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MYTHCON 43 CONFERENCE REPORTS

The Monthly Bulletin of the Mythopoeic Society
VOL. 49 NO. 8 AUGUST 2012 WHOLE NO. 361

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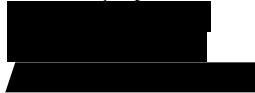
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Cover Art: *East Meets West*, by Kevin Farrell.
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Deadlines for receiving material for each issue of *Mythprint* are the 1st of the preceding month.

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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 discussion groups.

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Angry Birds Wanted My Pillow

By Berni Phillips Bratman

Mythcon 43, returning to beautiful and cool Clark Kerr Conference Center at UC Berkeley, was a hoot and a half. The food may not have been as good as in previous years, but the company continued to be stellar.

Friday night's entertainment was local professional medievalists Broceliande, trying their best to accommodate our East-meets-West theme. They play so well and are so interesting, we didn't care if they stretched the definition of



“East” to include Scandinavia. That's Margaret Davis on flute (with her harp standing by), Kristoph Klover on guitar, and Kris Yenny on her unusual bowed Swedish fiddle. In the case on the floor to her right is the Persian instrument she also played. Persia is definitely East of Sweden, as I recall, so that's topical.

After the concert there was the Stewards' Reception in the hospitality lounge. This was a little too crowded for me to stay long, but I was pleased that the silly Chocovine (Dutch chocolate in red wine) which I had brought had been opened and was being shared.

Following breakfast on Saturday morning, we gathered in the courtyard for the procession. Berkeley is about the only place cool enough to wear the costume I made for my first Mythcon in 1988 (right). Many others appeared in costume or academic



regalia as well.

The procession was a bit of a gallop with the Big Cheese, Eric Rauscher leading. (That's what the ribbon on Eric's badge said: Big Cheese.) We went down the stairs instead of the ramps, leading me to fear that the folks in wheelchairs would be going bumpety-bump-bump in our wake. Fortunately they were all sensible ladies and made it to the Krutch Theater without incident.

Fr. Murphy (in his academic robes — he said it was the first time he had given a lecture in his robes) gave a very interesting talk on the topic of his upcoming book on stave churches. This was followed by the first of a series of East meets West panels, all of which were good.

I'm not much of a film buff, but I was curious about one of the offerings of Mad Doctor Smith's Video Laboratory. It was a WWII propaganda film from Japan. It was short, so I thought I would watch it. It was strangely cute and disturbing at the same time. It was a cartoon celebrating the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Cute little bunnies used their ears as semaphores, sending out planes for the sneak attack. American sailors were shown as demons — Or perhaps unicorns — they all had a single horn on the top of their head — with their leader bearing a remarkable resemblance to Bluto from Popeye. The Japanese cartoon characters cavorted and frolicked as they dropped their payloads of bombs. There was much rejoicing on their return after the ships slowly sank to the tune of “Aloha, Oi.” It was the stuff of nightmares.

The one program item I was on was the discussion of the finalists for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Awards. My qualifications for this are being on both the adult's and children's committees. Plus I'm married to the guy who was in charge of programming. The discussion was not well-attended, but it was lively. Some of us had very decided opinions about the books. I like these discussions because you can find out which books are polarizing — the ones people either love or hate.



You can't write a Mythcon report without mentioning the food sculptures. Our table was mostly se-

date, Lynn Maudlin having retired from the field of edible art. We merely witnessed the presentations of others. Some of them were too obvious: *Ash* from Malinda Lo's first novel, a finalist for the MFA (above left).

Fr. Murphy's speech had captivated many folks. The primary inspiration for food sculpture seemed to be Yggdrasil (one of which is shown below).



My favorite combined references to both guests of honor. Here we have an owl for Fr. Murphy's *The Owl, the Raven, and the Dove*. This is paired with a bow for Malinda Lo's huntress (below).



The programming and papers are always enlightening, but it's the other stuff we mostly come to Mythcon for. Sunday night was busy for me. David Bratman had put together a Reader's Theater production of a Lord Dunsany play, "The Queen's Enemies." If you've never heard of that, there's a reason for it. It's not very good (in my decidedly non-scholarly opinion). It's set in Egypt but you wouldn't know it from the dialogue. Bonnie Rauscher played the Queen, a most fair and illustrious lady who sweetly plots to kill her enemies and succeeds. I played her minion.

Sarah Goodman had instructed all of us in the play (about half a dozen) to stop by her room some time Friday or Saturday so she could try stuff on us. I thought she would have things like scarves and jewelry. No. She had entire costumes — things that were just in her closet which she pulled out to bring to Mythcon. She was able to costume the entire cast! Of course, she accomplished this somewhat by death threats. I was unfortunate enough to have to deliver a death threat to one of my favorite authors, Sherwood Smith. I begged her to connect with Sarah so I could continue to read her books.

I had to make a quick change after the Dunsany play because I don't think the masquerade happened this year. No one had signed up. I didn't want to wear Sarah's lovely gown for the Not Ready skit. As we were not ready, I did not know that I would be falling down dead, shot by an angry bird.

I was cast — some would say typecast — as a pig. We pigs had been instructed to bring pillows. These pillows represented the eggs which we had stolen from the Angry Birds. (These Angry Birds were the Owl, Raven, and Dove, from Fr. Murphy's first Mythopoeic Scholarship Award-winning book.) The Angry Birds were launched at us. I was to fall down dead in the second wave of attacks. Then we were told to go backstage and become a dragon. I'm not sure how that transition happened: from pig to dragon part. As a dragon, or the Wyrn Oogabooga, we wound around Yggdrasil. I believe we were finally shot dead by arrows of Malinda Lo's

Huntress. The script was by Eleanor Farrell and Dr. Emily Rauscher, who you'd think, being a Ph.D. and all, would know better.

Golfimbul was played after that. Bonnie Calahan had decorated a new goblin's head this year and it was whacked with glee. As often happens, a first-time Golfimbul player won one of the gold medals: Jessica Weldon, youngest daughter of Bill Weldon and Jo Wilcox. This being an Olympic year, the awards presentation at closing ceremonies was conducted with kazoos playing the theme song for the Olympics.

See you all next year in Michigan. ≡



Mythcon 43 Report: Laeta in Chorea Magna

By Laura Smith

By chance — if chance you call it — I was taking my first-ever graduate level literature course online this spring at the newly minted Mythgard Institute. The course was called “The Making of Myth: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien,” and our final paper just happened to be due around the same time as the abstracts for presentations at Mythcon 43. Our professor, Dr. Corey Olsen, directed our attention to this fact, and a few of us took the plunge.

To my great surprise - and no slight trepidation — my paper was among those selected. And thus began my first encounter with the Mythopoeic Society and the wonderful world of Mythcon.

The People

I'd never been to an academic conference before, or even a science fiction convention, so I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. On the evidence presented, however, Mythcon seems to offer the best of both worlds. People were down-to-earth, lively, friendly and encouraging, and it was particularly interesting (as a newbie) to talk to those

who have been members of the Society since before the invention of Mythcon.

The Guests of Honor

Father Ron Murphy proved a very engaging speaker. He talked about how the Christian myth was successfully translated and adapted to accommodate the pre-existing Norse myths. He contrasted one missionary's rather high-handed and deeply offensive approach (“Those heathens worship a tree? Cut it down!!”) with a more nuanced approach that started from a real appreciation of the salvation myth of the tree Yggdrasil. He showed us how the nuanced, synergistic approach of more astute missionaries affected the architecture and designs of churches in the area — and how these designs have been routinely misinterpreted because people tend to “read in” Mediterranean ideas and imagery. An ironic illustration, perhaps, of Thorin's observation that “there's nothing like looking, if you want to find something.”

Author Malinda Lo spoke about her professional journey, and it is hard to do justice to the story without retelling it in full. Suffice it to say that in a very natural manner, she wove in personal observations about cultural clashes: not merely East versus West, but also the more subtle inter-generational dissonances between first- and second-generation Americans. She discussed certain issues (or non-issues) regarding gender and sexual orientation in her fiction. And she talked about the hurdles of self-doubt and procrastination. Of course, in her case, what I am calling “procrastination” resulted in (among other things) master's degrees from Harvard and Stanford University.

The Papers

My priority in scheduling was to make sure I attended all the papers my fellow Mythgard students were presenting, but I also managed to go to a few others as well. Topics ranged from the orientalism of Lord Dunsany, to issues in trans-

lating Hobbit names into Japanese, to Tolkien's "foolhardy" penchant for obscure puns on the etymology of his own name, and beyond. I also really liked the narrated slideshow of eastern and western dragons.

There was often lively discussion - particularly when the presenters talked Tolkien - but the audience could not have been more supportive. I felt really good about the experience of presenting a paper at Mythcon and highly recommend it to others.

The Entertainment

There were concerts and movies every night, along with plenty of opportunities for socializing throughout the weekend. Among the highlights for me:

From the film series, I found "Momotaro's Sea Eagles" (Japan 1942) especially intriguing. Our host described it as an animated wartime propaganda film "in which the Peach Boy from Japanese folklore makes a surprise attack on Demon Island." It is a positive spin on the attack on Pearl Harbor from a Japanese perspective — the bombers are cute little bunny rabbits, birds, and monkeys, and at least one dog, and the American victims are (at best) lumbering and stupid. Much of the action is played for laughs. Apparently, the movie was intended for children; according to the Nishikata Film Review, "the ads proclaim that the film is not only sponsored by the Naval Ministry but recommended by the Ministry of Education 'as a living textbook for your children.'"

I loved all the concerts, although out of respect for my fellow audience members I tried to keep my attempts to sing along strictly on the down low (*sottissimo voce*). My favorite was the unexpectedly interactive taiko drum concert Saturday night. At the end of the concert, the musicians invited a dozen or so mild-mannered Mythcon attendees to try a simple drum lesson. We learned a few different drumstrokes in a simple rhythm pattern, with variations. Then, with coaching from our instructor, we gave our first performance — running through all the varia-

tions backward and forward!

The Bardic Circle was scheduled only for Friday and Saturday nights, but it returned Sunday night by popular demand. Participants went around a circle to take turns reading, singing or reciting poetry or songs. It was really fun, and I've already started mentally picking out poems I'd like to share next year.

And could anyone possibly overlook the Not Ready For Mythcon Players? A short and sweet and very funny production written during the weekend and presented without rehearsal. Brilliant.

Conclusion

If online translators are to be trusted, the motto on the Mythopoeic Society banner, *Laeta in Chorea Magna*, means "great joy in the dance." I certainly hope that's correct, because it's a wonderful and very fitting motto. For we did experience great joy in the amazing dance of academia and fandom that is Mythcon. ≡



Mythcon Report — Mythcon 43

By Sarah Beach

I was ready to enjoy this year's Mythcon, no matter what, because I had actually been expecting to miss it. But things worked out for me to attend, so everything was going to be bright and shiny for me. The weather in the Bay Area was cool, which was a refreshing change for many attendees from other areas of the country. It was god to see many of the regular attendees at Mythcon, as well as the number of new attendees (especially those from other countries!).

The conference got off to a strong start on Friday. I was introduced to Asian versions of the Cinderella story and then attended Eric Rauscher's discussion of the poetry of Charles Williams. The evening entertainment came from Brocelian-

de, favorite musical performers for Bay Area Mythcons.

Father Murphy's Guest of Honor speech on Saturday gave us an intriguing look at the myths of Yggdrasil and their influences on the construction of the stave churches in northern Europe. The rest of the conference provided many fascinating papers. I seem to have gotten a lot of Narnia, Tolkien, and dragons in general. I was surprised to find a friend of mine from screenwriting circles giving a paper, but Brian Godawa's paper on Leviathan in Biblical imagery fit right in with the dragon-theme.

I did moderator duty on the "Myth meets Religion" panel, with Father Murphy, Donald Williams, Diana Paxson, and Tim Callahan as panelists. We ranged over the ways that myth affects belief and can shape religion. The panelists all brought thoughtful considerations to the discussion. And we had some interesting questions from the audience as well.

The Saturday evening highlight was a performance by Wa-



daiko Newark on taiko drums. They did a set of pieces that were most impressive. And then they gave selected attendees the chance to learn how to play the

drums. That was equally entertaining!

Sunday was more Narnia, Middle-earth, and even more dragons. The solemnities of the Sunday evening were observed with a satisfying buffet banquet (except no dessert, apparently), highlighted with the "traditional" Food Sculptures. We then moved to Krutch Theatre, where Malinda Lo charmed us with her Guest of Honor presentation. The awards presentation followed. We were then entertained by a Readers Theatre



presentation of Dunsany's *The Queen's Enemies*, led by Bonnie Rauscher charmingly playing that "Gracious Lady." After that came the Not Ready For Mythcon Players in a froth that in-

cluded: three Angry Bird-men, pigs stealing eggs, the Bird-men defeating the pigs and returning to their home tree, Yggdrasil. The roots of the tree became infested with a dragon, which brought two Huntresses on the scene. But the dragon was enticed away from the tree with a pearl. (No, don't ask me to make sense of it: at least I took notes!)



Mythcon ended all too quickly on Monday. It was a lovely time, full of great discussions. I'm ready for next year! ≡



Wandering Among the Ilk of the Inklings

By J.S. Webster

Fantasy is a genre that means many different things to many different people. For many, it means a summer action movie, a chance to escape the heat or the weight of the world. For kids it means a fabulous new world of their own to explore, perhaps not consciously realizing at first that a ripping good fantasy tale is that way because it reverberates with our own quotidian lives. Many kids and teens who adore fantasy "outgrow" the genre (or at least think they outgrow it) on their way to becoming serious adults who prefer literary novels or stop reading fiction altogether.

Then there are those of us who loved fantasy

as children and never stopped loving it as adults.

For today's young generation, that love largely took root in Harry Potter; it remains to be seen how many will retain that love into adulthood. Those in my generation cut our adolescent teeth on Tolkien, and to lesser extent, C.S. Lewis. These two authors belonged to a small circle of writers named the Inklings, and to this day their works are celebrated by the Mythopoeic Society. Earlier this month, they held their 43rd annual conference in Berkeley, just a short bike ride from my house. So as a longtime Tolkien fan I decided to attend my first conference.

I had some misgivings at first. Tolkien fans can be notoriously indulgent expressing their personal knowledge, not only of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, but of *The Silmarillion* and other secondary Tolkien works. They, as well as C.S. Lewis fans, often bind themselves spiritually to these works, incorporating them into their own pagan or Christian world views. They have a reputation for being indifferent to social norms, and frequently sport feathers, Celtic crosses, or tangled facial hair, together with capes and other medievalish gear.

I need not have feared. Yes, the conference had some folks dressed like that, but it was nothing like a Harry Potter or Star Trek con, in which many fans come fully dressed as their favorite character. No, this was far more intellectual than that. About half the proceedings were taken up by academic papers addressing various aspects of Tolkien and other fantasy writers. The conference theme was East and West, and I learned a new word: Orientalism, which is how the West has incorporated stories and culture from Asia into fantasy. Alyssa House-Thomas read a fascinating paper on how Lord Dunsany, a turn-of-the-century British writer who was a huge influence on Tolkien, both used and played against the Western projection of the East as an exotic place in which to stage fantastic tales — and in some cases rely on racial stereotypes. Other speakers explored topics such as Eastern vs. Western dragons, or whether Marco

Polo's tales were actually inventions. Finally, one of the Speakers of Honor was Malinda Lo, a Chinese American fantasy writer, who talked about how she incorporated Chinese culture into the original world she created for two of her novels, *Ash* and *Huntress*. The main characters for both these novels are also Lesbians.

This was all heartening to me, for it affirmed that one can be a Tolkien fan and still consider worldly issues like racism, cross-cultural influences, and homosexuality. There was much talk of the Other — that which is strange and foreign to us — as expressed in culture clashes of the real world as well as that between the real world and Faerie. I left the conference feeling I'd met people who were intensely creative, in some cases brilliantly intellectual, and very open to hanging out, whether they were published writers, academics, or "just" fantasy fans. No one was an Other, and we all seemed to have an inkling of what true fellowship is about. ≡

— Visit J.S. Webster at his blog —



Photos by Bonnie Callahan



2012 MYTHOPOEIC AWARD WINNERS

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature

Lisa Goldstein, *The Uncertain Places*
(Tachyon Publications)

Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children’s Literature

Delia Sherman, *The Freedom Maze*
(Big Mouth House)

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies

Carl Phelpstead, *Tolkien and Wales:
Language, Literature and Identity*
(Univ. of Wales Press, 2011)

Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies

Jack Zipes, *The Enchanted Screen:
The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*
(Routledge, 2011)

The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature is given to the fantasy novel, multi-volume, or single-author story collection for adults published during 2011 that best exemplifies “the spirit of the Inklings.” Books are eligible for two years after publication if not selected as a finalist during the first year of eligibility. Books from a series are eligible if they stand on their own; otherwise, the series becomes eligible the year its final volume appears. The Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Children’s Literature honors books for younger readers (from “Young Adults” to picture books for beginning readers), in the tradition of *The Hobbit* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Rules for eligibility are otherwise the same as for the Adult Literature award. The question of which award a borderline book is best suited for will be decided by consensus of the committees.

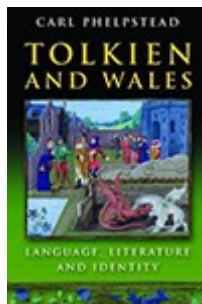
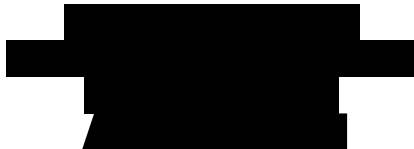
The Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Inklings Studies is given to books on Tolkien, Lewis, and/or Williams that make significant contributions to Inklings scholarship. For this award, books first published during the last three years (2009–2011) are eligible, including finalists for previous years. The Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies is given to scholarly books on other specific authors in the Inklings tradition, or to more general works on the genres of myth and fantasy. The period of eligibility is three years, as for the Inklings Studies award.

The winners of this year’s awards were announced at Mythcon XLIII in Berkeley, California, on August 5, 2012. A complete list of Mythopoeic Award winners is available on the Society web site:



The finalists for the literature awards, text of recent acceptance speeches, and selected book reviews are also listed in this on-line section. For more information about the Mythopoeic Awards, please contact the Awards Administrator:

David D. Oberhelman



NEW DISCUSSION GROUP

The Mythopoeic Society is very happy to welcome its newest Discussion Group, The Grey Havens. The Longmont, Colorado, group meets once a week to discuss the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and once a month, at a special Inklingsiana meetings, they discuss the works of all of the Inklings and talk about mythopoeic literature in general. The regularly hosted events that are open to the community, including Tolkien Reading Day last March (for more information, see [REDACTED]), and an upcoming Hobbit Day celebration. They have their own musical group, The Grey Havens Minstrels, maintain a blog, and are active on Facebook and Twitter. They plan to begin monthly podcasts soon, and got to take part in a fun video for Middle-earth News. They even maintain a free, Inklings-themed lending library at a local bookstore where anyone can check out a book.

J.R.R. Tolkien: The True Lord of the Rings. Comic book/biography. Bluewater Productions, 2012, 28 pp. \$3.99 softcover (exclusively in comic book shops); \$1.99 for Amazon Kindle. Reviewed by Marcel R. Aubron-Bülles

Comics as an art form have been offering new and very often different approaches to storytelling for many decades now. Their mixture of a graphic account with text would seem uniquely suited to portray the interesting life of

J.R.R. Tolkien; however, it is all about walking a very fine line between the advantages of the medium — and its obvious disadvantages. *J.R.R. Tolkien: The True Lord of the Rings* is the first major attempt of this kind.

Bluewater Comics: Orbit published this comic in 2012. It was written by Brian McCarthy and Michael Lent. The tasks of the penciler, colorer and letterer were taken over by Louis Chichón. It is being sold for \$3.99; its 28 pages are comprised of one title page (displaying a Tolkien portrait), one page of publishing information, four pages of advertisement and twenty-two pages of actual story.

Graphics

Judging a graphics style is inherently difficult. I have been strongly influenced by French and Belgian artists in my youth (Goscinny's and Uderzo's *Asterix*; Charlier's and Giraud's *Blueberry*; Craenhals's *Chevalier Ardent*; Charlier's and Hubinon's *Redbeard* — and one exception: Foster's *Prince Valiant*) and by rather comical and non-realist elements in recent years (*Bone*, *Calvin & Hobbes* or web comics like *Dominic Deegan*.) Therefore, my heart did not go out easily to this particular coloring and style.

Flashbacks in the storyline are done in greyish, dark and earthen tones, distinguishing them easily from the ongoing story. All other colors tend to be quite naturalistic. The painting style might be called 'early impressionist' — all figures and objects are clearly discernible but with blurred edges and limited details. The text is set in square (background story) or round (dialogue) balloons and clearly readable with a non-serif font face.

All in all, the graphics are a suitable setting for the life of an author and academic born at the end of the 19th century and living well into the 20th. The painting quality is high from end-to-end with a certain inclination to oversimplification and using alienation effects spoofing either characters or scenes.

Writing style and content

The obvious advantage of comics as a medium is their interpretation of a particular topic in aesthetic terms. It can be highly illuminating and gripping, offering an unusual visual approach. However, its limitations concerning the amount of written information available become very clear on these 22 pages.

All the text is by necessity short. Clear-cut lines offer the most essential pieces of information and are enhanced by quotes from Tolkien's and other works, making them easily accessible and enjoyable. No major mistakes are made, although a few smaller ones crop up, especially spelling mistakes. Unfortunately, due to its limited space this comic can only provide a very rough outline of J.R.R. Tolkien's life which I would call appropriate to its task — offering people an easy and quick access to this fascinating author's life. However, it is by no means an in-depth storyline; it barely scratches the surface.

The title page particularly exasperated me with its subtitle: "The True Lord of the Rings." The question is whether there is or are "true Lords" of this particular kind. It is highly misleading to call Tolkien this and I am very surprised to find this un-Tolkienian blunder right up front.

It is also rather irritating to find the story continually switching between present and past tense; there is nothing wrong in enlivening the story but there should be some regularity when it comes to the choice of tense.

On page 16, with the lines "writing gave his troubled mind a way to cope with the horror of combat" (referring to World War I) a dark figure in red outline bearing a sword is wearing a black cloak with a red swastika on its chest; I think this is a particularly confusing choice of imagery at this point.

Lúthien is not blonde but this is, of course, a lesser mistake in the grand scheme of things. Surprising, though, is page 21, where a quote is attributed to Tolkien which — as far as I can tell — it is not: "*I dislike allegory wherever I smell it. The Great War showed me enough horrors to fill my books. The second war only confirmed human barbarism, it didn't introduce it.*" Up to this point all quotes are taken from the Letters or Carpenter's biography without any such changes.

An overall evaluation

A review of this comic will inevitably fall short depending on your point of view. For me as a Tolkienist it is, based on its content, perfectly useless, as it does not even contain the short chronology of events in the life of Tolkien to its full extent — in fact, the events depicted in the comic make it fairly clear that this is the basis for the storyline. No other works or events find their way in between these pages. It sounds and looks odd where it deviates from Carpenter's list, i.e., when artist and writer chose to use their artistic freedom instead of sticking to the well-known story. Bluewater

has been publishing many of these genre comic book biographies in recent years; Tolkien is just one volume like any other.

However, if you judge it from the point of view of people who are just becoming interested in Tolkien's life and works it might be a good and easy read without too much demand on the reader's attention. Its pleasant graphics and clear-cut layout make it easy to follow and it should appeal to everyone wishing to have a quick look at who this 'Tolkien fella' might be. ≡



— Visit Marcel R. Aubron-Bülles at —

The Mythopoeic Society



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The 44th Mythopoeic Conference

*Scholars, Readers & Fans...
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**July 12-15,
2013**
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University,
East Lansing

Author Guest of Honor

Franny Billingsley



Scholar Guest of Honor

Christopher Mitchell



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