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**Middle-earth; or There and Back Again, by Łukasz Neubauer.
Reviewed by Larry Swain.**

Larry Swain

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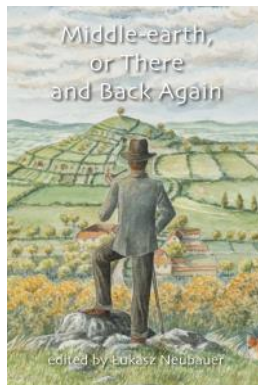
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Neubauer, Łukasz. *Middle-earth; or There and back again*. Zürich: Walking Tree Publishers, 2020. Reviewed by LARRY SWAIN.

This collection of six essays plus introduction is a welcome addition to Tolkien scholarship. The volume contains essays that examine sources and influences on various aspects of Tolkien's work. While

this approach is not in itself something new, the authors in this assemblage cover other texts than *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, with a single exception. The collection comes in at about 126 pages of reading. It is a welcome addition to Tolkien scholarship; in part, this is because all the contributors work in eastern Europe and have a wide range of professional interests and expertise that they bring to bear on the topics they study here.



In Leśniewski's initial essay, the author covers a large territory from the famous bet between Lewis and Tolkien to the Atlantis myth and Tolkien's dreams of a flood. In addition, the author draws an analogy between how Plato constructs his myth out of strands of pre-existing materials and Tolkien's own myth-making. But one important, vitally important, strand for Tolkien is missing: as much influence on both content and style of the Akallabeth as Plato's and Tolkien's own dream, just as important is the Biblical myth of Noah's Flood, itself like Plato's mythmaking, made of strands of pre-existing mythic material. It may have been useful to speak less of the "bet" which is not directly relevant to the essay's subject and to say something about the Biblical material and background. This criticism should not detract from the value of what is in the essay, however.

Neubauer's essay, "Tolkien's Christian Reinterpretation of the Traditional Germanic Ideals of Heroism and Loyalty in *Lord of the Rings*" argues that Tolkien reinterpreted the heroics of Byrthnoth in the "Battle of Maldon." Byrthnoth is fortunate enough to have a Viking force trapped on a small island connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land (available only at low tide). The Viking leader challenges Byrthnoth to allow them safe passage to the mainland in order to engage in battle. Byrthnoth allows this, and as a result he loses his life and the battle. Byrthnoth's Germanic *ofermod*, a word on which Tolkien wrote and interprets as "overmastering pride," an overconfidence in a victory against the invading force, cost him all. Neubauer argues that the bridge at Khazad-Dum is a reinterpretation of the poem. Gandalf stands blocking a narrow connection between forces; but his stand is not based on "overmastering pride" but rather ultimate sacrifice.

Kowalik examines the influence of the *Pearl* poem on Tolkien, particularly in the sense goldsmithing, and rings. The author argues, quite cogently, that *Pearl* is a more likely source than Wagner for the ring imagery so important to the novel. In this examination of connections between the poem and Tolkien's narrative, many of which to my knowledge have not been noted before, the author does not include the Nibelungenlied or the notion of "ring-giver" in the context of discussing the influence on Tolkien's own development of thought. On the other hand, many of the parallels, such as the father/jeweler's stubborn pursuit of his Pearl across the threshold of life and death and almost

across the final barrier, Kowalik sees paralleled in Gollum's pursuit of the One Ring. The father is also likened to Bilbo, for both in the end give up the Ring to another. It is appreciated to bring the *Pearl* poem into Tolkien studies, too often overlooked.

The next two articles in the collection add to our knowledge of Tolkien by discussing *The Fall of Arthur* in the context of the Medieval Romance tradition, and "The Story of Kullervo" in the context of Finnish myth in the Kalevala. From this reader's perspective, addressing these two somewhat recent, posthumous publications is welcome. Sadly, the article by Blaszkiewicz on Tolkien's indebtedness to the alliterative Romance tradition is the briefest article in the collection! Would that there were more!

The final contribution explores the notions of wisdom in *Lord of the Rings* arguing that Galadriel rather than the "Marian" interpretation is really more a "Lady Wisdom" (my term) rooted in St. Paul's statements that the wisdom of the world is folly, but divine wisdom which appears as folly is truly wise. I am not convinced that these are dichotomous or separate in a polysemous characterization such as Galadriel. Furthermore, Mary takes on many of the aspects of Wisdom as a divine figure as veneration of her becomes more important. Nonetheless, this is an interesting and convincing argument to consider when examining the role of Galadriel in the *Legendarium*.

The essays collected here are interesting and thought-provoking contributions to Tolkien Studies. They are accessible to readers who know Tolkien; knowledge of the other texts mentioned is not required. It is to be hoped, however, that these essays will spur readers to become familiar with the other texts as well as further think on Tolkien's creative works.