



Hugo's Bookshelf

An American Tolkien™ Society News and Review Feature

from *Minas Tirith Evening-Star: Journal of the American Tolkien Society*

Volume 34, Number 2 © Copyright the American Tolkien Society, 2005 ISSN 1063-0848

Interrupted Music:

The Making of Tolkien's Mythology

Verlyn Flieger

ISBN 0-87338-824-0

Kent State University Press

Trade Paperback, 194 pages \$18.00 US

Verlyn Flieger is also author of *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*, *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie*, and co-editor of *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on the History of Middle-earth*. She is a scholar of some distinction, with a well-deserved reputation among Tolkien enthusiasts. Her latest offering, *Interrupted Music*, is a worthy addition to any collection.

She draws her title from *The Silmarillion*, or more precisely from the Ainulindale, but applies the concept to Tolkien's own creative process. Her thesis is that, in attempting to create a mythos and legendarium for England, he imitated the historical, sometimes random process by which tales have developed, moved from oral tradition to print, and become generally established. From this view, Tolkien deliberately created numerous, fragmentary, variant (or even inconsistent) versions of his tales, carefully attributing each to an internal source - bard, storyteller, or collector (She likens Bilbo's efforts to the Childe Collection) - mimicking the evolution of legend and tradition. The ultimate expression of this view would deplore Christopher Tolkien's edition of *The Silmarillion*, and hail *The History of Middle-earth* as the fullest expression of Tolkien's creativity.

She concludes that, perhaps inadvertently, *The Lord of the Rings* became the final vehicle and frame for the mythos, allowing Tolkien himself to become the pseudo-editor and translator (a popular device in Nineteenth Century adventure fiction), and to place the greater mythos as backdrop for the immediate and compelling adventure.

In pursuing her thesis, Flieger has generally cited only the most reputable authorities, such as Shippey and Carpenter, and by and large shows great respect for Tolkien's genius and creative process. However, there are certain inevitable pitfalls for any enthusiast who attempts to explain "what Tolkien was really doing:" The most common and obvious of these is to ignore a familiar statement by Tolkien, or to acknowledge the statement and endeavor to explain it away: "He said this, but what he really meant was something else." Flieger is not entirely immune to this failing: by way of example, she puts herself through contortions to assert that although Tolkien did not care for matters Celtic and denied that his mythos was in any way Celtic, he didn't really mean that, and it really is Celtic in some sense.

Setting aside such foibles as inevitable in the human condition, Flieger's *Interrupted Music* is a fine addition to Tolkien scholarship, but must be viewed as literary scholarship rather than internal scholarship. With this single reservation, we can recommend it heartily to the reader.

- Philip W. Helms