Editor's Opening - Two Decades: Looking Back

Glen GoodKnight
Editor's Opening - Two Decades: Looking Back

Additional Keywords
Bernard Zuber; Paula DiSante
Editor's Opening

Glen GoodKnight

Two Decades: Looking Back

This is written for those new to the Mythopoeic Society who may ask how it began and how it became what it is now. It is a personal overview by its Founder. No single person can know everything about the Society, and with that thought well in mind, I write about those things I know.

I first read The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings in 1957, and discovered the Chronicles of Narnia the next year. These books were powerful, satisfying, and seminal to a change in world-view for a teenage mind. During the following years I sought out and read everything I could find by, and about, these two men. In this process, by 1964 I had discovered the richness of Charles Williams.

But I was alone. I knew no one else who was familiar with these authors. Then Ace Books printed its unauthorized edition of The Lord of the Rings, and soon after, Ballantine produced its authorized version. As soon as Tolkien became widely available in paperback, his popularity soared. The interest about Middle-earth was promoted by the media, until it became "the Tolkien phenomenon."

In early 1967 I started a Tolkien Society at California State University at Los Angeles, where at last I could meet and exchange views with others like-minded. Meeting times that accommodated everyone's schedule were difficult to arrange, which limited the growth of the group, but in the process of organizing it, I met many other Tolkien readers off-campus. In September of 1967 we held a large picnic in a public park, honoring Bilbo's and Frodo's Birthdays. Nearly a hundred people came, many costumed as Middle-earth characters. I came as Elrond. After the games, costume judging, and mathom exchange, I made an announcement that a new organization was being formed, which would be devoted to the discussion of Tolkien, Lewis and Williams, and the first meeting would be held in October. About thirty people came to that meeting to discuss Tolkien, most of them high school students.

We were launched, and it was exciting. What a pleasure to talk with others who had read the same books —Lewis' quote, "You feel that too? I thought I was the only one," was happily repeated many times. There were some ideals I worked hard for: all would be welcome, regardless of age or background, and all aspects of the books would be open to discussion.

The Mythopoeic Society came into being during a time of great cultural turmoil and polarization. Its vision was meant to offer a liberating alternative to both hedonistic iconoclasm and sterile adherence to traditional forms. Through myth, fantasy and imagination one could perceive important values and yet free the mind to see beyond itself, so that a joyful, integrated person could emerge from the cultural chaos of the 60s.

Continued on the next page
During the Society's second year a second monthly discussion group was begun in another area; by the third year, two more came into being. I was commuting each Saturday to different portions of the Los Angeles basin in order to lead the discussions. The Society grew steadily and several more groups were proposed, which necessitated the first structural change. Each group was to have its own (elected) Moderator, Secretary and Treasurer. These Officers met regularly for general planning, and to coordinate the organization of the biannual picnics: September for the Birthday Party and April for the Memorial Victory Celebration of the Destruction of the Ring and the Elvish New Year. Each month I'd send out a one-page announcement of the discussion topic, with a second page of maps and directions to various meeting places. These announcements evolved into Mythprint in 1970.

From the first, voices were raised in favor of a lengthy publication that would contain articles, reviews and art related to the Society's interests. So, on January 3, 1969, the first issue of Mythlore was finished just in time for a special party celebrating Tolkien's birthday.

Now the members expressed a wish for a general, and more lengthy, gathering. In 1969 we held a one-day Narnia Conference, which was very successful. From the beginning we had had cordial relations with the Tolkien Society of America; a year and a half later, the first Mythopoeic Conference was planned in conjunction with the third Tolkien Conference. C.S. Kilby was our first Guest of Honor, and the Conference activities were proof positive of the number of creative and talented people who belonged to the Society.

By 1971, the average age of the Society's membership was somewhere in the mid-twenties. In the spring of that year, after a long series of meetings of what was called "The Great Council" (comprised of all the discussion group officers), a set of Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws was hammered out, and the Society incorporated as a non-profit, tax-exempt literary and educational organization.

That same year saw a merger. In 1965, Richard Plotz had gathered a few friends and started the Tolkien Society of America. The overwhelming response began to conflict with his plans to enter college, committing each Saturday to different portions of the Los Angeles basin in order to lead the discussions. The Society grew steadily and several more groups were proposed, which necessitated the first structural change. Each group was to have its own (elected) Moderator, Secretary and Treasurer. These Officers met regularly for general planning, and to coordinate the organization of the biannual picnics: September for the Birthday Party and April for the Memorial Victory Celebration of the Destruction of the Ring and the Elvish New Year. Each month I'd send out a one-page announcement of the discussion topic, with a second page of maps and directions to various meeting places. These announcements evolved into Mythprint in 1970.

By now Mythopoeic Conferences were held both in Southern and in Northern California. Meanwhile, the Society's participation in other types of creative expression continued to grow. In Inklings II Writers' Workshop, started in 1970, began publishing a fiction journal, which was superseded by Mythellany in 1981, and in 1987 by The Mythic Circle.

In 1979-80, the Bylaws were rewritten in order to conform to changes in state law pertaining to non-profit organizations. The Stewards used this opportunity to make other structural changes. These Bylaws, with some subsequent minor emendation, are the ones governing the Society today.

Continued on page 57

Mythopoeic Core Reading List

Mythlore frequently publishes articles that presuppose the reader is already familiar with the works they discuss. This is natural, given the special nature of Mythlore. In order to assist some readers, the following is what might be considered a "core" mythopoeic reading list, containing the most well known and discussed works. Due to the many editions printed, only the title and original date of publication are given. Good reading!

**J.R.R. Tolkien**


**C.S. Lewis**

Out of the Silent Planet (1938); Perelandra (1943); That Hideous Strength (1943); The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (1950); Prince Caspian (1951); The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (1952); The Silver Chair (1953); The Horse and His Boy (1954); The Magician's Nephew (1955); The Last Battle (1956); Till We Have Faces (1958).

**Charles Williams**

War in Heaven (1930); Many Dimensions (1931); The Place of the Lion (1931); The Greater Trumps (1932); Shadows of Ecstasy (1933); Descent into Hell (1937); All Hallow's Eve (1945); Taliesin through Logres (1938); and The Region of the Summer Stars (1944) (printed together in 1954).

The Procession at the second Mythopoeic Conference, 1971; Mary McDermott Shideler as Guest of Honor.
Letters, continued from page 42 elaborate composition and its rendering with such bold, sure lines and delicate, carefully controlled stipple. But the piece is even my impressive in the sense of mystic grandeur it conveys. I love the stylized, yet somehow plausible, architecture (a specialty of Ms. Patterson) which sweeps towards St. Anne's and culminates in the walled garden jutting up impossibly among the sun, moon, and stars (reminiscent of Tolkien's image of the holy mountain Taniquetil, whether coincidentally or intentionally); and the magnificent arc of planetary names, each overlaid with its appropriate symbol of power. This is St. Anne's, not as it would appear to one's physical eyes, but as it would appear to one's soul.

Equal praise is also due Ms. Patterson for her other fine illustrations from That Hideous Strength appearing in ML this past year, namely the cover of ML 45 and the superb portraits of the book's "good" characters in ML 47. The latter were amazing in their sensitivity -- these were the very faces I had seen in my own mind's eye when reading Lewis' book. I would love to see NLP's versions of the book's villains, especially Fairy Hardcaste. Perhaps she can be persuaded to try!

I'll bring this to a close before I begin to wax lugubrious (unless I'm too late already); but suffice it to say that I am looking forward to seeing more of Ms. Patterson's work (both artistic and scholarly) in future issues of ML, Malevolent willing.

Tales Newly Told, continued from page 14 Christian myths so that they illuminate and reinforce each other. He never tries to side-step the full emotional impact of myth, as so many modern treatments do. He does make more use of genuine horror than any of the Inkling writers would have (though one should remember that there is a strong element of horror in Lewis' own writing: witness the "Miserere Vision" in Perelandra, and the many levels of ghastliness suggested in That Hideous Strength), and yet, despite the bleakness of many of the episodes, the novel ends on an image of warmth and goodness. To gaze upon death in its most disquieting aspects and still be able to offer hope -- a deep, lasting hope -- is a precious gift indeed in a writer.