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Reviews

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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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Abstract

Good News from Tolkien's Middle Earth. Gracia Fay Ellwood. Reviewed by Edward Fitzgerald.

REVIEWS

The Applicability of The Lord of the Rings

-- Edward Fitzgerald

Ellwood, Gracia Fay. Good News from Tolkien's Middle Earth. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 160 pp. photographs. \$3.25 indexed. paperback.

Each of the various books published that concern themselves with J. R. R. Tolkien and his created Universe of Middle Earth have tried to relate The Lord of the Rings, his master work, to the real world. Ready takes on the burden of analysing the man, Tolkien, and fails miserably, tumbling to the ground under the crushing weight of the author's personality. Carter attempts to relate Tolkien's work to the literary genre Fantasy, discussing the influence that it has had upon Tolkien, and the way that he will influence it. Carter also goes the way of Tinkler, building a relationship between the words and names in LotR and those of the Primary world. Essayists represented in Tolkien and the Critics all attempt to analyse LotR in terms of our world, some succeeding, some failing. And so, of course, it is not surprising that the newest book on the scene is subtitled "Two Essays on the 'Applicability' of The Lord of the Rings."

The book is Good News from Tolkien's Middle Earth, authored by Gracia Fay Ellwood. What is most surprising about this book is the first of the two essays "Everything is Alive: An Essay on Magic in Middle Earth and Elsewhere." This essay presents what is perhaps the freshest approach to the exploration of LotR in terms of our Primary world. What Mrs. Ellwood attempts to do is to show that we are very much like Shirefolk when we think (if we ever do) about things which she describes as "paranormal;" clairvoyance, clairaudience, precognition, retrocognition, to name some examples. The Shirefolk's knowledge of the world extended past their borders only in order to include Bree in their sphere. In fact, each farthing or section of the Shire thought the inhabitants of the other areas of the Shire to be queer or not quite normal. We are the same way in the limits that we impose upon reality. In fact, says the author, we can only appreciate the "aliveness" of everything in reality by throwing away (for the moment) our usual objective-analytic minds, and using the facilities of our myth-making unconscious. And what better way to do this than to compare aspects of the "paranormal" in our world with the degrees of aliveness in Middle Earth. When the author has done just that, we have learned more about our own world than about Middle Earth, but we have found another way in which Middle Earth and LotR can be related, "Applied", to our own reality, however unreal that may be.

In her second essay, "The Good Guys: A Study in Christ-Imagery", the first part of which appeared in the Tolkien Journal in a slightly altered form as "The Good Guys and the Bad Guys" (TJ 10, pp. 9-11), the author falls back on more well-trodden ground. Many essayists have attempted analyses of LotR as a Christian document. Some have called the trilogy allegory, while others point out that the basic morality of the book is Christian. In this essay, however, the author shies away from allegory (she points out, as have many, that Tolkien dislikes it himself, but like Reilly she admits that the critic must discuss not intentions, but what the author has actually created) and expresses instead the symbolism of LotR. Thus, she examines Tom Bombadil, Gandalf, Frodo and Aragorn, and finds in each of the last three some traces of the different aspects of Christ. Frodo, for instance, has the meekness and humility of Christ, while Aragorn is Christ the King and Gandalf Christ the Miracle Worker. All three undergo adventures which can be taken as being symbolic of the Fall and Ascension of Christ, and Aragorn's coming into his Kingship telescopes both the Ascension and the Second Coming. In Tom Bombadil, the author finds aspects of the unfallen Adam (but not an Eve in Goldberry), and uses her analysis of him as a point of comparison between the three heroes of the Ring tale.

Mrs. Ellwood has admirably presented what she announces that she will, two essays on the applicability of LotR. In these two well written, easily read discourses she has both reinforced many ideas concerning Professor Tolkien's magnificent trilogy, and presented some exciting new ones concerning the Primary "multi-verse" in which we (and everything else) live.

40. Hobbit, p. 81.
41. Ibid., p. 293.
42. Towers, p. 322.
43. Return, p. 146.
44. Ibid., p. 36.
45. Towers, p. 135.
46. Ibid., pp. 168, 169.
47. Ibid., p. 173.
48. Return, p. 96.
49. Fellowship, p. 365.
50. Ibid., p. 376.
51. Ibid., p. 373.
52. "Notes and Translations," The Road Goes Ever On (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 60.
53. Return, pp. 359, 360.
54. Fellowship, pp. 68, 69.
55. Towers, p. 125.
56. Ibid., p. 190.
57. Return, p. 29.
58. Ibid., pp. 30, 31.
59. Fellowship, p. 375.
60. Return, p. 365.
61. Fellowship, p. 344.
62. Towers, p. 279.
63. Ibid., p. 106.
64. Return, p. 275.
65. Ibid.
66. Return, p. 233.
67. Towers, p. 222.
68. Return, p. 204.
69. Ibid., pp. 252, 253.
70. Ibid., p. 276.
71. Ibid., p. 282.
72. Ibid., pp. 285, 289.
73. Ibid., p. 285.
74. Saint Joan (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1924), p. 159.
75. Hobbit, p. 98.
76. Return, pp. 221, 222.

