

"The Lord of the Rings": Cinematic British fantasy

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Abstract: Among the dazzling array of fantasy literary works, the most classic is undoubtedly the "Lord of the Rings" by British author J.R.R. Tolkien. The entire Middle-earth world system and the basic settings of the other-dimensional world he created have laid the fundamental rules for subsequent fantasy novels. Peter Jackson's film adaptation of "The Lord of the Rings" successfully brought the literary classic to the screen and won several Academy Awards, becoming the cornerstone of fantasy film art. This article analyzes the cinematic presentation of fantasy literature, taking "The Lord of the Rings" as an example, from three aspects: the creation of a tragic atmosphere, the setting of the "witness" narration, and the camerawork techniques.

Keywords: The Lord of the Rings, United Kingdom, Fantasy Literature, Cinematic Presentation

1. Introduction

Fantasy literature can be traced back to the ancient myths, which is a literary motif present in every nation. However, it was in the 20th century that fantasy literature (Fantastic Literature) officially became a sub-genre of literature, encompassing a broad field. It primarily depicts things that are considered impossible according to modern human experience and rational judgment, often involving supernatural phenomena and the interaction between humans and these phenomena, with extensive borrowing from mythological motifs. In the creation of 20th-century fantasy literature, the United Kingdom undoubtedly yielded remarkable results. At the beginning of the 20th century, Yeats had already devoted himself to the collection of Irish folk tales and created works with a fantasy flavor, such as "The Celtic Twilight," "The Secret Rose," and "The Stories of Red-Haired Hanrahan," which can be regarded as the prelude to British fantasy literature. After World War II, the UK saw the emergence of J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit," C.S. Lewis's "The Chronicles of Narnia," and J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series at the end of the 20th century, which set off a global fantasy craze. Among these dazzling works, the most classic is undoubtedly Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings," with the entire Middle-earth system and the basic settings of the other-dimensional world he created, such as the characteristics of dragons, dwarves, wizards, and the relationships between different races, laying the basic rules for subsequent fantasy novels.

At the same time, as movies gradually became the leading art form in popular culture, they formed a rather subtle relationship with literature. On one hand, movies need literature to provide vitality; the purely documentary filming technique of the early Lumière brothers was ruthlessly negated by reality. On the other hand, literature nourishes movies to expand their influence and prolong their artistic life. Among the cinematic presentations of British fantasy literature, "The Lord of the Rings," directed by New Zealand director Peter Jackson, is undoubtedly one of the most dazzling. Jackson poured a great deal of effort into the production of "The Lord of the Rings," ultimately leading the series to win several Academy Awards and become the cornerstone of fantasy film art.

2. Tragic atmosphere in LOTR series

The extensive use of special effects in The Lord of the Rings caters to the audience's increasing demand for sensory stimulation. While showcasing the inherent fantasy of the story, it also risks luring viewers into the opulent and thrilling imagery and dazzling packaging, potentially perceiving it as a mere Hollywood blockbuster. In reality, although The Lord of the Rings begins with a traditional "American hero" narrative commonly found in Hollywood films (where an ordinary person saves the world), it ultimately leads to a conclusion that is tragic in the style of a Greek hero. The words Tolkien wrote for Frodo, who, after enduring

countless hardships, returns to his peaceful Shire only to be forced to leave, were preserved in full by Jackson: "Can you still pick up the traces of your old life? How should you go on? When you have come to understand in your heart that the past is gone forever, and that some things cannot be healed even by time, some wounds are too heavy, too profound." This reflects Tolkien's aesthetic judgment at the time of writing, and Jackson also ensured that this tragic essence was maintained in the film.

Although the entire film features thrilling scenes and concludes with justice ultimately triumphing over evil, it is always permeated with a faint sense of sorrow. The movie unfolds amidst the conflict between the "extremely weak" and the "extremely powerful," successfully creating a tragic atmosphere centered on "sacrifice." In the first part, Gandalf the Grey and Boromir are sacrificed, in the second part, Haldir is sacrificed (a modification by the film from the novel), and in the third part, King Theoden of Rohan is sacrificed. Despite the seemingly happy ending where Sauron is vanquished, the ending where Frodo and Gandalf sail west still demonstrates The Lord of the Rings' inheritance of the traditional ancient Greek tragic structure. Taking the ending of *The Return of the King*, which was controversially considered "drawn out," as an example, after Aragorn ascends to the throne as the human king, Jackson devotes more than ten minutes to narrating the life of Frodo and his companions upon returning to their homeland. The peaceful and beautiful scenery of the Shire remains, Sam's joyful proposal and marriage, and Frodo's slightly melancholic appearance witnessing all this. Such a conclusion is extremely rare among Hollywood blockbusters. Jackson faithfully conveys the essence of Tolkien's original work: the tranquil and beautiful homeland no longer belongs to Frodo, who has suffered immense physical and mental devastation and can no longer live in the Shire as he once did. At the same time, defeating the enemy is by no means the end of everyone's life. It can be said that Jackson has endowed this epic masterpiece with a richer humanistic concern with a somewhat lengthy ending that is quite different from the tight rhythm in the second part.

3. LOTR series: 'Witness' narration

Krzysztof Kieslowski once introduced the concept of the "silent witness" in his films, a witness that is easily overlooked by the audience but always present, skillfully connecting several of his films into a series. [2] In subsequent discussions about Kieslowski's films, people have proposed various guesses about the "witness," including God or the director himself. However, when faced with this question, Kieslowski indicated that it was not himself, but was inspired by a writer, believing that there should be some mysterious and inexplicable elements in the film, and people notice the existence of the witness because something in the film resonates with people's subconscious. Peter Jackson also imitated this. Although *The Lord of the Rings* is divided into three movies, both the original text and the filming process are an indivisible whole. However, it is an undeniable fact that for the audience, these are three movies that need to be appreciated separately, especially since the vast majority of the audience has not read Tolkien's original work and lacks a basic understanding of the vast genealogy in fantasy novels, and their understanding of the connections between various characters and events in the novel is far from enough. Therefore, the *Lord of the Rings* series urgently needs a "witness" that can connect for the audience across thousands of years and multiple races. With instinctive artistic intuition, Jackson added the narration of Lady Galadriel in the three movies, arranging this elf woman who has experienced many vicissitudes as the witness of the entire Ring story, which is not present in the original work. [3]

At the beginning of the first film, *"The Fellowship of the Ring,"* Galadriel does not make a physical appearance, but her mysterious and deep narration has already recounted the origins of the One Ring, how it was obtained and lost by the forces of good, and fell into the hands of Gollum, seamlessly connecting with the later revelation that Bilbo obtained the Ring from Gollum. Firstly, Galadriel is a princess of the Noldor royal house. As a member of the Elf race, she possesses the characteristic of immortality and, concerned for the fate of Middle-earth, has never sailed west to the Undying Lands of Aman, enduring the separation from her daughter and other Elves who have crossed the sea. This also provides an objective guarantee for her to be a dispassionate observer of the rise and fall of Middle-earth. Secondly, this is determined by Galadriel's status. Galadriel is the Lady of Lothlórien, and although King Elrond also has a leadership role, he is actually Galadriel's son-in-law in terms of generational rank. In addition, Galadriel is one of the five members of the White Council and has faced and repelled the powerful Sauron, an honor and experience that even her husband, Celeborn, Lord of Lothlórien, does not possess. Lastly, women have a different

intuition and wisdom from men. When men are confused, Galadriel, as a woman with extensive knowledge and formidable magical power, can realize sooner than any man the inevitable trend of the world's destruction under Sauron's rule. For example, in "The Two Towers," when King Elrond solemnly watches the Elves depart from Rivendell, the film inserts Galadriel's narration predicting the future of the world, deepening the audience's understanding of Elrond's worried mood at this moment. Despite Galadriel's selfless help to the Fellowship, she remains pessimistic about the future. This can be considered a typical example of Jackson's overflowing spirit.

The director (artist) and the characters in their own film (work) must go through a certain aesthetic discovery to achieve a kind of life communication. In the original work, the image of Galadriel is somewhat thin, and what readers often remember is just her beauty and powerful magic. However, Jackson's adaptation has enriched the character of Galadriel, making her an almost omnipresent and omniscient "witness" (the film specifically shows that she can see the future in the water), and a "spectator" more sober than the men who gallop on the battlefield in the play. Her greatness lies in the fact that she did not stop at being a spectator. When the weak Frodo and others appeared, she gave them selfless help and blessings, fulfilling the elves' last responsibility in the world of the Middle-earth. Secondly, the narration helps the audience who are not very clear about the original to interpret the picture, and Galadriel's narration is not explanatory, but has a cold personal judgment as an elf. Finally, there are very few female characters in "The Lord of the Rings". Apart from Arwen and Eowyn, who have emotional entanglements with Aragorn, there are few impressive women. Although Galadriel doesn't appear much, her narration outlines the plot, and appears repeatedly in front of the audience's eyes and ears, achieving a balance in character gender.

4. LOTR: camerawork techniques

"The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," the third installment of the series, won the Academy Award for Best Film Editing on behalf of the entire The Lord of the Rings trilogy. After the Fellowship of the Ring was scattered in the first film, the entire movie essentially entered a mode of "triple narrative" and "dual narrative," which undoubtedly enhanced the watchability of the plot for the film. Due to the differences in the characters' routes and experiences, there are significant stylistic differences between the different narrative threads. How to grasp the audience's viewing emotions undoubtedly poses higher demands on the film's editing.

Overall, Tolkien's original work adopts a simple and straightforward narrative method, presenting the plot in chronological order, which undoubtedly takes into account the epic style of the novel. However, for the film, the director must provide the audience with a suitably dense climax experience during the three-hour viewing process. Moreover, since the mode of film appreciation cannot allow the audience to repeatedly appreciate or revisit a certain plot, the interweaving of different narrative threads can serve as a reminder to the audience. Jackson was clearly not satisfied with the original presentation method; he divided the entire process of destroying the One Ring into two parts. One part expresses the main theme of the original work, that is, the seemingly weak Hobbits destroyed a small ring, thereby saving a big world. This part mainly depicts the arduous journey of Sam and Frodo. The other part undertakes to create visual wonders and provide the audience with a shocking experience of life and death, highlighting the style of fantasy novels, and also bears the heavy responsibility of showcasing the commercial value of a big movie. This part mainly shows the large-scale combat of Aragorn, Gandalf, and others against the forces of Mordor or Isengard, and the visual style of this narrative line shows more complexity and diversity compared to the former, with more use of moving shots, color, and pyrotechnics.

Specifically, when the clear and loud horn of Rohan's cavalry resounds from the depths of Helm's Deep in "The Two Towers," just as the audience's emotions have been slightly eased, the film cuts to the Dead Marshes, where Frodo and Sam are struggling to move forward and getting closer to the dark shadow of Mordor. In "The Return of the King," when the White City of Gondor is under attack by the Ringwraiths and the flames of evil are blazing, the scene shifts, and Frodo and Sam have already entered the territory of Mordor, crossing the eerie and terrifying spider caves. Subsequently, when the allied forces of Gondor and Rohan launch a suicide charge in front of the Black Gate to divert Sauron's attention, Frodo and Sam, who have reached the limit of their physical strength, are getting closer and closer to their destination, Mount Doom, crawling forward in the scorching flames. From these three examples of editing, it is not difficult to

see that Jackson's way of handling the camera is not a reproduction of the original work, nor is it a documentary expression, but an arrangement made after rational consideration. There is a contrast between the two lines, one grand and the other mysterious, with one side magnificent and the other side full of fantasy. However, in terms of emotion, the two lines are increasingly unified, from the initial opposition of joy and sorrow to the later situation where both lines are in a desperate situation, the audience can feel the tense atmosphere in this kind of camera switching and worry about the protagonist's situation. However, just as all hope seems to be about to be shattered, and all the resistance of the just world is about to fail, Frodo, after a great deal of internal struggle, finally completes the mission, and the ring is completely destroyed with Gollum falling into the magma, and the narrative reaches a climax. Jackson originally wanted to arrange a decisive battle between Aragorn and Sauron at the Black Gate, but in the end, he gave up this idea considering Tolkien's original intention. No matter how shocking the battle on the side of the king, it is to serve the struggle of will between Frodo and the ring. Therefore, in the film, when Aragorn turns his head before charging, he says "For Frodo." Although Frodo's will ultimately fails, the task he undertakes to destroy the ring and the process of people, elves, dwarves and other races who desire freedom to unite to fight against evil is enough to make people admire.

"The Lord of the Rings" is a legendary reproduction of the original work in terms of imagery, representing a win-win situation between commerce and art, literature and film. It serves as an important window for understanding the cinematic presentation of British fantasy literature. If fantasy literature stimulates the human brain, then film serves the human eye. Through the long-term and arduous work of the film's creators, it helps the audience to understand the original work in front of the screen in a short time, to obtain sensory pleasure, and ultimately to achieve a spiritual satisfaction similar to reading the original work. As the spiritual demands of the audience continue to increase, works that strive for excellence like "The Lord of the Rings" will still have a huge market.

5. Conclusion

Fantasy novels, as a literary genre, have flourished in the United Kingdom since the 20th century, with J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" series setting a benchmark not only in literature but also creating a classic in the realm of cinema. By analyzing the literary and cinematic expressions of "The Lord of the Rings," this article reveals its profound tragic hues, unique narrative structure, and exquisite cinematic language. It demonstrates the perfect fusion of fantasy literature with the art of film and their potential to meet the spiritual needs of a modern audience.

6. References

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