

## Book Notes

VII: *Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center*, Vol. 34 (2017)

**Zachary A. Rhone, *The Great Tower of Elfland: The Mythopoeic Worldview of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and George MacDonald*. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2017), \$39.67 (hardback).**

The relationship between C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien is famous, and *The Great Tower of Elfland: The Mythopoeic Worldview of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and George MacDonald* claims that it is famously misunderstood. In a growing field of Inklings studies, Zachary Rhone seeks to correct 50 years of error, first made by Humphrey Carpenter and perpetuated by all of his successors, concerning the worldview of the Inklings' most famous members. Whereas the earliest studies of the Inklings proposed that the group shared a common Christian mysticism, this unified Inklings theory was debunked by Humphrey Carpenter in his 1978 biography of the group. Since then, few have ventured to disagree with Carpenter's statement that they were held together by nothing but Lewis' friendship. The pendulum swings the other way in *The Great Tower of Elfland*, in which Rhone argues that the worldview of the Inklings, specifically Lewis and Tolkien, bound the group together. Rhone, an adjunct English professor at a number of institutions, has published several articles as well as his dissertation on Lewis, Tolkien, and mythopoeia. To support his argument Rhone uses the works of George MacDonald and G.K. Chesterton, authors who were influential to both of the famous Inklings. By identifying the worldview of MacDonald and Chesterton, then drawing the same elements out of Lewis and Tolkien's work, Rhone hopes to convince readers of the common link amongst the 20th century's most famous writing club and reverse half a century of error.

**Schall, James, *The Satisfied Crocodile: Essays on G.K. Chesterton*. (Charlotte, NC: American Chesterton Society, 2017), \$14.95 (paperback).**

The latest in the long list of books by Fr. James Schall, *The Satisfied Crocodile* is a selection of essays on G.K. Chesterton. These essays, by one prolific author on another, cover a wide variety of topics, from "Chesterton on Aquinas" and "The Theology of Christmas Presents" to "On Knowing Too Many People" and "On Girls, Golf-Clubs, and the Presence of Man on Earth." These 59 essays demonstrate Fr. Schall's familiarity with Chesterton, as does the title. In the introduction, Schall justifies his "odd" title by remembering that "the great truth of Chesterton's writings is that wit is not contrary to truth." With

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anecdotes drawn from Chesterton's life and Schall's own life, *The Satisfied Crocodile* is a journey both long and wide through Schall's considerable Chesterton research.

**Honegger, Thomas and Maureen F. Mann, editors, *Laughter in Middle-earth: Humour in and around the Works of JRR Tolkien*. (Zurich, Switzerland: Walking Tree Publishers, 2016), \$24.30 (paperback).**

Anyone who has read Tolkien's *Father Christmas Letters*, or perhaps *Farmer Giles of Ham*, knows that Tolkien was no stranger to comedy. It is easy to think that, in his most popular myth, the serious tone of great halls and dark times overpowers Tolkien's love of humor. According to *Laughter in Middle-earth*, this is not so. The 35th book in the Cormarë series, *Laughter in Middle-earth: Humour in and around the Works of J.R.R. Tolkien* is a collection of essays focusing on the 'fountain of mirth' in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, and even the tragic *Silmarillion*—to borrow a phrase from Alastair Whyte's chapter title in the book. Contributors include Signum university graduates, Tolkien art collectors, and doctors of literature from around the world. Their topics range from the different uses of laughter in *The Lord of the Rings*—ferocious laughter in the face of death as well as Gandalf's 'pure sound of mirth'—to the different sorts of humor Tolkien employed in his legendarium—such as the etiquette based humor of *The Hobbit*—to a discussion of the many parodies of Tolkien's works. Tolkien's first reviewer of *The Lord of the Rings*, Rayner Unwin, overlooked the comedy in the books in favor of the struggle between good and evil; while *Laughter in Middle-earth* does not diminish that struggle, it corrects that oversight by reminding the reader of Tolkien's love of humor and its importance in his works.

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