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*Tolkien Studies: An Annual Review v. XIII.* Eds. Michael D.C. Drout, Verlyn Flieger, and David Bratman; *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies v. 35.* Ed. John Pennington; and *VII (Seven): Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center v.33.* Ed. Marjorie Lamp Mead

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## Mythcon 50

Looking Back, Moving Forward

San Diego, California

August 2-5, 2019

*Tolkien Studies: An Annual Review v. XIII.* Eds. Michael D.C. Drout, Verlyn Flieger, and David Bratman; *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies v. 35.* Ed. John Pennington; and *VII (Seven): Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center v.33.* Ed. Marjorie Lamp Mead

fascinating and original argument; like the Birns piece, I hope it's a piece of scholarship that doesn't get lost.

Because of the uneven quality of the contributions, this isn't necessarily a collection for scholars, but it is definitely of interest to Tolkien fans. I wish that Burke and Burdge's editorial apparatus had been a bit clearer about how these pieces came to be: in the foreword, it seems to represent a specific fan group from a specific location (NYC) and yet the contributors are from across the US; there is the claim that fans were the first Tolkien scholars (which is true), but these are all contemporary pieces. An afterword of any kind could have cleared this up, but there isn't one; the last essay is followed directly by the index. Despite these puzzles, all of the contributions are engagingly written, and there are some real gems here for fans and scholars alike.

—Cait Coker



**TOLKIEN STUDIES: AN ANNUAL SCHOLARLY REVIEW.** Edited by Michael D.C. Drout, Verlyn Flieger, and David Bratman. Volume XIII (2016). ISSN 1547-3155. 321 pp. \$60.00 annually.

**NORTH WIND: A JOURNAL OF GEORGE MACDONALD STUDIES.** Edited by John Pennington. No. 35 (2016). ISSN 0265-7295. 143 pp. Print with \$26.00 annual membership. Online [digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/](http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/)

**VII: JOURNAL OF THE MARION E. WADE CENTER.** Edited by Marjorie Lamp Mead. Volume 33 (2016). ISSN 0271-3012. 122 pp. \$18.00 US annually, other prices on website.

MANY OF THE ARTICLES IN THE 2016 ISSUE OF *TOLKIEN STUDIES* deal with Tolkien's recently published *Beowulf* and Arthurian materials. Simon J. Cook's essay "The Cauldron at the Outer Edge: Tolkien on the Oldest English Fairy Tales" is a complement—not a continuation, since it has a different focus—to his essay on "The Peace of Frodo" in *Tolkien Studies* 12 (reviewed by me in *Mythlore* #128). Here he delves into Tolkien's understanding of some of the very oldest stories in English mythology, and how he used elements from these tales to construct *The Lord of the Rings* as an asterisk-origin for them: the "scholarly-literary nexus" of Tolkien's work as a whole provided him with a way to "[connect] his philological inquiries with his emerging story of the Third Age of Middle-earth" (10). Cook looks particularly at two legends referenced in *Beowulf*—the Scyld Scefing story, with its culture hero who arrives and departs

by sea, and the star-crossed love story of Ingeld and Freawaru—and how they might, through an imagined progression from “conventional exegesis to conjectural reconstruction [by way of] the imaginative component” (26) be derived from and point back to the lost older asterisk-history of Arda.

Paul Acker next provides some background on how Tolkien came to write *Sellic Spell*, the fairy-tale version of *Beowulf* now published with Tolkien’s translation of and commentary on the poem. While writing “On Fairy-stories,” Tolkien noted of *Beowulf* that it was not retold in the Andrew Lang fairy books but “should be retold as a fairy-story” like his childhood favorite in the *Red Fairy Book*, “The Story of Sigurd” (33). Tolkien in his version “[condenses *Beowulf*] in the direction of a fairy tale” (33), with a tendency towards “pastiche” (34). In *Sellic Spell*, Tolkien attempts to achieve “the comparative anonymity of the fairy tale” by removing specific name and place references and playing up the fairy tale elements: the “unlikely lad” (35), clumsy and greedy, who proves his mettle by defeating an ogre and marries the king’s only daughter (a folk tale element Tolkien deliberately adds to the story, 32). *Sellic Spell* stops short with this happy ending, as a good fairy story must.

Tolkien’s well-known observation that his invented mythology deliberately contains no reference to primary world religion because “That seems to me fatal” is examined by John D. Rateliff in connection with the recent publication of *The Fall of Arthur*. Here Tolkien is dealing with a mythos that *does* “explicitly [contain] the Christian religion,” while attempting to connect this body of tales with his own legendarium. Rateliff suggests that Tolkien has “followed the time-honored tradition of altering the Arthurian myth to suit his own purposes” (45); in this retelling, fantastical and mystical elements like the Grail are greatly reduced, Arthur’s European quest is rendered as a religious crusade, and the departure of Arthur and Lancelot’s voyage after him draws on both the Christian *imram* tradition (56) and the Germanic ship-burial motif reappearing throughout the legendarium (and, as mentioned above, in Tolkien’s work with elements of *Beowulf*).

T.S. Sudell places Tolkien’s uncompleted *The Fall of Arthur* in context as part of a revival of Old English alliterative meter in the twentieth century, citing Seamus Heaney and W.H. Auden as other practitioners of this complex verse form. *Beowulf* will perhaps be the most familiar original example, demonstrating the typical half-lines linked by a caesura or pause, with alliteration of stressed syllables. Sudell applies the classification method developed by Eduard Sievers, sorting lines by stress patterns, to Tolkien’s *Arthur*, pointing out the adaptations Tolkien had to make in order to use modern English for this Old English form—modern English falling naturally into iambic feet (75) and including far more rhyming words after the Norman conquest (73).

This highly technical study is accompanied by tables classifying each line by both stress and alliteration type, and analyzing their distribution.

Dennis Wilson Wise, in his “Book of the Lost Narrator,” proposes reading the 1977 *Silmarillion* as many of us did when it first came out, before the publication of the *History of Middle-earth* material: not as a problematic compiled text (collecting disconnected pieces by multiple narrators) or a mediated text (as Douglas Kane does in *Arda Reconstructed*, with his careful inventory of what Christopher changed or omitted), but as a unified text, full of “careful rhetorical maneuvering” (111) designed to support the single narrator’s “moral focus” (117). Wise contends that “the ‘unified text’ thesis holds that all the pieces within the published *Silmarillion* fit together, have meaning, and relate to a larger whole” (117), in the end revealing a central concern with “ethical knowledge rather than with ‘true history’” (118). With the *HoMe* material now available to us, this is quite a challenge, but Wise applies a method of “suspicious reading” (111) to narrative styles, focuses, and manipulations which certainly make this an approach worth considering.

Jeremy Painter, however, in “A Honeycomb Gathered from Different Flowers,” suggests reading *The Lord of the Rings* at face value, as Tolkien claims in the Prologue, as a medieval-style distillation of stories derived from multiple distinct narrative traditions. He defines three sources: the “Ælfwine” tradition, from archives collected by Bilbo, Frodo, and Sam, the “Holbylta” materials originating with Merry, and the “Perriannath” sources traced back to Pippin. Lest this sound too much like splitting hobbit-hairs, Painter backs up his thesis by bringing to light certain traits associated with each tradition, and the inconsistencies between strands in the narrative arising from these traits. The Ælfwine materials are most associated with Elves and the experience of Faery; the Holbylta narratives with Rohan, horses, and, I would say, the “feel” of northern European heroism; the Periannath sections with Gondorian history, kingship, and the moral quandaries of obedience. If Painter’s case will not convince all readers, it has certainly given me something to pay attention to in my next re-reading of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Oswald Spengler’s 1932 *Der Untergang des Abenlands* (commonly translated as *The Decline of the West*) was, for good or ill, a hugely pervasive influence on world thought in its time. It would have been hard to avoid Spengler’s conception of the cycles of great civilizations, rising from vigorous youth to a “pathologically expansive” imperialism and fall (153), or his privileging of the “eternal peasant” over the decadence and parasitical nature of the great cities. Michael Potts, in “‘Evening-Lands’: Spenglerian Tropes in *Lord of the Rings*,” points out elements in Tolkien’s vast history that show he was likely as influenced by these models as anyone else in his time—the “pervasive sense of decline” from a golden age based on the defining sins of individual

cultures (149), the stark contrast between Gondor in its decline and Rohan in its youth, the hobbits as idealized country-dwellers in harmony with their land. While Potts claims that this use of Spenglerian motifs should put to rest any debate over Tolkien's supposed racism, I am not so sanguine; it would be too easy, as the Nazis tried to do, to co-opt Spengler in support of theories of racial purity and superiority. I feel this closing argument would have been much stronger had Potts gone into misuses of Spengler even briefly, rather than abruptly jumping from the Spenglerian historical model to the assertion that Tolkien's use of it proved he was no racist.

In "J.R.R. Tolkien and the Irish Question," Matthew M. DeForrest speculates that the long, fraught, and tragic relationship between England and Ireland is reflected in the few hints we have about Dunlending culture and its relationship with Rohan and Gondor. Using the Dunlendish term *Forgoil* (a reference to the Rohirrim) as a starting point, and noting its similarity to the Irish *forghabháil* with its implications of forceful usurpation, DeForrest notes how the 1916 Easter Uprising and its consequences may be paralleled in the situation on the western borders of Rohan. Some support for this interpretation comes from *The Notion Club Papers* and early drafts of *The Lord of the Rings*. Going beyond linguistics and source-hunting, DeForrest also notes how Tolkien's re-use of this primary world material supports his thematic interest in "the way mercy can and should be used by leaders of men" (174) and how leaders "prove worthy of the power granted them" (179).

As usual, the 2016 volume of *Tolkien Studies* closes with book reviews, The Year's Work in Tolkien Studies for 2013, and the Bibliography (in English) for 2014.

THE 2016 ISSUE OF *NORCH UNNO*, the journal of the George MacDonald Society, begins with Pallabi Gupta's "The Female Explorer and the Child Wanderer in George MacDonald's 'The Day Girl and the Night Boy' and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*." Gupta draws a line of descent from Nycteris, the central girl character in MacDonald's story, to Mary Lennox, the young girl at the center of Burnett's novel. Burnett admired MacDonald, so it is not surprising that both young girls "redefine the conventional heroine of children's literature" by challenging the confinement of women in domestic space and by exhibiting characteristics of the "imperialist explorer" (5). Gupta classifies Nycteris and Mary as representatives of the archetype of the *female explorer* (4), "hungry for knowledge, unafraid to travel, who questions the norm,

escapes subjection, and finally, rescues a male" (5)—a figure in sharp contrast to the usual Victorian "Angel in the House."<sup>1</sup>

Inbar Kaminsky uses Foucault's and Barthes's theories about authorship and the "death of the author" to explore the "literary illusion of the narrator as an independent voice" (21) in MacDonald's *Lilith*. In this novel, the unreliability of the narrator, and the various techniques MacDonald uses to undermine him, force the reader to consider "external knowledge versus self knowledge and the inadequacy of language" (32) and seek out the "implied author" as a more authoritative voice. Yet, as Kaminsky concludes, the reader is left unsatisfied, and *Lilith* is revealed to be ultimately "not a novel about faith but rather about the need for faith" (33).

In an article that nicely parallels the Mythcon Guest of Honor speeches by Laura Schmidt and Bill Fliss in this issue, Joe Ricke and his colleagues and students provide an orientation to the Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis and Friends at Taylor University and in particular its MacDonald materials. The library collects material relating to MacDonald, Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, Owen Barfield, and Charles Williams (The Wade Collection covers the same authors with the addition of Tolkien and Chesterton), and is considered the third strongest Lewis collection in the world after the Bodleian and the Wade. The Center holds about 500 MacDonald items, and a full bibliography is in preparation. This particular article lists materials in the 76 bound periodical volumes and 75 single issues held there; in MacDonald's case, these materials are of great value because they frequently constitute earlier versions of material later collected and published in book form.

Carla Elizabeth Whytock, in "Understanding the Self through Recognition and Mortality: MacDonald's Portrayals of Identity in his Fairy Tales for Children," explores MacDonald's frequent use of the contrast between what she terms "static" characters (whose physical appearance stays much the same over the course of a story, and "kinetic" characters (whose physical appearance is mutable but whose core self remains the same and recognizable by static characters), and the relationships between these character types. With support from MacDonald's *Unspoken Sermons* and other writings, she links this theme to his "abandonment of Calvinism [and] predestination" (71) and his understanding of death as "a rebirth into a life different than the one experienced presently" (79). Whytock's examples are primarily drawn from the Curdie books, *At the Back of the North Wind*, and "The Golden Key."

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<sup>1</sup> Gracia Fay Ellwood similarly proposed the term *Adventurer* for a female character neatly fitting neither the Consort nor Virgin archetype in a 1979 *Mythlore* article and listed several additional characters who fit this pattern, among them Tolkien's Éowyn and Lúthien.

*Phantastes* is often characterized as unstructured, episodic, and plotless, but Michael Burt's well-structured paper teases out the scaffolding on which it is built. The parallel motifs of Nature and Books chart "a path of imaginative development out of a rationalism-dominated perspective" (90) that demonstrates in story form MacDonald's "theory about the imaginative development of the individual" (89). Anticipating Tolkien's theory of sub-creation, MacDonald considered human imagination a derivative power, in imitation of God's original creative imagination, and therefore the highest expression of our being. "The foods most fitting to the imagination" are Nature and Books—Nature providing the forms and raw materials, Books recording the act of imagination on those forms. The reader joins Anodos on a spiritual pilgrimage that develops the imagination. (The essay is, alas, marred by several lapses in proofreading.)

Jonathan Litten's following essay "*Phantastes*: All Mirrors are Magic Mirrors" is not nearly so tidily structured, though this perhaps is appropriate since his conclusion is that "a text with capacity for psycho-spiritual reading should provide sustained interaction with the symbolic without offering definite resolution" (124). Litten attempts a Jungian reading of the text, demonstrating Jung's and MacDonald's "mutual belief in the autonomy and vitality of the unconscious and the imagination" (105), and pays particular attention to Anodos's relationship with anima figures and how he "suffers for his mistaken relationship to the anima energy" (118) during many phases of the story.

John Pennington concludes this section on *Phantastes* by speculating about MacDonald's influence on the works of children's author and illustrator Maurice Sendak. Sendak admired MacDonald and illustrated "The Light Princess" in 1969 and "The Golden Key" in 1967<sup>2</sup>, as well as referencing MacDonald in his Caldecott Medal acceptance speech. Pennington argues that the scene where Anodos's bedroom transforms into fairy-land "is the ur-text for Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*" (126), and that these transformations "open a space that allows for the vulnerabilities of Anodos and Max to play out in the fantastical realm" (129). Both works are quests in which the protagonist must experience "the vitality of imaginative play" and "find catharsis" for what troubles their mundane lives (130).

AS A JOURNAL ASSOCIATED WITH AN EVANGELICAL COLLEGE, *VII* tends more to theological analysis of its authors than *Mythlore*; a useful perspective taken

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<sup>2</sup> See my review in *Mythprint* of a new illustrated edition in which I also discuss Sendak's version.



in balance with our more secular approach, but this issue seems somewhat more theologically-oriented than other recent ones.

Kathryn Wehr leads off the issue with a useful disambiguation of Dorothy L. Sayers's use of the term *catholic/Catholic*. Sayers described herself as an Anglo-Catholic, emphasizing a "continuity with the historic Church" but a separation from the *Roman* Catholic tradition (8), an important distinction in her mind. Lower-case *catholic* Sayers generally used to mean *universal*, but for the most part when she used upper-case *Catholic* she had in mind the shared elements of the Roman, Greek Orthodox, and Anglican traditions: the "Apostolic Succession, [...] the Sacraments, and the Four Last Things" (12). Wehr discusses a project Sayers was involved in that did not come to fruition—a collection of doctrines common to all three Catholic churches that she nicknamed the "Oecumenical Penguin"—and also offers some insight on Sayers's opinions on women priests and the evolution of her use of *Catholic* while working on her Dante translations.

Dante scholar Dabney Park relates how, as an undergraduate at the University of Texas in 1961, he wrote to C.S. Lewis for advice on interpreting Charles Williams's writings on the Grail legend in his Arthurian poetry in light of the vessel's Celtic mythological resonances. Much to his surprise, Lewis responded with a short but thoughtful note (here both reproduced and transcribed) about how the work of "individual men of genius" can often contribute far more to the meaning and interpretation of motifs and symbols than the slow, anonymous work of storytelling processes often privileged in folklore studies. This intriguing concept influenced the direction of Park's honors paper, and may certainly resonate today with those seeking to better understand Lewis, Williams, and how motifs and symbols spread.

Elaine Tixier, in a revision of her address "'On the Stairs of the Great Gate'" given to the New York C.S. Lewis Society, considers the quest for faith in *Till We Have Faces* in particular, bolstered with examples of parallel imagery and themes in "Light," *Surprised by Joy*, and *A Grief Observed*, among other sources. There is a tension between "seeing and not seeing" (23), between receptivity to signs and suspicious doubt. Orual's self-examination as she writes her complaint allows her to "read, in a new light, signs that [were] not always immediately perceptible" in her life (32), paralleling the work Lewis himself did in his most autobiographical writings; both processes bring to mind Job's argument with God.

Pierce Taylor Hibbs's "Meddling in the Mind of Melkor: *The Silmarillion* and the Nature of Sin" is even more concerned with theology. He links literature and theology as "complementary perspectives on our experience, [...] both [...] rooted in the linguistic and relational nature of reality" (51). Language is relational in its very essence, as it means nothing if it is not

used for communication (or communion) between beings. Hibbs reads Melkor's rebellion as a denial of communion, a sinful urge for autonomy and self-governance that inevitably leads to a "thirst for tyranny" (41). Hibbs supports this interpretation through an extensive explanation of the doctrine of *perichoresis*, "the teaching that the persons of the Godhead dwell in communion with one another" (46). In this light, "the essence of good is communion" (50) and "sin, essentially [...] is disunion" (49). Tolkien's fictional theology is thus in line with, and illuminated by, primary world theology, though Ilúvatar is not a tripartite deity. I find myself reminded of Granny Weatherwax's dictum that "sin is when you treat people as things"; in other words, when you see yourself as autonomous, and not in communion with them as fellow-beings (Pratchett 217-8).

In C.S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair*, a key turning point to the plot is when Puddleglum, resisting the efforts of the Lady of the Green Kirtle to convince her prisoners that Narnia and Aslan are simply products of their imagination, stomps out her magic fire and declares that he intends to live as if they *are* true and escape in search of them. Critics have variously analyzed Puddleglum's thought process and actions in terms of Pascal's Wager or Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Joseph Chapa identifies the "limitations" of these approaches (57) and suggests that better keys may be found in Lewis's essay "On Obstinacy in Belief" and his "argument from desire." One thing to keep in mind is that Puddleglum is neither trying to convince himself nor to win a debate with the Witch; he is simply "trying to break contact with an enemy that will not yield" (64) and changes the terms of the engagement, in effect, by arguing that "what is 'important' [is] more fundamental than what is merely 'real'" (68).

Charlie W. Starr has been, for a number of years, developing what he calls the LHC—the Lewis Handwriting Chart—an effort to track the many changes to Lewis's handwriting through his life. Lewis always wrote with a dip pen, never a typewriter or fountain pen or ballpoint; changes to his writing style were sometimes deliberate, sometimes unconscious, and sometimes in later years his "'Villainous Handwriting'" was the result of arthritis or rheumatism. Starr details how his chart, now online at *VII*'s website, can be employed to solve the problems of undated manuscripts, or even manuscripts to which Lewis added a date later (as "we can't always trust Lewis with his own dates" [74]). Starr details how his chart has already been used to solve dating problems with the Barfield-Lewis "Great War" materials, as well as a number of letters and poems in the Wade archives. There is much more that can be done; for example, narrowing down the dates Lewis read or re-read books in his personal library based on his annotations.

This issue of *VII* closes with two lengthy review essays: by Edwin Tait on two 2015 books on the "Great War" reviewed here in *Mythlore* #130 by Phillip

Fitzsimmons, and by Travis Buchanan on the massive five-volume attempt by Paul H. Brazier to derive a systematic theology from Lewis's works. For this issue of *VII*, most of the additional book reviews and notes and the charts for Starr's essay are available online at the journal's website, [www.wheaton.edu/wadecenter/Journal-VII](http://www.wheaton.edu/wadecenter/Journal-VII). Judging from the thickness of the issue of *Mythlore* in which this review appears, this may be an option we need to explore as well!

—Janet Brennan Croft

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#### BRIEFLY NOTED

**ORCRIST #9 (2017). THE BULLETIN OF THE TOLKIEN AND FANTASY SOCIETY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—MADISON.** 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue. Ed. Richard C. West, Lucas Annear, and Jack Mathie. ISSN 0474-3369. \$7.00 plus shipping; contact [tolkiensocietyuw@gmail.com](mailto:tolkiensocietyuw@gmail.com) or visit <http://www.southparkbooks.com/>.

ALONG WITH THE MYTHOPOEIC SOCIETY, the Tolkien and Fantasy Society at the University of Wisconsin at Madison is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Originally formed as the Tolkien Society by Ivor Rogers, the group has met on a monthly basis since its founding. Its literary journal, *Orcrist*, was published more or less annually from 1966 through 1973; *Orcrist* 8 appeared in 1977. *Orcrist* 3, 4, and 5 were published as joint issues with *Tolkien Journal* 11, 13, 14; shortly after that, *Tolkien Journal* merged into *Mythlore*. These three joint issues are included in the *Mythlore Index Plus*.

After a forty-year gap, it is a pleasure to see this special issue. The front and back covers, by Sylvia and Rachel Hunnewell respectively, are quite lovely.