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**‘The proud people, deathless but
doomed, from far beyond the sea’**

An application of György Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel* to
J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*

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*To my family,
the salt of the earth and that of the sea.*

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Introduction

Written in 1914 and first published in book form in 1920, *Theorie des Romans* by Gyorgy Lukács was, according to Max Dvorak, ‘the most important publication of the intellectual sciences movement’ (Lukács 1978, p.12). The book offers an insight into the philosophical and historical roots of the novel by establishing a connection between the development of this literary form and European modernity. Lukács locates the rise of the novel in the context a fall. Its starting point are those ‘happy ages’ (Lukács, 1978, p.29) in ancient Greece when the essence and meaning of life are immanent:

When the starry sky is the map of all possible paths —ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning—in sense—and complete for the senses; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself. (Lukács, 1978, p. 29)

The fall causes an age of transcendence to start, when the unity described above is compromised, the immanence of meaning in life is lost and there occurs a ‘rift between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, a sign of the essential difference between the self and the world, the incongruence of soul and deed.’ (Lukács, 1978, p. 29) It is at this time that the novel form arises, embodying the ‘rift’ and the loss of the immanence of meaning, which entails a transcendental search for it as well as the possibility for an independent inner life.

This work aims at applying the theory formulated by Lukács to *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien. In particular, the novel photographs the moment

of the rift: the moment in which the Elves, immortal beings bearing the immanence of meaning, leave Middle Earth to the Men, who, being mortals, do not participate in the communion elves share with the land, God and the 'Holy Ones' (Tolkien, 2013, p. 3).

In order to corroborate this statement, this thesis will begin with a necessary premise, which constitutes the foundation of its argument: the independence, credibility and intrinsic consistency of the Secondary World where Tolkien sets not only *The Lord of the Rings*, but also many other works. Èa, the universe created by Tolkien, of which Middle Earth is a portion, provides not only the backdrop for the adventures narrated in *The Lord of the Rings*, but also a social context, a civilisation from which the novel form arises. Proving its seriousness and solidity, therefore, demonstrates that the novel form is capable of rising not only from the society of our Primary World, but also from a fictional one.

The aforementioned premise will constitute the first chapter of this thesis. It will be followed by a second chapter in which Lukács's theory of the novel will be explained in detail and contextualised within his production. The third chapter will discuss the application of *Theory of the Novel* to *The Lord of the Rings*: the creation of Elves and Men, as well as their development and relationship with God and the land will be analysed, in order to explain how the immanence of meaning is lost in the Third Age, with Elves leaving Middle Earth to Men.

Finally, the fourth chapter will explore how the inner life of Men identifies them as novelistic characters. In fact, Adriana Cavarero aligns herself with Lukács when she states that the characters we find in novels are complete, self-sufficient beings by virtue of their inner life: their existence is rooted in it. In contrast, the heroes of epic poems have to act, to perform deeds in order for their identity to be recognised. *The Lord of the Rings* offers an

embodiment of this distinction in the portrayal of the rich inner life of Aragorn, in contrast with that of the Elves, whose deeds are of paramount importance compared to their psychology.

Chapter I

The fairy way of writing

On 1st July 1712 Joseph Addison introduced the following topic of discussion in the magazine *The Spectator*:

There is a kind of writing wherein the poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his reader's imagination with the characters and actions of such persons as have any of them no existence but what he bestows on them; such are fairies, witches, magicians, demons, and departed spirits. This Mr. Dryden calls the fairy way of writing, which is, indeed, more difficult than any other that depends on the poet's fancy, because he has no pattern to follow in it, and must altogether work out of his own intention (Wolfe, 2012, p. 7).

Addison was mainly referring to poetry and drama, however, according to David Sandner, these lines identify Addison as 'the first critic of the fantastic:' (Wolfe, 2012, p.7). In other words, he is the first to establish a distinction between mimetic fiction and fantasy. As a genre, fantasy has always been extremely difficult to define, and the establishment of its canon has been equally controversial, since there is no unanimity among scholars. However, "the major theorists in the field - Tzvetan Todorov, Rosemary Jackson, Kathryn Hume, W. R. Irwin and Colin Manlowe - all agree that fantasy is about the construction of the impossible." (James and Mendlesohn, 2012, p. 1).

All the aforementioned scholars, therefore, agree on one basic point: the speculative nature of the 'fairy way of writing', where both the author and the reader exercise their imagination. It is also important to notice that, according to Addison, the author 'bestows' existence onto his or her characters: the writer acts like a God and creates creatures which have no correspondence in the real world – the Primary World, as Tolkien would call it. Both these aspects will be crucial in the understanding of Tolkien's contribution to the fantasy genre.

Imagination

Another key notion to understand Tolkien's world-building and the birth of modern fantasy is that of imagination, especially in relation to the concept of fancy. Joseph Addison suggested that they both derived from sight, constituting 'our reaction to or memory of objects of nature or art' (Wolfe, 2012, p.8). This view of imagination had had a long life before Addison: imagination was thought to be a mirror of the external reality. However, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'Romantic poets and their critics could undertake debates about the nature of imagination as revealed through the literary art, and [...] Romantic narrative artists [...] could begin to construct theoretical examination of the nature of their craft, a tradition continued by later fantastic authors from George MacDonald to J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Ursula K. Le Guin' (Wolfe, 2012, p.9).

In 1714, Johan Jakob Bodmer – German poet, critic and translator—wrote:

The imagination is not merely the soul's treasury, where the senses store their pictures in safe-keeping for subsequent use; besides, this it also has a region of its own which extends much further than the dimension of the senses... it not only places the real before our eyes in a vivid image and makes distant things present but also, with a power more potent than that of magic, it draws that which does not exist out of the state of potentiality, gives it a semblance of reality and makes us see, hear and feel these new creations. (Wolfe, 2012, p.8)

Lord Henry Home Kames was another critic who stressed, in 1762, the importance of the creative power of imagination, defining it as a 'power of fabricating images without any foundation in reality' (Wolfe 2012, p. 8). Moreover, William Blake used the term Visionary Fancy to refer to imagination, which he conceptualised as 'surrounded by the daughters of inspiration' (Wolfe, 2012, p.8).

It was Samuel Taylor Coleridge who provided two definitions of fancy and imagination which would ‘set the stage for the critical debate that would occupy much of the nineteenth century and that arguably surrounded the birth of the modern fantasy narrative’ (Wolfe, 2012, p.9). In his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge theorised the existence of ‘two distinct and widely different faculties’ (Wolfe, 2012, p.9): fancy and imagination. While he identified fancy as no more than a ‘mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and place’ with ‘no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites’ (Wolfe, 2012, p.9), he defined imagination as ‘the living power and prime agent of all human perceptions’ (Wolfe, 2012, p.9). Imagination embodies, according to Coleridge, the esemplastic power of the mind: it is capable of ‘shaping disparate things into a unified whole’ (Merriam Webster) and, therefore, of establishing new connections within the mind. As Mendlesoh (2012, p.9) points out, it is ‘the most godlike of human qualities’ – a particularly useful definition, in light of the concept of sub-creation, which will be described later.

Tolkien contributed to the debate in his book *On Fairy Stories* (1943). The essay was first delivered as a lecture at St. Andrews College in 1939 and then published four years later with the title *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, edited by C.S. Lewis. It was eventually included in the volume *Leaf by Niggle*, issued in 1964. *On Fairy Stories* can be considered a compendium of Tolkien’s theoretical views, which include his formulation of the concept of imagination – completely distinct from that of Coleridge, which he deemed ‘philologically inappropriate’ (Tolkien, 2014, p.87) and analytically inaccurate because of the distinction of terms it postulates. Tolkien starts from the recognition that ‘The human mind is capable of forming mental images of things not actually present’ (Tolkien, 2014, p.59) and proceeds to call it imagination, but with one proviso:

In recent times, in technical not normal language, Imagination has often been held to be something higher than the mere image-making, ascribed to the operations of Fancy (a reduced and depreciatory form of the older word Fantasy); an attempt is thus made to restrict, I should say misapply, Imagination to ‘the power of giving to ideal creations the inner consistency of reality.’ (Tolkien, 2014, p.59)

Tolkien denies the existence of a distinction between fancy and imagination, especially in qualitative terms. He states, instead, that there can only be a quantitative variation in imagination:

The mental power of image-making is one thing, or aspect; and it should appropriately be called Imagination. The perception of the image, the grasp of its implications, and the control, which are necessary to a successful expression, may vary in vividness and strength: but this is a difference of degree in Imagination, not a difference in kind. (Tolkien, 2014, p. 59)

Furthermore, he describes the product of the expression of imagination: Art and sub-creation, meaning the act of creation performed by an author, which results in fairy-stories. He finally advocates for the use of another term, more suitable for his theorisation and capable of comprising both the faculty and its outcomes, Fantasy:

The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) “the inner consistency of reality,” is indeed another thing, or aspect, needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. For my present purpose I require a word which shall embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to fairy-story. I propose, therefore, to arrogate to myself the powers of Humpty-Dumpty, and to use Fantasy for this purpose: in a sense, that is, which combines with its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notions of “unreality” (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the domination of observed “fact,” in short of the fantastic. [...] Fantasy may be, as I think, not less but more sub-creative; but at any rate it is found in practice that “the inner consistency of reality” is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the

actual arrangements of the Primary World. [...] 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, 2014, p. 59-61)

Tolkien's contribution to the debate on imagination and fancy and his theorisation of the faculty of Fantasy provide us with an indispensable intellectual tool: they enable us to understand the origin of his ample and complex world-building as well as the process behind it. This is crucial in order to contextualise his work and comprehend the enormous impact that he had on the fantasy genre.

Tolkien's role in the history of the fantasy genre

In his book *Tolkien, Author of the Century* Tom Shippey argues that the fantastic mode, to which the fantasy genre can be ascribed, was of fundamental importance in 20th century literature:

'The dominant literary mode of the twentieth century has been the fantastic [...]. This is not the same, one should note, as fantasy as a literary genre – [...] the fantastic includes many genres besides fantasy: allegory and parable, fairy tale, horror and science fiction, modern ghost story and medieval romance. Nevertheless, the point remains. Those authors who have spoken most powerfully to and for their contemporaries have for some reason found it necessary to use the metaphoric mode of fantasy, to write about worlds and creatures which we know do not exist' (Shippey, 2022, p.vii-viii)

In particular, J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novel *The Lord of the Rings*:

'Looms over all the fantasy written in English - and in many other languages - since its publication; most subsequent writers of fantasy are either imitating him or else desperately trying to escape his influence. His hold over readers has been extraordinary.' (James, 2012, p.62).

The novel was, in fact, crucial for the growth of what we know today as the fantasy genre, because it fixated many of its characteristics. In terms of content, the elements established in fantasy criticism by *The Lord of the Rings* are listed in Clute and Grant's *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy* (1993):

Middle Earth is subject to THINNING, a decline from its former state, partly due to the action of Sauron, the *Dark Lord*. The sense of WRONGNESS in the world demands *Healing*, and that is the purpose of the QUEST on which the heroes embark [...] the heroes move from a familiar world into an unfamiliar one, and learn about the unfamiliar world largely through the uncontested explanations of a mentor-figure [...]. In the course of this quest, the characters reach RECOGNITION, an awareness of their own role in the story of the world, and finally achieve EUCATASTROPHE, a term which Tolkien himself invented to describe the uplifting characteristics of a fairy tale. It is the final turn in the plot, which brings 'a catch of the breath, a beat, and a lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given in any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality'. These elements are part of the basic structure of many fantasies, but Tolkien also indulged in various PLOT DEVICES which are commonly found in subsequent fantasies. These include the Cook's tour, (a journey around the MAP OF FANTASYLAND); Escape [...]; Separation (when the COMPANIONS are able to have different adventures [...]); Temptation (which brings drama into the confrontation between good and evil); and Walking (which means that characters travel slowly through LANDSCAPES and have to solve problems rather than ride away from them.' (Clute and Grant, 1993, cited in James 2012, p.64-65)

Moreover, 'one of the other things that make [Tolkien] distinctive is his professional authority. On some subjects Tolkien simply knew more, and had thought more deeply, than anyone else in the world.' (Shippey, 2022, p. ix). This is why he was not only able to invent a whole functioning world, but he was also able to formulate theories on the structure and origin of what he created:

Tolkien has been described as perhaps the quintessential contemporary mythmaker, yet he was not only a maker, but also a theorist of myth: [...] One sees that [he] slips easily between myth, legend, fairy story and fantasy [...] both in his letters and in his essay *On Fairy Stories*: while ostensibly limited by its title to one specific type of fantasy that essay makes much larger claims about imaginative literature, including myth. (Phelpstead, 2020, p.79)

Specifically, he theorised two interrelated concepts: that of Secondary World (Tolkien's capitals) and that of sub-creation. In *On Fairy Stories*, Tolkien provides a definition of fairy-stories from which a theorisation of the Secondary World stems. These narratives, of which *The Lord of the Rings* is an instance, are:

Stories about [...] Faërie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. Faërie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted. (Tolkien, 2014, p.32)

Therefore, Tolkien postulates that, in the same way in which God has created our Primary world – i.e. the world in which we live – an author can sub-create a Secondary world that is serious, believable, intrinsically coherent and, ultimately, self-sustained. This is, in the words of Carl Phelpstead, ‘an explicit theological imperative for mythopoesis: as God is a creator, so human beings, made in his image, are sub-creators’ (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 82). Mythmaking is, in other words, an essentially human characteristic, which gives human beings the right to ‘fill the world with Elves and goblins and to invent gods and ‘sow the seed of dragons’’ (Tolkien, 2014, p.85).

Since it is independent and self-sustained, the realm of Faërie, can be perceived but not completely described with words, and the existence of its

inhabitants does not depend on our dealings with them. In other words, the sub-created Secondary World has a life of its own:

For if elves are true, and really exist independently of our tales about them, then this also is certainly true: elves are not primarily concerned with us, nor we with them. Our fates are sundered, and our paths seldom meet. Even upon the borders of Faërie we encounter them only at some chance crossing of the ways. The definition of a fairy-story—what it is, or what it should be—does not, then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country. I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. (Tolkien, 2014, p.32)

Tolkien also states that Faërie, i.e. the Secondary World, and the narratives about it should ‘take themselves, and above all their magic, seriously’ (James, 2012, p.65):

A fairy-story is one which touches or uses Faërie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faërie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic - but it is a magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific magician. There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away. (James, 2012, p.32-33)

It is therefore crucial for the existence of the Secondary World that readers not only suspend disbelief, but truly believe in the sub-creation, putting into practice a specific faculty called Secondary Belief:

What really happens is that the storyteller proves a successful “sub-creator.” He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is “true”: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the

little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more or less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed. (Tolkien, 2014, p.52)

The sub-creation of an independent, credible, serious and coherent Secondary World on the part of Tolkien, as well as the theorisation behind it, serves as a basis for the application of *Theorie des Romans* to *The Lord of the Rings*. It is in fact the belief in the existence of Arda and its inhabitants that sustains an analysis of its society – which is organic, lively and articulated, as it will be illustrated later.

Envisioning Middle Earth: Ralph Bakshi's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*

The belief in an intrinsically consistent and self-sufficient Secondary World does not belong exclusively to Tolkien. These ideas were also at the root of the choices made in the first movie adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, directed and animated by Ralph Bakshi and produced by Saul Zaentz.

Ralph Bakshi was born in Haifa in 1938 and raised in Brooklyn. In his webpage, his contribution to the history of filmmaking and animation is described as follows:

Ralph Bakshi has created controversy in all his films while continuously breaking new ground in his art form. He has encouraged the public to look at animation in a new way by creating worlds that are sometimes familiar and sometimes strange, always challenging. He pioneered animation with adult themes using political commentary and satire. (Bakshi Film Studios, 2022)

He is known for animated movies such as *Fritz the Cat* (1972), *Heavy Traffic* (1973), *Coonskin* (1973), *Wizards* (1975), *Hey Good Lookin'* (1982) and *American Pop* (1981). In 1977 the production of his adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* began and on the following year the movie was released. It was animated through the use of rotoscoping, a technique described by the director himself in an interview given in 1978, on the occasion of the release of the film:

The attempt in *The Lord of the Rings* was to create the first realistic painting in motion ever. That means realistically proportioned characters, moving as a live-action picture character would move, with the same frame-by-frame grace and ease, being able to [meet] the epic adventure's needs. To achieve this, I shot an entire live action movie of *The Lord of the Rings* and then retraced each frame of the film back to an animation character. [...] We put it over traditionally painted backgrounds and created this realistic painting-movie. (Wygant, 2020)

Live-action frames were then turned into 8x10 stills and given to the animators: they followed the examples provided by the director, who drew the first and last frames. This was done in order to show animators how to make alterations and refinements, and what elements to leave out. The result of a precise retracing of live-action images would have been, in the words of Bakshi himself, 'boring and sterile' (Bakshi and Wygant 1978). On the contrary, the purpose of the use of rotoscoping was to achieve realism, and specifically to elicit authentic belief on the part of the audience:

If you freeze the frame of film, you can see a drawing. But the total effect is exactly what I wanted. [...] The whole purpose of a film director is not necessarily how he did something, but how you feel when you are watching it. The whole purpose in *The Lord of the Rings* is to make you believe what you are looking at on the screen. If I had chosen to use live action, I would have used it. (Wygant, 2020)

Therefore, it can be argued that Tolkien's theorisation of the Secondary World and its relationship to the audience overlaps with Bakshi's intent in

the animation of the movie: both writer and director aimed at creating a world which could be believed and perceived as real by the audience. Bakshi's act of envisioning Middle Earth by representing it in a movie does justice to the seriousness of Tolkien's sub-creation and serves as a confirmation of the validity of his theoretical views.

The intellectual context of Tolkien's sub-creation

Tolkien was not the first author to create a mythology or to turn to 'mythological and legendary narratives from the past' (Tolkien, 2014, p. 80) as a response to modernity. Before him, William Blake had invented a 'private mythology' (Tolkien, 2014, p. 80) which remained such because it never reached the wide audience Tolkien's works had. At the beginning of the 20th century, modernist writers also resorted to mythology with the purpose of bringing 'order to the chaos presented to them by modernity' (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 80). Nevertheless, 'he went beyond using such narratives to organise representations of contemporary reality and instead created from them and from his imagination a new world and a new mythology' (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 80). In his process of sub-creation, Tolkien was influenced by a number of other works, both thematically and theoretically. In terms of content, he 'takes motifs and patterns from classical, medieval, and later mythological traditions, but transforms them in combination with a wealth of wholly original material into a comprehensive new mythology of his own' (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 80). In terms of theory, Tolkien drew heavily from Owen Barfield, fellow Inklings and theorist of the interdependence of language and myth. In *Poetic Diction* (1928), Barfield argued that:

The historical separation of literal and metaphorical meanings of words divided what had been an original semantic unity: words had originally themselves been

mini-myths embodying a view of reality in which experienced phenomena were at one and the same time physical and spiritual. (Phelpstead 2020, p. 84)

Barfield's theory of the 'primordial unity of physical and spiritual' (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 84) contributed to reinforce Tolkien's idea that myths bore the truth, since, in this view, 'words were used mythically to convey the truth' (Tolkien, 2014, p. 84), to comprehend the whole purport of phenomena. According to Tolkien, in fact, among the functions of myth there is Consolation:

The Consolation of the Happy Ending. Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a word that expresses this opposite—I will call it Eucatastrophe. The eucatastrophic tale is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function. The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous "turn" (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale): this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially "escapist," nor "fugitive." In its fairy-tale—or otherworld—setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality. (Tolkien, 2014, p. 75-76)

As Tolkien himself notes, eucatastrophe is also present 'at the climax of the Christian Gospels, where the crucifixion is followed at the turning point by of human history by the resurrection' (Phelpstead, 2020, p.88). Therefore, it can be inferred that fairy-stories (and myth, since they are related forms of

storytelling) offer a glimpse into the truth conveyed by the Gospels and are somehow prophetic of the eucatastrophic turn of the Gospels. As a consequence, when humans exert the faculty of sub-creation, through them ‘the single white light of truth is splintered to many hues’ (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 85). Ultimately, it can be argued that ‘Fantasy is founded on the recognition of a single fact: that humans sub-create with materials derived from God’s creation’ (Phelpstead, 2020, p.88).

As Phelpstead (2020, p.89) suggests, Tolkien’s conception of ‘physical phenomena bearing witness to a spiritual reality,’ as well as his theory of the Secondary World and sub-creation as a reproduction of the process through which God created the Primary World, are derived from Plato. However, he points out that it is Neoplatonism who revalued imaginative literature as a possibility of having an insight into the truth: before, Platonic philosophy rejected the fantastic mode because it dismissed it as imitative. Neoplatonic understanding, on the contrary, embraces an idea of imagination as ‘a lamp illuminating worlds beyond perceived reality’ (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 89), which is more similar to a Romantic definition of imagination, as it was explained above.

As we have seen, Tolkien drew from a wealth of ideas and materials to write his books and to formulate his theories. However, it is also necessary to explain the root of his sub-creation, as well as the reasons that brought him to write such an extensive corpus of fairy-stories and myths.

The root of Tolkien’s sub-creation: language and patriotism

On 30th June 1955, Tolkien wrote a letter to his American publishers, Houghton Mifflin Co., as a response to The New York Times columnist Harvey Brite. The journalist had written an article about Tolkien and his works which included a series of provocative and inaccurate statements.

These affirmations had apparently been taken and decontextualised from a letter Tolkien himself had written to answer Brite's enquiries. He makes clarifications and corrections concerning his life, his profession, his books, the theoretical aspects behind them and the elements that served to him as an inspiration.

In his letter, Tolkien provides an insight into the linguistic root of his sub-creation, by stating that he invented *Ēa* in order to provide his invented languages with a context: 'The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stones' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me a name comes first and the story follows' (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p. 219). Another explicit reference to the linguistic origin of sub-creation is to be found in *The Lord of the Rings*, when, in Book III, the Ent¹ Treebeard makes the following statement: 'my name is growing all the time, and I've lived a very long, long time; so my name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language' (Tolkien, 2005, p. 465). Middle Earth, where *The Lord of the Rings* takes place, is in fact peopled by several races – not only Elves and Men, but also Ents, Dwarves, Orcs, Hobbits etc. – speaking different languages invented by Tolkien himself. From his childhood years, in fact, he was always fascinated by languages: his linguistic imagination was deeply struck by the names of places he saw on trains going to and coming from Wales, while he lived in King's Heath, England (Doughan, 2021). He eventually mastered Latin, Greek, Gothic, Old English, Welsh and Finnish, and invented his own languages purely for fun. He graduated in English Language and Literature in 1915 and devoted his academic life to literature and philology.

¹ Ancient and wise tree-like creatures, created with the purpose of protecting forests. They are also called Tree-shepherds.

In this context, it is also important to highlight that the names for Middle Earth and Hobbits have an extremely specific linguistic origin. As he states in the letter, Middle Earth derives from the Old English word ‘Middangeard’, which Tolkien found while studying the *Crist* of Cynewulf: ‘Middle-earth (...) is just a use of the Middle English *middel-erde* (or *erthe*), altered from old English Middangeard, the name for the inhabited lands of men ‘between the seas’” (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.220).

This word fascinated him so deeply, that it caused him to begin the creation of a Secondary World imbued with the ancient beauty it evoked. Despite being a term invented by Tolkien himself, Hobbit had a similarly casual origin. According to his own account, it first appeared while he was marking examination papers and scribbled on a blank page the following sentence: ‘In a hole in the ground there lived a Hobbit’. Eventually, the concept came to define a population dwelling in the northern part of Middle Earth that, despite conducting a secluded and peaceful life, will have a role of primary importance in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Moreover, in an earlier letter sent to Milton Waldman, not dated but presumably written late in 1951, Tolkien had already provided another motive that had led him to develop his legendarium. The letter served to prove to Collins Publishers – for which Waldman worked – the necessity to issue both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* in one single volume, by virtue of their continuity and proximity within the context of the legendarium. In order to prove this, Tolkien provided a significant amount of additional information concerning languages, mythmaking, allegory, as well as matters of content like, for example, the origin of evil, magic and divinity. He then proceeded to give a summary of the history of Middle Earth, aiming to demonstrate that the plot of *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* are interconnected by virtue of their chronology and the

concatenation of events they narrate. The contextual information that he gives in the letter includes an account of his process of mythmaking, which had been in progress all his life and was stimulated by an awareness of ‘the poverty of [his] beloved country’ (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p. 144) in terms of myths and fairy-stories. In other words, Tolkien found that England lacked a mythology of its own and of the quality other national mythological apparatuses displayed:

[England] had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. For one thing its 'faerie' is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion. [...] Once upon a time [...] I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story – the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendour from the vast backcloths – which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be 'high', purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.144)

In this passage, Tolkien makes it clear that at the root of his sub-creation there is a ‘patriotic motive’ (Phelpstead, 2020, p.81): an aspiration to national

resonance and a desire to link his creative work with his country. However, as Phelpstead notices, with the evolution of Tolkien's reflection on the theoretical aspects of mythmaking, the patriotic impulse lost its importance: the composition of the poem *Mythopoeia*² and the essay *On Fairy Stories*, in fact, caused him to reflect on the connection between the Christian religion, the Gospels and imaginative writing. This led him to aspire to a universal resonance rather than a national one, since speculative fiction (myths, fairy stories and other related forms) became an instrument to access the truths revealed in Christianity.

The theoretical background provided here serves to prove that *The Lord of the Rings* takes place in a Secondary World, Æa, and Middle Earth specifically, which can sustain a Lukácsian reading of the relationship between the evolution of its society and the novelistic form in which it was written. It was therefore necessary to demonstrate its intrinsic coherence, seriousness and independence, by tracing its origin back to the birth of modern fantasy, sustained by the faculty of imagination, and subsequently by describing Tolkien's impact on speculative fiction, which involved a deep influence on the plot and content of fantasy books, but also a crucial contribution to the scholarly tradition and the theory that lies behind them: the invention and defence of the Secondary World, its independence from our dealings with its inhabitants and the necessity of secondary belief. The identification of the intellectual influences and the motives which caused Tolkien to sub-create Middle Earth and write extensively about it provides context and depth to his work. Finally, the fact that Ralph Bakshi, a director, came to the same conclusions when he adapted *The Lord of the Rings* into an animated movie serves as additional proof of the validity of Tolkien's

² Published posthumously in the second edition of *Tree and Leaf* in 1988, the poem is a record of a debate Tolkien had with his friend and fellow Inkling C.S. Lewis in 1931. The two discussed about mythmaking and imaginative writing. The argument sustained by Mythophilus, Tolkien's alter-ego in the poem, was eventually developed in essay form in *On Fairy Stories*.

theorisation. In the following subchapter, a brief chronology of the history of Middle Earth will be given, with the purpose of giving a sense of the amplitude and complexity of Tolkien's sub-creation. Further details on the origin and development of the races of Elves and Men will be provided in chapter III.

Chronology and description of Middle Earth

The Lord of the Rings and *The Hobbit* are set in Middle Earth, but their mythological background is documented more extensively in other works, all published posthumously, among which we find: *The Silmarillion* (1977), *The Unfinished Tales* (1980), *The Book of Lost Tales* (1983) and the other volumes of the series entitled *The History of Middle Earth* (1983-1996), and the newly published *The Nature of Middle Earth* (2021). Moreover, Tolkien provides a significant amount of information in his correspondence. These works trace the complete arch of the history not only of the continent of Middle Earth, but also of Arda – the Earth – as a part of Eä – the universe.

As it is narrated in *The Silmarillion*, the creation of Eä occurs through music. The supreme deity 'Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar' (Tolkien, 2013, p. 7) creates the Ainur, 'the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought' (Tolkien, 2013, p. 4) and begins musical themes upon which they improvise. Melkor, the most powerful of the Ainur, sings a disharmonious tune 'to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself' (Tolkien, 2013, p. 7) Ilúvatar incorporates Melkor's music to the rest, and shows the Ainur a vision of Eä, the result of their Great Music. He then sends the Flame Imperishable to give it existence. Some of the Ainur feel a strong desire to contribute to the realisation of the vision, and therefore descend into 'Eä, the world that is' (Tolkien, 2013, p. 9). Their descent into Arda marks the beginning of the Years of the Valar. At first, the world consists of two

continents: the Undying Lands and Middle Earth. The Powers begin to shape Eä according to the vision, but Melkor contrasts them and the First War breaks out – with devastating effects on the land. It is only when one of the Valar, Tulkas, defeats Melkor and sends him away from Arda into the Void, that the Valar can continue with their endeavour.

The Years of the Lamps are marked by the building of two sources of light, Illuin and Ormal, illuminating Arda from the North and South. While the Valar, in particular Yavanna, labour to grow plants and flowers and people the earth with animals during the Spring of Arda, Melkor builds the stronghold of Utumno, from which he wages war on the Valar again, destroying the Lamps, together with the dwelling of the Valar in Almaren.

The Valar therefore settle in Aman, the westmost of all lands, the Blessed Realm. There, Yavanna plants two trees of silver and gold, named Telperion and Laurelin: this is when the Years of the Trees begin. During these years, the Vala Aulë creates the Dwarves in a hall under the mountains of Middle Earth, out of his desire to impart his knowledge to and care for another creature. He is forgiven by Ilúvatar, who has compassion of his humility and good intentions. Eru therefore endows the Dwarves with a life of their own, but commands them to remain hidden until after the awakening of the first-born Children of Ilúvatar: the Elves. The Eagles and the Ents are created as well. Varda kindles the stars of the firmament, under which the Firstborn Children of Ilúvatar awaken in Cuiviénen. Some of them are ensnared and corrupted by Melkor, who turns them into Orcs. For the sake of the Elves, the Valar wage war on Melkor in the Battle of the Powers, besiege Utumno and Angband, the fortress of Melkor's lieutenant Sauron, and sentences to spend three ages in the halls of the Vala Mandos, from which no one can escape.

The Valar summon the Firstborn to Valinor, causing a migration called the Great Sundering of the Elves, during which the Elves are divided into three kindreds: the Vanyar, the Teleri and the Noldor. In Valinor, Fëanor, son of Finwë, king of the Noldor, forges the Silmarils: three wonderful jewels containing the light of Laurelin and Telperion. When Melkor attacks and kills the trees with the help of the giant demonic spider Ungoliant, Fëanor refuses to consign the Silmarils to Yavanna to bring the trees back to life, but in the Meantime Melkor assails Formentos, the stronghold of the Noldor, slays Finwë, thus spilling the first drop of blood in the Blessed Realm, and flees to Middle Earth. Fëanor curses him (calling him Morgoth, meaning the Black Foe of the World) and swears to recover the Silmarils. In order to do this, he and his kindred return to Middle Earth, against the will of the Valar, who forebode a tragic denouement for their pursuit. The Valar then create the Sun and the Moon – respectively a vessel and an island steered by two Maiar³: Arien and Tilion.

The first dawn marks not only the beginning of the **First Age**, but also the awakening of Men, the Younger Children of Ilúvatar, in the eastern region of Hildórien. By virtue of their wisdom and their immortality, the Powers and the Elves teach Men their lore. In the meantime, the War of the Jewels between the Noldor and Morgoth rages in Middle Earth. The intervention of Eärendil the Mariner – who crosses the sea of Belegaer and sails to Aman to ask the Valar for aid – brings together the hosts of the Powers, of the Elves and part of those of Men⁴. Melkor is therefore defeated and expelled into the Void outside the borders of Arda, from which he cannot descend again into the world. With the War of the Jewels ends the First Age.

³ Immortal beings of the same nature as the Valar, but less powerful. They help the Valar give shape to Arda.

⁴ Men are divided during the War of the Jewels: some join the Elves and the Valar against Morgoth, while others choose to serve him.

The **Second Age** is characterised by the rise and the fall of the realm of Númenor. The Valar raise from the depth of the sea an island, Andor, the Land of Gift, and bestow it onto the Men that were faithful to their cause. Moreover, they reward them with ‘wisdom and power and life more enduring than any other of mortal race have possessed.’ (Tolkien, 2013, p. 310). There, the realm of Númenor is founded. In the Meantime, Sauron returns to Middle Earth, builds the tower of Barad-Dûr and fortifies the land of Mordor in the East, aiming to rule over Middle Earth. Angered by the power gained by Sauron, the Numenorean king Ar-Pharazôn sails to Middle earth with his army and defeats Sauron, with the purpose of subduing him. Sauron, in fact, humbles himself in front of the Numenorean host and is taken to Andor. There, he gains the King’s trust and convinces him to disavow their allegiance to the Valar, worship Melkor ‘Lord of All, giver of Freedom’ (Tolkien, 2013, p. 325) and wage war to Aman. It is Eru who, in wrath, sinks the island into the sea. Only nine ships of Men faithful to the Valar survive, and reach Middle Earth to found the realms of Gondor and Arnor. As a consequence of the Fall of Númenor, Aman is removed from Arda by Ilúvatar.

While in Middle Earth, Sauron had lured the smiths of the Noldor into forging the Rings of Power, while he, in Mordor, secretly forged the One Ring, capable of controlling the others. Once they become aware of his design, the Last Allegiance of Elves and Men wage war on Mordor: Sauron is defeated, though not killed, by Isildur, who cuts with his sword the finger where the Dark Lord wears the Ring. Isildur, King of Gondor, decides to keep the Ring instead of tossing it into the fire of Mount Doom – the volcano where it was forged and the only place where it can be destroyed.

With the fall of Sauron Begins the Third Age, in which *The Lord of the Rings* takes place. While the Elves slowly leave Middle Earth and return to Aman,

Sauron gathers his forces to conquer it and searches for the Rings, which has been lost after the murder of Isildur. The Ring has in fact been found by Gollum, who dwells in a cave underneath the Misty Mountains, and then taken by Bilbo. This brings the Ring to the Shire, a northern area of Doriath inhabited by Hobbits, who live a peaceful and rural life. Frodo, Bilbo's nephew, inherits the Ring and is bound to destroy it by throwing it into the Crack of Doom. He is joined in the enterprise by eight more companions, who form the Fellowship of the Ring, and among which we find the wizard Gandalf – one of the Istari, Maiar who are sent to Middle Earth in the Third Age. The destruction of the One Ring brings about not only peace in Middle Earth, but also the coronation of Aragorn, king of Gondor, heir of Isildur.

Chapter II

The context of Lukács's production

In the former chapter, the theoretical framework of Tolkien's literary production was provided. This chapter will be instead devoted to a contextualisation of *Theorie des Romans* in György Lukács's production. The essay can be ascribed to the field of the sociology of literature, meaning the study of the functional relations between literature and the socioeconomical process (Ludz, 1976, p. 9), however, Lukács used the term critically, for two reasons listed in the introduction to his *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie* written by Peter Ludz (1976). Firstly, Ludz highlights that Lukács interprets his writings as contributions to a historical and philosophical reading of literature in the frame of a Marxist-Leninist aesthetic. Their association to sociology reflects the development of literary theory in Eastern Europe and in the USSR, where the artistic doctrine or method of socialist realism encompassed perspectives that, in the West, would be ascribed to the sociology of literature. Secondly, despite the fact that sociology has been recognised, even in Russia and Eastern Europe, as a science, Marxism dismisses it as "bourgeoise science" and rejects it as such. Furthermore, Ludz provides context for *Theorie des Romans* by delineating the intellectual biography of Lukács. He divides his production into four periods, and considers his publications in relation to the historical and ideological context in which they were written. He divides his works into five phases, and locates *The Theory of the Novel* in the second one.

Born in Budapest in 1885, György Lukács graduated in 1906 and in 1909 moved to Germany, in order to deepen his knowledge of philosophy. This was a decisive period for Lukács's intellectual formation: he was heavily influenced by Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Heinrich Rickert, Emil Lask and Wilhelm Dilthey – the founder of the Hegel Renaissance ('Lukács, György',

2009). The first phase of his production took place during those years, between 1907 and 1912, when he wrote and published *History of the Development of the Modern Drama*: the essay was in fact written between 1908 and 1909 and then issued in 1912. Another crucial work published in this first period of his production was *Soul and Form* (1911). During this period, he was:

Under the influence of Neoplatonism, of the philosophy of life (Dilthey, Bergson, Simmel), of phenomenology (Husserl) and of Neokantism (Rickert, Lask) (...) of K. Fiedler's and P. Ernst's theories on art. The impact of Thomas Mann was already strong. (Ludz, 1976, p. 12).

Between 1914 and 1915, when Lukács returned to Hungary from Germany, a new phase of his production began: he had embraced the philosophy of Hegel, whose thought would contribute decisively to his philosophy, and he had also come into contact with Marx, Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, who influenced him decisively. *The Theory of the Novel* was written and published during these years and actually marks the beginning of this new phase in Lukács's intellectual biography and production. The first draft of the book was written, as Lukács himself said in the preface to the study that he added in 1962:

In the summer of 1914 and the final version in the winter of 1914-15. It first appeared in Max Dessoir's *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1916 and was published in book form by P. Cassirer, Berlin, in 1920. (Lukács, 1978, p. 11)

Moreover, Lukács points out that *The Theory of the Novel* was not supposed to appear in the form in which we know it today:

At first it was meant to take the form of a series of dialogues: a group of young people withdraw from the war psychosis of their environment, just as the story-tellers of the *Decameron* had withdrawn from the plague; they try to understand themselves and one another by means of conversations which gradually lead to the

problems discussed in the book—the outlook on a Dostoevskian world. On closer consideration I dropped this plan and wrote the book as it stands today. (Lukács 1978, p.12)

The ‘war psychosis’ that Lukács mentions in this passage is also the reason why, according to his own account, he decided to write this study:

The immediate motive for writing was supplied by the outbreak of the First World War and the effect which its acclamation by the social-democratic parties had upon the European left. My own deeply personal attitude was one of vehement, global and, especially at the beginning, scarcely articulate rejection of the war and especially of enthusiasm for the war. I recall a conversation with Frau Marianne Weber in the late autumn of 1914. She wanted to challenge my attitude by telling me of individual, concrete acts of heroism. My only reply was: ‘The better the worse!’ When I tried at this time to put my emotional attitude into conscious terms, I arrived at more or less the following formulation: the Central Powers would probably defeat Russia; this might lead to the downfall of Tsarism; I had no objection to that. There was also some probability that the West would defeat Germany; if this led to the downfall of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs, I was once again in favour. But then the question arose: who was to save us from Western civilisation? (The prospect of final victory by the Germany of that time was to me nightmarish.) (...) Of course it would be possible to consider this study simply in itself, only from the viewpoint of its objective content, and without reference to the inner factors which conditioned it. But I believe that in looking back over the history of almost five decades it is worthwhile to describe the mood in which the work was written because this will facilitate a proper understanding of it. (Lukacs, 1978, p.12)

Furthermore, later in the preface, Lukács locates *Theorie des Romans* in the development of his thought and highlights the role Hegel had at this point of his formation:

I was then in process of turning from Kant to Hegel, without, however, changing any aspect of my attitude towards the so-called ‘intellectual sciences’ school, an attitude based essentially on my youthful enthusiasm for the work of Dilthey, Simmel and Max Weber. The Theory of the Novel is in effect a typical product of the tendencies of that school. When I met Max Dvorak personally in Vienna in 1920

he told me that he regarded my book as the movement's most important publication.

(Lukács, p.12)

In this period, Lukács was also actively involved in Hungarian politics: in 1919 he took part in the government of the Hungarian Soviet Republic led by Béla Kun. When it was overthrown, in August of that same year, Lukács emigrated to Vienna, where he spent ten years. In 1923 he published *History and Class Consciousness*, where 'he developed a unique Marxist philosophy of history and laid the basis for his critical literary tenets by linking the development of form in art with the history of the class struggle' ('György Lukács', 2024). On the following year, the short work entitled *Lenin* was issued. This second phase of his intellectual biography ends in 1926, with *Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics*. From this phase on, Ludz notes, Lukács's thought will become more and more political, 'producing historical and sociological considerations that are increasingly more concrete' (Ludz, 1978, p.13)

The third period comprises the years between 1926 and 1933, when Lukács emigrated to the Soviet Union. During those years, he published his writings on the review *Die Linkskurve*. Hegel will still prove a fundamental influence, but Ludz also highlights a tendency on the part of Lukács to reconsider the works he had published between 1914 and 1926, in particular *Theorie des Romans* and *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*.

The fourth phase covers the years he spent in the Soviet Union, from 1933 to 1945, and the first decade after the end of the Second World War, ending in 1955. When he moved back to Hungary from the USSR, Lukács was again involved in the political scene, whereby he was the minister of education during the second mandate of Prime Minister Imre Nagy, and a Major figure during the Hungarian uprising against the USSR. After the revolt failed, he was deported to Romania, but was allowed to return to Budapest in 1957,

where he retired and devoted his efforts to his scientific work. The years of his permanence in the USSR and the post war-period were characterised by important research in the field of literary history and by the writing of *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Aesthetic* (1954), based on Lenin's theory of knowledge. During these years, he also challenged Stalin's writings on linguistics, because he had never had the possibility to do so: in fact, his response to Stalin's view of linguistics is one of the many cases in which Lukács, during his forty-year-long political career in the Communist Party, had to defend himself from attacks coming from the ideologists of the party itself and retract his ideas.

The fifth and last period of Lukács's intellectual biography begins with a crucial speech delivered in Budapest in October 1956 – a few days before the outbreak of the Hungarian uprising led by Nagy – which resulted in *Realism Misunderstood* (1962). The ideas Lukács held in this period, as Ludz highlights, do not differ from those of the years of his emigration, although in a different context. He again responds to Stalin's writings, in particular to *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1951), which he discussed in the book. He died in Budapest in 1971.

The link between Lukács and Hegel: the unhappy consciousness

As it was argued in the previous section and as highlighted by Ludz, *The Theory of the Novel* was written in 1914, and marked the moment in which Lukács turned 'from the Kantianism and Platonism of his youth (...) toward (...) riper Hegelianism and Hegelian Marxism' (Miles, 1979). His debt to Hegel is therefore considerable, and shows also broader connection to the

German idealist tradition, of which Hegel was ‘the supreme codifier and mediator’ (Miles, 1979).

In particular, David H. Miles (1979) notes Hegel’s presence in Lukács’s image of ancient Greece and in the philosophical and cultural roots of this portrayal. As Miles highlights, Lukács’s idea of ancient Greece was inspired by the description Hegel provides of it in the *Aesthetics*: ‘Homeric man felt at home in the world and enjoyed a true village sense of being and belonging- not only to the community but also to external objects around’ (Miles, 1979), experiencing a ‘totality of objects,’ an ‘organic unity of being’ (Miles, 1979). This relationship between the Homeric man and its surroundings is, therefore, unmediated and unalienated.

Furthermore, Paul de Man (1966) highlights a formal parallelism between Hegel and Lukács: in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the achievement of absolute knowledge is described from the point of view of the Spirit that has gained it; in the same way, the rise of the novel form is narrated from the standpoint of the novelistic consciousness itself. However, while the Spirit relates a history of development, the novelistic consciousness traces the trajectory of a fall, as it will be clarified later in this chapter.

Finally, the Hungarian theorist was influenced by Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and by the concept of the unhappy consciousness, developed in the second section of the book – dedicated to self-consciousness.

In his foreword to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, J.N. Findlay states that the aim of the book is:

To run through, in a scientifically purged order, the stages in the mind's necessary progress from immediate sense-consciousness to the position of a scientific philosophy, showing thereby that this position is the only one that the mind can take, when it comes to the end of the intellectual and spiritual adventures described in the book. (Findlay, 1977, p.5)

In other words, the book traces the movement through which the conscience develops and obtains absolute knowledge (absolutes Wissen), whereby it is both its own subject and object. One of the stages of such development is the unhappy consciousness. The unhappy consciousness is split between a mutable and an immutable part: what refers to the former appears to man as inessential and therefore worthless, because value only lies in the latter part, transcendental and unreachable. The relationship between the conscience and the immutable is therefore an unhappy one, because it implies an unbearable laceration within the conscience itself, and entails nostalgia for an impossible conciliation. What the conscience is unable to grasp is the fact that this division actually constitutes a contradiction: these two parts are necessary for the recognition and existence of one another, therefore becoming essential within the scope of a consciousness that is whole, undivided and complete within itself.

The concept of the unhappy consciousness, as well as all the other Hegelian contributions to Lukácsian thought, are of fundamental importance to understand the development of the novel form, as it is theorised in Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel*, and the structure of human consciousness from which this form rose.

The Theory of the Novel

As it has been stated above, *The Theory of the Novel* provides an analysis of the development of the novel form. Such development is seen from the point of view of the novelistic consciousness, an aspect which, as it was stated above, resonates with Hegelian thought. As Paul de Man notes, in fact:

The book is written from the point of view of a mind that claims to have reached such an advanced degree of generality that it can speak, as it were, for the novelistic consciousness itself; it is the Novel itself that tells us the history of its own

development, very much as, in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, it is the Spirit who narrates its own. (De Man, 1966)

Furthermore, the *Theory of the Novel* offers a historico-philosophical interpretation of the rise of the novel form, thus stating that the emergence of the novel is the result of a change in human consciousness: 'the development of the novel reflects modifications in man's way of defining himself in relation to all categories of existence' (De Man 1996, p.529). In fact, what Lukács highlights is a rift between Greek and contemporary consciousness. In other words, our world is a fallen one, one that has lost something: the immanence of meaning.

In the Greek world, in particular in the world of the epos, of Homeric epic poems, essence is immanent, present and shared: this entails a correspondence between the outer world, permeated by essence and essential in itself, and the inner world, the soul which accesses the essence and is therefore essential. It is an enclosed world, dominated by the Gods:

Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning—in sense—and complete for the senses; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself. (Lukács, 1978, p.29)

In this context, the soul is constantly aware of being part of a whole, surrounded by an 'original unified nature' (De Man, 1966) and is therefore never lost or alone. It has, in other words, a place in the world. For this

reason, it is impossible for man, in the world of the epos, to develop interiority:

There is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exterior, any 'otherness' for the soul. The soul goes out to seek adventure; it lives through adventures, but it does not know the real torment of seeking and the real danger of finding; such a soul never stakes itself; it does not yet know that it can lose itself, it never thinks of having to look for itself. Such an age is the age of the epic. (Lukács, 1978, p. 30)

This is the reason why, in epic poems, heroism involves not a single individual, but the whole community, meaning that the destiny of the hero is inevitably linked to an awareness of totality:

The epic hero is, strictly speaking, never an individual. It is traditionally thought that one of the essential characteristics of the epic is the fact that its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community. And rightly so, for the completeness, the roundness of the value system which determines the epic cosmos creates a whole which is too organic for any part of it to become so enclosed within itself, so dependent upon itself, as to find itself as an interiority— i.e. to become a personality. (...) The epic hero, as bearer of his destiny, is not lonely, for this destiny connects him by indissoluble threads to the community whose fate is crystallised in his own. (Lukács, 1978, p. 66-67)

Moreover, the deeds performed by the soul in the world of the epos are rooted in this identity between inner and outer life, because they correspond to the instances of the soul – which partakes of essence:

It is the adequacy of the deeds to the soul's inner demand for greatness, for unfolding, for wholeness. When the soul does not yet know any abyss within itself which may tempt it to fall or encourage it to discover pathless heights, when the divinity that rules the world and distributes the unknown and unjust gifts of destiny is not yet understood by man, but is familiar and close to him as a father is to his small child, then every action is only a well-fitting garment for the world. Being and destiny, adventure and accomplishment, life and essence are then identical concepts. (...) The world of meaning can be grasped, it can be taken in at a glance; all that is necessary is to find the locus that has been predestined for each individual.

(...) It is a homogeneous world, and even the separation between man and world, between 'I' and 'you', cannot disturb its homogeneity. Like every other component of this rhythm, the soul stands in the midst of the world; the frontier that makes up its contours is not different in essence from the contours of things: it draws sharp, sure lines, but it separates only relatively, only in relation to and for the purpose of a homogeneous system of adequate balances. For man does not stand alone, as the sole bearer of substantiality, in the midst of reflexive forms: his relations to others and the structures which arise therefrom are as full of substance as he is himself. (Lukács, 1978, p. 31-32)

The world of the epos is therefore characterised by totality of being:

Totality as the formative prime reality of every individual phenomenon implies that something closed within itself can be completed; completed because everything occurs within it, nothing is excluded from it and nothing points at a higher reality outside it; completed because everything within it ripens to its own perfection and, by attaining itself, submits to limitation. Totality of being is possible only where everything is already homogeneous before it has been contained by forms. (Lukács, 1978, p. 34)

The structure of human consciousness described above is what sustains the epos, in particular Homer's epic poems – whose works alone can be ascribed to that category, according to Lukács. However, with the advent of modernity, human consciousness changed radically: historico-philosophical reality underwent a shift that involved the loss of all the aforementioned values and characteristics. This laid the basis for the emergence of the novel, which rose to become the dominant form of the new world. In particular, what was lost was the immanence of meaning:

'The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality. (...) The novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life. (Lukács, 1978, p. 56)

This inherent tendency of the novel to strive for unattainable totality is mirrored in the characters that people it, who search, in vain, for the meaning that was once omnipresent and accessible:

The novel's heroes (...) are seekers. The simple fact of seeking implies that neither the goals nor the way leading to them can be directly given, or else that, if they are given in a psychologically direct and solid manner, this is not evidence of really existent relations or ethical necessities but only of a psychological fact to which nothing in the world of objects or norms need necessarily correspond. (Lukács, 1978, p. 60)

Furthermore, the fact that meaning is not immanent anymore and causes characters to develop interiority, to contemplate the abyss that opens within themselves after their inner life has been severed from outer life. Each interiority is exclusively individual, and therefore, the cause of alienation of human beings from one another. The absence of totality is also the cause of separation between souls and deeds, whereby the true meaning of deeds becomes inaccessible as well:

The autonomous life of interiority is possible and necessary only when the distinctions between men have made an unbridgeable chasm; when the gods are silent and neither sacrifices nor the ecstatic gift of tongues can solve their riddle; when the world of deeds separates itself from men and, because of this independence, becomes hollow and incapable of absorbing the true meaning of deeds in itself, incapable of becoming a symbol through deeds and dissolving them in turn into symbols; when interiority and adventure are forever divorced from one another. (Lukács, 1978, p. 66)

The novelistic character, therefore, finds himself alone on a quest towards unattainable meaning:

The inner form of the novel has been understood as the process of the problematic individual's journeying towards himself, the road from dull captivity within a merely present reality—a reality that is heterogeneous in itself and meaningless to the individual—towards clear self-recognition. After such self-recognition has been

attained, the ideal thus formed irradiates the individual's life as its immanent meaning; but the conflict between what is and what should be has not been abolished and cannot be abolished in the sphere wherein these events take place—the life sphere of the novel; only a maximum conciliation—the profound and intensive irradiation of a man by his life's meaning—is attainable. The immanence of meaning which the form of the novel requires lies in the hero's finding out through experience that a mere glimpse of meaning is the highest that life has to offer, and that this glimpse is the only thing worth the commitment of an entire life, the only thing by which the struggle will have been justified. The process of finding out extends over a lifetime, and its direction and scope are given with its normative content, the way towards a man's recognition of himself. (Lukács, 1978, p.80)

When, in *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács delineates the unbridgeable gap between the consciousness of ancient Greece and that of modernity, he refers to what Tolkien would call the Primary World. However, this thesis aims at demonstrating that this formulation can be applied to a Secondary World as well. A sufficiently complex and solid fictional world, such as Arda, is in fact capable of developing social structures and a collective consciousness of the same quality as those that caused the emergence of the novel form, through which the Secondary World itself is conveyed to readers. The following chapter will be devoted to a more detailed analysis of this possibility, through the application of Lukács's insights to *The Lord of the Rings*.

Chapter III

***The Lord of the Rings* in Tolkien's legendarium**

Published in three volumes between 1954 and 1955, *The Lord of the Rings* can be considered 'the most famous trilogy in the fantasy genre, or perhaps even in modern literature itself' (Tally, 2017) However, 'it was not intended to be a trilogy, and its author generally disavowed descriptions of the work as a trilogy' (Tally, 2017): the decision to sell it in three volumes depended on extra-literary factors, namely the marketability of single-volume editions (Tally, 2017). In fact, the definition of trilogy – meaning 'three related books or films that tell a single overarching story,' each of them being 'intelligible on its own' (Tally, 2017) – does not apply to *The Lord of the Rings*, because the novel was conceived as a unified narrative divided into six books, which are interconnected, though not autonomous.

The Lord of the Rings came out seventeen years after *The Hobbit* (1937), of which it constitutes a sequel in chronological terms. However, it is also tightly connected with *The Silmarillion*, with which it establishes a relationship of continuity: for this reason, Tolkien suggested to his publishers that the two books should be published jointly.

Synopsis

Book I

The novel is set in the Third Age and follows the quest of 'Frodo Baggins, a hobbit from the Shire, who receives a mysterious magic ring as a birthday present from his uncle Bilbo, who disappears on the night of the celebration. The young hobbit is soon informed by [...] Gandalf of the true nature of the Ring: it is the One Ring' (Scandagliato, 2021, p.15).

Frodo, advised by Gandalf, undertakes a journey to Rivendell to present the Ring to the Elven-lord Elrond. He leaves with his faithful friends Samwise Gamgee, Peregrin Took and Meriadoc Bradibuck:

From the beginning of their quest, they find themselves pursued by Black Riders, also referred to as Ringwraiths, servants of Sauron corrupted and consumed by the evil power of the Ring. The hobbits successfully manage to escape this and other dangers they find on their way - Old Man Willow in the Old Forest, from which they are rescued by Tom Bombadil, and the Barrow-Wights - and reach the town of Bree. [...] At the Prancing Pony inn, they become acquainted with Strider, a friend of Gandalf who offers to lead them safely to Rivendell. On the following day, they set out again [...], and reach Weathertop, where the company is attacked by the Ringwraiths and Frodo is stabbed by their leader. Joined by the elf Glorfindel, the travellers escape a new attack on the part of the Ringwraiths by crossing the Ford of Bruinen, where the riders are washed away by a sudden horse-shaped tide. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.15-16)

Book II

Once in Rivendell, Frodo is healed and a Council is held:

in order to establish whether the Ring Frodo carries is truly the One Ring, and what to do with it. It is on this occasion that the origin of the One Ring is clarified, as well as the events that brought it into Frodo's hands. Finally, it is deemed necessary to destroy the Ring, in order to defeat the enemy, but the only way to do so is to throw it into the Crack of Doom where it was forged. Frodo offers to be the Ring Bearer. Eight companions will join him in the quest: Strider (who, during the Council, revealed his identity as Aragorn, the rightful heir to the throne of Gondor), Boromir, son of Denethor – the Steward of Gondor –, Gimli, Legolas, Gandalf, Sam, Merry and Pippin. (Scandagliato 2021, p.16)

The Fellowship of the Ring begins its journey: they head south to the pass of Caradhras, where a heavy snowstorm caused by the evil power of Saruman⁵ forces them to continue their journey underground, through the mines of Moria⁶: 'inside the mines, they are assaulted by a troop of Orcs. However, another creature lurks in the deep of Moria: a Balrog⁷, which, confronted by

⁵ The most important and powerful of the Istari, who dwells in Isengard.

⁶ Once a thriving dwarf kingdom, now overtaken by the Enemy. The Fellowship finds it in ruins.

⁷ A powerful ancient creature of fire and shadow, brandishing a whip and a sword.

Gandalf, drags the wizard into the abyss underneath the bridge of Khazad-Dûm.’ (Scandagliato, 2021, p.16)

Appalled by the death of Gandalf, the members of the Fellowship spend some days in the Realm of Lothlorien, where they meet the Elves Galadriel and Celeborn, who provide them with the boats they use to resume their journey and sail down the Great River Anduin – followed by Gollum⁸, who picked up their trail in Moria:

They pass the Argonath, the Pillars of the Kings, where a new stage of their quest begins: they have to decide whether to go to Minas Tirith and aid Gondor in the war against the Dark Lord or to head to Mordor to destroy the Ring. The last word is given to Frodo, who asks for some alone time to make his choice. However, he is attacked by Boromir, who attempts to seize the Ring to take it to Minas Tirith as a weapon. Frodo escapes, Boromir repents, but in the meantime the travellers are waylaid by Orcs, who kill Boromir, take Pippin and Merry as prisoners and cause the Fellowship to break. Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas will run after the Orcs to rescue the Hobbits, while Frodo will complete his quest accompanied by Sam. (Scandagliato, 2021, p. 17)

Book III

While they follow the track of the Orcs, Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas meet a group of riders of Rohan led by Éomer, King Theoden’s nephew, who informs them of the presence of Saruman and his servants in the realm. Éomer and his riders had in fact just slain a group of Orcs⁹: the ambush gives Merry and Pippin the opportunity to escape, and the two hobbits enter Fangorn forest. There, ‘they become acquainted with the Ents, the Three-shepherds. After waiting until the end of their Entmoot, the Hobbits join the

⁸ ‘Formerly a hobbit named Smeagol, Gollum becomes a treacherous and wicked creature under the evil influence of the Ring. He dwells in a cave underneath the Misty Mountains; it is there that the Ring is found by Bilbo, after it has slipped off Gollum’s finger.’ (Scandagliato 2021, p.17)

⁹ Northerners and Uruk-Hai: the former come from Mordor and serve Sauron; the latter are under the command of Saruman.

Ents in their beleaguering of Isengard, their vengeance against the tree-cutting perpetrated by the orcs' (Scandagliato, 2021, p.17):

In the meantime, Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli are accosted by Gandalf in Fangorn Forest: 'after having defeated the Balrog, the wizard has come back stronger than before, as Gandalf the White, the most powerful of his order' (Scandagliato, 2021, p.17). Together, they head to Edoras and free King Theoden from Grima Wormtongue, a servant of Saruman who has poisoned his mind. They also persuade Theoden to prepare for battle at the stronghold of Helm's deep – which is attacked by the troops of Isengard, but resists, thanks to the intervention of Gandalf, who had left to seek help from Éomer's riders.

After the victory, Éomer, Théoden, Gandalf, Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn reach Isengard to meet Saruman. Once there:

They are surprised to find the city flooded and under the control of the Ents, Merry and Pippin. Saruman, failing to use the power of his voice to lure his enemies, encloses himself in the tower of Orthanc. Grima Wormtongue throws a crystal sphere¹⁰ out of the window in order to strike Gandalf, who picks it up. During the night, Pippin looks into the globe out of curiosity, but feels appalled by the visions it shows him¹³. The wizard then rides with Pippin to Minas Tirith. (Scandagliato 2021, p.18)

Book IV

The focus shifts again to Frodo and Sam, who:

Struggle to find their way through the barren mountains of the Eryn Muil. They are still pursued by Gollum, who ambushes them: they capture him, have him pledge obedience to Frodo and take him as their guide to Mordor. They are travelling through the Dead Marshes when Sam overhears Gollum talking to himself and plotting against the Hobbits to recover his "Precious" by having them killed by a mysterious "She" (Tolkien, 2005, p.632-634). When they finally reach

¹⁰ The globe is a Palantir, a tool used by Sauron for communication and manipulation.

the Black Gate of Mordor, the Ringbearer and his companions discover that it is closed and garrisoned ceaselessly. Gollum therefore proposes to take the pass of Cirith Ungol. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.18)

In order to reach the pass, the three walk through the lush meadows of Ithilien, where:

They are found and taken prisoners by Faramir, Captain of Gondor, and his soldiers patrolling the area. After witnessing the defence of the Men of Gondor against an attack on the part of the Southrons, the hobbits are forced to follow the men to the cave in which they hide. Faramir understands that Frodo bears the One Ring, but does not wish to seize it or use it. [...] Later, the captain releases the three travellers. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.18)

The party reaches the Cross-Roads and takes the stairs that lead to Cirith Ungol. The stairs are located near the city of Minas Morgul, from which the Morgul army exits, led by the Lord of the Nazgûls¹¹. At the top of the stairs, the travellers find a tunnel:

It is the lair of a monstrous she-spider called Shelob, who attacks the Hobbits to feed on them. This was, in fact, Gollum's plan: to guide Frodo and Sam inside the tunnel, to let Shelob kill and eat them, and then to search their remains for the Ring. The Hobbits are able to exit the tunnel, but, once out, they are assailed a second time by the spider - who pricks Frodo with her poisonous sting - and Gollum: they are both defeated by Sam, who, nevertheless, is utterly despaired because he believes his master to be dead. He decides to take the Ring and finish the quest. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.19)

Book V

Pippin and Gandalf reach Minas Tirith, where Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, receives them and asks the hobbit to relate the circumstances of

¹¹ Also referred to as Ringwraiths or Black Riders, the Nazgûls are the nine kings of Men to whom Sauron gave the Rings of Power. He eventually used the power of the One Rings to control and corrupt them, thus causing them to acquire the appearance of spectres.

Boromir's death; 'since he died in an attempt to defend Merry and Pippin from the Orcs, the hobbit swears his services to Denethor as a compensation' (Scandagliato, 2021, p.19).

In the meantime:

The riders of Rohan returning from Isengard are joined by the Dúnedain of the North and Elrond's sons, Elladan and Elrohir. Merry offers his sword in service of king Théoden. Aragorn decides to take the Paths of the Dead¹², together with the Dúnedain, Legolas and Gimli. At the Stone of Erech, Aragorn summons the Sleepless Dead, who follow him to aid Minas Tirith against Sauron's forces. The rest of the Riders muster in Edoras and prepare for war. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.19)

Merry and Éowyn¹³ are forbidden to take part in the battle; nevertheless, she disguises as a male soldier and joins the rest of the army, together with the hobbit.

In Minas Tirith, Faramir:

Volunteers to lead one last desperate attempt to keep the bulwark [of Osgiliath] against the gathering forces of evil. However, his efforts are vain and Minas Tirith is besieged. The remnants of the rearguard ride back to Minas Tirith, chased by the Southrons and the Nazgûls, who strike Faramir with a poisoned dart. Denethor, in despair, forsakes his command of the city. Gandalf takes over: he guides the defence against the siege and confronts the Lord of the Nazgûls at the Gate of Gondor. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.20)

At dawn, the Riders of Rohan come to the aid of Gondor: they have reached Minas Tirith with the help of the Woses, the Wild Men of the Woods, who showed them an alternative path which enables them to avoid the Orcs. 'The Lord of the Nazgûls, who slays Théoden, is killed by Éowyn with help on

¹² 'A path through the White Mountains. It is there that, according to an ancient song, the Heir of Elendil will be able to summon the Oathbreakers, or Sleepless Dead, soldiers who betrayed Isildur for Sauron in the early days of Gondor and were therefore condemned to never find peace until their oath was fulfilled' (Scandagliato 2021, p.19)

¹³ Théoden's niece. A shieldmaiden in the battle of the Pelennor Fields, she will forsake this role when the war against Sauron ends. Moreover, she falls in love with Aragorn but is rejected, and finds true love in Faramir, whom she meets in the Houses of the Healing where the two are recovering from the wounds they received on the battlefield.

the part of Merry. However, his power is so deadly that they both fall on the battlefield and are rescued by Éomer' (Scandagliato, 2021, p. 20). The final decisive moment that determines the victory of the Free People is the arrival of Aragorn, followed by the Dúnedain and the Sleepless Dead, sailing on the ships that belonged the Corsairs of Umbar.

In the innermost part of the city of Minas Tirith:

Denethor, who has lost his judgement, is having a pyre built for himself and his son. Nevertheless, Faramir is still alive, though seriously injured. Gandalf, summoned by Pippin, saves him but is unable to prevent Denethor from burning himself alive while holding the Palantir through which the Enemy had slowly poisoned his mind. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.20)

Aragorn heals Faramir, Éowyn and Merry in the Houses of Healing, thus demonstrating that he is the rightful king of Gondor, according to what the lore says: "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer" (Tolkien, 2005, p.862).

The remaining force of the Free people gather for one last battle: they will attack Mordor in order to distract Sauron's eye from Frodo's quest.

Book VI

In the land of Mordor:

Frodo is found by a group of Orcs patrolling the pass of Cirith Ungol and taken into their stronghold. Sam understands from their conversation that his master is not really dead: Shelob's poison has only paralysed him. He manages to rescue Frodo and the Hobbits, finally reunited, dress as Orcs and head to the Orodruin, the Mountain of Fire. Frodo is visibly weary and his will is twisted by the corrupting power of the Ring (Scandagliato, 2021, p.21).

The two hobbits are ambushed by Gollum, determined to recover the Ring:

While the creature fights with Sam, Frodo stands on the brink of the chasm and claims the Ring as his own, wearing it and disappearing. Gollum, jumps onto him and bites the Precious off the Hobbit's hand. "Dancing like a mad thing" and

“gloating on his prize” (Tolkien, 2005, p.946), the creature stumbles and falls into the abyss. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.21).

Mordor is destroyed completely, ‘The Nazgûls crackle and wither, the Morgul army is scattered. The Lord of the Eagles, Gwaihir, rescues the Hobbits and takes them to Ithilien, where they rest and heal, tended by Aragorn’ (Scandagliato, 2021, p.21). The end of the quest is celebrated a few days later in Minas Tirith, where Aragorn is also crowned as king of the Westergesse and marries Arwen. ‘The Queen, who has chosen to lead a mortal life with her husband, is aware of Frodo’s weariness, and offers him her place on the ships that will soon depart from the Grey Havens, heading to Aman, the Blessed Realm’ (Scandagliato, 2021, p.21).

After the final separation of the company, the Hobbits return to the Shire:

But they find that it has been overtaken by Saruman (under the name of Sharkney) and his ruffians - who, after having overpowered the former leader, Lotho Sackville-Baggins, have started plundering and ravaging the Shire as an act of vengeance. The Ringbearer and his fellows therefore organise a revolt against the wizard and manage, together with the other hobbits, to overthrow him. Sam gets married and moves in with his wife at Bag End, where Frodo also lives. The Ringbearer, decides to pass into the West, together with Galadriel, Gildor, Gandalf and Bilbo. The narrative ends with Merry, Pippin and Sam, who after having accompanied Frodo to the Grey Havens, returning home to a finally serene, though changed Shire. (Scandagliato, 2021, p.21-22).

The Elves and the immanence of being

As it is narrated in *The Silmarillion*, the elves are the Firstborn Children of Ilùvatar, the first of the races of Middle Earth to be born, during the First Age. They awaken in the darkness, and the first thing they see is the firmament, which causes them to develop a privileged connection with one of the Valar, Varda:

It is told that even as Varda¹⁴ ended her labours, and they were long, when first Menelmacar¹⁵ strode up the sky and the blue fire of Helluin flickered in the mists above the borders of the world, in that hour the Children of the Earth awoke, the Firstborn of Ilúvatar. By the starlit mere of Cuiviénen, Water of Awakening, they rose from the sleep of Ilúvatar; and while they dwelt yet silent by Cuiviénen their eyes beheld first of all things the stars of heaven. Therefore they have ever loved the starlight, and have revered Varda Elentári above all the Valar. (Tolkien, 2013, p. 45)

The Elves are described as ‘the fairest of all earthly creatures,’ (Tolkien, 2013, p.35) and those who ‘shall have and shall conceive and bring forth more beauty than all my Children; and they shall have the greater bliss in this world’ (Tolkien, 2013, p.35). This description foreshadows the immense knowledge of language, craft and art that the Elves will acquire from the Valar, especially during their stay in Valinor, by virtue of their bond with the Powers:

Manwë and Varda loved most the Vanyar, the Fair Elves; but the Noldor were beloved of Aulë, and he and his people came often among them. Great became their knowledge and their skill; yet even greater was their thirst for more knowledge, and in many things they soon surpassed their teachers. They were changeful in speech, for they had great love of words, and sought ever to find names more fit for all things that they knew or imagined. And it came to pass that the masons of the house of Finwë, quarrying in the hills after stone (for they delighted in the building of high towers), first discovered the earth-gems, and brought them forth in countless myriads; and they devised tools for the cutting and shaping of gems, and carved them in many forms. They hoarded them not, but gave them freely, and by their labour enriched all Valinor. (Tolkien 2013, p.59-60)

The special bond the Quendi¹⁶ have with the Valar is rooted in the main attribute that Ilúvatar endows them with: immortality. Their eternal life –

¹⁴ One of the Valar, the Lady of the Stars, who creates the firmament from the dew of the tree Telperion. Elentári is one of the names given to her by the Elves, meaning Queen of the Stars. (Tolkien 2013 p.16)

¹⁵ The constellation of Orion.

¹⁶ Original Elvish name referring to the Elves themselves. (Tolkien 2013, p. 418)

which can only be ended by violent death or unbearable grief – is in fact not only the characteristic that sets Elves aside from all the other creatures of Middle Earth, but also the attribute that causes them to love Arda and feel in communion with it.

The Elves remain until the end of days, and their love of the Earth and all the world is more single and more poignant therefore, and as the years lengthen ever more sorrowful. For the Elves die not till the world dies, unless they are slain or waste in grief (and to both these seeming deaths they are subject); neither does age subdue their strength, unless one grow weary of ten thousand centuries; and dying they are gathered to the halls of Mandos in Valinor, whence they may in time return. (Tolkien, 2013, p.35)

Tolkien develops this aspect not only in *The Silmarillion*, but also in the long letter he wrote presumably in 1951 to Milton Waldman. As it was stated in chapter I, the letter provides a significant amount of contextual information aimed at proving the proximity between *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* within the legendarium. Among the many pieces of information we find in the letter, there is the nature and role of the Children of God, as well as their relationship with the Valar and the other creatures:

The Children of God are thus primevally related and akin, and primevally different. Since also they are something wholly ‘other’ to the gods, in the making of which the gods played no part, they are the object of the special desire and love of the gods. (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.147)

In this passage Tolkien clarifies that the two races are not ontologically different: they both issue from God, and are related by virtue of this. God is also the only being who has a complete knowledge of the cosmic cycle of Arda¹⁷, and of the birth of the creatures that dwell on it. Therefore, the Valar

¹⁷ ‘The Knowledge of the Creation Drama was incomplete: incomplete in each individual ‘god’, and incomplete if all the knowledge of the pantheon were pooled. For (partly to redress the evil of the rebel Melkor, partly for the completion of all in an ultimate finesse of detail) the Creator had not revealed all. The making, and nature, of the Children of God, were the two chief secrets.’ (Carpenter and Tolkien 2006, p.147)

and the Maiar perceive the Children of Ilúvatar as a mystery and a miracle, which causes Men and Elves to become the object of the love of the Powers.

Moreover, the letter provides a more detailed description of the implication of immortality for the Elves:

The doom of the Elves is to be immortal, to love the beauty of the world, to bring it to full flower with their gifts of delicacy and perfection, to last while it lasts, never leaving it even when 'slain', but returning – and yet, when the Followers come, to teach them, and make way for them, to 'fade' as the Followers grow and absorb the life from which both proceed. (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.147)

Therefore, the implication of immortality is a privileged connection with the world and its beauty: their purpose is to take care of it, because they share the same endurance as Arda itself, and are in communion with it. In Other words, they live as long as Arda lives, and are aware that the reason why they inhabit it is to use their art to make it thrive. They share a purpose as a community, deeply felt by each individual. Such awareness is also revealed in the words Tolkien chooses to name magic, as respectively used by the Elves and the Enemy:

I have not used 'magic' consistently, and indeed the Elven-queen Galadriel is obliged to remonstrate with the Hobbits on their confused use of the word both for the devices and operations of the Enemy, and for those of the Elves. I have not, because there is not a word for the latter (since all human stories have suffered the same confusion). But the Elves are there (in my tales) to demonstrate the difference. Their 'magic' is Art, delivered from many of its human limitations: more effortless, more quick, more complete (product, and vision in unflawed correspondence). And its object is Art not Power, subcreation not domination and tyrannous reforming of Creation. The 'Elves' are 'immortal', at least as far as this world goes: and hence are concerned rather with the griefs and burdens of deathlessness in time and change, than with death. The Enemy in successive forms is always 'naturally' concerned with sheer Domination, and so the Lord of magic and machines; but the problem: that this frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root,

the desire to benefit the world and others* – speedily and according to the benefactors own plans – is a recurrent motive. (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.145)

As it is stated here, there are two kinds of magic in Tolkien’s legendarium. One is called Art and it is used by the Elves: it’s aim is to take care of the community and the environment where the Elves dwell eternally. The other is called alternatively magic or machine, the domain of the Enemy. It is used with the purpose of exerting power over other creatures and of achieving the ends of the Enemy more quickly. Therefore, the capacity and necessity to care for the world is embedded in the power of the elves, because they perceive it as a duty and a purpose as a community, as a faculty they were created to exert.

In a 1969 handwritten note transcribed and published in the edited volume *The Nature of Middle Earth*, Tolkien provides the readers with further information on the immortality of the Elves. In particular, he describes the cycles of renewals that constitute their eternal life, as well as the modes in which the Elves fade from Middle Earth in the Third Age:

The Elvish lives should go in *cycles*. They achieved longevity by a series of *renewals*. After birth and coming to maturity and beginning to show age, they began a period of *quiet* in which when possible they ‘retired for a while’ and issued from it renewed again in physical health to approximately the vigour of early maturity. (Their knowledge and wisdom were however progressively *cumulative*.)

This had not appeared in the periods dealt with (or had only begun towards the end of the Third Age).

The fading was apparent in this way:

1. The periods of activity and full vigour became progressively shorter, and
2. The renewal was not so complete: they were a little older at each renewal than at the previous renewal. (Tolkien, 2021, p.155)

This does not imply that the Elves can die; nevertheless, it is a mark of the fact that, in the Third age, Middle Earth is not fit for them anymore. Their

race is becoming increasingly weaker, and is therefore encouraged to join the Gods in the blessed realm of Aman: ‘But heir immortality within the Life of the World was guaranteed, and they could depart to the Blessed Realm if they willed.’ (Tolkien, 2021, p.156)

Moreover, another note dated 1968 – containing the explanation of some Quenya words to be glossed in *The Lord of the Rings* – points out that Elves, on the one hand, believe in fate, but on the other hand have also their own concept of will and chance. In other words, the fact that they are so strongly connected with the world does not annihilate them as mere instruments, but causes they will to align with that of Ilùvatar:

MBAR: basically ‘settle, establish’ but with a considerable semantic development, being especially applied to ‘settlement’, sc. the settling of a place, occupation (permanently) and ordering of a region as a home (of a family or people) > to erect (permanent) buildings, dwellings. [...] The full implications of this word cannot be understood without reference to Eldarin views and ideas concerning “fate” and “free will” [...]. The sense ‘world’ – applied usually to this Earth – is mainly derived from sense of settlement: “the great habitation”. [...] Though *mbar-* was naturally mostly used of the activities and purposes of rational creatures, [...] it could refer to the conditions and established physical processes of the Earth. (Tolkien, 2021, p.226-227)

In this note, Tolkien clarifies that *mbar* is the root of the word *ambar*, Quenya Elvish for World, and of *umbar*, meaning Fate, and describes the relationship between the wills of the Quendi and the existence of a maker: Eru Ilùvatar. Fate is, according to Eldarin thought:

The order and condition of the physical world (or of Eä in general) as far as established and pre-ordained at Creation, and that part of this ordained order which affected an individual with a *will*, as being immutable by this person’s will. (Tolkien, 2021, p.227).

The Elves are, therefore, aware of the fact that there is a God, omnipotent and omniscient, whose design ordains the world and to whom everything returns. The same concept is stressed in the first chapter of the *Silmarillion*, the *Ainulindalë*, where Ilùvatar reminds Melkor that every attempt at marring creation will eventually become part of the God's design by virtue of his foreknowledge:

'Behold your Music! This is your minstrelsy; and each of you shall find contained herein, amid the design that I set before you, all those things which it may seem that he himself devised or added. And thou, Melkor, wilt discover all the secret thoughts of thy mind, and wilt perceive that they are but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory.' (Tolkien, 2013, p.6)¹⁸

Furthermore, in the note Tolkien explains the intersection of fate and will:

[The Eldar] would not have denied that (say) a man was (may have been) fated to meet an enemy of his at a certain time and place, but they would have denied that he was "fated" then to speak to him in terms of hatred, or to slay him. "Will" at a certain grade must enter into many of the complex motion leading to a meeting of persons; but the Eldar held that only those efforts of a "will" were "free" which were directed to a fully aware purpose. [...] Umbar thus relates to the net-work of chances (largely physical) which is, or is not, used by rational persons with free-will. (Tolkien, 2021, p.229)

In this excerpt, the author highlights that Elves have the ability to make decisions concerning themselves, reacting to the circumstances *umbar* presents to them. This is the way in which they exert their will. However, their exertions of will do not change the course of fate, instead, they are entangled with it. In other words, there is identity between their wills and God's design, because Elves have a harmonious relationship with the world and its maker: 'Will first appeared with the Ainur/Valar, but except for

¹⁸ In the *Ainulindale* (The Music of the Ainur) the world is created through music: Ilùvatar proposes a theme, on which the Ainur improvise. However, because of his thirst for power, Melkor introduces disharmony into the composition and attempts to make it his own. He will also try to destroy and conquer the result of the music: Eä, the Universe (see chapter I)

Melkor and those he dominated their wills being in accord with Eru effected little change in Ambar and they deflected Umbar.’ (Tolkien, 2021, p.230)

Despite the fact that the Elves inhabit the Secondary World, while Lukács analyses the historico-philosophical aspects of the Primary World, the society of the Elves is comparable with the enclosed civilisations Lukács refers to in *The Theory of the Novel*, ‘those happy ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths’ (Lukács 1978, p. 29). Their souls are constantly aware of being part something greater, they are never fundamentally lost nor do they need to search for themselves. In other words, Elves experience a totality of being which translates into a sense of communion with the world, a privileged connection with the Valar, an awareness of having a purpose as a race, as well as into an identity between their wills and God’s will. In the world of the Elves, essence is present, felt and shared; the soul accesses essence and behaviour accord with the awareness of collective purpose and fate. The world has not yet experienced the rift whereby outer and inner life are separated, and whereby interiority is developed.

However, as we have seen, Elves start to fade and leave Middle Earth in the Third Age: the world does not seem to be fit for them anymore. This phenomenon too can be interpreted using the tools Lukács provides. In fact, the Elves are leaving Middle Earth to the Men, whose consciousness and experience of the world embodies the rift.

Men, mortality and interiority

The awakening of Men occurs later in the First Age with respect to the Elves, in a world that has radically changed. Concretely, Men do not behold the stars as they awake in Middle Earth: instead, they are born under the light of the Sun. After the trees of Valinor are killed by Ungoliant and Fëanor has refused to give the Silmarils to the Valar in order to save Laurelin and

Telprion, the Powers establish the Sun and the Moon as sources of light in Arda, to replace the shimmering trees:

Isil the Sheen the Vanyar of old named the Moon, flower of Telperion in Valinor; and Anar the Fire-golden, fruit of Laurelin, they named the Sun. But the Noldor named them also Rána, the Wayward, and Vása, the Heart of Fire, that awakens and consumes; for the Sun was set as a sign for the awakening of Men and the waning of the Elves, but the Moon cherishes their memory. The maiden whom the Valar chose from among the Maiar to guide the vessel of the Sun was named Arien, and he that steered the island of the Moon was Tilion. In the days of the Trees Arien had tended the golden flowers in the gardens of Vána, and watered them with the bright dews of Laurelin; but Tilion was a hunter of the company of Oromë, and he had a silver bow. [...] Isil was first wrought and made ready, and first rose into the realm of the stars, and was the elder of the new lights, as was Telperion of the Trees. [...] Tilion had traversed the heaven seven times, and thus was in the furthest east, when the vessel of Arien was made ready. Then Anar arose in glory, and the first dawn of the Sun was like a great fire upon the towers of the Pelóri: the clouds of Middle-earth were kindled, and there was heard the sound of many waterfalls. (Tolkien, 2013, p.110)

The world in which Men are born is already a mark of the role they will have in it. The world after the Darkening of Valinor¹⁹ is a fallen world, marred by the first assassination perpetrated in Valinor – the killing of Finwë by the hand of Melkor – and by the fall of Fëanor, who refuses to surrender his creation, the Silmarils, for the sake of the Trees, and therefore of the creatures that inhabit Valinor.

Fëanor's fall, however, cannot be considered a lack of awareness of the immanence of meaning and sense of communal purpose that the Elves share. His fall actually follows the same mechanism that all the narrative arches of fallen creatures can be ascribed to, including Melkor and Sauron, a scheme that is embedded in the design of Ilùvatar and is recurrent in all races,

¹⁹ The destruction of the Trees.

regardless of their involvement with the world. Each fall in the *Legendarium*, in fact, starts from the awareness of a limit and results in the desire to overcome it – namely, to possess what cannot be possessed – by using magical tools that enable the subject to impose his or her will upon others. One of the main triggers of this process is the awareness of mortality (in mortal races), however, this discourse can be applied to any aspect that constitutes a limit for a creature's desire to be 'lord and God of his [...] creation' (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.145):

All this stuff is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine. With Fall inevitably, and that motive occurs in several modes. With Mortality, especially as it affects art and the creative (or as I should say, sub-creative) desire which seems to have no biological function, and to be apart from the satisfactions of plain ordinary biological life, with which, in our world, it is indeed usually at strife. This desire is at once wedded to a passionate love of the real primary world, and hence filled with the sense of mortality, and yet unsatisfied by it. It has various opportunities of 'Fall'. It may become possessive, clinging to the things made as its own, the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. He will rebel against the laws of the Creator – especially against mortality. Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective, – and so to the Machine (or Magic). By the last I intend all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of developments of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating: bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills. The Machine is our more obvious modern form though more closely related to Magic than is usually recognised. (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.145-146)

Men awake, therefore, on the first day in which the Sun rises on a fallen world, deprived of the Trees and defiled by the spilling of Elven blood in the Blessed Realm of Aman:

At the first rising of the Sun the Younger Children of Ilúvatar awoke in the land of Hildórien in the eastward regions of Middle-earth; but the first Sun arose in the

West, and the opening eyes of Men were turned towards it, and their feet as they wandered over the Earth for the most part strayed that way. (Tolkien, 2013 p.115)

From the beginning, their relationship with the Valar is completely different from the one the Elves had with the Powers. In both cases, the Valar are unaware that the First and Second born are coming, because this piece of information is kept secret by Ilùvatar. However, Men do not develop the same strong bond with the Valar as the Elves. This is an early sign that they will feel the presence of the Powers less near and less involved in their life as a race:

To Hildórien there came no Vala to guide Men, or to summon them to dwell in Valinor; and Men have feared the Valar, rather than loved them, and have not understood the purposes of the Powers, being at variance with them, and at strife with the world. Ulmo nonetheless took thought for them, aiding the counsel and will of Manwë; and his messages came often to them by stream and flood. But they have not skill in such matters, and still less had they in those days before they had mingled with the Elves. Therefore they loved the waters, and their hearts were stirred, but they understood not the messages. (Tolkien 2013, p.115)

This is due to the fact that Men are endowed with a different life span with respect to Elves: they are mortal creatures. The mortality of Men constitutes the main element of separation between the two races, because it entails that they occupy different places in the world, and have different roles in it. In fact, despite their immense knowledge, Elves cannot fully comprehend the implications of mortal life:

The Doom (or the Gift) of Men is mortality, freedom from the circles of the world. Since the point of view of the whole cycle is the Elvish, mortality is not explained mythically: it is a mystery of God of which no more is known than that 'what God has purposed for Men is hidden': a grief and an envy to the immortal Elves. (Carpenter and Tolkien, 2006, p.147).

In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien also adds that the place where Men dwell after death²⁰ is unknown to the Elves and even to some of the Ainur:

Men were more frail, more easily slain by weapon or mischance, and less easily healed; subject to sickness and many ills; and they grew old and died. What may befall their spirits after death the Elves know not. Some say that they too go to the halls of Mandos; but their place of waiting there is not that of the Elves, and Mandos under Ilúvatar alone save Manwë knows whither they go after the time of recollection in those silent halls beside the Outer Sea. None have ever come back from the mansions of the dead, save only Beren son of Barahir, whose hand had touched a Silmaril; but he never spoke afterward to mortal Men. The fate of Men after death, maybe, is not in the hands of the Valar, nor was all foretold in the Music of the Ainur. (Tolkien, 2013, p.117)

Furthermore, the ambivalent consideration of Men's mortality as both their doom and their gift is to be attributed to the implications of their limited life span in relation to their will:

But to the Atani I will give a new gift. Therefore he willed that the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein; but they should have a virtue to shape their life, amid the powers and chances of the world, beyond the Music of the Ainur, which is as fate to all things else; and of their operation everything should be, in form and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest.

But Ilúvatar knew that Men, being set amid the turmoils of the powers of the world, would stray often, and would not use their gifts in harmony; and he said, 'These too in their time shall find that all that they do redounds at the end only to the glory of my work.' Yet the Elves believe that Men are often a grief to Manwë, who knows most of the mind of Ilúvatar; for it seems to the Elves that Men resemble Melkor most of all the Ainur, although he has ever feared and hated them, even those that served him.

²⁰ The design of Arda includes a place comparable to the Underworld: the halls of Mandos, where the Vala Námo dwells. 'He is the keeper of the Houses of the dead, and the summoner of the spirits of the slain' (Tolkien 2012, p.19).

It is one with this gift of freedom that the children of Men dwell only a short space in the world alive, and are not bound to it, and depart soon whither the Elves know not. (Tolkien, 2013 p.35-36)

In this passage of *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien clearly states that Men, as mortal creatures, are not bound to the world: in other words, they do not share the Elves' communal purpose of tending Middle Earth. Instead, they can choose what to devote their lives to and, most importantly, they do not make this choice as a race: each individual has control over its life, and makes decisions based on factors that are contingent and even personal. In their relationship with the categories of existence, they have lost the awareness of a present, immanent and shared meaning, and, as a consequence, they perceive themselves and their deeds as separated from the wholeness of the world. Hence, totality is unattainable for Men.

The results of this state are disquiet, loneliness, restlessness: in other words, the development of interiority. Men search for meaning in the world but do not find it, thus wanting to go beyond it, to abridge the chasm that separates them from each other and from essence. They may even develop a conflictive relationship with the world, which associates them with Melkor and the disharmony he causes in Arda. In particular, this comparison echoes with the definition of the novelistic consciousness as demonic in *The Theory of the Novel*:

The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God. The novel hero's psychology is demonic; the objectivity of the novel is the mature man's knowledge that meaning can never quite penetrate reality, but that, without meaning, reality would disintegrate into the nothingness of inessentiality. (Lukács, 1978, p.87)

In Lukácsian terms, the fact that in the Third Age Elves leave Middle Earth in order for Men to inhabit it, is the embodiment of the rift whereby, in the Primary World, an irreversible change in human consciousness and the subsequent emergence of the novel form occur. This means that the

society of the Secondary World is undergoing the same historico-philosophical shift that the Primary World underwent when the world that sustained the epic disappeared.

Since the dynamic of the rift is the same in both the Primary and the Secondary World, the form that arises from it is also the same: the novel; specifically, *The Lord of the Rings*. This is in fact the book that captures the moment of the rift, the moment in which Middle Earth ceases to be an enclosed world ‘where the starry sky is a map of all possible paths’ (Lukács, 1978, p.29) and an age of transcendence begins. Concretely, the novel portrays the events occurring in the Third Age, the precise moment when the last Elves leave Middle Earth to the Men, for the sake of whom they took care of the world and thus fulfilled their purpose.

However, the novel does not develop this matter from a theoretical point of view – this is the reason why most of them was explained in *The Silmarillion* and in Tolkien’s letters. However, it contains several moments which can be interpreted according to Lukács’s theorisation.

Aragorn and Arwen

Included in Appendix A, *The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen* relates the love story between a Man –Aragorn, future king of Gondor and Heir of Isildur – and an Elf maiden – Arwen, daughter of Elrond. The couple meets in Rivendell, where Aragorn had found shelter with his mother after his father was killed by an Orc, and where she has returned after spending some time with her mother’s family in Lothlórien. They fall in love instantly, but their union seems to be doomed by their difference in race:

But as for Arwen the Fair, Lady of Imladris and of Lorien, Evenstar of her people, she is of lineage greater than yours, and she has lived in the world already so long that to her you are but as a yearling shoot beside a young birch of many summers.

She is too far above you. And so, I think, it may well seem to her. But even if it were not so, and her heart turned towards you, I should still be grieved because of the doom that is laid on us.”

“What is that doom?” said Aragorn.

“That so long as I abide here, she shall live with the youth of the Eldar,” answered Elrond, “and when I depart, she shall go with me, if she so chooses.” (Tolkien, 2005, p.1059)

In this passage, Elrond warns Aragorn not to hope for a union with his daughter, because the doom of the Elves is incompatible with the future of Men: the former will soon be unfit to live in Middle Earth while the latter will thrive in it. Aragorn therefore leaves Rivendell to fight against Sauron, and after many years he visits Lothlórien. There, he is reunited Arwen, and finds their love unchanged. It is during one of their conversations in Lothlórien that their different degrees of knowledge of the world emerges:

Arwen said: “Dark is the Shadow, and yet my heart rejoices; for you, Estel, shall be among the great whose valour will destroy it.”

But Aragorn answered: “Alas! I cannot foresee it, and how it may come to pass is hidden from me. Yet with your hope I will hope. And the Shadow I utterly reject. But neither, lady, is the Twilight for me; for I am mortal, and if you will cleave to me, Evenstar, then the Twilight you must also renounce.”

And she stood then as still as a white tree, looking into the West, and at last she said: “I will cleave to you, Dúnadan, and turn from the Twilight. Yet there lies the land of my people and the long home of all my kin.” (Tolkien, 2005, p.1061)

Here, Aragorn admits that his mortality limits his knowledge of the world, and prevents him from foreseeing what will happen in the future. This is why he trusts Arwen, by nurturing his hope with her prediction, when she foreshadows that he will overcome the Enemy. Moreover, the passage is emblematic of a dynamic that in more than one occasion had taken place in Middle Earth: the betrothal and marriage of a mortal and an immortal being.

Arwen is not the first Elf to marry a Man. Before her, Lúthien, daughter of the Elven king Elu Thingol, had married Beren of the house of Beör; and Idril Celebrindal, princess of Gondolin, had married Tuor of the house of Hador. As a matter of fact, Elrond and Arwen themselves descend from Dior, the son of Beren and Lúthien. All these unions follow the same dynamic whereby the Elven maiden forsakes her immortality and adapts to the limited life span of her husband; the opposite never occurs. This can be interpreted as an instance of the inaccessibility of essence for Men: nothing, not even the love of an Elf, can enable a mortal being to catch a glimpse of that totality that belongs exclusively to immortal races.

Tom Bombadil

One of the most elusive characters in the *Legendarium*, Tom Bombadil is only seen in Book I, where he intervenes to save Pippin from Old Man Willow. Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin have just begun their journey, and find themselves in the Old Forest. There, they stop to rest near a river, on which bank stands a willow tree. The scene has an uncanny air about it: they all feel caught by a sudden drowsiness, because the tree seems to be singing about sleep. Sam is the first to become suspicious: ‘I don’t like this great big tree. I don’t trust it. Hark at it singing about sleep now! This won’t do at all!’ (Tolkien, 2005, p.117). He goes to check on the ponies, when:

He heard two noises; one loud, and the other soft but very clear. One was the splash of something heavy falling into the water; the other was a noise like the snick of a lock when a door quietly closes fast.

He rushed back to the bank. Frodo was in the water close to the edge, and a great tree-root seemed to be over him and holding him down, but he was not struggling. Sam gripped him by the jacket, and dragged him from under the root; and then with difficulty hauled him on to the bank. Almost at once he woke, and coughed and spluttered.

‘Do you know, Sam,’ he said at length, ‘the beastly tree threw me in! I felt it. The big root just twisted round and tipped me in!’

‘You were dreaming I expect, Mr. Frodo,’ said Sam. ‘You shouldn’t sit in such a place, if you feel sleepy.’ ‘What about the others?’ Frodo asked. ‘I wonder what sort of dreams they are having.’

They went round to the other side of the tree, and then Sam understood the click that he had heard. Pippin had vanished. The crack by which he had laid himself had closed together, so that not a chink could be seen. Merry was trapped: another crack had closed about his waist; his legs lay outside, but the rest of him was inside a dark opening, the edges of which gripped like a pair of pincers. (Tolkien, 2005, p.117)

Sam and Frodo try to free their friends, but in vain. Then, a chant is heard in the distance and Tom Bombadil appears:

Frodo and Sam stood as if enchanted. The wind puffed out. The leaves hung silently again on stiff branches. There was another burst of song, and then suddenly, hopping and dancing along the path, there appeared above the reeds an old battered hat with a tall crown and a long blue feather stuck in the band. With another hop and a bound there came into view a man, or so it seemed. At any rate he was too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not quite tall enough for one of the Big People, though he made noise enough for one, stumping along with great yellow boots on his thick legs, and charging through grass and rushes like a cow going down to drink. He had a blue coat and a long brown beard; his eyes were blue and bright, and his face was red as a ripe apple, but creased into a hundred wrinkles of laughter. In his hands he carried on a large leaf as on a tray a small pile of white water-lilies. (Tolkien, 2005, p.119)

The Hobbits ask for his help, and he seems to be aware of the tree’s tendency to behave like that. Therefore, he scolds Old Man Willow, who releases Merry and Pippin:

‘What?’ shouted Tom Bombadil, leaping up in the air. ‘Old Man Willow? Naught worse than that, eh? That can soon be mended. I know the tune for him. Old grey Willow-man! I’ll freeze his marrow cold, if he don’t behave himself. I’ll sing his roots off. I’ll sing a wind up and blow leaf and branch away. Old Man Willow!’

Setting down his lilies carefully on the grass, he ran to the tree. There he saw Merry's feet still sticking out – the rest had already been drawn further inside. Tom put his mouth to the crack and began singing into it in a low voice. They could not catch the words, but evidently Merry was aroused. His legs began to kick. Tom sprang away, and breaking off a hanging branch smote the side of the willow with it. 'You let them out again, Old Man Willow!' he said. 'What be you a-thinking of? You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep! Bombadil is talking!' He then seized Merry's feet and drew him out of the suddenly widening crack.

There was a tearing creak and the other crack split open, and out of it Pippin sprang, as if he had been kicked. Then with a loud snap both cracks closed fast again. A shudder ran through the tree from root to tip, and complete silence fell.

'Thank you!' said the hobbits, one after the other. (Tolkien, 2005, p.120)

After this intervention, Tom Bombadil invites the four hobbits to go home with him for supper, where a rich table has been laden by his wife Goldberry. He dashes away singing and hopping, at a pace the hobbits cannot follow but with extreme difficulty, until they reach his house. There, they find Goldberry:

Her long yellow hair rippled down her shoulders; her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew; and her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots. About her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, white water-lilies were floating, so that she seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool. [...] The hobbits looked at her in wonder; and she looked at each of them and smiled. 'Fair lady Goldberry!' said Frodo at last, feeling his heart moved with a joy that he did not understand. (Tolkien, 2005, p.123)

Goldberry is also capable of understanding that the Hobbits have been acquainted with an Elf at the beginning of their journey: 'But I see that you are an Elf-friend; the light in your eyes and the ring in your voice tells it' (Tolkien, 2005, p.124).

The hobbits find the opportunity to ask her questions about her husband:

‘Fair lady!’ said Frodo again after a while. ‘Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?’

‘He is,’ said Goldberry, staying her swift movements and smiling. Frodo looked at her questioningly. ‘He is, as you have seen him,’ she said in answer to his look. ‘He is the Master of wood, water, and hill.

‘Then all this strange land belongs to him?’

‘No indeed!’ she answered, and her smile faded. ‘That would indeed be a burden,’ she added in a low voice, as if to herself. ‘The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master. No one has ever caught old Tom walking in the forest, wading in the water, leaping on the hill-tops under light and shadow. He has no fear. Tom Bombadil is master.’ (Tolkien, 2005, p.123)

After supper, Frodo asks Tom Bombadil himself another question: whether he had heard him scream for help in the Old Forest, or whether chance brought him there at the right moment.

‘Did I hear you calling? Nay, I did not hear: I was busy singing. Just chance brought me then, if chance you call it. It was no plan of mine, though I was waiting for you. We heard news of you, and learned that you were wandering. We guessed you’d come ere long down to the water: all paths lead that way, down to Witherwindle. Old grey Willow-man, he’s a mighty singer; and it’s hard for little folk to escape his cunning mazes. But Tom had an errand there, that he dared not hinder.’ (Tolkien, 2005, p.126)

The following day, Tom reveals to the hobbits his deep knowledge of the trees of the Old Forest, with their malice and dark thoughts, remnants of the pride and nostalgia of being:

A survivor of vast forgotten woods; and in it there lived yet, ageing no quicker than the hills, the fathers of the fathers of trees, remembering times when they were lords. The countless years had filled them with pride and rooted wisdom, and with malice. But none were more dangerous than the Great Willow: his heart was rotten,

but his strength was green; and he was cunning, and a master of winds, and his song and thought ran through the woods on both sides of the river. His grey thirsty spirit drew power out of the earth and spread like fine root-threads in the ground, and invisible twig-fingers in the air. (Tolkien, 2005, p.130)

Later, when asked directly about his true nature, Tom gives an answer even more elusive than his wife:

‘Eh, what?’ said Tom sitting up, and his eyes glinting in the gloom. ‘Don’t you know my name yet? That’s the only answer. Tell me, who are you, alone, yourself and nameless? But you are young and I am old. Eldest, that’s what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas were bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside.’ (Tolkien 2005, p.131)

Finally, and much to the hobbits’ amazement, Tom demonstrates to be immune to the power of the Ring: he holds it in his hand, observes it with a slight air of mockery and then slips it on his little finger. However, he does not disappear like Frodo had done at Bree when he had worn the Ring by accident.

This fact, together with the mysterious answers to the hobbits’ questions and the uncanny air about the situation, make Tom Bombadil and Goldberry possible subjects of a Lukácsian interpretation, as bearers of totality and the immanence of meaning seen through the eyes of mortal creatures like the hobbits. They demonstrate to have a deep knowledge of the world derived from direct experience, their life seems to be eternal, and they display unique powers: all of this is inexplicable to the hobbits, not only because of the obscure formulation of the couple’s answers, but also because their level of closeness to essence, the broadness of their perception, is unattainable for

limited mortal beings like the Hobbits are. It is beyond that unbridgeable gap which makes it impossible for mortal races to access a totality of being.

The Grey Havens

In Book VI, Sam accompanies Frodo to the Grey Havens²¹, where he is reunited with Galadriel, Gildor, Gandalf and Bilbo, to pass into the West and reach the Blessed Realm. This passage is not only an instance of the disappearance of Elves from middle Earth, but also of the key role the access to the immanence of meaning has in this context. In fact, here two Hobbits, and therefore two mortal creatures, join a group of Elves on a ship: the two Ring-Bearers, who, by virtue of their contact with an artifact of the Enemy, have had access to a form of awareness which causes them to be unfit to continue their lives in Middle Earth.

The Ring was in fact forged by Sauron, a Maia, a creature who – despite his fall – is ontologically akin to God and the Ainur. The fact that Bilbo found the Ring by chance and passed it on to Frodo as part of his inheritance, gives the two Hobbits access to the enclosed world of Gods and Elves. This is too much for them to bear, especially for Frodo, who falls ill after returning from his quest:

One evening Sam came into the study and found his master looking very strange. He was very pale and his eyes seemed to see things far away.

‘What’s the matter, Mr. Frodo?’ said Sam.

‘I am wounded,’ he answered, ‘wounded; it will never really heal.’ (Tolkien, 2005, p. 1025)

The only hope for Bilbo and Frodo to be reconciled with the world around them is finding a place in the integrated civilisation of those creatures for

²¹ A harbour in the north-west of Middle Earth.

whom essence is immanent. Neither the Shire nor Middle Earth are fit for them anymore, because the totality they experienced is not perceived anymore:

Then Bilbo woke up and opened his eyes. ‘Hullo, Frodo!’ he said. ‘Well, I have passed the Old Took today! So that’s settled. And now I think I am quite ready to go on another journey. Are you coming?’ ‘Yes, I am coming,’ said Frodo. ‘The Ring-bearers should go together.’

‘Where are you going, Master?’ cried Sam, though at last he understood what was happening.

‘To the Havens, Sam,’ said Frodo.

‘And I can’t come.’ ‘No, Sam. Not yet anyway, not further than the Havens. Though you too were a Ring-bearer, if only for a little while. Your time may come. Do not be too sad, Sam. You cannot be always torn in two. You will have to be one and whole, for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be, and to do.’

‘But,’ said Sam, and tears started in his eyes, ‘I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done.’

‘So I thought too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them. But you are my heir: all that I had and might have had I leave to you. (Tolkien, 2005, p.1029)

This excerpt, together with the preceding one on Tom Bombadil, can be read as a suggestion that all mortal races are as unaware of totality as Men are, because they all share the key aspect of mortality, directly connected with their existential condition. However, in the texts where he writes extensively on the subject of the roles of the various races of Middle Earth, namely *The Silmarillion*, his letters and the manuscripts recollecting in *The Nature of Middle Earth*, the main comparison Tolkien establishes is between Elves and

Men, as the First and the Second born children of Ilúvatar and the Hegemonic races in Middle Earth.

This chapter investigated the manner in which *The Lord of the Rings* frames the moment of passage between an enclosed world and an age of transcendence, as theorised by Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel*. In order to do so, it explored the history and characteristics of Elves and Men, and extended the discourse to other immortal and mortal creatures that inhabit Middle Earth. The following chapter this argument will be corroborated by the description of the approach used by philosopher Adriana Cavarero, who reached a similar conclusion by following a different path.

Chapter IV

Adriana Cavarero: the identity of the hero

The previous three chapters were dedicated to an exploration of the way in which the society portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings* can be interpreted using the tools Lukács provides in *The Theory of the Novel*. However, this reading can be corroborated by another book: *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti* by Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero.

In the first four chapters of her essay, Cavarero explores the identity of the heroes of epic and mythic texts, and establishes a comparison with the protagonists of novels. Her conclusions overlap with the ones theorised by Lukács and can therefore constitute a useful tool for the interpretation of the relationship between Men and Elves in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Regarding epic and mythic characters, the author analyses the narrative trajectory of two figures: Oedipus and Ulysses. In particular, the analysis focusses on the relationship between identity and the desire for narration; in other words, on the way in which other characters relate the stories of the protagonists, thus having a determinant impact on the perception and construction of their identity. Oedipus hears the story of his own birth, of which he was ignorant, from a messenger. The man professes to be the shepherd who received him from a servant of Laius, who had been ordered to abandon the infant on mount Cithaeron in order to avoid the fulfilment of the prophecy whereby he would murder his father and commit incest with his mother. Although the order had been given by queen Jocasta herself, the mother of the child, the shepherd pitied the baby and gave him to another shepherd, so that he could take care of him. The servant and the messenger reconstruct the events in front of a now adult Oedipus, who has become King of Thebes: in this moment, Oedipus discovers that he is the son of Laius and Jocasta, and that the prophecy has come to reality. He has, in fact, killed his

father during a quarrel on the way to Thebes, and has married his mother, with whom he has had two daughters.

Before the other characters tell him his story, Oedipus does not know who he is, and therefore, the story is implicitly divided into two threads: the true story, involving a murder and an incest, and the false one, where the protagonist ignores his relationship with the other characters:

É del resto questa ignoranza a consentire alle due storie di dipanarsi dai medesimi atti. La morte di Laio, al fatale crocevia, è contemporaneamente l'omicidio di uno sconosciuto e un parricidio, l'unione con Giocasta è contemporaneamente un legittimo matrimonio e un incesto. Ciò che regge la doppia narrazione, ossia l'equivoco reduplicante che fa di Edipo una maschera enigmatica della duplicità, è la sua nascita: di cui egli ignora la verità che il mito invece conosce. (Cavarero, 1997, p.17)²²

In particular, the most important event that Oedipus ignores is his birth, which, once revealed, makes him understand what he has done and who he is:

Sulla scena dell'Edipo Re, è proprio l'enigma di questa nascita a venirgli incontro facendogli scoprire chi è. Egli non si imbatte casualmente – come molti protagonisti del romanzo moderno – nella verità della sua nascita, bensì la cerca. Gliene dà l'occasione il dilagare della peste, il nuovo male che, dopo l'orrore della Sfinge, ora colpisce Tebe. L'oracolo la dice effetto di un'antica colpa impunita, quella dell'uccisore di Laio, che, rimasto sconosciuto, con la sua presenza contamina la città. Chi allora meglio di Edipo, re dei tebani e già sapiente solutore di enigmi, può scovare il colpevole e liberarli nuovamente dalla maledizione? Edipo così si mette a indagare sull'identità dello sconosciuto, ossia sull'identità, a lui sconosciuta, di sé stesso. [...] Edipo non sa chi è perché ignora la sua nascita, solo il racconto della sua nascita può quindi svelargli la storia di cui egli è protagonista. In altri termini,

²² It is indeed this ignorance which enables the two stories to unfold from the same deeds. Laius's death, at the fatal crossroads, is simultaneously the murder of a stranger and a parricide, the union with Jocasta is simultaneously a legitimate marriage and an incest. What sustains the double narration, meaning the reduplicating error that makes Oedipus an enigmatic mask of duplicitousness, is his birth: of that he ignores the truth, which the myth instead knows (all translations in this chapter are mine).

conoscere sé stesso, per Edipo, significa conoscere la sua nascita perché lì la sua storia è cominciata. (Cavarero 1997, p.17-18)²³

From the revelation of the circumstances of his birth and the reconstruction of the events that Oedipus retrieves a story, the story that defines his identity: ‘dalle sue azioni risulta una storia che custodisce il senso della sua identità’ (Cavarero 1997, p.19).

However, another crucial aspect of the reconstruction of Oedipus identity must be taken into account: the story of Oedipus is narrated to him by other characters, namely the servant and the messenger, as well as the diviner Tiresias and Jocasta.

Le azioni che Edipo ha compiuto sono sempre le stesse – un omicidio, un matrimonio – ma il loro senso è cambiato. Se prima Edipo si credeva un altro, ora, avendolo finalmente appreso dal racconto della sua storia, egli sa invece chi è. La forma edipica del *gnothi seauton* non consiste, appunto, in un esercizio di introspezione, bensì nel sollecitare il racconto esterno della propria storia. (Cavarero 1997, p.20)²⁴

Therefore, the affirmation of Oedipus identity occurs through the recollection of his birth and the subsequent events of his life on the part of other characters, who offer to him a portrayal of himself: the same dynamic is enacted in the *Odyssey*.

²³ On the stage of *Oedipus Rex*, it is the enigma of this birth which goes back to him and cause him to discover who he is. He does not find the truth about his birth casually – like many protagonists of modern novels do. Instead, he searches for it. This occurs because of the spread of the plague, the new disgrace that, after the Sphynx, befalls on Thebes. The oracle imputes it to an unpunished fault, that of Laius’s murder, who, still unknown, contaminates the city with his presence. Who better than Oedipus, king of Thebans and skilful solver of riddles, can find the culprit and free them from this new curse. So, Oedipus starts to investigate the identity of the unknown man, namely his own unknown identity. Oedipus does not know who he is because he ignores his birth, inly the story of his birth can therefore unveil the story of which he is the protagonist. In other words, knowing himself, for Oedipus, means knowing about his birth, because it was the starting point of his story.

²⁴ The actions Oedipus performed are the same – a murder, a marriage – but their sense changes. Before, Oedipus believed that he was a different person. Now, he has understood who he is after having learned it from the account of his story. The Oedipal exhortation *gnothi seauton* does not consist, in fact, in an exercise of introspection, but rather in the solicitation of an external account of one’s own story.

After he is shipwrecked on the island of Scheria, he is found on the shore by the young princess Nausicaa and her maids, and receives the help of her father Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians. He remains with them for several days, but does not reveal his identity, until he hears the blind singer Demodocus tell the story of the Trojan horse, the stratagem through which the Achaeans won the war, and in which Odysseus had a crucial role. It is in this moment that Ulysses is overcome by emotions and bursts into tears, thereby unveiling his identity to the Phaeacians and telling the story of his return from Troy.

In the same way in which Oedipus receives the story of his birth, parricide and incest from Jocasta, the servant and the messenger, Odysseus hears his adventures told by the singer; and here, too, narration on the part of other character goes together with a new form of self-awareness. In fact, what is recollected by Demodocus is the series of actions performed by the hero, which compose his story:

Ma cosa precisamente il racconto significa? Né l'azione stessa né l'agente, ci suggerisce Hannah Arendt, bensì la storia che l'agente, nel suo agire, si è lasciato indietro: ossia la sua storia di vita. Nel sentire la sua storia Ulisse, allora, si commuove. Non solo perché dolorose sono le vicende narrate, ma perché quando le aveva vissute direttamente non ne aveva compreso il significato. Quasi che, agendo, fosse preso dalla contestualità degli accadimenti. Quasi che, ogni volta, fosse catturato nel presente dell'azione che spezza la serie temporale del prima e del dopo. Ora, invece, nel racconto dell'aedo, i tempi discontinui di quell'accadere si dipanano in una storia. Ora Ulisse viene a riconoscersi nell'eroe di questa storia. Acquisendo appieno il significato della storia narrata, acquisisce nozione anche di chi ne è il protagonista. Dunque, prima di sentire la sua storia, Ulisse non sapeva ancora chi è: il racconto dell'aedo, il racconto di un altro, finalmente, gli svela la

sua identità. Ed egli, nel cavo purpureo del suo mantello, piange. (Cavarero 1997, p.25-26)²⁵

The story Odysseus hears does not unveil to him the circumstances of his birth, like Oedipus story did. Instead, it provides him with the true meaning of the events that he lived: in fact, after revealing his identity, Ulysses is capable of narrating his own autobiography; however, the true meaning of a person's identity is always discovered through someone else's narration.

This idea is rooted in the thought of Hannah Arendt, according to whom:

La categoria di identità personale postula sempre come necessario l'altro. Prima ancora che un altro possa rendere tangibile l'identità di qualcuno raccontandone la storia, molti altri sono stati infatti spettatori del costitutivo esporsi dell'identità medesima al loro sguardo. Detto altrimenti, l'esistente umano, in quanto è unico e tale si mostra fin dalla nascita, è appunto l'esposto. (Cavarero, 1997, p.28)²⁶

Furthermore, this process must be inserted in a much ampler context that involves the whole cosmos, which Cavarero calls 'festa cosmica della reciprocità' (Cavarero 1997, p.29)²⁷. In this context:

The world men are born into contains many things, natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal, all of which have in common that they appear and hence are meant to be seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled, to be perceived by sentient creatures endowed with the appropriate sense organs. (Arendt 1978, p.19).

²⁵ But what does account mean? Neither the action itself nor the agent, Hannah Arendt suggests. Rather, the story the agent, with his acting, leaves behind: that is, his life story. On hearing his story, Ulysses is moved and cries. Not only because the events narrated are painful, but because he had not understood their meaning when he was directly experiencing them. As if, while acting, he had been caught by the contingency of the present action which breaks the temporal series of before and after. Now, in the singer's tale, the discontinuous time of those events are organised into a story. Now Ulysses, recognises himself in the hero of that story. By comprehending the full meaning of the narration, he also acquires the notion of who its protagonist is. Therefore, before hearing his own story, Ulysses did not know who he was: the singer's tale, the tale of another, finally, reveals his identity to him. And he, concealed by his purple cape, cries.

²⁶ The category of personal identity always postulates the other as necessary. Even before anyone could make identity tangible by telling someone's story, many others were the spectators of the constitutive exposition of identity to their gaze. In other words, human existence, being unique and showing itself as such from birth, corresponds to what is exposed.

²⁷ Cosmic feast of reciprocity.

In other words, Arendt formulates a law whereby ‘Being and Appearing coincide’ (Arendt, 1978, p.19), which has not only phenomenological, but also ontological implications: appearing is in fact the mark of a deeper and truer essence. In particular, human beings have the privilege of appearing to each other, thus distinguishing each individual for his or her innate uniqueness: ‘in questa reciproca esibizione, chi si mostra appare, interamente e senza residui, tale a quale è’ (Cavarero, 1997, p.29)²⁸. Cavarero therefore deduces that the expositive and relational character of identity are indistinguishable, thus rendering inexistent what cannot be exposed (Cavarero 1997, p.29-30).

However, Arendt distinguishes between the mere registration of a person’s appearance and his or her active exhibition of identity. The difference lies in the deeds and words through which people actively reveal who they are: ‘in altri termini, chi ciascuno è lo rivela agli altri quando agisce al loro cospetto su un teatro interattivo dove ciascuno è al tempo stesso attore e spettatore’ (Cavarero, 1997, p.31)²⁹. Arendt calls this interactive scene of exhibition *politics*, because ‘l’attivo rivelarsi agli altri, con atti e parole, offre uno spazio plurale e perciò politico all’identità’ (Cavarero, 1997, p.31)³⁰.

This Arendtian interpretation of identity enables us to understand Oedipus and Ulysses as heroes, who present themselves as ‘campioni dell’agire, il cui l’impulso all’autorivelazione si esalta’ (Cavarero, 1997, p. 32)³¹ – a conception that has already been developed by the critical tradition of epic poems. In particular, Maurice Blanchot (1977, cited in Cavarero 1997, p.32) develops this concept even more radically, arguing that the fact that essence and appearance are intertwined implies that the hero who does not act, is

²⁸ In this reciprocal exhibition, those who show themselves appear, without any residual elements, as they are.

²⁹ In other terms, each person reveals who he or she is to other people by acting in front of them in an interactive theatre where each individual is at the same time actor and spectator.

³⁰ Active revelation to others through acts and words offers a space that is plural, and therefore political, to identity.

³¹ Champions of action, in whom the impulse of self-revelation is exalted.

nothing: he reveals his whole essence in the action that reveals him. Arendt takes this idea even further by making the hero the prototypical man of the Greek polis:

Il passaggio dall'eroe omerico al cittadino della polis è coerente e diretto. In ambedue si manifesta una pulsione autoesibitiva che trova, anzi, crea spazi adeguati, ossia spazi interattivi, alla propria espressione. Per l'eroe tale spazio è la piana di Troia, dove egli mostra ai suoi simili chi è con atti e parole. Per il cittadino esso è invece l'agorà, la piazza al centro della polis. Sulla piana troiana gli eroi hanno "l'opportunità di mostrarsi come realmente sono, di rivelarsi nella loro reale apparenza e dunque di divenire pienamente reali". Nell'agorà i cittadini fanno altrettanto costituendo sull'interagire e su una rete plurale di sguardi quello che è appunto il solo statuto di realtà concesso all'esistente umano in quanto è unico. Possiamo così facilmente capire perché, per Hannah Arendt, l'azione sia sinonimo di politica. Modellata sull'agire eroico dell'epica omerica, essa conquista nella polis il suo scenario più celebre. (Cavarero, 1977, p.32-33)³²

Moreover, the necessity of self-revelation through action is not only a descriptive tool for the characters of epic poems, but also the element that distinguishes them from novelistic characters. Cavarero, in fact, argues that the characters that people modern novels do not have the same impulse to reveal their essence through action: they exist before their action and regardless of it, because of their psychology.

Arendt sottolinea più volte come il protagonista della storia narrata sia chi si è mostrato nelle azioni da cui la storia medesima è risultata. Per dirla con il lessico di Roland Barthes [Barthes, 1984 cited in Cavarero, 1997, p.41], nell'idea arendtiana di narrazione "il personaggio è sempre l'agente di una azione", dipende da essa e a

³² The message of the Homeric hero to the citizen of the polis is coherent and straightforward. Both manifest a self-exhibitive pulsion which finds and even creates adequate spaces – interactive spaces – for its exhibition. For the hero, this space is the plain of Troy, where he shows to people akin to him who he is, with acts and words. For the citizen, this space is the agora, the square at the centre of the polis. On the Trojan plain, heroes have the opportunity of showing how they really are, of revealing their true appearance, thus becoming fully real. In the agora, citizens do the same, by building, upon interaction and a plural net of gazes, the sole condition of reality permitted to human existence. We can therefore easily understand why, according to Hannah Arendt, action and politics are synonyms. Shaped upon heroic action in Homer's epos, action acquires in the polis its most famous scenario.

essa si subordina. Al contrario di quanto avviene nel romanzo moderno – dove il personaggio incarna un'essenza psicologica e diventa una "persona", ossia "un essere pienamente formato, anche nel caso in cui non faccia niente e naturalmente, anche prima d'agire" (Cavarero, 1997, p.41)³³

This concept overlaps with the Lukácsian theorisation of the development of interiority: in the novel, characters develop individual inner lives because their souls lose their awareness of totality of being and are therefore lost and alone, seeking that meaning which was once immanent. While Lukács attributes the birth of interiority to the condition of the soul in the modern world, Cavarero explains it through a radical change in the expression of identity on the part of characters. Nonetheless, they both reach the same conclusion: that novelistic characters experience the autonomous life of interiority as intertwined with their existence.

Aragorn and the Elves: novelistic and epic characters

This analysis too can be applied to *The Lord of the Rings*, as it corroborates the Lukácsian interpretation of the interplay between Elves and Men – and therefore, more generally, between mortality and immortality. In fact, there are instances in the novel of the possibility for Men to exist only as psychological entities, whose thinking does not directly contribute to the plot, whereas Elves systematically show a necessity to act in order to affirm their existence.

In Book II, after fleeing the mines of Moria, the Fellowship enters the realm of Lothlórien, where 'Elves still dwell (...) in the darkening world' (Tolkien, 2005, p.338), living of flets perched on the forest trees. There they take

³³ Arendt repeatedly underlines how the protagonist of the story is who he demonstrated to be in the actions from which the story itself results. To use Roland Barthes's words, in the Arendtian idea of narration the character is always the agent of an action, depends on it and is subordinated to it. In opposition to what happens in the modern novel – where the character incarnates a psychological essence and becomes a person, meaning a fully formed being, even in the case in which it does nothing and, naturally, even before acting.

refuge from the Moria orcs following them, and are conducted into the heart of the realm, the Naith of Lórien, on the hill of Cerin Amroth, where ever bloom the gold and silver flowers of *elanor* and *niphredil*:

At the hill's foot Frodo found Aragorn, standing still and silent as a tree; but in his hand was a small golden bloom of *elanor*, and a light was in his eyes. He was wrapped in some fair memory: and as Frodo looked at him he knew that he beheld things as they once had been in this same place. For the grim years were removed from the face of Aragorn, and he seemed clothed in white, a young lord tall and fair; and he spoke words in the Elvish tongue to one whom Frodo could not see. *Arwen vanimelda, namárië!* he said, and then he drew a breath, and returning out of his thought he looked at Frodo and smiled. 'Here is the heart of Elvendom on earth,' he said, 'and here my heart dwells ever, unless there be a light beyond the dark roads that we still must tread, you and I. Come with me!' And taking Frodo's hand in his, he left the hill of Cerin Amroth and came there never again as living man. (Tolkien, 2005, p.352)

In this passage, Aragorn is seen deep in thought, musing over what Frodo knows to be a memory. Appendix A, at the end of the novel, will explain that what Aragorn remembers in Lothlórien is the love promise Arwen made to him years before, in which she chose to spend one lifetime with him, rather than facing all the ages of the world alone. Aragorn's remembrance is of no practical use to the plot: its only function is to give psychological depth to the character by showing that the memory of his distant love causes him to feel a sense of longing. The plot does not proceed through this scene, he does not act, and the words he pronounces are a painful invocation of his nostalgia for his beloved Arwen – and therefore, do not cause any action neither by him nor by any other character. This passage proves that the existence of Aragorn is not directly linked to his actions, that his identity is expressed not only through deeds but also through his thoughts and emotions. His interiority, therefore, characterises him as a novelistic character, in light of both Lukács and Cavarero's definitions of it.

If, on the one hand, Aragorn is a representative of Men as novelistic characters, Elves, on the other hand, show their nature of epic characters through their actions – or rather by the absence of them. In fact, Elves are given much less space in *The Lord of the Rings* compared to mortal races, and are never seen in moments of sheer individual thought in the same way Aragorn is. Readers only see elves acting, performing deeds that are of practical use to other characters and contribute to the unfolding of the plot. The fact that their deeds are shown less with respect to the deeds of mortal races, is proof of their unfitness for the world of the third age, which is supposed to belong to Men and where the immanence of meaning is lost, thus leaving no space for their awareness of totality. In other words, Elves are fading, and so are the deeds that mark their presence and identity in Middle Earth.

Conclusions

This thesis aims at demonstrating the applicability of György Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In his essay, the Hungarian philosopher adopts a historico-philosophical perspective that links the emergence of the novel form to a deep change in human consciousness which occurred on the advent of European modernity: a shift from an enclosed world, where the essence and meaning of life are immanent, to an age of transcendence, where the soul's sense of belonging to a totality of being is lost, a transcendental search begins and, as a consequence, interiority is developed.

The *Lord of the Rings* portrays a complex and self-sustaining Secondary World, corroborated not only by other narratives written by Tolkien himself, but also by a series of theoretical texts that underline its independence, credibility and coherence. Therefore, the society that emerges from these writings provides a social context comparable to that of the Primary World, from which forms are able to rise – namely, the novel form. In fact, *The Lord of the Rings* narrates the moment of passage from an enclosed world to one of transcendence. This is embodied in the roles of Elves and Men in Middle Earth: the former, immortal bearers of totality, are fading, thus leaving the land to the latter – mortal creatures that have no access to the immanence of being, whose souls are therefore lost and alone, forced to develop an independent inner life.

Moreover, the possibility to interpret Elves and Men as, respectively, epic and novelistic characters is also sustained by the interpretation Adriana Cavarero provides of both typologies. In her essay *Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*, in fact, she defines them according to the way in which their identity is expressed. On the one hand, Elves, as epic characters, have to perform deeds in order for someone else to reconstruct their identity through

their recollection and narration. On the other hand, Men's inner life is at the root of their nature of novelistic characters: they in fact exist, regardless of their acts, as psychological entities.

In conclusion, the fact that *The Lord of the Rings* portrays a society which can sustain the emergence of literary forms, using the theoretical tools provided by *The Theory of the Novel*, has deep implications for both works. Firstly, it offers an additional reading to the novel, which establishes a relationship between the society it represents and the novelistic form itself. Secondly, it enlarges the applicability scope of *The Theory of the Novel*, by proving that Tolkien's Secondary World can be the object of a historico-philosophical interpretation by virtue of its credibility and coherence. Finally, the application of a renowned and consolidated theoretical work such as *The Theory of the Novel* to a fantasy novel constitutes a contribution to the establishment of the genre as serious and dignified.

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