6-15-1987

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Tales Newly Told
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A Column by Alexei Kondratiev

All of us have, by now, become used to seeing Tolkien’s name as a promotion for new fantasy works of varying quality. However far removed, in terms of depth, intensity, and command of style, these works may be from Tolkien’s original, and however inappropriate the comparison may therefore seem, there does appear to be a general agreement on what constitutes the “Tolkienian manner” — as far as, say, plot situations, choice of imagery, and basic tone are concerned. Strangely enough, the same has not happened for C. S. Lewis’, although his works have circulated almost as widely as Tolkien’s. The only thing that seems to stick to Valedon, a planet structured along familiar military/industrial lines, and part of a larger inquiry, asking global questions about human life and the unstable islands are used to symbolize the ever-changing nature of the Real, which the wise soul must recognize that the powerful images that draw one to Lewis’ work — the prehuman, unhabitable planet Malacandra, the sensuous ocean-world of Perelandra, the archetypal personalities of the planetary gods — are not specifically Christian at all, and that the incidental Christian message contained in the works derives its strength from the elemental, universal nature of this imagery, and not the other way round. It would be a wonder if Lewis’ mythopoetic imagination — independent of his doctrinal allegiances — had not produced echoing images in the works of younger fantasists. In this column, I would like to draw attention to two fairly recent novels that seem to me to have particular resonances of Lewis in them, whether it be in their imagery or in their general manner.

Joan Slonczewski’s A Door Into Ocean (Arbor House, 1986; Avon, 1987) is a scence-fiction novel of conflict between planets, following the by-now familiar (perhaps too familiar) pattern in which a “masculine” culture based on aggression and dominance is encroaching upon a “feminine” culture based on balance and empathy. Slonczewski, however, treats this theme masterfully, perhaps better than any have before her. The book is in the grand tradition of the Utopian novel — that is, a novel of philosophical inquiry, asking global questions about human life and human needs. In this instance, the “masculine” side is represented by Valedon, a planet structured along familiar military/industrial lines, and part of a larger imperial continuum ruled over, appropriately, by a “Patriarch”. The idealized “feminine” counterpart to this is the planet Shora, inhabited by the all-female Sharers, whose name speaks for itself. Shora’s resemblance to Perelandra is immediately striking: it is an ocean world of lushly vegetated floating islands, rich with exotic life-forms of all kinds, and peopled by women (purple-skinned, not green) of remarkable strength and independence necessary to obtain her revenge. When, however, she discovers that violence and ruin, and who actually reproduce with the help of mates can become Sharers, and the most repulsive of myth and the sacred. The novel is set in an imaginary land with a vaguely Mesopotamian flavor, now invaded by demonic creatures who spread death and ruin, and who actually reproduce with the help of men, and thus combines the complementary opposites necessary for any creative endeavor, she succeeds where Gilgamesh failed, but without paying a terrible price. There is wealth of incident and invention in the plot, some of it grotesque, some of it sublimely beautiful, but every image is bright and sharp, charged with numinous power, and the themes unfold with a certain graceful seriousness, very much in the Lewis manner. Also reminiscent of Lewis is Ryman’s ability to juxtapose Pagan and Judeo-

Continued on page 57

It is refreshing to see that here, in contrast to some more heavy-handed feminist approaches, the “male/female” opposition is clearly used as a philosophical metaphor, not implied as a biological destiny: males can become Sharers, and the most repulsive material to be a grippingly suspenseful moral battle, effectively maintained to the last page.

Geoff Ryman first drew attention to himself with The Uncovered Country, a moving and frightening novella inspired by the war in Indochina. With The Warrior Who Carried Life (Allen & Unwin, 1985; Bantam, 1987) he has entered the realm of high fantasy, and demonstrated an exceptional sensitivity to the dimensions of myth and the sacred. The novel is set in an imaginary land with a vaguely Mesopotamian flavor, now invaded by demonic creatures who spread death and ruin, and who actually reproduce with the help of men, and thus combines the complementary opposites necessary for any creative endeavor, she succeeds where Gilgamesh failed, but without paying a terrible price. There is wealth of incident and invention in the plot, some of it grotesque, some of it sublimely beautiful, but every image is bright and sharp, charged with numinous power, and the themes unfold with a certain graceful seriousness, very much in the Lewis manner. Also reminiscent of Lewis is Ryman’s ability to juxtapose Pagan and Judeo-

Continued on page 57
Please Stand By...

First some information about this issue, and then about the future: Mythlore is delighted to have full color covers for the first time. This is done to mark the 50th issue and the Society's 20th anniversary. It was made possible by the very generous underwriting of the additional cost involved with the color printing by Bonnie Callahan, and we are all deeply grateful to her to see this long held dream at last come true. This one-time event could be repeated again if other generous underwriters would step forward. It could also come about if Mythlore added about another 250 subscribers. Adding to what I wrote about in the last issue on what readers can personally do to promote the journal, if those steps are taken by each of us, then we could see color artwork and other varied benefits in the future. Whether you are a potential underwriter or can simply post Mythlore flyers, your help is needed.

You will notice a new typeface in this issue, mixed with typing done previously with the old style (plus and article submitted on a separate word processor). We hope you like the new typeface.

In the future we hope to see Mythlore completely typeset. Good things can happen if we expect and work for them. Please stand by for future improvements.

The Society is rich in many things: people who are gifted, intelligent, creative, and enthusiastic -- all for good reason, namely what the Society means. Our biggest lack is sufficient funds, which keeps us from realizing much that could be done. A combination of generous donations and an increase in new readers would make a great deal possible. This is surely not new, but our spirit to challenge the seemingly impossible can be. Onward and Upward.

Glen GoodKnight

Letters, continued from page 42

elaborate composition and its rendering with such bold, sure lines and delicate, carefully controlled stipple. But the piece is even my impressive in the sense of mystic grandeur it conveys. I love the stylized, yet somehow plausible, architecture (a specialty of Ms. Patterson) which sweeps towards St. Anne's and culminates in the walled garden jutting up impossibly among the sun, moon, and stars (reminiscent of Tolkien's image of the holy mountain Taniquetil, whether coincidentally or intentionally); and the magnificent arc of planetary names, each overlaid with its appropriate symbol of power. This is St. Anne's, not as it would appear to one's physical eyes, but as it would appear to one's soul.

Equal praise is also due Ms. Patterson for her other fine illustrations from That Hideous Strength appearing in ML this past year, namely the cover of ML 45 and the superb portraits of the book's "good" characters in ML 47. The latter were amazing in their sensitivity -- these were the very faces I had seen in my own mind's eye when reading Lewis' book. I would love to see NLP's versions of the book's villains, especially Fairy Hardcastle. Perhaps she can be persuaded to try!

I'll bring this to a close before I begin to wax lugubrious (unless I'm too late already); but suffice it to say that I am looking forward to seeing more of Ms. Patterson's work (both artistic and scholarly) in future issues of ML, Maleldil willing.

Tales Newly Told, continued from page 14

Christian myths so that they illuminate and reinforce each other. He never tries to side-step the full emotional impact of myth, as so many modern treatments do. He does make more use of genuine horror than any of the Inklings would have (though one should remember that there is a strong element of horror in Lewis' own writing: witness the "Misericord Vision" in Perelandra, and the many levels of ghastliness suggested in That Hideous Strength), and yet, despite the bleakness of so many of the episodes, the novel ends on an image of warmth and goodness. To gaze upon death in its most disquieting aspects and still be able to offer hope -- a deep, lasting hope -- is a precious gift indeed in a writer.