

St. Louis Catholic Church
2013 Summer Book Club
Prof. Rob Koons
PEC 201, Thursdays 7-8:30 pm

Tolkien's Catholic Imagination

May 30: Fairy-Tales and Philosophy

The Hobbit, "On Fairy Stories":

http://bjorn.kiev.ua/librae/Tolkien/Tolkien_On_Fairy_Stories.htm

June 6. Creator and Sub-Creator: "We Make by the Law in which We're Made"

The Silmarillion (Ainulindalë, Quenta Silmarillion Chapters I-IX, XIX, XXIV),
"Mythopoeia": <http://home.ccil.org/~cowan/mythopoeia.html>

June 13. The Metaphysics of Middle-Earth: How Tolkien's Platonic Philosophy Shaped His World, and Ours

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

"Leaf by Niggle" <http://www.epubbud.com/book.php?g=QCLTJ8S8>

June 20. The Nature and Origin of Evil; Freedom and Divine Foreknowledge

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Books IV and V:

<http://san.beck.org/Boethius4.html>, <http://san.beck.org/Boethius5.html>

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II q6 (a1), q13 (a6), q75 (a1-4), q76 (a1-2), q80 (a1), q85 (a1-6): <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm>

June 27. The Shire and the Social Teaching of the Church: Technology, Nature and the Community.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

"The Sea-Bell" <http://memoirsoftheshire.webs.com/theseabell.htm>

G. K. Chesterton, "The Ethics of Elfland":

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/chesterton/orthodoxy.vii.html>

Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*

<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113rerum.htm>

Hillaire Belloc, *The Servile State* <http://archive.org/details/servilestate00belluoft>

Pre-study questions on *The Hobbit* (May 30)

1. Who is the narrator of the story? In what setting can we place him? (Ancient, modern, in-between? Gondor? Modern England?) Does he reflect a modern viewpoint? How?
2. Is Bilbo a hero, in the end? Why or why not?
3. Does *The Hobbit* present two conflicting visions of 'heroism' and 'courage'? Is one clearly superior to the other?
4. How does Tolkien describe the "goblins" (orcs) on page 70 (5 or 6 pages into chapter 4)? What does this tell us about Tolkien's conception of evil?

5. Why does Gollum speak as he does? How does he refer to himself? To Bilbo? To the ring? Why the strange doubling of plurals (pocketses, handses)?
6. Did Gollum ever have any intention of keeping to his bargain in the riddle game? Did Bilbo? Did the antiquity and sacredness of the game have any effect on either of them? Why did both play it with such intensity? How were their riddles similar? How different?
7. How does Beorn interact with the natural world? Why is it significant that he is a mortal man, rather than an elf or wizard?
8. Note the style of speech and reasoning of Smaug (chapter 12, p. 212). Is it archaic, or modern, or a mixture? Note also the speeches of the Master of Lake-town (chapter 10, p. 193, chapter 14, p. 239). How does Tolkien use shifts in style of speech to convey character?
9. How do the tension and conflict between the Master and Bard the Bowman reflect a distinction between a modern (commercial, capitalistic) and ancient (feudal, honor-bound) society? Where do Tolkien's sympathies lie, and why?
10. Why do Thorin and Bard come to an impasse in their negotiations in chapter 15 (pp. 249-250)? Why does Thorin refuse to negotiate? Why can't Bard retreat?
11. What lessons can we take from Bilbo's actions with respect to the Arkenstone? Did he act wisely? Justly? Did his end justify his questionable means: did he have a right to take the stone, or to give it to Bard and the elf-king? Is Tolkien implicitly criticizing here the archaic culture that he so obviously loved? What do we learn about Thorin's character?
12. How has Bilbo changed? What exactly has changed him? How has he remained the same?

Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories"

1. What "primordial desires" do Fairy-Stories satisfy?
2. What does Tolkien mean by "literary belief"? (p. 132) Why is it different from credulity? Why does he think that the phrase "willing suspension of disbelief" is an inadequate definition? What does Tolkien mean by a "Secondary World"? Why is desire more important than belief or credulity? (134-5)
3. How is fantasy a "higher" form of art than realistic or historical fiction?
4. Tolkien rejected Lewis's early view that myths were "lies breathed through silver." What did he mean? What does he mean by "refracted light" in his poem, "Mythopoeia"?
5. Tolkien argues that Fantasy does not destroy or insult reason. (p. 144) What does he mean? How are fantasy and the apprehension of reality inter-connected?
6. What does Tolkien mean by "recovery"? (146) How does fantasy achieve it? (Compare Chesterton's Mooreffoc.)
7. Fantasy is made out of the Primary World. (147) What are the implications of this fact? How does fantasy convey truth about the Primary World?
8. What does Tolkien mean by distinguishing the Escape of the Prisoner from the Flight of the Deserter? Why is "escapism" defensible? Must escapism take the form of a rebellion against modernity or technology? What is Tolkien's response to the argument, "Electric lamps have come to stay." In what way is our time an "age of improved means to deteriorated ends."