

12 “Mythonomer”: Tolkien on Myth in His Scholarly Work

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By the bye, we now need a new word for the ‘science of the nature of myths’ since ‘mythology’ has been appropriated to the myths themselves. Would ‘mythonomy’ do? I am quite serious. If your views are not a complete error this subject will become more important and it’s worth while trying to get a good word before they invent a beastly one.

(C. S. Lewis to J.R.R. Tolkien, in Lewis 1988: 255)

1. Introduction

This article is dedicated to Nils-Lennart Johannesson’s life-long interest in Tolkien. Nils-Lennart shares Tolkien’s scholarly interests in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English and continues the tradition of the philological school that developed at Oxford in the late nineteenth century (e.g. Palmer 1965, Shippey 1982). This approach to the study of language in connection to literary and historical texts made a paramount contribution to the study of historical development of English and the compilation of what is known today as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. For example, Tolkien’s essay on ‘*Beowulf*: the Monsters and the Critics’ marked a new epoch in the study and appreciation of the poem. For Nils-Lennart, the study and publication of the *Ormulum* manuscript has been the major project of his academic career.

In this article I examine the ideas of myth as expressed in Tolkien’s scholarly work. What is ‘myth’? The meaning of this word has changed throughout human history, causing a certain degree of semantic confusion. As a result, today myth is thought of as ‘fiction’ or ‘illusion’. People generally distinguish between myth as a story about ancient

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gods and myth as any fictitious narrative. However there is more to find in ‘myth’. In the OED the word is given the following definitions: “A purely fictitious narrative usually involving supernatural persons, actions or events, and embodying some popular idea concerning natural or historical phenomena. Properly distinguished from *allegory* and from *legend*.”; and in generalized use: “an untrue or popular tale, a rumour”. The second meaning is identified as concerned with “a fictitious or imaginary person or object.” Whether regarding a tale or an object, one quality seems to be particularly underlined in the above definitions of ‘myth’, that of falsehood.

It is not only in English but in all European languages that the word ‘myth’ denotes a ‘fiction’, and this connotation goes back some twenty-five centuries. It was in ancient Greece that myth became crucial for the development of epic poetry, tragedy, comedy and the plastic arts. But, on the other hand, due to the highly advanced philosophy, ‘myth’ was subjected to a subtle and critical analysis, which contributed to the process of its demystification. The Sophists interpreted myths as allegories revealing naturalistic and moral truths. Socrates, along with his disciple, Plato, was rather sceptical about such attempts at explaining mythical narratives (*Phaedrus*, *Republic* E378). Nevertheless, they both also pointed to the existence of “the under-meaning of ancient mythology” (Müller 1881: 580). For Plato, ‘myth’ was a form of knowledge itself, one of the human ways of knowing the world. Even earlier Ionian rationalism intensely criticised the classic mythology expounded by Homer and Hesiod. Xenophanes of Colophon (*circa* 565–470) was the first to reject mythological concepts of divinity employed by the two poets as “the fables of men of old” (Spence 1921: 41). From that point, the Greeks continued to empty *muthos* of its religious and metaphysical value. In short, the debate about the origins and validity of myths began in ancient Greece, the country with which today many people associate the word *mythology*. The following sections will focus on Tolkien’s views on myth.

2. J.R.R. Tolkien on Myth

The study of myth was not Tolkien’s chief occupation as a scholar, and in his writings he largely expresses his personal views and beliefs. Two main concerns for him are myth as story and the relationship between myth and history. He touches upon the matter of myth in his famous essay on ‘*Beowulf*: the Monsters and the Critics’ (1936) and chooses to speak on a related subject in his Andrew Lang lecture ‘On Fairy-Stories’ (1939).

In ‘*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics’ Tolkien argues against definitions of the poem as “a wild folk-tale” or “mythical allegory”. He asserts that the account of myth as mythical allegory of nature – the sun, the season, and so forth – is to be discredited. He also sees the term ‘folk-tale’ as misleading. In Tolkien’s opinion, there should not be any special distinction between myth and folk-tale:

Folk-tales in being, as told – for the ‘typical folk-tale’, of course, is merely an abstract conception of research nowhere existing – do often contain elements that are thin and cheap, with little even potential virtue; but they also contain much that is far more powerful, and that cannot be sharply separated from myth, being derived from it, or capable in poetic hands of turning into it: that is of becoming largely significant – as a whole, accepted unanalysed. The significance of myth is not easily to be pinned on paper by analytical reasoning. It is at its best when it is presented by a poet who feels rather than makes explicit what his theme portends; ... myth is alive at once and in all its parts, and dies before it can be dissected. (Tolkien 1983: 15)

Another interesting point is made by Tolkien with regard to the features of northern and southern mythologies. Tolkien deeply regrets that practically nothing has survived from pre-Christian English mythology. His general assumption is that it was essentially similar to Norse mythology. In connection with *Beowulf*, he suggests similarities between pagan English and Norse mythic imagination in their “vision of the final defeat of the humane (and of the divine made in its image), and in the essential hostility of the gods and heroes on the one hand and the monsters on the other” (Tolkien 1983: 21). Since the status and significance of monsters are of particular importance in his essay, the differences between southern and northern mythologies are discussed in connection with this theme:

We may with some truth contrast the ‘inhumanness’ of the Greek gods, however anthropomorphic, with the ‘humanness’ of the Northern, however titanic. In the southern myths there is also rumour of wars with giants and great powers not Olympian ... But this war is differently conceived. It lies in a chaotic past. The ruling gods are not besieged, not in ever-present peril or under future doom ... The gods are not allies of men in their war against these or other monsters ... In Norse, at any rate, the gods are within Time, doomed with their allies to death. Their battle is with the monsters and the outer darkness. (Tolkien 1983: 25)

Thus the northern gods degenerated in mythic imagination into the mighty ancestors of northern kings: “When Baldr is slain and goes to Hel he cannot escape thence any more than mortal man” (ibid.).

Tolkien admits that, in the case of southern mythology, gods appear to be more godlike. They are timeless and have no fear of death. Such a mythology is more likely to contain profound thought behind it. Yet one of the characteristics of classical mythology was its continuous development and change. Thus, he claims, it gradually evolved into philosophy (Greece) or regressed into anarchy (Rome). According to Tolkien, the northern mythology escaped this destiny by putting monsters in the centre:

It is the strength of the northern mythological imagination that it faced this problem, put the monsters in the centre, gave them victory but no honour, and found a potent but terrible solution in naked will and courage ... So potent is it, that while the older southern imagination has faded for ever into literary ornament, the northern has power, as it were, to revive its spirit even in our own times. (Tolkien 1983: 25–6)

The power ascribed by Tolkien to northern mythology is also significant for his own mythopoeic work.

‘On Fairy-Stories’ was an Andrew Lang lecture delivered at the University of St Andrews on 8 March 1939. Lang’s twelve-volume collection of fairy-stories is referred to as having no rivals in “the popularity, or the inclusiveness, or the general merits” in English (Tolkien 1983: 114).¹ However, Tolkien entirely disagrees with Lang’s presentation of the material as intended specifically for children.

‘On Fairy-Stories’ is Tolkien’s most well-known piece of academic writing. As Richard Purtill remarks it is even “too well known”, although “the more obvious points Tolkien makes in this essay have been repeated over and over again, and the subtler points have often been neglected” (Purtill 1984: 13). One of the latter points is the relationship between fairy stories and myth. As Tolkien argued in his lecture on *Beowulf*, folk-tales are nothing else but derivatives of myth. Folk-tales, in turn, belong to what he generally defines as *fairy-stories* which he considers to be ‘lower mythology,’ the humbler part of mythology. Therefore a great deal of what Tolkien says about fairy-stories can be applicable to myth.

¹ Tolkien is referring to the twelve volumes of different colours published between 1889 and 1910 by Longmans and Green.

Myth in Tolkien's understanding is, above all, a *story*. Discussing the question of its origins, he emphasises that when enquiring into the origins of 'fairy-stories', one should enquire into the origins of the fairy elements: "To ask what is the origin of stories (however qualified) is to ask what is the origin of language and of the mind" (Tolkien 1983: 119). The parallel he draws between story (or myth), language, and the mind gives us clues for understanding Tolkien's own account of myth.

Before considering the question of origins, Tolkien argues against the application of certain approaches to the study of fairy-stories. In fact the fundamental question of the origin of "the fairy *element*" ultimately leads the enquirer to the same mystery of the origin of story, language and the mind. There are many *elements* in fairy-stories that can be studied regardless of this main question. These kinds of studies, Tolkien asserts, are usually scientific by intention: "they are the pursuit of folklorists or anthropologists: that is of people using the stories not as they were meant to be used, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence, or information, about matters in which they are interested" (Tolkien 1983: 119). Tolkien expresses particular distaste with scholarly interest in recurring similarities, typical of certain schools: "We read that *Beowulf* "is only a version of *Dat Erdmänneken*"; then "*The Black Bull of Norway* is *Beauty and the Beast*", or "is the same story as *Eros and Psyche*", and the Norse *Mastermaid* . . . is "the same story as the Greek tale of Jason and Medea"" (ibid.). For him, such comparisons appear to be pointless whether in art or literature. As he remarks in his essay on *Beowulf*: "myth is alive at once and in all its parts, and dies before it can be dissected" (Tolkien 1983: 15).

Tolkien admits that the fascination of the desire to explain the history of the evolution of stories is very strong in himself. He expresses certain reservations regarding this kind of investigation of the Tree of Tales:

It is closely connected with the philologists' study of the tangled skein of Language, of which I know some small pieces. But even with regard to language it seems to me that the essential quality and aptitudes of a given language in a living moment is both more important to seize and far more difficult to make explicit than its linear history. I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them. In Dasent's words I would say: "We must be satisfied with the soup

that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled.”² (Tolkien 1983: 120)

Tolkien believes that to find out how the whole *picture* is formed is often too challenging a task. What can usually be done is to explain one particular element or detail (like a word in language).

Thus Tolkien believes it unworthy to go into inquiries concerning the history of stories. Fairy-stories are ancient indeed, and are found wherever there is a language. As in archaeology or comparative philology, the debate arises “between *independent evolution* (or rather *invention*) of the similar; *inheritance* from a common ancestry; and *diffusion* at various times from one or more centres” (Tolkien 1983: 121). *Invention* is considered by Tolkien to be the most important and fundamental, and, at the same time, the most mysterious factor of these three: “To an inventor, that is to a storymaker, the other two must in the end lead back” (ibid.). Thus Tolkien shows that both *diffusion* (borrowing in space) and *inheritance* (borrowing in time) are ultimately dependent on *invention*.³

Tolkien dismisses Max Müller’s account of mythology as a “disease of language”,⁴ although, he admits, language “may like all human things become diseased” (Tolkien 1983: 121). He emphasises how intimately linked the origin of language, the mind, and mythology are:

You might as well say that thinking is a disease of the human mind. It would be more near the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology. But Language cannot, all the same, be dismissed. The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval. (Tolkien 1983: 122)

What creates the fairy element, typical of fairy-story and myth, is the human art of ‘Sub-creation’. The latter, in turn, is based upon a unique admixture of human capacity for abstract thought and generalisation, for distinguishing objects from their qualities (e.g. *green-grass*). Indeed,

² Tolkien refers to Sir George Dasent’s translation of *Popular Tales from the Norse*, collected by P. C. Asbjörnsen and J. I. Moe (Edinburgh, 1859), p. xviii.

³ On Tolkien’s understanding of *invention* as ‘discovery’ see Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth*, p. 22.

⁴ In the second series of his *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1864) Müller dedicates five chapters to the discussion of myth. Here he states: “Mythology, which was the bane of the ancient world, is in truth a disease of language. A mythe means a word, but a word which, from being a name or an attribute, has been allowed to assume a more substantial existence” (p. 12, *emphasis added*).

the invention of the adjective is seen by Tolkien as a great step in the evolution of mythical grammar: “When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter’s power - upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes” (Tolkien 1983: 122). Tolkien believes that this is how by ‘fantasy’ a new form is made, and a human being becomes a sub-creator.

Tolkien points out that, as an aspect of mythology, sub-creation has been given too little consideration.⁵ Rather, a good deal of attention has been spent on examining representation or symbolic interpretation of various phenomena of the real world. Thus certain opinions divide mythology into ‘lower’ and ‘higher’, distinguishing ‘Faërie’, “the realm or state in which fairies have their being” (Tolkien 1983: 113) from Olympus.

Tolkien rejects the allegorical explanation of myths which claims that ‘nature-myths’ are based upon personification of natural phenomena (the sun, the dawn, and so forth) and that fairy tales are simply a sort of debased mythology. This seems to Tolkien “the truth almost upside down” (Tolkien 1983: 123). Indeed, the closer the so-called ‘nature-myth’ is to its prototype, the less interesting it is as a myth offering an explanation of the real world. Any ‘personality’ can only be obtained from a person. Thus Tolkien concludes:

The gods may derive their colour and beauty from the high splendours of nature, but it was Man who obtained these for them, abstracted them from sun and moon and cloud; their personality they get direct from him; the shadow or flicker of divinity that is upon them they receive through him from the invisible world, the Supernatural. There is no fundamental distinction between the higher and lower mythologies. Their peoples live, if they live at all, by the same life, just as in the mortal world do kings and peasants. (ibid.)

Tolkien illustrates this point by the example of the Norse god Thórr. His name means ‘thunder’, but his character and appearance cannot originate in thunder or lightening. He looks more like a not particularly clever, red-bearded, and remarkably strong Northern farmer, the kind by whom Thórr was beloved. So, what came first, Tolkien asks, the thunder or the farmer? It seems to him that “the farmer popped up in

⁵ Zettersten (2011) devotes an entire chapter “Tolkien’s double worlds” to the subject of sub-creation.

the very moment when Thunder got a voice and face; there was a distant growl of thunder in the hills every time a story teller heard a farmer in a rage” (Tolkien 1983: 124).

Another important point in Tolkien’s discussion of mythology is its relation to religion. This is where its ‘higher’ element comes from. Tolkien refers to the view, previously expressed by Andrew Lang, that mythology and religion are two different things. Although they have become confused, mythology as such does not have any religious significance. Tolkien largely agrees with this distinction, although he admits that in fact religion and mythology have become entangled. He does not deny a possibility that they could be separated long ago, but since then, through error and confusion, came back to re-fusion.

In Tolkien’s view, confusion itself appears to be a significant factor in the process of making mythical or fairy-story characters. Using Dasent’s image of the ‘Soup’, he talks about the continuously boiling ‘Cauldron of Story’ (Tolkien 1983: 125). Thus many famous historical characters find themselves “thrown” into the Cauldron, from which they re-appear changed into mythical characters. The most obvious example of this kind is king Arthur, but Tolkien also mentions Charlemagne’s mother, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Froda, King of the Heathobards, and others. His conclusion is this: “History often resembles ‘Myth’, because they are both ultimately of the same stuff” (Tolkien 1983: 127). This notion is anticipated in ‘The Monsters and the Critics’.

Above all, Tolkien is concerned with the question: What effect is produced by fairy-stories **now**? Myths and fairy-stories are old and therefore appealing but there is more to them:

Such stories have now a mythical or total (unanalysable) effect, an effect quite independent of the findings of Comparative Folk-lore, and one which it cannot spoil or explain; they open a door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe. (Tolkien 1983: 128–9)

It is because of this ‘timeless’ effect that old elements in myths and fairy-stories have been preserved. Even though some ancient elements in such stories are often dropped out, replaced, or changed by their oral narrators, the essential mythical elements survive because of their felt literary significance. For example, when a myth has an explanation of some ritual or taboo which no longer means anything, the value of the story itself still depends upon this ritual or taboo.

To sum up Tolkien’s argument, “There is no fundamental distinction between higher and lower mythologies” (Tolkien 1983: 123), regardless of whether myth and folk-tale speak of real persons and things, or whether they are merely a product of human imagination. Since he speaks of fairy-stories and myths as *stories* enjoyed by people today, the main criterion for defining a good story is how well it temporarily convinces the reader of the imaginary world of the story, with its own standards of truth. Thus the secondary worlds of fairy-stories, as products of sub-creation, require from the reader a special kind of Secondary Belief. The ‘primal desire’ for Faërie is often constrained in the modern reader by religion (or lack of it) and science. This was not the case for pre-Christian pagans who lived under the ‘spell’ cast by myths which led them to a more or less permanent state of secondary belief.

As a philologist, Tolkien was aware of the historical relationship between *spell* and *evangelium*. As Shippey notes:

... for the Old English translation of Greek *evangelion*, ‘good news’, was *gód spell*, ‘the good story’, now ‘Gospel’. *Spell* continued to mean, however, ‘a story, something said in formal style’, eventually ‘a formula of power’, a magic spell. The word embodies much of what Tolkien meant by ‘fantasy’, i.e. something unnaturally powerful (magic spell), something literary (a story), something in essence true (Gospel). At the very end of his essay he asserts that the Gospels have the ‘supremely convincing tone’ of Primary Art, of truth - a quality he would also like to assert, but could never hope to prove of elves and dragons. (Shippey 1982: 47)

Tolkien finishes ‘On Fairy-Stories’ with a discussion of the fairy-story element in the Gospels. They contain “a story of a large kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories” (Tolkien 1983: 155).

3. Pretence or Belief?

‘On Fairy-Stories’ was written for a non-specialised audience, and is therefore the least ‘philological’ of Tolkien’s scholarly works. This lack of philological core, as well as the comparatively popular style of the essay, has caused Shippey to remark that there is a sign that Tolkien tried to “talk down” to his audience, “pretending that fairies are real” (Shippey 1982: 45). On the other hand, if there had been an element of ‘pretending’, it could have also been intended to keep a form of seriousness about the works of sub-creation. As noted earlier, Tolkien believed that in order to create secondary belief in the modern reader, there

must be no laughing at the magic: “That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away” (*Tolkien* 1983: 114).

It seems that the merits of ‘On Fairy-Stories’, and its consequent popularity, are rooted in Tolkien’s less formally academic and more personal approach to the subject. The essay is invaluable for shedding light upon his views on myth and language. After all, philology was not the only, although surely the major, source of Tolkien’s inspiration. ‘On Fairy-Stories’ seems to be written more by Tolkien-the artist and Tolkien-the believer, rather than Tolkien-the philologist or Tolkien-the scholar. As he remarked in 1951 to Milton Waldman:

I am not ‘learned’* in the matters of myth and fairy-story ... for in such things (as far as known to me) I have always been seeking material, things of a certain tone and air, and not simple knowledge ... Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error) but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary ‘real’ world. (I am speaking, of course, of our present situation, not of ancient pagan, pre-Christian days). (Carpenter & Tolkien: 144)

* Though I have thought *about* them a good deal.

Later in the same letter he again recalls the theme of the Fall which he touches upon in ‘On Fairy-Stories’:

After all, I believe that legends and myths are largely made of ‘truth’, and indeed present aspects of it that can only be received in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear. There cannot be any ‘story’ without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them. (Carpenter & Tolkien: 147)

For Tolkien, myth is a form of art which inexplicitly transmits elements of truth. He strongly disagrees with the confusion of myth with allegory and the explanation of pagan gods as ‘personifications’ of natural phenomena. On the other hand, he also does not draw any clear distinction between mythology and folklore. Myth is interesting to Tolkien as a story with literary merits. In his opinion, the Tree of Tales should be left to be enjoyed rather than examined.

4. Myth: thought, language, and story

As mentioned in Section 1, Tolkien disagrees with the account of myth as an allegory of nature. The debate concerning this problem started in

ancient Greece when Socrates and Plato argued against the Sophists' explanation of myths as revealing naturalistic and moral truths (Spence 1921: 40–43). During the period of the Enlightenment, myth was interpreted as a lack of rationality, as a "defective understanding of scientific causes".⁶ One of the results of this "defective understanding" is the account of myth based on the personification of natural forces.

In the nineteenth century, Schelling (e.g. 1856) rejects the principle of allegory and turns to the problem of symbolic expression in myths. However, later Müller (e.g. 1881) returned to explaining myths by natural phenomena, although this time his conclusions were supported with reference to philological studies. Müller's explanation was attacked by Andrew Lang and by the time of Tolkien's scholarly activities was virtually discredited. Tolkien also rejects Müller's account of myth (see Section 1).

Let us briefly consider the link between myth, language and thought, as understood by nineteenth-century scholarship. Max Müller, for example, claims that mythology is "the dark shadow which language throws on thought, and which can never disappear till language becomes altogether commensurate with thought, which it never will" (Müller 1881: 590). Tolkien, however, does not derive one phenomenon from another. Objecting to the account of myth as a "disease of language", he asserts: "It would be more near the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology" (Tolkien 1983: 122). It is clear that Tolkien is being ironic here but his claim echoes Schelling's definition of language as '*verblichene Mythologie*' ('faded mythology') (Schelling 1856: 52).

In spite of his scepticism regarding attempts to discover the origins of myth, Tolkien points out three significant factors: *invention*, *inheritance* and *diffusion*, of which the first is considered as the most fundamental. The fairy element, typical of myth, is the product of the human art of sub-creation, or *fantasy*. Tolkien's theory of sub-creation and the parallels found in the ideas of Coleridge, Grundtvig, and other Romantics, have been discussed by a number of scholars (e.g. Agøy 1995, Seeman 1995).

When Tolkien discusses myth as story in its present form, he equates it with what is often defined as 'folk-tale'. He refers to these two kinds of narrative as 'higher' and 'lower' mythologies. It is noteworthy that instead of looking for certain criteria to distinguish myth from other kinds of stories, Tolkien rather draws a link between mythology and

⁶ J. W. Rogerson, 'Slippery Words: V. Myth', *The Expository Time* 90 (October 1978), 11.

what is usually regarded as folklore. This type of approach has a few analogies in both nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the most obvious of which lie in the ideas of Jacob Grimm.

Grimm's treatment of myth and mythology implies a very close connection with folklore, in particular with the tales and legends of Germany, and surely with the comparative study of languages. Since much of Germanic mythology is irrecoverably lost, in order to dig out Germanic divinities and beliefs, Grimm turns to the study of written and oral testimonials, especially legends, fairy tales, and superstitious beliefs, to runes and early language. As a result, Grimm is held "responsible for the development by which mythologic study has become the study mainly of folklore" (Feldman & Richardson 1972: 410). In his Preface to *Teutonic Mythology* he asserts:

... these numerous written memorials have only left us sundry bones and joints, as it were, of our mythology, its living breath still falls upon us from a vast number of Stories and Customs, handed down through lengthened periods from father to son ... Oral legend is to written records as the folk-song is to poetic art, or the ruling recited by schöffen (scabini) to written codes. But folk-tale wants to be gleaned and plucked with a delicate hand. (Grimm 1883, volume III: xiii)

In this Preface Grimm analyses fairy-tales as different from folk-tales (pp. xiv–xv), as Tolkien does in 'On Fairy-Stories'. He finally comes to the definition of the fairy-tale in relationship to other forms of common lore. Although Grimm does not point out the existence of 'higher' and 'lower' mythologies, he intimately links myths with folk tales and legendarium. Tolkien is careful in his use of the words 'myth' and 'mythology', often preferring the word 'legend' and 'legendarium', particularly when referring to his own work (Stenström 1995: 310). Both Grimm and Tolkien are especially enthusiastic about the vivid tales of the North as opposed to the ones of the South. Whereas Grimm is concerned with the reconstruction of Germanic heritage, Tolkien in particular regrets the loss of Anglo-Saxon myths (for further details see Kuteeva 1999, chapters 3–5).

Tolkien's understanding of myth demonstrates strong adherence to the symbolic interpretations of this phenomenon, which allies him with the Romantic movement. In other words, Tolkien can be seen as a 're-mythologiser' of the ideas 'de-mythologised' in the second half of the nineteenth century (e.g. Müller), and his views also appear to be strongly anti-modernist. This is particularly obvious in Tolkien's

creative writings, in which he weaves together language and myth in order to construct his own mythology dedicated to England.

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