

"A mere maiden": Exploring Lúthien Tinúviel's relationship with dance and song  
with word dispersions, correlations, topic modelling, and fuzzy matching

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Word count: 4000

**Commented [CN1]:** Pre-submission checklist:

- All "Luthien Tinuviel" is accented
- MLA formatted
- Images are all subtitled properly.
- 15-20 works referenced
- Word count: 4000 +- 10%
- Proper links to code, reading notes, explanation of how it all works
- Change all "we" to "I", or vice versa. Pick one to stick with.
- Change all italics of *singing* and *dancing* to quotation marks "singing" and "dancing", or vice versa. Pick one to stick with.
- Check that methodology summary matches what you actually ended up doing.

**Commented [CN2R1]:** Why doing these steps in this

order will help us answer this question ()  
What potential biases this has, what assumptions have I made,  
What have I done to eliminate as much statistical bias as possible  
What falls outside of this scope  
How this feeds into previous researchers' work – who has done what? Mini lit review

**Commented [CN3]:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khsNsa3-VqQ&ab\\_channel=VanityFair](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khsNsa3-VqQ&ab_channel=VanityFair) for fuzzy matching

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## Abstract

The character of Lúthien Tinúviel has frequently been described as being central to the entire creation of the Eä universe. As previous scholars have identified, the two major sources of her power are dance and song, which are sometimes described as extensions of her femininity, though this is hotly debated and often outright rejected. Clare Moore, in her 2021 article *A song of greater power*, contends that J.R.R. Tolkien “increasingly [...] establishes Lúthien as a figure of power” as the story is written and re-written, wielding these two art forms (song and dance) as expressions of self and influence (Moore). Tolkien also “increase[es] her agency and autonomy”, and therefore “presents her as the foremost figure of his entire legendarium by establishing her influence over the history that comes after her,” and part of that power comes from song and dance (Moore). Following on Moore’s close reading work comparing the five major texts telling the story of Lúthien Tinúviel, I create a corpus for use in R; create dispersion plots to visualize patterns of occurrences across the various versions of the story; and calculate correlation scores between *song* variants and *dance* variants. These are all ways to identify the true sources of her power and their evolutions over the five key manuscripts: *The tale of Tinúviel* (1917), *The Lay of Leithian* (1925), *Sketch of the mythology* (1926), *Quenta Noldorinwa* (1930), and *Quenta Silmarillion*; and perform fuzzy matching. The dispersion plots particularly probe Moore’s argument that the art form of dance gives way to song over time. The fuzzy matching supplements close reading attempts to identify similar passages between the manuscripts, especially in a systematic, descriptive and efficient manner that can only be pursued using computational methods. Using the program R to identify n-grams with varying lengths, and varying ‘fuzzy factors’, I expand on Moore’s close reading where she identifies several key passages that have stayed consistent throughout the story. Naturally this fuzzy matching also contextualizes the tf-idf scoring, allowing me to tell a well-rounded narrative in the mixed-method reading. Lastly, I also consider what weaknesses these R tools bring to studying the Lúthien story, and make suggestions for a text analysis package designed for use on Tolkien texts, including a specially designed lexicon, designed to minimize those weaknesses.

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## 1. Preliminary Matters

### 1.1. Hypothesis and research questions

Clare Moore’s close-reading interpretation of Lúthien Tinúviel follows the evolution of the myth over 5 texts written and re-written over time. She focuses on the sources of Lúthien’s power, i.e. song and dance, as an explanation for Lúthien’s growing autonomy and power. In terms of outcomes, Moore found that earlier drafts showed Lúthien as less autonomous and less powerful. Subsequent revisions and drafts showed the evolution of the character into a powerful, active, and independent character who is central to the legendarium.

In order to make Moore’s hypothesis machine testable (or, as it can be called, distant-reading and mixed-method reading), I focus specifically on two sections of Moore’s arguments. Firstly, Moore writes about a particular scene wherein “J.R.R. Tolkien’s shift from dance [as the main source of Lúthien’s power] to song in this scene reveals a focal shift [...] Vink [...] noted that the ratio between song-related words shifts dramatically between versions, with a 4:1 song:dance ratio in the *Lay* compared to a 16:1 ratio in chapter nineteen of *The Silmarillion*” (Moore).

Indeed this brings up the possibility of expanding this type of “word count” (laterally called *token counts* or *term frequency* in natural language processing) test to study, for *each* of the five texts:

- the term frequency of “danc\*” (which includes “dancing,” “dances,” “danced,” etc.). Hereafter I will refer to these as *dance* variants.
- the term frequency of “sing\*” and “song\*” (which includes “singing,” “songs,” etc.)
- calculating the inverse term frequency of the above terms. Hereafter I will refer to these as *sing* variants.

Note that above, every asterisk mark indicates a *wildcard function*, which in natural language processing indicates unknown characters in a text value; this is useful for locating multiple items with similar, but not identical data. In this first case, we see a search for all the possible conjugations of the verb *dance*.

Secondly, Moore notes that “[t]he oscillation of who names Lúthien – herself or Morgoth – reveals that J.R.R. Tolkien’s development of Lúthien’s agency is not always a steady progression” (Moore). Expanding from this idea of oscillating word choices, I investigate if there are *other* direct passages of text that we can quote that show nearly exact same phrasing of words. Moore’s close reading identified a few, but this was not the main focus of her argument – so it is up to us to do that. That can help us find the “essential differences” between the drafts’ portrayal of the character, *aside* from song and dance alone. In essence this means using these machine-testing methods:

- Fuzzy matching using n-grams and regex, using several key scenes (climaxes) that occur repeatedly throughout the 5 texts, to identify what words changed

These scenes are:

- Beren (Lúthien’s husband)’s first encounter with Lúthien
- Lúthien putting guards to sleep with song
- Lúthien’s battle against the monster Morgoth
- The naming of Lúthien (herself or Morgoth)

The method here is similar to those described in Shmidman et al.’s paper identifying similar parallel passages across various versions of the Talmud (Shmidman et al.).

### 1.2. The Lúthien Tinúviel story and myths

Why look at five retellings of the Lúthien Tinúviel story? Why identify the similarities and differences; why does this change the way we see the story? Why call it a myth? Myths are living, evolving, and growing narratives. We cannot expect myths to remain the same generation after generation – many attributes change, sometimes for reasons that we cannot understand in hindsight, and sometimes for reasons that we can. To demand that a myth, particularly those *deliberately designed* as myths, be faithful to some “original” is dangerous and detrimental to the retelling performance, and also brings serious implications to manuscript studies as a whole. Thus we reject what is known as the *fidelity discourse*; we

reject the idea that there is an original version to which we must adhere. A myth is about performance, about being spoken, told, and received by an audience, and by changing. Crucially, as William Uricchio writes, “there is much more to be gained [...] by exploring textual multiplicity, modification, and what [...] textual hacking as generative and interactive practices in their own right rather than as [...] corruptions of an idealized end-state” (Uricchio). Certainly, Tolkien understood this beyond the scope of the Lúthien Tinúviel story. In his own writing, there is the metatext of *The Red Book*, in which different characters are said to have recorded their adventures (from Bilbo in *The Hobbit*, it was then passed onto Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* and finally to Samwise Gamgee). In fact, it is hinted that the story of *The Hobbit* itself is the first draft the Red Book (Ferre). In Tolkien’s own studies, we know that he studied Old English narratives that were constantly retold and/or rewritten. So, there is no surprise in saying that understanding variation between myths (often by means of a variorum), and the context behind these changes, is essential to understanding Tolkien’s obsession with myth and myth telling.

Again, of particular focus to this paper is the myth of Lúthien Tinúviel, the elven maiden whose story shaped those of her descendants’ so powerfully. It is in the telling and retelling of her story that we witness the evolution of her character, both in qualities integral to her femininity and beyond. As Clare Moore notes, these qualities that make Lúthien “an active character and central to the legendarium [through] agency and autonomy” (Moore) specifically are song and dance. To track changes across 5 moderately similar retellings of the same story, it is only sensible to use computational methods: it is in this manner that we discover minute similarities – not just in similar phrases, but in similar plot tensions, sentiments, and word frequency. Without computational methods, we are limited to the boundaries of human memory and pattern recognition; thus, given the tools built into R, this research is more important, timely, and possible than ever.

### 1.3. The current state of related research

Vink  
Schmidmin et al  
Ferre  
Tom Shippey on LT  
James Tauber ngrams

## 2. Quantitative methodology and results

### 2.1. Creating the clean corpus

The corpus includes the 5 seminal texts that Moore originally chose as representative of the Lúthien Tinúviel story. Again, they are, in chronological progression:

- *The Tale of Tinúviel* (1917), the first chapter of *The Book of Lost Tales Volume 2*
- *The Lay of Leithian* (1925),
- *Sketch of the mythology* (1926), also known as *The Earliest 'Silmarillion'* and the second chapter of *The Shaping of Middle-Earth*
- *Quenta Noldorinwa*, the third chapter of *The Shaping of Middle-Earth* (1930), and
- *Quenta Silmarillion*, the third part of *The Silmarillion* text (published 1977)

While there are at least nine different drafts of this story, these five are the ones that Christopher Tolkien uses to “compile the single volume *Beren and Lúthien*,” the most whole telling of the story in a single manuscript (Moore).

For *The Tale of Tinúviel*, I have removed Christopher Tolkien’s footnotes and have not included the second version (which is very close to the first) of the tale.

For *The Lay of Leithian*, I have removed Bilbo’s forward and commentaries. Though this is a key contextual positioning of this version of the myth, indeed it is paratext (i.e. an element not part of the primary text), or what Gerard Genette calls *peritext*, rather than part of the myth itself (Genette). Its removal therefore will not affect the accuracy of the final corpus and textual analysis.

For *Sketch of the mythology*, I have removed the majority of Christopher Tolkien’s commentaries, save those at the end of the chapter wherein he summarizes’ Lúthien’s plight. Like *Quenta Noldorinwa* (below), since it comes from *The Shaping of Middle-Earth*, the commentaries help provide context but are not central to the computational analysis. I have also only included sections 10 forward which have especial focus on Lúthien, rather than Morgoth and the evil surrounding Morgoth.

For *Quenta Noldorinwa*, I have removed Christopher Tolkien’s footnotes and commentaries. Though the format of *Quenta Noldorinwa* is undoubtedly a compilation of nebulous sources, and the commentaries put context to these vignettes, again the commentaries are not part of the primary text and are thus erased from the final corpus. Additionally, only sections 10 and 11 of the *Quenta Noldorinwa* is included in the corpus, as sections outside of these do not cover the story of Lúthien Tinúviel in detail, and thus additional data would affect the accuracy of the final corpus and textual analysis.

For *Quenta Silmarillion*, I have included only chapter 19 of *The Silmarillion*, titled “Of Beren and Lúthien,” obviously since this is the only chapter that exclusively focuses on Lúthien’s adventures.

The corpus is made of 5 .txt files, which are easily parsed by read-in functions in R and may manipulated with any number of NLP packages. These files can be found at the stable link: [shorturl.at/esLWZ](http://shorturl.at/esLWZ).

## 2.2. Word frequencies

### 2.2.1. Absolute and relative frequencies of all of “sing” and “dance” variants (iterations)

Text	Absolute and relative frequency of “sing”’s iterations	Absolute frequency of “dance”’s iterations
<i>Tale of Tinúviel</i>	30, 0.0023	24, 0.0018
<i>Lay of Leithian</i>	22, 0.0010	80, 0.0037
<i>Sketch of the mythology</i>	1, 4.6e-05	4, 0.000018
<i>Quenta Noldorinwa</i>	1, 0.00032	9, 0.000018
<i>Quenta Silmarillion</i>	3, 8.1e-05	36, 0.0007

Figure 1. Absolute and relative frequencies of 'sing' variants and 'dance' variants across 5 texts.

As we can see, the extremely low amount of occurrences in some these instances means the values are almost trivial. This will affect how we perform the final mixed-method analysis.

```

19 #How many words are "dance"
20 dance_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="dance")])
21 dance_hits_v #9 hits
22 #How many words are "dancing"
23 dancing_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="dancing")])
24 dancing_hits_v #8 hits
25 #How many words are "danced"
26 danced_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="danced")])
27 danced_hits_v #1
28 #How many words are "dances"
29 dances_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="dances")])
30 dances_hits_v #2
31
32 #Therefore total number of all iterations of danc- is 9+8+1+2 = 30
33 totaldancehits_v = 30
34 total_words_v <- length(loweredtext)
35 totaldancehits_v/total_words_v #which tells us that "danc-" makes up 0.0023 of the whole Tale of Tinúviel
36
37 #How many words are "song"
38 song_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="song")])
39 song_hits_v #12
40 #How many words are "sing"
41 sing_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="sing")])
42 sing_hits_v #1
43 #How many words are "singing"
44 singing_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="singing")])
45 singing_hits_v #2
46 #How many words are "sang"
47 sang_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="sang")])
48 sang_hits_v #7
49 #How many words are "sings"
50 sings_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="sings")])
51 sings_hits_v #1
52 #How many words are "sung"
53 sung_hits_v <- length(loweredtext[which(loweredtext=="sung")])
54 sung_hits_v #1
55 |
56 #Therefore total number of all iterations of sing- is 12+1+2+7+1 = 24
57 totalsinghits_v = 24
58 totalsinghits_v/total_words_v #which tells us that "sing-"s iterations makes up 0.0018 of the whole Tale of Tinúviel
59

```

Figure 2. A sample calculation from R of the absolute and relative frequencies for both the conjugations of *sing* variants and *dance* variants, using only "The Tale of Tinúviel." For the chart above with all five texts, this calculation was simply repeated for the remaining four texts.

### 2.2.2. Word dispersions across the story

While the section above is good at telling us *how much* of the story *singing* variants and *dancing* variants makes up, it does not tell us much about *where* they occur in the story. For this test I will treat the order in which the words appear in the text as a measure of time, also called *novelistic time*. That means that the first word in every text is the index is  $n = 1$ , etc

```

63 #create novelistic time index
64
65 n_time_v <- seq(from = 1, to = length(loweredtext))
66
67 #1b1 identify at which index points the word "dance" occurs
68 dance_v <- which(loweredtext == "dance")
69 dance_count_v <- rep(NA, times = length(n_time_v))
70 dance_count_v[dance_v] <- 1
71
72 plot(dance_count_v, main = "Dispersion plot of 'dance' in TOLT", xlab = "novelistic time", ylab = "dance", type = "h", ylim = c(0,1), yaxt='n')
73
74 #1b2 identify at which index points the word "dancing" occurs
75 dancing_v <- which(loweredtext == "dancing")
76 dancing_count_v <- rep(NA, times = length(n_time_v))
77 dancing_count_v[dancing_v] <- 1
78
79 plot(dancing_count_v, main = "Dispersion plot of 'dancing' in TOLT", xlab = "novelistic time", ylab = "dancing", type = "h", ylim = c(0,1), yaxt = 'n')
80
81 #1b3 identify at which index points the word "danced" occurs
82 danced_v <- which(loweredtext == "danced")
83 danced_count_v <- rep(NA, times = length(n_time_v))
84 danced_count_v[danced_v] <- 1
85
86 plot(danced_count_v, main = "Dispersion plot of 'danced' in TOLT", xlab = "novelistic time", ylab = "danced", type = "h", ylim = c(0,1), yaxt = 'n')
87
88 #1b4 identify at which index points the word "dances" occurs
89 dances_v <- which(loweredtext == "dances")
90 dances_count_v <- rep(NA, times = length(n_time_v))
91 dances_count_v[dances_v] <- 1
92
93 plot(dances_count_v, main = "Dispersion plot of 'dances' in TOLT", xlab = "novelistic time", ylab = "dances", type = "h", ylim = c(0,1), yaxt='n')
94
95 #overlay/combine all the above dance variants together
96

```

Figure 3. A sample dispersion plot calculation from R for all *song* variants, using only "The Tale of Tinúviel." For the chart below with all five texts, this calculation was simply repeated for the remaining four texts and for *dance* variants as well.



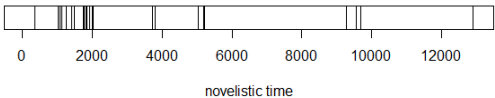
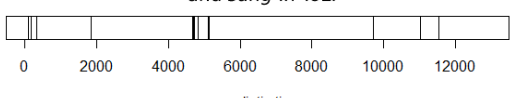
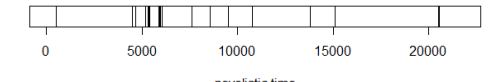
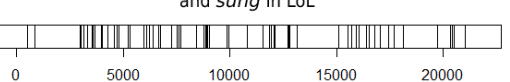
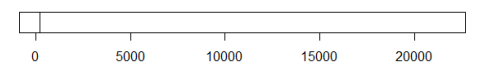
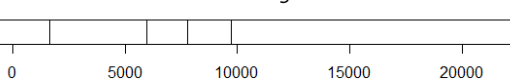
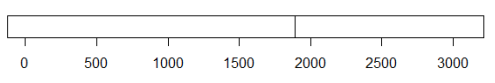
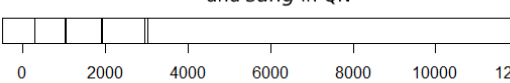
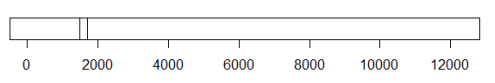
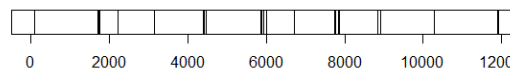
Text	Dispersion plot for <i>dance</i> and <i>dancing</i> and <i>danced</i> and <i>dances</i>	Dispersion plot for <i>song</i> and <i>sing</i> and <i>singing</i> and <i>sang</i> and <i>sings</i> and <i>sung</i>
<i>Tale of Tinúviel</i>	Dispersion plot of <i>dance</i> , <i>dancing</i> , <i>danced</i> , and <i>dances</i> in ToLT 	Dispersion plot of <i>song</i> , <i>sing</i> , <i>singing</i> , <i>sang</i> , <i>sings</i> , and <i>sung</i> in ToLT 
<i>Lay of Leithian</i>	Dispersion plot of <i>dance</i> , <i>dancing</i> , <i>danced</i> , and <i>dances</i> in LoL 	Dispersion plot of <i>song</i> , <i>sing</i> , <i>singing</i> , <i>sang</i> , <i>sings</i> , and <i>sung</i> in LoL 
<i>Sketch of the mythology</i>	Dispersion plot of <i>dance</i> , <i>dancing</i> , <i>danced</i> , and <i>dances</i> in SotM 	Dispersion plot of <i>song</i> , <i>sing</i> , <i>singing</i> , <i>sang</i> , <i>sings</i> , and <i>sung</i> 
<i>Quenta Noldorinwa</i>	Dispersion plot of <i>dance</i> , <i>dancing</i> , <i>danced</i> , and <i>dances</i> in QN 	Dispersion plot of <i>song</i> , <i>sing</i> , <i>singing</i> , <i>sang</i> , <i>sings</i> , and <i>sung</i> in QN 
<i>Quenta Silmarillion</i>	Dispersion plot of <i>dance</i> , <i>dancing</i> , <i>danced</i> , and <i>dances</i> in QS 	Dispersion plot of <i>song</i> , <i>sing</i> , <i>singing</i> , <i>sang</i> , <i>sings</i> , and <i>sung</i> in QS 

Figure 4. Dispersion plots for 'dance' and 'song' variants across the 5 texts.

To simplify, the question here is: “To what extent does the usage of *singing* variants change in relation to the usage of *dancing* variants?”

```
#Split into chunks of 200 words each
library(tokenizers)
library(tidytext)
library(readtext)
library(tibble)
text_v <- readtext("C://Users//chris//Downloads//TaleofTinuviel.txt")
text_v
text_v <- tolower(text_v)
text_v

chunky_text <- text_v %>%
  chunk_text(200) #chunked successfully!
```

Figure 5. Splitting a text into chunks of 200 words each.

[illegible]

To simplify this, add the matrices of song+sing+sang+sung into a single matrix called `song_variants_count`; and add the matrices of dance+dances+dancing+danced into a single matrix called `dance_variants_count`.

We will also combine these two simplified matrices into a single matrix of 83 rows and 3 columns (those columns are chunk number, number of song variants, and number of dance variants). This will be called song\_dance\_m.

Index from 1 – 83	Song variants	Dance variants

[cor test image here]

[image here]

[interpret correlation values]

### 2.3. Fuzzy matching with $n$ -grams

Editions →	Louvain: Martens, 1516	Paris: Gourmont, 1517	Basel: Froben, 1518 March	Basel: Froben, 1518 November	Florence: Giunta, 1519	Louvain: Sassen, 1548	Cologne: Birckmann, 1555	Basel: Episcopius, 1563
Prefatory material ↓								
I Map	1 (1516 map)		4 (1518 map)	4 (1518 map)				10 (1563 map)
II Utopian Alphabet	2		5	5				
III Utopian poem	3		6	6		5 (only c.)	2 (only c.)	6 (only c.)
a) In Utopian b) In transcription c) In Latin translation								
IV Anemolius' hexastichon	4	1	3	3		4	1	5
V Giles to Busleyden	5	3	7	7	2	6	7	3
VI Paludanus to Giles	6	4						
VII Paludanus' poem	7	5						
VIII Noviomagus' poem	8	10	11	11	5	10	3	7
IX Grapheus' poem	9	11	12	12	6	11	4	8
X Busleyden to More	10	9	10	10	4	9	10	11
XI More to Giles I	11	6	8	8	3	7	8	4
Book I	After 11	After 6	After 8	After 8	After 3	After 7	After 8	I: After II: After
Book II								
XII Marginal notes	12	7	9 Helvetii note omitted	9 Helvetii note omitted. Three notes added.		8	9 1518 N included	9 1518 N
XIII Colophon	13	13	13		7	3	6	2
XIV Printer's device			14	13	8			
XV Budé to Lupset		2	2	2		2	5	1
XVI More to Giles II		8				1 Privilege		12 Rhenanus' Pirckheimer's X Errata the end of volume
XVII Errata		13						
XVIII Erasmus to Froben			1 (After 2nd title page): 15 Rhenanus to Pirckheimer, introducing the epigrams	1 (After 2nd title page): 14 Rhenanus to Pirckheimer, introducing the epigrams	1 Erasmus to Foxe After 2: trans. from Lucian by More and Erasmus			
XIX Other material								

Figure 6. Variants in the ngrams across the five texts.

- “The oscillation of who names Luthien – herself or Morgoth – reveals that J.R.R. Tolkien’s development of Luthien’s agency is not always a steady progression.” I wonder if there are other direct passages of text that we can quote that show nearly exact same phrasing of words. That can help us find the “essential differences” between drafts’ portrayal of the character, aside from song and dance alone.
- Fuzzy matching using n-grams and regex, using several key scenes (climaxes) that occur repeatedly throughout the 5 texts, to identify what words changed:
- Beren’s first encounter with Lúthien
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- Lúthien’s battle against the monster Morgoth
- The naming of Lúthien (herself or Morgoth)
- Method here is similar to those described in Shmidman et al.’s paper identifying similar parallel passages across various versions of the Talmud [2].

2.5 topic modelling? Move up? Clusters of words that occur together

2.6 Sources of error

Bring over the lists of word search errors you wrote about in the OneNote notes of Lay of Leithina

Mention the dffeiretn formats of each of the five texts = e.g. Quenta Noldorinwa is an archivist text, Lay is a poem, etc. More specificity in future needed when designing the search terms and computational methods. As C. Tolkien explained it, “ After the hasty ‘Sketch of the Mythology’ (chapter II in this

book), the Quenta Noldorinwa was in fact the only complete ver-

sion of 'The Silmarillion' that my father ever made. Towards the end of 1937 he interrupted work on a new version, Quenta Silmarillion, which extended to part way through the story of Turin Turambar, and began The Lord of the Rings" (CITE THE SHAPING OF MIDDLE-EARTH).

### 3. Mixed-method reading

In this section, I bring close reading to bear with the distant reading conclusions we have made above.

### 4. Postludium

The false end of Tolkien studies (it has been echoed by many researchers that Tolkien studies has been finished, that every detail has been torn apart and repieced together a thousand times. Tolkien himself said that he has written enough work to give scholars something to study for a generation or two. Here we are at the tail-end of that timeframe, and yet some see that there is much to be done still. What DH can do.

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- ➔ Your journal article, *towards ...*
- ➔ *Your website*
- ➔ *Tauber*
- ➔

**Need about 10 more references**

[insert Mendeley works cited here] check if its mla

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**Cite Uricchio**