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***Celtic Myth in the 21st Century: The Gods And Their Stories in a Global Perspective*, edited by Emily Lyle**

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The book as a whole is quite short—this reviewer finished it in a day—but it provides some good engagement with key issues in the study of Lewis and Tolkien. There are no groundbreaking conclusions to be found here, though each entry is a solid piece of work. They are engaging and easy-to-follow, retaining their oral character. Since Ward and Caldecott’s major theses have already been presented elsewhere (in *Planet Narnia* and “Tolkien’s Elvish England,” respectively), this volume is enjoyable but not essential.

—Austin Freeman



CELTIC MYTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE GODS AND THEIR STORIES IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE. Emily Lyle, ed. Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press. 2018, 210 p. ISBN 978-1-78683-205-4. \$65.00.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO COLLECTION EDITOR Emily Lyle’s *Celtic Myth in the 21st Century*, series editor Jonathan M. Woodling finds it important to remind readers that scholars today “more than ever” must be “mindful that conceptions and associations of the ‘Celtic’ may be socially and politically constructed, as well as historically situated” (1). This frank statement—part admission about the inherent nature of historicizing and part recommendation that scholars remain aware and responsible when their work involves anything akin to historicizing—is reiterated when Woodling points out that “the last century was, in varying degree, a decolonising period in Celtic cultures, in which process ‘tradition’ became a politically charged concept—and, latterly, a contested one” (2).

Both for Woodling, as editor of the University of Wales’s *New Approaches to Celtic Religion and Mythology* series, and for Lyle and the other scholars whose work is collected here, new work in Celtic studies and on Celtic mythology must navigate the tensions between established conceptions of the field and its subjects on the one hand, and on the other, a critical need to re-examine that same field during a time when former shortcomings and potential misapplications are becoming more visible. And today this need extends beyond even a growing awareness of “the colonial—especially orientalist—context” (2) that fields such as anthropology, religion, and folklore studies have often worked from. As I read *Celtic Myth in the 21st Century*, I was constantly thinking about how such projects are crucial despite their fraught complexity—particularly in the context of related fields experiencing grimmer versions of myth being reified as history or tradition, as is happening with white supremacists claiming an imagined Nordic past and its symbols, or the ongoing

conversation about how the descriptor “Anglo-Saxon” has been used to construct and defend a similarly white tradition, even within academia. Given these concurrent realities, *Celtic Myth in the 21st Century* is very welcome for its realization that studies of myth and mythology must be more comparative and myth itself perhaps redefined “to operate largely independently of its claims to a prehistoric dimension” (3), even though some of the collection’s chapters seemed to address this project more head-on than others.

There are three sections in *Celtic Myth in the 21st Century*—“Myth and the Medieval,” “Comparative Mythology,” and “The New Cosmological Approach”—and each of these sections contains four chapters. As Woodling promises in his introduction, contributors apply a refreshing range of approaches, both methodological and theoretical, to the myths they examine. Likewise, contributors contextualize the narratives and beliefs contained within these myths well—both in the understanding that our knowledge today of Celtic myth is inherently fragmentary and re-constructed by nature, and also within a look to broader global perspectives, particularly Indo-European ones.

Most chapters are by established scholars within Celtic studies, leading to a high degree of intertextuality within the collection and also to some contributors citing their own previous work as recommended reading for those interested in digging deeper. Contributors also tend to offer extended close readings and sentence-level translations of the myths they focus on, of which some stories are perhaps less familiar to general audiences than others. In addition, some chapters assume enough reader familiarity with the material to move rapidly through multiple myths, as Sharon Paice MacLeod does in her otherwise fascinating work on the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom in “Gods, Poets and Entheogens: Ingesting Wisdom in Early Irish Literary Sources” (89–106).

Aside from its relevance to ongoing conversations about the function of myth today and its welcome variety of critical approaches, then, *Celtic Myth in the 21st Century* can be difficult going at times. Part of this difficulty may stem from the fact that the title led me to expect that Lyle’s collection would be examining contemporary reworkings of Celtic myth—texts along the lines of Eoin Colfer’s 2001–2012 YA series *Artemis Fowl*, perhaps, or else the 2016 season 6 of *American Horror Story* featuring Lady Gaga as Scáthach of the Ulster Cycle, or the many RPGs that draw on and revise the sidhe to create playable characters or bosses. However, once I’d reoriented my expectations away from this perception and more toward Woodling’s question of “How [do] we continue to make a productive and critical approach to mythology in the twenty-first century?” (3), I quickly saw and appreciated the contributors’ answers in the form of multiple approaches to the myths themselves. Ultimately, I found the scholarship highly specialized but also very productive to and within those particular specialties. This collection might not be an effective general

introduction either to Celtic studies or to scholarship regarding Celtic myth, but then it is not meant to be. Instead, I imagine that it will prove a valuable addition to ongoing conversations about these subjects.

A final note here: although the particular focus that I have identified above might seem inapplicable to scholarly work on Tolkien, the Inklings, or mythopoeic literature more generally, I actually found it quite thought-provoking with these topics in mind. The contributors' precise, able close readings of various myths immediately reminded me of Tolkien's famous allegory of the tower by the sea, when critics overlooked the beauty of a poem like *Beowulf* in trying to understand how it works—though here, I for one think that the “confusing babel” Tolkien might still have been frustrated by serves a much-needed purpose. In addition, some contributors do touch on mythopoeic projects, as when Grigory Bondarenko in his chapter “Ireland as Mesocosm” (53–71) examines “Mythopoeic models of the world” (54) in ways that, to my mind, could certainly be applied to understanding other authors' more consciously mythopoeic projects in fantasy literature as well.

All in all, *Celtic Myth in the 21st Century: The Gods and Their Stories in a Global Perspective* might be specialized fare, but I maintain that it will serve those particular needs quite well indeed.

—Maria Alberto



TOLKIEN'S LIBRARY: AN ANNOTATED CHECKLIST. Oronzo Cilli. Edinburgh: Luna Press Publishing, 2019. 466 pp. ISBN 978-1-911143-67-3. \$39.00 paperback; \$50.00 hardback; \$10.69 e-book.

ALTHOUGH A BOOK SHOULD NOT BE JUDGED BY ITS COVER, *Tolkien's Library: An Annotated Checklist* delights our senses with its gorgeous medieval-style outer design by Jay Johnstone, which together with its superior trade paperback finish, tempts us to discover its contents. It is important to stress that this is not a typical cover-to-cover read, but rather a meticulous and scholarly research aid tool which took five years to complete. Oronzo Cilli is not only a Tolkien scholar but also a collector himself, which makes him ideal for authoring this type of volume, as we shall discover. A foreword by the well-known Tolkien expert Tom Shippey sets the bar high. The book begins with a preface, followed by six sections (A-F), and it is rounded off with a bibliography and nine indices, to be reviewed in turn.