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Letters of Comment

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Ann Blackwell

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ditorial

Welcome to The Mythic Circle #12. We apologize for the lateness of this issue. Tina's triplets (!), born in March, slowed her down considerably over the past few months. They are now beginning to sleep at night, however, and she anticipates returning to a normal pace soon. We appreciate your patience in the meantime.

This issue contains a fair amount of poetry, as did the last two, and we feel we have whittled our backlog to a manageable level. Therefore we are reopening the magazine to poetry submissions. (There is still a backlog, though, so be aware that poems won't be published for a year or so.) We thank Paul Nolan Hyde for creating the lovely lettering which begins each story.

Our sponsoring organization, the Mythopoeic Society, is instituting an overall change in pricing policy for its publications. Lynn Maudlin provides a description of the change, which is appended at the end of the Letters of Comment. This will affect only new subscriptions, so if your subscription is paid up you don't need to send money now. (Let's rethink that. Contributions to the Mythopoeic Society are tax-deductible, and, if they are earmarked for The Mythic Circle, are very helpful to us. If you feel moved to send money, do, by all means, send money.)

Tina Cooper and Christine Lowentroun



Letters of Comment

Dear Christine and Tina,

I found *The Mythic Circle #11* to be extraordinarily satisfactory, and perhaps for this reason I find that I have far fewer comments to make on it than usual. (Why is it so much easier to blame than to praise? No doubt this has something to do with a certain fruit plucked from an Edenic tree. . . .) In a reverse from last issue, I greatly preferred the stories to the poetry, notable exceptions being (of course) Gwenyth's poems. As your long-time readers will know, I have a bias against free verse; because of this I liked "Seamist for Two Voices" the best of Clelie Rich's poems, and in spite of this I rather liked Walter Kuchinsky's "Wind, Maybe" and David Sparenberg's "Red Hawk Song." A number of the other poems had interesting bits in them, but many left me wondering what, after all, the poems were meant to mean. There is no virtue in obscurity for its own sake; or maybe I'm just dense.

Among the stories, I was not entirely sure I understood the ending of Susanne Dieckman's "Sun-Time;" nonetheless I thoroughly enjoyed the story's delicate whimsy. "A Special Bus" by Charles Rampp was pleasingly warm and moving. Dan O'Keefe's "The Light that Was Lorainne" (great title) also moved me in a much more gut-wrenching sort of way,

though the ending felt slightly anti-climactic. I think the first paragraph of this story could be improved on, particularly the sentence beginning with "No other physical, living presence".

Amy Wolf's "Cat's Paw" could use a new title; this one is clever, but really doesn't have a lot to do with the events of the story. Though the last sentence was a little too blunt to satisfy me, I generally thought this story well written.

"Passage in the Night" by Brian Mason held me breathless, only to let me fall -- splat! -- with its "and then I woke up" ending. I have nothing against stories whose major events are revealed to be visions or dreams, as long as those dreams go on to somehow impact the "real life" of the character who has had them. To simply say "it was a dream" and leave it there cheats the reader. Besides revising the ending, I would recommend re-writing paragraph two, which is very awkward (it is hard to describe mystical feelings). The character's following the summoning of the evening star because he had "nothing better to do" is much too flippant and hardly credible.

I cannot accuse "The Theft of the Sun" of not telling a good story, but the telling itself I find lacking something. Douglas Rossman's prose is too workmanlike -- gets the job done but no more. More imagery, and perhaps more finely drawn emotions, might help. As it is, the "this happened and then this happened and then this happened" style lacks dynamics and therefore, for me, suspense. (By the way, "but" and "mere" in the first sentence's "but a mere lad" are redundant.)

Conda Douglas' "The Rune Master" was effectively chilling, but would, I believe, have been even more effective if it hadn't been so apparent from early on in the story how it was destined to end.

My favorite story in the issue was V. W. Massie's "Enforced Adaption" -- a delightful lightness of style combined with a creeping sense of horror (a hard mix to achieve), and then an ending one could not help but feel happy about. (At least I couldn't help it, but then being an adorer of dogs I had a natural bias in favor of it; also, one of my own stories postulates a land world which, together with its creatures, becomes a water world.) My complaint about this story is that I would prefer another explanation, or no explanation at all, to the "space alien" one given, but this too is probably a bias on my part. Also, the last sentence could be beefed up a bit (this letter makes it apparent that I am particularly picky about endings).

Readers familiar with my work may be interested to know that after five years of rejections, I finally managed to sell (!) a story -- a dark fantasy (not horror) called "Son of God, Daughter of Man" to *Pulphouse: A Weekly Magazine*. I don't know yet when the story will appear. Lesson to all those others out there whose rejections total a hundred or more: perserverance can pay off, a little, eventually.

Angelee Sailer Anderson
Westminster, California

Hurrah! It can happen.--TC

Dear Mythic Circle,

First, some comments about the layout of the magazine (#9) itself; there are a few problems with the flow of text from one page or column to the next in which lines of print are repeated. In one instance, there was a repetition of over two paragraphs of a story. In another instance, an undeterminable amount of text (but probably not more than a few lines or so) was cut between one page and the next. My issue of *The Mythic Circle* is circa January, 1990, so those problems may have been cleared up since then. But why is one story set in a different typeface and in a different format (justified left and right margins) when every other piece in the magazine is in sans-serif Helvetica and in "flush left, ragged right?"

As to the stories themselves:

I very much liked "Prince of Thieves" by Angelee Sailor Anderson. I didn't want it to end; I was left wanting to know what happened next. It has some wonderful descriptive prose in it, and the voice of the narrator is very distinct. And I was touched by the beauty, love and joy that was in her "Sonnet For a Blessed Son of Grace" along with the pain.

I also enjoyed David Rubenstein's "Hard Time," although it suffered a bit from the text-flow problems that I referred to earlier. Again, very nice descriptive prose that captures the setting's ambience. I'm rather partial to bagpipes myself, and stories with bagpiping in them have added appeal for me.

Mark Andrew Garland's story "Anniversary" consists of only one scene and is told almost entirely as dialogue, but it is fully realized in its simplicity. Mr. Garland used dialogue very effectively to advance the story step-by-step. And the characterizations seem realized and fully developed.

"The Crimson Berries" by Deborah L. Hunt was harder for me to follow, especially in figuring out why the elf would flee in terror from something it had previously demanded. And in a scene which featured action by two characters, I found it hard to keep track of which character the pronoun "he" was supposed to refer to as one character reacted to the other's actions. It helped that the story's point of view stayed consistent, but I'd still have liked a few more "Alec's" thrown in to replace some of those "he's" to make the scene between Alec and the elf easier to follow.

Gwenyth E. Hood's "Sweet as Muscatel" gave me the pleasant surprise of disproving my assumptions about what was going to happen next. The wine cellar scene made me anticipate a parallel sequence of events with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontilla do," but when Prospero (Ms. Hood's incarnation of "Fortunato") left the wine cellar unharmed, my preconceived expectations were disproven, and I was glad that they were. And the revelation at the end gave a surprising and refreshing new twist to the old "bargain with the devil" plot device.

My apologies to Bonnie B. Kennedy, but I did not get her "Unearthly Pun." I assume that, because they are capitalized, the pun has something to do with the words "Bored to Death." It may be that I missed something in my reading of the story; if not, and if others had the same reaction, she might want to keep that in mind in getting the joke across so that its

point is more readily understood. In any case, I could find no hidden or double meaning in the phrase in addition to its referring back to "a monotonous, boring routine of daily living," and I couldn't justify considering the phrase a pun with just that implication alone. I'm afraid that for me, the story did not live up to the definition of what its title promised.

Over all, I liked the variety of backgrounds and settings that were utilized by the various writers. There is a nice diversity represented in your selection of stories and poems, and I enjoyed other readers' reactions to past stories and to your "Mythic Circle Cirvay," especially the argument against developing a closed forum. The results of the "Cirvay" were rather difficult to interpret; for the most part, the numbers were just thrown out and it was left up to the reader to figure out what they indicated. I feel that the work should have been done for me, and should have been incorporated into the presentation.

Cynthia M. Parkhill
Calistoga, California

Dear *Mythic Circle*

It is with slightly mixed feelings that I saw *TMC #11* - proud that the infant I co-mothered is able to toddle off without me, but a twinge of - regret, perhaps? - that I prove to be dispensable. This may be heightened by the fact that my son just turned 21 and is looking for an apartment...

That out of the way, I must say that I particularly enjoyed Charles Schabel's analogy (in his LOC) that "Love is not like instant coffee and needs time to brew." After twenty-five years of suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous hormones, I've come to believe in *lust* at first sight but not love. Fascination, definitely. We live in a culture that endorses the other myth.

In response to Tina's "no new stories" theory (read my lips?), I do believe there are new stories out there but that most plot outlines follow a few basic themes, and that's okay. Our lives have a great deal in common and yet each one is worth living to its fullest; the similarity is no reason to quit.

I find it difficult to comment on David Sparenberg's poetry as I accepted it (lo, many years ago!) and it *still* makes it for me. Wonderful marriage of poem and illo for Gwenyth Hood's "Signs of the Times." And "The Prodigal Son's Older Brother..." by Dirk Verhulst was highly evocative and brought to mind several dear (but bizarre) friends. His other work is also powerful: capturing the otherworldly aspect of an emergency room; disturbing me with images of a boy drowning in weeds.

I like "Enforced Adaptation," I think in part because it reminds me thematically of a piece of fiction I've been working on & off (mostly off) for years; maybe I just like the concept of mutated humans. I also enjoy the dog knowing more than she does.

I am charmed and a little confused by "Sun-Time" -- what kind of little girl is Mryeshta, really? Enigmatic but appealing.

"The Light That Was Lorraine" is beautiful and moving, though I find it just a little vague in the final interaction with Lorraine: how did she come to admire Alan? How did he help

her? But if one examines a soufflé too closely it may collapse; better to eat it while it's hot...

"A Special Bus" is enchanting: is it the result of an endowment or is it a side jaunt into faerie? Charles Rampp does a wonderful job of tapping into Clyde's mental state: depressed; discouraged; putting himself down; and then, without being quite aware of why or how, the improvement; the certainty that life is worth living. Sweet and succinct.

"Runemaster" never quite engages me and I'm not sure why; perhaps simply that I don't like Emerad, so I don't care about him, and I don't know enough of anyone else to care about them, either.

"The Theft of the Sun" is another well-crafted tale from Doug Rossman, accompanied by a beautiful illo by Nancy-Lou Patterson (I'm an unabashed fan: NLP can do no wrong).

"Cat's Paw" is a story I want to like but it's problematic: a tale which could be almost epic in scope, (girl child sold into bondage amid the fall of a great house, manages to cope with her brutish life, learns her true identity, identifies and learns to hate her cousin, takes up with a mercenary, masters arms in four weeks (give me a break!), confronts her usurping cousin, discovers he's an all right guy, is possibly engaged, and wins her birthright) all compressed down to a few pages; a false analogy made between white hart and Cat (a grown deer can choose to leap a fence or not; a child under the age of 13 or so has no such capacity - thus Cat at best might have run away (she would not have been free to "walk away" as she was sold into bondage) from the village perhaps a few years earlier; a mercenary who might as well be her guardian angel (hey, that's a promising concept); well - you see what I mean. "Cat's Paw" could have been a rich and hearty ale but it turns out to be Kool-aid... I'd really like to see Amy Wolf tell this tale as if it's worth telling, and I think it is.

I'd also love to know about this great, bizarre tree on Bonnie Callahan's cover (beautiful but reproduced a little faint), complete with curious three-legged bird and a circular thaw around the roots. Somebody should write a story...

And finally, I was tickled to note the appearance of Roberts St. Evans Malaise in the pages of #11. Kudos to a very pregnant Tina, Christine, and Paul Nolan Hyde for putting together a fine issue.

((I suppose it might be a little like *cheating* to write a LOC for #10, the last issue I edited, but I'm gonna do it anyway!))

"Merlusine" is another fine story by Janet Reedman (and I'm proud to note that *The Mythic Circle* has encouraged a handful of consistently good writers - guess maybe it's working!). I might quibble about dense vocabulary but I believe that choice is reserved for the author. Hopefully it's a conscious choice: the use of foreign and unusual words, and their added precision and mood-establishing qualities, versus the use of more simple language and the unimpeded forward momentum it allows. Each choice has an impact on the reader and in my own limited experience I've seen more readers put off by the former than the latter. But I think most good writers have a composite reader for whom they write (often the reader-side of themselves) and I trust Janet's reader responds

to her use of language. She's a good storyteller and I think her work ought to be selling.

"Sea Spiders" is an incredible piece, powerful and fascinating. It leaves me wanting more - who is this great bronze god and who are these people?

I really enjoyed Jill Solnicki's poems, particularly the fairy-tale based ones. I particularly like the way "Sleeping Beauty" and "Snow White Speaks Out" blend into each other and her prods me to wonder about the sexist advantages of sleeping maidens: they are appreciative and inexperienced, their beauty unmarred by the ravages of time and care - the perfect "trophy wife"!

Dan Ryan (16 when he wrote "The Chain") shows great promise and a way with words; I like his altered ending and, truth be told, I prefer *Romeo and Juliet* with a happy ending! (as in the version contained within *Nicholas Nickleby* or here, as contrived by Dan).

"Janus Winked" is an interesting solution to the problem of mortality; I wonder whether the pattern continues to repeat?

Owen Neill tells so much so succinctly in "Lohengrin" - the songwriter in me (deliver the whole ball of wax in 3 minutes) especially appreciates his evocative and precise use of language.

I enjoyed the overlay of David and Goliath upon Arthurian legend ("Giants of Avalon"); I don't recall seeing it before.

I like Erin Lale's fierce energy in "The Betrayed".

"M.I.A." is, I suppose, a soft and wondering response to Kafka's beetle, but knowing how brief and fragile is a butterfly's existence I found the tale's "Pollyanna" tone and lack of resolution unsatisfactory.

I would have enjoyed a little more from Rhea Rose's "Untitled" poem; there was the hint of rhyme scheme and pattern, but then it would pan out and leave me somewhat disappointed.

"Cairnwoman" so effectively captures the defeatist self-loathing of its fat little heroine that I wanted to grab her by the shoulders and shake her! But I also found her easy acceptance of the Cairnwoman unlikely, i.e. "You've certainly seen some things, haven't you?" as a response instead of the conclusion the old woman was mad. It's a nice moral but a contrived story.

I found "The Magus" both oddly compelling and dissatisfying. The prose was stilted and strange, a result, I suppose, of being so dialogue-heavy. I don't know how effectively Greek tragedies bear modern retellings, but I did find it interesting.

I really like the 3 closing poems, "Walking on Royal Carpets," "Meteorite," and "Elfin Corner Trees." Each with a very different voice and each effectively transmits its mood and sense.

Lynn Maudlin
Altadena, CA

Thanks, Lynn, for the detailed comments. Our authors probably like to see the editorial thinking, and Lynn's letter shows it. Please read on; Lynn has also sent us an explanation of *The Mythic Circle's* link to the Mythopoeic Society, and an announcement of a change in pricing for future subscriptions. -- TC

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the latest *Mythic Circle*. There seems to be a trend in the issues I read. You appear to pick a set of stories that I think are good every other issue. I was not very fond of the stories you printed last time; this time I thought the stories were, on the whole, well written.

"The Theft of the Sun" by Douglas A. Rossman was a nice story written in an easy-to-read style, as was "The Rune Master," by Conda V. Douglas, "The Light That Was Lorraine," by Dan O'Keefe, and "A Special Bus" by Charles Rampp. These are all near-professional in quality, in my opinion. I wonder if the authors of any of these attempted to submit them for professional publication, and if so, what excuses the editors gave for rejecting them, for I find very little wrong with them. (Some polishing might be called for, but that is all.)

"Passage in the Night" by Brian Mason was fine so far as it went, but it came to a rather abrupt halt. I think some further development at the end would have improved it. "Enforced Adaptation" by V.W. Massie was also interesting, but also suffered from a weak ending. "Sun-Time" by Suzanne Burgoyne Dieckman had an interesting start, but I did not understand the ending. "Cat's Paw" by Amy Wolf started out well, but the ending was a little too convenient and simplistic.

I noted that Charles R. Schabel proposed collaboration among "Mythic Circle" writers. I am a veteran of a collaborative task: I wrote a novel in collaboration with four other people. The effort took three years. We were all satisfied with the result; we all thought that the novel was a better one than any of us could have produced separately. But it took discipline and determination. Although we resolved differences amicably, and although we are still all speaking with each other, collaborations have the potential for disastrous results, both in the writing and in interpersonal relations. I would therefore suggest that anyone considering writing anything in collaboration with someone—even if writing a short story with only one other person—be very cautious. Agree beforehand whether the other person can finish the story alone if one drops out, for instance (we had two people drop out of our novel-writing effort.) Try not to start unless every party has a common goal and a high level of motivation. In short, keep in mind that collaboration is not necessarily a simple solution to the problem of not being able to get one's writing published professionally.

Joan Marie Verba
Minnetonka, Minnesota

I believe--I may be wrong here--that Charles envisioned his proposed collaboration as a forum for the writers to learn each other's strengths (or at least observe those strengths in action.) A polished stylist has much to impart to the less-artic-

ulate inventor of brilliant plots, and vice versa. This seems worthwhile, even if their joint product is not published.--TC

Dear Editors--

I read your magazine with great interest. I was impressed by the very high quality of the stories and poetry you included.

Douglas A. Rossman's "The Theft of the Sun" was superb, though Frey's Scarlet Pimpernel-ish persona was a bit distracting for me. Both his incongruity and his bombast were amusing, and I didn't know if the author intended that. Despite this, however, I thought the story, the language and the author's sense of character were just wonderful. The illustration seemed a bit stiff for the piece.

I also particularly enjoyed V.W. Massie's "Enforced Adaptation." It had a wonderfully-realized, almost tactile, atmosphere of rain: the seeping damp, the moldy smell, the heavy air, the lack even of dry food. This convincing detail lent great credibility to the underlying story.

"The Rune Master" by Conda V. Douglas is enjoyable--classic fantasy--though rather grim. The story would be more powerful, I think, if Emerad were more appealing. But the author has shaped him effectively as he stands.

Among the poems, those written by Dirk Verhulst and Gwenyth Hood were especially impressive (though completely different in style). Ms. Hood seems almost effortless in her mastery of the more traditional verse forms; Mr. Verhulst creates quietly disturbing effects with his free verse. Both are writing at a professional level.

The illustrations were good and generally effective, illuminating the poems and stories which they accompanied. I liked the flowing quality of the drawing framing "Seamist for Two Voices."

Ann Blackwell
Sacramento, California

Thanks for the letter. This type of feedback, with detail, is useful for our authors.--TC

Gentle Readers:

Hello again, Lynn Maudlin here, this time in my capacity as Membership Secretary for the Mythopoeic Society - the non-profit organization that underwrites the production of *The Mythic Circle*.

Those of you who are already members of the Mythopoeic Society know that we've undergone a change in the structure of the Society. In the past, membership was acquired by subscribing to either *Mythlore*, the Society's quarterly journal, or *Mythprint*, the Society's monthly newsletter. This has been changed and now one pays a \$5.00 annual fee for membership in the Society.

With this change the Mythopoeic Society has instituted members' and non-members' subscription prices for Society publications. Currently, the non-member price is equal to the member price plus \$5.00, so the real break comes when a person subscribes to more than one publication.

What the new program bodes for *The Mythic Circle* is that the subscription price for Mythopoeic Society members is dropping (!!!can you believe it?!!!) down to \$13.00 for three issues and the non-member price is rising to \$18.00. Individual non-members may join the Society by sending \$5.00 to The Mythopoeic Society and with membership they will receive voting rights and the opportunity to buy other Society items at members' prices, but libraries and institutions must pay the full non-member price.

The Mythic Circle has a higher percentage of non-member subscribers than either *Mythlore* or *Mythprint* so in a way this change hits us harder. But, to look at it from a different angle, it also means *The Mythic Circle* has a greater opportunity to bring new members in to the Society, folks who might enjoy subscribing to other Society publications or attending the annual conference* or becoming more active participants in this Society which has believed in and sup-

ported the concept of a writers' roundtable in print for so many years. To that end, an order form has been enclosed with this issue of *The Mythic Circle* in the hope that more of you will join this non-profit organization and become more involved with The Mythopoeic Society.

-- Lynn Maudlin

*Speaking of the annual conference, our next Mythcon is a special celebration of the centenary of J.R.R. Tolkien's birth, combined with the (British) Tolkien Society's annual Oxonmoot - the result? *The J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference*. There are still some spaces available and prices rise after the end of this year, so if you're interested in a week-long conference in Oxford, England, August 17-24, 1992, write for more details to me (Lynn Maudlin) in my capacity as North American Booking Officer: P.O. Box 394; Altadena, CA 91001.

THE MAN OF AN UNCERTAIN ADDRESS

by lala heine-koehn

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde were my neighbours at one time. We used to chat across the fence, discuss the weather due the next day, sometimes our dual problems. Since I moved away to a hedged neighbourhood, we see each other less frequently.

Involved in myths since I was little, I followed the call this year again, am still here, nine thousand miles away, thirty five days later. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, who have been always thoughtful and kind, sent me a crate with broken pieces of crockery, excavated on Hydra, which, they claimed, in the small note they attached, should prove useful to me for I am now in its vicinity.

Busy with one particular myth, I follow it for several kilometers each day, but at times, the myth flies away to remote areas which, if it wasn't for Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde's thoughtful gift, would reduce me to sitting idly on the balcony of the place I live now. (The place belongs to a man of an uncertain address but who in spite of it, insists, I share his bed and kitchen table whether he is here or not.)

On such days, I collect the broken pieces of crockery from shelves, kitchen cupboards, the bathroom windowsill, which is dangerously narrow, but I am running out of space. I take them to the balcony, to make them fit. Never good at jigsaw puzzles, I often get mixed up, pick up the odd shard belonging to the man. One jug though is almost whole, missing a small piece from its bottom and a spout only. I am waiting for the man to return from whatever address he is at present, to ask him, has he not, by oversight, packed away the missing pieces before he left. For I want to finish that one jug at least, to drink from it to the health of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, my two former neighbours who were always to me so thoughtful and kind.