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God and the Gothic by Alison Milbank

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our times and is a way for us to remain engaged with the sacred in a way that, in Campbell's words, is "necessary to the balanced maturation of the human psyche as is nourishment to the body" (xi).

I recommend *The Flight of the Wild Gander* to anyone who wants to explore a secular and tender-minded approach to engaging with multicultural mythologies and sacred texts, from around the world. Joseph Campbell was an excellent writer who did extensive research on mythologies, sacred texts, and religions. He was also well-read in the psychoanalytical and anthropological literature of his time, which he used in his analyses of mythologies throughout the book. Campbell was able to weave his ideas about these topics and from these disciplines into chapters that were scholarly, thought provoking, and provides a pleasure to the reader akin to experiencing the performance of an exceptional story-teller. This book is appropriate for all public and University libraries. I also recommend it to the libraries of private religious institutions provided they understand that Joseph Campbell's work is a challenge to traditional religion as practiced in the United States. More than anything, I recommend the book to individual readers who are looking for a solid piece of writing about mythology that is inclusive, thought provoking, and a good read.

—Phillip Fitzsimmons



GOD AND THE GOTHIC: RELIGION, ROMANCE, AND REALITY IN THE ENGLISH LITERARY TRADITION. By Alison Milbank. Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN 978-0198824466. Hardcover. x + 354pp. \$99.00.

ALISON MILBANK IS KNOWN TO TOLKIEN SCHOLARS for her fine book *Chesterton and Tolkien as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (2007), which was her third scholarly monograph. Her first, *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* (1992), was a reworking of her 1988 doctoral thesis at the University of Lancaster. This was followed in 1998 by *Dante and the Victorians* (1998). As per Milbank herself, she was the John Rylands Research Fellow at the University of Manchester, and has taught at Cambridge, the University of Virginia, and, since 2004, at the University of Nottingham. She is also Priest Vicar and Canon Theologian at Southwell Minster.

God and the Gothic not only revisits a few of the authors (Charlotte Brontë and J. Sheridan Le Fanu) covered in her thesis and first book, but, as Milbank notes "this book has been many years in gestation" (vii). This is self-evidently true, for such a wide-ranging study is not likely to be accomplished in less than a decade or two.

The book is divided into four main parts, which include some fourteen chapters. Besides an introduction and an epilogue, there is a lengthy bibliography (over twenty pages) and an index.

Part I, "Whig Gothic in the Long Reformation," consists of six chapters. It begins with a lengthy discussion setting the stage of the use of Gothic tropes in the British Reformation, before turning to closer readings of works by writers including Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, Charles Brockden Brown, and Mary Shelley.

Part II, "Duality and Mediation in Scottish Gothic," discusses the Gothic Double in two chapters, the first ranging from Christopher Marlowe to John Buchan, and the second covering Walter Scott and James Hogg.

Part III, "The Ambivalence of Blood in Irish Gothic," contains three chapters, covering Irish writers, one per chapter, Charles Maturin, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, and Bram Stoker.

Part IV, "Later Gothic: Re-Enchanting the Material," comprises another three chapters, covering two or three authors per chapter, including Margaret Oliphant, Elizabeth Gaskell, and the Brontës, grouped as writers of supernatural naturalism; Arthur Machen, Evelyn Underhill, and Charles Williams, as writers of mystical Gothic, and J. Meade Falkner and M.R. James, as writers of the ecclesiastical Gothic.

Milbank's prose is at times dense and academic, but it remains intelligible to the attentive reader. Her thesis is, elementally, that the Gothic tradition is not a literary expression of spiritual fears, but instead it is a genre that allows for theological reflection. She notes that other approaches tend to define a secularizing movement in the nineteenth-century Gothic: "I argue just the opposite: that it is moving towards an ever-deepening religious engagement. Later Gothic is both more theologically informed and radically conservative in relation to modernity" (4). And she maintains throughout the book a close attention to contemporary theological thought and religious thinkers.

God and the Gothic covers many writers in the Gothic tradition anterior to those authors of primary interest to readers of this journal. For example, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis are barely mentioned at all, and then only in the context of their friend and fellow Inkling Charles Williams. But the final three or four chapters of the book discuss authors of the generation prior to the Inklings, and some near-contemporaries, whose works would likely have been familiar to them.

Milbank has an interesting ecumenical take on Bram Stoker's novel *The Snake's Pass* (1890), and recognizes in it some of Stoker's friend Walt Whitman's "democratic mysticism" (235) before she moves on to consider *Dracula* (1897). Here Milbank's explication, particularly of the scene where Van Helsing, placing

the host on Lucy's forehead, burns her, is quite intriguing, and the discussion of biblical references in Stoker's text is equally interesting.

Chapter 13, "Holy Terrors: The Mystical Gothic of Arthur Machen, Evelyn Underhill, and Charles Williams," is perhaps the most significant chapter in the book for the Inklings scholar, and not only for its coverage of Charles Williams. Here Milbank considers three writers of the Christian faith who also had strong interests in the new mysticism: "at some point in their lives all took membership in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn" (270). Unfortunately, I wish that this chapter could have been much longer, for the coverage of each author's work is too selective. The Machen section concentrates on *The Three Impostors* (1895); the section on Underhill cursorily mentions her three early novels (and doesn't even mention her admittedly rarely-seen short stories), but analyzes only one, *The Column of Dust* (1909); and the section on Charles Williams centers on *Descent into Hell* (1937), "his most Gothic novel" and "his most successful combination of realist and supernatural elements" (281). One feels that much is missing that could have been illuminating.

The final chapter covers M.R. James, and the lesser-known J. Meade Falkner, who in terms of fiction wrote only three short novels and a couple of short stories, though Milbank discusses primarily only *The Nebuly Coat* (1903), which I've always thought much less interesting than, say, *The Lost Stradivarius* (1896). Milbank is quite interesting on James, but again, I wish she could have covered more of his relevant writings.

God and the Gothic is not always an easy read, but it is always thoughtful, and it makes the reader think and question previous interpretations of the literature discussed. And I should note here that Milbank's arguments are more complex and nuanced than I am able to represent in a mere book review.

—Douglas A. Anderson



THE SAGA OF THE VOLSUNGS: WITH THE SAGA OF RAGNAR LOTHROK. Translated by Jackson Crawford. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2017. 184p. 978-1624666339. \$15.00.

The SAGA OF THE VOLSUNGS: With the SAGA OF RAGNAR LOTHROK is a treat. Both compositions in the volume contain larger than life heroes and heroines who engage in adventures and who fight for the survival and wealth of their clans. They are also consumed—generation after generation—by the blood-feud and by the compulsion to fulfill, to the letter-of-the-word, their unwise vows, and executing them to their last logical and bitter consequences.