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Tolkien and Campbell Compared

Abstract

Compares Tolkien's and Campbell's "thinking about myth." Identifies three themes they share and traces their aesthetic vision in this context.

Additional Keywords

Aesthetics of myth; Campbell, Joseph; Myth, theories of; Social order in myth; Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-stories"

Tolkien and Campbell Compared

Chris Seaman

I. Comparing Tolkien and Campbell

The present occasion of a conference devoted to the discussion of archetypes in fantasy literature invites a broader comparison of the work of Joseph Campbell with that of the Mythopoeic Trinity of Tolkien, Lewis and Williams. What follows is an exploration of some key dimensions of Tolkien and Campbell's thinking about myth which might serve as a basis for further reflection on their commonalities and differences. Joseph Campbell and J.R.R. Tolkien share the ambiguous status of having exercised an immense popular appeal, both posthumously and during their own lifetimes, while often receiving only marginal recognition by the academic communities in which they worked. Yet beyond these biographical similarities, their respective writings about myth address themselves to at least three significant themes on which I would like to elaborate. Briefly stated, these may be characterized as a preoccupation with: 1) the creative role of the artist in modern society, 2) the comparative study of mythology as a source of cultural critique, and 3) myth and the problem of social order. Although not always explicitly invoked, these themes are nevertheless present throughout the work of Campbell, as well as in Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-stories." They are interwoven by the unifying thread of an aesthetic vision; that is, by their conscious use of art as the reference point for the ultimate significance of mythology. In the course of this paper I shall attempt to trace the principal aspects of Tolkien and Campbell's aesthetic visions in the context of these three themes, and will offer a few suggestions regarding the broader cultural significance of an aesthetics of myth.

II. The Creative Role of the Artist in Modern Society

The cultural shift from the Enlightenment to Romanticism makes up the intellectual milieu in which Campbell and Tolkien are to be understood. The Romantic tradition emerged as a critique of the excesses of eighteenth century rationalism, empiricism and certain mechanistic conceptions of history. Its response was an attempt to forge a new kind of human subject whose Enlightenment faculties would be united to an organic vision of humanity and the world. As the monarchical and ecclesial institutions of the *ancien regime* were shaken to their roots, so too traditional conceptions of human agency were rendered obsolescent; and as Europe underwent revolutionary change at the hands of the emerging bourgeoisie, so too a new experience of the productive powers of humanity was foregrounded, demanding recognition. The intersection of these transformations found articulation in the Romantic

concept of the creative imagination, which Tolkien inherited through a long and hallowed tradition of British aesthetic thought and Campbell through various strands of Orientalism and transcendental philosophy.

Although most often associated with the nascent discourse of aesthetics, the creative imagination was by no means limited to esoteric discussions of art. It was as much at home in the writings of Locke, Addison and Hobbes as in the meditations of Kant, Shaftsbury and Coleridge. Throughout the Romantic period the idea of the imagination played a central role in ethics, literary criticism, psychology, empirical philosophy and even political rhetoric. Its prominence, one might argue, resides in its location of *creative* or *productive* power in human agency and will. The breakup of divinely-ordained feudal or monarchical social relationships, facilitated by the rise of capitalist production, contained on the one hand an imperative to undermine the ideology of God as the Creator of that particular social order, and on the other hand a need to take over that discourse of creative power in the service of legitimating a new set of social arrangements. It is therefore by no means fortuitous that the narrative of Romanticism should, from the outset, contain an *internal* proximity to theological categories. And as art was for the Romantic period the paradigm of imaginative creation, it is not surprising that the artist should become the central icon of the Humane.

Tolkien's concept of subcreation, that "we make still by the law in which we're made" (*OFS*: 51), supplies for him an anthropological foundation for this transfer of power. If we are made in the image of God, then it is from God that we receive the capacity to image things in our own right. The validity of our imaginative creation stems precisely from the fact that they are in accord with a "law" — the divine law which is identical to our own created nature. But the idea of *subcreation* also contains the nuance that while the necessary starting point for the artist is the created world, the object of art is not simply to reproduce what is given but rather to actively exercise the human will upon those materials so as to change, modify, transform, and rearrange them into a *new* creation according to our desires. For Tolkien, then, the artist is the metonym for human nature and activity as a whole.

Subcreation is Tolkien's particular inflection of the Romantic tradition. His distinction between the imaginative faculty in general — the ability to reproduce in the mind the world as it is presented to the senses — and what he chooses to call "fantasy"; that is, the active reordering of those images, places Tolkien in a well-worn Romantic

track of assigning different levels to the operations of the imagination (cf. Engell). The distinction between the passive reproduction and active production of images (a distinction, one might add, closely intertwined with sexual imagery) was initially affirmed in reaction to the positivist psychology of the Enlightenment which sought to limit the faculties of the mind to the mechanistic replication of the material world. The recovery of the imagination from its pejorative associations within this positivist model served then to assert the self-transgressive capacity of human desire to make something of that which made it. Tolkien's most obvious ancestor in this regard seems to have been Coleridge, whose "primary" and "secondary" imagination bear a striking resemblance to Tolkien's own identification of subcreation as the making of a "secondary world" to which "secondary belief" is ascribed.

While his discussions of myth do not always focus on the role of the artist, it is apparent from the sheer size of *Creative Mythology*, the fourth and final volume of *The Masks of God*, that this is where Joseph Campbell's ultimate concerns lie. Having been released from social, cultural, and historical limitations, it is the individual artist who for Campbell most fully signifies the source of mythic power for the future. The modern artist is for Campbell both an historical novelty and a perennial return to the archetype of the shaman, albeit now liberated from tribal particularities so as to address a truly global context. Like Tolkien's subcreator, the goal of Campbell's neoshamanic artist is to make something original (by contrast to the bureaucratic priest who is condemned to sublimate his own experience in his functioning to reproduce an institution). Campbell's celebrated distinction between the literal and the metaphorical as modes of mythic understanding does not exactly correspond to the primary-secondary modes of imagination, but it occupies a similar space within his narrative of the artist, who seeks to transcend the literal meaning of myth "given" to him by his culture so as to actively illuminate its metaphorical possibilities.

III. The Comparative Study of Mythology as a Source of Cultural Critique

Tolkien and Campbell undoubtedly inherited this Romantic tradition in part from their respective intellectual backgrounds. Although Campbell rebelled against the academic system of his time, his work can nevertheless be placed alongside that of Mircea Eliade and others of the so-called "History of Religions" school which, in its historical origins, was significantly influenced by Romantic ideas. Moreover, Campbell's early discipleship to the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer would have exposed him to the Romantic tradition of Orientalist scholarship. Tolkien, on the other hand, received through the work of Victorian philology a tradition of linguistic Romanticism which delved into the relations between the "archetypal" structures of language and organic models of historical process (Bowler:182). A common feature of philology and the history of religions, perhaps more so during the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than today, was the fact of their both being what might be called "active" cultural discourses. That is to say, the comparative study of religion and of language contained a conscious (and sometimes volatile) element of cultural critique. Whether this gesture involved an open commitment to Fascism as with Eliade or a more liberal response to the moral bankruptcy of industrialism and Western claims to cultural hegemony, much was at stake in the act of interrogating the structures of myth and language. Tolkien's own work on *Beowulf*, for example, sustained an internal dialogue signified by the encounter of southern Christendom with the northern Germanic ethic of feudal loyalty and heroic resignation in the face of immanent destruction.

Tolkien viewed this as a mutually enriching dialogue which served as an historical precedent and paradigm for his own fiction. He also saw such Anglo-Saxon literature as the source for an organic English identity to be placed in opposition to the "Ugly Fact" of industrial Britain. In a similar way, he explored the broader realm of Fairy-stories in an effort to bring their mythic resources into accord with a Christian salvation history, centered upon the Incarnation. In this scenario, subcreative art performs a mimetic function with respect to the Resurrection, offering a redemptive consolation to unfulfilled human desires while anticipating final eschatological salvation "beyond the walls of this world" (OFS:62). From an aesthetic point of view, the Incarnation of God is the ultimate artefact, the archetype of the realization of human desire which subcreation can only imperfectly echo in Platonic fashion.

Campbell's cultural critique is at once harsher and more moderate than Tolkien's. As a lapsed Catholic, Campbell's criticism of Western culture did not exclude the criticism of Christianity. Whereas for Tolkien the Evangelium is necessarily the pivotal moment of aesthetic redemption, for Campbell the emergence of the Judeo-Christian tradition signifies a kind of anti-myth which becomes a negative foil for his own vision of "true" myth. It is Campbell's own myth of the Fall — the Fall into literalism, otherworldliness, dualism and tribal particularism. Yet his view of Western culture is not purely negative. He also sees throughout the history of Europe an older "Northern" mythology, periodically repressed by incursions of "Southern" Christendom and other such Near Eastern anomalies, which finds a positive space in his genealogy of myth (cf. *Creative Mythology*). Thus, as with Tolkien, the history of myth involves an implicit negotiation of cultural and religious identity. If he is less forgiving of the Church, Campbell's estimation of modern secular society is much more generous than Tolkien's grim horror of zip-fasteners and internal combustion engines, and here perhaps their different experience of the war-years may prove to be the most crucial element in the formation of their views. Tolkien's vision of art is consciously juxtaposed against its evil twin: the mechanized commodity as counterfeit artefact. Campbell, on the other hand, while he preserves a critical stance towards

"mechanized" social systems, nevertheless has a much rosier vision of technology which he sees as playing an instrumental role in the birth of a new mythology.

Both Campbell and Tolkien are Platonists inasmuch as they view mythology from a dialectic of the real and the ideal, the universal and the particular, but their aesthetic visions vary in their relative valuation of these qualities and over the proper historical referent of them. Platonism is a formalistic model of reality, and both Tolkien and Campbell ultimately value form above content. Campbell, for example, sees the universal *forms* or archetypes of myth as infinitely more important (in the last analysis) than their particular historical or cultural content:

There are of course differences between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind, but...once [the similarities] are understood the differences will be found to be much less great than is popularly (and politically) supposed. (*Hero*: viii)

Tolkien's response to the archetypal argument was that:

Statements of that kind may express (in undue abbreviation) some element of truth; but they are not true in a fairy-story sense, they are not true in art or literature. It is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable impartial details of a story, and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count. (*OFS*: 21-22)

It is doubtful that Campbell would take issue with Tolkien's analysis; indeed, his own predilection for storytelling admirably demonstrates his appreciation of the particularities of myth. Conversely, Tolkien's theory of Eucatastrophe as the proper form of the fairy-tale is potentially just as universalizing and formalistic as Campbell. But this seemingly duplicitous emphasis is not, of course, a problem for Tolkien or Campbell because their model of the *relationship* between the form and content of myth is organic rather than crudely mechanistic. For Tolkien, the *unity* of form and content is exemplified by the Incarnation: the content of our salvation is appropriate to the form of our humanity, hence God redeems us human storytellers by telling us a new story, in the form of a human being. For Campbell the human psyche is the source of mythic selection, whereby we are naturally and intuitively drawn to those images whose content best accords with metaphysical and psychological realities (*Myths to Live By*: 265).

Despite these similarities in the Platonic structure of their aesthetic, however, fundamentally different consequences are drawn from them. To a large extent these differences center upon Tolkien's Catholicism and Campbell's rejection of Christianity. Whereas for Tolkien the Church is the necessary institutional space wherein mythic consolation occurs, for Campbell it is the global individual (in contrast to any particular group) which serves as the site of mythic experience. The logic of this religious difference replicates itself in various ways in their writing. One example of this is Tolkien and Campbell's

disagreement over the metaphysical function of myth. For Tolkien the effect of Enchantment is to free our perception from "the drab blur of...familiarity" (*OFS*: 53), to recognize the otherness of things, that they are "no more yours than they were you" (*OFS*: 54). This ultimately metaphysical imperative to recognize difference and separation between self and other is reprehensible to Campbell, for whom true myth is meant to demonstrate the pantheistic oneness of all things.

Another significant indicator of divergence is Tolkien and Campbell's estimation of the significance of dreams in relation to myth. Strongly influenced as he is by the psychoanalytic tradition, Campbell affirms the importance of dreams as a source of myth, even to the extent of asserting that myths are in fact collective dreams. Tolkien grants dreams far less value, if he nevertheless acknowledges their power. For him, though, fantasy is fundamentally a rational activity (*OFS*: 45). Related to this question of dreams is Tolkien's predilection for "realism" in fantasy: successful fantasy or myth must be able to command secondary belief, and so must be presented as "true" (*OFS*: 18). This proposition follows logically enough from a theology of Incarnation in which the mythic is also necessarily "literal." Whereas for Campbell myth is more often "surrealistic" in that it is only metaphorical and never to be found in promiscuous unity with the literal (unless we take the literal here to mean the metaphysical and psychological dimensions of our existence).

IV. Myth and the Problem of Social Order

As we turn now to the ways in which Campbell and Tolkien invoke the discourse of myth in response to the problem of social order, it becomes necessary to address the historical context in which they are writing. As I have suggested earlier, the experience of the war years provides the principal reference point to this context. Tolkien's lecture "On Fairy-stories" was delivered on the eve of WWII, and Campbell's groundbreaking work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* hailed the aftermath of that same war with a faith that the revitalization of myth would contribute to a new world order:

My hope is that a comparative elucidation may contribute to the perhaps not-quite-desperate cause of those forces that are working in the present world for unification, not in the name of some ecclesiastical or political empire, but in the sense of human mutual understanding. (*Hero*: viii)

This remark is dated June 10, 1948.

Campbell and Tolkien are here addressing two rather different audiences. While Campbell's universalistic model of myth parallels his concern for a new, global understanding, Tolkien's driving intention had always been to imagine and create "a mythology for England" (Carpenter: 87ff). Consequently his focus is national rather than international. The problem for Tolkien was to realize through storytelling an organic vision of the world in the midst of a society oppressed by the shadow of war. As one

writing from the perspective of a pre-Vatican II Catholic minority, Tolkien's vision was inevitably defensive rather than generously ecumenical. The combination of these two factors generated a context in which a mythological paradigm of "the long defeat" would prove an authentic expression of a real experience. In his correspondence to his son Christopher during the second World War, Tolkien explains the genesis of his mythic imperative in the following manner:

I took to 'escapism': or really transforming experience into another form and symbol with Morgoth and Orcs and the Eldalie...and it has stood me in good stead in many hard years since and I still draw on the conceptions then hammered out.... I sense amongst all your pains...the desire to express your feeling about good, evil, fair, foul in some way: to rationalize it, and prevent it from just festering. (Letters: 78, 85)

If for Tolkien mythopoeia is an act of defiance in the face of a fallen world, for Campbell it is a great adventure. Campbell's valorization of the hero as the promethean individual who embarks upon a quest to save himself and the world from a tyrant (*Hero:15*) would perhaps speak much closer to Campbell's own experience as an American who watched the war from the opposite side of the Atlantic. And just as Tolkien out of his context addressed the problem of maintaining a particular national and religious identity in the face of oppression, so Campbell out of his own grappled with the challenge of how the war-torn remnants of local mythologies could become a resource of hope for a new, global and international human community.

Whether its goal is to escape a fallen world or to live within it, both Tolkien and Campbell invoke myth in the name of certain universal human desires: myth is generated by desire, and its narrative and imagery are expressions of its realization — or, alternately, of its unrealizability. For Tolkien fairy-stories are not concerned so much with possibility as with desirability. "If they awakened desire, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded" (*OFS: 39*). The desire of which Tolkien speaks is made manifest in the fantastic content of myth, its unlikeness to the world that we know. The presence of talking animals, for example, suggests to Tolkien a deeper and more pervasive human longing for communion with the natural world, and ultimately the desire for a morally intelligible cosmos. And, he adds:

there are also other and more profound 'escapisms' that have always appeared in fairy-tale and legend.... There are hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice, death. (*OFS: 60*)

The escape from mortality is, for Tolkien, the arch-desire to which all true myth must address itself. Yet ironically the "satisfaction" or "consolation" which myth is to deliver us must also contain an element which must deny that desire (at least as far as the fallen world is concerned) since it can never in *fact* be realized.

For Campbell the principal human longing which gives rise to myth is the desire to be (as he puts it) "in accord":

The...most vital...function of a mythology...is to foster the centering and unfolding of the individual in integrity, in accord with d) himself (the microcosm), c) his culture (the mesocosm), b) the universe (the macrocosm), and a) that awesome ultimate mystery which is both beyond and within himself and all things (*Creative Mythology: 6*)

For Campbell this unity takes on even greater importance since, in his view, science and secularization have for the present effectively nullified the sociological and cosmological functions of myth (*Creative Mythology: 611-623*). Mythology can no longer provide transcendental validation to a social order, and yet according to him the loss of such validation cannot help but breed anomie and barbarism. Campbell's solution to this dilemma is to valorize the principal of accord by rooting it in the Jungian concept of individuation (*Myths to Live By: 68*). By refusing to grant its inauthentic claims of transcendental validity to a mythically-deprived society, the self-actualizing individual recognizes himself to be the true site of mythic power. Rather than submit to a social system he puts himself in accord with the transcendent structure of myth, which is not really submission at all (in any pejorative sense) since it is at one with his own nature.

All societies are evil, sorrowful, inequitable; and so they will always be. So if you really want to help this world, what you will have to teach is how to live in it.... The important word here is "all", which cannot be translated to mean "modern life", or (as I have recently heard) "life under Capitalism", so that if the social order were altered, people then might become happy. (*Myths To Live By: 106, 136*)

What is noteworthy about Campbell's rather grim Schopenhaurian vision of human activity, is that despite his revulsion at the perversity of ideas such as Original Sin and fallen worlds, his own thought about the relationship of myth to social order demonstrates a remarkably similar structure to Tolkien's traditional Catholic views. It may also be appropriate to question whether in denying myth a role in underpinning contemporary society Campbell is not deluding himself, as his own universalism and individualism square off rather nicely with the core values of capitalism — in other words, it could be argued "that Campbell's preoccupation with a perennialist vision of the eternal truths that mythology has taught us," truths which supposedly transcend all particular cultures, turns out in the end to be a *de facto* universalization of a particular culture: Campbell's own; and thus one would have to conclude that myth is in fact alive and well in its sociological and cosmological functions, and that people like Tolkien and Campbell are not only students of myth, but architects of it.

Accordingly one would have to appreciate their visions of myth as mythologies in their own right. For Tolkien this is perhaps more obvious, since he was both an artist who created a mythology as well as a committed Christian who lived within one. Campbell's non-religious position at first

renders this kind of myth-making less apparent, yet the Romantic tradition to which he was heir was, if you will, thoroughly mythological in its own cult of the creative powers of the individual. On the relationship between art and modern society, quite apropos to the discussion of myth, Terry Eagleton observes:

that the idea of autonomy — a mode of being which is entirely self-regulating and self-determining — provides the middle class with just the ideological model of subjectivity it requires for its material operations [that is, its functioning as a particular society]. Yet this concept of autonomy [in our case, the autonomy of myth as a spontaneous and universalizing source of individual creativity] is radically double-edged.... The aesthetic is at once...the very secret prototype in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought. It signifies a creative turn to the body, as well as an inscribing of that body with a subtly oppressive law; it represents on the one hand a liberatory concern with concrete particularity, and on the other hand a specious form of universalism. It offers a generous utopian image between men and women at present divided from one another, it also blocks and mystifies the real political movements towards such historical community. Any account of this amphibious concept which either uncritically celebrates it or unequivocally denounces it is thus likely to overlook its real historical complexity. (Eagleton:9)

Whether the paradigm of human activity be to follow one's bliss or to make by the law in which one is made, Campbell and Tolkien embrace a vision of art which is quite consciously juxtaposed to a model of social order that valorizes individual creativity and damns any kind of collective activity towards "change" or "improvement." Although this must be qualified for Tolkien, who identifies the Church as site of collective *resistance* against the fallen world. The reason for their so adamantly foregrounding this opposition as a necessary component to their respective visions of myth is precisely for the fact that they see themselves as addressing the question of social order in a time of radical social and political upheaval. One aspect of their social visions which Tolkien and Campbell held in common was elitism; whether it be Campbell's rather blunt assertions about virile geniuses impregnating the docile masses with spiritual insights or Tolkien's more theological ideal of the subcreative artist as the recipient of grace, the individual is seen as an autonomous source of sanity for a society which has lost its vitality — or its mind.

A second common aspect to their social vision was a revulsion to the thought of "collective" or "organized" human activity as a subject of mythic empowerment, at least as a model for our contemporary world. Tolkien is most vocal on this point, and his view of all such pretensions as polluting to the human spirit figures centrally in his fiction. "The essence of a fallen world", he writes,

is that the best cannot be attained by free enjoyment, or by what is called 'self-realization'.... but by denial, by

suffering... one must face the fact: the power of evil in the world is not finally resistible by incarnate creatures, however 'good'; and the Writer of the Story is not one of us. (Letters: 51, 252)

For Tolkien, then, there is a gap between mythic ideals and temporal realities. Humility and equality, in his eyes:

are spiritual principles corrupted by the attempt to mechanize and formalize them, with the result that we get not universal smallness and humility, but universal greatness and pride, till some Orc gets hold of a ring of power — and then we get and are getting slavery.... I am not a 'reformer' (by exercise of power) since it seems doomed to Sarumanism. (Letters: 246)

Tolkien's bleak vision of "mechanization" returns us to the way in which the Machine (technology) becomes an icon for all that art is not. While Campbell does not share Tolkien's unqualified disgust at technology (inasmuch as that is taken to be a symbol for modern society as a whole) he nevertheless recognizes that human society can easily become an impersonal "system" which denies the aspirations and desires of humanity articulated by myth. But like Tolkien he also regards collective action as a kind of pollution which is somehow self-undoing. Tolkien and Campbell are by no means unique in this. Eagleton offers the following scenario for the logic of this view:

Suppressed by the varieties of Victorian rationalism during the epoch of liberal capitalism, myth stages its dramatic re-entry into European culture...in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If a *laissez-faire* economy is now moving into more systemic modes, then there is something peculiarly apposite about the rebirth of myth — itself, as Levi-Strauss has taught us, a highly organized 'rational' system — as an imaginative means of deciphering this new social experience. Such mythological thought belongs with a radical shift in the whole category of the subject.... for it is really no longer possible to pretend, given the transition from market to monopoly capitalism, that the old vigorously individualist ego, the self-determining subject of liberal thought, is any longer an adequate model for the subject's new experience of itself under these altered social conditions. The modern subject, much like the mythological one, is less the sharply individuated source of its own actions than an obedient function of some deeper controlling structure, which now appears more and more to do its thinking and acting for it.... the individual [is] constituted to its roots by forces and processes utterly opaque to everyday consciousness. Whether one names such implacable powers Language or Being, Capital or the Unconscious, Tradition or the *elan vital*, Archetypes or the Destiny of the West, their effect is to open up a well-nigh unspannable gulf between the waking life of the old befeathered ego and the true determinants of its identity, which are always covert and inscrutable. If the subject is accordingly fractured and dismantled, the objective world it confronts is now quite impossible to grasp as the product of the subject's own activity. What stands over against this individual is a self-regulative system which appears on the one hand thoroughly rationalized, eminently logical in its minutest operations, yet on the other hand blankly indifferent to the rational projects of

human subjects themselves. This autonomous, self-determining artefact of a world then rapidly takes on all the appearances of a second nature, erasing its own source in human practice so as to seem self-evidently given and immobilized as those rocks, trees and mountains which are the stuff of mythology. (Eagleton: 316-317)

Whether or not we agree with Eagleton's analysis, our appreciation of Tolkien and Campbell's differences must include an understanding of this larger cultural milieu which they shared, and how it provided a context within which their vision of myth would become meaningful. This broader appreciation of key elements of their own writings on myth is valuable not only for the sake of comparison, but because it can suggest new ways in which Campbell's theory of the hero, for example, might be used to illuminate the archetypal patterns in Tolkien's own fiction, and how those patterns cohere within his overall artistic vision. Similarly Tolkien's affirmation of Catholicism provides an interesting angle from which to explore the subtle ways in which Campbell's thought sometimes preserves the structure of the theological heritage which he rejected. Finally, comparison is always mutually illuminating and points to the common intellectual and aesthetic traditions from which more notable students of myth such as Tolkien and Campbell drew upon for their inspiration, for it is within those traditions that we come to a fuller appreciation of their work.

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The White Raven (continued from page 33)
be betrayed before she betrays; refusing growth, Esseilte's betrayal is simply the sign of careless self-absorption in her own love affair.

In the Prologue, Branwen prepares the audience for the contrast which structures *The White Raven*, asking:

But what is the Queen?

If I am ever to know how Esseilte's fate and my own have been twined with those of Drustan and Marc'h the King, that is what I must understand. (1)

More succinctly, in the Afterword, Paxson stresses that the novel is not "merely a story about a pair of lovers, but about the meaning of sovereignty" (438). Such statements can be taken literally, since Branwen becomes more fit to use authority than Esseilte. At the same time, they can also be taken symbolically: a Queen, as anyone who considers the meaning of the Empress in the Tarot deck can understand, is a common symbol for a mature or successful woman. For this reason, it is in Esseilte's and Branwen's attitudes towards Queenship that the novel's two views of the Heroine are most succinctly revealed. By sending Branwen as her substitute in the marriage bed, Esseilte is metaphorically refusing adulthood. By contrast, in accepting responsibility and by facing the hard truths about herself, Branwen transforms herself into an adult — and, by extension, into a woman worthy of being queen. In this sense, Esseilte is perhaps right to say that Branwen has stolen her life (401) — yet, because Esseilte has refused responsibilities and taken advantage of Branwen's willingness to face them, the accusation is hardly a fair one. For Esseilte, as for the traditional Heroine, love for a man becomes an end in itself, a childish attitude that ends in tragedy. Literally unable to live without Drustan, she dies shortly after him. For Branwen, winning a man's love is only the outward sign of her inward development. Having gained the insight that is the goal of the true Hero, she wins a chance for permanent content — an end that is quite beyond the short-sightedness of her cousin Esseilte.

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Editorial Note

Periodically someone will ask "Is that *really* your name?" In an age of media hyperbole and outright fiction, it is not unreasonable to question such an unusual and rarely encountered name, especially in this Society. But it is my real name — the one on my birth certificate. According to family history the first GoodKnight immigrated to the Carolinas in 1758, when the name was Anglicized from the German "Gut Knight." The family followed the frontier of an expanding nation, and the trails leads from North Carolina to Kentucky, to Missouri, to Texas, to California. The family began in France with Pierre du Terrail Bayard called "*le bon chevalier sans puer et sans reproche*." Later becoming Huguenots, the family later prudently migrated from France to Germany following the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. The maiden names of those who married into the family here in America over the generations reveal English and Scottish blood. While my name and many of the things I treasure are derived from Europe, I am unmistakably and proudly an American hybrid.

— Glen GoodKnight