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25 Years: The Mythopoeic Society Appreciations

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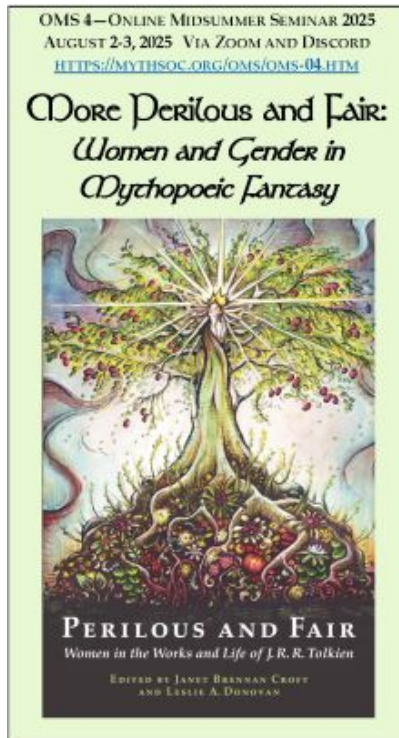
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25 Years: The Mythopoeic Society Appreciations

Abstract

"The following are tributes written by readers of *Mythlore*" - Glen GoodKnight

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25th THE MYTHOPOEIC SOCIETY

APPRECIATIONS

The following are tributes written by readers of *Mythlore*.

— Glen GoodKnight

Nancy-Lou Patterson Waterloo, Canada

Being invited to discuss the influence of the Mythopoeic Society upon my life takes me, at the age of 63, a long way back, and as I've just retired from my role as a Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Waterloo, the chance to see things retrospectively is irresistible. I'm a Canadian citizen, having lived in the "True North" for thirty years, but I do this, in our national atmosphere of cultural pluralism, not only as a loyal subject of Her Majesty the Queen, but also as a transplanted and unregenerate American, born in New England (Daddy was at Clark, Yale, and the U. of Connecticut); a child in Carbondale, Illinois (he'd moved on to Blackburn College and S.I.N.U. — now the U. of Southern Illinois); a girl in Seattle (my parent's home, to which we all returned fifty years ago [as of 1992]); and a woman, spending two years at the University of Kansas (my husband's M.A. and my career as a scientific illustrator), and a decade more in Seattle (his PhD, my Lectureship at Seattle University); and from 1962 till now, pursuing our mutual careers at U.W., with nine children and six grandchildren mixed in along some 38 years of the way.

Besides my marriage in 1951, the other most pivotal event of my life was my conversion to Christianity and in particular to Anglicanism. The long-term result of that has been an extremely entertaining way of life and a profound underpinning in the inevitable hard times. But the immediate consequence of my conversion was the discovery of C.S. Lewis. This led in due course to Dorothy L. Sayers, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, and T.S. Eliot, as well as readings from the vast European background of writings from which they drew. At the same time that I began to read the Bible all the way through (I thought it was the least I could do) I began to read Lewis. This, at least spiritually, marked the beginning of my membership in The Mythopoeic Society.

By 1968 I had read all I could acquire of the Inklings and Sayers, and when the Tolkien Society of America announced a conference in New Hampshire, in a science

fiction publication I happened (providentially) to buy, I delivered my first academic paper there, an event marked by my first meeting with my spiritual sister Gracia Fay Ellwood. Soon afterwards that group coalesced with the young Mythopoeic Society and I found myself not only a member but a subscriber to *Mythlore*. I've read every article in every issue since, and this ongoing internal conversation is a central feature of my life, both scholarly and spiritual.

In the intervening years I've attended as many Mythopoeic Conferences as I could (mostly those nearby), and met the ever-to-be-thanked Glen GoodKnight, the gracious and supportive Joe Christopher, the deliciously individual Kay Lindskoog, the stalwart Sarah Beach, and many other good people in person, and have sent and/or delivered a paper at every subsequent conference, with exception of a year in the 70s when Glen mislaid my submission, and the year when everybody but myself (sob) went to Oxford. I'm glad I'd already gone in 1966 and visited Magdalen College, where my daughter Francesca climbed up a spiral staircase and discovered a skeleton jauntily reading a book in the College library! In 1975 Glen generously asked me to become the Reviews Editor of *Mythlore*; in 1979 Gracia Fay and Joe both very sweetly saluted my 50th birthday in that journal, in 1983 I joyously gave the Keynote Address at the Mythopoeic Conference. Countless reviews, many papers, and quite a few drawings have appeared in *Mythlore* over my name, as our beloved publication has grown from an unabashed celebration of "TLW" to a distinguished scholarly journal.

The sense this affiliation has given me, of being part of a long and wide community, of the dead as well as the living, has made my entire adult life into one long Inklings' meeting, in which I could listen and speak, sharing joy and courtesy with the best company I could possibly imagine. The whole experience has been one of profound blessing, truly a gift from God to one who is still, inside, the little girl who used to curl up in a big armchair in Carbondale and hope nobody would interrupt her as she travelled with Dorothy of Oz, the Swallows and Amazons, Siegfried, the Red Cross Knight, Tom the Water Baby, Little

Diamond, Sarah Crewe, the Little Colonel, the Girl of the Limberlost, Princess Irene, and her goddess grandmother. Is it any wonder that I first visited Narnia as an adult, I found that I had arrived where I started, and knew the place for the first time?

Mary Stolzenbach

Vienna, VA

My adventure with Lewis, Williams, and Tolkien began more than 25 years ago. It was during my high school years that I moved from *Screevetape*, the only Lewis book in our small-town library, to *Mere Christianity* (found in a church camp bookstore) and decided that I should look into *anything* this man had written. I remember well the summer I ordered *Perelandra* through inter-library loan, lay down on the sofa one hot afternoon to read it, finished it, and started over, immediately, at the first page. Here was glory!

It was later, at Duke University, that I very joyfully discovered the Chronicles of Narnia, and, thanks to Lewis' praise of them, the novels of Charles Williams.

But I don't remember that as clearly as one special afternoon I went questing in the Women's College Library stacks. I had wandered back towards the end of the alphabet, and there I spotted, under "T," three fat blue volumes that were completely new to me. Lifting out the first one, I opened it to discover a fantasy map of places with high-sounding names that breathed of adventure and strangeness. It was a moment of sheer delight.

Three whole volumes — and *thick* ones — of just exactly the sort of stuff I liked! Once in a while, the Universe simply pays off above measure.

Several years later I was overseas with my husband Conrad — raising two children, and reading the Chronicles of Narnia to them, but rather lonely. It was then that I bought a paperback book about the fantasy genre, by Lin Carter I believe, and found in the end pages an address of an organization which was dedicated to ... Lewis, Williams and Tolkien. I wrote, they sent information, and I immediately joined. From that followed fat, juicy quarterlies and skinny, piquant monthlies, filled with intelligent discussion of the very books I loved. And then from *that* sprang valued pen friendships with various people — Kay Lindskoog and Lee Speth in particular.

When we came back to the States, it became possible to open new dimensions of enjoyment as we attended several Mythopoeic Conferences; and now we are involved in helping to create one — 1994's planned Mythopoeic Conference XXV. One has to return a favor, after all.

In 1988, when we were already considering the Holy Catholic Orthodox Church, which we later joined, we attended Mythopoeic Conference XIX in Berkeley. The "magic moment" here was less directly connected with the Society, but I think Charles Williams would have said "it is all part of the Coinherence."

On Sunday we made the effort to search out Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Ben Lomond. It was a long drive along winding, narrow mountain roads — rather like a mythopoeic quest journey in itself — but when we saw the building with all the brilliantly colored saints painted in a row on the outside wall, we knew we had arrived!

The service was beautiful, and afterwards we were introduced to another visitor. Who was he? An Englishman who was director of a C. S. Lewis Institute in London. And what was the hymn we had sung in church, honoring the saint of the day? "The noble Joseph took Your most pure Body down from the tree; he wrapped it in clean linen with aromatic spices, and gently laid it in a new tomb."

St. Joseph of Arimathea. Legendary voyager to Britain and guardian of the Holy Grail, setting in place the focal point of Arthurian legend, long before Arthur's time. God seemed to be smiling especially for us that day.

"Under the Mercy" (to quote Charles Williams again) the Mythopoeic Society has been one of our most fruitful sources of enjoyment and inspiration over the years.

Long may it endure.

THE THREE

Jack — who sought all his life that One Garden —
Tolkien, the lover of Trees,
and Charles, who gave praise to the City...
Though their fellowship, times, was broken,
There's an inn at the end of the road.
May they gather — and we, too, with them —
in that last great place of good welcome
where the Innkeeper never calls "TIME."

Bernie Zuber

Pasadena, CA

My appreciation of the Mythopoeic Society is intrinsically linked to my appreciation of J.R.R. Tolkien. Since I did not write a tribute for the special Tolkien Centenary issue of *Mythlore*, I will combine both subjects now.

I found out about the Mythopoeic Society from a flyer posted at a meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS), in late 1967, and I attended the second meeting of Lothlorien, the first discussion group of the Society. I had heard of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* from LASFS members, who were some of Tolkien's first fans in this country, but I hadn't paid much attention till then. What attracted me was the Elvish calligraphy on the flyer.

I don't remember whether I read *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* but, in any case, I was hooked. Tolkien's imagery provided fertile ground for my artistic imagination. I appreciated the wealth of details that Tolkien was famous for and I felt that by simply following his description an illustrator could be true to the story.

The publication of the paperback editions in the late 1960s increased Tolkien's popularity. Although he did not approve, his epic fantasy became associated with the

Hippie subculture through "Frodo Lives" buttons at Love-ins and articles in "psychedelic" publications. Early members of the Society still recall with amusement that passersby observing our Bilbo and Frodo Birthday picnics thought they were seeing a Love-in.

This brings me to the subject of Middle-earth costumes. Since the atmosphere of the late 60s was that of a new Romantic Age, colorful "medieval" costumes were worn by members of the Society and of another somewhat related group, the Society for Creative Anachronism (a recreation of the Middle Ages as they should have been). I seldom wore costumes but I did enjoy taking many photos of both Mythopoeic and SCA events.

Being a reader of science fiction fanzines, I encouraged Glen GoodKnight to start a Mythopoeic publication. I remember fondly the meeting at which Glen and I arrived at the title of *Mythlore*. Someone had jokingly suggested *Mythprint* and that, in turn, became the title of the Society's bulletin. This fannish nomenclature culminated with *The Mything Link*, a fanzine published by Dave Hulan, another Society member who had come from LASFS.

For all three publications I drew cartoons of hobbits, orcs and elves. Looking back, one of my favorites was the one in which I showed Glen in his first Elrond costume sporting a pair of pointed ears while, in the background, Mr. Spock looks on disapprovingly. The first *Star-Trek* series was very popular then, and so was Laugh-In. In one of my cartoons Laugh-In's Dirty Old Man asked, "Want to come to a Mythopoeic meeting?" and was then slugged by the Little Old Lady. *Mythlore* is a scholarly journal now, and its computer-enhanced layout is far superior to its first mimeographed issues, but I personally miss the more informal tone.

Some of my more serious art for *Mythlore* included illustrations for *All Hallows' Eve* by Charles Williams and *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis. If it hadn't been for the Society I might not have discovered those two marvelous authors.

As associate editor of *Mythlore* I contributed articles on the revival of fantasy litera-

ture, spurred by Tolkien's success, and wrote a column entitled "Across the Brandywine." This experience with the Society eventually enabled me to write a lengthy article, "The Magic of Middle-earth," for the Winter 1978 edition of a magazine called *Fanfare*, and I co-authored the first professional *Tolkien Quiz Book*, published by Signet in 1979. I persuaded the other co-author, Bart Andrews, to hire other Society members who were better versed in Elvish than I was (my original attraction to Elvish calligraphy never led to a full knowledge of Tolkien's languages).

My other reason for joining the Society in 1967 was to meet fantasy fans of the feminine gender (LASFS didn't have enough single women in those days). My search was amply rewarded, since many of the Society's charter members were attractive ladies, and in 1970, at the Orange County discussion group, I met Teny Rule whom I married in 1972. During our ten-year marriage Teny and I created the publicity campaign at science fiction and fantasy conventions for Ralph Bakshi's animated film of *The Lord of the Rings*. I'm sorry to say that even though we had high hopes for it, that film fell short of satisfying knowledgeable Tolkien fans and the sequel to finish the story was never made.

My membership in the Mythopoeic Society brought me many long-lasting friendships, and my interest in Tolkien led to correspondence with other fans both nationally and worldwide. As the first art editor of *Mythlore* I had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with talented fantasy artists George Barr, Bonnie Bergstrom, Annette Harper, Tim Kirk, and Nancy-Lou Peterson, and I now know Paula DiSante and Patrick Wynne.

Although there are a few purists who feel Tolkien's Middle-earth should not be invaded by the interpretation of others, we should remember that Tolkien fired our imagination and that he wrote that his mythology would "leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama."

I thank Tolkien for inspiring some of my best paintings, including "Rivendell" which I presented to Glen in recognition of his founding the Mythopoeic Society. That gesture symbolized my appreciation of both Tolkien and the Society.

I would love to include descriptions of legendary Society traditions, such as the once annual award of the Bird, but this tribute would be too long.

Although I do not reread *The Lord of the Rings* religiously every year as some members do, Tolkien and the Mythopoeic Society has influenced my life in a most positive way.

The Tolkien Centenary and the 25th Anniversary of the Society, along with the readings of *The Lord of the Rings* at Glen's home, have brought new Tolkien readers into the Society and brought me more pleasure and inspiration for years to come.



Diana L. Paxson Berkeley, CA

August 14, Somewhere over the Atlantic

THE ROAD GOES ON —

As Bilbo once observed, roads are funny things. Once you go out your front door they may take you anywhere. A long time ago, when I was the age my son Ian is now, I set out from the Greyhound Bus station in Oakland, of all places, in order to join a Charter flight to England. I quoted Bilbo in my journal then, and I can't help remembering those words now, on my way to Britain for the Tolkien Centennial/Mythopoeic Conference XXIII. Glen has asked me to write an appreciation of the Mythopoeic Society. I find it impossible to do so without also writing about Tolkien, and vice versa, so this essay will have to do duty for both tasks!

For those of us who discovered the "Big Three" of the Inklings at a formative period of our lives, England, especially Oxford, will always be a gateway to the Shire. On that first journey I made my way out to the house where Tolkien was living, though I did not have the courage to knock the door. After standing for several minutes in silent veneration I wandered down to the end of the street to gaze at the view. I still have the picture I took of the open fields and woodland there. It was the Shire indeed, and to me it seemed as if with a few more strides I could walk into the song which had haunted my dreams. Like the theme in a film score, that song has remained part of the background of my life.

I was lucky enough to encounter Lewis, Tolkien, Williams (and Dorothy Sayers) at Mills College, where they were the secret passion of a group of faculty and students whose patron was Dr. Elizabeth Pope, head of the English Department. In graduate school, another student, Ruth Berman, saw a Lewis book on my desk and introduced me to science fiction (and fantasy) fandom. We favored few were all Tolkien fans before the first American paperback started the craze, and were rather astounded when *The Lord of the Rings* caught on. One does not expect a private passion to become a public institution. But then, as now, Tolkien's work was one of the things that reconciled me to living in twentieth century.

My first encounter with the Mythopoeic Society was at the joining of Mythopoeic Conference III and Westercon in Long Beach. After that I started attending "Mythcons" regularly. Ian appeared in a masquerade with me as "Mr. Tumnus and the White Witch" when he was seven years old. My children were raised on the Shire and Narnia, which no doubt seemed as real to them as England! They grew up in a family culture which was vastly different from the world of the fifties in which I was raised. For them, hearing about Narnia and Shire from the cradle, and attending Society Conferences at which people of all ages gleefully affirmed their love fantasy, imagination and magic, these things have been not an aberration but a fact of life, needing no apology.

This kind of active participation in literature seems to be a specialty of our quarter-century. Far from being a

momentary craze, the work of Tolkien, and the Mythopoeic Society itself, have not only survived, but flourished for more than a quarter of a century. Friendships, families, children, and lives, especially the lives of those who have remained active in the Society, have been built on the sharing of experience and dreams.

This pilgrimage brings me full circle, and it is inevitable that I find myself taking a retrospective view. The Inklings, bolstering each other against the skepticism of their scholarly colleagues, could hardly have anticipated that they would become, if not the mainstream, at least a strongly flowing current of the age. How very odd it has been for all of us to find our bizarre and romantic obsessions becoming almost respectable!

In 1966, it was a triumph to get Tolkien on the list of classic authors I studied for my M.A. Today, he is an academic staple. In those days, Adult Fantasy was a subset of a genre at which even science fiction writers, themselves marginally respectable, looked down their noses. Sometimes they still do, but for the past ten years I have been able to make a living writing the kind of fiction I only dreamed about 25 years ago.

Tolkien's vision of the War of the Ring was colored and formed by the experiences of his youth and manhood — the Great War, which turned out to be only a prelude to one which was worse still, and the gathering shadow of uncontrolled technology, ecological destruction and all the other consequences of human misuse of power. With Lewis and the others, he tried to console himself by recalling the virtues of a vanishing age. As rational men, in sober prose they saw little hope that those qualities could survive — but their fiction tells a different tale. As writers, their faith was stronger, and their powers of prophecy greater than they knew.

Those of us who were young when *The Lord of the Rings* became part of the culture are now reaching the age that the Inklings themselves were when they produced their most important work. We too see the dangers of the future — new hazards arising from the ashes of the old — and mourn the idealism of our youth, when we thought that we could change the world. But the Inklings did change it, whether or not they realized this at the time. Like Bilbo and Frodo, they did what they could with the time that was given to them, playing their part in the history of Middle-earth.

That history goes on. And now it is my son who is about to encounter the land of Tolkien and Lewis for the first time, with the same excitement I felt when I was the age he is now. The Road is bringing us both back to England, and when our journey is over, will return us to California once more. I trust that my own home will not have changed as much as the Shire had by the time Frodo returned, but change is a fact of existence. New generations arise, building on the foundations of the old, dreaming the same dreams. Though much is lost, the old virtues of honor and faith and heroism survive. And the Road goes ever on.