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# The Development of J.R.R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-stories

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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume VIII**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Joint Meeting of

The Eighth

FRANCES WHITE EW BANK COLLOQUIUM ON C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS

and

THE C.S. LEWIS AND THE INKLINGS SOCIETY CONFERENCE

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## **The Development of J.R.R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-stories**

Paul E. Michelson  
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# The Development of J.R.R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-stories<sup>i</sup>

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In 1938, J. R. R. Tolkien was asked on very short notice if he would give the 1939 Andrew Lang Lecture at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. Rather surprisingly (Tolkien was a notoriously slow and perfectionistic writer), he agreed and—motivated by the pressures of a deadline and a creative dry spell as he labored over a potential sequel to *The Hobbit*—he systematically elaborated his thoughts on Fairy-stories for the first time.

Tolkien had, of course, been thinking about and discussing "myth" with his friend and colleague C. S. Lewis for more than a decade, including an early 1930s poem on "Mythopoeia"—the making of myths, written after a late night discussion with Lewis about the purpose of myth that was a crucial step in Lewis's conversion to Christianity.<sup>ii</sup> However, in Tolkien's thought, "myths" and "Fairy-stories" are different. As he was to point out in the Lang lecture, Fairy-stories are "a new form, in which man is become a creator or sub-creator." Put another way, since "fantasy is one of the functions of the Fairy Tale...what is normal and has become trite [is] seen suddenly from a new angle: and...man becomes sub-creator."<sup>iii</sup>

Characteristically, Tolkien had had an earlier opportunity to discuss the subject when he was invited to give a lecture on Fairy-stories at Worcester

College, Oxford in January 1938 following the publication of *The Hobbit*. But when the time came, "in lieu of a paper 'on' fairy stories", Tolkien read a revised and expanded ("about 50% longer") version of his story *Farmer Giles of Ham*.<sup>iv</sup>

The importance and significance of the Lang lecture was clear to Tolkien as he looked back. It was "written," he told us in 1964, "in the same period (1938-39), when *The Lord of the Rings* was beginning to unroll itself and to unfold prospects of labour and exploration in yet unknown country as daunting to me as to the hobbits. At about that time we had reached Bree, and I had then no more notion than they had of what was to become of Gandalf or who Strider was; and I had begun to despair of surviving to find out."<sup>v</sup>

The truth of the matter, as he wrote to his publisher in 1938, was that

"The sequel to *The Hobbit* has remained where it stopped. It has lost my favour and I have no idea what to do with it. For one thing the original *Hobbit* was never intended to have a sequel...I am really very sorry: for my own sake as well as yours I would like to produce something...I hope inspiration and the mood will return. It is not for lack of wooing that it holds aloof. But my wooing of late has been perforce

intermittent. The Muses do not like such half-heartedness."<sup>vi</sup>

Part of the problem, Tolkien later wrote to W. H. Auden, was that he had made the mistake of tailoring *The Hobbit* to children: "It was unhappily really meant, as far as I was conscious, as a 'children's story', and as I had not learned sense then, and my children were not quite old enough to correct me, it has some of the sillinesses of manner caught unthinkingly from the kind of stuff I had had served me....I deeply regret them. So do intelligent children."<sup>vii</sup>

Thus, as he put it in yet another letter,

"I had not freed myself from the contemporary delusions about 'fairy-stories' and children. I had to think about it, however, before I gave an 'Andrew Lang' lecture at St Andrews *On Fairy-stories*; and I must say I think the result was entirely beneficial to *The Lord of the Rings*, which was a practical demonstration of the view that I expressed. It was *not* written 'for children', or for any kind of person in particular, but for itself."<sup>viii</sup>

Verlyn Flieger and Douglas Anderson summarize: "The lecture *On Fairy-stories* came at a critical juncture in Tolkien's creative development. It marked the transition between his two best-known works, but it also functioned as the bridge connecting them, facilitating the perceptible improvement in tone and treatment from one to the other."<sup>ix</sup>

Tolkien was also becoming quite frustrated and more than a little peeved with being pigeon-holed as a "children's writer."

"It remains a sad fact that adults writing fairy stories for adults are not popular with publishers or booksellers. They have to find a niche. To call their works fairy-tales places them at

once as juvenilia; but if a glance at their contents show that will not do, then where are you? There is what is called a 'marketing problem'. Uncles and aunts can be persuaded to buy Fairy Tales (when classed as juvenilia) for their nephews and nieces, or under the pretence of it. But, alas, there is no class Senilia from which nephews and nieces could choose books for Uncles and Aunts with uncorrupted tastes."<sup>x</sup>

Finally, and obviously, the Lang lecture was significant since it provided the core for Tolkien's continuing interest in a subject that eventually appeared as his seminal essay "*On Fairy-stories*."

## II. THE ANDREW LANG LECTURE, ST ANDREWS UNIVERSITY, 1939

The lecture was named for Andrew Lang (1844-1912), the pioneering collector of twelve volumes of the "colour " fairy tale books between 1889 and 1910. St Andrews had originally proposed Gilbert Murray for the 1938-1939 lecture, Hugh Macmillan for 1939-1940, and Tolkien for 1940-1941. Neither Murray nor Macmillan were able to give the 1938-1939 lecture, so in October 1938, Tolkien was asked if he would step in. He agreed and on November 25, 1938, the appointments of Tolkien (1938-1939), Murray (1939-1940), and Macmillan (1940-1941) were announced. In February 1939, Tolkien suggested March 8, 1939 as the date for the lecture, which was accepted.<sup>xi</sup>

The lecture, delivered under the title "Fairy Stories,"<sup>xii</sup> raised three questions: "What are Fairy-stories? What is their origin? What is the use of them?"<sup>xiii</sup> These questions were dealt with in a magisterial sweep that could be said to have done for Fairy-stories what Tolkien's 1936 British Academy lecture

on "Beowulf" did for the study of early English literature.<sup>xiv</sup>

After debunking the idea that Fairy-stories are about beings of diminutive size, Tolkien's response to the first question was that Fairy-stories "are not generally 'stories about fairies', but about Faery—stories covering all of that land or country which holds many things beside 'fairies' (of any size), besides elves or fays or dwarves, witches, or dragons it holds the sun the moon the sky the earth and us ourselves. (sic)" Indeed, if one looked at the collection of Fairy-stories gathered by Andrew Lang and his wife, Tolkien pointed out, "the stories about fairies are few (and the whole poor) but [are mostly] about men women and children in the presence of the marvellous. [sic]"<sup>xv</sup>

This led Tolkien to suggest that "if we cannot define a fairy-story positively we can do [it] negatively." He disqualified travelers tales (such as *Gulliver's Travels*) and beast fables (the *Monkey's Heart*), though he did not mention dream stories such as *Alice in Wonderland*, as he did in the 1947 revision.<sup>xvi</sup>

As for the question of origins, Tolkien argued (with Dasent) that "we must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled," adding that "By the soup I mean the story as it is now served to us and by the bones the analysis of its sources."<sup>xvii</sup> He could not resist showing, however, that he was fully aware of the history of such analyses and their deficiencies.<sup>xviii</sup>

As for the third and final question—the use of Fairy-stories—Tolkien affirmed that they were not necessarily written for children, even though he agreed with Lang that "He who would enter into the Kingdom of Fairy should have the heart of a little child." Tolkien qualified this by noting that "They may have children's hearts...but they have also heads."<sup>xix</sup> He illustrated the dangers of patronizing children with a personal

anecdote that he wrote for a revision of the lecture, but wound up omitting in the 1947 essay: "I once received a salutary lesson. I was walking in a garden with a small child...I said like a fool: "'Who lives in that flower?' Sheer insincerity on my part. 'No one,' replied the child. 'There are Stamens and a Pistil in there.' He would have liked to tell me more about it, but my obvious and quite unnecessary surprise had shown too plainly that I was stupid so he did not bother and walked away."<sup>xx</sup>

In the lecture, Tolkien also identified the three faces of Fairy-stories "the Mystical (towards God divine), the Magical (towards the world) and the Critical (towards man in laughter and tears). Though the essential centre of fairy-story is the Magical, both of the other things may be present separately or together."<sup>xxi</sup>

What is the use of Fairy-stories? Tolkien briefly responded: renewal and escape. With regard to the latter, he launched his now well-known idea that "to judge whether escape is good or bad, weak or strong we must know from what we are escaping." This is not hard to understand when one is trying to escape from a prison.<sup>xxii</sup> There the lecture ended.

### III. ESSAYS PRESENTED TO CHARLES WILLIAMS, 1947

The usual procedure was for the Lang Lecture to be published by Oxford University Press, but this appears to have been prevented by the outbreak of the Second World War. The delay was fortuitous since it led Tolkien to develop and expand on his ideas connected with Fairy-stories. In any case Tolkien seems to have been revising the lecture since 1943 for independent publication, principally by converting it into more of an essay and less of a lecture and by adding material that he could not include in a brief lecture.<sup>xxiii</sup>

This resulted in the 1947 appearance of Tolkien's revised study in the C. S. Lewis-edited *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*,<sup>xxiv</sup> a work intended originally as a festschrift for Williams as he was ending his war-time refuge in Oxford and preparing to return to Oxford University Press's Amen House in London. Williams' untimely death on May 15, 1945 converted the tribute into a memorial.<sup>xxv</sup>

Though Tolkien was later to describe the 1947 essay as a publication of the 1939 essay "with a little enlargement,"<sup>xxvi</sup> it was considerably expanded and modified. This owed in part, as Tolkien noted, to the fact that the lecture had been "a shorter form" of his presentation.<sup>xxvii</sup> Nevertheless, there were important arguments in the 1947 essay that were missing from the 1939 lecture and its fragmentary ms. Several significant ideas—*eucatastrophe*, *evangelium*, secondary world, secondary belief—did not appear in the lecture, but found their way into the essay as Tolkien developed his thoughts.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Other concepts that were mentioned in the lecture—such as the faces of Fairy-stories, sub-creation,<sup>xxix</sup> consolation, and the relationship of fantasy to drama—were augmented in the essay. For example, in the essay, Tolkien lightly modified the "faces" of Fairy-stories. His final formulation now read "fairy-stories as a whole have three faces: the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards man. The essential Face of Faërie is the middle one, the Magical."<sup>xxx</sup>

The most prominent of the additions had to do with Tolkien's new ideas about *Eucatastrophe* and the Supernatural element of Fairy-stories. Tolkien discussed this in a 1944 letter to his son, Christopher. He and his wife had attended church where the priest spoke about miracles:

"I was deeply moved and had the peculiar emotion we all have—though not often. It is quite unlike any other sensation. And all of a sudden I realized what it was: the very thing that I have been trying to write about and explain—in that fairy-story essay that I so much wish you had read....For it I coined the word 'eucatastrophe': the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears (which I argued is the highest function of fairy-stories to produce)....I concluded by saying that the Resurrection was the greatest 'eucatastrophe' possible in the greatest Fairy Story....Of course I do not mean that the Gospels tell what is *only* a fairy-story; but I do mean very strongly that they do tell a fairy-story: the greatest....[In this] you not only have that sudden glimpse of the truth...a glimpse that is actually a ray of light through the very chinks of the universe about us."<sup>xxxi</sup>

This was a major new development of Tolkien's approach and was clearly articulated in the 1947 version of "*On Fairy-stories*." The consolation of happy endings in Fairy-stories, touched upon briefly in the 1939 lecture,<sup>xxxii</sup> was now transformed from a merely "imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires" into the joy of the *evangelium*.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Tolkien went so far as to claim that

"Almost would I venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it [the Consolation of the Happy Ending]. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story."<sup>xxxiv</sup> Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite—I will call it *Eucatastrophe*. The *eucatastrophic* tale is the true form

of the fairy-tale and its highest function....It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief."<sup>xxxv</sup>

In the end, "The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels...and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The other major change as lecture became essay related to *Faërie* itself.<sup>xxxvii</sup> "An essential power of Faërie is," Tolkien wrote, "...the power of making immediately effective by the will the visions of 'fantasy'....This aspect of 'mythology'—sub-creation, rather than either representation or symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world—is, I think, too little considered. Is that because it is seen rather in Faërie than upon Olympus?" In the 18th and 19th centuries, *Faërie* was thought to be derived from Myth, and was, therefore, a kind of "lower mythology" as compared to "higher mythology". As Myth dwindled down, "it became folk-tales, *Märchen*, fairy-stories...." Tolkien responded: "That would seem to be the truth almost upside down."

Tolkien illustrated this with Thórr, who

"must...be reckoned a member of the higher aristocracy of mythology: one of the rulers of the world. Yet the tale that is told of

him...in the Elder Edda...is certainly just a fairy-story....If we could go backwards in time, the fairy-story might be found to change in details, or to give way to other tales. But there would always be a 'fairy-tale' as long as there was any Thórr. When the fairy-tale ceased, there would be just thunder, which no human ear had yet heard."<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Much the same could be said about King Arthur, who for us is historical, mythical, and of *Faërie* simultaneously.<sup>xxxix</sup>

All of this is part of what Tolkien called the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story. The Cauldron contains all the elements of story: history, myth, and Fairy-story. Indeed, "History often resembles 'Myth,' because they are both ultimately of the same stuff...They have been put into the Cauldron, where so many potent things lie simmering agelong on the fire..."<sup>xl</sup>

By 1947, Tolkien had become even more convinced that *Faërie* could not be defined so much as experienced: "Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities is to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole."<sup>xli</sup>

But it can be caught in story. Recall Sam Gamgee's query at a trying moment in *The Lord of the Rings*:

"I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterward. And people will say: 'Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!' And they'll say: 'Yes, that's one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn't he, dad?' 'Yes, my boy, the famousest of *The Hobbits*, and that's saying a lot.'"

"It's saying a lot too much,' said Frodo, and he laughed, a long clear laugh from his heart. Such a sound had not been heard in those places since Sauron came to Middle-earth. To Sam suddenly it seemed as if all the stones were listening and the tall rocks leaning over them. But Frodo did not hear them; he laughed again."—even though he realized "You and I, Sam, are still stuck in the worst places of the story..."<sup>xlii</sup>

Tolkien's own summary of the essay?

"If adults are to read fairy-stories as a natural branch of literature...what are the values and functions of this kind?...First of all: if written with art, the prime value of fairy-stories will simply be that value which, as literature, they share with other literary forms. But fairy-stories offer also, in a peculiar degree or mode, these things: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation [including the Eucatastrophe], all things which children have, as a rule, less need than older people. Most of them are nowadays very commonly considered to be bad for anybody."<sup>xliii</sup>

The essay concludes with six pages of significant notes which elaborate important points or add details that Tolkien had to omit in the lecture.<sup>xliv</sup>

#### IV. TREE AND LEAF (1964) AND AFTER

For many years, *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* was the only available exposition of Tolkien's ideas on Fairy-stories. Much to Tolkien's annoyance, by 1955 Oxford University Press had "infuriatingly let it go out of print, though it is now in demand—and my only copy has been stolen."<sup>xlv</sup> As a result, Allen and

Unwin now proposed re-publication of "On Fairy-stories" in 1964 as part of a "new" book, entitled *Tree and Leaf*, which included revised versions of the Lang Lecture/essay and of Tolkien's quasi-autobiographical allegory, "Leaf by Niggle."<sup>xlvi</sup>

The changes between 1947 and 1964 are carefully catalogued by Flieger and Anderson, who identify "substantial revisions to at least two passages, and a host of lesser revisions at the sentence level..." including the addition of subheadings that make the argument easier to follow.<sup>xlvii</sup> The key changes appear in the initial paragraphs of the essay, which are less diffident in tone, and where *Faërie* now appears prominently in the second sentence instead of several pages later. Flieger and Anderson attribute these changes to Tolkien's increased confidence in his art and his conception of Fairy-stories, showing "the ongoing development of his vision" while making "the trajectory of Tolkien's thinking clear."<sup>xlviii</sup>

*Tree and Leaf* was followed by the September 1966 American publication of a mass market paperback book called *The Tolkien Reader*, a rather obvious ploy to capitalize on the tidal wave of Tolkien's popularity, which was reaching tsunami proportions especially in the United States.<sup>xlix</sup> Unfortunately, "the text [of 'On Fairy-stories'] is a poor one," Flieger and Anderson tell us, "with numerous typographical errors...that are not only incorrect but also misleading. There is no evidence that Tolkien undertook any revisions for this edition."<sup>l</sup> This is unfortunate, given that *The Tolkien Reader* was and is still the most widely available source for "On Fairy-stories."

One other major problem created by both *Tree and Leaf* and *The Tolkien Reader* was that juxtapositioning the essay *On Fairy-stories* and "Leaf by Niggle" gave the false impression that the latter was a working out in fictional form of the precepts of the former. This



"mythconception" was fostered by Tolkien's "Introduction" to *Tree and Leaf* which blithely informed readers that "Though one is an 'essay' and the other is a 'story', they are related: by the symbol of the *Tree and Leaf*, and by both touching in different ways on what is called in the essay 'sub-creation'. Also they were written in the same period (1938-1939)..."<sup>ii</sup>

This is misleading at best because "Leaf by Niggle" is an allegory and, as readers familiar with Tolkien should know, allegory has no place in *Faërie*. Tolkien made this plain in a 1957 letter: "There is no 'symbolism' or conscious allegory in my story. Allegory...is wholly foreign to my way of thinking." However, "That there is no allegory does not, of course, say there is no applicability. There always is."<sup>iii</sup> The real "example" story was actually Tolkien's 1967 work *Smith of Wootton Major*, which he had written between 1964 and 1967.<sup>liii</sup>

The third edition<sup>liv</sup> of "*On Fairy-stories*" appeared in 1983, when Christopher Tolkien collected and edited several of Tolkien's essays under the title *The Monsters and The Critics*.<sup>lv</sup> The only changes were to correct editorial errors. This was followed in 2008 with Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson's Expanded edition with commentary and notes (London: HarperCollins, 2008). The text of Tolkien's now-classic essay follows the 1983 Christopher Tolkien edition. The volume also includes all of the surviving manuscript materials related to "*On Fairy-stories*" and extensive notes and commentary. Unfortunately, the scholarly nature of this volume and the fact that it was published only in Great Britain and only in hardback, makes it unlikely that it will get the use it deserves.

The 1947 essay, as subsequently modified/edited, was not, however, Tolkien's last word *On Fairy-stories*. Late in life, he wrote a piece to illustrate his ideas *On Fairy-stories* called *Smith of*

*Wootton Major*. This story was the product of an unlikely chain of events, beginning in 1964 with a request from a publisher for a preface to a new edition of George MacDonald's *The Golden Key*. The project was eventually shelved, but the ms. of Tolkien's draft preface remains as does a note by Tolkien to Clyde Kilby dealing with the MacDonald edition and the genesis of the subsequent story. All of these were published by Verlyn Flieger in the 2005 Extended Edition of *Smith of Wootton Major*.<sup>lvi</sup>

Tolkien related to Kilby that he was glad in the end that the MacDonald project collapsed because his re-reading of MacDonald had reminded him of why MacDonald "critically filled me with distaste."<sup>lvii</sup> However, as he worked on the preface, Tolkien "found it necessary to deal with the term 'fairy'—always necessary nowadays whether talking to children or adults..."<sup>lviii</sup>

Tolkien's draft was a condensed version of some of his key ideas *On Fairy-stories* and as such provides a convenient terminus to this account of the development of his ideas. "If a thing is called a 'fairy tale', the first point to note is 'tale'," Tolkien wrote, defending the legitimacy of Fairy-stories as a form of literature.<sup>lix</sup> He followed this by pointing out how "fairy" was often "misused" to identify a story as "specially suitable for children."<sup>lx</sup>

Next, Tolkien noted that "fairy" itself is often misunderstood. It was once a

'big word', including many marvellous things, but it has in ordinary use dwindled, so that I suppose to many people 'fairy' now means first of all a little creature....But 'fairy tales' are not just stories in which imaginary creatures of this kind appear. Many do not mention them at all. In many others where they do appear (such as *The Golden Key*) they are

not important...the truth is that *fairy* did not originally mean a 'creature' at all, small or large. It meant enchantment or magic, and the enchanted world or country in which marvellous people lived, great and small, with strange powers of mind and will for good and evil. There all things were wonderful: earth, water, air, and fire, and all living and growing things, beasts and birds, and trees and herbs were strange and dangerous, for they had hidden powers and were more than they seemed to be to mortal eyes....The Fairy Queen was not a queen shaped like a little fairy, but the Queen of Fairy, a great and dangerous person, however beautiful, Queen of the enchanted world and all its people. A fairy tale is a tale about that world..."<sup>lxi</sup>

Tolkien's 1964 manuscript concluded: "This could be put into a 'short story' like this. There was once a cook, and he thought of making a cake for a children's party. his chief notion was that it must be very sweet, and he meant to cover it all over with sugar-icing..."<sup>lxii</sup> Though the ms. breaks off here, we all recognize that this story is an early draft of *Smith of Wootton Major*.<sup>lxiii</sup>

The story is noteworthy as a deliberate application by Tolkien of his ideas concerning Fairy-stories and repays a thoughtful reading. If Tolkien's publishers were interested in the further dissemination of Tolkien's revolution on Fairy-stories, it would be well if this story was combined with the essay on Fairy-stories into a single mass market paperback.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The Lang lecture and its further development were important in a number of ways. Tolkien's efforts to come up with

a sequel to *The Hobbit* had been fruitless, as he told Auden, since he "was not prepared to write a 'sequel', in the sense of another children's story." Through the Lang lecture, Tolkien came to see

"that the connexion in the modern mind between children and 'fairy stories' is false and accidental, and spoils the stories in themselves and for children. I wanted to try and write one that was not addressed to children at all (as such); also I wanted a large canvas. A lot of labour was naturally involved, since I had to make a linkage with *The Hobbit*; but still more with the background mythology That had to be re-written as well."<sup>lxiv</sup>

Once he had clarified in his mind the essentials of Fairy-stories in preparing the Lang Lecture, the road forward from Bree was opened up.

In the process, Flieger and Anderson write, "Tolkien established positive criteria by which fairy-stories—and by extension his own developing kind of fantasy literature—could be evaluated." At the same time, "He built up a working vocabulary for the craft of fantasy that could be used in its criticism, developing such terms as *sub-creation*, *Secondary World*, *Faërie*, *inner consistency of reality*, *Cauldron of Story*, *the Soup*."<sup>lxv</sup> Finally, "The progress of '*On Fairy-stories*' from lecture to published and twice re-published essay is an index of Tolkien's developing views and continuing engagement with the subject."<sup>lxvi</sup>

The net result was to give imaginative fantasy literature respectability. It seems safe to say that far fewer people today think that Fairy-stories are primarily for children, that escapism is always bad, and that adults shouldn't be interested in fantasy literature.<sup>lxvii</sup> At the same time, Tolkien's ideas about *Faërie*, sub-creation, and *Eucatastrophe* have developed a

considerable degree of currency in a wide reading and writing public.<sup>lxviii</sup>

J. R. R. Tolkien was a master storyteller. His *Lord of the Rings* was, as C. S. Lewis put it, "like lightning from a clear sky."<sup>lxix</sup> I think it is no exaggeration to say that Tolkien's "On Fairy-stories" was also like lightning, flashing over the story-telling landscape and continuing to have revolutionary potential for literary work of the present and future. At the same time, Tolkien warned us not to over-analyze the subject:

"Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold....In that realm a man may, perhaps, count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very richness and strangeness tie the tongue of a traveller who would report them. And while he is there it is dangerous for him to ask too many questions, lest the gates should be shut and the keys be lost."<sup>lxx</sup>

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> In what follows, I will use "Fairy-stories" to indicate what Tolkien is talking about, which was the final title of his work. He was not always consistent on what to call such stories, as will appear below in various quotations. Flieger and Anderson's expert edition of J. R. R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition with commentary and notes edited by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2008), which publishes the "definitive" version of the now-classic essay along with relevant manuscripts, was indispensable for the task that follows.

<sup>ii</sup> C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, October 18, 1931, in C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters. Volume I: Family Letters, 1905-1931* edited by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins, 2000), pp. 975-977. See also Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien. A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 146-148. "Mythopoeia" was eventually published by Christopher Tolkien in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, second edition edited by Christopher Tolkien (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 97-101. For discussion, see Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion: Vol. II: Reader's Guide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), pp. 620-622.

<sup>iii</sup> "Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, pp. 181, 192. Since Tolkien spoke and wrote of the realm of "Faërie", one wonders why he didn't call them "Faërie-stories". See Verlyn Flieger's note on Tolkien's "idiosyncratic" uses of "Fairy>Faëry>Fayery>Faery," in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wooton Major. Extended Edition* edited by Verlyn Flieger (London: HarperCollins, 2005), p. 143. There are also a number of manuscript fragments dealing with Magic, Miracles, and Faëry that have been published by Flieger and Anderson in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, 2008, including, "Manuscript B Miscellaneous Pages," pp. 252 ff., especially pp. 254-257, and 260 ff. These bear further examination, but this is outside of the scope of the present paper.

<sup>iv</sup> Carpenter, Tolkien, 1977, pp. 165-166; and J. R. R. Tolkien to C. A. Furth, Allen and Unwin, July 24, 1938, in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* selected and edited by

## The Development of J.R.R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-stories · Paul E. Michelson

Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), pp. 38-39. The first version of this tale had been rejected by Allen and Unwin in 1937, but, because it eventually became clear that Tolkien's "new" *Hobbit* would not be finished in the foreseeable future, his publishers accepted the expanded story for publication. In the end, *Farmer Giles* did not appear until 1949. For details, see Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond's "Introduction," to the 50th anniversary edition of J. R. R. Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham* edited by Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), p. iii-xiii.

<sup>v</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, "Introductory Note," in his *Tree and Leaf* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 5, also in his *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), p. 31.

<sup>vi</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien to C. A. Furth, July 24, 1938, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, pp. 38-39.

<sup>vii</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien to W. H. Auden, June 7, 1955, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, p. 215.

<sup>viii</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien to Jane Neave, November 22, 1961, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, p. 310.

<sup>ix</sup>Flieger and Anderson, in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 15.

<sup>x</sup>"Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2000, p. 249. This manuscript dates from 1943, but portions of it were "recycled" from his 1938-1939 notes. Judging from the context ("If there were more time, I should like to speak more of modern fairy-stories..." is how the following paragraph begins), this was likely written for the original 1939 lecture.

<sup>xi</sup>Details in Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, "The History of 'On Fairy-stories'," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 123-125.

<sup>xii</sup>Though only a partial draft manuscript for the lecture remains, its basic ideas can be gathered from what remains and from several local newspaper accounts, all conveniently reprinted in Flieger and Anderson's Expanded Edition: "Manuscript A," and "Contemporary

Reports on the 1939 Lecture," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 173-205, and pp. 159-169. Ms. A, which Flieger and Anderson identify as the 1939 lecture text written between December 1938 and March 1939, is missing pp. 1-4 and a few pages at the end, but they are reasonably certain that these "missing pages" were mostly "recycled" into Manuscript B, which was written between 1943 and 1945. See Flieger and Anderson, "Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 173, 195-196.

<sup>xiii</sup>"*The St. Andrews Citizen*, March, 1939," reporting on the lecture changes the tense, reprinted in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 165. The same wording is used in "Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 207-208, possibly recycled from the lecture, and in the 1947 version.

<sup>xiv</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: *The Monsters and The Critics*," reprinted in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and The Critics and Other Essays* edited by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1983, paperback edition, 1997), pp. 5-48. Tolkien's essay was, writes Michael D. C. Drout, "the single most important critical essay ever written about *Beowulf*..." in his "Introduction," to J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf and the Critics* edited by Michael D. C. Drout (Tempe AR: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), p. 1. (This work publishes the manuscripts from which Tolkien drew the *Beowulf* lecture, according to Christopher Tolkien. p. xv.) Interestingly, Tolkien had some pungent criticisms to make of "quarrying researchers" who see *Beowulf* as a source and not as something in itself. (pp. 6-7) that are reflected in "Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 218, where he reproved scholars for "studying the stories not for themselves, but as a quarry from which to dig evidence or information on other matters in which they are interested....So much so that they are apt to get off their own proper track..." These same strictures are reiterated in "*On Fairy-stories*."

## The Development of J.R.R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-stories · Paul E. Michelson

<sup>xv</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 176; and "The St. Andrews Citizen, March 1939," reprinted in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 164-166. The punctuation of some of the manuscripts is rather haphazard.

<sup>xvi</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 177-179; and "The St. Andrews Citizen, March 1939," reprinted in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 166-167.

<sup>xvii</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 180.

<sup>xviii</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 180-185.

<sup>xix</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 185-188.

<sup>xx</sup>"Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2000, p. 248.

<sup>xxi</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 183.

<sup>xxii</sup>"Manuscript A," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 193-194; and "The St. Andrews Citizen, March 1939," reprinted in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 167-168.

<sup>xxiii</sup>Flieger and Anderson, in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 131 ff. on this project. The draft is "Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 206-299.

<sup>xxiv</sup>(London: Oxford University Press, 1947), xiv + 145 pp.

<sup>xxv</sup>Lewis wrote: "We had hoped to offer the whole collection to Williams...when peace would recall him from Oxford to London. Death forestalled us; we now offer as a memorial what had been devised as a greeting." C. S. Lewis, "Preface," in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, 1947, p. vi. A little confusingly, Lewis's own contribution (pp. 90-105) was entitled "On Stories". It had originally been titled "Popular Romance." See C. S. Lewis to T. S. Eliot, May 17, 1945, in Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 2000, Vol. I, p. 650.

<sup>xxvi</sup>Tolkien, "Introduction," *Tree and Leaf*, 1964, p. 5; and in *The Tolkien Reader*, 1966, p. 31.

<sup>xxvii</sup>Tolkien, "Introduction," *Tree and Leaf*, 1964, p. 5; and in *The Tolkien Reader*, 1966, p. 31.

<sup>xxviii</sup>The final version in Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, contains three mentions of secondary worlds, pp. 52, 61-64, and 77, compared to none in 1939; and five on secondary belief, pp. 52, 59, 61, 63, and 64, compared to none in 1939. On *euclatrophe* and *evangelium*, see below.

<sup>xxix</sup>The final version in Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 42, 59, 78, includes three mentions of sub-creation compared to two in the lecture, pp. 181, 192.

<sup>xxx</sup>"Manuscript B," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2000, p. 226; and Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 44.

<sup>xxxi</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien to Christopher Tolkien, November 7-8, 1944, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, pp. 99-101.

<sup>xxxii</sup>"The Scotsman, March 9, 1939," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 131.

<sup>xxxiii</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, p. 81.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>The mention of drama here is not accidental and it required Tolkien to make another important change in the lecture through a significant expansion of his ideas on the relationship of fantasy and drama. See Flieger and Anderson, in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 138 ff., and Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, pp. 69 ff.

<sup>xxxv</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, p. 81.

## The Development of J.R.R. Tolkien's Ideas on Fairy-stories · Paul E. Michelson

<sup>xxxvi</sup>In Manuscript B, in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 295, he added a comment later omitted in the 1947 essay: "Marvels: yes, but the story is true, therefore the marvels are true, occurring in history."

<sup>xxxvii</sup>What follows is from Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, pp. 51-52.

<sup>xxxviii</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, p. 52.

<sup>xxxix</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, p. 55.

<sup>xl</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, p. 56.

<sup>xli</sup> Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, pp. 42-43.

<sup>xlii</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 50th Anniversary Edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), pp. 712-713.

<sup>xliii</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, p. 66.

<sup>xliv</sup> "Notes," in Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in *Essays Presented to Williams*, 1947, pp. 84 ff.

<sup>xlv</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien to Houghton Mifflin, June 30, 1955, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, p. 220. The quotation is from notes sent by Tolkien to Houghton Mifflin to deal with inquiries about Tolkien's work, principally to correct errors about same. Ironically, *Essays presented to Charles Williams* was reprinted in a paperback edition in early 1966 by Eerdmans in the United States. This edition was photolithographed so the pagination is identical to the hardcover Oxford University Press edition. One alteration in the text is a change of the date of the Lang Lecture from 1940 to 1938 (p. 38). Both are incorrect.

<sup>xlvj</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), with an introductory note by Tolkien. A second edition, J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, second edition edited by Christopher Tolkien (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), with a

preface by Christopher Tolkien includes the early 1930s poem "Mythopoeia".

<sup>xlvii</sup> Flieger and Anderson in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 147-148. The "substantive" changes are discussed on pp. 148-151; the others (some 20 in number) are on pp. 151-155.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Flieger and Anderson in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 147-148.

<sup>xlix</sup>Details in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 156. This volume included the contents of *Tree and Leaf*, along with "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," and "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil." *The Tolkien Reader* is still in print.

<sup>l</sup>Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 156.

<sup>li</sup>Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 1964, p. 5; *The Tolkien Reader*, 1966, p. 31.

<sup>lii</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien to Herbert Shiro, November 17, 1957, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, p. 262. For other comments on allegory, see Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, pp. 41, 121, 145, 121, 220, and 246. Of course, like Fairy-stories, allegory is a branch of what Tolkien called the "Tree of Tales" or part of "the Cauldron of Story". Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, pp. 39, 46-47.

<sup>liii</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wooton Major. Extended Edition* edited by Verlyn Flieger (London: HarperCollins, 2005). See below.

<sup>liiv</sup>The Flieger-Anderson Extended Edition reproduces the 1983 text, adding only a helpful paragraph numbering system.

<sup>lv</sup>See the preface by Christopher Tolkien in J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and The Critics and Other Essays*, edited by Christopher Tolkien (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), paperback edition: London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 3: for *Tree and Leaf*"some minor alterations were made, and it is this later text that is given here with the correction of some errors that go back to the 1964 reprinting." The essay is reprinted on pp. 109-161 of the collection.

<sup>lvi</sup>See Verlyn Flieger, "Afterword," to J. R. R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major. Extended Edition* edited by Verlyn Flieger (London: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 59 ff. The documents are published here as "'Genesis of the story'. Tolkien's Note to Clyde Kilby," pp. 69-70, and "Tolkien's draft introduction to *The Golden Key*," pp. 71-75. Unhappily, this edition has become a rare book, apparently published in a very limited print run only in the UK and only in hardback.

<sup>lvii</sup>"Tolkien's Note to Clyde Kilby," in Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major. Extended Edition*, 2005, p. 69. The note was sent by Tolkien in response to an interest expressed by Kilby in December 1967 in buying the Smith manuscripts for the Wade Collection at Wheaton College. See pp. 135-136.

<sup>lviii</sup>"Tolkien's Note to Clyde Kilby," in Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major. Extended Edition*, 2005, p. 69.

<sup>lix</sup>"Tolkien's introduction," in Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major. Extended Edition*, 2005, p. 73.

<sup>lx</sup>"Tolkien's introduction," in Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major. Extended Edition*, 2005, p. 73.

<sup>lxi</sup>"Tolkien's introduction," in Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major. Extended Edition*, 2005, pp. 73-74.

<sup>lxii</sup>"Tolkien's introduction," in Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major. Extended Edition*, 2005, p. 74.

<sup>lxiii</sup>Interestingly, Tolkien recapitulated the history of his 1938 Worcester College lecture *On Fairy-stories* in 1966, when he was scheduled to give a lecture at Blackfriars in Oxford on October 26. He read instead *Smith of Wootton Major* (to an audience of over 800!). Tolkien later wrote "I did not warn you of my talk on Wednesday night. I thought you would be too busy. I did not give a talk in fact, but read a short story recently written and yet unpublished; and that you can read when you have time: *Smith of Wootton Major*: if I have not already inflicted on you. Though the title is intended to suggest an early Woodhouse [sic] or story in the B[oy's] O[wn] P[aper], it is of course nothing of the kind. The event astonished me altogether, and also the promoters of the series....I am told that more

than 800 people gained admittance...." J. R. R. Tolkien to Michael George Tolkien, October 28, 1966, Letters, 1981, pp. 370-371; Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion: Vol. I: Chronology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), pp. 678-679.

<sup>lxiv</sup>J. R. R. Tolkien to W. H. Auden, 7 June 1955, in Tolkien, *Letters*, 1981, p. 216.

<sup>lxv</sup>Flieger and Anderson, in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 19.

<sup>lxvi</sup>Flieger and Anderson in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2000, p. 128.

<sup>lxvii</sup>A recent example is Arthur Krystal, "Easy Writers. Guilty pleasures without guilt," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2012, pp. 81-84.

<sup>lxviii</sup>See T. A. Shippey, *J. R. R. Tolkien. Author of the Century* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), pp. vii ff. and also pp. 318-328.

<sup>lxix</sup>C. S. Lewis, "Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," in his *On Stories and Other Essays in Literature* edited by Walter Hooper [New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982], p. 83.

<sup>lxx</sup>Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," in Tolkien, *On Fairy-stories*, Expanded edition, 2008, p. 27.