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## *The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien: The Places That Inspired Middle-earth*, by John Garth

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tradition giving readers insight into the transmission history of the text. In addition, Whobry provides indices of personal and place names as well as an inventory of the manuscripts and versions, and a brief bibliography of key scholarship. This is a very readable translation of a vitally important medieval text with valuable helps and information for student and scholar alike.

—Larry J. Swain

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**THE WORLDS OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN: THE PLACES THAT INSPIRED MIDDLE-EARTH.** John Garth. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford. 2020. 208 pages. ISBN 978-0-691-19694-7. Hardcover \$29.95

JOHN GARTH'S MASTERFUL STUDY BELONGS on every Middle-earth scholar's shelf. Encyclopedic in its scope, it melds Tolkien's biography with his imagined worlds. From Morgoth to the Mewlips, no sub-created stone is left unturned. Lavishly illustrated with photographs, maps of both real and imagined lands, and art and illustrations by Tolkien and others, many hitherto unpublished, Garth's guidebook to the geography and history of Middle-earth is boggling in its breadth and depth. Its command of scholarship enhances it immeasurably. Each page illuminates with insights and dazzles with details. Time and again, the reader will marvel at how much knowledge Garth fits into 208 pages. The large (eight by ten inches) format amplifies the impact of the illustrations, whose reproductions here are of the highest quality. The two-column layout enhances readability. A weighty tome at two and three-quarters pounds, *The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien* does not skimp on words or pictures.

One virtue is stand-alone passages that those of us who share a newspaper background with Garth would call sidebars. "Tales That Grew in the Telling" traces the evolution of Tolkien's Middle-earth maps. "A Hostile World" shows his debt to Anglo-Saxon cosmology. "Where On Earth Is Dorwinion?" "Forest Of Thunder," "Elvish And Welsh," "A Mythology For England," "Forests And Cathedrals," "The Marsh Of Tode," "What's In A Name? Luthien And Leithian," "Hollin And The Doors Of Durin," "Radagast And Medwed," "The Curse Of Porlock," "Doom Rings," "A Battlefield Both Ancient And

Modern," "From Great Yarmouth To Belfalas," "In A Cave By The Sea Lived A...," "Tanks At Gondolin," and "River Names," to cite but a few, enrich the text without distracting from it. Garth employed such sidebars in his earlier work, *Tolkien at Exeter College* (2014), but since this book has a far grander scope, the passages here are even more valuable.

England's green and pleasant land is where *The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien* begins. The West Midlands was the true Shire, where Tolkien, his brother Hilary, and their mother Mabel came to live in April, 1895, after the harsh heat of Bloemfontein, South Africa, proved too hard for them. Tolkien's father Arthur stayed behind. Five miles southeast of industrial Birmingham, Sarehole, where Mabel and her sons lived,

stood in a country that was still little altered by the modern age. The horse ruled the roads. On a clear night, the stars ruled the sky. It was a world that had more in common with 'the lands and hills of the primitive and wildest stories', Tolkien recalled. 'I loved it with an intensity of love that was a kind of nostalgia reversed' — an aching love for a new-found home. (13)

"Looking from the Shire into the dim distance — present and past — it is clearer still that we are standing in a kind of England," Garth writes.

Both the Shire and England are reportedly founded by brothers whose names mean 'horse' and 'horse' — Marcho and Blanco for the hobbits and Hengest and Horsa for the Germanic peoples. Both settlements involved three peoples — the hobbit Fallohides, Harfoots and Stoors and the Germanic Angles, Saxons and Jutes. It all happened fourteen centuries ago from the perspective of the War of the Ring or Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. (22)

The Shire and the realms of *Farmer Giles of Ham* and *Smith of Wootton Major* derive many of their place names from Tolkien's Oxford and its environs, Garth points out. Many Middle-earth pub names, such as The Green Dragon, The Golden Perch, and The Ivy Bush, have Oxford antecedents. Bree's Prancing Pony was originally The White Horse, an occasional Inklings haunt.

In his second chapter, "Four Winds," Garth begins by tracing the North as Tolkien's first linguistic love, in both its languages and its lore, "a primary inspiration":

It has gradually become clear how much he owed to the West, too — to Celtic traditions of Faërie. The influence of the classical South, Greece and Rome, is still almost unexplored, even though it dominated his own

cultural era. Then there is the East, which reached him primarily through Anglo-Saxon wonder-tales. All this is so superbly fused in his invented world that it feels both unique and original. (25)

The North inspired Tolkien's first Elvish language. Its source was the Finnish *Kalevala*. "Reading it was like crossing a gulf into a new world, Tolkien enthused. [...] [In his *Story of Kullervo*] for the first time he was giving one of his invented languages a home inside a story" (28). Turning his compass ninety degrees left, Garth states that "Tolkien's debt to the Celtic West has long been severely underrated—mostly thanks to his own comments. He once said that 'Celtic things' were 'like a broken stained glass window reassembled without design . . . in fact, 'mad.'" A note for *The Book of Lost Tales* says the Irish and Welsh knew only 'garbled things' about the Elves" (33).

Moving to the myths of the other West, America, Garth asserts that

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* helped Tolkien towards Middle-earth in autumn 1914. He surely noted Hiawatha's departure by canoe into 'the portals of the Sunset', so much like the westward flight of his own Éarendel. [...] The natural worlds of Longfellow and Tolkien are alike in their animism—their rivers imbued with spirit, and their trees with speech. (35-36)

Throughout this book, Garth animates his text with illustrative art by Tolkien and others. Here, he includes N.C. Wyeth's 1911 painting of Hiawatha paddling toward the sunset.

The South of classical Greek and Roman myth and the Africa of Tolkien's earliest boyhood both contributed to his legendarium. "Simultaneously, the story sticks to his overarching method—portraying remote people and places as medieval Europeans believed them to be, rather than as they actually were" (39).

The historic East was the seed of "multiple flags of biblical portent in his story of Númenor. Its kings are as long-lived as biblical patriarchs, yet give more thought to their tombs than their palaces, like Egyptian pharaohs" (41).

Garth's third chapter includes Tolkien's first map for *The Lord of the Rings*, which expanded as the tale grew in its telling (45). The chapter also chronicles the geography of Tolkien's courtship and wedding to Edith Bratt melded with the history of the island of Britain.

It seems doubtful whether he actively imagined an island Britain emerging from Lindon [an enchanted west beside the Great Sea] and the Shire. Although he said that Hobbiton was about the latitude of Oxford,

and implied that it was around that longitude too, he admitted it was tricky fitting his invented lands to past European geology. (58)

Leaving land for ocean, Garth's fourth and, at 22 pages, longest chapter, "The Shore and The Sea," states "The entire mythology sprang into life in 1914 with the image of a ship sailing into the sky, and *The Lord of the Rings* ends the same way" (61). Tolkien's painting of the Cornwall coast done on Aug. 12, 1914, *Cave near The Lizard* (63), and his letter to Edith show that the call of the sea was strong. *Roverandom* and *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil* are cited for their aquatic elements. Tolkien's recurrent nightmare of being swept away by giant wave reminiscent of the drowning of Atlantis is noted. Furthermore, Garth links the ocean to both the mythologies of King Arthur and Middle-earth.

Tolkien probably imagined his Lonely Isle of Tol Eressëa as the true source of all later legendary 'fortunate isles' that are home to faëry folk [...]. In writings from the mid-1930s, Tolkien actually made *Avallon* a byname for the Lonely Isle. This means that in *The Lord of the Rings*, the wounded Frodo ends up sailing to Avallon—truly 'an Arthurian ending,' as Tolkien once described it. When Sam Gamgee eventually sails there in Frodo's wake, in effect he does something that Tolkien meant Arthur's Lancelot to do in his unfinished poem *The Fall of Arthur*. (66)

Beginning with Tolkien's 1911 hiking trip to the Swiss Alps when he was 19, "Roots Of The Mountains," the fifth chapter, asserts that "[a] single trip to Switzerland laid the foundation for almost every mountain scene Tolkien wrote. His account of it, though neither comprehensive nor orderly, is his frankest statement of his debt to real places" (83). The valley of Lauterbrunnen, shown in a full-page photograph here, inspired Rivendell. The mountains of Wengen, Silberhorn, Eiger, and Jungfrau that frame the valley were reborn in Tolkien's fiction.

Beneath the mountains are caves, the dwelling places of Gollum, Shelob, and the dwarves. Garth details Tolkien's fascination in both fictional and real caverns: "One extraordinary piece of description comes directly from [an English] experience--Gimli's description of the Glittering Caves of Aglarond behind Helm's Deep. Tolkien told a reader, 'the passage was based on the caves in Cheddar Gorge and was written after I had revisited these in 1940'" (98). A photograph illustrates the similarity.

"Rivers, Lakes and Waterfalls," at twelve pages the shortest of the book's eleven chapters, catalogs Middle-earth's inland waters. "For the inspirations behind Tolkien's writings, rivers are a rich but cautionary symbol. Our word *influence* comes from the Latin for 'flowing in', and one influence is likely to mingle with others to make something both new and protean" (101).

This fifth chapter wends through *Lay of the Children of Húrin*, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, *The Book of Lost Tales*, and *The Fall of Gondolin*, linking their waters to ones in Tolkien's experience: the Rhine, River Cole, the Cherwell in Oxford, the Thames, Avon, and the confluence of the Sow and Trent. Garth also studies Tolkien's still waters. "The pool at the West-gate of Moria certainly bears comparison with Grendel's mere, a gloomy place among 'highlands wolfhaunted'" (109).

"A deep feeling for trees is Tolkien's most distinctive response to the national world," Garth writes at the beginning of "Tree-Woven Lands," the sixth chapter. "As a child, he drew them and he liked to be among, beside or up them" (113). The 'tree-woven lands' of Tolkien's own imagination are places of liberty and enchantment, refuge and terror," he continues.

They can renew the spirit or weigh it with autumnal cares. Increasingly, they stand for nature itself, and against the axe and furnace. Tolkien seeded them from the forests of adventure yarn, fairy-story and philology, the woods of childhood play and adult rambles, and the potent myth of a world once blanketed in green. (113)

Garth roots Tolkien's love of woods to "Bumble Dell," perhaps Moseley Bog, where he and his younger brother Hilary rambled during their Sarehole boyhood.

"In English culture, the epitome of greenwood liberty is Nottinghamshire's Sherwood Forest, where the noble outlaw Robin Hood and his 'merry men' resist the tyranny of King John" (116). Tolkien reincarnates Robin Hood in Faramir of *The Lord of the Rings*, the character the author once said he most strongly identified with, and Beren's father Barahir in *The Silmarillion*.

Lothlórien and Mirkwood also earn mention as fictional forests from the roots of real woods:

Lothlórien is a land of mallorn-trees, a species of Tolkien's own invention. He compared the mallorn to the beech—upright grey bole and perpendicular branches upswept at the tips—but he gave it the same massive majesty he praised in the elm. In a punning piece of early language-invention, he made *elm!* the Elvish expression for 'marvellous!' (118)

But the mallorn's longevity differentiates it from the elm. "English tradition associates the elm with transience and death. Its timber was used for coffins and ships' keels. It had a reputation for dropping branches without warning, and it was notoriously prone to disease" (118-120).

Garth continues: “The name *Mirkwood* was no invention, and it belonged to a real place of mythic stature—a forest than had haunted the European imagination two thousand years ago” (123). Tolkien had first encountered it in Julius Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*. The name “Mirkwood” was the English name bestowed on this vast woodland by nineteenth-century authors including “William Morris, whose romance *The House of the Wolfings* [was] a favorite of Tolkien’s after he bought it in 1914” (*Ibid.*) At 19, Tolkien had seen the western remnants of this great forest in Germany and Austria traveling by riverboat and train on his 1911 trip to Switzerland.

In old age, Tolkien could no longer access the visionary feelings of his youth when (as Christopher Tolkien writes) ‘for him Elvish songs “lingered yet mightily in the woods and the hills”’. But exploring the forests of *The Lord of the Rings* at his zenith as a writer, he could still recapture them. His memory was shorter than Treebeard’s but no less heartfelt. (131)

“Ancient Imprints,” the seventh chapter, delves into archeology, “which by now was revealing ancient earthworks across Britain using aerial photography techniques first developed for trench warfare” (133). “The legendarium texts themselves, from the Book of Lost Tales to the Red Book of Westmarch, purport to be records from our own forgotten past,” Garth states. “They are meant to be relics comparable to the tablets of Nineveh [...], like [H. Rider] Haggard’s Sherd of Amenartas, the inscribed poetry fragment that launches the quest for the lost city in *She*” (136).

Similarly, Lake-town of *The Hobbit* is based on archeological discoveries of wooden villages constructed on pilings near Zurich that Tolkien could have seen in the Swiss National Museum in 1911. Such settlements would have been susceptible to fire, and indeed some were destroyed by flames:

Lake-town marks a crucial point in the development of Middle-earth. It is neither a mythological settlement like Gondolin or Rivendell, nor even a parodic latter-day England like the Shire. Instead it is an historical reconstruction of a working town broadly based on what was then understood about lake-villages. That makes it a significant step toward the rich cultural backdrops that Tolkien developed from *the Lord of the Rings* onwards. (139)

The chapter revisits forgotten wars, such as the one recounted by Tom Bombadil after he saves the hobbits from the Barrow-wight:



The hobbits, picnicking like tourists beside an old megalith, are plunged into sleep and entombed alive in the regalia of ancient burial—circlets, chains, rings, and swords. [...] Part of the peculiar horror of all this is the sense of meaningless grievance. Time has made a mockery and mystery of the causes for which the old wars were fought.

The same sense could not be achieved later in *The Lord of the Rings*, when ancient history has come into sharp focus. [...] Tolkien creates a tremendous sense of perspective. This is vital in making us feel that Middle-earth was not invented for the story, but existed before it. (141)

Oxfordshire and the regions to the south and west of it boast many archeological sites, such as the Stonehenge, Avebury, the Rollright Stones, and the White Horse of Uffington. English archeological sites, like Avebury and Offa's Dike, certainly figured into Tolkien's fiction, especially in connection with Rohan. Garth writes: "Christopher Tolkien recalls sitting as a young boy on White Horse Hill near Uffington. 'I think even then I appreciated his intense awareness of that hill,' says Christopher, 'the archaic carving of the white horse in the chalk, the *bones* of the hill. One can see Weathertop in that'" (145).

The ninth chapter, "Watch And Ward," begins "It was Tolkien's great fortune to grow up around people and places that could nurture his extraordinary his extraordinary capacity for learning" (147). His mother Mabel taught him Latin, French, botany, and drawing. His guardian Fr. Francis Morgan's priestly community at the Birmingham Oratory allowed him access to an admirable library. At Oxford, he discovered the Bodleian Library: "'an awesome and splendid place' of 'wonderful manuscripts and books without price'" (147). The library of his college Exeter introduced him to a Finnish grammar that engendered his Elvish language.

But beyond Oxford World War I loomed. Garth's award-winning 2004 biography *Tolkien And The Great War* is the seminal study of how that "colossal and mismanaged butchery," as Hemingway called it, affected the life and influenced the writing of the author: "On these foundations of war Tolkien built the towers, towns and realms of his legendarium" (148).

German troops had burned the library at Louvain in Belgium, destroying thousands of medieval manuscripts. The fate of Gondolin, chronicled in Tolkien's tale written a year after the battle of the Somme, "Not Nineveh, Babylon, Troy, or Rome 'saw such terror as fell that day,' the storyteller of *The Book of Lost Tales* declares" (150).

Garth links Númenor to Atlantis and the Tower of Babel, Minas Tirith to Rome and Dante's *Divine Comedy* vision of Limbo, and Rohan's Golden Hall of Meduseld to Hrothgar's hall in *Beowulf*. The chapter concludes with a recollection of Tolkien's allegory of the tower, used in his famous 1933 undergraduate lecture on *Beowulf*. The lecture ends "But from the top of the

tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea" (156). The allegory evokes the Shire's Tower Hills and Frodo's vision of the ship sailing for the West, occurring both in his dreams and in the finale of *The Lord of the Rings*.

In the tenth and penultimate chapter, "Places of War," Garth describes how the author created his world amid the sordid horrors of the Western Front:

Tolkien recalled that much of the early legendarium was devised 'in grimy canteens, at lectures in cold fogs, in huts full of blasphemy and smut, or by candlelight in bell-tents, even some in dugouts under shell fire'. This was no mere escape to fairyland. Then and later he wrote to express his *feeling* about good, evil, fair, foul in some way: to rationalize it, and prevent it from just festering'. (159)

Unlike writers like Welsh Catholic poet David Jones, whose *In Parenthesis* employed Arthurian myth to hallow the war, Tolkien was more inclined to realism: "Rather than look at remote figures in a tapestry, we seem to walk with his heroes through the world of lived experience; [...] [L]andscape becomes a way to chart interior as well as exterior journeys" (160). Tolkien's many trips to the trenches between July and October 1916

were marked by ominous symbols of the old order overturned. [...] The crucified Christ presided over many road junctions; and such a calvary had once stood en route to the front line from Bouzincourt, at a tree-girt crossroads that the soldiers called Crucifix Corner. Similarly, en route to Mordor, Frodo and Sam see the old stone king at the Cross-roads in Ithilien—his head knocked off by orcs yet still whole. (162)

Thus the Somme was reborn as the most horrific geography of Middle-earth. It inspired the Dead Marshes, the Barrow-downs, and Morgul Vale. The fictional webs of Shelob are analogous to the fatal barbed wire which had entangled many doomed soldiers. "Recalling the real battlefield, Tolkien said, 'I remember miles and miles of seething, tortured earth, perhaps best described in the chapter about the approaches to Mordor. It was a searing experience'" (166).

The last chapter, "Craft And Industry," returns to the city where Tolkien grew up.

Birmingham's most effective invention was itself. [...] [It] pushed ahead of its rivals with new technologies to create fashionable novelties—pearl jewelry, enameled snuffboxes, silk-covered buttons, pearl buttons, gilt buttons.

These are exactly the knick-knacks that a well-to-do hobbit appreciates. Bilbo Baggins has a clock on his mantelpiece and brass buttons on his waistcoat. [...] In the end, his rise in the world is signalled

by new buttons—of gold. Tolkien does not explain which hobbit hive of industry made them. (176-77)

Birmingham was also the cradle of the Arts and Crafts movement spearheaded by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, and “What can be said with confidence is that the Elves, representing words ‘beauty and grace in life and artefact,’ embody the Arts and Crafts way that Tolkien first imbibed in Birmingham” (178).

The industrialization of Birmingham was a bitter pill. Tolkien had never seen an automobile during his Sarehole childhood. “‘I always knew it would go—and it did,’ Tolkien recalled in old age” (181). His beloved West Midlands had been transformed by the Industrial Revolution:

The heroes return to Hobbiton to encounter after-images of Tolkien’s 1933 visit to his vanished Sarehole. Trees have been wantonly cut down. Cosy hobbit-holes and gracious old buildings have given way to ‘shabby houses’. [...] ‘This is worse than Mordor,’ [Sam] reflects—worse because it was home and he remembers it before it was ruined. (182)

Meanwhile, Oxford had become the Detroit of Britain, the third fastest-growing city in England, with the establishment of the automobile-building Cowley motor works. The Oxford Noise Abatement Society was formed in 1931 to campaign against the traffic blight. It was a losing battle. Industrialization and mechanization had transformed England’s green and pleasant land into a realm overrun with William Blake’s dark, Satanic—or Sarumanic—mills.

It is easy to mock Tolkien as reactionary, misty-eyed and impractical in his opposition to industry and the machine. Indeed, there was a time when no self-respecting opinion-maker would miss the chance to do so.

Even admirers who embrace an environmental message in Tolkien’s work can sometimes underestimate the strength of feeling behind it. The attack on Isengard by the Ents strikes Anne C. Petty as ‘one of the most satisfying acts of retribution ever committed to paper,’ yet she is at pains to defuse any power it might have had beyond mere literary pleasure. [...] She seems to have overlooked a comment from Tolkien in support of far more radical action. ‘There is only one bright spot and that is the growing habit of disgruntled men of dynamiting factories and power-stations,’ he said. ‘I hope that, encouraged as “patriotism”, may become a habit!’ [...]

Patrick Curry has described Tolkien’s mood as one of ‘radical nostalgia’ that sees a problem and can inspire change—‘an emotionally empowering nostalgia, not a crippling one’.

The values that Tolkien saw in old Sarehole—community, freedom, craft and intimacy with nature—speak eloquently to people worldwide when embodied in the Shire. So does his ideal of craft, not least because he put it so superbly into practice himself. (184)

Garth concludes:

Middle-earth was created to reflect what [Tolkien] most loved and detested in his own world. It folds into itself a multitude of real landscapes and locations, wild or nurtured or despoiled. Indeed, you might say that upon the pages of Tolkien's legendarium, landscape itself has written an impassioned message. That is why this is not ultimately a mythology for England or for Britain only, but for a planet that sorely needs every inspiration to save itself. (184)

Admirers of Tolkien's art will find much to appreciate in *The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien*, including many hitherto unpublished drawings, maps, and paintings. Biographical tidbits add new information. The sidebars enhance its prodigal detail.

In all, Garth's command of the life and works of the maker of Middle-earth make this book an essential work for those who wish to increase their understanding of the author. Tolkien scholarship is much the richer because of it.

—Mike Foster



## BRIEFLY NOTED

**A DICTIONARY OF SYMBOLS: REVISED AND EXPANDED.** Juan Eduardo Cirlot; translated from the Spanish by Jack Sage and Valerie Mills; foreword by Herbert Read; afterword by Victoria Cirlot. New York Review of Books, 2020. pbk. 978-1-68137-197-9. 553 pp. \$34.95.

**D**ICCIONARIO DE SÍMBOLOS TRADICIONALES was first published in Spanish by the poet and critic Juan Eduardo Cirlot, active in Barcelona in the mid-1940s through early 1950s, in 1958. The first English translation was in 1962, and it went through several more editions, expansions, and translations before his death in 1973. A member of the Dau al Set artistic movement in Catalonia, Cirlot was contemporary with the Surrealists and Dadaists and influenced by Jung and