

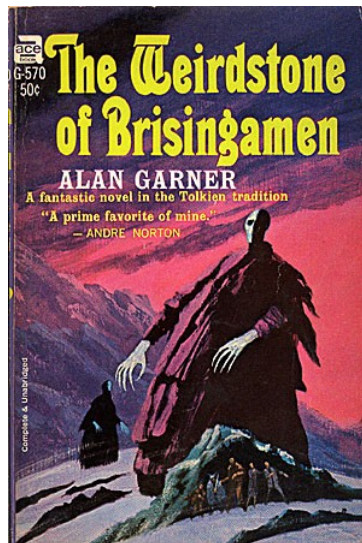
# mythPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

VOL. 47 NO. 10

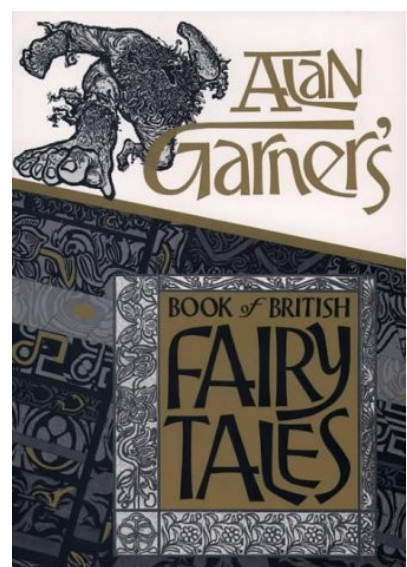
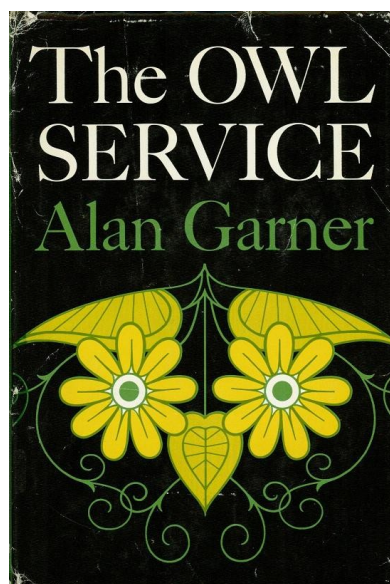
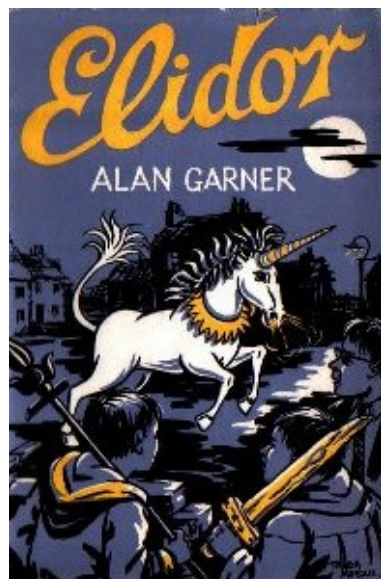
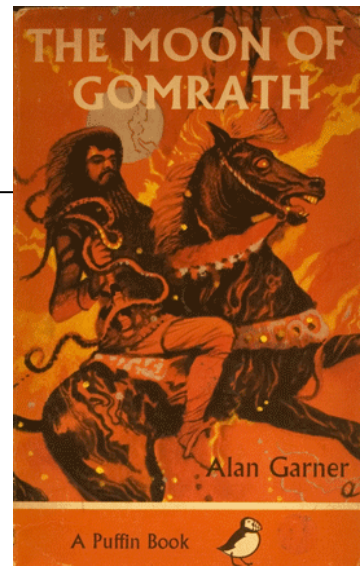
OCTOBER 2010

WHOLE NO. 339



SPECIAL ISSUE

CELEBRATING  
ALAN GARNER



# mythprint

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society  
VOL. 47 NO. 10      OCTOBER 2010      WHOLE NO. 339

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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:

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Editor, *Mythprint*



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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



Visit the Mythopoeic Society on the web at [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.

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Mythopoeic Society membership: \$12/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.

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*The Weirdstone of Brisingamen:*  
50 Years Young. By Matt Fisher.

October 2010 marks a significant anniversary in the history of 20th-century mythopoeic literature: fifty years ago Alan Garner's first novel, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* was published in England. Since October 1960, the book has never gone out of print ... a major accomplishment for what many viewed at the time as merely a children's book.

*The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* starts with the Legend of Alderley, a story told over and over to Garner by his grandfather. Garner's family has lived in Cheshire as generations of craftsmen for over 300 years. The Legend of Alderley is a version of the myth of the Sleeping Hero, where a legendary hero, often with a number of armed retainers, sleeps in a remote location such as a cave on a mountain. The sleeping figures wait for a future time of great peril when the hero and his retinue will need to come out of their seclusion to defend the land. In this version of the myth, the knights sleeping under the hill are in need of one more horse to make their number complete. In addition, the particular legend Garner's grandfather told him includes very specific references to the area around the village of Alderley Edge and the sandstone escarpment known by the same name. Garner, who has described himself as a "first generation educated child", was accepted at Manchester Grammar School for his secondary education and completed two years studying Classics at Magdalen College, Oxford. The deep divisions between the world he grew up (rural Cheshire craftsmen) and the world he encountered through education created a tension that Garner finally attempted to reconcile through the craft of writing. As he told Raymond Thompson in a 1989 interview:

"I just wrote what was in me. It came out in that way because it seemed to be the way to express it, and it was what I knew. It started off with the question, so you're going to be a writer; what do you know? And there was very little I knew that other people didn't know. But I did know what I felt about that hill. And I thought, I'll try to say something about that."

The story that Garner created focused on two children, Colin and Susan, who come to Cheshire for a

temporary stay with an old friend of their parents and her husband. Soon after their arrival, the two children find themselves entangled in a growing battle between good and evil that threatens the continued existence of the 144 knights sleeping under the hill. It turns out that a jewel given to Susan by her mother is the Weirdstone of Brisingamen, which contains within it the heart of the magic that protects the sleeping knights. Colin and Susan find themselves pursued by the goblin-like svart alfar, witches, and other evil figures who seek to steal the Weirdstone. When the gem is stolen by dark forces, the children and their allies—the wizard Cadellin, two dwarf companions of Cadellin, and the husband of their mother's friend—frantically seek to recover the Weirdstone before it is too late.

Such a brief description of the plot cannot do justice to Garner's work. The book was widely hailed by critics as a major and high-quality new work for children, with the *Times Literary Supplement* describing it as "excellent and overflowing with largesse and imagination", the *New Statesman* describing it as "marvelously exciting", and the *Manchester Evening News* stating that the book was "Absolutely first class. Well written, well told, it mixes legend, fact and fairy tale." In addition to the Legend of Alderley, Garner incorporated a number of other sources into the novel: names from the medieval Welsh tale "Culhwch and Olwen", elements of Scandinavian (lios alfar/light elves, Grimnir, Ragnarok) and Celtic mythology (the Morrigan), and elements of Arthuriana. However, it should be noted that many of these elements were incorporated in a way that was different from the original sources. Garner commented in the Thompson interview that he didn't like invented names, but that using authentic names that once had traditions and stories attached that are now lost allowed him "the genuineness, but no burden."

I first read the novel and its sequel *The Moon of Gornrath* in the 1980's, and re-reading it in preparation for writing this article reminded me of how energetically Garner tells his story. In the Thompson interview, Garner acknowledged that the characterization in the book is not particularly strong, a view shared by Neil Philip in his excellent study of Garner's early work, *A Fine Anger*. I would agree with that assessment, just as I would describe the plot as being fairly typical of many children's fantasy books. But what struck me re-reading the book this summer was how the energy that I mentioned previously, as well as the incredibly strong sense of place, more than make up for the more generic character development and plot.

After the publication of his first two novels (both identified in their titles as “A Tale of Alderley”), Garner continued to write fantasy works that were marketed for children even with his expressed discomfort at being viewed simply as a “children’s writer.” *Eli-dor* was published in 1965 and *The Owl Service* in 1967. The latter novel received wide critical acclaim and received both the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Award, both prominent recognitions for outstanding children’s books published in the U.K. In 2007, the 70th anniversary of the award, the organization that sponsors the Carnegie Medal set up an online poll to identify the public’s favorite Carnegie winners over the entire time span of the award. *The Owl Service* was ranked by the public as one of the ten best Carnegie Medal books of all time.

Garner’s next novel, *Red Shift*, marked a major change in literary tone—a much more taut and minimalist approach to storytelling. That same approach characterized Garner’s most recent novels, *Strandloper* (1996) and *Thursbitch* (2003). While Garner’s output has not been prolific—seven novels, two collections of stories, and several collections of folk stories edited by him—it has remained centered on myth, legend, and place. As he stated in the talk “Old Men’s Trousers and the Making Strange of Things”, given at the Manchester Grammar School Philosophical Society on 14 September 1999:

“By ‘myth’ I do not mean ‘fiction’, but more the weaving of patterns that we unconsciously recognize as the core of being, both within and without us ... Myth is as near as words, through poetry and metaphor, can get to the wholeness of perfect truth.”

Garner was awarded the OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 2001 for services to literature and is widely regarded as one of the greatest writers in England today. In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the first publication of *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, a number of events have occurred in England. Fortunately for *Mythprint* readers, recordings of some of these events can be accessed through the Internet.

His renown in America is significantly less, perhaps because his work has been so tightly connected to Cheshire and English legends. His impact on fantasy literature is, at this moment, somewhat hard to judge; there aren’t other writers younger than Garner whose work is similar and his name is not one that appears to be mentioned often by today’s fantasy writers. So it would be particularly appropriate if the

50th anniversary of *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* this fall were to serve as an opportune time for many people to discover or rediscover this unique and gifted author of modern fantasy.

For further information, the unofficial Alan Garner web page at [REDACTED] is by far the single best Internet resource on Garner and his work; a full bibliography can be found here as well as links to an amazing range of resources. For example, links at this site will take you to the 1989 interview with Raymond Thompson and Garner’s presentation at the 2010 Oxford Literary Festival (among other gems). ≡

### Northern Mythological Traditions in *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. By Jason Fisher.

First published in *Journey to the Sea* 8 (2/2009).

As part of this special issue of *Mythprint*, I’d like to take a closer look at Alan Garner and his first and best-known novel, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. Garner’s novels are a rewarding combination of northern mythological and folkloric elements, incorporated into fantasy adventure stories set in modern times. By preserving these traditions in a modern fantasy story, Garner is doing his part to ensure the heritage of northern England is not forgotten. Sadly, too many readers—at least, American readers—are now forgetting Garner himself. But both he, and the traditions he aims to protect, are worth remembering.

In *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, two schoolchildren, Colin and Susan, become unwittingly entangled in conflict with supernatural powers. Unaware of its mythic significance, Susan wears a family heirloom, the Weirdstone of Brisingamen, around her wrist. This jewel could bring great power to the forces of evil that could turn the tide in the imminent battle of the last days. Like *The Lord of the Rings*, the backbone of the tale is a kind of “reverse quest”—that is, a quest not to retrieve something, but to get rid of it. Susan must deliver that artifact into the safe keeping of the wizard Cadellin. The Great Enemy, Nastrond, desperately desires the Weirdstone; at the same time, Nastrond’s minions hope to snatch it for their own use. The bulk of the novel is an exilic journey in which the protagonists’ only goal is to evade capture

until they can put the Weirdstone into more capable hands and return to their normal lives.

Garner grew up and still lives in Cheshire, a county in northern England. *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* includes real landmarks from Cheshire—the Wizard’s Well, Goldenstone, and Clulow Cross—as well as other familiar features of the countryside—abandoned copper mines, the old quarry, Radnor Mere, and so on. This contributes to the novel’s verisimilitude (one can actually retrace the protagonists’ steps on their journey), but more than that, Garner associates them with supernatural and mythic underpinnings. Garner has used what one literary critic called an “immense narrative and verbal power, with a feeling for landscape” in this novel to “infuse the countryside of contemporary Cheshire with ancient, furious magic”. The Wizard’s Well and its inscription, for example, are given a magical explanation: there really is a wizard! The landmark is well-known to Cheshire-folk, though no one remembers with any certainty the true story of the carven image and inscription. Garner, having grown up near the Wizard’s Well, must have heard many stories (and imagined many more) to explain it. In *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, he offers readers his own fictive explanation, the wizard Cadellin.

The story is set in the environs of Alderley Edge, in present-day Cheshire, but its backdrop is an intricately woven tapestry of mythological influences drawn from the traditions of that region. Historically and geographically, Cheshire finds itself at something of a mythic crossroads, where Celtic, Old English, and Old Norse strands once met and mingled. Over the course of the Middle Ages, Celtic influences spread south from Scotland and northeast from Wales, while the Norse traveled southwest over the rough North Sea. Both of these converged on the Anglo-Saxon traditions already well-established in England. The epic poems of legends of the Celtic *Mabinogion*, the Norse Eddas, and the English *Beowulf* were probably all known and appreciated in equal measure in this chilly northern county. Garner, therefore, takes pains to reflect the same admixture in his fictional representation. Let me give a few further examples of each to demonstrate how effectively Garner assimilates them into his novel.

The forces of evil include elements of all three mythologies. The Great Enemy is called Nastrond, and his abode is Ragnarok, both terms drawn from Old Norse mythology. But in the Old Norse, Nastrond is a place, not a person, while Ragnarok is an event, not a place. Why did Garner alter them? My

suspicion is that he is trying to demonstrate the way in which mythologies erode over time. Names are remembered (usually), but their precise applications often are not—especially where disparate mythologies commingled. (Tolkien demonstrated much the same kind of mythic mixture and erosion in his fiction.) As another example, the svart alfar, represent the dark elves of the Old Norse tradition; here in *The Weirdstone*, they represent something analogous to the goblins of folklore. And where there are “dark elves,” there must also be “light elves”—and indeed the lios alfar make a quick appearance (they are more important in the sequel, *The Moon of Gomerath*). Later in the story, the forces of evil summon the fimbulwinter, a preternatural storm of snow, ice, and deadly cold invoked through dark magic, which also dates back to the Old Norse Eddic tradition (with later echoes in Narnia).

The evil hoards against which Colin, Susan, and their allies find themselves pitted include a group of witches and warlocks called the morthbrood. This is clearly resurrected from Old English (*morþ* ‘death, destruction, perdition’ + *bród* ‘brood’). Another part of the dark forces are the Lyblacs—a strange-sounding name for the equally strange scarecrow-like creatures it represents. But for those in the know, not so alien after all—*lyblác* is a kind of dark Anglo-Saxon magic. The word means ‘sorcery, witchcraft, the art of using drugs or potions for the purpose of poisoning, or for magical purposes.’ And finally, we have the Mara, great troll-like women, practically indestructible, and one of the most significant threats to our protagonists. These, too, are not mere invention on Garner’s part. The mara is a mingled Norse / English representation of the nightmare personified. The Old Norse word *mara* means a ‘nightmare, incubus,’ while in Old English there is the *mare* ‘a night-mare, a monster oppressing men during sleep.’

Garner’s principal witch, and the leader of the morthbrood, is called the Morrigan. This is a direct reference to a kind of sorceress archetype in Celtic mythology. One of the heroes, too, the dwarf Fenodyree, has Celtic origins. His cousin, Durathror, on the other hand, owes his name to Norse myth. But their mysterious ally, Gaberlunzie, is also a Celtic figure, as are Angharad Goldenhand and the distant realm of Prydein, to which some of the characters allude. Prydein lies outside the immediate map of the action, but it represents Northern Scotland, mythologized in the tradition of the Mabinogion (Prydain, so-spelled, also forms the mythic backdrop for Lloyd Alexander’s well-known fantasy series; however,

Alexander shifted it southwest to Wales). In most cases, Garner draws little more than these distant names into his tale, like herbs and spices added to an already rich stew. But as with the examples of Nastrod and Ragnarok, Garner minds less that these remote people and places erode and evolve than that they be lost entirely.

I could easily enumerate a dozen other elements from these three major mythologies—the Weirdstone of Brisingamen itself refers to the necklace of the Norse goddess Freyja—but half the fun is in stumbling upon them for yourself. Indeed, these mythological landmarks are analogous, within the novel, to the actual landmarks of Cheshire and Alderley Edge, around which Garner built his fantasy adventure. Any walking excursion in the real, present-day countryside will reveal one ancient sight after another, and Garner wants to remind us that these landmarks have genuine stories—stories whose distant echoes in England’s early mythology can still be heard, if one stops to listen. And perhaps even a little of the magic lingers there as well. ≡

### Free Lecture on J.R.R. Tolkien



Long-time Mythopoeic Society Member and Professor Mike Foster will discuss “J.R.R. Tolkien and the Languages of His Legendarium” at 6:00 PM, Monday, November 29, 2010, in the Prucha Archives Reading Room in Raynor Library (1355 W. Wisconsin Avenue) at Marquette University.

Foster (Arts ’68, Grad ’71) began his study of Marquette’s Tolkien manuscripts collection in 1977. He has been the Tolkien Society’s North American representative since 1995 and a voting member of the Mythopoeic Society’s Inklings scholarship committee since 2000. His essay, “Teaching Tolkien”, was published in a collection honoring Dr. Richard Blackwelder (Marquette University Press, 2006). He retired as Professor of English and Journalism after thirty-four years at Illinois Central College in 2005.

This free lecture is sponsored by the Marquette Linguistics Club and the Library’s Department of Special Collections and Archives. Guests without Marquette University identification should register by noon on November 29 by telephoning (414) 288-7256.

Jeff Duntemann. *Souls in Silicon*. Reviewed by Alana Joli Abbott.

When I’m looking for fiction, I gravitate toward fantasy and science fiction that deals with the nature of the soul, particularly in the relationship between men and God. Whether those men are humans, a fantasy race, or, in the case of Duntemann’s excellent short story collection, artificial intelligences, is less relevant than the nature of what they discover about themselves, and their faith, in the course of recognizing their humanity. *Souls in Silicon* deals with the nature of what makes someone a person, and what relates them to their faith, from the very first story. In “The Steel Sonnets,” two robots make contact with a culture that thinks mythically, and the relationship between them grows into an understanding that leads one of them to question the nature of his own dedicated higher power. “Silicon Psalm” shows the difficulty of a medical AI keeping a child alive, and suffering, when the child seeks the release of death. In “Bathtub Mary,” an explorer AI reveals a “miracle” to the humans remaining on earth, encouraging them to travel to outer space. Duntemann has great insight into what it means to be ensouled and how humans might react to AI were it to become so.

Published through the small press Copperwood and available via Lulu.com, *Souls in Silicon* is, I’m afraid, doomed to be under read, despite containing a 1981 Hugo finalist (“Guardian”) and two terrifically funny short stories: “Stormy vs. the Tornadoes” and “Sympathy on the Loss of One of Your Legs.” Since it’s hard to find in print, why should you pick it up? Along with the themes, the storytelling is first rate. It’s easy to get lost in the world that Duntemann paints, and the two comedic stories read aloud beautifully. But as is true in many short story collections, the style varies: some of the stories feel like a friend could be relating them to you, while others are more cerebral. In each, Duntemann thoroughly gets into the heads of his characters, showing the world from behind their eyes, whether the perspective is human or otherworldly or innocent.

Luckily, the collection is available in digital format—and a collection about artificial intelligence seems ideal for reading electronically. The stories are definitely worth going out of your way to read—especially if, like me, you enjoy pondering those questions about the nature of the spirit. Duntemann handles both ethics and philosophy deftly, tells his stories masterfully, and deserves to be far better known than he is. ≡

# Discussion 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.

Starting with this issue, only **active** groups are listed here. 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 *Mythprint*. 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 [www.mythsoc.org](http://www.mythsoc.org).

Marion VanLoo, Membership & Discussion Group Secretary

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## CALIFORNIA

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

Lee Speth, [REDACTED]  
Nov. 21: *Planet Narnia*, by Michael Ward. 2:30 pm. At the home of Carol Jacobsen, 205 Malcolm Dr., Pasadena. (626) 796-7456  
Dec. 19: *Tea with the Black Dragon*, by R. A. Macavoy. 2:30 pm. In the lounge area off the mail lobby at the Pasadena Hilton, 168 S. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena

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

David J. Theroux, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

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

Amy Wisniewski & Edith Crowe, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Dec. 4: The Annual Reading and Eating Meeting. At Edith and Amy's. Time TBD.

## COLORADO

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

Patricia Yarrow, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Nov. 7: *Storied Treasure* by Bailey Phelps  
Dec. 12: Recent works by Terry Pratchett

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**Washington & Suburbs:** *Knossos*

Mimi Stevens, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Nov. 19: *The Abolition of Man*, by C. S. Lewis

## HAWAII

**Oahu:** *Sammath Naur*

Steve Brown, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Nov. 13: *South of Skye*, by Steven Goldsberry.

## ILLINOIS

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

Mike Foster, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Nov. ?: Discussion of 13th Anniversary Moot of the Smial.

## IOWA

**Decorah:** *Alfheim*

Doug Rossman, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Contact Jennifer for topic, time, date & location details:  
[REDACTED]

## MINNESOTA

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

David Lenander, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Nov.: Gilbert & Sullivan's *Iolanthe, or the Peer & the Peri*  
Dec. 11: *Turning Pages in the Magician's Book*, a conference on Narnia, cosponsored with the University Libraries Children's Literature Research Collections, Dec. 10 — more information soon!

## NEVADA

**Reno:** *Crickhollow*

Joanne Burnett, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## NEW MEXICO

**Albuquerque:** *The UNM Hobbit Society*

Leslie A Donovan, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
For topics, times, dates & locations, visit our website:  
[REDACTED]

## NEW YORK

**New York:** *Heren Istarion: The Northeast Tolkien Society*

Anthony Burdge & Jessica Burke, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## OREGON

**Portland:** *Bywater Inklings*

Gary Lundquist, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## PENNSYLVANIA

**Pittsburgh:** *Fantasy Studies Fellowship*

Lori Campbell, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## WASHINGTON

**Seattle:** *Mithlond*

John D Rateliff, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## WISCONSIN

**Milwaukee:** *The Burrahobbits*

Jeffrey & Jan Long, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



Dwarves, Spiders, and Murky Woods: J.R.R. Tolkien's Wonderful Web of Words, by Jason Fisher  
Let Us Now Praise Famous Orcs: Simple Humanity in Tolkien's Inhuman Creatures, by Robert T. Tally, Jr.  
Myth-Remaking in the Shadow of Vergil: The Captive(-ated) Voice of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lavinia*, by T.S. Miller  
Corrupting Beauty: Rape Narrative in *The Silmarillion*, by Lynn Whitaker  
The Company They Didn't Keep: Collaborative Women in the Letters of C.S. Lewis, by Sam McBride  
Master of Doom by Doom Mastered: Heroism, Fate, and Death in *The Children of Húrin*, by Jesse Mitchell  
Germanic Fate and Doom in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, by Richard J. Whitt  
The Thread on Which Doom Hangs: Free Will, Disobedience, and Eucatastrophe in Tolkien's Middle-earth,  
by Janet Brennan Croft  
Simbelmynë: Mortality and Memory in Middle-earth, by William H. Stoddard

And reviews of: *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History*, by Dimitra Fimi; *Charles Williams and his Contemporaries*, by Suzanne Bray and Richard Sturch; *In the Land of Invented Languages* by Arika Okrent; *Millennial Mythmaking: Essays on the Power of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*, edited by John Perlich and David Whitt; *Middle-earth Minstrel: Essays on Music in Tolkien*, edited by Bradford Lee Eden; *Harry Potter and Imagination: The Way Between Two Worlds*, by Travis Prinzi; *Fastitocalon 1.1*; *Theodor SEUSS Geisel* by Donald E. Pease.



## Greetings from The Tolkien Society!

We would like to invite you to our 2012 event, 'Return of the Ring', to be held at Loughborough University, UK, 16-20 August 2012. While of course we have a September 'Oxonmoot' each year, RotR is a larger scale international conference/convention following the model of our hugely successful 'Tolkien 2005' at Aston University (to which the Mythopoeic Society contributed much).

Our conference theme is 'Celebrating Tolkien'; to that end we are offering multiple strands of programming – scholarly, creative, fan-based ... and every permutation thereof! Registration and accommodation bookings are now open with the very best rates available to those who book before 1st December 2010. You can book online or download a form at [REDACTED]

We are offering everything you would expect of a large scale Tolkien celebration – papers, panels and readings, workshops and demonstrations, a masquerade, banquet and ceilidh, art show and dealers' room – but we also have some new ways in which to celebrate our fellowship such as a 'March of the Entwives' and participative music and photography streams. We encourage proposals and programme items from throughout the international Tolkien community and you can see our call for papers as well as our 'not the call for papers' at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Nascent Tolkien scholars of any field of Tolkien Studies (including creative responses to Tolkien) will also be interested in our Christine Davidson Memorial Lecture award which will fund the attendance of a Tolkien scholar in need of support. Details of this scheme are available at [REDACTED]

Our guests of honour are Tom Shippey and Brian Sibley and we will be confirming more in the coming months. We are also in negotiation with performers Charlie Ross (One Man Lord of the Rings) and Tinkerscuss (Celtic folk trio) to bring their world class entertainment to our event. Truly there will be 'something for everyone' and our new policy of having a dedicated 'family events co-ordinator' will ensure that there are plenty things suitable for those attending as a family group.

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### Call for Applicants for Secretary of the Mythopoeic Press

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Mark Rosenfelder. *The Language Construction Kit*.  
Reviewed by Harley J. Sims.

Long available online, Mark Rosenfelder's guide to constructing languages has at last found its way into a print edition. Expanded, full of essential lists, tables, and recommended readings, and including a complete reference grammar of Rosenfelder's invented language Kebreni, the *Language Construction Kit* (henceforth *LCK*) is a unique and enormously welcome manual for anyone interested in conlangs, alternate-world contexts, and linguistics as a whole. *LCK* is to be praised for serving not only as a guide to crafting conlangs, but also as an introduction to language and languages; at 292 pages, it has been distilled from an enormous amount of knowledge and experience, more of which can be appreciated by visiting Rosenfelder's website at [REDACTED]. There, one can find numerous links, lists, and downloadable resources, as well as many more of Rosenfelder's own, elaborate creations.

The sections of *LCK* move through their subject in as elementary an order as possible, beginning with the raw science of sounds, word-building, and grammar before moving into the more abstract areas of semantics and pragmatics. Of these, pragmatics is perhaps the most bewildering being, as Rosenfelder describes, "something of the trash bin of linguistics" (129)—representing those aspects of language

use that are the most difficult to circumscribe formally, and yet are essential to even the most basic real-world utterances and exchanges. They include issues such as deixis (contextual relativity), implicature (tacit forms of meaning), politeness, and real-world knowledge, all of which must be taken into account if the invented language's fictional speakers are from a world unlike our own. A section is then dedicated to language families, which poses the weightiest technical consideration for language creators. Coming up with a tongue that is both original and functional may sound intensive enough, but for those who wish to establish truly credible linguistic landscapes, Rosenfelder recommends creating whole groups of languages with dialects, sisters, and a history of interaction. Whether one invents these languages laterally, works forward from a proto-language, or (as Rosenfelder discourages) reconstructs ancestral forms, this section of *LCK* addresses primarily the issue of sound change—the phenomenon that, for example, in part caused an ancestral language of English to become as diversified as Irish, Armenian, and Sanskrit (students of Old English and other early Germanic languages will recall Verner's Law and Grimm's Law). It is not until one considers the complexity of sound change that one truly comes to appreciate the depth of J.R.R. Tolkien's Elvish languages, not to mention the ingenuity of philologists in establishing relationships among the attested languages of our own world. Whereas Tolkien had to apply his sound changes manually, however, Rosenfelder's *Sound Change Applier* computer application can be downloaded from [REDACTED]. It takes a bit of patience getting used to—and likely much more to master—but much of the section on language families in *LCK* is dedicated to explaining how it works. With it, one can apply sound changes to the entire lexicon of an invented language in moments.

Addressed last of all before the sample grammar of Kebreni is the area of writing systems. Its position emphasizes Rosenfelder's recommendation that constructed languages first be conceived in terms of sounds and mechanics, and only then subjected to the relatively artificial technology of writing. Several major sorts of systems are outlined, including logographs, syllabaries, and true alphabets, preceded by an introduction urging care for matters of media (the materials with which the language is written out), direction of the text, fonts, and the various idiosyncrasies of certain scripts. The 51-page grammar of Kebreni which follows outlines the sort of language a dedicated student of *LCK* should eventually be capa-

ble of producing. Its features are treated largely in the same order as the sections of the book, with Rosenfelder's additional comments indented throughout. The grammar is followed up by a piece of extended prose (grammatically parsed), a list of historical sound changes separating Kebreni from an ancestral form, and a lexicon. After the section on Kebreni, *LCK* concludes with an enormously useful collection of wordlists for creating lexicons, an annotated reading list, a detailed index, and a reproduction of the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Despite seeming hectic at times, *LCK* is a pleasure to read and consult. Rosenfelder's breezy familiarity with his material makes his writing facile without sacrificing information. He knows the conventions of conlanging, and is able to discourage the most tired and faulty of them without pontificating. On inventing alphabets, for example, he advises his readers to

“[k]eep the letters looking distinct. The best alphabets spread out over the conceptual graphic space, so that letters can't be confused for one another. Tolkien [Tengwar] is a bad example here: the elves must have been tormented by dyslexia.” (198)

Tolkien's languages take the brunt of Rosenfelder's criticism several times, primarily because—as fantasy archetypes—they are so often imitated. It is here as well where *LCK* is most special—not with its patient explanation of terminology nor its infectious enthusiasm, but rather with its constant appeal to the insight and innovation of language inventors.

The presence of constructed languages in the worlds of science fiction and fantasy—once as rare as the training required to invent them well—has now become somewhat standard. Where professional linguists are now commissioned to devise the alien tongues heard in such worlds as those of *Star Trek*, and, most recently, James Cameron's *Avatar* (not to mention the *Lord of the Rings* films, for which David Salo was hired to extrapolate new vocabularies from Tolkien's pre-existing corpus), the absence of moderately developed languages in alternate worlds is something writers can no longer get away with. Though there may only be occasional fragments—such as the Dothraki language of George R.R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* series—the presence of or at least potential for formal grammaticality is now essential to secondary belief. Ursula K. Le Guin's works—with their frequent emphasis on the mean-

ings and power of invented words—seemed relatively hollow once LeGuin admitted she is not a linguist, and that there is no point, for instance, in trying to formalize Hardic and the True Speech of her *Earthsea* series. That being so, the “Standard Fantasy Language,” as Rosenfelder calls it (17, 44), has also become somewhat hackneyed. Versions of and variations on Elvish, Dwarvish, and Black Speech are now a dime a dozen, to the extent that some fantasy writers—J.K. Rowling and Susanna Clarke, for example—simply use Latin for their otherworldly lingo.

Rosenfelder challenges this stagnant state of affairs by urging his readers to put themselves constantly in the minds and bodies of their invented language's speakers, and to allow that perspective to influence the way the conlang is devised. It has been common in both sci-fi and fantasy, for example, to represent non-human speech simply with a lot of gutturals and consonant clusters; *LCK*, however, urges inventors to consider the effects of alien speech organs, and to imagine sounds humans simply cannot reproduce (48-9). The Kebreni counting system, meanwhile, is based on a race with “only four toes per foot; as most counting systems are based on counting on the fingers and feet, this easily suggests a base 18 system” (226). As Roger D. Woodard observes in the introduction to the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages*, “if there was a time when human language was characterized by features and strategies fundamentally unlike those we presently know, it was a time prior to the development of any attested or reconstructed language of antiquity.” Rosenfelder seems to understand this implicitly, and urges those in search of original language forms to try to invent them from inside the imagination.

It is difficult to find fault with *LCK*, if only because it is a one-of-a-kind book. If there is anything unfortunate about it, the problem lies not with the author, but with the hobby's incongruity with its own genre. For the most part, conlangs seem the interest of technicians rather than literati—more scientists than poets. This means, among other things, that the best conlangs are more likely to remain in their inventors' laboratories than ever to find themselves showcased by the fiction of a real-world language. ≡



Helen Lowe. *The Heir of Night*. Book One of *The Wall of Night*. Reviewed by Sarah Beach.

Lowe enters the ranks of fantasy writers with a solid beginning. Although this volume is the first of a series (no indication of just how long it is to be), it manages to provide a sense of completion for at least this leg of the main character's adventures.

Malian, daughter of the Earl of Night, his only child and heir, is far more venturesome than any of the adults around her think she ought to be. She is described as "half-grown," but it is unclear what her exact age is: old enough to be competent in taking and planning actions, yet apparently not yet quite old enough for marriage alliances to be considered for her. This is one of several key details I wish Lowe had filled in a bit more explicitly, but only for a sense of fullness. It in no way hampers the storytelling. The story is unmistakably a "coming of age" one and Lowe does a good enough job of conveying Malian's existence on the edge between childhood and adulthood.

I found the world and backstory for Lowe's saga to have a very strong echo of P.C. Hodgell's *Rathillien*. It's enough to make me guess at a possible influence, but not so much as to be certain of any copying. The Derai, Malian's people, have come into this current world of Haarth after a defeat in their long battle against the Darkswarm. But that defeat fractured the Houses of the Derai, and made them (apparently) suspicious of the very powers needed to combat the Darkswarm. For those who know Hodgell's work, the similarity in Lowe's world-making is strong. But I'll give Lowe credit for making the pattern her own.

I found Malian engaging and the integration of the supernatural very smooth. The storytelling mostly flows very well, except for one tendency I found slightly annoying: Lowe chooses inopportune moments in the story to go into historical / backstory info-dumps. At one point, Malian and some others are trying to decide a course of action while being pursued by minions of the Darkswarm in the Old Keep of Night, and the characters launch into a rather leisurely discussion of history! It undercuts the tension and sense of threat at a point when the reader *wants* the tension to continue. The sense of urgency gets lost. However, the misplacement of exposition is pretty much the only "crime" I can level against Lowe. I was engaged by the characters and story, and am interested enough to want to know what happens next. ≡

Alan Garner. *Strandloper*. Reviewed by Jason Fisher.

Alan Garner isn't the most prolific of mythopoeic authors, so I don't feel particularly guilty about reviewing a book published more than a decade ago. Garner has published only one novel since, *Thursbitch* (review forthcoming in *Mythprint*), so in the context of his career, *Strandloper* is not that old. I also do not feel particularly guilty cannibalizing a shorter review of the novel I wrote almost four years ago—though perhaps on that score, I should!

This is a remarkable, luminous, difficult book. It doesn't do the reader any favors—exposition? bah!—but if you take the time to work at penetrating this seemingly impenetrable novel, the rewards are many. It is the most purely mythopoeic of all Garner's novels, describing the experiences of William Buckley, a real historical figure convicted in his (and Garner's) native Cheshire and sentenced to exile in Australia. Once there, Buckley escapes and is abandoned for dead. But he is not dead: he is discovered by an aboriginal tribe, who accept him as one of their own. I will not say more about the plot here, but suffice to say that the novel echoes Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* and other novels of the "noble savage" tradition. But it is also heavily steeped in traditional English folklore, as well as the beautiful and inscrutable mythology of the aborigines.

Having said this, I must caution that *Strandloper* is not for all readers. If your preferences are for straightforward fantasy, this isn't that. If you're looking for "another Alan Garner novel", this isn't even *that*. Some reviewers have likened the prose style of *Strandloper* to that of William Faulkner, and the comparison is an apt one. If you find getting through Faulkner a bit difficult, then *Strandloper* is going to make you want to check into an asylum—or possibly chuck the book into the fire. Garner's deep, almost baptismal immersion, first into the folklore, then into an alien mythology is exactly that: immersive. The idiom is very difficult. Unfamiliar words and phrases are very many, and they are almost never defined. Reading the novel is not a passive act, the way reading most novels usually is; you have to take an active part in working to unravel its abstruse layers of narrative and meaning, and if that doesn't sound like much fun to you, then put down *Strandloper* and try something else—perhaps O'Brian's *Master and Commander*. But if this kind of engagement sounds rewarding, give it a try. *Strandloper* may be a tough nut to crack, but for me at least, it was very much worth the effort. ≡

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