

Winter 12-15-1993

J.R.R. Tolkien

Canon Norman Power

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Power, Canon Norman (1993) "J.R.R. Tolkien," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 19: No. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol19/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



J.R.R. Tolkien

proposal regarding the various forms of *lh* and *ngh*: "Could one represent a 'light' *l*, another a 'dark' *l*, and so forth? Similar questions might be raised about N^o 57-58, variants for *ngh* ... Perhaps in the case of *lh* and *ngh*, a kind of articulatory fronting is implied" (*Mythlore* 69, p. 24). Not only can I make the same arguments here that I made above, but I can also apply the notion of symmetry of phonological systems to the problem. It would be unnatural for a three-way phonetic distinction to be made in the voiceless lateral approximant *lh* when no such distinction is made in its voiced counterpart *l*. A similar argument could be made regarding *ngh* and *ng*. Granted, a writing system would be highly unlikely, especially in a written system created by a philologist like Tolkien!

I have one last comment: the pictures on page 33 of *Mythlore* 70 are all backward. Is this a subtle reminder that Lewis Carroll lived in Oxford too? [That was an inadvertent error of the printer at time of printing; only the sharp-eyed would detect it. —GJ]

David Doughan

London, England

[This a combination of two letters he sent.]

This is just a very belated line to say how magnificent it was to meet you and so many of the Mythopoeic Society regulars at the Keble conference. I had already gathered that you were a pretty fantastic (in every sense of the word) bunch, but reality so far outstripped rumor that I was (by my standards) dumbstruck. Among many others, I was particularly delighted to meet Sarah Beach and Paula Di-Sante, whose artwork I have admired over the years, the Callahans, Mike Foster, David Funk, David Bratman, Charles Coulombe (who has to be met to be believed), Lynn Maudlin (I've met her and I still don't believe it) and, above all, the members of the E.L.F. — Carl, Pat, Nancy, Chris, Arden, and above and beyond all, PAUL NOLAN HYDE. I could write a long (and not entirely libelous) article about this character; for the present, I shall restrict myself to remarking that he showed us Brits up who consistently dressed like a Proper English Gentleman (apart from a couple of evening appearances which are best left to obscurity). Anyway, *thank you all very much for coming*. I trust that the consequences of the Conference will rumble on for a good few years yet (and I shall be adding my own occasional rumble thereto). Meanwhile, may I ask you to pass on to the above mentioned, and the Mythopoeic Society generally, in whatever way seems appropriate to you, my very best wishes and hopes that we may meet again in the not-too-distant future.

Many thanks for *Mythlore* 70, especially for the marvelous Conference photos — you and Bonnie are definitely to be congratulated! Did you see the Belgian writup in *Cirth de Gandalf*? In French, I fear, but you surely have some competent Francophones in California to translate. I've also seen a highly enthusiastic account in a Russian literary weekly ... its only we Brits who are lukewarm about it. Grr.

Just one comment on an article: on page 41 William

Senior quotes Christine Barkley to the effect that the unmaking of the Ring was the equivalent of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which solved all problems at a stroke, leaving an uncomplicated situation as distinct from the "post-Vietnam world." Surely Tolkien disposed of this very argument once and for all in his second edition preface to *The Lord of the Rings*:

If [the real war] had inspired or directed the development of the legend, then certainly the ring would have been seized and used against Sauron; he would have not been annihilated but enslaved, and Barad-dûr would not have been destroyed but occupied. Saruman ... before long would have made a Great Ring of his own with which to challenge the self-styled Ruler of Middle-earth.

It's surprising how few people either then or now realize that Tolkien was depicting the post-World War Two world: the world of the Cold War, pre- and post-Vietnam, which is with us yet in modified form, except that the war-led economy of Isengard has finally gone bankrupt, and Saruman has (temporarily?) been ousted by Wormtongue. The "self-styled Ruler of Middle-earth" is with us yet, and it remains true that hobbits are held "in hatred and contempt." Fortunately, Tolkien's prophecy that "they would not long have survived even as slaves" seems so far overly pessimistic.

Anyway, congratulations on 25 years of The Mythopoeic Society — I hope we'll all be around for your 50th!

Eleri Vardo isilïer lumenn' omentielvo!

Nai kaluva anar motalyanna.



J.R.R Tolkien

by Canon Norman Power, Vicar of Ladywood,
Birmingham, England 1952-1988.

If I were well enough to write the article I would wish to write, I think I'd begin with the magic evening when Tolkien read to The Lovelace Club at Worcester College, Oxford in 1938. Of course, we undergraduates did not realize at the time that this was a turning-point in the great man's life.

Tolkien was despondent over publishing problems. The tremendous reception we gave him to his reading of *Farmer Giles of Ham* encouraged him to persist with his project — *The Lord of the Rings*. The occasion is highlighted in Humphrey Carpenter's excellent biography of Tolkien, page 165.

I had already discovered *The Hobbit* and been enchanted by it. To sit (literally — the room was packed out) at Tolkien's feet on that evening, was unforgettable.

I have tried to describe in various articles the enchantment of that evening during which the "Loving Cup" of Lovelace circulated until all were cheerfully mellow. The subject of Dragons was raised; I maintained with great erudition and scores of examples from the world's literature that the universal awareness of what a dragon should be like must be based on something; he also produced a Leprechaun's shoe, which he declared to be genuine. I was amused by the contents of the great man's pockets which he emptied to find the shoe. I remember that Tolkien's delivery of *Farmer Giles* was animated and delightful (though his lectures in the English School were reputed sometimes to be rather dry). I often wonder if I am the last survivor of that magic evening.

Apart from adoring *The Lord of the Rings* I had no further contact until, shortly before his death, Tolkien wrote to me about the houses in Ladywood, Birmingham, England, where he had spent part of his boyhood.

In one of these houses, the one on Duchess Road, Tolkien met his future wife. I had not the heart to tell him both houses had been demolished; I don't think the loss of the Oliver Road house would have upset him. However he might well have been grieved by the loss of the one on Duchess Road.

I had already been Vicar of Ladywood for 21 years. With Tolkien's last letter (July 8th 1973) came a gift. This treasure, which Tolkien kindly inscribed and signed, is a critique of a Victorian novel *John Inglesant* by J.H. Shorthouse. It was a most thoughtful gift because Shorthouse had been Churchwarden of my church over a hundred years before my time — naturally I was fascinated by *John Inglesant*. In various publications I have tried to write about this as one of many possible influences on Tolkien; if I had time and health I'd love further to explore it.

When I first came to Ladywood in 1952, the house of Shorthouse (it was called "Inglesant") was still there in Beaufort Road. It has been demolished, with no plaque to mark its former existence. Every day, on his way to "The Orator" Tolkien would pass this house. (I think the East side of the end of Beaufort Road — some forty yards — should be named "Tolkien's Walk."

The book Tolkien sent me certainly gives the impression that *John Inglesant* could have been an influence — one the critics don't know about, though Humphrey Carpenter is aware of it. The eucatastrophe in *John Inglesant* is a powerful saving act of renunciation — as Bilbo renounced the Arkenstone; Frodo renounced the ring. Other points of contact can be illustrated in some detail. This could be a fascinating study — the story of the publication of *John Inglesant* is remarkable in its own right — and this link with Tolkien gives it a new and great interest.

In a letter (with photographs) which I sent recently to *Mythlore*, readers may have noticed an amusing postscript to Tolkien's association with my old parish of Ladywood.

A huge building has gone up opposite the end of Oliver Road (where Tolkien lived as a boy before his mother died) called GAMGEE HOUSE (a sort of Medicare Centre). The point is that Gamgee house is named after a local worthy, a Dr. Gamgee who achieved fame as the inventor of cotton wool. And he happened to be a neighbor of the Tolkiens in Oliver Road. I don't suppose those who built and named Gamgee house knew the immortal Sam Gamgee had already been named after the good Doctor, whose name, by the way, was of Huguenot origin.

I'm afraid I sometimes told pilgrims who came to Ladywood to visit Tolkien sites that Gamgee House was named in tribute to Sam Gamgee.....and, in an odd unintentional sort of way, I suppose it was.



Tolkien and I

A Brief Memoir by Richard Plotz

Sunday, 18 August 1963. I am visiting my cousin John Plotz, who lives a few blocks from me in Brooklyn. His older sister Sally will be 19 the next day. A student of Old English at Vassar, Sally unwraps her birthday present from her grandmother. It is *The Lord of the Rings*, the Houghton Mifflin hardcover with the CJRT foldout maps. A lifelong map person, I am fascinated. Sally assures me that one needs to study Old English to appreciate these books.

July 1964. Those maps are still on my mind. Some day I'll ask Sally the name of those books. I am on a cross-country trip with my family when I receive a letter from my best friend, Bob Foster. I must read *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. That's the one! I drag my parents to a book store in Santa Fe, which has *The Hobbit*. The clerk assures me that *The Hobbit* is strictly a children's book.

August 1964. Back in New York, I make tracks for the (alas, now long gone) 8th Street Bookshop, where they do have *The Lord of the Rings*. It costs (gasp) \$4.95 per volume. I can afford one volume. I buy *The Fellowship of the Ring*. I finish it that night. The next day is Sunday. Monday I buy *The Two Towers* (only, more fool I). By Tuesday someone else has bought *The Return of the King*. I have to wait a week with Frodo in the hands of the Enemy for the new order to arrive. Finally, having been assured by Bob Foster that *The Hobbit* is not just for children, I buy it.

January 1965. I see the (later so well-known) Tengwar subway graffiti, which I can't yet read. My first Tolkien fan meeting takes place on a frigid, blustery, but sunny day