Missives to Mythlore

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Margaret Esmonde, Merion Station, PA
Dear Glen,

As a newly adopted member of the Mythopoeic Society, I would like to express my deep enjoyment of Mythlore 9 and the two complimentary issues of Mythprint. I read every single word of each at one sitting. Isolated as I am here in the East from any of the Society's branches, I rarely meet anyone who shares a mutual interest in mythopoeic literature, so the letters and articles in your magazine are the next best thing.

As a faithful member, I was sorry to learn of the demise of THE TOLKIEN SOCIETY and its journal, but the disappointment was lessened considerably when I saw the quality of your excellent publications. I heartily agree with Joy Chant's statement "that Mythprint impressed me as being so much better than any other comparable magazine I have ever read."

My doctorate was in the field of Renaissance Literature and naturally I was familiar with the brilliant Renaissance scholarship of C.S. Lewis, again being totally unaware of his fantasy trilogy. When all my studying was over and I had my degree, I found that reading was as much a necessity as breathing for me, so I went out to find some books to read strictly for pleasure. As I browsed, I saw the familiar but unexpected names of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien in the section of the bookstore marked "Science Fiction." Lewis, I knew, had interests outside the field of Renaissance Literature, but I couldn't believe that it was the same J.R.R. Tolkien. But, sure enough, it was one and the same. Out of past loyalty I bought the two trilogies and have been ever since enthralled.

I must confess that LOTR holds first place in my esteem--its impact was inestimable. It was the doorway to a whole realm of mythopoeic literature, which I consider the best and truest kind of writing, and I am glad to be able to find a medium for the exchange of ideas about this literature in your society.

One last comment if you have the patience to read on. I have just read an interesting but annoying article on C.S. Lewis in an Anglo-American journal, Children's Literature in Education, No. 10 (March 1973) published by APS Publications, 150 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011, entitled "The problem of C.S. Lewis," by a British writer named David Holbrook. A brief excerpt or two may give some idea of his Freudian approach to the Chronicles of Narnia:

Taking clues from the philosopher of surrealism, Gaston Bachelard, from psychoanalysis, and from my work on Sylvia Plath, I believe that C.S Lewis' Narnia stories have their origins in the fact of his life that his mother dies when he was a baby. I believe that this left him a psychic hunger--to be nurtured by the mother he lost. It left him... needing to find his way into the other world where the mother was: the world of death.

He continues:

How do we get there? Since we came into the world through mother's body, we could go back there, through her body: and the Wardrobe is her body (or, to be more specific, her birth passage). But also symbolized is the need to be seen as ourselves as we seek to find ourselves in the mother's eyes: in the front of the wardrobe is a mirror, and the path to 'other worlds' is through reflecting pools. Going 'through the mirror'... is going through the mother's eyes into the other world where the dead mother is, she who can help one to BE. This is, of course, a quest for birth. (pp. 6-7)

Holbrook remarks that "what is so sad about the Narnia stories is the fact that their benign and creative elements are too marred by hate," and concludes his article by stating:

Most children probably read the stories as spooky yarns, and probably little harm is done. But under cover of his apparent religious intentions and his mask of benignity C.S.
Lewis conveys to his readers a powerful unconscious message: that the world is full of malignancy; that one must be continually alert; that aggression is glorious, exciting and fully justified; that tenderness, cowardice and reticence are weak; that one may easily be assured as to one's righteousness; that magic works--and these messages are sometimes conveyed with undertones of a sadistic-sexual kind, or with powerful phantasies rooted in hate. This must surely raise doubts as to the wisdom of exposing children to them, from a writer of such clarity, persuasiveness and power?

Some of your branches might find this article an interesting topic for discussion.

I am enclosing on a separate sheet my order for some back issues as well as my subscription renewal.

---

Harry Warner, Jr., Hagerstown, MD

Dear Glen:

I'm grimly working my way back through stacks of fanzines, attempting to write some comments even on those which I have been stacking there for months and months. I'll never catch up because I can barely make progress under the best circumstances and I fall back dramatically when something goes wrong. But Frodo and his friends would have undertaken the quest even if it had turned out to be a failure, and it is better to travel than to arrive and so on and so forth.

Anyway, I'm sorry about the silence which the ninth Mythlore heard from Hagerstown. It was an entertaining issue, even for a person like me who hasn't read everything by the three authors it emphasizes and hasn't re-read any of their books often enough to comprehend the finer points of scholarship. I can imagine the enormous event that arrival of an issue must represent for the fan who is really all-out in his knowledge and enthusiasm for Tolkien, Lewis and Williams.

The long leadoff article was particularly well done. There must have been a great temptation to incarnate the basic idea of this article in a brief form which wouldn't have taken much work and still would have amused the readers. I'm staggered by the amount of time that must have gone into this full-sized carrying out of the notion, and by the genuine insights that are included behind the superficialities of the futuristic costume that the essay wears. The only real difficulty I found in it was the discouragement I sensed when I found quite a few sentences showing influence of the stilted style of today's scholarly essaying. I had this wistful hope that just possibly after a few thousand more years such bad writing habits might be mislaid by people who write literary criticism.

Diana Paxson on the Grail legend was lucid and she deserves particular commendation for refraining from Freudian musings on the symbolism of the cup and lance tradition.

On the other hand, I'm too ignorant of the Narnia books to have been the ideal reader for Joe Christopher's article. Besides, I think he is factually inaccurate on various matters: the Tempest is not laid entirely in the woods, and I don't believe he can find much drama by Ibsen to justify the reference to plural plays of a symbolic nature by this writer. And surely the frequency with which the woods appear in old English drama and verse is not a phenomenon peculiar to one nation's literature, but an outgrowth of the Arcadia mania that swept almost all aristocratic-type writers before it throughout Europe for two or three centuries.

I don't know if you put the issue together with such intent, but I found the lighter tone of the items from the centerfold on to be the right thing in the right place, good relaxation after some heavy going, the dessert after the nutritious part of the meal. Bernie Zuber's article, for instance, held my interest throughout, and I kept thinking how useful for some future fan historian this kind of compact summary of a convention event will be. I suppose it's bad taste to think of such a thing, but I keep wondering whenever I see a reference to The Silmarillion if arrangements have been made with Tolkien's family or closest friends to get the manuscript to a safe place immediately, if the writer should die before it reaches an editor's hands. Even famous authors have sometimes received terrible posthumous treatment by heirs and executors because of grief or greed or gen-
eral stupidity.

Samuel Long's letter fascinated me. It would never have occurred to me that modern meteorological deductions could be made from the weather clues in the Tolkien books. I'm sure I'm too ignorant of weather science to venture such a thought, but wouldn't geography in sections of Middle Earth beyond the area described in detail have considerable effects on the climate of the area in which the story occurs?

Joy Chant sounds like a fascinating person. If I were a Mythopoeic Society member, I don't think I'd rest until I'd promoted a variation on TAFF designed to bring important pros to the United States for visits to local units, and obviously this would be the one imported before all the others.

I'm glad to see Ed Meskys cheerful and active in the middle of his misfortune. His little column is one of the finest things in this particular issue.

The art work is beyond criticism, for the most part. I liked in particular the sense of space and light that Diana somehow got into the comparatively small sketch on page 11, the untypical Tim Kirk heading for Bernie's column, and the exquisitely detailed and rounded creative mouse on page 23 by James Shull. Annette Harper's cover is splendid except for one thing that I really shouldn't mention because it's more a personal preference than an artistic principle. I don't like hobbits when they're portrayed with childlike faces, and this one doesn't look to be more than twelve or thirteen years old. But I suppose that the old association of small people with young people is hard to break.

The reproduction is exceptionally clean and clear. I think I'd be more comfortable if I didn't have to shift visual gears to accommodate different typefaces so often, but I wouldn't wish on anyone the task of typing off on just his own typewriter all the thousands of words contained in this issue, so I won't even mention that matter.

Janet B. Fisher, Kerhonkson, NY

Dear Glen:

Enclosed is my long-overdue check, to cover 4 issues of Mythlore and 12 issues of Mythprint. Having been a member of the Tolkien Society since the days of Dick Plotz and having continued under the enduring enchantment of LotR (which I reread annually and have read aloud to two daughters), I think I would be lost without some contact with persons of similar interests!

I have at various times thought of possible articles etc., and most recently, the thought of doing something on animals in Tolkien occurred to me. This came after my last re-reading, when it struck me for the first time that no dogs, cats or pets as such figure in the books. In fact, horses, eagles, wolves, and spiders seem to be the only members of the animal kingdom given any prominence, with very few exceptions (the thrush and the ravens in The Hobbit and Beorn in his bear shape, most notably--I discount Smaug and Shelob, who are properly classified as monsters).

The horse is, of course, traditionally a noble and much loved and honored animal, but he is about the only admirable animal Tolkien uses. Eagles are usually considered "kings of birds," but they are also very cruel. Wolves Tolkien uses as most people regard them--fierce and wilde, treacherous and bloodthirsty. Likewise spiders, which arouse loathing and fear in many (in spite of Charlotte's Web!). It would seem, in keeping with the gentle, homely nature of hobbits, that there should also be a place for some of the smaller and more lovable creatures of the animal world--and yet they are conspicuous by their absence. An interesting subject to consider, but probably difficult to develop because of the scarcity of material.

Now, re James Allen's "Genesis" in Mythlore 9 (I won't attempt the alien cognomen): an ingenious approach but one that contains some highly suspect assumptions and claims for which no real proof is put forth--just as his futuristic writer complains of in Tolkien! E.g. (1) In speaking of the "golden trees", he states ..."the assumption that their continued growth depended on the power of the ring, and when the ring was destroyed they slowly began to die away" (Note 12). Note 12 gives 2 page references, neither of which contains any specific reference to the mallorns--only to the land of Lorien itself and the Three Elven Rings. Where is there any place in the books where the fading of these trees is mentioned? (2) Concerning Faramir's warning not to drink of any
stream flowing from Imlad Morgul, he states......
"this taboo was forgotten......twice Sam fills their
bottles from water flowing within Mordor." Within
Mordor, yes, but not from Imlad Morgul--the latter
is outside of Mordor itself; this point about the water
is clearly made by Tolkien. (3) In his discussion of
the Aragorn tale, Allen's alien comments, "some
late redactor, perhaps Tolkien himself, has inserted
references to the supposed earlier visit to Rohan.
What is his basis for this statement? Indeed, in other
references to insertions, additions, and interpolations,
many of which are clearly Tolkien's, it seems he is asserting that they are not part of the
"original tale" simply to bolster his theory. Even an
imaginary "mouthpiece" should support his premise with more concrete evidence! (Also his reference to
Theoden's not recognizing Aragorn is pretty weak and
no real evidence at all--after all, Theoden is old at
the time of the story, and it has been distinctly point­
et out also that Aragorn has changed a great deal
from his years of wandering.) Pretty thin, too, is his
"plausible" picture of Aragorn and his "probable" i­
dentity, since it is stated quite definitely by Elrond in
Book II at the Council (p. 260): "He is Aragorn son of
Arathorn," said Elrond, "and he is descended through
many fathers from Isildur Elendil's son of Minas Ithil
...."

(4) I also resented his rather summary dismissal
of Legolas, Gimli, Merry, and Pippin as "unimportant". Legolas and Gimli would be important even if
regarded solely as the lone representatives of Elf­
and Dwarf-kind in the Fellowship. (It would seem that
The Hobbit did not survive into this hypothetical future
age, hence no knowledge of Gimli as a link between the
two works--and Legolas, too, as a matter of fact--
and maybe this explains some of the other "assump­
tions".) The role of the two hobbits in rousing Tree­
beard is also brushed aside carelessly; yet Gandalf
himself speaks of the significance of Merry and Pippin's entry into Fangorn and their meeting with Tree­
beard--and surely Treebeard's unhasty nature is re­
peatedly emphasized. He himself calls the hobbits' tale "a bundle of news and no mistake." Allen's
chronicler also seems to be quite devoid of a sense of
humor; these four "minor" characters do much to
enliven and spark the entire work, especially the hob­
bbits.

All in all, the 'Genesis' article, while quite interest­
ing, exhaustively documented and footnoted, seems
to illustrate the peril of taking an entrenched position.
One then has to defend it, and make all deviations fit
somehow, anyhow!

P.S. Sincere compliments to A. Harper for the cover
portrait of Aragorn--just about the first illustration
I've seen which lives up (almost!) to my own mental
image!

Paul M. Lloyd, Secane, PA

Dear Glen,

With further reference to the article by Burt
Randolph, "On the Singular Incompetence of the Valar," in the Tolkien Journal, No. 9 (Summer 1968), I be­
lieve that David Ring's letter in "The Shire Post" in No. 15 gives an excellent answer to the points raised
by Randolph. I have no criticism to make of his let­
ter, but rather wish to offer some further comments.

Part of Randolph's puzzlement over the behavior
of the Valar may be not only due to his misinterpret­
ation of the nature of their guardianship, but also to
a misunderstanding of the basic nature of the Valar.
Must we assume, for example, that the Valar are
creatures sufficiently like humans as to be judged in
human terms? Is it not entirely possible that they are
a different order of beings altogether and that their
guardianship of Middle Earth is only one of their du­
ties?

Perhaps a metaphor may make my idea clear.
Let us suppose that a beekeeper has charge of several
beehives. If the bees could think, they would interpret
the world entirely in terms of their own welfare.
From their point of view, the beekeeper exists solely
for their benefit, to protect them and keep them from
harm. Let us suppose further that a spiteful neighbor
destroys a hive and harms a number of bees, without
the knowledge of the beekeeper. He does not think to
blame his neighbor, one of his own kind, until, per­
haps, further degradations cause him to suspect a human agent and he finally calls the police to protect his property.

Of course, this kind of comparison can only be taken so far. The speaking creatures of Middle Earth are intelligent, rational beings, not mindless insects, and there is no reason to think that the Valar "keep" Middle-earth as a sort of game preserve. Nevertheless, if they are as far beyond humanity in development as man is beyond bees, we may just possibly imagine why the Valar fail to act against Morgoth. He was, after all, one of their own kind. They would probably have found it difficult to imagine that he was indeed capable of evil. In addition, they may have had all sorts of other purposes to accomplish besides being guardians of Middle Earth.

Finally, their concept of guardianship is undoubtedly on a very different moral plane from that of a bee-keeper, as David Ring has pointed out so well.

IN TRIBUTE (continuing from page14.)

by Nancy-Lou Patterson

A clear view of man--of other beings--is essential to the vision of truth, and the epic is full of understanding of all intelligent species of Middle-earth; and if the characters in the epic can learn to understand each other, and each other's characteristics of species and their needs and problems, then what indeed is the matter with us, today? We are faced with as many differences among peoples, but at least we are all men. Should we not be able to find it easier than did the peoples of Middle-earth? And on a more personal level, the friendships are deep and meaningful, loyal and lasting, everything a friendship should be. Who can fail to be moved by the joy of Aragorn and Eomer upon their meeting in battle upon the Pelennor Fields? Who would not smile at the camaraderie of Merry and Pippin, their jokes and spirited conversation, as they buoy each other up in strange places and in dark moments? Who would not laugh as Gimli chides the hobbits for 'truancy' as the five companions meet at last in Isengard? Who would not understand the friendship which grows between Legolas and Gimli, representatives of two widely disparate species, once they have come to understand and appreciate each other during their long travels and adventures with the Company? And, finally, who could possibly find anything corny or unreal about the devotion of Frodo and Sam, a gut-level relationship, based far more on the necessity of physical and psychologica survival than on the nicety on which we tend to pride ourselves? Tolkien's narrative is so vivid and compelling that we find ourselves side by side with the characters, sharing in their trials and in their joys; and our understanding is widely broadened, almost without our realization of the fact.

But perhaps one of the subtlest, and yet most charming, of the visions we see thus clearly is that of nature itself--of water and wind, sun, moon and stars, trees, flowers, mountains, meadows, birds and beasts, all that we tend to take the most for granted. Not only are Tolkien's descriptions vivid and beautiful, but the reverence for all these things expressed by his characters open our eyes to them in a way we have forgotten existed. I have seen this at work in myself during the last six years since reading the trilogy for the first time: of trees that I have passed by daily for years, I now study with interest and wonder the contours of the branches and the shape and color of the leaves; I gaze into the hearts of flowers; I have rediscovered my once intense interest in the stars; and this past summer one day I was rewarded by the sight of a type of butterfly, in the yard of a city dormitory, which I had sought in vain for years as a child in a country town. I might never have noticed it at all; but I did, and my surprise was such that I started after it in wonder, as I would have done fifteen years ago, heedless of time or place. I owe this increasing awareness to Tolkien's works; I remember how I once let so many things go past me without notice.

Wordsworth said that the older man becomes, the farther he goes from his Creator and from the fresh observations of the wonder of creation. Tolkien has shown us that we need not lose this intimacy with creation. Our eyes can be opened anew, as they were in our youth, and it is possible, even desirable, for maturity and a sense of wonder to go hand in hand. His fantasy is proof of that; in his works, the two supposed opposites blend and grow together as one quality in his characters. So should they do for the reader.

Tolkien is already sorely missed, not only as a writer whose beloved works will no longer be augmented, but as a man whom one feels one knows personally through his works, and as a living link between the Primary World in which we live and the Secondary World of his subcreation, as if he were come from Middle-earth himself, or as if he had the long life of Elrond himself, or as if he had the long life of Elrond that spanned the ages and brought the far distant past close to us through his living memory. His Middle-earth is indeed more real than many of the things that surround us here, and in a very real sense he is still with us and will continue to be as long as his works are read and remembered, which promises to be a very long time indeed--perhaps even as long as the life of Elrond.