

Tolkien on Holiday

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According to the school's published chronicle, on 27 January 1911 the debating society of King Edward's School Birmingham, which included J.R.R. Tolkien among its active members, came back together after the Christmas break to start another year of debates. The report of the first debate states: 'a puzzled House fresh from the Christmas Revels came together to hear the discussion on the motion that, "This House considers that Holidays are in no way Beneficial, and demands their Abolition"'¹

First into the fray was Tolkien's T.C.B.S.² companion Robert Quilter Gilson who chose to take a negative position in the holiday debate. Gilson asked what were the foundations of our deep-rooted preference for holidays, suggesting that our pleasure in them was gained merely by contrast with the opposing pain – work.³ 'What are holidays used for?' he asked, and then gave his own answer – 'sleep, food, flimsy novels.'⁴ Thomas Kenneth Barnsley (also known as 'Tea Cake') countered Gilson's anti-holiday diatribe by taking a more positive position on the value of holidays: likening the desire to work our brains without rest to the ridiculous act of attempting to set 'the Koh-i-noor in a jelly.'⁵ K.W. Grant also took up the affirmative position and indicated that he thought holidays 'especially at Christmas were good for trade.'⁶ As for Tolkien, it is not told in the report what position he took up or what he thought about the holiday debate. Tolkien's contribution (possibly written by himself) focuses more on the 'Koh-i-noor' comment made by Barnsley with Tolkien taking the reference to 'Koh-i-noor in jelly' as a personal insult, because he was in the habit of wearing a yellow pencil in his mouth.⁷ In characteristic fashion, Tolkien was ludically punning⁸ the literal meaning of the name 'Koh-i-noor' ('mountain of light') with the name of a brand of pencils that were also called 'Koh-i-noor.'⁹ While we do not know how Tolkien voted, the motion, with thirteen negatives and only six affirmatives, did not pass and holidays were not abolished by the King Edward's School debating society.

Debates are all about taking up positive and negative sides for the purposes of the 'thrust and parry' of verbal sparring. Therefore, we cannot be entirely sure that the position each debater took up in the 'holiday debate' reflected their actual opinions on the value of holidays, nor, given the report, what side Tolkien would have positioned himself as being in the debate. However, it is interesting that in the years that followed, Tolkien would use the idea of a holiday and taking a holiday in different persistent contexts. This paper will explore several groups of examples of Tolkien's use of the word 'holiday'. First it will explore how Tolkien evoked the idea of a holiday in his writing to describe elements of a creative process; suggesting an encounter with the perilous realm of Faërie. Secondly, it will investigate examples of how Tolkien incorporated holidays into his own world-building containing, like the debate, both positive and negative aspects. Finally, this essay will conclude with exploring one of the most poignant uses by Tolkien of the

word 'holiday' in his creative writing.

Of course, given his love of language, it is a fairly good assumption that what may also have been in Tolkien's mind during the debate besides constructing a punning jibe to 'Tea-Cake', was the word 'holiday' itself and its truly English (that is Old English) origins. Our modern word 'holiday' comes from the Old English compound word 'Hāligdæg'; a combination of *hālig* (holy, sacred) and *dæg* (day). Thus, 'holiday' literally means 'holy day'. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the word first appears in 950 C.E. in a note in the margin of the Lindisfarne Gospels.¹⁰ Originally, the word signified a consecrated day or religious festival. According to the Venerable Bede's *De Temporum Ratione* (circa 725 C.E.), in the pagan early English calendar the month of September is known as 'haligmonath' meaning 'holy month' when celebrations and religious festivals would be held to celebrate a successful summer's crop.¹¹ In Early Middle English, the word became expressed in variant spellings including *halidei*, *halidai*, *halliday*, *haliday* – with the word 'halidei,' (and variants) being recorded in the early 13th century guide for anchorite nuns *Ancrene Riwe*; a work that Tolkien knew very well.¹² The spelling of the word as 'holiday' was first recorded in 1460, and it was here that the word started to acquire a more secular meaning. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines this sense of the word as 'a day on which ordinary occupations (of an individual or a community) are suspended; a day of exemption or cessation from work; a day of festivity, recreation, or amusement.'¹³ That is how the single word 'holiday' came to include the secular side of life and became identified with vacations. In British English, the secular nature of this word was expanded to specifically mean a summer vacation from school; as in the title song from the 1963 British movie *Summer Holiday* whose lyrics, song by then British pop idol Cliff Richard, start 'We're all going on a summer holiday / No more working for a week or two. / Fun and laughter on our summer holiday / No more worries for me or you.'¹⁴

One of the earliest published examples of Tolkien's use of the word 'holiday' appears in his talk on the Finnish body of mythology the *Kalevala* which he first gave to the Corpus Christi College Sundial Society in November 1914. In this talk Tolkien suggests that the act of discovering and reading this body of strange and foreign mythopoeia was like taking a holiday:

We are taking a holiday from the whole course of progress of the last three Millenniums, and going to be wildly un-hellenic and barbarous for a time, like the boy who hoped the future life would provide for half holidays in Hell, away from Eton Collars and hymns. (*Kullervo*, p. 72)

When Tolkien said this he was already, in a sense, on a more permanent holiday from the Hellenic; having in 1913 switched his academic studies at Oxford from the Classics (known as

‘Greats’) to English literature and language.¹⁵ The ‘Eton Collar’ Tolkien mentions was a wide stiff-buttoned collar which, starting in the late 19th century, formed part of the uniform of Eton College and suggests something very traditional and, given the tightness of it, quite restrictive. The holiday from hymns, suggesting organised religion, may be the ‘holiday’ that the *Kalevala* stories offered to Tolkien through its pagan nature and ‘luxuriant animism’ where everything, even beer and swords, have sentience (*Kullervo*, pp. 80-81).

When Tolkien gave a revised version of this talk in circa 1918, he elaborated on what he meant by the word ‘holiday’:

The holiday I suggest is a holiday from poetic and literary development, from the long accumulated weight of civilised tradition and knowledge, not a decedent and retrograde movement, not a ‘*nostalgie de la boue*’ – only a holiday; and if while on holiday we half hear the voice of Ahti in the noises of the sea, half shudder at the thought of Pohja, gloomy land of witchcraft, or Tuonela yet darker region of the dead, it is nonetheless with quite another part of our minds that we do this than that we reserve for our real beliefs for our religion just as it undoubtedly was for the Icelandic ecclesiastics of old. (*Kullervo*, p. 114)

Here Tolkien not only repeats and elaborates on his earlier thought that the very nature of the *Kalevala* represents a different type of literature that does not come from the familiar ‘weight of civilised tradition and knowledge’, but now adds to it that we take this holiday with another part of our minds and by doing this we come closer – we ‘half hear’ the enchantment of the *Kalevala*. It is also interesting that in this passage Tolkien evokes ‘Icelandic ecclesiastics’ which seems to suggest Christian writers like Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) who wrote about pagan Norse mythology by, if you will, going to another part of his mind than the part he reserved for his ‘real’ Christian beliefs.

In both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien uses the word ‘holiday’ to describe not a mental but a physical journey to another strange and foreign place. At the end of *The Hobbit* Bilbo thinks about describing his memoirs as ‘There and Back Again, a Hobbit’s Holiday’ (*Hobbit*, xix).

According to John D. Rateliff’s *History of the Hobbit*, the original manuscript just had ‘he thought of calling them “There and Back Again” – when there was a ring at the door.’¹⁶ The published evidence suggests that Tolkien inserted the phrase ‘a Hobbit’s Holiday’ in the final text. By doing this, Tolkien seems to be framing Bilbo’s exciting as well as dark and perilous adventures to strange and foreign lands with elves, trolls, eagles, spiders and of course a Dragon as a holiday. Corey Olsen characterises this proposed title as ‘both cavalier and self-deprecating, speaking of his great adventure as if it were only a little interlude in his life, a vacation he took one year to get away from home for a while.’¹⁷ Olsen also suggests that the title shows, with some comical exaggeration, how thoroughly Bilbo has integrated the experience of his journey into his life, in which the marvellous and the mundane are now ‘blended in measure.’¹⁸ In her paper ‘Travel, Redemption and Peacemaking – Hobbits, Dwarves and Elves and the Transformative Power of Pilgrimage’ Victoria Holtz-Wodzack suggests that in this

case Tolkien is using the British-English meaning of the word ‘holiday’ to indicate a vacation such as the walking holidays he took with his Inklings colleagues C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield.¹⁹

One of the early events of Tolkien’s own life, which he would later link with the landscapes and story of *The Hobbit*, was a walking holiday. In August and Early September 1911 Tolkien joined a summer holiday walking tour in the Swiss Alps with his Aunt Jane Neave, his brother Hilary and several friends and colleagues. Tolkien would characterise this summer before he went up to Exeter College, Oxford as the “*annus mirabilis*” of sunshine in which there was virtually no rain between April and the end of October’ (*Letters*, p. 391). Like Bilbo’s proposed ‘a Hobbit’s Holiday’, Tolkien’s walking trip in the Alps would be mixed with moments of extreme fun (such as damning a stream and letting the water loose on the villagers – well, not fun for the villagers!) and extreme danger; as Tolkien experienced when the party of twelve marched up the forbidding Aletsch Glacier and Tolkien nearly perished in an avalanche.²⁰ In an unfinished letter to his son Michael, Tolkien remembered that one of the rocks of the glacier only missed him by a foot (*Letters*, p. 393). In another letter from 1961 to Joyce Reeves, Tolkien recalled that, ‘it was while approaching the Aletsch that we were nearly destroyed by borders loosened in the sun rolling down a snow-slope. An enormous rock in fact passed between me and the next in front’ (*Letters*, p. 309). As Tolkien said in the same letter mentioned above to his son Michael, ‘it was a remarkable experience for me at 19, after a poor boy’s childhood’ (*Letters*, p. 309). In several of these later accounts Tolkien would characterise this holiday as inspiring certain key scenes and visual images in the very story and imagery that he also thought about associating the word ‘holiday’ with namely *The Hobbit*.²¹ One wonders if the remembrance of this real holiday mixed with fun and terror was in Tolkien’s mind when, in the final stages of composition, he thought about characterising Bilbo’s adventures as a ‘holiday’.

At the start of *The Lord of the Rings* Bilbo uses the word ‘holiday’ several times. When Gandalf comments on how bright Bilbo’s garden looks, Bilbo responds with ‘I am very fond of it indeed, and of all that dear old Shire, but I think I need a holiday’ (*FR*, I, i). Suggesting that Bilbo, while loving his home, is also restless to be off again on another adventure. After his birthday party Bilbo expresses his concerns about feeling old and well-preserved with an even more emphatic need for a holiday which grows in its intensity:

I feel I need a holiday, a very long holiday, as I have told you before. Probably a permanent holiday: I don’t expect I shall return. In fact, I don’t mean to, and I have made all the arrangements. (*FR*, I, i)

In this development, Bilbo is no longer desiring a ‘there and back again’ holiday but a permanent one, and in this passage Tolkien seems to be foreshadowing the final journey that both Bilbo and Frodo will take at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*: the Grey Havens – the ultimate permanent holiday.

When the fate of being the Ring-bearer falls to Frodo, he too evokes the word ‘holiday’. In this case, Frodo’s use of the word

seems to be based on his perceptions of what Bilbo's adventures has been with the dwarves, which he now contrasts with the dark and perilous journey ahead for him:

I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again... I have sometimes thought of going away, but I imagined that as a kind of holiday, a series of adventures like Bilbo's or better, ending in peace. But this would mean exile, a flight from danger into danger, drawing it after me. (*FR*, I, ii)

In Frodo's mind a holiday is 'a series of adventures like Bilbo's or better, ending in peace' as indeed Bilbo's seemed to be. Frodo's perception of the journey ahead is clearly not 'a hobbit's holiday' and seems more like Tolkien's own Alps walking holiday mixed with good times and fraught with peril; starting with encountering the Black Riders while still in the Shire. Before this encounter, the start of the hobbits' journey is positioned very much like a walking holiday, including cooking and sleeping in the outdoors with only a few creatures including a passing fox seeing them (*FR*, I, iii). The encounter and pursuit by the Black Riders changes this, and the holiday quickly becomes a series of perilous connected adventures. In her paper 'Tolkien's French Connection' Verlyn Flieger explores the difference between the adventures that Bilbo has been on and the more serious and darker 'quest' that Frodo is undertaking.²² This indeed is no holiday, as Barliman Butterbur in Bree makes clear when he rebukes the careless hobbits with: 'Well, you do want looking after and no mistake, your party might be on a holiday!' (*FR*, I, x). Butterbur's rebuke reinforces the idea that this time the hobbits (and therefore the readers) are not on a holiday. This point is emphasised again by Gandalf in the darkness of Moria when he scolds Pippin growling, 'This is a serious journey, not a hobbit walking-party. Throw yourself in next time, and then you will be no further nuisance. Now be quiet!' (*FR*, II, iv). The quest therefore is a much more serious journey than 'a Hobbit's Holiday'; harkening back to Gilson's negative position at the King Edward's School debate that holidays are frivolous and only good for sleeping, food and reading flimsy novels. There will certainly not be any time for such acts on the perilous quest to destroy the One Ring and save Middle-earth from a second darkness.

Bilbo's comment to Frodo in *The Lord of Rings* about wanting to take a permanent holiday might suggest another aspect of holidays which returns to Tolkien's idea of creating an opportunity to travel to another part of the mind. If, as Tolkien says, a holiday 'even for a time' allows you to go to another part of your mind and access the strange and fantastic – what would a permanent holiday away from the mundane world allow you to do? Indeed, for Bilbo, after seeing mountains again, his holiday will fulfil the wish he expresses to Gandalf of finishing his book (*FR*, I, i). Bilbo will spend most the War of the Ring in Rivendell, certainly a physical state of Faërie, where he will not only finish his book but also compile the three volume *Translations from the Elvish*; the body of Elvish mythology mythically signifying Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* (*RK*, II, vi). Indeed, the very genesis of the earliest version of this

mythology itself was conceived in part when Tolkien was on a summer holiday. In the summer of 1914 while on holiday in Cornwall, Tolkien would study several Old English works that would, in part, inspire his own unique world-building and lead to his composing the earliest drafts of arguably one of the first poetic expressions of his mythology 'The Voyage of Éarendel the Evening Star' on 24 September 1914.²³ It was also while on a typically British 'summer holiday' in 1925 at the seaside resort of Filey in Yorkshire that Tolkien's son Michael lost his beloved toy dog on the beach which resulted in Tolkien creating the story of *Roverandom* to explain the adventures of the lost dog.²⁴ This desire for a long or permanent holiday to inspire creativity and stay much longer, or even indefinitely, in that other part of the mind also occurs in two other of Tolkien's works. At the end of his allegorical story 'Leaf by Niggle' the Second Voice describes an actual spatial place that represents Niggle's creation as a holiday that most people do not come back from:

'It is proving very useful indeed,' said the Second Voice. 'As a holiday, and a refreshment. It is splendid for convalescence; and not only for that, for many it is the best introduction to the Mountains. It works wonders in some cases. I am sending more and more there. They seldom have to come back.' (*TL*, pp. 311-312)

At the beginning of Tolkien's last published work, *Smith of Wootton Major*, the Master Cook, much like Bilbo, goes on a holiday that seems to reflect a transformation – an accessing of Tolkien's other part of the mind:

There came a time, however, when the reigning Master Cook, to everyone's surprise, since it has never happened before, suddenly announced that he needed a holiday; and he went away, no one knew where; and when he came back some months later he seemed rather changed. Now he was merrier, and often said and did most laughable things; and at feasts he would himself sing gay songs, which was not expected of Master Cooks. Also he brought back with him an Apprentice; and that astonished the Village. (*Smith*, p. 7)

The Master Cook, of course, has journeyed into the realm of Faërie and like Bilbo, as Gandalf remarks, has come back changed by his 'holiday'. Shortly after, the Master Cook tells Alf that he is going on holiday again 'and this time I shan't be coming back again' (*Smith*, p. 9) – again echoing Bilbo's desire for his ultimate holiday in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.²⁵

An interesting mixture of the two conceptual spaces of home and holiday (both sides of the mind perhaps) occurs in a passage in *The Lord of the Rings* when Sam Gamgee in the Elvish realm of Lothlórien curiously describes his experience there as, 'it's like being home and on a holiday at the same time. If you understand me... I don't want to leave. All the same, I'm beginning to feel that if we've got to go on, then we'd best get it over' (*FR*, II, vii). Lothlórien for Sam is a place that is both familiar and strange; a physical and conceptual place, in a sense, that bridges both sides of the mind that Tolkien described in his talk on the *Kalevala*. Indeed, in another part of his *Kalevala* talk Tolkien described his discovery as crossing a gulf between

Indo-European speaking peoples of Europe into this smaller realm of those who cling in queer corners to the forgotten tongues and memories of an elder day (*Kullervo*, p. 69). As Verlyn Flieger has explored in her seminal *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie*, in entering Lothlórien Frodo has a similar experience as Tolkien had in his discovery.²⁶ In the passage above it is Sam, like the boy who wished for half holidays in Hell away from Eton Collars, who realises that while he enjoys his time there it is also time to get back to the 'real' world and the journey ahead – the holiday for Sam (and Frodo) is over.

Within the context of his world-building, Tolkien did include a good number of holidays in the calendars of Arda. From the earliest log drawing fest of 'Turuholmë' in *The Book of Lost Tales* (pp. 229, 270) to the Lithe and Yule Days on the Calendars in the Appendix in *The Return of the King* (Appendix D, I), Tolkien gave the peoples of his world time for holidays, celebrations and periods to stop and remember the past; as on *Cormarë* or 'Ring-day' held on the 22nd of September to celebrate Bilbo and Frodo's birthday (*RK*, Appendix D, I). In 'The Etymologies' the reconstructed proto-Elvish root MBER is the source for a series of Elvish words such as the Quenya word *meren* meaning 'feast' or 'festival' and *meryale* specifically meaning 'holiday' (*Lost Road*, p. 372). In inventing this proto-root with its derived Elvish words, Tolkien may be using sound-sense to signify the happy nature of holidays by echoing in his language invention the English word 'merry' – perhaps suggesting that our use of 'merry' in holiday greetings derives from and is an echo of this long forgotten Elvish word.

However, opposing this there are some examples of disastrous events that occur on days that are marked as the word's original meaning – holy or sacred days. The great tale of The Fall of Gondolin relates that as winter moves into spring, the inhabitants of the hidden city of Gondolin, unaware that the location of the city has been divulged to the first Dark Lord Melko, celebrate the holy day of Nost-na-Lothion – Gnomish for 'The Birth of Flowers' and the great feast of Tarnin Austa 'The Gates of Summer':

For know that on a night it was their custom to begin a solemn ceremony at midnight, continuing it even till the dawn of Tarnin Austa broke, and no voice was uttered in the city from midnight till the break of day, but the dawn they hailed with ancient songs. (*FoG*, p. 72)

It is at this moment when the city is engaged in this 'holy day' that Melko and his invading forces invade and vanquish Gondolin as the sun goes down:

Lo! even when she had gone and all was dark, a new light suddenly begun, and a glow there was, but it was beyond the northward heights, and men marvelled, and there was thronging of the walls and battlements. Then wonder grew to doubt as the light waxed and became redder, and doubt to dread as men saw the snow upon the mountains dyed as it were with blood. And thus it was that the fire-serpents of Melko came to Gondolin. (*FoG*, pp. 72-73)

In a later version of this tale from the 'Quenta Silmarillion' Tolkien emphasises that this act of 'holy-daying' caused the watch on the walls of Gondolin to be less vigilant:

The host of Morgoth came over the Northern hills where the height was greatest and the watch less vigilant, and it came at night at a time of festival, when all the folk of Gondolin were upon the walls to wait upon the rising sun and sing their songs at its uplifting; for the morrow was the feast they call *The Gates of Summer*. But the red light mounted the hills in the North and not in the East: and there was no stay in the advance of the foe until they were beneath the walls of Gondolin – and Gondolin was beleaguered without hope. (*Shaping*, p. 144) (my emphasis)

In this passage, Tolkien subverts the joy of the breaking of the night and the heralding of dawn (Tarnin Austa) with the glowing red light of Melko's fire serpents as the tragic invasion of Gondolin begins; an invasion which might have been prevented if the Gondolithim would not have been diverted by their 'holy-daying'.

Tolkien repeats this theme in part of the cosmogonical cycle of the Lost Tale stories found in the published section 'The Theft of Melko and the Darkening of Valinor'. Tolkien describes a great feast held by the Elves and Valar every seven years called 'Years of Double Mirth' which is a three day holy-day Festival that ends with the Elves ascending to the heights of Taniquetil 'and there Manwë would speak to them as he thought fit of the Music of the Ainur and the glory of Ilúvatar, and of things to be and that had been' (*Lost Tales I*, p. 144). It is just on this last day of this sacred Festival that Melko, in company with the spider creature Ungoliantë, comes back into Valinor:

But in that fateful year Melko dared of his blasphemous heart to choose that very day of Manwë's speech on Taniquetil to carry out his designs; for then would Kor and Valmar and the rock-ringed dale of Sirunúmen be unguarded; for against whom indeed had Elf or Vala need to guard in those old days? (*Lost Tales I*, p. 144)

In the 1930's 'Quenta', this Festival is mentioned again, and Tolkien emphasises the fact that the Quendi were all on the heights of Tindbrenting (Taniquetil) engaged in singing before the feet of Varda. Thus, as in the earlier example of the invasion of Gondolin, due to the act of 'holy-daying' no one was guarding the land when Melkor and Ungoliantë entered and destroyed the Two Trees:

It was a day of festival, and most of the people of the Valinor were upon the mountain of Manwë – singing before him in his halls, or playing in the upland pleasaunces upon the green slopes of Taniquetil... Valmar's streets were fallen silent, and few feet passed upon the stairs of Tun... Silpion was waning and Laurelin had just begun to glow, when protected by fate Morgoth and Ungoliantë crept into the plain. (*Lost Road*, p. 231)

In the 1950's 'Annals of Aman', Tolkien adds a new aspect to this holy day; it is now said that Manwë decreed a great festival to both celebrate the seeming defeat of Melkor and to heal the division that Melkor had caused among the Valar and the

Noldor:

Such now was the hour; but Manwë, hoping that indeed the shadow of Melkor was removed from the land, and fearing now worse than maybe a new war with Utmno and a new victory to end all, had decreed that this feast should be more glorious than any that had been held since the coming of the Eldar. He designed moreover to heal the evil that had arisen among the Noldor, and they all were bidden, therefore, to come to him and mingle with the Maiar in his halls upon Taniquetil, and there put aside all the griefs that lay between their princess and forget utterly the lies of their Enemy... It is said that even as Fëanor and Fingolfin stood before Manwë, and it was the Mingling of the Lights and both Trees were shining and the silent city of Valmar was filled with radiance as of silver and gold, in that hour Melkor and Ungoliantë came over the plain and stood before the mound. (*Morgoth*, p. 100)

What are we to make of this aspect of holidays as holy days that result in disaster? It appears that in both cases Tolkien is setting up a moment of joy and celebration when the Elves take a break from their daily life and watch upon the walls and in doing so forget for a moment that danger that is lurking outside waiting to attack. In a sense, both these tales' climaxes result in a reverse 'eucatastrophe'; Tolkien's term for the good catastrophe 'the sudden joyous turn' (*OFS*, p. 71). In both these holy days joy turns to grief. In *On Fairy-stories* Tolkien contrasts 'eucatastrophe' with 'dyscatastrophe' which are acts or events of sadness and failure that are necessary for 'the joy of deliverance' (*OFS*, p. 71) that the event or act seems to deny. Tolkien seems to be using these sacred holy days to emphasise that even if the greatest evil can subvert the glory of the holiest days that it will only be for just a time and eventually there will be deliverance and 'evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the wall so of the world, poignant as grief' (*OFS*, p. 71). Indeed, at the conclusion of *The Silmarillion* both these dyscatastrophic holy-days are contrasted with the eucatastrophic arrival on another holy-day of the great hope and deliverer for Elves and Men – Eärendil (*Silmarillion*, p. 256).²⁷

To conclude, there is one other use of the word 'holiday' by Tolkien that has an incredible poignancy and perhaps contains Tolkien's own reflection on the fate of several of his King Edward's School companions who took part in the original holiday debate. In 'The Battle of the Pelennor Fields', Tolkien describes the heads of dead soldiers that are being hurled by Sauron's forces over the walls of the besieged Minas Tirith to frighten the soldiers of Gondor:

But marred and dishonoured as they were, it often chanced that thus a man would see again the face of someone that he had known, who had walked proudly once in arms, or tilled the fields, or ridden in upon a holiday from the green vales in the hills. (*RK*, II, iv)

These soldiers too had gone on holidays and then had ridden in from the green vales to find themselves back in the ranks of soldiers soon to be slaughtered; just as Tolkien's debating partner Robert Quilter Gilson was killed in 1916 at the Battle of the Somme. For them the holiday was over – an elegiac there but this time not back again.

Notes

- 1 Scull and Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide vol 1. Chronology* (Revised and Expanded Edition) (London: HarperCollins, 2017), pp. 27-28.
- 2 An acronym for Tea Club, Barrovian Society – a fellowship of Tolkien and his friends in Birmingham who often met at the Barrows Stores.
- 3 Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide vol 1. Chronology* (Revised and Expanded Edition) (London: HarperCollins, 2017), pp. 27-28.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.* The 'Koh-i-noor is a famous diamond and became one of the British crown jewels after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849. The name is from the Persian koh-i-nur, literally meaning 'mountain of light', from the Persian koh 'mountain' and Arabic 'nur' light
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 This would not be the first time Tolkien would use punning in the King Edward's School debates. In his very first reported debate in October 1909 on the subject of the Militant Suffragette the report states that Tolkien 'spoke of the Suffragette from a Zoological point of view and gave an interesting display of his paronomasiac powers (ability to play on words). A good humorous speech.' (cited in Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide vol 1. Chronology* (Revised and Expanded Edition) (London: HarperCollins, 2017), pp. 18-19.
- 9 Koh-i-noor was the name of a brand of pencils made by a Czech manufacturer of various arts supplies. In the 1889 World's Fair in Paris this manufacturer Hardtmuth displayed these pencils with the name 'Koh-i-Noor' with each pencil encased in a 'mountain of light' of a yellow cedar barrel which apparently Tolkien had in the habit of putting in his mouth;
- 10 *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), p. 836.
- 11 Bede, *The Reckoning of Time* (edited by Faith Wallis) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 53.
- 12 For example, '3ef hit is halidei, buhinde sumdeal duneward seggeð Paternoster ant Credo ba stille' 'if it is a holy day, bowing somewhat downward, say the Paternoster and the Credo both silently.' *MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402* edited by J.R.R. Tolkien E.E.T.S. Oxford 1962, p. 14.
- 13 *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 1997), p. 836
- 14 <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/cliffrichard/summerholiday.html> (last accessed 28 April 2020)
- 15 Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide vol 1. Chronology* (Revised and Expanded Edition) (London: HarperCollins, 2017), p. 46
- 16 John D. Rateliff, *The History of The Hobbit*, One-Volume Edition (London: Harper Collins, 2011), p. 692.
- 17 Corey Olsen, *Exploring J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit* (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2012), p. 313.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Victoria Holtz-Wodzak, 'Travel, Redemption and Peacemaking - Hobbits, Dwarves and Elves and the Transformative Power of Pilgrimage' in *The Hobbit and Tolkien's Mythology Essays on Revisions and Influences* edited by Bradford Lee Eden (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014), p. 182.
- 20 Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide vol 1. Chronology* (Revised and Expanded Edition) (London: HarperCollins, 2017), p. 33
- 21 *Ibid.* 33-34.
- 22 Verlyn Flieger, 'Tolkien's French Connection' in *The Hobbit and Tolkien's Mythology Essays on Revisions and Influences* edited by Bradford Lee Eden (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014), pp. 70-78.
- 23 Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide vol 1. Chronology* (Revised and Expanded Edition) (London: HarperCollins, 2017), p. 31.
- 24 *Ibid.* 141.
- 25 Tolkien's Inklings colleague C.S. Lewis also used the word 'holiday' in an intriguing way that also suggests the movement to another conceptual place. At the end of *The Last Battle* when Lucy asks Aslan if he is going to send the children back to their own world as he has done before, Aslan responds 'No fear of that.... There was a real accident.... Your father and mother and all of you are - as you used to call it in the Shadowlands - dead. The term is over, *the holidays have begun*. The dream is ended: this is the morning.' (C.S. Lewis. *The Last Battle* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 224. (my emphasis)
- 26 In Verlyn Flieger, *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), p. 91. Flieger cites the following passage from 'As

soon as he set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling had come upon him, and it deepened as he walked on into the Naith: it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more' (*FR*, II, vi).

- 27 This contrast is especially emphasised in the 1930's Quenta 'and he came at a time of festival even as Morgoth and Ungoliant had in ages past' (*Shaping*, p. 153).



Figure 1: The Man in the Moon came tumbling down – by L.L. Brooke. This illustration is from Andrew Lang's *The Nursery Rhyme Book* (1897). Interestingly, the image shows two dogs – a small (terrestrial dog) between the seated children and a (lunar) dog accompanying the Man in the Moon complete with his bundle of staves. Image: public domain.