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## Reviews

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## Reviews

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*Fish Soup*. Ursula K. Le Guin. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

# REVIEWS

## "Boxen" and other "Phantasies"

Catherine Swift, *C.S. Lewis* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 127 pp. ISBN 1-55661-126-9.

Since I first read Chad Walsh's *Apostle to the Skeptics* I've tried to read every book published about C.S. Lewis (An effort he would certainly have disapproved), and for my sins, I've read more than a few that were, frankly, execrable. I'm afraid this present volume belongs on their shelf.

I think, on internal evidence, that this may be intended as a juvenile biography; it reads for the most of its pages like a breezy synopsis of *Surprised by Joy*. A comparison of quotes may show the effect of imprecision and emasculation. Swift writes the following of a remark made by an atheist friend to Lewis:

...It's a strange thing," said the friend, "this story about God. A very strange thing! You could almost believe what the Gospels say really did happen. Very strange indeed!" (p. 102)

On the other hand, Lewis wrote this:

Early in 1926 the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew sat in my room ... and remarked that the evidence for the historicity of the Gospels was really surprisingly good. "Rum thing," he went on, "all that stuff of Frazer's about the dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it really happened once." (C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* [London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955], p. 211.)

Add to this the consistently wrong spelling of several of Lewis' titles: Boxen becomes "Boxon," *Dwymer* becomes "Drymer," and even MacDonald, whose *Phantastes* becomes "Phantasies," is not immune. It seems unlikely that the author of this biography has read any of these works. There are also passages of, shall we say, undergraduate grammar — a book is described as "laying on the table" — and of sheer, ludicrous inaccuracy, like the following paragraph:

Jack's greatest friends at Magdalene were Charles Williams .... And John Tolkien .... His other close associates were William Yeats, Walter de la Mare and John Masefield .... Because these young men were all writers and held regular discussions in Jack's .... they were known as "The Inklings." (p.101)

Leaving you to imagine an Inklings' meeting that included Williams, Tolkien, Lewis, Yeats, de la Mare, and Masefield, I rest my case.

—Nancy-Lou Patterson

[The typist confesses that the vision of Williams, Tolkien, Yeats, de la Mare, and Masefield all gathered together in Lewis' rooms put him into a fit of uncontrollable hilarious laughing that lasted for 20 minutes.]

## Tolkien's Life and Work

John and Priscilla Tolkien, *The Tolkien Family Album*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. ISBN 0-395-59938-5. 90 pp., 119 photographs and illustrations.

This delightful book appeared early in this centennial year, and it is much appreciated for the pleasure and insight it brings. All Tolkien readers know of and are in debt to J.R.R. Tolkien's literary executor, his youngest son Christopher Tolkien. Now his only daughter and youngest child, Priscilla, and his eldest son, Father John Tolkien, have collaborated to bring us this very welcome addition to understanding Tolkien's family, the course of his life, and many of the significant people in it. The book begins with a large Tolkien family tree, which seems even more intricate than the family trees found in the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*. It starts with both of Tolkien's grandfathers, each born in the first decade of the 1800's, and ends with his great-grandchildren, the latest born in the last decade of the 1900's.

The text of the book is of necessity brief, yet it achieves clarity with well chosen words. For Tolkien biography, this book must take its place alongside that of Humphrey Carpenter's *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, both for the text and pictures. The extensive variety of photographs is well done. If there are any regrets, they are that the book is not larger and the reproduction of some of the photos is rather small. This is probably a function of the book's graphic designer. Overall, Priscilla and John have come forth with a treasured gift for us on the occasion of their father's one-hundredth birthday.

—Glen GoodKnight

## MORE SUBCREATION

James Gurney. *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*. Written and illustrated by James Gurney. (Atlanta: Turner Publishing), 1992. ISBN 1-878685-23-6. 159 pp.

This book is now enjoying an enormous promotion and popularity. Most readers have already seen a copy and little needs to be added in praise or comment. According to Ian Ballantine, the artist/author James Gurney likes to paint while listening to tape recordings of J.R.R. Tolkien reading from his own works. While there is no apparent connection between Tolkien and Gurney, there is a similarity between these two as fountains of creativity. The

difference is that Tolkien was primarily a writer, and secondarily a visual artist. Gurney is primarily a visual artist, and one of the very best at what he does, and secondarily a writer. While Gurney is a good writer, it is his visual art that distinguishes him — the reverse of Tolkien.

Gurney's work is being marketed with masterful promotion, taking advantage of a crest of interest in dinosaurs, and marking the 150th anniversary of the coining of the term "dinosaur." I hope Gurney's talents will be rewarded handsomely, and that he will reward us with other works in the future.

— Glen GoodKnight

## Mossy Untangled

Walter Raepier, editor, *The Golden Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 198 pp. ISBN 0-7486-0166-X.

As late as we are in the twentieth century, we cannot be surprised to see attention to, and distance from, the nineteenth century expressed in a renewed interest in Victorian writers, including the great fantasist George MacDonald, whose works anticipated more than one preoccupation of our period. *The Golden Thread* adds to this the appearance of attention of his native country, that place where Jesus said a prophet would be least likely to get it.

MacDonald was, and remained, a Scot. The strong appreciation and interpretation of "George MacDonald's Scottish Novels" by David S. Robb, an authority on Scottish literature, opens this admirable and valuable volume. In it he counsels against the often quoted comment by C.S. Lewis that readers will appreciate these works chiefly for their "queer awkward charm." Rather, as Robb sets out to prove, in writing the novels, MacDonald was not merely yielding to the need to write for profit, but "conducting a sensitive exploration of his Scottish origins, and meditating on the relationship between those origins and the world of urban England where he now found himself" (p. 13).

This revealing study is followed by a powerful new interpretation of MacDonald's two adult fantasies, by Roderick McGillis, in "*Phantastes* and *Lilith*: Femininity and Freedom." McGillis (A Canadian) is one of North America's most significant MacDonald scholars, always compelling and original in his arguments; here he discusses the role of the feminine in these novels. For him, both *Phantastes* and *Lilith* express things that are "inexpressively different from any possible events of this economy," suggesting that "'this economy' refers to the patriarchal world. ...the world MacDonald creates in his two fantasies presents a different economy, one presided over by the feminine spirit of love, mystery, and generosity" (p. 54).

Edmund Cusick's essay, "George MacDonald and Jung," and F. Hal Broome's "The Scientific Basis of George

MacDonald's Dream Frame," offer intriguingly differing angles upon MacDonald's works. Cusick accounts for a number of elements — 'the shadow,' various *Animas* figures including not only the eponymous Lilith but Eve, Mara, and Lona from the same novel; and the like — as expressing significant Jungian archetypes, as indeed they do. Among these he also includes "Three images: Light, Water, and the Forest," (p. 75) and here Cusick's subject and the coincidence of his essay with Broome's begins. Mossy's journey in *The Golden Key*, the red glow in *Lilith*, and "the ray of rich red light" in MacDonald's "realistic novels" (p. 78) can, he says, "be illuminating by reference to Jung."

Here Broome adds his own illumination. Carefully setting forth MacDonald's debt to the science of his period (a science a Jungian would probably successfully interpret as owing as much to the unconscious as to observation of the physical world), Broome shows the debt of his fantasy to this science, most particularly the budding psychology of his era, especially the study of dreams (a subject by no means exhausted today). Justus von Leibig, in particular, dismissed "the germ theory in favour of his atmospheric theories," and MacDonald following this teacher, filled his stories with "water and light," and receding or approaching equilibrium (the periods of daybreak or gloaming) when both light and water had an enhanced effect." (pp.

# MYTHLORE

## ART PORTFOLIO

Over the years *Mythlore* has published a considerable amount of highly praised mythopoetic artwork. Few people are inclined to cut up their issues of *Mythlore* in order to frame these pieces for their walls. Therefore, *Mythlore* has begun a series of portfolios reproducing various pieces on quality paper suitable for framing. A limited number of portfolios are now being offered containing copies signed and numbered by the artists.

Signed portfolios are \$25.00 / Unsigned portfolios are \$15.00

Included in the first portfolio are the following pieces:

**"Meditation of Mordred"**  
(Williams) by Sarah Beach (from *Mythlore* 39)

**"Trothlight on Cerin Amroth"**  
(Tolkien) by Paula DiSante (from *Mythlore* 45)

**"The Mistress of the Silver Moon"**  
(MacDonald) by Nancy-Lou Patterson (from *Mythlore* 21)

**"Till We Have Faces"**  
(Lewis) by Patrick Wynne (from *Mythlore* 39)

Each Portfolio comes in a folder with Patrick Wynne's "Triskelion" (from *Mythlore* 35) printed on the cover. The artwork is reproduced on 9" x 12" sheets, and is suitable for framing. Please specify whether you want a signed or unsigned portfolio. Write to: *Mythlore* Orders Dept., 1008 N. Monterey St., Alhambra, CA 91801.

93-94); those moments, in fact, when the red light shines in MacDonald's stories.

The final four essays, all superb, document the relationship of MacDonald's fiction to other fiction (as opposed to Scotland, the feminine, Jung, and Victorian science). MacDonald can and ought to be so interpreted, because he was widely read and has continued to be widely read. He stood upon a deep literary tradition, lived among an active literary milieu, and has influenced writers actively studied by *Mythlore* readers. Stephen Prickett's essay, "Fictions and Metafiction: 'Phantastes,' 'Wilhelm Meister,' and the Idea of the 'Bildungsroman,'" begins with the remark about *Phantastes* that

the first puzzled and contemptuous reviewers ... could hardly have been expected to hail it rapturously as the harbinger of the new literary form that we now call 'Victorian Fantasy.' (p. 109)

He then proceeds to search for *Phantastes'* source in German literature, finding it, convincingly, in Carlyle's translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, both the *Apprenticeship* and the *Travels*. Deliciously, the latter included a "golden casket with a (missing) golden key" (p. 116) searched for by a character "through moss and tangle" — in Carlyle's translation —, thus perhaps explaining Mossy and Tangle, the protagonists in *The Golden Key*, over whose vaguely Freudian names much ink has been expended (not to say computer time logged).

Gillian Avery's "George MacDonald and the Victorian Fairy Tale" proceeds with the discussion, situating the master's stories in "one of the bleakest periods for children's books." "All children's writers found it difficult to personify the spirit of Good," she says, but MacDonald not only invested his "elusive and beautiful" grandmother figures "with mystery," but "excelled at making virtue in

children both credible and attractive" (p. 136). Colin Manlove specifically compares "MacDonald and Kingsley: A Victorian Contrast," calling them "arguably [the] only two significant writers of Christian fantasy in the Victorian period," a point I find interesting because along with *At the Back of the North Wind*, my second grade teacher also read aloud to my class *The Water Babies* (for which, may her name be praised!). Manlove finds not only parallels but cross-relationships between the writings of both authors, but concludes that "In terms of 'faculty psychology,' we find that MacDonald most looks to the imagination, Kingsley to the intellect and the senses" (p. 145). This substantial and significant essay argues that point in convincing detail.

Finally, in her essay "George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis," Catherine Durie begins her argument with Lewis' professed debt to MacDonald, analyzing his distinctive and highly personal response and lifelong moral debt to the man he acknowledged as his spiritual guide. She then seeks to examine "how far Lewis departs from MacDonald," by looking at the elements in MacDonald that Lewis excludes: "a God who actually suffers Himself on Calvary," (p. 171); "a violent attack on the doctrine of original sin and on any understanding of atonement as propitiation of substitution" (p. 172); "the childlikeness of God" (p. 173); and "MacDonald's ... horror at the doctrine of eternal punishment" (p. 174). This powerful essay concludes a major collection, one which considerably furthers the interpretation, appreciation, and understanding of MacDonald. Highly recommended!

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

## Unexpected Centenary Surprise

**J.R.R. Tolkien, Architect of Middle-earth. A Biography by Daniel Grotta. Illustrations by the Brothers Hildebrandt.** Philadelphia: The Running Press. iii + 197 pp. ISBN 1-56138-112-8.

1992 saw Tolkien's 100th anniversary celebrated and observed — and used — in many ways. Near the end of 1992 there appeared a new edition of a work that first appeared in 1976. The Grotta biography of Tolkien was quickly eclipsed by the appearance of *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* by Humphrey Carpenter in 1977. The "authorized" Carpenter has been the standard reference ever since. There were some hard feelings on Grotta's part. He complained:

I could... count on no assistance from the family; hence I did not have access to Tolkien's literary papers, and other records. Matters became doubly worse when I learned that the family had requested Tolkien's close friends and associates to refrain from releasing information.... (p. 175)

Other comments in the 1976 edition were far less charitable. It is understandable that Grotta would complain about his lack of access, but even more it is perfectly logical that if the Tolkien family was supporting and cooperating



with Carpenter to produce the "authorized" biography, any assistance to Grotta would senselessly undercut Carpenter's work. In the 1976 edition there were several gaps in the text, with the statement "[Material deleted for legal considerations]" inserted in their place.

It would require a major article, at the least, to compare the Grotta and Carpenter biographies. Few would dispute that Carpenter's is much superior. But Grotta, in doing his research for his book, did "beat the bushes" for any information about Tolkien. As a result, his book contains a number of anecdotes from various sources, which, if not possible to verify, make unusual reading.

The 1976 Grotta biography streaked across the sky and then disappeared from sight, seldom, if ever, to be mentioned again — until 1992.

The original paperback sold for \$2.95 (it startling to recall that books, even paperbacks, once sold for prices like this) whereas the new hardcover edition is priced for \$24.95. It is a much larger and more lavish production, with the marks of being packaged to be a good seller. On the outside it features an intricate dustjacket by Graham Evernden. Inside, the book features fifteen color illustrations by the famous Brothers Hildebrandt. We have seen all of these illustrations before in the 1976, 1977, and 1978 *Tolkien Calendars*. They include "Bilbo at Rivendell," "Eowyn and the Nazgul," "The Dark Tower," "The Wedding of the King," "Old Man Willow," "Untitled" (being the cover design for the 1977 calendar, with an inset of Gandalf's face), "Rivendell," "Cirith Ungol," "The Statues of the Kings," "On the Road to Minas Tirith," "Goldberry," "Orthanc," "Mount Doom," "Beorn," and "Lothlorien." I will not comment in length on the talents of the Brothers Hildebrandt. Some people love their work, while others loathe it. I have mixed feelings, admiring much of the color and dimensional depth of the work, while regretting the static cartoon-like quality in many of the pictures. The purpose for including them in this volume is not explained. I would think it was to further attract collectors, since they have no direct connection to the text.

Grotta in one way continues his bitterness in this new edition, when he says "Christopher Tolkien has now developed something of a cottage industry in editing and reworking his father's fragments for publication..." This is offensive and uncharitable. I have heard statements to this effect before from a few people, and I can not disagree more. When we stop to consider what Christopher Tolkien has done for the Tolkien field of knowledge and furtherance of the "Tolkien Canon," we see it is immeasurable. Every Tolkien reader owes him a deep gratitude, not slights for the intense work he has done.

Yet there is an somewhat irenic close to Grotta's Preface to the 1992 edition, when he says:

...rather than competing or clashing with Carpenter's, this biography complements very nicely. Carpenter is more interested in marshalling names, dates and facts,

while this book concentrates on placing Tolkien in the context of his time and society.... Carpenter's primary point of reference is in developing the theme of who and what Tolkien was.... I would therefore recommend that anyone seriously interested in obtaining a complete, well-rounded perspective on Tolkien and his work should definitely also read *Tolkien: A Biography*.

Each reader will draw their own conclusions as to the purpose of the timing of this book. For me it is like an uninvited and unanticipated guest appearing at the long-expected party.

— Glen GoodKnight

## Impeccable Penwork

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Fish Soup* Illustrated by Patrick Wynne. (New York: Atheneum, 1992) 32 pp. ISBN 0-689-31733-6.

At the time, the only discussion group meeting of the Mythopoeic Society that I ever attended (it was Roke, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana), we discussed the fantasies of Ursula Le Guin. I have to admit that my favorite of these is not the highly-regarded Earthsea cycle, but *Catwings* (which my grandson Shaughessy gave me as a present), surely one of the sweetest short fantasies ever penned for children or adults. Now comes a new and delightful companion-piece, this time illustrated by *Mythlore's* own Patrick Wynne.

The marriage of illustration and text is complete, with Wynne's impeccable penwork — wait until you see his flying mice! — depicting exactly the combination of wry wit, benign didacticism, and joyous astonishment that is embodied in Le Guin's wise prose. Congratulations are in order, to Wynne for keeping such illustrious company, to Le Guin to being lucky enough to have such an excellent illustrator, and to *Mythlore* for having discovered him first!

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

