MYTHPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

VOL. 47 NO. 12 DECEMBER 2010 WHOLE NO. 341

mythprint

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REVIEWS:

Reviews, discussion group reports, news items, letters, art work and other submissions for *Mythprint* are always welcome. Please contact the editor for details on format, or send materials to:

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Deadlines for receiving material for each issue of *Mythprint* are the 1st of the preceding month.

The Mythopoeic Society also publishes two other magazines: *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* (subscription $25/year for U.S. Society members) and *The Mythic Circle*, an annual magazine publishing fiction, poems, etc. ($8/issue for U.S. addresses). Subscriptions and back issues of Society publications may be purchased directly thorough our web site (using PayPal or Discover card), or you may contact:

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Mythprint is the monthly bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society, a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the study, discussion and enjoyment of myth and fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. To promote these interests, the Society publishes three magazines, maintains a World Wide Web site, and sponsors the annual Mythopoeic Conference and awards for fiction and scholarship, as well as local and written discussion groups.

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ISSN 0146-9347, © 2010 Mythopoeic Society

Fictionalizing Lewis. By S. Dorman.

Is there a "right way" and a "wrong way" to fictionalize C.S. Lewis? Should mere dialogue be considered? Should his most recognizable aspect be left out, namely that of the astute and determined debater so marked in person and in his apologetics and criticism? Legality aside, does a writer's liberty include a license to use the names, likenesses, and settings from the real world to subcreate something that is in large part *unlike* its model(s)?

How can a writer with no legal access to quotation synthesize a fictional Lewis? If the would-be recreator is no debater of any confidence, social wit, acumen, and depth of knowledge, how does he or she make a good C.S. Lewis? There are authors with works in the public domain who might reasonably fit into the scheme of such fictionalizing, Mark Twain and George MacDonald being two examples. One might not scruple to quote them verbatim. Lewis might legally have paraphrased for his storybook portrait of George MacDonald. He chose to subcreate dialogue between himself and his imaginative mentor. There can be no doubt that Lewis knew George MacDonald, from his works, well enough to do this.

We may have a *dialogue* in the formal sense of the word, but do we have a *story* if what we are given is a CSL arguing with disembodied others in a netherworld of mist — or even in a world of light? — when vindication through argument is the sole purpose of both the work and the subcreation of his character? But the author of *Till We Have Faces* has said, "Forms of literature in which Story exists merely as a means to something else [. . .] have had full justice done to them; but those forms in which everything else is there for the sake of the story have been given little serious attention." (*On Stories* 3) This is no longer true, thanks in part to Lewis's own great influence. A narrative whose purpose is argument and debate is not the story *The Great Divorce* is — where rhetoric is but a part of the whole. A character who but debates in a debatable "land" may not be the "right way" to fictionalize C.S. Lewis.

Another wrong way? Be careless with the content of a man's moral or religious character. There must be leeway for the writer's own imagination in his or her making, but to change appreciably the beliefs of the character would be to subvert it. Some authors, scholars and critics, would feel that to convert a dead author is not good characterization. It has been suggested, by William Gray in *Mythlore* 25.3/4, that this is what CSL did with his fictionalized George MacDonald. Surely, Universalist that GMD was, he would not have said, "'I know it has a grand sound to say ye'll accept no salvation which leaves even one creature in the dark outside. But watch that sophistry or ye'll make a Dog in a Manger the tyrant of the universe.'" (*The Great Divorce* 118)

Two ways *perhaps* not "wrong" but not strictly "right" might be to depict a Lewis who was not as astute and argumentative as the original, and/or willing to forego debate for a better purpose. He has written, "Gulliver is a commonplace little man and Alice a commonplace little girl. If they had been more remarkable they would have wrecked their books. [. . .] Falsification of character will always spoil a story. But character can apparently be reduced, simplified, to almost any extent with wholly satisfactory results." (*On Stories* 61) (Falsification here means within the context of the story, formally.) This is the way CSL fictionalized himself in *Perelandra* and *The Great Divorce*. Peter Schakel, in *Reason and Imagination and CS Lewis*, suggests that we may read Orual the Queen of Glome as self-fictionalizing in *Till We Have Faces*. Here we see the character disliking the view of herself in the mirror. The suppression of self-contemplation is a theme of the story, and the mirror is symbolic of this. There a mirror is part of the nightmare scenario. The bus driver's rearview mirror in *Divorce*, in which the character Lewis views himself, is not used as a realist would use it: to access psychological portraiture. Instead, Lewis the first-person narrator sees his reflection, and allows that moment to echo in our imaginations producing its nonverbal insight, before the narrative moves on.

Is the chief characteristic of Lewis's self fictions wonderment? Bemused and troublous confusion in life's events and circumstance? He points toward a *subject* of wonder, careful consideration and awe. Consider the opening sentence of *Perelandra*. "As I left the railway station at Worcester and set out on the three-mile walk to Ransom's cottage, I reflected that no one on that platform could possibly guess the truth about the man I was going to visit" (*Perelandra* 9). Immediately the first-person narrator deflects from himself, toward both his reader (perhaps figured as those on the platform) and to Ransom, who, it turns out, is at center stage in the story.

So Lewis writes himself. But is it fair for us would-be fictionalizers to do likewise? Can we ethically permit ourselves to boil this poor man down to this one element of character, leaving all his other considerable charms and attributes out of it — or perhaps merely suggesting them from time to time?

After all, isn't he best known in this life as a wise man, a soaring intellect of incisive insight; rational; harmonizing his great qualities in a variegated multitude of books? Why then choose the one quality that makes him seem so unlike all this? The quality that makes him something of a child.

If it is so done, it must be because it is *worthy* to be child, to wonder, suffer confusion, long for both adventure and the fantastic. He must be the childlike Lewis because that is the closest a maker can come to subcreating the "ordinary" Lewis. It's right to give him a fantastic setting, and it is also right to give him an anchoring setting. Because his was an imagination ready for phantasmagoria, ready for historic Western literary culture, ready for theologic concerns, it is right to give him fictive companions also anchored in this Western cultural paradigm. But all must be plausibly crafted within the given "world" of the story.

I've been discussing right and wrong ways to fictionalize C.S. Lewis. Assumptions of craft have been considered, and the dialog form rejected. Ideas do not a story make, nor do they make an imaginative character. In this essay C.S. Lewis's self-subcreation points the right way to fictionalize him — as an every-soul who is visiting in a strange land. We considered falsification, discovering that, in order to be believed, Lewis's own beliefs and moral content should be preserved.

Finally, is it *ethical* to fictionalize a person made by God in primary creation — does an artist have any such right? Perhaps: if his or her craft is good enough to coordinate the elements of story inclusive of such characterization. But there is no license to defame, distort, or otherwise abuse a real person. One who would carefully make a portrait does well to have access to the primary verbal materials and history. In this way Mark Twain might be more easily drawn than Lewis. George MacDonald, on the other hand, would be nearly impossible to fictionalize well, even though his books, verbal thoughts, and reminiscence of him pile high. Though I will not argue it here, George MacDonald simply cannot be successfully done. Not by me surely, and not by C.S. Lewis. Or maybe *you* can? ≡

Carolyn Crane. *Double Cross*. Reviewed by Berni Phillips Bratman.

Double Cross is the second book in Crane's Disillusionists trilogy, the first being *Mind Games*. Justine Jones is a rather pathetic hypochondriac who, some time in the first book, has acquired the ability to transmit her specialized health fears to others. This makes her one of a band of disillusionists, people who are assigned to special prisoners who need to be kept distracted by their emotions. The prisoners are all highcaps, Crane's term for what in comic books would be mutants, people born with extra powers, usually psionic in nature.

Justine is pretty much indentured to a highcap named Packard, a former criminal who assigns Justine and the other disillusionists their targets. Her cover is that of a nurse, although she has no medical training other than the autodidacticism that a hypochondriac is likely to acquire. When she's not scaring the pants off her "patients," she's sneaking around with Otto, her secret boyfriend who is openly the mayor and secretly a highcap whose tremendous power keeps all the prisoners in their prisons.

The prisons are one of the ways in which this book is clever. Justine's main target, Ez, is imprisoned in a dry cleaners. Ez doesn't realize she's a prisoner. She thinks she's working a job which lets her live there, and she's become so phobic about germs that she thinks the force field which keeps her in is to keep other people from infecting her. Otto's prisons allow the prisoners to be contributing members of society as they serve their sentences. Packard used to be a prisoner in a restaurant.

Bad things start happening in Midcity, the city where they live. A trio of serial killers dubbed "the Dorks" have been going around killing highcaps, although the existence of highcaps is an urban legend to the citizenry of Midcity. (Another of the clever things I liked about this book was Crane's naming of the villains. I wonder if she meant it as a nod to the trio of villains in Buffy the Vampire Slayer season 6.) And Justine makes a mistake on the job. Ez is a dream walker. Touch her flesh to flesh, and she can invade your dreams. That's what she's imprisoned for, invading people's dreams, making them perform criminal acts for her, including cannibalism. Justine touches Ez to "zing" her (transfer her fear to Ez) as Justine's also touching Packard. The result is that Justine and Packard start sharing each other's dreams, and Ez can start controlling them.

It's an interesting premise and interesting characters. When Justine gets together with her fellow disillusionists, it's like reading about the bizarre "D" family in Gaiman's *Sandman* series (Dream, Death, Desire, Delirium – the whole gang). The pacing in the book didn't always work for me. It dragged in the middle, making me wonder why I was continuing reading it, but then it got exciting towards the end of the book. It made me want to read the final book when it comes out and maybe seek out the first as well. ≡

Patrick Rothfuss. *The Name Of The Wind. The Kingkiller Chronicle: Day One*. Reviewed by Sue Bridgwater.

I found this 662 page fantasy novel on offer in a remainders bin at a garden centre, at a fraction of its original cost. I cannot understand why. A work so well written and ingeniously conceived should have sold every copy. It is a double-first, being not only Rothfuss's debut novel but the first volume in a proposed trilogy.

The tale opens on a dark, but not stormy night, in a lonely inn in a small settlement in a dark forest. So far, so conventional. However, the five customers and the enigmatic innkeeper who people the opening scene are just the first in a novel packed with well-realised characters whose fates draw us in, leading us to share vividly-presented joys and sorrows, griefs and losses, hopes and terrors.

As is common in many fictions these days, the story unwinds on two timescales, and the deeply complex back-story is unrolled by the innkeeper as he tells it to the customers. Dreadful things happen in both narratives, and unpleasant creatures, both human and non-human, afflict the community where the Inn is set, Newarre, and the life of the boy whose story is related by the innkeeper, Kote.

There are conventional elements at every stage of the story; the boy moves from childhood in a troupe of travelling players to desperate loneliness as an orphan after his family is massacred by mysterious, demon-like entities known as the Chandrian. He lives for many years as a near-feral orphan in a crime-ridden city, then talks his way into a legendary school of magic; but becomes a fugitive after the murder of a king. So the themes to be worked out are common ones in fantasy; revenge, the acquisition of knowledge as a step to gaining magical power, constant pursuit by evil beings, a flight from injustice. And not to be forgotten, our hero also falls in love with a mysterious woman whose motives constantly bewilder him.

However, rather than point out similarities to Harry Potter or Ged or to any other fantasy characters or tales brewed from the traditional soup-stock, one should approach this work on its own merits, which are many. I have seldom read such a long tale (save one that I need not name here) that managed to sustain my interest and keep me genuinely wrapped up in its world. It was at times quite terrifying, and often poignant, funny, or magical. Its hero is in search of the name of the wind, so as to control its power; one of many traditional features of the magic in this book. On the way he has a lively time: "I have stolen princesses back from sleeping barrow kings. I burned down the town of Trebon. I have spent the night with Felurian and left with both my sanity and my life. I was expelled from the University at a younger age than most people are allowed in. I tread paths by moonlight that others fear to speak of during day. I have talked to Gods, loved women, and written songs that make the minstrels weep."

One of the strongest features of this work is its language; Rothfuss knows how to handle English. He also knows how to plot, how to evoke character and how to move a tale along at different paces according to need. Elements of adventure and horror tales are here, the old struggle between good and evil, and also solid writing about the realities of cold, hunger, grief and bereavement that reach far deeper than anything Potter's life-story has to offer. Once, on the streets of Tarbean, the boy is raped; no pretty fairy-story here, nor glamourising of life on the streets.

I said the tale is told on two time-levels, but in fact there are three, since many tales of ancient legend are told by various characters to one another, and seem to enshrine much of the morality and belief of the various cultures of The Four Corners of Civilisation. This is a writer with a strong voice of his own, whose work will appeal to the many who like their Fantasy written with intelligence and style. I look forward to the sequel, *The Wise Man's Fear.* As of this writing, however, it is delayed until 2011. And I so much want to know what happens next! ≡

Jonathan Strahan and Lou Anders (eds.). *Swords and Dark Magic: The New Sword and Sorcery*. Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller.

Not too far down the road from this year's Mythcon site in Dallas, Texas, is Cross Plains, Texas, in farm country, which was the home of Robert E. Howard, the creator of Conan the Barbarian. Unusual and worldly folks could be observed at the grocery store there. Also living in the Dallas area is Michael Moorcock, the creator of maybe the second most famous Sword and Sorcery "hero": Elric a sometimes servant of The Lords of Chaos. Ironically enough I visited this year's Mythcon from San Francisco, the territorial home of Fritz Leiber. *Swords and Dark Magic*, edited by Jonathan Strahan and Lou Anders, is dedicated to all three of these fantasy titans, some of the surviving voices of Swords and Sorcery, but as

attested here, the literary subgenre has changed. There is a connection with the god-fearing and god-serving heroes of Swords and Sorcery, and the theme of the recent Mythcon, War in Heaven, that is hard to ignore. Very evident in the tales of Conan and Elric are doings of the gods, but as the editors of this volume attest, the subgenre has changed roads again in modern times.

Swords and Dark Magic has a fascinating introduction – "Check Your Dark Lord at the Door" – which compares Epic Heroic Literature to Swords and Sorcery. The whole world is at stake in epic fantasy like *The Lord of the Rings* and Narnia; whereas, Swords and Sorcery, the editors write, is usually about smaller stakes. There are deadly battles nonetheless. Fantasy is now in a digital, post-cinematic Inklings and Harry Potter age. The Inklings have now made it to the big screen and Harry Potter has broken the old cinematic records. The task to collect stories here, which are now cleaner because of Harry Potter's school-time fans; they still hearken to the past, but a careful reader will notice the difference.

Swords and Sorcery, with its thieves and sexual references, was always grey, as attested to in some of the stories in the new anthology, but the reader will probably not find many stories that a young reader would need parental guidance for. There is a great deal of violence (to be expected), but not many sexual references. For example "Bloodsport" by Gene Wolfe with its unusual narration is especially violent, but told with a cleanness nonetheless. There are also more medieval settings for these stories, suggesting the influence of Lewis and Tolkien on the new fantasy that postdates the pulps of Robert E. Howard's time.

While reading, I found myself wanting to find a Conan story in the collection. I missed his references to his Hykranian sword, and the cold God Crom. I did find some similar stories near the end in "The Fools Jobs" by Joe Abercrombie and "Thieves of Daring" by Bill Willingham. Conan may no longer appeal to the highly informed Internet crowd. In the past Conan appealed to the young and unsavvy who might have liked to chop someone's head off or vent his/her anger by breaking some bones. The gods of Swords and Sorcery would also sometimes like to do the same. Now people would rather study to be wizards. The Internet Age has superseded the prejudices and limitations of Conan the Barbarian. Conan found magic and the workings of the gods unsettling. In our Information Age most children have the option not to be brutes, especially when they can access all the info they would like with hand-held devices.

We also live in a more circumspect time, one not suited to the thieves of Conan's Shadizar the Wicked, with its no longer romanticized Breaking and Entering. I did miss reading some of this, but the villains have changed. They are less likely to have demons at their command. There are some holdover's here, like a sentient spear, similar to Moorcock's Stormbringer, in the "Singing Spear" by James Enge. Fantasy is no longer just about the classics or just fun. One can find the heroes of their times in its blossoming pages. One may not be just reading for fun, but searching for people like themselves. Unfortunately they may not be able to learn magic, even if they are spending a lot of time in schools for wizards. There is also the audience to explore modern themes here.

As I said, these stories exhibit influences of the new fandom of Harry Potter, presenting the strident striving of the idealistic student. "In the Stacks" by Scott Lynch is about a search for a book in a magic library; it will remind one of the struggles and environment of our modern British fantasy superhero Harry Potter. The new *Swords and Dark Magic* also reflects another change: now, something one writes could be better translated into images on the big screen due to the new digital technologies. The new heroes may be grey, but they are not retrograde. Leave that for the villains. I also missed the world-building one finds in a collection of stories or novels by one author, but that is not necessarily the fault of the short story teller. It was hard to follow all the worlds presented in these 19 stories. One standout was "Red Pearls" by traditionalist Michael Moorcock, whose world I remembered well enough. The collection, however, will be fun for those who wish to enter many different worlds, if only briefly.

I have read somewhere that some consider all of fantasy with all its many archetypes one big "mega world". For Inklings fans it may be hard to open their imaginations to all of them having been so thoroughly charmed by the concerns of Middle-earth and Narnia. The gods of Elric and Conan's worlds, however, seem less contemporary and more mischievous. Inkling fans need not read the book for the slightly disappointing story by Tanith Lee, "Two Lions, a Witch, and the War-Robe", which is good fun but predictable. It does display some overlap between the weird and the epic, and is probably intended to bait readers, but it is less filling than some of the other stories. ≡

Discussion Groups

The Mythopoeic Society has members throughout the U.S. and in several foreign countries; the lucky ones are able to find other people interested in the Inklings, myth, and fantasy literature close enough geographically to meet on a regular basis. The Society sponsors Discussion Groups in several different states in the U.S., with a number of additional groups in the process of forming and active.

Starting with this issue, only **active** groups are listed here**.** Groups that wish to be listed in the active category should regularly update the Secretary with their meeting and discussion plans. Groups are also encouraged to share reports of their activities with the Secretary for inclusion in *Mythprint*. Groups that wish to become active should contact the Secretary and inform her of their first meeting, topic, time, location and contact person. Groups that have not yet chosen to become Chartered, or those who are interested in creating a new Mythopoeic Society-sponsored discussion or special interest group, please complete our group charter form at **www.mythsoc.org**.

Marion VanLoo
Membership & Discussion Group Secretary
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membership@mythsoc.org
www.mythsoc.org/groups

CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles/Pasadena: *Mydgard*
Lee Speth, 920 N. Atlantic #E, Alhambra, CA 91801.
Sept. 19: *The Vinland Sagas*, trans. by Keneva Junz. At the Callahans' home, 3771 Alzada Rd., Altadena; 2:30 PM.
Oct. 17: *City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau. Meeting room at the back of The Coffee Gallery, 2029 Lake Ave., Altadena, (626) 398-7917. 3:00 PM.

Oakland: *C.S. Lewis Society of California*
David J. Theroux, 11990 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, CA 94619.
dtheroux@lewissociety.org
Web site: http://www.lewissociety.org
Sept. 15 & Sept. 29: *That Hideous Strength*, by C.S. Lewis. 3006 Central Ave., Alameda, CA 94501. RSVP: 510-635-6892,
Oct. 13 & Oct. 27: *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, by C.S. Lewis. 3006 Central Ave., Alameda, CA 94501. RSVP: 510-635-6892.

San Francisco Bay Area: *Khazad-dum*
Amy Wisniewski & Edith Crowe, 1124 Eden Bower Lane, Redwood City, CA 94061. edithcrowe@comcast.net
Web site: www.mythsoc.org/groups/kd
Dec. 4: The Annual Reading and Eating Meeting. At Edith and Amy's.

COLORADO

Denver area: *Fanuidhol* ("Cloudy Head")
Patricia Yarrow, 2465 S. Franklin St., Denver, CO 80210.
yarrowp@mscd.edu or lottiedeno7@aol.com
Web site: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Fanuidhol/
Oct. 10: *The Owl, the Raven and the Dove* by G. Ronald Murphy
Nov. 7: *Storied Treasure* by Bailey Phelps
Dec. 12: Recent works by Terry Pratchett

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Washington & Suburbs: *Knossos*
Mimi Stevens, 3805 Franconia Rd., Alexandria, VA 22310.
mimi.stevens@verizon.net
Oct. 15: *The Graveyard Book*, by Neil Gaiman
Nov. 19: *The Abolition of Man*, by C. S. Lewis

HAWAII

Oahu: *Sammath Naur*
Steve Brown, Box 22332, Honolulu, HI 96823.
slbrown@hawaii.rr.com
Ken Burtness. purplewolf@hawaii.rr.com
Web site : http://bookgroup.pulelehuadesign.com/
Oct. 16: *A Game of Thrones,* by George R.R. Martin
Nov. 13*: South of Skye*, by Steven Goldsberry.

ILLINOIS

Peoria: *The Far Westfarthing* smial
Mike Foster, 743 County Road 1200N, Metamora, IL 61548-7726.
mafoster@hughes.net
Sept. 24: Peoria Pizza Works, Peoria Heights. Clerihews in honor of Baggins' birthday. *Deryni Rising*, by Katherine Kurtz.
Nov. ?: Discussion of 13th Anniversary Moot of the Smial.

IOWA

Decorah: *Alfheim*
Doug Rossman, 1316 Blue Grass Dr., Decorah IA 52101.
rossmado@luther.edu
Contact Jennifer for topic, time, date & location details:
jfolstad@millerlawdecorah.com

MINNESOTA

Minneapolis-St. Paul: *Rivendell*
David Lenander, 2095 Hamline Ave. Roseville, MN 55113.
d-lena@umn.edu
Web site: www.umn.edu/~d-lena/rivendell.html
TBA: *Thirteenth Child*, by Patricia Wrede.
TBA: *The Magician's Book*, by Laura Miller.

NEVADA

Reno: *Crickhollow*
Joanne Burnett, 3275 Vickie Lane, Sparks, NV 89431.
Burnie96@sbcglobal.net
Web site: riske.wncc.nevada.edu/Crickhollow

NEW YORK

New York: *Heren Istarion: The Northeast Tolkien Society*
Anthony Burdge & Jessica Burke, 110 Patten St., Staten Island, NY 10307. herenistarionnets@gmail.com
Web site: www.herenistarionnets.blogspot.com
Oct. 3: *The Two Towers*, Book/Film/Concert Discussion.

OREGON

Portland: *Bywater Inklings*
Gary Lundquist 2627 SE 68th Avenue Portland OR 97206-1235
lundquig88@msn.com See also http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=107493056056&ref=ts

PENNSYLVANIA

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Lori Campbell, University of Pittsburgh, Department of English, 526 CL, Pittsburgh PA 15260.
camenglish@cs.com

WASHINGTON

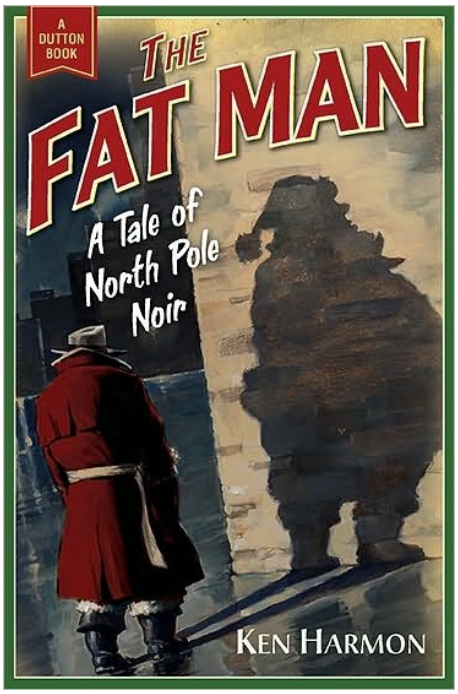
Seattle: *Mithlond*
John D Rateliff, 6317 S. 233rd Street Kent, WA 98032.
sacnoth@earthlink.net
Web site: http://mwinslow.firinn.org/mithlond/

WISCONSIN

Milwaukee: *The Burrahobbits*
Jeffrey & Jan Long, 1903 N. 118th St., Wauwatosa, WI 53226.
longfam@milwpc.com

Ken Harmon. *The Fat Man: A Tale of North Pole Noir*. Reviewed by Edith L. Crowe.

Sometimes books "in the spirit of the Inklings" can be found in unexpected places. Like many a lover of mythopoeic fiction, I am also a voracious reader of mysteries. In addition, I like authors who play games with literature. Since I enjoyed Jasper Fforde's "Thursday Next" and "Nursery Crime" series, this book sounded like it might be similar in its appeal. Quirky, amusing, full of literary and cultural in-jokes—these I expected and found. What I did not expect was an almost Lewisian moral undercurrent which became more obvious and explicit as the book progressed.

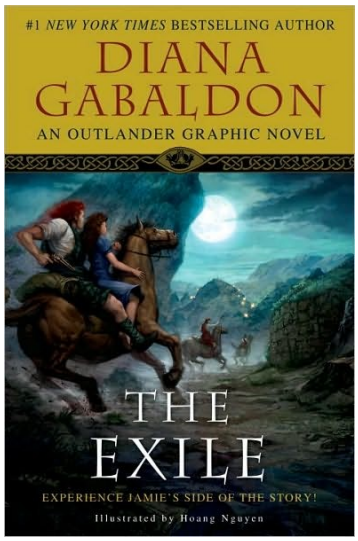


The protagonist and narrator is a hard-boiled elf named Gumdrop Coal, age 1300. (That phrase alone should demonstrate the quirkiness involved here.) As the book opens, Coal is happily in charge of the Coal Patrol (which he founded), depositing lumps of same in the stockings of those who've made his assiduously-kept Naughty List. Coal is one tough elf, dedicated to bringing proper punishment to those who've transgressed (some of whom, admittedly, could give Eustace Scrubbs a run for his money). He's been through Zwarte Piet's rigorous elf-commando training. He's been handing out a hefty ration of coal for a long time.

No one is more surprised than Coal when he's suddenly replaced by smarmy up-and-comer Candy Cane, who has convinced the Santa that even naughty children shouldn't be punished. Coal worries that the wave of greed unleashed when all children get toys—despite their behavior—will be too much for Santa, and will drive him and the elves to exhaustion as their toy-making quota ratchets up. He suspects that Cane is up to something, and investigates with the help of a tough-elf-dame reporter, his best friend Dingleberry, and others who lend a hand along the way. He travels through many places besides Kringle Town, and we learn that it's not all sugar cookies at the North Pole. There's Whoville, but also the Island of Misfit Toys, the dreaded Forest of Mistletoe and bleak Pottersville. What Coal discovers is a plot bolder and more horrifying than he imagined, one that would shake the foundations of the North Pole.

In the earlier parts of the tale, the hard-boiled voice and popular-culture Christmas humor predominate, but even as early as the second chapter, a very Christian undercurrent peeks out. Santa's philosophy of giving is clarified by a reference to his well-known remark: "A child gave the world so much that night in Bethlehem, I just want to find a way to spread the spirit of that wonderful gift!" As the story progresses, and the seriousness of the threat becomes clearer, Coal becomes less bitter and cynical, and the references to the "reason for the season" become more frequent and clear. Our heroes survive many a life-threatening threat, not the least of which is the monstrous Tannenbomb. Our heroes prevail in the end, however, and emerge better for the experience. It's hard to be more detailed without revealing more of the plot that would be wise, but *The Fat Man* packs a lot of incident into its pages.

There's a certain hokiness in the relentless march of allusions, puns, and both obvious and oblique references to a lot of Christmas-themed characters from books and media—primarily twentieth-century contributions to Christmas folklore. (Reading descriptions of many of the oddball misfit toys, it's hard not to think of what Pixar might make of them.) It's a curious combination of characters and traditions that are for the most part thoroughly secular, but with a strong moral message that is frequently presented clearly, though not dogmatically, in Christian terms. For some this strange mixture of noir mystery, Christmas-cliché silliness and moral/religious message might feel too dissimilar to hang together; I sometimes thought so myself. For example, the *noir* tropes in the early chapters are sometimes presented in a way that is jarringly violent, and inappropriate for younger children. However, the sheer oddity, and the often bizzarely creative twists on familiar Christmas themes, make this worth a look. For those willing to try something a bit off the beaten path, it's an interesting hodgepodge that a number mythopoeics might find a fun holiday read. ≡



Diana Gabaldon, illus. by Hoang Nguyen. *The Exile: An Outlander Graphic Novel*. Reviewed by Berni Phillips Bratman.

Diana Gabaldon is a name well-known to romance readers, a writer whose books cross genres into fantasy. This book is a comic book version of the first third of the first Outlander novel, *Outlander*, evidently told from the hero's point of view rather than the heroine's. The cover proclaims that in this book, you "experience Jamie's side of the story!"

The story concerns the meeting and eventual marriage of Claire, a WWII nurse who mysteriously appears in 1743 Scotland in a ring of standing stones similar to Stonehenge, with Jamie Fraser, young Scottish buck with a price on his head whose death is sought by both family and foe. We're never told how Claire gets from the 20th century to the 18th but hers is not the only arrival in the stones. The mysterious Kenneth also arrives, but we're told that he's made his journey through the shedding of blood. His was obviously planned and he arrives naked. Hers was obviously unplanned and she arrives fully clothed, which suggests a different mechanism.

Jamie is newly arrived from France, agonizing over a love whom he failed to save and vowing to become a monk. Injured in a fight, he and his wound are tended to by feisty Claire, whom he and his friends have just picked up. She immediately takes charge of the situation, declaring herself a nurse. There is an amusing image of the thoughts of some of the surrounding men, to whom "nurse" meant one thing at that time: a wet nurse for babies. Jamie is immediately smitten with her and there's no more talk of him becoming a monk.

Claire adapts quickly to her surroundings. She figures out pretty fast that she's traveled in time, and tries to find out the year without being obvious about it. She left a husband, Frank, back in her own time period, and is startled by the appearance of the villain of this piece, Captain Black Jack Randall, a British army officer hot on Jamie's tail, who is the perfect image of her husband, Frank Randall.

We don't know when the mysterious and somewhat sinister Kenneth is from. He has come to join the witchy Geilie Duncan, another who has made a blood sacrifice to get where she is. In a sub-plot, they are working to restore the Stuarts to the throne. This seems a strange goal for people who can do what they seem to be able to do. They, also, are interested in Claire, wanting to use her to further their cause. Again, how and why is not clear.

To add yet another set of roadblocks, Jamie's family on his mother's side, the MacKenzies, are torn between trying to kill him or making him heir to the clan chieftain. The current chieftain is not well, and his only son is too young to lead. His brother is too hot-tempered to be an effective leader. It is feared that Jamie has come back to try to put himself forward as the next chieftain. Gabaldon gives us an example of how noble Jamie is: he offers to take a girl's punishment for her (a beating) because he figures he can survive it and the shame better.

The best parts of this are the culture clash: the men thinking Claire is a wet nurse, the maid waving around Claire's bra, asking what outlandish thing that could be, etc. Claire is a good heroine, believable and with a personality. Jamie – not so much. I am not familiar with the original, but this still seemed to me to be more Claire's story than Jamie's, and she was more interesting. He's almost too good to be true. He doesn't seem to have much of a personality besides being good at getting beat up and deciding he wants Claire.

The artwork is lovely: beautiful "painterly" backgrounds. Gabaldon talks at the end about the search for the artist and her visual conceptions of the characters. Nguyen was a good choice. He's an excellent illustrator. The female figures are all easy to distinguish from each other, but I had difficulty with the men. Of course, when you're writing about people who are mostly related by blood and all wear the same clothing (men in kilts!), the artist is limited in the amount of variation he can do. It's much easier in super-hero comics, when you can plaster a big "S" or "X" on someone's brightly-spandexed chest.

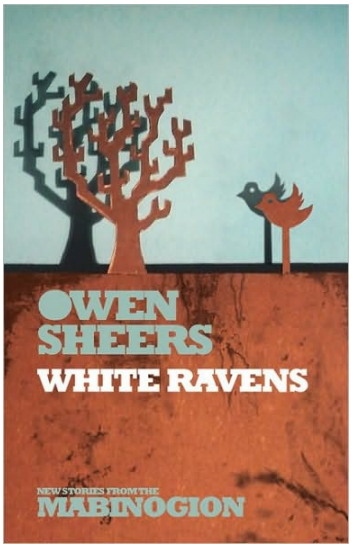
It's likely that some of my difficulties with this would be minimized if I were familiar with the source material. Most likely the target audience is those who already know and love the novels. (I come at it from the angle of knowing and loving comic books and fantasy in general.) It's stated that this is just a third of the first novel, so it's possible there will be two more volumes which answer some of the questions. If you are a Gabaldon fan and also love comics, run out and get this. If you're neither of those, this probably isn't a good starting place for either. ≡

Owen Sheers. *White Ravens*. Reviewed by Alana Joli Abbott.

The second novel in the "New Stories from the Mabinogion" series, *White Ravens* is a reinterpretation of the second branch, the tale of Branwen, daughter of Llyr. But where *The Ninth Wave* recast the original story, structure and characters intact, though recast, *White Ravens* takes a much different approach. Framed by a contemporary narrative, the main story takes place during World War II, when Irishman Matthew O'Connell is sent on a mission to restock the Tower of London with ravens. Matthew has been a soldier, and because Ireland is neutral during the war, he works for the British, Ireland's all too recent enemy. His dedication to fighting against the rise of Nazi Europe is unappreciated by his family and his friends, who seem to recognize only that he is fighting on the side of the British, whom they despise. Injured in Italy, Matthew is sent to recover in Kent, and later finds a job with the propaganda spinning branch of the British war effort. It's while working at that office that he is sent on a mission, from Churchill himself, to bring ravens back to the Tower of London. The legend of the day says that so long as the Tower has its ravens, British soil will not be invaded, and the British leaders are concerned that the recent disappearance of some of the Tower ravens will cause a panic if the enemy gets a hold of the knowledge.

Matthew's quest takes him to Wales, where he meets and falls in love with Branwen, the sister of Ben Llewellyn, a giant of a man. The brother of Bran and Ben, Evan, is still at war — Evan returns on the eve of Matthew and Bran's hasty wedding, irrationally insulted that he was not consulted in matter. To revenge his pride, he tortures Matthew's horse, and things continue into the tragic from there. In Ireland, Branwen is greeted with suspicion, and Matthew is also treated warily, now that he has gone to work for the enemy. A wedge drives between the two lovers, and further tragedy is inevitable — all, Ben might say, because Matthew has not read the old stories and learned not to repeat them.

Sheers creates a compelling tale from the opening, in which Rhian has betrayed her brothers by running away from a crime she has helped them commit, to Matthew's narrative, told to Rhian by an old man in the shadow of the tower. Despite the contemporary and historical settings, and the fact that no actual magic is present in the story, the narrative *feels* mythic, imbued with those qualities that so deeply resound from the original tale. Matthew and Bran are more than just an Irish and a Welsh Romeo and Juliet; their tragedy stems from what happens when lovers who have found happiness are chipped away at over time, who allow their relationship to be destroyed by their family and their peers. The inspiration for the tale is acknowledged inside the story: Ben urges Matthew to read *The Mabinogion*, and it isn't until Matthew actually reads it that he realizes his mistakes. The power of story is invoked, even as the lack of listening to the old tales brings about a repeated tragedy.



Some styles of storytelling simply work better for some readers than others. *White Ravens*, far moreso than *The Ninth Wave,* resonated with me as a reader. Is it the love story? The strong female narrative at the beginning, told in the first person, in the voice of a confused young woman unsure how to heal her family? Perhaps it is in the old man telling a story aloud — a story I guessed early on was his own — to a girl who is lost. It could be something in the shifting of myth to folklore: in the second branch of the Mabinogion, the head of a giant, whose name translates to "Magnificent Crow," is buried in London, and so long as he remains there, the shores will be safe from invasion. Later, that same hill is the home to the Tower of London, where the presence of ravens is also a national defense. The myth resonates deeply, both in the tale and in the historical reality behind the story being told.

Sheers offers a wonderful afterword, discussing his choice of using veterans — and the senseless violence that sometimes accompanies the PTSD soldiers suffer — as a reflection of the brutality in the original tale, as well as presenting some of his research on the Tower ravens. But while there is plenty of insight there, it's the conclusion of the tale that offers a "wow" factor, a feeling of just-rightness in the way the story is told, the way the threads have come together, and the way that the story — this one or its inspiration — could be told to prevent later generations from repeating the mistakes of their elders. It wowed me, and the reading of the novel gave more weight, on reflection, to the original tale. That is a great mark of success for this type of project, and a remarkable accomplishment. ≡

Call for Papers
Mythopoeic Society Conference 42
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM
July 15–18, 2011

Monsters, Marvels, and Minstrels: The Rise of Modern Medievalism

The year 2011 marks the 75th anniversary of both C.S. Lewis' publication of *The Allegory of Love* and J.R.R. Tolkien's lecture "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics." To commemorate these important anniversaries, Mythcon 42 invites reflection on the impact of these critical works and how they offer new ways to view the fantastic in earlier texts as well as how they initiated many of the approaches modern fantasy applies to its reading of the medieval. While legacies inherited from Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Scandinavian, Biblical, and Classical cultures will be obvious subjects, papers and panels that explore mythological and fantastic works from other early traditions (such as Native American, Asian, and Middle-eastern) are also welcome, as are studies and discussions that focus on the work and interests of the Inklings (especially J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams), of our Guests of Honor, and of other fantasy authors and themes. Papers from a variety of critical perspectives and disciplines are welcome.

Paper abstracts (250 word maximum), along with contact information, should be sent to the Papers Coordinator at the e-mail address below by 15 April, 2011. Please include your AV requests and the projected time needed for your presentation. Time slots for individual papers are one hour (45 minute paper plus discussion) or 1/2 hour (20 minute paper plus discussion). Panels consisting of related short papers may be proposed for a 90 minute time slot. Undergraduate and graduate presenters are encouraged to apply for the Alexei Kondratiev Award for Best Student Paper.

Send abstracts to:

Janet Brennan Croft, Paper Coordinator
jbcroft@ou.edu

2011 Mythopoeic Awards Announcement

Individual members of the Mythopoeic Society are invited to nominate books for the 2011 Mythopoeic Awards, and/or to volunteer to serve on any of the committees. (You need not join the committee to make nominations.) The deadline for committee volunteers and for nominations (limit of five per person per category, please!) is **February 10, 2011**. Please send nominations to the awards administrator (see contact info below) via e-mail (preferred) or U.S. mail. Authors or publishers may not nominate their own books for any of the awards. Books published by the Mythopoeic Press are not eligible for the awards. The Mythopoeic Society does not accept or review unsolicited manuscripts.

The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature is given to the novel, multi-volume novel, or single-author story collection for adults published during the previous year that best exemplifies "the spirit of the Inklings". Books not selected as finalists in the year after publication are eligible for a second year. Books from a series are eligible if they stand on their own; otherwise, the series becomes eligible the year its final volume appears.

The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature honors books for younger readers (from "Young Adults" to picture books for beginning readers), in the tradition of *The Hobbit* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Rules for eligibility are otherwise the same as for the Adult literature award. The question of which award a borderline book is best suited for will be decided by consensus of the committees.

The Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies is given to books on J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and/or Charles Williams that make significant contributions to Inklings scholarship. Books first published during the previous three years are eligible, including finalists for previous years.

The Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies is given to scholarly books on other specific authors in the Inklings tradition, or to more general works on the genres of myth and fantasy. The period of eligibility is three years, as for the Inklings Studies award.

Winners of the 2011 Mythopoeic Awards will be announced at the 42nd Annual Mythopoeic Conference (Mythcon XLII), to be held July 15–18, 2011 at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, NM.

Please contact David Oberhelman, the Awards Administrator, to nominate books, volunteer for committees, or ask questions about the Mythopoeic Awards process.

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