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Reviews

Paula DiSante

Nancy-Lou Patterson

David Bratman

James E. Pearson Jr.

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Reviews

Abstract

The 1991 J.R.R. Tolkien Calendar. Illus. by John Howe. Reviewed by Paula DiSante.

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The Cosmic Trilogy. C.S. Lewis. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante. Barbara Reynolds. Reviewed by James E. Pearson Jr. .



R E V I E W S



One Foot in Middle-earth

The 1991 J.R.R. Tolkien Calendar. Illustrated by John Howe. Ballantine Books ISBN 0-345-36757-X.

Ballantine's latest edition of the J.R.R. Tolkien Calendar offers twelve new paintings by John Howe, and interior graphics by Alex Jay/Studio J. Happily, since last year's calendar, the graphic designers have removed the intrusive borders from around the artwork. The individual months are neatly laid out with clearly labelled days of the week, but unfortunately each month is surrounded by a garish Art Deco border that simply does not fit with the fantasy tone of the art.

Howe's approach to Middle-earth has improved, but remains hit-and-miss. This unevenness makes his calendar an exercise in frustration: sometimes Howe is right on the money, and sometimes he is way off base.

January's "The Company of the King Approaching Caradhras" (shouldn't this be "The Company of the Ring"?) is a fairly good attempt at the kind of scope that paintings of Middle-earth landscapes ought to possess. The mountains are majestic, and the blowing snow adds a real sense of atmosphere. The blue of the sky is too intense, however, suggesting instead a sunset-sky deepness that the established daylight denies. Howe's composition is relatively static. All of the elements are arranged in overlapping planes that are parallel not only to each other, but also to the picture plane. But on the whole this painting is handled with skill.

February — "The Dark Tower." Here is one of the better Towers in recent Tolkien art history. This creepy Gothic structure seems to go on forever. Sauron's stronghold looks blackened and ossified — like a huge charred bone splitting the sky. The deep grey-black clouds fill the painting with a sense of dread and doom, which is the perfect mood for the piece. The Nazgûl, however, does not fare nearly as well. The use of cold light skittering across the monster's body does give it an appropriately reptilian look. But the iron-clad head of the creature comes across as slightly silly. The monster is rather staidly perched on an outcropping of rock. Compare this to the dizzying terror of Ten Nasmith's airborne Nazgûl in last year's calendar, and it is easy to see that Mr. Nasmith's painting more successfully integrates all of the elements of the scene.

March — "Sam and Shelob." This is undoubtedly one of the most popular scenes in *The Lord of the Rings*, but enough already! This scene has been published too many times in the calendar. Howe's version does have a bold dynamism, but the lighting and the dominant color (blue) are too cold, too pristine, and out of context.

April — "Galadriel." This painting is superficially 'pretty.' It owes a lot to the type of jewel-like representation that the Pre-Raphaelites did so well. Howe should have borrowed that school of painters' use of underlying context. There is little here to recommend the painting. An indifferent Galadriel holds up her ring, but she is not focused upon it. In fact, she seems to be dozing, or perhaps glancing at her watch (if she were wearing one!). Nothing in this depiction gets the viewer's blood moving. The painting is remote, and offers no insight into the person who is Galadriel.

May — "Gandalf." This is the best painting in the calendar. It is the antithesis of the "Galadriel" piece because it endeavors to explore character. Howe makes us evaluate the different sides of Gandalf. Is the intense, striding wizard bringing the sunshine and driving away the dark clouds, or is he Gandalf Stormcrow, the wind and rain following his path? He is both, of course, and Howe captures this beautifully. On a technical level, this painting exhibits a high level of artistic ability — the rain, the wind-swept tree branches, the lush grassland, and Gandalf himself. Although his observations of nature are not nearly as detailed as Ted Nasmith's (see Ted's Lúthien in the 1990 calendar for an example), Howe manages to be convincing in what he does choose to show.

June — "At the Ford." There is a very believable sense of the motion of water in this painting. Howe puts the viewer virtually in the midst of the crashing torrent. But the composition of the figures is only fair. There is more threat in the perilous flood than there is in the approaching Nazgûl. The magnificent white elf-steed of Glorfindel that Frodo rides has been reduced to Asfaloth the Wonder Pony. But Howe's skillful handling of the water makes up for many of these other shortcomings. The white foam "horses" are also well done, even if they read a touch too literally.

July — "Old Man Willow." The willow itself has a fine twisty, ancient look. The bare, upswept branches suggest the ribcage of some giant, long-dead beast. But aside from the artfully handled moss and ivy, there is not *one* willow leaf on this willow tree. Howe's brush technique in the water is very good, and the background elements are appropriately soft and dreamlike.

August — "Turambar and Glorund." The dragon is terrific, even if it resembles an overgrown iguana. The play of light and dark works better on the creature than it does on Turambar, who is not depicted nearly as effectively as the dragon. The furious spout of flame from the enraged Glorund is a memorable visual climax, contrasting angrily with the dark, lowering sky. But the deep gorge of

Tolkien's description is here, unhappily, little more than a drainage ditch. Niniel's suicide attempt at this same location would have netted her (at most) a sprained ankle and a pair of wet shoes.

September — "Éowyn and Nazgûl." Here is another too-often published scene. This composition suffers from its parallel elements. Howe cuts the picture plane virtually in half with his horizon line — which is, visually speaking, the dullest placement for it. The sky is filled with a non-descript fog, but the grass (although too brown) is nicely painted. Again we have the ridiculous aluminum siding on the creature's head. The beast has also, in this painting, somehow acquired a narwhal's horn, and three or four additional rows of teeth. Howe's depiction of Éowyn is awkward, almost disjointed. The chief blunder is this composition is the placement of the creature. The wings sweep so strongly to the left that they take the viewer's eye off the page, never to return.

October — "In Mordor." The lighting and mood in the scene are sufficiently dark and dangerous. Frodo is drawn quite convincingly, and we can sympathize with his inward struggle. Sam, on the other hand, looks like the Pillsbury Dough Hobbit (which is a condition that has plagued other Howe hobbits in previous calendars). Frodo and Sam, dressed here improperly (they should be clad in orcs' clothes), stand out like sore thumbs against the hideousness of Howe's ghoulish orcs. The two would never be mistaken for orcs. Still, Howe does catch the hobbits' despair in the midst of this hellish march.

November — "Glorfindel and the Balrog." The kindest thing that can be said about this painting is that the background, especially the mountain, is appropriate. But the focus of the painting — Glorfindel and the Balrog — is downright awful. Howe's Balrog looks like a bat-winged Minotaur with an attitude problem. The "valiant" Glorfindel struggles to wield a sword that is much too big to be of any practical use. He grasps it clumsily, and seems ready to skewer his own kneecap. The composition is terrible — a mishmash that leaves us completely confused as to exactly *where* we are supposed to be looking. This painting does not work, period.

December — "Minas Tirith." The ultimate "Minas Tirith" has already been accomplished by Ted Nasmith in last year's calendar. Oddly enough, it was also positioned in the December slot. That is where the similarities begin and end between Howe's citadel and Nasmith's. Howe's painting is lovely in the European/Fantasy castle kind of way. In that respect, it owes a major debt to Maxfield Parrish's fantastic castles. It might even be mistaken by some as a Parrish painting. Yet, pretty as it is, it is *not* Minas Tirith. Mr. Nasmith's painting from last year leaves no doubt as to what the great city of Gondor really looks like. Howe does not even scratch the surface.

Middle-earth does not suffer as much as it might have in this new calendar. Howe's work has made forward strides, but he still has a long way to go before he achieves a consistent vision of Tolkien's world. Next year's calendar

will feature Ted Nasmith's art, and it will be a relief and a pleasure to once again have a Tolkien illustrator with both feet set firmly in Middle-earth.

— Paula DiSante

A Handful of Jewels

Brian Sibley, *The Land of Narnia*, illustrated by Pauline Baynes (London: Collins Lions, 1989), 96 pp. ISBN 0-00-673591-6.

For fans of Pauline Baynes, this charming book is a great bonanza, with several beautiful new paintings and drawings as well as a careful selection of significant works already published. For fans of C.S. Lewis, this is a young people's literary study (a rare thing) which gives a brief biography of Lewis, a discussion of his writing methods, an outline of the Narnian Chronicles with a careful interweaving of Narnia history and story, an overview of the Narnian population, and, in a chapter of exquisite delicacy, an invitation to the reader to look for "A Deeper Magic" behind "The Meaning of Narnia."

Besides Miss Baynes's incomparable illustrations, there are a number of very well chosen photographs of Lewis and his family (early and late), some of his and related books' covers, of dramatizations of the works, and other appropriate and associated images.

Altogether this book is a delight, in no way a substitute for the Chronicles themselves, developed with tact and charm. I leave to others any controversy over details of content in interpretation. The visual impact of the book is like a handful of jewels, a perfect analogue for the crafted enchantment of Lewis' masterpiece and a strong invitation to reach out and read on.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Tolkien Set to Music

Thomas Peterson and "The Tale of the Rings of Power," produced by Bill Drake and KFJM Radio for NPR. 60-minute cassette tape. Cynthia Publications, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

There's been a fair amount of Tolkien-inspired music written over the years. There have been folksong-like settings of Tolkien poems, some of them pretty good; rock songs, most of them pretty bad; and some concert music, most of it pretty neglected. Now comes Thomas Peterson, a young classical composer from North Dakota, with a massive choral-orchestral setting of Tolkien which he is determined will not be neglected. Towards that end, he has published a cassette tape of a radio program on him and his work that was produced for NPR's "Performance Today".

"The Tale of the Rings of Power," the musical work in question, is a mammoth piece in 18 short movements, requiring a narrator, two choruses, five solo singers, and a moderate-sized orchestra to perform it. As the title

suggests, it's a musical setting of the final section of *The Silmarillion*: the narrator reads abridged prose texts; the soloists and chorus sing appropriate poetry, most of it taken from *The Lord of the Rings*.

As described by the interviewees on the tape, and as evinced by the portions of it I've heard, "The Tale" is a highly effective work in performance: tonal and melodic (totally unlike the "bleeps and whispers" stuff that usually passes as 20th-century classical music); powerful and lyrical by turns. Parts of it have the stark intensity of another great modern choral classic, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*; the lyrical sections are a bit more like Aaron Copland. Peterson clearly knows and loves his Tolkien, and has treated the saga of Middle-earth with care and respect. Tolkien fans who have heard it in performance have been highly impressed by the effectiveness of the work; and though I suspect people unfamiliar with Tolkien might have trouble understanding the storyline, they could easily be carried away by the piece's musical qualities.

"The Tale" was commissioned by Olympic College in Washington State and was first performed there in March 1987; since then it's been played on two separate occasions, once again in Seattle, and once in the composer's home town of Grand Forks. It's scheduled to be performed again in November, 1991, by the Riverside (California) Master Chorale. Though the composer hopes someday to secure a professional performance (and a commercial recording), it seems to me that he's written a staple of the college/community choral repertoire, akin to Leonard Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms" or the works of John Rutter.

Someday, if we're lucky, we can all hear the work in person. (I intend to make it to Riverside if I can.) In the meantime, there's this Profile tape. It consists mostly of interviews with three groups of people: long-time acquaintances of the composer (his piano teacher and a fellow conducting student); performers of "The Tale"; and Tolkien fans. There are brief comments by Douglas A. Anderson (compiler of *The Annotated Hobbit*) and Gary Hunnewell (dubbed a "Tolkien Completist", as if that were his job description), and longer remarks by illustrator Patrick Wynne. The composer himself makes a brief appearance towards the end of the tape, describing how reading Tolkien sparks the imagination, and remarking on his surprise at the devoutness of Tolkien fans.

There are some very brief excerpts from the music on the tape, recorded at one of the live performances. Unfortunately this doesn't give much of an idea of the impact of the work. Most of the excerpts are tiny snatches of the first movement, "The Rings of Power". The narrator intones the Ring Verse in English while one chorus chants it in the Black Speech and the other sings what sounds like the Elvish word "Ea" above them, and the trumpets repeat a dramatic motif. Doug Anderson describes this movement as a staccato "punching" that captures the frisson of the making of the Rings, but I don't think you get the full impact of the movement in such short excerpts. This is a pity, because at its full 4 or 5 minute length the movement

is really stunning. Excerpts from it are quoted several times; at the end of the tape you finally get to hear some other music: a section of the penultimate movement, "Namarie" (a beautiful setting of Galadriel's Farewell "Ai! laurie" for soprano), and then part of the finale, which is essentially a reprise of the opening.

Raleigh McVicker, the conductor of the first performance, says on the tape how surprised he was at all the Tolkien fans who came out of the woodwork for the concert. Thomas Peterson obviously hopes to reach as many of them as possible, which is why he's selling copies of his NPR Profile tape. I suspect he could use all the help he can get: he intends eventually to compose six prequels to "The Tale" to create an entire seven-part "Eaquenta." He is obviously a man worth keeping an eye on: with luck, and by talent, he might become the definitive interpreter of Tolkien in musical terms. Even if being bored by Donald Swann and Bo Hansson has turned you off Tolkienian music (in fact, especially in that case), you should give the snatches of Peterson on this tape a hearing, and listen to the testimonials of the interviewees.

David Bratman

A Unique Thing

C.S. Lewis, *The Cosmic Trilogy: Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength*

(London: The Bodley Head, 1990), 651 pp. ISBN 0-370-31439-5.

At Last! A handsome volume with a beautiful dustjacket by Brian Froud presenting the entire Ransom trilogy or Interplanetary trilogy, or, as phrased here, *The Cosmic Trilogy* of C.S. Lewis, ready to delight new readers. As Sir Hugh Walpole said of *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), one may say of the complete trilogy,

It is of thrilling interest as a story, but it is more than that; it is a kind of poem, and it has the great virtue of improving as it goes along. It is a unique thing, full of stars, cold and heat, flowers of the planets and a sharp sardonic sense of humour.

Long available only in tiny individual hardbacks or a few endlessly repeated paperback editions, at last there is a volume of Lewis' science fiction masterpieces to set on the shelf beside *The Faerie Queene*, the *Mort d'Arthur*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, as essential books of fantasy for adults.

Once upon a time, as an undergraduate, single and far from home, I spent an hallucinatory afternoon, and having slept past noon at the end of a long working summer in my twentieth year, and awakened to pick up a friend's battered paperback of *Out of the Silent Planet*, I began to scan it. To my pre-Christian eyes it was exciting science fiction and nothing more; the author's name meant nothing to me. Four years later, a married woman and a new-made Christian, pregnant with my first child, I began to read a set of paperbacks recommended to me by an Episcopalian university chaplain, and the scales fell from my eyes as I explored the starry worlds and flowery planets of the writer whom I now recognized as C.S. Lewis. The ground was prepared and the flowers took root.

In *Out of the Silent Planet*, a young philologist, Ransom, is dragooned by the scientist Weston and his cohort Devine to a space flight to Mars, taking another man's place as a human sacrifice; in this sharpened, chilly, ageing world he becomes instead a friend of the indigenes, a variety of species who can communicate by speech across genetic barriers. With the help of spiritual beings he foils the plans of his captors and returns to earth, where he tells his story to the narrator Lewis. In *Perelandra*, a tougher and more experienced Ransom is called to duty by his spiritual masters, and travels to Venus, where with terrible effort he foils a far more terrible plan to subvert the first female of a new race through the devil-infested body of his old enemy Weston, returning as before to tell the tale to Lewis. In *That Hideous Strength* the Silent Planet, earth, so-called because it is in quarantine from the rest of the solar system, becomes the setting, as Ransom, now remade by his supernal sojourns into the guru of a tiny religious community of humans, plants, and animals, and re-named Mr. Fisher-King, waits with a wounded heel while his surrogates, a young couple named Jane and Mark Studdock, risk everything in contact with the spirits of the age, (as a malignant organization, the N.I.C.E., masquerading as the cutting edge of science, technology, and social control, and inwardly in the grip of diabolical forces), until Merlin, raised from long sleep, returns to serve as a lightning rod who draws down the angelic forces of the cosmos to destroy this latest attack upon humankind. In the end Ransom is carried away to *Perelandra* like Arthur to Avalon, and the young couple are reconciled as it were, truly married in an eucatastrophic finale as described by the narrator Lewis.

I still find *The Cosmic Trilogy* to offer an instant and endlessly renewed virginity to the soiled and aching spirit; this is the very cosmos renewed, fresh and pristine as on the first day of creation. *Out of the Silent Planet* is a fine, fresh-aired, masculine book, befitting its setting on *Malacandra*, which we know as the red star Mars. *Perelandra*, set on Venus, the Morning and Evening Star, explores the mystery of temptation and salvation in a world redolant of nectared femininity. And *That Hideous Strength*, my favorite book in the world next to George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, is a garden of earthly and heavenly delights, as richly tapestried as the gown of the Virgin Queen Elizabeth I, that lady of masculine will and feminine way (or, contrariwise, of feminine will and masculine way), a splendid, complex, astounding, terrifying, unforgettable nuptial romp full of angels, devils, gods and goddesses, fools, sages, saints, sinners, animals, humans, gardens, forests, prisons, mansions, crypts, and marriage chambers, not to say university quads and playing fields and common rooms, which celebrates once and for all the wedding of the genders, the syzygy of humanity and divinity which is humankind, the lords and ladies of our own blue planet Earth whose day, like the ancients, we are beginning again (and on Lewis' strong advice) to celebrate.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

The Great Storyteller

Barbara Reynolds, *The Passionate Intellect: Dorothy L. Sayers' Encounter with Dante* (Kent Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), 267 pp. ISBN 0-87338-373-7.

"The variety of Dorothy Sayers's works makes it almost impossible to find anyone who can deal properly with it all," wrote C.S. Lewis in early 1958, shortly after Sayers's death. "Charles Williams might have done so; I certainly can't," he added.

In stating this, Lewis touched on an issue that has proved troublesome for scholars of his friend's life for over thirty years now. Creator of the Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries, poet, literary theorist, creator of several memorable dramas, formidable Christian polemicist, and translator of Dante's *Commedia*, Sayers seemed to stir every pot in literature. It was thus left to her close, longtime friends and fellow Dantist, Barbara Reynolds, to attempt to draw together the disparate threads of Sayer's career, sort out any central, organizing concerns, and otherwise "deal properly with it all" in *The Passionate Intellect*.

Reynolds, who completed the Penguin Classics translation of *Paradiso* Sayers left unfinished at her death, was in close touch with Sayers throughout their 11-year friendship in matters related to translating the *Commedia*. *The Passionate Intellect*, then, is the result of some thirty years of rumination on the subject of Sayer's encounter with Dante, written by one who brings an insider's viewpoint to her work.

Reynolds attempts to show that the young Sayers who created Lord Peter Wimsey in 1923 "is the same in essentials as the mature scholar-poet-interpreter who made Dante intelligible and relevant to millions of modern readers," and that "to see this is to have a deeper understanding of her earlier works." "There is in reality no cleavage between the detective stories and her other works," wrote Lewis, years ago. "In them, as in it, she is first and foremost the craftsman, the professional." In her book, Reynolds convincingly confirms Lewis' judgement.

Inspired by Williams' Dantist study *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943), Sayers read the *Commedia* for the first time in 1944 while huddling in an air-raid shelter at her home outside London. She had come to the poem with what she later called "an unprepared mind," later writing, "Neither the world nor the theologians, nor even Charles Williams had told me the one great, obvious, glaring fact about Dante Alighieri of Florence — that he was simply the most incomparable story-teller who ever set pen to paper."

Drawing upon Sayer's unpublished letters to Williams, Reynolds details how Sayers arose for her reading of the *Commedia* determined to better translate the work and thereby release Dante from the increasingly exclusive demesne of Professor Dryasdust. By this time in her career, the mid-1940s, Sayers had mastered the techniques of the literary forms mentioned above. All this expertise, Reynolds says, "she brought to bear on her reading and

translation of the *Commedia*: from her novel-writing, the habit of visualizing a narrative in three dimensions and the ability to handle structure, characterization and dialogue; from her experience as a playwright, a heightened awareness of the interplay of character and plot; from her polemics, skill in the marshalling of facts and in presenting a case with logic and cogency; from her Christian apologetics, a grasp of doctrine and a capacity to expound unfamiliar concepts in present-day terms; from her poetry (which she wrote all her life), skill in verse-form, meter and rhyme.

More importantly, Sayers possessed what she herself call "the passionate intellect," defined by Reynolds (with a nod to R.J. Reilly) as a mind attuned to "the union of the intellect and the imagination as the highest means of religious truth." Combining this myth with adept translation skills enabled Sayers (and later Reynolds) to produce a translation which has reached more readers in forty years than had previously read Dante in the preceding six-and-a-quarter centuries combined.

Reynold's book is tightly written, well researched, and well organized. Altogether, Reynolds has produced what should be recognized as one of the two most valuable books yet written on Sayers, the other being Ralph E. Hone's *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Literary Biography* (1979). In *The Passionate Intellect* she has explained the significance of Sayer's encounter with Dante and its importance to the whole of her canon as clearly and rewardingly as anyone can.

— James E. Pearson, Jr.



Editorial Notes



The technical production of *Mythlore* has recently been upgraded to make the journal both faster and easier to produce on the computer, as well as to provide previously unattainable effects. The current tools are as follows — SOFTWARE: Microsoft Word (word processing); Xerox Ventura (page layout); Logitech Scanman (scanning art and text); Corel Draw (text manipulation for titles & graphics); Cassidy & Green (for the Celtic and other added fonts). HARDWARE: a 386/25mhz PC Computer; MDS Genuis full page monitor; QMS PS (Adobe Postscript) 410 laser printer. The access to this printer makes last minute changes much easier, and makes proofing far easier and more accurate, since we are able to see a page *exactly* as it will be printed. This was not possible previously with the fickle and visually confusing dot-matrix printouts, which frequently did not print in the correct point sizes.

The editor is aware that improved proofreading is needed, and along with the new equipment, has taken measures to improve the proofing and copy editing. It is exciting to have the access to the added resources, and, with the prospect of several art projects expected in the near future, the Editor looks forward to many great issues to follow that keep the readers' pleasure in mind. — GG



The White Raven — continued from page 40
world, and all the beauty, and all the joy.... If Niamh should shake her silver branch over me, I would not be so foolish as to return to the world of men!"

"And are you still seeking that country?" she said in a still voice.

Dughan nodded. (pp. 104-105)

I dare not say that Diana placed that little aside for me. I think she knows me well enough to have done it, but in reality I think it was there for all who are like me. It was another example of Diana's careful use of a connecting link between her and her readers. How could anyone steeped in the lore of Eriol, the Magic Isles, Eressea, the Blessed Land of Aman, the Valinor of Middle-earth, the lore of the Elves, and their hot desire for the Belegaer, not respond to Diana's counterparts in *The White Raven*? J.R.R. Tolkien's deep affection for Saint Brendan is quite explicit in his early writings and Diana Paxson's portrayal of Brendan elaborates and vitalizes Tolkien's conception. As I read that account, I felt as if I had met the ancient mariner again in a lighted hall that I had flown into momentarily while on another journey. This time, however, I did not see him from afar; Diana introduced him personally to me.

Conclusions

Diana Paxson's capacity for captivating her readers is demonstrated by her careful depiction of her characters who in turn draw us into the world of the Story through their own sensitivity. I think that it is a great complement to her craft that Diana relegates so much of what a narrator does to her creations. The three women, Ogrin, and Saint Brendan are just a few of the many examples that might be cited to demonstrate the vitality and importance that the author of *The White Raven* places on the delicate relationship between reader and author, a relationship that every writer covets and Diana Paxson establishes and maintains.

I think it would not be amiss to conclude my remarks by making some sort of categorical statement about Diana's style of writing. I once took on the world defending the prose style of another Guest of Honor whom I had met at a Mythopoeic Conference years ago. The fracas that appeared in several issues of *Mythlore* had to do with who was the literary heir of J.R.R. Tolkien. Some of you may remember the episode. In my letter to the Editor, which somehow got printed, I suggested that the whole procedure was in vain. Tolkien's style, I said, is like drinking clear, cold spring water from cut crystal, and that to compare my friend's prose to Tolkien's was like trying to drink Dinty Moore stew from that same sweet glass. Use stemware for Tolkien, I suggested; use a great stone bowl for Stephen Donaldson. Since we are now in the midst of a somewhat festive metaphor, to what shall we compare Diana Paxson and her *White Raven*? A flagon of hot Irish ale, please; lift it high and drink it to the dregs. ☞