J.R.R. Tolkien with regard to the Counterculture

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is to make analysis of J.R.R. Tolkien’s views and positions, through the *Lord of the Rings*, to the modernization and the stream of the social consciousness by the Industrial Revolution, and the counter culture.

Key words: Counterculture, Modernity, Tradition

A Written Tradition and Culture to A Spoken Tradition and Culture

I am not sure whether or not *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the best books of the 20th century, but I do agree that it is an authoritatively prominent piece of work against modernity, questing for human ephemeral, evanescent existence. The book is a reflective sorrow. *The Lord of the Rings* was first published in 1968 as a trilogy and fascinated public consciousness, presenting the challenge to the notion of modernity: various experiences of the modern age, the Industrial Revolution, the battles against Nazism, the Cold War, the repercussion against it, etc. Tolkien unconditionally disagreed with modernity and modernism, and this is the crux of his allegory and this is the fundamental principle of Tolkien’s philosophy. This is the
reason why so powerfully *The Lord of the Rings* appeals to some people as much as disgusts others. It was forecasted that it would become a work of forgetfulness, nonetheless, it still has the solid and long-term popularity. *The Lord of the Rings* is profound and intricate. It is so bold in scale and emotionally traditional. It is recognized anomalously, without comparison, but not all the academics accept it as an indisputable work of art, I should mention.

Since the film, *The Lord of the Rings*, was released, Tolkienian has become popular in a fanatic fever. A piece of work like *The Lord of the Rings* has two extreme opinions: some people love the piece of work and others hate it. We can not bear it or find some line in between. For me, I like Tolkien's work and I like Tolkien's being weary of life and pessimistic. I like Tolkien’s storylines which are neither sarcastic nor suspicious, but melancholic, laudable, catastrophic, and sometimes humorous. It is no exaggeration to say that the literary genre in the 20th century did not take up the main attribute of the modern culture. Tolkien's work which is very English in essence, however, formulated and designed new novelties and modernism, which the public craved for to the 20th century literary field. Both Tolkien himself as an intellectual and the legendary, a linguistic and philosophical description, in short, a work of reconstructive myth and romance, are dealt with, in *The Lord of the Rings*. Still, the morality is very much of the 20th century. Moreover, *The Lord of the Rings* takes a role as a struggle for the Tolkienian spirit, that is the chronicle and framework of languages and the academic authority of philology. For Tolkien, linguistics and philology are totally different disciplines. The theme of philology is a literary and cultural understanding.

*The Lord of the Rings* is described to be naive, simple, adolescent, raw, natural, even righteous and dignified. It is regarded to be an unreal,
imaginative fantasy, to the conservatism, but for Tolkien, it is not a fantasy but a true myth written by a religious Christian. It is an intensely conventional piece of work, a poem for forlorn narratives and lost epochs. It is a manifestation of motivation and encouragement to the vigorous environmental development and a fundamental substance of the 1960's counterculture. Tolkien did not try to write a modern fiction but try to write and recreate and modernize ancient myth. *The Lord of the Rings* is an expression of grief of the destruction of the pastoral life and scenery of England by the Industrial Revolution, machinery in Matthew Arnold’s term. *The Lord of the Rings* is not the imagination but the manifestation that Tolkien tried to retrieve truth.

“Faith in machinery is, I said, our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it had a value in and for itself. What is freedom but machinery? what is population but machinery? what is coal but machinery? What are railroads but machinery? what is wealth but machinery?” what are, even, religious organizations but machinery? Now almost every voice in England is accustomed to speak of these things as if they were precious ends in themselves, and therefore had some of the characters of perfection indisputably joined to them.,,,”¹

For Tolkien, the kingdom of Middle-earth is not a fiction or imagination but the retrieval of something sincere and true that had lost in the theme and development of modernity. The central quality of Tolkienian literature is the escape from material and political progress, in short, the modernity. Tolkien had the spirit of the counterculture and was fond of trees and hated machines. Furthermore, he did not support modern views of egalitarianism
and classlessness.

The Counterculture

The concept of culture is derived from the idea of social groups, denoted by language, nationality, religion, descendants, and traditional foundations. Culture is a multifaceted network that brings people together in various environment and social structures of various degrees. Could culture in effect change primary human perception and understanding? A class consciousness existed, in the 18th and 19th century, between a high culture and a low culture. This consciousness was not supported by the popular culture where mass-produced consumption is applied. The representation of sociology and literary criticism called for Marxism in the late 20th century, which focus was on the analysis of subcultures in industrial, capitalist societies.

Counterculture is a term to explain a type of cultural group and imply a noteworthy, perceptible experience, and it grasps judgmental and analytical group and carries on for a period of time. It is a term to depict social thoughts or physical stance that does not agree with conventional public rules. Counterculture is a totally new form of culture, where industrial, capitalist culture is not supported, nor is regeneration movement welcome in counterculture. Countercultural suggestions exist more or less in all societies. The features of the counterculture deny political, social commitment, in force, with the conventional. A counterculture, that the desire, ambitions, the established social order, new theories about cultural and personal identity, and objectives of a specific group are expressed, is a social manifestation of the current of the times. The values and rules of life of a cultural group in counterculture oppose to those of the then social and
cultural conventions.

The observable facts to characterize the counterculture stand for freedom: sex, drugs, music, and art as the expression of freedom: freedom for individual expression, freedom to discover one's potentiality, freedom to establish one's Self, freedom from hierarchy. A pop group like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones came out a new form of music, the pop music. Another observable facts to characterize the counterculture stand for the attitude of opening out to originality and to features of individual life, that the most apparent witness is the hippie, who lived outside of the confirmed structure and constructed their own communities. However, it does not mean that the hippie was accepted fully within the counterculture. The hippie had their own values and ethics, that caused an extensive extensive obstruction within the counterculture. The hippie imposed their own morals and ethics on other people, and the hippie were kept away from obstinately. In the end, the hippie were predisposed to be isolated, and this jeopardized mutual engagements and achievements. The hippie formed without the counterculture.

Nonetheless, the counterculture development does not necessarily oppose en bloc and sometimes becomes even a well-accepted fashion. A group that accomplished its performance within the counterculture is, for example, a musical group, a pop group. Some of the groups did not last long, but this does not mean they were failures.

The counterculture development took a place in the West, first. The counterculture of the 1960's and 70's in the States mainly started off from a college. Not only college students but also other young people joined to develop the counterculture. The younger generation in the States began to characterize themselves as a group that intended to initiate a new kind of the social order, and this impetus grew into a counterculture. I was a
student in the States in those days and I saw clearly the students’, both of a high school and of a college, corollary against the political air of the US government’s martial involvement in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was much criticized and the military draft system of the States has become a major issue for the opposition to the War. The War took a significant role to spread the concerns of racial prejudice, drugs, women’s rights, and it directed the art and style of life into money-oriented support of the American Dream.

The counterculture is demonstrated not only in literature, art, and music, but also in the law, business, technologies, sciences, and other realms, and some of them were not always improvised, but they were constant and long-standing. One of the productive creations, I would say, from the counterculture in the 1960’s and 70’s is the computerized skill for communication. The emergence of a computer is one of the demonstrations of the West counterculture. The advancement and expansion of a computer is clearly the demonstration of the counterculture in business and technologies. A computer and networking system is the emergence from the socially nonconformist, unconventional, free spirit group for another shape of the 20th century.

However, the people, who have established and developed the counterculture, do not necessarily ignore fidelity. They took on psychedelic music, fashion, art, drugs, premarital sex, philosophy, etc, in short, an unconventional way of life: the counterculture. But, they did not, of necessity, intend to make themselves stand out with “the counterculture”, despite the way how they looked from the outside witnesses. They moderated their way of life and profitably reached something alongside others. Gradually, they dissociated themselves from, so-called, the counterculture. They maintained principles, fashion, art, fundamental philosophy and values and
communal standard of their background. The counterculture took in or was taken in with the mainstream of the previous, conventional culture. The tradition and custom of the 1960's and 70's counterculture is still a major issue to dispute in terms of creating a new kind of society.

The scandalous and sensational journalism for the personal, informal and secret statements is another form that appeared in the late 20th century media counterculture. The journalism was so popularized by the public that it was even concerned that such journalism identifies social standard and rules. The emergence of this type of journalism is the media upheaval in the 20th century, which is highly suggestive between normality and abnormality in terms of the behaviour of people and of a society itself as a whole. The media counterculture in the 20th century created statement culture. The term, "Conventional Counterculture" means a growing youth movement that rejects psychedelic music, fashion, art, drugs, alcohol, pre-marital sex, philosophy, etc. The young people in conventional counterculture disagree with the racial, religious, political discrimination.

Tolkien's whole practiced life has been in the universities, but ironically, his work had not been appreciated straightforwardly in the academics. His work was considered to be rather extraordinary than a fashionable movement. It was not until the growth and development of the Cultural Studies in the middle of 70's that Tolkien's work started to receive the attention and interest. Tolkien is a philologist. The Cultural Studies had its birth in the academics, whereas Tolkien as a philologist was not a central figure of the academics in the Cultural Studies. Would Tolkien have exercised both the assessment in his philology and the meaning of his novel? Furthermore, as the media analysis has grown to be a part of the major prospectus in the Cultural Studies, The Lord of the Rings in a form of a
motion picture with much computerized technique was focused on and hasecome very popular. This is a mass cultural trend. The motion picture of
The Lord of the Rings has won benefit over the book of The Lord of the
Rings, owing to the development and establishment of the media analysis in
the Cultural Studies, although a motion picture leaves out the characteris-
tically cultural substance of the book, I would argue.

The Dialectic between Orality and Literacy: The Lord of the Rings

There are three consecutive technologies in communication, in modern
culture: a technology by writing, a technology by speaking, and a technol-
ogy by a central processing unit, a computer. Here, I would like to make
analysis of the key concepts in J.R.R. Tolkien's work, in particular, The
Lord of the Rings, to be precise, the dialectic between orality and literacy,
within the purview of the articulation of cultural significance and charac-
ter. Why is The Lord of the Rings so popular? Or, isn't it so popular after
all? The Lord of the Rings is either a significant and essential or a common
and trendy success. It does not have both results, in terms of its method,
genre and subject matter. The Lord of the Rings may not be the "best
book" of the twentieth century, but it does not deserve to be rebuked and
slandered by some conceited critics. Tolkien's works, The Lord of the
Rings, The Hobbit, as well as The Silmarillion were merchandised insensi-
tively, nonetheless, the obsessive entity of Tolkienism still lingers in these
books. Tolkien did not receive the first-class evaluation of his books, which
was, I assume, the most difficult hurdle for him. His books were criticized
to be both argumentative and admiring, trivial and insensible. The books
were even assessed as "the book of the century" in Britain in the outbreak
of agitation. The Lord of the Rings, especially was, year after year, selected
as a school textbook. In the end, Tolkien's books appeared to be as farce,
although, of course, the Tolkien fans disagree with this.

The cultural significance of The Lord of the Rings should be focused on in the subsequent, quantitative and qualitative debates; its qualified value associated with its prominence and reputation in the cultural principle. It should be stimulated from the limited artistic culture, a novel, to the extensive mass culture, a motion picture. It should be measured through a diverse pattern of cultural significances, and in diverse criticisms. It should be a positive task to evaluate these two types of culture, and how these two types of culture are accepted. A motion picture is not simply a new method, but an alternative, different content, and has its own entitlement.

Let us begin with some assessments about adjustment and variation of a novel to a motion picture. One of the main issues is, in regard to the comparative analysis of a novel and a motion picture, how the motion picture is committed to the novel, having in mind that the novelist him/herself sometimes does not know what he/she intends for the novel, deep in his/her mind; and the far-fetched arguments over commitment can practice to conceal the fact that a novelist and a motion picture maker can simply dispute with the significance of the original content of the novel. How can on earth motion picture producers be committed to the novel, if the novelist him/herself does not know of his/her real intentions? Commitment itself seems a disasterously predestined project, and the discussion over commitment is the most common and most boring discussion of adjustment. However, there must be the lines of discussion to regard commitment without restricting commitment into the conventional literary class structure that books are good, while films are bad.

Literary class structure has three categories: Review, Replacement, and Correlation. Revision is performed, deliberately or accidentally, in Review. A story is shown, with the least impediment, to a film, in Replace-
ment. Films are made based on a book story to develop into a new piece of work, in Correlation. It is, nonetheless, a principal task that a film devotes as much as possible to a book story. The issue here is whether *The Lord of the Rings*, in concrete, is in the form of Replacement or in the form of Correlation. In a film, the major central factors of the literary content cannot be removed without adjustment and a film maintains the major central factors of the literary content, hence, a film is entirely decipherable as the description of the story. But, a film maintains other minor factors as well. Verbatim version doesn’t happen as expected in a film. The nature of the literary content subtly changes in a film.

My observations to the issues in terms of Culture is as follows. Intricate description and cultural structure may be abstained from the film, *The Lord of the Rings*. Verses and songs are strategic manifestations to the cultural distinctiveness and cultural resources of societies throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. And yet, in the film, *The Lord of the Rings*, there is no verses and songs, that is the most significant change to the cultural framework of Middle Earth. In Middle Earth, verses and songs are not just the cultural forms, but the routine of everyday life. Verses and songs in Middle Earth are minor factors and insert artificial elements to the major central factor of the story. But, without those verses and songs, it would cause haphazard involvedness to a film. The significance of poetry and songs is in a figure of speech, which has a cultural quality. It is Tolkien’s design to use poetry and songs comprehensively, and this is the primary verbal practice in Tolkien’s conception. Is Middle Earth knowledgeable after all? Middle Earth is not a sphere of written form of letters but of a spoken form of letters. The cultural practice and traditions in Middle Earth are diffused in the form of spoken letters. The film can present the fundamental function
of oral practice of the framework of Middle Earth culture, whereas the novel cannot.

The structure of *The Lord of the Rings* has much pastoral sentimentality and reminiscence in historical features in an undeveloped, pre-industrial, quiet, and no-contaminated society. Middle Earth does not have printing, where books and documents are valuable and at the same time uncertain. It is a world of a manuscript culture. It is brought up that Biblo’s and Frodo’s description and explanation of the aftermath of The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* are contained in “the Red Book”.

“You will be the Mayor, of course, as long as you want to be, and the most famous gardener in history; and you will read things out of the Red Book, and keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more. And that will keep you as busy and as happy as anyone can be, as long as your part of the Story goes on.”

Although multiple copies brought much removals, additions and variations as a result, the fundamental role of a manuscript, which the Red Book performs in practice, is the literary pride that institutes the links between the imaginary world of Middle Earth and the real world of the audience. One of the poems of mediaeval English poetry Tolkien was influenced by is *Boewulf*, which is of noteworthy application here. The pre-knowledgeable Christian culture out of which *Beowulf* grew, is described. The Beowulf manuscript was noted down by numerous scribes for several hundreds of years after its earliest piece of work, and this is just like the Red Book of Westmarch.
“This account of the end of the Third Age is drawn mainly from the Red Book of Westmarch. That most important source for the history of the War or the Ring was so called because it was long preserved at Undertowers, the home of the Fairbairns, Wardens of the Westmarch. It was in origin Biblo’s private diary, which he took with him to Rivendell. Frodo brought it back to the Shire, together with many loose leaves of notes, and during S.R. 1420-1 he nearly filled its pages with his account of the War. But annexed to it and preserved with it, probably in a single red case, were the three large volumes, bound in red leather, that Biblo gave to him as a parting gift. To these four volumes there was added in Westmarch a fifth containing commentaries, genealogies, and various other matter concerning the hobbit members of the Fellowship.

The original Red Book has not been preserved, but many copies were made, especially of the first volume, for the use of the descendants of the children of Master Samwise.”

“They removed to the Westmarch, a country then newly settled (being a gift of King Elessar) between the Far Downs and the Tower Hills. From them came the Fairbairns of the Towers, Wardens of Westmarch, who inherited the Red Book, and made several copies with various notes and later additions.”

Tolkien presents the arguments of manuscript’s fraud in legendary work of art. Verbal communication has an extended existence in narrative, and poetry tradition, but still it is tenuous. Tolkien’s family is originated in the West Midlands, and he has a corny, I would say, confidence in the West
Midlands. He regrets that modern English is so standardized that local characteristics of the language has lost. He certainly expressed grief that pre-industrial, agricultural England is disappearing and composed a threnody, in *The Lord of the Rings*, to the lost culture of oral traditions.

It is significant here to classify qualities of culture with written and spoken traditions. Is the culture with spoken traditions classified as “badly informed” or “orally informed” culture? Is it that individuals in orally informed traditions and culture are not predisposed to literature than individuals in literately informed culture? Not so. In Hall of Fire, that implies the central figure of an orally informed traditions and culture, the Elves chant their songs and Bilbo recites verses. Orally informed traditions and culture can be more cherished and treasured for it is delicate, and it can easily disappear. This is patently obvious and it is essentially important to interpret and understand Tolkien’s works that orally informed traditions and culture is exceptionally principal. Thence, the vital consequence of *The Lord of the Rings* is to observe the operative function of narrative itself. The point here is whether the cultural value as the orally informed traditions is stated in the film, or not. Obviously, the Old English lyrical styles are losing ground, and Tolkien naturally has practiced to appeal and uphold the values of lyrical styles as well as to maintain both values of oral and written forms.

**In Summary**

Tolkien’s motivation on oral texts is noticeably interacted to the upholding of cultural traditions. Through the Imperialism, England has overwhelmed the native indigenous cultures of the colonies. Both England and its colonies have shared, equally or unequally, fairly or unfairly, the
experience to enrich the diffusion of traditions, conventions, beliefs, and folklore. On the other hand, this could cause cultural wipe out as a consequence. Tolkien’s analysis on traditions, conventions, beliefs, and folklore is diverse. The ethos of Middle Earth is so profound that Tolkien’s novel is placed higher than other fantasy stories. Each culture has its language, and has each race, its history for self-establishment and independence. Tolkien’s yearning for an indigenous English folklore and legends was the moving force for The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien deferred to other cultures and intended to stimulate a storyline style to provide a structure for creating the legendary stories of indigenous sources. For this, Tolkien freed himself from any historic, chronological, momentous facts.

Nonetheless, some part of The Lord of the Rings can be interpreted as an observation of England of directly after the post-war, and The Lord of the Rings has the social and political concerns of the times. Thus, The Lord of the Rings presents that the spoken tradition and culture is displaced with the resourceful written tradition and culture, and appeals the inheritance of post-colonialism. The Lord of the Rings is the schematic intention to maintain a spoken tradition and culture. The reason and cause why The Lord of the Rings became popular, all of a sudden, is significant, being aware of the variation to and from the spoken and written traditions and cultures. A spoken tradition and culture was being replaced into a written tradition and culture, and this proves that the next generation, children have been, without fail, fascinated with the culture of Middle English.

Notes
1) Culture and Anarchy Matthew Arnold Edited with an introduction by J. Dover Wilson Cambridge at the University Press 1971 pp.49~50

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