

A LONG-EXPECTED PARTY

*A Celebration of
Tolkien's Life, Works, and Afterlife*

EDITED BY
ERIK Z. D. ELLIS AND BEN REINHARD

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ACADEMIC

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Paul Gondreau is professor of theology at Providence College (Rhode Island). He is the author of *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (University of Scranton Press, 2009), as well as of numerous articles on human sexuality and marriage, Christology, sacraments, the priesthood, the theology of disability, and the Catholic vision of J. R. R. Tolkien. He is associate editor of the journal *Nova et Vetera*. He is also a frequent lecturer for the Thomistic Institute.

Michael Hoggatt is a middle school teacher at Hillsdale Academy in Hillsdale, MI. He earned his BA at Hillsdale College, majoring in English with a minor in classical education, before completing his MA in humanities at Ralston College. He loves theological literature, especially all biblical, Augustinian, English medieval, and English Renaissance literature. He has published poetry in *The Locus* magazine. While longing to understand the Platonic corpus and its thread through Western history, a penchant for athletics, music performance, and cooking keep him grounded.

John R. Holmes is professor emeritus of English at Franciscan University of Steubenville, OH. He has published extensively on Tolkien, and a few of these publications have actually been read. He is a founding member of the editorial board of the online *Journal of Tolkien Research*. His book *Tolkien's Glee: A Reading of the Songs in The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings* is forthcoming from McFarland.

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medieval-Latin poem *The Speculum Humanae Salvationis: The Mirror of Human Salvation* (Brill, 2022). Lately, she has returned to her first love, the Oxford greats, and their transformation of Catholic literary culture. Her newest book, *Festivals of Faith: The Sermons of St. John Henry Newman for the Liturgical Year* (Cenacle, 2023), arranges and introduces Newman's magnificent homilies for reading across the Christian year. She is currently editing a volume on *Reading Boethius in the Twenty-First Century* with Sarah-Jane Murray.

Ben Reinhard is a professor of English at Franciscan University of Steubenville, where he teaches courses in medieval English literature, mythology, and the Inklings. In addition to numerous articles, he is the author of *The High Hallow: Tolkien's Liturgical Imagination* (Emmaus Road, 2025) and *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, 2nd ed. (Cluny, 2026). He is currently working on projects on the Holy Ghost in the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien and on C. S. Lewis's reception of Christopher Dawson. He lives with his wife and five children in Steubenville, OH.

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Juliana J. Undseth is a graduate of Hillsdale College and an independent scholar curious about the intermingling of philosophy, myth, and literature. She is particularly interested in Tolkien studies and Platonic resonances in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. The True Myth has captured her soul, and she seeks it in everything. You might find her reading, acting, analyzing films, spending time with family and friends, or being active in God's great outdoors.

Foreword

Michael Ward

The essays in this volume derive from a Tolkien conference held at Franciscan University of Steubenville in 2023. Much delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was aptly called “A Long-Expected Party”—that name, of course, being the opening chapter title of *The Lord of the Rings*.

At that conference, I myself was *an unexpected party* (to re-purpose the opening chapter title of *The Hobbit*) after one of the keynote speakers suddenly needed to withdraw from the lineup. Happening to be stateside and with a most unusual window of flexibility in my schedule, I was drafted in, at short notice, to plug the gap and flew into town on the day of my talk, the final talk of the whole event,¹ only to learn that the airline had mislaid my checked baggage—this while I was dressed in my oldest and shabbiest travel-wear, clothes that were barely acceptable for flying and totally wrong for a formal academic conference.

To spare my blushes, one of the other speakers, my friend, the invariably well-dressed Michael Hoggatt, kindly swapped his garb with mine, and I was ushered onstage to deliver the concluding lecture, looking much more dapper than ever before in my life.

I mention this mildly amusing little adventure not only to explain my involvement with the conference and the subsequent request that came my way to author this preface but also to highlight the concepts of the expected and the unexpected.

The expected and the unexpected strike me as highly relevant to this volume’s contents, and that in two ways: first, in the various approaches to Tolkien’s work that the contributors

1. Michael Ward, “Peak Middle-earth: Why Mount Doom Is Not the Climax of *The Lord of the Rings*,” *An Unexpected Journal*, December 8, 2021, <https://anunexpectedjournal.com/peak-middle-earth-why-mount-doom-is-not-the-climax-of-the-lord-of-the-rings>.

provide; second, in Tolkien's legendarium itself and the faith that underlies it.

With regard to the contributors' approaches, the editors say in their foreword, "In addition to the expected English-literature papers, the disciplines of theology, philosophy, political science, and education are here represented." They go on to remark that this diversity of perspectives shows "the boundary-transcending attractiveness of Tolkien's mythopoetic project" (p. xix). Yes, indeed. Well said!

One expects to find, in a volume of this kind, a discussion of 'the function of literature and storytelling,' such as Laura Sigler ably presents: One does not expect John Holmes's sizzling essay, "Tom-Bombadillo-Ba-Wop-Bam-Boom." Erik Ellis's excellent "Key to the Wordhoard" is what one knows one wants in a study of Tolkien the famous philologist; an exploration of national apostasy, such as Luke Foster helpfully supplies, was not on my bingo card. The other fifteen contributions provide a similar mix of the looked-for and the surprising.

Tolkien's legendarium itself repeatedly exhibits expectedness and unexpectedness, and this duality is insightfully brought out in many of the chapters that follow. Let me list just a handful of examples:

- As Gandalf struggles to rid Théoden of Wormtongue's evil influence: "Tolkien does something entirely unexpected, choosing to have Gandalf gather power not from a weapon or spell but from a mere song" (p. 285).
- "When an Elf acts rightly, it is commonplace and expected, and thus the nobility of the act is lesser. When a Man acts rightly, it is monumental simply because his fate is not previously determined to act in goodness or wickedness" (p. 78).
- *Amdir* is an Elven kind of hope that springs from "an expectation of good, which though uncertain has some foundation in what is known," whereas *estel* is the hope that