JUST A FEW WORDS…

> Then darkness took me, and I strayed out of thought and time, and I wandered far on roads that I will not tell. Naked I was sent back – for a brief time, until my task is done.
>
> J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Lord of The Rings. Part II – The Two Towers*

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has been read and transformed in multiple ways, its narrative meticulously examined, its symbols analysed, its text regarded as configuring different allegories. Indeed, the novels became the best-known and most celebrated epic fantasy trilogy in the 20th century preserving their preponderance throughout more recent times. Whether in literature, cinema or music, countless works have been produced in their shadow, both as mere derivative pieces and as original fictions with an active and distinctive voice. As clearly shown by numerous studies in wide areas of literary theory and criticism as well as in comparative literature, Tolkien's legacy is both literary and cultural, it tackles sensitive national identity issues, and its influence pours out in many postmodern representations of man and nature, thus recreating the old traditional paths of epic fantasy and fantastic literature overall.

Derived as they were from the absorption and transformation of a sizeable body of mythological works in a number of languages, as well as from ancient-classical epic narratives and travel literature, Tolkien’s mythopoetic compositions have themselves spawned a wealth of intermedial adaptations, from illustrations and radio plays to films, comic books, heavy metal and folk songs, symphonic compositions, operas, videogames, role playing games (RPG), spoofs...

Peter Jackson's cinematic adaptation of *The Lord of The Rings* (2001-2003) is perhaps the greatest example of all, having contributed so far to further popularize Tolkien’s work and to awake a global epic fantasy euphoria.

‘’The laws of the fantastic are, above all, those of the imagination, and they are, as such, difficult to define’ – these are the words of Maria do Rosário Monteiro,

in her study *A Simbólica do Espaço em* O Senhor dos Anéis *de J.R. R. Tolkien* (2010: 15, our translation), to describe Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as a pioneer novel in contemporary fantastic literature. This book also proves it with a polyhedric approach.

In the short anthology of essays that we are now most pleased to launch as a digital publication of the University of Porto, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, literary and cultural questionings will be discussed alongside intermedial dynamics within the context of Tolkien's work and its multiple versions and expansions. Ultimately, at a narratological level, a particular interest will be given to textual analyses around rhetorical/ stylistic features and devices that further reveal important ideological layers.

Essays are ordered alphabetically, based on the authors' first name initial. Starting with "The Importance of Songs in the Making of Heroes and their impact in Different Media", by Ana Loureiro, the paper analyses the construction of heroes in *The Lord of the Rings* and discusses how heroes lead to the making of songs and vice versa: as they are related to the elvish world and actions, songs lead eventually to the making of heroes.

Andrew Roos Bell's paper, "Wounds in the World: The Shared Symbolism of Death-sites in Middle-Earth", examines a correlated aspect of the symbolism of Middle-earth's three most prominent death-sites (the barrow downs, the dead marshes, and the paths of the dead) while suggesting that the unquiet dead owe their state not simply to these locales' status as tombs, but to burial following acts of unresolved violence.

Bernard Scherr presents his "From Epic Poetry to Music. Tolkien's universe as inspiration for *The First Age of Middle-earth: a Symphony for Concert Band*", where he regards Tolkien's epic narrative as the inspirational source behind the author's musical composition: *The First Age of Middle-earth: a Symphony for Concert Band*. Its four movements express in sound certain thematic elements that are woven throughout Tolkien's epic narrative. An analysis of each movement, illustrated throughout with written musical examples, shows how the musical material is connected to specific themes found in Tolkien's narrative.

Bernhard Hirsch's essay, "Character and Perspective: The Multi-Quest in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings*", approaches Tolkien's most celebrated novel from a narratological point of view, studying its complex character system and concluding that the text narrates not just one Ring-quest but many quest plots. The multi-quest narrative, as the author describes it, resists and defies the *actantial* models of formalist and structuralist analyses of single-quest narratives, and emphasises subplots of the text, as it brings forth "marginalised points of view of secondary (anti-)heroes".

Addressing contemporary concerns of national identity in Wales, Carl Phelpstead's essay, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and J. R. R. Tolkien: Myth-Making and National Identity in The Twelfth and Twentieth Centuries", traces back the origins of the stories of King Lear and Cymbeline to the twelfth-century account of the early history of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia regum Britanniae)*, which also provided the seminal early account of King Arthur. The essay further explores the striking parallels between Geoffrey's work and that of J. R. R. Tolkien and how they both "'turned to the making of myth in order to address contemporary concerns of national identity."

The Indo-European mythological structure of *The Lord of The Rings* is the theme of Cong Mingh Vu's essay, "Mythology and Cosmology in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*". Introducing Dumézil's threefold model of functions – the royal function, the warrior function, the productive function – the author points out the cosmological and metaphysical dimension of Tolkien's work based on the proposition "All is One".

In "Beren and Rhaegar as Two Kinds of Heroes. The Cultural Transmission of the Topic of Love", Eduardo Encabo-Fernández and Isabel Jerez-Martínez reflect on the hero characters of Tolkien's "Beren" and G. R. R. Martins's "Rhaegar" and on what links them, namely, their love stories. Emphasising love conditions and dimensions rather than epic aspects, the authors aim at a comparative study of both characters, different in nature as they are and reflecting their own particular story contexts.

"Of Dead Heroes and Mutable Faces: A Study of *A Song Of Ice And Fire*'s Rhaegar Targaryen", by Hugo Ferraz Gomes, points out the material absence of

Rhaegar Targaryen from the narrative of George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, since, at the outset of the series, the death of the Prince of Dragonstone is already an event of the past. Rhaegar is therefore interpreted as an amalgam of truth and imagination. Ultimately, the paper emphasises that while undergoing a process of reevaluation, rewriting and manipulation, Rhaegar may also be compared to many other heroic characters like Cú Chulainn and Achilles. Since it is 'profuse and impossible to fixate" he "not only fits the archetype of the hero but also subverts it by interpreting its heroic role as an equivocal symbol."

The last essay, by Raul Montero Gilete, "Children and Young Heroes in *The Fellowship of The Ring* and *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe"*, analyses the role of children and young heroes in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* and C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* based on Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and his account of the hero on the first adventure stage, the Departure. The paper further focuses on Lewis' heroes of Book 2 of *The Chronicles of Narnia,* the Pevensie siblings — Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy —, as well as on Tolkien's four Hobbits — Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin — of Book 1 of *The Lord of the Rings*, in order to outline a common ground of possible links between the nature of children and heroism.

Perhaps this last essay provides the reason to read all the others, inquiring why Tolkien's work remains so attractive to so many readers around the world: maybe because it is the representation of a radical vitality in the face of obstacles.

Tolkien's success would not certainly result from undertaking "a world around language", from outlining a "creative process" that encompasses even the musical elements of that language, or from "creating a mythology for England" that can be read in its contemporaneity – even if Tolkien and his main biographer, Humphrey Carpenter, have called our attention to the importance of these three elements as the founding forces of his writing. In fact, today, at least, Tolkien's readers don't seem to be particularly captivated by the mythology created for contemporary England. Also, the translation of his novels seems to diminish the poetic impact the latter have in English. And general questions about languages and the creation of archaic, forbidden or invented codes – which have been Tolkien's "secret vice" since his childhood and are certainly seductive to those who despise the war between Lang (Linguistics) and Lit (Literature) – remain for

most readers “exotic” references, and would never justify the great enthusiasm for the adventures of Bilbo, Frodo, Gandolf, Beren, Lúthien or Éowyn…

Translated into more than 40 languages, finding readers in almost all ages, Tolkien's work only seems to require the open-mindedness of that sort of reader we associate with the child, however ageless this open-mindedness may be. Such open-mindedness is perhaps to be found at the very core of “fairy-stories”. As Tolkien remarks, one should not mix up children with childlike: “In describing a fairy-story which they think adults might possibly read for their own entertainment, reviewers frequently indulge in such waggeries as: ‘this book is for children from the ages of six to sixty’. But I have never yet seen the puff of a new motor-model that began thus: ‘this toy will amuse infants from seventeen to seventy’; though that to my mind would be much more appropriate” (Tolkien, 1983: 129-130).

The common association, even nowadays, between Fantasy and Childhood would denounce the dangerous idea of considering Fantasy as an inferior kind of Literature, and children as inferior beings, “almost a different race, rather than normal, if immature, members of a particular family, and the human family at large” (ibid: 130).

Regardless of the time or space in which Tolkien’s novels were written, the reason for their success is certainly found in the radical vitality that links both the author’s and his readers’ motivations: Tolkien's work requires only the curious and wondering reader he himself was. Never does it infantilize the reader, simply because it does not infantilize the child. Tolkien’s intent has an utmost precision: the reader must believe what he is being told, even if some “details” of the narrative seem new and strange in the actual world he knows: “If they awakened *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded” (*ibid*: 134). Therefore, to understand Tolkien, the capacity for Fantasy must never be confused with the mere capacity for Imagination (i.e., “the mental power of image-making”, “the perception of image, the grasp of its implications, and the control”, with several differences of degree). What interests Tolkien is a very different world: “the inner consistency of reality”, “needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation”. In this sense, Fantasy is “a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when

achieved) the most potent" (*ibid*: 138-139). Under this perspective, Fantasy is the most natural human activity. It does not oppose Reason or Science. It does not cloud our perception of reality. It is not a lie – "On the contrary" (*ibid*: 144). It is a desire for "Truth" and "Reality".

When Tolkien chooses the short epitaph on his wife's tomb and on his own – "Edith Mary Tolkien, Lúthien, 1889-1971// John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, Beren, 1892-1973" –, he denounces the vivid reality of the fable. When W. H. Auden, J. I. M. Stewart and other students recall Tolkien's lectures of Medieval Literature - – which invariably began with an exclamation (*Hwaet!*) followed by a reading of an excerpt from *Beowulf* – they believed they were hearing a bard or the voice of Gandalf. Not because Tolkien was Beren, a bard or Gandalf, but because his readings introduced them to a Secondary World, the transferred reality of their Primary World: this hidden world came into being and there was poetry in the life lived by each of them (Carpenter, 1990: 284, 151): "To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed, narrative art, story-making in its primary and most potent mode" (Tolkien, 1983: 140).

Another reason, still related to its radical vitality, seems to justify the indelible enthusiasm for Tolkien's work: a deep Joy that radiates from his narrative, perfectly compatible with the melancholy that comes from knowing consciously that all Joy is fragile. Joy persist even though heroes die and dragons and rings survive them. During the second world war, on October 6, 1940, he wrote to his son Michael: "I am very sorry indeed, dear boy, that your Varsity career has been cut in two. […] Though in times of peace we get, perhaps (and naturally and for the purpose rightly), too engrossed in thinking of everything as a preparation or training or a making one fit – for what? At any minute it is what we are and are doing, not what plan and do that counts" (Tolkien, 1981: 46).

Tolkien often uses the word "Game" when referring to stories and life: it is a structure constrained by chance and established rules, yet, full of imaginative possibilities. The "story-making in its primary mode" does not disappoint him: on

the contrary, he rejoices in its basic character, as if he were a painter who discovers that he can paint everything with three colour tubes, or an architect who is ecstatic about the simplicity of having only straight and curved lines: “We do not, or need not, despair of drawing because all lines must be either curved or straight, nor of painting because there are only three ‘primary’ colours” (Tolkien, 1983: 146). In fact, this immanent despair in the face of simplicity or repetition is the clearest evidence of the freedom they hide. Tolkien's imitators did not always understand it this way: the literary escape is not only a form of consolation, but also a force of creation: “[…] 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 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 and such states we need recovery. We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make.” (*Ibidem*)

It is in search of creative liberation that we go back to basics, reading, re-reading Tolkien. It is still a quest for our salvation and a quest for objectivity: “Recovery (which includes return and renewal of health) is a re-gaining of a clear view. I do not say ‘seeing things as they are’ and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say ‘seeing things as we are (or were) meant to seen them’ – as things apart from ourselves” (*ibidem*). So we wish for this book on Tolkien's work.

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Filomena Vasconcelos
Maria Luísa Malato

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