

From the fairy tale to the epic: the change in the narrative tone in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

Do conto de fadas ao épico: a mudança no tom narrativo em *O Hobbit* de J.R.R. Tolkien

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RESUMO: Este trabalho analisa como J.R.R. Tolkien usa elementos do conto de fadas e do gênero épico para escrever seu romance *O Hobbit*. Publicado em 1937, o primeiro romance de Tolkien é frequentemente visto como um conto de fadas. Além disso, partindo-se de seu ensaio “On Fairy-Stories” para analisar sua própria ficção, é possível argumentar que *O Hobbit* tem a maioria das características que ele atribui ao gênero conto de fadas: acontece em um mundo secundário consistente, satisfaz vários desejos humanos, como o de vislumbrar outros mundos e o de conversar com outros seres; mais importante, tem um “final feliz”, que é, por excelência, a essência do gênero para o autor. No entanto, uma leitura atenta de sua ficção revela que seu tom leve é lentamente substituído por um tom mais sombrio, típico de narrativas antigas como o poema épico *Beowulf*. Esta pesquisa, portanto, investiga como Tolkien constrói uma narrativa que começa com a sobriedade do conto de fadas, atinge um clímax característico do épico e termina com um sabor agri-doce que mistura traços de ambos os gêneros. Para tal, utilizo as teorias de Tolkien sobre esses gêneros.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Conto de fadas; Épico; J.R.R. Tolkien; *O Hobbit*.

ABSTRACT: This work analyses how Tolkien uses elements of the fairy tale and the epic genre to write his novel *The Hobbit*. Published in 1937, J.R.R. Tolkien’s first published novel² is frequently seen as a fairy tale. In addition, by using the author’s essay “On Fairy-Stories” to analyze his own fiction, it is possible to argue that it has most of the characteristics he ascribes to the fairy tale genre: it takes place in a consistent secondary world, it satisfies several human desires, such as the one of glimpsing other worlds and the one of conversing with other beings; more importantly, it has a “happy ending”, which is, *par excellence*, the essence of the genre for the author. However, a close reading of such fiction reveals that its light tone is slowly replaced by a darker one, typical of ancient narratives like the epic poem *Beowulf*. This research, therefore, investigates how Tolkien builds a narrative that begins with the sobriety of the fairy tale, reaches a climax characteristic of the epic, and closes with a bittersweet taste that mixes traces of both genres. To do so, I rely on Tolkien’s own theories concerning such genres.

KEYWORDS: Fairy tale; Epic; J.R.R Tolkien; *The Hobbit*.

2 Used here as an all-encompassing term to mean simply a fictional narrative of considerable length and complexity.

About the terminology

Before any consideration concerning Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is made, it is important to discuss some terminology I refer to throughout this work. I propose to analyze Tolkien's narrative both as fairy tale and as epic. The way these concepts are understood and addressed varies considerably depending on the scholar and theory one chooses. For the present analysis, I opt for addressing Tolkien's fictional work under the light of his own theories concerning the fairy tale and the epic. The author's views on the first are expressed in his 1947 essay "On Fairy-Stories", in which he extensively discusses three questions: "What are fairy-stories? What is their origin? What is the use of them?" (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 4). The scholar's considerations on the first and third questions are of great value to this work, while the second will not be discussed here.

For Tolkien, fairy stories are not precisely about fairies (though they may be), but actually about one's *aventures* in what the author calls the Perilous Realm of *Faërie* or upon its shadowy marches (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 9–10). In other words, Tolkien believes that fairy stories are tales that take place in *Faërie*. Such a realm, the writer argues, cannot be directly described since one of its characteristics is to be indescribable. In spite of that, the author offers the following explanation:

[...] *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being, [...] 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, 2001, p. 9).

If fairy stories are, for Tolkien, the ones that take place in the realm of *Faërie* and in such realm things that in our world are seen as fantastic and extraordinary have their being, it can be argued, as Brian Attebery (2014) and John Clute (1996) believe, that Tolkien envisions fairy stories as fantasy stories. Such argument is, to a great extent, corroborated when Tolkien discusses the social function of fairy stories.

Tolkien claims that among all the benefits of reading fairy stories there is one

that stands out: their potential of providing readers with four things: fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation. Briefly put, fantasy has to do with the human mind's capacity of forming mental images of things not present in our world (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 46–47). In addition to that, fantasy is connected to the power of giving to such imagined things what is called secondary belief, “[...] a belief that accepts the inner reality of the story and believes in its ‘truth’ as long as the reader’s mind is there within that story’s bounds.” (RUUD, 2011, p. 327). Fantasy also makes possible the creation of what Tolkien calls secondary worlds, fictional universes in which fantastic things or events (i.e.: things and events that are regarded as impossible in our world) feel possible. Recovery, in its turn, is deeply connected with fantasy, for when one sees the fantastic things in a secondary world, one may regain a clearer view of the things in the real world. In other words, as Tolkien argues, recovery is concerned with the return and renewal of health and the regaining of a clear view: “[w]e should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make.” (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 57).

Then, there is escape and consolation, which Tolkien discusses jointly. For the writer, these two characteristics are deeply concerned with wish fulfillment and the imaginary satisfaction of ancient desires: escape, for example, fulfills what C.S. Lewis calls our desire for a far-off country, a glimpse of other-worlds: “[...] a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience.” (LEWIS, 2001, p. 30). Consolation, on the other hand, satisfies a very specific human desire: the desire for a happy ending. Tolkien proposes that such consolation is the highest function of fairy stories and to illustrate it he creates the term *Eucatastrophe*,³ explaining it thus:

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

3 As Verlyn Flieger (2017, p. 37) points out, Tolkien’s *Eucatastrophe* is derived from the Greek word *katastrechein*, *kata* (down) and *strephein* (turn). By adding the prefix “eu-” (good), Tolkien changed the negative meaning of the original word to a positive one: the “good catastrophe”.

existence of *dyscatastrophe*,⁴ 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 [...] 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, 2001, p. 69).

The notion of fairy tale used in this article, then, comprises all these specificities proposed by Tolkien. The understanding of epic, on the other hand, derives from the author’s 1936 essay “Beowulf: the monsters and the critics”, in which he discusses the literary and historical importance of the Old English poem *Beowulf*. Tolkien was deeply concerned with medieval texts and he spent a considerable time of his life studying and lecturing about them. The *Beowulf* poem was among his favorites, for he believed it was a meaningful expression of pagan Germanic warrior culture, whose centrality resides on what he calls “the theory of courage, which is the great contribution of early Northern literature.” (TOLKIEN, 2006, p. 20). Before I discuss such theory, it is important that I call attention to the fact that Tolkien did not consider *Beowulf* an epic poem *per se* but rather an elegy: “*Beowulf* is not an ‘epic’, not even a magnified ‘lay’. No terms borrowed from Greek or other literatures exactly fit: there is no reason why they should. Though if we must have a term, we should choose rather ‘elegy’. It is an heroic-elegiac poem; [...]” (TOLKIEN, 2006, p. 31). For Tolkien, most of the poem (its first 3,136 lines to be precise) works as a prelude to a dirge, the hero’s demise. During most of these first 3,136 lines, the reader is presented with the heroic deeds of Beowulf, from his youth, when he becomes a legendary hero, to his old age, when he becomes king of his people,

4 Also coined by Tolkien and derived from the Greek word *katastrephein*, it means the opposite of *Eucatastrophe*; it is the “bad catastrophe”.

the Geats. Beowulf's trajectory during most of the narrative, to a considerable extent, resembles those of Aeneas and Odysseus, since the three heroes leave home seeking for renown and, after years of perilous adventures, win it. One of the main differences between these heroes is that Beowulf's tale ends with his demise during his confrontation with the dragon that was threatening to destroy the hero's homeland. The warrior slays the beast and saves his people, but pays with his own life.

It can be argued, however, that “[...] though Tolkien called Beowulf a heroic-elegiac, it is precisely its heroism that allows one to define it as an epic elegy, for if on one hand, it tells of the heroic deeds of “superior men”, to use Aristotle's own term, on the other hand, it closes with the somber tone that reminds us that “lif is læne: eal scæceð leoht and lif somod.”⁵ (TOLKIEN, 2006, p. 19). Such tone and quote capture, as Flieger (2017, p. 62) suggests, the essence of what the poem meant to Tolkien and of what he called the theory of courage. Such theory, as Ruud (2011, p. 558) suggests, is founded on the belief that true courage is connected to keep fighting even when there seems to be no more hope left. Tolkien's theory of courage is, in this sense, about doomed heroism and, differently from what he proposes in his “On Fairy-Stories”, about the recognition that happy endings depend not only on providential help but also on the self-sacrifice of a hero for a greater cause.

Having defined the terms I use in my analysis, I intend now to exemplify how Tolkien's *The Hobbit* moves from the light-hearted fairy tale tone to a darker and heavier one that resembles *Beowulf*, and closes with a bittersweet mixture of the two.

From the fairy tale to the epic and back again

The Hobbit opens with the famous sentence “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 3). Such sentence, as Flieger (2017, p. 38) claims, has

5 Life is loan: all perishes, light and life together. (Verlyn Flieger's translation).

a very important narrative function since it is through it that readers enter Tolkien's secondary world: the author makes sure that his readers are arrested to his fictional universe from the very beginning and he does so by informing us that the story we are about to read does not take place in the primary world, but in a magical one in which creatures called hobbits live in holes in the ground. However, immediately after that, readers are informed that such hole was

Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with panelled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with polished chairs, and lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats—the hobbit was fond of visitors. [...] Bedrooms, bathrooms, cellars, pantries (lots of these), wardrobes (he had whole rooms devoted to clothes), kitchens, dining-rooms, all were on the same floor, and indeed on the same passage. The best rooms were all on the left-hand side (going in), for these were the only ones to have windows, deep-set round windows looking over his garden, and meadows beyond, sloping down to the river. (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 3).

Using such description as a corroborating argument, Tom Shippey (2001, p. 5) claims that Bilbo Baggins's residence is, apart from the fact of being underground, the home of a typical upper-middle-class Victorian citizen of Tolkien's youth. Besides that, as the scholar points out, there are several other internal pieces of evidence that help to place Bilbo in time and space: he is fond of smoking tobacco in his pipes, he makes use of postal service, he has his afternoon tea every day at four, etc. Flieger adds to that by arguing that even though the story takes place in a secondary world, such universe is "so firmly grounded in the primary one that we can recognize the links. It is a world where imaginary creatures called Hobbits live dull boring lives, get letters in the mail, enjoy pipe-smoking but neglect the washing-up" (FLIEGER, 2017, p. 38). The scholar even goes on to say that Bilbo could be described as an imaginary

toad in a real garden: the Shire, Bilbo’s homeland, is a worldly place that is home to fantastic creatures.

The secondary world in which Bilbo lives is a rather safe one, where there are no perilous adventures or dangers of any sort and the hobbit is happy for that, so much so that when Gandalf comes to him one morning saying that he was having difficulties in finding someone to share in an adventure he had been planning, the hobbit tells him straight away: “I should think so—in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can’t think what anybody sees in them [...]” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 6). Bilbo, and most other hobbits, are not fond of adventures mainly because going on an adventure means leaving the comfort and safety of the Shire and stepping into the dangerous unknown. Rarely do Hobbits leave the Shire and they do not know much about the affairs of the lands beyond the borders of their homeland. It is as if the Shire was an altogether different world, secluded from the rest of Middle-earth. In fact, scholars such as Shippey (2001) and Flieger (2017) see it exactly this way: according to them, Tolkien’s narrative consists of multiple secondary worlds; Middle-earth, *per se*, is the greatest of them all and it encompasses a number of other secondary worlds. Every time the characters move from one of these worlds to another, there is a change in the narrative tone. Such aspect can be noticed already in chapter one, “An Unexpected Party”, in which the comic and light-hearted tone predominates in the exchanges between the characters, as it can be argued from the dialogue between Bilbo and Gandalf in which the wizard plays with the (un)intended meaning of the hobbit’s “good morning”:

“Good Morning!” said Bilbo, and he meant it. The sun was shining, and the grass was very green. But Gandalf looked at him from under long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat.

“What do you mean?” he said. “Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?”

“All of them at once,” said Bilbo.

[...]

“Good morning!” he said at last. “We don’t want any adventures here, thank you! You might try over The Hill or across The Water.” By this he meant that the conversation was at an end.

“What a lot of things you do use *Good morning* for!” said Gandalf. “Now you mean that you want to get rid of me, and that it won’t be good till I move off.” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 5–6).

The following day, when Bilbo is getting ready for his afternoon tea, he receives a most unexpected visitor: a dwarf from a far-off land. Bilbo does not at first understand the meaning of the dwarf’s visit, but soon he learns that Gandalf had set the hobbit’s residence as the meeting point of a group of 13 dwarves who are planning a most perilous adventure. Not knowing what to do and not wanting to be rude, Bilbo welcomes the unwanted visitors who soon turn the meeting into a lively party. This is probably one of the funniest moments in the narrative (at least for the dwarves and the readers), but it is also during the party that readers are first presented with the difference between the light tone of the Shire and the grave one of the lands outside its borders, as it may be argued by comparing the two songs sung by the dwarves during the party. Here is an excerpt from the first one: “Dump the crocks in a boiling bowl;/ Pound them up with a thumping pole;/ And when you’ve finished, if any are whole,/ Send them down the hall to roll!/ That’s what Bilbo Baggins hates!/ So, carefully! carefully with the plates!” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 13). The language in such song is quite plain and the tone is playful, for the dwarves were mocking Bilbo’s uneasiness in the face of the apparent mess the visitors were making out of his residence. The second song, however, contains much more ornate language, since it is used to describe a secondary world outside the Shire, a world which is the homeland of the dwarves:

Far over the misty mountains cold/ To dungeons deep and caverns old
/We must away ere break of day/ To seek the pale enchanted gold./
The dwarves of yore made mighty spells,/While hammers fell like
ringing bells/ In places deep, where dark things sleep, /In hollow
halls beneath the fells. (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 14-15).

The song tells of a far-off land, filled with dangers and dark creatures. A land where great deeds once took place. The light tone witnessed in the previous song is replaced by a sense of wonder that may remind one of ancestral times, which can be argued from Tolkien's choice of words and syntax (e.g.: "ere", "yore", "paces deep", etc.). This song is the prelude to the adventure that Bilbo is soon to join in, which means he will leave the orderly and peaceful Shire and step into the wild and perilous lands beyond its borders. If, on one hand, the song above is the prelude to the upcoming adventure, on the other hand, the exact moment Bilbo moves from one secondary world to another is marked by a dramatic change in the surrounding landscape. Differently from the Shire, which is depicted as orderly and homely, the lands in which Bilbo enters are unwelcoming and dreary, as it can be noticed in the excerpt below:

At first they had passed through hobbit-lands, a wide respectable country inhabited by decent folk, with good roads, an inn or two, and now and then a dwarf or a farmer ambling by on business. Then they came to lands where people spoke strangely, and sang songs Bilbo had never heard before. Now they had gone on far into the Lone-lands, where there were no people left, no inns, and the roads grew steadily worse. Not far ahead were dreary hills, rising higher and higher, dark with trees. On some of them were old castles with an evil look, as if they had been built by wicked people. Everything seemed gloomy, for the weather that day had taken a nasty turn. Mostly it had been as good as May can be, even in merry tales, but now it was cold and wet. (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 30).

The language choice is particularly interesting in the passage above: the narrator closes the paragraph by saying that the weather had been mostly good; he even compares it to the weather in "merry tales". The past perfect tense there is used to recall the beginning of the paragraph, when the adventurers were still traveling through hobbit-lands, Bilbo's own peaceful and orderly secondary world. At that point, things still seemed like a merry tale, however, from the moment they leave those lands, the atmosphere darkens and becomes gloomy and uninviting. The transition between the secondary world of the Shire to the one of Middle-earth is well marked and from

that narrative point on, Bilbo will have to struggle to survive, for he does not belong to the epic world beyond the borders of his homeland.

It is worth noticing that the first adventures of the hobbit outside the Shire, though dangerous, still maintain a somehow comic tone, such as in the confrontation with the trolls, in which Bilbo, rather than fighting for his life, decides to convince his captors to let him live by offering to cook breakfast for them: “And please don’t cook me, kind sirs! I am a good cook myself, and cook better than I cook, if you see what I mean. I’ll cook beautifully for you, a perfectly beautiful breakfast for you, if only you won’t have me for supper.” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 35). As the adventure goes on, the confrontations with the dangerous creatures of Middle-earth grow grimmer and grimmer: from the riddle game with Gollum in the Misty Mountains, through the dreadful fight against the giant spiders in Mirkwood, and to the grim Battle of the Five Armies at the end of the narrative. Through all these adventures, the readers confirm what they may have already guessed by then: Bilbo is not a hero, at least not an epic hero such as Beowulf. In this sense, none of the great war deeds in the narrative are performed by him, but rather by some other character; that does not mean, however, that Bilbo lacks courage, but rather that his courage is different from that portrayed by Beowulf and by Thorin and his company. The hobbit’s courage is connected to the classical virtue of temperance, which Louis Markos (2012, p. 74) defines as a kind of courage that lies between rashness and cowardice: Bilbo will neither leave his companions behind during a moment of need nor will he run deliberately into mortal danger without a plan that grants him a chance to survive. Such idea is corroborated, for example, in the passage the hobbit rescues the dwarves that had been snared by the spiders in Mirkwood: Bilbo was only able to do so because he wore the invisibility ring he had found in the Misty Mountain, which means he did not have to engage in direct fight. This idea is even stronger in the chapter “The Clouds Burst”, in which The Battle of the Five Armies takes place. Bilbo’s participation in it, as the narrator declares, was “quite unimportant [...]. Actually I may say he put on his ring early in the business, and vanished from sight, if not from all danger.” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 257). Later, in that same chapter, readers are informed that Bilbo first idea

is not to fight, but rather to hide: “[h]e had taken his stand on Ravenhill among the Elves—partly because there was more chance of escape from that point, and partly [...] because if he was going to be in a last desperate stand, he preferred on the whole to defend the Elvenking.” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 259).

As it was mentioned above, after the confrontation with the trolls, the narrative tone starts to get darker and darker. The passage that probably best illustrates that appears in the chapter “On the Doorstep”, which tells readers that when Bilbo and his companions finally approach the final stage of their quest, the atmosphere is no longer hopeful:

It was a weary journey, and a quiet and stealthy one. There was no laughter or song or sound of harps, and the pride and hopes which had stirred in their hearts at the singing of old songs by the lake died away to a plodding gloom. They knew that they were drawing near to the end of their journey, and that it might be a very horrible end. The land about them grew bleak and barren, though once, as Thorin told them, it had been green and fair. There was little grass, and before long there was neither bush nor tree, and only broken and blackened stumps to speak of ones long vanished. They were come to the Desolation of the Dragon, and they were come at the waning of the year. (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 186-187).

It is interesting to think that Tolkien (and the writer himself, as well as scholars such as Shippey and Fliieger, comments on that) inserted a passage that was undeniably inspired by the *Beowulf* poem right after the chapter in which we are given the information above. In the chapter “Inside Information”, Bilbo enters Smaug’s lair and steals from the dragon’s hoard a “great two-handled cup, as heavy as he could carry [...]”. (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 198). Such an act soon rouses the dragon’s wrath and impels him to leave his lair and cause great havoc in the village nearby. Below, I selected an excerpt from *Beowulf* which describes a scene similar to the one mentioned above:

Even thus had that despoiler of men for three hundred winters kept beneath the earth that house of treasure, waxing strong; until one

filled his heart with rage, a man, who bore to his liege-lord a gold-plated goblet, beseeching truce and pardon of his master. [...] Then the serpent woke! New strife arose. [...] The Guardian of the Hoard searched eagerly about the ground, desiring to discover the man who had thus wrought him injury as he lay in sleep. Burning, woeful at heart, oftentimes he compassed all the circuit of the mound, but no man was there in the waste. Nonetheless he thought with joy of battle, of making war. Ever and anon he turned him back into the barrow, seeking the jewelled vessel. Quickly had he discovered this, that some one among men had explored the gold and mighty treasures. In torment the Guardian of the Hoard abode until evening came. Then was the keeper of the barrow swollen with wrath, purposing, fell beast, with fire to avenge his precious drinking-vessel. Now was the day faded to the serpent's joy. No longer would he tarry on the mountain-side, but went blazing forth, sped with fire. Terrible for the people in that land was the beginning (of that war), even as swift and bitter came its end upon their lord and patron. (TOLKIEN, 2015, p. 144–145).

When Tolkien brings this grave tone to the narrative accompanied by a series of scenes that resembles the *Beowulf* poem, he seems to be trying to make sure that whoever has read the poem makes the connection between his own novel and the medieval text. It is likely that even the ones who have not read *Beowulf* will be able, at that point in the narrative, to understand that whatever comes next will require heroic deeds: the dragon was awakened and it must be slain. Bilbo cannot slay it, for he is not a hero, at least not a hero of the same kind as Beowulf. The burden of slaying the dragon falls onto Bard's⁶ shoulders, who has to face the beast in order to save the lives of the residents of Lake-town, which Smaug chose to destroy as an act of revenge against their inhabitants who had helped Bilbo and his companions. It is true that the dragon is slain and its slayer survives the confront, but the price that is paid is burden-

6 A resident of Lake-town who is a descendant of Girion, the last lord of Dale, a city situated in the valley between the south-western and south-eastern arms of the Lonely Mountain and that was destroyed by Smaug when it first came to that region.

some: Lake-town is utterly destroyed and a quarter of its inhabitants lose their lives. At this point in the story, with the dragon slain, readers may feel that the narrative is flowing towards some sort of happy-ending, the Tolkienian *Eucatastrophe*. However, there is one last confrontation to be faced: a gruesome battle in which dwarves, elves, the men of Lake-town and the eagles have to join forces to fight against an enormous and deathly army of goblins. The Battle of the Five Armies is the apex of *The Hobbit* and it is during such war that the essence of what Tolkien calls the theory of courage appears more prominently. As mentioned earlier in this work, such theory encompasses the idea that in a hostile world such as Middle-earth there will be moments in which it will be necessary to fight and resist in the face of imminent defeat. To use Ruud's words, such theory is connected with "the willingness, even the necessity, to continue fighting in a lost cause even to the death. Lasting glory only comes with the heroic and unflinching defense against impossible odds." (RUUD, 2011, p. 157). According to this theory, the scholar adds, "courage to fight on when all hope was gone was the ultimate value of life in a world in which even the gods were destined to be destroyed [...]." (RUUD, 2011, p. 292). All the creatures fighting in such battle, except for Bilbo, belong to this hostile world; thus, it is expected that they will fight to their last breath and the bitter end. Such is what happens to Thorin and two of his companions, his cousins Fili and Kili, who are all slain in the battle against the goblins while fighting to protect their homeland. Their deaths are probably one of the saddest moments in the narrative and the language and the tone used by the author to describe the moment Bilbo learns Thorin was slain reflect such idea:

There indeed lay Thorin Oakenshield, wounded with many wounds, and his rent armour and notched axe were cast upon the floor. He looked up as Bilbo came beside him.

"Farewell, good thief," he said. "I go now to the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers, until the world is renewed. Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate.

"Bilbo knelt on one knee filled with sorrow. "Farewell, King under

the Mountain!” he said. “This is a bitter adventure, if it must end so; and not a mountain of gold can amend it. Yet I am glad that I have shared in your perils—that has been more than any Baggins deserves.”

“No!” said Thorin. “There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world. But sad or merry, I must leave it now. Farewell!”

Then Bilbo turned away, and he went by himself, and sat alone wrapped in a blanket, and, whether you believe it or not, he wept until his eyes were red and his voice was hoarse. (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 262–263).

Afterwards, Bilbo learns the full account of what happened in the battle⁷ and, readers are informed, that what he heard gave him more sorrow than joy. With the battle over and the dead buried, Bilbo returns home with a heavy heart and also with a heavy purse, for he had been promised a share of the treasure Thórin and his company reclaimed from Smaug. It is interesting to notice that on the homeward journey, the narrative once again returns to a somehow light-hearted and hopeful tone, which may be perceived by the way the narrator describes the weather and the landscape:

It was spring, and a fair one with mild weathers and a bright sun [...].

At last they came up the long road, and reached the very pass where the goblins had captured them before. But they came to that high point at morning, and looking backward they saw a white sun shining over the outstretched lands. (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 268).

The return journey is marked by the beauty of Spring, which may allude to renewal and hope. At the same time, when Bilbo and Gandalf reach the Misty Mountains, where, at the beginning of the narrative, they had been snared by the goblins,

7 Bilbo is knocked out by a stone during the battle and misses its final events.

the region is no longer seen as dreary as it had been before, for where there had been dark skies and snow, the Sun now shines. Then, when Bilbo finally arrives home, he slowly gets back to his normal life. It is true that he has to deal with some incidents upon his arrival and that the adventure he had made him a totally new hobbit; however, as we are informed by the narrator, “he remained very happy to the end of his days, and those were extraordinarily long.” (TOLKIEN, 2007, p. 275). Such sentence recalls the typical “and he lived happily ever after” of fairy tales, the *Eucatastrophe* that, as Tolkien believes, assures readers of fairy stories that no matter how dreary and near to tragedy a tale may be, there will always be a sudden turn that denies ultimate final defeat. (TOLKIEN, 2001, p. 68–69). Such ending, however, is possible for Bilbo, who does not belong in the wild world of Middle-earth, but rather in the peaceful Shire. For the dwarves, for example, inhabitants of the perilous realm beyond the Shire borders, the ending is not as happy, for it is not inspired in fairy tales, but rather in the dark tales of doomed heroism, such as the *Beowulf* poem. Can it be said, then, that *The Hobbit* has a happy ending? The answer, for Flieger is both yes and no:

The Hobbit is an idiosyncratic fairy story whose tone and ethos shift markedly halfway through. [...] What began as a mock fairy-tale quest to There and Back Again changes when the dwarves reach the Lonely Mountain and rouse the wrath of Smaug into a mini-epic like *Beowulf* than “Snow White” [...]. (FLIEGER, 2017, p. 39).

Thus, *The Hobbit* may be seen as neither a fairy tale or an Epic, but a hybrid that draws on the elements of both genres and hovers, in tone and style, between them. In this sense, the author’s first novel presents traces of the two narrative genres he appreciated the most, both as scholar and reader. By mixing aspects of the fairy tale and of the Epic, the author managed to write a narrative that reminds one that happy endings may exist, but at times not for everyone and, at others, at a high price.

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