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Tolkien's "New" Mythology

Abstract

Discusses Tolkien's particular retelling in *The Lord of the Rings* of three basic mythic elements: the quest, its outcome, and the kinds of characters needed to achieve it.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Characters

Tolkien's "New" Mythology

William Edwin Burridge

Myth, as the folklorist and the student of literature normally understand it, is the presentation of dramatic and supernatural episodes to explain and interpret natural events, to make concrete and meaningful and particular an otherwise abstract and difficult perception of man or a cosmic view. It may, in its various forms, explain or raise questions about such fundamental issues as creation, divinity, religion; it may justify rituals, or guess at the meaning of life and death. In short, it provides a narrative, dramatic embodiment of man's perceptions about the deepest truths and most perplexing questions concerning his existence, here or elsewhere.

Since the study of human psychology and literary criticism came to be regarded as near sciences, the study of myth has been intense and often confusing, not to say wrongheaded. After Freud began the plumb the depths of the human subconscious, the tendency grew to see in the tales of mankind, especially those we have identified as mythic, reflections of common truths, hopes, fears, aspirations of races and of mankind generally. Working from Jung's idea of the racial consciousness, thinkers like Philip Wheelwright envisioned an archetypal imagination, something deep and primitive in all that manifests itself in the stories we make and tell and preserve.

Since the nineteenth century, the exploration of man's myths has taken various forms, such as Max Muller's study of folktales as degenerate solar myths, and the even more pervasive Freudian view of the latent sexuality subconsciously implicit in all our conscious activities.

While much that is useful has come from these endeavors, even though individual approaches have fallen into disrepute, the thoughtful student of literature and literary criticism has to see that myth criticism is all too often reductive, reducing all literary variety to an alleged archetypal common denominator. To reduce all literary symbols and meaning to Freudian arrows and circles is not to make literature more accessible; it is to render it dull and unnecessary. This is true whether the criticism is Freudian, or solarian, or Jungian, or whatever.

Still, our great literary monuments from all eras and places at the last deal with a relatively limited range of broad and perennial human concerns. Behind even apparent particularities there lie certain basic philosophic issues common to these particularities. These concerns — the meaning and significance of life and death, of the relationships with one's fellows or deities, of identity of self, etc. — are not easily or effectively discussed in the abstract, certainly not by all who must confront them (as we all must at some time or another); and much of the uniqueness of various periods lies in the choice of symbolic or mythic structures within which they address the

old questions. The questions themselves are never new; the freshness, the imaginative impact comes from the novelty and ingenuity, the metaphysical insight of the symbolic vehicle which asks them anew.

Therefore, while I retain my personal suspicions of unrestrained symbol hunting and myth criticism, I am compelled to find at least some of the sources of the popularity of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in the imaginative quality of the medium in which he sets forth some of the old questions, a medium that may be viewed cautiously but, I think, legitimately as mythic. Because I do not want in any way to reduce the particularity of *The Lord of the Rings*, I shall try to investigate these mythic elements or qualities in the context of Tolkien's story and that of others that seem to shed light upon it, trying not to mistake simple universal statements for true myths, and leave the search for Jungian archetypes to others who are perhaps more bold than I, or less devoted to narrative for its own sake.

One last point: a mythic approach to such a work may also be useful if it saves us from a search for allegory, which Tolkien vehemently and, I think, rightly denied existed in his book. Allegory demands unmistakable one-to-one correspondences with observed reality. To search for, much less to find unintended allegory is at least as reductive as promiscuous myth criticism. If Sauron is made to stand for Adolf Hitler, and the Ring for the atomic bomb, and the hobbits for the English people, then we have lost a great deal from the story.

There are various ways in which *The Lord of the Rings* may be looked at as myth, but three areas in particular may serve as examples: the Quest itself, the outcome of the Quest, and the kinds of characters used to achieve the Quest.

I

It is in the nature of heroic/romantic literature that it involve a quest of some sort. The hero must leave his familiar surroundings and go somewhere to find adventure. Here it does not seem inappropriate to turn to Freudian symbolism to help us understand what is happening at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*. The womblike nature of the safe and comfortable Shire is unmistakable. It wears an aura of green and gold, traditionally the colors of springtime and innocence, as Northrup Frye has shown us. Its soft hills and plentiful but unthreatening woods are obvious feminine symbols, as are the homes of the hobbits themselves: tunnels in the hillsides, with round doors and windows, refuges against all dangers and discomforts. The symbolism is supported by the childlike, even childish, nature of the hobbits themselves, of which more later.

It is from this maternal security that Frodo and his hobbit companions are plucked — in Frodo's case much against his will — and sent into a world of constant hardship and danger, on a mission that they have not sought, do not want, and only vaguely understand.

In a now familiar but useful essay, W.H. Auden has pointed out some of the more important aspects of the quest as it applies here. The road the journey takes is hard and strange, its destination and even its direction often unknown to those who must traverse it. "I will take the Ring, although I do not know the way," says Frodo at the Council of Elrond. Similarly, such heroes as Beowulf and Sir Gawain (of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) must seek conclusions to their quests that are beyond their ken. Beowulf leaves Hygelac's court, scene of his boyhood and early triumphs, to engage in combat the half-human monster, Grendel, unlike any enemy he had faced before. Sir Gawain is bound by his word to turn his back on the safety and comfort of King Arthur's court to search out — he knows not where — a green giant, who will presumably cut off his head. It is thus a measure, both of the quest and of the hero, that the test be unknown and unknowable, and therefore doubly fearful.

Especially interesting is Auden's suggestion that, since the purpose of the quest is normally to find and possess some precious object or person, Tolkien has created a quest in reverse; its purpose is to get rid of something: the Ring and its threat to the safety of Middle-earth. While this is literally true, of course, we must be careful not to let it direct our attention away from the deeper truth that the hero or heroes of the Quest are in fact in search of something, although they are largely unaware of it or of its true nature until the end. Certainly it is Frodo's discovery of self, the growing confrontation with his true nature, that is central to the book. If this were not so, the story would necessarily end with the destruction of the Ring and the fall of Sauron, with everyone living happily ever after, just like a "proper" fairytale.

But the quest hero must make a "journey into sorrow," from which he can never completely return. The Beowulf who arrives in the Danish court, ready to slay the monster Grendel and thereby win fame and fortune, is a brash and naive young man, even a simplistic one. Trials he has had, but he has never had to confront the subtle and more dangerous evils of the world; and it is surely significant that the foe of this first great test is the descendent of Cain, the first murderer, the slayer of kin. Triumphant though he is, Beowulf returns to Hygelac bearing more than glory and treasure. In the recounting of his adventures to the king, the hero reveals a new-found knowledge of the ways and evils of man. Hrothgar's attempt to buy lasting peace with his daughter's marriage is doomed from the outset; for human pride, Beowulf sees, is greater at the last, or at least more durable, than human reason and largely inaccessible to it. Old injuries may not be forgiven and forgotten; and the Heathobard feud will break out afresh sooner or later. Beowulf's entirely accurate prophecy reveals a

growth of knowledge that continues by implication throughout Beowulf's life and is the product of his many deeds and experiences. It culminates in the final dragon fight with Beowulf's own recognition of his personal capacity for evil and his participation in the general evil of the human condition, which the poet makes clear by his compression of history at the end of the work, the collapse of the past into the present so that they become one.

Similarly, Sir Gawain leaves Arthur's court untested in any moral way. He is, in his own mind, as well as in the world's estimation, a nonpareil knight. The "pride of life," as the Middle Ages called it, is obscured at first by the hero's gracious manners and humble behavior. But it is there; and when he is weakened by the rigors of his journey and by his growing fears about the trial to come, and distracted by the vain but repeated attempts of his hostess to seduce him, he falls from his lofty ideals and seizes upon the offer of a magic object to save his life, a worldly life he finds all too pleasant to give up. The fall into self-knowledge at the Green Chapel is precipitous and painful, even though the denouement is comic rather than tragic. Gawain is left with his life and reputation intact, but also with the inescapable truth — his until he dies — that he participates in the frailty and fallibility of mankind.

A final example may be useful, for nowhere is the mythic nature of the quest for and the acquisition of self-knowledge clearer than in the Genesis tale of Creation, especially as Milton has retold it in *Paradise Lost*. The testing object is explicitly called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (good lost and evil gained, as Adam cries later). Adam's fall from a state of blissful ignorance (a cloistered and untried virtue, as Milton calls it elsewhere) to a most painful state of self-awareness is manifestly the product of his human nature, not of the serpent's temptations. (In this case, the quest, leaving Paradise and going forth into the world, comes after the acquisition of self-knowledge, although it will be in travail in the world that Adam and his wife will come to know fully the implications of what they have learned.)

Frodo Baggins looks little like the giants of heroic literature, nor is he a near-allegorical Everyman; but the origin, conditions, and purpose of his quest are largely the same as those of his more obviously heroic counterparts. He begins in the same prideful ignorance of the realities of life and self. His nature is reflected in the Shire itself — contained, comfortable, parochial little world that it is — and in the personalities of his fellow hobbits: self-centered, lazy, closed-minded, rather bigoted and suspicious of anyone or anything different from themselves, all too often petty and petulant, like children protected by and from things they know nothing about, complacent in the extreme.

It is from this complacency that Frodo is cruelly wrenched. He, no more than we, understands exactly why he is chosen or by whom for this terrifying task, and he is more than a little unwilling to go. His latent wisdom, as much as his present fears, tells him that it will likely destroy him. But few seek to make the "journey into sor-

row;" most who appear to go willingly do not know what lies ahead. The reasons why we go when called are various. We may act altruistically for the good of the nation or the race or our friends; perhaps we go seeking glory; maybe we go because we cannot think how to avoid going. But go we must or abandon all pretense of a moral existence. Frodo goes in part because of his Took blood, that part of him that seeks adventure, wishes to transcend the narrowness of Shire life, provokes him on to "manhood" and fulfillment, whatever the price. He also goes because Gandalf, whom he respects, has impressed upon him the need to go. However incompletely, he understands that the Quest is his and may not be rejected. Hesitantly, stumblingly, certainly reluctantly, Frodo sets out on the long road to Mount Doom and to his personal doom, a word we must remember means "judgement." Like his counterparts in other quest myths, he must leave behind what is safe and comfortable and familiar. Moreover, he must go alone, for one does not go to his judgment with an army or a committee or a staff of lawyers. Ultimately, one cannot find self except in solitude. And, as we know, Frodo's companions are stripped away one by one, until at his moment of truth he has only himself.

Frodo will succeed in his Quest, both in that he will destroy the Ring, and in that he will gain something precious, a new and mature knowledge of self. He pays a terrible price for that knowledge, however, and its possession is as painful as it is valuable. Like Adam, his life has been changed hugely and irrevocably. He can never again see with the same eyes as before, nor return to the childlike world of innocence. If he weren't a hobbit, he'd be a man, both in the sense that we popularly employ the term and in the sense that Tolkien uses it: he shares the tragic knowledge of the men of Middle-earth, whose tumultuous history makes up so much of the appendices (and, of course, *The Silmarillion*), men such as Aragorn. Frodo becomes old both in years and in the burden of the awareness that he must carry. It behooves us now to consider the nature of that burden.

II

If Frodo is saddened and unable to return to former joys at the end of his quest, it is because the outcome has been truly "good lost and evil gained." In the context of the story, the Ring has worked its curse upon the bearer, weighing more and more heavily upon him with each passing day and mile. In the larger context, however, we know that the Ring has no real positive influence of its own; it can only reveal qualities which are already present in those who come in contact with it. As Gandalf says, it confers power according to the stature of the wearer. What it reveals, of course, is Adam's sin, pride, the assertion of self at the expense of others. All who wield the Ring do so in the hope of gaining power, and power means the control of others. The wise, such as Gandalf, Galadriel, Aragorn, know well the temptations of the Ring and the dangers of possessing it and refuse to take it. Those less wise, though perhaps well-meaning in some degree, desire the Ring for the furtherance of their dreams. To the wretched Gollum it confers status such as he has never had

and the power of invisibility over enemy and prey. To Boromir it offers the salvation and aggrandizement of his beloved city; his is the warrior, the imperial dream. Perhaps most interesting is the case of Saruman, for in some ways his is the greatest perversion. He dreams of an intellectual utopia, a re-ordering of the world according to his lights. But far more repugnant to us and to Gandalf than the industrial ugliness of his vision are the means which he is willing to resort to achieve it. At the council of Elrond, Gandalf tells of Saruman's attempt to seduce him to his cause. Saruman urged, "We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, *deploring maybe evils done by the way* (italics mine), but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order." He goes on to make perfectly clear that his goal will be achieved by riding roughshod over any who oppose, in whatever way or for whatever reason. This perverted idealism is frightening to see, and it represents the ultimate in intellectual pride: the insistence upon the primacy of one's own vision of truth and upon imposing it upon others, regardless of the cost. It is the sin both of revolutionaries and reactionaries, and all too often the mark of the intellectual.

As Gandalf has foreseen, the hobbits, Bilbo and Frodo, are less affected by the Ring than their greater counterparts. Their desires, after all, are simple: plenty of food and drink and parties, a maximum of comfort and a minimum of bother. Such goals are largely inconsistent with the lust for power. Moreover, the strength to resist the effects of the Ring that Gandalf has seen in the hobbits derives ultimately from their stubborn moral fiber, from a sense of integrity that remains perfectly and remarkably clear in spite of their pettiness; and it stands them in good stead when the chips are down. Some things are always right and always have been; some are always wrong.

Nevertheless, the Ring reveals pride where it finds it, as does the reflecting pool that Milton's Eve looks into. It has consumed Gollum, who was proud and spiteful to begin with. It reveals in Bilbo a malicious unwillingness to give up the Ring to Frodo. And in a hundred ways of growing intensity it slowly lays bare the soul of Frodo. No remark is more pregnant than one in Frodo's first conversation with Gandalf about the history of the Ring and the story of Bilbo and Gollum. "What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had the chance." It is not Gollum's moral loathsomeness that inspires that remark, nor what he tried to do to Bilbo. It is the difficulty and inconvenience that he is presently causing Frodo. More pointedly, it is Frodo's lack of compassion, which again testifies to the primacy of self. And in Gandalf's reply that the pity Bilbo showed saved him from the greater effects of the Ring is a vital lesson that Frodo will have to learn for himself at great cost.

He does learn it, of course, or perhaps the truth that he has always known deep in his heart asserts itself at need. Mile upon painful mile that he bears the Ring brings him to a fuller understanding of the wretched Gollum (to whom he earlier wanted to deny all hobbit kinship), until it is he who must preach the lesson of pity and forbearance

to Sam, who would destroy Gollum out of fear and intolerance, if left to his own devices.

The Ring, then, reveals the essential dichotomy of the human soul, a dichotomy represented mythically in Frodo's moment of truth at the Cracks of Doom. He has journeyed to the moment when at last he can no longer delay the confrontation with his pride, his capacity for sin. At the very end of the quest, when his defenses are lowest, he succumbs to that pride and claims the Ring for his own. But there is more to human nature than pride and evil. Frodo's essential goodness, seen throughout the story and manifested in his growing compassion, saves him from himself. The Gollum that he has pitied and spared leaps out of the darkness to bite off Frodo's finger, together with the Ring, and plunges into the fiery pits below; and Frodo's capacity for evil, mythically embodied in the figure of Gollum, is thus purged. The physical wound is then a symbol of the price of knowledge. It represents the expiation of Frodo's guilt, an expiation made possible by his rejection of the primacy of self: his pity for another. It is interesting to note the use of the same symbol in classical literature. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Euripides has Orestes satisfy the Furies that pursue him with a ritual payment of blood. Even more suggestive is the version of the same story by Pausanias, in which Orestes gives the Furies the blood they seek by biting off one of his own fingers.

The mythic element pervades *The Lord of the Rings* in the formal language, the hereditary titles, the songs, and the stories that are told and remembered. And Sam gives testimony to the mythic quality of Frodo's experience at the Cracks of Doom, even before he knows that they will be saved, when he laments that he will not be around when the story is told of *Nine-Finger Frodo and the Ring of Doom*. In this story, as surely as in that of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, is embodied the essential contradiction of the human condition.

But the story does not end here. Frodo and his companions must return to their own world and find there what life they can. And Frodo learns, as other heroes who make the quest for self must learn, that he cannot go home again. Even after order has been restored to the Shire, and all seems back in its original state, Frodo's wounds continue to pain him, reminding him of his ordeal, of good lost and evil gained. The sweet, comfortable innocence of the Shire mocks him now, for he must see its essential unreality. He stands in contrast to Merry and Pippin, who strut about like overgrown boys, boasting of their adventures, not really understanding what has happened. For while they went on the journey, they did not enter the hell of Mordor, and they did not possess the Ring. They remain untouched, in no important way different from their younger selves. Frodo's somber condition after his return is reflected in the larger conclusions of the quest. Were *The Lord of the Rings* a fairytale in the popular sense of the term, it would have ended with the destruction of the Ring and by extension all of the evil forces, with the crowning of the King, the marriages of heroes and heroines, and with some

form of the words, "And they lived happily ever after." But like the *Beowulf* which so obviously influenced it, Tolkien's book ends on a somber note. The victory is only an interim one. Evil has not been destroyed; it has suffered only a temporary setback, and sooner or later the battle must be joined again. For evil, despite its dramatic embodiment in the story, is not an external force to be contended with and defeated. It lies in man, in his greed and pride, in his essential selfishness. This knowledge is the source of Frodo's discontent, and we see it in nearly all of the creatures of Tolkien's world: in the pride and isolation of elves and dwarves, and in the power lust of men, as well as in the obvious evil of orcs and trolls and Ringwraiths. To be sure, with a few individuals of good will, such as Gimli and Legolas, Theoden and Treebeard, the barriers of self can be temporarily and locally broken down and a truce, if not a peace, achieved for the nonce. But the injuries, the old feuds, cannot be forgotten. Sooner or later, self will reassert itself, friends will become enemies, and the world will take one step nearer the end.

Many critics have called attention to the Christian qualities of *The Lord of the Rings* and of Tolkien's world view. Yet in at least one important way, his mythos is anything but Christian. The Christian myth is essentially an optimistic one. Eve's seed will bruise the serpent's head; through her child Mary will redeem what Eve has lost. The curse of sorrow and toil is upon Adam and his wife, but the promise is there. Tolkien's view is much more Germanic. The world is slowly running down. Men and gods may be loyal allies, but Ragnarok is inexorably coming, and in the end death, the ultimate form and consequence of evil, will prevail and all will be snuffed out. Tolkien's history looks always back, never forward. The future is at best vague and ominous. The King may be on his throne and the Fourth Age begun. But this means the end of the Third Age, with all that is good as well as with all that is bad. The wizards are leaving; the elves are at virtual end of their sojourn on Middle-earth and leave it, filled with melancholy; Elrond's daughter has chosen mortality; and even those authors of peace, the Ring-bearers, must leave. It is no accident that we read the final pages of Tolkien's book with wet eyes and a lump in the throat. He has clearly intended it.

The picture is not entirely of gloom, of course. Life will go on, at least for a time. To set against the growing darkness are the thoughts and deeds of heroes. The *Beowulf* concludes with the death of its hero and the specter of war and annihilation for his people. His efforts of a lifetime seem to have come to nothing. Or have they? We still have the portrait of the hero, his tireless struggle against overwhelming odds and certain defeat. Too, there is his kinsman Wiglaf, alone of his followers loyal to the King in need, who picks up the sword from Beowulf's lifeless hand to continue the fight. For it is in the ceaseless attempt, not in the victory, that man's dignity lies. As long as there are brave men of good will, men who "will take the Ring, although they do not know the way," there is reason to continue. Life is hopeless, but it is not futile.

III

Let me conclude with a few remarks about Tolkien's characters. Few aspects of his book have so distressed his critics, who find the characters variously silly, shallow, unreal, or confusing. The problem seems to me to be that they are trying — consciously or unconsciously — to read *The Lord of the Rings* as a realistic work of fiction rather than what it is: a romantic quest myth. As Auden has pointed out, the essential quality of the questor is his apartness, his separation from others. This is inconsistent in the end with the subtler kinds of characterization of other forms of fiction, and leads to the creation of archetypes. If the story of the hero is to be the mythic embodiment of fundamental human qualities and questions, it is necessary that certain facets of the human condition be extrapolated and looked at in a kind of isolation, as the hero must look at himself apart from the incidentals of life if he is to discover truth. Subtlety of characterization is, in fact, at odds with the purpose of myth. Adam is no Raskolnikov, but we enjoy *Paradise Lost* nevertheless.

This does not mean, however, that mythic characterization must be simple-minded. The creator of myths has means at his disposal for attaining necessary depth of characterization. One such means is through the juxtaposition and interaction of characters who may be relatively flat in themselves. The Genesis myth, in *Paradise Lost* or elsewhere, can best be understood by seeing Adam and Eve as different aspects of mankind, instead of viewing them as discrete characters and trying to decide whether man or woman is responsible for the fall. We see this kind of pairing of characters throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. Aragorn has his Denethor, Gandalf his Saruman, and so on.

The approach reaches its zenith, however, in Tolkien's treatment of Frodo, Sam, and Gollum. We must not overlook the bonds among these hobbits, nor the fact that they are drawn closer and closer together as we near the end of the quest. Tolkien clearly means for us to treat them as a unit.

As the hero of the story (if he is to be so described), Frodo does seem to lack the requisite complexity of personality to show forth the truths the story compels him to carry. His fears and every-growing anguish seem more physical than mental, more external than internal. Despite his partial failure at Mount Doom and his condition at the end of the story, he really is too monolithic (if anyone three feet high can be called a monolith) to exemplify complexity. We must look at him in the light of his companions on the final approaches to the Cracks of Doom. The combination might seem to deny an important quality of the quest myth: the isolation of the hero at the critical moment. But if every man can choose a companion from his life when he goes to judgment, so Frodo can, and even must, take with him to his doom what he is, for on that he shall be judged.

While he has a good deal of charm, Sam Gamgee is largely unattractive as a character. To be sure, he is admirable, loyal and courageous; his dreams and pleasures are simple and altogether commendable. But he is much more monolithic than Frodo is. He is unrelievedly and

almost unbearably good and strong. In fact, the only moments in which we see him at all unattractively presented are the natural consequences of his nature. His intolerance of Gollum is the intolerance of what is almost superhumanly good for that which is evil. (It should be noted that Sam does have one lapse into pride, when he puts on Frodo's Ring. He does this, however, only to help his master; and it is a measure of his character that in his vision of himself as Samwise the Strong, he is only the world's greatest gardener.) But Sam is better understood as a character if he is seen as an aspect of Frodo, as a manifestation of the good, the loyalty, the bravery that sustains Frodo and makes possible his endurance of the forces of evil. Gandalf, Elrond, and Aragorn are awed by Frodo's ability to withstand the effects of the fragment of the Morgul knife in the wound that he sustains at Weathertop. It is the strength of his moral fiber that makes this possible, a strength that Gandalf has foreseen. The wizard's choice of Sam as Frodo's companion reflects the same foresight about Sam; Gandalf sees them the same way. Conversely, Sam's narrow intolerance of Gollum reflects Frodo's own earlier attitude. It is only through suffering and the awareness of his own sin that Frodo is able to temper the intolerance of goodness with humanity, with compassion.

Gollum, on the other hand, plays the opposite role. As Saruman represents the evil possible to Gandalf, Smeagol represents the evil possibilities which are a part of Frodo. The insistence of Gollum as being of hobbit-kind is important here. Tolkien is stressing the relationship. Whether Frodo likes it or not, he is closer in nature to Gollum than he realizes until well along in the story. Gollum, interestingly enough, is a more fully developed character than Sam. Doubtless this is true in part because evil is more interesting than good, but also because Gollum reflects to some degree the complexity of Frodo's personality. Nonetheless, Frodo is obviously — physically, mentally, spiritually — squarely between his two companions; and in this triumvirate we are enabled to see the totality of his character.

In this way, myth develops its characters, through fragmentation and subsequent juxtaposition. They are not simplistic, and they certainly are not silly. Such a treatment of personality makes possible the exploration and exposition of the human condition as myth and permits the reader both the sympathetic reaction necessary for his involvement and the objective distance necessary for his contemplation and edification.

Finally, then, it should be apparent that, despite the title of this paper, Tolkien's mythology is not new. It tells old truths and explores the old problems, and in spite of cosmetic differences, does it in the old way. His myths are old, heroic; simple but not simplistic. It tells no less truth because it is not tortuous or obscure. Perhaps it tells even more truth to an age that has desperately sought such unity of vision, such clarity of insight, not to mention such elegance of expression. I think it therefore not at all surprising that our time has taken this strange, "old" book to its heart. ♀