

# '... A local habitation and a name...'

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Tolkien and Birmingham was the theme of this year's Tolkien Society Seminar in the Shakespeare Memorial Room at the Central Library. Birmingham, an industrial city, has often been a home-town that inspired artists to produce works of fantasy, Burne-Jones and Sleigh for example. Sometimes Tolkien's writing is seen as pure fantasy — airy nothing — but it has roots in the earth, so can be given a local habitation, and a name. Tolkien wrote in 1956 that he took his 'models from life' (ref. 1, *Letters* 181). So we might expect to find echoes of Birmingham in Tolkien's work, drawn from the 16 and a half years he spent in Birmingham when young — from the spring of 1895 to the autumn of 1911.

In addition to the similarities between people, buildings and landscapes in his early life and in his writing there are also underlying themes, an outlook on life characteristic of Birmingham that is reflected in Tolkien's writing. He learned things from his early experiences in Birmingham that would be important to him throughout his life. Of course, as well as the influence of Birmingham, people, places and events in Tolkien's life after he left also played a significant role!

## Tolkien's Birmingham

For a century and a half Birmingham has been England's second largest city, with many suburbs. Tolkien certainly knew the centre, the suburbs to the south and southwest in Worcestershire, and Edgbaston to the west in Warwickshire. These are marked on the map. The asterisk shows King Edward's School in New Street, the numbers show each of the places where he lived, in order: King's Heath, Sarehole, Moseley, King's Heath, Edgbaston, Rednal, Edgbaston (several addresses). King's Norton (in 1904) and Frederick Road Edgbaston (in 1910) are not shown as he lived there very briefly.

Apart from Rednal these places are not far distant from each other; two miles from Sarehole to Moseley, or to King's Heath; two miles from Moseley to Edgbaston; two miles from Edgbaston to King Edward's School in the centre of Birmingham. From his letters and from Carpenter's biography<sup>2</sup> we know that Tolkien walked, cycled, took the bus, the tram or the train — so he had a good knowledge of the southern suburbs of Birmingham.

## How Birmingham is seen

In a number of Tolkien biographies Birmingham is depicted as being purely an industrial city with slums, distant from the countryside. Maps of the time, in addition to contemporary descriptions by people living in Birmingham suburbs, give a different picture. The parts of Birmingham where Tolkien lived had parks, streams, gardens and trees. Birmingham was and is a city of trees. It is said there are more trees in Birmingham than in any other European city. This may be an urban myth, but undeniably trees flourish there, and aerial



Tolkien's Birmingham.

photographs show that much of the city is green. Trees had a deep significance in Tolkien's work, and were dear to him, he used them as symbols of spiritual matters as well as enjoying trees in themselves<sup>2</sup>: "In Fayery a tree is a Tree, and its roots may run throughout the earth, and its fall affect the stars."

Carpenter's role is significant. His biography is still highly influential as he had greater access to Tolkien's letters and papers than has any biographer since. However, he might not be the most reliable informant on matters in Tolkien's life linked with Birmingham. Douglas Anderson's obituary of Humphrey Carpenter suggests that he wrote Tolkien's biography with the desire to show him as a man from Oxford<sup>4</sup>: "I'd lived in the same culture as him, in an Oxford academic family. I wanted to portray that milieu." Tolkien called both Oxford and Birmingham his home town when writing to his son Christopher in 1944 (Letter 58)<sup>1</sup>. Carpenter seems to be prejudiced against Birmingham as a town, saying in 1977 that the industrial wasteland of Birmingham was the inspiration for Mordor. But this was refuted by Graham Tayar, who had corresponded with Tolkien. Tolkien had told him<sup>5</sup> "the physical setting [of Mordor] derived directly from the trenches of World War I, the wasteland of shell-cratered battlefields where he had fought in 1916."

Tolkien felt that the world of his childhood was fundamentally different from the world in the time when his stories were published. The Birmingham described as wasteland by Carpenter in the 1970s was not the Birmingham that Tolkien knew around 1900. Much of the town had been rebuilt during the 20 years before Tolkien arrived there as a three-year-old in 1895. There were many new and imposing buildings.

Sarehole, on the edge of Birmingham, was described by Tolkien as an “almost rural village”<sup>1</sup>. It was the centre of Tolkien’s tales, he said that the Shire was based on the Worcestershire countryside of his youth. His favourite landscape was unmechanized farmland. Most transport depended on the horse and there were very few cars. From his biography<sup>3</sup> we know that he was entranced by the story of Sigurd and the dragon when he read it at Sarehole; in *On Fairy Stories* Manuscript B he wrote<sup>2</sup>: “I never imagined that a dragon was of the same order as a horse or stud. I am clear that this was not solely because I had seen many horses but had never seen a dragon.”

Many aspects of Tolkien’s daily life were the same in the countryside as in the nearby city. The countryside was not distant from the city as implied in some Tolkien biographies. Sarehole was four miles from the centre of Birmingham. He wrote of hobbits in Letter 25 that they “only lived on the borders of the wild”<sup>1</sup>. Horses were in the city as well as in the country.

In 1900 trams were still drawn by horses and cars were a rarity. Horses were used on the land; they were also used in most Council departments. Birmingham City Council had an official register of these horses. This had columns listing their colour, price, where they were bought and so on. The Fire Brigade added a column for the horses’ names: such as Kichener, Bobs, Snowball, Gladys and Muriel<sup>6</sup>.

Tolkien’s fiction is linked with his life through his use of language and through the names he invents. In *The Roots of Romance*<sup>9</sup> Tom Shippey looks at the derivation of the name Sarehole. ‘Sare’ might derive from Old English *sear*; grey, withered. Or it might be from a name *Searu* — in the Midland (Mercian) dialect this would be *Saru*. Peter Jackson’s film changed the story, but in Tolkien’s tale the old and withered Saruman is killed by Wormtongue in Bilbo’s hobbit-hole in the very heart of the Shire. And so the village might later be known as Sarehole, the place of the hole where Saru died.

## Later visits

Tolkien’s picture of Hobbiton, drawn to accompany *The Hobbit* published in 1937, probably reflects not only his childhood memories, but also what he had seen when he visited Sarehole later in life. He kept in touch with the



The Suffield clan circa 1880.

Mittons who lived nearby, visiting his aunt Mabel after her husband died in 1933. In 1900 when the Tolkiens were there Sarehole was a working mill. However during the World War I the younger miller, George Andrew Junior, started a floristry business, and this was the business listed in directories after the milling had stopped. A photograph from the 1960s shows a ruined greenhouse on the side of the mill. There is a flower-bed next to the mill in Tolkien’s drawing, perhaps inspired by what he had seen in 1933.

The Shire is important as a home in *The Hobbit* and in *The Lord of the Rings*<sup>10</sup>; the stories begin there and the adventurers return there at the end. Sarehole was special because it represented the happiest time of Tolkien’s childhood. He had joyful memories, it was the place where he lived with his mother and brother before he had to go to school, and before his mother became ill. He reminisced<sup>2</sup>: “I lived in childhood in a cottage on the edge of a really rural country — on the borders of a land and time more like ... the lands and hills of the most primitive and wildest stories ... than the present life of Western Towns (in fact and wish). This virtue of fairy-story may appeal only to a kind of nostalgia, to mere regret. Yet nostalgia means an ‘(aching) desire to go home.’”

## Moseley, a prosperous suburb

In the autumn of 1900 the Tolkiens left Sarehole for Moseley. Carpenter presents this as a move from countryside to city, and stresses how the brothers suffered. Later biographers have developed this theme with enthusiasm: smoking factory chimneys, mills, slums and so on. But this doleful description of Moseley is not true to life. In his poem *Battle of the Eastern Field*<sup>11</sup> written in 1911, Tolkien refers to “Moseley’s emerald sward” — there were several parks, almost all the houses had large gardens, and it was the home of “the prosperous bourgeoisie of Birmingham”<sup>1</sup> on the edge of the countryside. Moseley is next to Sarehole, and the Tolkiens probably visited their aunt and uncle Beatrice and William Suffield, who moved into their house there when they left.

## Tolkien’s family

Many of Tolkien’s relatives lived in Moseley, a pleasant middle-class suburb. The Mittons — his aunt Mabel was a sister of his father Arthur Tolkien — lived at Abbotsford, a large house and garden on Wake Green Road, about a mile from Sarehole. Tolkien visited his uncle aunt and cousins often; he was named as an executor and was an heir in his aunt’s will. His Suffield grandparents had a house in Cotton Lane, off Wake Green Road, from 1904 until John Suffield died in 1930. His Tolkien grandparents lived in Church Road, off Wake Green Road, until 1900. And the Incedons — his mother’s sister’s family — lived in a luxurious new house on Chantry Road Moseley, with a garden running down to a private park.

## Bourgeoisie

Some of Tolkien’s relatives, especially the Mittons and the Incedons, could certainly be described as the ‘prosperous bourgeoisie of Birmingham’ [Letter 181]. This photo of the Suffield family taken around 1880 offers several possible

models for the type of hobbits who played heroic roles in Tolkien's stories: "[Bilbo] was a prosperous, well-fed young bachelor of independent means." (ref. 1, Letter 25, 1938.) Another characteristic of the English middle-class, that they rarely express emotion, is also true of hobbits. Merry says to Aragorn<sup>7</sup>: 'It is the way of my people to use light words ... and say less than they mean. We fear to say too much. It robs us of the right words when a jest is out of place.'

Hobbits were based to a large degree on the people Tolkien knew in Birmingham when he was young, as well as on individuals he knew. Tolkien said that the smallness of the hobbits represented their limited imagination. The smallness may also represent the fact that they are fairly ordinary middle-class or working-class characters. Yet they can show heroism. Other characters in his writings show this ordinariness along with a down-to-earth heroism. Farmer Giles states<sup>5</sup>: "I am a farmer and proud of it; a plain honest man." Heroic hobbits and others have a sense of humour and enjoy jokes: "His [Farmer Giles'] wife made a queen of great size and majesty, and she kept a tight hand on the household accounts. There was no getting around Queen Agatha — at least it was a long walk."

The characteristics of the Edwardian middle class make another story about Tolkien and Moseley unlikely; that Tolkien and his future fiancée and wife Edith met by chance in a Moseley pub in February 1910, after Father Francis Morgan had forbidden Tolkien to see her. He thought Tolkien should spend all his time in study for the scholarship he needed to go to university. Carpenter reports that Tolkien wrote in his diary on 16 February<sup>2</sup>: "Last night prayed would see E. by accident. Prayer answered. Saw her at 12.55 at Prince of Wales ..." A landlord of the Prince of Wales pub in Moseley took this reference up with enthusiasm.

This story is improbable for several reasons. What was Tolkien doing in a pub at lunchtime on a schoolday 'by accident'? — 16 February 1910 was a Wednesday. His school was in the centre of Birmingham, why was he in Moseley three miles to the south? And what was Edith doing in a pub, by accident or design? Single ladies from the middle class would not go into pubs on their own, they were not considered respectable at that time. Where did they meet? There were several Prince of Wales pubs in Birmingham, but they are all unlikely meeting places for the same reasons. However, until the 1940s — it was destroyed in a blitz in April 1941 — there was a Prince of Wales Theatre on Broad Street.



St Patrick Chapel oratory.

Broad Street is the road from Five Ways, on the route from where Tolkien and Edith were living to the centre of Birmingham. Almost certainly they saw one another 'by accident' while going along Broad Street, in front of the Prince of Wales theatre. Tolkien saw *Peter Pan* when it was on at the Prince of Wales<sup>12</sup> in April 1910<sup>2</sup>. He was probably thinking of the chance meeting two months earlier when he wrote of the play: "Indescribable but shall never forget it as long as I live ..." and continued "Wish E. had been with me."

## Birmingham

From 1900 Tolkien travelled into the centre of Birmingham to go to King Edward's School in New Street. Birmingham was a city of industry, but this was industry entailing craftsmanship, taking place in thousands of small work-

shops. There are many guides produced in the nineteenth century that describe this character. This is from Cornish's *Stranger's Guide through Birmingham 1867*<sup>13</sup>

In Birmingham steam machinery has never been more than an auxiliary force ... the majority of Birmingham workmen are employed in their own homes, or in little shops not large enough to hold more than four or five men. These artisans depend chiefly upon skilled hand labour ...

The writer goes on to apologize that there are no large factories such as those in the north, but recommends that the visitor should stand on the railway viaduct at night:

Beneath him, and seemingly for miles round, he will observe thousands of twinkling points of fire, indicating the spots where industrious artisans are engaged in fashioning articles of Birmingham manufacture ...



Birmingham's coat of arms (ca 1889).

Birmingham's coat of arms from 1889 when it finally became a city suggests how Birmingham saw itself. Some parts of the coat of arms represent industry. The motto 'Forward' suggests modernity. But the man is a blacksmith, a craftsman. Art and literature are represented by the woman holding an artist's palette and a book. The two figures stand on a flowery meadow, which sadly no longer appears on the coat of arms.

## Craftsmanship seen in buildings

Of hobbits Tolkien wrote<sup>10</sup>: "They were skilful with tools." Tolkien was skilful with words but he was also an artist.

In his writings he praised those who could craft beautiful things. In *Smith of Wootton Major Smith* is a blacksmith, working with iron<sup>14</sup>. He could make lasting things, good strong tools “but some things, when he had time, he made for delight; and they were beautiful, for he could work iron into wonderful forms that looked as light and as delicate as a spray of leaves and blossom, but kept the stern strength of iron, or seemed even stronger.”

One hundred years ago there were many examples of such beautiful work in Birmingham, iron gates and railings; buildings enriched with elaborate terracotta decoration, and with decorative stained glass windows. Much of Birmingham had been rebuilt during the 1870s and 1880s. Tolkien felt that beauty should be an integral part of a building; from *On Fairy-stories*:

In Faerie one cannot conceive of a house built with a ‘good’ purpose — a hospital, an inn or refuge for travellers — being ugly or squalid.

Much of Birmingham’s metalwork was melted down for munitions in two world wars, and many buildings have been demolished for road improvement, but some remain to give an idea of Tolkien’s Birmingham.

The school Tolkien attended was beautiful. King Edward’s in New Street was a magnificent building, like a smaller version of the Houses of Parliament. It was designed by the same architect, Sir Charles Barry. Big School, the main school hall, is not unlike Beorn’s Hall in *The Hobbit*. One small part of the old building was transported to the current site at Edgbaston; now the school chapel it had been the upper corridor in the old building, leading into Big School.

This was also true of the Oratory church, founded by John Henry Newman. Mabel Tolkien brought the family to Edgbaston to be close to the Oratory. While the Tolkiens were there the Oratory, originally a fairly plain building, was rebuilt to give a more fitting memorial to Cardinal Newman. Between 1903 and 1906 the church was transformed; materials coming from all over Europe to build an outstandingly beautiful church. The artistic skills and the crafts of men were being offered to glorify God.

A further building that would have aroused Tolkien’s curiosity was a distinctive tower, called both Perrot’s Folly and the Observatory. It had been built in 1758 by John Perrot, and there are several stories about his reason for building. The most prosaic — it was on the edge of his large estate, Rotton Park — was that he wished to be able to see the game. The other two concern his wife, who came from a village to the west in Worcestershire; one story is that he wished to see what she was doing when she went back there, the second that he wished to look towards her grave in the village. Perrot’s Folly is normally described as being one of two towers

— thanks to Bob Blackham for pointing out that the second tower is actually the waterworks chimney. As such it is supposed to be the inspiration for the second part of *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Two Towers*. I do not intend to discuss this here, as it could be a lengthy debate.

However, towers are generally significant in Tolkien’s writings, and there is one that almost certainly owes something to Perrot’s Folly, an odd-looking brick tower looking across to the hills and the canal reservoir constructed from a small lake in the late eighteenth century. In *Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics*, Tolkien proposed an allegory to explain how the work of the teller of the story of Beowulf had been treated. The story was like an old tower built by a man who inherited a field that contained the ruins of an old hall. Friends and relatives wished to discover why the tower had been built, so they destroyed it to be able to examine it

closely. Then they suggested perhaps the man should have restored the old house. But, Tolkien wrote: “from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea”. A tower is often a place of vision.

From the 1880s to the 1970s Perrot’s Folly was a weather observatory, used by Birmingham University with equipment on the top. Old photos show that Tolkien could see the equipment on top of the tower from below. In Tolkien’s fiction *palantiri*, ‘far-seeing’ stones, are all set on towers. In English an instrument which looks a long distance is described by a word of Greek origin that means far-seeing — a telescope. Tolkien lived close to a tower with a telescope, Perrot’s Folly, from the age of

10 to the age of 19.

### The craft of Birmingham reflected in *The Hobbit*

At Bag End Thorin gives an account of the history of the dwarves, and of their life and work in the past: “those were good days for us, and the poorest of us had money to spend and to lend, and leisure to make beautiful things just for the fun of it”. Thorin ended this speech with a phrase that would have appealed to Tolkien, the scholar of language. It echoes the history of Birmingham in a way not immediately apparent in our times, as Thorin continued: “not to speak of the most marvellous and magical toys . . . the toy market of Dale was the wonder of the North”. I would like to thank Murray Smith for mentioning a further reference to toys from Dale in the first chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*; musical crackers, obviously of high quality as they contained small musical instruments “of perfect make and enchanting tones” — not normally a characteristic of musical instruments found in modern crackers.

To the modern reader a ‘toy’ is a plaything for children. But it had a different meaning two centuries ago, as Tolkien would have known. A poem written in 1800 told of the Ramble of the Gods through Birmingham<sup>15</sup>:



Perrot’s Folly

The Toy Shop of the World then rear'd its crest,  
Whilst hope and joy, alternate, fill'd each breast  
Inventions curious, various kinds of toys,  
Then occupied the time of men and boys

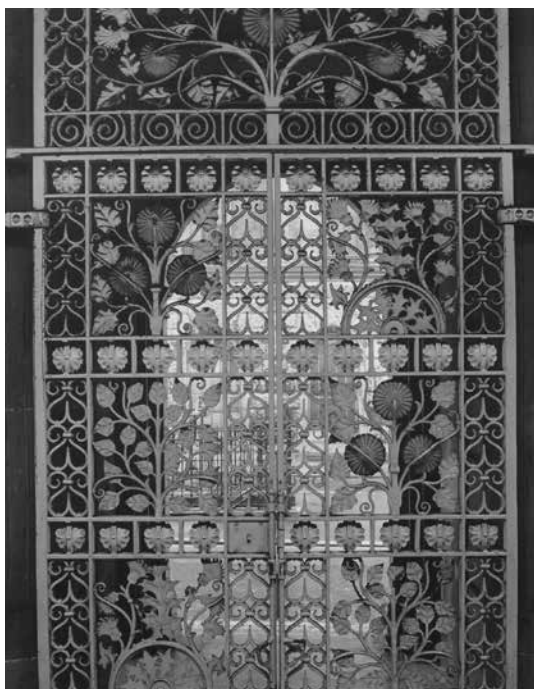
This concept of Birmingham continued through the nineteenth century; in the 1867 guide<sup>13</sup>: “Birmingham has not infrequently been called ‘the toy-shop of Europe’ ... Birmingham makes toys enough, no doubt, but they are intended for the rough hands of hard-working men; not to amuse the idle hours of laughing children.”

In our times Tolkien has been perceived as a man who objected to many things modern, especially industry. Tolkien's objection was to large-scale industry — and indeed to many other modern ‘ugly or squalid’ impersonal activities; mass mechanized warfare, mass housing, mass production. He was not protesting about small workshops where things of beauty might be produced. When writing about cars he criticized car factories partly because of the effects of its production on the workers<sup>5</sup>: “the motor-factories and their subsidiaries and the cars themselves and their black and blasted roads, devour the ‘country’ like dragons ... and to make the chain hundreds of the magician's prisoners sweat like morlocks.” This comment probably refers to Oxford (Cowley) rather than Birmingham, as motor factories came only to Birmingham in the 1920s, after Tolkien's time there. Before the Great War, Birmingham had many craftsmen, and the largest firm in 1914 did not make cars, but confectionery; it was Cadbury's.

Individual craftsmen are praised in Tolkien's stories. Individual craftsmen and workers had created Birmingham, and Birmingham society and politics. Individual workmen had independence of mind. The owner of a workshop had been part of it, he might through work come to own a factory, but would still have a link with those who work there. His men would not be overawed by their masters because they were too close. So hobbits speak with respect to those whom they feel deserve respect — but there are no hobbit kings. Tolkien explained in the Prologue to *The Lord of the Rings* that “The Shire at this time had hardly any ‘government.’”

Because there is little ‘government’ there is little about politics in the Shire. Tolkien does describe one politician in *The Hobbit*: the Master of Lake Town. The Master of the Town is the equivalent of a mayor. John Rateliff in *The History of the Hobbit Mr. Baggins*, suggests that the Men of Lake Town were “urbane, with a culture right out of the High Middle Ages”<sup>16</sup>. His description of the Master however bears a close

resemblance to a man whom Tolkien's grandfather John Suffield would have known in Birmingham societies. The Master “has a good head for business — especially his own business ... he is not without skills ... it is he who plans the new Lake Town that rises from the ashes of the old, and does it so well that the new is fairer than the old. A wily politician (the only one in Tolkien's work) the Master is sophisticated, subtle, and just a touch corrupt.” For the Master as for other characters Tolkien probably had several models — Murray Smith has suggested David Lloyd George. The Master also bears a close resemblance to a famous Birmingham politician before and during Tolkien's youth, Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain had been Mayor of Birmingham, and caused Birmingham to be demolished and rebuilt before he left to take part in national government<sup>18</sup>.



The Old Library's gates.

## Learning and study

Mabel wished her sons to study at King Edward's School New Street. Their father Arthur Tolkien, her older brother Roland, her brothers-in-law T. E. Mitton and Wilfred Tolkien, her nephews Eric and Thomas Ewart Mitton were all pupils there. King Edward's was of fundamental importance to Tolkien's future career as an academic. High standards were demanded, to the extent that the most able scholars took part in a debate in Latin each year. University places were then far more limited than they are now. If Tolkien had not gone to King Edward's it is unlikely that

he would have been able to study at Oxford, and the rest of his life might have taken a very different course. There were only a few schools in England at that time that would give education of that kind to a middle-class boy whose mother had little money.

## Religion: love the Lord your God, love your neighbour

Pity, compassion and mercy were important qualities to Tolkien throughout his life. When Gandalf tells Frodo the story of Bilbo and the ring, Frodo says of Gollum: “‘What a pity [Bilbo] did not stab that vile creature, when he had the chance!’ Gandalf replies: ‘Pity? It was pity that stayed his hand. Pity and Mercy, not to strike without need.’”

In *Unfinished Tales*, in the Quest of Erebor there is an account by Frodo of a conversation between Gandalf and the hobbits that took place after the coronation of Aragorn. Gandalf explains his concern for the hobbits<sup>18</sup>:

I began to have a warm place in my heart for the [Shire-folk] in the Long Winter ... They were very hard put to it then: one of the worst pinches they have been in, dying of cold, and starving in the

dreadful dearth that followed. But that was the time to see their courage, and their pity one for another. It was by their pity as much by their tough uncomplaining courage that they survived.

In 1957, after he had taken part in working on the translation of the Jerusalem Bible, he wrote<sup>1</sup>: “If you look at Jonah you’ll find that the ‘whale’ — it is not really said to be a whale, but a big fish — is quite unimportant. The real point is that God is much more merciful than ‘prophets’, is easily moved by penitence.”

The qualities of compassion and pity were not only evident in religious life but also in Birmingham society generally. The reference to the recreation of Lake Town by the Master above may be a reflection of the creation of a new Birmingham in late Victorian times, for the sake of both the middle-class and the working-class. The social values of the city that Tolkien knew are also reflected in the Shire, for example Sam’s sharing of Galadriel’s gift with the whole Shire. Some of Birmingham’s middle class felt it their responsibility to make life better for those poorer than themselves. One rich lady, Louisa Anne Ryland, gave land to the city for hospitals and parks. Boys at King Edward’s, at the time when Tolkien was there, arranged evening clubs for street-boys, and organized camping trips for them. In 1900 they helped collect for the national Baden-Powell collection for widows and orphans in Mafeking.

At the Oratory, from his mother, and probably from other members of the family, Tolkien learned to worship God. His devotion also was part of his whole life. He enjoyed his creation and wrote of his desire to tell an exciting story<sup>10</sup>. This he hoped was part of God’s creation, as a subcreation. His

fiction was based on real life, in Birmingham and elsewhere. The hobbits linked the fantasy with the reality: “I myself saw the value of hobbits, in putting earth under the feet of romance” (Letter 163; 1955). The reality, like the trees he loved, reached from the earth to the sky.

“Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, Finished. If you could say that of a Tree that was alive, its leaves opening, its branches growing and bending in the wind... ‘It’s a gift!’ he said. He was referring to his art, and also to the result; but he was using the word quite literally.”<sup>19</sup> m

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## The magic of fantasy: the traditional, the original and the wonderful

SIMON BARRON

Over the past decade, fantasy literature has experienced an immense resurgence in popularity. The critical success of fantasy literature is demonstrated by the honours recently bestowed upon them. According to AwardsAnnals.com, of the ten most honoured fiction books, four are fantasy books — Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book* and *American Gods*; Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* and Terry Pratchett’s *Nation*. A further two can be classified as speculative fiction — Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Michael Chabon’s *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*. In terms of commercial success, the past decade has brought the massive popularity of the Harry Potter series and the *Twilight* series as well as a renewed public interest in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*: in 2003, the fantasy epic took the top spot in the BBC’s The Big

Read survey; in the same year, Peter Jackson’s movie version of *The Return of the King* was a tremendous box-office success and tied for winner of the most Academy Awards ever.

This renaissance of fantasy literature has flooded the book market with fantasy fiction. Despite the large amount available, only a few achieve excellence. Here I discuss what makes fantasy literature successful by examining which qualities of plot, characterization, and style serve as marks of excellence within the fantasy genre and demonstrates how Tolkien’s masterpiece matches all the criteria of successful fantasy.

### Defining fantasy

Fantasy has been defined in various ways. Leng<sup>1</sup> defines works of fantasy as those in which “the author deliberately presents objects or incidents which do not observably occur in real