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**“Tolkien and the Art of the Manuscript.” Exhibition, Haggerty  
Museum of Art (Milwaukee, WI). Reviewed by David Emerson.**

David Emerson

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## REVIEWS

### “Tolkien and the Art of the Manuscript.” Exhibition, Haggerty Museum of Art (Milwaukee, WI). Reviewed by David Emerson.

By now you all have no doubt heard of the “Tolkien and the Art of the Manuscript” exhibit at the Haggerty Museum of Art on the campus of Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It’s a marvelous exhibit; if you have a chance to see it, you should definitely go.

On Thursday, August 18, the evening before the official opening day, Janet Brennan Croft and I were privileged to represent the Mythopoeic Society at an opening reception at the Haggerty Museum, at the invitation of William (Bill) Fliss, co-curator of the event and a former Mythcon guest of honor. The reception was attended by several dozen people, only a few of whom I recognized as fellow Mythies (John Rateliff and Janice Coulter, Eric Mueller-Harder), so I presume most of the rest were either local dignitaries, university personnel, or museum donors. In addition, two prominent members of the Deutsche Tolkien Gesellschaft were there—Annika Röttinger and Tobias Eckrich—and Catherine McIlwaine from the Bodleian in Oxford, organizer of the “Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth” exhibit a few years ago.

There were speeches, of course. We were welcomed by Susan Longhenry, director of the Haggerty, who described the long process that resulted in this event and thanked the many people responsible for its existence. Prominent among these were Bill Fliss, archivist and curator of Marquette’s collection of Tolkien’s manuscripts, and his colleague Sarah Schaefer, both of whom gave their own speeches about the creation of this exhibit. The exhibit’s

major financial sponsor, a local bank, was represented by a gentleman who admitted to being an ardent Tolkien fan himself, and dropped a few *LOTR* quotes into his short talk. Finally, there was a recorded video message from J.R.R.’s grandson Simon Tolkien, who had been invited but was unable to attend in person; he spoke of the importance of letters, writing, calligraphy, and manuscripts, and included personal touches such as recognizing the way his grandfather wrote the letter “G”, or recounting an anecdote from his aunt Priscilla. (Note: the video is now included on the Haggerty web site, linked to below.)

After the welcoming remarks, we were able to view the exhibit itself, which was truly extraordinary. In addition to the plethora of Tolkien manuscripts (many of which had been included in the “Maker of Middle-earth” exhibit), there were additional items from the Bodleian, ancient MSs that emphatically demonstrated the tradition of writing and manuscript-making that Tolkien was following. There were pages of Tolkien’s philological work for Oxford, charts showing the development of language sounds over the centuries (it was noted that these were just a very few of dozens of such charts he had created). Of particular interest to *LOTR* fans were items such as a long series of pages containing hand-written spreadsheets of the timelines of each character. For myself, I was fascinated by side-by-side comparisons of the many different versions of the poem “Errantry” as it morphed inevitably into the “Earendil” poem that Bilbo recites in Rivendell. There were also a few different hand-written versions of the letter from King Elessar to the hobbits, in English and Sindarin, using both Tengwar and Roman letters. And of course Thror’s map, with the moon letters written on the other side so they could be seen when the page was held to the light—this document was in a free-standing glass case so that you could see both sides.

But surely the most striking set of items were several attempts to create the blood-stained, slashed and burned pages of the Book of Mazarbul. We know that he drew the runes and letters by hand, then deliberately stressed the pages, including burning the edges, but to see the resulting objects in their actual physical existence—and in three dimensions, as they were held out a bit from the backs of their display cases—is a unique experience. And I for one had not realized that he had done this several times, in an attempt to create the most convincing artifact. Too bad that his publishers concluded that inserting it into the printed

books would have been far too expensive.

Finally, there was a display of the years-long project of digitizing the Marquette collection, graphically illustrated by a long chart showing the different versions of each manuscript page of *The Lord of the Rings*. Each item was indexed and could now be pointed to by computer, and brought up on a screen for viewing, and invaluable tool for future researchers, no doubt.

Is there a catalog? Of course there's a catalog! It's a bit pricey at US\$60, but it contains high-quality reproductions of virtually everything in the exhibit, with explanatory text. You can order it at [REDACTED]

The exhibit runs through December 23, 2022. You can get information on it, and/or buy tickets, at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

