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Letters

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Margaret M. Howes

Minneapolis, Minnesota, U.S.A.

One can only feel pity for David Holbrook, whose pathetic misunderstanding of everything Narnian was brought to our attention in Margaret Esmonde's letter [*in Mythlore 10*]. Have you ever met a child who found anything but delight in the Narnia books? Holbrook reminds one very forcefully of the dwarfs in *The Last Battle*, who sat in the midst of glory and splendor, life and light, and could not see it because they would not. Or of the characters in *Pilgrim's Regress*, who could not come out of the black hole even when the door was opened, because they would not! Or, especially, of Aragorn's reply to Boromir, when the latter "did not feel too sure of this Elvish lady and her purposes." Says Aragorn, "There is in her and in this land no evil, unless a man bring it hither himself."

This, one suspects, is Mr. Holbrook's problem—he brings a certain attitude to the Narnia books, plus a will to see only evil in them, and so of course he finds it.

More disturbing is the way he links together "tenderness, cowardice and reticence," as if he considers all three to be equally desirable qualities. Has ScrewTape's master at last succeeded in making cowardice seem commendable? After the healing of Sir Urre, Sir Lancelot "wept as he had been a little child"; Aragorn wept at the death of Boromir; but neither man was a coward, and it's unlikely that any coward could be capable of real tenderness. Fear is one thing; cowardice is quite another, but Holbrook doesn't seem to know the difference. He's a sad victim of the spirit of the age.

"The Genesis of *The Lord of the Rings*" [*in Mythlore 9*] was simply priceless, and a perfect example of "modern criticism"—see Robert Graves on the Greek myths, or any really up-to-date, liberal discussion of the Bible—they're probably just about as accurate as this one is! Or W.J. Gruffydd's *Rhiannon*.

On the whole the memorial issue was excellent, especially the poetry, and Professor Glover's article. The issues may be somewhat far between, but they are well worth waiting for!

[With this issue, we will have hopefully overcome the problem of frequency.—G.G.]

Jessica Kemball-Cook

London, England

I am writing in answer to Margaret Esmonde's letter in *Mythlore 10* on David Holbrook's article "The problem of C.S. Lewis" in *Children's Literature in Education*, No. 10.

First, about the journal itself, It is the leading periodical on children's fiction, and contains long, critical and well-researched articles on the literary qualities and educational use of fiction.

This journal arose out of the Exeter conference on children's fiction, and Holbrook's talk, reprinted in the March 1973 issue, was originally given at Exeter in, I think, the summer of 1971! so it was a long time ago and the controversy it aroused over here has died down. David Holbrook started off as a progressive critic of English teaching but has now gone over totally to the anti-porn crusade. As a result he has the reputation of someone who looks for sexual references in the most unlikely places, and his letters to the press (when they get printed) are always full of

indignation at his latest discovery, and thus highly amusing when they are not tedious and repetitive.

This article, then should not be taken seriously. Holbrook has "discovered" that the Wardrobe is a birth passage; Tumnus is a penis symbol; the murder of Aslan has undertones of castration; the lamppost is a penis-object. Thank you very much, Mr. Holbrook; this we can do without! Holbrook also discusses the violence in the Narnia tales, and may have a point, but when he states that Aslan gives the children no free choices, I think he has deliberately misread the books. Surely they are all about choice, and God has the right to set the choices up.

However, there is a grain of truth at the bottom. Writers of great fairy stories have often had unhappy childhoods or abnormal sex lives, for example J.M. Barrie (impotent), E. Nesbit (unhappy marriage), Hans Christian Anderson and Lewis Carroll (never married). Holbrook ascribes CSL's Narnia stories to the trauma he suffered when his mother died—and we all know about his misogyny and late marriage. On the other hand, Tolkien, Grahame and A.A. Milne all had normal married lives. Nevertheless, there is something about the conventions of the traditional fairy story: its other world, its witches, its Good versus Evil and its happy ending—which does appeal to the type of person who had an unhappy childhood, as they are constantly striving to "put things right" retrospectively. Maureen Duffy, in her book *The Erotic World of Faery* has revealed the subconscious sexual basis of many fairy stories. A certain amount of psychoanalysis might reveal much truth about how CSL operated. The trouble with Holbrook is: he uses his insight to condemn CSL utterly. He skims over the beautiful parts of the Narnia books and whenever he discovers a point of interest he uses it against CSL. One might well reply to him: Yes, all you say is true, CSL's Narnia books are full of all these symbols—so what? all the best fairy stories have wicked witches, phallic symbols, Good versus Evil. All you have proved is that CSL was the ideal person to write a fairy tale, because he could use the traditional symbols so well.

Holbrook may know a lot about child psychology, but he hasn't done his homework on Narnia. He tries to work out whether the actual name was invented, and suggests that it's related to *Nannie*, or the Latin *narro* "I tell." Many Mythopoeic Society members will know that the place Narnia exists eighty-six kilometers north-east of Rome, and is now called Narni. CSL's motive for choosing this name?—it has few historical associations to get in the reader's way; and it harmonises well with *Aslan* (Persian for "lion").

Frank A. Hallock

San Diego, California, U.S.A.

Being rather more akin to simple Samwise than the cerebral reaches of Galadriel I find a certain uneasiness growing in me with each succeeding issue of *Mythprint*. I wonder if my mystical experience of enjoyment of *LotR*, *Perelandra* and the *War in Heaven* is somehow less rich than an examination of languages, geography, philosophy and diets! Or, to state it another way, I miss the free exchange of emotional response to the writings of "The Three." By emotional response I mean those surprises of joy rather than heated discussion on the flatness of Middle-earth.

I do not mean to deny the enjoyment of many to "get into" the worlds of Fantasy and draw maps, decipher names,

catalog plants or any other marvelous interests. If I have offended any of you I most abjectly apologize. But I am interested to hear from anyone on the subject of that first adventure into Faërie, the breathless anticipation of the next page, the rush over poems and songs to devour this rich and tasteful world. It is a thrill too often denied entry onto editorial pages or articles from the learned. Glory and trumpets! I await a poetic song of wonder or canticle of praise to these great authors and others like them who have set me free to be a child again. And I return from that journey with wisdom and insight, perceptions and feelings quite different than those with which I entered.

Lewis in his preface to *Surprised by Joy* talks about his noticing that when others experience what he calls "joy" they often do not mention it, and when they do, are confronted with the statement

"What! Have you felt that too? I always thought thought I was the only one."

Well, yes I have felt it, and I wanted to share that with you.

[Your point is well received! For far too many people, myself included, the "mystical" vividness of the initial encounter tends to imperceptibly fade to become more like a value judgement of the work as being "very good!" or something to that effect. The host of details in each work however tend to remain in the memory like entries in a computer, and continue for a much longer period to provide intellectual entertainment for the mind to ponder, synthesize, and develop. I regret in myself that the "mystical" joy of the reading does not linger for a longer period, yet its effect on my total person is never completely lost, for which I am grateful indeed.]

[While I do tend to agree that the initial experience with a work is usually the most intense, I have found that rereading a work after several years (not just bits of it, while doing research) can be very intensely meaningful. It is well known that many readers of The Lord of the Rings have reread it time after time, finding new delights and insights each time. Then there is the case of those who read a work before they were perhaps yet old enough to comprehend its depth, but when reading it again, years later, find that it is like reading an entirely different book—so changed or matured is their perception. This happened recently to a good friend rereading Lewis' Pilgrim's Regress.—G.G.]

Lloyd Alexander Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

In addition to my enjoyment of *Mythlore* No. 11, I must ask you to pass along my special appreciation to Nancy-Lou Patterson for her excellent article on "Gurgi and Other Shadow Figures." It was, for me, both a pleasure and a compliment to reach such a perceptive analysis.

To reinforce her thesis, I'd mention a passage at the end of *The Book of Three* where Dallben tells Taran: "...you have been as impetuous as your friend Fflewddur...and felt as sorry for yourself as Gurgi..." And I also realize that I said much the same in the course of writing an autobiographical note for Holt, Rinehart & Winston: "The characters certainly reflect parts of their author...I know I've been as fearful as Gurgi; and, like Doli, striven for the impossible. Like Fflewddur Fflam, I've even been accused of stretching the truth."

I agree: the shadow we cast is our own, as Nancy-Lou Patterson says, and we ourselves are the monsters. We must also hope that we are, as well, the heroes and heroines.

Harry Warner, Jr. Hagerstown, Maryland, U.S.A.

You are doing a good job of keeping your balance on the highwire between triviality and stodginess. Even though I haven't had the complete reading background that I would need to sop up all the vital juices of scholarship that flow through these issues (I've read most of Tolkien, but little of Williams and I'm only about half-and-half with Lewis), I've enjoyed them. I'll even forgive the footnotes, one topic that normally causes me to behave naughtily, when I find them in fanzines.

[I don't consider Mythlore a "fanzine." In its current

form it seeks to be the best cross between a journal and a magazine.—G.G.]

Paul Lloyd may be demonstrating the realism element in *The Lord of the Rings* when he describes the military deficiencies of some of its characters. If the military historians are correct, there has never been an actual war in the real world which hasn't been overburdened with incompetencies and blunders of the commanders and the non-fighting authorities. But I like to feel for Sauron and Saruman the same sympathy that I sense for all the real generals who have been so berated by the students. The commander doesn't have either the all-seeing eye of the historian; forcing him to make decisions without knowledge of many aspects of the situation, or the weeks or months of time in which he can review the circumstances and finally arrive at the best possible decision on what to do next.

Glen is sensible to hold to the course described in "An Enlargement of Being." Your situation isn't too different from that of a worldcon committee nowadays. "Fandom" and "fantasy" are so far evolved and so enlarged by now that some sort of specialization is inevitable. I might find more material dealing with fiction within my reading experience if you widened the scope of the Mythopoeic Society. But the overall worth of the organization would be damaged in exactly the same way that worldcons have been damaged by trying to appeal to every interest area in recent years. FAPA, which I've loved so much down through the years, is sick, maybe even unto death, from yet another manifestation of the same trouble. People wander into FAPA from every area of fandom nowadays, and so the membership is composed of sixty-five men and women who have little in common with one another in special interests or background in fandom.

"Celtic Myth in the Twentieth Century" is one of the rare speech transcripts that leave me wishing desperately that I could have heard it as originally spoken. Usually something written for a podium just isn't comfortably at home in print and the person who reads it feels as a result that it must have made a poor effect in delivery. *[Unfortunately Miss Walton became too ill at the conference to give the address herself. I read it cold, in her place, to a much "poorer effect" than if she could have done so herself.—G.G.]* But I do feel that Miss Walton has overlooked something in her dismay over Branwen's talking starling. If you were a starling and you had a letter tied to your wing, just how would you proceed once you'd found her brother, Bran, as a result of Branwen's accurate description? Your anatomical configuration would prevent you from reaching over, untying the thread, and getting the letter in your claws so you could wave it in Bran's face. Bran would undoubtedly have the same inability to tell one starling from another that I have when it comes to cub scouts and he would have no reason to pay any attention to the mailstarling. He probably wouldn't even notice something attached to its wing. Starling wings beat too fast for the letter to be visible in flight. If the starling stood on the ground and tried to flap those wings slowly enough to display the letter, it would probably reel around as drunken-appearing as the condition of the scribe on whom Miss Walton blames the paragraph. Bran, if he noticed it, would be more likely to give it a swift kick in the tailfeathers in the belief that it was throwing a fit and might bite him. No, the only way to be sure that a starling will deliver a letter efficiently is to train it to talk so it can explain the situation as soon as it finds Bran.

Incidentally, this issue arrived with pages twenty-nine and thirty still attached to the last page. It took considerable willpower to persuade myself to cleave the pages asunder. I can't remember this happening in any other fanzine I've ever received, and I kept telling myself that it might be such an extreme rarity that I might want to retain my status as the owner of an uncut fanzine, just like book collectors who are so fastidious that they prefer volumes with uncut pages. But I've had too much experience with Dainis Bisenieks' writing ability to yield to snob impulses, when they would have prevented me from reading easily the last two pages of his article.

Alexei Kondratiev

Flushing, New York, U.S.A.

Celtic scholarship being my main professional interest, and my involvement with fantasy having been conditioned by

my experience of the "Celtic thing," I was delighted to read Evangeline Walton's article on the Celtic myths in *Mythlore* 11. However, I would like to comment on her statement that "the Scotch have lost their heritage." It must be remembered that during the Middle Ages the population of Scotland was not ethnically homogeneous: there were both Goidelic and Brythonic Celts, not to mention the mysterious Picts, as well as Norsemen and Angles. Each group had its own traditions. Thus the *Gododdin* and the tale of the doom of the Brythonic Strathclyde tribes could in a way be called a "Scottish" national epic, told in the Welsh (or more accurately "British") language. It is now associated with Wales because that is the only area where the "British" tongue still survives.

Only one Celtic group has preserved its linguistic identity in modern Scotland: the Scottish Gaels. They migrated from Ireland to western Scotland around the sixth century, when they established the kingdom of Dalriada. But there was no cultural break with Ireland: a common language allowed for the free flow of tradition between the two countries. Throughout the Middle Ages Irish and Scots-Gaelic literature were basically one and the same. The Gaels of Scotland did not develop a specifically Scottish epic because they had already adopted the epics of Ireland as their very own. Even as late as the beginning of the seventeenth century as Scots-Gaelic bard like Cathal Mac Mhuirich was still faithfully imitating Irish models. It was not until English and French expansion had thoroughly obliterated the Celtic nations as political entities that Scots-Gaelic began to develop in isolation and display individual characteristics; but by that time, literary interest in the old pagan myths and traditional epics was fast waning—not only in Scotland, but throughout Celtdom. Even where Celtic literature still flourished it was usually more concerned with politics, theology, and the imitation of pan-European styles than with native folklore. Only with the emergence of romanticism and the self-conscious Celtic Revival did the Celtic nations again come to respect and study their own mythological heritage. But what has been written since then is (usually) thought of as fantasy fiction rather than "legitimate" mythology.

Ms. Walton rightly mentions the Highland skill as storytelling. Indeed, the corpus of Scots-Gaelic oral tradition is vast and rich. Campbell's classic *West Highland Tales* are only the beginning of the treasures that have been unearthed, some quite recently. A number of the examples of Scottish *Fionnaigheachd* (tales of Fionn Mac Cumhail and the Fiana) are wilder and more magical than any of their Irish counterparts, and are in some cases linked with that peculiar style of recitation ethnomusicologists know as "Ossianic chant." In fact, it may be noted that many traits thought to be Old Celtic (pertaining to social organization, ritual practises, dress, music, etc.) have been better preserved, and for a longer time, in Gaelic Scotland than anywhere else in Celtdom. Of course, the *Mabinogion* and the Irish manuscripts have the prestige of genuine antiquity. Yet I am certain that when all the material will have been studied, including material from oral sources, Gaelic Scotland's contribution to the knowledge of Celtic mythology will turn out to be much less meagre than might have been supposed.

Gu robh Dia leibh.

[I also admire Cordwainer Smith's fiction very highly, and in spite of the problem of where the line is to be drawn between fantasy and science fiction, do consider him my favorite "science fiction" writer. He has a strong humane quality, somewhat like Bradbury, but has a far greater imaginative scope.

[I fully agree with your point that science fiction developed as a sub-genre of fantasy, as is historically evident. I am always amazed and bemused when I hear "science fiction fans" say just the reverse!—G.G.]

Pierre H. Berube

North Swanzey, New Hampshire, U.S.A.

Tolkien is usually praised for his brilliant reshaping of traditional themes and materials rather than for any original invention. When the critic has exclaimed over the new species of *ent* and *hobbit* he goes on to look for influences. And yet there is at least one other element in *LotR* which, as far as I can see, is completely original with Tolkien:

the concept of Elbereth as Kindler of the Stars. This powerful and mysterious image seems so moving to me that I sometimes find myself saying "A Elbereth Gilthoniel" when I should be saying my Hail Mary's, and when I first encountered it I assumed that it must be found in mythologies everywhere. But I can think of no parallel in the mythologies I know. There are Moon Goddesses and Sky Kings and Earth Mothers galore, but no Star Sowers. Can any reader supply a source from any pantheon?

[Two referents come to my mind. One is in chapter 8 of *The Magician's Nephew*, where Aslan kindles the stars of Narnia simultaneously into being and singing, by his own creating song. The second is *Job*, chapter 38, verses 4-7, where God asks Job, "Where were you when I founded the earth?... Upon what were its foundations sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, while the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy?" (*The Berkeley Version*).—G.G.]

L.D. Fleckenstein, Jr.

Meridian, Mississippi, U.S.A.

My first concern is on the *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. On page 16 in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* Reepicheep tells us that when he was an infant a Dryad sung a verse to him. How is this possible since the Dryads were sunk in deep sleep from the time Caspian the First invaded Narnia until the time Aslan awakened them ten generations later? And by that time Reepicheep was an adult. A correspondent of mine attempted to answer this question by saying that maybe the Dryads appeared only to the Old Narnians and not to the Telmarines. This cannot be possible because on page 76 Trufflehunter makes it quite clear that the Dryads and the Naiads have been gone for many years, even to the old Narnians. Also, Professor Lewis makes no mention of Dryads being present at the meeting of Caspian and the Old Narnians to decide on what action to take against the Telmarines. If there were any "unsleeping" Dryads at that time, they most certainly would have been at that conference for the decision made there would no doubt have altered their lives to a great extent. So my question still remains unanswered. Would someone please clear this enigma for me?

[After reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* aloud each year for seven years, I have noticed certain "non-synchronous" elements with the seven books that make up the *Chronicles*. The problem of Reepicheep's Prophetic Dryad, is, I believe, one of these elements. Neither Lewis nor Tolkien is entirely free from minor inconsistencies in their work, but that in itself does not spoil the fantastic imaginative achievement recognized in each. I do not defend the inconsistencies, but think they should be kept in proper perspective of their total artistic accomplishment. Had Lewis and Tolkien held back to minutely polish and perfect their work to an absolute degree, the corpus of Lewis' fiction and The Lord of the Rings would have surely found the same fate as *The Silmarillion*.—G.G.]

On page 134 of *The Two Towers* Gandalf says, "Far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves, the world is gnawed by nameless things. Even Sauron knows them not. They are older than he." Now this is a very interesting statement. Sauron should be of greater age than any creature in Moria with the possible exception of the Balrog. But since he is not, then he cannot be a Vala. The reason being that the Valar are older than Middle-earth and any of its native inhabitants for they aided in its creation. Because of this, I believe that the Dark Lord was either of the Eldar or of the same race from which came Gandalf and Saruman. Hopefully we will have a final answer on this when *The Silmarillion* comes out.

Finally, I would like to give my compliments to Valerie Protopapas for doing such a terrific job on the cover art of the March issue of *Mythprint*. Using the chessmen was a clever idea as the game of chess does have some mythopoeic qualities.

Your thoughts. . . ?

Letters of comment are encouraged on articles, features, and letters appearing in this issue; letters of comment are also welcome on past issues both of *Mythlore* and *Mythprint*. If your letter is printed, your membership/subscription is extended another three months. Submission information is on p. 26. A lively and diverse letter column is vital — GG.