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Fantasy Characterization: The Example of Tolkien

Abstract

Distinguishes the aesthetic requirements of fantasy as a genre and how they differ from those of mimetic fiction. Analyzes the success of *The Lord of the Rings* in meeting those requirements, particularly in characterization and inner consistency.

Additional Keywords

Fantasy literature—Aesthetics; Fantasy literature—Characterization; Realism; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characterization—Technique; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Technique

Fantasy Characterization: The Example of Tolkien

Dwayne Thorpe

Although forays into its aesthetics have increased dramatically during the past twenty years, fantasy literature remains a marshy territory with few established roads and no solid ground for distinguishing good from bad. When the subject is itself unreal, do terms like good and bad even have meaning? Some readers delight in this state of affairs, a cheerful anarchy being characteristic of many fantasy readers. But even the least academic are sometimes irritated by an inconsistent snobbery ("fantasy is for morons but *The Faerie Queen* is a major English poem"). And in any case, the territory is not all marshland. A foundation for a genuine aesthetics has already been laid by fantasy authors — Tolkien among them.

Firm ground was located as far back as the 18th century by Richard Hurd:

A poet, they say, must follow *Nature*; and by *Nature* we are to suppose can only be meant the known and experienced course of affairs in this world. Whereas the poet has a world of his own, where experience has less to do, than consistent imagination.²

Tolkien would have agreed with the spirit of that passage. His well-known definition of Fantasy as the art "which gives (or seems to give) 'the inner consistency of reality'" to an act of imagination might almost be a repetition of Hurd.³ The great task of the writer of fantasy, he thought, is to build a consistently imagined world.

Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the *green sun*. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough.... To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will... demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft.⁴

That is not the only obligation of the fantasy writer — but it is an obligation peculiarly his own, for realistic literature often succeeds by merely recording the fact, but fantasy can do nothing without consistent imagination.

Here I must make a careful distinction, however, in order to define the kind of consistency which makes the fantastic credible, because more than a century of realism has taught us to equate credibility with verisimilitude. It is not just the admirers of Dreiser who make that equation, either. Almost all modern readers equate consistency with a minutely circumstantial approach. Thus, when readers refer to Tolkien's "consistency," they usually have in mind the elaborate mesh of geographic and historic details which make Middle-earth coherent on all but a micro-

scopic level. Certainly Tolkien labored at this web with the aim of convincing readers that Middle-earth is solid, and verisimilitude is as important in Middle-earth as in Yoknapatawpha County. But it does not make supreme fantasy. Witness the annual flood of "trilogies" which tediously detail worlds few wish to enter and no one remembers. And it cannot fairly be called, as Tolkien called it, "a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form."⁵ Verisimilitude is not an essential tool, and many of the best fantasies do quite well without it. Blatantly reversing the laws of physics does no harm to *Alice in Wonderland*. Rather, it creates much of the book's effect. Readers simply do not expect fantasy to mirror the facts of experience. Instead, they expect it to create a "dream" unbroken by intrusive inconsistencies until the moment of awakening at the end. And the combination of consistency and strangeness is difficult to sustain. While verisimilitude can be both copied and copyrighted, consistency of imagination is achieved only by the finest writers: a small circle which includes Dante as much as it does Tolkien.

Verisimilitude, as a measure of success, confuses fantasy with realism; but the two genres have different goals, employ different means, and must be judged in different ways. Tolkien recognized that the heart of fantasy is the need for escape and named escape as one of its chief satisfactions. Fantasy, he said, is the reaction of a prisoner who, if he cannot escape, at least "thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls."⁶ By contrast, realists act as if they *were* the jailers, insisting on accurate, minute, and unremitting attention to the walls. Consistency in realism is the lock which prevents prisoners from escaping. In fantasy, it is the key which makes escape possible.

I hope it is not a form of special pleading to say that realism and fantasy must be evaluated in different ways, for I am not trying to let fantasy off the hook. But there are differences between these literary kinds which are demonstrable facts of any reader's experience. Characterization is an obvious example, and I use it here to illustrate "in miniature" the consistency one finds in all aspects of the best fantasy.

To a realist, Tolkien's characters are clearly stereotypes. But Tolkien's readers are incensed by the assertion. Gandalf may wear a pointy hat and hurl fireballs, but he is, they feel, as intensely real as Raskolnikov. The disagree-

ment does not spring from the ill-will of realists or the bad faith of fantasy readers, but from the attempt to apply the concepts of realism where they are inappropriate. It is quite right to say that Gandalf has only two dimensions, the Grey and the White. But it is quite wrong to call him a caricature, because in fantasy terms like "stereotype" and "caricature" have no meaning. These are categories of realism.

Methods of characterization are functions of the entire design and purpose of literary works. Because realism is mimetic, based on the concept of the mirror, its strongest impulse is to make characters seem three-dimensional, as if they belonged in the world outside the text. It therefore values nuance above all things and pursues it in two modes: *external*, mimicking observed behavior, and *internal*, mimicking the flow of thought.

Henry James, a masterful practitioner of the first mode, achieves the illusion of reality by paying close attention to surfaces. In a typical passage, one of his characters, Daisy Miller, shifts between saying "he doesn't" and "he don't" four times within a single page. James calls no special attention to these shifts — they can be and are regularly missed — but leaves the reader to see for himself and draw his own conclusion. If we miss that detail, we will surely see others, for "Daisy Miller" is built on dozens of such nuances — a technique that mimics experience, where trivial details frequently reveal character and we must sort out impressions without the aid of an author.

James Joyce on the other hand, practicing internal realism, uses stream of consciousness. Here is Stephen Dedalus walking along the strand in *Ulysses*, Joyce's technique convincingly imitating the mind's associative leaps:

Yes, evening will find itself in me, without me. All days make their end. By the way when next is it Tuesday will be the longest day. Of all the glad new year, mother, the rum tum tiddledy tum. Lawn Tennyson, gentleman poet. *Gia*. For the old hag with the yellow teeth. And Monsieur Drumont, gentleman journalist. *Gia*. My teeth are very bad.

The techniques are "opposites" in some ways, but both kinds of realism, external and internal, are designed to convince the reader that they mirror reality. But other narratives have other work to do. Characters in didactic literature, for instance, illustrate ethics. The parable of the Prodigal Son teaches not how people live but how they *should* live. It would be as improper to provide detailed descriptions of the prodigal's clothing or stream of consciousness as it would be to intrude a comment on proper grammar in *Daisy Miller*: an impropriety one feels in the DeMille-inspired biblical extravaganzas, which give us accurate costumes rather than incisive wisdom. Didactic characterization should provide not three-dimensional facts but moral depth.

Three-dimensional characterization has no more value in fantasy than in parable, for fantasy provides not char-

acter development but dreams and nightmares. To the extent that the writer has brought these to life, the fantasy does its work.

However, having said as much, I must add an important qualification. While the tools of the realist, the moralist and the fantasist are not and cannot be the same, fantasy no more exists in an autonomous world than other works do. It is illegitimate to demand that a fantasy follow the "rules" of the realistic novel, but it must meet the test of all art: the test of depth. A realistic story may be thoroughly realistic and still fail by being trivial, as the once-numerous "slice of life" stories proved by fading into literary history. A didactic tale may oversimplify the moral questions it deals with, as Parson Weems' little fiction about Washington demonstrates. And fantasy may offer shallow dreams: pornography, carnography, propaganda, coy fancies. Good fantasy, on the other hand, is adequate to the desires and fears it evokes. Hawthorne summed up the matter in his "Preface" to *The House of the Seven Gables*: a writer of romances can claim whatever latitude he wants in inventing the circumstances of his tale. But the tale "sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart."⁸ Though not at all alike in other ways, Hawthorne and Tolkien agree on this essential point, Tolkien saying that fantasies of the sort he admired exist for "the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires."⁹ They address themselves to deep and permanent needs of the human heart.

It is clear that Tolkien's tale has entertained millions of readers. But the critic must consider the implications of their delight. Does the thread of consistency which runs through Middle-earth match the truth of the human heart? Does it satisfy primordial desires? Or is there something childish about it? Those who love the work, wishing to distinguish it from stories with little more than plot lines, have often said that *The Lord of the Rings* contains an important moral point: the triumph of good over evil. In a way the work is didactic, of course, as the destruction of Sauron demonstrates. But one would have thought the long stretch of pages — more than a hundred of them — which follows Sauron's defeat adequately demonstrates that his destruction is not the main point. And in any case we should avoid confusing Tolkien with the simple-minded. One routinely hears the One Ring equated with power, and even so good a critic as T.A. Shippey, who has written the best book on Tolkien to date and who should know better, reduces its fatal attraction to a proverb. Reflecting on the ring's power over all those who possess it, he says, "it is a dull mind which does not reflect, 'Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. That maxim, one could say, is the core of *The Lord of the Rings*."¹⁰ But I should have thought it a dull mind which *does* draw that conclusion, since so much in the book undercuts it. The book's whole narrative drive aims at restoring a king to power; and the rescue of Theoden from powerlessness is a major sub-plot. Power in the Ring, evidently, is not the

same as power in the King. The subject, then, is more complicated than one expects.¹¹ A writer bent on showing the triumph of good over evil would be well-advised to at least keep them separate. But Tolkien does not. The motives of characters like Boromir, for instance, present us with puzzles in ethics. Good has its unexpected complications. Gandalf is the champion of good, but his genuine fear of losing, his death in Moria, his fear of taking the ring, his rudeness — all these are bones to sharpen one's ethical teeth on. Of course there is moral depth in the portrait: the sad truth about goodness, as it were. But *The Lord of the Rings*, although it contains prominent didactic elements, is not a didactic work. We come closer to its center through its oddities.

One of these is the remarkable fact that there are no graves in the Shire. Yet, just outside its borders the world is filled with grave mounds and memorials to the dead: the Barrow Downs; the ancient defensive walls around Weathertop; the pillars of the Argonath; the Dead Marshes; the burial mounds of Rohan. The explanation is to be found in the function of the Shire. On a personal level, the Shire, where an eleventh birthday is possible, fulfills what Tolkien called "the oldest and deepest desire, the Great Escape: the Escape from Death."¹² But it also works on a cultural level, as a fantasy of stability in a century of change and destruction: a rural world, sufficient to itself, untouched by the machines of Saruman, which allows the reader to escape "the rawness and ugliness of modern European life."¹³ *The Fellowship of the Ring* structurally repeats and magnifies that escape, bringing us to Lothlorien, a magnified Shire: a forest of mallorns where the very houses are in trees; where the pavilion pitched around Bilbo's birthday tree has grown to Cerin Amroth, "the heart of the ancient realm as it was long ago"; where winter flowers bloom forever "in the unfading grass: the yellow *elamor*, and the pale *niphredil*."¹⁴ Here conservative ways yield to the changeless, and hobbits give way to elves.

Other oddities are harder to explain but just as important: for instance, the transformation of Strider into Aragorn, Aragorn into Elessar, and Elessar into the heir of Elendil. As the names change, so does the person, even in appearance, from a disreputable-looking vagabond to a seasoned friend of Gandalf, then to a man intimate with elves, and finally to the returning king with healing hands. It is not character development but radical change which takes us from the *Prancing Pony* to the Pillars of the Argonath, where Aragorn beneath the statues of Isildur and Anarion calms the frightened hobbits. "Fear not!... Under their shadow Elessar, the Elfstone, son of Arathorn of the House of Vandalil, Isildur's son, heir of Elendil, has sought to dread!" (I, "The Great River").

As the king ascends into his titles, we see a unique approach to characterization. Realistic literature has been dominated by the idea of the individual, but Tolkien emphasizes those qualities which make a character repre-

sentative, not unique. His characters are not products of an internal dynamic. They are rarely even self-reflective and have nothing which could properly be called internal lives. One cannot imagine analyzing Gandalf's psychology—or Frodo's—for this is a book without autonomous individuals.

This approach to characterization is no flaw but part of Tolkien's imaginative consistency. The dream of a world which transcends time demands characters equal to splendor, not subject to eccentricity. It also demands that the reader be made adequate to the characters. Tolkien's methods consistently aim to produce both results. Here, for instance, is the introduction of Boromir. "Seated a little apart was a tall man with a fair and noble face, dark-haired and grey-eyed, proud and stern of glance" (I, "The Council of Elrond"). Tolkien does not use striking details, which would turn the reader's attention to matters of fact. Instead, he establishes a matrix of adjectives which elevate the reader to the position of unerring judge. We do not struggle to understand Boromir. We begin by understanding him.

The pitfalls of such a method are obvious. The author, having announced in advance what we are to think, is free to flout standards. He can declare splendor while producing frippery, set up poses instead of heroes, and cultivate rhetoric rather than learn honest style. Tolkien's imitators have in fact fallen into all these traps. But Tolkien, I think, does not. The details of Boromir's physical appearance which immediately follow his introduction are an example.

He was cloaked and booted as if for a journey on horseback; and indeed though his garments were rich, and his cloak was lined with fur, they were stained with long travel. He had a collar of silver in which a single white stone was set; his locks were shorn about his shoulders. On a baldric he wore a great horn tipped with silver that now was laid upon his knees.

What kind of man wears rich clothing on such a journey? The fine clothes, the jewelry, the striking appearance, in another work would indicate the hero: Prince Valiant or his equivalent. Here, they play a very different role, introducing a man who believes in his own superiority. The true hero, an undistinguished hobbit, has already been introduced. All the traditional heroes gathered here—the wizard, the warrior, the king in exile—are in fact secondary. In the scene that follows, Boromir, the heroic patriot, reveals his limits and lays the groundwork for his failure, the real end toward which Tolkien is moving. Why has *Boromir* come in response to *Faramir*'s dream? Why does he deprecate and doubt all strength and knowledge but his own, when it is clear that he needs help both to interpret the dream and to withstand the strength of Mordor? His misguided trust in himself implies an equally wrong distrust of others: a distrust which surfaces when he doubts Aragorn's claim to the throne and climaxes when his desire for the Ring's power overcomes his loyalty to its

bearer. The horn on his knees, like the bow of Odysseus, is one of those objects in heroic literature which embody the character of their masters. And when Boromir interrupts the order of speakers, usurping Elrond's place in his own house, boasts of his deeds, and insists (despite the need for secrecy) on sounding the horn before he sets out, the alert reader may well remember what is meant by "blowing one's own horn."

Though a reader who expects stereotypes may fail to see it, nothing in this description is simple ornament. Each detail challenges expectation. The same is true of Boromir's speech. All Tolkien's characters speak unrealistically, of course. But they are not all of a piece. Their range encompasses Elrond's archaic nobility; Grima Wormtongue's ugly sounds and images; Sam's inimitable hobbitese; Saruman's twentieth century political rhetoric; and Aragorn's simple gravity. Taken together, these speakers present a world in which each tongue plays its part. In Middle-earth, as a character speaks, so he is, and Boromir's use of words marks him clearly. He begins:

Give me leave, Master Elrond, first to say more of Gondor; for verily from the land of Gondor I am come. And it would be well for all to know what passes there. For few, I deem, know of our deeds, and therefore guess little of their peril, if we should fail at last."

Here is all the inflated rhetoric which the realist, suspicious of grandeur, anticipates and condemns: inverted phrases; alliteration; archaic words; parallelisms with more rhythm than information. But no other Tolkien character speaks quite that way. Boromir's wooden rhetoric points up the flaw in his makeup — it is a part of the consistency of his character — and the implied doubt of the conventional concept of the hero is confirmed in his fate. There is supreme irony when he, at Amon Hen, the Hill of Sight, blinded by his obsession with Gondor, assaults the ring bearer, betrays his own ideals, and dies.

This dissection of a heroic type must be taken seriously in a fantasy, where the celebration of heroes is the usual order of the day. Yet Tolkien is not being satirical nor deflating the idea of the warrior. Boromir in fact performs heroically and even in failure redeems himself through the manner of his death. Moreover, his replacement is hardly better. Frodo has no special strength, talent or intelligence — does not even know where he is going unless someone points him in the right direction. He can only keep putting one foot in front of the other. In the end, he cannot even do that. Having reached his goal, he fails completely and claims the ring as his own. If the traditional heroes have been replaced by a new one, why is the new one no better?

In the midst of this list of oddities, the strangest fact of all is that these failures are not failures but disguised triumphs. When Boromir assaults Frodo and dies protecting Merry and Pippin, there is no tragedy. He simply drives Frodo and Sam east with the Ring while Sauron and Saruman are distracted by the wrong hobbits. His "failure," then, makes the victory over Sauron possible. In

the same way, Frodo's "failure" makes it possible for Smeagol to take a wholly unanticipated but perfect part in the victory. One thinks of the Music of the Ainur, that irresistible harmony which makes Tolkien's universe a *concoro discordia*, and of which *The Lord of the Rings* is the chief illustration.

In Middle-earth, not just characterization but everything is of a piece. Though there is no space to demonstrate it here, nature is as alive as people and makes the same moral decisions we do, "deciding" to be Old Man Willow or Treebeard; aesthetics tally with ethics, so that there is no division between the appearance and the reality of Goldberry; meaning and feeling fuse, so that the meaning of a song in Sindarin or of a verse in Black Speech matches its sound. Tolkien's elvish craft so manages good and evil, life and death, language and music, that they meet in an all-inclusive, unifying structure. This, it seems to me, is the primordial desire Middle-earth satisfies: that everything should fit together. The consistency of Tolkien's creation, with its symmetries and balances and interweavings, satisfies the longing for a resolution to all disjunctions: for a world which will mean rather than simply be. And a considerable part of the book's "elvish craft," its capacity to cast enchantment over the reader, is its unremitting evocation of that desire.

But Tolkien's fantasy world does not just satisfy a primordial longing. Following "the truth of the human heart" means more than providing pleasant dreams. The author of a great fantasy dramatizes the complexity of our desires. If the consistency of a fantasy world depends upon falsifying or omitting that complexity, then its consistency really does sink to the level of stereotypes and caricatures. Many fantasies do precisely that. Their worlds, as a consequence, can easily be divided into traps and happiness machines. But Middle-earth derives immense power from being neither. Like the fate of Boromir, which contains victory within the bitterness of defeat, Middle-earth is a happiness machine disguised as a trap. Only at the end is the disguise whisked away, when the inhabitants of the East, the land of graves, are drawn into the Shire and beyond, to the Undying Lands. This mixing of elements is the chief means by which Tolkien creates a fantasy at once brighter and more brooding than most: one which cleaves to "the truth of the human heart" — not just the truth of our longings but also of their implications. Though this is a fantasy of escape from death and of stability, those very yearnings are probed with an honesty equivalent to Hawthorne's. These same yearnings caused Sauron to create the One Ring, drove Boromir to attack Frodo, and destroyed the Numenorean kings. "Death was ever present," Faramir relates, "because the Numenoreans still, as they had in their old kingdom, and so lost it, hungered after endless life unchanging" (II, "The Window on the West"). Even Frodo is not exempt. How is he different from Sauron when he uses the threat of the Precious to bend Gollum to his will? How is he different from Boromir

if, at Mount Doom, he replays Boromir's failure at Amon Hen? In his defeat and heroic self-sacrifice, where pride and heroism are absolutely intertwined, Boromir reveals the complex truth of our longings: the truth of the human heart. His dilemma lies at the center of *The Lord of the Rings*. I do not mean to suggest that this is his story, or that his fate holds some hitherto unseen key to the meaning of it. I am arguing, rather, that because it is a consistently imagined work — that is, a genuine work of art — all elements of *The Lord of the Rings*, even the smallest, radiate from its central issues. I have chosen to concentrate on Boromir, in fact, precisely because he is the least important of the tale's major characters.

The ambiguous longings of Tolkien's characters are no different from our own, and Tolkien's greatest strength may lie in his understanding that primordial desire and fear are two sides of one coin. The reader's desire for the Undying Lands is also the desire of Sauron, who is frightening because he is a nightmare of ourselves: a searching eye which may see and take us. The relationship between undying elves and undead Nazgûl ought to trouble us. So should the link which connects the ring-bearers, Frodo, Gollum, and Sauron. The book is filled with symmetries that point to the unity of our fears and desires. The ageless Tom Bombadil and the unsleeping barrow wight, Boromir and Faramir, Theoden and Denethor, whose very names are anagrams of each other, have a relationship which the reader feels, even when he cannot explain it. The fate of the Ring-bearer is sometimes misread by those who mistakenly see the One Ring as a symbol of power and trivialize Frodo's fate as the loss of a finger. But the One Ring is something very different, and the true sacrifice of Frodo is that, having suffered to save the Shire, he can no longer feel its satisfactions. The wound — "the memory of the burden," as Arwen calls it when she gives Frodo her place in the ship bound for the West (III, "Many Partings") — makes the Shire intolerable, and Frodo must leave it. Why? The power which makes the Ring both dangerous and irresistible, and which finally renders its bearer, no matter who he may be, unable to live with the world, is its gift of immortality. That gift has a price. Though fairy stories have often treated the desire for immortality, Tolkien adds that some of them rise above that level.¹⁵ *The Lord of the Rings* is one of those.

Most readers can easily see, I suppose, that the hobbits leaving the Shire in Book I are both themselves and embodiments of ourselves entering fantasy; and it is important that they go with both zest and regret: going to see elves but doomed, like Aragorn, to ride the paths of the dead. The road to the Undying Lands passes death and lamentation at every turn. In Rohan it passes through burial mounds blooming with Evermind, pulling us, by symmetries, back to the Barrow Downs, so similar to the mounds around Meduseld, but so much older that no one remembers why they are there. No Evermind grows on them, and the hunger of the barrow wight for departed life

and wealth is terrifying. Why? We know, though we do not often say. "I am wounded," Frodo cries. "It will never really heal" (III, "The Grey Havens"). And we know, in the truth of our hearts, what wound that is. Frodo's wound, delivered by the undead, is no rip in the flesh. It is the yearning for immortality, for which there is no cure, in him or us. The counting of years, the close attention to the calendar, the desire for appendices and chronologies after the tale is done: these will not go away. Only the consolation of enchantment assuages us.

Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.¹⁶

So Tolkien wrote in defining fairy-stories. To be enchanted literally means to be brought inside a song. It is the highest ambition of Tolkien's characters. It is what Sam believes he has reached in Lothlorien (I, "Lothlorien") and what he desires when he believes all is ended at Mount Doom (III, "The Field of Cormallen"). It was also, I believe, the highest ambition of the author of the tale. Something in the human spirit stands above alteration, lifting Tolkien's characters above the status of "individuals." Frodo's growth does not end at Mount Doom but in his journey through the dark, accompanied by the passing spirits of magic, to the Grey Havens, in a departure which is more than joyous or sad. It is one of the rare moments in the literature of this century to illustrate the full force of the word "solemn." As Tolkien gathers his strands together, drawing everything into that last scene, the symmetries of the work take the reader beyond questions of happiness and sorrow. In the solemn declaration that this is final — in the contrasting experiences of Frodo beholding the white shores and Sam beholding a shadow on the grey sea — characters and reader both come to see the pattern of the whole. We rise toward the level of the novelist, become conscious of the fiction, and escape, wakening as the dream ends.

It is one of Tolkien's gifts to show us the trap, allowing us to elude it. He wrote his son Christopher in Dec., 1944, "If lit. teaches us anything at all, it is this: that we have in us an eternal element, free from care and fear, which can survey the things that in 'life' we call evil with serenity."¹⁷ Without any disturbance of our spiritual equilibrium.¹⁷ The ending of *The Lord of the Rings* has sometimes been denigrated, but that seems to me wrong. Tolkien could have ended with something sonorous, but I am glad he did not. It is no mistake, but a deft final stroke, that as they take the East Road to Buckland at the end, Merry and Pippin are already singing, and even the devoted Sam ends with, "Well, I'm back." ¶

present situation (although this may form part of our possibilities, however banal it may sound; rather, the challenge that we face in such times of crisis is how our study and criticism of literature is to be made *answerable* to that situation.

By answerability I mean a recognition of the fact that, as a discourse, the mythopoeic is not a sublimely sealed off domain as Tolkien, Lewis and others would have it, but it is in fact *also* a constitutive element of the dystopic realities with which we are today confronted. To be "answerable" to this fact does not simply mean disclaiming something like the ideology of Bush's neocolonialism as the "misuse" of an otherwise pure mythopoeic realm of affectivity (although it may very well include such a denunciation). As a discourse and an experience, the mythical is not necessarily automatically predisposed to emancipatory consequences; on the contrary, it is impossible to fully appreciate a mythopoeic aesthetic without appreciating its insertion into a particular aesthetic ideology as an integral condition of its existence. It is only when this dimension of the texts which we take as *our* proper focus as a society is made a conscious part of our study and discussion, that a basis for the critique of such non-literary appropriations of mythical narrative will be at all convincing (to ourselves as well as to others) as a "relevant" priority.

(Your comments are quite tangential to the point of the editorial, which was that war makes the awareness of mortality as unavoidable, and asks what is the value of learning when death may be so near? I would recommend you read Lewis' essay "Learning in Wartime" in its entirety, as you have misunderstood his purpose as well — although this may come from the short quotations taken from it. The editorial took no political position on the war, because Mythlore is not meant to be a political journal. I leave others to comment on the points of your letter, particularly those on Tolkien and Lewis. —GG)

Notes to "Fantasy Characterization," pp. 37-41

1. Like the study of literature generally, the study of fantasy has mushroomed during our time: so much so that there is not even room here for an accurate summary of the variety of theories and positions. Those interested in the subject may consult Lynette Hunter, *Modern Allegory and Fantasy: Rhetorical Stances of Contemporary Writing* (New York, 1989). While her prose is forbidding, her overview of the subject is thorough.
2. Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, ed. Edith J. Morley (London, 1911), p. 138.
3. J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston, 1984), p. 139.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 148. The other satisfactions of fantasy, named in this same passage, are Recovery and Consolation.
7. James Joyce, *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York, 1986), p. 42.
8. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Hawthorne's Works: The House of the Seven Gables* (Boston, 1900), p. xxi.
9. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics*, p. 116.
10. T.A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth*. (Boston, 1983), p. 104.
11. The irony is all the greater since Shippey is responding to critics who deny moral depth, complexity, or significance in Tolkien's works. The

lapse, however, is uncharacteristic, and I should add that Shippey does a superb job of showing the many sides of Tolkien's complex view of evil.

12. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics*. p. 153.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
14. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings I*, "Lothlorien." I shall identify subsequent quotations from *The Lord of the Rings* parenthetically within the text. Because of the large number of editions readers may be using, I shall not cite pages but only book numbers and chapter titles.
15. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics*. p. 153.
16. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics*. p. 113.
17. Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Boston, 1981), pp. 106-107.

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◊ IN MEMORIUM ◊

Taam Santoski, scholar, linguist, advisor to *Mythlore*, died in the morning of August 19th. I regret that I did not know him better. Our love of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien brought us together eight summers ago and bound us in friendship. But we saw each other rarely, heedless, as only the young can be, of speeding time. We did not have the grace of Lórien, and in these mortal lands the cup of our parting was drunk much too soon.

Taam was not as well known in Tolkien studies as he deserved. This was his way: smiling and good-natured among friends, as a scholar he was quiet and unassuming, even timid. In fact, he was one of the foremost authorities on Tolkien's manuscripts, having studied the Marquette papers at length. Careful readers will have seen his name acknowledged by Christopher Tolkien in *The History of Middle-earth*. He was an expert on J.R.R. Tolkien's difficult handwriting, as well as on his texts, his invented languages, and his art.

At his death from cancer Taam left unfinished a number of Tolkien-related projects, most important among them an authorized history of the writing of *The Hobbit*. Others now will carry on his work, honoring the memory of their friend. We hope that Taam will approve our efforts, wherever he may be beyond the circles of the world.

— Wayne Hammond

Chad Walsh, poet and literary critic, died on 16 January 1991. Born on 10 May 1914, he was the first person to write a book on C.S. Lewis in 1949: *C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Sceptics*. His interest in Lewis continued, and in 1979 he wrote *The Literary Legacy of C.S. Lewis*. Walsh taught for 32 years at Beloit College.