



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 6
Number 1

Article 10

12-15-1979

Severe Mercies

Gracia Fay Ellwood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ellwood, Gracia Fay (1979) "Severe Mercies," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol6/iss1/10>

This Editorial Introduction is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>

SWOSUTM

Online Winter Seminar

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

<https://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/ows-2022.htm>

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>

Undoubtedly, although much of the coarse de-meaning of Tolkien's work can be directly attributable to the quality of Bakshi's imagination, understanding and taste, these technical inadequacies seem to have been necessitated by unforeseen difficulties--possibly originally intended as rough working versions, to be smoothed over later, which had to be adopted as final through exigencies of time and money or through failure to develop sufficiently sophisticated technical resources.

The embarrassingly amateurish quality of much of the action must be traced not to the animators, but to the amateurish actors whose gestures they were copying. Gandalf acting out charades with the ring inscription, Sam changing facial expressions to mirror every syllable addressed to him, the ill-at-ease postures of Merry and Pippin standing in the background at Bree--these needed a director of taste and talent, not a team of literal translators.

Bakshi gathered unto himself gifted people, from Peter Beagle to our own Bonnie GoodKnight. What a pity that he didn't work with them instead of considering only that they were working for him. Together they might have given us quite a different

product.

Disney over the years rejoiced in setting himself many problems, from *Snow White* on, and he met them all with results which ranged from pedestrian to breath-taking, but he never foisted upon the world such an admission of his inability to meet a minimal standard of competence in carrying out the charge he had taken up.

Some years ago Mythcon I screened what turned out to be a student film which with very little budget and with tongue towards the cheek presented the setting out of the hobbits from the Shire, complete with fox. We had been told that this was to be the beginning of a serious *LOTR* film, and slowly our indignation gave way to relief and amusement as we realized we had been put on. I can't help remembering that innocent evening with fond nostalgia as I meditate on the rough brutality of concept which infuses what will have to be the definitive film visualization of this work for our generation (This is one film whose memory won't have to be reckoned with when re-make time comes round). One can look at the film and see Tolkien clearly, even cleverly translated from time to time; yet but a little while and, sure enough, there's Bakshi again.

SEVERE MERCIES

Gracia Fay Ellwood

In this issue of *Mythlore* we have two letters, and in the previous issue an article, dealing with Gnosticism. Since Gnosticism is for the most part buried in the past, and its attitudes are alien to many of us, it is valuable for us to make an imaginative effort to enter the world of the Gnostics--the sort of entry Lewis applauds as one of the advantages of reading.

In attempting to do so I have been helped by friendship with a contemporary Gnostic, one Stephen Hoeller, a Hungarian nobleman now living in Los Angeles. (A former member of our Society, Baron Hoeller is leader of a Gnostic group, a lecturer on Jung, and a passionate devotee of *The Lord of the Rings*.) The Russian-invaded Hungary of his early years mirrors the world in which Gnosticism (and Manichaeism, and Christian monasticism) flourished.

Fleeing the invaders in the winter of 1944-45, his family came to a village in the north of the country, but found no safety there. In the middle of a January night a group of Russian soldiers came blustering into the house where two or three families were huddled. First they tried to get everybody drunk, with clear intentions of raping the women. One soldier poured vodka down twelve-year-old Stephen's throat, and when he bolted in terror out the door, sent a rain of bullets after him. Stephen kept falling in the snow. "It was like living the kind of nightmare in which you have to run and can't." Vodka made the gun hand unsteady, and Stephen's aunt dashed the kerosene lamp from the man's other hand. Stephen escaped and crept away. During that same period Stephen's father and uncle were stood against a wall and shot. The father miraculously survived three bullet wounds; the uncle did not.

It is hardly a novel idea that the fact that we are finite, physical beings with constant needs and sensitivity to pain makes us hugely vulnerable. The majority of human beings throughout history have little chance for intellectual or artistic creativity; their brains are stunted by early malnutrition, and nearly all their time and strength go into working to meet the bodily needs of their children and themselves (barely) and their "betters." They are Drudge of *Pilgrim's Regress*. And

that is when things are stable. In times of chaos or tyranny bodily existence makes masses of people liable to terror and violence. The ascetics in late Roman times who went to live in religious communities or as hermits in the wilderness were not merely seeking to avoid the *fin de siecle* corruption of the times, they also hoped to escape pillage, rape and massacre.

Stephen declares that his encounters with violence did influence him further toward Gnosticism, not only because of experienced physical vulnerability but because of the pervading terror of the disintegration of a world. "One day you're on top of the heap, and the next you're a hunted animal." Reepicheep would doubtless have called it the Turn of the Wheel of Fortune. But it certainly makes understandable the longing for an assured, nonphysical, eternal world. For Stephen this is essentially the world of the Archetypes elaborated by Jung; (and in fact Jung did draw substantially on Gnostic sources).

Of course not everyone who lives through such a world-breakup takes such a position. The Catholic and Orthodox churches affirmed Creation, Incarnation, bodily resurrection and sacramentalism in uneasy tension with much world-denying asceticism. And in fact the above is not to be taken as an endorsement of Gnosticism, especially its negatives. One of the best supports I know of an affirmation of physical creation is found in Williams' theology of romantic love. Ineffable glory has been seen embodied in human forms and faces, in nature, and in much else. I have seen it myself and cannot doubt it. It is reason enough to affirm the body as the glorious and holy flesh, and to hope for the best of both worlds.

Having only just been introduced as editor, I now have the happy task of introducing our new associate editor, Lee Speth. Lee is making available his considerable erudition and inconsiderable free time to share the jobs of evaluating MSS, writing endless letters, doing layout, and mailing (actually, mailing doesn't require vast erudition.) Best of all, he will be writing the column "Cavalier Treatment" for each issue, giving light-hearted trips to out-of-the-way countries of Fantasy. Many thanks, and welcome.