

# MYTHPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

Vol. 44 No. 3

March 2007

Whole No. 300



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## Illustrations

Cover: "Spring Flower Lady"

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See inside back cover

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DEADLINES for receiving material for each issue of *Mythprint* are the 1<sup>st</sup> of the preceding month (eg, April 1<sup>st</sup> for the May issue).

# The 38th Annual Mythopoeic Conference

Mythcon XXXVIII

Theme: "Becoming Adept: The Journey to Mastery"

Clark Kerr Conference Center

Berkeley, California, August 3-6, 2007

Guests of Honor: Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman

Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman are both Mythopoeic Fantasy Award winning authors for their novels *Thomas the Rhymer* and *The Porcelain Dove* respectively. Both have new novels appearing in 2006, Kushner's *The Privilege of the Sword* and Sherman's *Changeling*. Kushner's public radio series *Sound & Spirit* is a renowned weekly program. Both have made great contributions to the mythopoeic and interstitial arts, and we are proud to welcome them to Mythcon 38.

The Mythopoeic Society discusses myth, fantasy and imaginative literature in discussion groups across the U.S. and on the internet, in newsletters and scholarly books and journals, and at its annual Mythopoeic Conference (Mythcon). Inspired by the scholarly discussions and writings of the 1930s Oxford University group The Inklings (including C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams), the Society began in California in 1967.

The conference will feature the usual blend of the scholarly (papers, panels, keynote addresses, presentation of the Mythopoeic Awards) and seasoned Mythcon traditions (auction, costume presentation, banquet, Golfimbul, the Not-Ready-for-Mythcon Players).

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## Conference membership

Feb. 2–July 15, 2007

|                                    |      |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Mythopoeic Society members         | \$75 |
| Non-members                        | \$85 |
| Registered students, age 12 and up | \$50 |
| Children under 12                  | free |

If you are uncertain of your Society membership status, please contact our Membership Secretary, Marion Van Loo, at [REDACTED]

or make checks payable to The Mythopoeic Society, and mail to: Bonnie Rauscher, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] E-mail: [REDACTED]

## Room and Board

Rates are per person, for Friday dinner through Monday breakfast, including banquet, and three nights lodging. Payment must be received by July 15, 2007.

- \$275 for residence hall, double occupancy
- \$335 for residence hall, single room
- \$290 for suites, double occupancy
- \$365 for suites, single room

Online registration (using Paypal): [REDACTED]

## Book Reviews

PETER S. BEAGLE, *The Line Between*. San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2006. ISBN 1892391368, tp, 206 pp., \$14.95.

This long-anticipated new collection of short stories by Peter S. Beagle fulfilled this reader's hopes. Readers can see the culmination of a long life of writing distilled here, as his many styles and interests come together in one book rather like an apartment building between the worlds, with each story exploring new quirky characters inhabiting each room, whether temporarily or for generations.

Each story is prefaced by a Beagle-penned paragraph describing how it came into being. Allowing the reader in on its creation in this way adds to the joy and anticipation of entering the story. In particular, the preface to "Two Hearts," a short-story sequel to *The Last Unicorn*, entices and charms, as Beagle explains how he moved from a stance of 'a sequel can't, and won't, be done' to getting slowly snookered into writing it by his friend and publicist. How? By enticing Beagle to write one new story based in that world. Once there, of course, four of the main characters happened to show up. Then Beagle fell in love with the new main character, a feisty young woman named Sooz—so now, an entire novel may be lurking in our future. Hooray! Readers are similarly led to anticipate more stories following the siblings in El Regalo, to be collected in a book entitled "My Stupid Brother Marvin the Witch." Who can resist a title like that?

Other stories in the collection showcase Beagle's wide-ranging ability to combine the magical with the ordinary, while playing with several literary styles as seen across his earlier work, from his motorcycle travel saga *I See By My Outfit* to the somewhat tongue-in-cheek *The Folk of the Air*. One can also see the aging man as author of these stories, with the wit and wis-

dom of a grandfather amusedly musing over his life and the many types of fictional worlds he's entered earlier. "Gordon, the Self-Made Cat" was originally a humorous morality tale for his children while small. "Four Fables" is a paean to his own exposure to serious fables as a child. (He also drops the tantalizing historical tidbit that Aesop was done in...). "Mr. Sigerson" pays homage to Sherlock Holmes. "Quarry" brings back the world of *The Innkeeper's Song*, in order to answer the question posed to him about how Soukryan originally met his shapeshifting fox companion. Since Beagle had no idea how to answer, he wrote this story to find out. "Quarry" contains an encounter with houses that are not houses, but something else, something malevolent posing as the familiar in order to lure in the prey... a motif that I must admit I found unforgettable, as it echoes some of my deepest childhood nightmares.

These stories all have a sense of continual discovery and wonder. Even when a tale has a twist to the end like the best-planned mysteries, you get the feeling that Beagle was surprised and delighted by it too. These stories do not feel contrived, but organic, flowering madly where and how they will. And the characters are what drives them. One of my favorites, "Salt Wine," is told in the voice of the crusty old sailor Ben Hazeltine, "not some seagoing candy-trews dandy Captain Jack ... I can promise you" (p. 135), who gets involved in a business deal involving a recipe conned out of a merrow. And the final tale, "A Dance for Emilia," is a magical-realism homage to friends who have passed on too soon.

These are tales no young person could have penned. It takes the wisdom and the pain of years to bring about this sort of poignant appreciation, this combination of gentle love and no-B.S. crankypants humor. It's a beautiful

collection, and one that provides thrilling anticipation of more to come. Like Theodore Sturgeon before him, Beagle is proving himself a master bard whose tales use wild rolling imagination to kindle the reader's heart.

*Reviewed by Tina Fields*



DOUGLAS "DAG" ROSSMAN, *The Northern Path: Norse Myths and Legends Retold ... and What They Reveal*. Chapel Hill, NC: Seven Paws Press, 2005. ISBN 0-9649113-9-6, tp, 251 pp., \$15.95.

This is a fun book to read. The author is an oral teller of Norse myths and legends, and has here set down written editions of his oral versions, plus a few of his thoughts as to their significance. Having tried reading aloud some of these chapters to audiences, I can testify that they go over well. The original tales are classics, and Rossman has not embellished the plots very much. He has, however, retold them entirely in his own language. The sidelong explanations of motives and the straight-out bumptious humor mean that in literary style—but only in style—these tales read less like the stark originals they're based on than like a lively translation of the Grimms' fairy tales. Rossman writes plainly, but does not entirely eschew colloquial language. His Thor, asked to disguise himself as Freyja, says, "What? Me dress up like a girl? No way! The guys would never let me live it down." Adults should enjoy these tales, whether they already know the stories or not, and I suspect children would get a real kick out of having these read aloud to them.

The book comes in two parts. One of them consists simply of tales retold. Two subsections of these consists of tales from the Eddas of the gods, particularly Odin and Thor: Ragnarök is included, but for the most part these are stories rather than descriptions of the nature of the

world that also fill up much of the Eddas. Rossman also retells, highly summarized, the *Volsunga Saga* and the first part of *Beowulf*. Many readers will probably know the *Volsunga Saga* better as it was heavily reworked and combined with the *Nibelungenlied* to form Wagner's Ring cycle of operas. This differs from the tale here as much as *The Silmarillion* does from *The Book of Lost Tales*: the broadest course of events is pretty much the same, but the details and significances and names are mostly very different. Though he alludes to Wagner, and to Tolkien's use of Norse myth in his fiction, Rossman is not really here to discuss the variant versions or histories of the tales.

What he is here for, besides to retell the tales, he discusses in part two, which takes up about a third of the book. Here he deals with the Norse cosmology and species taxonomy which was mostly excluded from part one, but he's mostly concerned with the significance of the tales. Most of this section is addressed directly to readers of Norse ancestry, so other readers may feel like guests at an ethnic festival in this part of the book. Rossman is a firm believer in cultural heritage. He is drawn to these tales because he feels they are addressed to him personally, and hopes his readers of Norse ancestry feel the same way. He suggests what myths can say to modern readers (this section has more general application than the Norse, of course), outlines a temporarily admirable reading of the moral principles that Norse myths in particular convey, gives a brief survey of some source texts without going into detail on the sources for his specific tales, and addresses the symbolic significance of runes (a very popular topic among amateur dabblers these days). The bibliography goes into some depth in specifically Nordic source material and recent literature, but unlike the tales themselves, neither the bibliography nor the essay on sources go into broader Germanic context. This is not a

book of scholarship, but the author is learned and can point you to some useful directions.

A person seeking an introduction to a mythology is probably better advised to begin with a good modern retelling rather than by wading through scholarly translations of source texts. This is a good retelling to begin an exploration of Norse mythology.

*Reviewed by David Bratman*



GENE WOLFE, *Soldier of Sidon*. New York: Tor, 2006. ISBN 0-765-31664-1, hc, 319 pp., \$24.95.

In his earlier books *Soldier of the Mist* and *Soldier of Arete* Gene Wolfe began telling the story of Latro, a soldier from early Rome serving as a mercenary on the Persian side in the Persian-Greek war of the early 5th century B.C. Latro (whose real name, we eventually learn, is Lucius) suffers from an unusual disorder: like the main character in the movie *Memento*, he loses all his memories every twenty-four hours, and has to keep a journal to remind himself of who he is and who his companions are (the books are supposed to be a translation of the resulting manuscripts). This infirmity, however, has come with a gift: he can see the gods and other supernatural beings and converse with them, and even sometimes confer the same ability on anyone who is in physical contact with him. We follow his travels through Greece and Thrace as he unwittingly serves the schemes of both gods and mortals—that is, we follow him as best we can, since he often finds himself incapable of keeping his journal regularly and so forgets crucial events that have affected him. The last we saw of him, he was being taken away from Greece on a Phoenician ship, bound for parts unknown.

Now, after a long hiatus, Wolfe has come back to his story—using material obtained, we

are told, from a manuscript newly recovered from the area submerged by the Aswan Dam. Latro has, indeed, been brought to Egypt; and his journal recounts for us his adventures along the Great River.

Wolfe had earlier intimated that the Latro books were a kind of homage to Herodotus, emulating the more endearing aspects of the style of that first of travel writers, especially his deadpan, matter-of-fact yet tellingly detailed descriptions of exotic wonders. Moving the story to Egypt makes the allusions even more obvious, since Herodotus was the earliest writer to introduce Egypt to the Western tradition as a land of ancient mysteries. Here we have both the Egypt known to archaeologists and historians and the romantic Egypt of the Western imagination.

Egypt in the 5th century B.C. is under Persian rule, and the Persian administration sponsors an expedition to investigate the upper reaches of the Nile beyond Nubia, taking Latro along as a military commander. At the temple of Hathor Latro engages the services of the charming Myt-ser'eu to be a temporary “river wife” for him during the voyage, but their relationship gradually deepens beyond mere convenience. Some of the participants in the expedition appear to have hidden motives of their own—especially the enigmatic sorcerer Sahuset, who is a priest of the renegade god Set. And, of course, Latro can see the myriad gods and spirits of the cities of Egypt, although he only partly understands their complex alliances and enmities and political maneuvers—in which he must, willy-nilly, play a role. Among his more uncanny companions on the journey are a woman made of wax, a cobra who can take on human form, and a giant talking panther.

Although there are many gaps in the narrative, the story is generally easier to follow here than in the earlier volumes. Some of those previous episodes are now more fully explained; and a

mission entrusted to Latro by the gods in Greece finds its fulfillment in the heart of Africa.

Latro is one of Wolfe's remarkable "good" characters: fallible, yet pure in moral intention. This is especially brought out when his soul (or, more accurately, souls) undergoes the Judgment famously depicted in the *Book of the Dead*. Wolfe seems to suggest that the discontinuous consciousness that is the result of his deficient memory doesn't affect the deeper, spiritually significant aspects of his person. Latro frequently

forgets who Myt-ser'eu is, but he always knows that he loves her.

We are given no assurance, as the volume concludes, that Latro's adventures are at an end. Perhaps we will soon learn of the discovery of yet another Old Latin manuscript in some unexpected corner of the world.

*Reviewed by Alexei Kondratiev*



## MythSoc Web: Member Links

Our new webmaster, Randy Hoyt, has been working hard to update and redesign the MythSoc web site, and we hope to keep adding more material and information as time and energy permit. One of the 'perks' of Mythopoeic Society membership is the opportunity to list your own web site in our "Members" section, and we encourage all MythSoc members to participate.

We do have a few rules for the Members' section, so please note the official policy:

The Mythopoeic Society offers links on its web site to the personal web pages of its members as a benefit of Society membership. If membership lapses as defined by Section III.9. of our Bylaws\*, the page will be removed. Link must be to a personal page, not to a store or commercial business.

\* "All memberships shall terminate on death or resignation. Any member or joint member shall have his or her membership automatically terminated when his or her dues are 90 days in arrears."

**Disclaimer:** The Mythopoeic Society disavows any knowledge or implied endorsement of what its members are up to.

If you have other suggestions to improve the Society's web site, or specific items you would like to have included, please contact Randy at [REDACTED]

# Activity Calendar

Marion VanLoo

Membership & Discussion Group Secretary

## Prospective Groups

### CALIFORNIA

██████████ *LOTHLORIEN*

Linda Sundstrom, ██████████

### FLORIDA

██████████ *HOBBITON*

Paul S. Ritz, ██████████

██████████ *ERYN GALEN*

B.L. McCauley, ██████████

### INDIANA

██████████ *CERIN AMROTH*

Ellen Denham, E-mail: ██████████

Web: ██████████

### MISSOURI

██████████ *THE KHAZAD*

Gary & Sylvia Hunnewell, ██████████

E-mail: ██████████

### NORTH CAROLINA

██████████ *THE CAROLINA TOLKIEN SOCIETY*

Matt & Renita Peeler ██████████

### OHIO

David Staley ██████████

Web site: ██████████

## Chartered Groups

### CALIFORNIA

██████████ *MYDGARD*

Lee Speth, ██████████

March: *Solstice Wood* by Patricia A. McKillip

April: *Quest for a Maid* by Frances May Hendry

██████████ *KHAZAD-DÛM*

Amy Wisniewski & Edith Crowe, ██████████

mail: ██████████

Web: ██████████

March: *Solstice Wood* and *Winter Rose* by Patricia A. McKillip

June: *Swordspoint* and *The Privilege of the Sword* by Ellen Kushner

Sep: *Three Days to Never* and *Declare* by Tim Powers

December: Annual Reading & Eating Meeting

### COLORADO

██████████ *FANUIDHOL ("CLOUDY HEAD")*

Patricia Yarrow, ██████████

E-mail: ██████████

Web: ██████████

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

██████████ *KNOSSOS*

Mimi Stevens, ██████████

March: *Beowulf*

April: *The Hill of Dreams* by Arthur Machen

May: The Great Romeo and Juliet Taste Test

June: Virgil's *Aeneid*

July: *Stories of Your Life and Others* by Ted Chiang

August: *Dracula* by Bram Stoker

### HAWAII

██████████ *SAMMATH NAUR*

Steve Brown, ██████████. E-mail: ██████████

Web: [bookgroup.pulelehuadesign.com](http://bookgroup.pulelehuadesign.com)

March: *Child of Flame* by Kate Elliott

April: "Share a Book"

June: *The Book of Lost Things* by John Connolly

July: *The King Must Die* by Mary Renault

August: *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien

### ILLINOIS

██████████ *THE FAR WESTFARTHING SMIAL*

Mike Foster, ██████████

E-mail: ██████████



## IOWA

[REDACTED] *ALFHEIM*

Doug Rossman, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

## LOUISIANA

[REDACTED] *ROKE*

Sally Budd, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

## MICHIGAN

[REDACTED] *GALADHREMMIN-ENNORATH*

Dave & Grace Lovelace, [REDACTED]

## MINNESOTA

[REDACTED] *RIVENDELL*

David Lenander, [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

## NEVADA

[REDACTED] *CRICKHOLLOW*

Joanne Burnett, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

March: *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood

April: *Something Rich and Strange* by Patricia A. McKillip

## NEW YORK

[REDACTED] *HEREN ISTARION*

(*THE NEW YORK TOLKIEN SOCIETY*)

Anthony Burdge/Jessica Burke, [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

## OREGON

[REDACTED]  
Donovan Mattole, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

March: *Children of God* by Maria Doria Russell

[REDACTED] *BYWATER INKLINGS*

Gary Lundquist, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

## PENNSYLVANIA

[REDACTED] *C.S. LEWIS AND FRIENDS*

Neil Gussman, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

## SOUTH CAROLINA

[REDACTED] *THE COLUMBIA C.S. LEWIS SOCIETY*

Nina Fowler, [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

## WASHINGTON

[REDACTED] *MITHLOND*

Matthew Winslow, [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

March: *Night Life of the Gods* by Thorne Smith

April: *The Ladies of Grace Adieu* by Susanna Clarke

## WISCONSIN

[REDACTED] *THE BURRAHOBBITS*

Jeffrey & Jan Long, [REDACTED]

March: *Through a Brazen Mirror* by Delia Sherman

April: *Thud* by Terry Pratchett

### Special Interest Group

*THE ELVISH LINGUISTIC FELLOWSHIP*

Carl Hostetter, [REDACTED]

Newsletter, *Vinyar Tengwar*. Journal, *Parma Eldalamberon*. Christopher Gilson, [REDACTED]

### Correspondence Group

*ONCE UPON A TIME (children's fantasy)*

Laura Krentz, [REDACTED]

Web: [REDACTED]

### Online Discussion Groups

*MYTHSOC E-LIST*

Society activities and general discussion. Sign up:

[REDACTED] or contact Joan

Marie Verba: [REDACTED]

*COINHERENCE*

Online discussion of Charles Williams

David Davis: E-mail: [REDACTED]

## Book Reviews: Young Adult Fiction

N.M. BROWNE, *Silverboy* (English title: *The Spellgrinder's Apprentice*). New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2007. ISBN 1582347806, hc, 240pp., \$16.95.

N.M. Browne's *Silverboy* evokes a bleak island kingdom from which Tommo, the protagonist, tries to escape. His skin has changed to silver due to working in a Dickensian-style cellar where many apprentices die young due to contracting 'the quivers', a nasty side-effect of years spent grinding spellstones. The spellstones have a kind of life of their own and, since they don't wish to be ground down for human use, they ensure that no good ever comes from their exploitation.

The fantasy opens with Tommo lying in a ditch whilst waiting to die with circling birds overhead, though these human-headed birds have been made through magic. They pursue Tommo though their purpose and intent is obscure. Whilst they initially suggest Dantean harpies, they also present readers with an image of the divided self of their creator. They try to communicate symbolically with Tommo, forming shapes in the sky and singing messages. Symbolism is the central technique Browne employs in this fantasy. Characters are shown suffering a spiritual lack, the brutish side of their natures having come to dominate life on the Isle of the Gifted and thus the balance between base flesh and the spirit is out of harmony. This central theme leaves the tale feeling more like a Bunyan allegory than a high fantasy of the Tolkien variety. Browne's islanders worship gods that frame this division, 'Urtha of the spirit ... (and) Unga of the flesh'. Dragons, elves and all the usual paraphernalia of fantasy are omitted and instead we are treated to a tale of magical misuse.

Islanders live under a totalitarian-style despot called the Protector. This Cromwellian figure resides in his Fortress of Winter. His kingdom is rife with fear and treachery and without its right-

ful king, although Browne avoids the expected route of turning up an unwitting heir to the throne. Characters are often depicted in various forms of entrapment, either through being 'ensorcelled' or simply because of their position within the Protector's court. Whilst Gildea, high priest of Urtha, is imprisoned by the Protector, the Protector himself feels like a victim of his own success and an inmate of his own fortress stronghold, forced to rely upon the help of someone he fears.

However, in his defense, the Protector has tried to use spellstone magic to make life better for his people but the spellstones themselves negate such efforts. We thus receive a neat allegory of the use and effect of power, in this case a power the mere use of which will wreak evil whatever the intentions of the user. Power of the good variety is identified by Browne's characters as 'Inward Power' but emerges from a weakened spiritual side. The spellstones are like Kryptonite to adepts of Inward Power, preventing their ability to manifest magic that could work for good.

Tommo is soon allied to Akenna, a fisher girl abused by her father who seizes her chance to escape. Despite this ally, things turn from bad to worse and at times readers may find themselves hoping someone will put Tommo out of his misery since he has an advanced and terminal case of the quivers. Assisted by Akenna, he undergoes a symbolic dying and reviving before becoming an unlikely saviour of the kingdom. Whilst Tommo's story made me want to know what happens to him, I cannot say the same for many of the other characters spliced into the narrative. They often feel intrusive to Tommo's tale and only really come into their own in the book's culmination.

However, Browne's art is more successful in her realization of the way in which Tommo and others use Inward Power, or spiritual magic, to

achieve results for good despite impossible odds. Cliché ridden wizardly wand-waving is strictly avoided and instead we find that magic here is treated more subtly. Indeed readers find themselves, like Tommo, often wondering whether things have been achieved through magic, dream or luck. An unusual read, *The Spellgrinder's Apprentice* feels as though its author is striving for something largely allegorical rather than mythic. Tommo's journey is interiorized through travel into the island rather than an outward escape overseas. Living under oppression reduces people and stamps out magic but the drabness remains largely unrelieved when magic does finally turn up at the novel's climax. Don't expect sword fights but you will get a thoughtfully constructed allegory of magical misuse, far more subtle than Rowling's shops full of commercialized magic products though ultimately not as much fun.

*Reviewed by David Rafer*



TAMORA PIERCE, *The Will of the Empress*. New York: Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0439441714, hc, 560 pp., \$17.99.

This book reunites the four young mages from the **Circle of Magic** series. Sandy, Daja, Brier and Tris, now eighteen, have come back from their travels, trials and tribulations as portrayed in the earlier quartet of books. The time they have spent apart has changed all of them, and each now bears emotional scars that make them feel separate from the group they once were.

As a result, they are all caught off-balance to realize that, being eighteen, they cannot go back to their familiar school environment, but must begin to make new lives for themselves. In Sandry's case, this involves long-delayed obligations in a neighboring country where she has

inherited a title and large quantities of land.

As the four learn more about themselves and each other, they run into a host of problems, some of which are due to culture shock and the discovery that the land of Sandry's inheritance has some customs that they find very disturbing. Then, too, the Empress of that land doesn't want them to leave, and will go to almost any lengths to keep them in her grasp, as valuable assets to her empire. To add to their troubles, they encounter a man who has been driven mad by his own untutored magic, a form of magic disturbingly similar to Tris's.

All of this leads to a book that is a bit longer than most of Pierce's works, over 500 pages, with the various plot threads. Unlike most of her works, this one is not immediately obvious as part of a 4-part series, although it is certainly possible that the pattern will be repeated, since this one has to do with Sandry growing up. A volume each about Tris, Daja and Briar would certainly be possible, as each has a lot of potential for development.

*Reviewed by Nick Smith*



E. ROSE SABIN, *When the Beast Ravens*. New York: Tor, 2005. ISBN 0765347598, pb, 288 pp., \$5.99.

The Lesley Simonton School for the Magically Gifted is a challenging place to teach and to study. I found the atmosphere rather ominous; there seem almost no places where the students (or readers) can relax, let alone laugh for a moment. *Beast* is the third of three volumes; I chose to read it as a singleton and I'm impressed with how deftly and naturally—through characters' ruminations and conversational references—Sabin introduces the necessary background of events occurring in the first two volumes (*A School for Sorcery* and *A Perilous Power*).

Sabin's story is complexly plotted. From the first pages, she delineates mixed motives and uncertain purposes both *between* and *within* individuals. The plot thickens rapidly, fueled both by past events—Can people change? Will it ever be safe to believe that they have done so?—and by new dangers of uncertain source. In addition, the variety of magical gifts among the students strains alliances and makes distrust easier than not. Striking to me was Sabin's ability to tell her story exclusively through the eyes, experience and assumptions of her main characters, yet simultaneously to suggest that the characters are making false assumptions or taking actions or words too personally, and so making poor decisions. I confess I was not particularly drawn to any of the characters—age difference probably had a good deal to do with this—but I have to admit that the flaws in their “information processing” are all too familiar!

The story in *Beast* is challenging, especially when the action splits off in different directions and overlapping times, not to mention in different dimensions! Sabin does it very well, with only an occasional narrative glitch. The resolution of the plot was unexpected (to me). Like the characters, I was putting the pieces together a little too slowly—and mistakenly—in this unpredictable universe. To me, the most memorable part of *When the Beast Ravens* was the “As within, so without” aspect of the plot and the setting. In this school, your advances in power are marked by which illusions—e.g. about the food or the rooms—you become able to see through. In this school, going through a familiar doorway may deposit you in some other time, or some other place, or both. Return is never certain, nor is it easy. Accordingly, the physical outward structure of the school and the characters' multiple motives and purposes, the fuzzy borders between truth and deception thus reflect each other, composing between them a convincing and danger-

ous universe. In this universe, achieved survival requires both personal changes and better understanding of others—qualities which, in turn, carry their own promise of hope.

*Reviewed by Lois Hinckley*



YSABEAU S. WILCE, *Flora Segunda: Being the magical Mishaps of a Girl of Spirit, Her Glass-Gazing Sidekick, Two Ominous Butlers (One Blue), a House with Eleven Thousand Rooms, and a Red Dog*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2007. ISBN 0-15-205433-5, hc, 428 pp., \$17.00. Review based on uncorrected galleys.

Ysabeau Wilce's debut novel is a fast-paced and witty Young Adult fantasy that invites comparisons to nothing at all, because it's so marvelously original. It's not that the typical issues of teen fiction are missing. Flora Fyrdraaca, second of that name because she's a replacement for a sister lost in wartime, has the requisite parents who never pay attention to her except to control her life. But the book never felt remotely like something I'd read before, because the world Wilce has created is utterly her own and full of freaky charm, and Flora's narrative voice is as full of energy as her adventures.

Without slowing down a moment for exposition, these adventures introduce us to a gloriously inventive imaginary world, where unintended magic words bubble up unexpectedly from the heroine's innards and sheer will power can hold reality together. Refreshingly, none of Flora's adolescent troubles have anything to do with her gender. In Califa, sex roles seem much closer together than in our world. Both men and women wear kilts, a fan is a symbol of authority, and no one expresses the tiniest surprise that Flora's mother is a general or that her male friend prides himself on his fashion sense. Instead of the well-trodden ground of gender

discrimination, Flora's problems derive from family history and character.

Facing her fourteenth birthday, Flora prepares joylessly for the traditional "Catorcena" coming-of-age celebration, in which she's expected to give a speech on the greatness of her noble family. Among the openings she drafts, then scratches out, are "Crackpot Hall has eleven thousand rooms but only one potty" and "The Warlord freed all the slaves, but he forgot to free me." Although her mother is the Warlord's Commanding General, her family's greatness is a memory, and even their House is falling apart, with rooms that move about at random.

All the great Houses of Califa, built with their foundations in the magical Current, are designed to be maintained by supernatural denizens called Butlers. But Flora's mother, distrusting magic as "a trick the goddess plays on us," has disabled their Butler, leaving the resulting mess for Flora as she scurries about the many duties of her position. Flora's war hero father, crazy and perpetually drunk, is as much Flora's responsibility as the housekeeping. And to make matters worse, they both expect Flora to enter the army after her Catorcena. However, Flora is bent on becoming a Ranger, a magic-using secret agent, and in the army, magic is punishable by death.

Proud of the savvy gained from living in her mother's train, Flora doesn't recognize her own naïveté, quoting the fictionalized adventures of a famous Ranger as if they were historical fact, and trying to plan her next move by this guide. As with the best storytelling, Flora's predicament flows directly from her own character—both faults and virtues. And as with the best fantasy, the supernatural danger that looms over her, loss of Will, parallels the more mundane problems of her life as she tries to establish her own will in the shadow of a parent who hates insubordination.

Flora is rebellious, impulsive, and cocky, but essentially kind-hearted, and these traits launch

her into a series of misadventures. First, discovering the disabled Butler in a disused library, she tries to help him regain his position by lending him some of her magical Anima. Then, eavesdropping on her mother, she finds out that a folk hero is bound for the gallows and resolves to save him, in partnership with a school friend whose main talent is snappy dressing. When she postpones helping the Butler for the sake of this new mission, he turns against her, strengthened by her own Anima, and she finds herself in real danger.

Along the way, Flora faces such impossible tasks as trying to steal a word so powerful that it can only exist in one place at a time, and attempting to cozen the Butler of a deserted House who is rumored to eat trespassers. Friends turn into foes and foes turn into friends, and practically nothing is what it seems—least of all Flora's overwhelming parents.

Although the publicity for *Flora Segunda* makes it appear to stand alone, the publisher confirmed my suspicion that it is the first volume of a trilogy. This came as a relief, because many mysteries are unresolved at the end of the book. What really became of the First Flora? What was the connection between Flora's mother and the Ranger she condemned? What really happened when the magical adept Lord Axacaya changed sides in the last war, and what is he scheming now?

I, for one, can hardly wait to find out. *Flora Segunda* is a fun-filled roller coaster of a story, and a promising beginning to a trilogy. Officially recommended for adolescents 12 and up, this tasty confection of a book could please everyone from bright 10-year-olds to adults hungry a spot of light reading.

*Reviewed by Pauline J. Alama*



# Call for Papers

## The 38th Annual Mythopoeic Conference (Mythcon XXXVIII)

Theme: "Becoming Adept: The Journey to Mastery"

Clark Kerr Conference Center, Berkeley, California, August 3-6, 2007

### Guests of Honor: Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman

Both authors published new novels in 2006, Kushner's *The Privilege of the Sword* and Sherman's *Changeling*. Kushner's public radio series *Sound & Spirit* is a renowned weekly program "exploring the human spirit through music and ideas." Both have made great contributions to the mythopoeic and interstitial arts, and we are proud to welcome them to Mythcon 38.

Fantasy literature features many characters who journey along a path from beginner to adept, from apprentice to master. How is this journey portrayed? What various highways and byways have such seekers traveled? What are the stages of transformation and the elements of the process of achieving mastery? How is mastery demonstrated, and what happens if these skills are lost? From the seasoning of Tolkien's Merry and Pippin to the wizard-school training of Ursula K. Le Guin's Ged and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter, the journey to mastery runs throughout fantasy.

Papers dealing with the conference theme are especially encouraged. We also welcome papers focusing on the work and interests of the Inklings (especially J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams), of our Guests of Honor, and other fantasy authors and themes. Papers from a variety of critical perspectives and disciplines are welcome.

Each paper will be given a one-hour slot to allow time for questions, but individual papers should be timed for oral presentation in 40 minutes maximum. Participants are encouraged to submit papers chosen for presentation at the conference to *Mythlore*, the refereed journal of the Mythopoeic Society. All papers should conform to the *MLA Style Manual* (2nd ed). Paper abstracts (250 word maximum), along with contact information, should be sent to the Papers Coordinator at the following address (e-mail is preferable) by **April 15, 2007**. Please include your AV requests and the projected time needed for your presentation. All paper presenters must register for the full conference; please see the **Mythcon 38** web page, [REDACTED] for information and rates.

Eleanor M. Farrell  
Mythcon 38 Papers Coordinator

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
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*Mythprint*

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The Mythopoeic Society



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