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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
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Abstract

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

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

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.

Chapter One

The Currency of Heroic Fantasy

“The Strong Curse”

Ooba dooba laba dabba

Make me strong

Like Todd Blackadda

(Kinnear, qtd. in Haddad 68)

Eight-year-old Kinnear wrote this spell in response to the “Make a Wand and Write a Spell” competition run by the New Zealand bookseller Whitcoulls in 2000. The competition was a “huge success, attracting entries from all over New Zealand, from Whangarei to Invercargill” (Haddad 4). There are fan letters to Harry and J. K. Rowling, drawings of the Hogwarts’ characters, and plenty of spells with suitably revolting ingredients such as “pigs [sic] urine” (94) and “rotten eggs” (102), all collated from this competition into *The Magic of Harry: New Zealand Children Pay Tribute to J. K. Rowling*. One young reader, Guy (age 12), has written a piece of music entitled “Harry Potter Theme” and

suggests to Rowling that, “if they ever make a movie of Harry Potter, maybe you could use my music as a theme” (92). Another, Olivia (age 12), writes:

Dear the Best Author in the Universe, J. K. Rowling,

When I received your first book I was sick at home with pneumonia . . . Even though I was sick, I ended up reading the book non-stop . . . When I ended up in hospital, I pleaded with mum (if I could of [sic] gotten down on my knees I would have) to look for the second book. (10)

Such is the excitement about *Harry Potter* that even hospitalisation does not dampen the reader’s desire for more. Of the many inventive entries, Kinnear’s spell is striking for me in that he uses his admiration for the fictional hero Harry Potter to endorse his pride in a local, real life sports hero, Todd Blackadder. At the time the poem was written, Blackadder was at the height of his “powers” as captain of the very successful Crusaders rugby team. Local pride in his achievements is indicated by his hometown Rangiora temporarily renaming itself “Blackadderville” when the Crusaders won the Super 12 competition in 2000. Blackadder is a big, strong man, quiet spoken, and humble. He evoked loyalty and good play from his team mates - leadership qualities that eventuated in his becoming captain of the All Blacks. As captain of New

Zealand's foremost sports team and bearer of national identity, Blackadder is regarded as an important role model for young people.¹ Kinnear's spell suggests Blackadder embodies the qualities he admires, particularly strength.

While Todd Blackadder is not central to this thesis, the interconnection between fictional heroes and everyday life is, and the epigraph reveals one young person's attempt to draw two very different forms of heroism together. Or are they so different? Blackadder is a physically imposing man whose career is playing professional rugby. Harry Potter, on the other hand, is an undersized fictional wizard (16 years old in the latest novel) who is extending his magical powers within the Hogwarts education system. His destiny is to confront the most evil wizard alive, Voldemort, in a mortal duel, and in doing so he will either save or doom his world. Harry Potter does, however, play Quidditch, the most popular sport the wizard world has and is instrumental in thwarting the cunning and malicious Slytherin team from winning the Quidditch Cup. Voldemort used to be in the Slytherin House and is a gross exaggeration of Slytherin "values"; to beat Slytherin House therefore is to symbolically defeat Voldemort, and so each time the brave and honourable

¹ Lindsay Knight writes that Blackadder possessed "considerable leadership qualities." Further, Blackadder "achieved mighty deeds in New Zealand rugby and epitomised, with his devotion to any team for which he played, at club, provincial and international levels, all of rugby's best values" (L. Knight). Fittingly, the three "core values" of the All Blacks are "excellence", "respect" and "humility" (R. Brown).

Gryffindor win the House of Quidditch cup they bolster general well-being at the school. Similarly, the All Blacks bear responsibility for New Zealand's psychical well-being, with their failure to win at the last two World Cups in 1999 and 2003 "devastating" to many.²

As national heroes, Todd Blackadder and Harry Potter draw to themselves the collective desires of the broader community: their success is the collective's, as are their failures. But their affinity is stronger and deeper than this social acknowledgement; these heroes convey a "type" of heroism, which I will be referring to as the "everyman hero". This figure emerges from the fairy tale narrative, where the unlikely protagonist becomes a hero by learning to access already inherent heroic qualities – perseverance, honesty, endeavour, selflessness. Unlike larger than life heroes – Odysseus, Rambo, Conan the Barbarian or Wonder Woman – the everyman hero suggests direct alignment with his readership. Blackadder's small-town roots and family-orientation mark him as ordinary; anyone can become Crusader or All Black captain,

² When the All Blacks exited the 1999 Rugby World Cup after losing 43-31 to France in a semi-final, the BBC dubbed the day "Black Monday" for New Zealand ("Black Monday"). Coach John Hart acknowledged that the loss meant "devastation for the team, devastation for the fans back home and for the fans that were here." The psychological effects of such sporting defeats are attributed with generating political consequences; the BBC News article accurately predicted the sitting National government's defeat at the ensuing election; "And the effects may be further-reaching, with political experts expecting the sporting upset to have repercussions for the sitting government in this month's general election" ("Black Monday").

providing he puts in the training and dedication required. Clearly Harry Potter's wizard status is unobtainable for readers, but his recognition as a wizard feeds directly into what Sigmund Freud identified as the "Family Romance," the common desire or wishfulfilment dream to be seen as special and different from peers and siblings. His consequent reliance upon his bravery, sense of obligation towards the community and determination to out-manoeuvre his annual enemies also provides a template for maturation and socialisation.

Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim employs Freudian theory to detail the means by which fairy tales acclimatise the reader into a well-adapted social being. Fairy tales help the young reader to achieve an acceptable subjectivity and encourage particular modes of behaviour. Where Bettelheim and other commentators such as Anglican journalist Hal Colebatch celebrate the socialising value of these stories and their heroes, I want to emphasise the ideological position these heroes endorse. As action-oriented, "dragon-slaying" heroes, Potter and Blackadder portray patriarchal values and are received as the ideal subjectivity to achieve. Masculinity is valorised as the norm and femininity is the necessary and complementary other. This is particularly evident in the presumption I have made above that anybody can become an All Black through perseverance and hard work. Of course, only males can become

an All Black, rendering females marginal in this formulation of the New Zealand national identity.

To argue this position – heroism promotes patriarchy – is not an innovative stance; nevertheless, that heroism remains a prominent motif in literature, films, entertainment, and in cultural and national identity indicates that despite (perhaps because of) the achievements of feminism this patriarchal figure continues to resonate with contemporary readers, audiences and citizens. Yet, female heroes are also able to fulfil this masculine role, with Lara Croft, Cat Woman and Buffy the Vampire Slayer indicating popular culture’s ability to bring the disenfranchised outside.³

³ The New Zealand Army has run an advertising campaign to recruit soldiers that effectively utilises a “Croft clone”. This computer-generated character challenges the couch-potato viewer to complete two minutes of sit-ups during the ad-breaks; if the viewer can achieve this goal then he or she has “what it takes” to join the Army. By using a curvaceous female to entice recruits into a predominantly male and certainly male-oriented environment, the ad campaign potentially succeeds on a number of levels. The New Zealand Army can be viewed as an “equal opportunities” employer – you can be male or female to join, as qualification is on physical ability not gender. Equally female viewers may be encouraged to consider the Army as a profession with this “role model” demonstrating that women can be attractive *and* a soldier. The male viewer could be prompted to re-establish the soldier’s role as masculine by taking the challenge in order to prove he is as good, but preferably better than, the computer-generated female soldier. As a recruiting strategy, this “Croft clone” is effective in that she manipulates the desire of both genders to occupy the heroic masculine subject position, while serving the interests of the potential employer – the nation-state.

While heroism is a significant aspect of this thesis, the title “The Currency of Heroic Fantasy: *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* from Ideology to Industry” indicates other issues that will be raised and debated. The “currency of heroic fantasy” alludes to the contemporary popularity of a genre, which arguably began with Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954 but with roots dating back to heroic romances such as the Arthurian legends, *Beowulf*, and the Northern European epics the *Kalevala*, the Elder Edda and the Volsunga Saga. The *Harry Potter* series “updates” the genre, transplanting the hero from medieval castles and haunted forests to a co-ed boarding school set in contemporary England, while remaining remarkably faithful to the genre with its Hogwarts castle and forbidden forest. But the phrase “currency of heroic fantasy” is puns on the economic value of the genre. Upon the release of the first films for *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* in 2001 there has been an explosion of related marketing and merchandising, and it is this “epiphenomenon” – referring to the secondary effect or by-product of the original phenomenon - that I refer to as the industry of heroic fantasy.

Typically, interpretation of heroic fantasy looks to reveal the various ideologies embedded in the genre; it is patriarchal, conservative, backward looking. While I am interested in exploring how the heroic fantasy genre expresses and develops these purportedly out-dated ideologies and the reasons for their persistence, I am also concerned with how these ideologies are being

exploited by corporate and national interests in order to generate wealth and revitalise national economies. This discussion is largely framed within the New Zealand context, with particular reference to the nationalist function of branding the nation as Middle-earth. The incumbent government has tapped into the multi-billion dollar industry that heroic fantasy has become, looking to benefit from its seemingly inexplicable mass appeal – as have many other groups as diverse as Christians, national agencies, tourism entrepreneurs, ecologists and corporate powerhouses.

The purpose of this thesis, then, is to explore the current popularity of heroic fantasy through *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. Their popularity has been variously attributed to a satisfying writing style (N. Tucker, Shippey), providing a sense of security in troubled times (Suvin), conforming to a popular and commodified narrative with cosy images and comforting tropes (Zipes, Holden), answering concerns regarding environmental degradation (Kocher), portraying the hero's increasing maturity (Black), reinvigorating Christian motifs (Colebatch, Algeo), leading young readers astray through satanic images of witchcraft and wizardry ("Harry Potter: A New Twist to Witchcraft").⁴ My

⁴ According to this anonymous article on the Exposing Satanism website, the *Harry Potter* books are part of a vast scheme to lure children away from God: "The whole purpose of these books is to desensitize readers and introduce them to the occult. What better way to introduce tolerance and acceptance of what God calls an abomination, than in children's books? If you can

own approach is to argue that these texts (and the genre to which they belong) respond to a widespread dissatisfaction with modernity.

Stuart Hall writes that our individual and collective identities have been undermined or “de-centred” by a number of philosophical changes to the received conception of the individual and his/her place in society (“Question” 285-291). Once Descartes postulated the maxim “cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am), through which the individual was lifted out of the medieval belief in a “great chain of being” or a certain and immutable station in life and posited as the “knowing subject” capable of reflexivity, doubt and thought, the human being could then be conceptualised as subject to both internal (psychological) and external (social, historical, economic, political) forces. Therefore, subjectivity was envisaged as both apart from and constructed by the socio-historical moment in which it lives.

Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Marxism, psychoanalysis, linguistics, the Foucauldian conception of “disciplinary power” and feminism each contributed fundamentally to shifting perspectives on subjectivity, forcefully disproving the pre-modern belief in a sovereign individual; “the fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy” Stuart Hall declares (“Question” 277). Each of these theories advances in disparate terms

get them when they are young, then you have them for life. It’s the oldest marketing scheme there is.”

that the individual is constructed through external forces; the society in which the individual exists, not divine and unshakeable forces, shapes personality and social expectations. The individual is not inserted at birth into an immutable subjectivity and therefore pre-destined “life narrative”, but is capable of both being changed by a new environment and producing change through conscious action.

The rate and scope at which change occurs compounds the destabilisation of individual and collective identities in late modernity.⁵ For Anthony Giddens, “the modes of life brought into being by modernity have swept us away from all traditional types of social order in quite unprecedented fashion” (*Consequences* 21), and I believe that the heroic fantasy genre offers the reader an epic vision about how to retrieve this “lost” stability by invoking pastoralism, re-establishing clear-cut gender roles and evoking the nation as a “natural”

⁵ I have chosen to describe the contemporary period for Western societies as “late modernity” rather than “post-modernity” to support the tenor of my thesis; that consumers of heroic fantasy take pleasure from the genre’s humanist reassurances of “meaningfulness”, as opposed to the unsettling premise of “meaninglessness” playfully portrayed by the postmodernist text. Ulrich Beck et al. employ the phrase “reflexive modernity” to convey how cultural experience in late modernity is marked by the spread of rationality in which self-conscious individuals and entities engage in critique of themselves and the collective. According to Giddens, where the Enlightenment imagined scientific rationalism would generate emancipation from dogma and tradition the resulting self-conscious scrutiny (reflexivity) and decision-making has actually created “circumstances of uncertainty and multiple choices” at root of general contemporary anxiety (*Modernity* 3).

social unit. That is, by inserting the protagonist into a pastoral context (what I will refer to as the moral or gift economy) the reader is reassured of achieving internal coherence such as the hero enjoys through interaction with loyal friends and by acting for the benefit of the larger social unit, the nation.

Giddens contends that the ritual of traditional societies generates a sense of belonging and purpose that cannot be recreated or captured in modern living, arguing that, “personal meaninglessness – the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer – becomes a fundamental psychic problem in circumstances of late modernity” (*Consequences* 9). This “ritual of traditional societies” does not simply refer to the repetitive operation of certain duties each day, week or month, although such replication does provide continuity across time and generations, but alludes to the embedding of human activity into local communities and nature – the intensification of socialisation as immediate or proximate and profound (in the sense of essential and as a consequence of the natural world). Giddens deplores the “‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space” (21) which late modernity (or globalisation) has brought about.

Deepening the “crisis”, the individual is invited to identify with multiple subject positions, becoming fragmented at a fundamental level. The modern subject therefore exists in a time of instability, hyperstimulation and prevailing discontent – a recipe for dis-ease.

I therefore take three ideologies (consumerism, gender, nationalism) that shape our individual and collective subjectivities within late modernity to get some perspective on not only how the heroic fantasy genre reflects contemporary concerns, but how it is “consumed”. While I posit that the genre offers reassurance to the reader, I do not contend that the “answers” given are uniform across the genre nor unequivocally received by the audience. Rather, I suggest that both responses to and consumption of heroic fantasy are not singular and indisputable – and this is key to the genre’s success. By tapping into “large issues” of the historical moment, the heroic fantasy fulfils a variety of needs and desires, as consumers’ imaginations “variously resist, absorb, transform, play with and are mesmerized by the modes of production and their turbulent requirements” (Inglis, *Popular Culture* 94).

It is these ambiguities and ambivalences of reception that drive my interest in the phenomenal success of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and Rowling’s *Harry Potter*, as representative texts of an increasingly popular genre. What, then, are the key elements of the heroic fantasy?

Determining Heroic Fantasy

As Frodo and Sam undertake their epic journey toward Mordor, Sam ponders their future: “I wonder what type of tale we’ve fallen into?” (*TT* 696). It is

significant that Sam frames their outcome in terms of a particular type of tale, the heroic narrative pattern, suggesting that if their story is ever put into words, “people will say: ‘Let’s hear about Frodo and the Ring!’ And they’ll say: ‘Yes, that’s one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn’t he dad?’ ‘Yes, my boy, the famousest of the hobbits, and that’s saying a lot’” (697). Sam anticipates Frodo’s triumph and consequent heroic status because that is the way these stories work; after terrible hardship and challenges, the hero rises above his ordinariness and achieves the impossible.⁶ Frodo, too, acknowledges the genre, noting that the hero would not achieve his great deeds were it not for his faithful companion: “‘you’ve left out one of the chief characters: Samwise the stouthearted. ‘I want to hear more about Sam, dad. Why didn’t they put in more of his talk, dad? That’s what I like, it makes me laugh. And Frodo wouldn’t have got far without Sam, would he, dad?’” (697).⁷

⁶ Sam, like the reader, is drawn by the heroic narrative pattern to assume that Frodo will achieve his task – destroy Sauron’s Ring in Mt Doom. Frodo’s heroism is discussed in chapter five below.

⁷ Later, Sam returns to this analogy of their adventures as conforming to a narrative structure: “‘What a tale we’ve been in, Mr. Frodo, haven’t we?’ he said. ‘I wish I could hear it told! Do you think they’ll say: Now comes the story of *Nine-Fingered Frodo and the Ring of Doom*? And then everyone will hush, like we did, when in Rivendell they told us the tale of Beren One hand and the Great Jewel’” (TT 929). Sam realises the gravity and import of their achievements by imagining young hobbits listening as reverently to the adventures of Frodo and Sam as they themselves had been enthralled by the legend of Beren. Tolkien’s allusion to the power of story-telling within his narrative draws attention to issues of genre and the reading process;

As this scene relates, narrative patterns are influential on readers. Not only do the generic structures aid comprehension of the tale (every reader of heroic fantasy knows, for example, that the hero must leave home in order to achieve his destiny), they can even operate to structure the real world. Jerome Bruner claims that life experiences become filtered through the lens of narrative patterns, thereby constructing a sense of ontological continuity and meaning. Telling personal stories, Bruner asserts, ultimately delimits life experiences:

[the] ways of telling [our life histories] and the ways of conceptualising that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future . . . a life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not “how it was” but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold: Freud’s *psychic reality*. (582, italics in original)

The Lord of the Rings has been variously described as fairy tale, high fantasy, an epic romance, quest romance, sword and sorcery, heroic fantasy and epic fantasy. *Harry Potter*, too, has been determined as children’s literature, a

that readers may recognise their own personal reading of *The Lord of the Rings* is implied when Sam imagines others gaining inspiration from his journey with Frodo.

boarding school story, detective fiction, heroic fantasy and a fairy tale. These various categorisations indicate both the corresponding difficulties of ascribing a single genre to a text and of being definitive about a genre; designating a genre cannot therefore encompass the full meaning-potential of a text. Heather Dubrow warns:

Viewing genre and genres too deterministically has also led to oversimplifying readers' responses to them. We need to remember that . . . generic codes frequently function like a tone of voice rather than a more clearcut signal: they provide one interpretation of the meaning of the text, they direct our attention to the parts of it that are especially significant, but they do not and they cannot offer an infallible key to its meaning. (106)

Just as the text cannot be fully understood through categorisation, the category itself is fluid and evolving. Ken Gelder has recently recorded the current mixing and blending of genres, suggesting that alongside the entrenchment of some genres of popular fiction, others "have become more complex than ever, more fractured, more hybrid, more active and activating, more internally

antagonistic and cross-referenced” (74).⁸ Genre is neither static nor ahistorical but subject to continual movement, generating fluid boundaries, and eventually morphing into a subgenre. Or, as is asserted with *The Lord of the Rings*, into a seminal text of a new genre.⁹

Following Brian Attebery’s concept of the “fuzzy set” (*Strategies* 12-14), I would describe a genre as a floating set or paradigm of literary attributes that are modified over time by the inclusion of subsequent texts.¹⁰ Not all elements have to be met for the text to be regarded as participating in a particular genre, although a sufficient number should be apparent to justify the inclusion.

⁸ See Gelder, especially pages 40-74. Gelder observes that sub-genres attest to the variety within even those genres that have become entrenched through the production process – crime and romance fiction, for example.

⁹ Ironically, genre fantasy is essentially a cloning of Tolkien’s novel, giving rise to Clute and Grant’s observation that as the single most important twentieth century fantasy, the influence of *The Lord to the Rings* has been both profound and demeaning: “It is his work which has given licence to the fairies, elves, orcs, cuddly dwarfs, loquacious plants, singing barmen etc., who inhabit fantasyland, which itself constitutes a direct thinning of [Tolkien’s] constantly evolving secondary world” (955).

¹⁰ Attebery uses the mathematical term to grant membership of a text to the fantasy genre on imprecise grounds. While Attebery uses the concept to come to grips with the diverse texts that could qualify as “fantasy”, it can also be usefully deployed to register the diversity and mutability of sub-genres of fantasy. Similarly, Colin Manlove suggests a “ring fence” as a metaphor for determining what texts qualify as English fantasy: “To speak coherently of English fantasy, we need a definition, a ring fence; but it must be a wide one, a rule of thumb rather than a thumbscrew” (*Fantasy Literature* 3). Manlove’s comment nicely encapsulates an expansive and inclusive understanding of genre.

Further, a single text can contribute to several genres as a result of overlapping attributes between genres as well as the text containing properties relevant to multiple genres. Counter to essentialist understandings, I want to emphasise genre as both complex and already given – that is, recognition of a genre implies that the characteristics have already been agreed – despite a genre’s potential to morph. The fact that genres mutate suggests that the texts involved can be thought of as part of a continuum; I regard *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* as expressions of the heroic fantasy genre because they both contain enough of the genre’s key elements to justify categorisation as such. While this is not to deny the applicability or relevance of alternative designations, it is to emphasise particular attributes and therefore a particular reading.¹¹

The heroic fantasy typically includes the following key elements: a pre-industrial setting, medieval in tone and frequently with a widely varied landscape so as to provide the rationale for various challenges faced by the hero; a conflict between good and evil, and it is only by defeating evil that the hero may save his world; the challenges and conflicts arising from following a

¹¹ I discuss heroic fantasy as a literary hybrid of the epic and novel in chapter seven. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of the epic and its relation to the novel, I claim that the heroic fantasy bridges the pre-modern and the modern, attempting to project the former’s “authenticity” within the modern narrative convention of the novel by recourse to pre-industrial social bonds and values.

heroic code; the maturation of the hero over the course of the story; the presence of magic and the fantastic; and Tolkien's "eucatastrophe" or positive closure. While the majority of these factors are required for a text to be considered heroic fantasy, each convention may be played with to suit the particular story told.

Heroic fantasy can be profitably contrasted with the sword and sorcery genre. Two particular features differentiate them: the unlikely or "everyman" hero of the heroic fantasy distinguishes him from the larger-than-life warrior-hero of the sword and sorcery tale; and the eucatastrophe effected in the former contrasts with the serialisation of the latter. Both of these features express an ideological shift between the two sub-genres of fantasy, with the implications of the everyman hero and ideological closure for heroic fantasy being discussed in terms of gender and nationalism in this thesis.

The phrase "sword and sorcery" was coined in 1961 by the American science fiction and fantasy author Fritz Leiber in response to Michael Moorcock's desire for a term to define the particular sub-genre of fantasy that deals in strong muscular heroes who experience violent encounters with magical villains such as witches and wizards (Clute and Grant 915). The "swashbuckling" hero of sword and sorcery – Conan the Barbarian, Xena, Hercules – *is* a warrior, a fact that impacts upon the attitudes and events within the story. This orientation toward physicality in sword and sorcery is

paradigmatically apart from the protagonist's honourable behavioural code and foregrounded reflexivity of the heroic fantasy text. This is not to suggest that the hero of sword and sorcery is not capable of either rational thought or emotional responses, but it is to propose that physical strength and swordsmanship determines that character's primary defence. Sword and sorcery is a close but thematically and structurally different sub-genre to that of heroic fantasy.

This is the first point of difference between the two sub-genres of fantasy; that the physical prowess advanced in sword and sorcery contrasts to with the physically diminutive hero bolstered by an honourable moral code and strong friendships in heroic fantasy. The second difference between heroic fantasy and sword and sorcery lies in the general narrative arc of each sub-genre.

According to Clute and Grant, "the hero (and from an early stage the heroine) of sword and sorcery does not change in the mind's eye; he or she fights on, for ever, in the dawn of a day we do not wish to end" (915). Sword and sorcery therefore lends itself to serialisation, successfully achieved in the two television series *Hercules* and *Xena*. Each week the protagonists must undertake another battle because the issues fought over are local and only temporarily decided. This is in strong contradistinction to the heroic fantasy story, which has at its end the definitive overthrow of chaos in favour of order and peace. Heroic fantasy mostly deals in epoch-changing, nation-saving or –establishing eras.

The evil faced is determined to rule the world, and so by defeating this pervasive force, the hero is cast as saviour.

It is as if the patterns are reversed in sword and sorcery and heroic fantasy: in the former a large-than-life figure constantly defeats adversaries whose offences are limited in scale; in the latter, the maturing but nevertheless ostensibly human (and therefore flawed and physically limited) hero is pitted against an overwhelming evil force, whose intention it is to subordinate the world to its will. The heroic fantasy, whether written over the nine-standard trilogy of the genre or seven books as with the projected *Harry Potter* series, offers the reader closure. That is, a happy ending which conveys persuasively that a point in time will come when the suffering and danger associated with facing evil will be rewarded with peace and maybe even prosperity.

The point of any categorisation should be to elucidate an understanding of the text, to suggest an approach, rather than becoming a means to carrying out a “formalist” exercise to determine which texts are “in” and which are “out”. Even so, in being so precise about these particular texts I aim to identify what it is that sets them apart from other popular heroic stories and therefore accounts for the current success of heroic fantasy. I argue that it is precisely the recognition of the hero as a potential role model for the reader and the happy ending and closure given by the heroic fantasy that constitutes part of the appeal of these stories.

Including the Ethnographic

Inserting the national into a global context is an additional aim of this thesis; I want to contribute a New Zealand perspective to the global dialogue on *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. To this end I have bolstered theoretical discussion with ethnographic study by conducting focus group interviews with readers of *Harry Potter* and attending the “Red Carpet Parade” for the World Premiere of *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* in Wellywood (aka Wellington) in December 2003. These conversations and event observation enable me, in the first instance, to give voice to opinions and ideas held by New Zealanders about the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, and in the second, to witness first-hand the excitement and enthusiasm for *The Lord of the Rings* film project as expressed at a globally televised public event by individuals, as well as civic and national institutions.

At the Red Carpet Parade I observed the crowds and talked with individuals, noted the role of the local media in generating interest in the event, and considered the infrastructural support Wellington City Council provided for the event, such as encouraging participation in a shop front display competition, financial support for the upgrading of the Embassy Theatre and helping to organise the Red Carpet event and the appropriate global media

coverage. For all the reading of up-beat media articles and watching documentaries promoting New Zealand's participation in this historic film production, nothing beats being there; as they say in Wellington (known for its stormy weather), "You can't beat Wellington on a good day". The genuine enthusiasm by local Wellingtonians alongside fans dressed up as their favourite characters from as far away as Taranaki and Germany resulted in a communal experience that exuded goodwill; unlike sports events where one team is a winner, another a loser, everyone "won" at the Red Carpet Parade – especially those who were prepared to wait around long enough to view the "stars" leave the theatre and give their impromptu review of the film. The data from this event contributes to the eighth chapter, while the interview material is used in both the fourth and sixth chapters which consider the commercialisation of these texts and female responses to the male-oriented stories, respectively.

In each of the four focus group interviews undertaken in early 2002 the first four *Harry Potter* books and the first film, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, were discussed. Three of the interviews were with children – boys and girls aged 9-13, 14-16 and another with 12-year-old boys. The fourth interview was with adults aged 28-36. Two years later I also conducted an individual interview with Claire, who was by then 17. In each of the group interviews I

kept the debate within set parameters, thereby providing comparable data across the groups.¹²

These were the first formal research interviews I have conducted and while I found the interview process very rewarding it was a steep learning curve to be able to attain material for this thesis. I take heart from Ien Ang's observation that:

ethnographic fieldwork among audiences – in the broad sense of engaging oneself with the unruly and heterogeneous practices and accounts of real historical viewers or readers – helps to keep our critical discourses from becoming closed texts of Truth, because it forces the researcher to come to terms with perspectives that may not easily be integrated in a smooth, finished and coherent Theory.

(“Feminist Desire” 514-5)

Although I was very interested in what each individual had to say, I also wanted their comments to fit neatly into my existing plan for the thesis; however, I soon found that their views required more thought and respect than simple insertion. Nevertheless, the experience was all the more rewarding for engaging with readers and consumers of heroic fantasy, whose very

¹² See Appendix Two for an overview of the interview process.

“unruliness” has helped to shape my conclusions. In Ien Ang’s words, the interviewees served as “a reminder that reality is always more complicated and diversified than our theories can represent, and that there is no such thing as ‘audience’ whose characteristics can be set once and for all” (“Politics” 192).

Given their commitment to examining everyday social interactions, cultural studies practitioners undertake ethnography to place specific situations under close scrutiny. But with such research now understood as providing possible interpretations rather than the “truth”,¹³ - ethnographic research itself is open to the same investigation as the original subject¹⁴ - Janice Radway has asked whether the practice can ever “manage to capture the fluid, destabilized, every-shifting nature of subjectivity produced through the articulation of discourses and their fragments” (“Reception Study” 366). While the ethnographic primarily performs an illustrative role in this thesis, it is used to

¹³ See Clifford Geertz’s influential essay “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” (1973).

¹⁴ In “On Ethnographic Authority” (1980) James Clifford observes that the writing of ethnography itself is “an unruly, multisubjective activity” (279) but it achieves a sense of authority and coherence during reading. Yet, as with any literary text, an ethnography text is equally capable of “a variety of possible readings . . . One may approach a classic ethnography seeking simply to grasp the meanings that the researcher derives from represented cultural facts. But . . . one may also read against the grain of the text’s dominant texts and quotations gather together by the writer” (279).

emphasise the varied responses, including ambivalence, acquiescence and rejection, which consumers express toward heroic fantasy.

Chapter Structure: From Ideology to Industry

Between 2001 and 2006 New Zealand director Peter Jackson's three films have been released and celebrated at the Oscars. Over this time the films, the actors, the director and New Zealand's embracing of the Middle-earth image have rarely been out of the media. Radio, popular magazines, major and regional newspapers, inflight magazines, television documentaries and news programmes, academic conferences and articles have all contributed to the cacophony of images, adulation, discussion, criticism and reviews about every aspect of the film trilogy. Fantasy itself has become pervasive in the public arena through references in newspaper articles, television spoofs (2002 MTV awards, *The Simpsons*) and cartoons. The Netherlands's Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, is described in a newspaper article as "sober and straight with an uncanny resemblance to boy wizard Harry Potter" ("Dull, But Reliable"); *Harry Potter* Director Chris Columbus and Warner Brothers have been accused of disrespectfully basing the house-elf character Dobby on the Russian President Vladimir Putin (L. Smith); and President George W. Bush is shown to be wearing the Ring of Power in a widely distributed email in 2003

with the caption “Bush has the One Ring: Frodo has failed” (Gelder 144). With fantasy accepted as part of everyday language, providing readily understood metaphors, it is no longer an “f-word” at the Oscars, as Peter Jackson observed in 2004 when the final instalment of his adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* tied with only two other films in history to win 11 awards.¹⁵

It is this permeation of everyday life by the heroic fantasy genre that I wish to emphasise in this thesis, to highlight the importance of the genre due to its cultural resonance and amenability to various uses and interpretations. The diverse pleasures gained from reading *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* cannot be adequately accounted for through a single theoretical position, nor can the implications of commodification for individual and national identity be understood from the same perspective that informs, for example, gender analyses. However, cultural studies enables me to explore the texts from multiple angles and this methodology will inform the thesis. The following chapter will discuss the various theories commonly used to interpret fantasy texts, with the view of establishing a (necessarily severely edited) genealogy of fantasy criticism. Liberal humanism, structuralism, mythopoeic, Freudian psychoanalysis and ideological theories each contribute to the numerous critiques and analyses. Cultural studies is indebted to these theories that

¹⁵ William Wyler’s *Ben Hur* (1959) won 11 Oscars in 1960 and was consequently dubbed “the world’s most honoured motion picture”. Nearly 40 years later James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997) won 11 Oscars at the 1998 awards.

precede it, but promotes a reflexivity or self-consciousness that enables the expansive and contradictory understanding of heroic fantasy that I wish to articulate as typical of both its production and reception.

As noted, I will explore the multiple interpretations and uses of heroic fantasy through three themes central to the genre: pastoralism, gender and nationalism. As befits the overarching objective of considering the contemporary paradigm shift of heroic fantasy from ideology to industry, each theme is discussed over two chapters; a textual interpretation in the initial chapter is followed by the companion chapter stepping away from the text to ask how the ideology apparently communicated by the text is consumed and utilised in social practice. This general shape, however, is not rigidly applied, with the two gender chapters being more clearly differentiated along the lines of masculinity and femininity. What I endeavour to convey through this coupling of chapters is a “hybrid” cultural studies that values both close analysis of a text and the text’s production and consumption; emphasis upon textual analysis has been criticised within cultural studies circles, but, balanced with a recognition of the institutional, political and economic influences, I suggest that the critic is but one more reader, whose analysis is no less swayed

by ideological opinion than another's.¹⁶ However, by providing a close reading of the text my own perspective on the narrative is made explicit, which is then coloured by a study of the text when subject to mass production or consumption.

Consumerism is the first theme to be explored. Drawing on Marcel Mauss's anthropological theory of the gift, I propose that the hero's selfless disposition arises from a pre-industrial economy that establishes moral obligations through the social act of gift-giving. Mauss asserts that the gift is essential to binding individuals together into a cohesive and productive group. The heroic fantasy gives numerous examples of how the heroic character is fostered by the social networks effected through gift exchange, with Frodo and Harry only able to succeed in their tasks if aided by their friends. I argue that this "moral economy" is essential to the genre, not the pre-industrial setting with which heroic fantasy is most commonly associated. In an influential intervention on Mauss, Jacques Derrida views the gift otherwise, declaring that it is an impossibility. However, Derrida's demand that the gift be unsolicited and unrecognised if it is to truly be a gift is a difficult position to endorse when considered as a social practice.

¹⁶ Ien Ang writes of the "dangerous illusion" in which researchers assume their own "exemption from the realities under scrutiny, including the realities of living with the media – as if it were possible to keep our hands clean in a fundamentally dirty world" ("Politics" 192).

Following the theme of “ideology to industry” the next chapter considers how the concept of gift-giving as a form of heroic socialisation is exploited by “big business.” Both New Line Cinema and Warner Bros., as producers of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* respectively, have encouraged related merchandising and extensive marketing. The film itself no longer constitutes the end of an individual’s experience with a story and its characters, with audiences enticed to purchase the toys, computer games and endless other memorabilia, characterised by David Denby in *The New Yorker* as an “avalanche of crud”. The film is merely the starting point of brand loyalty, with production companies expecting better returns from on-going merchandising sales than from the original feature. By contrasting the opinions of those who disapprove of the profusion of toys marketed at children with those who derive benefit, this chapter considers how commodification impacts on the theme of a moral economy. Does the merchandise impede, denigrate or support the concept of gift-giving as an act of socialisation? Further, is it possible to offer a definitive response to this question?

Chapter Five explores the particular type of hero heroic fantasy favours. The heroic fantasy hero is remarkably ordinary, standing out from other characters through his leadership qualities and determination to ensure “good” prevails over “evil” more so than through any especial powers. I designate this hero the “Everyman” due to his similitude with the audience. Yet, the hero is

most frequently a male. So what does this mean for female readers of the genre? If the heroic fantasy genre is supposed to encourage young readers to mature with particular moral attributes, are female readers' subjectivities stifled with female characters typically cast in dependent, "cheerleading" roles? Chapter Six considers these issues with reference to an interview I conducted with one young female reader, asking how she responds to the characterisation of gender in the *Harry Potter* stories. For my own part, I suggest that Hermione's increasing awareness of ideology is a nod to the reader to register the influence of cultural bias in real life.

Having considered the construct of the hero both in terms of gender and the community in which he is produced, the thesis broadens out to the level of the nation. I argue that the heroic fantasy genre advocates the nation-state both through its structure and content. Following the logic of Mikhail Bakhtin and Timothy Brennan, I contend that it is the "epic" qualities of the heroic fantasy that establish a sense of authenticity for the narrative, which is an essential feature for national foundation myths.

While the nation-state exemplifies the geo-political aspirations of the hero, authors within the genre do not necessarily agree on how this social and political formation should be constructed. I contrast Tolkien's preference for the *natio* with Rowling's advocacy for multiculturalism. Both texts respond to the mass immigration to Britain from its ex-colonies at the close of World War

II, but as the authors bring to the genre very different political views both project alternative visions of attaining social harmony. Heroic fantasy is not a prominent genre within adult New Zealand literature¹⁷ and so I introduce first-time author Dale Elvy's *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy* (2000-2003) to further the New Zealand dimension to this thesis. Elvy, I contend, attempts to rewrite local colonial and indigenous relations, using the genre to envisage productive and convivial relations between Maori and Pakeha New Zealanders. How progressive Elvy's vision really is will conclude this discussion.

The final chapter turns to the commodification of the nation, that is, the production of national identity in line with commercial interests. The heroism inherent in Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* has been projected onto the New Zealand landscape and identity, and the local economy has purportedly benefited through increased tourism, interest in New Zealand

¹⁷ Although New Zealand literature has a rich heritage of fantasy writing – Margaret Mahy, V. J. Jones and Maurice Gee stand out in the field for children's literature - there are few conventional heroic fantasy authors. Although English by birth, Hugh Cook is sometimes taken as being a New Zealand author, having been educated in New Zealand. His ten-volume *Chronicles of Darkness* series begins with the popular *Wizards and Warlocks* (1986), described on his website as “very much a standard Tolkienesque quest with swords, dragons, battles, magic powers and so forth”. Philippa Ballantine is a new fantasy author, recently receiving warm reviews for her novel *Chasing the Bard* (2005). She includes a poll on her website for non-New Zealanders to complete, asking if they would read a fantasy story set in historical New Zealand. Of the 29 voters as at 10 June 2006, 25 (86%) said they would. Ballantine told me that she is conducting the poll for personal interest rather than as a tool to convince potential publishers of audience interest in a New Zealand context for a heroic fantasy story (Email Interview).

as a production location and the leveraging of other products off the Middle-earth brand. Despite the cacophony of feel-good documentaries, articles and rhetoric, I reflect on the unity that this particular postmodern production of national identity communicates, both to ourselves and to the world. I argue that it amounts to a fetishisation of nationalism, inevitably obscuring ethnic plurality and cultural difference in favour of an illusion of uniformity modelled on Tolkien's vision of "pure" Englishness.

Throughout the thesis I make the point that the heroic fantasy genre has been developed and rewritten to both challenge and acquiesce to the altering political landscape. This flexibility is essential to a successful genre, as otherwise it may lose cultural relevance and immediacy to the consumer. The hero is central to the genre, and so it is in his character that tolerance toward the fluidity of national borders can be gauged. Frodo and Sam want to destroy Sauron's One Ring so that they may return to life as normal in the homogeneous Shire, but the world that Harry Potter fights Voldemort for is more tolerant and inclusive, although still led by a young white male. The manifold political messages of the heroic fantasy combined with its permeation across the media implies that the genre is not "juvenile balderdash" as Edmund Wilson declared of *The Lord of the Rings* (qtd. in de Camp 218), nor necessarily so unequivocally backward looking as Darko Suvin sweepingly assumes

("Considering" 226), but increasingly a vehicle through which current political opinions are contested and promoted.

Chapter Two:

A Methodology for Heroic Fantasy

Early in 2002, on a visit to my local public library, I overheard an excited man asking the librarian for the *Harry Potter* books. He explained that he had read *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* upon his niece's recommendation and now he was very keen to read the other books in the series. Reading *Harry Potter* had apparently opened up a thrilling new experience for this Maori man in his mid 30s: "Now I understand why people sit around and read in libraries!" He left the library a happy man, with books under his arm and his walkman on, because he now had, he claimed, "music for his soul and reading for his imagination."

This man's obvious delight in reading the *Harry Potter* stories was infectious and ever since I have regretted missing the opportunity of speaking with him about his new-found interest in reading. Nevertheless, how to account for this particular reader's experience? Should his enthusiasm be casually dismissed as "wrong", him being but one of the 35 million deluded readers Harold Bloom describes? Is he merely "childish", as A. S. Byatt asserts

of adult readers of Rowling's series? And what about the grandparents I met who dress up as witches and wizards with their seven-year-old grandson and together make up spells and potions? Are they really acculturating their grandchild into Satanism? Even if I take the view that they are in fact developing strong bonds with their grandson through their role-playing, is this where the activity ends? Do grandma and granddad (aka Dumbledore) not also enjoy the books and films for themselves, not merely as a conduit for positive intergenerational relations?

Fred Inglis perceives that cultural practices and artefacts "are fiercely charged up in tight little nodes with human *values*, where a value simply means a concentration in action or artefact of human significance and preciousness. Such nodes rest in the texts which are their vehicle, travelling through time" (*Cultural Studies* 5, italics in original). I take the heroic fantasy genre to be one such "vehicle", with the values that it offers proving amenable to readers since its "genesis" with *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954. But at this particular historical moment the genre is ideologically, economically and culturally effective for film-goers, consumers, global corporations and national governments alike. To account for such diverse readings of the genre, I turn to a cultural studies methodology, although, as I discuss below, this "system" has largely resisted such "out-dated" vestiges from liberal humanism as values.

Pursuing a cultural studies approach has been a challenge that I suspect other students of English Literature will have also experienced. With my academic study, including my Masters, being under the mantle of English Literature it has been, at times, an overwhelming experience coming to grips with the requirement to contextualise a cultural practice or artefact, to speak about a text from multiple angles. Nevertheless, cultural studies recognises that it is impossible to completely contain a text, to offer a definitive interpretation inimical to criticism and further reflection. As this thesis intends to show, even well-known and formulaic genres such as heroic fantasy are ideologically flexible enough to sustain varied and conflicting interpretations.

Three significant issues that I have had to grapple with have been the “defence” of popular culture, the complexity of contextualising the text and, relatedly, the vast range of theoretical views to be taken into account. Despite being a keen consumer of popular culture in my youth – Enid Blyton and ABBA were important to me at different times – as an adult I have been scornful of many popular forms (except for those I like, of course!). What I have found liberating with cultural studies is viewing the text as part of a larger discourse or social praxis; whether I like the text or not, the point of the research is to comprehend how it “works” within the specific cultural moment, or conjuncture. To view the text “properly”, however, requires contextualising through a vast array of theories – a prospect I have found both stimulating and

daunting. Yet, having ventured on the path of cultural studies, I cannot now imagine conducting research otherwise.

Paul Goodall writes of the “parallel histories” of English Literature and cultural studies. With reference to Chris Baldick’s study *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1948-1932*, Goodall claims that both disciplines originated through dissatisfaction with contemporary analysis, leading to an emphasis in both disciplines on the social function of their object of study (154). Cultural studies’ claim to contextualization is therefore not novel. However, English Literature eventually narrowed its focus to an aesthetic critique of Literature with a capital L; an ultimately unsatisfactory direction when culture was becoming dominated by the popular in mass society. Goodall warns that cultural studies’ focus upon the popular may well represent the “same trap” (172); this methodology positions itself against the “high culture” impulse of English Literature studies by turning to popular culture and anthropological perspectives, remaining hostile toward the “sensibility” promoted by liberal humanists.

While outwardly seeking to cover up the guilty secret of its connections with liberal humanism through accusations of the latter’s apolitical stance, perhaps cultural studies is guilty itself of obliquely practicing value-laden critique. Jim McGuigan, for example, observes that “the study of culture is nothing if it is not about values” (*Cultural Populism* 173) While I agree with the

requirement for theoretical transparency, reflecting on the political, social and cultural influences that contribute to the text's production and consumption, and investigating how power operates through the cultural sphere, I have been reluctant to let go of the "moral dimension" of English literature study. Indeed, I have not completely shaken off this education; I pursue textual analysis in a conscious effort to explore the morals (Inglis's values) that pervade this genre.

Although I employ cultural studies to discuss the popularity of the heroic fantasy genre, this chapter will elaborate on and evaluate the theories commonly applied to the heroic fantasy genre. I begin with Tolkien's own view on the import of the genre he is credited with originating, which he describes as the "fairy-story." Tolkien attributes the happy ending of these stories with a considerable emotional force for the reader – a point reiterated by psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim in his analysis of fairy tales. Tolkien uses this positive closure to suggest that readers may well feel inspired to "revolt" against certain features of modernity (Tolkien singles out the electric street light ["OFS" 56-7]) and Bettelheim claims the happy ending enables young children to imagine this outcome for themselves when otherwise it is inconceivable. That they can both use the same motif for very similar ends but within divergent theoretical programmes indicates the potential for the continuity of ideas across the various systems of analysis.

From liberal humanism this chapter moves on to structuralism, followed by mythopoeic, psychoanalytic and ideological criticism, noting the strengths and weaknesses of each as well as prominent proponents of the theory, and conclude with cultural studies. To examine the various uses of heroic fantasy, the purview of the thesis necessarily ranges widely; from textual analysis of the “gift economy” within heroic fantasy to engaging in reader response, from theorising the nationalistic images of heroism to critiquing New Zealand’s self-promotion as Middle-earth. These are diverse issues that require specific theoretical approaches. Because cultural studies embraces “complexity, contingency, contestation and multiplicity” (Grossberg, “Does Cultural Studies” 6) it allows for the “thick description” I am seeking.

Cultural studies employs elements of preceding theoretical positions (structuralism, feminism, Marxism, psychoanalysis) and draws them together as the research requires into a coherent and comprehensive whole. Analysis is conducted with the aim of examining such features of the cultural sphere as production, consumption and distribution, always with the intention of foregrounding the contested nature of producer-consumer relations. Cultural studies views this dialectic between production and consumption as politically charged, with the act of consumption potentially a moment of ideological submission or negotiation. Equally, production is constrained by the need to accommodate economic requirements (profit generated through an acceptable

exchange value) with anticipating the market's desire for the commodity (the consumer's use value). That many new products and films fail to achieve a profit indicates the influence consumers exert in a capitalist economy; however, it is also true that the power of marketing and advertising testifies to the vulnerability of the psyche to what Arthur Asa Berger describes as a "manufactured desire". This makes the relations between production and consumption a very interesting and relevant field to examine, to which cultural studies is particularly suited. Yet, this methodology is reliant upon the insights offered by preceding theories, beginning with liberal humanism.

Tolkien's Liberal Humanism

Liberal humanism has been described as the "theory before theory" (Barry 3), being the dominant form of mid-twentieth century literary criticism before being challenged by a profusion of new theories (formalism, structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, Marxism, semiotics, psychoanalysis) following the 1960s. It is sometimes used in a derogatory sense to refer to those critics not overtly subscribing to one of the more politically-aligned theories: "liberal" implies the critic's avoidance of political issues and "humanism" equally denotes the critic's refusal to admit a theoretical position, preferring the concept

of “human nature” as inherent and immutable, not an outcome of particular social, historical, political or economic forces (Barry 3).

Liberal humanists, then, adhere to the notion that Literature reveals human nature and this literary category is afforded canonical status by virtue of skilfully expressing this universal and unvarying essence. Tolkien’s contemporary F.R. Leavis epitomises the liberal humanist position, being a vocal advocate of the civilising value of Literature through the literary journal *Scrutiny* (1932-53). Leavis abhorred the degradation of language that he perceived in popular culture and the mass media: “this debasement of language is not merely a matter of words; it is a debasement of emotional life, and the quality of living” (Leavis and Thompson 4). His criticism extended from a desire to identify and defend a body of literature that had the inherent ability to instil moral gravity and civilising qualities in the reader – a practice that mass culture was deemed singularly incapable of engendering by dint of the meanness of its language. Even so, for all Leavis’ railing against the spiritual squalor fostered by industrial capitalism and its offshoot mass culture, his criticism was not politically oriented; Literature enabled the reader to endure, not transform, capitalism.

Tolkien, too, is a liberal humanist, detailing his theoretical position in his 1939 Andrew Lang lecture entitled “On Fairy-Stories.”¹ In this essay Tolkien conveys his key ideas regarding the value and purpose of fantasy, or fairy-stories, as he insists.² But first, he establishes the parameters for what constitutes the fairy-story. The fully developed secondary world is the essential boundary marker, Tolkien declares: fairy-stories are therefore “about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being” (“OFS” 14, italics in original). It is impossible to describe this fantasy dominion, although “a ‘fairy-story’ is one which touches on or uses *Faërie*, whatever its main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy” (15). Fantasy is not therefore bound by its themes or genre, so much as defined by its internally coherent and autonomous fantasy landscape.

The key terms that Tolkien introduces in “On Fairy-Stories” are Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and Consolation, each of which is discussed in relation to liberal humanist concerns. First, Tolkien argues against the pejorative tone

¹ This lecture was later expanded and published within the commemorative collection *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* in 1947.

² Although Leavis and Tolkien have different views as to what constitutes Literature, both look to support their dismissive view of commercialisation and popular culture with reference to the humanist tradition. The irony is that Tolkien’s novel spawned exactly the mass literature he rejected and a cult he did not understand. The commodification of heroic fantasy will be discussed in chapter four below.

often employed when referring to fantasy literature.³ To indulge in fantasy, to flex the imagination and see beyond “mundane reality,” is a “potent” talent, with the genre being a high not low literary form (“OFS” 45). Tolkien acknowledges that some people “dislike any meddling with the Primary World” causing them to “stupidly and even maliciously” (45) equate fantasy with dreaming, mental disorders, delusion and hallucination.⁴ Reviewers and critics who disapprove of the liberal humanists’ transcendental stance have proffered vicious, sometimes personalised attacks, frequently resorting to mere dismay that the literature is not realism.⁵ Perhaps with some self-acknowledgement, if not defensiveness, Tolkien asserts that it is a difficult literary form to achieve to a high standard; that is, “‘the inner consistency of reality’ is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary

³ “On Fairy-Stories” provided a platform for Tolkien to consolidate his ideas about fantasy, as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. He pre-emptively rebutted critical reviews, most infamously that given by Edward Wilson. Wilson describes Tolkien’s novel as “balderdash” and “juvenile trash” (qtd. in de Camp 218). See also Anthony Holden “Why Harry Doesn’t Cast a Spell Over Me”. Hal Colebatch writes at length on criticism of *The Lord of the Rings* and notes that the majority of critiques rest upon political rather than literary criteria (see chapters 6 and 7, *Return of the Heroes: The Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Harry Potter, and Social Conflict* 81).

⁴ See chapter one “Evolution of a Word” of Stephen Prickett’s *Victorian Fantasy* for a discussion of the changing use and definition of fantasy.

⁵ Anthony Holden, for example, suggests that the Australian soap opera *Neighbours* is “better” than *The Lord of the Rings*, by virtue of it at least attempting to convey real life.

World. It is easier to produce this kind of 'reality' with more 'sober' material" (46).

Clute and Grant explain Tolkien's achievement in bringing about secondary belief in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. The reader must accept the secondary world on its merits without verification; there is no real-life framing of the extraordinary as in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. While readers today have become accustomed to the autonomy of a secondary world, Tolkien initiated readers to the practice, through "techniques which almost *secretly* transform readers from secular appreciators of a text into something like parishioners" (Clute and Grant 953, italics in original). They cite mixing of dictions, co-presentation of the marvellous and the ordinary as part of the same reality and the slow plot pace so that "slow growth-curves of understanding take on very much heavier implications" (953) as the means through which the environment of the secondary world is confirmed as "real". Importantly, readers become convinced that the story they are reading is part of a larger narrative, implying history; by noting at length that *The Lord of the Rings* is a history sourced from the "Red Book of Westmarch" (FOR 14), Tolkien generates credence, "to increase the verisimilitude, not the verity of his work" (Manlove, "Nature" 17).

Having commanded Secondary Belief by way of a "special skill, a kind of elvish craft" ("OFS" 46), the fantasy author offers the reader Recovery and Escape; the fantasist encourages readers to reconsider their view of the world,

to delight in the natural wonders that are becoming increasingly precious through rampant industrialisation, and offers rest from the pressures of the primary world by recourse to a predominantly rural and simplified secondary world.

Fundamental to Tolkien's view of the craft of writing successful fantasy is to observe the happy ending – the “eucatastrophe.” While learning of the hero's harrowing adventures, sorrows and failures, the reader must be safe in the knowledge that consolation will come at the close – although this closure must be unlooked for and resolved in an unexpected way so as not to undermine the narrative's affect. The intention of the eucatastrophe is to uplift the reader, to provide a “fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief” (“OFS” 62). This oxymoronic phrase indicates that emotional responses to events within the narrative tap into the reader's real experience, swinging between the highs of joy and the lows of grief, with both ends of the emotional spectrum being felt with equal intensity. Accusations of fantasy, and secondary world fantasy in particular, being escapist (dis)miss Tolkien's point.

Through each of these concepts - Fantasy, Escape, Recovery, and Consolation - Tolkien theorises the value of fantasy as liberating the reader from the everyday, providing solace for perceived failures of contemporary industrial capitalism. He anticipates that such literature can rejuvenate readers,

returning them to the real world inspired to bring about change. Although Tolkien suggests that the fantasy text can provoke condemnation and even insurgency through its “silence” on “progressive things like factories, or . . . machine-guns and bombs” (“OFS” 63), the transcendental function of the genre prevails; he prefers not to indulge in the explicit categorisation of modern ills because “fairy-stories, at any rate, have many more permanent and fundamental things to talk about” (57).

These “things” pertain to persistent and universal human issues – matters with which the liberal humanists engage, and which were the domain of religious discourses prior to the decline of Christian authority in the Victorian era. Where Matthew Arnold believed Literature provided the guidance that religion was no longer persuasive enough to portray, Tolkien understood his edifying fiction as an extension of his personal religious beliefs, with his work being a “sub-creation,” thereby acknowledging his indebtedness to the original creator, God.⁶

Tolkien’s friend, colleague and fellow fantasy author C. S. Lewis claims that the value of literature lies in personal growth,⁷ a point that Kathryn Hume identifies as instilling self-worth:

⁶ For a discussion of Christianity in *The Lord of the Rings* see Kocher, Shippey (especially 174-82), Colebatch and Hein.

⁷ Lewis also wrote from a Christian perspective, advancing that the power of literature enables the reader to extend himself (a male reader being implicitly assumed in Lewis’s dispensation),

Both Tolkien and C. S. Lewis argue that escape into an admittedly illusory world can make the responsive reader aware of mythic powers beyond the material world – the religious world of Christianity. Even without their religious concern, though, one can feel that the illusions of escape literature offer possible benefits. Trashy though many adventures are, they encourage belief in the possibility of meaningful action. They deny that the individual is worthless, a negligible statistic. Even at lowest valuation, this reassurance has psychological value, for people who cannot believe in themselves have trouble engaging themselves with life in any fashion. (68)

This is literature as *bildung*, referring to growing up, education or training, and hence the use of the German term *bildungsroman* for a novel presenting a characters' development and maturity (Goodall 155).

to experience characters and events beyond his everyday world, thereby transcending his limitations: "in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do" (140-1).

The trajectory of the *bildungsroman* is central to the heroic fantasy genre; as discussed above, Tolkien describes the heroic fantasy in liberal humanist terms as motivational, encouraging self-improvement in the reader at the same time as establishing the solace of a divinely ordered cosmos. The achievement of a satisfactory subjectivity as imagined through the heroic fantasy genre is a central theme of this thesis and therefore “On Fairy-Stories” provides a valuable insight into Tolkien’s intentions and motivations when writing his seminal novel. Nevertheless, other approaches elicit alternative views and ways of understanding heroic fantasy. Structuralists, for example, seek a sense of continuity not in the spiritual potential of the text but in its structural grammar.

Structuralism and the Fantasy Narrative

If liberal humanism can be described as an interpretive and evaluative methodology, looking for the essential meaning of a text and assessing its value by recourse to its moral significance for the reader, structuralism can be regarded as analytical; where liberal humanists focus upon *what* a text means, structuralists shift the emphasis toward *how* the text generates meaning.

Structuralism therefore looks for the patterns and functions occurring within a text, such as binary oppositions and repetitions. In turn, these grammatical structures make sense to the reader only when contextualised, or related back to

the overarching structure of which they are a part. In literary terms, this could mean comparing or contrasting the text with the genre to which it belongs. Ascertaining the conventions of a particular genre and deliberating on the text's faithfulness or transgressive attitude toward this signifying system occupy the structuralist.

The linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure underpin structural analysis. His contribution to modern linguistics has been to differentiate between the signifier and signified, being the spoken or written word and the conceptual meaning of that "sound-image" respectively. For Saussure the relation between the signifier and the signified is not inherent but arbitrary, with these meanings only discernable in relation to other signifiers. The impact of these findings is that language, as a pre-existing and distinct system from the empirical world, constitutes reality. That is, it is only through the convention of language that humans can make sense of their environment and experience; as a signifying system language colours and shapes that which it seeks to interpret.

Although Saussure describes language as a "social institution" (8), he insists that it remains "distinct from political, juridical and other institutions" (8). From its inception structuralism has been constrained by this theoretical ambiguity; language is a "system of signs expressing ideas" (8) and "must be studied as a social phenomenon" (9), yet language is also beyond the social,

capable of generating social and cultural experience, but not in turn influenced by them.

A structuralist approach to heroic fantasy, then, would focus upon language, plot structure and characterisation so as to identify a narrative pattern; by discerning parallels, repetitions and contrasts the structuralist determines that meaning is derived from the story's design. This schematic emphasis is evident in Vladimir Propp's analysis of the Russian folktale.⁸ Propp identified the essential components of the folktale, which will conform to a particular order in any given tale. He explains that a tale's structure "follow[s] the chronological order of the linear sequence of elements in the text as reported from an informant" (xi), and identified 31 essential "functions", each of which denote a general action. When sequentially connected, they give

⁸ Although a formalist and not a structuralist, Propp's influential work is closely related to structuralism. The main difference between the two methods is that the formalist school does not relate the elements of the narrative to its social or cultural context at all. It remains a narratological practice because the text is viewed as self-referential through its formal language. Where the structuralist argues that the components that make up the text form part of a signifying system that has a wider significance to the culture of which it is a part, Propp's objective was to identify a scientific approach to the text. Hence his 'morphology' of the folktale: "The word 'morphology' means the study of forms. In botany, the term 'morphology' means the study of the component parts of a plant, of their relationship to each other and to the whole – in other words, the study of a plant's structure . . . it is possible to make an examination of the forms of the tale which will be as exact as the morphology of organic forms" (xxv).

rise to a new story; the plot structure of such stories will coincide, but the content of the stories themselves varies.

Variation occurs through the type of hero involved in the story, whether a “victim hero” or “seeker hero.” As the titles suggest, the former falls victim to the villain’s actions and the latter ventures out into the world in order to complete a required task. Both the victim and seeker heroes succeed in overcoming the villain; however, the different functions generated by each character type effects the trajectory of the plot of which they are a part. Arthur Asa Berger provides an abbreviated list of Propp’s functions, which in the original encompass numerous variations (177).⁹

⁹ For clarity I have excluded from Berger’s list the symbols that Propp allocates to each function.

Propp's Basic Functions	
Initial Situation	Members of family or hero are introduced
Absentation	Member(s) of family absents self
Interdiction	An interdiction is given to hero or heroine
Violation	Interdiction violated
Delivery	Villain gets information about victim
Trickery	Villain attempts to deceive victim
Complicity	Victim is deceived, helps villain
Villainy	Villain causes harm to member of family
Lack	Member of a family lacks something
Mediation	Misfortune is made known, hero is dispatched
Departure	Hero leaves home
Receipt	Hero is tested by donor, gets magical agent
Transference	Hero led to object of search
Struggle	Hero and villain join in combat
Branding	Hero is branded
Victory	Villain is defeated
Return	The hero returns
Pursuit	The hero is pursued by villain
Difficult task	A difficult task is proposed to the hero
Solution	The task is accomplished
Recognition	The hero is recognized
Exposure	A false hero or villain is exposed
Transfiguration	The hero is given a new appearance
Punishment	The villain is punished
Wedding	The hero is married, ascends the throne

The generative syntax that Propp discerned in the Russian folktale has been recognised as having broad application to many narratives; for example, Stuart Voytilla finds that Propp's schema can be profitably applied to Hollywood cinema and Berger suggests that these functions are easily perceived in diverse stories because "the fairy tale is the prototypical tale, the

UR (original) tale, from which other kinds of stories draw sustenance” (179). As my own analysis below demonstrates, Propp’s morphology also elucidates the syntax of heroic fantasy texts such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, which exemplify the “seeker hero”. The table below covers all six books that make up *The Lord of the Rings* but only the first of the *Harry Potter* series.¹⁰

Propp’s Functions	The Lord of the Rings	Harry Potter
Initial Situation	Introduced to Bilbo, Frodo, Sam and the Shire	Introduced to Harry and the Dursleys
Absentation	Frodo and Sam take the Ring away from the Shire	Harry goes to Hogwarts, a school for wizards
Interdiction	Gandalf warns it is dangerous to wear the Ring	Students must stay in dormitory at night
Violation	Frodo accidentally disappears in front of patrons in the Inn of Bree	Harry uses invisibility cloak to see his parents in the Mirror of Erised
Delivery	The Black Riders follow the hobbits to Bree	Voldemort knows Harry is at Hogwarts
Trickery	The Black Riders attack the hobbits’ empty beds	Voldemort uses Quirrell to lure Harry into a false sense of safety
Complicity	Frodo cannot resist putting on the Ring on Weathertop	Hermione uses spell to stop Snape jinxing Harry’s broom when in fact Quirrell is responsible

¹⁰ William Green describes the narrative structure of Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* as having “five parallel parts, five component tales” (44). Within each of the “component tales” Bilbo leaves a safe refuge, is then endangered by aggressive enemies, but is unexpectedly saved from certain death – the eucatastrophe. Green provides a table of structural patterns on page 45.

Villainy	Frodo is attacked by the witch-king	
Lack	Rather than a lack, Frodo possesses the Ring which he must destroy	

Table contd. . .

Propp's Functions	The Lord of the Rings	Harry Potter
Mediation	The Council of Elrond is held in Rivendell	Harry learns Quirrell is withholding the last enchantment from Snape that protects the object stolen from Giggott's bank
Departure	The Fellowship leaves Rivendell	Detention in Forest
Receipt	Frodo and Sam are joined by the traitorous Gollum	Centaur Firenze saves Harry from Voldemort
Transference	Gollum leads them to Mt Doom	Firenze tells Harry the dark wizard is looking for the Elixir of life
Struggle	Frodo and Gollum fight for possession of the Ring	Harry is Voldemort's nemesis and he is relentlessly pursued by the evil wizard
Branding	Frodo loses a finger in the fight – mutilation is the cost of power or knowledge	Harry received his trademark "lightning bolt" scar from Voldemort as a baby
Victory	The Ring is destroyed when Gollum falls into Mt Doom	
Return	The hobbits return to the Shire	
Pursuit	Hobbits meet Saruman on their journey home	Harry must retrieve the Stone

Difficult task	The hobbits must oust Saruman from the Shire	Harry, Hermione and Ron must get through the enchantments that protect the Stone
Solution	All hobbits revolt in the Battle of Bywater	Harry completes the tasks with his friends' help
Recognition	Sam rallies hobbits and Frodo asks for all hobbit lives to be spared	Harry finds Quirrell, not Snape
Exposure	"Sharkey" is revealed as Saruman.	Quirrell reveals he is possessed by Voldemort

Table contd. . .

Propp's Functions	The Lord of the Rings	Harry Potter
Transfiguration	Sam becomes Mayor	Harry retrieves the Philosopher's Stone from the Mirror
Punishment	Wormtongue kills his master, Saruman.	Quirrell is killed and Voldemort escapes
Wedding	Sam marries Rosie Cotton	Harry Potter recovers and helps Gryffindor win the coveted House Cup

The predicates that Propp supplies in the form of functions are easily discerned in these texts. Functions may also be repeated within a story so there remains the potential for infinite variety despite the underlying homogeneity of the narrative's grammar or syntax.

I found the process of studying the text to ascertain whether or not these functions are present in the narrative a satisfactory means to recognising the shape of a story and understanding the causal effect of particular actions, but unsatisfactory in that this is as far as the analysis goes; Propp did not regard his project as extending beyond the texts he studied.¹¹ By contrast, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss perceives that social relations underpin the related genre of myths and hence social structure is conveyed through this narrative convention: “If there is a meaning to be found in mythology, this cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into composition of a myth, but only in the way those elements are combined” (Lévi-Strauss 86). The myth is not so much about its particular content as it is a means to conveying universal ways of perceiving the world. Lévi-Strauss came to this position by first identifying a constant structure to myths, despite their superficial differences. Universality and particularity co-exist in myths:

With myth, everything becomes possible. But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity

¹¹ Marina Warner similarly lays this complaint against the folklorists of the Scandinavian school, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson: “[Their] taxonomy provides a list of ingredients and recipes with no evocation of their taste or the pleasure of the final dish, nor sense of how or why it was eaten. However universally distributed, stories spring up in different places dressed in different moods, with different twists, and regional details and contexts which give the satisfaction of particular recognition to their audiences” (xviii).

between myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: if the content of a myth is contingent, how are we going to explain that throughout the world myths do resemble one another so much? (83)

As a structuralist, Lévi-Strauss asserts that this dilemma is explicable by recourse to the linguistic frames of reference *langue* and *parole*: the individual telling of the story is the *parole*, and the *langue* consists of the pre-existing codes, which determine the unique story's narrative structure. Just as these terms are relational – the *parole* cannot be understood without reference to the *langue* - each is necessary to fully understand the myth. Lévi-Strauss determined that myths therefore operate as a language; only when the individual units of the myth, the mythemes, are combined according to the rules that generate myths do they make sense to those practised in the social conventions and thereby project meaning.

Lévi-Strauss also asserts that all versions of a particular myth should be taken into account in the structuralist's analysis, stating, "there is no one true version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth" (94).¹² He claims, "repetition has as its function to make

¹² Lévi-Strauss even included commentary by Freud (for example, on the Oedipus mythology) as being within the bounds of the structuralist's enterprise (92).

the structure of the myth apparent” (105), and so it is the function of analysis to identify the foundational problematic addressed by the myth by means of a comparison of all versions. Yet Lévi-Strauss’s view that a culture or society’s concerns and beliefs are expressed through the abstract code or pattern he discerns in myth is ultimately rendered ideologically limited by his assertion that these structures are universal; social change is therefore precluded from analysis. Rather, the “deep structures” which structuralism identifies are found to be ahistorical and universal, and so a monolithic system is set in place that denies the possibility of exposing and challenging the complexity and interconnected nature of social relations.

Clarifying the structure of the narrative does have descriptive value and provides an essential foundation for ensuing textual approaches. Likewise, mythopoeic criticism sees similarities within the infinite variety of narratives. But where the structuralist identifies these patterns as linguistic codes – or social structures – that shape worldviews, the myth critic sees them as having symbolic value and originating in the cosmos.

Mythopoeic Criticism

Structuralism is perceived as an objective, even scientific, theory or analytic technique applied to various texts, objects or social practices. Irrespective of the

object of study the structuralist is looking for an underlying order to the “chaos” of potential surface meaning. Members of the mythopoeic school, too, are “depth” critics, although they centre their analysis on myths and their derivatives, and the elements and motifs that recur in these texts. This is not to say that myths are the only type of text discussed, but that the interpretation of the text or object of study is refracted through the theorist’s system of ideas relating to myth.

Recurring narrative patterns, images, structures of action, and character types are central to mythopoeic criticism. It is this reference to the power and priority of symbolism that is the hallmark of Jungian analysis, and, as Clute and Grant identify, this theory of analytic psychology, with its “essentially narrative delineation of the contours of the human psyche – and of the route each human must follow to attain full maturity – has proved enormously suggestive for writers of fantasy” (525-6).

Mythopoeic, or archetypal, criticism draws many of its insights from the psychology developed by Carl Jung. Jung broke away from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic group due to irresolvable differences as to the weight Freud gave to the sexual drive. The sexual impulse underwrites all neurotic disorders, Freud believed. But Jung read the individual’s psychology differently, claiming that the incestuous desires expressed in the Oedipus Complex were symbolic of

a wish for rebirth that would lead to successful individuation, not a repressed desire for sexual union with a parent.

Three key elements of Jungian analysis with especial relevance to myth criticism and fantasy literature are the collective unconscious, archetypes and the representation of individuation (subject development) as a journey.¹³ The collective unconscious refers to a fund of images and memories to which everyone has access, although Jung observed that this “rich vein of . . . material” was primarily a resource of “thoughts and ideas” utilised by “artists, philosophers, and even scientists” (25). A collective unconscious explains why many symbols and motifs echo through culture across history and geography, providing individuals with a sense of continuity and order. Within this communal creative resource, Jung identifies four archetypal figures that reside in a binary relation: the ego and shadow, the persona and soul image. The ego and shadow binarism reflects the self as split between “good” and “bad”. The ego refers to the conscious self while the shadow is this “light’s dark side” – the repository for uncivilised, inferior or animalistic qualities. The persona and soul image, by contrast, refer to the type of personality the individual portrays. The persona is the dominant image or “role” the individual identifies with and

¹³ The metaphor of personal development as a journey has become a cliché, being frequently employed in everyday discourse. For example, former All Black coach (2002-2003) John Mitchell often described the gradual improvement of the team as a journey which would culminate with winning the 2003 World Cup.

the soul image is a deeper aspect to the personality, an unconscious archetype revealed as the opposite gender.

Jungian therapy recommends the ego enter into a conscious and sympathetic relation with the shadow, culminating in integration for psychic health. Typically, however, patients project their shadow qualities onto another, resulting in divisive interpersonal relations of “them” and “us”. In heroic fantasy the ego and shadow are usually individually represented by the hero and the villain, such as Harry and Voldemort, Gandalf and Saruman; with the defeat of the villain the hero’s character is left unsullied and presents an image of unqualified goodness.¹⁴

Ursula Le Guin’s *Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) is exceptional of the genre, with the hero Ged recognising the evil he has raised as an *essential* aspect of himself:

¹⁴ In Peter Jackson’s adaptation, Gollum and Sméagol are paradigmatic of the troubled relationship suggested by Jung’s archetypes of ego and shadow. Sméagol represents the sibilant hobbit’s good potential, while Gollum is his evil twin, or dark side. The interior dialogue between these two aspects of the one self results in the domination of one, so that Gollum and Sméagol present themselves at various times to the other characters. That Frodo prefers to call him Sméagol while Sam insists he is Gollum indicates the hobbits’ personal opinions as to their guide’s faithfulness and reliability. The irony is that they are both right; Sam perceives the danger that Gollum represents (and arguably Sam is responsible for the prominence of the fallen hobbit’s evil nature), but it is Gollum’s desire for the ring and willingness to steal it back from Frodo that ultimately leads to the demise of the Ring and the cleansing of the world of such a malevolent power.

Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name, and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: "Ged." And the two voices were one voice.

Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff, and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met and joined, and were one. (164)

Ged's greatness lies in his recognition and acceptance of his full self; without his shadow he is merely a petulant young wizard, able to call up but not comprehend nor withstand evil. The shadow is therefore an integral aspect of the psyche, repressed at the individual's peril. "The person who denies his own profound relationship with evil denies his own reality," Le Guin asserts. "He cannot do, or make; he can only undo, unmake" ("Child and the Shadow" 64-5).

Jung describes the persona as the dominant image that the individual outwardly carries. It is the socialised aspect of the consciousness in that the persona is conditioned by the political, economic, and cultural context. Again, psychic health depends upon flexibility, the ability to incorporate those aspects of the soul image that will enable the individual to adapt and respond to social change. The soul image is the animus or anima, with the animus representing the masculine element found in all women and the anima recalling the feminine

aspect of all men. The anima is typically aligned with love (Eros) and the animus with reason (Logos); each gender is therefore complemented by the fundamental archetype of its opposite. Individual formative experiences influence the internalisation of the other gender (mothers or fathers for example) and condition the soul image as positive or negative. In the heroic fantasy genre positive soul images would include Gandalf and Bilbo Baggins for Frodo, Frodo for Sam, and Harry's include his parents and Dumbledore.

Other archetypal images include the hero (Frodo, Sam, Harry), the wise old man (Gandalf, Dumbledore) the terrible mother (Shelob, Aunt Petunia) and the trickster (Gollum, Barty Crouch Junior, Peter Pettigrew). Although these archetypes are conveyed as characters within the text, they represent "the forms taken by the archaic potentialities in the collective unconscious" (Hadfield 42). Each archetype is actually a primordial idea or innate instinct that influences every individual's perception, but cannot be expressed other than through an "archetypal image." The archetype therefore remains unconscious, with the image – such as the hero, the wise old man or goddess – being a conscious reflection of the (still) unconscious idea that these characters embody. An archetype therefore implies an unconscious wisdom, a repository of inarticulate, but formative ideas, which can only be expressed symbolically: "these archetypes, relating as they do to deep-seated ideas and feelings in the collective unconscious, cannot adequately be expressed in the language of

reason and therefore take form in fairy stories, in myths of the race, and in dreams” (Hadfield 46). Archetypal images and myth narratives, mythopoeic criticism proposes, enable readers to access an emotional level that rational explanation would destroy.

Jung understood these primordial images and narrative patterns as collective psychical material that would assist in individuation – a process of self-development through which the individual attains psychic harmony and wholeness by recognising and integrating the many aspects of the psyche. The metaphor of a journey illustrates the process. On this journey the individual is transformed, not only by the acts of leaving home (crossing the threshold) and entering the forest, crossing the sea, or travelling underground (entering the unconscious), but also by making contact with archetypal figures.

Equally, in heroic fantasy the hero’s ostensible purpose may be to retrieve an object or fulfil an obligation, but the result of his journey is an altered consciousness from an ordinary person to hero, with the hero exemplifying the individual’s potential. The “night journey” Jung describes is evident in Harry’s ventures into the Lake, the Forbidden Forest, and the Chamber of Secrets, and the Fellowship’s ominous detour through the Mines of Moria, as well as Frodo and Sam’s meeting with Shelob in Cirith Ungol. These night journeys symbolise a voyage into the unconscious, an opportunity for the individual to access the creative repository that is the collective unconscious, and in turn

enabling the individual to make contact with various archetypal images and integrate them into the psyche. Returning from a night journey is to enter back into the light from the potentially destructive realm of “primal darkness.” Each journey is motivated by the desire to experience redemption –Tolkien’s eucatastrophe.¹⁵

Northrop Frye has employed Jungian psychology to develop a theory of literary genres, arguing in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) that all literature derives from the myth of the hero. Four narrative archetypes each correspond to a particular type of hero: the literary genres romance, comedy, satire and tragedy.¹⁶ Despite the hero being central to his “anatomy of literature” and the Jungian framework underpinning his analysis, Frye’s motivation is to establish a metanarrative explaining the development of literature and its various genres.

¹⁵ Northrop Frye also claims that the happy ending is an essential aspect of the two literary genres he describes as comedy and romance. “One of the things that comedy and romance as a whole are about,” he writes in *Secular Scripture*, “clearly, is the unending, irrational, absurd persistence of the human impulse to struggle, survive and where possible escape. It is perhaps worth noting how intense is the desire of most readers of romances for the happy ending” (136).

¹⁶ Each of these narrative categories, or *mythoi*, illustrates a particular type of hero: the hero of the myth is superior to the reader “in kind” – he is a god, such as Zeus; in romance the hero is superior “by degree” to other men as well as the environment, that is he possesses fabulous powers and objects; if the hero is superior to the other characters but remains subject to natural law he is within the modes of epic and tragedy; the comic hero tends to be representative of humanity, being neither superior nor inferior to the reader; and the ironic narrative presents a hero whose position or intellect is inferior to that of the reader (*Anatomy* 33-4).

Of more direct relevance to a methodology for the fantasy genre is Joseph Campbell's rereading of myth criticism to pronounce the existence of a "monomyth." "The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero," Campbell writes in his popular book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949),

is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. *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.*

(30, italics in original)

Employing comparative mythography, psychoanalysis and structuralism, Campbell finds that all myths are ultimately variations of one myth, with the hero the common thread between them. He suggests that the temporal and geographic spread of the monomyth implies a "singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers, vicissitudes, and wisdom" (36). Campbell's research implies that the collection of myths he recounts or alludes to are vehicles for deep-seated values or proclivities essential to human experience: "the commonality of themes in world myths, [points] to a constant requirement in

the human psyche for a centering in terms of ‘deep principles’” (J. Campbell, *Power of Myth* xvi). It follows that modern stories that draw upon myth narrative structures, symbols and archetypes also have the potential to convey the “sacred” aspect of traditional myths.

Campbell senses the numinous or religious, as do Jung and Frye,¹⁷ explaining that what individuals in every culture over all time have yearned for is an expression and explanation of an overarching force that is responsible for all life and its meaning. It is taken for granted by myth critics that the repetition of images particular to myths, legends and folktales within dreams and rituals as well as across various media unconsciously impacts upon the individual, so that “[we believe] these images are important to mankind, even if we do not know exactly what mechanism makes them so” (Hume 182).¹⁸

¹⁷ Frye does not advance that narratives provide proof of a divinely ordered cosmos; rather, myths seek to convince the reader through repetition that such order exists. In *Secular Scripture*, Frye writes, “the anxiety of society, when it urges the authority of a myth and the necessity of believing it, seems to be less to proclaim its truth than to prevent anyone from questioning it. It aims at consent, including the consent of silence, rather than conviction” (16).

¹⁸ The exact transaction may not be understood, but fantasy author Ursula Le Guin explains that myths convey evocative ideas by, “speak[ing] *from* the unconscious *to* the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious – symbol and archetype” (“Child and the Shadow” 62, italics in original). Le Guin implies that it is beyond the spoken word to describe how myths express their ideas derived from the collective unconscious, and therefore their meaning and influence on the human psyche remain elusive and mysterious.

Campbell's confident assertion of the reality of a monomyth has become a powerful strategy for rationalising diversity in narratives; however, as Brian Attebery claims, "there is no universal grammar of story that makes all myths into one super-entity, one monomyth" ("Exploding"). Where Campbell prioritises similarities and equivalences, Attebery seeks to reinstate local variation and context. Attebery suggests that Campbell's theory "may be too powerful, because it tends to remake all traditional narratives into its own heroic image and to obscure relationships between teller and audience, tradition and the individual performer, and sacred and secular stories" ("Exploding").

Campbell's comparative analysis therefore seems at once expansive and reductive: expansive in that his subject matter ranges across culture and history, reductive in that their comparison leads inexorably toward a single foundational narrative, the monomyth. Myth criticism's emphasis on universality is both its virtue and its bane; universalising necessarily tends to eclipse specifics in order to illuminate recurrent narrative structures, symbols and characterisation, so that the conformity itself perceived across time and space becomes part of the comforting message that myth criticism offers.

Freudian Psychoanalytic Interpretation

Writing in 1981 Rosemary Jackson claimed that, “the current popularity of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* indicates the strength of a romance tradition supporting a ruling ideology” (155). She cites Tolkien’s nostalgic vision of a pre-industrial society and his “naïve equation” (155) of morality and aesthetics, so that industry is coterminous with evil, and the Elves’ eminence is conveyed through their elevated speech and beautiful handcrafted garments, weapons and unique gifts. “For Tolkien, the only way is backwards: the chauvinistic, totalitarian effects of his vision are conveniently removed from present material conditions, by providing ‘escape’ from them” (156). Although Jackson’s analysis of fantasy literature draws together structuralism, psychoanalysis and ideological critique, her emphasis lies on the psychological impact on the reader through the narrative structure of the novel. She offers the disclaimer:

A more extensive treatment would relate texts more specifically to the conditions of their production, to the particular constraints against which the fantasy protests and from which it is generated, for fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss. (3)

Jackson develops Tzvetan Todorov's structuralist schema that divides fantasy into the marvellous, fantastic and uncanny. Without recourse to psychoanalytic theory, Jackson argues, Todorov's insights fail to extend from historical context (the fantastic emerges in an atmosphere dominated by realism) to individual and unconscious experience: "fantasy in literature deals so blatantly and repeatedly with unconscious material that it seems rather absurd to try to understand its significance without some reference to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic readings of texts" (6). Jackson's revision attempts to shift Todorov's study of the fantastic from "being one limited to the *poetics* of the fantastic into one aware of the *politics* of its forms" (6, italics in original).

Jackson studies the narrative structure and the way in which this framework either "tells of" or "expels" desire. Materialist critic Darko Suvin dismisses desire as a "buzzword" of fantasy criticism ("Considering" 247), but Jackson argues convincingly that fantasy articulates the "absences" and "losses" that stem from the capitalist and industrial society out of which the genre emerges as a literary form. Fantasy therefore manifests the "unsaid and unseen" of culture: that which is "impossible" according to the contemporary realist worldview. Jackson suggests that, "since this excursion into disorder can only begin from a base within the dominant cultural order, literary fantasy is a telling index of the limits of that order. Its introduction of the 'unreal' is set

against the category of the 'real' – a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference" (4).

But not all fantasy texts are subversive; some forms of fantasy expel the same desire that initiated the text. Jackson establishes her schema of fantasy literature from this perspective, preferring to offer the "marvellous", "mimetic" and "fantastic" as modes not genres.¹⁹ The marvellous includes heroic fantasy, fairy tales and narratives of romance, magic and supernaturalism. Jackson identifies this mode as authoritative and definitive, retrospectively describing events from an objective point of view. The narrator's "absolute confidence and certainty towards events" (33) situates the reader as a passive audience, merely registering the formulaic opening ("Once upon a time") and ending ("and they lived happily ever after"). The reader is not invited to reflect upon the implications of this closed structure, which is to acknowledge the socially threatening desires that the text articulates; return the text returns the reader to the ruling ideology by closing off what Suvin would describe as "cognitive activity" – the inclination to question and critique social norms.²⁰

¹⁹ As a mode, the emphasis lies in the affect, the way the text "operates" on the reader, rather than on a pre-ordained set of attributes or elements a text must include to be considered part of a genre (R. Jackson 32).

²⁰ Where R. Jackson disagrees with Tolkien in this debate is whether the heroic fantasy, or marvellous text or fairy tale as per their lexicon respectively, generates political apathy or is capable of sparking a cultural revolution, and further, whether or not this political affect is the ultimate purpose of fantasy literature.

The next mode, the mimetic, describes those texts that endeavour to reproduce the real world in narrative form. This mode deflects critique of the narrative's psychological impact on the reader through its appeal to reality and verity by way of the "knowing third person voice" (R. Jackson 34) as well as ordering the text into a recognisable and meaningful structure. The nineteenth-century realist novel exemplifies the mimetic mode. However, it is the "fantastic" mode that evokes dissent and instigates change in the real world. In contrast to the comfort offered by the heroic fantasy, the fantastic text disturbs the reader through its "dislocated narrative form" (23), embedding the reader's existential anxiety into the structure and refusing to dispel such angst with cosy images of ideal characters and neat, pre-ordained happy conclusions. Jackson claims:

Where more subversive texts activate a dialogue with this death drive, directing their energy towards a dissolution of repressive structures, those more conservative fantasies [e.g. heroic fantasies] simply go along with a desire to cease "to be," a longing to transcend or escape the human. They avoid the difficulties of confrontation, that tension between the imaginary and the symbolic which is the crucial, problematic area dramatized in more radical fantasies. (156)

The instability of the narrative is central to the potentially subversive effect of the fantastic mode. Impossibility impinges upon the otherwise mimetic text so that the fantastic includes elements of both the marvellous and mimetic. The intrusion of the unreal produces uncertainty for the characters as much as the reader: “the narrator is no clearer than the protagonist about what is going on, nor about interpretation; the status of what is being seen and recorded as ‘real’ is constantly in question” (34). Franz Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” (1937) is emblematic of Jackson’s fantastic, with the character Gregor as baffled as the reader by his inexplicable transformation into a beetle.

While Clute and Grant agree with Rosemary Jackson that Kafka is of “seminal significance” (528) to fantasy, they are dismissive of her theoretical contribution. In their brief entry on Jackson in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* they dismiss her theory of desire as not applicable to modern fantasy:

This theory is most clearly and generally applicable to the genre’s formative years (approximately 1780-1850), when the fantasy premise could be understood as an act of imagination that avowedly undermined the world. But later, when secondary worlds of varying textures began to be created, the normative weight of fantasyland gave to texts an air more of refusal than of

subversion. Modern fantasy's relationship to the inhibiting world is so lubricated as now to be more or less unperceived, and almost always painless. (511)

Jackson's theory fails to exhibit "any large current relevance" Clute and Grant argue because most fantasy narratives are embedded in a thoroughly imagined secondary world with no direct reference to the real world (511). Even without the explicit contrast between the fantasy world and the reader's social context (such as Stephen Donaldson and J.K Rowling portray in their work), it is difficult to imagine a reader not even subconsciously registering the differences between the two and longing for aspects of the alternative world. It seems to me that Jackson's reference to desire is immediately applicable to understanding the enjoyment or disquiet occasioned by a fantasy text.²¹

Clute and Grant's dismissal of Jackson's theory of desire applicable to fantasy literature is representative of a larger refusal to engage with psychoanalytic critique in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. Although the reference book reports enthusiastically on Jungian psychology, there are no entries on

²¹ See Freud's "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" (1908). He theorises that fantasies are a response to the ego's frustration at having to act in accordance with the reality principle. The ego's requirement to satisfy social conventions produces conflict with the pleasure principle, which generates psychological pull toward fulfilment of the id's demands. Ultimately, then, the "phantasy represents a compromise between the two: it creates an internal world which represents the external world as we would like it to be" (Noel-Smith).

Freud, Bettelheim or psychoanalysis. This ideological blindspot seems inexplicable, given psychoanalysis' productive relationship with fantasy. For example, like Jungian explanations, psychoanalytic interpretation of heroic fantasy often reads the genre as a guide to subject development, with the hero's advancement reflecting the reader's own potential.²² Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) has been greatly influential in this regard, although focusing on heroic fantasy's progenitor, the fairy tale. After World War II the fairy tale regained widespread social appreciation given psychoanalytic protestations of the genre as both restorative and educational, with Bettelheim's study instrumental in this cultural shift (Warner 413). He asserts that the value of fairy tales lies in their work on the psyche: "The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device because it makes obvious that the fairy tales' concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual" (Bettelheim 25).

Although Bettelheim's analyses have lost currency (his methodology unsophisticated in comparison with the post-Freudian theories of Jacques Lacan or Slavoj Žižek) psychoanalytic interpretations of heroic fantasy also argues that the genre's appeal lies in its representation of unconscious desires, or

²² For example Randel Helms presents Frodo as an "anti-Faustian" hero by reference to psychoanalytic theory (56-75) and Sharon Black draws directly on Freud and Bettelheim to explain her daughter's cross-gender identification with the character Harry Potter (241).

fantasies.²³ Kelly Noel-Smith undertakes such an analysis, positing that “the extraordinary success of the *Harry Potter* books is due, in part, to the universal phantasies they contain, in particular, those deriving from the Oedipal period.” Freud’s Oedipal complex refers to the psychological process by which infants become gendered subjects. Boys come to identify with their fathers through the realisation of sexual difference with the mother and a resulting fear of castration, while girls identify with their mothers once they recognise their “castrated” state and satisfy themselves with the prospect of bearing children instead of possessing a penis.

Freud’s significant “discovery” is that subjectivity is not innate, but a process to be negotiated and achieved. Subjectivity is fraught with complications; if the Oedipal complex is not successfully navigated then the individual will not be properly socialised, will not achieve a “normal” heterosexual subjectivity, and therefore will be unable to interact appropriately

²³ For example, Bettelheim’s reading of “Cinderella” utilises Freud’s understanding of the Oedipal Complex. Freud proposed that both genders negotiate the phase through attitudes toward the penis; girls as penis envy and boys through fear of castration. “Cinderella” therefore demonstrates to the unconscious that men and women can find psychological confirmation in an intimate relationship together. The ritual of exchanging rings during the wedding ceremony symbolises the acceptance of the other’s penis or vagina as their own, thereby satisfying their unconscious desire for the other: “By having the ring put onto her finger, the bride acknowledges that from now on, her husband to some degree will have possession of her vagina and she of his penis” (271). Neither Lacan nor Žižek have specifically critiqued heroic fantasy.

with others. The heroic fantasy provides a guide for this difficult and ongoing process, with the hero reflecting the reader's ego as Freud observes of fiction in his 1908 article "Creative Writers":

One feature above all cannot fail to strike us about the creations of these story-writers: each of them has a hero who is the centre of interest, for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to place under the protection of special Providence. . . . The feeling of security with which I follow the hero through his perilous adventures is the same as the feeling with which a hero in real life throws himself into the water to save a drowning man or exposes himself to the enemy's fire in order to storm a battery. It is a true heroic feeling, which one of our best writers has expressed in an inimitable phrase: 'nothing can happen to me!' It seems to me, however, that through this revealing characteristic of invulnerability, we can immediately recognise His Majesty, the Ego, the hero alike of every daydream and of every story. (149-150)

"Did Harry, like so many heroes before him, have to be yet another poignant orphan?" Anthony Holden opines in *The Observer*, and it would appear from a

Freudian psychoanalytic perspective that the answer is yes, he does.²⁴ As an orphan the hero satisfies the reader's unconscious Oedipal wishes, where the father is killed so that the child can possess the mother exclusively. Quoting Freud, Noel-Smith advances that these fantasies are an expression of repressed childhood wishes: "falling in love with one parent and hating the other forms part of the permanent stock of psychic impulses which arise in early childhood". It is through Harry then that readers reaffirm their own Oedipal process, "gaining psychical release from unconscious desires by reading about his exploits. But Harry's dead parents do not represent *his* wish fulfilment, but rather fulfilment of the reader's unconscious fantasies" (Noel-Smith, italics in original). Harry's dead parents are idealised and the replacement parents Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon are terrible, suggesting that the good and bad parts of parents have been split off into different objects. Voldemort therefore becomes the repository of all evil aspects that could possibly be attributed to Harry's parents, and similarly Harry's own propensity for wickedness is

²⁴ From a slightly different formulation, the adult hero of Dale Elvy's *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy*, Tane, is also bereft of immediate family. I asked Elvy if it would have been possible to write Tane as a hero while still a husband and father. Elvy believed that he could have, but wished to elicit sympathy for his hero and achieved this by taking away from him his most important relationships (Email interview). By contrast, I argue through this thesis that in heroic fantasy the hero needs to be cast adrift of close familial relations in order to fulfil his "mentoring role" for the reader; that his loneliness and alienation from the social group are alleviated when he conducts himself according to the moral code and, having saved the collective, is rewarded with reconnection through marriage.

divested into the character of Voldemort's younger self, Tom Riddle. Only as the child matures is he able to integrate these split objects and accept a less idealistic view of his parents and of himself, which is increasingly evident in the *Harry Potter* stories. For example, Harry learns of his father's cruel "jokes" on Severus Snape and, more importantly, becomes aware of the blurred boundary between his own (good) identity and Voldemort's (bad) identity with his visions in the fifth novel.

Psychoanalysis provides a seductive account of how subjectivity is achieved, but reinscribes masculinity as the normative gender. Although, as Juliet Mitchell points out, psychoanalysis is a description of patriarchy, not a prescription for its imposition (xv), Freud used his theories to "cure" women who were troubled by the social conventions that described their gender as secondary, fragile and irrational. Freudian psychoanalysis was not employed to challenge or revolt against the biases of patriarchy, but to a significant extent it encouraged patients towards psychological acceptance of the system. By contrast, ideological critique specialises in monitoring and contesting the economic, social, cultural and political conditions that shape our lives, and is the topic of the next section.

Ideological Critique

The theories critiqued so far leave their political views oblique. By contrast, ideological critique endeavours to make apparent the normalised attitudes and expectations that are contained within the text, bringing into question the validity of that particular ideology - class, race, gender, for example.

Ideological critique holds that the conditions conveyed in the text can reflect, reproduce or normalise inequalities. In relation to the fantasy genre, feminists argue that the passivity of female characters predisposes readers to enact conservative subjectivities, for example, and Marxists abhor the class and economic inequalities evident in the social hierarchy of the pre-industrial world. Gender critique forms an essential part of this thesis, with chapters five and six examining the forms masculinity and femininity take in the genre. Feminist theory will be reviewed within these chapters; therefore this section will focus on the ideological critique of fantasy by Darko Suvin beginning with his application of Marxist critique to the genre.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels developed the concept of ideology in the 1840s when describing how the dominant ideas and values of a particular society reflect those held by the dominant social group. Marxist theory is a materialist philosophy, positing that social relations differ according to the mode of production for that era. Marx and Engels believed that the evolution of social organisation, while marked by revolution and dramatic changes,

moves forward from feudalism, through capitalism to the endpoint of communism. The proletariat increasingly assume autonomy against the constraining authority of the ruling class (the élite in feudalism, the bourgeoisie in capitalism), until all are equal within the social group.

The term “ideology” was coined to refer to the ways in which the ruling class reproduce their own particular interests as commonsense within capitalism, linking the economic (material production) with dominant codes of thought (associated with the ruling class en masse) which in turn saturate individual consciousness, irrespective of class. The ruling class, classical Marxism affirms, maintains supremacy by representing historically contingent social arrangements as natural across all spheres of social activity. If class structure is deemed inevitable and binding, it becomes invisible, rendering the disadvantaged as docile citizens.

The Marxist critic, therefore, pays particular attention to the mode of production described in the text, the resulting class structure and the ways in which the text configures the social organisation as acceptable to the whole of society. Cultural forms such as novels and films are heavily influenced by the socio-political moment in which they are produced, and therefore provide a snapshot of that era’s dominant social values as well as (perhaps latent) conflicts. Marxist critics may demonstrate Marxist principles through a study of the content of a particular text, the characters or across the genre as a whole.

Darko Suvin's Marxist view of the fantasy genre registers his frustration at the success of fantasy over what he purports to be the more progressive genre, science fiction. In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979), Suvin rejects fantasy due to its inability to critique the "technoscientific" world, being "inimical to the empirical world and its laws" (8). He proposes that both fantasy and science fiction arose as cultural forms in response to the ravages of industrialism in the late 19th century; however, while science fiction provided (sometimes dire) visions of where technology would lead the human race, fantasy gave the reader consoling images of a green, pre-industrial world, devoid of contemporary concerns such as pollution and oppression of the proletariat through unacceptable working conditions.

In contrast to the bulk of fantasy literature, Suvin claims, science fiction is a valuable and critical genre because it allows for "cognition". Cognition refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and applying reason and so Suvin claims science fiction encourages the reader to scrutinise the social system portrayed, thereby drawing the reader into a dialectic with present day conditions; the genre, "sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a *cognitive view*" (*Metamorphoses* 17, italics in original). The subversive potential of science fiction lies in this engagement with alternative socio-economic systems, Suvin asserts, in contrast with most fantasy, which closes off enquiry and the prospect of change by offering

absolutes and eternal or irrevocable morals. He writes, “when fantasy does not make for such a tension between the supernatural and the author’s empirical environment, its monotonous reduction of all possible horizons to Death makes of it just a subliterate of mystification” (8-9). Rather than offering a clarifying lens to the everyday world, so Suvin’s logic goes, fantasy reduces alternative perspectives to a single backward-looking narrative, finding solace in the terminal space of a historical fantasy realm. “Commercial lumping of [fantasy] into the same category as [science fiction],” Suvin exclaims, “is thus a grave disservice and rampantly socio-pathological phenomenon” (9). To translate his passionate rhetoric: conservative genre fantasy is swamping science fiction, so that the commercial sector aids mass political apathy.

By 2000 Suvin revised his polemic against the fantasy genre. He maintains in his article “Considering the Sense of ‘Fantasy’ or ‘Fantastic Fiction’: An Effusion” that science fiction is the more progressive and socially and politically responsible genre, but seeks to understand the burgeoning popularity of fantasy. Essentially, he views the popularity of the genre as an expression of mass angst; the genre is indicated by its refusal to discuss the roots of material production (“the field of production is under a total proletarian taboo” [“Considering” 227]), revealing the “technological ideology” (the production sphere and its impact on the individual’s well-being and place in society) as the silent yet controlling mechanism of the genre. This propensity to avoid

discussion of economic factors appeals, Suvin claims, to young males who have become disaffected as a result of the instability caused by the lack of permanent employment (237). Yet he also asserts, “there is no doubt that the sociological bearer of Fantasy is a large group of alienated readers at the margins of the post-Fordist social hegemony, drawn from the marginalized intellectuals, the young, the lower classes, and the women” (237).

Those who feel powerless and have lost confidence in their society to provide adequate emotional or institutional support find solace in fantasy; the genre registers their concerns in broad strokes through the “new thrills and affects” (237) offered by fantasy and then annuls their fears by vanquishing evil and reasserting security in a more primitive realm. Suvin summarises his hypothesis regarding fantasy as a palliative for alienated individuals as follows:

The long-range structural crisis of capitalism coincides with the mass growth of fantastic fiction in and at the end of the high modernist phase, in direct parallel to the widening of its readership from the Poe-to-Morris disaffected intellectuals into a mass appeal to the marginalized social groups. (“Considering” 237)

In Suvin's account fantasy opposes contemporary economic conditions, but fails to provoke revolution. Rather, fantasy is deeply implicated in capitalism, having become a tool of corporations through commodification.

Some of Suvin's opinions are echoed by other critics and form part of my own understanding of the appeal of heroic fantasy: the genre offers solace in an uncertain capitalist world, and its commodification further embeds the reader or consumer within capitalism. However, his economic determinism ultimately constrains his argument. In his analysis Suvin implies that readers of fantasy are mere puppets of their economic circumstances. They are blinded by false consciousness, while readers of science fiction, by dint of their preferred reading material, are critical readers and engage "cognitively" with the real world. Suvin writes of constituencies as coherent social groups – the working class, women, young men, readers of fantasy or science fiction. His sweeping generalisations and reference to stereotypes are in part due to his endeavouring to broach a large subject in a few pages; however, this limitation is also a consequence of his emphatic refusal to engage with psychoanalytic theory on the basis that "neither the subconscious nor archetypes can deal with institutions, social contracts or proper uses of artefacts" (219).²⁵ His economic determinism is rooted in classical Marxism, with culture being a direct

²⁵ With intended slight on both authors, Suvin remarks, "I love reading Freud's novels (certainly more than Tolkien's)" (219).

reflection of economic conditions. The economic realm appears as an unwieldy and monolithic system implicated in but nevertheless distinct and alien from human activity and practices. There is no sense of the individual participating in, supporting and conspiring with capitalism, except as a slave; capitalism looms over Suvin's narrative as oppressively and overwhelmingly as any dark lord of heroic fantasy.

Although Suvin briefly refers to Antonio Gramsci's term "hegemony", the spirit of the concept does not enter his argument. Hegemony allows for a dialectical account of the individual's interaction with dominant institutions and practices – which are after all, "man-made" and can only persist with consent. This is not to suggest that it is simply a matter of recognising unsatisfactory power relations for the subject to resist them – a possible view arising from Marx's account of false consciousness. But it is to suggest that power relations are more dynamic, complex and multidirectional than Suvin allows.

Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony in the 1930s to explain how ruling classes maintain their dominance over subordinate social groups with minimal recourse to force. He theorised that social and cultural artefacts are used by the state to actively seek popular consent to values and ways of viewing the world that coincide with those of the ruling bloc. According to hegemony theory, the exertion and distribution of power is not merely "top

down” as described by Marx and Engels, but involves coercing people into acting in ways that do not coincide with their own class interests. That is, hegemony refers to the winning of consent to unequal class and power relations:

The normal exercise of hegemony on the classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always to ensure that force would appear to be based on the consent of the majority expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspapers and associations. (Gramsci, *Selections* 80)

Yet, hegemony is not absolute; rather it is a “continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria . . . between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups . . . equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point” (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 182). Some groups, Gramsci claims, remain impervious to manipulation and exert their own “counter-hegemonic” ideas.

Alongside politics and the economy, culture is increasingly perceived as exerting a pernicious influence over subordinate social groups. Durham and

Kellner suggest that “societies, like species, need to reproduce to survive, and culture cultivates attitudes and behaviour that predispose people to consent to established ways of thought and conduct, thus integrating individuals into a specific socio-economic system” (1). Culture is taken to be ordinary, including artefacts such as television programmes, newspapers, books, films, music as well as practices like shopping, going to the beach, supporting a sports team or meeting friends at a café. These artefacts and practices generate social meaning and identities, giving purpose and pleasure.

But cultural texts and practices also produce political consequences and it is the purpose of cultural studies to “play a de-mystifying role” (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 31), to foreground the values and ideologies within these texts and practices, which, under hegemony, have been depoliticised. Cultural studies holds that texts are “saturated with social meanings, they generate political effects, reproducing or opposing governing social institutions and relations of domination and subordination” (Durham and Kellner 4). A cultural studies methodology, therefore, engages with the premise that the cultural sphere is a conflicted site through which social meaning is negotiated, imposed or rejected.

Cultural Studies

As will be amply evident by now, no single theory or perspective is able to articulate or access the “truth” of a text; there is “no magical formula or hermeneutic key to unlock the hidden secrets of cultural meaning and effects” (Durham and Kellner 4). Rather, each theory elaborates on and prioritises particular views; critics therefore select a theory that will allow them to access predetermined critical or ideological perspectives to which the theory itself is suited. So theorists wishing to examine the portrayal of gender use one of the feminist theories, just as the critic interested in class issues will employ one of the many strains of Marxism. The aim of this thesis is to examine the various uses of heroic fantasy – individual, nationalistic and commercial – and it follows that none of the preceding interpretive theories alone can fulfil this analytical intention. Structuralism falls short on social analysis, as do Liberal Humanism and the psychoanalytic theories. Ideological theories, on the other hand, reveal social and economic factors but frequently neglect the reader-text relationship. To anticipate analysing heroic fantasy “from ideology to industry” is to require a “meta-theory”, but one does not exist. However, as an interdisciplinary programme capable of investigating both production and consumption of a text or social practice, cultural studies best suits my interpretive purposes.

The four men primarily responsible for the emergence of British cultural studies, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart and Edward Thompson, “developed Leavis’s thought for what they wanted to do, and broke with it, as new generations must always do, at the points at which it hemmed them in” (Inglis, *Cultural Studies* 47). The breaks generated by this group of intellectuals included resistance to their predecessor’s moral condescension toward popular culture. For this group, to examine the cultural sphere, to study everyday practices, the structures and rituals that produce meaning and subjectivity, is to adopt a thoroughly political position. Tracing political effects within the cultural sphere may have initially derived from Hoggart and Williams’ teaching of popular culture to mature students, but it was also a rejection of the liberal humanist refusal to engage in explicit political analysis (39).

Further, in moving beyond élitist critiques, cultural studies investigated to what extent the specific cultural form either sustained social control or enabled resistance. But the nascent cultural studies not only intended critique; social transformation was also on the political agenda. In 1981 Stuart Hall described popular culture as being, “one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged” (qtd. in Grossberg, “Does Cultural Studies” 10). He asserts that popular culture “is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture – already fully formed – might be simply ‘expressed’. But it is one of

the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why ‘popular culture’ matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don’t give a damn about it” (10).

The University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, led and inaugurated by Richard Hoggart in 1964, became the focal point of this developing strain of criticism. Three foundational texts of British cultural studies precede the Centre’s opening; Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), Williams’s *Culture and Society* (1958) and Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). These works are marked by their original use of now common cultural studies terms such as “agency”, “intervention”, “effect” and reflect each author’s working class activism. “Class,” Roger Bromley writes, “was the primary analytical resource; education, at all levels, seen as the principal medium of empowerment and change” (“Cultural Studies” 151). After the Second World War, this group wanted to ensure that the “hard-won literacy of the working class” (151) was employed constructively, for the citizen to consciously engage in democracy, rather than become the pawn of the culture industries, as per the Frankfurt School of thought.

From 1968 when he replaced Hoggart as director of the Birmingham Centre, Stuart Hall played a key role in developing the direction of British cultural studies, being instrumental in incorporating the various critical perspectives conducive to a deep analysis of cultural artefacts. Cultural

theories respond to the socio-historical moment – conjunctures²⁶ - and during the 1960s and 1970s British cultural studies worked with and incorporated the theories of the movements that mark that era: class, gender, race, ethnicity and nationality. Consequently, cultural studies is an eclectic mix of theories, brought together as analysis requires.

Through the 1970s and 1980s cultural studies continued to assimilate topical politics, both developing and appropriating the most recent theoretical work on sexuality, gender, and race. Theories available to the cultural studies critic therefore proliferated, but critique continued to identify hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces in popular culture. That is, how social relations enabled the contrary forces of oppression and resistance. To facilitate this political intention, much research was redirected from the text to the audience, allowing for focused study upon the subjects of the power relations under scrutiny.

As globalisation has extended its pace and reach throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century it is increasingly untenable to posit cultural studies without regard for political economy. Adherents of the political economy perspective claim that the political economy shapes the end product – the types

²⁶ Lawrence Grossberg defines a “conjuncture” as “a description of a social formation as fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes, planes and scales, constantly in search of temporary balances or structural stabilities through a variety of practices and processes of struggle and negotiation” (“Does Cultural Studies” 4).

of cultural artefacts available for consumption are delimited by the dominant mode of production. Therefore, research considers the specific economic and political systems that influence the network of relations between the state, social institutions, the economy and organisations that contribute to the cultural sphere, so as to determine to what extent political economy is implicated in culture. In particular, “political economy highlights that capitalist societies are organized according to a dominant mode of production that structures institutions and practices according to the logic of commodification and capital accumulation” (Durham and Kellner 18). The cultural sphere within capitalism is therefore organised to a significant extent by the requirement to fulfil a profit imperative, with marketing and distribution of cultural goods equally profit-oriented. As an example, the massive budgets for production, marketing and distribution means that the Hollywood film industry looks to minimise risk by employing stars and following successful narrative formulas (During 92-3).

Given the “theoretical explosion” since the 1960s, cultural studies’ inclination toward incorporation of new and salient thought, its institutionalisation and its global reach continuing since the 1990s, it is not surprising that there is difference and vocal dissent amongst cultural studies practitioners. Just as there is not one but many feminist theories, cultural studies has numerous strains which have developed through conflicting values or opinions. Thus, Jim McGuigan has complained about the “cultural

populism” he associates with John Fiske and the Popular Culture Association, and Tony Bennett has expressed dissatisfaction with cultural studies’ profession of political intervention but lack of specific engagement with government and social institutions that exert direct influence over cultural policy.

The intention behind Bennett’s cultural policy approach is to focus upon policy formulation and implementation by the institutions that administer the cultural products. Cultural studies is biased toward understanding human consciousness through ideological critique, Bennett argues, when it would be more productive to turn to materialist politics by “modifying the functioning of culture by means of technical adjustments to its governmental deployment” (T. Bennett, “Useful” 406). Because “the relations of culture and power which most typically characterize modern societies are . . . now increasingly governmentally organized and constructed” (T. Bennett, *Culture* 61), Bennett urges cultural studies practitioners to become involved in the policy-making process. His concept of “governmentality” refers to the “broad processes of regulation throughout the social order by which a population becomes subject to bureaucratic regimes and modes of discipline” (Barker, *Making Sense* 189). That is, the “cultural technologies” are not oppressive organisations that install individuals into pre-ordained subject positions, but rather they enable self-reflection on modes of conduct and social values. Better to be involved and moderate policy than merely proffer enlightenment via critique.

Nicholas Garnham, too, has “call[ed] for a major revision within cultural theory” (225). Drawing on the intellectual weight of Raymond Williams, Garnham argues that the neglect of political economy that he perceives within much cultural studies serves as ideological resistance to genuine critique and understanding of the relationship that exists between the culture industries and the state. The trend within cultural studies to focus upon various forms of identity (gender, ethnicity, nationalism), Garnham contends, diverts attention away from the crux of social formation under capitalism; the economic deserves especial attention at this particular conjuncture “because capitalism is a mode of social organization characterized by the domination of an abstract system of exchange relations” (227).

Agitation by scholars such as Bennett and Garnham since the 1980s has contributed to an increased interest in political economy within cultural studies. Yet Simon During observes, “not all forms of oppression and subordination are economic,” meaning that for cultural studies “the pleasures and uses of cultural production and reception need not be translated back into political-economic terms” (43). Rather, the economic and cultural domains can be more productively viewed as exerting “dynamic interrelations with one another, and not that the first simply determines the second” (44). Given that cultural studies begins from the premise that the economic, political and cultural

spheres each influence the cultural text or practice under consideration, a thorough analysis would need to acknowledge their compounding influences.

Ideally, cultural studies examines a text or practice from a number of perspectives, and the influence of cultural studies over fantasy literature is evident in recent books on *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, revealing that this methodology is increasingly applied to the genre.²⁷ In this thesis I employ textual analysis, ideological critique, audience response and a political economy approach to analyse the various ways in which heroic fantasy, and *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* in particular, is utilised to construct individual and national subjectivities. Utilising a diverse range of theories enables me to develop a picture of the heroic fantasy as publishing phenomenon *and* favourite book, a marketing franchise *and* ideological instrument. The structure of this thesis looks at both sides of an argument: to assess the social structure applauded in the genre and how this is received or manipulated within capitalism; to explore the heroic subjectivities described in the genre and investigate the implications of this persona for male and female readers; to consider the types of nationalism conveyed by the genre and to critique the use of the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* to strengthen New Zealand's vulnerable agrarian economy within the globalising market.

²⁷ See, for example, *Reading The Lord of the Rings: New Writings on Tolkien's Classic* (2005), *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context* (2006), *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon* (2003) and *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter* (2002).

Looking Ahead

I begin, then, with an assessment of the social environment in which the hero of heroic fantasy exists, positing that the pre-industrial clime is not an essential social setting, although by far the most utilised, but the social convention of gift-giving is. Gifts incorporate the hero into society, obliging as well as enabling him to fulfil his destiny of eschewing totalitarian chaos for a more enlightened order. After Mauss I refer to this gift economy as a “moral economy”; however, morality as an idea has not been intrinsic to the cultural studies project.²⁸ Given that cultural studies has generally refused to accept the

²⁸ Although the terms “ethics” and “morality” are sometimes used interchangeably in that they both dwell on the issues of what is good and what is bad, I use morality here to specifically refer to a behavioural code that originates with the individual but submits those actions or ideas to the benefit of the social group (see *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* 366-7). Where ethics is more closely aligned with a formalized doctrine for a particular group (business ethics, religious ethics), morality implies that consideration of what is right and wrong has begun with the autonomous individual, taking into account personal and group welfare. I posit that where ethics is imposed upon the individual by the group for the benefit of the latter, morality, with decision-making coming from the individual, allows for the potential that the individual has a better understanding of what is right and wrong than the received wisdom of the group and so opens up the possibility of social change. This is most obvious in *Harry Potter*, with the hero refusing to condone bureaucratic bungling as the Ministry of Magic incarcerate innocents as a means to presenting an image of positive action and ameliorating widespread panic. The heroic fantasy, then, promotes the “reflexivity” that Giddens identifies as problematic for the

evaluative judgements of the Frankfurt School or liberal humanism, it follows that this critical theory does not indulge in evaluation per se; whether the cultural artefact or practice under consideration is right or wrong, good or bad, is not for the cultural studies critic to assess, but rather to reveal the “real” or obscured impetus for such cultural effects – to contextualise: “contextualism aims to understand any event relationally, as a condensation of multiple determinations and effects . . . and embodies the commitment to the openness and contingency of social reality where change is the given norm” (Grossberg, “Does Cultural Studies” 4).

Chris Barker, however, advocates a paradigm shift for cultural studies from the politics of inequality to the “life-politics of meaningfulness” (*Making Sense* 20). Although these two goals are not necessarily disparate, Barker argues that it is time for cultural studies to focus upon the emotional paucity of western societies where few are absolutely poor in a material sense:

We need such a spiritual intelligence in relation to a rampant consumer culture that is producing more discontent than happiness because of the black hole of meaninglessness that remains after

individual within late modernity, but offers relief by presenting a moral code or order upon which readers can base their own conduct.

consumption is over. We also need it in relation to the stress, fatigue and social isolation that mark western culture. (20)

For some cultural studies critics such concerns have always been central to their work. Fred Inglis, for example, believes “the heart of the matter for Cultural Studies is the study of values in culture, where culture simply is the system of humanly expressive practices by which values are renewed, created, subverted, and contested” (*Cultural Studies* 38). Given that I read the heroic fantasy as responding to the oppressive deconstruction of the individual and his social environment, I place the genre’s moral code and its corresponding imagined security - ontological and physical – at the heart of this thesis. Wayne Booth has warned that:

Anyone who attempts to invite ethical criticism back into the front parlour, to join more fashionable, less threatening varieties, must know from the beginning that no simple, definitive conclusions, lie ahead. . . . But if the powerful stories we tell each other really matter to us – and even the most sceptical theorists imply by their practice that stories do matter – then a criticism that takes their “mattering” seriously cannot be ignored. (4)

I propose that the heroic fantasy conveys a healing narrative for the individual in late modernity. The current phenomena deriving from *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* suggest that collectively we are indulging in “ahistorical nostalgia” (aided and abetted by the culture industries), “as we often do,” Kimmel writes, “during periods of uncertainty, suggesting that earlier times were happier, easier, and more stable times” (262). These stories therefore “matter”, given that they represent a dominant fantasy of the time.

So, unlike Stuart Hall, I do give a damn about popular culture other than as a road to a socialist utopia; with heroic fantasy’s influence so pervasive, I care very much about the types of images, ideas and behaviour the consumer is encouraged to accept. It may be that I personally prefer marginal heroic fantasies, such as Mervyn Peake’s *Gormenghast*, Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* and Le Guin’s *Earthsea* stories, but it is the conservative fantasies that are finding particular purchase at the turn of the millennium – and I’m interested in finding out why.

The following chapter, therefore, considers how the hero finds “meaningfulness” through social obligation. Capitalism promotes the self as the endlessly desiring subject, but heroic fantasy holds up the hero as finding purpose and peace by subsuming the individual to the collective, which is in large part produced through the social contract of gift-giving. How this

concept of a moral economy “survives” commodification is the subject of chapter four.

Chapter Three:

The Gift Economy and the Heroic Character

Eleven-year-old Harry Potter gazes into the Mirror of Erised and for the first time sees his parents. They wave and smile at him, reflecting his unruly hair and bright green eyes. Ron Weasley looks and sees himself differentiated from his siblings for once; he is head boy and Quidditch captain, and he holds the House and Quidditch Cups. What kind of magical mirror is this and why does Dumbledore forbid Harry to go searching for it when he has the mirror shifted to a secret place? The mirror “shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts” (*HPPS* 157), the headmaster explains, and this is the dangerous potential of the mirror for the young hero.

Orphaned Harry yearns for his unknown and idealised parents, but, as Dumbledore warns, “this mirror will give us neither knowledge or [sic] truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible” (*HPPS* 157). Harry longs for family continuity, to be enfolded within the warm and loving nuclear family. By contrast, Ron enjoys a large family and desires to exceed the

accomplishments of his numerous siblings, to stand alone. The mirror doesn't hold the same interest for Ron as Harry because he already experiences the sense of belonging the family engenders. He knows who his parents are, their talents and values. Knowing where he has come from means Ron can focus on himself, separating from his parents and siblings by establishing his own unique personality and achievements.

Harry's fascination with the Mirror indicates a regressive narcissism. He looks to lose himself in the repetition of familial features in his unknown and presumably all deceased family members: "Harry looked into the faces of the other people in the mirror and saw other pairs of green eyes like his, other noses like his, even a little old man who looked as though he had Harry's knobby knees" (*HPSS* 153). Harry hasn't experienced a sense of belonging such as his own family would appear to offer – his aunt and uncle make it clear that he is barely tolerated in their suburban oasis. Yet this illusory connection with his past is unsatisfactory. Harry becomes distant and reluctant to participate in activities with his friends. He quickly becomes obsessed with his clandestine nocturnal visits which his father's invisibility cloak have made possible, losing sight of everything but the mirror's occupants' spellbinding hold over him (156).

The mirror reveals the foundational lack that fuels Harry's heroism. Denied the hypnotic vision of his parents and family, Harry turns to his friends

for comfort, although his parents remain a vital inspiration and motivation for his feud with Voldemort. Harry fosters loyal relations with Ron and Hermione, in effect recreating through his friends the family he deeply longs for. What is of concern in this chapter is the means by which the social relations that sustain and motivate the hero in heroic fantasy are generated. I will argue that it is the exchange of gifts that distinguishes the hero's devoted and dependable companions from the enemy's use of force and fear to command respect.

Although gifts may seem a marginal motif, I view these exchanges as central to the genre's theme of anti-materialism. These apparently minor details pervade these two texts and can be small items, such as the dispersal of gifts Tolkien describes as a social ritual on each hobbit's birthday, or more expensive, as in the Firebolt broomstick Harry receives from his godfather and the property of Bag End which Bilbo bequeaths to Frodo, who in turn gifts the home to Samwise Gamgee. Gift-giving occurs frequently in heroic fantasy; indeed, Propp highlights the receipt of gifts as one of his key narrative functions. These gifts, or "agents" in Propp's terminology, are magical, typically aiding the hero in his tasks. According to Propp's formalist analysis, gift exchange projects the narrative forward; the gift has a functional purpose within the framework of the story's structure, with the use of the gift effecting future events, or even the outcome of the tale. This situation is evident in a wide range of stories: in the *Star Wars* series Luke's destiny as a Jedi knight is

indicated when he is given his father's lightsaber; James Bond receives numerous gadgets that constitute technological magic; Lyra is given the truth-telling alethiometer in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy; and in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* Pip is the beneficiary of an anonymous gift of money, which transforms his class status in much the same way as Cinderella's dreary existence is radically altered when her fairy godmother answers her wish to go to the ball by gifting her the necessary clothing and coach. However, Propp's functions are concerned only with the structure of the story, not with the social implications of the narrative units he reveals, and it is with the motivations behind gift exchange that I am primarily concerned. Who gives and who receives the gifts? What form do the gifts take and what does this mean in terms of the particular story? Why is the pattern of gift exchange so important to the heroic fantasy genre?

To investigate these questions I will consider the theories of the gift put forward by Marcel Mauss and Jacques Derrida. Derrida's conceptual account of gift exchange derives from Mauss's research; he denounces the anthropologist's assertion that gift exchange in traditional societies motivates indebtedness on the part of the recipient. The gift, Derrida argues, is a theoretical impossibility, with it requiring observance of ritual obligation and return at the same time as refusing this requirement. These positions will be addressed separately, followed by a discussion of gift exchange within the

capitalist economy. This is the experience of Harry Potter, and I suggest that his ability to conduct his social relations within a “moral economy” is one of the lessons Rowling endeavours to put across to readers. Capitalism is notorious for its commodification and reification of social relations; therefore Harry’s example of restrained consumption is, in part, indicative of his heroic status. How can the rampant commodification of these two texts be regarded in light of the moral economy that structures the heroes’ relationships? Chapter four will detail the various ways *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* have been immersed in the commercial environment, asking whether their commodification necessarily undermines their altruistic message of anti-materialism.

Mauss’s Gift Exchange Economy

As Gandalf explains to Frodo, Sauron’s Ring looks to return to its master.

A Ring of Power looks after itself, Frodo. *It* may slip off treacherously, but its keeper never abandons it. At most he plays with the idea of handing it on to someone else’s care – and that only at an early stage, when it first begins to grip. But as far as I know Bilbo alone in history has ever gone beyond playing, and really

done it. He needed all my help, too. And even so he would never have just forsaken it, or cast it aside. It was not Gollum, Frodo, but the Ring itself that decided these things. The Ring left *him*.

(FOR 54, italics in original)

Inherent within this small but formidable object is a desire to once again conjoin with Sauron, cementing the latter's total power over Middle-earth. In an earlier Age Sauron took fair form and the name "Annatar" or "Lord of the Gifts" (*Silmarillion* 287). He imparted to the Elves the lore and means of creating Rings of Power, so as to manipulate the Elves to his evil and selfish purposes.

With these powerful symbols the Elves hoped to build Middle-earth as fair as their departed homeland Eressëa; yet Sauron schemed otherwise. These Rings of Power may have been wrought by the Elves, but they were imbued with Sauron's knowledge, "for his desire was to set a bond upon the Elves and to bring them under his vigilance" (*Silmarillion* 287). To secure this overwhelming control Sauron secretly made another ring, the Ruling Ring, through which "he could perceive all the things that were done by means of the lesser rings, and he could see and govern the very thoughts of those that wore them" (288). Sauron's considerable power is distilled within this Ruling Ring, which is cut from his hand by Aragorn's ancestor, Isildur. Isildur refused to destroy the Ring, vainly hoping to use its power for himself; however, Sauron's

orcs pursue him into the Great River, and there “the Ring betrayed him and avenged its maker, for it slipped from his finger as he swam, and it was lost in the water” (295). Isildur is killed by the orcs; the Ring is lost in the river. And so begins the Ring’s long search for Sauron.

The Ring relies upon a number of supposedly weak beings to ensure its safe return to Sauron, who is reduced to spirit form, hiding for many years in “waste places” (*Silmarillion* 294). Gandalf recounts to Frodo the fortunes of the Ring up until Bilbo’s possession of it, reassuring the latest Ring-bearer that it may be his destiny to destroy the Ring: “Behind [Bilbo’s appropriation of the Ring] there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought” (*FOR* 54-5).

The Ring cannot be trusted, Gandalf schools Frodo; it is not just that the Ring is imbued with the power Sauron once possessed, but of its own volition the Ring will betray the bearer in order to ensure its eventual reconnection with its maker. This seemingly magical and fantastical motif, central to Tolkien’s tale, bears striking similarities to the concept of the Maori *hau*. *Hau* translates as “spirit” or “energy” and Maori custom has it that the *hau* attaches to any gift or *taonga*. Marcel Mauss claims, “the *taonga* is animated with the *hau* of its forest, its soil, its homeland, and the *hau* pursues him who holds it” (9, italics in

original). The *hau* of the Ruling Ring is Orodruin, or Mt Doom, from which Sauron manufactured it, as well as Sauron himself, having imbued the object with his extraordinary power. The Ring is “content” with Frodo as Ringbearer as he carries it toward both Sauron and Mt Doom, because, “the *hau* wants to return to the place of its birth, to its sanctuary of forest and clan and to its owner” (9). Mauss continues:

The *taonga* or its *hau* – itself a kind of individual – constrains a series of users to return some kind of *taonga* of their own, some property or merchandise or labour, by means of feasts, entertainments or gifts of equivalent or superior value. Such a return will give its donor authority and power over the original donor, who now becomes the latest recipient.

(9-10, italics in original)

Mauss here describes the gift exchange economy, which, he asserts in *The Gift*, is a defining feature of archaic societies. Through a network of gift giving, social relations are contested, settled and negotiated in traditional communities. Gift giving is conducted through customs and rituals, and demarcates social hierarchy. Gifts establish status and bonds through the obligation of reciprocity inherent in the ritual of gift giving. As Mauss notes, the acceptance of a gift

acknowledges a bond with and obligation toward the individual giving the gift. These transactions are the building blocks to social coherence, forcing individuals and communities into constructive relations: “As against war, exchange. The transfer of things that are in some degree persons and of persons in some degree treated as things, such is the consent at the base of organized society. The gift is alliance, solidarity, communion – in brief, peace” (Sahlins 84).

Nevertheless, the bonds created by the gift exchange economy and enforced by beliefs such as the *hau*, make this system “dangerous” (Mauss 10). Manipulation and coercion as well as honour and trust are generated through these exchanges, the “danger” residing in the potential of gift-giving to bond an individual reluctant to accept the influential gift. Gift-giving is not an innocent act, it is “loaded,” and each obligatory return gift “(re)fuels” (Godbout 133) the circle of transactions.¹ As the tainted gifts from Sauron indicate, it is only with the destruction of the Ruling Ring that this Dark Lord’s power can finally be undone and the series of transactions broken.

¹ Jacques Godbout identifies the spiral as a more appropriate frame through which to visualise the system of gift and counter-gift. In each subsequent transaction there is an element of excess, necessary to not only clear any debt but to, in turn, give rise to a counter debt, so that the recipient becomes donor. Where the circle suggests the exchange is closed by equivalence, Godbout’s spiral encapsulates the continuous cycle of activity that motivates the gift-exchange economy (132-3).

What are the key features of the gift exchange economy Mauss attributes to archaic societies? As indicated above, they include the bonding of individuals and communities through the giving of gifts. These gifts give rise to obligations and debts on the part of the recipient through the social custom of acknowledging the connection of the original giver with the gift. The attachment of the essence of the giver to the gift is particularly important. I have demonstrated this “presence” above through the illustration of Sauron’s One Ring and the Maori concept of *hau*; however, the gifts Galadriel bestows upon the Fellowship deserve to be remarked upon.

Entering the legendary land of Lothlórien, Boromir warns his companions, “of that perilous land we have heard in Gondor, and it is said that few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed” (*FOR* 329).² The Elves of Lothlórien have kept themselves apart from the rest of Middle-earth and have become part of folklore, treated with fear and dread. Yet Elrond has requested they “befriend” the Fellowship. In doing so, these Elves reconnect with representatives of the different races of Middle-earth, and this is the significance of Galadriel’s gifts. The Elf queen heals rifts and augments alliances through her beautiful and practical presents, as well as her

² In Peter Jackson’s adaptation it is the dwarf Gimli not Boromir who voices his concerns regarding entering Lothlórien. In doing so the screenplay shifts the focus from Boromir’s tragic desire for the Ring toward the healing of relations between Elves and Dwarves which Galadriel and Gimli cement with the Elf queen’s gift.

rejuvenating hospitality and advice. Her honour and wisdom are invested in the objects she gives and the recipients partake of that knowledge and reputation.³

The Fellowship first receives general items for the journey ahead – boats, cloaks, lembas (elven food) and ropes. Galadriel also gives personal gifts: a sheath for Aragorn’s sword, a gold belt for Boromir, silver belts each for Merry and Pippin, a new bow for Legolas, a box of Lórien soil for Sam, and for Frodo a phial of the light of Earëndil’s star. She has no gift prepared for Gimli and so asks him to name what he desires. The dwarf reluctantly requests, “a single strand of your hair, which surpasses the gold of the earth as the stars surpass the gems of the mine” (*FOR* 367). Typically dwarves are characterised as greedy for treasures – as portrayed in *The Hobbit* – but here Gimli is given the opportunity to reveal his genuine renunciation of materialism. What will he do with a lock of Galadriel’s hair? “It shall be set in imperishable crystal to be an heirloom of my house, and a pledge of good will between the Mountain and the Wood until the end of days” (367).

Galadriel’s hair, then, would become a symbol of allegiance between two previous adversaries. Gimli is so enamoured by the Elf queen’s presence that

³ For example, both Frodo and Sam inexplicably speak Elvish when brandishing the Phial of Earëndil’s Star in moments of crisis. Although ignorant of the words spoken, these hobbits nevertheless draw upon the Elvish power inherent in the gift from Galadriel, saving them from certain death (*FOR* 191 and *TT* 712).

he seeks to immortalise his admiration by cherishing a lock of her hair. Her hair is the greatest possible gift to Gimli because it not only symbolises Galadriel, but is of her. There is a hint of a fetish about Gimli's request, yet Mauss clarifies gift exchange as embodying the act of giving oneself: "If things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns 'respects' and 'courtesies'. But in addition, in giving them, a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself – himself and his possessions – to others" (45). The Elves of Lothlórien take no active part in the defence of Middle-earth against Sauron in this Third Age, but Galadriel's gifts are constructive in the dark lord's demise. These gifts carry the exemplary character of the Elves so that when the Fellowship use the gifts, such as when Frodo and Sam turn to the phial of Earëndil's star, they are lifted beyond their limited experience and capability.

So far the discussion has centred on the productive social function of gift-giving; as Mauss summarises, "although the prestations and counter-prestations take place under a voluntary guise they are in essence strictly obligatory, and their sanction is private or open warfare" (3).⁴ However, as the anthropologists Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood observe, "goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges" (xv). The

⁴ Here "prestation" refers to the gift as a payment, an obligatory duty or the rendering of a service.

social relations defined through gift exchange can demarcate beneficial relations conducive to harmonious communities as demonstrated, but equally, gifts can symbolise and create poor relations. That is, gifts can cement enmity as thoroughly as instil trust. The use value of the object given for the recipient indicates the quality of the relationship. So Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon's miserable gifts to Harry declare he is marginalized and barely tolerated within the Dursley household. The Dursleys' express their contempt for their godchild through such churlish gifts as a 50 pence piece and an old pair of Uncle Vernon's socks. These awful presents indicate his exclusion from the loving nucleus of their family; Harry is isolated and friendless in the muggle world, and the gifts his aunt and uncle give him confirm his lowly status. But it is worse not to receive a gift at all, as even a bad gift implies some social connection: "The Dursleys hadn't even remembered that today happened to be Harry's twelfth birthday. Of course, his hopes hadn't been high; they'd never given him a proper present, let alone a cake – but to ignore it completely . . ." (*HPCS* 9). Dismissing Harry's birthday is particularly hurtful when contrasted with the lavish presents bestowed upon Dudley (*HPPS* 21).

Mauss describes these types of negative presents as "poisonous," and beyond symbolising bad relations they can challenge or even endanger the recipient. Unwittingly, Bilbo Baggins bequeaths a poisonous gift to his nephew and heir Frodo. When Frodo realises the enormity of the Ring's power he tries

to give it away to someone better able to cope with the responsibility. But Gandalf and Galadriel each refuse, and Frodo eventually realises that it is his burden to remain the Ringbearer; to knowingly give away such a powerful object would not only be irresponsible but would indicate that Frodo did not care for the recipient.

As with the “good gift” an element of the giver is retained in the poisoned gift. Irrespective of who is Ring-bearer, the Ring looks to return to its master and maker, Sauron. The poisonous gift aims to destroy or at least disrupt relations, and it is this potential for disorder that is the trademark of evil in the heroic fantasy. The intentional meaning behind the poisonous gift is to conjure the enemy’s downfall. By contrast, the hero’s honesty and integrity preclude him from such divisive tactics. Rather, he looks to integrate individuals into the community. A comparison between Harry and Voldemort will illustrate their differing spheres of action. In the third *Harry Potter* novel it is revealed that Harry’s godfather betrayed his parents to Voldemort. This is a terrible act of perfidy; Black’s disloyalty betrays his longterm friendship and trust with James and Lily. Eventually, however, Black convinces Harry that he did not inform Voldemort of their whereabouts, but another friend, Peter Pettigrew, did. Pettigrew has been hiding as Ron’s rat Scabbers, and Black has tracked him down, intending to kill him for his deceit.

Pettigrew “gave” the Potters to Voldemort to ingratiate himself to the dark wizard; better to join the most powerful wizard than die opposing him. Black is livid, for there is only one moral response for loyal and trusting friends: “‘YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED!’ roared Black. ‘DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!’” (*HPPA* 275, capitalisation in original). The bonds of friendship demand allegiance to the death, with the punishment for not obeying this silent rule being death. Together with another close friend of Harry’s parents, Remus Lupin, Sirius Black points his wand at Pettigrew. But before they can perform their deadly magic, Harry intervenes. He seeks justice for his parents’ deaths, as do Black and Lupin, but he recognises their vigilantism will make them no better than the man they want to kill: “I don’t reckon my dad would’ve wanted his best friends to become killers” (275). Harry saves the life of the man implicated in his parents’ murders, and this gift he has bestowed upon the traitor will be significant for future events. Pettigrew is now indebted to Harry, which, Dumbledore explains, “creates a certain bond” (311) between himself and Voldemort’s servant. Harry’s heroic act effectively draws Pettigrew into a close relationship – one which neither character may like or even fully appreciate at this stage. When discussing the troubling events with Dumbledore Harry exclaims, “I don’t want a bond with Pettigrew! He betrayed my parents” (*HPPA* 311). The wise headmaster reassures Harry, “[t]his is magic at its

deepest, its most impenetrable, Harry. But trust me . . . the time may come when you will be very glad you saved Pettigrew's life" (311).

Gift exchange does not occur in isolation; as Mauss describes it, it is an economy, a web of relations which may intersect or influence each other. Harry has extended a life-line to Pettigrew, creating a debt in return, a need for a counter-gift. Relations between Voldemort and Harry have become connected through an exchange of gifts with Pettigrew. More than that, Harry has shown the munificence of the "good side"; heroism calls for courage (a quality seemingly absent in Pettigrew) but equally Harry shows that members of the "good side" are mutually bound together, despite differences, under a constructive leadership. This directly contrasts with Voldemort's power. His leadership is destructive and overwhelming, and where Harry gives, Voldemort is more likely to take – that is the nature of evil in heroic fantasy. Voldemort delights in creating a culture of fear and deceit, trepidation and secrecy amongst his followers as much as between those opposed to his campaign to rule the world.

The spell in which Voldemort rematerialises reflects his distorting power. Pettigrew apprehensively puts the potion together and casts the spell:

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son . . .

*“Flesh – of the servant – w-willingly given – you will – revive – your
master . . .*

*“B-blood of the enemy . . . forcibly taken . . . you will . . . resurrect your
foe.”* (HPGF 556-557, italics in original)

Although Voldemort has promised him a “better” hand in return for his gift, Pettigrew is nervous at relinquishing his hand to the cauldron - justifiably, as it turns out. Rather than acknowledging his servant’s generous act, Voldemort regards Pettigrew’s self-mutilation as repayment of a “debt”, as punishment for his weak impetus for returning to his master: “You returned to me, not out of loyalty, but out of fear of your old friends. You deserve this pain, Wormtail” (HPGF 563). Pettigrew - Wormtail to Voldemort - finally receives a powerful silver prosthetic hand from his master; however, as noted, it is likely that this obligatory “gift” may yet act against Voldemort, just as Gollum ironically saves Frodo and the world by taking and destroying the Ring at the moment when the Ringbearer claims it for himself.

Pettigrew plays a dangerous game, one that he is likely to lose. He fears death at the hand of Voldemort and so sacrifices his friends to save himself, failing to appreciate that betraying his “good” friends is just as perilous as opposing the dark lord. Honour and integrity have meaning because friendship requires individuals to fight for their friends to the death if

necessary, as exemplified by soldiers in wartime. Heroic fantasy promotes this ideological commitment and it is the gift exchange economy that reinforces the binding of individuals together through moral obligation. Throughout his essay Mauss indicates the precarious balance with which social relations acknowledge the needs and desires of the individual and the group. He is disdainful of the contemporary valorisation of the individual, whose interests are met even at the expense of the group. Equally, the collective must not diminish the substance of the individual; “Communism and too much generosity is as harmful to him and society as the selfishness of our contemporaries or the individualism of our laws” (67). Rather, “this new morality will consist of a happy medium between the ideal and the real” (67). In the introduction to *The Gift* E. E. Evans-Pritchard maintains:

Mauss is telling us . . . how much we have lost, whatever we may have otherwise gained, by the substitution of a rational economic system for a system in which exchange of goods was not a mechanical but a moral transaction, bringing about and maintaining human, personal, relationships between individuals and groups. (ix)

However, before discussing the issues of being a hero in a market economy I will consider Derrida's critique of Mauss.

The Derridean Gift

"In order to think the gift, a *theory of the gift* is powerless by its very essence," Derrida proclaims in his provocative work from 1992, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* (30, italics in original). The French philosopher's argument here turns on the paradox inherent in the concept of the gift; the act of giving a gift is, on one level, conceived as an unsolicited, freely given object, but on another level, the gift commands a return gift, having set in place an obligation of reciprocity toward the original giver. This aporia is acknowledged by Mauss as the complex logic underpinning the social practice of gift exchange; however, Derrida contends that a gift in fact fails in its function as a gift if it is recognised as such. If a thing given - a gift - is received as a gift, the receiver then acknowledges a debt. A cycle of indebtedness and reciprocity is then entered into, which, Derrida argues, denies the very essence of the meaning of a gift. A gift is supposed to be "free" and unencumbered by obligation or responsibility:

For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt. If the other *gives me back* or *owes me* or has to

give me back what I gave him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or is programmed by a complex calculation of long-term deferral or difference.

(12, italics in original)

Derrida constructs his argument against Mauss's essay on the gift, looking to problematise the anthropologist's sociological interpretation of a gift exchange economy. Mauss claims that gift-giving within traditional societies is a constructive means of containing, restoring, dominating or maintaining social relations. The gift economy is a cultural universal, a peace-keeping methodology practised in pre-state, or non-institutionalised, societies. Derrida, on the other hand, refuses to be tied to the constraints of institutional structures and practices of exchange; he deliberately lifts his discourse beyond the strictures of tradition, announcing:

Even though all the anthropologies, indeed the metaphysics of the gift have, *quite rightly and justifiably*, treated *together*, as a system, the gift and the debt, the gift and the cycle of restitution, the gift and the loan, the gift and the credit, the gift and the counter-gift, we are here *departing*, in a peremptory and distinct fashion, from this

tradition. That is to say, from tradition itself.

(12-13, italics in original)

Having distanced himself from a socially-embedded discourse, Derrida offers an abstract and speculative analysis of the gift by unravelling the anthropologist's "flawed" logic. Significantly, the gift itself is an impossibility; "the simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it" (Derrida 14). Not only must the receiver be blissfully unaware of the implications of the object that would make it a gift, so must the individual giving it:

But the one who gives it must not see it or know it [as gift] either; otherwise he begins, at the threshold, as soon as he intends to give, to pay himself with a symbolic recognition, to praise himself, to give back to himself, to gratify himself, to congratulate himself, to give back to himself symbolically the value of what he thinks he has given or what he is preparing to give. (14)

Neither giver nor receiver must be aware of the binding or loaded quality attached to an object when construed as a gift. For the giver, a gift asserts certain rights – a countergift, a contractual obligation to repayment in due course, a sense of control or domination over another, and for the recipient

acceptance signifies indebtedness, the requirement for a satisfactory return gift, an acknowledgement of social relations with the giver. Where Mauss views these transactions or contractual exchanges as an appropriate means to cement relationships thereby giving rise to a coherent and unified social group, Derrida's interpretation is cynical – especially toward the giver. This individual is not so much involved in culturally endorsed practices of ensuring normative relations as in securing a “return payment to oneself” and accruing regard by generating a “gratifying image of goodness or generosity” (23). Derrida characterises the “giving-being” as using the transaction to indulge in a public display of benevolence that generates “self-approval, and [a] narcissistic gratitude” (23). Derrida's argument cannot accept Mauss's embedded interpretive position, instead privileging semantics over sociology. By decontextualising and abstracting the act of gift giving, Derrida reduces constructive social praxis to mere word play. Mauss's examination reveals gift-giving as a multifaceted practice, involving individuals and groups, war and peace; however, Derrida would reduce this complexity to a narcissistic boost.

The inadequacy of Derrida's analysis can be demonstrated by reference to the unconditional gift of a mother's love in the *Harry Potter* novels. Lily Potter gives her life to save her baby son from Voldemort. In doing so her love permeates Harry, shielding him from Voldemort's attack, which rebounds to devastating effect. Harry continues to be protected by this intangible source

until Voldemort forcefully takes some of his blood in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Although Lily's act is "aneconomic", Derrida's position cannot account for the extreme cost of her gift, except, perhaps, to denigrate the symbolic logic of her martyrdom as a kind of "deferred narcissistic boost" (23). To be fair, Mauss does not explicitly deal with this form of gift, but neither does he attempt to simplify a complex social and cultural system or abstract gift-giving from the structures which shape these interactions, in this instance the familial institution. Gifts within the nuclear family appear to require separate analysis, being outside of the market exchange (capitalism) and the system of indebtedness that Mauss regards as a cultural universal in traditional societies (the moral economy). With specific reference to the mother-child relationship, David Cheal observes that, "not all social life in a capitalist society is dominated by the rational acquisition of goods and influence" (8). Giving within this context is not marked by a self-interested contest between unconnected individuals; parents' interest in this relationship involves altruism unimaginable by Derrida.

Can Derrida's subversion of the gift, denied the contextual elements of exchange and debt, be taken seriously, or is it just a linguistic game, a cerebral exercise unencumbered by real life experience? He demands that neither giver nor receiver know that a gift has in fact been given and received; is this a reasonable position to take, or is John O'Neill right in claiming that "Derrida's

forté is to make difficulties where there are none” (134)? Derrida’s “free” gift is an impossibility, a point that he makes clear by referring to the gift as a “simulacrum” (31). However, his intention to isolate the concept of the gift from its economic background deliberately problematises a social practice without gain. Evans-Pritchard observes, “The exchanges of archaic societies which [Mauss] examines are total social movements or activities. They are at the same time economic, juridical, moral, aesthetic, religious, mythological and socio-morphological phenomena. Their meaning can therefore only be grasped if they are viewed as a complex concrete reality” (vii). Derrida’s speculations distort the social relations that underpin a gift exchange economy. It is the “aneconomic” gift that is an aporia, when viewed from an anthropological perspective, not the social practice Mauss describes. Derrida’s “tit for tat” (37) deliberately obscures the motivations behind gift-giving, implying that the practice is irrational and dismissible. The double bind that Mauss identifies in gift exchange – that in social practice it simultaneously acknowledges and denies the obligation it carries – is a paradox that his analysis can accept.

There is a sense that Derrida’s theory of the gift is sheer intellectual play. He revels in the ability for language to twist and turn about the relatively fixed concept of a gift exchange economy. However, O’Neill levels a serious accusation against Derrida; that the theory of the Derridean gift has been appropriated by those liberals who seek to further deconstruct social welfare on

the basis that such gifts provoke an “immoral binding of free subjects” (131).

O’Neill may well be attributing too much influence to Derrida’s philosophising; however, the individualism prioritised over community in this perspective is clearly at odds with that of Mauss. Mauss concludes, “therefore let us adopt as the principle of our life what has always been a principle of action and will always be so: to emerge from self, to give, freely and obligatorily. We run no risk of disappointment” (71).

It is the hero’s compulsion to act on behalf of the community, and in doing so he lifts his personal potential above the ordinary. To this extent, the hero fulfils Mauss’s directive. Without a sense of community and responsibility toward others the hero would not exist; that heroes have existed in various forms over all time, as Joseph Campbell describes, suggests that the cultural need to inspire the individual to conform to the group is continual. Mauss’s research works neatly with Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Without a pan-monetary system the various peoples of Middle-earth rely upon gift transactions to conduct inter-racial relations, as exemplified by Galadriel’s gifts to the Fellowship. But, as I will illustrate in the closing section of this chapter, giving gifts remains a powerful system for securing group relations even within a market economy.

The Gift Economy within Capitalism

Gift-giving is a complex social activity. A gift can be an object or an act, and exchanged between both individuals and groups. The rituals within which they are distributed influence the connections generated by the practice. By focusing upon archaic societies, Mauss's research identifies gift-giving as the foundation of the social fabric, with exchanges asserting hierarchy and status within and without the group. What, then, of gift-giving within contemporary societies where market exchange dominates the economic sphere? How does the gift function within a system marked by commodification, fetishisation and reification?

Although his essay on the gift documents this exchange economy within archaic societies, Mauss has one eye on the temporal present. A market economy may be the primary system of exchange within capitalism, but gift-giving remains an important feature:

Much of our everyday morality is concerned with the question of obligation and spontaneity in the gift. It is our good fortune that all is not yet couched in terms of purchase and sale. Things have values which are emotional as well as material; indeed in some cases the values are entirely emotional. Our morality is not solely commercial. (63)

Mauss thus differentiates gift-giving from the commercial imperative, aligning, instead, this exchange system with morality. Gift-giving in this sense is less concerned with the gift itself than the relations that it gives rise to. It therefore does not matter if the exchange occurs within a market economy; the exchange of gifts remains apart from commercial imperatives, with the gift economy occurring concurrently with market relations. The symbolic value is prioritised in the contemporary exchange of gifts. Sociologist David Cheal argues that it is the shift from a functional and pragmatic exchange of goods which produce social relations to the symbolic sphere that differentiates the gift-exchange economy of archaic societies with gift-giving practiced within market economies:

What has happened is a process of the differentiation of gift transactions within a changing moral order of economic relationships. As a result, gifts are no longer used principally as practical means for mutual aid, but instead they are the symbolic media for managing the emotional aspects of relationships. (5)

The most significant feature of gift exchange for the purposes of this thesis is the ability to generate and establish a network of trust, and for this

reason it is called a *moral economy*. The moral economy is a “system of transactions which are defined as socially desirable (i.e. moral), because through them social ties are recognised, and balanced social relationships are maintained” (Cheal 15). Creating small communities of selected individuals who can be trusted because they conform to a known set of behaviours is an important feature of social life in mass societies. These exchanges identify and bring into close contact those individuals deemed to hold similar values. Associating with those of like mind and building relations with them through the exchange of gifts brings ontological stability and coherence for the individual in a globalised world.⁵ In fact, the gifts themselves are to a significant extent unimportant. Within the moral economy the function of gift exchange is not so much to redistribute goods but to secure a community. As Cheal describes, these exchanges are “redundant transactions that are used in the ritual construction of small social worlds” (16). Great import is therefore placed upon these exchanges - to disrupt the flow is to signify a break with the collective and its way of life.

Destabilising the moral economy causes consternation for participants, generating a sense of betrayal that Cheal attributes to the belief that the moral economy is actually “part of the natural order of things” (16). In Jackson’s film

⁵ The Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing first used the phrase “ontological *insecurity*” to refer to those individuals who suffer from a troubled sense of identity and autonomy. See his book *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*.

adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* the audience's assumed empathy for Frodo and Sam's friendship is exploited for cinematic effect. Gollum recognises that the plain-speaking Sam is getting in the way of his manipulation of Frodo and so he conspires to end their friendship. He throws away the little remaining lembas bread, blaming Sam for the hobbits' lack of supplies. Sam is distraught, and tearfully begs his master to recognise that Gollum has "poisoned you against me." Gollum's machinations project his own traitorous desires upon the innocent and loyal servant, but Frodo's own frailty toward the Ring means he falls for the ruse. "You can't help me anymore," he tells his faithful friend, "Go home." The pathos of the situation lies in the viewer knowing that Frodo has wrongfully punished his best friend and that he places his trust in another who is equally susceptible to the lure of the Ring.

Frodo and Sam have enjoyed a long and stable relationship up to this point, but as Jackson's scene evokes, even these friendships are vulnerable. Close social relations require constant nurturing and upkeep, which it is the role of gift-giving to help maintain. The continuity Frodo and Sam have experienced means they have certain expectations of behaviour. According to Cheal these longterm relationships are important "because they provide a stable core of interactions in unstable social environments" (18). As Frodo travels into the frightening depths of Mordor he is in great need of a loyal

friend; his betrayal of Sam in the film version is therefore only explicable by reference to the destructive influence of the Ring.

To discuss Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, though, is to return to the nostalgia for a "natural economy" (Cheal 12) where economic relations are direct and underpin the social fabric largely unsullied by commercial imperatives. To achieve this moral economy the heroic fantasy genre uses the pre-industrial setting. Actions undertaken have a directness absent in the technological age, causing the instigator to take full responsibility; thrusting a sword directly into the enemy's body requires infinitely more heroism and conviction than pressing a button to set off a bomb, or even brandishing a gun, which disconnects individuals from the consequences of their actions. It is from this contention that I suggest that the role of heroism exists outside of mediating material relations. However, this is not to suggest that heroic fantasy necessarily locates characters within a pre-industrial society, although this would be the most common setting for the genre. Rather, the defining context of the hero is the moral economy. *Harry Potter* is clearly situated within contemporary England, for example. Despite the market economy common to both the muggle and wizarding worlds, it is the emergence of a moral economy, centred upon Harry (and for many characters, Albus Dumbledore), that establishes the strong bonds of trust and friendship between diverse, even antagonistic, individuals, which will ultimately prove Voldemort's undoing.

Yet the tension between the market and moral economies plays an integral part in Harry's particular heroism. It is part of Harry's heroism that he must navigate the compelling lure of materialism, especially when at age eleven he suddenly inherits his parent's considerable wealth. As Harry enters the Hogwarts Express for the first time, he has a pocket full of money, but no family or friends. To this extent Ron Weasley offers a direct contrast in that he has a large family, but as a consequence his parents have very little money. It is a mark of Harry's future status that he uses his money to create and celebrate his new friendship with Ron, sharing an exciting new gastronomical and cultural experience with him. During this feast of chocolate frogs, cauldron cakes and Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans, Ron helps Harry interpret and understand the wizarding society he is entering; subjects of a picture are active in a wizarding photograph and Albus Dumbledore is regarded as "*the greatest wizard of modern times*", for example (HPPS 77, italics in original). But equally, the experience of giving is formative for Harry's character, who, the narrator declares, "had never had anything to share before or, indeed, anyone to share it with. It was a nice feeling, sitting there, with Ron, eating their way through all Harry's pasties and cakes" (76).

The "mounds of gold coins. Columns of silver. Heaps of little bronze Knuts" (HPPS 58) that Harry has inherited enable him to be generous. His lack of concern regarding money means he does not notice when Ron unwittingly

repays his debt with disappearing Leprechaun gold, and when he wins the Triwizard Cup he can afford to give the money away to the Weasley twins to set up a magic shop, on the condition they buy Ron some new dress robes (*HPGF* 636); it is easy to be munificent when wealthy. Harry does not suffer personal sacrifice by giving material gifts to his friends, unlike the Weasleys whose generosity must stretch their already financially difficult circumstances. Giving gifts to his friends is not the source of Harry's heroism, but establishes the foundation and possibility of his attaining his destiny through the bonds and obligations his presents foster.

The characters Ron Weasley, Dudley Dursley and Draco Malfoy act as foils to Harry, and their families can be assessed through their attitude toward money, materialism and gift-giving. The Dursleys represent conspicuous consumption of the bourgeois, who profess their love and assert their social ranking through disposable goods. Uncle Vernon, for example, leaves his new company car out for the neighbours to register his increased status as reflected by the vehicle (*HPPA* 8). The contemporary values and ideals of the middle-class as caricatured by the Dursleys will inform the following chapter; it is sufficient to note here that the protagonist, Harry Potter, is opposed to the rampant consumption of his aunt and uncle, although he, too, is not immune to the pleasures of materialism.

The Weasleys and Malfoys invite direct comparison. Most obviously, the Weasleys have a low socio-economic status and the Malfoys are wealthy aristocrats. Despite both families being “pureblood” they despise each other on the basis of conflicting moral values. The Weasleys align themselves with Dumbledore and foster inclusivity and love. The Malfoys, on the other hand, support Voldemort and enforced class divisions. Like the Dursleys, the Malfoys regard financial wealth as the marker of personal worth. They pride themselves on their aristocratic ancestry and old money, and openly express their disdain for the poor Weasleys.

The gifts that these two families give reflect their associated characteristics. Mrs Weasley’s knitted jumpers and general concern for Harry’s health and welfare portray the family’s generosity and kindness despite their weak financial position. The homemade gifts, typified by the “Weasley jumper” (*HPPS* 147), from Mrs Weasley can be read as of particular value because they have been made especially for the recipient (Harry).⁶ These items are unique and therefore priceless gifts. But to the Malfoys, homemade and “pre-owned” indicates poverty, and, according to their ideology, the Weasleys are therefore despicable. Lucius Malfoy scathingly implies that the second-hand books Ginny Weasley receives for her first year at Hogwarts are a

⁶ Hagrid also gives homemade gifts. For example, he very thoughtfully gives Harry a photo album full of pictures of his parents – and having learnt his lesson from the Mirror of Erised, Harry isn’t tempted to waste away in front of their smiling and comforting faces.

measure of her parents' love: "'Here, girl – take your book – it's the best your father can give you'" (*HPCS* 51).

By contrast, Mr Malfoy gives to manipulate. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Mr Malfoy sponsors the Slytherin Quidditch team by purchasing "the fastest racing brooms gold could buy" (25) for the entire team, thereby securing a place for Draco as seeker. Through such acts, Lucius Malfoy teaches his son that the way to attaining what you want is through money, whether through things that it can buy or the people that it can manipulate. But Hermione voices the Gryffindor creed, humiliating Draco by pointing out, "[a]t least no one had to buy their way in [to the Gryffindor team] . . . They got in on pure talent" (86).

Where the broomstick for Draco is a tool through which he attains advancement, Harry's broomstick is a loyal companion. When his first broomstick is broken by the aggressive Whomping Willow, Harry is distraught. Following the event Madam Pomfrey keeps him overnight in the hospital, but he doesn't mind: "He didn't argue or complain, but he wouldn't let her throw away the shattered remnants of his Nimbus Two Thousand. He knew he was being stupid, knew that the Nimbus was beyond repair, but Harry couldn't help it; he felt as though he'd lost one of his best friends" (*HPPA* 137). Sirius Black eventually replaces the Nimbus with an even better broomstick, the

Firebolt. Harry has previously admired this broomstick in a shop window, but resisted the desire to purchase it:

Harry didn't like to think how much gold the Firebolt would cost. He had never wanted anything so much in his whole life – but he had never lost a Quidditch match on his Nimbus Two Thousand, and what was the point of emptying his Gringotts vault for the Firebolt, when he had a very good broom already? Harry didn't ask for the price, but he returned, almost every day after that, just to look at the Firebolt. (HPPA 43-4)

Harry is therefore subject to the same pressures to consume as many of his peers or readers, but his moderate consumption, his canniness with his pile of gold and silver is a sign of his status within the series. Rather than satisfying his immediate desire for the Firebolt, Harry invests in his education; he turns away from the Firebolt displayed in the shop window and buys the supplies he needs for the upcoming school year. Harry's temperance suggests his maturity and marks him as choosing to resist the economy that would assign him status only if he flaunted his wealth.

Harry's status as hero is primarily predicated on his actions and decisions. His first major decision was to choose to be in the brave and honourable

Gryffindor House, against the sorting hat's wish to place him in the cunning and sly Slytherin House. The sorting hat "sees" courage, talent and "a thirst to prove yourself" (*HPPS* 90) in Harry's mind and believes that "Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness" (91). But as Dumbledore later confirms, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (*HPCS* 245). Harry's role as "seeker" for the Gryffindor Quidditch team is a metaphor for his annual scrapes and confrontations with Voldemort, or at least one of his minions. He is part of a team, but his role is pivotal to their success, mirroring his heroic role against Voldemort. On the Quidditch pitch Harry endures injuries, foul play, and inclement weather, but each time he catches the elusive snitch he receives the adulation that will be his when he finally destroys the evil wizard.

In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* Harry learns of the prophecy that has so emphatically influenced his life. In his effort to kill Harry as a baby Voldemort chooses the young wizard as his nemesis, marking him with the trademark lightning bolt scar in the process. To get to the baby Voldemort first kills Harry's parents. This act makes Voldemort Harry's personal enemy as well as the enemy of the entire world(s). It is worth pursuing this point to consider the conflation of individual and community concerns here. I have claimed that the hero's gift is to subsume himself to the needs of the group, but when written within the context of late-capitalism it would seem that the most

successful formula is to satisfy both desires. Harry wants to “save the world,” but that Voldemort is responsible for killing his parents is never far from his mind. In the first novel Harry convinces Ron and Hermione to help him find the Philosopher’s Stone:

“Don’t you understand? If Snape gets hold of the Stone, Voldemort’s coming back! Haven’t you heard what it was like when he was trying to take over? There won’t be any Hogwarts to get expelled from! He’ll flatten it, or turn it into a school for the Dark Arts! Losing points doesn’t matter any more, can’t you see? D’you think he’ll leave you and your families alone if Gryffindor win the house cup? If I get caught before I can get to the stone, well, I’ll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for Voldemort to find me there. It’s only dying a bit later than I would have done, because I’m never going over to the Dark Side! I’m going through that trapdoor tonight and nothing you two say is going to stop me! Voldemort killed my parents, remember?” (HPPS 197)

Harry’s rallying call, although couched in contemporary syntax and conveyed in terms of the schoolyard, is reminiscent of King Théoden’s

evocative call to arms in *The Lord of the Rings*.⁷ Harry shows that he is capable of thinking beyond the threat of being expelled which immobilises Hermione, but his final reference to the intimate pain he has endured from Voldemort cements and validates his desire to vanquish the dark wizard. It is also key to convincing Hermione and Ron to join him in his attempt to find the Philosopher's Stone. This coincidence of the personal and social makes heroism explicable within capitalism, giving the hero motivation for personal sacrifice on behalf of the social group. But to save the collective from ultimate evil is to be celebrated as hero – re-immersing the individual back to the group, as Harry discovers.

Probably one of the greatest gifts Harry receives is the belief and companionship of his friends at the close of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. This novel is marked by his anger and frustration that the members of the Order refuse to include him in their offensive against Voldemort. But realising their mistake, the Order show their bond with Harry when they meet him off the Hogwarts Express at the end of the school year. Having felt isolated from his school friends as a result of another confrontation with Voldemort as well as Sirius Black's death, Harry is buoyed by the expression of solidarity: "He somehow could not find words to tell them what it meant to him, to see

⁷ "Arise, arise, Riders of Théoden!/Fell deeds awake: fire and slaughter!/ spear shall be shaken, shield be splintered,/ a sword-day, a red day, ere the sun rises!/ Ride now, ride now! Ride to Gondor!" (RK 820).

them all ranged there, on his side. Instead, he smiled, raised a hand in farewell” (*HPOP* 766). It may be Harry’s ultimate destiny to face Voldemort alone, but his friends and allies are determined to help him in whatever way they can to fulfil that role.

Conclusion

The key features of gift giving include the existing relationship between giver and recipient, the symbolic value invested in the object given or action taken and the type of relationship being fostered. Each of these aspects influence the other, so that existing good relations are likely to procure gifts that nurture and maintain this friendship, and will be received in that spirit. Equally, relations marked by distrust and malevolence will give rise to a “poisonous” gift that threatens the integrity of the recipient. Although the poisonous gift has been discussed, this chapter has focused upon the type of gift associated with the hero and the “good” side, as these form the productive relations, described as the moral economy, with which the heroic fantasy situates the hero and which it promotes thematically. The exchange of gifts maintains and secures relations between individuals who share in common ideals and ways of life, thereby identifying with each other. Trust is established by the continuity of these relations and the expression of uniformity or agreement, providing a

framework for ontologically secure individual. That is why when Harry receives an expensive Firebolt broomstick from an anonymous donor, Hermione and her mentor Minerva McGonagall insist that the gift be treated with caution. They rightly suspect the stick is from Sirius Black who is believed at that time to be plotting to kill Harry; any present, therefore, could endanger the young wizard. Within the wizarding world the risk of being hurt by a gift is an accepted possibility. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Mr Weasley remonstrates with his daughter for using what turns out to be Voldemort's childhood diary: "Haven't I taught you *anything*? What have I always told you? Never trust anything that can think for itself *if you can't see where it keeps its brain* ... A suspicious object like that, it was *clearly* full of dark magic!" (242-3, italics in original). Material objects in the wizarding world are much more than symbolic as are those from the muggle world. The dreadful gifts Harry receives from his aunt and uncle symbolise his demeaned position within their household, but they do not literally hurt him. Inherent within objects in the wizarding world is an energy or essence that manifests itself, so that Ginny can be enchanted by a diary and a hexed broomstick can buck off Harry and hurt him. The donor's relation with the recipient reveals whether a gift is likely to be malevolent or benevolent, so knowing where an object comes from is imperative.⁸

⁸ An exception to this directive is the invisibility cloak that Harry receives as an anonymous

This discussion of gifts has not yet touched upon the implications of commodification, reification or fetishisation. I have argued that the hero is immersed in a moral economy, which promotes friendship and loyalty between individuals to create a unified and powerful social unit. Cultural studies as a methodology has not typically been concerned with issues such as morality, yet the morals of the hero and the “good” side in general are fundamental to heroic fantasy. The hero’s socialisation is conducted within a wider acceptance of anti-materialism – aligned in *The Lord of the Rings* with pre-industrial culture and in *Harry Potter* with sober consumerism. However, both texts have become commodified, especially since New Line Cinema and Warner Bros. respectively exercised their film rights. Harry Potter’s lightning bolt scar is purportedly attaining the same global brand recognition as the Nike swoosh (S. Brown 11); with the logic of consumption having a profound effect on personal and political life, does commodification therefore neutralise or even annul the anti-materialist message I claim is essential to the genre? The branding of an entire country - New Zealand - as Middle-earth will be considered in the final chapter; chapter four will be limited to a discussion of the merchandising arising from

Christmas present in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. The immediate donor remains unknown to Harry, but this mystery is immaterial as the gift is effectively from his father; the person passing it on to Harry never owned it but held it in keeping for the protagonist. If any *hau* were to attach to the cloak, it would be toward the holder if he or she refused to give it to the rightful recipient.

the commodification of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, and the extent to which readers, viewers and consumers challenge the seemingly monolithic control the culture industry has over individual desires.

Chapter Four

The Commodification of Heroic Fantasy

With the fundamental shift in social conditions from feudalism to capitalism, that is, from a rural and agrarian social environment to one that is urban and industrial, production has become motivated by profit rather than need. This paradigm shift has had a profound effect on the worker, as Marx and Engels observed. Inevitably drawn into the capitalist marketplace, the worker is paid to produce goods or services that do not belong to him, but are sold for a profit. In return, the worker receives a wage through which he then purchases goods and services for himself, and as a direct consequence becomes perceived within this socio-economic system as primarily a consumer, not a producer.

Consumption is therefore the crux of capitalism, given that it is a system based “on the market, on money and on profit” (Storey, *Cultural Studies* 113). To be most effective, to produce the maximum possible profit, people must consume – endlessly. Advertising supports this consumption ethic, constantly reminding us that we *need* specific goods to feel good, to be somebody, to be relevant in a consumer society. Identity has become bound to the act of

consumption rather than production, creating dis-ease, or alienation: “the fact that labour is external to the worker . . . [means that] the worker feels himself only when he is not working . . . His labour is therefore . . . not the satisfaction of a need but a mere means to satisfy needs outside itself” (Marx qtd. in Storey, *Cultural Studies* 114). It follows that within such a system consumption takes on a fetishistic quality, with fetishism defined as “the attribution of life, autonomy, power, and even dominance to otherwise inanimate objects [presupposing] the draining of these qualities from the human actors who bestow the attribution” (Taussig 31). A consequence of fetishism is that we pursue happiness and satisfaction through the purchase and exhibition of goods even though the sense of fulfilment promised in the branding and advertising remains elusive or temporary.

Not only are we encouraged to consume in order to secure our identity, but also for the efficiency of production and profit we are all to desire and buy the same things. Commodification is a significant feature of market capitalism, referring to the way in which industrialisation tends to mass-produce and standardise goods and services. Commodification therefore saturates all spheres of life, with the purchase and consumption of these goods and services as much a means to satisfying individual needs as a way to attain identity through the signs attributed to the commodity.

As discussed in the previous chapter, heroic fantasy engages with capitalism's materialism; Tolkien's criticism is oblique, but Rowling's commentary is direct. The Dursleys are caricatures of the bourgeois, especially in their belief in social mobility - that overt consumption reflects moral and social status. The more the Dursleys consume the better people they are, the more love they show their grotesque son. But despite this thematic dissatisfaction with the "consumer society", heroic fantasy has itself become heavily commodified in recent times, both in terms of the narrative and the merchandising that feeds off the popular genre.

The celebrated science fiction and fantasy author Ursula Le Guin has written disparagingly of a sector of fantasy writing which she refers to as "commodified fantasy":

Commodified fantasy takes no risks; it invents nothing, but imitates and trivialises. It proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity, turning their action into violence, their actors into dolls, and their truth-telling to sentimental platitude. Heroes brandish their swords, lasers, wands, as mechanically as combine harvesters, reaping profits. Profoundly disturbing moral choices are sanitized, made cute, made safe. The passionately conceived ideas of the great story-tellers are copied . . .

advertised, sold, broken, junked, replaceable, interchangeable.

(Tales from Earthsea xvi-xvii)

Le Guin refers to “genre fantasy”, pejoratively described as derivative or “universally imitative dross” that is “emitted by publishers to fulfil their monthly quotas” (Clute and Grant 396). Genre fantasy is instantly recognisable – the narrative arc, characters and landscape are familiar and comforting (an accusation made of the *Harry Potter* series), and frequently bear Tolkien’s influence. However, genre fantasy, Clute and Grant assert “is not at heart fantasy at all, but a comforting revisit of cosy venues, creating an effect that is almost anti-fantasy” (396). Where “full fantasy” is a “perception changing” (751) literature and should “release or even . . . catapult the reader into new areas of the imagination” (396), genre fantasies “cater in large part for unimaginative readers who, through the reading of a [genre fantasy], can feel themselves to be . . . vicariously imaginative” (396).

The esteemed fantasy author Diana Wynne Jones parodies genre or commodified fantasy in her novel *The Dark Lord of Derkholm* (1998). In this story, the wizard world regularly hosts “Mr Chesney’s Pilgrim Parties.” These Pilgrim Parties originate from the world next door and require the wizards to provide the quintessential fantasy experience – replete with a Dark Lord, Elves, dwarves, a magical guide, flying dragons and battles between good and evil.

But now the wizards have had enough of the devastation these tourist parties are causing to their world and look to challenge Mr Chesney's power over them.

Jones' novel suggests that powerful individuals like Mr Chesney (who can be read as standing for Walt Disney) are devastating fantasy literature by turning the world into an industry. Both Le Guin and Jones bemoan the fact that some fantasy authors, armed with the essentials of the genre, merely imitate Tolkien.¹ The genre is therefore depleted by replication; what the genre needs, they argue, is thought-provoking invention, not more versions of *The Lord of the Rings*. The concerns about the commodification of fantasy are two-fold: there is the reduction of the genre itself to a formula, easily reproduced and readily consumed by a purportedly addicted audience; and the rampant merchandising and marketing surrounding the fantasy story, particularly when

¹ Jones is clear that the success of fantasy literature relies on authors bringing their own voice and ideas to the narrative rather than regurgitating Tolkien's successful formula. In Jones' 1984 novel, *Fire and Hemlock*, the young female protagonist, Polly, is writing fantasy. After reading *The Lord of the Rings* four times she writes her own adventure story, in which Tan Coul and Hero, aided by Tan Thare, Tan Hanivar and Tan Audel, seek the Obah Crypt in the Caves of Doom. "After *The Lord of the Rings* it was clear to her that the Obah Crypt was really a ring which was very dangerous and had to be destroyed. Hero did this, with great courage" (156). When her friend Mr Lynn reads the story he chastises her for her lack of invention: "*No, it's not a ring. You stole that from Tolkien. Use your own ideas*" (157, italics in original). Jones seems to suggest that rewriting Tolkien is an early stage in which authors practice their writing skills; it is not an end point for their creative talent.

produced as a film. This chapter is primarily interested in the latter, exploring the extent to which consumers influence or submit to the commodified culture they consume.

To enter this debate, I contrast the theoretical perspectives and attitudes of the Frankfurt School and cultural studies.² The Frankfurt School perceive commercial culture as a pernicious ploy by big business to indoctrinate the masses into capitalism. Jack Zipes, for example, forcefully denounces the commodification of culture, especially children's culture: "Everything we do to, with, and for our children is influenced by capitalist marketing conditions and the hegemonic interests of ruling corporate élites" (xi). This position privileges production as the source of capitalist ideology, which is then straightforwardly received by the consumer. However, although the Frankfurt School's theory of the culture industry provides an excellent account of an "exceedingly commercial and technologically advanced culture that promotes the needs of dominant corporate interests, plays a principal role in ideological reproduction, and enculturates the populace into the dominant system of needs, thought, and behavior" (Durham and Kellner 12), this theoretical perspective nevertheless also promotes the idea of the "cultural dope". It is as if the

² References to the Frankfurt School are deployed loosely here, primarily to register the formative values and contributions of the school toward popular culture, which are invoked by other commentators, not necessarily adherents of Horkheimer and Adorno.

commentator is inexplicably prescient and the fan of *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* is not.

Wayne C. Booth observes, “most critics who have openly addressed ethical or moral questions have worked mainly at warning about the dangers lurking, *for other people*, in seductive fictions” (159, italics in original). Critics of the Frankfurt School persuasion predominantly register the “harmful effects” (159) of such narratives, and so I turn to commentators who illuminate the process of consumption. Cultural studies argues that meaning is made during consumption, rather than determined within the text. From this standpoint the consumer is understood as actively engaged with popular culture. But this is not to imply that consumers are all-powerful in their relationship with commodified culture. Control over cultural products and therefore over cultural meaning is neither imposed from above nor cheerfully deflected from below. Rather, the process is hegemonic, with producer and consumer negotiating control. Power is unevenly distributed, however, as a case study of the interaction between *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* fans and the film production companies New Line Cinema and Warner Bros. demonstrates. Following an analysis of the commodification of these texts from the perspective of the Frankfurt School and those who express similar views, I introduce perspectives from *Harry Potter* consumers who participated in

interviews arranged in 2002.³ The discrepancy between gifts and commodities therefore arises in this section; while many adults and children express dissatisfaction with the proliferation of goods surrounding the series, some adults indicated that *Harry Potter* merchandise nevertheless provided an effective tool with which to connect with children. That there was no clear consensus within or across these focus group interviews regarding the culture industries' exploitation of *Harry Potter* suggests that our relationship with such goods is often equivocal.

The Frankfurt School and an Avalanche of Crud

Both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* have become heavily commodified since their adaptation to film. The list of merchandise is extensive and the quality variable: jewellery, Lego sets, video games, chess sets, t-shirts, figurines, duvet sets, soft toys, costumes, stamp collections and posters. Prior to the adaptation, the merchandising attached to *The Lord of the Rings* was a “respectful and tasteful cottage industry run by pipe-smoking enthusiasts with a weakness for made-up languages [but it’s] now a brand with global reach: it is books and DVDs baseball caps and badges, pillowcases and towels, fridge

³ A list of the participants in these interviews with their demographic data is included in Appendix Two.

magnets and pointy elastic ears. It's hobbitmania!" (Errigo 243). There are also very expensive memorabilia, including Royal Dalton ware, Sword sets, and jewellery from Jens Hansen Workshop, the New Zealand makers of the "original" Ring. Weta Collectibles, co-owned by Peter Jackson and Richard Taylor, have established a reputable industry for memorabilia through association with the film. Weta Collectibles gains instant credibility for its *The Lord of the Rings* merchandise (including medallions, figurines, busts, and chess sets), being responsible for the sets and props used in the films; Richard Taylor of Weta is proud that it is the "first time in merchandising history that an FX shop has gone on to make products for the film it has just serviced" ("Holmes").⁴

Similarly, the marketing and merchandising surrounding *Harry Potter* has turned the books into a phenomenon, particularly evident with the release of the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in 2003. Rowling's insistence upon extreme secrecy surrounding this book ("Interview") generated

⁴ Jackson's interpretation has endeavoured to convey the epic tone and aesthetic beauty of Tolkien's novel. For Peter Jackson, "the great thing about a movie like this is it's not all trickery and fakery" (*The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy – The Exhibition*); the costumes, armour and swords have all been meticulously made as per traditional methods where possible, thereby contributing to the visual authenticity of the cinematic narrative. Richard Taylor explains that employing the original method of sword and armour production, "comes to bear on the reality of the props seen on the film" (*The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy – The Exhibition*).

a frenzy of anticipation, with one American buyer paying \$90,990 for a 93-word synopsis a few months prior to the book's worldwide release ("\$954").⁵ 21 June 2003 was declared "Harry Potter Day", and such was the media saturation that even London buses bore Harry's name. Young *Harry Potter* fans dressed up to purchase the latest instalment, whether they lived in London or Rangiora, sat down for hours at "read-a-thons" to have the book read to them, and queued at book launches to get a glimpse of Rowling or the Hogwarts Express train.⁶

This overt commercialisation of a children's story has raised the ire of some social critics.⁷ Peter Travers, film critic for the *Rolling Stone* magazine,

⁵ All monetary values in this thesis will be recorded in \$NZD unless otherwise stated.

⁶ Sometimes these "event launches" are ruined by their very success: in 1999 at an event at an American Border's bookshop Rowling's fans, who had queued to meet her and get their books signed, became unruly. The signing was a "fiasco", one attendee claimed; "irate parents were screaming" and "the store's general manager was bitten and punched" (qtd. in Maughan 36).

⁷ But as Robyn Sheahan-Bright points out the "cultural industries" are also promoting Philip Pullman's "literary" trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. Random House spent \$250,000 on marketing *Northern Lights*, the trilogy has been turned into a Westend play and the film rights have been sold to New Line Cinema. While Random House's budget is negligible compared to the money poured into the *Harry Potter* film franchise, it would seem that commodification of Pullman's trilogy is likely given that New Line claim that the cost of this film adaptation will far exceed that of *The Lord of the Rings*, estimated at \$US350 million ("New Line Cinema"). Excitement and concern regarding the commodification of *His Dark Materials* corresponds to that discussed here; on a BBC chatsite 11-year-old James states, "Dark Materials are much better than Harry Potter. A film should be made of them instead because Pullman wouldn't let a huge company mess it up like Warner Bros. did." And 15-year-old Lisa agrees: "Such an intelligent book

refused to write a review of the first *Harry Potter* film in 2001. It “isn’t a movie at all,” he argued, “it’s an industry and should be treated as such” (155). By “industry” Travers refers to the vast network of corporate businesses hoping to sell related products through the success of the film franchise. Stephen Brown summarises the resulting network of commodities:

Warner Brothers have signed a seven-figure, five-year, two-film deal with Rowling in October 1998, and so far the conglomerate has granted 46 licences to all manner of memorabilia manufacturers: Mattel for board games and toys; Hasbro, for trading cards and candy; Electronic Arts, for video games and computer-based ancillaries; Lego, for the eponymous building bricks; and the Character Group for plastic and porcelain figurines. Coca-Cola has also signed a \$150 million sponsorship deal, while rumors of everything from Hogwarts theme parks to Harry Potter Happy Meals are circulating. (7)

deserves such recognition. He's miles better than Harry Potter and I hope he will not subject it to the cheap merchandise market that the Harry Potter film has opened” (“What do you love”).

The *Harry Potter* film franchise, from Travers' point of view, is merely a cynically-produced piece of entertainment created primarily for the benefit of profit-seeking corporations.

According to the Frankfurt School, producing cultural products purely for financial gain is at the heart of the culture industries: "the entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms" (Adorno 87). A direct consequence of this is a consumer society, in which individuals are obedient to the machinations of capitalism, each having "uniform needs and desires for mass-produced products" (Durham and Kellner 11). Consumer society reifies the individual, this school of thought propounds. Bound within the capitalist social fabric through manufactured desires for material goods, individuals now imagine themselves reflected through their commodities.

Extending the Frankfurt School's analysis to heroic fantasy, the "deceived masses" that buy or consume merchandise relating to *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* are actually being drawn into the capitalist net, their enthusiasm for the text simply a reflection of their uncritical support of the culture industries. In his article "Buried Alive", David Denby argues that under late capitalism and an "avalanche of crud" (48) the individual is acculturated to consume so that, "by the time they are five or six, they've been pulled into the marketplace. They're on their way to becoming not citizens but consumers" (Denby 51). What young people read, view and play with become the tools

through which the culture industry invests in itself, with each book or film having a litany of toys, games, and CDs associated with it. As a parent and social commentator, David Denby complains of the “toy systems” that monopolise children’s leisure time. Cleaning up after his son, Denby was confronted by the political implications of the toys he was putting away:

On the floor was the plastic detritus of half a dozen . . . what? Not toys, exactly, but toy systems, many of which were also available as a television show or a movie, or both, with links to computer games, video-arcade games, comic books, regular children’s books, clothes, and cereal boxes. Each part of the toy system sold another part, and so [son] Max was encased in a fantasy of props – stuff – virtually to the limits of his horizon. (48)

Denby does not object to popular culture as such; what does concern him is the sheer volume of it and the inherent product senility (the brief life-span of the product) either by design or through “fashionisation” (the quick succession by a new product). “The media have become three-dimensional, inescapable, omnivorous, and self-referring – a closed system that seems, for many of the kids, to answer all their questions” (51).

Denby and Zipes argue that social relations are damaged because they are conducted through material goods. Total immersion in a mass-mediated society leads to an emphasis being placed on the goods themselves rather than the people; that is, commodity fetishism, with goods treated as people and people as things. It is relevant to ask, then, whether the values that I suggest are promoted through the heroic fantasy gift economy can withstand the commodification of the text. Denby and Zipes would say no. Bearing in mind that Zipes regards *Harry Potter* and most of children's literature as commodified in the first instance - "Children's books are formulaic and banal, distinguishable from [one] another only by their brand labels" (Zipes 7) - any qualities the text may possess or convey are lost in the empirical world in the mire of material goods and the marketing pressure to consume.

Of course, Travers is right to highlight that the film is a pretext for selling merchandise. As well as securing from the author the right to produce a film adaptation, the production company buys the authority to on-sell the right to make products such as toys and computer games, and secure tie-in endorsements (Intellectual Property) as often seen with Burger King or McDonald's promotions. The important function of related commodities and marketing to mitigate the enormous costs of film-making is clarified by Rowling when, in an interview with Jeremy Paxton in June 2003, she claims that

it was impossible for her to prevent the wholesale commodification of her series:

JKR: I think it's pretty well known, if I could have stopped all the merchandising I would have done. And twice a year I sit down with Warner Brothers and we have conversations about merchandising and I can only say you should have seen some of the stuff that was stopped: Moaning Myrtle lavatory seat alarms and worse.

...

JP: But you could have said "No, I'm not gonna have any merchandising".

JKR: I don't think I could at the time. . . . It must have been about 1998-99, I started talking to Warner Brothers, and at that point I just didn't have the power to stop them. That is the nature of the film world. ("Interview")

It could be taken from Rowling's comments that with her present celebrity status she may well be able to contain the commodification of *Harry Potter*, but this is unlikely; any power she now exerts is to a significant degree due to the successful marketing and merchandising by Warner Bros., and of the

perception of Rowling as the mediator between fans and the films. What Rowling does highlight is the limited control authors have when they offer up their intellectual property for film adaptation and the seemingly inevitable commodification.⁸ This now normalised practice developed out of George Lucas' *Star Wars* film franchise. Twentieth Century Fox accepted Lucas's demand for a percentage of the merchandise takings from the first *Star Wars* film to bolster a modest director's fee. As is commonly known, *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977) was a huge success, and so was the merchandise. Contemporary films have exorbitant budgets, and the associated merchandise is regarded as an important means to off-set production costs. With the production and marketing costs of a film frequently reaching over \$US100 million it is unlikely that the association between film production and

⁸ Merchandising does not go hand in hand with all films. Commonly merchandising is associated with children's film and those with a strong fantasy or science fiction element – *Star Trek*, *Toy Story*, *Ice Age*. Fantasy and children's film are susceptible to commodification because they provide the appropriate images as well as a responsive market. Clute and Grant claim that “fantasy is unusual among the genres in that there is no clear cut distinction between its four primary forms: the written word, comics, cinema, and art” (339). That fantasy is susceptible to the visual form makes it vulnerable to commercial exploitation. In contrast, merchandising is not associated with period pieces and art films such as *Gosford Park* or *The Hours* nor present-day action films like *The Bourne Identity*.

merchandise will cease in the near future.⁹ Indeed, Rowling jokes that the only way for her to stop the *Harry Potter* merchandising would be to kill off her eponymous hero (“Interview”).

The “vertically integrated culture monoliths [such] as Disney, Sony, and Time Warner” (Denby 58) effect a synergy of technologies and services, making the culture industries a formidable force for the individual – author or consumer, adult or child - to withstand. As the largest media company in the world, Time Warner exemplifies current corporate integration of various media; it is “the standard bearer of synergy and vertical integration in the modern digital age” (Who Owns What”). With film production companies, magazines, an internet service and television channels in its stable, including the influential brands Warner Bros, TNT, Time, CNN, HBO, America online and New Line Cinema too, “a Time Warner property is never too far away from any consumer’s fingertips” (“Who own what”).¹⁰ As proprietor of the *Harry Potter* trademark, Warner Bros. therefore possesses a formidable customer base on which to promote its movie franchise: according to Professor Aurora Wallace

⁹ In 2003 the Motion Picture Association of America reported that the average cost of producing and promoting a Hollywood film had risen above \$US100 million for the first time. By 2005, however, the cost had dropped slightly to \$US96.2 million (Motion Picture Association).

¹⁰ In 2000 AOL and Time Warner integrated as AOL Time Warner but by 2003 “AOL” was dropped from the name. For a lengthy list of Time Warner’s associated companies see “Who Owns What: Time Warner”.

from the New York University's Culture and Communications Department, "what they're doing to *Harry Potter* is making it another widget inside the larger corporation. It's not about magic or fantasy or wizardry even. It's about selling more subscriptions" ("AOL"). Wallace's opinion is given much credence when considered alongside Time Warner's "Global Marketing Mission." The Global Marketing mandate is to "provide its strategic marketing partners with a unique point of access to Time Warner" through "the ability to deliver across all the Time Warner businesses" ("Push Brand Awareness"). By developing a relationship with its "marketing partners" that will tap into a number of Time Warner corporate bodies, the Global Marketing will advance "the growth of advertising and marketing revenue across all of Time Warner's businesses" ("Push Brand Awareness").

Inarguably, Warner Bros. bought the rights to *Harry Potter* to secure a profit, to commodify a book with the essential ingredients for a successful commercial venture; a ready fan base and a narrative susceptible to film adaptation and merchandising. Further, the serialisation of *Harry Potter* into seven parts means the film franchise will continue for many years. Heavy marketing through Time Warner's media spread meant fans were drawn into the hype and convinced of their need to see the film and receive the goods. The pervasiveness of *Harry Potter* in the media was a calculated ploy to ensure the success of the franchise. The *New Yorker* reporter Ken Auleta claims a Warner

Bros. executive crowed that the public “won’t be able to move an inch without confronting Harry Potter” (“AOL”). Presumably this marketing decision reflects Time Warner’s executive resolve to “push brand awareness to a new level” (“Push Brand Awareness”).

The film franchise was never likely to fail, with Coca Cola paying \$US150 million even before the first film was released to secure this highly lucrative strategic relationship as “sole global marketing partner” with Warner Bros. (S. Brown 7). According to Jan Hall, Senior Vice President Consumer Marketing, Coca-Cola North America:

Coca-Cola celebrates and embraces the ideals promoted through the stories of Harry Potter – friendship, love, self-reliance, the importance of the family, the magic of shared experiences and the value of diversity. Through brands like Minute Maid and Coca-Cola, we are creating special initiatives that will invite people to experience the magic of Harry Potter in their lives. (J. Hall)

Having expressed resignation over her ability to resist the commodification of her stories, Rowling has nevertheless moderated the associated corporations’ profit imperative by demanding initiatives to directly benefit consumers, such as a reading programme.

Coca Cola's claims of sharing values with *Harry Potter* only makes sense in an environment in which consumers accept associations between a material good and the symbolic realm declared through advertising. A product or corporation then becomes imbued with appealing values and connotations; MacDonalds promises fun and food, diamonds evoke wealth and happiness, and Nike footwear projects star athleticism upon the wearer. In his influential 1972 television series and book *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger declared that advertising "remains credible because the truthfulness of publicity is judged, not by the real fulfilment of its promises, but by the relevance of its fantasies to those of the spectator-buyer. Its essential application is not to reality but to day-dreams" (146). Zipes asserts that it is extremely difficult for children to comprehend this obfuscation surrounding commodities because they have been indoctrinated to submit to a specular materialism. Yet comments made by children I have interviewed suggest that they are more aware of their "exploitation" than Zipes gives them credit for, and this position is discussed in the next section.

Zipes provides valuable insights for the debate on the commodification of culture; however, his argument, and that of others aligned with the Frankfurt School, is dominated by production, with the material good invested with capitalist ideology at the moment of its production. Accordingly children passively accept the ideological programme he sees as imposed by the cultural

industries, and although he notes occasionally that this is not the case, his emotive language and images suggests he really thinks otherwise. Zipes implies that he himself is unaffected by the consumerism that so afflicts the American children he describes, adopting an “us and them” attitude that smacks of élitism; unlike the children he writes about, Zipes “knows” how to read the text, a position that will be investigated in greater detail in chapter six.

The extremity of Zipes’ position is reflected in his view that capitalism is more insidious than totalitarianism: “The totalitarian nature of the former communist states in Eastern Europe and the Far East were vapid in comparison with the capitalist conglomerates that penetrate our lives constantly in the name of globalization” (xi-xii). But does this argument reflect the reality of living within capitalism? There must be gaps in the system to enable the criticism that this school of thought has been able to voice, suggesting that the “totalitarianism of capitalism” is not as absolute as Zipes portends. While accepting that “cultural production is . . . powerfully penetrated by the economic practices of corporate capital” (Wayne 188), cultural studies offers an alternative view to adherents to the Frankfurt School’s reductive analysis, arguing that production is merely one link in the chain of attributing value to commodities; to understand the nuances of why commodified culture is popular we need to examine consumption, because “culture may have become

mass culture, but consumption has not become mass consumption” (Storey, *Cultural Theory* 93).

Cultural Studies and Consumer Power

In a focus group interview I conducted with six adults, Rena (37) spoke about her experience of the *Harry Potter* “craze” with respect to her relationship with her niece and nephew, four and six years old respectively.

It’s just like any fad or trend that particularly children at school encounter; it does have an impact on what they want their parents to buy them, what they want their aunty to bring down from Auckland. Definitely, they’re right into the *Harry Potter* merchandise thing. And as an aunty it’s a great relief to know that if it’s got Harry Potter on it they’ll love it! (FGI4)

Knowing that her niece and nephew enjoy the *Harry Potter* stories helps her purchase a gift for them that will be appreciated. As far as Rena is concerned, the interaction she experiences with them through *Harry Potter* products is a win-win: she takes pleasure in knowing that she has given a gift that is wanted and desired, and her niece and nephew enjoy investing their pleasure with the

story and its cultural currency through the merchandise. As discussed, gift-giving is an important feature of connecting with others; in this instance Rena shows her love for her niece and nephew by acknowledging their cultural interests and participating in their activities by taking them to the first *Harry Potter* film.

Rena is uncritical of the commodification of the *Harry Potter* merchandise, emphasising instead how she can use the merchandise to emotional affect and cement important familial relationships. It could be argued that Rena's consumer behaviour typifies the passive consumption that the Frankfurt School argues derives from products supplied by the culture industries, that she is "buying their love". But equally her gifting of commodified goods implies the complexity of social interactions when immersed in late capitalism. Her experience shows that the pleasure of gift-giving is entangled with the capitalist economic structure, and it is difficult to give without being implicated in commercialism. Daniel (34), on the other hand, was scathing about the ubiquitous *Harry Potter* goods. He believes that the merchandise detracts from the books and that the driving concept behind the goods is "let's milk this for all it's worth."

Hegemony theorist Martyn J. Lee suggests a way in which the oppositional stances of the Frankfurt School and the cultural populism John

Fiske represents (to which Daniel and Rena's positions roughly relate respectively) can be amalgamated:

if consumption is simultaneously the touchstone of the political economy, underwritten by a commercial logic which places the realisation of surplus-value at its core, as well as the site upon which popular pleasures are produced, often as a result of the unforeseen uses and meanings given to goods by consumers in their everyday domestic life, then it is clear that we need to construct a theoretical model of consumption which is sensitive to both its economic and cultural dimensions. (49)

For hegemony theory, social meaning is established through a contested relationship with cultural products and forms. That is, the consumer good can both mediate and enable social control, and provide the tools through which people construct their everyday lives and culture.

Fiske asserts that consumption of popular culture frequently expresses an active struggle for social meaning and authority. This ability of the consumer to submit to, negotiate with or retaliate against the dominant social order is inherent in the capitalist system itself. Fiske suggests there are two parallel economies operating dialectically within capitalism – the financial and the

cultural. The financial economy, as the name indicates, is the sphere of production and distribution. Because production is oriented toward generating exchange value, a surplus, the cultural product is a commodity. Once complete, the commodity then enters the cultural economy, where the focus is the product's use value – “the ability of the commodity to satisfy some human want” (Marx, qtd. in Storey, *Cultural Studies* 223). The cultural economy is the site of consumption; the cultural product is interpreted, giving meaning and pleasure to the audience.

So as to generate as much surplus profit as possible, the financial economy looks to homogenise and incorporate consumers into the dominant social order, thereby ensuring the producer's viability; however, the cultural economy is motivated by the consumer's desire to express individualism. The cultural economy is therefore characterised by heterogeneity and resistance to incorporation. It is the conflicting motivation behind these two interacting economies, Fiske claims, that enables agency within a system that intends to constrain and limit each individual's authenticity, ultimately creating what Marxist critic Mike Wayne refers to as “crippled subjectivities” (185).

From this perspective it follows that the cultural economy is of primary interest to those looking to understand how such diverse phenomena as authority, social meaning, and identity are negotiated through cultural products. Fiske confirms that:

the workings of the financial economy cannot account adequately for all cultural factors, but it still needs to be taken into account in any investigation. . . . but the cultural commodity cannot be adequately described in financial terms only: the circulation that is crucial to its popularity occurs in the parallel economy – the cultural. (*Television Culture* 311)

There are two modes by which the “powerless” resist those with power: the semiotic and the social. The semiotic relates to the meanings and pleasures derived from the cultural product as well as social identity. The social refers to the possibility of influencing the socio-economic system effecting change. Popular culture predominantly relates to the former, with “semiotic guerrilla warfare” (Fiske, *Television Culture* 316) occurring between those who seek to enforce social meaning and those who refuse or negotiate such impositions. It follows that popular culture is not a site of radical politics, but it *is* progressive in that it enables resistance.

Although Fiske provides a sense of the dialectical nature of the economic and cultural spheres, his analyses privilege the consumer as active and devious. But as Paul Willis observes, “the market does not provide cultural empowerment in anything like a full sense. There are choices, but not choices

over choices – the power to set the cultural agenda” (160). Rather the market offers “contradictory empowerment” (160). Willis points to the irony that capitalism, in allowing critique, offers the very tools for it to be challenged. He suggests that resistance lies *within* capital relations; that in “supplying materials for its own critique” (139) capitalism permits creativity and protest that takes the socio-political system to task.

One example of consumers’ reluctance to conform with capitalist expectations was the organised protest against Coke’s involvement with the *Harry Potter* franchise. Parents (primarily) expressed concern that the attachment of the global corporation to the franchise does not add anything to the consumer’s enjoyment of Rowling’s creation, but merely ferments in young consumers a subconscious pleasurable connection between the sugary drink and the boy wizard. The internet website SaveHarryPotter.com prompts *Harry Potter* fans to send a generic email letter to the author (notably not Coca-cola), protesting against the marketing deal with “one of the world’s largest junk-food marketers” (SaveHarry.com). The website offers advice (“What YOU can do: Take Action!”) and information (“Dangers of Liquid Candy” and “The Press Room”). This protest has not severed the lucrative relationship between Warner Bros. and Coca-Cola, but it serves to show the potential of the internet

as a tool through which consumers can communicate and mobilise across the globe.¹¹

Diane Nelson of Time Warner has stated that, “we have to be very careful not to exploit, not over-commercialise, not to take [*Harry Potter*] from the kids and turn it into something that it’s not” (“AOL”). However, across the focus group interviews many complained that the merchandising had gone too far. 14-year-old Kelly claimed that she did not want any *Harry Potter* merchandise because “we all get pencil cases like everyone else” (FGI3). Against the advertising promise that ownership of these items will confer a unique individualism, Kelly observes instead that these mass produced goods make her indistinguishable from her friends. 13-year-old John also spoke of the extensive merchandising as diminishing the series’ appeal during the pilot interview: “If there is too much hype it destroys the whole thing. I think that is what has happened with *Harry Potter*” (FGI1). And 15-year-old Claire claimed, “It’s almost too commercial . . . [the merchandising] cheapens it for me” (FGI3).¹²

¹¹ Evidence of consumers refusing to “buy into” the merchandising is indicated through 2003 being a bad year for Lego with the *Harry Potter* merchandise not providing the expected boost to sales (“Loss Likely”).

¹² This is not to forget that some people enjoy the commercialization of their favourite text. On TheOneRing website “WendyLadyofLothlorien” complains that the shop at the London *The Lord of the Rings* exhibition failed to meet her expectations: “To say that I was disappointed with [the shop] would be an understatement . . . the Science Museum missed out on an absolutely

Most of the children interviewed had read the books, watched the films, engaged with the computer games, consumed the chocolate frogs and “Bertie Botts’ Every Flavoured Beans” and had been “sorted” into one of the Hogwarts Houses via the internet. But few interviewees had many other *Harry Potter* products; for these young people a few computer games, toothbrushes and trading cards characterises the level of participation in the phenomenon. Discussions with the children about *Harry Potter* merchandising shows that they become more discerning as they mature; my four- and seven-year-old nephews uncritically accept with exclamations of delight anything at all with *Harry Potter* on it, but as children reach ten years they become aware of the cynical aspect of the late capitalist system into which they are being acculturated. Ten-year-old Leo cautiously describes the merchandising as ‘kind of copying’, but believes this is acceptable if it means more people will read the books. Leo is defensive of Rowling’s intellectual property, concerned that the ubiquitous *Harry Potter* products are undermining her creativity; as Kapur observes, “bringing children into the market as consumers can also politicize them against the market” (161).

golden marketing opportunity.” WendyLady observes that those items available for purchase were “lower end”, predominantly t-shirts, mugs, action-figures. What she was looking for were the more up-market products, including reproductions of the Ring, Galadriel and Arwen’s accessories and the wide range of weaponry which is available over the internet (“WendyLadyofLothlorien”).

I cannot extrapolate from these interviews that this entire New Zealand demographic (middle-class, Pakeha, and a cross-section of urban and rural), shows little evidence of the “totalisation” by the *Harry Potter* phenomenon that so upsets those critics of the Frankfurt School persuasion. Nevertheless, what these interviews do suggest is that the ubiquity of the merchandising and the “illiteracy” of young consumers may not be as thorough as some commentators imply; the problem with generalisations is that they tend to fulfil their own prophesying by refusing legitimacy to those not conforming to the generalisation.

With so many of the items in the books now available for sale, it is worth noting what is *not* for sale. For me, a significant item absent from the shelves is the “Weasley jumper”, the “thick hand-knitted sweater” (*HPSS* 147) that Mrs Weasley gives to her children (Harry included) every Christmas. A search on the “Official Warner Brothers Harry Potter Shop” for “Weasley jumper” brings up t-shirts, scarves and ties, but no hand-knitted jerseys. Warner Bros. try hard to evoke a magical experience for the shopper on their website with sparkling icons such as “add to cauldron” (add to shopping cart) and “summons details” (product information) connecting the tone of the story with capitalism. It would seem that there is the ability and desire to commodify “magical” objects (various wands are available for purchase as “authentic recreations” of those represented in the film), but unique hand-made items made with love (such as

Hagrid's roughly hewn wooden flute [HPPS 147] and photograph album) are immune to capitalism – just as Lily Potter's love for her son is incomprehensible to Voldemort.

Many fans of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* raised concerns over the “Hollywoodisation” of their favourite stories. Christopher Tolkien, J. R. R. Tolkien's son and literary executor, believed that *The Lord of the Rings* was peculiarly unsuited to film adaptation (“Tolkien's Son Speaks Out”) and equally sceptical was “Quickbeam” from theonering.net, who asked rhetorically, “what kind of disaster is this going to be, turning something that is so epic and so deeply revered into another piece of American pop junk?” (qtd. in O'Hehir). How, then, have the culture industries managed the vocal and organised fans to accept the films and related merchandise when the texts evoke such passion and enthusiasm?

Jyotsna Kapur explains the contradictory relationship between the media corporations and fans:

On the one hand, fans do the work of these corporations, buying their products and thus creating profits for them. On the other hand, when fans begin to create alternatives, they threaten the iron grip these corporations seek to retain on their brands. The true nature of the relationship between media corporations and

audiences is revealed when the control of the former is threatened. Then, from posing as democrats who make what audiences want, these corporations transform into powerful policing agents. (161)

The relations developed by Warner Bros. and New Line Cinema leading up to the release of the first film in both series in 2001 illustrate Kapur's point. Both production companies employed two main strategies to manipulate the pre-existing fan base into accepting the new vision for *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*. First, they used a "gatekeeper" through which discourses legitimating the film adaptation and related merchandise and marketing were disseminated. Second, the internet was employed as a tool through which the production company, as culture industry, communicated with fans around the world. Through these key practices Warner Bros. and New Line Cinema endeavoured to placate concerns and to project the films as culturally authoritative. According to hegemonic relations, they cannot impose the text upon an audience but must convince fans that they approve of the film and want to purchase the memorabilia. Yet, as Kapur describes, the democratic face of these media conglomerates quickly turns to forceful policing when they fear their intellectual capital is being misused. The following section explores these corporate strategies in more detail.

Hegemony in Practice

With Tolkien long dead and his literary executor against the project, it was up to director Peter Jackson to bridge the gap between the culture industry (New Line Cinema) and the fans. To plead his worthiness as creator of one of the most influential cultural products at the beginning of the 21st century, a myth of Jackson as Tolkien fan and unconventional director was disseminated.

Jackson's fraught relationship with Hollywood is central to this myth, aligning himself with the fans (those without power) as opposed to the production company (the powerful culture industries).¹³ Despite the artistic control he wields as director of the overall project, symbolised by his "PJ Approved" stamp (Sibley 7), and the vast amounts of Hollywood money at his disposal, Jackson identifies himself as a fan, lending authenticity to his adaptation. He stresses that *The Lord of the Rings* films "are very much a labour of love: made *for* fans of the book, *by* fans of the book" (7, italics in original). Jackson implies that satisfying the fans is a primary motivation for making the films ("Because *The Lord of the Rings* is based on such a widely read, well-loved book, we are as

¹³ Jackson's antagonisms with the New Zealand Film Commission and Hollywood are well-documented, particularly in 2003 when the "low-budget" New Zealand production company Kahukura was liquidated, owing money to Jackson's production unit. See, for example, *OnFilm's* article "Jackson Berates". Perhaps Jackson's lack of awe for Hollywood is cheekily represented in his brief appearance as a grubby-looking local at the Prancing Pony in the first *The Lord of the Rings* film, where he burps as the camera pans past.

determined as is humanly possible not to let people down!” [7]), but equally, “it may also be a way of introducing people to Middle-earth who have never read the book. I would like to think that they may go and see the films and in seeing them experience something of the complexity, the magic and fascinating themes found in Tolkien’s book” (7).

Not only is Jackson a Tolkien fan (as are a number of the crew and cast), he is also hobbit-like: his dishevelled hair, “round” build and casual dress sense (shorts and bare feet typically) tend to be interpreted as evoking his inherent hobbit-nature (Sibley 7).¹⁴ Further distancing himself from Hollywood, Jackson describes the global cinematic powerhouse as “driven by money and an obsession with success . . . it’s all a little bit fake and phoney” (“The Ring Master”). In distinct contrast to the perceived crassness and ephemerality of Hollywood, Jackson asserts his project as enduring and aesthetic, obsessively concerned with authenticity and crafted out of “a very strong affection and respect for the material” (*A Passage to Middle-earth*).

Jackson has directed the film trilogy according to his own personal vision of Middle-earth; “I am trying to do this movie exactly like I imagined it. To do anything else would be silly . . . Ultimately it always has to be an interpretation” [qtd. in Baillie and Watkin D4]). Nevertheless, he has managed to convince many of the Tolkien community to embrace it as their own. This

¹⁴ Tolkien described himself as “a *Hobbit* (in all but size)” (*Letters* 288-9, italics in original).

has also been the challenge for J. K. Rowling. As author of the *Harry Potter* series she is held by fans to be *the* authority on how the world looks and what the characters do. Since signing the rights to Warner Bros. she has been responsible for convincing her young readers that the films are good because they meet with her approval. Despite accepting Warner Bros.' offer, Rowling felt nervous and protective of her literary creation, telling *January Magazine*, "when I met the scriptwriter for the first time, he was the person I was most antagonistic towards without having met him, because, you know, *he was going to butcher my baby*" (Richards 4, italics mine). As with Jackson, Rowling aligns herself with the fans, aware that her approval acts as a barometer for public acceptance of the film:¹⁵

my opinion has been asked about all sorts of things where I didn't really think I'd ever be consulted. I'm grateful for that, obviously. But I'm also very aware that it's not anything to do with me, it's really to do with the readers. I think they see me as standing in front of about a million children wanting to see it done my way. So that's what gives me any power I have. I have script approval and as of the present moment the script looks great. (qtd. in Richards 4)

¹⁵ In fact, Rowling suggests that she is even more "vulnerable" than the fans, stating "people have to understand that no one could feel as protective as I do about these characters. If it goes wrong, I'm going to be hurting more than anyone else" (qtd. in M. Jones 56).

Rowling therefore reassures her fans prior to release of the first film that “they’ve taken my information and used it well. There are going to be people out there that will say that this is not my Great Hall but, I can promise them, it is my Great Hall” (qtd. in Oliver).

Numerous websites, fanclubs, discussion groups and societies attest to the reverence for these texts. With all of these people having their own conception of the story, it is not surprising that managing the pre-existing fan-base is an important function for the producers of the films, and the internet has provided an efficient means to do so. The New Line co-chairman of worldwide marketing, Bob Friedman, goes so far as to suggest that it would have been too great a financial risk to make *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy 10 years ago, without the worldwide web through which Peter Jackson can contact fans en masse and “somehow convince us to share his vision of Middle-earth” (Baillie and Watkin D4). Friedman states that, “The proliferation of new media, in which I include cable television and especially the internet, allows you to so specifically target audiences that without that I don’t think we could have effectively launched a franchise as big as this one” (qtd. in Lyman 3-4), insinuating that an epic story must be told and marketed in commensurate terms.

Simone Murray describes this system of marketing – where fans are fed information by the studio which they then on-distribute to their other contacts – as “viral marketing”: “Studios and their parent conglomerates display increasing willingness to disseminate usually highly guarded production information and intellectual property (IP) in the interests of sophisticated viral marketing and audience development schemes” (8). Murray points to the value placed on intellectual property by studios and the strategies traditionally employed to protect this prized asset. It is on this particular point that the marketing of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* film franchises differ; where New Line cinema sought to manage fan/producer relations by taking a more “permissive approach to intellectual property” (Murray 8), Warner Bros aimed to protect the “creative integrity” of its new franchise.¹⁶

New Line’s innovative attitude toward the vast Tolkien fan communities began with a question and answer session on Harry Knowles’ Ain’t it Cool News website. Peter Jackson responded to twenty questions Knowles selected from queries sent in by fans.¹⁷ Evidently, the decision was made at the outset to

¹⁶ Part of this “permissive approach” included the opportunity for fans to touch some of the weaponry, armour and costumes that were used in the film while on display at *The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy – The Exhibition*.

¹⁷ A number of “Q&A” sessions were conducted via Knowles’ website, beginning 30 August 1998 with Jackson responding to 20 questions derived from the 14,000 sent in by fans. Having first thanked Knowles for “allowing me to commandeer his site” because “using Harry’s site was the only way I could imagine reaching all of you in an efficient way”, Jackson jokingly

bring the global Tolkien fan-base onside by a strategy of engagement, thereby directly assuaging concerns regarding the presentation of characters, casting, the translation of the “untranslatable” to the screen and anxieties about Hollywoodisation. But as Murray observes, the:

operation of [*The Lord of the Rings*] franchise is not reducible to the case of a cynical multinational exploiting gullible Tolkien acolytes in the cause of corporate profit. The fans’ tendency constantly to contest the parameters even of New Line’s permissive approach to its intellectual property evinces the open-ended nature of struggles over fan/producer relationships, providing insight into the inherent instability and immense complexity of cultural power in play. (8-9)

An early incident that came close to jeopardising New Line’s attempt to woo Tolkien fans demonstrates the fragility of fan/producer relations. New Line issued New Zealander Erica Challis, a co-owner of the website theonering.net, a trespass notice for “spying” on production undertaken in

acknowledges the tension underpinning their discussion: “After this brief warm shower together, Harry and I return to our different sides of the line - us trying to maintain secrecy . . . and he using his low-life methods to publish it all on the net” (“Peter Jackson Answers THE GEEKS”).

Wellington. Challis, however, was in Queenstown at the time. Jackson prevented a potential public relations debacle with the “web-based guardians of Middle Earth” (Baillie and Watkin D4) by contacting Challis and offering to meet with her. A constructive relationship resulted, as theonering.net was “adopted” by Weta Workshop (sponsoring the website as Weta Collectibles) leading to many of the production crew favouring the website’s post-Oscar parties over more prestigious functions. For Richard Taylor, the enthusiastic reception by these fans was “really special” as “these are the true fans of the book and these are the people that you hope to please more than anyone else” (“Holmes”).

New Line’s strategy of releasing pictures and divulging information to the top forty Tolkien websites (Murray 19) prior to release of the film has successfully disseminated Jackson’s vision of Middle-earth into public consciousness. Trailers and officially “leaked” news pieces from New Line familiarise fans with the characters and scenery, encourage anticipation of the film’s release, and pre-empt personal interpretations and expectations. By nurturing the fan/producer relation via the internet New Line has cemented the film trilogy’s box office success. Rick Lyman of the *New York Times* observes that:

When a movie is almost magically embraced by the Web – sometimes with the connivance of the distribution company – a strange relationship forms among the cybercommunity of fans, the filmmakers and the studio marketers. The online ferment includes nitpicking about casting choices, complaints about script changes and gossip across the globe about every nuance of the production. However, when everything clicks, a network of eager Internet evangelists evolves to promote and support the film. (2)

In this new fan/producer dynamic, the studio recognises the importance of involving – and thereby manipulating – the avid fan base. Murray comments that “New Line’s innovation has been to reclassify fans from the status of IP-flouting textual obsessives to the role of non-salaried marketing collaborators, effectively outsourcing to them key sections of pre-release publicity” (21). This is not to say that all fan behaviour is tolerated, but even “misdemeanours” were resolved by appealing to the fan/producer relationship: when unofficial photographs of Gollum were displayed on the internet, New Line employed the tactful services of theonering.net. Joint-webmaster Michael Regina shamed the people involved: “Richard Taylor is really, really saddened you put that up – could you think about taking it down?” (qtd. in Murray 18). Individuals employed on *The Lord of the Rings* project are regarded as friends, or at least part

of the Tolkien fan community. Therefore to disappoint Richard is to let down a fellow Tolkien fan, not a coup against Hollywood.

Warner Bros. originally undertook a different approach to that employed by New Line Cinema. Warner Bros. was authoritative and overtly controlling in its dealings with young fans of *Harry Potter*, perhaps stemming from a perspective of the fans as powerless children and the production company as caring but dominating parent. By late 2000 they were concerned that websites held by fans of *Harry Potter* would “cause consumer confusion and dilution of the intellectual property rights” (Kapur 161) and so letters were sent to domain holders demanding that “Harry Potter” be taken out of the domain name. The 12-year-old owner of the domain name HarryPotterGuide.co.uk, Claire Field, was advised that if Warner Bros. did not hear from her by return, they would “put this matter directly into the hands of our solicitors” (qtd. in Kapur 160).

Warner Bros. failed to recognise that their attempts to protect their intellectual property were in fact threatening their intended customer base. The passionate fans that Warner Bros. was relying upon to support their movies and merchandise were being alienated from their ownership of *Harry Potter* and consequently the intimidation backfired; fans used the internet to create new websites, such as www.potterwar.org.uk and www.dprophet.com/dada, to publicise Warner Bros.’ poor public relations and to encourage other fans to

resist the corporate bullying by boycotting all *Harry Potter* merchandise apart from the books (Kapur 160).

By March 2001 Warner Bros. withdrew their threats of lawsuits against young fans, advising that they “at no time . . . proposed or threatened to take over or shut down any fan sites” and certainly not those which are run by “enthusiastic fans who simply want to pay homage to Harry Potter” (qtd. in McCarthy).¹⁸ However, Warner Bros. did not return any domain names relinquished to them. Rather the large corporate launched an “Official Harry Potter Webmaster Community” website through which they selectively released details of upcoming films.

Despite small victories of the fans over New Line Cinema and Warner Bros., the participation and impact of the former on the film trilogy should not be exaggerated; the fans have been brought into line with the directors’ adaptations more than they have manipulated the director. As Murray observes:

corporate media are ready to strike terms with underground fan practices if they detect means to enhance corporate self-interest.

Reading the LOTR film franchise in this light might rather posit

¹⁸ The full letter can be read in Kieren McCarthy’s article, “Warner Bros. Scraps HP Legal Actions.”

Tolkien fans as the orthodoxy-policing and globally co-ordinated gate-keepers, past which Jackson's production team attempts to sneak artistic innovation. (12-13)

Cultural leadership involves media conglomerates not only producing consensus but manufacturing consent (Hall, "Rediscovery" 86). New Line Cinema and Warner Bros. have therefore exhibited the "cultural leadership" Gramsci identified in his theorising of hegemony, manipulating the fans into accepting their interpretation of the revered text.

Conclusion

I agree with Peter Travers' assessment that the film adaptations of these popular heroic fantasies act as commercials for the associated merchandise; however, for the merchandise to succeed the film itself must be a success. To this end, the production companies have employed "gatekeepers" – Peter Jackson and J. K. Rowling – to mediate between the corporate body and the extraordinary number of fans who collectively assert ownership of the story through their emotional attachment. The relationship between these two "interested parties" is best understood as hegemonic, with each vying for control over the material. Through an appearance of concession, the production

company manipulates the fans into (largely) accepting the film adaptations. Consumer power is therefore limited, but should not be dismissed as non-existent.

Indeed, many of the involved parties express frustration that they are perceived as somehow encroaching on the capitalist exercise of producing films. For example, Coca-cola's spokesman Andrew Coker dismisses accusations of exploitation of young *Harry Potter* fans as "sensationalism"; he is quoted as stating "our intention is to spread the joy of reading and that is exactly what we are doing. To characterise our involvement in any other way is missing the point for the sake of sensationalism" (Day). *Harry Potter* fans have protested at Warner Bros.' heavy-handed approach to their websites, and author J. K. Rowling wearily acknowledges parental concerns about the commercialisation of *Harry Potter*, articulating her mediation for the ongoing conflicting interests in terms of a boxing match; "Please trust me, I am fighting in your corner" (qtd. in M. Jones 56). In his new venture following *The Lord of the Rings*, director Peter Jackson complains of being at the "mercy of the great shopping mall population of America", with Universal Home Video delaying a decision on whether or not to produce an "extended cut" DVD of *King Kong*, due to "doing 'surveys' of people's interest in buying Kong with extra footage" (Jackson, "Interview"). Ironically, it seems that all the parties involved in the production and consumption of the cultural artefact within capitalism feel that

someone else is infringing on their right to pursue their interest in the project unobstructed.

Commodification of heroic fantasy is therefore a complex process that cannot be explained by reference to production alone. It is necessary to consider the various forms of consumption to assess whether or not the theme of the gift economy advocated in the genre is able to withstand the pressures of commercialisation. As Wayne suggests, “we cannot reduce the text to its immediate mediation by the production process, for then we would be unable to explain how cultural texts are not only reified, at the level of both form and theme, but are often also commentaries (particularly in narrative-based media) on that selfsame process of reification” (189). As critique of the consumption ethic that characterises late capitalism, the heroic fantasy film is one of the reified texts to which Wayne refers.

In particular, the *Harry Potter* films demonstrate an increasing indifference to Rowling’s remonstrance against materialism, with the fourth film eliding the Dursleys from the story. At the beginning and end of each book Harry is ensconced in the Dursleys household where he is reminded of the stifling conditions created by (admittedly caricatured) bourgeois capitalism. Here in “Little Whingeing” goods are barometers of success and love, as they are in the upper class wizarding environment of the Malfoys. Cutting scenes of Harry’s

incarceration in suburban England, then, limits the critical effect of the series.¹⁹ Rather, viewers are encouraged to pursue their enjoyment of the stories through the associated marketing and merchandise. For example, one of Coca-Cola's 2001 promotions in New Zealand included a "Hogwart's Castle Adventure." The label on the 1.5 litre bottles of Coke featured an owl and images of Hogwarts Castle, cajoling the consumer to "Join the Search. See the Movie. Live the Magic." This competition can be interpreted as a parody of Harry's search for the Philosopher's Stone. Harry looks into the Mirror of Erised and succeeds by refusing those seductive contemporary desires, money and immortality. But in contrast to Harry's restraint, the fan has to succumb to her desires; only by purchasing coke can she have the opportunity to fulfil her dream of attending Hogwarts.

This discussion shows the contestatory nature of popular culture. Upon recognising the appeal of a particular genre, the cultural industries seek to secure a profit from it; but to do so they must attain a level of consent from the consumer. It is at this point that the consumer can primarily exert influence by purchasing the product or not. It is a game, however, where the dominant hand is to a degree given rather than achieved; consumers are manipulated into condoning and accepting rampant commodification in a process that recognises

¹⁹ Even when the Dursleys do feature in the first three films Daniel felt that Harry Potter's "homelife was very insignificant" (*FGIA*).

and distorts desire for the authentic and real – the “uncommodified” – by offering a commodified artefact in its stead.

For the best possible economic return, the culture industries underwrite narratives that convey characters, morals and story-lines with wide appeal. The heroic fantasy is one such narrative form, which, I have argued, promotes a moral economy that binds individuals following a particular code of conduct into a coherent society. But in the most popular heroic fantasies, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, it is typically a male hero who is the primary advocate of these admirable codes. These particular narratives appear to offer conservative constructions of gender, which compare with R.W. Connell’s conceptions of “hegemonic masculinity” and “emphasised femininity”. Chapter five will therefore consider the dominant representations of masculinity through four heroes – Aragorn, Frodo, Sam and Harry. Given that Tolkien’s character Aragorn most closely approximates an “epic” hero, who by the genre’s terms does not change over the course of the narrative, I look at the adaptation of this character to the big screen, asking if he has been modified to more closely reflect contemporary masculinity. Although a masculine subjectivity requires compliance to a certain set of notions that may be regarded as limiting and stifling (authority, responsibility, strength, expressing few strong emotions, for example), the obedience of femininity to play masculinity’s other necessarily requires female subjectivity to defer to her dominant,

complementary other. Having posited a textual reading that claims these narratives invite a nostalgic view of “traditional” gender forms, chapter six discusses what female readers make of heroic fantasy. How do real female readers “consume” heroic fantasy?

Chapter Five

Heroic Endeavour: A Quest for Masculinity

In September 2004 Jason Hatch, dressed as the comic book superhero Batman, breached security at Buckingham Palace, unfurling a banner on the balcony, which read “Superdads of Fathers 4 Justice: Fighting for your right to see your kids”. As a member of the civil rights group Fathers 4 Justice, he was protesting the limited access fathers have to their children following separation of the parents and the unwillingness of the family court to enforce fathers’ rights. Matt Connor founded the group in the late 1990s in response to his own frustration at not gaining reasonable access to his children, and, drawing on his training as a marketing and public relations consultant, conceived the mix of superhero costumes and antics as a publicity campaign for the cause. Connor masterminded a combination of civil disruption and high profile media events: a flour bomb was thrown at Tony Blair in parliament in May 2004; “Spiderman” scaled the London Eye in September 2004, closing the attraction down during the 18-hour protest; “Batman” breached security at Buckingham Palace for five

hours (although his sidekick, “Robin”, failed to evade police); and three more superheroes gained the Foreign Office balcony in March 2005 (Fathers 4 Justice).

While gaining notoriety and recognition for their cause, Fathers 4 Justice did not necessarily gain sympathy; an angry mayor of London City suggested that such irresponsible behaviour was probably the reason these fathers were not given access in the first instance (“Palace Balcony”). Indeed, the antics went too far when allegations were made linking the group to a plot to kidnap Tony Blair’s youngest son, Leo. Connor distanced himself and most members of Fathers 4 Justice from this event, claiming that extremists on the fringe of the group were discrediting the cause, dividing members and alienating the public.

The Fathers 4 Justice campaigns suggest a number of points about masculine experience in the 21st century: men perceive themselves to be victims, in this case of a biased court system; as “just ordinary guys” (Dave Pyke aka “Robin” qtd. in “Palace Balcony”) men lack authority and therefore they must refer to images of heroic masculinity to gain public attention; some men are willing to take increasingly desperate action to make the government listen to their concerns; fathers are a collective that must act together to counter the successful demands made by mothers since the 1970s; by expressing their message in terms of fictional superheroes, the group indicates that theirs is a

heroic and just “fight”;¹ and, finally, their invocation of superheroes places their complaints within the framework of a fight or aggressive confrontation, with fathers occupying the “good” side, making their former wives and the “system” the evil other.

The Fathers 4 Justice group reflects a popular belief that masculinity is a fragile and threatened identity, creating general anxiety for men. Men have purportedly become dispensable following women’s increasing independence; no longer required to lead and feed the family, so this line of thought goes, men are confused as to who they are and what they should do to be masculine, to be men.² It is within this context of perceived crisis that I consider the heroes in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* – Aragorn, Frodo, Sam, and Harry. What forms of masculinity do these characters communicate to the audience? Does a “masculinity crisis” in contemporary Western culture offer some explanation for the currency of heroic fantasy? Following this typology of heroes, I offer a textual analysis of Aragorn’s character in Peter Jackson’s film adaptation. I am interested in highlighting what changes Jackson effects to modernise Tolkien’s

¹ Fittingly, in 1939 Batman was introduced in *Detective Comics* as “a mysterious and adventurous figure fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrong-doer, in his lone battle against the evil forces of society” (qtd. in Clute and Grant 89). Like the Fathers 4 Justice members fighting for fair access to their children, Batman’s motivation to apprehend all criminals is also personal, with both his parents killed by a Gotham City criminal.

² See Antony Easthope’s *What a Man’s Gotta Do* (1990) and Susan Faludi’s *Stiffed: the Betrayal of Modern Man* (1999) as examples of literature supporting the “masculinity in crisis” thesis.

warrior hero. Working from the premise that the heroic fantasy genre maintains its currency by reflecting contemporary concerns, this chapter reflects on the images of heroism portrayed in these texts, suggesting that the characters connect with contemporary explorations of masculinity as found in other social, cultural and political contexts.

A Crisis of Masculinity?

Since its publication in 1954, *The Lord of the Rings* and the ensuing heroic fantasy genre have remained popular, due in part to the appealing images of masculinity portrayed. The heroes of heroic fantasies “begin in unremarkable places, discover they possess extraordinary gifts, and set out on voyages, using their gifts to combat evil, overcoming several obstacles on the way and learning profound truths about their inner selves” (Gritten A17), offering consumers an ideal to respond to. Since the box office success of the film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, the fantasy genre is viewed as peculiarly amenable to reflecting heroism. David Gritten explains that fantasy is the one genre that is able to offer “heroism with no reservations” because, as “imaginary creations, [the heroes] stand beyond the reach of the carping that can dethrone real-life heroes” (A17).

The hero of heroic fantasy conveys an ideal image, in the sense that he is brave but not emotionally stifled or inhuman, socially responsible and remains

strongly connected with society as discussed in chapter three. It therefore seems cantankerous to critique the character. Surely the values upheld by these heroes and the qualities they portray should be celebrated and not debunked? Yet the very normality of the hero suggests that the category should be deconstructed. Feminists have long argued that constructing masculinity as the “norm” has provided a mask of invisibility that effectively obscures the ideological power this subject position attracts. Conceptualising the hero as representative of a “universal” longing for inspirational and ideal figures, as Jung, Bettelheim and Campbell argue, should be qualified by historical and ideological analysis.

This section therefore looks to contextualise the heroism in heroic fantasy within a contemporary discourse of masculinity in crisis. I argue that this perception of a permanent crisis surrounding masculinity secures hegemony, in part against the “threat” of feminism with anxieties about manhood corresponding to shifting gender relations particularly since the 1960s. Tim Edwards maps areas of concern for the “masculinity in crisis” thesis, including education, the workforce, crime, health, family and sexuality (7-24). Boys do not do as well at school as girls do, for example, men exhibit higher suicide rates and lower life expectancy (even when adjusted to account for their higher tendency toward death by accident and suicide), and the role of fatherhood has lost its authority. The concept of a crisis covers many aspects of a man’s life,

with the undermining of his traditional role as primary provider and authority figure to his wife and children a central theme. Women's increasing independence from men, access to the workplace, compassion from the courts, and demand for emotional intimacy have collectively eroded the "power men have wielded over women of their own class and kind, with their shared belief in their entitlement to do so" (Segal 233).

Influential author Robert Bly claims the root of the crisis lies in the nineteenth century; he declares that the crisis of masculinity has been "increasing steadily since the start of the Industrial Revolution and the grief has reached a depth now that cannot be ignored" (x). And with a "deluge of books, research and punditry on men and masculinity" (Segal 236) being published since the 1990s, to which his very popular *Iron John: A Book About Men* (1991) contributed, Bly should be satisfied that the issue has not gone unnoticed. Magazine articles, populist self-help books, academic theory and psychotherapeutic research invoke, refute, and discuss perspectives on the popular notion that men en masse are currently experiencing an identity crisis. Roger Horrocks, for example, argues that emotional repression is at root of men's problems (*Masculinity*) and in a *Metro* magazine article Bevan Rapson asks whether it's "Great to Be a Guy?", suggesting men are traumatised by changing expectations: "First they were bastards. Then they were wimps. No wonder men are confused" (36). Because men lack a clear-cut identity, they

“suffer from stress, depression, sleeplessness and a loss of meaning in their lives” (40).

In New Zealand a backlash has occurred against the perceived feminisation of politics. In July 2004, then Labour minister John Tamihere “came out” in celebration of being a “red blooded heterosexual male” in a speech at St Peter’s College, Auckland (Tamihere); National Radio host Shaun Plunkett has referred to the Prime Minister as “mum” on air (for which he later made an unconvincing apology); National politician Murray McCully insists on calling the female-led Labour government the “Sisterhood”; and the 2004 television political satire series *Facelift* lampooned male members of parliament, especially the Minister for Maori Affairs, Horomea Parakura, as hapless and submissive to the domineering leadership of Helen Clark. Individually, these are humorous asides to the serious business of running a country; collectively, they suggest that there is a general concern with the prominence of women in the political sphere in New Zealand. Wendy Taylor is extreme in her argument that everyone loses with the feminisation of New Zealand politics:

Until we rid Parliament of the undue influence of the social misfits (stud breeders call them "off-types") who use it to express their abnormal personal psychological orientations - feminists, lesbians, homosexuals, trans-sexuals, and the effeminate sychophants of both

genders - our society will continue to fail. A friend of mine calls our Parliament a "freak show." Who can argue? What real male will fully contribute to such an unnaturally female dominated society? Where, in history, have such societies succeeded? The Prime Minister's reported pathological dislike for men, and of mothers who are dedicated to raising children, sets the tone for the decay our society is experiencing. Her approach - to feminise men and to masculinise women - is wholly unnatural. It permeates her party colleagues, officialdom and society, to everyone's detriment, except the off-types. (9)

In 2005 major political positions were occupied by women: Prime Minister (Helen Clark); Governor General (Dame Sylvia Cartwright); Parliamentary Speaker (Margaret Wilson); and Chief Justice (Dame Sian Elias). Consequently, the *Sunday Star Times* newspaper warns that "the blokes are getting snappy" (Laugesen C4), reporting that Helen Clark's government is irritating conservative male voters who feel disenfranchised by Labour's liberal social and economic policies, "concessions" to Maori grievances and the "feminisation" of parliament. The Labour Party's president Mike Williams identifies two main reasons for the National Party gaining male votes in 2004: economic stress and identification with the new Leader Don Brash. Disaffected

by their inability to compete in a new economic climate, Williams suggests, these voters have rallied to Brash's rhetoric against Labour's "special treatment" for Maori.

Feminist historian Sandra Coney believes that Brash's unexpected popularity with the working class derives from his appeal to the "man alone" aspect of the New Zealand male psyche; "men are more in tune with the National Party creed of self-reliance and standing on your own two feet, and the idea that life is a 'dog-eat-dog' struggle" (Laugeson C5). Ironically, this worldview does not preclude these men from seeing themselves as victims of the Labour government's political correctness, such as "nanny-state" welfarism and outlawing smoking in public bars.

Claiming victim status is prevalent amongst men's movement groups, which seek to redress the inequalities they perceive and experience in contemporary society.³ The men's movements have been particularly active in America, identifying their role as actively promoting traditional patriarchal

³ Feminism, too, went through this "phase" but some forms of post-feminism advance that the 'biological' attributes that have been regarded by the original feminists as damaging to the gender's position in society (her sexual allure, her emotional sensitivity) should be celebrated and used to advantage. There is an element of hegemonic concession to patriarchy in this position; by "choice" women are conceding to a masculine ideology. Sarah Projansky provides an excellent summary of the various post-feminisms, in her book *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (2001). See the second chapter, "The Postfeminist Context", especially pages 79-83.

values and reinvesting the male as head of the household in response to the shifting values of masculinity. Bly's *Iron John* is thus an influential text for the American Men's movement. He encourages men to reassert their masculinity through his reinterpretation of myth and folklore, via a "plasticised hotchpotch of Jungian psychoanalytic theory" (Edwards 27). Bly denigrates the Soft Man's connection with his emotions, viewing this figure as emasculated and passive, lacking the self-esteem to reassert himself against the overwhelming pressures applied by contemporary women. Nevertheless, his mythopoeic men's movement focuses upon consciousness-raising; his "Wild Man" weekends encourage men to bond together through outdoor experiences and therapeutic confessional story-telling sessions.

In New Zealand the men's movements are concerned with countering what is perceived as feminist advances which discriminate against men, the loss of access to children through the Family Court and, in keeping with the values and beliefs of overseas men's groups, they underpin their philosophy with recourse to traditional or religious formations of the family. For example, the Promise Keepers in New Zealand are Christian based and "dedicated to uniting men through vital relationships to become Godly influences in their world" (Promisekeepers), while the New Zealand Men's Rights Association asserts more aggressively that:

Feminism is hostile to the traditional two-parent, one-income family, which is associated with stable societies with low crime-levels. There is a mass of evidence associating increased numbers of single-parent families with increased crime. Women in the workforce drive down real wages by increasing the pool of available labour. This in turn makes the single-income family less viable. (NZMRA) ⁴

Inherent in the more extreme men's movements is a conservatism that asserts cultural gender differences as biological, with masculinity superior to femininity, yet unfairly deposed by feminism. There is some popular sympathy for this position, if not its more aggressive rhetoric, with recent Colmar Brunton research overseen by Gabrielle Zerafa recording a general trend toward conservatism. Zerafa concludes from her ten years of qualitative research that New Zealanders in general, but particularly young women under 24, are becoming increasingly conservative (N. Smith 14). This group look favourably upon traditional roles and expectations, and seek comfort in the certainty

⁴ This group advances that men are disadvantaged in all spheres of society, from law to media coverage, health to taxation and from the absence of a Ministry of Men's Affairs (to counterbalance the Ministry of Women's Affairs) to a widespread failure to recognise men's sacrifice in war, which they insist women cannot emulate. Support groups for fathers separated from their children include Union of Fathers, NZ Father and Child Society and PANIC - Parents Against Negative Intervention by CYFS.

traditional gender expectations are perceived to represent. Zerafa explains that as “latchkey children” – children brought up in an environment where both parents work and they looked after themselves rather than have their mother tend to them - the younger generation are saying, “I was brought up that way and I don’t want my children brought up that way” (15).

Zerafa’s research, involving “thousands of interviews” (14) records the current trend toward conservatism as part of a cycle to which social attitudes are subject. There are six prominent phases to the cycle, described as rebellion, enfranchising, status, hedonism, grounding and conformity, and, the researchers claim in the present decade, “we’re spearheading down into conformity” (14). With each of the cycles dominating approximately ten years, contemporary social attitudes are reverting to those that characterise the mid to late 1940s. For women, conservatism involves no pre-marital sex, taking her husband’s name and forgoing a career to stay at home and look after the children. The men are described as “retromales”: according to Zerafa, “we are definitely seeing them taking the role of provider-carer. There is a quest to re-establish a sense of masculinity among men, [there is a] traditional male thing happening. Its quest: what does it mean to be a man?” (15).

Indeed, Zerafa’s is a central question. While Bly and his acolytes universalise from the particular, implying that there is a single biological form of masculinity, and therefore all men everywhere experience the same issues

they list, there are in fact many forms of masculinity. Bly evokes a white American middle-class perception of emasculation, with little acknowledgement of alternative visions of being male. But even within this socio-economic demographic it is misleading to suggest that there is a pervasive and thorough crisis of masculinity. As Tim Edwards perceives:

Though there is some evidence to support the notion of demographically or even geographically specific “crisis tendencies” for some men, there is very little to endorse any overall masculinity in crisis thesis other than to say that masculinity is perhaps partially constituted as crisis. In short, there is no crisis of masculinity as it is commonly portrayed. (24)

The thesis that masculinity is formed out of crisis refers to the vexed relationship of culturally enforced difference between masculinity and femininity and historical evidence of an ongoing crisis for masculinity. M. S. Kimmel, for example, documents historical evidence of a masculinity crisis discourse in America dating back to the formation of the United States, reinforcing the assertion that such anxieties are historical constructs and the means by which hegemonic masculinity retains its essential elements. R.W. Connell describes hegemonic masculinity as “a social ascendancy achieved in a

play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes” (194). Following Antonio Gramsci’s conception of hegemony, hegemonic masculinity is characterised by a “dominant cultural pattern” (194) rather than relying on violence, although the latter often reinforces the former. Popular culture plays an integral role in constructing and maintaining the dominant image of masculinity, which shifts over time. For example, the hyper-muscularity of the 1980s/1990s actors Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, indicative of a “celebration of violent masculism” (Kellner 65), no longer has the same cultural power, with the “metrosexual” (Orlando Bloom), “retrosexual” (Viggo Mortensen), even homosexual (*Brokeback Mountain* 2006) currently finding favour.⁵

For all the chest-beating about emasculation and confusion over appropriate role models for masculinity, men have retained their dominant social status. Those propounding the masculinity in crisis thesis ignore the “pay-offs men receive (or hope to receive) from their claims to manhood. For while men everywhere express their anxieties and loss of former privileges, overall they are conceived of and remain the dominant sex” (Segal 239).

Likewise, Tania Modleski urges academics to “consider the extent to which

⁵ The “metrosexual” refers to the image-conscious urban-oriented male, and the “retrosexual” connotes a more rugged and hirsute masculinity: “Retrosexuals reject the implied effeminacy of rigorous personal hygiene in favour of the natural approach that reeks of little more than testosterone and Brut” (“Goodbye Smoothie” A17).

male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution, whereby men ultimately deal with the threat of female power by incorporating it” (7).

So how do the male protagonists in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* project masculinity to the contemporary audience? Christopher Newfield asserts that “hegemonic patriarchy can survive without male assertion, but not without feminization”:

only feminization enables men to evade the one-directional dominations of stereotypical masculinity to master the non-conflictual, and to occupy both sides of a question. Whereas tyranny depends on male supremacy, liberal hegemony or “consensus” depends on male femininity. (qtd. in Modleski 7)

If claims of a widespread and constant crisis of masculinity are essentially a social and cultural construct through which men retain privilege, does the heroic fantasy genre participate in this hegemonic activity? The next section provides a typology of the heroes in the books providing a guide as to each character’s key features and motivations.

A Typology of Heroes

The protagonist of heroic fantasy is typically action-oriented and exhibits a strong social conscience.⁶ As hero, he represents growth towards the values that underpin the world in which he resides, so that, Clute and Grant assert, the heroic fantasy “derives much of its emotional appeal from the sense of identification with a strong individual” (464). The hero acts as a mentor for the reader, offering examples of strength and perseverance, providing a “sort of blueprint of how to manage” (D. W. Jones, “Heroes” 6).

According to the liberal humanist and psychoanalytic interpretations of tales of heroism, these narratives are a “necessary fantasy” (Jones and Watkins 6), encouraging the reader to recognise and tap into the heroic potential that is within every human being. The hero’s physical journey toward great danger followed by his return home to reap the rewards acts as an analogy for the individual’s own journey toward psychological maturity. This is a favourite metaphor, especially for those who subscribe to Jungian theory: “When we see our difficulties as parts of a developmental journey,” Carol Pearson writes, “then some of the pain can be lessened” (157). She explains that “we take our

⁶ Stephen Donaldson’s anti-hero Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever stands out as an exception within the genre. Donaldson wrote against Tolkien’s influential narrative, defining his hero as a leper whose disbelief in both himself and the fantasy world he is destined to save is ironically the means by which Lord Foul is subdued. Covenant frequently refuses to act but when he does, he lacks self-control and behaves dishonourably, such as when he rapes his young guide.

journeys so that we know who we are and what we think and feel, what our values and convictions are” (152) and counsels that personal crises are best viewed as “one’s heroic ‘road of trials,’ an initiation of sorts” (157).

Yet there are a number of “types” within this broad description of the hero as a protagonist who actively engages in securing his destiny as king. From a reworking of the Jungian perspective Pearson offers six archetypes: the innocent, orphan, magician, warrior, martyr and wanderer. Clute and Grant indicate there are numerous character possibilities for the hero, offering as examples avatars of gods, brave little tailors, hidden monarchs, changelings, duos, childe figures and persons who learn better (464). However, I am primarily interested in the types of heroism portrayed in the novels *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. Aragorn, Frodo, Sam and Harry each present an alternative heroism, communicating to the audience an array of identification possibilities. Each of these heroes presents alternative experiences and characteristics with which individuals can align themselves.

Identification with the subject positions offered in the text need not be accepted in entirety, but, as Simon During suggests, “we find ourselves in relation to them, sometimes taking the identities they offer pretty much wholesale (whether knowingly or not), but just as often distancing ourselves from them by taking advantage of a whole range of tones and modes that allow this” (46). Precisely how identification with fictional characters operates, and

even whether the concept is admissible, is to lead into a contentious debate.⁷

For my purposes, I accept that identification to varying degrees does occur; the notion that fiction influences our everyday lives underpins this thesis, arising through the alignment of the consumer with characters and the actions or attitudes (morals) they convey. During points to the fact that the character may be identified with in totality or in part, and in the following chapter Claire's comments on her ambivalent relationship with the character Hermione imply a partial identification. Identification, therefore, need not be complete, but flexible and equivocal.

This position gives rise to the concern about what the consumer "receives" from the text they encounter; while I believe the heroic fantasy has numerous positive values to impart to its audience, I also think that these ideals have been distorted. As discussed, consumerism complicates the moral economy in which

⁷ Martin J. Barker is skeptical of the concept "identification". He draws on qualitative and quantitative data from a large study into the reception of *The Lord of the Rings* films to argue that it is a problematic concept precisely because of its "persistence" and "convenience" (358). The concept is deployed uncritically, Barker elaborates, and primarily toward a critical position that emotively perceives "moral harm". Therefore identification's "rhetorical power is in inverse relation to [its] explanatory power" (358), with the concept used to imply engagement with a text but failing to explain how this is so. Ultimately, Barker concludes that "there is a need . . . to develop a set of terms for conceptualizing *relations between factors inside and outside the film*" (374, italics in original). He does not therefore assert that no such relationship as the elusive "identification" occurs, but that unreflective use of the concept prevents thought and research into the many and diverse ways the audience engages with a text.

the hero is the focal point of a strong and connected social group. Later chapters look into the forms of nationalism promoted by the genre, followed by a review of New Zealand's national fetish toward the film adaptations and what I perceive to be outdated colonial values attributed to the films and overlaid on the local landscape and peoples. For now, however, I want to examine the issue of gender; a textual analysis of the male characters – the “heroes” – demonstrates their individual qualities and provides a platform for the next chapter which critiques this masculine perspective. Giddens describes the family, with the heterosexual couple at its core, as not only a site for the struggle between tradition and modernity, but also as a metaphor for them (*Runaway* 41). To reassert masculinity as a dominant cultural force within this social unit, then, is to promote “tradition” – defined as providing a “kind of truth” and “a framework for action that can go largely unquestioned” (41). In turn, the individual feels secure and comfortable, unchallenged by alternatives or a compulsive requirement for reflexivity. But traditions such as patriarchy mask *and* sanction social power relations, generating a “binding emotional and moral force” being “tied to memory and ritual” (K. H. Tucker 146). How the hero claims masculine power is therefore conveyed by his character and actions.

Aragorn: Warrior Hero

As a projection of masculinity, the character Aragorn most closely reflects heroic masculinity; his character arc is that of the Hidden Monarch, so that while he is first encountered as the dishevelled Ranger named Strider, he is ultimately revealed as King Elessar, inheriting the kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor and marrying an Elvish princess, Arwen. As a Ranger, Strider is much more than “one of the wandering folk” (*FOR* 153). He is the last Chieftain of the Dúnedain of the North, the Dúnedain being the Men of Westeros or Númenóreans. This dwindling group of men scour Middle-earth, secretly defending the Free Peoples, such as the unwitting hobbits, against Sauron’s growing malevolence. Strider’s status derives from his lineage; he is Aragorn son of Arathorn, heir of Isildur, and as such he is heir to the throne of the realms of Gondor and Arnor but only those who know Strider’s true name and the history of Middle-earth will recognise his eminence.⁸

Aragorn’s “personal journey” is to heal the injury his ancestor Isildur wrought upon Middle-earth. Isildur had bravely cut the Ring from Sauron’s hand, but then refused to destroy it. Consequently, Sauron’s spirit was able to continue to threaten Middle-earth. One of Aragorn’s challenges, then, is to resist the lure of the Ring. Should he submit to the illusory powers of the Ring

⁸ The hobbits’ ignorance of history means they fail to realise Aragorn’s destiny, as Gandalf points out to Pippin when they prepare to meet Denethor, whom the “Hidden Monarch” will depose (*TT* 737).

Aragorn could immediately satisfy his personal goals; defeat Sauron, take up his rightful throne and wed Arwen. He is perfectly capable of overpowering the hobbits while at Butterbur's Inn and taking the Ring for himself, as he informs Sam: "If I was after the Ring, I could have it. – NOW!" (*FOR* 168). But he resists the temptation, choosing to follow the uncertain path that his honour dictates, pledging instead his allegiance to the hobbits' own honourable task of destroying the Ring: "I am Aragorn son of Arathorn; and if by life or death I can save you, I will" (168).

The hero is required to submit to the greater good, and is eventually rewarded for this patience. Thus, "by confiding to the hobbits his true identity [Aragorn] puts his life in their hands. And by his pledge of help he subordinates his own ambitions to their safety as bearers of the Ring" (Kocher 122). So as Aragorn bides his time before he becomes King Elessar, he travels the land as a Ranger. This warrior role is his "training ground" for his ultimate challenge – to organise the diversionary battle against Sauron while Frodo, Sam and Gollum limp toward Mt Doom.

Although Aragorn proves himself valiant and strategic in war, it is equally important for him to put down his sword and tend to his people. The wise-woman Ioreth recalls that, "*the hands of the king are the hands of a healer, and so shall the rightful king be known*" (*RK* 844, italics in original). Aragorn heals his injured subjects with the herb kingsfoil, which only responds to the true king,

thereby indicating his communion with the land and people. Aragorn is similarly adept at ensuring peaceful relations amongst the various peoples of Middle-earth, identifying rightful ownership of land and commanding that none may transgress the accompanying rights. Clearly, being the ideal warrior king involves far more than being “merely a captain of war” (846-7). Although being a warrior has been Aragorn’s “rite of passage” to his kingship, war is not an end in itself. Rather, the dark times have dictated that being able to lead and defend his subjects in battle has become a necessary prerequisite for him to prove his worth as king.

There are a number of foils to Aragorn’s portrayal of a true king, each with a flaw that highlights Aragorn’s perfect example. King Théoden of Rohan and Denethor, Steward of Gondor, each succumb to despair in the face of Sauron’s threat; Théoden is manipulated by his advisor, Gríma Wormtongue, who has become Saruman’s servant, and Denethor allows grief and bitterness to turn into distrust and secrecy. These two characters provide a contrast for Aragorn’s steadfast optimism against a formidable foe and conviction of his own decisions, making him a compelling figure with which to identify. But as Richard Purtill observes, Aragorn’s “traditional” heroism is itself a foil to the “simple dogged heroism of the Hobbits” (45). The new king’s nobility contrasts with the ordinariness of the hobbits. Tolkien writes that “a moral of the whole [tale] is the obvious one that without the high and noble the simple and vulgar

is utterly mean; and without the simple and ordinary the noble and heroic is meaningless" (*Letters* 160). So the hobbits provide the "human interest" in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (Purtill 45). Indeed, the author describes Sam as the "chief hero" of the story (*Letters* 161), yet Frodo's own "journey" leads him away from the ordinariness of his beloved Shire.

Frodo: Spiritual Hero

The heroism described through Aragorn emphasises dramatic action. All of the alliances and confrontations, battles and then the spoils of war – a kingdom and bride - orient him towards wielding immense power conscientiously and with dignity. Frodo, however, is quick to realise that his personal adventure is unusual, and it follows that so too is his particular form of heroism. "What is to be my quest?" he asks Gandalf. "Bilbo went to find treasure, there and back again; but I go to lose one, and not return, as far as I can see" (*FR* 65). Two key qualities characterise Frodo and his quest: his renunciation of overwhelming power and the development of a higher level of self-reflection. The two qualities develop together. As he travels he becomes increasingly aware of the power he holds as Ringbearer, which makes him realise both his own vulnerability and the need to acknowledge and be sympathetic of others' susceptibility toward the desire for power and control.

Where tales of heroism are usually about the attainment of power and wielding it responsibly (both Aragorn and Sam, for example, reach the pinnacle of authority according to their species), Frodo's heroic example is to portray the value of letting go of all power. He is an "anti-Faustian hero" (Helms 56-75), or martyr, eschewing power and control for compassion and forgiveness. The latter qualities inflect his character with a spirituality that also resonates in his quest as personal sacrifice. Just as Jesus's martyrdom on the cross symbolises humankind's deliverance from sin and admission to heaven, Frodo carries the knowledge of his own, and therefore all humanity's, inherent propensity for evil. The symbolic Christ therefore absolves the sins of his people, offering up his life to ensure the salvation of the Shire and all Middle-earth.⁹

It is through his contact with Gollum that Frodo recognises his own potential demise through attachment to the Ring. Further, in witnessing, and in

⁹ The film adaptation reinforces the association between Frodo and Jesus through the hobbit's "resurrection": Frodo symbolically "falls" with Gollum as they fight desperately for the Ring, but he manages to hold on to the edge of the cliff and so regain safe ground. Gandalf, too, has been attributed with Christ-like qualities; his transformation from Gandalf the Grey to Gandalf the White after his fall into the abyss during his battle with the fiery Balrog suggests his ascension to a Christ-like status. However, Purtill perceptively notes that rather than Gandalf's "return" from certain death resulting from the intervention of God, "it seems within the 'natural' abilities of embodied Ainur to re-form their bodily 'clothing' after it has been damaged or even destroyed" (114). As an "angel", then, Gandalf is not subject to the physical limitations exhibited by Men or Hobbits, and when one body is damaged he merely assumes another human form in order to continue his work in Middle-earth.

part experiencing, the hobbit's wretchedness, Frodo learns the pity and mercy which elude him at the beginning of his journey. Frodo becomes increasingly aware of the hold the Ring has over him, the desire to submit to the Ring gradually eroding his physical strength, although making his understanding of the Ring's lure more astute (*TT* 691). It is only this newfound knowledge that enables him to feel pity for Gollum (601). Where Sam dehumanises Gollum by referring to him as "it" (600), Frodo conveys his empathy for the abject creature by calling him by his hobbit name, Sméagol. Frodo is well aware that Gollum may prove treacherous as a guide to Mordor, but he also realises, as Gandalf had earlier observed, that he cannot foresee what role Gollum may play in his Quest, whether for good or evil. To obtain Frodo's trust, Gollum agrees to swear *by* the Ring, as the Ring-bearer insists, "'not on it . . . All you wish is to see it and touch it, if you can, though you know it would drive you mad'" (604). Frodo briefly assumes a formidable form when he confirms to Gollum that he is the Ring-bearer, indicating his authority should he claim the Ring: "For a moment it appeared to Sam that his master had grown and Gollum had shrunk: a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in grey cloud, and at his feet a little whining dog. Yet the two were in some way akin and not alien: they could reach one another's minds" (604). As Ring-bearers past and present, an affinity exists between Frodo and Gollum which Sam can neither understand

nor endure, but for Frodo Gollum's presence is an important reminder of the enormous cost the simple circle of gold he carries can exact.¹⁰

Gollum's fealty to Frodo, sworn by the Ring, is ultimately played out just as his master had warned. Frodo cautions Gollum that he is in danger if he breaks his oath by the Ring and prophesies their collective fate (*TT* 626). However, when the time comes for Frodo to relinquish the Ring into the Cracks of Mount Doom, his physical exhaustion and dread leave him and he claims the Ring for himself: "I have come . . . But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (*RK* 924). Immediately Sauron is aware of the Ring's whereabouts and, "[Sauron] knew his deadly peril and the thread upon which his doom now hung" (925). Without Gollum's interference, the Ring would not have been destroyed and Sauron defeated. Gollum bites off the Ring-bearer's finger to take back his Precious, but by dancing in delight too close to the brink of the firey depths of Mt Doom, he falls to his death, destroying the Ring in the process: "the irony of evil is consummated by its doing the good which good could not do" (Kocher 47). Frodo both fails and succeeds in his attempt to destroy the Ring: succeeds in that he manages to

¹⁰ Frodo's potential demise is also pre-figured through Bilbo. When Bilbo asks to see the Ring again once Frodo has recovered in Rivendell Frodo reluctantly shows him: "Frodo quickly drew back the Ring. To his distress and amazement he found that he was no longer looking at Bilbo; a shadow seemed to have fallen between them, and through it he found himself eyeing a little wrinkled creature with a hungry face and bony groping hands" (*FOR* 225-6).

undertake the journey all the way to Mt Doom, and fails in that he refuses to throw the Ring into the fire. Together Frodo and Gollum are responsible for saving Middle-earth, “neither of whom is grand, neither of whom at the last moment sought the Ring’s destruction” (Sale 232).

Roger Sale believes that Frodo’s benevolent “taming” of Gollum is his particular form of heroism (225). Frodo’s perspicacity allows him to recognise himself in Gollum, and this mental acuity means he will instinctively “wish to save and tame Sméagol rather than destroy him” (225). The Ring-bearer treats Gollum respectfully, always with the intention of helping the pitiful hobbit overcome his desire for the Ring. It is the close and mutually supportive relationship between Frodo and Sam that reveals to Gollum the potential of trust and friendship rather than power and possession. Gollum is affected by the contentment he witnesses in Frodo and Sam when they fall asleep in each other’s arms; “A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired” (*TT* 699). The alienated hobbit reaches out to gently reciprocate the kindness Frodo has extended to him, an action Sale describes as Sméagol’s, and therefore also Frodo’s, “finest moment . . . This love is almost without its like in our modern literature, because it is not filial or sexual but the tentative, unbelieving response to a caring so unlikely it seems heroic even to Gollum” (236).

Gollum's potential recovery is lost, however, when Sam awakes and mistakes Gollum's proximity for treachery. Gollum reverts to his old ways, determined to betray his companions to Shelob. Nevertheless:

Frodo's uniqueness and greatness lie in his way of being returned to himself as he sees a light shine in others. ... He turns out into the world and so finds a means of self-knowledge, and in his scarred and beautiful relation with Sméagol he finds himself and lives by the light of the self he finds. He is saved from the worst ravages of the Ring because of his lovely courtesy that lets others be themselves and unbound, and therein finds a way to be heroic.

(Sale 236-7)

Frodo's compassion dominates his type of heroism, his example serving to show that tolerance and integrity may do much to sway the malevolent forces in the world; war should be a last resort not an immediate response. Frodo's brief attempts at wielding his blade Sting (against the Dark Riders on Weathertop [FR 191], the orcs in the Chamber of Mazarbul [FR 316] and to subdue Gollum [TT 600]) are the limits of his being a "warrior"; by the time he returns home he no longer uses his weapon and urges others, to resist the easy

temptation to use arms to solve the problem of Sharkey's – Saruman's – unwelcome presence in the Shire.

Frodo is a changed hobbit as a result of his experiences, capable of far-reaching insight, and it is this aspect of his character which vividly contrasts with Sam's unwavering "hobbitness." Sam plays an important role in Frodo's psychological development in that he is a constant reminder to the older hobbit of all the good and simple inhabitants of the Shire. Before leaving Bag End and before learning Sam will accompany him, Frodo confesses to Gandalf:

I should like to save the Shire, if I could – though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid and dull for words . . . But I don't feel like that now. I feel that as long as the Shire lies behind, safe and comfortable, I shall find wandering more bearable: I shall know that somewhere there is a firm foothold, even if my feet cannot stand there again. (FOR 61)

When the Ring has been destroyed and Gollum with it, Frodo acknowledges the solace that Sam's company gives him: "I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam" (RK 926). Sam represents the best of the hobbits for whom Frodo has sacrificed his personal peace – he is one

of the “little people” who were so important to the author. And it is through Samwise Gamgee that Tolkien reveals his chief form of heroism.

Samwise Gamgee: Everyman Hero

Although Sam follows the same path as Frodo to Mordor, his is a different journey. Frodo’s motivation is to save the Shire from certain destruction, but Sam’s heroism lies in his servility, his faithful subordinate status. He is always there to ensure his master is fed, that he sleeps well, offering his well-intentioned and simple wisdom. Sam even carries his master when Frodo becomes over-burdened by the Ring.¹¹ Roland Hein believes that Sam’s character reflects:

the ideal of servanthood, which in Christian terms, is the epitome of heroism. He is the foil for Frodo as regards the renunciation. On numerous occasions he sacrifices his own desires, such as those to

¹¹ The name Samwise means ‘half-wit’ in Old English, but not in a derogatory sense; rather Sam is credited with a “vulgarity – by which I do not mean a mere ‘down-to-earthiness’ – a mental myopia which is proud of itself, a smugness (in varying degrees) and cocksureness, and a readiness to measure and sum up all things from a limited experience, largely enshrined in sententious traditional ‘wisdom’” (*Letters* 329). Sam comprehends practical matters (he offers his Gaffer’s saying “Where there’s life there’s hope and need of vittles” [*TT*685]) but it is his limited life experience which compromises Gollum’s repentance.

return to the peace of his garden in the Shire, and, with no thought to his own advantage, continues to think only of the good of his Master and their mission. (207-8)

Against the backdrop of the impending oppression and ugliness that Sauron and Saruman represent, the character of Sam offers the reader an example of “goodness incarnate” (Hein 208). At root of his inherent “moral beauty” is his lack of pride – “the besetting sin of heroism” (208).

Sam’s total devotion to his master inures him from the sin of pride, as illustrated by his brief term as Ring-bearer. Becoming Ring-bearer arises out of Sam’s greatest dilemma: when the fiendish spider Shelob poisons Frodo, should he remain beside his dead master (as he believes him to be) and eventually expire himself, or should he take the Ring and continue the Quest alone, to the best of his ability? Sam’s strongest impulse is to stay with Frodo, but his practical nature suggests to him that he should endeavour to destroy the Ring himself. He is doubtful he has made the right decision, but in a roundabout way he has: in this simple act of retrieving the Ring from Frodo he thwarts the most likely chance Sauron has of re-assuming control of the Ring. The orcs find Frodo and take him away to a tower, but not before Sam overhears that his master is not dead at all, merely sedated.

It is at this point that Sam reveals his heroism by refusing the lure of the Ring; he puts it on and briefly fantasises of becoming “Samwise the Strong, Hero of the Age, striding with a flaming sword across the darkened land, and armies flocking to his call as he marched to the overthrow of Barad-dûr” (*TT* 881). But Sam has no desire for such extraordinary power; “he knew in the core of his heart that he was not large enough to bear such a burden” (881). Rather, “the one small garden of a free gardener was all his need and due, not a garden swollen to a realm; his own hands to use, not the hands of others to command” (881). Sam gains insight into his master’s relationship with Gollum by experiencing the delusional effects of the Ring. When the wretched hobbit attacks Frodo on the final approach to Mt Doom, Sam draws his sword on the whimpering and prostrate Gollum. Although he believes it would be “just and many times deserved” to “slay this treacherous, murderous creature” Sam is unable to kill Gollum: “He himself, though only for a little while, had borne the Ring, and now dimly he guessed the agony of Gollum’s shrivelled mind and body, enslaved to that Ring, unable to find peace or relief ever in life again” (*RK* 923).

Sam certainly matures during the course of the journey, but his experiences, including being Ringbearer briefly, do not change his “plain

hobbit-sense” (*TT* 881).¹² Frodo’s experience sets him apart from his community, but Sam remains embedded within the Shire, regenerating the land, serving the hobbits as Mayor for seven terms and marrying his sweetheart Rosie Cotton. As an ordinary hobbit Sam is husband, father and mayor: to affect a “heroic mask,” which the Ring promises, is to belie Sam’s essential character. Tolkien’s liberal humanist conception of heroism is not a persona worn for the public, a cynical ruse to effect power, but is an expression of an individual’s genuine self – the circumstances allowing inherent traits of bravery, sacrifice and endurance to surface. The heroism Sam displays, and Harry Potter too, is no “costume” to which alternative popular heroes Batman and Spiderman resort so as to hide their true identity.

The Lord of the Rings closes with an image of domestic bliss - Sam returns home after seeing Frodo off to the Undying Lands, child on his knee, the evening meal on the table cooked by his wife (*RK* 1008) – and it is this contrast of the everyday with the heroic world that Tolkien intends to impress upon the reader. He wrote, “I think the simple ‘rustic’ love of Sam and his Rosie

¹² Sam himself does not want to change his inherent nature. When the younger hobbit makes up a song Frodo realises his companion has hidden talents: “I am learning a lot about Sam Gamgee on this journey. First he was a conspirator, now he’s a jester. He’ll end up by becoming a wizard – or a warrior!’ ‘I hope not,’ said Sam. ‘I don’t want to be neither!’” (*FOR* 203). Although Sam does evoke the spectre of a warrior briefly, his heroism lies in his prevailing ordinariness; he remains distinctly a hobbit irrespective of his encounters with elves and orcs, dwarves and Men.

(nowhere elaborated) is absolutely essential to the study of his (the chief hero's) character, and to the theme of the relation of ordinary life (breathing, eating, working, begetting) and quests, sacrifice, causes, and the 'longing for Elves', and sheer Beauty" (*Letters* 161, italics in original). For Tolkien, heroic endeavour only has value if it is to ensure the sanctity of domesticity, emphasised by the hero's return home and re-immersion into the everyday.

John Miller believes that the multiple masculine subjectivities that Tolkien describes in the Third Age of Middle-earth are a eulogy for the hardening of early twentieth century masculinity into a singular form. He views the dwarves, elves, orcs and hobbits as each constituting a different type of masculinity to that displayed by the Men, and their displacement through the ascendancy of Men signals the eclipsing of masculinity as a site of potentially plural and contradictory identifications. The denial of these other forms of masculinity in fictional Middle-earth from the Third Age to the Fourth is a direct analogy for the loss of multiple identities available to men as a result of the First World War, Miller contends: "As the watershed event of modernity, World War I marked for men of Tolkien's generation the point after which this new order assumed 'Dominion'" (201). The "new order" Miller refers to aligns masculinity with "the assertion of physical power, unambiguous

heterosexuality, a lack of close bonds with other males except those necessary to succeed on the “battlefield,” and a necessary, almost tragic engagement in history” (201).

Where Tolkien describes and condones multiple masculinities, I suggest that Rowling brings together attributes found in Aragorn, Frodo and Sam into the single character of Harry Potter. Harry’s story therefore represents an ideal synthesised masculinity, his maturation through trials showing it is a tough and dangerous journey, but attainable in the end.

Harry Potter: Composite Hero

At the outset of the *Harry Potter* series the protagonist turns eleven years old. With each new book Harry is a year older, so it is unremarkable that this hero reproduces and discusses the physical, social and political powerlessness experienced by the intended reader. Harry is described from the outset as “small and skinny for his age” (*HPPS* 20), and so he remains; at fifteen he is still “skinny,” even with a “slightly unhealthy look of someone who has grown a lot in a short space of time” (*HPOP* 7). His slight build is a motif of the stories, emphasising as it does the unlikelihood of his being able to win a physical confrontation with the school bullies Crabbe and Goyle let alone frustrate the cunning Lord Voldemort. However, these stories of heroism, like that of the

hobbits Frodo and Sam, are not so much about domination and physical strength as they are about compensating this lack of presence with mental acuity and determination.

Like Samwise Gamgee, Harry is an “everyman,” the equivalent of an ordinary boy within the parameters of a magical world, who is thrust into an extraordinary conflict with the most evil wizard alive. Harry is “normal” in the sense that he goes to school, he has friends and enemies, he plays sport and has to complete his homework like all the other students at Hogwarts. Yet he is also clearly destined for great things. His name is known throughout the wizarding world for inexplicably thwarting Voldemort as a baby, and it is as Voldemort’s nemesis that Harry will in due course prove the saviour of the world. Hermione recognises the essence of Harry’s heroism as “friendship and bravery” (*HPSS* 208), identifying his human qualities as more intrinsically heroic than his magical skills; his commitment to friends, his “saving people thing” (*HPOP* 646) put him a cut above the rest, more so than his ability to produce a patronus, despite it being advanced magic. As Julia Eccleshare notes, Harry’s “heroic solutions” are “part-human, part magical” (18). By placing Harry into dangerous situations as “underdog” (22), Rowling insists her hero revert to human, not necessarily magical, skills and qualities.

Harry’s name designates him as both common and noble. As the common form of the popular royal Christian name “Henry”, the name “Harry” borders

the two political spheres.¹³ He is school boy and hero, but I suggest that the heroism he conveys includes elements of those I have categorised above as “warrior,” “reflective” and “common.” As a warrior, Harry excels in the often dangerous sport Quidditch, and pursues evil whenever it threatens him or his friends. This warrior aspect also incorporates the detective work required to solve the riddles that confront him, such as what constitutes Slytherin’s Heir in the Chamber of Secrets. As a “common” hero, Harry aligns himself with the marginalized - mudbloods (Hermione) and purebloods who have fallen on difficult times (Ron). While marked out for greatness by the lightning bolt scar on his forehead, he does not assume to set himself up as a “positive alternative” to Voldemort, nor even to be the Minister of Magic, but wishes to become an “auror”. As such he subjects himself to maintaining the safety of the people – the equivalent in Rowling’s wizarding world to Aragorn’s role as Ranger in Middle-earth.

A key part of Harry’s education is to understand that the difference between himself and Voldemort is his capacity to love. It was his mother’s love

¹³ At a Theosophical Society meeting that I attended in January 2003, Dr John Algeo suggested that the name “Harry Potter” implied the character represents God within the narrative, with reference to the scriptural reading, “Have thine own way, Lord;// Have thine own way.// Thou art the potter, I am the clay.// Mould me and make me, after thy will,//While I am waiting, yielded and still” (Jeremiah 18:1-11). According to Algeo, the surname “Potter” therefore evokes the image of this hero as all-powerful and epitomising the characteristic strengths associated with Christianity.

that saved him as a baby, and now it is time for him to move “beyond the narcissistic egocentricity of the Orphan” (Pearson 99) and learn the self-knowledge that marks Frodo’s journey. While Harry’s desire to save the world is commendable, to do so he needs to understand himself as well as those around him. For example, he shows limited compassion for Cho Chang’s grief over the death of her ex-boyfriend, Cedric Diggory. Even when Hermione explains to him and Ron the complex emotions that Cho will be experiencing, Harry agrees with his friend that Hermione should “write a book, translating mad things girls do so boys can understand them” (*HPOP* 505). With even greater consequences, Harry ignores Hermione’s intuition about Voldemort; Harry races to the Ministry of Magic to save his godfather in the fifth book only to discover that Voldemort has manipulated him. A hero typically succeeds on the basis of being able to understand the way that evil works, but in this instance the situation is reversed. It is the evil Voldemort who successfully manipulates and coerces Harry because he is able to anticipate the young man’s hasty and dogmatic actions. “[Harry Potter] has a great weakness for heroics; the Dark Lord understands this about him” (*HPOP* 690).

It is Harry’s increasing connection with Voldemort that constitutes the most interesting and original aspect of Rowling’s portrayal of heroism. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* Harry learns that the lightning bolt scar on his forehead is a consequence of Voldemort attempting to kill him as a baby.

Some of the evil wizard's powers were transferred to Harry and consequently he can speak parseltongue (that is, he can converse with snakes). But as the series proceeds, the two extreme characterisations of good and evil become more closely aligned. It's not just that Harry has been marked by Voldemort as his arch-enemy and is destined to enter into direct mortal conflict with him; their association is unique for the level of mutability between the two. Three events in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* impress upon the reader the level of convergence between Harry and Voldemort: when Harry occupies Voldemort's mind while possessing his snake's body and attacks Arthur Weasley; when Harry looks into a mirror while dreaming and sees not himself, but Voldemort reflected back; and when Voldemort possesses Harry's body directly, in an attempt to have Dumbledore achieve what he cannot – kill Harry Potter.

While the two dream sequences suggest that the fusion between Harry and Voldemort predominantly occurs at a metaphysical or unconscious level, Voldemort physically occupies Harry's body during their confrontation at the close of the fifth novel. Harry "was locked in the coils of a creature with red eyes, so tightly bound that Harry did not know where his body ended and the creature's began: they were fused together, bound by pain, and there was no escape" (*HPOP* 719). The pain of Voldemort's occupation is excruciating and Harry believes he will die as a consequence. At this desperate thought Harry

feels relief and happiness – he will be reunited with his dead godfather, Sirius – and it is this positive emotion that evicts Voldemort from his body. Just as Voldemort could not break through the protection of Harry’s mother’s love as a baby, the cold and cruel wizard cannot abide occupying a body that radiates love.

Harry finds his emotional capacity painful and debilitating, but it is precisely this ability to feel that is his most potent weapon against the heartless and inhuman Voldemort. According to Dumbledore, “suffering like this proves you are still a man! This pain is part of being human” (*HPOP* 726) – a cold comfort to Harry who has been unable to control his emotions throughout *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Rowling indicates that (controlled) emotion is acceptable, even desirable, in the hero with Harry’s mentor, Dumbledore, shedding a tear over his mistake in withholding information from him, resulting in Sirius Black’s death (*HPOP* 744). Therefore, when Harry reflects on his conflicting emotions at the end of the school year and “[wipes] his face on his sleeve” (754), readers can assume that he has matured as a result of his experiences so far from “the *boy who lived*” into “a marked *man*” (754, italics mine).

Power is a dominant theme of heroic fantasy; the excessive power possessed by evil characters is revealed as dehumanising, and acts as a warning to the hero. To use power toward social ends, not personal gain, is a necessary

code for the hero's character, although it is clear that in *Harry Potter* the personal and social coincide; ridding society of Voldemort's malevolence conveniently allows the young hero to exact revenge for his parent's murders. Given this element of revenge in Harry's destiny, it is even more important for him to recognise that it is only the hero's moral code toward others that differentiates him from the villain, as Rowling demonstrates when Harry "dreams" he is the dark wizard. Rowling disrupts the discrete individuality of Harry and Voldemort by designating Voldemort's speech and actions to the hero. Harry speaks with a "high, cold voice that pulsed with anger" (*HPOP* 515) and, most disconcertingly, refers to himself as "Lord Voldemort" (516). This slippage between good and evil taunts the dreaming Harry when he looks into the mirror and is horrified to see reflected a "face whiter than a skull . . . red eyes with slits for pupils" (516).¹⁴ Rowling here complicates the alignment of Harry with good and Voldemort with evil, which has been the assumption of the previous books. Although it is extremely unlikely that Harry will turn to evil in the final instalment, Rowling advances that the path toward heroism is not straightforward, that mistakes (Harry fails to use the two-way mirror Sirius

¹⁴ This scene has parallels with that in *The Lord of the Rings* when Bilbo Baggins asks to see his "old ring". As Frodo proffers it to his benefactor Bilbo is transformed into a "little wrinkled creature" (*FOR* 203). Both Frodo and Harry are distressed by the image they are confronted with as it represents their own future if they do not forsake the power that evil entices them with. Power, and the desire for power, is shown to dehumanise, to hollow out, and leave only a shell of a being behind.

gave him) and temptations (he submits to curiosity regarding the object hidden within the Ministry of Magic) are part of his journey.

Reading the heroic fantasy for its character arcs illustrates the potential traits a reader may absorb from the tale. Identification with characters in a text, however, is a complex activity and difficult to determine. This topic is considered in the next chapter; the following section discusses Peter Jackson's characterisation of Aragorn. To confirm that popular culture really has the potential to influence even those in the highest of political positions, I begin by briefly commenting on the American President George W. Bush conveying to the public the "military success" of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq through imagery taken from the 1986 film *Top Gun*.

Reappropriating Masculinity: Updating Aragorn's Journey

On 1 May 2003 George W. Bush was photographed on the US aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln dressed in a flying suit with his helmet tucked under his arm setting the scene for his pronouncement of the end of the American-led war in Iraq (Harnden).¹⁵ A banner on the carrier proclaimed "Mission Accomplished,"

¹⁵ His "Top Gun" image is even available as an "action figure" for \$US29.95. On its website, the NewsMaxStore enthusiastically describes the action figure as capturing "the good ol' boy essence of the original George, from his rugged Texas back country good looks and characteristic placid political face. Its resemblance to the 43rd President is amazing, duplicating

although peace in Iraq was clearly celebrated prematurely. This infamous aping of Tom Cruise's aptly named character, Maverick, from the popular film *Top Gun* refers to Bush's own presidential appeal as a military leader. Given the post 9/11 climate of elevated fear of terrorism against America, and encouraged by Bush's extreme rhetoric characterised by simplistic constructions of events such as "good and evil", "with us or against us", "order and chaos", "freedom and fear" ("Address"), people look to leaders who offer the appropriate credentials to protect them – strength, conviction and authority. Bush's conservative leadership has established a divisive hegemony that defines the "war against terrorism" as divinely sanctioned. Within this fundamentalist framework Bush sets himself up as the saviour of civilisation, thereby authorising his government's off-shore military aggression and increased civilian surveillance at home.

Bush's political deference to Hollywood imagery of militaristic heroism reveals the influence icons of masculinity can wield. Antony Easthope explains that:

his crystal blue eyes, engaging smile and chiselled features." The "George W. Bush: Top Gun" action figure "does not talk but comes dressed in a full flight suit, helmet, goggles, breather and tanks that are identical to the ones George Bush wore when he landed on the flight deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln." A transcript of the speech Bush delivered on the aircraft carrier is also included in the package.

men do not passively live out the masculine myth imposed by the stories and images of the dominant culture. But neither can they live completely outside the myth, since it pervades the culture. Its coercive power is active everywhere – not just on screen, hoardings and paper, but inside our own heads. (*What a Man's Gotta Do*, 167)

As “Maverick”, Bush signals to his knowing audience that they can trust him and his strong leadership to heal the “wound” inflicted on America and, “assured of the rightness of our cause” (Bush “Address”), bring to justice those who orchestrated the attacks on America’s symbols of power.¹⁶

Other American politicians, too, draw on the affect of mass media to establish their authority; Hollywood actors Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger have both encouraged the public to confuse their political careers with the masculine and heroic characters they have portrayed.¹⁷ But for

¹⁶ See Chapter Seven of Ken Gelder’s *Popular Fiction* (2005). He writes of the connections between *The Lord of the Rings* and current fears of terrorism.

¹⁷ Reagan is credited with bringing a managed image to politics: “Leveraging their candidate’s ease before the camera, the Reagan team crafted a campaign founded upon a sophisticated grasp of the television industry, TV news routines, and the medium’s growing importance to electoral politics” (Howley). Reagan’s media-savvy political image has strongly influenced American politics, with Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Arnold Schwarzenegger emulating Reagan’s style and media management strategies. Schwarzenegger, as an ex-body builder and popular Hollywood star, used his celebrity status to advance his 2003 election as California’s

voters to require a heroic political figure, the historical moment needs to be defined as in a state of crisis; by claiming repeatedly that “this is a dangerous world” Bush can promote himself as a “war president” making decisions “here in the Oval Office in foreign-policy matters with war on my mind” (“Meet the Press”). Douglas Kellner perceives that:

it is through the establishment of a set of representations that a hegemonic political ideology is established, such as New Right conservatism. Representations thus transcode political discourses and in turn mobilize sentiment, affection, perception, and assent toward specific political positions, such as the need for male warriors to protect and redeem society. (60)

Kellner specifically refers to Sylvester Stallone’s *Rambo* and *Rocky* movies popular in the 1980s, observing that these images of individualistic heroism

Governor, with journalists wittily personalising the position as “Governator” (Breslau). He frequently evokes his Terminator role, “slipping” well known soundbites into his speeches (“I’ll be back”) with “his everyday speeches . . . littered with verbal plays on bodybuilding and the terminology of action heroes” (Breslau). By evoking his heroic filmic roles the electorate are invited to equate Schwarzenegger the political candidate with his onscreen image(s). The Schwarzenegger brand suggests that he will bring the same strength and authority – and happy and conclusive outcome – to the political stage as he did on the screen. Celebrity politicians are not unique to America, however; three actors were elected to the Philippine Senate in 2003 (Zafra). Notably, they were each known for playing “tough-guy heroes” (49).

express a distrust of government structures. Rambo's real enemy is the "governmental machine, with its massive technology, unlimited regulations, and venal political motivations. Rambo is the anti-bureaucratic non-conformist opposed to the state, the new individualist activist" (Berman, qtd. in Kellner 66). Other heroes who evoke anti-state sentiment and promote individualism and activism include those in *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones* and *Superman* (Kellner 66), but, suitably, the hero Bush prefers to evoke, Maverick, is part of and supportive of the American government's military system. Notably, the character Aragorn also expresses an alignment between the hero and government as he is crowned King; however, Harry Potter openly distrusts his government, rejecting multiple pleas by the new Minister of Magic to be the "Ministry's poster boy" (*HPHBP*, 605). As these are two very popular cultural texts, this suggests that there is some ambivalence amongst consumers about the role of government in contemporary events. While the key facets of heroism remain consistent (action-oriented, repelling evil, being socially responsible), whether the hero is behind or against the prevailing system is flexible.

I have noted that Harry's maturation into a hero requires him to acknowledge his capacity for emotion, particularly love. The need to be able to express emotions is a necessity for the contemporary hero, but what then of the film version of Aragorn, whose literary antecedent was created over 50 years

ago? Scriptwriters Peter Jackson, Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh have rewritten his character to better reflect contemporary masculinity. While Tolkien's Aragorn never waivers from his destiny, the cinematic version enacts the purported current masculinity crisis before securing his manhood and his kingdom. Aragorn's destiny is best understood in conjunction with that of Arwen, therefore the discussion below reflects on the ebb and flow of power – the hegemonic relations - between these two characters.

In a “featurette” on the DVD of the third film entitled “Aragorn's Destiny,” producer Barrie Osbourne states that Aragorn has grown up with a “sense of failure.” Osbourne refers to Isildur's appropriation of the Ring. By refusing to destroy the Ring generations earlier Isildur has tainted Men as selfish and shortsighted; as the troubled Aragorn tells Arwen, “the same blood runs in my veins. The same weakness” (*LORD*). The future king is therefore unsure of his ability to refuse the lure of the Ring, given his forefather's actions. Peter Jackson suggests that Aragorn is “not really sure whether Men are worthy to inherit the world. But there is a realisation that obviously comes that if it isn't Men it's going to be orcs. It's going to be something far far worse. And so Aragorn has to have a belief in the nobility of his people” (“Aragorn's Destiny”).

Aragorn's sense of nobility must begin with himself as future leader of Men, but he suffers from self-doubt. In direct contrast to Tolkien's

characterisation, the filmic Aragorn's lack of confidence is emphasised when he is shown as inferior to his betrothed. While Arwen believes in Aragorn's ability as a warrior and urges him to take up Isildur's sword against Sauron's infinite might, she also reveals his weaknesses. Arwen is able to draw a sword to Aragorn's throat as he searches for the healing herb kingsfoil, and as the better horse rider of the two she assumes responsibility for bearing the wounded Ringbearer safely to Rivendell. Women, then, both support and undermine masculinity with their independence and superior skills. It is significant that when the symbol of their betrothal, a necklace, is snatched by an orc in battle, Aragorn falls into a fast-flowing river. His luck falters when alienated from Arwen's love, but returns when she appears as if in his unconscious: "May the grace of the Valar protect you," Arwen whispers, breathing life once more into the future king (*LORII*).

Aragorn is purified and reinvigorated by his near-drowning; the resurrected warrior arrives at Helm's Deep, dramatically sweeping into King Théoden's presence and informing him of Saruman's imminent attack. Aragorn is confident and kingly from this point on, as demonstrated by his rallying of King Théoden, confronting Sauron through the palantîr or seeing stone, and commanding that the Dead repay their debt for past treachery – a feat that could only be achieved by the King of Men. His changed demeanour is also expressed by his altered appearance; his "designer sweat and stubble" and

“fashionable dishevelment” (Kelso) is replaced by a clean-shaven and well-groomed figure, fit for kingly duties and marriage.

Aragorn’s character arc follows the template I have described for heroes of heroic fantasy: he matures and gains confidence through his trials, becoming a suitable king at the close of the story. Arwen, on the other hand, loses the confidence she displays earlier in the film. Tolkien’s Arwen is remote from the entire narrative, her only function being to signal Aragorn’s elevated status as King of Men. Her screen role can therefore be viewed as a construct of the scriptwriters’ desire to attract female viewers. Taking aspects of the much reduced character of Éowyn as well as actions originally designated to Aragorn, Walsh, Jackson and Boyens have created a beautiful and strong female hero. Visually, Arwen evokes Walt Disney’s Snow White. Actress Liv Tyler is romantically dressed in long flowing dresses with low-scooped necklines and her long dark hair, full sensual lips, big blue eyes and perfect white skin suggest both innocence and sexuality.

Despite the confidence and “masculine skills” (Hopkins 119) Arwen displays on screen, she remains subordinate to the dominant male in her life. Although she has pledged herself to Aragorn and has been a source of strength to him as he develops his masculinity, her father, Elrond, insists she leave Rivendell for the Undying Lands. However, a vision of a young boy running into the arms of Aragorn convinces Arwen to defy her father; upon

“recognising” this boy as her future son Arwen turns her horse back to Rivendell where she convinces her father to reforge Isildur’s sword for Aragorn to use in the ensuing battle against Sauron’s army. As her immortality leaves her Arwen becomes weak and cold; only being reunited with Aragorn will rejuvenate her.

At his coronation King Elessar visibly draws breath before making his first speech as king: “this day does not belong to one man, but to all. Let us together rebuild this world that we may share in the days of peace” (*LORIII*). The crowd applauds the new king’s vision of collective responsibility, and Aragorn, confident now in his role as peace-time ruler, sings his own “anthem”. As King of Men (the most powerful man in Middle-earth) Aragorn becomes fit to marry Arwen, an Elvish princess. Their marriage, at first glance, is a union of equals to some extent; however, there is some ambiguity about their roles in the imagery of the film. Where Aragorn expects to marry Arwen upon his coronation in Tolkien’s story, the newly crowned king in the film is unaware of his betrothed’s presence. In distinct contrast to Aragorn’s confident image, Arwen stands weeping behind a flag bearing the symbol of King Elessar; she, too, is subservient to the king, now that she lives in the world of Men and has recognised that her biology reflects her destiny as mother. Arwen presents herself to Aragorn, stepping out from behind his flag but is unsure whether he will accept her as his bride. Aragorn seems confused by her tears, but when he

does realise her intentions he lifts her bowed head and kisses her. It is a dreadful, “Hollywood” kiss, where Aragorn launches himself aggressively at his bride. But this kiss that seals their union and ensures Arwen’s happiness also conveys that Aragorn has control over the relationship. Not only is he King of Men, but of women as well.

Arwen has performed significant tasks to ensure Sauron’s demise, but it is as wife and mother that she represents all that the men (of various races) have valiantly fought for. Through her character the new collective has a powerful and evocative symbol of the peace and fecundity that necessarily follows a righteous war, with her “political agency domesticated by the language of familial service and subordination” (McClintock 278).¹⁸ Éowyn, too, is mute and smiling at the side of her new love, Faramir, at the coronation, any doubts about her gender role inexplicably resolved. But none are more silent than Rosie Cotton. Given Sam’s status as “chief hero”, it is striking that Rosie has no

¹⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias relate the role of gender to the prevailing constructions and images of the nation and identify five particular ways in which women are active in the maintenance of ethnic and national forms: “as biological reproducers of members of the ethnic collectivities; as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; as signifiers of ethnic/national differences – as a focus and symbol of ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories; as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles” (7). These roles will not necessarily be equally prominent at any one time, but they represent the dominant ways in which women assist in the persistence of specific cultural and social forms.

voice, functioning purely as the subservient complement of masculinity within the domestic sphere. These images of femininity conform to what R. W. Connell deems “emphasised femininity” (183), where women comply with their subordination, “oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men” (183).

There is a sense through the film that power cannot be equally held in heterosexual relationships, that Aragorn is weak when Arwen strong, and vice versa. Significantly, then, Aragorn’s hegemonic authority is asserted over both his public and private lives at the close of his narrative arc; a compelling image for masculinity in a time of crisis of “gender containment, containing women’s mutinous power within an iconography of domestic service” (McClintock 276).

Conclusion

In previous eras masculinity has avoided analysis on the assumption that it is the normative gender. But now it is a prevailing contemporary issue.

According to Easthope masculinity has “always tried to perpetuate its power by feigning invisibility. As soon as masculinity can be seen as masculinity, its power is challenged” (*What a Man’s Gotta Do* 167-8, italics in original). With masculinity now frequently under the microscope the suggestion is that men are experiencing the same confusion and difficulties as women have when

conceived of as “other”. Indeed, Segal regards the masculinity in crisis argument as echoing the same issues expressed by feminists: “What men found when finally, in the wake of feminism, they turned to survey themselves . . . provided an analogue of women’s adversities: evidence of constraint, unease, misery, trying to embody the ideals of masculinity” (237).

The heroic fantasy genre attempts to reassert and redefine masculinity, offering to men a revised image with which to identify; this new hero is equally capable in the public sphere as the private, being emotionally articulate as well as action-oriented, and as comfortable and successful in peace-time as he is in war. Writing in 2002 John Beynon suggests that there is “no longer any consensus as to what the new man actually stands for” (120), but I contend the heroic fantasy proffers the nation as the focus for this new composite masculinity.¹⁹ Masculinity is validated and delineated by its contrast with femininity (despite its incorporation of “feminine” traits) and acting within a “moral economy”, and is given meaning by pursuing the security of the social group.

Against the fluidity and potential incoherency of identity and social conditions created under modernity, the heroic fantasy genre extends the

¹⁹ Beynon uses the term “new man” to refer to the “general, hybridized” values embodied in this “nurturer-narcissist” (120) form of masculinity, in which the new man is both “laddish” – fun-loving and adventurous – and sensitive – capable of emotional connection, as well as doing his fair share of the domestic chores.

promise of ontological security. The genre evokes a traumatic period of social and political upheaval, and by coping with this transitional period the hero becomes a fully unified being – a subject. Connell observes that this “public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support” (185). That is, exact clones of these ideal images of masculinity do not exist in reality, but their repetition in the cultural sphere has a material effect on contemporary subjectivity and social and cultural expectations.

Antony Easthope claims that “deprived of structure the subject is driven into culture; denied identity fulfilled in a significant role, he or she demands an individuality which will make up for what has been relinquished. This new, mobile, ‘pocket’ individuality provokes the subject to seek national identity, among others” (*What a Man’s Gotta Do* 52). It is “lack” at the core of modern experience that motivates the individual to find unity, both at an individual and collective level;²⁰ indeed, one will not be found without the other, according to heroic fantasy. A unified subjectivity requires not only the moral economy previously described, but the heroic fantasy also inserts the hero *and* reader into the nation-state, through both its content and form. The confluence of the heroic fantasy genre and the nation-state will be discussed in chapter seven;

²⁰ Easthope asserts that with modernity the “subject becomes *more* individualized and isolated” (*Englishness* 54, italics in original). As this lack is intensified the subject correspondingly “desires identity *more* intensely” (54, italics in original).

suffice to note here that although the genre promotes a particular form of subjectivity – characterised as the masculine subject²¹ – this subject attains fulfilment upon social integration into the national collective.

Pearson and Pope observe that “our understanding of the basic spiritual and psychological archetype of human life is limited . . . however, by the assumption that the hero and central character of the myth is male” (4).

Although not all males are able to access this powerful subject position (“The hero is almost always assumed to be white and upper class as well” [4]) this figure becomes the trope for the “normal human condition” (4). The many who fall outside this powerful subset (including women, the poor and other ethnicities) are seen as “secondary characters, important only as obstacles, aids, or rewards in his journey” (4). Heroic fantasy would seem to be primarily a text for the boys; certainly Tolkien’s seminal work has little space for female characters. But this “flaw” was recognised early on and subsequent authors sought to “correct” this imbalance. Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon* (1983) is notable in this regard, in that she recounts the eclipsing of feminine power associated with pagan magic by Christianity and its attendant

²¹ This is a pertinent fact for New Zealanders where the All Blacks embody what are collectively perceived as “New Zealand” values. The “core values” have already been recorded as “excellence”, “respect” and “humility”; however, a further seven “extended values” have been defined by Saatchi and Saatchi as “power”, “masculinity”, “commitment”, “teamwork”, “New Zealand”, “tradition” and “inspirational” (R. Brown). Refracted through the All Blacks, these values contribute to a primarily masculine sense of national coherence and well-being.

patriarchal ideology by rewriting the Arthurian legend from a feminist perspective.

Nevertheless, as Simon During remarks, “popular culture has proved quite immune to feminist reform” (178). The following chapter therefore considers how female characters are represented in the key texts, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. Continuing the theme of “ideology to industry”, this chapter will investigate the reception of heroic fantasy, asking whether female readers necessarily subscribe to the “emphasised femininity” described in these texts.

Chapter Six:

Females, Femininity and Heroic Fantasy

In Sharon Moore's book *We Love Harry Potter!* two young readers suggest that Harry's father, James, is more important than his mother, Lily, and that is why he is referred to more in the narrative. Although Hermione is her favourite character, noting that she is very brave and "perfect", 10-year-old Becky Rubin believes, "you hear more about Harry's father than his mother because his father was killed fighting You-Know-Who. His father was fighting because men are more brave. Harry's mother just tried to protect him because women love kids" (15). Becky clearly differentiates motivations for bravery between the sexes; Lily is not actively brave so much as merely *reacting* to Voldemort's violence. This form of action does not count so highly in Becky's worldview as James' confrontation with Voldemort. Another reader, 11-year-old Jeffrey Morse is even more dismissive of Harry's mother: "Harry's father is mentioned a bit more than his mother because he played an important role at Hogwarts" (50). That is, Harry's mother did not.

Further, at the close of the book there is a “Survey of Our Opinions.” Moore summarises that Harry is the young readers’ favourite character, Hermione is their second favourite. Similarly, Dumbledore is their favourite teacher and McGonagall their second. This pattern of preference for male characters over female signals that female readers frequently undertake cross-gender identification, more so than male readers identifying with female characters. A survey of the letters in *We Love Harry Potter!* Also suggests girls are more likely to identify with male characters than male readers with female characters. In fact, in this text, no male correspondents expressed any alignment with a female character. 10-year-old Matthew Lebowitz may well be representative of his fellow readers when he writes, “Hermione is sometimes a nuisance, but I like her anyway. I wouldn’t like to be like her; I’d rather be more like Harry and Ron” (49).

These comments suggest that young readers of *Harry Potter* view the male characters as socially and culturally more powerful than the female characters, making them attractive figures with which to identify. Not all heroic fantasies are guilty of the gender bias found in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, but it is notable that the two most popular heroic fantasies are conservative in these terms. This would seem to fly in the face of the “girl power” that currently pervades popular culture, with books, films and television series offering up youthful and attractive female heroes who are also aggressive and independent.

There are many examples of female action-heroes – Buffy, Xena, Lara Croft, Charlie’s Angels, to name just a few – and their popularity suggests that female audiences want to see larger-than-life projections of themselves on screen “kicking butt”. “Today’s girls don’t just want the tough action hero,” Susan Hopkins enthuses in *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture* (2002), “they want to *be* the tough action hero” (140).

These characters reflect a new form of female heroism: “the girl of today’s collective dreams is a heroic over-achiever – active, ambitious, sexy and strong” (Hopkins 1). Wearing miniskirts and knee-high boots Buffy slays vampires when she’s not at school, and in a leather mini-dress Xena leads her army of Amazons in violent clashes against the numerous villains that litter her world. With typical emphasis on the specular, popular culture combines violent action and sex appeal, drawing attention to the female hero’s physique and desirability.

This form of female agency is a trendy construction in contemporary popular culture, but how relevant is it to the female characters in heroic fantasy, especially those in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*? Are the female characters in these texts given the prominence or action that “girl power” demands of role models? As discussed, the feisty character Arwen is domesticated at the close of the film adaptation, interpellated as mother by the vision of her future progeny. Arwen’s portrayal of femininity may in fact be, as

Murray Pomerance observes of other popular culture characters, “less rooted in cultural practice, an expression of hope more than social fact; or a clever deception built and re-built to guide us away from the pathway to equality instead of toward it” (7). Indeed, despite the “updating” of Arwen’s character and Rowling’s portrayal of a strong female in Hermione, the stories remain conservative in terms of gender.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how girls may read heroic fantasy, thereby providing an examination of the metaphorical consumption of the genre, as opposed to the material consumption identified in chapters four and eight. Reading as consumption looks to the effect of the text, how meaning is produced and transmitted within social discourse. The encoding and decoding process that Stuart Hall describes only becomes complete when meaning is produced and effected in social practice; “if no meaning is taken, there can be no ‘consumption’. If the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect” (“Encoding/decoding” 128).

After establishing the sexism evident in the stories, and the genre in general, I look at the theoretical positions that endeavour to understand reading behaviour. Is the patriarchal ideology evident in these stories necessarily picked up by all readers all of the time? And even if readers are aware of this ideology, will they succumb to it? I then discuss an interview with Claire, a

young female reader of *Harry Potter*, thereby providing contingent and provisional responses to these questions.

I follow up Claire's appraisal of *Harry Potter* characters with my own interpretation of Hermione. I read the character as developing during the series, and, unlike Ron Weasley, Hermione is not in total thrall of Harry's heroism, despite her ongoing support. I close the chapter with a discussion of the prevalence of cross-identification. Although I wish to emphasise that ideology is not necessarily absorbed uncritically by readers and consumers of popular culture, I do not want to suggest that these images do not exert any influence. These reiterated stereotypes – of the passive and emotional female and active and successful male – become powerful patterns of gender roles and expectations, as portrayed by President Bush's impersonation of the character "Maverick".¹ The frequency with which these values are encountered in popular culture gives them a "confirmatory and consensual effect" (Bromley, "Natural Boundaries" 149), so that ideology is misread as commonsense. However, the ambivalence with which we interact with these patterns is relevant to gauging their continuing impact.

¹ Is it possible to imagine the American public taking seriously a female President who presented herself as a fictional hero? Who would this character be? No comparable popular culture characters immediately spring to my mind, suggesting the assumed masculinity of such authoritative and powerful roles.

Feminist Decodings

Rowling's fictional hero is aligned with liberalism, demanding and fighting for equality for all, irrespective of race, class or gender. Harry defends the marginalised and oppressed - whether mudblood, muggle, house elf or female - against both unthinking prejudice by those on his side (represented, for example, by Ron's cultural bias against giants) and Voldemort's fascism. Despite this calculated fairness spread throughout the series, from the co-founding of Hogwarts by two males and two females to the mixed-gender Quidditch teams, Julia Eccleshare claims Rowling gives "mixed messages" (82) regarding gender. Christine Schoefer is:

perplexed that a woman (the mother of a daughter, no less) would, at the turn of the 20th century, write a book so full of stereotypes. Is it more difficult to imagine a headmistress sparkling with wit, intelligence and passion than to conjure up a unicorn shedding silver blood? More farfetched to create a brilliant, bold and lovable heroine than a marauder's map?

Schoefer argues, as do Jack Zipes, Julia Eccleshare, Anthony Holden and Andrew Blake (amongst others) that the female characters in the *Harry Potter*

series are merely stereotypes, secondary characters to the dominant male roles. Zipes observes that “Typically, the girls are always left to gawk and gaze at Harry’s stunning prowess” (179), and Schoefer suggests that “Harry Potter’s Girl Trouble” lies in the social mores, with boys being privileged over girls: “No girl is brilliantly heroic the way Harry is, no woman experienced and wise like Professor Dumbledore” (Schoefer).

This valorisation of male performance, made possible by contrast to the passive female, is common in heroic fantasy. The fundamental binarism of male/female underpins myth as well as influencing the way in which the world is understood. It is a patriarchal construct, subtly normalised in cultural discourse. As an example, Joseph Campbell initially claims that the hero of his monomyth can be either male or female, yet he ultimately resorts to patriarchal gender stereotypes; the typical hero is male with the female cast in supporting roles of goddess, temptress or earthmother. “The hegemony wrested from the enemy,” Campbell writes,

the freedom won from the malice of the monster, the life energy released from the toils of the tyrant Holdfast – is symbolized as a woman. . . . if his stature is that of world monarch, she is the world, and if he is a warrior, she is fame. She is the image of his destiny

which he is to release from the prison of enveloping circumstance.

(*Hero* 342)

Campbell recounts the character positions available in myths, reverting to limiting gendered positions with woman as the matrix or ground through which the masculine principle achieves transcendence.

The Lord of the Rings likewise taps into the stereotypes fostered by myth and fairy tales, differentiating spheres of influence according to gender as Joseph Campbell observes. Criticism of *The Lord of the Rings* points to the few female characters featured in the 1000-odd pages of narrative and their marginal or supportive roles: there is the ethereal Elf queen Galadriel, a goddess; Goldberry, another goddess but more closely aligned with the natural world as Campbell describes the symbolic role; Shelob, a malevolent spider who preys on virginal male characters (J. Miller 184); Éowyn is troubled by the social expectations arising from her gender until safely repositioned within patriarchy through marriage; Rosie Cotton, a benevolent mother figure, is the “reward” for the chief hero; the hobbit Lobelia Sackville-Baggins is mocked for her petty materialism until she bravely makes a stand against “Sharkey.” She repents her desire for accumulating wealth when rescued from imprisonment when Sharkey is repelled; Arwen, whose character has been resurrected from

the appendices to prominent position in the film, is Aragorn's muse;² and, finally, Ioreth, who has access to the lore that will allow Aragorn to heal his subjects and secure his crown, is ridiculed as an otherwise vacuous gossip. Each of these female characters stands alone within the overwhelmingly masculine community, which is epitomised by the Fellowship. Their lack of solidarity reflects their relative powerlessness; even Galadriel's apparent power (she, not her husband, bears one of the Three Elven Rings of Power and greatly assists the Fellowship) is shown as passing in terms of the history of Middle-earth, with the Elves' retreat to the Undying Lands.

A brief discussion of Éowyn in *The Lord of the Rings* will serve as an example of the constraints placed upon female characterisation throughout the genre. Éowyn is the niece of King Théoden and determined to share in the defence of Rohan. Her uncle, however, refuses to allow her to fight; instead she must govern his subjects while he is at war. She has been given a role with

² The film adaptation conflates the roles of Arwen and Éowyn to some extent. Arwen's presence in the narrative is bolstered so that she is shown to possess the positive qualities of adept horse-riding skills, emotional conviction and strength of character. The cinematic Arwen's dilemma is the need to disobey her father's wish for her to abandon her promise to the mortal Aragorn and travel with the elves to the Undying Lands, and her desire to fulfil her betrothal to the future king of Men. Arwen is therefore torn between two loves; that she chooses a finite marriage over a never-ending paternal love does not alter the fact that in the final instance she is in a subservient relationship. In Tolkien's text the challenge to femininity is focussed through Éowyn's character, and is "resolved" through her marriage to Faramir, although the latter event does not form part of the film.

significant responsibility, but what Éowyn seeks is an opportunity to prove her strength and bravery on the battlefield. Not to be denied, she covertly joins the battle, taking with her the hobbit Merry. Éowyn ultimately plays a significant role in the War of the Ring, slaying the captain of the Nazgûl who, legend has it, cannot be struck down by the sword of any man. Her sex allows her to do what no man can do, and consequently she helps change the course of history.

Martin Barker's research into the reception of Jackson's film adaptations records that younger female respondents expressed "a strong strand of Personal Connections" (369) with Éowyn's character; they thought she showed the favourable qualities of courage and determination, but more importantly she is seen as a "*representative for all women, who have to fight for their place*" (369, italics in original). Numerous respondents stated that Éowyn's slaying of the witch-king and dramatic declaration "I am no man" was "a moment of special magic for them" (369). Barker summarises that those who chose Éowyn as their favourite character did so "because she is *against the grain* of the overall narrative" (369, italics in original).

Nevertheless, as John Miller suggests, Éowyn's significant achievement is undermined by her subsequent illness; her "unwillingness to accept her social role is portrayed as madness, even as an almost physical disease" (186). Éowyn's full recovery occurs when she accepts Faramir's offer of love, the implication being that with the love of the right man a woman will willingly

accept her domesticity. Miller observes that the meaning of Éowyn's disposal of the witch-king - the equivalent of any male hero slaying the dragon - is equivocal:

it sanctions both Eowyn's difference from Men and her rejection of that difference. Eowyn, in fact, does not really rebel against gender roles; she simply objects to the fact that she is assigned one role rather than the other. And both the catalyst for her rebellion (her unrequited love for Aragorn) and its resolution (her requited love for Faramir, who is of more appropriate status) imply an affirmation of conventional gender roles. (186)

Éowyn, then, is given some scope to act, but not so as to surpass or obscure that achieved by the male characters, and although young female viewers liked her character for the way she tests the boundaries of femininity, in the end she does not overturn gender roles.

Unlike Tolkien's novel, there are many female characters in *Harry Potter*; the issue is that they are stereotypes and lack development.³ Of the more prominent female figures – Hermione, Professor McGonagall, Ginny Weasley,

³ It is pertinent to note that many of the male characters are also stereotypes. As with the female characters they form a backdrop and contrast to those male characters that really matter.

Mrs Weasley - Schoefer sums up their functions: "Girls, when they are not downright silly or unlikable, are helpers, enablers, and instruments" (Schoefer). Of all the female characters Hermione and Ginny have been developed the most, and it is likely that they will continue to contribute to Harry's adventures. Nevertheless, Andrew Blake reads Harry's defeat of Tom Riddle in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* as indicative of the establishment and regeneration of masculine power in the series. In this scene Dumbledore provides Harry with the symbol of Gryffindor's power, the sword, via his phoenix Fawkes.

"Whatever the gestures towards equality", Blake declares:

in the end the stories represent a patriarchal world, in which power is exercised by individual males and transmitted to other individual males – whether they are "good" (Dumbledore) or "bad" (Voldemort). The sword is given to Harry, if temporarily and indirectly, by Dumbledore, who acts as his guardian and substitute father; he continues to keep the sword in his office. The patriarchal bestowal of this quintessential phallic symbol indicates that Harry has taken more of his own individual male power, and this may be why the friends' scope to combine in collective heroism diminishes.

(43)

If Harry's sole responsibility for destroying Voldemort was ever in doubt it is made clear in the fifth book with Professor Trelawney's prediction that "*either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives*" (HPOP 741, italics in original).

Additional to secondary functions the descriptives used for female characters are "positively pejorative" (Eccleshare 86). The girls scream, shriek, hiss, sob and moan, consistent with the overall portrayal of female characters as overly emotional. More disturbing is the collaboration of female characters with their diminished positions: "while [Rowling's] girl characters are capable of being intelligent and competent, they appear naturally to adopt subservient or stereotypical roles" (87). Hermione and her mentor Professor McGonagall concede to their "betters," Harry and Dumbledore respectively, not assuming superiority or even equality despite their singular talents. When a female character does look to extend her influence, she is shown as grotesque; the female Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Dolores Umbridge, envisages herself as succeeding Dumbledore, but she lacks the incumbent's foresight. Her love of stifling rules and control contrasts with Dumbledore's more relaxed attitude; where Dumbledore encourages Harry's heroism by allowing exploration and adventure – even mistakes – Umbridge attempts to undermine Harry's destiny through petty and cruel detentions. Ultimately Umbridge's

character is merely an opportunity to emphasise the benevolence and vision of the hero's mentor.

Jack Zipes believes these stereotypical characters are particularly damaging to child readers, regarding this audience as especially susceptible to the ideology carried by the roles. Part of the power of these ideological constructs lies in the repeated patterns of behaviour; a single text may be withstood, but to encounter sexist ideology in the majority of readings, and in popular culture in general, is to enforce and naturalise the message. The reader is likely to consciously or unconsciously reconcile the attitudes and behaviours of the character with his or her own expectations and those of the social group thereby fostering patriarchy.

Zipes is adamant that the popular culture that currently dominates children's lives in the western world restricts imagination and creativity while imposing an ethic of consumption, which serves capitalism.⁴ He raises issues that are pertinent to this thesis, including the need to take into account the

⁴ By "ethic of consumption" I refer to Zipes' assertion that popular culture, in particular, inserts the audience into capitalism as discussed in Chapter Four. He writes: "our society has cultivated reading and viewing habits that prey upon and exploit the desires and deeds of the young to make it appear that virtue is constituted by one's ability to buy and consume whatever one chooses, and that the more one consumes of product names, the more one is identified with the successful, omnipotent product. Such consumption . . . while seeming to be free, is actually determined by mass-marketing techniques and technologies that have a profound effect upon our culture" (11).

production of cultural products and the influence mass media have on (young) audiences; however, his analysis is ultimately unsatisfactory. His high-pitched concerns regarding the “the cultural homogenization of American children” positions young people as passive victims of the culture industries, giving rise to a “forceful legitimization of adult power and control” (Buckingham, “Young People” 4).

Zipes’ commentary can be distinguished from others employed in this thesis by his explicit concern with the child reader. Discussing children’s literature (and by implication their welfare) is an emotive area. Parents, educators, and religious groups each vie to promote values, morals and belief systems they assert as essential to the child’s well-being. What is lost in Zipes’ criticism is the fact that there is no ideologically-free position. By contrast, Peter Hollindale refuses “to argue for or against any single ideological structure in children’s books” (“Ideology” 27). Rather he contends that,

ideology is inevitable, untameable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children, and that it is so because of the multiplicity and diversity of both “book” and “child” and of the social world in which each of these seductive abstractions takes a plenitude of individual forms. Our priority in the world of children’s books should not be to promote ideology

but to understand it, and find ways of helping others to understand it, including the children themselves. (“Ideology” 27)

Hollindale indicates the complexity of the practice of reading by emphasising the heterogeneity of the readers themselves and the values expressed by any one book. Zipes concentrates principally on what Stuart Hall refers to as the “preferred” reading position, the first of three possible levels of decoding a text (“Encoding/Decoding” 134). This involves identifying the “tractable” (Hollindale, “Ideology” 27) dominant hegemony, otherwise regarded as surface ideology.

Zipes is so keen to expose this ideology that his analysis refuses any other reading position. However, surface ideology typically resonates with those already convinced – it preaches to the converted: “Where the ideology is explicit, it does not matter how morally unanswerable the substance is if it speaks persuasively only to those who are persuaded already, leaving others with their own divergent ideology intensified by resentful bemusement” (Hollindale, “Ideology” 35). Alternatively, David Buckingham recognises the diversity of possible readings, declaring that “while the text might ‘prefer’ or ‘invite’ a particular reading, and thus prevent or restrict others, it might also invite multiple readings” (13). The text is not endlessly ‘open’ to subjective

interpretation;⁵ rather reading draws on social constructions of making meaning, orienting the reader toward certain definitions. Readers, then, “make meanings, but they do so under conditions which are not of their choosing” (14).

Child readers are not ideologically innocent when reading a book; they bring with them their own (admittedly limited, but nevertheless apparent) experiences, opinions and desires. Yet, Zipes would argue that each of these personal attributes has been sullied by the mass media and its alignment with capitalism. This is a fair response; however, to scapegoat the media as progenitor of all social ills does not allow for the diversity that does nevertheless arise. All subjects are necessarily influenced by institutions (whether familial, religious, political, cultural); what Zipes seems to assert is that there is a space beyond ideology that he wants enlightened subjects to occupy – like himself.

Despite accusations of sexism, the many critical interpretations of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* suggest that texts are not necessarily ideologically oppressive. Interpretation cannot explain away a text, nor should it wish to. To discuss adequately how the supposedly “closed” and formulaic text permits alternative readings it is necessary to reposition the theoretical focus from

⁵ Subjective interpretation refers to the reader’s personal understanding of the text, which may be at a remove from the dominant reading.

Zipes' reifying analysis toward a commentary that recognises and prioritises the role of the reader in creating the text. Readers are not passive in the position they adopt towards characters or attitudes they bring to the reading experience, nor are they "couch potatoes passively receiving whatever is injected into them by the hypodermic needle of mass media" (Real xviii). Rather, a dialectic between text and reader occurs, allowing for cultural influences and individual biases to bear upon the interpretation.

Theorising Reading

A number of writers within heroic fantasy have chosen to contest the ideological boundaries common to the genre, rewriting according to their particular interests: Ursula Le Guin addresses issues such as gender and the good/evil dichotomy in her *Earthsea* series, for example; Stephen Donaldson revisits the genre emphasising the environmental and behavioural destruction wrought by war equally attributable to good and evil through his eponymous anti-hero, the leper Thomas Covenant; Marion Zimmer Bradley rewrites the legend of Arthur from a feminist perspective in *The Mists of Avalon* and fosters feminist sword and sorcery; and Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman focus the narrative of *Well of Darkness* (2000) from the *Sovereign Stone Trilogy* through evil protagonists rather than the usual socially-acceptable, if flawed, hero.

However, I want to address here the ways in which readers approach and make sense of those texts ostensibly operating within the dominant hegemony. In particular, how do female readers negotiate the limiting characterisations offered to them as gendered subjects in heroic fantasy? Interviewing female readers gives an added dimension to the overall theoretical discussion on the relevance of the heroic fantasy genre for both genders. Reader response situates interpretation within the historical context and offers ambiguity and diversity which theory may flatten out in an attempt to give closure and purchase on the ideas presented. An influential example of research into reader reception is Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1987). Radway writes productively about the complex and ambiguous relationship readers have with the Romance genre; female readers take up the text in dissatisfaction with their patriarchal society, yet their reading sustains the status quo by reinvesting them into the phallogentric social contract. Radway nevertheless observes the cultural practice of reading Romances as containing elements of power and agency; viewed from this perspective it is possible to articulate "the difference between the repressive imposition of ideology and oppositional practices that, though limited in their scope and effect, at least dispute or contest the control of ideological forms" (*Reading* 221-2).

Despite Radway's provocative and seminal analysis on reading popular culture, Ien Ang has criticised her for projecting an objective moralising stance.

Radway's "complicity" with the ideology she intends to critique is a difficulty confronting all critics. Consider, for example, Zipes' description of his interaction with young *Harry Potter* readers:

I did a story-telling session at the Marcy School in Minneapolis with fifth- and sixth-graders. At the end of the session I discussed the Harry Potter books with them and why they liked or disliked the books . . . When I criticized the books for being sexist, several girls rose to the defense of Rowling and argued that Hermione was a key figure in the books, and without her Harry would not be able to solve the mysteries. Yet after I explained my viewpoint, some agreed that Hermione was more an accessory than the major active protagonist. (185)

There is something smug and self-serving in Zipes' swaying of the young readers' point of view; surely arguing the *Harry Potter* stories are sexist is almost too easy when even the two privileged houses in the series, Gryffindor and Slytherin, are the houses begun by the male founders, and not the two female founders Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. By telling the young female readers that Hermione is secondary to Harry and women in general are not given powerful roles in the series, Zipes is in fact carrying out the very

hegemonic control that he wishes to subvert. Zipes, as an adult, male academic, imposes his reading and interpretation of the text on to the young female readers, thereby showing them that they are wrong – they have not read the text “properly” and should accept his interpretation. Not only has Zipes disempowered these readers by suggesting that there is a single meaning (his) to be taken from the text, he re-enacts the male domination he so despises in the stories.

Reading is a process in which the reader selects and elides information as suits the reader’s particular culture or social position and awareness of “decoding” conventions; to deny the validity of these readers’ interpretations of Hermione as a powerful witch who contributes much to the denouement of the mysteries and adventures the three children encounter, is to censure oppositional readings of the dominant hegemony. David Buckingham comments on this “bullying” imposition of meaning within the education system:

The emphasis on “demystification” has tended to result in a propagandist style of teaching, in which “politically correct” analyses are simply imposed on students. This approach is all too often perceived by working-class students as an attack on what they regard as their “own” cultures – as yet another instance of

middle-class teachers seeking to command assent to their views of the world, while simultaneously claiming to be acting on the students' behalf. ("Re-reading" 214-5)

Buckingham cautions against both the text-centred approach where all meaning is located as inherent and stable in the text and the "celebratory" cultural studies approach in which the smallest of subversions are taken as unequivocal consumerist empowerment.

Buckingham claims that power resides in the relationship between the text and the reader or audience. Just as the reader must concede to and accept social power relations for them to take effect, so too must the reader acquiesce to the text's dominant reading for that particular interpretation to exert power. Consequently, the "resisting reader", as Judith Fetterley's phrase denotes, redirects the emphasis, skewing the ideological horizon of the text. Students do not require "ideological salvation" (Buckingham, "Re-reading" 215) but the opportunity to explore and generate potential meanings of their own. Radway likewise argues for recognition of the reader's individual production of the text:

Commodities like mass-produced literary texts are selected, purchased, constructed, and used by real people with previously existing needs, desires, intentions, and interpretive strategies. By

reinstating those active individuals and their creative, constructive activities at the heart of our interpretive enterprise, we avoid blinding ourselves to the fact that the essentially human practice of making meaning goes on even in a world increasingly dominated by things and by consumption. (Reading 222)

In the focus group interview with 14-16 year olds, Claire professed that, “Hermione reminds me of me a lot. She’s always the hard worker and always doing work, worrying, and that’s me a bit” (FGI3). Intrigued by her identification with the character Hermione, I interviewed Claire again in an individual interview. I wondered if Claire could be subconsciously accepting that, as a female, she is inferior to the male hero, by aligning her own personality with that of Hermione? Cultural studies regards the cultural text as a site through which the subject can contest and negotiate the dominant hegemony; without wishing to generalise her comments as representative of all young female readers, I will consider how Claire confronts a potentially proscriptive and phallogocentric text. The personal interview occurred two years after Claire’s comment quoted above and so the analysis opens up with a commentary on her changing responses to Rowling’s characters.

Claire Reads *Harry Potter*

In the 2004 interview Claire suggests that upon reflection she would claim Ron Weasley as her favourite character from the *Harry Potter* series and not Hermione. The identification remains with Hermione, but she currently enjoys Ron's humour. Claire's preference for Ron's character does not reflect cross-identification, however. Rather, she currently values his comic qualities and his reflection of her male peers: "Ron's so likeable. He makes mistakes. He's a real lad and I can see that in my peers because most of the boys my age are just lads." What Claire likes about Ron is his generous portrayal of her friends. She does not (at least consciously) wish to enact his funny personality. To this extent, her "relationship" with the characters Ron and Hermione are different. Claire identifies with Hermione because she reflects her own qualities (but not all as Claire was at pains to point out during the interview), but with Ron it is more a matter of appreciation of his character.

Claire was sure that her identification with characters occurred along gender lines. She felt this to be a likely alignment: "I can relate more to a female character. Actually, I think in some ways that's the way it should be . . . I think it is natural that I can relate to the female character because I am female."

Claire was impressed by her recent viewing of the New Zealand film, *In My Father's Den* (2004). The young female character, Celia, contributed significantly to Claire's enjoyment of the film, allowing her to enter the narrative through a

character who directly reflected her age and socio-cultural context. Claire contrasted this identification with Keisha Castle-Hughes' portrayal of Paikea in *Whale Rider* (2003). Because she did not feel the same affinity for Paikea struggling for her rightful place in her small male-dominated community Claire did not enjoy the film as much. Claire explains:

I've just seen the movie *In My Father's Den* and I've also recently seen *Whale Rider*, and the thing that really sparked me about *In My Father's Den* was the female role that I could really relate to. That just makes the story so much more personal, if you can relate to the character and see your own characteristics or those of people around you. But with *Whale Rider* I couldn't, with Keisha Castle-Hughes.

So while gender is important, not all female characters are amenable to identification; there needs to be a connection with the character that implies synchronicity perhaps of situation, emotions, or experience.

Claire's own prioritisation of gender does not preclude her from enjoying texts with a predominantly male cast; one of her favourite books is William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), which has no female characters at all. Yet her favourite characters are all female: Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone with the Wind*

(1936), Cathy from *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Anne from *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). Claire describes these characters as strong and authentic reflections of human character; of Scarlett O'Hara she asserts, "Of all the books I've read, she's my favourite female character. Because she knows her own mind, she's strong. She's not necessarily perfect, but she's just a character that you can believe, that you can believe exists."

It is this desire for her characters to be realistic that makes Claire reluctant to validate the characterisation of Harry Potter.

Harry Potter, I don't know, there's something . . . I never really . . . this sounds strange but it's as though he's not really a real person. Whereas Ron and Hermione you can, yeah . . . Harry Potter's just, he really is to me just an imaginary person. He really is a fictitious person whereas Hermione and Ron sometimes you can see them in the playground around you.

Claire is hesitant in her analysis of the hero's character. As the quotation indicates, she pauses and thinks about what she wants to say. Yet when it comes to discussing Ron and Hermione she is more confident and forthright in her appraisal. Effectively, Claire dismisses the protagonist of the series; for her, Harry lacks substance and character. I realise that Claire's dismissive approach

toward Harry Potter is at odds with the many younger readers who write to Harry or enact his character during playtime, but for this particular female reader it would seem that the potential patriarchal hegemony carried by this character is denied in favour of characters that register as more realistic.⁶ Harry Potter, then, is almost side-lined in Claire's reading as a mere cipher, a weak character who fails to come up to the solid evocative personalities of Ron and Hermione.⁷

Claire values the intensity of Harry and Ron's friendship, but feels that their co-dependence is ultimately unhelpful; "I think Ron should be getting more independent. Because he's pretty stuck on Harry." The boys lack the maturity which Claire perceives is developing in Hermione. Claire views this representation of uneven development between the genders as reflecting her own social group. It would seem that the *Harry Potter* books, despite accusations of not dealing with problematic issues for young people – drugs,

⁶ Contrast Claire's rebuttal of Harry Potter's character with the inspirational power Sharon Black declares her daughter attributes to the hero. Black writes: "Since she was old enough to swing a plastic lightsaber, Sandra has lived with fantasy and loved its heroes. At the age of three she saw Star Wars and announced that she was going to be Luke Skywalker. When her brother patiently pointed out that she could not be Luke because Luke was a boy, Sandra declared that at least she was going to be a Jedi knight; she was going to change the world" (Black 241).

⁷ In the first two films the presence of the supposedly secondary characters Ron and Hermione overwhelm that of the hero, with the strong personalities of actors Rupert Grint and Emma Watson overshadowing the less charismatic Daniel Radcliffe.

sex, puberty – do convey issues and relations that coincide with reader experience. Claire comments numerous times that she witnesses amongst her peers or sees in herself the close male friendships between Harry and Ron, or females enjoying platonic relations with boys, or Hermione’s Cinderella-like transformation at the ball. But my main intention from the interview was to pursue her assessment of her identification with Hermione and to ask whether, two years later, she still felt that Hermione was an important character.

Early in the interview Claire said that it was important to her to see elements of her own personality reflected in Hermione’s character when reading the *Harry Potter* series. Primarily she enjoyed reading about an academic character: “she is a very academic girl and I’m quite academic.” Even so, she later sought to limit any reading of her own personality as being too close to that of the character: “[Hermione’s] a good character, but any influence she has on me is not something conscious. But I can still see the similarities between her and me. So there are some similarities but there are some that are not.” Claire also described Hermione as stubborn, loyal and a perfectionist, but defended herself against these traits.

Of particular interest to Claire was Hermione’s development outside the academic sphere. In response to my suggestion that Hermione may become like Professor McGonagall in time she stated, “I’d like to see [Hermione] as more than just a strict feminist, but to have her finger in all pies; to be beautiful,

to be clever, to be smart, because I think she deserves that.” Claire negatively equates McGonagall’s authoritarian manner with feminism and wants something “more” for Hermione than the stereotype of spinster. There is a sense from Claire’s comment that being a feminist means the individual cannot pursue beauty and romance, which she desires for Hermione – and herself:

With Hermione it’s nice to see her development as a young lady, because I can understand. In the books she’s referred to as having wild hair and not being very pretty and then in the second to last book, *The Goblet of Fire*, at one of the balls she does something to her hair and makes her teeth smaller and she is really transformed as a beauty. I’m enjoying seeing that because it’s a little bit like myself because I can surprise people. I’m not always seen as a pretty girl so it’s nice to see that. And she’s not always being stereotyped as an academic sort of girl. No one notices but she can become the pretty girl too.

What Claire wishes for Hermione reflects her own concerns. Because Claire prefers, “romantic knights in shining armour kind of thing”, she insists Minerva McGonagall is not an attractive subject position for Hermione, as the Transformation teacher is portrayed as “a rather severe-looking woman” who

wears her hair “drawn into a tight bun” (*HPPS* 13). McGonagall is single (as are all the teachers) and the implication Claire takes from her description is that she will remain that way.

Claire also feels that Hermione should commit herself to a more worthwhile political issue. For Claire, Hermione’s determination to emancipate the house-elves is “comic relief,” as indicated by the unfortunate acronym S.P.E.W. According to Claire, Hermione’s activism arises from her stubbornness and, in turn, is the reason for her failure:

She just needs to learn . . . that sometimes it might be a losing battle. She’s wasting her energy on something that’s not really a problem at all. Which I think personally is sometimes a problem with activists. I think sometimes you need to realise that some things are not going to change. . . . But you can’t always change people’s attitudes towards things.

Claire draws an analogy between Hermione’s activism and activism in the real world. She seems to promote political apathy; she refers favourably to an article that claimed, “youth today don’t really stand up for what they believe in.” Nevertheless, Claire also suggests that a more appropriate cause for Hermione would be muggle-wizard relations. So what Claire wants for

Hermione is to be successful in her activism, for it to be a more noble and amenable cause, and for the character to be less dogmatic in her attempts to change perspectives, because, as Claire has indicated, it is very difficult to do.

Hermione's unreflective determination to free the house-elves is not a failure, Claire thought, but the character's opportunity to learn and develop. Hermione has also conveyed her maturity by manipulating Dolores Umbridge through stereotypical behaviour. Claire claims that Hermione shows her intelligence by using tears to distract Umbridge from harming Harry; Hermione is smart to enact the stereotype and Umbridge is stupid to be so duped. Hermione has therefore moved beyond the constraints of "girlish" behaviour, enabling her to use it to conscious effect and advantage.

When asked if she thought the *Harry Potter* stories sexist, Claire suggested that such characterisation is part of the genre's formula: "I see it as a stereotype, because it does seem with fantasy novels that the male is always the main character. But it was a female writer who wrote it. So I see it as a stereotype that you can't help but follow rather than [Rowling's] writing being sexist." Claire recognises the patriarchal bias but attributes it to necessary narrative patterns rather than reading it as the author's own perspective. Her comments express a tension between accepting and disputing the ideology, which is not unreasonable given that Ursula Le Guin only recognised in retrospect that she had written her influential *Earthsea* trilogy from a masculine position; Le Guin

observes that over the years between the publications of *The Farthest Shore* (1972) and *Tehanu* (1990),

feminism was reborn and I became 17 years older, and learned a good deal. One of the things I learned was how to write as a woman, not as an honorary, or imitation, man.

From a woman's point of view, *Earthsea* looked quite different that it did from a man's point of view. All I had to do was describe it from the point of view of the powerless, the disempowered – women, children, a wizard who has spent his gift and must live as an “ordinary” man. (“Interview”)

Hollindale claims that Le Guin has “led her readers a merry dance” (“The Last Dragon” 183), with the original trilogy (*A Wizard of Earthsea* [1968], *The Tombs of Atuan* [1971] and *The Farthest Shore* [1972]) effectively rewritten by subsequent instalments – novels *Tehanu* (1990) and *The Other Wind* (2002) and a collection of short stories entitled *Tales From Earthsea* (2002) – so that the first two books in fact become “prequels” to the latter three (183). He perceives the major thematic changes across the texts as including a paradigm shift from balance to that of change, the introduction of feminist perspectives, and a “movement from supernatural to secular and domestic power” (183).

Le Guin's progressive "rewriting" of her fantasy classic through ensuing texts, demonstrates how an unconscious submission to a dominant ideology can be subsequently acknowledged, reviewed and contested; as the author notes, new discourses in the 1960s and 1970s, such as feminism, provided a meaningful theoretical framework through which to comprehend and articulate an alternative perspective – with profound political, economic and social effects. Power, therefore, does not reside in the text itself, but is found in the relationship between the reader and the text. To be a reader or consumer of popular culture, of heroic fantasy, is to engage in a social practice; reading is not nearly so isolated an activity as it may first appear.

My own interpretation of Hermione argues that Rowling presents this character as an example of how girls can critique dominant ideologies such as patriarchy; Hermione's character is indeed a caricature of "emphasised femininity" at the beginning of the series, but with each ensuing instalment she displays as much development as the eponymous hero.

Hermione's Guide to Negotiating Patriarchy

At the outset of the series Hermione is bossy, intelligent and fiercely rule-abiding. She is also very good at spell-work, concerned about the welfare of others and has a tendency to be overly emotional. She contributes essential

information, ideas and acts in each of their annual adventures, although, like Ron, she never eclipses Harry's singular heroism. Further, Hermione character is marked by contradictory behaviours; she cries easily and "loses her head in a crisis" yet also displays remarkable composure and logical abilities, such as when she solves the potion puzzle set by Severus Snape to protect the philosopher's stone. But as the narrative progresses, Hermione's personality matures, most prominently in terms of her emotional expression, her independence from Harry and Ron, and her capacity to recognise ideological bias in wizarding cultural practice.

Hermione's love interests indicate her developing emotional maturity. From her "childish" infatuation with the glamorous fraudster Gilderoy Lockhart Hermione becomes "successful" in love at age fourteen, dating the very popular Quidditch player Victor Krum. However, their relationship is unappreciated by Krum's many fans, especially when he takes Hermione to the Yule Ball. This is her "Cinderella" moment, causing a stir with her physical transformation; Hermione receives "looks of deepest loathing" (360) from Krum's female fan club, indicating the lack of female solidarity when it comes to finding a mate within patriarchy – as the story of Cinderella reveals, it is a competitive process.⁸

⁸ The analogy with Cinderella is made explicit in the film *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005) when Hermione slumps on the steps at the close of the ball, pulling off a single slipper.

Hermione's emotional awareness is indicated when she acts as an "agony aunt" for Harry; however, her desire to emancipate the house-elves suggests that her ability to understand others is at times limited. With good intentions Hermione bullies and demands that her friends subscribe to her Society for the Protection of Elvish Welfare but her means are devious and therefore her scheme fails; the hats she plants around the common room insult the house-elves, only appreciated by the clothing fetishist Dobby, as they symbolise his freedom. Her gifts of knitted hats are "poisoned" gifts in that they work against the desires of the intended recipient, who in this context insist they are not enslaved. By comparison, Harry's emancipation of Dobby is an intuitive and spontaneous reward for the house-elf's bravery. Yet Hermione can be intuitive too. When Harry wants to rush to Sirius Black's rescue, Hermione correctly divines that Voldemort is manipulating Harry through his dreams. She also instinctively knows that her cat Crookshanks is trustworthy, despite Ron's retraction of friendship when it appears that the cat is trying to eat his pet rat, Scabbers.

Hermione's independence (or interdependence as Dresang claims) from Harry and Ron is often demonstrated during the series. She has different interests from the boys; she pursues her own education programme, and reading is her favourite pastime, not Quidditch. Although Hermione remains loyal to her friends, she is not bound by their approval. She adamantly trusts

Crookshanks, keeps secrets from Harry and Ron (the time-turner, that Professor Lupin is a werewolf) and is determined to make S.P.E.W. a success despite their reluctance to support the cause. Hermione differentiates herself from Ron and Harry - she even questions the competitive masculine ethic to which her friends subscribe: “‘That’s the thing with Quidditch,’ said Hermione absentmindedly . . . ‘it creates all this bad feeling and tension between the houses’” (*HPOP* 507).

Hermione’s frustration at the elves refusal to be freed is at least countenanced by her gradual appreciation of ideological bias. When she learns of the unpaid and often unappreciated work the house elves do, Hermione becomes scathing of the book she has previously enjoyed reading and quoting: she explains to Harry and Ron that “Hogwarts: A History” is “‘not entirely reliable. ‘A *Revised* History of Hogwarts’ would be a more accurate title. Or ‘A Highly Biased and *Selective* History of Hogwarts, Which Glosses Over the Nastier Aspects of the School’” (*HPGF* 209-10, italics in original). Hermione realises that the text elides sections of society and so condones and naturalises inequality. This new awareness is essential to her social activism, but needs to be tempered by an understanding of the complexity of each subject’s individual relationship toward the dominant hegemony.

Like Claire, I read Hermione’s getting the better of the vicious teacher Dolores Umbridge as a significant moment; a point at which this female

character displays a flexible and thorough understanding of her gender's stereotyping and the power she can in turn affect by knowingly deploying it. When Umbridge threatens to place the terrible cruciatus curse on Harry Hermione ironically turns to stereotypical "girly" behaviour in order to save him. As Hermione begins to sob the reader can be forgiven for assuming she is once more "losing her head on a crisis", but Harry notices there are no tears; Hermione is manipulating Umbridge by telling the teacher what she expects to hear. But her good idea to distract Umbridge leads them towards danger in the Forbidden Forest. Umbridge antagonises the centaurs they meet and is taken away, and then Hermione, too, insults the creatures. She has used them to get rid of Umbridge, assuming that the centaurs would then allow Harry and herself to leave because they do not harm "foals." As the centaurs argue over Harry and Hermione's fate, Hagrid's giant half-brother appears and inadvertently saves them by chasing away the centaurs. It is disappointing that Hermione's escape relies upon their being saved; it hints at a supposedly feminine response to danger. But this response conveniently forgets that Harry, too, sometimes needs help from unexpected quarters when facing life and death situations. A prominent theme of heroic fantasy, after all, is the socialisation of the characters, working together so as to secure a safe and fulfilling collective.

Hermione is therefore not the two-dimensional character some critics claim. Indeed, I read her character as illustrating for the reader the damaging

ideologies at play in the wizarding world, of which Harry, as bearer of hegemonic patriarchy, is less politically aware. Hermione still has a lot of maturation to go, yet she clearly has her own goals, motivations and objectives outside the influence of Harry and Ron. Dresang advocates the postmodern feminist perspective “as an opportunity to observe whether or how females may find strength and agency despite their marginalization” (218) and from this position Hermione can be viewed as less subservient and more nuanced than some critics would allow.

Empowerment or False Agency?

If I reflect upon my own engagement with characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* identification is not constrained by gender. The characters that appeal to me most do so by their attitudes and behaviours towards other characters and the trials they face, not simply because of a coincidence of gender. I identify most with Frodo and Dumbledore, not because I am like them, but because they show values and attitudes I would like to express myself.

I also like Rita Skeeter, Gilderoy Lockhart and Gollum – but the type of engagement is different. I enjoy Rowling’s two characters for their parodic qualities. They make me laugh and grimace equally, while Gollum’s character

is tragic; not only can Frodo see his own potential demise reflected in Gollum's sad fate, so can the reader. I do not feel drawn toward Galadriel, Arwen or Éowyn. Nor do I identify with Hermione, although I feel that I understand her character. That is, I can appreciate Rowling's development of Hermione but am not drawn closely to her. In fact, it is probably due to recognition of some aspects of myself in Hermione that I resist her character. I, too, went through a "bluestocking" phase. Each week I would address assembly at school entreating other students to join S.A.F.E. (Save Animals From Experiments) and protest injustices against animals. And like Hermione with her organisation S.P.E.W. I had difficulty enticing recruits. Truth be told, I fared worse than Hermione; I didn't gain any support, not even from my friends!

So perhaps I contradict myself; I *do* identify with Hermione, but it is a reluctant and embarrassed recognition rather than a positive acceptance of a past self. This brief personal reflection suggests that identification with fictional characters is indeed a "fluid, shifting, paradoxical" activity (Horrocks *Male Myths* 49). Had I first read Rowling's series when I was twelve and not mid-30s I can imagine I would respond more enthusiastically to her character. Forging a relationship with textual figures is not simplistically performed along gender lines; rather, as a practice it is continually modified.

Roger Horrocks' view is that all readers take from the text what suits and "fits" at that specific moment; the reader will accept and reject not only between

characters of both genders, but of particular elements of any one character. Eleven year old Nicholas Chapman writes, for example, “My favourite character would have to be Hermione because she is really smart and pays attention in class (in other words a bit like me!)” (Haddad 80). Nicholas enjoys seeing his own attributes reflected in a character, even if that character is not the same gender. But Ling Yan Pang, also eleven, views her ethnicity as a barrier to her portraying Hermione in the film adaptation. “I really want to be in [the film], as Hermione. But ’cos I’m Asian (black frizz hair), I am totally wrong for the part (as my friends say) *sigh*” (43). Ling then suggests that she may be suitable for one of the lesser parts – Cho Chang or Parvati. Again she foresees a problem – she wears glasses. Identifying obstacles to her wish to act in the film is not quite the same as refusing to identify with the literary character on this basis but Ling’s consciousness of her “otherness” does point to the different levels at which readers engage, or not, with the characters.

Although I do believe that readings can be plural and the reader’s experience and personality will impact upon the particular reference or interpretation taken from the story, I am not as optimistic about cross-identification as Horrocks. He believes that cross-gender identification is “rife”, that it “is part of the theatre of gender and sexuality” (*Male Myths*, 50). Cross-gender identification, he continues, “gives us a huge pay-off of excitement and pleasure, but also leads us into deep, dangerous and painful waters: as we

search for the other, we search for ourselves” (50). Horrocks alludes to the Lacanian psychoanalytic view that the “wholeness” of the subject remains elusive, giving rise to a powerful psychological impulse or drive. The gendered subject therefore “searches” for the other hoping to achieve unity and coherence.

I suggest, however, that female identification with male characters *is* rife, but male identification with female characters is less frequent on the basis that the male is viewed within patriarchy as the norm and therefore is generally perceived as a positive subject position to desire. Because they already “hold” a position of power, males are therefore less likely to submit or admit to an identification with a female character, unless that character is actually occupying a masculine role. Horrocks himself observes that each of the masculinities available to men preserves the essential element of differentiation from the feminine: “All shades of masculine identity, ranging from macho to the effeminate, have this in common: they convey the message: ‘I am not a woman’” (*Masculinity* 33).

Eccleshare, too, wonders at the level and form of identification made with Harry Potter by boy and girl readers. That the series is popular with both sexes is indisputable, but “while boy readers may identify with Harry’s heroism, girl readers, like the girls at Hogwarts, respond to him both as a motherless boy in need of love and as a romantic hero with special powers” (87). Similarly,

Gerard Jones observes that readers do not necessarily take a text literally and claims that young readers and consumers of popular culture are capable of “sifting” through a text for information and emotional affects that are of particular importance to them at that point in time. He argues:

female readers of Harry Potter engage more passionately with the fantasy, and they identify with Harry himself . . . Girls show a greater flexibility and complexity in their fantasizing than boys. Young girls are far more accustomed than boys to viewing a fantasy character simultaneously as a subject of identification and as an object seen from the outside. A boy might be Indiana Jones, but a girl can identify with both Indiana Jones and the female sidekick in love with him. That’s an imaginative strength, but it’s also, of course, an effect of the self-diminishment that girls have traditionally been taught from early childhood. If a woman is expected to glory not in her own accomplishments but in her husband’s, then girlhood requires learning to admire the accomplishment of heroes without openly wanting to be them.

(83-84)

Jones indicates the potential for hegemonic influence despite the (female) reader's initial resistance to patriarchal diminishment. Admiration for the role collides with social convention and rather than seeing herself as Harry Potter, Jones implies, the female reader undermines this powerful image by equally directing her attention towards the character as a love interest; that is, female readers tend to reinforce patriarchy by wanting to have the hero, not be him.

This assertion appears to contradict the current appeal of "girl power"; however, a glance at fan fiction on the internet corroborates Jones' assertion that female readers of *Harry Potter* tend to favour romantic readings, as demonstrated in their own narratives. harrypotterfanfiction.com categorises the stories posted on its website as either action/adventure, angst, general, humour, romance or "songfic"; of the 9029 postings 4261 were classed as romance and only 921 as action/adventure.⁹ Both males and females contribute stories to the website, although "Edward," assuming the author is male, is one of the few males writing romance.¹⁰ The story "Quidditch Goodies," demonstrates 14-year-old author Janine's ambivalent attitude toward her gendered subjectivity, expressing tension and uncertainty through her narrative.

⁹ As at 22 December 2004.

¹⁰ The plot of Edward's "A New Life" is summarised: "After the war Harry has disappeared, Hermione and Ron have gotten together and Draco has a lot on his mind."

Janine writes herself as the hero(ine) called Charlie, who is a better Quidditch player and magician than both Harry Potter and Victor Krum. Charlie is a 16-year-old boy who is a popular American Quidditch player and son of the American Minister of Magic. However, “He is a She.” Because she is a “Matamorphmagist” she is able to hide her gender, the narrator rationalising this deceit due to social and cultural oppression: “if you’re a boy a boy play a get mad ‘spect and you don’t get much ‘spect when you’re a girl play.” The young author emphasises her character’s superior skills, yet ultimately cannot imagine an alternative closure to her story without resorting to a romantic trope. Malfoy has to save “Charlie” when a hungry squid attacks her: “Charlie fainted. Malfoy grabbed her and her broom. They flew to shore. Charlie in Malfoy’s arms.”

Despite possessing singular abilities, in the end Charlie is exposed as a girl; her gender combined with the well-worn narrative structure of fairy tales requires her to submit and finally “give ‘spect” to the real “boy playas”. This story is intriguing for its mixed gender messages and closure upon submission of the female gender. Janine seems divided between wanting the social authority and respect given masculinity and desiring the culturally entrenched views of femininity wrapped up in romantic notions of security and absolved of responsibility when positioned within the heterosexual relationship. In this instance, the lines of identification for girls are revealed as complex. But

equally, Charlie's adventures can be read as a piece of fan fiction in which one female author plays with identity, with the author (Janine) writing the female protagonist (Janine) as a girl disguised as a boy (Charlie), thereby revealing the lengths femininity needs to go to (assuming masculinity) to gain social and therefore personal respect.

However, what I want to foreground here is that there are a diversity of responses to a text; we can despair that Janine resorts to conservative views of gender, or we can think that if she is aware of the gender bias, she might become more critical and subversive as she matures – that she may effect agency rather than submit to cultural discipline.

In these stories the height of feminine achievement is romantic union with the hero. It seems fair to suggest that boys will portray in story form the aggressive hyper-masculinity represented in the various media oriented toward male consumers – computer games, movies, literature and toys.¹¹ To this extent I am suggesting that young people do respond to the stereotypes popular culture promotes; the boys enact the aggressive images they associate with masculinity and the girls cultivate a competitive form of love. Christine Schoefer asks with reference to Hogwarts, “do we feel comforted by a world in which conventional roles are firmly in place?”; I propose that we do. The

¹¹ For example, Julian Sefton-Green writes of the importance attached to stories written by young males, which valorise violence and competition. See “Untidy, Depressing and Violent: A Boy's Own Story” (1993).

“truth” of these roles provides a satisfying fantasy; the dovetailing of stereotypical behaviour patterns is part of the appeal of the genre, albeit subject to negotiation. It is not unreasonable for fantasies of clear-cut gender roles to assume cultural significance at a time when they are increasingly blurred and contested.

Conclusion

Rather than imposing textual meaning upon readers, it is more productive and empowering to foster personal reflections on the process of reading or consuming heroic fantasy. Where polemicists ironically constrain interpretation toward ideological closure, in conversation, letters and stories many readers express more nuanced interpretations. Young consumers are also more aware of damaging ideologies than some critics will concede; Eliza T. Dresang provides an example of young readers identifying and commenting upon the sexism in the *Harry Potter* stories. She records that a two-week discussion began on the Un-Official Harry Potter Fan Club website when a 13 year old female asked, “Do you ever get the feeling that the HP books are SEXIST?” (236). Dresang notes that this original posting questioned the number and role of male characters:

The story's very enjoyable with all the guy characters, but I personally don't like the way the female characters are written. And plus, wouldn't it still have been acceptable if Voldemort had been a woman? A cold, murderous woman that is able to lead evil men. Where's the harm in having a commanding female presence? Oh yes, and the Triwizard Tournament was also something. ¾ of them were guys and Fleur was given last place. Any comments on that? (qtd. in Dresang 236)

Discussion oscillated between those who agreed with the above sentiments, that the female characters are denied central roles, and those who argued that Hermione and Professor McGonagall are both important characters, with Hermione revealing the strength of her convictions regarding the slavery of the house elves and generally contributing significantly to each of the adventures.

One contributor, "Lioness", asserted that the sexism these readers had identified was actually a reflection of our own, real world, anomalies: "The ministry is such a male-dominated thing BECAUSE OUR MINISTRIES ARE. There are very few witches in leading positions anywhere BECAUSE IT'S THE SAME WITH US. It's part of the ironic presentation of the Muggle world in its parallel, the Wizarding world" (qtd. in Dresang 237, capitalisation in original). Lioness' observation hints at one of the difficulties confronting authors

concerned about the ideology they convey, especially to younger readers. Is it preferable to express an ideal social and political climate as understood by the individual author or to reveal the contemporary context warts and all as a means to inspiring reflection? According to Peter Hollindale:

It is difficult in contemporary Britain to write an anti-sexist, anti-racist or anti-classist novel without revealing that these are still objectives, principles and ideals rather than realities of predictable everyday behaviour. If you present as natural and commonplace the behaviour you would like to be natural and commonplace, you risk muting the social effectiveness of your story. If you dramatize the social tensions, you risk a superficial ideological stridency.

("Ideology" 28)

Because of the numerous potential readings to be taken from a text it is possible to defuse or ignore what many commentators argue is the genre's conservatism and find expressed, instead, a more liberating and personally satisfying set of beliefs and principles. To maintain popularity a genre must appeal to the widest possible audience and to do so the text must be open to multiple readings. This has been discussed in chapters three and four above through the

theme of pastoralism and the appropriation of this non-consumerist stance by capitalism.

It has become fashionable to express anti-materialist sentiment, which the genre accommodates at the same time as providing a material outlet for that desire through consumables. The genre, in its more progressive forms, has also accommodated the issue of gender. Tolkien presents varying forms of masculinity, which I suggest consolidate into a popular form of heroism as presented by the character Harry Potter. But, as I have argued in this chapter, the place of women in the masculine narrative of heroic fantasy has become a contentious issue. Just as the ideal of masculinity has been developed or “discussed” through heroic fantasy, so too has femininity: the development of the character Hermione illustrates just how difficult and complex being a girl in a phallogentric world can be. Although Hermione’s role in relation to Harry’s adventures may be diminishing, she is shown to have her own views and life away from the hero. Unlike Ron, who is only ever known through his relationship with Harry, Hermione is “interdependent” of her two friends and shows clear signs that “she has her own quest to follow” (Dresang 224).

The adventure that these characters undertake, then, is the opportunity for them to achieve the gender they are destined to attain; the action implies what each gender can and cannot do. Given their roles in the adventures it would seem that women can affect the same agency as men, but is this realised at the

close of the narrative, bearing in mind the powerful ideological effect of the end of the story? Both masculinity and femininity are domesticated at the close of Tolkien's narrative; their adventures lead to the hearth. But where masculinity holds the promise of kingship, power and autonomy, femininity remains in thrall to masculinity: in the film Arwen may have undertaken the very important and risky role of protecting the Ringbearer as she bore him to the safety of Rivendell while dramatically chased by nine ring-wraiths, but her destiny is to be a mother. Rosie Cotton and Éowyn follow this template, each mute and smiling alongside their husbands at the close of the story.¹² Connell states that "the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage" (186), and the "coupling" of characters at the close of *The Lord of the Rings* and the conjectured match between Hermione and Ron in *Harry Potter* support this hypothesis.

But the heroic fantasy not only maps out gender; nationalism is also a prominent theme through which cultural identity is achieved; with the nation being the particular form of collective identity enabled under modernity it is not unreasonable that the heroic fantasy, in its desire to envisage the contented

¹² New Zealand actress Sarah McLeod, who plays Rosie Cotton, recounts a comment from "Arwen": "I was standing next to Liv Tyler, and she gave me a look and a smile, and said, 'At least we both get our men'" (qtd. in Catherall A4). Tyler implies that through their characters' domestication they are both "winners".

individual, provides its hero with a national identity. Tolkien wrote his epic fantasy as compensation for the loss of Anglo-Saxon legends, which in his view dates back to the Norman Conquest in 1066. *The Lord of the Rings*, then, is an English myth, written to tap into specifically local language and culture. To this extent the story is nationalistic. But further inscribed in his narrative is the ideological viewpoint that each people belong to their own country; against the prevailing experience of ethnic diversity within the nation-state Tolkien fantasises of an intimate community where the lack of difference “reflects back to the subject a relatively stable and relatively limited sense of who he or she is, one to which few alternatives can be imagined” (Easthope, *Englishness* 55). By contrast, Rowling promotes a collective tolerant of ethnic and social diversity. The heroic fantasy’s various expressions of nationalism will therefore be the focus of the following chapter, while chapter eight will consider the paradox of New Zealand – a marginal outpost of the former British Empire – selling itself to the world as Middle-earth.

Chapter Seven

Narrating the Nation through Heroic Fantasy

This chapter is concerned with the political structures expressed in the heroic fantasy genre. In particular, I ask what form the governing structures take at the close of the narrative, given that this is the “progress” that the hero and his friends have battled for. Is there a consensus amongst heroic fantasy authors as to what shape the political sphere should take, a pattern across the genre favouring certain political forms? I propose that the heroic fantasy, as a literary hybrid of the epic and novel, highlights the nation as problematic, engaging with this political form in order to demonstrate the author’s views.

To enter this debate, I begin with a brief discussion of the epic’s affiliation with nation-building and the novel’s association with the nation-state. Bakhtin observes that the epic is the literary precursor to the novel and extrapolating from this position Timothy Brennan advances that the epic functions to promote nationalism while the novel endorses the nation-state. It follows that as literary descendent of the epic the heroic fantasy reflects on nationalism, in both form and content; when closer to the epic (*The Lord of the Rings*) it

advocates the nation as *natio* arising out of birthright, but when structurally aligned with the novel (*Harry Potter*) it promotes the nation-state where active citizenship, not patrilineage, serves as the basis for unity. Further, any patterns relating to the political sphere presented are linked with the dominant mode of production, suggesting that certain economies require commensurate political governance. Therefore, the paradigm shift from pastoralism to modernity requires a unified and coherent political system; whether this is the nation or nation-state forms the crux of the debate for heroic fantasy.

This introductory material is followed by textual analyses of the two primary texts to investigate in what ways these narratives fulfil the prescription Bakhtin offers. Further, I consider the political systems the heroic fantasy genre uses to stage arguments regarding collective identities. *The Lord of the Rings* endorses monoculturalism, but this outcome is not essential to the genre, with *Harry Potter* promoting multiculturalism. Despite the presumed constraints applied by the genre, there is flexibility concerning the political and organising structures given ideological force at the close of the heroic fantasy. The final section of this chapter therefore looks at New Zealand author Dale Elvy's *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy*. This narrative envisages a bicultural nation, which, I suggest, reflects on the colonisation of New Zealand. That Elvy proposes indigenous leadership suggests a politically progressive story, but I argue that this initial assumption is not necessarily borne out in the reading. This textual

discussion of nationalism and heroic fantasy is followed by an investigation into the commercial and social deployment of the text, focusing on Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* to boost the New Zealand economy.

But before looking into the political and commercial functions of the heroic fantasy, it is necessary to substantiate the terms "nation" and "nation-state". "Nation" refers to an area of land which is populated by people who share heritage, language and descent. These people cohere by virtue of their common history and association with a particular tract of land. By contrast, the "nation-state" refers to "political apparatuses, distinct from both ruler and ruled, with supreme jurisdiction over a demarcated territorial area, backed by a claim to a monopoly of coercive power, and enjoying legitimacy as a result of a minimum level of support or loyalty from their citizens" (Held 45).

The key features of the nation-state include a political system imposed over a fixed geographic area, which is distinct from both the citizens and those in power. That is, the mode of politics is prioritised over any cultural or ethnic differences between groups within the nation-state. A "basic fault line" exists within the nation-state (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 157), in which tensions develop between the motivations behind the nation and the state: "Where the political borders of the state and the cultural boundaries of the nation do not coincide, as is the case with the vast majority of so-called nation-states, friction develops

between the principles of territorial integrity and national self-determination” (157). The nation-state attempts to amalgamate the potentially diverse cultures within a geographic area under a single political umbrella, and I suggest that the heroic fantasy engages with the issue of whether this is not only possible, but desirable.

The Political Form of Heroic fantasy

Michael Billig has described the various stories, songs, rituals, flags and symbols utilised, performed and participated in by members of a national collective as “banal nationalism”.¹ They are “banal” because they are everyday interpellations of national citizens, recognising their identity and responsibility as part of a collective when the national flag is raised, the anthem sung or ancient myth retold. So it is that New Zealand nationals are rallied to support “their” team when the Maori haka is performed, with national pride riding on the game’s outcome.

These interpellations conform to Benedict Anderson’s description of the nation as an “imagined community”, a social and cultural construct. A national consciousness was only possible after the advent of print capitalism and the

¹ See *Banal Nationalism* (1995), especially chapter three entitled “Remembering Banal Nationalism”.

onset of modernity, Anderson determines; vernacular languages were standardised and circulated once the commodification of books and newspapers was made possible by industrial production processes. The nation-state is therefore “imagined” because:

the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the images of their communion. . . . The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries beyond which lie other nations. . . . It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely ordered, hierarchical dynastic realm. . . . Finally, it is imagined as a *community* because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

(15-16, italics in original)

Although “imagined”, the nation is not lacking material effect. Rather, Anderson highlights “the people’s” necessary investment in the nation for it to

exist. He claims that in Western Europe, the novel was developed over a similar period to the standardisation of language and the availability of newspapers, contributing to this mediated sense of unity amongst otherwise diverse peoples. Anderson has been criticised for over-emphasising the nationalist feeling and sense of unity derived through mass communication; however, his recognition of the role of narrative in nurturing a sense of belonging to a community – a national identity - is instructive when considering the heroic fantasy.

Drawing on the influential ideas of Benedict Anderson and Mikhail Bakhtin, Timothy Brennan claims that “the epic was the genre the novel parodied in its nation-forming role” (“National Longing” 50), primarily through its conventions of “beginning”, “first”, “founder”, “ancestor”. This “rhetoric of nationhood” helps constitute the nation by way of explaining its existence. Bakhtin claims that the epic is the literary precursor of the novel. He writes that “the world of the epic is the national heroic past; it is a world of ‘beginnings’ and ‘peak times’ in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of ‘firsts’ and ‘bests’” (13). In lofty diction the epic tells of heroic deeds set in the “absolute past” (13) – an inaccessible and always distant historical epoch:

Both the singer and the listener, immanent in the epic as a genre, are located in the same time and on the same evaluative (hierarchical) plane, but the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance. (14)

And because he regards the epic as “closed as a circle” (16), everything it contains is “finished, already over” (16). The genre reflects its “utter completedness” in its structure, language and characterisation because there “is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy” (16).² The circularity, archaic language and assuredness of character and events therefore preclude alternative reading positions, creating what Bakhtin terms “epic distance”:

The epic world is an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own

² See Tolkien’s letter to Milton Waldman in late 1951 where he describes at length his own ideal of “sub-creating” an epic cycle for his country (*Letters* 144-160): “I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I would dedicate simply to: to England; to my country” (*Letters* 144). Despite his extraordinary success toward this daunting goal, Tolkien humbly notes his desire as “absurd” (145).

standards; it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it. It is completed, conclusive and immutable, as a fact, an idea and a value. This defines absolute epic distance. (17)

The epic is confident in its truth, reflecting a “closed and deaf monoglossia” (12) – an inward-looking world where national languages co-exist but fail to hear or influence each other (11-12). By contrast, the novel emerges, Bakhtin avers, at precisely the time when “intense activization of external and internal polyglossia was at the peak of its activity; this is its native element” (12). The altered consciousness arising from a recognition of multiple languages disrupted the epic’s assuredness, generating a new literary form – the novel.

In contrast to the epic’s aloofness from contemporary concerns and desire to establish a national tradition, the novel embraces contemporaneity – both in terms of its “low”, everyday language, and its representation of the present, rather than an idealised and remote past. In the sacred or “congealed” epic there is no accounting for the relativity of the past, no recognition of connection with the present or alternative perspectives; the novel, however, “is determined by experience, knowledge and practice” (Bakhtin 15). The novel is infused with “familiarization and laughter” (15) breaking down the stylistic boundaries that secure the epic’s representation of an absolute past.

These two contrasting spheres of literary forms come together in the heroic fantasy. In Tolkien's narrative the epic dominates. *The Lord of the Rings* tells just a small portion of the overall history Tolkien created of Middle-earth, satisfying the requirement of the epic to be circular. The archaic language necessarily invokes an epic tone because "[e]pic language is not separable from its subject, for an absolute fusion of subject matter and spatial-temporal aspects with valorized (hierarchical) ones is a characteristic of semantics in the epic" (Bakhtin 17). Further, the "epic" characters (principally the Elves, but Aragorn too) are suitably two-dimensional to maintain Bakhtin's "epic distance". As noted in Chapter Five, Aragorn is largely unaltered throughout the story; he is alien to our contemporary expectations of heroism and therefore "updated" in the film adaptation as temporarily conflicted before establishing and asserting his masculinity. Epic characters do not reflect and mature, as I suggest occurs within heroic fantasy, for "tradition isolates the world of the epic from personal experience, from any new insights, from any personal initiative in understanding and interpreting, from new points of view and evaluations" (17). Frodo's reflexivity therefore marks him as contemporary, or at least not epic in character; his journey and destiny necessarily differs from that of Aragorn.

It is the epic's intractability to re-evaluation that represents the genre's projection of tradition. Bakhtin writes that "the epic past, walled off from all subsequent times by an impenetrable boundary, is preserved and revealed only

in the form of national tradition. The epic relies entirely on this tradition” (16). The values and attitudes held by characters and revealed through the epic are obdurate and permanent. “Thanks to this epic distance, which excludes any possibility of activity and change” Bakhtin declares, “the epic world achieves a radical degree of completedness not only in its content but in its meaning and its values as well” (17). The epic therefore conveys a confidence that is foreign to the novel, enforcing a message of a stable and honourable - “sacrosanct” (17) - tradition, which Bakhtin aligns with the nation.

In contrast with the epic quality of *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Harry Potter* series is bathetic. Although the hero has a prophecy to fulfil as per the epic and the dangers he faces are no less frightening than the Dark Riders that torment the hobbits as they leave the Shire, the tone of the narrative is brought “low” by its novelistic qualities. Firstly, and most importantly, the spatio-temporal structure that gives rise to epic distance is replaced by a contemporary English setting. As a direct consequence, characterisation and language reflect contemporary discourse, because “language about the dead is stylistically different from language about the living” (Bakhtin 20). As a reflection of contemporary subjectivity Harry is subject to doubts and anger, he makes mistakes and upsets his friends, as well as inspiring loyalty, championing the marginalised and performing heroic deeds.

Rowling's choice of a contemporary setting for her hero makes him accessible to her readers and signals her series as dominated by the "novel" characteristics that influence the heroic fantasy. Part of the influence of contemporaneity, Bakhtin claims, lies in its "openendedness" or lack of "authentic conclusiveness" (20) which the epic conveys. Contemporaneity lacks a beginning or end and is impervious to the idealisation heaped upon the epic. Instead, the novel, informed by its "authentic folkloric roots" (21), privileges "the common people's creative culture of laughter" (20):

Alongside the direct representation – laughing at living reality – there flourish parody and travesty of all high genres and of all lofty models embodied in national myth. The "absolute past" of gods, demigods and heroes is here, in parodies and even more so in travesties, "contemporized": it is brought low, represented on a plane equal with contemporary life, in an everyday environment, in the low language of contemporaneity. (21)

Harry Potter is not a parody of the epic (the code of heroism is intended to be taken seriously), but it is a parody of late capitalism; laughter permeates the text, alongside its genuine references to heroic endeavour. However, Bakhtin's analysis of the epic and novel indicates how these two texts, as popular

examples of the heroic fantasy, reflect two very different forms, being two ends of the genre's spectrum.

Heroic fantasy straddles the genres of epic and novel and so looks both backwards to pastoralism and forwards to modernity. But the author ultimately opts to take the reader in a particular direction. Following the epic, *The Lord of the Rings* energises the concept of the *natio*. The closed borders and exclusivity of the nation coincide with the epic's sense of finality and completion (Bakhtin 16). Similarly, the *Harry Potter* series – as yet incomplete and undetermined – champions the diversity indicative of the nation-state. The transitory present coincides with the encyclopaedic diversity Bakhtin perceives in the novel, revealing the nation-state as the most advantageous political system to cope with this fluid and reflective climate; the political formation of the nation at the close of the text is therefore determined by the particular heroic fantasy's form.

These two texts, then, provide an interesting political contrast; where Tolkien rejects modernity and espouses homogeneity, Rowling embraces modernity and argues that fear of multiculturalism and difference, as symbolised by the evil character Voldemort, is the peril that threatens to destroy contemporary Britain. Rowling's position – that the multicultural nation-state is to be celebrated – is markedly different to that of Tolkien. However, that two very popular heroic fantasies offer alternative perspectives

on this highly emotive and complex issue is reflective of the genre's ability to cope with competing views. What they offer is an opportunity for the reader to reflect on possible social structures: the monoculture of the Shire and the multiculturalism evident in both the wizarding and muggle worlds of contemporary England in *Harry Potter*. While Rowling looks forward, offering visions of togetherness within diversity, Tolkien harks back to a conception of society that, as New Zealand heroic fantasy author Dale Elvy asserts, "can only have been a fond memory at the time he wrote [*The Lord of the Rings*]", if indeed it ever existed at all (Email Interview).

The Lord of the Rings as Nationalist Epic

In 1943 Tolkien wrote to his son, Christopher:

My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs) – or to 'unconstitutional' Monarchy. I would arrest anybody who uses the word State (in any sense other than the inanimate realm of England and its inhabitants, a thing that has neither power, rights nor mind). (Letters 63)

Tolkien's remarks provide a helpful guide to his political views when writing *The Lord of the Rings*. He expresses preference for either anarchy – understood as an absence of government in a society – or unconstitutional monarchy – a system whereby the sovereign ruler's authority is truly divine rather than a constitutional monarchy where the King or Queen is ordained by political process. He holds a correspondingly strong dislike for the state – the secular political system wielding power over all inhabitants of a given territory.

Tolkien writes these two political systems into his narrative, with the Shire representing anarchy and the union of Gondor and Arnor under King Elessar (Aragorn) as an unconstitutional monarchy. Tolkien therefore rejects modernity and its secular nation-state system. The power assumed by the people in modernity, as represented in democracies, paves the way for abuse of power, Tolkien suggests: “I am not a ‘democrat’, if only because ‘humility’ and equality are spiritual principles corrupted by the attempt to mechanize and formalize them, with the result that we get not universal smallness and humility, but universal greatness and pride, till some Orc gets hold of a ring of power – and then we get and are getting slavery” (qtd. in Carpenter 132-3).³

³ Tolkien's rhetorical slide from democracy to slavery is problematic. He seems to imply that the idealised sense of the involved and responsible democratic citizen leads to a diminishment of proper Christian humility in the individual. Thus an individual who is particularly susceptible to personal power is just as likely to “enslave” the collective if elected leader under democratic conditions as any other system – other than anarchy. Carpenter observes that

Tolkien's biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, suggests that his subject's opposition toward democracy arises from his "old-fashioned conservative" belief in class (Carpenter 132). Tolkien was firm that "each man belonged or ought to belong to a specific 'estate', whether high or low" (132), and only by submitting to this system would the individual find inner certainty or ontological security, "for it is those who are unsure of their status in the world, who feel they have to prove themselves and if necessary put down other men to do so, who are the truly ruthless" (132). If any particular person or political situation influenced Tolkien's rejection of democracy it is left unclear. Rather, it seems to me that his conservatism primarily arises due to a combination of his religious convictions and distaste for the modern world.⁴

Tolkien's Catholicism involved a stringent belief in social order, with the monarchy functioning as God's representatives on earth. He firmly believed in the humility of the individual as conveyed in his character Samwise Gamgee, once commenting that "touching your cap to the Squire may be damn bad for the Squire but it's damn good for you" (qtd. in Carpenter 133). Such visions of innate modesty hint at Tolkien's idealisation of English country folk through his

Tolkien was a "strange and complex man" (134), being both pessimistic and fun-loving; perhaps this comment records a more pessimistic moment.

⁴ Colin Wilson writes in *The Independent* that "The Lord of the Rings is a criticism of the modern world and of the values of technological civilisation. It asserts its own values, and tries to persuade the reader that they are preferable to current values . . . it is at once an attack on the modern world and a credo, a manifesto" (qtd. in White 217).

portrayal of the hobbits: “The Hobbits are just rustic English people, made small in size because it reflects the generally small reach of their imagination – not the small reach of their courage or latent power” (qtd. in Carpenter 180). What Tolkien asserts as significant about these people (whether hobbits or English countryfolk) is their inability to conceive of extending their limited power beyond their own immediate community and requirements. Having no education of the outside world, or interest in it, means hobbits and “rustic English people” remain happy and secure in their pastoral idyll.⁵

Bakhtin has recorded three distinctive features of the idyll: first, a profound relationship between “folkloric” time and space to create continuity, which is expressed through “an organic fastening down, a grafting of life and its events to a place” (225); second, the rendering of the basics of life - “love, birth, death, marriage, labor, food and drink, stages of growth” (225) - as central and important to lives, acquiring “thematic significance” (229); and third, the linking of nature with human events so that “the rhythm of human life is in harmony with the rhythm of nature” (229).

⁵ This is an ironic attitude to adopt given that the British Empire was “the most global of any formal empire” (Held et. al. 335). By 1900 Britain controlled close to a quarter of the earth’s land mass and over a quarter of the world’s population (41). Tolkien, however, equates his vision of Englishness with timeless “country folk”, suggesting that they were not only uninterested in this “progress” but destroyed by it. Therefore his fond remembrance of England as “the Shire” disavows Imperial England’s global reach.

Each of these features is evident in Tolkien's representation of the Shire, which is "all that he loved best about England" (Carpenter 192). Clearly Tolkien does not refer to contemporary England, in thrall to modernity and capitalism, but to an idealised vision of pre-industrial, rural England. Hobbits are described as loving "peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilful with tools" (*FOR* 1). Hobbits typically enjoy and prioritise beer-drinking, pipe-smoking, food, stories and company. They are social creatures, with family the cohering factor and essential bond of their social groups (7).

So what political governance is required to maintain these idyllic pastoral circumstances? In the "Prologue" to *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien provides some background information for the reader, including commentary on the Hobbits' socio-political circumstances. Although each family tends to its own domestic welfare, the Took family are pre-eminent within the Shire. As "The Thain" the chief Took takes up the role of leader of the Shire-moot (a form of parliament) and the Shire-muster (armed forces). The moot and muster occur only in times of emergency, however, and so are infrequent duties. For laws the Hobbits rely on "The Rules" decreed by a long deceased king, which are respected because they are "both ancient and just" (*FOR* 9). Governance is

minimal, with the Mayor of Michel Delving being the only true official. This position is largely nominal, although he is in charge of the twelve Shirriffs, or police, whose primary concern is to constrain stray beasts. The Shirriffs also “beat the bounds” on the outskirts of the Shire to make sure that “Outsiders of any kind, great or small, did not make themselves a nuisance” (10). When the story begins these positions are being reinforced: “There were many reports and complaints of strange persons and creatures prowling about the borders, or over them: the first sign that all was not quite as it should be” (10).

The boundaries to this exclusive, isolated, apolitical, and agrarian idyll are being violated; modernity is entering the Shire by way of Saruman, “the embodiment of the corrupt twentieth century” (White 217). Biographer Michael White suggests that Tolkien amalgamates the worst aspects of modernity in Saruman’s character, invoking “the fork-tongued politician, the meddler in the ways of nature, the polluter and the evil scientist” (217). However, the “country folk” triumph over the harbinger of modernity and the boundaries are closed once more, with the hobbits’ peace secure through the ascension of King Elessar, as will be discussed shortly. Tolkien is unequivocal about the Edenic qualities of the Shire post-war:

Altogether 1420 in the Shire was a marvellous year. Not only was there wonderful sunshine and delicious rain, in due times and

perfect measure, but there seemed something more: an air of richness and growth, and a gleam of a beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth. (RK 1000)

All of the many children born in 1420 “were fair to see and strong”, “the fruit was so plentiful that young hobbits very nearly bathed in strawberries and cream” and “no one was ill, and everyone was pleased” (1000).

Tolkien presents a pathetic fallacy in that the hobbits’ general content is reflected in the countryside and the weather. This is the freedom and idyllic peace that was fought for both without and within the Shire. Tolkien rallies the reader about a particular nostalgic sense of Englishness represented by the hobbits of the Shire. Purged of all “dissenters,” it is assumed that all citizens of the Shire concur with the community’s isolationist and protectionist worldview, and its preference for the “good life.” However, this peaceful state of affairs is based upon exclusionist principles, as Spencer and Wollman argue:

The invocation of community, however, can indicate a nostalgia for a Tönnies-like *gemeinschaft*, characteristic of a pre-industrial age.⁶

⁶ In 1887 the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies claimed that the contrast between pre-industrial and modern societies (the past and the present) could be framed as two distinct forms of the collective: *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, typically translated as “community” and “society” respectively. The community is associated with feudal collectives where familial and

The positive features of this ideal type are well known – a world dominated by face-to-face interactions, where kin and neighbours supply mutual support, where individuals are and feel integrated into society. But cosy community involves exclusion as well as inclusion; communities can be inward-looking, narrow-minded, controlling and keeping under surveillance the intimate lives of its inhabitants; consensual communities may penalize or ostracize dissenters; and outsiders may be despised or never integrated. The invocation of this nostalgic idea can then draw attention away from division and conflict. Class, religion and gender, for instance, have historically been powerful forces of division, which are not easily visible within a conception of *gemeinschaft* as an organic society with a functional fit between its constituent parts. (38)

Tolkien presents the benign and appealing face of the *gemeinschaft* in the Shire. There are no conflicts or divisions of interest, just happy couples consuming their own produce tilled from the land and bringing forth beautiful progeny.

kin relations structure social conduct through “timeless” customs. Society, by contrast, refers to modernity with the state and capitalism controlling social interaction. Easthope notes that “within community individuals form parts of a totality whose members experience it as a given, supernaturally endowed: in society participants are isolated and think of its authority as the humanly created product of convention and class relationships” (*Englishness* 51).

But as Spencer and Wollman indicate, communities such as the Shire can be intolerant of difference, insisting upon conformity so as to maintain order. The inns and spaces on the borders between nations, for example, provide a contrast to the familiarity of the Shire. The hobbits feel vulnerable amongst “Bree-landers” (hobbits living beyond the borders of the Shire), dwarves, Men and “other vague figures” (*FOR* 151) in The Prancing Pony pub. Interaction within such spaces requires the participants to declare who they are and then decide whether to trust each other. Ironically, it is Frodo who uses this opportunity to try to hide his true identity, pretending to be “Mr Underhill” in an attempt to avoid the pursuing dark riders. The hobbits also discover that they should not judge character by looks alone; while originally intimidated by Strider’s unkempt appearance, Gandalf’s delayed letter soon informs them that this stranger is essential to their safety.

The reassertion of contented ethnic division throughout Middle-earth at the close of *The Lord of the Rings* is instigated by Aragorn. Tolkien creates his ideal unconstitutional monarchy through King Elessar – envisioning a society in which the sovereign leader is divinely sanctioned.⁷ The reign of King Elessar is heralded as a “new age” of stability. Central to his strategy for stability in post-

⁷ Although mortal, Aragorn is a higher order of Man as is indicated by his marriage to the Elf Arwen and his close association with Gandalf, an angelic Istari wizard, whose role in Middle-earth is to help Men oust Sauron. Aragorn’s exceptional character is also expressed through his longevity; he lives to 210 and in him “the dignity of the kings of old was renewed” (*RK* 1020).

Sauron Middle-earth is his division and assignation of land (which presupposes his authority over the people and land to do so): peace will prevail if each of the peoples of Middle-earth has their own land or nation, upon which Men are forbidden to trespass. In this way the new King rewards each of the peoples of Middle-earth who contributed to the routing of Sauron. He travels Middle-earth proclaiming, "Behold, the King Elessar is come! The Forest of Drúadan he gives to Ghân-buri-ghân and to his folk, to be their own for ever; and hereafter let no man enter it without their leave!" (*RK* 954). Similarly, King Elessar legitimises the Shire as the rightful place for Hobbits, declaring it a Free Land with protection from the Northern Sceptre (which is the standard of the King of Arnor and Gondor) (*RK* 1071).

Through his representation of a peaceful Middle-earth at the close of the narrative, Tolkien suggests that war can be mitigated by neighbouring peoples each having ownership of land, self-governance and respecting other people's rights to the same. Tolkien equates a people (in Middle-earth a people might be dwarves or hobbits, men or elves) with a particular geographic area. Tolkien here integrates two nationalist principles, that of "ius soli" and "ius sanguini". Ius soli (or Law of the Soil) evokes civic nationalism: any individual residing within the nation's boundaries may be a citizen, replete with the rights and obligations incumbent upon that privilege. Yet this potentially liberal conception of the national subject is limited by the closure based upon race:

Tolkien demarcates national boundaries within Middle-earth on the basis of the peoples who populate the area. In this regard, fiction avoids the difficulties of empirical life, where interracial marriage is commonplace.

Intermarriage is improbable between an elf and dwarf, or a hobbit and ent, and even where interracial marriage is possible, as it is between elves and men, it is infrequent. Consequently, boundaries between peoples do in fact coincide with bloodlines or ethnicity, as per “*ius sanguini*”. This principle implies that irrespective of birthplace or residence, the individual possesses a national identity on the basis of ancestry; hobbits are ineluctably hobbits even if they live in the Undying Lands with elves and wizards. Therefore for Tolkien nationhood is bound up with the notion of a people belonging to a particular tract of land; in his Letters he asserts, “The toponymy of the Shire . . . is a ‘parody’ of that of rural England, in much the same sense as are its inhabitants: they go together and are meant to” (*Letters* 250).

This interpretation of Tolkien’s political views is reinforced by his admission that his motivation for inventing his fictional world of Middle-earth was the lack of specifically English tales: “I was distressed that almost all the myths were Welsh or Scots or Irish, French or German. All we English seemed to have were a few things like Jack the Giant Killer. So I thought I’d make [a story] myself” (Tolkien qtd. in Birzer 41). From its inception, then, the fictional world or “*legendarium*” of Middle-earth, was a nationalist project: Tolkien

wrote his (his)stories as a compensation or replacement for the Anglo-Saxon mythology that was lost as a result of the Norman Conquest in 1066.⁸ Tolkien used his knowledge of philology to extrapolate characters, events, and narratives from the Anglo Saxon language, ultimately finding literary expression in *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*.⁹ Having begun his writing from the premise of developing an English mythology, Tolkien infused his stories with historical references and linguistic and geographic correlations.

Humphrey Carpenter documents Tolkien's real distress over the Norman invasion: "his gallophobia (itself almost inexplicable) made him angry not only about what he considered to be the pernicious influence of French cooking in England but about the Norman Conquest itself, which pained him as much as if it had happened in his lifetime" (Carpenter 134). Tolkien therefore invented Middle-earth to both compensate for the loss of English stories and to re-

⁸ See Tom Shippey's *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* 230-232. Shippey writes that as a philologist Tolkien was in a unique position to recognise the suppression of the "native English tradition, following the Norman Conquest and the take-over by French and Latin learning" (231).

⁹ Tolkien has also claimed that the Middle-earth stories were written in order to accommodate his invented languages, Quenya and Sindarin (*Letters* 219). These languages belong to the elite beings the Light-elves (Quendi) and Wood-elves respectively, whereas the aspects of geography and peoples which culturally or linguistically reflect the Anglo-Saxon are associated with the Shire and the hobbits, and The Mark and the Riders. For example, the hobbits are quintessentially English and the Rohirrim, or Riders, refer to their land as The Mark, which is also the old translation for the Anglo-Saxon medieval kingdom Mercia (Birzer 42).

imagine English identity. Yet no ethnicity is “pure”, as Tolkien’s desire for an English mythology suggests. Tolkien was of course aware that the English, too, were immigrants; “nevertheless, Tolkien would have liked to create a ‘mythology’ for his own people, to anchor it in the counties of the West Midlands, and simultaneously to preserve in it what scraps remained of the myths and legends there must once have been” (Shippey 233).¹⁰

Birzer proposes that Tolkien’s tales about Middle-earth were written in order to “attenuate the re-emergence of nationalism” arising out of World War I and II, claiming that the “legendarium grew much larger in scope and significance. The story, especially *The Lord of the Rings*, became much more than a myth for any one people or any one nation. It, instead, became a myth for the restoration of Christendom itself” (Birzer 42). Given Tolkien’s political leanings toward unconstitutional monarchy, Birzer’s view has merit. Indeed, Tolkien’s outlook is medieval, referring to a time when religious faith structured commerce and private lives. “In the Middle Ages,” Held et. al. claim, “‘Europe’ more accurately meant ‘Late Christendom’” (35). Further,

¹⁰ Tolkien’s own father was of German descent. As a child he was told romantic stories of his Tolkien ancestors; however, he suppressed this possible identification and focussed instead on his mother’s family, the Suffields: “Though a Tolkien by name, I am a Suffield by tastes, talents and upbringing” (Tolkien qtd. in Carpenter 27). The Suffields were an “old and respectable Midland family” (Carpenter 18) and so Tolkien came to think of the Midlands as his home: “Any corner of that county (however fair or squalid) is in an indefinable way ‘home’ to me, as no other part of the world is” (Tolkien qtd. in Carpenter 27).

Europe was “Christian first and foremost; it looked to God for the authority to resolve disputes and conflicts; its primary political reference point was religious doctrine, and it was overlaid with assumptions about the universal nature of human community” (35).

From this perspective *The Lord of the Rings* is a Christian text. Yet, the author’s self-professed Christian and nationalist motivations for writing the story are not necessarily irreconcilable. *The Lord of the Rings* implies that religion, specifically Catholicism, should govern individuals and societies. Tolkien writes to an acquaintance in 1953 that the story is “of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. . . . the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism” (*Letters* 172). Benedict Anderson claims that nationalism developed at the ‘dusk’ of religion, implying that the energies and passion formerly expended in religious rituals became oriented toward affirming the nation. Timothy Brennan also asserts the relation between religion and nationalism, declaring, “nationalism largely extended and modernized (although it did not replace) ‘religious imaginings’, taking on religion’s concern with death, continuity, and the desire for origins” (“National Longing” 50). Brennan refers to “nationalism’s reliance on religious modes of thought” (51); therefore it is reasonable to regard religion and nationalism as two cultural outlets reaching for existential meaning and occupying the same continuum.

Rather than suggesting that Tolkien holds up the monocultural qualities of the Shire to indicate that this socio-political system is irrelevant to contemporary geopolitics, given its demise and the coming “Age of Man” in his fictional historical time-line, I read this work as a eulogy to the passing of a particular Englishness that Tolkien associated with the Anglo-Saxons, pre-1066: his francophobia, the alignment of the Shire with a romantically envisioned pre-industrial England, the nostalgic closure of the narrative, his Catholic predisposition toward “mankind’s decline” and his discontent with contemporary politics all suggest that while Tolkien acknowledges the Shire no longer exists, he wishes it were not so.¹¹

Nevertheless, cultures must be open to change to survive; cultures will ossify, Stuart Hall states, unless “they take on the people next door, adopt some of their customs, adapt to the new conditions, and thereby create something new” (“Les Enfants” 35). Hall goes on to observe that, “while in the 1960s and 1970s we [immigrants] thought we were a marginal diasporic people, now everyone turns out to be a bit diasporic, to have some funny business in their backgrounds. This is the modern experience, what modernity is about” (35). Tolkien laments this consequence of modernity, viewing the mixing of cultures, the separation of culture from society, the denial of humankind’s need to be

¹¹ Tolkien attributed his worldview to his beliefs in a letter of 1956: “I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect ‘history’ to be anything but a ‘long defeat’” (*Letters* 255).

aligned with nature as the cause of discontent and conflict. There is no conflict in the Shire because equilibrium has been achieved. The hobbits, as participants in a pastoral idyll, are in tune with nature; everything they do is “natural”. That is, from reaping nature’s bounty to heterosexual relations, asserting male leadership¹² and living in homogeneous communities, all acts reflect authentic or real ways of being. With no split between culture and society, there is no ideology or political system required to impose identity, either on the individual or collective. Hobbits in the Shire can just “be”.

***Harry Potter* and the Multicultural Nation-State**

The homogeneity favoured by Tolkien is discarded as outdated and irrelevant by Rowling. The Dursleys and Malfoys, with their refusal to celebrate difference and multiculturalism, are revealed as intolerant and, in their separate muggle and wizarding spheres, at root of the malfunctioning of society. As victim of the Dursley’s violence, Harry understands prejudice, and it is a signature of his character, like that of his mentor Albus Dumbledore, that he befriends and protects the ostracised, such as Hermione, Luna Lovegood, Dobby the house elf and Sirius Black. In this sense the *Harry Potter* series

¹² Tolkien writes that the hobbits’ “family arrangements were ‘patrilinear’ rather than patriarchal” (*Letters* 293). However, the examples the author cites refer to backstory and in terms of the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*, male authority is shown as privileged.

promotes the nation-state, understood as a state of diverse peoples who choose to live together under the cohering fiction of a nation. Rowling's narrative suggests that humankind must learn to accept differences in order to live together peacefully, and to do this, she argues, it is necessary to recognise difference as a cultural construct.

Tolkien's Shire reflects a "traditional" society, where harmony prevails, ostensibly as a result of humanity (or hobbits) following the rhythm of the land they belong to. Lawrence Grossberg suggests that one way of understanding the rise of modernity is through a split between culture and society. Culture becomes both a constitutive and central feature of modernity given that "the concept operates at the intersection of the processes (modernization), experiences (modernity) and discourses (modernism) that marked its very emergence" ("Victory" 8). Culture is the tool by which modernity (self-perceived as the most humane and progressive of human societies [8]) distinguishes itself from the "other" – now constructed as "traditional society". Not that these pre-modern societies understood themselves as such; rather, "traditional" is the "epithet applied to those in a state of existence before such awareness" (Strathern 41).

Modernity's rupture with tradition, this line of thought goes, derived from the twin forces of capitalism and the nation-state, and was supported by the "fantasy of a set of sociocultural 'ideals' which would define the positive

outcome of the former developments: the supposed expansion of reason, of political and intellectual freedom, etc.” (Grossberg, “Victory” 8). Therefore, for society to be constructed as an object it was necessary to conceive of culture as an “isolable sphere of human activity as well. The modern is, thus, constituted by the separation of culture and society” (8). Rowling engages with modernity, aligning her heroic fantasy more closely with the novel than the epic, the nation-state than the nation, by inserting her hero within a contemporary setting, not a traditional past. This has been discussed in terms of the moral economy, which, I suggest, is possible within late capitalism despite commodification. But here I want to extend the argument to claim that Rowling offers allegiance to the nation-state as a means to cutting through the culture that divides people from each other.

Before starting their fourth year at Hogwarts, Harry, Ron and Hermione go to the Quidditch World Cup. Watched by one hundred thousand fans (*HPGF* 87), the two national teams, Ireland and Bulgaria, vie for the coveted trophy. This international event opens Harry’s eyes to the global wizarding community. But over and above the material differences of clothing, food, and language between the nationalities, Harry observes the shared excitement about the upcoming event amongst the various social groups:

Three African wizards sat in serious conversation, all of them wearing long white robes and roasting what looked like a rabbit on a bright purple fire, while a group of middle-aged American witches sat gossiping happily beneath a spangled banner stretched between their tents which read: *The Salem Witches' Institute*. Harry caught snatches of conversation in strange languages from the inside of tents as they passed, and though he couldn't understand a single word, the tone of every single voice was excited.

(*HPGF 76*, italics in original)

From this first contact with other national communities, Harry finds common – universal - emotional experience overrides the differences he sees and hears. According to Dumbledore this is the point of such sporting events as the Quidditch World Cup and the Triwizard Tournament that Harry later wins: “The Triwizard Tournament’s aim was to further and promote magical understanding. . . . Lord Voldemort’s gift for spreading discord and enmity is very great. We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open’” (*HPGF 627*).¹³

¹³ Similarly Findlay and Rothney offer the Olympic Games as an example of “uplifting visions of a human community in which competition remains within bounds. Such visions make the

Yet Rowling uses the Quidditch World Cup, with its nationalist emotion and subsequent violence, to highlight how difficult Dumbledore's goal of unity within difference will be to achieve, as racism remains a strong undercurrent in the wizarding community. In stark contrast to Dumbledore's humanity and openness to alterity – as witnessed by his multicultural student intake and his employment of Dobby the House Elf and Hagrid the half-giant at Hogwarts – Voldemort is feared for his extreme racism and cruelty. Voldemort enforces a “policy” of racial purity, spreading his hatred of mixed races and muggles in an attempt to shore up his own power. Unlike his celebrated ancestor Salazar Slytherin, however, Voldemort is not a “pure blood”; his mother married a muggle and when she died, he was brought up in a muggle orphanage, only learning of his wizarding heritage when invited to attend Hogwarts as does Harry Potter. Voldemort's mixed heritage suggests the frequency of commingling between muggles and wizards; indeed, without intermarriage, Ron informs Hermione and Harry, wizards would have died out long ago (*HPCOS* 89). But Voldemort's rhetoric of purity does not imply being of pure blood necessarily; rather it implies subscribing to an ideology that privileges one group over others on the basis of social class and/or ethnicity.

world a better place” (29). But, as Rowling also projects, such harmony will not occur if the desire to live together in a multicultural community with minimal conflict is not pursued by all members of society.

The racism Voldemort endorses is revealed in various forms throughout the *Harry Potter* series; wizards are shown as prejudiced against mudbloods, muggles, werewolves, centaurs, giants, house elves. At the Quidditch World Cup these tensions and fears over difference surface and, due to the lack of proper security, give rise to violence. Disruption begins when nationalist pride intensifies during the match between Ireland and Bulgaria; the referees are unable to restrain the mascots of each team, who attack each other in a parody of the violence in the game they are celebrating. After the game, however, there is a shift in focus when, “nationalist differences are put aside in light of a shared bond against a common (in both senses of the word) group: Muggles” (Westman 320). A riot ensues and a muggle family are tortured (*HPGF* 108-9). Although Voldemort’s few remaining Death Eaters mete out the torture itself, they are supported by a growing group of onlookers, who act as cheerleaders by “laughing and pointing up at the floating bodies” (108).¹⁴ According to Westman, “this scene underscores the degree to which Voldemort’s extreme racism and his hatred of Muggles and mixed races remain a part of wizarding culture as a whole, emerging when wizards feel free from Ministry control and

¹⁴ The film adaptation of this episode removes it from a racial or discriminatory context (Voldemort’s Death Eaters victimising muggles) and focuses the mayhem, terror and destruction onto the single shadowy figure of Barty Crouch Junior. This insane character is intent upon delivering Harry Potter to his master and thereby becoming Voldemort’s favourite. This depiction of an elusive and terrifying figure taps into contemporary Western fears arising from Osama Bin Laden’s continued “absent” presence.

their everyday obligations to Ministry policies on wizard-Muggle relations” (321).

Racism is not just peculiar to Voldemort’s Death Eaters; Rowling uses Ron to reveal how cultural racism becomes naturalised even amongst those who otherwise oppose prejudice. Ron angrily defends his friend Hermione against Draco Malfoy’s racial taunt of “filthy little Mudblood” (*HPCOS* 86), yet he is equally guilty of latent racism. Ron’s wizarding background attunes him to prejudice against giants, werewolves and house elves; cultural beliefs that muggle-raised Harry and Hermione do not share. Upon learning that Remus Lupin is a werewolf as a result of a bite as a child, Ron is quick to express his distaste for his former teacher: “*Get away from me, werewolf!*” (*HPPA* 253, italics in original). By contrast, Hermione had deduced Lupin’s secret but had not notified anyone. Ron’s upbringing informs him that werewolves in general are not to be trusted, and neither are giants: ““They’re just vicious, giants. It’s like Hagrid said, it’s in their natures, they’re like trolls . . . they just like killing, everyone knows that” (*HPGF* 373-4).

Hermione objects to Ron’s biological determinism, claiming that his remarks are “just bigotry” (*HPGF* 377). In particular, Hermione challenges Ron’s (and by implication all wizards’) complicity in the oppression of house elves. House elves are essentially slaves to a wizarding family, unable to leave unless the family approves. So when Ron exclaims, “[w]e’ve been working like

house elves” (197), Rowling is making a clear reference to such objectionable sayings as “I’ve been working like a nigger”. Hermione’s campaign to emancipate the house elves has already been discussed; however it is relevant to note here that her political awareness prompts Ron to reflect on his unrecognised prejudice. His excuse that “‘it’s just an expression’” (197) is inadequate, as his ideologically-laden language ultimately disguises discrimination within a supposedly democratic system: “‘It’s people like you, Ron,’ Hermione began hotly, ‘who prop up rotten and unjust systems’” (112). This clash between Ron and Hermione “illustrates how participation in ideological systems is hardly ever seamless” (Westman 327), but that change may come with education heightening awareness of deeply held prejudice.

Separated by nearly 50 years, Tolkien and Rowling narrate opposing responses to immigration into Britain. Tolkien proposes a form of “cultural racism”, a phrase that denotes the “strengthening of local identities [as a] strong defensive reaction of those members of dominant ethnic groups who feel threatened by the presence of other cultures” (Hall, “Question of Identity” 308). Hall extrapolates, claiming, “in the UK, for example, such defensiveness has produced a revamped Englishness, an aggressive little Englandism, and a retreat to ethnic absolutism in an attempt to shore up the nation and rebuild an identity that coheres, is unified and filters out threats in social experience” (308). It is precisely this enthusiasm for ethnic purity that Rowling casts as evil

through the character of Voldemort. Further, Rowling acknowledges that allaying such prejudices will be complicated when even the well-meaning characters hold unrecognised biases.

Only Harry is remarkably free of intolerance (if his dislike of his disagreeable muggle family is taken as reasonable due to their own fear of difference projected onto Harry himself): capable of seeing unity amongst difference, Harry will counter the discourse of exclusivity and its attendant intolerance that Voldemort fosters. Having been the victim of his aunt and uncle's inability to cope with difference, Harry will strive to ensure that diversity is celebrated. With Dumbledore as his mentor - "that champion of commoners, of Mudbloods and Muggles" (*HPGF* 562) - Harry will ultimately defeat Voldemort, the unifying force of prejudice in the series.

As attractive as Rowling's stance is - that the collective should celebrate the diversity that makes it whole - her vision is ambivalent. Although Hermione is instrumental in revealing the various levels of ideology (gender, class and racism) that permeates the Hogwarts school system and society in general infused through the language we use, the hero of Rowling's tale continues to be a young white male. The harbinger of peace is precisely the "urban, male, vanguardist and violent" figure whom Anne McClintock regards as the typical "national agent" (267). Rowling has softened the edges of her hero so that he responds to what is currently viewed as hegemonic masculinity;

rather than further patriarchal discourse perhaps what her story intends to relate is that if males (characterised as active and violent) continue to be the primary agent of nationalist discourse, then peace will always prove elusive.

Following this line of thought, Hermione's ("feminine") role is precisely to deconstruct the values that are promoted by "masculine" discourses, as implied by her critique of the book "A History of Hogwarts". I suggest that Rowling attempts to address gender imbalance – not radically, but subtly, by modifying the characterisation of the agents who typically populate these narratives. It is likely that Harry's heroic example will shake up the bungling bureaucracy currently controlling the state, revealing the real "sovereign authority" in the community as the individual. Rowling implies that impersonal political systems endowing some individuals with inordinate power cannot be allowed to quash the precious human qualities of love, courage and truth. It is up to the fully informed and participating citizens to reject a state authority that scapegoats one group for the benefit of another, condescendingly seeks to obfuscate the truth, and institutionalises prejudice. McClintock declares that "if nationalism is not transformed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations and male privilege" (281). Although Hermione mirrors Harry's character – she, too, is gifted, brought up in the muggle world, desires the truth and wants to help others –

Rowling's hero remains a young white male; it would seem that an alternative vision of a national hero is still difficult to imagine.

The Bicultural Nation in *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy*

If *The Lord of the Rings* can be read as regretting the consequences of imperialism and *Harry Potter* posits that harmony must be sought within the diversity created by the empire "coming home", then New Zealand author Dale Elvy's *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy* can be read as a post-colonial text which invites both colonised and coloniser to unite and together forge an economically successful nation. Where Tolkien's epic looks to reaffirm or consolidate a people, the novelistic *Harry Potter* and *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy* are "contemporary, practical means of *creating a people*" (Brennan, *Salman Rushdie* 9, italics in original). That is, these contemporary heroic fantasies embrace the diversity that characterises the nation-state.

Elvy's trilogy is not a direct allegory for the New Zealand experience of colonialism, but there are enough references to encourage such speculation.¹⁵ Correlations with the New Zealand colonial experience are primarily implied through the hero Tane and representations of bi-culturalism. Tane of Maori mythology is "the creator of the world" (Orbell 179), thereby alerting the

¹⁵ In our interview, Elvy stated that his intention was to portray colonialism in general.

knowing reader to the hero's destiny of forging a new future as well as inviting conjecture on New Zealand history. He is an indigenous tribal hunter, but his heroic destiny is set when he perceives the plight of coastal tribes who have been oppressed by colonisation. As the story commences, the island Maragon is primarily inhabited by tribal societies, such as the Gerhan to which Tane belongs. On the neighbouring continent there are a number of powerful "Houses", two of which vie for power over Maragon – Basimi and Jintao. The port-city Shevilian on Maragon is a colonial outpost of the House Basimi and, as the narrative proceeds, the evil Lord Kuso of House Jintao attempts to take over the island via Shevilian for its valuable timber resources and potential slave labour. House Basimi is unable to prevent Kuso's increasing bellicosity; however, Shevilian is eventually saved by the visionary leadership of Tane, who instigates the union of the indigenous peoples with outcast House Basimi colonialists living in the port-city, and Sajha, a recent immigrant who is able to use her extraordinary connection with the spiritual aspect of Maragon to destroy Kuso. Elvy therefore narrates the emergence of the island Maragon as a post-colonial and sovereign island-nation.¹⁶

¹⁶ Refer to Appendix Two for a summary of Elvy's trilogy.

At the close of the trilogy the social, political and economic structures on Maragon Island have irrevocably changed, leading the country toward democracy. Author Dale Elvy claims that the unification of the peoples is "mindful of the histories, backgrounds and cultural experiences of its participants. That is why a provisional council representing different factions within the city

Reflecting indigenous peoples' common experiences of colonialism, Elvy writes that the Makewi's loss of self-esteem and meaning derives from the disruption to their community. Bereft of their tribal social structures and values, the Makewi have lost their pride and dignity, their "unquestionable self-validating certainties" (Laing 39), and have succumbed to the coloniser's liquor. In turn the colonisers treat the Makewi as second-class citizens, denying them equality, proper housing and meaningful occupations. Tane is appalled at the injustices he witnesses, but also intuitively believes that the indigenous people and their colonisers must work together to defeat Lord Kuso: "We must unite, for alone we stand no chance against the soldiers who seek to enslave us" (*FH*, 243). In doing so, Tane reasons, the indigenous people will also raise their status within Shevilian society: "The only way [Tane] could see a future for his people was in co-operation with Outsiders . . . But that co-operation needed to be between equals, not with the tribes subservient as they were now – second-class citizens in a bewildering society they did not fully understand" (167).

Yet through Tane's vision and the unifying impetus of impending war the tribal peoples of Maragon regain control over their lives and (significantly) choose to cohabit peacefully and productively with the colonisers. By encouraging the tribal peoples to join forces with the coloniser against the

was formed, rather than a reformation of the dynastic style of leadership practised by the Great Houses" (Email Interview).

external threat of House Jintao, Tane choreographs an abrupt social change from tribal society to bicultural sovereign nation. Importantly, Tane takes the initiative, as whether or not the tribes choose to defend Maragon against Kuso, major social changes are imminent: refuse to confront the danger Kuso poses and risk slavery and exploitation, or act and irreversibly be drawn into the modernist age, particularly in terms of urbanisation and trans-national trade.

Anthony Giddens believes it is necessary for contemporary nations to “rethink their identities” (*Runaway* 18). Contentiously, he posits that “nations no longer have enemies” (18); the external threat that Spencer and Wollman identify as a unifying force for the nation no longer holds the same significance at the present conjuncture. Contemporary conflict, Giddens argues, is not so much based on “old-style territorial nationalism” but a “new ethnically driven interventionalism” (18). His position can certainly be challenged by the ongoing Middle East crisis and Palestine’s desire for a nation-state to call home; however, Giddens draws attention to the “basic fault line” (Barker, *Cultural Studies* 157) within the nation-state. And it is this potentially divisive ethnic difference that Elvy’s heroic fantasy imagines as resolved, primarily through the relationship between the two heroes, Tane and Sajha.¹⁷

¹⁷ Elvy hints at difficulties ahead; at the close of the trilogy antagonisms are emerging within the provincial council and Elder Tunati rejects the modernity that Tane pursues and returns to his traditional tribal community (*DS* 277). Nevertheless, the ideological closure of the story lies

The indigenous Tane experiences profound changes; he loses his family, his forgoes his role as tribal hunter to become the leader, war hero, and chief administrator of the diverse people and city of Shevilian, he experiences slavery, attends to international diplomatic and trade matters, eschews his kilt for the coloniser's trousers and shirt and learns to read and write. Even when his self-control becomes temporarily ensnared by a Genie Mage disc of power he has the willpower to dispose of it. Irrespective of the challenges Tane faces, he is able to cope because of his robust and constant sense of self that he has inherited from his tribal upbringing.

The implication is that the integrity and genuine concern Tane displays for other people translate into an honest and just political system. Tane's fairness and inherent ability to negotiate and reconcile differences between parties contrasts markedly with the abusive imperial power favoured by the Great Houses. Where Kuso desires control of Maragon to selfishly exploit the island of its resources and consolidate his personal power and status, Tane seeks a mutually beneficial relationship between the two ethnic groups that will deliver peace and prosperity for the island's future. Tane is an heroic leader who will

with the happy union between Tane and Sajha, and the birth of a baby boy for Masio and Vardis. Under late modernity, the bourgeois family triumphs over tribal connections.

guide his people out of the poverty and “meaninglessness” in which colonisation has trapped them.¹⁸

Tane is an ontologically secure individual. Despite the radical and rapid changes in his surroundings and experiences, he remains a sincere and generous human being, dedicated to protecting his people in his new role, just as he had as a tribal hunter.¹⁹ However, the respect that the colonisers express for Tane is due to his swordsmanship, leadership qualities and natural comprehension of House Jintao’s “civilised” war-techniques. He is not revered as the First Hunter of the Gerhan tribe, in which role he wears a kilt, wields a

¹⁸ A little imperiously, Elvy also suggests through the bard Vardis that the colonisers can in fact play an essential role in reinvigorating pride amongst the tribespeople. Vardis plies her trade in bars around the country inspiring loyalty and patriotism through the indigenous myths she relates even though she herself is not native to Maragon. As does the heroic fantasy author, Vardis uses these myths to rally individuals to a collective future through a nostalgic vision of their past heroism and commitment: “They need to be reminded to be proud of who they are” Vardis informs Tane (*FH230*). The colonisers, it would seem, are both the bane and saviour of tribal societies.

¹⁹ R. D. Laing writes that, “a basically ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people’s reality and identity” (39). Laing suggests that it is sometimes “difficult for a person with such a sense of his integral selfhood and personal identity, of the permanency of things, of the reliability of natural processes, of the substantiality of natural processes, of the substantiality of others, to transpose himself into the world of an individual whose experiences may be utterly lacking in any unquestionable self-validating certainties” (39). In Elvy’s narrative, Tane’s empathy for others is sustained, not constrained, by his own equanimity toward social upheaval.

spear and lives in the tribal community.²⁰ That is to say, Tane has to prove himself as “one of them”, and in fact “better than them” to be accepted as “lord” of both the indigenous tribes and the colonisers. Therefore, the tribal peoples’ increased status arises out of their ability to adopt the coloniser’s own culture. Although *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy* gives the marginalized tribal peoples a voice and role in preserving their island from Kuso’s aggression, to become an integrated member of the nation the tribal peoples need to adopt the urban lifestyle Shevilian represents.

Sajha, Tane’s co-hero, is born in House Yakoso but her spiritual affinity for Maragon and her ability to tap into the power of the “ancients” of the island, point to her incontrovertible right to belong. Sajha is the Spirit Shinto of the title – a mage who controls elemental spirits. Where Tane is characterised as a warrior and strategic leader under whom the people of Maragon are willing to unite and fight, Sajha is aligned with the metaphysical or spiritual world. It is Sajha who is responsible for finally defeating the monster Lord Kuso has become, using the spirit spear she has procured from her time at the island’s “fabled Spirit City” (*DS 9*). Sajha’s strength derives from her ability to connect with the spirits of past peoples of Maragon; in fact her affinity for the land of Maragon and the language she shares with the tribespeople is derived from a

²⁰ Tane’s character amalgamates symbols of marginalization: the Scottish kilt, and the spear and social unit of indigenous peoples.

common ancestry. The elder Pitiha explains that the fifteen families who founded the Great Houses and Maragon's First Tribe all "descended from the same people" (*FH* 251).

Despite this genealogical connection, Elvy implies that belonging to Maragon is as much a matter of choice as birthright. Esteemed New Zealand historian Michael King argues passionately for this position on behalf of the Pakeha:

My own people, descendents in the main of displaced Irish, had as much moral and legal right to be here as Maori. Like the ancestors of Maori they came as immigrants; like Maori too, we became indigenous at the point where our focus of identity and commitment shifted to this country and away from our countries of origin . . . With my own background here, and with as strong a spiritual association with the land and its history as anyone I know, I have sometimes been angered by misrepresentations of my position . . . It is simply not valid to make sweeping judgements that identify Pakeha as rapacious exploiters of natural resources and Maori as kaitiaki [guardians] committed to protect them.

(235-6)

Like King, Elvy insists that “outsiders” (*tauwiwi*) become as connected with their new land as indigenous peoples.

However, there remains a tension in *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy* between advocating the co-existence of ethnic difference and advancing unification between two “not so very different” groups. Elvy confirms the alignment of these peoples, stating that Tane’s people and the “outsiders” “share a similar, ancient history” (Email Interview). The character Tane literally embraces the “outsider”, suggesting to the reader the inevitability, even naturalness of colonisation. And in turn, the “outsider” communes with the land, implying their own “indigeneity”.

There is a sense in *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy* that tribes must evolve, that a secure future relies more upon common descendants for an ethnically diverse nation-state, and not so much on common antecedents (Bahktin 145). This orientation is indicated at the close of the narrative with Tane and Sajha celebrating the birth of a baby boy for Masio and Vardis. Sajha wants to delay becoming a mother herself, because “there’s too much to learn” (DS 328) in the short term. Sajha is committed to understanding the ancient history of Maragon, which can then be used as a warning to future generations of the “price of great power” (329).

Tane, too, is busy. His prescient vision has set Maragon on the path of economic well-being; having embarked upon a programme of international

trade, Tane has been quickly rewarded with the “first of many” international trade agreements (*DS 329*). This hero recognises international trade and relations as essential to economic security, making Tane representative of “modern” man. The international orientation of Tane’s character enacts New Zealand and international politician Mike Moore’s conception of globalisation as an evolutionary process: “We evolved from families, to tribes to the city state, to the nation state and now to global and regional economic and political arrangements” (qtd. in Kelsey 14). As a model of the neo-liberal man who instinctively pursues “competitive individual entrepreneurship” (Kelsey 18), Tane corrects indigenous powerlessness and reimagines identity from within the colonialists’ capitalist system.

Elvy’s tale may be fiction, but he reflects on significant domestic issues. For example, In 1995 Robert Mahuta of the Tainui tribe voiced the same attitude Elvy attributes to his hero: “The only way we are going to beat the white man is at his own game. We could allow ourselves to come out thinking as white men, but ideally we will come out *thinking as international people*” (qtd. in Kelsey 21, emphasis mine). Like Tane, Mahuta has mana within his tribe, and is credited with negotiating the first complete settlement directly with the government for confiscated land, bypassing the Waitangi Tribunal.²¹

²¹ The tribe received cash and land to the value of \$170 million (Treaty of Waitangi).

It is significant that at the beginning of the 21st century the New Zealand government is still attempting to address wrongs committed in the 19th century, to ease relations between aggrieved Maori and the Pakeha-dominated government. With Tane's easy transition from tribal hunter to leader of a bicultural nation there is a sense that Elvy's heroic fantasy is implying that we need to imagine a united future for the bicultural nation-state to be successful. With the nation-state's external threat deposed, internal dissent such as ethnic difference is envisaged as overcome through hybridisation, the willing unification of two peoples. This revision of the Maori hero heralds the beginning of a new world, one which is outwardly oriented toward inclusion into the global community, rather than inwards towards tribal affiliations.

Thus the heroic fantasy engages with contemporary concerns and discourses; yet, as I discuss in chapter eight below, just at the moment when cultural policy demands Maori attend to projecting and protecting their own images and identities within the global sphere, New Zealand national identity is swamped by the rhetoric of Middle-earth.

Conclusion

The heroic fantasy may respond to the difficulties arising from the modern nation-state, but how unity is envisaged is open to the author's particular

world-view. Given the political divide between *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy*, it is clear that heroic fantasy is able to consider widely disparate ideological positions, not all subscribing to the same “rhetoric of nationhood.” Heather Dubrow writes that, “however detailed the conventions associated with a literary form may be, they represent not merely an injunction to adopt certain topoi but also an invitation to adapt those topoi to the aesthetic and social conditions of one’s age and to the dispositions of one’s own writing temperament” (14). Genre is not stifling of creativity or political views. Elvy concurs:

fantasy (of all types) does lend itself particularly well to a wider exploration of ideas and ideologies. In creative terms the fluidity and lack of constraints of the genre allow a much greater freedom for an author to create or experiment with a geo-political setting (so long as [authors] maintain the cardinal rule for providing the maximum possible degree of realism within their creation).

(Email Interview)

Common to each heroic fantasy, however, is conflict with an “other”. Historian Heinrich von Treitschke declares that “it is only in war a people becomes in very deed a people. It is only in the common performance of heroic deeds for

the sake of the fatherland that a nation becomes truly and spiritually united. . . . War is a sharp medicine for national disunion and waning patriotism” (qtd. in Spencer and Wollman 16). What the heroic fantasy narrative does, then, is to recount the conditions in which nationalist feelings are evoked. As von Treitschke observes, an external threat invigorates passion and purpose in an otherwise disparate group, foregrounding and strengthening weakened or previously non-existent feelings of belonging. The ubiquitous totalitarian “dark lord” is therefore the catalyst for consolidating or founding a nation. Having strengthened the nation, the hero can retreat from national issues to familial relations; the orphaned hero becomes family man, thereby enjoying meaningful social bonds at both the national and personal level.

So the heroic fantasy genre, both structurally and thematically, promotes nationalism by telling stories of communities threatened by dark lords and narrowly managing to survive only when the people unite under a suitable hero. As narratives, heroic fantasies emphasise unity, and generate foundational myths of collective origin. Foundation myths are essential to nation-building; these stories vindicate the nation, providing a “heroic memory” and a “historical sense of rightness” about the nation’s existence around which diverse peoples amalgamate. As Brennan posits, “the idea of nationhood is not only a political plea, but a formal binding together of disparate elements. And out of the multiplicities of culture, race, and political

structures, grows also a repeated dialectic of uniformity and specificity: of world culture and national culture, of family and of people” (62).

But as the discussion of gender indicated, the nation is a masculine enterprise. It is masculine action that characterises the nation and it is the masculine gender that realises authority through the socio-political entity. Taking the example of Elvy’s *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy*, it is the new male leader who is aligned with the modern future, and his female companion who is associated with the archaic past through her ability to connect with the “ancients” of the island. Elvy may be progressive in envisioning the new leader as indigenous (although I have argued that this character is predominantly assimilated into the new modern culture rather than the new society reflecting his tribal roots), but his deployment of gender tropes conforms to the conservative practice identified with the genre.

In email conversation Elvy expressed disappointment over sales of the trilogy. He had also hoped for the books to be adapted to a television series with New Zealand actor Temuera Morrison (*Once were Warriors* 1994) as Tane. This is not an unreasonable expectation given New Zealand’s reputation for producing “swords and sandals” dramas. New Zealand production company South Pacific Pictures alone is responsible for the long-running series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995-1999) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), and the company more recently adapted for television Margaret Mahy’s post-

apocalyptic techno-fantasy *Maddigan's Fantasia* (2005) as *Maddigan's Quest* (2005). Could it be that the local production industry perceives an indigenous leader as a politically contentious issue? New Zealand film has of course included Maori leaders such as Paikea in *Whale Rider*, and Will Bastion in *Crooked Earth* (2001), although these characters' influence remains within the realm of the indigenous community and so does not pose a "threat" to Pakeha authority.

The screen generates compelling images of "ways to be", especially when national identity is regarded as a "scopic politics" (McClintock 268). Yet this is not normally a problem for mainstream media, which readily casts white actors in roles originally conceived as coloured. Ursula Le Guin, for example, complains that her hero Ged is inexplicably cast as a white man in the television series *Earthsea* (2004):

To some extent I pushed against the limits. For example . . . only the villains were white. I saw myself as luring white readers to identify with the hero, to get inside his skin and only then find it was a dark skin. I meant this as a strike against racial bigotry. I think now that my subversion went further than I knew, for by making my hero dark-skinned I was setting him outside the whole European heroic tradition, in which heroes are not only male but white. I was

making him an Outsider, an Other, a woman, like me.

(qtd. in “Ursula Le Guin”)

Le Guin emphasises how important issues of colour are to her story and any changes by the “culture industries” to comply with what they perceive to be mainstream audience expectation is to distort her authorial intentions.

Similarly, in terms of gender representation, Mahy’s red-haired protagonist Garland Maddigan wears a shapeless green velvet dress on the cover of the original publication, but is cast as a blonde in an array of more flattering costumes in the tele-series. This representation of Garland may well emblemise what Balibar describes as the “dominant form of national belonging” (138), which also accounts for the “colour-blind” casting of American actor Shawn Ashmore as Ged.²² With individual identity a historical construct, that is, formed “within a field of social values , norms of behaviour and collective symbols” (138), a dominant image is created that is taken as

²² Robert Halmi, executive producer of the miniseries, claims that there was no intention to modify the character of Ged, but merely to cast the right actor for the role; “There was no decision to make Ged blond and pale-skinned” (Halmi). He also claimed to be “true and honest to the source. I think that the scope and spirit of [Le Guin’s] work is represented closely and fans of the books are not going to be disappointed. These books have been around a long time, so it would be a shame to change them” (Halmi). However, fans were disappointed – and none more so than the author. See also Le Guin’s response in “A Whitewashed Earthsea: How the Sci Fi Channel Wrecked My Books.”

representing the social group in totality. The heroic fantasy as commodified spectacle aligned with national identity therefore informs the next chapter, extending this discussion on how imagining race and the nation are compromised when occasioned through the culture industries.

Chapter eight:

The Real Middle-earth: Re-branding New Zealand¹

In the documentary *The Real Middle Earth* narrator Jim Hickey proudly summarises the value to New Zealand of Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, claiming that critics describe the film trilogy as "among the greatest of all time":

[They are] masterpieces by a New Zealand director who's now become one of the world's leading movie makers. And yet of all the places on the planet, Peter Jackson chose his own country and thousands of his own countrymen to help make these movies. And that loyalty gave New Zealanders a sense of ownership. It inspired the passion and creativity and lots of hard work. Just as the little hobbits helped restore Middle-earth, the little guys of New

¹ This chapter is based on two articles I have co-authored with Dr Jenny Lawn. The material from these articles has been updated and reoriented to focus more closely on the issue of how the commodification of the heroic fantasy genre impacts on national identity.

Zealand, ordinary kiwis, helped produce the success of the Rings trilogy from within the scenic magnificence of their own backyard . . . [*Hickey spreads out his arms to direct attention to Southern Alps mountain backdrop*] the Real Middle Earth. (*Real Middle Earth*)

Hickey enthuses about the numerous “unsung heroes” who contributed to the making of the film trilogy. Arriving in Matamata where the village of Hobbiton was set, Hickey declares, “when the big movie came to town, the small community got right into the spirit of things, even adopting the name Hobbiton. You can even buy Hobbiton burgers” (*Real Middle Earth*). Hickey’s “feel good” documentary emphasises the sense of ownership and pride New Zealanders tend to exhibit toward Jackson’s film trilogy, wasting no time providing evidence to support his subtext that the project has generally boosted the local economy. Advertising, too, taps into the upbeat mantra surrounding *The Lord of the Rings*, with New Zealand Post boasting of the remarkable lengths that were required to produce their physically diminutive, but epically proportioned, stamp:

For this stamp to exist, it’s taken over six years of production, an immense level of creative talent and enthusiasm from thousands of New Zealanders to create a trilogy of films on a scale the world has

never seen before. This stamp is one frame, or one twenty-fifth of a second of film footage from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. New Zealand Post is proud to be associated with such a magnificent achievement. (“Stamp”)

Margaret Werry describes this repetition of self-congratulatory messages as an “appeal to appeal” (9), generating an image of success by dint of the volume and momentum of the rhetoric. Since 1999, Labour-led governments have focused this explosion of populist rhetoric, with a view to exploiting the cultural sphere for economic gain. *The Lord of the Rings* film phenomenon has therefore functioned as a gravitational force around which a relatively incoherent set of ideas about the nature and purpose of national culture could coalesce into a highly integrated, cross-sectoral cultural development policy based on a vision of government-industry partnership, a close alignment of cultural and economic interests, and the promotion of an export-oriented creative imaginary.

This chapter discusses the government’s use of *The Lord of the Rings* production to brand and sell New Zealand and its products and services. Economic growth is anticipated by luring global entertainment productions to New Zealand that are then used as vehicles for leveraged, worldwide promotion of New Zealand’s natural and technological capital, in turn

attracting further foreign investment. Heroic fantasy proves to be an effective genre through which to base such an economic campaign, given its compelling story-line and amenability to trans-media representation. In *Creative Business: The Making of Addictive Stories* (2003) Paul Nero and Neeta Patel explain the economic value of “sticky content”:

Sticky content is addictive content, luring users from one place to the next, with the promise of bigger, better, purer fixes. When stories catch fire and become hits, audiences are measured in millions. Millions of people, generating millions of dollars. All from a sticky story of addictive content. That which transfers across media. And hangs around. (3)

In contrast to the condemnation delivered by the Frankfurt School and its successors, Nero and Patel write approvingly of the compulsive behaviour characterising late capitalist consumption upon which business can “generate millions”. The key, they advise, is to identify a “sticky” story; given the enduring popularity of *The Lord of the Rings*, the New Zealand government has stumbled onto the right formula for financial success.

Wellington city’s embracing of the Wellywood brand provides a case study through which to appreciate the commercialising effect of current

economic policy. Spec(tac)ular events such as the World Premiere of *The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* and *The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy – The Exhibition* at Te Papa have raised the international profile of Wellington city and New Zealand, but what are the implications for national identity in the wake of public approbation of Jackson’s Oscar-winning film adaptation? Anne McClintock advances that “the singular power of nationalism since the late nineteenth century . . . has been its capacity to organize a sense of popular, collective unity through the management of mass national *commodity spectacle*” (273, italics in original). I suggest that New Zealand’s appropriation of Tolkien’s heroic fantasy as its own operates both as a vehicle for launching a new economic strategy *and* a persuasive symbol of national unity as McClintock postulates. As a “scopic politics” (268) nationalism conveniently dovetails with cultural and economic imperatives under late capitalism. Jackson’s film trilogy therefore operates as a unifying point through which the New Zealand public willingly collude in the commodification of the text and the local landscape with the result that national identity is subsumed both within the narrative itself and the ongoing and insistent success of the films and leveraged products and services.

The economic strategy is not unique to New Zealand – think of the tourism generated by *The Sound of Music* (1965) for the Salzburg Alps, the busloads of Shakespearean fans visiting the playwright’s birthplace in

Stratford-upon-Avon, the interest in Prince Edward Island as a result of L. M. Montgomery's popular novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). However, perhaps representing the entire country as a studio backlot is a distinctive feature (Macdonald, "Beverley Hillbillies" 4). The intense media saturation of all New Zealand and its people as Middle-earth fulfils the demands of an integrated branding strategy, in which the commodity must be thoroughly immersed into business plans and individual actions. To convince the world that New Zealand is home of Middle-earth requires national unity around this concept; and its success reflects a "triumph of fetish management" (McClintock 274), such as that evoked at the world premiere of *The Return of the King* in "Wellywood".

Yet even Peter Jackson has sloughed off his "hobbit" image. Between the completion of *The Lord of the Rings* films and commencement of production on his next Hollywood box office hit, *King Kong* (2005), Jackson lost 70lbs and had laser surgery so that he no longer needed to wear glasses ("Biography for Peter Jackson"). The dramatic change in Jackson's image suggests he has moved on from his celebrated personification of the hobbitesque; perhaps it is time that New Zealand national identity did too.

Brand New Zealand

In the globalised world suffused by media, governments have become increasingly aware of the importance of how their nation is represented to consumers. The country's image is therefore managed and manipulated so as to stand out as a distinctive and desirable tourist destination, a favourable business environment or exporting nation. By emphasising its distinguishing features – its history, geography, ethnic groups – the nation-state “(re)invents a sense of national identity in order to carve out a strategic niche and competitive advantage in the global economy” (True 204).

The nation-state is regarded as a business, with all spheres of activity subject to a competitive business model, such as Helen Clark outlined at the Innovation Conference in Christchurch in March 2002:

We will be working with the private sector to develop a consistent brand image of New Zealand across all our industry sectors, so that we add smart and innovative to the clean and green image! Currently we are also investing millions of dollars in leveraging benefit for New Zealand off the release of *The Lord of the Rings* - filmed in New Zealand and made by New Zealanders, and the second defence – by New Zealanders – of yachting's premier trophy, the America's Cup. Both events can help promote New

Zealand as technologically advanced, creative, and successful – and our many other innovators can leverage off that brand. (18)

Clark singles out Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* and the 2003 defence of the America's Cup as significant events through which to establish this new economic model. As spec(tac)ular events given intense international media coverage they provide unprecedented opportunities to launch a national branding campaign.

The programme that Clark outlines in her speech is an integrated branding strategy, differing from the thinner concept of brand image in its reach and penetration of all elements of organisational management. Accordingly, "all actions and messages are based on the value the company brings to its line of business" (LePla and Parker 2). The integrated brand therefore requires "consistent" behaviour and vision across "all our industry sectors", with the national brand, "supported, reinforced and enriched by every act of communication between the country and the rest of the world (Anholt 11, italics in original). The government's role is to coordinate public and private interests, brokering contracts between New Zealand agencies and transnational capital, and to convince potential markets that "there is a mind behind the brand and its offer: a collective and conscious force which can be relied upon to

keep the promise set out by the brand” (Lodge 384). Indeed, public relations expert Wally Ollins goes so far as to state that:

nations increasingly use business-speak – growth targets, education targets, health targets; global companies increasingly emphasise “soft” issues, their value to society and their benevolent influence. The relationship between companies and countries is getting closer. They compete, they overlap, they swap places. (qtd. in True 204)

The “100% Pure” campaign launched in 1999 claims New Zealand is essentially “clean and green”, but to maximise marketing potential a national brand must also convey human intelligence, which Clark identifies as innovation, technological capability, and creativity. Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* and the New Zealand film industry provide the ideal vehicle for the current confluence of creativity and business; following Tony Blair’s “Cool Britannia” lead, Clark’s government unifies national aspirations by promoting Jackson’s creative team as role models in the developing “creative economy”. The government is encouraging other entrepreneurs to attach their products to *The Lord of the Rings* and thereby leverage off the film industry’s global reach. “Brand Jackson’s” international recognition is greater than “Brand New Zealand”; it therefore makes sense to utilise the recognition attached to Jackson

and *The Lord of the Rings* as a catalyst to further marketing of New Zealand-related services and products.

Where previously “our story to the world – and to ourselves – was muddled” with “confused myths . . . no global view, a poor sense of history, little imagination, no focus, wrong imagery, an absence of metaphors” (Sweeney), New Zealand now has a coherent message peddled by an emotionally persuasive vehicle (*The Lord of the Rings* films), which revitalises the pre-existing and internationally recognised “clean and green” campaign: New Zealand is projected as a safe place, a largely pre-industrial, rural idyll; but it’s also an adventure playground full of creative, fun and technologically advanced people/hobbits. It is a powerful factor in the success of the rebranding of New Zealand that there is a significant level of coincidence between the values and myths of Tolkien’s heroic fantasy and those pre-existing in the national imaginary. New Zealand “Home of Middle-earth” taps into current ideas and beliefs about the New Zealand landscape and people; branding New Zealand as Middle-earth therefore re-energises and strengthens existing conceptions of national identity.

Critical to the success of this branding strategy, too, is the “reinvention of the archaic to sanction modernity” (McClintock 273). *The Lord of the Rings* films express both the authenticity Bakhtin attributes to the epic and the advanced computer graphic imagery (cgi) technology of late capitalism, at once satisfying

the audience's desire for images and products related to natural or "folkloric" time and commitment to modernity's technological innovations.² The irony is that New Zealand, as a "young" country (both in terms of human occupation and its geology) can project itself as Middle-earth or pre-industrial England. By virtue of a small population and "short" history, New Zealand can plausibly evoke a timeless and wondrous land – especially with the intervention of the Weta Workshop's computer graphics.

In 2004, New Zealand marketing expert Kevin Roberts informed tourism students at Limerick University that Peter Jackson's "effort is the biggest and boldest and the best story about taking on the world and winning." He continues:

The Lord of the Rings shows the scenic splendour of New Zealand that is opening up a whole new wave of tourism . . . But more profoundly, the Rings enterprise shows a design and technology capability unmatched in the world, it shows off a business moxie that we are not previously known for, and it shows off a spirit that

² Jackson asserts his film trilogy as "historical films" rather than fantasy, on the basis that Tolkien's Middle-earth is not on another planet, but "our own planet about 6000 or 7000 years ago" ("The Director" 116). He has endeavoured to convey authenticity by, for example, employing original methods of sword making and stamping the coat of arms inside individual pieces of armour, where only the actors would see it (*The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy – The Exhibition*).

marks out New Zealanders as being among the best people in the world to work and play with.

Roberts summarises the myriad of ways in which *The Lord of the Rings* film franchise can potentially benefit New Zealand economically, but to be effective, there needs to be an emotional quotient to the marketing: “you need to invoke the power of metaphor in order to unleash emotional responses to what you do. Only by doing this will you have consumers who are ‘loyal beyond reason’” (Roberts). Again, Tolkien’s story and the myths created around Jackson’s adaptation and New Zealand’s appropriation of it provides this “emotional richness” (Roberts). Repeatedly telling ourselves and the world that we are “the little nation that could” (Oram “New Zealand”) produces self-belief at the same time as evoking the heroic archetype. At the level of both the individual (Peter Jackson) and the nation (New Zealand) we may be diminutive (hobbits) and unheard of (the Shire/Hobbiton), but we have beaten Hollywood (Sauron) at its own game. Peter Jackson was, after all, voted the most influential and powerful director in (but proudly out) of Hollywood for 2005.³

The reason that such stories about New Zealand’s various levels of involvement with *The Lord of the Rings* provoke impassioned responses, brand

³ Jackson quickly moved up the *Premiere* magazine’s Power List. In 2002 he was ranked #41, but by 2005 he was #1 (“Biography for Peter Jackson”).

marketing would argue, is due to the compelling meaning that archetypes provide. Archetypes are attributed with working on an individual's deep psyche or unconscious, referring to basic human desires and motivations and inciting deep emotions and yearnings. By not only evoking the heroic archetype but *embodying* it provokes an "emotional affinity" (Mark and Pearson 10); the key is not "borrowing meaning in an ephemeral advertising campaign, but rather *becoming* a consistent and enduring expression of meaning – essentially becoming a brand icon" (11, italics in original).

Tourism marketing has sought to encourage visitors by attaching the emotional value they feel for Tolkien's Middle-earth to the New Zealand landscape, claiming New Zealand as "best supporting country in a motion picture", where "the set hasn't been taken down yet" (*Tourism New Zealand*). Such marketing establishes a synchronicity between brand and vehicle that commands optimal market reach. "Product placement", where companies pay for their merchandise to appear in a movie, is no longer the favoured marketing strategy, given the vulnerability of the product's brand if the narrative context does not support the entirety of the brand value. Rather, companies now look for "ideas that bring entertainment value to our brands, and ideas that integrate our brands into entertainment" (Steve Heyer qtd. in Sutter 18).

For New Zealand business and creative industry sectors to fully realise the marketing potential that *The Lord of the Rings* offers, it is essential that the

landscape is not viewed as a tourist product placement. Clark looks to annul this weakened form of branding by adding “smart and innovative” to the existing brand of “clean and green”. However, it is difficult to achieve an association for the consumer between the New Zealand landscape on-screen and the technical skills of the local film industry as well as other sectors of the New Zealand economy. As Rod Oram warns, cross-marketing “everything from wine to widgets on the back of the films” is implausible (“Brand New Zealand” 41) and the representation of New Zealand as “mythically medieval” (*The Lord of the Rings*, *The Last Samurai*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) is unlikely to convince investors to “bankroll a sophisticated software or biotech business here” (42).

Nevertheless, local entrepreneurial response to *The Lord of the Rings* demonstrates that good financial returns are possible through cross-sectoral leveraging, whether as an established commercial business or a newly developed enterprise; Air New Zealand painted characters from *The Lord of the Rings* on international aircraft, Resene Paints launched a new colour called “Wellywood” and Telecom proudly advertised its advanced telecommunication innovations to the trilogy production’s unique demands, while Ian Brodie’s guide to film locations around New Zealand (*The Lord of the Rings Location Book* 2002) and the establishment of Hobbiton Tours marked local

start-up businesses responding to intense international interest in the film and New Zealand.

The Lord of the Rings: The Motion Picture Trilogy exhibition presented by Te Papa Tongarewa-Museum of New Zealand provided a further leveraged commodity. The exhibition used original costumes, scale models and documentaries to tell the story of the making of the trilogy, attracting over 200,000 visitors to Te Papa in Wellington and over 1 million to its touring locations in Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia.⁴ A number of documentaries and books detailing the “making of” the trilogy bear witness to the exceptional level of skilled craftsmanship and technological innovation employed to create *The Lord of the Rings*; however, whether these favourable qualities are attributed by the audience to New Zealand’s design and information technology sectors, or simply to Peter Jackson, is unclear.

The greatest momentum, however, for cross-sectoral leveraging through *The Lord of the Rings* has been with tourism, and essential to this marketing campaign is the projection of New Zealand as Middle-earth. Tourism New Zealand has centralised the implementation of this branding of New Zealand,

⁴ This exhibition was the most successful to date for Te Papa, resulting in its return in 2006 running from April to October. An example of Tolkien’s economically rewarding heroic fantasy over-riding New Zealand and especially Maori culture, the return of *The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy - the Exhibition* side-lined *Toi Te Papa* for eight months. Described as an “art of the nation exhibition”, *Toi Te Papa* was originally intended to open in February 2006, complementing the New Zealand Arts Festival (“Old Engine”).

reinforcing the “verity” of *The Lord of the Rings*-based Fantasy tourism ventures such as Red Carpet Tours, Extreme Green Rafting and Hobbiton Tours. That the New Zealand landscape-as-commodity has become thoroughly infused with the affect and narrative coherence of Tolkien’s imaginary world is a welcome development for fans, predicted Vic James, a guide for Red Carpet Tours:

For years, genuine *The Lord of the Rings* fans have adopted the story as their own, and they reach for it daily as a reference. . . . When the filming was done, they adopted the actors as part of their extended family, too . . . I think that when the movie comes out, they will then add New Zealand as *their* Middle-earth. So, to complete that whole picture for them, they will want to make a pilgrimage here. (qtd. in G. Campbell 19, italics in original)

Indicators of the success of this tourism strategy include: the *Lonely Planet* designating New Zealand as the “Hot Spot for 2003” (“IMP Success Story” 8); New Zealand displacing four-time winner Italy for the 2004 *Daily Telegraph* Travel Award; the *Guardian & Observer’s* People’s Choice award for best long-haul travel destination going to New Zealand (“Another UK Award”); and the

tourism sector's surprising out-performance of the dairy industry in 2004 ("Tourism's in for a Hot Summer").⁵

Despite tourism's upbeat profile and commendations, Peter Calder notes that the increase in visitor numbers was even higher in Australia during a similar period (10); given the very low margins in this highly seasonal service industry, increased visitor numbers do not necessarily translate into higher net earnings. For *The Lord of the Rings* to remain an effective marketing tool the branding needs to remain current; however, by early 2006 New Zealand tourism is already looking to revitalise its brand. In February 2006 Adam Bennett reports in the *New Zealand Herald* that "Tourism New Zealand is increasing its international marketing efforts to try to offset softening tourism numbers". Then at the 2006 annual tourism expo, Trenz, it was mooted that Peter Jackson could help boost American tourist numbers to New Zealand by becoming what Thierry Jutel has quipped as the "poster boy for fast capitalism". Tourist operator Michael McClelland suggested that the director's

⁵ It has become familiar government rhetoric to juxtapose film industry achievements with references to New Zealand's tourist appeal: Minister of Economic Development Jim Anderton sees Brad McGann's *In My Father's Den* as "a powerful piece of social commentary with stunning New Zealand backdrops", and a press release implies runaway Bollywood productions are responsible for Indian tourism and the export education market: "Over 100 Bollywood productions have been filmed in New Zealand since 1995. An estimated 18,000 Indian tourists visit New Zealand each year with 2,500 Indian students studying in the country" ("New Zealand a World-Class Film Making Destination").

celebrity status would appeal to his targeted market, producing a “tremendous impact” if Jackson were to participate in an advertising campaign, in which he would stand barefoot with a glass of New Zealand wine in his hand.

Although *The Lord of the Rings* has proven an and amenable vehicle through which to brand New Zealand, Helen Clark’s other brand vehicle, the 2003 America’s Cup defence, was, unfortunately, a disaster. Team New Zealand lost 5-0 to the Swiss conglomerate Alinghi, the campaign seared into national consciousness by the embarrassing demasting of the New Zealand yacht in the fourth race. Professions of technological wizardry did not bear out on the water, a group entitled the “Blackhearts” provoked nationalistic fervour against former Team New Zealand skipper Russell Coutts, and the entire campaign was marred with claims of death threats against members of the Alinghi team.⁶

This example proves the inefficacy of branding when the product does not match the images and messages the branding endorses. The Blackheart campaign to generate nationalistic support for Team New Zealand was cynical

⁶ Jacqui True describes the 2003 America’s Cup defense as an example of economic nationalism (214-218). This campaign was also of “heroic” proportions. Team New Zealand was the only “national” team competing in the Louis Vuitton Cup, supported by corporate sponsorship and government funding. In contrast, the Alinghi team was a commercial syndicate, privately funded by owner billionaire Ernesto Bertarelli. As the advertising at the time quipped, “it’s their billions against our team of 3.9 million”, contrasting Alinghi’s enormous funding pool against the (loyal) population of New Zealand.

to some extent, given that some prominent members of the group had a vested business interest in the success of the defence, owning property in the Auckland Viaduct where the syndicates were based (True 217). The public tirade against former captain Russell Coutts hints at the dark side of nationalism, and, finally, Team New Zealand simply did not fulfil their promise to retain the Cup.

Branding the nation requires all businesses and government agencies to engage with the concept in order for it to succeed. New Zealand's capital, Wellington, has taken up the opportunity to reimagine the city in terms offered by Jackson's Hollywood project, coming up with the epithet "Wellywood." Jacqui True amusingly describes the jostle for countries to sell their image for competitive advantage in the globalising environment as a beauty pageant: "Countries represent themselves to global consumers and investors, acting like contestants at a beauty contest" (205). This description is particularly apt for the international film industry, with national agencies (such as Film New Zealand) vying for Hollywood to produce films in their country.⁷ But it equally describes the inter-regional competition within New Zealand for the Hollywood dollar and mana it brings. Unlike the competition, however, Wellington has given the keys of the city to Peter Jackson, and has marketed its own distinctive identity within New Zealand as the "creative capital."

⁷ Film New Zealand emphasises the diversity of locations within the country through its logo, "The World in One Country."

Absolutely, Positively “Wellywood”

In 2000 the *Heart of the Nation* report observed that, “more than any other city in New Zealand, Wellington has demonstrated how to use strategic positioning to add value to existing cultural assets and deliver economic, social, and cultural benefits to the community” (42). In this context, “adding value” refers to the potential spin-off activities (merchandising, marketing, tourism, leisure, education, and events), made possible through the integration of New Zealand cultural production and regional economic development with the structures of global entertainment. Peter Jackson’s commitment to Wellington (indicated by locating his Weta Workshop and Park Rd Post post-production facility in the eastern suburb of Miramar and his insistence that the premiere for the final film in the trilogy be held in Wellington’s historic Embassy Theatre) has enabled the city’s civic leaders to exploit this “creative industry” opportunity. The soubriquet “Wellywood” suggests a local spin on a global brand by blending Wellington and Hollywood, implying that New Zealand is able to vie with Los Angeles for blockbuster film productions and their attendant international mass audiences and celebrity media. But equally, with reference to the fellow neologism Bollywood (the Bombay film industry), Wellywood suggests that a

local flavour may be sustainable even while servicing the global entertainment market.⁸

From the mid-1990s Wellington began to remarket itself under the tagline “Absolutely Positively Wellington” in response to a substantial drift of corporate entities northwards or overseas.⁹ Wellington is therefore looking to consolidate alternative markets centred around the consumption of images (communications, marketing, entertainment, and tourism) to bolster the city’s economic position. Given the current move for manufacturing to pursue cheap labour offshore and the difficulties of negotiating trade deals for New Zealand’s bulk commodity exports into the protected markets of the European Union and the United States, the global entertainment market looks attractive with substantial growth figures.¹⁰ In order to realise the potential economic rewards

⁸ Anthropologist Jonathan Friedman describes this assimilation of the global into the local as “weak globalization”. An example of “strong globalization” would be the Club Med franchise, where a standard product is imposed irrespective of the location.

⁹ For example, the dairy co-operative Fonterra relocated its head office to Auckland in 2004 (announced 2003). See the Wellington City Council’s Draft Economic Development Strategy 2003.

¹⁰ Statistics from the 1990s that support this new economic vision include estimates from UNESCO that international trade in cultural goods increased from \$US47.8 billion in 1980 to \$US213.7 billion in 1998, with the United States importing \$US60 billion in 1998 (UNESCO v, vii). Statistics relating to the consumption of leisure activities in the United States show the percentage of household spending on entertainment (5.4%) exceeding those of clothing and health care (5.2% each). Similarly, between 1992 and 1997 the annual expenditure on leisure

from the cultural sector, Vantage Consulting recommended the “Wellywood” brand to the Wellington City council in 1999, advising that, “Wellington needed to strengthen its film production infrastructure, which was fragile compared with those of overseas film centres” (“Blumsky”). Brand Wellington reflects the region’s urbane lifestyle and “creative class” (Florida) demographic, characterised as engaged in technology, entertainment, finance, high-end manufacturing, and the arts, which are estimated as 38% of the working population in Wellington (Wellington City Council 13). Wellington’s integrated brand has provided a focus for the regional tourism and business agencies (Positively Wellington Tourism and Positively Wellington Business respectively) to encourage communication and synergy between diverse business sectors such as film and television production, telecommunications, and fashion design. Telecom, for example, drew on the media pull of high profile star Tom Cruise to announce their introduction of fibre optic cabling to Wellington’s infrastructure: “Broadband brought this man [Tom Cruise] to NZ: Is there no end to its powers?” Other commercial cross-marketing opportunities arising out of the Wellywood brand includes Resene Paint’s

activities rose by 50% in the United Kingdom, so that, “by the end of the 1990s, British consumers spent more on leisure and tourism than on food, rent, and local taxes put together” (Hannigan, 20-21). Over the same time frame, the cultural sector’s proportion of New Zealand Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased to approximately 2.8% in 1996 (*Government Spending on Culture* 9). Between 1994-1999 growth in the creative industries sector (16.3%) surpassed that of the general economy (11.2%) (*Heart of the Nation* 9).

“Wellywood” paint. This lime green paint was used in the refurbishment of the Embassy Theatre for *The Return of the King* premiere: “Aptly named Wellywood, this colour is unique. Distinctive like Peter Jackson and a celebration of NZ’s claim to green, Wellywood is truly one of a kind” (“Wellywood Paint”).

Wellington’s (and New Zealand’s) cross-marketing of products and services has taken advantage of the international platform *The Lord of the Rings* has provided, to a greater extent than has Britain. Immediately after the world premiere of *The Fellowship of the Rings* in London the New Zealand herald claimed “NZ Rings gets flying start over squabbling British”:

New Zealand has grabbed the upper hand in a tourism battle for the [sic] Middle-earth as Britain dithers over just where J.R.R. Tolkien set *The Lord of the Rings*. . . .

“In a few weeks visitors can explore the regions used for filming – a road trip that will take them from mountains and volcanoes to farmland and forests,” Tourism New Zealand publicity released in Britain stated. . . .

In contrast, British Tourist Authority attempts to cash in have been stymied by a dispute over where Englishman Tolkien set his blockbusting book. (Norquay)

Britain also met “difficulties” when attempting to take advantage of the increased tourism generated by the *Harry Potter* franchise. As evidenced by their heavy-handed approach to website domain names, Warner Bros. are “very protective of [the] *Harry Potter* brand” and cautioned British tourism enterprises against directly promoting locations such as Scotland’s Glenfinnan Viaduct with the films (Naysmith). Warner Bros. profess altruism; they do not want to “demystify the magic for its fans” by making connections with real places (Naysmith). Scotland’s national tourism board, VisitScotland, has therefore resorted to more “subtle” means of exploiting and generating potential *Harry Potter* tourism. For example, they offer a “Pottering Itinerary”, which suggests a five-day trip around Scotland that includes a visit to Edinburgh’s medieval Old Town (it being a source of “inspiration for *Harry Potter*”) and the Glenfinnan Viaduct where you can “imagine yourself aboard the Hogwarts Express with the Weasley’s flying car in hot pursuit” (“Pottering Itinerary”).

But while British tourist operators must take care not to “break the spell” of Warner Bros.’ “most valuable commodity” (Naysmith), Warner Bros. themselves have endorsed the “Harry Potter Movie Magic Experience” at their Movie World theme-park in Australia. Touted as the “only place where . . . movie magic comes alive everyday”, Warner Bros. entice *Harry Potter* fans to their theme-park, where “you will enter the spellbinding world of Harry Potter

. . . and meander down a fully recreated Diagon Alley and discover a captivating display of sets inspired by the film and real film artefacts” (“Harry Potter Movie Magic Experience”). With Diane Nelson of Warner Bros. claiming that marketing and merchandising are “nowhere near saturation point” (qtd. in Naysmith) it is no surprise that to complete the “Harry Potter Movie Magic Experience” there is a “fantastic retail store where all your Harry Potter keepsakes are available for purchase” (“Harry Potter Movie Magic Experience”).

Warner Bros., then, want to make their movie experience “real”, but not so real as to totally displace consumption from their highly profitable marketed product onto the authentic historic and geographic sites of Britain. Malcolm Roughead is head of marketing at VisitScotland and sympathetically explains that while “Glencoe and Glenfinnan viaduct are providing backdrops [to the films], in the world of Harry Potter they don’t really exist. We have to treat that with sensitivity and understanding and explore how we might work around it” (qtd. in Naysmith). This leads to a curious conundrum where reality gives way to that generated by Hollywood.

British experience with the *Harry Potter* franchise contrasts markedly with that of New Zealand and *The Lord of the Rings*. VisitScotland credits the New Zealand Tourist board with providing the “model of how to make use of such gift-wrapped opportunities”. Key to this success is the co-ordination of the

national tourism body, the national airline (Air New Zealand) and financial and policy support from the government: “They joined up, got together and that makes life much easier,” Michael Roughead told his local media (Naysmith).¹¹

Where *Harry Potter* is perceived by its trademark proprietor as being susceptible to a close association with the authentic, historical Scotland, *The Lord of the Rings* is apparently enhanced by lifting it out of the national context Tolkien associated it with and translating it onto another. Britain’s desire to anchor *The Lord of the Rings* tourism in historically legitimated locations has been eclipsed by New Zealand marketer’s postmodern exploitation of the text. The assumption of Tolkienesque nomenclature to each of the New Zealand locations used in Jackson’s project is made possible by grasping the virtuality of Middle-earth, so that maps presenting New Zealand as Middle-earth accompany the “set-jettlers” (Conway) who seek to extend their fantasy experience from the cinema into the New Zealand landscape.¹² According to

¹¹ VisitScotland has “benchmarked” Scottish tourism against that of New Zealand, Austria and Ireland in a series of Benchmarking reports, which are posted on the website under “Research and Statistics”.

¹² This opportunity is also available for fans of C. S. Lewis’s *Narnia Chronicles* from January 2006. It will cost up to \$1,100 to tour the South Island locations (Conway A3). Fervour to inscribe Middle-earth nomenclature over the New Zealand landscape reached its zenith with one Tolkien fan proposing to the New Zealand Geographic Board in 2005 that locations in Fiordland be renamed so as to “attract visitors and serve as a lasting memento [sic] of the filming in New Zealand” (Bain A3). Aaron Nicholson suggests U Pass could become Rivendell

the intellectual property lawyer for the Tolkien estate, “it’s all a bit ridiculous because Tolkien never had any connection with New Zealand; neither did his book” (Brooke). Ian Collier, spokesman for the Tolkien Society suggests, “as for New Zealand being the home of Middle Earth – well, it is the home of the film of Middle Earth” (Brooke).

Irrespective of these complaints, the projection of New Zealand as Middle-earth continued with the world premiere of the third film in Wellington providing an exceptional opportunity for the city to “promote the Capital’s creativity and innovation and for Wellingtonians to show their support for Peter Jackson and his crew” (“Return of the King”). However, to make this branding exercise work there needs to be a viable and vibrant New Zealand film industry. To fully appreciate the fundamental policy shift relating to the film industry in New Zealand it is pertinent to recall conditions prior to the extension of neo-liberal economic logic to culture and recognise the government’s initial reluctance to subsidise Hollywood projects undertaken in New Zealand.

Gap and an unnamed peak could be called Aragorn’s Sentinel. This proposal has not met with much favour, with the Southland Mayor, Frana Cardno stating, “The mountains belong to the people of New Zealand and it is up to the community and the people of New Zealand to decide what names we have. I’m a great supporter of *The Lord of the Rings*, but in 20 or 50 years’ time, people will be wondering why we have these funny names” (qtd. in Bain A3). Nicholson’s suggestion arose alongside an initiative to give Maori greater influence over name changes in New Zealand. See Bain’s article “More Maori Say”.

Cultural Policy

The 1999 Labour government's reluctant approval of a tax shelter for Peter Jackson's film adaptation ironically precipitated a thorough change in policy and attitude toward the cultural sector, establishing an ambitious, integrated initiative to expand its tiny market share of the global entertainment industry, estimated at half a trillion US dollars (Vogel xvii). Jackson's film project was significant on a Hollywood scale let alone in comparison with any previous local production; *The Lord of the Rings* is the first trilogy made by a single director, 23,000 New Zealanders¹³ were involved in the \$600 million production and Jackson's creative team appeased a difficult and obdurate fan base who were collectively ambivalent about a successful cinematic representation of Tolkien's sacrosanct Middle-earth.

The financial, technological, logistical and artistic success of Jackson's project allowed the government to imagine wooing further foreign large budget film productions. Cabinet Minister Pete Hodgson was appointed "Minister of the Rings", overseeing a \$9 million government package to promote spin-offs (shared between Jackson's adaptation and the 2003 America's Cup defence),

¹³ Pete Hodgson quoted this figure at the Parliamentary reception for Jackson and *The Lord of the Rings* talent at the Wellington premiere of *The Return of the King*.

and a \$4 million government subsidy to stage *The Return of the King* premiere. Discourse about New Zealand film shifted from “quality” – a film’s aesthetic and expressive appeal – to “quantity” – the capacity of a film to produce foreign exchange. And in a thorough turn around from the business ethos of the 1990s where arts agencies were expected to behave more like business, businesses are now encouraged to act more like arts agencies, for “creativity is at the heart of innovation” (*Growing an Innovative Economy* 56).

Cultural policy has been a prominent portfolio under Helen Clark’s prime ministership and *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy has helped facilitate this blurring of the boundaries between the cultural and the economic with its potential for generating significant revenue through “value-adding”. Yet to realise this untapped potential first required the government to logically dissolve previously irresolvable policy tensions: the differing demands of “art”, “cultural development”, and “creative industry”; production for domestic versus international audiences; aesthetic versus commercial criteria for quality; state funding of production versus foreign direct investment; the degree of state interventionism in funding mechanisms and signals; and the effort to capture the distribution of cultural products as well as their production.

While creatively driven from New Zealand, *The Lord of the Rings* was financed through foreign sources. Such productions are attractive to the government as New Zealand interests are potentially able to retain and exploit

intellectual property rights, and so corresponding policy initiatives have been introduced including the large budget grant scheme and tax incentives. Those supporting these productions in New Zealand (Peter Jackson is a prominent proponent) rebut opposition to tax-funded incentives by claiming that such films would not be made here without the incentives. Inherent in this argument is that these films benefit the New Zealand economy; however, this has not yet been reliably ascertained of *The Lord of the Rings*.¹⁴

The New Zealand Institute of Economic Research wrote the *Scoping the Lasting Effects of The Lord of the Rings* report for the New Zealand Film Commission in 2002. This report has been widely criticised, particularly for its silence on the substantial tax relief the production received, but also for its hasty timing; given the difficulty to determine long-term effects of film production, the report seems premature. What the report does continue, however, is the “feel-good effect” of the appearance of success. The barrage of self-congratulatory catch-phrases (Ruth Harley’s “How we created world-class performance”, for example) carry their own momentum and implied value; as John Downie observes, “how could the *Lord of the Rings* not be a success when the very terms of its cranking up, its momentum, and its manufacture, were always posited on a final idea of the ‘success’ it must of necessity be?” (3).

¹⁴ See Barnett (2002) and Lawn and Beatty (“On the Brink”).

Jackson's team have achieved a "subtly compelling public consent" (Werry 7) through the management of perceived social inclusion. The New Zealand army were engaged as extras for orcs; ecologically-friendly filming practices kept the Department of Conservation, environmentalists and the Ngai Tahu and Tuwharetoa tribes onside (Phillipson 30-31); a Wellington rugby crowd were roused to record the foot-stamps of the oliphants in the *Return of the King*; and international media attended the *Return of the King* film premiere held in Wellington. All of these strategies "firmly inserted the kiwi into the Tolkien bestiary" (Downie 5). But this seductive "cyclone of the hyperreal" (4) generates "production fetishism", which Arjun Apparadai suggests occurs when a nation proudly appropriates as "ours" an entity that is largely owned and controlled overseas, creating an illusion of "local control, national productivity and territorial sovereignty" that obscures the transnationalism of a product (306).

Current policy for the creative industries not only seeks to improve economic outcomes, but also helps create new perceptions and social relationships. The definition of capital has softened to include physical and financial capital *and* human, cultural, and creative capital, allowing for an overall conceptual shift toward post-modern policy that projects the impression of success through persistent expressions of confidence in order to stimulate that success. The government has therefore used Peter Jackson's adaptation as

a policy vehicle to direct New Zealand toward an entrepreneurial creativity. Film production, with its transnational reach and associated global media opportunities, provides a vital platform for New Zealand to enter the post-industrial environment, which, as discussed above, is characterised by the trading of images.

The change in cultural policy got off to an ambivalent beginning. By 2002, there was intense media excitement regarding the impending Oscar success of Jackson's creative team and Nicki Caro's *Whale Rider* was being lauded for the strength of its international sales. At the same time, however, the local film industry was being described as "very sick indeed" (Peter Jackson qtd. in "Filmz"), "a disaster . . . in terms of telling New Zealand stories" (Vincent Ward, qtd. in Hansen 19), and "intellectually run-down [and] artistically impoverished" ("A Fran by any other name"). Not only was there no domestic Film Award ceremony due to a lack of films, but the low-budget film production company Kahukura collapsed, generating an upsurge of industry discontent with the New Zealand Film Commission. It seemed that producer and director John Maynard's dire prediction for the New Zealand film industry was coming to pass: "anywhere foreign productions increase, local productions decrease" ("Filmz").

Three years later in the June 2005 Annual Report, the New Zealand Film Commission is upbeat about the success of the New Zealand film industry,

celebrating the “extraordinary group of films” to be released over the summer of 2005-2006.¹⁵ Roger Donaldson’s *The World’s Fastest Indian*, Vincent Ward’s *River Queen*, Glenn Standring’s *Perfect Creature*, Toa Fraser’s *No. 2* and the Naked Samoans’ *Sione’s Wedding* contribute to this successful season.

According to Chairman Barrie Everard, “artists like these and scores of talented people from a wide range of crafts create the unique identity of New Zealand films”:

Films like the group that are coming up for release make an enormous contribution to our national identity and say a huge amount to international audiences about the sophisticated level of our technical, technological, craft, creative and producer’s skills.

¹⁵ See also, Tim Watkin’s “Kings of Fantasy.” “It may sound pure Hollywood,” Watkin gushes, “but this story of the little guy conquering the world is all true. New Zealand film-making is about to reach a new pinnacle this summer as films made here or directed by New Zealanders hit the world’s screens like never before” (14). Watkins includes in his list of films Caro’s *North Country*, and the two Hollywood blockbusters directed by New Zealanders, *King Kong* and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Ironically, this spectacular season for New Zealand film coincides with a slump in the Hollywood film industry; a significant drop in box office revenue apparently has Hollywood turning to New Zealand for “salvation” with the releases of *King Kong* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (14, 15). But this rhetoric seems reminiscent of the “crisis” discourse discussed above in relation to masculinity; the public are invited to view Hollywood as vulnerable and only they may “save” it by supporting the latest blockbuster, which for 2006 is the new film in the *Superman* franchise (“Superman to Save Hollywood?”).

They also speak of our multi-cultural society and present New Zealand to the world as a proud, innovative, confident nation. They represent the fruition of Helen Clark's government's comprehensive programme of support for the arts.

(NZFC Annual Report 5)

Everard stresses the cultural relevance of New Zealand film over potential economic reward, and firmly attributes this turnaround in fortunes to the incumbent government's foresight and support for the sector. Yet, have the fears that Vincent Ward has voiced regarding "New Zealand stories" really been annulled? Judging by Ward's fraught experience making *River Queen*, and indecision about whether he will ever make another film in New Zealand suggest that the process of producing films reflecting national stories and national identity remains difficult.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Vincent Ward's interview with Olivia Kember. After the difficulties of organising adequate finance, the shooting of *River Queen* was dogged with dramas of its own, with the experience so stressful "it turned [Ward's] hair, if not white, a good deal greyer" (Kember 18): winter conditions on the Whanganui River caused ill health and discontent amongst cast and crew – most notably that of lead actress Samantha Morton; insurers shut down shooting for five weeks in response to a claim; the United Chiefs of Aotearoa published a curse over the film in the *Taranaki Daily News*; Ward was sacked as producers lost faith in his ability to finish the film, only to be reinstated as director soon afterwards. Although Ward had long been determined to make a film reflecting New Zealand history, he is reluctant to commit to another; "I don't know that I'd be game to do another New Zealand film" (17).

Ward's reference to "New Zealand stories" indicates concern that cultural globalisation will accompany economic globalisation. Cultural globalisation describes the homogenisation (sometimes taken as the Americanisation) of cultural products to satisfy mainstream global audiences. Given government policy to utilise film production to endorse New Zealand as a film location and tourist destination to a global audience, with an eye on cross-sectoral leveraging, there is concern that a unique New Zealand idiom will be lost or compromised. This is a charge against *Whale Rider* that Niki Caro has defended at the 2005 SPADA Conference, claiming that "*Whale Rider* had never 'dumbed down' its culturally specific themes for an international audience" (paraphrased in "How Local Can You Go?").¹⁷

Despite continuing issues within the local industry, Ruth Harley asserts "New Zealand film is a brand now. A big brand" (qtd. in Watkin 17). To support this claim Harley observes that since the release of *The Lord of the Rings* it is the American distributors who initiate contact, they know where New

¹⁷ Jurgen Fauth writes in his brief but critical review of *Whale Rider* that he felt "insulted" by the "shallowness" of Caro's film. He claims that "every so often, a foreign movie will offer a hackneyed story, easily identifiable yet 'other' characters, and a formulaic story of empowerment, and without fail, that movie will do more business and gain wider attention than any other world film." He describes *Bend it Like Beckham*, *Chocolate*, *Life is Beautiful* and *Billy Elliott* as examples of this transnationally successful "genre". "Whale Rider is gearing up to be this year's pandering faux-foreign success" is his withering conclusion. Fauth's opinion taps into the concern Ward raises regarding homogenisation of film stories to ensure commercial success.

Zealand is and the New Zealand Film Commission is “dealing with individuals higher up the food chain” (17). The successful branding of New Zealand film is not solely attributable to Jackson’s success; Nicki Caro’s *Whale Rider* showcased another level of New Zealand film: “People saw we weren’t just blockbusters or just arthouse. We can do both, and both can be economical”, Harley declares (17).

Harley endorses the fundamental cultural policy shift that the Labour-led governments have instigated since 1999. For an example of the change of attitude toward the role of the film industry in New Zealand compare representations made by the NZ Film Commission nearly 20 years apart. In its 1985 annual report the New Zealand Film Commission described the local film industry as a “constant tug of war between finance, investment and economic returns on the one hand and art, culture and national identity on the other.” However, by 2001 the Commission’s CEO forcefully asserts, “there is no place in the new economy for the type of thinking which sees a disjunction between the business world and the art world” (Harley 2001). For a brand to be effective it needs to reflect the community’s existing self-perceptions; despite being developed and imposed by the government and corporate agencies, the brand should feel natural and unstructured to those who invest in it, both emotionally and financially. As Lodge notes, national brand equity, defined as “those residual beliefs in people’s minds about a country which they believe they have

adduced for themselves,” should generate self-confidence and pride (372).

With national wellbeing conflated with the integrated branding strategies introduced since 1999, the cultural sector is steadily being commercialised into cultural *industries*, effectively bringing a “friendly face” to the economic globalisation of New Zealand screen production.

In *No Logo* (2000) Naomi Klein argues that corporate branding obscures the material conditions of production in poor countries, but defenders of national branding claim that it enables small states to project themselves onto the global marketplace of products and ideas. Simon Anholt believes that even economically marginal states can compete with the first world in the globalised marketplace, with national branding imitating corporate branding to balance out structural inequities. Apparadai cautions, however, that small groups (including economically marginal states) can become enamoured “with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of global or cosmopolitan stage” (304). The efficacy of branding to mould popular opinion and ideals has convinced Peter van Ham to urge states to make brands not war, for state branding is “gradually supplanting nationalism” and therefore “contributing greatly to the further pacification of Europe” (3). The pacifying effect attributed to branding derives from the “soft power” that it exerts, that is, the capacity to make people want to do what their governing corporate bodies want them to do (Anholt 13). Comparing the popularity of New Zealand’s current integrated branding

strategy with the contestatory reform tactics of the National government in the 1990s, it would seem that Anholt's analysis holds true.

As CEO of the NZ Film Commission, Ruth Harley makes instructive comments about the function of national identity within a globalised economic climate, advancing that the "cultural industries are based on national identity" and that "national identity is key to creating a unique positioning for our goods and services". What Harley ignores, or perhaps did not foresee when making her comments in 2001, is that Tolkien's narrative fits so well with dominant perceptions of the New Zealand national identity that it both threatens and re-establishes collective identity in New Zealand. For example, Claudia Bell offers the following elements as characteristic of the New Zealand rural mythology: "the wholesomeness of working the land, joyful community life, satisfying family life, the rural aesthetic ideal, the nature myth, the traditional division of rural labour, rural conformity" ("Rural Way" 194). These attributes also closely reflect the idyllic qualities I have credited with providing the epic resonance in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* for alienated readers situated within late capitalism.

Within this framework, conservative values are reinvigorated as favourable, authentic: masculinity continues to represent the ideal subjectivity and therefore encapsulates the national identity; rural life is idealised as pure compared to the contaminated urban environment; and the heterosexual family

is “preserved as the ‘truth’ of society – its organic, authentic form” (McClintock 271). Conflict – gender, racial – vanishes once the “the natural image of national life” (271) is achieved. If there is doubt regarding Jackson’s films’ promoting a retrospective masculinity and commensurate national identity, consider the following editing decision. New Zealand actress Robyn Malcolm, who plays a Rohan refugee named Morwen, believes her character was the brainchild of co-scriptwriters Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens. She asserts that Morwen “was written because Fran and Philippa went, ‘This is turning into such a boys’ story’, and felt like they needed a bit more girl energy in the middle of the second film” (qtd. in M. Williams “Robyn Malcolm”). “Girl energy” included shooting Morwen giving birth in the midst of “all this hardcore male battle stuff”; however, “in the end, the testosterone-fuelled action scenes must have got the better of the editors because the part Malcolm shot was slashed dramatically” (M. Williams). Many such editing decisions are made during post-production, but given the amount of time devoted to battle-scenes in Jackson’s nine hour epic this particular editing decision indicates the overall tone and impetus of the film – that “the white nation emerges as the progeny of male history through the motor of military might” (McClintock 272).

The successful overlaying of Middle-earth mythology and topography onto New Zealand identity and landscape confirm McClintock’s view that the spectacle reveals the “extent to which nationalism is a theatrical performance of

invented community” (274). Eschewing Anderson’s influential perspective that nationalism arose from the emergence of print capitalism, McClintock argues the case for understanding the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century as effected through “the management of mass national *commodity spectacle* (273, italics in original). “More often than not”, McClintock continues,

nationalism takes shape through the visible, ritual organization of fetish objects – flags, uniforms, airplane logos, maps, anthems, national flowers, national cuisines and architectures as well as through the organization of collective fetish spectacle – in team sports, military displays, mass rallies, the myriad forms of popular culture and so on. (274)

Following McClintock, I suggest that *The Lord of the Rings* has become a “fetish ritual” (273) through which New Zealanders can submit to the “cultural persuasion” (273) that they live in a safe, idyllic land, enjoying the soothing rhetoric of international success and adulation, and the supremacy of Pakeha culture.¹⁸ To desire and achieve collective unity is a creditable and

¹⁸ It is because of the unique “fit” of Tolkien’s mythology with New Zealand’s own that the films have found such purchase on local cultural, economic and political goals. Therefore, I do not think that New Zealand national identity is at risk of being exploited each time an epic fantasy is filmed here; Andrew Adamson’s *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe* (2005), for

understandable undertaking, indeed it is a basic human need, but the vehicle through which it is imagined compels New Zealand back to its early colonial conception as “the Great Britain of the South” (Julius Vogel qtd. in Belich 447).

The world premiere in Wellington of *The Return of the King* exemplifies McClintock’s conception of “specular politics”. The event brought together local entrepreneurs, street theatre, Maori performance, fans, civic investment, national pride, and multinational corporate interests, marking it as a conjuncture where economics, politics and identities met in a warm display of singular unity, conveyed to the world via the obligatory media. This “Wellywood” premiere of a Hollywood movie highlights the confluence of production and consumption, the local and the global, the cultural and the economic; it signals the currency of heroic fantasy in late modernity as both ideology and industry.

Specular Politics

Since the mid 1990s Wellington has become an “event city”, with frequent spectacular festivals and sports events reinforcing the city’s signature as the “creative capital” of New Zealand. Events such as the World Sevens Rugby

example, has proven popular at the box office and set-jetting tours are available to location sites, but the film has not captured the national imaginary as has *The Lord of the Rings*.

weekend, Wearable Arts festival (WOW) and *The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy – The Exhibition* presented by Te Papa Tongarewa-Museum of New Zealand have contributed to Wellington being selected in September 2004 as 18th “hottest city in the world to visit” (“Wellington Amongst”), with each event, Mayor Kerry Prendergast believes, confirming Wellington’s ability to “throw a great party” (“Sevens Dates Confirmed”).¹⁹ The key to the success of these events is the participatory and convivial atmosphere that permeates the city. Reflecting on the WOW festival, Chris Lamers, General Marketing Manager of Positively Wellington Tourism observed, “Retailers themed their windows, the streets were decked out with banners, there was a street parade and Wellington Airport themed the terminal. All of this ensured that anyone who came to Wellington knew the show was on” (“WOW Showcases Wellington”).

A similar approach was taken to World Premiere of *The Return of the King* on 1 December 2003, at an estimated cost of \$1.8 million to Wellington ratepayers (Richardson). Given the global media attention that would be focused upon the event and Wellington city itself, local and national government alike were eager to present a good image to optimise potential

¹⁹ The local Wellington paper, *The Dominion Post*, helped hype up party fever on the day of the premiere, splashing across the front page “Will Frodo destroy the ring? Will Gollum snatch his precious: Will Peter Jackson wear shoes? Get ready for Wellington’s biggest-ever party . . .” (“Return of the King”). Journalist Nikki MacDonald develops the “fever” metaphor of the party atmosphere in Wellington, describing “the buzz that has spread through Wellington” as an “infectious disease – powerful, indiscriminate and inescapable.”

economic returns: “we aim to capture the maximum benefit for tourism, the New Zealand film industry and international understanding of this country’s exceptional creative talent and technology”, reiterated Minister for Lord of the Rings Pete Hodgson (Hodgson). Activities surrounding the premiere incorporated a Folklore Festival, a photographic exhibition by actor Viggo Mortensen (Aragorn), a low flyover of the city by a *The Lord of the Rings*-themed Air New Zealand jumbo jet and an outdoor screening of *The Two Towers*. These premiere festivities ran from 20 November through to 2 December 2003, encouraging visitors to prolong their stay.

Vast Weta Workshop models of Gollum, a Ringwraith and gargoyles marked significant buildings (the airport terminal, the Embassy theatre and the Beehive respectively), retailers put up themed displays, some individuals dressed up as their favourite Tolkien character,²⁰ street entertainers and concerts kept the near 120,000 attendees entertained (“The Lord of the Rings”). But the main event of the premiere event was the red carpet parade, which ran the length of Wellington’s “golden mile” from the Beehive (government

²⁰ One attendant at the Red Carpet event for *The Return of the King* world premiere stood out from the crowd. Dressed as Elvis Presley – the “King” of rock ‘n roll – he playfully interpreted Jackson’s film title to accord more closely with his own interests. It made a nice change from the more common “Elvish” impersonators and hints that there are limits to New Zealanders’ embracing of *The Lord of the Rings* motif.

buildings) to the especially revamped Embassy theatre.²¹ Celebrities and local dignitaries proceeded along the red carpet, with some – Viggo Mortensen, Orlando Bloom, Sir Ian McKellan, Helen Clark – wearing New Zealand-inspired clothing and accessories to emphasise their attachment to the country to the global audience. Overall, the day of the premiere was a success; the film was warmly received, media images were viewed across the world and the stars continuously regaled the pleasures of working with Peter Jackson and being in New Zealand. Local Wellingtonians, too, were proud of their most prominent citizen and the media exposure their city was receiving. Many took time off work to attend the Red Carpet event to express their appreciation and participate in the celebrations. Wellingtonians seemed to embrace *The Lord of the Rings* as a local rather than national project, with one individual I spoke to conveying popular opinion in the city that Jackson's film trilogy "belongs" to Wellington, while Auckland city had (and lost) the America's Cup sailing event.

The local government's projected \$12 million profit from the premiere and associated events therefore seemed a possible target, given "there's lots of foreigners. There's a lot of cash in the till" (N. MacDonald). However, a follow-up economic impact report has not yet been undertaken. A McDermott Miller

²¹ The Wellington City Council underwrote the refurbishment of the Embassy Theatre for \$4.66million and consequently took ownership of the "heritage icon" (WCC website). With Wellington's pitch as the feature film capital of New Zealand, the historic theatre becomes a fitting icon for the city.

report anticipated that, on the basis of 170 international journalists attending the premiere, the event would represent in New Zealand dollars \$9.5million new spending, \$25million in international media exposure, \$5million per annum in new tourism spending and \$25million per annum in on-going feature film production spending. But with close to 500 international journalists and media organisations attending, “beam[ing] images of the Capital in full party mode around the world, publish[ing] articles in most major international dailies and post[ing] stories on news websites” McDermott Miller’s figures are regarded as “extremely conservative” (“The Lord of the Rings – The Return of the King”).

While such revenue is clearly welcome, it is minuscule compared with the sums New Line and Peter Jackson himself are currently in litigation over. Although “Time Warner does not break out the revenue of feature films from total entertainment revenue in its statements” (Johnson), that is, the giant corporate does not publicly clarify the exact profit made from any individual film, Jackson is reportedly suing the production company for up to \$US100 million.²² Therefore the fetish ritual around the idea of Wellington as

²² Jackson’s position is that “self-dealing”, or the sale of subsidiary rights to other companies under the Time Warner umbrella, reduced the film’s potential gross revenues, upon which his agreed percentage is based (Johnson). The Time Warner website does, however, reveal some “core statistics”, indicating the very large sums of revenue accrued to the trilogy: as at 1 August 2005 the worldwide box office receipts from the film trilogy were \$US2.9 billion. Consumers

“Wellywood” and New Zealand as Middle-earth masks the globalising economics of the film trilogy, with the majority of the money going offshore back to Hollywood.

Certainly Jackson is to be commended for his contribution to the regional and national economy through his commitment to the local film industry; however, it seems that at a commercial level the civic leaders must be content with the “trickle-down effect” of global economics and the “feel-good factor” fostered by such specular events. Any sense that Wellywood, or even Middle-earth, is a serious competitor with Hollywood can be dismissed when New Zealand’s top business paper, the *National Business Review*, runs an article as late as March 2006 with the headline, “Taxpayer Wrung Out by Lord of the Rings” (Cone). New Line may have grossed over a few billion US dollars, but neither local high-flying investors nor the New Zealand taxpayer have reportedly received “a penny” in direct returns for their investment.

The Wellington City Council declares that they “supported the World Premiere because of its close fit with the Council’s long-term strategic vision for the city – Creative Wellington – Innovation Capital – and the city’s burgeoning reputation as a world class centre of film and television production” (“The Lord of the Rings – Return of the King”). The appeal is made, then, that the ultimate

spent a further \$US3 billion on associated home entertainment and merchandise (“Core Statistics”).

benefit to Wellington in return for investing in the world premiere of a Hollywood movie is to project back to Hollywood images of the city as a film location extraordinaire. And a beneficial side effect of the celebrity that comes with being a Hollywood offshoot is that Wellington can picture itself as an exciting and fabulous “event city” for the set-jetting tourist.

In the end, the premiere emptied Tolkien’s text of all content, replacing it with a mass of images and rhetoric projecting national unity. New Zealanders rally around *The Lord of the Rings*, both the project and the world premiere event, so that it operates primarily as a sign of national identity and unity – shorthand for a “safe, secure place in a globalized world, a remote and tiny island identified both locally and globally as terrorist-free”, which, Ken Gelder proceeds to note, “is precisely the fantasy at stake in its identification with Tolkien’s trilogy” (149-150). However, this “fantasy” has become so successful, so real that it seems commonplace and evident that New Zealand *is* Middle-earth, kiwis *are* hobbits, and (to make an inverted pun on Jim Hickey’s documentary) chances are they may even sell Matamata burgers in Hobbiton.

Conclusion

When the celebrated Shakespearean actor and screen star Sir Ian McKellan proclaims, “Middle-earth is a real place, and it’s New Zealand” (Tourism New

Zealand) this otherwise blatantly impossible statement is lent a certain authenticity. Similar endorsements made by celebrities associated with *The Lord of the Rings* fuel the pretence that New Zealand and its people have some peculiar affinity with Tolkien's idyll.²³ But New Zealand's adoption of the Middle-earth brand has required a number of divergent concepts - expressive nationalism, aesthetic protectionism, populism, and market-driven economic pragmatism - to be accepted as co-extensive. Equally, otherwise diverse sectors (business, creative industry workers, middle-class consumers of high culture, and advocates of popular culture) have been encouraged by government policy to believe they have the same interests in common. The high level of conformity to the branding of New Zealand as Middle-earth alongside Peter Jackson's successful adaptation has enabled the brand to obtain optimal reach, with the desire to "reinvent" New Zealand's national identity arising from economic imperatives.

In this sense, as Jacqui True observes, economic nationalism does not necessarily run counter to the objectives of globalization: indeed, "nationalism and globalization may serve the very same material ends" (219). However, the problem with the pursuit of global capital through economic nationalism is that

²³ A *New York Times* journalist suggests that Pete Hodgson, as Minister responsible for *The Lord of the Rings*, has a "Gandalf-like beard" and jokes that with the intense branding of New Zealand as Middle-earth "some visitors can be forgiven if they start scrutinizing New Zealanders for traces of Hobbit ancestry" (Brooke).

the national identity (re)constructed by the branding campaign results, in this instance, in “forgetting and erasure” or “the narcissistic reliving of a colonial myth-wish” (Werry 6). Werry refers to the elision of Maori from the sense of nationhood generated by the fetish ritual surrounding *The Lord of the Rings*. At the moment when the global media is shining on New Zealand, the emphasis is on an imported myth which effectively recolonises the country so that the post-colonial Aotearoa once more becomes imagined as “Little Britain” (Werry 6).²⁴ The current cultural policy that demands the thorough interpenetration of the cultural and economic spheres drives this recolonisation of the national imaginary via Jackson’s film trilogy; what is forgotten is that any similarities between the New Zealand landscape and that of Britain have in fact been manufactured by British colonialists so as to appease their utopic imagination of this land as a perfected version of their homeland – making New Zealand a fantasy space from the moment of its British colonisation (6).

²⁴ Werry discusses the success of Nikki Caro’s *Whale Rider* in terms of the universalising and commercialising impetus of an economic cultural policy. She reads the films’ “commodification of post-ethnicity” as a “ritual exorcism of the spectre of ethnic particularism (ethnic nationalism) and the demands it makes on majority governance” (9).

Chapter Nine

Negotiating Identity through Heroic Fantasy

The sheer popularity of heroic fantasy, combined with the level of concern expressed over whether or not the genre is ideologically suspect, signals the very real and contested influence that popular culture has. This “power” is all the more important to understand across its various cultural platforms when the genre is also perceived as a compensatory genre for the “ills” exacerbated by late modernity. I read the heroic fantasy as a specific narrative response to the insecurities haunting individual and collective subjectivities; however, its recent institutionalisation as a Hollywood box office genre and the focal point of a national economic strategy complicates the understanding of its consumption as well as emphasising the cultural relevance of the genre at this particular conjuncture.

By focusing on three ideologies associated with the genre I have been able to detail consumers’ various responses and map conflicting needs, desires and subjectivities as negotiated through the genre. Placing analysis within the complementary perspectives of close textual reading and the diverse

methodologies associated with cultural studies, I have traced the themes of consumerism, gender and nationalism.

I began by claiming that the hero operates within a “moral economy”. This system is defined as a social network, created through the giving and receiving of gifts (in the form of material goods or actions), which in turn bind individuals together to form a strong and coherent community. The sense of obligation and duty generated by gift-giving does not so much constrain the individual within the collective, as project significance and purpose into actions. The basis for a moral economy, therefore, is to give the individual a meaningful purpose beyond that of the self; the individual, the heroic fantasy illustrates, needs to conduct himself toward the good of the social group, which in turn reflects on his own sense of worth.

Although the heroic fantasy typically aligns the moral economy with a pre-industrial setting, it is not an essential framework to display this code of practice. As Rowling demonstrates, the hero can still establish a moral economy within late capitalism, where gift-giving can be sullied by the commodification of goods. The hero’s restrained consumption becomes part of his heroic code; the heroic fantasy hero set within the contemporary socio-economic system must be a sober consumer, as well as brave and loyal. Therefore, the moral economy operates at a different level from capitalism with its aggressive orientation toward surplus profit, although these spheres may

intersect. However, when the very narrative that promotes this honourable code is put on the production line and the franchise made to serve global corporations such as Time Warner, it is unsurprising that these businesses' professed altruism is viewed cynically by cultural critics and concerned parents.

There have been strong appeals against capitalism's appropriation of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* by fans, but especially Rowling's series with its added emotional impact of being directed toward children. From this perspective, children are perceived as innocent and vulnerable to the aggressive marketing around *Harry Potter*. Rather than registering the hero's honourable code of conduct, the child is interpellated as consumer, with the story becoming a hollowed out vehicle for a hyped-up branding mission geared toward maximum profits. Although I have some sympathy for this position (who isn't tired of the hyperbole surrounding the marketing of the films and their products and the measured gravitas of each tagline?) I cannot accept the equally emotive language and stance of those campaigning against the commodification of culture. Children I spoke with regarding the commodification of *Harry Potter* registered the global corporates' cynical incentives for producing manifold items bearing the *Harry Potter* logo. While limited purchasing power was certainly indicated in their own "sober consumerism", they also expressed an unwillingness to collude. But equally, they were receptive to some of the goods available – especially the films and

associated computer games – and they didn't say no to the *Harry Potter* chocolate frogs I offered them at the end of the interview!

Although both the books and films were met with mixed reviews by those interviewed, Rowling's books were perceived as *the* primary *Harry Potter* text. No one interviewed expressed any concern that the books themselves are products of a commercial publishing system. The marketing and merchandising were seen as deriving from the films and Rowling was credited with revitalising a well-known formula:

It's a slightly different bent on an absolutely classic framework which you hang these stories to. There's the sort of Ulysses chapter at the beginning and then the quest. Then there's the confrontation with evil and there is the triumph over evil . . . it's just a fairy tale. Every single one, period, is the same in absolute basic context. It's just the characters and setting that are different.

(Peter, *FGI4*)

These interviews add fresh perspectives from readers and consumers of *Harry Potter* to this thesis, but the results are indicative only and cannot be used to reach an authoritative conclusion regarding consumers' opinions and experiences in general. What the interviews did provide me with was an

indication that the consumer's experience of commodified goods is not as uncritical or passive as opponents such as Jack Zipes assume. They also clarified to me that the use and experience of a cultural text cannot be singularly defined; to do so is to reify the consumer.

This is one area in which I would like to pursue further research, in particular expanding the study to include a social, cultural, economic and ethnic base to the interviews. All participants I interviewed had read the books and seen the films, but what of those who either chose not to engage with *Harry Potter* on the basis of their beliefs, or could not participate in the phenomenon to the extent they would have liked due to economic or social reasons? What has been their experience of Pottermania from the margins, as it were? And what about those many individuals for whom *Harry Potter* simply does not register on their cultural radar? Such a study would provide insight into the multiple ways that cultural phenomena can intersect across a nation's diverse groupings, and possibly reassure those of the Frankfurt School persuasion that there are gaps within the capitalist system.

That capitalism's scope is not total suggests that the moral code the hero stands for is not lost in the mire of merchandise. Through a typology of the heroes from *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, I found that each of Tolkien's characters, Aragorn, Frodo, Sam, displayed a certain form of heroism (warrior, spiritual and everyman respectively) and that their various attributes combine

in the single character of Harry Potter. Most interviewees recognised the hero's role as conveying a system of values, but, complicating the assumption that the hero therefore becomes a meaningful role model, many also claimed if not to dislike Harry Potter then at least to prefer other characters.

These types of hero provide masculinity with diverse forms of being; however, it is notable that Peter Jackson's adaptation of Aragorn portrays him as negotiating the current discourse of "masculinity in crisis". Aragorn is at times lacking in confidence and self-belief in the first film, vulnerable to his betrothed's superior "masculine" skills such as horseriding; however, he overcomes his "weaknesses" to prove his manhood and become a king. Incorporating a personal crisis into Aragorn's character arc makes him believable to a contemporary audience. He shows that an individual's insecurity can be stabilised through self-belief, positive action – and finding the "right" woman. The film implies that Aragorn's "feminised masculinity" teamed up with Arwen's "emphasised femininity" makes an effective social unit (the nuclear family) as the basis for a sound society (the nation). Heterosexuality is the norm, and, after a brief sojourn in the traditional territory of the other gender, man and woman return to their time-honoured social positions, thereby reinstalling masculinity as the dominant gender.

This is one theoretical perspective on the conservatism heroic fantasy typically expresses toward gender; however, alternative views deconstruct this

appeal to traditional gender roles. As I read or view these stories I register the narrative's gender bias but do not consciously submit to that outlook. 17-year-old Claire, too, recognises masculinity and femininity as social and cultural constructs, whose characteristics can be sifted through and accepted and rejected as required. Claire's reading of *Harry Potter* suggests that readers of her age can exhibit a sophisticated level of interpretive skills toward ideology, intuitively if not consciously. In my interpretation of Hermione I claim that the character can be read as negotiating contemporary patriarchy; like Harry, Hermione is on a heroic journey that involves many challenges, successes and failures, ultimately maturing into a responsible and empathetic young adult who will help establish and participate in a better world. A new and more tolerant society, Rowling suggests, requires *both* sexes to transcend their stereotypes.

The collective represented at the close of the heroic fantasy therefore takes on a particular resonance, as it is a glimpse of the author's ideal society. But the author's vision is also constrained toward nationalism, which is the dominant communal form in modernity; only those heroic fantasies on the margins of the genre's "fuzzy set" can imagine society otherwise. The irony is that the seemingly desperate contemporary need to indulge in symbolic forms of national identity and unity is necessary precisely because modernity exacerbates ontological insecurity: "Confronted with greater difference in the

dispersal and atomisation of industrialisation, urbanisation and the division of labour, the subject finds in the idea of the nation the allure of a hypostasised identity which will efface the greater difference” (Easthope, *Englishness* 55). That is, the conformity and ensuing harmony that the imagined nation promises serves to anchor the disoriented individual.

Tolkien “eulogises” the small, closed community, the *natio*, where individual difference is difficult to imagine because the rest of the group reflect back similitude. Rowling, however, envisages the ethnically diverse nation-state as tolerant of difference, offering a critique on contemporary racial and ethnic discord, not only in multi-cultural Britain, but around the world. Elvy’s reflection on the bicultural nation in *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy* goes further, writing a myth through which New Zealanders can collectively forge a new identity as a hybrid culture. But the “home-grown” heroic fantasy fails to find an audience; by contrast, Tolkien’s retrospective vision, refracted through the sympathetic lens of local hero-director Peter Jackson, is picked up by the incumbent government and used to rally citizens under the banner of “nation” and to encourage “outsiders” to buy this spectacle through “authentic Middle-earth” tourism, products and services.

Branding New Zealand has arguably been a resounding success in terms of fiscal returns and the sense of collective pride; New Zealanders have largely endorsed the overlaying of “hobbitesque” values on national identity in lieu of

economic rewards and feeling good about seeing ourselves adulated on the global stage. Yet, as time passes by from the origins of this campaign in late 1999, this branding exercise comes to feel as quaint and unlikely as Tolkien's Shire itself; a fantasy projection that is unsustainable and, like the hobbits' homeland, ultimately doomed to the annals of a fictional history. Under modernity, the national narrative is evidently a necessary fantasy; the current success of the heroic fantasy genre attests to this fact. But care should be taken about how this collective is imagined.

Middle-earth imagery does not occlude other symbols of national identity; the All Blacks, Sir Edmund Hillary, the (endangered) kiwi continue to shape our collective hopes and identity amongst many others. But Tolkien's fantasy has been a dominant cultural force in New Zealand since the heady days when Peter Jackson was recognised by Hollywood as the world famous director we always knew him to be and the incoming Labour government implemented the cultural policy that would make the alignment of the values attributed to the hobbits with aspects of the New Zealand national psyche sound like commonsense. As a nation, then, New Zealand may not be able to reject its hobbit-esque image as easily as has Peter Jackson.

The heroic fantasy matters not only because of its recent commodification, but also because of the ideological positioning it can occasion. While the heroic code the hero embodies is creditable, I am concerned to clarify how it is

portrayed, and who benefits. Thus, the individual's desire for a moral economy within late modernity is exploited by global corporations seeking new ways to generate profit across the widest possible audience or consumer group, the need for ontological security is packaged as a nostalgic return to traditional gender roles, and the new collective that the hero brings about is national in orientation and, in terms of New Zealand's appropriation of Middle-earth, becomes a vehicle through which indigeneity is conveniently reimagined to accord with the dominant colonial culture.

The conservatism of these heroic fantasies suggests that such "outmoded" ideas retain their resonance within late modernity. The modern subject therefore yearns for the sense of cohesion and continuity that the genre promises. This modern subjectivity, with its stress upon personal existence and reflexivity, emerged as the rigid hierarchy of medieval social, economic and religious order was broken down. The heroic fantasy, I argue, enacts this fundamental shift in comprehending the social subject; the genre's obligatory orphan-hero undertakes a journey in which he relinquishes his dependent and prescribed social position to realise his greater potential, as hero and leader. However, as Stuart Hall observes, individualism cannot be allowed to undermine social cohesion; the complexity of modern societies demands a "collective and social form", resulting in the "individual citizen [becoming] enmeshed in the bureaucratic administrative machineries of the modern state"

("Question" 284). This "containment" of individualism is ascribed in heroic fantasy, with the hero's deeds differentiated from those of his evil nemesis through his strong social bonds with loyal friends and the nation as the absolute limit of his rule.

So the heroic fantasy reflects a desire for conditions not met by late modernity, offering certainty and security for both the individual and national identity, but notably *originating* with the individual; the genre imagines a fully developed and self-reflective individual who operates within social parameters that he has done much to restore. The genre, then, looks to encourage the individual to take personal responsibility at the same time as aligning this motivation with the social group.

By providing an image of a socialised individual, the heroic fantasy responds to our desires for unity, proximity and security, which are otherwise denied in the present conjuncture. Heroic fantasy therefore manages the anxiety that cultural change can cause. Writing in 1995, Douglas Kellner observed that:

historical epochs do not rise and fall in neat patterns or at precise chronological moments. Change between one era and another is always protracted, contradictory, and usually painful. The sense of "betweenness," or transition, requires that one grasp the

continuities with the past as well as the novelties of the present and future. Living in a borderland between the old and the new creates tension, insecurity, and even panic, thus producing a troubling and uncertain cultural and social environment. (49)

Eleven years later it would seem that we remain in the same crisis, which, if anything, has intensified with the rise of a global and nebulous terrorist threat exacerbated by the Al Qaeda “9/11” attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001.¹

I have aligned myself in broad terms with Attebery’s view that the “fantasist responds to destructiveness by building, to disorder by imagining order, and to despair by calling forth wonder” (*Fantasy Tradition* 186). Attebery’s analysis of fantasy focuses upon the author’s response to a general discontent associated with modernity and capitalism. What this thesis has reviewed is what *type* of order the fantasist imagines as well as discussing the various possible cultural uses of heroic fantasy in an endeavour to scope the needs that this genre currently fulfils.

¹ Collett-White notes that “war, rape, kidnap, torture, prejudice, environmental meltdown and dictatorship filled the screens during 12 days of competition” at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival, and observed that “if cinema is the mirror of the world, then the films at this year’s Cannes festival suggest the world is in a sorry state”. Films include Oliver Stone’s *World Trade Center*, about a policeman caught in the rubble of the attack, and clips from upcoming movies by two US directors dealing directly with 9/11 and the ensuing American-Iraq war.

The heroic fantasy acts as a cultural tool with which to cope with dramatic changes in how we perceive ourselves and the world. The genre offers “truth” and security, and reassures the consumer that change can be managed and evil averted. Ironically, capitalism finds this genre amenable to commodification; one of the characteristics of late modernity is its ability to fold resistance back into itself, and so the commodification of the genre controls (but does not close off) the heroic fantasy’s potential to inspire reaction to and contempt for late modernity through its “pastoralism”. The heroic fantasy is repackaged and sold to the consumer as commodity, temporarily assuaging consumers’ need to acknowledge and express discontent by luring them back into the compelling and familiar, although disorienting, web of consumption and fractured subjectivities. As psychologist John F. Schumaker succinctly observes, “in the consumer society you can even consume the antidote to consumerism” (33).

There is a tension, then, between following the key ideas of pre-industrial ethics and individual action directed toward social good which leads to a fully integrated (and implicitly masculine) subjectivity and the desires “manufactured” by popular culture that leads to the accumulation of toys, games, and memorabilia. Similarly, the disaffected modern subject does not necessarily wish to conform so totally as the hero either. Reflections on the merchandising, the characterisation of Harry Potter and the branding of New Zealand as Middle-earth replete with hobbits illustrate the conflicting opinions

that these images generate. I am aware of a similar tension running through this thesis – that of desiring difference to be not only accepted but celebrated, and at the same time acknowledging that social unity, as a prerequisite for the individual to feel safe and content, requires a level of integration and confluence.

Lawrence Grossberg asks presciently, “how society is possible without the assumed unity guaranteed through notions such as mechanical solidarity or the commonality assumed in images of community” and “how is a society built on dissensus without perpetual violence, possible?” (“Does Cultural Studies” 28, fn 11). Under the conditions of late modernity these are important questions to which the heroic fantasy responds; after the war, tolerance will ensure enduring peace. As a single cog within the diversity of the collective, the self-regulating individual is encouraged by the heroic fantasy to pursue what Fred Inglis describes as “the ‘master-symbols’ of an individualized morality” (*Promise* 14). These include “sincerity, dignity, integrity, honesty, authenticity” (14), and are all values that the heroic fantasy posits as essential and *universal* values; that is, “the permanent and fundamental things” that Tolkien believes it is the heroic fantasy’s role to convey (“OFS” 57).

On face value the promotion of these moral values by *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* is admirable; however, cultural artefacts and practices are best understood within a framework of the power relations in which they are

produced and consumed. It is then possible to evaluate the extent to which material social relations are reproduced, challenged, or negotiated. This thesis has therefore portrayed the multiple and conflicting points of view that co-exist toward the production and consumption of heroic fantasy in terms of consumerism, gender and nationalism, and concludes that at the beginning of the 21st century the heroic fantasy is a peculiarly suitable vehicle for cultural and political negotiations over individual and collective identities.

Appendix One

Summary – *The Spirit Shinto Trilogy*

Book One: The First Hunter

The island of Maragon is being threatened by Outsiders from House Jintao and House Basimi who want to exploit the island for its natural resources. Despite the recent deaths of his wife and only child, Tane, first hunter of the Gerhan Tribe, is required to take a spear with protective powers to the Elder of the Makewi tribe, who resides in the port city of Shevilian. Tane's elder, Pitiha, has been told by the spirit world that the Makewi tribe has become vulnerable to the Outsiders and will be destroyed through a war if they do not receive assistance.

Tane meets the female bard Vardis on his way to Shevilian and she introduces him to Shevilian's "underworld", where a group of colonialists are trying to protect the city and its innocent residents from the impending war over the island between House Basimi and House Jintao (led by Lord Kuso). As he waits for the Makewi Elder to interpret how to use the spear he has brought

him, Tane lingers in the city and is appalled at the degradation of his fellow tribes-people.

As Shinto Mage Sajha uses the power of the air, water, fire and earth shintos that she is able to harness. But despairing of her future as a slave, Sajha escapes from House Yakoso and arrives on Maragon island. She makes her way to a lodge where she becomes involved in a fight between Lord Kuso's Shinto Mage (Larmon Dol) and Tane and Vardis's husband Masio. Although Sajha prevents their certain deaths, they are captured. The men are sent to the slave galleys and Sajha is taken in by Larmon Dol so that he may study her inexplicably potent powers and the spear he has taken from the Makewi Elder.

Tane and Masio escape from the galley when it is attacked by Lord Kuso, but not before Tane has earned a loyal following by sharing his food and telling tribal stories to restore their dignity and hope. Back with Vardis, Masio and Tane begin to organise an offensive, with Tane keen to help these Outsiders to protect his island and people. Tane learns how to use "House" weapons, such as the sword, and quickly comprehends battle tactics. Tane helps Sajha escape from her imprisonment and together they return to the Gerhan tribe in the mountains to enlist support from all tribes against House Jintao and Lord Kuso, who now controls Shevilian. Amongst the Gerhan Tribe Sajha learns more about the spirit energy of the island which she is able to sense. Once Tane has enlisted the support of the other tribes, he returns with Sajha to Shevilian.

With Masio they retrieve the spear from Larmon Dol's house. A battle ensues in which Larmon Dol is destroyed when Sajha draws on the spirits through the spear. Together with the spirits, the indigenous people and Masio's Outsiders unite to purge House Jintao from Shevilian. Sajha returns to the Gerhan tribe and Tane is elected leader of the new administration of Shevilian city and its peoples.

Book Two: Spirit City

Tane is occupied ensuring adequate food and housing for the people, and organising the city for another attack by Lord Kuso. His status from the battlefield is carried into the bureaucratic sphere, where the public start to refer to him as "Lord Tane". When a Genie Mage, Jenna, arrives in Shevilian looking for his friend Wazid and reveals him to be the husband of Princess Alia as well as the Hand of the Caliph, Tane decides to go back to the Eastern Empire with them to seek a trading deal with the Caliph.

Sajha has gone to the "ruined city" to discover the origins of the source of the spear. Lesawi, sole survivor of a catastrophic event, explains to her where the Shinto power comes from. A thousand years ago human sacrifices were made to an elemental power deep within the earth. When a human was merged with the natural element a Shinto was created, which, as a Shinto Mage, Sajha is able to call upon to release devastating force against her foes. Lesawi

also believes that a further, more dangerous, weapon was created, and it was this that caused the devastating event many generations ago, but he does not know exactly what it is.

Wazid is required to help Jenna locate a treasure that will give the Genie Mages the power they need to defeat the Brotherhood of Assassins who seek to oust the Caliph. As they locate the treasure, Tane also picks up an amulet that he feels compelled to take. Jenna and Wazid are kidnapped by the Brotherhood of Assassins, Wazid losing an arm during interrogation before he is rescued by Tane and some of the Caliph's men. The Caliph is impressed with Tane and agrees to trade with Maragon, pledging a galley and soldiers to Tane to cement the security of the island from Lord Kuso. The Caliph is unaware that Lord Kuso's power is increasing and he also plans to attack the Eastern Empire.

Sajha discovers that not all tribal elders are willing to support Tane against Lord Kuso; Tinati believes that Tane is leading the tribal people into a confrontation that is not their own and argues that they should leave the fighting to the Outsiders. Sajha returns to Shevilian in time to assist against House Jintao's attack. House Jintao's power is weakened with Lord Kuso focusing on the Eastern Empire; Sajha is therefore able to protect the city through her use of the spear until reinforcements arrive in the form of Jenna and Tane. House Jintao are once more denied control of Shevilian, through the united efforts of Sajha's use of the elemental spirits, Jenna's Genie Mage and the

brute strength of the soldiers led by Tane. Sajha's power is spent, however, and she remains unconscious at the close of the book.

Book Three: Dark Shinto

During her coma, Sajha's mind is transported to the Spirit City of Valain. When Jenna released her Genie Maragon's elemental spirits killed it, thereby letting their old enemies know that they still exist. Their enemy resides deep below Zhandar, the capital of the Eastern Empire, and the spirits view Sajha as Maragon's one hope of ending an ancient feud between the island and the Eastern Empire. With this knowledge and burden Sajha regains consciousness.

Tane insists that they go to the Caliph's aid when they hear that Lord Kuso has begun his attack, departing just before Sajha's recovery. He becomes enamoured with the amulet, which Jenna believes is somehow connected to her own Genie Mage circlet. Their ship is attacked by a leviathan and Jenna, Tane and the captain, Costa, awake in its belly, attended by the Sea Folk. The three are delivered to Talisan, a Prospero figure who has taken refuge on an island. Talisan is learned in magic and identifies Tane's amulet as the Disc of Rashaman-nar. On discovering that it is a powerful trinket, Tane recognises that he is being manipulated by it and vows to get rid of it.

On her way back to Shevilian, Sajha is attacked by three skaltha – large spider-creatures. She is taken by the Skaltha to a cave where she meets

Makaru, who is responsible for the ancient weapon being prematurely released and the catastrophic results. He had destroyed the weapon because he was appalled at the sacrifice of human lives. From within Makaru's cave Sajha gains access to the power that infiltrates Maragon and constitutes its defences. Strands of power cover the island and Sajha must draw on this power like she would a spirit elemental to defend the island. Tapping into this potential Sajha becomes metaphysically aware of the island.

Lord Kuso's attack of the Eastern Empire goes wrong when he accepts an amulet from the Brotherhood of Assassins to enable him to access a tunnel that through which Wazid, Tane and Alia have escaped. A powerful force kills Kuso's men, leaving him alone with an ancient man who demands he accept a gift of power. This "gift" destroys Kuso's last remaining vestiges of humanity; henceforth he is inhuman, vampiric and motivated purely by aggression and killing his own men indiscriminately to feed his abominable strength. Kuso has thus become the weapon through which the ancients of the Eastern Empire intend to destroy Maragon and finally settle their (very old) feud.

With the support of a group of bandits, Wazid and Alia return to Zhandar to recapture the city. Tane and Jenna are unable to help Wazid and Alia's cause when Kuso's war galleys push them back toward Shevilian. Tane dispenses with the Disc into the sea, rejecting the power on offer. A final battle ensues in Shevilian, with Kuso reinvigorating the dead and creating a shadow of death

before him. While the Sea Folk respond to Talisan's call to dispose of the "undead", Sajha confronts Kuso. Using the island's "heartblood" she destroys Kuso in a swathe of golden energy.

The war is won with Kuso annihilated and Maragon is finally independent of the warring Great Houses. Tane and Sajha contemplate a future together, as do Alia and Wazid after having reclaimed Zhandar.

Appendix Two

Focus Group Interviews

Jack Zipes has written prolifically on his concerns about children's literature, yet he acknowledges reader-response is a limitation in his own work as well as in criticism in general:¹

Children's opinions, judgements, notions, desires, needs, conceptions, views, and tastes are probably the last consideration when critics are reviewing and evaluating a book produced for an audience of young readers (even though some critics, including myself, use a rhetoric that would like to convince us that they or we know what is good for children and have children's interests at heart). (62)

¹ This comment by Zipes was made early in the same book in which he makes disparaging comments regarding the character Hermione. See chapter six.

With this thesis aiming to document the production of individual and national identities from an ideology to an industry immersed within commercial culture, it is appropriate to give voice to the opinions of readers and film-goers – the consumers of heroic fantasy. I chose to limit the interviews to *Harry Potter* because young readers were more likely to have read and engaged with the *Harry Potter* books and films than *The Lord of the Rings*; while many 10-year-olds have watched Peter Jackson's film trilogy, fewer have read the novel.

I conducted four focus group interviews to gain an understanding of the participants reading of the texts. The interviews were undertaken between February and June of 2002 and so do not cover the books and films subsequently released. Three group interviews were conducted with children and another with adults. The first (the pilot) interview was with seven boys and girls aged nine to thirteen of Westmere School (Auckland), the second with six 14-16 year old boys and girls at Kaipara College (Rodney), the third with four 12 year old boys at Ellesmere College in Canterbury, and the final interview included four adults aged between 28 and 36. The adults met on Massey University's Auckland campus, while the childrens' interviews were each conducted on the school premises. Two individual interviews were also arranged; 10 year old Leo was interviewed at home and Claire was interviewed at her school, Kaipara College.

To locate interviewees I approached teachers at each of the schools involved and requested their participation in the research. The teachers then selected students to attend the lunchtime interview. In the case of the adult interview, I asked acquaintances to participate. Examples of Consent Forms, the Question List and Information sheet are included at the end of this appendix. The adult interview was the most difficult to co-ordinate; identifying a day, time and location to suit everyone was problematic. Although only four adults were able to attend on the day, I elected to proceed with the interview. The decile ranking of the schools involved range from 9 (Ellesmere) to 6 (Kaipara), and the predominant demographic represented was middle-class Pakeha; the data collected necessarily reflects this ethnic and socio-economic bias, therefore I do not assume to universalise from the comments put forward within the thesis.

The school location provided an underlying formal context for the interviews, while the interview structure emphasised a convivial atmosphere from which general conversation could ensue. Participants generally knew each other well and were encouraged to enter into an exchange of views within a non-judgemental environment. Each of the 45 minute interviews were audiotaped. After transcribing the audiotapes I reviewed the data, looking for common ideas as well as points of difference both between and within the interviews. To assist this analysis, I prompted independent debate amongst

participants through a list of set questions and issues I wished to raise, broadly categorised as the books, the film, the merchandise and the use of the internet to access *Harry Potter*-associated information. Such uniformity within the interviews would provide the foundation for comparisons of responses made at the conclusion of the interviews. (For a full description of the focus group interview process, see Hansen et al.)

List of Focus Group Interviewees

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Name	Age	Ethnicity
<u>Pilot</u>			<u>Kaipara College:</u>		
Ernie	10	Pakeha	Olwyn	15	Pakeha
Rachel	10	Pakeha	Amanda	15	Pakeha
Hetty	10	Pakeha	Claire	15	Pakeha
John	13	Pakeha	Kim	14	Pakeha
Robin	9	Pakeha	Kelly	14	Indian
Lenny	11	Pakeha	Alan	14	Pakeha
Erica	11	Pakeha			
<u>Ellesmere</u>			<u>Adults:</u>		
<u>College:</u>					
Jared	12	Pakeha	Rena	36	Pakeha
Josh	12	Pakeha	Peter	33	Pakeha
Duane	12	Pakeha	Kate	28	Pakeha
Sean	12	Pakeha	Daniel	34	Pakeha
<u>Individuals:</u>					
Claire	17	Pakeha			
Leo	10	Dutch			

Harry Potter Group Interview
INFORMATION SHEET – Children

Researcher: Bronwyn Beatty

Contact Details: [Deleted in PhD Copy]

I would like you to participate in a group interview, which will form part of my PhD thesis. This interview will involve about six people of your own age and we will talk about the *Harry Potter* books and movie. I will record the 45 minute interview, and later I will type up your conversation for me to study. Your school Principal and teacher have agreed that I may ask you to join the interview which will be conducted on your school premises. You need to have read at least one *Harry Potter* book, but you don't have to have seen the movie.

I will be interviewing three different age groups (10-12 years, 14-16 years and adults). I will compare the information from each of the interviews, looking for differences and similarities of responses across the age groups. My findings will be discussed within a chapter of the final PhD thesis.

Once a transcript has been made of each interview, the tapes will be kept within the School of Social and Cultural Studies' Archives on Massey University's Albany Campus. To make sure that your information remains confidential, only my two supervisors and myself will have access to the tapes. The tapes will be cleaned of data when the university has accepted my thesis (approximately May 2004), but the transcript will be kept for reference in the Massey University Archives. I will not use your name in the transcript but will give you a codename. Again, only my supervisors and myself will have access to the transcripts, specifically for further consultation for publications and seminars arising from the research.

It is okay to discuss what we talk about in the interview with others, but please don't give out anyone's name with the comments. In this way, we can all be safe to say what we please, knowing that it will not go beyond the interview room.

If you wish to come to this interview, you will need to complete a Consent Form. This form will be given to you to obtain your parents' signature.

You are entitled to:

- Decline to participate;
- Refuse to answer any particular questions;
- Withdraw from the study up to 1 month after the interview has taken place;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- Be given access to a summary of the findings of the study when it is concluded.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Regional Human Ethics Committee, Albany Campus, Protocol MUAHEC 02/003.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact [details deleted in PhD copy]

Harry Potter Group Interview

CONSENT FORM – Children

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study up to one month after the interview, and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. Further, the information will be used only for this research, and any publications and seminars arising from this research project.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I also understand that I have the right to ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview to ask questions or make comments off the record.

I agree that the information obtained during the Focus Group Interview will remain confidential amongst group members.

Having participated in the interview, I would like to receive a summary of the findings of the study upon its conclusion: YES NO

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:.....
(Participant)

Signed:.....
(Parent or Guardian to participants under 16)

Name:.....

Date:.....

Parents: if you have read some of the Harry Potter books and would like to participate in the adult interview, please not your name and contact details below.

Name:.....

Contact Details:

INTERVIEW QUESTION CHECKLIST - Children

The following are questions that may be asked during the interview. Not all of these questions will be asked; however, they provide a guideline as to the anticipated scope of the discussion, which will be moderated by the researcher.

Books:

- Is Harry Potter a good book to read?
- How many times have you read a Harry Potter book?
- How does Harry Potter compare with other books that you have read?
- Which are your favourite characters? Why?
- How much time do you spend reading for pleasure? Has your time reading increased since Harry Potter?

Film:

- Have you seen the Harry Potter movie? How many times?
- What did you like or dislike about the movie? Why?
- Will you go to see the other Harry Potter movies?

Toys and Games:

- Can you name some products that are associated with Harry Potter?
Would you buy these products because they are associated with Harry potter? Why?
- Do you play games associated with Harry Potter? What games?
- Do you own any Harry Potter toys or games? Did you buy them yourself, or were they gifts?

Internet sites:

- Have you looked at Harry Potter websites?
- What kind of information were you looking for? Why?

Letter

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS 2002

Dear _____

Thank you for participating in the group interview in which we discussed the *Harry Potter* books. I hope that you enjoyed the discussion as much as I did. I appreciated your perceptive comments and enthusiasm for the subject.

I have analysed the data from the interviews. This information has provided me with valuable insights into our reading and understanding of this popular series. Enclosed is a summary of the findings. If you would like more information about this research or would like to discuss the subject further, please contact me.

Detailed information obtained from the interviews will ultimately inform a chapter within my PhD thesis. The thesis will be completed mid-2004.

Kind regards

Bronwyn Beatty

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS 2002

Why do readers enjoy Harry Potter?

Most of the younger readers (10-16) indicated that they regularly read fantasy stories. What makes *Harry Potter* particularly enjoyable is the humour, the combined excitement of mystery and adventure, and the accessibility of the prose. Despite the easy-to-read nature of the series, re-readings are rewarded with 'clues' to sustain and generate the reader's interest until the next book is published.

The adults interviewed read the *Harry Potter* books when they became aware of the popularity of the series with children. This group also enjoyed the stories' humour, but noted additional benefits such as providing a light-hearted reprieve from normal activities (work!) and being a 'quick read'.

What elements make fantasy a popular genre?

Imagination was frequently referred to as the vital aspect of fantasy: the genre provides an opportunity for the reader to explore a world that is beyond his or her normal experience. This was felt to make the reading process exhilarating as well as being an important thought process to nurture.

Whose book?

All interviewees thought that the book is for everyone on the basis that they know people of all ages reading and enjoying the books. However, in the adult interview there was the concurrent understanding that the book was 'children's literature' and *Harry Potter* was not their usual reading material.

Is Harry Potter too violent?

All age groups defended the use of violence in the *Harry Potter* series. The rough play on the Quidditch pitch and resultant injuries were felt to be commensurate with that experienced on our own sports fields (rugby was specifically mentioned). Readers acknowledged that general danger and violence (not associated with sport) had increased in the fourth *Harry Potter* book with the death of Cedric Diggory, but understood this to be appropriate to the genre: battles between good and evil characters is essential going to entail some deaths.

Was the film a good adaptation of the book?

The majority of interviews had seen the films. On the whole, the film was thought to be successful. The adults tended to be more critical than the children', suggesting that the film was 'as good as it could be'; the 14-16 year olds observed discrepancies with the books but nevertheless enjoyed the film; while the 10-12 year olds generally gave a more unconditional endorsement of the adaptation. 10-16 year olds would have liked the film to be much longer if it meant that it would more faithfully represent the book. Specific (popular) complaints were that Harry Potter's infamous scar was too small and that Daniel Radcliffe's acting as Harry Potter was disappointing.

Marketing and merchandise:

Younger readers accessed information about *Harry Potter* through the internet and magazines (e.g. K-zone). This age group also participated in *Harry Potter* games and activities such as being 'sorted' and playing the *Harry Potter* playstation game. Adults did not participate in the *Harry Potter* phenomenon at this level.

Across the age groups some interviewees were concerned at the intensity of the marketing of the *Harry Potter* products and the film. These people regarded many of the products as 'babyish' and cynically exploiting their interest in the story. They felt that there was a danger that the commercialisation surrounding the *Harry Potter* books could detract from the potential pleasure of reading the books. The 14-16 year old readers noted that the objective of the merchandise (to make the individual feel special by possessing *Harry Potter* products) was in fact undermined by so many people owning the branded goods.

Adults who voiced concerns about the level of marketing and merchandise nevertheless appreciated the fact that these goods provided an opportunity for them to purchase a gift for younger people that would be well received.

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