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More than a Bandersnatch: Tolkien as a Collaborative Writer

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More than a Bandersnatch: Tolkien as a Collaborative Writer

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Additional Keywords

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Introduction: The Nature of Influence

There are many famous insults. Your mother wears army boots. When you were a kid, you were so ugly your mother tied a pork chop around your neck to get the dog to play with you.

Influence is a Dirty word

One of the worst insults in literary circles, worse than army boots or pork chops, is to accuse an author of influence. In literary circles, influence is a very dirty word.

Think about the language we use when we talk about literary influence. As Goran Hermeren has pointed out, the words themselves are value-laden. We say a writer borrows another's imagery, echoes another's phrases, overlaps another's interests. We use word like copies, follows, imitates, reflects, mirrors, derives from, and we use each of them in a negative sense. Hermeren notes that all of these terms are implied in accusations of some wrong-doing, such as lack of imagination, lack of originality, or even plagiarism.

In fact, the most common words used to describe influence use an economic metaphor: borrow, owe, debt, indebted, debtor, etc. Hermeren emphasizes "The economic metaphors used . . . have normative implications; at least, they do when used literally. If X owes 20 dollars to Y, then X ought to pay Y back 20 dollars" (Hermeren, 1975, p. 133). In other words, if Lewis borrows the term "Númenor" from Tolkien, then Lewis is in debt to Tolkien, and ought to pay Tolkien back what he owes him.

Tolkien certainly thought so. Tolkien wrote, "my only real desire is to publish 'The Silmarillion', . . . [e]specially as I find allusions and references to it creeping into Mr Lewis' work . . ." (Tolkien, 1981, p. 113). It annoyed Tolkien to see "echoes" of his unpublished work "creeping" into Lewis's published work: it annoyed him even more when readers noticed and wrote to ask him about it. In 1965, Tolkien wrote the following in a long letter to Dick Plotz:

Lewis was, I think, impressed by "the Silmarillion and all that", and certainly retained some vague

memories of it and its names in mind . . . since he had heard of it, before he composed or thought of *Out of the Silent Planet*, I imagine that *Eldil* is an echo of the *Eldar*; in *Perelandra* "*Tor and Tinidri*" are certainly an echo, since *Tuor and Idril*, parents of Eärendil, are major characters in "The Fall of Gondolin" . . . (Tolkien, 1981, p. 361)

Tolkien falls short of accusing Lewis of theft, but clearly he believes that some trespass has been committed, and that Lewis's accomplishment is the less because of it.

Studies of the Inklings, like studies of other writers and artists, have often been characterised by a similar suspicion of influence. It is almost humorous to hear various enthusiasts insist that their favourite Inkling was a unique and solitary genius. "My favourite Inkling was not sullied by the influence of others," they imply. "My favourite Inkling didn't need another's help."

Lois Lang-Sims, for example, has stated that Charles Williams is the most original of the Inklings and therefore the best:

Nowadays the name of Charles Williams tends to be associated with those of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis . . . Neither Lewis nor Tolkien were *original* thinkers . . . Charles Williams will be remembered when they are forgotten . . . the association is misleading; and, in fact, when one looks around for his true companions, no name suggests itself. He stands *very much on his own* . . . (Lang-Sims, 1989, p. 16, emphasis added)

What makes Charles Williams stand head and shoulders above the rest? According to Lang-Sims, it is his independence and originality. According to Lang-Sims, Williams was free from influence. In a similar fashion, Humphrey Carpenter stubbornly insists that neither Tolkien nor Williams needed the other Inklings. "Tolkien and Williams owed almost nothing to the other Inklings, and would have written everything they wrote had they never heard of the group" (Carpenter, 1979, p. 160). I believe that such arguments, despite the sincerity of their proponents,

have their basis in a faulty view of the nature of influence.

Influence Redeemed

No matter which of the Inklings is your personal favourite (but since this is the Tolkien Centenary Conference, I have a hunch which one it might be), I believe that the claims of originality and the accusations of influence are counterproductive ways to think about the accomplishments of these men. More importantly, I think this is a counterproductive way to think about influence. Harold Bloom has coined the phrase “the anxiety of influence”, and in his book by that title he blames the Cartesian concept of the individual for creating it.

Such a possessive attitude toward ownership of texts and the value of individuality is, after all, an invention. Before the Enlightenment, Bloom explains, the prevailing attitude towards literary influence, even of the nature of authorship, was quite different from that taken for granted today. Ben Jonson, for example, defined imitation in art as “convert[ing] the substance or riches of another poet to his own use” (quoted in Bloom, 1973, p. 27). Similarly Goethe took the pervasiveness of influence utterly for granted: “As soon as we are born the world begins to influence us, and this goes on until we die” (quoted in Bloom, 1973, p. 52). Goethe continues,

Do not all of the achievements of a poet’s predecessors belong to him? Why should he shrink from picking flowers where he finds them? Only by making the riches of others our own do we bring anything great into being.

(quoted in Bloom, 1973, p. 52)

Time does not me to quote Shelley, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Schopenhauer, Emerson and Baudelaire, who all agree, more or less, with this positive view of influence. I will quote one other writer, however, because he has been so influential in promoting a positive view of influence, and because he was well acquainted with the Inklings. That writer is T.S. Eliot.

Like Goethe, Eliot believed that literary influence is inevitable and that it is good. He goes further than Goethe, though, in stressing that good poets should actively seek the influence. The result will be a sense of tradition which compels the poet

. . . to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with the feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

(Eliot, 1983, p. 784)

The poet who immerses himself in the literature of others, Eliot would say, writes not only for himself but for all of human kind. This is not far from Tolkien’s own description of the writing process. Tolkien says that the stuff of his art does not arise fully-formed in his imagination, but

. . . it grows like a seed in the dark out of the leaf-mould of the mind: out of all that has been seen or thought or read, that has long ago been forgotten,

descending into the depths.

(Carpenter, 1977, p. 126)

In his essay “On Fairy-Stories”, Tolkien goes further in emphasising the continuity of the individual writer with all of the writers who have gone before, with writers who are his contemporaries, and with “all that have been seen or thought or read”. He uses three great images: first, that of the “seamless web of story”; second, that of “the countless foliage of the Tree of Tales”; and third, that of the “Cauldron of Story”. For Tolkien, literature is all of a piece, for there is only one web, one tree, one cauldron. In discussing the cauldron, Tolkien particularly emphasises the ongoing and inter-dependent nature of the creative process, for each individual author is merely adding his or her ingredients into a rich and timeless dish:

Speaking of the history of stories and especially of fairy-stories we may say that the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty.

(1947, p. 53)

As an antidote to a narrow and nasty view of influence, I would suggest we partake of this rich soup. As an alternative to a suspicious and anxiety-laden attitude towards influence, I would suggest we see it as an inherent part of the human creative process. As an alternative to drawing up a balance sheet of who owes what to whom, I would suggest that we take our cue from Michael Oakenshott, and see all writers as participants in the lively conversation of humankind, and welcoming the rich contribution of those who have gone before, and inviting the participation of contemporaries.

Influence on Tolkien

So far I have addressed three underlying assumptions that have guided my study of the Inklings: that all writers are influenced, that evidence of influence is not evidence of moral or literary failure.

I believe that the Inklings and others participated with Tolkien in his writing process, and that they influenced his work as a result. Now for some specifics: How was Tolkien influenced by those around him? If we put aside a negative view of influence, I believe we can identify many types of influence. For the sake of time, I will move quickly through two different aspects: Tolkien valued the encouragement of others, and he relied upon the suggestions of others.

Tolkien Relied on the Encouragement of Others

You have probably heard the statement made by C.S. Lewis that “No-one influenced Tolkien. You might as well try to influence a Bandersnatch.” The title of this paper is a reference to that famous statement.

Another famous statement about influence comes from Tolkien. Listen carefully:

“*The unpayable debt I owe to Lewis is not influence.*” The first thing I want you to notice from this statement is the use of an economic metaphor, the word “debt”, as I discussed a little while ago. Influence is seen as a debt, a terrible debt

that is owed, in this case, an unpayable debt. It is negative, almost embarrassing to admit such a debt.

The second thing I want you to notice is that I have in fact just misquoted Tolkien. That is not what he said at all, but that is what we have often heard. Here is what he actually said:

The unpayable debt that I owe to Lewis is not influence as it is normally understood, but sheer encouragement.

This statement is usually read as a denial of influence, quoted by Carpenter and others who argue that the Inklings did not influence Tolkien. It seems to me that this assertion demonstrates quite the opposite; Tolkien readily admits that he owes a great debt to Lewis, a debt of influence. What he seems to me to be pleading for is a broader view of influence. Influence as it is normally understood is inadequate, he says; we need a view of influence that includes encouragement.

I believe that the most important type of influence that took place in Tolkien's life was encouragement, as he himself acknowledged. As a result of his interaction with the Inklings, Tolkien became convinced that his "stuff" could be more than a hobby. He persisted in producing text long after his own energy and interest flagged.

Tolkien noted in a letter to his son, "[Lewis] is putting the screw on me to finish [*The Lord of the Rings*]", and there is a consensus that Tolkien would never have brought the project to a close if it had not been for the constant urging of his friends. I would argue further, that such encouragement, while not "influence as it is normally understood", is influence indeed. As LeFevre notes, "Certain acts of invention – or certain phases of inventive acts – are best understood if we think of them as being *made possible* by other people" (LeFevre, 1987, p. 64, emphasis added). Her wording is important, for these people do not merely help a project along, or quicken the pace; they become crucial participants in the fact of its existence.

Tolkien refers to Lewis and the Inklings as helpful, perceptive, and skilled critics. More than that, though, Tolkien expresses the conviction that his work could not have been completed apart from Lewis's input. "But for the encouragement of C.S.L.", he wrote, "I do not think that I should ever have completed or offered for publication *The Lord of the Rings*" (Tolkien, 1981, p. 366).

This remark was not made once, but over and over again. Just after reviews of *The Fellowship of the Rings* began to appear, in September of 1954, Tolkien wrote ". . . only by [Lewis's] support and friendship did I ever struggle to the end of the labour" (1981, p. 184). Several years later he again made a similar statement:

. . . I owe to [Lewis's] encouragement the fact that in spite of obstacles (including the 1939 war!) I persevered and eventually finished *The Lord of the Rings*. He heard all of it, bit by bit, read aloud . . . (1981, p. 303)

And again, "But for [Lewis's] interest and unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought *The L. of the R.* to a conclusion" (1981, p. 362). When we think about those who influence writers, we need to give credit to those

who encourage and challenge a writer to produce a text in the first place.

Tolkien Followed the Specific Suggestions of Others

In addition to welcoming the encouragement of others, Tolkien also welcomed their advice. Following the suggestions of others is one of the most obvious kinds of influence, and yet it is often overlooked. Let me give you an example of how this works.

When we look for influence "as it is normally understood", we typically look for imitation. Let's say I am listening to a paper in a draughty lecture hall, and Lynn Maudlin is sitting next to me. She puts on her sweater, and I think, "Look at that. That's a great idea. I'll do the same." So I put on my sweater. That's one kind of influence.

That is the kind of influence we notice when we read *That Hideous Strength* and we say, "Wow, Lewis was really influenced by Charles Williams!" In the third book of the Space Trilogy Lewis apparently had observed Williams's approach to fiction, admired it, and imitated it in his own work.

Back to my sweater analogy. If I see Lynn put on her sweater and do likewise, that's influence. But let's say that we are sitting in that same lecture hall, and Lynn notices that I am shivering and says, "Why don't you put on your sweater?" That's influence, too, whether or not she puts on a sweater of her own.

Are there any instances where the Inklings gave Tolkien specific directions, where they told him what to do and he did it? Yes, there are.

One example is found in the manuscript of *The Lord of the Rings*. John Rateliff has noted that Tolkien made many changes in the text, "one might say there as many changes as there is manuscript" (1985, p. 279).

Rateliff points out that in the chapter where the character Treebeard is introduced, Tolkien originally gave Treebeard the line, "Crack my timbers, very odd." In the manuscript copy, the line is struck out, and underneath is written "queried by Charles Williams – root and twig". The published version bears this change. Rateliff observes that this is the only change in *The Lord of the Rings* that Tolkien ascribes to a specific source.

There are several things that are significant about this small detail. While some scholars have suggested that the Inklings found Tolkien's never ending manuscript tiresome to listen to and hard to follow, Williams apparently listened with enough attention to characterisation and phrasing that he noted that this small interjection seemed awkward.

In addition, it appears that very little pressure was used to provoke this change. Williams merely "queried" the appropriateness of the phrase: Tolkien promptly changed it.

Changing "Crack my timbers" to "Root and twig" is a very small change of wording. A larger, more pervasive change in the same manuscript occurred as a result of comments made first by Lewis, and later by Rayner Unwin. Both of them warned Tolkien that there was too much "hobbit talk" and not enough narration in the story. On June 4, 1938, Tolkien wrote,

I meant long ago to have thanked Rayner for bothering to read the tentative chapters, and for his excellent criticism. It agrees strikingly with Mr Lewis', which is therefore confirmed. I must bow to my two chief . . . critics.

(1981, p. 36)

Tolkien did not agree with Lewis or Unwin; he noted that he personally preferred "hobbit talk" to story telling. "The trouble is that 'hobbit talk' amuses me privately . . . more than adventures . . ." None the less, this so-called Bandersnatch did not argue, growl or fuss. He "bowed" to his critics, and expressed his intention to "curb this severely." Tolkien chopped dialogue and increased narrative in his draft, and increased the percentage of narrative in the new sections he wrote.

Another aspect of this same problem was Tolkien's tendency to abandon the text altogether in favour of refining his invented languages. Clyde Kilby noted this with obvious irritation during his stay with Tolkien; Tolkien sheepishly admits throughout his letters that if he had his way, he would devote his time to publishing the languages rather than telling the stories.

Here again, Tolkien curbed his preferences in deference to his audience. If he had not, the work would have been much different, for as he observed, "If I had considered my own pleasure more than the stomachs of a possible audience, there would have been a great deal more Elvish in the book" (1981, p. 216). In my opinion, there would have been a great deal more Elvish, and a great deal less book!

A third example of the interplay of detailed criticism and extended revision is a very early letter written by Lewis commenting on "The Lay of Leithian". In December of 1929, four years before the Inklings began to meet, Tolkien decided to show Lewis his narrative poem, "The Gest of Beren, son of Barahir, and Lúthien the Fay, called Tinúviel the Nightingale, or the Lay of Leithian, Release from Bondage". Lewis responded on December 7, 1929, with a brief and encouraging note:

I can quite honestly say that it is ages since I have had an evening of such delight: and the personal interest of reading a friend's work had very little to do with it. I should have enjoyed it just as well as if I'd picked it up in a bookshop, by an unknown author.

(quoted in Tolkien, 1985a, p. 151)

Early in 1930, Lewis responded to the poem again, this time with fourteen pages of detailed criticism. Most of this commentary is published in *The Lays of Beleriand*, volume three of the series *The History of Middle-earth*, edited by Christopher Tolkien. Lewis criticised the poem thoroughly, even suggesting new passages. According to Christopher Tolkien, Tolkien's revisions of this poem took into account "almost all" of Lewis's comments. Christopher Tolkien writes:

Almost all the verses which Lewis found wanting for one reason or another are marked for revision in the typescript B if not actually rewritten, and in many cases his proposed emendations, or modifications of them, are incorporated into the text.

(Tolkien, 1985a, p. 151)

While it is clear that Tolkien took all of Lewis's comments seriously, and took most of them to heart, he did dispute a few of them. Lewis, for example, claimed that lines 629-630 made use of "half-hearted personification". Next to this comment in the letter, Tolkien wrote "Not so!!" and added the explanation, "The moon was dizzy and twisted because of the tears in his eyes." Christopher Tolkien notes that despite the objection, his father still struck the questioned lines from the manuscript.

In another case, Lewis wrote, "The chiasmus is suspiciously classical." In the margin Tolkien responded: "But classics did not invent chiasmus! – it is perfectly natural." No change was made in the text. Nor did Tolkien take Lewis's rather peculiar suggestion that the spelling of "labyrinth" in line 1075 of the poem be amended to "laborynth".

These exceptions aside, the degree to which Tolkien rewrote this text according to Lewis's suggestions is remarkable. According to Christopher Tolkien, J.R.R. Tolkien revised lines 563-592 of this poem more than a quarter of a century after it was written, and he rewrote it specifically along the lines that Lewis proposed (1985a, p. 322).

Let me give you a fourth example of a change that Tolkien made as a result of the advice of others. Tolkien wrote several versions of an epilogue for *The Lord of the Rings*, consisting of a bedtime conversation between Sam and his children. But *The Lord of the Rings* was published without the epilogue. Why? Tolkien admitted that he did it on the advice of his readers. He did it as a concession to those who read the manuscript.

An epilogue giving a further glimpse (though of a rather exceptional family) has been so universally condemned that I shall not insert it. One must stop somewhere.

(1981, p. 179)

I would not argue that *The Lord of the Rings* is a better book for Tolkien having followed the advice of those who "universally condemned" the epilogue. I will stress again, however, that the decision to leave it out offers further evidence of the very great extent to which Tolkien was influenced by those around him, even against his (and perhaps our) better judgement.

Tolkien's Life Demonstrates the Importance of Others

I have considered two ways that Tolkien was influenced: by the encouragement of those around him, and by the specific suggestions that others made. I might also look at factors like the effect of writing for a specific audience or his use of others as characters in his work, or the poems he wrote about many of the Inklings, or a number of other forms of influence. Instead I would like to shift my focus slightly in the time that remains. I have tried to demonstrate some of the ways Tolkien's work shows the direct influence of others. I would like to turn now to consider the importance or extent of that influence. I would like to consider two factors that I

believe illustrate the central importance of others to Tolkien's own writing process: his life-long involvement in writing groups, and the collaborative projects that characterise his scholarly work.

Tolkien Had a Long History of Involvement in Groups

Humphrey Carpenter has said that Lewis and Williams needed the other Inklings, but that Tolkien would have written everything he did had he never heard of the group. I disagree. I think Tolkien was of central importance to the Inklings, and they to him. The importance of this group to Tolkien, and the evidence for the extent of their influence upon him, is underscored by the fact that participation in groups is a consistent feature of Tolkien's entire life.

The first group of which Tolkien was a founding member was the Tea Club and Barrovian Society, abbreviated T.C.B.S. The group began in 1911 when Tolkien was 19 years old and a student at King Edward's, an all-boys school. Three of the senior boys – John Ronald Tolkien, Christopher Wiseman, and R.Q. Gilson – worked in the school library and formed the nucleus of a clique which met in the library for tea.

The nature of the T.C.B.S. is suggested in a letter Tolkien received more than 60 years after the formation of the group. C.V.L. Lycett had been a classmate at King Edward's School. In 1973 he sent Tolkien the following note:

As a boy you could not imagine how I looked up to you and admired and envied the wit of that select coterie of J.R.R.T., C.L. Wiseman, G.B. Smith, R.Q. Gilson, V. Trought, and Payton. I hovered on the outskirts to gather up the gems. You probably had no idea of this schoolboy worship.

(Tolkien, 1981, p. 429)

Tolkien did not view the group as a coterie, and certainly had not suspected that the meetings engendered awe and worship of others around them. Still, this glimpse of the group through Lycett's eyes shows something of the coherence and power that those outside the group attributed to it.

Bound together first and foremost by the difficulties of preparing and enjoying tea on the library premises, the fledgling T.C.B.S. took on an increasingly literary nature with the addition of Geoffrey Bache Smith to their ranks. Although Smith was a bit younger than the rest of the group, he wrote poetry. It was about this time that Tolkien tried his hand at poetry, too.

The initiation, then, of Tolkien's work as a poet and writer took place within the context of a small, enthusiastic group of young men. Before his involvement in this group, Tolkien was clearly both imaginative and literary. But unlike C.S. Lewis, who at the same age was writing tales of Animal-land (published in 1985 as *Boxen*), Tolkien's early creative expression consisted primarily in inventing languages. Learning foreign languages, inventing new languages, and creating alphabets to correspond to his languages occupied his creative energies until he helped form the T.C.B.S., and

under their influence, he turned his energies to writing poetry¹.

In the fall of 1911, Tolkien began his studies at Oxford. Even though the four members of the T.C.B.S. were now separated geographically, they continued to exert a crucial influence over one another. In a letter to Edith Bratt dated November 26, 1915, Tolkien discusses his plans to send a copy of his poem "Kortirion" to the T.C.B.S. Despite the distance, members continued to exchange draft copies of work in progress, and comment upon one another's work.

All four members of the group assembled in London in December, 1914, for a weekend of conversation, which he referred to as the "Council of London". In a letter written in 1916 he indicated how significant it was:

. . . I cannot abandon yet the hope and ambitions (inchoate and cloudy I know) that first became conscious at the Council of London. That council was as you know followed in my own case with my finding a voice for all kinds of pent up things and a tremendous opening up of everything for me: I have always laid that to the credit of the inspiration that even a few hours with the four always brought to all of us.

(Tolkien, 1981, p. 10)

This group gave impetus and focus to Tolkien's efforts as a young writer, "inspiration" as he puts it, a word that he used over and over again throughout his life in acknowledging the part that others played in his accomplishments. The T.C.B.S. provided the interested, sympathetic, and demanding readers that Tolkien relied on in all of his writing. In that sense, the T.C.B.S. can clearly be considered a precursor to the Inklings, and a first example of the key role that groups played in Tolkien's writing process.

Tolkien's participation in the T.C.B.S. did not prevent him from founding another group upon his arrival as an undergraduate at Oxford. He called the group Apolausticks and, according to Carpenter, ". . . it was chiefly composed of freshmen like himself. There were papers, discussions, and debates, and there were also large and extravagant dinners" (1977, p. 53). In addition, he and Colin Cullis started a group they called the Chequers, a small clique that met for dinner on Saturday nights.

While there is little evidence that the Apolausticks or the Chequers provided either audience or encouragement for Tolkien's writing, he joined yet another club which did, the college Essay Club. In a letter to Edith Bratt dated November 27, 1914, he reports that he read aloud his poem "The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star", which was "well criticised". Just as his poetry had thrived at King Edward's School as he shared it with the members of the T.C.B.S., so now at Oxford his work continued to be produced within the context of interested readers, and continued to receive feedback which Tolkien apparently found not only welcome but necessary in order to continue to write.

In 1925 Tolkien and E.V. Gordon formed the Viking Club, a gathering of undergraduates devoted to reading sagas and

¹ I might add for the benefit of the elvish linguists among us, Paul Nolan Hyde, that I am not arguing that this shift from linguistics to poetry is an improvement, merely that it was stimulated by an external force.

translating songs and children's tale into Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse. In 1926 he began the *Kolbitar*, a group that consisted not of undergraduates but Oxford dons. Rather than translating material into Old Norse, this group read aloud from sagas in the original languages and translated them into English. C.S. Lewis became a member of the *Kolbitar*, and it is through this group that he and Tolkien established their friendship and began to read original works together.

I have argued that groups in general were important to Tolkien's written work, and that the T.C.B.S. in particular played a critical role: channelling his creative energy from languages into literature, modelling the behaviours of poets and story-tellers, providing critical feedback on his drafts in progress, developing his own critical faculties, recommending reading material that might support and shape his imagination, suggesting that certain pieces be started, reworded, completed, or submitted for publication. Ironically, it may be that the end of the T.C.B.S. provided for Tolkien the largest boost his writing career ever had, giving him another ingredient essential to his writing: a sense of mission.

Tolkien passed his final examination in English Language and Literature with First Class Honours in June of 1915. With the First World War in progress, he took up a commission as a second lieutenant. He trained for a year as a signaller, then was deployed in France.

Rob Gilson and G.B. Smith of the T.C.B.S. were similarly deployed, and on July 1, 1916, Rob Gilson was killed in battle. Five months later, G.B. Smith also died in battle. Tolkien felt devastated. With two of the four members gone, the T.C.B.S. was finished.

Before he died, Smith wrote the following assurance in a letter to Tolkien:

My chief consolation is that if I am scuppered tonight – I am off on duty in a few minutes – there will still be left a member of the great T.C.B.S. to voice what I dreamed and what we all agreed upon.

(Carpenter, 1977, p. 86)

Tolkien was fully convinced of the greatness of the T.C.B.S. With Smith's death, he became equally convinced that he had been spared in order to be a voice for ideas that the war had tried to silence. Smith's letter continued with a charge that is even more specific: "May God bless you, my dear John Ronald, and may you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them, if such be my lot" (Carpenter, p. 86).

After Smith and Gilson died, the other remaining member of the group, Christopher Wiseman, wrote to Tolkien in order to encourage him. Wiseman added, "You ought to start the epic."

Gilson had provided the vision, Smith the commission, and Wiseman the direction. Tolkien took them up, and began work on *The Silmarillion*, the work he considered his most important.

Tolkien's Scholarly Work is Clearly Collaborative

So far I have looked at Tolkien's literary work, his early

work as a poet, and personal associations that inspired his mythological fiction. In these endeavours, Tolkien was strongly influenced by his involvement in writing groups. I would like to turn now to consideration of his scholarly work, and show that once again the input of other people made a critical difference. Following the Armistice on November 11, 1918, Tolkien took up his first professional writing task. He was hired by Henry Bradley to research and write etymologies for the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

He thoroughly enjoyed this work, partly because it was linguistic, and partly because he learned so much during this two year time. I believe that another reason for his great success in this venture was that he worked collaboratively as part of a team to contribute to this great work.

This is not the only major scholarly project in which Tolkien participated as a team member: much later he was one of the "principal collaborators" of the newly-translated Jerusalem Bible. He contributed to considerations of style, criticised the translation work of others, researched the translation of some large sections of text, and worked for five years to produce the translation for the book of Jonah. Unlike his enthusiasm about his contribution to the *O.E.D.*, however, Tolkien tended to understate his contribution to this translation.

Tolkien's first published book was also a collaborative project, a glossary to a Middle-English reader that had been edited by his former tutor, Kenneth Sisam. Once that was published in 1922, he began another collaboration, this time with colleague E.V. Gordon. They worked for three years on an edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. They published it in 1925, and it remains a highly regarded work.

Gordon and Tolkien were a strong writing team: Gordon was aggressive, industrious, demanding, and energetic; Tolkien thorough, meticulous, and brilliant. Therefore, upon completion of *Gawain*, Gordon and Tolkien immediately planned additional projects; editions of the poems *Pearl*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*. But when Tolkien was elected the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, an honour he had achieved partly on the strength of the *Gawain* volume that he and Gordon had done, Tolkien left for Oxford, while Gordon remained on the faculty at Leeds.

The geographical separation proved too difficult to overcome. Each man continued researching for these books for almost thirteen years without further publication. After Gordon died suddenly in 1938, his widow, Ida Gordon, compiled her husband's research notes and finished the projects E.V. Gordon and Tolkien had begun.

Tolkien worked with another scholar in collaboration, and their story is nearly identical to that of Tolkien and Gordon. Tolkien began to work with Simonne d'Ardenne, a Belgian graduate student who had studied Middle English with him. Tolkien contributed significantly to d'Ardenne's *The Life and Passion of St. Juliene*, so much so, in fact, that the book has been said to reflect his views much more than hers. Tolkien and d'Ardenne planned to build on the success of this first volume with a second project, an edition of *Katerine*, another Western Middle English text. But distance

and the war intervened, making communication difficult, and the work was never completed.

Tolkien's most important and most successful collaborator is his son Christopher Tolkien. The first posthumous collaboration between J.R.R. Tolkien and Christopher Tolkien is actually a Middle English work rather than a Middle-earth one. Tolkien's translation of *The Pearl* foundered on the publisher's desk for lack of an introduction. In 1975, two years after Tolkien's death, Allen and Unwin decided to issue Tolkien's translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Pearl*, and *Sir Orfeo* all in one volume. Christopher was called upon to write the introduction to that volume.

The publication of *The Silmarillion*, considered by Tolkien to be his most important work, offers yet another example of extensive collaboration. As Tolkien laboured on *The Lord of the Rings*, he often protested that his real work was *The Silmarillion*. The work was essentially drafted by 1924, although some parts admittedly were in outline form, and connecting material was scant. He made little more progress on it until his retirement, when he vowed to address his full attention to the work.

But he became overwhelmed by the task. He found himself easily distracted, and spent his days writing letters or playing solitaire. When he accepted Clyde Kilby's offer to come and help with the book, he still had trouble applying himself to the task. Kilby notes, "It would be satisfying to record that I always found [Tolkien] busy at his writing, but that is not true. I did find him sometimes working at his Elvish languages, an activity which seemed endlessly interesting to him" (1976, p. 26).

Kilby helped to impose a bit of order onto the disordered versions of the manuscripts, but was able to contribute little else to bring the book closer to publication. Tolkien had become increasingly isolated, and as a result he found himself increasingly unable to write.

Christopher Tolkien wrote, "On my father's death it fell to me to try to bring the work into publishable form" (Tolkien, 1977, p. 7). He decided that rather than present the different versions of the poems and stories, he should select among them, arrange them in the "most coherent and internally self-consistent" way, and compose connecting material. In this work, Christopher Tolkien not only collaborated with his father, but also with Guy Gavriel Kay, who worked with him on the project 1974-1975. *The Silmarillion* was published at last in 1977.

The Silmarillion was followed by *Unfinished Tales*, a collection of unfinished, unpublished works by Tolkien. And

this was followed by Tolkien's longest published work, *The History of Middle-earth*. It spans nine volumes and more than 3,000 pages so far. The critical volumes, published after Tolkien's death and still in progress, represent an extensive collaborative effort between Tolkien's creative imagination and his son Christopher's persistent energy. I believe that the nine volumes of *The History of Middle-earth* are best understood as a collaborative effort.

In the absence of a present, active collaborator, Tolkien's progress on manuscripts was thwarted and his energies were dissipated. These are not the only examples of projects that were begun with abundant skill and enthusiasm, and later abandoned, incomplete. He began work on the Anglo-Saxon poem *Exodus*, but never finished. He did a translation of *The Pearl*, but never finished the introduction to the work and so publication was suspended.

Tolkien has argued that life events kept intervening: sick children, disruptive moves, etc. Carpenter has argued that Tolkien's "passion for perfection" is the cause (1977, p. 138). Others have pointed to procrastination, fear of criticism, overwork on his job and his passion for creating languages as the reasons for the large body of unfinished work Tolkien left when he died. While I agree that Tolkien exhibited these tendencies, I also feel that the occasions when he successfully overcame these obstacles have in common a single variable; the persistent motivation provided by other people taking an active, collaborative role.

Conclusion: Co-architects of Middle-earth

This discussion of the ways Tolkien was influenced by those around him is a small part of an ongoing study of the ways that the Inklings influenced each other. In looking at the Inklings, I am asking, what difference did it make that they wrote in association with each other? How did their relationship affect the amount of material that each man produced? What kind of feedback did they offer each other? What were the results of that feedback? What part did encouragement and discouragement play in the completion of texts? What impact did they have on the reception of their work by publishers and readers?

The Inklings met on an ongoing basis in order to discuss written works in progress. Like any successful writing group, they influenced each other and each other's writing. As a result of their interaction, Tolkien was influenced "more than a Bandersnatch". In fact, I see him as a model of life-long collaboration. Throughout his life Tolkien was surrounded and influenced by co-architects of Middle-earth.

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