

## **J. R. R. Tolkien: the Letters to Milton Waldman (1951?) and Peter Hastings (1954)**

### **Letter 131 to Milton Waldman:**

144 "[Arthurian legend] is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion.

"For reasons which I will not elaborate, that seems to me fatal. Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world."

144 "[English] mythology] should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (...North West...not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East...), and, while possessing.. the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be 'high,' purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry."

145 Mortality as it affects "subcreative" desire: "This desire at once wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world, and hence filled with the sense of mortality, yet unsatisfied by it."

149 "As the stories become less mythical, and more like stories and romances, Men are interwoven."

151 The Elves' second [post Númenor] "Fall": "There was nothing wrong essentially in their lingering [in Middle-Earth instead of departing for Valinor] against counsel, still sadly with the mortal lands of their old heroic deeds. But they wanted to have their cake without eating it. They wanted the peace and bliss and perfect memory of "The West," and yet to remain on the ordinary earth where their prestige as the highest people, above wild Elves, dwarves, and Men, was greater than at the bottom of the hierarchy of Valinor. They thus became obsessed with 'fading'...They became sad, and their art...antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming..."

## Letter 153 to Peter Hastings:

188: "The tale is after all in the ultimate analysis a tale, a piece of literature, intended to have literary effect, and not real history. That the device adopted, that of giving its setting an historical air or feeling, and (an illusion of?) three dimensions, is successful, seems shown by the fact that several correspondents have treated it in the same way--according to their different points of interest or knowledge: *i.e.*, as if it were a report of 'real' times and places, which my ignorances or carelessness had misrepresented in places or failed to describe properly in others. Its economics, science, artefacts, religion, and philosophy are defective, or at least sketchy."

188 Since the whole matter from beginning to end is mainly concerned with the relation of Creation to making and sub-creation (and subsidiarily with the related matter of 'mortality'), it must be clear that references to these things are not casual, but fundamental: they may well be fundamentally 'wrong' from the point of view of Reality (external reality). But they cannot be wrong inside this imaginary world, since that is how it is made."

188 "I should say that liberation 'from the channels the creator is known to have used already' is the fundamental function of 'sub-creation,' a tribute to the infinity of His potential variety..."

189 "Reincarnation may be bad *theology* (that surely, rather than metaphysics) as applied to Humanity...But I do not see how even in the Primary World any theologian or philosopher, unless very much better informed about the relation of spirit and body than I believe anyone to be, could deny the *possibility* of re-incarnation as a mode of existence, prescribed for certain kinds of rational incarnate creatures."

189 "...Elves are certain aspects of Men and their talents and desire, incarnated in my little world. They have certain freedoms and powers we should like to have, and the beauty and peril and sorrow of the possession of these things is exhibited in them..."

Comment re the discussion on page 194] Tolkien would like to feel that there is something "true" in his construct (sees the desire as perhaps hubristic), but he cannot see it as *harmful*. Observes that some whom he considers more "pious and learned" than himself have seen no harm in his writing.