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Abstract

Uses Tolkien's letter (#43) of 1941 to his son Michael as a springboard for discussing the alternatives Tolkien presents there—renunciation, physical gratification, friendship, and love. Gives examples of each in Tolkien's works.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Views on friendship; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Views on love; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Views on the sexes

Emotion with Dignity

J.R.R. Tolkien and Love

Paul Nolan Hyde

Some years ago I had the opportunity to formally address the vast array of literary criticism leveled at J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*. The occasion was the defense of my Masters Thesis¹ wherein I attempted to demonstrate that no one but a dunderhead would dare to disparage even the doodlings of the Master. My affection for Tolkien and his creations were already in full bloom and I as sallied forth, I felt that invigorating rush of adrenaline that comes to every knight errant on the morning of his first tilt. Looking back on it, I suppose I didn't do too badly. What little embarrassment that I have felt over the years, as I have reread my squeaky protestations, has been at realizing that my little leaps into the breach were in areas where Tolkien himself could have pulverized the opposition and chose not to do so. Amidst the critical furor over his fantasy works, however, J.R.R. Tolkien seldom took up the gauntlet. Lin Carter, in his *Tolkien: A look behind The Lord of the Rings*², quotes from the transcript of an interview between Professor Tolkien and Henry Resnik, which explains in part his reticence:

He finds the attentions of his enthusiastic following rather embarrassing and his notoriety a bit of a bore. He particularly feels that studies of his work (such, I presume, as this one) to be an annoyance. He feels that they are premature. When asked if he approved of this sort of intensive research, he replied: "I do not, while I am alive anyhow." He went on to say that he has read some of these studies, "and they are nearly all either psychological analyses or they try to go into sources, and I think most of them are rather vain efforts" (p. 29).

One of the more egregious commentaries to which Tolkien would have undoubtedly objected, albeit tacitly, was Cathrine Stimpson's *J.R.R. Tolkien: Columbia Essays on Modern Writers*³, which not only missed the point as to what Tolkien was trying to achieve, but also mistakenly accused him of being possessed of an insensate and outdated view of the relationship between the sexes. She specifically laments the "fact" that "Tolkien is irritatingly, blandly, traditionally masculine" (p. 18). Later she is quite abusive to Tolkien's apparent attitude toward women when she takes offense at his description of Shelob and the implied fickleness of the Entwines. She adds,

It is hardly surprising that Tolkien generally ignores the rich medieval theme of the conflict between love and duty. Nor is it startling that the most delicate and tender feelings in Tolkien's writing exist between men. Fathers and sons, or their surrogate figures, also receive attentive notice. When Tolkien does sidle up to genuine romantic love, sensuality, or sexuality, his style becomes coy and infantile, or else it burgeons into a mass of irrelevant,

surface, descriptive detail. Unlike many very good modern writers, he is no homosexual. Rather, he simply seems a little childish, a little nasty, and evasive (pp. 19-20).

For the likes of those weaned on D.H. Lawrence, J.D. Salinger, and Harold Robbins, *The Lord of the Rings* may not be as prurient as some might desire. But that kind of repartee to Ms. Stimpson does beg the question a little. At some point we need to consider Tolkien's personal views on love and discover those elements as manifested in the themes and characters of his stories. To my knowledge, the best precis of Tolkien's philosophy on human relationships is found in the *Letters*, no.43, written to his son Michael in March of 1941. While it is much too long to quote here in full, it is well worth the effort to study in detail, addressing as he does almost all of the concerns that a young man might have approaching his twenty-first birthday. The first printed paragraph of the letter outlines the possible courses that a man might take with the opposite sex.

A man's dealings with women can be purely physical (they cannot really, of course: but I mean he can refuse to take other things into account, to the great damage of his soul (and body) and theirs); or 'friendly'; or he can be a 'lover' (engaging and blending all of his affections and powers of mind and body in a complex emotion powerfully coloured and energized by 'sex'). This is a fallen world. The dislocation of sex-instinct is one of the chief symptoms of the Fall. The world has been 'going to the bad' all down the ages. The various social forms shift, and each new mode has its special dangers: but the 'hard spirit of concupiscence' has walked down every street, and sat leering in every house, since Adam fell. We will leave aside the 'immoral' results. These you desire not to be dragged into. To renunciation you have no call (L, p. 48).

Without going into the long, though interesting history regarding sexual relationships as espoused by Traditional Christianity, let us here say that J.R.R. Tolkien holds to the views of his own religion, in the general sense that something has been amiss with the sexual relationship between men and women since the days of Adam and Eve. Leaving that aspect aside, the father Tolkien presents four options to his son Michael: renunciation, physical gratification, friendship, or love. It should be profitable to address each of these alternatives in their turn.

Renunciation

When Tolkien says to Michael "To renunciation you have no call", there are at least two obvious interpretations possible. First, Tolkien may have been saying to his son

that there was no necessity for Michael to avoid women, tacitly suggesting that Michael's temperament was such, in his father's estimation, that he could live up to the principles of heterosexual love that he would set forth in the letter. A second possibility suggests that Michael had no ministerial "call" which in Roman Catholicism required celibacy, a call to which his older brother, John, had responded a few years before.

Celibacy in *The Lord of the Rings* is not lauded *per se*, but the importance of singularity for a "call" is implicit. Humphrey Carpenter makes an interesting observation about the beginning of the New Hobbit story, that which would become *The Lord of the Rings* in his *Biography*.

Tolkien had as yet no clear idea of what the new story was going to be about. At the end of *The Hobbit* he had stated that Bilbo 'remained very happy to the end of his days, and those were extraordinarily long'. So how could a hobbit have any new adventures worth the name without this being contradicted? And had he not explored most of the possibilities in Bilbo's character? He decided to introduce a new hobbit, Bilbo's son — and to give him the name of a family of toy koala bears owned by his children, 'The Bingos'. So he crossed out 'Bilbo' in the first draft and above it wrote 'Bingo'. Then another idea occurred to him, and he wrote it down in memorandum form (as he was often to do during the invention of this new story): 'Make return of ring a motive.' (pp. 185-186)

Indeed, in *The Return of the Shadow*, the first draft of the story contains the following in recounting the Long-expected Party:

'I have called you all together,' Bilbo went on when the last cheer died away, and something in his voice made a few of the Tooks prick up their ears. 'First of all to tell you that I am immensely fond of you, and that seventy years is too short a time to live among such excellent and charming hobbits' — 'hear, hear!' 'I don't know half of you half as well as I should like, and less than half of you half as well as you deserve.' No cheers, a few claps — most of them were trying to work it out. 'Secondly to celebrate my birthday and the twentieth year of my return' — an uncomfortable rustle. 'Lastly to make an *Announcement*.' He said this very loud and everybody sat up who could. 'Goodbye! I am going away after dinner. Also I am going to get married.'

He sat down. The silence was flabbergastation. It was broken only by Mr Proudfoot, who kicked over the table; Mrs Proudfoot choked in the middle of a drink.

That's that. It merely serves to explain that Bilbo Baggins got married and had many children, because I am going to tell you a story about one of his descendants, and if you had only read his memoirs up to the date of Balin's visit — ten years at least before this birthday party — you might have been puzzled (RS, pp. 14-15).

A few paragraphs later we are favored with another bit of hobbit lore that bears citing. After recounting the fact that Bilbo's personal assets were essentially nil, the narrator queries

Then how could he get married? He was not going to just then — he merely said 'I am going to get married'. I

cannot quite say why. It came suddenly into his head. Also he thought it was an event that might occur in the future — if he traveled again amongst other folk, or found a more rare and more beautiful race of hobbits somewhere. Also it was a kind of explanation. Hobbits had a curious habit in their weddings. They kept it (always officially and very often actually) a dead secret for years who they were going to marry, even when they knew. Then they suddenly went and got married and went off without an address for a week or two (or even longer). When Bilbo had disappeared this is what at first his neighbours thought. 'He has gone and got married. Now who can it be? — no one else has disappeared, as far as we know.' Even after a year they would have been less surprised if he had come back with a wife. For a long while some folk thought he was keeping one in hiding, and quite a legend about the poor Mrs Bilbo who was too ugly to be seen grew up for a while (RS, pp. 16-17).

In the second version of the chapter, no announcement of an upcoming marriage is made, but the Party guests do speculate: "Is he going to get married? Not to anyone here tonight. Who would take him?" (RS, p. 25) In the third version of the Chapter, which is somewhat different in its temporal setting, Bingo is the protagonist, appearing as the son of Bilbo. In relating Bilbo's past eccentricities, the narrator includes the following:

He did two more things that caused tongues to wag: he got married when seventy-one (a little but not too late for a hobbit), choosing a bride from the other side of the Shire, and giving a wedding feast of memorable splendour; he disappeared (together with his wife) shortly before his hundred-and-eleventh birthday and was never seen again (RS, p. 29).

Bilbo's wife and Bingo's mother was Primula Brandybuck, she who in later story developments would be the mother of Frodo. As a quick aside, I find it interesting that during the Second Phase of the writing of the chapter that Bingo is described thusly: "He was the son of poor Primula Brandybuck who married late and as a last resort Drogo Baggins (Bilbo's second cousin but otherwise quite unimportant)" (RS, p. 234). Could that not refer to the ugliness factor that was suggested in the first version when the Shire-folk wondered where Bilbo was keeping his wife? In the fourth version of "A Long-expected Party", Bingo is suddenly no longer Bilbo's son, and Bilbo's marriage has been rejected for some reason. Christopher says, without elaboration, that for him that rejection was an inevitable development (RS, p. 36). It is at this point, however, as Carpenter points out above, that the importance of the One Ring also surfaces (RS, p. 42).

It is to me intriguing that neither Bilbo or his heir (regardless of nomenclature) have placed upon them by the author the responsibilities of a husband and father once the Ring is part of the story in earnest. The Ringbearers have extraordinary pressures placed upon them and all that they do with the Ring is primarily for the salvation of their fellows. Both Bilbo and Frodo sense that it is their responsibility to bear the Ring to its destiny, as if they had been "called" to do it. Bilbo was "meant" to find

the Ring, Gandalf says (I, p. 65). To Frodo Elrond remarks, "I think that this task has been appointed for you" (I, p. 284). They were both part of a larger plan in which they had a small, but overwhelmingly significant part. Are we dealing with the dreaded Allegory here? Are Bilbo and Frodo the faithful celibate priests bearing the Ring like the Cross of Christ? I think not. It is merely a tacit recognition on Tolkien's part, whether we agree or not, that there are some duties that are so consuming that family life would be an unfair burden to all concerned. In concert with this idea, I find it equally fascinating that the Wizards, the Istari of the Valar, do not marry, even though one of their spiritual peers of the Maiar, Melian, does so.

Physical Gratification

J.R.R. Tolkien spends a great deal of time expressing his views regarding the potential problems with unbounded sexual pleasure in his letter to Michael, even the titillation of the loose woman.

You may meet in life (as in literature) women who are flighty, or even plain wanton — I don't refer to mere flirtatiousness, the sparring practice for the real combat, but to women who are too silly to take even love seriously, or are actually so depraved as to enjoy 'conquests', or even enjoy the giving of pain — but these are abnormalities, even though false teaching, bad upbringing, and corrupt fashions may encourage them (L, p. 50).

Tolkien also suggests that even women who appear to be wanton, by their speech and other conduct may be following the crowd rather than their own basic inclinations.

Unless perverted by bad contemporary fashions they do not as a rule talk 'bawdy'; not because they are purer than men (they are not) but because they don't find it funny. I have known those who pretended to, but it is a pretence (L, pp. 50-51).

In one of his typical footnotes to the letters, Tolkien explains what he means about wanton women in literature.

Literature has been (until the modern novel) mainly a masculine business, and in it there is a great deal about the 'fair and false'. That is on the whole a slander. Women are humans and therefore capable of perfidy. But within the human family, as contrasted with men they are not generally or naturally the more perfidious. Very much the reverse (L, p. 50n).

Given that positive view of womankind, is it any wonder that his portrayal of women in his fiction is primarily chaste, even though some are quite openly and forcefully heroic. Given also his choice to tell the tale in the style of the Traditional Fairy Tale, is it not equally necessary to portray his women in concert with that romantic tradition?⁴ Continuing his discussion about human sexuality, Tolkien addresses the issue of incontinence.

However, the essence of a *fallen* world is that the *best* cannot be attained by free enjoyment, or by what is called 'self-realization' (usually a nice name for self-indulgence, wholly inimical to the realization of other selves); but by

denial, by suffering. Faithfulness in Christian marriage entails that: great mortification. For a Christian man there is *no escape*. Marriage may help to sanctify & direct to its proper object his sexual desires; its grace may help him in the struggle; but the struggle remains. It will not satisfy him — as hunger may be kept off by regular meals. It will offer as many difficulties to the purity proper to that state, as it provides easements. No man, however truly he loved his betrothed and bride as a young man, has lived faithfully to her as a wife in mind and body without deliberate conscious exercise of the *will*, without self-denial. Too few are told that — even those brought up 'in the Church'. Those outside seem seldom to have heard of it. When the glamour wears off, or merely works a bit thin, they think they have made a mistake, and that the real soul-mate is still to find. The real soul-mate too often proves to be the next sexually attractive person that comes along. Someone whom they might indeed very profitably have married, if only —. Hence divorce, to provide the 'if only'... But the real soul-mate is the one you are actually married to (L, p. 51).

Under the philosophical circumstances, it is easy to imagine the implicit tension for Aragorn when Eowyn expresses her devotion to him. She is serious, he realizes that. She is desirable, he realizes that. Part of the problem that Aragorn experiences has to do with Tolkien's view of one of the major biological differences between men and women. Women, he asserts,

are instinctively, when uncorrupt, monogamous. *Men are not*..... No good pretending. Men just ain't, not by their animal nature. Monogamy (although it has long been fundamental to our inherited *ideas*) is for us men a piece of 'revealed' ethic, according to faith and not to the flesh. Each of us could healthily beget, in our 30 odd years of full manhood, a few hundred children, and enjoy the process. Brigham Young (I believe) was a healthy and happy man (L, p. 51).

Aragorn could accommodate Eowyn given his eventual position as monarch, but that is not his "revealed" ethic either. He is not a Christian as far as the literal story line goes, but his creator is, and thus he is faithful to Arwen in Tolkien's terms. On the other hand there are others in Tolkien's works who are undeniable lechers, but their lechery is never completely explicit: Wormtongue's lust for Eowyn among the Rohirrim, Morgoth's unspeakable thoughts as Luthien stands before him in Thangorodrim, Celebrian's capture by the orcs in the Misty Mountains, Meglin's desire for Idril in Gondolin, to name but a few. One of Tolkien's saving graces is that he cannot bring himself to graphically depict sexual violence. By the same token, he is not prepared to introduce his readers to voyeurism either.

Friendship

Friendship is a principle of great importance for Tolkien, but in his letter to Michael he discusses the problems associated with a man and a woman being "just friends".

In this fallen world the 'friendship' that should be possible between all human beings, is virtually impossible

between man and woman. The devil is endlessly ingenious, and sex is his favorite subject. He is as good every bit at catching you through generous or tender motives, as through baser or more animal ones. This 'friendship' has often been tried: one side or the other nearly always fails. Later in life when sex cools down, it may be possible. It may happen between saints. To ordinary folk it can only rarely occur: two minds that have really a primarily mental and spiritual affinity may by accident reside in a male and a female body, and yet may desire and achieve a 'friendship' quite independent of sex. But no one can count on it. The other partner will let him (or her) down, almost certainly, by 'falling in love'. But a young man does not really (as a rule) want 'friendship', even if he says he does. There are plenty of young men (as a rule). He wants *love*: innocent, and yet irresponsible perhaps (L, p. 48).

Tolkien's conclusion is, then, that love is primarily between men and women, and friendship is primarily between persons of the same sex. Stimpson's comment about Tolkien not being a homosexual is quite accurate; the option does not occur to him in 1941. Whatever our own personal orientations or preferences may be, I think that Tolkien would still say that friendship really ceases to exist when sex becomes a factor in the relationship. In the following paragraph, Tolkien discusses Chivalric love which for him, I think, is the prime example of 'friendship' between men and women run amuck. The problem, no matter how wonderful the relationship, is that deifying another fallen human being, making him or her the object or reason of noble conduct, is false and at best make-believe. If a young man takes his eye off women as they really are, as companions in shipwreck not guiding stars, three possible ills occur: first, when a young man finally realizes that his guiding star is somewhat tarnished, he is apt to become cynical; second, exalting a fellow human being tends to the neglecting of the beloved's own desires, needs and temptations; and finally, under this delusion young people expect that true love is a fire from outside one's self, something to be warmed by in a cold world, not something that is generated from within. (See L, p. 48)

Stimpson's criticism about Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* being "irritatingly, blandly, traditionally masculine" is wholly unfair because Tolkien had not proposed to write a love story; he had set about to write a tale about friendship. And if the story is about masculine friendship rather than feminine friendship, who should be surprised? Tolkien's deepest personal associations, outside of his own family, were with men.

Without question the most famous of masculine friendships to which Tolkien was party must be the Inklings, which usually are limited to Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. Several others, however, were part of that initial group and remained essentially loyal while it existed: Warren H. Lewis, C.S. Lewis' brother; Owen Barfield, a close friend of CSL; R.E. Havard, Lewis' and Tolkien's physician; and Hugo Dyson, a Lecturer of English Literature at Reading University. The primary characteristic that marked their friendship, other than the

common interest they all had in the Arts and Letters, was their humor which sometimes was almost abrasive.

Nicknames were part of the humor: Tolkien was "Tollers", Warren Lewis was "Warnie" and The Captain" (L, p. 84); R.E. Havard was "Honest Humphrey" (L, p. 109), the "Red Admiral" (L, p. 103), and the "Useless Quack" (L, pp. 59, 71). Tolkien's recollections of the humor was frequent in his letters to his sons:

The Inklings meeting.... was very enjoyable. Hugo was there: rather tired looking. The chief entertainment was provided by a chapter from Warnie Lewis's book on the times of Louis XIV (very good I thought it); and some excerpts from C.S.L.'s 'Who Goes Home?' — a book on Hell, which I suggested should have been called rather 'Hugo's Home' (L, p. 83).

.... and then a great event: an evening Inklings. I reached the Mitre at 8 where I was joined by C.W. and the Red Admiral (Havard), resolved to take fuel on board before joining the well-oiled diners in Magdalen (C.S.L. and Owen Barfield). C.S.L. was highly flown, but we were also in good fettle; while O.B. is the only man who can tackle C.S.L. making him define everything and interrupting his most dogmatic pronouncements with subtle *distinguo's*. The result was a most amusing and highly contentious evening, on which (had an outsider eavesdropped) he would have thought it a meeting of fell enemies hurling deadly insults before drawing their guns. Warnie was in excellent majoral form. On one occasion when the audience had flatly refused to hear Jack discourse on and define 'Chance', Jack said: 'Very well, some other time, but if you die tonight you'll be cut off knowing a great deal less about Chance than you might have.' Warnie: 'That only illustrates what I've always said: every cloud has a silver lining' (L, p. 103).

Sometimes the insults hit a little too close to home and drew blood. In response to the accusation that Tolkien was unjustly harsh in his criticism of one of Lewis' pieces, Tolkien sent a tender letter to C.S. Lewis (well worth reading in its entirety) that ends with humorous affection.

But I warn you, if you bore me, I shall take my revenge. (It is an Inklings' duty to be bored willingly. It is his privilege to be a borer on occasion). I sometimes conceive and write other things than verses or romance! And I may come back at you. Indeed, if our beloved and esteemed physician is to pose us with problems of the earth as dynamo, I can think of other problems as intricate if more petty to present to his notice — if only for the malicious delight of seeing Hugo (if present), slightly heated with alcohol, giving an imitation of the intelligent boy of the class. But Lord save you all! I don't find myself in any need of practicing forbearance towards any of you — save on the rarest occasions, when I myself am tired and exhausted: then I find mere noise and vulgarity trying. But I am not yet so hoar (nor so refined) that that has become a permanent state. I want noise often enough. I know no more pleasant sound than arriving at the B[aby]. and B[ird]. and hearing a roar, and knowing that one can plunge in. (L, pp. 128-129)

However stimulating, affable and congenial the Inklings may have been, Tolkien's first and deepest fraternal

experiences must have been with the Tea Club and Barrovian Society (T.C.B.S) founded at King Edward's School in Birmingham in 1911 by Tolkien and his three friends, Rob Gilson, Christopher Wiseman, and Geoffrey Smith. Theirs was a profound relationship, clearly delineated by Humphrey Carpenter in the *Biography*. Wiseman is quoted as saying that when they were together they felt "four times the intellectual size" (*Biog.*, p. 73). The four were somewhat specialized in their predilections, though unified in their love of learning: Gilson had a flair for art, particularly Renaissance painting, and the eighteenth century in general; Wiseman contributed his skills in the natural sciences, mathematics, and music; Tolkien was equipped with Germanic languages and philology, with a particular interest in Northern European literature; Smith was knowledgeable in English literature, especially poetry and creative writing. Tolkien's own creative doors were opened by that association, as he confides to Geoffrey in August 1916, upon the battle-death of Robert Gilson:

Of course the TCBS may have been all we drempt — and its work in the end be done by three or two or one survivor and the part of the others be trusted by God to that of the inspiration which we do know we all got and get from one another. To this I now pin my hopes, and pray God that the people chosen to carry on the TCBS may be no fewer than we three....

I do however dread and grieve about it — apart from my own personal longings — because I cannot abandon yet the hope and ambitions (inchoate and cloudy I know) that first became conscious at the Council of London [December 1914]. 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 (*L*, p. 10).

The great loss that Tolkien felt is expressed in that same letter:

So far my chief impression is that something has gone crack. I feel just the same to both of you — nearer if anything and very much in need of you — I am hungry and lonely of course — but I don't feel a member of a little complete body now. I honestly feel that the TCBS has ended — but I am not at all sure that it is not an unreliable feeling that will vanish — like magic perhaps when we come together again. Still I feel a mere individual at present — with intense feelings more than ideas but very powerless (*L*, p. 10).

Geoffrey Smith's response, shortly before his own death due to battle wounds, carried with it the sense of the eternal spirit of the manly friendship that the four had enjoyed.

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. For the death of one of its members cannot, I am determined, dissolve the T.C.B.S. Death can make us loathsome and helpless as individuals, but it cannot put an end to the immortal four!

A discovery I am going to communicate to Rob before I go off to-night. And do you write it also to Christopher. 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 (*Biog.*, p. 86)

One can be overly anxious to make connections between the Primary and Secondary Worlds, but I am really curious as to how much of the character and affection of four members of the TCBS has been woven into the four jovial companions from the Shire who played such an active and conspicuous part in the War of the Ring. At some point too, we need to consider Sam's great devotion to Frodo, Frodo's affection for Bilbo, and even Gollum's partial and momentary regenerated tenderness for Frodo⁵, as a reflection of the importance of friendship and brotherhood in Tolkien's philosophy. In addition, I believe is Frodo's motivation for accepting the Quest which Tolkien tells us was done out of love (*L*, p. 327).

Love

We have now arrived at that pinnacle of human relationships which Tolkien suggests engages and blends all of the affections and powers of mind and body into that complex emotion of love (*L*, p. 48). The history of Middle-earth is rife with love stories, but they are fraught with trouble. Tolkien tells his son Michael that the romantic tradition that prevails in western civilization is only partially true:

only the rarest good fortune brings together the man and woman who are really as it were 'destined' for one another, and capable of a very great and splendid love. The idea still dazzles us, catches us by the throat: poems and stories in multitudes have been written on the theme, more, probably, than the total of such loves in real life (yet the greatest of these tales do not tell of the happy marriage of such great lovers, but of their tragic separation; as if even in this sphere the truly great and splendid in this fallen world is more nearly achieved by 'failure' and suffering). In such great inevitable love, often love at first sight, we catch a vision, I suppose, of marriage as it should have been in an unfallen world. In this fallen world we have as our only guides, prudence, wisdom (rare in youth, too late in age), a clean heart, and fidelity of will (*L*, p. 52).

To see how profoundly this view of love has effected the history of Middle-earth, one need only mention the star-crossed lovers with whom we are so well acquainted: Beren and Luthien, Earendil and Elwing, Celeborn and Galadriel, Tuor and Idriel, Turin and Nienor, Elrond and Celebrian, among others. One might suggest Tom Bombadil and Goldberry as counter-evidence, but I will let you think about that one for a while, keeping in mind that there is hardly a more enigmatic character in all of literature than Tom Bombadil. We have mentioned Aragorn and Arwen before in conjunction with potential infidelity. Here it would be well to treat their own saga. In an amazingly long letter to Milton Waldman about 1951, Tolkien explains why more of the tender aspects of love between the sexes is not forthcoming in *The Lord of the Rings*. After giving a story summary of the trilogy, Tolkien writes:

That is a long and yet bald resume. Many characters important to the story are not even mentioned. Even some whole inventions like the remarkable Ents, oldest of living rational creatures, Shepherds of the Trees, are omitted. Since we now try to deal with 'ordinary life' springing up unquenched under the trample of world politics and events, there are love-stories touched in, or live in different modes, wholly absent from *The Hobbit*. But the highest love-story, that of Aragorn and Arwen Elrond's daughter is only alluded to as a known thing. It is told elsewhere in a short tale, *Of Aragorn and Arwen Undomiel* (L, pp. 160-161).

In a letter written to Michael Straight, the editor of the *New Republic* early in 1956, Tolkien reiterates the importance of the Aragorn-Arwen love-story. After assuring Straight that he not trying to compete with the Gospels of the New Testament in his portrayal of Life, Death, and Sacrifice, Tolkien says of the *Lord of the Rings*,

Here I am only concerned with Death as a part of nature, physical and spiritual, of Man, and with Hope without guarantees. That is why I regard the tale of Arwen and Aragorn as the most important of the Appendices; it is part of the essential story, and is only placed so, because it could not be worked into the main narrative without destroying its structure: which is planned to be 'hobbitocentric', that is, primarily a study of the ennoblement (or sanctification) of the humble (L, p. 237).

Perhaps no one needs to be reminded of the gentle association that Tolkien makes in the "Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" that appears in Appendix A(v) in *The Return of the King* between Aragorn and Arwen, and Beren and Luthien. The Aragorn/Arwen story line is somewhat gentler overall than that of Beren/Luthien, but the superstructures of both are essentially the same. The history of Samwise Gamgee and Rosie Cotton is not completely devoid of association with the great love-story. Tolkien himself says of them:

I think the simple 'rustic' love of Sam and his Rosie (nowhere elaborated) is *absolutely essential* to the study of his (the chief hero's) character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes, and the 'longing for Elves', and sheer beauty (L, p. 161)

In addition, anyone who is familiar with Ronald/Edith story line cannot help but recognize the obvious similarities. Some quiet moment, on a winter's eve perhaps, an open-hearted reading of Tolkien's own account of the young lovers might be in order (See L, pp. 52-53). The full weight and measure of Tolkien's conception of love cannot be considered without one final quote, of Ronald and Edith's love for one another, written so long ago.

Lo! young we are and yet have stood
like planted hearts in the great Sun
of Love so long (as two fair trees
in woodland or in open dale
stand utterly entwined, and breathe
the airs, and suck the very light

together) that we have become
as one, deep-rooted in the soil
of Life, and tangled in sweet growth.
(*Biography*, p. 74)

Tolkien's view of the deepest of human emotions may not fully express for every reader the full weight and measure of that emotion to the individual heart. But Tolkien's letter to his son Michael concerning the condition of the human heart helps us to understand that his creations correspond to that well thought out view, and contributes to our awareness of Tolkien's skill and philosophical fidelity as an author. ☞

Notes

- 1 Paul Nolan Hyde *A Descriptive Analysis of the Languages Used in J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings* (Unpublished Masters Thesis: Brigham Young University, August 1972). See particularly Chapter I "Reactions to and the Purpose of *The Lord of the Rings*". For those with a militant sense of justice, see my *Linguistic Techniques Used in Character Development in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: Purdue University, May 1982), especially Chapter I "Tolkien's Talent for Portraying Character: The Controversy".
- 2 Lin Carter, *Tolkien: A Look Behind The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969).
- 3 Cathrine Stimpson, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Columbia Essays on Modern Writers*, 41 (Columbia University Press, 1969).
- 4 See Chapter I of Hyde-1982 where there is an extended discussion concerning the nature of the Traditional Fairy Tale and Tolkien's strict adherence to the form.
- 5 See *Letters*, pp. 325-333, Tolkien's letter to Eileen Elgar, particularly pages 328 and 330, wherein the principle of brotherly love is made quite clear as an informant to the story line.



ART Submissions



Mythlore welcomes the submission of new artists to its pages. Both full page and column pieces are encouraged. Full page art should be 7.25" wide by 9.25" tall — it may actually be larger if it is in proportions. Column art should first be 5" wide by 6" to 8" tall, which can be photographically reduced to fit the printed size of the column. Material inspired by or illustrating the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, or Charles Williams is especially sought, but other mythological and fantasy inspired artwork is also welcome. Write directly to the Art Editor, whose address is found on page 2.

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