

Jung, Tolkien and the Hermeneutics of Vision

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Abstract

Beginning in the years around the First World War, two extraordinary men were called to take an exceedingly difficult journey of exploration. It was a voyage of discovery, a passage into the world of imagination. For the rest of their lives both men – J. R. R. Tolkien and C. G. Jung – affirmed that their mythopoetic fantasies had led them to something intrinsically real. The figures they encountered in vision spoke with autonomous voices, and the tales they told were entwined with history and human destiny at the perilous threshold of a new age.

Jung and Tolkien each struggled in solitude with the hermeneutic challenge of recording their experiences. How does one recount in word and image the tale of a venture into vision? And how does one then interpret this record of an imaginal fact?

In this presentation, Dr. Owens examines the private accounts that both Jung and Tolkien scribed about their imaginative experiences – personal writings that remained mostly hidden for several decades after their deaths. What did they "think" they were doing? How did they understand "vision"? What was their "hermeneutics of vision?" And what interpretive approach will we now take to the strange tales of wayfarers who wander in the imaginal world?

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