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LOCs Box

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Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



LOCs Box

Authors

Bob Foster, Peter Sloman, Ned Brooks, Vyanar Eldarion, Dainis Bisenieks, and Joan Biella

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LOCS BOX

Dear Dick,

I've just received and read the Afteryule Journal, of course enjoying it michelly. However, one thing disturbs me greatly. I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Boardman's successful application of the basic laws of heredity to elf-human matings, but question the validity of such findings when seen within the context of LotR. Although it seems to be the fashion to explain supernatural phenomena (not to mention deities) by scientific rationalization, I feel such an interpretation of LotR, the beginnings of which seem to be upon us in "The Hereditary Patterns of Immortality in Elf-Human Crosses", would ruin much of the beauty (to lift a word from John Plotz's letter) of the trilogy. To reduce the Valar ("At the end of the First Age the Valar gave to the Half-elven an irrevocable choice to which kindred they would belong..--III 389; "immortality is a recessive characteristic, and is transmitted...by the Mendelian Laws."--Tolkien Journal, II, 1, p. 11), and then probably the Western Lands, to a status comparable to that now accorded the first eleven chapters of Genesis is inconceivable to any true lover of Middle-earth. Yet this seems to be what Mr. Boardman's thesis leads us to. Eventually, if this trend continues, a thesis will be advanced that the War of the Ring was caused by economic factors, or even that Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and Orcs were merely different races of men.

I am in favor of detailed study and interpretation of LotR, but only when such work does not violate the principle of internal integrity: take Middle-earth as it is, not as it "should be" by our corrupted, skeptical and "scientific" standards.

May the hair on your feet grow ever longer,
 Bob Foster
 376 E. 8 Street
 Brooklyn, N.Y. 11218

But, Bob, you would be denying to the creative the opportunity to interpret Middle-earth rather than to merely "study" it. I share your sentiments about the Boardman article, but you must admit that it was an attempt at creative (if incorrect) interpretation of Tolkien's world.

Dear Mr. Plotz,

Having finished vol. 2, no. 1 of Tolkien Journal within ten minutes of reception thereof, I must say that this is a noble undertaking, for which I had been hoping for a long time. However, I agree with John Plotz of Cambridge, Mass. that the surest way to ruin the paraworld which the Master has striven so hard to establish is to treat it too seriously. As long as reading the Books is fun, well and good, but when researching and commenting on them becomes work, it is time to stop. This, however, in no way diminishes my esteem for the TSA, and for anyone who raves insanely about the greatness of LotR as is my wont. I will say that once I attempted to compile a dictionary of Sindarin and Quenya, but gave it up when I couldn't tell which was which. If someone can have fun doing this, I would greatly appreciate receiving a copy.

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I am a co-director of the student-operated paperback bookstore here at Webb, Sign. When my associate was found to be buying the Ace Edition, I quickly tossed him into Dol Guldur (my own Barad-dur is not yet completed), and ordered thenceforward only the Good Edition. So far we have sold about fifteen sets, quite a few to teachers, and since out of two hundred students here, about thirty already had copies, I feel we have done quite well.

I would like to comment on two letters I read in the Journal. In reply to Cory Seidman, why force the Tengwar to fit phonetically a language for which they were never intended? In a language such as Latin, the vowels are clear enough to be expressed with Tengwarian tehtar, but making complicated changes and rules to fit them to a language so complex phonetically as English strikes me as being a bit silly. I use the Tengwar myself for class notes and scribblings, but like the Elves, I use anything which comes along to represent a sound, and related signs for related sounds, but without the unElvish (as it seems to me) practice of rigid adherence to a table.

To Mr. Boardman, concerning applicability of Mendelian heredity to Elvish immortality: if immortality can be dispensed with at will (e. g. the choices of Luthien Tinuviel and Arwen Undomiel) it seems rather difficult to speak of it as a distinctly physiological, and therefore genetic quality.

In case it has not been brought to anyone's attention, the first prize in the Art Show at Westercon XVIII (The Eighteenth Annual West Coast Science Fantasy Convention) went to a beautiful oil painting entitled "Khazad-dum".

Yr. obdt. svt. in perpetuo,
Peter Sloman
Webb School of California
Claremont, Calif. 91711

To repeat one of your criticisms with a slight change: Why force the Roman alphabet to fit a language (English or Turkish) for which it was never intended?

Dear Dick,

The TSA Journal is getting better and better. Wish I had known you were going to do such a big one. I would have sent you the article I sent ENTMOOT. It is about two pages and I thought it would be too long.

I'm glad to hear that Ballantine has turned the Ring inscription right-side-up and changed the cover. I will be interested to see the new cover. When was this new edition issued? Will it be given general distribution? Guess I can get one through Witter anyway.

Glad to hear I had been pronouncing "Meriadoc" right. I did pronounce "Michel" as "Michael" tho.

To carry Poul Anderson's analogy a little further, the girl's marriage to "C" was a marriage of convenience, as "C" is a business partner of her father (H-M)!

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The Reis article was great, tho little of it was news to me. I hadn't seen the use of this word "mythopoeic" before. I've read all the modern books that he mentions except that I haven't finished PHANTASTES and will probably have to start over again from the beginning since I got off it some time ago. Does Mike Ward get the Journal? He is a Ring fan; he even read the entire FAERIE QUEEN last summer. Now that we have a nice mouth-filling word like "mythopoeic", we can argue over what other works fit the label. What about Kingsley's WATER BABIES or Lindsay's VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS?

Inclosed is my effort in the poetry contest. I sincerely hope you get something better!

Sure wish I could have made that meeting. I would have loved to meet you and Auden and the rest.

The Boardman article was beautifully worked out. I am somewhat in doubt, however, about the orc-hobbit cross referred to as being on p. 12 of THE HOBBIT. Reading pp. 12-13, it seems pretty clear that the cross referred to is the elf-hobbit cross in the Took family, and that the supposed orc-hobbit cross, the orcs being called goblins, is the same union, but as seen by the Took's enemies, who circulated the base canard that it was a goblin-hobbit union.

The Rebecca Wenger illos look a lot like Pauline Baynes'. The cover is very good too. If you keep improving you may succeed in filling the aching void left by the demise of I-PALANTIR.

Best,
Ned Brooks
911 Briarfield Road
Newport News, Va. 23605

I understand from Ballantine that the 4th printing of Loth will have the corrections. The "Revised Edition" of The Hobbit (revised I don't know how) has the changes in the cover.

Thain Richard Plotz,

I am Vyanar Eldarion, brother of Vorlak Eldarion of the regions of Forskalath and Ivendile, ranger of the West. I consider myself to know as much as anyone about the information in the Lord of the Rings. As the most expert Rangers, my brother and I have already claimed, explored and laid trails on some 200,000 acres. We have mastered the Tengwar and have developed a spoken language from that of combinations of Quenya and Westron. We swear faith in protecting all causes for the refinding of the Ennorath with the swords Naurgoth and Numen Morvilya. Please inform me as to what the Tolkien Society of America is.

Vyanar Eldarion
4107 Dickey Road
Gibsonia, Pa. 15044

Gentlebeings:

If this keeps up, the Elvish tongue and script are going to succeed where Esperanto and Shaw's alphabet fail. Stick around for a few centuries and see if I'm not right. How soon do you think there will be a demand for BASIC CONVERSATIONAL ELVISH? Or editions of Tolkien's works in the original Elvish (or Westron as the case may be)? One of these days I'm going to invest in a pen that can render thick and thin strokes--then I'll take up writing Tengwar--to use a ballpoint would be indecent.

I would like anything of a factual nature in the Journal to be concise, complete and accurate. Let me therefore inform Mr. Hoffman that the names of the Dwarves in the Eddas are not garbled. The extra -n or -r at the end of a name is the nominative case ending of the name; just as -is is the case ending of my name in Latvian. Hence such names as Gandalf, or, say, Olaf, which we usually render as "Olaf", but which also becomes "Oliver". Spelling conventions in Norse and English account for the difference between "Dvalin(-n)" and "Dwalin".

Yes, and somebody should learn to spell (page 3, line 4) Mervyn Peake; but I would like to get in touch with R. H. Reis. I am (in case you don't know) secretary of the Gormenghast Junior Chamber of Commerce---Meanwhile, let us nag Houghton-Mifflin to bring back all the colored illos that were in the early editions of THE HOBBIT. I wrote to Allen & Unwin, but they didn't think it a good idea. I'd gladly pay an extra buck to avoid having to buy a rare first edition.

Yours,
Dainis Bisenieks
1033 Pomona
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48103

If BASIC CONVERSATIONAL ELVISH were to appear, I'd be the first to buy ten copies. Latest from Allen & Unwin is a projected reissue of the original Hobbit plates in the next printing, later this year; also an Unwin paperback Hobbit with an old Tolkien color illo of Bard killing Smaug on the cover.

Dear Dick,

Mine is, perhaps, a problem which can be solved only by Professor Tolkien himself, but surely the Society will have views on the matter. Please help me!

Who is Eldest?

The question has been smoldering in my brain for years. I used to ask it of people I met on the street. They put me off--"That question shows you've read closely. Read more closely and find the answer."

Well, I've done the research and I've collected the Scriptures which seem relevant to me, and here they are.

On page 182 of The Fellowship (I must cite Ballantine, as the hardbacks weighted too much to be carried from my home in California to Radcliffe) we find Tom Bombadil putting in his claim, the claim accepted by most orthodox readers.

"Eldest, that's what I am..." (Tom) knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless"--before the Ring was forged. A strong assertion, and unchallengeable; or is it?

L

What does Celeborn mean, Return of the King, page 321, when he addresses T r e e b e a r d by the honorable title of "Eldest"? I've never credited Celeborn with a lot of brains, but here I must suspect him of quite a vulgar error, the misinterpretation of a bit of lore (Two Towers, page 187):

"Ere ring was made, or wrought was woe,
(Ents) walked the forest long ago."

Are we really to read this as supporting an Entish claim to Eldesthood? Or is there other, more substantial evidence--solid enough to absolve Celeborn, and incidentally make a liar out of Bombadil?

I take no side in the controversy. It's above my head.

The current nationwide attention paid to the Society by important publications like Seventeen alternately cheers and disheartens me. It will be long before the world is ready for my own personal dreamworld, though manuscript never ceases piling up in my drawers. I call my version of Faerie the Yon Shores (little or no relation to the "Hither Shore" in Galadriel's song). Is there a Tolkien fan somewhere who would like to learn Essian, a very corrupt synthetic-agglutinative cousin of Sindarin? I offer a FREE correspondence course--would be delighted to trade languages, especially if imaginary. May a star shine on our meeting.

Sincerely,
Joan Biella
Frustrated Linguistics Major
100 Walker Street
Cambridge, Mass. 02138

*Joan, maybe you could write a piece on Essian for the Tolkien Journal.
I suggest you change for that correspondence course. You might earn
a fortune if it's good enough.*

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