On Stories: Tolkien and fictional worlds

Maria do Rosário MONTEIRO

CHAM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa
E-mail rosariomonteiro@fcsh.unl.pt
ORCID: 0000-0001-6214-5975

Abstract

This chapter will deal with Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy-Stories” (1983d). Two main ideas will guide the text. To prove how in the first half of the 20th century, in an academic scenario dominated by the discussion of who was worth to be included in the novel “Great tradition”, Tolkien produced an essay on a genre unworthy of any serious attention, which however became itself an unavoidable source for students and researchers of literature in the last century. The other main idea is to prove that “On Fairy-Stories” changed forever the way fantasy was understood (as happened with the essay “Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics”(1983a), anticipating much of what is now discussed in narratology: storyworlds and fiction worlds. Tolkien did not have at his disposal the contemporary theoretical vocabulary but he definitely launched the cornerstones for contemporary narrative study that came to be known as the “narrative turn” that took form in the 1990s with critics as Umberto Eco (1990), Lubomír Doležel (1998), Thomas Pavel (1986, 1988), and Marie-Laure Ryan (1992).

Keywords: Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories, Fictional worlds, narrative theory