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A Wilderness of Dragons: Essays in Honor of Verlyn Flieger (2018), edited by John D. Rateliff

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A Wilderness of Dragons: Essays in Honor of Verlyn Flieger, edited by John D. Rateliff. Wayzata, Minnesota: The Gabbro Head, 2018. xx, 448pp. \$24.95 (reduced price hardcover) ISBN 9781732579903; \$16.95 (reduced price paperback) ISBN 9781732579910.

Verlyn Flieger hardly needs an introduction. Her books *Splintered Light: Language and Logos in Tolkien's World* (1983; revised 2002), *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (1997), and *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien's Mythology* (2005) have become part of the canon of Tolkien scholarship, providing the groundwork and inspiration for future generations of Tolkien scholars. Flieger's critical editions of Tolkien's works include *Smith of Wootton Major* (2005; 2015), *Tolkien on Fairy Stories* (2008, co-edited with Douglas A. Anderson), *The Story of Kullervo* (in *Tolkien Studies VII*, 2010; in book form, 2015) and *The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun* (2016). The dozens of scholarly articles and conference papers that Flieger has authored are too numerous to mention. In *A Wilderness of Dragons* John D. Rateliff has assembled an impressive collection of essays from scholars working in a wide range of disciplines whose understanding of Tolkien owes something to Verlyn Flieger. The volume is organized into three sections: (1) Tolkienian Studies, which consists of sixteen essays treating Tolkien's legendarium from a variety of perspectives; (2) Flieger's Fictions, comprising three essays analyzing Flieger's creative work; and (3) Three Personal Tributes, testimonials about Flieger's influence from Tolkien scholars and a former student.

Tolkienian Studies

Rateliff presents the essays in alphabetical order according to the names of the contributors, but I found that the essays coalesce around certain themes, and have thus grouped them accordingly. This seems to me to be a more logical and cohesive organization of the essays in the first section, which at 335 pages, makes up three quarters of the volume.

One essay that stands alone is "**A History of the Acquisition: Marquette and the Tolkien Manuscripts**," a paper by the late **Taum Santoski**. Rateliff has included this essay "as a token of Taum's and Verlyn's friendship," (p. 237) and because many of the aspects of Marquette's acquisition and stewardship of the manuscripts detailed by Santoski have not previously been published. These manuscripts include drafts for *The Hobbit*, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *Mr. Bliss*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Santoski wrote this paper for the 1983 Marquette Tolkien conference, and Rateliff has helpfully provided notes with updates pertaining to the archives and related events. Santoski's meticulous work as "resident Tolkien expert" at Marquette cannot be underestimated, as Rateliff mentions in Santoski's

biography at the end of the volume: “He worked closely with Christopher Tolkien to sort out the difficult tangle of how the manuscripts sent to Marquette in the mid-1950s and those retained by Tolkien meshed together, foundational work for *The History of Middle-earth* Volumes VI through IX” (p. 424). Santoski’s meticulousness in organizing the manuscripts was matched by his attention to detail in telling the story of the papers’ journey to Marquette. His account of the correspondence between Bertram Rota, the book and manuscript dealer who helped negotiate the sale of the manuscripts, William Ready, Director of Libraries of Marquette, and Tolkien makes for fascinating reading. The portrait of Tolkien that emerges from these negotiations in one of an author who was as courteous and conscientiousness as he was disorganized and prone to procrastination. Rateliff notes that “at one point, Tolkien was unsure of what he kept and what came to Marquette” (p. 255; note 1). Happily, Christopher Tolkien sent several shipments of *Lord of the Rings* material to Marquette between 1987-1997, bringing the total number of pages of Tolkien manuscripts at Marquette to 11,098.

Language, Myth and Dreams

Language and myth are interrelated and often overlap in Tolkien’s legendarium, and **Andrew Higgins** reminds us of Flieger’s claim in her essay “The Mind, The Tongue and the Tale” (*Green Suns*, p. 242), that if she were to have a bumper sticker on her car, it would be a statement from Tolkien’s essay *On Fairy Stories*: “Mythology is language and language is mythology” (p. 94, *Tolkien On Fairy-stories* p. 181). In “**‘Mythology is Language and Language is Mythology’: How Verlyn Flieger’s favorite ‘Bumper Sticker’ works in Tolkien’s Legendarium,**” Higgins uses Flieger’s “bumper sticker” as a springboard for an examination of how this statement is “woven into the fabric of Tolkien’s creative thought and approach” (p. 112). Higgins, who with Dimitra Fimi published a critical edition of Tolkien’s essay *A Secret Vice* (2016), has authoritatively written about Tolkien’s languages in numerous articles and conference presentations. Higgins notes that while Tolkien was not the first author to include invented languages in his creative work, “in most cases the author’s use of elements of invented languages tend to be, at best, a curious appendage to the text and do not appear to have either the depth of perceived historicity or integration into the narrative which Tolkien achieved by putting his languages at the core of his myth-making (pp. 94-95). Higgins’s essay is divided into four parts: “ ‘Welsh’ Changes to Nomenclature in *The Tale of Tinúviel*,” “Transmitting Myth . . . and Language,” “The High-Elven Tongue and Mediation with Faërie,” and “Sound-Shifts & Political Strife: ‘The Shibboleth of Fëanor.’” Through a meticulous analysis of each of these texts and themes, Higgins illustrates how “the interrelated and inter-dependent relationship of myth-making and language

invention . . . clearly was a dominant factor . . . in each phase of Tolkien's invention" (p. 111).

John R. Holmes' essay " 'A Green Great Dragon' and J. R. R. Tolkien's 'Native Language' " also explores language's "essential unity with myth" (p. 155) in Tolkien's work, beginning with Tolkien's childhood memory of writing a story about "a green great dragon" and being gently told by his mother that the correct order of words was "a great green dragon." Many years later, in a letter to W. H. Auden from 1955, Tolkien confessed "I wondered why, and still do" (*Letters*, p. 214). Holmes draws upon a rich variety of linguistic sources to delve deeper into this question, citing Noam Chomsky's distinction between "internal" and "external" grammar, R.M. Dixon's research on adjectives, Mark. E. Davies' work on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC), and Derek Bickerson's research on the creolization of pidgin languages. According to Dickerson, this creolization evolves much the same way as a child's individual linguistic preferences (later referred to in by Tolkien in "English and Welsh" as a "native" language) eventually conform with standard usage. Thus, Holmes suggests, while Mabel Tolkien's corrections were empirically correct—the "rule" is that adjectives of size come before those of color—the young Tolkien's instinctive use of "green great" suggests that "in the early stages of linguistic development, all individuals do what Tolkien is famous for continuing to do as an adult: invent languages" (p. 145).

In her contribution to this volume, **Sandra Ballif Straubhaar** also pursues the mystery of "**The Rare and Elusive 'Green, Great Dragon,'**" in a discussion of what she has dubbed the "Color Adjective Order Rule," or COAR (p. 298), according to which in strings of adjectives, adjectives of color are generally closest to the noun. This rule does not come naturally to children, and Straubhaar quotes her 29 month-old grandson as having referred to an "orange big truck" in much the same way as the young Tolkien composed a story about "a green great dragon" (p. 298). So where does the rule come from? Straubhaar finds part of the answer in traditional Anglophone alliterative verse, citing examples such as the "gay green woods" in Robin Hood ballads and the "gay green spreading bowers" and "good grey hawk" in ballads by Robert Burns. Straubhaar also combs various corpuses such as the GloWbE (Corpus of Global Web-based English) and the Wikipedia Corpus, in addition to websites for teaching English as a Second Language, and confirms that "great green" is, not surprisingly, more prevalent than "green great." Another question that Straubhaar asks is why the default color for dragons must be green: she cites of course the Green Dragon Inn in Bywater, but notes that there are dragons of other colors in the Tolkien's legendarium, such as Ancalagon, Glaurung and Smaug. The green-clad Robin Hood comes to the rescue here, as do Sir Gawain's Green Knight, and the Green Man on tavern signs: "The color green has deep roots in Anglophone folklore and literature" and

is thus “entirely worthy of such brooding, immense creatures as dragons” (p. 307).

Jason Fisher devotes his essay “**J.R.R. Tolkien: The Foolhardy Philologist**” to a thorough investigation of the term “foolhardy” and how it applies to both Tolkien’s genealogy—specifically, the etymology of the Germanic origins of Tolkien’s surname—and to his creative and scholarly activity. Tolkien described his surname as an anglicization of *Tollkiehn*, derived from *tollkühn*, a German compound word combining “*toll* and *kühn*, meaning, respectively ‘mad, foolish,’ and ‘bold, daring’” (p. 80; *Letters* p. 218), thus “foolhardy.” Tolkien jokingly wrote that he was neither German nor foolhardy, but Fisher argues that in both his creative and his scholarly activities, Tolkien’s “ambition could run totally unchecked” (p. 74), with the result that many projects were left unfinished. In his 1977 review of *The Silmarillion* writer John Gardner expressed bafflement as to why anyone would undertake to create an entire new mythology, when there were already plenty to be found in the ancient world. Tom Shippey dubbed Tolkien “The Foolhardy Philologist” in the title of his review of Humphrey Carpenter’s 1977 biography of Tolkien, finding that Tolkien lived up to the nickname “foolhardy” in the seemingly rash but bold choices he made in both his personal and professional life. Nineteenth-century German and English translations of *Beowulf* which use the terms *tollkühn* and *foolhardy* in reference to the hero Beowulf are also scrutinized by Fisher, who concludes: “In a sense, Tolkien’s name and personality were stamped into the poem of which he made such long and close study” (p. 89).

John D. Rateliff also ponders the significance of a name in “‘**To Recall Forgotten Gods from their Twilight**’: **J.R.R. Tolkien’s ‘The Name Nodens.**’” Tolkien’s original essay was published in an archeological report in 1932, and until its reprinting in *Tolkien Studies* (Volume VII, 2007) was almost completely inaccessible. However, as Rateliff notes, no introduction or notes accompanied this reprint, and his meticulously researched essay sets out to fill this void, by situating Tolkien’s essay in the context of other scholarship on the mystery of Nodens. Theories about the identity of Nodens stretch back to the early nineteenth century, and Rateliff explains why some of these are far-fetched. His discussion of the material evidence that helped shed light on this “elusive deity” is richly illustrated with photographs and drawings of artefacts, archeological sites, and inscriptions found on mosaics and tablets. Archeology could only establish that Nodens was a god; it would take philologist John Rhys to make a connection between Nodens and the Irish mythological figure Nuada of the Silver Hand, and the Welsh folk heroes Nudd and Lludd. Novelists and playwrights also had their say: Arthur Machen identified Nodens with Pan, Thomas Evelyn Ellis depicted Nodens as the “God of the Abyss,” and H.P. Lovecraft dubbed him “Lord of the Great Abyss” (p. 219). While not rejecting a connection with the Irish Nuada,

Tolkien also saw in this name a possible ancient Indo-European root “Neud-/Noud,” meaning to hunt, fish or trap, and thus dubbed the god “Nodens the Catcher” (p. 222). Rateliff concludes his fascinating scholarly excavation with the suggestion that this “catcher” may have emerged from the depths of paleolithic mythology to take form as “the Hunter,” a “dark, sinister figure” (p. 224) who pursued wandering Elves, alluded to in the Annals of Aman and *The Silmarilion*.

Irish mythology and its resonances in Tolkien’s work was of great interest to Verlyn Flieger, as **Kris Swank** acknowledges by quoting Flieger in the title of her essay “**A Recognizable Irish Strain’ in Tolkien’s work.**” Flieger completed this statement by noting that this Irish strain was “often overlooked in the search for sources and influences.” (p. 311; *Question* p. 155). Swank has a strong command of both Irish myth and legend and previous scholarship on the Celtic in Tolkien by Dimitra Fimi, Marjorie Burns, Andrew Higgins, Aurélie Brémont and others. Swank identifies several Irish sources and mythological elements in Tolkien’s work, “including the Tuatha Dé Danaan, whose history inspired that of his Elves; the ‘bruiden’ or supernatural hostel, which is recreated in The Cottage of Lost Play, the House of Tom Bombadil, and Rivendell . . .” and many other characters from both ancient Irish myth and Christian legend. The medieval motif that most influenced Tolkien, according to Swank, was “the supernatural voyage tale found in the medieval *immrama* (‘voyages’) and *echtraí* (‘adventures’)” (p. 326). Swank sees Valinor, for example, which Tolkien also named Elvenhome and the Undying Lands, as “related to Brendan’s Land of Promise and Oisín’s Land of Youth” (p. 326). Swank authoritatively identifies Irish influences in texts as varied as “The Lost Road,” “The Notion Club Papers,” *The Fall of Arthur*, *The Silmarilion* and *Roverandom*, noting that “the ‘Irish strain’ in Tolkien’s work is not only recognizable, as Flieger noted in 1997, but endemic and widespread” (p. 330).

“**In Lessons of Myth, Mortality, & the Machine in the Dream State Space-Time Travel Tales of J.R.R. Tolkien and Olaf Stapledon,**” astronomer **Kristine Larsen** finds many parallels between Tolkien and another twentieth-century mythmaker, philosopher and writer, Olaf Stapledon. Not only did they both witness the horrors of WWI, they were also both influenced by engineer J.W. Dunne’s books exploring the possibility of time travel through dreams, in particular *An Experiment with Time* (1934), as Verlyn Flieger discussed in *A Question of Time*. Following the path begun by Flieger, Larsen sees connections between Tolkien’s “Notion Club Papers” and the first two novels of Stapledon’s time travel trilogy, *Last and First Men* (1930) and *Last Men In London* (1932), but also includes *Star Maker* (1937) in her analysis. In the third book of Stapledon’s trilogy, the Star Maker is portrayed as “creating and dispassionately observing the destruction of the seemingly endless series of universes that he artistically creates” (p. 181). Larsen perceives in Stapledon’s trilogy a “grasping

for immortality and its ultimate relationship to the Fall” that “would have certainly resonated with Tolkien” (p. 189), creator of the Númenorians, who brought about their own destruction in their quest for immortality. Like Tolkien, Stapledon “draws a distinction between science in terms of investigating the mysteries of the universe and the use of technology to enslave others (or in some cases, allowing oneself to be enslaved by the machine)” (p. 190). The fact that both men witnessed the horrors of WWI, as Larsen perceptively notes, had a lasting impact on their work.

Flieger’s *A Question of Time* is also the inspiration behind “**Do Eldar Dream of Immortal Sheep?: Dreams, Memory, and Enchantment at the End of the Third Age,**” albeit with a difference in emphasis, as delineated by the authors: “Flieger is primarily concerned with the connection between dream and time, while our starting point is rather the relationship between dream and enchantment” (p. 115). The five co-authors, **Thomas Hillman, Simon Cook, Jeremiah Burns, Richard Rohlin, and Oliver Stegen**, organize their essay into three sections: the first, “Dreams in *The Lord of the Rings*,” focuses on the hobbits at the outset of their adventure, and explores “the relation of dreams to waking life, on the one hand, and to enchanted consciousness on the other” (pp. 115-116). In “Dream Landscapes in Middle-earth,” the authors then relate these states of consciousness to the landscapes of Middle-earth, “where the passing traveler may find long forgotten ghosts intruding into his conscious experience (p. 116). The third and final section, “Elvish Dreams,” explores landscapes and memory from the perspective of the Elves, whose dreams “when made sensible to us through Elvish art, enchant us” (p. 116). The essay provides an analysis of dreams and enchantment that is both detailed and concise, and includes close readings of several key passages. The essay also takes inspiration from “On Fairy-stories,” in which Tolkien stated that one of our primordial human desires “is to survey the depths of space and time” (slightly misquoted on p. 116, *Tolkien On Fairy-stories* pp. 34-35). The authors confirm that he accomplished this in *The Lord of the Rings*, in which dreams “allow the characters and the readers along with them, to survey these far-flung horizons and traverse the depths of space and time” (p. 117).

Heroes and Storytelling

“Heroes come in many shapes and sizes,” writes **Amy Amendt-Raduege** at the beginning of her essay “**A Seed of Courage: Merry, Pippin, and the Ordinary Hero**” (p. 3). For Amendt-Raduege, Verlyn Flieger is a hero for having the courage “to pave the way for a new field of literary studies,” which she did in her 1977 dissertation and her early scholarly work on Tolkien, published at a time when the academy was still skeptical of the literary value of the Professor’s

creative work. Quoting Flieger, Amendt-Raduege reminds us that “the lack of any one heroic protagonist is one of the hallmarks of Tolkien’s legendarium (p.4, *Green Suns* p. 132). Amendt-Raduege concurs with Flieger, noting that in *The Lord of the Rings*, “different characters reach their heroic peak at different points in the story, during different events and different places” (p. 6). Merry and Pippin already manifested certain heroic qualities when they pledged to stick by Frodo come what may, but “the seeds of heroism—persistence, integrity, hope and honor—need the right experiences and the right tutors to help them flourish” (p. 7). Amendt-Raduege sees Boromir as Pippin’s role model, for Pippin only knows that Boromir died defending Merry and himself against an army of Uruk-hai, and learns of his attempt to take the ring from Frodo much later. Merry’s mentor is the noble and brave Théoden King, who accepts Merry’s offer of service and dubs him esquire of Rohan. The experience of being held captive by the Uruk-hai, which the two hobbits endure with perseverance and even humor, also contributes to their development as heroes. By the time they reach Gondor, Pippin is bold enough to defy Denethor and save Faramir from being burned alive, and Merry helps Éowyn slay the Nazgûl king. Given the heroic trajectory through which Tolkien had led these two characters, it is no wonder that he changed earlier drafts of the story and made Merry and Pippin, not Frodo, responsible for taking back the Shire.

Thomas Honegger joins Flieger and Amendt-Raduege in observing that “Tolkien does not present us with a single, identifiable hero” (p. 158). In “**Splintered Heroes: Heroic Variety and its Function in *The Lord of the Rings*,**” Honegger argues that the inclusion of “(sometimes lesser) heroes” such as the hobbits in the epic sweep of Aragorn’s story is in fact a key to the success of the work: “It is mainly due to these two narrative characteristics that *The Lord of the Rings* gains a complexity, depth and audience appeal that would have been difficult to achieve within the framework of a traditional epic centering on one hero only” (p. 158). Rather than discuss the various characters and their heroic deeds separately, however, Honegger proposes that *The Lord of the Rings* be considered as “a tale of cooperative heroism . . . that finds its supreme expression in the constitution of the Fellowship of the Ring” (p. 159). This cooperative heroism harks back to “the cooperation of the Valar in the actual creation of Arda,” in stark contrast to “the Black Riders and everything they stand for” (p. 159). In the diversity of their qualities, the Valar present a model of cooperative heroism which is mirrored in the composition of the Fellowship. Honegger acknowledges a certain hierarchy among the characters, Gandalf as priest/teacher, Aragorn as warrior/king, Frodo as Sam’s master, but the hobbits overall exist outside of a medieval hierarchy, and give readers heroes with whom they can more easily identify. Most importantly, “The Fellowship, once formed, is thus

characterized by different forms of affection, love, loyalty and friendship” (p. 162), and as such is an exemplar of cooperative heroism.

Marjorie Burns discusses a new kind of hero and a new approach to the Victorian adventure novel that appeared in early 20th-century British literature in her essay “**Three Stories Holding Hands: *The Wind in the Willows, Huntingtower, and The Hobbit.***” These three novels follow a pattern of “an untried, unremarkable individual” who “leaves home . . . and finds himself in situations of increasing strangeness and risk (p. 42). Inexperienced at the outset of their journeys, the respective heroes all grow in confidence and courage along the way, and end up participating in battles. The heroes of these stories share other traits as well: “small stature,” “a childlike side to their characters” and an ability to resort to daring ruses which surprises even themselves (pp. 44-45). Both Bilbo and Dickson, the protagonist of *Huntingtower*, lead respectable, bourgeois lives before their adventures, but find themselves in the role of burglars at some point. Burns finds borrowings from *The Odyssey* in all three books, and concurs with William H. Green, author of *The Hobbit: A Journey into Maturity* (1995) who saw strong parallels between Odysseus’s helping his men escape the Cyclops by tying them under sheep, and Bilbo’s springing the dwarves from Thranduil’s underground prisons by stuffing them into barrels (p. 61). Most of all, what these humble heroes share with Homer’s famous wanderer is the longing for, and ultimate return to, home and hearth after a series of exotic and perilous adventures: “In each of these there-and-back-again tales, homes and houses play a central role” (p. 46).

Anna Smol’s essay **Seers and Singers: Tolkien’s Typology of Sub-creators** applies Flieger’s study of the role of light and music in the legendarium as expounded in *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien’s World* (1983; revised 2002) to three stories, “The Notion Club Papers,” “Leaf by Niggle,” and *Smith of Wootton Major*, in which, according to Smol, “the seers and singers . . . represent a typology of sub-creators . . . who demonstrate the powers of splintered music and light, word and image” (p. 258). The characters in “The Notion Club Papers” collaborate to use their “sub-creative powers” of visualization and language, accessed through dreams, “to see and hear beyond . . . primary reality” (p. 259). Collaborative sub-creation is also a theme in “Leaf by Niggle”: the artist Niggle’s tree is completed thanks to a combination of Niggle’s power of visualization and the practical touches provided by his neighbor Parish, but only in the afterlife: “once they both enter into the same place, their partnership allows a fuller experience of their Secondary World”(p. 267). In *Smith of Wootton Major*, Smol finds that “light and music, vision and word, are delicately intertwined” (p. 270). Thanks to the “fay star” that comes to him through a cake made by the Master Cook, Smith is gifted with a light in his eyes, a beautiful singing and speaking voice, and the ability to create “graceful and beautiful”

objects (p. 269). Smol notes a shared cooking metaphor in “The Great Cake” featured in *Smith* and the soup from “On Fairy-stories”: “The Cauldron of Story explicitly aligns the image of cooking with tale-telling, with the word” (p. 272). Like Honegger and Amendt-Raduege, Smol underlines the importance of collaboration among Tolkien’s characters: “Tolkien does not present a lone heroic poet or artist figure; instead some sort of pairing helps each of his sub-creators” (p. 276).

For **David Bratman** *Smith of Wootton Major* is “a perfect fairy-story” (p. 27), and his essay *Smith of Wootton Major and Genre Fantasy* credits Verlyn Flieger’s scholarly edition of the tale, which includes Tolkien’s essay on *Smith*, for bringing him to this conclusion: “What makes the story perfect” Bratman explains, “is that Tolkien didn’t publish the essay.”¹ This statement initially appears contradictory, for Bratman also describes the essay as illuminating and “a remarkable gloss on the story” (p. 30). He surmises that Tolkien wrote the essay after finishing the story, for it seems to Bratman “to be a pouring out of ideas conceived on the process of the story rather than an outline or other preliminary laying out” (p. 31).² Indeed Tolkien was opposed to the very concept of introductions, as he stated in his draft of an introduction to George MacDonald’s *Golden Key*: “It is not fair to the author or his reader. The author meant to speak direct to his reader, and did not want anyone else to interfere” (*Smith*, p. 89). Bratman contrasts post-Tolkien genre fantasy, which hastens to provide readers with an expository backstory, with Tolkien’s gradual presentation of characters and events. In *The Hobbit*, for example, “The images of a larger, more complex world are doled out to the reader bit by bit, even on the journey as Bilbo gets deeper into a world with which he is unfamiliar” (p. 31). The same technique is used in *Smith*, in which “Tolkien quietly sidles in to Faery . . . first introducing Alf with only the faintest hint that there is something mysterious about him” (p. 38). In this manner Tolkien leads the reader, along with the main characters, gradually into Faery. Reading Tolkien’s essay on *Smith* before reading *Smith* would diminish the “wonder and joy” of the fairy story (p. 38).

1. In his review of the 2015 extended edition of *Smith of Wootton Major*, Douglas A. Anderson points out that Flieger omitted the last 3 1/4 pages of Tolkien’s essay in both the 2005 and 2015 editions. “That these pages were simply omitted from the extended edition (without any notice given to the reader of their existence or absence) is an editorial decision only to be regretted.” *Journal of Tolkien Research*, Vol. 2, Issue 1.

2. Bratman’s supposition that the composition of the essay post-dates that of the story is confirmed in the above-mentioned review by Anderson, who notes that “a passage in the unpublished final pages of the essay refers to an advertisement in the *Times* published on 22 February 1965, which helps to date the essay as probably written very soon after the story itself was finished.”

Verlyn Flieger also edited and published *The Story of Kullervo* (2010; 2015), Tolkien's retelling of cantos 31 to 36 of the Finnish epic *The Kalevala* as translated by William F. Kirby in 1911. **Vivien Stocker** explains in her essay, "**Tolkien's Story of Kullervo: A Lost Link between Kirby's Kalevala and Tolkien's Legendarium**," how through a "complex process of invention and transformation" (p. 280) Tolkien used Kirby's translation as source material and inspiration for his own version of the epic, in which "we see arising the future 'Tale of Turambar,' the first layer of his legendarium" (p. 295). Stocker helpfully provides concise outlines of the main events of both Tolkien's *Kullervo* and the relevant cantos of *The Kalevala*. She notes that while the plot of Tolkien's story does not differ dramatically from its source, Tolkien's addition of the knife Siki and the dog Musti are significant. In Musti, Stocker sees a forerunner of the faithful hound Huan, who plays such a heroic role in the story of Beren and Lúthien. The knife Siki, "becomes the symbol for the death of Kalervo" and strengthens Kullervo's resolve to seek revenge for his father (p. 285). It is noteworthy that Tolkien omitted some of the more gruesome and shocking elements of *The Kalevala*, such as the scene in which the untamed and violent Kullervo hurts and kills an infant in his care: "In the hands of Tolkien, Kullervo is more human than his mythical equivalent, a personality trait that will appear again several times in the text" (p. 286). Thus, while at times Tolkien seems to be borrowing liberally from Kirby's translation, Stocker's careful comparison of the two texts reveals that Tolkien was in fact testing "with a certain success, his future story-telling abilities: the same principles he will later master in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* and *The Fall of Arthur*, using and reworking the stories at his convenience" (p. 295).

This principle is also manifest in "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," which as **Richard C. West** points out, was Tolkien's "only published drama and his only work of historical fiction" (p. 340). This verse drama takes its inspiration from the Old English Poem *The Battle of Maldon*, which described the resistance of the Earl of Essex and his retainers against a much larger and ultimately victorious force of Viking raiders in 991. In his essay **Canute and Beorhtnoth**, West delves into both the history behind the historical battle and the history of Tolkien's drama, which is set in the aftermath of the famous battle. What interests West most, however, is how the play is "both work of art and work of scholarship" (p. 336). References to Beowulf in the play are related to the theme of *ofermod*, a trait shared by Beorhtnoth and Beowulf, which Tolkien interpreted as "recklessness" or "a desire for glory overcoming prudence" in his essay on the subject, which was published alongside "Homecoming" in a scholarly journal of the English Association. Tolkien also included a "deliberate anachronism" in the rhyming couplet near the end of the poem, which is an allusion to Middle English rhyming verses about King Canute, whose reign came

after the Battle of Maldon (p. 352). As Tolkien explained in his essay, the addition of these rhyming verses to a piece that was written mainly in alliterative verse was meant to announce “ ‘the fading end of the old heroic alliterative measure,’” which West sees as essential to “Tolkien’s purpose of indicating change from one period to another” (p. 350, “Homecoming” p. 3), a change that included the fading of the “ ‘Northernness’ of the ancient English society that he so admired” (p. 352). West also speculates that by including references to the Christian King Canute Tolkien meant “to add a ray of hope to the apparently bleak ending of *The Homecoming*, or at least make it more ambiguous” (p. 352).

Three Personal Tributes

In “**A Teacher’s Teacher: Verlyn Flieger**,” **Susan Yager** recalls a course on satire that she took in 1975 at Catholic University, where she was an undergraduate English major and Flieger was pursuing her doctorate on Tolkien and myth. Yager, who eventually followed in Flieger’s footsteps, earning a doctorate in English literature and pursuing a career as a university professor, remembers Flieger’s “vibrancy . . . liveliness . . . welcoming smile . . . boundless energy” (p. 407), but most of all, her encouragement of her students’ critical thinking: “Having introduced an idea, she would lean toward the class, focused on encouraging a student’s developing response” (408). Yager also recalls that even Flieger’s wardrobe and gestures contributed to the relaxed and welcoming atmosphere in the classroom: perched cross-legged on the desk and wearing brightly-colored matching tops and slacks, which reminded Yager of “jewels, of changing leaves, of Christmas lights, of lilacs blossoming on central campus” (p. 407), Flieger caught and kept the attention of the class, while focusing her own attention on individual students. This example was a gift that Yager incorporates into her own teaching: “For my part, whenever possible, I sit on the instructor’s desk, lean in, and listen” (p. 409).

Bradford Lee Eden’s “Music, Time, and Light in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and Verlyn Flieger: A Reflection” is a personal testimonial to the impact that Verlyn Flieger has had on Eden’s own scholarly trajectory. As a musicologist and editor of the volume *Middle-earth Minstrel: Essay on Music in Tolkien* (2010), Eden is particularly sensitive to the importance of music in Flieger’s scholarship, and credits *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien’s World* (1983; revised 2002), with inspiring his interest in “the Boethian deconstruction of music’s power through time and history in Tolkien’s mythology” (p. 413). Eden finds Flieger’s references to Tolkien’s mythology as “an incomplete or unfinished symphony” to be “wonderfully woven in her *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien’s Mythology* (2005). What Eden

praises most, however, is Flieger's "approachability as a person and fellow academic" (p. 413).

The title of **Kristine Larsen's** second contribution "**'Whose Myth Is It?' Tolkien Studies as Interdisciplinary Studies**" is inspired by Flieger's essay of the same name, published in *Green Suns and Faërie: Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien* (2012). Larsen sees one of Flieger's most important contributions to Tolkien Studies as helping transform what was formerly a field dominated by English and History scholars into a truly interdisciplinary field, citing the wide range of disciplines represented by authors of recent Tolkien scholarship as evidence. Larsen herself is a professor of Astronomy, and other Tolkien scholars hold degrees in Library Sciences, Musicology, Scandinavian Studies, Law, Theology, Physics, Geology, Classics, Computer Science and even, in my own case, French literature. Larsen rightly states that "this intellectual diversity has enriched the field greatly, and more accurately reflects the interests of the Professor himself" (p. 415), who, as Flieger and Anderson noted in their expanded edition of "On Fairy-stories," from childhood was drawn to "astronomy, geology, history, [and] philosophy" (*Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, p. 189). One way that Verlyn Flieger encouraged the widening of the scholarly approaches to Tolkien's legendarium was through taking "a global perspective in analyzing Tolkien's works," finding cultural and literary connections between Tolkien and authors from around the world and across the ages" (p. 416). Larsen cites her own Tolkien scholarship, in which she "attempts to weave together scientific, literary, historical, and philological perspectives (pp. 418-19) as following in Verlyn Flieger's footsteps.

Flieger's Fictions

Peter Grybauskas's essay "**'Green Hill Country': A Scholar's Tale**," notes that for Flieger, as for Tolkien, creative and scholarly work were intertwined. As Flieger was aware, and as Grybauskas points out, Tolkien's "Sellic Spell" and "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorthelm's Son" were re-tellings of the Anglo-Saxon texts *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*. Flieger follows Tolkien's example in "Green Hill Country," which Grybauskas describes as "a kind of folk-tale re-telling of certain events in the War of the Ring, conducted by a number of descendants of its hobbit veterans" (pp. 361-362). The narrators in Flieger's story each tell a different version because each individual has heard the story passed on through several generations of descendants from a specific participant in the original events. Thus the emphasis in each version depends not only on the perspective of the various ancestral veterans of the war, but more importantly, on the way their experiences have been transmitted and (mis)remembered through each telling. In his anthology of fantasy short stories wherein Flieger's tale first appeared, *Seekers of Dreams: Masterpieces of Fantasy* (2005), Douglas A.

Anderson describes “Green Hill Country” as “a fascinating tale which circles around an unnamed text and explores the very nature of storytelling” (*Seekers*, p. 296). Grybauskas sees the story as both an illustration of “the slippery nature of memory” and a re-enactment in fiction of some of the major themes on Flieger’s own scholarship (p. 362).

J.R.R. Tolkien famously wrote in his letter to publisher Milton Waldman that he never felt he was inventing anything, but rather describing something that was “already ‘there’” (*Letters*, p. 145). **Paul Edmund Thomas** begins his essay “**Words Made Flesh in Avilion**” with the following quote from Verlyn Flieger: “I never once had the feeling that I was writing this story. I honestly heard those voices. So clear.”³ The voices Flieger heard were those of the characters in *Avilion*, a work composed of monologues spoken by Guenevere, Bedevere, Mordred, Igraine, and other key figures from Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*. As Thomas explains, “*Avilion* is not a narrative; rather, its monologues comment on key events of the Arthurian story as narrated by Malory (p. 375). The voices who speak through the twenty-two monologues in Flieger’s romance express regret, bitterness and sadness as they reflect upon “the ruthlessness of destiny” that compelled them to act as they did: “Several of Flieger’s speakers utter sentences which strike the mind as such perceptive truths about Malory’s story and characters that they ring like well-struck bells” (p. 375). Thomas attributes Flieger’s insights into the psychology of the characters to her intimate knowledge of Malory, whose work she had been teaching and studying for years, but also to her own creativity: “She suppressed her critical and analytical faculties, and she listened to her imagination” (p. 378). Lancelot is the one character who is not given a voice here, but rather is described by others. Thomas quotes Flieger as perceptively noting that: “Charismatic people like Lancelot are to a large extent the creation of their beholders” (p. 376). Flieger was able to reveal in 2016, after *The Fall of Arthur* (2013) had been published, that a scene in *Avilion*, in which Lancelot is looking out over the sea from a tower in Brittany, was inspired by a scene in Tolkien’s Arthurian work. *Avilion* owes most, however, to her own talent as a writer, through which she gave “the voices of these characters independence, vibrancy, flesh and life” (p. 378).

In *A Question of Time*, Flieger postulated that J. W. Dunne’s work *An Experiment with Time* (1927) left an imprint on Tolkien’s work, in particular “The Lost Road” and “The Notion Club Papers,” as Kristine Larson discussed in her essay in the first section of this volume. **Dennis Wilson Wise** sees resonances of Dunne’s theory on the nature of time in Tolkien’s *Smith of Wootton Major* and Flieger’s young adult novel *Pig Tale* as well. In **Identity, Time, and Faerie**

3. Thomas indicates that quotes from Flieger in his essay are from recorded conversations with her in January and February 2016.

in *Pig Tale* and *The Inn at Corbie's Caw*: An Unexpected Convergence of Realms, Wise demonstrates that *Smith of Wootton Major* and *Pig Tale* are works in which the realm of Faerie and the real world meet and overlap explicitly. In *Pig Tale*, Flieger applies Dunne's theory that a soul is not bound strictly by the linear trajectory of a single mortal life, but also exists in other, larger dimensions of time. The young pig girl Mokie lives for a short time with the Crystal Folk, one of whom is in fact Mokie in a different stage of existence: "The Crystal Folk have ... broken down the barriers between past, present and future (p. 389). Although Mokie is killed at the end of *Pig Tale*, she emerges as a character with a different name in *The Inn at Corbie's Caaw* and encounters Janno, a boy she knew in *Pig Tale*, who is also inhabiting a different identity: "they occupy the liminal space between two realms, Faerie and mortal" (p. 390). Unlike Smith, for whom "losing Faerie is like a desperately lonely man losing his only friend" Wilson argues, "Mokie and Janno can never ultimately be alone" (p. 398), because they never entirely leave Faerie. Wise finds Flieger's "daring" use of Dunne's theory of time to be her "most important innovation on Tolkien" (p. 384).

Conclusion

Multi-author volumes tend to contain essays organized around a particular unifying theme. The theme of *A Wilderness of Dragons* is the work of Verlyn Flieger, whose scholarly work on Tolkien covers a plethora of themes: language and mythology, time and dreams, fairy and folk stories, Arthurian legends and literature, and many others. Flieger is also a creative writer and generous teacher and colleague, and this diversity of her professional activities is reflected in the twenty-two essays of the volume. As I mentioned in at the beginning of my review, by virtue of the wide range of topics covered, the essays in the section on Tolkienian Studies could have been arranged in such a way as to make for a smoother transition between them. This is only my personal opinion, however. A criticism of broader consequence is that Tolkien's name figures neither in the title nor the subtitle, with the unintended result that the book does not appear in online searches for publications on Tolkien. This is unfortunate, for *A Wilderness of Dragons: Essays in Honor of Verlyn Flieger* is a rich collection of essays of overall very high quality, which both established Tolkienists and those new to the field will find informative and engaging.

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