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Fantasy and Personal Involvement



EDITORIAL



This is the 60th issue of *Mythlore*. As part of looking back over these 21 years since January 3, 1969 (Tolkien's 71st birthday — a day I remember well, when the first issue was finished), I give here a repeat of the editorial written for that issue.

Fantasy and Personal Involvement

The symptoms of increasing alienation of the individual from his total environment are increasingly apparent in our society today. The failure to really communicate, and the resultant intense frustration, bring about explosion or isolation.

The understanding of how former generations fumbled through with inconsistent and inadequate ethical and cultural systems is beyond many today. The apparently unreal systems of the past just do not seem to authentically work in the present. Can there be much wonder why there is alienation, frustration and anger today. To me there are three alternatives open for those who find themselves in this dilemma: 1. destroy the system, 2. drop out, 3. work within the system to bring constructive change and revitalization.

We can say the present system is hopeless, and more than that, it has become abhorrent and should be overthrown. Some are saying this now. Assume that happens, then what? For human being to live together in any culture or civilization, *some* system is demanded. It would seem that alienated, frustrated people, in general, would not have the accumulated experience to build a workable new system. I honestly fear (as critical as I am about many things in the present system) that any new system on that basis would be far worse than which we struggle with now. Cynicism is a corrosive poison; it can tear down, but it is impotent to create new life.

The second choice is to withdraw from the system; ignore the conditions around you, and attempt to live a beautiful and reflective life. This to a point is necessary for all of us. Vacations are a common attenuated example. However there are different kinds of dropping out. The second alternative is complete denunciation and permanent rejection of the system; the withdrawal to our self-centered universe; to become in the words of the song by Simon and Garfunkle, a *rock*, and island feeling no pain, thus feeling nothing. The third alternative is to temporarily withdraw a distance from the system, have a detached view, and return refreshed with new perspective. Man as a whole person has the quality to transcend any human system he daily lives in. In other words, whole man is potentially greater than any human system he creates.

Fantasy can be either way of dropping out. To me, the real function of fantasy is related to the third alternative. The fantasy of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams (among others) have this beneficial effect.

Fantasy has been accused of being "escapist;" that it

gives people a distorted view of reality. Critics point to the fact that Tolkien is a favorite of the hippies, thus proving their charge of "escapism." Why do hippies enjoy Tolkien? I do not know for sure. (I find things that I both agree and disagree on with the hippies.) Probably because people of *all kinds* respond to the creative art and the "inner consistency of reality" that exemplify his works. But I do not think that values of hippies and of Professor Tolkien are by any means the same.

You don't have to "drop Acid" to be a drop out. The hobbits of the Shire were drop outs in their own way. The only thing the culture of the Shire and the hippies have in common (contrary to *Ramparts Magazine*) is the simple, naive unconcern and almost congenial hostility with the out-side world. Perhaps this is the special reason why hippies like Tolkien. But his attitude of the Shire-folk led nearly to their destruction. It was only the return of the heroic hobbits, the ones that had been away and *involved* with the struggles of the larger world that turned the tide against the tyranny and exploitation of the Shire.

Frodo, in contrast to his environment, was not a drop out. His initial reluctance to assume responsibility makes his commitment more believable. He took upon himself the destiny of a whole world by choice in his own home. Tolkien, through the examples of Frodo and Sam, is saying just the opposite of a drop out philosophy. Personal involvement is necessary to save a world in danger, and probably to save one's self.

Thus for me, as for many, this kind of fantasy is a psychic vacation; an opportunity to temporarily escape the stream of immediate sense experiences and view from a different and perhaps breathtaking perspective those questions and issues that are always present and demand dealing with. Because these questions and issues are the same, whether in Middle-earth or Narnia or our own world, this fantasy is not escapist in an ultimate sense, but healthy and inspiring. The third alternative does not mean sticking with the system with blinders on. To bring change and new life to a system without vision, we need transcendence: transcendence not from the issues, but transcendence to see the issue in a larger context.

Glen GoodKnight



(The entire issue was finished, and this editorial written when I had the infamous "Hong Kong" flu for three weeks in '68-'69. I've reprinted it unchanged, even though much could be improved.)

The world has come a long way since the time this was written, some ways for the better, other ways not. The brawling polarity between "the Establishment" and "the Counter-Culture" has abated — hippies have produced yuppie children. Yet the need to stand back and take a look at the present world from a refreshed and informed viewpoint is still *very much* needed. New issues demand our involvement and contribution. We live in history, and cannot sit by the sidelines as disinterested observers. Our times involve rapid and exciting changes that have potent

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his father's two references in the text of "The Theft of Melko" to Melko's accomplice as "Ungwe" (See HME 1: 152 and 154).

7. *Ungwe Lianti*: *Ungwe* (see above #6). The second element derives from the root *LI + ya* 'entwine' (HME 1: 271) to form *liante* 'tendril' (HME 1: 271). -i is the regular plural ending for Quenya nouns using the second (of the possible two) declension(s). "In the second declension are found nouns whose singular (nominative and accusative) end in a consonant . . . or in a consonant + e" (Allan 14); thus, *lianti* is the regular plural of *liante* so that *Ungwe Lianti* translates literally as "Spider Tendrils."

8. *Ungoliont*: *Ungol* is the Sindarin derivative of the Quenya *ungwe*. In Third Age Quenya the *ngw* cluster was one of several consonant clusters including *nqu*, *ng*, *gw*, "all of which were frequent" (3: 399); however, in Sindarin we find "gw only initially" (Allan 59) so that *ngw* cannot occur; thus, *Ungwe Lianti* > *Ungweliant(e)* > *Ungweliont* > "Ungoliont" > *Ungoliont*. -liont would be a regular development in Sindarin

from the Quenya -liante as Quenya was the older language, and "older a had changed to *au/o*" (Allan 52) — *au* in stressed syllables, e.g. *Quenya nar* "red fire" > Sindarin *naur* "fire"; *o* in unstressed syllables, e.g. *Quenya Anar* "Sun" > Sindarin *Anor* "Sun." Final *e* must have disappeared before the change of *a* to *o*; otherwise, according to the rule of penultimate syllabic stress in the Eldarin tongues, *a* would have become *au* resulting in the pronunciation "Un-go-li-'aunt-te," not "Un-gol-'yent." We know, also, that pronunciation is "Un-'gol-yent" and not "Ungo-'li-oni" because of the only occurrence of the monster's name in Tolkien's Old English meter. In the alliterative poem "The Flight of the Noldoli from Valinor" (HME 3: 132), line 8 scans thus:

x x / x x / x / / x
and Ungoliant the grim the Gloomweaver

Tolkien's reasons for later changing *Ungoliont* to *Ungoliant* must have been not linguistically inspired but the result of visual suggestion (as discussed in the text of the present study).

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implications for both the near future and future generations. What it means to be human is now both a philosophical and scientific issue. Things are being done at this time or may soon be done in the foreseeable future to redefine what it means to be human. This should cause us great concern. Man, previously defined by nature, is attempting to divorce himself from this on a physical level through genetic manipulation and control. The clear warning of C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man* is taking on an ever increasingly prophetic voice.

The kind of "Secular" Humanism, which has been in vogue for many decades, is sadly proven in the end to be based on relative values that lack real foundation or connection with the world of actual practice. The Humanism that the Inklings (among many others) shared both in their lives and fantasy, based on spiritual and permanent values, gives us refreshing hope to bring revitalization and a new perspective both to our own lives and to a new and challenging world emerging around us. —GG



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