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The Story of Kullervo (2015) by J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Verlyn Flieger

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The Story of Kullervo, by J.R.R. Tolkien, edited by Verlyn Flieger. London: HarperCollins, 2015. xxiii, 168 pp. £16.99 (hardcover) ISBN 9780008131364. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016. xxiii, 168 pp. \$25.00 (hardcover) ISBN 9780544706262.

The Story of Kullervo is the most recent volume in a series of posthumous publications of Tolkien's fiction. The publication of *The Silmarillion* (1977), *Unfinished Tales* (1980), and the twelve-volume *History of Middle-earth* (1983-1996) made available in print the bulk of Tolkien's manuscripts and drafts pertaining to his mythology. Since then, Tolkien scholarship has witnessed a steady trickle of posthumous publications of Tolkien's other fiction, mostly focusing on Tolkien's translations, retellings, or adaptations of traditional material, such as *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun* (2009), *The Fall of Arthur* (2013), and Tolkien's translation of *Beowulf* (2014), together with accompanying texts. Like these texts, *The Story of Kullervo* is based on a mythological original, one of the best-known sections of the Finnish national epic, *Kalevala*. Like *The Fall of Arthur*, it is frustratingly unfinished. But, at the same time, like *The Children of Húrin*, published as a standalone text in 2007 with lavish illustrations, it does not quite fall within the category of "new" Tolkien, as the prose tale and its attendant documents have been published before, in *Tolkien Studies*, volume 7 (2010). Still, this is the first time this text has been made available to the general public, via a trade publication (2015 in the UK and 2016 in the USA).

Given the specialist focus of this journal, rather than attempting an evaluation of Tolkien's text, this review will mainly address a scholarly readership, who will already know the text of *The Story of Kullervo* and the two versions of Tolkien's essay on the *Kalevala* that accompany it from its previous publication. I therefore begin by offering below my attempt at a "what's new" list. First, the text of the tale is more faithful to Tolkien in keeping his variation of names, rather than regularising (e.g. Musti/Mauri for the magical dog; and Wanōna/Oanōra for Kullervo's sister). Second, it (tentatively) restores to the text some words that appear as "[illegible]" in the *Tolkien Studies* version (for example, compare pp. 223, 236 and 238 in *Tolkien Studies* with pp. 23, 42 and 47 in this new volume). There are a number of other similar additions and emendations, including half a sentence restored to the text in p. 11 (compare with *Tolkien Studies*, p. 217).

In terms of Flieger's editorial material, there are new elements here too. First, there are a handful of new or augmented notes (e.g. new note to p. 32, "but shall shudder when they hear them"; augmented note to p. 12, "the great knife Sikki"). Second, and most notably, there are new sections in Flieger's introductory essay, which adds a discussion of the nature and history of the *Kalevala*, including its effect on Finnish independence and its influence on Tolkien's so-called "mythology for England." In the introduction, Flieger also considers the genre of

“The Story of Kullervo,” arguing that—although it shares some elements with genres Tolkien would write later, such as short stories, myth-retellings, and mix of prose and poetry (the prosimetron of *The Lord of the Rings*, for example)—Kullervo is a *sui generis*, “so different in tone and content from his other short fiction as to be almost a separate category” (p. xv). She also briefly considers Kullervo within the context of Aristotelian tragedy but ultimately argues that “the greatest importance” (p. xvii) of Kullervo is its role as a germ for Túrin Turambar, one of the most significant heroes of Tolkien’s later legendarium.

The volume is well-designed and aesthetically pleasing. The inclusion of Tolkien’s *Kalevala*-related water-colour *The Land of Pohja* as frontispiece (in the UK edition only) is not just a charming detail but adds to the reader’s appreciation of Tolkien’s engagement with the Finnish text. Similarly, the inclusion of six pages from Tolkien’s original *Kullervo* manuscript, reproduced as facsimiles, have been chosen to show the difficulties of dating this group of texts, as well as Tolkien’s experimentation with the Finnish language. Flieger helpfully also reprints one of her own essays “Tolkien, *Kalevala*, and ‘The Story of Kullervo’”—originally published in *Green Suns and Faerie* (2012, pp. 185-201)—which offers one layer of interpretation to the tale. This is, perhaps, not quite within the strict remit of an editor, but the essay is still a useful addition for the general reader.

Ultimately, in my view the most important achievement of this new volume is indeed its capacity to reach the general reader. Academic journals are becoming increasingly financially prohibitive to access by independent scholars and the general public, and Tolkien’s tale, and his essays on the *Kalevala*, are worthy to be read by a wider audience.

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