

Winter 12-15-1993

Twenty-five Years with The Mythopoeic Society: A Personal Response

Glen H. GoodKnight

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

GoodKnight, Glen H. (1993) "Twenty-five Years with The Mythopoeic Society: A Personal Response," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 19: No. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol19/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Online Summer Seminar 2023

August 5-6, 2023: Fantasy Goes to Hell: Depictions of Hell in Modern Fantasy Texts

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2023.htm>



Twenty-five Years with The Mythopoeic Society: A Personal Response

Abstract

Reminiscences of the history of the Society on the occasion of its 25th anniversary.

Additional Keywords

Mythopoeic Society—History and personal reminiscences



A Personal Reprise by Glen H. GoodKnight

When the Mythopoeic Society was founded in 1967, I confess I was *not* foresighted enough at the time to have calculated that its 25th anniversary would coincide with the Tolkien Centenary — nevertheless it was a genuine pleasure that both observances fortuitously came together in 1992.

Before beginning the Society, I endeavored to find a common descriptive word for both the intentions and creativity of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams — and, despite its daunting length and disputed pronunciation, it was decided *mythopoeic* was the best single choice. The word has seen a variety of interpretations, but this uncommon word was *specifically* chosen to convey the creative characteristic of these three men. Twenty-five years ago this word had almost no common usage, even among literary circles. Now it is far more popularly known and used. Whether or not this was due in part to the influence of the Mythopoeic Society will be left to future literary historians to evaluate and decide.

After beginning a Tolkien group in 1966 on a commuter campus (California State University at Los Angeles), where few people could come together at one time, I came in contact with many off-campus Tolkien readers, and decided the best way to bring all the interested people in the region together was to hold a picnic celebration of Bilbo's and Frodo's Birthday in September of 1967. About 80 people turned out, and following the cake and costume judging, the announcement was made that a new Society was being formed with its first discussion meeting to begin the following month.

That first year was very exciting, with people coming from a large area to participate. The success of the monthly discussions and the picnics led to a second group being formed in the second year and then a third group a little later. By the beginning of 1969 there were four groups, and Yours Truly was commuting to four far-flung regions of southern California to moderate these discussions. Then there was an even greater burst of growth, so that by the end of 1969 there were about ten groups, with more to soon follow. The early Society had two events which had the intent of bringing all these groups together for fun and fellowship: Bilbo's and Frodo's Birthday Picnic in September, and a combination of

the Celebration of the Elvish New Year and the Destruction of the Ring in the early Spring. The officers of the different discussion groups met every three months to plan events and general policy.

But I and others were not satisfied. There was a great pool of learning and talent among the members — scholars, artists, musicians, and performers who wanted a greater opportunities of expression. The premiere issue of *Mythlore* was completed on January 3, 1969 just in time for a Tolkien birthday party. Soon after, plans were made for the first three-day conference in 1970. The monthly two page bulletin, which basically contained meeting information, was expanded into *Mythprint*, the Society newsletter. For several years I attempted to edit both publications. The Society had a buoyant enthusiasm, feeling that we were doing — and could do more — that had not been done before. We were pioneering many new things with a positive outlook derived from the Inklings' works that motivated us in what we did. The first Mythopoeic Conference was a tremendous success, in proportions that were unforeseen. In short, the Mythopoeic Society has held a Conference every year since 1970, which is a rich and amazing record.

After the first annual Conference, we entered a second major phase from 1970 to 1974, during which time we saw: over 20 recognized discussions groups scattered across the United States; the *long*, tedious legal procedures to write the organization's governing rules, and obtain non-profit legal status as a educational organization in 1971; a new board of governing directors, later to be renamed The Council of Stewards, was part of the incorporation process; the merger of The Tolkien Society of America with The Mythopoeic Society in 1972 — thus making us the oldest surviving Tolkien organization in the world. We saw the gradual transformation of a regional, activity-based group to a much larger national and international organization focussed on the primary way people scattered over great distances can feel connected with the others in the Society — in its publications.

The Society responded sadly but swiftly, when J.R.R. Tolkien passed away in September of 1973. A memorial service was held in Los Angeles, where I had the honor of reading "Leaf by Niggle" in its entirety as the eulogy. *Mythlore* followed (Issue 10) as a special Memorial Issue.

During the period 1974 to 1980 the Society struggled to fulfill its growing role as a national and international organization, and yet be what it was in its beginning years, a multifaceted regional group. The majority of our members were no longer attendees of local discussion groups but far-flung readers of the publications. Southern California was changing rapidly: the members there, which had been mostly high school and college students were getting married and establishing families and careers, which made for much less time for Society activities.

Eventually the new role became predominant, and the glories of the early days, such as the picnics, and abundance of local discussions groups, slowly diminished. Despite this, the many rich memories of golden afternoons at the picnics and the intense discussions, cannot be denied or ever taken away.

But for me personally the best was yet to come. During the 1980's the Mythopoeic Society finally, as part of the expression of its new role, expanded the location of its conferences beyond California. We saw Conferences in Nevada, Illinois, Wisconsin, and British Columbia. To see the 1992 Conference held in Oxford was a long-held personal dream made real at last. Next year will be in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and in 1994 it will be in Washington, D.C. The Conferences are the primary places where we now come together for study, discussion and enjoyment, and are very meaningful and rich for those who come. I know that some readers of *Mythlore*, for a variety of reasons, have never attended a Mythopoeic Conference. It is hard to describe the flavor of an unknown fruit, if you have never tasted it. In short, you are missing a great deal if you have not yet attended. Ask anyone who has gone. It is well worth the expense of time and funds to participate. Beyond this, each year's Conference has its own flavor, mood and memories.

I do not believe history is circular, but rather that it may move in a spiral motion. Specific events can never be repeated, yet the basic ingredients of an given event can be partially reproduced in a similar occurrence. Such it is that I feel this year has seen my experiences with the Society come "full spiral." The Tolkien Centenary of 1992 moved me to think of honoring J.R.R. Tolkien by holding weekly readings of his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*. A wonderful group of people participated in this group experience from the Spring to Autumnal Equinoxes. Following this we saw the Celebration of The Mythopoeic Society's 25th anniversary in September, mentioned elsewhere in this issue. At that cele-

bration I announced the formation of a new discussion group to have its first meeting in November. At that meeting we took the name "Niggle's Parish" for the group, based on our previous reading of "Leaf by Niggle" in September. Actually reading a work aloud makes appreciation much deeper and makes the following discussion more coherent and focussed, than if the people have separately read it alone and then met to discuss it. I urge you to try this approach if you are in a discussion group, or to attempt to organize a group in your area.

This is not the place or moment to outline the "political" history of the Society — the evolving issues that have caused controversy since the beginning. Of course, I have held strong views on any number of issues, and disagreed with various actions and policies. I will only mention that the first real controversy was whether or not a second discussion group should be begun in 1968, a year after the first group was started. If that second group had not begun, I doubt if any of the other events in the Society's history would have followed: the number of groups, the annual conferences, or the Society publica-

tions, *Mythlore* included. I am a mixture of extrovert and introvert, as are we all in varying degrees. I have met many hundreds of people through, and because of, the Society. With such a large diversity of people, it is not possible to be a friend on a personal basis with all of them, despite the many wonderful people I have met through the Society, and for whom I have a great respect and deep affection, far more than I can say.

It still amazes me how some people assume they *know* what has really motivated me. This demonstrates what mental preconceptions they bring to their own perception. To continue with a commitment is not easy, especially when life passes inevitably and periodically under clouds of adversity. To streak across the sky and then burn out is more typical. What *really* drives me is a profoundly deep enthusiasm for both the creations and vision of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams. Deep within I know "I shall never escape this. This will never escape me. These images have struck roots far below the surface of my mind."

Sometimes I feel like Elrond, who along with Galadriel never gave up in the long struggle. I, like them, am determined to continue with the work that needs to be done. I have been honored and enriched, first by the Inklings' works and then by contact with those around the world who say: "What, you too? I thought I was the only one!" Let us continue to share and learn from one another.

