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Reviews

Abstract

Tolkien: A Critical Assessment. Brian Rosebury. Reviewed by Glen GoodKnight.

The Road to Middle-earth. T.A. Shippey. Reviewed by Glen GoodKnight.

J.R.R. Tolkien: A Descriptive Bibliography. Wayne Hammond and Douglas Anderson. Reviewed by Glen GoodKnight.

George MacDonald. William Raeper. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

The Fiction of C.S. Lewis: Mask and Mirror. Kath Filmer. Reviewed by Nancy-Lou Patterson.

REVIEWS

ELUDING

THE CONVENTIONAL

Rosebury, Brian. *Tolkien: A Critical Assessment*. Houndsmill, England: Macmillan Press ISBN 0-333-53896-X; New York: St. Martin's Press ISBN 0-312-07583-9, 1992. 167 pp. + ix.

In his introduction, Rosebury states:

What I hope to do in this book is to arrive at a view of Tolkien, which places him in the same frame as other twentieth-century writers, explores his originality, and his modernity, and evaluates each of his individual works... without special pleading or hyperbole. (p. 6)

He makes a commendable attempt at this in this seemingly small book full of phrases in academese to the skimming eye. Actually this is a solid book of readable analysis that places this work in the better half of all the books on Tolkien criticism. Rosebury refers to T.A. Shippey in the Introduction more than once, taking issue, while acknowledging Shippey's critical achievement.

The book, intended to assess Tolkien on his Centenary, is divided into four major sections: 1. *The Lord of the Rings*: Conception. 2. *The Lord of the Rings*: Execution. 3. Minor Works, 1914-1973. 4. Tolkien and the Twentieth Century. Rosebury, Principal Lecturer in English at Lancashire Polytechnic, gives each section well thought out analysis. He often makes statements I would take at least partial issue with, but more often makes those that for me ring true or support ideas that have occurred to me before. This is all to be expected as we listen to a fellow admirer of Tolkien who has studied his material well.

Rosebury's assessment will surprise some with statements like these:

Tolkien was... a kind of theological anarchist, a type represented in the nineteenth century by Tolstoy or (less consciously) by Dickens. For such writers, secular political arrangements, including democratic ones, are poor substitutes for virtue: all would be well if human beings would only humbly obey the will of God — or, in non-theological language, act justly.

In his concluding paragraph, Rosebury looks forward hopefully to a gradual recession of "total war, or totalitarian, oppression, or destruction of the environment," and thus a recession of "urgent partisanship." "It will then be possible to judge [Tolkien's] stature without nervous glances in the direction of the ever-changing phantom, the *Zeitgeist*." I am uncertain that humanity, even the small

minority who are in any way literary, will ever achieve such an exalted and enviable position.

— Glen GoodKnight

AN EXCELLENT ROAD

Shippey, T.A. *The Road to Middle-earth* (Second Edition). London: Grafton (an Imprint of HarperCollins), 1992. ISBN 0-261-10275-3. Paperback.

I will not attempt to fully praise what I consider the best single book written on Tolkien. Every page seems to be crammed with new or overlooked information. When an advanced copy was sent to me in 1982 I wrote:

T.A. Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth* is a quiet giant, nourishing in its often profound insights, calmly and patiently correcting the mistaken notions of Tolkien's detractors, eminently solid in the knowledge of ancient sources and their often brilliantly illuminating relation to Tolkien's works. This is a gratifyingly substantial and thorough study that is sure to become a critical standard for scholars and literature readers of Tolkien.

Now we have the second edition — at least from England; Houghton Mifflin has not yet moved to reprint it in the USA. In his Preface to the second edition Shippey observes that since his book's original publication there has appeared Christopher Tolkien's *The History of Middle-earth* series as well as Tolkien's "reconstructed" editions of the Old English *Exodus* and the *Finnsburg* poem. He feels that "On the whole I feel I have got off lightly," meaning he has not needed to reconsider or revise much of his original work, and that "Generally,... I am happy to stand by what I wrote, remembering the data I had."

This book is so rich, it deserves a new reading from the beginning to the end, beyond just the reference hunting excursions.

— Glen GoodKnight

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE

Hammond, Wayne with the assistance of Douglas Anderson. *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Descriptive Bibliography*. (Winchester Bibliographies of 20th Century Writers) Winchester, England, ISBN 1-873040-11-3; St. Paul's Bibliographies; New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Books, ISBN 0-938768-42-5. 434 pp. + xiv. Hardbound with no dustcover.

He is a book that will make one exclaim "Here is everything you didn't realize you didn't know." Long overdue

and much appreciated, this book is a bibliography with commentary of everything known related to J.R.R. Tolkien. Perhaps "everything" exaggerates. I am besumed in thinking of certain materials produced following the Ralph Bakshi movie *The Lord of the Rings*, and certain posters found in "head" shops of the 1960s. Those types of things are outside the scope of the book, which instead focuses on everything from the hand or mouth of Tolkien himself. It is divided into seven major sections:

- A. Books by J.R.R. Tolkien
- B. Books edited, translated, or with contributions by J.R.R. Tolkien
- C. Contributions to Periodicals
- D. Published Letters and Excerpts
- E. Art by J.R.R. Tolkien
- F. Miscellanea
- G. Translations

Part A takes the largest section of the book with 277 pages; Part B with 56 pages; Part C with 6 pages; Part D with 19 pages; Part E with 15 pages; and Part G with 21 pages.

The authors go to considerable lengths not only to list each book in Part A in the order it was published, but also: to give the history of the book's publication and to give differences in minutiae concerning changes in the text and in the design and physical appearance of each subsequent edition and impression. The number of pages alone for *The Hobbit* is 67; and 95 for *The Lord of the Rings*.

While this book contains much information that is very technical, it also contains many anecdotes and account that are fascinating and well worth knowing.

Even though this book is indispensable for the serious Tolkien scholar, it is even more valuable for the collector, whether the collection be personal or in a public or institutional library and the collector is a curator or librarian. Wayne Hammond is a professional librarian, a Tolkien scholar and a Tolkien collector. Bravo to Hammond and Anderson for this impressive achievement. Highly recommended.

— Glen GoodKnight

A VERY MODERN BOOK

William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring, UK: Lion Publishing, 1987), 432 pp. ISBN 0-7459-1123-4.

Readers sometimes complain that *Mythlore* misses major works or reviews them late. I can account for that in this case; not long after I acquired this lengthy book, a major illness and its intense treatment and recovery intervened, and though I read many briefer books in the interim, this one stayed on my shelf until my retirement, since which I have indulged in the luxury of reading it carefully and slowly. It is, quite simply, a masterpiece.

Written by a man still in his twenties at the time, it is not only poised and penetrating, but intensely detailed, allowing the reader to travel almost month by month through George MacDonald's long, astonishing, and profusely creative life. His religious development and ideas are explored both in their life context and in the context of their period, with utmost clarity. Superb chapters are devoted to his poetry, to *Phantastes*, to his novels, to his theology, to his children's fantasies (giving to *The Princess* and *the Goblin* its proper title of masterpiece), and to *Lilith*.

William Raeper's reading of *Lilith* (first written in 1890; published in its final revised form in 1895) is without doubt the most perceptive, subtle and articulate study ever achieved of this "daring masterpiece." (P. 384) Raeper concludes his study of MacDonald's last fantasy with this assessment:

Lilith was written before its time — it is a very modern book concerned with the nature of the mind, the subjectivity of all writing, even with its own textuality. It stands as a junction in literature from which emerged the three different strains: fantasy writing, science fiction, and the parable mode, used by writers such as Kafka and Borges who create other worlds that closely mirror our own. (p. 384)

The powerful and supple mind of the young Scots scholar Raeper (b. 1959) meets here the father of modern fantasy writing, whose life (1824-1905) enclosed that of the entire Victorian era (1837-1901). Raeper's biography of MacDonald is packed with merits; it explores at length a long and complex life; it is set, superbly, into the full context of MacDonald's personality, behavior, thought, theology, and art; and it is informed in all by this poised, delicate, and compassionate Jungian interpretation of these elements as parts of a complex whole. The book is like a banquet: everything one wants to know about MacDonald is here, richly realized, explicitly stated, clearly expressed, and poignantly understood.

This MacDonald is, indeed, the man that C.S. Lewis met on the road from Hell to Heaven, as he tells it in *The Great Divorce* and *Surprised by Joy*. This MacDonald is the boy, born in 1824, whose mother died when he was eight, speaking to the boy, born in 1898, whose mother died when he was ten. Lewis acknowledged and demonstrated over and over the deep impact of this great Victorian upon him, and one could (though I wouldn't) say that Lewis, the self-designated dinosaur, simply continued the traditions of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. But in Raeper's biography of MacDonald, we have a meeting between a Victorian and a reader born in the second half the twentieth century, and this reader too is able to meet MacDonald directly, as powerfully as Lewis did when he picked up *Phantastes* from a railroad station bookstand in his late teens. The result in this case is an absolutely superb biographical and literary study that has the imaginative impact of a novel and the intellectual stimulation of a treatise.

It is never too late to read something worth reading! Run, do not walk, for the nearest copy of this rich, wise, compelling, illuminating, and enthralling book. And then, of course, prepare for a lifetime of reading MacDonald.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

Flawed and Fallible

Kath Filmer, *The Fiction of C.S. Lewis: Mask and Mirror* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 153 pp. ISBN 0-312-08667-9.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lucy Pevensie climbs the stairs in the Magicians Coriakin's house, and passes a little bearded mirror, where the glimpse of her own face, thus transformed, gives her a fright. Kath Filmer's book may do the same for you. Her premise, not a new one, but never, perhaps, so potentially expressed, is that he was "a brilliant, but flawed and fallible writer, a flawed and fallible human being on a hopeful quest for wholeness," (p. 138) as she says in her conclusion. His flaws and his fallibilities are evidently his behaviors as a "mysogynist" to which she devotes three of her nine chapters. Whether or not one agrees entirely or in part, with this extremely ad hominem argument, she has certainly made a pungently expressed case, but her analysis does suffer from the fact that *All My Road Before Me* was, at least according to her bibliography, not available when she prepared her manuscript. Clearly, it is simply not true that Lewis had little contact with women, but rather, that he lived a major part of his adult life, first and for many years in a shared home with daily contact, and for many years afterwards every weekend, as intensely as could possibly be imagined, with Mrs. Janie Moore and her daughter Maureen. Again, Lewis' portrait of the Un-Man in *Perelandra*, which causes Filmer to ask "What personal fear of evil, what psychological agenda would lead Lewis to create such a monstrosity?" is easily answered by that diary's account of the horrendous episode, a period of several weeks, when Mrs. Moore's kinsman, "the Doc," went mad (probably due to an advanced case of paresis) and underwent a series of episodes of

rolling on the floor and shrieking that he was damned for ever and ever. Screams and grimaces unforgettable. The fits began to get more frequent and worse. I noticed how exactly he reproduces what Faustus says in Marlowe. (C.S. Lewis, *All My Road Before Me*, London: HarperCollins, 1991, p. 202)

Lewis was about twenty-five years old when he recorded this experience, and in fact refers to it several times in his other writings.

Kath Filmer's emphasis upon Lewis' portraits of evil or sinful women, as if her never portrayed evil or sinful men, gives a distorted impression of his fiction. In *That Hideous Strength*, for instance, of the many evil denizens of the N.I.C.E., only one is female. I don't dispute that a strong

element of Lewis' sexuality is expressed in his portrayals of women, evil or good; he was a man of his period and we already know that he enjoyed sadistic fantasies as a youth. When he calls Fairy Hardcastle (a brutal female police officer) "insolently sexed," he means it. Even so, it seems unlikely to me that he "realized at some point that the image [of 'fictional women as Ladies of the Courtly Love tradition'" (p. 104)] did not sit comfortably with narratives set in the twentieth century," and thus set the Narnian Chronicles in a "medieval world" (p. 104); he has been declared a major creator of the twentieth century's views of the medieval world by eminent medievalist Norman F. Cantor, in *Inventing the Middle Ages* (1991), a most interesting study which discusses not only Lewis but Tolkien. In my life (which began in 1929) medieval topics were of immediate meaning and significance: all the more, then Lewis', which began in 1898. These concerns aside, *The Fiction of C.S. Lewis* does contain some highly significant, useful, and genuinely original and important material; Filmer offers a striking analysis of C.S. Lewis' politics, two chapters of really insightful readings on Lewis' Political Fictions" and "Political Issues in Lewis' Juvenile Fiction," including comparisons, very appropriately indeed, between his political concerns and those of a man who wrote a major and favorable review of *That Hideous Strength*, George Orwell. She defines politics very broadly in order to do this, but she is quite right to do so, and her contribution to Lewis studies in these two chapters is well worth reading and may (indeed, should) spark real and long over-due debate. For this I salute her, and would recommend the book for these chapters alone. Fortunately she also gives a sharply-focussed reading of *Till We Have Faces* which adds significantly to one's awareness of its elements of mask and face symbolism, intriguingly given both Jungian and Feminist readings, and which explains the meaning of her subtitle.

Fundamentally, she says that Lewis feared above all else the sin of self-regard, or Pride, the seeing of everyone else as existing only to serve one's self. She says this in such a way that we are led to ask, 1) did he really think this, to which the answer is yes, and 2) is this idea true, to which the answer is various and complex. Certainly a teacher stands in endless danger of exploiting his/her power; I certainly experienced temptations to power in the nearly forty years of my university teaching career and Lewis, a far more brilliant, argumentative, charismatic, combative, persuasive, and otherwise powerful academic than I (or most other teachers) could have been, had very good reason to fear those elements in himself. He always said he drew upon his own experience in his commentaries on sin, and I suspect he meant it.

— Nancy-Lou Patterson

