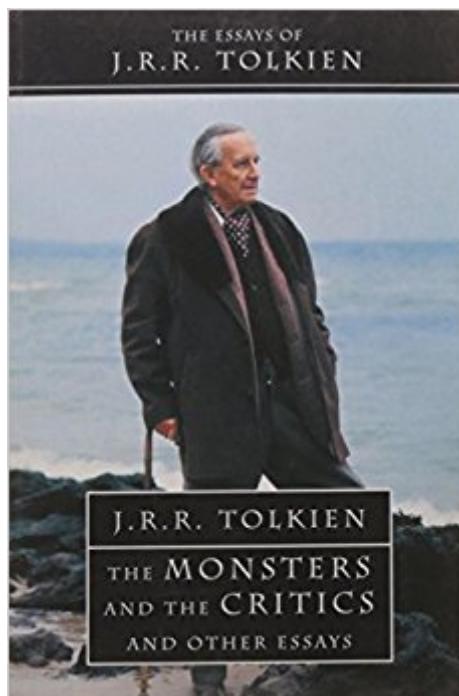


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The Monsters And The Critics: And Other Essays. J.R.R. Tolkien



Synopsis

Complete collection of Tolkien's essays, including two on Beowulf, which span three decades beginning six years before The Hobbit to five years after The Lord of the Rings. The seven 'essays' by J.R.R. Tolkien assembled in this new paperback edition were with one exception delivered as general lectures on particular occasions; and while they mostly arose out of Tolkien's work in medieval literature, they are accessible to all. Two of them are concerned with Beowulf, including the well-known lecture whose title is taken for this book, and one with Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, given in the University of Glasgow in 1953. Also included in this volume is the lecture English and Welsh; the Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford in 1959; and a paper on Invented Languages delivered in 1931, with exemplification from poems in the Elvish tongues. Most famous of all is On Fairy-Stories, a discussion of the nature of fairy-tales and fantasy, which gives insight into Tolkien's approach to the whole genre. The pieces in this collection cover a period of nearly thirty years, beginning six years before the publication of The Hobbit, with a unique 'academic' lecture on his invention (calling it A Secret Vice) and concluding with his farewell to professorship, five years after the publication of The Lord of the Rings.

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Customer Reviews

J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973) was a distinguished academic, though he is best known for writing The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion, plus other stories and essays. His books have been translated into over 30 languages and have sold many millions of copies worldwide.

I recently bought and read Tolkien's translation of Beowulf, and found Tolkien's notes to the text wonderfully illuminating. When I saw this volume on offer, I really wanted to see what more he had to say... and was not in the least disappointed. The lectures/essays presented in this volume are centered on medieval literature (Beowulf, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight), but in one case deals with "invented" languages and in another with fairy stories. I'm not a specialist on any of these topics, but I found the essays approachable, informative -- and thoroughly enjoyable.

This book has the essay that is the reason why we still read Beowulf, namely, Beowulf: The Monsters and Critics. That Old English poem was largely ignored by anyone other than specialists in the language until Tolkien explained to the world the wonders to be found therein. We who work with classic literature know this, but here's a chance for the fan who knows this author only through The Hobbit or The Lord of the Rings to get to know the man as a scholar and to see the source for much of his famous works. Several other essays in this book give Tolkien's views on fantasy stories, showing his understanding of the genre and the foundation of his creative thinking. Review by the author of A Draft of Moonlight

Interesting writings by Tolkien on non-Middle Earth topics.

Most of this book is spent discussing literature-- Beowulf, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, fairy tales, etc. These are not hard-core philology lectures but rather discussions about the works and why they are important to the human condition. Tolkein's love for these works and topics cannot be understated. He laments that too much emphasis is placed on dissecting rather than appreciating Beowulf, and his discussion of Sir Gawain is again full of love and awe. This is contagious, and one cannot help reading this and want to go back and read the works again. While the fields of philology relating to epic poetry have moved ahead at a lightening pace since Tolkein's time, and hence some of his statements are rather dated, most of the material is still solid and the sense of appreciation lives on. In the words of a Scandinavian poet: Cattle die Kinsmen die The self dies too; I know one that does not die: The glory of the dead man. These works are glorious and every medieval lit fan should read them.

Tolkien's "Monster and the Critics" lecture/essay is easily the professor's most famous piece of scholarship. In it, he argues that readers should appreciate the poem Beowulf as a work of art rather

than simply a historical document. Of particular note he defends the prominent role of monsters and dragons in the poem. Of course, more broadly - and of particular note for Tolkien's own Middle-Earth works - Tolkien justifies appreciating fantasy as a worthy genre of literature. The essay is somewhat academic, but still largely accessible to lay readers. It's interesting food for thought. However, of course, it does require some knowledge of the poem Beowulf as Tolkien follows the poem quite closely (it's not a general argument but rather tied closely to a debate over Beowulf).

I had heard of this book and had hunted for it everywhere. So glad to find it on . I used it for my Brit. Lit class and will be using it in the future to give students a better comprehensive understanding of the connection between "older" British literature, and modern British Lit. As the bible states, "there is nothing new under the sun," and so I want students to figure out for themselves that great British Literature withstands the test of time.

This book is hard to find in the US, and in fact, my copy was sent from the UK. But, it was well worth it. This is a collection of Tolkien's essays and lectures on diverse topics - Beowulf; On Faerie Stories; Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; English and Welsh, and others. None of them are for the casual reader... But if you're really a serious student of Tolkien, his works, and/or philology, they're extremely interesting and thought-provoking. Definitely rewarding for those who are into the "intellectual" background of Tolkien and his writings.

Unless you read Anglo-Saxon and Latin (and a little Greek), you will need several readings (and trips to various reference books) to relish fully the very good fruit in 'The Monsters and the Critics' essay by J.R.R. Tolkien. He has a very convoluted sentence structure and writing style that takes some getting used to. Re-reading rewards the faithful reader.

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