

mythprint



The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

VOL.48 NO.8

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WHOLE NO.349



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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 discussion groups.

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Mythcon 42 Conference Report. By Sarah Beach.

I happened to arrive by train in Albuquerque on Thursday and got to the venue early. But my room was ready, and I was very happy for that. I had been overnight on the train from Los Angeles, and hadn't really slept well. That was due in part to lack of familiarity with the "feel" of train travel, but also in part because I've driven the I-20 several times, and was conscious of all the stops along the way and was curious about them. For those who are curious, a "roomette" on Amtrak is basically something like a closet with two facing armchairs and a window. But it cost me just about as much as a road-trip would have. And it turns out the food on the train was delicious. I ordered myself a chef salad in room service and unwound.

By evening time, it occurred to me that others would have arrived, and so I took myself and my complimentary drinks tickets down to the lounge and there found a handful of other early-arrived Mythies congregating.

Once the conference got rolling on Friday, it was an act of will to keep up with everything. Very stimulating papers. I missed more of Kyle Smith's paper on Dante and the comic book, *Spawn*, than I wanted. Hearing only the very end of it made me regret my late arrival. Alejandra Pires's paper on Zamyatin's *We* was intriguing, especially as she observed the book's influence on Orwell's *1984*. I was looking forward to Karla Powell's paper comparing fostering procedures and aims in Tolkien and in Alaskan Indigenous culture (particularly since it is an issue I have touched on in my own fiction). Sara Rivera gave an impressive paper on the dichotomy of human and divine in Tolkien, referencing the Hypostatic Union of Christ — not a small thing to tackle! I was then faced with the dilemma of what to attend next as both offerings appealed to me. But in the end, the Panel on the Impact of Modern Myth on Society lost to Hannah Thomas' thought-provoking apologia for Stephenie Meyer's

Twilight saga. Hannah took some time to analyze why, in spite of the mediocre writing in the saga, it has had such a strong appeal to mature women. A nicely done job on a challenging topic.

I was one of the hearty souls who went off to see the Harry Potter movie after the evening festivities. It was rather fun to be with friends. But since it was so very late when it ended, and even later by the time we got back to the hotel (about 1 a.m.), I folded myself up and slid into bed.

Michael Drout's Guest of Honor speech got off to a rousing start, since he heartily declaimed the opening lines of *Beowulf* in Anglo-Saxon! He brought a lot of wit and fun to his speech, and this held true of the rest of his interactions during the weekend. He was a delight to be around — he even put up with my request to take his picture with my Creature from the Black Lagoon figure, captioned "The Creature discusses his cousin Grendel with Michael Drout".

The rest of the day was a day of Tolkien papers for me: Harley Sims discussing Tolkien and *Beowulf* and imaginative reality; Sam McBride touching on the nature of the Valar (again, I missed a chunk of this due to talking over lunch — much to my regret); Doug Kane discussing laws and customs in Middle-earth (the legal perspective being a new one for me to encounter in Tolkien studies). These were all good, interesting, thought-provoking presentations. But they were followed by Verlyn Flieger's challenging paper on the perplexing nature of the Silmarils: her basic question was, if the stones are so connected to matters of light, why do they bring about so much darkness and death? I love how Verlyn finds such pointed questions to consider in Tolkien's material. Happily, there was a slight break between Verlyn's mind-bending paper and Don Williams's (third annual) essay on transcendental aspects of C.S. Lewis (this year's entry was Goodness).

For myself, Sunday's activities were taken more by the writing panels, where I got to listen to some interesting discussions about writing fantasy in a general sense. But I also moderated a panel on poetry with Joe Christopher, Don Williams, Don King and our author Guest of Honor, Catherynne Valente. We even had a modest but engaged audience for it! Although the discussion covered the general questions of why write in verse rather than prose for some things, the caper for me was when Cat read one of her own poems. She is an extraordinarily good dramatic reader of her own works, and I'm sure that occasion was as memorable for everyone else in the room as it was for me. She was delightful.

The evening festivities were, of course, festive.



"The Creature discusses his cousin Grendel with Michael Drout."
Photo by Sarah Beach.

Some fun food sculptures went round, and those devoted to her works particularly delighted Cat. (Report says she Tweeted about them almost immediately! How times have changed!) I'm sure others can give a better report of the opus from the Not Ready Players — I was laughing a lot, myself.

Monday for me brought Joe Christopher's interesting discussion of Lewis's references and non-references to Chaucer's "The Franklin's Tale" which highlighted how even such a scholar as Lewis can pussy-foot around a topic. And then it was time to wrap up the weekend. It came and went so fast. But it is always such a pleasure to see people at Mythcon and just have fun discussions. At one meal, I was chatting with Melody Green, and she thought my name seemed familiar, so she asked what, if anything, I'd written. I mentioned my book on mythic motifs, and various things I'd had published in *Mythlore*, and for some reason I mentioned my paper on Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*. It turned out that she had recommended this paper to some of her students — which gave me a momentary ego-boost. An unexpected treat. I also have to thank my friends for putting up with me inflicting my Creature from the Black Lagoon figure on them — I got quite a few fun pictures that way. ≡

Mythcon 42 Conference Report. By Doug Kane.

We arrived in Albuquerque late on Friday night, so we missed all of Friday's festivities. On Saturday morning, after a nice workout on the stationary bike, I heard someone call my name and saw a face that was familiar to me from pictures only — Verlyn Flieger. I was thrilled and a little embarrassed that she recognized me first; as those who have read the reviews of her books that I have written for this newsletter know, I admire her tremendously, so I was excited to meet her for the first time.

After a quick breakfast, we went in to the room where Mike Drout was just beginning his scholar keynote address. Mike was talking about

the effect that Tolkien's famous *Beowulf* essay had on *Beowulf* scholarship. He is an excellent speaker, and his talk was thoroughly enjoyable; even when discussing things that were clearly over my head, he was able to make them both interesting and understandable.

I next sat through a short paper called "The Return of the King's Journey" comparing Neil Gaiman's comic book character the Sandman to Aragorn. I'm afraid I did not get much out of it. However, after I left that paper, and was heading back to my room, I noticed that Verlyn was sitting at a table with a gentleman in the hotel restaurant. She invited me to join her and her friend Vaughn, and I proceeded to have a lovely discussion with her for the next hour about my book, how I came to write it, about her work, and sundry other topics. We ended up sitting at a table with them at lunch, and continued to have a lovely conversation.

I presented my paper that afternoon, after making a few last minute hand-written changes. Arriving a few minutes early, there were only a few people present, but people starting arriving quickly, and by the time it was time to start, the room was almost full, including both Verlyn and Mike Drout, and a few minutes into the paper, I noticed that there were even people standing in the back.

The title of the paper was "Laws and Customs of the Peoples of Middle-earth, Númenor, and Beyond" and basically it was a look at how Tolkien incorporated legal themes into his legendarium both to give his secondary world an additional sense of credibility (a credible green sun, as I quoted from "On Fairy-stories") and to advance some of his moral, philo-

sophical, and psychological concepts, as well as to demonstrate how his writing matured over the course of its development. I'm happy to say that the paper seemed to be well received, and sparked a very lively discussion, with both Verlyn and Mike asking several questions and adding to the discussion. It was quite satisfying. I also sold (and signed) four copies of the new paperback of *Arda Reconstructed*.



Doug Kane delivering his paper. Photo by Sarah Beach.

Next up was the paper that I was most looking forward to: not surprisingly the paper that Verlyn was presenting, entitled the “Jewels, the Stone, and the Ring”, a look at the differences and similarities in the roles that the Silmarils, the Arkenstone and the One Ring play in their respective stories. It was thoroughly enjoyable, and sparked a fascinating discussion. One big surprise is that she actually cited me in her paper, though to be honest I was so surprised, I didn’t note actually what it was that she cited me as saying!

The final paper that I attended that day was called “Who’s Telling this Tale?: Modern Precision—or Ambiguity—in the Narrator of *The Lord of the Rings*,” by Chip Crane. It was quite fascinating, actually. He took a very narrow topic — looking at the instances in *The Lord of the Rings* where Tolkien used the words “seems” and “as if” — and speculated on what the purpose of this usage was. An interesting point was that in many of the circumstances, Tolkien appeared to use that language in order to place the reader into the mindset of the characters, showing how things appeared to, particularly, Frodo and Sam. However, one significant place where this type of language was used was in Gollum’s near-redemption scene at the stairs of Cirith Ungol, and since both Hobbits were asleep at this time (until Sam woke up, with disastrous results), that could not be the case.

The next morning, there was an early panel that I wanted to see on *The Silmarillion*. Actually, it turned out that it wasn’t really a panel, it was a series of three short papers written by participants in an on-line seminar on *The Silmarillion* that was done by Professor Corey Olson (a fourth participant was not able

to make it). The first paper was on Nienna, and made some nice points about how her relationship with Olórin might have influenced Gandalf’s making the point to Frodo about the importance of Pity. The next paper was on Fëanor and Thingol’s pride, and the final paper was an interesting comparison between Abraham in the Old Testament and Aulë. Another interesting discussion ensued; one of the greatest features of these conferences is the free flow of ideas between the participants.

After a nice lunch, I attended a panel on the continuing relevance of the Inklings’ scholarship, moderated by David Bratman, and featuring Verlyn, Mike Drout, and Marek Oziewicz. Much of what Mike said seemed to cover the same ground that he had covered in more detail in his keynote speech, but Verlyn of course was very illuminating in discussing how she uses both the *Beowulf* essay and particularly the “On Fairy-stories” essay in her teaching (as well as how she uses some of Lewis’s essays, though she is much less of a Lewisophile). However, the real revelation was Marek, who was witty, funny and interjected a real jolt of energy into the proceedings.

At the banquet that evening we ended up at a table with Marek, and he introduced us to his father, who had come up specifically for the banquet. It soon became clear why when David Oberhelman, the awards coordinator, announced that before they presented the 2011 awards, they were going to present the award to the 2010 winner of the Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies, who had come from Poland — none other than Marek himself. He proceeded to make an incredibly moving speech about what it was like for him to read Tolkien and Lewis while growing up in communist Poland, and talked about how his father — who was sitting there at the table next to us — had been active in Solidarity and had been several times arrested and jailed. It was a totally electric moment. As I expected, the Inklings Scholarship award went to Michael Ward for his *Planet Narnia*, which actually many had expected to win last year, and was in its last year of eligibility.

For me the highlight of the keynote address that Catherynne M. Valente gave was the introductory remarks that she made, which she took right from Bilbo’s speech at the long-expected party — particularly when virtually everyone in the room called out “Proudfeet” at the appropriate moment.

All in all, it was a thoroughly enjoyable weekend. ≡



Bruce Leonard temps Gollum with some lembas.
Photo by Sarah Beach.

2011 MYTHOPOEIC AWARD WINNERS

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature

Karen Lord, *Redemption in Indigo* (Small Beer Press)

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children's Literature

Megan Whalen Turner, *The Queen's Thief* Series, consisting of *The Thief*, *The Queen of Attolia*, *The King of Attolia*, and *A Conspiracy of Kings* (Greenwillow Books)

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies

Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis* (Oxford, 2008)

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies

Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature is given to the fantasy novel, multi-volume, or single-author story collection for adults published during 2010 that best exemplifies "the spirit of the Inklings." Books are eligible for two years after publication if not selected as a finalist during the first year of eligibility. 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.

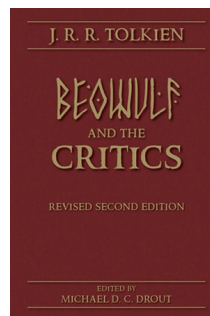
The Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies is given to books on Tolkien, Lewis, and/or Williams that make significant contributions to Inklings scholarship. For this award, books first published during the last three years (2008–2010) are eligible, including finalists for previous years. The 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.

The winners of this year's awards were announced at Mythcon XLII in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on July 17, 2011. A complete list of past Mythopoeic Award winners and finalists, the text of recent acceptance speeches, and selected book reviews are available on the Society web site at:

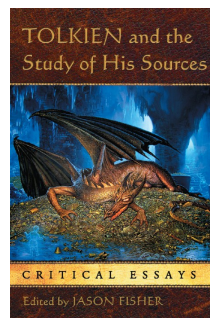
For more information about the Mythopoeic Awards, please contact the Awards Administrator:

David D. Oberhelman

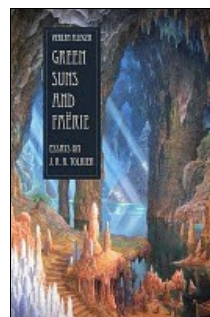
NEW AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS



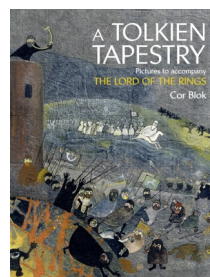
J.R.R. Tolkien. *Beowulf and the Critics* (Revised Second Edition). Edited by Michael D.C. Drout. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. 480 pp. \$58.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0866984508. July, 2011.



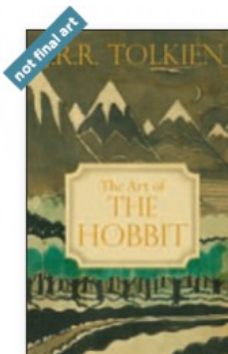
Jason Fisher, ed. *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources: Critical Essays*. 240 pp. \$40.00 (softcover). ISBN 978-0786464821. July, 2011.



Verlyn Flieger. *Green Suns and Faërie: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien*. Kent State UP. 224 pp. \$24.95 (softcover). ISBN 978-1606350942. August, 2011.



Cor Block. *A Tolkien Tapestry: Pictures to accompany The Lord of the Rings*. HarperCollins. 160 pp. £20.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0007437986. September, 2011.



Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull. *The Art of The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien. HarperCollins. 144 pp. (hardcover). ISBN 978-000744081-8. October, 2011.

Sheri S. Tepper. *The Waters Rising*. Harper Voyager, 2010. 512 pp. \$26.99 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0061958878. Reviewed by Sara R. Thompson.

The Waters Rising (TWR) is a sequel to *Plague of Angels*, but it stands pretty firmly on its own, and a new reader to the series — according to the author's website, [REDACTED], Tepper plans at least a third book, *Fish Tales* — should find it accessible. The wandering, slightly mysterious, but knowledgeable, Abasio from the first book is an important character in TWR, but enough of his history is revealed that he is not any more confusing than he is designed to be.

TWR begins with lists of characters and places, as well as a map. I used the lists initially, but the book is well enough written I was able to dispense with them fairly quickly. The map was useful in picturing the setting, though the locales where much of the early action takes place are in a geographically small area that Tepper does not enlarge on the map, so some areas are, frustratingly, omitted.

The book encompasses journey/quest and coming-of-age themes. The young person who comes of age in TWR is Xulai, a girl whom the reader meets via Abasio. He, along with his talking horse Blue (shades of Lewis's Bree) is travelling further north than typical. Xulai is in service to an incapacitated princess of Woldgard who has telepathically asked Xulai to retrieve an object from the forest. The task frightens the girl as there are real and psychological terrors in the forest. Abasio helps Xulai gather her courage, she retrieves the object for the princess, who bids Xulai to swallow it, and then the princess dies.

Xulai and the princess's husband, Duke Justinian who rules Woldgard, mourn, but also begin preparing to leave the area. Abasio and Blue remain at Woldgard, and we meet other key characters via them, particularly Precious Wind and Bear, two Tingawans from that far south island who are guardians of Xulai, who is also apparently Tingawan. It unfolds that the princess was cursed but withstood the effect for many years. Now her curser, presumably Queen Marami of the neighboring Ghastian Highlands, or her daughter Alicia, may be coming after Xulai or the Duke.

The journey/quest to Tingawa is launched fairly quickly, with important stops and battles on the way for the fairly large retinue that accompanies Xulai. In a typical story arc, the travelers have internal squabbles, and the company splinters several times, with some members never to return. In the course of the journey Xulai sheds her childhood and suddenly becomes a young woman, which complicates her emo-

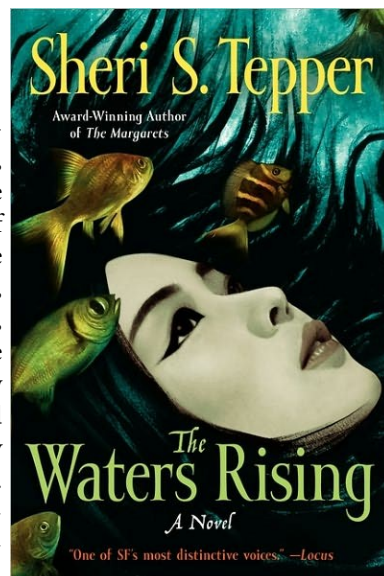
tions and Abasio's.

I thoroughly enjoyed the introduction, and particularly the journey portion, of *The Waters Rising*. The journey was exciting, and held my interest, and Tepper does a fine job of unfolding new wonders, terrors and information, especially through Xulai's eyes. The narrator is omniscient, but we see mostly through the Tingawans, who are clearly the "good guys", with some notable excursions into the minds of the evil women, who it turns out are not precisely human. There is a lengthy, satisfyingly horrific, subplot about these women and how they came to be created.

The latter third of the book, once Xulai and the others arrive in Tingawa, seems almost like a separate novel. The sections of the book could be tied together more clearly. It is in this latter section that Tepper reveals more about the setting, and we realize it is a post-Apocalyptic civilization, where the ice caps are melting and the ocean waters are rising. Tingawans, one of the pockets of civilization that have retained some pre-disaster biological and technological knowledge, are working, often with sentient marine species, to survive the oncoming floods. Some of the work involves interspecies reproduction. Tepper is quite explicit about her sociopolitical messages in this section of the novel. I often agree with her (I first heard of her when she was a Director of Planned Parenthood in Colorado in the 1980s, and read her *The Gate to Women's Country because of that*), but she can get just a bit preachy.

Per Harley Sims's fascinating review of Mark Rosenfelder's *The Language Construction Kit* in *Mythprint* #339, I would say that Tepper's Tingawan language, smatterings of which appear throughout TWR, does not follow a language's logic. It seems a bit Chinese, with the "sh" for x, but there are not enough words to be sure. However, the occasional word in another language lends a slightly exotic touch to the narrative.

The Waters Rising is a competent fantasy novel overall. It is a good read, despite some of the limitations discussed above. [Note: *The Waters Rising* is now newly available in softcover.] ≡



An Interview with Sheri S. Tepper. By Zach Watkins and Leslie A. Donovan.

What impacted your decision to turn to writing as a career? Had you wanted to be a writer throughout your life or did your interest in writing your own stories develop from some experience you had later in your life?

When I was a senior in high school, my parents asked me where I wanted to go to college, and I mentioned a school which had a very highly regarded creative writing course. I had been fortunate enough to have a marvelous English teacher for all four years of high school — though it was a very small high school. She had been very encouraging of my efforts and had hoped I would go on to study the field.

Yet, I was told in no uncertain terms that the college I had selected was too far from home for a girl. I don't know why they had bothered to ask, for they made arrangements to send me to a two-year girls' junior college which did not even have a creative writing course. (My brother, four years younger, was sent to the college I had chosen for myself — I don't know why, except that I had wanted to go there. He lasted about three months, came home, never left.) The main task of the junior college was to match girls up with likely husbands — or so it seemed to me. I ended up fulfilling prophesy, marrying at the end of a year and half and having two children at an appropriate interval thereafter.

I wrote — now, then, here, there — nothing good, nothing lasting, just boiling over at intervals. At the end of six years of marriage, I divorced and was responsible for the support of my two children. One does not do that by writing. One does that by working. I worked at a dozen different things — typing here, filing there, letter writing here, letter answering there. I was hired as an

assistant in the regional CARE office and later ran that office.

It was not a stimulating job. After several years of it, a friend mentioned that Planned Parenthood was looking for an executive director. I interviewed for the job, but was rejected in favor of a woman with "lobbying experience." Three months later, they called me back. Lobbying hadn't been enough, after all. I called the New York Office of CARE and told them I was leaving. They asked me to interview candidates for my replacement. I had two. One was a woman about my age with two children to support. The only other candidate was a retired Army major, on full retirement pay, with a wife who was employed and no children. The personnel manager at CARE told me, "Hire the man. Offer him XXX dollars. I know that's more than we've been paying you, but he's a man." Do I remember the man's name at CARE? Oh my, yes. I'm sure he's dead by now. I visualize him being pitchforked into the flames by very female demons. As I recall, I said, "Find him and hire him yourself," before hanging up, putting on my coat, and leaving the office, never to return.

The Planned Parenthood job was alternately stimulating, agitating, irritating, enthralling, inspiring, demeaning. The "anti's" reveled in demonizing anyone who thought there could possibly be a population problem or too many children for a family to feed. We were working very hard to get contraceptive services introduced into the post-partum clinics of the local public hospitals and to get public funding for them. It was a tiring job, rewarding in itself, but still, after the kids' homework was done and I had a few hours before bed, I wrote. Nothing lasting, nothing great. I sent some verses and one story to Fred Pohl, which he was nice enough to buy. During that entire time, I read science fiction



Sheri S. Tepper was born in 1929 in Littleton, Colorado. She is a prolific writer, having published more than 50 novels in multiple genres in slightly less than 30 years. Tepper started her writing career relatively late in life, publishing her first full-length novels when she was in her fifties. Before that, she had been a single mom, worked as a clerical worker for CARE, and then had a 24-year career at Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood as that organization's Executive Director.

While Tepper is most known for her science fiction and fantasy novels, she also has published works of horror and mysteries under the pseudonyms E. E. Horlak, B. J. Oliphant, and A. J. Orde. Her 1991 novel *Beauty* won both the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award and the Locus Award for Best Fantasy. In addition, Tepper's works have earned her numerous Locus award nominations and recognition as a finalist for the Hugo, World Fantasy, John W. Campbell Memorial, Arthur C. Clark, and James Tiptree, Jr. awards. Although at 82 years old, Ms. Tepper now suffers from severe arthritis which makes it difficult for her to leave her home, she agreed to conduct this interview via email with the authors.

and fantasy, bored my acquaintances by asking for their opinion of whatever I'd written last. During all that time, I was very conscious that I had no idea what I was doing. I considered taking courses at night, but the workload of being a full-time worker plus a full-time mom was simply too heavy.

So things went for some twenty years. I had remarried (to one of the nicest guys on this green earth) and I was approaching fifty. I decided that if I were ever going to write a book that was halfway decent, now that the children were grown and gone and the financial pressure was shared, this was the time. I began work on a book I called *A Remnant in Orena*. When it was finished, typed for the umpteenth time (I had an electric typewriter, but not yet a computer), I sent it away.

Into vacuum. Into deep space. Into oblivion.

I had sent a box and stamps. I burned. Seethed. After six months I finally called the publisher and talked to the person involved who said, "Ooh. That was rather well written, but it was far too long and too involved to publish by an unknown writer. If you could send me something more accessible..."

I sat down and wrote the first four chapters of *King's Blood Four* in the next four nights. I sent them to her. She replied, "Give me the rest of this, with two more like it, and we'll buy the other one."

That was the True Game series. *King's Blood Four*, *Necromancer Nine*, *Wizard's Eleven*. Followed by the Jinian Footseer books. Followed by the Maven Manyshaped books. Each triplet of them actually made a nice volume, and the first book was published as *The Revenants*. A friend of mine suggested an agent she knew in New York, and that person agreed to represent me. It was she who suggested all the other little books of that time under various other names.

During that time, I worked on books I considered of two types, one more difficult than the other. Whenever I ran out of steam on a tough one, I wrote an easier one, but both, more or less, in the same genre. My first agent passed away, I wrote to several others, one very nice man accepted the job and is still doing it. He called one day to say the publishers didn't want any more of the little books, that people expected the bigger, tougher ones from me. I said, but I need to write the little ones, so I get a rest. What about writing mysteries? So I did, and we did two series of those under the Oliphant and Orde names.

Actually, the little fantasy books weren't all that little. They are truer in philosophy and morality than some of the others.

While Mythprint readers are most interested in fantasy, a great many also regularly read science fiction. When you are working on a new book project, do you think about which genre you want to work in or does the story simply spin itself toward one or the other? Which elements of plot, character, or theme do you consider central to these genres? Why do you find yourself drawn to them in your writing?

There is no real difference between science fiction and fantasy. There are a few conventional differences. Science fiction forbids magic. Fantasy frowns on machines. Both of them allow horses. If proper adjustments were made as to bone constituency and wingspan, science fiction would allow flying horses. Both genres usually invent an alternate world. In one, there is a lot of technology; in the other, little or none. I think it's more that the world out there may assign my books to one or another category than that I do. PURE science fiction, however, wants stories based on technology, and that I can't do, because I'm not a technician.

I'm a futurist, however. Years before tissue typing was done, I remember telling a doctor on the Board of Directors of Planned Parenthood that we would soon be doing tissue matching (he had been talking about the difficulty of transplants) and he pooh-poohed me, saying, "You don't know what you're talking about; except for blood type there's no difference." I have always said there are billions of planets out there, since simple reason says there must be because no creator with any sense would go to all that trouble for one measly planet full of contentious life forms. Since high school, I've said we're going to have a big, big problem with overpopulation. I know that to be true. I also know that the biggest problem humans have is religion, because all religions control their adherents by postulating an afterlife in another world. This effectively allows the destruction of their present one. I believe the creator (gender, age, purpose, existence all unknown) will notice that fact and cross *homo* so-called *sapiens* off its list for all future universes. I have a fairly simple universe view: the purpose of the universe is life; the purpose of life is intelligence; the purpose of intelligence is language; the purpose of language is communication; the purpose of communication is discovery; the purpose of discovery is the universe (or another one). ≡

This interview will be concluded in the September issue of *Mythprint*.

Arne Zettersten. *J.R.R. Tolkien's Double Worlds and Creative Process: Language and Life*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. 256pp. £52.00 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0230623149. Reviewed by Andrew Higgins.

Like many, if not all, of you I am always on the lookout for new books about J.R.R. Tolkien. I probably hit the Amazon search button two or three times a week to see what is both out there already and on the horizon. (You'd think they'd have a twelve step program for this!) So it gave me great delight some months ago to see that Professor Arne Zettersten's new book on Tolkien was available for pre-order. At the same time as this rush of excitement I also had that usual tedious inner dialogue with myself regarding rationalizing the price for this book against other projected expenditures like rent, food, the dog, etc. As I remember, the internal dialogue for this book went on a bit — not as long as the continuing one for purchasing an original copy of *The Songs for the Philologists* — but finally my mind rang with “YOU SHALL BUY”, and I ordered it.

Before his retirement from teaching, Zettersten was a Professor of English at the University of Copenhagen. What probably tipped my purchasing decision over the edge was the fact that Zettersten is one of those fast-fading people who actually knew and worked with Professor Tolkien. Zettersten gave the keynote lecture at the 2004 Blackwelder conference at Marquette, where he discussed his work with Tolkien in the 1960–70s. At the time, Zettersten was working on his doctoral thesis on the AB language, a term coined by Tolkien to describe the dialect of a series of works in Early Middle English (e.g., the Katherine Group and the Ancrene Wisse), connecting them to the West Midlands, the area of England that interested Tolkien most, both linguistically and historically.

Zettersten's book is an incredibly focused blending of personal reminiscence and a biographical sketch that includes the greatest emphasis and discussion I have seen to date on Tolkien's philological development. He also gives an in-depth analysis of Tol-

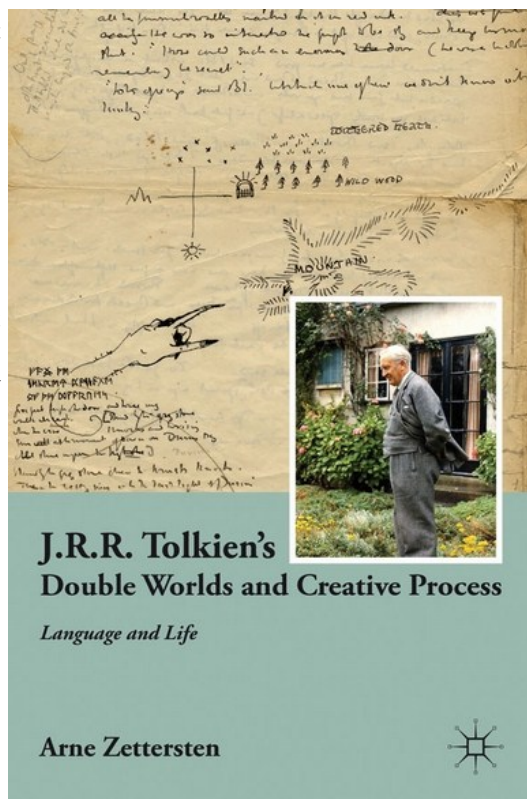
kien's professional and academic work and his parallel work on his legendarium. It is from this analysis and personal experience that Zettersten draws one of the key conclusions of the book, a conclusion I felt made the book worth the price of purchase — but more on that later.

The very cover of the book sets the tone for this exploration: a hand-sketched map from *The Hobbit* with an inset picture of Tolkien from the 1960s in his garden. The book starts with Zettersten's reminiscence of his first meeting with Tolkien in June, 1961. It is a scene I am sure every Tolkien lover has fantasized about — the walk up to the front of 76 Sandfield Road, the first glimpse of Tolkien standing by the garage (that garage with all its documents, maps, and some yet still to be revealed secrets!), and Tolkien offering him a cup of tea and saying, “Mr. Zettersten, do come in.” This was the first of Zettersten's meetings with Tolkien, which would continue up to Tol-

kien's death in 1973. As Zettersten points out, their shared love of languages, those of the primary and Tolkien's secondary world, and their depth of friendship resulted in Tolkien in the last year of his life asking Zettersten to call him “Ronald” (which Tolkien reserved “for my near kin” only (Letter #309). In addition, in March, 1973 Tolkien wrote a letter to Zettersten addressing him, “Dear Arne.”

While the biographical sketch (which covers close to ten chapters) does have strong echoes of the key Tolkien biographies we already have (Carpenter, White, and John Garth's excellent work on Tolkien and the Great War), Zettersten gives us a much more focused analysis of Tolkien's academic and philological development and especially the key role his mother Mabel Tolkien née

Suffield played in this. According to Zettersten, Mabel Tolkien was a lover of language, calligraphy and drawing — all loves and talents passed on to her son Ronald. Zettersten gives an example of this with a Christmas card Mabel wrote in 1893 on behalf of the then two-year old Ronald to his father in South Africa (a precursor to her son's later Father Christmas letters perhaps?). The card includes a rendering of “baby



speech” including “Toekins” for “Tolkien (babies have a hard time saying the letter l)”. As Zettersten says, “She taught him to read, write, draw and paint. She instructed him in both classical and modern languages. She placed the right books in his hands at a very early age and practised the precise and ornamental handwriting that was characteristic of him.” While this is certainly not new knowledge, what I found interesting is the emphasis on Mabel’s love and experience with languages *herself* before passing it on to Ronald. Zettersten brings Mabel Tolkien the person out of the shadows a bit more and emphasizes that very early bond between Mabel and her son — cut tragically short by Mabel’s death in that postman’s cottage at Rednal in 1904.

Another new area of insight that comes out of Zettersten’s work is through his focus on Tolkien’s ability to live in different worlds at the same time (the “double worlds” of the book’s title). Zettersten observes that in his meetings with him, Tolkien could suddenly move from the primary to his secondary world without the slightest difficulty or doubt and he did this with same rapidity that one would switch from one language to another. Zettersten uses the linguistic term “code switching” to describe this ability. He traces the development of this gift back to Tolkien’s early development (for example, his use of the Gothic language to construct new Gothic-inspired words for his very early languages) and up through his research work in the 1920s for the Oxford English Dictionary. For example, parts of drafts of *The Fall of Gondolin* were written on slips he used for researching the word *wariangle* (a kind of shrike) for the dictionary.

Zettersten’s main point here, and this is what I

thought was so revelatory in the entire book, is the effect Tolkien’s remarkable ability to switch between the “real” world and his secondary world had on the quality and depth of his work in both worlds. This “code switching” allowed him to put as much focus and emphasis on the history, language and culture of Middle Earth as he did on the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic literature and culture he taught and researched in the primary world. He had the remarkable ability to hold both these worlds in his grasp and to be able to discuss, debate, and explore each of them almost simultaneously. The primary world complimented and enriched his secondary world. Tolkien’s work as an academic and scholar gave him the process and methodology for the development of his secondary world, and his work on his secondary world informed his love and passion for the primary world and its “Northern Spirit.” While others may have frowned on Tolkien’s “waste of time” building a fantasy world, it seems clear from Zettersten that to Tolkien there was no division, they were in the same mold, and each was as important as the other. An area of Tolkien studies that perhaps could do with more focus and investigation!

I always judged the value of a scholarly work on the amount of highlighting I have done in it, and I must say at the first pass through this book (and there will be others), I would give it high marks all around. The appendices offer a good summary of the key points from each chapter and Zettersten gives some interesting insights into the screen versions of *The Lord of the Rings* (in the preface Zettersten states that Sir Ian McKellen — Gandalf — gave him some insights!).

This book includes some interesting illustrations and pictures of documents, including a photo of a handwritten page showing Tolkien’s time scheme for *The Lord of the Rings* (currently in the Marquette University Tolkien Collection). There are also some very useful charts, including a list of the books in Tolkien’s private collection when he was a student at Oxford (donated by the Tolkien family to the Bodleian library in 1982).

There is much more to dig into in this book and, speaking as an amateur Tolkien academic and philologist (who certainly lives in the primary world but takes extended visits to Tolkien’s secondary world), I would highly recommend Arne Zettersten’s book to all lovers, students, and aficionados of Tolkien’s works, in both primary and secondary worlds. I do hope other reminiscences from Professor Zettersten are on the horizon! ≡



“The Creature acknowledges that Thor is a god.”
Photo by Sarah Beach.

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