J. R. R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings': The Book, the Film, and Genre Criticism

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KIM SELLING

Contemporary audiences recognize the distinctive bookshop genre of "fantasy literature" that appeared following the publication of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954-55. The fantasy genre has experienced exponential growth over the last forty years, and its popularity shows no sign of abating. Yet the perception of genre fantasy as a subject not really worthy of scholarly attention has remained entrenched in the broader field of literary and cultural analysis, and until very recently fantasy has been excluded from most English literature curricula. Fantasy readers and critics have on the whole tended to assume a defensive position, arguing for their right not only to read fantasy but also to study it within intellectual institutions.[1] Whence came this great need for justification and validation, and whence the perceived attack? The key lies in the classification of fantasy as genre fiction: a term with a long history of derogatory implications separating "genre" from "real" literature. The relatively low cultural esteem in which fantasy is held is evident in the marginalization of its texts as objects of study in the academy.

The critical territory is changing, however, with the debut of the multi-million dollar movie trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings* directed by Peter Jackson. The massive popularity of the first film, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2001, and the appearance of bestsellers such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2003), have exposed the fantasy genre to a new, much broader audience worldwide. This has given rise to a barrage of new and republished works of fiction and criticism in the genre, cashing in on the sudden flood of marketplace popularity. The critical literature presents a bewildering array of contradictory and conflicting definitions of what fantasy is, its aesthetic value, and its meaning and place in

society and the Western literary tradition. This essay explores some aspects of the changing response both to fantasy in general, and to *The Lord of the Rings* in particular.

My discussion is divided into three parts: the first, "The Genre of Fantasy", provides an introduction to genre theory and a brief history of how the genre of modern formula fantasy accreted around Tolkien's ground-breaking text, *The Lord of the Rings*. The second section, "Taking Formulas Seriously", gives some theoretical background to issues and contentions in studying popular culture and formula fiction, suggesting that the traditional technique of close critical reading of primary texts, though an essential and important strategy, does not fully or adequately explain the popular appeal of fantasy or its function or structure as a genre. What is missing from most of the close readings of fantasy is *context*, both the unspoken and unacknowledged role of the reader/audience, and fantasy's status as a genre, as popular fiction. The third section, "*The Lord of the Rings*: Book into Film", addresses issues of film adaptations from written texts, using approaches from cultural studies to analyse Peter Jackson's film, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Throughout, Tolkien's text (as both book and film) is used as a central example to further a deeper understanding of the form and function of fantasy. It becomes clear that modern fantasy is not only a literary genre, but a commercial industry with a sizeable market whose products include written texts, art and cinema, and it is also the basis of a sub-cultural community incorporating fan groups, readers, writers and directors, producers and publishers. Hence a study of the system of evaluations and critical paradigms that have grown up around the set of texts recognized as fantasy becomes a map of the values, ideologies and interest groups at play not only within the academic discipline of English, but in the wider social and cultural context.

The Genre of Fantasy

On first appearances, the answer to the question, "What is fantasy?" would seem relatively straightforward. This is the definition offered by *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*:

> A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms.[2]

At its most basic level, fantasy is considered to be a variety of fiction containing an element of the impossible. But how do we recognize when something is impossible? Reality is, in one sense, socially constructed, as what is regarded as "real" and what is deemed "imaginary" generally require group verification and consensus.[3] The hegemonic scientific paradigm of today considers "impossible" or "fantastic" the existence of the demons, dragons and unicorns that were a central part of the medieval world-view. The impossible is thus always culturally determined, with every text inevitably representing the knowledge and beliefs of its own society. The very understanding of the "impossibility" of modern fantasy is its point: it deliberately flouts the conventional understanding of the universe as we know it; it sets itself up, as Clute notes, as "a counter-statement to a dominant world-view", without which its meaning and function would be entirely altered.[4]

The question then arises as to how to differentiate fantasy from other sorts of fictions of the possible/impossible, for example horror or science fiction, which are also predicated upon the condition of difference from mundane reality. Clearly these are very closely related sub-categories of the broader genre of speculative fiction or "the fantastic". Orson Scott Card gives a writer's point of view, suggesting a very basic difference between the publishing categories of fantasy and science fiction: "A rustic setting always suggests fantasy; to

suggest science fiction, you need sheet metal and plastic. You need *rivets*."[5] Science fiction, horror and fantasy differentiate themselves not only through setting, but also on the basis of their different historical developments, textual motifs and semiotic icons such as spaceships, vampires and dragons. However, attempting to isolate any one characteristic as the sole nexus of differentiation is bound to fail, because it takes all of these and more to establish generic differences. Even then, there are no clear-cut separations. There are always texts that contravene boundary distinctions and subvert the usual definitions. Australian author Sean Williams' fantasy series, *The Books of the Change* (2001-02), is one such example. The text contains science-fictional motifs like automobiles and post-apocalyptic cityscapes, but the narrative is a coming-of-age quest story, and magic is integral to its world. The presence of these boundary-crossing or genre-defying texts calls into question the ultimate usefulness of models of genre that depend on prescriptive definitions and exclusionary principles reliant on limits and boundaries or lists of rigidly defined genre characteristics.

A pragmatic approach to the problem of genre is taken by Brian Attebery, who draws upon "fuzzy set" theory to describe genres as sets or categories "defined not by boundaries but by a centre".[6] The concept of "fuzzy sets" stems from mathematics, but has also been utilized in philosophy to describe the way humans categorize things by constructing a set of norms around central, prototypical examples. In the case of literary genres, we tend to group genres around central texts that best seem to describe the essence of that category of texts, but the boundaries shade off into other sets or genres, so that a book on the margins may belong to one genre or another, depending on one's own interests. According to this model, there are no definite parameters or rigid boundaries, so fantasy texts often overlap with science fiction, romance, gothic horror, realistic, or historical fiction. Following Attebery, the "fantasy genre" referred to here thus describes the set of texts that resembles in one way or another J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien can in many ways be regarded as the father of modern fantasy. The phenomenal success of the mass-market paperback editions of *The Lord of the Rings* in the U.S.A., especially in the 1960s, inspired a huge and devoted following for Tolkien's masterpiece, and spawned a host of imitators. Tolkien's immense popularity signalled the beginnings of "fantasy" as a separate publishing category.

Indeed, says Attebery, "no important work of fantasy written after Tolkien is free of his influence, and many are merely halting imitations of his style and substance. Without Tolkien's work before us it might not seem worthwhile to isolate fantasy as a distinct form".[7] The popular acceptance of Tolkien's version of the fantastic gave coherence to an otherwise disparate set of earlier texts rooted in the Romantic revival of the "Gothic" Middle Ages from the second half of the eighteenth century to Victorian medievalism, including the fantasies of William Morris, George MacDonald and Lord Dunsany. As F. R. Leavis stated in *The Great Tradition*, "the work of all great creative writers gives a meaning to the past"; they have a "retroactive effect", creating a tradition out of texts that came before, as well as accreting a tradition for those coming after.[8] No doubt these sentiments, applied to popular culture, would have Leavis turning in his grave, but as Ursula K. Le Guin says, "A genre is a formal tradition".[9]

The tradition that has arisen from Tolkien's alternative-world fantasy tends to follow the basic narrative and stylistic form of romance: generally heroic, quest-centred stories drawing on western folk- and fairy-tale traditions, Norse and Celtic myth, Arthurian legend, and medieval romances. Tolkien himself was a notable philologist at Oxford University and an authority on medieval literature such as *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, both of which had a strong influence on his fiction. He once stated in a letter that he considered *The Lord of the Rings* "*not* a 'novel', but an 'heroic romance'."[10] Today, the fantasy combination of Tolkienesque settings, stock characters and (by now) well-known plotlines,

along with "sword and sorcery" motifs drawn from American pulp fiction such as Robert E. Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* (1935), are so familiar to contemporary audiences that they have become popular cultural clichés. They are recognizable as the generic "fantasy formula" parodied by authors Diana Wynne Jones in her mock travel guide, *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (1996), and Terry Pratchett in his *Discworld* comic fantasy series (1983-2003), as well as by scholar Brian Attebery, who remarks that "stopping overnight with the elves" has become such a popular fantasy cliché that the elves "really should organize themselves into a bed-and-breakfast association".[11]

It is not enough however, to consider only the text and its audience, whilst neglecting the forces present in the production of the text. Gary K. Wolfe notes that "the marketing and acquisitions practices of publishing houses have tended to emphasize certain conventions" within the genre, so that extra-textual devices like maps, glossaries, genealogies, and multi-volume novels ("the fat fantasy trilogy") have become standard signifiers of the genre.[12] "Commercial marketing category" is therefore another way of defining genre. The maps, genealogies and glossaries in most fantasy books are not only marketing devices following Tolkien's prototype, but also act as aids to readers, allowing a fuller immersion in the imaginary worlds and geographies of fantasy. This lends them an air of "truth" or credibility by co-opting the symbolic devices and narrative techniques of factual historical discourse. Tolkien's impact in this regard is undeniable: in the verisimilitude of Middle-earth lies its strong appeal. Tolkien's meticulously created world, complete with maps, languages, and phases of the moon, aspired to be as real and convincing as possible. Tolkien said later, "I wanted people simply to get inside this story and take it (in a sense) as actual history."[13]

Taking Formulas Seriously

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, genre simply means a "kind", or "type". When applied to literature, however, genre has come to mean texts that cater to specific types or kinds of interests and interest groups. They are by implication definable, limited in scope, function, relevance and value, as opposed to Literature – high, serious, canonical fiction, which is assumed to hold a universal appeal and value. In other words, "genre fiction" equals "formula fiction", reducible to limited props and motifs, "a list of items" fixed in a recitation of formula, regarded not as a literary tradition but as a commercial commodity.[14]

Commercial commodities or formula fictions are not inherently inferior, but commodification and mass production carry their own stigma: the social inferiority of being appreciated by "the masses". The democratization of culture thus renders the "popular" problematic. In a cultural environment where "originality", subversion, individuality, and difference from the norm are valued highly, literary forms that are seen to conform to relatively predictable models or stereotypes are downgraded and devalued. This begs the question: what constitutes originality in a work of art, when authors always need to create a meaningful common ground in order to connect to the reader? This common ground is shaped by mutually understood social and psychological codes expressed in the text as narrative conventions or formulas.

John Cawelti, an early champion of the study of popular culture, argued that the use of formulas need not detract from the "aesthetic force" or emotional enjoyment of a work.[15] The "once upon a time" fairytale formula signifies that we will be encountering a narrative of the fantastic, and we anticipate a sequence of events and possibilities that we generally expect to end in a "happily ever after".[16] The prologue to George Lucas's *Star Wars* films, "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away …"

immediately sets up this expectation. The Elf-lady Galadriel's narration functions similarly in the prologue to Peter Jackson's film of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, to convey to the audience as quickly as possible the background, setting and intention of the story. The prologue was deliberately created by Jackson as a framing narrative, setting up key elements such as the corrupting power of the One Ring and the immortality of the Elves, and introducing major background characters like Isildur, ancestor of the hero Aragorn, who succumbed to the power of the Dark Lord Sauron's Ring; and the Ring itself, which eventually found its way into the hands of the hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, at which point the story begins. The fact that Galadriel initially speaks in Tolkien's invented language of Elvish, along with the musical and visual cues, swiftly sets up the expectation that we are entering the realm of fairy-tale.

The art of formula fiction lies in playing upon audience expectations, by subverting or conforming to generic expectations in a delicate balance between predictability (which provides the pleasure of anticipation satisfied) and innovation (where the unexpected generates curiosity and surprise and keeps audiences interested). Amongst the sub-set of texts classified as fantasy, there is struggle to create new forms that subvert the model begun by Tolkien. Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000) and China Miéville's *The Scar* (2002) are two recent examples that specifically align themselves as antagonistic to Tolkien's formula, though they recognizably continue to function within the field of fantasy. These examples underline the reasons why prescriptive or static models of genre with rigid boundary demarcations are bound to fail: because genres, as fields of cultural production, are constantly in a state of flux and change. With each combination of the fresh and innovative with traditional formulas, new themes and motifs emerge that have the potential to influence and expand the limits of the field and perhaps even start a new genre altogether. Originality then becomes not simply the first

appearance of new inventions, but the skilful reworking and recycling of known themes and materials.

It is clear that theories that look to the text as the sole locus of meaning miss half the equation, that part to do with reader response and interpretation. As Dominic Strinati says, texts "become significant when they are located within the social relationships which produce and consume them".[17] In the process of reading books or watching films, we re-symbolize the text and make it our own, relating emotions, characters and events to our lives and the world as we know it.[18] Texts therefore come to vary in meaning for different social groups, and over time. Archetypal fantasy texts often look to a mythical European medieval past constructed as a pre-industrial period when people lived harmoniously with their environment. This is an inheritance of J. R. R. Tolkien's medievalist vision, but it continues to have relevance through its constant re-symbolization expressing the concerns of contemporary society. During the Romantic era, the idea of the "medieval" was constructed around a set of oppositions pitting Nature and "the primitive" against urban civilization, faith and the supernatural against scientific rationalism.

This Romantic construction of the medieval has retained its deep symbolic and cultural value as a medium for critiquing the conditions of modern industrialized society, particularly in contemporary fantasy, where ecological concerns form a strong undercurrent. Tolkien held a deep love for the English countryside and was extremely concerned about its destruction by the encroachment of an ugly, polluting, urban industrial wasteland. In *The Lord of the Rings* this concern manifests itself through the evil-doings of the corrupt Wizard Saruman who ravages the sanctuary of Isengard, effectively turning it into a factory for war machines, "filled with pits and forges".[19] Tolkien's disapproval of Saruman is clear: "He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for living things, except as far as they serve him for the moment."[20] The importance of the environment and respect for other living things continues to

be a highly relevant theme in contemporary fantasy in the face of the current ecological crisis. The landscapes of fantasy have thus become symbolically re-charged with an awareness of ecological issues, and it is notable that the growth and success of fantasy as a genre has in many ways paralleled the mainstreaming of environmentalist movements since the 1960s.[21]

The Lord of the Rings: Book into Film

The traditional bias of modernist literary criticism against popular fiction – seen as a mass-produced, disposable commodity of little aesthetic, moral or intellectual value – is rooted in the cultural hegemony of the privileged, educated classes as the arbiters of good taste in the West since the eighteenth century.[22] It carries within it a legacy of class-based hostility towards the uneducated lower classes, "the masses", regarding them as passive, unthinking, and easily manipulated. Implicit is the belief that art addressed to the masses must of necessity be more limited than art intended for an (unstated) élite audience. These attitudes should be viewed historically in the light of changing modes of cultural production, with modern technologies making books and magazines cheaper and more accessible to a larger, middle and lower class population. The stigma attached to "pulp fiction" is also evident in early twentieth-century attitudes towards film and television, which were initially regarded as vulgar, popularizing art forms, entertaining dross for the masses, and lacking in status and respectability.[23] It is evident that much criticism directed towards popular culture is often an implied criticism of the audience, rather than of the work itself.

The social changes resulting from the widespread acceptance of new technologies such as film are reflected in the changing status of popular culture, with sites of cultural change indicated by the fierce struggles for dominance between different discourses and systems of evaluation. One such site of contention is the debate over the value of adapting books into films. There is still lingering suspicion amongst some literary academics that cinematic adaptation produces a degraded or inferior version of the novel, thus betraying the implicit bias of a print-based culture that words are a superior medium to visual images.[24] Contrary to the dire predictions of literary critics in the early twentieth century that film adaptations would be anathema to the book trade and draw audiences away from the

written text, contemporary evidence shows that films often promote book sales. In fact, the desire for and interest in comparing different interpretations of the same text frequently impel audiences to read the book in conjunction with seeing the movie. This is certainly the case with Jackson's film, as many fans attest on "TheOneRing.net" Internet site.[25] Erica Sheen notes that the transition from page to screen has now become a commonplace and naturalized process, resulting in publishers and filmmakers symbiotically exploiting the connection between bestselling books and their cinematic adaptations.[26]

An understanding of the function and appeal of generic formula fictions can be brought to bear upon the issues surrounding film adaptation. Audience reactions to film adaptations of books clearly undermine assumptions concerning the power of the media to determine meanings for allegedly passive audiences. Joy Boyum's study of film adaptation points to the high degree of participation and emotional involvement in audiences familiar with the source text. Film adaptations of well-known novels trade upon audience desires for "recycled" narratives, where part of the attraction lies not only in the anticipation and curiosity of seeing the text "come to life" visually, but also in reliving the experiences and emotions elicited by the book.[27] This is analogous to the experience of reading formula or genre literature, where the desire for repetition of an enjoyable experience creates reader expectations of a particular literary genre. Thus the notion of dialogical contracts between audiences and texts eliminates the idea of passive, unthinking masses by empowering the audience as creative agents with an active role in the production of meaning.

The success of an adaptation often depends upon the degree to which the film directors are able to persuade us of the acceptability and validity of their interpretation. Director Peter Jackson and his co-writers, Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh, were extremely aware of the fidelity to the original text expected by the wider community of Tolkien fans, because they

too were fans. As Executive Producer Mark Ordesky stated, "Virtually everyone in a significant position on the movie knew the books inside-out, had been obsessed with them for years."[28] The books as they stood were "unfilmable", and the main task was to "translate" the essential themes of Tolkien's book into the audiovisual medium. Contemporary film criticism focuses on film's continuity with written narrative, rather than on the differences between films and written texts or the supposed primacy of word over image. Film utilizes the spoken if not the written word, so the narrative integrity of Tolkien's book was not lost in translation. Jackson was careful to use Tolkien's words and language wherever possible in the film, even if the lines were given to characters other than those who speak them in the book or were transposed to different scenes.[29]

The narrative strength and emotive impact of the cinematic form is at its most powerful in scenes such as the Wizard Gandalf's precipitous rescue from his imprisonment on the roof of the tower of Orthanc in the first half of *The Fellowship of the Ring* movie. Hoping for aid and counsel on the matter of "the Enemy's" Ring, Gandalf seeks out Saruman, greatest of the order of Wizards, only to find that Saruman's own lust for the power of the Ring has turned him into a mortal enemy. Trapped on the roof of Saruman's tower, Gandalf can only despair at his plight and the depth of Saruman's betrayal: "I stood alone on an island in the clouds; and I had no chance of escape, and my days were bitter." In the book, Gandalf's rescue by the giant eagle, Gwaihir, is serendipitously brought about by another Wizard, Radagast the Brown, who innocently sends the eagle to find Gandalf after Radagast, in all good faith, urged Gandalf to go to Saruman.

In Jackson's film, an entirely new scene is added – in the space of only a few minutes, and without dialogue – to allow Gandalf to effect his own rescue without introducing further characters. As Gandalf broods on the tower, contemplating Saruman's destruction of the Isengard valley below, a moth flutters around him in the moonlight, and the music suddenly

changes from the doom-laden martial horns and drums of warfare to the pure, high, sweet singing of a child's voice. Gandalf seizes upon this tiny opportunity, and catching the moth, he whispers to it in an unknown language, sending it (as we later find out) to fetch Gwaihir the Eagle Lord to rescue him. The sweeping camera angles and movements act as a voiceless narrator, in combination with composer Howard Shore's musical score, to tell the audience a story without words.

As Sheen notes, adaptation from page to screen turns the novel into a soundtrack, where the combination of image with word and music adds to its immediate emotive force, capable of directly addressing the emotions.[30] Music acts as an interpretation of and comment on the action, and gives emotional cues showing how we are to react to otherwise ambiguous visual images. The ethereal choral theme accompanying the image of the fluttering moth is one of Elvish beauty, hopeful and uplifting, poignant and magical. The emotional significance of the moth scene links thematically to one of the main themes of the story: that of hope, and the ability of even the smallest thing to undo great evil. Just as the moth – a tiny, fragile and seemingly insignificant creature – goes unnoticed by Saruman, thus allowing Gandalf to escape, so too does Frodo the Hobbit, humble, small and powerless, go unnoticed to the downfall and undoing of Sauron. The musical and thematic link to a later scene in the Elvish sanctuary of Lothlorien is clear. "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future", says Lady Galadriel to Frodo, urging him to take heart. The filmic medium thus displays its distinctive strength in translating action, character, thematic complexity and emotional depth from book to screen through its ability to convey multi-layered narrative concepts in a minimum of time.

As discussed earlier, the desire to replicate the pleasurable experiences elicited by narrative is an important factor in evaluating cinematic adaptations. Boyum explores the often overlooked emotional experience of reading, pointing out that

recollections of books are often based on feelings and sense impressions of characters and events rather than on details of plot.[31] The acceptance or rejection of a filmic interpretation of a known novel is less dependent upon the factual consistency of sequences or events than on the continuity of emotions elicited.

One could argue that *The Fellowship of the Ring* movie is on the whole successful in its use of additions, omissions and substitutions to enhance the cinematic translation of the plot. One example is the substitution of the Elven princess Arwen for the original Elf-lord Glorfindel in the rescue of the Ring-bearer, Frodo, from the Black Riders near Rivendell. What matters is that Frodo was rescued from the terrifying Black Riders by the shining figure of an Elf: "To Frodo it appeared that a white light was shining through the form and raiment of the rider, as if through a thin veil."[32] The actual identity of the Elf is of secondary importance, as the film action is in keeping with the emotional tone of the book. The love-story between the beautiful Elf, Arwen, who forsakes her immortality in order to be with a mortal man, Aragorn, is of major importance to the overall shape of Tolkien's narrative, but is portrayed very subtly in the book (in fact much of it is confined to the Appendices at the end of the final volume). Arwen's more prominent role in Jackson's film foregrounds this central love-story, as well as expanding the role of women in the text to cater to a twenty-first century demographic. Accordingly, it makes sense for the audience to become familiar with and sympathetic to Arwen at this point.

A more contentious case is the omission of Tom Bombadil from the movie. Tom Bombadil is an idiosyncratic Nature figure who rescues the hobbits from danger when they get lost in the Old Forest on their way to the town of Bree in the first book of *The Fellowship*. This entire sequence is omitted from the film, with Jackson arguing that Tom Bombadil doesn't contribute much to the central narrative, that of "Frodo carrying the Ring", and the film's emotional continuity does not suffer from Bombadil's absence. However, in terms of deepening and

exploring some of the central themes of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom represents an important facet of Tolkien's philosophy. Tom is the only character shown to be completely unaffected by and uninterested in the corrupting power of the Ring. He is a Pan-like figure, representing the natural world's indifference to human concerns, and yet, like Nature, his peaceful existence is dependent upon and ultimately vulnerable to human actions. Bombadil's neutral position in the conflict in Middle-earth also expands Tolkien's political meditations on power and control, with Tom representing a pacifist view of warfare.[33] Tolkien's work is a text of immense complexity and thematic richness, and the film version of *Lord of the Rings* may not be able to capture all of its scope or subtlety, if only because of the time constraints on the cinematic form. This forces the story to be concentrated and distilled, as well as entailing a multivalent interpretative framework which incorporates not only the interpretation of the scriptwriters, but also of the actors, artists, set designers and composers.

One element in which Peter Jackson's film adaptation has been highly successful is in its marvellously realized evocation of the look and feeling of Middle-earth. The eliciting of wonder as a response to the fantastic is considered an essential element in defining fantasy. Meredith Veldman writes, "The quality of strangeness and wonder, usually realized through the presence of the marvellous or numinous … not only defines fantasy but gives it its power".[34] Wonder relates to our cognitions or perceptions of the world; we wonder or marvel at something strange or new. Similarly, we wonder when through a process of estrangement or defamiliarization, the known or familiar is rendered unfamiliar, changing our perception of it.

Part of the wonder elicited by *The Lord of the Rings* is not only its strange and beautiful or horrific creatures – elves, dwarves, hobbits, orcs, giant spiders – but also the entire world of Middle-earth, in its verisimilar detail and believable realization. Jackson's film captures the importance of landscape and setting in Middle-earth both visually and thematically. The

air of historical realism, the "lived-in" sets and atmosphere, contribute to the story's credibility. At least a part of the enjoyment and sense of spectacle elicited by the film is due to the "magic" of the medium itself. The technological wizardry of film production has not yet ceased to evoke a sense of wonder in modern audiences, and the Special Effects of computer-generated imagery continues to be a major attraction in films such as *The Fellowship of the Ring*, where actors playing hobbits appeared on-screen as half their actual height with the help of a bit of technological tinkering. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), as in other recent films, characters such as Gollum were created entirely by digital special effects. Film technology plays an important role in the evocation of wonder, as its visual effects contribute to the audience's willingness to believe that what they are seeing is not simply an illusion.

Tolkien understood very clearly the power and attraction of fantasy in its ability to make concrete or believable our desire for alternatives, for the possibility of "what if?" His essay "On Fairy Stories" explains the attraction of the secondary worlds of fantasy and the kind of literary belief invoked by fiction that has so many critics up in arms about the credulity of fantasy readers:

> What really happens is that the story-maker … makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed.[35]

Within the parameters set up by the story, the world and events within it must make sense, must be logical according to their own internal rules. In this way, the "secondary worlds" of the fantasy genre hold the same appeal as film: as a medium for imaginatively escaping from the conditions of everyday life, for an immersion or transformation of the self into something other, for the vicarious participation in different experiences, and for

identification and communication with other living beings. Fantasy, like all fictions, is capable of expressing truth: metaphorical, symbolic, emotional truths. As a genre it is highly aware of its own construction, its formulas and conventions. The process of creating and experiencing fantastic narratives itself becomes a form of wizardry whereby new worlds are created that function as prisms through which to contemplate our world. As Charles Elkins comments, genre fantasy creates worlds which "contrast with and implicitly criticize our taken-for-granted world. Against rationalism and the antiheroic, it posits enchantment, the marvellous, and the heroic."[36]

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On Tolkien's religious beliefs, the best source is his *Letters*. Numerous specialist publications exist, such as the publications of the Mythopoeic Society; for an interesting point of view see also Robert J. Reilly, *Romantic Religion; A Study of Barfield, Lewis, Williams and Tolkien* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971).

On Tolkien's medieval sources

Derek S. Brewer, "*The Lord of the Rings* as Romance", in *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller*, ed. Robert T. Farrell and Mary

Salu (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 249-64.

Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth* (1982: London: Harper Collins, 1992).

"Inkling and Others", ed. Jane Chance: Special issue of *Studies in Medievalism*, 3, 3-4 (Winter 1991).

J. R. R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics" and "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*", in *The Monsters and the Critics*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, pp. 5-48 and 72-108 respectively.

On Peter Jackson's film

The Appendices to the Special Extended Edition DVD of Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (New Line Cinema, 2001) are an excellent resource for students, containing in-depth interviews with Peter Jackson and his film crew, and detailing the entire process of film-making and adaptation of Tolkien's world. Numerous "making-of" books related to the films are also available.

Website http://www.theonering.net is a useful site on all things to do with the book and the films of *The Lord of the Rings* and is run voluntarily by fans of both.

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[1] See e. g. Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1984). I have included a general note to secondary material and bibiographical sources at the end of this article as a guide to scholarship on Tolkien in particular and fantasy in general.

[2] *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ed. John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbit, 1999), p. 338.

[3] See Gary K. Wolfe's article in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature ad Art*, ed. Roger C. Schlobin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 6.

[4] Clute and Grant, p. 338.

[5] Orson Scott Card, *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 1990), p. 4.

[6] Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 12-14. The "fuzzy set" theory was developed from George Lakoff and Mark

Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[7] Attebery, p. 10.

[8] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 14.

[9] Ursula K. Le Guin and Brian Attebery, eds., *The Norton Book of Science Fiction: North American Science Fiction, 1960-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 21.

[10] Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, eds., *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 414.

[11] Attebery, p. 10.

[12] Gary K. Wolfe, *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. xxv.

[13] Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (London and Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1977), pp. 198-99.

[14] Le Guin and Attebery, p. 22.

[15] John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 6.

[16] Tolkien had much to say on the importance of the happy ending or "Eucatastrophe" of fairy tales in his essay "On Fairy Stories", in *The Masters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Harper Collins, 1939).

[17] Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 108.

[18] Joy Gould Boyum, *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* (New York: Universe, 1985), p. 50.

[19] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954; London: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 254.

[20] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (1954; London: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 462.

[21] See especially Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-80* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[22] Scott McCracken, *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 4.

[23] Boyum, pp. 8-9.

[24] Erica Sheen, "Introduction", in *The Classic Novel: From Page to Screen* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press,

2000), ed. Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen, pp. 1-13. Similar reservations are expressed by Plato in *Phaedrus* (274-77) on the change from oral into print culture in ancient Greece: see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 79.

[25] The URL is <http://www.theonering.net>.

[26] Sheen, p. 9.

[27] Boyum, p. 44.

[28] *The Lord of the Rings* Extended DVD (New Line Cinema: 2001), Appendix, Part II: "From Book to Script".

[29] One example of transposition in the film is Gandalf's speech to Frodo in the Mines of Moria before they find the tomb of the Dwarf Lord Balin. Gandalf speaks of Gollum's and Bilbo's roles in the fate of the Ring: "Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand" and "Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring … In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought." These lines are taken from various parts of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Book 1, Chapter 2, "The Shadow of the Past", before Frodo even leaves the Shire.

[30] Erica Sheen, "'Where the Garment Gapes': Faithfulness and Promiscuity in the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice*", in *The Classic Novel*, pp. 23-24.

[31] Boyum, pp. 51-54.

[32] Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 204.

[33] For more on Tom Bombadil, see Carpenter and Tolkien, pp. 178-79.

[34] Veldman, p. 46.

[35] Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", p. 132.

[36] Charles Elkins, "An Approach to the Social Functions of Science Fiction and Fantasy", in *The Scope of the Fantastic: Culture, Biography, Themes, Children's Literature* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 28.

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