

It is not every day that one has the privilege of reviewing a work as original and provocative as the one published by Dr. Miranda Boto, which is part of that current of Spanish labour law doctrine in which some authors seem to feel the temptation to abandon our main lines of research and enter into paths far removed from what is considered to be the normal performance of our academic duties. The present work is a good example of this, and the personal satisfaction that this risky decision entails for its author can be easily deduced from its lines.

Professor Miranda Boto had already taken a first step along this path with the publication by Ediciones Cinca of his book *El Derecho en Tolkien* (1st ed. 2017, revised ed. 2021). The work that is now being reviewed represents a second step, of considerable dimensions, on this path.

However, this monograph is not a translation of the first book, but a new work in which the outline and approach have been completely changed. Although the author claims to be a disciple of Jhering, the humour that characterised the Spanish work has given way (not entirely, it is true) to an erudition that overwhelms the reader who is not an expert in Tolkien's work. And this is an essential warning: this is not a book for neophytes, but a work that will be truly enjoyed by advanced readers who know their way around the universe created by the Oxford Professor. It is not the law that is the prerequisite for the reading, but the literature.

This strange erudition is not at odds with rigour. Professor Miranda Boto has put into this work, which is so much his own, the exhaustive method with which he has worked over the last two decades on the Social Law of the European Union. It can be said that no stone, mouldy or otherwise, has been left unturned in Middle-earth. With the same tenacity with which he has read the case law of the Court of Justice all these years, he has now painstakingly examined the laws and customs (especially these, given the primacy of common law in what he has studied) of Elves, Hobbits, Orcs and whatever strange creatures have sprung from Tolkien's imagination, including the walking trees that give their name to the publishing house that houses the work.

The text opens with an amiable Preface by Peter Buchs that is sure to raise a smile in those who know the author. This is followed by a Foreword by Professor Tom Shippey, widely regarded as the foremost academic specialist on Tolkien in recent decades. This generous endorsement bears a clear parallel to that given by Professor Luis Enrique de la Villa to the work in Spanish.

The Introduction with which Professor Miranda Boto takes the floor after these preliminaries is a true declaration of principles. In it, he immerses the reader in considerations about Tolkien's academic works, not his literary ones, and exposes him from the outset to a critical apparatus comparable to that of any work of the usual tenor. This is perhaps one of the strongest points of the work: the bibliographical review that the author has undertaken. The book includes a catalogue worthy of a doctoral thesis, which does not fail to arouse admiration among those who discover what has been written on Tolkien at the highest academic level.

Thereafter, the book is structured in four parts, an epilogue and an appendix.

The first, "Law and Tolkien", contains the most general and least detailed considerations. It is the most legal and least literary part, and many of its conclusions could be transposed to other fantasy worlds. The contrasts between natural law and positive law, the clash between law and justice, etc. give this first part considerable interest from the point of view of the philosophy of law.

The author's efforts to place Tolkien at the centre of the problems of the 20th century are striking. Throughout the book, Professor Miranda Boto insists on the background behind this powerful saga, born during the First World War, contemporary to the Second World War, the rise of totalitarianism, the Nuremberg trials... It is clear that he seeks to eliminate the "geek" component (if you will pardon the expression) and to place Tolkien's work in a different perspective from the "usual" one for standard readers.

The second part, "Law and Government in Arda", and the third part, "Law and Society", are the most literary. The author traverses Tolkien's worlds with the exhaustiveness noted above, searching for the smallest expression of a legal fact. He traverses monarchy, nobility, marriage, property, family structure, calendars, coinage, military ranks... He seems to have done so in excellent company, judging from what is said in the Introduction and footnotes: the acknowledgements on certain points show that this is a work that has been read and commented on intensively before going to press. Expert eyes have collaborated in improving the work, and this atmosphere of intellectual collaboration, so valuable, runs throughout the work.

Part four, "Law as a Joke in Tolkien's Works", is the most iconoclastic part of the book. The author seems to recover his old ways from the work in Editorial Cinca. With an infectious smile, he challenges Roald Dahl's Matilda and strives to defend Tolkien's humour. Humour is also transformed here into the most intense tool of analysis, as he embarks on a study of the customs of the Hobbits. These little creatures, whom the well-known films have identified with a haven of peace and food, do not come out of Professor Miranda Boto's -humoristic?- analysis all that well. Clinging to Max Weber, all the institutions are dismembered to offer as a result a Shire that is rather more organised than we think.

In the Epilogue, Professor Miranda Boto regains his status as a labour lawyer and makes an interesting reflection on the use of The Lord of the Rings as a tool for legal teaching. He proposes using Frodo Baggins and Sam Gamgee, in the first chapters of that work, as subjects of study when analysing the existence or otherwise of an employment relationship. Any Spanish labour lawyer will recognise here, and the author himself does not hide it, the influence of Manuel Alonso Olea. The proposal is certainly interesting, but one wonders what prodigious students the author hopes to have, capable of playing along with him and taking the study of the details of what happens in Bag End to the four characteristic notes of salaried work. In any case, the

idea of doing something different from reading the "usual" classical texts is to be considered very positive and each teacher can find his or her own book for the application of this methodology.

The book concludes with an Appendix where the author collects legal anecdotes from Tolkien's life, but no longer from his work. Knowing the structure of The Lord of the Rings, the inclusion of an Appendix does not seem to be accidental.

The final assessment of the work will vary greatly depending on the reader's knowledge of Tolkien's work and his or her own love of literature. Some will consider it a waste of time and others will enjoy discovering something completely new. It may even lead them to go their own way with the works they are passionate about. For that is the impression the book leaves: someone combining his craft and his passion to create a book that is different and unique, like that One Ring that gave so much play.

I can only conclude by fervently recommending the reading of such a unique and groundbreaking work, and I endorse the laudatory words of T. Shippey's Foreword: "Professor Miranda Boto's is a remarkable study of a neglected topic. Even those of us most familiar with Middle-earth will learn from it much that it is new, and also become more aware of things that we thought we knew already: such insights into familiarity are among the most welcome insights any work of criticism can provide".