

Hignutt's *Sword Penetrates Deeply* [book review]

By Erin Swenson

Moonsword, by Diana Hignutt. (PublishAmerica, Inc, 2002, paperback, \$21.95)

I have always particularly enjoyed the ways that fantasy and science fiction are able to illuminate the truth. Perhaps that is why, as a minister, I am not particularly put off by arguments that much of scripture is the record of ancient “oral tradition”—stories passed from generation to generation over campfires. These stories often tell more about us and the nature of our lives than cold hard facts could ever express. Diana Hignutt's first novel, *Moonsword*, is just such a fantasy, one that penetrates to the heart of transgender truth.

It's a druidic tale set in Middle Earth. Our hero, Tolian, is prince of the Kingdom of Lorm, and is on his way with his trusted friend and servant, Delorick, for a hunting trip to a distant wood when they are attacked and severely injured by a troll. With Delorick critically wounded in the battle Tolian ignores his own injuries to set out for help. He believes he is rescued by the druid priestess Brythia, but soon finds that the druids have actually kidnapped him. They have identified Tolian as the Champion, the chosen one to save the world from total destruction by a demon that has entered the world in the form of a human. In spite of himself and his predicament Tolian falls in love with the beautiful Brythia, who returns his love even though she knows his fate. It seems that the druidic prophecy that described the champion also said that this savior of the world could “not be male, nor born female.” So this order of druid priestesses has for many years been practicing a special ritual that will change the champion from a male into a female, thereby fulfilling the requirements of the prophecy. When he learns of this, Tolian, who is deeply in love with Brythia, finds himself in a terribly awkward predicament. Tolian cannot fathom himself becoming a woman. Not only would it destroy his relationship with Brythia, it would also remove him from succession to his father's throne as King of Lorm. On the other hand, if he refuses, the world and his beloved will surely be destroyed by the evil one.

Many of us who struggle through years of pain about our real nature feel like Tolian, the dread of becoming the other gender causing extreme anxiety which inspires all sorts of bargaining in an attempt to avoid it. There are still many “psychotherapists” who make large sums of money, sometimes as much as \$300 an hour, with the promise of a cure. It seems we would do anything to avoid the terror of changing gender, some of us even choosing suicide as an acceptable alternative. If we are lucky, and determined, we can finally become able to accept who we really are and find ways to live joyfully and creatively with our reality.

This is the stuff of the wonderful fantasy of the *Moonsword* crafted for us by Diana Hignutt. The story is full of twists and turns that captivate the reader. Anyone who likes science fiction or fantasy will enjoy *Moonsword*. Those readers who happen to understand transgender experience from the inside out will find here a mythic tale that penetrates the mystery and the truth of being differently gendered.