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## Editorial

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## Online Winter Seminar

February 4-5, 2022 (Friday evening, Saturday all day)

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## Online Winter Seminar



### Online Winter Seminar

The Inklings and Horror: Fantasy's Dark Corners

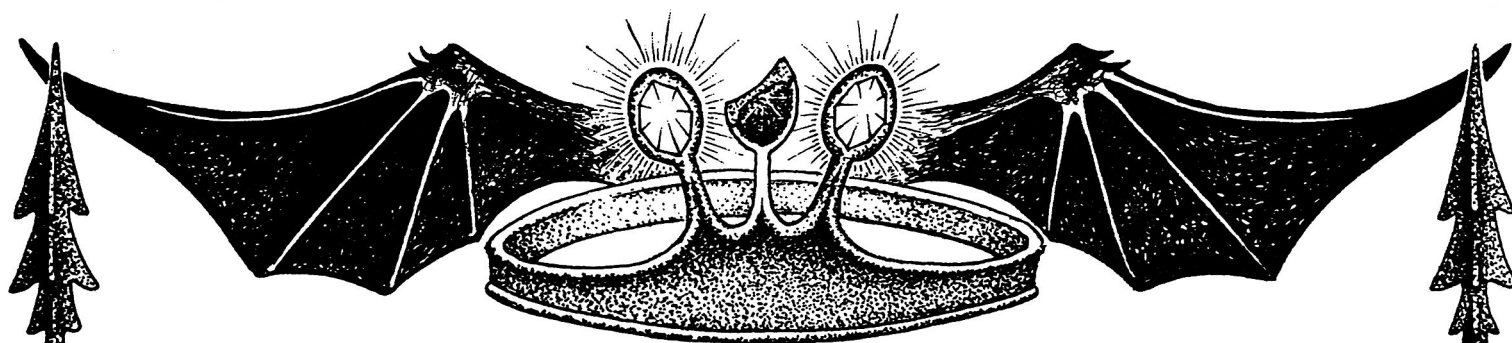
February 4-5, 2022 (Friday evening, Saturday all day)

Via Zoom and Discord

## Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>



*Special Issue Focusing On*  
*The Silmarillion Unfinished Tales*  
*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*

It was a long wait of more than twenty years from the publication of The Return of the King to The Silmarillion. The waiting was not in stoic silence, but filled with many false rumors that The Silmarillion was to be published the following year. Time after time hopes were to be raised, only to be followed by disappointment and frustration. Then in 1977 the seemingly impossible did indeed become fact. In a short time this was followed by the publication of Unfinished Tales in 1980, The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien in 1981, and most recently by another gem (see Reviews). Doubtless there will be other significant books yet to come, but almost surely of less import as far as giving us a complete insight into Tolkien's overall vision and aesthetic.

The digestion of the import of The Silmarillion, Unfinished Tales, and Letters has barely begun, especially for the latter two. Not having had these three works for long, most of us have basically retained our understanding of Tolkien built on his earlier published works.

That previous understanding, so ingrained in us like habit from years of exposure and many re-readings, has perhaps made some of us unconsciously resistant to rethink and incorporate the (to us) new visions and mythic information. Yet we cannot really claim to understand the mind and total vision of the sub-creator of Middle-earth, or should we say Eä, unless this is done. This assimilation and reforming of how we see Tolkien seems to have occurred on a superficial level, judging by the enthusiasm immediately attendant upon the release of each of these works by his admirers. On a deeper level, I have my doubts.

I have heard it said by some that they miss the dialogue and characterization, the suspense and gripping sense of personal involvement that they find in The Lord of the Rings, and based on that alone, I must agree. One of the fundamental differences between The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion is one of viewpoint. In the former we see the unfolding world and drama of Middle-earth through the eyes of the Hobbits who leave their countryfied near-Victorian world of comfort and ignorance, to mature from childhood to pivotal heroes. They are easy to identify

with because they are so much like what we suppose ourselves to be. Indeed Tolkien called himself a Hobbit, so the identification with Hobbits for us can not be merely accidental or unintended by the author.

But like Sam, who said "Me go and see Elves and all! Hooray!", we are introduced step by step to a world that the Elves (and their few friends) know the whys and wherefores best. The Elves are different from Hobbits and ourselves; they have such long bitter-sweet memories. But yet even they and the Istari do not understand all. The Silmarillion is basically an understanding of the world from the Elvish viewpoint, and it was on this and related stories that Tolkien spent most of his life working and reworking, like Niggle's unfinished picture. If we wondered why the Elves were so aloof and withdrawn in The Lord of the Rings, the reasons have been made painfully clear. The Silmarillion was envisioned to be a series of accounts, shaped into a sequential whole of the events from the Creation to the end of the Second Age. Criticism of it being thus must involve criticism of the intent of the author. Of course most of us respond more immediately to a fleshed out narrative that primarily spans the events of a little more than one year, in comparison to an outline of events of uncounted thousands of years! Is it then surprising that many have not cared to make the attempt to comprehend it all? If Tolkien had had the time and circumstances needed, doubtless he would have written countless volumes to do full justice to what he envisioned. For example, I find the many and long descriptions of the various battles the least interesting parts of the book, and tend to skim over them in my rereadings.

There is another reason why The Silmarillion is less popular than The Lord of the Rings: the treatment of, for want of a better term, religion, or explicit versus implicit theology. The expression of a world of natural theology found in The Lord of the Rings is built on a foundation of bedrock and underpinnings as solid as steel. Morality and the ideas of good and evil must be based on something fixed and

unchanging. In The Silmarillion we find things quite well explained and laid out, things that were once indirectly stated, implied, or lay hidden. This difference has dampened the enthusiasm for Tolkien in some of his admirers, who would prefer not to be troubled or perhaps burdened by weighty matters such as these. Indeed, when one would have thought a great new wave of enthusiasm for Tolkien would have arisen following the publication of The Silmarillion, in actuality I saw a gradual diminishing of popular interest in him. I cannot attribute this merely to the other differences between The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion mentioned before. I think it was more than that. Some now saw clearly what the foundation of Tolkien's world was really like and it colored their perception of their old favorite, and consequently their appreciation cooled down.

Of course some changes in the mass or overall cultural thinking of our civilization do ebb and flow year by year, but basically we are a secular-minded people; Tolkien was not. As long as he will provide pleasures and personal excitement, all is well, but it is another thing when he reveals what his load of gifts is based on, it is another matter. In 1953, Tolkien wrote to Robert Murray, S. J.:

The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.

But in The Silmarillion, where it is necessary to begin at the beginning, this could not be done. "Religion" of necessity must be given. Tolkien said in a letter to Deborah Webster in 1958, "...I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories),..." Indeed Letters repeatedly and eloquently testifies that Tolkien was

Christian to the core, and that not only do his works not conflict with his faith, but are a creative outgrowth and interpretive form of it. It would be an exercise in intellectual vanity to demonstrate otherwise. All literary criticism henceforth must deal with this fact, not skirting the currently unpopular or inconvenient. This does not mean everything dealing with Tolkien and his works will of necessity deal with this, only on matters that do pertain to it. Those who do not feel comfortable with this aspect are in a difficult situation in regards to their intellectual honesty. Some may fade away; some will try to ignore it, which will not wash. For those to which this proves to be no problem, they can go on to develop an even greater richness in study and appreciation. I see this parting of ways as having already begun, with both a wistful regret, and a certain relief that all uncertainty and doubt has been cleared away.

The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion must each be approached in different ways for all of the above reason, and more, but at the same time the import of each needs to be integrated into a comprehensive understanding if we wish to see along the same line as the mind of the sub-creator. The Silmarillion, Unfinished Tales, and Letters are gold, silver, and diamond mines awaiting further excavations and discoveries.

Mythlore has published articles, reviews, letters, and art on these books before; now we present a special issue, due both to readers interest and the coming together of several articles on them at this time. Keep in mind that we cannot publish what we do not receive about any author or subject. In future we plan to take a balanced approach on printing articles about the older published works of Tolkien and the newer ones. There is much more that can be said about both.

Glen GoodKnight

## Some Readers' Thoughts

In the last issue readers were asked to share their thoughts for possible publication on the question "How has the reading of The Silmarillion, Unfinished Tales, and/or The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien changed my perception and appreciation of Tolkien." There were many responses, and I have used the blue pencil very sparingly in order to share them here. (Editor)

Lloyd Alexander

Drexel Hill, PA

In all accuracy, I'd say that the other works of Tolkien haven't changed my perception and appreciation, already about as high as they could be. They've simply given me a larger view of the man and his creative genius. My admiration hasn't changed, there's just more of it.

Dainis Bisenieks

Philadelphia, PA

I had been certain all along, at least since I read "On Fairy-stories," that Tolkien as story-teller and stylist knew exactly what he was doing. That impression is confirmed in superlative degree by the Letters. I doubt if any critic has bettered Tolkien's own exposition of the character and the moral choices of the principal persons of The Lord of the Rings, and (as

C. S. Lewis also knew) he was aware that style determines what can be said.

For all the fascination of The Silmarillion and associated works, I cannot find it in my heart to love them as I do LR. There are grand and moving passages in them, the whole vision is grand, but the characters and events don't touch me as nearly as those of, well, the fully mature work. So it is that I regret most the incomplete state of "The Mariner's Wife", in which greatness of spirit is best shown, just before the tale, alas, breaks off.

Robert Boenig

Roosevelt, NJ

The Silmarillion and Unfinished Tales have changed my appreciation of Tolkien in two ways. First, when I reread The Lord of the Rings, I no longer puzzle over/wonder about what all the allusions in the songs and conversations are. The slash between the two verbs in the last sentence is meant to convey both gain and loss, for this new knowledge has diminished for me somewhat the size of LR. I now have, in other words, a map of the perilous realm; I can find my way from place to place with ease, but just a small bit of wonder is gone.

The second way the two books have changed my ap-