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**The Currency of Heroic Fantasy:  
*The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry  
Potter* from Ideology to Industry**

A thesis presented in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English at  
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## Abstract

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This thesis proposes that the current popularity of heroic fantasy arises from the genre's capacity to reveal "meaning" to the alienated subject within late modernity. While consumerism potentially undermines the subject's sense of stability both as an individual and as a member of a coherent and unified social group, the hero's journey conveys a compelling model for attaining a purposive subjectivity by acting on behalf of the broader community. However, this "healing" message is in turn appropriated by multinational corporations and nation states for financial advantage. Heroic fantasy can thus be read at various points of its production and consumption as both legitimating and contesting dominant institutions and ideologies.

With particular reference to the books and films of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, ontological security is discussed at both individual and collective levels across three horizons: commodification, gender, and nationalism. A combination of close textual analysis and the application of core concepts from cultural studies – particularly ethnographic study, hegemonic power relations and political economy – provides the methodological flexibility necessary to trace consumers' contradictory and ambivalent responses to the

three themes: the anti-materialist message incorporated in the genre's moral economy is jeopardised by the rampant commodification of the texts; the normative masculinity and emphasised femininity common to the genre is contested by female readers; and the utopic visions of a secure and homogeneous community are exploited by the New Zealand government rebranding the country as Middle-earth. These arguments are oriented toward a New Zealand perspective; interviews with readers of *Harry Potter* and a discussion of the World Premiere of Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Return of the King* in "Wellywood" contribute to this specific context.

This thesis therefore asserts that once heroic fantasy is placed in the contexts of production and reception conflicting trends are revealed, suggesting that the social impacts of heroic fantasy are complex and equivocal. Although the genre is readily commodified by the very system that it retaliates against, analysis suggests that heroic fantasy resists reification into a single dominant discourse as appropriation is never absolute.

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## Abbreviations

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### Primary Texts

J. R. R. Tolkien	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	(FOR)
	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers</i>	(TT)
	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i>	(RK)
	<i>The Hobbit or There and Back Again</i>	(H)
	“On Fairy-Stories”	(“OFS”)
Films:	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	(LORI)
	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers</i>	(LORII)
	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i>	(LORIII)
J. K. Rowling:	<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</i>	(HPPS)
	<i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>	(HPCS)
	<i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	(HPPA)
	<i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>	(HPGF)
	<i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>	(HPOP)
	<i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i>	(HPHBP)
Films:	<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone</i>	(HPI)
	<i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>	(HPII)

*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (HPIII)

*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (HPIV)

### **Secondary Texts**

Dale Elvy *Spirit Shinto Trilogy: First Hunter* (FH)

*Spirit Shinto Trilogy: Spirit City* (SC)

*Spirit Shinto Trilogy: Dark Shinto* (DS)

John Clute and John Grant

*Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (EOF)

### **Interviews**

Focus Group Interview – Pilot (FGI1)

Focus Group Interview – 12 year olds (FGI2)

Focus Group Interview – 14-16 year olds (FGI3)

Focus Group Interview – Adults (FGI4)

## Note on Editions

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George Allen and Unwin in Great Britain originally published *The Lord of the Rings* in three volumes (Volume One in July 1954), followed by the American Edition in October 1954 (Volume One) by Houghton Mifflin Company. Within each of these editions there were not only printers' errors but also corrections of Tolkien's idiosyncratic grammar. Some corrections were made for ensuing impressions of this first edition; however, these were offset by further errors occurring during the resetting process.

The Ace Books' unauthorised publication of a paperback version of *The Lord of the Rings* prompted the author to revise the text for Ballantine Books in 1965. Again, errors accompanied the corrections and revisions. Allen and Unwin's 1966 Second Edition did not include all the revisions made for Ballantine Books, and so inconsistencies of the texts between publishers were compounding with each printing.

It seems that between a final revision by Tolkien in 1966, ensuing corrections by Christopher Tolkien and the advent of computing have brought about a uniformity of the text between publishers, if not "typographical perfection" (Rayner Unwin qtd. in Anderson, "Note on the Text", *Lord of the*

*Rings* xi). I have accordingly selected the HarperCollins 1997 paperback publication for referencing in this thesis. Having given a brief account of the “vast and complex web” of the novel’s textual history, Douglas A. Anderson refers to this version of *The Lord of the Rings* as the “best possible” (xi).

*The Lord of the Rings* is frequently referred to as a trilogy; however, I will not be using this terminology in this thesis. Rather, *The Lord of the Rings* refers to the complete novel. The novel is divided into and published in three volumes (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*), which are further divided into two “books” each – a total of six books over the complete novel. Consequently, any references to *The Lord of the Rings* in this thesis will point towards either the novel or the films as a whole. It will be made clear in the context which is being discussed; however, I take the novel as the primary text, and if no other comment is made, it is the novel that is being referred to.

*The Hobbit* has also undergone revision and corrections. Most readers of *The Lord of the Rings* are aware that it was written in response to the success of *The Hobbit* when published in 1937. However, Tolkien had not envisaged a sequel when writing the children’s story. Consequently, in 1951 the Second Edition of *The Hobbit* was revised to make the story consistent with the writing-in-progress of *The Lord of the Rings*. The major changes were to “Chapter Five: Riddles in the Dark.” In his “Note on the Text” to *The Hobbit*, Douglas A.

Anderson writes that the HarperCollins 1996 paperback, based on the 1966 Third Edition, “represents as closely as is possible Tolkien’s final intended form” (ix). I am therefore referring to this edition throughout the thesis.

All *Harry Potter* titles refer to the English versions, published by Bloomsbury, rather than the Scholastic editions with their Americanised titles (for example, *Harry Potter and the DoomsPELL Tournament* for *Harry Potter and the Goble of Fire*). At the time of writing, the *Harry Potter* series is not complete. On the basis of the books published so far and the usual outcomes of the genre, I have assumed that the series will close with Harry ultimately and definitively defeating Lord Voldemort. Comments made throughout the thesis regarding the *Harry Potter* series should be understood from this perspective.