

Joseph Ripp. Middle America Meets Middle-earth: American Publication and Discussion of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, 1954-1969.

A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. November 2003. 73 pages.

Advisor: Barbara B. Moran.

This study discusses the early publication history of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* in the United States. It begins by examining the composition and publication of the book and its initial reception in American print media. Following an examination of the ambiguities of contemporary copyright law, the paper describes nearly simultaneous unauthorized and authorized mass-market publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, which resulted in radically increased public awareness of the book.

Public discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* centered on the relationship between the essence of the book, and its perceived audience. While the book met with some mild controversy during the mid 1950s, discussion was confined to literary terms. Following the publication of two competing paperback editions in 1965, however, the print media generated a substantial body of literature reflecting a broader attempt to describe the social impact of a popular book on a popular audience.

Headings:

Tolkien, J. R. R., 1892-1973

Publishers and publishing / Fantasy

Fantasy / Evaluation

Copyright / Unauthorized reprints

Publishers and publishing / Legal aspect

MIDDLE AMERICA MEETS MIDDLE-EARTH:  
AMERICAN PUBLICATION AND DISCUSSION OF  
J. R. R. TOLKIEN'S *LORD OF THE RINGS*, 1954-1969

by  
Joseph Ripp

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty  
of the School of Information and Library Science  
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science in  
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

November, 2003

Approved by:

---

Advisor

Since its publication in the mid-1950s, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has provoked a variety of reactions. A number of reasons for this exist: the book's length and ambition, its strange combination of extreme conservatism and mythic recasting of modern dilemmas, its downright peculiarity of content. Additionally, the book is unusual not just in terms of content, but physically as well, with its tripartite division and extensive scholarly apparatus.<sup>1</sup> For the average reader – and to the surprise of many observers who never anticipated the sort of mainstream popularity the book subsequently attracted – these features have seldom proved particularly problematic. The book has, in fact, remained spectacularly and perennially popular.<sup>2</sup> But while Tolkien's popularity is truly a global phenomenon, readers in the United States have always especially welcomed his work. Considering that Tolkien was an extremely *English* Englishman who never visited this country, the popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* here does, in itself, constitute an interesting fact. And an examination of how the book first evolved into a major literary success in the United States forms the basis for an interesting study.

Truly, perceptions of *The Lord of the Rings* appear to change continually. Perhaps

---

<sup>1</sup> This discussion will follow Tolkien's assertion that *The Lord of the Rings* forms a single work, and will consequently use the term "book" rather than "trilogy." Its component parts will typically be referred to as "volumes." Reasons for the book's presentation in three volumes are discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> The reported popularity for *The Lord of the Rings* is truly staggering. According to an interview with Houghton Mifflin's Tolkien Projects Director published on the HMCo. Web site, "lifetime global sales of ... *The Lord of the Rings*" total "more than 50 million copies," and the book has been translated into "more than thirty-five languages." [38 languages, per the HarperCollins website] "If you say it is the biggest-selling fiction creation of all time, you'll find it difficult to find anyone able to say you're wrong," according to HarperCollins, the current holders of the book's international copyright (*U.S. News and World Report* March 10, 1997). The turning of the century was a time of lists: a poll conducted by Amazon.com concluded that *The Lord of the Rings* was the book of the millennium, while readers polled in Britain by Waterstone's Books and Channel 4 decided that it was the "Greatest Book of the Twentieth Century" (Salon.com June 4, 2001).

this is natural, since Tolkien described how his “tale grew in the telling,” being composed as it was over a period of fourteen years. Eventually the book was published on both sides of the Atlantic, and generally received favorable notice and modest success on this shore. But then, a decade later, events unfolded that changed forever America’s perception of *The Lord of the Rings*, events that were discussed excitedly almost until the end of the 1960s. For the origins of Tolkien’s mass popularity date not from the book’s initial publication, but from this later period, when his masterpiece was introduced in paperback and distributed widely. To examine this period, from the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* beginning in 1954 (supplemented by an account of the book’s origins), until the end of the 60s (with relation to later events for historical perspective) is to observe an extraordinary instance of publishing history. This fifteen-year period consisted of a sometimes tenuous series of events that resulted in an obscure book becoming a national phenomenon in the United States. Speculation remains futile, but had certain events unfolded differently between 1955 and 1965, *The Lord of the Rings* might never have succeeded, and Tolkien would have remained an obscure English academic with a taste for dabbling in oddly archaic literary matter.

Books are a special form of media. On the one hand, they can be construed as relatively permanent records. The book is a durable artifact. Physical deficiencies are generally readily apparent. For collectors, completeness offers the first test of suitability, the *sine qua non* that qualifies a particular copy as a desirable instance of the edition. But beyond artifactual integrity, a reader normally approaches a book in the understanding that the information it contains will in fact be that which the cover declares it to be, that each copy of the edition will remain fundamentally analogous to every other copy. Apart from vanity publishing, the reader can feel that the content of the book has undergone

some process of review and correction. The mark of the publisher, ultimately, provides some guarantee that these basic expectations of consistency have been met. After publication, and particularly in the case of a work of fiction, a book's content seldom undergoes any substantial change, and if it does, a clear record of such changes can be expected to be apparent, both within the book itself, and externally. Publishing information can be consulted on the verso of the title pages. Different editions can be handled and compared.

What changes when we consider books is consequently not the thing itself. Instead, it is the public perception of the book that is altered, across time and distance. *The Lord of the Rings* provides an outstanding illustration of this principle. What began as a sequel to a children's book eventually emerged as an American cultural phenomenon. What happened to cause *The Lord of the Rings*, on the surface unlikely to succeed in any sense, to become perhaps the best-selling work of fiction ever? To consider this question, it is necessary to examine how the book has functioned in the American print media, as its contrarities played out in public for several years. For despite Tolkien's spectacular popularity, many critics writing in both the popular and literary press have vociferously expressed confusion, concern, and indeed, consternation, at the book's success during every stage of its history. As a result, a remarkable contemporary record remains by which the role of *The Lord of the Rings* as a public entity can be traced across the 1950s and 60s. Elements of this record include book reviews, news articles, letters-to-the-editor, notices in journals and reviews, and contemporary comment from participants and observers. Meanwhile, a variety of secondary materials have appeared, contextual ballast in the form of commentary and biographical background.

Discussions of Tolkien's work can ultimately be resolved to two interrelated

questions: who is the audience for *The Lord of the Rings*, and what, in fact is the book? During the early history of the book in the United States, attention to *The Lord of the Rings* occurred in two distinct waves. The first, following immediately upon the publication of the first edition, remained limited to the literary pages and to solidly middle-brow magazines. The second, resulting from publication of the book in paperback form, generated far more attention and controversy throughout the American popular press, directly influencing its subsequent progress. As time passed, discussion of the book was conducted less by *readers* of the book, than by *observers* of those readers. During both of these periods, the popular print media in the United States was frequently baffled by the nature of the book and its relation to Tolkien's audience, but nevertheless devoted countless column inches to discussing *The Lord of the Rings*. This public discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* has not as yet received adequate attention. Traditionally, critics tend to examine how a book functions internally, according to the author's intention or the reader's interpretation, rather than externally, as an element in the culture at large. This study will begin to redress this shortcoming, by briefly assessing the composition, publication, and reception of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, with the end of illuminating the American public's interaction with the book.

In the *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's character Gandalf famously warns that "he who destroys a thing in order to learn what it is has left the path of wisdom." Even with this sage admonition firmly in mind, a discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* in the United States – a popular book matched to a popular audience – nevertheless requires an examination of the facts of the book's early publication history. It is necessary, in turn, to consider the circumstances surrounding Tolkien's composition of the book, his relationships with his publishers, confused perceptions of American copyright law, the

influence of format on access and reader reception, and finally, how the book and its readership were discussed in the American print media.

\* \* \*

J.R.R. Tolkien was born in 1892 in South Africa, but spent all but the first few years of his life in England. He won a limited scholarship to Exeter College, Oxford, and eventually a first class English degree. After receiving his degree, Tolkien was commissioned in the British Army and spent 1917 on the western front (*Times* Obituary, 1973). His experience of war is said to have marked his personality permanently; Tolkien's confession (in the Foreword to the revised edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*) that he lost "all but one of [his] close friends" in the conflict might help to explain certain thematic elements later present in his fictional writings (e.g. high valuation of male "fellowship," hatred of mechanization). After 1925, Tolkien spent his entire professional career at Oxford. His professional field was Philology, his areas of expertise were Anglo-Saxon, the West Midlands dialect of Middle English, and early northern European literature. Tolkien's primary scholarly works included a standard edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (OUP, 1925) and a seminal essay in Beowulf studies, *Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics* (Humphrey Milford/OUP, 1937). At the same time that he published the *Beowulf* essay, however, Tolkien began a parallel career as a published writer of fantasy. Tolkien might have held the position of Professor of Anglo-Saxon, but his real gift, for *words*, led him beyond literary scholarship and into literary creation. *The Hobbit* was one unexpected manifestation of this gift.

*The Hobbit*, published in September 1937 by George Allen & Unwin in England and

by Houghton Mifflin in the United States in March 1938, was very clearly intended as a children's book. Despite Tolkien's occasional assertions to the contrary, it was marketed as such, was very well received, and has remained perennially popular. At the time it was published, the *New York Herald Tribune* selected it as one of the best children's books of the year. In 1955, a writer could state plainly that "*The Hobbit* was, and is, immensely successful." Houghton Mifflin reportedly sold 3,500 hardback copies in 1964, twenty-seven years after it was first published. In January 2000, a panel in *School Library Journal* selected *The Hobbit* as one of "One Hundred Books that Shaped the Century" (Brooks 107; Parker 602; Dempsey 40; Breen et al. 58). To its author, however, it soon came to represent the first public depiction of an entire imagined world.

Ever since his initial arrival at Oxford, Tolkien had begun creating, first, languages, but soon after a mythology from which the languages were meant to have grown. In Tolkien's view, language and mythology were so intrinsically intertwined that one could literally not exist without the other (Duriez 257-258). An explanatory statement the author provided for his publishers to accompany *The Lord of the Rings* noted in part that "the invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse" ("Tolkien on Tolkien" *Diplomat*). Linguistic roots combined to form names, names became the central figures inhabiting a corpus of histories and myths. In time, a complete fictive world – crystallized in a series of texts Tolkien eventually termed "The Silmarillion" – began to take form; *The Hobbit* "was originally quite unconnected, though it inevitably got drawn in to the circumference of the greater construction," providing a brief and entertaining glimpse into the broader world that encompassed Tolkien's life's work (*Letters* 215).

Tolkien did not, however, create *The Hobbit* with publication in mind. As has been

frequently noted, “Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* for his own children, originally,” (Gordinier, 43), beginning with the legendary day when he scrawled its now famous first line – “In a hole in the ground there lived a Hobbit”<sup>3</sup> – on a blank page in an examination book that he was marking. Like many imaginative parents, Tolkien was accustomed to regaling his four children with stories of his own invention. Humphrey Carpenter describes several of these in his official *Tolkien: a Biography*. Some remained strictly oral, some “never progressed beyond the first few sentences” in written form, while others reached some measure of completion (and have in some instances surfaced and found posthumous publication) (Carpenter 1977, 164).<sup>4</sup> Like these other narratives, “*The Hobbit* began as merely another story for amusement” that “nearly suffered the fate of so many others and remained unfinished” (Carpenter 1977, 177). And indeed, the typescript of this “last and best of this line” of private stories (Hammond 2000, 62) did remain unfinished, and was likely to remain so. Tolkien had extemporaneously concluded the tale to the satisfaction of his sons, and they were no longer interested in it. Still, occasionally possessed of an amateurish pride, Tolkien had shown the bulk of the story among friends. One of these, a former student who was engaged in revising a text for London publishers Allen & Unwin (A & U), mentioned the draft to a member of the firm’s staff, who “met Tolkien, asked for the typescript, ... took it back to London, read it, and decided that it was certainly worthy of consideration” once it was finished (Carpenter 1977, 180). As is well known among Tolkien aficionados, the firm’s chairman, Stanley Unwin, commissioned his ten-year-old son Rayner to evaluate the book for a shilling. Rayner approved; Tolkien became a published author of fiction.

---

<sup>3</sup> Now listed in *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Father Christmas Letters* (1976), *Mr. Bliss* (1983), *Roverandom* (1998).

Publication in the United States involved hesitation rather than luck. Houghton Mifflin (HMCo.) had a regular “working relationship” with what Paul Brooks, a former head of its trade department, termed “the prestigious, if somewhat conservative, house of George Allen and Unwin” (106). As a result HMCo. was provided first right of refusal to the 1937 list issued by A & U, which included *The Hobbit* as “either the last of the adult books or (more likely) the first of the juveniles.” As Brooks recalled, Houghton Mifflin’s “managing editor ([who] then had charge of children’s books) was not impressed” when he read a set of proofs for *The Hobbit*. “Nor was the children’s librarian at the Boston Public Library, who [had been] asked for a professional opinion.” Still, Brooks saw something in the book, and determined that the Boston house “must give it a try” (107). As in the U.K., acclaim was widespread and popularity was immediate. Significantly, acceptance of Tolkien’s first work of fiction led to his later works being offered to Houghton Mifflin. Thus, while Houghton Mifflin’s “Allen and Unwin connection did not strike many sparks,” once, however, “it lit a slow fire that smoldered for years before bursting into flame” (Brooks, 106). This fire was *The Hobbit*, the ensuing conflagration several decades of lucrative alliance between Tolkien and Houghton Mifflin in the United States.

Many potential pitfalls lay along this tenuous pathway to publication. That the manuscript of the book ever reached a publisher relied on the fortuitous circumstance of word of mouth. The romance of Rayner Unwin’s “book report” is well documented; what is not discussed is whether the boy did, in fact, actually hold veto power over the fate of the manuscript. Further, it is difficult to say, if Allen & Unwin had never come courting or in the case of an ultimate rejection by A & U, whether Tolkien would have felt sufficiently emboldened to shop the book around to other publishers. On the one

hand, this does not seem impossible. Tolkien generally felt that his stories contained merit, in an objective sense. He was, for example, willing to state later, but before it was published, his feeling that *The Lord of the Rings* was a “great (though not flawless) work” (Tolkien 1977, 164), and on another occasion when he had not completed a promised (and scheduled) lecture on time, he read the manuscript of his comic satire *Farmer Giles of Ham* instead. And Tolkien was, moreover, a published academic, for whom the simple notion of publication was not inherently daunting.

On the other hand, Tolkien’s relations with his publishers always appear so casual in retrospect, so based on the personalities of the parties involved, and Tolkien appears so consistently incapable of focusing his energies on the business aspects of publishing, that it seems quite possible that he would simply never have gotten around to actively seeking publication elsewhere. Tolkien, for example, never employed a literary agent, nor is there any indication that he considered doing so. After his death, it was Tolkien’s son Christopher, a scholar in his own right and the son most attuned to his father’s imagination, who acted as his literary executor, rather than a hired professional. And reading Tolkien’s letters to Allen & Unwin, it is not always easy even to recognize when they, in fact, state that a business transaction has been concluded. Moreover, as Rayner Unwin has noted, A & U “indulged” Tolkien to the extent that “at times it nearly drove one mad” (R. Unwin “Publishing Tolkien” 27). Such patience was simply the cost of publishing a renowned procrastinator and perfectionist such as Tolkien, but paid dividends over time.

In later years, Rayner Unwin became quite friendly with Tolkien, especially after the younger Unwin studied in Oxford. This friendship appears to have proved central to the fact that Tolkien ever managed to publish much of anything, because Tolkien’s letters to

Allen & Unwin increasingly came to be addressed to Rayner rather than to anyone else there. In one letter from 1965, Tolkien eventually begs the younger Unwin to stop addressing his letters to “Professor Tolkien.” Use of Tolkien’s Christian name would, of course, be out of the question, but a simple “Tolkien” would suffice (Tolkien and Sir Stanley Unwin began informally addressing each other by surname only from 1947) (*Letters* 365; 120).

This is all not to say that Tolkien completely lacked business sense, or was unconcerned with, or displeased by, what “a sneering critic” referred to (in the case of another book) as “the grosser forms of literary success” (*Letters* 256). For example, he “managed to extract \$100 from Houghton Mifflin for the use of the four colour pictures” he had done to illustrate *The Hobbit* (“Publishing Tolkien” 27); later Tolkien insisted that for Houghton Mifflin to anthologize his riddles from that book “without fee” was unacceptable (*Letters* 123). No, the matter was not that Tolkien did not concern himself with the income generated by his books, but rather that he was not, by temperament or perhaps even by comprehension, particularly *professional* in his dealings with publishers. And yet, in spite of all of the uncertainty, *The Hobbit* saw the light of day, in Britain and soon afterwards in the United States.

\* \* \*

A discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* requires an understanding of these facts because Tolkien would never have written the latter book had *The Hobbit* not earned a measure of success. The manner in which events did, in fact, unfold, are essential to the evolution of Tolkien’s subsequent career as a popular writer. With an American edition in its wake,

Allen & Unwin *did* publish the book, it *was* a success, and the firm's chairman *did* alert Tolkien to the fact that "a large public will be clamouring next year to hear more from you about Hobbits!" (quoted in Carpenter 1977, 182). This clamor, when it actualized, is essential to this discussion. Tolkien responded. "Among all of Tolkien's fiction only *The Lord of the Rings* was written from the beginning with publication in mind – because he was asked to write it" (Hammond 2000, 64). In the event, however, Tolkien responded much later than "next year," and the response carried hobbits – and Tolkien's readers – into an entirely different literary mode.

After the success of *The Hobbit*, Allen & Unwin was "longing for a sequel, but when [the publisher] learnt that it was a work of enormous length, primarily intended for adults, upon which Tolkien had been engaged for over twenty years, [some staff were] rather aghast" (Unwin *Publisher*, 300-301). Instead of receiving a long-anticipated continuation of *The Hobbit*, written in similar style and clearly targeted at children, it was immediately apparent that *something else altogether* had arrived at the Allen & Unwin offices in Ruskin House, Museum St. Describing his new work in a letter to Stanley Unwin, Tolkien admitted that in response to requests for a "sequel" he had produced a book that could "not be regarded as such in any practical sense, or in the matter of atmosphere, tone, or audience addressed" (*Letters* 138). Rather than another *Hobbit*, it was a typescript spectacularly totaling something like half a million words in length, unabashedly, willfully archaic in style, and thematically fixated on sacrifice and loss. The questions posed – not for the last time during the history of *The Lord of the Rings* – concerned exactly what it was, and what audience could possibly be found for such a thing? In order to consider this central issue, it becomes necessary first to examine the process by which *The Lord of the Rings* developed, and to note the fact that it ever saw

publication at all was no small wonder.

In reality, Tolkien himself was largely to blame for the uncertainty that greeted the draft of *The Lord of the Rings*. Despite literally years of avowals to Allen & Unwin that the book was nearly finished, Tolkien did, in fact toil over the text for nearly twelve years (Carpenter 1977, 207), sometimes making steady and even rapid progress, at others halted for a year or more at a time, constantly changing direction and emphasis, and finally polishing extensively. As it progressed, he shared the text of what he referred to as “the new Hobbit” (Carpenter 1977, 192) with a circle of friends known as the Inklings, now famous in its own right. This group, with C. S. Lewis at its center, generally (but not uniformly) offered encouragement and criticism. This in itself could result in occasional pauses in the book’s composition. Tolkien’s “drafts and letters show clearly enough that *The Lord of the Rings* was little changed due to outside influence, save at a few points” (Hammond 2000, 64). And yet, as Lewis<sup>5</sup> wryly noted, Tolkien’s “standard for self criticism was high and the mere suggestion of publication usually set him upon a revision, in the course of which so many new ideas occurred to him that where his friends had hoped for the final text of an old work they actually got the first draft of a new one” (*Times* Obituary). Other obstacles to the book’s completion included Tolkien’s heavy load of academic duties, and his lifelong tendency to refocus his attention dizzyingly between projects, imaginative and scholarly.

But even as the text neared completion, and even while he kept Allen & Unwin abreast of its development, Tolkien had begun informal discussions in 1949 with another publisher, Collins, who expressed interest not only in *The Lord of the Rings*, but in the background “Silmarillion” mythology as well (Carpenter 1977, 207ff). This latter work,

---

<sup>5</sup> Carpenter attributes Tolkien’s obituary to the pen of C. S. Lewis, printed posthumously.

or, to put it more accurately, large body of works, was dear to Tolkien. Parts of it had been submitted to Allen & Unwin as potential successors to *The Hobbit*, and had been considered unsuitable for that purpose. Tolkien now demanded of his publisher that the (as yet unfinished) “Silmarillion” accompany *The Lord of the Rings* into print, with the idea of liberating himself from any perceived obligation to Allen & Unwin in the event of their refusal. Without being given the opportunity to peruse either manuscript, A & U naturally hesitated. Collins, however, demonstrated similar reluctance when apprised of their combined length. After twelve years’ work, Tolkien found himself with half a million words of *Lord of the Rings* and no publisher. One account notes how “Tolkien had given up hope of ever having it published” (Sayer 23).

Eventually, the previous geniality of Tolkien’s relations with the Unwin family helped to resolve the situation. Rayner Unwin asked after *The Lord of the Rings* when writing to Tolkien concerning an unrelated matter, Tolkien affected a reconciliation, and before long Tolkien had delivered *The Lord of the Rings* typescript into Unwin’s possession. Other than Rayner Unwin, no one at Allen & Unwin had previously seen the book, and he had only read incomplete drafts. Their surprise can be guessed at. *The Lord of the Rings* is, quite simply, unique. And long. Now Tolkien’s publishers were forced to make a crucial assessment: would anyone read it, or, more to the point, would anyone *pay* to read it? As mentioned above, the Inklings had heard most of the text, over a period of years. “It is an Inklings’ duty to be bored willingly. It is his privilege to be a borer on occasion,” as Tolkien wrote to C. S. Lewis (*Letters* 128). But Tolkien had read them *most*, but not *all*, of the story. One recent account tells how “the readings were discontinued, largely because one of the group, Hugo Dyson, used to lie on the sofa with a whisky, grunting occasionally: ‘Oh fuck, not another elf’” (French 26). Whether or not

this tale is apocryphal, Dyson's hostility to *The Lord of the Rings* "had been voiced so often that eventually he was allowed a veto" to silence Tolkien, should he have been reading during a given meeting. (Carpenter 1978, 212). If outright loathing surfaced among Tolkien's cronies, would a general readership prove more receptive?

This question confronted not only Allen & Unwin, but anyone interested in the book. After reading a draft of "Book I" in 1947, Rayner Unwin had reported to his father: "Quite honestly, I don't know who is expected to read it: children will miss something of it, but if grown ups will not feel infra dig to read it many will undoubtedly enjoy themselves" (quoted in Carpenter 1977, 202). Tolkien responded that "those who like this kind of thing at all, like it very much, and cannot get anything like enough of it, or at sufficiently great length to appease hunger. The taste may be (alas!) numerically limited, even if ... growing, and chiefly needing supply for further growth." Several years later (in 1952), Tolkien still felt that potential readers for the book existed, although he was hesitant "to hazard a guess at their total numbers, or the chance of making contact with them" (*Letters* 121-2; 165). "But even with an audience somewhere in the future, as Tolkien hoped, he did not tailor his work for anyone but himself, or for a select audience only: his son Christopher, and C.S. Lewis, both close to him in blood or sentiment" (Hammond 2000, 64). As an acquaintance of both Tolkien's and Lewis's would later note, neither was "writing to be avant-garde. ... They merely wrote the sort of books that they liked which turns out to be the sort of books that many other people like" (Hooper, 192-3). This unexpected coincidence of taste finally proves to be one of the most outstanding facts of the reception for *The Lord of the Rings*. But while the passage of time verified the accuracy of this statement, from the perspective of 1952, a book that appealed to a group as odd as the Inklings, a group that had evolved out of another

(the “Coalbiters”) formed solely to read through the entire body of Icelandic sagas – in the *original* – would hardly seem to promise big sales beyond Oxford, or perhaps even beyond Lewis’ sitting room in Magdalen College. “Indeed, the hulking *Rings* saga ... looked at first like a sort of art-house anomaly” (Gordinier 44).

Consequently, when the book was finally offered to Allen & Unwin in earnest, staff there were uncertain how to proceed. When consulted by his father during the earlier negotiations, Rayner Unwin had advised from his studies at Harvard that “*The Lord of the Rings* is a very great book in its own curious way and deserves to be produced somehow ... I would say publish [it] as a prestige book” (quoted in Carpenter 1977, 210). Now, nearly two years later and with the typescript in the possession of Allen & Unwin, the younger Unwin was called upon to settle matters in the absence of his father, currently in Japan on one stop of an Asian tour. As Sir Stanley later narrated events, his son “was not intimidated either by the appearance or length of this formidable manuscript. He pronounced it a work of genius which [A & U] must find a way of publishing;” his father responded to Rayner’s concern that it might result in “a loss of as much as £1000” (Unwin *Publisher* 301) by writing “*if you believe it is a work of genius, then you may lose a thousand pounds*” (quoted in Hammond 1993, 88; Bramlett, 61, identifies this sum as the initial cost of publication). Sir Stanley, “a secure man, untroubled by doubts” (Brook 106), might later have asserted with characteristic self-assurance that he “recognized at once that [his firm was] backing a certainty and there would be no question of losing money” on *The Lord of the Rings*, but at the time things must have seemed less sure (Unwin *Publisher* 301). From the foregoing, it is apparent that Allen & Unwin was far from confident that *The Lord of the Rings* would prove successful. The presumed loss netted by “prestige books” was thought to be remedied by

the cachet such titles added to a publisher's list, but a thousand-pound loss was no insubstantial amount to any publisher in 1952. It is interesting, now, to consider how entirely mistaken a view Tolkien's publishers took of the work. Rayner Unwin had, quite literally, been familiar with Tolkien and his work for most of his life. And in the event, his guess proved diametrically opposite to the actual unfolding of affairs. In Britain, in particular, *The Lord of the Rings* has frequently generated outright hostility from literary tastemakers, but has enjoyed fabulous popular success.

Because of its length (nearly 1,200 pages as published in the first edition), and the high degree of uncertainty with which the project was viewed, Allen & Unwin decided to publish *The Lord of the Rings* in three volumes, each containing two "books" of the story. Hence, the recurring concern over who (if anyone) might actually buy the book directly and persistently influenced the manner in which it finally reached the public. One potential benefit of this plan would be the possibility of garnering three notices in each reviewing organ instead of only one. Tolkien, however, frequently took great pains to correct the notion that his work formed a "trilogy;"<sup>6</sup> *The Lord of the Rings* was not originally intended to appear in three parts (it has subsequently occasionally appeared in a single volume), but the decision to divide it was an economic one, a "mere practical necessity of publication" (Tolkien, quoted in Bramlett, 57). By publishing the book one volume at a time, not only did Allen & Unwin limit its initial financial outlay in terms of production costs, but it would also have allowed the publisher to cut its losses in the

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, information Tolkien provided to HMCo. in 1955 (*Letters*, 221). "The book is not of course a "trilogy." That and the titles of the volumes was a fudge thought necessary for publication, owing to length and cost. There is no real division into 3, nor is any one part intelligible alone. The story was conceived and written as a whole."

absence of demand by declining to publish the second and third volumes.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, to protect itself further, the publisher negotiated an unusual contract with Tolkien that did not pay the author any royalties until A & U had recouped its investment, but which afterwards provided for an even split of any profits (Hammond 1993, 88). In the short-term this allowed the publisher to price the book less expensively than it could if required to pay Tolkien royalties on each copy, and as things stood, the book already sold at a relatively hefty twenty-one shillings per volume (Carpenter 1977, 215). Ultimately, this arrangement proved extremely lucrative to Tolkien and his estate. For “once *The Lord of the Rings* was published, Tolkien found that he had shared his work with an astonishing number of readers” (Hammond 2000, 64). George Allen & Unwin published *The Fellowship of the Ring* on July 29, 1954, *The Two Towers* on November 11, 1954, and *The Return of the King* (delayed as the author made last-minute changes to the appendices) on October 20, 1955 (Hammond 1993, 83-86).

Meanwhile, the rights to publish an edition of *The Lord of the Rings* in the United States were first offered to the American publisher of *The Hobbit*, Houghton Mifflin. As at Allen & Unwin, the decision whether to publish such a risky book was not made easily. Eventually, Houghton Mifflin followed the advice of a senior editor named Anne Barrett, who in October 1953 evaluated the book: “I think it is wonderful, but it has its drawbacks. Who will read 423 pages [*The Fellowship of the Ring*] about an unfinished journey undertaken by mythical creatures with confusing names? Probably no one, but I still say it is wonderful and – with my heart in my mouth – *to publish*” (quoted in Brooks 107). *The Fellowship of the Ring* appeared on October 21, 1954, *The Two Towers* on

---

<sup>7</sup> In fact, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* were published as soon as they were ready for press. Stanley Unwin reported that readers eagerly badgered A & U for the delayed third volume.

April 21, 1955, and *The Return of the King* on January 5, 1956 (Hammond 1993, 100-1), all in the form of sheets printed by Allen & Unwin and imported and bound together by Houghton Mifflin in the United States.

The connection with Houghton Mifflin was almost certainly beneficial to the book's reception. After all, HMCo. bore little resemblance to the specialist publishers of science fiction, emerging around this time, who were better known for issuing works of fantasy. Rather, it was a respected century-old publishing house, connected by tradition to many great literary figures of the nineteenth century. Publishing such authors as Carson McCullers and Wallace Stegner, Winston Churchill and John Kenneth Galbraith, continued its solid reputation, and provided its products with a shade of credibility, if not glamour. The simple fact that *The Lord of the Rings* appeared under the Houghton Mifflin imprint helped insure that the book would not only reach reviewing organs, but also that it would be considered seriously by critics. Steady sales on both sides of the Atlantic vindicated the judgment of both the Unwins and Barrett,<sup>8</sup> and the book initially received mostly favorable attention in the press, especially in America.

\* \* \*

Houghton Mifflin's publication of *The Lord of the Rings* in hardback initiated the first public discussion of the book in the United States. This discussion was limited to consideration of the literary merits of the work, beginning with reviews of the individual volumes in the news press and regular reviewing organs, and concluding with

---

<sup>8</sup> Because exact sales figures have not been published, evidence remains somewhat anecdotal. Many of Tolkien's letters dated between 1954 and 1965 express his pleasure (and surprise) at the book's success. Contemporary mentions of the book in the media note that it sold respectably. In any case, *The Fellowship of the Rings* went through at least fourteen printings before 1967.

assessments of the entire work in established national magazines. W. H. Auden provided the first major positive review of *The Fellowship of the Ring* for the *New York Times Book Review*, which appeared on October 31, 1954. *The New Yorker* (November 13, 1954) followed with qualified praise, suggesting that while the book had its merits, there was simply “a great deal too much of it.” However, reviews of the individual volumes – in the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Saturday Review*, and a number of regional papers – were almost uniformly positive. One particularly interesting review of *The Two Towers* appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* (May 1, 1955). Donald Barr noted how “this work [was] much admired by certain critics who have always practiced a highly conscious and proud intellectualism.” After World War I, he continued, examination of interior “mental states” became paramount in literary fiction at the expense of “action.” “Never had the distance between popular appetite and serious art been so great as it then inevitably became.” Consequently, in the age of *Lolita* or *Bonjour Tristesse* it was particularly notable “that *The Lord of the Rings* should appeal to readers of the most austere tastes,” who demonstrated that “they too [had come to] long for the old, forthright, virile kind of narrative.” The appeal of the book was not simply that it was unusual, however, but resulted from its being “an extraordinary work” full of “bare-faced rejoicing in beauty.” Such praise was not universal, nor was such appreciation for Tolkien's resurrection of what a *New York Herald Tribune* reviewer termed “heroic romance.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> As suggested by the quotation from Philip Toynbee below, critical opinion was far more sharply divided in England. Richard Hughes spent much of his review of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (*Spectator*, October 1, 1954) responding to criticism of the *blurb* he had supplied before the book had even appeared in print, while in *The New Statesman and Nation*, the reviewer of each succeeding volume of the book disagreed vehemently with the opinions expressed by each previous reviewer in *the same magazine* (Naomi Mitchison on September 18, 1954, Maurice Richardson on December 18, 1954, and Francis Huxley on November 5, 1955). Auden, by this time a U.S. citizen but teaching at Oxford between 1956-1961, noted

Once the complete work had been published, opinions at once more varied and more extreme began to appear in the national serial press, rather than in the pages of dailies. Writing a substantial two and a half page review for the *New Republic* (January 16, 1956), Michael Straight was the first critic to bring Tolkien's own literary theories to bear in evaluating *The Lord of the Rings*. Devoting several column inches to a close analysis of the text, he concluded that “there are very few works of genius in recent literature. This is one.” On the opposite extreme fell the scathing criticism leveled at the book by Edmund Wilson in the *Nation* (April 14, 1956). A notable critic, Wilson described *The Lord of the Rings* as “a children's book which has somehow got out of hand” and as the work of an author with “little skill at narrative and no instinct for literary form.” Its “poverty of invention” was “almost pathetic.” He mocks Tolkien’s style, imagery, and concerns. But to a large extent, Wilson was less concerned with the book itself than he was with its various admirers, concluding that “certain people” – including Auden,<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, several British writers, and the critic for the *Saturday Review*, Louis J. Halle – “[had] a lifelong appetite for juvenile trash.” And because *The Lord of the Rings* has, in fact, ultimately proved far more successful on this side of the Atlantic,<sup>11</sup> Wilson’s emphasis on Tolkien’s appeal to the *British* is surprising in retrospect.

---

in his review of the last volume that he could “rarely remember a book about which [he had] had such violent arguments.” And, apparently, Lewis’ prediction that his name on blurbs and reviews might actually attract collateral hostility to *The Lord of the Rings* appears in some measure to have been validated, or at least Tolkien preferred to attribute certain hostile notices to this association (see *Letters* 184).

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, a 1967 issue of the academic review *Shenandoah* published as “A Tribute to Wystan Hugh Auden on His Sixtieth Birthday” included a poem by Tolkien (at the height of his 1960s popularity, Tolkien received top billing among contributors) as well as one co-written by Wilson and Louise Bogan. Perhaps characteristically, Tolkien contributed a highly sincere panegyric – in Anglo-Saxon with facing modern English translation – as “a tardy tribute and token of thanks.” Wilson’s sonnet (actually composed in 1956) was decidedly less lofty in tone, and included yet another swipe at “orc Tolkien” (Tolkien 1967, 98-99; Wilson 1967, 43).

<sup>11</sup> Consider, for example, a comment made by Amanda Craig in *The Independent* (London) that describes Tolkien’s core audience as “hippies, computer programmers and Americans.”

Wilson's diatribe has earned him an undying place as *bête noire* to Tolkien's partisans and apologists. It might have taken almost fifty years to receive an adequate response, but Tom Shippey, a notably sane and scholarly proponent of Tolkien's artistic and intellectual value in the face of academic and high-brow hostility, recently punctured the pettiness of Wilson's criticism by quoting from the latter's own *Axel's Castle*. In this work (as quoted by Shippey), Wilson had advised the literary critic not to heed the temptation "to characterize as 'nonsense', 'balderdash' or 'gibberish' some new and outlandish-looking piece of writing to which we do not happen to respond." And yet, quite literally, "Wilson was first in line with 'balderdash'" when *The Lord of the Rings* reached his notice (Shippey 2000, 307). In other words, Wilson's review illuminated its author's literary narrow-mindedness more clearly than Tolkien's limitations. Like many critics responding to *The Lord of the Rings* since 1954, Wilson's hostility was grounded on misapprehension.

Other critics in the American national press published less extreme assessments of *The Lord of the Rings* upon its initial completion. Anthony Bailey offered a more measured but only slightly more flattering summation than Wilson's in *Commonweal* (May 11, 1956). *The Lord of the Rings* was nothing grand, scarcely even something to be taken seriously. Despite its "original conception," despite its "delightful capacity for wonder," despite even its sporadic "power," the book remained at end merely "a large-sized fairy tale ... and as such ... it should be taken, neither for more nor less." As a final example, consider Douglass Parker's piece in the *Hudson Review*, one of the first to appear that was capable (despite the occasional howler of a factual error) of evaluating the book by appropriate measures, employing his knowledge of linguistics and theory of fantasy. Parker clearly shared many of his fellow critics reservations about *The Lord of the Rings*,

describing how “it labors under two almost impossible literary burdens – reams of interpolated bad verse and an utter lack of more than surface characterization” (602).<sup>12</sup> Still, in Parker one finds a clear-sighted writer willing to address many of Wilson’s hyperbolic criticisms head on. *The Lord of the Rings* is “no children’s story;” it is a *fantasy*, and, “as fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings* is unexampled and unassailable” (607).<sup>13</sup> (Poverty of imagination, indeed). Tolkien is a writer keenly aware that “the human condition is tragic, and must be faced up to.” That he is capable of conveying this sentiment reveals that “*The Lord of the Rings* is not trash, nor is it juvenile.” Tolkien “has accomplished, on an absolute scale, something significant and meaningful, and it should be soberly recognized as such” (608).

It was thus clear that while *The Lord of the Rings* had been well regarded by various book reviewers (and readers), critics writing for respected magazines were prepared to comment at greater depth and with greater conviction after the initial cycle of attention. Mirroring the questions that had confronted *The Lord of the Rings* before it had ever been published, at the heart of discussion during this first public stage of the book's history was concern over what function such a book could serve for its audience, and who would form this audience. Most reviews, favorable or hostile, included some comment to the

---

<sup>12</sup> Parker has certainly not been the only critic to denigrate Tolkien’s poetry: Wilson had (of course) emphasized its badness, other writers have clearly been tepid in their appraisals, and it is reported that even Lewis and Auden viewed it with severe reservations. Later defenses of Tolkien as poet, for example in Shippey’s work, have tended to emphasize its formal rather than artistic merit.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of “fantasy” as a literary genre was novel at this point in time. When *The Lord of the Rings* won the “International Fantasy Award” in 1957 (the last such prize given), it was the first title that would now be described as *fantasy* (rather than as science fiction) to win the prize. This helps explain in part why *The Lord of the Rings* was greeted with such surprise when it first appeared. Critics lacked (or ignored) an immediate context into which to place the book. As Parker noted, “fantasy suffers a general deprecation as a genre, a serious genre, with the resultant corollary that anything good emerging from it is immediately recategorized” (601). It should not be surprising, then, that Parker was perhaps the only reviewer to use the term generically when discussing Tolkien’s work during the 1950s. While works that are now categorized as fantasy had preceded Tolkien, to some extent *The Lord of the Rings* “has created its own genre” (Shippey 2000, 221).

effect that the book was “surely the oddest work of fiction that will appear this year” (Wickenden “Heroic Tale”). Reviewers who liked the book evinced willingness to consider it on its own terms as a serious work, superficially anachronistic but essentially timeless. The proper comparisons were to Mallory or Ariosto or Spenser (or at least to the *tradition* in which they wrote) rather than to any contemporary writers. To these writers, the word “heroism” could still be employed with a complete lack of irony. To hostile critics, on the other hand, *The Lord of the Rings* was so far removed from what they seemed to expect from “literature” that it had to be something else altogether. Auden suggested that “some people object to Heroic Quests and Imaginary Worlds on principle. Such, they feel, cannot be anything but light ‘escapist’ reading” (*NYTBR* January 22, 1956).

Clearly, *The Lord of the Rings* emphasized narrative over insight, and imaginative invention over psychological realism. These facts were not inherently damning in themselves; the problem arose because Tolkien had so obviously committed himself to their artistic validity, and to the fact that the book was, in the author’s own words, “not a book written for children at all” (Foreword to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, first ed.). Clearly, some critics writing in the middle of the twentieth century were entirely unable to accept *The Lord of the Rings* as a mature work of literature. The “durability and ubiquity” of this perception that *The Lord of the Rings* is inherently “juvenile” has continued to plague the book throughout its history (Curry 88).

By the end of 1956, media attention for *The Lord of the Rings* had apparently run its course. Despite the range of reviews in the book pages – each volume had been critiqued upon publication, and another series of reviews had appeared upon the completion of the work – the book had essentially been ignored by the *news* press. There had been some

public disagreement about *The Lord of the Rings*, but this controversy was strictly limited to *literary* terms: *what* (in terms of genre) *was* the book, and was it *successful* at whatever it tried to do? And, *who* (if anyone) should read the book, and should it be read *seriously*? So while the book's peculiarities had perhaps sparked more controversy than did most works of fiction (considering that it flouted none of the standards of morality or decency of its day), it appeared likely to follow the common run of books into eventual respectability or obscurity. There seemed little else to say.

Reflecting this mood, British critic Philip Toynbee was able to recall the brief controversy from the remote perspective of 1961:

There was a time when the Hobbit fantasies of Professor Tolkien were being taken very seriously indeed by a great many distinguished literary figures... I had the sense that one side or other must be mad, for it seemed to me that these books were dull, ill-written, whimsical and childish. And for me this had a reassuring outcome, for ... today those books have passed into a merciful oblivion" (*Observer* August 6, 1961).<sup>14</sup>

Public silence did not, of course, indicate that these "literary figures" had in fact changed their views about Tolkien. Still, Toynbee was correct on one count: it appeared that public discussion about *The Lord of the Rings* was finished. Granted, *The Lord of the Rings* began to attract some attention in more academic circles,<sup>15</sup> but it appeared on its way to becoming a literary curiosity for the reading public, and, if sales for *The Hobbit* could be any guide, another modestly successful backlist item for its publishers. "Sales

---

<sup>14</sup> This comment has become nearly as infamous among Tolkien scholars and fans as Edmund Wilson's earlier invective. And as with the case of Wilson, it once again falls to Shippey to provide the fullest response, expressing some bemusement that Toynbee failed to recognize Tolkien's fulfillment of Toynbee's own definition of "the Good Writer" as promulgated in the *Observer* a mere two months earlier. Toynbee's ideal was one who (in Shippey's paraphrase) is "private and lonely" with "no heed of his public," who "can write about anything and make it relevant," whose works are (now in Toynbee's language) "'shocking and amazing ... unexpected by the public mind,'" and who, finally, engages in "'a personal struggle against the intractable medium of modern English.'" (Shippey 2000, 306-7) In all objectivity, it would be difficult to describe Tolkien and his masterpiece more accurately than in these terms.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, R. J. Reilly's eighteen-page discussion in *Thought* (1963).

of ... *The Lord of the Rings* continued to rise steadily, but there was no drastic change in the pattern until 1965.” (Carpenter 1977, 226)

\* \* \*

Events in 1965, however, permanently altered the public's awareness of Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*, when Ace Books published a mass market paperback edition of the book, without Tolkien's knowledge or consent. These events originated in “the confused state of American copyright law at that time” (Carpenter 1977, 226). No real examination of the copyright law in effect at the time *The Lord of the Ring* was published exists in the literature of Tolkien scholarship, so the issue merits discussion at some length. Because of the idiosyncrasies of American law discussed below, the United States was not signatory to the international Berne Convention,<sup>16</sup> relying instead, to some extent, on bilateral agreements with various other nations and the fact that the desirability of success in the American market forced foreign publishers to adopt a conciliatory attitude toward the tenets of American law. The matter of copyright, seldom the most straightforward of issues, is particularly complex when discussing *The Lord of the Rings*. Still, some awareness of the issues, confused as they are, is necessary to understand the next stage of the book's history. First, there was the simple fact that its British edition had preceded American publication. Further, controversy arises because the Universal Copyright Convention was negotiated and eventually ratified almost simultaneously with the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. And finally, the decision by Allen & Unwin to

---

<sup>16</sup> The Berne Convention governed international copyright for most of the nations of the world, most importantly excepting only the United States, the U.S.S.R., China, and parts of Latin America. The first version of the Convention had been signed in 1886; it had subsequently undergone several revisions. (Unwin *Publishing* 261)

divide the book into three volumes for publication (and the fact that later editions have almost uniformly followed this initial division) further complicates matters.

To begin, the existence of two distinct hardbound editions, first that of Allen & Unwin in the United Kingdom, followed by Houghton Mifflin's American edition, factored into the eventual confusion about the status of American copyright. During 1954, an American publisher could only retain American copyrights to an English-language book, if it was the work of a foreigner and originally published outside the United States, in one of two ways. Which path it took depended on whether it printed the book itself, in the United States. If it imported physical copies of the book, limited copyright protection was accomplished by providing a copy to the American Register of Copyrights within six months of publication, with an application for *ad interim* copyright. The term of *ad interim* copyright was five years (extended as of 1949 by 63 Stat. 154).

In contrast to mere *ad interim* protection, full duration "American copyright in a British book could only be secured ... by its complete manufacture in the States," according to Stanley Unwin in his standard guide to publishing (*Publishing* 268). And Section 16 of Title 17 of the United States Code was very specific about what constituted complete manufacture: copies "shall be printed from type set within the limits of the United States, either by hand or by the aid of any kind of typesetting machine, or from plates made within the limits of the United States from type set therein, or, if text be produced by lithographic process, or photoengraving process, then by a process wholly performed within the limits of the United States, and the printing of the text and binding of the said book shall be performed within the limits of the United States." Otherwise, a publisher that imported "up to the number of fifteen hundred copies of each such book," so long as these copies carried proper "notice of copyright," was restricted to five-year *ad*

*interim* status (17 U.S.C. §16, 1952). The so called “manufacturing clause” resulted “from the fact that in 1891, the printing-trades unions succeeded in convincing the Congress of the United States that their livelihood might be endangered by the importation of English-language books produced in foreign countries by labor receiving lower wage rates” (Cary 95).

The Allen & Unwin edition of *The Lord of the Rings* contained “notice of restrictions under copyright” on the verso of the title page (according to Wayne G. Hammond’s standard *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Descriptive Bibliography*; Hammond does not specify the nature of the notice). Houghton Mifflin applied for *ad interim* protection based on sets of sheets printed for Allen & Unwin in the United Kingdom, so presumably its first impression continued to carry some form of notice (Hammond 1996). Hence, because a copy was deposited at the Library of Congress with an application for this temporary term, the author’s and publishers’ exclusive rights to *The Lord of the Rings* would not have been subject to dispute for five years at the very least.

Writing of the challenges of preserving copyrights for British books sold in the United States, Unwin noted that, “irrespective of other considerations, the British publisher naturally endeavours to arrange for separate printing in the USA because that gives a book the best chance [by satisfying the manufacturing clause]; but the number of new books so printed ... is exceedingly small.” Instead, more typical situations involved the British publisher providing its American counterpart with printing plates or “an edition in sheets or bound copies with the American publisher’s imprint” (Unwin *Publishing* 269). While some American houses of the period would “seldom, if ever, take a book if they [did] not feel it [was] worth while to print it [themselves]” (Unwin *Publishing* 272), *The Lord of the Rings*, as shall be discussed further below, was first published in the United

States in the form of imported sheets, cased by Houghton Mifflin in the United States. While this common method of publishing did not preserve American copyright for a British title in the long-term, the arrangement of an American edition did allow for distribution within the United States. For the common run of books, the value of a copyright simply did not extend beyond five years. In other words, the majority of books were published and forgotten before the lapse of copyright proved contentious. But if a book did demonstrate any kind of enduring value to the backlist, copyright for the whole term provided by American law (a renewable 28 years under the amended 1909 copyright act) could be acquired by adhering to the requirements of the manufacturing clause.

Other features of contemporary copyright law further clouded the legitimacy of American copyright in *The Lord of the Rings*. The foremost of these was the ongoing negotiations for the Universal Copyright Convention, which began in 1947 and culminated in its signing on September 6, 1952 by thirty-six countries “including the U.S.” (Fisher, vi). The Convention was largely intended “to secure the adherence of the USA and various South American countries” to international copyright (Unwin *Publishing* 263). In exchange for winning a requirement for standard copyright notice (the symbol © along with the name of the author or copyright holder and date of original publication), “the United States agreed to modify its manufacturing clause and make it inapplicable to nationals of other contracting countries” (Kaminstein, 28). Hence, under the Convention, importation of printed sheets, or even of complete books bound abroad, would no longer affect the validity of a book’s American copyright as long as copies of the book carried the standard copyright notice.

The ratified treaty was not, however, signed by President Eisenhower until November 5, 1954, and only took effect in the United States (simultaneously with the

enabling legislation) on September 16, 1955, after a twelfth signatory (Monaco) officially submitted its “instrument of ratification” with UNESCO in Geneva (Bogsch 106). In the United Kingdom, however, the Convention did not take effect until June 1, 1957 (the “Copyright Act” of 1956). These dates become relevant when one remembers the decision made by Allen & Unwin, and followed by Houghton Mifflin, to publish *The Lord of the Rings* in three volumes. Because *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers* were published in both Britain and the United States before the Convention took effect in either country, there appeared to be no reason to doubt its immediate inapplicability to those volumes. *The Return of the King*, meanwhile, was not published in the United States until after the U.C.C. had taken effect here, but before its adoption under British law. Because the Convention only operated mutually among the group of ratifying nations, the third volume of *The Lord of the Rings* still appeared to fall under the former version of American copyright law, and the original manufacturing clause still applied.

Still, there was, as is perhaps apparent at this stage of the discussion, ample room for confusion regarding all the volumes. During 1955, most publishers would have been well aware that the provisions of the Convention had already been accepted, if not yet formally empowered, even before the first two volumes were published. However, one final twist to the law did, in the fullness of time, prove significant. The legislation that enabled the Universal Copyright Convention in the United States, “Public Law 843” of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress, added a retroactivity clause to Section 9 of Title 17. Exactly what this meant for *The Lord of the Rings*, beneath its thorny tangle of verbiage and apparent self-

contradiction, would not be determined for another twenty-seven years.<sup>17</sup>

Houghton Mifflin published the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* between October 1954 and January 1956. Copies of the first edition still carried an Allen & Unwin printer's device ("St. George and the Dragon") on the half-title, clearly stated that they were "printed in Great Britain," and, at least in some copies, only (and obviously) featured a Houghton Mifflin title page attached to the stub of a cancelled leaf (presumably an original Allen & Unwin title). To a casual observer, Houghton Mifflin's original relationship to the book might be viewed more as that of a distributor than of a publisher. Still, the fact that the sheets of the book had been printed in England by Allen & Unwin did not constitute an unusual arrangement. "The importation of 'editions,' whether forming part of the English edition or separately printed, is the method adopted by American publishers in cases where a large sale is improbable" (Unwin *Publishing* 272). As has been observed, the decision even to publish *The Lord of the Rings* was not made blithely by Houghton Mifflin; that it anticipated an eventual blockbuster seems extremely unlikely. Consequently, Tolkien's American publisher was following conventional wisdom in not printing the book itself.

According to Hammond's *Bibliography*, the first Houghton Mifflin impression of the first volume included 1,500 sets, the second volume tallied 1,000, while the order for the third, presumably enlarged as a readership had worked its way through the first two books and was eager for the delayed conclusion to the story, totaled 3,000 unbound sets of sheets (100-1). This final total was clearly in excess of the terms of the manufacturing clause delineated above. Moreover, while exact sales figures have not been published, remember that the first two volumes were well received by the press. So while

---

<sup>17</sup> See page 33, note 18 below.

Hammond does not explicitly discuss later printings, it would appear certain that Houghton Mifflin must have imported more copies of the first two volumes before, or perhaps simultaneously with, the sheets for *The Return of the King* (it is otherwise difficult to explain an initial issue of 3,000 copies of the third volume). Almost certainly, then, Houghton Mifflin had exceeded Title 17's protectionist limits with respect to each component volume before it set the book at its own Riverside Press, and it had moreover apparently failed to print the book within five years (the initial term of *ad interim* copyright) of publication.

Another complication with American copyright to *The Lord of the Rings* involved a central feature of traditional American copyright law, the inclusion of formal copyright "notice" on copies of the work. As mentioned above, the United States demanded a provision requiring inclusion of notice as a condition for its joining the Universal Copyright Convention. The significance of notice derived from the fact that, until the United States joined the Berne Convention in 1989, copyright terms under American law were fixed to a period originating with a work's initial publication. Hence, provision of copyright notice not only revealed who owned rights to a specific work, but also indicated their duration. At the time of the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, this period consisted of twenty-six years, renewable for an additional twenty-six more. In most other nations, however, copyrights existed for a term encompassing a set number of years beyond the life of the author, which obviously could not, in the case of living authors, be readily determined at the time of publication. As a consequence, notice was uniquely important to American law, to the extent that Stanley Unwin believed that "the American principle" was "that everything is in the *domaine public* unless there is a notice to the contrary" (Unwin 1960, 263-4).

Here, once again, Houghton Mifflin – somewhat shockingly, really – allowed doubt over the American copyright to *The Lord of the Rings* to develop. In his *Bibliography*, Hammond transcribes a copyright statement from the first impression of *The Fellowship of the Ring* that fulfills the requirements of American law: “Copyright, 1954, by J. R. R. Tolkien.” In *The Two Towers*, he resorts to the vague formula of “[notice of restrictions under copyright].” But turning to *The Return of the King*, the typically scrupulous Hammond omits any mention of any assertion of copyright whatsoever (99-101). Apparently, the third volume of *The Lord of the Rings* was issued in the United States without a statement of copyright ownership.

The version of the United States Code that was in force in 1956 seems to excuse books under “ad interim protection” from carrying notice (17 U.S.C. §10). However, to reiterate the apparently relevant (and contradictory) section of law incorporating the manufacturing clause, the demand for domestic production is excused for “copies of books . . . , of foreign origin, in the English language, imported into the United States within five years after first publication in a foreign state or nation up to the number of fifteen hundred copies of each such book . . . if said copies shall contain notice of copyright in accordance with” the rest of Title 17. (17 U.S.C. §16, 1952, emphasis added). Without access to a large collection of copies of the first edition of the various volumes of the book it is impossible to state exactly which issues contain notice and which do not, but it is a fact that Houghton Mifflin, regardless of how many copies of the book it finally imported from Allen & Unwin, sold at least some in the United States with no copyright notice whatsoever.<sup>18</sup> In short, then, the two potential challenges to

---

<sup>18</sup> An early copy of mine, determined from evidence presented in *The Tolkien Collector* to be a copy in the second state of the fourth impression.

Houghton Mifflin's copyright of *The Lord of the Rings* rested on the publisher's importation of more than 1,500 copies of sheets printed in England, and its failure to provide notice of copyright consistently.

\* \* \*

The foregoing discussion of copyright law has demonstrated that the legal status of *The Lord of the Rings* appeared confused from the perspective of 1965. Despite later writers' frequent, careless assertions to the contrary, however, the argument concerning whether Houghton Mifflin had in fact surrendered Tolkien's exclusive rights was not actually introduced in the courts at this time. (The courts did eventually discuss the matter many years later.)<sup>19</sup> Had Houghton Mifflin been certain that *The Lord of the Rings* was still impenetrably copyrighted, it seems likely that it would immediately have resorted to legal action. Hence, it can reasonably be conjectured that HMC's hesitation to seek redress from the courts arose from its own suspicions that it lacked legal protection.

In consequence, as a result of the methods by which Tolkien's American publishers

---

<sup>19</sup> In fact, the courts only became involved with *The Lord of the Rings* in 1992, when a reprint publisher sought a declaration that the book was indeed in the public domain (Eisen, Durwood & Co. v. Christopher R. Tolkien). In this case, the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York declared that Houghton Mifflin's American copyright had indeed been valid all along. This decision, upheld on appeal, stated that the legislation (Public Law 743, enacted during the second term of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress) enabling the United States to join the Universal Copyright Convention included a retroactivity clause. Hence, because *The Lord of the Rings* was protected by valid *ad interim* copyright when the U.C.C. took effect between the United States and Britain, it was subsequently granted full term American copyright. [see Cary 97 for an applicable hypothetical discussion]. Also, despite the apparent convictions of all parties involved in the original dispute and, indeed, as expounded by Sir Stanley Unwin in his *Truth about Publishing*, the court noted that the result of violation of the provisions of Title 17 never had been surrender of copyright, which it characterized as "draconian." Nowhere, the court opined, did Title 17 explicitly state that loss of copyright would result from noncompliance. However, because this section of law – which deals exclusively with *copyright* – never mentions *any* penalty, it hardly seems an unreasonable assumption that surrender of copyright would in fact have resulted from failure to adhere to its restrictions.

had introduced *The Lord of the Rings*, it was conceivable to all parties in 1965 – and for many years afterwards – that Houghton Mifflin had technically, if not intentionally, compromised its “perfect” copyright (Weyr 33). The *presumed* result was that the book had entered the public domain. According to Hammond’s *Bibliography*, Allen & Unwin and Houghton Mifflin “were already aware that that a challenge could be made to [Tolkien’s] American copyrights. They thought it unlikely that any reputable publisher would take advantage, but in early 1965 began to take steps to secure U.S. copyright beyond question” by asking Tolkien to revise the text and provide new material which could be copyrighted as a new edition (104). Houghton Mifflin also began evaluating the possibility of authorizing a reprint in paperback.

It is, quite frankly, difficult to determine exactly how desirable a prize *The Lord of the Rings* would have appeared to an interloper at this juncture. Assessments of its success in boards vary widely. Bramlett (the accuracy of whose work is inconsistent) notes that “the book continued to win approval and sold well (but not overwhelmingly) in hardcover” (63). In a history of the paperback in the United States, Kenneth Davis stated simply that “the hardcover editions had not sold well” (Davis 328). Ian Ballantine of Ballantine Books (who became directly involved in subsequent events but whose recollections are perhaps biased), asserted that his company “bid for Tolkien a couple of years before a paperback edition was published, but Houghton Mifflin wasn’t interested. The book was selling too well” (Weyr 33). A recent story published in *Entertainment Weekly* has it thus: “From 1954 to 1965, U.S. sales were okay, but miles away from the Heroic Plateau of Blockbuster. ‘Before the paperback came out, it probably sold in [the United States] maybe, *maybe* 15,000 copies,’” [Houghton Mifflin’s “Tolkien Projects Director” Clay] Harper said. “‘Not many. *The Hobbit* had been pretty successful, but

*The Lord of the Rings* as a hardcover was a pretty big beast to tackle” (quoted in Gordinier 44). However actively the book sold, it must in any case have been sufficient to attract attention within the trade.

It was stated above that a casual observer might have questioned Houghton Mifflin’s proprietary rights to *The Lord of the Rings*. One such observer, with a more than casual interest, was Donald A. Wollheim, head editor at Ace Books, a well known publisher of imaginative fiction. Wollheim had a long history of involvement with science fiction (as will be noted above, “fantasy” was not yet established generically). He had done editorial work for early pulps and had purportedly edited “the first science fiction paperback (Pocket Books, 1943), *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*” (Davis 166). Before Houghton Mifflin could conclude binding copyright, Ace Books decided to play a “gambit” (Gordinier 44) and issue *The Lord of the Rings* in paperback. In an obscure science fiction typescript fanzine called *Lighthouse*, Wollheim wrote soon afterward that he “had known from the moment [he had] first bought a copy of the Houghton Mifflin edition” that “the Tolkien saga had never been copyright in the United States” (16-17). From the narrative that follows it is apparent that Wollheim’s grasp of copyright law was incomplete, but his doubts concerning the legal status of *The Lord of the Rings* induced Ace to publish its own edition in a large run. While Houghton Mifflin's hardbound now sold at six dollars a volume, the new Ace edition, eschewing payment of royalties to Houghton Mifflin and, more significantly, to Tolkien,<sup>20</sup> cost only seventy-five cents (ABPR, 1965). With little fanfare Ace issued 150,000 copies of *The Fellowship of the Ring* in the spring of 1965; it followed in July with *The Two Towers* and *The Return of*

---

<sup>20</sup> According to Stanley Unwin’s book on the publishing business, “royalties are often paid on books not legally copyright in the USA” (Unwin *Publishing* 272).

*the King* in the same quantities.

Ace produced a sloppy book. While it reset Tolkien's texts, Ace simply photo-reproduced the appendices from the Houghton Mifflin edition, with the result that page references referred to the original hardbound text rather than to the Ace edition. Ace also reprinted from Houghton Mifflin the promise of an index of names in the first volume and the apology in the third for its omission. Nevertheless, the Ace edition immediately became "the hottest-selling item in U.S. campus bookstores" (Resnick 90). From the perspective of Tolkien and his publishers, however, the publication of the Ace edition was tantamount to piracy; they quickly "authorized" Ballantine Books to issue the book in paperback containing new revisions and prefaces from the author (*Publishers Weekly* August 2, 1965).<sup>21</sup>

Houghton Mifflin had long enjoyed a close relationship with Ballantine Books. Ian Ballantine, who had worked for Penguin and had more recently directed Bantam Books before a forced departure in 1952, founded his eponymous imprint in September of that year as "a new company that would simultaneously publish hardcover and paperback editions of selected books. ... The Ballantine notion was to publish a hardcover edition for the bookstore trade that would gain review attention while a paperback edition would reach the mass market" (Davis 160-161). From the beginning of this venture, Houghton Mifflin acted as one of Ballantine's key supporters and partners, and the two had enjoyed remarkable success with *Executive Suite* (by Cameron Hawley) in 1952 (Kelley 30). During the first ten years of the existence of Ballantine Books, HMCo. had simultaneously published twenty-one of its partner's titles in boards,

---

<sup>21</sup> On the eve of the publishing controversy, the New York Times listed the Ace edition as a "recommended new title," calling the book "a modern classic of imaginative fiction" (August 1, 1965). A week later, Lewis Nichols's "In and Out of Books" column cast the conflict as one between Ace the energetic upstart and "leisurely" Houghton Mifflin.

far more than any other publishing house (apart from Ballantine's own hardcover issues) (Aronovitz 106). When Ballantine had faced a crisis of capital, Houghton Mifflin purchased a twenty-five percent share in the company.

While Ballantine might not have carried the clout of the truly pervasive mass-market publishers, it had nevertheless become a notably successful firm, and one that served an audience that Houghton Mifflin necessarily desired to reach. Where Houghton and Mifflin's respectability had been instrumental to *The Lord of the Rings* having received attention on the book pages a decade earlier, what Tolkien needed now was a publisher that could put lots of books in lots of outlets. Quickly. Ballantine had long enjoyed some measure of appeal to youth markets and to the nascent counter-culture, routinely publishing proto-environmental works and enjoying an early success with the *Mad Reader* (1954) (Davis 164), which published selections from the iconoclastic *Mad Magazine* in book form.<sup>22</sup> But most importantly of all, "very quickly, the genre that became almost synonymous with Ballantine Books was science fiction" (Davis 166). Hence, by the time that Houghton Mifflin felt compelled to authorize a paperback version of *The Lord of the Rings*, Ballantine formed a "natural" choice (Frankel) to publish the mass-market edition. In October 1965, Ballantine's edition of *The Lord of the Rings* was published at ninety-five cents per volume (Hammond 1993, 106), notably "with heavy promotion in the college market" (*Publishers Weekly* August 2, 1965).

As a *Publishers Weekly* profile about Ian Ballantine later recalled the situation, "a panicked Houghton Mifflin called Ballantine and asked what to do. Ballantine proceeded to publish an authorized version and [in Ian Ballantine's words] 'won because [it] did

---

<sup>22</sup> Eventually *The Lord of the Rings* itself reached a new plateau of success by receiving a send-up in *Mad* No. 210 (October 1979).

right [by working with the author and his publishers]” (Weyr 33). While Tolkien undertook a personal letter-writing campaign, advising his (by now numerous) American correspondents that Ace was operating entirely independently of his interests, “Ian Ballantine picked up the ball and ran with it, as he was prone to do when something caught his fancy. In a grassroots publicity campaign, Ballantine produced maps of Middle-earth like travel posters, which said, ‘Come to Middle-earth’” (Davis 328).<sup>23</sup> Wollheim, who had been crowing about having received congratulations from rival publishers on having achieved “the publishing coup of the year” (*Lighthouse* 16), rapidly lost some of his bluster. The Ballantine paperback, which clearly carried Tolkien’s endorsement, was technically more complete, and carried a copyright notice fulfilling the requirements of American law, the Universal Copyright Convention, *and* the Berne Convention,<sup>24</sup> began to triumph in the marketplace even as bad publicity afflicted the Ace edition. Rather unusually, the news of the conflict left the book pages and became *news* in earnest.

One of the first notices of the fracas appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* on August 15, 1965. The article mentioned the controversy as one of “about half a dozen” similar cases, and initiated a discussion of the conflict, advantageous to Tolkien, based on ethical grounds. Not only did the article quote in full Tolkien’s statement to be printed on the back cover of the forthcoming Ballantine edition – “This paperback edition, and no other, has been published with my consent and co-operation. Those who approve of courtesy

---

<sup>23</sup> The *Christian Science Monitor* (April 18, 1967) reported that “the connoisseur ... can now hang items like a 30-by-40-inch map of Tolkien’s Middle Earth to guide his way through “Lord of the Rings.” “One California specialist claims he is selling 10,000 posters [on all literary themes] a month, mostly to bookstores in the San Francisco area.”

<sup>24</sup> “Copyright © 1965 by J. R. R. Tolkien  
THIS BOOK IS COPYRIGHT UNDER THE BERNE CONVENTION”

(at least) to living authors will purchase it, and no other” – but it also quoted the statement Houghton Mifflin sent to bookshops, which expressed the publisher’s expectation “that booksellers will prefer to sell authorized, royalty-paying editions if they exist.” Similar items appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* (August 7, 1965), the *National Observer* (August 30, 1965) and the story “made national headlines in the United States” (Bramlett 64).

By fall, the *Saturday Review* (October 2, 1965) had picked up the story as an example of the flaws in American copyright law, which threw copyright into question and failed to insure payment of royalties to living authors who were first published abroad. This article elicited two responses on the letters page (October 23, 1965), one from an angry supporter of Tolkien's copyright, and the other from Donald Wollheim of Ace. Wollheim's tone was entirely unrepentant, but he did allow that Ace was willing to pay “the author an honorarium for his work.” By October, copies of the authorized Ballantine edition of *The Lord of the Rings* entered the market. By March 14, 1966 *Publishers Weekly* could report that things had gone badly enough for Ace that, in the words of its spokesman, it had arranged to pay ““full royalties”” to Tolkien (but not to Houghton Mifflin), and a Ballantine representative stated how once ““the present stock of the Ace edition [was] exhausted, Ace [would] not be permitted to reprint without the consent of the author.”” As Rayner Unwin (of Allen & Unwin) noted (with some understatement) in a published response, it was “difficult to conceive such permission ever being possible” (*Publishers Weekly* May 9, 1966).

The controversy over the Ace edition influenced the history of *The Lord of the Rings* substantially. One significant result was the extent to which it focused attention on the book. According to Houghton Mifflin’s current Tolkien specialist, ““The brouhaha over

the whole thing helped bring it to the attention of a wider reading public that hadn't stumbled upon it already, and it made for 100 percent name recognition among booksellers'" (Clay Harper, as quoted in Gordinier 44). *The Lord of the Rings* had already been in print for ten years by 1965, and it is extremely unlikely that the simple event of its publication in wraps would have generated anything like the attention that arose from the debate. An oft-quoted letter from Tolkien (dated October 30, 1965) illustrates his recognition of this fact: "I am getting such an advertisement from the rumpus that I expect my 'authorized' paper-back will in fact sell more copies than it would, if there had been no trouble or competition" (*Letters* 364). Tolkien appears to have been right. *The New York Times* reported in its obituary of Tolkien that "a quarter of a million copies of the trilogy were sold in ten months."<sup>25</sup> It took nearly a year for *The Lord of the Rings* to appear on the *New York Times*' recently introduced list of Paperback Bestsellers, but on September 4, 1966 it entered the chart at number 3, and had climbed to the top position on December 4, where it spent eight weeks. In total, *The Lord of the Rings* spent forty-nine weeks on the list, which ranked only five titles at this time. This total also includes a brief appearance a full eight years later (after the list had expanded to ten books), which suggests that the book was never truly far off the list.<sup>26</sup>

But even beyond the fact that the conflict created publicity for the book, it is questionable when *The Lord of the Rings* would ever have appeared in an affordable paperback edition without the impetus provided by Ace. When approached about a U.K.

---

<sup>25</sup> In an unusual publishing alliance that says much about Tolkien's contemporary popularity in the United States, *Rolling Stone* reprinted the *New York Times* obituary for Tolkien in its issue for October 11, 1973.

<sup>26</sup> The fact that Tolkien's works enjoyed steady – perhaps growing – popularity over the years is borne out by the reception for *The Silmarillion* when it was finally published posthumously. The book was the best-selling work of fiction during 1977, selling over two million copies in hard covers (as well as being widely distributed through the Book-of-the-Month Club).

paperback of *The Hobbit* as recently as December 1960, Tolkien had expressed his preference not “to cheapen the old Hobbit” by issuing the book in a softbound edition.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Wollheim remained insistent that, in the final analysis, the Ace edition benefited the reading public and Tolkien by placing the work of the latter in the hands of the former. As the initial conflict reached a pitch, he argued publicly that “if Ace Books had not published these works in soft covers, ... there would not now or ever have been any other low-priced editions” (letter to the *Saturday Review* October 23, 1965). Two years later Ace placed an advertisement in the *Tolkien Journal* congratulating Tolkien on his seventy-fifth birthday, which reiterated that Ace had produced “the first mass breakthrough effort to bring a magnificent work to its eagerly waiting mass audience.” (*Tolkien Journal* 24) Later, in his book discussing contemporary science fiction, Wollheim claimed yet again that he was “guilty of having lit the spark that started the explosion for Tolkien, in so far as it was the [Ace] editions ... that first put Tolkien on the newsstands in low-priced paperback editions” (Wollheim 1971, 109).<sup>28</sup> The language employed is instructive. Wollheim understood the significance of *mass* publishing. And where neither Tolkien nor his authorized publishers were prepared to venture, Wollheim speculated that an enormous, unsuspected audience would welcome *The Lord of the Rings*. Events proved him right. A sense of having suffered an injustice moved Tolkien to authorize a paperback reprint; with an unofficial paperback edition selling well, Tolkien saw with the *necessity* of issuing a rival, comparably priced edition. Inadvertent,

---

<sup>27</sup> He did, however, relent on this occasion (a Penguin-Puffin edition set to coincide with a BBC serialization of the book) for financial reasons. Ballantine published the first U.S. paperback edition, just prior to its issue of *The Lord of the Rings*, as a preemptive move against another “pirate” edition.

<sup>28</sup> Such a statement was not self-aggrandizement. After Tolkien himself and perhaps Rayner Unwin, Wollheim could probably claim to have played the most important role in the public career of *The Lord of the Rings*.

“democratizing” results of the controversy with Ace Books, then, were both increased public awareness of *The Lord of the Rings*, and an abundance of inexpensive pocket book copies.<sup>29</sup> As the publishing world was increasingly coming to recognize, paperback publication really could affect a “revolution” in the world of books and readers.

\* \* \*

To the extent that softbound books have since achieved ubiquity, it is important to recognize that paperbacks were greeted with suspicion, even controversy, during the first decade after *The Lord of the Rings* was published. In *Two-Bit Culture*, a book describing the role of softbound books in the United States, Kenneth Davis notes that “to many people, the paperback book has always been little more than second-rate trash” (Davis, xi). As mentioned below, Tolkien appears to have thought of soft cover books as “cheap.” And yet the popularity of the paperback format was on the uprise. The noted historian of publishing John Tebbel began his 1964 “pocket history” of softcovers by mentioning the latest sales figures for the industry: in 1963, “there were 277 publishers producing a total of 300 million paperbacks sold,” which, at roughly ten percent of the total book market, was a record high (Tebbel 1). Partly this was due to increasing respectability. As lurid wrappers enclosing questionable content began to yield the market to higher quality paperback originals and trade reprints, paperbacks began to lose their taint of soft-covered turpitude. The *New York Times* initiated its first paperback bestsellers list on December 5, 1965 (Justice 8-9). Other indications of the increasing

---

<sup>29</sup> The assumption that Tolkien's readership had some "right" to an inexpensive edition of *The Lord of the Rings* did not end with Ace's concessions in 1966. During the mid-1990s, there was a brief resurgence of interest in the Ace edition on internet discussion lists, positing the idea of posting the “public domain” Ace text on the world wide web.

prevalence of pocket books also appeared. For example, the February 26, 1967 “Book Week” supplement of the *Washington Post* (which features a cover story about Tolkien) includes an advertisement for an early edition of *Paperbound Books in Print*, directly aimed at those who felt “overwhelmed by the profusion of paperbacks.”

School use further enhanced the status of paperbacks. And inevitably, the first generation to use paperbacks in school was accustomed to reading paperbacks when it arrived in college. “The college field,” Tebbel enthused in 1964, “is booming.” Partly this was simply a matter of utility: pocket books were affordable and portable. But it was also a matter of design. “Publishers have been diligently developing the 1,800 college stores as a distinct market in themselves” (Tebbel, 28). The results were apparent. “College reading and the college audience soon became linked to the paperback. The notion of ‘cult books’ and ‘cult writers’ entered the realm of publishing” (Davis 292). In his book about “’60s reading and writing,” *Scriptures for a Generation*, Philip D. Beidler asserts that such a “scripture” would necessarily be paperback, “in its inexpensiveness and availability, its widespread dissemination especially among the young” (Beidler 6). It was into this environment that tens of thousands of copies of *The Lord of the Rings* were suddenly introduced in the second half of 1965. Association of *The Lord of the Rings* with paperback format soon formed a central feature of the book’s public identity. As a general reflection on the importance of the paperback in the United States, Davis cites at length an anonymous child of the ’60s:

As a youngster, I borrowed the Ballantine edition of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and was promptly transported to Middle-earth. I was enthralled and proceeded to reread the trilogy at regular intervals. ... Such books as the trilogy cannot be properly savored during the day. No, I saved the trilogy for late-night perusal – something to curl up in bed with. This cannot be comfortably accomplished with a hardcover book. The wave of Tolkien’s popularity crested during the late-sixties counterculture and was undoubtedly linked with it, since Tolkien’s protagonists

embraced idealistic causes and saw them through with perseverance and determination. Truly a myth for the times. A hardcover edition would never have attracted such a following, since it would seem too ‘Establishment,’ resembling the much-feared textbooks wielded by stodgy professors (xiv-xv).

Perhaps the appearance of the authorized Ballantine edition in the 1966 *Annual Paperbound Book Guide for Colleges* (a “selective” Publishers Weekly/Library Journal/Bowker publication) would have also have smacked of the Establishment; by then, however, it was really too late. Tolkien and “fantasy” became concretely identified with Ballantine Books.<sup>30</sup>

Without the sudden public awareness, not only of Tolkien, but of Tolkien in *paperback*, the most notable stage in the public history of *The Lord of the Rings* – the emergence of the book as the center of a popular “cult” – might never have occurred. Reporting on the tail end of the controversy, the *London Times* credited the Ace Books edition with “unleash[ing] a Tolkien craze on American university campuses” (February 12, 1966). “The Tolkien boom cannot be said to have started on the grand, or cult-object,

---

<sup>30</sup> As “The Lord of the Rings grew to be immensely successful in the late sixties and seventies” with the “help [of] a paperback edition,” fantasy became an increasingly attractive genre to mass-market publishers. For example, “this success [of Tolkien’s] created a demand for fantasy and revived popular interest in Mervyn Peake’s earlier ‘Titus Books’” (Stevenson 106). But Peake was not the sole (deceased) beneficiary of Tolkien’s success. Ballantine introduced what it dubbed its “Adult Fantasy” series (meaning works aimed at mature readers, rather than works requiring plain brown wrappers). Ballantine applied its lesson well, issuing works not only by Peake, but by such other authors as Lord Dunsany (*The Queen of Elfland’s Daughter*), E. R. Eddison (*The Worm Ouroboros*), James Branch Cabell (*The Silver Stallion*), H.P. Lovecraft (*The Doom that Came to Sarnath*), George MacDonald (*Phantastes*), and William Morris (*The Wood beyond the World, The Well at the World’s End*). These authors, many of whose works had never found prior paperback publication, represented an older, more idiosyncratic form of fantasy literature than that emerging in Tolkien’s wake. And while none of the reissues – altogether the line included sixty-five titles (Kelley 36) – enjoyed anything like Tolkien’s success, their presence enriched the emerging field of imaginative literature and provided some sense of context for Tolkien’s sudden appearance. But, inevitably, Tolkien’s success at Ballantine also inspired the house to seek a “new Tolkien,” and, in fact, Tolkien’s identification with his publisher helped bring one of the best-respected series of the next generation to print. Stephen R. Donaldson, a fan of Tolkien’s whose “Chronicles of Thomas Covenant” had been rejected by “every publisher listed in *Literary Market Place*,” realized that “Ballantine Books must be ‘getting rich’ from the rage for *The Lord of the Rings*” and resubmitted his work, to acceptance and to eventual commercial and critical success (Walters 69). In the end, Tolkien’s success resulted in “fantasy” emerging as a viable – if never quite respectable, even within the boundaries of mass market publishing – genre in its own right, not just for the many imitative “epics” that followed *The Lord of the Rings*, but for an increasing range of works, from the pulpy to the literary. As a figure who has ultimately sold “some 100 million books,” Tolkien “ignited the whole fantasy genre in publishing” (Gordinier, 42).

scale till the Spring of 1965, when the first of the paperback editions hit the market.” The importance of the flood of soft cover copies of *The Lord of the Rings* should not be underestimated. Before either Ace or Ballantine had printed *The Lord of the Rings*, the *New York Times Book Review* printed an oddly prophetic article by NYU English professor David Boroff in January 1965 that bemoaned the lack of any “Big Books” capturing the attention of the nation's colleges. A “Big Book” was, by definition, an “ubiquitous paperback,” one “available in inexpensive, readily accessible paperbound form.” The article describes, among a number of regional “minor cults,” the popularity of J.R.Tolkien [sic] and “his major work, *The Fellowship of the Ring*,” which was “not yet available in paperback but should be” (24). Despite his apparent lack of real familiarity with Tolkien, Boroff’s implication that *The Lord of the Rings* represented an impending phenomenon predicted the results of the paperback controversy with uncanny accuracy. Suddenly, with a combined total of almost a million paperback copies of *The Hobbit* and the three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* in print by the end of 1966, the “reach” of the books had grown long.

\* \* \*

At first, the attention brought by the publishing controversy manifested itself in renewed interest in the books themselves, as evinced by articles in the *New York Times Book Review* (October 31, 1965) and the *Wall Street Journal* (January 2, 1966). Each article, ostensibly a review of the recently issued Ballantine paperbacks, was really was more of an “appreciation.” In the *NYTBR* review, Gerald Jonas became the first writer to contend publicly that the books admitted, or even demanded, multiple readings. And in a

implicit acknowledgment of the most common criticism leveled at *The Lord of the Rings*, Jonas argued that “the only ‘escape’ in Tolkien is to a world where the struggle between Good and Evil is waged more fiercely and openly than our own, where the stakes are at least as great, and where the odds are, if anything, even more perilously balanced” (78). A more unmistakable foundation for the ensuing discussion of Tolkien's book could scarcely have appeared at this juncture. For these two perceived elements of Tolkien's audience – zealous commitment to the book and willingness to surrender to a world “much like our own, as mythical, but no more so” (Beagle 128) – underpinned the entire public discussion of the book in 1966 and 1967. During these years, Tolkien achieved a level of popularity that no one had ever anticipated. In the context of the publishing controversy, one writer noted that “the Tolkien fantasies” remained as yet “not widely known in this country,” but shrewdly predicted that “that situation [was] about to change. ... This war [between the Ace and Ballantine editions] seems fairly certain to make Professor Tolkien a household word” (Frankel). He was correct.

The early signs of the incipient Tolkien “cult” were subtle. Nat Hentoff, hip jazz critic and columnist on civil liberties, recommended *The Hobbit* and *The Ring Cycle* [sic] (along with such books as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*) among his “Critics’ Choices for Christmas” (*Commonweal* December 12, 1965). Soon afterwards, the “Talk of the Town” section of the *New Yorker* described an early meeting of the Tolkien Society of America, “a group dedicated to the discussion and promulgation of ... *The Lord of the Rings*,” which “shows signs of becoming a modern classic” (*New Yorker* January 15, 1966). With patronizing good humor, the article describes the mostly high school aged group's passion for Tolkien. “I was *living* in *The Lord of the Rings* all last year,” one gushed. “It was my world. I wrote my notes

in Elvish. Even now, I doodle in Elvish. It's my means of expression.” Even the Society's founder, Dick Plotz, was a high school senior on his way to Harvard.<sup>31</sup> As mentioned above, the appearance of the book in paperback had gained considerable attention during 1965; soon, however, there was no doubt that the emerging craze for *The Lord of the Rings* would predominantly be a youth movement.

The first major article to address “the Hobbit-Forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien” appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* (July 2, 1966). Apart from some anecdotal evidence supporting Ian Ballantine's statement that “‘college kids have managed to get word to each other that this is the thing,’” the piece was really a sort of primer on Tolkien studies. Appearing as it did quite early in the public awareness of *The Lord of the Rings*, much of the article concerns itself with summarizing the plots of Tolkien's books and noting the emergence of what it terms the “Tolkien people.” Soon afterwards, *Time* described in a passage in its “Education” section how *The Lord of the Rings*, which had “languished largely unread until it was reprinted ... in two paperback editions,” was “this year’s ‘In’ book” (July 15, 1965). One indulgent mother who “bought the trilogy for her freshman daughter” said, “‘Going to college without Tolkien is like going without sneakers.’” A *New York Post* article penned by “Susan” was reprinted in the “Teen Talk” section of the *Los Angeles Times*, headlined “Wacky World of Tolkien Catching on with Youth” (August 31, 1966).

For the September “College Issue” of *Esquire*, Joseph Mathewson produced a substantial four-page article about “the Hobbit Habit.” Apart from the familiar talk of “Elvish” graffiti in the subways of New York, this piece was the first really to examine

---

<sup>31</sup> Apparently, Auden (who featured as guest of honor at the meeting described in the *New Yorker*), wrote Tolkien of his fear that the members would be “lunatics.” Tolkien responded that “such things” as the formation of the Society filled him “alarm and despondency” (*Letters* 359).

both the origins and extent of the “cult.” Tolkien's popularity began “slowly, with a few copies making the rounds at a handful of colleges ... There was, at the outset, something cliquish about the reading of Tolkien, a hint of the secret society.”<sup>32</sup> However, once copies of the books became common, “Tolkien's remarkable gossip value may [have been] one of the major reasons why his books ... ceased to be the province of cliques – or rather, why they [became] the province of cliques so widely spread as to form a cult.”

The *San Francisco Examiner* devoted the cover story of its “This World” magazine supplement to an examination of this cult in December, and other articles followed regularly in the first half of 1967. In January the *New York Times Magazine* offered five pages of heavily illustrated text. While this was one of the only articles in the American press actually to include conversation with Tolkien, the *Magazine* editors apparently found a Berkeley bookshop owner's characterization of the Tolkien fad – “this is more than a campus craze; it's like a drug dream” – more eye-catching, and added it as a supertitle. Media attention for the phenomenon culminated with articles in *Life*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *America*, *Commentary*, and the *Nation* (twice).

The essential point that marked most of the writing about *The Lord of the Rings* as “cult object” was the fact that the articles spent very little time (apart from brief synopses) discussing the book at all. During 1966, the press was most interested in describing the simple fact of Tolkien's sudden popularity. Very frequently, magazine writers reported the “news” of Tolkien's displacement of Salinger and Golding (and the

---

<sup>32</sup> Tolkien's burgeoning college popularity was not necessarily a well-kept secret. There was, of course, Boroff's assessment of *The Lord of the Rings* as a potential “big book,” along with another mention in his previous article on “The College Intellectual, 1965 Model” (December 6, 1964). And just as the Ace edition was hitting college bookshops, the *New York Times* (along with other papers) reported that “during the past year or so” *The Lord of the Rings* had “become popular on college campuses” (August 8, 1965). Donald Wollheim claimed to have been recognized Tolkien's growing popularity: “as a fan and an sf editor I became aware early that the Tolkien Rings books were becoming a sort of underground cult among college students – without the aid of any publicity or advertising by Houghton-Mifflin or anyone else.”

contrast was virtually always with these two writers) as “campus favorites.” When actually discussing *The Lord of the Rings* and readers’ ardent response to it, the tone of these pieces was generally mildly condescending. Journalists never tired of describing the “Frodo Lives” buttons and “May the hair on your feet grow ever longer” greetings and all the other various trappings that were thought to be part of Tolkien fandom. In time, writers in the media began to comment indirectly on the fact of the media attention itself; repeated references to *The Lord of the Rings* as something that “everyone now knows” (Schroth, in *America* February 18, 1967), for example, demonstrate an awareness that “the latest fad of the nation's teen-agers” (Crist, in *Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1967) was no longer restricted to campus but had entered the mainstream. “The books took off suddenly and became an overnight campus sensation, quickly spreading to larger segments of the mass market” (Davis, 328).

Of course, approval of the “cult” - or belief that it even existed - was not universal. A letter to *Esquire*, referring not only to Mathewson’s lengthy feature article but also to a brief mention elsewhere that an inability to “get past the first chapter of *The Hobbit*” was a sign of lost youth, complained that “the trends and fads covered in [the] September issue [were] really apparent only on the big campuses. That [left] a hell of a lot of kids who [had] never heard of Tolkien” (November, 1966). One of two letters responding to the *Time* article angrily complained that “now, everywhere one turns, gushing over-enthusiasts are to be found turning Tolkien into a common cult” (July 29, 1966).

Similarly, in his article for *Life* (February 24, 1967), Charles Elliott reported that *The Lord of the Rings* was “spoiled” for him now that Tolkien had “become the literary darling of an entire generation of ... students, who have made him a flagrant best-seller.”

While one letter writer applauded these sentiments, averring that “a true Tolkien lover

would never discuss [*The Lord of the Rings*]’ publicly (March 17, 1967), three others disparaged Elliott. And finally, there was Tolkien himself, opinionated as ever, who eventually referred to the “deplorable cultus” that had developed around his books.

Just as sales of the book in paperback began to alter the extent of Tolkien’s audience irreversibly, the author could (in all sincerity, it would seem) state that “nothing has astonished [him] more (and ... [his] publishers) than the welcome given to *The Lord of the Rings*.” The fact that “wonderful people still *buy* the book” is “a constant source of consolation and pleasure” (“Tolkien on Tolkien”). The answer to the core question – who is the audience for *The Lord of the Rings*? – was becoming objectively less difficult to determine, and had quickly acquired an entirely different cast. Suddenly, the book’s readership is no longer “people like me,” meaning those of Tolkien’s intellectual and artistic bent, academic and anglophiles; in fact, it becomes composed of people most patently *unlike* Tolkien by virtually any measure. As Jeff Gordinier’s useful article in *Entertainment Weekly* (a teaser to provide context for the release of the first of Peter Jackson’s films) put it in trying to approximate Tolkien’s befuddlement:

Who *were* these people? They tracked you down, they sent you presents, they asked silly questions. Here Professor Tolkien had spent 12 years on *The Lord of the Rings*, mapping out every mountain and glen of Middle-earth as if he were raising a cathedral in the clouds, and now a throng was passing through his private sanctuary for a gawk. Tourists, TV crews, drug freaks, scholars with their wild-goose theories and pontifications.

Tolkien enjoyed success long enough to become frustrated by the demands it placed on him. Stories about being awakened by transatlantic phone calls placed by young and/or mentally altered Americans to whom the concept of time zones was alien recur again and again in accounts both contemporary and recent. “He felt a responsibility to his readers, and tried to accommodate them as best he could – though surely he could not have

imagined such a demanding audience when he wrote his book” (Hammond 2000, 64).

Referring to his young American audience in the *New York Times Magazine* article, Tolkien said “art moves them and they don't know what they've been moved by and they get quite drunk on it. Many young Americans are involved in the stories in a way that I am not.”<sup>33</sup> An accompanying photograph showed Tolkien looking looking very English, very tweedy, and every one of his seventy-five years. Actually, Tolkien’s age is of some real interest to this discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* and its readership. Richard Plotz (the teenaged founder of the American Tolkien Society) had said that Tolkien in fact looked young for his age when Plotz interviewed his idol for *Seventeen* (January 1967). Perhaps so. But what Tolkien very clearly was *not*, was anything like *seventeen*. It is fascinating, really, that the editors of *Seventeen* decided that an interview with (not to put too fine a point on it) an old man would appeal to their audience. What is more fascinating yet is the fact that it almost certainly *did*. Tolkien would seem to be, on reflection, quite an unlikely hero for the militant college generation of the 1960s. Which raises the question that various commentators attempted to address during the latter stages of discussion of the Tolkien cult: why *were* the youth of the United States so besotted with *The Lord of the Rings*? What was the source of their “uninhobbed, joyous passion” (Resnick 91)? How did the book relate to its rapidly expanding, almost uniformly youthful readership?

---

<sup>33</sup> A long quotation attributed to Ian Ballantine (who reportedly enjoyed a good working relationship with Tolkien) typifies this perspective, so alien to Tolkien. “... Tolkien had that property that is so important in communicating any book that is pivotal or influential in changing people’s thinking; he drew the audience into the work. They became participants. They added to the story. We soon saw paintings, maps, stained glass, songs, and poetry that had been inspired by Tolkien. People learned the language of *The Lord of the Rings*. In this time, young people could be observed stretching their skills much more so than my generation of young people had. The individuals who were attracted to Tolkien were in one way or another finding dissatisfaction in their own time. Tolkien was a catalyst” (quoted in Davis 329-330).

\* \* \*

The greatest concern over Tolkien's popularity with students – what with bizarre descriptions of *The Lord of the Rings* being “as catching as LSD” (*Time*) or rivaling the Beatles in “popular acclaim” (*Commentary*) – centered on what this popularity said about the young people involved. “Rightly or wrongly, contemporary accounts of [Tolkien’s] sales surge handcuffed it to the collegiate counter-culture” (Foster 42).<sup>34</sup> *Something* was attracting a large college readership to *The Lord of the Rings*, and the popular media spent considerable energy in the attempt to ascertain *what*. Just as Edmund Wilson and other hostile critics during the period between 1954 and 1956 struggled with how *The Lord of the Rings* fit into their ideas of “literature,” writers in the popular press during 1966 and 1967 tried to ascertain what *function* the book served for its young readers.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> An inaccurate and simply odd entry for Tolkien even exists in the *ABC CLIO Companion to the 1960s Counterculture in America*, which relates how *The Lord of the Rings* was a book “that counterculture youths read avidly” (306). One can imagine Professor Tolkien’s consternation at his inclusion, and more precisely, at the exact situation of the “Tolkien” entry, between “toke” and “topless bathing suit.”

<sup>35</sup> With a nod to the frequently-voiced criticism that Tolkien depicted Good and Evil simplistically and statically, Mathewson pointed out (in *Esquire*) that for increasingly political young people, the “real world” did indeed appear morally Black and White. In Tolkien, “the lines [between good and evil] are as clearly drawn as they ever were in Selma, Alabama.” Similarly, the *Nation* (May 8, 1967) ran an article maintaining that in *The Lord of the Rings*, “above all, what matters is the act of choosing to take part.” The author, Robert Sklar, felt that “the fantasy and imagination and other-worldliness of Tolkien’s world [were] all important, but what [was] most important [was] not that it serve[d] as an escape, ... but that it provide[d] a paradigm for action.” This point was not universally conceded. Douglas J. Stewart later argued in the same magazine (October 9, 1967) that the arrangement of diametric opposites was dangerous; he claimed to “dislike fairy tales in general and hate Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy with passionate particularity” because its simplistic black/white schema results in Frodo’s, “remarkably like a modern GI” shipping out to Vietnam, being “*sent*, for reasons he doesn’t understand (and isn’t supposed to understand).”

Another recurring question, when considering the popularity of the book with modern students, was its hostility to modernism. Writing in the *New York Review of Books* (May 4, 1967), Matthew Hodgart suggested that Tolkien’s hobbits resembled young British gentlemen, going “straight from school and university to the slaughter of the 1914-18 war.” The hobbits were similarly unprepared for what they faced; the problem from Tolkien’s vantage was that they were called to face it at all. This idea grew from hints mentioned by Tolkien about the horrors of the War in his new foreword to the revised edition, and helps explain much of the author’s “reactionary” idealization of pre-industrial England. But *The Lord of the Rings* was clearly intended to be more than a statement about war.

Writing in *Holiday* (June 1966, reprinted in *The Tolkien Reader*), Peter S. Beagle offered one of Tolkien's better early defenses. With a tacit nod to Holden Caulfield (whom Frodo Baggins was generally said to have supplanted in the affections of college readers), Beagle contended that young people were attracted to Tolkien's writing because they could "sense the difference between the real and the phony." Because Tolkien himself was so obviously dedicated to the creation he had "made with love and pride and a little madness," to enter the world of *The Lord of the Rings* was not to leave "reality" at all. It was, instead, a world no more "mythical" than our own. To visit Middle-Earth was simply to view reality from a different angle. The validity of this assertion was debated.

Eventually, the argument whether *The Lord of the Rings* was merely "escapist" entertainment – and if so, to what extent this served a valuable purpose – formed the crux of the public discussion over the book. Charles Elliott noted in *Life* how "*The Lord of the Rings* is innocent. It is even innocent of ideas, which doubtless helps recommend it to those aggressive searchers for sincerity, the opt-out crowd." Raymond Schroth claimed that "Tolkien glories in his irrelevancy," providing "a treasure of trivia for pseudo-scholarly digging and sterile cultish chatter" (*America*, February 18, 1967). For their opinions, both writers earned responses from readers describing them as "orcs." (*Life*, March 17, 1967; *America*, March 25, 1967). Further, Matthewson's essay in *Esquire* characterized *The Lord of the Rings* as "nothing more than fairy tales, grown up and grown exceedingly lengthy, escapist and nonintellectual."

The book has attracted such criticism consistently since it was first published. The assumption, of course, is that "escape" – typically used to imply that Tolkien's readers preferred "fantasy" to "reality" – inherently lacks value. Many writers wrote in Tolkien's

defense at the time,<sup>36</sup> and many have continued to do so over the ensuing decades. Often, their arguments actively (and persuasively) attempt to controvert the notion that the appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* consists exclusively in its otherworldliness. But perhaps, really, Tolkien should be allowed scope to defend his own work. In his essay “On Fairy Stories,” first published in the United States in 1965, Tolkien had in fact argued that “Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which ‘Escape’ is now so often used.” Critics who use the word in this fashion “are confusing, not always by sincere error, the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter” (60). The Prison is the literal and the mundane; escape provides “sudden glimpse of the underlying reality of truth” (71). Tolkien’s essay also focused on “Joy,” a literary virtue as out of favor in 1939 (when Tolkien first delivered “On Fairy Stories” as a lecture) as it was in 1965 (when the recently-published essay began increasingly to be applied to *The Lord of the Rings*). Interviewed by the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1966, Tolkien confronted his literary opponents with a simple defense. Reporting on, and then transcribing, her conversation with Tolkien, Daphne Castell, states that “he believes that books nowadays, fictional works at any rate, are misused: ‘Isn’t it widely thought, because it is widely taught (in schools and colleges) that enjoyment is an illiterate reaction, and that a serious reader must at once begin to take the construction to pieces?’” (Castell). In other words, the pleasure a book affords justifies the book’s existence. To Tolkien, at least, there was no inherent mystery to the simple fact of readers enjoying reading a book.

---

<sup>36</sup> Notable among these was Loren Eiseley, a professional scientific writer. In the *New York Herald Tribune* (and reprinted in *Horn Book* of August 1965), Eiseley characterized those who disdain escapist literature as individuals who “have a prejudice or fear of being transported out of time even momentarily, of ‘meddling’ with reality.” This forms a “sorry phobia.”

\* \* \*

While this latter stage of attention to the book bore out one critic's opinion that “there are always a lot of people who would rather talk about books than read them” (Kiely 93), a few critiques concerned with discussing the book, rather than the sensational phenomenon surrounding it, still appeared. These critics occupied themselves less with issues of genre and literary form than had those writing a decade before, and more with thematic elements. Academic journals had occasionally featured articles about Tolkien's academic work – his theories about Beowulf, his translations of, and essays about, Middle English literature – simultaneously with the considerable attention he received in the popular press. Interestingly, there was virtually no acknowledgment of the public debate in these articles, just as the American popular press continued, essentially, to ignore Tolkien's scholarship.

The single noteworthy exception to this intellectual segregation was the essay “On Fairy Stories” mentioned above, which could be applied directly in the attempt to explain *The Lord of the Rings* by popular reviewers, even as it informed Tolkien's academic approach to literature for his fellow scholars. This essay had originally been delivered as a lecture in 1939. An expanded form was published in the memorial volume *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* in 1947, but Allen & Unwin, seeking more works from Tolkien to take advantage of the public's attention, reissued the essay with the story “Leaf by Niggle” in a small volume entitled *Tree and Leaf*. Houghton Mifflin published an American edition on March 3, 1965, just before the paperback publication controversy focused public attention on *The Lord of the Rings*.

While earlier critics had occasionally demonstrated an awareness of “On Fairy

Stories” (e.g. Straight, in the *New Republic*), those writing during the mid-60s were far more likely to assess *The Lord of the Rings* with the essay in mind. Acknowledging Tolkien’s theory of “subcreation,” Matthew Hodgart suggested in the *New York Review of Books* (May 4, 1967) that Tolkien sought nothing less than to create a “secondary world” to rival our own. To this critic, who clearly read *The Lord of the Rings* carefully and appreciatively, Tolkien nevertheless lacked the artistry to realize these ambitions fully. In a response to this review (which he called “at once perceptive and wrong-headed”) in the *National Review* (September 5, 1967), Jared Lobdell agreed with Hodgart’s hypothesis but not with his assessment. Instead, Tolkien was successful, and “the present high standing of *The Lord of the Rings* [was] fully justified, precisely because of its widespread success in this mediation of imaginative life.”

Hence, the coincidental appearance of *Tree and Leaf* just as public awareness of *The Lord of the Rings* exploded not only provided popular reviewers with a “theory” to assist them in grappling with the latter book, but arguably also led in time to longer and more “scholarly” reviews of Tolkien’s work. For a time, the media’s absorption with the “campus craze” obscured this fact, as at least some academics recognized. In the first edition of *Tolkien and the Critics* (1968), the co-editor Neil D. Isaacs wrote in the first essay, “On the Possibility of Writing Tolkien Criticism,” that “this is surely a bad time for Tolkien criticism.” The popular press stories discussed above – their mere *existence* – “to say nothing of the feverish activity of the fanzines, do not produce a climate for serious criticism” (1). Enthusiasm for *The Lord of the Rings*, however, did not entirely undermine thoughtful commentary. Tracing Tolkien’s treatment in more sober-minded circles suggests that the increasing seriousness of the popular press in assessing *The Lord of the Rings* ultimately facilitated sophisticated discussion of the book and its audience.

Two useful examples, one “academic” and one “literary,” appeared as discussion of the Tolkien craze began to decline. First, the *Cimarron Review* published an essay about Tolkien in its first issue (September 1967). Even as the popular clamor was fading, the editors apparently perceived a discussion of Tolkien as being germane to its stated mission, “to illuminate the contemporary American Scene ... *in medias res*,” while being unwilling to “consciously pursue any fad...” (in the terms of the Foreword). Tolkien was, to use a word of the day, “relevant.” As had occurred previously in the popular press, Samuel Woods’s essay appeared interested largely in introducing Tolkien to a (presumably) academic readership. Consequently, it emphasizes Tolkien’s scholarly credentials before seeking to discover what “attracts many readers, makes almost fanatic admirers out of many, and leads some to make Tolkien the object of cult-worship” (45). Soon afterwards, the second issue of the *New American Review* appeared, which contained Mary Ellmann’s sardonic appraisal of Tolkien and his young American audience. An unusual pocketbook publication, the *N.A.R.* perfectly exemplified the new and simultaneous interest in “literature” and the mass market that also encompassed *The Lord of the Rings*. Hence, it was the perfect outlet for an assessment of *The Lord of the Rings* at this juncture, and, moreover, “one of the magazine’s appeals ... was the refusal to accept blindly the new idols of the counterculture” (Davis 326). As with Woods, Ellmann’s interest was in describing Tolkien’s appeal to his readers. But where Woods found a “narrative gift” and “fertility of imagination” (45), Ellmann saw a “gap in Tolkien’s writing between an intended sublimity and an actual absurdity” that “doubles the audience” (218). While each writer saw something radically different in the appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* to its readership, viewed in tandem their work reflected the fact that two previously distinct strands of writing about Tolkien – as scholar and as popular

author – eventually began to become reconciled.

It is noteworthy that for Tolkien, at least, there was never any rift between the distinct roles he played in life, those of “Scholar and Storyteller” (as later fossilized in the title of a memorial volume dedicated to him).<sup>37</sup> Assessing himself in 1966, Tolkien stated that his “work is all of a piece, and fundamentally linguistic in inspiration.” He takes pains to emphasize that his creative works springs from the same source, and serves the same ends, as his academic work. The ability (and desire) to feel at home in a world conjured up by Anglo-Saxon or Old Norse corresponds *directly* to the desire (and ability) to create a world based on his own created languages. It might be well for “the authorities of the university [to] consider it an aberration of an elderly professor of philology to write and publish fairy stories and romances, and call it a ‘hobby,’ pardonable because it has been (surprisingly to [Tolkien] as much as to anyone) successful” (“Tolkien on Tolkien”). But such critics – and more broadly all of those who have found it so difficult to reconcile the nature of the *audience* of Tolkien’s works with Tolkien’s *authorship* of those works – fail to perceive the author’s unity of intent and of execution.

One consequence is reflected in the publishing record for Tolkien during the late 1960's. His story “Smith of Wootton Major” (with its origins as a literary illustration to an introductory essay Tolkien was asked to submit to a new edition of George MacDonald) was published in the December 1967 issue of *Redbook*, Tolkien's only literary work to appear in a popular American magazine. Meanwhile, *The Tolkien*

---

<sup>37</sup> A fact that has been little mentioned in discussions of *The Lord of the Rings* is that Tolkien’s professional familiarity with literary scholarship – as an editor and textual critic – actually influenced the manner in which the book was introduced to readers. Within the book, Tolkien maintained the fiction that he was not the author of the book, *per se*, but rather the translator and editor of the ancient records from which he drew the narrative. The “scholarly” apparatus that accompanies the book – appendices containing historical annals, linguistic notes, genealogical tables, etc. – complements this fiction. What *has* received comment is the extent to which Tolkien appears to have internalized this perspective; one frequently reads of his desire to “find out” what fills a perceived gap behind the fabric of the story, rather than to “make it up.”

*Reader*, a paperback original published by Ballantine in September 1966, included Tolkien's challenging alliterative poem, "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son," a "sequel" to a late Old English text. In other words, a number of related strands were becoming intertwined to the "enrichment" (variously interpreted) of all. Tolkien himself became more willing to engage with the reading public at large in response to the unexpected attentions paid to his works. Tolkien's publishers introduced works of dubious popular appeal (apart from Tolkien's name on the title page), to challenge or to exploit the audience, depending on the degree of the observer's cynicism. Critics and (increasingly) scholars learned to situate *The Lord of the Rings* in the broader context of Tolkien's interests. And a wide body of works – which has in fact swollen since Tolkien's death in 1973 with the publication of at least seventeen posthumous volumes<sup>38</sup> – has become available to the range of readers, from the casual one-time reader of *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings* to the enthusiast who glories in the abundance of arcana with which they are encrusted.

Such discussion reflected a new gravity in the public consideration of the *content* of *The Lord of the Rings*. A serious, if limited, discussion of Tolkien's artistic ideology had begun to appear. Other noteworthy issues included both the seemingly anachronistic ideals (heroism, the virtues of patriarchy) and contemporary concerns (totalitarianism, the corrupting influence of power, ecology) that inform the book. But more important than the matters discussed was the fact of the discussion in itself. At a time when most of the press media appeared uninterested in *The Lord of the Rings* except as a youthful fad, the appearance of real criticism demonstrated the limitations of such journalism. Finally, a

---

<sup>38</sup> In addition to the three children's titles mentioned above – *The Father Christmas Letters* (1976), *Mr. Bliss* (1983) and *Roverandom* (1998) – as well as there are large volumes largely related to "Middle-earth" – *The Silmarillion* (1977), *Unfinished Tales* (1980), and the *twelve* volumes comprising "The History of Middle-earth" (1984-1996).

brief notice in the library journal *Choice* provides a telling comment the second stage of the book's life in the media. *Choice* validated the book's emerging respectability when it suggested that *The Lord of the Rings* would survive "present popularity as well as former neglect" (July/August 1967). The book was, additionally, "recommended to all libraries." Demonstrations of the book's progression towards acceptability continued, in terms of attention from educators<sup>39</sup> and inclusion in literary reference works.<sup>40</sup> Subsequent events have, of course, borne out this trend; today the book remains widely read and its merits and faults are still debated in popular and academic arenas. In fact, the interests of the two previously distinct strands of discussion about Tolkien – social and literary – began to fuse during 1968. The momentum propelling the popular press' treatment of *The Lord of the Rings* fad eventually spent itself; not long afterwards the literary press began once again to consider the book a work of literature.

For *The Lord of the Rings*, finally, the 1960s were crowned with two distinct hints toward future acceptance as an enduring literary object. Interestingly, both in some sense sought to debunk the Tolkien myth. First, the Columbia University Press discussed Tolkien in the forty-first number of its series of monographic "Columbia Essays on Modern Writers." Suddenly, here was Tolkien, rubbing shoulders with Dostoevsky and

---

<sup>39</sup> For example, an article appeared in the pedagogical *English Journal* as early as November 1969 advising how *The Lord of the Rings* could be taught effectively in the classroom.

<sup>40</sup> A synopsis of *The Lord of the Rings* first appeared in the 4<sup>th</sup> Series of *Masterplots* in 1968. Inclusion in other references and series followed. However, recognition does not necessarily equate to acceptance. As Patrick Curry points out, entries pertaining to Tolkien in standard scholarly resources frequently remain cursory at best. For example *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, re-edited by Margaret Drabble in 1985, "gives Tolkien exactly thirteen lines out of 1154 [double column] pages." (Curry 1999, 84) And Curry, a writer who has published outside the Tolkien field but who clearly remains entrenched within the Tolkien camp, is not alone in denouncing the scant attention the academy is perceived to pay Tolkien. In his review of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2001), R. V. Young decries the "scandalous" omission of both Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, "men of outstanding scholarly achievements, [who] have had arguably more influence on the general reading public than any other academics of the twentieth century. ... With their unabashed Christianity and genuine popular appeal, they are beneath the notice of the postmodernist coterie, which, for all its egalitarian rhetoric, is *elitist* – that is *snobbish* – in the worst sense of the term" (Young 258).

Brecht (the authors that immediately preceded and followed Tolkien in the series) and their ilk. Granted, the essay was analogous in tone to Wilson's earlier attack; its mere existence, however, vindicated discussion of Tolkien in the academy. And second, the Harvard Lampoon published its Tolkien parody, *Bored of the Rings* (Signet). These two poles delineated a future where Tolkien could inspire both academic conferences and Burger King kiddie meals. But this future remains ineluctably grounded in events of the 1950s and '60s.

\* \* \*

To conclude, the early publication history of *The Lord of the Rings* was dominated by concerns over the nature of the work, and how a book of its type could (and eventually *did*) find an audience. These concerns attached to the book even before it was published, substantially affecting the way it ultimately appeared for sale, and how it has subsequently been perceived by the reading public. For example, one result is the division of *The Lord of the Rings*, the first "epic fantasy" (as the book has been defined by some critics), into three physical volumes. Dictated by economic prudence at Allen & Unwin, this division has subsequently inspired an entire sub-genre of sprawling, multi-volume fantasies gathered under collective titles. Also, the fact that Tolkien's publishers were baffled at how to market the book resulted in a chaotic assemblage of extreme pre-publication notices being attached to the book, an acute case of "hyblurbole," if you will.

Hence, when the book reached American reviewers and critics, they responded with some confusion. In the present, most members of the reading public have *some* preconception of *The Lord of the Rings* (although frequently wildly inaccurate), even if

they have never actually undertaken the long slog through. But when the first reviewers opened *The Fellowship of the Ring*, essentially no context existed in which to place the book. It must indeed have seemed, to allude to one of those grandiloquent prepublication notices (by C. S. Lewis), “like lightning from a clear sky; as sharply different, as unpredictable in our age as *Songs of Innocence* were in theirs.” In consequence, early reviewers were obligated not just to judge the merits of the book, but to some extent to establish a schema by which to judge those merits (of deficiencies). Perhaps it should be even more surprising how many early reviewers reacted positively to the book. And Tolkien and his publishers do appear to have been genuinely and pleasantly surprised by the book’s initial reception. Speaking of those hostile to the book, their criticisms very frequently have had less to do with *The Lord of the Rings* itself than with their aversion to the *type* of book they think it to be, and equally to the *type* of reader attracted to such books. Hostile critics did indeed point out many of the reasonable grounds on which to criticize *The Lord of the Rings*, but in many instances they also did not even seem to be reading the same book as Tolkien’s proponents and steadily increasing audience. They manifested their confusion in dismissal.<sup>41</sup>

After the initial round of reviews for the individual volumes and the period of summation that greeted the work’s completion, the discussion, which was limited to literary terms and the literary pages, appeared to have concluded. The most significant stage of public attention to *The Lord of the Rings*, however, did not take place for nearly ten more years. While Tolkien and his publishers gave every appearance of contentedness with his book’s limited but dignified success in boards – viewing it as

---

<sup>41</sup> It has become prevalent among Tolkien scholars, with some justification, to note how many of Tolkien’s harshest critics seem incapable of even reading the book. It is shocking how frequently fundamental factual error – for example, an inability even to spell the names of characters correctly – creeps into the body of hostile criticism.

“literature” – others perceived an entirely different potential audience for *The Lord of the Rings*. Only when Ace Books took advantage of the apparent confusion over American copyright law to issue the book in an inexpensive mass-market format did the true popular potential of the book appear. Within a year of paperback publication, roughly 500,000 copies were offered to the public. The treatment of *The Lord of the Rings* in soft covers suggests the existence of substantive differences between the ways hardback and paperback books are viewed. Bound in paper, the book underwent a “popularizing” transformation. In the United States, a small readership composed of intellectuals gave way before the onslaught of millions of zealous American university students.

No one, and least of all Tolkien, was prepared for this development. *The Lord of the Rings* left the book pages to appear in the front sections of newspapers around the country. The book became not just the focus of a widespread campus “cult,” but of print media attempting to describe that cult. Mainstream magazines discussed Tolkien’s popularity, attempted to assess what it said about American youth, and were generally bemused and occasionally troubled by what they “discovered.” Contentions were aired.<sup>42</sup>

Contributors to the controversy over *The Lord of the Rings* no longer simply involved

---

<sup>42</sup> That *The Lord of the Rings* was in fact controversial at one time is suggested by the fact that it was fortieth on the American Library Association’s list of the one hundred books likely to be challenged or banned during the twentieth century. At one time, Tolkien, conservative, devoutly Catholic university professor that he was, was clearly controversial. It is interesting to note, however, that *The Lord of the Rings* does not appear on the similar list compiled for the decade from 1990-2000. It seems apparent that the book is no longer identified with any “counter-culture” that might still be perceived to exist, and moreover that it has, in fact, become unremarkably, even dully, mainstream. Despite considerable joint publicity as the respective releases of the film versions of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* neared, *The Lord of the Rings* has avoided being sullied by any association with J. K. Rowling’s Potter books, fantasy works that have consistently headed the lists of books challenged over the past several years. Indeed, articles have even appeared extolling the former at the expense of the latter. It seems apparent that, as the American book reading public has become accustomed to Tolkien, the book burning public has forgotten him. One reason might be the fact that mainstream American culture, to the extent that it demonstrates any interest in books or decency at all, has had the opportunity to discover Tolkien’s shocking conventionality. Not to imply that all would-be book censors are religious fanatics or that all Christians have an interest in suppressing free expression, but this might result partly from the fact that a substantial proportion of recent books and favorable press devoted to Tolkien has appeared under the imprint of Christian publishers or in explicitly Christian media outlets.

themselves with matters of literary genre, but rather professed to investigate the fundamental issues underlying what a book said about its readers. The result, as described above, was a flurry of media attention to the *fact* that the book had become a cult object, with little attention actually paid to the book at the center of the maelstrom. In short order, confused ideas about Tolkien and his masterpiece became part of the general fabric of American popular culture. For some time, the attention of the mass print media naturally dissuaded serious appraisals of Tolkien, and only as the book's notoriety faded did critics begin once again to focus on the book itself, and began to reconsider the book on its own terms rather than as a talisman of 60s youth culture. Without the sudden explosion of attention, it seems doubtful that *The Lord of the Rings* would still attract such hostility in some circles. Nevertheless, as the natural cycle of sensationalism drew to a close, the book's longevity could no longer reasonably be doubted. Respectability, however, might still need to wait for another day.

## Works Cited

- “Ace Books Reaches Agreement with Tolkien.” *Publishers Weekly* 14 Mar. 1966: 37.
- American Book Publishing Record: 1965*. New York: Bowker, 1966.
- Aronovitz, David. *Ballantine Books: the First Decade*. Rochester, Michigan: Bailiwick Books, 1987.
- Auden, W.H. “At the End of the Quest, Victory.” *New York Times Book Review* 22 Jan. 1956: 5.
- . “The Hero is a Hobbit.” *New York Times Book Review* 31 Oct. 1954: 59-62.
- Bailey, Anthony. “Power in the Third Age of Middle Earth.” *Commonweal* 11 May 1956: 154.
- “Ballantine Books Has Paperback Rights to Tolkien.” *Publishers Weekly* 2 Aug. 1965: 44.
- Barr, Donald. “Shadowy World of Men and Hobbits.” *New York Times Book Review* 1 May 1955: 4.
- Beagle, Peter S. “Tolkien's Magic Ring.” *Holiday* June 1966: 128-134.
- Bogsch, Arpad. *Universal Copyright Convention: an Analysis and Commentary*. New York: R. R. Bowker in association with The Copyright Society of the U.S.A., 1958.
- Boroff, David. “No Big Books on Campus.” *New York Times Book Review* 10 Jan. 1965: 2, 24.
- Bramlett, Perry C. *I Am in Fact a Hobbit: an Introduction to the Life and Work of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer UP, 2003.

- Breen, Karen et al. "One Hundred Books that Shaped the Century." *School Library Journal* Jan. 2000: 50-58.
- "Brief Notes, Fiction." *New Yorker* 13 November 1954: 218-219.
- Brooks, Paul. *Two Park Street: a Publishing Memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978.
- . *Tolkien: a Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.
- Cary, George D. "The United States and Universal Copyright: an Analysis of Public Law 743." *Universal Copyright Convention Analyzed*. Eds. Theodore R. Kupferman and Mathew Foner. New York: Federal Legal Publications, 1955. 83-106.
- Crist, Judith. "Why 'Frodo Lives.'" *Ladies' Home Journal* Feb. 1967: 58.
- Curry, Patrick. "Tolkien and His Critics: a Critique." *Root and Branch – Approaches towards Understanding Tolkien*. Ed. Thomas Honegger. Zurich and Bern: Walking Tree Publishers, 1999. 81-148.
- Davis, Kenneth C. *Two-bit Culture: the Paperbacking of America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- Dempsey, David. "The Candy Covered Copyright." *Saturday Review* 2 Oct. 1965: 40, 45.
- "Don's Tales Start U.S. Campus Craze." *Times* (London) 12 Feb. 1966: 6.
- Duriez, Colin. "J. R. R. Tolkien." *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 160. Detroit: Gale Research,
- Elliott, Charles. "Can America Kick the Hobbit?" *Life* 24 Feb. 1967: 12.
- Ellmann, Mary. "Growing up Hobbitic." *New American Review* 2. 1968. 217-229.
- "The Elvish Mode." "Talk of the Town." *New Yorker* Jan. 1966: 24-25.

- Fisher, Arthur. "Foreword: Comments of the U.S. Register." *Universal Copyright Convention Analyzed*. Eds. Theodore R. Kupferman and Mathew Foner. New York: Federal Legal Publications, 1955.
- Foster, Michael. "An Unexpected Party." *Christian History* 78 Spring 2003: 42-44.
- French, Sean. *New Statesman*. 127.4374 (27 Feb. 1998): 26
- Frankel, Haskel. "Two Publishers Vie for Gold from Middle-Earth." *National Observer* 30 Aug. 1965: 19.
- Gordinier, Jeff. "Elvish Lives!" *Entertainment Weekly* 14 Dec. 2001: 40-46.
- Hamilton, Neil. *ABC CLIO Companion to the 1960s Counterculture in America*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1997.
- Hammond, Wayne G. *J.R.R. Tolkien: a Descriptive Bibliography*. New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Books, 1993.
- . "Re: JRRT's LotR PD?" E-mail to: CNI-Copyright Forum. Coalition for Networked Information. 27 February, 1996. Archived at <http://www.cni.org/Hforums/cni-copyright/1996-01/0563.html>.
- . "Whose Lord of the Rings is it, anyway?" *Canadian C.S. Lewis Journal* Spring 2000: 59-65.
- . Email correspondence on November 2, 2003.
- Heidkamp, Maria. "Hobbits, Wizards, Elves and Orcs." *Publishers Weekly* 11 Oct. 1991: 22.
- Hentoff, Nat. "Critics' Choices for Christmas." *Commonweal* 12 Dec. 1965: 284.
- "The Hobbit Habit." *Time* 15 July 1966: 48, 51.
- Hodgart, Matthew. "Kicking the Hobbit." *New York Review of Books* 4 May 1967: 10-11.

- Hooper, Walter. "Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: an Interview with Walter Hooper." *Tolkien: a Celebration*. Ed. Joseph Pearce. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001.
- Isaacs, Neil D. "On the Possibilities of Writing Tolkien Criticism." *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*. Eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo. Notre Dame UP, 1968.
- Jonas, Gerald. "Triumph of the Good." *New York Times Book Review* 31 Oct. 1965: 78-79.
- Justice, Keith. *Bestseller Index*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1998.
- Kaminstein, Abraham L. "©: Key to Universal Copyright Protection." *Universal Copyright Convention Analyzed*. Eds. Theodore R. Kupferman and Mathew Foner. New York: Federal Legal Publications, 1955.
- Kelley, George. "Ballantine Books." *Mass Market Publishing in America*. Ed. Allen Billy Crider. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982: 28-39.
- Kiely, Robert. "Middle Earth." *Commentary* Feb. 1967: 93-93.
- Lee, Billy C. "The War over Middle Earth." *Paperback Quarterly* Winter 1978: 37-42.
- Levine, Beth. "Ballantine and Houghton Mifflin Celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*." *Publishers Weekly* 5 Aug. 1988: 24-25.
- Lobdell, Jared. "Words that Sound Like Castles." *National Review* 5 Sept. 1967: 972-974.
- Mathewson, Joseph. "The Hobbit Habit." *Esquire* Sept. 1966: 130-131, 221-222.
- Norman, Philip. "The Prevalence of Hobbits." *New York Times Magazine* 15 Jan. 1967: 30-31, 97, 100-102.
- Parker, Douglass. "Hwaet We Holbytla..." *Hudson Review* 9:4 (1957): 598-609.

- Petersen, Clarence. "Another Battle of Editions is Joined." *Chicago Tribune Books Today* 15 Aug. 1965.
- Plotz, Richard. "J. R. R. Tolkien Talks about Middle-earth..." *Seventeen* Jan. 1967, 92-93, 118.
- "Professor J.R.R. Tolkien" (Obituary). *Times* (London) 3 Sept. 1973.
- Resnick, Henry. "The Hobbit-forming World of J.R.R. Tolkien." *Saturday Evening Post* 2 July 1966: 90-94.
- Sayer, George. "Recollections of J.R.R. Tolkien." *Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference, 1992*. Altadena: The Mythopoeic Press, 1995. *Mythlore* 80: 21-25.
- Schroth, Raymond A. "Lord of the Rings." *America* 18 Feb. 1967: 254.
- Shippey, Tom. *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. London: HarperCollins, 2000.
- Stevenson, Randall. *The British Novel since the Thirties: an Introduction*. Athens, Ga.: Georgia UP, 1986.
- Straight, Michael. "The Fantastic World of Professor Tolkien." *New Republic* 16 Jan. 1956: 24-26.
- Susan. "Wacky World of Tolkien Catching on with Youth." *Los Angeles Times* 31 Aug. 1966: V 4.
- Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, [n.d.].  
     [early printing containing imported sheets bound in the United States]
- . *The Fellowship of the Ring*. 14<sup>th</sup> printing. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, [n.d.].
- . *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Ace Books, 1965.
- . *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1965.
- . "For W. H. A." *Shenandoah* Winter 1967: 98-99.

- . *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Ed. Carpenter, Humphrey. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- . "Tolkien on Tolkien." *Observer* Oct. 1966. 39
- . "On Fairy Stories." *Tree and Leaf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Toynbee, Philip. "Dissension among the Judges." *Observer* 6 Aug. 1961.
- 17 United States Code. 1952.
- Unwin, Rayner. Letter. *Publishers Weekly* 9 May 1966.
- . "Publishing Tolkien." *Proceedings of the J.R.R. Tolkien Centenary Conference*.  
Altadena: The Mythopoeic Press, 1995. *Mythlore* 80. 26-29.
- Unwin, Sir Stanley. *The Truth about a Publisher: an Autobiographical Record*.  
London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960.
- . *The Truth about Publishing*. New York: Macmillan, 1960.
- Walters, Roy. "Lord of the Land: Stephen R. Donaldson." *Paperback Talk*. Chicago:  
Academy Chicago Publishers, 1985. 69-70.
- Weyr, Thomas. "Ballantine Books at Quarter Century." *Publishers Weekly* 12 Dec.  
1977: 30-33.
- Wickenden, Dan. "Heroic Tale of Tiny Folk." *New York Herald Book Review* 14 Nov.  
1954: 5.
- . "Humor, Drama, Suspense in Unique Romantic Epic." *New York Herald Book  
Review* 8 May 1955: 5.
- . "Notable Allegorical Trilogy Comes to a Triumphant End." *New York Herald  
Book Review* 5 Feb. 1956: 3.
- Wilson, Edmund. "Oo, Those Awful Orcs!" *Nation* April 14, 1956: 312-313.

Wilson, Edmund and Louise Bogan. "To Wystan Auden on His Birthday." *Shenandoah*  
Winter 1967, 43.

Wollheim, Donald A. "The Ace Tolkiens." *Lighthouse* 13 (1965): 16-18.

---. Letter to the *Saturday Review* October 23, 1965.

---. *The Universe Makers: Science Fiction Today*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Young, R.V. "Academic Suicide." *Modern Age* 44:3 (Summer 2002): 254-261.

*1966 Annual Paperbound Book Guide for Colleges*. New York: R. R. Bowker, 1966.