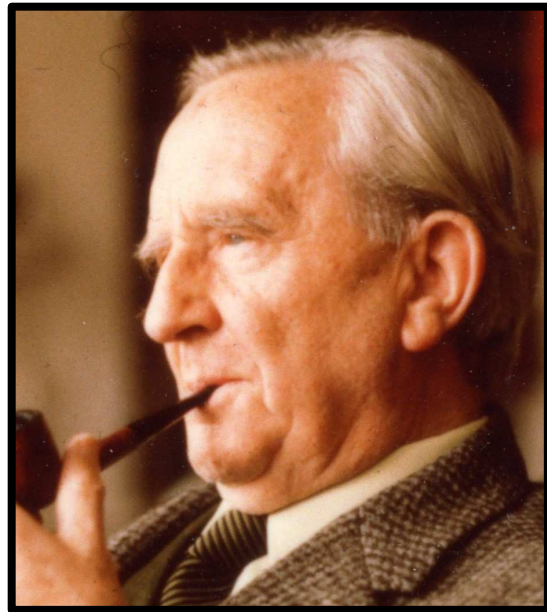
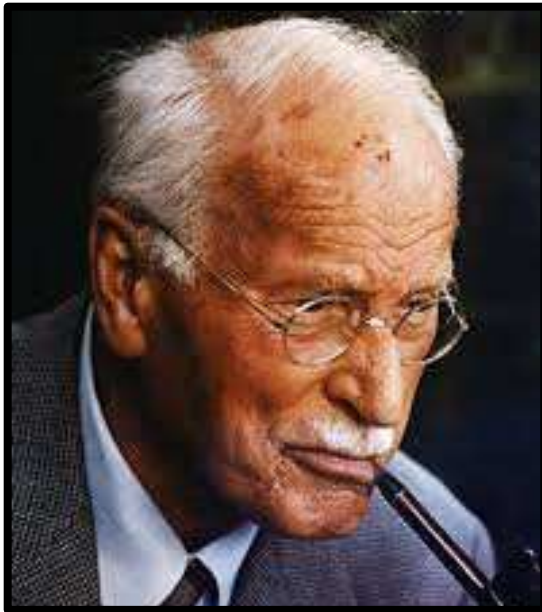


J. R. R. Tolkien and C. G. Jung: Fantasy, Vision, and Reality

Seminar presented by Lance S. Owens, MD.

*Seminar presented in the AEL Lecture Series
Alta Club, Salt Lake City, Utah
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Audio lecture available online – [Click here to listen](#)



Seminar Abstract:

Beginning in the years around the First World War, both J. R. R. Tolkien and C. G. Jung were summoned by their own unique natures and inclinations to take an exceedingly difficult journey of exploration. Both experienced it as a journey of discovery into unknown realms. But it was not a journey taken in terms of time or space. It was passage across the quotidian borders of physical reality into the timeless realm of imagination.

Jung and Tolkien each ventured into a world revealed by vision – or imagination, or fantasy (and each man employed all these words to describe what had happened to them). “There” – however one defines the visionary “there” – they met a reality, an independent, autonomous, objective fact. And it had a story to tell. They both felt they had discovered something precious, vital, something of signal importance: they had heard a story that they needed share with the people of their time.

Each man kept private accounts of his experiences – records of what he had seen and heard in his interactions with the imaginal realm. They both labored for decades with the meticulously crafted primary manuscript accounts of their experiences. And strangely enough, both men ending up calling the records they brought back from their explorations of imagination, their Red Book. During life, neither man finished or published his full record.

Jung and Tolkien recognized that their experiences were far from ordinary. What had happened to them was so strange, so rare, so non-ordinary that they struggled throughout their lives trying to find a way of explaining it. What words could one use to explain the reality of an imaginal world opened to vision?

They toiled trying to find a way of revealing, or at least interpreting, their experiences and observations to others. They both searched the annals of history for accounts of similar events – paradigms for their experience. By the end of life, neither man felt he had succeeded in his hermeneutic efforts.

Nonetheless, both Tolkien and Jung affirmed in unequivocal statements that what they had discovered was a living fact: a substrata of consciousness, or an inherent and natural function of consciousness, a province of experience intimately involved in life and the story we call human history. It was, they both declared, the spring of a creative power that moved human history. How does one understand such experiences, such lives? How will we interpret them?

The introductory lecture presented in this two-day seminar is available online in mp3 audio format. [Click here to listen to the lecture.](#)

In this first lecture, I begin by discussing the clinical implications of this subject for psychologist and analysts. The lecture then proceeds with an opening evaluation of the experience of Jung and Tolkien.