



The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition

Martin Simonson

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When *The Lord of the Rings* was published in the 1950's it did not sit comfortably among any preconceived notions of literary genre. The critical responses reflected the confusion: for some, it was an unwelcome reappearance of narrative standards that modernism was supposed to have done away with, or just a bad novel. Others considered it a refreshing work in the epic and romance traditions. Ironically, much of the critical prejudice regarding the question of genre in *The Lord of the Rings* has been motivated by the same kind of blindness that Tolkien denounced in his famous 1936 lecture *Beowulf: the monsters and the critics*. Like *Beowulf*, Tolkien's work has also failed to be properly appreciated and assessed due to a general refusal to accept the centrality of monsters, because despite its 'monstrous' originality and fantastic setting, it is very clearly, and not only chronologically, at the centre of twentieth-century literature. *The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition* is an attempt to account for the particular genre interaction that governs Tolkien's tale and put it in a meaningful relationship with the contemporary literary context. At the same time, it is a quest to track down one of the most famous and elusive literary monsters of the past century by filling out a long-neglected white space on the map of comparative literature and genre criticism.

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