

## Tanith Lee is Reading...

My reading is diverse, and seldom now among fantasy or science fiction. Strangely, you catch me when I've just encountered a stunning representative of each field. Both remind me, in their very different and contemporary ways, of the Masters I relished in my youth.

*The Bitterbynde Trilogy*, by Cecilia Dart-Thornton, begins with the novel *The Ill-Made Mute*. This stylish fantasy is packed with sumptuous imagery, color, and geographies, yet keeps up a racing pace, shot through with fierce action and startling events. Every astonishment, meanwhile, stays *believable*. Dart-Thornton's winged horses and rigged air-ships really *do* fly; her people remain as real as any you might wish (or fear) to meet. They include an appealing heroine, and also the fascinating Thorn (perhaps related to the author?), who'll probably engage as many hearts among the readership as on the page! I have to say this glorious book gives me back my faith in fantasy fiction.

The book that has rekindled my allegiance to science fiction is *Empire of Bones* by Liz Williams. With a rare control of structure, and the interplay between humans, aliens, and empire organized on colossal scale, Williams' epic, like Dart-Thornton's, is virtually un-put-downable. Sparely, lucidly, this writer evokes not only a disturbingly credible future India, haunted by its own ancient glammers, but extraordinary space hardware and other worldsapes that are frankly mind expanding. However, unlike much science fiction, Williams' book *never* sacrifices psychology, or humanity, on the altar of her truly wonderful gift for invention. More, she's achieved that almost impossible contradiction: aliens who are a lien (!)-yet accessible, *identifiable*.

To both of these women I extend the plea: *More! More!*

Alas, I can't extend that plea to my third Unputdownable One, the unique Elizabeth Bowen, since she died in 1973. Not long ago I

finished reading her novel *To the North*. Of a novelist of genuine stature, a supreme example, this history of monumental pain and passion, cramped by grace, at last rippling free like an erupting volcano, within the perfectly reported, flower-vase confines of 1930's England. A delicately measured tale, with the killer punch of Chekov, or Tolstoy. Bowen is one of the Greats. How I wish she were still at work.