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## Letters

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

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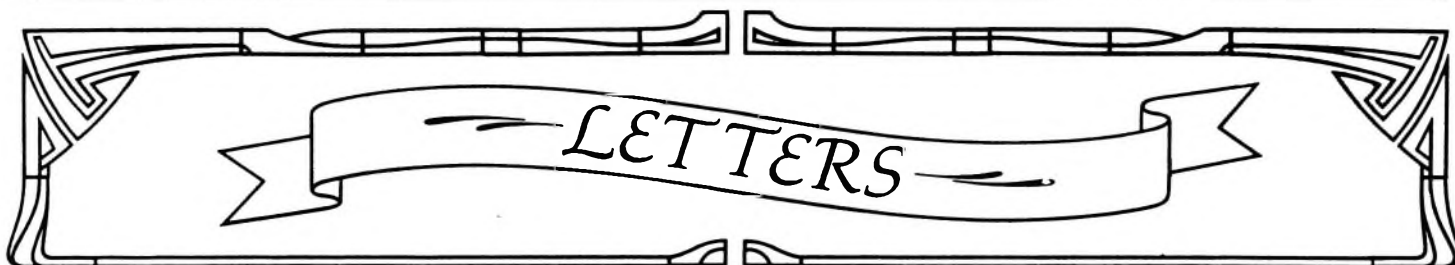


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### Authors

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Jeanne Wardwell

New Haven, CT

I have been reveling in *Mythlore* 35 and am very much impressed with the artwork by Patrick Wynne (cover, pp. 3, 36, 39). I have long been fascinated by Celtic design and was thrilled by that cover, the great tirskeilion of the Society with all the marvelous creatures (and one of them has a pipe) and the symbols for the three authors and their literature at the corners; but beautiful as they are, the designs for the authors on page 3 puzzled me a bit at first until I read Nancy-Lou Patterson's article "Bright-Eyed Beauty," in which she discusses each author's attitude toward Celtic art, both professed and practiced. It is curious that Tolkien viewed Celtic art as being possessed of a "fundamental unreasoning" and like a "broken stained-glass window reassembled without design"; I have been studying George Bain's book on Celtic art (Dover Books) which demonstrates the great sense of order and methodical precision used to execute this style, which is at least as formal as that of Egypt under the pharaohs. Yet Tolkien acknowledges his debt to "things Celtic" in his literary endeavors, as does Williams; and it is here that Wynne's method becomes clear. The designs for Tolkien and Williams include some of the central figures of the imagination in Celtic shape, but states much more simply, the individual components being even romantic in style. Lewis, however, a Celt himself, is given unabashedly Celtic design, glorious in its profusion. The center symbol of each design is particularly apt; each may be considered a gateway to the numinous: the hobbit-hole door, out of which one goes to find it; the wardrobe *into* which one goes to find it. Wynne's Gandalf on page 39, in Celtic stylistic convention, I find entirely appropriate: Gandalf himself is a symbol, an archetype, and Celtic art is at its best when dealing with archetypes. It was not for nothing that the Celtic triskelion became the symbol of the Society!

In response to the editorial: I am quite in agreement with the concept of the Middle Way. For the record, I hold a B.A. in English and would further my education if I could afford it, which puts me on the fringes of academia; I am also on the fringes of organized fandom, having attended several conventions in the Northeast; I am a practicing Catholic, which accounts for the religious community; and above all I greatly enjoy the three authors and their related genres, in which I find much to appeal to each of these aspects. I am very grateful that there is such a group as the Society, in whose publications so much variety can stand together on equal footing. The more scholarly articles are not one bit lessened in value for the scholar by their proximity to more lighthearted things; in fact, I would imagine the lighthearted things to be a refreshment, in Tolkien's sense, intended for the regaining of a clearer view. Yet the scholarly pieces are interesting and clearly written, and might be viewed by non-academic fans as refreshment in

their own way, helping to deepen their understanding of the literature they love and present them with new paths to follow if they choose.

Darrell Schweitzer

Strafford, PA

In the recent *Mythlore* [Nancy-Lou Patterson] made the comment that Tolkien didn't quite like Celtic art, or found the extreme exuberance of something like *The Book of Kells* a bit much – all that complicated form with very little content. Well, a little while later I found a song lyric which explains the whole thing, and I thought I'd pass it on to you. This is a song from the Scots Gaelic, translated by the Clancy Brothers as "Ar Fol Lol La Lo." The lyrics are mostly nonsense syllables, but it does contain this verse, which strikes me as a Celtic artistic credo:

There's lilt in the song I sing,  
there's laughter and love.  
There's tang of the sea  
and blue heaven above.  
Of reason there's none,  
and why should there be, forbye?  
As long as there's fire in the blood,  
and light in the eye.

Rhona Beare Univ. of Newcastle, NSW 2308, Australia

J.R. Christopher sent me Charles Williams' short story about Lord Arglay and an entrance to hell. Its title is a Latin quotation that he and I cannot place; perhaps the readers can. It might come from one of Dante's Latin works, or Thomas Aquinas, or Abelard, or some other Christian writer. It is the end of a sentence. If it is a dependent clause, I should translate "and perish everlastingly." If it is a complete independent clause, it means "and let them perish everlastingly." ET IN SEMPITERNUM PEREANT. The verb is third person plural, subjunctive; may they perish, so that they perish, that they may perish, let them perish – without knowing the earlier part of the sentence one cannot be sure. "Sempiternum" suggests Late Latin, not classical. Presumably Charles Williams thought the quotation would be familiar, but it is not in the dictionary of quotations. The short story appeared in the *London Mercury*, December 1935. Lord Arglay is the hero of *Many Dimensions*.

[I believe having read somewhere that the quote is from Dante or the Vulgate – G.G.]

Steven Wissler

Leesburg, VA

Having seen in *The Lord of the Rings* an orc with "some



rough elements of nobility” and a depiction of some humans gone “utterly bad,” Jefferson P. Swycaffer then leaps to the most unsupported generalization I have ever read in a *Mythlore* article: “No culture is significantly better than another.”

The more I look at this statement, the less I understand it. Does Swycaffer mean that the art, music and literature

characteristic of one group of people can not be judged as aesthetically better than another group's? Or does he mean “better” in the moral sense, that no one culture is a better, more effective force for good than another culture?

Perhaps I am off target. But as it reads now, when Mr. Swycaffer says in general that “No culture is significantly better

than another," he must mean in particular that the art, music, and literature of Elizabeth's and Victoria's England are aesthetically and morally comparable to that of Hitler's Germany and Mao's China. This may be Swycasser's own muddy cup of axiological tea, but he need not imply that J.R.R. Tolkien drank of it. During WWII, on 9 June 1941, Tolkien wrote his son that Adolf Hitler "that ruddy little ignoramus" went about "ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making for ever accursed, that noble northern spirit, a supreme contribution to Europe, which I have ever loved, and tried to present in its true light. Nowhere, incidentally, was it nobler than in England, nor more early sanctified and Christianized."

Tea, anyone?

David Dougham

Morden, England

Briefly, [*Mythlore* 35] was a pretty good issue. The article on Iolo Morganwg in particular was a really fine piece of scholarship. Now for a few quibbles. I generally agree with Mr. Schimanski's letter, but would like to point out that 1. the weight of probability still seems to descend in favor of deriving the name Arthur from the Roman Gentile name Artorius. 2. There is absolutely no evidence for a "revival of Celtic tradition" in mid-5th century Britain (there's no evidence against it either, but that isn't the way Scientific Enquiry works). 3. On available evidence, it would seem likely that 5th century Brittonic and (Irish) Gaelic were about as mutually comprehensible as modern English and modern German. However, the same evidence does indicate that there were at least some Irish who were pretty fluent in Brittonic, to the point of hypercorrecting British names (e.g. *Cybi* becomes *Pubeus* in Irish Latin texts). 4. Celtic solidarity has always been a pretty theoretical concept. One of the few things "Celts" have in common is a marked tendency to join forces with the common enemy in order to score over their Celtic brothers. Certainly British (i.e. Welsh) relations with the Irish have been pretty fraught since at least the days of Niall of the Nine Hostages (fl. ca. 390 AD). Finally, Mr. Swycasser: "No culture is significantly better than another." Really? So Nazi Germany and Broederband South Africa are morally equivalent to present day Canada and Switzerland, right? Please, sir, how "significant" is genocide? Sorry to be so righteous, but when people moralize, I tend to moralize back, if only in self-defence. As to the Middle Way: if *Mythlore* 35 epitomizes it, I'm for it.

Grace E. Funk

Lumby, B.C., Canada

"In the Forge of Los" Mary Aileen Schmiel "spoke to my condition" when she said "keep the flame of imagination kindled in the face of the Shadow." So often we picture Evil as greed, or scheming power, or mere bullying; so seldom do we see mechanization as a real threat. I'm not talking about the tools of technology - tools are meant to be used - I'm talking about attempts to reduce human beings, human spirits, to passive cogs, unaware of their own potential for choice, unable to escape self-absorption. Some children never learn to read at all, never achieve "image-ination" through language because they cannot lose themselves long enough to accept meaning from printed language. Science fiction writers have long tried

to make us aware of the danger. I can think, off hand, of Harlan Ellison's *Repent, Harliquan*. Also of an earlier writer - John Buchan in *Greenmantle* expresses the same sentiment. (Reread the book, if you don't believe me.) How shall we reach those who live so wholly in the Shadow that they willingly surrender all choice to those who seek "domination of things and wills"?

The Second Raisin in the pudding is Alexi Kondratiev's careful analysis of Iolo Morganwg, and in particular his suggestion of a model for Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*. I have puzzled over this book for a year, without benefit of scholarship, trying to disentangle anthropology from poetic license. Now I think I shall stop trying.

#### GIFTS

With the Holiday Season soon approaching, why not give a gift subscription to *Mythlore* to your friends who share its interests. The new Celtic Stationery mentioned elsewhere in this issue would also make a beautiful gift.

#### THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue (37) will be a Tolkien theme issue, with the great majority of articles on his works, some of which should spark strong controversies.



## Contributors

Sarah Beach

B.A., Univ. of Houston; M.A., Univ. of Texas. Her Master's Thesis was on Beowulf. Her main area of study was English Medieval Lit., having also studied Old Irish. A librarian professionally, she writes, draws, paints and plays music in her private time.

Edith Crowe

B.A. (Art History) and M.L.S., SUNY; M.A.; CSU Dominguez Hills. She has been Reference Librarian in California State Universities and Colleges (CSU) since 1973. Art Editor of *Mythlore*.

Alexi Kondratiev

B.A. (Anthropology and Linguistics), Columbia Univ. He has studied and knows numerous languages, including the Celtic languages. With a passion for Natural History, he is active in the New York chapter of the Audubon Society, and leads bird watching trips.

Dominic Manganiello

B.A., McGill Univ.; D. Phil., Univ. of Oxford. Currently an Assistant Professor of English Lit. at the Univ. of Ottawa, he is the author of *Joyce's Politics*, and is now working on a book entitled *T.S. Eliot and Dante*.

Mary Ellen Pitts

B.A., Univ. of North Alabama; M.A., Univ. of Florida. She has taught for several years at Western Kentucky Univ. and Memphis State Univ. In the spring of 1982 she moved to Florida to complete her residency requirement for her Ph.D. She plays a harpsicord she has mad herself, and a dulcimer.

Apologies for unavailable information for Robert Boenig and Karl Schoor. This should appear in the next issue.