

Jim Schwenk

The Road Goes Ever On and On: The EPIC Reasons Why Tolkien Appeals to New Generations

Tolkien's works may not rise to the literary definition of an epic, but they have many characteristics of the world's great epics. As people continue to seek self-identity and their place in the world, it is no surprise that they would turn to stories that help them do just that as most epics did. I find at least four common characteristics of epics in the pages of Tolkien's mythology:

1. Eternal principles to celebrate.
2. Powerful heroes to emulate.
3. Identity of a people to cultivate.
4. Cosmic struggles in which to participate.

By developing these in the lives of his characters, Tolkien encapsulates the common quest of the world's inhabitants and invites us to make that quest our own. We see ourselves and our stories in Tolkien's stories. We resonate with his stories because in them, we see ourselves – our desires, needs, hopes, disappointments and dreams. Through his “epic,” we live our own.

Dr. Jim Schwenk is a pastor, author, professor and former employee of the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire. He is a board member of the C.S. Lewis Institute of Central Pennsylvania and lectured on J.R.R. Tolkien at Oxbridge 2008 at Oxford University. He and his wife Lore have two adult children, and live in a 270-year-old log cabin named “The Doctor and the Rose.”



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