

BRIEF NOTES ON HEROIC FANTASY

by Phil Spencer

A number of fans who have written to me seem to be of the opinion that Tolkien is the only good Fantasy writer. This is a claim that I would strongly dispute. Tolkien is a good fantasy writer, in fact he is a brilliant one, however I would suggest that they take a rather more broadminded view and do not lose sight of the fact that there are numerous examples that are as good as LotR. LotR is the most famous of the twentieth century fantasies without doubt but no unbiased criticism of Tolkien's work can fail to take into account comparison with the other examples available. The purpose of these notes is to give those who are unaware of the wide range an idea of just how much they are missing. This is not a complete list but just a sketch of some of the better works worthy of attention by those who enjoy Tolkien.

The modern fantasy first came to light at the end of the last century when the heroic romances written by William Morris were published by Longman's. 'The Wood Beyond The World', 'The Well at World's End' and 'The Water of the Wondrous Isles' all helped to prepare the field for the numerous pieces that were to follow.

Lord Dunsany is probably best known for 'The King of Elfland's Daughter' a tragic and ironic tale but he wrote a number of other fantasies some of which appear in the collections of his work 'The Book of Wonder' and 'A Dreamer's Tale and Other Stories'.

James Branch Cabell, like Tolkien, has had a Society formed around his writing. His massive twenty volume series created a stir in the Twenties when it was first published. The most notable books are 'Figures of Earth', 'The Silver Stallion' and 'Jurgan', which was at the centre of the controversy. They have been written by a witty and entertaining author who has created a world on par with Lord of the Rings.

Mervyn Peake, the creator of the strange castle of Gormenghast and its even stranger inhabitants, has had the honour of having his works published by Penguin in their Modern Classics series. His trilogy comprises of 'Titus Groan', 'Gormenghast' and 'Titus Groan'.

Those four are just the cream off the top. The list could be continued with many authors not immediately associated with Fantasy. Amongst them are H.P. Lovecraft who wrote 'The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath' whilst heavily under the influence of Dunsany. This is totally different to his later horror works. There are many Science Fiction writers who have had fantasies published including Poul Anderson and Fritz Leiber. Lyon Sprague de Camp has produced the well known work 'The Incomplete Enchanter' with Fletcher Pratt, but both have produced fantasy novels on their own. De Camp writing Sword and Sorcery like 'The Tritonian Ring' and Fletcher Pratt, using the pseudonym George U. Fletcher, wrote 'Well of the Unicorn' back in the thirties.

These are a selection that are, in their fields, as good as LotR. Fantasy neither started nor ended with Tolkien, it was only influenced by him.

(((Most of the books mentioned in this article can be obtained in paperback. If you have difficulty obtaining them get in touch with "Dark They Were and Golden-Eyed" 28 Bedfordbury, London W.C.2 which will probably have them in stock. Personally I largely agree with Phil's selection except that the only books which for me have as much magic as LotR are the Narnia books of C.S. Lewis. RAP)))

THE LANGUAGES OF MIDDLE-EARTHby Bob Borsley

The languages of the various peoples of Middle-earth are one of the most interesting features of The Lord of the Rings. Study of them is difficult because of the comparatively few examples of them in the book but, nevertheless, a considerable amount can be learnt about them. This is a description of the languages based on information from both The Lord of the Rings and The Road Goes Ever On. To this information I have added comments and observations of my own. A glossary of linguistic terms is given at the end of the essay.

THE ELVISH LANGUAGES

Two Elvish languages are seen in THE Lord of The Rings : Quenya or High-elven and Sindarin or Grey-elven *. Quenya was the ancient language of Eldamar brought to Middle-earth by the High Elves who returned in exile at the end of the First Age. It was in the Third Age no longer a birth tongue, but had become an 'Elven-latin' used only for ceremony and song. The High Elves in the Third Age used the Sindarin of the Grey Elves for every day use. This was originally akin to Quenya but had changed greatly over the years so that it had become far estranged from the High-elven tongue.

QUENYA

Perhaps the most notable feature of the phonology of Quenya is, as in such languages as Italian or Finnish, the frequency of words ending in vowels. As in Finnish t, s, n, r, and l are the only consonants that occur finally. Another notable feature is that the consonants b, d, and g do not occur initially. Here again there is a similarity to Finnish. b and g only occur after the related nasals - d also occurs after r and l. It seems possible that Quenya originally possessed both initial b and initial g. The relationship between Quenya Valar and the cognate Sindarin word Belain ** seems more probably explained by the weakening in Quenya of b to v *** than by the strengthening in Sindarin of V to b. Similarly the difference between Quenya alda 'tree' and Sindarin galadh seems most likely explained by the loss in Quenya of initial g.

A number of changes in the development of Quenya can be seen. One is the change of w to v, a change which took place in the evolution of the Romance languages from Latin. This is seen in the development of archaic Quenya wilya 'air', 'sky' into Third Age Quenya vilya. Then there is the change of z to r, a change which took place in the early development of Latin and of the Germanic languages. This is seen in the development of early Quenya aze 'sunlight' into afe. The nasal ng (the sound in English 'sing') occurred initially in archaic Quenya as it does in Malayan and the

* A third language that of the Silvan Elves is mentioned but no examples of it occur. The words Lorien, Caras Galadhon, Amroth and Nimrodel are probably Silvan in origin but adapted to Sindarin.

** Senh in Orbelain, Sindarin name for the last day of the week.

*** This change occurred in the evolution of modern Greek from classical Greek.