6-15-1980

Myth in the Media

Glen GoodKnight

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore

Part of the Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons

Recommended Citation


Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol7/iss2/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to: http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm
Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien
Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021

Additional Keywords
John Pivovarnick; George Barr

This article is available in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol7/iss2/7
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.

Prankly 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 as the water has 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 Joe, as an actual witch. In the first Henry VI play she appears at first as merely a bold and adventurous woman, inspiring the French, swamping 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 Jurdin and a conjunction of 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.

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 Lord of the Rings. 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 Lord of the Rings Part II. But he has gone into other films, such as American Pop, and Variety has reported...
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 LotR'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 TLMW 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 CTV did not do a bad job. Perhaps we may see the other six stories presented also, but then 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 much 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 themes, verses to great stories for expected profits? Given me the rich tapestry of the real book any day over the selvage, 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.