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Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss: Steps on the Developmental Journey by John Rosegrant

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Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss: Steps on the Developmental Journey by John Rosegrant

TOLKIEN, ENCHANTMENT, AND LOSS: STEPS ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNEY. John Rosegrant. Kent OH: The Kent State University Press, 2022. 208 p. ISBN 9781606354353. \$55.00.

MUCH SCHOLARLY WORK HAS BEEN DEDICATED to analysis of the texts and letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, searching for insight into his inspirations. But few authors of such works are truly qualified to offer professional analysis on the underlying psychology of Tolkien's artistic expressions. John Rosegrant is one of these few exceptions. As a practicing clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst, Rosegrant is professionally trained to probe and uncover conscious and subconscious motivations of behaviour. In his first monograph, he synthesizes multiple disparate fields—psychoanalysis and literary studies—together into an emergent and harmonious whole, greater than the sum of its parts. *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss: Steps on the Developmental Journey* comprises a collection of Rosegrant's previously published articles and conference presentations on Tolkien and his works (revised and updated), plus new materials, assembled together under several broad themes as outlined in the title. The book is extended into a detailed dialogue between Tolkien's biographical history and its impacts on his personal development, his explicitly stated influences, and the expression of these through his library of published works, ranging from his famed Middle-earth legendarium to less-studied prose and poetry.

Rosegrant guides the reader deep within symbolism in Tolkien's works, connecting those symbols to related meanings in psychology. Based on the vocabulary level, *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss* feels as though it is written for an undergraduate-level audience or higher. That being said, sufficient context and background are provided for those unfamiliar with the aspects of both psychoanalysis and Tolkien studies discussed. In particular, I found terms of psychology to be defined effectively and efficiently for the scope of the work. Where necessary, Rosegrant communicates base knowledge of psychological phenomena to the reader—trauma response, development of various cognitive functions, etc. Rigorous reference to psychoanalysis and developmental psychology literature is provided should the reader be interested in exploring these concepts further, outside of their relation to Tolkien and his works. As the book progresses, Rosegrant kindly provides periodical reminders of specially-defined terms that are relevant to the discussion at hand, limiting the reader's need to refer back to previous chapters or to the index and improving the overall flow of the work. Ultimately this monograph feels well-researched and thoroughly referenced in both fields it straddles. Rosegrant regularly cites many well-known Tolkien scholars (Flieger, Shippey, Scull and Hammond, Carpenter,

Garth, etc.), both in cases where their analyses support his own, and where they may differ.

Rosegrant has crafted a thoughtful and introspective work, suitable to be pondered over and dwelt upon rather than ravenously devoured. He gently leads the reader through his own thought processes in crafting the arguments to support his points. Use of Tolkien's own words about his writings is careful and measured, as he quite famously contradicted himself over the course of his life on a number of issues, even on topics as vital as the 'central' theme of his legendarium. Rosegrant is also careful to delineate when he is making statements based firmly on Tolkien's own writings (either in-universe or in letters, etc.) and when he is extrapolating or inferring. Seemingly natural conclusions are arrived at when they are earned by the arguments presented, whereas in other cases certain questions are left unresolved so as not to force an answer that may not be wholly convincing to the audience.

The introduction provides a framework and parameters for the rest of the book, built upon two metaphors—Tolkien's idea of a stone tower that must be toppled in order for its component parts to be studied, thus losing the enchantment provided by the whole (his metaphor for the study of *Beowulf*), and Barliman Butterbur's soup at the Prancing Pony, which provides a sort of simple enchantment in that humble ingredients can be combined to create a nourishing meal that transcends its origins. These examples set the stage for the primary tension at play in the rest of the book, between enchantment and disenchantment (loss). For the purposes of this work, Rosegrant defines 'enchantment' thusly:

[E]nchantment is not easy to define, but drawing on [Max] Weber and Tolkien I approached its definition as a sense of wonder, meaningfulness, and connection to an Other, with the lack of precise boundaries to this definition in fact being intrinsic to the concept. All these qualities are best experienced in a state of mind that is situated intermediate between reality and unreality. Tolkien invoked this state of mind in the quote I used earlier as his definition of enchantment ("the primal desire at the heart of Faërie [is] the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder"): the denizens of Faërie and the realm of Faërie itself are experienced both as having independent existence and as in a sense existing because of ("imagined" by) the believer. (19)

The remainder of the introduction identifies the three psychoanalysts which primarily guide the book's explorations—Sigmund Freud, D.W. Winnicott, and Julia Kristeva—and outlines the objectives of each chapter.

A substantial list of examples from the primary texts of Tolkien's Middle-earth works demonstrates convincingly that the two core concepts of

Rosegrant's thesis are inextricably entwined (chapter 1, "Tolkien's Dialogue between Enchantment and Loss"). No victory in the legendarium is complete, no success wholly untainted by grief and loss. Transitioning from the story itself to an analysis of Tolkien's writing style, Rosegrant illustrates how language itself is utilized to enchant the reader, with capitalization and phrasing manipulated to produce an otherworldly effect. The first chapter continues with an examination of the themes of loss and enchantment/disenchantment in Tolkien's own life. Like his hero Frodo, Tolkien suffered grievous losses during his life, especially in his childhood, which tinged his successes with disenchantment—an inability to fully enjoy the enchantment of creating his fictional worlds. Frodo is perhaps the character who experiences the most significant disenchantment in the closing chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*: the Scouring of the Shire, the ceaseless effects of his possession of and by the One Ring, and the Morgul-blade wound which continues to ache well after its incurrence at Weathertop.

Departing temporarily from Tolkien's legendarium, the second chapter, "My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me" delves into Tolkien's stated appreciation for a particularly gruesome Brothers Grimm fairy tale, *The Juniper Tree*, which he discussed in *On Fairy Stories*. While the story dives into very dark topics of loss—the murder of a child, and subsequent unknowing cannibalism of the child's body—Rosegrant theorizes in part that Tolkien's fascination with this story is related to its tension between fantastical elements (a mystical bird arising from the base of the eponymous tree and meting out justice upon the murderer) and the more abjectly horrific content. In short, the enchantment involved in the story allows a safe cognitive distance from the brutal, grisly content. Rosegrant returns to Arda in chapter three for a brief comparison of the opportunities of two characters in *The Hobbit* to engage with enchantment—Bilbo Baggins and The Master of Laketown. Bilbo, while reluctant at first, opens himself to enchantment when he tags along on the Dwarves' adventures involving distant, mysterious settings, peoples, and creatures, only to lose much of that enchantment upon his return to The Shire. Even late in life, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo desires to return to one of the locations of his enchantment—Rivendell. In contrast, The Master of Laketown is too bogged down in the minutiae of 'everyday' things like taxes and governance to become enchanted by the Dwarves' mission to take back their mountain kingdom from the dragon Smaug.

In a decidedly more Freudian turn, Rosegrant dives deep (so to speak) into the different holes encountered in *The Hobbit* (chapter 4, "In Deep with *The Hobbit*"). The homely comforts of Bag End are juxtaposed with the nasty, dank caves of Gollum, Smaug, and the goblins of Goblintown, which represent aspects of the "abject," as defined by French philosopher and psychoanalyst

Julia Kristeva. In true Freudian fashion, the sexual connotations of such locales are not ignored. Both the pleasant and unpleasant holes and caves of Middle-earth can be enchanting in their own way—either through fascination with hoards of Dragon treasure, or disgust and revulsion at signs of death and rot. Rosegrant then shifts to examples of mostly-self-contained “*aventures*” in Tolkien’s legendarium that serve little narrative purpose—Tom Bombadil, Beorn, etc.—but which are nonetheless beloved by many readers as enchanting bits of world-building. These vignettes are likened to the developmental idea of “play”—that which is pleasurable without being necessarily productive. The importance of colour to the world of *The Hobbit* is provided as a further signifier of the story’s “playfulness.” This chapter felt perhaps a little out of place in the larger narrative of the book, having less to do directly with the tension between enchantment and loss, but is still relevant to the larger developmental journey of the human psyche.

The death of Tolkien’s mother marks what was likely the most profound and impactful loss of his childhood. Appropriately, two chapters of *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss* are dedicated to feminine and maternal components of his legendarium. Rosegrant draws parallels between several usages of song in the legendarium to the Mother/child relationship, noting that song often induces changes in consciousness (either awakening or entrancement—literal loss of self) or repair of something damaged or disrupted, as a Mother’s presence can improve the mood of an infant after even a brief absence. Song in Arda has the ability to enchant the listener, but afterwards frequently leaves them with a sense of longing for something unattainable. Rosegrant rightfully acknowledges the limited and often one-dimensional depictions of Tolkien’s female characters, comparing this with the author’s idealized remembrances of his own mother, simplistic and underdeveloped due to his young age when she died. Rosegrant notes that Tolkien credited his appreciation of music in large part to his mother, providing another link between song and maternity. In chapter 6, “The Man-Maiden and the Spider with Horns,” Rosegrant presents Galadriel and Shelob as opposite feminine and maternal figures. He acknowledges that this comparison has been made in prior literature, but here develops the idea further by highlighting each character’s dual nature as personifying both masculine and feminine aspects, and suggests that through these two characters, Tolkien may have been grieving the loss of both his mother and father. Galadriel has undoubtedly experienced much loss throughout her millennia-long life, and continues to be subjected to loss during *The Lord of the Rings* in the fading of her peoples and the land of Lothlórien itself. Shelob, for all her evil actions, is the last of her kind in Middle-earth, having experienced the loss of the rest of Ungoliant’s spawn. Rosegrant reinforces his argument that Tolkien dealt with the loss of his parents through his writing with

examples from secondary works such as “The Lost Road” and the related poems “Shadow-Bride” from *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* and “The Shadow Man.” Further examination is given to the character of Galadriel, in particular her mirror and other instances of reflective surfaces in Tolkien’s writings (chapter 7, “Seeing the Self in the Mirror of Galadriel”). Rosegrant compares the mirrors in Tolkien’s legendarium against two opposing theories of the symbolism of reflection and mirroring in psychology, demonstrating that Rosegrant is not hesitant to explore the tension between conflicting ideas within his field of expertise. This argument is expanded to explore the symbolism of stars, including characters related to stars, that are often found to be reflected within Galadriel’s mirror, the Mirrormere, and other bodies of water in Middle-earth.

The final four chapters of *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss* follow a rough chronology of major developmental stages and events in Tolkien’s life, and their impacts on his writing. In chapter eight, “From the Ineluctable Wave to the Realization of Imagined Wonder,” Rosegrant explores the psychological concept of “transitional phenomena”—internal representations of the relationship between one’s internal subjective understanding of the world and objective reality—and their effects on Tolkien’s creations. The primary example provided is Tolkien’s exorcism of his recurring dream of a great wave, achieved through externalizing the dream into the story of the downfall of Númenor. Rosegrant speculates that the origin of this dream may have been in Tolkien’s loss of his father at an early age, while an ocean lay between them as his father was still in South Africa at the time of his death. This chapter also examines Tolkien’s struggle to overcome his feelings of hubris in order to create his fictional worlds and stories, and the ultimate internal resolution that his sub-creation was divinely inspired—stories and events that were revealed to him from his God. Rosegrant argues that Tolkien poured his hesitancy and conflict regarding hubris into the character of Fëanor, whose artistic ambition ultimately outstrips his humility, with disastrous consequences for his family and descendants. Transitioning from Tolkien’s childhood to his young adulthood, a psychological case is built to explain Tolkien’s recurring bouts of prolonged illness (chapter 9, “Something Has Gone Crack”). Rosegrant combines biographical information and excerpts of Tolkien’s letters to suggest that he frequently experienced somatic responses to personal traumas and stresses, resulting in a heightened susceptibility to physical illnesses with long recovery periods. Tolkien’s purported psychosomatic response, a recognized psychological phenomenon, may have been born out of an inability to process intense emotions related to WWI, losses of loved ones, moving to unfamiliar places, and other upsetting events in his life. Examples are given of characters in the legendarium that experience trauma and injury, both bodily and

emotional, through war, suggesting that Tolkien may have been expressing the emotional injuries he sustained during WWI through his writing.

Occasionally Rosegrant indulges in tangents which do not seem to fully align with the larger narrative being built. I did not find that these detracted significantly from the broader argument of the book, and were usually worthwhile pursuits on their own, possibly representing avenues for further study and reflection. One such example is an extended contrast of the One Ring, a rigid unyielding fetish item that induces obsession, lust for power, and loss of self, with the inexplicable Tom Bombadil, a character that Rosegrant presents as an excellent symbol of transitional experience (chapter 10, "The One Ring and Tom Bombadil"). Tom Bombadil has a liminal existence with seemingly unfettered potentiality, beyond or perhaps simply outside of the One Ring's influence.

In the final chapter, Rosegrant explores Tolkien's late life challenges in accessing the transitional thought processes that appear to have been founts of creative inspiration in his earlier days (chapter 11, "Late Life Loss of Transitionality"). In support of this argument, Rosegrant utilizes thematic comparison between a story that Tolkien wrote at what may be considered his creative peak, "Leaf By Niggle," authored while he was working on *The Lord of the Rings*, with "Smith of Wootton Major," which was written much later in his life. To further support this argument, a detailed comparison of two different revisions of the same poem is employed—"Looney," written when Tolkien was forty-two, and "The Sea-Bell," revised in 1962 when Tolkien was seventy, well after the publication of *The Return of the King*. To further the argument, Rosegrant presents evidence of Tolkien's ongoing internal struggle with hubris. Late in life, Tolkien's ideas and thought processes were becoming more rigid—elements and rules of the primary world were becoming increasingly integrated into his vision of Middle-earth. This is supported by Tolkien's unpublished revisions to *The Hobbit*, and his attempts to revise the chronology and cosmology of Middle-earth to better align with real-world astronomy and other physical sciences. The epilogue of *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss* feels somewhat brief for the scope of the work, but does summarize and harmonize the volume's core themes.

Having had the pleasure of attending some of Rosegrant's presentations at past Mythcons, I could often hear the calming yet engaging tones of his voice in my mind as I read *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss*. In my personal journey with the book, I found myself identifying phenomena in my own development of which I either was not previously fully conscious, or of which I was aware but did not have the terminology to effectively describe. *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss* does not look at Tolkien as a static monolith, but as an individual along his own developmental path, struggling with life events

and often exorcising them through his secondary worlds, whether consciously or not. Rosegrant paints a portrait of Tolkien that is flexible—changing and adapting to external and internal influences. Those looking to understand Tolkien as a whole person rather than a historical figure should find Rosegrant’s first monograph to be an invaluable addition to their bookshelves.

—Timothy K. Lenz



BRIEFLY NOTED

ITHELL COLQUHOUN TARO AS COLOUR [78-card Tarot deck] and **ITHELL COLQUHOUN TARO AS COLOUR**. Ithell Colquhoun with pamphlet containing a short introduction by Richard Shillitoe and Colquhoun’s essay “Taro as Colour” (1977). Lopen, Somerset, UK: Fulgur Press, 2022. 78-card Tarot deck.

IT WAS A MERE TWO YEARS AGO that Fulgur released Leonora Carrington’s trumps-only deck and the publisher has already outdone itself by reproducing Ithell Colquhoun’s (1906–1988) unique abstract seventy-eight-card “Taro,” as the artist preferred to call it. Adam McLean released a one-hundred copy limited edition of Colquhoun’s deck in 2009, but Fulgur’s is its first commercial offering. It was preceded by a fully-illustrated book titled *Taro as Colour* (Fulgur, 2018) that is addressed, along with Carrington’s deck and related book *The Tarot of Leonora Carrington* (Fulgur, 2020), in my *Mythlore* (40.1) review essay. Colquhoun is widely recognized for her association with the Surrealist movement and dedication to occult studies, particularly those of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and related groups. Unlike Inkling Charles Williams, Colquhoun was not a member of Arthur E. Waite’s revised Golden Dawn order, but she was deeply involved with Tamara Bourkoun’s (1911–1990) Golden Dawn-based Order of the Pyramid and Sphinx. My review of Colquhoun’s Tarot is available at *Facing North* (<https://facingnorth.in/>), as is my review of Amy Hale’s excellent biography of the artist *Genius of the Fern Loved Gully: The Supersensual Life of Ithell Colquhoun Artist and Occultist* (Strange Attractor Press, 2020). A review of the revised and expanded edition of *The Tarot of Leonora Carrington* recently released by Editorial RM (2023) is available at *Facing North* as well.

—Emily E. Auger

