

Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien

Peter Hunt, ed. 2013. *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 178 pp. ISBN 978-0-333-71702-8

J.R.R. Tolkien is one of the most popular and influential fantasy writers. His position in literature is controversial but his popularity is never ending. His works have sparked many discussions and are constantly critically examined because of the issues surrounding the status of the fantasy genre and the never-ending debate of quality and popularity. The latest examinations and discussions are due to the development of children's literature studies and approaches to children's and young adult texts.

The recently issued collection of critical essays in the *New Casebooks* series by Palgrave Macmillan, edited by Peter Hunt, focuses on J.R.R. Tolkien and two of his most popular books, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. This interesting collection of original essays explores these works from various perspectives and examines numerous issues such as gender, language, worldbuilding, the placement of Tolkien within the field of children's literature, and the visual representation of his works, including Peter Jackson's movies. The authors of the essays reflect a critical attitude that accepts the value of Tolkien's work and attempt to connect it to its linguistic and cultural roots and to the politics and literature of its time. The authors also consider the relevance of the work to contemporary discussions of fantasy, gender, cultural theory and film.

In the Introduction, Peter Hunt examines the critic's confusion with *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (*LOTR*) regarding how to place them in literature. He states that one of the problems critics had with these works was the fact that normal critical tools were not appropriate. Since then, the critical landscape has shifted and developed, fantasy has become part of the mainstream, and children's literature a respectable academic discipline. The readership of these books is what defines them. They are both read by adults and children, but the 'story shapes' are what distinguishes *The Hobbit* as a children's book and *LOTR* as a book for adults. Hunt ends the Introduction to this collection by commenting on the complexity of Tolkien's works and their importance in the discussion of fantasy literature, children's literature and contemporary popular culture.

The first essay deals with *The Hobbit's* precarious position in literature thought appropriate either for children or for adults. Children are the implied reader of the story, and the story has a simple narrative structure which deals with the maturation of a child-like protagonist. The author, Keith O'Sullivan, covers various critical viewings of this story: as a *bildungsroman* and as a quest-story. He also states that *The Hobbit* is comprised of writings for both children and adults and as such encourages crossover readings, meaning it can be read by both adults and children. The second essay, by Maria Sachiko Cecire, deals with Tolkien's influences. Tolkien's interest in northern European languages and mythology, medieval literature and fairy stories is well known and has influenced his work greatly. The author of this essay also reflects on Tolkien's teachings at Oxford and the curriculum he designed to do so. Tolkien's influence on other authors is another issue that is explored in this essay.

The third essay, written by Hazel Sheeky Bird, explores escapism and ‘pastoralism’ in *The Hobbit* and its influence on Britain during the interwar period. The author of the essay claims that the story of *The Hobbit* offers a means of facing the future with renewed optimism and strength by affirming principles of friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation. The issue of pastoralism in *The Hobbit* comes from the enduring equation between the Shire and England. The mythical English national countryside was often used in these kinds of stories as a refuge from the modern world. With other examples of British interwar children’s fantasy and ‘camping and tramping’ fiction, the author of the essay demonstrates the ability of such works to use escapism and pastoralism in a dynamic way.

The fourth essay, by C.W. Sullivan III, explores Tolkien’s story as a traditional dragon tale. In it the author argues that Tolkien was a traditional storyteller in the ancient sense, meaning he created and shaped his narrative in an individual way, creating a variation on a formula like all the traditional storytellers before him. Only Tolkien did so in a modern medium. As a traditional storyteller, Tolkien recreated and told an old dragon-slayer story but then made it his own when he made Bard the dragon-slayer and not Bilbo, the main character of *The Hobbit*.

Several essays in this collection deal with Tolkien’s creation of Middle-earth. Catherine Butler explores the implications and ramifications of worldbuilding, the art of constructing a universe with its own history and geography, cultures and languages, and other components. Tolkien famously worked on the creation of Middle-earth for sixty years, even after the publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. He made sure that every detail fitted into the total pattern where everything had to be entirely consistent. Jane Suzanne Carroll deals with the topoanalytical readings of landscapes in Middle-earth. She explores the role of the spatial-cultural intertext in Tolkien’s fiction and does so by focusing on a single topos, a topological commonplace, the sanctuary. The essay explores the homes, halls and strongholds of Tolkien’s fiction, and the author shows how medieval literature influenced Tolkien and his topoi. Tolkien did not just copy the landscapes of older literature but adapted and modified them to fit into his world. In the last essay concerning Tolkien’s worldbuilding, Shelley Saguaro and Deborah Cogan Thacker focus on the importance of trees in Tolkien’s novels. Tolkien, a lover of trees, littered his world with them, for they stand for attitudes towards nature, offering real or imaginary respite from the modern world. In his work, Tolkien created magical ancient tree beings (Ents) under the influence of older literature, like the Grimms’ fairy tales, all infused with the view that a tree is a beautiful aspect of creation.

Louise Joy deals with language and Zoë Jaques with gender in Tolkien’s work. While writing *The Hobbit*, Tolkien understood he was writing for children and thus modified his language to fit his audience. But this does not mean he limited his vocabulary. Joy explores especially the language used by Bilbo Baggins. Jaques states that Tolkien’s work has been criticised for depicting outdated or stereotypical models of gendered behaviour and for the shortage of female characters. However, if one considers gender a mode of behaviour separate from a certain sex, then Tolkien’s characters (the Hobbits) are given various opportunities for gendered development on their journey through Middle-earth.

In the last essay in this collection, Kate Harvey explores different methods used by adapters of Tolkien's work to address specific audiences through a range of visual media. The Alan Lee illustrated edition is the best known and has influenced and is referenced in all the other works mentioned in this essay. Other adaptations of Tolkien's work into visual media i.e. comic books, graphic novels, animation and films, face a problem in transforming the text from a verbal to a graphic medium since efforts are generally made to fit as much of the original text as possible into the new pages, illustrations, animations and film.

This interesting and compelling collection of essays deals with various issues in J.R.R. Tolkien's work and offers a new critical approach through the lens of children's literature studies and looks at some problems through adult and fantasy literature. This collection will be attractive to students of children's literature, fantasy, illustration, film and anyone who has an interest in Tolkien's work.

Maja Loborec

Desire: Right or Wrong?

Lydia Kokkola. 2013. *Fictions of Adolescent Carnality: Sexy sinners and delinquent deviants*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 236 pp. ISBN 978-90-272-0155-3

In this study, Lydia Kokkola explores one of the most controversial topics in young adult literature: carnal desire. Reviewing about 200 Anglophone novels and short stories published in more than one English speaking country and featuring sexually active teenage characters, Kokkola has arrived at interesting generalisations about Anglophone society's attitudes to adolescence, adolescent sexuality, and the messages adult writers convey to their young readers on the topic. The author points out that though this is a literary enquiry, the root phenomenon is of a social character because teen fiction does not reflect real teens but rather what adults think about them and what they should be, proving that despite the liberal democratic stance Anglophone society takes, it remains conservative regarding adolescent sexuality.

In the introductory chapter, the author starts off by examining the social beliefs embedded in the concepts of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. She states that "adolescence is a social construction" (2) just like the myth of innocent childhood, both existing because of adults' urge to "privilege adulthood as a period of balanced maturity" (6). In Anglophone cultures, Kokkola argues, adolescent *sturm und drang* is actually invented by adults for this very reason. Focusing on inner turmoil, the angst-ridden teen is celebrated through the media and literature, actually perpetuating stereotypes in order to serve broader social purposes, as this enables the younger child to remain innocent for longer.

Kokkola claims that the "aetonormative" order of society, as Maria Nikolajeva terms adults' power over children, allows adults to decide what constitutes age-appropriate behaviour and to convey it to their offspring via literature for youth which offers an "ideal site for indoctrination" (14). Thus, instead of reflecting reality, literature has been used as a