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## Introduction

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# Mythopoeic Society's Online Midwinter Seminar 2024

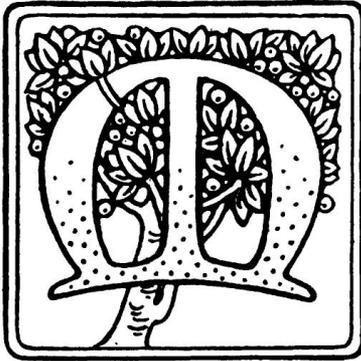
17th–18th February 2024: Something Mighty Queer

Submission Deadline: November 30, 2023

<https://mythsoc.org/oms/oms-2024.htm>



## Introduction



## Mythopoeic CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

*I saw the shadow of the One, Adon Amil, Orethan the Unbound, rise up in his steamy cave, and rise through the earth, through rock and through clouds, until he stood like a mountain, towering above us. Like this, he took the edge of the turf beside me and pulled it, as I would pull a rugcoat up round my shoulders, and he clothed himself in this and in the land that lay below. And as crumbs fall from a coat as you move it, the falls, the lake, and the green valleys beyond were spilled downward and tipped away toward the sea. [...] The River was tipped and spilled even after this, until it ran as a thread, which thread became a thousand streams, as many as the threads of my weaving. And the land was a new shape.*

—*The Spellcoats*, Diana Wynne Jones

Mythopoeia has a long history in children's literature, predating Tolkien's popularizing of the term *mythopoeia* in the 1930s. George MacDonald, one of the earliest names associated with mythopoeia, was writing myth-based fairy tales for children in the 1860s, the decade celebrated as the beginning of modern children's literature. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien both claim MacDonald as an important influence on their work. In fact, most of the Inklings, including Lewis and Tolkien, wrote mythic fantasy for children in addition to their adult works. This special issue of *Mythlore* recognizes the importance of the Inklings' work for children by including articles about Lewis's *Narnia*, Tolkien's *Roverandom*, and Owen Barfield's fairy tales. In their turn, Lewis and Tolkien inspired later fantasy writers like Diana Wynne Jones, who studied at Oxford while both men were teaching there. The epigraph above shows evidence of Tolkien's influence on Jones. Not surprisingly, seven of Jones's children's fantasies have been nominated for Mythopoeic Awards, and two have won. The Mythopoeic Society recognizes the importance of children's

literature by devoting a separate category to it in the annual Mythopoeic Awards—a category established in 1992.

Because the *Inklings* are so closely linked to children's fantasy, *Mythlore* has always been open to articles that focus on mythopoeic children's literature, as both Janet Croft and I can attest, having written some of them ourselves. Last year we decided it was time to produce a special issue devoted to mythopoeic literature written for children and young adults, and this issue is the result. I suspect that articles prompted by our paper call will carry over into future issues as well. The book reviews in this issue also focus on children's and young adult literature, as does David Emerson's Note on animated films.

A list of all the mythopoeic works written for younger readers would run into several volumes, so this single issue cannot do justice to it all. Besides the aforementioned articles on Lewis, Tolkien, and Barfield, we also present several studies of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, and individual examinations of Lloyd Alexander's *Chronicles of Prydain*, Rick Riordan's *Kane Chronicles*, and the little-known *Stag Boy* by William Rayner. For those interested in other good writers who make myth for children and young adults, the list of nominees for the children's Mythopoeic Award is a good place to start. Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* books, Nancy Farmer's *The Sea of Trolls* trilogy, Robin McKinley's *The Blue Sword* and *The Hero and the Crown*, and Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* are familiar mythopoeic titles. More recent (and lesser known) works that I recommend are Elizabeth Knox's *Dreamhunter Duet*, Rae Carson's *The Girl of Fire and Thorns* trilogy, Laini Taylor's *The Daughter of Smoke and Bone* trilogy, Ysabeau S. Wilce's *Flora Segunda* trilogy, Alwyn Hamilton's *Rebel of the Sands* trilogy, and S.E. Grove's *The Glass Sentence* trilogy. Other scholars in the field of children's literature would come up with different lists: the literary heirs of Tolkien and Lewis are many, and their numbers continue to grow.

—Donna R. White, Guest Editor

**DONNA R. WHITE** is a professor of English at Arkansas Tech University. She has published many articles about children's fantasy, as well as a handful of books, one of which won the Mythopoeic Scholarship Award. She is a long-time member of the *Mythlore* Editorial Board.

