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The Lord of the Rings Through the Lens of Narratology

A Narratological Analysis of J. R. R. Tolkien's Masterpiece

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Abstract

The aim with this essay is, through the lens of narratology, to study J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and find as many examples of different narratological aspects as possible. These narratological aspects will then be presented in a thorough analysis. Furthermore, the difference in narratological theory between realistic and unrealistic literature is highlighted. The aim is also to try and find out whether the narrative structure might have influenced the novel's popularity among its numerous readers.

The analysis shows that the primary narrator is omniscient, the novel is well structured with good descriptions of the settings and well depicted portrayals of the characters. The analysis also shows that time and space are equally as important as in a classical work of fiction. Moreover, it is evident that the narrative structure is an essential aspect of the success and longevity of the novel, in which the narration and the characterizations are vital. The analysis also highlights the unrealistic features of the novel.

Key words

Narratology, narrative theory, narrative, fiction, plot, narration, J. R. R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings

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Introduction

The Lord of the Rings was first published in 1954 and has since then been translated into numerous languages and issued in several editions. Over the decades, the novel has become an important part of our fictional literary canon. Tolkien writes in his foreword to the second edition: "The prime motive was the desire of a tale-teller to try his hand at a really long story that would hold the attention of readers, amuse them, delight them, and at times maybe excite them or deeply move them" (xxiii), and with all facts on hand one can only say that his attempt was a great success. Tolkien's success as an author was probably based not only on his great storyline, but also the brilliant characterizations that he made in the novel. Characterization and story are vital building blocks of narrative theory but there are other, less obvious factors, that also aid in the creation of great literature. Narratology is the study of narrative structures by literary scholars, and narratological elements possibly contributed to the success of Tolkien's work. The aim of this essay is to do just that; to look at the narratological construction of Tolkien's famous epic tale, to closely examine the novel in its entirety and find as many different structures as possible and critically analyse them, as well as give a general view of the composition of the novel. Is it possible, through its composition, to find out what it is that has kept readers' attention through the decades? Is the narrative structure composed in such a fashion as to keep it timeless, or is it only the classical fight between good and evil that continues to tantalize people of all cultures and ages?

To achieve this goal, *Narratology & Classics* by Irene J. F. de Jong and the analytic steps by Gerard Genette as presented in *Beginning Theory* by Peter Barry will be applied to help form a base structure in the analysis of the novel. Furthermore, Mieke Bal's *Narratology, Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* will be used as well as

Narrative Theory, Core Concepts & Critical Debates by David Herman et al., in which Brian Richardson's line of theory will be in focus.

The Lord of the Rings is very extensive, about 1100 pages including appendices, and it will be impossible to go deeply into every page of the book, or every aspect of narratological theory found in the narrative, but there will be a general evaluation of the novel in its entirety. The analysis will be divided into four sections for an easier overview: narration and focalization, character, time, and space. First of all, the primary and secondary narrators will be established, and their internal or external relationships will be defined. We will also find out from whose point of view the story is narrated. Secondly, great characterizations are vital to any narrative and they are closely linked with narration. For that reason, a large part of the analysis will be concentrated on characterization and the narratorial point of view. Thirdly, perhaps time does not play a large role in the drama from a reader's point of view, but it is important for the story and therefore it must be considered in a proper analysis. Fourthly, an unrealistic narrative would not be complete without a proper and believable setting, hence it must be brought forth and highlighted. After the general analysis, which will be rather comprehensive, a deeper analysis will be made on two short chapters in the novel.

Theories

The study of narratology is a fairly broad theoretical field, and there are many different schools and theorists whose work not always follow the exact same detailed direction in their studies. A choice had therefore to be made to narrow down the amount of theoretical information to something that would suit an essay of this format. In *Narratology & Classics*, Irene J. F. de Jong thoroughly describes and explains narratological concepts divided into four main categories. Firstly, she discusses

narrators and narratees, which she considers the "central concept" in the sense that there is no narrative without a narrator and its audience (de Jong 17-42). The second category is focalization, which is closely linked with the previous category. Here we find out from whose point of view the story is told. The narrator can be either omniscient or a recognizable character, but it is the narrating voice that mediates the implied author's words to the audience (de Jong 47-69). Thirdly, time is identified by de Jong as a very important part of a narratological study of a text (73-101). As a reader, one wishes to receive at least some information of the timetable set for the story at hand. On the other hand, for an unrealistic narrative time is perhaps not quite as crucial. Where a realistic narrative's plot probably is controlled, an unrealistic plot may be "indeterminable, unknowable, or denarrated" (Richardson 78). Finally, space is a category that, according to de Jong, fills a large gap in narratological theory and should not be forgotten in a thorough analysis (105-129). Irene J. F. de Jong more or less follows the same line of ideas as Gerard Genette, whose ideas have been described and divided into six categories by Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory, an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*.

Barry's first category is the narrative mode, which Genette has divided into two parts: mimesis, where the story is presented in a slower pace to give space for more detailed descriptions and dialogues, and diegesis, where the pace is quicker, and the reader is given a more general view of the action in the story (232). The second category is focalization, and Barry seems to put the same meaning into this as de Jong (233-34). The third category is the narrator, where we find out who is telling the story, primary as well as secondary narrators. The fourth category is time. Is the story narrated chronologically or is the plot constructed with a mingled timeline of flashbacks (analepsis), either internal or external, and foreshadowing (prolepsis) that may be predictive (Barry 235-36)? The fifth category is how the story is presented: whether the

frame narrative is double- or single ended with one or more embedded narratives (meta-narratives) (Barry 236-37). Finally, the sixth category describes how speech and thought are represented (Barry 238-39).

With this in mind, de Jong's and Genette's theories will collectively form a base to build a study on, as the analytical process is divided into steps that provide valuable guidelines for making a full analysis. Together they present a broad general idea of the quintessence of how to analyse a text's narrative structure. Genette and de Jong do not use the exact same vocabulary throughout, but they discuss the same things, and their terminology will be used extensively in this essay.

The narrator plays a crucial part in any story; in fact, there would not be a narrative without the narrator. The difficulty lies in identifying the narratorial persona and its role in the story that is being told. According to Mieke Bal, author of *Narratology, Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, the narrating voice is always an 'I', no matter whether it is in first person or third person perspective (21), but in this essay the primary narrator will be referred to as 'it', since the primary narrator in *The Lord of the Rings* is an unknown, external, omniscient all-knowing authorial voice. The secondary narrators, on the other hand, are identifiable characters in the story and will therefore be referred to as an 'I'.

Out of the five co-authors presented in *Narrative Theory, Core Concepts & Critical Debates* by David Herman et al., the choice fell on Brian Richardson, who puts his focus on highlighting antimimetic or unrealistic literature and wants to fill the gap that he has found in narratological theory. Richardson attempts to build a theoretical skeleton for literature that does not follow the standards of traditional stories (21-22), and *The Lord of the Rings* is a good example of this kind of literary work. Richardson writes about narratives and/or characters as being either "mimetic (natural) or antimimetic (unnatural)" (22), and this concept will be further explored in the general

analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* as a whole. What must be brought to attention is that Richardson uses the term 'mimetic' in a different way than Genette who, along with the term 'diegetic', uses the term to describe the "basic narrative mode", in other words the speed or rhythm of the narrative (Barry 232). Therefore, when Richardson's theories are discussed, this essay will refer to the narrative or a character as natural/realistic or unnatural/unrealistic.

Analysis

Narration and focalization

Every narrative demands a narrator, a telling voice that conveys the story. Tolkien has created a typical heterodiegetic primary narrator for a zero-focalized, unnatural literary work. As mentioned in the introduction, this narrator is an omniscient, all-knowing, external voice that knows the thoughts and feelings of all characters yet is not itself part of the story (Barry 234). It feels, using Irene J. F. de Jong's words, "anonymous and disembodied" (27). The narrator in *The Lord of the Ring*s is emotionally disconnected from the characters it is referring to and engages in telling the story as detailed as possible in a neutral fashion to its audience, who, in their turn, are fully aware of the story's unrealistic nature and prefer it that way (Richardson 176-177). Even when there are episodes in which an internal secondary narrator takes over the storytelling, their stories are still in the end conveyed by the primary omniscient narrator of the frame narrative.

The tale is narrated in a subsequent fashion which means that everything that happens, hypothetically, "ha[s] already taken place" (de Jong 74). As a reader, one can almost imagine that the story actually could have played out in a long-forgotten past, only remembered by a select few and now finally written down for everyone to read.

One episode that shows this clearly is when Sam for the first and only time sees an Oliphaunt or Mûmak: “The Mûmak of Harad was indeed a beast of vast bulk, and the like of him does not walk now in Middle-Earth; his kin that live still in latter days are but memories of his girth and majesty” (Tolkien 661). It is easy to think how Elephants conceivably could originate from Oliphaunts. The way the story is composed makes it feel as much as an historic account as a fictional novel. It could, in theory, be composed from real events, but they did not actually happen (de Jong 76).

Peter Barry states that the secondary narrative as a rule is the “main narrative”, but in this case that is not true (236). The frame narrative is also the main narrative throughout, and it is double ended, meaning that it continues after the embedded story is finished. Within the frame narrative there are a number of metanarratives. Most of the secondary narratives are analeptic episodes that are explanatory, meaning that they explain something in the primary narrative, and actorial, where the narration is done by a character in the story. Most of these analepses are internal and describe things that have happened “within the time span of the main story” (de Jong 80). Some are external, which means they took place outside the timeline of the main story (de Jong 80), and usually refer to the war 2000 years ago and happenings around it which are the origins of the conflict that now plays out in the main story. A few of the external actorial flashbacks discuss divine matters. Through poetry, songs and stories the secondary narrators tell their audience of events that took place even further back in time. Almost all secondary narratives are thematic with the frame, internal as well as external, meaning that they in one way or another deal with the fight against the Dark Lord Sauron. An example of external analepsis in *The Lord of the Rings* is when Aragorn tells the story of how the Path of the Dead came to be 2000 years ago: “For at Erech there stands yet a black stone that was brought, it was said, from Númenor by Isildur; and it was set upon a hill, and upon it the King of the Mountains swore

allegiance to him in the beginning of the realm of Gondor" (Tolkien 782). Furthermore, foreshadowing plays an important part in the story, as it adds to the suspense and gives the reader an idea of what might happen later in the story. In the early chapters of the novel, Frodo has a dream that can be looked at as a somewhat mixed up prophetic vision of his journey into Mordor and his very last hour on Mount Doom (Tolkien 127). There is also the instance when both Sam and Frodo look into Galadriel's Mirror and Sam has a clear vision of what will happen to their home in the Shire if they do not succeed with their mission (Tolkien 362).

As a rule, every narrator must have one or more narratees, and these usually correspond with the role of the narrator. A primary narrator would therefore have a primary narratee, a secondary narrator would have a secondary narratee, and so on (de Jong 28). A narratee is the adopted audience of a narrator, and every narrator is telling their story to someone. Sometimes it might be hard to discern who that someone is. In this novel, the omniscient narrating voice has external narratees. Whether the story is consciously told to us, the readers, or to an unknown audience is not clear, but one might assume that as a reader one is included in the narrator's intended target group. As for the secondary narratives told by an internal secondary narrator, their narratees are clearly other characters in the story. The primary narrator then only forwards the information word by word to its external narratees.

The Lord of the Rings has a "supernatural canon of probability" (Richardson 107), as have all unnatural narratives. The superhuman forces that appear are, among others, elves, wizards, ghosts, rings with magical properties, entities with infinite life span, enormous eagles, and ents. The supernatural properties are then woven into the realistically formed background that the scenery is based on.

The narrative structure is for the most part ageless or modern in its composition, but there are significant segments of the novel, in the third part, that are written with a

much more archaic language. All of a sudden it feels as if the reader is brought back in time. The style changes around the time when Aragorn decides to make his true identity known to all, and every time the narrative involves him or anything that even remotely has to do with him, Gondor, or the Rohirrim, the writing style becomes old-fashioned and declamatory: "…and when they looked up again, behold! their enemies were flying"…"Then Gandalf, leaving all such matters of battle and command to Aragorn and the other lords, stood upon the hill-top and called; and down to him came the great eagle, Gwaihir the Windlord, and stood before him" (Tolkien 949). There are merely small things that indicate this change of style: sometimes 'lo!', sometimes 'behold!', and sometimes it is the word order that gives it away. The narrative style does not only depend on what words one uses, but it is how they are used that makes the difference. The interesting thing though, is that this formal style is not applied in any of the chapters in the third part of the story that tells of Sam's and Frodo's adventures in Mordor. In those chapters the narrator returns to the more informal style that marks the first two parts of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the very last chapter, the narrator once more speaks with the timeless ease that was noticeable through the first two parts of the book, which also certainly is quite deliberate. It is once more the four hobbits that are in centre and around them the language always had a more modern-day feel to it all through the narrative.

Focalization is another important aspect of the narration. The primary narrator keeps its role as a voice outside of the actual story with zero focalization but every so often it changes perspective, turns internal and dives deeper into a specific character's mind, usually one of the nine companions of the fellowship, and the reader learns of their thoughts and how they experience the world around them. According to Peter Barry, this is quite typical for a conventional work of literature (234). As an example, we can look at the first chapter of Book Five which starts with Pippin as focalizer, and

everything is seen through his eyes and from his point of view. The reader experiences how Gandalf has encouraged him to sleep away most of the three-day ride they are taking on horseback. Pippin has very vague memories of the different stages of their journey and wonders whether he is still dreaming or if he is truly awake. The only thing he can see through the opening in Gandalf's cloak is the stars in the sky (Tolkien 747). Another interesting detail to mention is that even though Frodo must be considered the protagonist, he is hardly ever the focalizer; rather it is from Sam's point of view that we get to find out what happens to Frodo. This is particularly noticeable in the third part of the book.

In the embedded narratives there are sometimes similar situations. The only difference is that here we know who the narrator is. The secondary stories are often told without emotional involvement from the character doing the telling, who only mediates stories told orally one generation to another. However, some secondary narratives are told from the character's own experiences and filled with their emotional luggage.

Character

There are many important parts of a narrative, and the characterisations of individuals are no exception. A story built up by eloquently described scenery and action will still fall flat without first-rate characters. They form a crucial part of every story, and in this area, one must say that Tolkien must have done almost everything right, considering the popularity of his work. His characterisations are vivid, with just enough detail, and he managed to make them really come alive. As a new character is introduced, one gets a general depiction of their main traits, but as the story carries on one learns more and more of each one of them, as one does when getting to know a new

person in real life. This suspension also helps in keeping a reader interested, because most of the questions one might have will be answered eventually.

Human beings are part of the tale in *The Lord of the Rings*, but they share the narrative space with the many unrealistic beings that populate Middle Earth. They could be considered realistic in the sense that they are human characters with human limitations and reactions. All other characters fall under the term unrealistic. What the implied author has done here is to provide all his fictional characters with very human traits, both good and bad ones, which in turn give them the air of realism. The nine main characters of the Fellowship are chosen from different races of beings in the same way as one puts together a group of people from different cultures. They may have supernatural characteristics, but they are human in their emotions, motivations, and intentions. In general, every race has been given traits that are distinctive to their specific species, such as cultural traditions, life span, attitudes towards other communities and so on.

Richardson mentions three factors that he considers important in unrealistic characterisations: "(1) functional aspects that help keep the narrative moving along; (2) aesthetic aspects…; and (3) an antimimetic aspect that provides for the appearance of truly unnatural figures" (135). Every individual important for the storyline has been portrayed as human as possible; they act and speak in a realistic manner, but they never lose their unnatural properties. They are representative of a large spectrum of sentiments that are clearly visible despite the fact that not all their thoughts are shown in writing. It is possible for each reader to put their own emotions and experiences into the gaps in the characterisations, which might make the characters more vivid. "A character is a complex semantic unit. As readers we 'see' characters, feel with them, and like or dislike them", Mieke Bal writes (113). She also discusses the "character-effect", which is "when the non-existing character resemble real people to the extent that we identify

with it and forget the fundamental difference" (Bal 113). The traits given to the many important characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are at the same time complex and very simple. One might get the impression that the characterisations are quite Manichaean and for the most part they are. On the one hand, you have the good side, where, for example, Aragorn might be considered too good to be real. He is kind and quiet, humble and fair, and he is extremely brave and mentally strong when the situation demands it. In other words, a perfect candidate for a leader, and also a combination that makes him as unrealistic as any of the others. Are these not traits that one looks for in every leader, but one rarely finds all in one person? On the other hand, there is the bad side, with orcs and men with dark minds, controlled by the ultimate evil.

The characters in the novel are not all perfect. They all have qualities, just as humans do, that are not always admirable. They make mistakes and it is these faults that might make us as readers accept them, and because we can see ourselves in them, we are able to identify with them. They do not always listen to their own good advice but pay heed to their emotions, which sometimes brings them bad luck. Overall, no reader should have any problems to imagine Middle Earth or its inhabitants as realistic because they are experienced as real enough in the way they are described. The description of Elrond, the elven lord, is one example of how an unrealistic character can be experienced as realistic if he is provided with realistic traits:

> The face of Elrond was ageless, neither old nor young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful. His hair was dark as the shadows of twilight, and upon it was set a circlet of silver; his eyes were grey as a clear evening, and in them was a light like the light of stars. Venerable he seemed as a king crowned with many winters, and yet hale as a tried warrior in the fulness of his strength. (Tolkien 227)

However, in spite of everything that makes these characters seem real, there is no escaping their unnatural features. Furthermore, each character is only given as much background and personality as is needed to fulfil his or her mission in the narrative. Brian Richardson states that in a fictional text it is possible to enter the inside of a specific character's mind and know what they really think and feel. Things that one would never know in real life, and if those thoughts and feelings are not put in writing and spoken by the narrator, no one will know of them for they do not exist outside the narrative (133).

Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and other fictional ethnic groups that are mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings* each represent a different ideological viewpoint, and the reader should not have any difficulties to find a view that suits their perspective. It is possible for everyone to find a character with whom to identify in this novel, even if they might be figures of the imagination. Their characteristics are human enough for us to embrace, and their unrealistic features, like magic, we let the child within us dream of being able to perform.

The purpose of this essay is not to discuss feminist values but to show as objectively as possible how the novel is composed. But nevertheless, women must be mentioned and of all named characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, women are not represented in great numbers, but those who are mentioned are all depicted as strong and independent women in positions of certain power. The two most important are Lady Galadriel, the elf queen in Lothlorien, who offers great help to the fellowship, and Eowyn, the shieldmaiden of Rohan, who plays an important role in the final battle before Minas Tirith. The remaining undefined female crowd, when mentioned at all, is depicted as anonymous victims of the hard times they live in.

Time

The Lord of the Rings is a work of fiction, with all that it entails. Though the story bears the signs of a fairy tale, it does not begin with 'Once upon a time'. The reader is instead dropped into what seems to be the middle of an ongoing sequence of events, the planning of a birthday party (Tolkien 21), where one learns of previous comings and goings as "explanatory flashbacks", metanarratives told by a character that shed more light on current events within the primary narrative, and from that point one gets to follow the protagonists more or less chronologically through the storyline (de Jong 35). According to Richardson, there are no strict rules as to how time should be expressed in an unrealistic narrative (78). It can either move sequentially or jump back and forth through time and even space. Generally, the primary narrative in this text moves along sequentially with very few instances where the plot deviates from the fabula timeline. Progression of time in Tolkien's novel is not always obvious; sometimes it is very clear how much time has passed between two events and the narrator provides clear information of years, months, days and so on. Sometimes it is more difficult to discern, but the whole narrative is played out within a two-year time frame. Often the awareness of time is blurred when the focalizer is momentarily debilitated and unable to understand the concept of time. There are some instances also, where time appears to move in an unrealistic manner. This happens when The Fellowship spends time in Lothlorien among the Elves. They remember spending several nights under the Mallorn trees, but they could never have imagined that a whole month had passed while they were resting and enjoying the peace and quiet in the enchanted realm of the Elves (Tolkien 388). Of course, no one was playing with time, it is only an illusion where the comrades in their leisure temporarily forget all about the pressing matter at hand and merely enjoy themselves. Playing with time in such a way

is not possible to the same extent in a realistic narrative, where you have the laws of nature and physics to adhere to.

The many episodes of analepsis or prolepsis do not really interfere with the plot in any other sense than that they bring the action to slow down for a while or come to a complete stop. A pause "includes all sections in which no movement of fabula-time is implied. A great deal of attention is paid to one element, and in the meantime the fabula remains stationary" (Bal 106). This is something that has been put to good use in Tolkien's narrative. There are many detailed descriptions of important characters, major scenery, or significant places that bring the fabula-time to a standstill, of which the descriptions of Gandalf, Glorfindel and Elrond in Rivendell are very telling examples (Tolkien 226-227). Another good example is when Merry and Pippin lay eyes on Treebeard the tree herder in Fangorn forest and they see an Ent for the first time (Tolkien 463). Furthermore, the meticulous depiction of the deathbed of Théoden King is a very showing example:

> …and before the dais lay Théoden King of the Mark upon a bed of state; and twelve torches stood about it, and twelve guards, knights both of Rohan and Gondor. And the hangings of the bed were of green and white, but upon the king was laid the great cloth of gold up to his breast, and upon that his unsheathed sword, and at his feet his shield. The light of the torches shimmered in his white hair like sun in the spray of a fountain, but his face was fair and young, save that a peace lay on it beyond the reach of youth; and it seemed that he slept. (Tolkien 861)

It is what the eye can register within a second or two but takes much longer to mediate in written form, hence the pause in the movement of fabula-time is essential in story-telling such as this. Without the allowance for unnatural jumps in time or

slowdowns or pauses no narrative, unrealistic or realistic, would be particularly interesting to read.

Gerard Genette has divided the basic rhythm of a narrative into ‘mimesis’, which roughly means that the story slows down somewhat and we can “see and hear things for ourselves”, and ‘diegesis’, which means that the story is presented in a more summarising way without showing many details (Barry 232). Mimesis and diegesis often work together so that the distinction between them can be hard to recognize exactly, but it is easy to see how fundamental they are as the building blocks of narrative. *The Lord of the Rings* is no exception; the text moves effortlessly back and forth between the two and together they form a well composed rhythm for the narrative:

> The sun was sinking behind the mountains, and the shadows were deepening in the woods, when they went on again. Their paths now went into thickets where the dusk had already gathered. Night came beneath the trees as they walked, and the Elves uncovered their silver lamps. Suddenly they came out into the open again and found themselves under a pale evening sky pricked by a few early stars. There was a wide treeless space before them, running in a great circle and bending away on either hand (Tolkien 353).

This example is quite showing of the seamless change from diegetic mode to mimetic mode, from the rather quick overview to the more detailed description where the movement of the action slows down again significantly.

Space

Narrative space can be almost anything, not least in an unnatural narrative. There are no real boundaries or regulations as to how a plot should be constructed - only the imagination of the implied author sets the limits. It is within the narrative space that

one can find many of the unrealistic features that are so telling for a fictional text. *The Lord of the Rings* is a fictional narrative and as such it brings the reader into places that do not exist in the real world, yet they are constructed and presented to be felt and experienced as realistic elements. One can almost certainly find portrayals in the text that could be considered to describe a specific place in the real world quite realistically, and that is the brilliance with Tolkien's novel. Surely, many Tolkien fans have had ideas of real places that are hidden within the narrative. The descriptions and maps of Middle Earth could give the impression that it is based on Europe and the West could very well be America, but are they? By fashioning the fictive world as true as possible the unnatural elements appear in a slightly less unrealistic light. Brian Richardson writes that "when a work is designated as fictional, the status of all its elements becomes different from similar elements in works of non-fiction" (106), different in the sense that everyone knows that they are fictional but chose not to focus on that specific part.

Tolkien put a lot of consideration into the description of settings of certain significance that are found in the narrative, while other settings are left more or less unheeded. As Irene J. F. de Jong writes, space "can never be presented in a narrative text in its totality"; rather the audience is provided a selection of very graphic descriptions of places important to the story (105-106). The narratees are then given the trust to use their own memories and experiences to fill the gaps and complete the scenery in the text at hand. Many of the detailed descriptions that are provided at the protagonists' arrival at new places are synoptic in their nature and delay the action or even bring the action to a standstill and are indications of their importance (de Jong 110). Part from the setting, there are places that only appear in a character's "thoughts, dreams, memories or reports", called frames (de Jong 107). *The Lord of the Rings* provides plenty of frames such as this; many characters tell vivid stories from their memories or sing old songs that tell a tale, as Bilbo's song to Frodo in Rivendell

(Tolkien 278-279). Most of the poetic features of the novel portray scenes of various kinds as stray indications, where spatial descriptions are "sprinkled over the text" as needed (de Jong 110).

Even though the world that is constructed in this narrative does not exist in the real world, it does not contain any spatial features that can be considered alien or unnatural. Only characters and creatures in Tolkien's created space can be looked on as unnatural, but that was brought up under the subheading 'Character'. One exception is the Mallorn trees in Caras Galadhon, which are fictional (Tolkien 353).

Close-up analysis 1

For this deeper analysis, the chapter called "Strider" has been chosen (Tolkien 163-175), and it will be executed in more or less the same order as the general analysis. As written before, Tolkien constructed a zero-focalized narrative with an all-knowing entity as the narrator for his novel, and this chapter is no exception. It is easy to relapse into the idea that the author himself is the narrator, but of course that is not the case. The narrating voice is for the most part external in this chapter and tells the story as if it was a fly perched on the wall, seeing and hearing all without itself being noticed. Irene J. F. de Jong describes this as "narratorial scenic" (62). There are also some instances of internal focalization where the narrator shows its knowledge of the thoughts and feelings of specific characters. This chapter, as the whole story, is told in past tense, which strengthens the feeling that the fabula happened a long time ago and that the narrator is recounting it either from old oral traditions or its own memory. Speech and thought are in present tense and presented in a "direct and tagged" manner, and it is easy to follow the conversation (Barry 238). The majority of the chapter consists of

dialogue and is clarifying or advisory in its nature: it is not so much part of the action as it is a slowdown to allow for the reader to get a deeper understanding of matters at hand.

Even a short chapter like this contains analeptic episodes. In this case they are all explanatory and told by secondary homodiegetic narrators who are characters in the story. The poem in Gandalf's letter is an example of foreshadowing (Tolkien 170); a predictive prolepsis that gives a glimpse of what might come to be further on in the story (de Jong 35). How someone who is meant for great things will withdraw from anonymity and reclaim his heritage.

There is a slow progression of time in which we follow the characters' conversation in what appears to be real time, yet nothing is said for certain. It is written mainly in mimetic mode, a close and detailed depiction of the whole event, with short episodes of diegesis at the moments when no words are spoken. The setting is reduced to only one room. The perception of the room is that it is a realistic stage in an unrealistic tale, but not much is told of the surroundings in which the characters are at the moment. The focus lies on the conversation between Strider and the Hobbits. The way the conversation is presented, makes it easy to forget the unrealistic nature of the story. It does not matter that most of the characters are fantasy figures. They all feel real in how they are portrayed. Mieke Bal calls this the "character-effect", when an unrealistic character shows such likeness to people in the real world that the readers "identify with it and forget the fundamental difference" (113). The conversation these characters are involved in seem only slightly less normal than any non-fictional conversation.

Close-up analysis 2

For the next more focused analysis, attention is directed to the chapter called "The Battle of the Pelennor Fields", which is a great example of the change of narration style that appears in the third part of *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 839 – 849). It is quite descriptive, with a high and formal style, full of similes, rhetorical speeches and invocations to muster the men for battle. The style is reminiscent of an old heroic epos, composed hundreds of years ago. The change is subtle but obvious and it very well suits the overall theme of the great battle that takes place near the end of the tale. The way the characters' express themselves in speech has also been affected by the change of style and they talk in a more stilted fashion. The interesting thing though, is that this formal style does not apply to Merry when he speaks or thinks. Whether or not this is intentional, it serves its purpose and separates the action and the characters within the text.

The chapter starts out with internal focalization through Merry's eyes and thoughts, where the reader is guided through the battle between the shieldmaiden Eowyn and the Nazgûl king (Tolkien 840 – 842). At this moment the omniscient narrator is perceived as being situated close to the character in its focus, as if it were a soldier on the battlefield. The speech in this section is direct and untagged as there are only two parties involved. As for the rest of the chapter, the narrator remains more or less external, yet it is the same all-knowing authorial voice that recounts the story. As this is a fictional novel, there are no strict rules as to how narration must be done, but the primary narrator keeps its omniscient nature all the way to the end.

The basic narrative mode in this section of the chapter is mostly mimetic; it seems almost as it is played out in slow motion, for the reader to keep track of the action. Much happens in a short period of time and to be able to portray that in writing one must slow down the pace significantly. At one occasion there is a complete pause when Merry recounts a memory in his mind (Tolkien 841). After Eowyn's fight viewed

through Merry's eyes the text is mostly diegetic with jumps in time between paragraphs, but nowhere is the reader told exactly the amount of time that goes by. The storyline of the chapter is chronological, and the plot more or less follows the fabula; at times events overlap slightly, but that is as it must be seeing that many different events take place at the same time.

The action takes place on a large open field between the city of Minas Tirith and the river Anduin, but there are not really any spatial descriptions because emphasis is put on the great battle that is taking place and not the surroundings. Through the eyes of the focalizer, in this case Merry, the stage is set, and the scenery is bestowed to the reader (de Jong 116). The implied author uses the primary narrator as the photographer uses his camera: it does not only hover high above the ground to report a chaotic battlefield but dives down and highlights certain important events and then zooms out again in its search for another happening.

Characterisation in the chapter at hand is mainly centred around heroism and strength, downfall and death. There are no detailed descriptions of the characters, only their actions. This is where one of the female characters, Eowyn, shows her strength and her importance for the story as a whole.

Conclusion

The narrator plays an immense part in a narrative, as we have seen in the beginning of this analysis. The telling voice of the primary narrator, as well as its external audience, is detached from the story itself, which is quite noticeable. The metanarratives are narrated by characters within the story and their narratees are other individuals in their immediate vicinity, but in the end all secondary narratives are still recounted by the primary narrator. As for focalization, the majority of the text is zero

focalized, but every now and then a focalizer is chosen and the narration comes through his or her point of view.

At first the alteration of style in the language feels incompatible, but as one continues to read, one realizes that it suits this kind of heroic tale and adds to the overall build-up of tension before the resolution of the story and the king returns. The third part of the book where this change appears coincides with the parts of the story that more closely resemble a traditional tale of knights in shining armour.

Another feature in the novel that is involved in making *The Lord of the Rings* so popular must be the characterisations. Brian Richardson describes the unrealistic character as a regular character whose fictionality is brought forth and not hidden (133), and the characters in Tolkien's narrative are no exceptions. He makes no attempt to hide their unnatural qualities but softens them almost to invisibility through their realistic thoughts and actions. Love and compassion, equality and racism, evil and hatred are all very human emotions and characteristics, and they are all found within the different main characters in the text. Whether it was an intentional move or not to make fictional characters feel realistic, it works its magic.

As the narrator and the characters, time is an essential part of any narrative. Everything the narrator says and the characters do takes time. Often the plot does not follow the same time course as the fabula. But in Tolkien's novel the main plot moves chronologically alongside with the fabula and only the embedded narratives make large jumps in time and space. The amount of text does not necessarily correspond to the amount of time that has past, as a long description of something or someone often puts fabula time to a pause. The nine companions of the fellowship are running a race against time, each in their own surroundings after their parting, but the actual movement of fabula time is not often mentioned; the reader is not given a precise schedule over the time table in *The Lord of the Rings*, only that it is urgent that they do not waste time.

Hence, the reader is given a sense of urgency which in itself adds to the tension in the drama. Time is always present in any text, and it is the implied author's privilege to play around with it to make the narrative as interesting as possible.

A well-written description of narrative space is quite essential for a successful narrative. Much effort has been put into depictions of the scenery and close-up settings. Whether the space described is realistic or not does not really matter as long as it manages to capture the readers complete attention, and that is one of the things that characterizes a story that survives through the decades and continues to be popular.

As it turned out, *The Lord of the Rings* is written in a quite orderly fashion; Tolkien followed more or less the same line of thought all through the novel, and there are not many exceptions to put in a close-up analysis. Instead, more effort was put towards every paragraph in these chapters rather than the general view of the entire works given earlier.

A noteworthy fact about this novel is that despite the fact that it was first published in the 1950's, it feels somewhat modern as it brings up the issue with racism and how a common enemy can help conquer the animosity between different cultures. Perhaps it was not something Tolkien planned, or perhaps the narrative was coloured by World War I and II, but it does not really matter; it is an essential part of the narrative structure in this novel.

The typical ending of an unrealistic text is to see all secrets revealed, the story wrapped up with no lose ends left hanging, and the main issue, around which the plot has been built, finally settled with a happy ending (Richardson 80). In many ways *The Lord of the Rings* has all the boxes ticked for a traditional fairy tale/story of good vs. evil, where the good side always has to fight exceedingly hard but still win in the end. Almost all expectations of the reader are fulfilled in the end. The ending is conventional in the sense that it attempts to wrap up all lose ends and give closure to the audience,

and yet there is more to be found beyond the end, which could also be part of a typical story. The characters are still there, and they supposedly have a life after the ending of the novel (Richardson 80). For example, Bilbo and Frodo follow the elves on their last journey into the West, but one might think that is not the end of their lives: "…slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth; and the light of the glass of Galadriel that Frodo bore glimmered and was lost. And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West…" (Tolkien 1030).

In the introduction, three questions were asked, and now is the time to attempt to answer those questions. Before each answer the question will be repeated to make it easier to understand the context. Is it possible, through the novel's composition, to find out what it is that has kept readers' attention through the decades? To a certain extent, it is possible. The well-balanced distribution between fictive and non-fictive elements, such as a realistically depicted narrative space that works together with unrealistic characters, is a significant aspect. Through their historic connection with the world they are portrayed in, the characters give the impression that once upon a time our real world may have been home to creatures with extraordinary long life and with abilities beyond human comprehension. A fictive text that keeps the readers' attention by its ability to give the audience something to relate to, such as the characters and their feelings and opinions, is important for the longevity of a novel's popularity.

Is the narrative structure composed in such a way as to keep it timeless? *The Lord of the Rings* is a fantasy epos, so people from any culture or ethnic group can identify with the 'good' side and be drawn into the fantastic world Tolkien created, without having to consider anything political. In an unnatural text, the implied author is not bound by the rules and traditions of the real world. This could be one, if not the one, reason why the novel has been so successful through the years and, still to this day,

continues to entice people of all ages and professions who, for a while, want to escape the real world.

Is it the classical fight between good and evil that continues to tantalize people of all cultures and ages? Again, the answer is yes, to a certain degree. Surely, most people want the traits they consider good to win at all times and having a common enemy to fight unites people. So, despite the fact that there is death and despair in the fabula, the overall message is one of peace. This might be why people from every generation continuously pick up Tolkien's novel and lose themselves in it for a while.

As mentioned in the introduction *The Lord of the Rings* has not been loved by everyone. Tolkien appears to have been well aware of this fact, but it did not seem to cause him much concern (xxiii). The fantasy genre is not for everyone; one must probably still, in some way, be in touch with one's inner child to really enjoy a narrative such as this. Nevertheless, enough people have enjoyed the tale over the years to ensure its continued existence among the classics in fiction.

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