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Lore of Logres

by Rand Kuhl

Lore of Logres is the title of the new book section of Mythlore. Logres is the name for Arthurian Britain, and if any men reflect the spirit and splendor of that era beyond time and on the borders of Faerie Land as well as shine in their own light, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams certainly do. While leaving the discussion of their fiction to the monthly meetings of the Mythopoeic Society, this column will be concerned with three other areas for the most part. First, each quarterly issue of Mythlore will contain a review of one of the non-fiction works of either Tolkien, Lewis, or Williams. The second area of interest will involve the review of works of literary criticism and commentary directed toward the writings of our three authors. And the last area will be quite broad and will include the review of books by those who were associated with Tolkien, Lewis and Williams in one way or another, as well as reviews of works in the genre of fantasy, for children and adults (if one can really make that distinction, see Tolkien's "On Fairy-Stories").

And remember, any comments, suggestions, or criticisms (helpful) will be welcomed by the reviewer. Good reading.

"Music Hath Charms...":

A Review of Owen Barfield's The Silver Trumpet

The close, lifelong friendship of C. S. Lewis and Owen Barfield began with their common interests and undergraduate days at Oxford. The flavor of this friendship can be noticed in the dedication of Barfield's book, Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning; "To C. S. Lewis 'Opposition is true friendship'." Even though Barfield achieved first class honors in English Language and Literature, he became a lawyer and practised until his retirement in 1959. He was a member of that unique gathering of British intellectuals in wartime Oxford--the Inklings, who met for reading, good talk, and laughter. Since his retirement he has come to the United States as a visiting Professor of English, Philosophy, and Letters.

The book I am about to deal with below is not the culmination of his literary powers, but rather it is an early encounter with the art of narrative. First published in 1925, The Silver Trumpet has recently been republished by Eerdmans (1968) with a large complement of new illustrations in a handsome format.

The Silver Trumpet is a light, readable (especially fun for reading aloud), and unusual fairy tale which begins...

Once upon a time there were two little Princesses whose names

ML2

were Violetta and Gambetta; and they lived in Mountainy Castle. They were twins, and they were so like each other that when Violetta came in from a walk with her feet wet, Gambetta was sometimes told to go change her stockings, because the Queen couldn't tell which from the other.

When the two girls had been christened as babies, Miss Thomson, "a kind hearted old lady", pronounced two magical spells on them: first, they would love each other more than anyone else and be "as like as one to another pea", and, second, "as long as one of you is living both shall be".

As the sisters grew into young maidenhood they remained outwardly identical, but two very different personalities developed. Violet and Gamboy, their names having been changed from Violetta and Gambetta, respectively, by the Lord High Teller of the Other from Which because he thought that it would help to distinguish one from the other (it did!), got along together only because of the bond of love between them which had been wrought by magic. Violet was tender, kind and loving, while Gamboy was insensitive, cynical and cruel.

Then one day a Prince, Courtesy by name, arrived at Mountainy Castle and announced his coming by several blasts on the Silver Trumpet. The sweetness of that sound would bear its hearers away into another world; even Gamboy had nice thoughts for awhile. The Prince had come looking for adventures and a bride. However, the Little Fat Podger talks the Prince out of adventures and offers to introduce the Prince to Violet.

The Little Fat Podger is a Dwarf, the jester that cures the King's megrims. He defines his job with great spirit. "Wit, you know--wit," said the Dwarf, "jokes, practical jokes, chestnuts, japes, jests, gibes, pranks, cheek, balder-dash, noodledum, nincompoopery, somersaults, tumbling, twinkling, capers, and the sidestep step and the sidestep step, and the sidestep, sidestep, sidestep step."

Violet and Prince Courtesy soon meet and fall in love, but the course of love is not smooth. A jealousy prompts Gamboy to plague the couple because she resents their love for each other. Yet for one moment the three of them are happy together, a moment brought about by the magic of music: "the sounds coming from the five fiddles were five shining silk threads, each of a different colour, twisting and twining and curling and winding in and out and over and under one another in a marvellous pattern and always moving on and on and on..." But the moment of music passes and Gamboy once again begins to pester her sister and the Prince. The Prince wonders why Gamboy had been so nice for awhile. The Little Fat Podger answers him with what I feel is the central theme of the story (and I shall return to it later): "Music hath charms," said the Dwarf. "Harmony, you know, harmony--Form versus Chaos--Light v. Darkness--and the Dominant Seventh. It's all one."

Despite Gamboy's efforts, Prince Courtesy and Violet are married, but the couple does not live happily ever after. The Silver Trumpet is lost and the divisive efforts of Gamboy grow more drastic as she dabbles in dark magic. The country around Mountainy Castle becomes a waste land; Courtesy, who is now the King, can do nothing. Gamboy's

evil machinations become bolder and more powerful, while Violet is taken deathly ill.

What happens to Courtesy, Violet, and their daughter the Princess Lily, who learns to be terribly frightened of toads; how Gamboy ascends to power and influences the Amalgamated Princesses who really aren't Princesses at all; and what happens when Prince Peerio comes to Mountain seeking Princess Lily and the Silver Trumpet is found makes up the largest part of the story.

To return for a moment to the central theme, which is the tension between form and chaos, light and darkness, brings us to the point where the story can be understood in all its significance. The instrument and harbinger of form or harmony is Music; the Silver Trumpet and the five fiddles make the music that ushers in peace. But the Silver Trumpet is lost, Mountain becomes a waste land, the King is so poor that he can no longer afford to pay the five fiddlers for their music making, and chaos replaces harmony. Gamboy is the agent of chaos, and as long as she wields power there is no melody or joy in the land; she even instructs the Amalgamated Princesses (who really aren't) on how to go to other lands and disrupt the affairs of state there. But remember, the Silver Trumpet is found. The Dominant Seventh demands resolution to one, to unity, to form.

In the development of the theme, many elements common to fairy stories are woven into the fabric of the tale: love at first sight, various prohibitions, and the Toad Prince among others. But here I must state two reservations I have about the book. First, although many traditional themes are used, the primary requirement is not put across by the story's language, the requirement for "the realization... of imagined wonder". The sense of the marvellous is missing by an order of magnitude. The magic is taken seriously, quite seriously in the context of the story, but its deeper significance is somehow unappreciated, not fully comprehended. The second reservation has to do with the illustrations. Here I must be careful. The quality and spirit of the numerous line drawings sprinkled throughout the text are very good. In this book, however, I think Tolkien's dictum that "illustrations do little good to fairy stories" holds true. The illustrator, Betty Beeby, has turned Mountain Castle into a giant live-in organ, with no support from the text as far as I can tell. I realize she was trying, most probably, to give the musical part of the story a special life of its own, but in doing so without support from the story itself she has definitely weakened the impact of the story. It makes the environment in which the magic occurs less believable; in other words, the illustrations hamper our belief in the Secondary World the author tries to create.

In conclusion, this book is for you to judge for yourselves. If you enjoy fairy stories, read The Silver Trumpet, for it is a cut above most. Not only is it a good story, but it has some insights which are helpful for the adult and younger reader alike. For example, "... there are two ways of loving people: one is to like seeing them well and happy, which was Violet's way of loving, and the other is to like them to do what you tell them to, which was Gamboy's way". Again, "... the hardest of all trials in this world is to have to do without

something you have been accustomed to all your life...". And finally, "... how queer, thought the King,... that a thing which makes one person laugh should make another scream and shiver."

... Randall Kuhl

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED:

Regrettably, we received the following Ballantine Adult Fantasy books too late to be able to review them for this issue of Mythlore:
 Peter S. Beagle, The Last Unicorn
 Peter S. Beagle, A Fine and Private Place
 Both are \$0.95 paperbacks.

THE RAPE OF THE HOBBIT, continued from page 44

Bilbo. The people in Bilbo's mind come by and everybody sings a song. Then Bilbo seizes the Ring and they all have a merry chase scene. Bilbo soon realizes that all these things are happening in his mind. So Bilbo with the power of his mind, gets rid of his adversaries, goes home a hero, puts the Ring on Phoebe's finger, and he is known as the Lord of the Ring(s). The end at last!

Now that we are all throughly sick, I for one, would like to know what should be done about plays like this. I'm not sure but I think to put on a play based on the book you would have to have the rights from the publishers to do such a project. If this is so, then the publishers should see to it that the thing does not get out of hand. There may be other solutions. Any ideas on Tolkien based plays should be sent to such interested organizations such as the Tolkien Society of America and The Mythopoeic Society. I am very disapointed in this play. It's really a shame because a good play could do so much in bringing Tolkien to the greater public. Let us hope the future will produce some plays that will capture the true Tolkien flavor.

