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"Bare and Leafless Day": The Function and Poetic Structure of the Poems in *The Lord of the Rings*¹

The origin-myth of *The Lord of the Rings* universe, recounted in *Ainulindale*, names music—the Music of the Ainur—as the medium and form of creation. In the beginning, Ilúvatar does not simply 'speak' to his creatures, but sings to them, or more precisely, he propounds themes and motifs of music to them, to which they reply likewise with singing, to the utmost joy of the creator.² The collaboration between the members of the 'orchestra' is halting at first—they are capable of apprehending each other's chords only slowly.

But for a long while they sang only each alone, or but few together, while the rest hearkened; for each comprehended only that part of the mind of Ilúvatar from which he came, and in the understanding of their brethren they grew but slowly. Yet ever as they listened they came to deeper understanding, and increased in unison and harmony.³

It seems that dialogue unfolds gradually between the parties, and only with the establishment of a *deeper understanding* can they reach the harmony considered sufficient by Ilúvatar to sing the basic motif of the Great Music that offers the form for the creation of the world. This is how the Ainur need to shape that melody, endlessly changing and woven into harmony, which can finally fill the surrounding Void.⁴

Thus, the genesis of Arda could only have taken place deep in the context of mutual understanding and cooperation—we may say that the creation of the universe does not only stand as an example of the Romantic act of creating worlds out of nothing with a single word, but also assumes a certain kind of hermeneutic work.⁵ Creation remains immaculate right until one of the Ainur, Melkor, begins to exaggerate the workings of his own imagination, weaving unfitting accords into the melody of Ilúvatar, which results in a dissonance in the Great Music. *Ainulindale* recounts the musical competition between Ilúvatar and Melkor, during which the

harmonic melodies of sorrow and beauty from Ilúvatar stand against the 'loud,' 'vain,' aspiring uproar of the greatest of the Ainur. 'And it essayed to drown the other music by the violence of its voice, but it seemed that its most triumphant notes were taken by the other and woven into its own solemn pattern.'⁶ The role of Melkor (later called Morgoth, 'the Black Foe of the World,' master of Sauron) in the creation is not to be underestimated, because even though Ilúvatar understands the essence of the narcissistic thoughts and is able to integrate the dissonant accords into the Great Music, he is nevertheless forced to change the shape of the Melody. The formation of Arda is thus not just the result of an ancient melody being woven further (that is, not a one-way process), but the consequence of mutual determination, an encounter of two, where, due the appearance of difference and dissimilarity, there will always be the Other, which needs to be explained, interpreted and answered, turning the well-known world upside down. However, the discordant voice of Melkor may prove to be a productive subversion, if we consider that Ilúvatar is able to attach meaning to it, constructively contributing to the formation of the plan. (In one of his letters, Tolkien claims that Melkor 'introduced alterations, not interpretations in the mind of the One'; the One then presented the Music which included Melkor's discords as well.)⁷

The fundamentally aesthetic nature of the creation of the world is enthralling—the aesthetic pleasure, and more closely, the *aesthesis*, the knowledge acquired by sensory experience defines the recounting of *Ainulindale* from the very start. Ilúvatar is happy for the song of the Ainur, who are in turn amazed by the majestic, glorious and radiant melody of the Great Music, and whose task is to 'adorn' it and to fill it up with 'great beauty,' so that Ilúvatar can sit and hearken, and be glad of it.⁸ When describing the Music of the Ainur, sensual reception and comprehension are both significant.

Accordingly, the definition of aesthetic pleasure as enjoyment of self in the enjoyment of what is other presupposes the primary unity of understanding enjoyment and enjoying understanding. [...] In aesthetic behaviour, the subject always enjoys more than itself. It experiences itself as it appropriates an experience of the meaning of the world which both its own productive activity and the reception of the experience of others can disclose, and the assent of third parties can confirm. Aesthetic enjoyment that thus occurs in a state of balance between disinterested contemplation and testing participation is a mode of experiencing oneself in a possible being other which the aesthetic attitude opens up.⁹

¹ I render thanks to Thomas Honegger and to Thomas Kullmann for their very expedient remarks and advice—without them, this essay would be much *barer*.

² John Ronald Reuel TOLKIEN: *The Silmarillion*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1982, 3.

³ TOLKIEN: *Silmarillion*, 3.

⁴ On the Music of the Ainur, cf. Chiara BERTOGLIO: 'Dissonant Harmonies: Tolkien's Musical Theodicy.' *Tolkien Studies*, Vol. XV, 2018, 93–114.

⁵ This act, moreover, definitely refers to the Bible—the Book of Genesis—in the first place. In my essay, however, I discuss the relationship from a different point of view.

⁶ TOLKIEN: *Silmarillion*, 5.

⁷ Humphrey CARPENTER (ed.): *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 2000, 300.

⁸ TOLKIEN: *Silmarillion*, 3.

⁹ Hans Robert JAUSS: 'Aesthetic Pleasure and the Fundamental Experiences of Poiesis, Aesthesis, and Catharsis.' In *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, translated by Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1982, 22–35, 32.

The dissonant voice of Melkor is revealed on all levels: he does not wish to join the consonance, he would like to control the leading melody in a narcissistic way—we may say he would rather start a radically new song. But his singing does not have a flow, it is not majestic and radiant (euphonic), but primitive, loud and repetitive (almost cacophonous).¹⁰ Yet this does not mean that nobody else can join in: some of the Ainur start to adopt it in their confusion, and Ilúvatar himself cannot stay untouched by it. The expressive power of Melkor's song has a great sensual effect.

If we observe how the featured songs in the text of *The Lord of the Rings* affect the characters of the book, we can state that there is a correlation with what has been said above. Tom Bombadil almost repeats the structure of the music of the Ainur in his song—according to Richard Mathews, this is the first of many episodes that stress the power of the word, especially of poetry and song, to restore harmony and order to the natural world.¹¹ The voice of Goldberry is 'as young and as ancient as Spring, like the song of a glad water flowing down into the night from a bright morning in the hills.'¹² It is not a coincidence that in *The Silmarillion*, the leading medium for the creation of the world is singing, for the songs and poems fundamentally define the possibilities of understanding the world in *The Lord of the Rings* as well: they are responsible for transmitting knowledge and have an influence on the condition of the characters' body and soul. It is also rather curious that while reading the lyrical texts of the book, the reader seems to have a similar experience as the characters of the book—it is an illusion, certainly, an effect of the text. In the text of *The Lord of the Rings*, the featured poems provide the most significant sensual effects, and though Tolkien's prose is indeed able to call forth the most diverse 'sensations,' it is the different lyric sections that can have a physical effect on the reader in the first place. The rhythmical, pulsing forms of text that have an increased sonority and operate with consonances (and jingles) generate powerful effects of presence,¹³

¹⁰ The narrator of the *Aimulindale* recounts the events from the point of view of Ilúvatar, and the result of this focalization is that Melkor consequently plays the role of the antagonist, the Other who causes confusion. The teleology of *The Silmarillion*'s narrative legitimizes the order kept by the Valar and the Elves against Melkor (and later Sauron), and this structure and logic also pervades the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*. The possibility to change perspectives, and so the chance to place ourselves in the position of the Other, is not something that can occur to a relevant extent in Tolkien's texts. However varied and not over-idealized the portrayal of the realms and worlds represented by elves, humans, dwarves and hobbits is, the other side, the negative position of the sphere of Morgoth, Sauron and the orcs, does not become internal, so it will never be, apart from a few isolated situations, something available to the reader.

¹¹ Richard MATHEWS: *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1997, 68.

¹² John Ronald Reuel TOLKIEN: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1982, 158.

¹³ I am using this term in the sense defined by the book of Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT: *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004: presence is a significantly spatial relationship, during which a certain thing has a direct, physical influence on the human body. The accessibility realized through senses challenges the meaning, the interpretative relationship. Presumably, the oscillation of the effects of meaning and presence defines the aesthetic experience of the lyric texts to a greater extent than that of the epic pieces.

making the process of reading more dynamic—the reception of the poems puts our usual rhythm out of joint, initiates us into a different dimension of experience, and we can say that it makes our (imaginative) entrance to the other world possible in a somewhat more informal way, without using epic means. The songs function as a (medial) system of transmitting knowledge of the past, contributing to the development of cultural traditions related to the peoples (Hobbits, Ents, Elves, and Dwarves) and regions (Gondor, Rohan, Mordor) in the novel, and as such, help both the reader and characters of the book to understand the story; but at the same time, they can represent atmospheric tension or contrast. They may draw up the sense of nostalgic desire, intensify the notion of adventure or intimacy, but can also provide shelter in a distressing or desperate situation, bringing a momentary calm in the midst of chaos. Maybe the most typical example of this dual nature is the scene in Moria from Chapter II/4 ('A Journey in the Dark'), where Gimli sings an old dwarf-song ('The world was young, the mountains green...'), which recounts the former power and glory of the ancient Dwarf-halls. Sam is astonished, his curiosity is spurred, and his mood is directly defined by the beauty of the song: "I like that!" said Sam. "I should like to learn it. *In Moria, in Khazad-dûm!* But it makes the darkness seem heavier, thinking of all those lamps. Are there piles of jewels and gold lying about here still?"¹⁴ Christopher Tolkien claims that by his 'enthusiastic cry,' Sam brings closer 'the mighty kings of Nargothrond and Gondolin, Durin on his carved throne, but places them at once at an even remoter distance, a magical distance that it might well seem (*at that moment*) destructive to traverse.'¹⁵ Indeed, experiencing the historical ballads and legends leads to the impression of familiarity and strangeness at the same time.

It resembles the phenomenon of wandering—the road itself bears the duality of being simultaneously at home and homeless. Tamás Bényei claims that 'stories are like roads: on the one hand, flowing endlessly, they connect the characters strange to each other (and connect the storytellers as well), and on the other hand, they make all participants homeless at the same time.'¹⁶ The walking-songs (road songs)¹⁷ themselves present this experience. In the case of the poem beginning 'The Road goes ever on and on...' Tolkien offers a slow, thoughtful, highly meditative song, which unveils the unknown, distant nature of the road itself. There is a delicate, but significant

¹⁴ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 377.

¹⁵ John Ronald Reuel TOLKIEN: *The Book of Lost Tales 1*, The History of Middle-Earth Vol. 1, edited by Christopher Tolkien, London, HarperCollins, 2002, 2.

¹⁶ BÉNYEI Tamás: *Az ártatlan ország: Az angol regény 1945 után*, Debrecen, Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2003, 191. The translations of the Hungarian sources are mine—J. L.

¹⁷ In connection with the three variations of the 'Old Walking Song' in the novel, see T. A. SHIPPEY: *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, London, HarperCollins Publishers, 2000, 189–191; Petra ZIMMERMANN: "'The glimmer of limitless extensions in time and space': The Function of Poems in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*." In Julian Eilmann – Allan Turner (eds.): *Tolkien's Poetry*, Cormarë Series No. 28, Zurich and Jena, Walking Tree Publishers, 2013, 51–90, 73–74.

distinction between the first two occurrences of the song (Chapters I/1 and I/3):¹⁸ instead of Bilbo's version, which goes 'Pursuing it with eager feet,' Frodo sings 'weary feet'—which suggests a completely different relationship between the singer and the road before him (one is hurrying anxiously to leave, while the other feels rather the weight and gravity of it). The third version of this song can be read in Chapter VI/6, presented again by Bilbo ('Many Partings').¹⁹ As Shippey also suggests,²⁰ the radically different nature of this version stems from the fact that, according to the analogy of road and life, the sleep and settling at the end of the poem implies the symbolic meaning of death. The third version has a specifically elegiac atmosphere. The close connection between the three occurrences is obvious and significant: the characters retell the same melody again and again according to their actual position in the story, following the traditions of folklore and folk songs (and this oral tradition may be, in all probability, a trait of Shire-poems themselves). In the version at the end of the novel, Bilbo uses the phrase 'weary feet' again, which he heard from Frodo earlier in the story. By this, in a very subtle and elegant way, the novel indicates that the mental state and existence of the old hobbit have dramatically altered since the variant of 'eager feet,' whereas for Frodo, it was the weight of the burden that made it difficult at the beginning of his journey to experience their venture as a thrilling adventure. The three versions of the 'Old Walking Song' represent the special and complex relationship of the figures of Frodo and Bilbo. Moreover, as Petra Zimmermann argues in her essay, the presence of the three versions is not accidental: they are in a special intertextual and intratextual relationship with each other, and they are able to create a sense of passing time by referring to each other. She conceives the song as a medium which makes us 'perceive together' all the layers of time.²¹

One typical and revealing example of the previously described multi-level modes of effect of the poems can be demonstrated by Samwise Gamgee's case in Chapter IV/10 ('The Choice of Master Samwise'), when in Shelob's Lair Sam, crouching beside the unconscious Frodo, takes Galadriel's Phial, and out of his desperation, 'as if some remote voice had spoken,' 'in a language which he did not know,' he starts yelling the Elbereth song,²² the Elvish hymn heard a long time ago. This arouses his courage and strengthens the light of the star of Erendil, thus enabling Sam to chase away the monster.²³ Szymon Pindur argues that the song²⁴ 'is able to affect the reality in some way,' 'its magical nature makes Frodo stop and listen as if he were bound and unable to move.'²⁵ (Based upon this scene, Pindur claims that words have power in Tolkien's stories.)

¹⁸ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 58, 102.

¹⁹ John Ronald Reuel TOLKIEN: *The Return of the King*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1983, 297.

²⁰ SHIPPEY: *Author of the Century*, 190.

²¹ ZIMMERMANN: 'The Function of Poems,' 74.

²² In connection with the Elbereth-song, see SHIPPEY: *Author of the Century*, 200–202.

²³ John Ronald Reuel TOLKIEN: *The Two Towers*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1982, 399–400.

²⁴ He refers to the occurrence of the song in TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, II/1 (in the Rivendell scene).

²⁵ Szymon PINDUR: 'The Magical and Reality-transforming Function of Tolkien's Song and Verse.' In

We should not forget that the song is composed in the form of a prayer: it is an invocation, by which it can evoke and summon the Vala, creating her presence.²⁶ The main characteristic of the figure of the apostrophe (see Culler's study²⁷) is the fact that it creates the rhetoric illusion that the summoned phenomenon becomes responsive, as if being alive, due to the act of invocation. The old Elvish hymn now invoked by Sam (who becomes the medium of the song), and the terrible light of Galadriel's gift ('May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out'²⁸) create a presence that gives untameable courage to Sam, who is on the verge of exhaustion. The speech act itself has a greater importance than the meaning of the words, which is indicated by the fact that the sense of the song composed in Sindarin language is unknown to Sam—and to the reader as well. Even so, as Tom Shippey suggests, the sound of the poem is able to mediate a certain meaning by itself both for the reader and the hobbits (at this actual moment of the story and when recited in Rivendell as well).²⁹ We do not have the accurate meaning, even if Frodo more or less translates the song for himself (and for the reader) in Chapter I/3 in the Shire, but the given passage indicates that it is just an approximate interpretation. We see that the Sindarin lines recited by Sam³⁰ do not coincide with either of the English verses, furthermore, the first and the last of the four lines hold the invocation of Varda and contain her three different names—Elbereth, Gilthoniel and Fanuilos (the last one meaning Snow White³¹). The Sindarin exclamation "A" is the same as the English "O", the most typical apostrophic device in lyric poetry.

In Chapter I/11 ('A Knife in the Dark') the escaping and hiding hobbits are tortured both by the dread caused by the Black Riders and the incomprehensible nature of the events happening to them, which, certainly, are mingled with a healthy and naughty curiosity, a characteristic feature of the hobbit folk. Strider attempts to soothe their curiosity as much as possible, and at a certain point, to everyone's surprise, it is Samwise who comes to help him out by answering Merry's question ('Who was Gil-galad?') with a poem learnt from Bilbo Baggins. The reactions of his companions indicate that his recitation does not only help the team (and, again, the reader) to make sense of the events happening to them, but also gives them a direct

Anna Milon (ed.): *Poetry and Song in the Works of J. R. R. Tolkien*, Peter Roe Series XVIII, Luna Press Publishing, 2018, Kindle Edition, Location 852–853.

²⁶ Regarding the role of the prayer in Tolkien's verse, see Lynn FOREST-HILL: 'Poetic Form and Spiritual Function: Praise, Invocation and Prayer in *The Lord of the Rings*.' In Julian Eilmann and Allan Turner (eds.): *Tolkien's Poetry*, Cormarë Series No. 28, Zurich and Jena, Walking Tree Publishers, 2013, 91–116.

²⁷ Jonathan CULLER: *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002.

²⁸ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 444.

²⁹ SHIPPEY: *Author of the Century*, 201.

³⁰ 'A Elbereth Gilthoniel / o menel palan-díriel, / le nallon sí di'nguruthos! / A tiro nin, Fanuilos!' (TOLKIEN: *Two Towers*, 400).

³¹ Cf. Ruth S. NOEL: *The Languages of Tolkien's Middle-earth*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980, 143.

sensual experience by raising their spirit and mood. Furthermore, in this case foreshadowing is used as a narrative device as well:

'There was a lot more,' said Sam, 'all about Mordor. I didn't learn that part, it gave me the shivers. I never thought I should be going that way myself!'
'Going to Mordor!' cried Pippin. 'I hope it won't come to that!'³²

In the same chapter a few pages later, in an even darker hour of the day, hiding in a dent, Strider tells old tales to the hobbits, who are shivering from cold, in order to 'keep their minds from fear.'³³ Finding the story of Gil-galad too dangerous at this point, in response to Sam's request ('I would dearly like to hear more about Elves; the dark seems to press round so close') he sings the rhyme of Beren and Lúthien Tinúviel. 'It is a fair tale, though it is sad, as are all the tales of Middle-earth, and yet it may lift up your hearts.'³⁴ The ancient song shows the most characteristic motifs of Elvish lyric: music, stars, light, forest, leaves, sea, sorrow, travelling, passing away, etc. When having sung the saga-like song, Strider confesses that this version of the tale belonging to the genre of Elvish *ann-thennath* songs (a kind of a long verse³⁵), performed in Common Speech, is only a 'rough echo' of the original.³⁶ So both the characters and the reader can feel that however enchanted they were by the beauty of these verses, they could only have an insight into a remote and inaccessible world, into the realm of eternal beauty and wisdom, yearned after but unattainable for mortal beings. As written by Tolkien himself in one of his often quoted letters: 'Part of the attraction of The L. R. is, I think, due to the glimpses of a large history in the background: an attraction like that of viewing far off an unvisited island, or seeing the towers of a distant city gleaming in a sunlit mist. To go there is to destroy the magic, unless new unattainable vistas are again revealed.'³⁷ It is exactly these mysterious poems that are responsible for a greater narrative hidden in the background, for the 'new unattainable vistas.' Being aware of the fact that reciting Tinúviel's tale would create an unwanted informational obscurity, Strider tells the hobbits the story of the doomed lovers (which is potentially a parable of his own fate, too), until the moon rises above them.

It is strange that Aragorn defines the old tales of Middle-earth, as I mentioned before, in the same way as the song of Ilúvatar was described: 'deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow from which its beauty chiefly came.'³⁸ Beauty filled with grief, nostalgia for the lost home mingled with desire and the heroic and majestic grief of loss: these are indeed the leading motifs of the Elvish songs of Middle-earth. The most memorable piece of this kind in *The*

Lord of the Rings is Galadriel's farewell song in Chapter II/8. 'In the midst of the vessel sat Celeborn, and behind him stood Galadriel, tall and white; a circlet of golden flowers was in her hair, and in her hand she held a harp, and she sang. Sad and sweet was the sound of her voice in the cool clear air.'³⁹ Eric Bronson writes that the 'concept of lost beauty and dispossession' is the main theme of the book, and is especially characteristic of the Elves. 'Galadriel presides over Lórien with songs of joy, and that is why the Fellowship takes such comfort in its beauty. But it is a happiness born of sorrow and dispossession.'⁴⁰ No wonder that Lórien, one of the most sublime places in Middle-earth, has such a deep impact not only on the Shire-folk but also on the experienced members of the Fellowship. It is obvious to them that all the present beauty is nothing but the shadow of an even more majestic realm (Valinor), and that the grandeur of Lórien shall soon fade and pass. This is similar to the ambivalent experience of the hobbits (and the reader) walking through the ways of the book and encountering memorials of the glorious past of an ancient and mighty world in the form of fragments of tales and sagas. On the basis of these narratives and lyrics the past cannot fully be restored, but even so, through the metonymical (and sometimes synecdochical) relationship with the past, listeners may share in the vividness of glorious history or myth. In *The Lord of the Rings* 'all the fictional world that disguises the past is covered by the ruins and remains of the forgotten and uninterpretable past.'⁴¹ What we experience first of all is not the past, but the desire for something that is missing from the present. For the hobbits, it is magic and adventure, or else the alluring and inspiring strangeness (as they have a peaceful home: the Shire), while in the case of Elves and Dúnedain, it can rather be described as a nostalgic longing felt towards their lost (real) homeland. However, it is a narrative of consolation for the reader: the Story, even if only parts of it are accessible, still exists and may be tangibly reached, as if he or she could hear the music of the Ainur, and we were not fully surrounded by chaos and the Void.⁴²

But it is not only the songs of the Elves that are full of the sad beauty of lost things, even though in the case of mortal beings the feeling of loss may also come from the fleeting nature of their own mortal lives. Consider, for example, Bilbo's quiet little song in Chapter II/3 ('I sit beside the fire and think / of all that I have seen, / of meadow-flowers and butterflies / in summers that have been'),⁴³ Gimli's above-quoted Dwarf rhyme, or the elegies of the Rohirrim. When thinking about the function of poetry in *The Lord of the Rings*, we can agree with Thomas Kullmann, who emphasizes the significance of the narrative context of the occurrences and

³² TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 229.

³³ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 235.

³⁴ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 235–236.

³⁵ NOEL: *Languages*, 112.

³⁶ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 237.

³⁷ TOLKIEN: *The Book of Lost Tales* 1, 2.

³⁸ TOLKIEN: *Silmarillion*, 5.

³⁹ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 439.

⁴⁰ ERIC BRONSON: "'Farewell to Lórien": The Bounded Joy of Existentialists and Elves.' In Gregory Bassham and Eric Bronson (eds.): *The Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*, Chicago and La Salle, Open Court, 2004, 72–84, 76.

⁴¹ BÉNYEI: 193.

⁴² 'Despite the prospect that "Consolation" is attainable through fantasy, Tolkien, unlike Milton, sees loss as irremediable,' claims Richard Mathews (*Fantasy*, 62).

⁴³ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 333.

the communal aspect of the texts. He claims that all the poetic insertions 'appear to fulfil a function within the narrative; they are all part of the plot and motivated by narrative developments. Most of the poems and songs are sung by a group of characters or recited by one character for the benefit of a group of listeners; they constitute or record communal experiences; and they serve to convey important information.⁴⁴ The culture of Rohan is fundamentally based on orality, and, as mentioned by Shippey, in a culture which has no written records, poetry has the function of presenting and refusing the grief of loss. That is the reason why most of the songs of the Rohirrim are rather elegiac.⁴⁵ In Chapter III/6 ('The King of the Golden Hall') the song beginning with 'Where now the horse and the rider?' functions as a mourning song or lament as well and 'is laden with the sadness of Mortal Men.'⁴⁶ It is sung silently by Aragorn on their way to Edoras, among the sepulchral mounds of Théoden's ancestors. The song is performed in the language of the Rohirrim and Aragorn translates it into Common Speech for his companions (and the reader), leaving them in doubt again about the accuracy of the translation. He eventually adds: 'Thus spoke a forgotten poet long ago in Rohan, recalling how tall and fair was Eorl the Young, who rode down out of the North; and there were wings upon the feet of his steed, Felaróf, father of horses. So men still sing in the evening.'⁴⁷ This song portrays the final days of a nation and a royal dynasty, the undone past, the sentiment of *sic transit gloria mundi*, in a moment when little hope seems to have remained for Théoden's rebirth and for Rohan's rise.⁴⁸ This sort of passing has a peculiar heroic glory, it is a more tangible and real condition, much less decadent than the departure of the immortal Elves. It is worth comparing the lament of the Rohirrim with Galadriel's farewell song: although there is a prominent structural and modal resemblance, there are some basic distinctions between them. The song of the Rohirrim emphasizes the longing for positive notions, such as fertile summers with all their crops and springs symbolizing rebirth ('Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?').⁴⁹ It still renders some strength, as all the questions are full of desire and hope, pointing at the present,

⁴⁴ Kullmann draws attention to the literary tradition behind the poems as well: 'Most of them, however, do not serve as expressions of the poet's or singer's personal feelings and thus do not correspond to the "mainstream" of English lyric poetry. Their origins can rather be found in Anglo-English poetry or in English folksong, as can be seen from the metres used.' (Thomas KULLMANN: 'Poetic Insertions in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.' *Connotations* Vol. 23.2, 2013/14. Web: connotations.de/article/thomas-kullmann-poetic-insertions-in-tolkiens-the-lord-of-the-rings/.)

⁴⁵ SHIPPEY: *Author of the Century*, 97.

⁴⁶ TOLKIEN: *Two Towers*, 132. Certainly, this is a version of the well known 'ubi sunt' theme.

⁴⁷ TOLKIEN: *Two Towers*, 133.

⁴⁸ It is worth turning to the movie version for a moment, where the scene of the song (recited in a condensed version) is one of the most memorable ones of the movie: Théoden is preparing for the battle at Helm's Deep, when he starts reciting, almost murmuring to himself the verse. However, contrary to the book, this is a situation of great significance, preceding a big change, even though at this point it is still unknown whether the outcome will be a victory or the fall of the people.

⁴⁹ TOLKIEN: *Two Towers*, 132.

while in Galadriel's song the productivity of the yearning is hardly perceptible. It is nostalgia and contemplation on the past days that prevails, and of all the natural allegories the song evokes primarily winter: 'O Lórien! The Winter comes, the bare and leafless Day; / The leaves are falling in the stream, the River flows away.'⁵⁰ The last question is asked in a mood of powerless and helpless homesickness, inquiring about the possibility of a happy sailing away, and doubting the magical and creative power of poetic words: 'But if of ships I now should sing, what ship would come to me, / What ship would bear me ever back across so wide a Sea?'⁵¹ The unknown poet of Rohan sings a similar tune in the final question of his song, although he is not fearful about his own destiny, only about the fate and survival of his people. 'Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood burning, / Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning?'⁵² Galadriel's song is a magnificent, art-nouveau style confessional song, ending with the wish of sailing away to another, more blessed world, but she has little hope, lacking the belief in the power of the words and the strength of her own desire. The song from Rohan is a piece of popular poetry, and even though this poem also ends with images of grief and absence, there is still a trace of hope in it: the task of preservation and protection, the duty of gathering the smoke and ashes belongs to someone from the community, who is expected to give an affirmative answer to the call. The final expression, 'from the Sea returning' now gives a hint of a possible revival, for the last word keeps echoing the returning time.

In my essay, I attempted to outline some possible functions of the poems in *The Lord of the Rings*, in order to point out the fact that these passages have a crucial role in the interpretation of the novel, apart from the atmospheric contribution they provide. I am convinced that the origin myth of Tolkien's world is a useful starting point for this kind of study, because in this myth the form of song (and singing) has a fundamental role in the formation of the world's structure. This is why the interpretation of the related parts of *Aimulindale* took up a relatively long part of the essay. The examination of the lyrical pieces discussed in the present paper is certainly not enough for thorough research, so I have to emphasize that parallel analyses shall be carried on. For instance, I have not mentioned such exciting texts as the song of the Ent and the Entwife (beginning with 'When spring unfolds the beechen leaf' in Chapter III/4),⁵³ which provides a sensual context to the present situation and story of the Ents. Nor could I discuss the riddle-like poetic pieces of prophetic character (for example the ones beginning with 'All that is gold does not glitter' and 'Seek for the Sword that was broken,' both in Chapter II/2⁵⁴).⁵⁵

⁵⁰ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 440.

⁵¹ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 440. The starting lines of the poem, however, apparently affirm the Orphic power of poetry: 'I sang of leaves, of leaves of gold, and leaves of gold there grew: / Of wind I sang, a wind there came and in the branches blew' (TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 439).

⁵² TOLKIEN: *Two Towers*, 133.

⁵³ TOLKIEN: *Two Towers*, 94-95.

⁵⁴ TOLKIEN: *Fellowship*, 298.

⁵⁵ I have to say thank you to my colleague, György Marcsek, for his invaluable help in translating this essay.

Abstract

'Bare and leafless Day': The Function and Poetic Structure of the Poems in The Lord of the Rings

Poetic texts form an integral part of the epic world of The Lord of the Rings. These poems and songs (ballads, epic poetry, riddles, various folk and popular songs, etc.) function as elements in the formation of the fictional world as well as a system of transmitting knowledge of the past, contributing to the development of cultural traditions related to the peoples (Hobbits, Ents, Elves, and Dwarves) and regions (Gondor, Rohan, Mordor) in the novel.

In my essay, I attempt to outline some possible functions of the poems in The Lord of the Rings, in order to point out the fact that these parts of the text have a crucial role in the interpretation of the novel, apart from the atmospheric contribution they provide. I am convinced that the origin myth of Tolkien's world is a useful starting point for this kind of study, because in this myth the form of song (and singing) has a fundamental role in the formation of the world's structure.

Keywords

Tolkien, music, Ainulindale, song, nostalgia, poetic structure

Rézümé

„Lombtalan idő”: A Gyűrűk Ura verses szövegeinek funkciója és poétikai szerkezete

A költői szövegek lényegi szerepet játszanak A Gyűrűk Ura epikus világformálásában. E versek és dalok (balladák, verses elbeszélések, rejtvények, különféle népi énekek stb.) funkciója részint a fikcionális világ megformálásában rejlik, részint a regény népeinek és régióinak közösségi emlékezetét jelenítik meg, s a hagyomány közvetítésért felelősek.

Dolgozatomban megkíséreltem A Gyűrűk Ura lírai szövegeinek bizonyos funkcióit bemutatni, s eközben értelmezéseket is kínálni a szövegekkel kapcsolatban. Középfölde eredetmítoszájának vizsgálata (ahogyan azt A szilmarilok elbeszéli) az elgondolás hasznos kiindulópontjának tűnik, ezért foglalkozom részletesebben az Ainulindale vonatkozó részeinek interpretációjával.

Kulcsszavak

Tolkien, zene, Ainulindale, dal, nosztalgia, poétikai szerkezet

TURI ZITA

Középkori és kora modern pageant-hagyomány a kortárs brit kultúrában¹

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.

(Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 4.1.152–156)²

Az angol középkorral és a kora modern korral kapcsolatos performansz-tudomány kutatóinak figyelme eddig elsősorban a tizenhatodik és a tizenhetedik század eleji drámára összpontosult, és viszonylag kevesen foglalkoztak az úgynevezett pageantek³ kutatásával. Ennek oka egyrészt az lehet, hogy ugyan számos középkori és kora modern forrás elérhető a témakörben, ám az előadások rendkívüli sokszínűsége miatt ezek nehezen kategorizálhatók és rendszerezhetők. Másrészt a műfaj populáris jellege miatt a korszak szakértői sokszor meglehetősen elutasítóan viszonyultak a pageantekhez. Ennek ellenére az utóbbi időben néhányan vizsgálták a témát: Tracey Hill elsősorban a társadalmi-politikai szempontokat mérlegelte, míg David M. Bergeron, Gordon Kipling és Kathleen Ashley, akárcsak e cikk írója, rituális előadásoknak tartják a pageanteket.⁴

Edward Muir olyan performatív cselekedetként határozza meg a rítusokat, amelyek funkciója csak akkor teljesül, ha a résztvevőkben konkrét reakciókat váltanak ki; ha ezt nem teszik meg, akkor a performansz pusztán hatás nélküli, üres csele-

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² William SHAKESPEARE: *The Tempest*. In Virginia Mason Vaughan – Alden T. Vaughan (szerk.): *Arden Shakespeare*, Revised Edition, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011. Minden magyar idézetet Fábri Péter fordításában közlök. mek.oszk.hu/00400/00483/00483.htm (2020. május 28.).

³ Mivel a pageant szót nem lehet pontosan lefordítani magyarra, az angol kifejezést használom. A pageant olyan nyilvános performansz/látványosság, amelyet felvonulások, zene és ének, illetve színpadi előadások kísérhetnek. Ilyen például az uralkodó beiktatása, éves városi ünnepségek és felvonulások, évfordulók, illetve a vallásos ünnepek szekuláris megnyilvánulásai.

⁴ Lásd Tracey HILL: *Pageantry and Power: A Cultural History of the Early Modern Lord Mayor's Show, 1585–1639*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013; Gordon KIPLING: *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy, and Ritual in the Medieval Civic Triumph*, Oxford, Calderon Press, 1998; Kathleen ASHLEY: „Introduction: The Moving Subjects of Processional Performance”. In Kathleen Ashley – Wim Hüsken (szerk.): *Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, Rodopi, 2001, 7–35; David M. BERGERON: *English Civic Pageantry, 1558–1642*, London, Edward Arnold, 1971.