

REMEDIATING FANTASY NARRATIVES FOR PARTICIPATORY FANDOM: TOLKIEN'S STORIES AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS IN FILMS, VIDEO GAMES, MUSIC AND OTHER PRODUCTS OF THE CULTURE INDUSTRIES¹

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Abstract

The phenomenon of fantasy transmediality (Rebora 2016) has been discussed by many researchers and scholars during the last decade. The need for the creation of alluring cultural products in the highly competitive new media environment has led to synergies between many cultural industries and/or cultural producers, such as film, music, literature and videogame industries, etc. Many well-known and fan-developing narratives have been remediated – repackaged and redistributed – through the various media, answering to the contemporary nostalgia of pastness (Williams 2016), the

¹ The authors wish to express their gratitude to the reviewers and the editors of this volume for their thoughtful comments, which helped considerably towards the improvement of the paper.

cherishing of the familiar and intimate, as well as the need to further popularize “a pre-conceived merchandising industry” (Ball 2002), create new side-products for a fan community or even offer escapelands, which fantasy narratives succeed in creating.

This paper will examine the translation and adaptation of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) to different media and cultural industries, such as:

- ▶ Peter Jackson’s films,
- ▶ role-playing games (RPGs),
- ▶ the music industry – with reference to well-known songs and bands

Through comparative analysis of certain segments of the LOTR industry market and comments made by fans on digital platforms, the paper underlines the basic story elements of the Tolkien universe, as adapted to each above-mentioned variant and examines the role of fans in the digital semiosphere.

Keywords: Lord of the Rings (LOTR), Tolkien, translation, transmediality, francize, media texts

Introduction

LOTR is undoubtedly a big success story in the book industry, both economically, as it has sold an enormous number of copies in many languages, and in terms of transmediality, since it is one of the books that has been remediated and redistributed through many different media and in many different ways from the time of its publication until today, becoming a classic of the fantasy genre.

For Mathews (2002) the element of fantasy is visible in early literature texts and a part of ancient myths. It can be seen as the predecessor of all popular literature of the western world (Sherman 2008: 160). The “unrealistic” and “impossible” “outworlds” of the fantasy fiction led to its undervaluation as a literature genre (Jackson 1981) and its listing under the category of children literature or fairy tales (Moran 2019). For many readers, publishers and researchers, LOTR actually set the ground for the fantasy genre and even made it highly commercial. It is still considered a touchstone for epic fantasy (Moran 2019), while Tolkien is considered the “dominant influence” of the genre (Goh 2014: 264). The “secondary world” Tolkien shaped by combining existing, recent or historical/mythological, elements of the real world, underline his belief that imagination is an essential part of story-telling (Tolkien 1939). This kind of recreation is essential to fanta-

sy writing, according to him, and actually defines the way he understands and proposes fantasy fiction. Inspired by Scandinavian mythology, Celtic myths and the literature of the Middle Ages, he created his own world of Middle Earth, with its own gods, beings, geographical spaces, each with its own characteristics and history. Some elements of Middle Ages (knights, kings, swords, battles etc) have been widely adopted by other writers in fantasy fiction since Tolkien, and are considered nowadays as basic ingredients for a successful fantasy story.

Being a fantasy novel and a cultural phenomenon from the time of its publishing until today, LOTR has itself created its own commercial industry, placed in a wider fantasy industry, forming at the same time the basis of a “sub-cultural community incorporating fan groups, readers, writers and directors, producers and publishers” (Selling 2022: 47). From Peter Jackson’s film trilogy to the merchandise industry, from story-inspired lyrics and music bands’ stage appearances to role-playing video games, from museums to themed restaurants, Tolkien’s story has offered a lot of products to various cultural industries and created a fandom that follows every new release and interacts digitally in various pages and environments. This testifies to “the high complexity of LOTR’s influence on contemporary culture” (Pagello 2010: 235). LOTR’s multimedia appearance is still growing (despite the fact that 68 years have passed from its first publication), with the much-discussed TV series “The Rings of Power” as the latest translation of Tolkien’s book. These translations make LOTR the “perfect franchise” (Thompson 2007:4).

Some of these translations will be examined in the next pages, in an attempt to establish which story elements are considered important and are maintained in every translation. In terms of methodology, we will use both qualitative and quantitative methodological tools. Barthes’ theory on narrative will be used, in order to understand the basic narrative elements each translation uses. In addition, the role of fans, as receivers of every Tolkien-inspired production will be studied, through their comments in digital platforms, in order to evaluate the success of the translation mechanisms used, as well as their place in the Tolkien semiosphere.

Barthes’ theory on narrative

Barthes (1975) proposes three levels of description for a narrative: function, action and narration. Function is the smallest unit and consists of nuclei, catalysts, indices and informants. Nuclei are the core of the story, catalysts make an event happen, expanding the nuclei, while indices re-

fer to more diffuse information: for example, the atmosphere of a scene, and informants state a specific location in time and place for the narrative. Action refers to large scale plot happenings and finally, narration is the coherent whole in which all these levels are integrated. According to MacFarlane, “the film-maker bent on ‘faithful’ adaptation must seek to preserve the major cardinal functions” of a literature text, for the filmic text to be a faithful transmediation. According to Barthes (1975: 249), “a nucleus cannot be deleted without altering the story, but neither can a catalyst without altering the discourse”.

The analysis that follows will try to examine which of the levels Barthes proposes are maintained in each transmediation, which are altered and which are decreased or even deleted as unnecessary, altering, in essence the story and/or the discourse.

The role of fans

According to Barker (2006), Tolkien’s story can be conceived as an “English mythology,” filmed in New Zealand, funded by a large Hollywood film studio – AOL-Time-Warner. It has inspired franchise products worldwide, from festivals in Germany to theme parks in the USA, creating one of the most participatory fandoms in its more than 50 years of circulation. The marketing strategies applied by all the culture industries involved (film, video games, music industry, etc), as well as the use of the Internet for the communication with the book’s fandom, in order to adjust the upcoming franchises to the fans’ responses make LOTR an exemplary case study for a researcher to study. At the same time, it is a very complex one. Regarding the role of fans in the translation of the story from one medium to the other, the case study of LOTR has shown that the active involvement of fans by Jackson throughout authoring, filming and marketing the trilogy has produced good results, although there is no way that all the fans will be satisfied with any adjustment needed for any mediation of any story.

The forums on the official web site and the fan pages allow fans to express their opinions and producers to measure and decide whether to take into account the fans’ desires or not. Web-based fan sites can be seen as *virtual* communities of consumption (Hills 2002: 29; Kozinets 1999). Shefrin (2004: 262) states that “Internet clubs and Web sites have provided venues for fans to maintain heightened connections to media producers and their evolving franchises through social gossip, artistic production and political activism”.

For the needs of this specific research, two such venues were examined: theOneRing.net (Reading Room) and Quora. The reason for the choice of the specific platforms was the fact that we wished to examine forums made and answered by fans themselves. The specific two included threads comparing the various LOTR transmediations and could therefore provide data for the specific research.

1. From book to film

Tolkien's books were re-packaged into different forms for different media and succeeded in two important goals: to keep and further engage active fans, while at the same time winning new audiences. Peter Jackson translated LOTR books to the medium of film. The first film was released on December 10, 2001, almost a year after the first trailer which appeared in January 2001 and the 26-minute preview at the Cannes Film Festival, in June of the same year. As a big media event, it followed the communication strategy of preparing the ground for almost a year, making the audience anticipate and wait for it, count the days for its release. The 2nd film was released in 2002 and the 3rd in 2003. The filming was undertaken in the director's native land of New Zealand, which he believed could stand in for Tolkien's Middle Earth: countryside hills, valleys, icy mountains, rock formations, forests, volcanoes. Every scene described by Tolkien could be staged in the specific land. This is the first major adaptation of the story (from the English countryside of Tolkien's childhood to New Zealand's scenery) and the first step of turning New Zealand into an "authentic stage" tourist destination (Tzanelli 2004).

Every filmmaker who works on translating a literature story into a screenplay faces many dilemmas. They need to take creative decisions about what to keep in, what to leave out, and what to adapt. Regarding the case study of the Lord of the Ring, the dilemmas were major and intriguing. The enormous scale of the story, the different creatures/races Tolkien brought to life (Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, Ents and Men), the complexity of the geography and the narrative, as well as the complicated story line and the fictional universe of Middle Earth added more difficulties to Jackson's decision-making.

The major differences between the books and the films can be summarized under two headings, if we were to follow Todorov's distinction on the levels of narrative: differences in the story [the logic of actions and the "syntax" of characters (Barthes 1975: 242)], which account for deletions, additions and/or adaptations in the storyline, and differences in discourse,

which account for changes of tenses and/or modes and the work's cultural messages to suit the film.

a. Differences on the story

Regarding story differences, the viewer easily notices the absence of parts of the story, the reduction or even removal of critical plot conclusions, while other plot elements become more significant. All these alterations, adaptations and omissions and/or additions – mainly of what Barthes describes as action – can be justified, if one bears in mind that the target audience of a film production is not the same as the readers of a published literary text. In addition, the cost for producing a movie is much higher. The filmic narrative needs, therefore, to adjust to a new framework. The story threads (or Barthes' catalysts) are switched more frequently in the films, in order to maintain the interest of the non-fan audience. This fact is mainly evident in the films "The Two Towers" and "The Return of the King", where the two story-lines of the books² are interwoven in the screenplay to maintain the pace and progress in the first film, and presented completely differently in the second. In "The Fellowship of the Ring" however, the story maintains a single thread from beginning to end in both book and film.

The movies do not follow Tolkien's timeline of events. The story threads in the films are switched more frequently, in order to maintain the audience's interest. Frodo's age is changed, as well. He is around 50 in the book, but seems to be 20 in the films, a peer to the four hobbits who are much younger than Frodo in the books. Another example is the different climaxes that appear in each medium. In the films, the fall of Sauron is the climatic event, while in the book, six more chapters follow that event. The eradication and the death of Saruman offer the climax in the books. For the audiences that have not read the books, of course, the movies offer narratives on their own.

b. Differences in discourse

Undoubtedly, the differences in the story (be it nuclei or catalysts) influence the discourse of the story, as well. The fact that Frodo appears in the film as young and inexperienced, in contrast to the book's middle-aged hobbit, affects the emotional reaction of the audience (Barthes' indices) to his choice to keep the Ring. The reader of the book is shocked, while in the film Frodo's personality is easily corrupted by the Ring and therefore no

² a. The exploits of Frodo and Sam on the road to Mordor and b. The adventures of the other characters in the lands of the West-Gondor, Rohan, Fangorn.

viewer is surprised to see him wishing to keep the Ring. The theme of the book that even Frodo can be corrupted, as all men are potential sinners, according to Christianity, is decreased in the movie. Even the character of the Ring seems altered on screen. The destruction of the Ring has also significant differences between the book and the film. Many of these alterations affect the discourse, as the omitted scenes are part of Tolkien's worldview, altogether creating his universe, the social structure of the hobbit society, etc.

In addition, the reader of the book notices the absence of a key character in the films (Tom Bombadil), the replacement of Glorfindel with Arwen and the alteration of other characters, both in appearance and personality. For instance, certain characters in Jackson's films do things in the movies which are contrary to their personalities, in the way in which Tolkien portrayed them, or adopt completely different personalities in the films. The Elves, for instance, seem mysterious in the films, with a sense of sorrow, while in the book they are frequently joyful, making fun of people and singing songs. In general, the characters are more humanized on screen.

c. The book fans' reaction to the films

According to Jenkins (2003), active fans are a type of audience that is personally identified with the texts and are both emotionally and physically engaged with the universe of the narrative in many ways. They are always alert to new experiences offered through various channels. Their engagement can be seen in new media environments such as the official web site, fan sites and other online groups. Knowing that LOTR has created a growing and highly engaged fandom, Jackson tried to take their views into account before going on to film the LOTR trilogy. He did this by means of online interviews with fans, thus making a strategic move to have them by his side.

"Due to their close textual readings, their enthusiastic critical analyses, their extreme dedication, and their growing numbers, active fans are beginning to be recognized as important contributors to the formation of collective belief" (Sherfin 2004). In the book "Watching the Lord of the Rings", edited by Martin Barker and Ernest Mathijis 24.739 questionnaires from 100 different countries were studied, focusing on the audience perception of "The Return of the King". Following the editors' hypothesis that "the meaning of such complex texts can be fully understood only as a result of dynamic processes involving the viewers and their social and cultural contexts" (Pagello 2010: 238), we examined the comments left by fans on

certain web platforms, in order to test their reactions to the films and the way they perceived the mediation of the book's message through another medium.

After researching the comments left by fans on TheOneRing.net³ and Quora⁴, it seems that the reactions among fans are varied. A number of fans argued that the screenwriters Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens needed more oversight into the books. Some find that certain characters have been through major adaptations. For example, a comment in Quora from a LOTR book fan states that "Aragorn is not the other Captain America", "Legolas is not a super parkourist" and "Gimli is not a comic relief, but a very brave and faithful hero" (see: <https://www.quora.com/search?q=Aragorn%20captain%20America>). A great number of comments found in Quora disapprove of the cutting of the Scouring of the Shire scene. However, there is one comment arguing that if the scene was included, it would have become a long, tiresome movie. Most fans comment that they understand that the plot of the book needed to be simplified for the movies, but they disagree on the characters' changes. Most admit that the increased role of Arwen in the movies is one of their strong points. Arwen's more "prominent role in Jackson's film foregrounds their central love-story, as well as expanding the role of women in the text to cater to a twenty-first century demographic" (Selling, 2022: 60). Gandalf is the character that was depicted in the most similar way to the book, according to the fans. The sets and scenery are generally seen as in accordance with the atmosphere of the book, the Middle Earth believed to be successfully depicted for all fans, both in Quora and TheOneRing.net. The Special Effects used to make hobbits appear half their size, characters created by digital effects (such as Gollum), as well as New Zealand's countryside managed to create the "unrealistic" and "impossible" fantasy, while coming very close to Tolkien's "secondary world". The great majority of fans find the films intriguing and a way of promoting Tolkien's work. The film trilogy is seen as "a modern classic of the adventure film genre and the high-water mark for high fantasy on the big screen", as commented by a fan in theOneRing.net.

³ TheOneRing.net is a digital platform founded in 1999 by a group of Tolkien fans in order to create a forum for the discussion of Jackson's films. It is a web gathering of Tolkien fans, offering a space for interaction and exchange of ideas on any issue about Tolkien.

⁴ Quora is a social platform, used by 300 million people worldwide, where the users answer each other questions in a variety of topics. It was chosen for this research because the topics are both created and answered by the users themselves and therefore we can see both what interests them and how they deal with it.

There are a small number of Tolkien fans who believe that Jackson's adaptation is not close to Tolkien's spirit and actually betrays it. The removal of Tom Bombadil's character, for instance, is believed to be an erroneous choice. The specific character is the only one who is not affected by the Ring's corrupting power. He symbolizes neutrality, the natural world's serenity and by extension Tolkien's viewpoint on politics and power. By trying to bring the story towards the needs of the contemporary audience, Jackson has created more realistic, conflictual characters, rather than staying with the romantic, virtuous characters envisaged by Tolkien. Many fans stress that a medium such as film, aims to make profit and naturally manipulates the meaning of a story, in order to be attractive to the wider possible audiences. In this respect, a lot of action is added, the battles are harsher and many things simplified. Some aspects of character, philosophy or the writer's worldview might not translate well from the written word into the audiovisual medium, but the fact is that the LOTR trilogy invited a vast number of people to Tolkien's "secondary world", many of whom actually read the books after seeing the movies, as they themselves admit on Quora. A fan who characterizes himself as a "life-long Tolkien fan; aspiring fiction author" comments on Quora, answering the question "How many people have actually read Lord of the Rings vs. just watched the movies?": "I remember the times before the first movie came out (in roughly 2000) very well. In those days, one met people who'd read the Lord of the Rings everywhere you went" (<https://www.quora.com/search?q=have%20you%20read%20the%20LOTR%27s%20books%3F>).

"There is still lingering suspicion amongst some literary academics that cinematic adaptation proposes a degraded or inferior version of the novel, thus betraying the implicit bias of a print-based culture that words are a superior medium to visual images" (Selling 2022: 56). Jackson's films actually increased Tolkien's book sales, as the fan themselves admit both in Quora and TheOneRing.net Internet site. Cinemagoers are used to watching book adaptations on screen nowadays and it has become common practice, according to Sheen (2000). Boym argues that the familiar with the text audiences show a high degree of involvement when watching film adaptations, wishing to relive the emotions felt when reading the book and/or being curious about their rebirth as visual texts.

2. From book and film to the LOTR inspired gaming

Tolkien's books and their visual adaptations through Jackson's films have influenced the gaming industry in many ways. Not only have they inspired the creation of fantasy worlds, epic battles and character types, but they

also have given rise to many role-playing games (RPGs) – in digital and analogue forms – that follow or extend the story of the books.

Dungeon and Dragons (1974), Elder Scrolls (1994) and Warcraft (1994) referred to LOTR, by including many characters from the story (Elves, Hobbits and Ents, to name a few), and are set in medieval times. D&D's creatures initially featured the same characteristics and roles in the unfolding of the story/game. The names were altered after a lawsuit from Tolkien's publishers, but the influence is still recognizable, as in almost every fantasy work produced in the 70s, a decade that marked the peak of Tolkien's popularity worldwide. Of course, as in any RPG, D&D's story, characters and aim has been transformed through the decades to come to terms to contemporary fantasy subculture and the needs of its audiences.

In "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" (ROTK) video game – designed by E.A. Redwood in 2003 for PC and Playstation – the synergy with the film is more than obvious (the player recognizes music, aesthetic influences, as well as actual footage from the films) and the experience of the players is actually blended with that of the film audience. "The interactivity that the player enjoys in ROTK is strategically limited, and the strategy that informs these limitations serves to incorporate the player into the LOTR franchise" (Brookey and Booth 2006: 226). According to Brookey and Booth, the video game invites the player into "playing the movie" and "identifies a subject who is part of a culture that is created by the LOTR franchise" (2006: 227). As in every subculture – be it a music culture, a sport team's fan club, etc – the members should be able to testify their belonging to the specific community, by wearing scarves or specific colours, by using specific words and symbols, so in the LOTR subculture "the intertextual allusions found in most modern texts allow viewers to exercise specialized knowledge and to mark their membership" (Ott and Walter 2000: 440) in the particular culture.

The more recent tabletop RPG game "The One Ring" by designers Francesco Nepitello and Marco Maggi is also based on LOTR. It was first released in 2011 and has won many awards for art and presentation. In its second edition, released in 2021, the game is based on Tolkien's books, not Jackson's films, according to its creators. There are features called Virtues, as well as some magical items, which players can use, re-introducing the first segment of the LOTR industry and reminding the fans of another product in the franchise.

Board games such as Monopoly or Trivial Pursuit have produced themed-LOTR versions, where the iconography and linguistic messages are based on LOTR signs. In order to experience Middle-Earth, one should

experience all the franchise products, as suggested by the synergies of all the culture industries involved.

a. Differences in story and discourse

RPG – be it video, mobile or tabletop games – based on or inspired by LOTR do not in principle follow the storyline of the book. They may refer to earlier times or continue the plot. Such games are “open-ended texts” (Jara and Torner 2018), allowing the reader/player to make choices and contribute towards the formation of the final story of the game (the characters involved, the paths they follow, their interaction, etc). Regarding discourse, the case is similar to that of the filmic translation, since most games are inspired by Jackson’s films both in terms of the story plot and its visual representation. This is why the new version of “TheOneRing” promises to refer to the books, in order to please Tolkien’s fandom. The use of the word “virtues” for some of the game’s features is therefore chosen to stress the return to the romantic medieval world Tolkien had envisaged.

b. The main narrative

The narratology of a RPG is very different from a literary work. Bode and Dietrich (2013) have offered the notion of “future narrative” to describe RPGs. RPGs “combine pre-established textual structures and emergent performance” and are multi-linear, as they offer several “storylines” (Jara and Torner 2018: 273), depending on the path the player will choose to follow and the choices that he/she will make. The signs the players read in RPGs, based on or inspired by LOTR, stem from Medieval connotations and symbolisms: swords, knight armors, battles, fights for glory, etc. A certain fictional world is represented through these signs and a fantasy universe is created. In digital formats, RPGs use motifs and themes from LOTR to generate several potentialities of a narrative. Board game adaptations of LOTR “engender narrative flexibility and a resultant multiplicity in the story-telling/discovering/making process” (Brown and Waterhouse 2016). Therefore, even if core parts of the story and/or their expansions (Barthes’ nuclei and/or catalysts) are altered, or large plot happenings (Barthes’ action) are inserted or erased, the indices and informants are always visible: the Middle Earth, its atmosphere and connotations form the basis for every gaming translation.

c. The reaction of book fans to LOTR gaming

According to Punday, as mentioned in Jara and Torner (2018), RPGs help players get in touch with literary genres such as fantasy... RPGs are

“extremely artifacts of fan culture and reflect the cultural work done by objects that achieve “cult” status” (Punday 2005: 128). “Not only do these games allow us to become involved in fictions, but they allow us to do so simultaneously as a group, therefore establishing fiction as a place of “real” encounters” (Jara and Torner 2018). “Through the RPGs, fantasy enthusiasts found the opportunity to actively explore its “Secondary Worlds”, thus accomplishing one of its earliest transmedial expansions: from book to game, from imagination to interaction” (Jenkins 2006: 220).

As the fans comment on Quora and TheOneRing.net they recognize Tolkien’s medievalism in many games and that make them feel familiar with the game’s universe or even “happy to be able to use immersive virtual environments that RPGs offer in order to actively take part in Tolkien’s worlds” (comment in Quora). There are a small number of comments which criticize the designers’ choices and offer solutions and comments that completely discard such games. The major number of comments, however, in the above-mentioned sites, highlight the fans’ eagerness for RPGs, both video and tabletop games, as translations of Tolkien’s universe into other media.

3. From book to music

Specific music genres, like metal music, due to their stylistic and sonic characteristics, can move in a parallel way with fantasy fiction. They stress elements like strength, mythical and magical elements, imagination and the supernatural, while the lyrics might talk about heroes, criminals, gods and monsters (McParland 2018). Beaman (2021) argues that Tolkien is one among the writers that have inspired rock and metal bands, due to the themes that Tolkien uses, such as the nature of good and evil, death, war, freedom, sin and justice among others.

According to Sederholm (2016), music shares common interest with mythology for the expression of the strange or the unusual and metal music often uses translations from other media, offering their audience the chance to discover the connections between songs and the sources of the translations. Trafford and Pluskowski (2007) argue that metal music emerged and developed in a parallel time period with fantasy fiction. It is, therefore, self-evident that the one influenced the other. Moran (2019) notes that between 1960 and 1980 many songs were produced that included or were inspired by elements of fantasy fiction. Some of them had LOTR as their basic theme, like “The Ballad of Bilbo Baggins” (1967) by Leonard Nimoy, while in Hard Rock and Metal culture, “Rumble On” (1969) and “The Battle of Evermore” (1971) by Led Zeppelin are some examples of

such influences. Simmons (2017) argues that Tolkien's Middle Earth inspired many metal songs.

Led Zeppelin is one of the bands that was influenced by fantasy fiction. In 1969, the record "Led Zeppelin II" included the song "Ramble On", which refers to LOTR, and more specifically to Gollum and the Mordor area. The song "Misty Mountain Hop" seems to refer to Tolkien's geographic universe, Misty Mountains, while in "The Battle of Evermore" an epic battle is described. This seems to refer to the battle in "Pelennor Fields" which takes place in the third book, "The Return of the King". At the same time there are some direct references in the lyrics, such as the "Ringwraiths", which are some of the threads that the heroes of the books face. Both songs are included in the album "Led Zeppelin IV" (1971). Black Sabbath also performed songs inspired by the fantasy fiction in their first appearance in 1970. To an extent the record was influenced by the first book "The Fellowship of the Ring" (1954). Specifically and the song "The Wizard" refers to Gandalf, who plays a crucial role in LOTR.

Tolkien is probably the writer who has influenced metal music the most. The references are usually found in the lyrics of some songs. There are also entire CDs based on his work. There are many bands whose names are inspired by LOTR and the universe Tolkien created, mostly the geographic areas he envisaged, the beings and the objects referred in the pages of his books.⁵ The band Cirith Ungol for instance, is named after a certain path in Mordor. Other bands like, for instance, Blind Guardian, a popular German band of Power Metal, created songs inspired by *The Hobbit* and LOTR. They also produced a concept record entitled "Nightfall in Middle-Earth" (1998), referring to the "Silmarillion", the book which introduced the Middle-Earth cosmology, through specific stories. Some of their songs influenced by Tolkien are "Gandalf's Rebirth" and "By the Gates of Moria" in the record "Battalions of Fear" (1988), the "Lord of the Rings" in the record "Tales from the Twilight World" (1990), and *The Bard's Song (In the Forest)* and *The Bard's Song (The Hobbit)* in the record "Somewhere Far Beyond" (1992). The band Cruachan, a folk metal band, has also made some referents to LOTR, with the song "Shelob" for the record "The Morrigan's Call" (2006).

a. Differences on story and discourse

When we talk about translating a written text into a musical format, one has to take into account certain parameters such as musicality, the transla-

⁵ Some examples of bands influenced by Tolkien are: Burzum, Darkthrone, Gorgoroth, Marduk and Dimmu Borgir, according to Kuusela (2015).

tion of text into lyrics, etc. Linda Hutcheon, as stated in Albalat (2017), proposes certain rules: In the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds and visual images. In the case of translating one work into another, therefore, it is obvious that the discourse will change, in order to adjust to the new medium. However, it is necessary to maintain the essence of the main story, even with a different discourse, so that the mediation could succeed. The basic themes of the book should be translated into the musical form.

Metal music offers an interesting and special framework for the reading and re-examination of traditional narratives. Music bands, through the different uses of myths, legends and literature texts in their songs, reshape the beliefs of audiences in the original sources, while at the same time preserving and refreshing them for new social formations and promoting literature texts to new, contemporary audiences. Metal music can be seen as a dramatized music scene, perhaps like opera. Many metal bands were inspired by sketches and drawings based on books and fantasy stories. Some CD covers that have been inspired by fantasy tend to include iconography of a battle scene, scenes from Beowulf or a scene from Tolkien books. The theme “fight for glory” is a usual theme inspired by Tolkien books, as well (Hellrich, Rzymiski and Vestergaard 2019)⁶.

b. The main narrative

As a characteristic example, we will analyze the lyrics of Led Zeppelin’s song “Ramble On”. The song includes some direct references to Tolkien’s book, such as Gollum and Mordor, but is not a representation of the story’s scene or a part of the plot, like, for example “The Battle of Evermore”, again by Led Zeppelin. “Ramble On” is instead a symbolic, contemporary story about a search for a “Queen”. As the title suggests, the song talks about a journey, possibly through the countryside, as the lyrics “Leaves are falling around, it’s time I was in my way” and “The autumn moon lights my way” imply. The connection to nature is evident in Tolkien’s books. New Zealand’s landscapes are widely depicted in Jackson’s films and the RPGs connected to LOTR, since nature is believed to symbolize the unspoiled, pure, pre-industrial eras which Tolkien was nostalgic about. The “Queen” whom the singer is searching for might stand for the pure Tolkienian forests or, according to some fans’ comments, the Ring. One interpretation

⁶ The term “fight for glory” includes references to words and/or images, such as “fight”, “battle”, “blood”, “sword”, “gods”, “king”, “die”, “glory”, “warriors”, “victory” και “death”.

of the lyric “But Gollum, and the evil one crept up and slipped away with her” by Tolkien’s fans equates the Ring with the girl, as Gollum’s only desire is the Ring in the book. It is, after all, referred to as “my precious” in Tolkien’s story. Following a similar analysis, Mordor, a ruined land in the book, can be seen as a sign of loneliness in the song. The lyric says “T’was in the darkest depths of Mordor, I met a girl so fair”. The song could therefore be interpreted as referring to Frodo’s journey, even if he did not find the Ring in Mordor. As we have already mentioned, in our analysis of the filmic adaptation, the story might change in order to adjust to the new medium. However, the discourse should remain similar to that of the original story. The long journey (“I’m goin’ round the world, I got to find my girl”... “I’ve been this way ten years to the day”) and the constant, tiring search (“Ah, sometimes I grow so tired”) can be paralleled to LOTR’s journey and fight for man’s salvation (saving the world in the book, finding love in the song).

In general, “Ramble on” speaks about longing, nostalgia for the past, with its countryside walks, the harmony with nature, in contrast to the machinery world we now live in. The lyrics imply the need to keep moving, through the constant repetition of the phrase “ramble on”.

According to Carlos (2020: 530) “Led Zeppelin’s allusions to Tolkien’s literature rely on cultural memory to actively participate in a dialogue of urban criticism and a romanticized vision of rural Britain”. Using nostalgia theory, Carlos states that the band’s songs that refer to LOTR create a spatial and temporal fictional world. The song refers to the timeless tradition of journeying, going back even to the medieval world (2020: 541). It is a manifestation of the antimodern, a hymn to the shared values of the past. Even the sonic characteristics of the song (acoustics, folk genre, aesthetics) keep a link to the past. For Carlos (2020) fantasy can be seen as a means of maintaining certain cultural resources – both Tolkien and Led Zeppelin aim for that.

As a more abstract narrative genre, songs seem to maintain the main signs of the book and, similarly to gaming narratives, the indices and informants of the original story.

c. The fans’ reaction to the songs

Arnett’s (1996) research entitled “Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation” examining teenage fans of metal music, reinforces the evidence that nerd culture has an important influence and relation with metal culture. On the other hand a significant part of the audience plays video games, reads comics and collects figures of magicians and dragons.

According to Lagopoulou (2015: 116) “the literary representation of a fantasy world can be an ideological protest against conditions in our own society”. If we extend this concept to every transmediation of a literary text, or every representation, be it cinematic, music or through a RPG’s narrative, we could see a revolution of metal fans against the dominant contemporary culture. Such revolutions have been witnessed through many other music cultures (especially youth ones): rock, hip hop, punk, to name but a few. The connotations offered by the Middle Ages and transmitted through every LOTR transmediation help emphasize such a revolutionary fight: the swords, the knights, the effort to save a kingdom, the moral virtues and friendship values highlighted in such narratives can easily visualize the ideology forementioned.

Returning to Barthes’ analysis on narrative, the above analysis guides us to understand that LOTR adaptations maintain the main nuclei of the text while changing some elements of the catalysts, making all narratives easily recognizable by LOTR audiences. There are characters’ alterations in filmic texts, expansion of female presence in both filmic and RPGs’ texts, replacement of storyline in music texts and even completely different storylines in RPGs and the new Amazon series “The Ring of Power”. There may be different levels of interaction and immersion in these LOTR transmediations, (e.g., in reading a book, watching a film, singing a song or playing a RPG), and a different signification (e.g., through film dialogues or music lyrics). However, there is a common LOTR sign industry on Tolkienian medievalism and his nostalgia for the past, as well as a hope for the future of humankind.

LOTR franchise: narratives and the sign industry

As a genre, fantasy contains an element of the impossible, an impossible “culturally defined” and representing the “knowledge and beliefs of its own society” (Selling 2022: 48). The impossible, unknown, foreign or historically far away is a common thread between all the mediated narratives mentioned above. Due to the different characteristics and uses of each above-mentioned translation, however, Tolkien’s narrative has been adjusted to the needs of each medium and the various audiences in a variety of ways.

There are many readings of the book’s narrative, most of which agree that LOTR’s main theme is the endless effort of man to avoid sin, refuse temptation and therefore defeat evil and rescue mankind. According to Vassanyi (2015: 232), “this great novel is first and foremost a poetically

formulated metaphysical statement concerning redemption, relying on a set of concealed theological presuppositions, drawing on the prototypical imagery of the great medieval epics, yet comparing in philosophical grandeur and relevance with the greatest contemporary literary works". It is an attempt to show the constant power of temptation and redemption upon mankind, from the story of Adam and Eve in Paradise to every human effort, at a personal, social and panhuman level. At the same time, LOTR can be seen as a narrative of hope. The corruption of the human free will, the threat of committing the sin, and at the end the prevention of evil through a healing mechanism, an accidental act or a catharsis. Frodo acts as a symbol of man, fighting against temptation, bravely but at the end pointlessly. Virtues such as justice, wisdom, compassion are emphasized over the will to govern the world. The Ring can be seen as a general moral symbol (Vasany 2015).

The role of History and the creation of Middle Earth are other aspects of the LOTR story which have inspired research. Kim Selling (2022) argues that "the idea of "the medieval" was constructed around a set of oppositions pitting Nature and "the primitive" against urban civilization, faith and the supernatural against scientific rationalism". In Tolkien, Saruman represents the urban, industrial threat against living things (awareness for ecological issues). "The filmic medium thus displays its distinctive strength in translating action, character, thematic complexity and emotional depth from book to screen through its ability to convey multi-layered narrative concepts in a minimum of time" (Selling, 2022: 59).

According to Goh (2014: 273), LOTR's signification should include "the (variously) external correlatives of internal struggle, despair and discouragement, the victory of the human spirit, and havens or spots of peace along the life journey", i.e. specifically Christian elements. Other researchers, have highlighted "utopianism", the journey to a "higher state of consciousness" and "purification" (Brisbois 2007, Nilubol 2007, Barker and Mathijs 2007), as elements important to the LOTR story. According to Tzanelli (2004: 23), "Tolkien provided a Weberian understanding of 'disenchantment', mirrored in the end of Hobbit and Elfish eras and the dawn of warfare and appropriation of natural resources – the beginning of rationalization in human history in short".

Media adaptations

With regard to the translation of narratives into other media, Camacho and del Campo (2017) comment that in most cases the original text is in a sense removed from the boundary framework of its first creation and

allows the audience to meet it in different forms and settings, creating new narratives or strengthening the initial one. According to Jenkins (2006: 95-96), “a transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction”. Ciastellardi and Di Rossario’s “transmedia literacy” (2015) implies that all products stemming from a work create a meaningful universe for fans and audiences, offer new opportunities to re-live or even expand their experiences. Rebora (2016: 220) sees Tolkien’s work as “an invitation to fulfill its own potentialities”, “the skeleton for further expansions” and a big number of culture industries has taken that opportunity to continue the story or fill in the gaps in Tolkien’s story.

Tolkien follows the narrative of romance: heroic stories drawing on western folk- and fairy-tale traditions, such as Norse and Celtic myths, Arthurian legends and medieval romances (Selling 2022: 50). Nowadays, in the various translations of Tolkien’s stories, there are even fantasy clichés with Elves. Attebery mentions that Elves “really should organize themselves into a bed and breakfast association” (Attebery 1992: 10). As stated above, many Tolkienian adaptations have been criticized for using specific formulas to attract the media masses, re-symbolize the text and place it in new social relationships.

Jackson, for example, seems to adjust Tolkien’s romantic narrative to a more contemporary epic. With the use of a variety of codes, including social, technical, representational, music and others, Jackson creates an epic of good versus evil in medieval times, featuring heroes, dragons and other creatures. By offering visual appearances to LOTR’s characters (dress, make-up, gestures, even special effects in the case of hobbits and Gollum), he adds information regarding their social status and importance to the story. He retains Tolkien’s invented languages to a great extent. The camera shoots and zooms, while technical effects also add and, in many cases, alter the narrative.

Certain themes in LOTR seem to be presented in greater extent and intensity in the films and games. For instance, in the transmediations through audiovisual media, violence (battles, death, fight scenes) is increased in narratological terms both in the story and narrative time, and is magnified both as signifier and signified (Ball 2002). On the contrary, complicated aspects of the story-line are cut. Female narrative space is added and charac-

ters are changed, both as their role in the plot and their nature (e.g. Elves, as stated above). These omitted catalysts influence the substance of the story.

The vital role of oral tradition, as signified in the book by story-telling and singing (by Elves, among others) is reduced in the film and video games adaptations. Tolkien is talking about the lost culture of oral traditions, agricultural England, pre-industrial times, the romantic nostalgia of looking back into the pure essence of being. The human virtues he sketches, parallel to the rhetoric of man's effort to avoid sin are inspired from these times. The mediations of the books present a rather de-historicized story, focusing on the fight of man against evil. According to Bell (2002), the films reduce or even diminish some cultural material that Tolkien offered to his readers.

The narratives produced (literature, film, tourist, etc) create different imaginary worlds, as "transmedia storytelling is the art of world building" (Jenkins 2003: 21). Fantasy offers the "best fitting literary ground", because it gives rise to cognitive dynamics (Rebora 2016: 221). The multiple characters and stories are re-created in every transmediation, since the openness of the narrative allows for additions, subtractions, as well as efforts to fill in potential narrative gaps. These alterations, made either for the necessary narrative adjustments to specific media or in order to fill in aspects of the story, show previous times or expand the plot. The addiction of the fans allows for such an experimentation, while the not-so-utopian ideal of the "convergence culture," where new forms of narratives (extensible, participatory, and 'lifelike') can finally take shape (Rebora 2016) and can be brought up to date.

The variants of Tolkien's books, mediated through various media, consist of new texts in their own right. The issue of fidelity might be problematic for a part of Tolkien's fandom⁷, but all the new texts have been embraced and experienced by large audiences. They have achieved the ultimate goal of any cultural industry: to retain permanent audiences, while developing new ones and expanding the fandom.

Conclusion

The creation of authentic, self-contained alternate universes is the common achievement of all LOTR translations. They have all managed to create new worlds with more or less common threads between them, albeit highly recognizable by fans worldwide as stemming from Tolkien's "secondary

⁷ There are hashtags such as #Tolkienfidelity and #fidelityTolkien in fans' post, highlighting the fans' interest in the transmediations' maintaining the main narrative of the books.

world". As Pagello writes, referring to Lothar Mikos, today "not only has the number of texts been multiplied many times over, but their quality in the social process of communication has been transformed" (2010: 208). According to Pagello's argument, the influence of marketing strategies in LOTR promotion, as well as the variety of products inspired by Tolkien's books, each of these products offering a unique version of its own, according to the needs of the specific cultural industry it is created for, produce a general project that needs to be studied as a whole. "This reasoning implies that the final goal of reception studies lies not only in understanding the way audiences read a particular film, but also in investigating the processes that have contributed to making it a part of the circulation of meaning in cultural and social contexts" (Pagello 2010: 212).

The LOTR franchise can be seen as a holistic meaning-making product – a result of the synergies of many cultural industries – creating a subculture rich in symbolisms and a devoted fandom. Each member of the LOTR community is happy to identify him or herself as a member of the specific community. They are immersed in LOTR video games, wear T-shirts and eat in LOTR inspired restaurants, listen to music that refer to Tolkien's world and by so doing state their disagreement with the practices of the contemporary world and their longing for past times.

Tolkien's book is therefore the primary – or "cult" – text and has created many paratexts, or texts "separated from a related text but inform our understanding of that text" (Booth 2015: 3). It is evident by now that audiences and transmediated products producers share common connotations (in some cases product producers are members of the fandom themselves). Fans expand their experiences and perhaps understanding of an already known text when consuming one of its paratexts. For example, playing a video-game is more interactive than watching a film (Hedge and Grouling 2010: 19). These fan texts may expand, modify, transpose or quote one another (Ryan 2013), but the fact is that they have placed Tolkien's writings in new economic, as well as socio-cultural context (Grouling 2015), adding to his cultural status. These transmediations might, to a lesser or greater extent, alter Tolkien's narrative. This is the way texts survived in pre-industrial times, where one story-teller passed the story to the next one, who retained what he or she thought was important and/or beautiful and passed it on to the next story-teller... Like the oral traditions and the myths he admired, Tolkien's own story travels through time with the expansions/modifications/ transpositions/ quotes that each producer/cultural industry placed on it, becoming itself a myth of fantasy fiction... or the English mythology Tolkien dreamt about.

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