



Tolkien and the Modernists: Literary Responses to the Dark New Days of the 20th Century

Theresa Freda Nicolay

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The Lord of the Rings rarely makes an appearance in college courses that aim to examine modern British and American literature. Only in recent years have the fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien and his friend, C.S. Lewis, made their way into college syllabi alongside T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* or F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. This volume aims to situate Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* within the literary period whose sensibility grew out of the 19th-century rise of secularism and industrialism, which culminated in the cataclysm of world war. During a pivotal moment in the history of Western culture, both Tolkien and his contemporaries--the literary modernists--engaged with the past in order to make sense of the present world, especially in the wake of World War I. While Tolkien and the modernists share many of the same concerns, their responses to the crisis of modernity are often antithetical. While the work of the modernists emphasizes alienation and despair, Tolkien's work underscores the value of fellowship and hope.

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