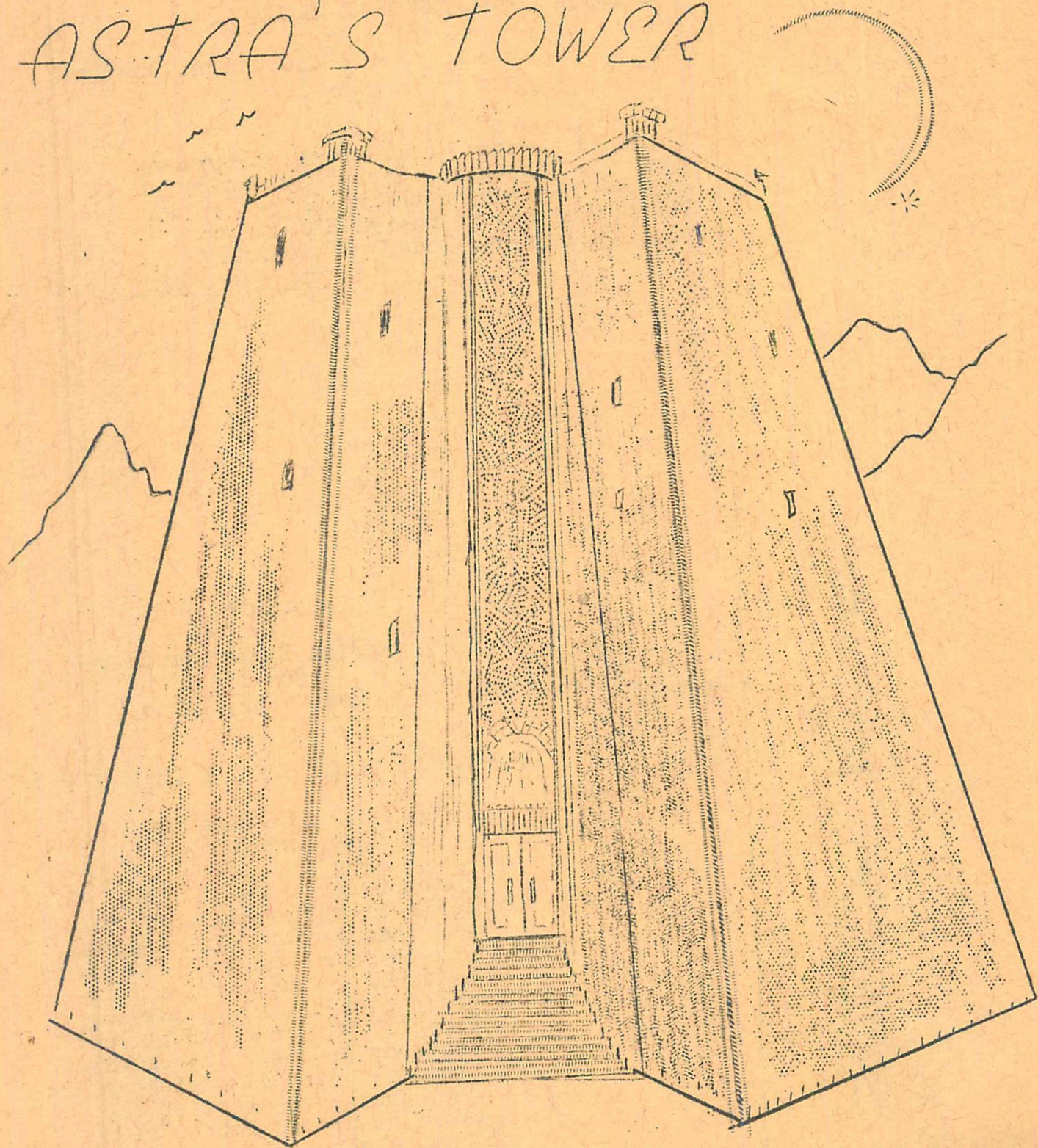


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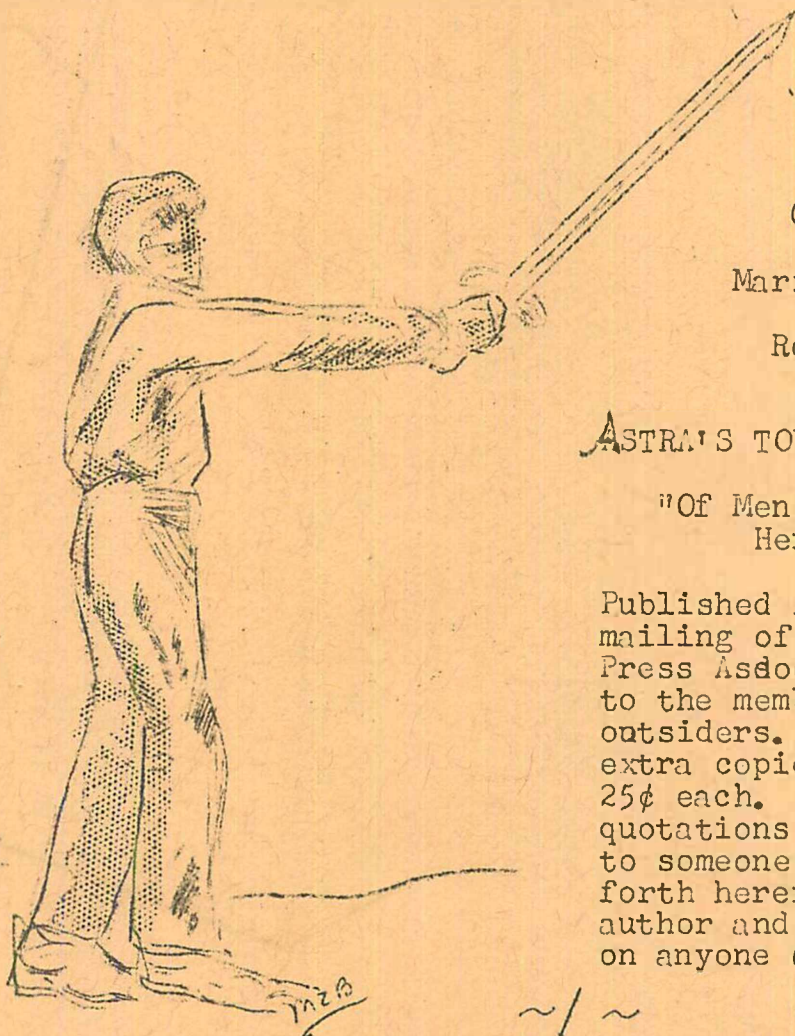
men, halflings & hero worship

FANTASY DOES NOT OBSCURE, BUT ILLUMINATES
THE INNER CONSISTENCY OF REALITY ."

...Michael Straight

"There is always a collaboration between
poet and listener. Everybody projects
his own novel upon the novel he reads.
The writer has to resign himself to
that kind of usual deformation...."

Maryse Choisy



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ASTRA'S TOWER SPECIAL LEAFLET # 5

"Of Men, Halflings and
Hero Worship"

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PREFACE

One of the curious aspects of our society's changing tastes and manners is the shift -- of recent years--in the definition of what constitutes a novel or magazine of interest to men. The book aimed primarily at a masculine audience is no longer the novel of heroism or high adventure; a "man's book" now connotes, rather, one of unsubtle sexual treatment.

This is stranger than it seems. The pornographic we have always with us, but I am not here speaking of pornography.

In the past, the novel whose main interest lay in the relations of the male with the female characters, be these courtly, or undecorously erotic, was by definition a woman's book. Novels for men dealt with other drives than Eros. MOBY DICK and THE IVORY TRAIL are men's books. WUTHERING HEIGHTS, and GONE WITH THE WIND, are women's books. Zane Grey, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Talbot Mundy and the purveyors of air-war, detective and sea stories, wrote largely for men -- or for women impatient with romantic, erotic or domestic tales. But even a cursory glance through the racks of "men's magazines" will show the extent of this shift -- and I am not here speaking of the "girly" books, but those which purport to be "adventure" stories for men.

I am not yet wholly convinced that, in fanzine phraseology, "Sex and S-F do mix." In the lost letter-columns of the pro-mags, there were many young and articulate readers (adults, too) who kept saying in effect, when a story introduced a romantic, sexual or domestic element, "Yes, yes, we know all that, but what else did they do and think about?"

They have been shouted down by the frustrated adults moving in on the last outpost of the fiction of adventure and idea. A small, but regrettably articulate anxious element among readers seem afraid that if sex is ignored for even a few pages, someone will think they are not interested; if sex is left out of one story, it might be left out of their lives. Reaching for their own insecure virility, they have forced on us an anomaly; sexy science fiction. Now mark me well; I am not denouncing serious investigation of alien manners, including the sexual. I am questioning the mere incursion of sexy adventures into the escape reading of the day. We should beware of how we seek "wider acceptance of science fiction" in that audience which seeks only vicarious stimulation.

Else we deprive s-f of a major value; a last outpost where youth, in our increasingly sex-anxious, sex-guilty world, can inquire into matters lying outside the miasm of anxious sexuality pervading our fiction. Sturgeon, his novels heavy with sex, parodies this element. Tolkien, ignoring it, causes perhaps more introspection than Venus Plus X.

OF MEN, HALFLINGS

An inquiry into the relationships developed in THE LORD OF THE RINGS, by J.R.R. Tolkien; with various speculations about the passing of the Heroic Age in society, in literature and in the individual.

+ IT IS PROBABLY A VERY
+ considerable compliment
+ to the ability of Dr.
+ Tolkien at weaving a
+ spell; not until weeks
+ after I had completed
+ reading his monumental
+ saga (*) and was lovingly
+ working through the



appendices did a very curious fact strike me. In four volumes, comprising substantially over a thousand pages of unlarge type, there is almost nothing which could be construed as love interest. The books are, in fact, almost womanless. There are at least thirty major male characters, and at least as many more about whom we know something, who are described briefly and given a line or two to speak. But even including the super-numeraries, there are exactly seven female characters in the entire trilogy.

This is not unusual in children's books of a certain kind. But these are not children's books. They have, it is true, a great appeal to some children, particularly the precocious and imaginative; but they are genuinely adult novels, adult in thesis, concept, manner and structure. Edmund Wilson, it is true, in his disparaging review of the trilogy, after commenting that he had just completed reading the whole thing to his seven year old daughter, remarked that "except when he is being pedantic and boring the adult reader, there is little....over the head of the seven year old." If Mr. Wilson is sincere, then he must read even more superficially than the average critic is sometimes accused of doing; undoubtedly a seven year old could follow the story and might enjoy it, but a book which does not yield up all its complexities even to the educated adult on first reading could hardly be said to be wholly comprehensible even to the possibly precocious little Miss Wilson.

The critic is possibly deceived by this curious fact; they are probably the only books written for adults in the past twenty years or so which are almost devoid of overt sexual motivation.

Now of course, the English novel is traditionally more decorous than the American. There are no Faulkners or Mickey Spillanes among British writers (for which I am sure the British sometimes offer up thanks); but if English novelists do not in general go in for the open-bedroom-door techniques of the fifties, they have displayed an adequate awareness of basic drives; all the way from Malory, whose Tristram and Iseult have become the stereotype of passionate lovers, through the in-its-day shocking emotional frankness of the Brontes, to today's Colin

AND HERO WORSHIP

Wilson and Mary Renault; the English novel for adults has shown adequate understanding of the fact that life consists of a few basic patterns, and that the pattern of relating ones-self to womankind is too basic to be ignored, or left to the purveyors of sensational stuff. Even that most proper of novels, now assigned as required reading to preadolescents, IVANHOE, derives much of its force, not from the battles and adventures but from what lies behind the battles and adventures -- the desire of Ivanhoe to win not only his father's forgiveness but the hand of Rowena, the desire of the Templar for Rebecca.

How then do we explain these books, wholly adult (as will be shown) in emphasis, and written midway through the twentieth century, and yet as devoid of ordinary love interest as The Wind in the Willows or Mary Poppins?

Edmund Wilson, quoted above, has a ready and pat answer. Comparing them unfavorably with the "Poictesme" tales of James Branch Cabell, ("who at least writes for grown-ups") and trying to explain Tolkien's popularity among the literate, he comments that some "otherwise intelligent people...retain all their lives an appetite for juvenile trash".

If this is so we should note, in passing that the "otherwise intelligent" people include Naomi Mitchison and W.H. Auden, in whose company even a literary snob might feel more comfortable and secure than in Mr. Wilson's; but I do not think so. I think he is dead wrong.

For he calls the four books, with their "intricate maps, glossaries and runic inscriptions", a "children's book that has somehow gotten out of hand."

And this is where he both makes and misses the point he set out to seek. For the age of intricate maps, private worlds, of allegory and daydream and the weighting of all relationships with forces intricately spiritualized, is NOT childhood. The age of "maps, glossaries and runic inscriptions" is the long latency period of adolescence, when the weight of the entire libido -- not sexual instinct alone, but the entire creative drive -- forms a cluster of images from which, later, emerges the total personality.....over

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TOLKIEN, JAMES RANALD RENEL: The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers & The Return of the King; Houghton, Mifflin, 1955, 1956

WILSON, EDMUND: Oooh, Those awful Orcs! The Nation, Apr. 14 56

STRAIGHT, MICHAEL: The Fantastic World of Professor Tolkien; New Republic, January 16, 1956

ENEY, RICHARD: A Faithful Servant Named Sam: I Palantir #1 1960.

These books, then, have the universality of an adolescent period which, in our increasingly anxious culture, pushing the age of physical maturity lower and lower as we push the age of social maturity and responsibility higher and higher, is losing its force as an incubation period for ideal and creative experience. As we become more and more preoccupied with teen-agers, more anxious to keep them out of trouble on one hand, and push them toward healthy, non-symbolic and premature relations with the opposite sex with the other, we lose sight of true adolescence and its function as a bridge between childhood fantasy and adult realism.

One reason, I think, for the widespread appeal of the Tolkien books is the relentlessness with which ordinary fairy tales have been banned from the nursery and psychoanalyzed from the classroom. The young no longer grow up with a mental powerhouse of Gods, heroes, and demons to act as foci for their latent emotions. Yet these images lie, universal stereotypes, at the back of most human thought. For those, then, who have spent an almost fantasyless childhood, Tolkien's books have an immense emotional power to mobilize these dormant archetypes of the psyche.

Yet they contain, in themselves, little which is new. Michael Straight says that Dr. Tolkien has prepared himself by "immersion in Welsh, Norse, Gaelic, Scandinavian and Germanic folklore."... in short, by the elements and sources of our language and the roots of much of our culture. Which are, as most students of philology will admit, the very tools of concrete thought. More fortunate adults, reared on ample folklore and fantasy, admire the ingenuity with which Tolkien has woven his component elements into a pattern of his own; but they see the sources behind the pattern, and thus it is sometimes hard for the detached reader to understand the fantastic spell which these books cast over the youthful and often ill-read reader who is meeting all these looming images for the first time.

Michael Straight, quoted above, also quotes Dr. Tolkien directly about the value of fairy tales; and defines the four elements of their value as Fantasy -- the purest of art forms; Escape -- from oppressive and meaningless detail; Recovery -- of true perspective; and Consolation -- the joy of the happy ending. Obviously the illuminations about the nature of thought, revealed by the universality of such a structure of legend and archetypal image, is of greater psychological value to adults than to any child.

In the course of this paper, then, I hope to prove, first, that THE LORDS OF THE RING is adult in structure, thesis and emphasis; that the human relationships are adequately motivated; and second that the trilogy has a valid, basically self-consistent theme and progressive development in character and style, documenting a universal experience illuminated by fantasy; the end of the Heroic Age in the individual, as well as in Middle Earth.

II

In the 1086 pages of THE LORD OF THE RINGS there are exactly five romantic attractions. They occupy somewhat less than a chapter apiece. (Compare that with even a child's 300-page edition of KING ARTHUR AND THE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE.)

They are, in the order we shall discuss them: Aragorn's long love for Elrond's daughter Arwen and their eventual marriage; the unreturned passion of Eowyn for Aragorn; the romance of Eowyn and Faramir; and the adoration of Gimli the Dwarf for the Elf-Queen Galadriel.

The fifth is the unprepared-for, but necessary marriage of Samwise to Rose Cotton; which will, being in a class by itself, be dealt with separately.

Let us first examine Aragorn, the classical Hero of the trilogy from his first appearance as the careworn, grim Ranger, to his final crowning as King of Gondor and Arnor and his marriage to the Lady Arwen. The love of Aragorn and Arwen runs like a skeinwork through the trilogy; yet it takes place offstage, as it were, and in the wings of the action. Arwen actually appears only three times in the story. At Elrond's feast, Frodo sees her in the distance; again when the quest is over he sees her come "glimmering in the evening" on Midsummer Eve as a lovely, silent pawn; and the third and last time when Frodo asks leave to depart from Gondor, in the court of the White Tree; here she appears queenly and gracious, giving Frodo a gift. She is mentioned, apart from this, in a few mirror-glimpses; Aragorn purposefully remains away from a feast where she is present; in Lorien he picks a flower and speaks as if she were present; and before his decisive battle Halbarad brings him a banner she has made.

The supplement gives a slightly more thorough account of their love story, but even there it seems more courtly/conventional than passionate. Aragorn is shown as a man devoted rather to the restoration of his Kingdom than the winning of his Lady Fair. Even there, the conflict is shown more in the light of Aragorn's struggle to win Elrond's consent to their marriage. It is true that Elrond has made Aragorn's success a condition of that consent... "Arwen... shall not diminish her life's grace for any man less than the King both of Gondor and Arnor..." but there is no very clear idea that Aragorn accomplishes his long tasks for the sake of his love. He does so, rather, because he is simply that kind of man. Many times in the course of their long adventures he shows himself willing to follow, if need be, a course which would end all his hopes of kingship or of love.

This is emphatically not a criticism. In the context of Tolkien's work, and for reasons presently to be made clear, any strand of romance other than courtly would be grotesquely out of key.

Aragorn, as a lover, is obviously (to the author) a less comfortable figure than as a hero. This will be more fully discussed when speaking of Eowyn. (But then, heroes of adventure fantasy are rarely comfortable figures among the ladies; and I don't know which pleases me less; the treat-em-rough tactics of Conan and Tarzan * or Aragorn's embarrassed courtliness.)

Dr. Tolkien sometimes veils this is more or less obscure symbolism. Freudians in the audience have probably already drawn their various conclusions, slipshod or significant, from the manner in which Aragorn carries, during all his years of eclipse as a shabby, grim wanderer, the shards of a broken sword; which he rather portentuously displays, early in their acquaintance, to Frodo and Sam, remarking "Not much use, is it?" Yet before he sets out on his great adventure the sword (as in Siegfried) is re-forged and given a new name; after which Aragorn treats it as a thing of great value, displaying touchy reluctance to lay it aside even briefly (in Theoden's hall) and submitting, with great anger and annoyance, only to Gandalf's paternal coercion. Of this subjection to Gandalf, more will be said later. It is only from Gandalf that Aragorn will accept any check on his authority; and significantly it is during this time when he has laid his leadership aside that Aragorn first meets Eowyn and is disturbed at her reactions to him;

"...he looked down at her fair face and smiled; but as he took the cup his hand met hers and he knew that she trembled at the touch...." "Hail Lady of Rohan," he answered, but his face now was troubled and he did not smile."

Aragorn's general unease in such situations, and his hesitancy in final acceptance of them even when he has come to the successful end of all his labors, is also shown clearly in one of the very few directly traceable allegories in the entire story; that of the Dead Tree in the court of the Kings. Despite his repeated emphasis on his age ('I am older than I look'....'I am no longer young, even in the reckoning of the men of the ancient houses',) Aragorn delays his marriage to Arwen while he seeks a sign:

"...And who then shall govern Gondor and those who look to this City as their queen, if my desire be not granted? The Tree in the Court of the Fountain is still withered and barren. When shall I see a sign that it will ever be otherwise??"

"Turn your face from the green world, and look

* I am no Burroughs fan. My brother, who is, added a footnote after reading the first draft of this article; "The treat-em-rough tactics appear only in Tarzan movies. In the books he is almost as diffident a courtier as Aragorn himself." We apologize.

where all seems barren and cold,' said Gandalf.

And there Aragorn finds a seedling of the White Tree, and not till it is planted in his courtyard and bursts into flower does he accept the sign he has been given and receive Arwen's hand.

As this study progresses I hope to show how right it is that Aragorn should be the only one of the Fellowship to have a lady love in the wings of the action and the first to marry. Gandalf is the idealized father-image, the Wise Counselor; retaining the staff of his authority when even Aragorn surrenders his weapon. But among the Fellowship, Aragorn is the Eldest and the Hero.

Age, of course, is relative in this fantasy. In years, Legolas and Gimli are both older than Aragorn. Gimli is over a hundred; Legolas speaks at one point of events five hundred years past. Yet neither are more than striplings in the reckoning of their own people.

Now we turn to the second of these affairs; Eowyn's unreturned love for Aragorn. To me, the scene in which Eowyn pleads with Aragorn not to ride the Paths of the Dead, or to let her ride with him, seemed at first reading the only really awkward, poorly written one in the whole trilogy. It is not a good scene. It is positively embarrassing.

At first I blamed my dislike for this scene on the stilted language used by both. Dr. Tolkien, attempting to portray a change in mood or manner, often takes refuge in a sort of high-flown story-book speech. Yet elsewhere this is accomplished without the jarring sense of wrongness which this scene produced in me. Aragorn in particular often lapses into bookish archaisms and yet manages to sound convincing. Also, in charity, I wondered if this were a masterstroke of the author's genius in making me share Aragorn's discomfiture and Eowyn's abandoned distress. But I do not think so. I think that scene is a failure because it is an attempt to introduce a false note of romantic passion into the story in the wrong place.

For of course Eowyn's attraction to Aragorn as is clearly shown later (and understood by Dr. Tolkien very well, when Aragorn discusses it at ease with Eomer, brother of Eowyn) is neither romantic or passionate. Eomer, who has immediately fallen under the spell of hero worship, says of Aragorn elsewhere that no man can know him long without loving him and desiring to follow him to high deeds of valor. And Eowyn's attraction to Aragorn is of this nature, and essentially masculine: Aragorn understands this very well when he says;

"..in me she loves only a shadow and a thought; a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan".

And significantly the move of Eowyn's desperation is to ride to battle with Theoden, in male disguise as Dernhelm.

Aragorn gratefully accepts the affection, the love and hero worship, of most of his young followers; yet for all his understanding and pity of Eowyn he shows no sign of being flattered by the compliment, much less of being even briefly attracted in return:

"Few other griefs amid the ill chances of this world have more bitterness and shame for a man's heart than to behold the love of so fair and brave a lady that cannot be returned."

Nor will he willingly confront her again, though he puts forth his skill to call her back from the shadows: and this is in sharpest contrast to his warmly personal dealings with Faramir and with Merry; with Faramir he wait until "...a light of knowledge and of love was kindled in his eyes"; later, in one of the best and most fascinating scenes in that book, a tiny self-contained masterpiece of sparkling, deft changes in mood and spirit, Aragorn first consoles the heart-broken Merry in his grief for Theoden, then light-heartedly teases him in a satirical speech which parodies the pedantry of the loremaster who had delayed and exasperated Aragorn in the course of his weary work. But with Eowyn (sandwiched between these two), he "...laid her hand in Eomer's, and stepped away. 'Call her' he said, and passed silently from the chamber."

Aragorn, for once, has met his match.

We will say more of Eowyn's deeds in male disguise later. For the moment let us turn to Faramir and Eowyn. To me this romance seemed at first perfunctory; as if Mr. Tolkien, like Aragorn himself, wanted Eowyn out of his hair at all costs, and shoved her into the nearest pair of male arms. Yet on closer examination this romance is well-structured. Faramir is, of course, in a sort of emotional style, more Gandalf's son than Denethor's, and more brother to Aragorn than to Boromir. He is, in fact, a slightly paler Aragorn; of all the romances in this book this is the most conventional, and the most straightforwardly delineated, without the murk of symbolism. Eowyn is more compelling than Arwen if only because she experiences action and emotion in the direct line of the story and not offstage. There is excellent reason for this. Eowyn, for reasons which will be made clear somewhat later when speaking of Merry, is personally involved not in the action alone, but in the broad basic theme of the trilogy...which Arwen is not.

Viewed only in the light of "story value", of course, Faramir's gentleness and Eowyn's positive, aggressive courage complement one another so well that even if this was a handy contrivance of plot, it was an inspired one; the reader, like Aragorn, (with, I am sure, a great inner sigh of relief) say:

"I have wished thee joy since first I saw thee.
It heals my heart, to see thee now in bliss."

Now we turn to the fourth major romantic attraction; told again lightly and in few words, but with depth and emotional tension: the adoration of Gimli for Galadriel.

The antagonism of Elf and Dwarf runs all through the books. Common

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foes of a common enemy, they have little love for one another and much suspicion. Gandalf must beg Legolas and Gimli not to disrupt the Fellowship by their bitter quarrels; in Lorien they come nearly to blows. But from Gimli's first sight of Galadriel his heart is overcome and his stubborn distrust melted. From that moment he and Legolas become inseparable comrades, and their disputes become the teasing, affectionate squabbles of brothers. It is to Legolas that he voices his pain on leaving Lorien;

"...I have looked the last on that which was fairest. ...henceforward I will call nothing fair, unless it be her gift... Tell me, Legolas, why did I come on this Quest? Little did I know where the chief peril lay! Truly Elrond spoke, saying that we could not foresee what we might meet upon this road. Torment in the dark was the danger I feared, and it did not hold me back. But I would not have come, had I known the danger of light and joy. Now have I taken my worst wound in this parting, even if I were to go this night to the Dark Lord."

And in this we have the beginning of a clue to the whole psychological puzzle of the story.

For this worship --distantly courtly, untinged by desire or possessiveness --- is not merely conventional and chivalrous. When Galadriel's riddling message is later given...

"To Gimli son of Gloin, bear his Lady's greeting, Lockbearer, wherever thou goest, my thoughts go with thee..."

she does not mean, by "Lockbearer" only the one to whom she has graciously given a lock of her hair. For Gimli is indeed the "lock-bearer" -- it unlocks, when you understand it rightly, the key to the psychological "age" of the whole story, the "Third Age", the Heroic Age.

For what is the age in which the young conceive these passions for women incredibly distant and high, longing only to achieve worth in their eyes, and win their respect, not their love? There is, of course, in the by-play where Gimli threatens Eomer with his axe if he will not acknowledge the Lady Galadriel fairest of all living creatures, some hint of chivalrous antecedents; Lancelot sending every conquered knight to bow before Guenevere; ((And a careful reading of the early chapters of the book THE ILL MADE KNIGHT, from T.H. White's trilogy THE SWORD IN THE STONE, sheds light on Gimli, and vice versa.))

But in Gimli we see this in essence, untouched by desire; it is a "pure passion" in the truest sense of that currently derided tradition. Forgotten in this "realistic" age, and surviving, unmocked, only in the emotional upheavals of early adolescence.

Which brings us round to awareness that, devoid as it is of love affairs and "passions" in the sense in which that world is used in current fiction, THE LORD OF THE RINGS is nevertheless pitched in

a high key of emotional tension. Nor are these emotions only the fevers of achievement or glory, or the love of home and country. They are intensely, often emotionally personal. But the major threads of these emotions are not concerned with women; they are drawn between men.

Care -- great care -- should be taken in drawing any too obvious inferences. For these relationships are Platonic in the real, and classic sense of that word. Like the novels of Talbot Mundy (cf the later chapters of The Devil's Guard) they fall into a category once predominant in adventure fiction; that in the best and most worthy masculine lives, women and the romantic emotions are irrelevant, to be taken and enjoyed, as it were, in the intervals of real life and real companionship.

At one time this was a manly and respectable viewpoint, conceded even by women. "Togetherness" and too much popular psychology have almost chased it from the scene; such books are now gravely suspect, as are those who stubbornly cherish such a viewpoint. (cf William Rotsler's Are Stf Heroes Queer? reprinted in the recent AFFAMATO). It has become a popular parlor game to interpret them in terms of sublimation and latent homosexuality and what-have-you.

But unless we are willing to concede the validity and force of this viewpoint -- that in certain frames of reference women are mere marginal commentary on the procession of events, and the adventure story is one such frame of reference -- it is useless to pursue this study further.

III

As pointed above, only seven of the thronging characters in the trilogy are women, and we may omit as unimportant the brief comic relief of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins or the sparkling, deft portrait of the loquacious old beldame Ioreth. Rose Cotton does not appear until the very end. Arwen stands poised and beautiful in the wings. Eowyn plays a definite part in the story, but, as will be more fully shown later, not a romantic one. But the other two female characters are uncompromisingly maternal ones.

Goldberry is described as young and lovely, and even the inarticulate Frodo waxes poetic when he greets her. Yet she is a maternal figure providing shelter, good and beds for weary men (in exactly the way Eowyn rages against later). Galadriel, who appears perhaps in the greatest depth of any female character, also inspires distant filial admiration rather than feminine. Gimli adores her only with the most circumspect reverence. When she shows Frodo and Sam her mirror, she is now a kindly, now a stern motherly figure, but motherly none the less; and to these two, her gifts are later the very stuff of life, so that she is an apotheosis of that watchful maternity which occasionally provides an anchor on Quests worse than theirs; the cloaks, the lembas which feeds their will as well as their bodies (another of the very few direct allegories) and the light which shines "when other lights go out". Aragorn is high in her confidence,

but even to him she displays a maternal aspect. And this is not surprising, perhaps...she is, after all, the grandmother of Arwen.

The women thus dealt with, we proceed.

It should first be noted, briefly and in passing, that Tolkien's self-consistent world, along with an alien geography and ecology, has its own appropriate manners, in general those of the heroic ages; explicitly they are NOT the stiff-upper-lip unemotional ones of the modern English-speaking peoples. Affectionate and emotional displays are permitted not alone to women and children, but to men; thus Legolas trembles with terror and wails aloud before the Balrog without his courage or manliness (if this word may be used of an Elf) being suspect; Boromir weeps in passionate repentance after his attack on Frodo, and when he is slain, Aragorn kneels at his side so "bent with weeping" that Legolas and Gimli are dismayed, fearing he too has "taken deadly hurt". The men display affection freely, as when Faramir parts from Frodo with an embrace and kiss; this is simply a pattern of manners and does not in itself merit mention as ballast for the thesis that the major emotional threads of the story are drawn between men.

The prevalent emotion in general is the hero worship of a young man for one older, braver and wiser. It has already been mentioned (and will be again) that all the company treat Gandalf as an exalted Father-figure. But the major object of hero worship, as opposed to paternal veneration, is Aragorn himself. With the single exception of Boromir, the actual leadership is resigned to him by all; Frodo, a hero in his own right, immediately yields to him:

"...yes, it was Strider that saved us. Yet I was afraid of him at first. Sam never quite trusted him, I think..."

Gandalf smiled. "I have heard all about Sam," he said, "he has no more doubts now."

"I am glad...for I have become very fond of Strider. Well, fond is not the right word. I mean he is dear to me; though he is strange, and grim at times...he reminds me often of you."

Eomer and Faramir, too, quick fall under Aragorn's spell. The only one who does not is Boromir, and one of the subtlest threads of the story is Boromir's competition for Aragorn's place. In many small episodes he attempts persistently to maneuver things his way, not Aragorn's; not in petty jealousy, nor, at first, for any base motive. He is brave and valiant, and well "worthy of the admiration he gets from the young hobbits; he fights for them and defends them and at least in Pippin's case he partially succeeds (and this is very carefully, deftly studied; for Pippin is the persistent rebel against Gandalf); slain in the first chapter of Volume II, Boromir is nevertheless a compelling force of emotional motivation all through the book. He is emotionally present in Frodo's meeting with Faramir, and Pippin's with Denethor; and Pippin's memory, his admiration for Boromir, lies behind his service to Denethor which, at last, saves the life of Faramir.

If Gandalf plays the part of the ideal Father, and Aragorn the heroically loved Elder Brother (and there is some hint of the sullen rivalry between Achilles and Agamemnon in Boromir's jealousy of Aragorn) then Peregrin Took, the hobbit Pippin, is most emphatically the spoilt Youngest Child. Here we re-emphasize the peculiar chronology of fantasy, for Peregrin is 29 years old, but four years short of his "coming of age", and thus equivalent to a boy in his teens.

And he is literally treated like a child. He falls asleep and is carried to bed while Frodo talks with the Elves. Elrond's "heart is against his going" on the dangerous Quest. Gandalf, who lets him come, nevertheless, in Pippin's words "thinks I need keeping in order", and singles him out, several times, for testy rebuke. He is in fact the childish mischief-maker of the company. Yet even Gandalf treats him indulgently when he is not squelching his bubbling spirits. And this subtle study of Pippin as the "naughty rebel" against Gandalf's kind authority culminates in his logical resentment against being treated like a child; so that his theft of the Palantir -- which is treachery in essence --- is motivated and at last understood simply as an act of purely childish mischief and devilry.

((Somewhat apart from this line of thought we should point out that Gandalf fears and refuses the challenge of the Palantir, pointing out to Pippin that "even your folly helped, my lad" -- he might otherwise have dared to use it himself. He cautions Aragorn against looking into it; but Aragorn later makes up his own mind. And the "moral" of this seems to be that sometimes the young have their own answers, as they grow toward independence, for what their elders fear.))

But this father-son relationship remains; during the sequence of the Great Ride, when Gandalf flees on the wings of the wind of war, he bears Pippin with him on Shadowfax quite literally like a small child,.... "Aragorn lifted Pippin and set him in Gandalf's arms, wrapped in cloak and blanket", and Volume III opens with the sentence "Pippin looked out from the shelter of Gandalf's cloak. He wondered if he were awake or still sleeping, still in the swift-moving dream in which he had been wrapped... since the great ride began." As Pippin slowly recovers, Gandalf first scolds, then lectures, and finally forgives him in true father-fashion. Their relationship in Minas Tirith continues to be that of loving, if stern father, and wilful, but no longer rebellious child.

The character evolution of Meriadoc, Merry, the other of the young hobbits, is less obvious and at a somewhat deeper level. Merry, older than Pippin, more sensible and quieter, seems less vital at first and, until Pippin draws attention to himself by the theft of the Palantir, seems to have remained in the background. Yet on a second evaluation of Merry it becomes obvious that, like a perfectly cast supporting actor, all of his quiet background activities are of a perfectly consistent kind. It comes slowly to the readers notice that Merry has, in fact, played a very quiet part in all their adventures. It is Merry who provided ponies for their flight, who led them into the Old Forest, and after the attack on Weathertop

it is consistently and logically Merry on whom Aragorn calls for help to bring them (quietly, without credit) through dangers; Frodo being wounded and too burdened, Sam too hostile and too absorbed in Frodo, Pippin too irresponsible.

After Pippin's escapade, while the others show concern Merry simply turns away; he shows all the earmarks of the neglected "good" child resenting the kindness shown to the naughty one who has drawn attention to himself; as Gandalf rides away, his bitter comment to Aragorn is almost his clearest utterance yet;

"A beautiful, restful night; Some people have wonderful luck. He didn't want to sleep, and he wanted to ride with Gandalf, and there he goes. Instead of being turned into a stone himself to stand here forever as a warning."

And it seems significant that after the two are separated, they follow paths similar on the surface but differing greatly in emotional motivation. Both offer their sword and service to a mighty King. Pippin impetuously to the Lord Denethor, "in payment of my debt" to Boromir, slain defending him and Merry; Gandalf is astonished, saying

"I do not know what put it into your head, or your heart, to do that...I did not hinder it, for generous deed should not be checked by cold counsel..."

But Merry's choice, though equally impulsive, is not motivated by pride:

"Filled suddenly with love for this old man, he knelt on one knee and took his hand and kissed it. 'May I lay the sword of Meriadoc of the Shire on your lap, Theoden King?' he cried, 'Receive my service, if you will!'

'Gladly will I take it,' said the king; and laying his long old hands upon the brown hair of the hobbit, he blessed him...

'As a father you shall be to me,' said Merry.

When ordered later to remain behind Merry reacts with almost childish desperation... "I won't be left behind, to be called for on return... I won't be left! I won't!" and he disobeys with the connivance of the other "disobedient son", in this case Eowyn in her male disguise as Dernhelm.

Together Eowyn and Merry face and slay the Nazgul over Theoden's dead body, both striking an enemy far beyond their strength for the love of one who has been like a father to them. Later Faramir, Eowyn and Merry all lie in the shadow of the Black Breath and it should be said in passing that Faramir, too, lies in the shadow of a father's displeasure... Gandalf has had to counsel him when he goes in desperation on his last mission;

"Do not throw your life away rashly or in bitterness... your father loves you, and he will remember it ere the end."

When recalled by Aragorn it is apparent that Merry, at least, has been through a profoundly maturing experience;

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I noted, on a previous page, the excellence of this scene between Aragorn and Merry; not only for wit and warmth but because Aragorn here appears wholly human for once; he consoles the grieving Merry, teases him, then confesses weariness and for the first time Merry speaks in realization of Aragorn's real stature;

"I am frightfully sorry...ever since that night at Bree, we have been a nuisance to you..."

and this change in Merry is made more emphatic when, left alone with Pippin, the irrepressible younger hobbit says

"Was there ~~any~~ anyone like him? Except Gandalf, of course. I really think they must be related..."

and, of course, spiritually, they are. Then he adds

"Dear me...we Took and Brandybucks, we can't live long on the heights!"

And here it is apparent that, if Pippin has changed from a rebellious child to a loving one, Merry has been far more deeply affected by his service to a beloved King;

"No, I can't. Not yet, at any rate. But at least, Pippin, we can now see and honor them...it is best to love first what you are fitted to love, I suppose...still, there are things deeper and higher.. I am glad that I know about them, a little."

Few clearer statements could be made of the way in which the young come to the simple, but deeply affecting discovery of worlds far outside their own small selfish concerns and events greater than the small patterns of their lives. The experience is universal, even though Tolkien has cast it into heroic mold and scorned obvious moral or allegory.

Whatever hobbit chronology, neither Merry nor Pippin quite achieves full adult stature until they return to the Shire to set their own country in order, when Gandalf finally resigns his authority, saying in so many words "You do not need me... you have grown up." Then Merry's firmness and Pippin's courage show echoes of Theoden, of Aragorn, even of Denethor and Gandalf. They have to some extent become what they admired.

And it is Merry who sheds light on why Eowyn belongs to the story *and* why Arwen does not. For Eowyn, too, achieves the passing of the "Heroic Age" -- the age in which girls rebel against their sex and their limitations and dream of male deeds; Gandalf says with pity:

"She, born in the body of a maid, had a spirit and courage at least the match of yours...who knows what she spoke to the darkness alone, when all her life seemed shrinking and the walls of her bower closing about her, a hutch to trammel some wild thing in?"

She does indeed achieve great deeds in male disguise, and chafes at her "imprisonment in the Houses of healing; yet when she meets Faramir she is abashed, after she complains to him, thinking that he might see her as "simply wayward, like a child."

Faramir it is who sees Eowyn most clearly and her love for Aragorn in unmistakable terms; simple hero worship on a masculine level;

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"And as a great captain may to a young soldier he seemed to you admirable. For so he is..." and Eowyn, suddenly understanding, accepts what she is, and is not; "I will be a shieldmaiden no longer, nor vie with the great Riders....I will love all things that grow and are not barren!"...no longer do I desire to be a queen,"

In other words, no longer does she desire to be a king..i.e. identify with Aragorn...but to be a woman. This is no new theme --Wagner, at the end of Seigfreid, puts such words into the mouth of Brunnhilde-- but it is apt to the picture of the passing of the Heroic Age.

IV

I have reserved for last, because most intense, the strong love between Frodo and Samwise, and the curious part played in it by the creature Gollum.

Frodo and Sam reach, toward the end of the third book, an apotheosis of the classical "idealized friendship" equivalent in emotional strength to the order of Achilles and Patroclus or David and Jonathan; "passing the love of women". Edmund Wilson speaks with some contempt of the "hardy little homespun hero" and the "devoted servant who speaks lower-class and respectful and never deserts his master" thus displaying a truly cataclysmic ignorance of the pattern of heroic literature. Both Frodo and Sam display, in full measure, the pattern of the Hero in Quest literature, although of another order than the shining gallantries of Aragorn.

Aragorn of course is the "born hero" --son of a long line of Kings, born to achieve great deeds in his time. Frodo is the one who has heroism thrust upon him, as it seems, by chance; and to complete and fulfil the analogy we might say that Sam achieves heroism undesired, and unrecognized. Frodo accepts the charge of the accursed Ring because it has come to him, as it seems, by chance; and because the great ones --Elrond, Gandalf, Galadriel and even Aragorn --are afraid to trust themselves to the lure of its power. Sam cares even less for heroic deeds; he simply wishes to guard, and remain with Frodo, and Elrond realizes this even before they set out;

"It is hardly possible to separate you from him, even when he is invited to a secret council and you are not!"

It is in Elrond's house that the intensity which will eventually enter this relationship is first shown;

Sam came in. He ran to Frodo and took his hand, awkwardly and shyly. He stroked it gently and then he blushed and turned hastily away.

Frodo, as a hero in his own right, displays slightly less helpless hero-worship for Aragorn than do the others; though while Aragorn is with them, he bows to his judgment. Sam, during this time, is little more than, as he calls himself, "luggage in a boat", and at

first appeared to be little more than comic relief. This early element of comedy is doubtless what misled Edmund Wilson; and caused Dick Eney (*) to identify him with the type made immortal by Sancho Panza. ((Note, however, on second thought; this is not as grotesque as it appears. Eney comments that Sam "turns the whole master-servant relationship inside out." Sancho Panza, at first, followed Quijote cynically, for pay and amusement... just as Sam, at first, wishes for adventure and to see Elves. Later Sancho comes to follow his demented old master out of love; to defend him, and to enter into the spirit of his fantasies, at times even speculating oddly on the nature of reality and wondering whether his master, or the world, is truly sane.))

It is also traditional in Quest literature that the Hero should have a comic-relief satellite; but Sam, though occasionally witty, is not really a figure of comedy; not in the sense that Papageno, in The Magic Flute, is a comic figure. He is blunt of speech, and there is the humor of incongruity when he faces down the wise and valorous; as, for instance, when he defies Faramir, twice his size. But he is far less of a comic figure than Butterbur, or even Pippin.

Frodo makes his own choice, and proclaims his emancipation from the others, at the end of Volume I --as even Aragorn clearly realizes when he says: "Well, Frodo, I fear that the burden is laid upon you...I cannot advise you", and Frodo also realizes that even if Gandalf had not been taken from them, he too would have refused to make the final decision. Aragorn has offered to guide him to Mor-dor, and to the bitter end; there is no doubt whatever that Aragorn would have carried out his word; he had committed himself at first; "if by life or death I can save you, I will."

Yet Frodo realizes that Aragorn's Quest is not really his; "I will go alone. Some I cannot trust and those I can trust are too dear to me; poor old Sam, and Merry and Pippin. Strider too; his heart yearns for Minas Tirith, and he will be needed there..."

But it is Sam who has courage to speak up and explain Frodo even to Aragorn; to read Frodo's heart, disobey Aragorn (the only time ANY one does so) and slip off alone with Frodo.

In the second volume Sam has begun to foreshadow the eventual conflict and denouement. Still insensitive, seeing only his own fear for Frodo, he wishes to kill Gollum; Frodo, having come through his own first sufferings to compassion, protects the wretched creature from Sam. And from that moment Sam's love and Gollum's hate become the millstones between which Frodo is eventually broken; both victor and vanquished.

Sam's emotional growth is spotlighted briefly the second time he watched the sleeping Frodo; not helplessly as in Elrond's house. He muses on how he loves him "whether or no", though this is still shown in terms appropriate to the simplicity of the character, as when he coaxes-threatens Gollum to finding better food for Frodo, and cooks it for him. And as Frodo is weakened by the cursed Ring and his Doom, Sam grows ever more fiercely protective; and this curious,

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triangular relationship reaches its apex in Gollum's treachery at Cirith Ungol.

In very strong emotional relationships, particularly among the weak, hate and love are very much akin. Gandalf, describing Bilbo's first encounter with the wretched, lonely, miserable old Gollum, says;

"Even Gollum was not wholly ruined; ...there was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, like a chink in the dark. It was actually pleasant; I think, to hear a kindly voice again, bringing up memories of wind, and trees, and sun on the grass, and such forgotten things. But that, of course, would only make the evil part of him angrier than ever, in the end--unless it could be conquered. Unless it could be cured..."

Gandalf points out too that Gollum "loved and hated the Ring, much as he loved and hated himself..." and in this fearful ambivalence, Gollum -- like a terrible shadow of Frodo himself -- comes to have dual love and hate for him as well.

To me the most poignant moment in the three books is where Gollum comes on them sleeping; Frodo with his head in Sam's lap, Sam himself fast asleep. And anyone who has noted the small threads running through the story will be reminded of a time very obviously present to Gollum; when he, then Smeagol, had a trusted and loved friend, Deagol, who shared his wanderings and searches, whom he called "my love" and whom he killed for the sake of the cursed thing he later came to hate.

And in this ambivalent sway of emotions "...an old starved pitiable thing" he touches Frodo humbly, fleetingly "almost the touch was a caress..." but Sam, startled awake, uses rough words to him. And Gollum's momentary softening (it is worthy of note that he is never called Smeagol again) is once more overcome by a blasting hurricane of hate and rage equal to the pitiable impulse of despair which it displaces.

Sam too is cheated by his own hate; later he delays to try and kill Gollum, and Shelob has a chance to attack Frodo; Gollum escapes and Frodo lies apparently dead.

And here at the apparent bitter end of this relationship, Sam's anguish is difficult to read without emotion; I have yet to see a child or adolescent read it without tears, and few adults who have gotten into the story can read it without being badly shaken. So compelling it is that only in retrospect has it become apparent how Sam's choices here are a shadow of his final status. One by one he forsakes the other possibilities.... vengeance, suicide ("that was to do nothing, not even to grieve") return for wiser counsel, and finally accepts what is laid on him; to take the Ring undesired and complete the Quest, knowing its full terrible power -- which no

one else had dared to do. Aragorn and Gandalf had feared even the test. Elrond would not take the Ring even to guard it. Galadriel, confessing temptation, finally renounced it. Frodo, when he took it, had no knowledge of its awful power. Sam knew, but accepted.

This is the decisive moment in character development.

From this moment in essence the Quest is Sam's. It is significant that when he believes Frodo dead, for the first and last time he drops the formal "Mr. Frodo" and cries out "Frodo, me dear, me dear"...but though after rescuing him he returns to the old deferential speech (partly to restore his own sense of security) he has become, not the devoted dogsbody of Volume I, or the sometimes fierce, but simple and submissive watchdog of Volume II, but the "tall, towering elf-warrior" of the orc's vision. He renounces the temptation to use the Ring for his own; then flings his defiance against the shadows;

"I will not say my day is done,
Or bid the stars farewell..."

and when he finds Frodo, beaten, naked and unconscious in the orc-tower, their reunion sets the tone of their relationship from that moment;

"Frodo,...lay back in Sam's gentle arms, closing his eyes, like a child at rest when night-fears are driven away by some loved voice or hand.

Sam felt that he could sit like that in endless happiness; but it was not allowed....

Instead he gently takes on himself the task of bringing Frodo to the end of his Quest. And here, again Sam achieves what no one else has been able to do. No one but Bilbo has ever given up the ring of his free will, and Bilbo, who did not know its power, could only do so with all Gandalf's help. Yet Sam, with only momentary hesitation, ("reluctant...to burden his master with it again") immediately takes the chain from around his neck and hands it over; wounded but without anger when Frodo, maddened by the thing that is destroying him, turns on him and calls him "thief".

And the surrendered-sword symbolism returns when Frodo allows Sam to keep his elvish sword Sting, saying that though he has an orc-knife, "I do not think that it will be my part to strike any blow again." From this point he places himself unreservedly and passively in Sam's hands; allowing Sam to clothe him, to deal out their food, to choose their road. As his will and endurance are sapped by the destructive, tormenting power of the Ring he speaks of himself as "naked in the blind dark" while every thought and movement of Sam's reaches an almost religious devotion and tenderness toward easing Frodo's path...even though he cannot share his torment or even share the burden.

This lessening distance and growing devotion, increasing as Frodo weakens to "dying ember of will and spirit", continues to the end of the Quest. When they cast away their arms and gear, Frodo throws away even the orc-knife, saying "I'll bear no weapon, fair or

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foul," and lets Sam clothe him, in the grey Lorien cloak. But Sam, even at that edge of desperation and despair, retains some spark of hope; and though casting away his own treasures, he retains the gifts of Galadriel and the elvish sword which Frodo had given him.

Once again, watching awake for the last time while Frodo sleeps; Sam fights his own battle with despair and gives up his own last hopes, realizing that all he can do is accompany Frodo to the Crack of Doom and die with him there, fights the temptation to abandon the quest, knowing that without his insistent courage Frodo cannot complete it either; and in his one unguarded moment of despair he shows how he now regards their death;

"you might have lain down and gone to sleep together, days ago, if you hadn't been so dogged. #

This last stage, where nothing matters and they may never return, is significantly the first time when his thoughts turn to Rose Cotton --who has never been mentioned before--but "The way back goes past the Mountain, if there is one." And at the very last of their quest Sam "held no more debates with himself" - he knew all the arguments of despair and had absorbed them. He takes Frodo in his arms "trying to comfort him with his arms and body" so that "the last dawn of their Quest found them side by side."

This growth in intensity, this ever-lessening distance, with each change documented and studied, is surely one of the most compelling of its kind.

And Sam's emotional growth is shown at the final meeting of love and hate, when Gollum appears at the last moment. Frodo, far past all pity or humanity (in Sam's vision only a tall figure, with a wheel of fire at its breast) only curses Gollum and threatens him with the Fire of Doom; and here it is Sam the inarticulate who achieves the height of pity and compassion for Gollum's agony, and in his own rough, painful manner, only bids him...

"...you stinking thing! Go away! Be off!

I don't trust you, not as far as I could kick you; but be off. Or I shall hurt you, yes, with nasty cruel steel..." even at this moment of desperate

danger still mocking Gollum's whining speech.

And Frodo at the bitter end cannot destroy the Ring and fulfil his Quest; and Gollum's tormented love and hate does what even the Dark Lord could not do; he tears Ring and finger from Frodo -- but his fall into the Crack of Doom, glossed as an accident of his exaltation, is more, far more than accidental. It has been too carefully prepared by this studied hate and love.

Gollum loved the thing which destroyed him -and destroyed it in revenge. In "saving" his "precious" from destruction, he genuinely saves Frodo (whom, obviously, he loves as much as he hates) from destruction too; in seeking to save and destroy what he loves and hates, he saves himself, and Frodo; by bringing the accursed Ring and his own long agony to an end; so that Frodo, rather than meeting the total destruction of his own curse, loses only his Ring finger.

When the Quest is finally completed and it seems that nothing remains but death, Sam's attitude is still distinct from Frodo's;

...In all that ruin of the world for the moment he felt only joy, great joy. The burden was gone. His master had been saved; he was himself again, he was free....

but even so, it is Sam who does not abandon himself to resignation;

"Yes, I am with you, Master," said Sam, laying Frodo's wounded hand gently to his breast, "and you're with me...but after coming all that way I don't want to give up yet. It's not like me, somehow..."

And Frodo replies;

"...but it's like things are in the world. Hopes fail. An end comes....we are lost in ruin and there is no escape..."

But nevertheless he allows Sam -- passively, still -- to lead him out of the Crack of Doom, and even there Sam makes jokes, asking if some day they will sing the song of Nine-fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom, "...to keep fear away till the very last"...and still his eyes search the sky to the north, from whence their rescuers finally come.

And when Sam and Frodo are led before Aragorn it is to Sam, not Frodo, that Aragorn says

"It is a long way, is it not, from Bree, where you did not like the look of me? A long way for us all; but yours has been the darkest road."

As indeed it has;

Frodo has known torment and agony and terror, but Sam has endured them voluntarily, with no great Cause to strengthen his will, and only for the sake of one he loves beyond everything else.

Edmund Wilson has said in his critical review that Frodo is "unchanged" by his Quest. This is manifestly ridiculous. If nothing else the compassion he shows to Saruman, even at the moment when Saruman has attempted to stab him, is in great contrast to his insensitivity when Gandalf first told him the Gollum story and he cried out "How loathesome...what a pity that Bilbo did not kill the wretched creature"? Saruman recognizes this; he says "You have grown very much, Halfling....you have robbed my revenge of sweetness."

Frodo shares for a time in the rewards of their labors, but he bears forever the three wounds of his folly (the knife-wound of Weathertop) overconfidence (the sting of Shelob) and pride (the finger torn away with the Ring).

The recoil of the Wounded Hero is mainly, however, on Sam. He longs to stay with Frodo forever, but Sam has achieved true maturity; and as the Heroic Age passes, he longs to put down roots into the soil of the Shire and raise a family. (It has been said that significantly this dream comes, first, during the dreadful last stage of the Quest; when Sam, denying himself water so that Frodo may drink, daydreams of the pools of Bywater, and of Rosie and her brothers.)

Aragorn, the Eldest and the Classic Hero, was shown achieving his Lady Love as the reward of all his labors; but Sam is the only one of the characters who truly passes out of the Heroic Age into the world of today; Aragorn becomes a King, but it is aptly Sam who is shown making the actual, personal choice, at the end, between that early flame of true, prime, single devotion which burns up the whole soul in a passion for heroic ends, and the quiet, manful, necessary compromise to live in a plain world and to do ordinary things.*

Merry, too, has achieved high adult stature; for him, the return to the Shire is like "a dream that has slowly faded" but for Frodo it is like "falling asleep again". Yet Frodo's quiet dream of peace is never achieved; he has given too much of himself to the struggle to cast away the curse; suffered too much in the achieving of this peace for others. He has won through to nobility and compassion, but hardly.

And Sam is torn by divided loyalties; to raise his family, to remain always with Frodo; but for Frodo there is no real return, while Sam has returned in heart and soul. It is partly this, as well as the "memory of fear and darkness" which Arwen, in her one clear moment of emerging from the mists, had foreseen would continue to trouble him, brings Frodo to his final choice. (And to me one of the most beautiful and poetic symbols is Arwen's white jewel, even though she lies outside the story; it has a dreamlike coherence, the fantasy of inner understanding). Arwen has given him another gift; the gift she herself has foregone for Aragorn's sake: and Frodo chooses the course which Arwen cannot:

"Someone must always give up these things, so that others may have them..."

and how many young, young men had that choice forced on them, in the desperate England of Dukirk and the Blitz, though the allegory is nowhere that crude?

At their last parting, Frodo shows how clearly he understands the nature of Sam's growth, his change and his conflict;

"You cannot always be torn in two, Sam; you were meant to be one, and whole; and you will be, for many, many years."

So that he departs with the others, removing the need for Sam to feel "torn in two" by his divided loves and loyalties; and Sam, though grieving and in pain, returns to Rose and his children, to make the Shire even more "blessed and beloved."

Sam cannot be compared to Jurgen entirely, who also endures adventures and renounces them; nor to another famous adventurer who decides in the end to "cultivate his garden"; for Jurgen, and Candide, belong to anti-Quest, rather than Quest literature. A truer parallel would be to Papageno in the Magic Flute: Tamino achieved his quest and stood with Pamina before the Sun, but Papageno asked only for a nice little wife and his birds. Yet Sam is a true figure of the Age; as he real-

*Somewhat outside the scope of the story, in the Appendix dealing with Aragorn and Arwen, the contrast may be noted between Aragorn's quiet acceptance of mortal doom, and Arwen's bitterness. She, too, bore a Doom, unwilling.)

recognized that Rivendell, the Refuge, had:

"...something here of everything, if you understand me. The Shire and the Golden Wood and Gondor and king's houses and inns and meadows and mountains all mixed..."

Bandalf, too, after his return from death, has said;

"...indeed I am Saruman, one might almost say; Saruman as he should have been."

So Sam, in becoming Frodo's heir, in retaining and passing on ("and keep alive the memories of the days that are gone") retains also in himself much of what he has become and known; enriched by the Heroic Age through which he has passed, retains some -- though sadly not all--of its glory; he has become, in a way, the beauty of the Elves, the hardiness of the dwarves, the wisdom of wizards, the gallantry of men, and the sound staunchness, at the root, of the halflings.

And so this final relationship, even its failure (for all of Sam's selflessness and love could not save Frodo from his destiny, any more than the downfall of evil in Sauron could save the good things achieved by Elrond and Galadriel) reflects the symbolism of life, and the passing of the Heroic Age. Sam's heroism and devotion is in curious contrast to the humdrum marriage and life he accepts and desires ("one small garden was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm"). The only way to achieve maturity is to leave behind the Third Age with its dreams and desires, its emotions and needs and glories: the only way to remain forever young is to die young.

Yet Sam names his daughter for the flowers of Lorien; and the Golden Tree blooms, forever, in the Shire.

V

The author of THE LORD OF THE RINGS has been quoted as saying that his book is not "about anything but itself; certainly it has no allegorical intentions, general, particular or topical, moral, religious or political."

I am sure of it. I am also sure that when Shakespeare chronicled the adventures of the Prince of Denmark, he had no idea of contributing anything to the literature of psychology dealing with the Oedipus Complex, and even surer that when Sophocles retold an episode from the ODESSEY he had few allegorical intentions. Probably Milton is the only artist who ever consciously desired (or at least would admit desiring) to "justify the ways of God to Man." And he was not the best who ever did so.

I do not quite go along with all these vociferous youngsters who, losing all perspective, proclaim Dr. Tolkien as the greatest writer of the century. His "infatuated admirers" often defeat their own purpose. One young admirer of the trilogy wrote me,

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presumably in all seriousness,

"What do you mean, one of the greatest writers?

Tolkien is the greatest writer of the century!
What other writer can give the same cosmic sweep and grandeur as Stapledon, the same glorious personal adventure as Burroughs, the same sense of cosmic terror as Lovecraft, and wondrous beauty that surpasses Merritt, bound up in a single package with poetry that would make Longfellow and Kipling--
aye, even Spenser and Milton -- blush with envy?"

Faced with this sort of thing, Edmund Wilson's reaction is possibly automatic. Yet it seems to me that he is equally blind in assigning its true level to his "seven year old daughter". He has fallen into a common fallacy; that "adult" fiction is necessarily that which deals with matters specifically improper or unsuitable (by his standards) for children; and that if a book may be safely or wisely placed in the hands of a child by a conscientious parent, it is ipso facto unsuitable for adult attention, and beneath their notice. But this is a dangerous premise, leading to its inescapable premise; that only those books which deal with matters out of the province of childhood (again, by his standards, which I suspect are those which involve sexual matters) are truly "adult" and thus, for some reason, LADY CHATTERLAIN'S LOVER is somehow more adult than DAVID COPPERFIELD. From here it is a very short step to saying that any indecorous book, however poor, is "adult" and any non-sexually oriented one is "childish".

Certainly there is nothing in THE LORD OF THE RINGS which would make the most careful of parents, or for that matter nursery-school teachers hesitate to hand it over to any child who had the interest and persistence to read it all the way through. But, although I have just finished reading the whole thing aloud to my own ten year old son, I do not deceive myself that he, even though he enjoyed the story very much and found in it much food for discussion and thought, has gotten out of it all there is to get. I read DAVID COPPERFIELD at the age of nine, and Dostoevsky's CRIME AND PUNISHMENT at thirteen, but not until I re-read both in my late twenties did I get more out of them than the story alone; I had read them as a child and understood them as a child. But a "children's book" which a child will outgrow is, nine times out of ten, a book on which he should not waste his time in the first place; as I understood when I re-read Dostoevsky and Dickens and found them worthy of attention, which I could not do with SUE BARTON, STUDENT NURSE. I hope that my son (the level of his interest in the books is shown by the sketch on the titlepage, sketched quickly by me while he was playing Aragorn) will re-read them when he is sixteen, and perhaps again when he is thirty-six.

The passage quoted above from the young admirer of Dr. Tolkien above represents a typical seventeen-year-old reaction; and because some of my infatuated-admirer letters about another writer, Henry Kuttner, at seventeen, are still in print over my name in the letter columns of vanished pulp magazines, I will not embarrass him by identifying

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him any further than this. And quite obviously, among the writers of science fiction and fantasy with whom he compares Dr. Tolkien, all of whom are second or third rate, the professor makes a very fair showing; displaying competence and facility as well as power and imagination. Compared with mainstream writers, which is perhaps unfair, he makes a showing less imposing.

W. H. Auden, otherwise one of Tolkien's loudest admirers, speaks of his "bad poetry". As poetry, Tolkien's is very bad indeed; though, as verse and in the context of the story, it is interesting and sometimes moving. About all one can say about Tolkien as a poet is that his poetry is better than that of Edgar A. Guest, Rudyard Kipling and James Greenleaf Whittier --- which is as little a compliment as saying that his prose is better than that of Zane Grey and Gene Stratton Porter. Certainly it is of more interest to most young people than that of Longfellow, Wordsworth and the other dreary rhymesters read in the average high school, but the question here is not so much whether this makes Tolkien a great poet, as why such wretched versifiers should be permitted to form, or to deform the tastes of school children. The great mass of abundant verse in THE LORD OF THE RINGS, if detached forcibly from the books and analyzed only as poetry, would appear on a level with that of any other scholarly, sensitive amateur with a feeling for words, conscientious about rhyme and metre, imaginative and vivid; but neither artistic nor great.

Wilson also calls his prose on a "similar level of professorial amateurishness". We must concede his disinterested accuracy. Dr. Tolkien's prose is often awkward, stilted, pedantic. He comes off poorly when compared with James Branch Cabell, Charles Williams or even Robert Graves. But this ignores one great fact; great prose, or great poetry, does not make a great work of art. Shakespeare was not a superlatively great poet, yet his plays have more power than many more "poetic". Jewelled prose, and artistry with words, often hides that the writer has little or nothing to say. Tolkien has a great deal to say; and he has sufficient command of the English language to say it well, compellingly, truthfully and spell-bindingly.

And this alone will make THE LORDS OF THE RING a great work, and give it lasting place in literature when his critics, and the great prose and poetry they admire, have passed away in the nothingness of changing tastes. Possibly Dr. Tolkien has written THE definitive Quest novel. Certainly he has written a great masterpiece and one which will long endure --MUCH longer than anything Mr. Wilson may write -- to seize on generations of children, adolescents and adults with its pity and terror, its catharsis and consolation.

What more can anyone ask?

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