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The 15th Anniversary of The Mythopoeic Society

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

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The 15th Anniversary of The Mythopoeic Society

To Travel Hopefully

It was at the first Bilbo and Frodo's Birthday Picnic in September of 1967, which was an outgrowth of a campus Tolkien club I organized, that I made the announcement of the formation of The Mythopoeic Society and its first meeting to be held the following month. This is not going to be a history of the Society, of which a full book could easily be written, but rather a moment to pause and reflect. The country and the world were in a different climate then: a dicotomy existed between the "establishment" and the "counter-culture." This Society was meant to transcend the negative elements of both and let its members find a recovered sense of joy and meaning through the reading and discussion of works that represented both an older wisdom and a more engaging vision of what it is to be truly alive.

Fifteen years later our general culture, further jolted by a series of crises, is even more cynical, two-dimensional, and pragmatically self-involved than before. The lively possibility of hope is much dimmer culturally now than before. The visions that Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams, and the genres from which they have drawn from and enriched continue to impart a sense of joy, of participation in "The Great Dance" for those who read with receptive eyes and minds.

The purpose of the Society, stated in its Articles of Incorporation, and similarly repeated in its Bylaws, is: "...to educate persons in the study, discussion, and enjoyment of myth, fantasy, and imaginative literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams." The word especially needs focussed attention. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "in an especial manner," "principally," and "chiefly." The O.E.D. further defines especial as "special as opposed to general," "provide for a particular purpose," and "specific;" special as "of such a kind as to exceed or excel in some way that which is usual or common; exceptional in character, quality or degree;" particular as "specially attentive to a person; bestowing marked attentions" and "specially careful, precise, exact, scrupulous; hence exacting in regard to detail."

While the Society has undergone a number of changes in the effort to better serve its purpose, there exists the continuing challenge to keep clear sight of our purpose. We have a clearly defined center of interest: the works of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams, but as we radiate out into the genres of myth, fantasy, and imaginative literature, we both spread very wide nets indeed and attract of a great variety of varying interests. This has been shown many times. Not the least has been the recent poll of the seven favorite authors of members, which produces a very long list indeed with few overlaps. Our interests radiate out in many directions, but not all members' interests are in the same direction. Some people are mainly interested in new writers of fantasy, some in traditional mythologies, some in medieval literature, some in "main-line" contemporaries of the Inklings, some in horror literature, some in speculative fiction; all which are within the scope of the Society in varying degrees.

In each of us resides overlapping interests in many areas of writing, but it is near unique blend for each

of us. The interests of an individual can change markedly over time, but our unique Society would be in danger of several things to do the same. We could dilute our attention to the center, which gives us continuing attraction, strength, and flexibility, and drift impulsively, catering to other interests of a changing majority, or very vocal part, at any given period. To do this, I fear would seriously alter their perceived and actual character of the Society, and have it lose its uniqueness and historical identity. What would be left to find for those who come to the Society for its central focus? Understanding this clear distinction between an individual's various interests and the Society's purpose causes respects for both in their interaction. Over the past fifteen years I have seen the full spectrum of how people relate to the Society. Some respect this distinction and others do not. Some seek community with others who share the Society's central focus, some use the Society as a convenient vehicle for their own interests, and others have used the Society as a mere pretext for social involvement. I should add that I have found almost all of them truly interesting and memorable individual people. Thus is the nature of human diversity. In the journeys of our individual lives and the life of the Society, to travel hopefully -- the take a theme of Tolkien's -- is the key.

I look forward to continuing traveling hopefully with the Society as it begins to approach a new generation, preserving, sharing, and discovering the insights, visions, and joys which Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams have masterfully shared with us.

Glen GoodKnight

Some Readers' Thoughts

In the last issue readers were asked to respond to the statement "What The Mythopoeic Society has and does mean to me: an appreciation." We are happy to include some of these responses.

Mindi M. Reid Bellevue, WA

The Mythopoeic Society has kept me in touch the last number of years, in a scholarly yet refreshing fashion, with the body of literature that promotes a special appreciation of God and His cosmos, and a general, rich sense of wonder for the gift of human imagination and the realities that are its taproot; it has helped me to understand the noble function of myth as it relates to the faith of the heart, and has enriched the over-all scope of my life. The Society and its publications are a joy that I wouldn't want to do without, as they make the interim journey to the Undying Lands a more pleasant and meaningful one.

Grace E. Funk Lumby, B.C.

Communication among a group of people I would otherwise never meet or hear of, concerning my favorite authors and my favorite type of reading, namely, created-world fantasy. A source of articles by this group of people, some very thoughtful and well written indeed, which would otherwise never come my way, probably would never come into being at all. A very useful source of book reviews, of books I would otherwise probably miss altogether. I find I read the book reviews first, rapidly, then the articles more slowly. An undemanding Society, in

which I can participate at long range, by mail, in my owntime.

Dave Pomeroy Ossining, NY
Probably the main thing the Society has done for me is to stimulate me from time to time to go back and read the original works. Also, I feel my mind stretched by some of the insights in Mythlore.

Elizabeth H. Woods Pomfret Center, CN
My appreciation of Mythlore has been most rewarding through the years that I have subscribed. It has led me to the type of books I enjoy knowing about. I am not very good at putting into words what my mind tells me; like Sam Gamgee, I enjoy dwelling on the heights but am at heart a gardner and could not sustain myself at altitude.

D. E. Puckle Chippewa Falls, WI
I like the fact that Mythlore holds to a scholarly line, generally. The area of fantasy has enough "fanzines." I enjoy fantasy, science fiction, etc. both as fantasy and science fiction in their own right and for its intellectual possibilities. Mythlore feeds this second aspect.

Dale W. Simpson Joplin, MO
I cannot make a response to the topic outside of my general appreciation for the work of the Society in making a forum for the exchange of ideas concerning mythopoeic writers, particularly Tolkien. I believe that the Society's influence, especially through Mythlore and Mythprint, is partially responsible for the publication of the posthumous works. And, as the special Tolkien issue shows, the appearance of those works will fuel Tolkien scholarship for years to come.

Winifred D. Moorhead Richmond, VA
To me you are unique. I was reading Williams' books without understanding them and was delighted to find a club of others who enjoyed and understood. When you all joined forces things were even better. Real fantasy takes one out of the clatter and distractions of this world.

Nancy C. Hanger Wenham, MA
The Society has allowed me a greater contact with those who also appreciate modern myth-makers, and, in addition, a greater understanding of the writers themselves -- an invaluable delight! I've not only been able to gain wisdom from others' insights, but have been encouraged to pursue studies in that which I love: the worlds, brilliant figures, and fantastical creatures inhabiting both modern myths and their ancient sources.

Elizabeth Harrod Hayward, CA
The Mythopoeic Society is for me foremost a way of validating an intellectual interest in fantasy. One reads/watches many things for sheer wheel spinning escapist pleasures. The pleasure is deepened by intellectual involvement. The Conferences provide a wide range of both intellectual and playful pleasure. The Society provides the companionship of other people who take seriously the same interests.

Kathryn Lindskoog Orange, CA
The Mythopoeic Society has enriched me for almost fifteen years by providing pleasure, information and challenge. But I value most of all the friends I have found there and the special acquaintances.

Robert Buehlar New York, NY
The Society has enabled me to stay connected to

many others who appreciate great fantasy writing. In my limited world I know of only a few people who share my particular love for Tolkien and Lewis. My membership in the Society enables me to share this love with others. I always look forward to the next Mythlore and I devour every page and enjoy every article. The Society is a vital outlet into which I can channel all of my interests concerning fantasy. Without the Society, I'm sure I'd be a more frustrated person, having to conceal my love for Middle-earth and Narnia. The Society, however, makes sure my love does not go unrequited.

Anne Osborn Riverside, CA
To me The Mythopoeic Society means:
-- publications that represent my most meaningful personal concerns in a professional way I can take pride in;
-- a fine group of people who have matured over the years but not compromised their principles; they have retained and strengthened their interest and involvement in the literature that continues for me to have the deepest and most significant things to say about that which matters;
-- a screwball bunch of people who are fun to be around (same group as above);
-- the hope that through fads and styles and media crazes, we can keep alive the true appreciation of our authors and genre.

Alexei Kondratiev Flushing, NY
Early in 1975, as I was browsing in the Science Fiction Shop here in New York, I came upon a curious little 'zine called Mythprint which as I leafed through it, turned out to be entirely devoted to my favorite writers. Like many people who had come to love the Inklings before the late '60's Tolkien craze, I had not only been repelled by the commercial fad surrounding LotR but been made to feel more isolated than before, more frustrated by the discrepancy between my own perception of Tolkien's works and the vulgarized image of them given by the media. Yet here, in the page of Mythprint, I found people throwing around a lot of questions and comments in an unmistakably fannish manner, yet asking the right questions, in the right spirit, as though they'd shared the experience I'd had when I first encountered the works. This seemed incredible to me, and I lost no time in contacting those people. As my store of Mythopoeic Society publications began to pile up, I marvelled at how well they succeeded in combining all that is most vital and enriching in fandom with genuine, thoughtful scholarship. Although I live far away from the center of the Society's activities, I have made many friends through its channels. And I feel that this is an experience that is not past its peak but has only just begun to bear its fruits.

A sincere thank you for these comments and for the others who wrote as well. It is a pleasure and an honor to be part of and to serve such specially constituted community of people, who are spread far across this country and the world, yet brought together in this diversified unity. -- Ed.

Awards

We are pleased to announce that Little, Big by John Crowley is the winner of the 1982 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award, and that Humphrey Carpenter is the winner of the 1982 Mythopoeic Scholarship Award, particularly for his book The Inklings.