

Beren and Lúthien: Tolkien's Greatest Love Story

There are many great literary love stories. Apart from fairytale princesses and their trysts with charming princes, we think perhaps of Romeo and Juliet, or Helen and Paris, or Odysseus and Penelope, or Aeneas and Dido, or Dante and Beatrice. And we think of those who gave us such lovers. Shakespeare, Homer, Virgil, Dante.

We probably don't think of J.R.R. Tolkien.

We don't associate the writer of *The Lord of the Rings* with great literary lovers. And yet he gave us Aragorn and Arwen, and Celeborn and Galadriel, and the rustic simplicity of the love of Samwise Gamgee and Rosie Cotton. We might, if we are of a melancholic disposition, think of Eowyn's thwarted passion, her love unrequited as she watches Aragorn ride off to what she presumes will be his death, or, if we are more sanguine, we might prefer to think of Eowyn's eventual marriage to Faramir and their living happily ever after. Chances are, however, that we probably don't think of Beren and Lúthien, Tolkien's greatest lovers, whose self-sacrificial romance reflected the deep love between Tolkien and his wife, Edith.

The reason that Tolkien's greatest love story has been largely unknown, except among aficionados, is that the story is little more than a footnote in *The Lord of the Rings*, in which the self-sacrificial adventures of the lovers are recounted, in passing, by Aragorn. They are, however, told at greater length in *The Silmarillion* and there are earlier versions of the story, told in both poetry and prose, in other posthumously published books.

Now, however, or at least in about five weeks from now,

Tolkien's greatest love story will take centre stage. On June 1, *Beren and Lúthien*, a stand-alone book of the story, will be published. Illustrated by the wonderful Tolkien artist, Alan Lee, and edited by Tolkien's youngest and only surviving son, Christopher, the book draws from the various unfinished versions of the story to form a complete narrative, with minimal editorial intrusion. It will bring this neglected part of Tolkien's corpus to the fore, simultaneously bringing two of literature's greatest lovers into the limelight.

Those wishing to know more about Beren and Lúthien might want to purchase a little-known book by John Carswell, recently published, entitled [*Tolkien's Requiem: Concerning Beren and Lúthien*](#) (True Myths Press www.truemyths.org). This gives the backdrop to the story, connecting it with Tolkien's other work and with its biographical context. Regarding the latter, it is significant that Tolkien had the name "Lúthien" inscribed on his wife's tombstone. She was always his Lúthien, his greatest love story being inspired by his memory of the elven and sylphlike vision of her dancing in the woods in the first years of their marriage. After his own death, his family had the name "Beren" inscribed on the tomb that he now shared with his wife, uniting them in death as they had been united in life but also uniting them in the love story that their own love story had inspired.

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