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Matters of Grave Import

A Column by Gracia Fay Ellwood

Gems: The Power and The Glory

Diamonds are a girl's best friend, goes the song, much more reliable than men and their declarations of love. The song expresses a common feeling about gems: they are associated with love of wealth, with display, frivolity and extravagance; they say "look at me."

In *The Silmarillion* Tolkien draws our attention to another side of the matter. Jewels are not props to the ego; to the contrary, they draw one's attention away from the self to an enjoyment of that which is beautiful for its own sake. When all goes as it should, they lead to an expansion rather than a contradiction of the self; thus the Elves, desiring to share this delight, scatter their jewels by the shore.

With Fëanor and the Great Jewels, this expansion begins to reverse itself. Using Williams' language we could say that the Jewels symbolize the containment of the Glory; in their making, and in the taking of the Oath, the Elves seek to appropriate it for their own possession. Numberless evils follow, for "He who bends to himself a joy / Doth the winged life destroy." Finally one of the *Silmarils* is placed in the heavens, its Glory once again available to all.

Tolkien's Jewels not only contain the Glory as beauty but also as power; i.e. they are talismans. We see what the *Silmaril* does to Carcharoth the wolf, what its light does to Shelob. Galadriel's *Nenya* is a vital weapon of defense against Sauron; Gandalf's *Narya* is no doubt a repository of the power of the Secret Fire. It is possible to be a Keeper of a jewel, a steward of its power for the general good, as both Galadriel and Gandalf show. But it is not easy; neither of them will trust themselves as keepers of Sauron's ultimate talisman.

In the ancient and medieval literature dealing with jewels, we find both the matter of preoccupation with adornment and the concern with the powers of gems, but the former is put down not only as frivolous but often as evil (especially in the case of the adornment of women, whose dangerously corrupting sexuality is thereby accentuated). Talismanic use is more acceptable, at least to pagan writers, and was quite common also among Christians, judging by the repeated fulminations of churchmen against it.

However, the idea that there are twelve stones of particular potency, corresponding to the months of the year or the zodiacal sun-signs, takes its rise (or at least its content) from the Bible. The first list, in Exodus 28, is of the twelve stones of the High Priest's breastplate, one representing each tribe. Most of these gems reappear, in altered order, in the list of jewelled foundations of the Holy City in Revelation 21; it is this latter list (or a lost intermediate one) from which all subsequent lists evidently derive.

The foundation jewels are as follows: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, carnelian, chrysolite (i.e. peridot), beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst. (It is not quite certain what jacinth refers to—probably sapphire or zircon). If we take the year as beginning in the spring, we have jasper for March, sapphire for April, etc. The many later lists keep this overall pattern, most of them having jasper (or its first cousin bloodstone) for March, sapphire or diamond for April, agate (a form of chalcedony) and emerald playing musical chairs for May and June, onyx, its cousin sardonyx (both banded chalcedony) or ruby for July, carnelian (a reddish chalcedony) or sardonyx for August, chrysolite for September, opal or beryl, especially the bluegreen beryl aquamarine for October, topaz for November, ruby or turquoise for December (Chrysoprase, i.e. green chalcedony, virtually disappears for reasons unknown), garnet or zircon for January, and amethyst for February.

The astrological sun-signs of course overlap the months, which gives one a still wider range of choice. There are many associations with each sign and its related planets, so if you fancy your sign you may have a feel for which stone is for you. For example, if you are an Aquarian, cool and airy in style, a blue zircon (which may be mildly radioactive—appropriate for a futuristic sign) may be more "you" than the darkly impassioned garnet or the mystical amethyst. (Note: amethyst, from the Greek for "not drunk," is traditionally supposed to prevent intoxication. I can attest to this; I have worn an amethyst for a month now, and I haven't been drunk once!)

So there you stand with your zircon on your finger. You may choose to go no further, simply losing yourself in the contemplation of a made thing of great beauty. (Some zircons even glow in the dark.) Or you can choose to make it into a talisman. Franz Bardon in *Initiation Into Hermetics* tells us that the first step is to cleanse the stone from any prior influences. This is done by immersing it in water and concentrating for some minutes on having the water absorb any evil influences. After you are satisfied that they are out, dry the jewel and "load" it.

This can be done in various ways. One is to simply hold the jewel and imaginatively will it to fill with power, intended to be either temporary or permanent. The loading can be intensified by repetition if desired. Another method is to bind an elemental to the stone, a little on the order of the genie in the bottle. This can be done by means of a self-selected word, a composed ritual or gesture; a trance or magic mirror may be used.

Still another method is to repeat a magical formula, or a mantram (i.e. a single-sentence prayer) many times while concentrating on the talisman. A fourth method is by means of the "electric fluid" or the "magnetic fluid," which are found respectively in the right and left halves of the body. This means that the left half of the body is considered to be receptive while the right half radiates energy. A talisman that is intended to protect, to irradiate or give off any energy will be held in the right hand and charged with electric fluid, while a talisman intended to attract sympathy, good fortune or success will be held in the left hand and charged with magnetic fluid.

Bardon speaks of loading a talisman with accumulated light-power until it "shines brighter than the ordinary sunlight."—but it is difficult to see exactly how this method differs from some earlier ones. No doubt Fëanor could enlighten us.

Finally, Bardon mentions briefly the use of tantric rituals for loading. He is vague and secretive, and urges that only the very mature and high-minded attempt such things, as unworthy motives in such a situation would do harm rather than good.

He points out that magical objects do not work at all for those who don't believe in them; and, further, that it doesn't matter what object or jewel one begins with; even the most unlikely-seeming, from the astrologer's viewpoint, will do.

The idea that what matters is in one's own mind is supported by a Tibetan parable of a monk who made a laborious trip to India to get a relic of the Buddha for his temple. Returning with his treasure, he was waylaid by bandits within yards of his destination, and the precious relic stolen. In the best Chaucerian tradition (but with nobler motives) he found an animal bone by the road and set it up in his shrine. The faithful came to venerate, and miracles began to happen.

All very well; still, it does seem rather a pity to lose the fun of playing with the astrological signs, their

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17); but most of the details suggest knowledge of Dante and of American culture, not Lewis.

Wildman, Mary. "Twentieth-Century Arthurian Literature: An Annotated Bibliography," pp. 127-162. In Arthurian Literature II, ed. Richard Barber. Cambridge, England: D.S. Brewer, and Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, n.d. 1982. viii + 168 pp. [Lewis, 144, 160; Williams, 156-157, 159-160.]

Wildman has 362 listings in her primary bibliography, and a secondary bibliography of works consulted has an additional fifty-three items. The primary bibliography is an impressive work, with a large number of obscure publications listed among its movies, plays, poems, fiction, musical works, and miscellaneous items. It certainly seems to contain all the major items in English. There are, inevitably, omissions, and it is fair to say that the work is fuller on British material than on American. For example, it misses H. Warner Munns Merlin Ring (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974) and its related volume, Merlin's Godson (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976); the latter collects King of the World's Edge (New York: Ace, 1966) and The Ship from Atlantis (New York: Ace, 1967). And it misses a large number of poems in magazines and elsewhere; a few examples are Robert Boenig, "Lancelot Running," Mythlore, 6:2/20 (Spring 1979), 37; J.R. Christopher, "The Spoils of Annwn," Mythril, 2:3/7 (Fall 1975), 9; Lin Carter, "Merlin, Enchanted," in his Dreams from R'lyeh (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1975) pp. 47-48; and L. Sprague de Camp, "Tintagel," in his Demons and Dinosaurs (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1970), p. 25.

On the Inklings, Wildman does a generally satisfactory job. She lists Lewis' "Lancelot" in Narration Poems and his That Hideous Strength (p. 146). (Lewis has minor Arthurian allusions in a few of his poems—"Old Poets Remembered," "Re-adjustments"—but they are probably not worth the noting in this type of work.) The annotation of "Lancelot" says that it tells of Lancelot's return from the Grail Quest, which is true enough; but Wildman does not note that the poem is incomplete, and the return from the Quest sets up Lancelot's account of his Quest. The annotation of That Hideous Strength emphasizes the major Arthurian element—"Merlin returns to aid Logres"—but does not mention the Fisher-King. A work that probably should have been listed, with Wildman's "m" for miscellaneous, is Mark vs. Tristram: Correspondence between C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge, Mass.: The Lowell House Printers, 1967), 11 pp., a hand-printed edition of 126 copies.

Wildman lists Williams' War in Heaven, the five Arthurian poems in Three Plays, Taliessin through Logres, and The Region of Summer Stars (pp. 156-157). According to Lois Glenn's Charles W.S. Williams: A Checklist (1975)—a book not in Wildman's secondary sources—there are ten Arthurian poems in periodicals or anthologies, not counting four identified as reprinted from the two books of Arthurian poetry.

Elsewhere in the primary works, Wildman lists Roger Lancelyn Green's King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table (p. 140) without noting the allusion to That Hideous Strength and John Heath-Stubbs' Artorius (p. 141) without mentioning the use of Williams' ideas. M. Hadfield's King Arthur and the Round Table (p. 140) is listed, but it is probably only an associational item; she wrote the first full-length book on Williams, yet no evidence has been given that her book borrows from his Arthurian poems. The major omission in this field of related works is Sanders Anne Laubenthal's novel Excalibur (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973).

In secondary sources, Wildman lists E.M.R. Ditmas' "King Arthur in Literature" (1960), which refers to Williams; T.S. Eliot's "The Significance of Charles Williams" (1946); David Jones' "The Arthurian Legend" (1948), which is a review of Arthurian Torso; Lewis's Arthurian Torso (1948), with an annotation which identifies Williams' part; and Charles Moorman's Arthurian Triptych (1960). The omission of the Williams checklist was mentioned above. Wildman does not attempt to make this secondary complete—"Some secondary works consulted" (p. 158)—so the omission of several dissertations on Williams' Arthurian poems, and other such materials, is not of significance.

Note: none of the other five items in Arthurian Literature II mention the Inklings, but the preface by the editor (p. viii) does refer to Williams in passing.



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ruling planets and their rainbow of jewels, in favor of a pebble picked up by the wayside. Unless every stone of the waste does indeed contain the glory of the summer stars....

* * *

I wish to make an Announcement: I am retiring as poetry editor with this issue. I wish my successor every good.

* * * * *

We will miss the much appreciated influence and presence of Gracia Fay as Poetry Editor. Her personal service to the journal and its readers over the years deserves sincere gratitude from us all. Mythlore, desiring and intending to continue to feature poetry, seeks a new Poetry Editor. The requirements are somewhat subjective: both an appreciation of and experience with poetry, and a general sensitivity to what would be appropriate for this journal. Please write me if you are interested to be a help in this way. — Glen GoodKnight



Contributors

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B.A. at Columbia University in Anthropology and Linguistics. He has studied and knows numerous languages from literally around the world, including the Celtic languages. He has a passion for Natural History and Ornithology, being active in the New York chapter of the Audubon Society, and leading bird watching and nature excursions.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

B.A. in Art from the University of Washington, Seattle. Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, specializing in Canadian Indian and Eskimo Art, and Canadian-German Folk Art. She and her husband, E. Palmer Patterson II, a Professor of History, are the parents of nine children and have 2 grandchildren. In addition, she is a liturgical artist, designing stained glass windows, wall hangings and similar objects.

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He has attended San Diego State University, majoring in Math. He writes Science Fiction and has had works appear in the anthology Swords Against Darkness IV, and The Dragon. He is interested in role-playing gaming and Science Fiction fandom.

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