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## Myth in the Media

Glen GoodKnight

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## Online Winter Seminar

February 4-5, 2022 (Friday evening, Saturday all day)

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## Online Winter Seminar



### Online Winter Seminar

The Inklings and Horror: Fantasy's Dark Corners

February 4-5, 2022 (Friday evening, Saturday all day)

Via Zoom and Discord

## Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>

### Additional Keywords

John Pivovarnick; George Barr

the terms of Charles Williams, that they are citizens of Broceliande, not of Scotland. What they *do* is their own business; my concern is what they *are*. The only statement in the play as to their nature is Banquo's "The earth hath hubbles as the water has / And these are of them..." Of course we can't be sure that Banquo knows; still there it is.

Frankly it is the whole atmosphere of their scenes that must convince. Shakespeare has simply refused to give them anything of earth. They never appear, in the play, between man-made walls; they are offered no money for their foretellings and they ask none. Their malice toward the rulers of Scotland is malice pure, with no traceable motive of revenge or political interest. They are not met walking in a field, hobbling up a lane or seated before a hovel; the dramatist introduces them by materializing them out of a thunderstorm.

Fortunately the same author has given us two other witchcraft presentations elsewhere in his works and it is in *Henry VI, Part One* and *Part Two* that we may study at our leisure what the English Renaissance believed about Satanism.

In obedience to that smug sense of insular superiority which historians continue to mistake for a virtue in the Elizabethans, Shakespeare portrayed Joan of Arc, Britannia's foe, as an actual witch. In the first *Henry VI* play she appears at first as merely a bold and adventurous woman, inspiring the French, swapping vaunts and insults with Talbot and the other English officers, persuading Burgundy to renounce the Plantagenets. Then, as Bedford's army closes in on her, she cries out for escape, calls up the spirits of darkness who - aha! - have all along been helping her, only to find that they will now desert her. Joan is dragged away to her burning railing and cursing; she, at least, cannot dissolve into air.

In *Henry VI, Part Two*, the Duchess of Gloucester hires a rogue monk called Roger Bolingbroke to conjure up a spirit who will prophesy upon her husband's future and that of his enemies. Bolingbroke is assisted by a witch called Mother Jourdain and a couple of conjuring acolytes. The spirit comes, it prognosticates, but Cardinal Beaufort's soldiers catch the guilty parties in the act and the Duchess must do public penance while her hirelings go to death.

These witches, Joan and the Bolingbroke circle, come and go like other people. They strike no dread at their first appearance. They can be taken by soldiers and confined; imagine a man-at-arms in *Macbeth* laying hands on the Weird Sisters! Nor do the mundane witches of the *Henry VI* plays carry another world in their speech. Of course Shakespeare was a great poet when he wrote *Macbeth* and a fledgling one when he turned out *Henry VI*, but if one wants the tone of the Weird Sisters in those early plays, one will hear it best in the voice of the spirit conjured by Bolingbroke. The wizard can only question; it is the spirit who must answer:

BOLINGBROKE

What fates await the Duke of Suffolk?

SPIRIT

By water shall he die and take his end.

(Suffolk is at last decapitated by a pirate called Walter Whitmore; get it? - Walter - water.) The Weird Sisters are from that spirit's world, not from Bolingbroke's, Shakespeare's or ours.

# MYTH IN THE MEDIA

Glen GoodKnight



In a relatively recent span of time, those of us who admire the works of Tolkien and Lewis, as well as the general public, have witnessed four different adaptations for television and the motion pictures. They are: *The Hobbit* produced by Rankin and Bass; *The Lord of the Rings (Part I)* produced by Ralph Bakshi; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* produced by the Children's Television Workshop; and *The Return of the King* produced by Rankin and Bass. All four adaptations arouse mixed reaction and all suffer in varying degrees from abridging to fit the Procrustean Bed of time limitations.

*The Hobbit* appeared first and has been shown twice on national television. It attempted to follow the story, but was flawed by unjustified exaggeration or interpretation of the goblins, woodelves, and other characters. The original music was well intended but gave the production a kind of cellophane feeling of over-packaging to fit a commercialized view of what would create broad appeal. An eleven-year-old, who had the story previously read aloud to her, told me she basically liked it, "but they left out all the good parts".

Bakshi's *The Lord of the Rings (Part I)* has certainly been the most ambitious of the productions. My own review of Bakshi's *Wizards* in a previous issue of *Mythlore* stirred up a fair amount of controversy, predicting a poor production of *LoTR*. In hindsight, the movie was not quite as bad as I anticipated, due in large part to less of the Bakshi personal stamp than was expected. Much imagination and technical talent went into the film, but there were a fair amount of technical errors as well. I suppose one should take a charitable attitude, due to the obvious effort expended. I have heard through the grapevine that because of contractual stipulations, Bakshi won't make much money out of the film, unless and until he produces *LoTR 2*. But he has gone into other films, such as *American Pop*, and *Variety* has reported

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# DISCUSSION REPORTS



This issue we are presenting Discussion Reports for the readers' reactions. We would like to print more in the future, especially on topics from Tolkien, Lewis and Williams. Discussion Groups may follow guidelines on page 9 for reports.

Reported by Ruth Berman Rivendell  
Minneapolis/St. Paul

August 20th, 1977--topic: Joy Chant's Red Moon & Black Mountain.

We began with some talk about the apostrophes in the Khendiol names. "In'serinna" might be Khendiol, as her real name was a secret.

The 3 Earth children are brought to this world because Thendarl could not be harmed by anyone of the Red Moon world. This is different from the situation of The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe, though, because there seems to have been no prior connection between the worlds in this case--while it was children from Earth who brought the White Witch to Narnia in the first place (as revealed in The Magician's Nephew). Of course, we might learn more about Thendarl in the future, and it doesn't seem too likely that CSL had thought much about the origins of the White Witch before he came to write Nephew. The real reason for the arbitrary kidnapping that begins this book is to provide an intermediary to introduce the Red Moon world to readers of this world. The frame may be an awkward device,



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that he is thinking of getting out of animation altogether and into live-action films. With Rankin and Bass's Return of the King, we have additional doubt if LotR 2 will ever be made. I had heard rumors before that United Artists was considering suit to prevent the R&B production. Perhaps some reader can explain in a letter how Rankin and Bass got the rights for Return; I would surmise through the unprotected Ace edition of LotR.

The production of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe has been the most satisfactory over-all. This is a shorter story and less had to be cut to fit into the two one-hour segments. The text was much more faithful to the book, in fact the dialog is taken line for line in many places. This was due in part to the on-going negotiations between the producers and the C.S.Lewis Literary Estate, especially Walter Hooper. Fr. Hooper had to stand firm several times, including when the producers wanted to have Susan kill the White Witch! Unfortunately the rights to Tolkien's works were more complete, and not open to such crucial negotiations. Who knows what would or could have resulted if members of the Tolkien family or their representatives could have had a say in the various productions. The chief fault of TLWW was its mediocre animation and its depiction of the Witch who was not as Lewis described her, as "beautiful...and cold and stern." All in all, the CTW did not do a bad job. Perhaps we may see the other six stories presented also, but then

and inartistic, but inasmuch as it must be incorporated into the story (that is, we cannot in a discussion ignore what the frame action does to the story by suggesting why Chant might have used this device for reasons unrelated to the coherence of the story), it provoked discussion of a problem arising from the way Chant has worked the children in--or the gods of Red Moon world have worked the children in. Supposedly, it is important that Oliver has free choice in his decision to make his sacrifice. Does he really? He was definitely kidnapped. Then he was so thoroughly indoctrinated-encultured with the plains folk's lifeways that he can no longer remember Earth--could he really have made any other choice? This is a problem beyond Patty Hearst's. Of course it also touches on the question of whether any of us has free will, or if all decisions are shaped entirely by upbringing--but at least in the imaginary world of RM&BM this is inappropriately problematical. D.B. commented that the Prydain books are a more effective treatment of the growth of a hero. Whether D.B. was Dainis Bisenieks, Don Braasted or Darla Baker, I don't know, though I think perhaps Don. Someone else rejoined that Chant has a lot less room to do it in, and that this was a pretty good first novel. (Generally assented to). There was talk about the believability and careful construction that had gone into this secondary world. The world of Eldor, by contrast, is not believable. (But, then, it is etched so shadowily that Garner apparently doesn't care about that, either.)

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the others are more complex and would need more time given to even hope to approach a good treatment.

Rankin and Bass's The Return of the King was not as good as their Hobbit. It suffered from the same exaggeration of the orcs. A five year old in delirium could probably do better. Liberties were taken with the time sequencing of the story, such as leaving Frodo wandering inside Mount Doom while Aragorn marches for several days to the Black Gate. Granted much had to be left out to present the core of the story within the time limitations, but so much was left out that the gaps were filled in with such non-textual inanities as the orcs' marching song "Where There's a Whip, There's a Way".

Some people are so excited about Tolkien that anything related to Middle-earth is welcome. I can view with detachment, damning and praising various aspects of someone else's commercialized interpretation without needing it to make Tolkien's sub-creation more real to me. Is there the danger that many need or prefer pre-digested adaptation for their esthetically malnourished imaginations? Or is it the threat of parasitic translators to the visual medium to attach themselves to great stories for expected profit? Give me the rich tapestry of the real book anyway over the selva, threads, and poorly executed postage stamp sized condensations. Let my own imagination work joyously along with the author's creation, filling in the fine details and making the experience personal. This is one of the best and most rewarding forms of work I know.