

Mythmoot VI: Dragons!

Abstracts for Saturday, June 29, 2019

Academic Presentations (10:30 am – 12:00 noon)

Main Room

The Perilous Realm: Faërie and the Numinous in Tolkien – *Emily Strand*

Faërie, for Tolkien, is a world of enchantment, a “perilous land, and in it are pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the overbold.” This strange, enchanted land of Faërie and its various inhabitants dominate Tolkien’s writings, providing a magical setting for his epic adventures. But for Tolkien, the land of Faërie was far more than a backdrop; it was a point of encounter with the holy, a metaphor for the human experience of the numinous.*

This presentation will trace Tolkien’s deeply spiritual notions of Faërie through a handful of his writings, both poetry and prose. First, we will explore definitions and parameters for Faërie from Tolkien’s famous essay “On Fairy-Stories” which point to its numinous character, then examine the figure of Tom Bombadil in Tolkien’s early poetry and (eventually) the *Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien’s “Bimble Bay” poems will help us understand Faërie by contrast with the “real” world (that is, the one *without* dragons), and we’ll consider what Tolkien called the “peril” of Faërie through his poem “Earendil.” Finally, the story *Smith of Wootton Major* will help us understand Faërie in Tolkien’s worldview as a metaphor for the life of God.

*Many thanks go to Dr. Corey Olsen who first uttered this connection in my hearing; this paper is inspired by and seeks to explore this idea which Dr. Olsen put forth in the first iteration of the course “Beyond Middle-Earth”.

Emily has a Master’s degree in theology and has enjoyed taking several courses with Mythgard. She has taught religion at the collegiate level for more than 15 years, authored two books and many articles on Catholic liturgy and has written extensively about religion and popular fiction for the Hogwarts Professor blog; her essay on Quidditch appeared in *Harry Potter for Nerds 2* (Unlocking Press, 2015) and she is a co-host of the podcast “Reading, Writing, Rowling.”

“I suggest you may be human”: Humanity and Human Action in *Dune* – *Curtis A. Weyant*

Among other things, Frank Herbert’s *Dune* explores assorted conceptions of humanity: What does it mean to be human? How do (or should) humans act? What considerations drive those actions, and how do the options available limit them? Who even qualifies as “human”? This paper

will explore the perspectives of humanity held by various groups and individuals within the story of *Dune*, including but not limited to: the Bene Gesserit who “sift people to find the humans” and who see “the need of a thread of continuity in human affairs”; the Mentat who are “trained and conditioned to perform certain duties” and are “encased in a human body,” but whose functions are deemed (by some) as little more than rigorous mechanical calculation; the Fremen who work “slowly but with certainty...to make [Arrakis] fit for human life”; the leaders of the Great Houses and their attendants, who consider other humans as tools; and various others. Analysis will focus on the ideas that drive each group’s or individual’s aims and actions, especially among characters who attempt to navigate the conflicting influences, perspectives, and goals of multiple groups to which they belong. Particular consideration will be given to Paul Atreides as the point of intersection between all the primary perspectives of humanity presented throughout the book, and whose willingness to continually expand his own perspective provides him with a greater ability to achieve his goals and respond productively to obstacles as they arise.

Curtis Weyant is a digital marketer and author who has published and presented on the works of Robert Heinlein, Ursula K. Le Guin, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Joss Whedon. He co-hosts the podcast *Kat & Curt’s TV Re-View*, co-produces the Mythgard Movie Club, and edits the SF&F-themed satirical news website *Laserflail*.

Creating a Fantasy Experience: Let’s Brainstorm – Trish Lambert

I want to present my vision for my property...a campsite of little gypsy caravans (similar to those found in The Shire in The Lord of the Rings Online), all named after hobbits. AND the offering of "Experiences" for people who would come stay in the caravans. For example:

A night around the campfire with Corey the day before Texmoot is held.

Educational experiences for children that could include role play and enactments.

Interactive experiences for adults/families along the line of what’s being offered at Evermore in Utah (evermore.com)

My goal in the session is to present my vision/goals (~15 minutes) and then brainstorm with audience, get their suggestions and ideas about how this setup could be used to produce really interesting (and educational) fantasy/Tolkien experiences.

Breakout Room 1

Wangerin and Wyrn – Christine Norvell

“Why is Wyrn?” Pertelote asks of Chauntecleer. “Wyrn is,” Chauntecleer responds.

Walter Wangerin, Jr., takes great care to craft a great and cosmic evil, one determined to break free of the earth’s crust, to destroy, to get at God. In Wangerin’s extended beast fables, *The Book of the Dun Cow* and *The Book of Sorrows*, Wyrn is a dual creature, a blend of Jörmungandr from the Icelandic Sagas and the serpent of Scripture, best described in the Aberdeen bestiary. This

medieval duality evolves in the stories as a whole and in the lives of key characters like Chauntecleer. Wholly evil, Wyrms is a “terrible antagonist” in Wangerin’s words, but more importantly an external and internal force in the plot.

The paper examines Wangerin’s interpretation of Wyrms as a medieval creature and an evil force who interacts with individual characters, especially through dreams, and with the earth of Wangerin in the first two books of the loose trilogy.

Christine Norvell is a classical Christian educator and voracious reader. A graduate of Faulkner University’s Great Books program with a Masters in Humanities, she is the author of *Till We Have Faces: A Reading Companion* (2017) and writes regularly at The Imaginative Conservative, The Classical Thistle, and at her literary blog christinenorvell.com.

Role Playing Games in Therapy – *Bodhana*

Tabletop games are fun, but can they help people as well? The Bodhana Group, located in southeastern Pennsylvania, thinks so and has been working to educate folks about the many ways that games can be used to teach important skills and help provide a nurturing and safe environment where people can work through trauma, anxiety, and other emotional issues. The group consists of therapists, teachers, administrators, and direct care professionals who work with other professionals to educate them on the therapeutic uses of tabletop games. They offer free structured game programs for kids, adults, and seniors and programs designed to improve social skills, education, critical thinking, resiliency, and creativity through game play and discussion.

Breakout Room 2

Sunday’s Dragon: The Paradox of a Suffering Satan in G.K. Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday* – Jennifer Rogers

The dragon figure has been used across cultures and time to represent evil and enemy forces. Through rereadings of John Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost*, scholars have problematized the archetypal dragon to include images of suffering and heroic rebellion. This makes the dragon figure today a rich literary device that must be examined more closely than a strict allegorical reading would allow, especially when it comes to the revolutionary question of isolated suffering. How can we read dragons in the past, given interpretations today?

G. K. Chesterton’s imaginative political thriller *The Man Who Was Thursday* plays with the perception of its draconic Satan figure, Lucian Gregory. Clearly writing from a post-revolutionary and post-Miltonic position, Chesterton explores contemporary views of the Satan character as that of Gregory’s unfolds throughout the novel. This paper seeks to unpack this multifaceted character by comparing Gregory to Milton’s Satan and its Romantic revisions, while at the same time examining that comparison under the light of Chesterton’s other revealing works, especially *Orthodoxy*. The paper focuses its draconic study on the question of rebellious suffering and evil as Chesterton explores them in his imaginative fiction. From this review, it hopes to find a deeper understanding and appreciation of the dragon archetype for modern myth lovers.

Jennifer Rogers lives in Alexandria, VA, where she works for Signum University, tutors English, and does freelance editing from her home. While not staring at the computer or on a regional moot planning call, Jennifer loves to hike Virginia's hills with her husband Timothy and, always, drink the last drop of coffee.

“What a worm’s made for!”: The Cure to Conquering Dragons in C. S. Lewis’ *Pilgrim’s Regress* and *Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* – Jacob Schreiner

C.S. Lewis’ *The Pilgrim’s Regress* and *The Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* share a couple of prominent features. Each are written as a commentary and showing forth of the Christian life (whether it be in allegory or children’s fantasy), and each have main characters who struggle with a dragon (whether metaphorical or actual). By examining the idea of the dragon in these two works, I clarify that they echo the inner struggle one has in the personal or Christian life. In *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, John, in his venture to discover truth and what it means to be a Christian, must defeat the Northern dragon, who represents austerity and pride, if he is to continue in the Christian life and join the Landlord in the East. In the same way, his counterpart, Vertue, must defeat the Southern dragon, who represents masochism and indulgence, if he is to join himself with John in this quest. In this paper, I argue that C. S. Lewis’ earlier work in *Pilgrim’s Regress*, after his conversion to Christianity, serves as a template for how Eustace in *Voyage of the “Dawn Treader”* can conquer his inner (and eventual outward) dragon if he is to begin the road to being cured in the Christian sense. The key to understanding this cure lays in the song that the dragon of the North sings before John’s battle with him and the song that Vertue sings after his battle with the Southern dragon. Each song expresses the outward showing of the inward character before and after conquering these dragons, and they reveal the answer that Eustace must seek and battle within himself to be cured of the inward and outward dragon his character is and becomes. By the conquering of and curing from these dragons, each character fulfills the role that the Landlord or Aslan has called them to perform, and in consequence, we learn what a worm is really made for.

Jacob is from Houston, Texas and graduated from Sam Houston State University with his Bachelor’s in English. He is currently an M.A. student at Signum University, studying the works of J. R. R. Tolkien, and runs the blog *The Tolkienian*.

Invented Language and Worldbuilding in Frank Herbert’s “Dune” – Trevor Brierly

Worldbuilders in the science fiction and fantasy genres attempt to create worlds which are similar enough to the Primary World to allow a connection to it by the audience, yet different enough to evoke the “strangeness and wonder” that Tolkien spoke of in “On Fairy-stories”. One of the best techniques to create distance and connection is invented language and Frank Herbert’s masterpiece novel “Dune” is a prime example of the use of invented language in worldbuilding.

Herbert creates a vast number of new words, reapplies existing words to new concepts and otherwise uses invented language to create the experience of encountering a very different world, one that is a great distance in time, space and culture from us, yet still recognizably connected to our world. This takes place externally between the audience and the novel, but also happens internally as Paul Atreides finds himself within the very alien culture of the Fremen.

This presentation will examine how Herbert uses invented language to create the Imperial and Fremen settings within "Dune". It will look at how Herbert uses neologisms, neosemisms, dialectal extrapolation and other forms of invented language to portray both connection and distance through the languages of the Imperium and the Fremen.

Trevor Brierly works as a software engineer in Northern Virginia, USA. He has a BA in English from George Mason University and an MLIS from University of Texas, Austin.

Creative Presentations (2:00 – 3:30 pm)

Main Room

Love Not Too Well the Work of Thy Hands: Painting "The Fall of Gondolin" – *Brian Burgess*

I request the opportunity to deliver a short presentation on my process of painting a visual interpretation of a section from "The Fall of Gondolin" by J.R.R. Tolkien in which the dragons of Morgoth lay siege to the doomed city. This presentation will follow a format similar to the one I gave to art students at a local community college a few years ago (available on request). My primary motivation to make this presentation is to repay, in some way, the benefit I received (and still receive) from listening to the podcasts published by Professor Olsen during his lecture series on the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. These lectures helped inspire many of my Middle-Earth based paintings.

Brian Burgess is a 2014 graduate of the Hartford Art School MFA in Illustration program and currently works as a graphic artist for the Department of Defense. In his free time, he enjoys painting and playing guitar.

How to Draw Your Dragon: An Interactive Foray into Visualizing a Creature of Myth – *Emily Austin*

Dragons are a common subject for artists working in folklore and fantasy tradition, but, as with other mythical beasts, a sorry lack of live models means that there are particular challenges accompanying the task of bringing them to visual life. This workshop will begin with a presentation exploring common physical traits found in many images of dragons, along with the primary-world creatures who often serve as sources for anatomy and personality. Next, participants will be invited to use this knowledge to sketch out some unique dragons of their own, using provided art materials and image references. No prior drawing experience necessary! Come ready to have fun, experiment, and enjoy the creativity which we will all generate together.

Emily Austin is a Signum MA student and a visual artist working in watercolor and other media. In college, Emily was struck by how frequently people misheard her major of 'Drawing and Painting' as 'Dragon Painting,' and she's been trying to live up to that originally-undeserved reputation as her artistic career progresses.

Breakout Room 1

Original Story, a Reading from *The StoryKeeper's Tale – Sparrow Alden*

"The Storykeeper's Tale" A typical soccer mom librarian starts seeing things that no one else can. For relief of her hallucinations, she tries a number of different therapies. Finally, she consults a shaman from the dodgy side of town who treats these visions as real. This gentle paranormal suburban fantasy introduces a character whom free-floating stories recognize as someone who will curate and tell them.

Rolling up a dragon in Adventures in Middle-earth – Jacob Rodgers

When Cubicle 7 released *The One Ring*, Jacob began to champion the game in any way he could come up with and was fortunate enough to worm his way to the inside track. When the chance arose to help even more people roleplay in Middle-earth by using the OGL rules, he jumped at that opportunity as well. Jacob believes that *Adventures in Middle-earth* presents everything wonderful about *The One Ring* in an easily accessible format.

He's excited to talk to the folks of Mythmoot about the history of Tolkien's influence on roleplaying games and to teach people how to make Dragons in *The One Ring* and *Adventures in Middle-earth*. No prior experience with the game systems are needed.

Jacob Rodgers works for Cubicle 7, doing writing and development work for *The One Ring Roleplaying Game* and *Adventures in Middle-earth*.

His history with Middle-earth and roleplaying games extends for decades, with the very first game he ever bought being the first edition boxed set for *Middle-earth Role Playing*. He promptly roped all his friends into playing and tried to recreate the Quest of the Ring in a roleplaying format. It failed miserably. But it was a stepping stone to many more great adventures in Middle-earth and beyond for many years.

Breakout Room 2

The Silmarillion Film Project Workshop – Nick Palazzo

The Silmarillion Film Project, spearheaded by Professor Corey Olsen, Trish Lambert, and Dave Kale, has completed its third season of its theoretical adaptation of Tolkien's Silmarillion to the screen in the form of a long-running TV drama. We have met the Ainur and watched them shape Arda, while engaged in conflict with their nemesis, Melkor. We have met the Elves, journeyed with them through Middle Earth to Valinor, and seen the Bliss of Aman plunged into Darkness by Melkor, and his temperamental ally, Ungoliant. We have seen the development of civilization amongst the Sindarin Elves under the guidance of Thingol and his Maiar Queen, Melian. We have seen the Rebellion of the Noldor, and their Flight to Middle Earth. We have seen Feanor's descent into obsession and madness, and his death at the hands of Melkor's balrogs.

Now, we call for aid. Presented with our outlines, you will band together to choose a scene which you would like to flesh out into an actual script with dialogue. This experiment will give you some

insights into what the SilmFilm Project is about, and hopefully, encourage everyone to engage with the text at a deeper level than even a close reading provides.

The Silmarillion Film Project Reading – *Nick Palazzo*

A dramatic reading of scripted scenes for the Silmarillion Film Project, to be performed by volunteers. Scenes will be those generated as part of a workshop earlier in the day, and/or by the SilmFilm Project's script team.

Nick Palazzo has been a member of the Silmarillion Film Project since the beginning of Season 1, and joined by Marie Prosser, Karita Alexander, Brian Fattorini and others, has worked to create script outlines for the individual episodes. They have thus far outlined thirty-nine episodes through hundreds of hours of roundtable discussion, and pages and pages on the Signum University Forums.