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[1]: "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[10]. 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."[19] 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[1] defines works of fantasy as those in which "the author deliberately presents objects or incidents which do not observably occur in real

life". Lourie[2] distinguishes realism, which deals with improbabilities, from fantasy, which deals in impossibilities. These definitions are too broad as they cover a range of speculative fiction including science fiction and horror. Merla[3] narrows the definition by identifying 'magic' as the essential component of fantasy: "a supernatural force whose use, misuse, or disuse irrevocably changes the lives of those it touches". This is equally unsatisfactory as there are fantasy works in which 'magic' is either not used or used only tangentially.

Fantasy literature may best be defined by its tropes: a nebulous cloud of shared characteristics rather than a strict verbal definition. *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, published in 1812, introduced the characteristics of fantasy fiction that have been adopted as hallmarks of the genre. Tales such as 'The Frog Prince', 'Hansel and Gretel', 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'Snow White' and 'Rumpelstiltskin' share the characteristics of anthropomorphic animals, dream-like scenarios, and the use of magic as a plot device. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the stories of Hans Christian Andersen have been identified as the first 'literary fantasies for children'. As well as possessing the characteristics listed above, *Alice* contains another that would become important for fantasy: the creation of a fantasy world. Use of magic, anthropomorphic animals, and the creation of a secondary world are tropes shared by subsequent fantasy classics, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Peter and Wendy*, *The Once and Future King*, the novels of Roald Dahl and the epics created by C. S. Lewis and Tolkien. The works of Narnia and Middle-earth introduced another defining characteristic of fantasy: the stark depiction of good and evil, and the eternal struggle between those forces. These defining tropes have been passed on to current fantasy literature: all fantasy novels will contain one or more of these characteristics. How is it that works containing such similar elements can have such divergence in quality? What is it about a great fantasy work that sets it apart from the lesser works lining the shelves of bookshops?

Plot

Plot refers to the structure of the story and the setting including the building of any secondary worlds. A good fantasy plot involves the balance of two contrasting qualities: traditionalism and originality. As Gates and colleagues[4] explain: "The making of successful fantasy calls for a mélange of original and traditional, unfamiliar and familiar, unconventional and conventional, fresh and imitative." Too traditional, and a work feels derivative, as in the numerous novels about young wizards that appeared when the popularity of the Harry Potter series was at its height. Conversely, too much originality can dilute the defining tropes and means a work falls outside the genre border.

On the traditionalist side, a mark of excellence is a the kind of story structure readily recognizable from traditional myth or legend. In his 1949 book, Joseph Campbell[5] determined the 'monomyth': the standard structure for tales of mythic heroes . The monomyth structure recurs across cultures and throughout history. The author of a novel is often consciously unaware that he or she is following a pre-defined story structure, aware only of the intuitive satisfaction of the 'standard story'. Many great works of fiction, especially children's fiction, follow Campbell's outline which consists of three parts corresponding to traditional tribal rites of passage: 'separation–initiation–return'. The full structure is as follows[5]: "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."

Most of the classics of fantasy literature share this traditional structure. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* follow it closely: a girl is transported away from her mundane existence to a magical realm; strange beings are encountered and befriended; a victory is won — in these cases over a tyrannical matriarch: the Queen of Hearts and the Wicked Witch of the West respectively — after which the heroine returns home, all the richer for her experience. So too in fantasy books for younger children: consider *Where the Wild Things Are* and *The Cat in the Hat*. The same basic structure occurs in *The Hobbit*: a child-like figure ventures from his comfortable home, has extraordinary adventures, and returns home with renewed confidence and a magic ring. The quest structure is even more explicit in *The Lord of the Rings* which, to some extent, renewed and updated the monomyth for the latter half of the twentieth century through the addition of stark good and evil and a large cast of allies and enemies.

Although many adult fantasy novels have more sophisticated plot structures, many still owe something to the monomyth. At its essence, George R. R. Martin's sprawling epic *A Song of Ice and Fire* is about the displacement and subsequent adventures of the House Stark. Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series centrally follows the traditional quest structure albeit in a non-traditional fashion. Neil Gaiman, in particular, has acknowledged the unintended debt which *American Gods*, *Stardust* and some of *The Sandman* stories owe to the monomyth[6].

As mentioned, successful fantasy blends traditionalism with originality. To a greater extent than realist literature, fantasy writing is based upon imagination: expansive creations of fancy and whimsy; the construction of unique characters; unusual beasts and creatures; the construction of worlds; and the writing of new laws for the operation of reality. Realist works do require authorial imagination but fundamentally operate under the laws of our reality. Fantasy works require more invention and a further mark of quality is the conveyance of the author's unique imaginative vision.

While the plot structure of heroic fantasy follows the traditional outline, a novel's setting can be used to demonstrate originality. This is often done through the author's creation of what Tolkien referred to as a 'secondary world'. World-building is a key part of fantasy literature and an original fantasy world is often the most memorable part of a novel or series: from the whimsical worlds of Wonderland and Oz to the culturally complex kingdoms of R. Scott Bakker's Eärwa or Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea. In the absence of original plot,

setting is a key place for the author's originality to manifest itself. The central stories of *The Hobbit* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, for example, are fairly similar but it is the setting that distinguishes these novels and makes them so memorable: Middle-earth is a land of sprawling history with only a few races — largely elves, dwarves and men — living and struggling together; Narnia is a more fanciful land of talking animals, hundreds of races, and a unique system of time dilation. An original setting can give a fantasy novel a unique flavour. As another example, the plots of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* are virtually identical : it is the idiosyncrasy — and uniquely British nature — of Hogwarts that gives the setting and consequently the whole novel an original feel.

Fantasy has the unique ability to evoke the sense of wonder that comes from encountering the unexplained.

Character

Another good place to demonstrate originality is in characterization — indeed, another element determining a novel's quality is original characters. These are the characters that stick with you long after the story has faded from your mind: Gollum, Mr Tumnus, Merlin, Roland Deschain, Rincewind and others. Original characters are often secondary characters as primary characters by necessity act as a 'blank slate' for entrance into the text. Particularly in children's novels, primary characters act as avatars for the reader to occupy while exploring the story and the world of the fantasy novel. Most children's fantasy books, for example, have a young protagonist or a protagonist sufficiently childlike that children can identify with them . These protagonists are usually nondescript thus allowing the reader to project themselves into the characters: take Alice, Dorothy, Wendy Darling and Bilbo Baggins — characters largely defined by their attribute of curiosity, an attribute that all children can identify with.

Secondary characters have more freedom to be original, unconventional, fantastic, unusual and ultimately memorable. There are hundreds of stories in which certain characters are more memorable than the central plot overshadowing the primary character: the eccentric Toad in *The Wind in the Willows*; Willy Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; Death in Pratchett's Discworld (who started 'life' as a secondary character before his promotion in *Mort*); the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter, the Caterpillar, the Duchess and so on from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Tolkien's stand-out example is Gollum, a unique and tragic character whose struggle against the ring epitomises the reason for the primary characters' journey.

Style

In addition to the substance of plot and characters, style is important in making successful fantasy literature. This includes the narrative techniques used to advance a story and the use of language to create a novel's tone. A distinct style helps to embed the author's work in the reader's mind and there are specific stylistic qualities that make fantasy writing excellent.

The first is a level of narrative sophistication appropriate to the book's audience. As an example, fantasy literature tends to invite the use of the *deus ex machina* — a sudden, inexplicable event that immediately resolves a problem within a story. In fantasy, the author may extend the internal logic of their secondary world or classify anything unexpected as 'magic' to cover inexplicable events: this was parodied in *The Simpsons* through the use of the cover-all phrase: "Whenever you notice something like that, a wizard did it." As a fantasy reader grows more sophisticated, he or she loses their patience with lazy narrative techniques and feel cheated when books do not possess narrative consistency. For example, as part of the dénouement of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, it is revealed that Harry survived Voldemort's attack as a baby because of 'love' and a protection that is never mentioned prior to that scene or used in the series again . By contrast, the climax of *The Lord of the Rings* is Gollum's final attempt to wrest back his Precious: this event is foreshadowed and made possible by events throughout the novel. The narrative progression is logical, the reader feels that it makes sense, and the scene is satisfying. Survey data[1] indicate that "Miraculous events occur in nearly a quarter of the books borrowed at the age of six. Afterwards, the boys borrow fewer and fewer of these stories every year, until by the age of twelve they are seldom borrowed." This indicates that as readers grow, they lose patience with *deus ex machina* techniques, progressing to narratives with more sophistication. Thus a mark of excellence is the use of plot devices appropriate to the age of the reader.

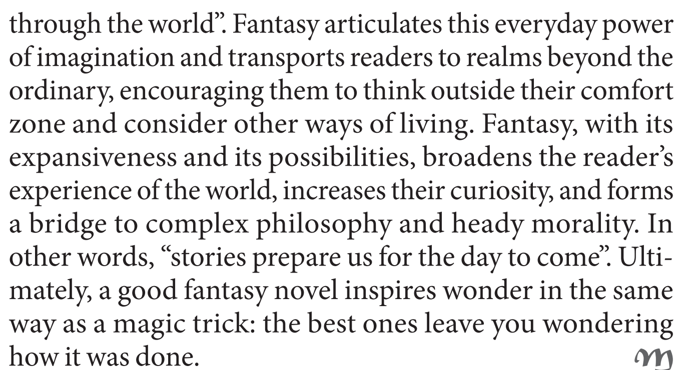
A second stylistic mark of successful fantasy literature is a certain tone. More than other genres, fantasy requires willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader. Fantasy literature — particularly children's fantasy literature — requires readers to 'play along' with the author as he or she spins a tale of impossibility: one effective means of cultivating this sense of playfulness is by using language to create a tone. The first lines of *The Hobbit* for example immediately involve the reader in the author's telling of the story: "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort." Tolkien begins by clarifying his first point: this lets the reader see 'behind the scenes' of the telling of the tale. It is the author's way of telling the reader that this is an invented story and that they should play along from the start. Similar playful tones occur in Pratchett's writing and Gaiman's novels, particularly *Neverwhere*.

Although a playful tone is a mark of excellence for children's fantasy, adult fantasy generally aims for a more serious style. Though there can be moments of light-heartedness and brevity (notably in adult fantasy novels such as Patrick

Rothfuss's *The Name of the Wind* or Scott Lynch's *Gentleman Bastard* series), most fantasy novels tend towards a historical tone as if the author were imparting lost tales of what happened long ago. This is certainly the case with *The Lord of the Rings*, Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Erikson's *Malazan Book of the Fallen* series, and Bakker's *Prince of Nothing* series. The main stylistic mark of successful fantasy is a tone appropriate to the story being told. Tone helps ease a reader into a narrative and helps them to believe in the story — either as a ripping yarn or as a serious moralistic tale.

The unquantifiable

The most important quality of good fantasy is one that does not fall under the categories of plot, character or style but is an amalgamation of all three: "the capacity to incite wonder"[4]. Fantasy has the unique ability to show events, people, and worlds that could not possible be seen in real life: to evoke the sense of wonder that comes from encountering the unexplained. G. K. Chesterton said fantasy shows that "the universe is wild and full of marvels"[7]. In defending fantasy as a genre, Jorge Luis Borges said[8] that fantasy is the most ancient genre: "dreams, symbols and images traverse our lives; a welter of imaginary worlds flows unceasingly



through the world". Fantasy articulates this everyday power of imagination and transports readers to realms beyond the ordinary, encouraging them to think outside their comfort zone and consider other ways of living. Fantasy, with its expansiveness and its possibilities, broadens the reader's experience of the world, increases their curiosity, and forms a bridge to complex philosophy and heady morality. In other words, "stories prepare us for the day to come". Ultimately, a good fantasy novel inspires wonder in the same way as a magic trick: the best ones leave you wondering how it was done.

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The wizard and the rhetor: rhetoric and the ethos of Middle-earth in *The Hobbit*

CHAD CHISHOLM

Early in *The Hobbit* when the wizard Gandalf arrives at the clearing in the woods, he finds that Thorin Oakenshield and his 12 dwarf companions have been captured by the trolls Bert, Tom and William. Shortly before their captivity, Thorin had fought valiantly, using a torch to burn Bert in the eye and to knock out one of Tom's front teeth, before William finally takes Thorin from behind and places him in a sack. Now the trolls, more incensed than before, are quarrelling about the most expedient way to cook these unlucky 13: roast them slowly, mince and then boil them, or "sit on them one by one and squash them into jelly". After much heated debate, the trolls decide to follow Bert's idea to roast the dwarves immediately and save them for a later snack. However, once they come to their tenuous consensus, the trolls hear a voice (which Bert takes to be William's) say "No good roasting 'em now, it'd take all night". William and Bert immediately begin to quarrel again and finally decide to boil the dwarves, when the voice (which Bert and William take to be Tom's) begins to quibble about fetching the water for the pot. This starts the argument afresh, and the three trolls start fighting again, which goes on awhile until the sun peeks into the clearing in the woods and the voice says, "Dawn take you all, and be stone". The trolls freeze into statues, and Gandalf, who had been disguising his voice, steps triumphantly into the clearing.

Although it is unclear whether Gandalf used magic or acting to dissemble his own voice for the trolls, his strategy for keeping the trolls from eating the dwarves and arguing until morning is shrewdly rhetorical and begins long before he contributes a single utterance to the trolls' culinary conversation. For instance, before he speaks, Gandalf listens to Bert, Tom and William argue and fight over roasting or boiling, and deduces the character (ethos) and emotional state (pathos) of his audience: that the churlish companionship of the three trolls is hardly filial, but held in place mostly by their gluttonous urges and desire for plunder, which leads to a mutual suspicion that makes their alliance shaky. Gandalf then infers that the trolls could be credulous enough that if he were to exploit these tensions, he might persuade them to focus their anger more on themselves rather than the dwarves.