



## **Hobbits on the Wall: The ‘Frodo Lives!’ Campaign as Psychosocial Symbol** Alexander Sergeant

The ‘Frodo Lives!’ campaign was a widespread social phenomenon of counter-cultural disobedience, reaching a particular zenith during the mid-to-late 1960s before dissipating throughout the 1970s. Coinciding with the astonishing commercial success of J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) and the wider rise in popularity of genre fantasy during the mid-twentieth century (James, 2012), the campaign encouraged its participants to graffiti the slogan ‘Frodo Lives!’ (inspired by Tolkien’s protagonist) on public spaces including subway stations and bus shelters, as well as displaying the message individually on badges, t-shirts and protest banners. Without any overt political agenda and without being particularly organised, the movement became a popular way of articulating youth dissatisfaction and dissent within a generational cultural war, whilst at the same time providing more conservative detractors with a useful slogan with which to denounce and deride the youth counter-cultural movement. ‘Frodo Lives!’ became a catch-all term that seemed to mean lots of things to lots of different people, offering a playful but nevertheless empowering register inspired by mid-twentieth century fantasy literature that played amongst the fractured US society of the 1960s.

The widespread popularity of the ‘Frodo Lives!’ movement serves as a potentially illustrative synecdoche for assessing both the political and emotional function of popular fantasy fiction within US society over the last century. Prior to its emergence as arguably contemporary mass media’s most popular storytelling form, genre fantasy played a somewhat different social role during its initial wave of popularisation. Emerging out of the pulp fiction magazines of the 1930s and 1940s and aimed at a newly emerging market demographic of children and teenagers, fantasy fiction’s popularity amongst certain subsections of the population was juxtaposed with its low cultural status amongst traditional, conservative critics. As these readers of fantasy came of age, the contrast in taste across different subsets of the population quickly became synonymous with a broader generational gap articulated within the politics of the time. Fantasy fandom took on a quasi-socio-political function as an expression of youth dissatisfaction and rebellion during the mid-century culture wars, as being a fantasy fan meant rejecting mainstream dogma and embracing an alternative cultural vision. Fantasy therefore operated in the murky ground between official political discourse and emotional catharsis, providing its readers and audiences with a set of both personal and social pleasures that played out during the 1960s as an underground folk movement expressing itself through a single, largely meaningless slogan.

This personal and political side to fantasy requires a dual perspective in order to understand the significance of the ‘Frodo Lives!’ campaign. During the 1960s, the fantasy genre’s propensity to provide relief, relaxation and a temporary ease from anxiety through an engagement with the imagination extended to its role within a community as much as it did to individuals. The genre offered itself out to both the individual fantasy

reader and to a burgeoning community of fantasy fans as an effective relief from the stress of living in a fractured and conflicted society. The way it achieved this separation from society can be explored through causes that stem as much from the individual as they do from the context in which individuals live. Theorists such as Rosemary Jackson have offered insightful commentaries on the subversive relationship the fantasy genre has with ideology by speaking in a register that, by its very nature, taps into some of the basic psychoanalytic principles of phantasy (2008). This understanding of phantasy (spelt with a 'ph' to differentiate it from the genre but nevertheless an underlying part of the genre's mode of address) suggests that fantasy fiction has an inherent ability to showcase the inherent slippage of the determined symbolic order in which ideology operates, and to expose the fundamentally imagined component to meaning.

Likewise, social historians including Meredith Veldman have provided compelling analyses of the links between the reception of Tolkien and movements such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), demonstrating a synergy in popularity between Tolkien's environmentalist and anti-materialist mode of fantasy writing and the values of 1960s activism (Veldman, 1994). Yet, the insights provided by either a social historical or purely psychoanalytic reading of fantasy fiction have been given little to no opportunity to cross-fertilise. This means that our understanding of how fantasy fiction functions as a cultural force is diminished by a communal reticence to combine these two methodological perspectives to examine the role and impact of fantasy fiction on the 1960s subject.

This article offers a new way of understanding the significance of the 'Frodo Lives!' campaign to those that participated in it. Employing a psychosocial methodology, I seek to add an important cross-disciplinary perspective on the 'Frodo Lives!' movement that will contribute to long-standing debates over the political substance of fantasy reception, and consider the psychological and emotional resonance of the movement within its social context. Addressing the multiplicity of meanings present within US society under which the slogan seemed to operate, I will theorise how the 'Frodo Lives!' symbol became both so widespread and malleable within its multifarious usages throughout fantasy fans, counter-cultural activists and conservative detractors. Seeming to provide an important emotional function to each of these strands of US culture, the function of 'Frodo Lives!' seems to reside, somewhat conversely, in its lack of imposed meaning.

To make the case for the importance of this absence of meaning, I draw from psychoanalytic theories of both phantasy and symbolism from both Lacanian and Kleinian traditions, placing two differing (and often antagonistic) perspectives on the imaginary nature of language in dialogue with one another to try to understand the parallel emotional and intellectual function of 'Frodo Lives!' as a counter-cultural signifier. This psychosocial conceptual framework will then be used to offer a speculative insight available within the remit of this article as to why such a process was psychologically important for individuals and groups during the socio-political context of the 1960s and, perhaps, why Frodo continues to 'live' in one form or another in today's media environment in which fantasy storytelling operates as one of the most culturally visible ways in which youth culture announces itself both in cooperation with and in defiance of the traditional mainstream.

### **‘Who is Frodo?’ Fantasy and US Counter-Culturalism**

It is easy to forget that J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), and the particular style of fantasy fiction it helped to popularise, has not always been synonymous with Hollywood adaptations and transmedia franchises. Thanks in no small part to the popularity of Peter Jackson’s cinematic trilogy (2001-03), the cultural status of fantasy media in today’s contemporary climate is very different from the position it held during the mid-1960s when Tolkien’s novel first began to penetrate the public consciousness (Sergeant, 2015). Having initially opened to mediocre sales figures and little public impact, *The Lord of the Rings* would go on to achieve an unprecedented level of commercial success, becoming one of the highest selling books of all time after slowly building an audience of devoted readers.

The success of *The Lord of the Rings* was partially due to its timing. The novel was released between two distinct waves of fantasy fiction and fantasy fandom, coming after the initial wave of enthusiasm for the genre during the 1930s and 1940s and prior to what Drew Casper describes as the ‘paperback revolution’ taking place throughout US society in the latter half of the century (2007: 31). Within the US, fantasy storytelling first rose to popularity through the rise in pulp literature, sold in weekly short story collections and magazines. Serials such as Robert Howards’ *Conan* (1932-1936) stories or Edgar Rice Burrough’s *Tarzan* (1912-1941) and *Barzoom* (1912-1943) tales were sold as cheap, disposal entertainment for a large audience, targeted at a mainly youthful demographic as enterprising magazine owners took advantage of a combination of rising literacy rates and falling paper prices to create a form of writing deliberately designed as closer to Hollywood cinema than so-called respectable fiction.

The genre’s popularity amongst children and young teenagers meant that it held a paradoxical relationship within the entertainment industry. The rising middle classes, armed with an increasing amount of disposal income, offered publishers a lucrative opportunity to generate revenue off these stories by selling them to a rising youth culture whose taste differed greatly from standards of mainstream taste at play since the 1920s (Jacobs, 2008). At the same time, fantasy’s divergence from the accepted standards of quality highlighted a schism between high and low culture. To be a fantasy fan was to embrace a mode of appreciation that was in self-conscious defiance of the mainstream, forgoing the supposed higher pleasures of naturalism in favour of the baser delights of escapism.

The emotional function of fantasy within this era therefore contrasts significantly with its role in the twenty-first century. Today, popular fantasy media is promoted, popularised and celebrated by a hegemonic power structure of big business and its supporting cultural industry (see, for example, *Comic Con*, trade presses, traditional journalism and fan websites such as *DenofGeek.com*) that work to give the genre and its associated fandom cultural capital and influence (Geraghty, 2015). In contrast, whatever ability fantasy fiction had to provide emotional catharsis and/or therapeutic affirmation to its fans in the mid-twentieth century came as part of culture of appreciation that not only operated outside the remits of mainstream taste and sensibility, but deliberately shunned it. Fantasy fandom as it existed prior to and immediately after the success of *The Lord of*

*the Rings* required its participants to operate somewhere outside of the dominant discourse of the era. References to fantasy fans appearing in publications like *The New York Times* would refer to fans as a strange but nevertheless recognisable subset of society, often describing their activities in condescending terms or else simply from an outsider's perspective that acknowledged the popularity of the genre whilst at the same time expressing bemusement for its appeal (*The New York Times*, 1950a and 1951). Reports on the first wave of organised regional or national fantasy and science-fiction conventions were often written in an exotic or exasperated tone, reflecting a feeling of alienation or bemusement at the behaviours of such fans who express such a feverish enthusiasm for something perceived to be derisory (*The New York Times*, 1950b; *Los Angeles Times*, 1968). Yet, the cultural dynamics in play at the time almost demanded such a form of reception. Because appreciation of the genre was so scarce within official publications, fantasy fans would have to look beyond the traditional culture industry for an open celebration of the literature they enjoyed, organising frequent meet-ups within the local communities so that they might share their appreciation of the genre with other, likeminded individuals. The fantasy fan was required to reject an alternative approach to art valued by their parents and the press at the time if they were to acknowledge their appreciation for the genre, an act that charged the status of being a fantasy fan with something of a political edge.

This dynamic between fantasy fiction as a voice outside dominant culture, and as a storytelling that allowed individuals to find new personal and social modes of expression by appreciating its examples separately or collectively, creates a dynamic that echoes far more with Kleinian discourses of phantasy than it does with the Lacanian approach so often privileged with both psychoanalytic political discourse, and in psychoanalytic theories of media. The traditional Lacanian dynamic between phantasy and language stresses the importance of the imagination as a psychic device which provides the *point de capton* ('quilting' or 'stitching point') between the word and its meaning. Extended into broader analyses of ideology and society (Žižek, 1989), phantasy works to shore up and affirm pre-existing power structures within the world, either by providing an imaginative bridge between the signifier and the signified or offering itself as an outlet for the frustrations and inconsistencies of any ideological system that then fails to challenge or call for change of said system.

Yet, the discourse of fantasy fandom during the mid-twentieth century prior to its assimilation with mainstream culture created a far more fractured dynamic between the emotional outlet the genre provided its audiences and the dominating structuring principles of society. This gives phantasy a value more in line with its usage in object relations therapy as something that gives voice to that aspects of existence otherwise restricted or repressed within the structuring dynamics of both the individual and collective consciousness. To enjoy genre fantasy was not to simply express dissatisfaction for the existing order, nor to find a way of reconciling with that order. To enjoy fantasy was to proclaim a desire to find a new way of approaching the world, even if that were simply a new way of approaching art.

The structuring dynamics surrounding the first wave of fantasy fandom that existed prior to the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* would galvanise in the years that followed, culminating in a correlation between the emotional value of found in fantasy

and the emotional impetus towards cultural and societal revolution. As this same generation of readers who grew up on *Tarzan* and *Conan* stories were then radicalised in the 1960s by the socio-political trauma of the Vietnam War (1955-75) and Civil Rights Movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the comfort taken amongst such fantasy fan communities in being different from a conservative, adult mainstream sensibility resonated with the overt political concerns of a wider youth-led movement. It was within this climate that counter-culturalism and fantasy became intertwined. Much to the chagrin of its own author, Tolkien's tome was released during a time in which the college-aged target audience for his book seemed a natural fit to sell to, increasingly engaging as they were in a radical political agenda of social reform, and those already steeped in counter-culturalism were turning to fantasy for entertainment.

Tolkien's status as an Oxford Professor and style of writing gave *The Lord of the Rings* an air of intellectual credence, whilst its themes of environmentalism and anti-materialism resonated with many of the key social issues of the era. The book's complex mythology and epic length also required the fantasy fan to invest effort and time into the fantasy world Tolkien had constructed, and gave those versed in its lore a shared field of dense references that demarcated fans of the novels from the rest of society. This delight in obscurity transcended beyond the novels themselves. Popular rock bands like *Led Zeppelin*, formed in 1968, would include cryptic references to obscure moments and names from Tolkien's mythology within their song lyrics, speaking across and to fans simultaneously through songs such as *Led Zeppelin's* 'The Battle of Evermore' (1971) or 'Misty Mountain Hop' (1971), the former of which contains references to 'ringwraiths' whilst the latter is named after a key location in *The Hobbit* (1937). 'Frodo Lives!' provided fantasy fandom with a sense of community defined in opposition to mainstream discourse. To be a fan of *The Lord of the Rings* was to be simultaneously a fan of lots of other associated trends playing out in youth culture, and to become empowered in one's status as an outsider.

The slogan 'Frodo Lives!' emerged out of these somewhat cultish origins of popular fantasy media. Although it is impossible to trace the primary origins of the movement, the slogan itself seems to emerge from a point of debate that arose internally within the fantasy fan community over the correct interpretation to the ending of *The Lord of the Rings*. The novel concludes with the protagonist Frodo sailing off somewhat ambiguously to the mystical world of the undying lands, a place from which he can never return. Whilst some argued the undying lands to be read as a thinly veiled metaphor for death, and in particular Tolkien's own Catholic faith, others suggested a more literal interpretation for the ending's meaning, a debate which continues to this day (see: *TheTolkienForum.com*, 2002). This difference of opinion gave rise to the statement 'Frodo Lives!' as a quasi-humorous statement that spoke to fantasy fandom circles. At first, the phrase seems to have meant nothing more than a playful disagreement of interpretation, used by fans to promote one mode of interpretation over another.

However, as fans began writing the slogan on subway stations, benches and in other public areas, 'Frodo Lives!' began to serve an alternative function. The slogan highlighted the existence of a subsection of the population whose interests and values diverged from the mainstream. For those in the know, 'Frodo Lives!' meant something very distinctive with the appreciation of *The Lord of the Rings*. For the majority of people

who had not read Tolkien's novel, the references was completely baffling, creating a schism between culture and counter-culture enacted throughout society during this era. 'Frodo Lives!' functioned akin to the kind of phantasy symbols patients are encouraged to create in a Kleinian treatment room. It expressed something that meant very little as a communication device to others, but meant a great deal to those who said it.

As the slogan continued to amass this counter-cultural cache, people began using it out of its original context. No longer used to speak necessarily to fantasy fans about fantasy fiction, 'Frodo Lives!' became a symbol for a wider sense of youth disenfranchisement, an in-joke shared amongst a community at the expense of the mainstream. Writing the slogan became an act of rebellion, albeit a playful one without a clear political agenda, and this gave individuals license to insert the phrase surreptitiously into all kinds of public arenas. Even on protest marches where the slogan was seemingly aligned closed to clear political agenda, the banners displaying 'Frodo Lives!' largely offered little more than light-relief amongst the most seriously intended message decry the US's involvement in Vietnam, sandwiched between other equally comical messages including 'Mary Poppins is a Junkie', 'Hobbits Unite!' and 'Gandalf for President' (*Arizona Republic*, 1966). It might be tempting to view the 'Frodo Lives!' movement as broad, if somewhat less than radical, campaign of civil disobedience.

Megan Schalkwijk's analysis of the synergy between hippie culture and *The Lord of the Rings* argues that the 'Frodo Lives!' movement demonstrates how 'the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* became a unifying factor amongst the counterculture' (2013: 16). According to such a view, 'Frodo Lives!' became a wider symbol for the counter-cultural movement, functioning as a catchphrase or motto to denote something wider about the alienation between youth culture and the rest of society. Yet, such a reading would fail to acknowledge the lack of conviction that phrase seemed to hold within swathes of the population who used it. A common journalistic prank during the era became to insert the phrase into one's copy as an obscure reference for readers to find, often within little or nothing to do with the piece itself. The phrase 'Frodo Lives!' would appear in anything from ballet reviews to sports journalism, used by journalists for *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Boston Globe* as a cryptic references with little explanation as to what it meant (1967a). In Texas, high school students writing for the local paper snuck the phrase 'Frodo Still Lives!' into an article summarising the weekly activities within the school (*The Childress Index*, 1966). Soon, companies also joined in on the joke.

Advertisements taken out by record companies included the slogan in its print media advertisements of its latest products (*The Bee*, 1966). Financial advisers taking out advertisements in local papers highlighting their service in response to recent tax rises would jovially try to ease the anxieties of their potential customers by ending their short pieces with 'Frodo Lives. All is not Lost' (*Detroit Free Press*, 1967). By the end of the 1960s, the slogan had morphed from an inside joke shared within a particular fan community to a wider symbol of a rebellion without a cause. Retaining its therapeutic value, the 'Frodo Lives' symbol did not suddenly operate like other signifiers as an intersubjective vessel for communication. Rather, its emotional value shifted from an expression of fan individuality to an expression of political anger or, more broadly, frustration.

By continuing to stress the emotional value of ‘Frodo Lives’, we might be able to see a function of the movement despite its obvious hypocrisies and contradictions. Instead of writing the slogan on public places or performing any other modest act of rebellion, most people who participated in the ‘Frodo Lives!’ craze did so through a series of transaction exchanges. As soon as the slogan started to carry weight within society, shops began selling badges and bumper stickers with ‘Frodo Lives!’ emblazoned upon them. These buttons were hugely popular as a fashion accessory, particularly in areas associated with the youth movement including Greenwich Village, NY and North Beach, CA. A single shop in Greenwich Village reported to sell somewhere in the vicinity of 20,000 buttons a day, and the level of ubiquity they achieved throughout society at large convinced major outlets and exclusive fashionistas to get involved in craze (*Honolulu Advertiser*, 1967). *Macy’s* began stocking ‘Frodo Lives!’ mugs in 1967 whilst, in New York, artistic resident of Andy Warhol’s factory Tiger Morse re-designed a version of the ‘Frodo Lives!’ buttons and sold them on Madison Avenue as high-end fashion accessories. But such acts of commercialisation, whilst highlighting the lack of clear political agenda or strategy, also highlight the desired lack of agenda embedded within the very make-up of the movement as a primarily emotional as opposed to societal campaign.

This would again be highlighted as ‘Frodo Lives’ continued to take on different meanings for different members of society. As the movement gathered pace, very soon the slogan was just as likely to be used by conservative detractors as it was by its initial popularisers. Within numerous opinion pieces appearing in both national and regional newspapers, the possession of a ‘Frodo Lives!’ badge became a shorthand to describe a generation of apathetic, stoner college students (*Independent Star News*, 1966; *Progress Bulletin*, 1968; *The Hartford Courant*, 1966). Elsewhere, agony aunt columns featured exasperated partners writing about their boyfriends stuck in a perpetual state of adolescence, their refusal grow up and commit to an adult life revealed through the synecdoche of their refusal to stop wearing ‘Frodo Lives!’ badges (*Chicago Tribune*, 1967b). Not all of these attempts to conflate counter-culturalism with the ‘Frodo Lives!’ phenomenon were as derogative either.

Quizzes entitled ‘How Wide is Your Age Gap?’ would feature questions asking to whom the Frodo from the badge referred (*Florida Today*, 1969). The slogan became a shorthand for a generational confusion and distance, but not a sense of opposition. This then fed back into an interest in fantasy fiction. Opinion columnists with frequently recite a narrative in which they were drawn to reading *The Lord of the Rings* in a partial attempt to understand what the badge means (*The Indianapolis Star*, 1970), whilst obituaries published in reaction to Tolkien’s death in 1973 included headlines like ‘Frodo Lives But Quiet Don Tolkien Dies’ (*The Orlando Sentinel*, 1973). *The Lord of the Rings* would never lose its association with the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. Yet, its function as a symbol of the separation between youth culture and the mainstream would fluctuate drastically depending on how it was used.

The various lives and emotions attached to ‘Frodo Lives!’ showcase how loose a relationship a signifier might have to its sense of a signified, and yet still function as an intersubjective activity. ‘Frodo Lives!’ was a malleable, flexible slogan that meant contradictory things to different people in various guises. To interpret the meaning of that

slogan, we must first acknowledge that it is not a symbol in the Lacanian sense of the term, at least not in terms of its societal role. Its cultural function was not rooted primarily in the symbolic, but in the imaginary, in the emotional pressures created (in part) as a result of the structuring components of the psyche and the society in which it operates. The generational and ideological trauma of living in a divided society during the heavily contested cultural wars of the 1960s and 1970s created an emotional need for an expression of a feeling of belonging within a community so heavily devoid of such qualities. ‘Frodo Lives!’ provided people with that sense of belonging, something that unites the repurposing of the slogan throughout its various usages. For fantasy fiction fans, it expressed the existence of likeminded people in a culture in which a taste dictated by a conservative mainstream focused on a vision of realism that excluded fantasy fiction.

For activists, it expressed an anti-materialist message to others fighting the same cause, offering solidarity and collectivism without having to express it in terms of antagonism to the individualised ideologies they encountered. For conservatives, the phrase was used to affirm the superiority of mainstream discourse over the increasingly vocal counter-cultural movements that swam beneath it. For others, it was simply a phrase that expressed something counter, something above and beneath the logical, something playful and none purposeful and, perhaps crucially, silly in a world of serious concerns. The shared space of culture need not always be a reflective of the power structures of society. A word’s meaning need not always be determined in order to be shared. Instead, culture can be a space for peoples and generations to share feeling and affect which, when understood psychoanalytically, operates through an intertwined but not always subservient relationship with that of the symbolic. In the case of ‘Frodo Lives!’, its ability to express something outside official meaning for all those was fuelled by the flexibility by which it is used. Once a culture has proven through usage that two words – ‘Frodo Lives!’ – can mean pretty much anything, it became very useful to those who want to use it for their own, therapeutic ends.

### **What does Frodo Mean? Phantasy and the Symbol**

The malleability of the ‘Frodo Lives’ slogan not only highlights the emotional (as opposed to intellectual) value the movement held for those participants from contradictory and competing ideologies, but also speaks to the core structural dynamics of both the rhetoric of fantasy within the form of storytelling exemplified by Tolkien, and of phantasy as an internal process of the psyche. Evoking ideas, concepts and objects that do not exist, the fantasy novel brings to bear the emotional force that underpins linguistic structures, making words evoke meanings that do not have any physical or logical reality within the context of a story of an imagined, secondary world. Literary theorist Christine Brooke-Rose refers to this as a process of ‘over-determination’ (1981:106), wherein writers are able to assign a meaning to words like *goblin*, *orc* or *hobbit* despite the fact the reader knows that such creatures possess no such meaning in reality.

Existing on the edge of meaning due to this over-determined nature, fantasy novels have therefore a capacity to break free of interpretative practices that insist on a fixed or stable meaning into far more creative modes. Fantasy’s ability to enact a process of estrangement from its literal circumstances created the necessary ‘freedom of interpretation’ that Jeremy Tambling argues is essential for figurative readings to occur



(2010:17). This not only explains why fantasy fiction has shown such a historic propensity to offer readers opportunities to read its secondary worlds as coded metonyms, metaphors and allegories. It also explains why *The Lord of the Rings* can function as a text for which the very act of interpreting seems to demand some kind of fusion between the objective meaning of words and the subjective associations and emotions that individual subjects possess in relation to language.

Within Lacanian psychoanalysis, the capacity of stories involving self-consciously false fictional scenarios to evoke a slippage in the fixed meaning of the words is articulated as part of Lacan's wider attempt to explore the relationship between the imaginary order of 'phantasy' and the symbolic order of language (Lacan, 2016). Lacanian theorist Bruce Fink states succinctly that, for Lacan, 'a new metaphor brings new meaning into the world' (1995: 70). A metaphor creates a disturbance in the assumed fixity of language, and allows the construction of a new signified out of a set of pre-existing signifiers. Not only does the metaphor create new meaning, it also shatters the imposition of pre-existing meaning, demonstrating paradoxically both the capacity of language to signify and the flexibility and malleability of what it signifies. This is particular apt in relation to the 'Frodo Lives!' campaign.

The slogan seems to have meant so many different things to so many people because the imaginative form of interpretation fantasy fiction requires is free from the restrictions of logic, order or pre-existing causality. Like Lacan's more abstract notion of the metaphor within language, phantasy is not a psychic activity invested in meaning, at least not in the conventional sense of the word. However, there is another facet to the popularity of 'Frodo Lives!' that benefits from analysing through a psychoanalytic perspective. Not only does the slogan's usage during the 1960s and 1970s demonstrate a celebration of a multiplicity of meaning, but also a celebration of the absence of meaning, at least in the conventional sense. The slogan meant so much to so many people because it seemed so joyously to *not* mean anything at all.

The empowering nature of this non-meaning stems from the way fantasy fiction functions as a vessel for the imaginary. Phantasy, as a psychological act, does not claim to offer objective insight into the world and cannot be subjected to the principles of logic to test whether it exists or not. An idea can be argued to be valid or invalid based on its consistency. In contrast, a dream might not make sense, but it does exist. Fantasy, as both a preconscious and unconscious act, is therefore invested in meaning only as much as it functions to give life to basic emotional and instinctual desires. In its earliest incarnations amongst preconscious stages of infant development, fantasy is a form of expression that seeks to articulate the emotional state of being of a child without access to the thought processes that will ultimately insist upon curtailing such patterns of expression under the rigor of objectivity or logic. As the human subject then develops, phantasy becomes the space in which such modes of expression can exist outside the same confines of language and symbolism. To think about the world is to engage in a set of fixed meanings and patterns, whether this be on a macro-level of understanding (as for example, in one's ability to understand Quantum Physics) or a micro-level in which subjects communicate through a shared lexicon of symbols. Phantasy, however, reveals the ability of thought to be wholly illogical, and speak instead to the fundamental excess that comes through conceiving of subjectivity only for its capacity for thought. As Fink argues, 'the

imaginary register ... is tantamount to what Lacan latter calls the subject's *jouissance*' (2004: 146). Phantasy exists in the gap between meanings, the space in which meaning does not dominate and the opportunities available for people not to think but to do and be.

It remains consistent with the psychoanalytic principles of phantasy to extend these insights into the governing dynamics of the imaginary at work within an individual into a broader, societal structure. Just because any kind of communal activity requires a certain adherence to the logic of the symbolic in order to allow individuals access to a pool of shared meaning, this does not necessarily mean that the function of symbolism must always be entrenched in service of logic. Film theorist Todd McGowan discusses just such a function for cinema in his theorisation of his 'cinema of phantasy' (2007: 23-30). Drawing on Lacanian theory, McGowan argues that certain cinematic forms can expose spectators to a hidden excess behind meaning, revealing an affective component to existence that cannot be contained or coded into language. Citing Spike Lee and Stanley Kubrick as filmmakers who achieve this cinema of phantasy, McGowan sees phantasy's cultural function through cinema as opportunities to expose and confront this excess of feeling through aesthetics.

Although McGowan ultimately separates this cinema of phantasy from the fantasy genre, he seems to value cinema's ability to expose the inherent vacuity of the symbolic by revealing a hidden order of phantasy, evoking a felt absence of meaning onscreen to expose a wider absence of meaning in the dominant ideologies and power structures of life. Fantasy media, at least in its popular guise as a genre of storytelling, offers a more therapeutic as opposed to traumatic encounter. It does not seek to deny its audiences access to feelings of certainty and security. However, the pleasure that it does offer comes through its ability to transcend rather than support reality. It comforts not by avoiding reality (as is so often said), but through the emotional stasis provided by avoiding the avoidance of reality that is embedded within the heart of unconscious repressions. Instead of insisting on the meaning of symbols, it offers opportunities for symbols to exist outside of fixed or determined meaning.

The capacity of phantasy to evade the need for meaning (in the symbolic sense of the term) allows it to offer itself to the subject as a mode of expression that is rooted in the emotional rather than in the intellectual. This aspect of phantasy is highlighted most clearly in Melanie Klein's psychoanalysis of early infant object relations, a project which rejects the Lacanian definition of 'the analytical object [as] the one cathected by the libido' (Benvenuto, 1997: 21). For Klein, phantasy is not a by-product of the schism between the conscious and unconscious self but the 'mental corollary' of a self prior to the emergence of consciousness (1952). As such, phantasy not only plays an important role in linking the subjective, inner world of the psyche and the objective realm it encounters through cathexis. It also functions to allow the desires and anxieties formulated in relation to the external world to be integrated within the infant's developing understanding of identity. Whereas for Lacan, the symbol controls the phantasy, for Klein, phantasy creates the symbol. The emotional need of the subject creates the necessary impetus for meaning-making to emerge as a process and it is the primacy of phantasy over language that gives shape to future interpretations.

The same emotional impetus seem rife in the context of the ‘Frodo Lives!’ campaign. Cultural historian Sharon Monteith argues that US society during the 1960s represented a collective consciousness of trauma (Monteith, 2008; see also Greene, 2010, Isserman and Kazin, 2000). As psychoanalytic theory suggests, trauma is caused by an excess of emotion that, consequentially, leads to a lack of emotional expression (Freud, 1920). The subject experiencing trauma allows the imposition symbolism brings to conscious discourse to obfuscate his or her inability to cope with the powerful affect of feeling caused by a particular moment. Rather than feel the event, the subject traumatises the event. To get over that trauma, what is needed is a process of ‘working-through’ (Freud, 1914). Through the therapeutic environment or through other intersubjective platforms provided in life, people must be able to feel the emotion fully, to its greatest degree, in order that they might transfer the phantasy they possess in relation to a particular symbol onto another that provides a more productive resolution to the inner conflict. In a broader societal context, the particulars of the emotion change depending on what particular peoples are feeling. The 1960s was an era of anger, fear and resentment for many people in many different ways. If the symbol ‘Frodo Lives!’ is seen as the means of articulation rather than the locus of meaning itself (as is the case within Lacanian theory), then the competing and contrasting ways in which the slogan was utilised speaks to a world of unarticulated societal phantasies hitherto unexpressed within a cultural form.

‘Frodo Lives!’ therefore expresses something quite contradictory but nevertheless important within its socio-cultural context. It is a forceful denouncement of fixed meaning and official discourse (defined by logic of the symbol) in favour of an expression of a celebration of non-meaning, or a discourse of meaning fuelled by the emotional charge of phantasy. In all its usages, the slogan highlights the absurdity of any form of interpretation within a context as obviously fabricated as *The Lord of the Rings*. In this sense, its playfulness is actually a way of looking askance at the limitations of symbolism more broadly and, within a societal context, the absurdity embedded within any dominant ideology’s claim to speak of truth. This gives it a quality akin to McGowan’s cinema of phantasy in that it offers an opportunity through a cultural mode of expression for individuals confronted with the basic absurdity embedded within meaning.

Yet, its therapeutic function to 1960s society was less Lacanian and more Kleinian in tone and content. Rather than focusing on an assault against the symbolic, ‘Frodo Lives!’ empowered the imaginary. Like Klein’s therapy of play, the slogan’s alignment with fantasy fiction seemed to create the necessary psychic platform to break free of the imposition of pre-existing symbolism and allow for a process of symbol formation (1955). Even though Frodo does not exist, the fact that it might be important that he lives or not within the context of his fictional narrative is, in fact, more of an expression of the characteristics of the individual doing the interpretation rather than the validity of its truth. The societal implications of that are just as provocative. ‘Frodo Lives!’ becomes a gesture of counter-cultural defiance not by advocating that one means of living is inauthentic or less true than another, but by insisting that the emotions of either an individual or a community is valid simply by existing. It is a defiant call to curtail the restrictions on what can be meaningful, whether this be the insistence that fantasy fiction is a form of entertainment without purpose or a more explicitly political rebuke to conservative backlash against the 1960s youth movement.

This defiance is wrapped up within a playful register that was equally important to the therapeutic function of the symbol. For fantasy fans, ‘Frodo Lives!’ was not a polemic designed to advocate for a readjustment in the mainstream taste in order to win mass acclaim for the fantasy genre. It was a message to be shared amongst fans to communicate the pleasure of being in a community. For counter-cultural activists, ‘Frodo Lives!’ was not an expression of the seriousness of their socio-political agenda, but a chance to enjoy themselves. For conservative commentators, the slogan was not a polemic that might denounce and eradicate the hippie movement, but a tool to mock something that had already been expressed. For everyone else, ‘Frodo Lives!’ was never rhetorical, but always libidinal. Its function was to be felt by all those that used it, and to reassure that the slippages, fractures and points of dialectic between culture and counter-culture, between the mainstream and the unorthodox, could be approached without the gravitas the age otherwise seemed to demand. In a sense, it was a way of approaching the socio-political trauma embedded within US society without being traumatic and, in this way, acted as a form of emotional resolution, as opposed to ideological reconciliation, between generations.

### **Conclusion: Frodo Still Lives!**

The popularity of the ‘Frodo Lives!’ campaign began to wane in the early 1970s, largely disappearing from the popular zeitgeist as the baby boomers became old enough for late capitalism to incorporate enough aspects of counter-culturalism to become the very culture they were rejecting. However, the slogan would continue to hold a degree of cultural currency in the decades to come by aging baby boomers who had embraced it during the 1960s, resurfacing from time to time to help express the feelings of new generations to come. Whimsical reports during the 1980s reported in glee on office workers naming companies after obscure *Lord of the Rings* references, referring to the slogan almost as an attack on the dissipation of youth counter-culturalism into a neoliberal workspace (*The Wall Street Journal*, 1986).

In the early 1990s, ‘Frodo Lives!’ emerged during the rise of digital culture, as hackers named one of the first widespread virus to effect DOS computer systems after the counter-cultural slogan. Even when Jackson’s cinematic trilogy was released to critical and popular acclaim, (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003), reviewers at the time felt inclined to reference the slogan to contextualise the film both as an adaptation of a book that, by this point, had become revered literary classic, and to highlight the journey fantasy fandom had undergone since its cultish, counter-cultural origins during the mid-twentieth century (*The Washington Post*, 2001).

If the various lives and afterlives that ‘Frodo Lives!’ enjoyed within US society during the 1960s and 1970s are united by anything, it is by their inconsistency. The slogan was used by some to celebrate alternative lifestyles, by others to denounce the banality of counter-cultural activities and by seemingly the majority just to play along with a rather fun conceit. ‘Frodo Lives!’ seems to mean anything to anyone, its popularity in part fuelled by its ability to be co-opted and adapted by various subsections of society rather than its ability to present a clear message of counter-cultural rebellion. Nonetheless, one must be careful not to mistake a malleable message with a confused message. Instead, to understand the phenomenon of ‘Frodo Lives!’ properly, it is important to embrace its malleability of message as a means of understanding its

strengths and limitations. The point of the movement, from any direction, was never to say anything. It was to enjoy the act of saying it. With this in mind, 'Frodo Lives!' seems to have served an overwhelmingly emotional function to those that used it. Its purpose was to bring joy, a function that can often be dismissed or overlooked if one takes a purely sociological stance on the phenomenon, but an essential part of living within the world and culture. As a societal gesture, 'Frodo Lives!' is chaotic. As an expression of subjectivity, the phrase has hidden realms of order and meaning whose plethora of usages highlights rather than diminishes.

As one attempts to offer any theoretical insight into the psychosocial dynamics at work in the popularity and malleability of 'Frodo Lives!' both at the height of its popularity and ever since, there seems little point offering a dogmatic or deterministic understanding of what the phrase seems to enact in its users. There are too many variations for such an interpretation to be credible. Instead, what needs theorising is the very malleability offered, and the binding emotional resonance beneath its vastly competing usages and interpretations. Psychoanalytic theories of phantasy provide a useful tool within this process. Both the Lacanian and Kleinian approach to phantasy highlight the lack of fixity of language (and the meaning it denotes) to provide for the subject alone, and the essential role of the imaginary in the creation and perpetuation of human discourse. Both theorists emphasise different aspects to this experience, often to the point of disagreement, but within their melting pot of ideas there is successful attempt to articulate the role of fantasy as both a supporting system for dominant doctrine, and as a way of expressing something beyond the pre-existing and pre-determined. Applying these ideas to something as culturally ubiquitous as fantasy fiction and the movements it inspires may seem obvious to the point of triteness, but it is only in a critical approach to phantasy that we might understand the emotional (as opposed to intellectual) impact of contemporary mass media's most popular form of storytelling.

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