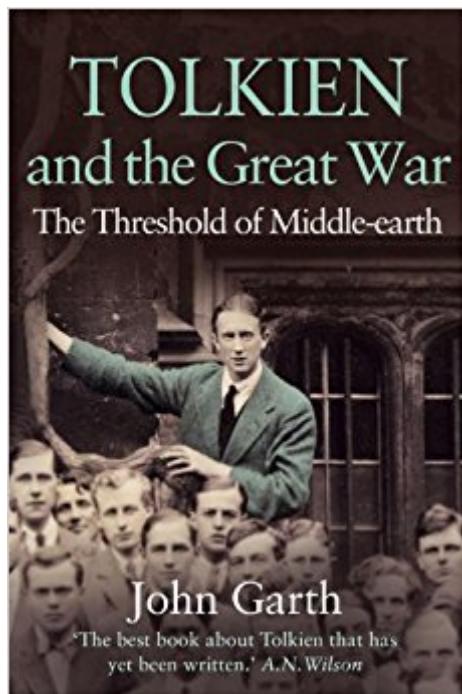


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# Tolkien And The Great War



## Synopsis

A new biography exploring J. R. R. Tolkien's wartime experiences and their impact on his life and his writing of The Lord of The Rings. To be caught in youth by 1914 was no less hideous an experience than in 1939 ... by 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead. So J. R. R. Tolkien responded to critics who saw The Lord of the Rings as a reaction to the Second World War. Tolkien and the Great War tells for the first time the full story of how he embarked on the creation of Middle-earth in his youth as the world around him was plunged into catastrophe. This biography reveals the horror and heroism that he experienced as a signals officer in the Battle of the Somme and introduces the circle of friends who spurred his mythology to life. It shows how, after two of these brilliant young men were killed, Tolkien pursued the dream they had all shared by launching his epic of good and evil. John Garth argues that the foundation of tragic experience in the First World War is the key to Middle-earth's enduring power. Tolkien used his mythic imagination not to escape from reality but to reflect and transform the cataclysm of his generation. While his contemporaries surrendered to disillusionment

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## Customer Reviews

Millions of new captives of the Lord of the Rings saga have been roped into J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy world as the result of Peter Jackson's three-part cinematic interpretation of the great 20th century fantasy. John Garth's Tolkien and the Great War will certainly captivate an elite segment of those recent converts, but it is written more for those who have long been enthralled by Middle-earth and its fantastic denizens. While many early readers found parallels between World

War II and the Lord of the Rings fairy-tale, Garth reaches back to World War I to find the deep roots in Middle-earth. Prior to the Great War, Tolkien was a scholar with a deep passion for language and fables. In fact, he formed a literary circle with a few friends dubbed the Tea Club and Barrovian Society. Its members had the misfortune of coming of age just as the war was reaching a fevered pitch; Tolkien, a second lieutenant in the British army, survived the bloody Battle of the Somme, which took the lives of two of his closest friends. Garth adeptly chronicles how the devastation Tolkien witnessed helped shape the mythic tale that was already brewing in his mind. Written with a seriousness one associates with the time it chronicles, Tolkien and the Great War is a erudite but eminently readable exploration of how the harsh reality of the early 20th century colored one of the beloved fantasies of the modern era. --Steven Stolder --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This dense but informative study addresses the long-standing controversy over how J.R.R. Tolkien's WWI experience influenced his literary creations. A London journalist, Garth is a student of both Tolkien and the Great War. He writes that when war broke out, Tolkien was active in an Oxford literary society known as the Tea Club and Barrovian Society (TCBS), along with three of his closest friends. Finishing his degree before joining up, Tolkien served as a signal officer in the nightmarish Battle of the Somme in 1916, where two of those friends were killed. The ordeal on the Somme led to trench fever, which sent him home for the rest of the war and probably saved his life. It also influenced a body of Northern European-flavored mythology he had been inventing and exploring in both prose and verse before the war, toward its evolution into The Book of Lost Tales and in due course Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion. This book could not pretend to be aimed at other than the serious student of Tolkien, and readers will benefit from a broad knowledge of his work (as well as a more than casual knowledge of WWI). But it also argues persuasively that Tolkien did not create his mythos to escape from or romanticize the war. Rather, the war gave dimensions to a mythos he was already industriously exploring. Garth's fine study should have a major audience among serious students of Tolkien, modern fantasy and the influence of war on literary creation. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

John Garth's "Tolkien and the Great War" is essential reading for any enthusiast of Tolkien (and indispensable for anyone interested in studying Tolkien's life and work). Garth's groundbreaking research forms the basis for an insightful, in-depth, and very well-written analysis of the way that

Tolkien's WWI experiences shaped his writing. This study is not just outstanding as a biography, but also as a literary study, and it is written in a clear and readable style - all of which is a considerable achievement! Garth is an appreciative and attentive reader of Tolkien's writings; the result of reading Tolkien and the Great War is to come away with a deeper and fuller appreciation of Tolkien's work and its depth. Now that it's available in paperback, there's no excuse not to add it to your shelves right away.

There are very few Tolkien books that deserve to be called indispensable: this is one of them. Tolkien is so popular that lots and lots of people want to jump in and have their say. This book is grounded in exquisite research and offers page after page of significant insight. I cannot imagine any serious student of Tolkien managing without it.

If I could say anything to this author, I would say, "Thank you!." I now feel that I am closer to understanding Tolkien by knowing as much as can be learnt from the available information regarding his wartime experiences. It would also be interesting to know more about Tolkien's feelings regarding his medevac and recuperation. Was he simply relieved, or - after he recovered from exhaustion and sickness - did feel guilt toward those who stayed in the combat zone? He didn't attend reunions of his unit. Why? How was he remembered by the surviving officers? I am a wounded combat veteran myself, and I understand - because I share this experience - that it is often haunting, and memories of it are unhappy and unsettling, not something that one welcomes. Things don't go well in combat, and honest memories of it are difficult. All pre-mission planning is optimistic and inadequate, and the consequences are frustrating (weather, the enemy, unforeseen circumstances, and coordination w/ other units). Memories of the myriad of mistakes can only conjure up regrets! The emotions of an officer who has been medevac'ed out of combat are difficult to describe. I share this experience w/ Lieutenant Tolkien, and so I have a unique insight into at least this facet of his personal history and personality. Clearly, the greatest contribution of this work is the impact of the loss of half of the TCBS upon Tolkien - and the fact that these were the other two land-serving WWI officers of the small group, besides Tolkien himself. Tolkien was a member of several well-knit academic/social all-male groups, including the TCBS and much later the Inklings. When he entered such groupings after WWI, he did so after this poignant TCBS experience. That had to have affected his Inklings, and other friend-group, experiences. After the dissolution of the TCBS, he may have felt that he carried w/ him an obligation to literarily produce not for one only, but for the absent two TCBS members as well. And it may have also made him more reserved and

hesitant in his friendships.

I have been a Tolkien fan for years and teach a course on the Professor. This book gave me insight into an often overlooked - but very important, very formative period in the life of Tolkien. In my opinion, it is a MUST read for any serious Tolkien fan.

Wow. When this first came out, I had no interest in reading it. I thought it would be very dry and not all that relevant. Boy, was I wrong! After reading this, I feel I have a much greater understanding of Tolkien and his works and interests. I knew, of course, that he had fought in WWI and that it had a profound impact on his life (losing most of his friends) and viewpoint. I was not aware that it was during this time that he was doing a great deal of work developing his original languages, Quenya and Sindarin, not to mention his myths which form the background of Middle-Earth. It's been many years since I read *The Silmarillion* and I've only read bits and pieces of the other posthumous works, so I was pleased by how readable this book was to a non-scholar.

This book is fantastic and has a lot of great details on Tolkien's early life, down to specific address of where he lived while at Oxford. It also gives a great deal of emphasis on his closest friends and their war experiences. My only real quibble is that the "Great War" portion of the book is less meaty than I would have thought. Something like "Tolkien's Early Life" would have been a much more apt title. Overall well written, this was a quick read and I recommend it to any fan of Tolkien the man.

This is a timely and important contribution to Tolkien studies. However, the reader needs to engage seriously with the details of the part of the Somme offensive that Tolkien was caught up in, as this forms the main theme of the work. Perhaps wisely the author does not get too involved in literary analysis of "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Silmarillion" themselves, illuminating instead the author's very early works, written before and during the Great War, which were the genesis of his mythology. Personally, I learnt much about the conduct of the war itself, the course of Tolkien's literary friendships and Tolkien's emergence from the war on the cusp of a new literary age.

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