

Presentation for AARWR

Becca S. Tarnas

Presentation Title: “Light from an Invisible Lamp: The Ecospiritual Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien”

Presentation Description:

Saturating J.R.R. Tolkien's world of Middle-earth is an ecological spirituality that extends from the deepest mountain roots to the starry celestial dome, that gives voice to the trees and agency to the waters. Tolkien's work, particularly *The Lord of the Rings*, was informed by the dynamic interplay between the great pagan mythologies of Northern Europe and his life-long commitment to Catholicism. Yet religion, ritual, and Christian dogma all remain hidden in the background. At the forefront is an ecological ethic that can be seen not only in how the characters of the story interact—for good or ill, with kindness or cruelty, cowardice or courage—with each other and with the land, but also in how those diverse landscapes themselves are characters in their own right, often with feelings, minds, and voices of their own. The direct source of Tolkien's ecospiritual vision remains obscured from view, yet, like light from an invisible lamp, it provides a moral sanctity that illumines the whole of Middle-earth—and can shed light on our own human relationships with the greater Earth community.

Panel Title: “Ecospiritual Ethics in Our Time”

Panel Description:

Few would deny that our world is currently in turmoil, facing political, economic, ecological, and spiritual crises at a scale previously unseen on our planet. Such a crisis calls for the development and practice of an ecological ethics that is rooted in both relationship and spirituality, affirming our connections to the Earth and the cosmos itself. Where does one look to discover such an ethics? This panel will present four potential sources, looking to the wisdom of water, relational and participatory paradigms, imagination and storytelling, and indigenous leadership for answers to what it means to be a member of the Earth community in our time.

Presenter biography:

Becca S. Tarnas is a doctoral candidate in the Philosophy and Religion department at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Her dissertation research is focused on the theoretical implications of the synchronicity between the Red Books of C.G. Jung and J.R.R. Tolkien. Becca received her M.A. from CIIS, and her B.A. from Mount Holyoke College. Her research interests include ecology, imagination, philosophy, and depth psychology, and she is also co-editor of *Archai: The Journal of Archetypal Cosmology*.