6-15-1987

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Alexei Kondratiev

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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien
Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021

This column is available in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature: https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol13/iss4/12
Tales Newly Told
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 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 from his "Christian" label and on the rare occasions when a publisher refers to a new work as being "in the manner of C.S. Lewis", the work in question is usually a palid, transparently Biblical allegory with no imaginative depth and no power to move any but the converted. It does not appear to be widely recognized that the powerful images that draw one to Lewis' work — the prehuman inhabitants of Vala, the senuous 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 science-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 spiritual maturity. As in Lewis, the sea imagery and the unstable islands are used to symbolize the ever-changing nature of the Real, which the wise soul must accept instead of seeking to protect itself by an illusionary and alienating fixity. The idea of the "Fixed Land" is here expressed by the concept of stone itself, unknown on landless Shora, and which disturbs the Sharers (unlike the inhabitants of Vala, who name themselves after stones) because it seems to deny the motion and mutability of life. The Sharers' harmonious dealings with their environment are based upon their knowledge and acceptance of the realities of Shora, and their internal harmony comes from seeing every event as a relation, rather than as an ego-experience. When Valedon finally invades Shora, it is as though Weston, having failed to subvert the Queen, had returned with an army to conquer Perelandra in a later era. Military might is founded entirely on inspiring and exploiting fear, but the Sharers, who have the "perfect love that casteth out fear" — a fearlessness undiminished in the face of pain and death — do not react as expected. Stung by its initial defeats, the army adopts strategies that are ever more insane and cruel, and the story turns into a grippingly suspenseful moral battle, effectively maintained to the last page.

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 character in the story is a woman (a la Fairy Hardcastle). This is a thoughtful, intelligently constructed Utopia. On the whole, Slonczewski's Utopian concerns, "intense meaning", unswerving moral vision, feminist perspective, and generally Taoist interpretation of reality remind one more of Ursula Le Guin than any other writer — which makes it all the more remarkable that the link with Perelandra should come through so clearly, and that the views expressed in the two books should, in the end, be so compatible.

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 the hate and violence humans invariably direct at them. The heroine, Cara, who has been disfigured and embittered by the invaders, turns herself magically into a man (while retaining her female identity, and still being referred to as "she") in order to have the strength and independence necessary to obtain her revenge. When, however, she discovers that violence is useless, she embarks upon a much more complex and perilous quest, which takes on the character of Gilgamesh's quest for the flower of immortality. The source of the flower is the Tree of Life in Eden, where Cara meets Adam and Eve (who are not quite as the Bible portrays them). Since she is a male warrior with a female soul, and thus combines the complementary opposites so 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 sublime, and 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
Two Decades: Looking Back, continued from page 4

In 1980, the first Mythopoeic Conference to be held beyond California took place in Nevada. In 1985 the Conference was held in Wheaton, Illinois, and in 1987 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Society members are located in all parts of the United States and 15% of the membership lives outside the borders of the United States.

It took the vision and enthusiasm of youth to bring the Society into being. Now, and in the future, it requires the experience and determination of maturity to fulfill the original vision of the Society.

There is no progress without change, and no change without some feeling a sense of dislocation. We have had our critical junctures of transition. Underlying each was a challenge to the original vision, and purpose. I have always stood firm in my resolve that these not be changed, but remain active in the evolving process of how the original purpose and vision are best carried out. Looking forward to the coming decade, and into the next century, I can see exciting and ever-expanding possibilities for living out that vision.

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

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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 Hardcaste. 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.

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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 writers would have (though one should remember that there is a strong element of horror in Lewis' own writing: witness the "Miserable Vision" in Perelandra, and the many levels of ghastliness suggested in That Hideous Strength), and let, 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.