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Editorial

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Editorial

Additional Keywords
Sarah Beach
Editor's Opening

20 and 10 Years

To mark the passing of special individuals is less appealing than to mark the anniversary of their births, but it is a time to recollect their accomplishments and note with respect and sadness that they are no longer with us. 1983 was the tenth anniversary of the passing of J.R.R. Tolkien, and the twentieth anniversary of the death of C.S. Lewis.

Americans over 30 can recall the shock, horror and numbing sadness that overwhelmed the nation at the assassination of John F. Kennedy. This overshadowed all other news for months. It wasn't until five months later that I learned, by reading an article that C.S. Lewis had died quietly in his bed on the same day. Disbelief, then sadness came over me, followed by a strange feeling—as if I had been deprived of a proper mourning period for a man whose writing had had such a powerful effect on me. In a letter he wrote me in 1959 he urged me to read more books generally. This was good advice to anyone, especially an adolescent. Lewis, one of the best read men of this century, knew the power and satisfaction of being well read, and his advice still stands.

I learned of the passing of Tolkien as I was woken up on a Saturday morning by the news on the radio. Jolted fully awake, I called C.S. Kilby to inform him, hoping against hope that he might deny the validity of the report. That evening the westering sky appeared remarkably luminous and the clear light lingered long, as if a distant portal were flung wide. A Mythopoeic Society memorial service was planned that evening. At it I read, in place of the eulogy, "Leaf by Leaf," which took on a new, deeper meaning for those of us gathered there. It was hard to say good bye to this man who had been adopted as a personal, grandfatherly figure by so many of us.

Several years ago someone wrote to criticize the Mythopoeic Society for studying "dead authors. It is difficult to express the in comprehensibility I felt at this; the sadness for the person, the grief. Death is the natural and eventual lot for us all. To only read "living" authors is an absurdly limited view of literature. In Mythlore 10 (The J.R.R. Tolkien Memorial Issue) a letter was printed that Tolkien had written to an admirer in which he said The Lord of the Rings was not really about Power and Dominion, but about Death and the desire for deathlessness. The gravestone of C.S. Lewis bears the quote from Shakespeare: "Men must endure their going hence."

While Lewis and Tolkien are gone physically, the impact they made reverberates powerfully in countless people, and surely will continue to do so far past the forseeable future. Walter Hooper and Christopher Tolkien have performed and are performing an admirable stewardship in bringing new material to our eyes. Lewis and Tolkien are not dead unless we individually make them so to ourselves. Like Niggle, they have gone up the mountain to look at a wider sky, laughing joyfully.

The Inklings Circle

Even though a similar idea was presented in an Editorial several years ago, the question raised remains in need of a workable solution. What expression should be used when referring to writers who were connected with the Inklings? Because of a lack of an adequate and accurate term to describe these writers and the prominent Inklings, a number of less than satisfactory terms have come into being and are continuing to be used.

The most prominent of the Inklings include C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Owen Barfield. They did meet with other Inklings (fifteen of whom are listed in Humphrey Carpenter's The Inklings) in Oxford. There are other writers who are literarily and spiritually connected with them, especially George MacDonald and G.K. Chesterton (who preceded the Inklings and had varying degrees of influence on them) and Dorothy L. Sayers (who was a contemporary, a literary friend Williams, and cordial acquaintance of Lewis.

Certain terms of reference repeated frequently enough become used as a matter of habit, but when examined are clearly inaccurate or misleading. There is the tendency today to refer to all of the above-mentioned writers, plus certain others, as being "Inklings." For example, a well-known publishing company produces a very fine annual "Inklings" calendar, featuring illustrated quotes or passages from the actual Inklings, especially Lewis, but it also includes earlier writers who were admired by and may have influenced the Inklings, as well. MacDonald and Chesterton had departed this world before the Inklings began to meet. Dorothy Sayers (who perhaps from a certain light could be considered an "honorary Inklings") never actually attended a gathering of the Inklings. Despite the connection in many people's minds, it is a mistake to call them Inklings.

If by calling these various writers "Inklings" one wishes to indicate that they shared (spiritually) a similar world view, one's conclusion may be defensible but the term itself is still misleading. This holds for other terms in use. "Oxford Christians" is not satisfactory for four reasons; not all the Inklings are identified with Oxford (Charles Williams was a Londoner, though he lived in Oxford for the duration of World War II); the term puts too much emphasis on the writers' religion, creating an image of crusading evangelists; the term could be confused with the "Oxford Movement" connected with Cardinal Newman in the late 19th Century; and Oxford lays claim to quite a number
I propose calling these writers the "Inklings Circle." Even though this term is not perfect, it is clearer and less inaccurate than the other terms discussed. The word "circle" is used to identify a group bound by a common tie, therefore the "Inklings Circle" refers both to the actual Inklings and to the other writers who are frequently associated with them. Readers' reactions to this are invited.

Looking Ahead

I am pleased to report that since 1981 when I resumed the Editorship of Mythlore, circulation has increased 30%. This is due in very large part to the enthusiasm and support by you the readers in promoting Mythlore, and for this I have my sincere gratitude. This has happened in spite of the economic recession which has made growth more difficult. I hope the improving economic conditions will cause further growth, but relying on this is not sufficient. Mythlore needs a 50% increase, and later a 100%. So much more can be done to achieve Mythlore's full potential! Increased circulation more than anything else can bring this about. I am turning to you asking that you become personally involved by doing these things:

1. Use the enclosed flyer by posting it in an English department, a library (public or academic), a book store, or other similar place. The flyer is meant for publicity rather than as a personal subscription renewal. Please write me for additional copies.

2. Show copies of Mythlore to those who you think may be interested among your friends and acquaintances.

3. Ask your public library to subscribe, explaining why they need and should have the service it provides.

4. If you are a faculty member, request in writing that your institutional library subscribe and obtain back issues. If you know a faculty member, ask them to do this. (This is nearly the only effective way to get institutional library subscriptions.)

5. Give gift subscriptions to friends and libraries.

6. If possible, become a Benefactor. My sincere appreciation to those who have done this. If you subscribe in relation to your professional activity, you may deduct the expense from your taxes, as all can for donations beyond the price of subscription.

7. Look for a variety of ways that Mythlore can receive free publicity. Take the initiative yourself to gain this publicity and keep me informed of these sources.

I am sad to report that David Callaway's services are no longer available. His recent change of job meant loss of access to his University computer. If we are not back at square one, then square two, since we do have justified columns. Again, a healthy increase in circulation would make book-style typesetting assured on a regular basis.

The date of mailing of each issue has been slipping slightly in the last year and a half, mainly because my quarterly vacations, which I use primarily to do a great deal of Editorial work, were shifted to a later schedule. The lateness of the last issue, the reasons for which were explained, put Mythlore well out of alignment with the seasonal designation and thematic color of the issues (ivory for winter, green for spring, golden yellow for summer, and brown for autumn). To bring Mythlore into alignment with the correct season we have passed from the last issue, Summer 1983 (perhaps Indian Summer) to Winter 1984. This will not affect subscriptions, or the number of copies received for the price of subscription.

15 Years

Mythlore marks its 15th anniversary with this issue. The first issue was dated January 1969. The collating was finished on January 3rd, J.R.R. Tolkien's birthday. Born during the era when Tolkien was a fad, Mythlore need not be merely a faddish vehicle. Its purpose has been to be a creative bringing together of many talents and interests. The variety of the written words, the wealth of visual interpretations, and the intense and highly informed enthusiasm of the readers, all make Mythlore a very special and unusual publication. Over the span of fifteen years a great deal has appeared that is still fresh and appealing. Back issues are available as a service to you, and I hope you will take advantage of this. As Editor I am both honored and enriched by the experience. It is a labor, not freed from frustration or continuing struggle, but above all it is a labor of love. May the next fifteen years bring much solid information, insight, and pleasure, the configurations of which are yet unknown.

Glen Goodknight