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Growth and Consolation

Glen H. GoodKnight

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Growth and Consolation



EDITORIAL



Growth and Consolation

(The following remarks were given on July 29, 1989 at the Opening Ceremonies of the 20th Annual Mythopoeic Conference, held at the University of British Columbia.)

Nineteen years and nineteen previous Mythopoeic Conferences have passed. Now we are at the Society's Twentieth annual event. We have come a very long way, both in historical development and geographical distance. The Society itself will mark its 22nd anniversary this autumn. Gone are the days when meeting notices were dittoed, when *Mythlore* was laboriously mimeographed, and when the first Conference drew attendees only from the greater Los Angeles area. We have grown from Conferences in one great metropolitan area, to State wide Conferences, to interstate and national Conferences, to bring us here to our first International Conference. My sincere praise to the Committee who worked so hard to make this possible. In 1992 we will have our first Inter-continental and World Conference in Oxford.

The Mythopoeic Society is unique in several ways. It is the oldest on-going Tolkien-related organization in the world and the very first devoted to either C.S. Lewis or Charles Williams. Its nature is fixed yet open. Its focus of attention is fixed and centered on these three authors who have evoked a deep intellectual, imaginative, and creative response in so many of us, and have given us our shared enthusiasm in study, discussion and enjoyment. Yet we as a Society are very open, with wide horizons opening out before us on all sides. We cannot fully appreciate these writers in a vacuum. By studying the realm of myth, the genre of fantasy, and the literary, philosophical and spiritual traditions which underlie their work – and which they have drawn from and enriched – we understand them better. But there is a fundamental exchange and interaction between the Society's central focus and its wide ranging interests. Written into the Society's governing documents is its statement of purpose, which says "The Society shall be based on the idea that these authors provide both an excellent introduction to and fundamental understanding of" these genres of literature.

Over the years, many who first read Tolkien or Lewis have gone on to develop a rich appreciation of a great many directly or tangentially related works and authors. And it is the collective and cumulative vision of these three men that has guided and informed us of a view of literature that is both comprehensive and affirmative in its view of life.

This affirmative element has been a solace at difficult times. The new American edition of Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf*, which includes the full text of the elegant, formidable, and inspiring poem "Mythopoeia," reached me at a time of bereavement. My mother passed away suddenly six months ago, and my father joined her just one week ago.

This has been a time of much recollection and remembrance of the distant and recent past, thinking both of origins and ultimate destination. The poem "Mythopoeia" has been especially relevant, comforting, and inspiring to me. Most of us know the part of it quoted in Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-stories":

... 'Although now long estranged,
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
Though all the crannies of the world we filled
with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build
Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
and sowed the seed of dragons — 'twas our right
(used or misused). That right has not decayed:
we make still by the law in which we're made.'

I have often said that one cannot fully understand either Tolkien's craft or intention without reading his indispensable essay "On Fairy-stories." Now, since the publication of his *Letters*, and just recently the publication of the full text of the poem "Mythopoeia," I would have to say that *all three* are indispensable to this end. C.S. Lewis is well known for his clearly written apologetics. The poem "Mythopoeia" was written to the then unbelieving Lewis shortly after the famous midnight walk and discussion that Tolkien and Hugo Dyson had with Lewis in 1931, expounding their faith (see J.R.R. Tolkien: *A Biography*, p. 147-48). After reading "Mythopoeia" one can appreciate and praise Tolkien for his elegant, poetic, and powerful apologetics. There are many phrases that evoke connections and allusions to his mythology found in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, and further extensive study in this area is in order. In closing, let me share the hitherto unknown conclusion to the poem.

In Paradise perchance the eye may stray
from gazing upon everlasting Day
to see the day-illuminated, and renew
from mirrored truth the likeness of the True.
Then Looking on the Blessed Land 'twill see
that all is as it is, and yet made free:
Salvation changes not, nor yet destroys
garden nor gardener, children nor their toys.
Evil it will not see, for evil lies
not in God's picture but in crooked eyes,
not in the source but in malicious choice,
and not in sound but in the tuneless voice.
In Paradise they look no more awry;
and though they make anew, they make no lie.
Be sure they still will make, not being dead,
and poets shall have flames upon their head,
and harps whereon their faultless fingers fall:
there each shall choose for ever from the All.

