic king of Faërie (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 19; ll. 167-74), the opposite of Sir Orfeo’s benign kingship. Shippey asserts that the Elves are modelled chiefly after the Faërie (*Road* 71) but the disparities that are observable above and will be commented below show Tolkien’s process of altering the source, which will ultimately continue and lead to dissimilar beings in *LotR*.

However, despite this difference, other similarities remain striking. The onset of abduction is manifested through a dream which turns, within a brief time span, into reality in both narratives.²⁴ In *Sir Orfeo* it happens when Lady Heurodis dozes under an *ympe-tre* ‘grafted tree’²⁵ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 16; ll. 69-72) and in *The Hobbit* when Bombur falls into the enchanted stream²⁶ which puts him to sleep (*The Hobbit* 137). Both Heurodis and Bombur are able to witness their future by means of these dreams but only after the two of them undergo a long trance phase that does not end until Heurodis is able to speak calmly again and Bombur awakes (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 17-19; ll. 117-74; *The Hobbit* 140-42). These dreams are the portals that allow the reader to peep into the world of Faërie for the first time (Hillman 46) in retrospect, as in both cases the action is not directly recounted by the poet or narrator but reported by the dreamers.

Wickham-Crowley explains how Tolkien held the assumption that enchantment is not produced by a dream but rather by factual events, which *Sir Orfeo* epitomizes by not containing traces of oneiric experiences (9-10). While this is true and I agree with Wickham-Crowley in that the actual abduction of Heurodis, and the following chase and liberation, are real and not dreams (10), I also agree with Rateliff that a mere oneiric experience is the harbinger of abduction (398). When Heurodis is taken away, she suddenly disappears, but in the initial dreaming scene, there are two maids by her side who would have noticed her abduction, had she left the bower of the tree (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 16; ll. 69-77). The ‘grafted tree’ serves as a medium for the king of Faërie to enter Lady Heurodis’ mind, a tool to exercise his magic and a meeting point under which she later disappears.²⁷ The enchanted stream in *The Hobbit* is also a way to access Bombur’s psyche, though it is unclear if the stream has powers of its own, as it does not seem controlled by the Elvenking of Mirkwood.²⁸ Tolkien, at any rate, did not create an Elvenking with such unlimited power as that displayed by the king of Faërie.

Now, there is a point where both narratives diverge and Tolkien follows a different path. Heurodis’ dream clearly predicts the abduction (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 18-19; ll. 165-68), whereas Bombur’s, as it will later be seen, acts as a trigger for being captured as the information is not complete. In Bombur’s case the fact that the dream foreshadows later events is confirmed by the narrator (*Hobbit* 142), but as stressed before it does not point towards the consequences (141). In any case, these premonitions warn the reader of the presence of the Faërie and Elves in both narratives respectively, introducing them into the plot.

In the two cases the dreams are taken seriously, which leads one to think that their foreshadowing power is understood. In the case of *Sir Orfeo* this is seen by the heavy measures he takes in an attempt to defend his wife: “Amorwe þe vndertide is come, / And

Orfeo haþ his armes ynome, / and wele ten hundred kniztes wiþ him / Ich y-armed stout and grim”²⁹ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 19; ll. 181-84). In *The Hobbit*, Bombur’s dream is not believed at first, but this is explained by the dwarves’ annoyance at having to carry him while he sleeps (*The Hobbit* 141). However, despite having been warned not to leave the path: “In the end, in spite of warnings, hunger decided them, because Bombur kept on describing all the good things that were being eaten, according to his dream, in the woodland feast; so they all left the path and plunged into the forest together” (142). Although hunger seems to justify the decision, yet they were hungry before and still reluctant to approach, it is the dream taken for a premonition which initiates movement.

The method to capture those abducted allows parallels. Heurodis suddenly disappears under the grafted tree: “þe quen was oway ytuizt, / Wiþ fairi forþ ynome; / Men wist neuer wher sche was bicomē” (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 19; ll. 192-94). This is translated by Tolkien as “the queen was sudden snatched away; / by magic was she from them caught, / and none knew wither she was brought” (*Sir Orfeo*, 138; ll. 192-94). *Fairi* is translated as ‘magic,’ the same word Tolkien chose for glossing the term in *MEV* (“Fairi” unpaginated). *Fairi* is predominantly glossed as ‘enchantment’ by other editors, though it constitutes an interchangeable synonym in this specific context. Tolkien uses those two terms the third time Thorin steps into the clearing full feasting Elves “he fell like a stone enchanted . . . Then the Wood-elves had come to him, and bound him, and carried him away . . . their magic was strong” (*The Hobbit* 156). All this is explained afterwards and thus readers are first under the impression that Thorin³⁰ has vanished as suddenly as Heurodis does. Magic and not force seems in both cases the procedure for capture.

Afterwards, Bilbo and the dwarves are left alone, much like Sir Orfeo, and in both cases their struggle to stay alive is severe: “Bilbo and the dwarves made one last despairing effort to find a way out before they died of hunger and thirst” (159). Bilbo and the dwarves

find no source to replenish their scanty water and food supplies³¹ and the only prey they manage to hunt is an inedible squirrel (133-34). Though Orfeo fares slightly better, his low calory and innutritious diet, consisting of fruits and berries of lesser value in summer, and roots, grasses/herbs and rinds/husks in winter (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 21; ll. 257-60), results in Orfeo's body manifesting physical signs of the penury and hardships: "Al his bodi was oway duine / For missays, and al tochine" (21; ll. 261-62).³² Then, in Bilbo and the dwarves' case, there is a further abduction as the remaining dwarves are captured, which is welcomed "they were actually glad to be captured" (*The Hobbit* 159) owing to their desperate situation.

It is very important to understand that although in both narratives the scene of abduction enables the furthering of the plot, the purpose is totally different. In *Sir Orfeo* it gets the story started, in *The Hobbit* it emerges as a dire necessity for consistency's sake. Bilbo and the dwarves are desperate to find "a way out before they died of hunger and thirst" (*The Hobbit* 159), and through capture, the characters are allowed to muster back their strength and find an escape route from the forest. On top of all this, Tolkien uses this strand to allow Bilbo to grow and to prove his worth for the first time, as it will be discussed in the next section. However, the established parallels demonstrate that Tolkien adapted certain consistencies and reworked the elements he believed less successful. The result is a version of abduction transformed to suit his story and taste with a similar outcome/atmosphere.

Otherworld

According to Saunders the forest is the threshold of the otherworld as well as a meeting point for humans and fairies (133). In *Sir Orfeo*'s forest and in the episode of Mirkwood in *The Hobbit*, the otherworld plays a major role in enhancing the content of the narrative. Under the eaves of both forests the most astonishing events take place, but it is of greater interest to consider how Tolkien seems to have based his narrative's structure on that of *Sir Orfeo*. An

interesting parallel is the existence of two distinct otherworlds in each work, different from each other though dominated by a similar atmosphere. The borderline of the first otherworld is the forest itself both in *Sir Orfeo* and *The Hobbit*, though in the latter the boundary is more clearly marked by the crossing of the enchanted stream. The second border is crossed via an underground passage that leads to a medieval court experience in the midst of those forest. However, otherworldly traits beyond this boundary make the protagonists and readers/audience aware that the societies and settings where they linger briefly, though familiar, are strikingly uncanny and must be abandoned at first chance.

Verlyn Flieger proposes that the eaves of Mirkwood work as a transitional space which subsequently leads to an absolute change of environment, in her own words “from one world to another” (38). In the first of these two otherworlds, marvelous events take place, such as the presence of hunting parties that vanish (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 22; ll. 281-88; *The Hobbit* 137) and mysterious revelers richly dressed who dance along (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 22; ll. 299-302; *The Hobbit* 144-45). This last passage in *The Hobbit* seems to correspond to the original in *Sir Orfeo*, leaving some room for additions and changes: compare “In queynt atire, gisely / Queynt pas and softly”³³ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 22; ll. 299-300) with “Their gleaming hair was twined with flowers; green and white gems glinted on their collars and their belts” (*The Hobbit* 144), and “Tabours and trunpes zede hem bi, / And al maner menstraci”³⁴ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 23; ll. 301-02) with “some were harping and many were singing . . . Loud and clear and fair were those songs” (*The Hobbit* 144-45). I do not wish to suggest that Tolkien had the exact original lines in mind when writing this part, but there are definite strong echoes. He seems to have developed some points left unexplained in the source such as *queynt* ‘skillfully’ and *gisely* ‘elegant,’ donning the Elves with graceful and stylish looks. Tolkien also could have chosen the harp, *Sir Orfeo*’s favorite and that most appreciated at his court

(Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 15; ll. 33-36), as the instrument of choice for the performance, as *tabours* and *trunpes* may not have fitted the more sophisticated Elves.³⁵

As Hillman hints, some time passes in *Sir Orfeo* and *The Hobbit* between accessing the forest and the initial contact with the Faërie (45), but whereas Sir Orfeo sees them clearly, Mirkwood Elves avoid being seen (46). Moreover, the ten-hundred knight army ready for battle that Sir Orfeo suddenly spots (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 22; ll. 289-96) offers no parallel in Mirkwood.³⁶ Vice versa, the same thing happens with the rather long interlude of the spiders in *The Hobbit* (145-54) which forces Bilbo to evolve: “Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr Baggins” (146), and after freeing his companions from the whole spider colony: “Bilbo began to feel there really was something of a bold adventurer about himself after all” (155). Instead, Sir Orfeo remains a flat character all along, his change is more connected to material and spiritual loss than psychological change, a point to which I aim to return.

The first otherworld has been accessed in both stories by now with an occasional spotting, or aural perception, of the Faërie and Elves respectively. Yet, in order to access the next otherworld, some changes must be overcome by both Bilbo and Sir Orfeo. In both cases, before the further otherworld can be entered, the protagonists have to undergo a process of absolute loss, including their social standing, that will be recovered at the very end. Sir Orfeo loses his happiness, domains, people, comforts and good looks (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 21; ll. 239-66),³⁷ and of course his wife. Bilbo had to leave his worldly possessions, community and comforts behind as well, which he greatly misses during the Mirkwood episode, especially his hobbit-hole (*The Hobbit* 145, 163). Bilbo’s loss is complete when he is separated from his companions. Undergoing the same process as Sir Orfeo, he is disoriented about what to do next: “indeed he did not know where in the world to go without them,” and falls into a phase

of inaction (161). Yet this loss forces him to evolve and begin to take active measures in his adventure as the stagnant Sir Orfeo does after more than ten years.

Once the loss has occurred, the intrusion into the second otherworld occurs in different contexts but in similar episodes. In *Sir Orfeo* a hunting scene, a recurring motif in romance (Saunders 139), of a group of sixty ladies on horseback with falcons makes Orfeo find Heurodis (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 23; ll. 303-22), though “Ȝern he beheld hir, and sche him eke, / Ac noiþer to oþer a word no speke” (23; ll. 323-24).³⁸ Then a stealthy chase follows, which takes Sir Orfeo, unnoticed, to the second otherworld (24; ll. 343-51), as happens with Bilbo, who slips the ring onto his finger when his companions are captured and follows them into the Elvenking’s halls unseen (*The Hobbit* 159-60). As the ladies’ falcons seize other birds so do the Elves capture the dwarves, but this hunt yields no slain as the prisoners are kept alive. The most important inference from these scenes is that both Orfeo and Bilbo, in contrast with the abducted characters, are the only ones to enter the second otherworld willingly.

Saunders points out that the ultimate change occurs when Sir Orfeo crosses a cave and finds himself in different surroundings, which contrasts with the forest (Saunders 140-41; cf. Whitaker 27). The entrance to the Elvenking’s halls in *The Hobbit* is also labelled a “cave” (*The Hobbit* 157, 160), and when the threshold of its “huge doors of stone” (157) is crossed, the setting equally changes into a distinct environment unlike Mirkwood. Rateliff believes that the Elvenking’s halls are an element taken from fairy-lore because it resembles the folklore fairy-mound in all its characteristics (325, 403-04). According to Dimitra Fimi, the Elvenking’s halls are well-integrated into the landscape (46). Rateliff’s comparison of the halls with a fairy-mound relay on a similar premise, Tolkien’s drawings and an overall comparable appearance conveyed in the textual descriptions: “at the far end were gates before the mouth of a huge cave that ran into the side of a steep slope covered with trees” (*The*

Hobbit 160). However, Tolkien's portrayal seems to be sourced from *Sir Orfeo*, a work of an older origin belonging to the tradition of romance where the entrance to a Celtic otherworld and not fairyland is sometimes located inside a hollow hill (Whitaker 28), something Rateliff is aware of (403). The Elvenking's halls entrance has the appearance of a mound, but a quick look at Tolkien's drawing *The Elvenking's Gate* (Hammond and Scull 128; fig. 121), included in all editions of *The Hobbit*, proves that the architecture of the place is of great complexity to be compared to a folklore fairy-mound.

³⁹ One must not neglect Legolas' comment either that the design of this abode is so owing to the contemporary circumstances: "The people of the woods did not delve in the ground like Dwarves, nor build strong places of stone before the Shadow came" (*LotR* 341). Sauron did not exist as such in *The Hobbit*, yet the Necromancer already lingered on Tolkien's mind at the time of writing it.

Moreover, Saunders defines the Faërie castle in *Sir Orfeo* as a "city-court,"⁴⁰ and remarks the luxuries, complexity and visual appeal of the architecture (141), characteristics absent in the folklore fairy-mound. In contrast, these lovely features are indeed found in the Elvenking's halls: "In a great hall with pillars hewn out of the living stone sat the Elvenking on a chair of carven wood. On his head was a crown of berries and red leaves, for the autumn was come again. In the spring he wore a crown of woodland flowers. In his hand he held a carven staff of oak" (*The Hobbit* 160). This portrayal of sophistication is comparable to what Sir Orfeo observes: "He went into þe kinges halle. / Þan seiþe he þer a semly siþt, / A tabernacle blisseful and briþt, / Þerin her maister king sete, / And her quen fair and swete. / Her crounes, her cloþes, schine so briþt,⁴¹ / Þat vnneþe biholde he hem miþt"⁴² (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 26, ll. 410-16). The brightness which emanates from the Faërie and their possessions, a characteristic often highlighted (Rateliff 402), seems in principle absent in Tolkien's description. Yet if one remembers Mirkwood Elves, the "green and white gems glinted on

their collars and their belts” (*The Hobbit* 144), being possible to consider that Tolkien avoids repetition in this case. Nevertheless, the Elvenking seems more modest, and this shall be expanded on below.

Wickham-Crowley posits that the world in which Sir Orfeo and Heurodis are immersed has been subcreated by the king of Faërie (8). Together with the Elvenking’s domains, both territories are ruled and absolutely controlled by their respective monarchs, who take for granted the impenetrability of their realms. The king of Faërie is baffled, as Sir Orfeo is the first to enter his kingdom without leave “Y no fond neuer so folehardi man / Ðat hider to ous durst wende, / Bot þat ichim wald ofsende”⁴³ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 26; ll. 426-28). This point poses a little inconsistency: why was Sir Orfeo the first to enter? Do others fear accessing? Are they incapable? The Elvenking is less lenient in this matter: “There is no escape from my magic doors for those who are once brought inside” (*The Hobbit* 160). Tolkien chose to resolve this issue to avoid leaving the reasons unexplained as in the original.⁴⁴

Each cave leads the heroes to different surroundings, in *Sir Orfeo* to some open ground and in *The Hobbit* to an underground building, but in both cases when the domains of each kings are presented, the magnificent dwellings are at the very center of the descriptions:

Amidde þe lond a castel he siȝe,
 Riche and real, and wonder heize.
 Al þe vtmast wal
 Was clere and schine as cristal;
 An hundred tours þer were about,
 Degiselich, and bataild stout;
 Þe butras com out of þe diche,
 Of rede gold y-arched riche;

De voursour was anow<rn>ed al

Of ich maner diuers animal.⁴⁵

Wipin þer wer wide wones

Al of precious stones.⁴⁶ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 24; ll. 355-66)

In a great cave some miles within the edge of Mirkwood on its eastern side there lived at this time their greatest king. Before his huge doors of stone a river ran out of the heights of the forest and flowed on and out into the marshes at the feet of the high wooded lands . . . The king's cave was his palace, and the strong place of his treasure, and the fortress of his people against their enemies. (*The Hobbit* 157)

It is interesting that to the line “De voursour was anow<rn>ed al” (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 24; l. 363), Tolkien adds “carven” (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 142; l. 363), which parallels the idea he had for the Elvenking's halls: “a great hall with pillars hewn out of the living stone” (*The Hobbit* 160). Both are complex structures, with tactical defensive features such as the *diche* ‘moat’ (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 24; l. 361) or river (*The Hobbit* 157), the wall and embattled towers (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 24; ll. 357-60) matched by a “fortress of his people against their enemies” (*The Hobbit* 157). While the original must have provided some characterization, Tolkien seems to have toned down the luxuries, which is not left unjustified: “though his [the Elvenking's] hoard was rich, he was eager for more, since he had not yet as great a treasure as other elf-lords of old” (157). This change becomes mandatory so as to preserve Middle-earth's inner consistency, but also because the reckless display of wealth by the king of Faërie in *Sir Orfeo* seems highly inappropriate behavior for the Elves, even in their early stages of development recorded in *The Hobbit*.

It must be stressed that the second otherworld plays a different function in each story. Whereas in *Sir Orfeo* it is the place where a quick rescue plan is improvised with a rapid successful outcome, in *The Hobbit* the process is quite laborious and complex, with

occasional returns to the first otherworld. Bilbo undergoes the same process of debasement to stay alive as the one Sir Orfeo endures in the first otherworld: “He was hungry too outside, for he was no hunter; but inside the caves he could pick up a living of some sort by stealing food from store or table when no one was at hand” (*The Hobbit* 161-63). However, unlike Bilbo, Orfeo does not depend on civilization to survive and even though he does not hunt either, he clings to life by scavenging any food he is able to find: “In somer he liueþ bi wild frut / And berien bot gode lite; / In winter may he noþing finde / Bot rote, gras, and þe rinde” (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 21; ll. 257-60).⁴⁷ In opposition to Sir Orfeo, Bilbo never breaks away from civilization and remains dependent throughout, though both suffer privations unknown to them in their former lives, resulting in either theft or desperate foraging. Tolkien softened the tone as well, as he does with the abduction performed by the Elves and their cruelty. While Sir Orfeo suffers severe physical deterioration: “Al his bodi was oway duine / For missays, and al tochine. / Lord! who may telle þe sore / Þis king suffered ten zere and more?”⁴⁸ (21; ll. 261-64), Bilbo’s sufferings are not so great nor prolonged, and do not leave behind any physical signs of them: “it was a weary long time⁴⁹ that he lived in that place all alone, and always in hiding, never daring to take off his ring, hardly daring to sleep, even tucked away in the darkest and remotest corners he could find” (*The Hobbit* 161) and “[he] was left to wander miserably in the forest, terrified of losing himself” (163).⁵⁰

Lastly, as Saunders explains “Only trickery can conquer the fatal games of the faery” (141) referring to Sir Orfeo’s victory, which is indeed the only way Bilbo can succeed, since escaping from the Faërie otherworld is a daunting task. Negotiations are out of the question; the dwarves do not wish to see their share of the treasure diminished by the Elvenking’s greed (*The Hobbit* 164). As Honegger explains: “The pivotal quality that enables Orfeo to gain back his wife is not a heroic one—military might seems to be useless against the power of Faërie. It is the enchanting power of his music that conquers all” (123). It is important here

to stress the comparison between Sir Orfeo's harp and Bilbo's ring, as these arguably magic items,⁵¹ external to the respective otherworlds, are the devices that allow a successful escape. Despite their magical nature, both objects depend on the abilities of the bearers to guarantee success; the harp requires Sir Orfeo's musical talent as much as the ring necessitates Bilbo's reluctant burglary prowess. Since the ring does not hide others but Bilbo himself and its power is limited to concealment, it is ultimately his sly plan and theft that gets them out of the Elvenking's halls. Additional proof that Tolkien is drawing material from *Sir Orfeo* is provided by Hillman, who suggests a plausible reverse borrowing: "One could also say that Bilbo's invisible rescue of the Dwarves from the dungeons of Mirkwood turns what we see in *Sir Orfeo* on its head: Bilbo snatches the (nameless) Elvenking's prisoners away by enchantment just as the (nameless) fairy king had stolen Heurodis" (49), though Tolkien may name those processes 'magic,' a technique, rather than 'enchantment,' a powerful form of art ("OFS" 64).

Tolkien at this point complicates escape for Bilbo and makes his plan of liberation more complex, slow, building up tension. The dwarves agree to withstand the pressures from the Elvenking and not to tell him anything about the treasure, trusting Bilbo to free them (*The Hobbit* 164). In fact, the most interesting part of Tolkien's adaptation is the amusing barrel escape made purely possible by the random wine factor: "he [Bilbo] saw that luck was with him and he had a chance at once to try his desperate plan" (166). Sir Orfeo instead is predestined to succeed, being no struggle, and the king of Faërie, though reluctant at first, is faithful to his word. It is interesting to notice though that both the king of Faërie and the Elvenking are defeated by their pleasures, in the former's case by his love for music, in the latter's by his love for wine.

Conclusion

Fantasy novels share with *The Hobbit* the indebtedness to *topoi* present in earlier traditions, and though this study just focuses on an example of Tolkien's borrowings, the analysis of the adaptations provides an insight into a common procedure in the genre. Although I believe that there are more borrowings to be discovered, my aim has been to point out that the *topoi* of abduction and otherworld, characteristic of medieval romance, are direct extrapolations from *Sir Orfeo* into *The Hobbit* as demonstrated by their textual manifestations. Certainly, Tolkien further reworked and adapted the material to his needs and tastes, making the correspondences vaguer, yet not less likely. This study provides some valuable material to understand Tolkien's creative process and how he chose to exploit the consistencies and contradictions he encountered. It also testifies to the way he was able to borrow from verse and transform it into a smooth seamless prose, a technique he often employed. The main difference is of course the diverse functions that the forest plays in each work. While Mirkwood is an obstacle in the journey that must be overcome, the forest in *Sir Orfeo* becomes a retreat where the life of the protagonist is put on a standstill, though ironically, it constitutes the only place where Orfeo can get back on track and pave the way to recover his kingdom.

Even if some scholars have proposed different sources than *Sir Orfeo* for the *topoi* mentioned above, the difficulty to prove Tolkien's access to the source makes those studies comparative analyses rather than source studies (Fisher 37). As Shippey alerts us, influential works cannot be detected under the sole premise of resemblance ("Introduction" 10). Instead, *Sir Orfeo* is a source Tolkien had demonstrably known for twenty-one years by the time he finished *The Hobbit*. He had to study the work for his finals, scrutinize every word for *MEV* and probably lecture on it in Leeds. Some years later, he kept it fresh in his memory when writing his own Breton lay, because he probably found the poem appealing. All that, together with his love for forest settings, makes me consider that the abduction and otherworld from

Sir Orfeo find their way into *The Hobbit* in a clearer way than has been suggested before, with explicit provable examples. Yet a lot of work remains to be undertaken, as after the publication of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien kept on working on *Sir Orfeo* intensively and this must have left further undetected traces in his later works.

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Notes

¹ For one of the latest articles see Andoni Cossio (“Forest” 1-22), for the latest book see John M. Bowers (105-267). See Cossio as well (“Addenda” 1-8).

² Following Tolkien’s translation of *Sir Orfeo*, Faërie (capitalized) will be the word used throughout to translate the ME word *fairy*. At the same time, the Faërie in *Sir Orfeo* encapsulate well Tolkien’s particular use of that same noun as a concept in “OFS.” See Verlyn Flieger and Anderson for clarification (85-86).

³ Thomas Honegger previously argued that Tolkien had the medieval *Sir Orfeo* and not the Greek myth in mind when he was developing those four key concepts in “OFS” (117-36).

⁴ See Carl F. Hostetter for suggested parallels between the Elves in *The Silmarillion* (1977) and the Faërie in *Sir Orfeo* (“Orfeo” 487-88). See also Sue Bridgwater for a different type of influence (49-70).

⁵ Shortly after *MEV* was published, both works started to be bound in a single volume.

⁶ “I certainly lavished an amount of time on it [*MEV*] which is terrible to recall . . . but it was instructive” (Tolkien, *Letters* 11).

⁷ Tolkien taught that course in his last academic year in Leeds at the least (*Letters* 12-13).

⁸ For the arguments leading to this conclusion see Rateliff (xiii-xxii).

⁹ Cf. the original draft (Rateliff 303-26), the interpolated material (347-60) and the final result (*The Hobbit* 132-58). The insertion of the enchanted stream and surrounding elements makes the *topoi* of abduction and otherworld in Mirkwood more indebted to *Sir Orfeo* than as originally conceived.

¹⁰ See John S. Ryan for a comprehensive list of lectures delivered by Tolkien during that time (“Lecturing” 47-51).

¹¹ *Sir Orfeo* continued to be part of the ‘detailed study’ section of ME Texts in the exams after 1937, but that information is not relevant for the present study.

¹² On 29 May 1930 Tolkien advocated for a series of changes in the English syllabus. Among others, “worthy” ME literary works should become central, laying aside postmedieval ones (“Oxford” 779). In view of the changes recorded by the Examination Statutes quoted above, it appears that *Sir Orfeo* was “worthy” enough for Tolkien.

¹³ Edited by Christopher Tolkien and published in 1975. The translation was probably completed by c. 1944 and the start date, as that of the edition, remains unknown (Hostetter, “*Sir*” 87-89). This is particularly supported by the inclusion, in Tolkien’s edition and the rendition in his translation, of the inexistent ME word in l. 364 **animal* ‘animal,’ which has been superseded in later editions by *aumal* ‘enamel’ (88, 120-22).

¹⁴ See Hostetter for detailed parallels (“*Sir*” 86-87). Note as further evidence of authorship the hasty annotation in what appears to be Tolkien’s handwriting on the first page of a surviving copy of the mentioned edition of *Sir Orfeo* (Tolkien VC Pamph [7], preserved at the Weston Library, Bodleian Libraries [University of Oxford]).

¹⁵ As Oronzo Cilli records, Tolkien owned since September 1920 a copy of the second edition of Marie de France’s *Die Lais der Marie de France* (1900), edited by Karl Warnke, containing Breton lays in French (183-84). The ubiquitous annotations within this volume in Tolkien’s hand reported by Bowers further prove that it was thoroughly scrutinized (251). Tolkien also owned the third edition (1925) free from his jottings (Cilli 184).

¹⁶ Between 1925-31, Tolkien worked on the unfinished *The Lay of Leithian* (1985), which narrates the story of Beren and Lúthien in verse (West 349). This again coincides with the early stages of writing *The Hobbit*.

¹⁷ For a detailed explanation of the relevance of the forest in *Sir Orfeo* see Corine J. Saunders (133-41). Note that in *Sir Orfeo* more than one third of the plot is set in the forest (ll. 237-476). The Faërie otherworld is peppered with forests and a woodland (l. 160). Treed locations are mentioned throughout under many names: *holtes hore* ‘ancient woods’ (l. 214), *wode* ‘wood’ (ll. 237, 272) and *frip* ‘woodland’ (ll. 160, 246). Even once back in the city a simile of Orfeo with the word *tre* ‘tree’ (l. 508) evokes previous wooded areas.

¹⁸ Although the current standard edition is that by Tolkien’s student Alan Bliss (1954), it is better to refer to the edition Tolkien was most familiar with before the publication of *The Hobbit*. Moreover, “Tolkien’s Middle English version of *Sir Orfeo* was based on Kenneth Sisam’s edition” (Hostetter “*Sir*” 89, see 88-89 for specific examples) and thus, if in 1944 Sisam’s was the standard edition, it was so during the writing of *The Hobbit*.

¹⁹ In Tolkien’s own words as quoted by Christopher Tolkien: “A translation may be a useful form of commentary” (Preface, vii, see as well vii-viii). It is also worth considering Shippey’s view: “One may then think that the poem meant something different, but at least one knows what the translator thought it meant . . . Tolkien’s translations (always into the same meter as the originals) . . . can be a valuable guide to his editorial opinions. Translating, like glossing, keeps an editor honest” (“Tolkien” 54).

²⁰ The otherworld motif does not appear for the first time in ME romance. As Muriel A. Whitaker points out “The Otherworld journey is an archetype of early Irish Literature” (27). See Whitaker for the Irish influence (27-46, especially 30-31).

²¹ “sudden out of mind she went” (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 135; l. 82).

²² Both under the spelling *wode*, “Wod(e)” appears twice in ll. 237 and 272 (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 21-22) and “Wode” only once in l. 394 (25). No faithful reading of the poem would imply association between the forest and madness.

²³ In *LotR* even the villain Gollum receives a just treatment: “The Wood-elves have him in prison, but they treat him with such kindness as they can find in their wise hearts” (60).

²⁴ “In dreams strange powers of the mind may be unlocked” (Tolkien, “OFS” 35). In the draft commentary of his unfinished *Selections from Chaucer’s Poetry and Prose*, Tolkien addressed at length whether oneiric experiences have effective foreshadowing powers (Bowers 114). The suggestion in *Sir Orfeo* may have prompted Tolkien to explore this possibility further through fiction.

²⁵ Though there are different possible translations for *ympe*, I follow Tolkien’s choice ‘grafted’ throughout, the one with the greatest acceptance rate among scholars (Jirsa 142).

²⁶ *Sir Orfeo* reaches an apparently ordinary river to witness a hunting scene (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo*; l. 308). Did Tolkien assume that the water was enchanted owing to its proximity to the dwelling of the Faërie and thought it could yield an interesting episode in his own work? It is striking how similar the geographies of both forests seem at any rate.

²⁷ It is a recurrent motif in popular belief that lying on the bower of trees may trigger supernatural events. Jaqueline Memory Paterson notes that the ancients associated the hazel, whose bower may induce trance, with an entrance to the world of fairies (70). The bower of the elder was thought to give access to the underworld or allow one to see the king of fairy and his train (283). The species of the tree in *Sir Orfeo* remains undisclosed but the fact that it is grafted is a powerful premonitory symbol in itself: a severed shoot or twig from another plant must be inserted into the trunk of a tree to graft it, and this process forebodes in imagery the actions of the king of Faërie cutting all of Heurodis’ ties with her homeland and placing her forcefully into his realm.

²⁸ It is worth bearing in mind however that after Bilbo is pushed into the clearing where a second Elven feast is held, the Elves cast a sleep spell on him which makes him dream of food, as Bombur had previously after

plunging into the stream (*The Hobbit* 143-44, 156). This somehow connects the stream's magic with the Elves' enchanting powers.

²⁹ "On the morrow, when the noon drew near, / in arms did Orfeo appear, / and full ten hundred knights with him, / all stoutly armed, all stern and grim" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 137; ll. 181-84).

³⁰ Thorin conceals his royalty at this point by appearing in the guise of a beggar as Sir Orfeo does later in his tale, yet this motif is far from being exclusive to *Sir Orfeo*.

³¹ Beorn points out that there are edible nuts in Mirkwood, though these are unfortunately never found by Bilbo or the dwarves (*The Hobbit* 125): "Nothing wholesome could they see growing in the wood, only funguses and herbs with pale leaves and unpleasant smell" (138).

³² "All his body was wasted thin / by hardship, an all cracked his skin" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo*, 139; ll. 261-62).

³³ "in rich array and raiment meet, / softly stepping with skilful feet" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 140; ll. 299-300).

³⁴ "tabour and trumpet went along, / and marvellous minstrelsy and song" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 140; ll. 301-02).

³⁵ Tolkien revered musicians of this type: "Anyone who can play a stringed instrument seems to me a wizard worthy of deep respect" (*Letters* 173).

³⁶ Rateliff notes it may have inspired the Elven army mustered to persuade the dwarves to share the treasure, the same one that later fights on the dwarves' side in the final battle (425). At any rate the Elves' martial society strongly echoes that of the Faërie.

³⁷ The poet's stark contrasts between past affluence and current penury exacerbates Sir Orfeo's hardships (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 21; ll. 241-260).

³⁸ "Intent he gazed, and so did she, / but no word spake; no word said he" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 141; ll. 323-24).

³⁹ For greater understanding of the evolution of Tolkien's ideas on the design of the entrance to the Elvenking's halls cf. Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull fig. 117 (124), fig. 118-19 (125), fig. 120 (127) and fig. 121 (128). The version included for publication in *The Hobbit, The Elvenking's Gate* (128; fig. 121), shows a wooden bridge that allows the crossing of the river towards the fortress of the king. There is a staircase that leads to an entrance adorned with two posts at the bottom and two at the top. Further at the back, the entrance is sculpted into a stone wall and the door is adorned. Moreover, the path that leads towards the bridge has been cleared of any vegetation blocking the way. All these features give a rather sophisticated touch to the place that the ordinary fairy-mound lacks.

⁴⁰ In Robert Scholes' words, literary fabulation "offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way" (29).

⁴¹ The king of Faërie's crown is made of a precious stone as bright as the sun (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo*, 18; ll. 151-52).

⁴² "he went before the king in hall, / and there a joyous sight did see, / a shining throne and canopy. / Their king and lord there held his seat / beside their lady fair and sweet. / Their crowns and clothes so brightly shone / that scarce his eyes might look thereon" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo*, 143; ll. 410-16).

⁴³ "I have never found so rash a man / that he to us would dare to wend, / unless I first for him should send" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 144; ll. 426-28).

⁴⁴ Though Bilbo manages to go in and out unseen by following the Elves close behind (*The Hobbit* 160-61).

⁴⁵ See note 13.

⁴⁶ "A castle he saw amid the land / princely and proud and lofty stand; / the outer wall around it lay / of shining crystal clear was made. / A hundred towers were raised about / with cunning wrought, embattled stout; / and from the moat each buttress bold / in arches sprang of rich red gold / The vault was carven and adorned / with beasts and birds and figures horned; / within were halls and chambers wide / all made of jewels and gems of pride" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 142; ll. 355-66).

⁴⁷ "In summer on wildfood fruit he feeds, / or berries poor to serve his needs; / in winter nothing can he find / save roots and herbs and bitter rind" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo*, 139; ll. 257-60).

⁴⁸ "All his body was wasted thin / by hardship, an all cracked his skin. / A Lord! who can recount the woe / for ten long years that king did know?" (Tolkien, *Sir Orfeo* 139; ll. 261-64). Note that Tolkien replaces *ten zere and more* for 'ten long years.'

⁴⁹ It is never revealed how long this last in the printed text, but Tolkien reduced the time from several months (autumn to spring), as initially devised when sketching the plot, down to mere three weeks in a timeline prepared during the 1960 revision of *The Hobbit* (Rateliff 824).

⁵⁰ This whole passage provides a different view to John Plotz's claim that "Tolkienesque fantasy worlds . . . simply ignore the grit, awkward-ness, and embarrassment of life as it actually is" (432). The bourgeois Bilbo's survival, now dispossessed of his former comforts, wholly rests unfairly on thieving and miserable hiding in isolation.

⁵¹ When Sir Orfeo plays his harp in the forest all wild animals, including birds, approach him to listen to his melody (Sisam, *Sir Orfeo* 22, ll. 270-77). Whether a coincidence or not, both objects assist their bearers in completing their final quests and allow them to enjoy at times the company of other beings during their isolation.

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