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The Inklings, In Memoriam: A Cycle of Poems

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Cover Page Footnote

These poems are excerpted from *Stars through the Clouds: The Collected Poetry of Donald T. Williams* (Lynchburg: Lantern Hollow Press, 2012), and used by permission.

THE INKLINGS, IN MEMORIAM: A Cycle of Poems

by Donald T. Williams

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I THE GRAVE OF C. S. LEWIS

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, HEADINGTON QUARRY, OXFORDSHIRE

There was a marble slab, the evidence
Of burial, with writing on the stone
Which said, "Men must endure their going hence."
The mind that had restored my mind to sense
Was there reduced to elemental bone;
There was a marble slab, the evidence.
That well of wisdom and of eloquence
Was now cut back to just one phrase alone,
Which said, "Men must endure their going hence."
No monument of rich magnificence
Stood fitting one who had so brightly shone;
There was a marble slab. The evidence
That plain things have their power to convince
Was in that simple block with letters strewn
Which said, "Men must endure their going hence."
The weight of time was focused there, intense
With wrecked Creation's universal groan:
There was a marble slab, the evidence,
Which said, "Men must endure their going hence."

II SENSUCHT

When the fog obscures the outlines of the trees
 But breaks to show the sharpness of the stars
 And the blood feels sudden chill, although the breeze
 Is warm, and all the old internal scars
From stabbing beauty start to ache anew;
 When mushrooms gather in a fairy ring
 And every twig and grass-blade drips with dew
 And then a whippoorwill begins to sing;
When all the world beside is hushed, awaiting
 The sun as if it were his first arising
 And you discover that, anticipating,
 You've held your breath and find the fact surprising:
 Then all the old internal wounds awake.
 The pain is sweet we bear for beauty's sake.

III SENSUCHT II

God knows no shame in what He will employ
 To win a wandering sinner back again.
 Thus, C. S. Lewis was surprised by joy.
A childish garden made to be a toy
 Of moss and twigs upon a biscuit tin?
 God knows no shame in what He will employ.
The silly garden helped him to enjoy
 The real ones, made him want to enter in.
 Thus, C. S. Lewis was surprised by joy.
Not Athens (first), Jerusalem, or Troy,
 But Squirrel Nutkin's granary and bin?
 God knows no shame in what He will employ.
When Balder the beautiful was dead, destroyed,
 The voice that cried it came into his ken;
 Thus, C. S. Lewis was surprised by joy.
But pagan legend! Could *that* be the ploy?
 Somewhere the path to Heaven must begin.
 God knows no shame in what He will employ;
Thus, C. S. Lewis was surprised by joy.

IV TO J. R. R. TOLKIEN

On a day when Fall's first leaves were flying
And the wind was howling and geese were crying
And clouds were black and the sun was hiding,
Word first came, on dark wings riding.
 "Tolkien is dead,"
 Was all they said,
 And left us crying.

He heard by light of star and moon
The Elven songs and learned their tunes.
He had long walks with them, and talks,
Beneath the swaying trees in June.

Dwarf-mines deeply delved he saw
Where Mithril glittered on the walls
And mighty kings wrought wondrous things
And reigned in hollow, torch-lit halls.

To forests wild and deep he went
And many lives of men he spent
Where leaves of years fall soft like tears,
Listening to the speech of Ents.

In lofty halls of men he sat
Or rustic rooms of bar-man fat;
In hobbit holes, heard stories told
By an old man in a wizard's hat.

With magic words of dark and light
And days of doom and coming night
And magic rings and hoped for spring,
He wrought the record of his sight. . . .

In Beowulf's bold fleet he sailed,
With Gawain the Green Knight beheld;
By Beornth's side he stood and cried
And hordes of pagan Danes he felled,
"Will shall be sterner, heart the bolder,
Spirit the greater as our strength fails!"

On a day when Fall's first leaves were flying
And the wind was howling and geese were crying
And clouds were black and the sun was hiding,
Word first came, on dark wings riding.
 "Tolkien is dead,"
 Was all they said,
 And left us crying.

V A GLIMMER OF HOPE

When Bilbo Baggins ran off down the road
 Without a hat or pocket handkerchief
 Or even proper time to say, "Good bye,"
Did Smaug, asleep in his usurped abode,
 Dream of Burglars stealing from the Thief?
 Did Sauron shudder without knowing why?
The hobbit, Gandalf later said, was *meant*
 To find the Ring: a thought to bring relief
 To Frodo's mind when it was asking, "Why?"
Iluvatar had left at least that glint
 For them to spy.

**VI ARAGORN,
SMELLING THE NIPHREDIL IN PARTH GALEN,
 THINKETH ON ARWEN**

Thou wert not there by trail or stream
Beneath the green, tree-filtered light;
Thou wert not there but as a dream
 Remembered from the night.
Thou wert not there by stream or trail
But as a vision sweet and fair.
I tried to take thy hand, but failed,
 Clasping only air.
And will I ever know thee as my wife,
Or will the future leave us both behind?
How can this valley be so full of life
Yet feel so empty, lacking only thine?

INKLINGS FOREVER X

Thou wert not there by glade or glen
Except as memory and desire
That burns as strongly now as when
 It first sprang into fire.

Thou wert not there by glen or glade
Save as desire and memory:
Memory that will never fade
 While life is left to me

And will I ever know thee as my wife,
To tip each other that sweet cup of wine?
How can this valley be so full of life
Yet feel so empty, lacking only thine?

Full soon the long, hard road of grief and strife
Resumes. For now, that destiny is mine.

VII LOTH LORIEN

From silver trunk the golden leaf
Blows through the old abandoned fief,
For Time, the robber and the thief,
Has brought the hidden realm to grief:
 The wonder is withdrawn.
Now far beyond the Western Sea
The merry folk have gone to be
Naught but a fading memory
 In Caras Galadon.

For untold years Galadriel
Did weave her magic and her spell.
Nor warg nor orc nor dragon fell
Could enter the enchanted veil
 Until it was withdrawn.
Now in the once protected Wood
The Evil mingles with the Good—
Foul things that never could have stood
 In Caras Galadon.

Now through the hushed and chilling air

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There rings no voice of minstrel fair,
No melody of sweetness rare,
No magic words beyond compare;
 The music is withdrawn.
The happy sound of harper's glee
 Sounds only far beyond the Sea.
The rasping raven's symphony
 Fills Caras Galadon.

In Cerin Amroth, Arwen's tomb
Lies hidden in the gathering gloom.
The niphredil no longer bloom.
She sleeps within that narrow room,
 All memory withdrawn.
The sons to Aragorn she bore:
They come to mourn her there no more.
They sleep beneath the marble floor
Of cold and deep Rath Dinen, far
 From Caras Galadon.

A lonely wanderer passes by;
He sees there is no shelter nigh.
The stars are twinkling in the sky.
He groans, and on the ground doth lie
 Within his cloak withdrawn.
The leaves are rustling on high.
It seems to him they softly sigh
A sad lament—he know not why—
 In Caras Galadon.

VIII THE QUEST MOTIF

What Lewis and Tolkien Knew, but Peter Jackson Does Not

Snaking out across the vast expanse
 Of History and Legend lies a trail,
 The footing treacherous, the markings pale,
And peril lies in wait for those who chance
 To travel it. But if they can advance,
 And if their luck and courage do not fail,

INKLINGS FOREVER X

They may emerge into a mystic vale
And find the magic realm of fair Romance.

The landscape's always changing. There is no
Map that can be trusted once you swerve
Aside; you only compass is your quest.
If, true to friend, implacable to foe,
You're faithful to the Vision that you serve,
You'll find that country which the Muse has blessed.

IX TO CLYDE S. KILBY

A

I wandered through the silent trees
Of fair Loth Lorien,
At Cerin-Amroth saw the leaves
Blow o'er the tomb of Arwen.

I wandered North to Rivendell,
To Elrond's homely halls,
And watched as evening shadows fell
On long deserted walls.

Then West I turned, past hill and tree,
Til I stood by the shore.
But Cirdan was gone, and elves to the sea
Down Anduin sail no more.

B

And I have stood as tall as a king
On a hill top windy and bare
And drunk the air of a Narnian spring
When no one else was there.

And I have seen Cair Paravel
And stood by Aslan's Howe,
But where the king was none could tell
For no one goes there now.

C

And homeward I my feet have turned
 But there I never came,
For in my soul a fire burned
 And “home” was not the same.

And human eyes I seldom find
 Who seem to comprehend
The longing of a pilgrim mind
 For distant Fairie lands.

But when I find such eyes, I call
 The man who owns them “friend.”
And together we wander through leafy halls
 In fair Loth Lorien.