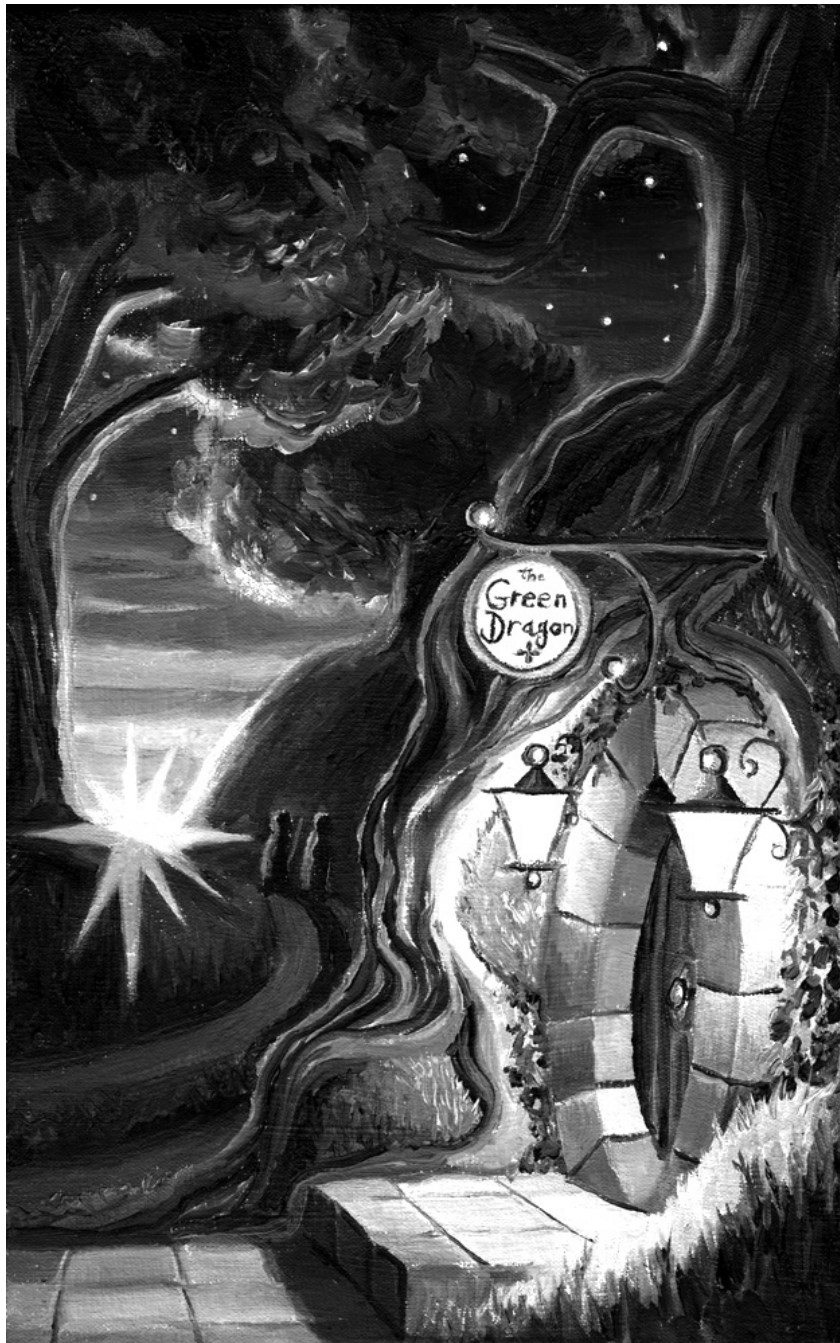


# mythPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society  
Vol. 47 No. 2      February 2010      Whole No. 331



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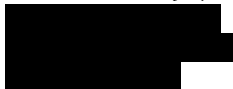
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Reviews, discussion group reports, news items, letters, art work and other submissions for *Mythprint* are always welcome. Please contact the editor for details on format, or send materials to:

Janet Brennan Croft  
Interim Editor, *Mythprint*



[mythprint@mythsoc.org](mailto:mythprint@mythsoc.org)

Send other Correspondence to  
Edith Crowe, Corresponding Secretary  
[correspondence@mythsoc.org](mailto:correspondence@mythsoc.org)

Deadlines for receiving material for each issue of *Mythprint* are the 1st of the preceding month

The Mythopoeic Society also publishes two other magazines: *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* (subscription \$25/year for U.S. Society members) and *The Mythic Circle*, an annual magazine publishing fiction, poems, etc. (\$8/issue for U.S. addresses). Subscriptions and back issues of Society publications may be purchased directly thorough our web site (using PayPal or Discover card), or you may contact:

Mythopoeic Society Orders Department



Mythopoeic Society Web Site: [www.mythsoc.org](http://www.mythsoc.org)

*Mythprint* is the monthly bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society, a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the study, discussion and enjoyment of myth and fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. To promote these interests, the Society publishes three magazines, maintains a World Wide Web site, and sponsors the annual Mythopoeic Conference and awards for fiction and scholarship, as well as local and written discussion groups.

## Membership and Subscriptions

Mythopoeic Society membership: \$15/year includes an electronic subscription and \$25/year includes a paper subscription to *Mythprint*; either entitles you to members' rates on publications and other benefits.

### Postage and Non-member Subscription Rate

Members		Institution and non-members
First Class U.S.	Included	\$25/year
Canada/Mexico (air)		\$7/year additional for postage
		\$32/year
Rest of world (air)		\$16/year additional for postage \$41/year

The number in the upper right hand corner of your mailing label is the "Whole Number" of the last issue of your subscription. Checks should be made out to the Mythopoeic Society. Foreign orders should use U.S. funds if possible; otherwise add 15% to the current exchange rate. Back issues of *Mythprint* are available for \$1 each (U.S. postage included.)

ISSN 0146-9347, copyright 2010 Mythopoeic Society

## ANNOUNCEMENT

We are pleased to announce that, beginning with the next issue, Jason Fisher will be the new *Mythprint* editor and Steward. Email addressed to mythprint@mythsoc.org will reach him. Please join us in congratulating Jason!

There have been some questions about the numbering of *Mythprint* issues. The whole number (issue number) is your guide as to whether you are missing an issue or not. Volume 46 was a short volume and ended with V.46 #8, whole issue #329. Volume 47 marks the beginning of simultaneous electronic and paper editions, and begins with January 2010, V. 47 #1, whole issue #330.

—The Council of Stewards



### The Mythic Circle Submissions

*The Mythic Circle* is on the lookout for original stories and poems. We are also looking for artists interested in illustrating poems and stories.

We look mostly for original work by authors following in the Mythopoeic tradition; this can include a certain amount of commentary and allusion to the works of other mythopoeic authors (though such allusions and commentary are not necessary). We do not, however, wish to see “fan fiction” – stories that make use of characters and settings drawn from works by living or recently deceased authors whose material remains protected under copyright law.

Works submitted on paper should be typed and double spaced and should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of manuscript. We have, as yet, no hard and fast length limits; as a small publication, however, we have to think very well of a story 5,000 words long to publish it. Shorter stories are more likely to be accepted. Email submissions are also encouraged and are likely to get a faster reply. Simultaneous submissions should be clearly identified as such. It is our policy to respond individually to each submission.

As a small publication, we can only reward our authors and illustrators with one complimentary copy of the issue in which the accepted work appears. All rights revert to the author on publication.

Submissions should be sent to: Gwennyth Hood, Editor of *Mythic Circle*, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], mythiccircle@mythsoc.org.



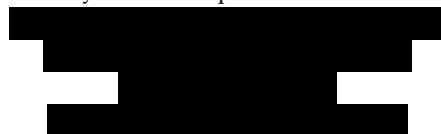
### Mythcon 41 Call For Papers

From the great epic poems of ancient Greece and ancient India to the Book of Revelation and the Poetic Edda; from John Milton and William Blake to J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams; from Philip Pullman to Neil Gaiman and beyond, theomachy (conflict amongst and against the gods) has been a perennial theme in mythology and mythopoeic literature. Moreover, the year 2010 marks our theme with special significance as the 80th anniversary of the publication of Charles Williams’s novel *War in Heaven*.

Papers dealing with the conference theme are especially encouraged. We also welcome papers focusing on the work and interests of the Inklings (especially J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams), of our Guests of Honor, and other fantasy authors and themes. Papers from a variety of critical perspectives and disciplines are welcome. Each paper will be given a one-hour slot to allow time for questions, but individual papers should be timed for oral presentation in 40 minutes maximum. Participants are encouraged to submit papers chosen for presentation at the conference to *Mythlore*, the refereed journal of the Mythopoeic Society. Paper abstracts of no more than 300 words, along with contact information, should be sent to the Papers Coordinator at the address below (e-mail preferred) by April 15, 2010. Please include your A/V requirements and the projected time needed for your presentation.

All paper presenters must register for the full conference; please see the Mythcon 41 web page, [REDACTED] for information and rates.

Robin Anne Reid  
Mythcon 41 Papers Coordinator





## Announcing the First Annual Mythcon Outstanding Student Presentation Award

The Council of Stewards is pleased to announce this new award for the best paper presented at Mythcon by an undergraduate or graduate student.

- An application form must be submitted to the award committee chair, Janet Brennan Croft, at [mythlore@mythsoc.org](mailto:mythlore@mythsoc.org), at least 30 days before the first day of Mythcon. (Deadline for 2010 is June 9.) If you did not receive an application with your paper acceptance and wish to enter, please contact Professor Croft directly.
- The finished paper must be submitted electronically to the chair at least ten days before the first day of Mythcon. (Deadline for 2010 is June 29.)
- The paper must follow *Mythlore* style guidelines (see our website) and should be between 4000 and 9000 words long.
- Applicants must be accepted in or currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at the time their abstract was submitted.
- You must attend Mythcon and present the paper to qualify for the award.
- The awards committee will consist of the Mythcon paper coordinator, the editor of *Mythlore*, the Mythopoeic Press secretary, and up to two other Society members if needed.
- The winner will receive a certificate, a one-year subscription to *Mythlore*, and half-off registration for the next Mythcon he or she attends. The winner is also strongly encouraged to submit the paper to *Mythlore* for consideration.
- The winner will be announced at the Mythcon banquet and on the society's website, as well as in *Mythlore* and *Mythprint*.

# SELECTED UPCOMING EVENTS



**C.S. Lewis and the Inklings: Discovering Hidden Truth.** April 9-10, 2010. Oklahoma City University.



**45th International Congress on Medieval Studies.** May 13-16, 2010. Kalamazoo, Michigan.



**Baycon 2010.** May 28-31, 2010. Hyatt Regency, Santa Clara CA. baycon.org



**Infinitus Harry Potter Fan Conference.** July 15-18, 2010. Orlando, Florida. www.hpef.net.



**Comic-Con 2010.** July 22-25, 2010. San Diego Convention Center. www.comic-con.org



**Confluence 2010.** The 22nd Annual Literary Sci-Fi Convention in Pittsburgh. July 23-25, 2010. Doubletree Hotel, Pittsburgh Airport.



**Edge of the Wild Tolkien Art Exhibition.** August 13-16, 2010. Redesdale Hall, Moreton-in-Marsh, England. Search on www.facebook.com.



**Annual Convention of the Dorothy L. Sayers Society.** August 13-16, 2010. University of Nottingham. www.sayers.org.uk.



**Festival in the Shire:** August 13-15, 2010. Conference, Collector's Exposition, and Festival. Y Plas, Machynlleth, Wales. www.festivalintheshire.com. 15% discount for MythSoc members; code MS2010.



**Oxonmoot 2010.** September 24-26, 2010. Annual meeting of the Tolkien Society. Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.



**H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival and CthulhuCon.** October 1-3, 2010. Hollywood Theatre, Portland, Oregon.



**Omentielva Cantea: The Fourth International Conference on Tolkien's Invented Languages.** August 11-14, 2011. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain.



**The Return of the Ring:** Sponsored by the Tolkien Society. Loughborough University (England), August 16-20, 2012.

## OWEN BARFIELD THE ROSE ON THE ASH-HEAP

*Sultan, Lord of all the Asias, falls passionately in love with a beautiful and elusive temple dancer. He pursues her across continents, all the way to Albion, where the Lord of Albion – guardian of all that is good in the English spirit – confronts the overwhelming threat of Abdol and the forces of materialism.*

A dramatisation with harp music of Owen Barfield's 1929 novella

# Groups

The Mythopoeic Society has members throughout the U.S. and in several foreign countries; the lucky ones are able to find other people interested in the Inklings, myth, and fantasy literature close enough geographically to meet on a regular basis. The Society sponsors Discussion Groups in several different states in the U.S., with a number of additional groups in the process of forming and active.

Groups are listed as **Active** or **Inactive**. Groups that wish to be listed in the Active category should regularly update the Secretary with their meeting and discussion plans. Groups are also encouraged to share reports of their activities with the Secretary for inclusion in *Myth-print*.

Groups that wish to become active should contact the Secretary and inform her of their first meeting, topic, time, location and contact person. Groups that have not yet chosen to become Chartered, or those who are interested in creating a new Mythopoeic Society-sponsored discussion or special interest group, please complete our group charter form at <http://www.mythsoc.org>.

Marion VanLoo  
Membership & Discussion Group Secretary

[membership@mythsoc.org](mailto:membership@mythsoc.org)

## Active Groups

### CALIFORNIA

**Los Angeles/Pasadena:** *Mydgard*

Lee Speth,

**San Francisco Bay Area:** *Khazad-dum*

Amy Wisniewski & Edith Crowe,

March 14, 2010: *The Knights of the Cornerstone*, by James Blaylock. In Saratoga, CA; contact Edith for more info. Time TBA

June 13: *Earthquake Weather*, by Tim Powers. At Edith and Amy's; time TBA.

Sept 12: *The Legend of Sigurd & Gudrun*, by J.R.R. Tolkien. Contact Edith for time and location.

Dec. 4: The Annual Reading and Eating Meeting. At Edith and Amy's; time TBA.

### COLORADO

**Denver area:** *Fanuidhol* ("Cloudy Head")

Patricia Yarrow,

Web site:

March 14: *Ink and Steel* by Elizabeth Bear.

April 11: Movie day: Neil Gaiman's *MirrorMask*

May 16: Game day: we'll be looking at, and possibly trying, board games with fantasy themes, particularly those inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*

June 13: Mythopoeic Award nominees (if the list is out) or recent fantasy

July 11: Mythopoeic Award nominees

Aug. 15: *Coyote Road: Trickster Tales* (anthology) edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling

Sept. 12: Classic fantasy: *The King of Elfland's Daughter* by Lord Dunsany

Oct. 10: Scholarly work: *The Owl, the Raven and the Dove* by G. Ronald Murphy

Nov. 7: *Storied Treasure* by Bailey Phelps

Dec. 12: recent works by Terry Pratchett

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**Washington & Suburbs:** *Knossos*

Mimi Stevens,

March 19: *In the Land of Invented Languages* by Arika Okrent. At Brent's,

April 16: *Coyote Blue* by Christopher Moore. At Mimi's,

### HAWAII

**Oahu:** *Sammath Naur*

Steve Brown,

Or, Ken Burtress- email: Web site :

March 21: *Mutant Messages Down Under*, by Marlo Morgan.

April 18: *Lavinia*, by Ursula K LeGuin

May 22: Topic: Ghosts

June 20: *The Magician*, by Lev Grossman

July 18: *The Lost Symbol*, by Dan Brown

August 21: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, by Betty Smith

Sept. 18: *Garlic and Sapphires*, by Ruth Reichl

Oct. 16: *A Game of Thrones*, by George R.R. Martin

Nov. 13: *South of Skye*, by Steven Goldsberry.

### IOWA

**Decorah:** *Alfheim*

Doug Rossman,

### MINNESOTA

**Minneapolis-St. Paul:** *Rivendell*

David Lenander,

Web site:

TBA: *Thirteenth Child*, by Patricia Wrede.

TBA: *The Magician's Book*, by Laura Miller.

TBA: *Iolanthe*, by Gilbert and Sullivan

### NEVADA

**Reno:** *Crickhollow*

Joanne Burnett,

Web site:

Crickhollow

March: *Pandemonium*, by Daryl Gregory

April: *Lavinia*, by Ursula K. LeGuin

May: *The Bell at Sealey Head*, by Patricia McKillip

### OREGON

**Portland:** *Bywater Inklings*

Gary Lundquist

See also

### PENNSYLVANIA

**Pittsburgh:** *Fantasy Studies Fellowship*

Lori Campbell,

### WASHINGTON

**Seattle:** *Mithlond*

John D Rateliff,

## WISCONSIN

**Milwaukee:** *The Burrahobbits*

Jeffrey & Jan Long, [REDACTED]

**Note:** *Burrahobbits* is currently full to overflowing with members. If you live in the Milwaukee area and would like to be a part of a discussion group, why not start your own? Contact the Discussion Group Secretary for more details.

## Inactive/Prospective Groups

### CALIFORNIA

**Oakland:** *C.S. Lewis Society of California*

David J. Theroux, [REDACTED]

### FLORIDA

**Tampa Bay:** *Hobbiton*

Paul S. Ritz, [REDACTED]

**North Central Florida:** *Eryn Galen*

B.L. McCauley, [REDACTED]

### ILLINOIS

**Peoria:** *The Far Westfarthing smial*

Mike Foster, [REDACTED]

### INDIANA

**Central Indiana:** *Cerin Amroth*

Ellen Denham, [REDACTED]

### LOUISIANA

**Baton Rouge:** *Roke*

Sally Budd, [REDACTED]

### MICHIGAN

**Ann Arbor area:** *Galadhrimmin-Ennorath*

Dave Lovelace, [REDACTED]

### MISSOURI

**St. Louis:** *The Khazad*

Gary & Sylvia Hunnewell, [REDACTED]

**St. Louis:** *Imladris*

Tonia O'Neal, The Tolkien Adventure Community, [REDACTED]

### NEW YORK

**New York:** *Heren Istarion*

(The New York Tolkien Society)

Anthony Burdge & Jessica Burke, The New York Tolkien Society, [REDACTED]

### NORTH CAROLINA

**Charlotte:** *The Carolina Tolkien Society*

Matt & Renita Peeler, [REDACTED]

## OHIO

**Akron:**

David Staley, [REDACTED]

## OREGON

**Mid-Willamette Valley Area**

Donovan Mattole, [REDACTED]

## PENNSYLVANIA

**Lancaster Area:** *C.S. Lewis and Friends*

Neil Gussman, [REDACTED]

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**Columbia:** *The Columbia C.S. Lewis Society*

Nina Fowler, [REDACTED]

## Special Interest Group

**The Elvish Linguistic Fellowship**

Carl Hostetter, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], Vinyar Tengwar.

Journal, *Parma Eldalamberon*: Christopher Gilson, [REDACTED]

## Active Correspondence Groups

**Once Upon A Time (children's fantasy)**

Laura Krentz, [REDACTED]

Correspondence circular. Issues come out every other month, on the even numbered months. Our membership is small; we would welcome new members. Interested people can contact Laura for a sample issue.

Web site: [REDACTED]

## Online Discussion Groups

**Mythsoc Announcements**

Society announcements

Sign up: [REDACTED]

or contact Joan Marie Verba: [REDACTED]

**Mythsoc E-List**

Society activities and general book-related discussion.

Sign up: [REDACTED]

or contact Joan Marie Verba: [REDACTED]

**LiveJournal Mythopoeic Society discussion forum**

Society activities and general book-related discussion, especially the works of JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis, and Charles Williams. It is also a place to talk about The Mythopoeic Society and to post Society News. Sign up: [REDACTED] or contact Lisa Deutsch Harrigan: [REDACTED]

**Facebook Group**

Society activities and general book-related discussion.

Friend "The Mythopoeic Society"

or contact Lisa Deutsch Harrigan: [REDACTED]



*The Latest from*  
*The Mythopoeic Press:*  
**The Intersection of Fantasy and**  
**Native America: From H.P.**  
**Lovecraft to**  
**Leslie Marmon Silko.**  
*Edited by Amy H. Sturgis*  
*and David D. Oberhelman*

A number of contemporary Native American authors incorporate elements of fantasy into their fiction, while several non-Native fantasy authors utilize elements of Native America in their storytelling. Nevertheless, few experts on fantasy consider American Indian works, and few experts on Native American studies explore the fantastic in literature. Now an international, multi-ethnic, and cross-disciplinary group of scholars investigates the meaningful ways in which fantasy and Native America intersect, examining classics by American Indian authors such as Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor, and Leslie Marmon Silko, as well as non-Native fantasists such as H.P. Lovecraft, J.R.R. Tolkien, and J.K. Rowling. Thus these essayists pioneer new ways of thinking about fantasy texts by Native and non-Native authors, and challenge other academics, writers, and readers to do the same.

***Praise for The Intersection of Fantasy and Native America:***

The essays in Sturgis and Oberhelman's *The Intersection of Fantasy and Native America* open our eyes to the kinship between families of literature hitherto seen as separate-fantasy and Native American fiction-showing their interconnections in subject matter, in techniques of dream and trance and magical realism and post-modern meta-narrative, and most importantly, in their ability to penetrate appearances in search of underlying truths. The result is that we see each in light of the other and both as parts of the larger, so-called "mainstream," and as essential to our understanding of literature, its writers and readers, in the 21st century. — **Verlyn Flieger, Professor of English, University of Maryland at College Park, Author of *Interrupted Music*, *A Question of Time*, and *Splintered Light***

With excellent and accessible scholarship, this book opens wide the door of Native American mythology and fantasy by connecting it with the fantasy many of us already know and love. — **Travis Prinzi, Author of *Harry Potter and Imagination* and editor of *Hog's Head Conversations***

## Conference Reports

### Southwest/Texas Popular Culture Association Annual Conference, Albuquerque, February 10-13, 2010

*By Janet Brennan Croft*

SWTPCA is the largest regional conference of the national Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association, rivaling the national conference in size every year with close to 1000 attendees. One of the most active areas within the SWTPCA is the Science Fiction and Fantasy area, ably co-chaired by Ximena Gallardo-C., Alyson Buckman, Tamy Burnett, and Brian Cowlshaw. This year the SF&F area fielded over 20 panels of 3-4 presenters each, with topics including dystopia and apocalypse, *Twilight* fandom, *Lost*, werewolves and zombies, *Star Trek*, *The Jetsons*, gothic and dark fantasy, Robert E. Howard, steampunk, and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea*.

But this was really the year of Joss Whedon, with more than half a dozen panels on his *oeuvre*, including the Buffyverse, *Firefly* and *Serenity*, *Dollhouse*, and *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, and the now-traditional evening sing-along double feature of the *Buffy* episode "Once More With Feeling" and *Dr. Horrible*.

Additional areas that would be of interest to our members are Children's/Young Adult Literature and Culture (where I heard some excellent papers on Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, Harry Potter, and the novels of Robin McKinley) and Myth and Fairy Tale (with papers this year on *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the origin of Hansel and Gretel's gingerbread house, and folkloric imagery in children's novels about the Holocaust), but if your interests are as broad as those of most MythSoc members, you might also enjoy sessions in the Grateful Dead, Religion, Atomic Culture, James Bond, Shakespeare Film, Anime, Collecting, or Horror areas.

If you enjoy the scholarly papers and panels (and the video room!) at Mythcon, this is another conference you might like to add to your annual schedule. It's very welcoming to graduate students and independent scholars as well as traditional academics. In 2011 SWTPCA will be combining with the national conference, as it does every seven years, and meeting in San Antonio, but in 2012 we return to our "home" at the Hyatt Regency in Albuquerque.



### Mythcon 40: Readers' Theatre Adaptation of *Love All*

*By Lynn Maudlin*

In *Mythprint* 329, Berni Phillips wrote a wonderful review of Mythcon 40 at UCLA last summer. She modestly refrained from speaking much about the play, *Love All*, but I wish to praise where she could not – it was one of my very favorite experiences at Mythcon 40.

Sherwood Smith produced a terrific adaptation of Dorothy L. Sayers' play, *Love All*, for a readers' theatre presentation and it was wonderfully acted by Berni Phillips (Lydia Hillington), David Bratman (Godfrey Daybrook), Edith Crowe (Edith Daybrook/Janet Reed), Mike (Michael Selby) and Jo Foster (Mary Birch), Mike Glyer (Henry Norton, male narrator), and Sherwood herself (Stella Coppingham, Judy Mintlaw, and female narrator). Funny and absurd and delightful; I think Dorothy would approve.

## 2010 Mythopoeic Awards Announcement

Individual members of the Mythopoeic Society are invited to nominate books for the 2010 Mythopoeic Awards, and/or to volunteer to serve on any of the committees. (You need not join the committee to make nominations.) Deadline for committee volunteers and for nominations (limit of five per person per category, please!) has been extended to **February 28, 2010**; send nominations to the awards administrator (see contact info below) via e-mail (preferred) or U.S. mail. Authors or publishers may not nominate their own books for any of the awards. Books published by the Mythopoeic Press are not eligible for the awards. The Mythopoeic Society does not accept or review unsolicited manuscripts.

The **Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature** is given to the fantasy novel, multi-volume novel, or single-author story collection for adults published during the previous year that best exemplifies "the spirit of the Inklings." Books not selected as finalists in the year after publication are eligible for a second year. Books from a series are eligible if they stand on their own; otherwise, the series becomes eligible the year its final volume appears.

The **Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature** honors books for younger readers (from "Young Adults" to picture books for beginning readers), in the tradition of *The Hobbit* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Rules for eligibility are otherwise the same as for the Adult literature award. The question of which award a borderline book is best suited for will be decided by consensus of the committees.

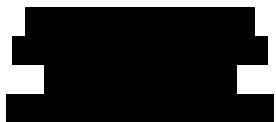
The **Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies** is given to books on J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and/or Charles Williams that make significant contributions to Inklings scholarship. For this award, books first published during the previous three years are eligible, including finalists for previous years.

The **Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies** is given to scholarly books on other specific authors in the Inklings tradition, or to more general works on the genres of myth and fantasy. The period of eligibility is three years, as for the Inklings Studies award.

Winners of the 2010 Mythopoeic Awards will be announced at the **41st Annual Mythopoeic Conference** (Mythcon XLI), to be held in July at Dallas, Texas.

Please contact David Oberhelman, the Awards Administrator, to nominate books, volunteer for committees, or ask questions about the Mythopoeic Awards process.

David Oberhelman



## Mythcon 41 Room and Board

**Room and board payments must be received by June 28, 2010.**

Friday through Monday morning: Full room and board packages include lodging for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night, along with the following meals: Friday dinner; Saturday breakfast, lunch, and dinner; Sunday breakfast, lunch and banquet ticket; and Monday breakfast. An additional night with breakfast are available on Thursday night.

- Single occupancy: \$275
- Double occupancy: \$235

Thursday night through Monday morning: An early arrival package is also available that also includes lodging for Thursday night, dinner on Thursday night, breakfast and lunch on Friday, plus all the lodging and meals in the conference package for Friday through Monday.

- Single occupancy: \$330
- Double occupancy: \$280

Meals only: Those who will not be staying on campus can purchase a package with meals only: includes dinner on Friday, lunch and dinner on Saturday, lunch on Sunday, and the banquet on Sunday. (Individual meals will be available for purchase at the door.)

- Commuter meal package: \$100



***The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Dir. David Fincher. Perf. Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett. DVD. Paramount, 2009. Reviewed by Randy Hoyt.**

*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* tells the fictional story of a man who ages in reverse. When Benjamin Button is born at the end of the First World War, his body is the size of a baby but has more in common with that of an old man: he has wrinkles, cataracts, and severe arthritis. His mother dies in childbirth; his father, wanting nothing to do with the baby, considers killing him but instead abandons him on the front porch of a seniors' home. The caregiver living at the home finds him on the front porch and raises him as her own son. The doctor predicts that the baby will not live long, but Benjamin defies the predictions. It soon becomes obvious that his body is getting younger instead of older, which provides an interesting opportunity to depict the symmetry of life: just like a normal child, Benjamin grows hair and teeth, learns to walk and talk, and outgrows his need for diapers. When a new resident moves in to the home, Benjamin meets her visiting granddaughter Daisy. Benjamin and Daisy are roughly the same age at this time, and they become friends—as good of friends as they can be considering that he appears to be in his seventies. Much of the story involves their interactions as they move in and out of each others' lives over the next sixty to seventy years.

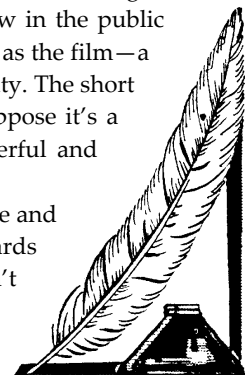
I have always been a fan of narratives that span the full lifetimes of the main characters, or at least a large portion of their lifetimes. These “lifespan stories” provide a much broader perspective that we often fail to appreciate in the midst of our day-to-day activities. Growing up with his curious condition in a seniors' home, Benjamin seems always to have this broader perspective. The film powerfully explores the nature of life and death, of love and loss, of the tragedy and joy of the human condition. It's hardly a spoiler to say that Benjamin and Daisy both die: it doesn't take much of the film for you to realize that death—for the characters in the film, just as for all of us in life—is the only way the story can end. Their deaths come after full lives filled with joyous moments and painful heartaches, with difficult choices and enduring memories. A quote from Benjamin in the middle of his life sums up the theme of the film quite nicely: “I was thinking how nothing lasts, and what a shame that is.” Coming to this realization and then learning to live with it seems to be at the core of the human experience, and encountering reminders like this film can only be a good thing for us.

The more I reflect on the film, the more I see it as a celebration of life. But I should warn that watching the film can be incredibly sorrowful and emotionally draining. I cried during it like I haven't cried in years, and my wife could not sleep at all the night after we watched it. Everything about this film draws you into the story and the characters' lives. The acting was superb: Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett were terrific together in the lead roles. (Pitt was deservedly nominated for the Academy Award for Lead Actor, and I'm still a bit stunned that Blanchett was not nominated for Lead Actress.) The film won three Academy Awards for Makeup, Visual Effects, and Art Direction; the spectacular achievements in all three of these areas contributed to the film's overall verisimilitude. I have read some reviews claiming that it is too difficult to suspend disbelief and enjoy the film, but this was not at all a problem for me. I easily granted to the story what J.R.R. Tolkien called “Secondary Belief” in “On Fairy-stories.” If anything, the film was too believable: some of what Tolkien said in the same essay about “Faërian drama” can be applied to this film without *too* much of a stretch:

*You yourself are, or think that you are, bodily inside its Secondary World. [...] [Y]ou are in a dream that some other mind is weaving, and the knowledge of that alarming fact may slip from your grasp. [...] [T]he potion is too strong.*

The Academy also nominated the film for Best Adapted Screenplay. The screenplay by Eric Roth (*Forrest Gump*, *Munich*) drew on a short story called “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” published by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1921. (This story can be found in Fitzgerald's collection titled *Tales of the Jazz Age*; it is now in the public domain and can be found easily online.) Fitzgerald's story starts with the same basic concept as the film—a man named Benjamin Button ages in reverse—but that concept is the only significant similarity. The short story is a satirical critique of high society in Baltimore after the American Civil War; I suppose it's a decent satire, but it feels quite flippant, trivial, and dated when compared with the powerful and emotional treatment of timeless concerns in the film.

I suspect that the images from this film will remain with me for a long time. My wife and I both started to tear up again watching brief clips of the film during the Academy Awards show. I have no doubt that I will watch this movie many more times, and I couldn't recommend it more highly ... just don't forget to take your tissues.



The Mythopoeic Society



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**Janet Brennan Croft** is editor of *Mythlore*, one of the premier periodicals on the Inklings and fantasy literature. She has published many articles on J.R.R. Tolkien, and her book *War in the Works of Tolkien* (2005) won the Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies. She also edited the collections *Tolkien on Film* (2005) and *Tolkien and Shakespeare* (2007).