



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 2 | Issue 4

Article 4

6-15-1980

The Angry Prince

James Dietrichson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythril>



Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dietrichson, James (1980) "*The Angry Prince*," *Mythril*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythril/vol2/iss4/4>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythril by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.



Mythcon 51: A VIRTUAL “HALFLING” MYTHCON

July 31 - August 1, 2021 (Saturday and Sunday)

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-51.htm>



Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>

Abstract

Once there was a prince who was so fair nothing ever made him angry in his life, except one thing. His face always shone with a smile tinged with sadness,

Keywords

Mythril; Mythopoeic; Fiction; The Angry Prince; James Dietrichson



THE ANGRY PRINCE

by James Dietrichson

Once there was a prince who was so fair nothing ever made him angry in his life, except one thing. His face always shone with a smile tinged with sadness, though no one knew why he would be sad; for his princess was the most beautiful maid in many lands, and each one of their children was more lovely than the others. When he laughed his laugh was like a child's but had a grace so perfect and a voice so richly tender it made his subjects weep with joy. All his people loved him, and his reign was full of peace.

One day a courtier said to him, "My lord, surely something on the earth can make you angry. We must seek to discover what it is." And from that day, it became the sport of the principality to see what would make the prince mad. They brought to him an old woman obsessed with her ailments who believed everyone wanted to hurt her, but he only listened and seemed graciously touched by her plight. They brought a philosopher who made an abusive speech denouncing privilege, but he only offered to give up his throne. They brought a fool to fret him with low jokes, but he only returned the jokes with better ones. They let loose lice-infested urchins in the palace; but he only bathed them, adopted them, and went to the street they came from to help the people there. They hired poor playwrights to write poor plays and poor singers to sing poor songs, but he only dismissed them and recited poetry and sang to himself. At last they locked his chapel against him one day and hid the key, but he only took a quiet walk on the grounds.

Then the courtiers tried something more wicked. They gave the prince a beautiful wild white horse, which he accepted because he was a great equestrian.

But the horse was bewitched. Whoever sat astride it would never be able to climb off again until the horse permitted or the spell was broken. And the heart of the horse was dark. It planned to carry the prince to the end of the world and back before it would allow him to get down. On a bright spring morning the prince came out to tame the new horse. As always, he carried no whip. When the horse saw the man it was awed by the grandeur and sweetness of his manner, and almost surrendered. But the spell was not broken. No sooner had the prince swung his leg over the back, but he was locked fast. Evil rose again within the beast, and it shot forward and raced like the wind. It took the prince through lands unknown in dreams and past unimaginable landscapes. They mounted hills high as the air and penetrated forests old as time. They were gone seven years. The princess was made regent for her eldest son, and the country mourned for the lost prince.

Then the horse and rider returned. The prince was encrusted with mud and stained with many stains; his pale blond hair, grown very long, was in insane disarray. In his azure eyes, before almost untroubled, there appeared a glint as sharp as madness and as strange as awe, yet it was also a glow of awakened joy. From that time on, the prince would sometimes lower his head with an humbled, nearly menaced look, as though in the presence of a king. The while, more noticeably, his smiles and laughter, along with the tinge of sadness and the perfect grace, were now and again haunted by a flash of ecstasy. When the courtiers saw that the prince was not angry, but only thanked them greatly for the horse, they gave up trying to find rage in him. When the horse saw how beautifully the

prince had borne his torment and how lovingly he tended his tormentor, it was mastered and the spell was broken. When asked to relate his adventures, the prince would only say, "I am the same, yet I am not the same."

Many years passed in plenty and happiness. The prince did not seem to age. One day a hermit came out of the woods, and the prince invited him to the palace. At table the hermit said, "When we are alone, Your Serene Highness, there is a secret of much import I must reveal to you." Now it was not the custom for the prince to receive anyone alone, but he was intrigued by this hermit, who had not seen the world yet spoke with a wisdom unlike that of his councillors. After the dinner, the prince retired to chambers, where he summoned the hermit to him. They were cloistered together a long time. From a window high in the palace a light streamed out to meet the moon and kept her company all night. In the morning, the prince came out looking grave and more haggard, in a way, than when he had come back from the ride. The hermit left, but no one saw him go.

"What did he tell you?" asked the courtiers.

"He says I am a creature, for one thing," answered the prince, "and there can be no good in me alone, at all."

They marvelled. "And did you believe him?" they asked.

"I do not know," he replied.

After that the prince was never quite the same. At first, he was merely sadder and more thoughtful. Then there were signs of age. The pale blond hair became mixed with pale silver, the flesh on his cheeks dropped a little, and there appeared clusters of delicate wrinkles around his eyes. But suddenly, from the day he knelt again before the sovereign to reaffirm his fealty, and for a long while thereafter, he was merrier than he had been all his life. At the harvest festival he danced with the peasants, laid tables for great feasts in their fields, and learned all their games. And his wit and charm, that had made his court the diamond of the empire, sparkled brighter than ever. Lavish, delightful entertainments were given at the palace at which the host was the principal glory. He was fond of jesting that his court had not been this much fun since the days of the poor playwrights. One of the court poets, the youngest, noticed during this time, subtle change though it was, the smile was become practically whole--the tinge of sadness a different sadness, slighter than before. Where faint anguish had been, now there stood a tranquil veil, as of a loss of pride consoled by a masterly love, or a frightening emptiness discovered and then unexpectedly filled.

At the end of this period, the prince built a theatre to celebrate his second daughter's marriage. During the building, he made an inspection with his master builder. He overheard one mason say to another, "Our beloved prince--he builds this great building. Yet they say he thinks he's no better than a swine. What does that make us?" The prince stiffened and looked queer.

Shortly afterwards he issued a decree. Criers read and posted it in every village. It stated, "Let no man say there is no good in man. He who violates this decree must answer to the prince." Now the prince had never expressly forbidden anything before, and he had certainly never threatened anyone. The people did not fear he would be cruel, but the goodness of the prince was their pride and his happiness theirs; and they would believe whatever he believed. So no one spoke the forbidden thought, which became known as the Hermit's Secret.

The prince was less joyful now and began aging more. The anguish reappeared quite visibly. Occasionally some trifle would displease him. A few seasons later, reports began to trickle in of violations. Not only hurt but astounded, the prince ordered the disobedient subjects brought before him. There were a young peasant girl, two students from the university, and a merchant's wife.

"Do you really think there is no good in me?" he asked.

"Your good does not well from the Source of good," they said.

He told them that was not the point and admonished them, for his sake, not to say that thing again. Then he sent them away.

But reports of violations continued to come in. Finally the prince decided, with extreme reluctance, that he must use some form of mild punishment. His advisors suggested short imprisonment, temporary banishment, a tax, cutting off of a finger, a term of work in the palace kitchen, hiring a witch to cast a small spell, and many other ingenious measures. But the prince thought them all senseless or disgusting.

One night laughter echoed down the palace halls, startling part of the court awake. "Ha! How foolish I have been! Why did I issue a decree?"

Various attendants and lords rushed in to see what was the matter.

"Laughter!" shouted the prince with musical gladness.

"Laughter?" they returned.

"The answer!--the answer is laughter!" he exclaimed. "What could be at all more fitting or gentle?" And he held out his hands as if they held his vision.

So the prince gave out that he hoped his subjects would laugh at anyone who spoke the Hermit's Secret. The people were always glad to do what their ruler and friend asked of them, and it pleased them to receive this message by word of mouth. The decree had wounded them a little. Anyway, they had already laughed at the rare silly folk who had slighted the prince.

The prince was very jovial from that time forward. Reports concerning the forbidden thought dwindled practically to nothing, for which he was greatly relieved and thankful to his subjects. The youngest of the court poets noticed about this time, the laughter of the prince was less childlike and its richness had taken on a brazen heartiness that was handsome but a little discordant.

Many more years passed, and the prince grew older but not old, though his hair was now all silver. His brow would sometimes knit when a servant was slack. Prince and country had forgot the Hermit's Secret, but its utterance would probably still have aroused amusement in nearly everybody.

After the death of the princess, the prince's children were a comfort to him. They planned to show their love for their father by a beautiful surprise. They commissioned a playwright, a famous fellow from the emperor's region who acted in his own works, to write a play commemorating their parents' marriage, which would be performed on the widower's anniversary, right after the new year, in the theatre he had built years before. Aside from knowing he would spend the evening out, the prince knew nothing of the surprise.

But the principality knew and, as the time approached, quivered with excitement in the cold. For all who arrived before the theatre was filled were invited.

On the awaited night, the prince sat in the state box dressed in scarlet and purple that set off his gleaming hair. The first act was a tender celebration

of young love. Toward the end of it, the prince took his eldest daughter's hand, and silent tears were seen to twinkle on his cheeks in the dark. A surge of love and sympathy passed through the audience like wine.

But the second act came as an alarming change. The lovers of the play, portrayed by the playwright and an actress of his troupe, were unfaithful to one another. Officials whispered to the prince they would have the performance stopped immediately. But he said, "We will see it out. Perhaps the man has in mind some worthy lesson."

In the third act the lovers were reconciled and exchanged promises of fidelity. The play became tiresome. The story was over but the actors talked on and on. "I think this was performed for me once with a different motive," said the prince, which set the gallery tittering.

In the next moment the actor moved into a speech of such unheralded magnificence it stunned all into silence. What this speech said was not easy to grasp, because it said so many things at once; but in it was wonder and it bound every ear to hear it. Each line seemed to tell a hundred tales, if only one could make out what they were. Grim cities and radiant suns rose and fell away. Kingdoms and children grew and died. The listeners somehow knew unawares by each tale that the speech told, above all, of a Power better than anything untrue--one which acts in might only to be made known or to be understood where it is missed, and which gently struggles to join with less complete powers it could unmake. Now in the majesty of the words and the actor's full voice, that Power was holding the audience as in a spell, except that they felt good within the spell and had no desire to break it. The speech was like a fire, warming thoroughly; burning but the pain was a relief.

Although the words continued strong and as though endless, the spell soon in a sense abated; the people were free to leave or reenter it like a land. Some, stung by the burning, began to dislike the speech. Then everyone looked to the prince for what to do.

One glance showed them he understood the speech well. But they saw also a face that had never before carried so much trouble. His eyes were liquid and wild, casting about to avoid the stage. His teeth shone in a grin that kept struggling in vain to become--perhaps a scoffing laugh or, out of the sadness in his eyes, a smile.

What has become of the prince? The people wondered.

Then they saw him close his eyes tightly, turn aside, and lift his hand against the light of the stage, beginning to wave it stiffly back and forth and to shake his head broadly and vigorously--so that his clothes and hair seemed to flicker in the theatre shadows. After a while he wearied of the movement of his head, and covered his face with his hands. When he uncovered it at last, the struggle had come to rest in a bitter frown. They watched as he rose from his chair. And as he stood with dignity at the balustrade, his voice blasted into the air of the speech:

"I shall not have this thing be! I only am the source of myself!"

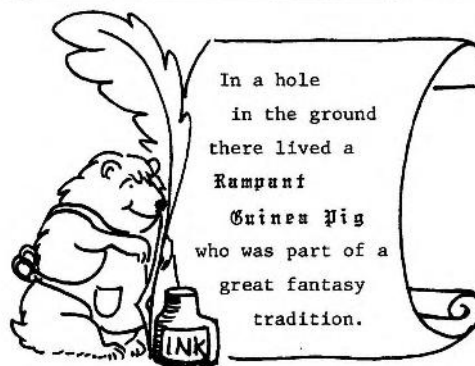
The instant he ceased speaking, his youngest adopted son, who sat next to him, rose to his side and placed one hand on the elder man's arm and the other on his own breast. This gentleman, whose attention to his father's every wish had always been touching, wore a duelling pistol in his waistcoat to impress the ladies. The prince stared at him for some time, the speech nearly forgotten. There was a long moment

when it seemed to the audience the prince had frozen where he stood. Finally he gave a mournful nod and resumed his seat.

Now they watched while the man left standing drew forth his weapon--aiming, as he could do so beautifully, at the stage--and fired.

The next day everyone who had not been there wanted to know had the play gone well, had the prince liked it. Many would say nothing. Others told a number of conflicting tales. It was important to accept that if the prince had been angry, there had been reason for anger; but a person who had not been inside could not be expected to understand how it had occurred. So it got about that the actor had had a fit, that a rival author had fired the shot out of envy, that one of the actor's former lovers had killed him. Eventually it became settled that a madman from an old wood at the edge of the prince's lands had jumped up yelling the forbidden thought and had tried to shoot the prince, but someone else close by had caught the assassin's arm just in time and swung it around so that the shot had happened to pierce the actor's heart. All the people remembered it that way when they came to tell it to their children.

No one ever again spoke the Secret while the prince was alive. He appeared no more outside the palace walls, and a few years later died in bed without saying a word.



THE RAMPANT GUINEA PIG

A FANTASY ZINE FEATURING:

Fiction	Reviews
Poetry	Letters
Artwork	Recipes

Subscriptions: 2 issues/\$4.50

Back issues: #1/\$1.50; #2, 3, 4/\$1.75

Mary Ann Hodge
10639 Deveron Dr.
Whittier, CA 90601

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME (INCLUDE S.A.S.E.)