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The Search for Spring

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Abstract

"This is the text of comments made at the Opening Ceremonies of the 25th Annual Mythopoeic Conference held in Washington, D.C. in August, 1994."

The Search for Spring

GLEN GOODKNIGHT

[This is the text of comments made at the Opening Ceremonies of the 25 Annual Mythopoeic Conference held in Washington, D.C. in August, 1994.]

Good morning and hello. It is exciting to be here in this beautiful city. There is so much to see and experience.

Let me begin with a few quotes from one of my most favorite books by C.S. Lewis: *That Hideous Strength*. It contains near its end a very interesting conversation between the members of the Company of St. Anne's. They are talking about the secret history of England.

[Dimble] It all began ... when we discovered that the Arthurian story is mostly true history. There was a moment in the Sixth Century when something that is always trying to break through in this country nearly succeeded. Logres was our name for it.... gradually we began to see all English history in a new way. We discovered the haunting ... something we may call Britain is always haunted by something we may call Logres. Haven't you noticed that we are two countries? After every Arthur, a Modred; behind every Milton, a Cromwell: a nation of poets, a nation of shopkeepers; .. the home of Sidney — and of Cecil Rhodes. Is it any wonder they call us hypocrites? But what they mistake for hypocrisy is really the struggle between Logres and Britain.

[Mother Dimble] England [is] swaying to and fro between Logres and Britain.

[Dimble] This haunting is no peculiarity of ours. Every people has its own haunting... We speak about Logres because it is our haunting, the one we know about.... The whole healing of Tellus [Earth] depends on nursing that little spark, on incarnating that ghost, which is still alive in every real people, and different in each. When Logres really dominates Britain, when the goddess of Reason, the divine clearness, is really enthroned in France, when the Order of Heaven is really followed in China — why, then it will be spring.

[Grace Ironwood] Those we have forgotten Logres sink into Britain.

Here we are at the twenty-fifth Mythopoeic Conference, and about to mark the twenty-seventh anniversary of the Mythopoeic Society's existence. It gives pause to look back on this and the twenty four previous conferences. Let me share with you some of the things that come to mind at this time.

The Society was only a little more than two years old when the idea of a Conference came about. In 1967 through

1969 The Society's sole activities were the monthly discussion group meeting in members' homes and the semi-annual regional picnics. Both the intellectual exchange and social pleasure at these events was intense. It wasn't long before I started to hope for an opportunity for a more elaborate and prolonged event, lasting several days. There was much talent on many levels and areas in the early society, and the planning began to organize a three day conference. Actually it was like this conference, while being around 72 hours long, it stretched across four days, from Friday to Monday.

Now Mythopoeic Conference Committees have a manual full of pointers and tips to help a local committee to plan the event from beginning to end. Of course in 1970 we had no such manual. It was akin to flying by the seat of your pants, albeit our untested flying skills and the thinness of the pant cloth. One of the Claremont Colleges in Southern California was chosen. In short, right up the very beginning of the Conference I was near panic wondering if all would come off as planned. Looking back on it now, it was as good as we had hoped and much more. That First Conference created such an impression of the quality of exchange and its many memorable moments, that all subsequent Conferences in my mind are challenged to equal it. This is not to say that there has *ever* been a poor "Mythcon;" there hasn't. Of course some stand out from others, each for different reasons, as those of you who have attended past Conferences can attest to. The first six were held in Southern California, not because we wanted to keep it only there, but because no other region had produced a local committee to make the planning and execution of a Conference possible. The seventh was the first to be held in Northern California — Those who do not live in California may not realized its North and South are in effect two different states; the Tenth was the first to be held in another State. The 16th was the first in an entirely different region of the United States, in Wheaton, near Chicago, the eighteenth was in Milwaukee, the 20th in Vancouver, Canada, the twenty third in Oxford England; last year's was in Minneapolis, and now, what so many members have asked for many years, a Conference here on the East Coast.

I want to take this occasion to personally thank and praise this year's Committee for making this excellent Conference a reality. We non-committee members can relax and enjoy that which took many, many hours stretching over a period of years to bring to fruition. Thank you, thank you very much.

Some of you might ask if the Conferences and the Mythopoeic Society itself have changed over the years.

Certainly the times have changed, and as those others here who were around at the early Conferences know, we ourselves have changed, both in span of years and how we see the world.

But if we focus in on the question of whether the Mythopoeic Society has changed, it seems to me that the answer has to be yes and no. If changed, how, and should those changes have been made.

I have always taken the position that the Society should always be open to making changes that will further enable it to carry out its purposes, but have also always held that the original purpose of the Society should not be changed: that of the study, discussion and enjoyment of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams primarily, and all the realms of myth and fantasy that they both drew upon and enriched.

I am also very proud of the wide spectrum of people who are involved with the Society in one way or another: from the people who attend the annual conferences, to those that attend the many monthly discussion groups, to the people who only are able to participate by receiving the publications. From young people to senior citizens, from academics to homemakers, from those who live close by, to those that live on the other side of the world. And it naturally follows if we have such a spectrum, we are also going to have people who are interested in the Society for different reasons. For example, some are solely and strictly interested in J.R.R. Tolkien, while there are those who only have a mild and passing interest in him but enjoy immensely the field of modern fantasy, which they may or may not know that he, by his example, more than anything else made this contemporary industry possible. Others are strictly scholars seeking to build resumes, some are interested primarily in their own creative writing, and yet others seem to be only along for a fun time.

The danger is that in our diversity, some of us may forget what is the primary interest of this Society, and proceed in their activities and making plans, as if this purpose did not exist. From my perspective as Founder, I could liken it to holding a birthday party to honor some very cherished friends and making a public invitation for all to come. Of course some who come will know, or know of, the focus of this celebration, but others seem to wander in and want to change the reason of the party, not necessarily by saying so, but by the things they do and the demands they make. Why isn't a certain food available, or why did we chose this venue, or why aren't we honoring their own favorite friends? In moderation, this can be understandable, but at times it is as if these people feel they have to right to *de facto* change the reason for the party. It is as if we are being entertained to someone singing Tolkien's Narnia, and from the back of the room some else starts singing Enya songs, or even imitating the Rolling Stones.

I urge everyone to pursue their own interested in the Society, in all its facets, but to be open to tolerance and

learning from people who don't see things exactly the same way, and to also respect the original dynamic vision and reason for the Society's existence.

I think this Conference Committee has tried to strike the balance between interest in the Inklings and all that has flowed into them and proceeds from them, as well as to cover other writers and topics the Inklings did or would have enjoyed.

Will the Society survive far into the next century, and if so, will it remain true to its purpose, or will its members quietly permit its real purpose to gradually sink away, and to see it become a general fantasy organization. The pressure for this has always been there, much akin to the struggle between Logres and Britain. The unique thing about this Society is that is fixed yet open. Fixed on the Inklings as the center, yet open to proceed forth into many other areas and directions, all interesting, all legitimate.

That has been one of the basic purposes of the Mythopoeic Society, that people could say to each other about the Inklings and their realms "What you too! I thought I was the only one." If we lose *that* quality, our society is lost as well. If you the members drift without purpose and direction, it will be always winter; if you respect and help realize our purpose, then myth will have become fact, and it will be spring.

Thank you.

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EDITORIAL NOTES

This is to mention that I have moved in 1994. My new address is 245-F South Atlantic Blvd, Monterey Park, CA 91754; it is only one mile from my former residence. Should you plan to be in Southern California, and would like to attend a meeting of the monthly discussion group, Niggle's Parish, which is held at my home on Sunday afternoons, please phone The Mythopoeic Society number, 818-281-8334, to verify the date. Besides the good company of mythopoeic members reading and discussing, you might enjoy seeing the extensive collection of Inking books and artwork.

It is with sadness that we share the resignation of Frank Medlar, *Mythlore* Submissions Editor, due to increasing work and family obligations. We currently are looking for a Submissions Editor, preferable an academic faculty member, who would be able to use part of their professional time doing this important work and receiving institutional recognition and support for it. If you are interested in serving *Mythlore*, whether you are institutionally affiliated or not, please write me.

In the mean time, please send submissions of articles, papers, and letters directly to me.

—Glen GoodKnight.