



RECORD OF MY TRIP TO ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO FOR MYTHCON 42 - THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE MYTHOPOEIC SOCIETY - JULY 15 THROUGH 18, 2011

I set out for Mythcon 2011 in Albuquerque, traveling by train. I posted about the initial train trip on the ScribblerWorks News, but then didn't follow up with the rest of the excursion. So I decided to make this little document, to post on my website.

I arrived in Albuquerque just before noon, which meant that I did not get a lunch on the train. I had breakfasted at 6:30, as soon as the dining car had opened (on very nice French toast, actually).

I had brought The Creature from the Black Lagoon with me on the trip for the fun of it. I figured that it would amuse me to take pictures of him with various participants during Mythcon. And this proved to be very effective. But for the start, I took a picture of him with the Chef's Salad I ordered from room service after checking in. I was very impressed by the size of the salad.



On Facebook I gave this picture the following caption –

The Creature was upset that after spending almost 24 hours in bubble wrap the first thing he finds on emerging is that I'd ordered room service for myself. Sorry pal, but I'd had breakfast at 6:30, and I was hungry.

After I had relaxed for a couple of hours, it occurred to me that other Mythies had probably arrived as well. Since the hotel gave complimentary drink coupons to the guests, I figured I might find the others in the lounge. And I did. I also figured that since my body was still feeling the effects of the train-ride, I could use a muscle relaxant. So I ordered myself a Lemondrop Martini.



In the background of that shot are Lee Speth and Harrold Harrigan. The rest of the amiable company —



Janet Croft and Lynn Maudlin. I happened to catch Lynn just as she was starting to respond to something someone else was saying.



Indeed, I think Lynn was reacting to something David Oberhelman had said. He was seated to my right, with Lisa Harrigan.



David Bratman joined the Lounge crew.

The Speths (Lee and Dolores) also enjoyed the comraderie.

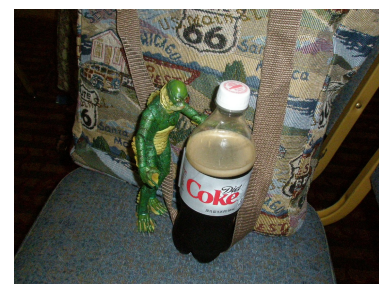


Hannah Thomas and Karla Powell arrived a bit later, and also joined the company. But they really were “just arrived” and bailed to get some rest.



The hotel only served Pepsi products, and that was what was in the vending machines. The Creature (and I, of course) considered this the “Wrong Cola.”

Happily, the next day, I learned that the gift shop had Diet Coke for sale. Expensive, yes, but after all, it is “The Real Thing.” The Creature expressed his approval of this development.





The next day, programming began in mid-afternoon. I had gotten caught up in a conversation and so arrived late to hear the first paper I'd meant to attend. "Dante and Spawn: How *Inferno* has influenced the Modern Comic Industry," given by Kyle Smith. From what I did hear, it sounded like he'd done a good job considering the issue, and I wish I'd heard the whole thing.

Following that, I listened to Alejandra Pires give her paper, "An Active Imagination: The Irrational Identity in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*." This was an intriguing offering, as the Russian work apparently had an influence on George Orwell's *1984* (Orwell apparently had noted reading the book).

After a short break, I moved on to hear Karla's presentation.



Karla was the first of my friends to let me take a picture of them with The Creature. I had humorously captioned this one –

"The Creature reminds Karla Powell that the title of her paper is right there on the first page."

What I quickly realized is that I would get some very nice photographs of my friends, by letting them react to or interact with The Creature.

Anyway, Karla's paper, "Indigneous Fostering: Tolkien and Alaska Natives," intrigued me, since I had included fosterage of a sort in my own fantasy novel. She made a good thorough discussion of the matter, and gave me some food for thought. Which is always one of the pleasures of Mythcon.

After Karla's paper, I listened to Sara Rivera's "Human or Divine? Tolkien and the Hypostatic Union of Christ." She had certainly bit off a large chunk to deliver, but I think she did a good job. It certainly raised some issues about how to regard Tolkien's Elves and Valar.

After her paper, I was faced by the common Mythcon dilemma of "What to attend next?" There is always going to be at least one conflict in the course of the weekend, where one's interests are pulled in two directions. At this point, there was the panel "Impact of Modern Myth on Society" - a topic I am very interested in. After all, I have written a book on mythic motifs for writers, which discusses mythic patterns in modern stories. Opposite it was Hannah Thomas' paper on ... yes, the *Twilight* Saga.



Hannah also was a good sport about sharing a photograph with The Creature. She was a bit nervous about her paper, but she needn't have been.

I've always been impressed by the clear, powerful thinking that Hannah brings to her analysis of topics, and she did another fine job with this one. "More than Adolescent Emotional Self-Gratification? Why *Twilight* has 'Captivated' Mature Women Too" - this was the title of her paper. She

began with a legitimate consideration of the fact that since there seemed to be a consistent response to the Saga among a segment of mature women, some consideration of the factors that lead to this deserves to be made. The *why* of the appeal that certain aspects of popular culture is something that does not always get analysed. I enjoyed her paper.

Then came the dinner break. So I will take this moment to insert a few of the random photos I took during the conference.



David Bratman amiably tolerated my taking this silly picture. I told him that The Creature was complimenting him on the music reviews he writes and posts on LiveJournal. Lynn, however, was swallowing her laughter at David's response to The Creature.

One of the members of the Conference Committee happened to possess a statue of Gollum from the Peter Jackson films, and they placed him out in the registration area for the amusement of the attendees.



Bruce Leonard posed with Gollum, pretending to feed Gollum a morsel. One would assume *lembas*, even though all good Tolkien readers (of which Bruce is indeed one) know that Gollum can't eat such.

Tim Callahan's response to meeting Gollum was to attempt to imitate the statue's pose. Not an easy thing to get that flat-footed approach. Gollum looks a bit dubious about this process.



With all this posing going on, I had to get a picture of The Creature with Gollum.



Dinner was, of course, filled with delighted conversation. And then there were a handful of folks who once again took advantage of the complimentary coupons for drinks in the Lounge, prior to further events.



There was a reception after dinner, and some general milling about. And then at 9 p.m., a clutch of attendees gathered in the hotel lobby to be conveyed to a nearby multiplex to see the 10:20 showing of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*. Once at the theater, there was a little bit of confusion in getting folks to sit together (we waited a bit long to go into the actual screen, with the result that it was pretty much filled up in the middle). Even so, it was fun to be sitting with a couple of friends while watching the wind-up of the Harry Potter Saga. Those of us who attended the screening came away satisfied, but it was about 1 a.m. by the time we were conveyed back to the hotel.

The morning began with some confusion as to where the attendees would assemble for the traditional Procession. This year, I didn't worry myself about that so much, as I was still finishing my breakfast while they processed. But once fed, I got myself into the main room, for Michael Drout's Scholar Guest of Honor presentation.



I had become intrigued by Dr. Drout a few years ago, when his work won the Mythopoeic Scholarship Award. The fact that *Beowulf* (and other Anglo-Saxon studies) was as important to him as Tolkien certainly appealed to me, given that I had done my Masters thesis on *Beowulf*. So I was definitely delighted that he began his speech with a rousing rendition of the opening lines of the Anglo-Saxon poem. It became quite evident during the course of his presentation that he not only had a lively sense of humor, but that

he also approached his scholarly subjects with a joy and delight that was entirely infectious.



I wanted very much to talk with him at further length after his speech, but programming was calling to me. The panel "History of the Mythopoeic Society: Reminiscences and Archival Planning" did have its appeal, but I was on a definite Tolkien kick for the weekend, and so Harley Sims' "'The dragon wields a physical fire...': Tolkien, *Beowulf*, and Imaginative Reality" won out.



From Harley's paper, I dashed to the luncheon area, as I had arranged to sit with Michael, to continue our casual discussion of *Beowulf* studies.

He very patiently let me inflict The Creature on him, as well, which gives him high points as a Good Sport in my book.

I captioned this picture –  
“The Creature discusses his cousin Grendel with Professor Drout.”

I admitted that I have not kept up with *Beowulf* scholarship since I completed my Masters degree ... um, some time ago. But I recounted how while doing some research a few years ago at *Jeopardy!* I had checked the *Britannica* article on the Anglo-Saxon poem and found that many of the terms and outlooks I had developed for my thesis had now become the standard interpretation. This has intrigued me (though not so much as to do really deep digging), since I've wondered whether somehow my thesis got read at a crucial influential point, or whether I was simply prescient, since none of my points were standard at the time I wrote the thesis. He didn't know for sure either, but it made for an interesting conversation.



He was not the only outstanding scholar at the conference, of course. It is always a pleasure when Verlyn Flieger makes it to Mythcon.

She humored me in letting me take this picture, wherein I said that The Creature was expressing his adulation of her.

She certainly unnerved a few of the other presenters of Tolkien papers, for she has a way of going at details that can be unsettling. I observed to someone else that she is a very meticulous and precise scholar. When I repeated that to her, she seemed pleased with the description.



For me, Sam McBride led off the afternoon session, beating out the panel on Monsters. I did miss part of Sam's paper, "May the Valar turn him aside!': Metaphysical Presence in *The Lord of the Rings*." I did like what he had to say in what I heard, and I'm hoping this sees print in *Mythlore* because I want to mull over his observations some more. Again, these issues are pertinent to my own fiction.

I faced another occasion of "Decisions! Decisions!" for the next programming slot. David Bratman was presenting "Roger Zelazny, Mythopoeic in the High Desert," and as someone who has enjoyed Zelazny's work (and in fact referenced it myself in the paper I gave at last year's Mythcon) I was intrigued. But gain, the call of Tolkien analysis called to me, since Doug Kane was giving a paper titled "Laws and Customs of the Peoples of Middle-earth, Numenor and Beyond." (He also beat out the Writers' Track panel on "World Creation" which appealed to me, but not enough to skip Doug's paper.)



Doug brought a lawyer's background to his presentation, which cast some interesting lights on aspects of Tolkien's *legendarium*. It made for a fresh take on some things.



The highlight of the afternoon was for me Verlyn's paper, "The Jewels, The Stone, The Ring and the Making of Meaning" - a Tolkien topic, of course. She made a very thorough survey of the presentation of the Silmarils in Tolkien's work, considering how they were made, from what materials, how they were regarded, and the actual effect they had on people that encountered and/or possessed them. She raised the very interesting question of how things which Tolkien took great pains to identify as objects of light

could be the cause of so much metaphorical darkness and death. It was quite a challenging presentation, and one I want to give more thought to (again, something I'm looking forward to seeing in print one way or another).



The last afternoon session for me was Don Williams' paper. For the last three years, he has been working on a major consideration of aspects of C.S. Lewis' work, and this year he got to part three: "A Tryst with the Transcendentals: C.S. Lewis on Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, Part III: Goodness." Don is always thoughtful and insightful in his analyses, and so I appreciated hearing his finale to this particular endeavor.



Dinner and some more relaxing followed this brain-intensive day.



After dinner, there was some casual hanging out one one sub-lobby. Since Janet Croft was one of those in this group, this led to the historic encounter between The Creature and Janet's Thor. "Historically," Janet had found the Thor figure by chance and had started taking pictures of him at her work place, posting them on Facebook with humorous captions. Her series of pictures had inspired me to take pictures of The Creature rummaging around my desk and chastising me for procrastination. So we had

agreed that these two mythic figures ought to meet at Mythcon. I captioned this shot as "The Creature acknowledges that Thor is a god."

However, The Creature did not end his evening with that. Erik Rauscher's feet were a great temptation, and so I posed this shot, titled "The Creature massages Erik's feet." I'd intended that he not actually be touching the feet, but the way Erik carried on verbally, apparently there must have been a little bit of contact. Still, he held still for the picture, and that's what counted.



The evening Plenary Session from Marta Weigle, covered a lot of folklore and factlore about female figures in New Mexico lore. It was an unexpected topic, but interesting nonetheless.



I'd stayed up chatting in the Con Hospitality Suite on Saturday night, so it took a bit of a push to get myself rolling on Sunday morning. As it was, I got down to breakfast on the late side, and was still finishing getting nourishment into me when programming began. Thus it was that I missed the first part of the panel of short papers, "Opening *The Silmarillion*" moderated by Corey Olsen.

(In picture, left to right: Corey Olsen, Jason Jewell, Jordon Brown, Laura Berkholtz)



What I entered on was Laura finishing a discussion of Nienna, which of itself made me deeply regret missing the whole of it, since that Vala is only rarely discussed. Jordon's paper dealt with Feanor and Pride, primarily the effect of Feanor's Oath on himself and his sons. Very well thought out. Jason's paper dealt with Aule and the creator of the Dwarves, compared with the Biblical patriarch Abraham and his impatience with God's promise of a son. This fresh approach was very effectively argued.

Indeed, these papers provoked quite a train of thought for me, so much so that I wasn't really paying attention in the Writers Track panel on writing serial fiction.

After lunch, I went to the panel "Continued Relevance of Scholarship by the Inklings"

(In photo: Michael Drout, David Bratman (moderator), Verlyn Flieger, and Marek Oziewicz)

These four did a good job of reviewing the effects of the scholarship done by the Inklings, with Marek bringing in the scope of studies in Europe outside of Great Britain. It was actually rather lively. I could wish there were an audio recording of this panel, or a transcript of it. It was thought provoking in many ways.



After this panel came the panel I had proposed, rather mundanely titled in the program as “Fantasy Poetry.” I was the moderator, but my co-panelists were Author Guest of Honor Catherynne Valente, Joe Christopher, Don Williams and Don King. It had been inspired by some email discussions Don Williams and I had had about poetry in general, and since I knew that Cat had written fantasy poetry, it seemed like a suitable topic for this Mythcon. Happily, we even had an audience that outnumbered the panelists.

In part, we discussed the impulse to write poetry versus prose, a fairly standard “Defense of Poetry” sort of point. But I had also wanted to leave time for each panelist to read some poetry. Which led to the highlight of this panel for me, when Cat read one of her poems, with tremendous dramatic effect. The rest of the panel is sort of wiped from my memory, the pleasure of her reading being so high.

Coming out of that, the rest of the afternoon sort of swam by me. I know I sat in on the Artists’ Track panel “Paint, Exhibits, Film: Other Ways to Make a Living as a Fantasy Artist”. There were some interesting points to it, but they just haven’t registered on my brain. I’m not even sure I made it to the last panel of the day, though it’s marked on my schedule (Writers Track: “Pitching Ideas to Publishers, Agents, Readers, and Everyone Else.”). But then, after all, we were looking forward to the Banquet, the Awards, Catherynne’s Guest of Honor speech, and the Not Ready for Mythcon Players.

One of the playful elements of the Banquet is the inevitable Food Sculptures that result. What began years ago as a prank has become a tradition. I didn’t capture pictures of every offering this year. But the following were notable.



Catherynne Valente’s (revolutionary in publishing) award-winning *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland In a Ship of Her Own Making* was “immortalized” in two sculptures, but in my opinion, this was the better of the two.



A second one of Cat's works also got the Food Sculpture treatment: *In the Cities of Coin and Spice*.

Yes, not quite as artistic, but that's not the entire point of the Food Sculptures. It's more about what you can express with what is present on the Banquet table and plates (or your pockets, as the coins indicate). All in fun.



In honor of our Scholar Guest of Honor, this concoction was presented as "The Monster and the Croutons" (referencing Tolkien's "The Monsters and the Critics" essay on *Beowulf*).

Well, yes, that is another element of the Food Sculptures – bad puns.

Once the ceremonial silliness of the Food Sculptures (which get paraded from table to table) was completed, we settled in for the more serious ceremonies of the evening.

The Society Awards were given. The new award to best paper from a student scholar had been named for Society Founder Glen GoodKnight, and was bestowed first. That was a pleasing thing, since Glen felt it very important that the Society foster rising scholars.

After that came the book awards, the highlight of which was actually the presentation to Marek Oziewicz with the Aslan he had won last year. Marek had traveled from Poland this year, and he spoke of how the works of the Inklings had inspired him as a teen under the oppressive Communist regime. His father, who had been a member of the Solidarity movement, had made the trip to Albuquerque from Mexico to be with Marek for this evening. It was a very moving moment.





After the scholarship awards, the fiction awards were presented. Author Guest of Honor Catherynne Valente helped present these.



And then Cat herself gave her Guest of Honor speech. (The text of the speech can be found on the Mythopoeic Society's website and on Cat's own blog.) She is a wonderfully evocative writer, who weaves a poetry of expression into her prose. And since she is a wonderful reader of her own words, the whole experience is a great pleasure. She had been a delightful Guest of Honor, and everyone was pleased that she had enjoyed herself so much that she intends to attend Mythcon again in the future.

The "dessert" of the evening was, of course, the Not Ready for Mythcon Players. We did have a masquerade this year, with a nice handful of offerings - but my pictures of the participants are not very good shots, alas. I'm not sure that it is ever possible to accurately report just what went on in a Not Ready production - you very often "had to have been there." This year's offering had many elements tossed in, so these pictures only reflect highlight moments.



There were Zombies. I forget the special qualities these possessed, but they were Zombies.

(Erik and Autumn Rauscher, and the daughters of another attendee, who had participated in the masquerade prior to the Not Ready performance.)



The “fascinators” seen at the Royal Wedding earlier in the year met with spooferie from the Not Ready Players.



The most “successful” of the Not Ready fascinators was Lynn Maudlin’s. Which, if she had refrained from telling us what it was would have simply been unusual and curious. (It was one of her bras.)

There remained the Monday morning sessions. Getting started after such an evening is a challenge, but there are often gems in the Monday schedule. I did rather peter out in the photo-taking, alas.

First after breakfast was Brian Melton's paper: "From Beruna to the Lonely Mountain: A Comparison of Wartime Themes in *Narnia* and *The Hobbit*." Brian, a former student of Donald Williams, first attended Mythcon last year and gave an insightful paper on the effect of their wartime experiences on the writing of Lewis and Tolkien. He's a military historian, and like Doug Kane and his legal background, he brings a fresh eye to Inklings scholarship. He does a good job in explicating where the personal war experiences show through the authors' writings.

Last up, for me, before the Members Meeting and Closing Ceremonies, was Joe Christopher's paper: "C.S. Lewis's Problem with 'The Franklin's Tale'". By this point, my brain was beginning to boggle, but I tried to stick it out. The gist was a case study of intellectual avoidance on Lewis' part, and I wished I could have been more focused for what Joe had to say. As it is, this is another of those papers on my "now I want to read it" list.

The Members Meeting went rather speedily as things seem to be running fairly smoothly for the Society. The electronic version of *Mythprint* has been well received, but the issues of what to do for those subscribers who still desire hard copy were discussed. The formal announcement of next year's Mythcon, to be held in Berkeley, was made. And this was when Catherynne Valente expressed her attention to "come again." There followed the usual wind-down of singing the "Chorea Magna", "The Baby and the Bird" and of course, "The Drunken Hobbit."

People began dispersing quickly after that. Off to catch their flights (or in my case, train), to find their ways home. Weigh hey, the Mythcon's over.

(Margaret Dean, a friend I made at my very first Mythcon, has a parting exchange with The Creature, before I bundled him up in his protective travel bubble-wrap.)

By Sarah Beach  
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