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The Return of the Ring (2016), edited by Lynn Forest-Hill

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The Return of the Ring: Proceedings of the Tolkien Society Conference 2012, vol. I, ed. by Lynn Forest-Hill. Edinburgh: Luna Press Publishing, 2016. [2], x, 273 pp. \$35.00 (oversized paperback) ISBN 9781911143024. [Also available in Kindle format.]

The Return of the Ring: Proceedings of the Tolkien Society Conference 2012, vol. II, ed. by Lynn Forest-Hill. Edinburgh: Luna Press Publishing, 2016. [2], vi, 213 pp. \$35.00 (oversized paperback) ISBN 9781911143031. [Also available in Kindle format.]

When looking at any volume of conference proceedings, it often first helps to understand exactly what we can and cannot expect from such a collection. On one hand, these kinds of volumes are usually destined to suffer certain limitations. Inevitably, some articles will fail to engage the secondary literature adequately—sometimes even not at all. In other cases, authors will inadequately contextualize their arguments; similarly, the greater brevity of the conference format limits every author’s ability to push the implications of their conclusions. Such collections also tend toward heterogeneity, lacking the clear unified focus of a more targeted essay collection. All these issues, granted, certainly (with some notable exceptions) affect volumes 1 and 2 of *The Return of the Ring*, ably edited by Lynn Forest-Hill. Nonetheless, these issues also perhaps suggest the great strength of these two books: the solid convergence of fan culture with academic culture. Within these pages Tolkien enthusiasts come together with Tolkien scholars, both independent and university-affiliated alike. Oftentimes, the boundaries between them have beneficially been blurred at a time when many more hidebound fields of literary study still seek to rigidly demarcate academic activity from fan activity. The end result has led to an eclectic, often rigorous, sometimes idiosyncratic, and occasionally even odd (and yet refreshing) set of critical takes on Tolkien subjects as diverse as magic, Celticism, mysticism, philosophy, the gothic, biography, source studies, and mythopoesis.

Even more importantly, however, these two volumes provide a snapshot of one moment in contemporary Tolkien scholarship and appreciation. In his foreword to the first volume, Shaun Gunner suggests that *The Return of the Ring* offers scholars “a chance to access research and ideas they will not find anywhere else” (vi). Six years after these papers first saw delivery at the 2012 Tolkien Society Conference, held in celebration of the 75th anniversary of *The Hobbit*, however, Gunner’s claim is now only partially true. Many of the papers—about a third, actually—have been revised and re-published in other venues. Some of them even appear in peer-reviewed journals. Since research-active scholars will wish to consult the latest revised versions, I’ve included in this review the relevant bibliographic information. (Although some textual footnotes provide this

information, they're neither up-to-date nor always present when necessary, so researchers shouldn't rely upon these.) Yet my summaries themselves will always focus on the essays as they appear in *The Return of the Ring*. What emerges is an image of Tolkien Studies from earlier in this decade: an established field with established scholars and long-time enthusiasts talking with, and working alongside, a new generation of up-and-coming "aca-fans" (to borrow a useful term from Henry Jenkins). Active researchers can use *The Return of the Ring* as a witness to scholarship in development; more casual readers can simply enjoy it for what it is.

I've designed this review to maximize readability, and I follow the same organizational schema devised by Forest-Hill, who divides 36 total contributions into eight separate sections. Volume 1 contains five of these sections:

Biography
War and Its Effects
Philosophy and Ethics
Religion and Its Discontents
The Mythic Dimension

Many of these titles are self-explanatory, although "Philosophy and Ethics" contains an essay on pedagogy and "The Mythic Dimension" covers subjects as broad as the Atlantis myth, mythopoesis, and comparative literature. In volume 2 of *The Return of the Ring*, shorter than the first, Forest-Hill presents three sections to the reader:

Medievalism
Fantasy
Diversity

Of these, only the last section needs explanation—"Diversity" here merely means those articles that fall neatly into no other category, not a discussion of issues of multiculturalism, difference, or otherness. Curiously enough, source studies (i.e., Tolkien's influence by or adaptation of previous texts), a traditional mainstay of Tolkien criticism, bears a somewhat muted presence in both books, although many contributions touch upon it.

At any rate, depending on one's personal or academic inclination, readers can simply skip to relevant section(s) of this review. Overall, this two-volume record of the 2012 Tolkien Society Conference not only bodes well for the health of Tolkien Studies in general, across academic and fan culture alike, but also provides a promise of things to come—a presentation of the work of new scholars

bearing new approaches and perspectives as they work alongside more established voices in the field.

BIOGRAPHY

Blackham, Robert S. “Tolkien’s Birmingham,” pp. 3-8.

—. “Tolkien’s Oxford,” 19-24.

Ferrández Bru, José Manuel. “J.R.R. Tolkien’s ‘Second Father’ F. Francis Morgan and Other Non-Canonical Influences,” 9-17; some overlap with his 2013 Spanish-language biography of Morgan (forthcoming in English in 2018), *La Conexión Española de J.R.R. Tolkien: El Tío “Curro.”*; also some overlap of information with “‘Wingless Fluttering’: Some Personal Connections in Tolkien’s Formative Years,” in *Tolkien Studies*, vol. 8, 2011, pp. 51-65.

Duriez, Colin. “J.R.R. Tolkien and the Origins of the Inklings,” 25-38; a footnote claims that this paper derives from a 2013 book called *The Origins of the Inklings*, but I could find no book by that title. Possibly refers to the then-in-manuscript version of *The Oxford Inklings: Their Lives, Writings, Ideas, and Influence*, published in 2015 by Lion Hudson publishing.

This section provides little new information on Tolkien *per se*, although it offers individual takes on questions relating to areas of interest such as places, Father Francis Morgan, and the Inklings. The two contributions by Robert S. Blackham, for example, reflect his experience as a tour guide as he guides readers through Tolkien’s Birmingham and Oxford. Overall, Blackham prefers to present his topics as a series of facts without the distraction (or contentiousness) of an argumentative thesis or set of interpretative claims—if images had accompanied the original presentation, it’s a shame they haven’t been reproduced here. From places we turn back to people with José Manuel Ferrández Bru’s discussion Father Francis Xavier Morgan. This figure, somehow unfairly, is most often mentioned almost as an afterthought in biographical discussions of Tolkien. Since Ferrández Bru sees a general animosity toward Fr. Morgan by various other biographers (Humphrey Carpenter and Charles A. Coulombe, for example), he seeks to correct accounts. Father Francis came from a long line of writers, scholars, and entrepreneurs; served a stint as personal secretary to John Henry Cardinal Newman; and had a family genealogy filled with people who had “important social positions and a very notable history in the world of [Spanish] literature” (11). Ferrández Bru also likes to pepper his text with speculations about sources, although they’re more amusing than believable. For example, it’s suggested that the story of Father Morgan greeting a small girl perhaps inspired Tolkien’s troll in the poem “Perry-the-Winkle” (14).

Colin Duriez's article presents much information already familiar to readers of Humphrey Carpenter's *The Inklings* (which goes uncited, although Duriez does cite Carpenter's biography of Tolkien). Still, Duriez takes a stance on various recurring questions within the scholarship. For example, he defends Lewis from charges of sexism—Lewis's loose inclusion of Dorothy Sayers into the Inklings indicates for Duriez that Lewis was "far from the misogynous or at least exclusive-club attitude that some wrongly perceive in him" (28). Indeed, Duriez sees much importance in the amorphous quality of the Inklings. Less "distinct than the academic clusters Tolkien and Lewis frequented," and including people from a modestly wide variety of professions, the Inklings were "Christians, they tended to write, and they belonged to more than one profession" (37). Duriez also puts the origin date for the name "Inklings" at 1933 (29).

WAR AND ITS EFFECTS

Garth, John. "Robert Quilter Gilson, T.C.B.S.: A Brief Life in Letters," pp. 43-57; an extended version appears in *Tolkien Studies*, vol. 8, 2011, pp. 67-96.

Blackham, Robert S. "Tolkien: The War Years," pp. 59-67.

Hinds, LeiLani. "Sauron Revealed," 69-84.

Thayer (née Slack), Anna E. "Clean Earth to Till: A Tolkienian Vision of War," pp. 85-97; also published as is in *Hither Shore*, vol. 6, 2009, pp. 116-30.

Brown, Sara. "The Importance of Home in the Middle-earth Legendarium," pp. 99-107.

This section, which focuses mostly on the First World War (mentions of WWII are rare), obviously overlaps somewhat with the previous *Biography* section, yet it tends to present more daring theses. The gem of the section is John Garth's opening piece, a selection of the letters—almost a diary—of Rob Gilson, a member of the T.C.B.S. who had died on the Somme. Although Garth makes no overarching claims, the tragic shortness of Gilson's life makes this contribution powerful reading. Afterward comes Robert S. Blackham's third and final contribution to *The Return of the Ring*. Like his previous pieces, this one focuses on the places Tolkien lived, worked, and served during his war years. Blackham does make one evocative suggestion of the similarity between barbed wire and Shelob's web—although I suspect that spiders, rather than barbed wire, offer a better true "origins" of her great web (62). Blackham also provides a nice description of the trench fever that eventually forced Tolkien to take home leave.

The award for most *dramatic* contribution must go to LeiLani Hinds, who claims a startling discovery: the real-life inspiration for Sauron. Her big reveal turns out to be none other than General Sir Douglas Haig (promoted to Field Marshal in 1917), commander of the British Expeditionary Force from late 1915 until the war's end. Having no fear of wading into contentious waters, Hinds links

Haig's "poor leadership" and his cruelty "to his own troops" as qualities indicative of Sauron as a war leader (77). As intriguing as her suggestion is, however, Tolkien never once mentions Haig in his letters, nor does Hinds provide any collaborating biographical evidence of influence—and neglects to mention that public negative views of Haig only truly began after his death in 1928. As such, skeptics might reasonably remain skeptical.

Anna Thayer connects *The Lord of the Rings* to just war theory (although she goes light on the theory). On her view, we can divide war in Tolkien into either literal war or metaphorical (i.e., spiritual) war. In the process, Tolkien "powerfully reconnected heroic fantasy to its literary and warfaring roots" (88), an important and certainly *partially* true claim, but a subject this complex and important could have benefited from greater nuance. For example, although *The Lord of the Rings* can easily be read as critiquing "blind pacifism" (91), it nonetheless also criticizes Boromir and the Gondorians who love war for its own sake. Thayer leaves that wrinkle out of her argument, and overall her suggestive argument has been particularly harmed, in my view, from the brevity of the conference format.

This section ends with Sara Brown's examination of the concept of "home"—both as a physical structure and as a geographical place of belonging—within *The Lord of the Rings*. She finds that, as important as "home" might be, there must also be "an acceptance of the possibility that home may be fundamentally changed" (106), a point which is well-taken. Intriguingly, Brown ties her argument to England's post-WWII situation, when British society had begun forming a new understanding of the importance of "home" amidst "the changes that the mass economic immigration of foreign cultures would soon bring" (102); unfortunately, the corresponding larger debate over the ideology of "Little England" is something into which Brown chooses not to delve, and might constitute an area of further research.

PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

Manni, Franco. "Tolkien Versus the History of Philosophy," pp. 111-129.

Hynes, Gerard. "Tolkien's Boethius, Alfred's Boethius," pp. 131-140.

Miller-Purrenhage, Laura. "Teaching Leadership and Ethics through Tolkien," 141-150.

Three outstanding contributions make this section arguably the strongest in either volume of *The Return of the Ring*—even more so because, so far as I can tell, none have found subsequent publication in other venues.

Franco Manni opens with the surprising, yet true, observation that Tolkien almost always avoids mentioning philosophers by name—yet certainly borrows ideas from many of the non-modern ones. For example, in Tolkien we "find

respect (though not *declared* love) for ancient and medieval philosophy, together with skepticism or at least lack of interest regarding modern and contemporary philosophy” (124, emphasis original). Manni attributes Tolkien’s reticence on naming philosophy to his identity as a Christian “Germanistic” philologist. Whereas C. S. Lewis was comfortable engaging modern philosophy directly, Tolkien’s mode of apologetics “was perhaps to avoid surrendering to the ‘enemy’ by the tactic of not naming him” (126). Manni’s essay is full of gems on topics as diverse as the philosophy of history, freedom and foreknowledge, and aesthetics, and any scholar working on this topic would be wise to consult this piece.

Gerard Hynes continues where Manni leaves off, examining the influence of King Alfred’s *Boethius* on Tolkien—a topic only Tom Shippey has previously discussed in any depth. The question of free will particularly interests Hynes. On his view, Tolkien agreed with the original Boethius “on the essentially ordered nature of the universe” (134), but Tolkien, breaking not only with Boethius but “with more than a millennium of Christian theology,” envisions a “dynamic and responsive” God who changes the details—though not the overall divine plan—of the world according to actions undertaken by individual people out of their own free will (136). In this conception, Tolkien actually follows Alfred’s *Boethius* more closely, which had replaced the original Boethius’s “theory of order [and rigid causality] with a theory of freedom” (138).

The final contribution in this section, more properly pedagogy than philosophy, belongs to Laura Miller-Purrenhage. She provides many useful teaching tactics and, as such, should be read in conjunction with *Approaches to Teaching Tolkien’s “The Lord of the Rings” and Other Works* (2015), edited by Leslie A. Donovan. Miller-Purrenhage structures her Tolkien courses around the ideas of leadership and ethics, and employs advanced (but easily followed) pedagogical concepts such as modeling to help students become more active learners within her course.

RELIGION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Testi, Claudio A. “Tolkien—Pagan or Christian? A Proposal for a ‘New’ Synthetic Approach,” pp. 155-64; a greatly extended version appears in *Tolkien Studies*, vol. 10, 2013, pp. 1-47; see also *Pagan Saints in Middle-earth*, Walking Tree Publishers, 2018.

Holt, James D. “A Latter-day Saint Reading of Tolkien,” pp. 165-73.

Hutton, Ronald. “Tolkien’s Magic,” pp. 175-86; a revised version published in *The Year’s Work in Medievalism*, vol. 31, 2016, pp. 144-53.

Three very different approaches to the question of religion mark this section of *The Return of the Ring*. Claudio A. Testi’s “synthetic” approach gives us a very reasonable take on the vexed question of whether Middle-earth should be

considered Christian or pagan in character. Anyone interested in this topic should certainly consult his longer article in *Tolkien Studies*, but a quick synopsis can be found here through his twin assertions that “*the theology of the Legendarium is essentially Pagan,*” especially if seen through a perspective internal to Middle-earth, but that this “*Pagan theology of the Legendarium is in harmony with the Christian Revelation*” if viewed from an external perspective (161; italics original). That is to say, the legendarium exemplifies the harmony Tolkien sees between Nature and Grace as well as between Reason and Faith (163).

A specifically religious interpretation marks James D. Holt’s own approach. While acknowledging that Roman Catholicism and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have their theological differences, he nonetheless advocates reading the “creatures and events of Middle-earth” in *The Silmarillion* through “Mormon spectacles” (169). After noting that the light of Jesus Christ can be seen even in pagan myths (a point nicely echoing Testi), which enables pagan myths to become potential stepping stones to truths more divine, Holt suggests two further major areas of convergence between Tolkien and Latter-day Saints theology. First, the participation of the Ainur in Ilúvatar’s theology parallels an important Latter-day Saints teaching about the *communal* nature of creation (170-71). Second, just as it was part of God’s plan that Satan tempt Eve, it is part of Ilúvatar’s plan that Melkor sow his discord.

Ronald Hutton, for his part, closes out this section with a marvelously well-researched must-read essay, one which nicely compliments (and contrasts) with the previous two pieces. Unlike Testi and Holt, who both (rightly, in my view) emphasize the general logical compatibility between Christian and pagan elements within Middle-earth, Hutton emphasizes (also rightly, in my view) the specific problem of *magic* and Christianity in Middle-earth. Three major claims distinguish Hutton’s argument. First, this problem didn’t initially capture Tolkien’s attention. Second, when it did, he couldn’t find an adequate solution. Third, Tolkien’s literary success nonetheless comes from his fidelity to sources that *also* rarely tried to reconcile magic with Christian thought. As Hutton observes, Tolkien’s work starkly contrasts with C. S. Lewis’s more ruthless—and theologically consistent—attitude towards magic in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Tolkien, however, tended to view magic in terms of the goodness or badness of its ends, rather than the goodness or badness of its sources—a position “never acceptable to established Christianity” (180). Indeed, although Hutton himself does not draw this connection, he does note one point about Tolkien with potential feminist-progressive implications: although the hostile European tradition to magic had often seen “its most dangerous and most natural practitioners as being female” (180-81), a tradition which Lewis blithely continues, Tolkien “has no prominent, unequivocal and obvious, villainous sorceresses” (181). Maybe even more important, though, may be Hutton’s

observation that Tolkien's approach to magic was "essentially a post-industrial, post-rationalist one" stemming from a "modern and rationalist age in which people were no longer afraid of spells"; as such, Tolkien ironically held elvish or fairy enchantment as potentially increasing one's receptivity to "the Christian message," not some source of great evil as many evangelical Protestants of the Reformation believed (184). Yet, as mightily as Tolkien strove to reconcile the pagan elements within Middle-earth with his own piety, tensions continue to exist that provide his work "its sheer richness and complexity" (186).

THE MYTHIC DIMENSION

Fernández Camacho, Pamina. "'Cyclic Cataclysms, Semitic Stereotypes and Religious Reforms: A Classicist's Númenor,'" pp. 191-206; also published *Lembas Extra 2012* (journal of the Dutch Tolkien Society).

De la Huerga, Xavier. "From 2012 AD to Atlantis and Back Again—Tolkien's Circular Journey in Time," pp. 207-18.

Doughan, David. "*The Notion Club Papers*: A Summary," pp. 219-26.

Rhone, Zachary A. "Myth-making: How J.R.R. Tolkien Adapted Mythopoeia from Old English," pp. 227-39.

Korpua, Jyrki. "J.R.R. Tolkien's Mythopoeia and Familiarisation of Myth: Hobbits as Mediators of Myth in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*," pp. 241-49.

Budde, Larissa. "White Riders and New World Orders: Natures and Technology in Theodor Storm's *Der Schimmelreiter* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," pp. 251-61.

This wide-ranging sections opens with an insightful and intelligent comparison by Pamina Fernández Camacho between Tolkien's Númenor and the story of Atlantis created by Plato. Among Fernández Camacho's most intriguing points is that Plato almost certainly invented the city of Atlantis (192), which complicates Tolkien's "pretensions to connect it with Northern myth and geography" (193). In contrast to those—like the Nazis—who viewed Atlantis as a utopia, Tolkien more clearly followed the Atlantis-as-dystopian tradition Plato intended, following Plato's model of "seeing the degeneration of the ruling line as a symbol for the decay of the whole kingdom" (198). Ultimately, Tolkien's Atlantis and Plato's Atlantis are the same: a flawed civilization with Persian-Phoenician-Egyptian elements or associations, as well as a "human kingdom that becomes an evil imperialistic power and is engulfed by a cataclysm" (206).

Xavier de la Huerga provides probably the most *non*-canonical take on Tolkien in either volume—and his abstract gives unusually clear insight into his core claims. For example, he suggests that "Tolkien did somehow accomplish some form of time-travel," and he reads *The Notion Club Papers* as a

“metaphysical manifesto” that reveals “Tolkien’s innermost visionary experiences, often going deep into the realm of mysticism and the paranormal” (207). As if that weren’t enough, de la Huerga ties the in-text discovery of *The Notion Club Papers* in the year 2012 to the Mayan Long Count Calendar. Even if anyone thought such ideas remotely compatible with Tolkien’s Catholicism, however, de la Huerga might have better served his argument had he engaged J. W. Dunne’s theory of time as explained through Verlyn Flieger’s *A Question of Time*, not to mention engaging some of Flieger’s key qualifications. In contrast, David Doughan provides a more down-to-earth (literally) synopsis of the *Notion Club Papers*, providing some nice linguistic detail about the fragment as well as suggesting that the mythic intrusions of Númenor upon the present reality of Lowdham and company recalls certain aspects of Charles Williams (224).

Jryki Korpua takes the familiar observation that hobbits are the “mediators of myth” for readers of Middle-earth, and he situates it within a well-informed discussion using influential concepts from literary criticism such as defamiliarization and the uncanny. A familiar observation is also taken up by Zachary A. Rhone. Most readers know that Tolkien found inspiration from Old English poems such as “The Ruin,” “The Seafarer,” and “The Wanderer” but, rather than looking for direct text-based influences, Rhone instead focuses on how Tolkien adapts core sentiments. For example, Tolkien’s Valar evoke the giants who originally built the structures in “The Ruin,” and as such Tolkien evokes “the universal feeling of sadness over ruin only felt by those laden with the gift of mortality” (232). Finally, Larissa Budde closes out volume 1 by drawing a novel comparison between Tolkien and German novelist Theodor Storm, author of *Der Schimmelreiter* (1888). Although she admits that neither work bears much relationship with the other, Budde’s main point may certainly interest ecocritics. The major horses for each novelist—Shadowfax for Tolkien, the Grey in Storm—represent “ideal human/nonhuman interaction,” or in other words the ideal relationship between human ingenuity and technology against the agency of the nonhuman world (259).

MEDIEVALISM

Hemmi, Yoko. “Tolkienesque Transformations: Post-Celticism and Possessiveness in ‘The Lay of Atrou and Itroun,’” pp. 3-14.

McGregor, Jamie. “Tolkien’s Devices: The Heraldry of Middle-earth,” pp. 17-24; a revised version has been published in *Mythlore*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2013, pp. 95-112.

Groom, Nick. “Tolkien and the Gothic,” pp. 25-34.

Wagner, Constance G. J. “Frodo and Faramir: Mirrors of Chivalry,” pp. 35-41; also published (although I could not track down a copy) in *Silver Leaves*, vol. 5, 2013, pp. 52-55.

Volume 2 of *The Return of the Ring* opens with a particularly strong section on Tolkien's literary medievalism. Considering that Verlyn Flieger's 2016 edition of *The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun* had not yet been published, Yoko Hemmi provides an especially nice discussion on Celticism within that poem for her conference audience. Hemmi argues that, while Tolkien endows his forest of Broceliande with "an aura of mythic marvels," he nonetheless also took a critical attitude toward "romanticized, stereotypical depictions of the Celtic lands, their people and culture" (5); even if he employed some images popularized by Celticism, he to his credit "showed no desire to depict the marvellous and the unknown being conquered by a mortal lord" (14).

Jamie McGregor provides a surprisingly illuminating analysis on Middle-earth's heraldic devices. The most wholesome devices tend to be natural, such as Gondor's White Tree, Rohan's White Horse, and Dol Amroth's Silver Swan. In contrast, Mordor's Red Eye and Saruman's White Hand show a "maimed" body indicative of their own maimed moral natures. Although linking Saruman directly to Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement (23) may be questionable, McGregor's core point about heraldry certainly indicates Tolkien's keen attention to detail.

The subject of the Gothic comes next in an important discussion by Nick Groom. After succinctly summarizing the history of Gothicism, including its positive and negative interpretations within English intellectual history, Groom highlights seven types of "obscurities" that best invoke the limits of rationality in the Gothic sublime: meteorological obscurity, topographical obscurity, architectural obscurity, material obscurity, textual obscurity, psychological obscurity, and spiritual obscurity. Tolkien, argues Groom, employs all except "spiritual obscurity." Whereas the Protestant Gothic writers in the 18th- and 19th centuries saw the Gothic in terms of forming a national identity in "relation to the suppressed horrors of historical change," Tolkien, as an anti-Enlightenment Catholic medievalist, purposely sought "to reconnect with and revive medieval identities" (34). Groom then intriguingly links Tolkien to Thomas Leland's *Longsword* (1762), a gothic novel prior to Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. This contribution by Groom can also be usefully read in conjunction with Anna Thayer's contribution on Tolkien's Romanticism, although the latter piece doesn't quite match Groom's erudition.

Finally, Constance G. J. Wagner draws a tenuous, though not indefensible, connection between *preudomme*, the ideal chivalric knight proposed by the 14th-century knight Geoffroi de Charny, and the personal qualities of Frodo and Faramir. These qualities include pity, mercy, God-fearing-ness, and the honoring of bonds of fealty. Wagner's observations, however, probably suggest

convergence rather than influence—although, granted, she makes no claim that de Charny directly influenced Tolkien.

FANTASY

Thayer (née Slack), Anna E. “An Old Light Rekindled: Tolkien’s Influence on Fantasy,” pp. 45-56 ; also published in *Hither Shore*, vol. 9, 2012, pp. 70-79.

Forchhammer, Troels. ““In the Memory of Old Wives’: Old Tales and Fairy-stories in Middle-earth,” pp. 57-67.

This short section combines a commentary on Tolkien’s influence upon the field of fantasy with an original new application of “On Fairy-stories” to *The Lord of the Rings*. Anna E. Thayer, for her part, begins on somewhat shaky ground with the premise that “fantasy is the black sheep of literature” (46), a point which was perhaps more true a few decades ago, but her closing comments on her experience as a writer struggling to remove herself from Tolkien’s shadow can be useful for the (many) other writers struggling with the same issue.

An original twist on an old theme comes courtesy of Troels Forchhammer. Whereas most treatments on Tolkien’s “On Fairy-stories” have chosen to read *The Lord of the Rings* in terms of recovery, consolation, escape, and enchantment, Forchhammer instead asks how the characters *within* Tolkien’s book are affected when they themselves hear fairy-stories. The hobbits undergo recovery and escape upon hearing their own native fairy tales and folk legends; even young Gollum feels a degree of consolation from fairy stories heard during his pre-Ring childhood. Rivendell, of course, sparks enchantment. Forchhammer ends by tying the “hierarchy of wisdom” in Middle-earth to how well characters react “to the Faërie in their midst” (67), which certainly seems like a fair enough point.

DIVERSITY

Mann, Maureen F. “Tolkien and Nonsense,” pp. 71-87; a revised version published in *Laughter in Middle-earth: Humour In and Around the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Thomas Honegger and Maureen F. Mann, Walking Tree Publishers, 2016, pp. 9-36.

Thayer (née Slack), Anna E. ““Stars Above a Dark Tor: Tolkien and Romanticism,” pp. 89-99; also published in *Hither Shore*, vol. 7, 2010, 8-17.

Naveh, Reuven. “The Ainulindalë and Tolkien’s Approach to Modernity,” pp. 101-10; previously appeared in longer form as “Tonality, Atonality, and the Ainulindalë,” in *Music in Middle-earth*, edited by Heidi Steimel and Friedhelm Schneidewind, Walking Tree Publishers, 2010, pp. 29-52.

Clarke, Jim. “Tolkien, the Russians, and Industrialisation,” pp. 111-22.

- Smith, Murray. “Legal Bother: Law and Related Matters in *The Hobbit*,” pp. 123-142.
- Croft, Janet Brennan. “Tolkien’s Faërian Drama: Origins and Valedictions,” pp. 143-57; a revised version published in *Mythlore*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2014, pp. 33-47.
- Barclay, Chris. “Women of Middle-earth,” pp. 159-172.
- Kreuzer, Christopher. “Colours in Tolkien,” pp. 173-186.
- Martsch, Nancy. “Thirty Years of Tolkien Fandom,” pp. 187-196.

No single theme guides the “Diversity” section—indeed, there’s remarkably little overlap in subject matter between the essays, making this final (and longest) section of *The Return of the Ring* a grab-bag of interests and approaches. Maureen F. Mann opens things up with a discussion of nonsense in Tolkien. Usually, “nonsense” denotes something either silly or unintelligible, but Mann also wishes to situate Tolkien within a tradition of nonsense verse. Building off the work of Roderick McGillis, this kind of verse—the prime representative of which is Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky”—generally seeks to ridicule or deflate the pretentiousness and high seriousness of canonized poetry (75). Tolkien could appreciate this, says Mann, but he also felt the enchantment of a “folk tradition” of nonsense, a genre that includes nursery rhymes, and to prove this argument Mann ably marshals together a host of Tolkien’s lesser-studied works like *Farmer Giles of Ham* and *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*. The figure of Bombadil also introduces this folk tradition into *The Lord of the Rings*. According to Mann, even if such verse is strictly unintelligible, it nonetheless signals ancient beginnings or origins, thereby evoking a sense—through nonsense—of both wonder and delight.

Thayer’s second contribution to this volume takes Tolkien’s privileging of imagination, not to mention his attention to nature, and situates him within the Romantic tradition. She also highlights the Gothic in Tolkien as an off-shoot relation to his Romanticism, which overlaps somewhat with Nick Groom’s essay in this volume.

A different note is sounded, however, in Reuven Nayeh’s contribution on music in the *Ainulindalë*. According to Nayeh in an extremely learned (and well-taken) discussion, the *dissonance* that Melkor introduces into Ilúvatar’s theme has a long history in Western music. Since many composers over the centuries have learned to incorporate dissonance into tonal music, strengthening the harmony, Nayeh reads Melkor’s dissonance as reflecting modernist *atonal* music, especially in composer Arthur Schoenberg’s works. Thus Tolkien’s critique of Melkor can be linked to a critique of atonal music within modernism.

Following Nayeh comes Jim Clarke. Some devout Tolkienists may have heard of Kyrill Yeskov’s *The Last Ringerbearer* but, without an ability to read Russian, this work has remained inaccessible for those of us in the West. Clarke, however,

provides a well-informed and intelligent summary of Yeskov's basic themes. Much like what Gregory Maguire does to L. Frank Baum's Oz in *Wicked*, Yeskov seeks to subvert the "binary good versus evil paradigm" in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* by re-evaluating Tolkien's own evaluation of industrialization (115). After describing various loose Russian "translations" of Tolkien, Clarke describes Yeskov's Mordor as a parliamentary monarchy, depicting "Barad-dûr as the Enlightenment capital of Arda," which feeds and maintains its citizens only through the agency of "technological advancement and trade" (121). In short, Yeskov demonstrates "the positive elements of industrialization that Tolkien's narrative refuses to countenance" (122).

From adaptation we now turn to legal matters. Murray Smith offers a detailed legal context for all relevant legal matters in *The Hobbit*, which he reads in isolation from *The Lord of the Rings*. While some of Smith's conclusion—such as viewing Laketown's demand for reparations in light of WWI German reparations—are not necessarily new, Smith nonetheless offers many intriguing remarks on legal matters. For example, he considers Bilbo an "independent contractor," not an employee, and this allows "him to make the moral decision to give away the Arkenstone" (142). Ultimately, Tolkien upholds the great importance of law in *The Hobbit* while also acknowledging its limitations in solving certain conflicts. Readers interested in this subject would profit from reading Smith in conjunction with Douglas Charles Kane's "Law and Arda," published in *Tolkien Studies* in 2012, the same year Smith delivered this conference paper.

Janet Brennan Croft follows up on an observation first made by Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson: although Tolkien mentions "Faërian Drama" in his essay "On Fairy-stories," he actually provides no good examples of such dramas or a succinct definition of the phenomenon. In terms of definition, Croft suggests that a Faërian Drama offers immersion into a secondary world, a "feeling of joining a world already in progress, that will continue after one leaves," which she innovatively compares to interactive MMORPGs, aka "massively multi-player online role-playing games" (148). Another significant element of Faërian Drama, however, is "recovery . . . redemption, reclamation, and personal (spiritual, emotional, or psychological) growth" (149). Contemporary examples include the films *Groundhog Day* and *A Christmas Carol*, and Croft suggests *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as medieval inspirations for Tolkien's original concept. Finally, Croft gives her audience a new interpretation of *Smith of Wootton Major* as a Faërian Drama that suggests that the perilous realm lies everywhere around us.

Chris Barclay, a practicing GP in women's health, sets himself the task (as he tells us) to look at women in Tolkien and discover what he finds. After a brief discussion of women in Tolkien's life, Barclay more usefully presents four

“archetypes” of women that appear in the fiction: the Mother, the Madonna, the Lover, and the Remarkable Women. None of these archetypes, though, strike Barclay as representing truly “real” women—but he adds a surprising touch by identifying Erendis from the unfinished (and infrequently mentioned) “The Mariner’s Wife,” composed in 1960, as Tolkien’s most “real” female character (172).

Color symbolism constitutes the major theme for Christopher Kreuzer. Going beyond a simple analysis of white and black, Kreuzer suggests that Tolkien may have “created a pre-modern verbal palette of colour and ‘quality of light’ in which to set his stories” (178)—in other words, different societies and different cultures have named (and arguably perceived) colors differently, so Tolkien tried to evoke something of the sort. What follows, though, is a lengthy description of the colors, and sometimes color compounds such as “blue-grey,” that Tolkien uses, and it would have been interesting to see a comparison between Tolkien and another writer to better glimpse what, if anything, was unique about the color usage in his prose.

Finally, a remarkably appropriate essay closes out this second volume of the 2012 Tolkien Conference Proceedings. Nancy Martsch focuses on Tolkien fandom during the last three decades and, as such, wonderfully compliments an earlier essay by Charles Noad, “The Tolkien Society: The Early Days,” published in *Mallorn*, vol. 50, 2010. According to Martsch, Tolkien fandom initially grew out of student clubs and science fiction fandom. It was mostly a youth movement—although Martsch pointedly notes that not *every* early fan was a hippie or a radical (190). Martsch then turns to *Beyond Bree*, the fan magazine she first began editing over thirty years ago in 1981. She offers many interesting stories about her aggressive promotion strategies, including sending copies of *Beyond Bree* to Rayner Unwin. Overall, the digital revolution comprises the biggest difference between early fandom and fandom from the last 30 years.

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