Tolkien and Tolkien's "Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary Together with Sellic Spell" (Book Review)

Robert Burgess
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

The Christian Librarian is the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL). To learn more about ACL and its products and services please visit http://www.acl.org/

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol58/iss1/14

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Christian Librarian by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.
Moynagh progressively builds his case, and then ties the progression together by repeating three questions and two concepts. The three questions (Who are you? What do you know? Who do you know?) allow readers to see how they can apply the book. The two concepts are actively living in the Spirit’s direction with non-Christians, and connecting the “traditional” church. This tension of following the Spirit and church tradition is repeated but is not addressed.

Moynagh writes from Britain, so the book has a UK tilt to its illustrations and mindset, and is from a High Church viewpoint. Moynagh presents a large number of stories to illustrate his points, many if not most of which are from Anglican or Methodist churches. The book’s major fault is undercutting its own teaching in two key ways. First, Moynagh lists data from a survey stating that the type of church he is promoting is 15% of the churches in 2 denominations in Britain, but only 10% of the attendance, so it seems to not be as successful gaining and keeping people. Second, he moves from a postmodern mindset in ten chapters where he illustrates but does not prescribe, to a modern approach in the appendix for how to evaluate qualitatively and quantitatively a church or ministry created using those illustrations. This book seems to work against itself, although the appendix is excellent for ways to assess missional ministries.


Reviewed by Robert Burgess, Digital Resources Librarian, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX

When people hear the name J.R.R. Tolkien, they immediately think about his classic fantasy works The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. However, many people often forget that he served as an Anglo-Saxon and English language professor at the University of Oxford for over thirty years. His professional career was spent in the study of linguistics and English literature. In addition to the study of Old English, Tolkien also translated the Book of Jonah for the Jerusalem Bible, created around a dozen languages for his Middle Earth stories, and translated a definitive edition of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. He spent several years translating his own version of the epic poem, Beowulf; however, he never published it during his lifetime.

This book was edited by Christopher Tolkien, who has disseminated several of his father’s unpublished manuscripts. Christopher combines his father’s Beowulf translation, notes, and lectures so readers can learn J.R.R.’s textual criticisms along
with his thoughts on the classic poem. Substantial historical context is also included in the commentary. Along with Tolkien’s translation, fans of his work will enjoy *Selling Spell*, his retelling of Beowulf, and his illustrations of the dragon and Grendal’s lair.

This new Beowulf translation brings a fresh look to a classic tale. This will be a welcome addition to the library of Old English language scholars. A book like this could serve as textbook for an Old English literature or linguistic college class. This book is very technical; however, parts of it will appeal to admirers of Tolkien’s work.

---

**Brief Christian Histories: Getting a Sense for Our Long Story,**
ISBN 9781556352430

Reviewed by Gary G. Merriman, Head Librarian, Life Pacific College, San Dimas, CA

*Brief Christian Histories* is an introductory level history, which traces four major themes through biblical and ecclesiastical history: the People of God, Christian Ethics, Practices and Piety, and Christ and Culture Interacting (p. 3). James W. White is the former pastor of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Colorado Springs and author of *Christianity 101: Tracing Basic Beliefs* and *Intergenerational Religious Education: Models, Theory, and Prescription for Interage Life and Learning in the Faith Community*. As can be observed by the titles, the author writes with church instruction in mind and *Brief Christian Histories* is no exception. While the book may be useful as a resource for college students, seminarians, and resource librarians, it will be most helpful for “learners about Christianity generally and Christian laypeople in particular” (p. 4).

This book is novel in its thematic approach and provides the ability to maintain focus when trying to place events from different locations and times into a coherent picture, which can be a problem when reading more exhaustive histories. The conversational language makes for an easy read, and the repetition of walking through the same eras of time (the author lists nine eras) while focusing on different themes helps the reader get a “sense of the whole Christian story” (p. 5). Another bright spot of the book is its intentional effort to identify noteworthy women in the history of Christianity such as St. Paula and St. Catherine (p. 22). The bibliography is useful, but far from exhaustive.