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From Peterborough to Faëry: The Poetics and Mechanics of Secondary Worlds. Eds. Thomas Honegger and Dirk Vanderbeke

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Mythcon 50

Looking Back, Moving Forward

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From Peterborough to Faëry: The Poetics and Mechanics of Secondary Worlds.
Eds. Thomas Honegger and Dirk Vanderbeke

FROM PETERBOROUGH TO FAËRY: THE POETICS AND MECHANICS OF SECONDARY WORLDS. Ed. Thomas Honegger and Dirk Vanderbeke. Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2014. Cormarë Series no. 31. ix + 165 pp. ISBN 978-3-905703-31-3.

A FURTHER SUBTITLE OF THIS COLLECTION IDENTIFIES IT as “Essays in honour of Dr. Allan G. Turner’s 65th Birthday.” According to the editors’ introduction, Dr. Turner, author of *Translating Tolkien: Philological Elements In The Lord Of The Rings* (2005), was profoundly influential among his students and fellow academics in areas of Tolkien studies and related fields, and this volume, which includes a bibliography of Turner’s published works, is a festschrift in celebration of his career. They say “Allan made incessant excursions into the Perilous Realm, not of faculty meetings but of Faëry. The works of J.R.R. Tolkien as well as the medieval (and post-medieval) literatures and languages of Northern Europe, which inspired much of Tolkien’s work, have had a profound and lasting impact on his personal and professional formation” (iii-iv). The editors have focused on one of Dr. Turner’s specific interests, that of the creation of secondary worlds in literature, as the theme of this volume. The “Peterborough” of the title refers to the Cambridgeshire city where Dr. Turner began his academic career.

The collection is organized more or less chronologically by the works discussed in the individual essays, beginning with Wolfram R. Keller’s discussion of a lesser-known work of Geoffrey Chaucer. Unfortunately, this might have been a poor choice for a lead-off piece, as its more academic approach is unlike all the rest of the essays, and the obscurity of its subject matter makes it difficult for anyone other than Chaucer scholars to appreciate Professor Keller’s obviously well-researched effort (his bibliography runs to three full pages).

Things pick up quite a bit with the second essay, Andrew ‘Chunky’ Liston’s “Burns’s Boggles,” which examines the supernatural elements of Robert Burns’s “Tam o’Shanter.” Liston, with prose that is lucid and direct, provides enough clear examples of his subject to justify his thesis that Burns was describing, if not actually creating, a secondary world of devils and other fantastical beings. He also notes how supernaturalism is tied to Scottish culture and hence to Scottish patriotism. An additional benefit of this essay is that Liston manages to link some things he discusses in the poem, such as religious/secular tension, morality and hypocrisy, and male/female duality, to issues still current in contemporary life.

Julian Eilmann’s “Romantic World Building: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Concept of Sub-creation and the Romantic Spirit” forms a bridge between the earlier works in the first two essays and those more modern ones in the rest of the

collection. It is also the only essay in the book that deals specifically with Tolkien. Eilmann first gives an overview of the Romantic movement in literature and describes some of the basic tenets of Romanticism. He then turns to “On Fairy-stories” to recap Tolkien’s views of fantasy, especially the concept of Recovery and how it relates to the value the Romantics placed on imagination.

Most readers of this journal know of Tom Shippey as a pre-eminent Tolkien scholar, but fewer, I imagine, are aware that Shippey is also quite a fan (and scholar) of science fiction, having edited *The Oxford Book of Science Fiction Stories* in 1992. In his contribution to this volume, he turns our attention to SF writer Jack Vance, whom he contends is underrated and overlooked in SF fandom and academia. Shippey describes various series that Vance created, each one depicting a fully-realized secondary world. Along the way, Shippey slips in a side comment about pondering the etymology of a word that came to him while he was dreaming a Vance-like dream, just so we don’t forget his philological expertise among all this praise for Vance. Shippey’s enthusiasm for Vance is obvious, and somewhat contagious—I have put some of the novels he praised onto my to-be-read list!

Finally (with one exception), the collection turns to authors of the present day, or at least very recent days: Terry Pratchett, Jasper Fforde, Neil Gaiman, and China Miéville. The exception is Honegger’s own “From Faëry to Madness: The Facts in the Case of Howard Phillips Lovecraft,” which should have been placed before the Vance piece if the chronological arrangement were to have been strictly followed.

But the one that does follow Shippey is Doreen Triebel’s “Stories that Last: Storytelling in Terry Pratchett’s *The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents*.” In it, Triebel describes Pratchett’s Discworld, a successful secondary world if there ever was one, and the *Maurice* novel’s place in it. She points out how Pratchett uses this children’s book to make pointed social and political commentary under the guise of humor and storytelling, as he does in nearly all his works.

Next is Next. Thursday Next, that is, the heroine of Jasper Fforde’s series of comic mystery thrillers set in a metaverse of books and stories. James Fanning, in “Thursday Next, or: Metalepsis Galore—and More,” examines the “fictional diegetic complexity” (105) of Fforde’s series, trying his best to make sense of a world which frequently verges on nonsense. For example, at one point the secondary world of the Bookworld (which is within the secondary world of the main storyline), is completely rewritten and gains a totally different geography. This sort of literary shenanigans either delights or annoys readers, depending on their own proclivities.

Honegger’s piece on Lovecraft discusses the Cthulhu Mythos as an example of mythopoeia, as well as tracing the external history of the mythos, as

first invented by Lovecraft and then continued by August Derleth and others. He compares Lovecraft with Tolkien, in that they both created consistent mythologies to serve as backgrounds for their stories, even though Lovecraft's stories are set here on this Earth rather than in a wholly invented secondary world. But the Cthulhu Mythos itself, Honegger points out, is itself a kind of secondary world.

Finally, Dick Vanderbeke compares works by two contemporary authors in "The Sub-Creation of Sub-London: Neil Gaiman's and China Miéville's Urban Fantasy." His focus is on how both writers have created alternate versions of the city of London, subterranean versions which he likens to Faëry realms from ancient (and not so ancient) folk tale traditions from Tír na nÓg to Rip van Winkle. Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and Miéville's *King Rat* and *Un Lun Dun* are the works to which he pays most attention, describing similarities in their approaches to creating these under-London settings.

On the whole, this is an interesting collection of different viewpoints on the different ways that different authors, over the century, have approached the concept, techniques, and execution of creating secondary worlds. The variety of those approaches is what becomes clear upon reading the entire volume.

—David Emerson



THE RAVENCLAW CHRONICLES: REFLECTIONS FROM EDINBORO. Corbin Fowler, ed. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014. 192 p. 9781443899413.

HARRY POTTER FOR NERDS II: ESSAYS FOR FANS, ACADEMICS, AND LIT GEEKS. Kathryn McDaniel and Travis Prinzi, eds. Oklahoma City: Unlocking Press, 2015. 328 p. 9780990882114.

IN THE DECADE SINCE THE FINAL HARRY POTTER NOVEL was published, scholarship inspired by the series has continued to flourish, alongside the pop culture fandom and merchandise. Two anthologies of criticism explore both the Potter canon and the fan culture.

The Ravenclaw Chronicles is the more specialized, being a collection of presentations at Edinboro University's Ravenclaw conference, the academic arm of a weeklong Potterfest. (Note: The university is located in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, hence the spelling.) In some ways, the book reads like a basic academic introduction to Potter studies—indeed, an apologia for the whole idea