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Letters

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Letters



LETTERS

Craig J. Brown, M.D.

Fayetteville, AK

I could not quite let pass Paul Nolan Hyde's (Mythlore 40) defense of Stephen Donaldson's prose efforts. I thought Darrell Schweitzer's comments had been kinder than deserved.

Although I do not have professional credentials, I have been a serious reader of science fiction and fantasy for 25 years and of Mythopoeic literature for 20. Mr. Donaldson's story concept is worthwhile and good enough, (though as a physician who has seen and treated leprosy patients overseas I think his concept exaggerates the modern reality of leprosy since the widespread availability of Dapsone treatment). Even very poor 3rd world nations have reduced leprosy to less than a tenth of its previous levels in recent years.

But his execution of his storyline is embarrassing for anyone with a masters degree in English. A compassionate editor should have sent his manuscripts back and asked him to reduce the wordage by 40% by jettisoning unnecessary adjectives and adverbs.

After reading 3 volumes (I tried to give him a fair chance to improve), I still turned each page with trepidation. I knew sooner or later I would read, "Before him ran the smooth expanse of a lazy curving river, winding in graceful arcs through a series of oxbow lakes, each broken by a low waterfall plummeting down sheer cliffs before gliding on." It was enough to make my jaws ache from "clenched" teeth.

Lest this seem like a personal attack, I do not mean it so. It is, at worst, a radical difference in taste. One of Mythlore's continuing joys to me is the seriousness with which we treat and study this literature.

One of my favorite features is Mr. Hyde's column. We cannot study Tolkien's work without careful study of its germinal linguistics. Each new volume published opens up new vistas, for which I am profoundly grateful to Christopher Tolkien.

Ruth Berman

Minneapolis, MN

This is a somewhat belated comment on Lee Speth's remark (Mythlore 36, reviewing Christopher Derrick's C.S. Lewis and the Church of Rome) that it seems odd to him that Lewis never actually said why he remained in the Church of England and never converted to Roman Catholicism. Some readers commented (#37) that Lewis was not interested in doctrinal differences, and therefore not interested in changing churches, to which Lee Speth answered (#38) that someone not interested in doctrinal differences ought to have considered joining the largest and oldest individual sect. It seems to me that #16 in Lewis's Screwtape Letters indirectly gives

a logical reason for Lewis's choice: "Why have I no report on the causes of his fidelity to the parish church? Do you realize that unless it is due to indifference it is a very bad thing?... The parochial organisation should always be attacked, because, being a unity of place and not of likings, it brings people of different classes and psychology together in the kind of unity the Enemy desires." On those terms, doesn't it follow that Lewis would consider the best Christian sect to be whichever one was largest locally and most representative of the local community?-- which in Oxford and Belfast would be C of E/I.

Re the review of Finn and Hengest-- I found the book as commentary tough going, but was interested by the narrative as Tolkien reconstructed it. Could some of the artists who've done work for Mythlore be talked into making some pictures from the reconstructed story? It seems as if it would lend itself well to illustration. (And much thanks to Sarah Beach for her fine curlicued dragon illustration.)

Dean A. Walker

Albuquerque, NM

I have a compliment and two questions.

First, I just love "Mythopoesis" by Sarah Beach; it always seems to be constinially good. Also, all of the art work appearing in Mythlore is very good. I didn't get a chance to send in the features inquiry form so I've said it here.

Now, I read about a record or tape called, "A song cycle" which is supposed to contain songs from LotR. With Tolkien being so popular these days, I would expect to have found it somewhere here in Albuquerque but that is not the case. In fact, neither the book stores nor the record stores seem to have heard about it. Perhaps someone out there knows where I can get it? (I did my own versions of them too.) Also, where can I get in touch with the Tolkien Society in England?

((I believe the record you are thinking of is "J.R.R. Tolkien/Poems and Songs of Middle Earth" Caedmon Records TC 1231 (TC 91231). It was made about 15 years ago, and because of this it may be hard to locate. The (British) Tolkien Society's address is c/o Lester Simons, 11 Regal Way, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 8RZ, England.--G.G.))

Benjamin Urrutia

Provo, UT

Family Conflicts

Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, an excellent writer as well as a famous psychoanalyst of the Freudian school, made an interesting comparison between the story of Eros and Psyche and that other myth which Freud is famous for recasting. "In some respects, the story of Amor and

Psyche is a counterpart of that of Oedipus, but there are important differences. The Oedipus legend tells of a father's fear that his son will replace him; to avert this, the father tries to destroy his son. Psyche's story tells of a mother who is afraid that a young girl will replace her in the affections of mankind and of her son, and who therefore tries to destroy the girl. But, while the tale of Oedipus ends tragically, the tale of Amor and Psyche has a happy ending... in the end Jupiter and Venus accept the situation; Amor and Psyche celebrate their wedding in the presence of all the gods; Psyche is made immortal; and Venus makes peace with her. ...Whether Freud was impressed by the parallels and differences of these two ancient myths we do not know...." [1]

Professor Rene Girard has, similarly, pointed out some interesting parallels, and one crucial difference (almost the same as the above mentioned) between the story of Oedipus and the story of Joseph son of Jacob [2]. Both men were outcast and rejected by the communities that gave them birth. They were both successful immigrants. However, they were then rejected by their adoptive communities as they had been by their native communities. Both were accused of sexual crimes: Oedipus of incest, Joseph of adulterous attempted rape. Both had to deal with major disasters: Oedipus with a plague, Joseph with drought and famine [3].

The major difference is that Joseph, unlike Oedipus, is vindicated. He is freed from prison and raised to a high station from which he does not come down again. He is not blamed for the drought, but empowered with the authority to take rational measures to alleviate it.

Putting together the observations of Professors Girard and Bettelheim, we would have to conclude that the stories of Psyche and Joseph are structurally identical, both being reversals of the Oedipal story. However, comparing the two directly with each other, we find that there is a major difference: Joseph is reconciled with his brothers, but Psyche is not reconciled with her sisters. This one factor is still missing to move Psyche from the realm of Pagan

mythology to the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

This lack is, of course, supplied by C.S. Lewis in *Till We Have Faces*, which ends in the full reconciliation of Psyche with the only one of her sisters who went up the mountain with her.

Notes

1. Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul*. Knopf, New York, 1983, 12-15.
2. Rene Girard, devotional lecture at Brigham Young University, 13 Nov. 1984.
3. There are also some strange points of contact between the story of Joseph and the story of Theseus (who was younger than Oedipus, but roughly contemporaneous). In the former, Pharaoh has a dream of seven lean cows devouring seven fat cows. In the latter, Minos king of Crete demands, and gets, a tribute of seven youths and seven maidens from Athens every year, to be devoured by the Minotaur. Both stories feature flesh-eating cattle and the number seven, doubled.



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"The Great Return" is told in the first person by an inquiring journalist from London, who, it seems, has old ties with Wales, as did Machen himself, whose father was a Welsh clergyman. He half-believes, but places his story in a skeptical framework. Strange things do happen, he says, but "at the last, what do we know?" This framework, though slightly disappointing, does not succeed in spoiling the central impact of the story, its delicious and memorable fragrance, abiding in the mind as did the incense in the church at the Return of the Hallows.

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