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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Editorial

Glen H. GoodKnight

The dream that the Mythopoeic Society would one day hold a conference in Oxford is nearly as old as the Society itself. The Society originally began in Southern California, that near-mythical place, both so curiously and inordinately lionized and denigrated by those who live elsewhere. All groups must have a place for their beginnings, while ideas, visions, and friendships know no borders. Naturally the first Mythopoeic Conferences were held in California. Gradually as the interest and membership of the Society grew to national and international scope, we desired to hold Conferences in other areas. I always felt Oxford was the ideal and ultimately logical location. I spoke of this several times in the Society's early history of the 1970s. After our Conference in Wheaton, a suburb of Chicago, I ended my "Editorial Note" in *Mythlore* 43, Autumn 1985, with this statement:

The center of the Society is not in one geographical place. It is . . . found anywhere where the vision is shared in the hearts and imaginations of the people involved. This was clearly proved in 1985. Now a milestone has been passed . . . I am confident that in the future we will see other Mythopoeic Conferences in other geographical centers . . . We need to be positive and progressive, and why not? Eventually, Onward to Oxford!

When in 1987 the Society celebrated the 50th anniversary of *The Hobbit* at Marquette University, with Christopher Tolkien as Guest of Honour, an announcement was made at the Banquet to celebrate the Tolkien Centenary with a Conference at Oxford. Immediately after the banquet it was learned that the Tolkien Society in Britain was also planning to hold a Centenary Conference as well. In brief, we negotiated to jointly hold a Conference for this occasion, and the long process of planning began.

The Conference spanned eight unforgettable days, August 17-24, 1992. Even though longer than previous Conferences, it followed the same pattern of making the papers the predominant feature of the programming. In the early days of The Mythopoeic Society, the first three Conferences published a separate *Proceedings*. Beginning with the fourth Mythopoeic Conference, papers have been published in *Mythlore*. Because the Conference was jointly sponsored, it was decided to publish the papers in a *Proceedings* that is a special issue of *Mythlore* and *Mallorn*.

How I regret that the *Proceedings* cannot capture the full panoply of exciting events, memorable experiences, and renowned locations that cannot be adequately expressed on paper: the wonderful international mix of people, the camaraderie at the dining hall, the crush of the Opening

Ceremonies at Blackwell's, the sublimely perfect Memorial Service, the whimsical masquerade, the Banquet, the dramatic performances, Christopher Tolkien's reading of "The New Shadow" in the ancient and magnificent Sheldonian Theatre, and the city of Oxford itself, to name only a few.

Regardless, what we do have here is remarkable unto itself. In these pages you are able to read in full *and* in leisure nearly every paper given at the Centenary Conference – something that was rarely, if ever, possible for those attending, due to the multiple scheduling during the Conference.

The Tolkien Centenary Conference was meant to lovingly celebrate J.R.R. Tolkien's 100th birthday. It was intended for all who love this man and his works, regardless of their nationality or academic credentials. Thus those attending represented a wide spectrum of people, from academic scholars to homemakers, from young people to those wise with years, from those only having read some of his books once to those who have read everything he wrote and some works many, *many* times. The papers reflect, in part, this spectrum. The vast majority are written by serious scholars on Tolkien and his work, but there are other kinds of material here as well. There is the section that contains personal recollections and appreciations of J.R.R. Tolkien; there are those few papers that are on other topics, and a few that perhaps might be described as "tongue-in-cheek." Those who feel that a *Proceedings* should only contain serious scholarly papers, need to consider that, as significantly scholarly as this *Proceedings* is, it does also reflect other aspects of the Conference.

Getting this *Proceedings* to completion and in your hands has been a very great undertaking, requiring many, many details to be worked through. As in any production by more than one person, many compromises needed to be worked out. Sometimes certain aspects of these compromises may not please all concerned. If decisions were to be made by myself alone, a number of things would have come out differently. Nevertheless the overall product and its achievement speaks for itself.

For those who miss the usual artwork, reviews, letters, Inklings Bibliography, columns, and the other features, be assured they will resume with the next regular issue of *Mythlore*.

I hope that this *Proceedings* will prove to be the milestone in Tolkien scholarship that I believe it will. It is sure to provoke much new thoughts, insights and ideas in those that read it. Should this be true in your case, I hope you will consider writing a letter of comment or a paper for

publication in *Mythlore*, whether you are a current subscriber or not. Critical responses to printed ideas is a long-standing tradition of *Mythlore*, and submissions of papers, letters, reviews and artwork are very welcome.

It was suggested by more than one at the Conference that

there should be a Bicentenary Tolkien Conference held in 2092. If so, we must set to work at once to adequately prepare for a Conference that could possibly equal the one we experienced in 1992.

Patricia Reynolds

J.R.R. Tolkien, I believe, was a man who liked parties. No-one who wrote so entrancingly of “songs, dances, music, games, and, of course, food and drink” – not to mention presents and fireworks – could possibly hate them himself. When the 1992 Tolkien Centenary Committee came to one of its least onerous tasks and chose a name for the conference, “A Long-Expected Party” leapt to the fore of someone’s mind, and struck a chord with all of us.

The conference was many years in the planning stage. There were instances in which, individually or collectively, we doubted that it could happen. New Year’s Day, 1990 dawned, and many of us felt that the new decade brought the conference uncomfortably close – but somehow more possible. Every member of the organizing committee can tell you of the moment when they personally knew it was happening, knew that it was *working*. As for some magician in a tower, the fog cleared, and the vision we had conjured appeared.

But, of course, it did not appear by magic. My fellow Chairman, Christina Scull, and I are thankful to our fellow organizing committee members, to the committee of the Tolkien Society and stewards of the Mythopoeic Society (both for pitching in, and for diverting the best energies of their society into this project for many years), to the writers and artists who contributed to publications, to the stewards and other volunteers, to those who presented papers, contributed to panels, or provided entertainments, and to those who were simply grabbed and did more than they were asked.

The conference was held at Keble College, Oxford, England. The conference could not have been held in any other city than Oxford, home for most of Tolkien’s adult life. This caused a few problems (when Keble was built, for example, a bathroom was provided on each floor against opposition: why, some argued, did students need baths: they went home at the end of each term, didn’t they?) but overall, the “city of dreaming spires” had no competition.

Songs, dances, music and games there were in plenty. Also

plays and coach tours and slide-shows and exhibitions. Tolkien’s works inspire great creativity in its readers: and so does seeing other’s responses.

There were three streams of papers and panels running concurrently, focusing on a great diversity of subjects. Looking back, it is scarcely believable that so much was fitted into one week. I am very pleased that so many papers have been fitted into one volume: a very few were not available to us for one reason or another, and these are listed. I hope that there is at least one which has what Glen GoodKnight has termed the “what – you too!” factor, and at least one which makes you cry “what!!!”, and produces a thoughtful letter or article in rebuttal. As editors of *Mythlore* and *Mallorn*, Glen and I await your responses.

The first section, **Recollection and Remembrance**, contains papers and presentations, mainly by people who knew J.R.R. Tolkien. The second section, **Sources and Influences** looks, conversely, at those Tolkien knew. The following two sections deal with specific works: **The Lord of the Rings, The Silmarillion**. A wide variety of approaches to the books are taken. The fifth section, **Linguistics and Lexicography** is not “just elvish” – although there *is* a paper on those languages: also here are papers on Tolkien’s work on the languages and texts of our world, the effect his work had on his writings, and the effect his writings have on translators. The sixth section, **Response and Reaction** contains papers dealing with other effects of Tolkien’s writing. The seventh section is the largest, covering as it does **Tolkien Studies**: papers concerned with more than one of Tolkien’s books, or with his life. Section eight, **Middle-earth Studies** is titled after a distinction John Ellison and I drew in *Mallorn* 31 – while “Tolkien Studies” are comparable to the body of work surrounding any other author (“Shakespeare Studies” or “Dickens Studies”, for example), “Middle-earth Studies” are serious examinations of Middle-earth, treating its history, geography and cultures as topics of study – comparable rather to “Pacific Rim Studies” or “European Studies”. While the papers dealing

with those Tolkien influenced and was influenced by are given sections of their own, one group of relationships is so special and complex, that section nine is set aside for **The Inklings** alone. Here there are overviews of those relationships, and comparisons between the works of various members of the group. The papers in Section ten **Flights of Fancy** take an imaginative approach to “Tolkien Studies” and “Middle-earth Studies”. Finally, in the section titled: **Other Writers** the spotlight is turned from Tolkien to 18th century authors, Kenneth Grahame, Welwyn Wilton Katz and Madeleine L’Engle.

While the conference took place in England, and was jointly organized by a British and American society, conference attendees came from across the world. We were especially pleased to welcome scholars from Russia, Poland and the Czech Republic. The changes in world politics in the late 80s and early 90s became close to our hearts through these people. It is hard to explain the atmosphere: knowing that whoever you sat down with at a meal, or next to in a lecture was as enthusiastic about Tolkien as you are is a unique experience. My own personal “this is going to work” moment came at a Bardic Circle. This is a traditional Mythcon event, where a circle of people take turns to read, or recite, sing or play. Inspiration is usually something “fantasy”, not necessarily Tolkien, and on this night the songs and stories came from across the world, and the fellowship was tangible.

The appearance of these, the *Proceedings* of that conference has been to me no less of a marvel than that of the conference itself. The contributors have all been very patient – with my own slowness, and especially after the joint catastrophe of having my computer stolen and misplacing the most recent back up discs. Like the Conference itself, it is a joint production of the Mythopoeic Society and the Tolkien Society. Like the Conference itself, it is the product of many hands: principally, Glen and I have to thank Charles Noad for a Herculean proof-reading task and Trevor Reynolds for typing, re-typing, indexing, translating computer manuals into English and being

positive. Helen Armstrong for additional typing. Secondary proof readers; Amanda Campbell, Christine Crawshaw, Richard Crawshaw, Anthony Dumas, John Ellison, Angela Gardner, Christina Hammond, Mr R. Heaton, Sarah Sturch and Andrew Wells also deserve our thanks. Design advice was given by Wayne Hammond and Lester Simons. Richard Crawshaw and Mark Sapey redrew maps and diagrams. General support and encouragement came from many people – for quality and quantity Lynn Maudlin, David Bratman and members of the Tolkien Society Committee 1992-5, under its chairman Amanda Campbell must be honoured. Of course, all errors and omissions are due to the editors alone.

Tolkien once described the elves in an interview with Denis Guerolt, who asked “Did you intend, in the *Lord of the Rings* that certain races should embody certain principles: the Elves wisdom, the Dwarves craftsmanship ...?”

After explaining he had to differentiate them somehow, and only having humanity to work with, the characteristics are taken from humanity, Tolkien continued:

the elves are simply in a sense an expression of certain, not really wholly legitimate, desires the human race has about itself. We should all, or at least large parts of the human race would like to have greater power of mind, greater power of art (by which I mean that the gap between the conception and the power of execution should be shortened), we should like that, and we should like, of course, longer time, if not indefinite time to go on knowing more and making more. Therefore we make the elves immortal, in a sense . . .

(Tolkien, 1980)

This volume deserves to have been edited by elves: but I am comforted by the thought that it will contribute to the desire of many to know more and make more.

I hope that something of the spirit of the conference comes to you through these papers. This may be for you a happy recollection of those times, or a foreshadowing of some future meeting with Tolkien scholars, who like their mentor, are undoubtedly people who like parties.

Reference

Tolkien, J.R.R. 1980. *Tolkien and Basil Bunting*. London: BBC Cassettes. Transcribed by author.