

FANTASY * GOES TO * HELL

Mythopoeic Society
ONLINE MIDSUMMER SEMINAR
5-6 AUGUST 2023

PROGRAM BOOK

Mythopoeic Society Online Midsummer Seminar:

August 5-6, 2023

“Fantasy Goes to Hell”

Chairs: Janet Brennan Croft and Erin Giannini

HELL IN MODERN FANTASY is usually a far cry from traditional depictions in major world religions—the dry and dusty hells of ancient Mesopotamia and the Classical world, the ambiguous Hel of the Norse, the fiery pit and everlasting torment of medieval Christianity and Islam, the purgatorial hells of reincarnative religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. How do creators of fantasy imagine Hell differently? And more importantly, why? What do these depictions have to tell us about what is hellish in our modern world? In our call for papers for this seminar, we provided a number of prompts for potential presenters:

- The mystical spiritual descent: What can be gained from a descent to hell
- The escape from hell: What is saved, and what is left behind
- The harrowing of hell: The rescue of others from hell
- The pact with hell: Self-damnation or turning the tables
- The intersection of race, racism, and hell
- Hellish places
- The influence of fantastic literary and artistic ur-texts about Hell
- The primary world as Hell

We said that we were interested in in ANY form of media—text, graphic novels, television, movies, music and music videos, games—as long as it could be described as fantasy and includes a hell or its denizens. Some texts that are considered by our presenters include:

- C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*
- J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion* and broader legendarium (and TV’s *Rings of Power*)
- Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman’s *Good Omens* (book and television series)
- Other television series: *Supernatural*, *The Good Place*, *Xena*
- Movies: *The Sentinel*, *Fantasia*
- Games: *World of Warcraft*, *Gears of War*, *Elder Scrolls*
- Dante – lots and lots of Dante!

FANTASY GOES TO HELL was originally intended to be our 2023 Midwinter Seminar, but our plans for an in-person Mythcon in 2023 fell through, and the topic proved to be so popular it strained the resources we had available for a seminar. Hence we proposed that we expand the seminar into what we have previously called a “Halfling Mythcon”—a virtual Mythcon taking the place of an in-person one. **FANTASY GOES TO HELL** will run in parallel with general virtual conference tracks devoted to other topics in Mythopoeic Fantasy, such as presentations by award nominees and traditional after-hours programming. The 2023 Online Midsummer Seminar will also include the presentation of the annual Mythopoeic Society Awards and Alexei Kondratiev Student Paper Award on Sunday morning.

Presenters are encouraged to submit finished papers to *Mythlore* by September 30, 2023, for potential inclusion in a special issue in Spring 2024. Please see the *Mythlore* Style Guide and submit at <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/>. All presentations for which we have permission will be recorded and made available at <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythsoc/>.

Paper abstracts

Animated Dancing to Hell and Back: Disney's *Fantasia*

Matthew Elfenbein: Saturday, Session III, Track 3

Imaginative images of Heaven and Hell capture the sociocultural engagement with Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), which demonstrates animated dancing bodies to represent the descent and passage of the hero's journey. This journey is presented with many different forms of conflict and images that become unique through the qualities of the animated screendance. This form of dance on film is accentuated by the visualization of imaginative bodies, a conflict between knowledge and curiosity, and the spectacle of layering images on top of symbolic meanings to emphasize the power of identification with the audience. The spectators of this film are engaged with the images and music, primarily through the two sequences in question: *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* and *Night on Bald Mountain/Ave Maria*. These two cartoons represent images of Hell, the barriers it places on the dancing body, and the lessons of morality. The bodies that fill these scenes also present mythological hybridity, yet in a manner that evokes more terror and curiosity through the imagination of watching soulless brooms or demons flitting along the screen. The effects on the senses and affective emotions are products of animation's ability to visualize and force believability of the dance onto the audiences, who are identifying and feeling for these characters. This paper utilizes theories of the Screendance, animation practices specifically from Walt Disney, and cinema's ability to signify and project powerful meanings onto the images seemingly brought to life to showcase the mythological hero and Hellish bodies that are byproducts of the experience.

C.S. Lewis's *Inferno*: Did the Two Queens Wish to Leave Hell?

Kyoko Yuasa: Saturday, Session VIII, Track 3

C.S. Lewis depicts "inferno" not only as the otherworldly vision of Hell, but also as how you would choose your life in the present. In *Beyond the Shadowlands*, Wayne Martindale discussed, in separate chapters, how Jadis and Orual chose Hell. This presentation will add to his research a comparison of the two queens' choice of "living in the self" and refusal to abandon themselves. In *The Great Divorce* and *The Silver Chair*, a protagonist moves out of the present world into a dimension of Inferno or Elysium, while Jadis in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and Orual in *Till We Have Faces* persist in their belief in the self. In *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis translated "living in the self" as "an appendage of the self," which can be vindicated by the word habitually used by both Jadis and Orual: "mine." An analysis of their repetition of "mine" will lead to a response to the question of whether the two queens wished to come out of Hell.

C.S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair*: Descent, Destiny, and Discipleship in the Deep Realm and Beyond

Aven Lumi Whitehorne: Saturday, Session VII, Track 3 CANCELLED

This paper will explore the descent and underworld journey of Eustace Scrubb, Jill Pole, and Puddleglum the Marsh-wiggle in C.S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair*, amplifying themes which indicate that Lewis's *The Silver Chair* distills Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* for young

readers. I use a Campbellian lens to discuss why Lewis set the climax of his adventure in the profane underworld ruled by the Queen of the Deep Realm. Through Bonhoeffer's notion of "cheap grace," Biblical parallels, connections to *Paradise Lost*, and contrasts with Dante's *Inferno*, we will explore the journey to the underworld and the descent into it. We will also consider what the metanoias experienced by Eustace, Jill, and Puddleglum could teach Lewis's young readers about faith, discipleship, and temptation.

Cloaked in Shadow: The Biopolitics of Sauron's Middle-Hell

Journey Cotton: Sunday, Session III, Track 3

This paper considers hellish aspects of *The Lord of the Rings* through an environmental bioethical framework focusing on the intersection of biopolitics, race, and ecology. Key figures that shall be examined include Sauron, Saruman, Uruk-hai, and the body of Middle-earth. Sauron shall be read as a Hades figure; they share numerous connections, such as their domain is hell, influence over invisibility (Hades' cloak and Sauron's Ring), characterization of giver of gifts, possession of dead bodies, and connection to the earth's fertility (or lack). Sauron's possession over dead bodies arises from the necropolitical power he incites over bodies in his sphere which causes them to exist in a state of living death. This biopolitical state inspires Sauron's underlings, such as Saruman, to enact racially charged genetic experimentation on the bodies to create the Uruk-hai, whilst simultaneously degrading and ruining the ecological balance of Isengard and thus the body of Middle-earth. A hell on Middle-earth, or 'Middle-hell', is created through the enactment of unethical biopolitics that harm the bodies and ecology of Middle-earth. Reading the hellish landscapes in Middle-earth through an environmental bioethical lens may allow readings that explore the intersections arising therein.

Denethor's Descent into Hell

Craig Boyd: Saturday, Session II, Track 3

One character in Tolkien's *Legendarium* stands out as one of the more morally sad and complicated individuals: Denethor, the Steward of Gondor. Although he tries to defend the kingdom he cares for, his own significant moral weaknesses subvert even the best of his intentions. His despair, provoked by the death of his favorite son—and the apparent death of his other son—sends him into a spiral of self-destructive harm from which there is no return. What accounts for this are three factors. First, his self-imposed isolation from others cuts him off from the necessary fellowship that could sustain his character; his rejection, for example, of the help that Gandalf and others offer him. This is further complicated by his solitary use of the Palantír alone in the tower. Second, his arrogance in thinking that he, and only he, knows how things will inevitably transpire seen in his derision of anyone who disagrees with him, "a fool." And third, the despair in assuming that the good he desires—the salvation of his kingdom—is no longer a viable possibility. His death by suicide is a kind of self-imposed, isolated hell of his own making.

The Dimensions of Damnation: Redefining the Geography and Spatial Boundaries of Hell in Modern Entertainment

Houston Howard: Sunday, Session V, Track 1 CANCELLED

This presentation delves into the intricate exploration of the spatial boundaries of Hell in modern fantasy literature and its diverse mediums. By analyzing the works of renowned authors and creators, this research aims to shed light on how they challenge and redefine traditional notions of Hell's physical geography, examining the possibilities for escape, transcendence, and alternative realms within Hellish settings. Moreover, it investigates the profound influence of the creators' worldview and religious views on the spatial depiction of Hell. Through a multidimensional analysis, I will delve into specific examples across a variety of media forms, such as literature, graphic novels, television, movies, and gaming. Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* graphic novel series, Clive Barker's *The Hellbound Heart* and its film adaptation *Hellraiser*, the television series *Lucifer*, and the video game *Dante's Inferno* serve as exemplary case studies, showcasing the diverse approaches in reshaping the geography of damnation. This presentation highlights how the creators' worldview and religious views inform their depictions of Hell, influencing the concepts of punishment, redemption, and the possibilities for transcendence within Hellish settings. By exploring the spatial boundaries of Hell, this presentation uncovers the intricacies of the human imagination and its ability to challenge conventional narratives, inviting readers, viewers, and players to question traditional conceptions and engage with the moral dilemmas embedded within these Hellish realms. The findings of this presentation contribute to the scholarly understanding of the modern fantasy genre, providing fresh insights into the complex relationship between spatiality, religious beliefs, and creative expression.

Feasting at the Threshold: Transubstantiation, Queer Desire, and Homonationalism in Diane Duane's *The Tale of the Five*

Taylor Driggers: Saturday, Session II, Track 4

Diane Duane's ongoing pulp fantasy series *The Tale of the Five* (1979-) is set in a world marked by constant bodily transgressions and surprises, where a human and dragon can occupy the same body and become lovers and a one-night stand can bring one face-to-face with God. This essay will argue that Duane's series articulates eroticism in a manner comparable to Linn Marie Tonstad's (2016) queer re-visioning of transubstantiation and bodily and spiritual transformation through the Eucharist. Acts of eating and drinking serve to highlight how characters' pansexual, polyamorous relations with each other and the love of the Goddess spill over into and amplify one another, constructing a theology premised on transformative pleasure. These aspects of Duane's worldbuilding, however, exist in uneasy tension with the series' increasing narrative concern with the maintenance of noble bloodlines and divinely sanctioned hereditary monarchies, which transforms a potentially radical queer eucharistic theology into something uncomfortably close to what Jasbir K. Puar (2007) has described as 'homonationalism'. These tendencies in Duane's writing highlight the need for fantasy's queer theological imaginaries to be attentive to the ways religious identity, desire, and nationhood serve as mutually constitutive and socially regulating forces, lest queerness become recuperated as an extension of Western theological triumphalism rather than its dissolution.

Frights and Forests: The Hellish Landscape of the Dark Forest, From Sleepy Hollow to the Forest of Arden

Minna Nizam: Sunday, Session VIII, Track 4

This paper seeks to explore forest settings in fantasy, and its hellish landscapes. From the headless horseman in Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, to the frights and horrors of mythical creatures in fantasy settings placed in forests. The purpose of this study is to dive deep into the fear of the forest, its early days in storytelling, to more modern renditions. Sources used will be primarily books, and texts within books, such as *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and much more.

From Fiery Pit of Divine Fire to the Watery Caves of Primordial Chaos: The Realm of the Dead, a New Hell of a Place

Gaëlle Abaléa: Sunday, Session II, Track 4

Representations of hell used to have an educational purpose, they conveyed edifying messages: be good or you will suffer for all eternity. Since the rise of psychology, the representations of Hell have evolved, losing their religious content yet, paradoxically, enduring. If they lost their religious purpose, they kept an ancient mythological architecture. Garth Nix's Old Kingdom series' depiction of Hell is at the same time Greek, with the river running as an entry point to the realm of the dead, adding a Bachelardian influence to the picture with the omnipresence of water. Besides, travelling through hell is a journey through successive gates, a more Dantesque element. The series by extension, also transform the long demoniac figure of the necromancer into a benevolent keeper of the peace between the living and the dead through the Abhorsen bloodline. The vision of the land of the dead thus mixes pagan, Christian and post-modern elements. Those images retain an educative quality, the stakes however, have shifted from a collective fate of a community of believers to single readers in quest of meaning. Hell is no longer a place of fiery torment for sinners but a journey back to the primordial chaos and an escape from one's own demons. In fantasy, artists have rekindled the old debate of the nature of souls and their destiny under new guises. This shift, indeed still asks the question of salvation: is it a divine intervention or is it in the hands of each individual?

From Hell (or Not): Representations of Merlin and His Origins in the Comics

Michael A. Torregosa: Saturday, Session III, Track 2

The Arthurian figure of Merlin has a long literary history, but he never seems able to shake off the effects of his parentage. In medieval tradition, Merlin is sired by inhuman powers: first a seemingly benign *dæmon* and then a decidedly wicked demon. This preternatural aspect to his conception grants Merlin the skills and powers he uses to support the realm, yet it also taints him as someone potentially dangerous. Although Merlin's background cannot be changed, creative artists often choose to ignore or alter his origins, especially when retelling his story for mass audiences. In contrast, other creators, usually those producing work for more niche markets, have more frequently accepted and/or embraced Merlin's dark side. Like film and television, the comics industry has explored both of these strategies, and the medium has proffered innovative approaches to the origins of Merlin that deserve further attention.

The Good, the Bad, and the Mind-Body Problem: Dualistic Punishment and Torture in *The Good Place*

Katelynn Baerg: Saturday, Session VII, Track 4

Theories about the afterlife have been a constant fixation of humanity throughout history, illustrated through diverse mediums and genres. Literary and philosophical movements reflect and influence the shifts between the worldviews of traditional and modern writers. In comparing Michael Schur's sitcom *The Good Place* with Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, this paper demonstrates how the writer's depictions of torture and punishment reflect their respective positions on philosophical concepts of the human self. Through the lens of the mind-body problem proposed by Rene Descartes, I analyze how the relationship between the mind and body in the afterlife is explored in each depiction. Dante's *Inferno* primarily depicts physical torture in accordance with the Catholic belief of the resurrection of the body, inferring the torture of the whole being through the body. *The Good Place* portrays a dualistic hell that parallels the human experience by including and focusing on the mind and mental states in torture and punishment. The characters are placed in emotionally and mentally stressful situations rather than just physically painful situations. I propose that a dualistic portrayal of hell mirrors the modern human experience, providing a means to express and cope with the fears surrounding the question of what happens after death.

Grey Town: The Practical Theology of *The Great Divorce*

Reggie Weems: Saturday, Session VI, Track 3

As one of the most-read Protestant authors of the last two centuries, the legacy of C.S. Lewis is surprisingly rooted in his various writings about Hell. And yet, even though his works are permeated with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, Lewis rarely spoke directly or clearly about Hell, such as he did in a single chapter in *The Problem of Pain* (1940). He nonetheless attempted to demythologize Hell from God's viewpoint in *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), Satan's outlook in *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), and the human perspective in *The Great Divorce* (1945), his last and perhaps, most insightful reflection on the subject. Of them all, Lewis considered *The Great Divorce* to be his "Cinderella" book, and his *magnum opus* on the subject of Hell. But interpreting the book is often as controversial as the doctrine itself. This paper intends to present *The Great Divorce* as Lewis intended, not as a theological exposé on the doctrine itself but as a practical theology concerning Hell.

Hell as an Exploration of Sin: A Comparison of Alan Moore's *Providence* to Dante's *Inferno*

Zachary Rutledge: Sunday, Session VII, Track 4

In Alan Moore's graphic novel *Providence*, Robert Black travels Lovecraftian New England and suffers a series of horrifying encounters—each an allusion to a Lovecraft story. These encounters contain direct references to various sins and taboos, thereby making explicit much of the sublimated sexuality in Lovecraft's works. Therefore, Black's journey constitutes not only a trip through Lovecraft's mythology but also reads as a cataloguing of sins reminiscent of Dante's passage through the levels of sin in *Inferno*. This paper identifies and explores the similarities between Dante and Black as examples of those who descend to the

underworld along with a consideration of the function of such texts as a way to catalogue and understand sin.

Hell as Colonizing Force: Postcolonialism in *World of Warcraft's* the Maw

Heather Bass: Sunday, Session IV, Track 1

The lore in *World of Warcraft* represents various global religions along with their multiple paths to the soul's redemption. One quest asks players to approach various divinities and retrieve their sacred objects in order to save a paladin from the disease of undeath in desolate Icecrown. Scholars have also noticed *World of Warcraft's* religious capacities with one such example being comparing Thrall to Jesus. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the *World of Warcraft* lore has its own version of Hell—a region known as the Maw—with its own version of Satan. The Maw is one of the new territories introduced in the afterlife-centered expansion, *World of Warcraft: Shadowlands*. However, the Maw's Zovaal is not satisfied with his domain and sets his sights for domination. The Maw then becomes a colonizing force in *World of Warcraft's* expansion with exploiting resources and Zovaal's campaign for conquest. While this becomes more explicit in the Shadowlands arc, players have already seen this portrayed in an earlier expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*. I intend to explore *World of Warcraft's* Maw as empire with Zovaal as colonizer in this paper.

Hell in Anime and Manga, From Go Nagai's *Devilman*, Kentaro Miura's *Berserk*, Hell Girl Project's *Hell Girl*, the Works of Junji Ito and Everything in Between

Minna Nizam: Saturday, Session VII, Track 2

This paper will explore the influence of Hell in Anime and Manga. The discussion will begin with Go Nagai's *Devilman* then lead into other examples of anime/manga with the same theme. The focus will be on the titular character, Akira Fudo, his transformation, and the villains throughout the story. Then a larger discussion on Kentaro Miura's *Berserk* and his interpretation of hell will be taken into account. From Griffith's transformation to Femto, to the iconography of the monsters Guts battles. Then another popular anime franchise will be discussed: *Hell Girl* and its impact on modern media. The story of revenge and having a young Hell Girl by the name of Ai Enma, enact your revenge fantasies through the use of hellish imagery to torment the victim. Once that part wraps up, the discussion will then lead to Junji Ito's works, his usage of hell within his art, manga, and much more.

"Hell is only a word. The reality is much, much worse": Black Holes as Fantasy Gateways to Hell

Kristine Larsen: Saturday, Session IV, Track 1

Black holes are frequently described as the scariest objects in the universe, even by the normally staid scientists who study them. Like the warning on the gate of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*, any (hu)man or matter that dares to cross the event horizon abandons all hope before literally being ripped to shreds by the object's extreme tidal forces. As the heart of the beast is approached, the laws of physics break down, time loses its simple everyday meaning, and mathematical madness reigns supreme. It is no wonder that Hollywood has repeatedly adopted the black hole as more than merely a metaphor for Hell, but a fantasy gateway leading directly

into it (with all the metaphysical and mythopoeic aspects one would expect). This presentation will concentrate on three such works, the “Impossible Planet/The Satan’s Pit” arc of *Doctor Who* (2006), the much-maligned Disney film *The Black Hole* (1979) and the cult-classic film *Event Horizon* (1997). While these works are usually considered sci-fi rather than classic fantasy, their use of black holes as fantastical gateways to Hell emphasizes their supernatural rather than scientific aspects.

Hell is School—and Other People—and Myself (but mostly Other People): From *Inferno* to the *Paradiso* in the Scholomance series by Naomi Novik

Nicole duPlessis: Sunday, Session IV, Track 2

In her novels *A Deadly Education*, *The Last Graduate*, and *The Golden Enclaves*, Naomi Novik constructs a world in which school is Hell and the outside world is Heaven—or so it seems from the inside. From the competition and internal hierarchies that exist between the students, to the monsters, or “mals” that stalk students and devour them for their “mana,” to the brutal lessons, harsh punishments, and presumed Darwinism of the school itself, the inside of the Scholomance seems the embodiment of Hell to the novel’s protagonist and central consciousness “El,” short for Galadriel, even as she struggles to contain her own affinity—or magical strength—which tends to the “infernal.” But this resemblance to Hell is not merely in El’s head; the school is designed in a cone- or funnel-shape analogous to the structure of Hell in the *Inferno* of Dante: each year the halls of the school rotate downward, space reallocated as the number of students decreases, to the “graduation hall,” which is the final test—and for many the final destination. This paper traces the parallels between the trilogy’s three novels, *A Deadly Education*, *The Last Graduate*, and *The Golden Enclaves*, and the three parts of the *Commedia* by Dante Alighieri. It emphasizes the Hell that is the Scholomance itself, the false promise of heaven offered in *The Golden Enclaves*, and the novels’ Sartrean notion, dramatized through the hierarchies and social Darwinism of the international societies of wizards in the novels, that “hell is other people.”

Hell on Earth in Garth Nix’s *Old Kingdom*

John Rosegrant: Saturday, Session III, Track 4

I explore psychological meanings embedded in the *Old Kingdom*. Its River of Death is a hell impinging on life: Like Dante’s *Inferno* it has nine sectors; the dead take hideous Boschian forms; and helped by necromancers wielding “free magic” they often return to life. On this metaphor Nix builds the insight that desiring to live deeply and joyously risks turning hellish if early life was loveless. Necromancers and Free Magic are battled by Abhorsens and others wielding “Charter magic,” Free Magic transformed by symbols. Immersion in the Charter gives a joyous experience of connection to all life. Symbolization must unite with Free Magic to create this experience; symbolization alone is inadequate, as we see in the example of mundanely rational people across the Wall. But the source of joyous access to the Charter is also the source of access to Death, demonstrating *jouissance* that can provide great pleasure or great horror. Integrating symbolic with nonsymbolic experience is fundamental to humanness, becoming crucial when language develops around year three. The theme of dead mothers indicates how this development can leave gaps that horror creeps through. The mothers of Abhorsens Terciel,

Sabriel, and Lirael are literally dead. Other mothers are emotionally dead, particularly Clariel's, one reason Clariel becomes the Dead arch-foe Chlorr. Desire for joyous connection turns hellish under the sway of the dead mother.

Hell on His Mind: Dean Winchester's Journey to Hell and Back

Anna Caterino: Saturday, Session I, Track 1

Season three of *Supernatural* (2005-2020) closes with a shot of Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles) in Hell. The place has no discernible features and resembles neither the long waiting line nor the gothic castle of later seasons. The few elements that do characterize it, however, make it look like a brain, the labyrinth of ropes reminiscent of neurons. This association introduces Hell as a place that exists first and foremost in Dean's dead. The lack of establishing shots and the abstract terms used to discuss Hell, damnation, and Dean's experience further support this claim, working in its favor. After all, the audience may not be presented with a physical place, yet the effects of it are made clear to the point of creating a place into which all of Dean's fears and trauma converge. Following this, this essay aims to analyze *Supernatural's* first iteration of hell as the manifestation of the "foundational drama" (Faludi 208) of post-9/11 America and, as such, as a place not too dissimilar to the microcosm that Dean already inhabits. Through the use of gender studies and queer studies, it will highlight the importance of White hegemonic masculinity and queerness in Dean Winchester's damnation and salvation, as well as the role played by Hell in the deconstruction of the character.

Hellish Landscapes in J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium

Willow DiPasquale: Sunday, Session VI, Track 3

J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium is rich with magical and mythological elements—enchanted rings, powerful wizards, stories told long ago—and near-Biblical struggles of good over evil, power over life and death, and the inexorable passage of time. The Halls of Mandos in Valinor even have echoes of the "afterlife," serving as a liminal place for the spirits of Elves to await their next destination. Interestingly, though, a "hell" in the classic sense (that is, a spiritual region of eternal torment and suffering) does not seem to truly exist in Tolkien's imagined worlds. However, Tolkien does fill those worlds with hellish landscapes: Utumno and Angbad in the Iron Mountains; Thangorodrim, Mount Doom, and Mordor; the Door of Night leading into the Timeless Void. These places reflect absence, abuse, neglect, and environmental exploitation. Why might Tolkien, a writer who has so carefully crafted the mythology, history, and geography of the Legendarium, avoid "Hell"? What do the hellish landscapes offer readers instead? And how might consideration of these physical spaces challenge or confirm our modern understanding of what hell on (Middle-)earth might be? By examining how Tolkien describes these landscapes and the effects of villainous figures like Morgoth on such places, we can begin to understand Tolkien's fantastic vision of hell.

The Image of Satan in Evangelical Children's Fantasy

Melody Green: Sunday, Session VII, Track 2

Over the last few decades, niche publishers have presented several children's fantasy series marketed as being "in the tradition of Lewis and Tolkien." These publishers, however, are

neither British, nor are they Anglican or Catholic. They are instead American Evangelical organizations, providing a space for faith-informed stories that wander somewhere between allegory and parable. Within the pages of these texts can be found not only the expected Christ-figures, but there are also Satan-figures and hellish landscapes much more likely to reflect concepts from Dante, Milton, and medieval witch-hunting guides than from the Bible, the text that evangelicals claim to be foundational for their beliefs. This paper will explore both the influences on the representation of Satan and hell in these texts, as well as the purpose of these representations. For example, some of these stories are designed to scare children into certain behaviors, others present the hope of an ultimate good as a foil against a (perceived) very real evil. Texts that will be addressed include David and Karen Mains' *Tales of the Kingdom*, Jerrel Law's *Spirit Fighter* series, and Andrew Peterson's *Wingfeather Saga*.

Infernal Landscape in *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) in Light of Carl J. Jung's Theory of Individuation Fryderyk Kwiatkowski: Saturday, Session II, Track 1

Carl G. Jung's conception of the human psyche as an inner realm that gives access to profound, numinous experiences inspired many artists and popular culture authors to portray heaven and hell as symbolic expressions of the opposite forces within the human psyche rather than cosmological or supernatural regions. In my paper, I will concentrate on how the Hollywood film *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) directed by Adrian Lyne, by portraying the main character's descent into a deathbed vision depicted as hellish reality, reflects Jung's theory of individuation, a process of self-realization that aims at reconciling various elements of the psyche and achieving wholeness. To this end, I will first demonstrate how the film reflects Jung's considerations on myths as carriers of the unconscious contents. Next, I will analyze film techniques whereby the narration conveys the infernal dimension of the main character's vision as a manifestation of his inner conflicts and traumas. In the final part, I will focus on how the protagonist overcomes them and discuss therapeutic aspects of his journey by taking a Jungian perspective.

***The Lord of the Rings & Dante's Inferno: The Pilgrim's Path—a Descent into Hell* Hayden Bilbrey: Sunday, Session IV, Track 4**

This project explores the parallels between the journeys of Dante's Pilgrim in *Inferno* and Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings*. It asserts that these two examples are a variant of the hero's journey, more akin to a divine pilgrimage. Through this analysis, each author's use and repurposing of mythology and monsters to fit within a Christian narrative will be closely examined. Following the Pilgrim and Frodo, this project charts their voyages through hell (or hellish landscape) and the effects that has on each of them psychologically and spiritually. In essence, this project seeks to chart both external and internal movement of these two characters as they traverse hellish landscapes. In doing so, it is important to also examine those who seek to guide our characters through their monumental task. Lastly, the taking on of sin, the bearing the weight of the world is a component that plays a major part in each character's internal arch and through the close reading of this process, gain an understanding of how the authors' view individual strength, devotion, and the overcoming of evil.

Managing Hell: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien on the Infernality of Managerialism**Mark Brians: Saturday, Session VII, Track 1 CANCELLED**

Other typical hadean tropes notwithstanding (e.g. the fiery slopes of Mt. Doom, or the demonic cannibal feast over which Screwtape gives a toast, the rank pits of Angband), the image that most commonly attends the hellish landscapes in the work of both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien is one of managerial governance. From the policies of the bilious Governor Gumpas to the Dark Lord's economic network of "long wagon-trains of goods and booty and fresh slaves," Hell for both authors is a place where all of life succumbs to what Baptiste Rappin has called "the foundation of Management." Hells such as these, amidst their various differences, are all animated by the same infernal logic—driven by probabilistic governance, inspired by naked appeals to power and efficiency, and wrangled by a kind of panoptic surveillance. In them coercive fiat is maintained under a constant stream of reports and forms—the purpose of which is the reduction of human and non-human life to the point of justified annihilation. This paper limns the managerial aspects of Lewis' and Tolkien's hells, comparing and contrasting their depictions, in order to consider the way in which these images of hell-as-management speak to contemporary issues of organization and social order.

'Nor am I Out of It': The Modern Bureaucratic Hell on Page and Screen**Janet Brennan Croft: Saturday, Session VI, Track 1**

The bureaucratic hells in *Good Omens*, *The Good Place*, *Angel*, *Supernatural*, *Beetlejuice*, and undoubtedly many other depictions on screen and page, owe a great deal to C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. Why do these depictions of Hell as embodying the worst of modernity resonate so with modern audiences? These nightmares of red tape and inefficiency, these cubicle hellscapes, say something about our modern anxieties, and this paper will delve into these issues. But some of these sources—*Good Omens* and *The Good Place*, in particular—also depict a correspondingly bureaucratic heaven, and this reveals perhaps an even more interesting anxiety.

A Nostalgic Understanding of Bureaucracy as Hell**Mayank Kejriwal: Saturday, Session VIII, Track 1**

There is a wide body of visual and literary cultural media on interpreting the over-bureaucratization in modern society as modern hell. I argue that more recent post-modern depictions of bureaucracy, especially in visual media, have been less disquieting. Apple's *Severance* tapped into deep uncertainties that modern workers face on issues like work-life balance and self-actualization, but if bureaucracy is present, it is well concealed under the gloss and efficiency of modern office buildings and technology. Hell is not the first word that comes to mind even when faced with such disquiet. Gone is the visceral fear associated with hell, or the otherwise raw intentionality of greed and lust. I argue that such association is now embedded in nostalgia. Nihilism has largely replaced intentionality and intensity. Bureaucracy, once something to rally one's mental energies against, is now seen as a complex social necessity, almost as inevitable as a force of nature. Viewed through this lens, I argue that Kafka and Orwell, who adroitly fused bureaucracy, dystopia, and techno-surveillance in their work, should be viewed as works of transition that draw on bureaucracy-as-hell themes from both the

post-war modern era and the now-mainstream postmodern era. Finally, I draw both on literary versions of their work, as well as filmic adaptations and graphic novels to further argue that even these works are now viewed with nostalgia. We may well be entering an era in public discourse where the concept of hell is itself nostalgic.

Only in Dying Life: The Production of Hope and Peace

Taylor Johnson Guinan: Sunday, Session V, Track 2

Unlike fantasy authors of previous generations like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien who wrote depictions of an afterlife that mirrored their personal faiths, modern children's fantasy authors of the last thirty years, such as Neil Gaiman, Ursula K. Le Guin, Phillip Pullman, Rick Riordan, J.K. Rowling, Jonathan Stroud, and Garth Nix, often merely use religious concepts as a way to depict the land of the dead. In their depictions, the land of the dead is a dark, terrible, and uninviting place. However, rather than ending on that dark point, these authors transition from fear to a sense of peace, acceptance, or hope toward death. The living's journey through the land of the dead results in a greater appreciation for life or reveals that the land of the dead is only a temporary transition stage to something greater, such as rebirth into life or an undescribed beyond. This revelatory experience replaces fear with peace and hope when death comes. Thus, modern children's fantasy authors' goal is not necessarily to convert readers to a particular faith, but to create a healthier understanding of and relationship with death, that universal life event all living beings must eventually face.

Orpheus, the Harrowing of Hell, and Mary Magdalene in the tale of Beren and Lúthien

Giovanni Carmine Costabile: Sunday, Session III, Track 4

Tolkien has a wealth of precedents in giving his Orpheus and Eurydice, i.e., Beren and Lúthien, a happy ending. My paper proposes to survey these precedents in the Orphic tradition of Ancient Greece, in its subsequent Christening in late ancient and medieval literature, and in its connections with the Harrowing of Hell. Looking for a female Orpheus, an undiscussed parallelism is found in the figure of Mary Magdalene.

Persephone Bites: Consumption in the Underworld

Erin Sledd: Sunday, Session V, Track 4

If you know one thing about Persephone, it is that she was abducted by Hades, held captive, and ate pomegranate seeds in the Underworld. Although Demeter rescued her daughter, she had to return for several months each year as a consequence of consuming the "Fruit of the Underworld." But tasting those succulent ruby red seeds was not the first time she succumbed to desire—according to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter II*, the first thing Persephone "bites" is a lure. Hades sets a trap: a flower with "one hundred stems of fragrant blossoms." When Persephone grasps a stalk of this flower, a hellmouth opens and "the wide-pathed earth yawned . . . and the lord, Host of Many, with his immortal horses sprang out upon her." Persephone's story is just one example of how hellmouths and consumption feature prominently in fantastic Ur-texts such as the *Aeneid* and Dante's *Inferno*. This presentation will trace the evolution of the Underworld and hellmouths as well as the consequences of consumption therein from the story of the future Queen of Hades through iconic texts including

Alice in Wonderland and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and then focus on Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, Erin Morgenstern's *The Starless Sea*, Del Toro's Pan's *Labyrinth*, Naomi Novik's *A Deadly Education*, and Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*.

Planes of Oblivion in The Elder Scrolls

Michael Barros: Sunday, Session VI, Track 1

The planes of Oblivion from *The Elder Scrolls* (TES) series are not explicitly Hell; they are any dimensions of reality which are not under control of the Aedra, the benevolent spiritual entities. As a result, these planes may be totally unknown, pleasant, chaotic, or horrifying, depending on who is in charge, reflecting the personality of its ruler. These planes are at the heart of the franchise, and the intrusion of the planes of Oblivion and its inhabitants is a constant in the series. The planes of Oblivion are a reimagining of Hell as a place of potential, rather than evil. This reimagining calls on the player to use ingenuity or grow in power to a point where they can escape, free others, or even defeat the occupants of certain realms. The metaphysics of TES teaches us that the Aedra are good, but only useful in a very limited sphere of influence. In contrast to *The Great Divorce*, Hell and its occupants surround the Aedra on all sides. This inversion draws on occultism and New Age spirituality to call the player toward a soteriology of individual transcendence and acquisition of power. TES did not create its mythos in a vacuum but has crafted it in relation and response to a cultural paradigm. We need not be passive observers of spiritual realities, but can be active agents, seizing salvation from and overcoming powers of Hell for ourselves.

Political Demons: Society as Hell in *Hellblazer* and *Sandman*

Andrew Burt: Sunday, Session VII, Track 1

In the *Hellblazer* and *Sandman* comic book universes, hell depends on the writer's worldview and often on the decade in which they are writing, appearing as a twisted version of a dreary regular world. Thus, this hell is often related to the contemporary Western political and cultural landscape as seen through Judeo-Christian conceptions of hell, demonology, and fears of everlasting torment and damnation, just like Dante's *Inferno* and many other representations for centuries. In creating a hell that mirrors the modern world and accounts for contemporary folklore about the supernatural, the creators humanize the character's quests and reify the fruitlessness of their actions against societal and political forces. Guilt and personal action are often more important than God's judgment as it changes character's hierarchical positions and reinforces how the trials between characters parallel earthly political processes with protagonists that have motivations or abilities like the souls already in hell. For example, the comic book writer Jamie Delano comments on Thatcher's England, where *Hellblazer's* John Constantine encounters soul-brokering demons from Mammon Investments in a mundanely realistic London. In *Sandman*, Dream's trips to hell deal with modernist devices, such as Dream's Helm, which he must battle the demon Choronzon to regain, that appear as manifestations of science and magic. Damnation can be bartered upon and changed based on transactions that correspond with earthly capitalism and politics.

Pullman's Problematic Paradise: Dissolving into Dust**David E. Isaacs: Sunday, Session VI, Track 2**

In the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Phillip Pullman has openly positioned himself as the anti-C.S. Lewis who attempts to embed the gospel of atheism through his fantasy novels. Pullman recasts classics such as *Paradise Lost* and Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven & Hell* so that humans triumph over the oppressive Authority by learning that sinning is simply enjoying life. This paper will specifically explore Pullman's depictions of the underworld and his alternative vision of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven in *The Amber Spyglass*, examining Pullman's attempts to assure readers that by rejecting Christian views of the final translation, one can live more freely and happily knowing that there is no individual afterlife. To help defeat the Authority, Lyra and Will journey through the grim underworld and free the spirits trapped there, allowing the ghosts to dissolve and escape the grim underworld. The ultimate end, and the greatest hope, is that Lyra promises the dead they will become "part of everything. All the atoms that were them" go "into the air and the wind and the trees and the earth and all the living things" (319). Each soul dissolves, but this is better than an eternal, grim waiting in the underworld. This paper will argue that by denying the reality of eternal souls, Pullman offers pernicious paradoxes (and outright contradictions) in his novels which are puzzling at best and even more frightening at worst than the doctrines he seeks to supplant.

Reforming Xibalba in *Gods of Jade and Shadow***Anne Acker: Saturday, Session VI, Track 2**

When *Gods of Jade and Shadow* was published in 2019, it was acclaimed both for its excellent writing and its revisioning of Mesoamerican mythology. While there is certainly a centering of indigenous American myth over the Western religion, depicted as alien and imposed, the novel also belongs to a growing body of feminist literature in the #MeToo era that critiques and reimagines the power structures of the original stories. This paper explores the literary reconstruction of Xibalba, the underworld of Mayan myth, as Casiopea Tun seeks to restore the god Hun-Kame to his rightful throne at great personal cost. The novel offers a dispassionate, even bleak, narrative about the struggle for power in the world, a struggle that Casiopea seems bound to lose as an impoverished female with indigenous ancestry. I argue that her journey is not about restoring a lost heritage, so much as it is about realizing the legacy of that heritage in the world and making the sacrifices necessary to abandon the past and embrace modernity. The survival of the gods lies in their ability to move on from a violent and destructive past and adapt to a world with different values.

Re-Visioning Underland: C. S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair* as Dystopian Fiction**William Thompson: Saturday, Session V, Track 3**

In C. S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair*, Jill, Eustace, and Puddleglum follow the four signs given to them by Aslan and descend into the underworld in order to rescue the lost prince. They find the enchanted Prince Rilian, along with thousands of Earthmen, enslaved to the Green Lady, who has a plan to subjugate the people and creatures of Narnia. Michael Ward, in *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens and the Imagination of C. S. Lewis*, takes a primarily Christological approach to the *Narnia* series, but finds a further analogue to Underland of *The*

Silver Chair in the underworld of Greek and Roman mythology. Ward's connection to the Christian and classical underworld shows Lewis's Underland as a representation of a particular, mythological hell; however, Underland also constitutes a particular landscape that repositions *The Silver Chair* in relation to dystopian texts for young adults. In *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry describe dystopian texts for children as pedagogical in nature, in which characters often confront issues surrounding social organization, power and control. I want to argue that *The Silver Chair* is a secondary world fantasy that reimagines the mythological hell as an otherworldly dystopia, which recasts traditional fantasy tropes and anticipates later dystopian texts of the twentieth century.

(Re)Visiting Hades: Depictions of the Underworld in Virgil's and Rick Riordan's Work
Inês Vaz: Sunday, Session II, Track 2

The hero's journey is one of the most popular narrative patterns in storytelling, constituting a particular bridge between classical mythology and modern fantasy. One of the most captivating and poignant parts of the journey is none other than the descent to the underworld. Since the beginning of time, countless heroes have come and gone, but the underworld stays the same. Or does it . . . ? From among the long tradition of classical texts that first helped bring the underworld to life, Virgil's can be praised for providing some of the most detailed descriptions, as both Orpheus' descent in Book 4 of the *Georgics* and Aeneas's journey in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* constitute key pillars of the imagery of the Underworld we know today. Likewise, modern fantasy texts that represent this supernatural land continue to inform our perception of it. And while classical texts may have fallen into disuse, retellings of classical myths have found great success. From which, Rick Riordan's series based on Greek and Roman myth, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* and its spin-off *Heroes of Olympus*, can be highlighted as some of the most popular. As such, this study will look at how the two authors choose to represent the kingdom of the dead with the goal of understanding what the different portrayals can tell us about classical mythology, modern fantasy, their relationship and how they help shape our notions of hell and heroism.

The Righteousness of the Damned in Jeffrey Konvitz's *The Sentinel*
Raymond G. Falgui: Saturday, Session I, Track 2

The paper will examine the nature of the damned in Jeffrey Konvitz's 1970s pulp horror novel *The Sentinel* by using a framework utilized by C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*, wherein damnation involves a species of spiritual blindness that masquerades as righteousness and shields the damned (for a time) from an awareness of their ultimate condition. Specifically, the paper will provide a character analysis of the co-protagonist Michael, arguably one of Konvitz's more complex literary creations, and the role he plays in briefly elevating a generic genre-contrived plot into the realm of true spiritual horror. While making such a claim for a character from a popular horror novel might seem pretentious, it is worth noting that Lewis himself acknowledged the ability of even minor writers and poets to contrive compelling images that expose the deformities of the damned. This paper argues that Konvitz has achieved the same effect—a pulp version of the denizens of Dante's *Inferno* that serves as a reflection of the form these deformities may take in the era of postmodernity.

The Road to Hell: Rebirth and Relevance in Musical Adaptations of Katabatic Myth

Jarrold DePrado: Saturday, Session V, Track 4

Adapting Greek mythology provides a framework to reapproach classic works through a contemporary lens to better understand the present. Of particular interest is the depiction of characters traveling to Hell in search of a better future. Looking at two myth-inspired musicals—*The Frogs* by Stephen Sondheim and Burt Shevelove and *Hadestown* by Anaïs Mitchell—we see two disparate journeys to the Underworld given contemporary relevance. *The Frogs* (1974) depicts Dionysus' journey to Hades to bring back a poet (originally Euripides, now George Bernard Shaw). However, it was not until the 2004 Broadway adaptation that overtly anti-authoritarian messages were added, aimed at the Bush administration. *Hadestown*, first conceived as a 2010 concept album, retells Orpheus' descent to the Underworld to rescue Euridice. As a "folk opera", the story becomes a commentary on economic disparity and exploitation: the central couple's poverty justifies Euridice's attraction to the industrial productivity of Hell; as a full Broadway musical production, their dilemma is given a counterpoint in the decaying marriage of Hades and Persephone, which itself is reflected in ongoing climate change. The adaptation and evolution of both works reveal how the message of each has been altered through various versions to keep reflecting the culture of the time. While the former is a comedy and the latter a tragedy, both arrive at the same message of endorsing political change and heralding endurance in the face of personal unrest: anyone can find themselves in Hell; it is what happens afterward that is ultimately important.

Substance Abuse: C.S. Lewis and the Symbolic Geography of Hell

Richard Angelo Bergen: Saturday, Session IV, Track 3

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell by William Blake the Romantic, proffers a Romantic vision of hell, and a geographical representation of capacity and scope with an energetic apology. On the other hand, C.S. Lewis's vision of hell in *The Great Divorce* is that of a land without substance: a land of addiction to mental maladies, an endless mental substance abuse, an emptying of presence. As one surveys the conversations throughout the book, one gets an increasing sense of the importance of understanding *place* correctly, as a matter of eternal consequence. One chapter concerns a well-travelled ghost who repeats his conviction that genuine progress is impossible because place, as a principle is empty of substance, "one wall inside another." Another ghost, a bishop no less, does not realize he is in hell, and mocks his friend for "believing in a literal heaven and hell." Spiritual beliefs can be summarized as "speculative questions," and a desire for "real" things is a "hankering after matter." When he states that he would like to come to an "atmosphere of inquiry," he does not mean that he is willing to travel to a new place with a new, real atmosphere, of a world that is the answer to inquiry. The ghost understands the phrase strictly as a symbol, and thus commits "substance abuse" to the nature of the spatiotemporal world: he understands "spiritual reality" only as a series of metaphors for psychological states.

“Swag to Spare”: The Grim Reaper in Korean Television Dramas
Vicki Ronn: Saturday, Session V, Track 2 CANCELLED

The concept of the grim reaper has been a constant in Western literature and drama since the 14th century with the Black Death. Other cultures around the world also have mythological figures that reap souls for the afterlife. The Korean version is a psychopomp, a bureaucratic figure whose job it is to escort the person to the afterlife, not to judge them. In the last few years, however, Korean television dramas have introduced a cooler version of the Grim Reaper. In shows like *Black, Tomorrow*, and *Guardian: the Lonely God*, reapers are high fashion functionaries whose lives as reapers are seen as: (1) existing on this plane until their missing bodies are found, (2) catching ghosts who refuse to go on to the afterlife, and/or (3) expiating some past sin.

Tarot as Ticket to Hell in Tim Powers’s *Last Call* (1992)
Emily E. Auger: Saturday, Session IV, Track 2

Last Call (1992), the first book in Tim Powers’s mythopoeic Fault Lines Trilogy, is a retelling of the Fisher King story in which a villainous King prolongs his life by stealing other people’s bodies. He acquires these bodies by using the powerful “Lombardy-Zeroth Tarot” in a game that allows him to “assume” the souls of other unwitting players, thereby condemning them to a twenty-one-year descent into hell that is experienced by way of fatal illnesses, alcoholism, and various tragedies, including an archetypal dance with Death. After this period, a second game is played during which he is able to completely take over their bodies and make their entire “self” permanently subordinate to his will. Even *Last Call* cartomancers who use different decks to try to help the hero, who happens to be on this dark path, are endangered by the overflow of malevolent magic affecting him. This paper examines the creative construction of the images and roles of Tarot in *Last Call* with reference to historical Tarot cards, decks, and associations.

Thinking Makes It So? Hell as a (Fixable) State of Mind in *The Good Place* and *Lucifer*
Erin Giannini: Saturday, Session V, Track 1

While different in genre, sitcom *The Good Place* and drama *Lucifer* share a certain irreverent tone and a somewhat unique approach to the afterlife. In *The Good Place*, there is no mention of gods or devils, only demons, a Good Place committee, and a judge. *Lucifer*, loosely based on Neil Gaiman’s graphic novels, however, features angels, demons, God, and the Devil, providing its own spin on established cosmology with embodied versions of prominent figures such as the archangel Michael and biblical brothers Cain and Abel. Yet what ties *The Good Place* and *Lucifer* together is a focus on hell and punishment as a state of mind brought about by one’s moral failings and guilt. For *The Good Place*, it is focused on learning to do better and thereby becoming one’s “best self,” while *Lucifer* leans heavily into the way the mind and its psychological tricks and turns can create a hell in both life and afterlife for both human and cosmic beings. Therefore, I will examine the way these two concepts of hell and eternity in both series both play off of and inform the other.

“This dark hive called London”: Mervyn Peake’s Anti-fantasies and Arbitrary Kindness
Hadas Elber-Aviram: Saturday, Session I, Track 4

This paper examines Mervyn Peake’s fantastical renditions of London, focusing on the London-based city in *Titus Alone* but also drawing on Peake’s other writings together with manuscript material from the Mervyn Peake Archive at the British Library.

Those Queer Devils: Queercoding Villains, Devils, and Demons in Mythopoeic Film and Media

Grace Moone: Saturday, Session III, Track 1

In the early years of Hollywood’s Golden Age, The Hays Code functioned as a rigid morality code designed to shape the norms of Western culture. Its far-reaching impacts remain visible even decades after its enforcement was no longer required. In this talk, we will explore one of the most pervasive elements of the code’s legacy: the prohibition against showing LGBTQ characters in a positive light, and the resulting phenomenon of “queer-coding” characters. The practice of portraying LGBT+ characters through a lens of villainy and stereotype to adhere to the Hays Code requirement that queerness be punished and depicted as undesirable has led to a proliferation of villains, demons, and devils who are coded as Queer. We’ll explore why characters across a broad range of Mythopoeic works and adaptations, from Maleficent to *Supernatural*’s King of Hell to numerous depictions of Lucifer himself in music videos like *Call Me By Your Name* or television shows like *Lucifer* are queercoded, and how these norms have become heuristically embedded in mythopoeic storytelling.

Through Sauron’s Eye: Hell, Arda Unmarred, Arda Marred, and Arda Healed According to the Maia Formerly Known as Mairon

Cameron Bourquein: Sunday, Session V, Track 3

From the beginning of Tolkien scholarship Mordor has been analyzed in light of its Hellish iconography; from the perspective of the narrative voice, what constitutes “Hell” in Middle-earth may seem clear. But what is Hell to Mordor’s chief inhabitant? What is Hell in Sauron’s Eye? *The Rings of Power* has brought Sauron into the spotlight by interpreting him not as depersonalized evil but as a character in his own right. Actor Charlie Vickers has shared how he developed this character for the screen, adapting characteristics taken directly from Tolkien’s own writings: Sauron’s love of order and his desire to “heal” Middle-earth—a goal with its implicit suggestion of utopian vision. Is such a goal even achievable within the theological and metaphysical constraints of Middle-earth? Drawing on Tolkien’s writings about Sauron from the 1950s, the biblical scholarship of Elaine Pagels, and the work of Jonathan McIntosh (among others), I intend to argue that Sauron’s goal strikes at the nature of Arda itself; to Sauron, Hell is Arda Marred, and his struggle to order it is ultimately his own struggle with the Problem of Evil—the very force he, in a feedback loop, comes to represent.

Through the Mirror Darkly: Link's Journey to Hell and the Inversion of Hyrule in *The Legend of Zelda's Underworlds*

Alicia Fox-Lenz: Sunday, Session III, Track 1

When talking about *The Legend of Zelda*, "underworld" can have a variety of definitions, from simple dungeons hidden beneath the ground to fully realized parallel dimensions. Since the first entry in the franchise, the subterranean dungeons have been where the player character, Link, learns new skills and battles colossal monsters, honing the player's skills and advancing the narrative. While not as ubiquitous as dungeons, since *A Link to the Past*, *Zelda* games have often included travel to parallel worlds, whether those are parallel dimensions or alternate time periods, where the rules and mores of Hyrule have been upended creating truly hellish environments. This presentation will explore some different types of underworlds present in the *Legend of Zelda* franchise, including *Majora's Mask*, the Arbiter's Grounds and Twilight Realm of *Twilight Princess*, and the chasms of *Tears of the Kingdom*, and examine how these areas reflect larger themes of duality, hidden knowledge, and the power of myth and legend.

Timeless Moments: Russell Kirk, Charles Williams, and Stephen King on the Afterlife

Camilo Peralta: Saturday, Session VIII, Track 4

In this paper, I apply the eschatological framework of Michigan historian and Gothic horror writer Russell Kirk to the depictions of Purgatory and Hell in certain novels by Charles Williams and Stephen King. Although these authors represent a wide range of faith traditions, there are a number of surprising similarities between their respective depictions of the afterlife, aspects of which Kirk's notion of "timeless moments" can help to clarify. All three authors, for instance, characterize the afterlife as a state of mind that is nevertheless closely associated with specific physical locations such as a castle in Scotland, the city of London, or King's famous Overlook Hotel. In these places, the living and dead work out their salvation or suffer damnation at one and the same time. The timeless nature of Hell, finally, ensures that it is never too late to try to escape from it and seek redemption.

Tolkien goes to Hell: From the Deepest Underground to the Utmost Void

Mónica Sanz-Rodriguez: Sunday, Session II, Track 3

There is almost no reference to our notions of Hell or Heaven in Tolkien's works. Nobody knows where humans, dwarves or hobbits go when they die, whether they have behaved in a civilized way or spent their lives murdering and stealing. Nevertheless, we can easily find hellish settings in Tolkien at different levels: deep pits of fire and torture, wide barren lands of destruction, and places of otherworldly nature used for incarceration. Hell can suddenly appear in any Middle-earth setting, transforming fertile lands and prosperous realms into haunted places or industrialized barren lands where modest people are cruelly enslaved. The balance between the Christian vision of Tolkien and his secular sub-creation is delicate; and we will find that in Middle-earth, where beauty and perfection dwell, there is also a place for the most despicable evil. Is there a place in his works where evil is punished? Is it possible to experience Hell while being still alive? Are there other Tolkien works related to the afterlife? Come with me, but beware: *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*.

The Underworld as the Heroine's Journey Home: Marvel, Xena, and Mythic Reimaginings **Valerie Estelle Frankel: Saturday, Session II, Track 2**

Hell is traditionally a place of torment, where the young heroine, like Persephone or Eurydice, is kidnapped by the patriarchy, leaving others to rescue her. The last few decades, however, have offered a model closer to Sumerian Inanna, in which the heroine is enlightened by hell or even conquers it. *Angela, Queen of Hel: Journey to the Funderworld* by Marguerite Bennett (2016) gives its heroine this path. Winning back her beloved, Angela, sister of Thor and Loki, becomes queen of the underworld but then prefers to bring Sera back to earth in a flip on Eurydice. The *Xena* episode "Fallen Angel" (5.01) has a similar arc. Xena, now an archangel, descends into hell to save Gabrielle. Saving Callisto makes Xena a vicious demon, one who glories in destruction. Only Callisto, like the good shadow within, can manage to redeem her. Likewise, the 2018 French graphic novel *Persephone* by Loïc Locatelli-Kournwsky shows the heroine discovering hell as her place of power. As Carol S. Pearson writes in *Persephone Rising*, "Persephone's ease in moving back and forth between the worlds and the seasons can be a model for our gaining ease in shifting between multiple roles and adjusting to new life stages that require different things from us" (190). All these heroines gain enlightenment and might through claiming hell as their birthright or conquest—the true font of feminine power.

The Videogaming Hell of *Gears of War* as a Political Parable **Orazio Marie Gnerre: Sunday, Session II, Track 1**

Gears of War is a series of video games born for the Xbox platform in 2006. These are set on a planet very similar to Earth and in approximately the same age as ours. As in the case of the ukronic tales, however, the political organization of the planet Sera (as the world of this narrative is called) is partially different from ours. Humanity on this planet has federated into a progressive political world government. There is no longer any internal enemy to humanity, but despite this society is managed in a highly organized and disciplined manner. From the depths of the soil, however, monstrous entities emerge, called the Locusts, which it turns out that they have always inhabited the heart of the planet. Between the emergence of these entities and the "descent into hell" to fight them, the world loses the distinction between what is below the surface (and which is obviously represented with any traditional infernal symbolism) and what is above. With this speech we want to propose a political interpretation of this fantastic narrative. If in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, as well as in other science fiction narratives, the alien enemies represented what was external to Western society, but with this type of infernal representations we pass to the greatest fear of a globalized society, namely that the worst enemy lies in the depths of our unconscious.

Who the Hell is Helen of Sparta? **Nyssa Gilkey: Sunday, Session VI, Track 4**

The rising popularity of Greek mythology is due in some part to female authors such as Madeline Miller and Natalie Haynes lending a fresh perspective to the Homeric tradition. However, these female authors tend to actually reduce the importance of one of the most important female characters of the Trojan War: Helen. Helen of Sparta has been an enigma to writers throughout the last 3000 years, her story changing with each iteration and era. Since

Homer's *Iliad*, the most beautiful woman in the world has been victim and villain, strong and weak willed. She has chosen husbands, and been forced to take them. She has gone to Troy willingly, and was stolen in the dead of night. She has hated the confines of Sparta, and she has missed it desperately. She loved her husband Menelaus, she loved Paris, and she hated both. She wasn't at Troy at all, and she danced on the wall while it burned. She was Helen of Sparta and she was Helen of Troy. In the past and going forward, writers and creators have to decide who Helen is for the story they wish to tell, even if she becomes a contradiction in the answer.

Panel Abstracts

Deep Places of the World: Journeys in the Underworlds of Middle-earth

Moderator: Alicia Fox-Lenz; **Panelists:** Laura Grabowski, Constance Wagner, Jim Wert

Saturday, Session VI, Track 4

In many world mythologies, underworlds are typically subterranean lands that house the dead. Sometimes these underworlds are visited by living heroes who pass trials only to return to the land of the living transformed. Tolkien uses this mythological theme to great effect throughout his legendarium. From *The Hobbit* to the *Silmarillion*, Tolkien's world is littered with underworlds through which characters journey and emerge forever changed. Join us for a lively discussion of Tolkien's underworlds and how they transform the characters who enter them, as well as the shape the larger events of Middle-earth.

"Hell Is Other People: Looking at the Political Rage Machine in Tolkien Fan Spaces and Media"

Moderator: Alicia Fox-Lenz; **Panelists:** Grace Moone, Cara Marta Messina

Saturday, Session IV, Track 4

Following the backlash against the Tolkien Society's "Tolkien and Diversity" seminar and the airing of the first season of *Rings of Power*, social media fan spaces for Tolkien remain politically charged and reactionary. Building on the foundation of Mythcon 51's Roundtable "Race, Racisms, and Tolkien," and Craig Franson's work showcased there and on the podcast "American Id," we will discuss the current state of Tolkien discourse on social media and how to navigate the landscape as safely as possible.

***The Rings of Power* Season 1: Underworlds, Overworlds, and Ocean Worlds**

Moderator: Tim Lenz; **Panelists:** Leah Hagan, Grace Moone, Pablo Guss

Sunday, Sessions VII & VIII, Track 3

Now that the first of five planned seasons of Amazon's big budget Second Age adaptation *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* has aired, we will provide a retrospective of Season 1. We will compare Tolkien's Second Age writings with the realized version in the show, including how the writers and showrunners have interpreted certain specific passages from the texts, and where significant departures were made for sake of adaptation. We will highlight themes of the season, as well as specific characters, relationships, and settings that have

resonated with audiences, and speculate on where the series could potentially progress in Season 2 and beyond. From Númenor to Near Harad, Harfoots to High Elves, we will give you the meat, and give it to you raw.

Interactive events

Bardic Circle

Hosted by David Lenander: Saturday and Sunday, Special Programming, Track 2

At this traditional MythSoc outlet of artistic expression, Mythies share music, poetry, and short stories in the mythopoeic tradition. Poets, writers, and musicians are encouraged to perform their own works or other inspiring works in a round-robin style.

Cards Against Arda

Hosted by Megan Abrahamson: Saturday, Special Programming, Track 1

Join *Mythprint* Steward Megan Abrahamson for a spirited and sure-to-be-raucous round of 'Cards Against Arda', a mostly-Silmarillion-themed version of the not-safe-for-work party game for terrible people, 'Cards Against Humanity'. Participants will be able to join the game at the free website 'All Bad Cards' (<https://bad.cards/>). Information on how to join the group game will be provided at the start of the session. Spectators also welcome. **Content Warning:** This game includes mentions of graphic violence, sex, and curse words.

Group Screening of 'Hobitit' (A Finnish Adaptation of 'The Lord of the Rings')

Hosted by Tim Lenz: Sunday, Special Programming, Track 1

Participate in a 'Mystery Science Theater 3000'/'Rifftrax'-type group screening of a Finnish television miniseries adaptation of 'Lord of the Rings', produced in the early 90s. English Subtitles will be available for those who do not speak Finnish. **Content Warning:** This event will likely include 'not-safe-for-work' content.

Lord of the Rings Online Livestream: Delve Deeply into Moria

Hosted by Tim Lenz: Saturday, Special Programming, Track 1

In keeping with the theme of the Seminar, join MythCon Steward Tim Lenz for a live exploration of the Middle-earth underworld of Moria in the online MMORPG 'Lord of the Rings Online' by Standing Stone Games. Visit beautiful and iconic locations from J.R.R. Tolkien's world, including the Twenty-first and the Bridge of Khazad-dûm. If you would like to join the Fellowship of exploration, Tim will be playing on the server 'Nimrodel' – you can send a friend request in advance to the character 'Bordenwulf'.

Mythopoeic Awards Discussion

Hosted by David Lenander: Sunday, Session VIII, Track 2

Come talk about the award nominees and winners for this year, your early picks for nomination for next year, and about the awards in general, including the idea of a YA award.

Seven Minutes in Hell: Hells in Fantasy Games

Hosted by Nyssa Gilkey: Sunday, Session VIII, Track 1

Join Nyssa Gilkey on a tour through several different fantasy video game depictions of hell. We'll spend about seven (-ish) minutes looking around each hell or underworld before moving on, touring Helheim in *God of War* and *God of War: Ragnarok*, Hades and Elysium as portrayed in *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey DLC*, and the Duat of ancient Egypt in *Assassin's Creed: Origins DLC*. With sufficient time and interest, we can tour other fantasy depictions of hell. Participants will be able to ask questions and discuss throughout the journey.

Sale of College Land

What's the Sale of College Land, listed on the schedule grid for 4:20 AM on Sunday with no Zoom link? It's an old Mythcon tradition to list this on the schedule, dating back to Mythcon 6 in 1975. This is a reference to the college dons' meeting in the opening chapter of C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*.

About the Presenters and Panelists

Gaëlle Abaléa teaches English in a high school in Orléans. She has a Master's degree in English literature from Sorbonne University and a licence in Ethnology from Université, René Descartes. Her master's degree, *The Influence of Christian myths in Middle-earth*, was directed by Leo Carruthers in 2003. Her article "Death as a Gift in J.R.R Tolkien's Work and Buffy the Vampire Slayer" was published in *Journal of Tolkien Research*, special issue, "J.R.R Tolkien and the Work of Joss Whedon," in 2020. She currently works on a PhD on *Destiny in Tolkien's work* at La Sorbonne Université.

Anne Acker teaches English at Tusculum University in Greeneville, TN. A native and lifelong resident of Johnson City, TN, she holds degrees from Milligan University, East Tennessee State University, and the University of Tennessee. She teaches courses in British and World Literatures, including Shakespeare, mythology, and research courses. She currently serves as Chair of English and Languages. When she is not working with students, she can be found haunting bookstore cafés and scenic mountain roads in Appalachia.

Emily E. Auger (Ph.D.) is the author of numerous books, articles, and reviews, including *Tarot and Other Meditation Decks* (2004; 2nd Ed. 2023) and *Cartomancy and Tarot in Film 1940-2010* (2016). She edited the anthology *Tarot in Culture Volumes I and II* (2014) and co-edited with Janet Brennan Croft a multi-volume anthology of papers by Nancy-Lou Patterson, including *Divining Tarot: Papers on Charles Williams's The Greater Trumps and Other Works* (2019). She was also the founder and area chair for Tarot and Other Methods of Divination at the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association conference from 2004–2020.

Katelynn Baerg is an MA student in the English department at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, British Columbia, Canada. Her current research interests include Victorian Literature, Fan Studies, Children's Literature, and the intersections between stress and adolescents' engagement with literature. Katelynn graduated in 2022 from UNBC's Department of Psychology with a BSc in Psychology with plans to continue with an interdisciplinary approach into a graduate clinical psychology program to start a career as a school psychologist in Northern BC.

Michael Barros is Humanities Coordinator at Boise Classical Academy.

Heather Bass is an adjunct at Fayetteville State University. She received her Masters in English and Literature at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and is pursuing her PhD in Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests are in the Gothic, monster theory, as well as fantasy video games. She's also a big Grady Hendrix fan.

Richard Angelo Bergen recently completed his PhD in English Language and Literature at the University of British Columbia. His dissertation discussed the use of space and place in medieval and Early Modern allegorical narratives, and he has won two Canada Graduate Awards from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Richard works part-time as an English instructor at a UBC affiliate institution (Corpus Christi College), where he has taught twelve undergraduate courses in literature and academic writing.

Hayden Bilbrey is currently pursuing his PhD in 19th century British Literature at Oklahoma State University. His research area focuses on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and the role it plays culturally as a mythology. He is an English instructor at Oklahoma State University and Oklahoma City Community College.

Cameron Bourquein has been a lover of Tolkien since the mid-90s. She is an independent scholar who received her BA in 2006 from Anderson University where she studied Theatre, Graphic Design, Sculpture, and Information Systems. Her undergraduate thesis integrated her love of acting, installation sculpture, spatial design, and the photography of Josef Sudek into a one-woman show examining the intersection of external space and internal narrative. In 2005 she started her own graphic design, web design, 3D graphics and animation business. She lives in Indiana, USA with her husband and her cat and can be found online at CameronBourquein.com.

Craig Boyd (PhD) is Professor of Philosophy & Humanities at Saint Louis University. His articles on Tolkien have appeared in such venues as *The Heythrop Journal*, *Christian Scholar's Review*, *Christianity & Literature*, and *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Life*. Forthcoming from Cambridge UP is *Tolkien on the True, the Good, and the Beautiful*. He has written extensively on the work of Thomas Aquinas, natural law ethics, and the virtues and vices. He (with Kevin Timpe) co-edited *Virtues & Their Vices* (Oxford UP, 2014) and co-authored *The Virtues: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2021).

Mark Brians is the rector of All Saints in downtown Honolulu. He lives with his wife, five children, a bird named Fancis, and a hive of honey bees in Liliha.

Andrew Burt works in the English Department at Gogebic Community College teaching composition, film, and literature courses. His research focuses on the intersections of film, television, and literature. He also specializes in crime studies, masculinity studies, and rock and roll studies among others. His recent publications consist of chapters in the edited collections, *Music in Twin Peaks: Listen to the Sounds* and *David Lynch and the American West: Essays on Regionalism and Indigeneity in Twin Peaks and the Films* as well as an article for a special blaxploitation issue of *The Journal of Popular Culture*.

Anna Caterino holds a BA and MA in foreign languages and literature. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in linguistics, literary, and intercultural studies at the University of Milan. Her research interests include Early Modern drama, fan studies, and audience reception studies. Her essay “‘I have my version and you have yours’: Fanfiction and *Supernatural* Fans’ Road to Damascus” will be included in the upcoming volume *Fix It Fics: Challenging the Status Quo through Fan Fiction* edited by Kaitlin Tonti (Vernon Press, forthcoming).

Giovanni Carmine Costabile (MPhil) Italian independent scholar, translator, writer, teacher. He has published in several international academic journals and volumes dedicated to the Middle Ages, Medievalism, and Tolkien. He is the author of a monograph on Tolkien in Italian, of a commentary in English on Tolkien’s essay *On Fairy-stories*, and conducted authorized research in the Tolkien Archive, Oxford. He translated more than ten volumes both from Italian into English and from English into Italian. He is a writer for the ‘Fellowship & Fairydust’ foundation from Maryland. For Phronesis he is the author of the high fantasy trilogy “Cronache di Arlen”.

Journee Cotton is a second year PhD candidate at the University of Exeter studying English. She obtained bachelor degrees from Lubbock Christian University and a master’s degree at the University of Bristol. She works at the University of Exeter as a Postgraduate Teaching Assistant, an editor for *PJMH: The Postgraduate Journal of Medical Humanities*, and a peer reviewer for *Exclamat!on: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Her current field of study uses environmental bioethics as a framework for the literature of J.R.R. Tolkien. She is interested in bioethics, ecology, and body studies.

Janet Brennan Croft is Associate University Librarian at the University of Northern Iowa. She is the author of *War in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* and has also written on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Orphan Black*, J.K. Rowling, Terry Pratchett, Lois McMaster Bujold, and other authors, TV shows, and movies, and is editor or co-editor of many collections of literary essays, most recently *Loremasters and Libraries in Fantasy and Science Fiction* with Jason Fisher. She edits the refereed scholarly journal *Mythlore* and is assistant editor of *Slayage*.

Jarrold DePrado is an instructor at Sacred Heart University in the Departments of Languages & Literature and Catholic Studies. He received his graduate degree from Boston University in English and American Literature. His area of specialization is drama (including Shakespeare, 20th & 21st Century American Drama, and musical theatre), with a focus on adaptation studies and American politics.

Willow DiPasquale is an adjunct instructor of English at Arcadia University, Bryn Mawr College, and Jefferson University. Her research focuses on the intersection of speculative fiction and ecocriticism, specifically representations of the environment and environment ethics in J.R.R. Tolkien's and Frank Herbert's mythopoeic fantasy literature. She teaches composition, speculative fiction, ecocriticism, animal studies, and research writing. She is the author of "Shifting Sands: Heroes, Power, and the Environment in the Dune Saga" in McFarland's recent collection, *Discovering Dune*, and has a book on Tolkien, Herbert, and ecocriticism under contract at the Kent State University Press.

Taylor Driggers holds a PhD from the University of Glasgow. His research examines how fantasy literature can reimagine the relationship between Christian theology, queer desire, and gendered embodiment, especially via theologies of failure. A member of Glasgow's Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic as well as the AHRC-funded research network Future Voices of Scottish Science Fiction and Fantasy, he is also interested in ways of curating fantasy's queer histories beyond mere representation and inclusion. His first monograph, *Queering Faith in Fantasy Literature* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), is a finalist for the 2023 Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies.

Nicole duPlessis has her Ph.D. in English from Texas A&M University, where she has worked as a lecturer, a technology trainer, and an editorial assistant for Texas A&M University Press. She is currently embarking on a new career in organizational development. In her spare time, she reads, writes about Tolkien and other fantasy literature, watches shows about farming in the U.K., crochets, sews, draws, and collects fountain pens. She has a book on "Marriage in Middle-earth" under contract with McFarland.

Dr Hadas Elber-Aviram is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame's London Global Gateway. She is the author of *Fairy Tales of London: British Urban Fantasy, 1840 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), which is a finalist for the 2023 Mythopoeic Scholarship Award for Myth and Fantasy Studies.

Matthew Elfenbein is a Ph.D. Candidate in Comparative Studies at Florida Atlantic University and holds his M.A. in Cinema Studies from New York University. He is currently working on a dissertation that looks at how audiences place meaning and emotion onto animated dancing bodies. His research focuses on film musicals, emphasizing corporeality, animation, and digital cinema. Matthew teaches a variety of classes in film studies for FAU's School of Communication and Multimedia Studies. He loves to branch away from the canons of film

scholarship and integrate new approaches and ideas into his work, thus making his work interdisciplinary when appropriate.

Raymond G. Falgui is an assistant professor at the University of the Philippines; he teaches English and American literature. His short stories have appeared in magazines such as *Philippines Free Press*, *Philippines Graphic*, and *Playboy Philippines*, e-zines such as *Innsmouth Free Press*, and anthologies such as *Philippine Speculative Fiction*, *The Digest of Philippine Genre Stories*, *Alternative Alamat: Stories Inspired by Philippine Mythology*, and *Trash: A Southeast Asian Urban Anthology*. His poetry has appeared in *Philippines Graphic*, the *Tulaan Sa Tren 2* anthology, and the *Little Things* poetry anthology.

Alicia Fox-Lenz is a co-host of *Queer Lodgings*, an LGBTQIA+-led Tolkien podcast, and an independent scholar studying Tolkien through a Cultural Studies lens and expanding the mantle of mythopoeic literature to interactive narrative platforms. They have been published in *Critical Insights: The Hobbit*, *"Something Has Gone Crack": New Perspectives on J.R.R. Tolkien in the Great War*, *Mythopoeic Narrative in The Legend of Zelda*, and is currently editing a collection tentatively titled *"I'm Going on an Adventure": Seeking Tolkien's Influence in Game Design and Culture*.

Valerie Estelle Frankel is the author of 88 pop culture books, including *Hunting for Meaning in The Mandalorian* and *The Villain's Journey*. Others focus on women's roles in fiction, from her heroine's journey guides *From Girl to Goddess* and *Superheroines and the Epic Journey* to books like *Star Wars Meets the Eras of Feminism* and *Fourth Wave Feminism in Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Now she's the editor of Jewish Science Fiction and Fantasy, publishing an academic series for Lexington Press. She teaches at Mission College, San Jose City College, and Athena's Advanced Academy. www.vefrankel.com

Erin Giannini, PhD is an independent scholar. She served as an editor and contributor at PopMatters, and written numerous articles about topics from corporate culture in genre television to production-level shifts and their effects on television texts. She is also the author of *Supernatural; A History of Television's Unearthly Road Trip* (Rowman & Littlefield 2021), and *The Good Place* [TV Milestones], and co-editor of the book series B-TV: Television Under the Critical Radar for Bloomsbury.

Nyssa Gilkey is a mechanical engineer. She has been playing video games since *Doom* came out (she was 5), and has been interested in Homeric Epics since she saw the *Wishbone Odyssey* episode (also at 5). She has nearly 4000 Playstation trophies, a dozen different copies of the *Iliad* (some in languages she can't read), and spends her free time streaming video games for her friends.

Orazio Marie Gnerre has a degree in Political Science and International Relations, and in European and International Policies at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan. He deals with political philosophy and international relations. He has written various essays and articles.

Laura Grabowski was handed a copy of *The Hobbit* at age 8. It was love at first read and the basis for a lifelong passion for Tolkien's work. Laura joined the staff of *Middle-earth News* in 2014, covering such events as the Los Angeles premiere of *The Battle of the Five Armies*. She is a regular Tolkien panelist at Dragon Con, where she may be seen cosplaying a variety of characters from a dwarf to a Vala. Laura holds a Ph.D. in Computer Science, and when not in Arda or captaining a starship, she is a professor at SUNY Potsdam.

Melody Green is the Academic Dean and Dean of Students at Urbana Theological Seminary. Her teaching interests include Tolkien, Lewis, MacDonald and other Inklings-related topics, as well as the relationship between faith and various aspects of popular culture. Her most recent publication is *J.R.R. Tolkien and the Arts: A Theology of Subcreation*, which she co-edited with Ned Bustard.

Taylor Johnson Guinan is a high school English teacher from Florence, Arizona with a passion for science fiction and fantasy. She has a BA from Arizona State University and an MA in Language and Literature with an emphasis in Speculative Fiction from Signum University. She has presented a number of papers at Signum's annual conference Mythmoot. While she personally enjoys the writing process, she also hopes to inspire her students to value reading and writing by continuing to hone and use her writing skills in applicable ways. When she isn't reading, writing, or teaching, Guinan enjoys cosplay and both board and video games.

Pablo Guss is a graduate of the University of New Mexico, now teaching high school physics. In the past, he's been a Mythcon panelist for "The Single Leaf Project: Tolkien in Birmingham", "Protecting the Shire: A Hobbit Society's Journey at the University of New Mexico", and "The Rings of Power Book Club: Seduction, Knowledge, and Metallurgy in the Second Age of Middle-earth".

Leah Hagan (she/her/hers) is just another geeky queer girl with a BFA in Film and a career in dogwalking. She co-hosts *Queer Lodgings: A Tolkien Podcast*, and co-leads The Grey Havens Smial, a gathering of Tolkien fans centered in the US Pacific Northwest. She lives between the Mountains and the Sea with two rabbits, too much yarn, and far too few books.

Houston Howard Author, transmedia architect, creator, speaker, professor and dad, Houston Howard has more titles than a *Game of Thrones* character, but with less beheading and more dad jokes. He is the co-founder of One 3 Creative, co-founder of Fulcrum Worldbuilders and the Executive Vice President of Transmedia Development and IP Incubation at The Story Plant.

David E. Isaacs is a Visiting Lecturer in Modern Languages and Literature at California Baptist University.

Mayank Kejriwal is a research scientist at the University of Southern California, with a focus on computational social science and Artificial Intelligence for Social Good. He has a deep interest in science fiction and fantasy, especially of the absurdist school. He has previously presented his work in the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association, and is currently writing a book chapter on the hit AppleTV show *Severance*.

Fryderyk Kwiatkowski is a joint doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Groningen and the Institute of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University. His research focuses on the history and development of the academic study of Gnosticism; its impact on Euro-American thought; and appropriation in the twentieth-century philosophy, religion, and popular culture. He has published in venues such as *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *Journal of Religion and Film*, *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies*. Currently, he is awaiting the reviews of his recently submitted dissertation entitled *Gnosticism in Hollywood: From European Academia to American Popular Culture*.

Dr. Kristine Larsen has been an astronomy professor at Central Connecticut State University since 1989. Her teaching and research focus on the intersections between science and society, including sexism and science; science and popular culture (especially science in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien); and the history of science. She is the author of the books *Stephen Hawking: A Biography*, *Cosmology 101*, *The Women Who Popularized Geology in the 19th Century*, and *Particle Panic!* and *Science, Technology and Magic in The Witcher: A Medievalist Spin on Modern Monsters*.

Tim Lenz (he/him) is the Steward for Mythopoeic Conferences of the Mythopoeic Society, Producer/Occasional Co-Host of *Queer Lodgings: A Tolkien Podcast*, and lifelong geek. He attended his first Mythcon in 2018, and was immediately struck with an appreciation for its unique blend of academics, fannish content, camaraderie, and goblin head-smashing. Tim has a PhD in biochemistry from Georgia Tech, but has also dabbled in media studies—his undergraduate thesis at McMaster University explored Cold War science fiction as a reflection of the public consciousness. He is also co-host of a ‘*Jeopardy!*’-famous’ annual Middle-earth Movie Marathon.

Cara Marta Messina is an Assistant Professor of English at Marist College (beginning Fall 2023). She received her PhD in English with a focus on Writing and Rhetoric from Northeastern University. Her research includes fan studies, game studies, and digital rhetoric. Her work can be found in *Computers and Composition Online*, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *The Journal of Writing Analytics*, and several edited collections. For more, visit her website at <https://caramartamessina.com/>.

Grace Moone (she/her/hers) is a writer, podcaster, educator and activist. She is a Steward of the Mythopoeic Society and Co-host of *Queer Lodgings: A Tolkien Podcast*. She holds a M.Ed in Educational Policy and Leadership from Marquette University as well as a B.A from Rockford University in History and Theatre, and serves on the Steering Committee for Bi+ Pride Milwaukee. Grace collects books like Smaug collects gems and gold. Her non-literary hobbies include quilting, fiber-arts, gardening, and almost any craft she can get her hands on.

Minna Nizam is a trans, Jewish, disabled, fantasy author of South Asian and East African ancestry who graduated from Drew University in 2017 with a degree in Art History and History, minoring in Medieval Studies. They are currently a second year graduate student at Drew University, where they study Women's History and plans to write a thesis about South Asian women's voices in Victorian era Britain. Minna is also working on a fantasy series, titled *United Kingdoms of Eslanda*, and plans to be published at the latest by 2025.

Camilo Peralta is an Assistant Professor of English at Joliet Junior College. For the past several years, he has taught composition and literature at various institutions in Kansas and Oklahoma; prior to that, he traveled the world as an ESL / EFL instructor. He has a PhD in the Humanities and degrees in English literature, and is a former Wilbur Fellow at the Russell Kirk Center in Mecosta, MI. His research interests include religion, popular culture, and science fiction / fantasy.

Vicki Ronn is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Friends University.

John Rosegrant is a psychoanalyst in private practice. He has given talks and published papers on topics including play therapy, dreams, fairy tales, Tolkien, Ursula Le Guin, two Potters (Beatrix and Harry), and the World of Warcraft computer game. He is author of the book *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss: Steps on the Developmental Journey*, as well as the Young Adult Fantasy series *The Gates of Inland*.

Zac Rutledge is a professor at Peninsula College in Port Angeles, Washington where he teaches a variety of courses including creative writing, statistics, and symbolic logic. His research interests include the exploration of psychogeography, occultism, and mathematics in literature. His focus currently is on weird fiction from the late 19th and early 20th century.

Mónica Sanz-Rodríguez is an Independent Tolkien Scholar born in Spain. She has an MA in English Philology, specializing in Literature from the British Isles. Tolkien has been her main field of study in essays published nationally and internationally. Her essay "Shadows of Middle-earth: Tolkien in Subculture, Counterculture and Exploitation" was nominated this year as Best Article for the Tolkien Society Awards. She has given numerous lectures, from schools to universities (Barcelona, Majorca or Saragossa) and participated in many conferences, both in Spain (HispaCon, Mereth Aderthad, Encuentros Tolkien...) and abroad (Tolkien Society Seminar, OMS Mythopoeic Society, NEPCA . . .)

Erin Sledd works at the intersection of the humanities, art, and technology. Her research and creative interests span the connections between the analog and digital world and include mythology and fairytales, Islamic sacred geometry, metamorphoses and hybridity, emergent design, virtual and material structures, narrative, sustainability, and eschatechnology. Both as a designer and academic, she is fascinated by the nature of form and structure, of transformation and permutation. For several years now, her research focus has been on the anthropological, architectural, and literary roots of the labyrinth and maze.

William Thompson is an associate professor at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Canada. He is totally blind, and regularly teaches courses in children's literature and science fiction, and has taught courses on both C.S. Lewis and the Inklings. He has written articles on L.M. Montgomery and J.K. Rowling, and his latest piece, "Of Dying Gods and Lamp-Posts: Repositioning C.S. Lewis's *Narniad* For The Twenty-First Century," appeared in *The Inklings And Culture: A Harvest Of Scholarship From The Inklings Society of Canada*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020.

Michael A. Torregrossa (he/him/his) is a graduate of the Medieval Studies program at the University of Connecticut and works as an adjunct instructor in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. His research focuses on popular culture's adaptation and appropriation of literary classics, including the Arthurian legend, *Beowulf*, *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, the Robin Hood story, and the works of Lovecraft, Shakespeare, and Wells. Michael is the founder of The Alliance for the Promotion of Research on the Matter of Britain and The Association for the Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching of the Medieval in Popular Culture. Michael chairs the NEPCA Monsters and the Monstrous Area.

Inês Vaz is a PhD student at NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities. Pursuing a degree in Modern Literatures and Cultures, the focus of her research is fantasy fiction. Her master's dissertation looked at female renditions of the monomyth in children's fantasy literature while her other published works explore themes such as adaptation and gender representations in fantasy contexts. It is her goal to keep contributing to fantasy studies through her work. Research interests include (but are certainly not limited to): children's and young adult fantasy, literature and other media, adaptation, animation, gender issues, steampunk, and neo-Victorianism.

Constance G.J. Wagner, a freelance writer, poet, and Tolkien scholar, is a lecturer in Writing and Literature at Saint Peter's University in Jersey City, New Jersey. She regularly presents on the question of sacrifice and heroism in *The Lord of the Rings*, speaking at conferences throughout the USA and Europe. She is also a regular speaker at such fan events as DragonCon, LunaCon, and A Long Expected Party. Her current projects include *The War Within: Frodo as Sacrificial Hero*, a book-length analysis; and *Winter's Bride, and Other Songs of Faerie*, an illustrated chapbook of lyric poetry inspired by fantasy imagery.

Reggie Weems has been married to his childhood sweetheart, Teana, since 1975 and they have three children and eleven grandchildren. He has served as the pastor at Heritage Baptist Church since 1991 and is also an Assistant Professor in theology and Bible, as well as a DMin mentor at Liberty University's Rawlings School of Divinity. He has earned his DMin in Pastoral Leadership (Liberty University), his PhD in Historical Theology (University of Babes-Bolyai), and his DThM in Romantic Theology (Northwind Seminary).

Jim Wert was introduced to Tolkien in the second grade, and has been deeply enthralled with Middle-earth and the Professor's works ever since. Jim is a volunteer staff member with *TheOneRing.net*, as well as with the High Fantasy Track at Atlanta's annual Geek-Fest, Dragon Con. In these capacities, he's a frequent panelist, interviewer, and occasional article author. Jim is also an avid Tolkien collector and cosplayer. He funds these obsessions through his "real world" work as a management consultant.

Aven Lumi Whitehorne (they/she) is a writer and PhD student in CIIS's Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program. Aven holds a BA in Environmental Humanities with emphases in Social Science and Writing, and an MFA in Creative Writing & Literature, as well as certificates in Ecopsychology and Applied Mythology. Through their graduate work, Aven hopes to illuminate the connections between language, story, culture, and climate. Aven's writing has appeared in the *Scribbler Blog*, *Role/Reboot*, and *TSR: The Southampton Review*. A lifelong Narnian, Aven speaks to animals—especially their 3 dogs—just in case one reveals that Aslan is on the move.

Kyoko Yuasa, Ph.D is a lecturer of English Literature at Hokusei Gakuen University, Sapporo, Japan. She is the author of *C.S. Lewis and Christian Postmodernism: Word, Image and Beyond* (2016), and Japanese translator of Bruce L. Edwards's *A Rhetoric of Reading: C.S. Lewis's Defense of Western Literacy* (2007). She has also written for *An Unexpected Journal*: "Table Narnia: Fugue to Evangelical Adventure" (2018) and "Narnia Adapted to Film: The Triune Dance" (2019). She has presented papers in Japan and many international conferences in Europe and the United States.



MYTHCON 53: FANTASIES OF THE MIDDLE LANDS

Join us for Mythcon 53 in Minneapolis!

Tentatively planned for the first weekend in August 2024

Chair: David Emerson ** Vice-Chair: Janet Brennan Croft

Papers Coordinator: Melody Green ** Guests of Honor: To be announced

THEME: Fantasies of the Middle Lands

In keeping with the location in the middle of the continental U.S., our theme builds on the idea of “middle-ness” in various ways. Possible subjects for papers and discussions would include:

- Middle-earth, Midgard, etc
- The English midlands, beloved by Tolkien
- Middle America: the heartland, folklore, tall tales, *Prairie Home Companion*, *Field of Dreams*
- Middle America in horror: *Stranger Things*, what's buried in the cornfield
- Middle America in fantasy: Lois McMaster Bujold's *Sharing Knife* series, Orson Scott Card's *Alvin Maker* series
- Liminal spaces as settings for fantasy: train stations, Purgatory, Wood Between the Worlds
- Intertextuality: crossing genres, multiple media
- Middle thirds of trilogies
- The middle of life: middle age, midlife crises, menopause

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