In Memoriam: Nancy-Lou Patterson

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NANCY-LOU PATTERSON, SCHOLAR, ARTIST, POET, AND TEACHER, was an essential figure in the history of both Mythlore and the Mythopoeic Society. Born in 1929 in Worchester, Massachusetts to academic parents, she and her husband eventually settled in Waterloo, Ontario in 1962, and within six years she had founded the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Waterloo. In 1993, upon her retirement, she became the university’s first woman to be named Distinguished Professor Emerita. She worked in textiles, stained glass, wood, metal, ceramics, and calligraphy, and her fine-line pen and ink drawings frequently graced the covers and interior of Mythlore and illustrated her many articles. In addition to her extensive publications on the Inklings, she also wrote about Inuit and First Nations art and the arts and crafts of Swiss and German immigrants to Waterloo County, and authored fiction and poetry as well.

Patterson passed away in October 2018, fifteen years after being diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, and is survived by her husband Palmer and eight of the nine children (six of them adopted) they raised together. Her family kindly granted us permission to publish one of her final poems, rendered all the more poignant by the misspelling of the name of her disease and the simplicity of its language.

On Being Diagnosed With Alzheimer’s

Of course, I knew
I’d die, someday,
but not like this.

The doctor smiles;
he’s counting out
his list of pills,

prescribing the
long, slow loss
of my known self,

reminding me
of Sandburg’s fog;
its small cat feet.

Nancy-Lou Patterson, 2003
While Patterson does not hold the record for the most articles published in *Mythlore* and other society publications (that honor belongs to Joe R. Christopher and is still climbing and unlikely to ever be beaten), she was one of our most prolific contributors, beginning with a paper in the *Proceedings* of the very first Mythcon in 1969 and continuing through her last review published in *Mythlore* #88 in 2001. Her essays were distinguished by clarity of style, breadth of reference, and insightful analysis. In addition to reviewing well over 200 titles for *Mythlore* (and a number for *Mythprint* as well), she served as Book Review Editor for issues #26-84, 1981-1998 and member of the Editorial Board for issues #58-84, 1989-1998, and was the Keynote Speaker at Mythcon 13 in 1982.

Patterson’s papers, including the poem reproduced above, are held in the special collections at the University of Waterloo, and a finding aid is available at https://uwaterloo.ca/library/special-collections-archives/collections/patterson-nancy-lou-fonds. I have been working with Emily E. Auger to collect Patterson’s Inklings and fantasy scholarship from *Mythlore* and other sources (including some previously unpublished essays as well as many from sources now difficult to find) into a series of volumes. So far we have published the following, and plan one or two more volumes to cover her non-Inklings papers and fantasy art. They can be ordered via Amazon, Lulu.com (for the first three), or Kobo.com (for the Williams volume) in paper or electronic format.


Nancy-Lou Patterson was an exemplar of the life well-lived and fully engaged, as a scholar, artist, writer, wife and mother, and active member of her community and church. “Being creative is who I am. It is everything. It is what I am about,” she said of herself. I am grateful that *Mythlore* and the Mythopoeic Society were beneficiaries of her intelligent and creative spirit.

Articles in Mythlore and other Society publications:


"The Bolt of Tash: The Figure of Satan in C.S. Lewis’ The Horse and His Boy and The Last Battle.” Mythlore 16.4 (#62) (1990): 23–26. (Reprinted in Ransoming the Waste Land vol.2)


Mythlore front and back cover art
“Straight as a Pillar She Stood.” (From The Princess and Curdie.) Front cover, Mythlore 6.3 (#21) (1979).
From That Hideous Strength. Front cover, Mythlore 12.3 (#45) (1986).
“St. Anne’s.” (From That Hideous Strength.) Front cover, Mythlore 13.3 (#49) (1987).
“The Destruction of Edgestow.” (From That Hideous Strength.) Front cover, Mythlore 16.2 (#60) (1989).
“Bacchus and All his Wild Girls.” (From The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.) Back cover, Mythlore 18.1 (#67) (1991). (Reproduced on the facing page.)
“Lucy of Narnia.” (From The Chronicles of Narnia.) Back cover, Mythlore 18.4 (#70) (1992).
“The Holy House of Ungit.” (From Till We Have Faces.) Front cover, Mythlore 21.4 (#82) (1997).