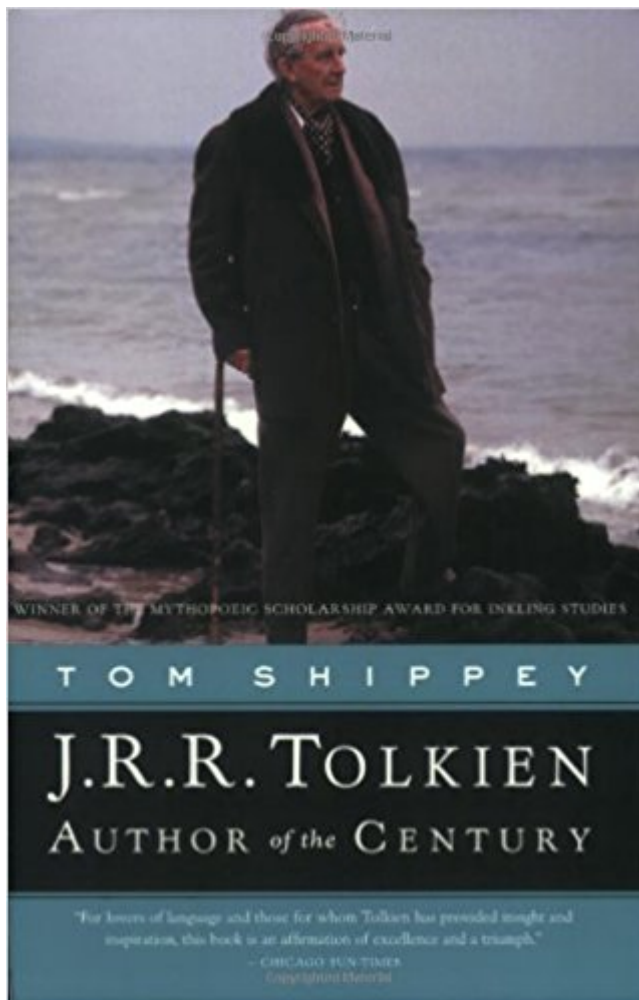


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# J.R.R. Tolkien: Author Of The Century



## Synopsis

Recent polls have consistently declared that J.R.R. Tolkien is "the most influential author of the century," and *The Lord of the Rings* is "the book of the century." In support of these claims, the prominent medievalist and scholar of fantasy Professor Tom Shippey now presents us with a fascinating companion to the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, focusing in particular on *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*. The core of the book examines *The Lord of the Rings* as a linguistic and cultural map and as a response to the meaning of myth. It presents a unique argument to explain the nature of evil and also gives the reader a compelling insight into the unparalleled level of skill necessary to construct such a rich and complex story. Shippey also examines *The Hobbit*, explaining the hobbits' anachronistic relationship to the heroic world of Middle-earth, and shows the fundamental importance of *The Silmarillion* to the canon of Tolkien's work. He offers as well an illuminating look at other, lesser-known works in their connection to Tolkien's life.

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## Customer Reviews

In a wonderfully readable study aimed at not just the Tolkien fan but any literate person curious about this fantasy author's extraordinary popularity, British scholar Shippey (*The Road to Middle-earth*) makes an impressive, low-key case for why the creator of Middle-earth is deserving of acclaim. (Recent polls in Britain have consistently put *The Lord of the Rings* at the top of greatest books of the century lists.) Having taught the same Old English syllabus at Oxford that his subject once did, Shippey is especially well qualified to discuss Tolkien's Anglo-Saxon sources, notably

Beowulf, for the elvish languages and names used in the fiction. The author's theory on the origin of the word hobbit, for example, is as learned as it is free of academic jargon. Even his analyses of the abstruse Silmarillion, Tolkien's equivalent of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, avoid getting too technical. In addition, Shippey shows that Tolkien as a storyteller often improved on his ancient sources, while *The Lord of the Rings* is unmistakably a work of its time. (The Shire chapters, like Orwell's 1984, evoke the bleakness of late-'40s Britain.) In treating such topics as the nature of evil, religion, allegory, style and genre, the author nimbly answers the objections of Tolkien's more rabid critics. By the end, he has convincingly demonstrated why the much imitated Tolkien remains inimitable and continues to appeal. (May 16) Forecast: With the long-awaited part one of the *Lord of the Rings*, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, due for movie release later this year, this, like all Tolkien-related titles, will benefit from hobbit fever. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Shippey, an expert on Old English literature and the author of *The Road to Middle Earth*, has written a critical appreciation of the popular creator of *The Hobbit* and "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy. The subtitle refers to Tolkien's ability to write about concerns of the 20th century (evil, religion, etc.) in stories that at first glance seem to be mere fantasy. Shippey examines Tolkien's published and many unfinished works (such as *The Silmarillion*), as well as the shorter poems and stories. He convincingly argues that Tolkien deserves to be ranked as a major literary figure. Shippey also castigates those critics, the so-called literati, for their vituperative and ill-informed attacks on Tolkien's reputation and achievements. This study is definitely not an introduction to the "Rings" books; because of the detailed readings on the major and minor works, it should be read by those who have already enjoyed the titles surveyed. Recommended for all public libraries, especially in the wake of the upcoming film version of "The Lord of the Rings"

A very interesting work, spoiled by shoddy editing. Given that so much of the Shippey's premise hinges on specific, minute detail relating to English as a language in context with other languages, like Old Norse, the very poor proofreading interferes quite annoyingly. For example, in citing the Old Norse Eddic sagas, the word "Eddic" is repeatedly misspelled as "Eddie;" another example is the word "orc," which is too often misspelled as "ore." This is really distracting in a philological discussion of consonant shifts, and language as it evolves; especially in conversations about "dwarves" and their mythological connection to "mining" and "ore," at the same we're hearing about subterranean "orcs" in translations from Old Norse. Pretty funny, actually, but I'm certain that Tolkien, while he may have smiled, would have made a significant fuss about it to the

publisher. Given the cost of the electronic version, I returned the book. Publishers who can't invest the minimal time to diligently proofread their publications don't merit the financial support of dedicated Tolkien readers. I'm sure, given Tolkien's own decades-long struggle to get his works published without misprints, he wouldn't be put out to find I share his distaste for shoddy editions of his writings.

I was prompted to read his book after watching the appendices from the five-disc sets to the three Hobbit movies and the five-disc sets to the three Lord Of The Rings movies. Tom Shippey was interviewed extensively in all, and he provided quite a bit of scholarly background that enhanced the viewing of all six movies. The book did not disappoint. He writes as well as he speaks, and his perspective as a scholar is invaluable in gaining further insight into the world created by Tolkien. Next steps? Why, read all four books again, and then watch the appendices to hear Shippey's contribution to them. I can't wait. But the book is about more than these classics, and he writes thoughtfully about all of Tolkien's works. This book is well worth reading, and re-reading.

Those of us who are hopeless Tolkienites have an insatiable curiosity about--and appetite for--the inner workings of Middle-earth, along with the man that brought that wonderful world to life. J.R.R. Tolkien was a fascinating man, and Oxford scholar Tom Shippey has forgotten more about this author than most of us will ever learn; to prove it, Shippey presents his analysis of Tolkien's work in his very readable book, J.R.R. TOLKIEN: AUTHOR OF THE CENTURY. I was astounded to learn, via Shippey's patient presentation, that so many of the names of characters and places that appear in Middle-earth are derived from ancient Norse mythology, poetry, and literature. That Tolkien was hugely inspired by Beowulf is a given; that The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings borrow extensively and richly from this centuries' old tale is not. Shippey also describes how Tolkien, as a devout philologist, was obsessed with words--with their infinite variations, and how the author utilized this knowledge not only to create names and places in his writing, but also create extensive, intricate languages. Regarding Tolkien's masterpiece, The Lord of the Rings, Shippey allows the reader to draw his/her own conclusions as to whether or not the novel is an allegory. Tolkien himself vigorously denied his fantasy tale was allegorical; in light of the fact LOTR is a classic tale of good vs. evil. . . a story that is a ringing indictment of modernization, industrialization, and technological destruction. . . it's almost comical how Tolkien went out of his way to deny the obvious. Shippey compares the novel to other allegories, and readily admits some of Tolkien's later short stories were indeed allegorical; thus the allegory card is played, albeit in a limited, less than satisfying

way. Shippey provides a detailed analysis not only of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* but of Tolkien's other works, including his poems and short stories, his essays, and his voluminous subject matter published posthumously (*The Silmarillion* and *The Lost Tales*, etc.). And "detailed" is the right word, as Shippey examines and magnifies information almost to exhaustion. That the scholar sees mountains where other readers see mole hills is readily apparent via the pages of this book. *J.R.R. TOLKIEN: AUTHOR OF THE CENTURY* is a compelling, recommended read for those wanting to know more about the man who brought us Middle-earth. One of Shippey's observations is right on the money: The fact that England itself didn't have its own mythology turned out to be most fortunate; Tolkien went about creating one.--D. Mikels, Author, *THE RECKONING*

This is an excellent book for anyone who wants an in-depth view of Tolkien. Most people today aren't philologists, so a lot of the depth of Tolkien's work is lost to the average reader. Shippey does an awesome job taking a microscope to the text and showing the incredible intricacy of *The Silmarillion*, *Hobbit*, and *LotR*. He shows the reader which ancient works Tolkien used for his own subcreation, as well as the way that those 'real' worlds and words affected his. It's definitely a great book for anyone who's interested in learning more about Tolkien and how his work is an extension of his philology. It shows how masterful Tolkien was, and how sophisticated his work is. Shippey is an amazing philologist in his own right, and the analysis in this book shows his academic caliber.

If you want to learn about Tolkien as a author and the basics of his life it is a good book to add to a collection. However, be aware, Shippey like Tolkien was a philologist, someone who studies languages, and the book is orientated in line with that fact. If you're not interested in that kind of thing it could make reading it rather tedious. Otherwise I'm quite glad I added it to my own scholarship on Tolkien.

You know a great commentary when it makes you fall more in love with a work than you already were. Shippey is a first rate writer and his eye for what is most meaningful and worthy of deeper thought is exceptional. I finished the book and then started over again. The chapter on evil alone is worth the price of the book.

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