

A WINDOW INTO TANJECTERLY

PROFESSOR ADAM ROBERTS¹ has published a personal reading of the Lyonesse Trilogy. He writes:

“Jack Vance’s Lyonesse books are the greatest fairy tale of the twentieth century.”

He justifies his insight.

“What Vance understands ... is that the wonder depends upon the danger and the fear quite as much as it does upon the beauty and the magic.

...

The Lyonesse books comprehend this insight on a deep level. On the one hand they delineate the adult mundane: the political ambitions and disappointments of King Casmir, for instance. On the other they adumbrate a wealth of vivid, monstrous terrors that confront the book’s children and young people. And what is more, they understand that the latter is realer than the former; that the adult world is rooted in childish wonder and terror: the vivid, pristine realm of the true imagination.”

it is all about the inner child in you, who is led with skill through the wonderful and terrible experiences of the characters.

Others have written about Jack Vance’s style, his baroque turns of phrase, his mastery of colour...

How do I justify my offering?

In proffering a map of Tanjecterly, what literary depths do I assay? How do I enhance the reader’s appreciation of the wonders of Jack Vance’s worlds of imagination? My justification is possibly of shallower psychic depths.

When I read adventurous fables in dreamlands, I see the imagined landscapes unroll before me in 3D glory. I feel impelled to draw them out. This impulse is not original. A hundred thousand years ago some ancestor of mine drew images of his world on a rock face in a dim fire lit cave...

But is it art? Does this ‘Window into Tanjecterly’ in any way enhance the literary appreciation of Jack Vance? Is such a map not a mere brummagem, a mere and pointless adjunct to the Master’s show? Are not the geographical landscapes mere backdrops to the real nub of the tale? Is it relevant if the heroine, the villains, the idiots, the fairies, falloys or the heroes dash 23 mile to the north or 15 yards to the west? If they cross mountains, rivers or swamps, so then? Who cares where is Swer Smod in Lyonesse, or the Kneekbrock Plains in Dahaut? Will the antics of Vus and Vuwas be any the less for it? If Aillas keeps fording River Iss wherever he goes, nevertheless he goes, does he not? Surely, Iss could just be the ditch running past some nameless hamlet for all the role it plays in the plot, action, heartache, thrill or denouement ...

¹ Vance, Jack (2010-08-26). The Complete Lyonesse: Suldrun's Garden, The Green Pearl, Madouc (Gollancz Black Books) . Hachette Littlehampton. Kindle Edition.

True: under the quill-points of lesser wizards, mediocre charlatans and greater popinjays, the stage is perhaps unimportant - not so with writers of the Vancian calibre who captures the dreams and nightmares of the child with casual skill.

Dreams bubble up from submerged depths of the mind to flare briefly in the conscious mind, even as Tanjecterly bubbles up from the deeps of Time to come briefly into phase with Earth-space 'on the quaver' before vanishing back into its nether dimension...

So as I followed Glyneth's desperate dash across the Tang-Tang Steppe, I was constructing the terrain in my mind. I wish to suggest that becoming immersed in the physicality as much as the fable of an intricately constructed imaginary world adds materially to the reader's overall delight with the book.

There is the added intellectual exercise (even if it might earn Lady Melanchthe's contempt for intellectualisation, when the need was for attention to certain exigencies of the moment). Like Sherlock Holmes, one must glean widely scattered bits of geographic data from the text and piece them together into a coherent whole.

And a coherent whole will emerge; I have witnessed such Vancian worlds emerge over and over again. From the pen of the indifferent writer emerges only badly cooked porridge.

So goes my theory of one of the criteria of literary excellence of tales set in faerie.

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