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***"Something Has Gone Crack": New Perspectives on J.R.R. Tolkien in the Great War*, edited by Janet Brennan Croft and Annika Röttinger**

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view of heroism with literary characters who held values similar to those of a Biblical spiritual hero (see 183-84). The second to last essay in the collection, by Rebekah Ann Lamb, is another intriguing one with its attention to the “living house” metaphor seen in MacDonald and Lewis’s writings (199), for example, with “homes and houses as being architectural metaphors for growth and suffering in the pilgrimage of faith” (200).

People studying Victorian and modern fantasy will probably be interested in this collection of essays, which could potentially open new ways to consider less familiar topics. The collection provides good coverage of MacDonald’s key ideas and criticism of some texts, so it will hopefully prove a useful introduction to him for new readers. The cost also appears fairly affordable for individuals and library collections.

—Tiffany Brooke Martin



“SOMETHING HAS GONE CRACK”: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON J.R.R. TOLKIEN IN THE GREAT WAR. Janet Brennan Croft and Annika Röttinger, eds. Zurich: Walking Tree, 2019. 383 p. ISBN 978-3-905703-41-2. \$29.15.

THIS COLLECTION OF SIXTEEN ESSAYS is a fascinating read for those who want to deepen their understanding of how the Great War, aka the First World War, impacted the writing of Tolkien, who always took great pains to deny any characterization of his novels that might smack of allegory. Tolkien did not want his Middle-earth to be seen as a fictional window dressing for the war in Europe, nor for anything else in the real world. Still, writers write from what they know. And it is impossible that *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* should not be influenced by Tolkien’s experiences on the front in the Somme.

Writers write what they know. Critics may claim that novelists like Hemingway were shamelessly autobiographical. But Hemingway merely made little effort to hide it. In spite of Tolkien’s well-documented dislike of allegory, the raw materials of the worlds he created were drawn from the world he actually inhabited. No matter how imaginative his inventions might be, the raw materials are and were the world he knew. And indeed, unlike many invented mythologies, which set their worlds far away from our own, Middle-earth is allegedly the pre-history of our present world. Tolkien has not set his mythical world on a Perelandra, or across the Wood Between the Worlds, perhaps parallel to Narnia or Westeros. Middle-earth in some ways is more like the Potterverse: it inhabits the geography we know in a different time or space. The wizarding world is only invisible to us Muggles because of the efforts of wizards. The Land

of Gondor is only invisible to us because except for the Red Book, it exists before recorded history. But Harry and Aragorn both walked in the world that we know.

Some of the writings collected by his son, Christopher Tolkien, sketched out how Tolkien might connect the history of Middle-earth to the earliest history we have of the British Isles. Those islands were to be placed off the coast of Eriador by the Vala, Ulmo. And if Tolkien had developed these ideas further, we would suddenly recognize that Europe was contiguous to Eriador. For Tolkien also made it clear that his tales were to be to England what ancient Finnish literature is to Finland. Middle-earth was intended to be iconic pre-history.

And that is what these essays explore. In spite of Tolkien's protests, there is a wealth of evidence left behind that we would have had a very different Middle-earth if young Tolkien had never walked the battlefields of France. This volume contains essays by writers of some reputation as well as relative unknowns. John Garth and Tom Shippey both contributed an essay, and Janet Brennan Croft is one of the editors and contributed. However, the wide range of perspectives here is precisely the attractive feature of this volume. It is divided into four sections:

1. The Conduct of the War: Reading the Great War in Middle-Earth's Wars
2. Biography: The Personal Becomes Art
3. Roots of Major Themes of the Legendarium in the Great War
4. Alterity: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in War

Personally, in section one I very much enjoyed Tom Shippey and John Bourne's "A Steep Learning Curve: Tolkien and the British Army on the Somme," which compared the strategic moves in the Great War, the mistakes and the adjustments, to the similar moves, mistakes, and adjustments in the War of the Ring, finding many interesting parallels. Editor Annika Röttinger's essay on where to find modern warfare in *The Lord of the Rings* finds striking parallels to Tolkien's known war experiences and passages from the novels. One of the most striking is the connection that Tolkien himself admitted, of the similarity of the Dead Marshes to the battlefield of the Somme.

In section two, I also much enjoyed John Rosegrant's "Fault Lines Beneath the Crack," which thoroughly investigates the evidence of Tolkien's PTSD and its effect on his inability to recover from trench fever over a much extended period. Trench fever normally lasts five to six days; for Tolkien, he kept recovering and relapsing for eighteen months, effectively keeping him out of the rest of the war. Rosegrant does not imply that Tolkien was shirking by any definition of that word, but rather that his PTSD contributed to frequent

relapses. Such cases, though not the usual course of the disease, were not unknown. Rosegrant explores how the “fault lines” of Tolkien’s youthful losses provided a psychologically fertile field for his PTSD to attack him all the more strongly.

Detailed in the essay by Michael Flowers is the account of Tolkien’s recovery time on the east coast of Yorkshire, where Edith danced in the hemlock blossoms for him. This was eventually worked in to the story of Beren and Lúthien. This essay gives us a taste of the bittersweet reality of Tolkien, young, in love, and married, and bound back to Hell the moment he is fully recovered. And in the midst of this, he is given a moment of bliss in Edith’s dance, which must find its way into his art.

In section 3, John Garth’s essay on “Revenants and Angels” was very illuminating, focusing in part on all the people in Tolkien’s work that come back from the dead, figuratively and even literally. We know of Gandalf, but we forget Glorfindel, who has a minor role in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, but was brought back from the Halls of Mandos. Garth compares this to tales of ghost brigades that fought for British soldiers against the Germans at critical moments.

In section four, I particularly enjoyed Lynn Schlesinger’s “Angels of Care and Houses of Healing in World War I” for its insights on the bravery of female nursing during the war in not only combating disease but also the limitations of perceived gender roles. I also want to mention Alicia Fox-Lenz’s well-thought-out essay, “Contemporary Reflections of War: Soldier-Servant Relationships,” which explores the role of batman in officer-servant relationships, and its echoes in the relationship of Samwise and Frodo.

But these were my favorites. As I said above, the appeal of this volume is that there is a great diversity of perspectives. Everyone interested in the topic will find something to intrigue them. And it adds greatly to our understanding of the subtleties of how Tolkien’s being swept up in the cataclysm of the Great War shaped his masterpiece.

—James Prothero

