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## Letters

Helen Armstrong

Darrell Schweitzer

Laura Ruskin

Benjamin Urrutia

Anne Etkin

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# LETTERS

Helen Armstrong

Essex, England

Now is the time to congratulate you on Mythlore 26 & 27. I have just finished M27 and it's one of my favorite for a long time, although I'm a Tolkien fan first and foremost. It provides very scholarly and readable essays on Lewis, MacDonald and Williams (in effect), any of which would do as an introduction to these authors. I'm only a recent convert to Charles Williams, and essays like "Praise & Christian Unity in War in Heaven," which concentrates on one aspect of a story and thus illuminates the whole story serve as an encouragement to go forth and read that story. I think this imparting of an urge to go and investigate the work discussed is the real mark of a good essay or review. Christine Barkley also captures the peculiar way in which much of Tolkien's writing makes things seem simultaneously "present or remote," as if his worlds were close enough to step inside, and at the same time separated from our world by insurmountable distances of time and circumstance, for more extreme contrasts, more perfectly resolved, than I have met in any other writer.

More power, too, to the invaluable Tim Kirk, a gem among illustrators, who seems to step effortlessly over the frontiers between the lighthearted and the perfectly serious.

I'm still absorbing 26 (what? me read in order?!). Miriam Y. Millers' comprehensive article on color in LotR reminded me that colour in Tolkien is almost a structural part of his fantasy writings, and would probably repay even further and deeper inspection. I worked on a book on color last year (Color, Knapp Press (Architectural Digest) 1980) which opened a great many doors on the world of color for me, particularly the very most fundamental color associations - red from blood and fire, yellow from the sun, blue from the sky, green from vegetation - which given the thinking of all notions about color, and lay a basis for incredibly complex color symbolisms. Also that red is the most fundamental color perception after black/white (dark/light): Tolkien does not use red much, but of course Gandalf's ring Narya was the red ring of fire and he was the 'servant of the secret fire.' Also that all colors have good and bad aspects.

... And I quoted 'The Cartography of Fantasy' to an English publisher as evidence that readers were interested in fantasy maps...

So I'm enjoying my Mythlores. One day when I have some funds I will build up a proper library of Mythlores, but, like most things, that comes after the husband, the house and the horse at the moment. Not much after, tho!

Darrell Schweitzer

Stratford, PA 19087

I must say that I'm glad to have a poem published in MYTHLORE, and I am grateful to the scribe, Lee Garig for the job she did lettering it. I'm particularly glad that she didn't succumb to the temptation to use some overly ornate script, which might be very handsome to look at, but impossible to read. I've seen that happen often enough. I write to be read. I think everybody does. So I'm glad I can be, in so handsome a rendition, even if the word "pharaoh" is misspelled. Oh well. I shall have to write more verse exercises like this, practising form and imagery, until this sort of thing comes as easily as breathing, if I am ever to write any real poetry. This one is the best so far. The problem is that I only write about one poem a year. Check back with me about the turn of the century....

I wish I had more time to read MYTHLORE more thoroughly, since it is an admirable journal. Right now I am in the middle of a large and important book project with a close deadline. I can't say more now, but you'll be hearing about it eventually. When I'm done I shall doubtless go back and read everything in the issues I have piled up.

To answer the question someone raised a couple issues back about Lord Dunsany's attitude toward the clergy, at the very worst, his depiction of clerics in his fiction might be called a little patronizing. But then, I can see how one might claim that his depictions are Irishmen are patronizing too, especially in Rory and Bran and Up in the Hills. Dunsany apparently had no religious beliefs of his own. He was raised Protestant, but he never seems to have had any interest in serious religion at all. I suspect this may have helped him in writing something like The Gods of Pegana, where he is taking the trappings of what could well be belief in someone else, and treating it purely as art. It's as if he read Genesis and decided he could do better. In any case, clergymen are always shown in a somewhat favorable light. The one in The Blessing of Pan is a good and sincere fellow. The one in The King of Elfland's Daughter is a trifle rigid, but just to be nice, Dunsany provides him in the end with a little area of ground which has not been overwhelmed by Faerie, so he won't have to live out his days among pagan things if he doesn't want to. There is also a clergyman in the play Cheezo, who refuses to believe in eternal damnation. This gets him in trouble with his bishop, and also with the father of his fiance', who is perfectly willing to accept the church as one business among others, but insists that if the young man is to provide well for his daughter, he (the cleric) had better give in, get on well with the boss, and go for a promotion. In the end, when it is learned that the father's company is marketing a synthetic cheese, and that laboratory rats have died after eating it, despite which the father intends to market the product, the young man decides he can believe in eternal damnation after all. It's a hostile caricature of the industrialist, but the clergyman is sympathetically portrayed. There is nothing in any of Dunsany's works which is anti-clergy. I suspect that as a member of the old Protestant aristocracy living in what became dangerous times, Dunsany appreciated religion for its role in maintaining social order, even if he didn't believe in it. Also, being a sort of romantic conservative, he doubtless liked things just the way they were (or he imagined them to be) and that included the clergy going on with their (to him) quaint ways.

Re. Poul Anderson's article, mythology has always impressed me as being, in the last analysis, a method of thinking, a device for intuitively grasping beyond the reach of reason. Thus, on a cosmic scale, a mythology is a system of metaphors which are somehow true in a way beyond simple description. On a very simple scale, I think the process works similar to the thoughts of the scientist who discovered the benzene ring in a dream (involving monkeys), then worked backward from this answer. In other words, as a myth grows and takes shape, it is a kind of revelation.

Lewis's chapter on Myth in An Experiment in Criticism has always impressed me as the most succinct and insightful examination of the subject that I've seen.

Laura Ruskin

Whittier, CA.

To the main argument of Lee Speth's delightful review, nothing needs to be added. All was fitly said. The shrink should stick to his couch, or give us some insight on what could have made Miss Gulch the nasty type she was. She and Auntie Em could have been schoolmates, and hardship had not spared either, yet Em was strong and alive, while Miss Gulch was proud and bitter. What did happen to Miss Gulch, anyway?

Elementary, my dear Speth. Miss Gulch had threatened Toto. Dorothy, who loved the little dog, was forbidden as a "nice" girl to hit back at her enemy. But the fantasy tells the truth. Miss Gulch, pedaling away, changes into a witch in the cyclone, and then appears as a pair of feet under-

neath the house. "Ding, dong, the witch is dead!" But not for long; the enemy is not so easily disposed of. Dorothy cannot stay uninvolved and let the house take the blame. The witch (rationalized as a sister) returns as a powerful and very dangerous ogre whom Dorothy must destroy to save her friends. So, in her fantasy, Dorothy does something about the threat to Toto. This time, the witch figure melts away entirely, taking Dorothy's fears along; after her victory, Dorothy sees the Great and Terrible Oz as just a human being like herself.

But after Dorothy woke up, where was Miss Gulch? When last seen, she was cycling down the road as the cyclone hit. Whether or not a falling building was the proximate cause, her chances of surviving were tiny. Miss Gulch is no longer a problem because she is no longer here. But that turn of events changes the fairy-story to a tragedy. Children under ten in the audience would have nightmares at such a plot development just when Dorothy had wakened in relief. So the audience was not shown the crumpled wheel underneath the fallen barn. "Ding, dong, the witch is dead" says everything necessary.

Benjamin Urrutia

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The passage in The Silmarillion, page 20: "Thus it came to pass that of the Ainur some abode still with Iluvatar beyond the confines of the World; but others, and among them many of the greatest and most fair, took the leave of Iluvatar and descended into it." - has an interesting parallel in the Mormon Scripture The Book of Abraham (part of the Pearl of Great Price): "Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones... And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them..." (Abraham 3:22, 24, 25).

Anne Etkin

Riverdale, MD.

Re Manfred Zimmerman's article in Mythlore 28, the lines from Homecoming on page 51 of Eglerio! correspond exactly to those of my first edition, first printing copy of The Tolkien Reader, page 17. Of course, I noticed the run-on of some of the lines as they appeared in the Ballantine book, but the poetry sounds right when it is read aloud, and with alliterative verse, the ear's the thing. For me, at least. I should have had Manfred as a consultant.

## SOME SAY IN ICE

For Boris, Chosen

*The exiled Florentine knew from afar  
For all the smoke and glare of upper hell  
The deep abyss burns breathless, hard and white.*

*A man plunged headlong down the snowdrifted world  
And lay, boulder-heavy, still.  
A wisp of cirrus breath, ice-lacy hair,  
Crystalled eyes, frost-cruised flesh, fused bones  
Then deep arctic night drifts down.  
An I becomes an it, a man a stone  
Unless one should come galloping, running, kneel  
To hear a heart, to shelter the alone  
With free radiant hands alive with Spring*

*He saved another from the conquering cold.  
Himself he cannot save.*

Gracia Fay Ellwood

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