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Letters

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Ken Raney; Edith Crowe

LETTERS

((Editor's Note: This letter was written several years ago during the controversy over pointed ears. Apologies for it not being printed at that time. We print it now because of its value and interest.))

Annette Harper

New Orleans, Louisiana

May I say what I hope will be the last word on pointed ears? For those of you who don't know, I am an artist who has been putting pointed ears on my Elves since 1967 and I have seen my name bandied about in this column once or twice in reference to this quirk of mine. Some of you don't like it and have presented your cases admirably; some of you do seem to like it and you have your reasons also. But none of the letters that I have read so far really touch on the reasons behind Arwen's peculiar auditory equipment in Harper drawings, and so I think that what I have to say might lay this little matter to rest.

I am a professional artist. That is how I make my living. But I wasn't always a pro and when I first sent an illustration to the old TOLKIEN JOURNAL in 1967, I was a hippie student who had a long way to go. Unlike other amateur fan artists, I wasn't content to draw hobbits; I wanted to draw Elves, beautiful inhuman Elves with faces "fair beyond the measure of Mortal Man", as Tolkien described them. Now, making them rather beautiful was easy; I knew how to draw nice lips and nice eyes and swell arms and legs. But when I got through, they looked like beautiful but very ordinary human beings. And obviously this wasn't enough. The characters in Tolkien's books never seemed to have very much trouble distinguishing Elves from other folk, and I felt that a drawing should adequately convey that Otherness. If I had to rely on a title with my drawing, a label saying "Galadriel" or "Thranduil" to let my viewers know that the person depicted was an Elf and not just another man-on-the-street, then I felt that I had failed. In my egomania, I wanted a viewer to glance at my work and immediately think "Elf". So the problem before me in '67 was to find a way of distancing Elves from humans visually without losing any of the beauty that was obviously so innate to their race.

Believe it or not, I had not seen STAR TREK in 1967 when I did my first Elf. But I had read a good deal of Norse mythology and had been struck by the marvelous illustrations in several of the books of myths that I had read as a child. Pointy ears abounded. And although Tolkien did not, as Glen has noted, say that Elves had them, he did not say that they didn't have them. I read the vague description in Tolkien's LOTR Appendix F of Elves and why he chose that word to translate "Quendi", and I noticed that he mentioned that the old word "Elves" was used because it "once was fitted to apply to such memories of this people as Men preserved, or to the making of Men's minds not wholly dissimilar." Now, the word had always conjured up the Norse elves for me since I was a Norse buff and not a Hans Christian Anderson fan, and so I had never associated Elves with wings and teeny-weeny mushroom thrones and all of the other cutesy things that Tolkien decried. But yes, my image of the Universal Elf came complete with pointy ears. And since the words "Elf" and "Quendi" should not suggest people wholly dissimilar, I drew my Elves with pointy ears. I don't know where the human race got this atavistic notion...probably more from illustrators like Arthur Rackham than from the actual myths, I'm afraid. But I had that mental image and nowhere did Tolkien say specifically that it was a mistaken one, so I gave my Elves points without thinking any more about it. I always wondered why Tim Kirk gave them to his hobbits, but I don't really have to ask. Evidently he was up against the same sort of thing I was: How, as an artist, to keep his hobbits looking more like hobbits and less like midgets or children or gnomes or God knows what. He probably didn't think too much about it, either. He made his choice and I made mine and that's that.

Of course, I am an old pro now and I like to think that I am able in this day and age to convey Elvishness through the sinuous lines and Art Nouveau trappings of my illustrations without sticking those ears right out in the open so that you will know that Annette Harper meant this guy to be an Elf. I am developing an Elf posture, Elvish hairdos for males as well as females, Elvish armor...a total Elvish gestalt, if you will. As a matter of fact, I recently did a drawing of Iathien Tinuviel before I had read any of your letters and I actually have her hair covering her ears entirely. In fact, she doesn't seem to have any ears at all, except her earrings have to be hanging from something. But I hope that she is identifiable as an Elf in other, more subtle ways (for instance, her hair is so incredibly long that no mortal woman could survive long enough to grow it unless she attained the age of 280...).

It's very hard, you guys, to paint something that's never been painted or to draw something that's never before been drawn. And it is very hard for a mere mortal woman to draw a being of superhuman beauty and perfection without relying on human standards or beauty: sexiness, voluptuousness, Farrah Fawcett-Majors' hair, Bruce Jenner's physique, a Coppertone tan. How do you depict a tall, elegant, pale male Elf without making him literally look like a fairy? It ain't easy. And you quibble about pointy ears?? Look. I've been holding the line for you guys for a long time. I've persisted in making Legolas a brunet when everybody else gives him blond hair, because as far as I can determine from a 10-year career of reading and drawing LOTR, he is not of the House of Finrod, his father's golden hair notwithstanding. His mama could've been anybody and blond hair is recessive, after all. So you see? I am basically conservative in my art--if Tolkien says that Boromir has shoulder-length hair, then I give him shoulder-length hair. And if he says that hobbits can, on occasion, be mistaken for human children, then I try to draw my Sams and Frodos so that they could conceivably be mistaken for kids. If you really object to the pointy ears, then I might consider covering more Elves' ears with hair or hoods in the future.

But I warn you...underneath that hair or that hood is a pointy Harper ear. Make no mistake about that.

In any case, thank you all for your kind comments and praise in the past. I am getting old (30) and I consider dropping out of Tolkien cultism from time to time. But every time I do, one of you says something nice about my work in this column and I pick up my pen again and invariably go to it. Like I said, I am a pro and normally I get paid rather well for the artwork I do: fashion illos, ads, portraits, boring things like that. But the ego-boost I get out of seeing my stuff in this mag is beyond monetary value. Thank you all.

Priscilla Drake

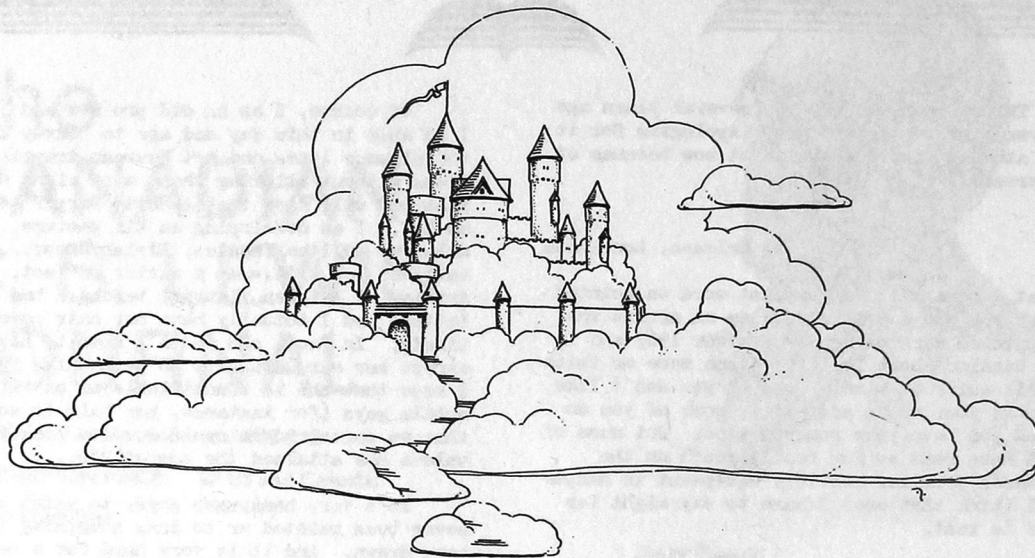
Webster Groves, MO.

I recently received a subscription to the New Oxford Review and was happy to find several interesting articles on C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams in the April 1981 issue (Volume XLVIII Number 3).

An article on, Discovering Charles Williams - and the Nuptial Dance, is written by Thomas Howard, now Professor of English at Garden College, Mass. It is the first of a series of 3 articles taken from his thesis on Charles Williams.

In the same issue is a review of a book on C. S. Lewis, also by the same author - The Achievement of C. S. Lewis: A Reading of His Fiction.

Also a review of, C. S. Lewis, Spinner of Tales: A Guide to His Fiction, by Evan K. Gibson.



The New Oxford Review is a monthly of Anglican-Catholic persuasion.

These are very stimulating articles. It's always good to see knowledge of our favorite authors being spread in new areas. I just thought members would like to know about this source.

Jessica Yates

London, England

Concerning the piece on the origins of the name "Narnia" (p.29) in Mythlore 24, I feel that I must draw attention to the fact that Mythprint for February 1977 carried a piece by me identifying Lewis's Narnia with ancient Nequinum, modern Narni, a town in Italy which still has the ruins of a Roman bridge. Albert Bell's article is more extensive, and no doubt he came to his conclusion independently, but all the same, he wasn't the first to make the connection in a Mythsoc publication.

Craig Brown

Columbia, MO.

Having recently reached the "mature" age of thirty, I have noted my enthusiasm for Tolkien has evolved from the Rabid to the Merely Fanatical. Seriously, I hold a minority opinion that the Unfinished Tales was much of Tolkien's best writing. I found especially moving and satisfying that fragment of narrative dealing with Isildur, his last stand and parting from his son; really bringing it alive for me.

RESPONSE

A Response to Thomas Gray's article on Bureaucratization in The Lord of the Rings (Mythlore 24)

I feel that the article on Bureaucratization in LOTR does not quite hit the mark in its comparison of modern "civilised society with Middle-earth societies. Remember that Tolkien was not only criticising 20th century life, but could also draw on his knowledge of many ancient and mediaeval societies.

My Oxford English Dictionary defines bureaucracy as: "Government by central administration; officialism of officials of such government... esp. unimaginative...." There are

connotations in its modern use, of excessive regulations, of paperwork or "bunf", of form-filling, of "red tape", of everyone evading responsibility with the reply "I'm only obeying orders"; of people sticking to the letter of the law instead of implementing its spirit.

In my reading of contemporary political writers, I find Arthur Koestler describing (as Gray refers to Weber) the positive aspects of centralisation and a hierarchical organisation. He believes that the pyramidal type of societal organisation is indicated to us by nature, because of the way that the human body is organised along networks of command. However, Koestler is also one of the West's most formidable prophets about the evils of centralisation if a society has got hold of the wrong ideology - or has perverted an originally moral system of beliefs.

Hannah Arendt, in On Violence (1970) spells this out; "the latest and perhaps most formidable form of such domination; bureaucracy or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no man, neither the one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called rule by Nobody....(it) is clearly the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done."

The modern bureaucracy, found both in the West and the Eastern bloc, involves written communications, and the involvement of mass peaceful organisations such as trade unions, political parties and the media. In the Eastern bloc these are centrally controlled, while in the Western democracies, although they are overtly free of state control, they reinforce the western way of life. But all this bears so little resemblance to the political structures of Middle-earth, that I find the continued use of the terms "bureaucracy" and its derivatives irritating, irrelevant, and misleading. "Sauron's forces at the Siege of Gondor provide an excellent example of what a bureaucracy can do with even the most middling material" contradicts Gray's later assertion that "the orcs were underbureaucratized" because they let Frodo and Sam escape. In both cases Sauron did not control his orcs by bureaucracy, but by the tyranny of terror, the example of evil. It was sheer evil which drove them on at Minas Tirith, and it was greed which made them fall out at Cirith Ungol.

As Gray eventually concludes, bureaucracy is a means

by which both a democracy and a tyranny can operate, but in LOTR Tolkien does not even describe one ruling system which is bureaucratic. Saruman is groping towards its invention, but that's all. Gray thinks that the leadership problems of Minas Tirith arise because there was not sufficient bureaucracy. But that does not follow: any political system may have a chain of command, or fail to have one. The only sign of the modern bureaucracy is Beregond's mental conflict, when he decides NOT to obey orders. If he had been part of a strict bureaucratic system, he would have obeyed Denethor and let Faramir burn.

The main conflicts in human history take place between totalitarianism and democracy: what C.S. Lewis called Britain and Logres. The trouble with democracy is that it must allow freedom of speech even to its enemies. If it can't trust its citizens to pay no attention to the extremists, then it must become more authoritarian. Such conflicts were between Greece and Persia; Athens and Sparta; Elizabethan England and Spain (where the use of the Inquisition had made Christianity totalitarian).

The characteristics of totalitarianism are: an ideology; a single party led by one man; a terroristic police; a communications monopoly; a weapons monopoly; and a centrally directed economy. (Friedrich, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy, 1956). In a 20th century society, totalitarianism is organised through a bureaucracy, as described by George Orwell in 1984, but so is democracy! The features of a society which communicates by written instructions inevitably lead to bureaucracy. But Tolkien is writing about a mediaeval world, where communication is oral, and by messenger; and a fantasy, where magic plays its part. Sauron's rule is obviously totalitarian as defined by Friedrich, but it is not bureaucratic. He controls the whole system with his single mind and palantiri, and a few servants, but the orcs do not go around parroting their ideology to give reasons for their actions. The Ring would have extended Sauron's rule to all beings on Middle-earth. We may contrast this, with Orwell's 1984 which illustrates thought control in a bureaucracy, with constant brainwashing of the population. Compared to Orwell's Big Brother, Sauron is an old-fashioned dictator. He would have ruled people as slaves, and taken pleasure in their misery. An ideological dictator wants people to love him - quite different. The best parallels with Sauron in the real world are military dictators in the developing world. Hitler? he didn't want the love of "lesser races" but he wanted his own people to love him. Still, Hitler is the obvious parallel.

Saruman is moving towards bureaucracy, in his use of Rules. He is a much more modern villain, a capitalist, if you like, a businessman, a multi-nationalist, even. Not to say that these trades are inherently evil, but if they are carried on by corrupt individuals, those will have something of Saruman in them. Saruman enjoys hurting other people and polluting the countryside, but he still rules through military domination. The modern Saruman simply wants economic domination, as long as the state is stable.

Gray says that Aragorn's government in the Fourth Age is bureaucratic. I doubt this. It is certainly hierarchical, and perhaps my quarrel with Gray derives from his different interpretation of the term bureaucratic. As my definition shows, bureaucracy needs a written culture with far less personal communication than Aragorn's state would have used. But once Fourth Age man had bureaucratized his state, he might have fallen into evil again, as Tolkien's sequel The New Shadow might have shown.

The problem with leaders is that power tends to corrupt. Bureaucracy is the only way to run a complex society that the 20th century knows, but some of us, including Tolkien, dream of an ecologically stable, decentralised society. With all societal systems, one needs the conviction that the people running them are basically moral. As they may not be, which is the best system to avoid disaster? A warlord may be good or evil, Aragorn or Sauron. A bureaucracy may be fairly honest or totally corrupt, existing mainly on bribery. But anyone anywhere can be evil - say a British policeman or an American soldier. The chance of getting away with crime can make anyone an orc.

Gray's continual application of the term bureaucracy is often irrelevant to the systems Tolkien describes and criticises. Is this statement really true: "Tolkien's story admits that bureaucracy plays an integral part in the struggle for good in Middle Earth." Of course not - it is good and evil, the deadly sins and the moral virtues which play the most important role. And how can someone who writes like this claim to understand Tolkien? "Only this wind saved them from the consequences of having no proper bureaucratic structure." (I could give more examples.)

Of course Tolkien criticises totalitarianism. Of course he also criticises the sleepy, self-satisfied democracy which lacks vigilance and allows, through bureaucracy if you like, exploitation and old-fashioned dictatorship to take over. But I wonder how Tolkien would describe his political beliefs in the world of the 1980's? Judging from the Foreword to the Second Edition, no contemporary political system would have suited his fiercely independent spirit.

Jessica Yates

REPLY

I originally wrote "Bureaucratization in the Lord of the Rings" as a humorous exercise in the sort of pseudo-scholarship Tolkien liked and did so well (see his introduction to The Adventures of Tom Bombadil). I was curious to see if I could apply the principles of my profession as an organizational analyst to Tolkien's world. It will come as no surprise to MYTHLORE readers that the internal consistency of Tolkien's secondary creation made this possible even though my perspective is alien to his personal philosophy.

Clearly Tolkien (Jessica Yates) and I do not agree about bureaucracy: its goals, its goodness or even its definition. I provided my own working definition of bureaucracy (MYTHLORE 24, p. 3, para. 2) which differs greatly from that written and edited by Tolkien and his colleagues for the Oxford English Dictionary. It would not surprise me to learn that Tolkien was in charge of that section of the words beginning with "B".

So ingrained is the misapprehension that bureaucracy is tyrannical and repressive that I do not expect to win many converts to my thesis that "Tolkien's story admits that bureaucracy plays an integral part in the struggle for good in Middle Earth." I will be satisfied if readers can agree with Thomas M. Egan in his letter to MYTHLORE 27: "Everything depends on the degree of governmental machinery. Some bureaucracy is always a necessity."

Thomas Gray

