

MIDDLE-EARTH, OR THERE AND BACK AGAIN

Review by Kristina Velis

Middle-earth, or There and Back Again, ed. Łukasz Neubauer; Comarë Series #44. Walking Tree Publishers. Paper, \$19.95 from amazon.com.

The book is made up of six essays written by six different Polish scholars and edited by Łukasz Neubauer. Each scholar looks at a different source material that Tolkien had read and would have been inspired by when writing his *legendarium*. These works include the Platonic myth of Atlantis, Arthurian Romance, the Finnish Kalevala, a Middle and Old English poem.

Michał Leśniewski's essay is about how Plato's writings on the mythical Atlantis inspired Tolkien's story of the fall of Númenor. This essay is very interesting and Leśniewski compares Plato's description of the destruction of Atlantis and Tolkien's description of the fall of Númenor and you understand the influence that Plato had on him.

The second essay written by the editor compares the character Gandalf's confrontation with the Balrog on the bridge in Moria and Byrhtnoth's mistake (from the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Battle of Maldon") of letting Scandinavian attackers to come across a causeway allowing them to slaughter the Anglo-Saxons. It also analyzes Tolkien's Christian reaction to the idea of the northern heroic spirit. Neubauer makes the statement that Tolkien, after fighting in World War One would have a much different feeling about war than the Anglo-Saxons

The Middle English poem "Pearl" which Tolkien translated and its influence on his work is the main theme of the essay written by Barbara Kowalik. In the poem "Pearl" the unnamed narrator uses the metaphor of the lost pearl for his daughter who has died; he has a dream vision of seeing her in paradise. Her coming back to him belongs to the Catholic belief of *communio sanctorum* where the dead interact with the living to assist or comfort them. Kowalik compares this belief to when Gandalf comes back after falling with the Balrog. I found this idea interesting.

The "Arthurian Romances" are the subject of the next essay by Bartłomiej Błaszkiwicz. Tolkien wrote his own version of "The Fall of Arthur" which was closer in storyline to John Dryden's adaptation of the Arthur story from Purcell's 1692 semi-opera "King Arthur". In his version King Arthur is England's Christian king defending his kingdom from the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Błaszkiwicz asked the reader to do a closer reading of Tolkien's version of "The Fall of Arthur" to appreciate its value on a deeper level.

Andrzej Szyjewski writes an essay about the story of Kullervo from the Finnish national epic the Kalevala. Tolkien reworked the story of Kullervo and used it for his inspiration for his "Children of Húrin", Kullervo morphing into the tragic hero Túrin Turambar. Szyjewski also mentions Kullervo's talking dog Musti who helped inspire Huan, the dog of Valinor, in "Beren and Lúthien". I find this essay interesting because of my studies of the Kalevala.

The last essay is by Andrzej Wicher. It explores the role of Galadriel's femininity in the male dominated world of The Lord of the Rings. Wicher makes the comparison of Galadriel to the Virgin Mary in Catholicism. After reading this essay it did make me think more about Galadriel and her role in The Lord of the Rings, why she is in the story and what was her importance to Tolkien.

In all I thought all of the essays were very informative, well written and easy to read. I found myself going back and rereading Tolkien's work that was examined in this book to reevaluate my thoughts and understanding them after reading it. Also not to "judge a book by its cover" I must say that I did love the cover art by Anke Eissmann. It is truly wonderful.