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An Enlargement of Being

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An Enlargement of Being

Additional Keywords
Bonnie GoodKnight
I promised in the July, 1975, issue of Mythprint to comment this year on what I believe is the essence of the Society, in part in response to comments by others in Mythprint in the form of letters, controversies concerning rabbits, and thinly veiled allegorical tracts. My recent journey to Britain, which was as much as anything else a quest better to understand our three central authors, has greatly aided in clarifying my own thoughts about them and about The Mythopoeic Society's relationship to them. I would like to share with you what I see as the essential nature of the Society. In the May, 1975, issue of Mythprint, I said: "The Mythopoeic Society treads the middle way between isolated exclusivity of interest ('sectarianism') on the one hand, and unfocused eclecticism ('lattitudinarianism') on the other." This needs further explanation. There are extreme versions that can be found within the Society on either side of the middle way:

There is what I see as an error of diffusion, of lack of focus, which in its milder form would have us completely and conveniently ignore the Christian element of the authors, and indeed spiritual which in its milder form would have us completely and conveniently..

... (continued on page 28)
An Enlargement of Being

(continued from page 9)

the Society's fuller maturity as a literary organization—balanced, united in intellectual honesty, and worthily fulfilling its stated commitment. What I say is not in any way directed toward specific individuals, because I recognize that no single person that I know of personally is an embodiment of either error. Rather, real people are constantly and subtly altering their own positions on these and many other questions. I believe there is a reason for literary experience—whether or not the individual acknowledges a link with spiritual experience—in which I hope we may and can all find agreement. In giving a justification for reading great literature, C.S. Lewis says in the Epilogue of An Experiment in Criticism:

What then is the good of —what is even the defence for—occupying our hearts with stories of what never happened and entering vicariously into feelings which we should try to avoid having in our own person?...The nearest I have yet got to an answer is that we seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves. Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and a selectiveness peculiar to himself. And even when we build disinterested fantasies, they are saturated with, and limited by, our own psychology....We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own....The primary impulse of each is to maintain and aggrandize himself. The secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness....Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realize the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors. We realize it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated. The man who is content to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison....Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound: but they destroy the privilege. In them our separate selves are pooled and we sink back into sub-individuality. But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and I am never more myself than when I do.

Noting the context of living as if we have spent the night in a forest or a desert, I believe that what we seek is an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves. Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and a selectiveness peculiar to himself. And even when we build disinterested fantasies, they are saturated with, and limited by, our own psychology....We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own....The primary impulse of each is to maintain and aggrandize himself. The secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness....Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realize the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors. We realize it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated. The man who is content to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison....Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound: but they destroy the privilege. In them our separate selves are pooled and we sink back into sub-individuality. But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and I am never more myself than when I do. a conceptually unambiguous content of consciousness (Complamin/Archetype/Symbol, p. 121); ("shedding," as it were, "what hair remained") or it may "not be understood at all," resulting in "an autonomous splinter psyche...that is, in all kinds of neurotic and psychotic symptoms" (p. 121)—such a being as Grendel. Whatever the result, the shadow must be reckoned with. Taran must agree with his hairy adversary, and take him along as a companion. As Alexander says in introducing his second book, "readers who have already journeyed with Taran are assured...that Gurgi, despite shakings and quakings and fears for his poor tender head, insisted on joining this new adventure" (The Black Cauldron, Intro, n.p.).

There is one last place to look for light on Gurgi, the shadow, and ourselves: this is a superb Little Golden Book, The Monster at the End of This Book, which stars "lovable, furry old Grover," one of a race of monsters familiar to the audience of Sesame Street. In this story Grover reads the title, and exclaims "Did that say there will be a Monster at the end of this book???? IT DIDN'T! Oh, I am so scared of Monsters!!" After a series of desperate attempts to prevent the reader from turning the pages and reaching the last page, Grover makes his discovery: "Well look at that! This is the end of the book and the only one here is...ME. I, lovable, furry old GROVER, am the Monster at the end of this book." This sums up my thesis admirably: we are ourselves the monsters, whether we know it or not. The shadow we cast is our own.

Nancy-Lou Patterson
Feast of St. Philip and St. James
AD 1973, Waterloo, Ontario

Notes on This Issue

The last issue took a great deal of time to become fact. This was in part due to my personal saddening resulting from the death of J.R.R. Tolkien, a man I, along with many others, respected and admired deeply. Nevertheless the issue needed to be finished, and gradually my personal feelings were forced to come to a head as I wrote the editorial "Death and the Desire for Deathless." Its writing was a cathartic experience, and no longer held back by the inertia of bereavement, I could look again look forward.

I realized Mythlore needed a larger staff, in order to publish it, hopefully, with greater frequency. I asked Laurence Krieg, Gracia Fay Ellwood, and George Colvin to join the staff, and they agreed. Laurence Krieg would undertake the role of Managing Editor in a similar fashion as he had done previously with Mythprint. As a result, credit goes to him for the organization, arranging of art, and layout of most of the interior of the issue (pp. 3-7, and 10-31). I am directly responsible for the content of the two covers, pages 2, 9, and the lower half of this page. I regret I was not able to follow the Managing Editor's policy of not continuing ends of articles later in the issue. Gracia Fay Ellwood made the arrangements for page 8. I express my thanks to all the staff for their vital assistance, especially Laurence Krieg, in getting this issue into facthood.

Plans are nearly finished on the working out of a new way of producing Mythlore on a regular basis. I have learned not to make premature promises in print, but do both hope and expect that you will be seeing the next issue sooner than you may expect.

— Glen H. GoodKnight