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Missives to Mythlore

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Missives to Mythlore

Missives to Mythlore



Bonnie's illo is a subtle hint to you, the readers, that we would like to hear from more of you, for good or ill. Mythlore is a labor of love, with no hope of monetary gain. It has certain special interests, and we assume that you, the subscribers, share in at least one of these interests; otherwise, why have you subscribed? You are invited to share your comments, reactions and ideas. If your letter is published, you get a free contributor's copy. I hope we'll have more "missives" next issue. — Editor.

Doug Cross, 4 Ridgeline Dr., St. Louis, Mo. 63122

I am a college freshman (MICHIGAN!), and I've been interested in Tolkien and fantasy ever since my second reading of *LotR*. I guess that was about 5 years ago. A friend of mine kept twisting my arm until I read the trilogy, and, upon completion, I joined a now-defunct organization called the Neo-Numenoreans. I joined more because of my friends' (oo!) friend's pressure and my own curiosity than out of love for *LotR*. After writing to several people who were in love with *LotR*, and through more discussions with my friend who forced me to read the thing, I discovered that all these people saw something in the books that I missed completely — all I felt was a mild wonder at the length of the series and a vague sense of fear of meeting up with a Sauron or one of his cohorts in a dark alley.

During my second reading, a funny thing happened — everything and everybody in the story started making sense — and, more importantly, I felt I was finally feeling what it was like to be actually alive. Many people — the great majority, in fact — don't possess this feeling. In a way, it's like the difference of being awake and asleep: aware and unaware. Heinlein certainly had the right idea in *Stranger* when he said that everyone was God, but I think it would be more correct to say that everyone (or nearly everyone) has the potential of being God — it's unfortunate that most people don't realize or don't choose to exercise this potential.

Do you get the same impression? I probably haven't expressed it very well, but I think if you're "awake" then you know what I'm talking about. I've found that many people who have read Tolkien are awake, though not necessarily because of reading Tolkien. While the difference between the awake and the asleep can often be subtle, it always exists.

The articles I've read in *Mythlore*, I've found to be outstanding, except for Louis Marvick's letter. I think the artwork is perhaps the best part of the 'zine, and I hope that in the future you can put even more in. So what if I have a slightly different impression of a particular scene or person or thing? I'm very poor artistically, and I like to see how others envision something. The back cover in *Mythlore* 5 by Tim Kirk is exceptional, and I'd say the same thing even if I hadn't been able to recognize it immediately.

(Yes, I think I know what you mean about being "awake." Reading Tolkien and Lewis in high school awakened me, and the inner joy of feeling oneself really alive, and that this joy could be shared (even as haltingly and crudely as it is) and communicated with others, has given me the impetus to found the Society, *Mythlore*, and Mythcon. Since I am a theist, rather than saying

we have the potential of being God, I would agree with Lewis that we have the opportunity of being dazzling Gods and Goddesses (see Lewis' *The Weight of Glory*). We can be part of the process of becoming; God cannot, he is in the eternal state of being. I often think of being "awake" or "alive" in terms of participating in the Great Dance.))

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It's interesting to see two Williams-type covers. I don't somehow like either Bernie's or Bonnie's, but I can't pin down why. I'd like to see more artwork based on Williams, though.

The Merlin article is a helpful summary of the part that Merlin and Arthurian legend generally play in *That Hideous Strength*. It doesn't answer one question which has been bothering me — what is Logres? I don't recall a kingdom of Logres in any of the Arthurian material I've read. My memory for names is not all that good, and I may just have forgotten it; but whatever it is, I suspect that opposition of Logres to Britain is Lewis' own invention. I don't think there's anything about the Fisher-King in Frazer (there's nothing in my abridged copy), and I suspect, more likely than Lewis' borrowing Eliot's Fisher-King, that Lewis went to Eliot's source, Jessie L. Watson's *From Ritual to Romance*. The figure of the Fisher-King does not appear to any particular extent in those of the Arthurian sources mentioned as Lewis' chief sources which I've read (Geoffrey, Layamon, and Malory — I haven't read Ware or the prose Merlin). I am not familiar with the Grail legends in their original versions, but I suspect that Miss Weston invented most of the significance of the figure of the Fisher-King (or deduced — she was working back through the extant versions to try to discover what the original Grail myth was).

The Galen Peoples article is likewise a useful summary. Barbi's Frodo fit is Frodo, isn't it, rather than Bilbo? I imagine Frodo as thinner than Bilbo was at the same age) is attractive. (Come to think of it, though, the pipe and sitting on the doorstep could make it a specific illustration of Bilbo in the opening to *The Hobbit*. If so, he looks too thin to me.)

"The Noises that Weren't There" is fascinating and absorbing. It's frustrating not to be able to go on and read the rest of it. I don't see how it can be the "straightforward novel" mentioned in the headnote — unless Clarissa's second-sight is to be taken as something that Williams believed to be possible and not supernatural in real life.

One of the inconsistencies in Narnian chronology discussed by J.R. Christopher vanishes if we suppose that "Dawn Trader" does not take place as late as c. 1950 — after all, the only evidence that it does take place that late is Christopher's suggestion that Mr. Pevensie probably would not get an American appointment just after the war. But that doesn't mean he couldn't have. The other inconsistency is, I think, to be explained as a convention of fairy-tale biology — very old men (and women) can have children (as in *King Lear* — which isn't a fairy tale, but employs some of the same conventions). The fact that Lewis doesn't bother to mention that it took Caspian and the Star's

daughter 45 years or so to have a child doesn't necessarily mean that he wasn't aware of the chronology he was setting up or that he expected the reader to be unaware of it. He's right, of course, that the real reason for setting up the age gap between Rilian and Caspian is one of symbolism, but I don't think the symbols in this case go against the literal details.

I'm afraid all the poetry in this issue (including Williams') strikes me as being quite dreadful.

((I'm glad you asked the question about Logres, even though I won't be able to give a definitive answer. - Anyone for writing a full research paper on the history and development of Logres? - Just looking through my library I found reference to Logres in 'Tennyson, and I suspect it goes back further than him. Of course Lewis' uses of Logres in *That Hideous Strength*, even though there is earlier reference, is almost wholly derived from Williams' Arthurian poetry - *Talesian Through Logres and The Region of The Summer Stars*. Williams says in *Arthurian Torso*, page 53, that it was Chrétien de Troyes in his poem *Lancelot* 'that the name of Logres seems first to be first used for King Arthur's land; its derivation is said to be from the Welsh *Lloegor*, a land of faerie which was also Britain or within Britain.' Williams, in his prelude to *Summer Stars*, says that Logres 'is Britain regarded as a province of the Empire with its center at Byzantium.' But what is more directly stated in *That Hideous Strength*, that is the tension or struggle between spiritual Logres and self-serving Britain, is also strongly sensed in Williams' poetry - Arthur struggling, with Merlin's help to establish Logres, with Mordred within and the forces of Plo-l'u without to tear it down.

As to Lewis borrowing from Jessie L. Weston's work, I have seen no reference in Lewis' writings to either disprove or affirm your suggestion. There is certainly much material on the Fisher-King in Weston.

As to "The Noises that Weren't There" being a straightforward novel, I'm not so sure after reading the third chapter, which will appear in the next issue. I can't spoil it for you by saying anything definite, but it is half-raising, and if Williams called this 'straightforward,' I'm sure he didn't mean it wasn't supernatural! The whole three chapters leave the reader nearly crazed to know what the rest would be.

(continued from page 14)

If I am correct in my assumption about the lineaments of Lewis' geographic imagination, then the basis for geographic criticism of Lewis' fiction has been established. Thus, when Ransom in *Out of the Silent Planet* journeys over high passes to Meldilorn, a critic can say, "This is analogous to Pledge's flight to the garden in *Magician's Nephew*, and to John's journey to the sea-shore in *The Pilgrim's Regress*." But the analogy is only the beginning; then he must decide what Meldilorn adds to the geographic myth, and in what ways it is unique.

Correction to Part I of an Introduction to Narnia: the Chronology of the Chronicles by J.R. Christopher

Since the publication of Part One, I have noticed one major blunder in my essay and one minor omission (why does a writer never find these things before publication?). The minor omission has to do with the Narnian time between *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I still cannot be much more precise than I was in my essay last issue, but I should have noted that in *The Magician's Nephew* the text twice indicates that the Witch left Narnia alone for "many hundred years" (pp. 134, 181) because of the Shield Tree. "Many hundred years" is vague, but certainly it is different from "many thousand years." I am, of course, assuming that her next attempt resulted in the magical winter in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: if she made an earlier attack on Narnia, there is no reference to it.

The major blunder has to do with my flat statement (on p. 25) that "There are no instances in the books of Narnian time flowing at a slower rate than earth time." Unfortunately (for me) there is one instance. In *The Last Battle* (pp. 51-2) one week passes on earth before Jill and Eustace are able to get to Narnia, while only ten minutes pass for Tirian, tied to a tree. Thus Lewis' statement in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* about the uncertainty of the time relationships (which I cite in my essay) is correct.

I wait to see what other errors other readers will find. (I hope not many!)



LEWIS, POWER, AND SCIENCE

The above illustration by Steve McIntosh is very appropriate to this editorial. Sauron's Ring of Power has been rediscovered by the N.I.C.E.

Lewis is sometimes charged with being anti-science. Such a charge seems to me to be a faulty over-simplification. Lewis is often misunderstood by people who haven't read the whole body of his writings. There is much inter-relation of themes and concepts in all his works, and often one book will shed much background information on another. To view Lewis' thoughts on Science from a wider perspective, we should consider what Science is and the human condition.

The word "science" means knowledge. Truly knowledge is power, but it is neutral power, available to be used in constructive or destructive ways. Certainly Lewis was not anti-knowledge, being one of the most well read men of this century. This tool of knowledge is just that, a tool. Any tool is only as good as those who use it; unused, it has no abstract power of itself. Man can and has used this tool of scientific knowledge to both beneficial and disastrous results. I think the real underlying question is whether Man, as Pascal called him - "the glory and shame of the universe," is able to handle the tremendous power made available through the scientific discoveries of modern times. While these discoveries are being made available, less and less have those who used them asked moral questions involved in their use. Science isn't bad or dangerous. What's dangerous is the moral and ethical relativity of those who might use the power of science. The danger can be seen on two levels: that of torture done in the name of science by Nazi doctors in the 40's, and the serious abuse of ecological principles in the "technological" nations of today. I would challenge anyone who might think Lewis is anti-science to read carefully his short book *The Abolition of Man* first. *That Hideous Strength* is only one of many anti-utopian novels that describe the perils of all-powerful governments run by a few men without any ethical standard. Lewis' warning in the 40's seem more and more prophetic today.

The character Weston is often brought forward as the proof of Lewis' anti-Science. But what Weston says in *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*, isn't science at all, it's philosophy. His thought is much like Wells in *ESP* and turns even less rationalistic in *Perelandra*, where he becomes a kind of Shavian worshiper of the Life Force. The N.I.C.E. is run by bureaucrats, not scientist. The only bad scientist, Filostrato, is balanced out by Hengist, the scientist killed by the N.I.C.E. for attempting to leave. A distinction needs to be made between technology and philosophy, since in many minds they are both lumped together in "science."