



BOOK REVIEW:

*Nólë Hyarmenillo. An Anthology of Iberian
Scholarship on Tolkien*

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Nuno Simões Rodrigues, Martin Simonson, Angélica Varandas, editors. *Nólë Hyarmenillo. An Anthology of Iberian Scholarship on Tolkien*. Walking Tree Publishers. 2022. ISBN: 978-3905703474.

The title *Nólë Hyarmenillo*, meaning “Lore from the South” in the High Elven language Quenya, created by renowned author and philologist J.R.R. Tolkien, aptly describes this collection of essays, and the subtitle *An Anthology of Iberian Scholarship on Tolkien* clarifies that most of the book's nine essays were written by authors from Spain and Portugal. Metaphorically, the expression *Nólë Hyarmenillo* also brings attention to the issue of whether academic studies on Tolkien from outside the Northern (European), or specifically the Anglophone world, are deemed valuable, emphasizing the question of whether scholars from other cultures, backgrounds, and languages can contribute anything of value regarding his work, sources, or influences. The issue of diversity and representation in the field of Tolkien scholarship has recently become a concern on a global scale. Professor Martha Celis-Mendoza highlighted the linguistic barrier as a major obstacle, particularly focusing on the dearth of translations of Tolkien's works beyond the most well-known ones. This problem is further exacerbated when it comes to the majority of

Tolkien's [sic] criticism which rarely gets translated into other languages based on the partial misconception that all scholars of an English language author must be proficient enough to read their work in the original language, but also all the major works of criticism around it Unfortunately, this poses a two-way challenge since works of fiction inspired by Tolkien's work and especially academic research and criticism, works written in other languages, rarely reach English-speaking fandom and scholars (Celis-Mendoza 3:08–4:14).

In addition, there is a prevailing belief that English has attained a status of near-universal recognition as the preferred mode of communication for scholarly discourse. As a result, academic discussions of Tolkien in languages other than English may have substantially diminished effectiveness as publications, and the most established academic circles may not even be aware of the existence of this scholarship. Hence, it appears that the true intent of *Nólë Hyarmenillo* is to promote the works of non-Anglophone scholars, especially those from the Iberian Peninsula, by publishing an English edition that can reach a broader readership. However, it is important to emphasize that nearly all of the essays are originally written in Spanish or Portuguese, and, paradoxically, some of them have deficiencies in their own English translation.

As this collection highlights the valuable contributions of non-Anglophone scholars from various backgrounds, it exemplifies the need for inclusivity in the field. Indeed, the book presents a wide-ranging and varied selection of themes and topics, united mainly by the commonality of the authors' geographic origins. In the introductory section, the editors offer a comprehensive overview of Tolkien scholarship in Spain and Portugal, providing both a valuable introduction to the field as well as a list of pioneering scholars. However, it is worth noting that the significance of fan communities as important sources of academic inquiry is sometimes overlooked, particularly with regard to Spain, where the Tolkien Society of Spain has played a crucial role in promoting the study of Tolkien's works. Structurally, the book is divided into two parts, featuring four essays by Portuguese and five essays by Spanish scholars. While this organization does an admirable job of highlighting the breadth and diversity of Tolkien scholarship in southern Europe, it does also result in a lack of coherence between the individual essays. Furthermore, one third of the essays focus on Peter Jackson's film adaptations rather than Tolkien's original works. While these adaptations have undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the literary works on which they are based, it is important to note that the interest in Tolkien's writing in southern Europe predates the release of these films. Despite these limitations, the collection presents a valuable contribution to Tolkien scholarship, showcasing the unique perspectives and insights of scholars from this geographic region. It covers a wide range of subjects, including but not limited to semiotics, sociology, comparative mythology, and rigorous literary analysis. The essays are characterized by their nuanced understanding of Tolkien's writing as they draw on a variety of disciplinary approaches and cultural contexts. These approaches range from the analysis of secondary works derived from Tolkien's creation (such as films, songs, and posters) to the societal responses to the literary phenomenon across a variety of domains as well as comparative studies with other traditions and mythologies. Readers will undoubtedly find a wealth of

interesting and diverse contributions within this volume, making it an important and enriching addition to the field of Tolkien studies.

As previously noted, several essays in this collection focus on the film adaptations of J.R.R. Tolkien's works by Peter Jackson, specifically *The Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit* (2012–2014) trilogies. In their essays, Miguel Monteiro Marques, Ana Daniela Coelho, and Amaya Fernández Menicucci examine various elements of the films that extend beyond Tolkien's original work. Monteiro Marques's analysis of the posters that were used to promote Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in the essay "I didn't see the films, but I read the posters" adopts a narrative and conceptual approach, following the ideas of Kress and van Leeuwen's *Reading Images – The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006). In turn, Coelho's essay "I See Fire: Adapting *The Hobbit* beyond the Image" explores the significance of the song "I See Fire," composed and performed by British singer Ed Sheeran for *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* soundtrack (2013), after providing an introduction to the importance of music in film adaptations. Lastly, Fernández Menicucci's essay "Aren't You Going to Search My Trousers?: Gender and the Representation of the Dwarves in Peter Jackson's Adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*" looks into the representation of gender and dwarves in Jackson's adaptation of *The Hobbit* with particular attention to the character of Tauriel, who was not created by Tolkien. In contrast to the orthodox approaches often taken in the Tolkien scholarship focused mainly on his books, these essays offer perspectives that delve into the adaptation of Tolkien's works into cinema. Since the title of the volume suggests a focus on the scrutiny of Tolkien's written oeuvre, it seems appropriate to point out that the essays that explore film adaptations may not entirely reflect this purpose.

Despite its apparent similarity, Monica Sanz's contribution, titled "Shadows of Middle-earth: Tolkien in Subculture, Counterculture, and Exploitation," is not thematically related to the previous essays. Instead, Sanz is concerned with the influence of Tolkien's own primary work on contemporary popular culture and offers a unique perspective on the impact of Tolkien's creation on social trends beyond Peter Jackson's films. Sanz's essay explores the varied and often bizarre references to Tolkien found within underground cultures, including the hippie movement, graffiti art, pro-fascist groups, drag performances, and non-mainstream cinema. The compilation of these cultural phenomena provides a fascinating insight into the widespread influence of Tolkien's work on diverse artistic and social expressions. Sanz also offers an insightful and nuanced examination of the various ways in which the process of adaptation and interpretation has given rise to a plethora of critical and creative responses, ultimately resulting in a multifaceted and dynamic field of inquiry that continues to shape the trajectory of Tolkien studies. It is noteworthy that this essay was nominated for the best article category in the annual Tolkien Society awards.

The rest of the essays in this anthology, in turn, center their focus upon the figure of Tolkien and the manifold influences that informed his work. To this end, in her essay "Facing Hope: *The Lord of the Rings*, Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon Elegiac Tradition," Angélica Varandas explores the intricate links between *The Lord of the Rings* and the heroic-elegiac poetry of Anglo-Saxon literature, particularly the epic poem *Beowulf*. Varandas deftly analyzes how the motif of the cycle of life and death, along with other hallmarks of Anglo-

Saxon culture, permeate Tolkien's tales. However, she is careful to note that this does not reduce Tolkien's work to an elegy as his vision transcends the fatalistic worldview of his Anglo-Saxon predecessors. Similarly, Hélio Pires' essay "Asgard and Valinor: Worlds in Comparison" offers a comparative analysis of Tolkien's legendarium and the Norse mythology of Asgard, as recorded in the Poetic Edda, and the prose works of Snorri Sturluson. Pires discusses how Tolkien drew on these sources to create his own mythology and how certain elements of Asgard recur in Tolkien's depiction of Valinor, the realm of the Valar. As a comparative examination between Tolkien's legendarium and other distinct literary and mythical contexts, Alejandro Martínez-Sobrino's "Boromir: A Character Doomed to Die" establishes a connection with the previous essays, presenting an in-depth exploration of the factors that resulted in the tragic fate of Boromir, a prominent figure in *The Lord of the Rings*. Through a close reading of the text, Martínez-Sobrino argues that Boromir can be viewed as a tragic hero, driven to his downfall by his own flaws and the inexorable forces of fate. By tracing these intertextual connections, all three essays enhance our understanding of Tolkien's creative process and the complex web of cultural influences that shaped his work.

The collection also includes two essays that focus on one of Tolkien's fundamental concerns: the complex interplay between human beings and the natural world. Andoni Cossio, in "The Voice of Nature in Middle-earth through the Lens of Testimony," examines the character of Treebeard in *The Lord of the Rings*, emphasizing his role as a witness to the story. Cossio analyses the theoretical background of testimony and links this to how Treebeard becomes involved in the narrative by leading the revolt of the Ents, who symbolize nature in Tolkien's work. Treebeard is a being belonging to past times, but living in the present world (of the narrative), and he becomes a chronicler of the passage of time. Meanwhile, in "Nevertheless They Will Have Need of Wood: Aesthetic and Utilitarian Approaches to Trees in The Silmarillion and Unfinished Tales," Martin Simonson, a Swedish scholar based in Spain, examines the concept of utilitarianism in Tolkien's work. Analyzing how characters such as Aulë and Yavanna from Valinor and Aldarion and Erendis from Númenor seek to appropriate and dominate nature, specifically trees and forests, Simonson offers an insightful exploration of how trees are viewed in Tolkien's work. Both essays share a common thread in their exploration of themes related to nature, which was one of Tolkien's core preoccupations.

Overall, the collection covers a wide range of topics that approach various aspects of J.R.R. Tolkien's work. While the thematic diversity of the essays provides a multifaceted view of Tolkien scholarship, it also results in an unbalanced work with some texts standing out more than others, such as the essays by Sanz or Simonson. In addition, there are noticeable areas that would have benefited from improvement, such as the uneven levels of English proficiency across the essays and some minor layout issues. As for the target audience, this anthology seems to be aimed at those interested in all phenomena related to J.R.R. Tolkien in all of their nuanced complexity, particularly those seeking fresh perspectives on the author's oeuvre. It is suitable for both scholars and general readers interested in Tolkien studies. Furthermore, the fact that these essays come from southern Europe adds a unique cultural and geographical perspective to the collection, perhaps not in the discovery of unknown connections, but certainly in the demonstration that

talent is not limited by borders or cultural traditions. This makes it particularly appealing to those interested in exploring diverse academic contributions in the field. On the whole, it represents an important stepping stone towards greater recognition of academic contributions in Tolkien scholarship from this underrepresented region.

Biography: José Manuel Ferrández Bru has spent the past thirty years researching the life and work of J.R.R. Tolkien. He founded and served as the first chairman of the Tolkien Society of Spain and has since published numerous articles and essays on the subject. His book, *El Tío Curro. La Conexión Española de J.R.R. Tolkien*, was originally published by Editorial Csed and has been reissued in both Spanish and English by Luna Press Publishing as *Uncle Curro. J.R.R. Tolkien's Spanish Connection*, as well as in Italian by Terra Santa Edizioni. Recently, he also published the book *Las Vacaciones de un Hobbit* with Legendaria Ediciones. Ferrández Bru's essays have appeared in publications such as *Estel* magazine (Tolkien Society of Spain), *Mallorn* (Tolkien Society), and *Tolkien Studies* (West Virginia University Press). Notably, he curated "La Fortaleza del Anillo" (Alicante 2015-2016), the largest exhibition focused on Tolkien ever organized in Spain and has presented his work at various conferences on Tolkien in Spain and abroad.

Works Cited

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