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In Memoriam: Pauline Baynes

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Abstract

A brief appreciation of artist Pauline Baynes's life and work, particularly her illustrations for the works of Tolkien and Lewis, with reminiscences of the authors' friendship with her.

Additional Keywords

Baynes, Pauline; Baynes, Pauline—Personal reminiscences



IN MEMORIAM: PAULINE BAYNES

WAYNE G. HAMMOND
AND CHRISTINA SCULL

PAULINE BAYNES, who died on August 1, 2008 at the age of eighty-five, was one of the most talented artists of the twentieth century. She was also shy and reserved, allowing the quality of her work to speak for itself, and as a result hers was never a household name. But by her hand, the invented worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis first came visually to life. Some readers, indeed, have said that for them, her pictures *were* Middle-earth, they *were* the land of Narnia.

Tolkien himself said that her art for *Farmer Giles of Ham* (1949), drawn in a medieval style which became one of her specialties, “reduced my text to a commentary on the drawings.” With that, she became his illustrator of choice, providing art also for *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book* (1962) and *Smith of Wootton Major* (1967), the wraparound cover for the Puffin Books *Hobbit* (1961), a triptych view of Middle-earth for the slipcase of a deluxe *Lord of the Rings* (1964), and two famous posters, *A Map of Middle-earth* and *There and Back Again* (1970, 1971, the latter based on *The Hobbit*). Pauline and her husband Fritz Gasch became good friends of Tolkien and his wife, and saw them socially from time to time. She remained a popular Tolkien artist long after the author’s death, with both poster and book versions of his *Bilbo’s Last Song* (1974, 1990), more cover art for Tolkien’s works, and new pictures added to earlier art in the Tolkien collection *Poems and Stories* (1980).

Through Tolkien, her art became known to C.S. Lewis, and she was engaged to illustrate his seven chronicles of Narnia, beginning with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in 1950. Like Tolkien, Lewis found that his artistic collaborator added more than mere pictures to his texts. Although he was privately critical of some aspects of her work, such as her depiction of lions, he admitted that the popularity of the Narnia stories was due in no small part to their illustrations. When the final book of the series, *The Last Battle* (1956), won the Carnegie Medal for excellence in children’s literature and Lewis received congratulations from his illustrator, he replied: “Is it not rather ‘our’ Medal?” Throughout her career, Pauline Baynes was best known as the “Narnia artist”; and while she was sorry that this overshadowed her many other accomplishments, she continued her association with the Narnia books for more than half a century, producing (among much else) color wraparound covers for

the Puffin paperbacks (1959–65), the poster *Map of Narnia and the Surrounding Countries* (1972), and new color plates and stunning panoramic endpapers (showing the coming of spring to Narnia after the long winter) for a special edition of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1991). For the Lewis centenary in 1998, she returned to her original line art for the Narnia books and gave it washes of color.

Tolkien and Lewis were, in fact, only two of a very large number of authors illustrated by Pauline Baynes. Notable books with her art include *A Dictionary of Chivalry* by Grant Uden (1968), for which she won the Kate Greenaway Medal, and *A Companion to World Mythology* by Richard Barber (1979), each with hundreds of pictures meticulously researched and drawn. For editions of the *Arabian Nights* and works such as *The Enchanted Horse* by Rosemary Harris (1981), Middle Eastern styles were handled with equal skill. Another interest was manuscript illumination, which is displayed in *The Song of the Three Holy Children* (1986), to name only one example. And above all else, there was the influence of nature, shown in all its glory in works such as *All Things Bright and Beautiful* by Cecil Frances Alexander (1986) and on the iconic cover of *Watership Down* by Richard Adams (Puffin Books, 1973).

In 1989, Christina, as chairman of the committee organizing the Tolkien Centenary Conference in Oxford, wrote to Pauline Baynes to invite her to attend. In the event, Pauline was unable to do so, but she lent some of her art to the conference exhibition, and it was our pleasure to visit her in November 1991 to make a selection. She warned us not to expect fine cooking, and not to dress up, as her home in Surrey was “squalid”; but Pauline’s meals never disappointed, and her cottage was of the storybook variety. And of course we were able to look at original Pauline Baynes paintings and drawings, each of which has the quality of magic. This was the first of many visits we made to Pauline, and of a long correspondence. We were privileged to count her as a friend. Pauline thought that we were mad to be interested in her work, to praise it so highly, to collect it and display it in our house, and to document its publication. “Why would you want to talk about me?” she would ask. “I want to talk about you.” She had a keen interest in people, and was unfailingly generous and kind. But she was also pleased to have genuine admirers, and amused whenever we came upon one of her old commissions that she had forgotten. She continued to work until her death, most recently on interpretations of Aesop’s fables and the Koran.

