


timeline (by saving Charlie) the rest of the timeline adjusts.

Desmond later endures uncontrollable bouts of mind-only time travel in Season Four, as he travels from the Island via helicopter to the offshore freighter. Apparently as a side effect of the Island's constant jittering in space-time, Desmond and the freighter's communications officer Minkowski become mentally dislodged in time and suffer life-threatening symptoms similar to the writings of Stapledon and Lewis. At the insistence of the present's Daniel Faraday, Desmond travels to past Oxford during one of his out of body flashes and witnesses past Faraday's experiments on the lab rat Eloise, lovingly named after his mother. Eloise's consciousness leaves her current body and travels to her future body, learns how to run a new maze, and then returns to her current body and successfully completes the task. However she dies of a brain haemorrhage shortly thereafter. Faraday explains that she couldn't tell which was which — the future or the present. "She had no anchor" — no constant. Desmond is able to return to the present and remain there after arranging for his beloved Penny to call him at a prearranged time, thus acting as his constant. As for Minkowski, his flashes escalate, he has a seizure, begins bleeding, and gasps "I can't get back" before dying. We also learn that one of Daniel's two human test subjects (the other being himself), his girlfriend Theresa, has fallen into a permanent disabled state as she uncontrollably travels between the past and present. As her sister

explains to Desmond when he visits: "Theresa's away now."

In the opening lines of his poem *Burnt Norton*, T. S. Eliot wrote:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present.

In introducing the scientific scaffolding of intense electromagnetism and the Casimir effect that the writers of *Lost* use to explain the time-travelling bunnies and scientist Pierre Chang's intense interest in the Island's properties, Dunne's largely pseudoscientific ideas are given a flash of hard-science credibility within the mythos of the series. But given the intricacies of the plotlines involved, who can blame the readers and viewers of all the works discussed here for commiserating with Eloise the rat right before her brain exploded? 

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Going back: time travel in Tolkien and E. Nesbit

VIRGINIA LULING

He felt that he could say that his most permanent mood ... had been since childhood the desire *to go back*. To walk in Time, perhaps, as men walk on long roads; or to survey it, as men may see the world from a mountain, or the earth as a living map beneath an airship. But in any case to see with eyes and to hear with ears: to see the lie of old and even forgotten lands, to behold ancient men walking, and hear their languages as they spoke them, in the days before the days.

The Lost Road and other writings 1987, p. 45

Among the many things that nourished Tolkien's imagination was the reading of his childhood and youth. This includes George MacDonald, the Kipling of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, H. G. Wells, Rider Haggard's *She* and also E. Nesbit's fantasy stories. Others have pointed this out, though not analysed it in detail, and I think that anyone who is familiar with those stories must recognize their presence in his work. Here I want to look at one particular and rather peculiar idea, found in one of his many

abandoned projects, which is clearly derived from E. Nesbit.

That Tolkien read Nesbit as a child goes without saying; there can have been few English-speaking children who read anything, at that time or for some time after, who did not read her books. Also he must have given them and possibly read them to his own children. I don't know how many read her now, apart from *The Railway Children* (whose ending, by the way, is one of the best examples I know of what Tolkien named 'eucatastrophe', though I am not suggesting he noticed that). I think there are a number of echoes of Nesbit in Tolkien, but there is one link that as far as I know nobody has noticed, but that I believe is obvious when you see it. This is in his unfinished, indeed barely begun, time-travel story *The Lost Road*. In a letter of 1964, he wrote:

When C. S. Lewis and I tossed up, and he was to write on space travel and I on time travel, I began an abortive book of time-travel of which the end was to be the presence of my hero in the drowning of Atlantis. This was to be called *Númenor*, the Land in the West.

The thread was to be the occurrence time and time again in human families ... of a father and son called by names that could be interpreted as Bliss-friend and Elf-friend. These no longer understood are found in the end to refer to the Atlantid-Númenórean situation and mean 'one loyal to the Valar, content with the bliss and prosperity within the limits prescribed' and 'one loyal to friendship with the High-elves'. It started with a father-son affinity between Edwin and Elwin of the present, and was supposed to go back into legendary time by way of an Eadwine and Aelfwine of *circa* AD 918, and Audoin and Alboin of Lombardic legend, and so to the traditions of the North Sea concerning the coming of corn and culture heroes, ancestors of kingly lines, in boats ... In my tale we were to come at last to Amandil and Elendil leaders of the loyal party in Númenor, when it fell under the dominion of Sauron.

The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien no. 257 and *The Lost Road and other writings*, pp. 7–8. The 'Lombardic legend' refers to events in the sixth century

But almost none of this was ever written; all that survives of the project, apart from some scattered notes, are a beginning, with a twentieth-century father and son (confusingly called by the Lombard names Audoin and Alboin rather than Edwin and Elwin), a Númenórean chapter, and a scene in the England of the tenth century. Tolkien had reason to abandon it: the existing chapters are unsuccessful, though with gleams. Evidently he was not really comfortable with the framework that he had taken on, and in the end he satisfied the desire to see "the lie of old and even forgotten lands" by going straight to them without explanation. Meanwhile the device he hit on for time travel was a curious one: the father-son pair recurring throughout history and prehistory with the same names in different forms, and the modern pair in some unexplained way entering the consciousness of their earlier namesakes. It is not suggested that this is a case of reincarnation; only that it is somehow a way into the past.

The only place I know that a similar device is used is in E. Nesbit's *The House of Arden*. In this story a brother and sister, Edred and Elfrida, travel back from their own time in Edwardian England to four earlier centuries; each time there was in the Arden family a brother and sister pair of the same names — "There was always a boy and a girl — a boy and a girl" — whose identities they take. Here too there is no suggestion of reincarnation; they simply occupy the places of their namesakes.

So far as I know, there is no other example of this particular time-travelling device: the visiting of the past in the person of an earlier person with the same name; and with it the very peculiar use of a related pair, father-son in one case, brother-sister in the other. I think it is a reasonable assumption that Tolkien's idea originated from *The House of Arden*. I am certainly not suggesting that he consciously borrowed it from Nesbit — I would think that most unlikely. I simply mean that it had become part of the 'leaf-mould of the mind', from which his own very different story grew. It was perhaps assisted by the real historical names of the two Lombard kings, and his playing with their meanings.

The similarity of the two pairs of names is intriguing too,

Edred being translatable as 'Bliss-counsel' or 'Wealth-counsel' and Elfrida as 'Elf-strength'. (These meanings are of no significance in Nesbit's story, and I do not suppose she was even aware of them.)

Otherwise the two stories are very different, in background and feeling as well as plot. *The Lost Road* has nothing of a children's story about it. There is naturally no question in Nesbit of the children's names taking different forms in the times that they visit, which are much more recent than those of Tolkien. Also, throughout their adventures, Edred and Elfrida have full recall both of their home period and of the other times that they have visited. As far as can be seen from the unfinished fragments of Tolkien's story, his heroes do not have any such recall; at most they have momentary feelings that their surroundings are somehow strange.

There is another remarkable thing. *The House of Arden* contains a marvellous hidden city, in a plain surrounded by a wall of unclimbable cliffs and accessible only through one way, which is closely guarded to protect it from the evils of the modern world. (It is in the South American jungle, and the children's missing father and uncle are held prisoner there.) I would not propose that this is definitely the source for Gondolin — there are other such 'lost world' stories after all — but it could well be the way in which the conception first entered Tolkien's imagination.

If so, then here are two instances of the way an idea or an image absorbed at an impressionable age can resurface in a creative mind years later. The one idea, however, was, as Tolkien said, abortive, the other richly fruitful. m

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