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Across the Brandywine

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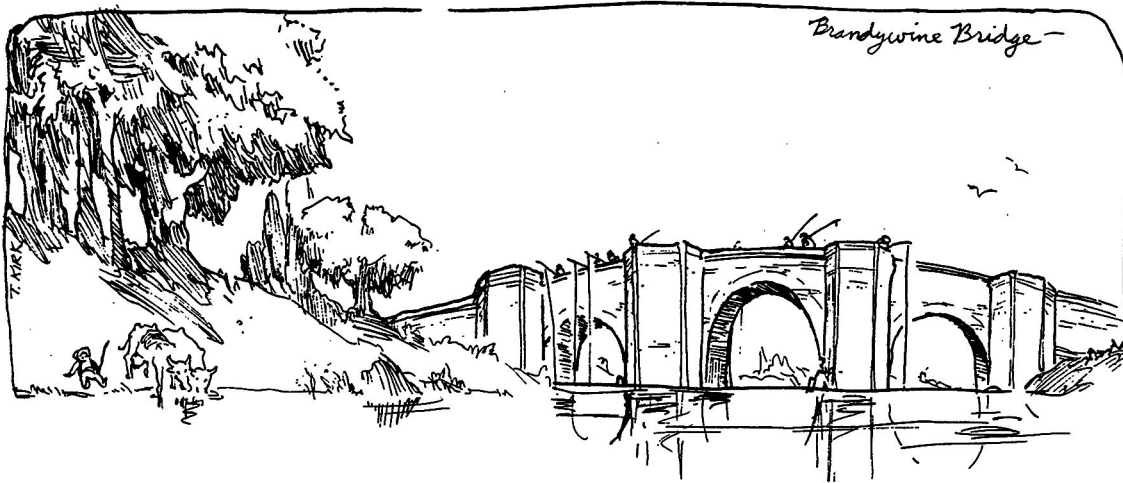


Across the Brandywine

Additional Keywords

Tim Kirk

Across the Brandywine



by
**Bernie
Zuber**

In the first issue of Mythlore (January 1969) I wrote a report on a meeting of the Tolkien Society of America at the 26th World Science Fiction Convention in Berkeley, California (Labor Day 1968). At that convention, Glen Goodknight, a few members of the San Gabriel branch and I were the only representatives of the Mythopoeic Society. The Society had been represented at only one other smaller convention in Los Angeles and it was too new a group to have official representation and program space at a Worldcon, such as the Tolkien Society had. Since then the Mythopoeic Society has had three conventions of its own, and merged with the Tolkien Society, so it is in a position to present an official program item at any Worldcon. Therefore, during this past Labor Day weekend at L.A.'s International Hotel, the Society presented a panel discussion of the Tolkien phenomenon on the program of the 30th Worldcon (IAcon).

The panelists on this Tolkien panel were Ian and Betty Ballantine (whose editions of The Lord of the Rings and Adult Fantasy series have done so much for the current popularity of fantasy literature), Marion Zimmer Bradley (a science fiction and fantasy writer whose article in Tolkien and the Critics is well remembered) and Gracia Fay Ellwood (author of Good News from Tolkien's Middle Earth and vice-president of the Society). Glen Goodknight was moderator. I won't try to give you a full transcript of this panel because there really isn't space for it, but the following is a report based on my tape recording.

Betty Ballantine opened the discussion by stating that Tolkien, more than other writers, evokes a need in his readers to participate in the world he has created. The Ballantines receive mail from Tolkien fans ranging in age from 7 to 70. The mail includes illuminated letters, maps, poetry and music. Mrs. Ballantine cited the example of a 17-year old girl who wrote in asking permission to reproduce the entire trilogy in longhand cursive script. It is this type of reader involvement that accounts for much of Tolkien's success.

Marion Zimmer Bradley brought up the fact that Tolkien talks to the young people of today about some very old myths. Man does not live by his religious or social institutions but by what he believes in, his myths. When she was young the Arthurian myth was very popular and influenced such sayings as "a knight in shining armor", to describe bravery, "a lily maid", to describe beauty, and "Merlin", to describe wisdom. But King Arthur is not quite as popular today as he was then, and the old myths have to be "re-treaded". This is what Tolkien has done. He has taken the ancient and basic myth that Evil can prevail for a time but Man believes, and proves, that

Good can win, though it's not easy. By doing this he has captivated the younger generation and fitted his story into the social climate of our time.

Gracia Fay Ellwood introduced elements of psychology and metaphysics into the discussion. She reminded us that Tolkien wrote in his essay, "On Fairy-Stories", that there is a need in us for that other side of the mind which is marvelous and strange...the antipodes of the mind, the collective unconscious. Man wants to communicate with that other side of reality and, since he can't see it in his daily life, he has to get at it in some other way. This is what fantasies such as Tolkien's have to offer. It's a chance to occasionally escape from the drabness of daily life and to rediscover the beauty and glory of things that had lost their freshness.

Ian Ballantine spoke at length of Tolkien's influence on others and particularly of the influence on him as a publisher. According to Mr. Ballantine Tolkien appeared at a time when there was a tremendous need for an artist capable of imagining things on a much wider scale than the current culture was able to manage. Tolkien's infectious enthusiasm stretched people's imaginations. The success of the Ballantine books on ecology has shown a great response from the younger generation who has not found, in the Establishment, the imaginative wattage needed to repair the damage that has been done in the past 50 years by the pursuit of technology. A fantasy writer like Tolkien can imagine great changes, bring the readers into his vision and enable them to go on and conjure for themselves. Tolkien's quality and energy also made way for the works of other fantasy writers, such as Mervyn Peake, to reach the audience they deserved. Tolkien himself is happy with the idea that adult fantasy has now reached academic acceptance and will be included in English texts.

Mr. Ballantine drew a parallel between Tolkien's success and the current interest in artists such as M.C. Escher and René Magritte, two surrealists whose art has recently been showcased in Ballantine books. He said that this interest in fantastic art is yet another aspect of the burgeoning of the imaginative side of human nature and tied this in with his remarks on the role of creative imagination in the conflict between ecology and technology. Next year, he added, Ballantine Books will publish an anthology of fantastic art, featuring artists who have been conjurers, such as Hieronymus Bosch, Brueghel, Salvador Dali, Escher and probably some of the illustrators who have done covers for the Adult Fantasy series.

In conclusion, Ian Ballantine gave us the most

recent news about Tolkien. The professor had sherry with the Ballantines at the London offices of Allen and Unwin last June. He is in good health but his publishers still screen his mail because of his advanced age. Reyner Unwin had obtained permission from Tolkien to publish a sample from The Silmarillion in the London Times, to commemorate Tolkien's 80th birthday last January, but the professor changed his mind, saying he would release it only when he was "good and ready". Later, during the question and answer session, Mr. Ballantine also mentioned that the projected Lord of the Rings film shows no sign of being made. Tolkien had said that his advice to the film makers was that they try to preserve the atmosphere and geographical scope of Middle Earth that he created with such care.

Glen Goodknight remarked that Tolkien has helped him believe that humanity is a great family with a collective unconscious. We all share archetypes from this collective unconscious and when we recognize them in Tolkien's work they evoke an immediate response. Archetypes, however, have to be fleshed out and we flesh them out from our own experience. Our reaction to Tolkien's Middle Earth and its archetypes is, therefore, a very personal thing and that is why, for instance, we fear that a film of The Lord of the Rings would shatter our individual concepts. Tolkien has also done something that the modern world needed. He has restored a feeling of order and permanence in the universe, something we had forgotten or passed beyond in this era of "future shock" when nothing seems permanent. Tolkien's interpretation of the universe has solid structures we can build upon. Glen also said that Tolkien has taken myth and refracted it through a different prism than that which we are used to. These new shafts of light penetrate where the more familiar forms of myth no longer come through because we are jaded. Myths such as King Arthur have become cliches. However, Glen reassured Marion Zimmer Bradley that there was a healthy "Arthur fandom" within the Mythopoeic Society.

After these initial statements Glen asked the panelists what they thought about the distinction between the critical reception the scholars have given The Lord of the Rings and the reception to it from Tolkien's fans. Did the panelists feel there was a difference in response from the two groups or were there any similarities?

The first to answer was Gracia Fay Ellwood who said that obviously people who talk about the genre and Tolkien's work on a linguistic basis are a long way from those who just like to wear costumes. But she felt that they all have important roots in common which relate to the topics Tolkien mentioned in his essay "On Fairy-Stories", otherness, recovery, escape and consolation. Both types of people are taken in by the three ages and this tremendous panorama that Tolkien unfolds. And there are some critics who respond to the otherness and the appearance of archetypes considerably more formed than in other literature.

Betty Ballantine stated that Tolkien works so beautifully for everyone because he deals with a classic theme we all know... Good versus Evil. He's also chosen a construct which is also classic... The Journey. That is a plot construct as old as Homer's Odyssey. And not only are his theme and structure classic but they are also of heroic stature. However, heroic themes can be remote because not everyone is heroic and therefore Tolkien has created a very believable creature that we can all identify with, who really doesn't want to go on that journey, he wants to live in his hole, "happy as a clam with his seed-cake". However this "hero in spite of himself" goes and fights with a quality of determination that common ordinary people can identify with. In the course of doing this extraordinary thing he finds his values, the same common decent values that people still seek today.

Another aspect of Tolkien was brought forth by Marion Zimmer Bradley. She remembered that Tolkien had been criticized for his bitter distaste for all the works of technology. He had been labelled as a reactionary who didn't appreciate progress. She proposed that it may have been the acceptance of Tolkien by the young that started them thinking about the whole ecological system, and thinking that maybe the engineers didn't have the last word on everything. You could almost say that Tolkien started the ecology movement.

Glen then asked, "How do we account for people who like to memorize the appendices and get into very detailed studies? Why does Tolkien motivate people this way?"

From the audience, Scratch Bacharach said that when people identify with hobbits they become aware of the hobbits' great interest in genealogy and soon find themselves immersed in studies of genealogical charts. Marion Zimmer Bradley added to his remark by saying that those who keep rereading about Middle Earth eventually memorize it and don't want to leave it. She and her children even made up new hobbit stories because they couldn't get enough of Middle Earth.

After some humorous exchanges in the audience about the relative merits of thinking of oneself as Aragorn rather than a hobbit, Betty Ballantine asked Marion what she thought of Tolkien's handling of the ladies. Marion replied by pointing out that in her essay, "Men, Halflings and Hero Worship", she wrote that adventurous women don't want to be treated as women, they want to be treated as human beings. She couldn't identify with the women in The Lord of the Rings specifically as women and she thought that bringing sex into it would be stupid because Tolkien was writing on a basis of "We are all living creatures together". She added that the English tradition is to write adventure stories for men and the women who want to read adventure read the men's books.

From the audience, Ian Slater made the point that instead of distinguishing between men and women Tolkien was describing hobbits, humans, ents, elves and dwarves and distinguishing between those groups. Marion said that this kind of thing came up during a discussion of science fiction writers when there was an argument over whether a man or a woman writer of sf could convincingly write about the opposite sex. At that time she vehemently made the point that if a writer can identify with a green-skinned monster he can certainly identify with the opposite sex of his own species!

Scratch Bacarach pointed out that Tolkien did describe both women who stayed home, and bore children, and women who went to fight battles, and didn't worry about the sexist problem. Someone else in the audience ventured to say that in mentioning love between males, Frodo and Sam in particular, Tolkien was dealing with a subject usually taboo in our literature, but Glen countered with the remark that we would be opening a big can of worms if we discussed whether or not the relationship between Frodo and Sam was homosexual. Other voices in the audience joined in to say that what Tolkien wrote of was not homosexual love but the great friendship between men that has been described in literature since the legends of Arthur and Charlemagne.

Glen announced that the panel would have to end soon but invited people to ask specific questions of the panelists. Mary Morman asked Ian Ballantine whether the deluxe boxed sets of The Lord of the Rings were a limited edition or not and he replied that they were limited and that after the remaining 5,000 copies have been sold it will be the end of that edition. No permission was granted for further

copies. Someone asked Mr. Ballantine why the Adult Fantasy series had not sold well, according to an advertisement in Galaxy magazine. Betty Ballantine took the microphone to explain that the writer of the ad mentioned there had been rumors that sales were not good, but, she emphasized, that is not at all true. The series has been selling very nicely. As a follow-up on the discussion about which of Tolkien's characters readers identify with, Antoinette Harris asked Glen why he chose to identify with Elrond. Glen explained that, as one who has retired from the battles of Middle Earth, Elrond has a quality of wisdom that he would like to have. Finally, I asked Ian Ballantine how he had managed to resist the temptation to include dates from Middle Earth in the Tolkien Calendar he recently published. He answered that he was afraid Tolkien would have found fault with them. He always tries to please Tolkien and he has sent him a copy of the calendar and asked the professor to make his own notations for a 1974 edition. Mr. Ballantine then added the remarks about the film of The Lord of the Rings that I mentioned earlier in this report.

Following the panel I presented a slide show of Tolkien art ranging from Tolkien's own sketches to illustrations by professional illustrators and paintings by fan artists such as George Barr, Diana DeCles, Bonnie Goodknight, Barbi Johnson, Tim Kirk and myself. The highlight of the show were the slides of Tim Kirk's thesis paintings from The Lord of the Rings. (The originals were also on display in the convention's art show.) The slide show was well received by the audience and I was asked if duplicate slides or prints would be available from the Society. I advised people to make their requests in writing and we would try to organize a system to make slides or prints available.

It was a pleasure to meet Mr. and Mrs. Ballantine. They were very friendly and quite willing to answer questions about their publications. They also gave us copies of the Tolkien Calendar. I asked Mrs. Ballantine whether future editions of Red Moon and Black Mountain might mention the fact that it received the 1971 Mythopoeic Fantasy award. She said that another edition was definitely planned and that chances were good the award would be mentioned. There is also a possibility that the Society might be mentioned in an introduction to a future Adult Fantasy book. The only disappointment at LAcon, as far as the Adult Fantasy series was concerned, was that its editor, Lin Carter, never did show up. He too had been scheduled for the Tolkien panel.

During the convention the Mythopoeic Society was also well represented in the hucksters' room. We had two tables to display our publications and attract prospective members. At one end of the tables we featured a continuous showing of slides taken at various Mythopoeic events by Jim Carleton, Jonathon Hodge and me. This "pictorial history" of the Society was successful in attracting the attention of several people who stopped to ask Glen and our other representatives all about the Society and its various functions.

It will be at least three years before another world or national science fiction convention comes to California but, meanwhile, the Society will continue to participate in regional conventions and then, of course, there are the Mythcons. I would strongly advise those of you who have never attended a convention to do so because the excitement of actually being involved can never be truly captured on paper. This report gave you an idea of what was only a part of a four-day event involving many different groups and over 2,000 people. Those of you who would like to read more about it, please write. I will try to refer you to other publications that describe LAcon.

THE MYTHOPOEIC PRESS



A PROPOSAL

For nearly two years there has been talk among interested members of the Society about the possibility of a Press. Both scholarly works focusing on the main areas of interest to Society members, and original works of fiction and poetry related to the genre that Society members appreciate, would be published.

This Mythopoeic Press would not be officially, legally, or financially connected with The Mythopoeic Society. It would be a separate non-profit corporation, with a special kind of membership. Each person who pledges either \$50 or \$100 would be a voting member of its Board of Directors, deciding which works would be published. Those who loan \$100 would receive a free copy of each book the Press would publish for its duration. These pledges would be loans, which would be paid back gradually from the profits earned. Loans less than \$50 would be accepted and paid.

The Mythopoeic Press would both supplement and transcend the periodicals of The Mythopoeic Society, as its published works would be complete in themselves.

We are not asking for any funds at this time; only a pledge for funds. The deadline for pledges will be June 1st, 1973. If sufficient pledges have been made by that time, the Press will proceed to establish itself, and contact members for decisions. Now is the time for serious consideration of this enterprise.

Address all pledges and/or correspondence about the Press to:
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