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Tributes to J.R.R. Tolkien

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Abstract

A collection of tributes written by readers of *Mythlore*

Authors

Gwenyth E. Hood, Dainis Bisenieks, Stephen Linhart, Gary Hunnewell, Tim Callahan, Edna Montemayor, John L. Leland, and Paul Nolan Hyde

TRIBUTES TO J.R.R. TOLKIEN

The following are tributes written by readers of *Mythlore*. So many tributes were submitted, that despite those given in the previous issue, there were more that had to wait until this issue. Many of the tributes are very personal, but that is Tolkien's magic as a writer — he invites us as readers to participate in the act of sub-creation: our own imaginations complete the details of the stories, and they become part of us.

— Glen GoodKnight

Gwenyth E. Hood

Huntington, WV

It was 1968 and I was thirteen years old when it happened to me. I was bound for a month-long family reunion in California where I was to meet some forty-odd aunts, uncles and cousins, all but one older than I was. To pacify me during the dull stretches, my mother gave me a copy of *The Hobbit*, which she knew by reputation only. (They say this is good. It's what the college students are reading now.) To my mother's disgust, I promptly read the book from start to finish and could not be distracted from it by anything around me, dull or interesting.

Just before I read *The Hobbit*, I had become cynical about books. They were beginning to seem all alike. It was just part of growing old and jaded, I told myself. Nothing really surprises you any more. But when I read *The Hobbit* (and afterward *The Lord of the Rings*, as soon as I could get my hands on it) I knew I had been wrong. Maturity did not leach all the joy out of life; you just have to choose your reading material carefully.

Back in Vermont in the fall, nothing was quite real to me during the time it took me to get through *The Lord of the Rings*. Heartbroken at Gandalf's fall in Moria, I put down the book and mourned for three days. Only when I peeked to the end, just to see how it turned out, and saw that Gandalf was back, did I have the courage to start the reading where I had left off.

Of course, finishing the work myself was not enough. I had to share it with others. I began reading the *The Lord of the Rings* to my mother in installments while she cooked the dinner. My younger brother was drawn, irresistibly, to join us, and the daily readings became an established custom for the three of us. Once or twice the dinner burned,

but otherwise they were an unqualified success. After we finished the *The Lord of the Rings*, I continued to read other books to Mom while she cooked, and after I left for college, my brother took my place. That was how my mother became acquainted with *Dune* and *Dune Messiah*.... But that's another story.

Of course, in the years that followed, Tolkien's works influenced me in subtler ways. Images from the *The Lord of the Rings* took residence in my imagination and gave me the form with which to express my perceptions of the world around me. Sauron and the Nazgûl seemed the essence of evil, while the elves and Lórien became the essence of beauty. But most important was the assurance the work gave me that there were, after all, in some sense, adventures to be had, somewhere, sometimes, in the world I lived in, and despairing passivity was not the only answer to our troubles.

For all these reasons, I would like to add my voice to the many others who are giving a special tribute to J.R.R. Tolkien on the hundredth anniversary of his birth, honoring the man who enriched our lives and imaginations with his wonderful stories.

Dainis Bisenieks

Philadelphia, PA

I came to *The Lord of the Rings* early on, alerted by the review in *F&SF*. It soon dawned on me that I could not have any abiding relationship with a woman who did not understand and share my love for this work. My shelves came to hold successively later printings (bought from England at the equivalent of \$10 a set) as the necessary condition proved not to be sufficient. Though as early as 1961 I met a young lady who not only knew Tolkien's work already but beat me to the draw. The advent of paperbacks made possible a more general proselytism.... It is the most civilized work of fiction I know. That is the first thing I found to say about *The Lord of the Rings*. Since then, I have been looking for an understanding of how the reader is moved by its visions of fulfillment in joy or sorrow. Who, reading the tale aloud and coming to the Field of Cormallen or the Grey Havens, could keep his composure? I could not. Which words are hardest to speak, and why?

Stephen Linhart Amherst, MA

I can't remember how many times I've read *The Lord of the Rings*. I lost track around 12 or 14. But I do remember that I cried, somewhere in the story, every time.

Gary Hunnewell (Hildifons Took) Arnold, MO

James Fenton's review of Carpenter's *Tolkien in The New Statesman* felt that in future ages people will look back on the Tolkien cult and shake their heads. Although we know that Professor Tolkien did not intend it, his books have brought together people who are socially, educationally and spiritually diverse. This cult has one thing in common, the mutual enjoyment and admiration of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, which has brought them together in, if the term is not too cliché, a fellowship of friends. Poor Mr. Fenton! I only hope that his friends have been as close as those I have found in my fifteen years of the cult (which we know as Tolkien fandom).

I cannot think of any better ways to spend my time than to invite friends over to talk Tolkien. There is a longing to share something that is so good that you relish the chance to sit and listen or expound your views on orkish souls (the Topic That Would Not Die) or participate in a lore tourney where you just might remember of what Balдор's belt was made. And the feasting and the late nights and the all-too-early mornings and the good-byes. As Tolkien realized from the days of the T.C.B.S., friendship is one of the dearest things in life and unwittingly he forged hard and fast friends amongst the admirers of his works.

Tim Callahan Pasadena, CA

Tolkien, Wagner and the Wild Lure of the North

It was back in 1964 when I was a freshman at the Chouinard Art School that I first became interested in (and, for a time, obsessed with) Norse Mythology. Throughout my high school years I had been an ardent Grecophile, focusing on Classical Mythology to the exclusion of everything else. This all started when I bought a paperback edition of Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*. I devoured that book, though the small section at the end on Norse myths did little for me. Somehow, the idea of gods who could be killed offended the rigid definitions of my adolescent mind. In a way, glutting myself on the Greek myths to the point that I was bored with them paved the way for my later acceptance of the Norse. But what actually led me into the world of northern myth was the music of Richard Wagner. Again, the seed had been planted in my high school years. While I was in high school I often listened to a classical music program in the early evening. The show's theme was the Magic Fire music from *Die Walkure*. One night, when I was visiting a friend, I mentioned how magical I found that music. He was quite a Wagnerian and introduced me to *The Ring of the Nibelung*. My interest was stirred, particularly when I remembered having read

Hamilton's unsatisfyingly abbreviated rendition of a part of the *Volsunga Saga*. I was particularly taken with the primeval quality of the myth in Wagner's synthesis, most of which was conveyed by the richly emotional music. My interest was further stirred when I decided to read the librettos of the Ring operas, since the copy in the school library was illustrated by Arthur Rackham. One can imagine the effect that book had on me, an illustration major. The double assault, visual and auditory, was more than I could withstand, and I had to know as much about the Norse myths as I could. The result was not only a thorough reading of the mythology, including the Eddas, but, since the material I was reading kept alluding to them, an investigation of the Icelandic family sagas. By the time I had graduated from Chouinard, I had read over thirty sagas, much of the material of which I related to long-suffering friends. That they remained my friends attests to the sincerity of their regard for me.

I had gotten a good start in all of this when my roommate came back from vacation at the beginning of our junior year (1966) insisting that I read this series of books he'd discovered. He started me out with *The Hobbit*. I loved it, of course, but what struck a resonating chord in me was that, excluding the Shire, Middle-earth was Midgard. As I read *The Lord of the Rings* I kept finding echoes of the northern myths. Yet, like Wagner, Tolkien had created a new synthesis. Unlike Wagner, his work didn't carry the onus of being co-opted by the Nazis. Likewise, Tolkien's heroes transcend the Teutonic mold more effectively than do Wagner's. Wagner and Rackham introduced me to the wild northern myths so full of raw potential and promise, but it was in the richness of Tolkien that I found the fulfillment of that promise.

Edna Montemayor Chicago, IL

It was towards the end of Winter, 1977, when I encountered Tolkien for the first time. I was going to school at the University of Toronto and was living in a women's dormitory located in the heart of downtown Toronto. I was sick with the flu and was in bed for the last three days. On that particular day, I was feeling much better, so after a dose of chicken soup, compliments of our housemother, I thought I would take a stroll towards the library which was located one floor below my room. The dorm I lived in was run by a group of women whose mission was similar to that of the WCTU, with an added goal of focusing attention on providing proper, temporary housing for young women attending the nearby University of Toronto. The library in this dorm was well equipped with books ranging from Old English writers to modern writers such as Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, as well as a large selection of books from the Victorian Era, particularly those written by previous administrators of the British Empire.

I wanted to do some light reading and was looking through the stacks when I saw a book lying on one of the

reading tables. It had figures of rabbits etched on her front cover, but it was the title that intrigued me — *Watership Down*. I picked up this book and leafed through the pages. It was a wonderful story. Here was a group of rabbits whose actions and decisions reflect human values; espousing very human concepts of individual freedom and collective responsibility. I finished the book for another dose of chicken soup before dinner. After reading the book, I looked through the reviews on the front pages and one of them mentioned *Watership Down* as one in league with Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*; both authors I had never heard of before. Immediately, I went through the book list, looking for one or both books mentioned in the reviews. I found neither of the books, but I saw the *The Lord of the Rings*. Another intriguing title, I thought, silently wondering whether these might be training books for sports boxing. I went through the first pages of the book not really expecting anything, but my excitement quickly rose to a level very much like the children at Bilbo's home, the Shire, awaiting the Grand Event.

The Grand Event came much later for me, but before then, I walked through a fantastic land called Middle-earth, inhabited by an amazing variety of life: hobbits, monsters, humans and ethereal creatures of power, the elves. I have never been made more conscious of the tenacious power of evil, embodied in Sauron and his followers, and which Tolkien evoked in various images of fear, pain, war and despair. Equally, I rejoiced in the eternal presence of Good, embodied in Gandalf, Elrond and Galadriel, but more so, in the fidelity and courage of human characters, Faramir, Aragorn, Frodo and Sam.

Though the women were not as fully developed as the male characters, the women were strong and heroic. Galadriel's choice to remain free and unbound to evil has no match in humility and courage. I will not fail to mention the quiet strength emanating from Arwen, and the Lady of Rohan, rebellious and imperial, who chose to channel her energies into becoming a healer.

The unexpected trip to Middle-earth in the Winter of 1977 has since kindled my interest in other writers of fantasy who, like Tolkien, write about the human adventure with all its horrors and failings, but equally of nobility and strength, beauty and joy arising from the free and courageous choices of human characters.

I share this enthusiasm for Tolkien with my friends, particularly those who live in the Philippines, some 10,000 miles away. It was rumored that during the dark days of Martial Law, under the tyrannical rule of the deposed dictator, Marcos, in that country, opponents of martial law named their oppressors after the Uruk-Hai. If the oppressive structures are still in place, in that land, then it is likely that General Shagrat and Captain Gorbag are still performing heinous deeds, even to this day.

My grand adventure through Middle-earth goes on, but I have an unfulfilled wish (shared by many others), for unlike Sam, who had, I have not had any chance encounter with elves.

John L. Leland

Salem, WV

It has been usual to begin these tributes with recollections of one's first reading of Tolkien. I cannot do that with any precision, because Tolkien, in the form of *The Hobbit*, was given to me (as I know by the bookplate in it) when I was one year old. My earliest memory of it, which I cannot date at all precisely, is of my father reading it to me; I can still recite much of the first few pages by heart. This was, incidentally, a first edition—the second edition must have appeared just about that time, but I did not encounter it till much later, and have never emotionally accepted it, not only in the larger matter of Bilbo's changing account of how he won the ring, but also in many small details that Tolkien removed in revision (such as that the Took's enemies accused them of having intermarried with goblins). I also read and loved *Farmer Giles of Ham* at an early age, especially enjoying the Baynes illustrations. I did not actually read *The Lord of the Rings* till considerably later, though my father had a copy from the time it first appeared—I recall my mother told me he bought *The Fellowship of the Ring* and was so impatient to know the rest of the story that she ordered the later volumes specially for him from England. I read the maps and appendices before I read the books themselves, being especially interested in further facts about the dwarves. The first time I tried to read *The Lord of the Rings* itself, I think I must have been about ten years old. I much enjoyed the early hobbitish humor, but was frightened by the Nazgûl on Weatherptop and gave it up for a while. I believe I must have read the entire work for the first time in my mid-teens—I recall that I read it all through the night, more or less at one sitting. My favorite part was the horns of Rohan blowing over the field of Pelennor, and I was pleased later to read that Tolkien himself liked that when he reconsidered the book. I never cared much for the long and gloomy Mordor episode or the sentimental relationship between Frodo and Sam, and on later rereadings I sometimes skipped the Mordor sequences, or at least postponed reading them until I had read all of the Aragorn/Legolas/Gimli/Pippin/Merry sections. Overall, though, I always loved the work; I think I read it at the right age, when I was still young enough to enjoy the childish aspects of *The Hobbit* and the opening of *The Lord of the Rings* (which put off some friends of mine who read it for the first time as adults) but when I was already old enough to appreciate the high tragedy of such later episodes as the deaths of Denethor and Theoden. It remains one of the central myths of my life.

Of the later works, I did not care for the rather gloomy atmosphere of "Leaf by Niggle" and *Smith of Wootton Major*—I read the latter only once, and have no desire to reread it. Like most of my generation of Tolkien enthusiasts in the

1960s and 70s, I looked forward tremendously to *The Silmarillion*, expecting full-blown narrative on the order of *The Lord of the Rings*, and was much disappointed by the rather dry summary eventually published under that name. I have been, in general, pleased with the more recent publications of the earlier versions of that mythology—for me, parts of *Unfinished Tales* and *The Book of Lost Tales* are much more real Silmarillion—that is, more like what I had imagined and awaited.

Having done graduate work in medieval English literature, I have read much of Tolkien's scholarly work, and while often enjoying the style I am bound to say that I have not always been impressed by the argument, save perhaps in the case of the well-known article on Beowulf.

I might also mention that my father and I attended the Second Tolkien Conference in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in 1969, and the Fourth Tolkien Conference in Cleveland a few years later. About the same time, a fantasy discussion group in Bowling Green, Ohio, became the Midgewater Marshes discussion group of the Mythopoeic Society, which survived for a number of years after I had graduated from Bowling Green State University (in 1972). I have remained in touch with Tolkien scholarship ever since, to varying degrees.

Paul Nolan Hyde

Simi Valley, CA

Where does one begin? Half a life-time ago for your humble servant. In the fall of 1966, I returned home from a two-year stint in southern Mexico as a full-time missionary for my church; I had no idea who J.R.R. Tolkien was. I was then living in Duluth, Minnesota, preparing to leave for school in Provo, Utah, trying to save up enough money to support a family (I was engaged to be married to a girl who, incidentally, has been quite tolerant of the subsequent developments). I went to work in Target Store #2, just north of Duluth, and began stocking shelves with candles, greeting cards, stationery goods, and other notions. My supervisor, a good friend about my age, had charge of the paperback book sales as well. One late morning as I met him for lunch, he pointed out a set of books (with rather garish covers) and asked me if I had read them. I said that I had not. "Oh, you ought! They're wonderful!" he exclaimed and persuaded me to buy them on the spot. In short order, however, he found himself quite alone during lunch, dinner, breaks, and the occasional quiet moment; I was occupied walking the great road to Middle-earth.

Within two weeks I had finished *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Seriously addicted, I attempted to find everything I could by Tolkien. *The Tolkien Reader* passed through my hands..... then *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (what?!).... and then.... nothing. My experience up to this point had been entirely literary; I knew nothing about Tolkien. I began spending a little time in the library at Brigham Young University trying to find more on the man. Through inter-library loan, I obtained a copy of Richard

West's *Annotated Bibliography*. I began collecting articles, commentaries, essays, academic papers, anything that would help me to understand what it was that had affected me so deeply. As I strayed into the arcane world of secondary literature, I became aware of other authors who seemed to be cut from the same bolt of cloth.

H. Rider Haggard was first, oddly enough. I actually knew who he was, having read *King Solomon's Mines* as a boy. Haggard produced over forty novels in his life time; I have read nearly all of them. Lord Dunsany, Charles Kingsley, and William Morris followed. In passing, I have to say that there is no one in English literature who can hold a candle to the magnificent titles of Morris' fantasy novels; they are exquisite. The works of T.H. White, Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis, and David Lindsay began to fill my shelves. David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* did something unspeakable to me; I shall not speak of it. My hunger for the Tolkienesque was insatiable. I found Richard Adams, William Harwood, John Christopher, Mervin Peake, E.R. Eddison, and hoards of others, book cases of others (when one goes out to pick up a new bookcase more frequently than to buy bread and milk, you know things have gotten out of hand). As my family and I moved from place to place, housing the parents and children was almost as important as where THE LIBRARY was to be protected. Fortunately, my wife is also a bibliophile and understands these things... sort of. But I digress....

Once Christopher Tolkien began the grand enterprise of publishing his father's literary estate, I began to refocus my attention back on Middle-earth. My Master's and Doctoral work centered on Tolkien's creative languages and I entered into the world of essays *ad nauseam*, as most everyone who is reading this little tribute is painfully aware. Thus, for the past 25 years I have been intimately involved with writings by and about J.R.R. Tolkien. I have just a word or two to say on what I think are the most important things that have transpired during that time which have given me the greatest insights into the nature of Middle-earth and its creator.

The single most important volume that has been published since *The Lord of the Rings*, is *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. I believe that no one can adequately understand the "compost pile" from which Middle-earth comes without a concerted reading of *The Letters*. I made that statement eight or nine years ago at a session of one of the Mythopoeic Conferences and was promptly nailed to the wall by one of the then luminaries of Tolkien studies. "Balderdash!" he cried. "No one needs to read that stuff. An author never knows exactly what he is doing in any event; you can't trust him." He was wrong then and, if he still believes it, he is wrong now. Willful ignorance of a man's heart is a travesty. The *Letters* reveal an active portion of J.R.R. Tolkien's heart.

Continued on page 60

Tolkien's fault." Van Elzen cannot believe that Tolkien did not know that his mythology was fake and that he couldn't write, as "it was his job to know such things and he knew his job." He supposes that there is a tragic reason why Tolkien did not finish *The Silmarillion*: "the idea that he then would be obliged to publish it, and that so his puzzle, his own-made world, the work of his youth would be devaluated."

He writes similar things about *The Lord of the Rings*.

As Tolkien was a Catholic, level-headed and right-minded person, it became a kind of epic of that right-mindedness. It is a book... where nothing is questioned... that makes no sense at all... From the Ring-trilogy you can judge what right-minded people are against, when they stop and think for a moment: against stupid demolition of nature, against barbaric industrialization, against murder and manslaughter, tyranny and wild violence. And especially against everything that could get their right-mindedness in difficulty. Like sex. Because sex would have caused problems.

And yet it is a great book... because it is the book every small boy dreams of ... because it moves all boundaries of the original adventure story to its outer limits.

He proposes to give this children's book of children's books back to the children.

The last book to be translated into Dutch was *Unfinished Tales*. The reviews were not really bad, but again they were few. And for expensive hardbacks reviews are a necessity. These days only *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are reprinted regularly. *The Silmarillion* is still on the market, but only in the 1988 edition. The two Tolkien exhibitions, in Antwerp and The Hague, were very successful, but the Dutch editor Het Spectrum was not very interested. And yet this time, the press showed a lot of enthusiasm for Tolkien's birthday. The Antwerp exhibition in Belgium was featured three times on television, eight times on the radio, and got twenty-three reviews in magazines and newspapers, five of which were full-page articles. Middle-earth is quite alive in the Lowlands. ☞

Notes

1. Guus Sötemann (1920-) would later become Professor in Dutch Literature at the University of Utrecht.
2. Rijn Blijstra (1901-1975) was head of the cultural redaction of *Het Vrije Volk*. He wrote several psychological novels and art-historical surveys, and received some awards.
3. Lode Roose (1920-1991) would become Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at the Universities of Antwerp and Louvain, and President of the Royal Academy of Dutch Language and Literature.
4. Jos de Haes (1920-1974) received the (Belgian) National Prize for Poetry in 1965, and many other awards.
5. Rico Bulthuis (1911-) (Netherlands) wrote many fairy-tales and several novels.
6. Lieven Rens (1925-1983) (Belgium) Poet and Specialist in Renaissance Drama. Professor at the University of Antwerp.

7. A. Masrja (1917-1964) was a protestant poet and writer of short stories. Well known for his radical views on literature.
8. Aad Nuis (1933-) (Netherlands) is a Professor of Modern Dutch Literature at the University of Leiden. He wrote poetry and essays, and is now a member of the Dutch Parliament.
9. Louis Theodoor Lehmann (1920-) (Netherlands) Poet.
10. Willem Wagener (1901-1968) (Netherlands) Wrote several novels and was a professional journalist at the *Rotterdamers Nieuwsblad*.
11. Johan Winkler (1898-) (Netherlands) was a very important journalist. He was adjunct-editor of *Het Parool* and editor-in-chief of *Vrij Nederland*.
12. Karl Josef Hahn (1912-) (Netherlands) Specialist in German Literature.
13. Herman Servotte (1929-) is Professor of English Literature at the University of Louvain.
14. Wim Zaal (1935-) is an important journalist, who works for many magazines. He also published poetry.
15. Maarten 't Hart (1944-) Well known Dutch novelist, who received several awards.

A complete list of articles in Dutch magazines and newspapers will be published in 1993 by Unquendor.

Tolkien Tributes (continued from page 31)

The most revealing piece of writing about J.R.R. Tolkien's deep commitment to Middle-earth is, without question, his own "Leaf By Niggle". Tolkien disabused his readers regarding any allegorical interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings*, but an open-hearted reading of "Leaf by Niggle" with Tolkien's own artistic creations and frustrations in mind allows for an almost allegorical interpretation. There is no fictional work by Tolkien that affects me more profoundly than "Leaf By Niggle," because within the narrative is Ronald Tolkien's life blood, the artist who will never be able to finish what he started. Make no mistake, Niggle is Tolkien.

There have been many wonderful essays written about Tolkien's linguistic creations, but, again, the most important is without doubt a product of his own pen. A careful reading of "The Notion Club Papers" in the latest volume of *The History of Middle-earth series, Sauron Defeated*, will do more to enhance the reader's understanding as to what Tolkien felt about language and why he created languages and the accompanying narratives, than any other one exercise. Each of the characters in the story is easily identified with the several members of the Inklings (CRT demonstrates that clearly in his commentary, I believe), but the carefully orchestrated discussions on language are at the heart of the matter. In my opinion, language has ever been at the heart of the entire matter from the very beginning, long before Bilbo was the Hobbit. Middle-earth is the languages; the languages are Middle-earth.

Finally, where does one end? It is hard to say. As long as there are those who find in Tolkien's writings a kindred spirit, there will be Tolkien Societies, Mythopoeic Societies, *Mythlore*, *Mallorn*, and all of the others. The most important product of my reading of Tolkien has been the friendship of men and women who share a love for a fabricated world, a world that has become more substantial as we have learned to love each other because of our love for that world's maker. J.R.R. Tolkien would be happy with that. ☞