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Tolkien And Philosophy, edited by Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi

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TOLKIEN AND PHILOSOPHY. Ed. Roberto Arduini and Claudio A. Testi. Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2014. Cormarë Series no. 32. 159 pp. ISBN 978-3-905703-32-0.⁶

IN THEIR INTRODUCTION, THE EDITORS REVEAL that this book is basically the proceedings of a 2010 conference held in Modena, Italy, which was specifically organized around the theme of Tolkien and philosophy. They explain the need for this by examining a list of sixty-two scholarly articles published on (or at least tangentially relating to) this theme as of that date, which points up the need for more focused attention to this subject. They conveniently reproduce the results of their research in eight pages of citations.

The leadoff article is a transcription of a dialog between Franco Manni and Tom Shippey, titled “Tolkien between Philosophy and Philology” and consisting of sections indicating the various subjects of their conversation: “philosophy” and philosophers in Tolkien’s works; the possible influence of philosophical ideas on Tolkien’s works; philology and philosophy; Tolkien’s personality; and providence in *The Lord of the Rings*. Manni’s contributions seem to be primarily in the form of questions or challenges to Shippey, and Shippey’s to be responses to those questions and challenges. Manni, trained in both philosophy and theology, demonstrates an admirably comprehensive scope of knowledge about these fields and about Tolkien’s works, and Shippey brings his usual brilliant expertise to the discussion, as well as his intimate knowledge of Tolkien’s milieu at Oxford.

Verlyn Flieger’s presentation, “Tolkien and the Philosophy of Language,” starts with examining Tolkien’s assertions about the relationship between language and mythology, and sets those ideas into their historical context. She shows how these concepts fed into Tolkien’s creation of Middle-earth, and how Tolkien’s development of Elvish speech led him to become a philosopher of language. She gives several philological examples from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* to bolster her arguments.

Another dialogue at this symposium took place between Andrea Monda and someone with the pseudonym Wu Ming 4, and is printed here as “Tolkien the Catholic Philosopher?” Monda, a teacher of the Catholic religion in Rome, is certain Tolkien was Catholic but not as certain of his status as a philosopher, despite his writings on mythopoeia and sub-creation. Wu Ming 4, a member of the Wu Ming writer’s collective, largely agrees, focusing on Tolkien

⁶ This book, despite the similarity in its title, is not part of Open Court Publishing’s “Popular Culture and Philosophy” series, which does include *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*, but not a book about Tolkien in general.

as a Catholic storyteller rather than a Catholic philosopher. The interaction between these two panelists ranges widely, touching on such as Flannery O'Connor, *Doctor Zhivago*, Gilgamesh, Borges, and Marxism. Both participants are impressively well-versed in Tolkien's works as well as other literature, and they bring all these influences to bear on their conversation.

Christopher Garbowski writes on "Tolkien's Philosophy and Theology of Death," and in the process examines Tolkien's life, his essays and letters, and his fiction, in order to shed light on what his philosophy of *life* might have been, which would have bearing on his philosophy of *death*.

The final piece in this volume is not a conference program item, but was commissioned by the editors to present some documents connected to Tolkien's own early studies in the field. Giampaolo Canzonieri does so in "Tolkien at King Edward's School," providing transcripts of a curriculum description and of an evaluation by an Oxford examination board which mentions both Tolkien and his fellow TCBS member Rob Gilson. Canzonieri also gives a brief summary of Tolkien's time at King Edward's.

On the whole, this volume presents a diverse array of views on Tolkien and on various aspects of philosophy, from a variety of European and Anglo participants. The editors of this book, as well as the organizers of the conference, are to be congratulated on this effort, and Walking Tree has done Tolkien scholarship a service in publishing these proceedings.

—David Emerson



INFORMING THE INKLINGS: GEORGE MACDONALD AND THE VICTORIAN ROOTS OF MODERN FANTASY. Michael Partridge and Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, editors. Hamden: Winged Lion Press, 2018. 261 p. 9781935688204. approx.. \$25.00.

INFORMING THE INKLINGS: GEORGE MACDONALD And the Victorian Roots of Modern Fantasy presents 12 essays that explore George MacDonald's writing and influence on writers of fantasy after him. In the preface by Stephen Prickett, who helped co-select the essays, he indicates the goal that "these essays [will] assist in a wider appreciation of both MacDonald and his Oxford successors" (3). Those successors appear to be primarily C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, though there certainly must be more, with a less obvious Oxford successor as Susanna Clarke and her book *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* included at the end.