

Coming out soon

Tolkien: Mythology, Imagination and Spiritual Insight; The Enduring Power of The Lord of the Rings

Why another book on Tolkien and on *The Lord of the Rings*? What could be said that hasn't been said a few times before about the author and his trilogy? Because I agree with Viggo Mortensen, who played the role of Aragorn in the latest production of *The Lord of the Rings* by Peter Jackson. When asked why Tolkien's trilogy is so popular, he replied "Because it is a true story." What he intuited can be shown more fully, by just delving into the power of Tolkien's imagination, and forming a bridge from artistic imagination to spiritual insight.

Artistic masterworks have the capacity to shed light and lift our spirits to a deeper perception of the universal human condition. They can also show us the reality of our present and possible future collective social paradigm and mold imaginations that fire us to work for deeper cultural change. Elsewhere I have looked at an example of the [trilogy of Krzysztof Kieślowski](#) as a powerful artistic work that can simply delight us, while leaving us with many more questions and layers to explore on second and third viewings.

Tolkien seems to gather in himself a bundle of contradictions. Though a Christian he is loved by many who have a New Age or pagan worldview, not to mention people with more secular affiliations. A traditionalist, even medievalist, yet he is the author of the myths that most grip the modern mind because of the relevance, even urgency of their themes. *The Lord of the Rings* could not have been written at another point in history; it could not better fit the cultural mood of the "end of history" as we perceive it all around us. Tolkien's is not only one of the most read body of legends in modern times; people who read him do not tire of reading him over and again. Nevertheless, reading Tolkien challenges us to enter what he called a secondary reality, a sub-created world with laws of its own. We readers must leave this comfortable reality of our senses to enter a new challenging reality; but in another sense, we escape to better be able to return.

What many don't know is that Tolkien was as much a scientist in his scholarly pursuits in philology, as he was a well-known artist. And this, I would argue, as others have, is one of the major strengths of his work. Science—as applied to his understanding of language, myth, and culture—is allied to art to create something that is larger than both. And Tolkien was as much of a

visionary as he was an "experimenter." In other words, what he communicated was very often what he perceived in his mind's eye. It may sound perplexing to hear from him that he mostly did not invent, and that such was his best work. What did he mean by that?

Why has Tolkien's work endured to such an extent that even today, much to the chagrin of the critics of his "escapist" literature, he comes at the top of the list of the most-read works of English literature? Why have *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* movies become such box-office hits? Partly because Tolkien's work has the power of the mythology of old, and as such has many layers of meaning.

One can read Tolkien on many levels; on the surface we can delight in the characters, the magic, the otherworldliness, the beauty of landscapes, the accompanying challenges, action, triumphs against all odds, and so forth. A second and third reading will show that there is unsuspected depth, a clever intricacy in the interlacing of events in chapters and books; there are amazing symmetries and connections; there are encompassing views of the ages of Middle-earth, and so forth. So, how could Tolkien achieve all of this?

The book simply looks at the central images of the trilogy and at the hidden architecture of the book to let it speak more fully for itself. Once that is done it is relatively easy to point out how Tolkien's literary imaginations correspond to inner and outer realities known to spiritual traditions of the past and the present. This work will form a bridge to these through Jungian interpretation and Steiner's spiritual science.

Looking back at the success of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien commented that "it was written slowly and with great care for detail, and finally emerged as a Frameless Picture: a searchlight, as it were, on a brief period in History, and on a small part of our Middle-Earth, surrounded by the glimmer of limitless extensions in time and space. Very well; that may explain to some extent why it 'feels' like history; why it was accepted for publication; and why it has proved readable for a large number of very different kinds of people." Further reflecting "on the wholly unexpected things that have followed its publication," he adds with what seems to have been a touch of surprise: "I feel as if an ever-darkening sky over our present world had been suddenly pierced, the clouds rolled back, and an almost forgotten sunlight had poured down again. As if indeed the horns of Hope had been heard again, as Pippin heard them suddenly at the absolute *nadir* of the fortunes of the West. But *How?* And *Why?*"

The Lord of the Rings as a timely inspiration offered to humanity through an ideal, though certainly imperfect, instrument— as J. R. R. Tolkien himself asserted—summarizes everything I present in the book. I am calling the book “Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings: Mythology, Imagination and Spiritual Insight*” because I want to add to what we know of Tolkien something that appears only tangentially here and there in his letters, in various essays, or through Tolkien’s fictional characters. Tolkien could talk to the spirit of the time only in the way that spirit talks to spirit; an author needs a deep spiritual perception to lead people to a cultural/spiritual accomplishment of the size of *The Lord of the Rings*. And he needs to have a dimension of personal spiritual experience in order to put it onto paper in a convincing way. The coming book’s main intent is to shed light on the sources of Tolkien’s spiritual perceptions, and the discipline with which he pursued them. It is the spiritual dimension of Tolkien’s being and work that makes the trilogy a universal legacy and an enduring success.