

***The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings*: similarities and differences between two children of the Great War**

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It is of common knowledge that both Lewis and Tolkien took part in the First World War, and that in the years following the conflict they became distinguished scholars of the English language and literature at Oxford University. Those who accuse these writers of escapism tend to overlook the fact that such a *curriculum vitae* would make it virtually impossible for them to remain ignorant of, and not to at least in *some* way reflect in their own writing, the events that changed the world and the literature in the first half of the twentieth century. This paper aims to offer a new approach to the place of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* in this common context, and also to discuss how these works differ from each other with reference to the way in which they combine Christian and pagan elements.

The Great War and the literary imagination

As we look back at the fictional accounts of the age immediately preceding the Great War, we find not only ostentatious dinner parties, hunting expeditions and luxurious holidays, as in Wodehouse's humorous portrayals of the "jolly" Edwardian spirit⁹, but also nostalgic tales of a simple, rural, domestic life marked by a sense of community, innocence and idealism, as in the novels of Thomas Hardy or the utopian fiction of William Morris. Both attitudes were justified by the ideas of the influential philosopher Moore, who considered that the most important thing in life was artistic experience and personal relationships, and everything else should be looked upon as means to achieve these ends (Lloyd 1993:28). With this philosophy, Moore paved the way for a paradoxical combination of hedonism and Puritanism that became immensely popular among a great part of the English population in the first decade of the twentieth century, giving rise both to the literary vanguard of the Bloomsbury group, in which writers such as Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey took part, and the more traditional school of Georgian poetry, perhaps best represented by the poet Rupert Brooke (Lloyd 1993:29).¹⁰

The First World War dealt a brutal blow to this mentality, a blow from which the innocent pre-war England never quite recovered. The break with the past that took place with the onset of the Great War implied a new conception of time and a new distrust in linear progress, concerning both the welfare state and time as phenomenon, that would have a profound impact on European culture.

⁹ Best seen in the immensely popular series of novels about Psmith. Robert Graves, in *Good-bye to All That* (1929), provides us with a more objective and sombre overview of the lifestyle of a well-to-do English family in the years prior to the Great War, but the main features of the carefree Edwardian and Georgian lifestyle remain the same.

¹⁰ On Georgian poetry as a school, see Reeves (1968).

During and after the war there seemed to have existed a generalized feeling that one cycle had concluded and another epoch was being initiated, the characteristics of which were still very unclear, even chaotic. The so-called war poets, among others Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Edmund Blunden, recreated pastoral settings in their poetry, partly in order to palliate the destructive aesthetic effects of the battles on the landscape and on the poets' own imagination. That tendency would disappear after the war, when many modernists tried to delve deeper into contemporary reality, centring instead on the sordid and unpleasant aspects of the modern world.¹¹

The particular conditions of the First World War, with its massive destruction and overwhelming scope, contributed to the general anxiety and generated a deep mistrust in modernity's capacity to find a stable progress. These doubts marked a great part of modernist literature, which often denies the possibility of finding something akin to happiness in the modern world. At the same time, the idea of being immersed in a process of destruction and renewal must have been inspiring to the literary imagination, offering, as it did, what looked like a fresh perspective – because of the complete break with the past it seemed possible, for the first time, to achieve a global vision of the cycle that was coming to an end,¹² and to put fragments taken from the chaotic birth of the new era next to images of the past in order to show the sundering effects on the collective imagination, or perhaps as a desperate attempt to connect the fragmented present with a more stable past. This, among other things, was what such renowned representatives of high modernism as James Joyce, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot tried to do in works like *Ulysses*, *The Cantos* and *The Waste Land*.

The common impulse in these works is perhaps best explained by Northrop Frye's famous theory of modes. Frye (1971:33-34) concludes that the Western literary tradition has been marked by five major tendencies: *myth*, in which the heroes are superior to men and to their environment (as, for example, the figure of Thor in Sturlusson's *Edda*); *romance*, where the protagonists are superior *in degree* to other men and their environment (some heroes of the homeric epics, such as Achilles); *high mimesis*, featuring heroes superior in degree to other men but not to their environment (like Roland of the *Chanson de Roland*); *low mimesis*, dealing with heroes that are neither superior to other men nor to their environment (Moll Flanders of Defoe's eponymous novel); and the *ironic* mode, whose protagonists are inferior to other men and to their environment (for instance Svejik, of Hasek's *The Good Soldier Svejik*).¹³

Frye (1971:42) considers that all modes may coincide to a greater or lesser extent in a single literary work, and that the mimetic modes (romance, high mimesis, and low mimesis) are examples of "displaced myth" that move progressively towards the opposite pole compared to mythic standards of verisimilitude, which is the starting point, until they commence to lean back towards myth in the ironic mode:

¹¹ Eksteins (1990:237) claims that modernism, "which in its prewar form was a culture of hope, a vision of synthesis, would turn to a culture of nightmare and denial [...] The Great War was the axis on which the modern world turned."

¹² Auerbach's study *Mimesis*, first published in 1944, is emblematic of this assumption, offering a survey of how the Western world has been portrayed in different literary traditions, from Homer up to the twentieth century. According to Kermode (1968:94), Auerbach was convinced that European civilization was on the verge of being replaced by another era, and that the historical moment taking place after the First World War offered a unique opportunity to achieve a global vision of the true character of Europe.

¹³ Our examples.

Irony descends from the low mimetic: it begins in realism and dispassionate observation. But as it does so, it moves steadily towards myth, and dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear in it. Our five modes evidently go around in a circle. This reappearance of myth in the ironic is particularly clear in Kafka and in Joyce [...] However, ironic myth is frequent enough elsewhere, and many features of ironic literature are unintelligible without it.

This return to myth, Frye argues, alluding to Yeats's ideas about the conclusion of the Western cycle and to Joyce's vision of modernity as a frustrated apocalypse, is reinforced by cyclical theories of time, "the appearance of such theories being a typical phenomenon of the ironic mode." (Frye 1971:62) However, as we have mentioned already, it was not easy to discern a general direction of the new age. Critics such as Kermode (1968:98) and Eksteins (1990:256-259) believe that time after the Great War came to be regarded as a transitional phenomenon; that is, a new cycle had not begun, but Western civilization had rather reached some sort of unheroic limbo between cycles.

It is only natural that the frustration caused by such an awareness should yield a use of irony in literature to reflect the bitterness, but the reasons for another, more creative response, aiming at recovering what could still be saved of the past cycle, are not difficult to imagine either. The latter attitude is expressed in the poetry of T.S. Eliot, who, in Kermode's (1968:112) view, pretended to "reunite the history of all that interested him in order to have past and present conform [...] He saw his age as a long transition through which the elect must live, redeeming the time [...]."

In other words, the need to recover traditions from past ages becomes particularly peremptory in times of transition, and the tendency to incorporate significant fragments – see Pound's *Luminous Detail* – from those traditions in newly-written poetry may be a consequence of this. Because, as Ricoeur (1987:33-34) concludes when discussing modernist attitudes towards plot-making, without the reference of accumulated tradition it would be impossible to see how the new style differed from the old, and therefore impossible to say that the novel is dead.

Lewis, Tolkien, and Ironic Myth

Like the modernists, both Tolkien and Lewis combine and reinvigorate the main Western narrative traditions – myth, epic, romance, and different stages of the novel, to use a more common terminology than Frye's – on a simultaneous level in their fiction. As a result of this insistent dialogue between different narrative traditions it is very difficult to attribute any given genre to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. To give just a few examples, in Tolkien's case the novel is used as the main narrative vehicle for the author's almost obsessive desire to situate the reader in space and time during most of the journeying. Lewis, though he is more vague about spatial and temporal relationships, employs the novel to incorporate other traditions – one example is the transition from the professor's wardrobe to Narnia, in which the children take on the role of interpreters of the new world for the reader and express surprise and incredulity much like a reader accustomed to novel-standards of

verisimilitude¹⁴ – which have previously dominated the narrative – would when confronted with fantastic events, settings and creatures. Apart from this, the novel genre is consistently used in both works for the particular distribution of information with dramatic intentions, making the reader formulate hypothesis that he or she must modify as more information is provided.

At the same time, the narratives of Lewis and Tolkien are heavily informed by romance standards. Many events seem to take place gratuitously, especially when the children (or hobbits) have left the familiar world (or the Shire): Tom Bombadil arrives at just the right time to save the hobbits from Old Man Willow, and the White Witch drives by in her sledge just as Edmund walks out in the woods of Narnia for the first time, and so on. As in medieval romance, we frequently come across visual images that are used to elucidate the essence of the experience¹⁵, such as the fallen King-statue redeemed by nature in Tolkien's Ithilien, or the broken Stone Table in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Apart from the novel and romance traditions, epic traits are also very much present in both tales. *The Lord of the Rings* is the story of the end of the Third Age in Middle-earth and the central action spans two years, but the text compresses and summarizes the main historical events and the artistic legacy of several thousand years of the History of Middle-earth, which are almost encyclopaedically incorporated in the text. Such a compression is a salient feature of the most well-known epic works of Classical Antiquity, such as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, or the *Aeneid*. Likewise, when the Pevensies arrive to Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the winter has been going on for a hundred years and the children appear just in time to take part in the Last Battle that will change the destiny of the world. As in the epic tradition, the information about action and events from the past is transmitted by means of digressions, in turn generated by the content of the main action – and even complete books, such as *The Magician's Nephew*, that may be contemplated as an extended digression that explains the beginning of all things Narnian.

The influence of myth in the works of Lewis and Tolkien is more difficult to state with concrete examples, this type of narrative paradigm being much more elusive compared to the other three. However, if we look at Cupitt's (Coupe 1997:5) list of what he takes to be the basic features of all myths – they are about supernatural beings with human form and supernatural powers; the action takes place outside historical time or in a supernatural world; there may be irruptions between this world and the supernatural world; they express the fragmented logic of a dream, and they explain and legitimate the action they describe –, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* incorporate almost all of them at one point or another.

Because of this insistent dialogue between narrative traditions and the general movement towards mythic paradigms, we believe that the works of Lewis and Tolkien may be fruitfully read in the context of ironic myth, though it is evident that they provide the reader with a very peculiar version of this kind of literature. While the two Oxford scholars express the common impulse to gather traditions from the past and put them together on a simultaneous level, they did not feel the need to portray modern Western civilization “as it was” in order to

¹⁴ In Watt's (1983:34) words, “particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and places” is the reality that the modern novel transmits to its readers, though we might add the adjective “credible” to the notion of particularity.

¹⁵ Stevens (1973:147), discussing the imagery of medieval romance, claims that “central to the experience conveyed by the text is not an idea, an attitude, a feeling or responses of a character, but an emphatically realized visual object pointing beyond itself, there to crystallize the meaning of the scene”.

make people see its dangers, perhaps because it was already there, day and night, speaking for itself. The time had come to propose a radically different vision, and this was partly conceived of as a common venture.¹⁶ Their alternative was a self-referential, invented world with a proper mythology, in which the different traditions were able to co-exist simultaneously and the past could interact with the present with a certain amount of fluency, in order to renew our perception of our own world. This decision is crucial to any understanding of the particularity of their vision within the contemporary literary context. In the works of Lewis and Tolkien, the Western narrative traditions interact in a previously unknown setting¹⁷ that, because of the particular cohesion required by such a chronotope, exhibits a clear contextualization of references to the previous traditions, and does not need to resort to irony or parody – two literary devices that Bakhtin (1989:451) considers indispensable in order to liberate the “dead” genres of the past – to portray the interaction of different genres. For this reason, the simultaneous presence of the heroic and the unheroic, the old epic and the modern novel, is not disruptive, as in the works of Joyce, Pound and Eliot, but smoothly integrated in the narrative dialogue.

One consequence of this fluency is that the reader hardly perceives the complexity of the web of interrelated traditions that is hidden beneath the adventure stories that take place on the surface, and the tales become much more accessible to the average reader than the modernist literature we have referred to above. This invisibility, generated by narrative functionality, and the ensuing lack of irony, may explain why *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* have not been previously studied in the context of ironic myth.

The reasons why Lewis and Tolkien gave such a peculiar twist to this kind of literature are various. To begin with, they disliked most modernist literature, partly because it tended to accept the negative aspects of modernity and contributed to, instead of palliating, the general confusion and hopelessness in an age seriously threatened by various forms of totalitarianism. This lax response to adversity implied a certain dose of defeatism, an attitude that the two Oxford scholars detested (partly as a result of their Christian faith) and strove to counter with a message of hope in their own literature. Another trait of high modernism that both writers wished to avoid was the elitist reference to the works of previous traditions and the formal experimentation that sometimes made the modernists' prose and poetry inaccessible to the general reader. Tolkien put forth the problem in the following terms:

We may indeed be older now, in so far as we are heirs in enjoyment or in practice of many generations of ancestors in the arts. In this inheritance of wealth there may be a danger of boredom or of anxiety to be original, and that may lead to a distaste for fine drawing, delicate pattern, and “pretty” colours, or else to mere manipulation and over-elaboration of old material, clever and heartless. But the true road of escape from such weariness is not to be found in the wilfully awkward, clumsy, or misshapen, not in making all things dark

¹⁶ While the narratives of Lewis and Tolkien were completely personal project, they had read and commented on each other's texts for many years prior to the publication of the works, during the gatherings of the so-called Inklings, an unofficial group of intellectuals at Oxford of which Lewis and Tolkien were members. For more thorough studies on the influence of this group on Lewis and Tolkien, see Carpenter (1977), and Duriez (2003).

¹⁷ In spite of the invented space, history and mythology, Narnia and Middle-earth are, of course, not completely foreign to the modern reader, being based on narrative, mythological and cultural paradigms of different epochs in the history of our own world.

or unremittingly violent; nor in the mixing of colours on through subtlety to drabness, and the fantastical complication of shapes to the point of silliness and on towards delirium. Before we reach such states we need recovery. We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red [...] This recovery fairy-stories help us to make. [...] (Tolkien 1966:76-77)

Tolkien seems to say that some modern literature is unable to recover a fresh perception of reality due to its excessive formal experimentation and the attention to the negative details of modernity. He speaks of the need to avoid this apathetic attitude toward tradition and modernity, stating that fairy-stories, as he understands the term, may help us renew our perception of the world and see new possibilities.

In the fiction of Lewis and Tolkien, recovery of a fresh vision leads not only to a new appreciation for the simple objects of the natural world, but also to the possibility of a new contact and relationship with the old, Christian message. However, while the two writers shared the Christian's belief in the immortality of the soul, they were at the same time profoundly attracted to Norse mythology and literature. And here the similarities end, because the question of how they integrate both elements – Christian and pagan – in their works articulates one of the fundamental differences between the two authors.¹⁸

Paganism and Christianity in 'The Lord of the Rings' and 'The Chronicles of Narnia'

When Tolkien looked for a way of combining literary traditions of the past, he wished to avoid the fatidic combination of "over-elaboration of old material" and defeatism. In order to add poignancy to the question of how to approach our mortality (i.e., how to face adversity), Tolkien portrays in *The Lord of the Rings* a stance which is sometimes deliberately crude and tinged by an element of despair that runs counter to the purely Christian culture of hope but coincides with the Norse attitude, which centres on stubborn resistance to the forces of destruction by means of manifestations of unbreakable courage in spite of the certainty of defeat. At the same time, he blends the Northern courage with Christian humility and a vague sense of hope, and this *mélange* gives rise to a great deal of inner tension in many of the characters.

This is particularly clear in (though by no means limited to) the character of Gandalf, who often acts like a heroic tutor for the members of the Fellowship and the other representatives of the Free Peoples.¹⁹ Gandalf can thus be seen as the most authoritative moral model in the work, and it is interesting to notice that he integrates the pagan and the Christian stances in a both peculiar and subtle way. An example of this combination is when the wizard mysteriously asserts that Boromir "escaped" before he died: "Galadriel told me that he was in peril. But he escaped in the end. I am glad. It was not in vain that the hobbits came with us, if only for Boromir's sake". (LotR, 517)

¹⁸ This is, of course, not the only difference, but we believe that it is one of the most important, giving rise to divergent stylistic treatments of the themes and the narrative universes – simple, forceful and direct in the case of Lewis; complex, vacillating and sometimes paradoxical, in the case of Tolkien.

¹⁹ According to Tolkien, the function of the wizards, "maintained by Gandalf, and perverted by Saruman, was to encourage and bring out the native powers of the Enemies of Sauron" (Letters, 180), which well fits the discreet role Gandalf plays when it comes to decision-making.

Escape from what? And what did the hobbits have to do with it? The only possible interpretation is that the answer is related to the same motivations that made Aragorn forgive Boromir after his treason: a *mélange* of Christian and pagan heroic ethics. Boromir's soul was saved due to his repentance, and the hobbits provided him with a just cause that helped him achieve heroic redemption in battle.

In the last debate of the eponymous chapter, the wizard's speech is marked by parables and sayings expressed with an almost evangelical diction, that exemplify his moral counsel regarding duty – “[...] it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till” (LotR, 913) – with a strong emphasis on the need to make altruistic sacrifices:

[...] it may well prove that we ourselves shall perish utterly in a black battle far from the living lands; so that even if Barad-dûr be thrown down, we shall not live to see a new age. But this, I deem, is our duty. And better so than to perish nonetheless – as we surely shall, if we sit here – and know as we die that no new age shall be.’ (LotR, 914)

Though the altruistic motivation be Christian, Gandalf obviously appeals to the qualities of “Northern courage”, offering no salvation but just the grim satisfaction of knowing, in the moment when they “perish utterly” – that is, with no further hope of salvation – that they have done their duty.

This paradoxical *mélange* – the need for a pagan courage in the face of impending disaster and death, without any hope for posthumous rewards other than one's lasting reputation, and the Christian humility based on virtues such as hope, mercy, forgiveness, and generosity – marks Gandalf's message, and is a clear inheritance from the Old English epic *Beowulf*.²⁰

Lewis, for his part, also combines pagan and Christian matter in his fiction, but he resorts to an allegorical treatment which is absent in Tolkien's narrative, directing the reader's attention unequivocally towards a Christian interpretation in which hope triumphs unquestionably. In Colbert's (2005:13-14) opinion,

The fairy tale animals and witches of Narnia are more than calculated ploys to make the Bible more appealing. Lewis believed fairy tales and religion were naturally connected. He saw myths and legends as a step in humankind's development of belief. To him, they were part of a logical path to Christianity.

Accordingly, in Lewis's work, the pagan elements become a matter of costume, skin-deep only, in which the Christian dogma is sometimes dressed in pagan clothing, and this leaves the characters with far less inner tension between faith and despair.

²⁰ In the essay ‘Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics’, Tolkien stresses the fact that the Old English epic poem was composed in an age when pagan beliefs and Christianity were fruitfully blended. Tolkien, writing in the opposite end of the period of Christian influence, when the religious doctrine, overtaken by a new kind of paganism (albeit worshipping different gods – of consumerism and politic extremism of different kinds), was losing force, perhaps wished to use the same formula to redirect attention to the Christian message in this transitional moment of cultural confusion and despair. See Tolkien (1997).

The character of the *Chronicles* that best articulates Lewis's stance is probably Aslan, the great Lion. Like Gandalf, Aslan acts like a moral authority that inspires courage in the people of Narnia that have been subdued by the Witch. However, in spite of the pagan symbolism of the rejuvenating spring that arrives together with the lion, and Aslan's allies, taken from the mythologies of Classical Antiquity (such as the dryads, naiads, centaurs and fauns), Aslan may be more readily interpreted as a Christ-figure than Gandalf. Indeed, he is meant to be. While Gandalf is greeted by Grima at Meduseld with the name *Lathspell*, or Ill-news, Aslan means lion – commonly known as the “King of the jungle”, a clear wink at Christ as King without a crown – and there are several references to the good news – Old English *Godspell*, modern *gospel* – that the name inspires in his followers. When the Beaver first mentions the name Aslan to the children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, they feel “quite different” all of a sudden – Edmund, who has already betrayed them, is significantly gripped by fear, but the others feel brave, happy and expectant. (*Chronicles*, 141) The second time they hear the name, the reaction is of unabashed joy and excitement: “Oh yes! Tell us about Aslan!” said several voices, for once again that strange feeling – like the first signs of spring, like good news – had come over them.” (*Chronicles*, 146)

One of the most crucial episodes within the whole series is Aslan's decision to sacrifice his own life in order to save Edmund's. This episode crystallizes the underlying moral that governs the very creation – past, present and future – of Narnia, as referred to in the title of the chapter – ‘Deeper Magic from before the Dawn of Time’:

“It means,” said Aslan, “that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation, she would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards. [...]” (*Chronicles*, 185)

In other words, Aslan's resurrection is the will of the Creator that can be imposed on the laws that govern our earthly existence (which, as opposed to the Creator, is confined to a particular space and time). Here, Aslan comes to embody something that lies very close to the essence of the tales, namely the celebration of the holiness of Creation, with all of its desired correspondences to our own world and the Christian religion.

These correspondences are also possible to trace in Tolkien's work, but in the *Chronicles* they become, quite ostensibly, an allegory of the New Testament. Aslan gives his life for another, and walks alone (even when accompanied by Lucy and Susan he underscores his loneliness) his private Golgotha towards the Stone Table where he is publicly tortured, humiliated and killed. The next day, Lucy and Susan, two innocent female figures, discover that the stone which formerly kept the lion bound to the realm of the dead is broken, having yielded to divine forces, much like the rock that was removed from the tomb of Christ.

When Aslan comes back to life again he is supremely confident about the forthcoming success of the war on the Witch, and the two girls' previous despair is immediately turned into unreserved happiness and delight. In other words, since there is no question that the opposing forces will be defeated and peace restored to Narnia, the characters are left without any tension between hope and despair. This is largely due to the fact that in Lewis's story, the deeper

implications of the pagan mindset are left out. The pagan creatures, and even the natural world, are an inherent part of the magic of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea (the equivalence of the Christian God), and bend willingly to His will through the figure of Aslan.

On the surface level, something similar to Aslan's death, return and triumph takes place in Tolkien's tale, when Gandalf, after his fight with the Balrog in Moria, dies and is sent back by the Valar to organize the war on Sauron. Here, too, Christian and pagan elements mingle, but the pagan influence is more profound and lingers even after Gandalf's return, offering a good deal of uncertainty as to the final outcome which permeates the narrative on many levels. At Meduseld, for instance, when Gandalf rouses Théoden from his defeatist slumber, Christian virtues such as forgiveness are imposed on the more savage warrior ethics, that would have had Gríma, the King's deceitful counsellor, executed for his treason – instead, Gríma is offered a place in the cavalry next to the King. However, it is worth to notice that the whole point of rousing Théoden is that he should engage his troops in the epic War of the Ring – indeed, the reason why the King agrees to do so is that Gandalf ignites his desire to achieve lasting glory by means of impressive feats on the battlefield, not because he longs for any posthumous celestial award.

Gandalf himself also shows the double influence of pagan warrior ethics and Christian hope. This can be seen in the final battle at the Black Gate, in which all hope is apparently lost as the lieutenant of Sauron shows them Frodo's clothes. Gandalf grimly accepts that they shall all “perish utterly”, but even so, he is unwilling to give up. As the battle rages at the Black Gate, Gandalf appears like a wrathful god of the old epics, coolly supervising the destruction of lives.

At the same time, the vision of the war-hungry gods of the classical epics and Norse mythology is suggestively combined with an image closely resembling the Archangel Michael, messenger of the divine judgment (the scene at Khazad-dûm also shows Gandalf like this), subtly underscored by his announcement that the hour of doom has come (the word “doom” significantly, and perhaps deliberately, leaves room for two interpretations – one referring to the Final Judgment of Christian dogma, the other to a moment in which a more general destiny is decided).

While *The Lord of the Rings* retains this ambiguity all through the tale, in the end of *The Chronicles* the protagonists die and come to the kingdom of heaven, guided there by Aslan:

“[...] The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion [...] All their life in this world and all the adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” (*Chronicles*, 767)

At this point, the semi-pagan disguise finally falls off and the narrator acknowledges almost explicitly, writing “He” with an initial capital letter, that the story is an allegory of the Christian message.

At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo, Gandalf and the elves also leave the earthly realm of Middle-earth to go to Valinor. However, Tolkien offers no complete or permanent hope for the rest of the inhabitants of the world, but

rather a melancholy, bitter-sweet and decidedly earth-bound sort of sadness at our transitory existence and the effects of time, that will sooner or later wipe away the traces left by elves, dwarves and men alike. This is expressed most poignantly in the Appendix A (v), which must be considered an internal part of the narrative, that tells of Aragorn's death and Arwen's subsequent loneliness as she must "abide the Doom of Men" (*LotR*, 1100).

The main difference between the integration of Christian and pagan elements in the fiction of Lewis and Tolkien can perhaps best be explained with reference to the concepts of *applicability*, which, as Tolkien wrote in the Foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (*LotR*, 11), is based on the reader's freedom to choose, and *allegory*, marked by the author's desire to guide the reader towards a given interpretation, which would be the case of Lewis.

This difference may in turn be motivated by the personal circumstances of the authors. Tolkien was raised a Catholic and remained one for his whole life, but at the same time, he was prone to suffer from depressions and was not seldom overwhelmed by hopelessness, as shown by his diary (Carpenter 2000:243). As a Christian specialist in Norse mythology and Old English literature, his ideological allegiance may have been divided²¹, and even if he had been a Christian believer without any inner tension, he was very much conscious that he could not propose a new evangelium completely in the "old style" if he wished modern readers to relate to it. He felt that he must avoid all explicit reference to Christian dogma and propose a different myth, deeply rooted in the traditions of Northern Europe, in which triumph could never be taken for granted, as the events of Tolkien's own lifetime had repeatedly shown. In part, such a sombre outlook have led most critics to abandon the premature view that Tolkien's best-known work belongs to the realm of children's literature, or to an escapist kind of literature without any connections to the twentieth-century context in which it was written.

Lewis, on the other hand, offers a narrative of everlasting hope and bliss, which perhaps reflects the joy he felt after his own conversion from youthful atheism to mature Christianity – a conversion in which, ironically, Tolkien played an important part. In his vision, as in Tolkien's, faith is the key to everything else, but as opposed to what happens in *The Lord of the Rings*, it comes relatively easy, and once it has arrived, there is no return to hopelessness and joy will inevitably be the final result. The chapter 'The Lion Roars' in *Prince Caspian*, in which the Pevensies find Aslan again because of their faith in Lucy's intuition, shows this particularly clearly. Only Lucy can see Aslan at first, and the others are naturally reluctant to believe her. However, they end up following the invisible lion, guided by Lucy, though they cannot see him and would have preferred to sleep. The idea that mankind tends towards the highest good – which is central to Boethius's classical *The Consolation of Philosophy*, a book that C.S. Lewis admired and acknowledged as one of his main sources of inspiration – also governs the Christian narrative of the *Chronicles* in such a way as to make it impossible for the reader to doubt that the Pevensies could do anything but to follow Aslan sooner or later. In part, the simplicity of such a response, and the stylistic consequences that come with it, have led most critics to consider that Lewis's fiction is literature for children.

²¹ In Burns's (2005:178) view, Tolkien "is a pessimist and optimist both. There is no in between. He is a Christian believer whose answer lies in a 'beyond' (a beyond that may as well be thought of as westward over the Sea). At the same time – on this plane – Tolkien is very much a Norseman and adheres to a Norseman's creed. His message, then, is a double one. It speaks of doom and inevitable battle and it speaks of eternal peace."

Be that as it may, while both tales can be interpreted as narratives of return and triumph, as Cantor claims²², and while they (to some extent) share the same space within the context of the Great War and its general literary outcome, the different ways in which the two writers combine Christian and pagan elements show that this space does not necessarily yield homogeneous responses, and we believe that any interpretation of Lewis's work may be enriched by a consciousness of this simultaneously symbiotic and adversary relationship.

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²² In Cantor's (1993:212-213) view, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis showed "a more positive response [...] than the postimperial stoicism, cultural despair, and resigned Christian pessimism that were the common response of their British contemporaries [...] Out of the medieval Norse, Celtic, and Grail legends they conjured fantasies of revenge and recovery, an ethos of return and triumph." See also Veldman (1994).

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