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Editor's Opening

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This issue bears a Celtic theme as a result of the 13th annual Mythopoeic Conference held in August of 1982 at Chapman College, Orange, California, which had the theme "Celtic Influences on Fantasy Literature." All of the articles in this issue were given as papers at that Conference. We plan to publish other papers from the same Conference in future issues. Something similar on the same order was done a year ago when we published papers from the 1981 Conference which had the theme "Festival in Faery," and plan to continue this thematic tradition for future Conferences and issues of Mythlore.

As introduction I offer some remarks I made at the 1982 Conference: Celtic symbolism and aesthetic imagination have been an implicit part of the Mythopoeic Society since its beginning some fifteen years ago. The Celts historically were the most culturally advanced and complex culture of Ancient Europe, excluding the Greeks and Romans. They dominated most of Western Europe for long ages until later invaders gradually drove them into pockets in the west of the British Isles, France and Spain. Perhaps we unconsciously identify with them, as they represent, among other things, a highly developed mystical imagination and a robust decorative elegance in their approach to life. The distant memory of them evokes a sense of longing for things we wish to know better. Some of us can claim at least partial descent from these once awesome peoples. Like the Old Narnians, they were driven into isolation by forces of what was then a cruder, more pragmatic approach to existence, and are now remembered as an emblem of what has been neglected in our modern, unbalanced, rationalistic, would-be-utopia. Celtic influences are heavily scattered throughout Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams, the Society's central triad. Indeed the number three had a special spiritual and mystical significance to the Celts. The Society's symbol, with its triskelion design, is of Romano-Celtic origin. In that light we are under the spell and hopefully the blessing of an intricate and heroic people of the distant past.

The Challenge Continues

I trust you note the computer justified margins in this issue. This is due to the very much appreciated contributions of Benefactors. In order that this can continue to be possible two things must happen: new Benefactors to support Mythlore, and an increase in circulation. There has developed very good news since the last issue. The cost of computer justification, using alternative services, would cost between one-half and one-third of the previously estimated $600. This makes our goal much closer to realization. Will you personally help Mythlore reach its goal? Become a Benefactor; help increase circulation by personal word-of-mouth; show copies to those you would feel are likely to be interested; give gift subscriptions; if you are a faculty member, request your library to subscribe, or if you are not, ask faculty members you know to do this. We are not that far from our goal, but your help is needed now to achieve it. Don't wait for others to act. We will reach our goal only if each of us makes this a matter of personal actions.

On the Middle Way

The idea of the Mythopoeic Society following the Middle Way is far from new, and it has served the Society well over the years. You might ask "Following the Middle Way between what alternatives?" There are several answers to this. These alternatives could be between the devotion to one author, as many groups hold, and to open-ended whole genres of writing. In this respect, the Society is neither. It is focused on three writers while holding wide ranging interests in different genres. But that distinction is not the one I wish to discuss here; rather the Middle Way between "fandom" (a term that has nearly as many definitions as there are fans) and "scholars" or "academia."
To some this is an irreconcilable dichotomy, but I fail to see it that way. Rather, within the context of the Society, there is a spectrum of attitudes, approaches, and modes of behavior. Both extremes are stereotyped, particularly by those in the opposite camp. Frequently these prejudices arise because of an initial negative reaction to the surface differences, without going beyond to discover the real worth within. For some, the need for a "them vs. us" attitude is deep seated and prevents any tolerance or realistic understanding. These prejudicial stereotypes abound, and regrettably the extremes of both camps provide fuel for these. I have met stuffy, dry-as-dust academics and immature, bubble-headed fans, and feel uncomfortable with both.

Speaking generally, it is not likely for the foreseeable future that fandom and academia will be at ease with each other (despite encouraging exceptions) and that that tension is bound to continue to affect the Mythopoeic Society. But the future of the reading of books does not look altogether bright, due both to cultural changes generally and the double-edged booming electronics revolution. The definition of literacy is bound to be quite different in the next century. These changes may or may not cause an alliance or synthesis of fandom and academia. The future can only at the best of times be dimly intimated, and, to echo Gandalf, our responsibility is to till the soil of the present.

I feel such a synthesis is possible in the context of the Society because it was founded upon the devotion to Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams and seeks to serve all who are interested in them. It was not meant to serve either organized fandom or academia. It is intended to be as inclusive as is possible, not exclusive. Both fandom and academia have a specialized vocabulary, which may serve them well, but does tend to exclude those not active in their respective circles, creating the impression of aloof indifference to others.

From my perspective, I find that the majority of Society members are a happy blend of the fan and the academic. Indeed the Society has attempted to take the best qualities of both approaches. Ironically, the Society has paid a price for this Middle Way. The extremes in both camps have seen the Society as "selling out" to the opposite side. Some "fans" have thought of the Society as overly dry and serious; some "scholarly types" have thought of the Society as frivolous and unsubstantial. Suspect or rejected by both extremes is strong proof to me that we are indeed following the Middle Way. It is a pity that the extremes of both sides seem to be unaware of the criticism of the Society from the other side. But then all of this is far less important than the real reasons why most people are attracted to the Society. The synthesis I have spoken of is an attempt to combine (among other things) that personal enthusiasm for the literature and the creative outgrowths that spring from it with the qualities of reasoned study, standards of expression, and ongoing dedication.

The annual Mythopoeic Conferences, or in short "Mythcons," are an excellent example of this synthesis, and are an enjoyable and rewarding experience to all who attend. How many strickly fan conventions present papers, and such well considered and crafted ones at that? How many strickly academic conferences have an art show, masquerade, drama and music? This blend is natural to our Society and gives it real strength. I hope you will attend this year's Conference and experience this for yourself, if you have not been to one before.

I have found that the majority of both "fans" and "academics" I know are warm, knowledgeable, and intelligent human beings first and foremost, and well worth the knowing. When involved in a discussion with them about TWW or related matters, I find these labels of little importance.

It should be noted that there are others in the Society who are neither in organized fandom or academia. At least two groups occur to me here: those in various religious communities who are primarily interested in the spiritual values found in mythopoeic literature, and the individual reader who is not in organized fandom, not in academia, and not affiliated with a religious community, but enjoys Tolkien, Lewis, and/or Williams and their related genres.

You may be one of these individual readers referred to, or you may see yourself as identifying with one of the other three camps, or you may see yourself as belonging to two or all three of the groups (as many do). In any case, the Society seeks to serve all who find value and interest in its purposes. Instead of creating dichotomies, let us recognize and respect the spectrum that does in fact exist, not magnifying it but keeping it in its secondary importance to the Society's real purpose.

I invite readers' thoughts on the above.

Glen GoodKnight

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The Mythopoeic Society is a nonprofit educational and literary organization devoted to the study, discussion, and enjoyment of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams, and the genres of myth and fantasy which they have drawn from and enriched. A subscription to Mythlore by individuals includes Society membership. Because of the Society's tax-exempt status, contributions beyond the subscription price are tax deductible.

If a group of people are interested in organizing a future Mythopoeic Conference in 1984 or beyond, they should write to the Chairman of the Council of Stewards, c/o P.O. Box 4671, Whittier, CA 90607, stating their interest and requesting a copy of the Conference Guidelines.