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French Connections in Middle-earth: The Medieval Legacy¹

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As was noted before by Verlyn Flieger² and others, Tolkien repeatedly expressed his reluctance towards French language and culture. Tolkien's francophobia, or "Gallophobia", probably has a biographical background. Although he was well versed in the French language from his childhood on, he had had some negative experiences in France: he had made a trip to France in 1913, accompanying two students – a trip that ended dramatically by a mortal car accident of a relative of one of the students he was to escort. More profoundly, he had had his horrible war-experience at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, where almost all his friends died on the field or in the trenches, and from which he had survived by pure miracle.

Tolkien's war-experience undoubtedly echoes in *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance in this description of the young men, marching in the army of the Allies towards Mordor: "and now they walked like men in a hideous dream made true, and they understood not this war nor why fate should lead them to such a pass" (*LotR* III, 144).³ But Tolkien's Gallophobia also had a cultural-historical background, which went back to the Battle of Hastings (1066). For Tolkien, the French-Norman Conquest by William the Conqueror caused the decay of his beloved Old English language and culture. Tolkien's dislike of French, however, did not result in an absence of French elements in his creative works. On the contrary, rather unexpectedly, French language and literature have a strong presence in his work: not only in his scholarly editions (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) and essays ("On Fairy-stories"),⁴ but also in his fictional narratives. In this article, I would like to address the presence of French in *The Lord of the Rings*: first in the language Tolkien use in his famous trilogy, secondly, in the themes he found in French medieval literature, and more specifically in the anonymous 11th-century epic *La Chanson de Roland* and in the 12th-century chivalric romances by Chrétien de Troyes.

French loanwords

Let me start with the French linguistic elements. For this, it is essential to turn briefly to Tolkien's philological research, especially his editorial work on the anonymous 14th-century chivalric romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, edited in 1925 by Tolkien in

¹ This is the first of two articles, devoted to Tolkien and French literature. My second article will deal with Tolkien's relationship to 20th-century French literature. I thank Thijs Porck for his useful comments.

² Verlyn Flieger "Tolkien's French Connection", in Bradford Lee Eden (ed.), *Essays on Revisions and Influences*, Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland & Company, 2014, p. 70-77. This article has inspired to me the title of my own article.

³ All references are to *The Lord of the Rings*, London, Unwin Books edition 1974, indicating in roman numbers Part I, II, or III, and in Arabic numbers the pages. For my interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings*, I have consulted extensively Wayne G. Hammond & Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings. A Reader's Companion*, London, HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014 (first edition 2005).

⁴ Flieger rightly mentions the French loanword *Faërie* in Tolkien's essay, and, in Tolkien's early poetry, his use of the French loanword "lay" (derived from Old French *lai*, song).

collaboration with E.V. Gordon.⁵ For my argumentation a brief summary of the beginning of this romance is necessary. King Arthur and his Knights are gathered at the Round Table, when suddenly an unknown knight appears, dressed in green, and riding a green horse. Using rude language, the Green Knight challenges the Knights of the Round Table to kill him with his ax, on condition that the Green Knight will return the blow in a year. Gawain accepts the challenge, and he beheads the Green Knight in a single blow. But, miraculously, the Green Knight picks up his head, speaks a word of goodbye to the assembly, and then rides away, holding his head in his arms (**Figure 1**). One year later, the Green Knight receives Gawain in his Green Castle, first as the courteous landlord Bertilak – and then as the Green Knight once again. The rest of the plot, albeit suspenseful and unexpected, is not essential for my argument.



Figure 1. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Late 14th century. British Library: Cotton MS Nero A.x, article 3, ff.94v95.

On the presence and role of French in this romance Tolkien gives the following information:

⁵ References are to *Sir Gawain & The Green Knight*, eds. J.R.R. Tolkien & E.V. Gordon, Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1925.

The French element in *Sir Gawain* is [...] extensive. The technical terms used in the descriptions of Gawain's equipment [...], the castle [...], and the hunting in the third fitt account for a large proportion of the French loan-words.⁶

Indeed, French tends to concentrate itself into specific, technical, descriptive language. A beautiful example of this technical use of French is found in the description of Gawain's garment, as it is given in the Tolkien-Gordon edition. In his personal copy of this edition, now in the Bodleian Library, Tolkien's friend and colleague C.S. Lewis underlined and annotated every technical (mostly French) term, possibly while preparing a course on Medieval literature for his Oxford students.⁷ Lewis visualized his annotations by a drawing of the knight's equipment at the left top corner of the page.

Another example of this technical use of French is given in a recent article by Maria Volkonskaya.⁸ This is the description of the Green Knight's garment, in which I have italicized the French loanwords:

Ande al grayþed in grene þis gome and his wedes:
A *strayt cote* ful streȝt, þat stek on his sides,
A meré *mantile* abof, mensked withinne
With *pelure pured apert*, þe *pane* ful clene
With blyþe *blaunner* ful bryȝt, and his hode boþe,
þat watz laȝt fro his lokkeȝ and layde on his schulderes...
(ll. 151-156)

The French of this description does not only have technical, but also courteous connotations. It contrasts with the harsh and impolite language by which, in the text's next passage, the Green Knight addresses King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. In that discourse, the French is absent, and replaced, as it were, by words from Scandinavian origin, especially Old Norse. However, when the Green Knight reappears in the shape of the courteous landlord Bertilak, his language changes from harsh and impolite into graceful and courteous, as can be seen in the next example:

Pou art *confessed* so clene, beknownen of þy mysses,
And hatz þe *penaunce apert* of þe *point* of myn egge,
I halde þe *polysed* of þat plyȝt, and *pured* as clene
As þou hadeȝ neuer *forfeted* syþen þou watz fyrst borne.
(ll. 2391-2394)

The same use of French in both technical description and courteous speech can be found in *The Lord of the Rings*.

My first example is a botanical one: Tolkien's description of Ithilien, the Garden of Gondor (*LotR* II, 227), which contains many flowers with French, or at least Mediterranean names: "tamarisk" (Old French, first attested in 1230), "terebinth" (Old French, first

⁶ *Gawain*, ed. Gordon and Tolkien, p. 128.

⁷ See http://medievalromance.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/C_S_Lewis_Sir_Gawain_and_the_Green_Knight.

⁸ Maria A. Volkonskaya, "Translation and Language Change: on J.R.R. Tolkien's Translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" (working paper, 2015) (retrieved from <https://www.hse.ru/data/2015/10/14/1075903818/10LS2015.pdf> on 27 October 2016).

attestation 1170), “olive”, “saxifrage” (13th c.), “anemones” (14th c.), “primeroles”. Concerning this last word, it is noticeable that Tolkien chooses the elder form, not the new one “primerose”. “Primerole” is used by Chaucer, as is explained by Tolkien’s son Christopher,⁹ but Christopher Tolkien does not mention that the word is frequent in Old French from the 12th century on.

Tolkien uses French loanwords to express courtesy (which is, of course, in itself a word of French origin): thus the brief dialogue between Lady Galadriel and the dwarf Gimli has echoes of courteous French: “gentle”, “gracious”, “a request so courteous”, “surpass the gems”, “to have dominion” (*LotR* I, 356-357) – I will come back to this dialogue.

An interesting example of a concentration of technical French is to be found in the poem, made by Bilbo, and sung for the Elves at Rivendell (*LotR* I, 225). In the left column I have italicized the French technical terms; the right column gives the original French words.

In <i>panoply</i> of ancient kings, in <i>chainéd</i> rings he <i>armoured</i> him; his shining shield was scored with runes to ward all wounds and harm from him; his bow was made of dragon-horn, his arrows shorn of <i>ebony</i> ; of silver was his <i>habergeon</i> , his <i>scabbard</i> of <i>chalcedony</i> ; his sword of steel was <i>valiant</i> , of <i>adamant</i> his <i>helmet</i> tall, an eagle- <i>plume</i> upon his <i>crest</i> , upon his breast an <i>emerald</i> .	panoplie (Middle French 1551) enchainé; armure ebaine (13 th c.) haubergeon escauberc (Anglo-French 13 th c.); calcedoine (13 th c.); vaillant adamant; héaulme plume, crête émeraude
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The question is how French should be evaluated here. Positively as in the previous examples, or as in *Sir Gawain*? Probably not. Bilbo is singing his poem (to which Aragorn contributed only one word: “emerald”) for the Elves, and they smile and applaud in respectful politeness, but not because they think this beautiful poetry.¹⁰

Clearly negative is the high concentration of French loanwords in the mouth of Saruman, when he tries to convince Gandalf, Théoden and Éomer, at the fall of Orthanc (*LotR* II, 162-165). These are the French loanwords I have noted: “noble devices”, “fair countenance”, “injuries”, “repair our injuries”, “our estates”, “valour”, “honour”, “grievances”, “valiant”. Even when Saruman gets angry, he continues to express himself in French loanwords: “gibbets”, “dotard”, “brigands” (*LotR* II, 164). In the mouth of Saruman, French is the language of evil and deceive.

The examples I have given so far concern concentrations of French loanwords, condensed in a relatively narrow textual space. However, there are also French loanwords, which are remarkable by their repeated and extensive use as proper names throughout the text. The following are the most spectacular examples, with various connotations – positive, neutral, negative; comical and serious:

⁹ Hammond & Scull 464.

¹⁰ Hammond & Scull 210-213 give another version of the text, in which, according to Christopher Tolkien, the poem “should have been published” (Hammond & Scull 213). This version contains much less French loanwords: “panoply”, “armoured”, “valiant”, “adamant” are replaced by English words.

1. **Bag-end** – the place where Bilbo and Frodo live. Tolkien scholars have since long addressed the French origins of this toponym: it is derived from the French word *cul-de-sac*. According to Tom Shippey: “The word has its origins in snobbery, the faint residual feeling that English words, ever since the Norman Conquest, have been ‘low’ and that French ones, or even *Frenchified* ones, would be better.”¹¹

2. The names **Pippin** and **Merry** are French, or at least Frankish. On the names of the Took, Tolkien said: “I have turned them into those old names, largely of Frankish and Gothic origin, that are still used by us or are met in our histories”. These high and important names, used for simple hobbits, have a comical effect. “Pippin” is derived from the French name *Pépin* – King Pépin (714-768) being the father of Charlemagne¹²; Pippin’s father’s name is “Paladin”, which is “any of the twelve peers of Charlemagne’s court”, and by extension “a knight renowned for heroism and chivalry” (*Concise OED*)¹³. “Merry” is also French; it is derived from *Meriadoc*, who is a hero in a 13th-century French Arthurian Romance.¹⁴

3. The **Ents**. Tolkien gives the following etymology: “It is an Old English word for *giant*”.¹⁵ Tolkien suggests that he had also thought of the Latin present participle *ens* (“being”) of the verb *esse* (“to be”). But how can one explain the “treeish” connotation of the name, as the word “ent” does not exist in Modern English? The French language makes clear why “ent” is semantically connected to “tree”: the French verb *enter* signifies “graft a tree”, and a “graft” is *une ente* – both words were introduced during the Middle Ages into Dutch, which has the verb *enten* and the noun *ent*. In Middle-Dutch, the word *ent(e)* can signify “young tree”, “sapling”.¹⁶

4. There are some other names that, by their phonetic resemblance with French, have a specific, positive connotation. For instance the name **Lórien** has the connotation of “golden”: Lórien is often called “the golden wood”. The semantic element “golden” can, once again, be explained by the French language: *gold* in French is *l’or*, derived from Latin *aureolus*. Modern English has the bird-name “oriole”, which is derived from the French *loriot*, the “golden bird”.

5. A similar argumentation can be set up for all the negatively connoted names beginning with **mor**: *Mordor*, *Morgul*, *Morgoth*, and also *Moria*. Tolkien himself explains that the suffix *mor-* has been derived from Old English *mor* meaning “black”.¹⁷ I think this etymology can only be grasped by Tolkien’s fellow philologists, not by his average readership. Indeed, for most readers, there is an automatic phonetical connection with the well-known French word for “death”, *mort*, derived from the Latin *mors*, as can be seen in its derivatives in English: *mortal* and *mortality*.

6. French is the language of deceivers, as can be seen not only in the voice of Saruman, but also in Gollum’s use of the word **present** (gift), which is originally a French loanword. In

¹¹ Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth*. Revised and Expanded Edition, Boston-New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, p. 71.

¹² Hammond & Scull 42.

¹³ Hammond & Scull 422.

¹⁴ Hammond & Scull 42.

¹⁵ Hammond & Scull 372.

¹⁶ J. Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch handwoordenboek*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973 (first edition 1911), p. 165.

¹⁷ See <http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/MOR>, accessed on 27 October 2016.

Tolkien's Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings*, this keyword is put in italics (*LotR* I, 23). When used by Gollum in the compound "birthday-present" or in combination with another French loanword "my Precious" (see below), the word "present" is evidently negative. Much more innocent is the author's repetitive use of the word "birthday-present" when narrating Bilbo's depart from the Shire (*LotR* I, 44-45): here the connotation of deceitfulness lies less in the denoting word than in the nature of the denoted thing: Bilbo's mock birthday-presents to his relatives.

All these linguistic examples enable us to problematize the often heard assumption according to which Tolkien's text would have a tendency to eliminate French words. Thus, Martin K. Foys, in his entry "Norman Conquest" to the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, notes:

For Tolkien, the Norman Conquest prevented the survival of a distinctly English language and corrupted the ideal of English life. Indeed, the very lexicon Tolkien uses in his own fiction seeks to moderate the linguistic impact of the Conquest; throughout his work he employs primarily words of Germanic (i.e. Old English) derivation over ones of more recent French or Latin origin.¹⁸

This is undoubtedly true, but difficult to prove, because, as far as I see, there is little manuscript evidence of Tolkien's linguistic preference of Germanic over French – except for the second version of Bilbo's poem, analysed above. However, when comparing *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, I found two important examples of this preference. The first one concerns the word "goblin", which is derived from Old French *gobelin*. Frequently used in *The Hobbit*, this word disappears almost completely in *The Lord of the Rings*, where it is replaced by "orc", a word of Old English origin. The second example concerns the name "Necromancer", originally a Greek-Latin word, which came into English via Old French. This name is often used in *The Hobbit*, but almost absent in *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Lord of the Rings* this name has been substituted by the name of Sauron.

Tolkien and the Chanson de Roland

The *Chanson de Roland* (*Song of Roland*), an anonymous epic of 4000 lines, divided into 291 *laissez* (stanzas of unequal length), dates from the end of the 11th century, but its historical content is much older. Originally, it goes back to the dramatic but local defeat of a small part of Charlemagne's army, which at the 15th of August 778, was ambushed and defeated at Roncevaux, in the north of Spain, by a local tribe, called the *Vascones*, which maybe the Basques, though certainly not the Saracens or the Arabs. In the *Chanson de Roland*, 300 years later, this local defeat has been blown up into an epic account of a war between Charlemagne's French army and the Saracens. Probably intended as a publicity for the Reconquista of Spain, the epic is preluding the first crusades, which took place some decades later.

Tolkien scholars have already noticed the resemblance between the death of Roland and the death of Boromir. Both heroes die in the thick of the battle, while blowing their horn for help, which comes, but too late. In both cases, the horn is broken. In both cases the

¹⁸ In: Michael D.C. Drout (ed.), *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia. Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, New York etc., Taylor & Francis-Routledge, 2006, p. 459.

enemies do not deare to come close: from a safe distance they send a rain of arrows and spears to the dying hero. As we can read in the English translation by Dorothy Sayers (1957)¹⁹:

“So grim of mood is Roland in his wrath
No man alive can put him to the sword.
Let fly at him, and then give up the war.”²⁰
So they let fly; spears, lances they outpour,
Darts and jereeds and feathered shafts galore.
The shield of Roland is pierced and split and scored,
The mail-rings riven, and all his hauberk torn [...] (laisse 160)

There is another resemblance: both heroes die because of their pride, their *hybris*, or *ofermod*, a recurrent theme in world literature, from Homer on.

The name of Roland’s horn is *olifans*, This word, originally a *totum pro parte* (the horn being made of elephant ivory), becomes in the French Anglo-Norman dialect *oliphaunt*,²¹ which, in Tolkien’s narrative, is the name of the gigantic elephant species which dwells in the southern parts of Middle Earth. The “old fireside rhyme of *Oliphaunt*”, recited by Sam (*LotR* II, 223-224), has rightly been interpreted as a popular version of a 12th- or 13th-century Latin or French (or Anglo-Norman) bestiary, such as the one which can be read in T.H. White’s modernized version *The Bestiary. A Book of Beasts* (1960).²²

Roland and Boromir are not the only characters that are comparable. Tolkien scholars have succinctly addressed some resemblances between Charlemagne and the old king Théoden. Both kings are old, have silver hair and a flowing white beard, and are “proud and tall” (*LotR* III, 66). As the French poet says:

Of fairest France there sits the king austere.
White are his locks, and silver is his beard,
His body noble, his countenance severe:
If any seek him, no need to say, “Lo, here!” (laisse 35)

Although they are wise, they have both a bad counsellor, who, at the end, turns out to be a traitor at the service of the enemy: Ganelon in the case of Charlemagne, Gríma, alias Wormtongue, in the case of Théoden. Both Charlemagne and Théoden have their moments of hesitation and apathy because of their bad counsellor; but once their decision is taken they turn out to be mighty warriors, who ride in front of their army. Charlemagne defeats the king of the Saracens in a single combat on the battle-field, just as Théoden himself kills the chieftain of the Haradrim.

But there is more. Tolkien’s southern Haradrim seem to be inspired by the medieval images of the Saracens. More broadly, not only the cruel Haradrim, but Sauron’s whole army, including orcs and trolls, does have features inspired by the medieval Saracens. The Saracens, according to the *Chanson de Roland*, are black and ugly, as is expressed in the following quotations, drenched with scarcely concealed racism:

¹⁹ References are to *The Song of Roland*, transl. Dorothy L. Sayers, London etc., Penguin Books, 1957 (retrieved from <http://www.fadedpage.com/books/20130224/html.php#c13> on 27 October 2016).

²⁰ It is the Saracens who speak.

²¹ For this phonetic shift from Anglo-Norman to Middle English, see *Gawain*, ed. Gordon and Tolkien, p. 128: “The development of *u* between *a* or *o* and a following *n* or *m* + cons.”

²² T.H. White, *The Bestiary. A Book of Beasts, being a translation from a Latin bestiary of the twelfth century*, New York, Capricorn Books, 1960, p. 24-28.

In his command are all the Negro tribes;
 Thick are their noses, their ears are very wide;
 Full fifty thousand are gathered in their lines,
 Boldly and fast and furiously they ride,
 Yelling aloud the Paynim battle-cry. (laisse 143)
 [...]

As black as ink from head to foot their hides are,
 With nothing white about them but their grinders (laisse 144)

Sons of the desert, a wild and godless clan;
 You'll ne'er hear tell of such repulsive scamps;
 Harder than iron their hide on head and flanks,
 So that they scorn or harness or steel cap;
 They are in battle extremely fierce and rash (laisse 233)

This last quotation can be related to the description of the hill-trolls in the army of Mordor: "Taller and broader than Men they were, and they were clad only in close fitting mess of horny scales, or maybe that was their hideous hide" (*LotR* III, 149-150).

Interesting for our argumentation is the naming of the swords. Aragorn's Anduril seems to echo phonetically Roland's Durendal. The sword of the Saracen king is called *Précieuse*, which is also the battle cry of the Saracens. *Précieuse* is a negative name in the *Chanson de Roland*, and, as such, it can be related to Gollum's "My Precious" in *The Lord of the Rings*. "My Precious" is the thing which continues to haunt Gollum's mind, and the other ring-bearers, Bilbo, Frodo and Beren also use the word from time to time. "*Precious*" is Gollum's last wail, while falling into the fire of Mount Doom (*LotR* III, 197). And at that ultimate moment the word is put in italics – with the word "*present*" in the book's Prologue, this is the only French loanword that has been italicised and put apart in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Saracen king swears upon his *Précieuse*, just as Gollum swears upon his Precious: "I will serve the master of the Precious" (*LotR* II, 197), just as the vassal swears fealty to his feudal Lord. In my conclusion, I will come back to Gollum and his negative characterisation, which, in an unexpected way, appears to be related to some other aspects of French culture.

The sole musical instruments of war of the Saracens are the drums, as opposed to the horns of the French.²³ This same opposition – drums against horns – is also present in *The Lord of the Rings*: "the drums in the deep" (*LotR* I, 306) in Moria, the rolling drums at the sieges of Helm's Deep (*LotR* II, 118; 120) and Gondor ("The drums rolled"; *LotR* III, 89) and on the battlefield of Mordor ("Drums rolled"; *LotR* III, 148).

Some visions of the enemy on the battle-field as seen in the *Chanson de Roland* remind us of certain scenes of *The Lord of the Rings*:

I have beheld the Saracens of Spain;
 They cover all the mountains and the vales,
 They spread across the hillsides and the plains;
 Great is the might these foreigners display,
 And ours appears a very small array. (laisse 86)

²³ See Barbara P. Edmunds, "Le Portrait des Sarrasins dans *La Chanson de Roland*", *The French Review* 44 (1971), 870-880.

This particular scene also has a parallel in the Battle of the Five Armies in *The Hobbit*: “Soon they could see the lands before the Mountain’s feet black with a hurrying multitude” (H 267).²⁴

At the eve of his final battle, Roland exclaims:

“Let each man stoutly smite!
No shameful songs be sung for our despite!
Paynims are wrong, Christians are in the right!
Ill tales of me shall no man tell, say I!” (laisse 79)

To survive in a song of praise, this is the ultimate wish of several of Tolkien’s heroes: “do deeds of song” (said by Éomir, *LotR* III, 108); “your deeds would be remembered by the minstrels” (said by Théoden to Merry, *LotR* III, 68); “the last march of the Ents may be worth a song” (said by Treebeard, *LotR* II, 78), “Maybe we shall [...] make such an end as will be worth a song” (said by Théoden, *LotR* II, 126). Sam, on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol (*LotR* II, 285) expresses the same hope: “I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We’re in one, of course; but I mean : put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards” (*LotR* II, 285). Hope reiterated while waiting for their death at Mount Doom: ““What a tale we have been in, Mr Frodo, haven’t we?” he said, “I wish I could hear it told!”” (*LotR* III, 201).

Chrétien de Troyes

Chrétien de Troyes (ca. 1140-1190) is the author of five chivalric romances: *Erec et Enide*, *Cligès*, *Lancelot*, *Yvain*, and *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*. My point of departure is the recent, already mentioned article by Verlyn Flieger (2014). Her article is mainly focussed on *The Hobbit*, and the theme of “adventure” as it is found in the romances by Chrétien de Troyes. She argues that Tolkien was well aware of the French origin of the word “adventures”, which was put in italics and in French (*aventures*) in his essay “On Fairy-stories”. Flieger argues that there is an essential difference between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*: *The Hobbit* is a series of adventures, based on the thematic stereotype expressed in its subtitle: *There and Back again*, whereas *The Lord of the Rings* is a quest. The difference between Bilbo’s adventures and Frodo’s quest is made explicit by Frodo himself. “This is no treasure-hunt, no there-and-back-journey” (*LotR* I, 106). According to Flieger, this difference coincides with the difference between the first four romances by Chrétien, which are *adventures*, and the last one, *Perceval*, which is a quest. Contrary to Flieger’s article, I will address another important aspect in Chrétien’s work: courtly love. And my focus will be not on *The Hobbit*, but on *The Lord of the Rings*.

The theme of courtly love in Chrétien has been given much attention by Tolkien’s friend and colleague in Oxford, C.S. Lewis. In his famous study *The Allegory of Love* (1936), Lewis devoted a great part of his first chapter “Courtly Love” to Chrétien de Troyes, and Tolkien has read this chapter. In the Preface of his book, Lewis wrote: “The first chapter was read and commented upon by [...] Professor Tolkien so long ago that [he has] probably

²⁴ References to *The Hobbit* are to *the Hobbit or There and Back Again*, New York, Ballantine Books, Revised Edition, Twelfth Printing, 1967.

forgotten the labour, but I do not therefore forget the kindness.” As we can read in Lewis, Chrétien was the first author to combine the *matière de Bretagne* (King Arthur and the Round Table) with the Provençal doctrine of the *fin’amors*, the courtly love, invented and sung by the troubadours of Southern France. It is principally to Chrétien that we owe the theme of the lonely knight who leaves his *comfort zone* of the royal court in order to earn, by his exploits, the love of his lady. This lady is not always accessible, she will not easily respond to the poet’s or the knight’s love, and often she is presented as a *princesse lointaine*. She is also inaccessible from the social point of view, for two reasons: she has a higher social ranking than the poet or the knight, and she is a married woman.

So, courtly love is in principle an extramarital affair, which can only be realised by a secret code, meant to deceive the husband, the Lord, for example King Arthur in the case of Lancelot and Guinevere, or King Marc, in the case of Tristan and Iseult. At first sight, this is true for Chrétien’s romance *Lancelot*, but with Chrétien things are problematic. That is, Chrétien’s *Lancelot* was written on demand, and does not seem to express his own opinion on courtly love. Three other of his love-romances start or end with a wedding, and therefore they are basically *anti-courteous*. And his most famous romance, his *Perceval*, is not a love story at all. Therefore, in Chrétien we find a questioning, a problematization of the love-romance as a genre – a questioning we also find in Tolkien, and, by the way, also in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

At first glance there are two love affairs in *The Lord of the Rings* that can be associated with courtly love, namely the love between Aragorn and Arwen and the one between Faramir and Éowyn. About Faramir and Éowyn Tolkien writes: “This tale does not deal with a period of “Courtly Love” and its pretences; but with a culture more primitive (sc. less corrupt) and nobler”.²⁵ The same can be said about Aragorn and Arwen, although Aragorn’s wanderings in the wilderness in order to earn Arwen’s hand, strongly remind us of the adventures of the wandering knights of the courtly romances, especially Tristan. In any event, Tolkien distances himself from the extramarital courtly love as it can be found in the poetry of the troubadours, or in *Tristan et Iseult*. His attitude, therefore, is very close to all Chrétien’s romances, with the sole exception of *Lancelot*.

However, there are several moments in *The Lord of the Rings* which are maybe inspired by Chrétien’s *Lancelot*, and which can be interpreted as a purified version of courtly love – a love between a highly situated, unattainable married woman and a poor, low-order lover. I am thinking of the relationship between Lady Galadriel and the dwarf Gimli. We have already noticed that Gimli expresses himself, unexpectedly in courtly French loanwords. Moreover, in this scene, there is an amusing wink at Chrétien’s love story between Lancelot and Guinevere, when Galadriel permits Gimli to ask a gift. To the astonishment of the assistants, Gimli asks: “a single strand of your hair, which surpasses the gold of the earth as the stars surpass the gems of the mine” (*LotR* I, 356). This seems to be a condensed form of Lancelot’s ecstasy when he finds some hairs of Queen Guinevere, narrated by Chrétien in an amusingly hyperbolic way:

A hundred thousand times he raises them to his eyes and mouth, to his forehead and face: he manifests his joy in every way, considering himself rich and happy now. He lays them in his bosom near his heart, between the shirt and the flesh. [...] Gold a hundred thousand times refined, and melted down as many times, would be darker

²⁵ Quoted by Hammond & Scull 631.

than is night compared with the brightest summer day [...], if one were to see the gold and set it beside this hair.²⁶

And there are some other, more serious parallels between Chrétien's *Lancelot* and *The Lord of the Rings*. For instance, the country of Gorre, in which one can enter, but only as a slave, and from which any escape is impossible, strongly reminds us of Mordor, and its Tower-Gate: "This stronghold had been built not to keep enemies out of Mordor, but to keep them in" (*LotR* III, 154). In order to enter into this country, and to free its captives, Lancelot had to pass impassable obstacles, like the *Pont de l'Épée*, the Sword-Bridge. Lancelot enters into Gorre by using a magic ring, not an invisibility ring, but one which can undo magical illusions. For a real invisibility ring, we have to turn to one of the other romances by Chrétien, namely *Yvain*. And in the works of Chrétien's contemporaries, for instance in the *Lais* by Marie de France, we find a number of other magical rings.

Epilogue

My examples from the *Chanson de Roland* and Chrétien de Troyes are no "sources" in the traditional, philological meaning of the word. We have here a form of what we now call "intertextuality", which Tolkien, in his essay "On Fairy-stories", presents with a tongue-in-cheek sense of humor: all these texts, themes and motifs are ended up in a large Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story. From this intertextual soup, the Cook, the Writer, picks up the ingredients he likes – in order to create a new dish, a new text, of which the ingredients have become unrecognizable and untraceable.

This culinary metaphor allows me to return to my starting point: Tolkien's Gallophobia. His down-to-earth dislike of all things French can be illustrated by a well-known quote:

I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; [...] I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome).²⁷

About the hobbits, he says: "They eat and drink often and heartily [...] six meals a day (when they could get them)" (*LotR* I, 14). The opposite of the eating habits of the hobbits (and Tolkien) are the food habits of Gollum: Gollum does not like the stewed rabbit prepared by Sam, but he prefers raw meat and fish, negatively appreciated by the other characters: "nasty furtive eating" (*LotR* I, 61); "'Worms or beetles or something slimy out of holes,'" thought Sam. "Brr! The nasty creature!" (*LotR* II, 203). It is not impossible that Tolkien thinks here of some specialities of the French *cuisine*. To the disgust of the British, the French eat raw beef in the form of the *steak tartare*, of which the first receipt was published in 1938 in the *Larousse gastronomique* by Prosper Montagné. The French also love raw oysters, and other "slimy" and "nasty" things, like snails (*escargots*) and frogs. The word "slimy" is derived from the French *limace* (which is a slug), and the word "nasty" comes from Old French *nastre*

²⁶ Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot, The Knight of the Cart*, transl. W. W. Comfort, London, Everyman's Library, 1914 (retrieved from <http://www.heroofcamelot.com/docs/Lancelot-Knight-of-the-Cart.pdf>, 27 October 2016), p. 21.

²⁷ Letter to Deborah Webster, October 25, 1958 (Letter 213).

(“bad, strange”).²⁸ We can go even further. Gollum is an amphibious creature, with bulging eyes and web-feet, and is explicitly compared by the orcs to a frog: “like a starved frog” (*LotR* II, 310) – and, accordingly, in Tolkien movies and iconography he is mostly represented froglike. “Frog” is, of course, the English nickname for the French. Is this mere coincidence, or are we dealing here with one of Tolkien's playful allusions, originating from his “very simple sense of humour”? – which maybe is not as simple as he says.

²⁸ The word *nastre* seems to be a shortened form of *villenastre* (“infamous, bad”), from *vilein* (“villain”) plus the pejorative suffix *-astre* (from Latin *-aster*). See <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=nasty> (accessed on 28 October 2016).