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Middle-earth, or There and Back Again (2020) edited by Łukasz Neubauer

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Middle-earth, or There and Back Again, edited by Łukasz Neubauer. Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2020. [6], iv, 137 pp. \$19.95 (trade paperback) ISBN 9783905703443. Cormarë series no. 44.

Middle-earth, or There and Back Again (a book with titles on the long side and essays on the short) is not trying to take the world of Tolkien scholarship by storm or to set it in new directions. What it does, mostly and best, is fill in gaps, expanding on what is known about Tolkien through new observations presented in convincing and memorable ways.

The book is edited by Łukasz Neubauer, whose essay, “‘You cannot pass’: Tolkien’s Christian Reinterpretation of the Traditional Germanic Ideals of Heroism and Loyalty in *The Lord of the Rings*,” is the second in the collection and one of the best. Neubauer argues that Gandalf’s sacrifice at the Bridge of Khazad-dûm serves as a correction to Byrhtnoth’s arrogant decision in *The Battle of Maldon* (an argument substantiated by Tolkien’s own work, “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Son of Beorhthelm”). In the medieval poem, Byrhtnoth places himself and his people in grave, unnecessary danger by allowing the enemy safe passage over a narrow causeway separating two armies. In *The Lord of the Rings*, there is only a narrow bridge between the Fellowship and a vast gathering of trolls, orcs, and a Balrog on the other side. Gandalf’s choice to sacrifice himself and face the enemy on his own allows the rest of the Fellowship to escape. In both accounts (Neubauer writes) “the passageway is held by exactly the same number of three men” (29).

Neubauer cites other sources of influence as well. These can be summed up by the following: “The characterisation of Gandalf’s heroics in Moria is therefore a broad, multifaceted concept that encompasses a number of different issues, from the sheer pragmatism of military leadership and management fashioned by Tolkien’s dramatic experience during the First World War to the writer’s private notion of personal morality which stemmed from his strict adherence to the Roman Catholic faith” (34).

The opening essay in the collection is Michał Leśniewski’s “Tolkien and the Myth of Atlantis, or the Usefulness of Dreams and the Methodology of Mythmaking.” As Leśniewski points out, variations on the Atlantis myth, with its moral implications, appear throughout Tolkien’s writing from “The Lost Road” to “The Fall of Númenor.”

In a section on Tolkien’s personal life, Leśniewski mentions not only Tolkien’s recurring flood dream (a dream shared by his son Michael) but suggests possible reasons for why this dream occurred. One possibility is the voyage Tolkien made from Cape Town to England at age three. Another possibility (one suggested by John Garth) is the time Tolkien spent at Withersea, recovering from trench fever and witnessing massive, damaging sea storms. Leśniewski then

proposes an observation of his own: that clouds along Signal Hill in Cape Town will at times create the illusion of a gigantic wave. This, Leśniewski proposes, may have been witnessed by the young Tolkien before his departure on the *SS Guelph*.

Leśniewski then brings up and explains in detail the increased attention the Atlantis myth received during the twentieth century. Tolkien would unquestionably have been aware of any developing research and approaches to the myth, all of which no doubt increased his interest and influenced his use of the story. That the drowning of Atlantis is considered to be mythology would make no difference to Tolkien. He believed history and myth to be equally important and equally useful for his own invention.

Barbara Kowalik's "Tolkien's Use of the Motif of Goldsmith-craft and the Middle English *Pearl*: Ring or Hand?" contends that Tolkien's mixed feelings about craftsmanship may have come—at least in part—from the Middle English *Pearl*, a poem Tolkien knew well and one that influenced his writing in small and larger ways. Kowalik points out that numbers of biblical significance found in *Pearl* are matched by numbers in *The Lord of the Rings*; these include the number of guests at Bilbo's farewell party, one hundred and forty-four or twelve dozen. Twelve itself is of biblical and *Pearl* importance, and 141 is (as Bilbo points out) the sum of his and Frodo's ages. Even more important is the symbolism of jewels in both *Pearl* and Tolkien's fiction. In the medieval poem, a pearl (symbolizing a precious, deceased child) works much as lost, precious items do in Tolkien's literature. A sense of ownership comes in; and like Fëanor in Tolkien's legendarium, the one who loses a precious gem fails to look beyond the item itself and succumbs to misdirected desire, to envy and pride (though the stages of corruption Kowalik sets out are more complex than this).

With rings (traditional symbols of power) the potential for a created item to dominate the craftsman (or the owner) is especially powerful. What matters here, Kowalik claims, is the difference between ring and hand, the one limiting and artificial, the other unhampered and natural. In *The Lord of the Rings*, this is best exemplified by Frodo's and Sam's response when Galadriel puts on the Ring. Frodo (himself tempted) sees the Ring on her hand; Sam (more innocent) sees only "a star" shining through her fingers—all of which makes good sense in relationship to *Pearl*.

Bartłomiej Błaszkiwicz's "J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fall of Arthur* in the Context of the Medieval Tradition of Romance" addresses the difficult subject of Tolkien's unfinished alliterative poem. Is it merely juvenilia? Is it worthy of study in its highly unfinished state? Does it add anything significant to serious Tolkien scholarship? "In other words," Błaszkiwicz writes, (making me laugh) "it is arguably a credit to both the Arthurian tradition and the work of J.R.R. Tolkien that neither particularly need *The Fall of Arthur* to enrich them" (72). And yet, at

the end of his essay, Błaszkiwicz acknowledges the poem does offer insight into Tolkien's "views on the nature of evil" and "his treatment of the theme of kingship"(81).

Tolkien was well versed in Arthur's story; and (typical of Tolkien) when he came to write his own version, he chose what he wanted from various accounts and added his own interpretations and his own versions of cause and effect. Tolkien's greatest changes come from strengthening or lessening the role of various characters, making Mordred, for example, "the principal advocate of the Saxon campaign" (73). Gawain too is granted a higher position, and Guinevere is given otherworldly connections as "fay" or "fay-woman," adding both to her attractiveness and to her danger.

In a nicely-presented section on the use of landscape to portray emotion or develop battle scenes, Błaszkiwicz quotes several passages of Tolkien's alliterative verse, passages so effective and well-written they should inspire those who have not read *The Fall of Arthur* to hurry up and do so.

"The Mythical Model of the World in *The Story of Kullervo*," by Andrzej Szyjewski examines the ways in which Tolkien drew from the Finnish *Kalevala* for his own developing mythology and legendarium (particularly his Túrin Turambar tale) and the ways in which he attempted to smooth out inconsistencies in Kullervo's story. Like Bartłomiej Błaszkiwicz's chapter on *The Fall of Arthur*, Szyjewski's essay shows us Tolkien at work, revising and adapting a traditional story to match his preferences. There are places where Szyjewski can only speculate, but his understanding of Tolkien and Tolkien's creative process adds validity to this speculation.

Before looking closely at Tolkien's approach to Kullervo's story, Szyjewski gives background material on Elias Lönnrot's nineteenth-century compilation work and Tolkien's early awareness of that compilation, which led to his enduring interest in Finnish and Finnish mythology. In Szyjewski's words, "This means that the two crucial elements of his creation met for the first time, namely the transformation of the Finnish language into what would later become Quenya and the conversions of Finnish myths into Tolkien's own" (84).

The changes and rechanges Tolkien made in his own version of Kullervo's story include the invention of names (names based on Finnish but not the *Kalevala*), plus changes to Kallervo's family, to workers of magic, to the function of the gods, and to accounts of the dog Musti (who serves as a model for Huan, the hound of Valinor). Tolkien's *Story of Kullervo*, however, remained a work in processes. As Szyjewski writes, Tolkien soon began "to revise what he had already written, yet he never managed to complete his corrections and, by the end of the narrative, goes back to the 'traditional' names of both the characters and places" (94).

The final chapter, Andrzej Wicher's "The Wisdom of Galadriel: A Study in the Theology of J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," opens by suggesting that Saint Paul's Epistles are a likely inspiration for Tolkien's concept of wisdom, a wisdom based on service to others rather than the "material power" behind Sauron's wisdom.

Galadriel, Wicher writes, is a "a rather stationary figure" in *The Lord of the Rings* (118). He cites John Ruskin's idealized woman figure in *Sesame and Lilies* and matches Galadriel with this ideal, claiming that Galadriel "avoids battle" and "never seeks the limelight" and that she is "quite happy to work behind the scenes," all traits praised in *Sesame and Lilies* (119).

While it is true that Ruskin believes "woman's power is for rule" and Galadriel is the ruler of her realm, I am not convinced Ruskin influenced Tolkien to the extent Wicher claims. Galadriel has indeed long remained in the protected realm of Lothlórien (as Ruskin would want her to), but within that realm she is dominant over her husband and outspoken in ways that do not match up with Ruskin's and other Victorians' female ideal of "sweet ordering" (Ruskin's words), modesty, and gentle behavior, all of it confined within the domestic sphere. Galadriel's moment of temptation with the Ring (which Wicher does address) clearly shows a more ambitious and power-seeking side.

Further on in his essay, Wicher refers to the name *Nerwen* (man-maiden) given to Galadriel in her youth, a name which suggests she is somewhat androgynous, a characteristic Wicher believes completes and advances her character. This too seems at odds with his claim that Galadriel embodies a Victorian ideal. The same is true of Wicher's reference, in his final paragraph, to Galadriel's early rebellion against the Valar, a rebellion that shows Galadriel's "role in the War of the Ring is indeed full of paradoxes" (128). Her role *is* full of paradoxes; but this admission, coming so late in the essay, seems a little puzzling.

While I agree with much of what Wicher writes, I would like to see Galadriel's imperfect past and complex character acknowledged from the start. To do so would strengthen Wicher's claim that Galadriel, who is often seen as a Virgin Mary figure, might better be compared to Mary Magdalene, "a penitent sinner" (126).

It was a pleasure and an honor to review this book. For a while there I was in the company of a Polish Fellowship, almost like one of their number. Tolkien would have understood. He would also have understood my admiration of those enviable diacritical marks in the Polish alphabet.

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