Reviews

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Reviews

Abstract


Outlaw Heroes as Liminal Figures of Film and Television. Rebecca A. Umland. Reviewed by Nancy Marie Brown.


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Together with the 2008 expanded version of “On Fairy-stories”, this standalone edition of Tolkien’s landmark essay on language invention now bookends Tolkien’s entire philosophy of “Lang and Lit” (see Monsters 224–40), “aim[ing] to confirm that ‘A Secret Vice’ is an […] indispensable manifesto for the […] art of language invention” (ix), and one that stands coequal with Tolkien’s manifesto on fantasy and fairy-tale literature. The chief value in this volume is the presentation of abundant new primary material—running to dozens of pages, rather than merely a sentence or paragraph or two. A side benefit not to be discounted is the thorough commentary by two knowledgeable editors, in the form of notes, introduction, appendices, and other apparatus.

The book begins with a short foreword, followed by an extensive introduction, comprising more than one-third the length of the whole volume. The essay, “A Secret Vice,” follows, edited anew from the original manuscript and therefore differing quite a bit from the version published more than thirty years ago in The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays. After this, the editors publish for the first time a short draft essay or lecture by Tolkien on phonetic symbolism. Several iterations of manuscript scraps follow, some more valuable than others. The editors then offer a coda on the legacy and reception of Tolkien’s invented languages. Three appendices—a chronology, table of abbreviations, and bibliography—bring up the rear. Before moving into the meat of the matter, let me dispense with a few smaller matters.

The chronology seems strangely selective and arbitrary, running from 1925 through 1933. I imagine it was intended to more narrowly contextualize the “Secret Vice” lecture itself, but why start and end on these particular dates?
Also, since the array of linguistic projects mentioned in the introduction might be dizzying to some readers, it could have been useful to be sure to include these in the chronology. They are in the bibliography at least, but the titles there don’t always correspond to those used by the editors in their commentary, and the dates of publication put them near the end of the list, which might confuse some readers, since the work occurred mostly in the early part of Tolkien’s life. Without an index, the book will be more difficult for scholars, let alone lay readers, to use than it might otherwise have been. And why place the table of abbreviations at the end, rather than at the beginning? But these are mainly small quibbles—apart from the lack of index, which is a major disappointment.

The introduction is a far-ranging orientation on the topic, following, more or less, the same organization in Flieger and Anderson’s introduction to “On Fairy-stories” (9–23). Having said that, I find it a little lengthier than need be on some topics, and sometimes of less than direct relevance to the subject at hand. Others may differ on this. One also gets the feeling this book is not intended for readers who are new to the subject. Terms like phonology, morphology, mutation, and lenition are thrown out without definition. This is fine for me, and for many with an established interest in this subject, but I wonder how carefully the editors considered their target audience. I suppose there is some reason to assume that anyone who would pick up a book about Tolkien’s views on language invention might be adequately prepared; however, many readers buy everything published under the Tolkien impresa. At times, the book reads like they wrote it for a much smaller audience than they might have done.

Perhaps the most significant discovery the editors have made is in tracking down the details of the original presentation of the lecture. Some impressive sleuthing has led them to the Johnson Society of Pembroke College, Oxford, whose minutes reveal not only that the lecture was delivered on 29 November 1931 at 9 o’clock in the evening, but also something of its content and reception. This information had lain forgotten for more than eighty years, and it mirrors the contemporary reports Flieger and Anderson provide for “On Fairy-stories” (161–9). These kinds of discoveries are what keep Tolkien studies fresh and exciting!

Another topic taken up by Fimi and Higgins in their introduction is phonetic aesthetics, an entirely subjective idea. What sounds pleasing to one may be ear-jarring to another, and there is really little to explain it (in spite of some attempts). I think there is a tendency among Tolkien fans to regard his invented languages as phonaesthetically pleasing—a bit of a chicken and egg problem: do we come to like his languages because we like the stories he has built for them, or are the people who like his stories and languages the ones who, for whatever reason, are already similarly aesthetically predisposed? Either way, these ideas are not always approached as objectively as they might
be. For example, in this volume the editors assert that “lalantila,” a Qenya word in the poem, “Narqelion,” meaning “let’s falls,” “conveys a sense of downward motion in the phonetic make-up of its syllable pattern” (xxii). How? What about the phonetic sounds in these syllables conveys downward motion? Why not upward motion? Why motion at all?

In another case of subjective aesthetic bias, certain phonetic combinations are described as “song-like” or “poetic” (xxii), but we must remember that languages considered by many to be ugly or harsh—German, Arabic, or Chinese, to take a few common examples—have substantial bodies of poetry or song themselves, and their own speakers may consider English or Spanish or Finnish uncouth. These are enormously subjective ideas, and one should be careful with them. I don’t want to suggest the editors should have been troubled every single time they wrote about aesthetically pleasing words to add pleasing to Tolkien, but this might have been said at least a few times and should certainly be understood. Some readers may be less alert to this subjectivity. We should keep in mind Tolkien’s strong dislike for French, widely considered among the most beautiful languages in the world, and his affinity for the Germanic, often considered among the harshest.

After from the editors’ introduction, the bulk of the book is the essay/lecture, “A Secret Vice,” Part I of the present volume. As to the title, some readers over the years may have found it a little strange that Christopher Tolkien opted for “A Secret Vice,” the title Tolkien recalled more than thirty years after the lecture, rather than “A Hobby for the Home,” as given in the manuscript (Monsters 3-4). But quoting from the hitherto little-known minutes of the Johnson Society (xxxii–xxxiii), Fimi and Higgins have put this question to rest, showing that Tolkien indeed titled his lecture “A Secret Vice” from its first delivery.

There are many differences between the texts presented by Fimi and Higgins last year and by Christopher Tolkien more than thirty years ago. It would take rather more time and care to compare them than we have available in this review, and moreover, the rewards in doing so are not all equal. Some variations tell us little; others, more. The paragraphs on Tolkien’s Fonwegian language comprise some of the most interesting and substantial of the new primary material (20–22). Unfortunately, without more of it or further notes as yet unpublished, Fonwegian still remains rather mysterious. When was it composed? Does it have any connections to Tolkien’s early mythography? “[S]ome secret documents” pertaining to “the island of Fonway” (20–1) is a phrase immediately redolent of the Lost Tales. I’m not quite sure I buy the editors’ suggestion (50) that Fonway/Fonwegian is related to “cheefongy” and thus to French in Tolkien’s early rebus message to Father Francis Morgan. While he apparently identified French as one of the sources for the language, its
phonology looks more like Frankish to me, at least judging from what little we have of it. Could Fonway even be connected to the name Finwë? If that sounds far-fetched, consider for a moment that Tolkien originally thought about repurposing the name, Fingolfin, for a goblin (120).

Or perhaps Fonwegian is not Tolkien’s invention at all. A blogger calling himself Philologus has proposed that Fonwegian might have been invented by someone else, noting the significance of how Tolkien introduces the material—“[h]ere I will interpose some material—which will save this paper from being too autobiographical” (20)—and how he contrasts the section that follows it—“[f]rom here onwards you must forgive pure egotism” (23). If Fonwegian were Tolkien’s own invention, would that not too have been “pure egotism?” The editors seem certain that Fonwegian is Tolkien’s invention; one of them, Andrew Higgins, has expounded on the subject at greater length in a conference paper. Nelson Goering, who has elsewhere reviewed the present Fimi and Higgins edition, has come down somewhat agnostically on the question. I must do as well, while acknowledging the strength of some of the points in Philologus’s argument. But thanks to Fimi and Higgins, we can all examine the raw material more closely for ourselves.

Although this edition supersedes in almost every way the version of the essay as published previously by Christopher Tolkien, there is one unfortunate loss: Tolkien’s “glossarial commentary” accompanying the poem, “Oîlima Markirya.” This is a series of Qenya words and English glosses keyed to the poem by line number (see Monsters 222–3 and PE 16 75). Parma Eldalamberon reprints all the extant versions of the poem and includes Tolkien’s glossarial comments for two of them. While this is not part of the lecture manuscript itself, and thus its omission can certainly be justified, Christopher Tolkien recognized its value to readers and chose to include it in his edition. It would have been valuable here too. As it is, those who would study the poem’s language more closely still need one or both of the other two works, just as those who would study “Narqelion” must turn to Vinyar Tengwar (Vol. 40, April 1999). No one edition can be all things to all readers, however it may try.

Part II makes available for the first time a draft essay or lecture Tolkien composed on phonetic symbolism. Here Tolkien attempts to formalize the idea that “certain combinations of sounds are more fitted to express certain notions than to express others” (qtd. 64), even though there are “difficulties as soon as we come to discuss actual cases” (qtd. 65). Difficulties arise from the distance from their original, more nearly onomatopoeic forms in unrecorded ancestor languages, and from the predilections and accidents of different racial histories, local preferences, and spheres of culture. Any such theory of phonetic symbolism, furthermore, “can only be used with great caution—and then probably without certain results” (qtd. 67). Nevertheless, even given the
challenges he admits, Tolkien believes such principles of phonetic fitness are real and are worth angling for. He believes the effects were stronger in older languages, becoming even more pronounced the further back you go. But trying to deduce all the side-effects that have hidden them over the millennia and to zero in on the original principles is “like trying to find pure water” (qtd. 68). There is a lot to digest here, and it will take me and others some time to do so. The editors deserve our gratitude for putting the essay before us.

Part III presents scattered manuscript jottings, including notes on invented words and names in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*; alternate versions of the Qenya and Noldorin poems associated with “A Secret Vice;” phonological tables; and other notes and miscellanea relating to the two essays, “A Secret Vice” and the “Essay on Phonetic Symbolism.” A “Coda” follows this, in which the editors provide a good, selective survey of the legacy and reception of Tolkien’s invented languages.

Taken as a whole, this new volume represents a welcome bounty of new material to reckon with and, hopefully, to build on in the years to come. Tolkien’s ideas on “phonetic fitness” were complex, subjective, and sometimes still only half-baked, but they inform every aspect of his fictional myth-making, and for that reason, they deserve closer scrutiny. Dimitra Fimi and Andrew Higgins have made an invaluable start.

—Jason Fisher

**WORKS CONSULTED**


Two books about the “Great War” described by C.S. Lewis in Surprised by Joy were published in 2015. The first reproduces the writings that Barfield and Lewis exchanged during their dispute; the second is a history of the event. Both are first-rate contributions to Inklings studies. Together they provide the primary sources and an engaging presentation of the Barfield and Lewis “Great War.”

The ‘Great War’ of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis reproduces all of the surviving primary documents of the debate that was so important to the development of both men. In this debate, Barfield’s contention was that human imagination contributes to the existence of the material world. This is a part of his system of thought about the evolution of consciousness, an idea that he discovered before studying Anthroposophy. Contrarily, Lewis held to a belief in the world as existing independent of any contributions of human imagination. He subjected all of the ideas shared between them to rigorous rational analysis. All of the far-ranging subjects discussed lead back to the original dispute about the existence and our knowledge of a God.

This is a demanding book. Yet, any determined reader will finish with a sense of the nature of the dispute Lewis described as “The Great War.” However, a strong background in western philosophy will help the more specialized reader to follow the thread of thought that begins with the question of God’s existence, ranges over forms of ontological and epistemological materialism and idealism, and then leads to questions of free will, ethical responsibility, and aesthetics. The exploration digs into the nature of imagination and its possible role in the continuing creation of the world around us.

This Inklings Studies Supplement includes forty pages of introductory essays by the editors that do a great job of providing the context and explaining the ideas contained in the writings. The writings themselves display the intellectual gifts, education, and high spirits of their two young authors as they
argue philosophical points that range across religion, psychology, and philosophy.

Thorson’s *Joy and Poetic Imagination: Understanding C.S. Lewis’s “Great War” with Owen Barfield and its Significance for Lewis’s Conversion and Writings* provides a more accessible treatment of the material than is found in the *Inklings Studies Supplement*. Thorson provides a rigorous but humanizing account of the story, personalities, and ideas involved—humanizing in the sense that Thorson’s presentation of the material in the form of a very good story connects us to Barfield and Lewis as young men. Thorson’s narrative moves from their different backgrounds, to their Oxford friendship of common literary and intellectual interests, including atheism, to Lewis’s verbal and written attack on his friend’s new monotheism and interest in Anthroposophy. Thorson’s writing is an engaging blend of storytelling and explanation of the ideas discussed. He shows how these arguments led Lewis from atheism to monotheism and made Barfield into a more rigorous thinker.

In the interest of disclosure to Barfield fans, the book provides a fair and accurate presentation of the contributions of both Barfield and Lewis. However, the author admits that his presentation weighs in Lewis’s favor because he believes Lewis is right and because he is more interested in him than in Barfield. Therefore, Barfield fans may find that the tone of the book suggests that Lewis’s ideas are the ones that are correct and to be believed. While Barfield is handled respectfully, the author apparently sees him as only an important but mistaken foil to Lewis and as an instrument in his development. Barfield is not shown to be of substantial value or worthy of study because of his merit alone.

With that said, I highly recommend *Joy and Poetic Imagination* to any reader interested in Owen Barfield, C.S. Lewis, or the Inklings. The book will contribute to a reader’s understanding of any of the three. Lewis fans will find that the book contributes to their understanding of Lewis as an intellectual, fleshes out his references to the “Great War,” and shows the intellectual narrative of the first stage in his passage from atheism to monotheism. Also, despite its Lewis-centric bias, it is still one of the better books published about Owen Barfield. The reader gets a sympathetic and accurate treatment of one of the many important moments in Barfield’s intellectual life. This book is appropriate for public libraries, undergraduate work, or independent study. Each chapter ends with “Questions for Further Reflection,” and the author provides very nice diagrams for clarification of ideas throughout the text.

Both of the books in this review are to be recommended. The ‘Great War’ of Owen Barfield and C.S. Lewis will interest the academic reader and is to be commended for bringing together all of the written “Great War” material into one volume. Also, the introductory essays by the editors are very useful for
understanding the writings themselves. *Joy and Poetic Imagination* makes this literary event accessible to the general reader and does a remarkable job of answering questions about what the “Great War” was and showing why it was so important to both men, but especially to Lewis. This reviewer recommends that both books be read together for the reader to see the primary sources and their historical treatment. However, both books can be read alone and are worthy of study on their independent merit.

—Phillip Fitzsimmons


As Rachel McCoppin explained in an online interview following the release of her previous book, *The Hero’s Quest and the Cycles of Nature: An Ecological Interpretation of World Mythology*,

Many nature-dependent cultures conceived of humans as inseparable from the natural world, as equal to other living beings, and believed that time was cyclical, not linear, because death in nature was something that appeared temporary.

Therefore, many myths from nature-dependent cultures focus on the message that death for all living beings is only one moment in an endless, natural cycle—in spring and summer botanical elements thrive, but in fall and winter they wither and die [...]. When myths present humans as also adhering to this natural cycle, the message of the meaning of life and death is arguably a very different message than the ones our contemporary culture offers. (Paul)

Here McCoppin rather clearly articulates what she sees as the central message of this second offering. Unfortunately, the volume itself (like its predecessor) often muddies the water as McCoppin unfolds her argument, and as this review will explain, still caused the reviewer frustration in several respects. On the positive side, the current volume is more focused and tightly argued than the first, with fewer rough spots in the prose and a more inclusive
(yet still incomplete) index. For example, it is missing entries such as "Crete/Minoan culture and myth" as well as important terms such as "botanical hero—definition," and "nature-dependent culture," perhaps because she does not clearly define either in a succinct way within the text.

There are many thematic parallels between her first work and this one. As in her previous volume, she draws examples from a wide variety of cultures, here including the *Rig Veda* and Indo-European myth, Greek traditions such as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, Arthurian legend, the Norse *Volsunga Saga*, *Beowulf*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and African, Native American, Inuit, and Slav myth (among others). She also continues her methodology of attempting to trace the evolution of mythology from Paleolithic and Neolithic times, especially as it relates to the Mother Earth Goddess. Indeed, in many ways, this volume appears to be an expansion of an important thread in her previous work, namely the use of seasonal cycles in mythology. This can be seen in the subtitle of the book, touting it as an “ecological interpretation of world mythology,” (the term “ecological” usually referring to the relations between life and the environment). But it must be noted that the author is particularly focusing on one very narrow part of the ecological message of world mythology, inventing the term “botanical hero” (i.e. relating to plants and their growth cycle) to describe her theoretical construct of the hero “in terms of a personification of nature” (McCoppin 1).

From the beginning of her Preface McCoppin clearly sets her botanical hero as superior to the modern American superhero. She chastises this modern mythic construction (what has been termed the American Monomyth by Jewitt and Lawrence) as a misrepresentation of mythic heroes, claiming it poses a “disservice […] to the integrity of mythology. Myths of the hero are for the education of the audience. The audience of heroic myth must relate to the hero, so that the wisdom the hero gains is embraced by the audience” (2). Such superheroes are not relatable, and hence the mythic message is lost. McCoppin also sets up a strong underlying ecological undertone for the book, proclaiming that “the wisdom audiences can receive from botanical heroes educates them on the necessity of embracing one’s role within nature. Given the current state of environmental destruction found in our times, it is imperative that humanity remembers their tie to the earth” (2).

A Professor of Literature and Humanities in the Department of Liberal Arts and Education at the University of Minnesota—Crookston (where she has received a number of teaching awards), McCoppin demonstrates as clear a passion for both world mythology and ecological issues in this volume as she did in its predecessor. She also similarly brings to this volume both her previous scholarly work on the intersections between mythology and popular culture (e.g. the works of Tim Burton) and her decades of not only teaching mythology,
but experiencing it in a personal way. A case in point is the way that she begins her Introduction, by recounting a personal journey to the Neolithic site Newgrange in Ireland. She makes connections between the womb-like nature of this subterranean structure (in which on the winter solstice a single shaft of light illuminates the back wall) to the seasonal rebirth of agriculture, and suggests that the message of the ceremonial site is that humans, like plants, would be “naturally reborn” (4). Without naming the “Emerging from the Belly of the Whale” archetype in the work of Joseph Campbell, she argues that the numerous examples of heroes descending into underworlds and cave-like structures reflect a central theme of the myths of “nature-dependent cultures,” namely that “mythic archetypes that continually ask heroes to face death in order to be symbolically reborn” derive from “the process of botanical agents within the environment” (4).

It was rather frustrating to the reviewer that nowhere does McCoppin define what she means by “nature-dependent cultures,” only that it is the opposite of “technologically dependent” ones (7). The closest she comes is the statement that many nature-dependent cultures throughout human history “revered the land as sacred because nature affected all aspects of life for human beings,” a rather sweeping generalization (4-5). Examples included range from those that revered a Paleolithic Great Mother or Neolithic Earth Goddess to more modern examples including Native Americans (what she terms “American Indians” [5]) and Aboriginal Australians. In other sweeping generalizations, she offers that “[m]any nature-dependent cultures believed that humans were only one part of the greater natural order, not at all superior to any other natural element” (5), had myths where “divine beings were also called upon to sacrifice themselves for the preservation of the eco-system” (5) and “did not conceive of time in linear terms” (5). She therefore suggests that “[m]any myths coming from nature-dependent cultures teach audiences that there is no ultimate death for humans, as there appears to be no lasting death in nature” (6). McCoppin then posits that in the evolution of a culture from a nature-dependent status (here seemingly synonymous with an agricultural culture) to whatever comes next, a culture’s mythology changes – the “messages of the regenerative value of nature become altered or omitted from their mythology” (7). This, in turn, leads to both a shift in the concept of time from cyclical to linear, and of the hero from being connected to nature to the role of isolated individual. However, she argues that later myths still contain a kernel of this earlier “botanical” worldview, and it is presumably this kernel that she seeks to illuminate in this volume.

Her argument (representing the main chapters of the text) is laid out in four parts. First, she intends to demonstrate how heroes often spend their youth away from their birth home, finding life-changing adventures within nature. Second to her argument is the mythic underworld (taken to be either a literal or
psychological descent), which she confusingly tackles in two parts. First, she considers this archetype when it occurs in the hero's youth, and secondly when it occurs later, after some adventure in the wilderness/nature. In the mythic underworld the botanical hero learns that "the loss of his or her identity and impending demise are necessary parts of nature" (10). This symbolic death (either literally or figuratively) leads to the third part of her hypothesis; she argues that in the willing self-sacrifice of the hero, the audience is forced to accept both the inevitability of death, and the botanical lesson that death is just a part of the grand cycle of life. This leads to a "symbolic resurrection" of the hero, which she connects to the apotheosis of the hero in Campbell's formulation of the hero's journey (10-11). Over the course of the text, McCoppin applies her methodology to heroes from a wide variety of cultures and finds that many potential botanical heroes fall short of her definition. This is interesting, because the failure of the majority of the famous heroes she analyzes to fall within her schema might be seen as negating (if not seriously undermining) the main argument of her book. If nothing else, it would seem that this issue needs to be addressed in the conclusion of the text (as we shall see).

The first chapter, "From Seeds and Sprouts to Branching Out," begins to explain through example what she means by a botanical hero, using characters with some obvious connection with nature/earth (although not necessarily botany). She begins with the Native American tale of Manabozho, son of the North Wind. She tells the myth in detail, including a rather confusing side myth from Alaska. After many pages, she declares Manabozho to be a fully formed botanical hero, having realized that "death in nature is only one small part of an eternal process" and "acknowledged that nature is supreme" (21). However, she herself admits that the most common versions of this tale (those found in the poetry of Henry R. Schoolcraft and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow) are replete with "artistic license" (15), detracting from the strength of the example. Her next case, the Slavic tale of Svyatogar, is even more confusing, and she makes the vague generalization that the source culture was "dependent on nature for survival" (21). She hedges her bets here, noting that "perhaps in his final moments" Svyatogar became a botanical hero, in that we do not know if he truly accepted his death in the desolation of the steppes (23). Thus begins a rather frustrating pattern in the book, whereby McCoppin carefully describes a myth and then after a number of pages comes to the conclusion that the hero she has set up as an example of a botanical hero is actually not a very good example after all.

In one of the more interesting sections of the book (despite its sometimes confusing writing), McCoppin carefully describes the complex relationship between Jason and Medea in Greek mythology, including a rather convincing discussion of Jason as the male consort to Medea's Neolithic Earth
Goddess. After leading the reader down a path of arguing that Jason is a botanical hero, in the end, she admits that he is not, but rather that role is fulfilled by Medea. Her discussion of Beowulf is uneven as well, with parts initially promising to be insightful, for example noting that since Beowulf represents an amalgam of both Christian and pagan influences, he will vacillate between acts that represent a botanical hero and those that oppose such a worldview. However, after a lengthy analysis she comes to no deeper conclusion. Likewise, her analysis of the character of Sigurd in the Icelandic Volsunga Saga is frustrating, with both excellent points and needless repetition. Again, after all this work by the author (and reader), she admits that Sigurd is not a botanical hero. The same can be said of her analysis of various characters in the Arthurian legends, where she finds that Arthur himself is not a botanical hero, nor are his knights, although some come closer than he.

In her second chapter, “Caves and the Underworld,” McCoppin again teases the reader by carefully detailing the heroic exploits of a number of mythic characters, only to conclude in the end that they are not true botanical heroes. Examples in this section include Perseus, Theseus, and Odysseus from Greek mythology (although she offers that Ariadne may achieve this distinction) and, most frustrating of all, Achilles. McCoppin’s analysis of Achilles is insightful and original, but she hesitates in parts, as if she is not confident of her own analysis. Where she does shine in this section is in her argument that, as in the case of Medea, it is often in goddesses and wise women that we come closest to botanical heroism. Perhaps as a vestige of their ties to the earlier Neolithic Earth Goddess, they continuously attempt to educate the male hero as to the ways of nature, but in the end the men turn out to be inattentive students. Refreshingly McCoppin does include some bona fide botanical heroes in this chapter, including the Sumerian hero Gilgamesh and myths from the Zuni Native Americans and the Maya Popul Vuh.

Although the role of “Death and Sacrifice” in defining a true botanical hero has been central to all of the examples discussed thus far in the text, this third chapter is meant to highlight that central aspect of these myths. But since this aspect has already been discussed in prior examples, this chapter is awkwardly short in comparison and the examples given are no less ambiguous than a number of those previously given. For example, the Inuit goddess Sedna is a central example in the discussion of the sacrificed divinity, but it is never decided whether or not she is also a true botanical hero. The same is true of Purusha and Prajapati in the Rig Veda. Perhaps the most interesting part of this chapter is her argument that Christ is a botanical hero (tying his Easter resurrection to seasonal cycles of vegetation). A similar (albeit much shorter) argument is made for the Cherokee Corn Mother and other Native American myths.
In her final chapter, “Natural Apotheosis and the Resurrection of the Botanical Hero,” McCoppin explains how the willing sacrifice of the botanical hero leads to a natural (metaphorically botanical) rebirth. Here she makes the important point that the botanical hero not only accepts death, but embraces life in all its stages. Her first example of a fully formed botanical hero in this chapter is the Buddha, while her second is the Chinese goddess Guan Yin (who is generally accepted by scholars as a Chinese version of the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion). Her lengthy discussion of the Irish hero Cúchulainn and the Greek Herakles are uneven, with some keen insights as well as some confusion and, as in the previous example of Achilles, illuminating a seeming lack of confidence in her own argument. I take slight issue with her analysis of Orpheus, not the least reason being that there are multiple versions of the myth that are barely acknowledged by the author. In addition, I feel that she is overreaching when she states that “Both the Buddha and Orpheus are signaled as enlightened because they sit in the center of the natural cycle of life, seeing time as illusory” (192). As in previous chapters, she ends with a flurry of shorter discussions of definite botanical heroes, in this case representing Siberian, Native American, and Celtic myths. My take away from this section in particular (and the book as a whole) is that most famous Western heroes are not botanical heroes, while copious examples can be found among nonwestern (and less famous Western) examples. However, McCoppin herself comes to no such conclusion, a weakness of the text in my mind, as such a conclusion reveals a great deal about Western cultures and their connections (or lack thereof) to nature.

McCoppin begins her conclusion by summarizing her argument, including what she sees as its central message: botanical heroes “bravely face the process of accepting both physical death and the annihilation of selfhood” (208). The rest of her conclusion is largely in the form of an impassioned environmental lecture, where she returns to her initial condemnation of modern American culture’s adulation of superheroes set apart from the everyman. In her words, the “environmental jeopardy” of our age is due in part to our worship of such superheroes in that it is a symptom of our sin of setting “the individual as superior to the natural world” (210). While it might have posed a tangent the author was not willing to explore, it might have been interesting for her to at least discuss the American Monomyth by name and note that she is certainly not the first person to question its relevance in the 21st century (e.g. Lawrence and Jewitt).

In the end, I came to a similar evaluation of this volume as I had her last. It frustrates in parts, illuminates in others, and will make the reader think deeply about both myths that are familiar to them and those that are not. I recommend it as an interesting review of old stories in a fresh way that points
out their relevance (or lack thereof) to our current ecological state. But I look forward to some other author picking up where McCoppin left off, and analyzing the relative dearth of botanical heroes among our most famous Western myths and reflecting on the important lessons that important (and condemning) realization has for our society.

—Kristine Larsen

WORKS CITED


ONE REASON TO READ FANTASY, as J.R.R. Tolkien noted in his essay “On Fairy-stories,” is our periodic need “to clean our windows; so that the things seen clearly may be freed from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity” (67). The same reasoning applies to reading scholarship from outside our own disciplines and particularly scholarship, like Richard Firth Green’s impressive Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church, that crosses the borders of many disciplines.

Green, a specialist in Middle English literature and emeritus professor at Ohio State University, announces the wide-ranging approach of his study by quoting astrophysicist Carl Sagan’s 1995 book-length essay on the scientific method, The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark, in the epigraph to his introduction: “For many pious Christians, as for the inquisitors of Joan of Arc, this was a distinction without a difference. Fairies were demons, plain and simple” (qtd. 1). To show not only that Sagan was quite right (for Joan’s era), but
how fairies came to be demonized over the course of the Middle Ages, Green cites sermons, theological texts, court testimony, romances (mostly Arthurian), histories, several of Chaucer’s tales, song lyrics, and plays drawn from the literatures of England, Ireland, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, and Iceland. His earliest citation (by date of manuscript, at least) is the Latin epic *Waltharius*, written possibly in ninth-century Switzerland, while one of the latest is a description by an Icelandic contemporary of Shakespeare, the Lutheran bishop of Skálholt, Oddur Einarsson, of precisely, Green says, “the kind of creature I am concerned with in this book.” As the bishop writes, in Green’s translation from the original Latin, “But some [beings], who live in the hills close to men, are more amicable and not so dangerous unless they chance to have been harmed by some kind of injury and provoked to wickedness. They seem, indeed, to be endowed with bodies of incredible subtlety, since they are even thought to enter into mountains and hills. They are invisible to us unless they wish to appear of their own volition” (13).

Green’s twelve-page bibliography of primary sources about these subtle and dangerous beings is a welcome resource to other scholars interested in fairy lore and, on its own, demonstrates the huge—and previously unrecognized—cultural importance of the belief in fairies through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. For Green makes clear that medieval and early modern people did, indeed, believe in fairies. They were “no more irrational than we are,” he notes (70), but fundamental to his approach to the sources he examines in *Elf Queens and Holy Friars*, “is the assumption that the beliefs of those for whom fairies were a living presence were sincerely held and that we should do them the courtesy of taking their beliefs seriously” (2). The medieval church certainly took those beliefs seriously; writes Green, “the official record is the story of an ever-increasing demonization of fairies and infernalization of fairyland throughout the course of the Middle Ages” (2), until “fairy” and “witch” became synonymous, and women were burned at the stake for having dealings with either.

Green uses two comments by C.S. Lewis to frame his examination of the medieval fairy world. His first chapter opens with a challenge concerning “ferlies” or marvels that Lewis had laid down in an unpublished work half a century ago and which Green, presumably, intends *Elf Queens and Holy Friars* to meet. Readers of medieval romance, Lewis asserted, “should deeply study the ferlies as things (in a sense) in the real world,” a clause Green italicizes. Continued Lewis: “As anthropologists we may want to know how belief in them originated. But it will illuminate the literary problem more if we can imagine what it would feel like to witness, or think we had witnessed, or merely to believe in, the things. What it would feel like, and why” (qtd. 11-12).
In his Postscript, Green addresses another of Lewis’s challenges, this being, from The Discarded Image, a contradiction in the ways writers and readers in the Renaissance saw fairies. How, Lewis wondered, could Edmund Spenser compliment Queen Elizabeth I “by identifying her with the Faerie Queene,” and yet “a woman could be burned at Edinburgh in 1576 for ‘repairing with’ the fairies and the ‘Queene of Elfame’” (qtd. 194)? In his answer, Green points to “the cultural prestige of The Canterbury Tales” (197) for making the English elite amused and skeptical about fairies in a way that their Scottish peers were not. The subject also sums up one of Green’s overarching themes: “the way the medieval church’s longstanding campaign against vernacular superstition culminated in the witch hunting of the early modern period” (194).

In the five rich and surprising chapters in between, Green presents and questions the kinds of evidence available for, first, a belief in fairies and, second, the church’s campaign against them. Around the year 1000, for example, according to the penitential of Bishop Burchard of Worms, the church’s only response to a confessed belief in fairies was to scoff: fairies were simply unreal; fasting on bread and water for ten days was penance enough. By the 1200s, however, the church had begun to take fairy belief seriously. “The single most informative source for medieval fairy beliefs,” according to Green (6), is Parisian scholar William of Auvergne’s De Universo, from 1230. There he maps out what would become the church’s orthodox position on fairies for more than three hundred years: “the idea that fairies were really devils” (14). Some priests, as Green shows, remained “reluctant to inquire too closely into the unorthodox beliefs of their flock.” Yet, “all medieval clerics seem to have been prepared to accept that fairy belief was a potentially serious issue” (21). That official attitude, he continues, “seems to have hardened throughout the Middle Ages, and on the eve of the early modern period things were very much darker than they had been earlier” (49). Throughout the period, he argues, there existed a “state of hostility, or at least deep suspicion” (50) between members of the clergy and those of their flock who believed in fairies.

The remaining three chapters each focus on a specific aspect of medieval fairy belief, illuminating the political reasons why the church felt so threatened by the Fair Folk. The church’s attempt to control sex and childbearing is examined through the many conflicting stories of the birth of King Arthur’s wizard, Merlin, and particularly the varying descriptions of his supernatural father. Stories of fairy changelings—ugly, squalling, unhealthy infants placed in the cradle in place of the fat, rosy, smiling children all mothers desire—when read through time, illuminate the church’s efforts to gain control of child rearing. Stories of the afterlives of dead heroes in fairyland, like that of King Arthur in the Isle of Avalon, to which he was spirited by Morgan le Fay, reflect and engage with the church’s developing ideas of purgatory.
Green is up front about the fact that he has no interest in what he calls “the vexed question of fairy taxonomy” (2). No matter their size or nationality, whether they are called elves or fairies, if they are “numinous, social, humanoid creatures who were widely believed to live at the fringes of the human lifeworld and interact intermittently with human beings,” they qualify for his purposes (4). He does not treat with giants (“solitary creatures who inhabited the wilderness” [4]) or household spirits like hobs and their like, but that is as scientific as he gets. He also makes no attempt to trace the origins of fairy lore, except to suggest those origins are not primarily Celtic. “As far as I can see,” he notes matter-of-factly, “just about every region in medieval Europe had its fairy traditions” (5).

He is concerned, instead, with the “political significance of fairyland” (8). There are “clear signs,” he writes, that not only believing in fairies but talking, writing, or singing about them was dangerous: “many of those who participated in the discourse of fairyland in the Middle Ages felt themselves under surveillance” (8). Without an awareness of both the ubiquity of fairy beliefs and their peril, be it spiritual or political, we cannot fully engage with much of medieval literature. As Green writes, “It is important to recognize that our perception of medieval romance itself, and not just its constitutive memes, is historically contingent and has been deeply affected by the changing history of fairies” (71). To us, in the twenty-first century, to call something a fairy tale means we doubt its truth, we find it unreal or unbelievable. To the medieval audience, to meet a fairy—in a tale or in the woods—was to be spiritually challenged.

—Nancy Marie Brown

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In OUTLAW HEROES AS LIMINAL FIGURES OF FILM AND TELEVISION, Rebecca A. Umland examines the origins and development of the liminal outlaw hero in the collective Western imagination. Starting with the errant knight and ending with the Dark Knight, Umland demonstrates how various societies have approached, interpreted, and represented the liminal outlaw hero. Umland divides the book in three main sections, tracing first the origins of the liminal outlaw hero as portrayed through the knight, then the deployment of the liminal outlaw hero in the urban western genre, and finally the liminal outlaw hero as portrayed in modern action films. Ultimately, the liminal outlaw hero speaks to collective cultural concerns about “freedom and order, the law and justice, [and] morality and vengeance” (8).

The first chapter, “The Typology of the True Knight: Sir Thomas Malory’s Lancelot,” opens by detailing the origins and development of knighthood in Western history and imagination. Umland explains, “Most scholars agree that knighthood dates back to a period from the 10th or 11th century, with a warrior of a lower social class who was enlisted to fight for a landowner or nobleman in exchange for material reward” (11). By the twelfth century, knights gained more social power, and the Church began to enlist knights to fight in the Crusades. Out of this historical link between the Church and knights developed the image of the chivalric Christian knight. Of all the typologies of knights, Umland argues, the “true or spiritual knight” has “enjoyed the most lasting influence in the western imagination” (14) and stems from Malory’s Lancelot, who functions as a liminal outlaw hero, seeking justice by negotiating various legal and moral codes and temporarily retreating into inner solitude.

The next chapter, “Chivalry, the Medieval Revival and the Popular Imagination,” looks at the transmission of the errant knight as a liminal outlaw hero and the revival of the King Arthur legend during the “larger Gothic Revival that occurred in the latter half of the 18th century” (24). For example, Sir Walter Scott’s fiction, William Morris’s poetry, and Alfred Tennyson’s Idylls of the King re-envisioned and popularized the chivalric ideal of knighthood, recasting the “characters and events to suit Victorian sensibilities” (29). Beyond celebrating the chivalric ideal, later works, like Mark Twain’s 1889 A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, also mocked the idealized vision of the past. More recently, the Boy Scouts, Disney’s “Fantasyland,” and Excalibur Hotel all demonstrate the contemporary appropriation of Arthurian chivalry and ideals of knighthood. Umland concludes this chapter with an insightful claim that the errant knight
corresponds with the liminal outlaw hero in the west because both “strive to preserve their individuality while serving a social cause,” “both were dependent upon their home and weapons as an integral part of their identity,” and both serve to “mediate between real and ideal” (32).

In “True Knighthood and the Liminal Outlaw Hero in Classic Hollywood Film,” Umland explores how Casablanca and Shane recast the knight for a twentieth-century American audience. Both films, Umland argues, rely on “certain conceptions of knighthood” to negotiate between “community and individual, between codified law and that of the solitary figure who remains outside the law” (33). More significantly, like their predecessor Lancelot, Rick from Casablanca and Shane from Shane remain “free of the fetters of the feminine” or other domestic relationships, allowing them the opportunity to seek after “a higher calling” (53).

Umland’s fourth chapter, “Remediation: The Rise of Television and the Liminal Outlaw Hero,” similarly looks at recent reinterpretations of the chivalric ideal, focusing on how television series approach the liminal outlaw hero. In this chapter, Umland first argues that the Lone Ranger from 1950s series The Lone Ranger and Paladin from Have Gun—Will Travel operate as errant knight figures because they, like Rick, Shane, and Lancelot, remain free from romantic relationships. Second, Umland argues that both the Lone Ranger and Paladin work outside the official law, sometimes even using violence, to achieve what they perceive as true justice.

Beginning the second section of the book, chapter five, “Poetic Justice and the Dirty Harry Franchise (1971-1988)” draws attention to Harry Callahan’s strong sense of poetic justice. Umland suggests that despite each film’s specific cultural context, the franchise has resonated and continues to resonate with a mass audience: “The appeal of the Dirty Harry films rests in their consistent rendering of poetic justice, an enduring and universal concept that transcends the topical issues that precipitate it” (133). Often, Harry’s retribution of justice involves violence, providing a cathartic experience for viewers. For Umland, Harry’s inner sense of justice, his individuality, and his avoidance of relationships align him with the figure of the knight in the American cultural imagination.

Chapter six, “Now cracks a noble heart: Revenge Fantasy in the Death Wish Series (1974-1994)” focuses on the franchise’s protagonist Paul Kersey as a vigilante and liminal hero who hunts and kills violent criminals. Like Dirty Harry, Kersey acts outside of the official codes of law to achieve justice, but, unlike Dirty Harry, who is a cop, Kersey is an ordinary citizen with liberal pacifist leanings. Engaging the arguments of John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, in their The Myth of the American Superhero, that Death Wish provides a mythic solution to the complex problem of crime, Umland suggests that one
primary appeal of the *Death Wish* Series is its representation of ordinary citizens as capable of fighting crime and achieving justice in the real world.

Part three of Umland’s work opens with “Reconciling Opposites in the *Rambo* Franchise (1982-2008),” examining the film’s title character, John Rambo, as a liminal outlaw hero. As a Green Beret, Rambo’s specialized training recalls the “trained professional warrior class” of the “medieval knight” (185). The *Rambo* films depict the tension between using violence as a means of justice and solitude as a means of controlling that violence and preserving community. In this way, Rambo is like the errant knight who acts for the community but must live apart from or outside that community.

The final chapter, “Dark Days and the *Dark Knight* in Gotham City (2005-2012),” looks at Batman, in the recent *Dark Knight* series, as a liminal outlaw hero. Like Rambo, the Dark Knight is a type of professional warrior, trained by the League of Shadows. Batman is like Rambo in other ways too. According to Umland, Rambo and Batman are complex characters who constantly change and grow as they work through trauma and seek after true justice. At the end of the Dark Knight trilogy, Umland concludes, Batman still remains separate from society: “as icon of what it means to live in a lonely space, ever vigilant, attendant on a transcendent ideal of justice and right, guided by his own conviction and singular purpose” (259).

Overall, Umland’s *Outlaw Heroes as Liminal Figures of Film and Television* is a compelling and insightful study. At times, the wide chronological scope of the work, from the tenth century to the twenty-first century, prevents a complete development of the social, political, and cultural concerns that inform each of the iterations of the liminal outlaw figure; yet, Umland still briefly points to these cultural developments and recognizes the other critics who have more fully engaged with these concerns. Ultimately, the wide scope of Umland’s study outweighs any inattention to cultural contexts. Because of this, I strongly recommend Umland’s *Outlaw Heroes as Liminal Figures of Film and Television* to casual readers and scholars interested in medieval romance, westerns, action films, or, more broadly, the Western cultural imagination.

—James M. Cochran

November 22, 2013 was the fiftieth anniversary of C.S. Lewis’s death, and prior to that date, much planning ensued to commemorate the occasion with a permanent memorial stone in Westminster Abbey. The book C.S. Lewis at Poets’ Corner, edited by Michael Ward and Peter S. Williams, collects the memorial service’s proceedings and additional related material to honor Lewis. Ward states, “To be memorialized in Poets’ Corner means you’ve received national recognition for your contribution to the arts. [...] So, for C.S. Lewis to be memorialized in the Abbey is an indication of the respect in which he is held and an acknowledgement of his enduring place in the world of English letters” (Introduction xvi). A day before the memorial service at the Abbey, a Symposium was held on November 21, 2013 to introduce the Westminster commemoration, and other Lewis-related events held around this time are also included in the book.

“Part One—Symposium at St. Margaret’s, Westminster” comprises three essays that are all available as YouTube videos online with links noted in the text. In the Symposium’s panel discussion, William Lane Craig advocates the use of YouTube as “an incredible tool for apologetics and world evangelisation” (36), so it is appropriate that several of the talks in the book are promoted via video as well. Using “the new media” of YouTube and other online tools also aligns with Lewis’s own use of what was new media in his time, namely the radio, to share Christian-based material with others (37). The edited texts from the Symposium have some deviations from the video recordings; for example, the introduction in the video for Alister E. McGrath is deleted from the printed lecture. Some significant differences from the transcript of the panel discussion are rather surprising. For instance, the text opens with Canon Andrew Tremlett introducing the panel, whereas Dr. Michael Ward is the one responsible for introductions according to the video. Later in a section by Ward, a phrase that is spoken by Jeanette Sears is inserted in his text without proper attribution, and further down the page, a comment by Williams is wrongly ascribed to Craig (48). Some words by the speakers are not in the transcription, and other words are rewritten, such as when Williams quotes a phrase “arrows of sunlight” that is printed as “spears of sunlight” (38), presumably a correction of what he had quoted. There is also inconsistent inclusion of speech fillers (“um”); some in the video are not in the text. The last page of the panel’s discussion has information about Don King stated by Ward that was not in the video, and the end of the first paragraph by Dr. John Hall was out of order in the text and actually came at the end of the video (52). While these differences
would not be obvious except to someone listening to the video while reading the transcription, the editorial decisions and attribution errors at the beginning and later in the text are peculiar considering the quality of the book otherwise.

Part Two details the memorial service at Westminster Abbey. The Order of Service is available as a PDF online (with a link in a footnote), and some portions of the service and musical selections are also on YouTube. A photograph of Lewis and another of dedicating the Abbey memorial stone are in the printed material. Part Three offers five brief “Reflections on the Westminster Commemorations,” with the most unusual being the “Mystery Worshipper” by Acton Bell, a pseudonym for a person who visits and reviews church services online at Ship-of-Fools.com. Several of the reflections praised the sermon by Lord Williams that is printed in the memorial service section, and both of these book parts help share the Westminster experience with those unable to attend.

Part Four includes six lectures from the Cambridge Conference that took place on November 23, 2013 about “‘Lewis as Critic,’ marking his professional career in the field of English Literature” (Preface xii). As usual with his contributions, the lecture “The Abolition of Man: From Literary Criticism to Prophetic Resistance” by Malcolm Guite is compelling and insightful regarding the “paradoxical and contradictory nature; [...] prophetic character [...]”; and [...] serious problems and cultural blind-spots” in Lewis’s The Abolition of Man (153). A particularly striking essay is Stephen Logan’s “The Soul of C.S. Lewis,” which concludes with the thoughtful poem “Westminster Abbey Unvisited” honoring the fiftieth anniversary of Lewis’s death (184-85). Logan explains the intriguing concept of “the grammar of emotion” as the “intermediate between the ego and the soul” (169), and he explores Lewis’s experience with grief, insecurity, and intellectualism.

Unlike Part Four’s wider range, Part Five only has two essays categorized as Oxford Addresses. The first lecture “God and the Platonic Host” by William Lane Craig was given to the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society on November 19, 2013, a few days before the Westminster events. Craig’s talk is also available on YouTube, and the video has approximately twenty minutes of questions and discussion at the end that are not in the essay. While the transcription has inconsistencies with some words missing from the video and other words rewritten, there are useful footnotes of explanatory material not in the video. The second essay and final one in the book, “Remembering C.S. Lewis” by Walter Hooper, was presented on November 23, 2013 at a “celebratory event and dinner” that hosted two other speakers (Williams and McGrath) whose talks were omitted from the book due to being “already well represented” (Preface xii). Apparently, the editors did not see it necessary or perhaps feasible to document everything in this book related to the
commemorative events for Lewis. In the end, it is a strong, diverse collection to better inform those not present at the events as well as to help maintain the memories for those who were able to participate in the celebration of Lewis’s life and impact.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin


This posthumous collection of Clyde Kilby’s Inklings essays brings to life the gentle, genial man who created that Rivendell in Illinois, the Wade Collection at Wheaton College. Kilby chronicles his meetings with the Oxford writers, most especially J.R.R. Tolkien, and explores the ideas in their works. In twenty-seven chapters (twelve on Lewis, seven on Tolkien, and one brief chapter each on Charles Williams and Dorothy L. Sayers), he offers lucid and occasionally luminescent insights into their prose. Kilby views them through an evangelical Christian lens, with the benevolent vision of a teetotal tobacco-free hobbit.

Kilby long loomed large in lore of the Inklings. He was the guest of honor at Mythcon I in 1970, and shared the Mythopoeic Society’s award for Inklings studies with Mary McDermott Shideler in 1971. “Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams” was the lead paper in the *Mythcon I Proceedings* published in 1971 (3-4). The “Mythcon Report” describes him as “a good friend of Tolkien and the only American to have read parts of [then unpublished] *The Silmarillion*” (59).

In 1965, he founded the Marion E. Wade Center and served as its first director. In 1980, I proposed writing a long profile of him for *Mythlore*. He replied, saying that his wife Martha suggested he demur and write his own autobiography. In the event, he did not, but *A Well of Wonder* gives a good sense of the man.

After reading C.S. Lewis’s “The Case For Christianity” in 1943, the first part of the later-published *Mere Christianity*, Kilby subsequently read all of Lewis’s works, designed a popular course around the mythopoetic works of
Lewis and Tolkien, and began a long-term correspondence with Tolkien that lasted until the author’s death in 1973. Kilby’s original correspondence with Lewis became the core of a collection of papers on first Lewis and eventually a set of six connected British authors who knew or influenced him: Tolkien, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield, G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy L. Sayers, and George MacDonald. This grew into the Marion E. Wade Center’s formidable collection of manuscripts, first editions, theses, interviews, books, dissertations, and twenty-three volumes of Major W.H. “Warnie” Lewis’s fascinating diaries as well as his letters and his eleven volumes of “The Lewis Papers,” family journals and correspondence going back to 1850.

According to *Well of Wonder*, at the time of Kilby’s death, the Wade’s riches included more than 1,100 original letters to, from, and about Lewis and 850 pages of his manuscripts, including the “Boxen” stories, written and illustrated during his boyhood. Thirty letters to and from Tolkien, twenty letters to, from, and about MacDonald, and 850 letters from, about, and to Williams add to the hoard (303). The Wade also has become the home of such artifacts as the Lewis family wardrobe carved by Lewis’s grandfather, famous from *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*; illustrator Pauline Baynes’s original map of Narnia; Tolkien’s and Lewis’s desks; Sayers’s spectacles; and many other items.

Lewis comes first and foremost in this book. One hundred and thirty-three of its 348 pages are given over to commentaries on his works, from “Logic and Fantasy: The World of C.S. Lewis” to “Till We Have Faces.” In chapter two, “My first (and only) visit with Mr. Lewis,” Kilby recalls meeting Lewis in his Magdalen College, Oxford, rooms in the summer of 1953. Lewis “laughed about idea of the scholar’s life as a sedentary one, saying that the physical labor of pulling big folios from the shelves of the Bodleian was all the exercise he needed” (17). They spoke of Palestine, St. Paul, the recently deceased C.E.M. Joad, and the truths to be found in fiction. When Kilby asked Lewis about the relationship between art and Christianity, the author replied that “the same relation existed between Christianity and art as between Christianity and carpentry.” “Both from reading his books and talking with him, I get the impression that he is far more fearful than most of us of the subtle sin of pride and tries in every way to escape it: thus his reticence to give an autograph” (18-19).

Chapter seven, “On Music, Worship, and the Spiritual Life,” is especially rich. Lewis’s early musical guides were his boyhood friend Arthur Greeves and Mrs. W.T. (Louisa Smyth) Kirkpatrick, his tutor’s wife. Both were pianists and introduced him to Chopin, Grieg, Beethoven, and Schubert and later to the symphonies of Sibelius and Beethoven. Lewis’s older sibling Warnie had a gramophone, and the two brothers and friends usually spent Sunday evenings listening, often attending live performances as well.
Kilby’s obituary of Lewis, “Everyman’s Theologian,” originally published in the January 1964 issue of Christianity Today, begins with this summation:

The death of Clive Staples Lewis on November 22, 1963, removed from the world one of the most lucid, winsome, and powerful writers on Christianity. We have reason to thank God that such a man was raised up in our time to become, as Chad Walsh has put it, the apostle to the skeptics. (43)

After praising The Screwtape Letters, Mere Christianity, The Problem of Pain, and the Ransom trilogy, Kilby concludes:

Like Albert Camus, Lewis believed death to be the most significant fact in the interpretation of life; yet, unlike Camus, he was convinced that man is primarily made for eternity. [...] But perhaps the most persistent theme in Lewis is that of man’s longing for Joy. He calls this longing ‘the inconsolable secret’ that inhabits the soul of every man, a desire that no natural happiness can ever satisfy. It is a lifelong pointer toward heaven, a nostalgia to cross empty spaces and be joined to the true reality from which we now feel cut off. The culmination of this longing in the rhapsodic joy of heaven is, for me at least, the strongest single element in Lewis. In one way or another, it hovers over nearly every one of his books and suggests that Lewis’s apocalyptic vision is perhaps more real than that of anyone since St. John on Patmos. (49-50)

In chapter eight, “Into the Land of Imagination,” Kilby writes that

[N]o one has ever been able to explain the imaginative process, no doubt because successful creativity is as large as life itself. Lewis give a fragmentary sketch of how The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, one of his Narnian stories, came to be. It began, as his stories generally did, with a mental image, this time of ‘a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood.’ This initial bit lodged in Lewis’s imagination when he was about sixteen, long before he became a Christian. Years later, he says, he sat down to see if he could make a story out of it. Had he not in the meantime given himself completely to God, it would probably have been a good story as such, but now ‘Aslan came bounding into it.’ Not only that, but ‘Aslan pulled the whole story together.’ Would the story become a Christian tract? Amazingly, in this book Lewis tied narrative interest and profound theology together, and we experience not only a multitude of details related to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but also note that he died on a stone table representing the laws of Moses. (110)
This reader wishes that Kilby had given more attention to Lewis’s poetry than the five brief quotations he includes, but quibbling here seems akin to grumbling over a fine, filling feast that lacks a dessert of Turkish Delight.

Of Warnie, Kilby writes: “I visited with Major Lewis many times. He has told me very, very graciously, that I am a member of the family. I’ve been in the bedroom where Lewis died, up in his regular bedroom. In his last days, he couldn’t go upstairs; he had heart trouble and various other serious ailments. I’d sometimes sit with Major Lewis at night and watch television.” (299)

The last time I saw Clyde Kilby, I said, “You know, if one could have a favorite Inkling, mine would be Warnie.” He beamed. “I’m so glad to hear you say that,” he said, smiling. “He was such a wonderful man.”

J.R.R. Tolkien entered Kilby’s literary consciousness later. While Kilby “does mention reading The Hobbit at an early date [...] he does not mention Tolkien until in a 1962 class on Romantic poetry,” according to editor Loren Wilkinson, who adds: “I had the distinct impression he didn’t know [Tolkien’s Middle-earth novels] well yet, and they were a very minor part of the evening discussion group in 1964. The books were not well-known and were still hard to find.” (149).

Kilby met Tolkien on Sept. 1, 1964. Their friendship began then. Dr. Robert Havard, the Lewis and Tolkien family physician and an essential Inkling because he owned an automobile and drove, told Kilby to simply go over to Tolkien’s home and ring the bell. Tolkien answered and escorted Kilby into his office, “remodeled from a one-car garage [...] pretty well filled up with a desk, a couple of chairs, and bookcases along the walls. [...] [He] was a most genial man with a steady twinkle in his eye and a great curiosity—the sort of person one instinctively likes.” The two discussed Tolkien’s friendship with Lewis, the financial strictures brought about by his retirement from Pembroke College in Oxford in 1959, and the popularity of the Middle-earth tales: “I think he was pleased” (177-78). To Kilby’s surprise, Tolkien invited him to return three days later. “I was by no means unhappy to find him doing nearly all the talking. [...] Tolkien, himself a Catholic, told anti-Catholic anecdotes [some gleaned from Lewis] with a glow of humor and an utter lack of antagonism” (179). Kilby observed that Tolkien was always neatly dressed from necktie to shoes. One of his favorite suits was a herringbone with which he wore a green corduroy vest. [...] His conversation bore about it a steady parturiency, like the sort of grass that sends out runners to root in every direction. One felt that his words could not pour out fast enough—there was a sense of the galloping on of all his ideas at once, along with kaleidoscope facial changes. (191)
Kilby attempted to purchase Tolkien’s manuscripts for Wheaton, but Marquette University in Milwaukee had beaten him to the punch in 1957. But the author did invite Kilby back to Oxford to assist in the completion of The Silmarillion in the summer of 1966. “Two things immediately impressed me. One was that The Silmarillion would never be completed. The other was the size of my own task. How could I in a few weeks read, analyze, and give a critical judgement on such a mammoth literary effort. Actually I spent one entire day on one six-page section of the manuscript” (186).

Kilby was exasperated by Tolkien’s dithering over the pirated Ace paperback editions of The Lord of the Rings, even though he acknowledged that those bootlegged books made his work popular. He understandably disliked Barbara Remington’s cover illustrations for the first Bantam editions, and complained about W.H. Auden’s condescending remarks about his home décor in a Saturday Evening Post feature story. All this distracted him from the task at hand. So did concerns about his wife Edith’s health.

Tolkien’s dilatory and unmethological approach to The Silmarillion troubled Kilby. “It would be satisfying to record that I always found him busy at his writing, but that is not true. I did find him sometimes working at his Elvish languages, an activity that seemed endlessly interesting to him. I think he did a good deal of reading of detective stories and science fiction” (193). In the long run, “My negative criticism of the manuscript became more or less a footnote to the positive. Afterward I remembered that Lewis also believed that Tolkien could be influenced only by encouragement” (201). (Kilby also failed to obtain an introduction to Tolkien’s modern English translation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Pearl, to publisher Rayner Unwin’s dismay. The works had been complete for twenty years.)

Kilby’s portraits of everyday domestic life in the Tolkien household interleaved with ecological and literary opinions are an especial joy.

On our first visit there, he took me round the garden and gave me the history of nearly every plant, and even the grass. He said he had loved trees since childhood and pointed out the trees that he had himself planted. […] Tolkien wrote a letter to the editor of the London Sunday Telegraph [on Sept. 19, 1973] taking exception to what he thought was an unfair allusion to his attitude toward trees. […] He spoke of birds, saying that a certain blackbird was now tame enough to eat out of Mrs. Tolkien’s hand. (192-93)

Tolkien and his wife spoke often and affectionately about their children and grandchildren. Kilby, who was childless, wrote: “I have a great yen for children. I have no children, but I love children. Some people say that it’s because I’m not around them long enough” (321). Kilby observed, though, that
while he “got the impression that [Tolkien] expected to live to a very old age [...] both he and Mrs. Tolkien were then in need of some attention from physicians. Both complained of rheumatism, which they felt was accentuated by wet weather. [...] One day the idea arose of taking a walk over some path he and Lewis had once covered, but he said it was no longer possible for him to walk far.” (194)

Comparing Tolkien to Niggle, Kilby concludes:

I might remark on one apparent difference between Niggle and his counterpart. Niggle was up on his ladder at work when the Inspector in black came to take him away. My own impression was that Tolkien, despite protestations to the contrary, had greatly slowed down and perhaps seldom climbed the ladder clear to the top at all. I hope I am wrong. And even if I am right, might not a Niggle at seventy-four deserve a recess from the heights? (203)

After 1966, Kilby never saw Tolkien again. Kilby invited him to come to Wheaton College, but Tolkien demurred, as he had declined Marquette’s offer ten years earlier. “In December 1967, he wrote me that his work had ‘proceeded hardly at all’ for a year. ‘I have been so distracted by business and family affairs (interlocked), and my dear wife’s health, which doesn’t improve [...] and I can no longer burn so much of the wrong end of the candle as I used to’” (207).

In February 1973, Kilby wrote again invited Tolkien to come to Wheaton. “He answered that he was unable to accept. ‘My age alone is I think sufficient reason but I have been in medical hands lately and have had some severe advice with regard to my future conduct.’ Of his life between then and September 2, when the Inspector in black came for him, I know little” (208.)

Kilby’s six-page summation of Charles Williams reveals understanding, if not admiration, for that Inkling. He states that Descent into Hell is “perhaps the best of Williams’s novels. It most clearly reveals how Williams welds events and Christian meaning together” (263).

Kilby gives the four remaining Wade authors less time and space. He praises Sayers’s theological essays, noting “that both Dorothy Sayers and G.K. Chesterton, each an effective Christian apologist, were famous as detective-story writers, where a sense of paradox is essential” (268). Kilby is succinct in his reading recommendations on Chesterton (“I would unquestionably say Orthodoxy and The Everlasting Man were good beginnings. At least they were for me.”), Barfield (“I would certainly suggest History in English Words”), and MacDonald (“There is no question, the children’s books, any of them. They’re all so beautiful, especially The Princess and the Goblin. In my opinion, that’s the best book he wrote. At the Back of the North Wind is his second-best book”) (323).
A Well of Wonder belongs on every Inklings scholar’s shelf. As a recovering reporter, this reviewer especially admires Kilby’s interviewing skills, the foremost of which was simply being a good listener. His puissant perusals of the published, and, in the case of his 1966 summer of working with Tolkien on The Silmarillion, the unpublished works of the authors he writes about here are what make this book so extraordinarily valuable.

In A Well of Wonder, years of Inklings study and first-hand experiences come together in a rich and robust scholarly chronicle. Clyde Kilby enjoyed friendships and conversations that Mythlore readers can only dream about. Reading this book, those dreams come true.

—Mike Foster

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WORKS CITED

BRIEFLY NOTED


FASTITOCALON CONTINUES ITS SERIES OF SPECIAL ISSUES with this on fantasy and animals. The lead essay by Friedhelm Schneidewind orients us to the territory to be covered: archetypal animals familiar from folk tales, like the fox, wolf, lion,
and bear; companion animals, like cats, dogs, and horses; wild animals like rats, crows, owls, serpents, and spiders; all as they appear across many genres of literature and popular culture. The following article by Anja Höing usefully orients us to theory surrounding the concept of the talking animal in story.

Of particular interest to Mythlore readers will be several articles on animals in fantasy works frequently discussed in these pages. Steve Gronert Ellerhoff explores western concepts of shamanism as depicted in Richard Adams’s Watership Down in “The Rabbit Who Saw It All Coming,” critiquing Joseph Campbell and touching on issues of cultural appropriation. Victoria Holtz Wodzak considers C.S. Lewis’s engagement with animals, and how Talking Beasts “complicate the categories” tidily drawn up in the medieval imagination (110), in “On Pilgrimage Among Beasts: Narnia, and the Beasts Who Teach.”

Two articles relate to Tolkien. Łukasz Neubauer’s “The Eagle is Not Coming: Some Remarks on the Absence of the News-Bearing Eagle in Peter Jackson’s Adaptation of The Lord of the Rings” examines the ways in which the director’s treatment of the Eagles lessens the eucatastrophic impact of their appearances. Timo Lothman’s “The Ravaging and Hoard-Guarding Antagonist: A Cognitive Approach to Dragon Conceptualizations in Beowulf and Selected Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien” is a dense study of the metaphorical meanings of dragons and their actions.

Other essays discuss queer readings of foxes, animals in Kafka’s works, Andrzej Sapkowski’s Witcher series (by frequent Mythlore reviewer Kristine Larsen), animals in Icelandic, Mesopotamian, and Talmudic tales, and the manga series Inuyasha.

Hither Shore collects the papers from the annual Tolkien Seminar of the German Tolkien Society, which this year focused on Tolkien’s seminal text “On Fairy-stories.” As usual, some essays are in German and some in English, with summaries provided in the other language (some of which make me deeply regret that I read no German). As with Fastitocalon, most of the contributions are from European authors, and in fact there is some overlap in authors between these two issues.

Stand-out articles, to my mind, include Renée Vink’s “Human-stories or Human Stories?”, on death and immortality in tales told of humans by elves, Gerald Hynes on “Theorists of Sub-creation Before Tolkien’s On Fairy-stories,” and Jonathan Nauman’s “Chesterton’s Chalk,” on creativity and the commonplace in Tolkien and Chesterton. Marguerite Mouton closely compares “On Fairy-stories” and Smith of Wootton Major, and Thomas Fornet-Ponse meditates on Faërie, Utopia, and escapism. For those interested in the tools of digital humanities, Claudio Antonio Testi’s paper is replete with charts of word-pairs
in the text and their implications. Łukasz Neubauer’s essay on the Eagles complements his essay in Fastitocalon, above. Thomas Honegger’s contribution is perhaps the first lengthy consideration I’ve seen of “Sellic Spell,” Tolkien’s retelling of the Beowulf epic as fairy-tale verse.

The hefty volume closes with a series of book reviews, but before that section, editor Honegger pens a “Reviewer’s Complaint” about rampant provincialism in literature searches and carelessness in editing. Here in the United States we have a tendency to overlook European scholarship, and the reverse is true as well; but with the research tools we now have available—databases, indexes, reference works, online journals—this neglect is becoming less and less excusable. Our field has long since reached a level of maturity where amateurish work should be beneath all of us. I will take the opportunity here to plug the Mythlore Index Plus, which can be downloaded from the Society’s website at mythsoc.org, and to recommend my article, “Bibliographic Resources for Literature Searches on J.R.R. Tolkien.” I hope to see other scholars follow this lead and create similar guides—and to see teachers and scholars use these guides in the classroom and in their own research!

—Janet Brennan Croft

WORKS CITED

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About the Reviewers

Nancy Marie Brown is the author of Song of the Vikings: Snorri and the Making of Norse Myths, winner of the 2013 Mythopoeic Society Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies. An independent scholar in Old Norse and Viking Studies, she holds an M.A. in Comparative Literature from Penn State University.

James M. Cochran is a doctoral student and Teacher of Record in the English Department at Baylor University. His research centers on twentieth-century and contemporary American literature, religion, and culture. His work has appeared in Label Me Latina/o, Word and Text, the Journal of South Texas English Studies, and forthcoming in Religion and the Arts.


Phillip Fitzsimmons is the Reference and Digitization Librarian at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, Oklahoma. He earned his M.L.I.S. from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. He is the administrator of the SWOSU Digital Commons. His research interests include the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, Owen Barfield, the Inklings, and digital services for academic libraries with an emphasis on institutional repository administration and library reference services.

Mike Foster was a member of the English faculty at Illinois Central College in East Peoria from 1971 until his retirement in 2005. His first specialty is English fantasy literature, especially J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and J.M. Barrie, and he has published widely in this area. He taught courses in both fantasy literature (1974-2005) and in Special Studies, J.R.R. Tolkien (1978-2005 and continued at
Bradley University in Peoria in 2006 and 2008). He is a founding member of the Far Westfarthing smial, a fantasy book discussion group whose special meeting guests have included Tom Shippey, Douglas A. Anderson, Jan and Jeff Long, and David Emerson. Foster’s second specialty is popular music, especially of the era of the Beatles, but reaching back into the blues, folk, and jazz traditions, especially music with a link to Illinois. He explores this interest weekly with A Fine Kettle of Fish, an “eclectic cover band” septet aged 24 to 76 based in Washburn, Illinois, now in its fifty-fourth year. He has written and performed spoof versions of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* based on the music of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and Motown hits. He lives with his wife Jo and elder daughter Martha in a 1936 farmhouse southwest of Metamora, Illinois.

**Kristine Larsen** is an Astronomy Professor at Central Connecticut State University. She is the author of *Cosmology 101* and *Stephen Hawking: A Biography* and co-editor of *The Mythological Dimensions of Doctor Who* and *The Mythological Dimensions of Neil Gaiman*. Her Tolkien scholarship has been published in a variety of books, as well as *Tolkien Studies*, *Mallorn*, *Silver Leaves*, and *Amon Hen*.

**Tiffany Brooke Martin** has a PhD in English and the Teaching of English from Idaho State University. Her dissertation was on Owen Barfield’s writings with a focus on fantasy and fiction, and she is an adviser and editor for the Owen Barfield Literary Estate. Tiffany currently works in communications for Roquette.