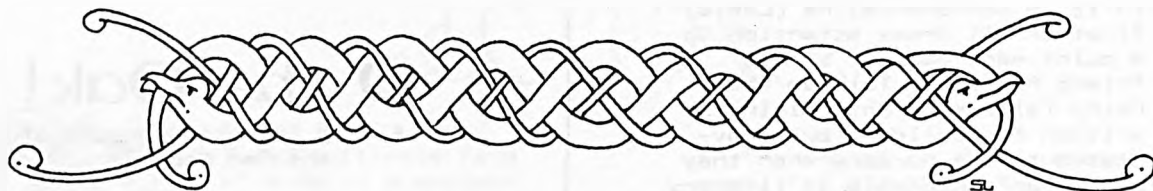


# Tolkien's influence on C.S. Lewis: epilogue

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**D**a previous article\* we set out to show the influence of Tolkien's world on Lewis, but in this paper we would like to show how Tolkien was the motive force which drove his friend Lewis to start writing fiction. However, it is important to point out from the start that while Tolkien may be (and is, as we have seen\*) an important source of his work, Lewis had other influences which may be counted as more important. Such a source is George Macdonald, of which Lewis writes:

"I have never concealed the fact that I regard him [Macdonald] as my master; indeed, I fancy I have never written a book in which I do not quote from him!."

The friendship between Tolkien and Lewis had a strange beginning arising from their initial disagreements over the different opinions they held concerning the way they would direct literary studies at the University. Both of them managed to overcome these disagreements and found that they held many things in common, one of them being their appreciation of Myth. Their theories about myths had such a strong hold over them that they became the foundation stone for their deep friendship which marked a long period of their lives until, on the personal level, a further disagreement undercut the friendship they had formed<sup>2</sup>.

Lewis tells us in his autobiography Surprised by Joy<sup>3</sup> how he first stumbled across myths. When still very

young he got hold of a book called Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods illustrated by Arthur Rackham. Both text and drawings drew him towards a whole world of literature and principally that of the Northern Myths.

For Tolkien, myth inspired literature was further enhanced by Catholicism teaching. We see his ideas collected together in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories'<sup>4</sup> and in a poem dedicated to C.S. Lewis called 'Mythopoeia' or also 'Philomyth to Mysomyth' or again 'Mysomythos', in which he tells us of the conversation which took place between both friends about the purpose of myths and in which their differing opinions are displayed. Tolkien convinces Lewis that he should change his ideas and persuades him that myths are not merely invented stories but participate in the Great Truth which Tolkien held as religious truth. Lewis then abandoned the atheism he professed and turned definitely towards Christianity.

Tolkien expressed what Lewis had believed in 'Mythopoeia' and repeated it again in 'On Fairy-Stories':

"I once wrote to a man who described myth and fairy-story as 'lies'; though to do him justice he was kind enough ... to call fairy-story making 'Breathing a lie through Silver'"<sup>5</sup>.

To this Tolkien added that there was a grain of the Great Truth in fairy tales, and that myths are a means of telling the untellable:

"Pagan myths are therefore never just 'lies'. There is something of the Truth in them"<sup>6</sup>.

\* Mallorn, no.17, October 1981, pp.23-28.

[1] Lewis quoted by R.L. Green & W. Hooper in C.S. Lewis a Biography, Collins, London, 1974, p.44.

[2] See H. Carpenter: J.R.R. Tolkien, A Biography, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1977.

[3] C.S. Lewis: Surprised by Joy, The Shape of my Early Life, G. Bles, 1955.

[4] J.R.R. Tolkien: 'On Fairy-Stories', Essays presented to Charles Williams, Oxford Univ. Press, London (ed. C.S. Lewis), 1947.

[5] J.R.R. Tolkien: 'On Fairy-Stories', Tree and Leaf, Smith of Wootton Major, The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth (paperback), George Allen & Unwin, London, 1975, p.55.

[6] Quoted by H. Carpenter in The Inklings, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1978, p.43.

Tolkien's theories concerning fairy tales as he had drawn them up in 'On Fairy-Stories' helped consolidate Lewis' own position concerning the religious applicability of fairy tales, and besides, as Walter Hooper tells us:

"In it [a conference] he [Lewis] first of all draws attention to a point made earlier by his friend Professor Tolkien that Fairy Tales were not originally written for children but gravitated to the nursery when they became unfashionable in literary circles"<sup>7</sup>.

Once Lewis has accepted Tolkien's arguments and been convinced by Christianity - but not to Catholicism - he stumbles upon the idea, already ripening in Tolkien, of creating a new mythology, a new parallel to the History of Truth in which he now believed. Lewis' mythology was to have two divergent forms: Science Fiction and Fairy Tales. In both literary forms his Christianity was to have a profound effect.

However, the direction Tolkien and Lewis took in the further development of the myths and fairy tales were not to follow parallel lines. Both started from similar principles and identical convictions, though with a time difference, as we have shown, Tolkien being the instigator, but likewise each was a master on his own. We are to see in their work a development which is characterized by the adaptation of the material which both men's genius gave it. W. Reedy shows us that the study of one is essential for the study of the other but emphasizes that they are men who have their own singular contribution to the world of myth:

"An appreciation of C.S. Lewis is essential for those who would read Tolkien, not because the two men are similar, as they seem to be on the surface, but because they are not"<sup>8</sup>.

So Myth for both Tolkien and Lewis was the starting point for their artistic expression, but we must emphasize that Tolkien discovered it first and that he was the one to instigate it in Lewis, who would express himself in like manner to his friend, becoming another creator of "Secondary Worlds".



[7] W. Hooper: Past Watchful Dragons, Collins, Glasgow, 1979, p.34

[8] W. Reedy: Understanding Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings, Warner Books, New York, 1969, p.19.

## O the Oak!

(A song from the margins of the Red Book.)

O the oak is old and hoary,  
Standing in the forest shade,  
Snoring like a bedtime story,  
Stirring every leaf and blade.

Oak he is a sturdy fellow,  
Limbs are strong, he weathers all;  
In the autumn, leaves are yellow,  
Softly now the acorns fall.

O the oak is tall and jolly,  
Standing by a forest glade,  
With his beard as green as holly,  
At his feet a carpet laid.

Oak his roots are deep and deeper,  
Wrinkled bole and haggard bough;  
Oak he is a heavy sleeper,  
Dreams are sitting on his brow.

O the oak is grey and hoary,  
Through the earth his old toes wade,  
Humming still an ancient story,  
Long ago the minstrels made.

Oak his heart is growing older,  
Summer sun and autumn air  
Playing softly on his shoulder;  
Winter comes, he'll still be there.

Michael Burgess