It was in 1971, almost 35 years ago, that, thanks to my friend Antanas Andrijauskas, I had the rare privilege of visiting the Ciurlionis Museum in Kaunas. I was struck by the beauty of Ciurlionis' pictorial universe and the presence of his imagination still strikes a profound chord in me and has left a mark on me forever. A few years later, in the spring of 1976, I experienced a similar feeling when I discovered the dazzling world of Tolkien. And yet, I did not think of establishing any relationship between their works which, it seemed, were not linked in any way. Besides, being a medievalist and an expert in the evolution of medieval studies in France in the second half of the 19th century I would never have thought of writing anything about Ciurlionis or Tolkien. However, it so happened that an editor asked me to write a synthesis on the entire work of Tolkien which led to the publication of a book, in 2004, called *Tolkien, le Chant du Monde*. And while working on this book I was struck by a parallel between the two visionary worlds of Ciurlionis and Tolkien.
The starting point was the theme of a great wave, which swallows an entire continent - an obvious reminder of the myth of Atlantis which has obsessed so many souls since Plato related this fabled continent's cataclysmic demise. The great wave, which pervades Ciurlionis' *Finale* and *Sonata of the Sea*, is a recurrent theme in the work of Tolkien and punctuates the chaotic period between the different ages described in his Legendarium. Indeed, it is an immense wave which, at the end of the Second Age, caused by the excessive pride of the inhabitants of the island of Númenor, swallows up the island, bringing an end to its royal line. And at the end of the Third Age the fall of Sauron in the War of the Ring, the central theme of *The Lord of the Rings*, takes the form of a final dark wave which tries, in vain, to engulf the world and which signals the end of this most terrible power. Starting from this common theme I noticed a true spiritual connection between the works of the two visionaries Tolkien and Ciurlionis. The connection is not dependant on any notion of one having influenced the other as the great Lithuanian artist died in 1911, whereas the work of Tolkien (born in 1892 and died in 1973) was first formulated in poetic texts dating from 1916. We know that the tragic circumstances of the 20th century did not permit the work of Ciurlionis to gain the status in the intellectual and artistic circles of Western Europe that its quality and originality merited. Thus, Tolkien would almost certainly have been unaware of Ciurlionis' work despite his continual keen interest in Norse mythology, particularly the Finnish *Kalevala*.

In the lecture that took place in Vilnius, I had the chance to mention numerous thematic affinities and concordances between Ciurlionis' paintings and Tolkien's Legendarium. What I, and Tolkien himself, call the Legendarium encompasses the entirety of his stories and other texts on the history of Middle-earth from the creation of the world throughout all its successive Ages. Tolkien's mythology is present potentially in his first poetic texts written during World War I, in which he fought on the frontline at the Somme, and it pre-empts the 1954 publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. The book earned him worldwide acclaim, especially since the sixties generation in the United States made it into a "cult book". This mythology which Tolkien never ceased to enrich and which he augmented and altered until the end of his life, is available to the reader in two works published posthumously by his son Christopher. The first work, *The Silmarillion*, was published in 1977 and presents, in the form of a continuous story, the history of the Elven kingdoms of Middle-earth and the great battles fought by the Valar (the custodians of the earth) against the Dark Lord, Morgoth. The twelve volumes encompassing *The History of Middle-earth* have a very different structure. Here we have multiple versions of stories that are treated in a scholarly way and annotated with commentaries by Christopher Tolkien. Middle-earth is not the only subject covered. There are numerous exciting treatises on diverse matters such as the history, language, philosophy and religion of the various people in the stories of the Legendarium. In this large number of texts the reader has all the elements of the mythology which Tolkien created as well as a history of the manuscripts of the Legendarium.

Besides his literary work Tolkien also created paintings of great interest, although the heart of his creative genius is philology, philology in the strongest sense of the word - *the love of the word*, of the *logos*. This love led him to invent several languages, some of them highly developed such as the two main Elven languages, Quenya and Sindarin, and it led him to invent characters and scenes to provide a use for these languages. This is the linguistic origin of Tolkien's fiction.
The evidence of Tolkien's visionary genius is as strong in his paintings as it is in his literary work. This is portrayed very competently in the book *Tolkien, Artist & Illustrator* by the talented scholars Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull. One main characteristic of Tolkien's illustrations and drawings is their small format. Generally they were on a sheet of paper 30cm square. For Tolkien the so-called “minor” arts, those of the artisans, embody truth and beauty as much as do painting or sculpture. Tolkien admired the talent of portrait painters like Frans Hals and Van Dyck. Moreover, he was influenced by Arthur Rackham and his method of drawing trees. Tolkien's mother took a great interest in the education of her two sons until her death in 1904 and she was, herself, a talented artist from a family of engravers and stamp makers. She wrote a treatise on ornamentation which almost certainly played a part in Tolkien's interest in calligraphy. The main body of Tolkien's art is preserved with his manuscripts in the Department of Western manuscripts in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and in the Archives and Special Collections Department at Marquette University Library in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Like the work of Ciurlionis, the art of Tolkien is profoundly inspired by nature. But often he further develops ideas which came from the observation of nature, in particular seas and forests as well as architecture. Sometimes this resulted in works that were close to being classified as abstract art. A good example of this can be seen in the wonderful drawing *Moonlight on a Wood*.

Some of Tolkien's early works have enigmatic titles such as *Before* and *Afterwards* and convey a sacred atmosphere which is, at the same time, tinged with fear. These works are certainly comparable to some of Ciurlionis'. In the drawing *Before*, a sinister corridor, lit by two ritual torches resting on cable columns, leads to a kind of door or obscure shrine which is the opening to either a world of light or of darkness, we know not which. We can compare this aperture with the portico and the hanging bell, the first work in Ciurlionis' *Funeral* cycle.

The drawing which Tolkien entitled *Afterwards* shows a person with a bent head who seems to have gone through this door and who advances along a torchlit path - the long path towards the light. This also forms the theme of the funeral procession in paintings 4 & 5 of Ciurlionis' cycle. We know that Ciurlionis actually liked the torches motif.
The proximity of these two artists is particularly striking in one work which shares the same title: *Thought*. In both cases the idea is expressed by a head bent against a large body. In Ciurlionis' work luminous rays emanate from the figure's eyes but in Tolkien's work a sun forms around the head of the thinker and we do not know whether the figure is luminous or dark.

Un autre dessin de jeunesse de Tolkien évoque une thématique bien présente dans l’œuvre de Ciurlionis : la marche sur un abîme qui suggère le passage d’un monde à un autre ; dans le *Bout du monde*, on voit une silhouette filiforme au sommet d’une falaise aride tombant à pic sur une mer ensoleillée et qui saute dans l’abîme – « avec insouciance ou vaillance ». 
We think of the *Scherzo* of the *Sonata of the Serpent* or of the star sign Gemini in the *Cycle of the Signs of the Zodiac*.

An important aspect of Tolkien's artwork is the illustration of his literature. Some artwork shows the tribulations of the Elven kingdoms of Middle-earth, the story of which fills the second part of *The Silmarillion* - the fall of Gondolin and the ravaging of the caves of Nargothrond by the dragon Glaurung. Several drawings illustrate scenes from *The Hobbit* which was published in 1937 and whose success spurred Tolkien, at the bequest of his publisher, to write *The Lord of the Rings*. These drawings closely reflect the text. The drawings allow the author to show the frame of the action unfolding in the text. This side of Tolkien's painting, which is directly linked to his writing, shows less of a connection with Ciurlionis than does Tolkien's early or later work.

**Tolkien – Tapis de Númenor**  
**Čiurlionis – Esquisse pour décor d’opéra**

Cependant, après l’achèvement du *Seigneur des Anneaux* (publié en 1954), Tolkien reviendra dans ses œuvres tardives à un art décoratif qui n’est pas sans rappeler, comme par exemple le *Tapis de Númenor*, les esquisses de Čiurlionis pour des décors d’opéras ou les encadrements des titres de certaines partitions musicales de chants populaires lituaniens.
In this last phase of Tolkien's artistic life he created Elvish heraldry using precise rules and it bore no relation to medieval heraldry. These emblems show great beauty, with their fine colours and harmonious shapes.

It seems appropriate to include two areas which are particularly important in Tolkien's multi-faceted artistic work: calligraphy and fictional cartography. As well as inventing numerous languages for the various non-human creatures who peopled his Legendarium (e.g. Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, Ents, etc.) he also invented specific alphabets for many of those languages. Tolkien was a medievalist and taught medieval English language and literature at Oxford, therefore he was well acquainted with original manuscripts of that era. One such manuscript is a letter dedicated to King Elessar and it demonstrates how sophisticated his work was.
Cartography too was another important element in Tolkien's creations. His Legendarium contains numerous and detailed maps, many of which are, in fact, the work of Christopher Tolkien, who had been, since his childhood, the first reader and fan of this father's work.

Voyons maintenant de plus près quelques aspects de convergence entre l’art pictural de Tolkien et la peinture de Čiurlionis. Dans un des essais les plus profonds sur l’esthétique de Čiurlionis parus encore du vivant de l’artiste, Valerian Chudovsky mettait en valeur la verticalité comme un des traits dominants de cette esthétique. On pourrait en dire sans doute de même à propos de l’œuvre artistique de Tolkien, et ce trait est particulièrement sensible lorsqu’il aborde le motif, qui lui est cher entre tous, de la forêt. En particulier, une citation de Valerian Chudovsky relative à l’attitude de Čiurlionis lorsqu’il peignait une forêt nous semble parfaitement adaptable à Tolkien :

There are sketches of his which clearly show that, when he looked into the depths of a forest, he did not see individual trees. He actually perceived only the overall vertical effect of the trees trunks, and he would create paintings which with their wondrous realism objectify abstract idealism.
Two of Tolkien's illustrations display quite strikingly the aesthetics of verticality: the first, *Fangorn Forest (Taur-na-Fuin)* refers to a place mentioned in *The Silmarillion*, whereas the second, *Mirkwood*, is the forest which Bilbo and his companions had to get through in *The Hobbit*. In this second drawing the stylised trunks and the absence of leaves give it an abstract feel. It suggests an oppressive atmosphere due to unlimited space buried in darkness and silence.
Sometimes trees are also transmitters of harmony and beauty; like the Tree of Amalion, for example, whose stylised flowers, small as well as big, stand for poems and legends. This tree is therefore a sort of emblem for Tolkien's Legendarium, made up of a multitude of stories and legends which, themselves, are developed to a greater or lesser degree. According to an expert in Tolkien's languages, Carl F. Hofstetter, the name Amalion is derived from the Quenyan Amalia, which means "rich" or "blessed". Thus, it is Tolkien's Legendarium that becomes, in turn, a "tree of blessings".

Another one of Tolkien's great themes is the sacred mountain. The mountain is considered sacred in itself and there is no need to build a temple on it. And the same goes for the cult of the one God, Eru, who does not need the intercession of a clergyman; he asks simply that those who come to venerate him remain absolutely silent. It is in solitude and silence that man enters into a relationship with the divine and several of Ciurlionis' works show this spiritual intelligence, e.g. the famous painting *Silence*.
The sacred mountain par excellence in Tolkien's Legendarium is Taniquetil, which lies in the Blessed Kingdom of Valinor in the far west of the world. On its summit dwells Manwê, the first of the Valar who is in direct contact with Eru, the only God. In one of this drawings Tolkien depicted the **Halls of Manwê on the Mountains of the World above Faerie**, which Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull described like this:

> The slopes on one side of the mountain are bathed in sunlight, while those on the other side shine more coldly in the light of a crescent moon. The different layers of air depicted here seem to accord with those described in Tolkien's *Ambarkanta* or *Shape of the World*, written in the 1930s. Usually, the pure clear middle air, *Ilmen*, in which were the Sun, Moon, and stars, stretched directly above Valinor, but at times Vista, the lowest air, flowed in from Middle-earth...
> (Hammond, p. 54)

Once again we cannot but be amazed by the connection between this vision and Ciurlionis' *Allegro* from the *Sonata of the Stars*, despite the presence of the cosmogenic theme (the passage from chaos to cosmos) absent in Tolkien's more static drawings.

A valued place is given to towers and cities in the epic scale of Tolkien's imaginary world and generally they are medieval in style. Thus, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Mordor, the territory of the Dark Lord, is surrounded by a series of terrifying towers and in its centre lies Barad-dûr, where Sauron himself lives. One of Tolkien's drawings depicts a particularly overwhelming and menacing view of the threats posed by this sinister place. Mount Doom, from which flows a river of lava, is shown in the background.

An equally terrible place is conjured up in one of Ciurlionis' most sombre paintings: *The Ballad of the Black Sun*. It could very well illustrate the invasion of the world by dark forces as in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. 

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![Tolkien - Barad-dûr](image1.jpg)

![Ciurlionis – Ballade du Soleil Noir](image2.jpg)
Let us draw a conclusion with two final comments. Firstly, one of the merits of Tolkien's work is that it inspired a number of illustrators, some of whom had great talent. And it seems that the invention of a world of beauty such as that of the Legendarium engenders beauty even if this world also contains a terrifying counterpart to its beauty. Some of the most remarkable Tolkien illustrators are Alan Lee, John Howe and Ted Nasmith and we may remind ourselves that Peter Jackson, the director of the film *The Lord of the Rings*, shown in the cinemas between 2001 and 2003, drew his inspiration mainly from those illustrators, perhaps even more so than from Tolkien's work itself. Those illustrators display three of the characteristics which contribute to bringing Tolkien's and Ciurlionis' fictional worlds together: a sense of the sacred, a feeling for the cosmic and a great architectural plasticity.

Finally, we may remind ourselves that Ciurlionis' creative genius is connected with the renaissance of Lithuanian culture at the end of the 19th century. And Tolkien expressed the desire to create "a mythology for England". Both their works are planted firmly on national soil and yet their universality is not affected. Surely this contributes to giving these two visionaries an important place in the artistic and spiritual conscience of all of those who yearn for a new "reenchantment" of the world.

Charles Ridoux

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