

# Foreword

It takes no great feat of literary insight to perceive that during a period extending backwards for almost a century from where we are now, increasing use has been made in creative writing of those extra-normal elements which we have chosen to label faerie, fantasy and pseudo-mediaevalia, and others (such as science fiction to name but one). It is not that these elements were unknown in former times; there is as much pseudo-mediaevalia in Malory as there is in Sir Walter Scott (who called the *Morte Darthur* "the best prose romance the English language can boast of";) much that is fantastic in the work of the Dean of St. Patrick's, and even some faerie in parts of Edmund Spenser. It is rather that in recent times, writers, and some artists in other media, have turned increasingly to the 'otherliness' of these elements, and used them with increasing intensity to try to interpret to itself a world whose un-otherliness has been its own dismantling. We hoped to bring together in this issue a set of essays representative of many aspects of these attempts

to break with 'reality' into reality, but inevitably limitations imposed themselves. It has always been our policy to allow the best of the work submitted to determine the pattern of the final product, and so it is here. There are regrettable gaps which can easily be detected, but there are also important strengths; for instance readers will find it particularly stimulating to compare the essays of a British, a French and a U.S.A. critic on an English writer who deserves to be known much better than he is, and whose work is by turns faerie-ish, fantastic and pseudo-pseudo-mediaeval (or *quasi*-Malory), also on occasions extremely amusing: T. H. White. It would be folly in a journal like MOSAIC to sacrifice quality to some pre-devised idea of what it should contain; we solicit and invite the best we can imagine, and here we present the best of what we received, knowing that the intelligent reader would not wish it to be otherwise.

We have, however, broken with tradition a little in this first special issue of our tenth volume; for the first time, there are no illustrations. Instead, we have the fine workmanship of a colleague at this University who has long practised, and long since mastered, the art of calligraphy,—of all arts surely that which is most closely associated (inseparably associated until the year before yesterday) with the art of literary composition, Mr. Desmond Bevis. Calligraphy is a noble skill, by no means the prerogative of slaves and menials as was once supposed. Indeed the Emperor Theodosius II (408-50) gained the nickname of "Calligrapher" for the following extremely unlikely reason, according to Michael Glycas:

The following story reveals what secret virtues Theodosius possessed. A certain monk who had served God in the correct manner for 40 years, began to have a rather high opinion of himself and sought to learn how he stood in the eyes of God; he discovered that his case was similar to the case of Theodosius the Emperor—so to him he went, and sought to discover his virtue. The Emperor revealed many other things to him, such as the fact that he went to bed fasting, he wore a hair shirt, kept away from women, fasted, gave alms, acted justly, and such like. The monk, not satisfied with this enumeration of virtues, besought the Emperor to say if there was anything greater than what he had spoken of. He replied that when there was an event at the Hippodrome, he would sit in his usual place, not paying attention to the event, but "calligraphing," thus providing for himself by the labour of his own hands. Hearing this, the monk was filled with such wonder that he congratulated himself on being acquainted with a man possessed of such virtue.<sup>1</sup>

A much more plausible story is found in Theophanes (a much more reliable authority) according to which this emperor would so delight in elegantly inscribing his signature in imperial purple ink on the documents brought to him, that he neglected to read what he was signing. This regrettable error was brought to his attention by his elder sister, the terrifyingly saintly Pulcheria, who gained his signature on a bill by which he conveyed

<sup>1</sup>Michael Glycas, *Annales in Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* vol. 27 (*Patrologia Graeca* vol. 158) pp. 485<sup>5</sup> - 468<sup>2</sup>.

his wife, the Empress Athenais-Eudocia, to his sister as her slave.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it was from that point that the practice of calligraphy went into decline, but in this issue we demonstrate that in spite of the invention of printing (four hundred years ago Caxton set up the first press in England,) the development of the mechanical typewriter and so forth, the art of writing beautifully is alive and well, and thriving in Manitoba. We may add that with the photographic processes now employed in printing, there is no reason why it should not take on a new lease of life, and by reproduction, please the eye of thousands where before it was reserved for the delight of the *élite*. At all events, we wish the reader good speed as he launches out into faerie, fantasy and pseudo-mediaevalia, hoping that he will share our delight in the fantastic creations of Mr. Bevis' fairly neo-mediaeval skills, as much as in the articles they herald forth.

<sup>2</sup>Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ad A.M. 5941 (*vide et* Georgii Cedreni *Historiarum Compendium CSHB* vol. 35 (PG vols. 121-122) I, 600<sup>15-24</sup>).