

“Companions in Shipwreck”

J. R. R. Tolkien’s Female Friendships



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1. A Fairly Perilous Topic

What did J. R. R. Tolkien believe about the value, danger, or even possibility of friendship love between the sexes? Did any of his relationships with the women in his life rise to the level of intimate friendship? Ironically symptomatic of the lack of concentrated attention these two questions have received is the recent study, *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J. R. R. Tolkien* (2015).¹ Of the fourteen articles that tackle the subject of the book, thirteen focus exclusively on

¹ CROFT and DONOVAN 2015.

Tolkien's *works* and only one is devoted to his *life*. Considering the subtitle *Works and Life*, the imbalance seems fairly misleading and potentially perilous, too. Why so?

For the purpose of this paper, I will leave aside Tolkien's celebrated works. This is not only to help, however modestly, to plug a real gap in scholarship on Tolkien. We must also be on guard against the perils of the so-called eisegetical temptation. Extracting any author's personal views from their fiction alone should only be attempted with extreme caution, if at all, lest we read into our sources opinions that the author may not have endorsed personally. This is certainly the case with Tolkien, and (perhaps more so) with C. S. Lewis.

A less hazardous and potentially less irresponsible endeavour is to try to establish their positions using more straightforward and biographical sources. In Tolkien's case, I am thinking of his personal letters, for example. While not impervious to hyperbolism, they often reveal uncensored opinions about contentious topics, ranging from male promiscuity to the quality of Belgian tap water.² As for views on women, whereas we are hard pressed to find negative characterizations of female characters in any of Tolkien's works,³ he was more candid privately. Women are "companions in shipwreck not guiding stars", as he reminded his son in a remarkable letter we will revisit later.⁴

Before we dig into our two main questions above, however, we must prepare the ground and commit to some spadework. I will first give a short overview of Tolkien's interaction with women. The types of relationships he tended to have with women can be grouped under three Fs: *family*, *fandom*, and *philology*. Rising out of these—just possibly—we may later be able to add a fourth: *friendship*. We will of course require a standard against which to determine whether any of his many female acquaintances or companions can also be called close friends. For this, we will need to describe friendship-love, as distinct from ordinary companionship. But first: the spadework.

2. The Three Fs—Tolkien's Interaction with Women

John Rateliff's well-researched study "The Missing Women: J. R. R. Tolkien's Lifelong Support of Women's Higher Education" is the contribution in *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J. R. R. Tolkien* that actually discusses women in the *life* of J. R. R. Tolkien. It is a persuasive critique

² On the other hand, Tolkien could also be quite indirect (SHIPPEY 2003, xviii), as well, compounding the need for careful consultation of his letters.

³ See RATELIFF 2015, 67. It has been suggested (e.g. FREDERICK and MCBRIDE 2007, 36; STIMPSON 1969, 19; PARTRIDGE 1983, 191) that Shelob is an evil *female* character and thus the exception to the rule, but according to a rival school of interpretation giant spiders do not really count.

⁴ TOLKIEN 2006, 49.

of Humphrey Carpenter's influential account of Tolkien as (here paraphrased by Rateliff) "a man who, by choice, spent most of his time, most of his life, in exclusively male company".⁵ Also leaning on Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond but primarily on his own explorations, Rateliff does a marvellous job of reminding us of the various female influences in Tolkien's life.

Tolkien had been orphaned at a very young age. He lost his father soon after birth and his mother at the age of eight. Mabel Tolkien (*née* Suffield, 1870–1904) had taught him to read by the age of four, and to write soon after. She tutored him in German, Latin, French, and botany, as one does.⁶ Tolkien's *family* further included five aunts, two from his mother's side and three from his father's. As a young boy he would regularly visit them and spend time with their families. He shared private languages and staged plays with his cousins Mary and Marjorie.⁷

Tolkien's aunt Jane Suffield (later Suffield Neave) taught him geometry (*Letters* 377). In fact, she was the only family member prior to Tolkien to get a university degree. As he wrote in 1961: "The professional aunt is a fairly recent development, perhaps; but I was fortunate in having an early example: one of the first women to take a science degree" (*Letters* 308). Aunt Jane had begun her career as a schoolteacher, recommenced it after her husband's death as the Warden of University Hall at St Andrews, and (it being Scotland) ended it as a farmer.⁸

While living with Mrs Louis Faulkner and her husband in Edgbaston, near Birmingham, Tolkien fell in love with another lodger, Edith Bratt (1889–1971), three years his senior. Fearing its distractive effects on Tolkien's education, his guardian Father Francis Morgan ordered him to break off the dalliance until the age of twenty-one. Tolkien accepted, not wanting to disobey, grieve, or deceive the man who, he explains, "had been a father to me, more than most fathers" (*Letters* 53). He broke off communication with Edith for years. On the night of his twenty-first birthday, he wrote to her, and five days later "went back to her, and became engaged, and informed an astonished family" (*Letters* 53). Tolkien and Edith eventually had four children: three sons (John, Michael, and Christopher) and one daughter (Priscilla).

It is easy to understand why Tolkien himself would find the Carpenterian "male-only" charge oddly misguided. In a radio interview in 1965, he described himself as "a man surrounded by

⁵ RATELIFF 2015, 41. In a talk presented to the Oxford University C. S. Lewis Society, Holly Ordway, drawing from her forthcoming book *Tolkien's Modern Sources: Middle-earth Beyond the Middle Ages* (2019), diagnosed well the problem of stubborn generalisations: "Especially in the early years of scholarship on an author, a half-truth or a generalization can be taken as a whole truth, a convenient way to sum up an author in a phrase. The complexity of the man—and his work—is easily lost to sight, and it takes a great deal of time and effort to change this over-simplified perception" (ORDWAY 2016).

⁶ TOLKIEN 2006, 218, 377. See also SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 1118–1120; and CARPENTER 1977, 17–27.

⁷ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 1108.

⁸ MORTON and HAYES 2008, 16.

children—wife, daughter, grandchildren”.⁹ Women who spent time with the Tolkiens would agree. In their memoirs of Tolkien, one of the family’s Icelandic *au pairs* Arndis Þorbjarnardóttir and Tolkien’s student-turned-colleague Simonne d’Ardenne both remember him as a “family man”.¹⁰

Another former student Mary Challans (pen name Mary Renault) remembers how Tolkien felt “unusual for being notably sympathetic to women undergraduates”.¹¹ That she was known to be in a lesbian relationship, and probably no sort of believer, testifies to the Catholic Tolkien’s tolerance, in the true sense of the word tolerance. Challans was a published novelist herself, and she and Tolkien read each other’s books. They got along well, but were not close friends. Tolkien describes an appreciative card from her as “perhaps the piece of ‘Fan-mail’ that gives me most pleasure” (*Letters* 376). It was but one of many: over the course of his life Tolkien received innumerable letters from a truly international female *fandom*.

Tolkien’s most persistent and famous admirer, however, lived closer to home. Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) was the daughter of the Oxford physiologist J. S. Haldane, and the sister of the equally celebrated evolutionary scientist J. B. S. Haldane (with whom C. S. Lewis debated in the 1950s). She was a prolific writer in her own right, and an ardent feminist and political activist, so her fame was self-earned. She was even asked to write a blurb for *The Lord of the Rings*.¹² Devoted to Tolkien, she sent him gifts and wrote letters peppered with informed questions about his *legendarium*. Some of Tolkien’s longest letters in this respect are responses to her inquiries. The two were friendly, but probably not intimates.

One Amy Ronald also sent Tolkien gifts. Once she sent him “4 Ports and 3 Sherries”, which were accepted with gratitude (*Letters* 396). Tolkien’s replies to her thereafter include some of the most endearing language found in his letters: “my dear” (397) and “poor dear” (401). He would slip in references to Edith, such as “I said to my wife” (396) or “we both like” (405). Perhaps he was deflecting a suspected romantic interest. Perhaps it was just a facet of his generosity to his wife. Tolkien took particular pains in this regard, as Edith felt so isolated in Oxford. His academic friends were seldom shared with Edith, but if she liked one at all, he would graciously speak of them as “a friend of my family” (374).¹³

⁹ GUEROULT 1965.

¹⁰ ÞORBJARNARDÓTTIR 1999; D’ARDENNE 1979, 34. Another Icelandic *au pair*, B. S. Benedikz’s aunt Sigrid, did not like being with the Tolkiens, having been passed on to them by William Morris’s daughter May (see BENEDIKZ 2008). I thank Tom Shippey for directing me to Benedikz’s reminiscences.

¹¹ SWEETMAN 1993, 29.

¹² SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 592–593.

¹³ I thank Holly Ordway for helpful exchanges and probing observations about Tolkien’s relationship with his wife and daughter in particular.

Unlike the bachelor C. S. Lewis, who began his career tutoring women only in groups, the married Tolkien needed no chaperone and thus tutored women in both group and private settings throughout his career. And he was committed to the task. “Tolkien was unusual for dons of his era”, says Rateliff, “in his support for women taking degrees and pursuing academic careers.”¹⁴ Examples abound, and the statistics are remarkable. As a tutor Tolkien particularly associated with four of Oxford’s five all-female colleges: Lady Margaret Hall (where Lewis had also taught women¹⁵), St Hugh’s, Somerville, and St Hilda’s. St Anne’s was the last to receive college status in 1952. Scull and Hammond have calculated that nearly half of the advanced degree students Tolkien supervised were women, a very high proportion for his era.¹⁶ This support remained consistent in his personal life as evidenced when his daughter Priscilla (b. 1929) writes:

[My father believed completely] in higher education for girls; never at any time in my early life or since did I feel that any difference was made between me and my brothers, so far as our educational needs and opportunities were concerned. [...] It was, I think, a source of pride and pleasure for him that he had a daughter as well as sons at the University, which was his scholarly and academic home for much of his working life.¹⁷

Rateliff notes the “easygoing camaraderie he had with his students, male and female alike”.¹⁸ (The reader might make a note of *camaraderie*, a key concept for later.)

Tolkien’s exceptionality heightens when viewed against Oxford’s milieu with respect to women at the time. Despite Carpenter’s oversimplifications, he is right about how “the men really preferred each other’s company”.¹⁹ The effects of the university’s long all-male history and hurdles in transitioning to a mixed environment should not be underrated. Bonded by an interest in literature and a love of language—or *philology*²⁰—Tolkien, however, got to know several female colleagues, not only female students. Oxford University women were granted full academic rights in 1920 and were thereafter able to take degrees, but for decades it remained difficult for women to acquire tenure. Attitudes changed slowly. Tolkien’s own progressive attitude is well described, again, by his daughter: “[O]f the five women’s colleges in Oxford at the time [Lady Margaret Hall] was probably the one he knew best; he spoke with appreciation of his visits to the High Table in the days when Miss Grier was

¹⁴ RATELIFF 2015, 42.

¹⁵ LEWIS 2017, 506.

¹⁶ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 1111.

¹⁷ Priscilla TOLKIEN 1992, 12–13.

¹⁸ RATELIFF 2015, 55.

¹⁹ CARPENTER 1977, 1954. But then, this might be true on average of both sexes in every generation.

²⁰ I am assuming a broad sense of “philology” that includes both language and its appreciation in and as literature. For a discussion of how difficult it has been for the English Faculty at Oxford to pair them in mutually enriching ways, see SHIPPEY 1991, esp. 144.

Principal and Miss Everett was his colleague on the language side of the English Faculty.”²¹ Dining at High Table would have been by personal invitation only.

Tolkien was, however, perplexed by the academic non-advancement of some of his brighter female students. “[W]hy did his male students do so much better”, asks Rateliff, “after they had left his supervision, than his female students did?”²² Tolkien came to believe that some of his female students’ success *as students* had depended on their personal interest in him and on his work—innocent interest, to be sure, but still a sort of dependency. Rateliff believes that what Tolkien failed to consider was the glass ceiling. When few academic chairs were available to begin with, “inertia and institutional bias” worked against women.²³ According to Rateliff, Tolkien was “observing a very real phenomenon but completely missing the factors that caused it”.²⁴

But was Tolkien really oblivious about contemporary attitudes to women in the academy or society at large? I have difficulties accepting this explanation *tout court*. There may have been other factors of which we are unaware. We should perhaps not be too quick to dismiss Tolkien’s own intuition. Whatever his possible blind spots, he really “understood and empathized with women”, as Rateliff himself admirably demonstrates.²⁵ The “final proof” of Tolkien’s empathy, Rateliff says, being that “a large percentage of Tolkien’s readers were women, who thus do not find his world unwelcoming”.²⁶ It is no coincidence that the J. R. R. Tolkien Professorship of English Literature, created in 1981, has rotated between the very colleges that had spearheaded female education, twice at Lady Margaret Hall.²⁷

We have now hopefully established that Tolkien was a man who, by choice, spent much of his time, much of his life, in largely female society. His mother raised him. Aunts cared for him. As a boy he played with girls. Women tutored him. He fell in love with a woman and remained committed to her for a lifetime. He raised a daughter into womanhood. He corresponded prolifically with women. He tutored and mentored women throughout his career. He worked alongside women. He dined with women. He even smoked pipes with them!²⁸ But did he ever *befriend* any women? Did any of his female relationships rise to the level of close friendship? This is an entirely different question.

²¹ Priscilla TOLKIEN 1992, 12.

²² RATELIFF 2015, 60.

²³ RATELIFF 2015, 62.

²⁴ RATELIFF 2015, 62.

²⁵ RATELIFF 2015, 64.

²⁶ RATELIFF 2015, 64. This argument should of course work in C. S. Lewis’s favour, too. But in an unfortunate move, Rateliff pairs his defence of Tolkien with a critique of Lewis—rescuing one from the cage of critics by tossing in the other. Here the evidence seems selective and the argument least persuasive (2015, 65–67).

²⁷ RATELIFF 2015, 64.

²⁸ Priscilla TOLKIEN 1992, 12.

What we need next is to establish some core characteristics of friendship itself. We need a yardstick or sorts to evaluate the questions and propose an answer. The careful reader might have noticed my earlier seemingly careless refusal to assign the name “friendship” to one or two of Tolkien’s relationships. I was, in fact, operating under implicit defining criteria for friendship that must now be made explicit. We will then be in a good position to answer our two main questions: What did Tolkien think about the possibility of intimate non-romantic friendship-love between the sexes? Did any of his relationships with the women in his life rise to the level of friendship-love?

3. The Nature of Friendship

Lewis first met Tolkien in May 1926. How appropriate, from our point of view, that Lewis’s first description of Tolkien happens to refer to gender: “He is a smooth, pale, fluent little chap [...] thinks all literature is written for the amusement of *men* between thirty and forty [...] No harm in him: only needs a smack or so.”²⁹ They quickly become friends. Tolkien would learn to admire what he called Lewis’s “great generosity and capacity for friendship” (*Letters* 362).³⁰ During a very bleak time in his life, for example, Tolkien wrote in his diary: “Friendship with Lewis compensates for much.”³¹ Lewis’s death in 1963 had felt like “an axe-blow near the roots”, he confided in his daughter (*Letters* 341).³² In another letter he explained, “C. S. L. was my closest friend from about 1927 to 1940, and remained very dear to me” (*Letters* 349). Tolkien was among the few friends who in November 1963 attended Lewis’s funeral, which was overshadowed by a high-profile American assassination.

It is primarily because of Tolkien’s great love of and friendship with Lewis and their fellow “Inklings” that I have chosen Lewis’s *The Four Loves* as a likely source for an approximate framework for friendship that Tolkien would, for the most part, subscribe to. Naturally, any standard of friendship is subjective, and different standards yield different outcomes when applied to our questions.³³ However, Lewis’s account of friendship provides uniquely explicit and helpful characteristics.

²⁹ LEWIS 2017, 523–524, emphasis original. Tolkien was still relatively young, and his attitudes did change a lot over time.

³⁰ TOLKIEN 2006, 362: “The unpayable debt that I owe to him was not ‘influence’ as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my ‘stuff’ could be more than a private hobby.”

³¹ Tolkien’s diary on 1 October 1933 (quoted in CARPENTER 1978, 32).

³² TOLKIEN 2006, 341. “Very sad that we should have been so separated in the last years; but our time of close communion endured in memory for both of us.”

³³ For example, although it would be tempting, I will refrain from discussing key friendships in *The Lord of the Rings*. Gleaning biography from fiction was methodologically ruled out for the purpose of this paper.

Especially relevant is the characteristic that made Lewis's view famous—his exploration of what gives friendship (*philia*) its unique flavour among the other loves.

Before introducing friendship proper, Lewis distinguishes it from the *camaraderie* that is “often confused with Friendship” (*TFL* 75). Friendship can *arise out of* camaraderie, he says, that is, from the “pleasures in co-operation, in talking shop, in the mutual respect and understanding of men who daily see one another tested” (77). If this was all there was to close friendship, our task would be easy: we could point to such amicable relations between Tolkien and the women in his life, and call it a day. But our task is more complicated than that. Camaraderie or companionship, Lewis explains, “is often called Friendship, and many people when they speak of their ‘friends’ mean only their companions. But it is not Friendship in the sense I give to the word. By saying this I do not at all intend to disparage companionship. We do not disparage silver by distinguishing it from gold” (77).

So what, then, is gold? What is friendship proper? We can single out six characteristics. Friendship shares the first three characteristics with all other love-relationships, and these allow Lewis to call friendship a love in the first place. The love-relationships discussed in *The Four Loves*—affection (*storge*), friendship (*philia*), and romance (*eros*)—belong to the same genus, and I believe it is this: They are in their own distinct ways appreciative and responsive commitments to the other's flourishing. The three main elements or alloys in all love-relationships, then, including friendship, are *appreciation, responsiveness, and commitment*.³⁴

1. In order for camaraderie or companionship to develop into intimate friendship-love it must be permeated by *appreciation*, what *The Four Loves* calls “Appreciative love”, a basic alloy in all love metals. It is the ability to see goodness in the beloved and rejoice in it non-possessively. If a so-called friendship “is not full of mutual admiration, of Appreciative love, it is not friendship at all” (103). In a true circle of friends, each finds “the intrinsic beauty of the rest” (104) and “counts himself to be lucky to be among them” (97). “[O]ur reliance, our respect, and our admiration blossom into an Appreciative Love of a singularly robust and well-informed kind” (84).

2. The second element *responsiveness* or, in Lewis's terms, “Need-love”. This means openness, receptivity, and even (in a highly evolved form of love) happy vulnerability. Stoic apathy and deluded self-sufficiency have no place in love-relationships, whether friendship or affection or romance. Lewis even chastises “a great saint and a great thinker” (137) for such ideas: St Augustine's *Confessions* led him to suspect a failure to fully recover from a Stoic or Neo-Platonic “hangover” (138).³⁵

³⁴ See LEPOJÄRVI 2015, 68–71; and LEPOJÄRVI 2019.

³⁵ For Lewis's disagreement with Augustine, see LEPOJÄRVI 2012 and ZEPEDA 2012.

3. The third element is *commitment* to the beloved's (in our case, the friend's) overall wellbeing and flourishing, insofar as possible and permissible. It is not so much duty as it is fidelity, reliability, or consistency in one's commitment to the beloved, and to the relationship. Lewis calls it "Gift-love".

If these three characteristics—appreciation, responsiveness, and commitment—are the characteristics that friendship-love shares with all forms of love, the final three characteristics are what set it apart: *joint passions*, *freedom*, and *un-inquisitiveness*. (The last two are the most disputable: freedom because it is almost superfluous, and un-inquisitiveness because it may be "a projection of Lewis's own preferred way of relating to his friends",³⁶ and not necessarily shared by Tolkien.)

4. Now the most famous of these, the one that has given Lewis's account of friendship its characteristic flavour, is *joint passions*. Or *mutual interests*. If romantic lovers stand face-to-face, friends stand shoulder-to-shoulder. True friends are "travellers on the same quest" (80) or "on the same secret road" (79). A friend is "a kindred soul" (78). Friends are bonded by a common interest, be it a religion, discipline, profession, or recreation. For this sort of friendship-love "must be *about something*, even dominoes or white mice" (79, emphasis added) or moths and butterflies. (Even lepidopterists have been known to make friends.) Friends can disagree about the answers but rarely about the questions. Tolkien and Lewis certainly had a fair share of disagreements.

5. The love of affection or family-love (*storge*), Lewis says, "obviously requires kinship or at least proximities which never depend on our own choice". But friendship-love is *free*, the "world of relationships freely chosen" (104). No one has a duty to be anyone's friend. Friends seek out each other's company; their bond is unforced. This might sound superfluous, however, because *all* love must in a sense be given and received "freely". Even love bound by blood. Obviously we can befriend (in Lewis's sense of the word) our relatives, too, or some of them, as Lewis did his brother Warnie.

6. If joint passions or mutual interests are the most famous characteristic of Lewis's account of friendship-love, its supposed *un-inquisitiveness* is the most infamous. This is the key passage:

For of course we do not want to know our Friend's [personal] affairs at all. Friendship, unlike Eros, is uninquisitive. You become a man's friend without knowing or caring whether he is married or single or how he earns his living. [...] No one cares twopence about any one else's family, profession, class, income, race, or previous history. [...] This love (essentially) ignores not only our physical bodies but the whole embodiment which consists of our family, job, past and connection. [...] Eros will have naked bodies; Friendship naked personalities. (83–84)

³⁶ BASSHAM 2012, 118.

Some of this is witty word play with a dash of hyperbole. But many modern readers might be put off by it. Was Lewis not interested in his friends' personal lives, only in their ideas? How could something so unfriendly be friendship?

A more positive reading, one that I have not seen, is that it reflects an understanding of friendship that is—for his era and for ours—admirably and surprisingly *inclusive*. Lewis, and Tolkien, lauded friendship that was tolerant, non-judgemental, anti-elitist, anti-racist. One did not have to be a wealthy, well educated, upper class white man with a spotless criminal record to become a friend. And Lewis never wanted his shoulder-to-shoulder metaphor pressed: “The common quest or vision which unites Friends does not absorb them in such a way that they remain ignorant or oblivious to one another. On the contrary it is *the very medium* in which their mutual love and knowledge exists. One knows nobody so well as one’s ‘fellow’” (84, emphasis added).³⁷

The above six characteristics define the sort of friendship we are looking for. I close with a few additional indicators, specific to Tolkien, that do not define but might help us *recognize* Tolkien’s friendships. These are not essential constituents of friendship but signposts; they do not establish Tolkien’s friendships but help us notice and identify them. First, we should remain alert to times when he actually refers to women as his “friends”. It is also important to flag relationships that are on first-name basis, as any transition in that era from formal cordiality to using a person’s Christian name, male or female, would not have been insignificant. Finally, I am interested in non-family members whose photograph might have been reproduced for *The Tolkien Family Album* (1992), compiled and edited by Tolkien’s children to commemorate the centenary of their father’s birth.³⁸

Of course, absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence. Tolkien may have had female friends whom he never on record addressed casually or called his friends, and occasionally he may have used “friend” in a liberal manner to refer to mere companions. Also, family albums are not infallible judges of the quality of relationships. This is especially the case with *The Tolkien Family Album*, which was meant to be only a scrapbook, or sampler, from Tolkien’s life. Not making the cut, so to speak, does not necessarily mean anything. But making it does mean something. These are small pieces in a very large puzzle. When assembling a new or complex image, every piece counts.

³⁷ Lewis’s radio talks on love support and even bolster the more magnanimous reading of his inclusive view. There “nationality” is included in the list of things that friendship “cares nothing about”, and Lewis explicitly distinguishes between a friend’s *personality* and his *ideas*, emphasizing that friendship is rooted in the former. One may enjoy a person’s conversation and ideas, but they may still be disqualified for the title of “friend” if their character repels us upon closer intimacy.

³⁸ TOLKIEN and TOLKIEN 1992.

4. Friendship between the Sexes: Problems and Prospects

“The Inklings”, explains Alister McGrath in a recent article on gender, “were a system of male planets orbiting its two suns, Lewis and Tolkien”.³⁹ The group had, he continues, one “obvious shortcoming”: “there were no female members”.⁴⁰ Whether this really is a shortcoming depends on our assumptions about single-sex friendships and clubs. Do we oppose them on principle? Tolkien and Lewis did not. This is not because they objected to mixed groups, either. On the contrary, they were members of various such groups at several stages of their careers.

“The Cave”, for example, was a conclave of like-minded scholars in the English School at Oxford, which formed in the early 1930s to advocate certain curricular reforms. Its members included both J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, possibly again in a solar capacity, with Dorothy Everett, Elaine Griffiths, Neville Coghill, Joan Blomfield, Dorothy Whitelock, Hugo Dyson, and others exerting their planetary influences. After achieving their initial goals, The Cave became “more of a social and literary club which held informal dinners or met in members’ rooms”.⁴¹ Much else could be said of Lewis’s enthusiastic involvement with the “Socratic Club”, which was predominated by female students and scholars.⁴²

In *The Four Loves*, Lewis explains that historically friendship between women and men had been rare, because home and work were so often segregated by gender. As a result, men and women had “nothing to be Friends about” (*TFL* 86). Circumstances have changed since, he contentedly argues, because “where they can become companions they can become Friends. Hence in a profession (like my own) where men and women work side by side, or in the mission field, or among authors and artists, such Friendship is common” (86).⁴³ Even lovers, Lewis insisted, can benefit from each other’s friendships with the opposite sex. “Nothing so enriches an erotic love as the discovery that the Beloved can deeply, truly and spontaneously enter into Friendship with the Friends you already had” (80).

Was Tolkien quite as optimistic?

³⁹ MCGRATH 2015, 82. I blame Michael Ward, the author of *Planet Narnia*, for the recent tidal wave of planetary witticisms in scholarship on Lewis.

⁴⁰ MCGRATH 2015, 83.

⁴¹ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 958. Lewis mentions the group at least three times in his letters to his brother, on 25 December 1931, 18 December 1939, and 17 March 1940 (LEWIS 2004, 26, 306, and 365).

⁴² The Socratic Club was founded in 1941 by Stella Aldwinckle (1907–1989), and Lewis was its first university representative, or “Senior Member” (ALDWINCKLE 1984). In Michaelmas Term 1944, out of 164 members 109 were from Oxford’s all-female colleagues (MCGRATH 2013, 252).

⁴³ But not as common as misreadings of Lewis’s clear affirmation of friendship love between the sexes. For example, both Janet SOSKICE (2007, 163–164) and Gregory BASSHAM (2012, 116) misrepresent Lewis’s view on this point.

During 6–8 March 1941, Tolkien wrote a long letter to his son, Michael, who was possibly thinking about marrying. This is the letter that in Rateliff’s words includes Tolkien’s “notorious” theory of his female students’ excessive dependency on him that later stymied their academic careers. But Rateliff’s dissatisfaction with this letter does not stop here. I agree that the letter is disconcerting, but not for the reasons he suggests.

First of all, Rateliff says Tolkien’s intention was to “talk his son *out* of marrying”.⁴⁴ Scull and Hammond have suspected the same.⁴⁵ I am less convinced. Direct internal evidence is lacking. According to Tolkien’s first grandson, also called Michael, his grandparents had “disapproved” of Michael’s “hasty wartime marriage”.⁴⁶ This, of course, does not prove that Tolkien’s purpose *in the letter* was to talk him out of marrying. Despite its more peculiar points, which we will discuss presently, the letter is full of wise and balanced words about love and marriage. It is almost a “call to arms” to take love seriously—and to take women seriously, for that matter. Women are “companions in shipwreck not guiding stars”, Tolkien writes.⁴⁷ The image is at once egalitarian and responsible, aimed against the double temptation to either patronize or idolize women.

An alternative hypothesis is that, *were* Michael to marry, his father wanted him to enter matrimony *with both eyes open*—mindful, above all, of the indissoluble nature of Christian marriage and of the dangers of sentimental love-idolatry. “Nearly all marriages, even happy ones, are mistakes”, Tolkien writes, “in the sense that almost certainly (in a more perfect world, or even with a little more caution in this imperfect one) both partners might have found more suitable mates. But the ‘real soul-mate’ is the one you are actually married to. [...] In this fallen world we have as our only guides, prudence, wisdom (rare in youth, too late in age), a clean heart, and fidelity of *will*” (*Letters* 51–52). In an unpublished follow-up letter to Michael, dated 12 March 1941, Tolkien gives him more such advice: marriage advice against subterfuge, not subterfuge advice against marriage.⁴⁸

Nor do I think the letter notorious because Tolkien suggested that “*men are polygamous; women are monogamous* (*Letters*, p. 51, emphasis added)”.⁴⁹ These are actually Rateliff’s own words, not Tolkien’s. Rateliff may have accidentally “added emphasis” to his own paraphrase. Tolkien’s original language runs as follows:

⁴⁴ RATELIFF 2015, 59.

⁴⁵ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 1112: “Tolkien’s purpose—to caution a son who might be marrying in haste.”

⁴⁶ MICHAEL TOLKIEN 1992, #2.

⁴⁷ TOLKIEN 2006, 49.

⁴⁸ See the extract quoted in CARPENTER 1977, 156–7, and CARPENTER 1978, 168.

⁴⁹ RATELIFF 2015, 60.

They [women] have, of course, still to be more careful in sexual relations, for all the contraceptives. Mistakes are damaging physically and socially (and matrimonially). But they are instinctively, when uncorrupt, monogamous. *Men are not...* No good pretending. Men just ain't, not by their animal nature. [...] Each of us could healthily beget, in our 30 odd years of full manhood, a few hundred children, and enjoy the process. (*Letters*, 51)

Rateliff dismisses this as “one of the things men tell themselves in self-justification of their more reprehensible impulses”.⁵⁰ This is unfair. Whether or not Tolkien here indulged in hyperbole again—and I think he did; what he really means is that on average men are *more* polygamous or promiscuous than women—he is not trying to self-justify anything.⁵¹ A factual claim about male biology is not a moral alibi. On the contrary, the letter openly sets and embraces the higher moral standard of lifelong faithfulness in marriage for men and women alike. But Tolkien believes that this standard is “revealed” to us through Scripture and tradition more so than through mere biology, “according to faith and not to the flesh” (*Letters* 51). One might be tempted to dismiss Rateliff’s dismissal as one of those things men tell women to score easy points or to avoid the ire of combative feminists. But that would be unfair, too.

The fundamental reason why I think the letter is objectionable is this: Tolkien expresses extreme cynicism about friendship between the sexes, basing it on problematic and generalized assumptions about male motivations and the effects of sin. Let us take the safer road by examining Tolkien’s words, rather than words about Tolkien’s words.

The dislocation of the sex-instinct is one of the chief symptoms of the Fall. [...] In this fallen world the “friendship” that should be possible between all human beings, is virtually impossible between man and woman. The devil is endlessly ingenious, and sex is his favourite subject. [...] Later in life when sex cools down, it may be possible. It may happen between saints. To ordinary folk it can only rarely occur: [...] The other partner will let him (or her) down, almost certainly, by “falling in love”. But a young man does not really (as a rule) want “friendship”, even if he says he does. There are plenty of young men (as a rule). He wants *love*: innocent, and yet irresponsible perhaps. (*Letters* 48)

Unless you are a senior or a saint, friendship between the sexes is virtually impossible. We are far from Lewis’s optimism. What should be made of this?

⁵⁰ RATELIFF 2015, 60.

⁵¹ While Scull and Hammond believe that key paragraphs were “probably exaggerated for the occasion” (SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 1113), they veer towards a more literal interpretation: “Considering modern *mores*, Tolkien seems to have had an unrealistic view of women as being ‘instinctively, when uncorrupt, monogamous’ (p. 51), unlike men” (1114).

Lewis, too, believed that sin has distorted the sex-instinct.⁵² But he never attributes the facile propensity to fall in love “unilaterally” to the symptoms of sin. Rather it is a reflection of the whimsical and playful nature of *eros* itself. Even *venus*, the sexual element in *eros*, is a “mischievous spirit, far more elf than deity, and makes game of us [...] a catch-as-catch-can” (*TFL* 115–116). One-sided and unreciprocated love may be painful and embarrassing (Lewis was no stranger to this), but it is not obvious why this should be a *moral* failure. Tolkien and Edith might have fallen in love simultaneously, in an orderly and synchronized manner, but their history is so unique that it hardly qualifies as normative.⁵³ Romance is generally messy, and not only for sinful reasons.

It is far from “certain” that one-sided falling in love will occur in the first place. Even if it did it is not obvious why this necessarily ruins the relationship. It may or may not. And I think it silly and even irresponsible to suggest “as a rule” that young men do not want friendship with women—even if they say they do—because (this would be comical were it not serious) otherwise they would “obviously” choose a man! On what grounds? How could he possibly know this? Tolkien is, of course, not alone in his pessimism. Many authorities agree with him, including St Augustine in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*⁵⁴ and Harry in *When Harry Met Sally*.⁵⁵

Did Tolkien live by these beliefs? Apart from letters to his wife and daughter, one searches *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* in vain for intimate epistles to female correspondents. Based on this vacuum, and in light of his letter to Michael, one might conclude that Tolkien anticipated and lived by the maxim that some Evangelical churches today know as the “Billy Graham Rule” (what I like to call the “Mike Pence Manoeuvre”) and avoided intimate correspondence with women in fear of “falling in love” or creating a sex-scandal—much like the absolutist who in fear of intoxication simply abstains from wine completely instead of letting the virtues of moderation and charity inform enjoyment and consumption. Except that women are not drinks. They are human persons.

We must remember, however, that *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* is merely a selection. The collection’s editor, Humphrey Carpenter, explained that “priority” was given to letters that discussed Tolkien’s *works*, and “an enormous quantity of material was omitted”.⁵⁶ Few letters from between 1918

⁵² LEWIS 1940, 57–76; also LEWIS 1952, II, 3.

⁵³ TOLKIEN 2006, 52: “My own history is so exceptional, so wrong and imprudent in nearly every point that it makes it difficult to counsel prudence. Yet hard cases make bad law.”

⁵⁴ AUGUSTINE, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 9.5. Augustine is asking how Eve “helped” Adam in Genesis 2. I thank Iain Provan for bringing this to my attention.

⁵⁵ The young Harry, but not the mature Harry. In the movie Harry grows out of his youthful cynicism (“Men and women can’t be friends because the sex part always gets in the way”) and becomes Sally’s best friend for several years, before the inevitable (it is Hollywood) transformation of *philea* into *eros*.

⁵⁶ TOLKIEN 2006, 1–2. With the assistance of Christopher Tolkien, Carpenter selected 354 letters from the thousands he had read (ANDERSON 2005, 219). For this paper I have not been privy to Tolkien’s unpublished letters held in the Tolkien

and 1937 survive, though thereafter, thanks to Tolkien's carbon copies, the epistolary stream is more or less unbroken until his death in September 1973. The vast majority of his letters remain unpublished to this day. And, even without a comprehensive collection (such as exists of Lewis's voluminous correspondence), if we broaden our focus to include diary extracts, personal memoirs, oral histories, and other miscellaneous sources, a rather different image of Tolkien emerges.

There is reason to believe Tolkien did not strictly adhere to such restrictive beliefs. Perhaps his dissuading advice to his son about friendship was tailored to him only. Perhaps it did not represent his full beliefs about female friendships. Or perhaps Tolkien knew better than he thought he did. Life sometimes runs ahead of theory. His biography certainly reveals a different tale.

5. Approaching Tolkien's Female Friendships

Tolkien's interactions with women were grouped into three: family, fans, and philologists (students and colleagues). I propose that some of them became true friends. When I use the words *friend* or *friendship*, I invoke again the following: a relationship that is marked by (1) appreciative and responsive commitment to the other's flourishing insofar as possible, (2) with joint interests or shared passions (as opposed to mere kinship or proximity) providing the unforced medium for affectionate mutual understanding. On this basis, Tolkien loved dozens of women (1) and befriended some of them (both 1 and 2). In the category of female fans, there is little evidence of Tolkien befriending any. (Lewis, on the other hand, did; eventually marrying *his* most persistent one.) We are left then with Tolkien's family, students, and colleagues. Several of these seem "friendly" enough, in sense above, but I hesitate to assert that many do. What should we say, for example, about Tolkien's relationship with his wife and daughter?

We should not overlook these two relationships simply because they are family. Tolkien may have had a genuine friendship-relation with his daughter Priscilla. There are some indications of this; most notably, their father-daughter holiday in Italy in August 1955. While his wife Edith was vacationing separately with her friends, Tolkien, who could have easily taken one of his sons or male friends were they available, chose to travel with Priscilla instead, and, based on his travel diary *Giornale d'Italia*, enjoyed the two-week voyage eating, drinking, and discussing religion, history, art,

Papers at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Careful analysis of these manuscripts from the concentrated perspective of Tolkien's female friendships awaits future scholars and will undoubtedly yield valuable insights.

and architecture in a companionable, friendly way.⁵⁷ Tolkien evidently loved and adored Edith, too, despite having marital challenges. It is not, however, easy to point to meaningful *shared interests* between these two.⁵⁸ Insofar as they felt passionate about their children, and thrived in exchange about them, perhaps the two were each other's friends.

If I have underestimated the “friendly” aspect in either of these relations, I am open to being corrected.⁵⁹ The same applies to the following four women, all but one of them students, a core sample of women I am tempted (but again hesitate) to call Tolkien's close friends: Katherine Farrer, Mary Salu, Helen Buckhurst, and Auvo Kurvinen.

Katherine Farrer (1911–1972) was the wife of the Oxford theologian Austin Farrer, a dear friend of C. S. Lewis. She was a published detective novelist, like Dorothy Sayers (another friend of Lewis), and she shared a range of interests with the Inklings. She translated Gabriel Marcel's *Être et avoir* (1935), published as *Being and Having* (1949).⁶⁰ The Farrers and the Tolkiens were neighbours for over three years between 1947 and 1950. This explains why Tolkien, in one of his many letters to Katherine, could say that he would “bring you round some *unique MSS.* [manuscripts] later to-day” (*Letters* 130). Though most of the letters are focussed on his works, at least one, dated 27 November 1954, betrays deeper intimacy:

I have felt very mean indeed, since I have known that you have both been ill and troubled, and I have never written, or called, or made any offer of help (or even sympathy). Always meaning to, of course! To any *eyes* but those of your charity I shd. [should] have appeared the sort of “friend” that dumps his works on you when you are already overloaded, sucks up praise and encouragement, [...] and then departs when you begin to break down... (*Letters* 207–208)

Realizing that Katherine and her husband were in dire need of respite, Tolkien writes that “*nothing* would give me more pleasure than to [help]. I could for instance *well* spare £50 (and *more* if this rise in

⁵⁷ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 462–474; and 2006b, 434–435. In Venice they met with Tolkien's son Christopher and his wife Faith, and the four spent some time together. A much earlier father-daughter trip had been to the Jesuit seminary Stonyhurst in Lancashire, staying at a nearby guesthouse for ten days in August 1947 (see SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 981).

⁵⁸ For example, CARPENTER 1977, 39: “Certainly she did not share his interest in languages.”

⁵⁹ A case could also be made for Tolkien's relationship with other female relatives, such as his Aunt Jane, mentioned above, and, perhaps more surprisingly, his son Christopher's first wife, Faith (*née* Faulconbridge, b. 1928). Tolkien mourned over the breakup of that marriage. One wonders if added to the pain of what it must have meant to Tolkien as a Catholic, was personal sadness about Faith. She sculpted a bust of him for the Royal Academy, with a copy at Exeter College Chapel in Oxford. Tolkien corresponded with a number of female relatives until his death. Wayne Hammond and Christina Scull informed me some of these letters have come up for sale.

⁶⁰ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 295.

my wages occurs)” (*Letters* 208).⁶¹ Notably, his letters to her were signed “Ronald Tolkien” instead of the official signature “J.R.R. Tolkien”.⁶²

Mary Salu was supervised by Tolkien from 1941 to 1949, a long process for a B.Litt degree.⁶³ She also worked for the professor, compiling indexes and glossaries, a task likely to stall anyone’s progress even without a war or post-war austerity. Tolkien wrote a two-paragraph preface for her translation of *The Ancrene Riwe* (1955).⁶⁴ She would later co-edit the essay collection *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam* (1979). Salu’s picture is not reproduced in *The Tolkien Family Album*. Scull and Hammond’s *Reader* provides a mere one-paragraph biography on her, and nearly all mentions of her in the *Chronology* are the same flat one-liner (“Tolkien will continue to supervise B.Litt Student M. B. Salu”). Yet, for reasons that escape me, Scull and Hammond rank her among the “close friends of Tolkien and his family”.⁶⁵

Helen Buckhurst, on the other hand, does not even receive a biographical sketch in the *Reader*. We know that she was Tolkien’s former student and also a Fellow at St Hugh’s.⁶⁶ She shared Tolkien’s Catholicism, like so many of his female acquaintances, and she even became Priscilla’s godmother.⁶⁷ The latter suggests amicable family relations, to say the least. Were they close friends, as well? The jury seems out and I can pass no definitive judgement, but Buckhurst herself certainly considered Tolkien more a friend or colleague than a tutor, as she addressed her letters to “Dear Ronald”.⁶⁸

It is similarly difficult to assess the intimacy of Tolkien’s relationship with Auvo Kurvinen (1916–1979) who, to the best of my knowledge, was his only Finnish student. (Despite a traditional *male* name, she was indeed a woman.) Auvo Kurvinen is not well known outside of Finland, and barely known inside. And yet she was academically one of Tolkien’s two most successful female students. Completing both a B.Litt (1947–1949) and a D.Phil (1954–1962) under his supervision at Oxford, she

⁶¹ Tolkien’s generosity here is astounding. According to the Office for National Statistics composite price index, £50 in 1957 has the purchasing power of around £1,200 in 2019. Tolkien’s children remember him winning a literary prize for *The Hobbit* in 1938: “A somewhat poignant memory is of him opening the letter at the breakfast table and passing the enclosed cheque for fifty points—a formidable sum in those days—to Edith, so that she could pay an outstanding doctor’s bill with it” (TOLKIEN and TOLKIEN 1992, 69).

⁶² SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 625. Only intimates such as Edith received letters from “Ronald” (without “Tolkien”). Scull and Hammond refer to her consistently as Tolkien’s “friend” (625, 674, 710).

⁶³ Tom Shippey has called the Oxford B.Litt degree “strange and anomalous [...] (a Bachelor’s degree, but only taken by graduate students), which [C. S.] Lewis obviously felt was a waste of time, but which even in the 1970s was regarded as one of the glories of the [English] Faculty” (SHIPPEY 1991, 147).

⁶⁴ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 44–46.

⁶⁵ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 1111.

⁶⁶ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 143. The revised edition of the *Reader’s Guide* includes a biography of Helen Buckhurst, occupying most of a page. Omitting her from the first edition was ‘merely an oversight’ (personal correspondence with the authors, 21 March 2018).

⁶⁷ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 830; and 2006a, 149–150.

⁶⁸ RATELIFF 2015, 58.

had a long career at the University of Helsinki from 1955 on, becoming full Professor of English Literature in 1972.⁶⁹ Perhaps it was Kurvinen who orchestrated Tolkien's proposed visit to Finland in 1958, eventually abandoned due to Edith's poor health.⁷⁰ He never did get to visit "*Suomi*", Tolkien explains in an unpublished letter from 1971, but the Finnish language continued to give him "great aesthetic pleasure".⁷¹

6. The Fourth F—Tolkien's Female Friendships

Several other countries Tolkien did visit. He visited Belgium at least four times.⁷² What drew him repeatedly back to Liège and Solwaster? Formally, academic conferences did, but informally, and perhaps as importantly, his very dear friend Professor Simonne d'Ardenne (1899–1986). While many of his relationships with women—for example, his wife and daughter, Farrer, Salu, Buckhurst, and Kurvinen—approached friendship, his relationship with d'Ardenne is, I propose, the *first of three* that almost certainly reached it. Of course, his range of friendships is more a spectrum than a binary, but there is nothing ambiguous about his relationship with d'Ardenne. It was a true friendship in the full sense of the word.

When Simonne d'Ardenne arrived in Oxford to begin her B.Litt in February 1932, she was 33 years old. Eight months later in October, she moved into the Tolkien household and lived with the family for an entire year as "an unofficial aunt".⁷³ She was the other of Tolkien's most successful female students. Working hard through the holidays, and with Tolkien's generous hands-on assistance, d'Ardenne graduated rapidly in 1933 and was then awarded a doctorate at Liège. Though Liège requirements compelled her to exclude Tolkien's name, she referred to her thesis as their joint work (suggesting a level of collaboration possibly frowned upon today).⁷⁴ She served as Professor of Comparative Grammar in Liège from 1938 until her retirement in 1970.

⁶⁹ RATELIFF 2015, 61 n. 23. See also Professor Tauno Mustanoja's obituary of his colleague Auvo Kurvinen (MUSTANOJA 1982, 1–3).

⁷⁰ In a letter dated 26 February 1958, Tolkien explains that he cancelled tours to "Sweden, Finland, USA etc." (quoted in SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 520). This is all we know about his planned visit to Finland (SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 798).

⁷¹ Letter to a Miss Morley dated 8 November 1971 (quoted in SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 463). For a review of the reception of Tolkien in Finland, see HEIKKINEN 2013.

⁷² SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 82.

⁷³ TOLKIEN and TOLKIEN 1992, 68.

⁷⁴ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 202. The thesis was dedicated to Tolkien.

During the Second World War, the Germans occupied d'Ardenne's town and the two lost touch with each other. On 11 November 1944, having not heard from her for nearly a year, Tolkien reached out to the British Council for help in locating her.⁷⁵ In March 1945, he writes to Stanley Unwin with good news about his "lost friend Mlle. Simonne d'Ardenne, who has suddenly reappeared, having miraculously survived the German occupation" (*Letters* 114). Later that year d'Ardenne returned to Oxford on a stipend for a couple of years, and probably stayed with Tolkien again for some time.⁷⁶ Priscilla visited her in Belgium in the summer of 1948.⁷⁷ Once, in November 1950 after a three-day conference in Liège, Tolkien spent four days with d'Ardenne in her family's old hunting lodge at Solwaster.⁷⁸ On a subsequent visit in 1957, possibly his last one in Belgium, he complains that the local "chalybeate water [impregnated with iron salts] is nearly brick-red: a bath is like being in a dye-vat; to drink is nonsense".⁷⁹

D'Ardenne's short memoir of Tolkien, "The Man and the Scholar", published in *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam* (1979), expresses gratitude for "a friendship which extended over forty years".⁸⁰ The description is wholly warranted. It was visibly characterized by all the hallmarks of friendship-love: by significant joint interests, reciprocal appreciation and affection, often tangible mutual support, and formidable trust on all sides—in effect, by shared lives. Even the Tolkien-specific signposts are there. They called each other friends. They were on first-name terms. Her photograph is reproduced in *The Tolkien Family Album*.⁸¹ She travelled to his memorial service in November 1973.⁸²

The second of Tolkien's three female friends whom I wish to single out is the aforementioned Dorothy Everett (1894–1953). She was the "Miss Everett" in Priscilla Tolkien's account of her father's High Table dinner invitations and attitude towards female scholars. She was also one of the members of The Cave. Dorothy Everett had first been a Tutor at St Hugh's, and then a Lecturer at Somerville,

⁷⁵ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 283. *The Tolkien Family Album* apparently misdates the event, or it was not the first time d'Ardenne had gone missing: "We heard nothing from, or about, her [Simonne d'Ardenne] until we received a message from the International Red Cross in 1943 to say that she and her family were alive and well. The village where she lived [...] had been occupied by German troops" (TOLKIEN and TOLKIEN 1992, 68).

⁷⁶ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 297.

⁷⁷ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 327.

⁷⁸ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 370.

⁷⁹ Early English Text Society archive (quoted in SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 82–83). Douglas Anderson claims Tolkien's last visit to d'Ardenne was in October 1954, when the University of Liège awarded him an honorary doctorate (see ANDERSON 2013, 118).

⁸⁰ D'ARDENNE 1979, 33. Tolkien's fatherly virtues are lauded, but his marriage goes entirely unmentioned. D'Ardenne's piece in this work is the only one that discusses Tolkien's life. The editors must have known she was optimally placed for such a perspective. In 1962 she had contributed to Tolkien's 70th *Festschrift*, as well (DAVIS and WRENN 1962).

⁸¹ TOLKIEN and TOLKIEN 1992, 68. "She [Simonne d'Ardenne] entrusted to Priscilla a great bundle of letters she had received from J.R.R.T. over a period of forty years" (86).

⁸² SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 775.

before being elected Fellow of English at Lady Margaret Hall. Tolkien had been among her electors. He served on various boards with her. They dined together at college. They co-examined students.⁸³ While we know less about Everett than we do about d'Ardenne, Priscilla in passing credits her for a most telling achievement, which almost single-handedly lodges her tightly among Tolkien's friends: "[My father's] many years of friendship with Dorothy Everett, the great beauty of the Hall's situation", Priscilla explains, "were the things that led me naturally to 'choose' Lady Margaret Hall."⁸⁴

"I am supping with Elaine, and others", Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher on 13 April 1944 (*Letters* 71). Here we meet Elaine Griffiths (1909–1996), the last of Tolkien's three definitive female friends, and we close with her. She, too, was Catholic. She, too, was a member of The Cave. Griffiths started her B.Litt under Tolkien's supervision in 1933 and soon "became his *de facto* assistant".⁸⁵ She was one of the very few intimates allowed to read *The Hobbit* in typescript.⁸⁶ Tolkien's personal dedication of her copy was as humorous as it was affectionate: "To Elaine, queen of the Hobbits and my very old friend."⁸⁷ (She was small in stature.) Scull and Hammond designate Griffiths "a close friend of Tolkien and his family".⁸⁸ She contributed to Tolkien's 70th *Festschrift* in 1962. Her picture is in *The Tolkien Family Album*.⁸⁹

One spring day, having just cast their votes for the new Professor of Poetry, Elaine invites Tolkien over to her place. They travel in her car, unchaperoned, and upon arrival his hostess asks Tolkien what he would like to drink. Had he been an overcautious Evangelical pastor, flaming red flags would have gone up by now. Instead, the reckless Catholic layman asks for a whisky! But it was 24 May 1973.⁹⁰ Tolkien would have been 81 years old, and Elaine, having passed sixty, was no spring chicken, either. The venerable old man visiting his "very old friend" was, by this time, a widower, a senior, and quite possibly a saint.⁹¹

⁸³ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 166, 254, 342.

⁸⁴ Priscilla TOLKIEN 1992, 12.

⁸⁵ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 353.

⁸⁶ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 353.

⁸⁷ Bonhams, *Printed Books and Maps* (online), 24 February 2004, lot 601 (quoted in SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 354).

⁸⁸ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006b, 353.

⁸⁹ TOLKIEN and TOLKIEN 1992, 69.

⁹⁰ SCULL and HAMMOND 2006a, 771–772. My fellow Evangelicals will appreciate this friendly jibe.

⁹¹ This essay would have been much poorer were it not for Holly Ordway's infectious encouragement and stubborn pushback. For helpful exchanges and thoughtful feedback, I would also like to thank Tom Shippey, Wayne Hammond, Christina Scull, John Rateliff, Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, Mark Scott, Monika Hilder, and Gregory Bassham—and for their extra pairs of eyes, Aime Nadeau, Ashley Moyse, M. Lee Alexander, and Simon Howard.

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