
Follow-On

Tolkien's influence on C.S. Lewis

I feel I must take issue with Pilar San José and Gregory Starkey on their article 'Tolkien's Influence on C.S. Lewis' in Mallorn 17. Many of their points were a little thin, but some were particularly questionable.

1. The question of the influence of vocabulary, though a common source of unconscious borrowing, is over-emphasised. "Boom ba ba boom", they quote, is 'similar to the noise of drums...when crossing the mines of Moria: "Doom Doom Doom"'. They are not very similar, actually; both have quite different rhythms. How else can the sound of drums be represented, if not onomatopoeically?
2. The Common Speech is an obvious device, and to speak of it as original to Tolkien is a little presumptuous. It is a natural solution to the problem of communication between a multilingual group of characters.
3. Regarding the corruption of language: surely it was Merlin's spell which caused the unintelligible sentences quoted, and not the corruption of language by the 'baddies'. The orcs in The Lord of the Rings communicate quite effectively, though unpleasantly, and war requires efficient communication, which they do seem to have achieved.
4. There is a definite parallel between Ransom and Frodo, but to see Ransom merely as an echo of Tolkien's admittedly more subtle Frodo is to miss the point entirely. They have quoted Lewis's statement concerning his and Tolkien's common commitment to Christianity in their introduction, and then seem to have forgotten it. The final point of this section is the question of Ransom and Frodo both gaining immortality through their sacrifices. There are strong indications that this is true of Ransom, but just the opposite for Frodo. In the 'Akallabeth' when the Numenoreans complain of the Ban, the 'Doom of the World', the elves reply, 'one only can change who made it', and, a little further on, 'nor can the Valar take away the gifts Iluvatar...you are punished for the rebellion of men, you say...and thus it is that you die...thus you leave the world, and are not bound to it'. Frodo, as a mortal, cannot achieve immortality without direct intervention from Eru. We have since had confirmation of this in Letters (No. 154).

Despite the opening words of the final paragraph, the article doesn't seem to come to any conclusion, and seems to contradict the introduction and itself. 'Comparisons' are rendered 'odious' by Lewis's originality, and this would, of course, invalidate the entire essay. For my own conclusion, I would say that San José and Starkey have made some interesting points, and drawn some undeniable parallels between the two authors; but they have not proved more than that the two had many common interests and beliefs and were, as is already known, close friends.

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