

Fall 10-15-1984

Reviews

Jessica Yates

Sarah Beach

Thomas M. Egan

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yates, Jessica; Beach, Sarah; Egan, Thomas M.; and Patterson, Nancy-Lou (1984) "Reviews," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 11: No. 2, Article 14.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol11/iss2/14>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



Reviews

Abstract

J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land. Robert Giddings. Reviewed by Jessica Yates.

The Book of Lost Tales Part II. J.R.R. Tolkien. Reviewed by Sarah Beach.

The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays. J.R.R. Tolkien. Reviewed by Thomas M. Egan.

The Restitution of Man: C.S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism. Michael D. Aeschliman. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

The High Kings: Arthur's Celtic Ancestors. Joy Chant. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

REVIEWS

Provocative and Infuriating

Robert Giddings, ed., J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 206 pp. (UK publishers: London: Vision Press, 1983)

The Giddings/Holland partnership which lasted for four issues of the New Tolkien Newsletter and produced The Shores of Middle-earth (scathingly reviewed in Mythlore 35) is over. Now Robert Giddings has edited an anthology of essays, mainly taking a hostile approach to Tolkien and the influence which the critics assume that Lord of the Rings has had on its millions of readers.

The contributors appear to be either academic colleagues of Giddings working in Bath or nearby Bristol; or radio broadcasters. A couple are already known in the U.K. as anti-Tolkienites: Fred Inglis, whose study of children's literature, The Promise of Happiness, (CUP 1981) included an attack on Lord of the Rings; and Kenneth McLeish, who criticized Tolkien on the radio program "The Titanic Booklist," about a number of books which should be placed in any new version of the Titanic and sent to the bottom of the ocean. Several of the essays fall into one main area: attacks on Tolkien for the political views perceived in Lord of the Rings. I shall take these together as a group, and first of all deal with the other essays.

Diana Wynne Jones, the outstanding children's fantasy novelist, is the one contributor who is not anti-Tolkien. Presumably she was chosen because she lives in Bristol (married to Professor J.A. Burrow). Neither is she a "literary critic" and her essay is a rare piece of reflection on the narrative art by an accomplished practitioner.

Nigel Walsley, a contributor to the New Tolkien Newsletter, writes about "Tolkien and the '60s"—the drug culture, anti-war demonstrations and so on. Alan Bold, an experienced poet and anthologist, considers in "Hobbit verse versus Tolkien's Poem" why Tolkien looked back to archaic diction and modes, why the prose of LoTR is better poetry than the verse, and why in his opinion Homecoming is a triumph.

In "The hasty stroke goes oft astray: Tolkien and humour" Derek Robinson explains why in his view there is little humor in LoTR. An essay by Roger King tries to show that LoTR is not a fairy tale according to Tolkien's definition in On Fairy-stories. However, this essay contains a serious error. King states that in Dick Whittington and Jack and the Beanstalk, the heroes attain public success and make good marriages; whereas Bilbo and Frodo retire and do not marry. Therefore The Hobbit and LoTR cannot be fairy-stories! King has forgotten that Sam, Aragorn (and Bard) are heroes just as much as Bilbo and Frodo, and they do achieve public success and make important marriages. King then insists

that reading Tolkien means that the reader withdraws into private life, foreshadowing the world of computer games.

The last essay of the book is titled: "No sex please—we're hobbits: the construction of female sexuality in The Lord of the Rings", and begins: "The claim that The Lord of the Rings contains no sex must be strongly refuted." It is a pity that the author, Brenda Partridge, goes off the track by citing the English boarding-school ethos as a direct influence on the Inklings: Tolkien and Williams didn't attend boarding-school, and Lewis was taken away because he hated it. The T.C.B.S. and Lewis's friendship with Greeves developed in spite of, and were apart from, the school atmosphere. Then Partridge suggests that Lewis fancied Tolkien, and this was possibly reciprocal! Amazing!

Once she gets on to LoTR she is on surer ground, though she might have drawn attention previously to the early deaths of the mothers of Tolkien and Lewis, which deprived them of a model of successful married love to imitate—though I don't think Tolkien did too badly, retaining his dream of Luthien to the end.

Partridge describes the Frodo-Sam relationship in physical terms, and draws out the "implied sexual overtones" in the scenes with Shelob. However interesting, I still believe these to be unconscious on Tolkien's part. Finally in attacking the absence of female eroticism in Middle-earth, she has omitted to consider Luthien and Erendis. In the latter, I believe there is much hidden commentary on Tolkien's relationship with his wife, more fruitful for study than Sam's attack on Shelob!

I now turn to the socio-political essays:

"Introduction" by Robert Giddings

"Middle-earth and the adolescent" by Janet Menzies

"The Rippingest Yarn of all" by Kenneth McLeish

"The Structuralist's Guide to Middle-earth" by Nick Otty

It would take up half an issue of Mythlore to quote and refute the choicest bits, so may I suggest that the material in this book be taken up by discussion groups. I must also enter a caveat here. I remind myself, and you, that Mythlore, Amor Men and Mallorn should not carry direct expression of party-political views, or campaign for political causes. We can comment on political and ethical issues, but take care how we choose our examples. We must not use non-political societies as a medium for pushing our strongly-held opinions. I can summarize the contributors' views, but I mustn't push my own overmuch.



Briefly the contention of the anti-Tolkienites is that reading *LoTR* has either caused its readers to drop out of society, or the opposite, to become cold warriors with rigidly-held views. Tolkien fans either opt out, or opt on the "wrong side." I shall have to clarify for U.S. fans that this political attack is waged from a left-wing point of view, sympathetic to the British Labour Party which is to the political left of your Democrats.

The "drop-out" theory is suggested by Inglish's portrait of an imaginary Tolkien fan who lives in the West Country selling artwork while his wife serves teas to tourists; and by Giddings' jibe at "the home-made armour and the Queen Guinivere outfits", and McLeish's with "dressing up in elven-cloaks, baking lembas and writing poems in Entish...is a way of avoiding, not finding, the truth of life."

The "cold war" theory is raised by McLeish: "it was precisely this Edwardian cosy view of human affairs in real life that cost Britain its Empire, cost Europe millions upon millions of its young men, and, unless we abandon it right now, will quite possibly cost us this planet and everything on it." (Allusions to World Wars I, II, and III.)

Meanwhile Otty writes: "War is celebrated in *The Lord of the Rings*. There is none of the ambivalence about war to be found in Homer or Shakespeare. It may be grim, but it is necessary; 'good' cannot prevail over 'evil' without the recurrent purging of war...." (note 33)

Note 33 reads: "In 1983 this model seems to match the foreign policy of both Downing Street and the White

House. The 'Empire of Evil' that President Reagan sees in Russia is, like Mordor, an appropriate object for total destruction. *The Lord of the Rings* feeds the Western ideologies of Cold War, and whatever ideologies are promulgated on the other side, the fact that they are materialistic might limit their extension to a universal frame for the justified war."

I can't comment on the above detail because of the non-political nature of *Mythlore*—so read, mark, inwardly digest, and look up Tolkien's *Letters* about there being orcs on both sides (166 p.78; 171 p.82). If anyone was waging a "holy" war in Middle-earth, it was Sauron, who desired to be a God-King (1183 p.243). See also Tolkien's description of the state of the world in approximately 1966, which he included in the Revised Foreword of *LoTR*, about a corrupt West, armed with the Ring, facing Saruman, who had made another Ring.

Alas, a general fault of *This Far Land* is that nearly all the essays consider *LoTR* alone, with references to the *Biography*, but to comment on Tolkien's political views without reference to the *Letters* seems to me to be unscholarly. I suppose the critics are not primarily interested in what Tolkien thought or intended, but in what they think Tolkien's readers think as a result of reading *LoTR* (and going no further into Tolkien's works). Therefore although I can find material in the *Letters* to defend Tolkien's own position, it won't affect their thesis one jot.

The anti-Tolkienites don't believe in absolute Good and Evil, as shown by the single quotation marks Otty places around the terms. They don't also seem to believe in war as caused by a warlord's evil aggression, to which self-defense is a reluctant and necessary answer—unselfish too if one interposes oneself between the invading soldiers and civilians. These critics can't conceive of people simply torturing others for pleasure: "It is assumed that the Enemy has no plan or purpose except enslavement, exploitation and a permanent diet of vœ." (Robinson) "To ask questions about what Sauron and Co. are working for is mental treason, almost tantamount to moving onto their side." (Otty) "*The Lord of the Rings* has no fundamental moral or human centre." (Menzies)

I wonder whether these critics have ever heard of prison guards in the real world. Recently Amnesty International has estimated the number of countries in which torture in jails is institutionalized, i.e. sanctioned by the state, as at least 100. (*Times*, July 4, 1984)

Lord of the Rings is about "sheer cruel aggression" and "the extreme importance of being on the right side" (1183 p.242). The moral center Menzies seeks, lies in the hero's character, and this is not provided by Tolkien—but as much fantasy and speculative literature, the issue at stake is more important than detailed characterization,—e.g. *Pilgrim's Progress* and Orwell's *1984*, where the "hero" is very much Everyman.

I wind up this section with a few comments on factual errors. McLeish alleges that God is missing from *LoTR*. Otty says that "the only mention of Beruthiel or her cats in the entire literature of the world" are the references by Tolkien and in Robert Foster's *Guide* (he hasn't read *The Inklings* or *Unfinished Tales*!). And then he says "How the plenty of food in which (the hobbits) take such delight is grown, harvested, marketed, transported, etc. is never even hinted at." (Farmer Maggot?)

Finally a general criticism. The contributors have each used their own editions of LoTR, instead of being required to use a single edition. In the U.K. now, the fourth edition in 3-vol. paperback is the best (or the Second Revised Edition in hardback). Many spellings and accent markings vary in the texts of LoTR. And, as I've already said, there are a number of sweeping generalizations based on reading LoTR not very carefully, without the other back-up material published by Allen and Unwin—for the aid of scholars as well as the delight of the fans.

Nevertheless the collection is readable, provocative and infuriating, and more of an invigorating exercise than other books on Tolkien I have read recently. I've always got time for criticism written with humor, energy, and without great chunks of other people's writing interspersed in order to gather academic kudos. A pity it couldn't have been more scholarly, as well; I would have given the opinions more weight if the facts had been accurate.

Jessica Yates

Working Sketches

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Book of Lost Tales Part II, edited by Christopher Tolkien. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), 385 pp.

It would be difficult to overestimate the value of the work Christopher Tolkien has been performing in editing his father's materials. With the publication of Parts One and Two of The Book of Lost Tales, he gives us the opportunity to study the progress of an author.

Part Two of The Book of Lost Tales gives us the earliest shapes of the major stories which wove themselves into The Silmarillion. Here we find the tales of Tinúviel, Turambar, and the fall of Gondolin. These three stories are recognizable as being predecessors of the later versions. Also included is the tale of the Nauglafring, which differs significantly in emphasis from the later tale of the Nauglamir. The tale of Earendel is not given here in a full prose narration, yet Christopher Tolkien does convey a clear idea of its shape, and again it differs on several points from the later version. The last section concerns the history of Eriol and has points of interest not directly connected to The Silmarillion.

The tale of Tinúviel as told here has the flavor more of "fairy tale" than "history." It is an enjoyable story read on its own merits. Yet it is also of interest as a comparison to the later version. This earlier presentation lacks the depth of history, feeling and meaning which the later tale achieves. Here the whole matter of Nargothrond is absent, as is Sauron. Instead there is Tevildo Prince of Cats, and the episode concerning him contributes greatly to the "fairy tale" atmosphere of this version.

The presentation of the tale of Turin Turambar is much the same here as in later versions. The differences are those of details and somewhat of emphasis. Yet the fullness of Turin is shown to be constant in Tolkien's conception of the character. One major change, which affects the Gondolin story as well, is that here the fathers of Turin and Tuor are not brothers and there is little familial connection between the two.

Of the three tales of the fall of Gondolin, the Nauglafring, and of Earendel, Christopher Tolkien gives a fully adequate discussion of their differences from the later versions. To recapitulate his presentation would spoil the reader's exploration of these sections.

The final section on the history of Eriol is of particular interest. Tolkien's statement that what he wanted to do was to create a new mythology for England has often seemed to be something left dangling in the air without an obvious connection between Middle-earth and England. But in Part One of The Book of Lost Tales, the first threads of the connection appeared. In Part Two the rest come into focus. For Tolkien intended to weave the history of his character Eriol into the background of the legends of Hengest and the Anglo-Saxon migration to England. It is a deft piece of weaving, bringing his hobby and his scholarship into such a close contact. In the end, it was perhaps the scholar in him which let this thread slide out of the web of his secondary creation. But it is a gleaming, brilliant thread, and I am glad it was picked up off the floor, for it gives me a clearer understanding of the weaver.

In all, The Book of Lost Tales is a valuable addition to the Tolkien canon. It may not provide as much constant delight as other works, and it may be difficult to endure without a good acquaintance with The Silmarillion. Yet, in it we are allowed the rare opportunity of seeing an author polishing his work. The depth of vision, of feeling, of meaning in The Silmarillion is given an added luster when seen next to its beginnings. The writing in The Book of Lost Tales is by no means poor, but the simplicity and subtlety of the writing in The Silmarillion is made clearer by comparison.

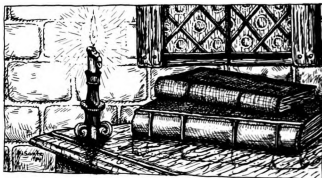
If nothing else, the publication of The Book of Lost Tales makes clear that Tolkien was a Craftmaster, not content with simply telling a good tale but intent on polishing it until it gleamed. The Book of Lost Tales is a collection of a Masters' working sketches for the work he intended as his Masterpiece.

Sarah Beach

Essays of Greatness

The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays by J.R.R. Tolkien. Houghton Mifflin Co.: Boston, 1984 (30 April '84). \$15.95, 240 pp.

This is a book rich in the history of English literary traditions, but it is not one for the average reader. Some of the prose is a bit turgid even if it is a Tolkien doing the writing. A good deal of





familiarity with ancient and medieval culture and writings are assumed. But for the dedicated enthusiast for things Tolkien and for those fantasy fans intrigued by what may lay behind "swords-and-sorcery" popular fiction this is invaluable indeed. Academics will get some sharp "cuffs" for some of the pompous nonsense they have put upon the public for many years, though.

Indeed, the whole collection (edited by Christopher Tolkien) is one long duel by the Master of Middle-earth with the established literary authorities of the English speaking world on the nature of myth and monsters. Tolkien was always a man who loved his "dragons" -- as his most famous essay (of 1936), "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," shows with a real sparkle of excitement. Of all the seven essays here this is the one upon which Tolkien's academic reputation chiefly rests. It brings before us the dilemma of having monsters in literature, whether it's an Old English epic *Beowulf* or modern escapist pulp. Do they belong in the center of the story -- or at its fringes, to be window-dressing for the hero and human problems of romance and/or revenge, etc.? Tolkien opts for the monster at the center -- dragons, ogres and all their kin. The why takes us into a long detective search through Germanic folklore and Norse sagas, modern critics' fallibility (punctured with flashes of prose from Lewis Carroll and even Shakespeare), the Old Testament and the mythic differences between the Nordic and Greco-Roman worlds. The logic leads us into the central question of fate and human freedom as Tolkien sees it in *Beowulf* -- and perhaps later in his *Lord of the Rings*? And in the process we learn a new respect for "Primitive" cultures whether it's the pagan Norse world or the early achievements of Christian Anglo-Saxon thinkers.

The rest of these seven lecture-essays (only two of which were previously unpublished, but hard to get now) written between 1930 and 1959 all go from pure scholarly problems into arenas of metaphysics and moral greatness surrounded by the tragic. We move into the difficulties of translations from Old English ("On Translating *Beowulf*") to modern survivals of

Ancient Celtic words/meanings ("English and Welsh"). The well known, "On Fairy-Stories," is reprinted from its 1964 version, and Tolkien becomes delightfully child-like over his joy in creating (this was in 1931!) imaginary other-world languages after immersing himself in the new strides of Esperanto in "A Secret Vice." The latter has some very beautiful poems of his as illustrations of his points, "The Last Ark" and "Earendel at the Helm" -- melancholic, vivid colors in imagery and full in mystery.

Surprisingly, his 1959 "Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford" contains not a word on his recent success of the published *Rings* saga or on *Hobbits*. It is full of everything else -- school questions of "Lang and Lit" (a Jekyll-Hyde tangle for everyone, students, professors and public), early reminiscences of his career and life, epics like the Finnish *Kalevala*, even a note on South Africa and its apartheid. His humor here is a fine partner to his scholarly wisdom.

The one essay Tolkien probably valued the most would be his 1953 "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." He moves us into the tangled society of fourteenth century England and its Arthurian myths. The temptations of a medieval knight takes us into a vast cosmos of life-codes, and metaphysical and moral questions. The ways in which Christendom and the sexual implications of Courtly Love could "co-exist" should fascinate any reader of today.

This book gives the serious-minded much to ponder and enjoy -- about monsters and critics and what makes up the human imagination.

Thomas M. Egan

Sciens et Sapieta

Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C.S. Lewis and the Case Against Scientism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 94 pp.

This little book is a useful compendium of powerful quotations against scientism, that "mistakes the truths about quantities, material, and spatial reality, for the Logos, the Word of sapientia, the realm of qualities, purposes, values, ends." (p. 36). It is an anthology which rises in crescendo to a mighty chorus of assent to the position Lewis argued in his philosophical and moral masterpiece, *The Abolition of Man*. Providing an excellent background to Lewis' sources and foundations, the book manages to cover its subject without extensively quoting from his writings. One hopes this will encourage readers to return to the original work, to which this present volume is clearly intended not as a replacement, but as a companion. If I taught a course in "The Thought of C.S. Lewis" I should be very happy to put copies of *The Abolition of Man* and *The Restitution of Man* into the hands of my students!

Some of Lewis' words are present, of course, and a judicious selection of his statements is at the heart of this work. Where they appear they remind us that with him it was not only the ideas, which as Aeschliman has shown us were deeply based upon the moral force of human experience, but the words, the music of his prose, which compel conviction and elicit assent. In him we hear the true timbre of sanity and

honor in a twentieth century voice, as the author says: "it is Lewis' obstinate common-sense contention that validity and morality are real and that every rational person acts as if they were, to the extent that he is sane and honorable." (p. 75)

Aeschliman's book provides an interesting example of orthodox writing which expresses itself *contra* the unorthodox. In it we learn of the heresies by hearing of their refutations. This, in an era when that other point of view is dominant, is refreshing! "Modern scientific doctrine holds all fact to be objective and all value to be subjective," he writes. "To call it a 'doctrine' is to draw attention to the fact that its characteristic assumption that only factual statements have validity is itself nonfactual, speculative, and dogmatic; it is, in fact, a diabolically ironic article of faith." (p. 74)

This book, which contains an "Index of Names" with 176 entries, includes one quotation from a woman, Rebecca West, and it is the gem of the collection: "perhaps the sin against the Holy Ghost is to deal with people as though they were things." (p. 54) Amen.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

A Celtic Night's Entertainment

Joy Chant, *The High Kings: Arthur's Celtic Ancestors*, illustrated by George Sharp, designed by David Larkin (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 240 pp.

Gorgeously illustrated by George Sharp and elegantly designed by David Larkin, this is one coffee-table book whose text can stand on its own, though its visual enhancement makes it a delight to hold and examine. Joy Chant's graceful, compelling study contains three interwoven strands of narrative. First are short passages of exposition which deftly touch upon aspects of ancient Celtic culture. The significance of these becomes clear as the book unfolds. A series of views of Arthur's court and life during various periods of his reign is the second strand. Within this context, as called-for tellings on appropriate occasions, is the third and central element: the splendid recounting of Celtic stories, in all their power and mystery. Soaked in blood and redolent with a musky passion, this, the real "mythology for England," emerges flashing with the metallic exchange of arms, the gleam of gilded ornament and the heft of brocaded garments, in which the people of the other world are even brighter and more beautiful than the gold-torqued princes of this one. This is the rich hinterland out of which the high tales of Arthur grew and flourished. In this world, Rome is a far realm but not too far for an Island king to aspire to its throne. Women are equal in splendor, ferocity and amorous independence with men. Indeed, the ladies of these tales can be read as a series of powerful role models for contemporary life, as perhaps their author intended. They are matched by an equally compelling series of unforgettable men, head-strong, brooding, and frequently doomed.

There is a strong element of originality in this work, as the author makes clear. "The form of the stories is conjectural," she states with disarming frankness; "the aim has been to remove the medieval gloss from those that have survived, and to retell



them in a way in which they might have been told in the last days of Britain." (p. 6) As sources, she cites "John Morris' *The Age of Arthur* and Rachel Bronwich's edition of the Welsh Triads, *Triodd Ynys Prydein*," for her "stories of the Island of the Mighty." As I said, her work is a thorough success, a delight from beginning to end.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Continued from page 50

Lost Play Eriol comes to Tol Eressea in the time after the Fall of Gondolin . . . but before the time of the . . . removal of Tol Eressea to the geographical position of England." (Italics in the original). But on pages 24 and 25 we have been informed that Eriol or Aelfwine was of the Angli or English, and that the Elvish island to which he came was the same one which his people would, not too long afterwards, invade and colonize, and even rename after themselves. Now this island has been where it is at least since 40 BC when Julius Caesar attempted to invade it, and 40 AD, when Claudius succeeded in doing so. Therefore it seems the editor's general interpretation is not correct.

Furthermore, having Tol Eressea in Britain's present location eliminates not one but two contradictions. On page 32 the editor points out that "the diminutiveness of the Cottage"--and of the dwellers therein--"is very strange"--since Eriol is surprised by it, though he finds the Cottage near the center of the island, after he "for many days had wandered its roads, stopping each night at what dwelling of folk he might chance upon" (p. 13)--"But Tol Eressea is an island inhabited by Elves" (p. 32). But not entirely by Elves, if (as it seems) it is the island which is about to be invaded by Angli and Saxons. The people Aelfwine has met have been Britons, ordinary-sized humans. The small folk of Faerie are a minority hidden here and there. When the conception of their small size was rejected by J.R.R. Tolkien (and he rejected it very strongly), then there no longer was

Continued on page 60