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***Death and Immortality in Middle-earth.* Ed. Daniel Helen.**

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Death and Immortality in Middle-earth. Ed. Daniel Helen.

perception of reality and God. The author also examines *The Great Divorce*, the *Space Trilogy*, and *Till We Have Faces*, all of which exhibit clear mythic elements. However, Lewis's most famous series, the tales of Narnia, are left out. This may be due to their somewhat allegorical nature. Their absence is notable, as they contain many instances of myth, as well as the common themes of renunciation, redemption, and rebirth.

In the final chapter, "Myth Today: L'Engle, Wangerin, Siegel, and Hurnard," the author examines four modern writers who are heirs to the mythic traditions instantiated in 20th-century literature by the Inklings. While each of these writers has some mythic elements in the works examined, this was the weakest chapter of the book. Hein would have been better served to concentrate solely on L'Engle and go more in-depth into her *A Wrinkle in Time* series. His analysis of the other three authors was cursory and did not sufficiently tie into the theme of myth making that had been integrally developed up to this point. Hein concludes the book by addressing the "essential nature of artistic composition" (284), but only implies that the referent is "dying to self" or perhaps evidencing the "maturity of spirit" which leads to dying to self. The book would have been better served with a stronger conclusion to wrap up the key points around the common ideas of journey, redemption, and reward that are universal to myth regardless of religion.

— Sharon L. Bolding



DEATH AND IMMORTALITY IN MIDDLE-EARTH: PROCEEDINGS OF THE TOLKIEN SOCIETY SEMINAR 2016. Edited by Daniel Helen. Luna Press Publishing: Edinburgh, 2017. 206 pages. ISBN 13: 978-1-911143-33-8. Softcover. \$16.50; \$8.99 Kindle edition.

IN AN APRIL, 1956, LETTER HE WROTE TO JOANNE DE BORTADANO discussing *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien said, "The real theme for me is [...] Death and Immortality: the mystery of the love of the world in the hearts of a race 'doomed' to leave and seemingly lose it; the anguish in the hearts in a race 'doomed' not to leave it, until its whole evil-aroused story is complete" (*Letters* 246). Published in 2017, the Peter Roe Memorial Fund's seventeenth volume features twelve essays on this theme first presented in the Tolkien Society seminar in Leeds on July 2, 2016. (Tolkien fan Roe was a poet, cartographer, and author. He was killed in 1979 at age 16 after being struck by a truck outside his home.) Small as it is, only five by seven inches with 195 pages of text, *Death and Immortality in Middle-earth* is not slight.

Matthew B. Rose's "Tolkien and the Somme," the first study here, links Tolkien's legendarium to the brutal butchery that he witnessed in the war. "Despite the darkness of war [...] this past century produced one of the greatest stories in our western canon," Rose concludes. "Good comes from evil whether from the hand of God or by the imagination of sub-creators like Tolkien" (21). In "Tolkien and T.S. Eliot," Tânia Azevedo couples *The Fall of Arthur* with *The Waste Land*. Both were written in the twenties; both depict defeats redeemed with a hope of healing. Her observations on this odd couple are cogent and coherent.

The many maimed characters in Tolkien's fiction are categorized and characterized in Irina Metzler's "Tolkien and disability." About Frodo, she writes, "One may note [...] the trinity of wounds [...] that draws association with the Christian trinity. In his suffering for the bettering of Middle-earth, Frodo may be compared to the medieval saints or martyrs" (47-48).

Giovanni Carmine Costabile's essay, "Facing death," moves from disabling to dying. At thirty-four pages the longest essay here, it draws on heroes like Gawain, Roland, and Tristan as well as Tolkien's characters. Costabile incorporates Sigmund Freud, Simone de Beauvoir, John Garth's *Tolkien and the Great War*, and C.S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed* in this thoughtful study. He links Lewis's loss of his wife Joy to "the saddest grief [:] Arwen's for Aragorn. It was so powerful that all she could do was go 'forth from the House, and the light of her eyes was quenched, and it seemed to her people that she had become cold and grey as nightfall in winter that comes without a star'" (78).

At seven pages, the briefest essay, "Mortal immortals: the fallibility of elven immortality in Tolkien's writing" by Anna Milon, also evokes Arwen: "Fading is another phenomenon significant of Elven mortality" (103). Another short essay, Gaëlle Abaléa's eight-page "Transmission: an escape from death in Tolkien's work?", astutely employs *The Silmarillion* and "Leaf By Niggle": "[T]ransmission through artistic creation could be a way that J.R.R. Tolkien somehow cheated death" (142).

In "Music of life: the creation of Middle-earth," Sarah Rose compares Tolkien's "Ainulindalë" to four other creation myths: the Norse "Völuspá," the Finnish "Kalevala," Pythagoras's "The Harmony of the Spheres" (which was taken up by Augustine and Boethius), and the Bible's book of Genesis. "Beginning with Pythagoras and continued and Christianized by St. Augustine and Boethius, the concept of the Harmony of the Spheres, though not a creation story, may well have inspired the musical creation account of *The Silmarillion*," Rose writes (129). Noting that Tolkien had "said that '*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work,'" she adds: "Genesis, unlike *The Silmarillion*, does not speak of creation through music [...]. Nonetheless, Ilúvatar is very much like the god of Genesis. [He] is eternal; before

creation, there is nothing but him. He is the source of all being. [...] Ilúvatar is good and all of his creation is good" (129-31). "Death is the great unknown," Rose concludes,

but it began as the gift of Ilúvatar, and since all things were created by Ilúvatar, to him all things must return. [...] As Aragorn son of Arathorn said at the end of his long life, 'In sorrow we must go, but not in despair. Behold! we are not bound forever to the circles of the world, and beyond them is more than memory. Farewell!' (132)

Andrew Higgins' "Gifts in harmony?" is a philological exploration of Tolkien's invented words for "life" and "death." He cites Tolkien's assertion in "On Fairy-stories" that "mythology is language and language is mythology" (109) as the premise of this linguistic exegesis. "Through his imaginative process of combined, coeval and intertwined mytho- and glosso- poeia, Tolkien depicted how the two children of Ilúvatar came be in and leave Arda [to] eventually [...] come back together beyond the end of time" (119).

"Recurrent pattern of the Fall in Tolkien's legendarium" by Massimiliano Izzo refers to Adam and Eve's *felix peccatum* as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. "Mortality—one of the two aspects of the Death/ Immortality dichotomy—is connected with the Fall [...], which is a central tenet in Christian, and in particular Catholic, doctrine" (144). Izzo cites "The Drowning of Anadûnê" and "Fall of Men" from 1992's *Sauron Defeated*:

[T]he recurrent theme of absolute domination is more explicit in 'The Drowning of Anadûnê': 'Yet it was the purpose of Zigûr [Sauron], as of Mulkhêr [Morgoth] before him, to make himself a king over all kings, and to be the god over Men.' [...] The theme of the usurpation of god's right might appear absent—as well as god—from *The Lord of the Rings*, but Tolkien did consider it the nexus of the War of the Ring and possibly, by extension, of all the previous wars between the free peoples and the Dark Lords. (153)

Aslı Bülbül Candaş's "The elven perspective of life, death and immortality" begins by noting that "the issue of the Half-elven makes the most important contribution to the triangle of life, death and immortality" (85). Their ability to choose their race, and thus their fate, "presents the reader with the thought that human life gains meaning through death" (85-86). Using Lúthien and Beren, Idril and Tuor, and Arwen and Aragorn as exemplars of the choice the Half-elven are blessed or cursed with, Candaş states that Elrond and his three children and "[T]heir deeds in strategical timings show at what points the themes [...] separate from each other and when they interlock" (87). Concluding, she writes that "this shift in the perspectives of the Elves and Men [...] reveals

one of the most powerful ideals of humans, to be immortal and to see unreached places in our real universe" (96-97).

Adam B. Shaeffer's "Frodo and Saruman: euformation, dysformation, and immortality in *The Lord of the Rings*" contrasts the journeys of those two crucial characters. "The random senseless destruction of the land reveals that Saruman has lost even the last shreds of his humanity, and descended to the level of a mere beast, or worse, an Orc" (177-78). Shaeffer continues: "While his descent from Istari to beast represents a real loss, Saruman's true loss runs deeper still. [...] He loses his access to euformative fellowship and loses his immortality and himself" (178-79). Conversely,

Frodo's euformation has empowered him to see Saruman for what he once was. [...] Frodo's pity for Saruman's fall presents a stark contrast to Frodo's words at the beginning at the beginning when he says of Gollum, 'What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had the chance!'

Pity is the significant term here, one with 'moral and imaginative worth' for Tolkien [...]. In the end, it is Pity 'that ultimately allows the Quest to be achieved' [...]. He has paid the price, but his reward awaits beyond the walls of the world [...]. (180-81)

In the final study, "'Tears are the very wine of blessedness,'" Dimitra Fimi comments on Tolkien's notion of eucatastrophe. "Tolkien here seems to echo ideas on the real Christian joy, the joy of God as opposed to the joy of the world. John's gospel refers to the 'complete' joy that only Christ can give. [...] [I]t is not to be found but in heaven, and we only get glimpses of it during our lives" (186). She includes seven examples, from the Battle of Five Armies in *The Hobbit* to the feast in Minas Tirith after Aragorn's coronation when the minstrel praises Frodo and Sam in his ballad of the destruction of the Ring (187). March 25, the date of that destruction, was thought to be the date of Good Friday, she notes. The ending's bittersweetness, Fimi writes, is because "[t]hose who have sinned and mourn, and are saved via their repentance, have tasted something very similar to Christ's death and resurrection. They have fallen and have risen again" (189).

The dozen essays collected here offer cogent studies of the darkness of death and the light of life in Tolkien's legendarium. By dying, Peter Roe has achieved an immortality through the seventeen scholarly studies published in this series. This latest is certainly not the least.

—Mike Foster

