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Editorial

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Online MidSummer Seminar 2025

More Perilous and Fair: Women and Gender in Mythopoeic Fantasy

August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

OUR PAPERS IN THIS ISSUE explore connections between love, sexual conduct, evil, immortality, creation, and desire.

We lead with Andrew Lazo's keynote address from Mythcon 47, a riveting study of the place of mythology in ancient, medieval, and modern literature, the responses of Lewis and Tolkien to Modernity, and a meditation on Lewis's thoughts on joy and the varieties of love in *Surprised by Joy*, the Narnia books, *The Four Loves*, and especially *Till We Have Faces*, for which Lazo offers an insightful reading of the concluding pages.

Nicole duPlessis then takes us to Middle-earth to study Tolkien's thoughts on love and marriage as expressed through the Ents and Entwives. Our understanding of their relationship and long sundering is enriched by considering Lewis's thoughts in *The Four Loves* on *philia* and *eros*, yet in the end both Tolkien's lived experience of marriage and parenthood and his Catholic background enhance his picture of the Ents with more realism than Lewis's somewhat (pre-Joy) theoretical approach.

We turn to a less pleasant face of *eros* with Joseph Young's paper on sexual characterization in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. It would be difficult to consider the behavior of any character in Martin's world of "gritty medievalism" beyond reproach. Yet there are subtleties in the intents and effects of their sexual conduct (or misconduct) that grant us, as readers, more than mere titillation: increased insight into his characters and themes.

Seduction is often connected to *eros*, but Tolkien generally uses the term in a broader fashion, as Maria Alberto suggests in her essay on evil in his legendarium. A theoretical underpinning based on medieval sources, Baudrillard, and Catholic thought provides a basis for understanding how characters may be led astray from their proper paths, and how Tolkien's critique of the domination of other wills is demonstrated in these cases.

My own paper more directly grapples with the issue of evil in Tolkien's work—not as much with its origins and methods as with its decline in power through the ages of Arda, and how this is connected with phases of the development of language as described by Northrop Frye and Owen Barfield.

With Wayne A. Chandler and Carrol L. Fry's essay, we turn to the topic of immortality and its involvement in the "emotional truth" (95) of Tolkien's backstory, a truth which draws us as readers into a world in which longing and loss, death and deathlessness, are the foundation of a sub-created world that we as readers desire.

Benjamin C. Parker then takes us to another sub-created world, the solar system of Lewis's *Cosmic Trilogy*, teasing out parallels to Thomas More's *Utopia* to show how Lewis's scholarly engagement with this text informs his depictions of Malacandra, Perelandra, and the smaller world of the N.I.C.E.

Desire, in the form of the yearning and compelling urge to create, is the topic of John Rosegrant's speculative but compelling reading of Tolkien's recurring "Atlantis-complex" dream, his "exorcising" of it through its use as a recurring theme in his writing, and the underlying tangle of hubris, loss, and father/son issues that might well be the source of this vision.

And desire is also at the heart of our concluding essay, Kelly Kramer's study of Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*. Grossman's trilogy, and particularly the first novel, is in her reading centered around the theme of unfulfilled and unfulfillable desire—the depressed main character Quentin's inability to find anything that will ease his disillusionment and grant him lasting happiness. Here we see the dark side of the escape that fairy tales offer; Quentin appears to seek the "flight of the deserter" rather than the "escape of the prisoner."

We conclude, as usual, with a diverse group of reviews. With this issue we mark the beginning of a three-year period of golden anniversaries: of the Society this year, of the initial founding of *Mythlore* next year, and of our annual conference in 2019. As part of this celebration we will occasionally reprint artwork from earlier volumes of *Mythlore*; in this issue, two pieces by Patrick Wynne.

If you would like to keep up with news relating to *Mythlore*, please follow us on Facebook, where we post advance notice of items accepted for upcoming issues, renewal reminders, and so forth. Watch this summer for news of a new editorial management platform for paper submissions, and of our archival arrangement with Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

The Mythlore Index Plus, which covers *Mythlore*, *Tolkien Journal*, published Mythcon proceedings, and books published by Mythopoeic Press, is available as a free .pdf file; download it, and order back issues, at <http://www.mythsoc.org>.

Please note the Call for Papers for a special issue of *Mythlore* on Divination in Mythopoeic Literature, to appear in Spring 2018 with guest editor Emily E. Auger. Details can be found on page 170 of this issue. If you are involved with a conference related to fantasy literature or teaching a course and would like to have print copies of older issues of *Mythlore* to distribute, please contact the editor at mythlore@mythsoc.org.

In addition to the members of the *Mythlore* Advisory Board, the Mythopoeic Society Council of Stewards, and our ever-dependable referees, I would also like to thank David Emerson for his assistance with proofreading and source-checking this issue.

—Janet Brennan Croft