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Abstract

The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond. Reviewed by David D. Oberhelman.

The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy: One Book to Rule Them All. Edited by Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson. Reviewed by Clark Hutton.

REVIEWS

THE J.R.R. TOLKIEN COMPANION AND GUIDE. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond. London: HarperCollins; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. 2 vol., 2300 pages. \$100.00. ISBN 978-0007169726.

Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond, two librarians known for their numerous editorial, bibliographic, and scholarly contributions to Tolkien studies, have finally produced what is undoubtedly a seminal if not the definitive reference source on the Professor, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*. Inspired by Walter Hooper's 940-page *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*, Scull and Hammond's work was a tale that, in true Tolkien fashion, grew in the telling, and has grown into two volumes: a 996-page *Chronology* and a 1,256-page *Reader's Guide*. The set is designed to be a "reference of (at least) first resort for the study and appreciation of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien," and the entries in the guide volume provide succinct glosses on "his writings and ideas, his life and times, his family, friends, and colleagues, and places he knew and loved" (ix). The volumes do have their small idiosyncrasies: since they are sold both together and separately, the two parts have the same preface, works consulted, and index, and neither volume has a table of contents. Scull and Hammond have made an electronic table of contents for the *Reader's Guide*, along with addenda and corrigenda, available on their personal Web site, <<http://mysite.verizon.net/wghammond/index.html>>, but few readers will know to look for it online. Despite such small imperfections, the breadth of the coverage and the authority with which Scull and Hammond document Tolkien's life and times will make these books an invaluable supplement to Humphrey Carpenter's classic 1977 biography and their own 2005 *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*.

The *Chronology* volume offers an often day-by-day record of Tolkien's activities and his professional as well as personal and literary dealings—a veritable "Tale of Years" for Tolkien's personal history. The authors' access to the Tolkien papers at the Bodleian and other archival records such as his correspondence with George Allen & Unwin and other sources has enabled them to give a remarkably complete picture of how Tolkien filled his day. Interviews with family and friends, colleagues, students, and schedules, minutes, notices, and news items culled from a wealth of sources at Tolkien's academic institutions flesh out the details of his life known from previously published sources. Scull and Hammond allow readers to trace the genesis of Tolkien's key writings, and

remind readers that Tolkien had to carve time out of a very busy professional and family life for his creative endeavors. The *Chronology* begins with an account of Tolkien's life as a schoolboy at King Edward's School (including his involvement with the Debating Society and his rugby matches). It goes on to recount his courtship of Edith, the foundation of the TCBS and the tragedy of his and his friends' service in World War I, and then charts the rise of both his academic career and his literary career. The record of the lectures he gave at Leeds and Oxford as well as his work with students, committees, and other university groups is especially revealing, for it shows the extent to which Tolkien was a productive member of the academic community despite his relatively small number of published scholarly works. "Warnie" Lewis's diaries and statements by other Inklings paint a vivid picture of Tolkien's relationship with C.S. Lewis and the members of that important group. The Allen & Unwin letters reveal the often-laborious process through which Tolkien had to channel his imaginative energy into the making of his published works such as *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and his other shorter works. Scull and Hammond use Christopher Tolkien's research to give us a history of the texts that comprise *The History of Middle-earth* series. Tolkien's ambivalence over his literary fame and his struggles with the "deplorable cultus" of his fans in his last years comes out in this history as well. The *Chronology* volume contains family trees for the Tolkien and Suffield families, a bibliography of works by Tolkien published during his life and posthumously, published art by Tolkien, his poetry, translations of his works, and concludes with a list of the published and unpublished works Scull and Hammond consulted in their research and an index for both volumes (those also appear at the end of the *Reader's Guide*).

The encyclopedic *Reader's Guide* is a "What's What," "Where's Where," and "Who's Who" of Tolkien. Unlike Michael Drout's *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia*, published shortly before Scull and Hammond's guide, which has articles on the scholarly reception of Tolkien and covers "Middle-earth studies" (i.e., study of the workings of Tolkien's invented universe) as well as Tolkien himself, this volume concentrates heavily upon the details Tolkien's own world. Yet the many thematic entries on topics such as "Mortality and immortality" or "Possessiveness" and abstractions such as "Light" or "Nature" delve into the fundamental principles of Tolkien's legendarium as it evolved over the years. In all there are close to 500 entries in the volume; asterisks before words indicate that there is a separate entry for that name or term and "see" cross-references allow the reader to locate articles with relative ease. The index is not the best substitute for the missing table of contents, but navigation within the text is not too cumbersome (though it is somewhat hard to distinguish main entries from subdivision headings within entries when thumbing through the book). The sections on Tolkien's individual texts give a thorough history of the piece as well

as a discussion of its place in the larger mythology he developed. The biographical entries on people, places, and things associated with Tolkien are well documented and complement the *Chronology*. In interpretive matters Scull and Hammond tend to stick to known facts or well-established readings based on Tolkien's letters and statements; when they go beyond Tolkien or Christopher Tolkien, they often cite criticism by well-known Tolkien scholars such as Tom Shippey, Verlyn Flieger, and others. They are balanced in their presentation of arguments and are always informative as well as entertaining in their discussions. The *Reader's Guide* will be an authoritative guide to facts, concepts, minutiae, and all things Tolkien.

The *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide* is truly a monumental achievement in Tolkien scholarship. Its publication has been long awaited by the Tolkien community, and end product is a work that will appeal to both scholars and fans alike. Readers can only hope that Scull and Hammond will continue to produce even more such authoritative guides and studies in the future to add to their already impressive body of work.

—David D. Oberhelman

THE LORD OF THE RINGS AND PHILOSOPHY: ONE BOOK TO RULE THEM ALL. Edited by Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson. Chicago: Open Court, 2003. 240pp. \$17.95. ISBN 0-8126-9545-3.

This recent volume in Open Court's *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series consists of sixteen essays that present a variety of philosophical approaches to Tolkien's major work. While one might understandably get the impression that the volume addresses Peter Jackson's films as well (Ian McKellan as Gandalf graces the cover), the authors are careful to acknowledge and correct Jackson's liberties with Tolkien's text. Throughout these essays, the writers employ footnotes and other explanatory measures to point out for those readers who know *Lord of the Rings* only through the films how and where Jackson has made significant deviations from Tolkien's work.

The essays generally take two approaches to examining Tolkien's work in philosophical terms: they examine philosophical ideas within the story itself, or examine to what extent Tolkien's work reflects the philosophical spirit of his age. The former group examines a variety of topics, with an emphasis on questions of ethics and morals, and the positions of Aristotle, Plato, and Nietzsche on these issues. The latter group of essays comprises a debate about the extent to which Tolkien may be considered a modernist writer, and they focus on Tolkien's debt to existentialism and (to a much lesser extent) the religious tides of the early twentieth century.

The essays are grouped into five clusters: "The Ring," "The Quest for Happiness," "Good and Evil in Middle-earth," "Time and Mortality," and "Ends and Endings." The editors have chosen essays that focus on a variety of aspects of Tolkien's works, so by reading the collection, one gets a sense of the breadth of philosophical thought in *The Lord of the Rings*. The editors avoid the pitfall of several other volumes in the series, namely, choosing essays that all refer to the same episode or passage over and over. Nonetheless, certain characters, episodes, and themes are discussed with some regularity: Samwise Gamgee's devotion to Frodo and their mutual friendship; the loyalty of Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas; and the unique nature of Tom Bombadil, who receives quite a bit of attention.

One surprising aspect of these essays is the extent to which they neglect Tolkien's religious background and the importance of the various philosophical movements within early twentieth-century Catholicism, especially the Thomistic movement. Overall, however, the collection provides a number of insightful observations about Tolkien's work and his place as a twentieth-century writer, and the best of the essays leave the reader with a greater understanding of both *The Lord of the Rings* and the philosophical ideas in question. Especially satisfying is Douglas K. Blount's essay about Tolkien and Nietzsche, which illuminates Nietzsche's thought as much as it does *The Lord of the Rings*. And perhaps best of all, those readers who pick up this volume expecting an examination of Jackson's films will find even more reason to turn to Tolkien's books.

—Clark Hutton

