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## Letters

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

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# Letters

Readers' Letters are an important form of feedback, an opportunity to comment on past issues, and to raise questions for others to comment on. Each letter that is printed extends the writer's subscription by an additional issue. Please send your letters directly to the Editor, Glen Good-Knight, 740 S. Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90005 USA.

Thomas M. Egan

Woodside, NY

The tradition of excellence for *Mythlore* reached new heights after issue 50. The article content and art illustration are truly superb. Patrick Wynne in the latter field is still my favorite artist, but Bonnie Callahan's color cover for *Mythlore* 50 was a real delight to see and explore for its depiction of the Inklings' major symbols in literature. Black-and white illustration [usually] gives more power to *Mythlore*'s mythic allusions. The cover on issue 52, "The Great Snow Dance" by Sarah Beach is more vivid and penetrating for character study [without] the distraction of color. And that great and terrible power of Beowulf's struggle with the monster Grendal as drawn by Patrick Wynne some issues back comes through all the better by being shown in the shadow world of black-and-white tones.

The articles in their themes and argument for *Mythlore* always show the intense power great writers like the Inklings can throw over the working of our imagination: Charles Williams via the occult tradition, Tolkien through the Nordic heroic ethos and Lewis through a symbiosis of Renaissance/Christian ethical symbols. All three respect and use the sacramental imagery of the Catholic religious tradition. I applaud the editorial in issue 50, It's hard to realize almost twenty years have gone by since *Mythlore*'s beginning in 1969. The high quality of the essays have given the journal great prestige and listing in the university research publications like *Extrapolation* and *PMLA*.

In regard to my own devotion to the Inklings, I started out in the early 1960s via my discovery of Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*. His space trilogy and the Narnia stories are still my favorites among his works, but I retain some strong reservations on his over-generalizations of medieval culture's supposed features regarding their "bad" treatment of women in marriage. Courtly Love could not have succeeded as it did without possessing a cultural base. The cult of the Virgin Mary played a large part as well as the growing elaboration of the nature of sacramental marriage in the 12th century. The result was an increased status to the position of women and human love in a sacred bond — courtly love borrows from both.

In this I differ from Lawrence Cobb's arguments in "Courtly Love in The Allegory" (*Mythlore* 51).

I have respect but puzzlement in regard to Charles Williams' achievements in Arthurian poetry and his occult novels. They can only be "digested" a little at a time with a good deal of background knowledge in "white magic." His is a "midnight realm" for the human imagination to explore but worth the effort as the essays by Donna White and Charles Huttar show so well (*Mythlore* 51 and 53).

But it's Tolkien who has my full devotion. He's a "father figure" to me as well as a grand storyteller. His tales of Middle-earth ring well on the surface level as well as in their mythic undertones. I first read him in 1964 at a time of personal turmoil and after my father's death my love for him cemented firmly. I read *The Lord of the Rings* first, then *The Tolkien Reader*, and finally *The Hobbit* in 1964-66. I was intrigued by Robely Evans "Tolkien's World-Creation: Degenerative Recurrence" in issue 51. Evans as author is an old favorite of mine, going back to his 1972 literary biography of Tolkien in "Writers for the Seventies" series. His thesis on *The Silmarillion* opus rings true. There is a fatalistic sense for Tolkien's early view of world mythic history which accounts for the melancholic sense everyone experiences after reading *any* of the published versions of this work. There is so much beauty in the narratives of pre-*LotR* Arda but the sense of loss overwhelms one. Free-will is there for all characters but spiritual pride creates the hateful arrogance that destroys all things of worth and invites that sense of fatalism through the ages — the "eternal return" of evil. No wonder Tolkien never felt *The Silmarillion* could be complete. People need concrete hope and that's why *The Lord of the Rings* has to be read before one attempts *The Silmarillion*. The quiet joy of the hobbits' world of the Shire is enough to hold a universe together. Regeneration can indeed start anew.

But Evans doesn't stress that evil and sorrow are not destroyed at the end of the Third Age with the unmaking of the Ring. They are only defeated for a time and must take new forms. That is why I feel that Tolkien has made his Middle-earth books into essentially a running commentary on the nature of Purgatory — a realm of suffering-into-purgation/purification. The "Road that goes ever on" twists and turns but leads ultimately to "The Beatific Vision," something better than even Valinor. Tolkien goes into this with his "Leaf by Niggle" tale and commentary, and, especially, with his essay "On Fairy Stories." Purgatory here appears as the essential matrix of our imperfect human nature to purge itself of its "dross" and reach its true fulfillment. How many readers remember the Pur-



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gatory scene in *The Book of Lost Tales*, Vol. II? There, the prototypes of Beren and Luthien die and are purified in a Purgatory-within-Valinor.

Other essays I have enjoyed include Nils Ivar Agoy's "A Nodal Structure of Tolkien's Tales of the First Age?" (issue 50) and Gwenyth Hood's "Sauron and Dracula" (issue 52). Agoy does a fine job in seeking out of the nuggets of motif and imagery in Tolkien's rough drafts of 1916-20 (the 2 parts of *The Book of Lost Tales*). He gives us a chance for richer enjoyment of these early alternatives to the final vision of Middle-earth after 1937. The Dracula myth (c.1898) of Bram Stoker is a possible influence (unacknowledged, of course) on some aspects of Tolkien's view of popular fiction as a strong influence on Tolkien in the authorized biography).

I was impressed with Dee Anne Westbrook's "The Souls of Animals" with its prehistoric and classical/medieval uses. Lastly, I wish to thank you for publishing the memorial poem on the late Clyde Kilby in issue 52 by Donald T. Williams. It was beautiful in sentiment and imagery of fair Loth-lorien and Narnia; Dr. Kilby is with Tolkien and Lewis now. I knew him from correspondence from 1981 onwards. He was always a courteous and kindly man.

Guthrie E.Janssen Sherwood, OR

Your new typeface is just beautiful! Congratulations! Would it be too [much] to ask the name of the typeface?

The text typeface is Palatino and the titles are Zapf Chauncery. - G.G.

Pauline Baynes Surrey, England

For years now [I have received] regular copies of *Mythlore*, and each time I have thought I must write to thank you and tell you how much I appreciate it and how much pleasure each copy has given me. So, at long last, THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH. I enjoy the art work enormously and find the whole journal stimulating and always interesting. I am still illustrating two or three books each year. However the fan mail I get is still mainly to do with the illustrations I did so many years ago for C.S. Lewis.

All best wishes for the continuance of your splendid journal.

**Members or Subscribers?** continued from page 3 voting rights, then their voice would be cut out of decisions (inadvertently or otherwise) that could possibly alter the original intention of this Society. As you must decide what you want to be – member or subscriber, I feel moved to share my own concern. It would be good to know your thoughts on whether the Society should be membership or publications oriented, and why. It would also be helpful to know, if the Society is to be member oriented, why or why not you think *Mythlore* should or should not continue to include Society membership. Finally, what benefits do you think Society membership should include?

I want the Society to be primarily a membership, rather than merely a subscriber, organization, because you are fellow sharers, a community of participants in the love of that which we study, discuss, and enjoy — *not* mere consumers of a publication. This is despite the fact that publications are our primary – but certainly not sole – activity, both in time expended and finances involved. With our membership spread all over the United States and many other countries, publications are the basic and only effective way open to communication. It seems that the majority of the Society's leadership (of which I am one of ten) is strongly in favor of reorganizing the Society as more member-oriented in a number of ways. While I support most of these ideas, it is possible we could be hurriedly rushing in a direction opposite of what the majority of you

the members may want. I drafted this Questionnaire – approved with revisions by the Council – and urged the others to wait for your response before enacting any proposals. Even if the majority of you the members prefer to see the Society as more publication oriented, the leadership might still go ahead and make various changes according to its good intentions, unless the response to the questionnaire was clear. Where would some of these changes, especially Question 9, leave the feelings of those who prefer to subscribe to *Mythlore* alone – then having no right to vote on possibly important issues that could affect the underlying nature and purpose of what the Society has stood for. This Questionnaire is, in effect, a vote by you on the future character of the Society. What ever your thoughts, *now* is the time to express them. **Let your ideas and feelings be known.** — Glen GoodKnight

### *Read any good new books lately?*

The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award and Scholarship Award Committees Chairperson would like to invite members to think about nominations for the 1988 Awards — and to volunteer to serve on the selection committees. Eligibility requirements for nomination of books for the Fantasy Award and the Scholarship Award and for serving on either Selection Committee are the same: you must be a member of the Society (your subscription to *Mythlore* includes membership); no more than five books can be nominated; to serve on either committee you must state your willingness to read or reread all finalists. You may nominate books for both awards, and may serve on both committees.

**Criteria for book nomination:** for the Fantasy Award, a fantasy work published during 1988 that best exemplifies "the spirit of the Inklings." A work reissued in paperback during 1988 that was published earlier may be nominated whether or not it has previously been nominated, as long as it did not make a previous finalists' list. At the nomination level, and at the finalist level, a majority of "no award" votes (if the committee members feel none of the choices should receive the award) will require we make no award for the year. The Scholarship Award is given for a book on Tolkien, Lewis, and/or Williams that makes a significant contribution to Inklings scholarship. Books published during 1986 to 1988 are eligible for the award; book may be renominated.

The deadline is **February 20, 1989** for nominations for both Awards and for volunteering to serve on either or both of the committees. Write to: Christine Lowentrout, 1017 Seal Way, Seal Beach, CA 90740. Please state your willingness to read all the finalists, and whether or not you are willing to have your name and address included on a list to be distributed only among members of your committee for purposes of intercommunication. There will be a preliminary vote due May 1, and the final vote is due July 15. The Awards will be announced at the 20th Mythopoeic Conference in Vancouver. **Let your voice be heard!**

### *Mythlore Art Portfolio*

Over the years *Mythlore* has published a large amount of highly praised fantasy artwork. Few people are inclined to cut up their issues of *Mythlore* in order to frame these pieces for their walls. Therefore, *Mythlore* has begun a series of portfolios reproducing various pieces on quality paper suitable for framing. A limited number of portfolios are now being offered containing copies signed and numbered by the artists.

Signed portfolios are \$25.00

Signed portfolios are \$15.00

Included in the first portfolio are the following pieces:

#### **"Meditation of Mordred"**

(Williams) by Sarah Beach (from *Mythlore* 39)

#### **"Trothplight at Cerin Amroth"**

(Tolkien) by Paula DiSante (from *Mythlore* 45)

#### **"The Mistress of the Silver Moon"**

(MacDonald) by Nancy-Lou Patterson

(from *Mythlore* 21)

#### **"Till We Have Faces"**

(Lewis) by Patrick Wynne (from *Mythlore* 39)

Each Portfolio comes in a folder with Patrick Wynne's "Triskelion" (from *Mythlore* 35) printed on the cover. The artwork is reproduced on 9" x 12" sheets, and are suitable for framing. Please specify whether you want a signed or unsigned portfolio. Send your order to: *Mythlore* Orders Dept., 1009 N. Monterey St., Alhambra, CA 91801.