Tesi di Laurea

Through The Magic World: Tolkien's New Myth

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Table of Contents

Introduction

> "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."[1]

I introduce my work with this quotation from *The Hobbit* (1937) by J.R.R. Tolkien because the fantasy novel is its core matter. This short passage perfectly represents my goal, that is to find the origin of the magic world of *The Hobbit* by looking at the processes of mythography and mythopoetics carried out by the author and by investigating the dynamicity of myth and the subsequent creation of new myths. Thus, speaking in Tolkienian terms, I look for the primary world in the secondary one and, through a journey in the magic world of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, I analyse not only the nature of myth, but also the figure of the hero, who, with his admirable humanity, transmits a message of tolerance and justice and represents the new myth.

As the title suggests, reading this work implies a sense of movement and the preposition 'through', in fact, emphasizes this aspect. Since *The Hobbit* is a fantasy novel, readers are asked to share an unknown dimension and to undertake their own adventure in the company of the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, the hero of the novel. Thus, it is by sharing Bilbo's adventure that readers can grasp the main goal of the work: discovering and interpreting Tolkien's processes of mythography and mythopoesis in *The Hobbit* novel and movies in order to reflect upon the nature of myth in all its facets.

The main reason why I decided to work on this novel is because it is rich with literary echoes and it gives me the chance to study and melt different kinds of literature. Furthermore, I have always been fascinated by mythology and its relation with culture. I think that *The Hobbit* can perfectly encapsulate both my love for literature since it is a journey through epic legendary narrations, medieval texts, post-colonial aspects and my curiosity about myths. I carried out my analysis not only by reading articles and books, but

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[1] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996, p. 258.

also by facing the challenge of Old and Middle English, which I won thanks to Professor Gabriele Cocco and his valuable suggestions.

The work is divided into three chapters. In the first part of chapter one, I examine the ephemeral nature of fantastic literature by mentioning Tzvetan Todorov and his *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre* (1973) and H.P. Lovecraft's *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927). In this line of reasoning, fantastic narrations are characterized by the intrusion of an unexpected event that breaks the order of things. Thus, readers are brought to think about the nature of the event and, by so doing, they experience the moment of the fantastic hesitation, which consists in the choice whether or not to believe in the unexpected. The decision of readers whether or not to believe is crucial because, at the moment, the fantastic vanishes and it is replaced by the uncanny or the marvellous. If the uncanny tries to find an explanation for the strange event; by contrast, the marvellous does not. Thus, rather than being an independent genre, the fantastic is a frontier one that embraces different forms of expressions. After proposing the view of Todorov and his classification of fantastic narrations, I focus on the emotional component by looking at Lovecraft, who suggests that readers should be frightened while dealing with a fantastic text and that it is the atmosphere that signals its value. In fantastic narrations, the atmosphere corresponds to the ability of the author to prepare his readers for the meeting with the unexpected. Thus, the setting of the narration is detailed described and transmits a sense of anxiety and fear, which, for Lovecraft, is the most ancient feeling that characterizes mankind. Thus, the aim of fantastic narrations is to convey a status of tension and alert while facing the unexpected.

The second part of the first chapter is devoted to J.R.R. Tolkien and his theories of fantasy, since fantasy is the most relevant form of fantastic narration to my work. After introducing the author and his brilliant academic career, I concentrate on his concept of the inner consistency of reality and his theories of sub-creation and mythology. For Tolkien, the fantasy world is rooted in the real world, in his view Secondary and Primary respectively. For him, in order to create a magical dimension, it is necessary to draw from reality and start a process of re-interpretation. It is this process of re-interpretation and re-creation that shapes the principle of the inner consistency of reality. What characterizes Tolkien's poetics is also his love for mythology and his desire to create a mythology for Britain. Hence, the author draws not only from reality, but also looks at ancient literary traditions. The first chapter clarifies not only the features of fantasy narrations, but also

Tolkien's theories. Both are a fundamental prerequisite to move on to the second part of the work, in which the magic world of - *The Hobbit* is described.

In chapter two, I stress the importance of Tolkien's theories and I carry out an intertextual analysis in order to reconstruct the origin of the Middle Earth. For this reason, I read Old Norse legends, such as the *Poetic Edda* and the *Elder Edda*; epic narrations like *Beowulf* and medieval texts such as *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Tolkien brilliantly manages to melt element deriving from different literary traditions and create a rich novel, which cannot simply be consider for children. Furthermore, in the novel, there are also many prompts that require a colonial and post-colonial reading. For instance, the figure of Gollum and his status of alienation and the mutant Beorn and his inexplicable anger.

After analysing every aspect of -*The Hobbit*, in the last part of the work, I focus on its cinematic adaptation and the central questions concern the reason why the novel has been transposed 75 years after its first publication in 1937 and why it is not part of the British literary canon despite its notoriety. Thus, chapter three is not only devoted to the theory of adaptation, but it covers the unresolved question of the literary canon. After focusing on the cinematic techniques mostly used in *The Hobbit* movies by Peter Jackson, I concentrate on the issue of the literary canon and I argue against its alleged inflexibility. I stress the fact that there is no good or bad literature as they coexist and are equally important and that popular texts like *The Hobbit* are not less worthy than classics. To support my point about the non-existence of literary categories, I mention the relevance of cultural studies and I propose the view of the famous scholar Edward Said, who affirms that insisting in maintaining borders between literatures is synonymous of reluctance to multiculturalism.

Starting from the view of Said, I reflect upon the dynamicity of myth by arranging my reasoning on three elements: nature, the hero and the dichotomy between good and evil. By comparing the description of landscapes in *The Hobbit* and their adaptation on screen, I provide the first reading of the new myth. By focusing on the figure of the hero and making a distinction between ancient and modern heroes, I examine the admirable humanity of Bilbo and his values and I analyse the concepts of friendship and loyalty. By looking at the ring, instead, I investigate the constant tension between good and evil, which is emphasized in both novel and movies. It is through the analysis of these three aspects that I carried out my process of mythography and mythopoetics of the Tolkienesque new myth. I conclude my work by making considerations about the richness of Tolkien's novel

and Peter Jackson's cinematic adaptation and I stress the fact that *The Hobbit* should stimulate people to fully understand what it really means to be a human being.

Chapter I
The Fantastic

I.i. The fantastic: a new genre between the uncanny and the marvellous

In his *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach To Literary Genre* (1973), Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as "the hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event."[2] According to this definition, the aim of the fantastic is to go beyond the rationality and scepticism of the modern era in order to start a journey that provides readers the possibility to go back in time and "bring up into their memory the stories they have heard in their childhood and those secret terrors and apprehensions to which the mind of man is naturally subjected."[3] Thus, the fantastic exists and functions only through the lasting relationship between one's own past and present experiences, which implies the way back to the world of childhood and a resulting feeling of nostalgia when leaving it. Going back to that innocent world means reaching a dimension that science cannot explain.[4]

In this view, the fantastic aims to represent what goes beyond the intellect of human beings and what happens in a fantastic narration is a kind of face-to-face encounter between the main character and a supernatural and unexpected event. However, it is not only the protagonist the only one who faces the unexpected, but readers too take part in the strange meeting and they decide how to perceive and interpret it.[5] Therefore, readers are asked to be active while enjoying the text and they should be able to fulfil three conditions.[6] First, readers are asked to look at the characters as if they were real people and not products of the imagination and they should not try to provide an explanation for what they are reading. Second, the hesitation of readers should be recognized in one of the characters, that means that readers are asked to be active parts in the narration. Lastly, readers should not classify the text as allegoric or poetic, but they are asked to decide whether to believe or not in what they have read. Believing or not is crucial in fantastic

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[2] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated from the French by Richard Howard, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975 in David Sandner, *Critical Discourse of the Fantastic 1712-1831*, England: Routledge, 2011, pp. 17-18.
[3] *Idem*, p. 8.
[4] *Ibidem.*
[5] Tzvetan Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica*, translated by Elena Imberciadori, Milano: Garzanti, 1991, p. 34.
[6] *Idem*, p. 36.

narrations and corresponds to the moment of the fantastic hesitation. It is at this moment that the fantastic vanishes.[7]

According to Todorov, these conditions describe three important aspects of the fantastic narration: the verbal, the syntactic and the semantic aspects. The verbal aspect corresponds to what is generally called "visions", the syntactic aspect implies the evaluation of the events described, while the semantic one has to do with the choice of the interpretation of the supernatural event.[8] In addition, he states that the fantastic narration can be classified as uncanny or marvellous. Todorov describes the uncanny as the kind of fantastic that rejects the presence of supernatural forces; it is based on the assumption that the rules that govern reality can furnish an explanation of them.[9] He states:

> In the uncanny, events are related to which may be accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that works of the fantastic have made familiar. […] The uncanny usually realizes only one conditions of the fantastic: the description of certain reactions, especially of fear. It is uniquely linked to the sentiment of the characters and not to a material event defying reason.[10]

On the contrary, he describes the marvellous as the kind of fantastic that accepts the presence of new natural rules that do not belong to reality, but can explain what seems to be inexplicable and out of norms.[11] To quote Todorov: "The marvellous, just as in the case of the uncanny, has no distinct limits. But, in this case, supernatural events do not provoke any particular reaction neither in the characters, nor in the implicit reader."[12] It is between the uncanny and the marvellous that the fantastic exists.[13] Hence, rather than being an autonomous genre, the fantastic is a modality of writing that embraces different forms of expressions. Todorov collects them in a diagram, where he identifies four fantastic narrations: the uncanny, the fantastic uncanny, the fantastic marvellous and the marvellous.[14] The fantastic uncanny and the fantastic marvellous differ from the uncanny and the marvellous in the perception of the supernatural event. In fantastic-uncanny

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[7] Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica,* p. 36.
[8] *Idem*, pp. 36-37.
[9] *Idem*, p. 45
[10] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, cit., pp. 46-47.
[11] Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica,* cit., p. 45.
[12] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, cit., p. 54.
[13] Rosemary Jackson *Il Fantastico: la letteratura della trasgressione*, ed. Berardi Rosario, Napoli: T. Pironti, 1986, p. 29.
[14] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, in Rosemary Jackson *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

narrations, strange events come from the subjects' personal perception of them. By contrast, in fantastic-marvellous narrations, supernatural events remain unexplained.[15]

So, for Todorov the fantastic is not an independent genre, but rather a frontier one. In reply to the scholars who doubted the validity of the fantastic as a literary genre, he affirms:

> There is no reason not to think of the fantastic as an evanescent genre. Such a category, moreover, has noting exceptional about it. The classic definition of the present, for example, describes it as a pure limit between the past and the future. The comparison is not gratuitous: the marvellous corresponds to an unknown phenomenon, never seen as yet, still to come- hence to a future; in the uncanny, one refers the inexplicable to know facts, to a previous experience, and thereby to the past. As for the fantastic itself, the hesitation, which characterized it cannot be situated, by and large, except in the present.[16]

Todorov does not treat the fantastic only in terms of classifications, but he also identifies the contents of fantastic literature by collecting them into two groups. The first group is about the self, that is the modality in which the subject perceives, interprets and approaches the world; while the second group deals with the other, which corresponds to the subjects' desires.[17] For the themes of the self, it is necessary to point out that establishing a relation with the world is not easy in a fantastic narration inasmuch both readers and characters do not usually believe in what they see and hear, so what they perceive is an illusion. In works, such as Guy de Maupassant's *Horla* (1886) and Gerard de Nerval's *Aurélia* (1855), characters are unable to divide ideas from perceptions and matter and mind become one.[18] As Todorov explains:

> A generating principle of all the themes collected in this first system is that the transition from mind to matter has become possible. Behind the metamorphosis (self-becoming another, whether animal or vegetable) and pandeterminism (everything has its cause and fits into a cosmic scheme, a series in which nothing is by chance, everything corresponds to the subject), the same principle operates, in a sense of correspondence, of sameness, of a collapse of difference. Doubles; or multiple selves, are manifestations of this principle: the idea of multiplicity is no longer a metaphor, but is literally realized, self transforms into selves. The multiplication of personality, taken literally, is an immediate consequence of the possible transition between matter and mind: we are several persons mentally, we become so physically.[19]

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[15] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, in Rosemary Jackson *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.
[16] Todorov, *The Fantastic,* cit., p. 42.
[17] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, *op. cit*., in Rosemary Jackson *op. cit.*, p. 46.
[18] Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
[19] Todorov, *The Fantastic,* cit., pp. 46-47.

That means that there is no boundary between subject and object and this fusion creates ambiguity because, according to Todorov:

> The principle may be designated as the fragility of the limit between matter and mind. This principle engenders several fundamental themes: a special causality, pan-determinism, multiplication of the personality, collapse of the limit between subject and object; and lastly, the transformation of time and space. This list collects the essential elements of the basic network of fantastic themes…of the self.[20]

If the themes of the self are related to consciousness; themes of the other; on the contrary, are related to the unconscious. The link existing between the subject and the other is very often expressed in terms of transgression. For instance, dualism, sadism, murder and eroticism.[21] For this category of themes, Todorov affirms that language is the most important component because it is the language that establishes the relation. So, in his view, themes of discourse and themes of the other are indissolubly correlated.[22] He affirms that "themes of discourse are inextricably bound up with these 'themes of the other', just as 'themes of vision' are bound up with 'themes of the self'."[23] So, if in the first group it is the self which creates danger because of its knowledge and rationality, think of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1897); by contrast, in the second group, the source of danger comes from external circumstances. The self is threatened by the other and becomes part of it through a process of metamorphosis. *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker could be an example.[24]

Thus, in both categories of themes, the self must face supernatural forces, which should be read as strange events because the term 'supernatural' is too generic. I argue that it is necessary to give a name to these strange events by collecting them in semantic areas, such as invisibility, transformations, dualism, good or bad and their correlate elements; such as ghosts, vampires, werewolves and monsters.[25] However, these recurring presences do not always identify a fantastic text; in fact, it is not important to pay attention to the storyline, but to the emotional component. According to H.P. Lovecraft, master of fantastical horror stories, in order to classify a text as belonging to the fantastic, readers should be frightened themselves while facing unknown forces.[26] The scholar explains the

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[20] Todorov, *The Fantastic,* cit., p. 47.
[21] Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.
[22] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, cit., p. 48.
[23] *Ibidem*
[24] Jackson, *op. cit.,* pp. 53-54.
[25] *Idem,* p. 45.
[26] H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, ed. Ben Abramson, New York, 1945 quoted in Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica, op. cit.,* pp. 37-38.

relevance of the emotional component in his *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927), where he states that fears is a primordial emotion that characterizes human beings, it is "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."[27] The scholar emphasises the fact that emotions are part of the nature of human beings and they emerge as a response to a circumstance. In the case of fear, it emerges from an unexpected event that men cannot identify properly because it does not belong to reality. Consequently, men cannot control the event and they feel powerless and scared. To quote Lovecraft:

> Definite feelings based on pleasure and pain grew up around the phenomena whose causes and effects he understood, whilst around those which he did not understand—and the universe teemed with them in the early days—were naturally woven such personifications, marvellous interpretations, and sensations of awe and fear as would be hit upon by a race having few and simple ideas and limited experience. The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part.[28]

However, although Lovecraft affirms that fear is the most relevant component while reading fantastic narrations, it is important to point out that the scholar clarifies that fear-literature must not be confound with "the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome."[29] In his view

> The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the demons of unplumbed space.[30]

Thus, the atmosphere is the most important component in fantastic narrations and it is the atmosphere that marks the authenticity of a text. It is also important to say that fantastic narrations do not have an educational purpose and do not transmit a moral; if it was so, they would lose their essence. As Lovecraft affirms:

> Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation. We may say, as a

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[27] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx, last access: 25.10.2018.
[28] *Ibidem.*
[29] *Ibidem.*
[30] *Ibidem.*

general thing, that a weird story whose intent is to teach or produce a social effect, or one in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means, is not a genuine tale of cosmic fear; but it remains a fact that such narratives often possess, in isolated sections, atmospheric touches which fulfil every condition of true supernatural horror-literature.[31]

Hence, since fear is part of human beings, Lovecraft thinks that "as may naturally be expected of a form so closely connected with primal emotion, the horror – tale is as old as human thought and speech themselves."[32] According to these words, it possible to assume that the fantastic has a very ancient origin.

The peculiarity of the fantastic as being out of standards, may allude to the ancient origin of this mode of narration, often related to the literary genre called "menippea": a satire developed in the 3rd century BC that could establish a relation between past, present and future and violate the norms of reality. Menippea was considered a carnival inasmuch people could go through life out of customs and fixed rules. However, although menippea seems to be the ancient origin of fantastic narrations, according to Lovecraft it is in poetry that the fantastic is rooted. He affirms:

> Just as all fiction first found extensive embodiment in poetry, so is it in poetry that we first encounter the permanent entry of the weird into standard literature. Most of the ancient instances, curiously enough, are in prose; as the werewolf incident in Petronius, the gruesome passages in Apuleius, the brief but celebrated letter of Pliny the Younger to Sura, and the odd compilation *On Wonderful Events* by the Emperor Hadrian's Greek freedman, Phlegon. It is in Phlegon that we first find that hideous tale of the corpse-bride, "Philinnion and Machates", later related by Proclus and in modern times forming the inspiration of Goethe's "Bride of Corinth" and Washington Irving's "German Student". But by the time the old Northern myths take literary form, and in that later time when the weird appears as a steady element in the literature of the day, we find it mostly in metrical dress; as indeed we find the greater part of the strictly imaginative writing of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. […] Prose literature gives us Malory's *Morte d'Arthur,* in which are presented many ghastly situations taken from early ballad sources […] In Elizabethan drama, with its *Dr. Faustus,* the witches in *Macbeth,* the ghost in *Hamlet.*[33]

By the end of the 17th century, the fantastic started to lose its essence and writers no longer thought about it as the representation of what was out of the schemes, but as a way to manipulate the world which was becoming more and more scientific and rational due to the many social and political revolutions.[34] It is in the 18th and 19th century, with the

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[31] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx, last access: 25.10.2018.
[32] *Ibidem.*
[33] *Ibidem.*
[34] Jackson, *op. cit.,* p. 16.

emergence of a new literary movement called Romanticism and the rise of the gothic novel, that the fantastic becomes a kind of literary device aimed at dismantling the Enlightenment reasoning and its alleged rationality. To quote Lovecraft and his descriptions of the emergence and authenticity of the fantastic:

> …in the birth of a new school of writing; the "Gothic" school of horrible and fantastic prose fiction, long and short, whose literary posterity is destined to become so numerous, and in many cases so resplendent in artistic merit. It is, when one reflects upon it, genuinely remarkable that weird narration as a fixed and academically recognised literary form should have been so late of final birth. The impulse and atmosphere are as old as man, but the typical weird tale of standard literature is a child of the eighteenth century.[35]

To provide evidences of the relation existing between the fantastic and romanticism, Thomas Welskel's *Romantic Sublime* (1976) can be a useful source to display the romantic origin. By analysing the concept of the sublime, he describes the structure of a fantastic narration and explains the sublime by identifying three phases: in the first one, the author refers to the relation existing between the experiencer and the event; a relation that seems to be apparently with no discrepancies. In the second one, the balanced relationship loses its equilibrium and what emerges is a feeling of astonishment that brings the experiencer to start questioning about the essence of the relationship. In the last phase, the moment of the sublime occurs, and it is the mind that creates boundaries and re-establishes order between the two participants of the relation.[36] This definition describes the structure of a fantastic text, where the first phase corresponds to the situation before the unexpected, the second one to the intrusion of the strange event and the last one to the moment of hesitation and the subsequent choice whether to believe or not.

A revolutionary view of the fantastic matured in the 20th century, when, due to the development of psychoanalysis, the fantastic started being read and interpreted differently. Sigmund Freud thought that the fantastic was a mode of literature that could give voice to the subconscious. In his essay *The Uncanny* (1919), Freud defines the fantastic as "a literary effect" and the uncanny as "a psychological response that requires a moment of uncertainty similar to Todorov's fantastic hesitation."[37] Similarity does not imply equality, hence, for Freud, the decision to believe or not, is not a proper decision because what happens is a process of decoding the event as if it represents one's deepest desires or fears. In doing so, the essence of the fantastic vanishes and it is recovered by psychoanalysis that

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[35] Lovecraft, site cit., last access: 25.10.2018.
[36] Welskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.
[37] Freud, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

aims to find a central idea to explain the functioning of the mind. As a result, in front of a supernatural event, hesitation, surprise, fear no longer exist since the event is translated and inserted within the reign of rationality.[38]

On the basis of this overview of the development of the fantastic over time, it should be clear that it is not an autonomous genre. Many fantastic narrations take different names, such as horror, science fictions, gothic novel and fantasy. They developed over time according to all the discoveries and issues of the period in which the text is produced. For instance, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley is a gothic novel written in 1818 that investigates some of the most relevant scientific discoveries that characterizes the 19th century. That is why, although more than one terms is used to classify the fantastic, whether looking upon it as a literary genre or not is an unsolved question. It is, in fact, very often confused with myths, legends, fable, fairy tales, and all kinds of narrations in which a magical, unexpected or inexplicable event is described. As previously explained, for Todorov, the fantastic exits in the moment of hesitation experienced by both readers and characters.[39] By contrast, the narrations just stated have their own features and they do not exist in relation to the moment of the fantastic hesitation. To better explain: myths; for example, are defined in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, as

> specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified, but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. […] Myths narrate fantastic events with no attempt at proof, it is sometimes assumed that they are simply stories with no factual basis. They would seem to be a basic constituent of human culture.[40]

The fact that myth narrates fantastic events does not imply that it shares the same structure and features of fantastic narrations. Myth is culturally related, while fantastic texts are not. Furthermore, the fantastic in all its facets does not present neither pedagogical aspects, typical of fables, nor is it "grounded in historical fact" like legends.[41] So, the fantastic is evanescent. It exists and functions for a very short period of time and it is not rooted in culture or education, but rather in the decision whether or not to believe made by both readers and characters.

The most relevant kind of fantastic narration to my work is fantasy. 'Fantasy' is commonly associated with fairy-tales and folklore, but these are not the only sources that

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[38] Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica*, *op. cit.,* p. 164.
[39] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, cit., pp. 17-18.
[40] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/search?query=myth, last access: 22.10.2018.
[41] *Idem.*

contribute to the realization of fantasy literature. Classical literature too has a relevant weight on the development of fantasy literary productions, especially for the literary topos of the "imaginary voyage".[42] Therefore, the roots of fantasy literature belong both to classical and non-classical traditions. For classical literature, the most significant narrations that are remembered are *The Iliad* by Homer and *The Aeneid* by Virgil, while for non-classical literature, there are narrations such as fairy-tales, legends and Norse sagas that contribute to the realization of the fantasy world.[43]

The relation between an epic narration and a fantasy one is not accidental; in fact, they share common features: the plot, the fight between good and evil, cultural and ethical issues, a feeling of nostalgia and references to the real world. For the plot, it is very often about the destiny or the origin of a land. For instance, Homer's *Odyssey* and the tortuous voyage of Ulysses to return to Ithaca, his homeland. To accomplish his long journey, Ulysses must fight against the supernatural and face the uninterrupted tension between good and wicked forces: Scylla and Charybdis and the sirens could be an example. The whole narration is surrounded by a feeling of nostalgia by presenting the anecdotes of the life of the character and references to his homeland, which are used as a literary device to mark the boundary between the real world and the fantasy one. In addition, there is the presence of ethical and cultural issues, especially concerning hospitality. Take as example the passage in which Ulysses is received by the Cyclops.[44] If one tries to make a comparison between the structure of an epic narration, like that just mentioned, and takes as reference a fantasy text, one will notice that the features stated are similar in both texts. For example, in *The Hobbit* (1937), the mission of the hobbit Bilbo Baggins is to help the dwarf Thorin Oakenshield and his twelve fellows to regain their Kingdom under the Mountain, their homeland. In their journey, they are forced to fight against vicious creatures, such as goblins, orcs and spiders, but they are also warmly welcomed by the elves and the mutant Beorn. The narration is rich of characters' memories: the dwarves grieve their motherland and its treasures, Bilbo misses his beloved house in the Shire and his abundant kitchen pantries.

It is also important to clarify that fantasy and the fantastic are not the same, although it may appear so. Fantasy is "all that which is counterfactual, contradictory and

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[42] Cecilie Flugt, "Theorizing Fantasy. Enchantment, Parody, and The Classical Tradition", in Brett M. Rogers, Eldon Stevens Benjamin, ed., *Classical Traditions in Modern Fantasy*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016, p. 48.
[43] Jesse Weiner, "Classical Epic and the Process of Modern Fantasy", in Brett M. Rogers, Eldon Stevens Benjamin, ed., *op. cit.,* p. 28.
[44] Homer, *op. cit.*, in Weiner, *op. cit.,* pp. 29-33.

counterintuitive."[45] That means that the world of fantasy is a magical world where one can find wizards and witches, dragons and other strange creatures. The peculiarity of this world is that it is like a representation of the real world and, therefore, it can be read as an allegory. In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, allegory is defined as

> a symbolic fictional narrative that conveys a meaning no explicitly set forth in the narrative. Allegory may have meaning on two or more level that the reader can understand only through an interpretative process. […] It may involve either a creative or an interpretative process; either the act of building up the allegorical structure and giving 'body' to the surface narrative or the act of breaking down this structure to see what themes or idea run parallel to it.[46]

When speaking about allegory in relation to fantastic narrations, it is necessary to point out that there is a connection between the two. As previously explained, while enjoying a fantastic text, readers should think about the nature of the strange event and they should decide whether to believe or not to what they have just gone through. However, their choice should not be taken for granted, as they could decide to focus their attention on the nature of the text, rather than on the nature of the event.[47] If readers decided to investigate the nature of the text, the moment of the fantastic hesitation would disappear and, obviously, also the fantastic itself. It would be substituted by poetry or allegory, which, as opposed to the uncanny and the marvellous, are not contraposed one to the other.[48]

The poetic image, in fact, is a combination of words, which does not necessarily require interpretation. Readers can decide whether to find other meanings or not. They have the right to choose whether to consider the poetic image a simple chain of words and figures of speech or not. By looking at the poetic image as a simple combination of sentences, the fantastic loses its essence because of the lack of reaction in front of the strange event of the world stated.[49] On the contrary, by focusing the attention on figures of speech, there is the possibility to slip on allegorical meaning.

While the literal meaning corresponds to what is stated, the allegorical one refers to the figurative power of words.[50] Thus, allegory implies the existence of at least two implicit meanings of the same words. So, if readers face the unexpected by not considering the literal meaning of the text and decide to look for another one, they destroy the essence

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[45] Camelia Elias, "There Is a Text in *The Balloon*", in Jorgen Riber Christensen, ed., *Marvellous Fantasy*, Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, 2009, p. 125.
[46] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, cit., last access: 23.10.2018.
[47] Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica*, cit., p. 63.
[48] *Ibidem.*
[49] *Idem*, p. 65.
[50] *Idem*, p. 66.

of the fantastic.[51] However, it could be that readers are not interested neither in the literal nor in the allegorical meaning and they discover a completely new purpose of the text. Finding a new sense does not imply the demolition of the fantastic because the moment of the fantastic hesitation keeps on existing.[52] So, I suggest it is important for readers to be as impartial as possible while reading a fantastic text, otherwise, there is the possibility of slipping in other genres which have nothing to do with the fantastic and thus destroy its consistency.

The fantastic takes place within the real world and it is expressed through a strange event that breaks the order of things. So, it does not require a fantasy setting, while fantasy needs the creation of an alternative dimension related to reality.[53] Although fantasy literary production is very often associated with childhood, the relation with the real world implies different modalities of reading the story. Obviously, a child is fascinated and recreates in his/her mind his/her own fantasy world; by contrast, adults reading a book which should be for children, not only have the possibility to escape from their worries, but also to read beyond the surface of the text. Therefore, there is a close relation between reality and fantasy, which is subjected to personal interpretations.

I.ii. J.R.R. Tolkien: myth-maker and sub-creator

As explained in the previous part, there is always a relation between reality and fantasy. This connection was studied by many scholars, who focused their attention on the structure of fantasy narrations and on their linguistic aspect to determine the importance of reality as starting point in the writing of a fantasy work. Among these scholars, there was also John Ronald Ruel Tolkien: a brilliant professor of Old and Middle English and philology and myth-maker.[54] Born in South Africa in 1892, Tolkien is still remembered for his wide cultural baggage and publications of medieval literature and philology.[55] He spent his childhood in Birmingham, where he attended King Edward's school and in 1913, he had almost finished his studies. A year later, there was the outbreak of World War I, which had a strong impact on Tolkien, who defines that moment "the collapse of all his world."[56] He

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[51] Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica,* p. 68.
[52] *Idem*, p. 70.
[53] Elias, *op. cit.,* in Christen Jorgen Riber, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.
[54] Carl Phelpstead, "Myth Making and Sub- Creation", in Lee Stuart, ed., *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, Wiley Online Library Online Books, 2014, p. 79.
[55] Vincenzo Piccione, *Il magico mondo di Tolkien*, Formello: Seam Libri, 1998, pp. 19-20.
[56] John Garth, "A Brief Biography", in Lee Stuart, ed., *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, Wiley Online Library Online Books, 2014, pp. 7-23, pp. 8-11.

was forced to leave his studies and join the "Lancashire Fusiliers as a second lieutenant."[57] Two years later, due to healthy problems, he returned to England, but he was not the same the person. The war had changed him, and Tolkien decided to investigate the atrocities of war in his writings. He wanted to create a contraposition between "a desperate heroism and a tyrannical and demonic evil."[58] He managed to put into practice this idea after World War II by portraying it in *The Lord of the Rings.*

Tolkien's career started between 1919 and 1925, initially as reader at the University of Leeds and then as a collaborator to the writing of the *Oxford English Dictionary.* In addition, he was asked to write a dictionary of Middle English and work to one of the versions of the medieval text *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* His knowledge and competence made him gain the opportunity to work on *Beowulf*, another significant medieval text, of which he carried out an analysis.[59] Thanks to these works, his reputation as scholar increased and soon he became professor of philology and English literature at University of Oxford.[60] Among his most famous works, there are *The Hobbit* (1937), the trilogy of *The Lord of The Ring* (1954-1956) and *Tree and Leaf* (1964). *Tree and Leaf* is the most significant text for its exposition of Tolkien's poetics. The book is divided into four parts: "On Fairy- Stories", "Mythopoeia", "Leaf by Niggle" and "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Berohthelm's Son."[61]

The first two parts are the most important. In "On Fairy-Stories", Tolkien explains the relation existing between reality and fantasy world, which he defines as "the inner consistency of reality."[62] This concept is crucial in his theory of sub-creation and its four fundamental aspects: fantasy, recovery, escape and consolation.[63] He starts by referring to the ability of human beings to elaborate images; a faculty known as Imagination, but he points out that the term imagination embraces a higher faculty called Fantasy.[64] In his view:

> The human mind is capable of forming mental images of things not actually present. The faculty of conceiving the images is (or was) naturally called Imagination. But in recent times, in technical not normal language, Imagination

[57] Garth, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

[58] *Idem*, p. 12.

[59] Piccione*, op. cit.,* pp. 23-24.

[60] *Ibidem.*

[61] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001, p. 1.

[62] Phelpstead, *op. cit.,* p. 87.

[63] Edward James, Farah Mendelsohn, "Tolkien, Lewis and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy", in Edward James, Farah Mendelsohn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 66.

[64] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, http://brainstorm-services.com/wcu-2004/fairystories-tolkien.pdf, p. 15, last access: 21.10.2018.

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.[65]

By so affirming, he rejects the idea of imagination and fantasy proposed by Samuel Tylor Coleridge, a romantic poet who deeply influenced Tolkien's theory of sub-creation and distinguished between fantasy and imagination by affirming that there was no relation existing between them. Coleridge thought that they should be read as two autonomous faculties.[66] What Tolkien did was to argue that there is no distinction between the two as to him they are indissolubly correlated.

Therefore, imagination implies human beings' power of image-making; however, this faculty is not enough because what is relevant is the perception, the essence, the consistency of the image created, and it is through the understanding of it that one can affirm to have experienced its inner consistency. According to Tolkien, this would correspond to art, that is "the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-Creation."[67] So, in his theory of fantasy, he states that "fantasy is a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent."[68] Therefore, fantasy is described as the result of sub-creation that is the ability to create a secondary world, where everything seems to be real and produces enchantment. It is the fact of being enchanted that "produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose."[69] Therefore, "What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful sub-creator. He makes a secondary world which your mind can enter. The moment of disbelief arises, you are out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World outside."[70]

The peculiarity of the secondary world is that it has the consistency of reality, that means that fantasy recognizes how things look like, but it does not feel indebted to them; they are simply a starting point, which must not necessarily be followed.[71] Hence, the secondary world is created to give readers the possibility to escape and dismantle all the barriers and impositions of society; it is built by looking at the real one, but its consistency

[65] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, site cit., p. 15, last access: 21.10.2018.
[66] Phelpstead, *op. cit.,* p. 87.
[67] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, site cit., p. 15.
[68] *Idem*, p. 16.
[69] *Idem*, p. 17.
[70] Phelpstead, *op. cit.,* p. 87.
[71] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, site cit., p. 18.

is different. The second aspect mentioned in the theory is the moment of recovery, which makes individuals realize how primary world looks like. To quote Tolkien:

> Recovery is a regaining- regaining of a clear view. I do not say 'seeing things as they are' and involve myself with the philosophers, though I might venture to say 'things as we are (or were) meant to see them- as things apart from ourselves. […] We say we know them. They have become like the things which once attracted us by their glitter, or their colour, or their shape and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them and acquiring ceased to look at them.[72]

Looking at the primary world more clearly gives individuals the possibility to escape and run away from sadness and evil. The last step, consolation, is gained through a happy ending that corresponds to the term "eucatastrophe", coined by Tolkien to emphasize the successful outcome of a mission despite the large number of vicissitudes.[73] He explains the term by affirming that it is "the joy of the happy ending or more correctly of the good catastrophe. […] it is a sudden and miraculous grace, never to be counted on to recur. […] It denies universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant ad grief."[74]

However, according to Tolkien, producing fantasy is not an easy task because fantasy is an attempt at digging up the beauty and the figurative power of words so that readers can have access to an unknown dimension. He provides an example that clearly displays his thought:

> Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough—though it may already be a more potent thing than many a "thumbnail sketch" or "transcript of life" that receives literary praise. 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. In human art Fantasy is a thing best left to words, to true literature.[75]

So, on the basis of his words, the world of fantasy is not as simple as it may appear, in fact, it requires commitment because it is not only a matter of invention, but much more. In the case of Tolkien, not only do his works present the structure of a fantasy narration, but he adds some other features as well. In the classical structure of a fantasy narration one can identify a land defeated and this corresponds to the moment of the decline caused, taking

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[72] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, site cit., p. 19, last access: 23.10.2018
[73] James, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[74] J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories*, site cit., p. 22.
[75] *Idem*, p. 16.

The Hobbit as example, by Smaug, the greedy and ferocious dragon which is followed by a feeling of wrongness that needs to be cured. Healing this sentiment becomes the main goal, the quest of the hero, the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, who will be forced to move into a different land and learn about new realities. In his adventure, the hero recognizes his role in the world and achieves eucatastrophe[76]: a good catastrophe, the consolation of a happy ending."[77] However, Tolkien does not restrict himself to the basic structure of fantasy narrations. He adds plot devices: the presence of map, like the one that Bilbo and his companion follow to reach the Lonely Mountain; detailed descriptions of landscapes to facilitate readers the entrance in the secondary world and give his readers the possibility of sharing the journey as a fellow of the company; moments of separation, that means that characters live different adventures independently, as in the case of the meeting between Gollum and Bilbo.[78]

Tolkien's ideas of fantasy and the structure of his writings are quite complicated and show a strong religious component. In fact, Tolkien defines his fantasy " a profoundly Catholic work."[79] He supports the idea that fantasy is built on a concrete origin which was created by God.[80] So, it is as is if there was the presence of a divine filter in the act of re-elaboration and creation, which is the act that characterizes human beings, who were created in the image and likeness of God.[81] The creation of a secondary world is; therefore, a process of re-creation and re-elaboration of the primary world and its inhabitants, who were in turn, created by a Maker. So, there is a strong faith behind his writings and it is implicitly expressed through his characters. It does not mean that Tolkien's aim is to retell the Christian story, but rather, he uses his characters and some objects to depicts the Christian struggle between good and evil. For instance, in *The Hobbit*, through the figures of Bilbo and Gandalf, Tolkien portrays the power of love, honesty and solidarity; by contrast, through the magical ring, the enchanted treasure and the greedy Smaug, he depicts avarice and desire of power.[82] Being sub-creator is, therefore, a vocation because "he is able to give voice his belief in the God-given nature of the story-teller's vocation."[83]

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[76] James, *op. cit.,* p. 64.
[77] Jane Beal, "Tolkien, Eucatastrophe, and the Re-Creation of Medieval Legend", *Journal of Tolkien Research*, 4 (2017), pp. 1-19, p. 1.
[78] James, *op. cit.,* pp. 64-65.
[79] *Idem*, p. 69.
[80] Phelpstead, *op. cit.,* p. 88.
[81] *Ibidem.*
[82] Pat Pinsent, "Religion: an Implicit Catholicism", in Lee Stuart, *op. cit.,* pp. 446-447.
[83] *Idem*, p. 457.

There is also another aspect that widely characterizes his writings and that it is part of his theory of sub-creation that is mythology. Tolkien examines it in the second part of *Tree and Leaf*; "Mythopoeia". In the elaboration of new mythological traditions, Tolkien was influenced by William Blake, a romantic poet who was the first to elaborate his own mythology to escape from the industrial modernity.[84] However, although, there is a strong romantic component, Tolkien invented his own mythology not only as a response to modernity like Blake, but also to accomplish his desire to create a context for the language he had started to invent. In fact, language was what interested him the most. He believed that "the invention of a language is the foundation. The stories were made rather to provide a world for the languages than reverse."[85] However, there was also a strong patriotic component in his decision: he wanted to create a mythology for Britain, his country because he wanted "to restore to the English an epic tradition."[86] So, what he did was to look at mythological and legendary narrations from the past to organize a representation of reality which could create a new world and a new mythology.[87]

Furthermore, Tolkien believed that myth somehow embraced "the truths revealed in Christianity"[88] and suggests that between the primary and secondary world, there is the existence of mythopoesis. The concept of mythopoesis refers to the creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God and their subsequent right to be sub-creators.[89] Therefore, according to Tolkien, there is a link between human beings' sub-creations and myth because, like human beings, myth is part of the primary creation of God and, for this reason, it is accepted as valid and true.[90] In *Mythopoeia*, Tolkien defends his position about the validity of myth and myth-making and provides evidence of the relation existing between non-Christian myth and Christian truth.[91] In the poem, Tolkien focuses his attention on the perception of things, that means that perceiving the existence of physical phenomenon only in terms of rationality and science means enjoying a minimum part of their real essence.[92] Myth, therefore, "enables a truer perception and are too essentially human that it cannot be 'lies'."[93]

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[84] Phelpstead, *op. cit.,* p. 87.
[85] *Idem*, p. 81.
[86] *Ibidem.*
[87] *Idem,* p. 80.
[88] *Idem*, p. 82.
[89] *Ibidem.*
[90] William Gray, *Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth: Tales of Pullman, Lewis, Tolkien, MacDonald and Hoffmann,* Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, p. 85.
[91] Phelpstead, *op. cit.,* p. 82.
[92] *Idem*, p. 84.
[93] *Ibidem.*

It is, therefore, through the re-elaboration of legendary narrations that Tolkien builds his second dimension. It is through his work of re-imagination, that he manages to create his own mythology by turning the tragic endings into joyful ones.[94] In the case of *The Hobbit*, his sources included Old Norse legends, such as the *Elder Edda*, *Völsunga Saga*, *Poetic Edda*; epic narration like *Beowulf*; medieval texts like *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[95] His aim was to set up elements from his sources, give them a new shape and make them the core of his secondary world, which, according to him should satisfy "the primal desire at the heart of fairy."[96] So, in Tolkien's writings, it is possible to find a stratification of historical, epic, literary ad mythological aspects in which his Secondary World is rooted.

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[94] Beal, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.
[95] John D. Rateliff, "*The Hobbit*: A Turning Point", in Lee Stuart, *op. cit.,* pp. 124-125.
[96] Anna Vaninskaya, "Modernity: Tolkien and His Contemporaries", in Lee Stuart, *op. cit.,* pp. 364-365.

Chapter II

Tolkien and the magic world in *The Hobbit*

II.i. Medieval and epic influences in *The Hobbit*

As explained in the first chapter, Tolkien's theories of mythology and sub-creation are quite intricate and play a relevant role in the creation of his secondary world. The influence of medieval and romantic literature, legendary epic narrations and his profound love for language affect almost all his writings and provide an interesting starting point to carry out an intertextual analysis. I focus my attention on the creation of Tolkien's secondary world in *The Hobbit*, a work which was unexpected. I say 'unexpected' because the author started working on it in a very unusual situation. In an interview for the BBC he told:

> The actual beginning – though it's not really the beginning, but the actual flashpoint I remember very clearly. I can still see the corner of my house in 20 Northmoor Road where it happened. I had an enormous pile of exam papers there. Making school examinations in the summertime is laborious and unfortunately also boring. And I remember picking up a paper and actually finding – I nearly gave an extra mark for it; an extra five marks, actually – there was one page of this particular paper that was left blank. Glorious! Nothing to read. So, I scribbled on it, I can't think why, 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.'[97]

That was the strangest moment to start writing a story, especially a story whose main character is a hobbit, a creature that Tolkien could not identify and describe properly. He admits in fact: "I don't know where the word came from. You can't catch your mind out."[98] And then, adds: "names always generate a story in his mind. Eventually I thought I'd better find out what hobbits were like."[99]

Tolkien seems to be confused about the origin and appearance of hobbits, he probably had an image in mind, but he could not give it a shape properly. In a letter to Roger Lancelyn Green, he confesses:

> My claim rests really on my nude parole or unsupported assertion that I remember the occasion of its invention (by me); and that I had not then any knowledge of Hobberdy, Hobbaty, Hobberdy Dick etc. (for house-sprites); and that my hobbits were in any case of wholly dissimilar sort, a diminutive branch of the human race.

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[97] BBC, cit., in Michael Livingstone, "The Myth of the Author: Tolkien and the Medieval Origins of the Word 'Hobbit', *Mythlore*, 30 (2012), pp. 129-146, p. 129.
[98] *Ibidem.*
[99] *Ibidem.*

Also, that the only English word that influenced the invention was hole […]. Oh, what a tangled web they weave who try a new word to conceive![100]

Many scholars have tried to investigate into the origin of the term and formulate hypotheses. For instance, in "On the Origin of the Name Hobbit" (1989), Donald O'Brien provides many possible explanations. For example, the term hobbit is associated to "a list of a hundred supernatural beings generally known as the Denham Tracts." Some other definitions refer to the etymology of the word; for instance, *Hobbity-hoy* that means "A clumsy or awkward youth"; *Hobbet*, a Scottish word for a thief; *Hob* that means sprite and *Rabbit*, a word that Tolkien affirms to have been very useful in the creation of the term.[101]

For the Hobbit race, it is necessary to have clear in mind Tolkien's theory of sub-creation and his concept of the inner consistency of reality because hobbits function as an intermediary between the primary and secondary world and are described as "The Little Men":

A self-caricature of the domesticated, middle -aged English everyman, put-upon but able to stand up for himself, sensible, pacifist, not concerned with foreigners or political nostrums, and above all small. […] The little man always possesses a strong attachment to home, locality and his amateur hobbies.[102]

According to this description, hobbits are depicted as mock late Victorians and what is interesting is that Tolkien too identifies himself with these little men. [103] To quote him:

I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain of food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even may appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). I do not travel much.[104]

So, it is possible to assume that to create his Bilbo Baggins, Tolkien re-shaped himself and created his double, which is not his carbon copy, but shares some features. In the first chapter of the novel, hobbits are described as:

…little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the

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[100] Tolkien, cit., in Livingstone, *op. cit*., p. 131.
[101] O'Brien, *op. cit*., in Livingstone, *op. cit*., pp. 132-133.
[102] Vaninskaya, *op. cit*., p. 361.
[103] David Day, "The Genesis of The Hobbit", *Queen's Quarterly*, 118 (2011), pp. 115-129, p. 120.
[104] "J.R.R. Tolkien" in Garth, John, "A Brief Biography", in Lee Stuart, ed., *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, Wiley Online Library Online Books, 2014, p. 20.

stomach; they dress in bright colours; wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads; have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it.)[105]

Hobbits share the characteristics of human beings and this sharing shows the relation between the magical dimension and the real one. Despite the similarity with human beings, hobbits present some characteristics typical of animals; for example, extraordinary senses of hearing, sight and smell and they easily camouflage themselves. Furthermore, they enjoy spending time with their families, telling stories, eating and drinking a go-go and taking care of their house, which is, as Tolkien describes in the very first lines of the book, "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 to sit down on or to eat it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort."[106]

Hobbits live in the Shire, an uncontaminated and beautiful land that Tolkien created by trying to think about England before the industrial revolution. He made an analogy and proudly affirmed that "the Shire is based on rural England and not any other country in the world!"[107] It is described as "a wide respectable country inhabited by decent folk, with good roads and an inn or two."[108] It is in the Shire where the narration starts. Bilbo Baggins, "a very well-to-do hobbit"[109] is ready to start his day, but his routine is interrupted by a wizard called Gandalf who had already decided to involve Bilbo in an adventure. Bilbo is described as a superficial bourgeois only interested in his wealth and morbidly devoted to his beloved hole and its comforts. He is reluctant to take part in adventures and, as soon as, Gandalf affirms that "he would go so far as to send him on adventure"[110], Bilbo reaction is not surprising. He exclaims that "he did not want any adventures" and "turned and scuttled inside his round green door, and shout it as quickly as he dared, not to seem rude."[111] However, Gandalf's intentions are clear and, although Bilbo shows his reluctance, the wizard already has a plan in his mind.

The following day, thirteen dwarves knock on Bilbo's door: they are fellows of the company of Thorin Oakenshield. Bilbo does not know them and cannot imagine that soon he would become the fourteenth member of the company. The poor hobbit is puzzled and

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[105] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996, p. 4.
[106] *Idem*, p. 3.
[107] Quoted in Day, *op. cit.,* p. 118.
[108] Tolkien, *op. cit.,* p. 29.
[109] *Idem*, p. 3.
[110] *Idem,* p. 7.
[111] *Ibidem.*

cannot even presume what is about to happen and how his life would change. Although, he does not know his guests, he does not send them away, in fact, he let them use his house to discuss their business and fills up their empty stomachs. What is interesting to notice in this passage is that, although Bilbo is described as a superficial middle- class bourgeois, he is characterized by warmth and conviviality. These two qualities are extremely important for Tolkien because of their religious connotations.[112] As explained in the previous chapter, the religious component is part of Tolkien's theory and Bilbo expresses it. Warmth and conviviality symbolize the divine and recall the behaviour of Jesus Christ, who "feasted with all who wanted to hear his message."[113] So, from the very beginning, it is possible to perceive that Bilbo is much more than a common hobbit, he has a potential that he does not know yet.

Bilbo cannot give a meaning to the dwarves' speech, he can only grasp words like burglar, mountain, map and dragon, but cannot find the relation between them. However, Gandalf's words bring Bilbo to ask for clarifications. The wizard, in fact, affirms that the hobbit is "the burglar, the chosen and selected burglar."[114] Bilbo is chosen by Gandalf to help Thorin and his fellow to regain their kingdom under the Mountain, which was defeated by the greedy dragon Smaug. The fellowship needs someone who manage to enter the mountain without being seen and heard and hobbits, with their extreme developed senses, are the perfect candidates. It is so that Bilbo becomes a fellow of the company and the following day he "could never remember how he found himself outside, without a hat, a walking-stick or any money, or anything that he usually took when he went out; leaving his second breakfast half-finished and quite un-washed-up, pushing his keys into Gandalf's hands and running as fast as his furry feet could carry him down the lane."[115] At that moment Bilbo's adventure begins.

The first chapter of the book presents readers all the main characters, which are very different one from each other, but share a common target. Tolkien's characters are not products of his imagination and, as I explained in chapter one, Tolkien manages to melt elements belonging to different literary traditions and this technique is evident from the very beginning of the story. Furthermore, his ability to work with language and the fact that names always portray the destiny of his characters is an excellent starting point to start analysing how he created his Secondary World. For the name of the hobbit Bilbo Baggins,

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[112] Pat Pinsent, "Religion: An Implicit Catholicism", in Lee Stuart, ed., *op. cit*., p. 451.
[113] *Ibidem.*
[114] Tolkien, *op. cit.,* p. 21.
[115] *Idem,* p. 28.

there are several aspects encapsulated in it. Bilbo's surname comes from "Bagg", a Middle English Somerset surname, that means money bag or wealthy and it is not a chance that Bilbo Baggins, is well-off.[116] Furthermore, 'baggins' means afternoon tea and breaks between meals and this is another clue because Bilbo is known for his gluttony.[117] Thus, Tolkien plays with the surname of Bilbo by creating a game that suggests the change of identity of the hobbit. Bilbo, in fact, is "a burgher who became a burglar"[118], so from an honest citizen who has his own dwelling, to a robber who sneaks in other people's homes, in Bilbo's case the Lonely Mountain.[119]

What is more, the stem of Baggins alludes to words such as "bag" and "baggage", which are instruments used by thieves and to the verb "to bag", which among its several meanings, signifies to steal.[120] There are also relevant connection with the French term "bague" that means finger ring, so there might be an allusion to the expression "bag thief", who is a robber who loves stealing rings.[121] So, it is possible to assume that Bilbo's name was very well-thought and his faith stands in it.

For the dwarves' names it seems that Tolkien looked at *The Poetic Edda* to find them and, especially, at the *Vǫluspá*, the first narration about the creation of the world. In the *Vǫluspá*, there is a long speech between the soothsayer and Odin, who wonders about the origin of the universe. The primordial origin comes from the abyss, where in the north there was a cold region, while in the south a hot one. What happened was that some drops, coming both from North and South, started falling in the abyss and it is through the combination of those two difference forces that was born a giant and a cow. The cow, by licking some stones covered by salt, gave birth an anthropomorphic being, who then has a son. The son marries a female giant and they have three children: Odin, Vili and Vé. The three divinities kill their primordial origin and create the world by dismembering the body. It is from rotting flesh that the Dwarves population comes into the world and, as told in the *Vǫluspá,* their names are:[122]

> Nyr and Nithi, North and South, East and West, Allthief, Entranced, Nar and Nain,
> Nithing, Dain Bifor, Bofor, Bombur, Nari, An, and Anarr, Oinn and Meadvolf.
> Veig and Gand-Elf, Windelf, Thorinn, Thror and Thrainn, Thekk, Lit and Vit,

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[116] Day, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
[117] *Ibidem.*
[118] *Ibidem.*
[119] *Ibidem.*
[120] *Idem*, p. 122.
[121] *Idem*, p. 123.
[122] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Di Snorri*, ed. Chiesa Isnardi Gianna, Milano: Rusconi, 1998, pp. 65-70.

Nar and Nyrath, Reginn and Rathsvith.
Now are the dwarves rightly listed.
Fili, Kili, Fundinn, Nali, Hepti, Vili, Hanarr, Sviurr, Billing, Bruni, Bild and Buri
Frar, Hornbori, Fraeg and Loni, Aurvang, Jari, and Oakenshield.[123]

When the dwarves swarm into Bilbo's house, they introduce themselves:

Dwalin at your service! […] Balin at your service! He said with his hand on his breast. […] Kili at your service said the one and Fili added the other and they both swept off their blue hoods and bowed. […] another dwarf had come along while he was wondering in the hall. He had hardly turned the knob, before they were all inside, bowing and saying at you service one after another. Dori, Nori, Ori, Oin and Gloin were their names. […] Let me introduce Bifur, Bofur, Bombur and especially Thorin […] the great Thorin Oakenshield[124], of the race of Durin, son of Thrain, son of Thror, King under the Mountain.[125]

By comparing the names mentioned in the *Vǫluspá* to those of Bilbo's guests, it is inevitable to notice that Tolkien draws from the *Poetic Edda*. In fact, it is possible to observe that some of the dwarves' names correspond. What is interesting to focus on is that their origin and typical features are not completely remodelled by Tolkien. According to the myth, dwarves belong to the subterranean world and this peculiarity is kept by Tolkien, Thorin and his fellows, in fact, lived in the Mountain before being assaulted by the dragon. What the author modifies is dwarves' common thought. In fact, in mythology, dwarves are associated with death because corpses are usually buried in the ground. This relation with the world of the dead appears also in the dwarves' name. For instance, the Norse names Nàr and Nàli mean corpses.[126] However, belonging to the subterranean world has its own advantages inasmuch dwarves can have access to the deepest treasures of Earth, in the case of Tolkien's fellowship, the Arkenstone. For this reason, they are considered the guardians of the wealth and this important position marks their aggressive and distrustful nature.[127] However, despite their bad temperament, dwarves are remembered for being excellent blacksmiths and, once again, this attitude can be found in their names. For example, the name Fili means file and Kili means wedge.[128] It is not always the case that the names of the dwarves depict some skills, some of them are related to physical appearance. For instance, the name Bömbur means massive individual.[129] I argue that Tolkien wants to try to maintain some aspects of the original conception of the dwarves, such as their

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[123] *The Eddas*, http://www.woodharrow.com/images/ChisholmEdda.pdf, p. 4, last access: 25.10.2018.
[124] Tolkien, *op. cit.,* pp. 8-11.
[125] *Idem*, pp. 176-177.
[126] Gianna Chiesa Isnardi, *I miti nordici*, Milano: Longanesi & C., 1991, p. 331.
[127] *Idem*, pp. 333-334.
[128] *Idem*, p. 335.
[129] *Idem*, p. 336.

temperament, and chooses the name that can provide a general idea of them. Tolkien avoids the names related to death and decides to focus on those that can portray a positive image of these little men.

While reading the list of the dwarves mentioned in the *Vǫluspá*, I noticed that Tolkien not only uses his source to give a name to Bilbo's guests, but also to shape Gandalf the wizard: the name Gand-Elf, in fact, could be the perfect source. Gandalf, who is described by Tolkien as "an old man with a staff and a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots"[130], is a very controversial wizard if one compares him with Merlin, the wizard par excellence in Arthurian legends and Medieval Welsh poetry. Tolkien works on the figure of Gandalf by taking as starting point the long literary tradition of Merlin, but by modifying it. Merlin is the stereotypical wizard, who uses his magic to manipulate the faiths and change the flow of events.[131] By contrast, Gandalf, although he is a member of the five Istari, very powerful sorcerers, rarely uses his powers and prefers to rely on his human skills. Like every common human being, Gandalf cannot predict future and tries to find answers and solutions to his vicissitudes without abusing of his magic. So, the first big difference between Merlin and Gandalf lies in the use of magic. While Merlin takes advantage of it, Gandalf does not, and this marks his humanity.[132] Like Merlin, Gandalf is not only a wizard, but also a teacher and counsellor, but the way they fulfil this task is completely opposite. Merlin is very often portrayed impatient and arrogant, while Gandalf is known for his politeness. In addition, as opposed to Merlin, Gandalf does not want to impose rules or obligations; but rather, his aim is to bring his pupils to be aware of what they are and of what they can do.[133] Thus, Tolkien managed to create a modern version of Merlin: more articulated and distant from the common idea of wizard.

So, the first chapter not only furnishes an overview of the main characters and the adventure Bilbo is about to start, but it also presents a very important object that will guide the company to the mountain: a map. The map "reveals a past betrayal, a primordial wound that the mission of Thorin and company needs to purge and avenge."[134] What is interesting

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[130] Tolkien, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[131] Frank Riga, "Gandalf and Merlin: J.R.R. Tolkien's Adaptation and Transformation of a Literary Tradition", *Mythlore*, 27 (2008), pp. 21-44, pp. 23-26.
[132] *Idem*, p. 39.
[133] *Ibidem*.
[134] Nicholas Birns, "The Inner Consistency of Reality: Intermediacy in *The Hobbit* ", *Mythlore*, 31 (2013), pp. 15-30, p. 23.

is that the map precedes the narration as if Tolkien wanted to prepare his readers to start their own adventure.
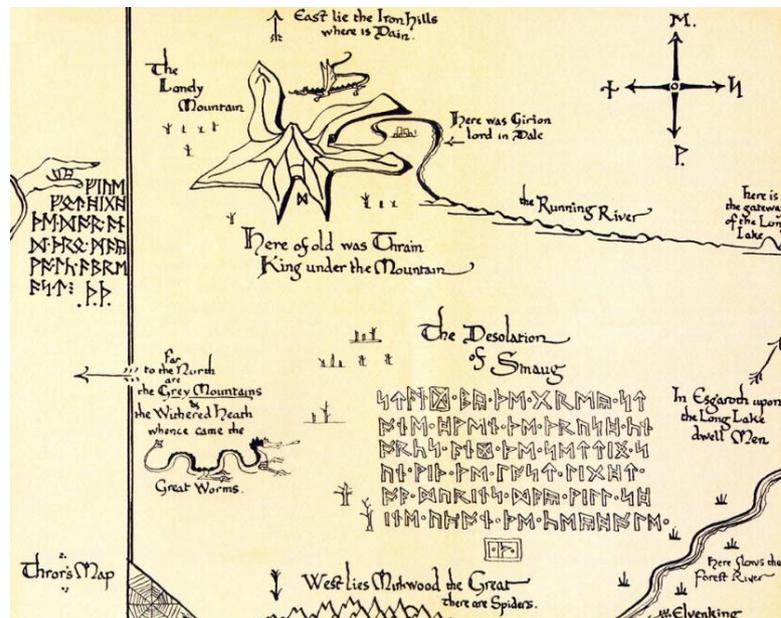

Figure 1: Thror's Map

As it is possible to see in the image, the map represents remote reigns which seem to be apparently products of imagination and impossible for modern readers to be interpreted and recognized. However, it is through the map that Tolkien presents his secondary world, which seems to be "so removed from ours that it needs orderings of the sort we rely upon so that we may make sense of all."[135] Although Tolkien's map might appear enigmatic and related to another dimension, it is important to highlight that this map is not "about the difference between our own world and the faerie world. It is about phases of the past within that world."[136] As Anne T. Eaton comments in *The Hobbit's New York Times*, the set of the story is "between the age of Faerie and the dominion of men."[137] So, Eaton's consideration about the setting alludes to Tolkien's principle of the inner consistency of reality, that means that, although modern readers cannot give a shape to those strange names in the map, they surely will find clues and aspects belonging to the world they know.[138] It is not a chance, in fact, that throughout the book, objects of the Primary World are mentioned. For instance, when finally Bilbo starts his adventure, finds himself in a group of trolls and the dwarves manage to save him, he immediately thinks: "I wish I was

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[135] Birns, *op. cit.,* p. 23.
[136] *Idem*, p. 25.
[137] Anne T. Eaton, *op. cit*., in Riga, *op. cit*., p. 25.
[138] *Ibidem.*

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at home in my nice hole by the fire, with the kettle just beginning to sing!"[139] Another example could be "he was dreaming of eggs and bacon."[140] In both expressions, it is not difficult to make a concrete association to the Primary World and it is this that marks the relation existing between the two dimensions.

After escaping the trolls, the fellowship continues its journey: they cross the Wild and reach the Last Homely House, the dwelling of elves, where they are warmly welcomed.[141] When speaking about elves, it is important to point out that Tolkien's idea about them does not have its roots in folklore. In Germanic folklore, elves were considered "spirits specialized into a diminutive creature, usually in tiny human form […]."[142] Furthermore, elves' reputation was originally not very good because they were associated with sexual diseases and were accused to steal infants.[143] Tolkien does not share this view about elves and in one of his letters, he writes that "elves are represented as a race similar in appearance to men and in former days of the same stature. […]. I should say that they represent really men with greatly enhanced aesthetic and creative faculties, greater beauty and longer life, and nobility."[144] When Tolkien describes Elrond, in fact, he portrays him "as noble as fair in face as an elf lord, as strong as a warrior, as wise as a wizard, as venerable as a king of dwarves, and as kind as summer."[145] Elrond is a light- elf and it could be that Tolkien's positive evaluation of him comes from the description of light-elves proposed by Snorri in his *Prose Edda*, where light elves are described as "fairer than the sun to look upon."[146] Elrond seems to possess the same feature. Thus, in opposition to the traditional negative image of elves, Tolkien re-shapes them positively and in Bilbo's adventure not only they are very welcoming, but also, they help the dwarves with their map. When Elrond looked at it, the light of the moon shines through it and strange letters appear. They are moon letters, which are "rune-letters that can only be seen when the moon shines behind them and, what is more, with the more cunning sort it must be a moon of the same shape and season as the day when they were written."[147]

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[139] Tolkien, *op. cit.,* p. 30.
[140] *Idem*, p. 245.
[141] *Idem*, p. 44.
[142] *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* cit., last access: 25.10.2018.
[143] *Idem.*
[144] *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, https://timedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/the_letters_of_j.rrtolkien.pdf, letter number 144, last access: 25.10.2018.
[145] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 48.
[146] Snorri, *op. cit.,* p. 77.
[147] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 50.

In this brief line, it is possible to notice that, once again, Tolkien takes advantage of his knowledge to re-tell the origin of the first form of writing. The moon letters that Elrond discovers in the map can be associated with the first runes belonging to *fuþark*, the most ancient Germanic alphabet.[148] Originally, runes were used to practice magic and had divinatory goals.[149] They were much more than signs: they encapsulated shapes, figures and sounds, which found their own place in the world. Thus, having access to the runes is a privilege because they allow the one who possesses them to the decide the fate of existence.[150] Hence, Thorin Oakenshield and his fellows have in their hands the destiny of their motherland. However, to accomplish their mission, they must "stand by the grey stone when the thrush knocks and the setting sun with the last light of Durin's Day will shine upon the key-hole."[151] Runes reveal them how to enter in the Mountain, but there is a condition: they must be at the Mountain on the Durin's Day, "the first day of the dwarves' New Year"[152], otherwise their efforts will be useless.

The following day, they get back on the road and are captured by the goblins, "cruel, wicked and bad-hearted"[153] creatures that want to kill them. Luckily, Gandalf intervenes and manages to save all but Bilbo, who "rolled off his shoulders into the blackness, bumped his head on hard rock and remembered nothing more."[154] When Bilbo opens his eyes, he is confused and cannot realize where he is. He walks around and, as soon as his feet touch icy cold water, he supposes to be in "a deep dark subterranean lake."[155] The sound of water made a "small, slimy creature"[156] prick up its ears: Gollum. This strange creature, described in chapter five, is extremely important to introduce one of the most significant sources that Tolkien used in the writing of *The Hobbit*: *Beowulf,* the Anglo-Saxon epic poem on which the scholar wrote an essay entitled "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and The Critics" (1936). In the essays, Tolkien focuses on the structure of the poem and its indisputable relevance in the literary canon. What interested Tolkien most are monsters because he believes that "monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem; which give it its

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[148] Vittoria Corazza, *Introduzione alla filologia germanica*, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2009, p. 45.
[149] *Idem*, p. 47.
[150] Snorri, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[151] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 50.
[152] *Ibidem.*
[153] *Idem*, p. 59.
[154] *Idem*, p. 63.
[155] *Idem,* p. 66.
[156] *Idem*, p. 67.

lofty tone and high seriousness."[157] Thus, for Tolkien, monsters are not simply creatures that must be beaten, but rather they play a relevant role in the story and contribute to the realization of evil.[158] Gollum is part of this project and he can be considered a modern Grendel, the marine monster killed by Beowulf.[159]

By looking at the figure of Gollum, it is possible to make some considerations by making a comparison with Grendel. First, both monsters' habitat is marine and isolated from the rest of the world. They live in a condition of exile. In *Beowulf* 102-107a, it is told that

> Wæs sē grimma gǣst Grendel hāten,
> mǣre mearc-stapa, sē þe mōras hēold,
> fen ond fæsten; fīfel-cynnes eard
> won-ǣlī wer weardode hwīle,
> siþðan him scyppend forscrifen hæfde
> in cāines cynne [160]

> That murderous spirit was named Grendel,
> huge moor- stalker who held the wasteland,
> fens, and marshes; unblessed, unhappy,
> he dwelt for a time in the lair of the monsters
> after the Creator had outlawed, condemned them
> as kinsmen of Cain [161]

In -*The Hobbit*, there are no clear references to the living condition of exile of Gollum, but I suggest that Tolkien recreates it by focusing on the description of the place where Bilbo finds himself. To quote the passage of the novel:

> Bilbo was in what is called a tight place. […] the tunnel seemed to have no end. […] On and on he went, and down and down; and still he heard no sound of anything expect the occasional whirr of a batt by his ears […]. He stopped, and he could hear, when he listened hard, drops drip-dripping from an unseen roof into the water below; but there seemed to be no other sort of sound.[162]

While in *Beowulf,* Grendel's existence is condemned like that of Cain and it is intuitive to make the association; in *The Hobbit* it is not so. There is no allusion to Gollum's life, nor

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[157] J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics,
http://producer.csi.edu/cdraney/2011/278/resources/Tolkien%20-
%20The%20Monsters%20and%20the%20Critics.pdf, p. 115, last access: 30.10.2018.
[158] Richard Angelo Bergen, "A Warp of Horror: J.R.R. Tolkien's Sub-Creation of Evil", *Mythlore*,
131(2017), pp. 103-121, p. 107.
[159] *Beowulf*, edited and translated with an introduction and commentary by Howell Chickering, New York:
Doubleday, Anchor Press Book, 1977, vv. 815-820a, pp. 95-97.
[160] *Idem*, p. 54.
[161] *Idem*, p. 55.
[162] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* pp. 65-66.

does Tolkien know "where he comes from, who or what he is."[163] However, readers can presume that the creature lives an alienated existence, in a place where there seems to be no forms of life but it. Gollum's subterranean world is distant and forgotten, "there is no reason to go that way."[164]

Another similarity between the two creatures is that neither the look of Grendel nor that of Gollum is likeable. In *Beowulf*, there is no accurate physical description of Grendel, but rather of its nature. In *Beowulf* 86a, it is portrayed as *ðā se ellen-gǣst* "powerful demon"[165] characterized by malice, violence and lack of remorse. To quote *Beowulf* 121-122a, 134-137:

> Grim ond grǣdig, gearo sōna wæs,
> Rēoc ond rēþe, ond on ræste genam
> þrītig þegna […]
> lāð ond longsum. Næs hit lengra first
> ac ymb āne niht eft gefremede
> morð- beala māre ond nō mearn fore
> fǣhðe ond fyrene; wæs tō fæst on þām.[166]
>
>
> Fierce and ravenous, soon found his war-fury,
> Savage and reckless, and snatched up thirty
> of the sleeping thanes […]
> Too hateful, long lasting. And it was no longer
> Than the following night he returned to the hall,
> Slaughtered even more, and he grieved not at all
> For his wicked deeds – was too deep in sin.[167]

Although there is no physical description, I believe that these human motives clearly allude to what one commonly would define a monster. By contrast, Gollum's nature is not detailed portrayed, but readers enjoy a brief description of its appearance: "as dark as darkness, expect for two big round eyes in his thin face."[168] I suggest that although Gollum is not portrayed by providing a detailed description of his nature, when he is defined 'as dark as darkness', Tolkien not only refers to the colour of the creature's skin, but also to his nature. In fact, as soon as Gollum sees Bilbo, at first, he is only curious and then

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[163] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 67.
[164] *Ibidem.*
[165] *Beowulf, op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.
[166] *Idem,* pp. 54-57.
[167] *Ibidem.*
[168] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 67.

hungry.[169] Furthermore, his dark nature can be perceived by his love for meat and tendency to cannibalism. Gollum, in fact, thinks that "goblin is good, when he can get it."[170]

Another aspect that characterizes both figures lies in the strategy Gollum adopts to capture the goblins, it is similar to that of Grendel. Both attacks their prey from behind and do not want to be neither seen nor heard. Gollum "takes care they never find him out. He just throttles them from behind, if they ever come down alone anywhere near the edge of the water, while he was prowling about."[171] Grendel's attacks are more aggressive, however, like Gollum it takes its prey by surprise. As it is told in *Beowulf* 122b-125:

> On ræste genam
> þrītig þegna; þanon eft gewāt
> hūðe hrēmig tō hām faran,
> mid þǣre wæl-fylle wīca nēosan.[172]

> …and snatched up thirty
> Of the sleeping thanes. From there he returned
> To his home in the darkness, exulting in plunder,
> Took his slaughtered feast of men to his lair.[173]

What differentiates the two creatures is their physical strength. Grendel has a supernatural strength and is immune to common weapons. It is possible to deduce its extreme strength by looking at the first part of *Beowulf* 146b-154a, where it is said:

> Wæs sēo hwīl micel:
> Twelf wintra tīd torn geþolode
> Wine Scyldinga, wēana gehwelcne,
> Sīdra sorga; forðam wearð,
> Ylda bearnum underyrne cūð,
> Gyddum geōmore, þætte Grendel wan
> Hwīle wið Hrōþgar, hete-nīðas wæg,
> Fyrene ond fǣhðe fela missēra,
> Single sæce […][174]

> The time was long,
> the space of twelve winters, that the scylding king
> endured in torment all possible cares,
> the fullest agony. and so it was told
> afar to men, and the sons of men,
> through mournful lays, that Grendel had fought
> long against Hrothgar, driven by hate,
> had committed crimes for many seasons,

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169 Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 68.
170 *Idem*, p. 67.
171 *Ibidem.*
172 *Beowulf*, *op. cit*., pp. 54-57.
173 *Ibidem*.
174 *Idem,* pp. 56-57.

a relentless feud.[175]

In *Beowulf*, twelve years of sufferings are told, no one could fight against Grendel and its supernatural and ferocious nature. By contrast Gollum, has no supernatural powers, but what makes him supernatural is his 'precious'[176], a golden ring that Bilbo finds when he wakes up and puts in his pockets.[177] Thus, Gollum is not the carbon copy of Grendel, but rather a miniature version of it. Tolkien manages to work on one of the most known monsters in literature by adopting and taking advantage of his power of sub-creator.

Although Gollum seems to be a marginal presence within the story, due to his appearance and mental disorder, I believe that he can represent what would be defined in the 19th century a deviant subject. The 19th century, in fact, was an essential time in Europe because of many revolutions which had affected not only science, but also politics and society. The main aim of scientist was to analyse the concept of humanity and what it meant to be human. The main problem concerning this issue was related to the research of the principle of life: scientists wondered whether men were simply a product of the universe or a creation of God with separated and eternal souls. Writers of time, Mary Shelley for instance, were very much influenced by the discoveries and debates concerning the issue and decided to investigate them in their novels.[178] The tendency of authors was to re-elaborate those controversial ideas of the time to try to find a plausible answer. Through the creation of their creatures, authors wanted to report what they had heard or witnessed. By taking into consideration the creature of *Frankenstein*, I argue that the condition of Gollum is the same experienced by the creature of Mary Shelley. As the creature, Gollum too belongs to another species, but presents human motives that clearly alludes to his human component which is not necessarily bad. In the novel in fact, readers learn that he probably suffers from multiple personality disorder inasmuch he keeps saying "we."[179] In this "we", a part of Gollum is innocent and naive, while the other one is malignant and clever. In addition, in the 19th century, there was the presence of basic ideas that categorize men as deviant subject or not. For example, criminals were no whites and lived as primitive people or homosexuals needed to be cured. I think that in the case of Gollum, it is not a chance that his skin is not white, and his style of life is based on hunting fish or

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[175] *Beowulf, op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.
[176] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 75.
[177] *Idem*, p. 64.
[178] Maurice Hindle, "Vital Matters: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the Romantic Science", Critical Survey, 1 (1990), pp. 29-35, pp. 33-34.
[179] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 69.

orcs. It seems that like Mary Shelley, Tolkien too wants to investigate the Victorian paradigms. Furthermore, nobody knows why he is there alone, Tolkien included. Readers can understand that Gollum lives in exile, but they do not know why. They do not know if it was by choice or if it was by obligation. What readers can perceive is that Gollum is a negative presence, probably sick and rejected. Thus, I argue that Gollum's character is a modern version of Grendel and he depicts issues still present nowadays, especially the fear of otherness.

Bilbo too is feared, but although he has the possibility to kill Gollum immediately, he does not. He feels "pity mixed with horror"[180] for that "miserable, alone and lost"[181] creature. So, he accepts to play solving riddles and make a pact: if Bilbo wins, Gollum will show him the way out. Gollum does not keep his word and wants to attack Bilbo by taking advantage of its precious: "a ring of power, and if you slipped that ring on your finger, you were invisible; only in the full sunlight could you be seen, and then only by your shadow, and that would be shaky and faint."[182] But, he cannot find it, Bilbo involuntarily had stolen it and it is thanks to the ring that he manages to save his life and join his fellows.

The ring is another interesting element to look at. In ancient times, golden rings had a double meaning. First, they represented the circularity of life and second, they possessed the knowledge of the aspects that made life prosperous.[183] Golden rings alluded to absolute control over material and immaterial aspects of existence and this implied access to a divine power.[184] However, rings could bring individuals to ruin when their owners were overpowered by cupidity.[185] In mythology, there are many tales concerning magical rings, which show both the positive and the negative effects that a ring can produce. In addition, if rings were stolen, they were contaminated by the evil and, as a result, their nature changed drastically.[186] In the case of Gollum's magical ring, the motif of the damned ring probably comes from the ancient conception of this small and precious object. However, it could be that Tolkien looked at the *Pearl* manuscript to create his precious and its power. There are, in fact, philological similarities between *Pearl* and *The Hobbit*. In both works, the word 'precious' is widely used: in the manuscript, it alludes to the dead daughter of the

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[180] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 80.
[181] *Ibidem.*
[182] *Idem,* p. 75.
[183] Isnardi, *op. cit.,* p. 658.
[184] *Idem*, p. 659.
[185] *Ibidem.*
[186] *Idem*, p. 660.

Jeweler; by contrast, in the fantasy novel it is an enigmatic magical ring.[187] What is interesting to observe is that both the father and Gollum uses the same word by providing it the same meaning, in both cases, in fact, the precious coveys a sense of consolation.[188] Furthermore, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term precious alludes to something "of great moral, spiritual, or other non-material values; beloved, held in high esteem. A stone of a kind prized for its beauty, hardness, or rarity and used in ornamentation or jewellery; a gemstone, a jewel."[189] This definition perfectly represents the nature of both 'preciouses': an object whose meaning is "far beyond its material form."[190] In -*The Hobbit*, nobody knows where the ring comes from. Although Gollum affirms it is a birthday present, I think it is a lie because the influence of the ring on its frame of mind is too wicked: he is ready to kill to have the ring again. It could be that Gollum's sickness comes from the ring, which seems to be apparently harmless, but it consumes the soul by creating a strong addiction. The ring, in fact, "is unable to comfort its bearer, instead, it has a corrupting and maddening effect, worsening rather than relieving the symptoms of its victims."[191] However, there might be a relation existing between the name Gollum and his precious. As the scholar Douglas Anderson observes:

> The Old Norse word *gull* means "gold." In the oldest manuscripts it is spelled *goll*. One inflected form would be *Gollum*, "gold, treasure, something precious." It can also mean "ring," as is found in the complex word *finger-gull*, "finger-ring"- points that may have occurred to Tolkien.[192]

So, as I previously outlined, the character of Gollum is very enigmatic because there are no allusions neither to his origin and nor to his nature. Readers can only formulate hypotheses and decide how to look at the creature. However, it is inevitable to think that the ring has a positive effect on his mind and temperament.

Escaped from Gollum's clutches, in chapter six Bilbo enjoys his fellows. What struck me the most in the chapter was this sentence: "Bilbo's reputation went up a very great deal with the dwarves. If they had still doubted that he was really a first- class burglar, in spite of Gandalf's words, they doubted no longer."[193] This sentence made me think about Bilbo's frame of mind up to that moment. I thought about the possible

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[187] Noah Koubenec, "The Precious and the Pearl: The Influence of *Pearl* on the Nature of the One Ring", *Mythlore*, 29 (2011), pp. 119-131, p. 124.
[188] *Idem*, p. 126.
[189] *Idem*, p. 125.
[190] *Ibidem.*
[191] *Idem*, p. 126.
[192] Douglas Anderson quoted in Koubenec, *op. cit*., p. 126.
[193] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 86.

relationship existing between Gollum's marginalization and Bilbo's. Although these two characters are extremely different, I argue that they both suffer from solitude. From the very beginning of Bilbo's adventure, the hobbit is considered by the dwarves a child to look after because of his small size and lack of fighting spirit. In the first five chapters; in fact, the dwarves do not trust Bilbo and the only reason why they probably accept him is because they fear Gandalf. There are several examples of the dwarves' reluctance towards Bilbo: first, in chapter one, a dwarf admits that "as soon as he clapped eyes on the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat, he had his doubts"[194] and adds that Bilbo "looks more like a grocer than a burglar."[195] Second, in chapter two, when the journey starts, "the dwarves jogged on, never turning round or taking any notice of the hobbit"[196] and the same happens when all the dwarves but Thorin are captured by the trolls, "they had forgotten all about him."[197] Third, in chapter four, when they are running away from the goblins, Bombur exclaims: "Why did I ever bring a wretched little hobbit on a treasure hunt!"[198] Last, in chapter six, before Bilbo reaches his fellow, "the dwarves wanted to know why he had ever been brought at all, why he could not stick to his friends and come along with them, and why the wizard had not chosen someone with more sense."[199] And they add: "confusticate him!"[200] It is clear that Bilbo lives a status of alienation within the company, he is not appreciated. The dwarves are not interested in Bilbo, but only in their mission. Before being accepted and looking positively, Bilbo must prove to be worthy. What surprised me about Bilbo is that, despite the palpable distance that the dwarves keep, he never leaves them, nor he gets angry. As opposed to Gollum, I argue that Bilbo is living a condition of exile within a group of people, which he tries to face by thinking about his beloved hole and its comforts in the Shire. In fact, the first chapters are not only rich with allusions to the marginalized status of Bilbo, but also to Bilbo's feeling of nostalgia. For instance, in chapter three, during a short rest, Bilbo "thought once again of his comfortable chair before the fire in his favourite sitting-room in his hobbit-hole, and of kettle singing."[201] And then in chapter five, before the meeting with Gollum, "he thought of himself frying bacon and eggs in his own kitchen."[202] I do not believe that these statements

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[194] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 18.
[195] *Ibidem.*
[196] *Idem,* p. 30.
[197] *Idem,* p. 37.
[198] *Idem*, p. 62.
[199] *Idem*, p. 85.
[200] *Idem*, p. 86.
[201] *Idem*, p. 43.
[202] *Ibidem*.

are only clues to identify the Primary World, but they also symbolize a means of defence for Bilbo. I presume that thinking about his home and comforts means for him to find a refuge from solitude.

From that moment Bilbo's consideration increases; nevertheless, his feeling of nostalgia is always present. The fellowship continues the journey and Gandalf informs them that before reaching the mountain, they must face Beorn, "a skin-changer"[203] and cross Mirkwood, an enchanted forest. To create the figure of Beorn and the forest, Tolkien looked at many different sources. To realize Beorn, the author drew from the Old Norse warriors called *berserkir* because of their affinity to a bear while fighting and to the nobleman Sir Gawain meets in the Arthurian poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Beorn reminds of a *berserkr* because he has the same temperament of those warriors, who used to be aggressive like bears and fought by wearing bear skin. In battles, they were the most hardened and had no scruples, they became bears in the spirit.[204] Furthermore, like the name of Bilbo, that of Beorn too has a meaning and marks features of the character. The name of the skin-changer is an Anglo- Saxon term that means warrior and chieftain and it was originally used for 'bear'.[205] So, those men had a seesawing personality and this feature too is applied to Beorn. Gandalf, in fact, says that "he can be appalling when he is angry, though he is kind enough if humoured. Still I warn you he gets angry easily."[206] Thus, Beorn's temperament is exactly like that described in ancient times. The skin-changer is "sometimes a huge black bear, sometimes he is a great strong black-haired man with huge arms and a great beard. Some say that he is a bear descended from the great and ancient bears of the mountains that lived there before the giants came. Other say that he is a man descended from the first men who lived before Smaug […]."[207] By looking at his description, it is possible to notice that the strong and impressive corporeality of Beorn shares some similarities with that of the nobleman in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. To quote the passage of the Arthurian poem, 842-849:

> Gawayn glyȝt on þe gome þat godly hym gret,
> and þuȝt hit a bolde burne þat þe burȝ aȝte,
> a hoge haþel for þe nonez and of hyghe eldee.
> Borde, bryȝt watz his berde and al beuer-hwed,
> sturne, stif on þe stryþþe on stalworth schonkex,

[203] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 106.
[204] Isnardi, *op. cit.,* p. 577.
[205] Paul Lewis, "Beorn and Tom Bombadil: A Tale of Two Heroes", *Mythlore,* 25 (2007), pp. 145-188, p. 147.
[206] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 106.
[207] *Ibidem.*

> felle face as þe fyre, and fre of hys speche;
> and wel hym semed forsoþe, as þe segge þuȝt,
> to lede a lortschyp in lee of leudez ful gode.[208]

> Gawain gazed on the gallant that goodly him greeted,
> and thought it a bold brave that the burg owned,
> a huge horseman for battling, and in his best years;
> board, bright, was his beard, and all beaver-coloured,
> stern, strong in his stance on stalwart shanks,
> face fierce as the fire, and the fair in his speech;
> and well him suited, for sooth, as the stalwart thought,
> to lead a lordship in a castle of liegemen full good.[209]

Although Tolkien's description is not very detailed, I suggest that it is inevitable to find or at least to perceive the affinity between the two characters. In addition, like Sir Gawain is hosted by the nobleman in his castle, also the fellowship of Thorin is given the possibility of refreshing at Beorn's home. However, not only does Tolkien recall the *berserkir*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but also *Hrólfs saga kraka*, called *Bjarki* (Little Bear). Due to a curse, the father of the main character became a bear, but he did not lose his humanity. Only in the night, he could regain his human aspect. His son Bjarki was condemned to the same sad destiny: he was both a man and a bear.[210] Being both human and animal is the same condition of Beorn. Tolkien created a very original *berserkir* because, despite his unsettling personality, Beorn does not reflect the ancient negative connotations concerning bears. Undoubtedly, his physical appearance intimidates, but he does not seem to be nasty. By looking at some passages of the chapter, it is possible to notice his extreme respect for living beings. To quote a passage:

> He lives in an oak-wood and as a man he keeps cattle and horses which are nearly as marvellous as himself. He does not eat them; neither does he hunt or eat wild animals. He keeps hives ad hives of great fierce of bees, and lives most on cream and honey.[211]

Thus, his animal side is part of what he is, but it does not influence his behaviour. By nature, he is suspicious and in fact, he verifies the story Gandalf told him. He is enthusiastic when he learns about the death of The King of the Goblins and the company's adventures with the orcs. I suggest that this could be an allusion not only to his animal nature, but also to his past. There is a passage in the book where it is said that Beorn was

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[208] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* edited and translated by Larry D. Benson with a foreword and Middle English text edited by Daniel Donoghue, Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2012, pp. 62-65.
[209] *Ibidem.*
[210] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, cit., in Isnardi, *op. cit.,* p. 577.
[211] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 106.

"a fierce enemy of goblins". Probably, he was forced to leave the mountains where he lived because of them. The extreme hate that Beorn feels towards goblins and orcs could come from the fact that he was deprived of his land. Readers do not know much about Beorn's past, but I argue that the fact of being deprived of his home, makes Beorn a colonial and post-colonial subject. If one thinks about colonialism, one should find in Beorn the colonised. Colonialism, in fact, was intended as occupation of other's people land and this occupation was motivated by project that pointed at the development of a nation.[212] The concept of nation is very difficult and ambiguous. According to the scholar Ernest Renan, nations are "unstable formulations, always likely to collapse back into sub-divisions of clan, tribe, language or religious group, is nothing new and the false tendency to assign this unstable condition to specific regions or conditions (the Third World)."[213] In this view, nations are created by what is considered to be "the natural expressions of a unified national history and culture."[214] Thus, the concept of nation is the basis of colonial thinking inasmuch colonial occupation consisted in the migration of people, whose aim was to invade foreign lands and force other people to abandon their cultural identity.[215] Then, with the event of slavery, people were forced to abandon their country and became instruments to increase wealth. Thus, I argue that it is not a chance that when Gandalf tells Beorn the story by referring to specific places, Beorn nods as he perfectly knew the places the wizard refers to. So, Beorn probably spent part of his life being a subaltern, subjected to the hegemony of the dominant class.[216]

The notion of hegemony can also be an interesting starting point to motivate the hate that Beorn feels towards those wicked creatures. According to Gramsci, hegemony is "domination by consent."[217] Colonisers convinced people that their interests and those of common people were the same as if they shared common values.[218] However, it was not so. Honest and naïve people trust colonizers and by so doing they signed their condemnation: they were no longer free to be themselves, but rather they became subalterns. They were deprived of their culture and soul. They became slaves, instruments to increase wealth. In the case of Beorn, I think that due to his strength, he was the perfect candidate for colonizers, but this implies the loss of his identity. In his *Necropolitics*,

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[212] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 40-41.
[213] Ernest Renan cit., in Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
[214] *Ibidem.*
[215] *Idem*, pp. 136-137.
[216] Ashcroft, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
[217] Gramsci in Ashcroft, *op cit.*, p. 106.
[218] *Ibidem.*

Achille Mbembe, one of the most relevant post-colonial scholars investigate the issue of sovereignty in relation to slavery. Before mentioning the condition of slaves, Mbembe focuses on the notion of sovereignty and provides this definition: "a generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations."[219] In other words, this definition alludes to the idea that men subjugate other men and decide the fate of their lives. Colonisation and slavery were the first extreme forms of sovereignty. Slaves lost not only their freedom, but also their home, their rights over their body and their political status. They were no longer human beings, but rather instruments to use and were condemned to a form of death in life.[220]

I argue that Beorn fulfils all the conditions resulting from loss of identity typical of slaves. Where Mbembe describes the loss of one's home, in *The Hobbit* Gandalf tells his fellow that "once he saw him watching at the moon sinking towards the Misty Mountain, and I heard him growl that the day would come when they would perish, and he should go back."[221] In the words of the wizard, it is possible to perceive that Beorn waits for the moment in which he can come back home and take revenge of colonizers. The second aspect mentioned by Mbembe is the loss of rights over one's own body. As mentioned before, the magic and the physical strength of Beorn were precious instruments to increase the wealth of his colonizers. The last point of the scholar is loss of political status.[222] Since Beorn lives alone near Mirkwood, he probably managed to escape from his colonizers. However, he lives a status of alienation and profound suffering for his condition and this could be the reason why he is so suspicious when meets his unexpected guests. Despite his powerful magic, Beorn lives an existence outside the world, basically he is alone and looks for solace in his animals, the ones who will never betray him. In addition, living near Mirkwood is a further proof of his status of marginalization.

Mirkwood is the enchanted forest Bilbo and the dwarves need to cross to reach their destination. As early as the name, Mirkwood does not seem to be an idyllic place; in fact, the name of the forest comes from the Old Norse term *Myrkviðr* that means dark wood.[223] The first description of Mirkwood is provided in chapter seven. Beorn warns the company of Oakenshield that "the way through Mirkwood is dark, dangerous and difficult. Water is not easy to find there, nor food. The time is not yet come for nuts and nuts are about all

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[219] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics", *Public Culture*, 15 (2003), pp. 11-40, p. 14.
[220] *Idem*, p. 21.
[221] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 107.
[222] Mbembe, *op. cit.,* pp. 20-24.
[223] Marco Post, "Perilous Wanderings Through the Enchanted Forest: The Influence of The Fairy-Tale Tradition on Mirkwood in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, *Mythlore*, 33 (2014), pp. 67-87, p. 68.

that grows there fit for food; in there the wild things are dark, queer and savage. […]"[224] It can be deduced that Mirkwood reflects in part the literary topos of the enchanted forests in fairy-tales literary tradition.

In the tradition, forests usually function as means to escape from modernity. They represent a boundary between civilization and wildness and depict a dimension that divides the primary world from the secondary one. As Alfred Messerli suggests in his *Spatial Representation in European Popular Fairy Tale*:

> The European fairy-tale creates two non-homeomorphic worlds - a magical world of supernatural beings from the beyond, and a non-magical one of normal human being- worlds that are divided from one another through occasionally fluid but sometimes also inflexible boundaries and frontier regions. With this first structure a second coexists in that for the narrator and the listener both worlds belong in any case to the same magic virtual world of the fairy-tales which is clearly separated from their own real one.[225]

Thus, in the fantasy world, there is the presence of a further dimension depicted by the forest and, as a result, there are three dimensions that readers enjoy while reading fantasy novels: the primary world, the secondary world and the forest. The latter create a boundary between the mundane dimension of readers, the Primary World for Tolkien, and the two magical dimensions within the novel. Forests represent a "a limen of particular importance."[226] By taking as examples *Pentamerone* (1634-36) by Giambattista Basile and *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (1812) by the Grimm Brothers, it is possible to illustrate the role of forests. In both texts the enchanted forest is a place of comfort and safety, but also a field of battle because, due to its wildness, characters are forced to face the unexpected and must prove to be brave and worthy. [227]

As soon as Bilbo and the dwarves enter the forest, the atmosphere becomes funereal. Mirkwood fulfils the expectations of desolation typical of the tradition:

> There were black squirrels in the wood. There were queer noises too, grunts, scufflings, and hurryings in the undergrowth, and among the leaves that lay piled endlessly thick in places on the forest-floor. The nastiest things were the cobwebs: dark dense cobwebs with thread extraordinarily thick, often stretched from tree to tree or tangled in the lower branches on either side of them. […] there was no movement of air down under the forest-roof, and it was ever-lastingly still and dark and stuffy.[228]

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[224] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 121.

[225] Messerli Alfred, "Spatial Representation in European Popular Fairy-Tale", *Marvels & Tales,* 19 (2005), pp. 274-284, p. 274.

[226] *Idem*, p. 274.

[227] Basile, *op. cit*., Grimm Brothers *op. cit*., in Post, *op. cit*., pp. 69-70.

[228] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 128-129.

However, the topos of the enchanted forest is damaged when the fellowship "saw a red twinkle in the dark; then another and another sprang out beside it. It seemed plain that torches and fires were burning under the trees."[229] They were wood-elves who, instead of helping the dwarves, put them in jail because they dared to cross their lands. So, the presence of a population in the forest affects the creation of the boundary within the magical worlds, as if there was no distinction between them. No longer exist three different dimensions, but rather only two because the court of elves and the forest are not two separate entities of the secondary world as they should be, in fact, they share the same dimension.[230] Consequently, there is no distinction between the magical dimension and the civilized one. Thus, it is possible to assume that Tolkien manipulates the tradition by making fun of readers because, at first, the forest perfectly embraces the traditional image, but then it is contaminated by civilization. Nevertheless, the forest does not lose its essence, it keeps on representing the space of the other because it presents some features that make it different from the external world, such as the enchanted river and wicked and monstrous spiders. Therefore, clearly, there is an antithesis between the lands outside Mirkwood and the atmosphere in the forest, which is a limen that functions, in the case of *The Hobbit*, both as a means of separation and transition.[231]

Despite its connotations, Mirkwood is, especially for Bilbo, a place of challenge, where he has the possibility to redeem himself. It is in the forest that Bilbo, for the first time, fights for his life and for that of his fellows. He battles the spiders and kills them when necessary. In that moment Bilbo no longer feels the same hobbit who had left the Shire, he manages to prove to himself that he is worthy and can rely on his own strength. Therefore, Bilbo experiences a process of self-recognition in Mirkwood. To quote the specific passage in the book:

> Somehow killing the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach, as he wiped his sword on the grass and put it back into its sheath.[232]

So, on the basis of this overview of Mirkwood, it should be clear that the enchanted forest shares almost all the features present in the Western-European fairy-tale tradition;

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[229] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 137.
[230] Post, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
[231] *Idem,* pp. 72-73.
[232] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, pp. 141-142.

however, there is one feature that is not fulfilled: the representation of space. Messerli stresses that in the tradition the representation of space is organized according to three principles. First, "economy in the organization of space", second "the discontinuous order of spatial perception", last "the significance of the narrative perspective for the narrated space."[233] Tolkien does not respect these conventions. He does not provide desultory details about Mirkwood, but rather he furnishes elaborated descriptions of the forest and on the journey itself. Furthermore, according to the tradition, there should be no topographic references. In Tolkien, it is not so: Mirkwood is not a place on its own, it is part of a land. It is another little piece of Bilbo's adventure and the map at the beginning of the narration shows it clearly.[234]

However, Tolkien did not only look at the Western-European fairy-tales, but also at *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Classical epic poetry, especially at the topos of *katabasis*: a voyage to the underworld.[235] In *the Green Knight*, Sir Gawain must cross the forest to reach the green chapel, where he will meet the Green Knight, in *The Hobbit* happens the same, Bilbo and his fellows must cross Mirkwood to reach the Mountain. Furthermore, like the dark forest in *The Hobbit,* that of *Sir Gawain* is barbaric and lugubrious too, and, like Bilbo, the knight must fight against wicked creatures.[236] The similarities between Mirkwood and the underworld can be found on the one hand on the lugubrious atmosphere and on the other on the presence of the Enchanted River. Like the magical rivers of the underworld, also that of Mirkwood has the same power: whoever drinks its water or touches it, falls in a deep sleep and finds him/herself between life and death.[237] Thus, Tolkien creates the dark forest of Mirkwood by looking at tradition, but he did not fulfil all the expected conditions. I suggest that his choice may have been influenced by his desire to show the psychological development of Bilbo and, in order to make his readers perceive it, it was necessary to create a condition that could scared both the main character and readers. Chapter eight, in fact, is rich of details that clearly produces jumps. There is a high emotional component that influences the narration and readers learn how Bilbo feels and can perceive his personal growth. I believe that this chapter is the most significant because it is inevitable to think about the figure of Bilbo

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[233] Messerli, *op. cit*., p. 276.
[234] *Idem*, p. 276-278.
[235] Post, *op. cit*., p. 79.
[236] Benson, *op. cit.,* pp. 54-55, vv. 720-725.
[237] Post, *op. cit*., pp. 80-81.

Baggins and make a reflection on his improvement. What Bilbo experiences in the forest is what everyone, sooner or later, must face throughout life.

After escaping from the imprisonment by the elves, Bilbo and the company reach Lake-Town, where they ask to speak with the Master. They spend a couple of weeks there, and then, they continue their journey toward the Mountain. Finally, they reach the doorstep of the dwarves' dwelling, but they cannot open the passage to come in. The whole company is disappointed and hopeless. It is only after many useless attempts that the prophecy written on the map accomplishes and they manage to open the entrance.[238] All the dwarves look impatiently at Bilbo, they cannot wait to take their treasure back. The hobbit ventures in the Mountain and, apparently, everything seems to be quite until he reaches the root of the Mountain, where he sees the "glow of Smaug."[239]

The figure of the dragon is extremely interesting to analyse, and Tolkien deeply investigates it in his "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics", where he states that

> Beowulf's dragon, if one wishes really to criticize, is not to be blamed for being a dragon, but rather for not being a dragon enough, plain pure fairy-story dragon. There are in the poem some vivid touches of the right kind in which this dragon is real worm, with bestial life and thought of his own, but the conception, none the less, approaches draconitas (dragon-ness) rather than draco (dragon): a personification of malice, greed, destruction, and of the undiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad.[240]

Thus, Beowulf's dragon is not as complete as it should be. For Tolkien, not only should the dragon represent malice, greed and destruction, but also it should depict "the evil aspect of all life."[241] Monsters; therefore, "are not simply an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essentially allied to the underlying ideas of the poem."[242] So, Tolkien re-shaped the dragon of *Beowulf* by creating a similar creature that not only represents cupidity, but also depicts the evil.

Chapter twelve is ripe with echoes from *Beowulf*. The first relevant similarity is that in both narrations the dragon protects a treasure, which is impregnated with cruelty.

> The splendour, the lust, the glory of such treasure had never yet come home to him. […] his heart was filled and pierced with enchantment and with the desire of dwarves; and he gazed motionless, almost forgetting the frightful guardian, at the gold beyond price and count. […] Smaug lay, with wings folded like an immeasurable bat […] Behind him, where the walls were nearest could dimly be

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[238] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 190.
[239] *Idem*, p. 193.
[240] Tolkien, "*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics", site cit., p. 114, last access: 12.11.2018.
[241] *Ibidem.*
[242] *Idem*, p. 115.

seen coats of mail, helms and axes, swords and spears hanging; and there in rows stood great jars and vessels filled with a wealth that could not be guessed.[243]

The figure of the dragon protecting a treasure is the same described in *Beowulf* 2241b-2245a, 2270b-2277.

> Beorh eall-gearo
> Wunode on wonge wæter-ȳðum nēah,
> Nīwe be næsse nearo-cræftum fæst.
> Þær on innon bær eorl-gestrēona
> hringa hyrde. […]
> Hord-wynne fond
> eald ūht- sceaða opene standan,
> sē ðe byrnende biorgas sēceð,
> nacod nīð-draca, nihtes flēogeð
> fȳre befangen; hyne fold-būend
> swīðe ondrǣ dað. Hē gesēcean sceall
> hord on hrūsan, þǣr hē hǣðen gold
> warað wintrum frōd; ne byð him wihte ðȳ sēl.[244]

> The waiting barrow
> stood high in the fields near the breaking waves,
> new-built on the headlands, its entrance hidden.
> That keeper of rings carried down into it
> the good worth burial. […]
> The old dawn-scorcher
> then found the hoard in the open barrow,
> that hateful burner who seeks the dead-mounds,
> smooth flame-snake, flies through the dark
> wrapped round in fires; earth-dwellers
> fear him greatly. It is his to seek out
> treasure in the earth, where he guards for ages
> heathen gold; gains nothing by it.[245]

Although the circumstances are different, both dragons share the same addiction to gold and they are robbed. Both thieves steal a cup: like Bilbo "grasped a great two-handled cup"[246], also the thief in *Beowulf* 2230-2231a *þā hyne se fǣr begeat sinc-fǣt sōhte* "he seized the treasure-cup."[247] Furthermore, both thieves have the same reaction when the dragon starts moving. Like Bilbo "fled and toiled back up the long tunnel […] and still he clutched the cup"[248], also the unknown thief has the same reaction.[249]

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[243] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 194.
[244] *Beowulf*, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-185.
[245] *Ibidem*.
[246] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 194.
[247] *Beowulf*, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183.
[248] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 194.
[249] *Beowulf, op. cit.*, pp. 182-183, vv. 2230-2231a

However, unlike the dragon in *Beowulf*, Smaug does not wake up immediately. In *Beowulf* 2285b-2289, as soon as the dragon perceives that something is missing from its treasure,

> Frēa scēawode
> fīra fyrn-geweorc forman sīðe.
> Þā se wyrm onwōc, wrōht wæs genīwad;
> stonc ðā æfter stāne, stearc-heort onfand
> fēondes fōt-lāst; hē tō forð gestōp.[250]

> His lord looked upon
> the gold of the ancients for the first time.
> By then, also, the dragon had wakened
> and with it new strife. It slithered and sniffed
> along the stone walls, found a footprint.[251]

By contrast, in *The Hobbit*, "the dragon did not wake- not yet- but shifted into other dreams of greed and violence."[252] However, the narrator tells that "dragons may not have much real use of their wealth, but they know it to an ounce as a rule, especially after long possession; and Smaug was no exception."[253] As opposed to the dragon in *Beowulf*, it is the dream of Smaug that makes him wake up and realize that a little part of his treasure is missing. Like his epic version, Smaug too experiences a profound status of rage, "a sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted."[254]

The dragon dreaming is another interesting difference between the two creatures. In *Beowulf* there is no reference to dreams, while in *The Hobbit* the dream of Smaug plays a decisive role because, first, it signals the awakening of Smaug and, second, it is a brilliant device that Tolkien uses to make further clear that epic and legendary narrations are the most relevant sources he takes advantage of.[255] Smaug "passes from an uneasy dream (in which a warrior, altogether insignificant in size but provided with a bitter sword and great courage, figured most unpleasantly) to a doze, and from a doze to wide waking."[256] The most intuitive interpretation of the dream is that, although Smaug is sleeping, he is aware of the presence of Bilbo. It is not a chance; in fact, that Bilbo is not very impressive in size

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[250] *Beowulf, op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.
[251] *Ibidem.*
[252] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 194.
[253] *Idem*, p. 195.
[254] *Idem,* p. 196.
[255] Felicia Steel, "Dreaming of Dragons: Tolkien's Impact on Heaney's Beowulf", *Mythlore* 25 (2006), pp. 137-146, p. 139.
[256] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*., p. 195.

and the only weapon he has is a dagger, which is not suitable even to injure the beast. However, Bilbo's intention is not to kill or wound the dragon, so it is not possible to state with certainty that the dream of Smaug is premonitory. Furthermore, another proof that his dream is not revelatory is that Smaug does not die at the hands of warriors, but at the hands of an arrow.[257]

By looking at these considerations, it seems that the dream of Smaug is meaningless. However, it is not so because the dream marks the historicity of Smaug, his affinity with the dragons of the past. The battles he dreams about allude to the stories of his predecessors.[258] As Tom Shippey points out

> For Tolkien's taste there were too few dragons in ancient literature, indeed by his count only three- the Miðgarðsorm or Worm of Middle-earth, which was to destroy the god Thor at Ragnarök, the Norse Doomsday; the dragon which Beowulf fights and kills at the cost of his own life; and Fafnir who is killed by the Norse hero Sigurð.[259]

Thus, Smaug's dream represents history. Smaug could dream about the lethal fight between Thor and "the Midgard-serpent"[260], where "Thor gets great renown by slaying the Midgard-serpent, but retreats only nine paces when he falls to the earth dead, poisoned by the venom that the serpent blows on him."[261] Or about the hero Beowulf and the ferocious beast and the death of both.[262] Tolkien uses the dream to recall the sleeping dragon in *Beowulf*, which is lethally wounded by the warrior. What is also interesting to notice is that, like Bilbo, Beowulf too is insignificant in size and attacks the beast with a short sword.[263] Another possibility is that Smug dreams about the death of the dragon at the hand of Sigurðr in the *Vǫlsunga Saga,* who speaks with the creature before its death.[264] Bilbo too dialogues with Smaug and, like Sigurðr, he does not reveal his name. In the Saga, Sigurðr affirms that he is called "Noble Beast and he has neither father nor mother."[265] Similarly, Bilbo replies Smaug by using riddles: "I am he that walks unseen. […] I am the clue-finder, the web-cutter, the stinging fly. […] I am the friend of bears and the guest of eagles. I am Ringwinner and Luckwearer; and I am Barrel-rider."[266] Thus, through the

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[257] Steel, *op. cit.,* p. 142.
[258] *Ibidem*.
[259] Tom Shippey quoted in Steel, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[260] *The Younger Edda*, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/18947/18947-h/18947-h.htm, p. 141, last access: 13.11.2018.
[261] *Idem*, p. 143.
[262] *Beowulf, op. cit.*, pp. 210-213, vv. 2703-2711a.
[263] *Idem*, pp. 210-211, vv. 2703- 2705.
[264] *Vǫlsunga Saga,* http://vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/Volsunga%20saga.pdf, pp. 30-32.
[265] *Idem,* p. 31, last access: 13.11.2018.
[266] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 200.

dream of the dragon Tolkien manages to allude to epic legendary narrations. Furthermore, for the author, dreaming is an excellent measure to depict the inner life of the dragon and locate him in the secondary world. By so doing, Tolkien manages to insert not only his profound love for epic narrations, but also his own view of *Beowulf*, which is undoubtedly the most evident source.[267] According to Seamus Heaney, the dragon is "a figure of real oneiric power"[268], that encourages readers to dream about the dragon itself.[269]

It is only when the dragon leaves the Mountain to hunt Bilbo that the dwarves can enter in their home. There, they are immediately overpowered by the magic of the treasure, which "had rekindled all the fire of their Dwarvish hearts; and when the heart of a dwarf, even the most respectable is wakened by gold and by jewels, he grows suddenly bold, and he may become fierce."[270] The treasure is a very important element to speak about antisemitism, especially in relation to the dwarves. It is Tolkien himself that, in one of his interviews, affirms that "he does think of the Dwarves like Jews: at once native and alien in their habitations."[271] However, it is important to highlight that Tolkien does not intend to be offensive while facing this topic, but rather he wants to depict the antisemitic belief of his own lifetime. Furthermore, I suggest that Tolkien wants to take advantage of his knowledge to make readers understand that antisemitism and other forms of racism have not overcome. Antisemitism is investigated in medieval texts, but also in Renaissance ones; think of the figure of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare. Stereotypes and prejudices are still present nowadays, and I argue that Tolkien wants to focus his attention on antisemitism because it is the cruellest form of racism and discrimination of his time. It is important to remember in fact that Tolkien experiences both world wars, so, he knew very well the Nazi and the Fascist dictatorship. Thus, probably for Tolkien is not only a question of culture, but also a personal one. That is why, I believe that his intention is not discriminatory, but rather he may want to attack implicitly all those ignorant people who strongly believe in the existence of a superior race.

Throughout the book, the dwarves present typical traits often associated with the Jews; for instance, the long beard, greedy and cowardly.[272] It also by looking at the words of Smaug that these traits emerge, and I must say that it is quite strange that the dragon

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[267] Steel, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
[268] Seamus Heaney, "Introduction." *Beowulf* in Steel, *op. cit.*, p.145.
[269] *Ibidem*.
[270] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 214.
[271] Tolkien's interview in Rebecca Brackmann, "Dwarves Are Not Heroes: Antisemitism and The Dwarves in J.R.R. Tolkien's Writing", *Mythlore*, 28 (2010), pp. 85-106, p. 85.
[272] Brackmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

makes Bilbo notice the dwarves' greedy given that Smaug is greedy too. Nevertheless, Smaug advises Bilbo by saying: "don't have more to do with dwarves than you can help"[273] and adds: "I suppose they are skulking outside, and your job is to do all the dangerous work and get what you can when I'm not looking."[274] Thus, greedy is the most evident trait underlined throughout the novel, especially in relation to their treasure. From the very beginning, the dwarves always mention their treasure. When they meet Bilbo for the first time, they sing their story, where they state that they want "to find their long-forgotten gold."[275] The gold has the power to change their personality and breaks the concept of justice. When the dwarves regain their treasure, they are infatuated by its magic and no longer realize what is wrong and what is right to do. Their attachment to the treasure and the fear to share it to help Lake- Town after the attack of Smaug is the trigger cause of a war.[276] The treasure is used as device to mediate the question of antisemitism, in fact readers know that the dwarves are not the only ones who yearn for the riches of the Mountain.[277] The death of Smaug implies the awakening of cupidity in all hearts: "a host of elves is on the way, and carrion birds are with them hoping for battle and slaughter. By the lake men murmur that their sorrows are due to the dwarves; for they are homeless and may have died, and Smaug has destroyed their town. They too think to find amends for the treasure."[278] The magic of the treasure clouds the minds and the hearts of the dwarves, especially that of Thorin, who immediately does not think about a possible compromise, but rather he prepares for war.

Bilbo knows very well that Thorin's behaviour is dictated by the magic of the treasure, so he decides to try to find a solution to avoid the imminent war. He sneaks off from the mountain to reach the camp of Bard and the Elves. He wants to keep the peace, so he offers Bard the Arkenstone and told him to use it a means to find an agreement with Thorin and avoid conflicts.[279] However, the attempt of Bilbo was useless: Thorin is ready for the war, which was not expected to be so terrible. "It was called the Battle of The Five Armies. Upon one side there were the Goblins and the Wild Wolves, and upon the other were Elves and Men and Dwarves."[280]

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[273] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 201.
[274] *Ibidem.*
[275] *Idem*, p. 15.
[276] *Idem*, p. 238.
[277] *Idem*, pp. 228-229.
[278] *Idem,* p. 232.
[279] *Idem*, p. 244.
[280] *Idem*, p. 251.

The battle is "the most dreadful of all Bilbo's experience."[281] I find this sentence significant because I suggest that it recalls Tolkien's memories. As previously remembered, Tolkien took part in both World Wars and through this sentence it seems that Tolkien refers to himself and, in particular, to his experience in the Battle of the Somme.[282] That was a very traumatic event in Tolkien's life because he lost two of his best friends: Rob Gilson and Geoffrey Smith.[283] I argue that Tolkien only wants to make an implicit allusion to the battle because, unlike Bilbo, he suffers a lot of post-traumatic stress disorder and the shadows of war were always part of his life and of his writings too. It is not in *The Hobbit* that it is possible to make a proper parallelism between Tolkien's life and that of his characters, but rather in the trilogy of *The Lord of The Rings*. There, through the figure of Frodo, Bilbo's nephew, Tolkien perfectly represents the condition of war and its consequences on the psyche.[284] By contrast in *The Hobbit*, Bilbo does not take part in the war properly: he uses his ring and then faints due to a blow to the head.[285] When he wakes up, Bilbo is told what happened, but what is sure is that he does not fight in battle. Bilbo does not experience in first person the conflict, he does not see the atrocities with his eyes, but rather he learns about them through the eyes of the few survivors. Bilbo, therefore, is less subjected to post traumatic stress disorder than his fellows. However, like Tolkien, Bilbo too experiences the death of three friends: Thorin, Fili and Kili.[286]

The exchange between Bilbo and Thorin recalls that in *Beowulf* 2724-2727. When Beowulf dies during the fight with the dragon, he lies wounded on the ground and pronounces his last words. To quote the passage:

> Bīowulf maþelode – hē ofer benne spræc,
> Wunde wæl- blēate; wise hēgearwe
> þæt hē dæg- hwīla gedrogen hæfde,
> eorðan wynne; ða wæs eall sceacen
> dōgor-gerīmes, dēað ungemete nēah.[287]

> Then Beowulf spoke, despite the gash,
> The gaping wound – he knew for certain
> He had finished hisdays, his joy in the world,
> That his time was over, death very near.[288]

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[281] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* p. 253.
[282] Michael Livingstone, "The Shell-Shocked Hobbit: The First World War and Tolkien's Trauma of the Ring", *Mythlore*, 25 (2006), pp. 77-95, p. 78.
[283] *Idem*, pp. 80-81.
[284] Livingstone, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-86.
[285] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 256.
[286] *Idem*, pp. 258-261.
[287] *Beowulf*, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-213.
[288] *Ibidem.*

The situation is similar in *The Hobbit*. When Bilbo is found, he is immediately brought in the presence of Thorin, who "wounded with many wounds, and his rent armour and notched axe were cast upon the floor."[289] Despite his wounds, as his last words, he asks Bilbo for forgiveness. After commemorating Thorin, Bilbo is ready to come back to his beloved Shire in the company of Gandalf. Before leaving, the hobbit decides to give the King of the Elves "a necklace of silver and pearls"[290], an object similar to that in *Beowulf* 2809-2810. Before dying, Beowulf *dyde him of healse hring gyldenne þīoden þrīst- hȳdig, þegne gesealde* "from round his throat he took the golden collar, brave hearted king, and gave to his thane."[291] Once again, the circumstances are different, but the echoes are several.

Finally, Bilbo and Gandalf reach the Shire, where they discover that Bilbo is thought to be dead and his house is at auction. It is not easy for Bilbo to find credibility, he had lost his reputation; however, he does not mind.[292] He decides to write about his adventures and thinks about entitling his memoirs *There and Back Again, a Hobbit's Holiday.*[293] It is not a chance that the title is similar to the one Tolkien uses for his novel. In the very last pages of the book, Bilbo and Tolkien become one entity. There is sort of circularity that brings readers to think about the genesis of *The Hobbit*: the hobbit that readers imagine writing his adventure is none other than Tolkien himself in his office marking exam papers.

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[289] Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, p. 258.
[290] *Idem*, p. 263.
[291] *Beowulf, op. cit.,* pp. 218-219.
[292] Tolkien, *The Hobbit,* pp. 270-271.
[293] *Idem*, p. 271.

Chapter III

The Hobbit on screen: a new myth

I.i. From page to screen: Peter Jackson's creation of a myth

As previously discussed, Tolkien's theory of fantasy paves the way to a new understanding of the fantasy world and has a decisive importance in the cinematic adaptation of *The Hobbit.* The transposition of the novel on screen was realized by the director Peter Jackson, who decided to divide it into three parts*: The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012), *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (2013) and *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (2014). Adapting the novel on screen was a challenge for the director because as he affirmed in an interview:

> "*The Hobbit* was written in such particular style that Tolkien, you know, he wrote it like a children's bed side story. It was always going to be very difficult to adapt because it's just such different…it is connected to *The Lord of the Rings*, but it is such different. It always made me nervous, it really made me kind of unsure about to do it. […] What ultimately changed things was saying that rather than adapting just *The Hobbit*, we would be taking the appendices and notes that Tolkien wrote much later on, where he was connecting *The Hobbit* in *The Lord of the Rings* and to treat these three movies that, basically, are going to lead to the three *Lord of the Rings* because that was really the point. […] We're coming at it from a different direction for sure."[294]

Jackson was aware that translating *The Hobbit* would be quite hard because the main problem was not only the complex process of mythopoeia elaborated by Tolkien, but also the need for a sense continuity between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In order to do that, Jackson studied Tolkien's works and, in addition, he tried to find the most efficient strategy to reproduce the voice of the author on screen. To quote him:

> "Tolkien's voice is very dominant in *The Hobbit*, it sounds like he's reading you a story. His whimsy and sense of humour is kind of it that you can almost hear him talking as you read the story. He is the narrator of the story and, obviously, we don't have that in the film and we can't have it in the film, so the voice of the characters is why you tell a story and film that what they say, in the way they interact and the decision they make and the conflict between them and all of those characters things are what drives the story."[295]

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[294] Peter Jackson, *The Hobbit* 'Peter Jackson'- Reason for changes from *The Hobbit* book, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Q51QDWz50g, last access: 19.12.2018.
[295] *Ibidem.*

To insert at least a part of Tolkien's ability as narrator, Jackson took advantage of all his characters and, by so doing, they all became equally important, and contributed to the development of the story and sense of order. This need derives from the fact that Tolkien expects *The Hobbit* to be the genesis of *The Lord of the Rings* and, in fact, the adventure of Bilbo and the dwarves is mentioned at the beginning of the first volume of the trilogy. Furthermore, it is also important to remember that before publishing the final version, Tolkien re-worked on *The Hobbit* and modified some aspects of the story, such as the names of characters and some aspects of the plot. For example, as for characters, Gandalf was not the wizard, but the chief Dwarf and, as for the plot, the order of some chapters and sequences changed. For instance, some descriptions of the dark forest Mirkwood were eliminated.[296] Undoubtedly, Jackson spent a lot of time finding out the relation existing between these works to create a coherent movie. Hence, the process of adaptation is a laborious task inasmuch as screenwriter and director try to find the most valid strategies to use to maintain the tone of the original source in all its components. It possible to assume, therefore, that adaptation is one of the many forms of translation. Both activities, in fact, are communicative acts that involve the presence of a source and of a target text.[297] Furthermore, as in the act of translating, where translators have control over the text and over their linguistic and pragmatic choices, the process of adaptation also depends on the decisions made by the adapters. In both cases, the processes do not only involve an interpretation of the text, but also a subsequent approach to the source, which is influenced by the cultural system and ideology.[298]

Thus, every kind of adaptation requires a source, which furnishes relevant information that can be completely exploited or not; the choice depends on what the producer aims to re-proposed on screen.[299] According to the Van Leuven-Zwart's model, it is possible to analyse the process of cinematic adaptations in terms of modulation, modification and mutation.[300] Modulation refers to choice of the adapter to maintain aspects already described in the text, modification consists in the change of details or sequences of the source and mutation involves the addition of elements.[301] There are three approaches that

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[296] Rateliff John D., "*The Hobbit*: A Turning Point", in Lee Stuart, ed., *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, Wiley Online Library Online Books, 2014, pp. 119-132, pp. 120-121.
[297] Katarina Perdikaki, "Film Adaptation as Translation: An Analysis of Adaptation Shifts in *Silver Linings Playbook*", *Anafora* IV (2017), pp. 249-265, p. 249.
[298] *Idem*, pp. 251-252.
[299] Robert Stam, "The Dialogics of Adaptation", in James Naremore, ed., *Film Adaptation*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000, pp. 54-79, pp. 69-71.
[300] Van Leuven-Zwart's model, cit., in Perdikaki, *op. cit*., p. 252.
[301] Perdikaki, *op. cit*., p. 253.

can be used to transpose the chosen source: first, borrowing; second, intersection and last, fidelity or transformation.[302] Borrowing is the most frequently used technique and consists in the choice made by producer and screenwriter to work on a very well-known text to reach considerable success. By contrast, the technique of intersection aims to look back to the "aesthetic forms of one period" and connect them to the current cinematic techniques. The last approach is the most difficult one because of the question of fidelity. Producer and screenwriter decide how to work on their source and can chose whether or not to realize a transposition faithful to the letter or faithful to the spirit. Trying to adapt the source by being faithful to the letter means to realize a direct transposition of a literary work, so the focus is more on the content. So, all the elements of the original source are preserved. By contrast, being faithful to the spirit implies a free transposition of a literary work and the focus is on the emotional component and themes of the source.[303] The choice to adopt one approach rather than the other does not diminish the novel because, in both cases, every detail of the text contributes to the realization of the process of adaptation: all the syntactic forms allude to psychological and moral traits that characterizes the content of the text.[304] Thus,

> film is found to work from perception toward signification, from external facts to interior motivations and consequences, from the givenness of a world to the meaning of a story cut out of that world. Literary fiction works oppositely. It begins with signs (graphemes and words), building to propositions that attempt to develop perception. As a product of human language, it naturally treats human motivation and values, seeking to throw them out onto the external world, elaborating a world out of a story.[305]

The process of adaptation aims to create a connection between language and screen by taking advantage of the ability of human beings to adapt to different circumstances and overcome obstacles to reach their goals.[306]

In order to reproduce Tolkien's Middle Earth, Jackson faced three challenges: firstly, the reproduction of Tolkien's detailed descriptions of unfamiliar and epic lands; secondly, the mission of Thorin Oakenshield and lastly, the portrait of Bilbo and Thorin, the two heroes.[307] In order to elaborate Tolkien's remote lands and characters, Jackson

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[302] Andrew Dudley, "Adaptation", in James Naremore, *op. cit*., p. 29.

[303] *Idem*, pp. 29-32.

[304] André Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest", in James Naremore, *op. cit.,* pp. 19-20.

[305] Dudley, *op. cit*., p. 32.

[306] *Idem*, p. 33.

[307] Frank Riga, "From Children's Book to Epic Prequel: Peter Jackson's Transformation of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*", *Mythlore,* 32 (2014), pp. 99-118, p. 106.

decided to work with the movie conceptual designers Alan Lee and John Howe and the result was, according to Dan Hennah, one of their colleagues:

> a road movie, and in travelling that road, Bilbo and the Dwarves are discovering different contrasting cultures. We have to reflect the epic nature of the journey while being true to our collective vision of Tolkien's world. […] So, in terms of our world, the inspiration for these eastern locations would be Norway, Russia, even some Asian influence, although it is always just a suggestion.[308]

Hence, the two artistic directors tried to re-interpret familiar places to create unfamiliar ones, such as the episode in the cave of the Goblins, which, unlike in the book, is very well developed in the movie. The brief description provided by Tolkien was expanded and enriched of details that give the idea of a subterranean world. To achieve the result, film techniques such as cross-cutting, high-angle shots, longs shots and golden light were used to provide a sense of depth and claustrophobia.[309] To show the final effect:
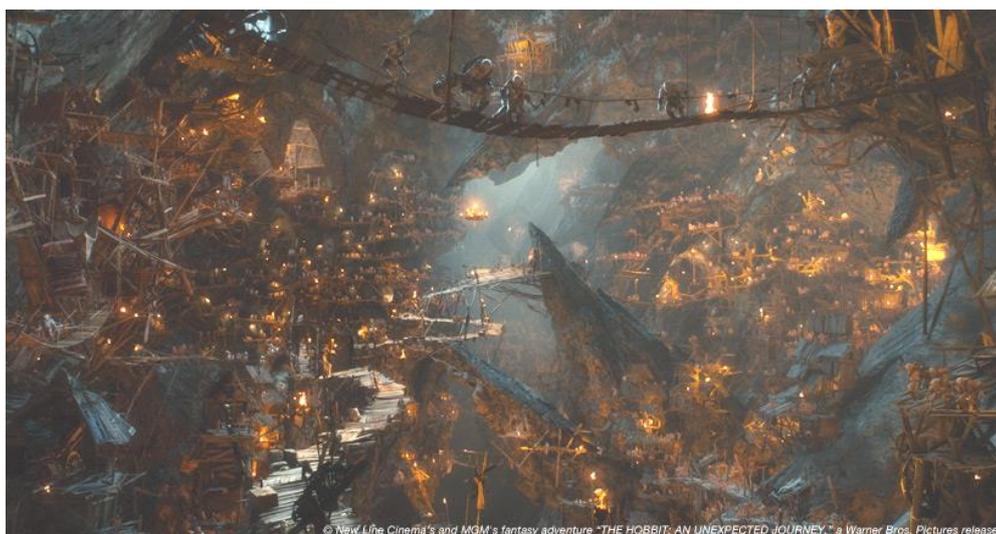
Figure 2. Goblin's Town

The sequence of the cave of the Goblins is not the only one that was re-elaborated. The Battle of the Five Armies too was re-examined. In the novel, in fact, there only few pages about it, while in the movie, it covers a significant part of the last movie. However, Jackson decided to work on the text not only by expanding sequences to provide a realistic effect, but also by modifying characters and passages of the novel. As for characters, the director inserted the figure of Azog the Defiler, which is not present in the novel and two female figures, the elves Tauriel and Lady Galadriel. What is more is that not only did

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[308] Dan Hennah, cit., in Riga, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.
[309] Riga, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

Jackson include two female characters that subvert the male universe of *The Hobbit* novel, but he also invents a love story between Tauriel and the dwarf Kili. As for passages of the novel, while in the novel Bilbo is the only one who meets Smaug in the Mountain, in the movie it is not so. The dwarves enter in the Mountain to help their little friend and fight together against the dragon. Then, when Smaug attacks Lake Town, he is killed by Bard, who mortally injures the beast with a black arrow. As in the novel, also in the movie, the death of Smaug is at the hand of Bard, what Jackson modified is Bard's temper and the circumstances in which he manages to kill the dragon. If, in the movie, Bard is a rebel, in the novel he is a good citizen. Furthermore, if in the movie the sequence of the death of the dragon is dramatic and make the audience perceive a sense of anxiety and suspense because the shoulder of Bard's son becomes the bow, in the novel readers do not know if Bard has children and the sequence about the death of Smaug is not thrilling, but rather flat.

Hence, it is possible to assume that Jackson's adaptation is neither completely faithful to the letter nor to the spirit because, by adding changes, the real tone of the book, which was originally thought for children, is lost. However, it seems that Jackson wanted to provide a new approach to the novel. He said, in fact, that he wanted to transpose *The Hobbit* by elaborating a version for "people who will never have seen the full story playing out in chronological order."[310] By so doing, the plot of *The Hobbit* was modified and it was no longer the transposition of a fantasy novel for children, but rather an adult prequel.

In order to realize a good transposition, cinematic techniques play a significant role. Framing, shot, angle, light, colour, costumes and sounds contribute to the realization of a good adaptation. Framing is "the technique that defines the boundaries of the image" and expresses its meaning. The shot determines how much the actor is seen, so it can be medium, full and long. An angle shot represents "the visual tone of a shot" and can be high angle, that means that the actor is an insignificant presence within the frame or, by contrast, it can be low angle and, in this case, the actors dominates the screen. Another typology of angle is the oblique one and it is very often used to introduce the point of view of an external narrator.[311] The framing of *The Hobbit* movies is 48 frames per second, a speed that differs from the common framings of cinema, which is usually 24 per second.

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[310] Riga, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
[311] Maureen Quinn, *The Adaptation of a Literary Text to Film. Problems and Cases in "Adaptation Criticism"*, Lewiston: Edwin University Press, 2007, pp. 33-42.

As Jackson affirmed, high frequency would be "more attractive."[312] This kind of frequency, therefore, improves the quality of the images by providing a realistic and, at the same time, magical effect. To show the resulting effect:

Figure 3. The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug

Among the cinematic techniques, cross cutting, intercutting, computer generated imagery and forced perspective have been the most used in the trilogy of *The Hobbit*. Cross cutting and intercutting allowed the creation of a coherent narrative. For example, in the case of the meeting between Bilbo and Gollum, while Bilbo finds himself in the most remote place of the cave of the Goblins, his fellows fight upstairs, and the audience can see both scenes. Then, when the dwarves reach the way out, they and Bilbo share the same scene: the dwarves run away and the hobbit manages to escape from Gollum. The resulting effect is that it is as if there were two cross-cut sequences combined that visually become one because characters share the same stage.[313] Forced perspective was fundamental to realize the height of the characters: hobbits and dwarves are small in size, while Gandalf is not. Forced perspective can create this effect and characters of different corporality can share the same scene. By using this technique, the image is divided into two parts, so that one becomes bigger than the other.[314] This is what audience sees:

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[312] Peter Jackson quoted in "Framing -*The Hobbit*", http://www.goldenlasso.net/framing-the-hobbit/, last access: 15.01.2019.
[313] Riga, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
[314] Allain Rhett, "How to make a hobbit with forced perspective", https://www.wired.com/2012/12/how-to-make-a-hobbit-with-forced-perspective/, last access: 15.01.2019.

Figure 4. Gandalf with Bilbo Baggins

If framings, shots and angles contribute to the realization of the impact of a movie, aspects such as light, colour, costumes and sounds are those that create the real tone cinematic production. Light in a movie is extremely important because it expresses the mood of the film. So, if a movie is well lighted, it conveys a joyful atmosphere typical of comedies and musical, for example. On the contrary, if there is the presence of many shadows, the atmosphere is dark, and it is typical of horror movies or drama.[315] Light can be classified as: low-key, high-key and three points. In low-key light, there is the presence of a light contrast, that means that there are many shadows and very few illuminated zones. High-key light, instead, - indicates a kind of illumination in which there is a slightest difference between dark and bright zones. Three points light is the most traditional kind of illumination used in cinema and consists in the combination of low and high-key light. Two lights are positioned in front of the actor, while the third one behind him.[316] Three points light effect was used in *The Hobbit* movies because it allowed both the creation of sense of calm and peace, think of the Shire in the first scene of the first movie, and fear and worry, as in the case of the meeting between Bilbo and Smaug. Therefore, this technique is the most efficient and provides a very realistic effect. The importance of light contributes to accent the colours, which are another relevant component in cinematic productions. They represent the psychological aspect of a movie.[317] In *The Hobbit* movies, there is a

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[315] Quinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.
[316] Kylieb 2007, "*The Hobbit*: An Unexpected Journey. Lighting Critique",
https://kylieb2007.wordpress.com/2014/08/29/the-hobbit-an-unexpected-journey-lighting-critique/, last
access: 16.01.2019.
[317] Quinn, *op. cit.,* pp. 43-44.

contraposition between cold and warm colours and this represents the dichotomy between good and evil. Thus, warm and bright colours have a positive connotation; by contrast, cold colours represent the wicked ones.

The phenomenon of cinematic transposition is, therefore, complicated and can be studied from three different perspectives. Firstly, adaptation can be considered as a formal entity or product. That means that the source chosen is re-interpreted by adopting more than one views. Secondly, it can be studied as a process of creation because it requires re-interpretation and re-creation, as it is a work of art. Lastly, it can be examined as a process of reception, which is strictly related to the notion of intertextuality. This concept alludes to the link existing between "the form of the source and the intersection of textual surface."[318] For example, by taking into consideration the dwarves in *The Hobbit*, Jackson managed to use Tolkien's fragmented descriptions of them without creating confusion. The ability of the team lied in their bravura to insert flashbacks and give importance to the voice of the characters to create the fragmented past of the ancestry of Durin and, by so doing, the figure of Thorin (Richard Armitage), one of the main characters, was intensified and recognized from the very beginning of the movie. Furthermore, excellent make up and costumes made the dwarves "visually distinctive", as Jackson stated.[319]

Costumes and make up are extremely important in a movie because they shape character's personality. By looking at the descriptions of the characters in *The Hobbit* novel, it is possible to observe that they were perfectly reproduced. For instance, Bilbo's clothes represent his status of Victorian bourgeois, while those of Thorin alludes both to his position as king and fighting spirit. So, costumes do not only convey credibility to the characters, but also to their nature. To exemplify:

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[318] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 7-8.
[319] Jackson, cit., in Riga, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Figure 5. Marvel Costumes   *Figure 6. Dwarves Cosplay Thorin*

Another relevant component that conveys meaning to a movie is sound, especially soundtrack music.[320] According to the composer Lawrence Kramer, music "connects us to the spectacle on screen by evoking a dimension of depth, of interiority, borrowed from the responses of our own bodies as we listen to the insistent production of rhythms, tone colours and changes in dynamics."[321] Thus, music provides the audience the possibility to access another dimension and, in the case of fantasy musical genre, the soundtrack impresses the audience because it is a melody that spectators have never heard before since it is rich of ancient musical tradition such as Celtic music.[322] In *The Hobbit*, music was composed by Howard Shore, who decided to use a Medieval and Renaissance scale to provide a sense of historicity. The technique mostly used at the time was the leitmotif, and it is not a chance in fact, that in *The Hobbit* movies the presence of leitmotif is what characterizes the melodies, especially the one at the beginning and of the ring.[323] There are many other leitmotifs that contribute to the creation of both characters and circumstances. For instance, if the leitmotif of the music thought for the Shire is joyful and conveys mirth[324]; by contrast the leitmotif that distinguishes Azog presents distorted notes that emphasize his cruelty.[325]

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[320] Quinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-44.
[321] Kramer, cit., in Hutcheon, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[322] Isabella Van Elferen, "Fantasy Music: Epic Soundtracks, Magical Instruments, Musical Metaphysics", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 24 (2013), pp. 4-24, pp. 7-8.
[323] Mark Richards, "*The Hobbit*: A Musical Journey", https://www.filmmusicnotes.com/the-hobbit-a-musical-journey/, last access: 16.01.2019.
[324] "*Lord of the Rings*. Sound of the Shire", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LML6SoNE7xE, last access: 16.01.2019.
[325] "Azog the Delfier Music", https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=NAgw6vUVMTU, in *The Hobbit*: A Musical Journey, site cit., last access: 16.01.2019.

63

The reason why Jackson decided to change *The Hobbit* is not only related to the question of creating a sense of continuity with *The Lord of the Rings*, but it also dealt with the expectations of the audience. In fact, in adaptation theory, it is stated that the audience expects a movie to be as faithful as possible when working with classics. By contrast, when dealing with popular texts such as those by Tolkien or J.K. Rowling, the audience is more flexible.[326] These texts are widely reproduced through different medias and they are not studied at school because they are not part of the canon: they are not classics, but rather popular texts. Unlike classics, which comprise "works that are more linguistically or aesthetically rewarding or more humanly moving than others"[327], popular texts are considered a form of mass entertainment, and it is this distinction that marks what is part of the canon and what is not.[328]

The question of the canon is very complex and raises many debates among intellectuals because of its porous nature. The canon, in fact, does not only refer to a selected group of texts, but it also deals with social, cultural and political contexts. Thus, it is not possible to affirm the presence of objective criteria to categorize a text as belonging or not to the canon. The consequence of this lack of valid criteria makes the question of the canon irksome inasmuch as it may question the validity of a cultural system. However, the parameter based on the aesthetic value of a work is absurd because by dividing, classifying and choosing some texts rather than other, the cultural component influences their perception.[329] In this view, "the so-called literary canon, the unquestioned great tradition of the natural literature has to be recognized as a construct, fashioned by particular reasons at a certain time."[330] By so affirming, it is possible to suggest that the canon is evanescent because it is subjected to the passing of time and the resulting development of societies.[331]

However, before the advent of printing and the emergence of mass culture, it was easier to determine which texts were part of the canon, ie: the works which had "some internally accepted code shared by all members of a community of belief."[332] Furthermore, canonical books "had the power to turn their readers into marvels of human adjustment"[333] and "survive because they are source of pleasure"[334]; on the contrary, non-canonical ones

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[326] Hutcheon, *op. cit*., pp. 28-29.
[327] Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon*, cit., p. 5.
[328] Gorak, *op. cit.,* p. *5.*
[329] Maria Renata Dolce, *Le letterature in inglese e il canone*, Lecce: Pensa Multimedia, 2004, p. 41.
[330] Quoted in Dolce, *op. cit*., p. 41.
[331] *Idem,* pp. 42-43.
[332] Quoted in Gorak, *op. cit*., p. 44.
[333] *Idem*, p. 73.
[334] *Ibidem.*

"can poison the moral character."[335] Starting-from the 18th and 19th centuries, things started to change: printing was invented and texts became more accessible. The result was the increase of readers and of works, which, rather than respecting the expected and alleged aesthetic norms of canonical works, were rich of engaging and captivating plots.[336] These texts were categorized as popular, which, according to Gramsci, included: novels whose aim was to depict a political ideology, romances, novels whose goal was to transmit revolutionary thoughts, historical novels, detective stories, gothic novels and adventure stories.[337] Gramsci adds that the authors of these novels were loved for their ability to stimulate the mind of readers through the creation of brilliant characters. In popular literature, in fact, the emphasis was on characters rather than on authors, readers were more interested in discovering the characters rather than their creator.[338]

Due to the spread of mass culture, the question of the literary canon has been re-examined and the main problem concerning the issue was to establish what was considered literature and what was not. Hence, the canon and its alleged uniformity and inflexibility was questioned and its internal structure was damaged because of the intrusion of popular texts. Thus, the raise of popular culture invaded the group of canonical works, which included those texts that were considered truly valid and must be studied inasmuch they were representative of a culture.[339] As Frank Leavis explains in his *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930),

> in any period, it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment. They are still a small minority, though a larger one, who are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgement by genuine personal response… The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, Hardy (to take major instances) but of recognising their latest successors constitute the consciousness of the race (or of a branch of it) at a given time… Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go. In their keeping…is the language, the changing idiom upon which fine living depends, and without which distinction

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[335] Gorak, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
[336] Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, https://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/g/gramsci/letteratura_e_vita_nazionale/pdf/gramsci_letteratura_e_vita_nazionale.pdf, pp. 190-191, last access: 16.01.2019.
[337] *Idem*, pp. 193-194.
[338] *Idem*, p. 223.
[339] Dolce, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

of spirit is thwarted and incoherent. By culture, I mean the use of such language.[340]

By reading his words, it was not only a matter of what was considered literature, but rather a clear portrait of the society of the time, which was far from being democratic. In this view, the canon appeared as a form of cultural hegemony because 'canonical texts' were selected by intellectuals such as writers, editors and critics. They decided whether or not include works in the literature of the élite and, by so doing, at the same time, they excluded other brilliant texts. It is in this dichotomy between external and internal that the canon is rooted and becomes synonymous of control over people's culture.[341] Think of the period of colonisation, where English literature was used as an instrument to control the mind of colonized people to create a fake collective identity.[342] Missionaries were sent to convert people to the true religion and their target was to prepare the future colonies to the arrival of white people. As for literature, the first stage of literary production included literature produced by imperial settlers, who wrote about their experience within new realities; while the second stage comprised the literature produced by Native people under the control of the Empire. Native people were educated to become intermediaries so that they could teach the culture of the British Empire. However, although some of them covered a privileged position within society and could write about their own story of the occupation, Native people's texts were revised in terms of style, language and ending inasmuch they did not respect the canonical standards and their contents were upset.

However, from the 19th century onwards, the canon "bursts from the framework of antiquity to meet the demands of modernity. Instead of functioning as a set of inherited rhetorical or poetic practices, it becomes a model for the whole imaginative life, an inspired pattern for future production across the borders of period of personal belief."[343] These words allude to the development of cinema and to the resulting further discrepancy between high and popular culture. Cinema, in fact, was and is a form of entertainment and early producers and directors decided not to transpose great masterpieces, but rather to use them as background to create forms of popular entertainment. Thus, the opposition between high and popular culture further

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[340] F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* cit., in Antony Easthope, *Literary into Cultural Studies*, London, New York: Routledge, 1991, pp. 3-4.
[341] Dolce, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.
[342] *Idem*, pp. 51-52.
[343] Gorak, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

increased and it was no longer the literature of the élite to hold the first place, but rather the popular one.[344] So, cinema too contributed to the dismantle of canonical standards.

Especially in the last two decades, the canon is still matter of discussion. Some scholars believe and support the idea that only certain texts are worthy and deserve to be part of the canon. But, this conservative view meets the opposition of a counterpart of intellectuals, who strongly suggest the complete abolition of the literary canon.[345] This ideology is represented by the emergence of a revolutionary approach to the study of popular literature: the field of cultural studies. This field adopts a sociological approach to the study of popular literature since it is based on the assumption that it can give voice to a new means of understanding the society itself.[346] By so affirming, supporters of this approach reject the rigidity of the canon and allude to its ephemeral nature because societies move on and continuously change. Thus, in the view of the scholars of the field of cultural studies, maintaining borders between literatures means refusing the multicultural reality in which nowadays people live.[347]

In the field of cultural and post-colonial studies, Edward Said, one of the most famous scholars of the field, proposes a revolutionary view of the canon. In his *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), the scholar expresses his view about the issue of the literary canon and affirms that rather than abolishing the canon, it would be better to re-invent it by keeping in mind the multicultural background that characterizes the world. This new modality of intending the canon should include all cultures without discriminations. Said believes that popular literature is not a threat, but rather a resource inasmuch it gives the possibility of looking at the world from different perspectives.[348] That is why he argues that there is no distinction between good and bad literature because every kind of literary production looks at the past. That means that every kind of texts is built on traditions which were already present in other texts and, for this reason, it is not possible to refer to the classics as the most valid forms of literary productions and to popular literature as the worst ones. Thus, every text hides allusions to other narrations, and that is why it is not possible to read a

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[344] Easthope, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.
[345] Dolce, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[346] Easthope, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
[347] Dolce, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[348] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 1-4.

text and not taking into account its literary references.[349] References to other sources, therefore, influence the act of interpretation and, for Said, the presence of different literary echoes in a text paves the way to a new modality of reading because interpreting not only allows people to be active while enjoying their readings, but also to reflect their own culture.[350] Hence, what the scholar emphasises is that there is always a strict relation between culture and literary production and it is not possible to make a distinction between them. They are, in fact, indissolubly correlated and one's own cultural ideology inevitably influences the perception of the texts itself. However, the fact that cultural ideology influences the approach to texts does not allude to a process of inclusion vs. exclusion, typical of the conservative idea of the canon, but rather it should stimulate the interest towards every kind of literature. The point of Said is that every kind of literature must have its own voice because each has something to convey. In this view, it is, therefore, important to reach equality and to give voice to the other.[351]

However, there is still a strong resistance to the idea proposed by Said about the internal relation existing between texts. Accepting the presence of different cultures and the resulting varieties of traditions and values is still an obstacle which must be overcome. The consequence of this obtuse view is that, despite the development of globalization and multiculturalism, there are still shadows of hegemony and ideas of superiority, which bring to the creation of categories.[352] This lack of open-mindedness to new horizons implies the mistaken view of multiculturalism, which is considered a threat by conservatives. However, the truth is that multiculturalism is part of the history of human beings. It is absurd, therefore, to maintain borders between cultures in all their facets because, in one way or another, they all are interconnected. For this reason, insisting on preserving the canon is useless because it cannot express the multitude of voices that enrich literature.[353]

On the basis of this view, it is possible to assume that the potential of popular literature is that it looks at the past and offers a picture of the present and of the future since it raises questions. Popular literature, therefore, has nothing worse than classical literature, in fact, it may appear more complicated because of its internal and hidden

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[349] Said, *op. cit.,* pp. 74-75.
[350] *Idem*, pp. 62-66.
[351] *Idem*, p. 68.
[352] Dolce*, op. cit.,* p. 43.
[353] *Idem*, p. 48.

structure. Drawing from literary productions of the past implies their re-reading and the subsequent process of re-interpretation.[354] That means that, in popular literature, the past is re-inserted and re-created in order to teach something and to create a new myth. When speaking about mythology, one refers to "the body of inherited myth in any culture"[355] and to "an important element of literature, which is a means of extending mythology."[356] However, providing a definition of the term myth is not as immediate as it could seem because myth includes many different sources, so it can be that one particular story paves the way to the creation of a myth and, in turn, this may function as a paradigm for mythology.[357] Because of its misleading origin, there are many different approaches to the term myth. According to Don Cupitt, "myth is paradigmatic, but there is no pure paradigm."[358] In other words, according to his family-resemblance approach:

> We may say that a myth is typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypical or universal significance which is recounted in a certain community and is often linked with a ritual; that it tells of the deeds of superhuman beings such as gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts; that it is set outside historical time in primal or eschatological time or in the supernatural world, or may deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history; that the superhuman beings are imagined in anthropomorphic ways, although their powers are more than human and often the story is not naturalistic but has the fractured, disorderly logic of dreams; that the whole body of a people's mythology is often prolix, extravagant and full of seeming inconsistencies; and finally that the work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide action or legitimate. We can add that myth-making is evidently a primal and universal function of the human mind as it seeks a more-or-less unified version of the cosmic order, the social order and the meaning of the individual's life.[359]

Cupitt suggests that the function of myth is social because it allows the creation of a sense of belonging to a culture and, in turn to a community. Hence, in his view, despite its connotations, myth functions as a glue. However, Cupitt does not reflect upon the importance of subjectivity in the interpretation of myth. A mythographer, in fact, can decide whether or not to emphasise all the paradigms of the myth.[360]

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[354] Dolce, *op. cit.*, p. 154.
[355] Laurence Coupe, *Myth*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 4.
[356] *Ibidem.*
[357] Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[358] *Ibidem.*
[359] Don Cupitt, *The World to Come* quoted in Coupe, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.
[360] Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

If Cupitt thinks that there are inevitable steps to respect in order to create a myth and that its author is unknown since myth belongs to the primordial origin of the universe, Kenneth Burke, a literary critic, rather believes that the presence of at least a few people in the moment of the creation of a myth is an indispensable prerequisite to its creation.[361] For him, "for both originators and interpreters, myth might offer, for the duration of the narrative, not just a provisional paradigm but an approximation to totality."[362] In other words, it is not only important to understand what the myth is doing, but also what it is saying. The idea of totality recalls the idea of perfection because, while dealing with myths, one tends to justify every aspect, whether positive or negative and consider it perfect.[363] The philosopher Paul Ricoeur agrees with Burke that myth can be explained, but suggests that people "must go beyond the modern view of myth as false explanation to a sense of its exploratory significance and its contribution to understanding."[364] Hence, in his view, myth has a symbolic structure and can be seen as a means of discovery and revelation. His philosophical thinking represents myth as a "dimension of modern thought"[365] and as a horizon because it functions as "a disclosure of unprecedented worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual worlds."[366] According to this view, not only does the myth imply ideas of order and perfection, but it also alludes to the existence of other dimensions to discover.[367]

When speaking about myth, it is important to point out that interpreting a myth, mythography, is different from making a myth, mythopoeia; however, there is a strong connection between these two processes.[368] Since myth generates myth, it is inevitable to wonder what Tolkien's *The Hobbit* conveys and why it was adapted only 75 years after its first publication. The answers to these questions deal with the new conception of myth in the modern and contemporary eras. If, in the traditional view, myth simply symbolized the access to another dimension; by contrast, in modern and contemporary eras, it starts hiding meanings that one should find out and investigates the role and nature of human beings. Thus, these new myths

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[361] Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
[362] Kenneth Burke, "Doing and Saying: Thoughts on Myth, Cult and Archetype" quoted in Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[363] Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[364] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, quoted in Coupe, *op. cit.,* p. 8.
[365] *Ibidem.*
[366] *Ibidem.*
[367] *Idem*, pp. 8-9.
[368] Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

offer a lens which can be used to see human identity in its social and cultural context – they can lock us up in stock reactions, bigotry and fear, but they are not immutable, and by unpicking them, the stories can lead to others. Myths convey values and expectations which are always evolving, in the process of being formed, but – and this is fortunate – never set so hard they cannot be changed again.[369]

Applying this concept to Tolkien's fantasy novel, I suggest that there are many aspects which one should focus on: firstly, nature; secondly, characters and lastly, the dichotomy between good and evil. As suggested in chapter two, to create the beautiful landscapes of the Middle Earth, Tolkien thought about England before the industrial revolution. All the landscapes described in *The Hobbit* are not contaminated by any forms of technology and this alludes to the virulent opposition of Tolkien to technological development.[370] His hate for technology derives from his experience in war, where he saw "the devastation caused by then state-of-the-art machinery during his time in the trenches."[371] From that dramatic moment of his life, Tolkien rejected modernity and its technological innovations, so much so, he rarely drove the car because he did not want to contribute to the damage of the environment.[372] Thus, he loved nature and in *The Hobbit*, not only does nature signals Tolkien's profound love for the ecosystem, but also the opposition between good and evil. Think of the description of the Shire, which seems to be an idyllic place and compare it to that of the forest of Mirkwood. While the first one conveys joy and peace, the other creates a sense of anxiety. So, I suggest that the first reading of Tolkien's new myth must be interpreted as an ecological metaphor. Both Tolkien's descriptions and Jackson's adaptations of landscapes provide the possibility not only of traveling with imagination, but also of reflecting upon the effects of technology on the world. If one looks around, there are fewer and fewer uncontaminated lands, and the few still existing are in danger because, unlike hobbits, which are happy with very little, human beings are not. They are involved in uninterrupted processes of 'development' as if the period of colonisation was not finished yet. Nowadays, mankind is the only responsible for the destruction of the planet, as in the cases of global warming or the huge quantities of rubbishes ending up in the sea. The landscapes in *The Hobbit* novel

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[369] Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 189.
[370] Anne Amison, "An Unexpected Guest", *Mythlore*, 25 (2006), pp. 127-136, p. 133.
[371] *Ibidem.*
[372] *Ibidem.*

and movies clearly show a primordial origin of the world, another era from which mankind should learn how to respect the environment.

Another reading of the Tolkienesque new myth can be elaborated by looking at the characters, especially at Bilbo and Thorin, the two heroes of both movies and novel. I think that the most engaging view of the hero is provided by the literary critic Northrop Frye, who, in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), classifies heroes by following the paradigms proposed by Aristotle. The philosopher thought about heroes not only as men characterized by a strong power of action, but also as someone closer to common human beings.[373] According to Frye, there are five kinds of heroes and the most relevant one to my work belongs to the fourth category and he is described in these terms:

> if superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the low mimetic mode.[374]

Both in the novel and in the movies, Bilbo is neither a God or a semi-god; he has no supernatural powers, but rather an admirable humanity. The hobbit, as described in the previous chapter, is not the carbon copy of a human being, yet he belongs to the human race. In his adventure, Bilbo experiences nostalgia, pain and fright, but also joy, affection and happiness. All these feelings underline his humanity and, inevitably, readers cannot avoid identifying with him. Obviously, it is impossible to think and speak about Bilbo Baggins by using the same words one would use for Beowulf; however, his humanity, morality and loyalty represent a strong form of heroism.

In the movies, the figure of Bilbo (Martin Freeman) is completely revolutionized by Jackson; not for his hobbit nature, so his love for food and comforts, but rather for his role in the story. If in the novel there is a development of the figure of Bilbo, so from a hobbit described as reluctant in taking part in adventures, coward and without spirit of initiative to one mature and self-confident, in the movie it is not so because the potential of Bilbo is highlighted from the very beginning. I shall take as example the scene where Bilbo is captured by the trolls. If in the book, he is very passive and does not know what to do; by contrast, in the movie he saves time and

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[373] Northrope Frye, *op. cit.*, in Coupe, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
[374] Coupe, *op. cit.,* pp. 160-161.

gives Gandalf the chance to act without being seen.[375] Thus, from the very beginning, the hobbit is represented as an active character, with great potential and heroic qualities. Bilbo is, therefore, not "child-like" as Tolkien had thought, but rather an adult-like and his heroism lies in his moral courage.[376] Thus, Jackson modified the nature of the novel, which is no longer simply a novel for children that functions as bildungsroman, but also a novel for adults because of its complexity, which "create an idealized cognitive mode of Tolkienesque fantasy."[377]

The antithesis of Bilbo Baggins is represented by Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage). Thorin represents the ancient conception of the hero: "one who is very great indeed, but who cannot yield and grow into true wisdom until he pays the ultimate price."[378] From the very beginning of both movie and novel, Thorin is a hero. What changes is his behaviour, while in the book Thorin's noble ancestry is clear from his entrance into Bilbo's home and from his rhetoric; in the movie, by contrast, the focus is on his personality rather than on his physical appearance and skills. The hero, in fact, has a very complex personality, like that of Macbeth. To quote the actor: "I look at the character of Thorin and see echoes of Macbeth: the megalomania, the obstinacy, the tragedy of snowballing toward an inevitable fate he cannot escape because it is the path he has to tread."[379]

By looking at the descriptions of the hobbit and the dwarf, it is inevitable to notice that, while Bilbo is the product of re-interpretations of traditional myths, Thorin is not. I suggest that this contraposition between new and ancient heroes is realized to further mark the emergence of the sociological and cultural aspect of the movie and to emphasize the new conception of myth. Although Bilbo does not reflect the typical contemporary hero of the Marvel Universe, he is the purest because he is always human. In the case of Spider-Man, instead, Peter Parker is a teenager who attends high school, but in dangerous situations, he abandons his being a common person to become special. Bilbo, by contrast, never loses his humanity or hides his identity. Despite his difference with the Marvel heroes, Bilbo has nothing on them. Like the Marvel heroes, also Bilbo shares the Secondary World described by Tolkien in his

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[375] Peter Jackson, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens and Guillermo del Toro, New Line Cinema, Metro- Goldwyn- Mayer, Warner Bros Pictures, 2012.
[376] Riga, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
[377] Marek Oziewicz, "Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit*: A Beautiful Disaster", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts,* 27 (2016), pp. 248-269, p. 257.
[378] Riga, *op. cit.,* p. 116.
[379] Richard Armitage quoted in Riga, *op. cit.,* p. 115.

theory of sub-creation, but what differentiates them is their nature.[380] While Bilbo is a figure from which one can learn self-confidence, Marvel heroes do not have the same quality and give only false hopes. I assert that it is in the humanity of Bilbo that one can find the new myth. While reading or watching *The Hobbit*, readers and spectators sympathize with Bilbo from the very beginning probably because of his appearance and many of them could even see a lot of themselves in him and in his routine. Clearly, what people read and watch seems to be with no defects: Bilbo wakes up, has breakfast, smokes his pipe and then he is ready to start his day. We do more or less the same, but quicker than Bilbo because 'time is money'. Bilbo's routine should make people think about the little pleasures of life, which is completely organized, busy and seems to be a race against time. The life of hobbits should make people realize that sometimes it is necessary to take time for themselves. Thus, Bilbo is our antithesis and what is also interesting to observe is that, for some aspects, Bilbo shares the ineptitude that characterizes men and women. By so affirming, I mean that many people would abandon their boring lives to start other stimulating experiences. I believe that everybody waits for something unexpected and revolutionary.

However, what conveys the real heroism of Bilbo is his conception of friendship. Friendship and loyalty are related and, in both movies and novel, they mark the opposition with the evil. Bilbo, despite his scant consideration, never abandons his friends and he is always ready to help them. Friendship, and all its implications, signals the purity of Bilbo's soul, who does not mind if his friends are not hobbits, but rather dwarves, elves or humans. He cannot see the difference and, neither when the dragon tries to make him doubts about the loyalty of the dwarves, Bilbo changes his mind. Neither in the book, nor in the movie, Bilbo seems to have preconceptions, but rather he is extremely curious and fascinated by what he discovers during his adventure. Curiosity and real friendship, therefore, seems to be the only means through which the other can be appreciated and considered a resource. It is through the meeting with the other that Bilbo realizes who he really is and manages to transmit a message of tolerance, think of the meeting with Gollum. However, if one should translate Bilbo's goodness into our reality, I argue that one would not find positive feedback because racism is still rooted in society, which does not seem to accept changes, but paradoxically wants more and more. Instead of taking advantage of the

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[380] A. G. Holdier, "In Superheroes Stories: The Marvel Cinematic Universe as Tolkienesque Fantasy", *Mythlore*, 36 (2018), pp. 73-88, pp. 74-75.

presence of different cultures, the main idea is that they infect a country by depriving it of its identity. Thus, the concept of the colour line elaborated by the sociologist William Du Bois is still present. The colour line is not a physical barrier, but rather a mental one. It is determined by historical facts which create the opposition between black and white, and it is caused by a distribution of material and symbolic resources among races. Those who are subjected to the colour line are those who are considered a danger and this implies a process of exclusion.[381]

As can be noted, the figure of Bilbo and his message of tolerance through his conception of friendship provides people a lot of food for thoughts. His being a hero, which is encapsulated in his humanity should not only make people reflect upon the importance of being open-minded, but also upon the concept of friendship. I am not sure if nowadays it is possible to refer to friendship by thinking about a relationship of the same quality of that described and transposed in *The Hobbit.* What I see around me is based on opportunism and lack of communication, many young adults, in fact, create virtual relationships, rather than spending time with people of their same age and learning how to relate. By so doing, they grow up insecure, weak and unable to make decisions. I suggest that Bilbo and his ability to create real relationships should be considered the starting point to reflect upon the importance of friendship in people's life because not only does friendship enrich ourselves, but it also helps us to better understand how to relate with the other and how to find compromises with ourselves because everybody should be aware that nothing is due. I argue that in all kinds of human relationships there should be the principle of give-and-take, nobody can demand the exclusive. Bilbo and his strong sense of loyalty manages to concretize one of the most beautiful relationships among human beings and his affection for his friend should make people ponder the current lack of sincere feelings and relations.

If in *The Hobbit* movies and novel, friendship represents the good, the ring represents the evil and its consequences on people. While the heroism of Bilbo can be used as a device to depict the dynamicity of the new myth, the ring should make people think about the effects of evil, which by translating them in contemporary terms, could allude to bad attitudes, such as drug or alcohol addictions, that bring people to become slave of themselves. The same form of addiction is the same readers

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[381] Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh, "La finzione della razza: la linea del colore e il meticciato", in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. Gaia Giuliani, Firenze, Milano: Le Monnier Università, Mondadori education, 2015, pp. 213-227, pp. 218-219.

and spectators are presented with in *The Hobbit* through the ring and the treasure of Smaug. The ring deeply influences the life of Gollum, he cannot help it and, for Bilbo, it is the same when he makes the ring its own. Thorin too experiences a status of addiction when he regains the treasure, which makes him change. Evil, therefore, causes alterations. I suggest that through the figures of the ring and of the treasure, the new myth may convey hints at current forms of addiction that characterize contemporary society.

It should be by now clear that myth constitutes society and every single aspects of it can be the starting point to create something new. As Roland Barthes suggests in his *Mythologies* (1957):

> myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be and object, a concept or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form. […] since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writings of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, and all these can serve as a support to mythical speech.[382]

Barthes refers to new myths because, as he clarifies in his definition, myth is part of society: when people go to the cinema, they experience a new myth. Although it is difficult to recognize it immediately, myth is part of people's life. Thus, according to Barthes, everything can be a myth because the "universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions."[383] This means that there are no useless objects because all of them can be manipulated and enriched by conveying them a social usage, think of the ring for instance. The scholar adds that, since myth is a type of speech, it is subject matter of research of semiology, "a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content."[384] Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the most relevant figures of the field of semiology, identifies the presence of a relation between signifier and signified and the link between them creates a third term, the sign, which corresponds to the concrete word. So, the signified is the concept, the signifier is the mental representation of it and the sign is the final product, the concrete entity.[385] In myth too, there is the presence of this schema, however, the process is not the same because myth is established on another entity. To quote Barthes:

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[382] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated from the French by Annette Lavers, New York: The Noonday Press, 1991, pp. 107-108.
[383] *Idem*, p. 107.
[384] *Idem*, p. 110.
[385] *Idem*, pp. 111-112.

myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. Myth sees in them only the same raw material; their unity is that they all come down to the status of a mere language.[386]

By looking at his words, it is possible to deduce that the most important element is the sign, the total product. However, although myth is reduced to mere language, this does not imply the loss of its meaning. In fact, "myth has at his disposal an unlimited mass of signifiers."[387] Myth does not aim to depict rational truth, but rather to illustrate human history through creativity. Thus, myth represents the primordial origin of human beings and contributes to the creation of their history. By playing such fundamental role, myth embraces culture and creates it.[388] Thus, on the basis of what has been suggested here, *The Hobbit* movies and novel show the origin of the history of human beings and its development. Their mythopoetic meaning it could allude to another dimension, so the fact that myth allows people to discover new worlds; or to the fact that myth hides something that must be imagined; or to the link between past, present and future possibilities.[389]

Thus, the Secondary World of Tolkien depicts the primordial origin of our contemporary era, which like its origin, is characterized by the presence of monstrosity. Monsters, in fact, are recurrent figures both in new and ancient myths and they contribute to the praise of the qualities of the hero. Hence, myth

shows something, it's a story spoken to a purpose, it issues a warning, it gives an account which advises and tells often by bringing into play showing of fantastical shape and invention – monsters. Myth defines enemies and aliens and in conjuring them up they say who we are and what we want, they tell stories to impose structure and order.[390]

Monsters play a decisive role in the process of mythography. Taking into considerations the monsters Bilbo must fight during his adventure, it is possible to further analyse his heroism and his contribution to the creation of a new myth. Bilbo is extremely good, however, driven by instinct of survival, he must kill to save his life

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[386] Barthes, *op. cit.,* p. 113.
[387] *Idem,* pp. 117-118.
[388] *Idem*, pp. 117-120.
[389] Coupe, *op. cit.,* pp. 196-197.
[390] *Idem*, p. 185.

and that of his fellows. I suggest that this aspect of Bilbo does not investigate the relation with the other, but rather the common instinct that characterizes mankind. Furthermore, I argue that monsters in *The Hobbit* represent the vicissitudes of life. Although, in the movie, the process of maturation of Bilbo is not as explicit as in the novel and he is from the very beginning a very active character, I think that the fact that he must fight against creatures, alludes not to a primordial instinct, but rather to all the obstacles people must overcome during their lives. By resuming the monsters Bilbo must fight, so trolls, goblins, wolves and spiders, it is possible to observe that, while fighting against trolls, goblins and wolves, Bilbo is not alone, whereas, when in the forest he realizes that he is alone, he must act on his own and rely on his own strength. Fighting alone is a challenge for Bilbo, who finally realizes that he does not always need help by someone else. He is intelligent and strong enough to find a solution to his vicissitudes on his own. Thus, the presence of monstrosity signals the process of personal growth and on the basis of this view, I suggest that although the movie is considered as addressed to an adult-like, it is rooted in the structure of the Bildungsroman.

Thus, new myths not only contribute to the realisation of culture, but they also function as source to translate current reality. According to this perspective, new myths must not be read in allegorical terms, but rather as a translation of the primary world to the secondary one. I argue that the aim of Tolkien in *The Hobbit* was not only to recall and combine elements belonging to different literary traditions, but also to depict the struggle of the periods in which he lived. He had to experience the situation of Britain in the 19th and 20th centuries: from the end of the Victorian age to the two War Worlds and their dramatic consequences. So, if the 1937 *The Hobbit*, was a translation of the far from peaceful reality in which Tolkien lived, Jackson's movies are a translation of our world, which like that of Tolkien, is not all fun and games. In fact, it is a world full of violence, opportunism and avarice, and lacks in tolerance and real love. Bilbo, and his humanity, gives this world a chance to improve. The hobbit is the new myth, he is the means to express a message of tolerance and justice.

On the basis of this overview, the Tolkienian myth is a very powerful instruments schools should take advantage of because it depicts current problematics and investigates forms of discrimination and multiculturalism. However, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is not studied at school and I argue that a considerable part of young students does not even know that *The Hobbit* movies are a transposition of a literary

work. That is a shame because they ignore the existence of popular literature and its relation with their reality. I suggest that *The Hobbit* could be a worthy novel to read at school firstly because it can be read by an audience of all ages and, secondly, because it investigates the question of multiculturalism, which is what nowadays characterizes European schools. Promoting cultures through every possible means, in fact, is one of the aims of education systems, however, it seems that there are still forms of resistance caused by the question of the canon which has not been dismantled yet. Not being part of the canon is the defect of *The Hobbit* and the consequence is that it is considered less important than texts written by John Milton or Mary Shelley. The result is that Tolkien's novel seems unworthy of study, despite its notoriety and continuous adaptation in different forms.

According to the analysis I have carried out up to now, this does not make sense. In fact, I suggest that cinema and its adaptation of the Tolkienian new myth functions as a pioneer to pave the way to a new approach towards the study of literature and understanding of society. As I have explained, there cannot be a distinction between classics and popular texts because they are indissolubly correlated, even in cinematic adaptations. The fact that *The Hobbit* was thought of as a novel for children, does not imply that its content is banal, in fact, it is the opposite. The linguistic choices made by Tolkien, his creation of a magical dimension allude to one of the most complex and hard periods for humanity: colonialism and all its implications. Clearly, the tone of Tolkien is not the same of Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness* (1899), but in both texts the authors try to discover and overcome the boundaries between the self and the other, white and black, civilise and savage. Furthermore, both texts are interesting starting point to analyse the power of Western society on colonized people and the terrible consequences on them. While Conrad investigates the issue through realistic characters, Tolkien realizes it by re-examining ancient paradigms. The fact that Tolkien created something magical and decided not to convey implicit meanings like Conrad does not imply a diminutive value, but it should rather function as an incentive to a new approach to reading. Despite their differences, high and popular literature coexist and I argue that they could be used by teachers to create stimulating reflexions and activities since both refer to historical issues that can be used to read our world. I cannot understand why students are led to think about literature only in terms of plays and sonnets and not also as dynamic subject that is closer to them than they might think. The point is that, although the issue of the

literary canon has been debated for a long time, it is still rooted and deeply influences the conception of literature, which offers the chance to better understand not only the passing of the time, but also to know better ourselves and the world in which we live. Through a journey in the magical world of Tolkien, readers are brought to re-think about the nature of mankind and reflect on their own culture; while dealing with every kind of literary production, they should also be aware that culture influences their own perception of the quality of a text. In the case of *The Hobbit*, creating this idea of cultural influences within a text has not been easy.

The Hobbit belongs to fantasy literature, a branch of the fantastic which rather than being a proper literary genre, is considered a modality of writing because of its porous nature. Through the study of Tzvetan Todorov and his analysis of fantastic literature, it was possible not only to investigate the evanescent essence of the fantastic, but also to look at its various modalities of writing and, especially at fantasy. Then, by mentioning the relevance of Tolkien in the development of the fantasy 'genre', I have highlighted his theories of mythology and sub-creation. Tolkien, in fact, paved the way to a new reading of the fantasy world and his theories undoubtedly make his texts rich in terms of content and literary echoes. In his theories, Tolkien suggested the existence of two dimensions, the primary and the secondary world, and their correlation. These two worlds in fact represent the same reality, but what takes place is a process of translation of the primary world, which is re-interpreted by looking at the past. As for mythology, the project of Tolkien was to create a mythology for Britain, thus, by taking advantage of his wide cultural baggage, he managed to create his own mythical corpus by looking at ancient paradigms.

His process of mythography and the subsequent mythopoetic makes his novels rich and entangled. In -*The Hobbit*, in fact, there is the presence of relevant literary narrations such as *Beowulf* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but also allusions to the period of colonialism. Discovering the presence of such famous literary works has been the most engaging part of the analysis because it caused the raise of questions and perplexities about the intrinsic nature of the novel. Finding out the different literary backgrounds and realizing that *The Hobbit* is much more than a novel for children was initially confusing. Its internal structure made me think about the reason why *The Hobbit* is not studied at school despite its notoriety on screen. In the last part of the research I tried to clarify that fantasy narrations such as *The Hobbit* or *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling are not inserted in a proper literary genre, in fact, they are

considered transient novels which are known for their notoriety on screen or computer games, but not in literature due to the question of the literary canon. Exploring the question and the debates about the canon, by taking into consideration especially the importance of the field of cultural studies and its sociological approach to literature made me inevitably think about the cinematic adaptation of the novel on screen.

Starting-from the theory of adaptation by mentioning the techniques mostly used in *The Hobbit* movies, it was possible to analyse the relevance of Tolkien's mythopoetic in the process of transposition and the subsequent discovery of the dynamicity of myth. Thus, through the investigation of the views of myth and its pragmatic aspect, I could carry out a reading of Jackson's re-elaboration of the brilliant project of Tolkien. The author of the 1937 novel, in fact, did not want to convey the idea that the adventure of Bilbo corresponded to an allegorical journey, but he rather aimed at re-writing the reality around him, which would later be undoubtedly changed by a new global war. Hence, in my view what Jackson attempted was to apply Tolkien's theory of sub-creation to re-write the world of the 21st century and the result was the creation of a new myth.

By focusing on the figure of Bilbo and Thorin, it was possible to investigate the role and ancient conception of myth. Bilbo, in particular, and his huge humanity represents the real essence of the new myth and its purposes. Bilbo, for me at least, transmits a message of tolerance and justice. Reading the new myth is subjective since, it is true that it represents society and its continuous development, but each of us perceives it differently because of political ideas or mere indifference. Using popular literature as a form of entertainment is a brilliant device to make people realize that they can be heroes of new myths because, like Bilbo Baggins, they all have a heroic side and wait for the right moment to escape from "our hole in the ground"[391] to discover new horizons. I contribute to the creation of this world but, exactly like Bilbo I am "only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all."[392]

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[391] J.R.R. Tolkien, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[392] "*The Hobbit* - The parting of Bilbo and Gandalf", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAganBGL_44, last access: 22.01.2019

Summary

Il testo preso in esame per la realizzazione di questo lavoro è il romanzo fantasy *The Hobbit* (1937) di J.R.R. Tolkien. L'obiettivo è scoprire il mondo magico della Terra di Mezzo attraverso lo studio dei processi di mitografia e mitopoietica e la conseguente creazione di miti e nuovi miti. Nel romanzo si racconta l'avvincente avventura di Bilbo Baggins, uno hobbit benestante e piuttosto apatico la cui routine viene sconvolta dall'arrivo di uno stregone di nome Gandalf, che lo coinvolge in un'avventura. Dapprima riluttante ma poi spinto da un inspiegabile spirito di avventura, lo hobbit abbandona la sua amata Contea per intraprendere un viaggio che gli cambierà la vita. L'idea del viaggio è il filo conduttore di questo studio. Ai lettori, infatti, viene chiesto di affiancare Bilbo e di condividere la sua avventura e il suo cambiamento.

Il lavoro si compone di tre capitoli: il primo riguarda la letteratura fantastica e la sua natura evanescente, il secondo consiste in un excursus delle principali fonti letterarie utilizzate da Tolkien e l'ultimo prende in esame l'adattamento cinematografico del romanzo e la sua rilevanza mitopoietica. Nella prima parte vengono presi in esame *La Letteratura Fantastica* di Tzvetan Todorov, teorico e studioso della letteratura in questione, e *L'Orrore Soprannaturale in Letteratura* di H.P. Lovecraft, padre delle storie horror. Todorov sostiene che il fantastico non sia un vero e proprio genere letterario, ma piuttosto un genere di frontiera, una modalità di scrittura che prevede un incontro faccia a faccia tra il protagonista e un evento inaspettato. Il momento dell'incontro con l'inspiegabile implica una scelta che sia il protagonista, sia il lettore devono compiere, ovvero credere o non credere a ciò che hanno visto o letto. Questa decisione costituisce un evento cruciale nelle narrazioni fantastiche in quanto corrisponde al momento dell'esitazione fantastica. La scelta di credere o meno all'inaspettato fa sì che il fantastico svanisca e prenda il nome di fantastico strano o meraviglioso. Il fantastico strano fatica ad accettare la presenza di forze sovrannaturali e prevede che le regole che governano la realtà possano fornirne una spiegazione. Per tanto, accettare o meno l'evento strano, dipende dalla percezione che il soggetto ha di quest'ultimo. Al contrario, il fantastico meraviglioso accetta la presenza di regole alternative e di eventi strani, che rimangono tali. Tuttavia, Todorov non si limita a classificare i diversi tipi di narrazione fantastica ma si occupa anche di raggrupparne i contenuti in due gruppi: i temi dell'io e i temi dell'altro. Il primo gruppo riguarda l'approccio che l'individuo adotta con la realtà, mentre il secondo riguarda i desideri più profondi dell'essere umano.

Le narrazioni fantastiche non sono solo caratterizzate dalla presenza di eventi strani ma anche da una forte componente emotiva. Secondo H. P. Lovecraft, i lettori devono essere coinvolti a tal punto da spaventarsi tanto quanto il protagonista quando si trovano di fronte ad un evento che irrompe e sconvolge la realtà. Nei testi fantastici è quindi fondamentale la creazione di un'atmosfera di continua tensione e suspense che generi nel lettore un senso di paura e timore.

Il tipo di narrazione fantastica che più interessa questo studio è il fantasy. Sebbene ci sia una forte assonanza tra i due termini, tanto da sembrare quasi sinonimi, il fantasy e il fantastico identificano due diversi tipi di narrazione e la differenza sostanziale la si riscontra nel setting. Mentre il fantasy necessita la creazione di una dimensione alternativa che guarda alla realtà, il fantastico ha come setting il mondo reale. L'evento strano, infatti, non si insinua in un mondo parallelo o magico ma nella realtà vera e propria e ne rompe gli schemi. La narrazione fantasy è stata a lungo oggetto di studio di J.R.R. Tolkien, noto professore di letteratura inglese e filologia. Nel suo saggio intitolato *Sulle Favole*, Tolkien analizza la relazione tra realtà e mondo fantasy che identifica con il principio di "profonda consistenza della realtà." Questo principio è cruciale nell'elaborazione della teoria della sub-creazione, teoria che consiste nell'abilità di creare un mondo secondario prendendo come punto di partenza il mondo primario. Tuttavia, la creazione del mondo secondario, non avviene solo tramite un processo di traduzione del mondo reale ma anche guardando alla mitologia. È attraverso la rielaborazione di narrazioni leggendarie che Tolkien costruisce il mondo secondario di *The Hobbit*. In particolare, riprende leggende norrene come l'*Edda Poetica*, l'*Edda di Snorri*, la *Saga dei Volsunghi*, narrazioni epiche come il *Beowulf*, testi medievali tra cui *Sir Orfeo* e *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Sir Gawain e il cavaliere verde).

Capire come queste fonti si intrecciano è oggetto di studio della seconda parte del lavoro, nella quale viene condotta un'analisi intertestuale. Il capitolo, infatti, non racconta la trama del libro ma piuttosto mira ad evidenziare tutte le relazioni esistenti tra *The Hobbit* e le fonti maggiormente utilizzate dall'autore. Il punto di partenza riguarda i nomi dei personaggi principali: Bilbo, i nomi dei nani e Gandalf e di come questi non solo racchiudano tratti caratteristici dei personaggi ma provengano dalla *Profezia della Voluspa*, la prima narrazione dell'*Edda Poetica*. Ci si imbatte poi nella fonte maggiormente utilizzata dall'autore: il *Beowulf.* Riproponendo passaggi della narrazione epica e mettendoli a confronto con alcuni del romanzo fantasy, è invitabile notare i molteplici echi letterari per quanto riguarda la creazione del personaggio Gollum e del

drago Smaug e il tesoro. L'incontro tra Bilbo e il drago riprende, invece, quello tra Fáfnir e Sigurðr descritto nella *Saga dei Volsunghi*. La modalità con cui Bilbo risponde al drago quando quest'ultimo chiede informazioni sulla sua identità è enigmatica e ambigua tanto quanto quella del protagonista della saga.

Altro elemento interessante è l'anello e il modo in cui viene chiamato da Gollum: 'precious' (tesoro), infatti, è la stessa espressione usata in *Pearl*, un testo medievale, per indicare un oggetto prezioso. *Pearl* non è l'unico testo medievale di riferimento, anche *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* viene ripreso nel romanzo, in particolare in relazione a Mirkwood, la foresta che Bilbo e i suoi compagni devono attraversare per raggiungere la Montagna. Il romanzo è inoltre ricco di aspetti che rimandano ad una lettura coloniale e post coloniale, basti pensare a Beorn e alla sua inspiegabile rabbia e a Gollum e al suo stato di alienazione.

L'ultima parte del lavoro consiste nell'analisi dell'adattamento cinematografico del romanzo e della sua rilevanza mitopoietica, termine che allude alla creazione di miti. *The Hobbit* è stato adattato dal regista Peter Jackson in tre film: *Lo Hobbit: Un Viaggio Inaspettato* (2012), *Lo Hobbit: La Desolazione di Smaug* (2013) e *Lo Hobbit: La Battaglia delle Cinque Armate* (2014). Nel capitolo si analizza la teoria dell'adattamento e delle tecniche maggiormente utilizzate nella trasposizione: i tipi di inquadratura, le luci, i costumi e la musica. Partendo poi dalle modifiche apportate da Jackson, come ad esempio una rivisitazione del personaggio di Bilbo, si intuisce che il romanzo non risulta più essere per bambini ma piuttosto per adulti e ci si inoltra così nella questione del canone letterario. Si discute l'ingiustificata distinzione tra letteratura popolare e letteratura classica e ci si interroga sul perché allora *The Hobbit* sia stata adattato 75 anni dopo la prima pubblicazione nel 1937. Proponendo la visione di Antonio Gramsci, menzionando poi l'importanza degli studi culturali e prendendo l'idea di Edward Said come punto di partenza, si passa all'analisi del nuovo mito. Ci si inoltra, quindi, nell'atto di interpretazione del mito, la mitografia.

Il nuovo mito è un messaggio, è una rielaborazione di un paradigma già esistente. L'obiettivo quindi non è solo ripercorrere il processo di mitopoietica di Tolkien e la dimensione magica da lui creata tramite la teoria della sub-creazione, ma di capire come questa possa essere sfruttata per rielaborare il mondo del ventunesimo secolo. Il lavoro di re-interpretazione parte dalla presa in esame di tre elementi: la natura, l'eroe e la continua tensione tra bene e male. Prendendo in considerazione la natura e mettendo a confronto i meravigliosi paesaggi descritti nel romanzo e riproposti sul grande schermo con quelli del

mondo di oggi, è possibile parlare del nuovo mito in termini ecologici e di come l'uomo danneggi il pianeta senza preoccuparsi delle conseguenze. Guardando all'eroe Bilbo, invece, si percepisce un forte messaggio di tolleranza, giustizia e amicizia, legame che va oltre il colore della pelle. Bilbo, e la sua ammirevole umanità, rappresenta l'antitesi dell'essere umano del ventunesimo secolo e la sua ostilità e paura verso l'altro, mentre l'anello e il tesoro rappresentano tutte le forme di dipendenza che lo schiavizzano.

Il lavoro si conclude con un finale aperto, ai lettori infatti non viene chiesto di condividere le idee proposte, ma piuttosto di servirsene come punto di partenza per elaborare una loro lettura della brillante mitopoietica ideata da Tolkien nel 1937 e da Jackson negli anni duemila.

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Main actors in the movies:
Martin Freeman (Bilbo Baggins)
Richard Armitage (Thorin Oakenshield)
Ian McKellen (Gandalf)

List of illustrations

Figure 1: *Thror's Map,*
https://www.google.it/search?q=Thror%27s+map&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0 ahUKEwi4t8CjvIDeAhVQz4UKHRYJB8QQ_AUIDigB&biw=1920&bih=894#imgrc=sY GrC1O-ow_rOM**:**

Figure 2: *Goblin's town*,
https://www.google.com/search?q=cave+of+the+goblins+the+hobbit&tbm=isch&tbo=u&s ource=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj88NSE_-
_fAhUPKewKHW7CB7IQsAR6BAgEEAE&biw=1366&bih=657#imgrc=GQ-
yxz_ORnHTdM:

Figure 3: *The desolation of Smaug*,
https://www.google.com/search?biw=1366&bih=657&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=kAc-XK-
UBZCckwWD1pT4Cg&q=the+hobbit+48fps&oq=the+hobbit+48fps&gs_l=img.3...96335.
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Z9o9g7338E8W4M

Figure 4: *Gandalf with Bilbo Baggins:*
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L5uDNn_DfAhWKqaQKHbjbDmQQ9C96BAgBEBg&biw=1366&bih=608&dpr=1#imgr
c=eJNn64iYyxtd-M:

Figure 5: *Marvel costumes*:
https://www.google.com/search?biw=1366&bih=608&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=zuw-
XJL2LtK2kwW6x5eABw&q=bilbo+clothes&oq=bilbo+clothes&gs_l=img.3...27573.2823
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IM:&imgrc=sZN54SvT6psIOM:

Figure 6: *Dwarves Cosplay Thorin*:
https://www.google.com/search?biw=1366&bih=608&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=7Ow-
XJ_RI8WdkwXQ6KioCg&q=thorin+clothes&oq=thorin+clothes&gs_l=img.3...56105.584
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