

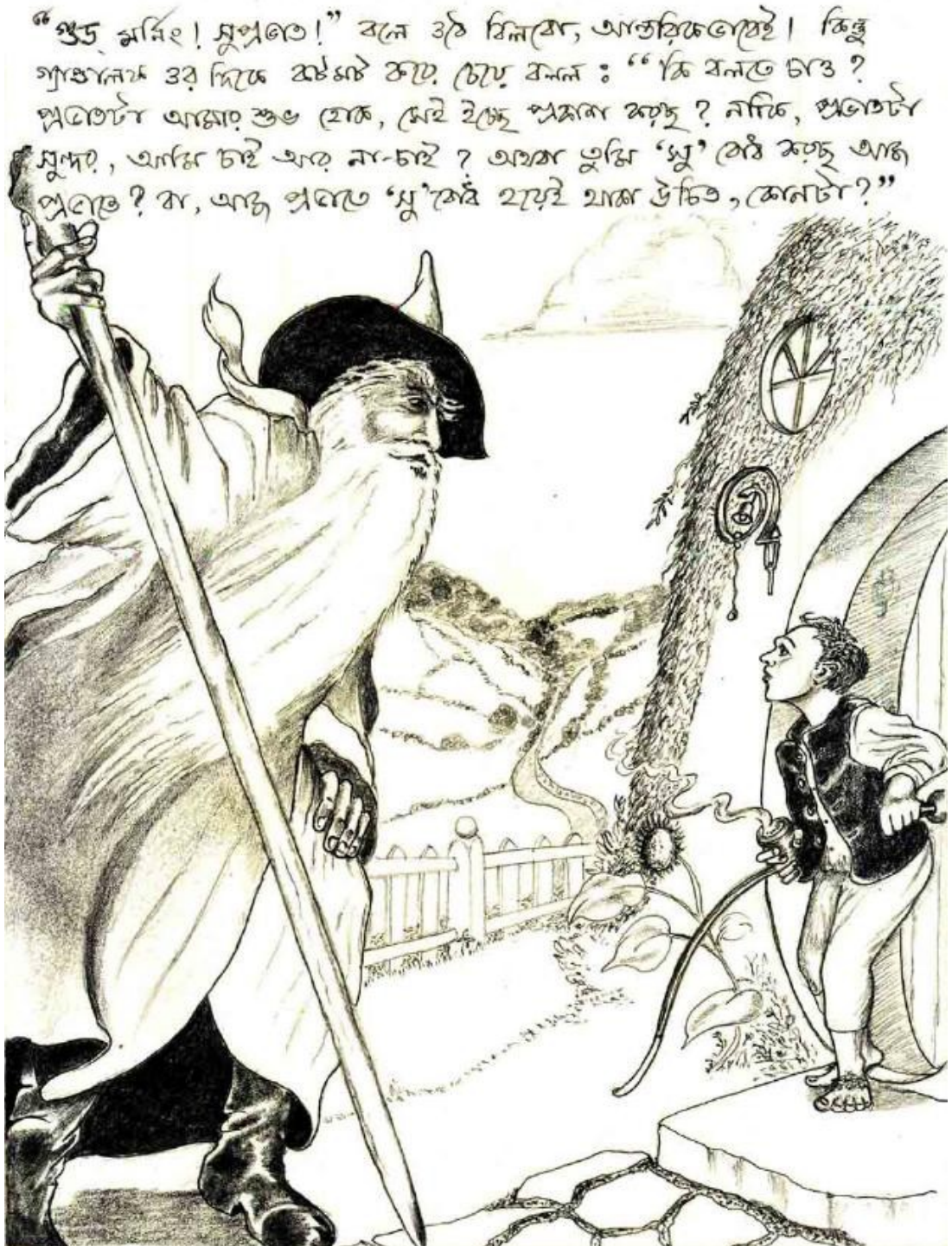
# mythPRINT

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society

VOL. 48 NO. 1

JANUARY 2011

WHOLE NO. 342



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Reviews, discussion group reports, news items, letters, art work and other submissions for *Mythprint* are always welcome. Please contact the editor for details on format, or send materials to:

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Deadlines for receiving material for each issue of *Mythprint* are the 1st of the preceding month.

The Mythopoeic Society also publishes two other magazines: *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* (subscription \$25/year for U.S. Society members) and *The Mythic Circle*, an annual magazine publishing fiction, poems, etc. (\$8/issue for U.S. addresses). Subscriptions and back issues of Society publications may be purchased directly thorough our web site (using PayPal or Discover card), or you may contact:

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Napoleon MI  
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Visit the Mythopoeic Society on the web at [www.mythsoc.org](http://www.mythsoc.org).

*Mythprint* is the monthly bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society, a nonprofit educational organization devoted to the study, discussion and enjoyment of myth and fantasy literature, especially the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams. To promote these interests, the Society publishes three magazines, maintains a World Wide Web site, and sponsors the annual Mythopoeic Conference and awards for fiction and scholarship, as well as local and written discussion groups.

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David Rudd, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2009. xvi + 320 pp. \$32.95 (sc). ISBN 978-0415472715. Reviewed by Ernest Davis.

Children's literature has at least a half-dozen Companions, as well as several Encyclopedias and hundreds of Guides. "Companion" is a vague term, encompassing books of quite different kinds. For example *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, by Humphrey Carpenter and Mani Pritchard, is actually an encyclopedia, with articles on authors, books, characters, illustrators, and many other topics. But it is indeed a beloved and well-thumbed companion, remarkably comprehensive and well-written, equally valuable for consulting as a reference and for pleasant browsing.

*The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, by contrast, is essentially a textbook for an undergraduate course on postmodern critical methods as applied to children's literature. It is divided into four parts, plus a bibliography of 750 items and an index. Part I is a collection of eleven essays, each 12 or 13 pages, on topics of critical interest. Each essay concludes with a short annotated bibliography for further reading. Part II is an encyclopedia of articles up to 3 pages long on terms and persons that arise in the critical literature. Any term that is the keyword of an article in part II is displayed in boldface in the texts of the articles in parts I and II, like cross-references in Wikipedia. This alerts the reader to the existence of the article, if she wants more information, but it is also a distraction; I am not sure it is a good idea. Part III is a timeline. Part IV is a two-page list of resources: journals, organizations, and online discussion groups.

Readers, like myself and, I expect, most of the readers of *Mythprint*, who are more interested in children's literature than in its criticism, and who pick up this book in order to learn something about children's literature, will be disappointed. Except in the timeline, the texts discussed were chosen in order to illustrate aspects of critical methods. Preference seems to have been given to texts that are familiar to current college students. Accordingly

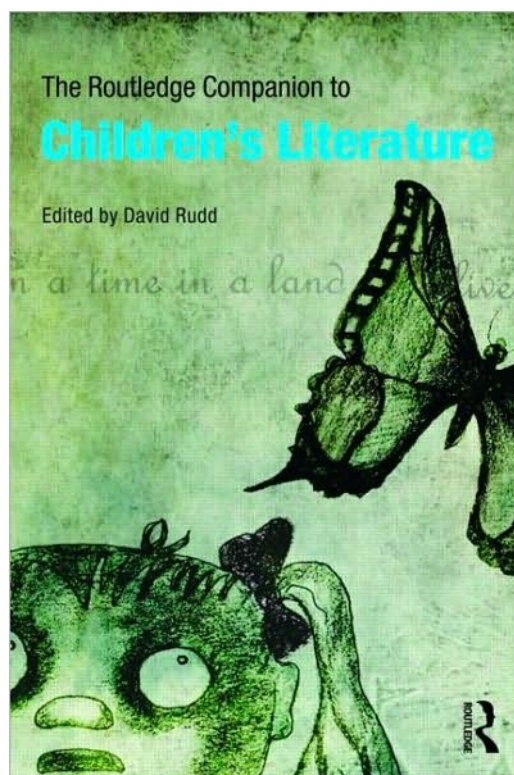
there is a strong emphasis on recent books — post-1950 and even post-1995 — as opposed to earlier books; on books for adolescents rather than for younger children; on books in English rather than other languages. The two series most often mentioned are *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*. Many important genres and issues are omitted or nearly so. There is no discussion of adventure stories or of animal stories, even though the editor, David Rudd, himself wrote an article on animal stories for the *Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*. There is no discussion of the role of religion in children's literature. There is an article on "Picturebooks, comics, and graphic novels", but no discussion of illustration, and no mention anywhere in the book of classic illustrators such as Shepherd, Wyeth, Tasha Tudor, etc. (Sendak is discussed several times, mostly in connection with *Where the Wild Things Are*. Howard Pyle and Arthur Rackham are each mentioned once, in the part II articles on "phallocentrism" and "orientalism" respectively. Beatrix Potter is included in the timeline.)

The most interesting of the essays in part I is an article, "Sidelines: Some neglected dimensions of children's literature and its scholarship" (i.e. neglected in the critical literature) by Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles with Abigail Robison. These dimensions include autobiography, literature written by children, writings by parents for their own children, oral tradition, poetry, and plays for children. The authors are properly indignant that poetry has ended up in this

list of also-rans, given the large quantity and high quality of children's poetry. This essay is all too brief, but is full of interesting leads in these many areas.

The article "Picture-books, comics, and graphic novels" by Mel Gibson, makes some interesting observations about the relation between graphic style and content in graphic novels. Unfortunately, this article is much less useful than it could have been, because there are no illustrations, here or anywhere else in the book; the publisher was too lazy or too cheap to bother getting the rights.

To her credit, Victoria Flanagan in her article "Gender studies" does not waste much time decrying sexism in classic



children's books, which would be shooting fish in a barrel. Instead, she discusses books (almost all very recent) that she considers make an honest effort to deal with gender issues sensitively and helpfully. Aside from these, there is an article on realism that argues that all realistic fiction is didactic; an article on fantasy from a psychological (essentially Freudian) perspective; an article on media adaptations which traces the various media in which *His Dark Materials* has appeared; an article on racism and colonialism (though, interestingly, none on classism); an article on narratology (narrative structure and literary devices); an article on young adult fiction and the "crossover phenomenon", the astonishing fact that adults read children's literature; an article on Theory; and an introductory overview. Some of these I found doctrinaire and wrong-headed, others I found open-minded and harmless; but I did not find any of them particularly informative, insightful, or thought-provoking.

Part II is in encyclopedia format; a collection of (by my quick count) 114 articles, arranged alphabetically by topic, in double column, by various authors. 43 of these are critical terminology, 46 are persons (contributors to critical discourse, not authors of children's books), 7 are critical schools or modes such as "postmodernism", 9 are genres, 3 are literary devices, and 6 are on other topics, such as "animation". The topics chosen for inclusion here are for the most part ones that arise in the essays; overall, therefore, it is a somewhat haphazard collection. For example there is an article on "animation" with descriptions of cel animation and CGI, and an article on "Disneyfication", but no article on "film". The only three literary devices that earn an article are "focalization", "free indirect discourse", and "metafiction".

At least fifteen of the articles are about professors here and there who specialize in children's literature, an unusual emphasis for a general book of this kind. However, I did get some perverse pleasure out of the article on Prof. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, Director of the Centre for International Research in Childhood at the University of Reading, who feels that no literature is good for children, and that a good course of individualized psychotherapy is much healthier.

Part III, the timeline, is the only section of the book that is primarily focussed on literature rather than criticism; it was presumably compiled by the editor David Rudd. He seems rather embarrassed by it. In fact, he uses four separate distancing techniques to separate himself from something so unsophisticated as a timeline. First, he says that these kinds of

lists are suspect because they endorse an established canon and privilege certain kinds of texts over others. Second, he says that assigning dates is suspect because (a) the calendar shifted from the Julian to the Gregorian; (b) some books, such as *Gulliver's Travels* were published in varying forms over an interval of time. The silliness of both of these objections to dates reveals how uncomfortable the postmodernist is with anything resembling a fact. There are many events whose dates are uncertain or vague, but with few exceptions, the years of publication for books in the last two centuries are as close to certain as anything can be. Third, his comments on well-known books tend to be jokey though not actually funny. Fourth, he includes jokey items, such as the invention of bubble gum and the founding of McDonald's, whose sole reason for inclusion is to allow us all to join in a collective sneer at American popular culture.

For the intended audience — that is, students interested in postmodernist criticism of children's literature — this collection is no doubt somewhat useful. However, it has little to offer to a reader whose goal is to deepen his/her knowledge of children's literature. =

Beth Bernobich. *Passion Play*. Tor, 2010. 368 pp. \$24.99 (hc). ISBN 978-0765322173. Reviewed by Berni Phillips Bratman.

For those readers who wished Éowyn had a larger page count in *Lord of the Rings*, have I got a girl for you! Beth Bernobich's first novel, *Passion Play*, is the story of Ilse, née Therez, Zhalina. A rich merchant's daughter, she decides to run away from home after her father unexpectedly promises her to a man she instinctively fears. This is her first choice in this novel about "how to act when neither choice was entirely good, and yet act they must" (256).

A privileged girl running away from home is hardly original in fantasy, but Bernobich's eyes-open treatment of the subject is. In the real world, we know that teenaged girls who run away from home all too frequently fall prey to men who abuse them, physically and sexually. In fantasies, there is often a hero who manages to save the girl from such a fate, or she's a plucky little Mary Sue who manages to save herself. Bernobich does not spare Therez from the more realistic fate. Therez signs on with a caravan, giving herself the new name of Ilse as she seeks to change her life. Therez truly becomes Ilse — the char-

acter is no longer called Therez—after one of those horrible real-world choices she is forced to make.

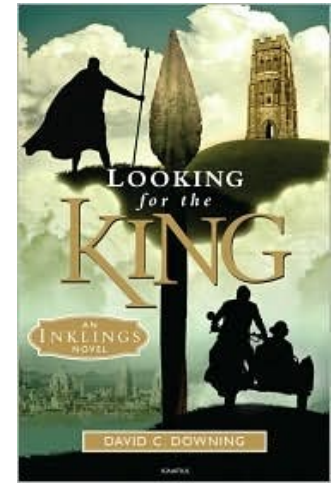
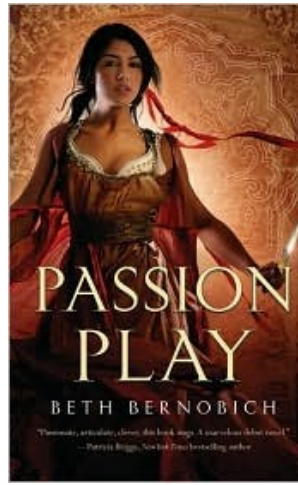
This section of the book may be difficult for some to read. It's something that every parent fears will happen to their daughter, and you have to wonder if Ilse had been foolish to leave home. Later in the book, Ilse still feels strongly about this first choice: "I hated home. It was like death. All wrapped in silk and scented with herbs, but dead. Dead and silent and locked in the dark. When I left, I said I would never go back. Never. No matter what happened. And so much did." (197).

She manages to escape and make her way to Tiralien and eventual employment in the house of a lord. The lord's business is pleasure, which is difficult for a rape survivor to confront, but she steels herself to do the best job she can in her new position in the kitchen. Ilse works hard and admits her mistakes. She manages to advance by her own merits (she is, after all, educated), but the all-too-common jealousy from her co-workers does not allow her to forget her past. Over and over, she repeats what she had to do, the result of a choice she made. She's never in any danger of having her feet anywhere except firmly planted on the ground because her past follows her. This makes her a very believable, well-rounded character.

*Passion Play* is the first book in a trilogy that is a secondary world fantasy. Bernobich's world building is good—I wish the ARC I had came with a map, but from the pages marked "MAP TK," it looks like the published edition will. There is much talk of various places, and a map will be useful. Besides the geography, there is a history and mythology referred to periodically. Magic is real and the characters have past lives which they may recall glimpses of.

I really liked the pacing in this book. It starts out simply with Therez and her best friend playing a word game. This word game becomes a recurring motif throughout the novel, a way of Ilse admitting her true feelings to herself with each chain of association the word game brings up. The plot elements build in a logical, methodical, but not boring manner. There is no romance for much of the book, so when it does come in, you have the rare experience of truly seeing why the hero loves the heroine for her brain and not just her beauty. Once romance blossoms, you believe it, for the characters have been built up so carefully by then.

In short, Beth Bernobich's first novel is an honest coming-of-age tale of a courageous heroine one can genuinely admire for taking responsibility for her choices, good and bad. =



David C. Downing. *Looking for the King: An Inklings Novel*. Ignatius Press, 2010. 250 pp. \$19.95 (hc). ISBN 978-1586175146. Reviewed by Sarah Beach.

I wanted to give this book every chance to engage and enchant me, because I felt the author was earnest in his desire to do justice to his inspirations. But by the time I finished it, I felt the title ought to have been *Looking for the Story*. On several levels it is "almost there." As a writer who takes part in a couple of critique groups, I kept wishing the story had gone through a few more polishes. It isn't that the book is bad, it is that it could and should have been much better. That said, I am sure that some readers will enjoy it as it is, in its mildly adequate form.

The premise of the story is that in 1940s England, a young man, an American academic (Tom), is researching Arthurian sites. He encounters another American, the young woman Laura, who has been having odd visionary dreams. The pair set off, vaguely searching for the locations of her visions. In the background, there are supposedly sinister figures, possibly trying to thwart the questing adventurers. And along the way, our Americans meet the Inklings.

It's a very promising premise. But it is presented in such a disjointed and reserved fashion that it loses all the excitement of its premise.

My first question was "Why are the Inklings in this story?" Yes, they provide some key information to the Americans about the nature of Laura's dreams and possible locations for the pair to visit. But there is nothing in those bits of information that would require it be the Inklings and not some other equally educated folk who might have provided the knowledge. Most of the passages with the Inklings felt to me as if they were present more because these conversations were ones the *author* wished he could have with the Inklings than because they actually advanced the plot.

My second question was "What is the quest

here?" Tom is merely researching Arthurian sites. Laura wants explanations for her dreams. These two very mild motivations cross with references to the spear of Longinus, but even then our "heroes" are not actively seeking the spear itself for any reason. Their drives are very tame emotionally and are too easily satisfied. There is no sense of what a "failure" of their quest would entail. There seem to be no drastic consequences either way.

What is the threat? Our sinister figure is indirectly connected to the Nazis and Hitler's quest for the Spear of Destiny and its guarantee of victory. But there is no sense of hazard or impending disaster about that possibility. It is mentioned but not really felt.

There is also a thread in the story about Tom's status as a not-quite-believer. But again, it is not presented very effectively. There does not seem to be much manifestation of it in the story until the end. Perhaps the author intended that Tom's obliviousness to actual sinister events would be indicative of his spiritual blindness, but it actually only makes Tom seem inordinately dense about the fact that they are being followed by flesh-and-blood hostiles.

It frustrates me as a reader and writer to encounter a book like this that ought to be better, and (with a bit more work) *could* have been better. As I said before, there are bound to be some who are content with it as is. But I think that the Inklings themselves would have pushed for more work on it, for more polishing that would bring the various elements into better focus. =

Russell Celyn Jones. *The Ninth Wave*. Seren, 2010. 176 pp. \$14.95 (sc). ISBN 978-1854115140. Reviewed by Alana Joli Abbott.

**T**he *Ninth Wave* takes the first branch of the Mabinogion, the story of Pwyll, and transposes it into a near future dystopia. There is no oil in the world, and though some modern technology is still in place, the world has largely broken down into feudal boundaries. Here, Pwyll is a bored aristocrat. He's served time as a soldier, which he enjoyed, except for the violence. By chance, he encounters another aristocrat, Arawn, who seeks to enlist Pwyll for his military experience in helping destroy another rival lord. While Pwyll runs his espionage out of Arawn's house, eventually speaking with Havgan, who is burning carcasses for fuel and has a side charity of

providing illegal euthanizing drugs for those who want to escape this new reality, Arawn sets Pwyll's lands to right.

The story continues on in much the same vein as its inspiration, from the meeting and courting of Pwyll and Rhiannon to the birth and disappearance of their son, Pryderi. But rather than the magic of a never-full food bag and the simple joy of having a lost son returned (and Rhiannon cleared of the crime), Jones's Pwyll kills his rival, Gwawl, at a Starbucks, and the author shows just how broken a family can be when a child has been missing for nine years. Apart from moments of happiness when Pwyll and Rhiannon finally overcome Gwawl, the characters are largely marked by their distance from each other. Pwyll struggles to find any purpose in his life—his people only love him because Arawn put harsher rules in order while Pwyll ran the mission against Havgan, and Pwyll keeps them in place despite his ambivalence about their morality. He has no real ambition, no clear ability to act on his desires without being pushed. Likewise, Rhiannon always seems one step away from killing herself. That feeling of disconnectedness is amplified when Pryderi disappears, and the deterioration of their marriage—and the lack of concern that Pwyll is doing nothing to tend to his lands—seem to show the unimportance of either of their lives to anyone but each other.

Does the novel work on its own, without that connection to the Mabinogion? I'm not sure. Like the branch that inspires it, the novel ends with Pryderi poised to become a hero. And it's in that moment that the novel offers something that hasn't shown up anywhere else in the text: hope. Pryderi doesn't seem to want responsibility—or have ambition—any more than his father. And yet, when the opportunity presents itself, Pryderi is the one who takes action on his own, who steps forward, rather than being dragged along by events like his father. That the novel ends with hope makes me think that Jones actually intended it to feel like a conclusion, that a whole story is told here: one son, returning from war uninspired, unready to claim his heritage, and with no parents to guide him, juxtaposed with a son, returned to his parents after years of no responsibility, who steps into responsibility without hesitation. It's hard to call the novel enjoyable given the dystopian state of both the world and the lives of the main characters, but the ending is utterly satisfying. As a writing experiment—updating an old tale for a new audience—there's a lot of artistry present, making it worthwhile, if not a lot of fun. =

# Discussion Groups

The Mythopoeic Society has members throughout the U.S. and in several foreign countries; the lucky ones are able to find other people interested in the Inklings, myth, and fantasy literature close enough geographically to meet on a regular basis. The Society sponsors Discussion Groups in several different states in the U.S., with a number of additional groups in the process of forming and active.

Only **active** groups are listed here. Groups that wish to be listed in the active category should regularly update the Secretary with their meeting and discussion plans. Groups are also encouraged to share reports of their activities with the Secretary for inclusion in *Mythprint*.

Groups that wish to become active should contact the Secretary and inform her of their first meeting, topic, time, location and contact person. Groups that have not yet chosen to become Chartered, or those who are interested in creating a new Mythopoeic Society-sponsored discussion or special interest group, please complete our group charter form at [www.mythsoc.org](http://www.mythsoc.org).

Marion VanLoo  
Membership & Discussion Group Secretary  
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Napoleon, MI 49261  
[membership@mythsoc.org](mailto:membership@mythsoc.org)  
[www.mythsoc.org/groups](http://www.mythsoc.org/groups)

## CALIFORNIA

### Los Angeles/Pasadena: *Mydgard*

Lee Speth, 920 N. Atlantic #E, Alhambra, CA 91801.

Jan. 23: *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (Film dir. by Michael Apted). At the home of Carol Jacobsen, 205 Malcolm Dr., Pasadena. (626) 796-7456. 2:30 PM.

Feb. 20: *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. In the lounge area adjoining the main lobby at the Pasadena Hilton. 168 S. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena. 2:30 PM.

### Oakland: *C.S. Lewis Society of California*

David J. Theroux, 11990 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, CA 94619.

[dtheroux@lewissociety.org](mailto:dtheroux@lewissociety.org)

Web site: <http://www.lewissociety.org>

### San Francisco Bay Area: *Khazad-dum*

Amy Wisniewski & Edith Crowe, 1124 Eden Bower Lane, Redwood

City, CA 94061. [edithcrowe@comcast.net](mailto:edithcrowe@comcast.net)

Web site: [www.mythsoc.org/groups/kd](http://www.mythsoc.org/groups/kd)

## COLORADO

### Denver area: *Fanuidhol* ("Cloudy Head")

Patricia Yarrow, 2465 S. Franklin St., Denver, CO 80210.

[yarrowp@mscd.edu](mailto:yarrowp@mscd.edu) or [lottiedeno7@aol.com](mailto:lottiedeno7@aol.com)

Web site: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Fanuidhol/>

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

### Washington & Suburbs: *Knossos*

Mimi Stevens, 3805 Franconia Rd., Alexandria, VA 22310.

[mimi.stevens@verizon.net](mailto:mimi.stevens@verizon.net)

Jan. 21: *The Nine Tailors*, by Dorothy L. Sayers. At Ellen Vartanoff's, 4418 Renn Street, Rockville, MD 20853-2745.

## HAWAII

### Oahu: *Sammath Naur*

Steve Brown, Box 22332, Honolulu, HI 96823. [slbrown@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:slbrown@hawaii.rr.com)

Ken Burtness. [purplewolf@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:purplewolf@hawaii.rr.com)

Web site: <http://bookgroup.pulehuadesign.com/>

## ILLINOIS

### Peoria: *The Far Westfarthing* smial

Mike Foster, 743 County Road 1200N, Metamora, IL 61548-7726.

[mafoster@hughes.net](mailto:mafoster@hughes.net)

## IOWA

### Decorah: *Alfheim*

Doug Rossman, 1316 Blue Grass Dr., Decorah IA 52101.

[rossmado@luther.edu](mailto:rossmado@luther.edu)

Contact Jennifer for topic, time, date & location details:

[jfolstad@millerlawdecorah.com](mailto:jfolstad@millerlawdecorah.com)

## MINNESOTA

### Minneapolis-St. Paul: *Rivendell*

David Lenander, 2095 Hamline Ave. Roseville, MN 55113.

[d-lena@umn.edu](mailto:d-lena@umn.edu)

Web site: [www.umn.edu/~d-lena/rivendell.html](http://www.umn.edu/~d-lena/rivendell.html)

## NEVADA

### Reno: *Crickhollow*

Joanne Burnett, 3275 Vickie Lane, Sparks, NV 89431.

[Burnie96@sbcglobal.net](mailto:Burnie96@sbcglobal.net)

Web site: [riske.wncv.nevada.edu/Crickhollow](http://riske.wncv.nevada.edu/Crickhollow)

## NEW MEXICO

### Albuquerque: *The UNM Hobbit Society*

Leslie A Donovan, UNM Honors Program, Albuquerque, NM.

[tolkien@unm.edu](mailto:tolkien@unm.edu)

Web site: <http://www.unm.edu/~tolkien>

For topics, times, dates & locations, see the website.

## NEW YORK

### New York: *Heren Istarion: The Northeast Tolkien Society*

Anthony Burdge & Jessica Burke, 110 Patten St., Staten Island, NY 10307. [herenistarionnets@gmail.com](mailto:herenistarionnets@gmail.com)

Web site: [www.herenistarionnets.blogspot.com](http://www.herenistarionnets.blogspot.com)

## OREGON

### Portland: *Bywater Inklings*

Gary Lundquist 2627 SE 68th Avenue Portland OR 97206-1235

[lundquig88@msn.com](mailto:lundquig88@msn.com) See also [http://www.facebook.com/](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=107493056056&ref=ts)

[home.php?#/group.php?gid=107493056056&ref=ts](http://home.php?#/group.php?gid=107493056056&ref=ts)

## PENNSYLVANIA

### Pittsburgh: *Fantasy Studies Fellowship*

Lori Campbell, University of Pittsburgh, Department of English, 526 CL, Pittsburgh PA 15260.

[camenglish@cs.com](mailto:camenglish@cs.com)

## WASHINGTON

### Seattle: *Mithlond*

John D Rateliff, 6317 S. 233rd Street Kent, WA 98032.

[sacnoth@earthlink.net](mailto:sacnoth@earthlink.net)

Web site: <http://mwinslow.firinn.org/mithlond/>

Jan.: The Story of Beren & Luthien (*Silmarillion*), by J.R.R. Tolkien

Feb.: *Johannes Cabal, Detective*, by Jonathan L. Howard

Mar.: *Huldufolk* (documentary)

## WISCONSIN

### Milwaukee: *The Burrahobbits*

Jeffrey & Jan Long, 1903 N. 118th St., Wauwatosa, WI 53226.

[longfam@milwpc.com](mailto:longfam@milwpc.com)

Jan. 7: *Zahrah the Windseeker*, by Nnedi Okorafor & Annual 12th

Night Party, 6 PM, at Sue's.

Feb. 22: *Storm Front*, by Jim Butcher, 7 PM, at Sue's.

Mar. 22: *Soulless*, by Gail Carriger, 7 PM, at Sue's.

Andrzej Sapkowski. Translated by Danusia Stok. *Blood Of Elves*. Orbit, 2009. 416 pp. \$7.99. ISBN 978-0316029193. Reviewed by Jason Easter.

Geralt of Rivia is a witcher, but he stands out from other witchers with his white hair and piercing eyes, as well as his cynicism and lack of respect for authority. Although a magically and genetically mutated monster-slayer for hire, he is far more than just a striking-looking man. As a witcher, his sorcerous powers, enhanced by elixirs and long training, have made him a brilliant fighter; a merciless assassin. Yet he is no ordinary murderer; his targets are the vile fiends and demons that ravage the land.

Sapkowski's world of Cintra is assembled extremely well, and his sense of depth is reminiscent of Tolkien's Middle-earth. The author includes the usual range of fantasy characters and types you would expect, but also manages to uphold the genre with energetic, intelligent, and compelling writing. What is most clever is his skill in adding a hint of Polish folklore, which has undoubtedly been partly responsible for catapulting his Witcher Saga onto to the European stage.

*Blood of Elves* (the original Polish title is *Krew Elfów*) is the first novel in this saga and was first published in Poland in 1994. The English translation was published in late 2008. This book is a sequel to the Witcher short stories collected in the books *The Last Wish* and *Miecz Przeznaczenia* ("A Sword of Fate"). It is followed by *Czas Pogardy* (literally "The Time of Disdain", but marketed as "Times of Contempt"). *Krew Elfów* was the winner of the Janusz A. Zajdel Award for best novel in 1994. *Blood of Elves* is only the second book by the author to hit the British (and now American) bookstores, the first in what is expected to be a five-part series.

For more than a hundred years the superficially familiar world of humans, dwarves, gnomes, elves, and warring human kingdoms lived together in relative peace. But in this fantasyland, time is changing, where magic gives its users genetic mutations and the uneasy peace is over. Now the races once again fight each other—and themselves: dwarves are killing their

kinsmen, and elves (an ethnic minority) are using guerrilla tactics to fight back against human colonization.

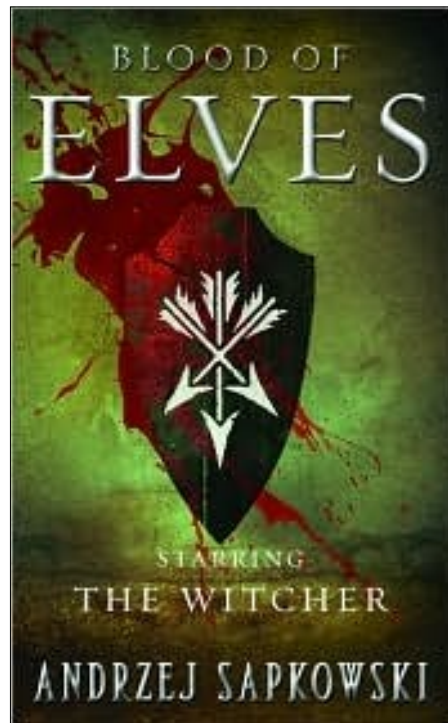
Sapkowski creates a world where there is moral ambiguity coupled with dark cynical humour. Cintra is a land which is mirroring our reality, with hard-hitting politics and unstable economies. It also begins to show the larger scope of events in the land where war is imminent and race discourse grows tense. The complex plot in the *Blood of Elves* focuses on the Empire of Nilfgaard attacking and overwhelming the Kingdom of Cintra. The Lioness of Cintra, or Queen

Calanthe, commits suicide and her granddaughter, Ciri—called Ciri, or Lion Cub of Cintra—somehow flees from the burning capital city. Emhyr var Emreis, who is the Emperor of Nilfgaard, sends his spies to find the youngling. He realises Ciri's importance, not only because of her royal bloodline, but also because of her magical potential: the elven blood that runs through her veins.

The heart of this installment is not the saga's signature character, the preternatural assassin Geralt of Rivia, but the young ward Ciri who needs his protection. He takes her to the witchers' stronghold in Kaer Morhen; the witchers, it transpires, have been waiting for the prophesied child. It becomes obvious that Ciri is extraordinary, so she is educated by old Vesemir,

Coen, Eskel and Lambert. She learns about monsters and how to fight with a sword (learning with the blindfold). But Geralt knows that she can never become a witcher. During her "education" a sorceress named Triss Merigold comes to Kaer Morhen. Triss (Geralt's former girlfriend) teaches Ciri how to control her abilities and helps with her strange, troubling, and abnormal behavior. Together they reveal that Ciri possesses powerful magical abilities. Individuals who exhibit such promise and power are referred to as the Sources.

As the political situation grows ever dimmer and the threat of war hangs almost palpably over the land, Geralt searches for someone to train Ciri's unique powers. At the same time, a mysterious mage of considerable skill called Rience (not the Rience in Arthurian legend) is looking for the girl. He is a ser-





vant of the powerful mage Vilgefortz of Roggeveen who is himself a member of the Chapter of Sorcerers. Rience catches Geralt's friend, Dandelion the bard, and demands information about Ciri, but another sorceress — this one called Yennefer — manages to save Dandelion and injures Rience in a conjuring battle. Dandelion might not have survived to continue his role as Geralt's frequent companion were it not for Yennefer.

Although initially painted as a helpless waif, Ciri the prophesied child soon grows into a tough, spirited girl under Geralt's protection. Holding this promise of immense power, for good or as a harbinger of doom, it is up to Geralt to ensure Ciri takes the right path and remains safe from those who wish to kill her.

The pace of the novel is a little lethargic and the political discourse can sometimes become irksome and often onerous. The most pronounced drive of the novel is that Ciri is a descendant of an ancient elven bloodline and that Ciri's is the key to harnessing all power in Cintra. There is disproportionately little action, and what there is seems overshadowed by lengthy political discussions and war strategy. (This is perhaps not terribly surprising in a novel from a former Soviet Bloc nation.) However, Sapkowski does address most aspects of a good fantasy story eloquently and with surprising ease. His style reads as easily as David Gemmel's, but hits harder and deeper. It recalls George R. R. Martin too, by creating a world that is both familiar and comfortable. And it is through his inventive use of characterization that Sapkowski makes this novel a new and realistic reading experience. =

Howard Shore's Complete Score of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. Performed Live at Radio City Music Hall. Friday, October 8th 2010. Reviewed by Jessica Burke.

I'm one of those people who feel that music is vital to life—but in the world most of us live in, live music isn't readily accessible and when we get the chance to hear a cherished piece of music performed live, the experience should be



sublime. And, it usually is.

Unfortunately, this wasn't the case for Howard Shore's complete score to *The Two Towers* performed live at Radio City this past weekend. While the music itself is beautiful, both Anthony and I found the experience was significantly dulled by having the film played at the same time. Yes. We are aware that this is a score to a film. However, it is also a symphony—and when going to hear Beethoven or Mozart performed, we'd be there for the performance. Folks attending this event were there first and foremost for the film—as evidenced by the continual hoots and applause every time a testosterone-laden actor graced the screen. At times, for the sake of balance, we tried our own applause for Treebeard, Éowyn, the kidnapping Orcs, the Eye of Sauron (*not* an evil Lighthouse)—but without much success (except for Treebeard where the applause caught on). And I was actually shushed by a twit in front of me for applauding the Eye. Really?!

The audience seemed oblivious to the fact that there were live performers on stage—except when the conductor, Ludwig Wicki, came on stage. Everyone around us was glued to the screen, even down to that same woman in front of me mouthing the dialogue to herself. The Dessoff Symphonic Choir and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus were dwarfed by the screen—and were pretty much non-existent to much of the audience. There was applause, I have to admit, at the entrance of Kaitlyn Lusk, the exquisite soprano, but I have to wonder if the applause was for Ms. Lusk—or for Arwen who had made a screen appearance at just about the same moment.

Some who know us may pipe up to say that we will find fault in anything film-related because we're not big Peter Jackson fans. Not so. In 2005, we attended Robert Bass's "The Rings: Myth and Music," performance at Carnegie Hall. While that performance consisted of Shore's score with selections from

Wagner for comparison, and even though selections of the Jackson films were played—the music was the focal point of the evening. The musicians were the stars—not Orlando and Elijah. We had assumed, wrongly it seems, that the same would be true for the

Radio City performance. We weren't lucky enough to get tickets for last years' *Fellowship of the Ring* performance, or we might have known better.

For me, Howard Shore's music is one of the highlights of the Jackson films—and one of the saving graces. These musical achievements of Shore, for Anthony and me, stand as a testimony to the sheer effort that went into the making of these films—and highlight our regret that Jackson didn't treat his source material with equal respect. We have our own copies of the score, and have listened to them with delight. The music is exceptional, and we were very much looking forward to seeing it performed live—again.

The performance was seamless and breathtaking, but unfortunately the blasted film took away from the fact that there were live human beings onstage actually performing something. The 21st Century Orchestra was brilliant. The strings were my personal favorite, and I would have been contented to just sit and listen—and watch the performers. Heidi Doppmann on harp and Roland Küng on dulcimer were some of the only performers not lost in the *mêlée* because they were physically separated from most of the orchestra. I found myself hunting the stage for the oboe and percussion. And our seats were good ones too, so please don't tell me we were too far away from the stage to notice the performers.

We were just so damned distracted by the film. I guess that sums up the experience for me. Give me the music any day of the week. Ditch the films.

Our advice to the folks at Radio City—give us a symphony, not a rehashing of the *entire* film—clocking at over three hours. Lower your prices for soda and Twizzlers. We left there dazed and rather confused. I scouted around at the other reviews, and all of them were raves. I have to wonder if the reviewers were just being gracious because of the free tickets. We're grateful to the wonderful press coordinators for this opportunity, but our policy is and always has been to give an honest review.

If there's to be a *Return of the King* show next year, it's our hope that the musical performance becomes the focus of this event—not the films. I mean, we can all crank up the volume at home and get the same effect. Or, to truly geek out, we can play the score on our surround sound stereo *while* watching the films. I wonder if you can try playing *Dark Side of the Moon* and get the same effect that you do with *The Wizard of Oz* ... it's worth a shot. =

**This review originally appeared online at  
<http://herenistationnets.blogspot.com>**

Editors Kristine Larsen, Jessica Burke, and Anthony S. Burdge are soliciting proposals for contributions to the second volume in their *Mythological Dimensions* series. Volume 2 will focus on Neil Gaiman, and will be published by Kitsune Press in 2012.

See their Call For Papers at —  
<http://herenistationnets.blogspot.com/2010/12/call-for-papers-neil-gaiman-collection.html>

Allan Zola Kronzek and Elizabeth Kronzek. *The Sorcerer's Companion: A Guide to the Magical World of Harry Potter*. 3rd ed. Broadway Books, 2010. xv + 366 pp., \$16.99 (sc). ISBN 978-0307885135. Reviewed by Jason Fisher.

This is a good start, but one expects something a little more thorough and more complete than a “good start” by the third edition. I have not seen the two previous editions of this title, but this latest still feels like a first edition to me. Judged in that way, it's not bad, but it could definitely be better. The entire Harry Potter series, plus *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, are now well established, but this new edition misses many opportunities. Also, there are more errors than one would like, indicating mediocre research and too little attention to detail. The cover claims it is “updated and complete”, but it is certainly not the latter, as the authors themselves admit in their introduction. Perhaps a disconnect between the authors and their publisher's marketing department.

The scope also seems a little unclear: nearly all of the entries are ones with a background in the real world; but what about items that are purely Rowling's invention—e.g., The Room of Requirement, The Ministry of Magic, Aurors, Petronus, Quidditch? Why are these omitted? Moreover, some entries (e.g., “Circe”) have only the slightest connection to Harry Potter. And why, under “Dragons”, if the book is indeed meant to be a “Guide to the Magical World of Harry Potter”, do the authors not give a catalog of the various species described by Rowling? The book ends up being much less about Harry Potter than about a generalized history of magic. This is not automatically a bad thing (many entries are fascinating), but it does make the book's subtitle a little misleading.

On the other hand, many entries are handled quite well (e.g., “Cauldron”, “Divination”, “Giant”, “Hand of Glory”, and “Magic” itself), offering a broad mythological and literary background, but still solidly tethered to the world of Harry Potter. All

readers are sure to learn interesting new things, and many of these will delight Harry Potter fans especially. For instance, the entry for “Nicholas Flamel” is wonderful (though it is a little strange to find it alphabetized under N). The book also has a generous visual component, relying mainly on public domain illustrations from 19th-century histories of magic, divination, alchemy, and the like. On the one hand, these are chosen for practical reasons (no difficulties with copyright); but on the other, they bring a dimension of antique charm to the book. They achieve the effect of making *The Sorcerer’s Companion* resemble something from the restricted section of the Hogwarts Library, like the notorious *Moste Potente Potions*. The authors also give the source of each illustration in the back of the book, so that interested readers can track down for themselves gems such as Collin de Plancy’s *Dictionnaire Infernal* (1863).

I mentioned errors, and indeed there are far too many for a third edition of any book. These fall into two broad categories: mistakes of the Harry Potter variety, and everything else. The former is perhaps worse than the latter. A handful of examples of each kind will have to suffice. Among non-Harry Potter errors, etymologies are often incorrect—e.g., *banshee* (20) and *augur* (64). On the other hand, the authors’ discussion of the likely etymology of *horcrux* is very good (133). Another odd error: the caption to the illustration on p. 60 refers to the “the triple-headed demon Asmodeus”, but the illustration has *four* heads! And the Edgar Allan Poe short story is not “Conversations with a Mummy” (207), but “Some Words with a Mummy.”

I called the Harry Potter errors the more serious kind. I say this because, while they might seem like trivial slips, they undermine the credibility of something pretending to be an encyclopedic guide to the Harry Potter world. For example, it’s just Godric Gryffindor, not *Sir* Godric Gryffindor (4). Dobby is not wearing a tea towel when Harry first meets him (80), but rather “an old pillowcase”; it is Winky, in

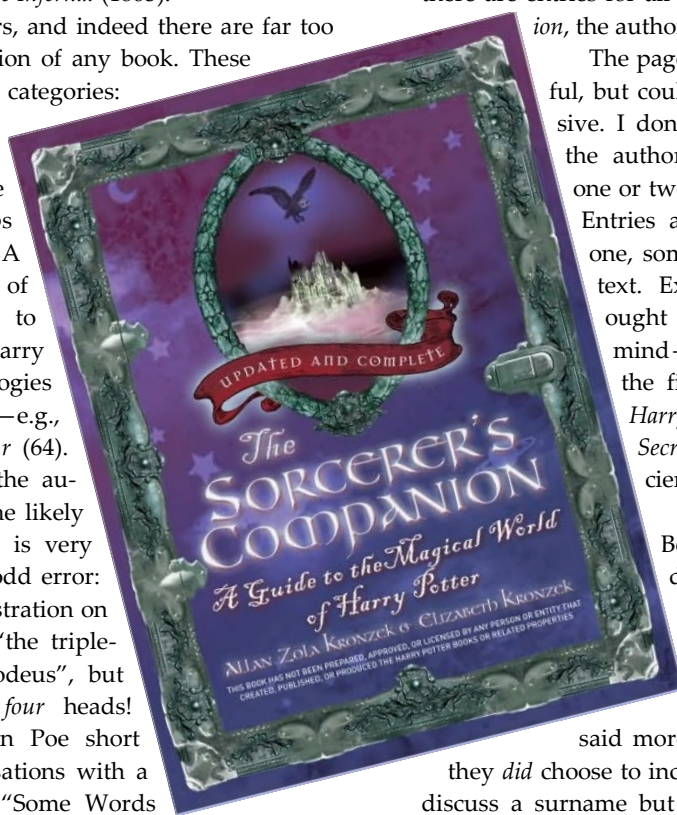
*Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, who wears a tea towel. Speaking of that novel, Harry is never in pursuit of the Goblet of Fire (115); the prize is the Triwizard Cup. And Gilderoy Lockhart’s autobiography is called *Magical Me*, not *Marvelous Me* (336).

There are also, as I mentioned, significant omissions of important Harry Potter material. In the entry for “Basilisk”, no mention is made of the fact that basilisk venom is one of the few substances capable of destroying a horcrux. For a Harry Potter encyclopedia, this is rather a critical point. Likewise, under “Horcrux” itself, there is no discussion of how to destroy them at all. Is it possible the edition was not really updated to include the complete seven-volume series? Here is another example. One of the perennial questions among Potterphiles is, what is the difference between a charm, jinx, hex, and curse? Though there are entries for all four in *The Sorcerer’s Companion*, the authors do not attempt an answer.

The page number references are helpful, but could be *much* more comprehensive. I don’t expect a concordance, but the authors might easily have added one or two more to most of the entries. Entries almost always point to only one, sometimes two, examples in the text. Example: “Elf”—which really ought to be “House-elf,” but never mind—gives only one citation (to the first appearance of Dobby in *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*). That is grossly insufficient.

The section, “The Meaning Behind the Names,” is a wonderful addition, right up my street, but I wish the authors had included many more names than they did. In addition, they could have

said more about certain of the names they *did* choose to include. For instance, they often discuss a surname but ignore the given name that goes along with it—e.g., Hagrid, but not Rubeus; Gryffindor, but not Godric; . Sometimes, it’s the opposite problem, as in Merope Gaunt, where they ignore the surname—not to mention ignoring the other Gaunts, Marvolo and Morfin. About the names Albus Dumbledore and Voldemort, there is much more that might be said, as I myself have done on my blog (<http://lingwe.blogspot.com>). All in all, it’s a nice try; maybe the fourth edition will be better still. ≡



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