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Editors' Introductions

The Editors

Southwestern Oklahoma State University

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Is it just us, or was 2020-2021 the worst year of the past hundred years? Infections, deaths, lockdowns, and quarantines too long for human endurance just kept on keeping on, intensified by squabbles between proponents of collective health measures (masks, vaccines, social distancing) on one side and of individual personal liberties, regardless of the social and health impact, on the other. But through it all, artists continued to think, dream, and produce new work.

As contributions rolled into the inbox, however, one couldn't help but notice the darker tone of many stories in particular. In this issue, #43, we have young people meeting and immediately falling into magically-induced danger (in "The Stable Keeper's Son," by Wesley Young, making a first appearance in *The Mythic Circle*), and we have old(er) people meeting and falling afoul of an ill-willed magical being (in "Tricked by the Queen of Fey," by Ella Walsworth-Bell, who also contributed a Cornwall story to issue #42). We have an adventurer striding into destruction (in "The Grim Morass," by David Samuels), and another leaping into danger and coming out the other side (in "The Black Eyes of Ulspruth Dimot," by long-time contributor Lee Clark Zumpe). We have tales of that universal transition from life to death which constitutes a kind of magic, or at the very least a mystery (in "Talking Things Over in Hospital," by S. Dorman—a continuation of her series of conversations between C. S. Lewis and Mark Twain, and in "The Little Wild," by Julian Grant). We have the conniving antics of a would-be trickster in the snippet "Welcome to the Busty Wench," by E. Clarence Peterson, which has been adapted as the initial episode of a YouTube series. And we have a struggle for survival, difficult enough for castaways facing only nature as an opponent, but made infinitely more threatening by the opposition of an unhinged mage (in "Two Souls on a Shore," by Geoffrey Reiter).

But all is not despair and dying and trickery! We have a number of old and new folk tales from different parts of the world: from Spain, readers can enjoy the beast fable (of a sort) of "Vargar," an award-winning tale by Andoni Cossio, or the place-spirit story of "The Legend of Halmonga," by Hector Vielva; and from Russia, Evgeny Khvalkov brings us "Alrond and the Magic Fox"—all of us should be so lucky as to meet with such a fox! We also have two modern versions of folk tale romances: "How the Naiad and the Dryad Got or Didn't Get Together," by Kevan Kenneth Bowkett (another repeat contributor), and "The Tale of the Troll Maiden and the Cobbler," by David Gilman Frederick, inspired, perhaps, by the myth of Hades' kidnapping of Persephone. And we have a quick view of the magic world intersecting with global climate change in "Holly in the New Millennium," by Susan Cornford (all the way from Australia).

This year, we have expanded our poetry selections over last year's edition, the first by the new editors of *The Mythic Circle*. We offer, for our readers' enjoyment, two poems by Joe R. Christopher ("C.S. Lewis's Meditation over "The Book of the Leoun" and the long ballad "Peredur in the Wasteland"); Joe has contributed to *The Mythic Circle* since it was founded in 1987. David Sparenberg has nearly as long of a record with our journal, this year bringing us a commemoration, in "Amergin," of Ireland's legendary first poet, a celebration, in "The Holy Green of Time," of Tom Bombadil, and an ecosophic prose-poem in "Two in One." New or less-frequently-heard voices include the meditations on story-telling of Sarah Berti ("Stories Grow Larger in the Night" and "You Passed Me the Story") and two studies of the power of the natural world from Krista Canterbury Adams in "Sleep" and "Wood Witches." Katherine Dubke takes inspiration from J. R. R. Tolkien in "Yet to be Revealed." Jonathan Rolfe contributes "The Three Kindreds," commemorating the peoples of Middle Earth in varying meters, including a verse in alliterative

meter for the dwarves. And finally, Joshua S. Fullman provides a study of old King Arthur in captivity in Avalon, pressured by Morgan Le Fay to accept his chains, in “Emhain Ablach.”

The appearance of our journal has been greatly enhanced by the visual elements provided by contributors this year. We have a stained glass theme, announced by the cover images and re-emphasized throughout with smaller images displaying mythic elements, courtesy of the Archivist for the Mythopoeic Society, Phillip Fitzsimmons. But we also include pencil drawings by Marc Rhodes-Taylor, Joseph Thompson, and Leigh Ann Brook, a vivid portrait of the protagonist in “Welcome to the Busty Wench,” by Samantha Henze, a custom illustration by Yiming Zhao for the story “Vargar,” and two views of roses in different media by Leigh Ann Brook.

It would not be possible to produce this journal without extra help, and the editors would like to recognize the contributions and expertise of Diane Fitzsimmons, Dr. Brian Rickel, and Dr. Denise Landrum Geyer for assistance in mastering the mysteries of page numbering in MS Word, and of Jillian Drinnon in assembling the components of the front and back covers. The Steward for Social Media of the Mythopoeic Society, Alicia Fox-Lenz, provided an effective background image for the front cover. Many thanks to them all! And best wishes to our readers and our contributors for a year of good health and an end to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Victoria Gaydosik, Professor Emerita

Nolan Meditz, PhD and Assistant Professor

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