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Letters

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Letters

LETTERS

Readers' Letters are an important form of feedback and exchange, an opportunity to comment on past issues and to raise questions for others' comments. Each letter that is printed extends the writer's subscription by an additional issue. Letters by disk are most preferred (see elsewhere in the issue in the Submissions announcement for formatting information), but typewritten and handwritten letters are also welcome. Please send your letters directly to the Editor: Glen GoodKnight, 742 South Garfield Avenue, Monterey Park, CA 91754 USA

Graham D. Darling McGill Univ., Montreal, Canada

C.S. Lewis' Ransom trilogy continues to have the reputation of being "anti-science," years after the author (in his "Reply to Professor Haldane") specifically denied such intent (his real target was idolatrous and absurd "scientism"). Thus, in his recent article "C.S. Lewis and the Narrative Argument in *Out of the Silent Planet*" [issue 70], Jim Herrick writes "When science does enter the picture in the novel, it is uniformly evil." It is true that Weston, one of the two villains in the book (though the less villainous, in Oyarsa's judgement and presumably Lewis' own), as a physicist cum spaceship engineer cum pontificator of big-S "science" is clearly in that field.... However, commentators don't seem to notice that the hero (indeed, saviour of three worlds) of the series, Ransom, as a professor of philology (*Collins Dictionary*: "The science of structure and development of languages") is also a scientist — indeed, in systematically studying hrossan Old Solar and its variations, and in making observations and reasoned deductions on Malacandran geography, biology and ethnology, he's the only one who ever actually does any real science in the course of the book, so allowing him to get a grasp on the true Malacandran (and indeed, cosmic) situation, while Devine and Weston, both only concerned with establishing a beachhead for exploitation and colonization (note that piloting a spaceship is no more "doing science" than driving a car), both remain ludicrously out-of-touch.

I also take issue with assertions that "science" and "technology" do not exist on Malacandra, to the planet's benefit. The sorns show an understanding of natural science far beyond mundane fields of "astrology (sic) and husbandry," which they have acquired through their own direct observations (example: using window-like telescopes — apparently similar to modern optoelectric-video systems — located above most of the Malacandran atmosphere), as well as through conversations with benevolent macrobes (who hold but tenuous contact with the Material Worlds, and cannot be depended on for all knowledge).

Though sorns prefer to lead an austere existence, and the hrossa a rustic one, my impression is that piffltriggi life included cheerful bustling workshops and teeming collections of extremely intricate artifacts, both with and without moving parts — recall they regard sorn commissions for scientific and technical instruments (such as breathing apparatus for travel on the upper plateau) as too simplistic to be very interesting. Finally, remember that much of currently-inhabited Malacandra is artificial, the several species of hnau have collaborated with Oyarsa terraforming the planet following the big Thulcandra Rebellion some millions of years before. Clearly there are places, in Lewis' view, for engineer-artisans and scientist-philosophers, as well as musicians-poets, in Malacandran meta-society and in the Great Dance as a whole.

Anne Burns

Cos Cob, CT

I've consistently enjoyed your excellent publication for many years now, but this is the first time I've felt compelled to write a letter of comment. (I was sorely tempted several years ago when the debate was raging over whether Tolkien was a "republican" or a "fascist." I didn't have time to compose a letter; and surely, I thought, *SOME-BODY* would see the obvious and point out that he was something quite different — a monarchist. I can't remember if anyone ever did.)

Anyway, the article which caught my attention was Melinda Hughes' "Dark Sisters and Light Sisters" [issue 71]. While fascinated by her analysis of feminine relationships, I was disconcerted by her apparent acceptance of Marion Zimmer Bradley's view of — or rather, vehement attack on — Christianity in *The Mist of Avalon*.

My impression on reading the novel was that the Christian characters are "Medieval Catholics" only in the most superficial sense. Yes, they have bishops and priests, monks and nuns, processions and pageantry — but they speak and think exactly like 20th-century American fundamentalists. In a book claiming to be true to history (herstory?) in its portrayal of the cultural conflict between Celtic goddess-worship and Roman Christianity, this struck me as a serious error.

In the final scene, Morgaine looks on approvingly as the nuns of Glastonbury rever the Virgin Mary and various female saints — "just other names for the Goddess." This misunderstanding — which is unfortunately quite common among those who view Medieval Christendom through the distorted lens of the Puritan tradition — is the basis for an accusation which fundamentalists never tire of hurling at Catholics: we're "pagan idolaters" who "worship" Mary and the saints.

All of this made me wonder if Bradley, and other feminists who reject Christianity as being excessively patriarchal, have ever experienced it in any form except for the deracinated, impoverished, narrow-minded version found in the "Bible Belt." If they haven't, it's no wonder they abhor it!

Admittedly, this is a subject outside the scope of Hughes' article; in fact, it might be a topic for a whole paper, if not a book. (Anyone interested?) However, I do find it odd that, in a magazine celebrating the work of three very Christian authors, a portrait of "Christianity" which they would scarcely recognize was presented so uncritically.

[The Hughes paper was published for its literary insights, not its theological correctness. If a "theological filter" was used on submitted material, we would have a much smaller publication. As Editor, I very seldom agree one hundred percent with opinions expressed in material. I think it is better — and far more interesting — to let readers react with their comments, which you have done quite lucidly. I encourage more readers to share their reactions, pro or con, to what they see in *Mythlore*. — GG]

Katrelia Angus

Sierra Madre, CA

As a member of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals since 1989, I was extremely impressed by John Laurent's "C.S. Lewis and Animal Right" [issue 71]. Laurent has effectively made the Mythopoeic Society readers of *Mythlore* aware of the evils of vivisection and animal abuse.

However, the needless torture of animals is still present today and must be completely discontinued. I firmly believe that the Mythopoeic Society is capable of alleviating this crisis.

Belbury is still alive and present. General Motors is the only automotive company in the *entire world* that continues to test on animals, for the sole purpose of thumbing its corporate nose at people who care. Weston and Feverstone would be very happy to be on its board. Likewise, Clorox prides itself on not testing on *dogs*, yet stresses that it still uses the barbaric Draize eye irritancy test on helpless rabbits. Similarly, L'Oreal and Gillette perform needless and cruel tests on rodents in the name of beauty, which I, a professional model, find very ironic! Furthermore, we must remember to make or trim our costumes out of *fake* rather than *real* fur, as minks and beavers die painfully in order for humans to use fur. With modern technology continually improving imitation fur, there is no real need, especially in America, for real fur.

On a more positive note, there are many companies that *do not* test on animals. PETA has enabled Estee Lauder, Purrex, Ford and Revlon to completely discontinue testing on animals. There are more companies that *do not* test on animals than ones that *do*. I am strongly urging the readers to buy products that are not tested on animals, and to avoid using real fur. I am positive that this is what C.S. Lewis would have wanted us to do.

John Houghton, Duke of Númenor, West Bend, IN

Thank you for the magnificent centenary issue of *Mythlore*. I've regretted not subscribing over the last several years, but somehow this graduate student budget has always prevented me from doing so. In any case, I've decided to put the Society at the head of my budget for the next two years! Best wishes for the New Year.

Leonardo da V Malaise &

Clifton Holt St. Evans Malaise

Florescence, NB

It is with some sorrow that we announce to the members of the Mythopoeic Society the passing of Robert St. Evans Malaise, poet laureate of the Cretian Islands, and native son of Lake Portmanteau, Wisconsin. R.S.E. Malaise is known in literary circles for his highly charged text on creative writing, "The Way Things Ought To Be Written" and his subsequent award winning volume describing J.E.C. Kelson's work on Folk Etymology, "I Told You It Was So." His own poetry collection, "A Month of Sundays," is still touted as one of the world's most eclectic and esoteric from this century.

Robert St. Evans Malaise was best known among Society members as the person who played the role of "Dr. Paul Nolan Hyde" at the annual Mythopoeic Conference for the past several years, the last performance at the Tolkien Centenary Conference held last August in Oxford, England. "Dr. Paul Nolan Hyde" was, of course, the linguistic nom de plume of Dr. Edward Clarendon who has also passed away after a long exile in the south of France. Clarendon is interred at Westminster Abbey, in London, at the foot of the staircase leading to the Nave of James VII. Malaise is to be buried in the family cemetery in Lake Portmanteau.

We express appreciation to all those who have extended their condolences to the family. In lieu of flowers, modest donations may be made to the Federal Witness Protection and Relocation Program Office in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

We have included the final poem in RESM's latest volume of poetry, "It Was About That Long, Too," as a token of his last breath among us.

I Remember Not My Former Dwelling Place

I remember not my former dwelling place
nor the sorrows that I left beside the track
piled up, invisibly hungering for my soul's shoulder

I left them there, and my bent back,
like sprung steel, snapped straight
when I beheld that far distant horizon to the west

I do not suppose that they have been stumbled over,
my monument of murmuring memories;
distress only has substance for its own

I carried them back about my neck with downcast eyes,

their weight pulling my heart earthward,
fixing my attention on the things of this world

I wore them about my neck like a Coleridgean owl
and despaired of the wretched stench of death
that rose noisome to my surfeited nostrils

Thus I labored through a third-score years
until, near the river's edge, I stood unburdened
and left without farewell for a promised land

I remember not my former dwelling place
nor the sorrows that I left beside the track;
without doubt they have no need to remember me.



Tales Newly Told — continued from page 34

Brothers of Arth to break their vow of chastity, thus upsetting the magical balance of Arth. This leads, of course, to some uproariously funny scenes which, despite the "adult" nature of their theme, are very similar in tone to much of Jones' juvenile fantasy. The subversion of Arth's emotionally repressed denizens and their revolt against Brother Lawrence, the monumentally hidebound and unimaginative High Head, bring to mind any number of boarding-school stories. This effect is heightened when Zillah makes friends with some young enlisted servicemen from the Pentarchy, who are on Arth against their will and have little respect for its peculiarities. Chief among them is the young aristocrat Tod, himself the heir of a Pentarch, and possessed of a magical "birthright" which will play a crucial role in the plot.

What saves these scenes from coming across as frivolous and unbelievable is Jones' unique empathy for the childlike (or childish, depending on the context!) aspects of adult behavior. In her juvenile fiction this is usually brought out when adults interact with children, or when children interpret their elders' actions. Here the adults manage very well by themselves, driven, no doubt, by the extreme stress that is put on them. Unresolved childhood conflicts, nursery frustrations, are found to be the true motivation for actions with a seemingly adult rationale. Zillah, who has had a very bad experience with her mother, finds it all the more difficult to confront the terrifying Lady Marceney of Leathe.

Yet these obscure, pre-rational regions of the soul are also the source of the magic that all the main characters use; in fact, the more in touch they are with their instinctive feelings, the more potent their magic. It is clear, for instance, that it is Gladys's very eccentricity, her ability to

pay no attention to social norms, that has made her the most powerful of England's Witches, although the others may laugh at her uncouthness. Zillah's magic is just as clearly founded on her love for her son, and for Mark. Because these are feelings she cannot measure or control, so is her magic measureless and uncontrollable (the "sudden wild magic" of the title). And Tod, in his impulsiveness and self-reliance, shares somewhat in the "wildness" of this gift, which will defeat the more disciplined and seemingly stronger magic of their adversaries.

The tale is not without its flaws. The ending is a little abrupt, with too much happening at a frantic speed (although this is, in a way, a Diana Wynne Jones trademark). And hasn't Jones already given us a female villain unmasked in *extremis* as a non-human creature? (One may recall the ending of *The Magicians of Caprona*.) A subplot involving Maureen and her lover Joe (an agent of Arth) begins with a promise of great suspense but fails to sustain its own flow within the narrative as a whole.

The book's problems — such as they are — come largely from its seeming to fall between two stools, being neither a conventional adult novel nor a conventional juvenile one. But for Diana Wynne Jones' many fans, this should present no difficulty. They will not be disappointed; this new tale will give them all they have learned to expect, and more.

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* 39) 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.