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In Memoriam: The Last Inkling

John Rateliff

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Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Abstract

The author of *The History of the Hobbit* remembers Christopher Tolkien (1924–2020) and recounts a history of their interactions over the years.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, Christopher

Christopher was already in his early seventies when he wrote *The Peoples of Middle-earth*, and yet he reported continuous days of working 9-10 hours per day. Christopher possessed the ability to concentrate on one task for weeks on end to the exclusion of other projects clamoring for his attention. One casualty was his personal correspondence: he often lamented the unanswered letters that piled up in his study, and he expressed remorse over the tardiness of his replies.

The greatest beneficiary of Christopher's labors was the audience of Tolkien scholars and fans that consumed his publications. In October 1988 Christopher informed Marquette that since May he had finished writing *The Treason of Isengard* and begun work on *The War of the Ring*. By the following October he reported completing a draft of it. Such prodigious output is remarkable given the high quality of his books. Anyone who reads *The History of Middle-earth* must be struck by the tremendous thought and care Christopher put into those volumes, providing his readers with close textual analysis and resolving complicated cruces.

After his father's death, Christopher Tolkien was presumably secure enough financially to have been able to retire in complete obscurity to southern France had he so chosen. Instead, he committed his remaining life to editing and publishing his father's works, a task in which the Marquette Archives is proud to have played a role. In Christopher Tolkien a more devoted and loving son can scarcely be imagined.

WILLIAM M. FLISS is the Archivist for the J.R.R. Tolkien Collection at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA.



IN MEMORIAM:

THE LAST INKLING

JOHN D. RATELIFF

THE PASSING OF CHRISTOPHER TOLKIEN marks the end of an era. He was the Last Inklings. Already an established scholar (a don at New College, Oxford) and experienced editor² by the time of his father's death, Christopher—appointed literary executor with explicit permission from his father's will to

² See his translation and edition of *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise* (1960).

publish, in whole or in part, or destroy, in whole or in part, all his father's papers—devoted the rest of his long career to editing and publishing as much as possible out of that vast archive.

In this task he was both diligent and prolific. I think many of those who came to expect a new Tolkien book every year or two never fully realized the enormous amount of work that went into sorting, transcribing, and editing these manuscripts and typescripts, not to mention providing detailed commentary laying out the relationships between the many different versions of a given story.

I was fortunate enough to meet him twice, at the Marquette Mythcon and again at the Oxford Centenary conference; both were memorable occasions. A few incidents stand out, like his accompanying a group of Tolkien scholars and fans to the local I-Hop the morning after the conference, where he told us the story about the time he and his father had had a heated debate over the role of the monarchy in modern Britain.

After the conference was over, Christopher and Taum Santoski and I drove down to Wheaton at the invitation of the Wade Collection. He enjoyed their hospitality, though afterwards he confessed that it was an odd experience when they showed him the place in the vault where they kept one of their most prized items: Warnie Lewis's diaries. Christopher said he had vivid memories of Warnie sitting at a little side table writing in those same books and found the shift from everyday object to venerated treasure unsettling. By curious chance, when they showed him the large photograph of J.R.R.T. they had hanging in a place of honor, Christopher noted that, having inherited his father's ties, on the day of this visit he happened to be wearing the very tie his father was wearing in the picture, which we quickly confirmed to be the case.

Five years later at the Centenary I got to see him again, and remember walking around the quad at Keble with him while he discussed the thinking that lay behind his naming his next book, building upon his father's realization that the whole of Middle-earth was Morgoth's ring. I also came to realize how important Christopher had been in preventing a deluge of authorized Tolkien clones, so that instead we got an unprecedented shelf-full of works by Tolkien himself: a fortunate decision but not a universally popular one.

Finally, as the conference was winding down, a small group of us had a gathering sitting in back of the Eagle & Child with Christopher. I count myself fortunate that, thanks to his generosity, I have thus once been at the Inklings' favorite pub with an Inking.

Although we only exchanged letters at intervals, I feel a great sense of loss knowing that there will be no more of his elegantly written yet sharply focused letters from the south of France. I did find comfort, after hearing of his death, when I pulled one of his volumes off the shelf and began to read, to find

that I could hear it in his voice. The Inklings believed that Christopher read his father's work better than the Professor himself could, and we have plenty of evidence that this is so. None of those of us lucky enough to hear him read 'The 1960 *Hobbit*' at Marquette or 'The New Shadow' at Oxford (both unpublished at the time) could henceforth doubt it.³ I wish we had the entire *Lord of the Rings* in Christopher's voice, but I am grateful for all he has done over the years, all that we do have thanks to his efforts.

JOHN D. RATELIFF is the editor of *The History of the Hobbit*.



LUPIN'S FIRST LESSON: AN EXAMPLE OF EXCELLENT TEACHING

JOSHUA COLE

IN *HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN*, our author J.K. Rowling presents us with Professor Lupin's first Defense Against the Dark Arts (*DADA*) lesson (on how to defeat a boggart by laughing at it) as a model of sound pedagogy.⁴ Lupin is aware of the students' learning and experience with previous teachers, connects theory to application, engages students with an activity, and tries to understand the character of each student. I'd like to suggest that reflecting on the model offered by Lupin can help teachers, including college professors (and that's my own profession: I teach math).

In addition to the usual difficulties facing a new teacher, Lupin must deal with a class that has lost its previous *DADA* teachers from their first two years. Their first-year teacher, Professor Quirrel, had turned out to be in league with Voldemort. Their second-year teacher, Professor Lockhart, was all glitter and no substance. This was perfectly illustrated in Lockhart's first class, described in *The Chamber of Secrets*. Lockhart released pixies (who seemed interesting and not too dangerous) and asked the students to sort them out. The pixies turned out to be difficult to control and attacked the students, and Lockhart was incapable of helping. So that first class ended in chaos.

³ Not to mention his recordings of excerpts from *The Silmarillion* he made for Caedmon Records or the introductions he provided for some audiobook adaptations of his father's work, or interviews he gave at the time of the Centenary and afterwards.

⁴ Almost every incident mentioned in this article is in chapter seven, entitled, "The Boggart in the Wardrobe." I am using an American edition, in which the chapter is pp. 123-140.