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Tributes to J.R.R. Tolkien

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Abstract

"The following are tributes written by readers of *Mythlore*. So many tributes have been submitted, that despite those given here, there are many more that will have to wait until the next issue. If you do not find your tribute here, please understand. Many of the tributes are very personal, but that is Tolkien's magic as a writer — he invites us as readers to participate in the act of sub-creation: our own imaginations complete the details of the stories, and they become part of us." — Glen GoodKnight



TRIBUTES TO J.R.R. TOLKIEN

The following are tributes written by readers of *Mythlore*. So many tributes have been submitted, that despite those given here, there are many more that will have to wait until the next issue. If you do not find your tribute here, please understand. Many of the tributes are very personal, but that is Tolkien's magic as a writer — he invites us as readers to participate in the act of sub-creation: our own imaginations complete the details of the stories, and they become part of us.

— Glen GoodKnight

Lloyd Alexander

Drexel Hill, PA

How to praise *The Lord of the Rings* — a convenient shorthand to include all the works of J.R.R. Tolkien? To me, it would be something like praising the constellation Orion or making laudatory comments to the effect that the Galaxy is, by and large, quite well done. To say that Tolkien has created a towering masterpiece of literature? Again, that seems to me somehow reductive, a little academic. I can, however, speak personally, though inadequately, and say simply that *The Lord of the Rings* has, for nearly forty years now, been a source of joy, delight, inspiration, and courage. It has become a permanent part of my consciousness and it is difficult to remember, even imagine, a time when it did not exist. To honor Tolkien? He is the one who has honored us: with his life, his spirit, his gifts. We can only be grateful.

✦

Rayner Unwin

London, England

I suppose that, outside his family, I have known and honored Professor Tolkien for as many years as anyone. I have been fortunate too in having had his friendship and trust; but I can't look back on the occasion of his centenary without being astonished at my blithe assumption that this happy relationship, which he once flatteringly compared to that of Rohan and Gondor, could go on for ever. We were not of the same generation for intimate friendships. Even when we knew each other well I never lost an initial wariness when he rang up, feeling subconsciously guilty lest I failed to match his own high standards of integrity or dedication on some matter or other. When we met I couldn't always grasp the subtleties of his conversation, which came in brisk explosions of words shrouded in the tobacco-smoke of battle. But we were friends and I actively

looked forward to every meeting. Eventually, towards the end of his life, he formally asked me to use his Christian name, a gesture that was deeply meaningful to both of us, though nowadays it might seem slightly absurd. Ever solicitous on my behalf he would sometimes detect tiredness and assume that I had incurred it on his account. But if I did show strain it only reflected my endeavor to respond to the challenges that he threw out (those in our Production Department had a far worse time), but they and I were his liegemen, as all good publishers should be to all good authors.

Long ago he had every reason to mistrust me, after my cavalier dismissal of *The Silmarillion* in favor of *The Lord of the Rings*, which my father was indiscreet enough to quote to him, but he never mentioned it. I think he accepted my 10-year-old verdict on *The Hobbit* (which he had never initially intended for publication) as my passport into Middle-earth, and the fact that I was a duffer at Anglo-Saxon, and never really mastered the complexities of his secret vice, did not disturb him. He wore his learning very lightly and could be talked to about any subject that was uppermost in his mind: the origin of some place-name, a rare flower spotted in a nearby meadow, the barbarity of French cooking, or a crux that seemed to undermine the very order of his cosmogony. Often it was exceedingly difficult to haul him back to the matter in hand (for almost all my visits had some business context), but he listened carefully and was never overbearing or assertive, unless one trespassed on an area where he claimed expertise. In publishing terms this meant "editing," production and design. And usually he was right: what book other than *The Hobbit* has the same outward appearance after more than fifty years?

Friendship, loyalty and trust are rare qualities, nowadays sadly lacking between authors and publishers on any continuing basis. I look on myself as fortunate to have shared some twenty years of publishing (plus some juvenile skirmishing) with an author of unwavering integrity, who was never tarnished by the fame that ultimately engulfed him, courteous even in exasperation, joyous in good company, wracked by private despairs and sustained by faith.

✦

The majority [of readers] never read anything twice. The sure mark of an unlitary man is that he considers 'I've read it already' to be conclusive argument against reading a work.... It was for [him] dead, like a burnt-out match, an old railway ticket, or yesterday's paper; [he has] already used it. Those who read great works, on the other hand, will read the same work ten, twenty or thirty times during the course of their life.

(C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 2.)



Elizabeth Lower

Springfield, IL

Perhaps my regard of Tolkien's work is best evidenced by the fact that for 25 years I have re-read *The Lord of the Rings* annually. Every September I take up the three volumes as my read-in-bed book. This I have done since 1966, the year I discovered the delights to be found in these pages. I am an old woman, but Tolkien's books restore me to a youthful outlook. At my age, there are almost no books in which one can completely lose one's self, but Tolkien's works do have that magic even after 25 re-readings. And he has no rivals. I have read some of the imitators. A few are not bad, but they are far, far below the master, J.R.R. Tolkien.



Poul Anderson

Orinda, CA

J.R.R.T.

Just in his judgment but of gentle heart,
Readily ranging through realms unbounded,
Ruler of runecraft, he wrought for us
Tower-strong tales and the tenderest songs.



Melanie A. Rawls

Tallahassee, FL

In his famous essay "On Fairy-Stories," J.R.R. Tolkien speaks not only of the Tree of Tales but of the Cauldron of Story ("On Fairy-Stories," *The Tolkien Reader*, p. 26). I have always marveled at the number of people, myself included, who have dipped into Professor Tolkien's own particular cauldron of Middle-earth and ladled up nourishment for their own creativity. Into the professor's seething cauldron have gone ladles from all over the world; people have dipped, sipped, slurped, gulped, gone back for seconds, thirds, twentieth servings and more of the tales of Middle-earth and subsequently produced: stories and poetry, music and dance, drawings, paintings, jewelry and sculpture, games, plays and scholarly essays, recipes, costumes, revelry and fellowships, and who knows what all else. All over the world: starbursts of creativity. How wonder-full! What a tribute to the master cook!



Gary Peterson

Hoffman Estates, IL

I stuffed this note inside my favorite copy of *The Lord of the Rings* nearly 20 years ago, and then squirreled the book away to pass on to my children. I hope you can include it in your tribute to Mr. Tolkien:

My dear reader,

I do not know who you may be, but I envy you. First, because you live in a time most certainly beyond

my years, and while I can but dream of the marvels of your age, you actually enjoy them in your everyday life, and secondly, because you have chanced upon a real treasure.

This book has fallen into your hands, perhaps by design, perhaps by fate. You may be my descendant; you may be a stranger; you may be a librarian or a book dealer in a faraway city. You may have purchased this book at a yard sale or a second-hand shop. In any event, you are a lucky individual, because you can read it.

The Lord of the Rings spoke to me as did no other book. It tells of nobility, of gallantry, of heroism and loyalty in a way that brought joy and tears throughout every one of my many readings. I genuinely hope that you enjoy this book as much as I did, and I wholeheartedly wish that I could stand at your side and turn the pages as you read.

Please, do a favor for a man you'll never know; one who wishes he could shake your hand and thank you graciously. After you've read this book, do not discard it. Give it to another who will treat it with equal affection. Let it be an heirloom to last a thousand years.



Judith A. Johnson

Ypsilanti, MI

I bought *The Lord of the Rings* as a Christmas present to myself in 1968. I was a 33 year old graduate student at the University of Michigan, in the second year of a doctoral program in medieval English language and literature. I was married with two primary school children.

I was familiar with J.R.R. Tolkien as the author of "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," which had swept away the turgid cobwebs of late 19th and early 20th century criticism and restored that superb poem to its proper position in English literature. The Tolkien edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was the recommended edition in my Middle English literature courses. Because I delighted in those two works, I had found all Tolkien's other scholarly essays to enrich my medieval background.

The Lord of the Rings had been mentioned by one or two friends, and I felt deserving of a gift of light reading as a break from my studies. I bought *The Lord of the Rings* half an hour after finishing the last exam of the term, took it home, and started reading. I guess the family got fed and I got some sleep, but all I remember is that I could not put it down, doing so only when I finished the last page sometime the next day. I wanted to start over at the beginning, but Christmas was coming, the tree was not up, and the children's gifts were not wrapped.

Since 1968 I have re-read *The Lord of the Rings* every 3 or 4 years, each time discovering allusions to or reminders of medieval tales, myths, and literary works I had missed in prior reading; each time finding word games missed before; each time finding more subtle nuances of character complexity and interpersonal relationships. Because *The Lord of the Rings* was my first of Tolkien's "fairy tales," I find in the others parallels to the characters, settings, relationships, and subplots of the *The Lord of the Rings*.

The primary reason I embarked on the seven-year task that finally produced my annotated bibliography of Tolkien criticism from 1920 to 1980 was a wish to attract the attention of those who knew only Tolkien's "scholarly" work to his "fairy stories" (let's be honest: it is *all* scholarly, in the finest sense of the word!) and to attract the attention of his fantasy fans to the delights of his other works, so far removed from the stuffy pedantry of so much scholarship on medieval language and literature.

Tolkien died before my husband and I started raising Paso Fino horses and Golden Retriever dogs, but I don't think he would have minded our calling our place Rohan. It was intended as a tribute.

Canon Norman Power

Birmingham, England

What tribute can express adequately our thanks to a writer who has brought so much happiness to so many millions? I was first enchanted by *The Hobbit* in 1937. The successive volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* were devoured with tense excitement. I have a compulsion to read again *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* every three years or so. The books have strangely powerful qualities. My own slight links with Tolkien are enormously precious.

Tolkien was richly gifted. His illustrations of *The Hobbit* were as enchanting and haunting as the story. Few poems in any language are as evocative as the Dwarves' Song in *The Hobbit*. Tolkien had a Dickensian gift for creating minor characters like Mr. Butterbur of "The Prancing Pony," and the garrulous nurse loth in the Houses of Healing.

But towering above the other gifts is the gigantic creative power which made a secondary world so real and peopled with convincing races, giving them languages and even hundreds of years of detailed history. Does any other work of fiction give the reader so overwhelming a feeling of supreme significance in a narrative? This strange gift brings a Miltonic and almost Biblical power to *The Lord of the Rings*.

More personally, I wonder how many lesser scribblers have felt (as I did), "If Tolkien can create a world and Lewis a country, surely I could manage one little island?" So he has moved others to share a little in the joy of creation. My own life, like that of millions of others, would have been sadly impoverished by the absence of Tolkien and his gifts so richly shared with us.

Pat Reynolds

Milton Keynes, England

When I first read *Beowulf*, I was overwhelmed by it. I was stunned by the completeness of the poem, where ideas and themes were so closely braided that, were it a basket, it would hold water. Shortly after, I first read J.R.R. Tolkien's "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*." I was studying at a university which encouraged the creative, the practical, the resourceful: that is to say, we spent many hours working with original texts, and comparatively few

working with commentaries, but even so, I had read enough polysyllabic penny-a-lining for Tolkien to show them up for what they were: ugly, and by their very ugliness, less useful than they could have been. A friend offered me *Finn and Hengist, the Fragment and the Episode*, and a few years later was threatening to divorce me because I had abstractedly made a few pencil glosses in his copy of *Exodus*. He also introduced me to Tolkien's fiction beyond *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In particular, to "Leaf by Niggle." The first time I read it, I found myself being overwhelmed again, in the old *Beowulf* way. But I found Niggle's journey beyond the tree a sudden shock. I am still not entirely happy with it, but then, I have not converted to Catholicism. I was recently asked by a radio interviewer if I didn't think...well...isn't all this fantasy stuff a bit...well...childish? That word always brings to mind the description of Arthur in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

his youth made him so merry with the moods of a boy ...
it pleased him not to eat
upon festival so fair, ere he were appraised of some
strange story or stirring adventure. (stanza 5)

Perhaps strange and stirring tales are considered childish because they are associated with change in the listener. I'm with the boyish Arthur, I like things that stir, and Tolkien's writings move me.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Waterloo, Ont., Canada

The last time I was asked to recall my associations with Tolkien in *Mythlore*, somebody else's memories were published over my name, so I will include the latter inside my text: this is the homage of Nancy-Lou Patterson, who wrote an essay on Tolkien in 1968, went to her first conference on ditto in the same year, and thereafter, finding her membership absorbed by the Mythopoeic Society, has never, as they say, looked back! I owe everything I have written since about mythopoeic literature to him, though I have never again written an article on his works alone.

In 1958 I had read all the works in print at that time by C. S. Lewis, and my bookseller (may he be forever blessed) said, "If you liked the Narnian Chronicles, I think you will like this," and put in my hand a copy of *The Hobbit*, to read first and pay for when I was able. He was right; it is still my favorite among Tolkien's books. In 1960, I was able to buy from England a beautiful set of *The Lord of the Rings*. I read this each night as I nursed my second-born child. In 1963 I spent a week in bed, vainly trying to prevent a miscarriage, and read *The Lord of the Rings* again. In 1964 I read them aloud to both my daughters, and a few weeks after I completed that monumental reading, my elder daughter was killed in an accident. That reading was, perhaps because of the circumstances, my last.

Of the three authors to whom *Mythlore* is devoted, Tolkien's death is the only one I knew about when it happened, because I attended a Mythopoeic Society discussion group meeting in Toronto and found

everybody in a state of mourning, and Marion Zimmer Bradley singing a lament in her beautiful voice. Like every other reader in the English-speaking world, I eagerly awaited the posthumous publication of *The Silmarillion*, and as few have been willing to say in public, I found the book anticlimactic. After you have walked in Middle-earth through *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, your imagination has been baptized. I have collected all the subsequent volumes of early Tolkien, now approaching ten, but nothing can match the sense of mystery, of dewy freshness, of the works published in Tolkien's lifetime. Reading him has been a very great gift, and I am grateful to him.

Ian Ballantine

Bearsville, NY

Working with J.R.R. Tolkien was one of the most thrilling things that Betty and I have in our memories of over 50 years of publishing. Tolkien was warm, witty, and had full perspective of his work. When he gave us his paintings for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien commented that, as one could see from the paintings, his greatest interest was in terrain and geography, and that he was circumspect about getting close to the people.

Arden Smith

Berkeley, CA

In attempting to write a brief centenary tribute to J.R.R. Tolkien, I made a number of false starts. One of these false starts went on for four pages before I realized that it was still inadequate. So much for a brief tribute!

What can I say about Tolkien that hasn't already been said? Perhaps only how his works have affected my own life—and that's practically a book in itself. What can I say about a man whose works inspired me to write tengwar headings on my sixth-grade schoolwork? What can I say about a man whose works inspired me, at the age of twelve, to spend almost fifteen months compiling, alphabetizing, and rewriting—without a computer and for nobody's benefit but my own—a glossary of words in a couple of made-up languages that nobody really even speaks? What can I say about a man whose works are such an important part of my life that my library of books and periodicals by and about him takes up over a dozen times as much shelf space as my collection of books by and about my second most favorite author? What can I say except: "Thank you, Professor Tolkien!"

Paula DiSante

Glendale, CA

I first read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* in 1975 as a high school Sophomore. My oldest sister was in the middle of reading the books at the time and she prodded me to give them a look, so certain was she that I would love them. I finally picked up *The Hobbit* and took the plunge. Beyond my sister's expectations, and to her utter astonishment, I inhaled the book and then dove head-long into *The Lord of the Rings*. I passed her up (she was loth to surrender *The Two Towers*, but I was not to be denied), and



J.R.R. Tolkien, with Betty and Ian Ballantine on right

rapidly finished *The Lord of the Rings* in a few marathon reading sessions. It was about two weeks later that she finally caught up with me.

For a long time after that first reading I was in shock. I couldn't believe that something so perfectly attuned to my private pendants and desires had simply fallen into my lap. I was an immediate convert, and drove my family crazy with Tolkien talk. But the scope of Middle-earth was so huge, so mind-boggling, that it took a second reading (two years later) for the full impact of Tolkien's mighty achievement to hit me. When it did, I knew my life was irrevocably changed. As I suspected would happen through the years (and many subsequent readings), I am a different person now because I read and loved Tolkien's works.

Encountering the Tolkien Calendars in the mid-70's first gave me the courage simply to *begin* thinking about illustrating Tolkien's world myself. By the time I was a Sophomore in college (there's something about those Sophomore years, I tell you!), I had the guts and audacity (at last) to paint a wall mural in my dorm—7 1/2 feet by 8 feet—of Gandalf and Frodo strolling down a road in Middle-earth. Looking back now on my old photos of the mural, the Cringe Factor is at near-fatal levels. Still, for a 19-year-old kid, it really wasn't *that* bad.

It took me until the early 80's (alas!) to finally discover the Mythopoeic Society. For someone who previously had to content herself with sharing a mad love of Tolkien with just one or two enlightened friends, this was a Godsend. The fact that I could now bring my own visual interpretation of Middle-earth to many others who likewise held Tolkien's writings as one of the grand passions of their lives made it all the sweeter.

Tolkien truly transformed my way of looking at the world—especially at literature, history, art and myth. He

made me realize the utter necessity of having fantasy and the fantastic in my life. For this I will be forever grateful. To paraphrase a passage from the Professor's own glorious writings, I can only say this: "For the gifts that you have given me I thank you, O Master of Middle-earth of whom were sprung *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion*, et al. What praise could I say more?"

Paul M. Lloyd

Secane, PA

I first read *The Lord of the Rings* in the mid fifties, shortly after reading a review in, of all places, the *New Republic*. I had loved fairy tales as a child, but could never have imagined such a story for adults. At first I was puzzled by what was going on, as I had never heard of *The Hobbit*. But by the time Frodo and his companions had reached Old Man Willow, I was caught in a net of wonder from which I have never escaped. I finished the *The Lord of the Rings* almost without stopping, with the feeling that I had been extraordinarily privileged to enter the world of Middle-earth and travel in it along with Tolkien, who had obviously spent many years there. I have read the book many times since, but still, in many ways, each time seems like the first time. I see in it now, of course, things I never noticed earlier, but the enchantment remains the same. I tried to explain to other people what *The Lord of the Rings* was like (this was before Tolkien had achieved great popularity) and found myself greeted with puzzled looks. Somehow it was impossible for me to put into words the fascination that the work had then and still has for me.

In a way, that is strange. Middle-earth is a creation of words and yet words cannot truly convey its fundamental reality. For it is a real world, in many ways realer than other worlds we live in day to day. Tolkien, a man of words, managed to go beyond words to a vision that can only be hinted at. Many have tried to imitate Tolkien, but none have succeeded: none have managed to achieve the realism that Tolkien brought to his tale. Perhaps it is not for everyone. Some people, with the best will in the world, have not been able to travel in Middle-earth and share the joy of those of us who have become honorary citizens of Tolkien's world. But for those who have, nothing they have ever read can equal it. No other work can bring the same kind of joy to our lives.

Marianne Russell

Mount Vernon, NY

Over the years interest in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has ranged from that of the many whose excited interest lay chiefly in the "good read" of an "adult fairy tale" to the smaller number who have an extraordinary love and detailed knowledge of the imagined other world of Middle-earth — its language, topography, paleography, and iconography. Recently, academicians have crowned *The Lord of the Rings* with scholarly apparatus and recognized it as a classic of modern literature. Similarly, popular recognition has been indicated by its translation into film, calendars, and other types of media recognition.

I myself in 1965 completed a doctoral dissertation on the Inklings. The dissertation was the result of a scholarly intent and a special interest in this type of *Mythlore*. I was privileged to have a dissertation mentor who did not insist that authors be dead before being written about nor that their work lie in the mainstream of an anxiety-ridden culture.

However, before I considered writing a dissertation on Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams, my interest, my true interest in Middle-earth had begun. Two things prompted me to read and read and read. The first thing that whetted my appetite was a *New York Times* book review of volume one of *The Lord of the Rings*. The article was accompanied by an illustration of a hobbit: a small, humanlike creature with hairy feet. This account of little, comfort-loving Brueghelesque people with hairy feet captures the essence of Tolkien's invention. One could almost say that Tolkien's "subcreation" of the familiar and the fantastic turns on the precision and the promise of a detail like hairy feet.

The other aspect of Tolkien's world of the Ring which piqued my interest at that early time was a bit of writing on the wall of the subway station nearest Columbia University. At a time when there was little graffiti on subway walls or cars, the statement "Frodo lives" stood out: not "Frodo is alive" or "Frodo didn't die" but "Frodo lives." The statement concerns an unlikely affirmation of a moral imperative. In a world of good and evil, *The Lord of the Rings* asserts a victory — however problematic, however transient, however painful — of good over evil. Frodo's real loss and symbolic recovery invite us all — to continue, to more than survive. Frodo lives, as Tolkien lives, to speak to us, to await us, to be our messenger from the beyond. The richness and marvelous detail of Tolkien's invented world quite rightly live on to touch us anew, to enchant us anew, to hover over and to transform the mundane. Yes, Frodo still lives.

Michael Underwood

San Diego, CA

When Autumn leaves do turn to gold
and a chill is in the air
I hurry home as day grows old,
to find my favorite chair.

The kettle on the stove does boil,
water to whistling steam;
providing respite from my toil;
spinning time into a dream.

A pomegranate freshly split
lies on the table nearby.
Candles round the room are lit,
as a storm crow passes by.

Hazelnuts, almonds and walnuts,
piled in a wooden bowl.
Champing and stamping chestnuts,
from a riddle game's costly toll.

The scent of oranges and spices
from the cup does gently waft.

The firelight that entices
dispels a cold and chilly draft.
The Redbook of the Westmarch
rests in its honored place.
The wind begins to blow the larch,
as I take it from the case.

The cover's gently lifted
past pages left behind,
where every word is gifted;
every page is mithril lined.

I am caught up in the journey
with the turning of each page;
entranced by Frodo's story
and the passing of an age.

I long to go upon that road;
in Ranger's boots I'd wander.
The light grows dim, the night grows old,
and still I put off slumber.

If roads go ever on and on,
must this story have an end?
The lone gull cries, the night is gone;
soon off to bed I'll wend.

As Autumn leaves do now grow old
and a chill is in the air,
I turn those leaves of solid gold
and wish that I was there.

28

Robert A. Hall, Jr.

Ithaca, NY

"You're in linguistics, so you ought to be interested in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and in the languages which he has invented to go along with his imaginary world of Middle-earth," people said to me in the 1960's. I paid no attention, because at the time it seemed that my friends' and others' enthusiasm for Tolkien was just a passing fad. It was not until the mid-70's that I read first those two works and then *The Silmarillion* and his further (by then posthumous) publications. I immediately became a Tolkienian and found in his *œuvre* a great source of both instruction and pleasure, such as I had come across in that of few other authors.

Especially in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien succeeded in taking a mass of motivic and cultural material of the type familiar to us from mediaeval literature and fusing it into an essentially integrated mythology. If this were all, it would not have the great significance for us of the late twentieth century (and, I dare think, of the twenty-first as well) that it has. Tolkien's greatest accomplishment was to reinterpret (as Tom Shippey has shown in his *The Road to Middle-earth*) this material in the light of modern attitudes, particularly towards power and its use and abuse. As Shippey also shows, Tolkien succeeded in integrating all five of the genres which Northrop Frye distinguished (epic, high mimesis, romance, low mimesis and irony) into a unified work of literature, as very few others have ever done. Tolkien's portrayal of his characters and of the world

they inhabit is so rich and so fully drawn that it can be fruitfully interpreted from many points of view, social as well as individual. This has been shown most recently by Jonathon Langford's perception of *The Lord of the Rings* (in *Mythlore* 67 [1991]) as a story of maturation affecting both the individual personages and the entire society of hobbits in their relation to the world around them.

Horace, in his *Ars Poetica*, describes the poet's aim as that of both teaching (*docere*) and pleasing (*placere*). From the latter point of view Tolkien succeeds, at least for me, fully as well as from the former. I find his skill in narration and in description such as to evoke in my imagination as full a picture of scenery and personages as I receive from reading the work of almost no other author. This is especially true of his visual imagery, in which he is second only to Dante and superior to all other writers. In both story-line and background, Tolkien's presentation is so pleasing as to make me want to return to his work time and again for both profit and enjoyment (although I have not gone quite as far as some of my friends who read *The Lord of the Rings* aloud all the way through, a chapter at a time, every year and then start all the way through, a chapter at a time, every year and then start all over again).

In my pantheon of "sub-creators," three occupy the topmost places. For poetry without music, I put Dante, in his *Divina Commedia*, at the top, and for poetry interpreted through music (but not as poetry alone), I esteem Wagner above all others, particularly, though not exclusively, in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. In a third category, prose narration, I put Tolkien as the equal of the two just mentioned. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that all three of these authors' work is in the field of fantasy rather than that of so-called "realistic" evocation of experience, which seems to be the dominant approach in modern literary activity. This is, I think, because fantasy enables the reader to penetrate farther into the world of ultimate "reality" (as far as humans can know it) which is embodied most of all in myth and in imagined scenes and actions based thereon.

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Craig Jay Brown

Fayetteville, AR

Professor Tolkien,

On the eve of your centenary many of us pause to gratefully remember you, your work, and your influence.

During a time when the old myths were being repudiated and the Church was deeply wounded, you brought us hope.

We drank deeply of Middle-earth, taking in with it the Purpose and Joy of the Eternal Lands.

As a teenager of the sixties, facing drugs, the draft, the Vietnam War and the turbulences of growing up, you showed me that being heroic in the Christian mode was both possible and intellectually respectable.

We now recognize how our culture for the past 40 years has been systematically destroying mens' archetypes,

leaving young men with few good role models. Mork and Homer Simpson may be funny on one level, but they are sick and destructive on another. Sadly, they are the rule on television today. In print we find men wounded, broken, and evil everywhere — the ilk of Boromir, Wormtongue, and the Black Númenóreans.

You gave us Aragorn, Faramir, Frodo and Sam to speak to the young as role models. You affirmed that Providence (God) is still involved with our world and our time, so that each of us will stand and fight our battles and hoe our own 40 acres as best we can — the victorious end has been ordained and Evil must ultimately fail.

The Morgoths and Saurons of the world, no matter how powerful they seem, in the end are always overthrown. Despair and nihilism are brought low. Caesar, Herod, Genghis Khan, Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin ultimately ended on the garbage heaps of History, brought down by the likes of Aragorn, Frodo and Sam.

You brought us gifts greater than you dreamed. May we use them wisely. Thank you.



Mindi M. Reid

Bellevue, WA

Tolkien: Reflections on the Shaping of Inner Landscapes

I was 13 or 14, as near as I can recollect, when a friend of my mother's suggested I read Tolkien; although I had seen his books on bookstore shelves numerous times, the garish and unidentifiable creatures and bulbous plants on their covers did not attract me. Knowing me to be already an initiate of Narnia, this lady thought I might be a candidate for fellowship in a still larger landscape of the imagination, and encouraged me to read the stories despite their covers.

The Hobbit went quickly, and an awakened curiosity then moved on to its longest reading-project ever: I do not remember how long it took me to complete the first adult work of mythopoetic fiction I had ever read, but when I closed *The Return of the King*, I and my world were irrevocably changed.

How can I describe that change, or the immense debt I feel I owe to the writer—a man from another time and culture, a man I would never have personal contact with, never meet — for bringing it about? How can I convey the shape-shifting that occurred in a young mind...the tapestried corridors that were discovered in my own subconscious as a result of a first contact with a truly immense Myth — a Myth that awakened echoes that still reverberate through the green-and-gold hallways down which I first followed hobbits and elves to beautiful (and sometimes bitter) Truths?

There is an Eye (and not all "Eyes" are Sauron's!) in the mind of man that may never open to see the wonders voiced into being by the great Tale-Teller, the Bard in the Brain: I have met people who live with that Eye tightly, defiantly shut, proud of their practical darkness. They feel no frisson at the sound of the word "elves"...;

J.R.R. Tolkien I might have remained unacquainted with the light that reveals the Country within...in its troubling, comforting, heartbreaking magnitude, or at best been content with a lesser light casting softer shadows.

Aslan's Country I hope is my destiny; but it is Middle-earth in which I live...complete with its fireside ordinariness; its mind-numbing losses and heroic commonplaces; its poignant hintings at the existence of eternal, transcendent beauties; its Shadow that is vanquished in one form only to rise in another...the Shadow I must be reminded to fight in myself and the larger world, no matter the inadequate weapons and ridiculous odds. My havens are very often grey, my joys bittersweet; the sonorous voice of Myth in *The Lord of the Rings* foreshadowed future understandings for me.... I recognize them consciously now; as a child they were stored away for distant need, picked up like precious magical stones along the magnificent and terrifying journey to Mordor and beyond.

...And it is to J.R.R. Tolkien that I owe an artistic education, the realization that "fairy tale" and "myth" are not terms to shun as representative of unsophisticated craft, unrelated to "real" life; in his mighty work of subcreation (a concept he introduced me to) I found incontrovertible evidence of literary nobility and significance that no critic has ever succeeded in causing me to question. There is a resonance in all works of truth: a Myth may be truer and of greater use in the living of life than gritty fictional cloning of contemporary "realities" (as so often approved of by a certain type of literary snob).

He set for me the standard by which all subsequent works of "fantasy" fiction are inevitably measured: I think all of us who honor Tolkien know when writers write authentic mythopoetic fiction because they have found the Country Within, and which cranked out crude imitations of such because wizards and dragons "sell." He has inspired the exploration of my own countries...I search them out now, and hope one day they may be adjudged landscapes of truth by others who have gained their wisdom on the long roads of Middle-earth.

The great mythic Story never ends; we characters come and go. Sometimes the Eternal Storyteller shows a human face: for me, one of His most evocative mortal masks was — and remains — John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.



Donald T. Williams, PhD

Toccoa Falls, GA

I read *The Lord of the Rings* like everyone else in my high school's intellectual subculture in 1968, and like everyone else enjoyed the game of interpreting all our experience in terms of its characters and events. We all took on the identity of one of the characters: I was Aragorn, and my best friends included Gandalf, Legolas, and Sam Gamgee. Perhaps I responded more enthusiastically to the spell than most, for I was finding Tolkien's world to be a powerful lens for bringing into focus the whole mystery of life. The building blocks of Middle-earth were the same as

those of our own world: tree and mountain, water, wood, and stone, starlit distances, beauty made poignant by the passage of time — and, with greater clarity than was usual, the conflict of Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, the heroic and sacrificial nature of the Quest. The vision was tragic, yet simultaneously hopeful; it was bracing, like a breath of wind from the sea. The thought even began vaguely coalescing in my mind that if a Christian ever really saw the mystery of life and came awake to the mystery of words, this might be how he would write. But of course all my experience denied the notion that such a thing could be.

Then I got to *The Tolkien Reader* and "An Essay on Fairy-Stories." And if so far I had been yawning and rubbing my eyes as the sunlight streamed in through the window, now I sat bolt upright in bed and looked out upon the day. Tolkien was coming to one more argument for taking fantasy literature as a serious art form, when suddenly the alarm clock went off without warning.

Although long estranged,
Man is not wholly lost or wholly changed.
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned.
And keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light
Through whom is splintered from a single white
To many hues, and endlessly combined
In living shapes that move from mind to mind
Though all the crannies of the earth we filled
With elves and goblins, though we dared to build
Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
And sowed the seed of dragons — 'twas our right
(Used or misused). That right has not decayed:
We make still by the law in which we're made.

My hands still shake with excitement when I read the note I scribbled into the margin: "I.e., Tolkien's theory is inherently Christian and assumes the *imago dei*." And as if he had known that such a revelation might seem too good to be true, he confirmed the poetry in plain prose one page later: "We make...because we are made...in the image of a Maker." There was only one thing to do: I slammed the book shut and went for a walk.

"We make still by the law in which we're made." It was one of those rare moments of white-hot insight which illuminates the whole dark world like a lightning bolt at midnight, drives away the shadows, and etches the true shape of things in your consciousness forever. The energy of it drove both my feet and my thoughts at a rapid pace as I tried to analyze it into its component parts. It knocked out the narrow and suffocating walls of my fundamentalist house while leaving the deep foundation of Truth on which they had been erected intact. So the life of the mind outside the narrow range of what was considered "spiritual," awake to nature and art and the mystery of life, was not incompatible with Christianity after all — in fact (what was really staggering), it depended for its meaning and validity on specifically Christian doctrine. Genesis,

creation, the *imago dei* had been in both my Bible and my mind for a long time; why had I never seen the connection? But there was more. What needed explanation was not my interest in philosophy and literature but the church's lack of it. Here they had a monopoly on the key to that whole dimension of man's life which separates him from the animals, and they not only didn't know it but wouldn't have seen why it mattered if they had. (As old mysteries were cleared up, new ones stepped forward to take their place.) But there was more: Christianity *had* to be true. Either the *imago dei* explained who I was and why I was here — either my creative urges were given meaning by their source in the ultimate Personal and Real — or life was totally absurd, meaningless, and futile. There were no other alternatives.

I had been living in two worlds — the world of Christian commitment and the world of the intellect and the imagination — and becoming increasingly incapable of holding them together. But now the two worlds rushed together and met, not with the crash of collision but with the embrace of marriage, and became one flesh. There was only one world, more alive and full of wonder than ever, and I was at home in it. The glory of its making, the tragedy of its fall, and the joy of its redemption — all were revealed in the part and the whole once you had the eyes to see. Mine now see Middle-earth — and Narnia, and the Field of Arbol, and Logres — wherever they look, which is to say they see Reality. To Lewis, Tolkien, and Williams I owe much of what vision of Reality I may have; but it was Tolkien who first put the key in my hands. Thanks.

Bonnie Callahan

Pasadena, CA

I am sitting in my studio gazing at the door which opens from the hall. Many pictures and bits of memorabilia adorn it, among them being several photographs. One is of my daughter, Arwen, aged 20 as of this day. Another is of my husband, Tim. There are also photos of art by colleagues in the animation industry, scenes of travel, cartoons, and also a xerox blow-up photo portrait of the author J.R.R. Tolkien. As I muse on this array of items, it occurs to me what an influential figure Tolkien has proven to be in my life.

Back in 66, a flaky, non-intellectual, Beatlemania college fresh (man? woman?) pulled the first volume of a book from the shelf in her Van Nuys home. It was a book her left-leaning brother had raved about for some months now. She strove to plow her way through this volume, wondering, "Why am I reading this? People my age don't...." (You have to remember that this was "Valley Girl" subculture circa the 60's.)

By the end of Vol. 3, a spell had been irrevocably woven and a life was utterly turned in its true direction. Twenty-six years later, that teenybopper sits here writing a tribute to the remarkable "guardian angel" of her life, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*. Had it not been for Tolkien, she might never have discovered the life of the mind his works beckoned her to and would surely not have discovered the fledgling

literary society hosting its Bilbo's and Frodo's birthday picnic (in 1968), nor one green-caped young man who had founded it and was later to become her husband for five years.

She would never have played with their daughter, Arwen, honed her mind on endless books, ideas, essays, shared innumerable friends and meetings and Mythopoeic Conferences, drawn and painted countless illustrations. Perhaps she might never have been given her major career break. At least one good thing in this life came out of Ralph Bakshi's production of *The Lord of the Rings*. No, make that two — not only entry into the adventuresome world of the animation business, but also a co-worker, whom she married in 1980.

Many blessings in my life seem to have come to me through the good offices of this J.R.R. Tolkien, to the degree that I hope he can experience the delight I feel at the magical connectedness of it all. I hope he knows full well how many more lives have been profoundly altered by his presence in our Middle-earth.

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Owen Barfield

East Sussex, England

About the celebration of the Tolkien Centenary, I am afraid I am going to disappoint you. Apart from the circumstance that energy is in shorter and shorter supply with me as time goes on, I have had to conclude, on reflection, that there is nothing I could say that others are not much better qualified to say, except that I knew and liked the man!

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Priscilla M. Drake

Webster Groves, MO

It's hard to remember just when we became acquainted with Tolkien. Perhaps it was reading in my college Alumnus that he had come in the 60's, wearing his FRODO LIVES T-shirt, to lecture to wildly cheering students.

We became more closely aware of his works (and of C.S. Lewis, too) in the early 70's, when 4 of our 5 children were attending a small private school. The books were recommended by several teachers. In fact, English class for the lowest ungraded grade consisted of the class reading aloud as many of Tolkien's books as possible. Our youngest, 9-year-old Judy (also the youngest and only feminine member of this class), was enthusiastic and recommended them highly. Unfortunately, considering myself "too busy," I only leafed through parts of the Introduction and the first chapter of *The Hobbit*. When my husband had to be immobilized under traction for his back, I started reading *The Hobbit* aloud to him. We found it transporting us to another and exciting time and place. Being immobilized physically, it is wonderful to be able to participate in adventures of the imagination. We were "hooked!"

After Bill became mobile again we determined to take turns nightly reading a chapter aloud before going to bed (when things were relatively quiet). The only trouble was, we could seldom stop after only one chapter! Tolkien was a master at leaving his characters in such precarious posi-

tions! So we raced through all four books about Middle-earth, breathlessly waiting to see what would happen next. We felt a sense of loss (as we suspect Tolkien did) after finishing the last chapter of the last book, and were grateful for his lovingly prepared Appendix A and B.

In retrospect, I think the reason the books enthralled us all so was because although the good forces seemed to be outnumbered so often by the evil ones, *someone* always rallied the others. If they had all done their utmost and faced almost certain doom, an outside force would appear unexpectedly, (as Aslan did in Narnia), to help tip the scales. The contests were not always exterior but occurred in various characters who struggled with inner fear, avarice, prejudice, thirst for power, or the "easiest" path. Both kinds of struggles symbolized in Tolkien's Middle-earth appear in our earth and our lives also. They are not minimized in the books but we are cheered and strengthened on our own way by reading about the final triumph of Tolkien's Fellowship in Gondor and the Shire and even of the final peace to be found by the small heroes Frodo and Bilbo, and the returning repentant elves after their last voyage.

Most recently, I re-read all these books for courage and comfort and as an escape from my sterile hospital room after having a heart operation last year. I found it still helped to escape to Middle-earth and its adventures again and receive renewed courage. How fortunate we are to have it to turn to!

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Alexei Kondratiev

Flushing, NY

If there is any one element in his work that best defines Tolkien's unique contribution to modern letters, it is his mastery use (and consequent validation) of the theme of *eucatastrophe* — a term he himself brought to the world's attention and popularized through his essay "On Fairy-Stories." "Happy endings" are, of course, by no means a novelty in literature, but in the modern age they have become suspect, and relegated to children's books and openly frivolous entertainment, or at best accepted as instances of a mannered (and therefore insincere) literary pose. With the elimination of God, and thus of any central meaning to existence, life is perceived to be absurd, except for the existential meanings we project onto that absurdity. But since such meanings have no impact on reality, we cannot expect life to follow patterns that provide aesthetic or moral satisfaction, and any literature that suggests otherwise is viewed as a deceitful sham. For much of this century intellectuals and artists have tried to deal with the cruelty of such a world-view by suppressing humanity's deepest spiritual aspirations. To avoid the pain caused by the frustration of those aspirations, they have developed a veritable phobia of "happy ending" concept — deciding, as it were, to learn to love ugliness rather than to have care about the final dissolution of beauty. This constant effort at "hardening the soul" has had far-reaching effects. One philosopher of religion recently expressed misgivings about the dangerous "consolation" Christianity provides,

its lack of respect for the "tragedy" of life. And one need only to listen to how those who dislike Tolkien describe him: they find him "soppy," "sentimental," they are repelled by the importance he gives to feelings they have ceased to take seriously.

Yet for many, reading Tolkien has been the first glimpse of a reality that could be compatible with the most profound of human needs, the first ray of warm light making possible the thaw of the "hardened" soul. Churches have long been preaching the same truths, yet Tolkien's medium has made the message far more compelling. Though deeply rooted in religious faith, it is not presented in religious terms, as a prescriptive belief-system: it is *experiential*, guiding the reader along the sub-creative paths that lead to the knowledge it seeks to convey. And it does not sidestep any of the anxieties and doubts that beset modern existence: its sorrows are real, the utter finality brought on by despair always looms as a possibility. So hope, when it comes at last, in spite of the horrors we have almost learned to accept, is all the more convincing. And so eucatastrophe, as a serious philosophical and literary concept and an object of belief has become re-acclimatized, through the power of Tolkien's art, in the modern environment.

René van Rossenberg Leiden, The Netherlands

As a child I had an insatiable appetite for reading. I would read anything I could lay my hands on. When I was about 11 years old I had finished the library of my father, which consisted mainly of war novels. I turned my attention to the book collection of my older brother, who had on his shelves three thick papercovers, being the Dutch edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. Its sheer size urged me to sink my teeth in them, but my brother advised me to read the prequel first. So I read *The Hobbit*, which I did not like all that much. Bilbo was too childish for me and the story too tame for my taste (no wonder, after all those war novels!). Yet Tolkien's style and imagination gave me enough to start eagerly on *The Lord of the Rings*.

I was completely captivated. Reading into the small hours with a flashlight under the blankets, for my mother had already told me to go to sleep, reading at breakfast, paying no attention at all at school for I was contemplating how the story would continue, the shock I felt reading the Khazad-dûm chapter; Gandalf dead! I was grieved and desperate.

Usually I quite quickly forget plots and names of characters of the books I have read, but *The Lord of the Rings* was burned into my memory. For years I did not re-read it; there was no point. I carried Middle-earth in my mind. After *The Lord of the Rings* I started to read other fantasy novels, but I could not stand them. The old publishers' adage that readers want more of the same is certainly not true for me. I constantly had the feeling that Tolkien was much better than what I was reading now, so I stopped reading fantasy altogether and nurtured two new pas-

sions: science fiction and Sherlock Holmes.

At the end of the seventies I returned to Tolkien. I was preparing for my high school exams and decided to include *The Lord of the Rings* in my list of 30 books for my English literature exam. It was the first time I re-read *The Lord of the Rings*, and although the impact was less than the first time, the plot, imagery, style and sense of history was still as perfect as I remembered it. By the way, my teacher removed the book from my list for "it is a children's novel and therefore not literature." Sir, you are wrong on several accounts.

Yet my new acquaintance with Tolkien started to grow into a passion. *The Silmarillion* was published in Dutch. I noticed other works by Tolkien and books on Tolkien, and my fate was sealed when I became a member of the Dutch Tolkien Society "Unquendor" (seven months after it was founded). Meeting fellow Tolkien fans stimulated me immensely and gave more depth to my Tolkien hobby. So on January 3rd I not only commemorated the birth of the man who filled my childhood with hobbits, gave Galadriel to this spotty adolescent, and left me as an adult a whole world to explore and to study, I also celebrated the international brother- and sisterhood of fans of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. I derive much pleasure in reading Tolkien magazines, corresponding with Tolkien fans all across the world (from Boise, Idaho to Volgograd, Ukraine, from Buenos Aires, Argentina to Helsinki, Finland) and meeting like-minded people at, for instance, the Oxenmoot in England. 1992 is the year of Tolkien fans, but also our year, the year of the Tolkien fan. Let's enjoy it.

Jorge Quiñonez San Diego, CA

No man in the fiction genre comes close to the accomplishment of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth. What the old Professor did over the period of his eight decade life span; that is the creation of a mythology, complete with players, scenery, language, history, *ad infinitum*. He was indeed, to use his invented word, the Master of Mythopoeia, "Master of the Making of Myths."

The *Star Trek* mythology, now the work of thousands of individuals, which is in its own right an extremely complex and elaborate myth (full of those extra details fans love), barely begins to compare with the life work of one John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.

The many thousands of pages of Tolkien's notes, calculations, diagrams, drafts, galleys, etc. now in the Bodleian library, Marquette Library, Christopher Tolkien's collection, and countless other private collections, are a tribute to the incredible determination of what one individual could achieve given enough time. I sometimes speculate if another writer was given the entire century to write the background for several novels all revolving around the same mythology, would they compare to the scope of Tolkien's work? I guess it is a bad experiment because it seems that all the fantasy fiction published

today only rarely puts in just one tenth of the work Tolkien put into his Middle-earth saga. The very fact that no one else has accomplished what he has in this century is a lasting testimony to his creativity, persistence, and love for the land where High-elvish Lords fought Balrog and Nazgûl, and a nobody Hobbit changed the course of history while at the same time saving it.

Joe R. Christopher

Stephenville, TX

Somebody (I forget where I read it) has said that one cannot imagine Milton or Wordsworth writing limericks; their understanding was that their poetic callings were too high and too serious for such playfulness, such triviality, (in some cases) such bawdry. Part of what I find interesting about Tolkien is his *range*. He has written everything from clerihevs (which will do for the equivalents of nonsense limericks) to an impressive attempt to create a mythology for England; everything from letters from Santa Claus ("Father Christmas") and variations on nursery rhymes to a great, long, and orderly romance. Of course, the bawdy and the erotic—the fabliau and the off-color limerick, let us say—are not part of his repertoire (unless those two sex stories which he mentioned to Clyde Kilby show up), and the realistic novel, in F. R. Leavis' sense, is not his goal nor (probably) within his gift; but the range that is there is amazing.

In this context, Tolkien's scholarly non-fiction is not surprising. Milton had his pamphlets and Wordsworth his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (as well as lesser known essays). But neither has any equivalent to Tolkien's drawings. (Milton played the organ and sang, but he did not — so far as I recall — write any music.) Tolkien's drawings may be of a rather primitive sort, but that does not invalidate this point about creativity.

The mystery of human creation has explanations, but none that represent a real consensus. No doubt Tolkien would have written (in a letter he never mailed) of the blessings of the Holy Spirit or of a saint. (One remembers how, in *The Silmarillion*, he allows for the Fall to have taken place before the humans appear; his is an orthodox imagination.) A psychiatrist would offer other terms.

However one explains it, the art works in line and color, in verse and prose, are there in a series of volumes. Of course, since they are all created by one individual, they reflect his personality — with all of its normal human quirks and, in his case, with an underlying strong morality ("There is not one law for elves and another for men" — I quote from memory and probably inaccurately). But, in Tolkien's works, the morality does not negate the impulse to play, to create small works as well as great ones, and to create the playful moments in the great ones. (Milton's Adam and Eve, before or after the Fall, have no impulse to sit by a campfire and sing nonsense songs.) It is certainly part of Tolkien's appeal to me — and, I believe, to others of his readers — that his works as a whole have this range, *The Lord of the Rings*, in particular, has this range within its greater unity.

Steven A. Schoenig, S.J.

St. Louis, MO

Though I did not make his acquaintance until seven years after he left this earth, I would count J.R.R. Tolkien as among the most formative influences on my life.

I was only in the eighth grade in 1980 when my godmother gave me a Christmas gift unsurpassed by any fairy godmother's — the boxed set of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. I still recall the mystery of all the strange names, the enchantment of a carefully woven and seemingly authentic history, and the sheer imaginative wonder of a tale of mythic proportions set within the beauty and terror of an all-too-real world.

For several years I read Tolkien's books annually, beginning each year on January 3rd, until I happened upon *The Silmarillion*. By now I was in high school, and the new book — far from dispelling the "lure of the backdrop," as Tolkien feared — only drew me more into the web of a "secondary world" crafted as no other before or since. As my interest in linguistics and philology developed, the prominent role of language — in an epic which found its origins in invented tongues — lifted Tolkien's opus to a level of my esteem which was, heretofore quantitatively, now qualitatively different from the regard I tendered all other books. I remember the thrill of discovery when I transliterated the elvish and dwarvish characters on the title pages of *The Lord of the Rings* — and thought I was the first to do so!

In college I made the best buy of my life. Amidst a pile of books for 99 cents each in a local discount store, I found a copy of Tolkien's *Letters*. Although I was not expecting much, I shelled out the dollar and bought myself an Easter present of manifold repercussions. At first I enjoyed those letters which discussed and illuminated the books I was so familiar with. But as my eyes were drawn to the more personal letters, I came to know a man whom I can only call a kindred spirit — a personality like mine and a genius towards which I could strive. The soul of this man attracted me and resonated within my own soul. Here I saw revealed a man of good humor, profound faith, charming idiosyncrasies, boundless creativity, tender compassion, and penetrating insight. My appreciation had moved from Tolkien the philologist to Tolkien himself. Who could not be stirred by, for example, the wartime "FS" letters to his son Christopher, with their poignant reflections and scenes crisply snatched from everyday life?

At every new stage in my life, my admiration for Tolkien had entered a new dimension, maturing as I matured. Now, after joining the Jesuits some five years ago and while currently pursuing philosophical studies preparatory to ordination, my respect for the man and his legacy has once again shifted. Now I take endless delight and find ceaseless fascination in his grasp of reality — his remarkable insight, both spiritual and philosophical, into the way the world works, into the meaning of life itself.

From shortest letter to longest tale he grants us a glimpse of the enduring reality behind the face of this world. The depths of his wisdom are not easily to be plumbed.

Personal memories aside, what was the genius of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien? I would not presume to sum it up in one brief point, but I can proffer an idea. One of Tolkien's fundamental discoveries in life was that one cannot create a language without creating a mythology which it expresses (or which expresses it). To me this is essential. It reveals the mystery of the Word itself. It means one cannot separate what one says from how one says it, one cannot divide form from matter, sound from sense. Ultimately, one cannot divorce Truth from Beauty, for they are one—and Tolkien has given us an insight into that One.



Jan H. E. Boom (Fangorn) Belfeld, The Netherlands

My name is Boom. If you translate it in English you find "Tree." As long as I can remember (in school I told everyone I was older than the humans—created the fifth day), from my childhood, I knew that Trees were important because they keep people alive.

So you can imagine when I read *The Lord of the Rings*—the best part was when I read about Treebeard the Ent, the eldest. Later (even better, but also with great sadness) I read in *The Silmarillion* when Yavanna created Telperion and Laurelin, and so the Ages of the Two Trees. From then I called myself Fangorn.

Great happiness I found in J.R.R. Tolkien, as I heard that he himself was very much in love with my "Tree" family, and that he spent much time with one in particular in a park in Oxford. I have the picture of those two on my office desk.

I do not know if he meant to, but I'm glad he, in a quest to also save humanity, told his readers that Nature (in the symbol of a Tree) must be saved and protected, and that there is hope for the future (even ours). As we read in *The Lord of the Rings* at the end: "then Aragorn cried: 'Yé! utúvienyes! I have found it! Lo! here is a scion of the Eldest of Trees!'" And a little bit further, in the Shire, where "a beautiful young sapling leaped up: it had silver bark and long leaves and burst into golden flower in April. It was indeed a malorn...."

Let this be my tribute in praise and honor of J.R.R. Tolkien—that in spite of what we have done to ourselves in destroying Nature, there is still hope for the future in Tolkien's words: "May your forest grow again in peace." My translation: "May our world be in peace again."

Thank you forever, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien.



Carl F. Hostetter

Crofton, MD

How can I express the profound influence that the life and works of J.R.R. Tolkien have had on my own life? It can perhaps be measured by the ever-increasing bulk of my library, assembled in order to more fully understand Tolkien's scholarly works and artistic creations; and by the

number of languages that I have studied or explored, Latin and Greek, Gothic, Old and Middle English, German, Welsh, and Finnish, and others, out of necessity for research into Tolkien's linguistic creations, and out of a linguistic aesthetic that through Tolkien I learned could exist and that I shared; and by the hours spent nearly every day reading and thinking and talking and writing about Tolkien; and by my burgeoning phone bill, reflecting hours spent every week talking with the greatest friend I have ever known, whom I met because of our shared interest in Tolkien's languages. By all these measures the overwhelming influence of Tolkien on my life can perhaps be assessed; but it cannot be expressed by any weighing or numbering, nor by any words, but only by the work that I do, to share what I and others learn about Tolkien's invented languages, and to encourage the wider appreciation and study of Tolkien's most treasured creations.



Jan C. Long

Wauwatosa, WI

It seems almost strange to me when I look back on important events in my life that one of those chief occurrences would be the first reading of a couple of books. Yet, I vividly remember my initial introductions to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

I believe I was in the 8th grade when a girlfriend of mine was telling me about a book she was reading who had a character with the strange name of Bilbo Baggins. "He lives in a place called Bag End," she continued, "and he has big furry feet!" I humored her by chuckling. She went on and on about this book until I was blue in the face. Yet, I did not forget the title—*The Hobbit*—or what she said about the book.

I did not pick up the book from the bookmobile (the traveling library van that parked near our family's house on a regular basis) until the following summer. And then I was hooked.

I made all sorts of exclamations while reading *The Hobbit* that first time. My mother would say things like "That must be a good book, Jan," while I would try to describe why it was. The closest I came to an explanation was, "The writing is so different from anything I've ever read!"

Needless to say, I had to read the sequel, *The Lord of the Rings*, to see what happens to Bilbo. My literary girlfriend was already wading through *The Ring* by this time; I got to it shortly after she finished it.

The bookmobile, which I relied heavily upon to bring me my lifeline of reading materials every three weeks, did not always have the volume of *The Ring* I needed at the time. I would have to request a copy from the bookmobile staff to bring it along the next time they came. So, I had to wait six weeks sometimes between volumes. Imagine my impatience!

My girlfriend has since gone on to bigger and brighter things (in her opinion): I do not think she re-read the

books. I have. In fact, I've lost count how many times I've read them. (Oh, yes, I received my first set of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* for Christmas before two more years had passed!) And yes, I do enjoy his other works too, especially *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales*.

Have I gone on to bigger and brighter things? In some ways, no, other ways, you bet. J.R.R. Tolkien is a guiding light in my life: he helped me to meet dear friends (one of whom I married). A new world of reading materials opened its gate to me too; I do not think I'd have read much fantasy without first reading Tolkien's books.

There is a lot I could still say about reading Tolkien. Yet, I think I shall let Tolkien's works do any more talking for me. Read these books. Read them every year for they are treasures to behold and not to hoard like a dragon does, sitting on his ill-gotten gold. Read them and enjoy them. Read them and love them.

28.

Lynn Maudlin

Altadena, CA

I have many wonderful memories of Tolkien's work. It was my brother who gave me *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* for Christmas one year — I don't recall if I was fifteen or sixteen. Craig was already away at UCSD. We took to writing each other letters in Elvish, although actually we wrote in English and only used the Elvish runes. But it was enough, the beginning of a new bond between us: we were moving out of being tormentor and victim and into the relatively unknown territory of true family. The gift of Tolkien and our letters were early steps on a long and worthy road.

Years later my son James read *The Hobbit* on his own and then started in on *The Lord of the Rings*. But the language structure and pacing were just a little beyond him and so I took to reading the books aloud, a chapter at a time. It was a priceless opportunity for a mother and her son, soon to embark on adolescence, to set aside nagging and whining and homework and curl up together on the sofa. It took us nearly a year to work our way from *Hobbiton* to Bree, Weatherhill and Rivendell, there and back again. It was on a drizzly Easter Sunday afternoon that we reached the Grey Havens and saw Frodo leave, knowing what he'd won and lost, knowing that some wounds are too profound to heal in this or any other earth, but also assured of redemption and the possibility of salvation, knowing that life is precious.

Reading Tolkien with my son helped solidify a bond between us that weathered raging teen-age hormones, moods and surliness; it's been more than a decade and James is now in college, looking tremendously like my brother circa 1968, and he aspires to many things, writing not least among them. As my brother and I begin to navigate the shoals of middle age, I see that we are close as few siblings are, and that my son and I are close as few of our contemporaries are. I thank God and thank Tolkien for creating that common ground, that Middle-earth.

Tim Callahan

29.

Pasadena, CA

Tolkien, Wagner and the Wild Lure of the North

It was back in 1964 when I was a freshman at the Chouinard Art School that I first became interested in (and, for a time, obsessed with) Norse Mythology. Throughout my high school years I had been an ardent Grecofile, focusing on Classical Mythology to the exclusion of everything else. This all started when I bought a paperback edition of Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*. I devoured that book, though the small section at the end on Norse myths did little for me. Somehow, the idea of gods who could be killed offended the rigid definitions of my adolescent mind. In a way, glutting myself on the Greek myths to the point that I was bored with them paved the way for my later acceptance of the Norse. But what actually led me into the world of northern myth was the music of Richard Wagner. Again, the seed had been planted in my high school years. While I was in high school I often listened to a classical music program in the early evening. The show's theme was the Magic Fire music from *Die Walkure*. One night, when I was visiting a friend, I mentioned how magical I found that music. He was quite a Wagnerian and introduced me to the *Ring of the Nibelung*. My interest was stirred, particularly when I remembered having read Hamilton's unsatisfyingly abbreviated rendition of a part of the *Volsunga Saga*. I was particularly taken with the primeval quality of the myth in Wagner's synthesis, most of which was conveyed by the richly emotional music. My interest was further stirred when I decided to read the librettos of the *Ring* operas, since the copy in the school library was illustrated by Arthur Rackham. One can imagine the effect that book had on me, an illustration major. The double assault, visual and auditory, was more than I could withstand, and I had to know as much about the Norse myths as I could. The result was not only a thorough reading of the mythology, including the *Eddas*, but, since the material I was reading kept alluding to them, an investigation of the Icelandic family sagas. By the time I had graduated from Chouinard, I had read over thirty sagas, much of the material of which I related to long-suffering friends. That they remained my friends attests to the sincerity of their regard for me.

I had gotten a good start in all of this when my roommate came back from vacation at the beginning of our Junior year (1966) insisting that I read this series of books he'd discovered. He started me out with *The Hobbit*. I loved it, of course, but what struck a resonating chord in me was that, excluding the Shire, Middle-earth was Midgard. As I read *The Lord of the Rings* I kept finding echoes of the northern myths. Yet, like Wagner, Tolkien had created a new synthesis. Unlike Wagner, his work didn't carry the onus of being co-opted by the Nazis. Likewise, Tolkien's heroes transcend the Teutonic mold more effectively than do Wagner's. Wagner and Rackham introduced me to the wild northern myths so full of raw potential and promise, but it was in the richness of Tolkien that I found the fulfillment of that promise.

Gloriana St. Clair

University Park, PA

Hammerstrokes with Compassion: A Paean

My 1969 dissertation was one of the first to treat Tolkien as a subject for scholarship. Over the intervening years, colleagues often ask what attracted me to *The Lord of the Rings* and why it continues to engage so many readers.

Literature's enduring tasks are to entertain and to instruct. While Tolkien's craft enhances the quality of our enjoyment, it also permits him to teach twentieth-century readers the lessons of *Beowulf* and Northern literature: courage and action. Lewis summarized the Northern qualities of *The Lord of the Rings*: If we insist on asking for the moral of the story, that is its moral: a recall from facile optimism and wailing pessimism alike, to that hard, yet not quite desperate, insight into Man's unchanging predicament by which heroic ages have lived. It is here that the Norse affinity is strongest: hammerstrokes but with compassion. The compassion is, of course, Tolkien's unique addition to the heroic tradition of the North.

Tolkien had devoured the materials of Northern literature in the same way that Charles Williams had devoured Arthurian literature and Lloyd Alexander Celtic literature. Many such writers have served up a banquet of raw vegetables from the feasts with the myths coming to the reader almost directly. In Tolkien's work, the old stories have been stewed, combined with other materials, and reconstituted as part of a different cohesive whole.

Everything Tolkien used from Northern literature is changed and altered to meet the demands and needs of his original creation. Pieces of story, bits of character, description of implements, themes and motifs, manners and customs are all borrowed, but nothing is left unaltered. In each instance, Tolkien changes materials to serve the needs of his own stories. The existence of earlier versions of many of his works shows that he is one of the finest craftspeople of the century. He wrote, revised, and re-wrote everything. He niggled over details until he achieved perfection in story and style. He forged the raw materials of Northern literature into *The Lord of the Rings* with a level of craft that ranks him with top writers in world literature.

Some critics tantalize readers by suggesting that somehow if they knew enough about Northern literature, *The Lord of the Rings* would be a novel with a key. Yet my lifelong studies conclude that no description of Tolkien's sources of inspiration and study can provide a simple explanation. Studying his works reveals Tolkien as subcreator. The master artist is at work, practicing his craft, engaging in the process described in that most original essay "On Fairy-Stories." Tolkien wanted to bring the power of Northern mythology and literature into modern times because he greatly valued the lessons of courage and action that he had learned there. He accomplished that goal, and the marriage of hammerstrokes with compassion has been a most meaningful life lesson for me.

Eric Rauscher

Berkeley, CA

In eighth grade I broke my arm acting stupid with a friend on a rope. It was a nice break, since instead of being in gym I had to work in the library. I had read all the Tom Swift junior books by that time and it was on to Heinlein and the like. Then I found an article entitled "Oo, Those Awful Orcs." The world described was so fascinating that I had to read the book. That Christmas I was in Cleveland for the holidays, and when my great-aunt asked what I wanted as a present, I took her to a bookstore and had her buy *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* for me. Funny that such a negative review could start such a positive attraction. I remember giving an oral book report in my freshman English class in high school on *The Hobbit*. It took me, as I recall, half an hour, and I am sure I gushed all the way from Bywater to Mount Doom.

I have now read *The Hobbit* to my daughter twice and *The Lord of the Rings* once. My youngest will soon be old enough to be read to. Not soon enough for me.

Sarah Beach

Los Angeles, CA

Before I reached junior high school, I had, I thought, read all there was to find of fairy tales and mythology (being a self-sufficient type, I never thought to ask a librarian), and had so drifted to science-fiction. By junior high school, I was regularly buying paperback books (in batches of 5 or even 6). I would see this set of 4 books, but knowing nothing about them, I kept passing them by — after all, they were 95 cents apiece(!) at a time when most of the books were 65 or 75 cents. (What can I say? It was 1967.)

Yet, finally, because friends had read *The Hobbit* and raved about it, I bought that one. Oh, the joy! Here was that which I had longed for! That was in the fall. For Christmas, I received *The Lord of the Rings* — and read it in four days. Memory says I immediately re-read it, but I'm not sure. In any case, I did read it three times that first year.

I probably would have become a medievalist in any case — my interests ran that way long before I met Tolkien. But certainly, Tolkien's example encouraged me to approach my studies — and indeed all studies — with love, to enjoy fully the world of the intellect.

A couple of years after Tolkien died, I wanted to articulate for myself his impact, on myself and, I hoped, on others:

Marvel Maker: J.R.R. Tolkien

A singer of songs had walked among us,
Waking our wonder from warped dreams.
He gave us a world of truth and marvel
Where choices reached out to high and low.
He opened minds to imagination,
Its ripples and laughter of highborn joy.
But from this world he has passed onward
To join the Singer of All Songs.
Yet he has left us his Tree of Tales,
May we care and tend it in his name.

Glen GoodKnight

My Gratitude

Monterey Park, CA

Books became friends at an early age. I remember going to the public library after school at the age of seven or eight to browse the children's section, and seeing what must have been a first American edition of *The Hobbit*. The memories of the color illustrations, particularly Bilbo up in the eagles' eyrie, are still there. But, alas, the book was too hard for me to read at that time. I was still on the level of *Babar*. I seem to have always loved books that had some element of the marvelous or of fantasy in them. This led to science fiction as a teenager. In late 1956 or early 1957, when I was in tenth grade, several of my friends told me about a new book that I had to read. "Was it science fiction?" "No," they said, "it was Fantasy." I wasn't sure what that was, but it was explained to me that instead of taking place on another planet, it happened in another world. It took awhile for this distinction to sink in. "Alright" I said, "I'll try it." I was told that it was three books long, but counting the "prequel" it was actually four. Up to this point I had preferred short stories that I could finish in one day, and was intimidated and discouraged by such length. It was their continuing discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* in the following days that finally intrigued me enough to take the plunge.

To describe something of my experience I give two quotes from C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien:

... the first reading of some literary work is often, to the literary, an experience so momentous that only experiences of love, religion, or bereavement can furnish a standard of comparison. Their whole consciousness is changed. They have become what they were not before. (Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 3.)

I coined the word 'eucatastrophe': the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears.... And I was there led to the view that it produces its peculiar effect because it is a sudden glimpse of Truth, your whole nature chained in material cause and effect, the chain of death, feels a sudden relief as if a major limb had suddenly snapped back.... You have not only that sudden glimpse of the truth behind the apparent Ananké [necessity, constraint] of our world, but a glimpse that is actually a ray of light through the very chinks of the universe about us. (Tolkien, *Letters*, p. 100.)

After reading and then re-reading certain portions, I wanted more. But in 1957 there was *no more* — at least it seemed so at first. Checking bibliographies and indexes in the Los Angeles Public Library, I did find a reference to a short work called "Leaf by Niggle," that had been published in 1945 in *The Dublin Review*. Did the library have this periodical? Yes! I eagerly filled out the call slip, and waited forty anxious minutes while the volume was called forth from the musty stacks deep in the core of the building. At last it came, and I sought out a quiet place alone. The little courtyard near the children's room was empty — except

for sparrows chirping in the center tree, and I eagerly sat down and began to read. — Oh, the wonder, oh, the silent awe that fell upon me. Like *The Lord of the Rings*, I had never read anything like this!

I continued my search by trying to read other "fantasy." Fletcher Pratt's *The Well of the Unicorn* and E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* were not the same. One of my Tolkien friends told me about *The Chronicles of Narnia* by Lewis, which was another life-changing revelation. They, and then the Ransom trilogy, watered and nourished the seed that Tolkien had previously placed in the barren terrain of my mind and spirit. Both these men had been life-long friends. It was at least five years more before I learned of this friendship and of the Inklings, and also came to know Charles Williams' metaphysical novels and jewel-like poetry.

That was all more than twenty-five years ago, when I could stand the isolation no longer and began the steps that led to The Mythopoeic Society, and the many people I have known through it. That is a story by itself.

It was J.R.R. Tolkien, and then the other Inklings, who gave me their gifts and shaped the living space of my mind. During this special Centenary year I have organized weekly readings of two or three chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*. We will finish in September, just in time for Frodo and Bilbo's Birthday Party and the Celebration of the 25th anniversary of The Mythopoeic Society. How deeply satisfying to hear the story read aloud by a variety of voices; to observe new people catch the excitement for the first time; to recall yet again all the richness of the story for myself through the reading and following discussion. This is good. Thank you Ronald, thank you for being true to yourself and your vision! Thank you for your gift!



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