

The Mystical Philology of J.R.R. Tolkien and Sir Israel Gollancz: Monsters and Critics¹

i. The Gollancz lectures

One of Tolkien's best known works of non-fiction (familiar to readers of his fiction and students of Old English alike) is the lecture which he gave on 25 November, 1936 to the British Academy: '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics.'² It was a brilliant, assured performance in which Tolkien gave considerable licence to his own imaginative engagement with the poem, and to his wit. Though its influence has recently been reassessed, it may still fairly be said that it effected a *bouleversement* in academic study of the Old English epic.

'The Monsters and the Critics' was one in a series of lectures by various speakers, given biennially in honour of the British Academy's founding Secretary, Sir Israel Gollancz. Gollancz, a senior Establishment figure, medieval and Shakespeare scholar, had been the first Jewish professor of English in a British university (King's College, London). He had been knighted in 1919. Gollancz had himself persuaded a wealthy donor, and personal friend, Mrs Frida Mond, wife of the industrialist, Ludwig Mond, to give the money to the Academy which provided for the biennial lectures.³ Tolkien was one of many medieval scholars to benefit from the generosity which had created this most distinguished showcase for their talents, though, thanks to Tolkien's later fame, as much as its own merits, 'The Monsters and the Critics' is probably the most widely known of these performances.

The lectures had been created as a means of perpetuating Gollancz's memory after his death in 1930. In that they have succeeded. Medievalists, and specialists in Old English in particular, know his name, in part, it must be said because of the success of Tolkien's lecture, and also as an editor who did much to make texts accessible which are now regarded as essential parts of the study of medieval English literature, especially the fourteenth-century poems surviving uniquely in a single manuscript (British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. x), in

¹ I am most grateful to Professor Gordon McMullan for sending me his essay in advance of publication: 'Goblin's Market: Commemoration, Anti-semitism and the Invention of "Global Shakespeare" in 1916,' in *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory*, ed. Coppélia Kahn and Clare Calvo (Cambridge, 2015), 182-201. The present essay independently develops the suggestion which he made there concerning Gollancz and Gollum. Professor Derek Pearsall read this essay in draft, and made valuable suggestions. I am grateful for his help (responsibility for errors remains my own). I should also like to thank the anonymous reader and the editors of *Tolkien Studies* for valuable advice and suggestions. The research for this paper was begun during my tenure of a Leverhulme Research Fellowship (2014-15): I gratefully acknowledge the Trust's support.

² '*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics,' *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 22 (1936-7), 245-95. Reprinted separately (Oxford, 1958). See further, J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf and the Critics*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout, revd. 2nd edn., ACMRS Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 402 (Tempe, 2011). For recent assessments of the significance of this lecture see Drout's introduction; also Tom Shippey, 'Tolkien's Two Views of *Beowulf*: One Hailed, One Ignored, But Did We Get this Right?' <http://lotrplaza.com>, accessed 9 November, 2016.

³ Annual Report, Session 1923-4, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 11 (1922-5), 4.

particular *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Perhaps inevitably, Gollancz's editions have since been superseded, not least by the work of Tolkien himself and his co-editor E. V. Gordon.⁴ Their edition of *Gawain* was published in Gollancz's lifetime, and was in competition with his work on the poem.

The two men belonged to different generations: Gollancz was born in 1863; Tolkien in 1892. The up and coming younger man who gave the memorial lecture in 1936 was also a rival, who was seeking to displace a patriarchal older figure who was becoming unfashionable in the 1930s. The obvious, and explicit, target for Tolkien's criticisms in the lecture was another of the previous generation, the distinguished Scottish literary scholar, W. P. Ker (1855-1923), mentioned repeatedly in the lecture, while Tolkien stressed that he honoured him.⁵ As for Gollancz, though it is not evident that Tolkien had known him personally, they certainly both knew of each other. And Gollancz had published very widely. Tolkien found, when he set about carving out his own career and literary interests, that Gollancz's prints were everywhere. It cannot be doubted that Tolkien knew that he was following in the older man's footsteps, and it is extremely unlikely that he would have wished to do so slavishly.

Indeed, Gollancz's literary interests and enthusiasms coincided remarkably with Tolkien's own. In the circumstances, the odd thing about Tolkien's Gollancz Lecture – intended to perpetuate Gollancz's memory – is that he did not mention Gollancz's name even once.⁶ It was not obligatory – another Gollancz lecturer, Robin Flower, also simply got on with his chosen task – but the majority of the lecturers did have something to say about the man they were commemorating.⁷ It seems a striking omission: at the very least piquant. It is, of course, difficult to argue from silence. We can only guess why Tolkien did not mention Gollancz. But the circumstances themselves suggest that the failure to mention him was a positive choice, not a simple piece of forgetfulness. All of the Gollancz lecturers were invited to give papers addressing Sir Israel's known literary interests and concerns; this in itself obliged the speakers to think about him, Tolkien as much as the others. From the Academy's point of view, Frida Mond had given the money for lectures 'connected with Anglo-Saxon or Early English Literature, and cognate studies ... in token of a highly valued old friendship and his [Gollancz's] efforts to further these studies.'⁸ Lecturers were chosen accordingly. It is argued here that there are clues in '*Beowulf*, The Monsters and the Critics' itself that Tolkien was not only thinking hard about Gollancz, but also about his own writing and how it compared with Gollancz's. The publication of the lecture in 1937 coincided with the publication of *The*

⁴ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (Oxford, 1925); *Pearl*, ed. E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1953).

⁵ 'Monsters and Critics,' p. 8. A lesser target (among others) was the Australian scholar, Sir Archibald Strong (1876-1930), who came in for more sustained attack in Tolkien's preceding Oxford lectures: see *Beowulf and the Critics*, p. 6, *passim*.

⁶ Compare Gwyn Jones, 'Egil Skallagrímsson in England,' the Gollancz memorial lecture for 1952, who took *Ambales Saga* for his starting point, confident that 'the distinguished and versatile scholar to whose memory we now pay tribute, would have approved,' p. 128.

⁷ Lawrence Nowell and the Discovery of England in Tudor Times,' read 19 February, 1934, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 21 (1935), 47-73.

⁸ Annual Report, 1923-4, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 11 (1922-25), 4.

Hobbit. It was a defining, and uncomfortable, moment in Tolkien's life and career, when he, so to say, 'came out' publicly as a writer of fantasy, just after he had given an unusually imaginative public lecture, in the heart of the academic establishment from which Tolkien feared disapproval for his fantasy writing.

What is less well known is that Gollancz had made his own, admittedly much more tentative, excursions into fantasy, children's fiction, and myth, based in his imaginative engagement, not only with Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic literature, but also with Shakespeare. As a professor of English dabbling with this sort of material (Gollancz never went further than dabbling), he was also anticipating Tolkien in areas that were not strictly academic. The lecture to the Academy was not the place for Tolkien to air his own fantasies openly (though, once *The Hobbit* was published, it is easy to see that he was thinking about his own fiction while also describing *Beowulf*). And it was not the place to talk openly about Gollancz's fantasies either, though the lecture does seem to hint at them. There are remarkable similarities between the two men, as well as obvious differences in temperament, not least because both, for religious reasons, thought of themselves, at least to a degree, as outsiders in early twentieth-century British society. Gollancz, who experienced anti-Semitism,⁹ strove hard for the acceptance by the British establishment which he undoubtedly won. Tolkien had to make his own accommodations; in his case active service during the Great War was undoubtedly a defining experience.¹⁰

Thus it is argued here that, in the lecture, Tolkien was not merely using the opportunity which Gollancz and the British Academy had provided to get his views of *Beowulf* off his chest, while hinting obscurely at his own special imaginative qualifications for doing so. He was certainly doing this, but he was also tacitly engaging with Gollancz, and not just as a competing older scholar, but as one who, like him, was drawn to expressing himself in storytelling and parables.

ii. Professors in Wonderland

When Gollancz has attracted notice in the last thirty years, it has not always been sympathetic, and, even in his own day his personality did not win over everybody, though he was a notably genial man. Part of the problem was his seeming ubiquity. Wherever one looked among Establishment causes there he was. In his Shakespearian bardolatry, and patriotism, the sun appears to have set on him as much as the Empire, for whose institutions, notably the British Academy, he did so much. Yet he was a man of many facets, with a cosmopolitan, as well as British identity, and the world of medieval English studies, owes him a great debt. Also the circumstances after the Great War of 1914-18 must be taken into account: it was a time which brought out oversimplified expressions of patriotism. Tolkien is likely to have shared the mixture of respect and irritation with which others responded to the older man, and, perhaps inevitably, as the younger scholar, he felt the need to disagree, however politely, with a grand

⁹ See McMullan, 'Goblin's Market'.

¹⁰ Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London, 1977); John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth* (London, 2003).

panjandrum. Gollancz's ventures into the world of imagination and fantasy – which Lewis Carroll had called 'Wonderland' – were part of his scholarship, and not offered as fiction. Tolkien's creation of a fictional world was also based in mythology, and underpinned by the etymologies of real, as well as created, languages.¹¹ But in formal academic writing, Tolkien was secretive about his mythology in a way that Gollancz was not; Tolkien may well have found Gollancz's fictional excursions both tasteless in themselves and out of place. And yet Tolkien's Gollancz memorial lecture is rich in little stories, allegories, discussion of mythology and in dragon-lore in a way which on the face of it seems unexpected in such a setting. It is arguable that Tolkien was using Gollancz's example to allow himself certain freedoms to discuss material – including dragons - which, if not off limits, was nevertheless rather suspect.

Gollancz, as much as Tolkien, was a trained philologist. He had studied at Cambridge, where he had also learned Old Norse, and he was taught by W. W. Skeat. Both Tolkien and Gollancz shared the wider passion among philologists of their time to quest for mythological origins concealed in names, which are rarely innocent. When investigated, names reveal rich seams of half visible culture, tradition and *narratives* which express, maybe unconsciously in their later tellings, the older meaning which can be glimpsed only through the misty spectacles of allegory. Not for nothing was Gollancz the disciple of the author of *Skeat's Etymological Dictionary*.¹² As Gollancz's friend, the bibliographer and fellow Shakespeare scholar, A. W. Pollard, put it, "Those who bring imagination to their study of language will find much of the history of man that really concerns us vividly reflected in the history of words."¹³ It is noteworthy that Pollard made this remark in a work of popular morality, which he published anonymously – it did not do for scholars to admit in public that they had imaginations.

Accordingly, this mythologizing philology was rather a guilty passion, of which not everyone approved. Thus the Rector (head) of Tolkien's own undergraduate college, Exeter, the Oxford classical scholar, L. R. Farnell, had commented tartly in a lecture, given to the British Academy no less, on the glib and fanciful nature, as he saw it, of such speculations: "The axiom that the hero is the faded god has been an obsession of German and English scholars.' Worse, 'the whole field is fascinating, and seems easy to work in, and appears to be especially alluring to the feminine mind' (Jessie Weston's 1920 *From Ritual to Romance* would be published in the following year).¹⁴ However, in the early 1930s, Tolkien, as much as Gollancz, could be seduced by the fascination of these kinds of speculation, though in the remote fastness of an archaeological report,

¹¹ T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth: How J. R. R. Tolkien Created a new Mythology* (London, 1982).

¹² W. W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Oxford, 1882-4).

¹³ 'Z' [A. W. Pollard], *Life, Love and Light: Practical Morality for Men and Women* (London, 1911), p. 26.

¹⁴ 'The Value and the Methods of Mythological Study', read 5 April, 1919, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 9 (1919-20), 37-51 (37, 45); *From Ritual to Romance* (Cambridge, 1920).

and hedged about with qualifications.¹⁵ Gollancz was less shy. Tolkien's elaborate reticences in 'Monsters and Critics' were hardly surprising in 1936.

Gollancz's literary imagination was aroused most powerfully by his reading of Shakespeare, an author of whom famously Tolkien said he was not fond. The origins of names were at the heart of Gollancz's reading of *The Merchant of Venice* in particular. His mythologizing engagement with this play was complex, and too detailed to describe fully here, but was strongly and painfully involved with his own Jewish identity. His arguments may be found in the three lectures which were published by his friends posthumously in his memory.¹⁶ He was not merely seeking to exonerate Shakespeare from crude Jew-hating, but in convoluted and indirect ways seeking to explain his own position as a Jewish professor of medieval English under a decent show of objectivity. The strength of his feelings meant that he could not leave the subject alone. As Pollard said of him, 'It is the more interesting to note the fascination which it exercised, so that it was essayed again and again.' But Pollard also noted that the arguments were incapable of proof in any conventional academic manner.¹⁷

The natural outlet for such convictions is in creative writing. Gollancz, though not a fully-developed writer of fiction or an independent poet, satisfied this instinct by verse translations of *Pearl* and other texts – he was a fluent translator, with a fondness for an archaic turn of phrase. Tolkien shared several of these characteristics, likewise undertook translations into verse, felt it his special privilege to interpret literature of the past for the present, and began his career of writing fiction with writings for children – his own initially, including Christmas stories. However, Gollancz's most sustained exercise in storytelling (also for a child) related to a different play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which, after the high seriousness of *The Merchant*, he reveals his playful side. And like Tolkien's *The Father Christmas Letters*, Gollancz's little story was a Christmas gift.¹⁸

iii. Fairies and Dragons

Gollancz's edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, addressed to an unnamed girl, and with plentiful black and white illustrations by Robert Anning Bell, included in his introductory matter a fairy tale for children, with a generous helping of sugar to beguile youngsters into accepting some Shakespeare learning. The edition also satisfied his taste for pretty books. The publisher, J. M. Dent, agreed to the enterprise on condition that Gollancz should write a preface. Dent insisted that Gollancz tell his child readers something about 'the Geography and History of Fairyland' – something Gollancz thought children would find boring. But 'publishers are terrible creatures,' Gollancz told the girl, 'and it is dangerous to

¹⁵ 'The Name "Nodens";' in R. E. M. Wheeler and T. V. Wheeler, *Report on the Excavation of the Prehistoric, Roman, and Post-Roman, Site in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*, Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries of London, 9 (Oxford, 1932), 132-7.

¹⁶ *Allegory and Mysticism in Shakespeare: A Medievalist on 'The Merchant of Venice': Reports of Three Lectures by Sir Israel Gollancz*. In *Memoriam*, ed. A. W. Pollard and M. Day (London, 1931),

¹⁷ *Allegory and Mysticism*, p.12.

¹⁸ *The Father Christmas Letters*, ed. Baillie Tolkien (London, 1976).

thwart them.’¹⁹ Gollancz, even more than Tolkien, disliked sustained academic writing for publication, having established his scholarly reputation largely through his many editions of texts – as Pollard said in the memorial volume, *Allegory and Mysticism*, he ‘preferred speaking to writing.’²⁰

Gollancz, like most who have written for children, including Tolkien, did so in the shadow of *Alice in Wonderland*.²¹ He teased his readers by calling the girl (real or imagined) whom he addressed, ‘Dearest.’ The book is a gift to her: ‘the most beautiful of all gifts for a fairy-loving child – this wonderful fairy-tale told three-hundred years ago.’²² If it was a real gift, it was a Christmas present, since, though the events are set in midsummer, the book was published at Christmas, with Dent’s eye to the Christmas market (as *Alice* had been dedicated to ‘a dear child in memory of a summer’s day’). And Gollancz sent copies of the book to friends as Christmas presents, including the medieval scholar and entrepreneur, F. J. Furnivall, who told him that people were agog to know who ‘Dearest’ was. ‘Why,’ said Furnivall, ‘there are 150 of em, so you may choose any one you like. Gollancz) loves *all* nice young girls.’²³

‘Dearest’ is a young girl, whom Gollancz finds in her school-room; Furnivall, who may have been right, and evidently did not wish to spoil his friend’s little mystery, suggested she was any one of the pupils, rather than an individual. In so doing, he mischievously raised the prospect of a Gollancz with a sentimental fondness for well-behaved schoolgirls, which is at least appropriate for him as the editor of *Pearl* (though 150 is as nothing compared with that poem’s 144,000 uniformed maidens). Whoever ‘Dearest’ was, Gollancz said he found her one bright spring day ‘poring over those terrible NOTES, committing to memory Mr Theobald’s conjectures, and Mr Johnson’s and Mr Steevens’ ... while at her side lay a gloomy-looking thing labelled “MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM; NOTEBOOK OF ETYMOLOGIES, &c.” carefully compiled,’ by her teacher ‘from the pages of a famous volume she familiarly described as “Skeat”!’ With her teacher’s permission (probably this was important to Gollancz) the pair take a holiday from serious scholarship, to have some fun. They went out into an old-world garden, ‘and we banished from our fairyland, “upon pain of instant death,” all trespassers, namely, parallel passages, various readings, conjectural emendations, etymologies, commentaries, commentators, etc., etc. ...’²⁴ And away the two went with the fairies, undisturbed by pesky Etymologies, until a host of fairies captured Dearest as a more attractive child than the boy-changeling they already had. ‘And with the noise I awoke and found myself all alone in my lonely turret, my head buried in the yellow leaves of a worm-eaten Folio.’²⁵

¹⁹ *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare, ed. Israel Gollancz (London, 1895). Published by J. M. Dent & Co., pp. x-xi.

²⁰ *Allegory and Mysticism*, p. 11.

²¹ Tolkien discussed the similarities between his own fiction and Carroll’s in a letter of 31 August 1937, to C. A. Furth of Allen and Unwin, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, selected and ed. Humphrey Carpenter (Boston, 1981), [15], pp. 21-2.

²² *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Gollancz, p. vii.

²³ Letter to Gollancz, 26 December, 1895, Princeton University Library.

²⁴ *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Gollancz, p. viii.

²⁵ *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Gollancz, p. x.

Before the end of the introduction Gollancz managed to get in some diluted Shakespeare biography, as well as some edifying material about the play, including diagrams to help Dearest and her friends keep track of the lovers' romantic gyrations between partners. He even smuggled in an Etymology or two in his brief account of fairy-lore. Dearest does not escape instruction scot free. This is perhaps what distinguishes Gollancz from other pedagogues turned children's storytellers (better ones, it must be said). Even while his story begins, as many do, with an act of transgression, it is under adult supervision, and he cannot forget he is a teacher. Tolkien, on the other hand, said that the idea for *The Hobbit* came to him while doodling – as he should not have been – on a candidate's exam script. He saw the writing of the book as an illicit pleasure of which colleagues would doubtfully approve, and which was not guaranteed publication.²⁶

In early 1937, the year of publication both of 'Monsters and Critics' and *The Hobbit*, Tolkien was clearly anxious about how the latter was going to be received, not least by his university, since, as he said, he was under contract to get on with serious research, not 'frivolities'.²⁷ Dragons were much on his mind after the Academy lecture of 25 November 1936, and he was still thinking how to get an academic audience not to dismiss them as childish, but to take them at least semi-seriously. He published two poems in 1937, one in February, the second in March, which addressed the problem in a fictional guise. They appeared in *The Oxford Magazine*, founded in 1883 as a weekly University publication, which included poems and reviews by members of the university, as well as more official notices. The first was 'The Dragon's Visit', a comic narrative poem (but with serious undertones) in which the dragon laments that modern people 'have not the wit' to appreciate 'a dragon's song or colour ... The world is getting duller.'²⁸ The second, 'Iumonna Gold Galdre Bewunden,' was a more serious performance, and was an exploration of ideas and themes in *The Hobbit*. In it Tolkien created a dragon which unmistakably owed much to *Beowulf*, but he put right what he saw as the defects of that creature. The *Beowulf* dragon, he said in 'Monsters and Critics' was too allegorical. Accordingly the bestial nature of Tolkien's own dragon is emphasized. As he had said in the lecture, the problem with the *Beowulf* dragon, 'if one wishes really to criticize,' was that it was more '*draconitas* than *draco*.'²⁹

In between these poems, Tolkien published another, 'Knocking at the Door', with the telling mock-heroic subtitle, 'Lines induced by the sensation when waiting for an answer at the door of an Exalted Academic Person.'³⁰ The situation may, or may not, have happened – it does not greatly signify. But Tolkien had metaphorically been knocking at the door, in that he had sought in 'Monsters and Critics' to get the attention of the august academic community, represented by that academic fortress, the British Academy. The sub-title of the

²⁶ Shippey, *Road to Middle-Earth*, p. 60.

²⁷ Letter to Allen and Unwin, 28 May, 1937, *Letters*, [14], pp. 18-19.

²⁸ Published 4 February, 1937, *The Oxford Magazine*, 55, no. 11, p. 342; Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* (London, 2006), p. 214.

²⁹ *The Oxford Magazine*, 4 March, 1937, 55, no. 15, p.473; 'Monsters and Critics,' pp. 16-17.

³⁰ *The Oxford Magazine*, 18 February, 55, no. 13, p. 403.

lecture, 'The Monsters and the Critics,' creates a parity between monsters and scholars and one is left speculating on which is which. Similarly in 'Knocking at the Door' Tolkien imagines the creatures residing within the exalted academic's lair as grey and sinister fantastical creatures whom he calls 'Mewlips', who feed on the prey that comes to their door. The mythical creatures in Tolkien's imaginary zoo not only really bite, but they eat unwary Oxford people (members of the public and members of the university) for supper. This rather savage poem was, unlike the other two, published – understandably - under a pseudonym: 'Oxymore'. The moral of all three is that 'correct and sober taste' rejects ogres and dragons at its peril – they may turn and rend. Also that, unless a dragon's defender 'speaks in parables, he will kill what he is studying by vivisection, and he will be left with a formal or mechanical allegory.'³¹

iv. 'Northernness'

Tolkien famously disapproved of Shakespeare's fairy plays, and he is likely to have deplored Gollancz's capers in fairyland. Tolkien had himself said that 'a professor at play rather suggests an elephant in its bath.'³² Yet, as a philologist, Gollancz had been drawn to 'northernness' as much as Tolkien. 'Northernness' is a word used by C. S. Lewis to describe that special glamour of Nordic legends, landscape and climate, an indescribable quality that could only be summed up as 'It's the Northernness – the Northernness.'³³ Gollancz had been a member, and subsequently President, of the Viking Club, mocked by journalists as an association of Edwardian gents who drank tea, assumed Norse names and held gala dinners.³⁴ As philologists, both men were aware that the etymology of words often took them into Nordic mythology; thus Gollancz noted that *fairy* was derived from a French word, also borrowed into English as 'fay', and that 'fay' 'is of the same Latin origin as our English word "fate"'. A 'fay' was originally one of the Three Fates of Greek and Roman mythology, and is also expressed in Old Norse. Accordingly, 'something of its old meaning still clings to the word, though we use it very loosely for all sorts of wonderful beings and stories from wonderland.'³⁵

Gollancz made repeated connections between his work on Shakespeare, and the training in Icelandic he had received at Cambridge. Thus his familiarity with Norse myths and legends led him to edit the Icelandic versions of the

³¹ 'Monsters and Critics,' p. 15. 'Knocking at the Door' (simply entitled 'The Mewlips', and without its subtitle) was later included in *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* (London, 1962). The Mewlips are later said to live beyond the 'Merlock Mountains'; in the original version, these are the 'Morlock Mountains', referring to H. G. Wells's cannibalistic underground creatures who form the underclass in *The Time Machine* (1895). The satirical edge of the poem is much softened by these changes.

³² Letter to C. A. Furth, of Allen and Unwin Ltd., 31 August, 1937, *Letters*, [15], p. 22.

³³ *OED*, 'northernness', n., sense 2, citing Lewis, *Rehabilitations and other Essays* (London, 1939).

³⁴ Gollancz submitted a paper to the Club, 'Gringolet, Gawain's Horse,' *Saga-Book of the Viking Club*, 5 (1906-7), 104-10 (summary of paper read at the meeting of 16 February); 'Vikings Drink Tea', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 January, 1894, p. 7; see further J. A. B. Townsend, 'The Viking Society: A Centenary History', *Saga-Book* 23 (1990), 180-212.

³⁵ *Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Gollancz, pp. xlvi-xlvii.

Hamlet story, represented by *Ambales Saga*.³⁶ Eiríkr Magnússon, his teacher at Cambridge, had been one of the sponsors of his application for the professorship in English advertised by University College London in 1899, and commended Gollancz's 'thorough training in the principles of Teutonic philology', combined with the extensive literary knowledge which enabled him to 'enter on a hitherto untouched field of research and to collect Icelandic MS. materials bearing importantly on English literature of the sixteenth century.'³⁷ Gollancz considered that Shakespeare had taken 'a rude, barbaric tale of the North' to create his play, 'which represents in some very vital way one of the noblest and most ancient of northern myths, where a young demi-god was, as it were, the Noonday Sun.'³⁸ Tolkien endorsed the same principle in the lecture when he spoke of poets' handling of old tales as 'alchemy performed upon the base metal'.³⁹

Gollancz and Tolkien thus had very similar tastes and literary views. Tolkien's first prose story, based on the Kullervo cycle from the Finnish *Kalevala*, and written in 1914-15, while he was an undergraduate, marked, as he said, the 'germ of my attempts to write legends of my own'; it also has striking similarities to the story of *Hamlet*.⁴⁰ Tolkien, as is well known, was stirred by the evocative opening of the Old English poem *Christ*, 'Eala Earendel, engla beorhtost!'; he would have read the poem most probably in Gollancz's edition – Gollancz himself had even drawn attention, in *Hamlet in Iceland*, to the power of the line, which he, too, felt strongly.⁴¹ Tolkien did not mention this.

Gollancz's excursions into northern scholarship surfaced in strange places – even in his edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which he told Dearest that, though Oberon's name looked French, it was Germanic in origin; he was 'in reality the famous little dwarf Alberich,' and his name meant 'Elf-king'. He regaled her with information about the Norns who sat 'under a wonderful ash-tree', and with an extended account, which brings us very close to Tolkien's fictional concerns, of Light and Dark Elves. Gollancz pointed out that elf-lore had its origins in Old English and Scandinavian mythology, but his anxiety to make elves appealing to a small girl who needed to be guarded from the darker and scarier aspects of mythology, led him to describe them as diminutive and guilty of nothing worse than mischief, except that dark elves stole children (the drawing back from real horror is of a piece with Gollancz's insistence that, if he had been in his right mind, Shylock would not *really* have exacted the pound of flesh): 'Nothing delighted these little elves more than dancing ... and the feasts in

³⁶ *Hamlet in Iceland, Being the Icelandic Romantic Ambales Saga, edited and translated [...] by Israel Gollancz* (London, 1898). Published as vol 3 in David Nutt's 'Northern Library'. The volume is dedicated to Magnússon, and H. L. D. Ward.

³⁷ *Testimonials of Mr Israel Gollancz [...] The Professorship of English Language and Literature, University College, London* [1889], p. 10, dated 12 March. The successful applicant was W. P. Ker.

³⁸ *Sir Israel Gollancz: In Memoriam*, p. 48.

³⁹ 'Monsters and Critics', p. 12.

⁴⁰ *The Story of Kullervo*, ed. Verlyn Flieger (London, 2015). The hero grew up in the household of the man who killed his father, kidnapped his mother, and attempted to kill him.

⁴¹ *Hamlet in Iceland*, pp. xxxvi-xxxviii; *Cynwulf's Christ: An Eighth Century English Epic*, ed. Israel Gollancz (London, 1892), l. 103 (and note). Noted independently by John Garth, 'Birth of a New World: The Tolkien Poem that marks the Genesis of Middle-earth,' *Guardian*, 24 September, 2014.

elf-land were never without elfin-music, which was so weird and enchanting, that any mortal coming near was forced to join in the dance.' 'Little dwarfs' were 'long-nosed, little-eyed, bluish-grey little creatures' who 'selected wicked people' as the victims of their jests.⁴² If Tolkien knew these fairy imaginings, as seems not unlikely, the winsomeness with which Gollancz so lavishly coated mythological matter seems the very thing to have revolted him, and the pretty children's book, with its charming illustrations, may have done something to confirm him in his avowed disapproval of Shakespeare *per se*, probably of his fairy plays in particular, and certainly of their Victorian successors. He did not subscribe to the belief in serving children with the milk of light and easy doctrine. His is 'splendid reading for children with strong nerves'.⁴³

v. Tolkien's 'obscure battle' with Gollancz

In such a context, the invitation to Tolkien to give one of the memorial lectures for Gollancz, a man very different from himself in temperament, but whose literary interests closely, and probably uncomfortably, anticipated his own, must have given Tolkien reason to think when the British Academy invited him to contemplate his predecessor. But, though Tolkien seemed pointedly to ignore Gollancz in the lecture itself, we are not therefore wholly dependent on conjecture as to his views. There is other evidence that Tolkien did not approve of Gollancz, and something may also be inferred from remarks made by other Gollancz lecturers, Tolkien's contemporaries, who did comment on the man. It is apparent that Gollancz's posthumous reputation was very mixed.

For a start, there was the rivalry between them. Tolkien and Gollancz were powerfully drawn, though for different reasons, to the same medieval texts, the thirteenth-century guide for women recluses known as *Ancrene Wisse*, and, above all, to *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Tolkien was emotionally drawn to these texts, both as West-Midlander and Catholic. All three texts, in different ways, are strongly religious, and all three have their origins in different parts of the West Midlands. All are recorded in varieties of a West-Midland literary standard dialect of English. Tolkien produced an important study of the language of *Ancrene Wisse*, and would, in due course, edit the text in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 402.⁴⁴ He edited *Sir Gawain*, and though he never edited *Pearl*, he had fully intended to do so, and the work was completed by E. V. Gordon's widow, Ida.⁴⁵

Gollancz, though no West-Midlander, quite simply adored the Cotton Nero poems, especially *Pearl*, to which he returned throughout his working life. He probably did the most of any scholar to promote enjoyment of these texts' literary qualities and make them better known. He fully subscribed to the

⁴² *Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Gollancz, pp. xlv-xlvi.

⁴³ K. M. Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London, 1967), p. 209. Tolkien on *Fairy-Stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London, 2008) (edition of Andrew Lang Lecture given in 1939 at St Andrews); remarks on Shakespeare cited by (amongst others) Carpenter, *Tolkien: A Biography*, pp. 27-8, 40-1; also Shippey, *Road to Middle-Earth*, pp.163-6.

⁴⁴, '*Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meiðhad*'; *Ancrene Wisse*, EETS, O.S. 249 (1962).

⁴⁵ *Pearl*, ed. E. V. Gordon (Oxford, 1953), pp. iii-iv.

reading of *Pearl* as a father's elegy for a young daughter, and he recognized that the poem could speak for the grief of all parents who had lost children in the Great War.⁴⁶ Furthermore, both Gollancz and Tolkien valued the Cotton Nero poems (and, in Tolkien's case, also *Ancrene Wisse*) as witnesses to the continuity, as they saw it, of literary traditions going back to Old English despite historical upheavals which temporarily sent the stream underground. Literary and linguistic continuity had a particular resonance for both men after the War.⁴⁷

The shared attraction to *Sir Gawain* had led to a direct conflict of interest. In 1924, Gollancz discovered to his chagrin that Tolkien, and his Leeds colleague, E. V. Gordon, had proposed an edition of the poem to Oxford University Press, which the Delegates had accepted, and which frustrated his own plans for a 'school' text. He protested. The Secretary to the Delegates (and Tolkien's former tutor), Kenneth Sisam, replied 'sweetly', but without giving ground.⁴⁸ Gollancz retreated, clearly hurt, but courteous as ever. However, he did not give up in the face of competition. Despite the existence of Tolkien and Gordon's 1925 edition, Gollancz's own edition of *Sir Gawain* was published posthumously by the Early English Text Society (EETS) in 1940, prepared for press and with introductory material supplied largely by his former student, Mabel Day.⁴⁹ In 1940 many of Gollancz's friends were still alive, and remembered him fondly. Among them was R. W. Chambers, Quain Professor of English at University College, London (in succession to W. P. Ker), and, at this date, Director of the EETS. Chambers had corresponded with Gollancz, and, after his death in 1930, he wrote to Lady Gollancz to condole with her loss of 'one of the most kind hearted of men, and one to whom English Scholarship is under an inestimable debt,' adding, 'To those of us who had the privilege of his friendship the loss is irreparable.'⁵⁰ Chambers had a foot in both camps, since he was also Tolkien's friend, to whom Tolkien would later send an advance copy of *The Hobbit*, which Chambers enjoyed during a period of convalescence.⁵¹ Chambers was a past master at academic diplomacy.

Accordingly, Tolkien's and Gordon's text of *Sir Gawain* was in competition with the posthumous EETS edition by Gollancz, and the OUP records show that the editors were well aware of the rivalry. The two editions were bound to be compared, not least by Tolkien himself. And, although he kept his criticisms *sotto voce*, Tolkien did not like Gollancz's book. We have a witness.

⁴⁶ 'In these latter days of stress and strain and tribulation, "Pearl" still symbolizes things of the spirit outliving the vesture of decay,' *Pearl*, ed. I Gollancz (London, 1918), preface (proceeds of this edition were given to the British Red Cross Fund).

⁴⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Ancrene Wisse and Hali Meiðhad,' *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 14 (1929), 104-26; Israel Gollancz, 'The Middle Ages in the Lineage of English Poetry' (London, [1921]).

⁴⁸ Letter from Gollancz to Sisam, 19 February, 1924; Sisam's Memorandum, dated 20 February, 1924, Oxford University Press archive, file 020486,

⁴⁹ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. Sir Israel Gollancz, with introductory essays by Mabel Day and Mary S. Serjeantson, *EETS*, O.S. 210 (1940 (for 1938)).

⁵⁰ Letter of 21 January, 1931, on receiving a copy of Gollancz's memorial volume. Gollancz Papers, Princeton University Library.

⁵¹ Letter to Chambers, 8 February, 1937, Chambers Papers 101, folder 2 of 2, University College, London. See also letter to C. A. Furth, 31 August, 1937; [15], *Letters*, pp. 19-20 (p. 20): 'Professor Chambers writes very enthusiastically [about *The Hobbit*], but he is an old and kindhearted friend.'

Twelve years after Gollancz's death, the medievalist, Derek Brewer, returning to Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1942, , to resume his English degree, remembered Tolkien in lectures on *Sir Gawain*. They were given, 'to a small group of devotees, confining himself entirely to textual cruces (often forgetting to tell us which line he was discussing), and doing obscure (to me) battle with some mysterious entity, prophetically as it may now seem, called something like "Gollancz".' Brewer evidently recognized that he was close to putting a foot wrong, and adroitly drew back, 'Even I eventually discovered that the reference was to the admirably ingenious Early English Text Society edition by Sir Israel Gollancz, no relation to Gollum.'⁵²

We should appraise Brewer's anecdote from his undergraduate days about the obscure war which Tolkien waged on Gollancz with caution. After all, we only have Brewer's word for it. It is highly credible that Tolkien used his lectures to criticize readings in Gollancz's text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – it is very unlikely that Brewer made this up. But Brewer's suggestion that Gollancz's name was being taken in a way that seemed to him 'prophetic' is most reasonably interpreted as a glance at the similarity of the name to one of Tolkien's most well-known characters, Gollum, both in *The Hobbit*, and as Tolkien would later develop him in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954). But, assuming this is right, it is Brewer's interpretation, not something he was reporting at first hand. Probably aware of the sensitivities, Brewer avoided being more explicit. It seems unlikely that Tolkien himself made such a connection within the formal setting of a lecture to undergraduates. It would have been deeply improper. His thoughts, however, were his own. As 'Knocking at the Door' shows, he *did* privately represent senior academics (the class to which Gollancz belonged) to himself as Gollum-like cannibalistic monsters, 'Mewlips'. A touch of malice is understandable, since, at the time he wrote it, he was on edge about academic reception of *The Hobbit*. But he was careful to publish 'Knocking at the Door' under a pseudonym, as a semi-serious skit in an academic magazine, and when the poem was later published, it was toned down and its subtitle was omitted. Tolkien, also, of course, belonged to the class of senior academics himself. He had been elected in 1925 to the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford – something that would have made it inappropriate both for him to make rude remarks published under his own name about 'Mewlips', and to make unkind public, or semi-public, comments about Gollancz, as Brewer hinted that he did. However, though the suggestion that Tolkien made a connection between Gollancz and Gollum is initially startling, Brewer's testimony at least merits consideration.

Gollum's name alludes to the convulsion in the throat, transcribed 'gollum', which characterizes his speech; it also refers to the suffix of his original name, Sméagol. Additionally, the resemblance of this suffix to the Old Norse 'gull', 'gold', is appropriate in view of his obsession with his 'precious' ring. It has also been suggested that there may be an allusion to Hebrew, 'golem,' an

⁵² *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 2, and footnote.

‘embryo’, ‘monster’, or ‘automaton’.⁵³ This is still a long way from ‘Gollancz’, but, as McMullan has pointed out, it is unfortunate in hindsight that Gollancz seems on occasion to have been known to his friends by the affectionate nickname ‘Goblin’. We simply do not know whether this was known to Tolkien; clearly he was not himself on ‘Dear Goblin’ terms with Professor Sir Israel.

It is, then, reasonably certain that Tolkien used his Oxford lectures to snipe at what he saw as Gollancz’s editorial lapses. As others noted in reviews, the details of Gollancz’s editing were not irreproachable. The view was current that Gollancz’s scholarship, while pioneering, could be swashbuckling and prone to conjectures in pursuit of a pet theory. Tolkien, whose scholarly publications were mostly concerned with editing, or close philological study, evidently disagreed with his emendations; we also know that Tolkien waged war on other editors by name in his lectures.⁵⁴ The irony is that Tolkien, in his own later editions could also be described as a bold emender: once again there are marked similarities between him and Gollancz.⁵⁵

Tolkien’s academic disputes were likely, thanks to his temperament and the decencies, to be ‘obscure’, even while they were also sufficiently heated to be described as a battle and remembered by an excited undergraduate. Yet Tolkien needed to tread carefully when dealing with Gollancz. Apart from considerations of *nil nisi bonum*, there was the difficult Jewish question – it is clear from Gollancz’s tortuous dealings with Shylock how painful this was. It should be made abundantly clear that, if Tolkien did make unkind comparisons between Gollancz and his own anti-hero, Gollum, this was based in the two men’s differences of opinion, nothing worse. Tolkien was not being anti-Semitic. Tolkien took trouble to show support for the Jews. When in 1938 the German publishers of *The Hobbit* wanted to know whether he was himself of Jewish origin, he replied angrily: ‘I can only reply that I regret that I appear to have no ancestors of that gifted people.’ He continued, ‘I have been accustomed, nonetheless, to regard my German name with pride.’⁵⁶ His railing against that “ruddy little ignoramus Adolf Hitler,” is well known.⁵⁷ As others have noticed, Tolkien’s invented dwarvish language owes a debt to Hebrew. Indeed, Tolkien’s generosity to the Jews was unusual in British public opinion between the two World Wars. The leading Catholic newspaper, *The Tablet*, in the same edition which carried a review of Tolkien and Gordon’s edition of *Sir Gawain*, also contained, on adjoining pages, an article, ‘Is the Jew an Anomaly?’⁵⁸ It makes nasty reading (even though the author, as a Catholic in the 1920s, regarded *all* non-Catholics as ‘anomalous’). Tolkien is likely to have read the essay, both as a committed Catholic himself, as well, one presumes, as someone interested in

⁵³ Gergely Nagy, ‘The “Lost” Subject of Middle-earth: The Constitution of the Subject in the Figure of Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*,’ *Tolkien Studies*, 3 (2006), 57-79 (59-60).

⁵⁴ Tolkien’s ‘strictures’ on other scholars’ textual readings were, as Joan Turville-Petre noted, a feature also of his lectures on *Exodus*, edition, p. iii.

⁵⁵ See the two editions published posthumously: *The Old English Exodus, Text, Translation, and Commentary* by J. R. R. Tolkien, ed. Joan Turville-Petre (Oxford, 1981); J. R. R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest: The Fragment and the Episode*, ed. Alan Bliss (London, 1982).

⁵⁶ Often quoted, e.g. by John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War* (London, 2003), p.42.

⁵⁷ Letter to his son, Michael, 9 June, 1941, *Letters*, pp. 55-6.

⁵⁸ *The Tablet*, 27 June, 1925, 862-4. The review by ‘W. H. K.’ of *Sir Gawain*, is on pp. 865-6.

reading reviews of his own work. Tolkien was proud of his surname, though it evidently ran the risk of creating silly misunderstandings (not all names of German origin indicate Jewish antecedents – and the German publisher’s enquiry was impertinent and worse). But it might be added that others who bore a Jewish-sounding name *were* embarrassed: the author of *The Tablet’s* article is likely to have been the same ‘Vera Telfer’ who, in 1938, found it expedient to abandon by deed poll her original Eastern European surname of Leviansky.⁵⁹ Tolkien rightly distanced himself from such views, but they were commonplace among his own community as much as the wider population.

So, if Tolkien wanted to wage obscure war on Gollancz’s scholarship, this would not be surprising. But he was not therefore impugning either his race or religion. Although this point should not be exaggerated, both Tolkien and Gollancz felt themselves in some measure in a minority because they held religious beliefs, albeit different ones, which, as both knew all too well, had been cruelly persecuted in England in the past; both were highly sensitive on the point.

vi. Monsters and Critics

Tolkien’s reticence about Gollancz in ‘Monsters and Critics’ leads one reasonably to see what other Gollancz lecturers had to say about him in the years shortly after his death. C. L. Wrenn, who had succeeded to Gollancz’s chair at King’s, gave the fullest appraisal. Without being uncharitable, he hinted at his predecessor’s faults. Gollancz’s posthumous reputation was of being too fanciful and clever for his own good: those reaching out for adjectives to describe him, including Wrenn, typically settled on ‘ingenious’ – a word which is not always a compliment. They were referring to what were perceived as Gollancz’s over subtle emendations of edited texts, and to his propensity to stretch evidence in the interests of a good story.⁶⁰ Derek Brewer’s mention of the ‘admirably ingenious’ Gollancz was similarly double-edged. The first of the Gollancz lecturers, John Livingstone Lowes spoke of Gollancz’s ‘friendship’ to scholars and his ‘warm humanity’.⁶¹ Kenneth Sisam referred to Gollancz’s ‘pioneer’ services as editor of *Gawain* and *Pearl*, and alluded to his ‘admirable translation’ of Cynewulf’s *Christ*. Again, Sisam’s remarks were not wholly complimentary: ‘pioneer’ suggests disregard for strict accuracy in the interests of blazing a trail, and Sisam indirectly also hinted at Gollancz’s – and others’ – inclination to make up stories unsupported by evidence by alluding to a ‘staid critic’ - who ‘some half century ago’ could conjure up a wife, ‘Cyneburh’ for the Old English poet Cynewulf, ‘without even a rib to build on.’ ‘Those were the excesses of an age of great discoveries, and should be passed lightly.’ It is not stated, but the

⁵⁹ *London Gazette*, 29 April, 1938, 2831.

⁶⁰ ‘The Poetry of Cædmon’, read 19 February, 1947, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, (1946), 277-95: ‘The authentic Cædmon has attracted explorers and speculators ... Gollancz, naturally, in seeking to provide the necessary background to his reproduction of MS Junius II, could not resist the fascination’ (277).

⁶¹ ‘The Art of Geoffrey Chaucer’, read 3 December, 1930, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 16 (1930), 297-326, ‘It is fitting that the theme of this lecture, chosen before his death, should be the poet whose learning ... was also irradiated and mellowed by his humanity’ (297).

suggestion is there that Gollancz's excesses, too, should be passed over lightly to avoid getting lost 'in a maze of ingenuities.'⁶² Even Gollancz had recognized that his proffered 'elucidations' of texts were 'bold' and had 'carried me into strange paths'.⁶³

The intention behind Tolkien's omission of Gollancz's name in 'Monsters and Critics', need not necessarily have been to wage war, or at least, not simply so. It is clear that all of the Gollancz lecturers gave careful thought to Sir Israel's scholarly interests and enthusiasms when choosing their subjects. As did Tolkien. For, especially at the beginning, where an acknowledgement to Gollancz might have been expected, the lecture covertly engages with remarks which Gollancz had made, and ideas which he had expressed with passion, most particularly in the lectures on 'Allegory and Mysticism', published posthumously five years earlier. In the circumstances, even Tolkien's passing reference to a 'Shylockian plural' seems suggestive in the light of Gollancz's obsession with this character.⁶⁴ Shylock was not mentioned in the Oxford lectures on which 'Monsters and Critics' was based; he was added when Tolkien worked up the material for the British Academy.⁶⁵ The result of these hints is that Gollancz is present though absent, though whether as a Monster or a Critic is carefully veiled. Perhaps Tolkien was not quite sure himself.

Tolkien's main argument was that the literary study of *Beowulf* had been neglected while critics rootled around looking for truffles of philological, archaeological, or historical interest. In the light of his well-known disagreements over the English syllabus at the University of Oxford, and the generally austere tenor of his philological publications, his stance here seems a little unexpected. It was, perhaps, a covert acknowledgement that the man, recently dead, in whose honour he was speaking, and in the institution – the British Academy – which Gollancz had done so much to establish, was himself known as a philologist. One who had been 'trained,' as Magnússon said, 'in the scientific school of Sievers' and other German luminaries, but whose interest, as another of his referees had said, 'is rather in literature than in language for its own sake.'⁶⁶ Equally, Tolkien's remark that '*Beowulf* has been used as a quarry of fact and fancy far more assiduously than it has been studied as a work of art,'⁶⁷ was a charge that could be levelled at Gollancz, who sought his own unprovable personal mythologies in Shakespeare, as well as *Pearl*, and whose edition of the fourteenth-century alliterative poem, *Winner and Waster*, had contained some

⁶² 'Cynewulf and his Poetry,' read 8 March, 1933, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 18 (1932), 303-31 (303, 320).

⁶³ *Cædmon Manuscript*, p. vii.

⁶⁴ 'Monsters and Critics,' p. 10.

⁶⁵ Compare *Beowulf and the Critics*, B-Text, p. 116, 'there is bias in this plural'; 'there is bias in these plurals', A-Text, p. 70. I am grateful to the editor of *Tolkien Studies* for pointing this out. The same source notes that R. W. Chambers' reference, which Tolkien quotes, to a 'wilderness of dragons' ('Monsters and Critics', p. 10) glances at 'a wilderness of monkeys' (*Merchant of Venice*, Act I, sc. i, l. 128. Tolkien relates the collective noun to the hunting manual, *The Book of St Albans*, but Chambers was more probably adapting the Shakespeare quotation.

⁶⁶ *Testimonials*, pp. 9-10, Magnússon, and John Peile, Master of Gollancz's college, Christ's, and Reader of Comparative Philology at Cambridge.

⁶⁷ *Monsters and the Critics*, pp. 1-2.

egregiously unctuous conjectural readings designed to flatter the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII.⁶⁸

Tolkien developed his argument in two short allegories – a mode of discourse which, in other circumstances, he notoriously disdained, and dismissed even within the lecture as ‘formal’ and ‘mechanical’.⁶⁹ Here the device allowed him as an as yet private storyteller to indulge his fancy. Furthermore, allegory was also at the heart of Gollancz’s most strongly felt response to the texts which most mattered to him throughout his scholarly life, as testified in his memorial volume, *Allegory and Mysticism*. In the first of Tolkien’s allegories, the ‘excellent ladies,’ Historia, Philologia, Mythologia and Laographia (the study of folklore) attend *Beowulf*’s christening, but Poesis was not invited. This was primarily a quiet dig at R. W. Chambers’s *Beowulf: An Introduction*.⁷⁰ Chambers, unlike either Gollancz or Tolkien, was not at ease consorting with Laographia, describing the main story of *Beowulf* as a ‘wild folk-tale’. ‘Quite true,’ Tolkien agreed, ‘It is true of the main story of *King Lear*, unless in that case you would prefer to substitute *silly* for *wild*’.⁷¹ His views echo Gollancz, who had described *Lear* as a story ‘of an ancient king of Britain who, in his old age, became very foolish in his attitude towards his children’. Underlying it, as divined by ‘your student of folk-lore and anthropology,’ said Gollancz, is a myth, whereby ‘King Lear is Neptune, the Scandinavian and Celtic Neptune, and the rough, heartless daughters are the fierce waves, and the gentle Cordelia is the mild wave’.⁷² In terms of Tolkien’s second allegory, whereby the proponents of assorted academic disciplines, push over a man’s tower in order to pick over the stones out of which it is made, it is reductive of Gollancz to dig away the material which had delighted Shakespeare’s audiences to leave readers with a ‘Scandinavian or Celtic Neptune’ story, and a feeling of ‘so what?’. But Gollancz’s abiding conviction was that Shakespeare, through his genius, had been able unconsciously to intuit – ‘divine’ - the myth so that the blend of the ancient myth with the ‘entrancing’ Jacobean add-ons results in something ‘too great for any stage.’⁷³ The moral that the sum is greater than its parts is also the lesson Tolkien preaches about *Beowulf*. As he pointed out, the owner of the tower, before the scholars had demolished it, had been able to see the sea – which was perhaps poetically quite satisfying enough without being able to perceive Neptune cavorting there with his daughters in some kind of Northern Trevi fountain.

Tolkien and Gollancz were, then, close in the imaginative importance which both attached to Scandinavian and Germanic mythology. And both were led by their creative urges to speculate in ways which Farnell, in 1926, had

⁶⁸ Stephanie Trigg, ‘Israel Gollancz’s “Wynner and Wastoure”: Political Satire or Editorial Politics?’, in *Medieval English Religious and Ethical Literature: Essays in Honour of G. H. Russell*, ed. Gregory Kratzmann and James Simpson (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 115-27.

⁶⁹ ‘Monsters and Critics’, p. 15.

⁷⁰ ‘Monsters and Critics’, p.4, and n.2 (p. 47).

⁷¹ ‘Monsters and Critics’, p. 11, with reference to Chambers, ‘Beowulf and the Heroic Age’, foreword to *Beowulf, translated into Modern English Rhyming Verse [...]*, by Sir Archibald Strong (London, 1925).

⁷² *Allegory and Mysticism*, p. 15. ‘Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics’, pp. 6-7.

⁷³ *Allegory and Mysticism*, p. 15.

ridiculed as alluring fantasy built upon insufficient foundations; as he put it, 'If Penelope was originally a water-duck,' her epic career becomes all the more startling.'⁷⁴ Even though he was aware that the temptation to build stories out of fascination with words was open to criticism, Tolkien had himself previously indulged in his own circular byways of 'linguistic palaeontology.'⁷⁵ His formidable philological knowledge, which included the Celtic languages, had led him just a few years before his Gollancz lecture to his own speculations about 'the ultimate original of King Lear.' However his conjectures were tucked away in the decent obscurity of an appendix to an archaeological report for the Society of Antiquaries. His admission that 'Linguistic considerations unaided by other data can do little, usually, to recall forgotten gods from the twilight,' was a libation to the godling of academic decencies which prefaced a series of etymological speculations to link the 'Nodens' venerated by the Romano-British Silures of Gloucestershire with the Irish mythological hero, Nuada 'of the Silver Hand', king of the Túatha dé Danaan, taking in the *Mabinogion* en route to conjure up 'an echo of the ancient fame of the magic hand of Nodens the Catcher.' Whether this god, Nodens, was a 'catcher' in a sinister sense, or 'merely as being a lord of venery, mere etymology can hardly say.' He might also have been an acquirer of valuable property – like a sword - or 'a ring'.⁷⁶ Tolkien's fiction would be nothing without annular acquisitive serendipity.

In conclusion, the difference between Gollancz and Tolkien was more one of style than substance, but style was not trivial in this case. Gollancz was fulsome and sentimental where Tolkien was reticent and acerbic. Tolkien was a complex man and his views on the prominent and distinguished medievalist who had dominated the literary Establishment in the 1890s and the first two decades of the twentieth century were almost certainly also complex. Gollancz's prominence, as much as his philological and editorial idiosyncrasies, left him open to criticism from the rising and prickly younger man. Yet Tolkien's own little allegories and asides can also be read as a private, if rather grudging, compliment to Gollancz.

But, as Tolkien must have recognized, there were marked, and probably uncomfortable, points of resemblance between them. In the lecture, Tolkien took pains to distance himself from Gollancz, not because Gollancz was a Jew, but because he was a competing philologist with leanings towards fantasy.

In short, Tolkien may have passed over Gollancz in his lecture in deafening silence, but he could not, and did not, really ignore him.

⁷⁴ Farnell, 'Value and Methods of Mythological Study,' p. 41.

⁷⁵ J. Fraser, 'Linguistic Evidence and Archaeological and Ethnological Facts,' Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture, read 26 November, 1926, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 12 (1926), 257-72. Fraser noted the circularity of linguists seeking help from archaeologists and anthropologists, who in turn 'have got into the way of using the results arrived at by the linguist' (260).

⁷⁶ 'The Name "Nodens",' pp. 135, 137. 'It is possible to see a memory of this figure in the medieval Llundud Llaw Ereint ... the ultimate original of King Lear – whose daughter Creiddylad (Cordelia) was carried off after her betrothal ... by Gwynn vab Nudd, a figure having connexions with the underworld' (p. 133). See further, Ronald Hutton, *Pagan Britain* (New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 364-5.

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