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Reviews

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Reviews

Abstract

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Farmer Giles of Ham. J.R.R. Tolkien. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

The Adventures of Tom Bombadil. J.R.R. Tolkien. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

Smith of Wootton Major. J.R.R. Tolkien. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

Christian Reunion and Other Essays. C.S. Lewis. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.



REVIEWS



Illustrating Tolkien I

The Lord of the Rings. Illustrated by Alan Lee. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991. ISBN: 0-395-59511-8; London: Harper Collins, 1991. ISBN 0-261-10230-3. [one volume] 1193 pp. + 7 pp. of maps following.

The first scholarly paper I ever delivered on any subject was the one I presented in 1968 at a Tolkien Society of America Conference. It concerned Tolkien's illustrators, of whom I still maintain that he was the best, and Tolkien's use of visual images in his writing. Perhaps because of the latter, displayed to their most perfect degree in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien did not choose to illustrate his long masterpiece, save for the depiction of the Doors of Durin. The publication for the Tolkien Centenary of this elegant edition, entirely in one well-bound volume including the Appendices and Maps, accompanied by fifty illustrations by Alan Lee, may not please everybody, but despite my views on Tolkien's best illustrator, I welcome it.

The images are excellent reproductions of very refined watercolors, ranging from the poignant to the elegant to the awesome to the sublime, well related to the text, consistent in style and manner, and as varied to accommodate the ever-changing moods of the story as the iridescence of a bird's plumage. The palette is gloomy and subdued; this is a world more moonlit with silver than sunlit with gold. The portraits of the many races of Middle-earth are satisfactory and consistent, and the architectural elements are powerful and convincing.

Lee has borrowed richly and delicately from British historical styles, wedding classical and medieval into fantastic visions. There are disappointments: the portraits of Treebeard (facing p. 496) and Tinúviel (facing p. 208) are inappropriately unpleasant on the one hand and banal on the other. The portrait of Gollum (facing p. 271) is appropriately unpleasant and that of Galadriel (facing p. 384) is sublime. One of the most successful images (facing p. 224) depicts the gather of stone-turned trolls who oversee a rest by the four hobbits and Strider beside Bilbo's old route. A lovely vision is the replanted "sapling of Nimloth the Fair" (facing p. 1008). The image of Orthanc (facing p. 608) is another success. And so it goes; I am sure others will find their own favorites and failures. These illustrations are appropriately modest, never forcing their vision upon reader or text; it is suitable that they remain as fleeting, ephemeral, suggestive, and faint as dreams remembered after waking. There can be no final external image of these perfect creations of Tolkien's mind; in such matters we are each our own internal illustrators, knowing the vastness

and intimacies of Middle-earth from the images his mind, through his writings, has conjured in ours.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

Living Outside the Song

The Lord of the Rings. Illustrated by Alan Lee. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991. ISBN: 0-395-59511-8; London: Harper Collins, 1991. ISBN 0-261-10230-3. [one volume] 1193 pp. + 7 pp. of maps following.

The arrival of the 100th anniversary of J.R.R. Tolkien's birth has brought about a flurry of activity by his publishers and a spate of a new/old books designed as much to delight as to deftly separate one's hard-earned dollars from one's wallet. In some cases, these are major dollars, attested to by the pricey new edition of the Professor's *The Lord of the Rings*. What's new, of course, is not the text, but the fact that this is the first official illustrated edition of Tolkien's masterpiece. This *should* have been exciting news for devotees. It is instead a dreary disappointment.

Compared to his proficient work in the illustrated book *Castles*, Alan Lee's journey into Middle-earth suffers from a glaring lack of soul and passion. There is a pervading remoteness in most of these paintings. They are cold, uninvolved and devoid of emotion. Very little here rends the heart, plunges one into dark despair, or lifts one to the heights of glorious victory. Lee has managed to depict many *non-scenes*, such as the empty hill of Cerin Amroth, Old Man Willow with no hobbits anywhere in sight, the Mirramere seen from a distance with no figures around it, the Three Hunters searching for hobbits-prints in Fangorn Forest (hardly a stirring a highlight of the book), a barely visible Gollum stalking the nearly invisible Frodo and Sam up Mount Doom. The list, be assured, goes on and on.

This isn't quite the neutron-bombing of Middle-earth that has been seen far too often in the past. Rather, it's as if half the characters are out to lunch and unavailable at the moment — and yet those are the very people one really wants to see. Lee paints a few things that have no business being in this edition. Why does he bother putting Lúthien here? Lee chooses to illustrate a *poem* within the main tale, while someone like Arwen is completely ignored. In another example, the river Isen's empty stream bed means nothing to the viewer because there are no figures in the composition to give the scene any context in regards to the plot. The way it is shown here, this could be *any* river in Middle-earth. Why couldn't Lee do something to identify this place as being special to the story? It is, in fact, another *non-scene*.

Frodo and Boromir barely make it into the painting that supposedly depicts their impending confrontation over the Ring. Boromir is almost invisible in the lower left-hand corner and Frodo is a minuscule lump in the middle-right section of the painting. Can one honestly say this quickens the heart one iota? And what of the last painting in the book? The hobbits ride back to a very dismal Shire where acrid smoke curls in the air and lopped trees litter the countryside. Yes, this is the last painting! Where is Frodo sweet Saruman? Sam replanting the Shire? The bitter-sweet parting at the Grey Havens?

When Lee does choose to show the characters, the problems only seem to multiply: Wan, stringy-haired elves look like they might break in half if the wind blows too hard. Elrond has grown for himself an impressive beard—too bad he doesn't actually have one in the book. Galadriel gets a dye job to an unmemorable drab brown, leaving her magnificent hair (said by Tolkien to be "gold... touched by some memory of the starlike silver of her mother") to crash and burn under the guise of "artistic interpretation."

By now the viewer most certainly should be saying "What's going on here?" This is a valid question. Where was the editor who was working with Lee on the project? Did no one at the publisher spot the inconsistencies in Lee's work, or did he or she think the problems wouldn't be noticed? This is Tolkien's publisher, for goodness sake. *Someone* there ought to be intimately familiar with the details of his texts. Who was responsible for guiding the artist along? Perhaps no one, and that's why we are treated to hobbits with pointed ears in one picture and rounded ears in the next, noticeably off-kilter perspective in the throne room of Minas Tirith, and a Prancing Pony with denizens who look like a gaggle of Ben Franklin clones at the Continental Congress. Tolkien said of Orthanc: "...it seemed a thing not made by the craft of Men, but risen from the bones of the earth in the ancient torment of the hills." But Lee's Isengard looks about as "natural" as the Cathedral of Chartres.

The most disheartening thing of all is the almost total lack of color in Lee's paintings. The vibrant spectrum of hues described by Tolkien is never given a second thought. This is Middle-earth drained of its life, Middle-earth before color was invented, Middle-earth as daguerreotype, frozen like a dusty, curious remembrance of long ago.

Let's one think that there is nothing of value here, some attention must be paid to the paintings that *do* work. Lee's Treebeard is sure to raise some howls of protest. But at least it's a challenging work, brave enough to face its subject with a daring and unblinking eye, no matter what one might think of Treebeard's depiction. Lee's cavernous halls of Moria have a sense of both grandeur and dread, and his painting of the three trolls now frozen in stone readily catches the spirit of that scene. Lee's battles scenes fare well (although two of them should *never* have been put back-to-back), and his orcs are quite convincing.

Lee's very best painting, where emotional content is

concerned, shows the Shelob/Frodo scene as we seldom see it: Frodo leaps away in the distance, unaware that the giant monster has him in her sights. We clearly sense that something terrible is going to happen in the next moment, and it's like waiting for the other shoe to drop. This is truly spine-tingling. One fairly wants to shout "Look behind you!" to help out the unfortunate hobbit. It is sad that Lee could not maintain this level of intensity in the other forty-nine paintings in this book.

For such a major undertaking on such an important occasion as the Centenary, it is an immense disappointment that this illustrated edition fails on so many levels. Lee's work here is uninspired, offering little life, drama, and virtually no color to the lore of Middle-earth. How much more preferable it would have been to have ten glorious illustrations instead of fifty mediocre-to-bad ones! That would have satisfied even the pickiest critic. Instead, we must be content to go on painting Tolkien's creation onto the canvas of our own private imaginings.

— Paula DiSante

Illustrating Tolkien II

J.R.R. Tolkien, *Farmer Giles of Ham* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990 ISBN 0-04-440723-8; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991, ISBN 0-395-57645-8) 79 pp.

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990 ISBN 0-04-440726-2; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991, ISBN 0-395-57647-4) 75 pp.

J.R.R. Tolkien, *Smith of Wootton Major* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990 ISBN 0-04-440722-X; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991, ISBN 0-395-57646-6) 79 pp.

Published as a set in England in 1990 and in the United States in 1991 with illustrations by Roger Garland, these three books were originally published in 1949, 1963, and 1967 respectively, with splendid illustrations by the incomparable Pauline Baynes. It should not come as a surprise that the present reprints, issued as "Children/Fantasy," are *not* improvements. The tortured inkwork within, reduced to a state approaching obliteration, and the unpleasant colored cover illustrations, look like pastiches of a handful of minor late 19th and early 20th century illustrators whose works, hitherto properly neglected, had been forced into this peculiarly inappropriate context. What is more, the books themselves are so tightly glued that only a *force majeure* will open them.

The texts, of course, are sublime. *Farmer Giles of Ham* is a witty medieval parody; *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* is a selection of 16 poems, some comic, some elegant, some eerie; and *Smith of Wootton Major* is an evocative fairy tale whose text simultaneously appeared in 1967 with breathtaking illustrations by Milton Glaser in *Redbook Magazine* (December 1967, pp. 58-107). All have been better presented and illustrated that the one I am reviewing, but these writings gleam like Silmarils however inadequate their setting.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

Surviving Leaves

C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reunion and Other Essays*, edited with a Preface by Walter Hooper (London: Collins, Fount Paperbacks, 1990), 113 pp. ISBN 0-00-627494-3.

This extremely thin volume contains the last scraps from *God in the Dock* (1970), also published as *Undeceptions: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (1971); one major essay, "Lilies That Fester," first collected in *The World's Last Night* (1959), the only collection of Lewis essays published in his lifetime; and one five page work published for the first time, which Walter Hooper has accompanied by five additional pages of exposition in the Introduction. This work, "Christian Reunion," of which Hooper tells us that "it is written on the back of a few surviving leaves of 'Mere Christianity' broadcast given over the BBC in 1944," and that "when it was discovered after Lewis' death in 1963, it was set aside by his estate," seems to me to be minor at best, although its interest for Hooper, a recent convert to Roman Catholicism, is understandable. A better view, visible through example, of Lewis' way of addressing fellow Christians who happen to be Roman Catholics, can be found in Lewis' *Letters* to Don Giovanni Calabria. I note in

conclusion that the first page of *Christian Reunion* (the volume, not the essay) devotes ten lines to telling its readers about C.S. Lewis, followed by ten lines telling them about Walter Hooper.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

An Inklings Bibliography continued from page 33

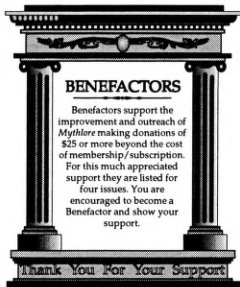
Walker, Andrew. "Under the Russian Cross: a Research Note on C.S. Lewis and the Eastern Orthodox Church." *A Christian for All Christians: Essays in Honour of C.S. Lewis*. Ed. Andrew Walker and James Patrick. London: Hodder and Stoughton (A C.S. Lewis Centre Book), 1990. 63-67, 226-27nn. [W.H. Lewis 66, 227n; Tolkien 227n; Williams 63.]

Walker presents evidence that the Orthodox have appreciated Lewis' writings (in his second and third paragraphs) and then turns to Lewis' knowledge of Orthodoxy: (1) Lewis' discussion of St. Athanasius in "On the Reading of Old Books"; (2) his use of the ransom theory of the Atonement in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which was a theory "much loved by the early Greek Fathers — especially by St. Gregory of Nyssa"; (3) Lewis' friendship with Nicholas and Militta Zernov at Oxford, which led him to attend one of the summer conferences of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (an organization which existed to bring Eastern and Western Christians closer together) and to read a paper on "Membership" at one of the Fellowship's Oxford meetings; (4) Lewis' unpublished (and probably no longer existing) paper titled "A Toy, an Icon, and a Work of Art," read at a meeting at St. Gregory's House in Oxford — another result of Lewis' friendship with Nicholas Zernov (probably the paper was a variant of Chapter III, "How the Few and the Many Use Pictures and Music," of *An Experiment in Criticism*, although Walker does not make the point); and (5) Lewis' description of a Greek Orthodox mass he once attended. Walker ends with the information that Militta Zernov made a cross of white flowers for Lewis' funeral; because W.H. Lewis did not attend — he wanted no flowers — and at the suggestion of the church warden, the cross was put at the foot of the coffin in the church and then on the coffin in the cemetery: a Russian Orthodox gift to mark Lewis' passing. [JRC]

Sys, Jacques. "Look Out! It's Alive!" *C.S. Lewis on Doctrine*. *A Christian for All Christians: Essays in Honour of C.S. Lewis*. Ed. Andrew Walker and James Patrick. London: Hodder and Stoughton (A C.S. Lewis Centre Book), 1990. ix-xii. [Barfield x.]

Sys begins with Lewis' core Christian position:

C.S. Lewis ... was not so much interested in speculative theology as in dogmatic theology.... Everything ... is contained in Scripture and in the definitions of the Apostles; the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds; and Lewis' whole work may be considered as a constant meditation on the central kerygma: 'I believe in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' Beyond this we find only explanatory theories, particular theologies which may or may not help us in our understanding of the 'formula'(175)



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