Reviews

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Abstract


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Mandalas by Tolkien


Clyde S. Kilby commented in his book on Tolkien and the Silmarillion that "The greatest defect of The Lord of the Rings... is that it is too short" and that Tolkien, had he had enough lives, would have written thirty or forty thousand pages." It is beginning to look, with the publication of The Shaping of Middle-Earth, the fourth volume of The History of Middle-Earth to be published after The Silmarillion and Unfinished Tales, and with the promise of yet another volume in the series, to be entitled The Lost Road and Other Writings, that he may yet reach his goal.

Happily, this volume was worth waiting for. Christopher Tolkien, his father's indefatigable editor, says in the Preface, "This book brings the 'History of Middle-earth' to some time in the 1930s... This is the stage at which my father had arrived when The Hobbit was written." (p. 1) The volume is divided into seven parts: "Prose Fragments Following the Lost Tales," which is a collection of "brief prose texts including Túrin and the Exiles of Gondolin, begins the sequence. Second is 'The Earliest Silmarillion,' which presents the 'Sketch of the mythology with special reference to the Children of Húrin,' and contains extensive passages with full details of the additions and variations of the texts.

"The Quenta," subtitled in part, "the brief History of the Noldoli or Gaëlmes, drawn from the Book of Lost Tales," is third, and at 142 pages forms a good one-third of the volume, a rich narrative which the editor calls "an important element in his conception of 'The Silmarillion' properly so called." (p.76) This long segment contains a gem of great power in "the second prophecy of Mandos" (p. 165):

When the world is old and the powers grow weary, then Morgoth shall come back through the Door out of the Timeless Night: and he shall destroy the Sun and the Moon, but Eärendil shall come upon him as a white flame and drive him from the airs. Then shall the last battle be gathered on the fields of Valinor.

If you want to know more, you will have to read the book.

The fourth entry is especially exciting because of its absolute novelty: "The First 'Silmarillion' Map," which Tolkien "made on a sheet of examination paper from the University of Leeds," (p. 219). This elegant example of the author-artist's refined calligraphy and powerful visual imagination is reproduced in full colour and accompanied by a text supplied by the editor, analyzing the place names and their history in Tolkien's usage of them.

The fifth section, "The Ambarkanta," which the editor quite rightly calls a work "of cardinal interest" (p. 235), is devoted to "The Shape of the World." Glen Goodknight, in discussing this section with me in a letter, says it is devoted to "metageography or metaphysical geography" (2 November 1986). The interest of this segment is considerable, not only in the rather brief text, which begins, "About all the World are the... Walls of the World. They are as ice and glass and steel, being above all imagination of the Children of Earth cold, transparent, and hard" (p. 235), but also in five remarkable drawings. These images, which are literally Mandalas (Models of the cosmos), resemble more than anything else I know, certain illustrations from The Red Book (yes, you read it correctly!) which C.G. Jung wrote, illustrated, and exquisitely calligraphed for his own use (circa 1921) to record his "inner experiences" (portions of this are reproduced in C.G. Jung, Word and Image, 1979). These drawings by Tolkien are all circular in form, and represent his effort to shape a world, indeed, a cosmos. The Ambarkanta -- a work of but six pages — and its five compelling Mandalas, are accompanied by an extensive analysis of what Christopher Tolkien calls "this elegant universe" (p. 241) in which the editor discusses in detail his father's elaborate cosmological concepts.

The sixth section of this volume is "The Earliest Annals of Valinor," a chronology which precedes its mature expression as The Annals of Amon: the editor calls it "a major new work... which contains some of the finest prose in all the Matter of the Elder Days." (p. 263) Seventh and last are "The Earliest Annals of Beleriand." Both are accompanied by brief versions in Old English.

Certainly, the greatest defect of The History of Middle-Earth will not be that it is too short.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

There and Blech Again


Wonderful. But unfortunately, these artists, and the often choose to be selective with given details when and, more importantly, lack of knowledge of the written materials on which the pictures are based. Artists often choose to be selective with given details when they wish to present a specific point of view. This is not the same, however, as omission of detail from ignorance of the material. Roger Garland must be guilty of the latter. His Minas Tirith (September) completely ignores the Rannas Echor and Mount Mindolluin. His Minas Morgul (June) portrays the tower set amid snow-covered (1) mountains. In this painting, the tower is so hastily sketched that it has all the believability of a cartoon. Garland’s paintings are so ill-conceived that it makes one guess that his three current contributions were rejects from his own Tolkien calendar of 1984. In these paintings he steers completely away from figures. But judging by the figures in his previous calendar, we must thank heavens for small favors.

Alan Lee’s two contributions (Minas Tirith, April and Barad-dur, July) have already seen print in his book Castles. Both pictures have been severely cropped from their original form to fit the format of this calendar whereupon they promptly lose their focus and scope. The choice of broad watercolor wash for the picture of the Dark Tower is poor, and it works against the feelings Barad-dur should evoke. The tower seems more dream-like and blearly than brooding, threatening, or terrifying.

Ted Nasmith chooses to portray hobbits in three of his four paintings—and hobbits have never looked more unattractive as they do in his work. Or as old. In Shelob (November), Sam attacks the great spider. But by the looks of him, he ought to be playing shuffleboard at the Bywater Retirement Village. The composition of this painting is nearly identical to Roger Garland’s rendition of the same scene in the 1984 calendar. The question is why Ballantine would allow this scene to be repeated after such a short span of time and in an almost identical way.

Nasmith’s other paintings fare no better. His The Balrog (August) is a sterile, unevocative treatment of a scene that fairly shrieks with dramatic tension. Much of this painting disappears into darkness. This could be considered a blessing in disguise when one realizes just how static the composition is. Nasmith’s primary interest here seems to be how much he can make the Balrog resemble the monster in Alien.

John Hove’s paintings are also tired and uninspired. His Lieutenant of the Tower of Barad-dur (October) is hackneyed barbarian-style illustration. The layout of the picture demands comparison with a bookplate. The only thing missing is “Ex Libris Conan”.

A disturbing thread that runs throughout the calendar is the inability of each of these artists to emotionally engage the viewer. The pictures are cool and dispassionate. This neutrality keeps the viewer at arm’s length, effectively shutting him out of involvement in the scene. This is hardly what pictures of Middle-earth should do. The job of the illustrator is to draw the viewer into a world, not slam the door in his face.

J.R.R. Tolkien’s world has never been emptier of the things that make it so exciting—the characters. Middle-earth has been neutron-bombed in this calendar. The people have been eliminated, but the buildings are still standing. A full five illustrations have no figures in them at all—nearly half the calendar! And what of the figures that do appear? One barely distinguishable Balrog. One Bakshi-esque Black Rider. One wizard’s backside. One Mouth of Sauron. A handful of Orcs. And Hobbits, hobbits, hobbits. No man, no woman, no dwarf, no elf. Just hobbits. Hobbits are fine, but they are only a part of Tolkien’s creation.

Many of the paintings bear dates that are a little surprising for a 1987 calendar: 1982, 1983, 1984. On would think that a publisher would insist on new, fresh artwork—no more than two years old. These older paintings seem to indicate that, to Ballantine, this calendar is now nothing more than an afterthought. It is as if they simply asked the artists if they had any old Tolkien illustrations kicking around in their closets. Let us hope that this trend does not continue.

This is rake-'em-over-the-coals criticism, to be sure, but if the history of disappointing Tolkien calendars is to be changed, the Tolkien devotees must be more demanding. There is hope for the Tolkien calendar, but Ballantine must be willing to take some chances, as well as do some serious artist-searching. ‘Outstanding,’ ‘exciting,’ and ’glorious’ are adjec-tives that may one day be truly applicable to the Tolkien calendar. But future artists must be steeped in the experience of Middle-earth. They must know the world they shape with paint, and know it well. They must approach Tolkien’s wonderful creation even as he did: With vision and talent. With passion and beauty.
Weather of the Consciousness

In the recent plethora of paperback anthologies reprinted from previous anthologies of essays by C.S. Lewis, Present Concerns stands out like a little star newly arisen above the horizon. It consists of nineteen essays which have: 1) never before been anthologized; or 2) never been here printed; or 3) never before been listed in a bibliography by Walter Hooper. It is not surprising under these circumstances that this latest yield of almost a quarter-century of Fr. Hooper's industry should be a very slim volume indeed. It is, however, remarkable that works which were missed or passed over by many previous winnowings should contain so much nourishment.

The essays in Present Concerns date from August 1940 to September 1962. They parallel with exactitude Lewis' better-known works of the same period, charting in miniature his preoccupations, his crochets, and even his illuminations, during the last two decades of his life. Many of them contain strong echoes of words as well as ideas which Lewis used elsewhere. In his most trenchant and familiar voice he declares: "I am a writer a decade later that "Until quite lately—I think I may claim some tiny share in breaking down the tradition—it was unlikely you would meet your female colleagues anywhere except at the Board of the Faculty or at a full dress dinner party" ("Interim report" [1956], p. 97). Not surprisingly 1956 was the same year that he published Till We Have Faces which he dedicated to Joy Davidman, whom he married in April, 1956. He had obviously learned a lot from her.

In one of the most charming of the essays, "Hedonics" (1945), he comments upon the difference between the specific tasks and significant events of one's life and what he calls the weather of the consciousness" (p. 53: his italics)—"the actual quality of life as we live it... from moment to moment." Because these works are firmly enshrined in their own period—wartime, postwar, at Oxford, at Cambridge, before Joy, after Joy—they comprise a miniature biography of concerns, incidental as well as life-long. He is annoyed, for instance, by the meaningless parades and other military paraphernalia of serving in the Home Guard, having already been wounded in the trenches of World War I, and worries that consolation to similar insanities may linger after World War II is over. Such particularities are a severe test of a writer's universality.

This test is in fact passed very well—there are here some diamonds of Lewisian thought, notably a brief and exquisite homily, entitled "Three Kinds of Men" (1943)—although its first sentence actually states that "There are three kinds of people in the world"—and a powerful work which should perhaps have formed the title of the book: "On Living in an Atomic Age" (1948). These works were found pasted into a book Lewis wrote, by a man who brought them to Hooper for identification, and were as new to him as they are to us. The essay on the Atomic Age is quite simply the best thing I have ever read on the subject, and is, indeed, one of the finest theological essays Lewis ever wrote.

So far I have discussed essays which reinforce, reiterate, or expand the Lewis canon. There are also two which clarify, in a striking way, the sources of two elements in That Hideous Strength. The first clarification is of Lewis' actual attitude to F. Anstey's Vice Versa. The essay is "My First School" (1943), which contains a shocking and explicit condemnation of Wynyard School, called "Belsen" in Lewis' autobiography Surprised by Joy. It is usually said (accurately) that Lewis named the bear Bultitude in That Hideous Strength after a character in Vice Versa. It is usually added that Lewis found this a very funny book. It is not in fact a very funny book, and Lewis says specifically in "My First School" that "My first preparatory school was one of the last survivals of the kind depicted in Vice Versa" (p. 23). This essay depicts that school as very unfunny indeed, with its "bellowing and grimmacing old man with his cane, his threats, and his ogleish facetiousness, the inky walls, [and] the stinking shed which served both as a latrine and as a store for our play-boxes" (p. 25). In fact, Vice Versa contains a number of elements which can only be described as sadistic. It has recently (1985) been republished by Puffin Classics, and will be of interest to people who want to know the background of Lewis' life and ideas in certain aspects, but pace the blurb which calls it "The wonderfully funny novel of a father and son who change places," I would not recommend it to any child.

The second clarification is found in the essay "Equality" to which I have already referred. There,
With the following sentence at the beginning of the chapter devoted to "1950" the return of wonder (or in the context of this book, the arrival of wonder) is heralded: "In the morning mail, he got letters from America, one of them a new correspondent; Joy Davidman Gresham." (p. 305) The pattern of Lewis' life, which emerges from a reading of its entirety, begins with a childhood and youth of extraordinary depths and heights. The depths were produced by the death of his mother from cancer when he was nine and she was 45, and by a subsequent succession of cruel schools, characterized by sadism, physical deprivation, and disordered sexuality, accompanied by the gradual loss of his childhood's oppressive religious faith.

The heights were produced by a series of intimations of immortality, breakthroughs of transcendence, and by the extraordinarily bookish late adolescence in which the lonely exile (he was born in Ireland and his happiest holidays were spent there until they became medically impossible) read most of the literature of the Western past, not as a detached critic, but as a passionate participant.

By choosing to begin Lewis' life story where he began his career as a Fellow of Magdalen College, Griffin puts even Lewis' first publication — Spirits in Bondage (1919) — and his service and wounding in World War I, in the past tenesse. From 1925 to 1950 — two thirds of the narrative in Clive Staples Lewis — Jack Lewis is depicted as living an outwardly uneventful life, writing or editing more than twenty books, developing his long friendships with fellow academics, students, authors, and a few other friends (including a number of women), and, treated here almost as a minor and inexplicable (because virtually unexplained) lapse, his conversion between 1929 and 1931 to a full and adult Christianity.

The narrative technique, after the first chapter, is to string together the major and minor events in a linear narrative sequence, based upon the very large number of letters, diaries, and reminiscences now available, and mostly already published in a long shelf-full of books and magazines which very devoted Lewis admirers will already have read. This technique does give, to a degree, a sense of Lewis' life as it must actually have been lived, as a long succession of similar days in his tutor's armchair and at his author's desk, in the context of his rooms at Magdalen College in Oxford and in his household at The Kilns with Maureen and Janie Moore — his adopted mother and sister — and his brother Warren Lewis. The many articles and books appear simply as duties fulfilled or ideas developed to fruition that move like so many milestones past the continual strides of a pedestrian and, as the man grows older, like so many stations flashing past a window beside a railway passenger.

In order to know the reality of these works, as they developed in the mind of the writer during the process of their creation — which must have formed a huge part of Lewis' consciousness during these twenty-five years — one must go to the books themselves. Obviously, Griffin expects his readers to know these books, for the most famous of them are barely sketched, while minor and brief papers are carefully outlined for readers who will not be as familiar with them.

While Lewis' youth — the period between his birth in 1898 and the beginning of Griffin's biography, 1924 — was one of profound emotional experience, the impression is given that his life one finds, at long last, the source of the idea expressed by Ransom to Jane that "obedience—humility— is an erotic necessity." (C.S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength, London: The Bodley Head, 1945, p. 179.) One is inclined to bridle at this idea, knowing what we now know about Lewis' boyhood sadistic fantasies as revealed in his letters to Arthur Greeves, so it is perhaps a relief to learn that Lewis derived this idea from Naomi Mitchison's book The Home and a Hideous Strength, London: The Bodley Head, 1945, p. 179.) One is inclined to bridle at this idea, knowing what we now know about Lewis' boyhood sadistic fantasies as revealed in his letters to Arthur Greeves, so it is perhaps a relief to learn that Lewis derived this idea from Naomi Mitchison's book The Home and a Hideous Strength, London: The Bodley Head, 1945, p. 179.) One is inclined to bridle at this idea, knowing what we now know about Lewis' boyhood sadistic fantasies as revealed in his letters to Arthur Greeves, so it is perhaps a relief to learn that Lewis derived this idea from Naomi Mitchison's book The Home and a Hideous Strength, London: The Bodley Head, 1945, p. 179.) One is inclined to bridle at this idea, knowing what we now know about Lewis' boyhood sadistic fantasies as revealed in his letters to Arthur Greeves, so it is perhaps a relief to learn that Lewis derived this idea from Naomi Mitchison's book The Home and a Hideous Strength, London: The Bodley Head, 1945, p. 179.) One is inclined to bridle at this idea, knowing what we now know about Lewis' boyhood sadistic fantasies as revealed in his letters to Arthur Greeves, so it is perhaps a relief to learn that Lewis derived this idea from Naomi Mitchison's book The Home and a Hideous Strength, London: The Bodley Head, 179. The pattern of Lewis' life, which begins in 1925 rather than with Lewis' birth in 1898, may agree. The best way to read this new biography would be to begin with Surprised By Joy, because without it, the central wellspring of Lewis' life and art would remain unknown. The quality of wonder, that stab of the supernal which Lewis' great fantasy works have brought to several generations of readers, and which pours from the pages of his autobiography, is almost entirely lacking in Griffin's biography, or at least from its first two-thirds.

In 1956, C.S. Lewis wrote to Dom Bede Griffiths, to whom he had dedicated his autobiographical account of his early years, Surprised By Joy, "I feel the whole of one's youth to be immensely important and even of immense length. The gradual reading of one's own life, seeing a pattern emerge, is a great illumination." (p. 374) Readers of Clive Staples Lewis, William Griffin's distinctive biography, which begins in 1925 rather than with Lewis' birth in 1898, may agree. The best way to read this new biography would be to begin with Surprised By Joy, because without it, the central wellspring of Lewis' life and art would remain unknown. The quality of wonder, that stab of the supernal which Lewis' great fantasy works have brought to several generations of readers, and which pours from the pages of his autobiography, is almost entirely lacking in Griffin's biography, or at least from its first two-thirds.

Seeing a Pattern Emerge


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between 1925 and 1950 was a vast plateau, barely interrupted by a few shallow valleys and a few minor hillocks, during which he patiently met his students and silently scratched his pen over endless pages of manuscript. Outwardly this must have been true, but the immense inner world of his scholarly and creative writing is barely hinted except for the occasional quotation of his poetry. Consequently, nobody reading the first 305 pages of this biography could agree that Lewis had lived "A Dramatic Life."

Afterwards, however, there is drama: the heights and depths of his gradually developing relationship with Joy Gresham, their wedding, her illness, her remission, their intense love and joyous marriage, her sudden decline as the cancer returns, her death and his profound mourning, are presented as dramatically as one could wish, as if, near the end of his path, Lewis reached the mountain range which formed for him the foothills to the mountains of Aslan. What this biography does not make sufficiently clear is that Lewis was granted a clear view of these mountain heights in his boyhood.

Aside from that objection, however, I found Griffin's study interesting, informative, and even compelling. During the latter period, which Griffin treats very well, Lewis produced his greatest masterpieces: The Narnian Chronicles, Till We Have Faces, and A Grief Observed. The quiet final years, in which he wrote the study on prayer, Letters to Malcolm, which had eluded his previous attempts to deal with that subject, and in which he briefly encountered Walter Hooper, that late and most copiously repaid of all his many acquaintances, are quietly and beautifully chronicled. The evening of his life is presented as having been lived in a manner pressed by the lines of his poem, "A confession" (1954):

> Like the departure from a silent, yet a crowded shore, Of a ship whose freight was everything, leaving behind, Gracefully, finally, without farewells, marooned mankind..."

Griffin's biography will not be the last. Its distinctive narrative technique is generally successful, and it makes available in a single volume much which otherwise requires (as it must have done for Griffin) a prodigious effort to read elsewhere. The intentional lack of interpretation, the cool tone of the chronicler, the critical silence, all allow the subject to emerge gradually and subtly as the person he became. When his wife died, her next to last words were: "You have made me happy." (p. 417) God knows, many others of us can say the same of Clive Staples Lewis.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

In L'Engle Waters


The years have not diminished Madeleine L'Engle's affection for the Murry family, whose adventures began with A Wrinkle in Time and have continued (In The Arm of the Starfish, etc.) even into a second generation. Many Waters, the newest story in what must now be called the "Time Tetralogy," occurs between the events of A Wind in the Door and A Swiftly Tilting Planet. Trespassing in their scientist parents' laboratory one cold winter's day, fifteen-year-old twins Sandy and Dennys Murry playfully ask a "not-quite-ordinary-looking computer" to take them "someplace warm." The computer unexpectedly responds, sending them Doctor Who-style to the desert camp of Noah in the days before the Flood.

To Sandy and Dennys their destination at first seems unearthly: here are unicorns who appear only if believed in (and can be touched, as in legend, only by virgins), griffins and manticores, water-scenting "mammoths" and metamorphic angels, all co-existing with humans whose lifespans run to hundreds of years. Though Old Testament references abound—Japheth, Lamech, Ham, Sheba—not until the fifth chapter do the twins realize that they are on the Earth of (chiefly) Genesis 6-7 — actually, an expanded/interpreted Genesis in which Hebrew and Near Eastern myths are combined with L'Engleian invention. The boys are intelligent and, it seems, divinely gifted — they unconsciously speak the Old Language not yet "broken at Babel" — but they have only "vague memories of Sunday school" and did not "go in for stories" except those their mother read to them "until too much homework got in the way." Accustomed to the practical, logic-and-proof world of the twentieth century, they are slow to adjust to myths come to life, to being inside a myth themselves. Their efforts to do so, and to escape the impending Deluge, are at the heart of Many Waters.

Also central to the story are the seraphim, good angels by way of Paradise Lost who have relinquished some of their great power to stay where they are needed, "with the children of humankind"; and their fallen brothers, the nephilim, who have vowed "never to hear the Voice again, never to speak with the Presence," and who seek to corrupt or destroy the good of heart. The nephilim tempt Sandy and Dennys with pleasures of the flesh, but the twins' love for Yalith,
Noah's youngest daughter, proves stronger than desire. Yalith likewise resists corruption, rejecting a nephil's disagreeably loveless advances. She is by far the most engaging character in the book, a sensitive woman-child who hears wisdom in the "delicate, stial chiming" of the stars. Her fate is in doubt through most of Many Waters: the Bible, we are reminded, names no daughters of Noah (L'Engle creates four) and lists none among the eight humans saved in the ark.

As usual, Madeleine L'Engle explores questions of faith, good and evil, the nature of reality, the power of love. She praises love in its "pure" sense but is chiefly concerned in this book with sexual love, from the innocent stirrings of youth to the destructive lust encouraged by the nephilim. Bare breasts, childbirth, interracial (human-nephil) marriage, and attempted seduction are presented graphically, though with propriety. This theme and others make Many Waters an eminently discussable book, thought-provoking and absorbing; but too many serious issues are raised and they are largely unrelieved by action or humor. Here there is no Mrs. Whatsit, no Proginoskes, no urgent, world-saving activities as in the previous "Time" books, nothing comparable to balance the many messages and morals conveyed, some rather pointedly — for example, a comparison of the Flood to nuclear holocaust.

Even so, Madeleine L'Engle has given us a tale which firmly holds our attention from a whirlwind (if somewhat contrived) beginning to a reasoned, catastrophic conclusion. Many Waters adds much of interest to the mythology already established in the "Time" saga, though like its predecessors in the series it may be read with profit on its own.

Wayne G. Hammond

Gentle Fantasy


Nancy-Lou Patterson has written a gentle, graceful fantasy, obviously intended for a juvenile audience but eminently readable by anyone who loves the genre. The fairy-tale atmosphere jewels the story of a usurped throne and the coming-of-age of a boy and a girl. The author proves herself a woman of her age in that she gives equal time to the quests of both youngsters. Irmengarde, the heroine, in fact sets out on what becomes a quest in true traditional form, not so much a quest for some thing as it is a quest for self. Prince Garth's adventures are more an exploration of the physical boundaries of the kingdom, but he too is questing for self.

The adventures of the two youngsters are encircled by the arms of a figure called "The Lady in the Spiral Apron." The significance of the Spiral is never elaborated, and the Lady herself is elusive. But this reticence adds to the charm of the tale: nothing is over explained. However, Irmengarde encounters three teachers who seem to represent the Lady in aspects of maiden, matron and crone.

The story has its fantastical wonders: a unicorn, a dragon, visionary dreams, magic of sorts, dramatic landscapes. The author presents each with a delicate prose style. This is how Irmengarde meets the unicorn:

When she reached the clearing, Irmengarde heard the sound of a hoof, impatiently stamping.

On Epic Fantasy

In this brief essay Donaldson is concerned with the epic fantasy as it applies to his "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant" in particular and in general with regard to his predecessor in the genre, J.R.R. Tolkien. He defines "epic fantasy" by analyzing its component parts. "Fantasy," he writes, "is a form of fiction in which the internal crises or conflicts or processes of the characters are dramatized as if they were external individuals or events. . . . In realistic fiction, the characters are expressions of their world, whereas in fantasy the world is an expression of the characters" (pp. [5-6]). And again: "In fantasy, the outside is an externalization, a metaphor, of the internal. And magic is perhaps the most fruitful metaphor available to this kind of fiction . . . an expression of the inner imaginative energy of the characters—an expression of their charisma, their force of personality and expression—a kind of being human that transcends physiology" (p. [7]). This is of course only one definition of fantasy, or rather, one expression of one or a few of its aspects—and none too clear an expression at that. The definition satisfies Donaldson personally, in support of his own writings, but "fantasy" is a word that speaks volumes and refers to something too complex to be defined so concisely or explained adequately with the few examples (from Stephen King, Tolkien, and Donaldson himself) we are given here.

Donaldson next examines the epic, which "deals explicitly with the largest and most important questions of humankind" (p. [12]). No enduring epic in English literary history, he asserts, has been written without using the tools of fantasy, "the metaphor of magic and the techniques of personification." In saying "something transcendent about what it means to be human, or . . . something about the nature of transcendence itself," the epic writer has necessarily erected "a magical or supernatural superstructure to explain his perceptions of reality/truth/meaning"—except in Beowulf, which "takes place in the 'real,' tangible, recognizable world" (p. [12-13]). From Spenser to Milton to Tennyson, the nature of the epic has changed, reflecting changes in the readers for whom each poem was meant, until "epic ideas [could] no longer function, no longer be taken seriously." By the time of Idylls of the King, Donaldson feels, humankind had lost that capacity for epic achievement expressed in Beowulf.

Then came Tolkien, who "made it possible to write epics again." Here Donaldson makes his most arguable point: Tolkien did this, Donaldson claims, by divorcing his work [The Lord of the Rings] from the real world, by insisting that there is no connection between the metaphors of fantasy and the facts of modern reality, by rejecting allegory. . . . Tolkien restored our right to dream epic dreams—but only if we understand clearly that those dreams have no connection to the reality of who we are and what we do" (p. [16]). If Donaldson is saying, in an unfortunately abstruse way, that The Lord of the Rings is not an overt attempt to explain reality or theology, and that epic fantasies do not need to be allegorical to succeed, then he is correct. But although Tolkien denied allegory he readily admitted the oneness of Middle-earth and the world in which we live (see, for example, his Letters, p. 239), and many thousands of readers have found The Lord of the Rings to have ample connections with "who we are and what we do," otherwise Tolkien's book surely would not be so widely read and enjoyed. (For a related discussion of this subject, see "Leaf and Key" by Paul Nolan Hyde, which coincidentally follows similar remarks by Donaldson on the epic, allegory, and Tolkien in the Rich-Burelbach interview in Mythlore 46.)

Epic Fantasy in the Modern World will be of interest mainly to readers wishing to learn more about the rationale of the "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant" series, and to admirers of artist P. Craig Russell, who designed this booklet's attractive die-cut cover.

Wayne G. Hammond

Bilingual Inklings


This is the fourth annual put out by the Inklings Society. The original concept of these volumes seems to have been inspired by VII, and each year's product is consistently VII's equal in quality. Besides a number of superlative articles, there is a lengthy review section. It is quite interesting to see reviews written by European scholars on works published here; it is also interesting to see mention of works printed overseas, which we would otherwise never discover, that handle some of the same topics that our writers deem important.

There is also a German translation of Taliesin Through Logres (VII-XVI), by Gisbert Kranz, who is a respected poet in his native tongue. Reading Williams in German is an odd experience; the familiar words alter in sound though not in sense. When one compares this text with Williams' work, one comes to appreciate the effort the translator made to maintain the hard-to-translate quality of Williams' imagery. This and the careful attention to cadence evokes an emotional response to the translated material that is very nearly equivalent to that inspired by the original.

Two of the articles on Tolkien are in English, and both are first rate: "The Lyrical in Tolkien's Trilogy," by Andrzej Zgorzelski, and J.S. Ryan's "Oath-swearers, the Stone of Erech and the Near East". Tolkien's work is examined further, along with T.H. White's The Once and Future King, in Dieter Petzold's "Politik in Fantasy Romanen." Comparing Tolkien and White with Orwell's 1984, Petzold makes a good point about the wide-ranging and sophisticated handling of political questions within the context of works of fantasy. C.S. Lewis is represented by an examination, by Gisbert Kranz, of "Malerei und Musik im Werk von C.S. Lewis." This study refutes with careful and convincing attention the assertion that Lewis had had no feeling for music or the visual arts. Finally, there is a profoundly thought-provoking study of the works of G.K. Chesterton, with a focus on Man Who Was Thursday, with the intention of bringing Chesterton to the notice of German scholars.

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