

Summer 7-15-1984

The Love of Old Friends

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Recommended Citation

GoodKnight, Glen H. (1984) "The Love of Old Friends," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 11: No. 1, Article 11.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol11/iss1/11>

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The Love of Old Friends

Editor's Opening

The Love of Old Friends

We have all read many books, which once read, we feel no desire or need to read again. They are akin to yesterday's newspaper to which we feel no lasting loyalty or devotion, and by which we are little inspired. Such books are for most of us the bulk of our reading experience. But each of us also has a special treasured list, often ranked in an ordered hierarchy of importance, of books that have interacted with us, touched us, and changed how we see ourselves and the universe around us.

While I certainly don't believe that we should limit ourselves to these golden lists, thus depriving ourselves of new literary experiences that may be equally golden, I do advocate the rereading of those books that once so powerfully moved us and opened up exciting and significant new vistas in our lives. I submit that a good book (how we define good in this sense is subjective and highly personal) almost requires rereading, often several times, to truly comprehend its totality and to savor its richness.

We, being human, are continually changing, learning positively or negatively from our experiences, becoming able to see heretofore unnoticed relations that were insignificant before. As we change we also tend to let old impressions fade if we are unable to integrate them with our current frame of mind. Time, it is said, "heals all wounds," but it slowly blunts many remembered joys as well. Much of our character and outlook has been shaped and built by these joys, and we would all benefit considerably from fresh encounters if we would take the time.

Going from the general to the more specific, have you read all the works in the Mythopoeic Core Reading List? Surely nearly every reader of *Mythlore* has read some of them, otherwise this journal would have little interest. But are there those you have not yet read? Both for your own personal enjoyment, and secondarily for a fuller enjoyment of *Mythlore*, it would be an exciting and fulfilling experience, with some unexpected surprises along the way, to round out your personal knowledge of the works on the Core List, as well as many other works by Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams.

Another question, perhaps even more pertinent to most readers: how long has it been since you reread many of the works on the Core List? Has it been five years, ten years, or more? Here I must express a personal frustration which occurs when talking about a certain book or group of books with certain people. I hear "Oh, yes I read that 'x' years ago." The implication is that having once read a book, that settles it; all that needs to be or can be known about a book is accomplished in one reading. But for many of us this is far short of being true. Haven't we all found and savored true richness in a second or further reading of a certain book, after our eagerness to see how the plot is going to develop and resolve is sated? With further readings we can, in a sense, relax, the plot now being known, to carefully proceed at a slower pace, inspect details, discover intricacies, and savor the language we missed before. This can be extremely pleasurable, and we grow to

appreciate much more the craft and imagination of the writer. Yes, you might say, this is certainly true, but at the same time you admit to yourself that this happens only infrequently. Consider the value and enjoyment of renewing contact with these old friends.

In *Prince Caspian*, when Lucy sees Aslan for the first time on her second visit to Narnia she exclaims, "you're bigger."

"That is because you are older little one,"

answered he.

"Not because you are?"

"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

For a time she was so happy that she did not want to speak.

In the last fifteen years I have read the seven *Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Hobbit* nearly every year, and feel I know these books well, like personal friends, and have indeed discovered much that I missed in the first reading. Though read less frequently, I have also found *The Silmarillion* and "Leaf by Niggle" by Tolkien, *That Hideous Strength* and *Till We Have Faces* by Lewis, and the Arthurian poetry of Williams, to name a few, of great satisfaction in rereading.

Books read in the past, like old friendships, can be in danger of fading into small fragmented bits of memory if the acquaintance is not renewed. While this is a true concern on general grounds, it may be of particular concern for members of a literary society devoted to the works of a specific author or group of authors. Time continues to flow, and should the central focus of this Society not be discovered anew in some and rediscovered in others, our Society could either slowly drift from its original dynamic enthusiasm or merely end up paying half-hearted lip service to its *Raison d'être*. I mention this as a generalized concern only. Many people I encounter in the Society, especially through this journal and at the Mythopoeic Conferences, do indeed show great love and enthusiasm for the Society's "reason for being". But should this change, what would those in the future find to attract them to this Society, who had recently been excited or enthused by the reading of one or more of our three authors? Surely they would find many worthy and interesting aspects of the Society, but would they find others who would share this special excitement and pleasure, or would they drift away disappointed? I am concerned about this possibility, and it is one of the main reasons I continue to work for the Society. Unless others share this concern and work for the preserving of the Society's main reason for being, what may we eventually expect? All good things—including this--need care and work to persevere and endure.

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