

AN ARTIST'S HEART

J.R.R. Tolkien and anthroposophy: inspiration and vision

Beyond the movies, beyond commercials and role-games, in the last 50 years we've been accompanied by a deep and wonderful story, which has enriched our literary, imaginary and human heritage. It is the world's most read story (numbers confirm it!). It is *The Lord of the Rings*.

I still remember the first time I read it. To be more precise, that I was called by it. I was a twelve-year-old lad and in a mail catalogue, a source of novels for my mother's reading, I glanced at a three-volume book peering from the pages. I was unshakable: with the next order that book had to be there.

I read it with the feeling that someone has who travels in a long searched for part of the world. I followed the travels of Gandalf, Aragorn and Frodo with all the imaginative participation that my childish soul could magically express. And I felt that the horizon that was opening in front of me through Middle-Earth belonged to what I came to (real) Earth for.

Many years (and many youngish-experiences) after, on a given day *The Lord of the Rings* decided to come out from the not so small(most read book in the world!) fan-niche and to present itself to a big audience through the movies. At the *première* of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, in my small Italian town, the theatre was packed to the gunnels, and I remember my surprise: everybody was there! People with no literary interests at all, who didn't like fantasy movies, and also people who could laugh at you for your choice of reading material! They were all there, to see "the movie of the moment". And it was. For three years almost no Academy Award went to anything other than *The Lord of the Rings*!

Now, if you want to discount all this, just taking it as fashion or gossip, you're welcome, but if you carry deeper questions in your soul, things are not so simple. When Tolkien came to the world's attention, it was clear in my inner self that I wanted to give a contribution in observing his mythology and creations through the lens of a wakeful eye, aware of the dynamics, processes and inhabitants of the spiritual world. I couldn't know, but I was starting on a fifteen-year-old's path, still going and promising for the future.

My spiritual scientific exam of Tolkien's work began with a crystal clear enlightenment, born of reading his pages again and again: it was clear to my inner eye how the different races who live in Middle-Earth are somehow embodiments of the many different aspects of a human being. Elves speak to us about everything in our nature related to a spiritual world in which we find our roots; Men talk about how we conquered the material side of the world, with all the "failings" and the dumbness related to this; Hobbits show us how we are inside, in our soul, where the great choices that guide our spiritual path (Hobbits relating with "Elves") and that open to us a chance to act in the physical world (Hobbits relating with "Men") are taken. These thoughts are not just confirmed by the textual evidence, but also by Tolkien himself, who said openly how Elves are just a representation of a part of human nature, and that man is *partially presented* in the figures of Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits, and so on.

Perceiving this inspirational plan brought me on in leaps and bounds. I began to understand how Tolkien's creativity worked, how his inner language evoked precise images when he wanted to talk about, let's say, human nobility, or treachery, or about inner trials, or about the spiritual world... This comprehension brought me to perceive a coherent and astonishing inspiration in the entire Tolkien world (not just in *The Lord of the Rings*), an architecture made not by "symbols" or "secret codes" we had to cypher, but by a path living like a resonance of images. A resonance working beyond his conscious knowledge, but in a precise and incredible way.

The tale Tolkien had to tell is that of mankind. Not the story told by a materialistic vision of world and life, but one similar to what you can find in the occult traditions, and in a renewed sense in anthroposophical spiritual science (which is my main working field)... Tolkien tells about a humanity born from the Music of the spiritual Hierarchies, that comes to Earth immortal and perfect, and gradually transforms this original pureness in a love for Earth and her creations. The way Tolkien chooses numbers, images, events... everything is amazingly similar to the truth, to ancient and modern teachings... everything reveals the presence in Tolkien's soul – from past earthly lives and maybe from a few anthroposophical talks with his friend Owen Barfield – of deep knowledge and images, that fill his inspired ear. And is a true artist's inspiration (like that of the precise professor Tolkien, that "listened" to his inspiration like we "listen" to historical facts, not relying on casual impressions) different from an educated "listening" to the spiritual world? Is the precise and patient, but not intellectual, building of an epic (the art which gives voice to an epoch) something different from an inner dialogue with the spiritual streams of a man's civilization and time?

Seen in this perspective, it is easier to understand Tolkien's success. Beyond fashions, times and political factions, Tolkien stands still. His works survives because it carries in itself something which comes from the source of the spiritual stream of our time, and does it telling the tale of one who leaves "given values", traditions and past, safe places and routines, to take a path he knows nothing about, save that it's right, to build "universal values". Frodo, who was expecting the great teachers of the past to carry the perilous mission, understands that the age of masters is over, and that a simple Hobbit like himself is called to develop in freedom the strength to decide to be on the right side, to accomplish his mission.

But which mission is Frodo's? To understand it we must get a little deeper into the story.

Let's take a step back, to when the Elves gradually faced the interaction with Men: the history of a spiritual humanity, then taken up by soul's strengths and consequent mistakes (Feenor and his sons), begins to become the history of an earthly humanity, doomed to failure and despair (let's think about Turin Turambar). For a part of his mythology Tolkien tells the story of a shaken and destroyed Earth, which lacks the strength to fight evil, and that needs to be saved by divine intervention. It is the history of a new-earthly mankind, shocked by its own material incarnation. The mankind of the origins (shaped in the form of the Elves) is one with the spiritual world, in harmony with the Gods and with nature. But then something inside breaks, and this mankind falls into a more egoistic way of being, from spirit level into soul level, and the light of the spirit, closed in the three jewels called *Silmarilli*, becomes reason for hatred and desire. The catastrophic events following this change bring the world deeper down, to a physical level: and now Men appear, an image of mankind when consciousness is limited to a material plan.

Then gradually something changes. In the middle of the world the great nation of Numenor rises, a nation which lives through the same events that spiritual science refers to as those that befell Atlantis. And Atlantis itself is Tolkien's explicit mythological reference for creating the Numenor histories... But the mythological sources of Tolkien do not talk about Atlantis in the precise way Tolkien does, a way that corresponds to Rudolf Steiner's researches...

Numenor is a land of noble Lords and Kings, who bring bread and the grape bearing vine to the scattered peoples of Middle-Earth, images of inner spiritual strength working on our "solid" body (the bread) and on the "waters" of our life processes, on the life that flows in the body itself (the vine plant). But slowly Numenor falls into corruption, rotted by a dark presence lying in the human heart – its roots in ancient stories: this force is depicted by Tolkien's imagination as Sauron.

After the Lords of Numenor have fallen, a new world arises. The world of *The Lord of the Rings* is born, the world warded over by the Three Rings of Power: Rings of the Elves, made to spiritually protect humans, and the three things in human nature which must be protected: body, soul, and spirit. Seven instead are the Rings of the Dwarves, the race which infuses life into dead matter, and in fact seven are the life processes of all living beings, just like seven are the steps of any living evolution. Nine are the Men's Rings, nine like the parts of the human being according to anthroposophical spiritual science. These Nine have been corrupted, which sounds as if the whole human being can be conquered by evil; and this happened through the power of the One Ring, which is an image for our Ego's strength. The One is the Ego: the strength which can corrupt also the noblest part of us, shaping it as its own wraith, into a *Ringwraith* (think about Gandalf: *I do not dare to take it!* Or Galadriel *Instead of a Dark Lord you would have a Queen* – they know what they are talking about). The Ring makes us invisible, taking us into a realm where "no one can see us", and we can hide our secrets: the realm of our own evil, into the realm of our own Ego.

And this Ego-Ring comes into the hands of the race whose traits are halfway between the noble Elves and the fallen Men, the race representing our soul: *Hobbits*, three of which will become Ring-Bearers: the instinctive Smeagol (corrupted in Gollum), the cunning Bilbo (who will use the Ring to overcome difficulties), and finally Frodo, who will find the strength to sacrifice the Ring for a higher goal. Anthroposophy sees in this path the way from *sentient soul*, succumbing to Ego forces (Gollum), *intellective soul* which must "use the Ring" to build its own identity (Bilbo), and *consciousness soul* ready to leave it behind and head to the spiritual world (Frodo).

The most famous tale of our times, *The Lord of the Rings*, begins in a traditional landscape, living in peace with agriculture, nature, happiness and ingenuity: the Shire. Without knowing it, the Shire is protected from Evil by the Rangers, last line of an ancient lineage of Kings long forgotten, the atlantideans, the Numenoreans. Into this simple land, which reminds us of our soul who loves her own habits and ways of thinking, comes a terrible object: the Ring, which has the strength to bind the whole world in darkness. This event talks about the moment in which our soul becomes conscience of her own Ego.

For everybody's sake, the Ring-Bearer is morally rich, understands his mission and the crucial times he is living in; thus he decides to leave and give the Ring to people who can take care of it: the Elves, the initiates, men inspired by the spiritual world. On his journey he finds out that the danger is far greater (and closer!) than he expected, but still he gets to the House of Elrond, ancient

spiritual leader of humanity, and here a Council takes place. This Council awakens in Frodo, the Ring-Bearer, a clear vision: no more should Elves take care of the Ring, nor Dwarves, prisoners of their own pride, nor Men in their weakness. Hobbits, Shire-folk, should accomplish the mission. We know that in Tolkien's world Hobbits are an image for our soul, Dwarves for our habits and life (etheric) forces, Men for the physical, heavy part of us. It is clear that our battle against the Ego must be fought *in our own soul*, without any "higher" (elven) help, if we want to achieve true freedom.

Frodo's mission is clear: the conscious and brave part of our soul (or "Hobbit") leaves following his own free impulse, to break the Ego's grasp on our humanity, corrupted in all its nine aspects (the Nine Nazgul, hunting for him). To create a correct image of the whole Man, a Fellowship of Nine Companions gathers, in whose traits we recognize every aspect of the human nature: our body in the Men, life forces in the Dwarf, our soul in the Hobbits, and our spirit in the Elf. And last but not least Gandalf the Wise, the guide and bearer of assistance from the spiritual world (he is a messenger of the Gods themselves! on Middle-Earth), the Guardian Angel of the Man-Fellowship.

But things are going to get complicated: the Fellowship will face dark trials, and face an initiation, going deep into the heart of the earth, in the Mines of Moria. Here the Angel will step back, apparently broken by the Demon of Darkness (Ahriman), and the Man-Fellowship will continue alone, relying on the wisdom of the Elves of the Golden Wood. Gandalf's guidance is over, and the Man-Fellowship will have to find a new core, a new reference point, will have to learn to walk through its own spiritual trials, trials that wait on the path of he who wants to transform himself not relying upon masters and revelations, but upon his own wisdom and maturity. Gradually, all the characters will be called to step up to the challenge: Aragorn in his long journey to become a King (from "assistant" to Gandalf's plans as Strider), Merry ascending to Squire of Rohan, Pippin as servant of Denethor and Soldier of the Citadel... and the mature figures, linked to the world of the past (Legolas the Elf and Gimli the Dwarf) leave their place slowly to the "children", to the forces freely developed by man from the strength of his soul, strength needed to let us live our particular experience, and which come to substitute what we find in ourselves as help "given" by the entities who brought us on Earth.

The pause will be brief: then the Initiation process will have to carry on in its course, and the physical plan will be overcome: the death of Boromir, man's warrior, will be the turning point in entering a more complex level of reality.

The second tome of *The Lord of the Rings* sees the main characters divided between different adventures. This recalls the reality that in the initiation process man feels himself, at a certain point, "divided", as if his whole being was not "held together" by itself, but needs conscientious work to remain a whole. Only learning this will man have the maturity to be a complete spiritual being.

What happens then? Merry and Pippin, soul's most instinctive parts, are caught by the Orcs (the inner "demons" proofing themselves); to their help run the spiritual parts of man: Legolas the Elf (like an image of the Spiritual Self), Gimli the Dwarf (working to grow from etheric to Life Spirit), and Aragorn the Man (working to become Spiritual Man). But our hobbits will grow stronger in the trial and will save themselves without much help, and doing so they will contact the strength ready for a renewal of nature, the new etheric forces, shaped in the forms of the Trees' Shepherds, the

Ents. The same experience will be reached by the three chasers, but in the shape of the renewed Gandalf the White, resurrected after his ahrimanic encounter. The Ents and Gandalf the White are both images of the Christ's Being, who is present today precisely in the etheric dimension. Together, these characters will wake up man's conscience (the King of Rohan), and will lead him to the battle against He who once was White, but has now fallen: Saruman, image of the rebel angel Lucifer. The Battle of Helm's Deep will sanction this victory.

Frodo and Sam will find themselves in an even more difficult position: they will need to meet, discipline and overcome nothing less than their own counter-image, shaped in a twisted Hobbit, darkly changed by his link to the Ring: Gollum. Image of a chewed, hurt and dried soul, confused by the unstoppable grasp of an Ego without redemption (despite being enriched by a faint glow of light), Gollum reveals himself as a pillar of the whole narration, firstly as a guide for Frodo and Sam, and in the end as destroyer of the Ring. And so it happens in our inner transformation: egoism, love for the earthly part of the world, is the element which allows us to develop a clear and wakeful conscience of our own being, it is the element which allows us to act like individuals beings, and to become free in the end. Without the gift of egoism – it really is a gift, even if we see it as an enemy when we try to overcome ourselves – we could not really grow up, we would miss the consciousness of ourselves. This is the reason why Gollum (that reminds us of the being esoterically known as our "Double") dies with the Ring: in a certain sense, they are one. Frodo, on his part, taming Gollum learns how to overcome himself, his own Double, his own Ego. The outer work on Gollum reveals visibly what happens inside when you are called to be (and each one of us is, in his own Middle-Earth) the Bearer, the carrier of the Burden of the human Ego. The difficult path for Frodo and Sam will be supported by a man ready for the new times, Faramir, image of a physical body that takes into itself the Christ given strengths of our times, and makes a connection with the consciousness soul (Frodo). Like Gandalf, Frodo too – in contacting the Christ forces – will have to die and resurrect fighting the Demon of Darkness, here embodied by Shelob the spider.

The Lord of the Rings' climax brings us to the highest edge of initiation, when the presence of the Christ awakens in man. Man, embodied in the members of the Fellowship of the Ring, will come together again after passing through the initiation experiences. He will find in himself, and without help from others, the strength to reunite his interior being.

Men are fighting directly against Evil, against Mordor, synthesis of all the antievolutionary forces still present in man. After Saruman (Lucifer), the Balrog and Shelob (Ahriman), now we must face the Nazguls and Sauron and the darkest ghosts (Asuric). The battle takes place in the Pelennor Fields, with Minas Tirith on one side, the ancient tower of the Sun (the human Spirit), and Minas Morgul on the other side, the ancient tower of the Moon (the biological regulator in the human body); in the middle stands Osgiliath, citadel of the seven stars (the seven aspects of our soul). The battle is the one for the human soul, between spirit and body. It is the same image (Sun, Seven Stars, Moon) impressed on the blade of Aragorn's sword, on the blade of the new King, who brings man to the point of being filled again by the forces of the stars, of the Sun and of the Moon. And to do it he too will have to "resurrect", following Gandalf and Frodo, by contacting the Dead and talking with them, developing a Life strength that overcomes Death itself.

Frodo and Sam, side by side, walk the hidden side of the path of Christian initiation. The victory of the King is possible thanks to a Calvary hidden behind it. The Hobbits' path touches all the

esoteric stages of the Passion of the Christ – most evident when Sam takes Frodo's body on his shoulders, like a Cross, for the last steps on Mount Doom. And it is in Doom's, Fate's, hands, with the help of Karma and of the Lord of the Karma, the Christ, that the mission is accomplished, and that Evil finds its own Doom fighting against itself (Gollum himself will be the Ring's, and so Sauron's, destroyer).

The new King is crowned, and the Age of Men begins. The Elves, the Wizards, Frodo himself, leave Middle-Earth for the Immortal Lands, to act towards Middle-Earth like helpers from the spirit. This is the path of the Christian initiate: to overcome Earth and Death, and then return onto Earth to help his brothers and sisters, in a continuous common evolution, in which nobody is "done". This is the reason why the last words of *The Lord of the Rings* are physically spoken by the mouth of Sam Gamgee, but at the same time hide the mystery of his spiritual relationship with Frodo, with the part of the soul filled by the presence of the Christ Himself: "*I'm back*".

It's easy to see in these words a parallel with Christian images and values. This is totally true: Tolkien's explicit intention was to give life to a Christian mythology for the Anglo-Saxon culture. But do not think about a Church-like Christianity, listen instead to Tolkien when he says such things as *I don't understand how a theologian or philosopher could deny reincarnation as a way of being, or we must care for the established altars, but God cannot be limited, also in the house He has founded, and can choose any mean to bring His Grace*. The images and inner dynamics that we find in Tolkien's mythology are very close to an *esoteric Christianity*, and pretty far from the common religion; in Tolkien we find reincarnation (among the Elves), we find Atlantis (Numenor) as a part of world's history, we find three evil forces on the path of the Fellowship (Saruman, the Balrog, Sauron) instead of a generic "Devil". Also the "bad guy" of previous ages, Melkor (image of Lucifer), comes to allegiance with the spider Ungoliant (mother of the Two Towers' Shelob) at a certain point, and so becomes Morgoth (Ahriman), "black enemy of the world".

We cannot speak longer here, but all these images, hardly acceptable for a conventional Christian, are perfectly aligned with anthroposophy and with esoteric Christianity. The "historical" images of Tolkien are ordered, are coherent with the stages in the path of initiation, and describe precisely all the steps of the so-called "initiation" – which is not an "access-rite-to-some-hooded-cult" but is instead is the "natural" process of overcoming all of our raw parts, a process in which we do not lose, kill or destroy what we overcome, but instead refine it, developing new faculties, able to perceive not only the physical world, but also the spiritual one.

We can understand the initiation process better by looking at a plant: every plant has some sap inside it, which nourishes the plant. But when this sap enters the region where a flower must blossom, then it is transformed and refined, and becomes the sweet and scented nectar, or the essential oil contained in the seeds, or the delicate colour that stains all petals. And all this could never be born if some time before a cold and hard seed (Ego) hadn't chosen to put himself, hard and compressed, into the cold earth.

All the same happens in man: it is indeed true that we all have spiritual and divine origins, that we are cosmic beings. But it is true all the same that this cosmic dimension of our being will not be reached again with regressions, or working "outside" our body (these kinds of things give us only some distant memory of past conditions of our being): we will reach it instead "getting smaller" and

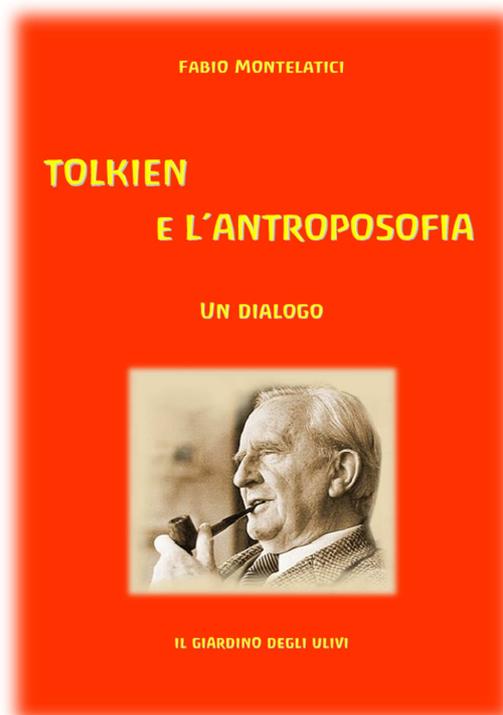
“closing” ourselves in our body, into our little “seed” planted on earth. If we are able to get the best from the Earth, and we live it catching Life and Light, then our “plant” will grow up – that means we will develop a healthy ability to live and manage our material and bodily dimensions; and if we are healthy inhabitants of the physical and material world, on this basis we will develop spiritual abilities, and so we will be able to build our future. We will all grow this plant: who cares who does it sooner, and it will be healthier and more luxuriant for this.

Tolkien’s Christian message must be perceived and studied starting with these thoughts, from similar references: every traditional perspective could certainly be “right”, but in my opinion could also impoverish a modern, rich, fruitful and in many ways new message. Investigate Tolkien’s images. They are not just fashion, or nerdish, or an expression of niggling scholarship. They are an imaginative and artistic help in taking a path that talks about the deepest events of our past, present and future.

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