



The Lost Road and Other Writings

J.R.R. Tolkien , Christopher Tolkien (Editor)

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Once again, editor Christopher Tolkien satisfies the hunger of his father's fans for more of the magical storytelling that has made The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings trilogy the most successful fantasy novels of all time.

The Lost Road and Other Writings Details

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Author : J.R.R. Tolkien , Christopher Tolkien (Editor)

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From Reader Review *The Lost Road and Other Writings* for online ebook

Terry says

All of the History of Middle-earth volumes that I have read thus far have been chock full of stories, details, notes, and essays that go a long way to showing the sheer scope of what Tolkien was attempting to create from his formative years up to and beyond the creation of his most famous works (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*), but in many ways this latest volume seemed to be nearly bursting at the seams. This foray through the HoME volumes has been an intriguing journey for me (and one that I've enjoyed far more than I would have thought) and now it would appear that the first phase of it has come to a close, for it is in *The Lost Road* that we reach the point Tolkien had come to in the creation of his original mythology before embarking on what would be perhaps the most important, and undeniably the most famous, (though also arguably the most disruptive) stage in his career: the composition of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Many nerds such as myself who are intimately familiar with the legends surrounding the lives of the Inklings, that group of Oxford writers that centred around Tolkien and his friend C. S. Lewis, know the story of a discussion the two men had when they decided that there was a dearth of the kinds of mythological and heroic tales that so fueled their own imaginations and thus as Tolkien recalled Lewis saying: "if they won't write the kind of books we want to read, we shall have to write them ourselves." Lewis decided to write a story that centred on the intrusion of myth into the world via the vehicle of space travel, while Tolkien was to write a story in which this happened through time travel. Lewis ended up creating the 'Space Trilogy' (in my mind his best works of fiction), in which his philologist hero (a probable partial nod to Tolkien himself) is thrust into a wider cosmos in which the beings and wars of the mythical world are seen to be all too real. Tolkien, as was alas often the case, never ended up finishing his story, though the fragments that exist are presented in this volume and make up the first section in which we see the birth of what was to become an important element of his ever-growing and evolving history of Middle-earth: the rise (and ultimate fall) of the fabled isle of Númenor.

Like so many of the elements of Tolkien's mythology the importance of Númenor seems to be contradicted by the relative scarcity of actual material relating to it. In his published works it is little more than a myth and legend from the distant past whose importance looms large in implication, though less so in apparent fact. Even the posthumously published *The Silmarillion* has relatively little to contribute on the subject. This was one reason, I think, that the stories which presented an inside look into Tolkien's conceptions of Númenor (both in this volume and in the book *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*) are especially tantalizing to me. Amongst all of the many writings and ideas left 'unfinished' by Tolkien I would probably pair the isle of Númenor with his sparse tales of Tuor, Earendil and the fall of Gondolin as the 'missed opportunities' that most torment me. I wish he had written more, and more fully, on these topics and so what I can find on them I treasure.

The Lost Road gives us some early outlines on Númenor as a concept and its eventual fall within the context of his still developing Middle-earth mythology, along with the few chapters that Tolkien actually wrote of "The Lost Road" (his proposed companion book to Lewis') in which a father and son were to travel back in time and discover their connection not only to this mythical isle, but also to many other significant moments in history which they would vicariously experience through their previous lives. It is in these texts that 'Sauron' was first used as the name for the lieutenant of Morgoth and it was perhaps his important role as the key behind Númenor's fall (along with his off-stage appearance as 'the Necromancer' in *The Hobbit*) that may have contributed to his pivotal role in the work which Tolkien was to begin writing soon

after and which would become his *magnum opus*: *The Lord of the Rings*.

The second part of the text returns us to more familiar ground as we see the further evolution of Tolkien's composition of the Silmarillion proper in the form of an updated series of annals (for both Beleriand and Valinor), a reworking of his 'cosmogonical myth' the Ainulindalë in which the angelic beings called the Ainur sing worldly creation into being, and 'the Lhammas', a text devoted to detailing the development of the languages of the elves within the fictional framework of Middle-earth (and which I found much more compelling than that description is likely to imply). Finally section two closes with a version of the 'Quenta Silmarillion' in which Tolkien again rewrites the entire history of the first age of Middle-earth in a somewhat compressed form...though much of the wording will be familiar to those who have read the published Silmarillion. In contrast to the first two volumes of the HoME series where even many of the familiar stories and characters were sometimes only vaguely recognizable, we now see much that is not only familiar, but often exactly corresponds to what we will see in the published Silmarillion. There seem to be relatively few elements that are yet to change and thus it is much easier to look back across the various volumes and gain a glimpse of how it was that Christopher Tolkien came up with the final text of the published Silmarillion.

The final sections of the book (part 3 and the appendices) will be of primary interest to linguists and others who want to get to the root of the work that, by his own admission, lay behind the creation of all of Tolkien's writings and were their ultimate key: the invented elvish languages. Along with a detailed set of etymologies, there are lists of names and some details on Tolkien's second (and final) map of the Silmarillion. There is definitely a lot to be gleaned from these pages, but I have to admit that I skimmed over most of them. Perhaps on a subsequent read I will be more attentive, but at this time it really was the story elements of the earlier portions of the book that held my interest. Again: if you are a hard-core fan then this is definitely for you, if not then why are you reading this review?

Nonabgo says

"The Lost Road" - the 5th volume of Tolkien's "History of Middle-Earth" - is in fact a collection of writings and re-writings of previous works, so in reality it doesn't bring a lot of new material. It feels like you're reading the same stories over and over again, but in reality it's another step forward in the development of the mythology towards the final(-ish) version that is "The Silmarillion". It's also the last book of the 12-volume history that deals with Middle-Earth before the final defeat of Morgoth.

I feel like the book should have been structured differently. It starts with "The Fall of Numenor", but reverts back to the annals (a later version than the one in volume 4) and the Silmarillion, but I guess Christopher Tolkien wanted to present his father's writings in the order they were written and not in the actual chronological order of the events.

What this volume brings new is the aforementioned "Fall of Numenor" and "The Lost Road", which was Tolkien's attempt at writing a time travelling story with reincarnation elements (he has a bet with C.S. Lewis about each of them attempting a type of travelling, and while Lewis chose space travelling - and, subsequently, wrote "Alice in Wonderland", Tolkien started working on "The Lost Road", but unfortunately never finished it). Other new elements are "The Lhammas" (account of the tongues) and "The Etymologies", which is basically elvish vocabulary.

This volume, I believe, a lot more than the others, is intended only for the most hard-core Tolkien fans, those who really want to dive in and see how his mind worked and how his mythology evolved. Otherwise, it will

feel repetitive and the reader might get bored of reading for the nth time about Hurin and Turin and the history of the silmarils.

X says

More unfinished writing of Middle-Earth. Very little of it is entirely new material, but instead is revisions of earlier writings. This needs to be read after the previous volumes of the HoME as very few of the stories are complete enough to give a full or even followable idea of the history. If not for the fact that it was written by Tolkien, I might give this four stars as it was very slow at times, but there are some parts that are real gems so I will leave it at five stars. Not for the casual reader!

Tommy Grooms says

The fifth volume of the History of Middle-earth is quite a bit of fun after the plodding fourth volume. Here we see the Númenor story shaped, famously as a result of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis agreeing to write a "time travel" story and a "space travel" story, respectfully. It's a shame "The Lost Road" was never written (Tolkien's narrative view of real periods of human history based on his linguistic knowledge would have been fascinating), but nevertheless Númenor is huge: Tolkien's retelling of the Atlantis myth is a big reason we have the Third Age of Middle-earth as we know it. Númenor's descendants extend the story past the Elder Days and shape most of the history of The Lord of the Rings, and were key to tying the lighthearted Hobbit into the greater legendarium.

Some of the linguistic material (the Lhammas and the Etymologies) are dense and tedious for those not of a certain bent, but reveal just how much Tolkien's languages were tied up in his myths.

We also get the (incomplete) Silmarillion as it stood before The Lord of the Rings was completed (a great thing to have in the back of my mind as I get ready to re-read The Lord of the Rings), as well as a tiny glimpse into some of the editorial difficulties that went into posthumously publishing the Silmarillion from texts at various stages of development. Tolkien as we know him from his published staples is finally in view, and so far it's been a gratifying trip.

Ron says

Only mildly interesting from a literary history virepoint. Hardly the "last chapter" of anything, except maybe Christopher's efforts to peddle on his father's name.

Emma says

4.5*

No me creo ni yo que haya terminado este libro tan rápido. Creo que en parte se debe a que soy una lectora más madura actualmente que cuando empecé la saga y, de la misma manera, el haber leído ya varios

volúmenes de la Historia de la Tierra Media hace que sea más sencilla su lectura ya que no partimos de cero. A todo esto podemos sumarle que tengo insomnio desde hace demasiados días y por tanto leo bastante.

Una vez más considero que Christopher Tolkien hace una grandísima labor aportándonos todo lo que su padre tenía en la cabeza, es decir, por traernos la Tierra Media en toda su descripción. Sin embargo, he de reconocer que siguen resultándome pesadas algunas de las partes en la que comenta los textos ya que considero que se extiende demasiado. Pero, más allá de ello, este es el primer volumen que de verdad he disfrutado desde la primera hasta la última hoja.

Artnoose McMoose says

I am slowly plugging my way through the History of Middle Earth series. I liked reading this volume more than some of the other ones.

It contains a story called "The Lost Road" that is about a contemporary father and son who are transported back to Númenor because they are descendants who start "remembering" the ancient language. Tolkien never finished it, but it's a neat oblique story.

It also contains another draft of the Quenta Silmarillion, and now that I know more about the history of Tolkien's cosmology, a lot of this stuff made more sense than when I read the earlier volumes.

In addition there are writings about the languages and some maps. Admittedly I skimmed through the etymology section.

Well, five down, seven to go!

Nicholas Whyte says

<https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/1785921.html>

Getting to the end of the books about how the Silmarillion was (and wasn't) written now, this volume includes several interesting insights into how Tolkien's works reached us. At the core is the rather slim pickings of The Lost Road, the time travel novel which Tolkien began at around the same time C.S. Lewis began his Ransome trilogy. Tolkien abandoned it, and it wasn't really going in the right direction; what we have here is too episodic to be coherent, and in particular, the framing narrative has a set of slightly odd father-son dynamics going on - Tolkien's own parents were absent, largely through being dead, and the same is true of most of his more successful characters (Bilbo's parents are never heard of, he in turn abandons Frodo in the first chapter of LotR, Húrin is a distant captive while his son and daughter fall in love with each other) though there are exceptions (mostly father-figures who are over-controlling - Théoden, Denethor, Thingol).

The importance of father-son dynamics extends also to the making of this book, and I was particularly interested in a passage on page 302 where Christopher Tolkien expresses his regrets that the Silmarillion as originally published was not better; he reflects on the role played by Guy Gavriel Kay in assembling the texts but in the end takes full responsibility for it himself. I was not surprised to read that the story he feels was

worst served is the tale of Beren and Lúthien.

There's also a lot of meaty material on the languages - an essay called the Lhammas and a set of Elvish etymologies, which brought home to me that for Tolkien his invented structure was much more than just Quenya and Sindarin, it also included half a dozen other languages spoken by different branches of the Elves, barely mentioned in the stories. I have dabbled enough in philology to sense the uniqueness of this achievement - very few sf or fantasy writers come anywhere near Tolkien's level of detail in his invented names and words, and some (eg Robert Jordan) are so bad at it that it's painful.

Apart from that, we have the Fall of Númenor, and yet another rehash of the main text of the Silmarillion. I am looking forward to the next volume which is about the early versions of LotR.

Marko Vasi? says

Precisely - 4.5 stars, for great deal of this 455 pages long manuscript is about creation and derivation of Elvish languages (Lhammas), their etymologies and genealogies, that I do not fancy much. But, the early version of the Númenorian annals where Valar were much involved in the plot (contrariwise to both official version of "The Silmarillion" and "Unfinished Tales"), along with Sauron's impact on story-line as well as Aelfwinas's song written in the old English poem "Pearl" fashion I fancied much. The second part is dedicated to later annals of Valinor and Beleriand, and gives insight in step-by-step development of the stories from The Silmarillion, but I found it somewhat tedious and redundant.

Chip says

Still working my way through the 12 volume set. Excellent and exhaustive analysis of the creation of Middle Earth, the milieu of The Lord Of The Rings. Of special significance in this particular volume, p.302:

I will say, however, that I now regret certain of the changes made to this tale [of Beren and Luthien, from The Silmarillion]... It is proper to mention that here as elsewhere almost every substantial change was discussed with Guy Kay, who worked with me in 1974-5 on the preparation of The Silmarillion. He indeed made many suggestions for the construction of the text (such as, in the tale of Beren and Luthien, the introduction of a passage from the Lay of Leithian), and proposed solutions to problems arising in the making of a composite narrative -- in some cases of major significance to the structure, as will I hope be shown in a later book. The responsibility for the final published form rests of course wholly with me.

So the much touted (by Kay) association with Christopher Tolkien (and through him to JRR Tolkien) is in fact regretted by Tolkien, who accepts responsibility for allowing Kay to manipulate him into altering his father's work. Christopher speaks volumes with his deliberate choice of those two words "I regret", and it can't be ignored that Tolkien's and Kay's working relationship dissolved in 1975 and has never resumed.

Justin Vestil says

This book is about the history of Middle Earth, from the Akallabeth(The Drowning of Numenor) towards the First Age(which ended with the defeat of Morgoth, and destruction of Beleriand).

To simplify, its the history of Middle-Earth before the time of Lord of the Rings. It is about how the Dark Lord Sauron came to be, and how Men and Elves came to Middle-Earth.

For history and LOTR buffs, it's a good read. It answers questions that LOTR left hanging.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

The Lost Road and Other Writings (The History of Middle-Earth #5), J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien (Editor)

Melissa says

Again I am reminded, how lucky his son is and in fact we are, that Tolkien lived and worked in the time he did, no computers and often when paper was scarce. Without those two facts there would be very little creative process to unearth. As it was, much of it survived, written on the backs of other dates letters and material, and thanks to the time and dedication of his son, made available to us. It truly is an amazing snapshot of an author creating a complex world.

Michael Davis says

A little less engaging than the other Histories I've read thus far. Looking forward to the 5th in the series, followed quickly (I hope) by the 6th, which takes up the behind the scenes tale at the point in Tolkien's life when he begins the Lord of the Rings. Recommend this one only for the die hard or the scholar.

I wrote about the experience of reading all 12 of these volumes here:

<http://soundscryer.com/2011/06/13/chr...> (part 1) and here: <http://soundscryer.com/2011/12/02/chr...> (part 2). Much more detail about the series in those two pieces.

Linda Hoover says

For an in-depth look at the history of Middle Earth from start to finish, this is the fifth one to read in "The History of Middle Earth" series of books, edited by Christopher Tolkien. An interesting look into Tolkien's creative genius at work! :-)
