

'Turning Imagination into Reality'

A Study on the works of J. R. R. Tolkien

Mr. Ashar Khan

*Assistant Professor School of Arts & Humanities Career Point University Kota, India
Email: asharkhan394@gmail.com*

Abstract:

“One Ring to rule them all.

One Ring to find them.

One Ring to bring them all , and in the darkness bind them.”

With these few classic lines, an English writer established a legacy that is being read, depicted, played out, investigated, and, most importantly, cherished even today. All who dare to take up the book 'The Lord of the Rings' will find themselves in the fictitious land of Arda. Tolkien infused the narrative of a long fight between good and evil, between what is easy and what is right, into his writings. His stories featured all of the qualities required to produce not just a best-seller, but a book that will be remembered for a long time. His works are interlaced with myths, magic, art, culture, and languages, but what stands out the most is the inspiration they bring to the reader. The sense of righteousness and heroism when Aragorn delivered the combat speech at Mordor's Black Gates, or the sense of futility and grief when Frodo sung a song in memory of Gandalf the Wizard after he died protecting his comrades. Tolkien took most of his ideas from his early life and the conflicts he had to fight throughout his lifetime, therefore the planet of Arda has a striking similarity to our own.

Keywords—Fiction, The Lord of the Rings, Languages, Mythology, Fiction

I. INTRODUCTION TO FANTASY

The fantasy genre is not a new phenomenon. Magical and mythical tales have been with us since humans first began telling stories. Since time immemorial, we have been captivated by the concept of something that is not natural, but supernatural. Literary fiction gives us the opportunity for escapism that we so urgently need. To escape our daily life and get immersed in a magical realm. Fantasy authors explore topics by building their own worlds, where dragons battle in the skies, extra-terrestrial diplomats struggle to keep peace between planets, and unusual species cohabitate Earth with humans, unfettered by science and societal norms. [1]

Fantasy is not tied to reality or any scientific facts. There have been books where writers superimpose a real-world setting with some fantastical elements (like Harry Potter Series by J.K. Rowling), or where writers create entire universes from their minds unto paper, a universe with its laws of physics, imaginary races and creatures (like Stormlight Archive by Brandon Sanderson).

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, falls in the category of High or Epic Fiction. These are the stories which take place in a different land, with a whole new set of magical creatures and different races like that of elves and dwarves. The book follows several different kingdoms, languages and cultures. Set in the continent of Middle-Earth, tells a tale of a well-developed hero, Frodo Baggins who undertake an epic quest with his friends. Other fantasy genres include Low fantasy, dark fantasy, fables, fairy tales and superhero fiction.

1.1 Life Of J.R.R. Tolkien

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien or as he is more popularly known, J.R.R. Tolkien, was born on January 3rd, 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa. He was an English writer, poet, linguist, philologist and an academic. When he was just four years old, his father, a bank manager, died. His mother then moved the family to Birmingham, England. On her death in 1904, Tolkien and his brother became wards of a Catholic priest, who nurtured them.

Four years later, at the age of 16, Tolkien fell in love with an orphan Edith Bratt. His guardian disapproved of this relation and made Tolkien keep a vow that he will never talk to the girl until his 21st birthday. Tolkien, a devout Roman Catholic, kept the promise. Meanwhile, he completed his school and college education. [2]

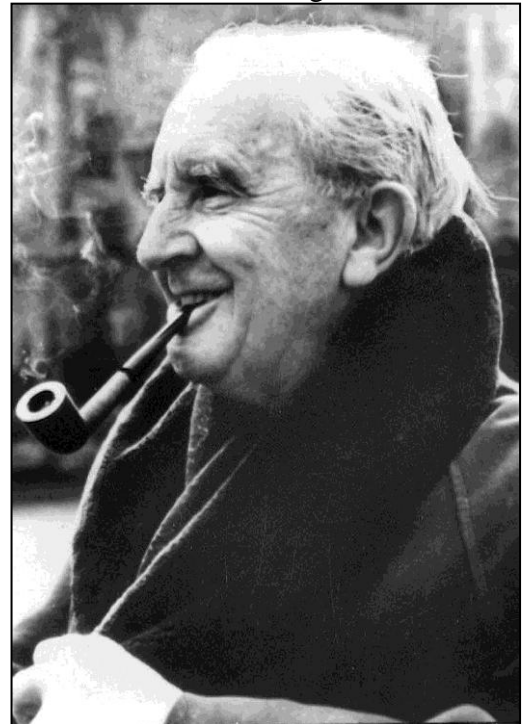
On his 21st birthday, Tolkien wrote to Edith asking for her hand in marriage. She was reluctant at first, as she had already accepted someone else's proposal. But after Tolkien met her, she rejected the other offer and agreed to marry Tolkien. They were engaged in January 1913. In one of his letters, Tolkien expressed great admiration towards his wife for her willingness to marry a man with no job, title, money or prospect, except the likelihood to be killed in the Great War. [3]

Later in 1914, when Britain entered the First World War, Tolkien elected to not volunteer for the British Army. Instead, he entered a program by which he delayed his enlistment until the completion of his college degree. He completed his degree of B.A from Exeter College, Oxford in 1915. About a year later, he received a telegram about his posting in France.

On 3 November 1920, Tolkien was demobilised and left the army, retaining his rank of Lieutenant. Initially, he started working at the Oxford English Dictionary. In 1920, he began working as a reader in English language at the University of Leeds, where he was the youngest member of the academic staff. [3]

Tolkien was the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon and a Fellow of Pembroke College at the University of Oxford from 1925 until 1945. He then became Merton Professor of English Language and Literature and Fellow of Merton College at the same university. From 1945 until his retirement in 1959, he held these posts.

Following his father's death in 1973, Christopher Tolkien released a succession of publications based on his father's notes and unpublished manuscripts, including *The Silmarillion*.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many published and unpublished works of Tolkien. This paper will focus on three main narratives. They are:

1. The Silmarillion
2. The Hobbit
3. The Lord of the Rings

Tolkien started writing a really distinct and elaborate series of fantasy tales. They were mostly dark and sorrowful. He set all of his stories in a world of his own creation. He called this first series 'Legendarium', which later on came to be known as 'The Silmarillion'.

Originally intended as a method of creating his own world — one that could accommodate his huge (and still-growing) Elvish languages — Tolkien quickly discovered that his children, like their father, sought worlds full of heroes, myths, and stories. Given that his fantasy tales in this 'legendarium' were a little too dark for a toddler's ears, however, Tolkien set about creating a lighter, more lively, humorous tale to entertain his children. [4]

And thus began the tale of Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit who lived in a house under the earth. But before that, the world of Arda was created.



Fig. 1 A Map of Middle Earth, where the incidents of the books took place.

1. The Silmarillion (1977)

If we talk about Tolkien's life and the chronology of Middle-Earth, the tales of The Silmarillion came first, but the book was published about 4 years after his death. The Silmarillion contains the stories from

the Three Ages of Tolkien's Middle Earth, arranged by Christopher Tolkien as per the chronicle order, under the explicit instruction of his father's.

Tolkien started writing the tales of the Silmarillion in 1917, when he was posted in France. Tolkien continued writing on these stories of fabled creatures. He even invented new languages to be used in his work. [6]

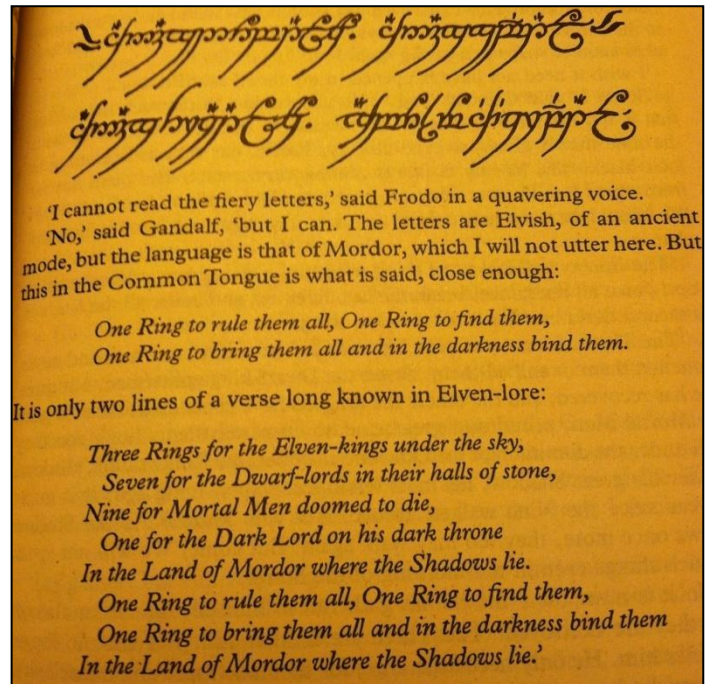
The stories in the Silmarillion deals mainly with the early history of the Middle-Earth. It tells how the world of Arda was created and the beings which eventually came to be known as Elves came into existence. It talks about the battles which were fought and a few elves who were exiled.

One of the many stories that shines out from the First Age of the Middle Earth is the story of a mortal man, Beren and Lúthien, who was an Elvish princess. Their union was frowned upon as this was the first time in Middle-Earth where a mortal Man fell in love with an immortal Elf. This story reflects the story of Tolkien and his wife, Edith. When Edith passed away in 1971, Tolkien had the word 'Lúthien' engraved on her tombstone. When Tolkien died in 1973, he was buried in the same grave, with 'Beren' added to his name.

The principal story of Tolkien's books revolves around the creation of the Rings of Power. The Dark Lord Sauron, servant of Morgoth, created a set of magical rings and gave them to the different races of Middle Earth, telling them that these rings contain strength and will provide great power and skills to each race.

As the poem goes in the book, three rings were given to the Elves, seven rings to the Dwarves and nine rings of power were given to the race of Men. These rings held power and all the races flourished with their effects, but they were all deceived. For the Dark Lord forged another ring in secret. And in this ring, he poured his malice, his evil spirit and his will to dominate all other races. This was the One Ring.

The climax of the Silmarillion follows a war between the evil Dark Lord Sauron with his armies of evil creatures called orcs against the Last Alliance of Men and Elves as they marched against the armies of Mordor. The battle was won, the enemy was defeated but the One Ring survived and was believed to be lost amidst the chaos.



2. *The Hobbit* (1937)

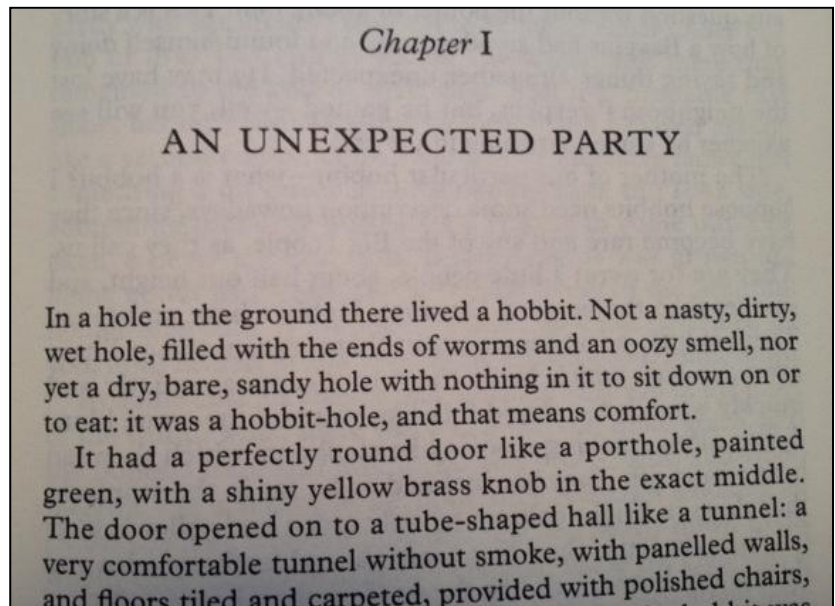
In 1930, Tolkien started working on another story about a hobbit and his adventures. The story began unexpectedly one day when Tolkien was simply grading some essays and came across a blank page and wrote a simple sentence on it.

'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit'

The Hobbit was mainly an adventure story where the main protagonist goes on a quest-like journey to achieve a goal. Tolkien uses hobbits to show that courage can develop in the smallest of creatures.

Hobbits, as Tolkien described, are a branch of the specifically human race (not Elves or Dwarves). [5]

The Hobbits reside in a faraway part of the continent called The Shire. They are prone to live a secluded and peaceful lives. Their lives and existence usually go unnoticed by the other races like Men, Dwarves and Elves.



One day, a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins is visited by a wizard called Gandalf who sets him off on an adventure with 13 dwarves, in search of Dragon's Gold, which was the major theme of the novel. A dragon called Smaug had taken over the Dwarven kingdom 'Erebor' long ago and had taken control over the mountain and all the treasure. Thorin, the leader of the company and the rightful heir of the Kingdom of Erebor seeks to kill the dragon and claim the treasure for his kith and kin. Bilbo's help is needed to sneak past the dragon and let the other dwarves into the mountain so that they can slay the dragon.

During the events of The Hobbit, Bilbo and the dwarves are captured by goblins and taken underground in their caves. Bilbo manages to slip away and unexpectedly comes across a creature named Gollum, with whom he plays a game of riddles. Bilbo bests Gollum and finds a gold ring in a deep underground cave, which used to belong to Gollum. Bilbo soon discovers that the ring has the power to make its wearer invisible. He uses the ring to turn invisible and then uses it against Gollum and the goblins to escape and free the dwarves in the process. Bilbo decides to keep the ring, without ever realizing the importance of the ring that he carried in his pocket casually.

Bilbo's skills, stealth and cunningness and his hard-won self-knowledge allows him to demonstrate the "indomitable courage of small people against great odds" when he is able to save Dwarves, Elves and Men from falling into a suicidal war against one another, after Smaug the dragon has been killed and the treasure is freed. After that, Bilbo returns home.

By 1932, Tolkien had completed a manuscript that he shared with his Oxford friends, but most of them saw the book as a simple children's story. Stanley Unwin published the book in 1937, with a cover designed by Tolkien himself and decorated with Old English runes. A first edition of 1,500 sold out quickly, and the book was published in the United States by Houghton Mifflin early in 1938. [6]

Since the book was an immediate success, the publisher asked Tolkien to plan a sequel for The Hobbit. The situation in Europe was dire, and to portray that dark feeling of hopelessness and bravery, Tolkien started working on a sequel which eventually became the reason for his most famed success.

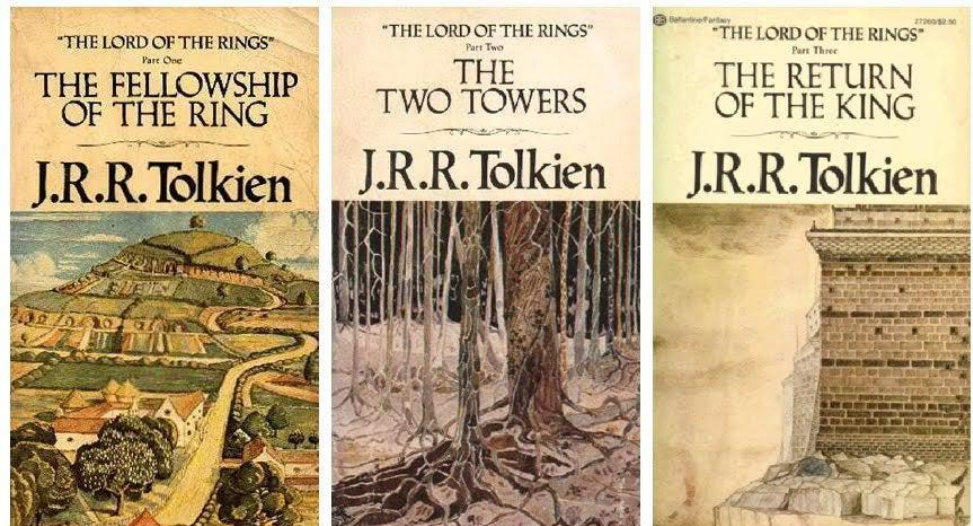
3. The Lord of the Rings (1954)

The Lord of the Rings is the most famed achievement of Tolkien's literary career, for which he is chiefly admired and remembered. Tolkien wanted his other book 'The Silmarillion' to get published first, but the publisher Allen & Unwin were not so enthusiastic about it. As the public was rather interested in the future of the Middle Earth, rather than its past. Instead, they asked for a sequel for The Hobbit. During the first years of World War II, Tolkien worked on his manuscript, while dealing with his other responsibilities as well. But all work regarding the sequel was put on halt during 1943. He started it again

in 1944, when his son Christopher was serving in the Royal Air Force. He started sending him bits of stories to cheer him up and to remind him of his childhood. By the end of the war, book 4 was finished. Tolkien took another few years to edit and remove any inconsistencies from the manuscript. By 1949, after almost an entire decade, the book was finished. [7]

The finished manuscript was about 1200+ pages long. It was difficult to publish it as one long book. The Lord of the Rings introduced a much larger scale of picture than the earlier stories. Even though Tolkien was strictly against the idea, but eventually, the book titled 'The Lord of the Rings' was split into 3 separate books (further divided internally into 2 parts each) and sold separately. The titles of the 3 novels are:

1. The Fellowship of the Ring (1954)
2. The Two Towers (1954)
3. The Return of the King (1955)



The story begins about 60 years later with Bilbo Baggins, who lives in the Shire. It's his 111th birthday and he organised a birthday party where everyone is invited. During the party, Bilbo wears his magic ring and vanishes. It is the same ring that once belonged to the creature known as Gollum, from whom Bilbo took this ring and kept it for himself in The Hobbit. Bilbo goes to his home and removes the ring. He is discovered by his adopted heir, Frodo. It is later revealed by the Wizard Gandalf that this magic ring is indeed the One Ring of Sauron.

Even though, Sauron's physical body was destroyed. His spirit survived with the One Ring. It yearns to be reunited with its master. As long as the Ring exists, Sauron has a chance of coming back to power. Frodo along with his trusted hobbit friend Samwise Gamgee, goes to the Valley of Imladris where the elf Lord Elrond called for a secret council of the Free Folks. Free Folks here refer to the races of Men, Elves and Dwarves. As the representative of each race is present in the meeting, they reach a consensus that the One Ring must be destroyed. Its power is to corrupt and too evil to be wielded by anyone. It can only be destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom, where it was created, so that its power can never dominate Middle-Earth again.

Frodo volunteers to be the Ringbearer, even though he did not know the way. He is given company by Sam, Merry and Pippin, hobbits from The Shire. Gandalf the Wizard, along with great warriors of Men i.e., Aragorn and Boromir, Legolas the elf and Gimli the dwarf also agrees to accompany him to Mordor safely. And so, the nine of them (also referred to as The Company or The Fellowship) sets out on an epic journey to Mordor. They face countless difficulties in their journey. Soon, the fellowship breaks as they are attacked and each party goes on their separate ways.

The story is then told from different perspectives as the characters all experience different struggles. Splitting the fellowship enabled Tolkien to cover a much larger area of Middle-Earth as compared to his previous book. From the kingdoms of Rohan and Gondor to the Fangorn Forest, Isengard, the tower cities of Minas Ithil and Minas Tirith and then eventually to Mordor for the big finale, where our brave heroes

fought their last stand against the foul orcs of Mordor, so that Frodo and Sam can sneak pass the enemy to the end of Mount Doom.

The entire tale is one compelling journey from the first page where we first meet Bilbo till the last when the fellowship succeeds in their mission. It is a vast panoramic contest between good and evil, played out against the backdrop of Tolkien's mythology as presented in The Silmarillion.

It is frequently stated that this work is not a novel in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a "fairy-story" of the type defined by Tolkien in his renowned essay on the genre: It presents a world invented through an act of imagination that requires a "secondary belief" on the part of the reader; it allows us to see the world in a new light and escape from the ugliness of contemporary industrialization and the woes of the universal human condition; and it ends with a eucatastrophe (a sudden happy plot turn) that reflects what Tolkien considered the transcendent truth of miraculous grace. [7]

III. LANGUAGES & DIALECTS

In many works of fiction, authors will invent spectacular new languages for their envisioned odd new realms. Among the most renowned are the languages invented by J. R. R. Tolkien for his fictitious universe, generally referred to as Middle-earth, and which serve as the foundation for The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings trilogy. Tolkien is regarded as a linguistic genius because of his innovative ability to create these new and difficult languages. He was fluent in a number of established languages, including Latin, Greek, and Spanish, as well as various old Germanic languages such as Gothic, Old Norse, and Old English. His discovery of the Finnish language, however, was what truly motivated him.

The world that Tolkien created is filled with different creatures, each with their own unique languages, dialect and accents.

- A. *The Elvish Language*: One of the most famous and widely used language in Tolkien's books and the movies which have been adapted on them. The Elvish language family is a collection of languages that have a common ancestor known as the proto-language, also known as Primitive Quendian. [8]
- B. *The Dwarvish Language*: The secret language of the Dwarves was called Khuzdul. According to The Silmarillion, Aulë, the creator of the first Dwarves, taught them "the language he had invented for them," implying that Khuzdul is a manufactured language.
- C. *Languages of Men*: Despite the fact that the languages of Men of Middle-Earth were numerous, the most of them were only referenced in his writings. He did, however, create grammar and vocabulary for at least three languages called Taliska, Adûnaic, and the Soval Pharë, which were spoken by both Hobbits and Men in the Third Age. Soval Pharë was the common speech, or Westron in English, comes closest to being a lingua franca in Middle-Earth particularly during the time period of The Lord of the Rings. Other less developed languages included languages called Dalish (derived from the Old Norse), Rohirric (derived from Anglo-Saxon) and Rhovanian (derived from Gothic). [8]
- D. *The Black Speech*: It is usually spoken by the orcs of Mordor, the black volcanic plain of evil. Tolkien depicted the language as an artificial language invented by Sauron to be the only language of all Mordor's slaves, while replacing the other dialects of Orkish and other dialects spoken by the orcs. The most famous quote of this language remains to be the poem of the 'One Ring' in Black Speech. (refer to Image)

Apart from these languages, there are several other languages that are mentioned in the books such as Entish (the language of the Ents), Haradrim, Dunlendish, Haladin and Easterling. But not much detail about them is known.

IV. MYTHS IN TOLKIEN'S WORK

Tolkien's novels and writings have been placed in the list of twenty greatest literary works of the twentieth century. The key reason for this choice was mentioned as Tolkien's ability to establish an alternate civilization with a fully formed system of morality and beliefs. Tolkien's mythical stories are significant, and they need serious consideration. Most of his inspiration comes from Norse mythology he learnt as a child, but also from his religious upbringing as a Roman Catholic.

"Tolkien at about the age of eighteen conceived the idea of recreating the '*Northernness*' that delighted him by writing a cycle of myth and legend." [9]

The creation of Arda resembles closely with the story of creation of the Norse mythology. Norse mythology gives heavy importance on the number nine. Nine worlds, The God Odin hung for 9 days and night on the tree Yggdrasil, The god Heimdall, who was born from nine mothers. Similarly, in the works of Tolkien, the number nine is greatly stressed upon. Frodo and his companions were nine. Nine rings were given to the race of Men, who then turned into the nine wraiths. The word Midgard in Norse myths is used for the Earth. It won't be too far-fetched to say that it is from there that Tolkien took inspiration to call his imaginary land 'Middle-earth'. Rings represents great power in Norse mythology.

Gandalf, the wandering wizard, represents the Norse God Odin, who was also famous for appearing to travellers as strangers and give them counsel. Both Gandalf and Odin use runes in their magic.

Even though Tolkien was a devout Catholic all his life, he never considered that his stories and books contained Christian themed stories. There are instances where certain characters appear as biblical figures, such as Gandalf coming back from the dead by resurrection etc.

V. ONGOING LEGACY

One does not simply use the word 'legacy' lightly. It involves leaving a type of cultural, historical, or social imprint that, over time, becomes so ingrained in the fabric of society that it is no longer possible to erase. Such is the legacy of Tolkien's Middle-Earth and its stories.

While many other authors had produced fantasy works before Tolkien, the enormous popularity of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* resulted in a popular resurgence and the creation of the contemporary fantasy genre. As a result, Tolkien is often regarded as the "father" of contemporary fantasy literature or, more accurately, high fantasy. The Times named him sixth in their list of "the 50 best British authors since 1945" in 2008.

The series has sold over 150 million copies since the first publication of *The Hobbit* in 1937. It has been translated into over 70+ languages. The current value of the first edition copy of the original trilogy is over £28,000.

The Lord of the Rings has been successfully adapted into three separate movies by New Line Cinema, directed by Peter Jackson, from 2001 to 2003. The series was successful and it performed really well economically and won numerous Oscars. From 2012 to 2014, Warner Bros. and New Line Cinema also released the movie adaptation of *The Hobbit*. It was also adapted into three films, with Peter Jackson serving as executive, producer, director and co-writer. A biographical drama film '*Tolkien*' was also released in 2019, about the early orphaned life of J.R.R. Tolkien. Recently, Amazon acquired the global television rights to *The Lord of the Rings*, for a series of new stories set before the events of *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Apart from the movies and tv series, Tolkien's books have been used as inspiration to countless artworks, radio shows, animated shows and board games.

Apart from that, the mountains on Titan (Saturn's largest moon) have been named after such as Mount Doom, Moria and Angmar. There are mountains in Canada named after the characters of his book series, such as Mount Gandalf and Mount Aragorn. The Tolkien Society also observes a Tolkien Reading Day on 25 March every year, encouraging students to read and experience the works of Tolkien.

VI. CONCLUSION

A sophisticated, thorough, and plausible mythology/legendarium is typically created by an entire people over many generations. Tolkien accomplished this feat alone and in his lifetime. It meant simply that in a little over half a century, Tolkien constructed a large universe of his own, with languages and topography and history of its own stretching back millennia, and that he produced it all out of his own head. Which made him its lone link to the world around us.

Indeed, any praise sung about these masterpiece of literature falls short in front of the grandeur and greatness of these literary composition, written by a man who faced loss, heartbreak, poverty and devotion. A man who not only fought but survived both the World Wars as well. His stories tell a beautiful tale of love, sacrifice, kindness and bravery. It tells us not about something that there already is, but what could be? His was the world of brave men, elves, dwarves and hobbits. Through his stories, he told us about how the smallest of man can alter the destiny of the entire world. That is the reason he still lives on in the hearts of men.

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