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Pagan Saints in Middle-earth by Claudio A. Testi

Toni Thibodeaux
Middle Tennessee State University

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of the papers is only tangentially related to the sea. And, of course, Tolkien scholarship has moved on since these papers were first presented in 1996.

Nevertheless, *Tolkien and the Sea* remains an interesting and illuminating little collection. Ostensibly available as a stapled booklet since its 1999 publication, this new, more accessible and higher quality edition will bring these papers to much wider attention and appreciation. Anticipating several directions Tolkien scholarship would take in succeeding decades, this small volume is enlightening and inexpensive (as well as supportive of a good cause: proceeds from the sale of books in the Peter Roe Memorial series go back into the Society's fund to support and disseminate Tolkien-related scholarship). All-in-all, the book's merits outweigh its limitations, and anyone interested in Tolkien's thematic uses of the sea, or in Tolkien scholarship in general, should enjoy these five vintage papers from the vault of the Tolkien Society.

—Kris Swank

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PAGAN SAINTS IN MIDDLE-EARTH. Claudio A. Testi. Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree, 2018. 196 p. ISBN: 978-3-905703-38-2

CLAUDIO A. TESTI'S STUDY OF THE CONTESTED ISSUES surrounding the religious implications of J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium consists of a deeply researched, well-thought out, and well-reasoned appraisal of existing scholarship in this area. Testi's objective revolves around reconciling the Catholic and Christian implications of Tolkien's work with the intentions of the author. Testi attempts to examine all existing arguments and his own in light of the entire body of Tolkien's work. In doing so, Testi relies heavily on Tolkien's own words on the matter, which is one of the great strengths of this scholarship. Testi proposes his own original theory of Tolkien's work, espousing what Testi

calls a “synthetic’ approach” to the matter of Tolkien’s work in which he synthesizes the pagan and Christian views (9).

Testi organizes the book in a logical format as he examines each existing theory in detail. In part one of the book, Testi begins by laying out current scholarship concerning the legendarium. The author identifies three major currents of thought (Tolkien’s work is: 1) Christian; 2) pagan; 3) Christian and pagan) concerning the religious and spiritual implications of Tolkien’s work and analyzes their weaknesses. In the second part, Testi makes his claims for his own synthetic approach, which posits a new yet-to-be-considered argument that seeks to harmonize pagan and Christian elements in Tolkien’s work.

In chapter one, Testi tackles the arguments of scholars who contend that “Tolkien’s Work is Christian” (13). Testi defines this group, which includes Catholic and Christian scholars such as Joseph Pearce, Ralph Wood, and Stratford Caldecott and Italian scholars such as Andrea Monda and Guido Sommavilla, as those who read in the legendarium “a world that intentionally contains in itself explicit Christian values,” beliefs, and doctrines considered matters of Christian orthodoxy (i.e., crucifixion, resurrection, Trinitarian nature of God, etc.) (13).

Testi then outlines five weaknesses inherent in the argument that Tolkien’s work should be strictly interpreted through a Christian lens. The first limitation that he identifies is that the strictly Christian interpretation violates what Testi calls “Tolkien’s Razor” (14). Testi argues, very eloquently using Tolkien’s own words, that a strict Christian interpretation of the legendarium contradicts Tolkien’s argument that the inclusion of explicit Christian references in faerie would be detrimental to the mythopoeic fantasy world, hence Tolkien’s desire to create a pre-Christian mythology for England which the King Arthur legend does not do because it is explicitly Christian.

Secondly, Testi posits that those holding to a strict Christian interpretation conflate exemplification with allegory and symbolism. Testi argues that although Tolkien conceded that the legendarium exemplifies universal Christian truths, he was opposed to allegory and symbolism in overt form and denied any symbolic meaning of characters, situations, or themes associated with “hidden meaning” (17) such as “Gandalf/Christ, Gandalf/Patriarchs, Aragorn/Christ, Lembas/Eucharist, Lórien/Paradise, Frodo/Christ, and Galadriel/Mary” (18). Similarly, Testi identifies a third weakness in the arguments of scholars holding to a Christian interpretation of Tolkien’s work as a conflation of “source with a representation” (21). Although Tolkien’s work may be influenced by Christian elements, it also contains characters and elements influenced by pagan myth. Therefore, argues Testi, characters like Galadriel and elements such as lembas do not correspond as

direct representations of Mary or the Eucharist; these Tolkien characters and elements are composites of both pagan and Christian influence.

Fourthly, a strict Christian reading of Tolkien does not account for differences in the Christian account of the nature of the created world and Tolkien's own world. Testi contends that although there are many similarities between the two, significant differences in respect to the orthodoxy of some of the representations in Tolkien's mythology argue against a strict Christian interpretation. Lastly in respect to a strict Christian reading, Testi posits that such a view of Tolkien's work limits the scope of the *legendarium* and "reduc[es] the enormous scope of Tolkien's body of work to a single dimension" (25). Testi argues that this limited view does not allow for the enormity of philosophical, linguistic, and theological influences on Tolkien's work.

In chapter two, Testi examines the contention that the *legendarium* should be viewed as strictly pagan. Testi does admit that this camp of scholars does not completely discount the Christian influence of Tolkien's work, but they reject the notion that it contains an explicitly orthodox Christian view, creating an antithesis to the Christian thesis. Testi characterizes the scholars in this camp as having a more varied and less unified argument as those in the other camp. However, this view, Testi argues, similarly limits Tolkien's work in terms of paganism that is "almost a mirror image" (27) of the arguments in favor of a Christian view. The first weakness that Testi identifies in a pagan perspective of Tolkien's work is that it "minimize[s] [...] those texts where the importance of Christian revelation" (27) is clearly evident, thereby denying the existence of any Christian influence on Tolkien. Similarly, Testi argues that this strict pagan view of Tolkien's work misinterprets aspects of the *legendarium* "to be in opposition to Christianity" (30) through either forcing a pagan reading onto some parts of Tolkien's work or inaccurately characterizing Christian thought. According to Testi, both of these misreadings of Tolkien tend to support a strictly pagan view. Testi further argues that, similar to a strictly Christian reading of Tolkien's work, a strictly pagan reading reduces it down to a symbolic reading. In turn, this limits the scope and vision of Tolkien's work.

Testi then turns to examine the view held by a majority of scholars: that Tolkien's *legendarium* contains "both Christian and pagan elements" (43). This view sees inconsistencies and contradictions in the worldview espoused within Tolkien's work. Testi analyzes the argument put forth by the two main scholars representing this view: Verlyn Flieger and Wu Ming. Although both scholars come to the same conclusion through different means, Testi argues that this view leads to the notion that Tolkien's world is of an "intrinsically contradictory nature" (57). Testi argues in response to Flieger's conclusions that Tolkien seeks to "demonstrate how some philosophical truths could be deduced [...] exclusively on the basis of the culture and knowledge of the sub-created world

itself" rather than by revelation as in a Christian view (57). Those points that exhibit Christian truth do so through rational means of reasoning rather than revelatory means. In order to understand the weaknesses of this view and to overcome it, Testi asserts that one must "substitute dialectics with a structure that analogically distinguishes different levels" to form a "unitary conception" (63). Only then will the proper perspective of Tolkien's work, "where [...] the terms 'pagan' and 'Christian' are never conceived of as contradictory" become fully clear (63).

In the second part of the book, Testi outlines his own synthetic approach to Tolkien's *legendarium*, one that Testi says presents Christian values and ideals within a pagan world. Tolkien's thought, as illustrated in "On Fairy-Stories," that pagan myth and faerie are pre-cursors or preparation for the coming of the Gospels, Testi argues, is an important concept to understand in order to fully comprehend the synthetic approach to Tolkien's work. Pagan and Christian elements do not work in contradiction to one another but work as an integrated unity in the works of Tolkien. Testi spends necessary space explaining his approach and also analyzing how it stands up to the weaknesses inherent in the other approaches. This section is another strength in Testi's argument and serves to circle back to his main thesis.

Well-respected Tolkien scholars Verlyn Flieger and Tom Shippey endorse the work done by Testi and hail his approach as original and noteworthy, one that should be seriously considered by those undertaking the serious study of Tolkien. This endorsement alone should make Testi's book worth at least a look. Testi's cogent presentation and examination of existing arguments as well as his own argument; his vast knowledge and use of Tolkien's work; and his compelling writing also make this volume not only necessary consideration for the Tolkien scholar but also an enjoyable read. Even those who do not accept Testi's own perspective on Tolkien's work will benefit from the discussion.

Testi's aims, in which he succeeds, are to "contribute to the understanding of Tolkien's greatness and the complexity of his artful mythology" (140); to show that to limit Tolkien to either Christian or pagan influences and to discount their interplay and unity is to restrict the vision of his mythlore; and to exhibit that the "fully pagan horizon of the *Legendarium* is in complete harmony with the supernatural level of Christian revelation" (63).

— Toni Thibodeaux

