

## Call for Papers

# Defying Death: Immortality and Rebirth in the Fantastic

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*“The doom of elves is to be immortal, [...] the doom of men is mortality.”*

—The Silmarillion

In fantasy and science fiction, death, immortality and rebirth are topics that feature frequently, elucidating that the loss of life and the questions of how it might be prevented or reversed are at the centre of human concern. These questions also constitute an essential focal point of the works of the Oxford Inklings, particularly Tolkien and Lewis. They created places of immortality, such as Valinor, also known as the undying lands in Tolkien’s legendarium, or Aslan’s Country in Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, wrote about the struggles of immortal beings amongst mortals in the fight of good versus evil, and frequently introduced ideas of resurrection or rebirth (the White Tree of Gondor, Gandalf the White, Aslan, the multitude of worlds in *The Magician’s Nephew*) and the neither living nor dead (The Nazgul, The (un-)Dead Men of Dunharrow) in their works.

Yet, the Oxford Inklings were by far not the only ones concerned with such themes. An interest in ancient belief systems, alchemy, theosophy, and science informed a broader literary fascination with immortality and rebirth, particularly in 19th and early 20th century fantasy and science fiction, with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* or Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Ring of Thoth” being prime examples.

Issues of life and death, immortality and rebirth remained a persistent concern in the later 20th century, especially in the aftermath of the two world wars, and continue to fascinate us in the 21st century. In the fantastical imagination, texts in all media, such as *The Sandman*, *Good Omens*, *The Expanse*, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Harry Potter*, *Hologrammatica*, *Altered Carbon*, or the *Maddaddam* Trilogy, to name just a few examples, all explore the idea of what a world might look like in which human and/or non-human beings experience immortality, or versions of it, thereby addressing questions of what constitutes the human soul, individuality, and the significance of existence beyond a single lifetime.

2023 marks the anniversary of the death of J. R.R. Tolkien (50) and C.S. Lewis (60) as well as the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the German Inklings-Society. We take these anniversaries as a cue to discuss the intersection of death, rebirth, and immortality in our symposium.

We invite contributions investigating how these topics are represented in the mode of the fantastic beyond the limitations of realism, including but not limited to the following possible topics:

- death as a character
- psychopomps
- (dis)advantages of immortality
- the pursuit of immortality
- art and immortality
- elixirs of life
- life-extending instruments and measures
- metaphorical or literal rebirth
- rebirth as new beginning or redemption
- afterlives and underworlds
- ethical, philosophical and religious perspectives
- circle(s) of life
- (ab)use of power
- new perspectives on death, immortality, and rebirth in Tolkien's and Lewis's works in particular

Please send proposals (300–500 words, either in German or English) as well as a short bio to [carsten.kullmann@ovgu.de](mailto:carsten.kullmann@ovgu.de) or [maria.fleischhack@uni-leipzig.de](mailto:maria.fleischhack@uni-leipzig.de). Please use the subject line “Inklings Symposium 2023”. The deadline is **28 February 2023**. Presentations at the symposium should be 20 minutes long and a selection of them will be published in the Inklings Yearbook.

**Location:** Otto-von-Guericke-University Magdeburg

**Date:** 29 April to 1 May 2023\*

**Travel Allowance:** There will be a small allowance available to speakers for accommodation and travel expenses.

**Organisers:** Carsten Kullmann, M.A. (Magdeburg)  
Dr. Maria Fleischhack (Leipzig)

For more information, please visit the conference website: [inklings.ovgu.de](http://inklings.ovgu.de).

\* In order to best avoid scheduling conflicts with the Leipzig Book Fair (27 to 30 April 2023), we plan for the majority of the academic programme to take place on 30 April and 1 May.