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## An Enlargement of Being

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### An Enlargement of Being

#### Additional Keywords

Bg Callahan

# An Enlargement of Being

Founder's Focus by Glen H. GoodKnight

(The following was given as the Keynote address at the 1975 Mythcon)

I promised in the July, 1975, issue of *Mythprint* to comment this year on what I believe is the essence of the Society, in part in response to comments by others in *Mythprint* in the form of letters, controversies concerning rabbits, and thinly veiled allegorical tracts. My recent journey to Britain, which was as much as anything else a quest better to understand our three central authors, has greatly aided in clarifying my own thoughts about them and about The Mythopoeic Society's relationship to them. I would like to share with you what I see as the essential nature of the Society. In the May, 1975, issue of *Mythprint*, I said: "The Mythopoeic Society treads the middle way between isolated exclusivity of interest ('sectarianism') on the one hand, and unfocused eclecticism ('latitudinarianism') on the other." This needs further explanation. There are extreme attitudes that can be found within the Society on either side of the "middle way":

There is what I see as an error of diffusion, of lack of focus, which in its milder form would have us completely and conveniently ignore the Christian element of the authors, and indeed spiritual implications in literature generally. Those who hold this view seem to be made uncomfortable concerning any such implications, even when this element arises naturally in a discussion or study of literature. This eclectic "meat-ax" approach of only taking from an author that which is acceptable to one's current limited understanding of the meaning of the author's work is wrong. We are misled if we fail to realize each author's work is a fusion of elements which cannot be separated with distortion. The more extreme form of this attitude would have the Society abandon its central commitment to the three authors, and become a generalized "fantasy fandom." While the nature of the Society is determined by the majority of its members, as the founder of this Society and one intimately acquainted with its many activities for nearly eight years, I believe that such an alteration in the purpose that the Society has maintained since its formation would be disastrous, for the Society itself as much as for any of the members.

No other group than the Inklings, certainly not in the last hundred years, has produced more material, both in the genre of myth and fantasy and in critical theory about it, than they have. By their being joined together in time and space as they were, their similarity is not only of idea and theory, but also of common atmosphere. In a world which was becoming increasingly disillusioned by its own vision of reality, seeking answers in forms of religion, political systems, science, and psychology, our three authors found a system of cosmic order and created a myth to contain it. They were more concerned with myth as a work of art and as a conveyer of truth, than as the end point of a long string of influences. Many persons, including members of this Society as well as myself, have found a special delight to define with the three. While being indebted to many other writers as well, we hold them in unique regard, and wish know their work better. The above reasons seem to make more than an adequate literary defense for an organization specially devoted to those men, if such a defense is really required. I recognize there are those who do not find this defense sufficient. To them I would say: Even though the Society does indeed function on many levels for many kinds of people — of which this convention is a good example — we exceed the bounds of the possible to seek to please the wishes of all persons in all ways.

There is, I believe, an opposite error of attitude: the idea that the Society should serve as an evangelical Christian organization. Those seriously concerned about evangelism I would direct to another organization, much older and more venerable, which has a founder much greater than I.

It is true that one result of my reading J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis as a high school student was my conversion from cynical agnosticism to Christianity — a conversion much as Lewis describes: "...The experience is that of catastrophic conversion.

The man who has passed through it feels like one who has wakened from nightmare into ecstasy. Like an accepted lover, he feels that he had done nothing, and never could have done anything, to deserve such astonishing happiness." (*English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama*, Oxford University Press, 1954. Page 33.) It is also true that the fusion of literary and spiritual joy which resulted from reading Tolkien and Lewis and from my conversion was the enthusiastic spark that led eventually to the founding of The Mythopoeic Society.

The joy that these men, and later Charles Williams, have brought me does indeed make me hope that every member of the Society would have a similar experience. I would be satisfied if each member would indeed read the primary works of the three authors, and "taste and see" what is to be encountered in that reading. How indeed persons do interact with this literature is beyond the scope of my reason for founding the Society: I realize one cannot institutionalize a personal experience. In this context, the Society's aim is to provide a medium of exchange rather than to be a bearer of doctrine. The Society best fulfills its function if it does not set bounds to its members' philosophies by adopting a religious or literary philosophy of its own.

My recent journey to Britain to see the people and places known to the three authors has affected me deeply. I have had time to allow what I already knew about these men to interact with and be corrected by what I learned on that very rewarding journey. I have returned appreciating and loving them even more than before, but worshipping them less. It is wrong to venerate them as icons of the joy to which they point. They would be the first ones firmly to protest such a view. The three as men seem much more individually distinct and real to me now, and this does help me to understand their writing more clearly; but the communication of joy comes primarily from their works, not their personal lives (although I do feel Lewis did at times, in his unselfish giving for others, take on saintliness).

Though one of the functions of the Society is to introduce persons to this body of literature, it would be presumptuous for the Society to insert itself in the experiential encounter between the reader and the body of literature. The Society has no doctrine, creed, or loyalty oath, and has never required one. Some people have assumed that the Society is evangelical or sectarian in that sense, or would be if it thought this would be permitted. I am sorry for those who have thus felt in this way a real or imaginary intimidation or threat, for that has not been the Society's intent. I would have all Society members reject religious sectarianism and literary cultishness, whether or not it would bring some apparent benefits (a thing I sincerely doubt). The Society has never been so narrow an organization, and any such narrowing of it in the future would be very unfortunate.

The sectarian drive, although especially understandable among those of fresh enthusiasm, is not ultimately constructive in this sort of organization. To the degree that sectarianism is gratified, the Society's universality is diminished, and such a trend, if continued, would make the Society's purpose self-defeating. One would be left only with those who think exactly like oneself, and the opportunity of growth and exchange would be excluded, the vision and experience of the Great Dance lost.

In summary, I would not have the Society compromise the religious belief of the three authors, nor elements of that belief in their works; nor would I have the Society presume to interpret as an organization the meaning of that belief. By taking this position, I do not in any way mean to limit individual members in their interpretation.

I have taken this moment to discuss "errors of attitude" on either side of the Society's middle course, in hopes of clarifying the situation and clearing the air, and in hopes of making the advantages of the middle way more obvious. I seek more than ever

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asked of Taran. In his final encounter with Arawn Death-Lord in *The High King*, Taran merely cleaves a serpent in twain. His shadow has been suited to his size.

Gurgi embodies, then, Taran's self-emasculating fear, his hunger (for self-knowledge and identity)—of which his being a pig-keeper is perhaps an echo, for the prodigal son, far from his birthplace, and starving, became a swineherd and ate husks with his pigs—and his doglike dependency: "had Gurgi owned a tail, Taran was sure he would have wagged it frantically" (*Book of Three*, p. 38). When Taran reaches maturity, Gurgi (and the other magical—that is to say, unconscious—companions) withdraws:

"Yes! yes!" shouted Gurgi. "All go to the land of no sighings and no dyings!" He bounded joyously and waved his arms in the air, shedding a good portion of what hair remained to him.

"Yes, oh yes! All together forever! And Gurgi, too, will find what he seeks. Wisdom for his poor tender head!" (*The High King*, p. 282.)

Jolande Jacobi discusses making conscious the unconscious contents (of which the shadow figure is actually the most shallow and immediate)—the symbol may be brought to a certain level of consciousness "but without being wholly fathomed, so that it continues to be 'alive' and effective;"<sup>19</sup> it may be "completely fathomed and explored." becoming "a mere allegory, a 'sign,' or

<sup>19</sup> Jolande Jacobi, *Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C.G. Jung*. Bollingen Series LVII, Princeton University Press (New York: 1959), p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> Jon Stone, *The Monster at the End of This Book*, Little Golden Books (1971), not paginated.

a conceptually unambiguous content of consciousness" (*Complex/Archetype/Symbol*, p. 121); ("shedding," as it were, "what hair remained") or it may "not be understood at all," resulting in "an autonomous splinter psyche, ... that is, in all kinds of neurotic and psychotic symptoms" (p. 121)—such a being as Grendel. Whatever the result, the shadow must be reckoned with. Taran must agree with his hairy adversary, and take him along as a companion. As Alexander says in introducing his second book, "readers who have already journeyed with Taran are assured... that Gurgi, despite shakings and quakings and fears for his poor tender head, insisted on joining this new adventure" (*The Black Cauldron*, Intro., n. p.).

There is one last place to look for light on Gurgi, the shadow, and ourselves: this is a superb Little Golden Book, *The Monster at the End of This Book*, which stars "lovable, furry old Grover," one of a race of monsters familiar to the audience of *Sesame Street*. In this story Grover reads the title, and exclaims "Did that say there will be a Monster at the end of this book??? IT DID? Oh, I am so scared of Monsters!!!"<sup>20</sup> After a series of desperate attempts to prevent the reader from turning the pages and reaching the last page, Grover makes his discovery: "Well look at that! This is the end of the book and the only one here is...ME. I, lovable, furry old GROVER, am the Monster at the end of this book." This sums up my thesis admirably: we are ourselves the monsters, whether we know it or not. The shadow we cast is our own.

NANCY-LOU PATTERSON  
*Feast of St. Philip and St. James*  
AD 1973, Waterloo, Ontario

## An Enlargement of Being

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the Society's fuller maturity as a literary organization — balanced, united in intellectual honesty, and worthily fulfilling its stated commitment. What I say is not in any way directed toward specific individuals, because I recognize that no single person that I know of personally is an embodiment of either error. Rather, real people are constantly and subtly altering their own positions on these and many other questions. I believe there is a reason for literary experience — whether or not the individual acknowledges a link with spiritual experience — in which I hope we may and can all find agreement. In giving a justification for reading great literature, C.S. Lewis says in the Epilogue of *An Experiment in Criticism*:

What then is the good of — what is even the defence for — occupying our hearts with stories of what never happened and entering vicariously into feelings which we should try to avoid having in our own person?... The nearest I have yet got to an answer is that we seek an enlargement of our being. We want to be more than ourselves. Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and a selectiveness peculiar to himself. And even when we build disinterested fantasies, they are saturated with, and limited by, our own psychology.... We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own.... The primary impulse of each is to maintain and aggrandise himself. The secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness.... Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realise the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors. We realise it best when we talk with an unliterary friend. He may be full of goodness and good sense but he inhabits a tiny world. In it, we should be suffocated. The man who is content to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison.... Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound; but they destroy the privilege. In them our separate selves are pooled and we sink back into sub-individuality. But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.



## Notes on This Issue

The last issue took a great deal of time to become fact. This was in part due to my personal saddening resulting from the death of J. R. R. Tolkien, a man I, along with many others, respected and admired deeply. Nevertheless the issue needed to be finished, and gradually my own personal feelings were forced to come to a head as I wrote the editorial "Death and the Desire for Deathlessness." Its writing was a cathartic experience, and no longer held back by the inertia of bereavement, I could look again look forward.

I realized *Mythlore* needed a larger staff, in order to publish it, hopefully with greater frequency. I asked Laurence Krieg, Gracia Fay Ellwood, and George Colvin to join the staff, and they agreed. Laurence Krieg would undertake the role of Managing Editor in a similar fashion as he had done previously with *Mythprint*. As a result, credit goes to him for the organization, arranging of art, and layout of most of the interior of the issue (pp. 3-7, and 10-31). I am directly responsible for the content of the two covers, pages 2, 9, and the lower half of this page. I regret I was not able to follow the Managing Editor's policy of not continuing ends of articles later in the issue. Gracia Fay Ellwood made the arrangements for page 8. I express my thanks to all the staff for their vital assistance, especially Laurence Krieg, in getting this issue into facthood. Plans are nearly finished on the working out of a new way of producing *Mythlore* on a regular basis. I have learned not to make premature promises in print, but do both hope and expect that you will be seeing the next issue sooner than you may expect.

— Glen H. GoodKnight