

## A Curated Collection of Quotations from J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis

“Blessed are the legend-makers with their rhyme / of things not found within recorded time.”  
—J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “Mythopoeia,” in *Tree and Leaf*, p. 88

“If they won’t write the kinds of books we want to read, we shall have to write them ourselves.” — C. S. LEWIS, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 154

“Faërie is a perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold.”  
— J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “On Fairy-Stories,” p. 27

### On Reading and Literature

“The best safeguard against bad literature is full experience of the good.” — C. S. LEWIS,  
*An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 94

“My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others .... In reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.”  
— C. S. LEWIS, *An Experiment in Criticism*, pp. 140-141

“We all need literature that is beyond our measure — though we may not have sufficient energy for it all the time ... Therefore do not write down to children or to anybody. Not even in language. Though it would be a good thing if the great reverence which is due to children took the form of eschewing the tired and the flabby clichés of adult life. But an honest word is an honest word, and its acquaintance can only be made by meeting it in a right context. A good vocabulary is not acquired by reading books written according to some notion of the vocabulary of one’s age-group. It comes from reading books above one.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, draft letter, in *Letters*, pp. 298-99

“Since it is so likely that they will meet cruel enemies, let [children] at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage. Otherwise you are making their destiny not brighter but darker. Nor do most of us find that violence and bloodshed, in a story, produce any haunting dread in the minds of children. As far as that goes, I side impenitently with the human race against the modern reformer. Let there be wicked kings and beheadings, battles and dungeons, giants and dragons, and let villains be soundly killed at the end of the book.”  
— C. S. LEWIS, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” in *Of Other Worlds*, p. 31

“I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which ‘Escape’ is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the word outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule

very practical, and may even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “On Fairy-Stories,” p. 69

“Now there is a clear sense in which all reading whatever is an escape. It involves a temporary transference of the mind from our actual surroundings to things merely imagined or conceived. This happens when we read history or science no less than when we read fictions. All such escape is *from* the same thing: immediate, concrete actuality. The important question is what we escape *to*.” — C. S. LEWIS, *An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 68

“The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a visible presentation and true literature is that it implies one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. If it speaks of *bread* or *wine* or *stone* or *tree*, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination.” – J. R. R. TOLKIEN, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 67

“Every age has its own outlook. It is especially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds ... by reading old books.” — C. S. LEWIS, introduction to *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius, trans. Sr. Penelope Lawson, pp. 4-5

“Find out what the author wrote and what the hard words meant and what the allusions were to, and you have done far more for me than a hundred new interpretations or assessments could ever do.” — C. S. LEWIS, *An Experiment in Criticism*, p. 121

### On the Creative Process

“Anyone who can play a stringed instrument seems to me a wizard worthy of respect.”  
— J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Robert Murray, 2 Dec. 1953, in *Letters*, p. 173

“I think Dante’s poetry, on the whole, the greatest of all the poetry I have read: yet when it is at its highest pitch of excellence, I hardly feel that Dante has very much to do. There is a curious feeling that the great poem is writing itself, or at most, that the tiny figure of the poet is merely giving the gentlest guiding touch, here and there, to energies which, for the most part, spontaneously group themselves and perform the delicate evolutions which make up the *Comedy* .... I draw the conclusion that the highest reach of the whole poetic art turns out to be a kind of abdication, and is attained when the whole image of the world the poet sees has entered so deeply into his mind that henceforth he has only to get himself out of the way, to let the seas roll and the mountains shake their leaves or light shine and the spheres revolve, and all this will *be* poetry, not things you write poetry about. Dare I confess that after Dante

even Shakespeare seems to me a little factitious?” — C. S. LEWIS, “Dante’s Similes,” in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, pp. 76-77

“Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it .... The peculiar quality of the ‘joy’ in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “On Fairy-Stories,” p. 77

“Many children make up, or begin to make up, imaginary languages. I have been at it since I could write. But I have never stopped, and of course, as a professional philologist (especially interested in linguistic aesthetics), I have changed in taste, improved in theory, and probably in craft. Behind my stories is now a nexus of languages (mostly only structurally sketched).” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Milton Waldman, 1951, in *Letters*, p. 143

“[C. S. LEWIS] said to me one day: ‘Tollers, there is too little of what we really like in stories. I am afraid we shall have to try and write some ourselves.’ We agreed that he should try ‘space-travel’, and that I should try ‘time-travel’. His result is well known. My effort, after a few promising chapters, ran dry: it was too long a way round to what I really wanted to make, a new version of the Atlantis legend. The final scene survives in *The Downfall of Númenor*.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Charlotte and Denis Plimmer, 8 Feb. 1967, in *Letters*, p. 378

“*The Lord of the Rings* was actually begun, as a separate thing, about 1937, and had reached the inn at Bree, before the shadow of the second war. Personally I do not think that either war (and of course not the atomic bomb) had any influence upon either the plot or the manner of its unfolding. Perhaps in landscape. The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to L. W. Forster, 31 December 1960, in *Letters*, p. 303

“He [Lewis] used to insist on my reading passages aloud as I finished them, and then he made suggestions. He was furious when I didn’t accept them. Once he said, ‘It’s no use trying to influence you, you’re uninfluenceable!’ But that wasn’t quite true. Whenever he said, ‘You can do better than that. Better, Tolkien, please!’ I used to try.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, interview with Charlotte and Denis Plimmer, *London Daily Telegraph Magazine*, 22 March 1968

“Nobody believes me when I say that my long book is an attempt to create a world in which a form of language agreeable to my personal aesthetic might seem real. But it is true. An enquirer (among many) asked what the L.R. was all about, and whether it was an ‘allegory’. And I said it was an effort to create a situation in which a common greeting would be *elen síla lúmenn’ omentielvo*, and that the phrase long antedated the book. I never heard any more.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to his son Christopher Tolkien, in *Letters*, p. 264

“My own secret is — let rude ears be absent — that to tell you the truth, brother, *I don’t like genius*. I like enormously some *things* that only genius can do: such as *Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy*. But it is the results I like. What I don’t care twopence about is the sense (apparently dear to so many) of being in the hands of ‘a great man’ — you know; his dazzling personality, his lightning energy, the strange force of his mind — and all that. So that I quite

prefer Trollope — or rather this re-reading of [Thackeray’s novel *Pendennis*] confirms my long standing preference. No doubt Thackeray was a *genius*: but Trollope wrote the better books.” — C. S. LEWIS, letter to Warnie Lewis, 14 June 1932, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 82

“There was one picture in particular which bothered him. It had begun with a leaf caught in the wind, and it became a tree; and the tree grew, sending out innumerable branches, and thrusting out the most fantastic roots. Strange birds came and settled on the twigs and had to be attended to. Then all round the tree, and behind it, through the gaps in the leaves and boughs, a country began to open out; and there were glimpses of a forest marching over the land, and of mountains tipped with snow ...” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “Leaf by Niggle,” in *Tree and Leaf*, p. 88

### On Language, Myth, and Meaning

“It’s a funny thing that all the children who have written to me see at once who Aslan is, and grown ups *never* do!” — C. S. LEWIS, letter to Philip Thompson, 21 Nov. 1963, in *Collected Letters* III, p. 1483. (This is the last extant letter that C. S. LEWIS wrote before his death the following day.)

“I had no special childish ‘wish to believe’ .... Fairy-stories were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “On Fairy-Stories,” pp. 54-55

“To imagine any special affinity between childhood and stories of the marvellous is like imagining a special affinity between childhood and Victorian sofas. If few but children now read such stories, that is not because children, as such, have a special predilection for them, but because children are indifferent to literary fashions. What we see in them is not a specifically childish taste, but simply a normal and perennial human taste, temporarily atrophied in their elders by a fashion. It is we, not they, whose taste needs explanation.” — C. S. LEWIS, *An Experiment in Criticism*, pp. 70-71

“The basic pleasure in the phonetic elements of a language and in the style of their patterns, and then in a higher dimension, pleasure in the association of word-forms with meanings, is of fundamental importance. This pleasure is quite different from the practical knowledge of a language, and not the same as an analytic understanding of its structure. It is simpler, deeper-rooted, and yet more immediate than the enjoyment of literature. Though it may be allied to some of the elements in the appreciation of verse, it does not need any poets, other than the nameless artists who composed the language. It can be strongly felt in the simple contemplation of a vocabulary, or even in a string of names.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “English and Welsh,” in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, p. 190

“I am historically minded. Middle-earth is not an imaginary world. The name is the modern form (appearing in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and still in use) of *midden-erd* > *middle-erd*, an ancient name for the *oikoumene*, the abiding place of Men, the objectively real world, in use specifically opposed to imaginary worlds (as Fairyland) or unseen worlds (as Heaven or Hell). The theatre of my tale is this earth, the one in which we now live, but the historical period is imaginary. The essentials of that abiding place are all there ... even if a little glorified by the enchantment

of distance in time.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, notes on W. H. Auden’s review of *The Lord of the Rings*, in *Letters*, p. 239

“Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say. It is a lovely language, but it takes a very long time to say anything in it, because we do not say anything in it, unless it is worth taking a long time to say, and to listen to.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, *The Lord of the Rings*, Treebeard speaking, p. 465

“I find it easier to believe in a myth of gods and demons than in one of the hypostasized abstract nouns.” — C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 139

“I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history – true or feigned– with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “Foreword to the Second Edition,” *The Lord of the Rings*, p. xxiv

“I dislike Allegory — the conscious and intentional allegory — yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Milton Waldman, 1951, in *Letters*, p. 145

“The value of the myth is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by the veil of familiarity. By putting bread, gold, horse, apple or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it. As long as the story lingers in our minds, the real things are more themselves. *The Lord of the Rings* applies the treatment not only to bread and apple but to good and evil, to our endless perils, our anguish, and our joys. By dipping them in myth we see them more clearly.”  
— C. S. LEWIS, “Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*,” in *On Stories*, pp. 138-139

“... each of us is an allegory, embodying in a particular tale and clothed in the garments of time and space, universal truth and everlasting life.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to W. H. Auden, 7 June 1955, in *Letters*, p. 212

“The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essences of fairy-stories ... but this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the ‘inner consistency of reality’. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, “On Fairy-Stories,” pp. 77-78

“You cannot go on ‘seeing through’ things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window is transparent, because the street or garden beyond is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use

trying to ‘see through’ first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To ‘see through’ all things is the same as not to see.” — C. S. LEWIS, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 81

### On Nature, Modernity, and the Machine

“[Lewis’s friend Owen Barfield] made short work of what I have called my ‘**chronological snobbery**’, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. You must find out why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realisation that our own age is also a ‘period’, and certainly has, like all periods, its characteristic illusions. They are likeliest to lurk in those widespread assumptions which are so ingrained in the age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them.” — C. S. LEWIS, *Surprised by Joy*, p. 254

“How I wish the ‘infernal combustion’ engine had never been invented. Or (more difficult still since humanity and engineers in special are both nitwitted and malicious as a rule) that it could have been put to rational uses — if any ...” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Christopher Tolkien, 30 April 1944, in *Letters*, p. 77

“In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1972, in *Letters*, p. 419

“I agree Technology is *per se* neutral: but a race devoted to the increase of its own power by technology with complete indifference to ethics *does* seem to me a cancer in the universe. Certainly if he goes on his present course much further man can *not* be trusted with knowledge.” — C. S. LEWIS, letter to science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke, 7 Dec. 1943, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 594

“Twenty years have flowed away down the long river and never in my life will return for me from the sea ... Ah, years in which looking far away I saw ages long past, when still trees bloomed free in a wide country. And thus now all begins to wither with the breath of cold-hearted wizards: to know things they break them, and their stern lordship they establish through fear of death ...” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, from an address at “The Hobbit Dinner,” Rotterdam, 28 March 1958, delivered in English, Dutch, and Quenya

“To write a book on miracles ... has made me realize Nature herself as I’ve never done before. You don’t *see* Nature till you believe in the Supernatural: don’t get the full, hot, salty tang of her except by contrast with pure water from beyond the world. Those who mistake Nature for All are just those who can never realize her as a *particular creature* with her own flawed, terrible, beautiful particularity.” — C. S. LEWIS, letter to Bede Griffiths, 10 May 1945, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. II, p. 648

“... what we call Man’s power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument.” — C. S. LEWIS, *The Abolition of Man*, p. 54

“Anyway all this stuff [*The Silmarillion*] is mainly concerned with the Fall, Mortality, and the Machine.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Milton Waldman, 1951, in *Letters*, p. 145

“There are of course certain things and themes that move me specially. The inter-relations between the ‘noble’ and the ‘simple’ (or common, vulgar) for instance. The ennoblement of the ignoble I find especially moving. I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; and I find human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to the Houghton Mifflin Co., June 1955, in *Letters*, p. 220

“Well the first War of the Machines [WWII] seems to be drawing to its final inconclusive chapter — leaving, alas, everyone the poorer, many bereaved or maimed and millions dead, and only one thing triumphant: the Machines. As the servants of the Machines are becoming a privileged class, the Machines are going to be enormously more powerful. What’s their next move?” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Christopher Tolkien, 31 Jan 1945, on the endgame of the Second World War, in *Letters*, p. III

### C. S. Lewis on C. S. Lewis

“I am the product of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences, attics explored in solitude, distant noises of gurgling cisterns and pipes, and the noise of wind under the tiles. Also, of endless books .... There were books in the study, books in the drawing-room, books in the cloakroom, books (two deep) in the great bookcase on the landing, books in a bedroom, books piled high as my shoulder in the cistern attic, books of all kinds reflecting every transient stage of my parents’ interests, books readable and unreadable, books suitable for a child and books most emphatically not. Nothing was forbidden me. In the seemingly endless rainy afternoons I took volume after volume from the shelves. I had always the same certainty of finding a book that was new to me as a man who walks into a field has of finding a new blade of grass.” — C. S. LEWIS, *Surprised by Joy*, pp. 7-8

“When I was ten, I read fairy stories in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.” — C. S. LEWIS, *On Stories*, p. 34

“The imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative, and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic. It was he who made me first attempt (with little success) to be a poet. It was he who, in response to the poetry of others, made me a critic, and, in defense of that response, sometimes a critical controversialist. It was he who, after my conversion led me to embody my religious belief in symbolical or mythopoeic forms, ranging from *Screwtape* to a kind of theological science-fiction. And it was, of course, he who has brought me, in the last few years to write the series of Narnian stories for children: not asking what children want and then endeavouring to adapt myself (this was not needed) but because the fairy-tale was the genre best fitted for what I wanted to say.” — C. S. LEWIS, letter to the Milton Society of America, October 1954, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, pp. 516-517

“It’s fun laying out all my books as a cathedral. Personally I’d make *Miracles* and the other ‘treatises’ the cathedral school: my children’s stories are the real side-chapels, each with its own little altar.” — C. S. LEWIS, letter to William Kinter, 28 March 1953, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, p. 314

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.” — C. S. LEWIS, “Is Theology Poetry?” p. 140. (This is also the quotation placed on Lewis’s memorial stone in Poets’ Corner at Westminster Abbey.)

### **J. R. R. Tolkien on J. R. R. Tolkien**

“I am a philologist, and all my work is philological. I avoid hobbies because I am a very serious person and cannot distinguish between private amusement and duty. I am affable, but unsociable. I only work for private amusement, since I find my duties privately amusing.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, interview with Harvey Breit, *New York Times Book Review*, 5 June 1955

“[In 1909] I met the Lúthien Tinúviel of my own personal ‘romance’ [Edith Bratt Tolkien] with her long dark hair, fair face and starry eyes, and beautiful voice. And in 1934 she was still with me, and her beautiful children. But now she has gone before Beren, leaving him indeed one-handed, but he has no power to move the inexorable Mandos, and there is no *Dor Gyrth i chuinar*, the Land of the Dead that Live, in this Fallen Kingdom of Arda, where the servants of Morgoth are worshipped ...” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, reflecting on the recent death of his wife, in a letter to his son Michael Tolkien, 24 Jan. 1972, in *Letters*, p. 417. (The eventual inscription on Edith Tolkien’s grave was as follows: “EDITH MARY TOLKIEN / 1889-1971 / Lúthien”.)

“The book [*The Lord of the Rings*] is about the world that God created—the actual world of this planet.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, interview with Charlotte and Denis Plimmer, *London Daily Telegraph Magazine*, 22 March 1968

### **C. S. Lewis on J. R. R. Tolkien**

“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. His pet abomination is the idea of ‘liberal’ studies. Technical hobbies are more his line.” — C. S. LEWIS, on first meeting J. R. R. Tolkien, 11 May 1926, in *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of C. S. Lewis*, pp. 523-524

“When I began teaching for the English Faculty [at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1926], I made two other friends, both Christians (these queer people seemed now to pop up on every side) who later were to give me much help in getting over the last stile. They were H. V. D. [Hugo] Dyson (then of Reading) and J. R. R. Tolkien. Friendship with the latter marked the breakdown of two old prejudices. At my first coming into the world I had been (implicitly) warned never to trust a Papist, and at my first coming into the English Faculty (explicitly) never to trust a philologist. Tolkien was both.” — C. S. LEWIS, *Surprised by Joy*, p. 264



“His standard of self-criticism was high and the mere suggestion of publication usually set him upon a revision, in the course of which so many new ideas occurred to him that where his friends had hoped for the final text of an old work they actually got the first draft of a new one.” — C. S. LEWIS, in Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 154

“My dear Tollers, / Just a note to tell you with what agreeable warmth and weight your yesterday’s good news [that Unwin & Allen would be publishing *The Lord of the Rings*] lies on my mind — with an inward chuckle of deep content. Foremost of course is the sheer pleasure of looking forward to having the book to read and re-read. But a lot of other things come in. So much of your whole life, so much of our joint life, so much of the war, so much that seemed to be slipping away quite *spurlos* [‘without trace’] into the past, is now, in a sort made permanent.” — C. S. LEWIS, letter congratulating J. R. R. Tolkien on finding a publisher for *The Lord of the Rings*, 13 November 1952, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, pp. 249-250

### J. R. R. Tolkien on C. S. Lewis

“But for the encouragement of CSL, I do not think that I should ever have completed or offered for publication *The Lord of the Rings*.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Clyde Kilby, 18 December 1965, in *Letters*, p. 366

“Friendship with Lewis compensates for much, and besides giving constant pleasure and comfort has done me much good from the contact with a man at once honest, brave, intellectual — a scholar, a poet, and a philosopher — and a lover, at least after a long pilgrimage, of Our Lord.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, private diary, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, p. 152

“CSL was my closest friend from about 1927 to 1940, and remained very dear to me ... But in fact we saw less and less of one another after he came under the dominant influence of Charles Williams, and still less after his very strange marriage [to Joy Davidman Gresham in 1956].” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Christopher Bretherton, 16 July 1964, in *Letters*, p. 349

“To tell the truth, [C. S. Lewis] never really liked hobbits very much.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, 1967, interview with Denis and Charlotte Plimmer, in *Letters*, p. 376

“So far I have felt the normal feelings of a man of my age — like an old tree that is losing all its leaves one by one: this [Lewis’s death on 22 Nov. 1963] feels like an axe-blow near the roots. 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.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, in a letter to his daughter Priscilla Tolkien, 26 Nov. 1963, in *Letters*, p. 341

“C. S. L. of course had some oddities and could sometimes be irritating. He was after all and remained an Irishman of Ulster. But he did nothing for effect; he was not a professional clown, but a natural one, when a clown at all. He was generous-minded, on guard against all prejudices, though a few were too deep-rooted in his native background to be observed by him .... Well of course I could say more, but I must draw the line. Still I wish it could be forbidden that after a great man is dead, little men should scribble over him, who have not

and must know they have not sufficient knowledge of his life and character to give them any key to the truth.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Anne Barrett, in *Letters*, pp. 350-1

### On the Human Condition, (Im)mortality, and the Meaning of Life

“Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we have been, in some sort we are still.” — C. S. LEWIS, *The Allegory of Love*, p. 2

“I wish life was not so short. Languages take such a long time, and so do all the things one wants to know about.” — J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, p. 46

“A small knowledge of history depresses one with the sense of the everlasting mass and weight of human iniquity: old, old, dreary, endless repetitive unchanging incurable wickedness .... And at the same time one knows that there is always good: much more hidden, much less clearly discerned, seldom breaking out into recognizable, visible beauties of word or deed or face — not even when in fact sanctity, far greater than the visible advertised wickedness, is really there.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Christopher Tolkien, 14 May 1944, in *Letters*, p. 80

“In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. I do not think that at any rate any ‘rational being’ is wholly evil .... In my story Sauron represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible. He had gone the way of all tyrants: beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to order all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of the Earth. But he went further than human tyrants in pride and the lust for domination, being in origin an immortal (angelic) spirit.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, notes on W. H. Auden’s review of *The Lord of the Rings*, in *Letters*, p. 243

“... remember (let us look in *our own* hearts for the truth!) humans are v. seldom either totally sincere or totally hypocritical. Their moods change, their motives are mixed, and they are often themselves quite mistaken as to what their motives are.” — C. S. LEWIS, letter to Mary Willis Shelburne, 28 March 1961, in *Collected Letters*, Vol. III, p. 1249

“For you do not yet know the strength of your hearts, and you cannot foresee what each may meet upon the road.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, *The Lord of the Rings*, Elrond speaking, p. 281

“Until you conquer the fear of being an outsider, an outsider you will remain.”  
— C. S. LEWIS, “The Inner Ring,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, p. 154

“Even in these legends we see the Elves mainly through the eyes of Men. It is in any case clear that neither side was fully informed about the ultimate destiny of the other. The Elves were sufficiently longeval to be called by Man ‘immortal’, but they were not unageing or unwearying. Their own tradition was that they were confined to the limits of this world (in space and time), even if they died, and would continue to exist in it until ‘the end of the world’.

But what ‘the end of the world’ portended for it or for themselves they did not know (though they no doubt had theories). Neither had they of course any special information concerning what ‘death’ portended for Men. They believed that it meant ‘liberation from the circles of the world’, and was in that respect to them enviable. And they would point out to Men who envied them that a dread of ultimate loss, though it may be indefinitely remote, is not necessarily the easier to bear if it is in the end ineluctably certain: a burden may become heavier the longer it is borne.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Rhona Beare, 25 June 1963, in *Letters*, p. 325

“Shall we, perhaps, in Purgatory, see our own faces and hear our own voices as they really were?” — C. S. LEWIS, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 8

“There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.”  
— C. S. LEWIS, *The Four Loves*, p. 121

“We are finite creatures with absolute limitations upon the powers of our soul-body structure in either action or endurance. Moral failure can only be asserted, I think, when a man’s effort or endurance fall short of his limits, and the blame decreases as that limit is closer approached. Nonetheless, I think it can be observed in history and experience that some individuals seem to be placed in ‘sacrificial’ positions: situations or tasks that for perfection of solution demand powers beyond their utmost limits, even beyond all possible limits for an incarnate creature in a physical world — in which a body may be destroyed, or so maimed that it affects the mind and will. Judgement upon any such case should then depend on the motives and disposition with which he started out, and should weigh his actions against the utmost possibility of his powers, all along the road to whatever proved the breaking-point.”  
— J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Eileen Elgar, September 1963, in *Letters*, pp. 326-327

“... the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.” — C. S. LEWIS, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 130

“It may be possible for each [person] to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour’s glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare .... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilisations — these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit — immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we that we are to be perpetually

solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously.”  
— C. S. LEWIS, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, pp. 45-46

“If anguish were visible, almost the whole of this benighted planet would be enveloped in a dense dark vapour, shrouded from the amazed vision of the heavens! And the products of it all will be mainly evil — historically considered. But the historical version is, of course, not the only one. All things and deeds have a value in themselves, apart from their ‘causes’ and ‘effects’. No man can estimate what is really happening at the present *sub specie aeternitatis*. All we do know, and that to a large extent by direct experience, is that evil labours with vast power and perpetual success — in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in. So it is in general, and so it is in our own lives ...” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Christopher Tolkien, 30 April 1944, in *Letters*, p. 76

“A man can’t be always defending the truth; there must be a time to feed on it.”  
— C. S. LEWIS, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 15

“So it may be said that the chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. To do as we say in the *Gloria in Excelsis: Laudamus te, benedicamus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te, gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam*. We praise you, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendour .... And in moments of exaltation we may call on all created things to join in our chorus, speaking on their behalf, as is done in Psalm 148, and in the Song of the Three Children in Daniel II. PRAISE THE LORD ... all mountains and hills, all orchards and forests, all things that creep and birds on the wing.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, letter to Camilla Unwin, 20 May 1969, in *Letters*, p. 400

### Final Thoughts

“The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things — the beauty, the memory of our own past — are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited.” — C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, p. 30

“... it is now exactly twenty years since I began in earnest to complete the history of our renowned hobbit-ancestors of the Third Age. I look East, West, North, South, and I do not see Sauron; but I see that Saruman has many descendants. We Hobbits have against them no magic weapons. Yet, my gentlehobbits, I give you this toast: To the Hobbits. May they outlast the Sarumans and see spring again in the trees.” — J. R. R. TOLKIEN, toast offered at “The Hobbit Dinner,” Rotterdam, 28 March 1958