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Review of Tolkien Studies

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Anderson, Douglas A., Michael D.C. Drout, and Verlyn Flieger, editors. *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review.* Morgantown, WV: West Virginia UP, 2004. x + 189 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 0-937058-87-04. ISSN 0038-7134. $60.00/year.

Given the renewed interest in Tolkien arising from Peter Jackson's films, Christopher Tolkien's edition of his father's unpublished *oeuvre* in *The History of Middle-earth*, and the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *The Lord of the* Rings, it is time that a scholarly journal devoted only to Tolkien should appear on the research horizon. *Tolkien Studies* is edited by Douglas A. Anderson (Tolkien bibliographer and editor of *The Annotated Hobbit*), Michael D.C. Drout (Associate Professor of English at Wheaton College) and Verlyn Flieger (Professor of English at the Univeristy of Maryland-College Park), who, together with the journal's editorial board (including Tom Shippey, Tolkien's successor at Oxford University and currently holder of the Walter J. Ong Chair of Humanities at St. Louis University) comprise a veritable *Who's Who* of Tolkien scholarship. Describing itself as the "first academic journal solely devoted to Tolkien," *Tolkien Studies*' stated goal is to publish "excellent scholarship on Tolkien as well as to gather useful research information, reviews, notes, and documents" (v). The lead article of this annual is to be solicited from an acknowledged expert, and all other articles are subject to blind external review by recognized scholars (v). This is a welcome addition to the journal literature on Tolkien, which heretofore has been primarily accessible in journals like *Mythlore* and *Mallorn*, organs of the Mythopoeic Society and the Tolkien Society, respectively, journals which are not of uniform quality in their contents and whose earlier volumes contained articles that were more suitable for inclusion in fanzines than scholarly journals.

The best articles in this volume pay double homage to Tolkien, in that they deal critically with his literary work and make use of scholarly philological methods to do so. The lead article by Tom Shippey, probably the most significant current Tolkien scholar, treats the latter's

resolution of a dispute between N.F.S. Gruntvig and Jakob Grimm about the distinctions between Snorri's four groups of elves (light, dark, and black elves, and dwarves). Pointing out that Tolkien tended to resolve scholarly disputes while protecting original sources (5), Shippey traces the development of Tolkien's thought on the different types of elves through *The History of Middle-earth* to its fruition in *The Silmarillion*. He demonstrates Tolkien's justification of the distinction between light and dark elves (those who had experienced the light of the Two Trees of Valinor and those who had remained in Middle-earth, respectively) vis à vis the black elves (Eöl and his son Maeglin), as distinct from the dwarves, who, of course, were not elves at all (Tolkien agreed with Grimm on this point and created a story that explained the distinction using older sources [11]). Gergely Nagy (Assistant Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary) also takes up the topic of Tolkien's use of older sources in his article on primary and secondary history in *The Silmarillion*, where reflexes of lost and extant primary poetic texts can be identified via "primary and secondary philology" in Tolkien's "adapted" prose texts (22). Nagy determines that Tolkien has inserted adaptations of primary poetic texts at key points in the story ("central scenes, climaxes, or privileged points in the narrative" [25]) in order to create a "heroic narrative" of these stories using "prose adaptations from … high-prestige texts," yielding "beautifully and perfectly crafted lines of great style and poetry, tight structure, and a very high standard of refinement" (32). By including reflexes of primary texts, Tolkien grounds his stories in myth (formally as well as topically), recapitulates the historical transmission of primary texts from poetry to prose, and makes his stories more philologically plausible (35-36). Michael D.C. Drout (Winner of the 2003 Mythopoeic Scholarship Award for Inklings Studies for *J.R.R. Tolkien's* <u>*Beowulf and the Critics*</u>) analyzes Tolkien's prose style in several episodes that have been labeled deficient by modern critics (Éowyn's fight against the Nazgûl and Denethor's self-immolation). In doing so, he

demonstrates how Tolkien has linked these scenes textually and topically on the one hand, and phonetically, lexically, and syntactically on the other, with *King Lear* (137-140). Additionally, he demonstrates that alleged archaicisms in utterances by both Éowyn and the Nazgûl that have drawn criticism are in reality textually, stylistically, and pragmatically motivated (149-155), and that they actually fall within the standards of Modernist Literature that Tolkien has been accused of violating (154-155). In their elegant philological examinations of Tolkien's writing and its sources (both real and invented), these scholars present the most interesting contributions to this work.

Other essays in this inaugural volume are also of high caliber. Verlyn Flieger's "'Do the Atlantis story and abandon Eriol-Saga,'" treats the development of the frame of *The Notion Club Papers* from Tolkien's original Eriol-frame in order to connect Númenor and its fate to English history linguistically and geographically. Flieger's analysis is crucial for understanding the documentary link between the story of Númenor and the "Englishness" of Tolkien's mythology. Not only does Tolkien establish an unbroken chain of documents for the transmission of this story, but he inserts himself into the novel (as "old Professor Rashbold of Pembroke") to translate an Old English manuscript written in Fëanorian Tengwar, inherited by one of the members of the Notion Club, that crucially links Númenor with English history (56, 65)—naturally, only Tolkien could have read Old English written in an orthography of Middle-earth!

"Identifying England's Lönnrot" by Anne C. Petty (who wrote her dissertation on Tolkien and now works as an independent author and lecturer on fantasy literature and Tolkien) pays homage to both J.R.R. and Christopher Tolkien for the attempt to create a national mythology and the editorial transmission of that mythology, respectively; functions which reflect Elias Lönnrot's work on the *Kalevala.* "A Note on Beren and Lúthien's Disguise as Werewolf and Vampire-Bat" by Thomas Honegger (Director of the Department of English and American

Studies at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität in Jena, Germany) provides a possible source for the lovers' dressing in skins (as opposed to the more common skin changing) by which they achieve the forms in which they travel on their quest for a Silmaril (172). The Middle English romance *William of Palerne* not only contains this motif of transformation, but it also attests other similarities, such as the presence of a "helpful canine possessing special powers" (173). A further note by Dale J. Nelson (Associate Professor of English at Mayville State University in North Dakota), "Possible Echoes of Blackwood and Dunsany in Tolkien's Fantasy," links works by two popular Edwardian horror writers that Tolkien would have known, Algernon Blackwood and Lord Dunsany, to the Nazgûl and the Mewlips (from *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*), respectively.

Mark T. Hooker's essay connects the character of Samwise Gamgee with the common soldiers of Tolkien's experience in World War I to illustrate Sam's heroic qualities of service and loyalty and to illustrate how class differences become less divisive when master and servant are at war (or on a quest [125, 132]). Hooker, a former linguist and area specialist with the U.S. Armed Forces and now a Visiting Scholar at Indiana University, links Sam with other batmen in stories by Edward Melbourne and Graham Seton Hutchinson; while this essay is weakened by an abundance of plot summary from the batmen stories, the discussion of Sam's heroic qualities is a valuable contribution. In "'Sir Orfeo': A Middle English Version by J.R.R. Tolkien," Carl F. Hostetter, a computer scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center who co-edited *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on the History of Middle-Earth* with Verlyn Flieger (Winner of the Mythopoeic Society's Scholarship Award for Inklings Studies in 2002), offers an edition, with introduction and notes, of a southern Middle English dialect poem published anonymously by Oxford University in 1944. Hostetter argues convincingly that Tolkien produced this version, since extant copies of it are annotated in his handwriting, he taught the course for which the

edition was produced, and the Modern English translation known to have been done by Tolkien corresponds to this version of the ME poem. Finally, the Russian Olga Markova presents an interesting history of the translation of Tolkien's Middle-earth works in Communist and post-Communist Russia in "When Philology Becomes Ideology: The Russian Perspective of J.R.R. Tolkien." These works have been consistently altered for Russian comsumption, first as science fiction to avoid censorship (163-164), later as "maximally Russified," emotional, and aggressive, for a post-Communist, more nationalistic audience (165). While Tolkien is popular in Russia because his values are not abstract or utopian (167), non-scholarly Tolkienism is viewed skeptically as something of a sect, as, perhaps, "Dungeons and Dragons" is viewed in America because many Tolkienists are "gamers" (168).

Two bibliographies, one of Tom Shippey's works on Tolkien (including interviews) compiled by Anderson, and one of works by and about Tolkien published in the years 2001-2002 compiled by Drout (with Laura Kalafarski and Stefanie Olson) amplify further the scholarly value of this journal. Essential for any library that serves a population of avid readers, students, and researchers of Tolkien, this is a very important and highly readable addition to Tolkien scholarship.

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