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## Letters

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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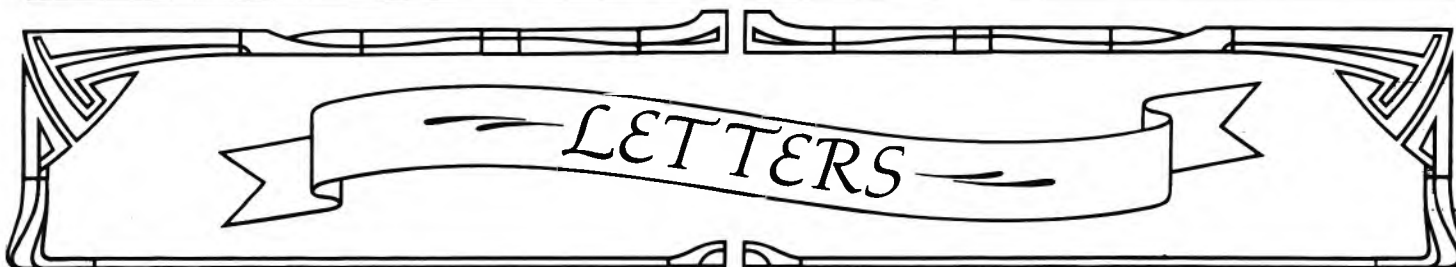


### Additional Keywords

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Your letter of comment is welcome on any aspect of Mythlore: the articles, art, reviews, letters, columns, and editorials. Writers whose letters are printed will have their subscriptions extended an additional issue.

L. Sprague de Camp

Villanova, PA

In Mythlore 47, p. 53, in Mr. Christopher's review of Schweitzer's symposium Exploring Fantasy Worlds, the reviewer comments on the influence alleged by Moorcock of Dunsany on Tolkien: "This derivation from Dunsany seems absurd." Perhaps I can shed light on the Dunsany-Tolkien connection.

In the 1960's I corresponded with Tolkien. In 1963 I edited a paperbacked anthology of heroic fantasy, Swords and Sorcery, with stories by Anderson, Lovecraft, Howard, Kuttner, Dunsany, C.A. Smith, C.L. Moore, and Leiber. I flatter myself that this anthology and its three successors played some part in the striking revival of fantasy in the 60s.

I sent Tolkien a copy of my little book, on which he commented in his letter of 8/30/64. After saying that he was interested in practically everything save literary criticism, he said of contemporary fantasy that "I will not pretend that it gave me much pleasure." About my book he wrote: "Though I might say, I suppose, as a purely personal aside, that all the items seem poor in the subsidiary (but to me not unimportant) matters of nomenclature. Best when inventive, least good when literary or archaic. (For instance Thangobrind and Alaric, both singularly inapt for their purpose.)"

"Thangobrind" is from Dunsany's Distressing Tale of Thangobrind the Jeweler; "Alaric" from Moore's Hellsgard. Tolkien went on: "Also I do wonder why you chose that particular tale of Dunsany's. It seems to me to illustrate all his faults. And the ghastly final paragraph!"

The paragraph in question reads: "And the only daughter of the Merchant Prince felt so little gratitude for this great deliverance that she took to respectability of a militant kind, and became aggressively dull, and called her home the English Riviera, and had platitudes worked in worsted upon her tea-cosy, and in the end never dies, but passed away at her residence."

I suppose Tolkien meant by "ghastly" Dunsany's leaving his "secondary world" to drag in a dig at a type of contemporary person he disliked. The "Merchant Prince" is an obvious expression of the hostility of persons of Dunsany's class before WW1 towards pushy commoners with purchased titles, especially those of Jewish origin. Cf. "Lord Castlenorman" in Hoe Nuth Would Have Practised His Art upon the Gnoles and The Bird of the Different Eye. I believe Dunsany later outgrew such attitudes.

Evidently Tolkien knew Dunsany's work pretty well and liked it well enough to have read a substantial part of it, even if he disliked features of it. It is rash to say of any such omnivorous readers, which most writers are, that they were not influenced by any given predecessor. It is a psychological commonplace that one's writings often include elements from things read long before but forgotten on a conscious level. Thus virtually all one reads is likely to influence one, either positively or negatively, sooner or later.

When I spent an afternoon with Tolkien at Oxford in 1967, by the bye, he said he "rather liked" Robert Howard's Conan stories.

Jan Noble

Milwaukee, WI

I would like to point out a couple of mistakes that Sean Lindsay made in his article, "The Dream System in The Lord of the Rings," which appeared in Mythlore 49.

Mr. Lindsay mentions Merry's dreamlike "adventure" with the men of Carn Dum at the Barrow Downs. He stated that Carn Dum's boundary seemed to be the steep wall and dike near the edge of the Old Forest. This is not correct. Carn Dum was a city in the realm of Angmar which was considerably northeast of the Old Forest near the beginning of the Misty Mountains. (See the map which accompanies The Lord of the Rings.) Angmar, as Appendix A tells us, was the evil realm of the Witch-King, or Lord of the Nazgul. The boundary which Bombadil "seemed to remember something sad about" probably was the border between the mini-kingdoms of Arthedain and Cardolan. Again, Appendix A mentions that when Arnor was split into three smaller kingdoms, Arthedain's and Cardolan's mutual boundary was the East Road. The wall and the dike were not distant from this road.

Thank you for an otherwise interesting article.

Alexei Kondratiev

Flushing, NY

I wish to add some corrective remarks to what I think was an over-hasty dismissal of the Father Christmas character in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (in Karla Faust Jones' "Girls of Narnia: Hindered or Human?", ML 49). On the basis of what she construes to be a "sexist" statement, Ms. Jones suggests that Father Christmas is meant to represent the superficial Christianity of "shopping-mall culture". While the commercialization of Christmas and of motifs related to it was something that Lewis was aware of and deplored (cf. "Xmas and Christmas" in God in the Dock), I find it impossible to believe that Father Christmas has any such connotation here. His appearance in the story is a joyful event, and his gifts are good gifts, that truly correspond to their recipients' natural dispositions. It seems to me that Father Christmas in fact represents Paganism in its best

aspect: "natural religion" capable of perceiving and celebrating the sacred and the good, and of enhancing the pre-existing gifts of human nature (as opposed to the gifts of God's grace). Thus he presides over sacred functions in Aslan's absence. The statement "battles are ugly when women fight" is not necessarily an expression of conventional sexism. Many cultures have barred women from warfare, not because they are perceived as soft and domestic, but because they are thought to fight dirty! In Celtic paganism especially, the divinities of war and slaughter are female, and bloodthirstiness in general is seen as a female trait -- perhaps from observation of the no-holds-barred violence of female creatures defending their young. Note that Lucy is allowed to be in the battle once she is with Aslan. The fact that Aslan backs her gives her actions an absolute moral value that cancels out any judgement of inappropriateness which might be applied to them by everyday cultural values.

Looking back on ML 37, I find something in Eleanor Farrell's "The Epic Hero and Society" that calls for comment. The presentation of the three epic heroes as a progressing theme is illuminating, and Cuchulainn does indeed come across as the most "archaic" of the three, in the sense of being the most pagan. But Ms. Farrell gives us a picture of Celtic paganism that is a bit more "primitive" than the evidence warrants. One is especially shocked by the statement "there was no strong belief in the afterlife". If we know anything at all about the creed of the ancient Celts, it is that they were staunch believers in the immortality of the soul, so much so that Classical writers made fun of them for this unswerving certainty (cf. Pomponius Mela's "ethnic joke" about Celts paying their debts in the afterlife). The fact that the Tain itself (written down, we must remember, by Christians who would have found explicit references to pagan practices inappropriate) is by and large silent (or "nebulous") on the matter should not make us ignore the wider cultural context in which the story of Cuchulainn took shape.

Melanie A. Rawls

Thomasville, GA

I enjoyed Verlyn Fleiger's article on E.R. Eddison. Not much seems to be written about Eddison, even about The Worm Ouroboros, which is a more traditional fantasy. I'd like to know more about his literary antecedents and descendants, if any; also about any other writing he did.

Poet Robert Graves, author of The White Goddess, wrote a poem, "Ruby and Amethyst", which I think fairly well describes the difficult Fiorinda.

Graves and Eddison appear to have similar notions about women, Woman and the Goddess. For Graves, She is the White Goddess of the Moon, the Muse, the Triple Goddess. She is the New Moon, goddess of birth and growth, the Full Moon, goddess of love and battle, and the Old Moon, goddess of death and divination.

The colors of the goddess are white for the new moon, red for the full moon and black for the Old Moon. So, too, are Eddison's heroines: fair, innocent, blonde Antiope; loving, mature and red-haired Mary Lessingham and Amalie, the duchess of Memison; and black-haired Fiorinda.

Graves also describes the goddess as fickle, demanding, mistress but never wife, inspirational,

maddening. Just like Fiorinda. There's an essay somewhere in here...

On the subject of Tolkien calendars... It's been a good ten years since I considered buying one. Here's the reason: both artists and editors appear to have forgotten that one has to look at the picture for an entire month(!) if one makes use of the calendar at all. Thirty days of Mordor! Thirty-one days of a battle with orcs! The month of May devoted to a balrog! I'd rather not.

Sandra Miesal

Indianapolis, IN

Since you [have asked] for some comments, let me share a reminiscence of C.S. Lewis from my friend Dr. George Oliver Plunkett O'Doherty. When George was a schoolboy in Northern Ireland ca. 1950, he and his classmates were taken over to Anglican-run McGee College to hear an address by Lewis. But their chaplain warned them in advance: "Lads, he'll be introduced as a 'Catholic' but he's not our kind of Catholic." In recounting the anecdote, George remarked that if he'd known the man was almost a saint, he'd have listened more carefully to what he said. He has no recollection of the subject of Lewis' speech.

Lawrence W. Cobb

Columbia, SC

You will receive ample comment on the literary content of Mythlore. Let me commend the art work. It is provocative and evocative. Whether I read the articles or not, I always examine the illustration.

The front cover of the last issue (XLIX) is a case in point. The little community of St. Anne's is being lifted heavenward by celestial forces to a level with the sun and the moon, as it is being surrounded by the influences of the planets. Issue XLV's cover was a detail of the same subject (and by the same artist) --Jane and Mark meeting at the bedroom, while a Mycenaean Aphrodite bears a torch for them.

On the cover of XLVI we tremble for Damaris Tighe as the dragon enters her bedroom window. She has evoked the energy without the intelligence.

Returning to XLIX, the back cover is no less intriguing than the front, though the subject is unknown to me. Who are the musicians? Why is the cat perched in the window sill? And what is the significance of the elaborate Celtic decorative treatment?

Mythlore illustrations are a blend of mystery and beauty; perhaps that is why they are so appealing.

Patrick Wynne

Fosston, MN

It's at times like this that I wish my abilities were in the field of writing rather than art, because in writing you to praise Nancy-Lou Patterson's beautiful artwork I feel certain that my paltry skill with words will fall short of the sort of praise work of her caliber deserves. Regardless of this, I am going to make an attempt.

The particular inspiration for this letter is NLP's cover for Mythlore 49, "St. Anne's", though I have been admiring her work in ML for some time now. I hardly know where to begin. In part, my admiration for this piece is technical, for the skillfulness of the

Continued on page 57

Two Decades: Looking Back, continued from page 4

In 1980, the first Mythopoeic Conference to be held beyond California took place in Nevada. In 1985 the Conference was held in Wheaton, Illinois, and in 1987 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Society members are located in all parts of the United States and 15% of the membership lives outside the borders of the United States.

It took the vision and enthusiasm of youth to bring the Society into being. Now, and in the future, it requires the experience and determination of maturity to fulfill the original vision of the Society.

There is no progress without change, and no change without some feeling a sense of dislocation. We have had our critical junctures of transition. Underlying each was a challenge to the original vision, and purpose. I have always stood firm in my resolve that these not be changed, but remain active in the evolving process of how the original purpose and vision are best carried out. Looking forward to the coming decade, and into the next century, I can see exciting and ever-expanding possibilities for living out that vision.

### Please Stand By...

First some information about this issue, and then about the future: Mythlore is delighted to have full color covers for the first time. This is done to mark the 50th issue and the Society's 20th anniversary. It was made possible by the very generous underwriting of the additional cost involved with the color printing by Bonnie Callahan, and we are all deeply grateful to her to see this long held dream at last come true. This one-time event could be repeated again if other generous underwriters would step forward. It could also come about if Mythlore added about another 250 subscribers. Adding to what I wrote about in the last issue on what readers can personally do to promote the journal, if those steps are taken by each of us, then we could see color artwork and other varied benefits in the future. Whether you are a potential



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underwriter or can simply post Mythlore flyers, your help is needed.

You will notice a new typeface in this issue, mixed with typing done previously with the old style (plus and article submitted on a separate word processor). We hope you like the new typeface.

In the future we hope to see Mythlore completely typeset. Good things can happen if we expect and work for them. Please stand by for future improvements.

The Society is rich in many things: people who are gifted, intelligent, creative, and enthusiastic -- all for good reason, namely what the Society means. Our biggest lack is sufficient funds, which keeps us from realizing much that could be done. A combination of generous donations and an increase in new readers would make a great deal possible. This is surely not new, but our spirit to challenge the seemingly impossible can be. Onward and Upward.

Glen GoodKnight

Letters, continued from page 42

elaborate composition and its rendering with such bold, sure lines and delicate, carefully controlled stipple. But the piece is even my impressive in the sense of mystic grandeur it conveys. I love the stylized, yet somehow plausible, architecture (a specialty of Ms. Patterson) which sweeps towards St. Anne's and culminates in the walled garden jutting up impossibly among the sun, moon, and stars (reminiscent of Tolkien's image of the holy mountain Taniquetil, whether coincidentally or intentionally); and the magnificent arc of planetary names, each overlaid with its appropriate symbol of power. This is St. Anne's, not as it would appear to one's physical eyes, but as it would appear to one's soul.

Equal praise is also due Ms. Patterson for her other fine illustrations from That Hideous Strength appearing in ML this past year, namely the cover of ML 45 and the superb portraits of the book's "good" characters in ML 47. The latter were amazing in their sensitivity -- these were the very faces I had seen in my own mind's eye when reading Lewis' book. I would love to see NLP's versions of the book's villains, especially Fairy Hardcaste. Perhaps she can be persuaded to try!

I'll bring this to a close before I begin to wax lugubrious (unless I'm too late already); but suffice it to say that I am looking forward to seeing more of Ms. Patterson's work (both artistic and scholarly) in future issues of ML, Maleldil willing.

Tales Newly Told, continued from page 14

Christian myths so that they illuminate and reinforce each other. He never tries to side-step the full emotional impact of myth, as so many modern treatments do. He does make more use of genuine horror than any of the Inklings would have (though one should remember that there is a strong element of horror in Lewis' own writing: witness the "Miserific Vision" in Perelandra, and the many levels of ghastliness suggested in That Hideous Strength), and let, despite the bleakness of so many of the episodes, the novel ends on an image of warmth and goodness. To gaze upon death in its most disquieting aspects and still be able to offer hope -- a deep, lasting hope -- is a precious gift indeed in a writer.