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Inklings of Truth (2018), edited by Paul Shrimpton

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Inklings of Truth: Essays to Mark the Anniversaries of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, by Michael Ward, Stratford Caldecott, Walter Hooper, and Simon Stacey, edited by Paul Shrimpton. Oxford: Grandpont House, 2018. 102 pp. Price unknown (trade paperback) ISBN 9780952216728.

This interesting but not indispensable collection includes four papers that Oxford's Grandpont House sponsored in 2013 in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of C.S. Lewis and the fortieth year after J.R.R. Tolkien's death.

Since Michael Ward's contribution "The Heavens Are Telling the Glory of God" deals solely with Lewis's Narnia, this Tolkien-centered review omits commentary on it.

The late Stratford Caldecott's "Tolkien's Search for England" begins by noting writers who influenced Tolkien, including G.K. Chesterton, E.R. Eddison, William Morris, George MacDonald, Kenneth Grahame, Charles Kingsley, and H. Rider Haggard.

William Blake, writes Caldecott, "decried in modernity the same things as Tolkien, and sought to resurrect the spirit of England in his mythological saga of Albion . . . Tolkien, a Catholic who possessed the same rare gift as Blake, found his myth-making faculty stimulated rather than destroyed by the Gospel and Church teaching . . . Tolkien did something comparable to Blake, but with a more orthodox theological intention" (44).

Another influence, J.M. Barrie, "should not be neglected. We know that Tolkien saw and enjoyed the play *Peter Pan*, and there is something, some note of Elvish poignancy, about Peter's doomed relationship with Wendy at the very end of that story that reminds one of the 'Athrabeth,' the background to which is the love between a old woman and an ageless elven Prince she met when she was young, the brother of King Finrod" (45).

Old English literature was a strong inspiration, Caldecott states: "Tolkien believed that the brutal Norman invasion of 1066 had effectively suppressed the imaginative life and oral traditions of the Anglo-Saxons, the true 'English'; and it was this that Tolkien set himself to rebuild . . ." (47).

"He wanted to prise the fingers of the Normans off the Celtic legends. . . . But it was initially the lost Anglo-Saxon culture that fascinated Tolkien, as he caught its far-off gleam in the poetry of Cynewulf and the saga of Beowulf. Rohan, Gondor, and Hobbiton are all attempts to capture one or other aspect of the lost civilization" (48).

Caldecott concludes: "Tolkien's final lesson about England and Englishness is located in his portrait of the Hobbit soul, its weaknesses and its potentiality for greatness, viewed in the light of a Catholic vision of reality. The greatness is demonstrated by the interior strength of Merry, Pippin and Sam as they face down the evil and uproot it. Frodo has a greatness of a different sort. He is weakened,

not strengthened, by his experience of bearing the ring and having it torn from him unwillingly, Thus he is living the tragedy of evil in his own person, bearing the wound of it so that others can live more freely and happily” (54-55).

“Englishness is not about having an empire . . . but about the civilization of the hearth, the fireside, the kitchen table, the conversation down [at] the pub . . . The true England has almost gone, but her seeds remain in the barren ground, as though waiting for the first touch of spring. *The Lord of the Rings* is one of those seeds (55).

Walter Hooper’s ”Memories of C.S. Lewis and the Other Inklings” focuses on Lewis, but Tolkien is mentioned. “To this day,” Hooper writes, “I do not understand why some of Lewis’s biographers, namely Humphrey Carpenter and A.N. Wilson, insist that the friendship between Lewis and Tolkien ‘cooled’ near the end of Lewis’s life. Lewis had already explained to me that he saw less of Tolkien because his wife insisted on his spending more time at home. . . . He [Tolkien] explained, however, that he had given up the Thursday evening meetings in Magdalen College because he felt he ought to spend, not only more time with his wife, but with his children. He sensed that I did not understand what I had heard about Jack being unpopular with many of his colleagues . . . ‘you are not forgiven [for] is writing popular works, such as Jack did on theology, and especially if they win international success as his did.’ He went on to say that Jack was ‘driven to write his theological books by his conscience’”(70).

“Tolkien loved Lewis very much and I always got the impression that he acted very much like an older brother to Lewis,” Hooper recalls. “[H]e said. ‘Jack was always been “taken in” by someone. First it was Mrs. Moore—the mother of Lewis’s friend who was killed in the war—then it was with Charles Williams. And then it was Joy Davidman” (71).

“Tolkien paid me the compliment of introducing me to his family,” Hooper says, “and in all my fifty years in England no one has been as marvelous to me as the Tolkien family” (71).

The last essay, Simon Stacey’s “Tolkien’s Tone and the Frequent Failure to Hear It,” is, at 22 pages, the longest here. Stacey lambastes Peter Jackson’s film version of *The Lord of the Rings* for its tone-deafness (“a dishonorable Faramir, a crudely and literally possessed Theoden, not to mention a skateboarding Legolas”) (76 n2).

Stacey states that Tolkien’s tone includes simplicity, restraint, beauty and “a sense of *loss*, indeed death, yet with *hope* (sometimes a surprisingly complex reading of hope) for recovery and final victory. This, of course, derived from Tolkien’s faith as a Christian” (79-80). Illustrating his point with four exemplars, Stacey cites the January, 1915, poem “As Two Fair Trees,” an early incarnation of the two trees of Valinor as a metaphor of his love for his wife Edith.

Faramir and Eowyn, with their emblematic self-denial and sacrifice, are two more embodiments of Stacey's view of Tolkien's essential qualities.

Finally, Stacey goes to the beginning of *The Silmarillion's* ninth chapter "Of the Flight of the Noldor," including Fëanor's refusal to surrender the Silmarils to the Valar in order to restore the Two Trees. He sees a "penetrating discussion of the question of fate, providence, free will and progressive corruption" (91).

"It should be clear by now that much of Tolkien's work is about death, the temptation and the desire for deathlessness or—its opposite?—the desire for release from a fallen world" (92).

His conclusion sums up the substance of all of Tolkien's tales of Middle-earth:

"Tolkien's tone requires careful listening. In its self-restraint, its contemplation of beauty, and in its powerful evocation of loss and the tough realities of sin, death and hope, it repays constant rereading. From its fully worked out creation-myth to the passing of the Ringbearers over the Sea at the end of the Third Age, Tolkien's whole oeuvre constitutes an *evangelica praeparatio* . . . The greatest eucatastrophe lies elsewhere, and triumphs over death; but in Tolkien's fiction—and though it is followed by death—the horns of Théoden's Rohirrim on the Fields of the Pelennor signal one of those great moments which ring out with the hope of the Gospel, and in its coda at Théoden's burial following the greater victory which his sacrifice has helped to accomplish, we hear a verse which might be felt to encompass all of Tolkien's life and work:

Out of doubt, out of dark, to the day's rising
he rode singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.
Hope he rekindled, and in hope ended;
over death, over dread, over doom lifted
out of loss, out of life, unto long glory" (96-97).

Mike Foster