

FLAWS IN THE TAPESTRY OF "THE LORD OF THE RINGS"

By John B. Abbott

These notes were originally intended to form the basis of a more detailed and closely knit article for "Woman's Own". Time, as ever, has been the enemy and the essay is incomplete. If you find these notes suggestive, rather than definitive, your rude forefathers were probably ruder than most people's.

The Background

Any researcher examining the hyperfine structure of "The Rings" is indebted to the pioneering efforts of Mr. B. Parsley: his colossal output of writings on the works of Tolkien staggered even his own generation of diligent scholars. Dr. Parsley's "Mallorn" articles were avidly collected even in his own lifetime, being used as door-stops, patio seats and ships' ballast. Professor Parsley once watched thousands of his volumes being stowed in the hold of a ship at the Grey Havens dock, Fleetwood, and asked the ancient mariner supervising operations if the crew would be reading these works during the voyage. The explanation (uttered through a mouthful of albatross feathers) was "Ballast".

A thousand page volume of Sir Robert Parsley's papers was published by Daffyd & Charlie (Newton Abbot) in 1970. Each copy was bound in an entire calf-skin and complete with castors.

Other References

Sir Robert's definitive work, "Tolkien: the Influence of Just About Everything on The Lord of the Rings", has served as a major source for this article. Other references, except the ones I have extensively plagiarised, are listed at the end. All references to Professor Tolkien's work are to the unauthorised, illustrated (luminous) and mindless versions churned out by Zaparelli and Bilco, (Medicine Bend and New York), 1966 - 1971.

Poetic License

One must surely allow a fair measure of poetic/author's license in a work as imaginative as LOTR. Few would object to Professor Tolkien assuring the development of forge-bellows and water-mills in such early times, for example (I. 11). One can even overlook the use of mothballs (I.40) in Middle-earth --- J.R.R.T. does not specifically mention naphthalene or p - dichlorobenzene and we may assume the use of pomanders or something like that. But the ~~internal~~ internal combustion engine? Hoom, hmm! Come now, that is another matter! "Aragorn and Legolas went now with Eomer in the van" (I.135). A clear statement of apparent fact. Yet the idea of two men and an elf bumping along in an ancient (e.g.) Bedford is surely stretching the readers' credulity too far.

There are other possible examples one could choose, but perhaps one is enough. Anyway, who cares?

Apparent Anomalies

The next question we must ask ourselves is: "Are there errors in the text of LOTR?" (There will now be a short intermission to permit medical assistance to those readers who have fainted.)

Practically all the original printing errors have been corrected in the second (1966) edition. However, they're still omitting the full-stop from the end of the first line (I. 376)....

A question of chronology now arises. It is recorded (III. 318, 378) that in Fourth Age 120, King Elessar died, and in the same year Legolas sailed over Sea---- "with him, it is said, went Gimli the Dwarf". However, the life-years of Gimli are given elsewhere (III. 361) as Third Age 2879 - 3121, implying that Gimli's life on Middle-earth ended in F.A. 100; i.e. 20 years before the

Death of Elessor.... What are we to make of this? Another printing error?

In passing, we may also ask who is "oldest", Bombadil (I.279) or Treebeard (II.102,164)? The written evidence appears conflicting.

Questions Left Unanswered

Many such questions will arise in the reader's mind. It could not be otherwise with a work of this scale. For example, two of the Fire Wizards are not named. What happened to them? Did they pass over Sea with Gandalf and Company? Did they go later? Did they go earlier? Did they miss the bus? And what became of Radagast?

Summary - And The Scope For Future Research

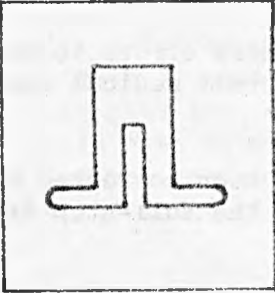
To sum up, the above quibbles are not worth bothering about, and LOTR is damn near perfect.

Far more serious is the question: "What happened to the real One Ring?" We are told (I.255, III.364) that Sauron FORGED the Great Ring in secret. The ring which was brought to the Fire in Mount Doom was a reasonably good imitation - its dissolution brought down Sauron's empire and much else; but THIS WAS NOT THE TRUE ONE RING. Somewhere, the Ruling Ring must still exist, untouched by time. Who would be its Master now?

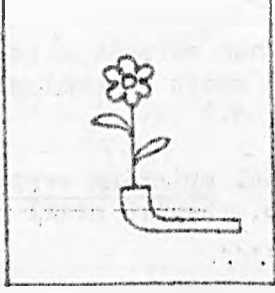
In a further article I will explain why I believe the One Ring will be found close to the right bank of the River Thames, immediately above Pangbourne. Meanwhile, we should all go on looking for it. If you find it, (it is but a trifle I fancy), you will write and tell me about it, won't you? I'm sure you will.

Bibliography

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Halfling.



Pipeweed.

