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Missives to Mythlore

Lloyd Alexander
Walter Hooper
William Linden
James D. Clark
Roger Bryant Jr.

See next page for additional authors

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Missives to Mythlore

Authors
Lloyd Alexander, Walter Hooper, William Linden, James D. Clark, Roger Bryant Jr., Simone Wilson, Mary Ezzell, Nancy-Lou Patterson, Margaret Howes, Bob Foster, and Mary McDermott Shideler
Just a quick note to transmit compliments on the new Mythlore/Tolkien Journal, and my delight at seeing a piece concerning the under-signed — not to overlook a very flattering sketch, best suit, necktie, and all!

But my interest is much more than personal. I have to teach a three-week course in children's literature at Temple University here, this summer. Obviously, the lectures are going to include fantasy, Tolkien, Lewis, Williams, et al., and I'm looking forward to using Mythlore, as an excellent means of helping the students get some real sense of perceptions about the nature of fantasy.

Don't forget to send my warmest greetings to all at Mythcon, and wishes for a superb meeting, which I'm sure it will be. Events that grow out of humanity and hope are rather in short supply; so, Mythcon is all the more welcome and meaningful.

Walter Hooper, Jesus College, Oxford OX1 3DW, England.

Yes, there is a fragment of a fourth Ransom novel: 64 folio pages, which are in my possession. I do not know if Lewis ever completed the book or not. I have not yet decided what to do with it, but I don't feel that the time for publishing the fragment is yet come. I have been working on an edition of the Boxen Stories for the last few years, but there are some people who do not feel that they should be published, at least not now. The most recent project of mine has been an edition of some of Lewis' contributions to ephemeral publications: 48 short essays on theology and ethics. They will be published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. sometime this autumn under (I think) the title God in the Dock.

The next project is a biography of Lewis which his brother and his Trustees have asked Roger Lancelyn Green and I to write. We hope to have it completed by March 1971.

Owen Barfield recently spent a few days with me, and he was interested to see the article about himself in Mythlore. I thought the line drawing of Mr. Barfield a very good likeness. I read Mr. Kuhl's review of Ready's book on Tolkien with great interest. Indeed a great deal more interest than I read Mr. Ready's book. Several years ago Ready came to see me shortly after seeing Tolkien. I was astonished to hear him say that Prof. Tolkien did not understand several things about The Lord of the Rings. But he found me just as ignorant, for I, too, could not see what was not there. Prof. Tolkien is a dear friend of mine so I shall say no more than that he has read Mr. Kreeft be informed that at least one fan accepts Lewis' myth wholeheartedly as symbolic truth and not a literary device, an elaborate hoax, extraneous baggage or purely for its aesthetic value.

In addition, Rand Kuhl's dissection of Mr. Ready's abomination was excellent, and if anything, understates the case. Indeed, he has not even made a complete listing of Mr. Ready's enormities. In addition to the errata Mr. Kuhl has listed, Ready thinks that the three Elven rings had, at the beginning of the tale, already passed over the sea. Further, he thinks Isilurd was a full Elf, and misquotes and utterly mangles a line from Chesterton's Ballad of the White Horse. Niggling and inconclusive points to be sure, but the errors are indicative and totally unredeemed by the rest of the book, as is succinctly stated by Mr. Kuhl. A good study of Garry Will's Chesterton: Man and Maak might help him on that subject. On Tolkien, Mr. Ready may be beyond help, though to be totally fair, I did find the 80 wks it took in the book, I agreed with. However, my case is worse than Mr. Kuhl's. He bought the paperback, I'm out 40, 00 for the hardback.

(The following excerpts are from a Mythlore reader in the Union of South Africa. His anonymity is explained in the letter. In an earlier letter he inquired of the possibility of forming a Mythopoetic Branch in his country. I replied, due to the bad press S.A. has had, that if it were formed, we would need to form a branch in Czecho-Slovakia or Sweden, to balance the thing out.)

Re the bad press South Africa has — any branch of the Mythopoetic Society (here) will be composed of the opponents, rather than supporters, of our regime. I myself, after becoming a Christian about eight years ago, became involved in the struggle against injustice in our country, and I have been a form of political prisoner for the last five years. I am not sure that Barfield "failed to make his point" about transiion des clerics. Remember how the phrase is applied to the faculty of Edggesto in That Hideous Strength.
Joseph Beyer Markham has just recently come to my attention, and on the strength of one-third of one novel, I am sufficiently impressed to mention him here. Markham wrote twenty-five books between 1929 and 1943, when he disappeared in London bombing-raids. A very few of these were published, but most were lost until 1943 when the manuscripts were found in the house where Markham lived. I have not read any of those published works, but I am told they are represented in the Western Reserve Library at Cleveland. I hope to stop there in the near future and see if I can check them out on the inter-college library program.

At any rate, Mr. Al Attanasio, a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, has adapted one of the newly-found novels and has begun publishing it, in sections, in a fanzine called Mount to the Stars. This novel, called Much of Madness and More of Sin, is a fantasy of black magic, and seems to verify Dr. H. P. Lovecraft’s Eastern-orr-sophy in an excellent fantasy style which seems to me to combine elements of Charles Williams with the flair for fear which was characteristic of H. P. Lovecraft. Your note in the "Inkings" article that Williams was a Lovecraftian, and that Markham's books show a similar strain, has caused me to wonder whether Markham and Williams might not have known each other, for both these things were true of Dr. Markham. At any rate, I think perhaps Markham's work might prove interesting to you.

Mount to the Stars is published by Gail Suttin, UTA Box 797, Arlington, TX 76010, and he charges $1.50 per copy.

Speaking of Mr. People's article, I would like to agree with the main point made, but take issue with some of the supporting evidence and peripheral remarks. The comments which appear here show some misunderstanding of the nature and history of magic and belief in the supernatural.

Mr. Peoples claims that the idea that young people can be "hexed" is nonsense, from either of two viewpoints. This is nonsense, from any viewpoint. There is no logic in the statement that if there is no God then no Satan. God may indeed not exist, in the sense in which organized religions picture Him, and neither may Satan. But does this disprove the existence of some order of beings which we would today call "supernatural"? I think not. I prefer to believe in a form of the supernatural, although my beliefs would not be in accord with the adherents of most religions. But I can no more prove the reality of the things in which I believe than anyone can prove the existence of God.

Some have said, sometimes in jest, that only Satan exists, and that he created the idea of God to distract men from his true nature. When one considers the long histories of horrors that have been perpetrated in the name of God, one wonders if this might not be near the truth.

Alternatively, there is the recurring idea that God and the Devil, or Good and Evil, are sides of the same coin. This has occurred as a heresy, and has been absorbed by occultists. Even remember reading a science-fiction story several years ago in which a scientist believed that the supernatural creator of the universe was afflicted with a clinical schizophrenia. He was God at times and Satan at others. The scientist conjured up the Devil to subject him to shock treatments.

It is equally perilous to assume that if God and Satan exist, God is of course the more powerful. This notion has triumphed in the orthodox theologies of today, but it was not always so. More than once the heresy has arisen that God and Satan are continually warring equals. The Maccabean heresy, which some scholars like Montague Summers believe is the very root of Witchcraft and Satanism as we know it today, claimed the "goodness" of God and the "evilness" of Satan were only so in relation to man's moral assumptions. Neither was "good" by any external standard, and which one chose to serve was a matter of trying to choose the ultimate winner. Of what worth are the Scriptures' claims and prophecies of victory when one considers that they may be wartime propaganda? In modern fiction, this theme is treated of in Black Easter by James Blish.

But whether any of these things are true or none of them, it remains true that someone can be "hexed," the victim of a witch, without the involvement of any supernatural agency. People who believe in witchcraft are going to find themselves sick when they believe a witch has cursed them. It's a natural result of their belief in the efficacy of magic, and their fear of it. Even those, in a modern and "enlightened" age, who fear that there might be some truth in it, will soon be allying.

Two recent books shed light on this subject. One concerns the witchcraft at Old Salem. Chadwick Hansen, in Witchcraft at Salem, asserts that there was sorcery practiced in Salem Village, and lifts an undeserved mantle of guilt from two who have long been mistreated by history: the victima, whom historians have portrayed as a vindictive and malicious group of teen-age girls, and Cotton Mather, who has been shown as a power-drunk preacher versed in the justices to greater excesses. In both cases, exactly the opposite was the truth. The other book is Hex, by Arthur H. Lewis. Its story is of the trial of the murderers of Nelson Rehmeyer, who was killed in 1928 by two or more men who believed that he had "hexed" them. To this day many believe that the verdict should have been justifiable homicide; if it could be shown that the dead "witch" had himself claimed to have that power and had threatened the men, I would agree.

The problem discussed here is not that some people believe that witchcraft works, but that it does work when people believe.

Simone Wilson, 1777 Las Llamas, Pasadena 81006

You know, (the Santa Barbara Branch) is getting on so well that I'm getting more enthused than ever about the Society. I'm really getting into a lot of mythical stuff thru my major too. For instance, next fall I have a class entitled Religious Myth and Language; one of the books required for the course is Till We Have Faces (1). Really I think there's a lot of important work to be done in this area, both in a scholarly vein and in a popular one too. I'm working on a theory that people in the modern secular world feel so alienated because they almost entirely miss the deep intuitive feelings about nature and culture and each other which are fostered by the kind of mythological thinking which associates things and gives them underlying meanings. Scientific thinking can't do this—it isolates. Mythological thinking takes a thing and brings into play all the ideas and qualities which that thing suggests. It's a very rich kind of thinking, and makes you aware of and in tune with all reality. It maybe sounds mystical, but only because we have largely lost this faculty of perception. Have you read Antigue Drum and Before Philosophy? They're both excellent books about myth in general.

Mary Ezzell, Box 561A, Rte. 1, Cedar Hill, Texas 75104

Though I have not yet learned to appreciate—or even to read thru—Professor Tolkien, I practically raised myself on Lewis and Williams. I cannot remember a time before I knew Lewis' books—not Narnia, but the Mere Christianity series—and used them as a norm to judge other writing and all thinking by. What real education I have I got from him—and the books they will lead you to.

I don't know if you want LOCs, etc., but I am going to run on a bit. Lewis is the best and clearest English stylist I know. From Oxford Hist.: "Things need to be treated at length not insofar as they are treated..." He's a master craftsman, and his show they connect to a problem discussed here is not that some people believe that witchcraft works, but that it does work when people believe.
Nancy-Lou Patterson, 115 William Street West, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Your magazine is fascinating. How strange that one correspondent objects to including Lewis and Williams: doesn't he know Tolkien already has an official journal and a host of fanzines? The overt Christianity of Lewis and Williams was perfectly in keeping with the Anglican, between-wars England of their day — Tolkien was R.C. and hence an "outsider," but he has had the advantage of living longer, and seeing his works accepted in a "Post-Christian" society; I wonder whether that really pleases him. Lewis did write one marvelous "extra" or "non"-Christian novel, Till We Have Faces. Perhaps the reason some people prefer Screwtape is that, like many Milton-lovers, they unconsciously identify with the chief protagonist, who is the same in Screwtape as in Paradise Lost! But nobody could say of Lewis that he did.

Mrs. Margaret Howes, 6523 Unity Ave. N., Minneapolis, Minn. 55429

I was delighted to find that there are other people besides myself who share in what Peter Kreeft has called "all three thirds of Lewis" — reason, faith, and fantasy. I am Catholic, for the benefit of anyone taking a survey, but 1 also think that you're right in looking up those novels again and re-read them, more carefully.) I have written to England in hopes of getting copies of The Silmarillion? My daughter says she's beginning to be afraid that it's really nonexistent, like the Necronomicon.

Bob Foster, 312 11th St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

Being from the city, I do not know enough about Nature to think about the ecology of Middle-earth, but I was very impressed with Marcella Juhren's article. It's always good to find another area in which Tolkien has really thought things out. I have two quibbles, however, both focusing around the sentence, "The thrush of Erebor was of magic (he could not have found much to eat there)," First, there were a lot of large snails in the small grassy bay outside the west door of Erebor (Ball. H. 197, 199-206, 200-201). Second, I do not think it wise to view Middle-earth as a Primary, natural World. Incidentally, I favor the use of Primary for the world of first focus; in LoTR it's Middle-earth; in The Worm of the World: Earth; in The Hobbit it's also Earth, because of the few examples of writing-down and Tolkien's placing (H. 19) of the Shire and Hobbits in the context of our world) with a Secondary "magic" World superimposed on it. All of the "magic" is integral to Middle-earth. Certainly the Northern Waste, Lorien and Wargs do not fit into an ecological perspective, but it violates the integrity (both integralness and plausibility) of Middle-earth to separate the phenomena too far. The Northern Waste represents the same type of thing as the deserts of Vietnam, which I have heard are being produced by the effects of direct sunlight on the jungle soil in defoliated areas; although perhaps unnatural, the two are by no means "magical," and if ecology is to embrace the efforts of all creatures to shape their environments (New York City and a bird's-neast differ in size, but not in intent), all effects either consciously produced (like the Northern Waste) or following in any way from intentional living patterns (like air pollution) must be included. Middle-earth is simpler in this respect than our own world, since one-shot phenomena like the Northern Waste merely need to be noted, while the pollution levels of Isengard and Minas Morgul were probably low enough not to make any great alterations in the environment beyond "natural" effects such as cut-down forests.

Actually, I suspect that Mrs. Juhren has overstated the extraordinary effect of her Secondary World. If we can use pigeons as messengers, why can't Saruman use crows as spies? The mellyrn of Lorien did not remain golden all year; they were green until the fall, when they turned golden and remained that way until they fell at the beginning of the spring. The mellyrn were probably originally found in the West, and thus represent a simple importation.

Still, despite Mrs. Juhren's unfortunate dichotomy between natural and magical (incidentally, one of the more "magical" ecological phenomena is that athelas grows only where the Dunedain, the Men of the West, once dwelled), I like how she has brought together and explained all of the seemingly gratuitous descriptions of nature in LoTR. I am indebted to her for the insight she has given.

Thank you for your article on the Inkings; it was very informative. It also explains, I guess, where Tolkien got the idea for the Great Eagles. Sister Elizabeth MacKenzie's article on love in LoTR inspires in me mixed feelings. There is little in it I can disagree with, although perhaps Old Testament "righteousness" is a better term than "love." Righteousness is the creative aspect of God's moral covenant with Abraham, as opposed to regulatory Justice. Justice is the negative aspect of Holiness; Righteousness, its positive aspect... Justice meant the recognition of six fundamental rights. These were the right to live, the right of posses-
sion, the right to work, the right to clothing, the right to shelter, and finally the right of the person, which includes the right to leisure and the right to liberty, as well as prohibitions to hate, avenge or bear a grudge.

"Righteousness was to manifest itself in the acceptance of duties (possibly a bad word), especially in the concern for the poor, the weak, and the helpless, whether friend or foe... Economic law in the Torah was thus to mean essentially services to one's fellow man; and behind this ethic stood the law of love as formulated in the golden rule, 'Thou shalt love thy fellow as thyself' (Lev. 19:18), which is expressly stated (v. 34) to include the non-Israelite stranger.

"Righteousness was also to express itself in the humane treatment of dumb animals." (Isidore Epstein, Judaism, Penguin 1959, pp. 38-7)

All of this follows from the existence of an absolute morality. The dichotomy between absolute and relative morality, between religion and philosophy, is very important, for in the latter righteousness or Dharma must be proven and striven for, while in the former it must be realised and accepted.

If, as in Christianity, Judaism and Middle-earth, there is also the notion of perfectability—or at least large improvement, a right-living individual must act with Bilbo's compassion, and a right-thinking individual must eventually realize what Gandalf knows.

However, righteousness by itself is not necessarily strong enough to overcome evil. God promised to protect and guide Israel if the Jews remained righteous. Although there does not seem to have been a formal covenant between Eru and his Children (the Eruen), the aid given by the Valar to the peoples of Middle-earth corresponds to the righteousness (and, since this is a heroic society, bravery) of the particular representative of his race—Earendil, Aragorn, Faramir, Frodo and, most plain bravery where this is necessary) and understanding. Sam is not noble, nobility: it is composed of two elements, righteousness (which subsumes to nobility, which is an awesome and heart-rending thing. Bilbo in addition represents the rare person in whom nobility does not replace sim­plicity, because it is too much against his nature.

This in turn enables me, after many years, to offer a definition of nobility: it is composed of two elements, righteousness (which subsumes bravery where this is necessary) and understanding. Sam is not noble, because he does not really recognize the significance of his deeds. Aragorn and the Denéan are noble by nature, but Frodo and Bilbo come to nobility, which is an awesome and heart-rending thing. Bilbo in ad­dition represents the rare person in whom nobility does not replace sim­plicity, but exists alongside it (cf. Sybil in The Greater Trumps); this nobility is almost as hard to perceive as it is to attain.

Although the form of my argument (that love or righteousness is necessary to Middle-earth, rather than being a theme of LotR) differs greatly from Sister Elizabeth's, I am not sure that we are really saying anything different. But the inherency and imminence of righteousness and nobility in a world with absolute morality are elusive enough, I feel, to warrant the restatement.