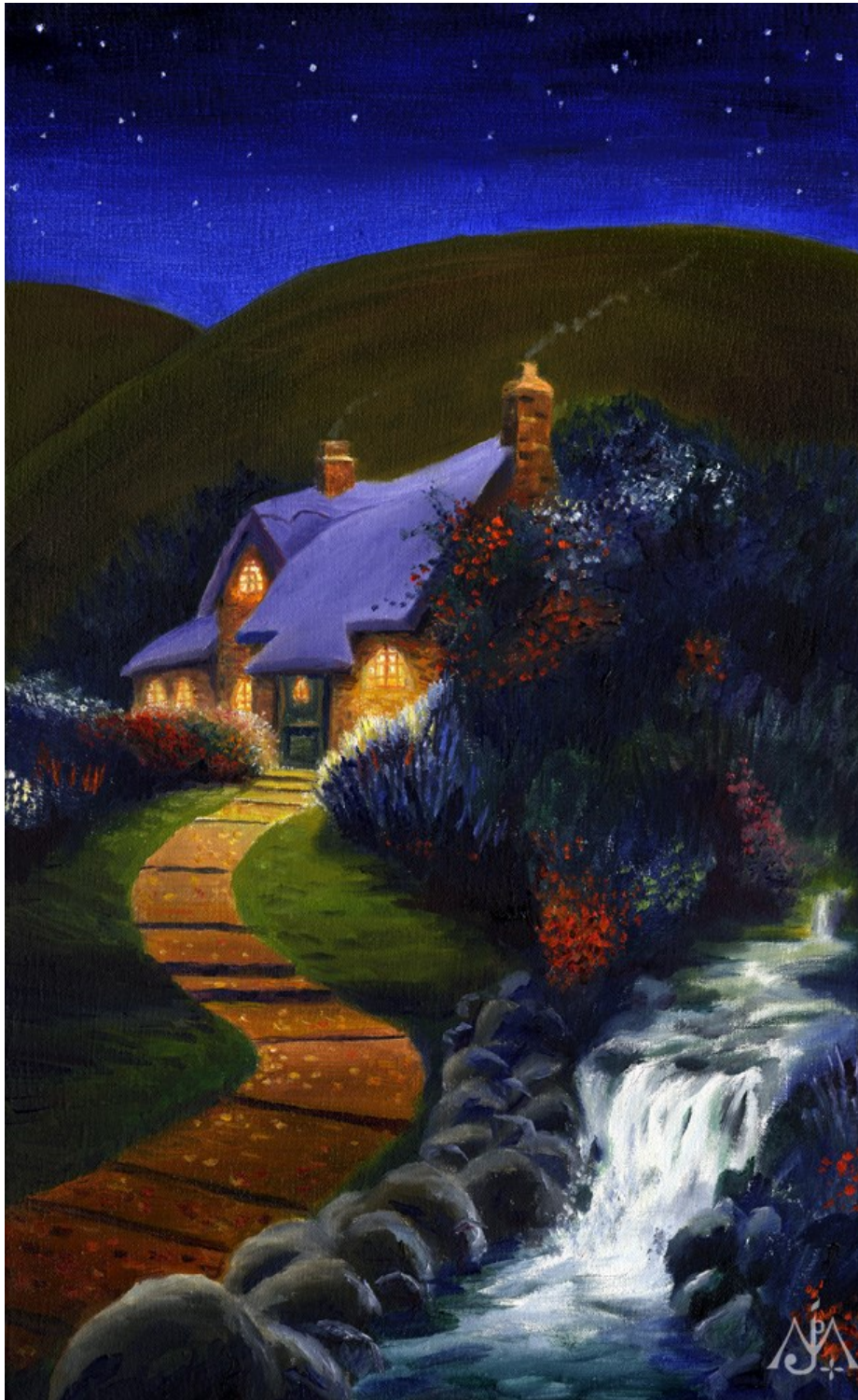


# mythprint



**Reviews Quarterly of the Mythopoeic Society**  
VOL. 50 NO. 2      SUMMER 2013      WHOLE NO. 367

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## Reviews Quarterly of the Mythopoeic Society

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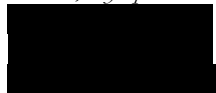
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Cover Art: *The House of Tom Bombadil* by Jef Murray.

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*Mythprint* is the quarterly review of the Mythopoeic Society, a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the study, discussion, and enjoyment of myth and fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. To promote these interests, the Society publishes three magazines, maintains a World Wide Web site, and sponsors the annual Mythopoeic Conference and awards for fiction and scholarship, as well as local discussion groups.

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Nancy Marie Brown. *The Song of the Vikings: Snorri and the Making of Norse Myths*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. xi + 244 pp., \$27.00 (hardcover). Reviewed by Ernie Davis.

Most of what we know about the pantheon of Norse gods and their mythology comes from a single poem: the *Edda*, by the Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241). Snorri is thus one of the greatest and most influential transmitters of myth in the Western tradition. Nancy Marie Brown's new biography *The Song of the Vikings* is a intriguing account of his life and the times he lived in, and of his work, its cultural setting, and its long, profound impact on Western culture from Thomas Gray to Grimm, Wagner, Tolkien, and many others.

One thinks of a Viking as an intrepid adventurer, like the explorers who sailed to Iceland, Greenland, and Vinland, and the pirates who terrorized the coasts of Europe and the Mediterranean; a strong, fierce, proud, laconic warrior, who accepts death fearlessly when it comes, in the belief of going off to eternal feasting and battle in Valhalla; either an indomitable hero or the scourge of Hell, depending on which side of his battle-axe you were standing on.

Snorri was not that kind of Viking. For one thing, he was born too late; the great age of the Viking explorers and the worship of the Norse gods had both ended more than a century before his birth. For another thing, it was not at all his style. According to Nancy Marie Brown, "He avoided fights, unless he and his men vastly outnumbered his enemies." He was a very successful, powerful, rich man with many estates. He was twice elected lawspeaker in the Icelandic parliament, the highest political position in Iceland, (Iceland at the time was independent and had no king, and the Icelanders were resolutely determined to keep it so.) He met his death unheroically: he was hiding in his cellar from a gang of thugs sent by his enemies; they found him; his last words were "Don't strike!"

In 1218 he sailed to Norway, where he stayed for two years. This was both the high point of his career and the seed of his undoing. He travelled around Norway, learning geography and history that he would use in his history of Norway, the *Heimskringla*. He was a guest at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson and the regent Jarl Skúli.

And, fatally, he achieved a great ambition; the king made him a "landed man", a baron, a rare honor. There are two mysteries about this. First, where was his fiefdom; a new estate in Norway, or just his old estates in Iceland? Second, and more importantly, what was the *quid pro quo*; what did he promise the king in exchange? No one knows; but when he returned to Iceland in 1220, he was widely suspected of having sold out his country to the King of Norway.

From then until his death twenty years later, his story is a dreary tale of gradual decline; of greed, quarrels, betrayals, agreements made and broken, daughters unhappily married off for his own advantage, and endless, endless violence of the most sordid kind, with no trace of heroism or nobility. Snorri seems to have been shrewd but not wise; he was greedy and vindictive when he should have been generous and magnanimous; he trusted the wrong people; he made enemies with every move. In 1237 he fled from his own nephew Sturla to Norway, now an unwanted fugitive rather than an honored poet. In 1239 he returned to Iceland, against the express command of the king of Norway, thinking that he saw an opportunity to regain his position. He was murdered in 1241.

He was also the greatest writer of the medieval Norse world. There are three major works attributed to Snorri: the *Edda* (often called the *Prose Edda* to distinguish it from the *Poetic Edda*, an earlier work); the *Heimskringla*, a long (800 page) history of the Norse kings in 16 sections; and *Egil's Saga*, one of the earliest and best of the Icelandic sagas, with a narrative spanning generations of wild, heroic, Viking warriors and derring-do.

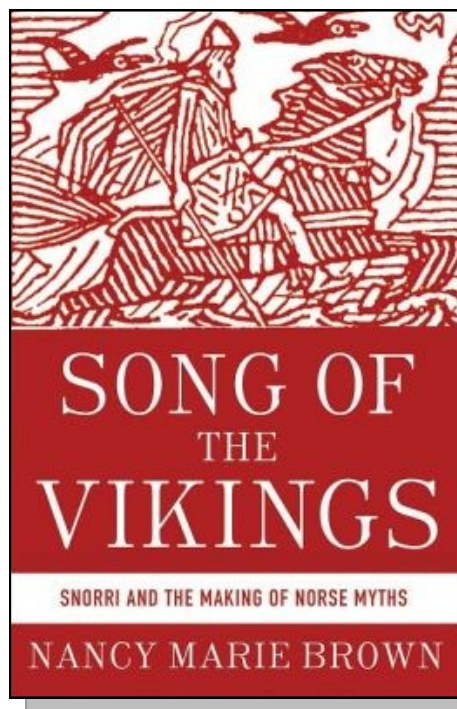
The *Edda* itself consists of three sections following a Prologue. The first section, "Tricking of Gylfi" (*Gylfaginnining*) is the important part (for us); it is the whole history of the Norse gods, from the Creation to Ragnarok. Here is the source — often the only source — of the familiar tales of Odin, Thor, Loki, Freya, Baldur and the rest that have enchanted centuries of readers, told with drama and often with ironic humor. The last section, the "Tally of Verse Forms" (*Háttatal*) is a manual for the understanding and writing of skaldic poetry, the most prestigious literary form of the time. The middle section, the "Language of Poetry" (*Skáldskaparmál*) is an explanation of the kennings used in the "Tally of Verse Forms", and contains some further myths. According to

Brown, these three sections were composed in the opposite order. The Prologue is a boring frame, added to make these tales of pagan gods acceptable to a Christian audience.

Poets had great honor and respect in Norse culture; and it was universally acknowledged that the best poets were Icelandic. Skaldic poetry was difficult, highly cryptic and allusive. Here's a literal translation of one of Snorri's own verses: "The noble hater of the fire of the sea defends the woman-friend of the enemy of the wolf; prows are set before the steep brow of the confidante of the friend of Mimir. The noble, all-powerful one knows how to protect the mother of the attacker of the worm; enjoy, enemy of neck-rings, the mother of the troll-wife's enemy until old age." ... The audience needs to know five myths and the family trees of two gods or it's nonsense. What does it mean? "A good king defends and keeps his land" (p. 113).

Skaldic poetry was also very rigid in form. In a praise poem, a stanza had eight lines, a line had six syllables with three stresses, and there were further rules governing rhythm, assonance, and alliteration. It has little appeal for modern readers, and was starting to go out of fashion even in Snorri's time; the king of Norway, who was educated in French culture, had no taste for it.

*The Song of the Vikings* weaves together the tales of the Norse gods, the life and works of Snorri Sturluson, and the history, society, and literary culture of 13th-century Iceland and Norway into a rich, colorful fabric. Nancy Marie Brown's earlier books — *A Good Horse Has No Color*, *The Far Traveler: Voyages of a Viking Woman*, and *The Abacus and the Cross* (a biography of Pope Sylvester II) — demonstrated her love for the land and culture of Iceland, her knowledge of the medieval world, and her gift for making that world come alive for the modern reader. *The Song of the Vikings* is both highly readable and impeccably scholarly, with extensive end notes, bibliography, map, and family tree. It is a fascinating introduction to this remarkable man and his world, a remote corner of the medieval world more alien to most modern readers than medieval England or western Europe, and much less well known. Anyone with an interest in the great myths and the great mythmakers will want to read it. ■



*"A Scream About Landscape": Topographic Romance and Cartographic Romance – Alan Garner vs. J.R.R. Tolkien.* By Dale Nelson.

To help focus some discussions of modern literary romance, I offer a couple of terms.

A **topographic romance** is a fictional romantic adventure story set in a specific real-world locale. The reader feels that the author was passionate about the setting. Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* (1960) and its sequel *The Moon of Gomerath* (1963) are particularly good examples. You can trace the journey of *Weirdstone's* two protagonists using a British Ordnance Survey map (Macclesfield and Alderley Edge, 1:25 000). Admirers of these books visit Alderley Edge and post online photos of their walks. Other examples are Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (1972) and *The Plague Dogs* (1977). As an author's references to identifiable landmarks, such as particular mountains, lakes, and villages, decrease in frequency and emphasis, the applicability of the term "topographic romance" becomes less sure. Is Robert Louis Stevenson's Scottish Highlands adventure *Kidnapped* (1886) a topographic romance?

A second issue is: how fantastic must the adventures be, for the story to qualify as a topographic romance? The Garner books are filled with creatures drawn from folklore, the Arthurian myth, etc. Adams's books are not, but they remain fantasies in that the animal protagonists think and



speak like humans. The Stevenson book is a thriller with no outright fantastic elements. Let's disqualify it.

To the definition in the second sentence above, I would, then, add that the topographic romance at least tends strongly towards fantasy. The freedom afforded by fantasy allows an author to visualize and embody elements that he or she may feel to inhere in the real landscape — as visible, conscious presences. A thriller with well-described real locales, such as a spy novel set in a meticulously-rendered Warsaw, may owe something to topography and atmosphere, but would not be a topographic romance, if my suggestion is accepted. I imagine that the writing of topographic romances reflects a common type of reverie in which an observer imagines where he or she would hide if pursued in a particular place, etc. This seems to be a natural mental activity.

A **cartographic romance** may be defined as a fictional romantic adventure story set in an imaginary world that is developed with great care, certainly including meticulous maps. The reader feels here, too, as with the topographic romance, that the author is passionate about the setting. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is the outstanding example. I will assume that the map(s) for a cartographic romance must be relatively detailed and (N.B.) must not suggest improvisation, after-the-fact elaboration undertaken in a bid to muster up an unearned convincingness. I'm aware that Tolkien tinkered with the Middle-earth map after *LotR* was published; there are additions in the Pauline Baynes map as a result. But I don't think these strike us as bogus, whimsical gestures. They seem rather like valuable further disclosures of that distant world — though we know always that it is indeed imaginary.

The mere presence of a map doesn't make a book a cartographic romance. Collections of Clark Ashton Smith's weird stories about Zothique, Poseidonis, Xiccarph, etc. in the 1970s included maps (drawn, I think, by Ballantine editor Lin Carter). These stories are not cartographic romances. Smith's geography is vague; in this as in other respects, his fiction is remote indeed from Tolkien's. What about Robert E. Howard's map of the Hyborean world? My feeling is that Howard had some interest in conjuring the sense of a vanished geography, but that, just as his plotting in the Conan stories is often slapdash, his Hyborean

world is largely concocted from scraps of popular fiction, bits of history, and so on, his pseudo-historical "Hyborean Age" essay notwithstanding. The Conan stories shouldn't be considered cartographic romances. However, cartographic romance needs to be a story of adventure, not "political intrigue" or a story of manners. I haven't read Austin Tappan Wright's *Islandia*. Is it a cartographic romance? I imagine that cartographic romancing may proceed from a common activity, the making of home-made maps of real or imagined locales. It is probably psychologically akin to the making of new languages. Tolkien, of course, did both.

Discussion of works of fantasy as topographic romances or cartographic romances may open up consideration of matters such as these:

Tolkien is the world's best-known creator of a secondary world, but he is on record as relating different places in it to real-world places, e.g. as in John Ezard's profile for the *Guardian* newspaper, or the well-known remark about Bombadil as the spirit of the vanishing Oxford and Berkshire countryside, etc. Consider, then, how imaginary worlds could be "precipitations" of an author's experience of real locations. Consider, however, how readers of *LotR* from early on have related Middle-earth scenes to real places known to them but not to Tolkien, or have related scenes they are beholding to their reading of the book — "That looks like the Shire!" This experience is relevant to the very large and important topic of Tolkien's role in the emerging concern for nature and for heritage sites. And one may consider also the failure of Tolkienian artwork that depends on artists' photo files! These are all matters that could be worthy of discussion.

The author's palette of styles — does the author use varying styles to evoke distinctive senses of different places? How well does the author of a cartographic romance succeed in telling a story rather than in suggesting indulgence in a day-dreamy evocation of a never-never land? In a given topographic romance, do authentic historical, geographic, geologic, etc. elements of a real location receive use, or transmutation, or are they conveniently ignored?

Was the development of the topographic romance and the cartographic romance stimulated, in part, by major mapping endeavors (see Rachel Hewitt's *Map of a Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance*

*Survey*) and also the popularity of travel writing in the past 200 years? Is it important to record (with photographs, oral histories, etc.) details about a real location for the sake of the enjoyment of a topographic romance, as Richard Blackham is doing for Tolkien? If fewer and fewer children are growing up with experience of the outdoors (Last Child...), does this have implications for the future of literary romance?

I well remember the experience, having read Tolkien, of wanting to read more fantasy that was somehow akin to his work. Does thinking about these two terms open up the possibility that readers wanting “more” might find satisfaction not in genre fantasy that lacks a strong sense of place, but in literary works possessing a strong sense of place even if lacking the element of outright fantasy? My own experience is that I can’t stand to read a great deal of the stuff published as fantasy, but that I do enjoy many of the books published in the Penguin Travel Library (in the 1980s) and by other publishers. See Note below. Should discussion groups that have focused on fantasy set aside a meeting to discuss, instead, something like fantasist William Morris’s *Icelandic Journals* or Eric Newby’s delicious *Slowly Down the Ganges*?

What are the implications, with regard to the two categories, for illustrations?

Is there evidence to suggest that a given romance, or the development of either or both of these categories, was affected by the author’s own experiences, including but not limited to his or her travels? Sometimes an author is on record in the affirmative. Alan Garner said that *Weirdstone* and *Moon* were “a kind of scream about landscape.” This suggests that Garner had come to feel that there was personal — emotional or imaginative — material, relating to the landscape he described, that he had not fully assimilated to the purposes of the story. Whether a failing like this appears to a given reader to have occurred in a given topographic romance could be a topic for discussion.

This paper attempts to contribute to conversations about modern fantastic romance. Perhaps refinements of these concepts, and new ones, can be proposed.

## Notes:

John Ezard: [REDACTED]

Garner on “scream about landscape”: Interview with Justin Wintle in *The Pied Pipers: Interviews with the Influential Creators of Children’s Literature* (1974), p. 226.

For *Mythprint* readers who are curious about travel books, here are some further suggestions: Eric Newby’s *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*; Patrick Leigh Fermor’s *A Time of Gifts*; Graham Greene’s *Journey Without Maps*; Heinrich Harrer’s *Seven Years in Tibet*; Francis Parkman’s *The Oregon Trail*; Lord Dufferin’s *Letters from High Latitudes*; Alexander Kinglake’s *Eothen*. I have written about Morris’s *Icelandic Journals* in “William Morris at Home and Abroad” for *Beyond Bree* Jan. 2008: 1–3. As “Extollager,” I have posted many entries at the Science Fiction and Fantasy Chronicles site, in the Forums section, under the “Penguin Travel Library and Other Literary Travel Books” thread, where a list — now approaching completion? — of titles in the PTL series may be found. My paper contending that *The Hobbit* may be usefully considered in the context of contemporary nonfiction is “*There and Back Again: The Hobbit* and Other Travel Books of the 1930s” in *Mallorn* #51, Spring 2011.

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Delia Sherman. *The Freedom Maze*. Big Mouth House, 2011. 258 pp. (softcover). Reviewed by Pauline J. Alama.

Thirteen-year-old Sophie is still reeling from her parents’ divorce — a shocking event in 1960 Louisiana — when her mother deposits her at her grandmother’s house for the summer. Grandmama Fairchild lives in an antebellum cottage on what was once the Fairchild family sugar plantation, where she tyrannizes her living relatives and cherishes stories of the family’s glorious past before its downfall in the War Between the States.

Worn out by her grandmother’s and mother’s criticism, Sophie wishes that, like the heroes of her favorite books, she could escape from present-day reality, travel in time, and have magical adventures. She gets more than she bargained for: through the whim of a trickster who may be Br’er Rabbit, she travels 100 years back in time and sees her ancestors’ plantation in its supposed glory days.

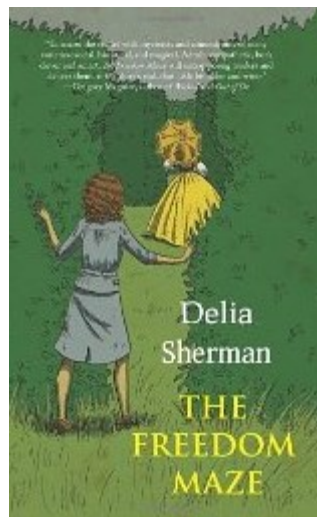
Nothing, however, is as she expected. Arriving in 1860 muddy and disheveled, Sophie appears

to her Fairchild forebears not as an equal, but as a light-skinned slave. The closest anyone in 1860 comes to identifying Sophie as white is when a fellow slave observes that she could pass for white. Even Sophie's characteristic Fairchild features don't win her a place as an honored guest. Pronouncing her the daughter of the master's brother, who has just run off to France with his black lover, they make her a maid to Old Missy, her putative grandmother. In a world where a slaveholder can literally own his child or half-sister, slavery is good old-fashioned family values.

Much of Sophie's journey is impressively researched, realistic historical fiction. However, *The Freedom Maze* also incorporates mythic elements in Sophie's visionary encounters with the West African Orishas. In addition, Sophie's effort to understand her adventure in terms of the books she has read links *The Freedom Maze* to a long tradition of children's fantasy.

Sherman deftly weaves the layers of the story together so that Sophie's problems in her 1960 life are paralleled in 1860. In both eras, the girl's father has abandoned her to the tyranny of her grandmother. The defensive secrecy she learned in dealing with her bossy grandmother and mother in 1960 help her adapt to life as a literal slave of her ancestor. Indeed, she finds Old Missy warmer toward her than her own grandmother in 1960, until the false accusations of a spoiled "belle" exile Sophie from house servitude to the dangers of the cane fields and the sugar house.

Sherman does not flinch from depicting the cruelties of slavery, even under a relatively "good" master, or the unthinking cruelty of twentieth-century racism. Sophie begins the story certain of her superior place in a world where black and white are clear and separate; by the end of the story, nothing is clear, least of all Sophie's place in the world. And yet in that upheaval, Sophie finds freedom. She returns to 1960 stronger and better equipped to deal with the injustices of her own time, including those within her family. Ultimately, this rich story of bondage and freedom travels toward a hopeful message for young readers seeking the course of their own lives. I recommend it highly for readers aged 11 to adult. ■



*The Ancient Gondorian Tongue.*  
By Damien Bador.

*Arnach, if the above explanation is accepted, is not then related to Arnen. Its origin and source are in that case now lost. It was generally called in Gondor Lossarnach. Loss is Sindarin for "snow", especially fallen and long-lying snow. For what reason this was prefixed to Arnach is unclear. Its upper valleys were renowned for their flowers, and below them there were great orchards, from which at the time of the War of the Ring much of the fruit needed in Minas Tirith still came.*

*Vinyar Tengwar* n° 42 — "Rivers and beacon-hills of Gondor"

The tongues spoken in Gondor and its surrounding regions before the return of Númenóreans to Middle-earth are poorly documented. Beside the tongue spoken by Tal-Elmar's tribe, which has been studied by Roman Rausch,<sup>1</sup> there must have existed at least another one. It is only attested through a few proper names, mostly toponyms. The Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings* (LR) quotes most of them:

*A few were of forgotten origin, and descended doubtless from days before the ships of the Númenóreans sailed the Sea; among these were Umbar, Arnach and Erech; and the mountain-names Eilenach and Rimmon. Forlong was also a name of the same sort.*

To this list we can add *Eilenaer*, the ancient name of Halifirien (UT, III/3, "Cirion and Eorl", n. 51; VT 42, p. 19.), *Erelas*, another beacon-hill of Gondor (VT 42, p. 19), *Lamedon*, a Gondorian region near Erech (*ibid.*, p. 17) and *Adorn*, a tributary of Isen (*ibid.*, p. 8, 15).<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that except for Umbar, all these names are close to the Ered Nimrais.<sup>3</sup> Maybe could we call this tongue "Ancient Nimraic"? No published explanation by Tolkien explains the history of this language. Of course, we know that Isildur is said to have brought the Stone of Erech from Númenor. It might thus seem strange that it bears a name neither Elvish nor Adûnaic. It is however possible that *Erech* was the name of this location before Isildur brought the Stone, or that the name was

given when the local king swore allegiance to Gondor against Sauron (LR, V/2).

In both cases, this name would be closely associated to the Men of the Mountains, whose Shadow Host still dwelt under Dwimorberg at the end of the Third Age. It is likely that other Ancient Gondorian names had the same origin, Umbar excepted. This is only a hypothesis, though, since only *Eilenach* and *Eilenaer* are explicitly related (UT, III/3, “Cirion and Eorl”, n. 51; VT 42, p. 19). We do not know when Ancient Gondorian ceased to be in use, but it might have happened at the same time as the dwindling of the Men of the Mountains, at the beginning of the Third Age. It does not seem likely that Númenóreans were ever interested in that tongue, since no information is available regarding the meaning of the few attested Ancient Gondorian names. Despite this ignorance, it seems that the cohabitation went relatively well, based on the number of original toponyms kept by the Númenóreans. The name *Forlong* even suggests that intermarriage was not unheard of.

Appendix F of LR suggests a link between Dunlendings and the Men of the Mountains. This might suggest that Ancient Gondorian was related to Halethian, the tongue of the People of Haleth in the First Age (PM, p. 314). Indeed, it seems that most Númenórean immigrants did not understand Ancient Gondorian,<sup>4</sup> which means that it was not related to Hadorian (UT, II/2, n. 3; PM, p. 314). Even if the phonology of the Ancient Gondorian corpus does not seem to fit very well with Halethian, both corpus are too small for a salient comparison. Besides, Tolkien mentions that most Ancient Gondorian toponyms had been altered to fit Sindarin phonology, like *Eilenach*, “better spelt *Eilienach*”, as “In true Sindarin *eilen* could only be derived from *\*elyen*, *\*alyen*, and would normally be written *eilien*.” (VT 42, p. 19) Several other names, such as *Erech* (L, n° 297), *Adorn* (VT 42, p. 8, 15) or *Erelas* (VT 42, p. 19) are adapted to Sindarin phonology, though they have no meaning in that tongue. The same goes probably for *Rimmon*, since only *Eilenach* and *Eilenaer* are confirmed to be Pre-Númenórean names (VT 42, p. 19). Unfortunately, we do not know the original forms for these modified names.

Númenóreans also appended Sindarin elements to local names, as in *Lossarnach* (from S. *loss* “snow, especially fallen and long-lying snow”; VT 42, p. 18), *Min-rimmon* (S. *min* “peak”; UT, Index)

and *Belfalas* (S. *falas* “shore”). This last case was quite peculiar, since *bel* is also Sindarin, and probably related to S. *beleg* “large, great, big”. According to Tolkien’s latest (and unfinished) explanation, this element came from Sindar who fled the destruction of Beleriand and settled not far from Dol Amroth (VT 42, p. 16; PE 17, p. 115). No translation of Ancient Gondorian names is provided, so we cannot say much about their meaning. Since Tolkien mentions that both *Eilenach* and *Eilenaer* were noticeable mountains of the Ered Nimrais (*ibid.*, p. 19), it is quite likely that the *eilen(a)*-element meant “mountain”. On the other hand, Tolkien warns, “Suggestions of the historians of Gondor that *arn-* is an element in some pre-Numenorean language meaning ‘rock’ is merely a guess.” (*ibid.*, p. 17) Indeed, Arnach designated the hilly region between Celos and Erui, which was no rockier than other valleys of the Ered Nimrais (*ibid.*). No final explanation is provided for the name of the Stone of Erech, though Tolkien provides some insight into what inspired him for this name.<sup>5</sup>

### Chronological notes

We can find older versions of Ancient Gondorian names in the drafts of *The Lord of the Rings*. However, it is not possible to determine whether Tolkien already considered them Pre-Númenórean. Before being the name of a lord of Gondor, *Forlong* was Gandalf’s name “in the South”, later changed to *Fornold*, and subsequently to *Incánus* (WR, p. 153). In the published book, it became *Incánus*, later explained as a Quenya name (LR, IV/5; UT, IV/2 “The Istari”). Before the order of the Beacon-hills was changed, Drúadan Forest was named *Taur-rimmon*, derived from its main eminence (WR, p. 350). The Havens of Umbar were initially named *Umbor* (WR, p. 243–244).

*Belfalas* was considered as a mixed compound for some time. Tolkien envisioned that *bel-* (also written *Bél*) was a Pre-Númenórean element, meaning “coast” and designating the region of Dor-en-Ernil. *Belfalas* would then have been tautological. This explanation was revised when Tolkien decided that the *Bel-* element was in fact Sindarin (VT 42, p. 15–16). ■

<sup>1</sup> Roman Rausch, “Tal-Elmar and the Drughu tongue”, *Sindanórië*, November 2005, retrieved at:

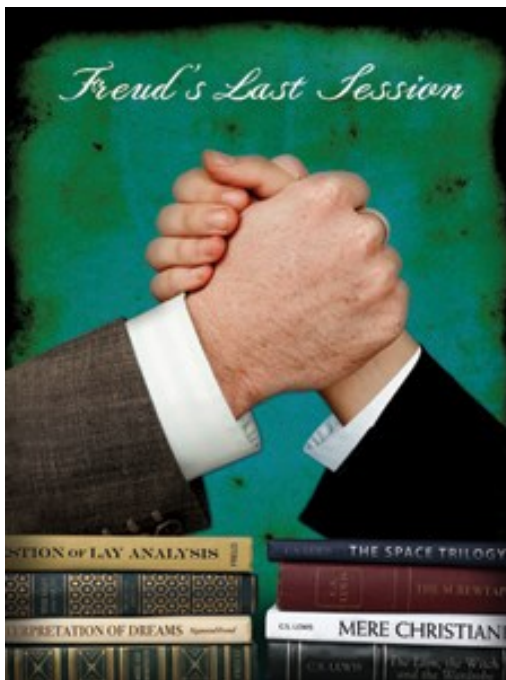


<sup>2</sup> Tolkien also wondered whether the hills of Arnen, on the Eastern side of Anduin, could have a name related to Arnach, but finally decided that this had to be debased Sindarin; VT 42, p. 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> Forlong the Fat was lord of Lossarnach, a Gondorian region bearing a name whose roots were Pre-Númenóreans.

<sup>4</sup> See the rejected text on VT 42, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> In L, n° 297, Tolkien explains that the Elvish root ER “one, single, alone” was probably his immediate source of inspiration, even if he ultimately decided that the name had no Elvish origin. He admits that he knew the name of the Biblical city *Erech*, but denies that it might have influenced his choosing the name for *The Lord of the Rings*.



**Theatre Review:** *Freud's Last Session*, by Mark St. Germain, directed by Stephen Wrentmore, presented by the San Jose Repertory Theatre. Performance at the Hammer Theatre, October 14, 2012. Reviewed by David Bratman.

This is a “what if?” historical play about C.S. Lewis. It was inspired by Armand M. Nicholi’s book *The Question of God* (reviewed in *Mythprint* in May 2002), which contrasts the theological and philosophical views of Lewis and Sigmund Freud. Well, after Austria was annexed by the Nazis in 1938, Freud moved to London, where he lived for

16 months until his death from cancer. What if he and Lewis had met then, and expressed their opposing views in person?

The conceit of this play is that Freud had read something of Lewis’s — it turns out not to matter much what — and asked to meet him. So Lewis comes to visit Freud in his consulting room in London on, as it happens, the very day war against Germany is declared in September 1939. The play covers the extent of Lewis’s visit and takes ninety minutes without intermission. There are no other characters except interjections by announcers and speechmakers when Freud several times turns the radio on briefly to check the news, and a little off-stage barking by Freud’s dog.

It’s up to the playwright and the actors to make the often rarified discussion interesting. St. Germain is a professional dramatist, not a scholar, and he has a good dramatist’s skill with dialogue and dramatic flow as the discussion turns from topic to topic. It feels real without being as boring as reality usually is. And he has read widely in Lewis’s work, and I presume also in Freud’s. Ideas that Lewis expressed in *Mere Christianity*, *Surprised by Joy*, and even an obscure essay on church music show up without any sense that he is just mouthing his books, a flaw that *Shadowlands* does not entirely avoid. The concomitant flaw is that it may not always feel as if it’s Lewis who’s talking.

Lewis and Freud exchange ideas in much the same way as did the Inklings, for whom, as Owen Barfield wrote, “opposition is true friendship.” Within a framework of personal sympathy and understanding — particularly Lewis’s towards the exiled and mortally ill Freud, while Freud is interested in exploring and understanding Lewis’s ideas — they range from quiet conversation (hardly any “small talk,” which Lewis hated, but a few jokes) to stringent accusations. St. Germain’s Lewis is straightforward, and uses none of the real Lewis’s sly debating tricks, like beginning, “When I was an atheist ...” About the existence of God, at which they are at fundamental odds, each angrily accuses the other of living in a personally-motivated denial, until Freud cuts the knot by saying that if Lewis is right, they will someday find out, and if Freud is right, they never will.

That’s only one of several accelerating clashes of ideas that occur throughout the play. None of them is ever resolved — how can they be? Philosophers have disputed them for centuries — and

St. Germain avoids impasse by interrupting almost all of them — with a phone call, a radio announcement, a false alarm of an air raid (which actually happened in real life), or an attack of pain from Freud's cancer. After which the conversation moves on to something else. Only in the direct clash on God, which occurs near the end, do they simply shake hands and agree to disagree.

Lewis's ideas are so securely expressed that it didn't bother me that they're paraphrases and not given in Lewis's distinctive style. The suggestion that he's a bit humble before the famous Dr. Freud is nicely expressed at the beginning, when he rather embarrassedly babbles an apology for the caricature of Freud in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. But that is context-setting, and Freud is in no other sense caricatured here. It's the only moment in the play, apart from his panic at helping Freud after a vicious attack of pain, when Lewis is at any loss for words. Freud brushes the apology off; he's been caricatured many times, and as for Lewis's book, he hasn't read it.

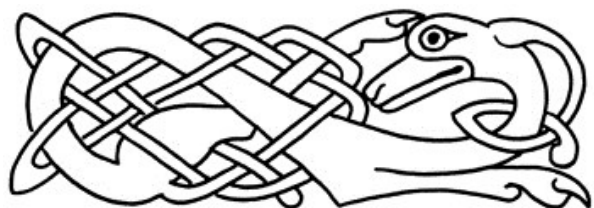
I only felt departed from a believable Lewis at a couple places where Freud gets him to discuss things that even a real psychoanalyst couldn't have gotten Lewis to speak of: his emotional feelings in battle in World War I (in *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis says only that he had felt detached, as if he were reading about it), and his relationship with Mrs. Moore, which even his brother couldn't get him to talk about. St. Germain's Lewis says nothing about this that we don't know for sure, and he does cut off Freud's questioning with a flat refusal to say any more, which the real Lewis would surely have done had he ever gotten that far. Freud speaks less of his exile than of his illness, and of his daughter Anna (who is the person who keeps telephoning him).

There are a few, fortunately only a very few, Americanisms in the text, and only a couple tiny factual errors about Lewis that I caught. (I know less about Freud, but what I do know is presented accurately.) One of these errors may perhaps be classed as an Americanism, for this Lewis introduces himself as "Professor Lewis." By 1939 he was a tenured (in practice) Oxford don, and by American academic custom he would have been a professor, but the British are chancier with that title and Lewis did not then have it. Nor was it yet entirely the custom in Britain to use "Professor" as a title of address, still less to use it of yourself. St.

Germain's Lewis says that during World War I, Mrs. Moore visited him in hospital in France, the last two words of which I believe are not accurate; and he speaks of the Inklings as more of a mutual support group than a forum for clashes of ideas (though, since they were all believers, compared to Freud I suppose they were). Lewis mentions Tolkien in this context, a name which would have been meaningless to the real Freud; this is the only spot in the play where St. Germain indulges in a winking reference to what was to come. (The real Lewis would have been more likely to enthuse to Freud about the unmentioned Barfield.)

Both actors were excellent in their performances. Michael Flynn's German accent as Freud was more secure than Ben Evett's English accent as Lewis, but they both spoke well. Flynn is too physically robust to suggest a mortally-ill 83-year-old man, though he acted the illness convincingly, while Evett is perhaps a bit too slight in figure for the beefy Lewis. But their facial appearances were generally close enough to suggest the characters they played, and the illusion of reality was enhanced by an awesomely detailed set by Kent Dorsey. Freud's study is richly carpeted, full of artifacts (Freud collected statuettes of gods) and packed bookcases, and with a bay door in the back leading to a sunny garden. And yes, there is a couch, which (as I believe was Freud's practice) is in a receded corner of the room. But Lewis is not Freud's patient, and he tells Lewis not to lie on it.

The naïve viewer of this play will learn a bit about Freud's and Lewis's work — Lewis had still published very little at this point, and St. Germain is careful to avoid mugging at the audience when he draws from future writings — and a bit more about their philosophies. What this play will do more thoroughly is introduce viewers to the clash of ideas that these two thinkers represent. ■



Lev Grossman. *The Magicians*. Plume, 2010. 416 pp., \$16.00 (softcover). Reviewed by Alana Joli Abbott.

By all rights, I should have loved *The Magicians*. The story of a boy who grew up loving a clear stand-in for the Chronicles of Narnia and who comes of age at a school for magic, and who then manages to travel to the faux-Narnia as an adult, should have captured me. I should have gotten goosebumps, or, at the very least, nostalgia. In many ways, Grossman has penned an homage to Narnia, with hints of his admiration for Tolkien and other fantasy writers throughout. I should have been exactly the target audience for this novel.

But it is also the story of a group of talented young people who, when they cannot make a way for themselves in the world, succumb to their own vices. They are apathetic, in relationships and friendships that are largely unhealthy, and for much of the novel do very little that can be conceived as admirable. They are not heroes. I did not expect the innocence of the Pevensie children in teen and adult protagonists. I did, however, expect to find characters with good intentions, trying to do the right thing, or, at least, to accomplish something worth accomplishing. Instead, the novel is populated with discontented youths who grow into discontented adults. It is as though to write an adult novel about traveling from the real world to a more fantastic one, Grossman felt he had to make everyone unhappy in the process.

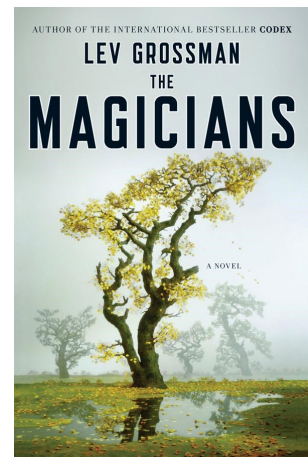
When discussing the novel with friends — because there is a lot of meat in the tale, and there are plenty of things to discuss — I have called it a cross between the Chronicles of Narnia and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Despite the best efforts of my college professor, I cordially hated the Kerouac, for many of the same reasons I could not bring myself to like *The Magicians*. In my interpretation, the characters — in the latter book, all of whom have found magic, and who know it is real — spend the entirety of the book looking for something beyond themselves, something that will bring meaning to their lives. Only one of the characters in *The Magicians* ever manages to realize that meaning is something that you bring to the plate yourself, rather than going out to look for it somewhere else.

The book opens with Quentin Coldwater, a

fan of the Fillory novels (which are only very thinly disguised stand-ins for Narnia), who discovers that there is an unpublished Fillory book — nearly at the same moment he discovers that he has the opportunity to apply for admission to an elite private school for learning magic. That unpublished manuscript that he sees briefly becomes a

seed for the rest of the novel and a clue to the eventual story — Quentin and his peers are called upon to save Fillory, and the title of the unpublished novel is the same as Grossman's book. Quentin is nearly rejected from the academy; he and another applicant who is almost denied admission, the talented Alice, are both accepted and begin their course of study. Their schooling is difficult, but they develop close friendships with upperclassmen, with whom they continue their friendships after leaving school. The group eventually discover a way to access the space between worlds — very much built on the concepts from Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew* — and find their way to Fillory. Grossman plays with the notion of villains in children's books by disguising the true villains of the Fillory novels, and the reveal at the end, about who has been guiding the fate of Fillory, is one of the most satisfying parts of the novel.

But in between, the depressed and aimless characters struggle with reality and have no idea what to do with themselves, rarely considering the idea that they could use their powers to help anyone besides themselves. The single admirable character sacrifices herself in a blaze of glory to save Fillory, but even that victory rings hollow when the magicians return to their real world. That disconnect meant that the characters never really reached me, and subsequently meant I didn't care much about their story — but the continual references to the works of Lewis and Tolkien kept me connected to the book enough to finish. Essentially, the story is not the draw, but seeing how Grossman draws on the works and worlds of his predecessors is engaging enough to have kept me through the last page. It is not enough, however, to give me any desire to pick up this novel's sequel (*The Magician King*). ■



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