

Bueno Alonso, Jorge Luis, ed. 2022. *Tolkien in the 21st Century: Reading, Reception, and Reinterpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Pp. 175. ISBN 9781527583955.

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It is an undeniable fact that, since Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) film trilogy came out at the beginning of the present century, the public's interest in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien has grown considerably. Indeed, making a list that includes every single product derived from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit*—be it in the form of research, books, films, videogames or merchandise, to name but a few—would be an arduous task for anyone. Even now, and leaving all controversy aside, Amazon's series on the history of the rings of power and Middle-earth's Second Age adds up to this never-ending list. Thus, we could say that Tolkien and his work have managed to obtain and hold on to a position of certain centrality in the cultural stage of the last two decades.

The book in hand is precisely a collection of essays that studies the current reception of Tolkien's works in a variety of formats, such as literary, film, or videogames. According to the editor, the aim of the present collection is to address the reception and reinterpretation of the work of this British author at this point in the 21st century. Hence, this collection of articles presents an analysis of both Tolkien's literary works and other renderings of his work in formats that are not necessarily literary. The topics covered are very varied and, some of them, we must say, rather innovative, or at least, not as common. These address issues like illustrations, linguistics, the quality of Tolkien's writing, race, oral tradition, or the literary and experiential sources of Tolkien's work, as well as offering a commentary on more modern renderings of it. In the same line, all the authors that contribute to this work share an interest in Tolkien, although they come from a wide variety of backgrounds ranging from Tolkien's literature, medieval and Arthurian literature, cultural studies, linguistics or adaptation studies. The acknowledgements, presentation of the contributors and a general introductory section are followed by the nine articles that form this volume.

The opening article, under the title “One visible form’: Illustrating Middle-earth”, is constructed around a topic that stands out as rather uncommon. Here, although Adriana Taboada González focuses on Tolkien's well-known facet as an artist or illustrator, she aims at establishing a relationship between his drawings and those of prominent Tolkien-illustrator Alan Lee, while asserting the latter's suitability for the task. The author argues, quite convincingly, that Alan Lee's illustrations for Tolkien's literature, as well as his work for Peter Jackson's film adaptations, follow Tolkien's ideal regarding the relationship between a literary work and its illustrations, in the sense that the latter should accompany and help the former and never impose a defined view on the reader, but rather allow for their own interpretation.

Tom Birkett's essay, "Tolkien's Runes and their Legacy", studies the origin of the runes that Tolkien designed for his *legendarium*, as well as their presence in his literature and more modern adaptations like Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Digging in Tolkien's linguistic facet, Birkett establishes that the runes devised by Tolkien, contrary to his claims, did derive from older sources, at least appearance-wise. In regard to their use, the author finds it strange that, given all the work that went into their devising, they are granted such a marginal presence in his literature. This clashes with the centrality that they have gained in the film adaptations and in the fantasy genre in general, since, although not functional as Tolkien would have originally wished, they are central to their aesthetics.

Next, Jorge Luis Bueno-Alonso, with his paper "Maldon in the Middle: J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* as a Guide to Translate "for his ofermode" (line 89), with a New Bilingual Proposal", dives into the topic of Old English and looks at a work that, even if it does not belong to Tolkien's Middle-earth stories, gives a meaningful insight into Tolkien as a linguist. Apart from Tolkien's own translation, Bueno Alonso presents an overview of the other most important translations and interpretations of lines 89–90 of the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, pointing at the strengths and weaknesses of those translations, considering, first, the word "ofermode" in isolation and, then, as part of its context. He finally moves on to offering his own proposal for what would be an appropriate translation into Spanish—"pronto"—and Galician—"arrouxada"—, which reads more as an absolute truth than as a proposal.

The fourth chapter consists of Stuart D. Lee's essay "Where many paths and errands meet: A Close Reading of *The Lord of the Rings* (RK, V, iv, 1083-1085)". One of the lengthiest chapters in the book, Lee's aims to prove wrong those who claim Tolkien's style to be dull and overdone, especially fellow writer Michael Moorcock and Burton Raffel, and portray Tolkien as someone who took his art very seriously. As he suggests in the title, Lee tries to do so by focusing on a specific passage of the chapter "The siege of Gondor" from *The Return of the King*. Indeed, by means of an extensive analysis of said passage where the setting, characterisation, and the style, as well as other elements of world-building are taken into account, Lee manages to highlight the richness of this author's writing and proves that Tolkien "at his best, ... was a master of narrative" (52).

Jonathan Lench's essay "Endings and Beginnings: Tolkien's World and the Question of Race" works around a topic that has haunted Tolkien scholarship over the years. This is the representation of race in Tolkien's Middle-Earth, one that, as Lench comments, has sadly been adopted and flagged by right-wing movements, making Tolkien a herald of their baseless claims. Lench's aim in this paper is precisely to show how, as a consequence of a social and personal evolution in terms of racial representation, Tolkien's oeuvre works towards a situation of cooperation and integration among the different races that inhabit his imagined world, stemming from individual characters ridding themselves of inherited cultural and racial stereotypes and embracing those that are different to them.

Among the many literary traditions, themes and figures around which Tolkien's *legendarium* is constructed, Andoni Cossío's article "Oral Tradition in *The Lord of the Rings*" vindicates the central position that oral tradition, so far rather overlooked by Tolkien academics, has in the structure and development of this author's Middle-earth stories. In his paper, Cossío focuses on several passages from *The Lord of the Rings*

where the singing of songs, the recitation of poems and the telling of stories work as a means of keeping alive cultural knowledge and tradition. After offering a definition of oral literature, Cossío moves on to studying some examples of orality in the main races that inhabit Tolkien's universe, that is, Hobbits, Men and Elves. His analysis certainly shows that the passages that he selects fulfill the function ascribed to oral literature, in addition to sharing many of its characteristics, such as mutability, didacticism, common themes or generational development, to name but a few.

Chapter seven presents "Finding a Mythology: From Tolkien's Reality to Middle-Earth" by Sergio López Martínez. This essay sets off from a challenging premise, namely digging into the relationship between Tolkien's life experiences and academic interests and his Middle-earth work. As a topic that has been already worked on so extensively, with seminal works by the likes of Carpenter, Shippey or Garth, it can be complicated to find crevices from which to obtain fresh perspectives and lines of study about it. And this is precisely the main problem with this article, since it reads as a compilation and summary of those sources. The truth is that López Martínez does present two or three ideas that could perhaps be developed and studied further, but they are merely mentioned, with no more than a few lines devoted to them.

Following this, we find an article that studies the figure of the dragon in Tolkien's work, analysing its historical and literary sources and its more contemporary renderings in the form of film and videogame adaptations. In "Concerning Smaug: Origins, Development and Afterlives of a Literary Dragon", Ibai Adrián Goldaraz studies draconian precedents such as those featuring in works like *Beowulf*, the *Völsunga Saga* or the *Edda* to establish connections between these and Tolkien's Smaug regarding their ability to speak, knowledge, wrath or episodes where there is a dialogue between the dragon and the hero. After this, and making use of the theory provided by adaptation studies and Genette's idea of "transtextualism," Adrián Goldaraz offers an analysis of Smaug's representation in Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* film trilogy and Inevitable Entertainment's 2003 videogame adaptation of the same work to conclude that, although still showcasing some traditional medieval characteristics, these more modern renderings have prioritised a more villainous, violent and visually striking version of Smaug.

Laura Gálvez Gómez's article "Fairy Women in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and their Arthurian Counterparts" brings the compilation to an end. As the title indicates, Gálvez Gómez proposes a study of the literary roots of three of the most powerful feminine figures in Tolkien's masterpiece: Goldberry, Galadriel and Arwen. By means of quite a detailed analysis, the author is able to establish several connections between these characters and those Fairy Queens—such as Olwen, Morgan Le Fay, the Lady of Shalott or the Lady of the Lake—found in pre-medieval and medieval traditions or in works by authors like Shakespeare, Spenser and Tennyson. The similarities that the author finds between both parties are based on those elements or characteristics to which these figures have been related, as can be nature, sorcery, beauty, or the power to heal and prophesy.

As can be seen, the fact that the contributors of the different papers come from different academic backgrounds and have different interests—something that the editor of the volume acknowledges to be deliberate—makes for a compilation that shows Tolkien's work in all its richness of topics and themes, while granting at the same time

insights into the myriad lines of study that it can offer. Linked to this, another aspect that is worthy of praise is that, among the nine essays that comprise the present compilation, the reader will find those which offer a more specific and, to a degree, personal reading or interpretation of Tolkien's work, alongside others that make more explicit reference to aspects of Middle-earth with which the general public can be more familiar, as the film or videogame adaptations that are studied in some of the chapters.

Concerning those aspects of the book that could be improved, it must be said that, even though they do not affect the reading of the text in any serious manner, the edition lacks uniformity all throughout. For example, while in most chapters the citation of both direct or indirect quotations runs within the text, there are other cases where these are referenced in the footnotes. In addition, not all of the essays are structured in the same manner. All authors except for one have opted for structuring their texts in different sections, each of them with a heading, but there is one essay that has not been divided into sections. Last, there is also a lack of uniformity when it comes to presenting the cited works. While most essays refer to them as "Bibliography", one of them uses the term "References". Again, these are minor issues that do not affect the reading experience, but taking into account the price of the book, one would expect the edition to be more consistent, if only for the sake of uniformity.

All in all, this is a volume that offers some serious and well-done research on J.R.R. Tolkien's literary creation, be it related to Middle-earth or not. The already mentioned variety that the text offers with regard to the type of authors included and themes that it touches upon is one of its strongest points, and it might constitute a factor that attracts a more general readership, as opposed to other works that only address scholars and do not seek to appeal to the interest of a wider public.

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