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'And Something Yet Remains to Be Said': Tolkien and Williams

Abstract

Attempts to sort through Tolkien's comments on Charles Williams "to show that Tolkien's opinion of Williams underwent a radical change years after Williams' death." Concludes the two main reasons were the death of Lewis and the rise of scholarly criticism defining the Inklings as a literary circle.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Relation to Charles Williams; Williams, Charles—Relation to J.R.R. Tolkien

'And Something Yet Remains to Be Said': Tolkien and Williams

John D. Rateliff

C.S. Lewis was a man of many friends, and a man who took special delight in bringing his friends together. For, as he wrote in his essay on friendship in The Four Loves, he believed that "In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out... Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend... we possess each friend not less but more as the number of those with whom we share him increases." [1] It was out of this fortunate habit of his that the Inklings arose, and despite all the changes the group went through in its thirty year history -- shifting membership, changes in the meeting dates, and so forth -- the one thing that remained constant was the aspect of the Inklings as a circle of friends with common (one is tempted to say, "uncommon") interests who enjoyed getting together to talk about them. Today, twenty-two years after Lewis' death brought an end to the last meetings, there is an Inklings archive and study center at Wheaton College, an Inklings study journal in Mythlore, and a more or less authorized history of the group by Humphrey Carpenter, all of which to some extent draw on the idea that the Inklings were a coherent group and that knowledge of one member's work translates into added understanding of another's, that they are best understood and studied in context with one another, rather than in isolation. Since the theme of the Sixteenth Mythopoeic Conference is 'A Kinship of Dancers' and its declared intent "exploring the interplay in the lives and works of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams," this seems like a good time to take a closer look at the relationship of two of these figures, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien, and at what evidence we have to determine what that relationship was.

Even before the removal of the Oxford University Press up to Oxford in 1939 made Williams a 'regular' at the Inklings, he had, Lewis wrote, "already become as dear to all my Oxford friends as he was to me" through "occasional meetings" and the odd luncheon, "both in [Lewis'] rooms at Magdalen and in Williams' tiny office at Amen House." [2] "Alas no!" wrote Tolkien in response, "In any case I had hardly ever seen him till he came to live in Oxford." [3] It thus becomes apparent at the very offset of our efforts first, that the evidence at hand is contradictory, and second, that it will be of the utmost importance always to consider the context of each piece of it -- who said it, and when, and (when possible) why. Lewis, for example, was writing eulogy, not a piece of cold sober reportage, when he said that in praise of his friend in the memoir he wrote just after Williams' death and published as the Preface to the Inklings' memorial festschrift Essays Presented to Charles Williams. Tolkien, on the other hand, was making a private note to himself (as was his habit) years after the event.

This latter point requires some explanation, since this quote, which I have taken from Carpenter's The Inklings, comes from Tolkien's own copy of Essays

Presented to Charles Williams and thus presumably would date from about the same time as Lewis' remarks, i.e. about two years after Williams' death. I think not. Carpenter's source is the copy now in the possession of the Tolkien family (I, p. 272), but in a letter Tolkien wrote to Houghton Mifflin in June 1955, he complained that "the O.U.P. have infuriatingly let [the book] go out of print, though it is now in demand -- and my only copy has been stolen. Still it might be found in a library, or I might get hold of a copy." [4] What I would like to suggest is this: that Tolkien did find another copy, that this is the copy which survives, and that Tolkien's remarks in it thus date from at least a decade after the fact. Indeed, I suspect they date from around 1963-64, a time when Tolkien was reviewing and re-thinking his entire relationship with Lewis and writing "The Ulsterior Motive" as a result. (It is also, incidentally, the period in which he was revising his contribution to Essays Presented to Charles Williams, the essay "On Fairy-Stories," for inclusion in Tree and Leaf [5]). This is important, because the tone of Tolkien's remarks concerning Williams changed greatly over the years, and these annotations Carpenter quotes are the only critical ones I have been able to find that predate Lewis' death, if indeed they do. All the other evidence suggest that Tolkien and Williams liked each other and in fact got along very well together -- they enjoyed one another's company, and read each other's works with some attention, at least to the extent that Williams was able to suggest an emendation to The Lord of the Rings which Tolkien accepted (more on this later) and Tolkien to quote Williams (approvingly, I might add) in a letter of spiritual advice to his son Michael: "Not that one should forget the wise words of Charles Williams, that it is our duty to tend the accredited and established altar, though the Holy Spirit may send the fire down somewhere else. God cannot be limited..." (LT, p.339) Until someone edits and indexes all of Williams' Oxford letters, we know relatively little about what Williams thought of Tolkien, but thanks to Mr. Carpenter's various efforts -- the biography, The Inklings, and especially the letters -- we do know something of Tolkien's ideas about Williams. What I propose to do in the rest of this paper is to sort through Tolkien's comments on Williams in an attempt to show that Tolkien's opinion of Williams underwent a radical change years after Williams' death, and that the cause of this was not Williams himself but the deterioration of Tolkien's friendship with C.S. Lewis and, possibly of equal significance, the advent on the scene of -- ourselves: Inklings scholarship, and fandom, and the rise on the early sixties of the idea of the Inklings 'school' of writers.

The popular conception, the 'received opinion' of Tolkien's attitude towards Williams, so far as I can tell, is that Tolkien rather enjoyed Williams' company, strongly disliked his books, and felt mildly jealous of him, somewhat resentful of Williams' (supposedly) coming between himself and C.S. Lewis. This view largely derives from Carpenter's biography (especially

the passage on pages 150-151) and, through Carpenter's authority, has gained general currency despite the fact that Carpenter somewhat modifies his views in the more detailed discussion of the same point in The Inklings. [6] One recent writer's summation can I think be taken as typical of the standard view when she says "Lewis was, as far as Tolkien was concerned, a very important friend. The friendship was at its most intense in the early days but was disturbed by the appearance of Charles Williams. Tolkien came to resent the close relationship which developed between Williams and Lewis" [7] and adds, a little later on, that "[Tolkien's] jealousy explode[d] when Williams [came] on to the scene." (Partridge, p.182.) Certainly Tolkien had some call to be jealous, especially in the years immediately following Williams' demise, when Lewis went about describing him as "my great friend Charles Williams, my friend of friends, and comforter of all our little set, the most angelic man." [8] Even someone not given to jealousy could be hurt by his best friend describing someone else as 'my friend of friends,' and some of the remarks Tolkien made late in life regarding Williams, about Lewis' being "taken in" by him, and how Williams "separated" them, do smack of the green. But these were made years after the fact, and are in direct contrast with the contemporary evidence. Why, if Tolkien was jealous of Williams, did he write to his son Christopher "I hope to see C.S.L. and Charles W. tomorrow morning"? (LT, p.72.) Why, if he was envious of Williams 'coming between' himself and Lewis, did he phone Williams once when Lewis was ill and suggest that the two of them go by to see him? [9] This does not, to me, seem to be the act of a man burnt up with jealousy and desirous of keeping his friend to himself. Quite the opposite; Lewis was ill, and in a nursing home, and a visit from Williams (and Tolkien) would probably do him some good. Either Tolkien here was being unusually selfless, throwing away a rare chance to have Lewis 'all to himself,' or the fabled jealousy simply did not exist. I believe the latter.

What of Tolkien's claim, made late in life, that he "didn't know [Charles Williams] very well"? [10] -- and again "I knew Charles only as a friend of C.S.L. whom I met in his company when, owing to the War, he spent much of his time in Oxford"? (LT, p. 349.) This was Tolkien's position in 1965, but only a year before he had written in another letter "I came into fairly close contact with him [Williams] from the end of 1939 to his death." (LT, p.349.) And in 1955 he had put the matter differently yet, in a letter which deserves quoting in length:

I knew Charles Williams well in his last few years: partly because of Lewis' good habit of writing to authors who pleased him (which put us both in touch with Williams); and still more because of the good fortune amid disaster that transferred Williams to Oxford during the War. But I do not think we influenced one another at all! Too 'set' and too different. We both listened (in C.S.L.'s rooms) to large and largely unintelligible fragments of one another's works read aloud; because C.S.L. (marvelous man) seemed able to enjoy us both. But I think we both found the other's mind (or rather mode of expression, and climate) as impenetrable when cast into 'literature,' as we found the other's presence and conversation delightful. (LT, p. 209.)

"The good fortune... that transferred Williams to Oxford" -- "large and largely unintelligible fragments of one another's works" -- "delightful" -- these

phrases, and indeed the whole tone of the passage, with all its good humour, is strikingly at variance with Tolkien's later reflections, about how Lewis "came under the dominant influence of Charles Williams" (LT, p.348.) which "spoiled the trilogy of C.S.L. (a very impressionable, too impressionable, man) in the last part," (LT, p.348) due to Lewis' being "bowled over" (LT, p.362) by Williams. What had intervened in between to make Tolkien so change his mind?

In a word, the death of C.S. Lewis. As late as only a few weeks before Lewis died, Tolkien could write about "the wise words of Charles Williams;" a month or so later he was writing to the same person how "We [i.e., Tolkien and Lewis] were separated first by the sudden apparition of Charles Williams and then by his marriage." (LT, p.341) The linkage of Williams with Lewis' marriage is significant. After suffering this "axe-blow near the roots" (LT, p.341) -- and I might note in passing how like Tolkien it is to use a tree metaphor for his grief -- Tolkien I think began casting about in his mind for some explanation to what happened to his friendship with Lewis, to the estrangement in what was probably the great friendship of his life; an explanation that would absolve Lewis (and coincidentally himself as well) from blame. He found two villains: Charles Williams and Joy Lewis, both of whom were already dead, like Lewis, and thus a part of the unalterable past. But not unalterable in Tolkien's mind, which now -- as I think the quotations already given show -- underwent a change of attitude. This is not the place to comment on Tolkien's attitude toward Lewis' marriage, nor on the cause or causes of the fading of his friendship with C.S. Lewis, nor even on whether the 'cooling of affection' between the two men was mutual [11]. It is the place to consider the effect that these things had on him and on his attitude towards Williams, and I think there can be no doubt that they definitely tarnished his memoirs of the man.

Another factor that must also be taken into consideration at this point is the rise, in the early sixties, of "Inklings criticism." Exactly when the idea of the Inklings as a literary circle, with all the coherence of aims and ideas that implies, first began to be mooted about I haven't been able to determine -- no doubt Lewis' introduction to Essays Presented to Charles Williams had laid the early groundwork for it, and Tolkien's dedication of the first edition of The Lord of the Rings probably also had some effect -- but at any rate by this period the idea was definitely 'in the air.' R.J. Reilly's Romantic Religion, although not published until 1971, had been written as a dissertation in 1960, and although primarily a book on Barfield, it contains a chapter on common elements in Williams, Lewis, and Tolkien. Former Inklings and 'Angry Young Man' John Wain in his 1962 autobiography, Sprightly Running, included a section on the Inklings in which he stated that "The group had a corporate mind, as all effective groups must; the death of Williams had sadly stunned and impoverished this mind, but it was still [Wain is writing of the years 1945-48] powerful and clearly defined. Politically conservative, not to say reactionary; in religion, Anglo- or Roman Catholic; in art, frankly hostile to any manifestation of the 'modern' spirit" [12]. And although he calls it an "informal circle," (Ibid., p.179) he also describes them as "a circle of instigators, almost of incendiaries, meeting to urge one another on in the task of redirecting the whole current of contemporary art and life," and adds "Now that Williams was dead, the two most active members were Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien" (Ibid., p.181.). It is in fact clear that Wain considers Williams (whom he had known as an

undergraduate but who had died before Wain started attending the Thursday evening meetings) the real genius of the group ("I was under his spell," he recalls at one point (Ibid., p.147)) --"Though I did not realize it at the time," says Wain, "I can see now that the group had begun to spiral downwards from the time Williams died" (Ibid., p.185).

Tolkien's opinion on all this might well be imagined, with his innate antipathy towards being labelled or pigeon-holed in any way or indeed written about at all -- his reaction upon hearing that W.H. Auden intended to write a book on him for a series called "Christian Perspectives" is well known [13]. Even Lewis was stirred to comment (publicly) in this case that "The whole picture of myself as one forming a cabinet, or cell, or coven, is erroneous. Mr. Wain has mistaken purely personal relationships for alliances" (I, p.160). But the idea took root, and by 1964 Roger Sale could take it as common knowledge that 'Anglo Oxford' (as he called it) existed, and that its denizens were Dorothy Sayers, Owen Barfield, Williams, Lewis, and Tolkien [14]. It apparently also appeared in several of Lewis' obituary notices, since we find Tolkien provoked into vigorously attacking them for it in a letter to Michael Tolkien shortly after Lewis' death:

How little truth there may be in literary appraisals one may learn from them [i.e., the "cold-blooded official obituaries"] -- since they were written while he was still alive. Lewis only met Williams in 1939, and W. died early in 1945. The 'space-travel' trilogy ascribed to the influence of Williams was basically foreign to Williams' kind of imagination. It was planned years before, when we decided to divide: he was to do space-travel and I time-travel.... Publication dates are not a good guide. Perelandra is dated 1943, but does not belong to that period. Williams' influence actually only appeared with his death: That Hideous Strength, the end of the trilogy, which (good though it is in itself) I think spoiled it... (LT, p. 341-342)

Here we have Williams' influence reduced to a bare (pernicious) minimum, with the space trilogy, or all that was good in it, being claimed as a result of Tolkien and Lewis, not Lewis and Williams (as indeed it was in its origins at least, if not in the final execution), and even rare errors of fact creep in (Lewis met Williams in 1936, not 1939, as Tolkien well knew, and mid-May is not particularly 'early' in 1945), apparently through Tolkien's desire to emphasize the relative brevity of Williams' period in Oxford in comparison with the whole of both men's lives. Still, despite whatever Tolkien or Lewis thought about it, the idea of the 'Inklings school' -- a sort of Christian Oxfordian Bloomsbury -- continued unabated, with perhaps the strongest statement in favor of its common elements being Charles Moorman's The Precincts of Felicity: The Augustinian City of the Oxford Christians, which appeared in 1966 and prompted even that most courteous of Inklings, Major Warnie Lewis, to sharp words (for him), writing in his diary that the whole idea was, in his words, "silly":

To begin with he dubs the Inklings 'The Oxford Christians' which strikes a wrong note at the outset by suggesting an organized group for the propagation of Christianity, whilst in fact the title is justified only in the most

literal sense, i.e. that we nearly all lived at Oxford and were all believers. His thesis is that in the Inklings a kind of group mind was at work which influenced the writing of every Inklings, and this he supports by assertions which seem to me very shaky. [15]

If the Moorman-Wain thesis brought about such a reaction from so mild a man as Warnie Lewis, what must Tolkien -- who, as LeGuin rightly pointed out, was no sweet old darling [16] -- have thought? One could in fact make a good argument that Tolkien's disparaging references to Williams' work during this time can at least in part be accounted for as part of Tolkien's effort to distance himself (that is, his work -- and rightly so I think) from charges of undue outside influence. To suggestions of being influenced by C.S. Lewis he responded that in fact it was Lewis who did borrowing from him, while in the case of Williams he retorted that he hadn't really known Williams well, didn't know much about his works, and didn't like them any way -- all statements which his own words in earlier years refute, or at least qualify. Warnie Lewis in a mischievous mood wrote "I smiled at the thought of Tolkies being under the influence of Moorman's group mind, and think of sending him the book," (BF, p.268) but if he did the explosion which must surely have resulted has left no surviving evidence, or at least none that has been published. C.S. Lewis, while open to the suggestion of mutual influence between himself and Williams ("Charles Williams certainly influenced me and I perhaps influenced him" (LL, p.287)), was equally direct on the subject of fellow Inklings influencing Tolkien -- "No one ever influenced Tolkien -- you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch" (LL,p.287). Tolkien himself probably put his own opinion on the matter best in what is his fairest appraisal from his later years, when he wrote that Williams seemed to him like "a comet that appeared out of the blue, passed through the little 'provincial' Oxford solar system, and went out again into the unknown," and described his presence there as "in fact an astronomical accident that had no effect on his work, and probably no effect on any of the members except Lewis." (TS, p. 71, 73)

This attitude was probably reinforced by one other event that intervened between Tolkien's comment that he "knew Charles Williams well" in 1955 and his opposite assertions ("I didn't know Charles Williams very well" and "I knew Charles Williams only as a friend of C.S.L.") in 1965 and '66: the publication, in 1959, of Hadfield's biography, An Introduction to Charles Williams. There is every reason to believe that Tolkien read this book -- his feelings towards Williams' shade were still quite warm at the time -- and, had he done so, it would have revealed to him just how much of Williams' life lay outside the common ground of "the Lewis seance": his family, his work at Amen House, his 'Companions of the Coinherence.' Williams' 'Oxford period' receives relatively little attention in the book, and Tolkien is hardly mentioned. Although some of the remarks that I've cited in this paper may make it appear otherwise, I believe that Tolkien was in large degree a humble man, and that he is probably being very sincere in relinquishing his claim to have known Williams "well." However much they may have enjoyed one another's company, there remained large areas in each's life that were shut off from the other. Remember that even C.S. Lewis, in his introduction to the Williams memorial festschrift, said that if its authors (Inklings all of them, except for one, Sayers) claimed to represent "the width of Charles Williams' friendships... Voices from many parts of England -- voices of people often very different from ourselves--

would justly rebuke our presumption" (EPCW, Preface, p. v). But to Lewis' further assertion that "in every circle that he entered, he gave the whole man." Tolkien -- perhaps more perceptively -- added in the margin: "No, I think not" [17]. We must remember that Williams was almost fifty-three when he met Tolkien and only fifty-eight when he died, and that, as Carpenter says, "[h]is work was almost finished by the time he came to Oxford." (I, p. 160) while this is perhaps putting it a bit strongly (let us not forget "The Notion Club Papers"), I think Carpenter is right in saying Tolkien and Williams had no real influence on each other's work. Despite the fact that they did have the friendship with each other and with C.S. Lewis, their real common ground was that they both took the same things seriously, to a degree few other people did: myth, literature, and theology, but their expressions of those interests were profoundly different, as were their styles (it would be hard to mistake any passage from Williams' writing for Tolkien's or vice versa, whether poetry, criticism, or fiction). The matters in which they differed were also crucial: to name only two, Williams did not share Tolkien's profound interest in language nor his extraordinary linguistic skill (his nomenclature, while eclectic, lacks coherence), while Tolkien was deeply suspicious of Williams' interest in occultism (we should never forget that Williams once belonged to an order of practicing magicians) and may have felt that Williams' attempt to Christianize certain occult principles was an example of trying to use the Ring against its maker, foredoomed to failure -- the cruelest remark Tolkien ever made about Williams was to call him a "witch doctor" (I, p.121). The two men, and their work, are very different, so much so that Owen Barfield has said: "Williams & Tolkien would certainly never have been coupled in people's minds, if they had not both been friends of C.S.L." [18]

Two more points need to be considered before we close. The first is that we should note that, even when he was at his most critical about Williams' reportedly baleful influence on C.S. Lewis, Tolkien almost always took pains to state that he and Williams got along very well, although he usually contrasts this with their supposed lack of common ground as authors. Thus "I think we both found the other's mind (or rather mode of expression, and climate) as impenetrable when cast into 'literature' as we found the other's presence and conversation delightful" (1955), or "I much enjoyed his company; but our minds remained poles apart" (1964), or "We like one another and enjoyed talking (mostly in jest) but we had nothing to say to one another at deeper (or higher) levels" (1966) (TS, p.71). Tolkien's insistence on the point is convincing, and the tone of the two poems he wrote about Williams [19] bears him out on it. Tolkien was not "bowled over;" unlike Lewis, Sayers, Wain, Eliot, Auden, Mathew, and countless others, Tolkien became neither an enthusiast nor a disciple. He liked the man but retained his independence, and when Williams wrote to his wife in early 1940 about his newest 'followers' i.e., Lewis and Tolkien -- he was (in Tolkien's case at least) [20] completely mistaken. Yet even the fact that he could make the mistake indicates much closer relations than most have guessed at, as does his light-hearted reference in another letter to having just read two chapters of his latest book to "C.S.L.-Tolkien." (I,p.194) To a large degree the Lewis-Tolkien-Williams friendship was a tripartite affair, with each side of the triangle sharing in the other two, and it is no wonder that Lewis, writing long afterwards, chose it as his example of an ideal freindship 'under the thin disguise -- if indeed it can be called that -- of "Charles" and "Ronald", adding sadly "Now that Charles

is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him 'to myself' now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald." (FL, p.92)

The second point regards Tolkien's attitude towards Charles Williams' works. Here I think the popular conception is much nearer the truth; certainly Tolkien's enthusiasm for Williams' books was much less than Lewis'. His letters to Christopher, for example, although they record many meetings with Charles Williams [21] most of them in company with C.S. Lewis or "the Brothers Lewis," make only one mention of Williams reading of works in progress to Tolkien [22], though he makes frequent reference to each of Lewis' projects in hand, and even to Warnie's latest endeavors. It might be that Carpenter simply does not print those excerpts or it might be that Tolkien saw no reason to keep Christopher informed of Williams' readings -- which we know took place from independent evidence, e.g. Williams' letter to his wife in which he reports "I have read some of it [i.e., All Hallows Eve] to C.S.L.-Tolkien... who admire and approve," (I, p. 194) Lewis' description of Williams reading to himself and "the Professor" in the introduction to Arthurian Torso. (I, p. 197-198) Tolkien's verse version of the same event in "Our dear Charles Williams" [23], not to mention Tolkien's rather surprising remark that he "was in fact a sort of assistant mid-wife at the birth of All Hallows Eve" (LT,p.349) -- but I'm afraid the truth of the matter is most probably that he just wasn't interested. As he freely admitted, he was a man of limited sympathies, and some works -- Lewis' 'Narnia' stories, Charles Williams' poetry, Charles Lamb -- simply failed to engage his imagination. This is not to say that he knew nothing of Williams' work, merely that he apparently made no connection between it and his own. In a 1966 interview Tolkien said, bluntly, "I have read a good many [of his books] but I don't like them" [24], and his equally curt reference to Williams' "'Arthurian' stuff" (LT,p.361) is in keeping with this. In a 1964 letter he stated "I actively dislike his Arthurian-Byzantine mythology" (LT,p.349) (very different in conception from Tolkien's own Arthurian piece, "The Fall of Arthur"), and he expanded upon this in a letter to Richard Plotz the following year: "I had read or heard a good deal of his work, but found it wholly alien, and sometimes very distasteful, occasionally ridiculous. (This is perfectly true as a general statement, but is not intended as a criticism of Williams; rather it is an exhibition of my own limits of sympathy. And of course in so large a range of work I found lines, passages, scenes, and thoughts that I found striking.)" (LT,p.362) -- presumably "the wise words of Charles Williams" which he referred to in the letter to his son were among these. Thus what he gives with one hand he takes away with the other and vice versa; in trying to achieve a balance in what Carpenter called his "complex attitude" [25] towards Williams, Tolkien often gets instead a paradox. But Tolkien was not being fair when he said, in the Plotz letter, "I doubt if he had read anything of mine then available" (LT,p.362). We know from Tolkien's own accounts that Williams was present at many of the times when he read out chapters of the 'New Hobbit' [26]. What is more, we know from Carpenter that Williams borrowed the manuscript shortly before his death to read it through (I, p. 123) -- perhaps because, unlike Lewis, he had not come upon the scene until late '39, by which time the story was already well underway. Clyde Kilby, years ago, wrote "How interesting it would be to see what Williams might have said about The Lord of the Rings!" (TS, p. 76) Now, thanks to Mr. Carpenter's labors, we can do just that, in the letter

Tolkien wrote to Christopher on Christmas Eve 1944 (which is, by the way, the last mention Tolkien makes of Williams before his death in any published letter), where he reports that

C. Williams who is reading it all says the great thing is that its centre is not in strife and war and heroism (though they are understood and depicted) but in freedom, peace, ordinary life and good liking [sic]. Yet he agrees that these very things require the existence of a great world outside the Shire -- lest they should grow stale by custom and turn into the humdrum... [27]

-- not a bad critique, one might add. There is also the curious matter of a line Tolkien wrote at the bottom of a page of The Lord of the Rings manuscript, now at Marquette. The page in question is part of a draft for the Fangorn Forest Chapter, the scene is that in which Merry and Pippin first meet Treebeard, who initially mistakes them for a pair of orcs (never having seen lost hobbits before). Originally Tolkien gave Treebeard the line "Crack my timbers, very odd!" This line was later struck out, and beneath it written

queried by Charles Williams--
Root and twig! [28]

Now, while there are many many changes Tolkien made in the manuscript of The Lord of the Rings (indeed, one might say there are as many changes as there is manuscript), this is the ONLY case I am aware of where Tolkien ascribes a change to a specific source, to somebody else. And the source? -- his supposed rival for Lewis' attention, "our own Charles Williams." There's no way of knowing if Williams suggested the substitution or merely pointed out the inappropriateness of a tree-man saying something like "Crack my timbers" (or the ludicrous ghost of Long John Silver the phrase conjures up), but the 'query' shows that Williams read the story carefully if he could catch such a detail, one that even Tolkien himself had missed in the draft, and also that Tolkien felt no self-consciousness about jotting down that note to himself giving Williams full credit. If the relations between the two men had been as most people assume, with Tolkien silently harboring resentment for Williams' very presence, the note would never have been made. Can we really believe that, had Tolkien been as jealous as all that, Lewis could have remained so blithely unaware of it? -- a reading of the situation that does not say much for Lewis' acumen or perceptivity. Such a scenario simply does not fit the facts; the interpretation requires a 'suspension of disbelief' all out of proportion to its merits, and Occam's razor intervenes. Tolkien, however much he may have disagreed with Williams on points, had in fact more respect for his judgment than we are given to believe. We should recall that it was Lewis and Tolkien who escorted Williams to his first Milton lectures and feted him afterwards at the Mitre, (I, p. 118-119) and that (as Williams reported in a letter to his wife early in '44) Tolkien recruited him to speak to navel cadets (TS, p. 71) -- on what subject, he does not say, regretfully. Tolkien was in charge of arranging the lecture schedule for the English faculty during much of the war [29]; admittedly he was shorthanded of faculty -- one of the reasons Williams was allowed (or asked) to lecture in the first place -- but he was also a responsible educator with strong opinions on the right way to run a school [30], and his asking Williams to "speak to" some students bespeaks some regard for his powers as a lecturer.

If, in this presentation, I have spent what may seem like an undue amount of attention on small details, it is because that is what time has left us, and also because little things may often be indicative, representative of more important things that remain unexpressed. Tolkien never, to my knowledge, described Williams as his friend, but we must remember that to Tolkien this was an almost sacred word, and he accordingly used it very sparingly. I can find no evidence that their relationship, their friendship, was tinged with jealousy or that their fundamental dissimilarities of mind prevented them from getting along very well together indeed; and I find much evidence to the contrary. Even Lewis' near deification of the man in the years immediately following his death does not seem to have upset Tolkien unduly, although one suspects that Tolkien's memories of Williams, like those of Warnie Lewis [31], remained those of an enjoyable companion and not of a man with a halo. And yet -- and this is important -- I think Tolkien was being quite sincere even when he was most severe in his remarks on Williams, and this brings up the main principle I'd like to get across: when dealing with memoirs, recollections, letters, and other evidence recorded years after the fact, we must always consider whether anything occurring in the intervening years might have distorted or colored the picture somewhat. We must not, for example, confuse the Mrs. Moore described in 1966 by a man who intensely dislike her with the Janie Moore C.S. Lewis fell in love with in around 1920. We cannot assume that the feelings Warnie Lewis wrote down about his brother's wife just after her agonizing death were identical with those he felt upon first meeting her a decade before. And we would be wrong to think that Tolkien had only one opinion about Williams (or about Lewis, for that matter) to which he clung tenaciously throughout life. People change, and their ideas often change with them: a fact we all know from our own lives and have to make ourselves remember in our scholarship.

I will close now, and since I'd like to leave the last word to Tolkien, I'm going to end with a few more quotes that I think represent the general ambience of the Lewis-Tolkien-Williams threesome, at least in its final year, notable most I think for their casual and genial air.

- * Tolkien to Christopher, November 1943: "Had a glass and half an hour at the B & B with Charles Williams." (I, p. 122)
- * Tolkien to Christopher, 9 December 1944: "I haven't seen C.S.L. for weeks or Williams." (LT, p. 65)
- * Tolkien to Christopher, 18 January 1944: "managed to have a colloquing with the brothers Lewis and C. Williams (at the White Horse)." (LT, p. 67)
- * Tolkien to Christopher, 13 April 1944: "I did see C.S.L. & Charles Williams yesterday for almost 2 hours (cut short by having to meet M[ummy] and P[ricilla] for lunch...)." (LT, p. 71)
- * Tolkien to Christopher, 21 May 1944: "Monday... I worked very hard at my chapter... I wrote and tore up and rewrote most of it a good many times; but I was rewarded this morning, as both C.S.L. and C.W. thought it an admirable performance, and the latest chapters the best so far." (LT, p. 81)
- * Tolkien to Christopher, 22 August 1944: "This morning I lectured, and found the Bird and Baby closed; but was hailed in a voice that carried across the torrent of vehicles that was once St. Giles, and discovered the two Lewises and C. Williams, high and very dry on the other side. Eventually we got 4 pints of passable ale at the King's Arms... I hope to see the lads tomorrow; otherwise life is as bright as water in

a ditch...." (LT, p. 92)

* Tolkien to Christopher, 23-25 September 1944: "Thursday night... Both Lewises were there, and C. Williams... some pleasant talk, such as I have not enjoyed for moons... I did not start home till midnight, and walked with C.W. part of the way, when our converse turned on the difficulties of discovering what common factors if any existed in the notions associated with freedom, as used at present. I don't believe there are any...." (LT, p. 92-93)

* Tolkien to Christopher, 6 October 1944: "On Tuesday at noon I looked in at the Bird and B. with C. Williams. There to my surprise I found Jack and Warnie already ensconced...." (LT, p. 95)

* Tolkien to Christopher, 7-8 November 1944: "On Monday... I saw C.S.L. and C.W. from about 10.40 to 12.50, but can recollect little of the feast of reason and flow of soul, partly because we all agree so. It was a bright morning, and the mulberry tree in the grove just outside C.S.L.'s window shone like fallow gold against [a] cobalt blue sky." (LT, p. 102)

* Tolkien to Mrs. Charles Williams, 15 May 1945: "Dear Mrs Williams. My heart goes out to you in sympathy, and I can say no more... in the (far too brief) years since I first met him I had grown to admire and love your husband deeply... I am more grieved than I can express...." (LT, p. 115)

Addenda:

Since delivering this paper, two additional references Tolkien made to Williams have come to my attention and are printed here courtesy of The Estate of J.R.R. Tolkien and F.R. Williamson, Executors.

(1) J.R.R. Tolkien to Caroline Whitman Everett, June 24th, 1957.

"I do not think I have ever read Many Dimensions. Is it by Charles Williams? If so, I may have done, though I have no memory of it. I remember The Place of the Lion(?). and I heard All Hallows Eve read in Ms. And poor Charles Williams endured a lot of the Lord of the Rings in Ms. (for which treatment, disjointedly, it was singularly unsuited). I knew Charles Williams, between 1939 and 45, and was very fond of him; but in spite of things in them which seemed to me memorable, I neither liked nor understood his novels and poetry."

Although passages from this letter are printed in both Everett's thesis and Letters (#199), this paragraph was omitted from both. I am grateful to Jessica Yates for providing me with a copy of the complete letter. Coming as it does in response to the first thesis ever written on Tolkien, we may here be seeing the very first of Tolkien's attempts to separate himself as a writer from identification with Williams, of whom he nevertheless remained "very fond." It is rather interesting to note that Williams' 'enduring' The Lord of the Rings reverses the situation in "Our Dear Charles Williams."

(2) J.R.R. Tolkien to Mother Mary Anthony, 12 April, 1966.

"I am afraid I can only give an external judgment on your second paragraph. It seems to me almost certain that the young man 'Williams' at the Oxford University Press in the 1920s must have been the Charles Williams who became a friend of C.S. Lewis (an intimate

friend of mine) and though I therefore often met him, I had no personal discussions with him about literature. His work gave me no pleasure, and I rather think that mine did not interest him either. But I found him a pleasant companion socially.

I never heard Williams mention Jung, though Lewis often did and had read him with attention.

I should be very grateful indeed for a copy of your lecture when that comes into being."

This rather courteous letter, apparently written to someone doing research on Williams, keeps Williams firmly at arm's length; like most of the other letters of this period, it presents Williams as Lewis's friend, not Tolkien's. And yet Tolkien still feels compelled to add that he was a "pleasant companion" and, note, he looks forward to reading the proposed lecture. All in all, this letter (which is now in the Wade collection, which I must also thank for their kind permission to print it) represents Tolkien's mid-60s attitude towards the memory of Charles Williams very well, and without rancor.

Notes

[1] C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1960), p. 92. Hereafter cited as FL.

[2] C.S. Lewis, "Preface" to Essays Presented to Charles Williams, ed. C.S. Lewis (1947; rpt. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm G. Eerdmans, 1966), p. viii. Hereafter EPCW.

[3] Quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their friends (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), p. 120. Hereafter I.

[4] J.R.R. Tolkien, The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, selected and edited by Humphrey Carpenter, with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), p. 220 Hereafter LT.

[5] See Letters, especially pages 335, 342, 349-350, and 351-352. The letter on p. 349-350 is of note in that it contains both disparaging references to Williams and talk about the forthcoming book.

[6] Especially in the chapter entitled "'We had nothing to say to one another'," The Inklings, p. 120-126.

[7] Brenda Partridge, "No Sex Please -- We're Hobbits: The Construction of Female Sexuality in The Lord of the Rings," in J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land, ed. Robert Giddings (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble, 1984), p. 181.

[8] C.S. Lewis, Letters of C.S. Lewis, edited, with a memoir, by W.H. Lewis (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966), p. 206. Hereafter LL.

[9] This incident is recorded by Clyde Kilby in his book Tolkien and The Silmarillion (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1976), p. 71; his source is an unpublished letter of Williams' to 'Michal' Williams dated July 12, 1944. Hereafter TS.

[10] "An Interview with Tolkien," by Henry Resnick, published in Niekas, No. 18 (Spring, 1967), p. 40. Although published in 1967, the interview itself actually took place March 2, 1966.

[11] The pertinent discussions on these and related matters can be found in Carpenter's The Inklings, particularly the last two chapters, and in Dr. Lyle Dorsett's recent biography of Joy Davidman, And God Came In.

[12] John Wain, Sprightly Running: Part of an

Autobiography (New York: St. Martin Press, 1962), p. 180.

[13] See Letters, p. 367, for Tolkien's exact words.

[14] Roger Sale, "England's Parnassus: C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien," The Hudson Review 17 (1964), p. 203-225. See especially p. 203-204.

[15] W.H. Lewis, Brothers & Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis, ed. Clyde S. Kilby and Margorie Lamp Mead (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 268. Hereafter BF.

[16] Ursula K. LeGuin, "The Staring Eye," reprinted in The Language of the Night, ed. Susan Wood (New York: Perigee Books, 1979), p.1 71-174.

[17] Tolkien's marginalia to EPCW; quoted in Carpenter, The Inklings p. 121. It might be noted that another friend of Williams', Anne Ridler, tends more towards Tolkien's position than Lewis' on this point in her introduction to Williams' posthumous The Image of the City and Other Essays.

[18] Personal letter to author, July 28, 1978.

[19] Reprinted in Carpenter, The Inklings; the cleriheo on p. 187 and "Our dear Charles Williams" on p. 123-126.

[20] Unpublished letter to "Michal" Williams, January 12, 1944; quoted in Carpenter, The Inklings, p. 194. David Bratman has informed me since the above was written that the letter in which this occurs is written in a light-hearted, mock-flattering tone; if so, then this might not be a sign of hubris on Williams' part but instead an indication of comradery similar to his 'C.S.L.-Tolkien' witticism.

[21] For the record, Tolkien reports Monday morning meetings with Lewis and Williams in the letters of 13 April 1944, 23 April, 11 May, 7-8 November, and 29 November 1944. He records pub meets with Williams and "the Brothers Lewis" in the letters dated 18 January 1944, 24 April, 22 August, 6 October (the Roy Campbell incident), and 7-8 November; apparently these were a regular event for the foursome. He also registers Williams' presence at Thursday night Inklings in the letters written 13 April 1944, 10 June (the Eddison night), 23-25 September, which was followed by Tolkien and Williams' walk, and 24 November (Owen Barfield's visit); Williams was probably also there at the meetings described in the letters of 31 May and 6 October (the Roy Campbell night). He speaks of seeing Lewis alone in the letters of 4 May, 11 May, 14 May, 31 May, 18 December (1944), and 31 January 1945. There are also brief moments of Tolkien with Williams but without Lewis; a half hour in a pub together (November 1943; The Inklings, p. 122), a walk together after an Inklings evening (Sept. 23-25, 1944; Letters, p. 92), an accidental meeting at the theatre (30 Sept.; Letters, p. 94, going together to the B & B to see the Lewises (6 Oct.; Letters, p. 95). Tolkien also heard Williams reading from his latest book (10 Nov. 1943; The Inklings, p. 194), but Lewis was probably there on that occasion, although he is not mentioned in the short quotation Carpenter gives.

[22] I.e. in the letter to Christopher dated 10 November 1943, where he reports "I heard two chapters of a new novel by Charles Williams, read by him, this morning." Quoted in Carpenter, The Inklings, p. 194.

[23] Especially in the final verse-paragraph, lines 95-106.

[24] "An Interview with Tolkien," p. 40.

[25] Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 150.

[26] See Letters, p. 71, 73, and 79 for examples.

[27] Letters, p. 105-106. The phrase "good liking" is probably a misprint for "good living" — i.e., in the Christian sense.

[28] Marquette J.R.R. Tolkien Manuscripts, Series Three (The Lord of the Rings), Box 5, Folder 4, page

2a. Quoted with the kind permission of The Estate of J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien and F.R. Williamson, Executors, and the Marquette University Archives.

[29] A most interesting memo on this survives among the Marquette papers, detailing who will speak on what and when; it is dated Jan 6 1944 and mentions that Lewis would lecture on "Dangerous Words" on Jan. 11th. Marquette J.R.R. Tolkien Manuscripts, Series Three, Box 1, Folder 10, page 9b. Quoted with the same grateful acknowledgements as in the preceeding note.

[30] For confirmation of this, see his piece "The Oxford English School," written near the beginning of his career (1930), or his "Valedictory Lecture" (1959) at the end of it.

[31] See his "Tuesday 15th May" entry in his diary (Brothers & Friends, p. 182-183).

continued from page 41

the geographical position of England. This latter element was soon lost in its entirety from the devoping mythology." (p. 27). But his general interpretation can not be correct if Eriol is the father of the Saxon chiefs Hengest and Horsa who are to invade Britain shortly before the time of Arthur (pp. 23-24). Certainly Albion was already in its present location at that time, and in fact at least since 40 BC, when Julius Caesar attempted to invade it. C.T.'s chronology can be correct only if J.R.R.T.'s scheme was violently contradictory with known world history, which is doubtful. The Faring Forth and the Human invasion of Logres are far more likely to correspond to the time when the Picts (or "Pixies", the historical ancestors of the mythological Faeries) were invaded and overcome by the first Celtic peoples who came to the island ca. 600 BC or so, a thousand years or more before Aelfwine.

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