

“Learn Now the Lore of the Living Creatures”: On J. R. R. Tolkien’s Alliterative Poetry

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of the ancient Germanic alliterative metre and literary devices in the 20th-century poems composed by the author John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. The first part briefly explains the Old English and Old Norse metrical rules as well as other poetical techniques (such as semantic linking) used by poets and singers of the second half of the first millennium, and presents analyzed examples of original works of art. The second part then focuses on and analyzes six extracts from Tolkien’s alliterative body of work, comments upon their accuracy as far as the Germanic metre is concerned, and discusses Tolkien’s contribution to alliterative poetry and literature in general. One of the article’s aims is to prove that the ways of the ancestors of English and American literature are not a matter of a long-forgotten past, and that in the 20th and the 21st century, among the plethora of diverse subject matters and genres, the original English way of storytelling is still relevant.

Keywords: Tolkien, alliterative verse, Old English, Old Norse, Anglo-Saxons, poetry, metre, Edda.

1. Introduction

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892 – 1973), the well-known author of the high-fantasy novels *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, has received much praise over the eight decades since his first work of fiction was published. In the eyes of the general public, he is obviously mostly famous for his contributions to the “corpus” of secondary world¹ fantasy stories, and to a slightly lesser degree for being an Oxford don and an accomplished linguist who lectured and wrote on Germanic languages, their history, and the literatures that were written in them. However, what could still be considered a relatively unknown

fact about Tolkien is his ability to combine all the above-mentioned, add in his knowledge of European legends and mythologies, and meld it into something new – which, nevertheless, has an ancient feeling. Furthermore, for all the success of the prose works he wrote, his skills and experiences as a poet and an expert on metre tend to be overlooked, and it was only with the publications of such works as *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun* and *The Fall of Arthur* that this particular skill of Tolkien's started to reach the attention and knowledge of the common reader.

Tolkien's passion for studying, teaching, and ultimately inventing languages required something which is also crucial when one wants to be a skilled poet or a musician, and that is a sensitive ear. That is especially true when one is interested in the oldest English poetry (c. 7th – 11th century), composed by Anglo-Saxon poets, also known as *scopas*, and later written down by ancient English scribes in scriptoria. This kind of poetry was completely different from what was composed in Britain during Tolkien's life, and had very different and more complicated sets of rules. Luckily for Tolkien, he did have a sensitive ear, and he understood the rules, which he then applied in his own poems, and by translating older texts² and writing new ones he became one of the writers who started what could potentially be called the "20th-century alliterative revival", spreading the ancient metre among a wide audience – and at a time when modernism was popular, he contributed at least partially to the survival of the heroic and romantic metre. But did he contribute to the revival and resurrection of the original Germanic metre? Did he help the "true" ancient poetical form re-enter the minds of readers and listeners? And, ultimately, was he in any way one of the minstrels who long ago kept the memory of heroes and gods alive? In this article I explore examples of Tolkien's alliterative poems and, comparing their metre (and to a certain extent the general atmosphere) with those of Old English and Old Icelandic poems, I hope to arrive at a positive conclusion. For today, more than ever before, it is crucial to remember where English and American literature came from, and in the midst of all that is being studied (which is often classed as "English" literature simply because it was written in the English language) it is important not to forget the literature's original European roots. Before looking more closely at Tolkien's poems, however, it would be fitting to briefly explain the above-mentioned rules, accompanied by examples and extracts from original works of art.

2. Alliterative Verse

2.1 Old English Metre

The poetry I analyze in this article is oftentimes called "alliterative", and that is because one of the two most prominent aspects of it was the use of alliteration, or "head-rhyme", which is when two or more words within a verse begin with the same sound. Indeed, the important word here is "sound", for alliterative poetry was first disseminated orally; thus, it is meant to be read aloud, and it is sounds that alliterate, not necessarily letters.³ The rules were that each consonant alliterated with itself, except the paired consonants *sc*, *sp* and *st*, which could only alliterate with themselves (which means that, for instance, "*Scyld*" can alliterate with "*Scefing*",⁴ but not with "*stan*") and any vowel could alliterate with any oth-

er vowel.⁵ An Old English verse was furthermore divided into two half-lines, or “hemistichs” (also called “a-verse” and “b-verse”), and it was alliteration that connected the pair syntactically and to a certain extent semantically, for usually three important words in a full verse alliterated (occasionally four). Here the word-stress, the other important aspect of alliterative poetry, should be mentioned. The metrical rules of Old English poetry were based on varying positions of stressed and unstressed syllables in individual hemistichs, rather than on a fixed pattern as is the case with romance-based poems.⁶ Stressed syllables are called “lifts” and unstressed syllables are called “dips”, and it is the former that alliterates – mostly being important, strong words such as nouns, adjectives, or verbs.⁷ Usually, a half-line contained two main stresses, whereas the number of unstressed syllables could be relatively unlimited. In one hemistich, therefore, there were at least two important words carrying the main stress, and most often the first lift of the second half-line alliterated with one or both lifts in the first half-line. The addition of head-rhyme was furthermore made easier by the nature of Germanic languages themselves, because they have always tended to put the main stress on the first syllables of words (except, of course, in the cases of prefixed words). The majority of Old English half-lines then falls into one of the six basic types, described for the first time by the German philologist Eduard Sievers:

A) Lift – dip, Lift – dip	<i>knights in armour</i>
B) dip – Lift, dip – Lift	<i>the roaring sea</i>
C) dip – Lift, Lift – dip	<i>on high mountains</i>
D) a) Lift, Lift – subordinate stress – dip ⁸	<i>bright archangels</i>
b) Lift, Lift – dip – subordinate stress	<i>bold brazenfaced</i>
E) Lift – subordinate stress – dip, Lift	<i>highcrested helms</i>
	(Tolkien, <i>Monsters</i> 62)

It could be said, then, that stress is an inseparable part of Old English poetry, whereas alliteration itself, although important and most certainly prominent, is not fundamental for it and its metre (Tolkien, *Monsters* 66). If a poem was written “blank”, i.e. without using alliteration, the metrical character itself would remain unaltered. C. S. Lewis said that Old English verse had a structure that could stand alone, and that alliteration was no more the secret here than rhyme is the secret of syllabic verse (15). The main metrical function of alliteration was then to link the two hemistichs together.

It needs to be said here that there were exceptions to the metre, although they only appeared sporadically and almost always served a purpose, such as balancing the half-line, substituting unstressed syllables, etc. The most common variation is called *anacrusis*, and it chiefly concerns the A-type, where it was possible for the poet to add one or two unstressed syllables before the first lift of the a-verse. In b-verses, however, it was seldom used, and C. S. Lewis in his essay on Old English metre states that any modern poet trying to write in this metre should avoid it. He further provides an example in Modern English of what anacrusis looks like in practice. The line “Merry were the minstrels” is a representative of an unaltered A-type, which could be varied thus: “And so merry were the minstrels” (18).

The fact that a half-line could contain a relatively unlimited number of unstressed syl-

lables – a factor that could also count as a variation of any of the patterns – has already been mentioned. Concerning lifts, if there was an apparent difficulty in finding two that would fit into one of the first three patterns, a subordinate stress could act as a major lift. Furthermore, a single lift could be separated into two syllables – the first short and stressed, and the following one unstressed. An advantage here was that many compound words in Old English bore a secondary stress. The range of words which the poets could use was therefore wide, and even more so if we take into consideration the fact that many a personal name contained a subordinate stress in its second “foot”, such as *Byrhtnoþ*, the Anglo-Saxon leader from *The Battle of Maldon*.

Now that the metrical “rules” of Old English alliterative verse have been explained, it will be fitting to demonstrate them graphically. The following example has been taken from the poem *The Battle of Brunanburh*⁹ in its original Old English form (followed by a Modern English translation), and markers of individual metrical features have been added (alliterating sounds are in bold and the primary stresses are marked by the sign “x”):

	x		x		x		x					
1	Her	Æþelstan	cyning,	eorla	dryhten		Here	Æþelstan	king,	earls'	leader,	
		x	x			x		x				
2	beorna	beahgifa,	and his	broþor	eac		bracelet-giver,	and his	brother	too,		
	x		x		x		x		x			
3	Eadmund	æþeling,	ealdorlangne	tir			Eadmund	prince,	honour	won	forever	
	x		x		x		x		x			
4	geslogon	æt	sæcce	sweorda	ecgum		slaying	in	battle	with	swords'	edges
		x		x								
5	ymbe	Brunanburh;					around	Brunanburh;	¹⁰			

(*A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* 40)

Another prominent feature of the oldest Germanic literature worth mentioning (and once again demonstrating the inventiveness and skills of the poets) is its specific vocabulary and a literary device called variation. As far as the former is concerned, there are expressions in the poems that were used specifically in poetry, and do not appear in any other historical texts. They might simply be Old English words like *mece* (sword) or *guð* (battle), which were merely synonyms of the words *sweord* or *beadu*, and do not hinder understanding of the meaning. There were, however, also words of metaphoric or metonymic nature, and with them the reader comes closer to the riddle-like character of Old English poetry. These words used an aspect or a part of the object, fact, or person in question to express the full meaning. Thus *ceol* “keel” could mean a particular part of a ship, but also the ship itself; or by saying *lind* “linden” a poet might very well mean “shield”.

The most prominent group of poetic words are called *kennings*, which were metaphorical compound words or phrases, or their combinations, composed of nouns and genitives, used to describe a person, object or fact, instead of using a more literal expression.¹¹ Here again, attributes were used instead of the whole, and for an unlearned reader they could be true riddles, making it quite difficult for him/her to read a text not accompanied by an explanation.

There were kennings for almost every sphere of life, so one can read about *handgemot* “hand-meeting” or “battle”, *swanrad* “swan’s road” or “sea” (the same would apply for *hranrad* “whale-road”, for the sea is as much a road for whales as land is for humans), or *beaduleoma*, “battle-light” or “sword”.¹² Often even names were composed of kennings, whether one talks about the clearer ones, such as *Ælfwine* “elf-friend”, or those that are riddle-like, such as *Beowulf*, the hero himself. *Beowulf* means “bee-wolf”, which is a kenning for “bear”. In his name there is thus expressed his superhuman strength and possibly even the significance of wild animals, like bears, for Anglo-Saxons.

The other literary device – variation – is then closely linked with kennings and formulaic expressions. It is a restatement of the same idea within a sentence or a group of verses, expressing general or specific qualities of a person, object, or a phenomenon. By using variation, poets were able to acquire more time when composing “on the spot”, while at the same time being able to express different features of one fact. When properly constructed, the result made a passage highly poetic, and emphasised that which the poet considered important or interesting. A description of king Hrothgar from *Beowulf* will serve as a fitting example:

“*Mære þeoden,*
æþeling ærgod unbliðe sæt
þolode ðryðswyð, þegnsorge dreah.” (Beowulf 49)

[Here, in five half-lines, Hrothgar’s qualities as a good ruler are stated three times: *Mære þeoden*, *æþeling ærgod*, and *þolode ðryðswyð*. Translation of these attributes would then go as “famous lord”, “prince good-of-old”, and “the very powerful one”, respectively] (Greenfield 128).

With the five hemistichs talking about the Danish King the description of Old English metre comes to its conclusion, and it only remains to mention some of the most prominent irregularities in the poetic form – for although the rules outlined above apply for the majority of the corpus, still there were poems and passages that differed. Old English verses, for example, were usually not divided into stanzas, but in the case of some of the Exeter Book riddles and poems like *Wulf and Eadwacer* or *Deor* we can see at least an indication of a stanzaic form.

And finally, putting aside the few instances of hypermetric structures (*Judith* and some riddles, for example), there are two poems that exhibit a feature that was not common in English literature until after the arrival of the Normans, and that is end-rhyme. It occasionally appears in *Judith*, but more distinctively it appears in *The Riming Poem* (transparently

named after this phenomenon), where the first half-line both alliterates with the second and rhymes with it.

2.2 Old Norse Metres

Old Norse (or Old Icelandic¹³) literature will be merely touched upon briefly, for the rules of the alliterative verse originating in this region are so complex they would take up an entire monograph. They are, nevertheless, fundamental for the purposes of this article, because Tolkien composed in both versions of the metre.

The poems of the old Scandinavians and Icelanders can be divided into two groups – Eddic (or Eddaic) and skaldic poetry. The former are poems of mostly legendary and mythological nature, for Christianity did not come to Iceland until the 11th century (because the colonization of the island began in the 9th century, the settlers were able to sing songs of praise of their gods for much longer than their continental brethren). The songs and stories were later written down in a manuscript known as *Sæmundar Edda*,¹⁴ also called *Codex Regius*,¹⁵ today commonly known as *Edda*, *The Poetic Edda*, or *The Elder Edda*.¹⁶ This is the most important collection of mythological and heroic poetry of the Old Norse corpus. Containing 9 mythological poems and 18 heroic poems, it provides the reader with the core and essence of Nordic myths and legends, telling of Germanic heroes such as Sigurd Fafnisbani and Helgi Hundingsbani, or of the gods Odin, Thor, Heimdall, Freyr, etc.

Skaldic poetry, in contrast to the anonymous lines in the *Eddas*, is Old Norse court poetry, composed and sung by *skalds* (poets and minstrels), most of whose names are known to the modern reader (Nordby 4). The court poetry was composed in honour of kings, jarls, and other aristocracy, in return for the benefactor's favour, financial and material gifts, and, last but not least, fame and renown. It is quite different from Eddaic poems, which were metrically simpler, as the skalds became famous for their ability to compose complex poetry according to highly strict rules, which were documented in Snorri's *Edda*.

Already at the time of the recording of the poems, four metres used in the *Poetic Edda* were distinguished by ancient theorists (*Eddica Minora* 38), and this distinction is still used nowadays. The four metres are called *fornyrðislag*, *ljóðahátt*, *málahátt* and *galdralag*. They (unlike the skaldic metres) are in many aspects similar to the Old English alliterative verse, but there are, nevertheless, differences, which make Old Norse poetry distinct from Anglo-Saxon poetry. For instance, Eddic poems were divided into stanzas (which occurred only scarcely in English manuscripts) and they show tendencies towards fixing not only the number of lifts and dips in a line, but also the number of syllables in general. Of the four types, *fornyrðislag* (old-lore metre) is the closest to the Old English, and, ultimately, to the common Germanic metre (Larrington xxviii), and was used chiefly for narrative in heroic poetry. The stanzas of *fornyrðislag* consisted of four lines divided into hemistichs, and each long-line contained four lifts and up to three alliterating stressed syllables, following the rules of alliteration already discussed (*Eddica Minora* 39). Four lines of the “old-lore metre” (which was used, for instance, in the poems *Völuspá* and *Rígsþula*) will suffice as a representative of Eddic verse. Alliteration is once again in bold, and stresses are marked by the sign “x”:

x x x x
 „Hér má Höðbroddr Helga kenna
 x x x x
 flóta trauðan, í flóta miðiom;
 x x x x
 hann heft eðli ættar þinnar
 x x x x
 arf Fiörsunga, und sic þrungit.”

[“Here Hodbrodd may recognise Helgi, | the fighter who does not flee, in the midst of the fleet; | the homeland of your kin, | the inheritance of Fiorsungs, he has conquered.”] (*Poetic Edda* xxviii)

Skaldic verse, on the other hand, was composed in a large variety of metres, documented already in the 13th century by Snorri Sturluson, who dedicated an entire chapter of his *Edda*, *Háttatal*, to metre, and another one, *Skáldskaparmál*, to the composition and interpretation of kennings¹⁷ and heiti. The two most prominent kinds of verse, however, are called *dróttkvæð* (the “court-metre”) and *kviðuátt* (the “ballad-metre”). *Dróttkvæð* is the more complex of the two, following standards in many ways quite different from the Anglo-Saxon metre, although the “basic” rules, such as how many lifts should alliterate, remain the same. Skaldic poems, like Eddic poems, were divided into stanzas, which in this case consisted of eight lines, divided into half-stanzas, or *hellingar*. Verses of *dróttkvæð* formed pairs, and are therefore called “odd lines” and “even lines” (instead of being divided by a caesura and called “a-verses” and “b-verses”); they are connected by alliteration in the same way as hemistichs were connected in English poems. Each line of the court-metre had a fixed number of syllables: three stressed and three unstressed. Furthermore, the first lift of the even line alliterated with two lifts of the odd line, and besides alliteration there was also a poetic device called “hendings” (ON *hendingar*), which are internal rhymes, similar to alliteration, but not necessarily bound to stand on an initial consonantal sound of a word, but rather on a non-initial vowel and its following consonants. It was a rule that every line of *dróttkvæð* contained a pair of these internal rhymes. *Kviðuátt*, or “ballad-metre”, was also divided into odd and even lines, forming pairs connected by alliteration. The odd lines had three syllables and the even lines had four. An excerpt from two poems, representing *dróttkvæð* and *kviðuátt* respectively, will conclude this brief venture into the theory of alliterative metre.¹⁸

“Títt erum verð at vátta
 vætti ber ek at ek hætta

þung til þessar gongu,
 þinn, kinnalá minni.
 Margr velr gestr þar er gistir,
 gjöld, finnumsk vér sjaldan,
 Ármóði liggr, æðri,
 Qlðra dregg í skeggi.”

[“Eager am I the meal to acknowledge | witness I bear that I dared | heavy make this journey | your, cheek-surge my. | Many pays a guest, there stays, | payment, we meet seldom, | in Ármóðr lies, dearer, | of ale dregs in beard.”] (Potts 6).

“Þar **h**augsegl
 í **h**rimis vindi
hranda byrr
hlása knátti...”

[“There shield-ring-sails | in the sword’s wind | sword’s breeze | blow could,...”] (Potts 7).

2.3 “*The Hope of the Heathens*” – Semantic Linking

Besides using alliteration because of the very nature of Germanic languages, for better memorization or simply for the sound of it, there was one more significant function of this literary device, and that is the possibility of using it to link the two hemistichs not only metrically and syntactically, but also semantically. Anglo-Saxon scribes often used alliteration to put two or more words or facts in the opposing half-lines in contrast, to support variation and repetition, or to emphasise that which they deemed important to emphasise (Greenfield 127–129). A fitting example could be taken from *Beowulf* itself, where there is a passage in which the poet describes Danes:

Swylc wæs þeaw hyra,
hæpenra hyhht: helle gemundon
in modsefan, Metod hie ne cupon... (ll. 178b–80)

[“Such was their custom, | the hope of heathens: it was hell that | governed in their thoughts, not knowing God...”] (Greenfield 127).

In the example above, the words “hope of the heathens” (*hæpenra hyht*) alliterate with “hell” (*helle*), putting in contrast non-Christians and the Christian version of the under-

world realm of suffering, while at the same time contrasting the positive word “hope” with “hell”, which in a Christian context has negative connotations. The negative “hell” is here the only “hope” of the “heathens”, the three words being both semantically connected and put in contrast (*Béowulf* 49).

One more example, this time from the “Swan” riddle, will show how alliteration and word-stress were used to support variation:

...Frætwe mine

swogað hlude ond swinsiað,

torhte singað, þonne ic getenge ne beom

flode ond foldan, ferende gæst.

[“My adornments | sound loudly and make melody, | brightly sing when I am not touching | water and land, [am] a wide-faring spirit.”] (Greenfield 129).

The second hemistich of the second verse could be considered a restatement of the first half-line, and it is therefore a typical case of variation. Here, additionally, it is emphasized by the alliterating words *swogað* (“sound”) and *swinsiað* (“make melody”).

3. The Oxford *Scop*

As has been mentioned above, Tolkien managed to combine a passion for languages, ancient stories, and a sense and understanding of metrical structure to such an extent that he was able to compose and write down a number of alliterative poems, many of which have been published by his son Christopher. Whether they are dealing with the lore of his secondary world or matters of the primary world’s history and legend, the analyzed examples below give evidence of Tolkien’s skills in the formal, technical, narrative, and metaphysical aspects of composing poetry.

Seven excerpts in total shall be presented, with lifts and alliteration marked in bold, followed by an analysis according to Sievers’ rules, and concluded by a brief commentary upon the metrical structure – and, if such a case occurs, upon the use of the semantic linking (marked by underlined words). In the light of the facts in the paragraph above, it will be appropriate to begin with the long narrative poem *The Fall of Arthur*, whose story deals with the last days of the legendary British king, his war against the Anglo-Saxons, as well as with Mordred’s betrayal. Furthermore, the poem is composed in what is called “the Beowulf metre”, formally nearly identical to the longest Old English epic poem. This combination of Celtic and Teutonic elements – i.e. a modern rendition of the Arthurian legend written in a proper Germanic alliterative verse – results in a work of art connecting more than a thousand years of the history of the British Isles.

The first passage describes sir Gawain, a knight of the Round Table, encouraging Arthur to hasten and go into battle against his treacherous and rebellious bastard son Mordred:

X X X X
 “...Here **free unfaded** is the **flower** of time
 X X X X
 that **men** shall **remember** through the **mist** of years
 X X X X
 as a **golden** summer in the **grey** winter.
 X X X X
 And **Gawain** has thou. May **God** keep us
 X X X X
 in **hope** allied, **heart** united
 X X X X
 as the **kindred blood** in our **bodies courseth**,
 X X X X
Arthur and **Gawain!** **Evil** greater
 X X X X
 hath fled **aforetime** that we **faced** together.
 X X X X
 Now **haste** is **hope!** While **hate** lingers,
 X X X X
 and **uncertain** counsel **secret** ponders,
 X X X X
 as **wroth** as **wind** let us ride **westward**,
 X X X X
 and **sail** over sea with **sudden** vengeance!” (Tolkien, *The Fall of Arthur* 25)

1. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (A, B)
2. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (A, B)
3. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (A, C)
4. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (B, C)
5. dip – Lift, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (C, A)
6. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (B, A)
7. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
8. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
9. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (B, C)
10. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
11. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (B, C)
12. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (B, A)

The extract above gives evidence of the precision with which the poem was composed. As far as its metrical structure is concerned, it is divided into series of hemistichs, each containing two main lifts and two dips consisting of variable numbers of unaccented syllables. Furthermore, all the half-lines fall into one of the patterns described by Eduard Sievers, in this case namely A, B, and C, out of which twelve are the A-type, seven are the B-type, and five follow the outline of type B. Tolkien also made use of anacrusis, the above-discussed device which places unstressed syllables before the first lift. It is interesting to notice that in five cases out of eight the anacrusis appears in the a-verse, which was a common practice in Old English poems. The remaining three, however, should not be considered a deformity, even though they are present in b-verses. Such cases did occur in ancient English poetry, albeit sporadically.

In terms of alliteration, the poem follows the series of ancient rules correctly as well, for two to three stressed syllables in each line alliterate in such a way that each consonant alliterates with itself, and vowels alliterate variably. The only two exceptions are represented by lines 6 and 7, where instances of crossed alliteration occur.

Besides its metrical composition, the passage above also honours its ancient ancestors by incorporating alliteration and word-stress as means of semantic linking. Like the *Beowulf* poet and his heathens above, in the third line Tolkien contrasted two opposing phenomena by alliterating the adjectives “golden” and “grey”, describing the seasons summer and winter, respectively. Moreover, taking into consideration the context of the utterance, which by itself talks about something unseen, the final result gives Gawain’s words strength and offers evidence of the knight’s rhetorical skills.

In the fifth line, on the other hand, one will notice variation achieved by restating the words “hope allied” in the form “heart united”, where “**h**ope” alliterates with “**h**ear**t**”. Four lines below, Tolkien then uses the word “**h**ope” again, this time to put it in opposition to “**h**ate”, an emotion at the other end of the scale.

Finally, via the instance of crossed alliteration in the sixth line, Tolkien creates both linguistic and semantic word-play. The full line reads “as the **k**indred **b**lood in our **b**odies courseth”, referring to the fact that Arthur is Gawain’s uncle, and therefore they are of the same blood line. Blood then, naturally, courses in bodies, and is often referred to when talking about family relations. It is only after a brief moment of reflection and pondering that one realizes how complex and deep the verse truly is, and how far from mere “ornamental elements” stress and alliteration are here.

Only a couple of lines previously in the poem, Cradoc came to his king with evil tidings, warning him against Mordred:

x x x x

“...**H**ither have I **h**ardly **h**unted riding

x x x x

on the **s**ea pursued to your **s**ide hastened,

x x x x

treason to **t**ell you. **T**rust not Mordred!

x x x x

He is **f**alse to **f**aith, your **f**oes harbours,

x x x x

with **l**ords of **L**ochlan **l**eague he maketh,

x x x x

out of **A**lmain and **A**ngel **a**llies hireth,

x x x x

coveting the **k**ingdom, to the **c**rown reaching

x x x x

hands **u**n**h**oly. **H**aste now westward!” (Tolkien, *The Fall of Arthur* 23)

1. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
2. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (B, C)
3. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
4. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (B, C)
5. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
6. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
7. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (A, C)
8. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)

In terms of the metre, very little new can be said about this extract, for the lines are composed as properly as in the previous example. One interesting fact is, however, worth mentioning, and it is connected with the remark made above concerning the oral nature of alliterative poetry. An unlearned person might think that the words in the a-verse of the seventh line cannot alliterate, since “coveting” and “kingdom” begin with different letters. The pronunciation of the words, however, clearly allows a proper head-rhyme.

As far as the semantic linking is concerned, there is more to be commented upon. In the third line, “treason” and “trust” are put into juxtaposition, once again empowered by the alliterating consonants, while in the fourth line the villain’s “false faith” is emphasized by the word “foes” in the second hemistich. In the remaining three cases of the use of stress and alliteration to support semantic linking, Tolkien linked nouns and verbs, describing how Mordred is making preparations for striking his final blow.

In the same way that Tolkien was shifting his attention between the primary and the secondary world when he was teaching at Oxford during the day and writing high-fantasy stories at night, he was also switching between those realms in his poems. Evidence of this can be seen below, in verses from the epic poem *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*, in which Tolkien combined his own mythology, concerning the history of Arda,¹⁹ with the primary world’s poetical and linguistic rules.

x	x	x	x
“Then T halion was th rurst to T hangorodrim,			
x	x	x	x
that m ountain that m eets the m isty skies			
x	x	x	x
on <u>h</u> igh o’er the <u>h</u> ills that H ithlum sees			

x x x x
blackly brooding on the borders of the north.
 x x x x
To a stool of stone on its steepest peak
 x x x x
they bound him in bonds, an unbreakable chain,
 x x x x
and the Lord of Woe there laughing stood,
 x x x x
then cursed him for ever and his kin and seed
 x x x x
with a doom of dread, of death and horror.
 x x x x
There the mighty man unmoved sat;
 x x x x
but unveiled was his vision, that he viewed afar
 x x x x
all earthly things with eyes enchanted
 x x x x
that fell on his folk - a fiend's torment." (Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand* 8)

1. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
2. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
3. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
4. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (A, B)

5. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
6. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
7. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
8. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
9. dip – Lift , dip – Lift / anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (B, A)
10. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B, B)
11. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (A, B)
12. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (B, A)
13. dip – Lift, dip – Lift/ dip – Lift, Lift – dip (B, C)

Once again, the poem is composed carefully according to the rules of the Old English alliterative metre, containing four lifts per line, each hemistich corresponding with one of Sievers’ types. From the 26 half-lines analyzed, 21 are of the B-type, while the rest is an example of the A-type. Furthermore, there are two to three lifts alliterating in each long-line, most of them being consonantal sounds, and the reader will notice that in the fifth line the author was keeping in mind the rules concerning the paired consonants *st*, *sp*, and *sc*, for the three words that alliterate there are “**stool**”, “**stone**”, and “**steepest**”. This phenomenon, however, does not necessarily have to be followed in Modern English alliterative poetry, because the language in question has, after all, changed (for instance the pronunciation of the “*sc*” sound, as has already been mentioned).

Putting the metrical aspect aside, Tolkien also made use of variation, the aforementioned “re-stating” literary device used in Old English poetry. In the sixth line, “they bound him in bonds” is followed by “an unbreakable chain”, the latter being a restatement of the “bonds”. Furthermore, taking the broader context into consideration, multiple names and kenning-like expressions are used for some of the protagonists. For instance, Húrin is thus called Thalion²⁰ or “the mighty man”, and the dark lord Morgoth²¹ is called “the Lord of Woe” in the seventh line, or “a fiend” in the thirteenth line.

Stressed words in the line “...they **bound** him in **bonds**, an **unbreakable** chain...” are furthermore semantically connected and emphasized by alliteration, the same being the case with e.g. the third, the fourth and the ninth line, where the author thus created pairs of words such as “**high**” and “**hills**”, “**blackly**” and “**brooding**”, and “**doom**” and “**dread**” (in this case also with “**death**”, yet another word with rather negative “connotation”).

Tolkien’s mind travelled not only from the primary world to the secondary world and back again, but also within the very worlds themselves. The scope of the sources that provided him with linguistic and literary material was wide indeed, for one of his chief inspirations came from the northern brothers of the Anglo-Saxons, that is, from Scandinavians and Icelanders. Not only did he teach Old Norse at Oxford, but many a name or an element originating in Norse mythology found its way into Tolkien’s fiction.²² Moreover, he went as far as writing his own “version” of the lay about the hero Sigurd, from whose “original” Old Norse version a considerable part is missing because pages were torn out

from the manuscript it had been written in. Tolkien then, instead of guessing what might have been written on these pages, went on and composed the verses “again”, in the stanzas of *fornyrðislag*, as can be seen above.²³ However, the already-provided excerpt in the “old-lore metre” demonstrates four lines divided into hemistichs, whereas Tolkien’s poem is divided into eight paired lines, the pairs acting as a-verses and b-verses. This variation was common, and additionally, Tolkien believed that *fornyrðislag* was actually a developed *kviðuhátt* (Tolkien, *Legend* 45), which was composed of eight paired lines – four odd, and four even. The metrical structure, however, follows the same rules as a standard OE line. Therefore the analysis of the part of the *Völsungakviða en nýja*²⁴, as Tolkien himself named it in ON, looks identical to the previous two analyses.

10

x x

“A seer long silent

x x

her song upraised –

x x

the **halls** **hearkened** –

x x

on **high** she stood.

x x

Of doom and death

x // x

dark words she spake

x x

of the last battle

x x

of the leaguered Gods.

11

x x

‘The **h**orn of **H**eimdal

x x

I **h**ear ringing;

x x

the **B**lazing **B**ridge

x x

bends neath horsemen;

x x

the **A**sh is groaning,

x x

his **a**rms trembling,

x x

the **W**olf waking,

x x

warriors riding.

12

x x

The sword of **S**urt

x x

smoketh redly;

x x

the slumbering **S**erpent

x x

in the sea moveth;

x x

a **shadowy ship**

x x

from **shores** of Hell

x x

legions **bringeth**

x x

to the last **battle**.

13

x x

The **wolf Fenrir**

x x

waits for Ódin,

x x

for **Frey the fair**

x x

the **flames** of Surt;

x x

the **deep Dragon**

x x

shall be **doom** of Thór –

x x

shall **all** be ended,

x x

shall Earth perish?” (Tolkien, *Legend* 62–63)

10

1. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)
dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)

2. dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)
dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)

3. dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)
Lift – SS – dip – Lift (E)

4. dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)
dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)

11

1. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)
dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)

2. dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)
Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)

3. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)
dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)

4. dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)
Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)

12

1. dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)
Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)

2. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)
dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)

3. dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)
dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)

4. Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)
dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)

13

1. dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)
Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)
2. dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)
dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)
3. dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)
dip – Lift, dip – Lift (B)
4. anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A)
dip – Lift, Lift – dip (C)

As in the previous examples given, here too all 32 lines correspond with those presented by Eduard Sievers. In this case, furthermore, it is interesting to notice the occurrence of the E-type (stanza 10, line 6/the even line of the third long-line), where there is only one dip; it therefore had to be substituted by a different element, i.e. the secondary stress. As far as alliteration is concerned, very little needs to be said about it at this point of the commentary; perhaps only that two phenomena worth special attention are the crossed alliteration in stanza 12 (“...legions **bringeth** to the **last battle**...”) and once again the poet’s awareness of the importance of sounds over letters, as can be read, or rather heard, in the lines “...a **shadowy ship** from **shores** of Hell...”. The words here do not alliterate because of the first letter “s”, but because of the /ʃ/ sound, represented by the initial letters “sh-”. The reader will notice that the odd lines are connected with the even lines precisely according to the rules of Old English and Old Norse alliterative verse.

Furthermore, the semantic linking and emphasis is here performed by alliterating words like “**doom**”, “**death**”, and “**dark**” (which are connected by their “negativity”, similarly to the previous extract) and “**horn**”, “**Heimdal**”, and “**hear**”. The latter emphasizes the act of hearing the very loud sound, which, according to myths, the god Heimdall’s horn *Gjallarhorn* will make to announce the coming of Rangarök.

Finally, when discussing J. R. R. Tolkien and alliterative poetry, one must not forget that verse also found its way into his most popular fiction. There are a number of old Germanic-style lines in *The Lord of the Rings*, most often uttered by the people of Rohan, who were modelled upon the primary world’s Anglo-Saxons. Here I shall analyze three brief examples, starting with a poem recited by Fangorn, or Treebeard the Ent,²⁵ followed by an exclamation of the King of the Rohirrim,²⁶ and in the end by a short speech of Éomer over his uncle’s body. The three short texts do not need to be commented upon in great detail, for they follow the same rules as *The Lay of the Children of Húrin* and *The Fall of Arthur*. Two remarks, however, need to be made. Firstly, being presented in the books as direct speech, the “poems” are not graphically divided by a caesura, but they still fulfil the metrical rules (after all, in their manuscripts, OE poems were not divided in this fashion, either). Secondly, as far as the last example is concerned, its third line’s a-verse begins with a lift of two short syllables – which was also acceptable, as has been mentioned above.

x // x x x

“Learn now the lore of the Living Creatures!

x x x x

First name the four, the free peoples:

x // x x x

Eldest of all, the elf-children;

x x x x

Dwarf the delver, dark are his houses;

x x x x

Ent the earthborn, old as mountains;

x x x x

Man the mortal, master of horses:...” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 604)

1. Lift – SS – dip – Lift / anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip (E, A)
2. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (B, C)
3. Lift – SS – dip – Lift / dip – Lift, Lift – dip (E, C)
4. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
5. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
6. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)

x x x x

“Arise now, arise Riders of Théoden!”²⁷

x x x x

Dire deeds awake, dark is it eastward.

x x x x

Let horse be bridled, horn be sounded!

x x //

Forth Eorlingas!” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 675)

1. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (B, A)
2. dip – Lift, dip – Lift / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (B, A)
3. Anacrusis – Lift – dip, Lift – dip / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (A, A)
4. Lift, Lift – dip – SS (Db)

x // x x x

“Mourn not overmuch! Mighty has fallen,

x x x x

meet was his ending. When his mound is raised,

x // x x x

women then shall weep. War now calls us!” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1104)

1. Lift – SS – dip – Lift / Lift – dip – Lift – dip (E, A)
2. Lift – dip, Lift – dip / dip – Lift, dip – Lift (A, B)
3. Lift – SS – dip – Lift / Lift – dip, Lift – dip (E, A)

This exploration of Tolkien’s alliterative poems will conclude by commenting upon the first of the three poetical utterances, in which alliteration links the individual races of Middle-Earth with their typical and most significant qualities. There are the “elf-children” connected with the word “Eldest”, since they really are the most ancient race to dwell in Arda. The second-mentioned are the dwarves in the line “Dwarf the delver” who lives in “dark” houses. That is because dwarves indeed live under mountains where they mine for precious metals and build their vast underground cities. Ents are the third on the list, and their kind alliterates with “earthborn” and “old”, for it is true that the shepherds of Arda’s forests are a very old race and many people confuse them with trees. Finally, “Man” is linked with the word signifying his ultimate destiny, the end we are all heading towards. Men are, after all, “mortal”.

In conclusion then, having analyzed both old Germanic texts and his own writings, it is safe to say that John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, as a scholar and a professor at Oxford University, was very well learned in the intricacies of the ancient Germanic alliterative metre,

and was able to compose modern poems in the heroic spirit (and form) of his ancestors, closely and carefully following the original metrical rules. As a man of many passions and interests he was able to enrich not only the corpus of English fantasy literature and literature in general, but along with other authors of the “20th-century alliterative revival”²⁸ he made sure that at times when modernism was popular among both the general public and academics, the metre and heritage of the Venerable Bede and Snorri Sturluson has survived into the present day. The modern English tongue and contemporary English literature are, after all, first and foremost the descendants of the dialects and stories the Germanic tribes brought to the British Isles more than a millennium and a half ago. It is vital and fundamental to remember this fact – especially in the 21st century, when the studies of English and American literature are greatly (and in the true sense of the word) diverse, and oftentimes reach into areas which do not necessarily have anything in common with the Germanic peoples. Tolkien (and others) then did the best thing he could do to honour the fathers of the half-forgotten past, and that is to write poems and songs about them and their achievements, and make people remember them, so they could live in the readers’ and listeners’ hearts forever.

Notes

¹ Tolkien used the expression “secondary world” for his fictional fantasy realm. The “real” world we live in he then called the “primary world”.

² Some of the more notable of Tolkien’s translations are the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, the religious *Exodus*, the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, etc.

³ It needs to be said here that Anglo-Saxons were not the only composers of alliterative poetry. Its metrical specifics are common to the oldest extant poetry of most Germanic peoples – it was written in Old English, Old Norse, as well as in Old High German and Middle High German, each of the above-mentioned versions sharing the same features but at the same time having many of its own. This article, however, focuses chiefly on the Old English version of alliterative poems. Furthermore, in the Middle English Period (c. 11th – 15th century), there occurred the so-called “Middle English Alliterative Revival” – several alliterative poems were written (with much looser rules and already influenced by romance-based poetry), of which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Piers Plowman*, and *Alliterative Morte Arthure* are the most prominent and well-known ones.

⁴ In Old English, “sc-“ was pronounced as /ʃ/, as in Modern English “ship”. Therefore, it is logical that it would not alliterate with /st/ or /sp/. Furthermore, the alliteration of this sound would be quite different in Modern English poems, because of the change in pronunciation. The sound has, under the influence of Nordic languages, developed into different forms, such as /sk/.

⁵ Once again it is fundamental to keep in mind the oral nature of the rules. “Any vowel alliterating with any other vowel” would then mean that the word “enemy” could alliterate with words like “apple” or “earth”, but not with “unicorn”, “yellow”, etc.

⁶ Tolkien himself stressed that a listener should not be listening for any “same metre” and that the one who recites should not be trying to strain the poem to fit any familiar modern verse-rhythm. OE verse should be read in the rhythm of natural speech, for, if composed and recited properly, a shape and balance of the halves distinctive to Germanic poetry will be heard (*Monsters* 63).

⁷ Prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, etc. tended not to alliterate. Therefore, because the strongest lift usually alliterated and ideally it was the first of the two, the word at the same time belonging to one of the word classes mentioned above, one must come to the conclusion that the Old English line tended to end with semantically inferior words, thus making the end of lines weak in significance. Moreover, the end of a full-line was not a natural stop, as is the case with some modern poems, but the end of the a-verse was. Usually, a “sentence” stopped there, and another one began with the beginning of the b-verse.

⁸ D and E types only have one dip. It must therefore be compensated for by a syllable nearly (but not quite) as strong as the Lift (19), i.e. by adding a subordinate stress.

⁹ *The Battle of Brunanburh* is a poem preserved in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It describes a historical battle, which took place in 937, and where the combined armies of Irish Norsemen (the overlord of Dublin was the Norse Anlaf at the time), Scotland and Strathclyde fought against the Mercian and West Saxon armies led by king Æþelstan and his brother Edmund.

¹⁰ Translated by Sebastian Komárek.

¹¹ The metaphorical compounds can in fact be further divided into two groups, although they are mostly both called kennings. Firstly, there are the so-called *kent heiti* (pl. *kend heiti*), which identify a person or an object with something it “literally” is, like *hæðstapa* “heath-stepper”, or simply “stag”. Secondly, there are proper kennings, and these identify the referent with something it is only metaphorically, like *garbeam* “spear-tree” or “warrior” (Greenfield 125).

¹² There were, of course, much more complex kennings, such as *æscplega* “spear-play”, which ultimately means “battle”. When deciphering kennings, one must often know more than Old English vocabulary. Otherwise one would not know that the word *æsc*, which means “ash-tree”, could also stand for “spear”, because spear shafts were most often made of ash-wood. Furthermore, battle was more than mere slaughter for the Germanic peoples. It was a way towards eternal glory, or, in the case of the pagan Norsemen, a potential gateway to Valhalla, an enormous mead-hall in the afterlife. They were brave warriors, and for them a battle could be, exaggeratedly or not, also a play. If one does not take context (which is often a helper) into consideration, one has to go through a process like this to come to the conclusion that *æscplega* simply means “battle”.

¹³ Old Norse and Old Icelandic are terms oftentimes used interchangeably when talking about the ancient literature coming from the North. The reason is that the majority of texts written in the ancestral language of Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish were in actuality written down in Iceland.

¹⁴ The manuscript was probably written in the 13th century, and was discovered by the bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson in the 17th century. He attributed its authorship to Sæmundr, an Icelandic priest; hence the name *Sæmundar Edda* (*The Poetic Edda* xi).

¹⁵ After having discovered the manuscript, Brynjólfur sent it to the Danish king, who added it to his royal collection, giving it one of its names, *Codex Regius* (*Eddica Minora* 14).

¹⁶ The name *Elder Edda*, however, is incorrect, for *The Edda* is in fact a 13th-century manuscript written by the Icelandic historian, politician and poet Snorri Sturluson (Krause 36), who (mostly in prose) wrote about the matters included in *Codex Regius*; in addition to this, he added a detailed survey and explanation of the metrical rules of ON poetry, as well as *Heimskringla* and *Ynglinga Saga*, one of the best-known sagas. Therefore, *Codex Regius* and *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, or the *Prose Edda* (also incorrectly called *The Younger Edda*), share one common source (a manuscript which has not survived), as well as their content and mood, and they were written down at about the same time (Krause 36).

¹⁷ An unlearned person might face serious difficulties when trying to understand some of the Old Norse kennings, even if they were translated into his mother tongue. These poetic expressions tended to be much more complex and riddle-like than those invented by Anglo-Saxons. A short passage from *Skáldskaparmál* will suffice as an example. There is a kenning that says: “... the son of the father of mankind was determined soon to test his strength against the water-soaked earth-band”

(Sturluson 69). Only the translator’s notes will reveal the meaning of the riddles in the sentence. “The son of the father of mankind”, in fact, means Thor (because he is the son of Odin), and “the water-soaked earth-band” is the Midgard Serpent, or Jörmungandr (Sturluson 69), for it is a giant snake that surrounds the world of men under the sea, biting itself in its own tail.

¹⁸ One could also discuss German alliterative poems, but for the purposes of this article they are not relevant.

¹⁹ The story of Húrin and his son, Túrin Turambar, inhabitants of Arda (the Elvish word for “world”) was written in several versions. There were two poetical versions of the story (one being a revision of the other, and both being longer than two thousand lines) composed in Germanic alliterative verse (Tolkien, *The Lays of Beleriand* 1–4), and a number of constantly revised notes in prose. The author’s son, Christopher Tolkien, later managed to edit most of his father’s notes, and John Ronald’s works of art were finally published posthumously as two poems in *The Lays of Beleriand*, and the prose *The Children of Húrin*. Furthermore, there is a shorter version of the tale in *The Silmarillion*.

²⁰ *Thalion*, “the steadfast” or “the strong” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 404).

²¹ The first dark lord to terrorize Middle-Earth, and the original master of Sauron, the villain from *The Lord of the Rings*. Morgoth, originally called Melkor, was one of the Valar, angelic-like characters who shaped the world.

²² Fitting examples could be Eddaic names in *The Hobbit* (such as Dwalin, Kili, Fili, or even Gandalf) or Smaug the Dragon, whose witty conversation with Bilbo resembles very much the encounter of Sigurd and Fafnir (not mentioning the fact that Smaug was guarding a glorious treasure, more than similarly to Fafnir and the dragon from *Beowulf*). Examples like these, however, could provide one with enough material to write several monographs.

²³ The part of the poem chosen for analysis, however, describes the mythological *Ragnarök*, or “the twilight of the gods”, which is the last battle during which the Norse gods will meet their enemies and fight them to death. The god Thor, for instance, will fight Midgardsörmr, the Midgard-Serpent, Odin will be killed by the giant wolf Fenrir, and Heimdall, the guardian of the Rainbow Bridge, will battle against Loki, who is often depicted as the trickster-god.

²⁴ Tolkien wrote two poems about the legend of the House of the Völsungs. They bear the titles *Völsungakviða en nýja*, or *The New Lay of the Völsungs*, and *Guðrúnarkviða en nýja*, or *The New Lay of Guðrún*. Both of them were published posthumously by Tolkien’s son under the title *The Legend of Sigurd and Guðrún*.

²⁵ In *The Lord of the Rings*, Ents were an ancient race of peoples who lived in forests and acted as the shepherds of trees. Their bodies were enormous and sometimes they looked like trees themselves. In OE, the word *ent* means “giant”.

²⁶ Rohirrim – the people of Rohan.

²⁷ Once again, one can see here how much of the primary world’s Germanic history and philology entered Tolkien’s fiction. The name of the king of Rohan, Théoden, is in fact the OE word *peoden*, meaning “lord” or “ruler”.

²⁸ In the 20th century, there were several poets and academics who wrote their own poems following more or less closely the rules of Old English and Old Icelandic alliterative poetry. Some of the more prominent names are: C. S. Lewis, W. H. Auden, John Myers Myers, Earle Birney, Henry Beard, and even the modernist author Ezra Pound.

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