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“Something Has Gone Crack:” New Perspectives on J.R.R. Tolkien in the Great War, edited by Janet Brennan Croft and Annika Röttinger. Reviewed by Michael McCartney.

Michael McCartney

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work (qtd. 45). As someone writing and studying from the vantage point of almost a century since Tolkien penned that condemnation, all I can say is, the editors of this present edition were right and our dear Professor Tolkien wrong. This collection of essays, focusing in particular on his experiences in the Great War and how he and his legendarium were shaped as a result, shows us his error. Far from distracting from our understanding of the Middle Earth opus, a close study of Tolkien's life actually helps us (or at least helped me!) to connect more deeply with some of the material that was most precious to him and from which I once found myself most distanced.

In this commendable compendium, Croft and Röttinger bring together a wide (and most essentially, *diverse*) group of thinkers to study the various ways in which The War to End War left its mark on Tolkien and the universe that he created. Without going into exhaustive detail, "*Something Has Gone Crack*" contains essays by, among others, child psychologists, aerospace engineers, military historians, literary critics, and writers and thinkers of all stripes, not to mention such Tolkien luminaries as Tom Shippey and John Garth. Not only is the varied and intellectually formidable authorship impressive, but the text is also organized in a refreshing and exciting way.

The editors have broken this text up into four main sections. My description of the categories will be, of necessity, reductivist, and I apologize in advance to the scholars whose works I may unintentionally pigeonhole as follows: Military History; Biographical Study; The Origin of Major Themes in the Legendarium; and Social, Sexual, and Gender Studies.

I admit that, if I had not been asked to review the text, I might have skimmed a few of the sections. Fortunately, when I read for someone else, I avoid such dilatoriness! Many of the essays, particularly those by John Garth and Annika Röttinger, are superlative. But to misuse a quotation from one of our other dear friends, I was consistently surprised by joy. Each section, regardless of how you might react to the headings given by the editors (or the inferior ones given by me), contains gems that cast Tolkien and his world in new and surprising lights. I'd like to highlight two such surprises here.

I had a great deal of fun with Michael Flower's exhaustive essay about the influence that

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Brennan Croft, Janet and Annika Röttinger, editors. "*Something Has Gone Crack: New Perspectives on J.R.R. Tolkien in the Great War*. Walking Tree Publishers, 2019. 383 pp. \$29.15. Reviewed by Michael McCartney

Rather infamously, Tolkien disdained what he perceived as the "excessive interest in the details of the lives of authors and artists," claiming that such study distracted from the author's actual

Yorkshire played in Tolkien's worldbuilding. Each nook and cranny of the area around Roos, where Tolkien was centered, is examined and its relationship to Middle Earth explored. I wish the author's photographs could have been included - the essay itself could almost form the basis of a coffee table book for us! - but being able to access them on the author's website was still helpful. Lynn Schlesinger's essay exploring the role of women, specifically as nurse-healers, in both the Great War and Tolkien's works is also particularly engaging. In this case, the author takes us through the often problematic roles that women could and did play in WWI before examining Tolkien's own convalescence and the role women played in his recovery. The author takes especial effort to break apart some of the jejune criticism of Tolkien's own use of women in his world before moving on to a sensitive and thorough examination of Eowyn as "a transgressive figure" (Croft & Röttinger 307).

I would love to see a companion piece that covers a topic only hinted at in this collection: the ways in which the Second World War impacted Tolkien and his writing. As a veteran, a teacher whose students are being sent away, and as a father, the psycho-social impact on the man must have been significant, as it was to everyone who lived at the time.

It is only natural that, in a text of this nature, some essays are more interesting to one reader than they are to another. Why that might be could easily form the subject of some pleasant future psychoanalysis. For now, it is enough to write that Croft and Röttinger have collected a sheaf of essential essays that each deserves a place on the shelf of anyone who has ever wondered what forces acted to create the man who created Middle-earth.