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## In Memoriam: Richard C. West

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## Online MidSummer Seminar 2025

### More Perilous and Fair: Women and Gender in Mythopoeic Fantasy

August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

<https://www.mythsoc.org/oms/oms-04.htm>



## In Memoriam: Richard C. West

### Abstract

Richard C. West (1944-2020) was one of the pioneers of serious Tolkien scholarship. He was the founder of the Tolkien Society at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. West is known particularly for his invaluable resource *Tolkien Criticism: An Annotated Checklist*. Among West's other scholarly works, his 1975 essay, "The Interlace Structure of The Lord of the Rings" (in Jared Lobdell's collection *A Tolkien Compass*) has proven to have particularly long-lasting impact. West had a long affiliation with the Mythopoeic Society.

### Additional Keywords

West, Richard C.; Tolkien scholarship history; Tolkien fandom history

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**IN MEMORIAM: RICHARD C. WEST**

JANET BRENNAN CROFT

RICHARD C. WEST (1944-2020) was one of the pioneers of serious Tolkien scholarship. He was the founder of the Tolkien Society at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which predates the Mythopoeic Society by one year, and met with astonishing regularity from 1966 until COVID forced a halt (hopefully just a pause?) in April 2020. The Society published the journal *Orcrist* from 1967–1977, with a one-issue revival in 2016 (reviewed in *Mythlore* #133). Three issues of *Orcrist* were joint issues with *Tolkien Journal*, which eventually merged with *Mythlore*, and were edited by West: *Tolkien Journal* #11/*Orcrist* #3; *Tolkien Journal* #13/*Orcrist* #4; and *Tolkien Journal* #14/*Orcrist* #5.

West is known particularly for his invaluable resource *Tolkien Criticism: An Annotated Checklist*. *Tolkien Criticism* was published in 1970 by Kent State University Press, with a second edition in 1981 and a supplement in the journal *Modern Fiction Studies* in 2004. The first edition won the Mythopoeic Society's award for Inklings Studies Scholarship in 1976. Among West's other scholarly works, his 1975 essay, "The Interlace Structure of *The Lord of the Rings*" (in Jared Lobdell's collection *A Tolkien Compass*) has proven to have particularly long-lasting impact. A bibliography of West's contributions to the field appeared in *Tolkien Studies* 2 (2005), with selected updates in *Beyond Bree* in January 2021.

West had a long affiliation with the Mythopoeic Society. He chaired Mythcon 30/Bree Moot 4 in 1999, held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with the theme "Beyond Bree: Exploring the Fantasy Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien and His Fellow Travelers." He was the Scholar Guest of Honor at Mythcon 45 in 2014 in Norton, Massachusetts, with the theme "Where Fantasy Fits"; West's Guest of Honor speech was published in *Mythlore* #125. West joined the board of *Mythlore* in 1999 when editor Ted Sherman revived it as a scholarly peer reviewed journal, and continued up until his death; he also served on the board of the Mythopoeic Press for many years. West was one of the founders of WisCon, the annual feminist science fiction conference held in Madison, and highly active in "Tolkien at Kalamazoo," the Tolkien track at the International Conference on Medieval Studies. West was a librarian at the University of Madison-Wisconsin.

It was always a high point of any Mythcon we both attended when I had a chance to talk with Richard. He was insightful, observant, generous, and kind, and a delight to work with as a *Mythlore* contributor, referee, and board member and on the MythPress board. West died of COVID-related causes in November 2020 and is sorely missed. *Mythprint* #396 (Spring 2021) includes a number of personal tributes by society members. Richard is survived by his wife Perri.

**RICHARD C. WEST:**

**SELECTED CONTRIBUTIONS TO *MYTHLORE* AND *TOLKIEN JOURNAL***

**"Contemporary Medieval Authors." *Tolkien Journal* 4.1 (#11) (1970): 9–10, 15.**

Discusses works of the "contemporary medieval" genre, a sub-genre of twentieth-century romance, including T.H. White's Arthurian cycle, and more briefly, Lewis's Narnia books and Space Trilogy and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

**"Progress Report on the Variorum Tolkien." *Tolkien Journal* 4.3 (#13) (1969–1970): 6–7.**

Chronicles an early effort to create a variorum edition of Tolkien's works, starting with *The Lord of the Rings*, using materials at Marquette University. As a preliminary finding, the author announces that "Middle-earth" appears to be the correct capitalization and punctuation of this term.

**"The Critics, and Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis." *Tolkien Journal* 4.3 (#14) (1970–1971): 4–9.**

Reviews and discusses a selection of contemporary books on Tolkien and Lewis.

**"The Status of Tolkien Scholarship." *Tolkien Journal* (#15) (1972): 21.**

Assesses the contemporary state of Tolkien scholarship, dismissing "Middle-earth studies" as not true criticism.

**"Review of C.S. Lewis's *Lost Aeneid: Arms and the Exile*." *Mythlore* 30.1/2 (#115/116) (2011): 174–176.**

**"Where Fantasy Fits: The Importance of Being Tolkien." *Mythlore* 33.1 (#125) (2014): 5–36.**

Scholar Guest of Honor speech, Mythcon 45. In his wide-ranging and conversational meditation on "Where Fantasy Fits," the conference theme, West places Tolkien within a broad fantasy tradition but concentrates most closely on the decades preceding *The Hobbit* and following *The Lord of the Rings*, bearing out Garner Dozois's observation that "[a]fter Tolkien, everything changed" for genre fantasy. Of particular interest is West's discussion of science fiction works and authors appreciated by Tolkien and Lewis.

**"[Letter]." *Mythlore* 33.2 (#126) (2015): 158.**

Corrects and expands on items in his Mythcon Guest of Honor speech ("Where Fantasy Fits") printed in *Mythlore* 33.1 (#125).

**"In Memoriam: Jared Lobdell [Note]." *Mythlore* 38.1 (#135) (2019): 41–42.**

Personal reminiscences of the scholar and author.