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"The Hobbit" and Tolkien's Mythology (2014), ed. Bradford Lee Eden

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"The Hobbit" and Tolkien's Mythology: Essays on Revisions and Influences, edited by Bradford Lee Eden. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014. viii, 236 pages. \$ 40.00 (trade paperback) ISBN 9780786479603. [Also available as a Kindle ebook.]

Collections of essays are often a bit like a bag full of Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans, and this volume makes no exception. It contains some delightful and illuminating papers next to others which are "solidly filling" academic fare and a few I'd rather have avoided. The idea to publish a volume on *The Hobbit* and its links with and influences on the development of Tolkien's legendarium (and *vice versa*) grew out of the topic of the 2013 conference at Valparaiso University and provides the red thread running through the collection.

The book includes fifteen essays in three sections, opening with two essays (by John D. Rateliff and Gerard Hynes, respectively) that both focus on the development of the dwarves within Tolkien's writings. The two authors successfully illustrate how the conception of the dwarves in *The Hobbit* was, on the one hand, influenced by Tolkien's earlier ideas found in his pre-*Hobbit* texts and by contemporary depictions of dwarfs in Western culture in general (Hynes). On the other, the appearance of the dwarves in Tolkien's children's story influenced the further development of Durin's race in the post-*Hobbit* writings. Rateliff builds his argument on Tolkien's various drafts and publications while Hynes also provides an overview of the potential sources and analogues (contemporary and medieval). The "dwarvish theme" continues in the second section with two papers discussing in depth the nature and importance of Durin's Day. Both Kristine Larsen and Sumner Gary Hunnewell try and provide an astronomical explanation for the phenomenon as described in *The Hobbit*. The argument is (necessarily) rather technical though both authors strive for clarity. Yet while Larsen argues that the astronomical situation described is "impossible" (55), Hunnewell offers a solution to the "puzzle" by identifying the Dwarvish New Year's Day and Durin's Day as two independent dates that, in the case of *The Hobbit*, coincide.

The following eleven essays cannot be subsumed under any single heading—which is why the editor has simply labelled this third and largest section "Themes." Pride of place goes to Verlyn Flieger who explores the different aspects of French influence in Tolkien's work. She starts, in good philological tradition, with Tolkien's use of the French term *aventure(s)* and points out the French-romance structure and spirit of the first half of *The Hobbit*. I largely agree with her analysis, though I have some reservations concerning some of her readings of Chrétien de Troyes's romance-heroes' adventures as "cumulatively ironic" and with "no larger unifying purpose or plot" (73) since the adventures of both Erec and Yvain do have a function within the concept of the "doppelter

Kursus” (Hugo Kuhn) that provides the underlying structure for both *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide*. Flieger then goes on to contrast the *aventures* of *The Hobbit* with the *quest* in *The Lord of the Rings*, which allows her to explain some of the difference in tone and spirit that distinguishes the two works.

Jane Chance’s essay explores the function of *The Hobbit* as a work that takes up and transforms elements from Nordic literature by using them in a fairy-tale framework (in the Tolkienian sense of the term). The idea is an interesting one and could be applied to recently published works such as “Sellic Spell,” Tolkien’s “fairy-tale” version of *Beowulf*. What bothered me a bit is the amount of dates gotten wrong: *The Silmarillion* was published 1977, and not 1976. Likewise, *Unfinished Tales* came out in 1980, not 1979; and Tolkien began his mythology of Middle-earth not “after World War I, in 1918” (all on p. 78), but already before. Furthermore, there are no “Danes who did battle with King Alfred [. . .] in tenth-century England” (80)—King Alfred died 899 AD, and I don’t think his ghost stayed on to fight the Vikings. Small details you may say, but I think they have to be right nevertheless.

Damien Bador tackles the question of names—a topic that was of great interest to Tolkien (see his “Guide to the Names in *The Lord of the Rings*” and Rainer Nagel’s monograph *Hobbit Place-Names*, 2012). Bador traces the development, re-interpretation or simple continuation of names between *The Hobbit* and the greater legendarium and gives a well-argued account of the linking-function of these onomastic elements. Things get theological in Gregory Hartley’s coherently and knowledgeably-argued paper on the question of the status of sentient creatures in Tolkien’s works. Starting out with Beorn’s talking animals, he discusses the questions and problems that arise when we try to fit a work like *The Hobbit* into the more serious-minded framework of the legendarium, where questions of Free Will and the ontological status of the different races loom larger than in the “folksy” tale of Bilbo and the dwarves. In spite of his systematic rigour, Hartley is also aware that we are dealing with works of fiction and that, for example, orcs function differently on different levels, and it would be pointless to expect an author to always consider the larger theological implications of his writing—sometimes you simply need a handful of bad guys that can be done away with without remorse.

Michael Wodzak’s contribution is a fascinating analysis of the optical theories that inspired Tolkien’s representation of invisibility (as an effect of the Ring) and other optical phenomena, such as Gollum’s glowing eyes. He convincingly argues that Tolkien, on the one hand, took into consideration modern “scientific” models of invisibility while, on the other, simultaneously making use of older concepts. What I missed in this otherwise enjoyable paper is a connection to the larger discourse on “light” within Tolkien studies (e.g. Flieger’s *Splintered Light*). And I was wondering whether the editor was aware that the same article (re-written

together with Victoria Holtz Wodzak and with additional nice illustrations, yet making exactly the same argument) had been submitted to *Tolkien Studies* and published in November 2014, one month after "*The Hobbit*" and *Tolkien's Mythology*.

The subsequent piece by William Christian Klarner gives a "biographical" reading of *The Hobbit*, arguing that the tale reflects very much Tolkien's attitudes and functions as a bridge between Tolkien's Victorian and Edwardian England and his Middle-earth. The argument is not really new (Shippey's publications come to mind), and though the text works very well as a conference paper (where it may have had its origin), it seems to me to offer too few new insights to justify the inclusion in a publication like this. Luckily, this is not the problem with Justin T. Noetzel's analysis of Beorn and Tom Bombadil within the discourse of space and place theory. He may mistakenly identify Beowulf as a Swedish warrior (162—this is important since Beowulf belongs to the tribe of the Geats, who are most of the time at war with the Swedes) and tries to push too much on Irish-Celtic inspirations for Beorn's shape-changing and the barrow-wights (the ON *draugr* seems to me a much more obvious model), but on the whole he makes a valid point by comparing the function and structural position of Beorn and Tom Bombadil within their respective works. The most important contribution is, however, the introduction of concepts from space and landscape study—which could and should be applied to other protagonists and passages.

The contribution by Vickie L. Holtz-Wodzak left me puzzled. Her argument is basically that the travels of Bilbo and Co. change the protagonists. So far, so good. However, Holtz-Wodzak tries to convince her audience that we should see Bilbo as a pilgrim and the Dwarves as Crusaders (185) and, for good measure, includes the journey of the Fellowship in this category. In my mind, this does not work. A pilgrimage has, by necessity, elements of a journey—and thus every journey shares some characteristics with a pilgrimage. Yet a pilgrimage is primarily a conscious act of religious devotion—often connected with some travelling! The term may be used metaphorically for non-religious journeys, but it should not be confused with *aventure* or *quest*—a reading of Flieger's essay in the same volume would have been helpful.

David Thiessen, then, takes a look at how the varying narratorial perspective in the texts of Tolkien's legendarium influences the stance towards nature and the environment. Thiessen makes a coherent argument, yet the problem is that his essay has almost nothing to do with *The Hobbit* and very much with the legendarium. It is furthermore marred by numerous formatting mistakes (titles of books are not set in italics and Middle-earth is repeatedly spelt "Middle Earth"—as in some of the other essays) and the non-inclusion of three important monographs on the topic of environmentalism (Patrick Curry's *Defending*

Middle-earth, Liam Campbell's *The Ecological Augury in the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* and Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans's *Ents, Elves and Eriador*).

The last two contributions focus on Peter Jackson's first movie of the *Hobbit* trilogy. Judy Ann Ford and Robin Anne Reid give a competent and illuminating discussion of how Jackson changes and adapts the text of Tolkien's children's book by "retconning," i.e. by "creating retroactive continuity between the two works [i.e. between his *Hobbit* movies and the earlier *Lord of the Rings* films]" (209). An enjoyable paper, even though the proof-reader seems to have nodded on page 213 where we have eight times "Sarumon." The final paper by Michelle Markey Butler discusses internet memes (recurring images with different captions) as a means for "crowdsourcing criticism" by highlighting some of the popular concerns about the *Hobbit* movies. Butler's essay gives a good overview of the types of memes in circulation and any user of the net recognises most of them from her descriptions. Nevertheless, it would have been nice to print at least some of the memes discussed.

Having edited about a dozen books with contributions from different authors, I know about the problems and challenges of editing. The editor of this volume has done a decent job and we should be grateful for his work. In an ideal world we would have perfectly proofread texts by authors who have done their homework and are on top of their topics opening up new horizons in Tolkien studies with their contributions. Needless to say that we do not live in an ideal world. So some of the texts still have too many typos and formatting slips, many of the contributions would have profited from cross-referencing with those essays in the volume that cover the same topic (or aspects thereof); and we sometimes miss an inclusion of important research already published on a topic (an MLA bibliography search works miracles . . .). With Chaucer's Nun's Priest I can only advise: "Taketh the fruit, and let the chaff be still."

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