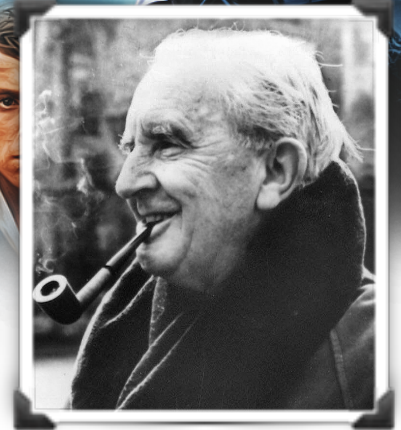


Modern Mythology and the hero's journey

by Joseph Campbell

J.R.R. Tolkien and power



J.R.R. Tolkien

The Lord of The Rings and the notion of power as Tolkien used to see it.

A 1997 readers' poll conducted by Britain's Channel 4 and the Waterstone's bookstore chain voted J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings the "greatest book of the century." A 1999 poll of Amazon.com customers went even further, choosing it as the "greatest book of the millenium." And now, Peter Jackson's dramatization of The Fellowship of the Ring confirms itself a widely announced blockbuster. Some consider The Lord of Rings a childish fable, but millions of people all over the world have found it an enjoyable and inspiring read.

Hardcore environmentalists have tried to enlist Mr. Tolkien among them, focusing on Tolkien's candid love for nature, for example. His point wasn't to bash industry or capitalism; it was to illustrate that evil is expansionist and projects itself even on the landscape. Hence bad environmental aesthetics are a reflection of bad rulers, which is to say, the use of power.

And here we have the correct understanding of the theme of the novel: it is about the evils of power. More precisely, the book aligns itself against power; not "economic power" or "social power", but specifically political power. This is also the central theme of the classical liberal political tradition.

This is an allegory for what actually happens in our world every day: rulers, even well intentioned and idealistic ones,

are ruled themselves at the same time. They are ruled by consensus and by the spasmodic hunger to acquire yet more power than they already have. This is why the state has never been limited, as the classical liberal thinkers had hoped it would be - because the people in charge of keeping the power of the state limited never do so. Politicians and rulers generally, always want to become more important and more respected - more powerful, in short.

In Tolkien's vision, the power is always evil - a good power cannot even exist. Since the very beginning, the good guys own the Ring. Since it is the most powerful weapon in the world, many of them ask why it can't be used against Sauron, the Dark Lord. Even though the Ring was forged by him and undoubtedly it is evil, yet it could help to pursue a good end, they suspect. This is an extraordinary way to ask the question: could the means be subordinated to the ends? Can a good end be pursued by evil means? Tolkien answers that no, evil means can only bring to an evil end - no matter if the original intentions are good.

Alberto Mingardi, Mises institute, February 21, 2002

« We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well. It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. Its strength is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise. For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so. I fear to take the Ring to hide it. I will not take the Ring to wield it ».

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord Of The Rings

1. Introduce the documents
2. Who is J.R.R. Tolkien?
3. Why is « The Lord of the Rings » a special book?
 - What reward did it get?
4. What are Tolkien's favorite themes he developed in his books?
 - Which one is the central theme?
5. Explain Tolkien's vision of Power.
 - What is an allegory?
 - Why is it important in a myth such as this one?
 - Do you agree with his vision?

Answer the online quiz

myenglishclass.net/classes/terminales



available on
MyEnglishClass.net