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Letters

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Additional Keywords

Kevin Farrell

David Bratman

Los Altos, CA

Mythlore 45 is a highly worthy issue, full of well-written and thoughtful articles, of which perhaps the most original and imaginative is George Musacchio's on A Grief Observed. I have never before come across the idea that this book was not merely a straight forward account of Lewis' true feelings, and I shall never be able to look at the book the same way again. Mr. Musacchio has struck a major blow against a particularly virulent form of the personal heresy in criticism -- the tendency to find an author's personal psychology in every book he writes.

John Rateliff's article, though, is my personal favorite of the issue. His exploration of the relation between Tolkien and Williams delves into a subject whose importance to Inklings criticism should be obvious, but which has not previously received any treatment more extended than a few uncomfortable pages in Humphrey Carpenter's The Inklings. Mr. Rateliff's reconciliation of Tolkien's inconsistent statements of his views on Williams is particularly admirable. One cannot dismiss Tolkien as "a bundle of contradictions" and leave it at that.

The article's emphasis on the personal relationship between the two men leaves much room for consideration of their literary relationship. This also is a richer topic than it may appear, and I have a few thoughts on it I would like to express here, in hopes that they will provoke further thoughts.

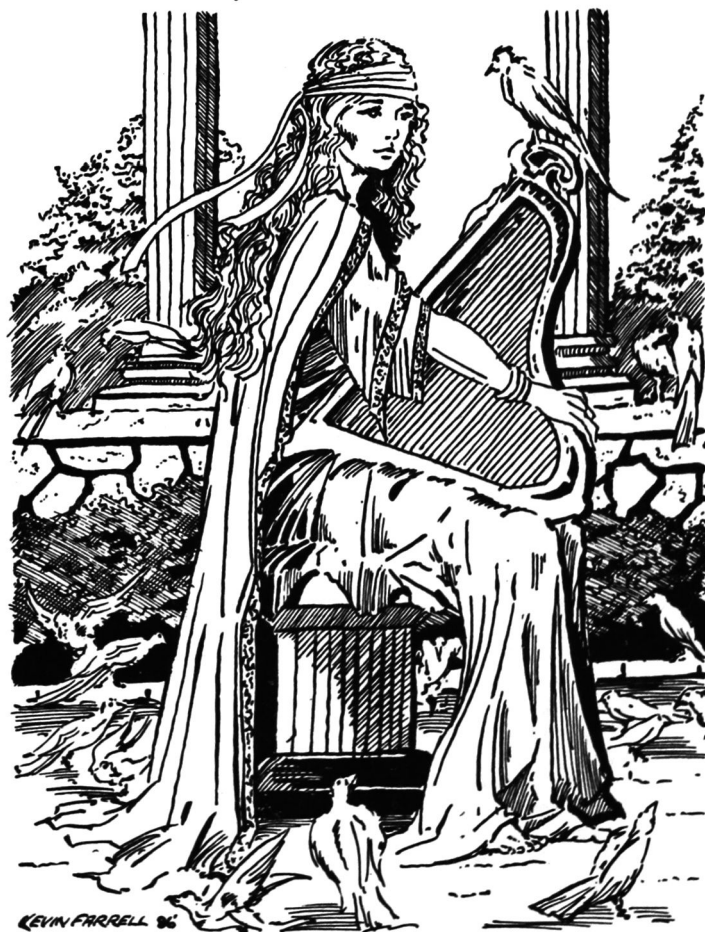
For one, an apparent common influence on both writers' early poetry: the 19th century Catholic poet Francis Thompson. Glen Cavaliero, in Charles Williams, Poet of Theology, calls Thompson "the principle inspirer" of Williams' early poetry (p. 11). Humphrey Carpenter, in his biography of Tolkien, finds in Tolkien's "Wood-sunshine" "a distinct resemblance to an episode in the first part of Thompson's 'Sister Songs' where the poet sees first a single elf and then a swarm of woodland sprites in the glade" (Houghton-Mifflin, p. 48). Thompson may thus be the spiritual grandfather of encounters with elves from Beren's in Doriath to Bilbo's in Mirkwood. An account of Thompson and his influence on the Inklings would be an intriguing article, and I hope it appears in Mythlore someday.

For another, a single book significantly influenced by both writers. Not surprisingly, the book is by C.S. Lewis: That Hideous Strength. Williams' influence on THS is a critical commonplace (see, for instance, Green & Hooper's biography of Lewis, HBJ trade pb edition, p. 174). This influence is most apparent in the general plot structure, with supernatural evil invading the mundane world as it does in so many Williams novels.

But Lewis was being influenced by Tolkien at the same time as he was being influenced by Williams. Little things bear this out: the references to

"Numinor" and "the True West". Both Ransom and Dimble have a very Tolkienian air to them; Fairy Hardcastle's misreading of Dimble's character in chapter 11 is a perfect example of the inability of evil to comprehend the motives of good that is so critical to Sauron's failure in The Lord of the Rings. The basic conservatism of the book shares attitudes that Tolkien expressed in his letters. In short, the philosophy of That Hideous Strength owes much to Tolkien. T.A. Shippey, in The Road to Middle-earth (footnote on p. 91) calls it "Lewis's most Tolkienian work." Williamsian and Tolkienian at the same time: most remarkable! THS may well be the closest thing to the perfect Inklings novel -- the one place where ideas and themes of all three authors nestle together closely.

'BARD OF THE BIRDS'



Pat Reynolds

Milton Keynes, England

I was looking forward to reading The Masque of The Simarils by Sarah Beach - but it doesn't seem to be a masque!. I referred the Shorter O.E.D. which defined a masque thus;

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Like Lucy in the story, J.B. Phillips is either lying or mad or telling us truth. Those who know Phillips say that he is neither mad nor lying, but I cannot attest to that myself. I can just pass on the words that Phillips claimed to hear from Lewis: "It's easier than you think, you know." [2]

Before he was slain, Aslan warned Lucy, "All shall be done. But it may be harder than you think." (p.104) "It's easier than you think," Lewis then is supposed to have assured us.

That sounds a bit like Peter's prophetic words, the very first words spoken in the book: "We've fallen on our feet and no mistake." (p.2) And the message in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe seems to be that very claim -- for Edmund, for Lewis, for Lucy, and us.

At the sound of his roar,
sorrows will be no more...
And when he shakes his mane,
we shall have spring again (p.64)

[1] The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, C.S. Lewis, (New York, Macmillan, 1953), p.40. All following citations are from this edition.

[2] Ray Cripps, "Dark Night of the Soul," Guidenposts, February 1967, p.6. Also, J.B. Phillips, The Ring of Truth (New York, Macmillan, 1967), pp. 188-119.



Mythlore Art Portfolio

Over the years Mythlore has published a large amount of highly praised fantasy artwork. Few people are inclined to cut up their issues of Mythlore in order to frame these pieces for their walls. Therefore Mythlore is now beginning a series of portfolios reproducing various pieces on quality paper suitable for framing. A limited number of portfolios will be offered containing copies signed and numbered by the artists. The first portfolio will be ready at the time of the Mythopoeic Conference in August, 1986.

Signed portfolios will be \$25.
Unsigned portfolios will be \$15.

Included in the first portfolio are the following pieces:

"Meditation of Mordred" (Williams) by Sarah Beach (from ML39)

"Trothplight at Cerin Amroth" (Tolkien) by Paula DiSante (from ML45)

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

"Till We Have Faces" (Lewis) by Patrick Wynne (from ML39)

Each portfolio will come in a folder with Patrick Wynne's "Triskelion" (from ML35) printed on the cover. The artwork will be reproduced on 9X12" sheets. Write the Art Editor (see page 2 for address) to reserve your portfolio (please specify whether you want a signed or unsigned portfolio). All profits will go to support Society activities. Suggestions for future portfolios are encouraged, as they are designed for members' enjoyment.

Continued from page 47

"a form of amateur histrionic entertainment, originally consisting of dancing and acting in dumb show, the performers being masked; and afterwards including dialogue and song".

To this The Oxford Companion to English Literature adds that "Masks or masques" are;

"dramatic entertainments, involving dances and disguises, in which the spectacular and musical elements predominated over plot and character".

To my mind a masque is above all a spectacle - they have more in common with 'son et lumiere' than with plays of the theatre.

The masque is an art form rarely performed or written today (note the use of the past tense in the Companion quotation above). As a Mythopoeic Conference brings together a number of young and enthusiastic amateurs with an interest in fantasy (one of the commonest subjects for masques) it seems a pity that, at the present, no masque is being planned for one.

However, a play is an equally worthy project, and Sarah Beach may feel that this is the most suitable medium for a dramatic exploration of this part of Tolkien's work. But I would be happier if she called her 'spade' a spade, and not by the more poetic title of a 'shovel'.

Reply: I will admit to making free with the term "masque". What I wrote was intended to be theatrical and ceremonial as opposed to an out and out drama (ie., play). I intended that each section reflect an aspect of the impact of the Silmarills on the characters that came in contact with them. As for it being performed, it will be, ceremonially and with masks for the Valar, at the 12th Mythopoeic Conference in Long Beach this summer.

Sarah Beach



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