

Traces of '*Sub-creation*': Applicability of Life Experiences to
J.R.R. Tolkien's Literature

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Abstract

Whether the English author J.R.R. Tolkien is present in his works, and if so, how, has been a very thoroughly discussed issue concerning this author and his literary work. This dissertation is an attempt to try and find examples that deal with the potential applicability of the life of the author J.R.R. Tolkien in some works of his 'sub-created' mythology. In order to do so, the biography of the author is going to be compared to three stories by him: *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Children of Húrin* and *Of Beren and Lúthien*. The main body of the essay has been divided into two sections, since each of them seems to be influenced in a different manner by the life experiences of the author. The results that have been drawn from the comparison of the texts mentioned above has suggested that, in fact, there are reasons to think there could be echoes of Tolkien's biography in his mythology. These similarities appear to be related mainly to the portrayal of nature in *The Lord of the Rings* and to the shape that is given to very relevant characters in the legendarium of Tolkien like Túrin Turambar and Beren, apart from other 'secondary' characters. Concerning the treatment of nature, it can be seen that it is Tolkien's beliefs and thoughts about it that are mostly portrayed in his work. As for the characters of Túrin and Beren, as well as for some others in those same stories, they seem to be an attempt on behalf of Tolkien of shaping them according to specific passages and experiences of his own life. On the light of this, it is suggested that Tolkien could have made use of what is known as 'autofiction' when constructing such characters. Finally, some concluding remarks have been made.

Keywords: applicability, sub-creation, life experiences, autofiction

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1. Introduction

The mythology –with all its stories and languages– that J.R.R. Tolkien created for his Middle-earth was a life-long labour. As he himself stated, his work was “written in [his] life-blood” (*Letters* Letter 109). His creation served a long desired purpose, the desire of offering his motherland, England, a legendarium and mythology that it lacked (*Letters* L131). Although we know that he was the real mind or, as he liked to call it, ‘sub-creator’ behind all the legends he created, he always wanted to, somehow, remain apart from his texts. That is, he wanted his stories to be some sort of historical record that had arrived to him, him being a mere editor in this matter. The fact that he saw himself as mere collector of these stories can be seen, for example, when he says that his character Faramir was not created by him, but that rather he came to him (*Letters* L66). His intention not to feature as the creator of the stories can be more clearly seen in the fact that he does not even portray himself as the narrator of them. Rather, he lets others take the narrative voice, creating a chorus in which “a multitude of characters speak in diverse voices, but the author stays well out of sight” (Garth 301). This plan was taken to such an extreme, that, as Judith Klinger states, even poems that had previously been published under his name were later on inserted in greater stories and “re-attributed” to other authors (96). Another clear example is that stories like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Silmarillion* are supposed to be translations by Tolkien from the so-called Red Book of Westmarch, which was said to be written in Elvish (Honegger).

However, is it really possible, from our modern perspective, that there could be a text without a real author, as Tolkien intended? The idea of there being a text totally devoid of an author has been extensively discussed by authors like Michel Foucault. In his essay “What is an author?”, Foucault suggests that texts nowadays have the ability of killing their authors, of getting rid of them (117). However, even though a text may not receive any implicit influence from its author, the producer of the text will always have an influence on it, even though this may be indirect. Foucault reinforces this idea by stating that the mere name of an author “is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description” (121) and that “the name of the author remains at the contours of texts ... characterizing their mode of existence” (123). From these words we could conclude that a text is never completely free from the influence of its author, since even their name conveys certain ideas that could alter the reader’s approach to the text. In a similar manner, Foucault suggests that, frequently, the inclusion and posterior development of

certain events in a story may have its source in the author itself (128). This could be the reason why Foucault would claim that today the author's control over their texts is total (126).

Regarding Tolkien's literary work, there have been many scholars who have carried out their research around the authorship constructions in his work. The following works that are going to be mentioned are just a little sample of everything that has been written and said regarding this issue. Perhaps one of the best resources for anyone interested in Tolkien is his biography written by Humphrey Carpenter. The reader of this work will find details about Tolkien's life concerning very different matters, and of course, Carpenter also talks about Tolkien the author and the relationship that existed between him and the texts that he wrote. First of all, it is interesting to point out that, as Carpenter writes, Tolkien was not very keen on allegory, but that he rather preferred the word 'applicability' (Carpenter 193). Nevertheless, Carpenter draws certain similarities between Tolkien and Niggle, the main character of his work *Leaf, by Niggle*. In Carpenter's words, Tolkien and Niggle are characters who "[niggle]" over details" (199). Besides, this work could well have been an attempt on Tolkien's behalf to express his anxieties concerning the mythology that he was creating (Carpenter 200). Carpenter writes that "Like Niggle [Tolkien] sensed that he would be snatched away from his work long before it was finished – if indeed it was ever finished in this world" (200). Truly, this story of Niggle has been much resorted to when it comes to relating Tolkien to his work. For example, in his essay "Estética y Don en *Hoja, de Niggle*", Eduardo Segura also declares this work to be one of the most allegorical works ever written by Tolkien (210). In keeping with Carpenter's views, Segura also suggests this work to be clearly linked to what Tolkien thought of his sub-creation. In Segura's words, "Leaf, by Niggle" could be the search for an explanation about Tolkien's artistic task (226). Leaving the story of Niggle aside, we see that there are also other authors and scholars who have worked generally on the way Tolkien made his presence felt in his texts. For example, John Garth has stated that although Tolkien's works are not autobiographical, there are certainly a handful of his values present in them (260). Similarly, Judith Klinger suggests that there is a permanent connection between Tolkien's "primary" and "secondary" worlds (92). In discordance with these opinions we find Patrick Brückner, who states that since Tolkien was not the inventor of his mythology, but a mere collector, it is not possible to find any traces of his influence in

the texts (166). Even though we can see that there are disagreements on this issue, an idea which most scholars share is that allegory or the applicability of Tolkien's work to his biography are not enough to see what really lies behind his works.

Precisely, it is the aim of this work to delve into Tolkien's mythology to try and find examples regarding the applicability of his life experiences and the beliefs derived from that background to his mythology. However, I would like to point out that it is not my objective to state that the similarities that are to be found were made on purpose by the author. In order to prove the aforementioned thesis, the work has been divided into two main parts. In the first part, we are going to talk about the manner in which Tolkien's experiences shaped his mind concerning his attitude to nature, and how this is portrayed in his work *The Lord of the Rings*. In the second section, we will have a look at the literary phenomenon called 'autofiction' and at how traces of it can be found in characters like Beren or Túrin. This section is going to be an attempt to relate Tolkien to Beren and Túrin, and also other characters to important people in the life of Tolkien. The adoption of this two-part structure of the work has been done on purpose. This is because the author's influence portrayed in both sections is different. While in the first one it is Tolkien's thoughts that are presented by means of certain characters in his work, in the second one it is Tolkien himself and other people taking the shape of certain characters via some recognizable events in Tolkien's life.

2.- Tolkien's own experience

In this first section we are going to consider the manner in which what Tolkien experienced during his lifetime shaped his conception of nature. Consequently, we are going to be able to see how these ideas are portrayed in his work *The Lord of the Rings*.

2.1. Experience concerning nature and industry

Nature seems to be a key element in Tolkien's Middle-earth legendarium and mythology. It is not a passive element, but rather a very active agent. In the stories written by Tolkien we perceive that nature is something that we must be respectful towards and careful with. Quite clear examples of this 'active' nature can be found in the figures of the mountain Caradhras, called 'the Cruel'- a mountain that seems to do everything in its hand to stop the Fellowship of the Ring from crossing its paths -, or Treebeard, which will be discussed later. Even an imaginary line can be drawn among

the different peoples that inhabit Middle-earth depending on their relationships with the natural environment. Some people will try to preserve it and come to terms with it, while others will completely despise it and get rid of it in order to achieve their goals.

2.1.1. Love for nature and rejection of modern technology and industry

This idea of nature being destroyed, closely linked to the advancement of industry, may have its source in the experiences that Tolkien went through during his childhood and shaped his mind forever. Tolkien lived in different places during his life, some of them being in the countryside and more in contact with nature, and others in urban and industrialized areas such as Birmingham. Thus, he developed a particular love for the English countryside and woods and quite a profound distrust of development in general and industry in particular. Later on, as his experiences with the world became more varied, he would develop a great disgust with the growth of industrialized areas that, in part, turned his world into a “bad corrupt unnatural world” (*Letters* L 52), as he himself put it.

The development of this way of thinking regarding nature and industry may well have its roots in the different environments in which Tolkien lived during his early years. This was mainly due to the family being constantly on the move. The ‘exodus’ of the Tolkien family - always consisting of Tolkien’s mother, younger brother and him – began in the spring of the year 1895 according to Humphrey Carpenter in his work *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, when his mother took John Ronald and Hilary to England to visit her parents in Birmingham. Their father remained and died in Bloemfontein, South Africa, where the family had originally lived. In fact, the environment in Birmingham proved to be very profitable, since it “marked [an] improvement in Ronald’s health” (Carpenter 23). After the death of their father, their mother decided to move to a quiet hamlet outside the industrial city of Birmingham where the two Tolkien boys would be in permanent contact with nature. This place was Sarehole, a place of pivotal importance both for Tolkien and his mythology. It was pivotal in the sense that it triggered his passion for nature and trees. His love for the latter was a very peculiar one. As a child he was very fond of drawing, and trees seemed to be quite a recurrent theme in his sketches. However, not only did he like drawing them, but rather, he liked “to be *with* trees”(Carpenter 30). Carpenter writes that Tolkien used to “climb them, lean against them, [and] even talk to them” (30). The fact that he used to talk to trees

may show us how he really believed that trees were living creatures inhabiting this world the same way as humans did. If we take a look at his literature, we see that trees have, indeed, their place within Middle-earth. Probably, the greatest expression of Tolkien's love for trees can be found in the figure of Treebeard, the Ent. Treebeard is a tree that has the faculty of behaving like a human being in the sense that he can move freely and communicate with the other inhabitants of Middle-earth. In fact, Carpenter states that the figure of Treebeard is "the ultimate expression of Tolkien's love and respect for trees" (198).

In the year 1900 the family moved to the industrialised city of Birmingham after having spent four years in the quiet and remote Sarehole. As can be easily imagined, the enormous difference between Sarehole, with its woods, mill, etc.; and Birmingham, with its factories and fumes, made a profound impact on Tolkien. The new scenery that he could see surrounding him struck him hard in comparison to the natural landscape that he had enjoyed so much in Sarehole. What Tolkien could see from the windows of his new house was, as Carpenter puts it, "a sad contrast to the Warwickshire countryside: trams struggling up the hill, the drab faces of the passers-by, and in the distance the smoking factory and chimneys of Sparkbrook and Small Heath" (33). In light of this, it is no wonder that he felt as if he was "trapped in the city", longing for his past experiences in the countryside, a countryside that at the time looked so far away (Carpenter 40).

As a result of all the experiences concerning city and countryside life that were building up inside Tolkien, he developed quite a profound distrust in progress and its consequences for the environment. Tolkien could not help feeling sad whenever he was witness of natural scenery that had been spoilt in the name of progress. For example, when in 1933 he returned to Sarehole, he realised that nearly everything had changed and many of the places where he had played during his childhood were not there anymore. Concerning this experience, in an entry of his diary he wrote that he envied those "whose precious early scenery has not been exposed to such violent and peculiarly hideous change" (Carpenter 130). Similarly, and following his strong attitudes, he reached a point in which he rejected moving around in a car, due to the damage that "the internal combustion engine and new roads were doing to the landscape" (Carpenter 162).

2.2. Nature and Good vs. Evil in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

Having seen the background of contrasts in which Tolkien grew up, we could say that his attitudes towards nature and progress were quite justified. It has been mentioned previously that his attitude was that of praising nature and demonizing progress and industry, and traces of this can be found all along his mythology of Middle-earth. In his work *Tolkien and the Great War*, John Garth suggests that the basis of Tolkien's legendarium resides in the everlasting "conflict between good and evil" (Garth 217). Consequently, we are able to outline a connection between Tolkien's approach to nature and the basic fight between good and evil that John Garth discusses. This connection can be especially established in what many consider Tolkien's masterpiece, that is, *The Lord of the Rings*. Throughout this work, we can perceive that all, or at least many, of the different people, creatures and inhabitants that dwell in Arda are somehow divided into two factions regarding their relationship with nature. In other words, it can be seen that there are certain people that live in harmony with and are respectful to nature; while there are others, whose only aim is to despise it and get rid of it, since it does not serve their purposes. However, it is also the case that in Tolkien's mythology nature is portrayed as an everlasting force that Men or any other element will have great difficulties taming. In fact, there will be many occasions on which nature will show its power by destroying those creations made by men. So the image of a beautiful but, at the same time, fierce nature is present.

Following the idea of there being people in Middle-earth who either live in harmony with nature or live against it, the two clearest examples of the latter group can be found in the figures of Saruman and Sauron and the places where they dwell: Isengard and Mordor. It is essential to bear in mind that both of them are linked to evil in *The Lord of the Rings*. First of all, however, I think it is convenient to explain what kind of figures Saruman and Sauron are. Both of them had originally been beings very much related to the Valar or gods. In fact, Saruman is an Istari, a kind of wizard sent by the Valar, and Sauron is a Maiar, that is, a servant of the Valar. None of them was originally evil, but they do become evil from the very moment when they become corrupted. Sauron was the servant of Melkor, the great enemy, by whom he was turned evil. In the same manner, Melkor turned evil because of his ambitions of being the most powerful among the Valar. In the case of Saruman, he also becomes corrupted and evil because he wants to be more powerful than what he was meant to be. In the case of these two characters,

their mass-production industry and the misuse they make of it, represents some sort of short cut in their objective of gaining power. As a consequence, their usage of industry shapes the places in which these two characters reside.

If we take a look at the dwelling of Saruman, Isengard, we will realise how much the place changes due to Saruman's foul industry. Isengard was originally a fortress erected by the Men of Westemnet to the west of Rohan in the ancient days. In *The Lord of the Rings*, we are told this about what the place had been like and what its shape was after Saruman dwelt there:

Once it had been green and filled with avenues, and groves of fruitful trees, watered by streams that flowed from the mountains to a lake. But no green thing grew there in the latter days of Saruman. The roads were paved with stone-flags, dark and hard; and beside their borders instead of trees there marched long lines of pillars, some of marble, some of copper and of iron, joined by heavy chains (*LotR* 554).

We could say that the change that we are told about in this extract tells us about a place that has been modified, urbanised in a way. It has been made fit for human livings with its paved roads. However, the changes do not merely reside in Saruman paving the roads that lead to the Tower of Orthanc, they go way far beyond that. What Saruman has built in Isengard is a heavily industrialised place, with "pits and forges" (*LotR* 260), whose fires light the whole valley at night. The construction and expansion of this industrial area has been made at the cost of the trees of the wood of Fangorn, which are later on "carried off to feed the fires of Orthanc" (*LotR* 474), as Treebeard says. Of course, as it happened in the Birmingham of Tolkien's youth, the valley of Isengard is also filled with some sort of "smoke or haze" (*LotR* 481) so typical of industrialised areas. The source of this change is clearly connected with the change that Saruman himself suffers. As it has been said before, he was sent to Middle-earth so as to help the fair folks that inhabited it. However, he becomes greedy and industry is presented to him as a shortcut to making his power greater. That is why from wandering in the woods of Fangorn with Treebeard's leave, he turns himself to someone who perceives nature as an obstacle (or a vehicle) for his ambitions of "becoming a Power" (*LotR* 473). His mind becomes, as Treebeard explains to Merry and Pippin, "a mind of metal and wheels" (*LotR* 473), making clear reference to his interest in industry. The fact that he

uses the trees of Fangorn as wood for his forges makes him the enemy of the Ents. Indeed, he is referred to as “accursed tree-slayer” (*LotR* 979) and as having a heart “as rotten as a black Huorn’s” (*LotR* 586) by the Ents themselves.

Another figure that is in line with Saruman and his attitude towards nature is Sauron, also known as the Dark Lord, and major enemy of the free people of Middle-earth during the Third Age. His dwelling place is Mordor, the Land of the Shadow, in the east. This is a very arid land, being a plateau enclosed within mountain chains such as the Ephel Dúath, Mountains of Shadow, and Ered Lithui or Ash Mountains. If we focus on the way this land is described by different characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, the idea that we form in our minds is going to be the image of an industrialised area, where industry has caused severe damage to the landscape. When Frodo and Sam find themselves nearly at the very end of their journey, gazing upon the stretch of land that extends between them and their objective, that is, Mount Doom, we are told that they stand in front of “a wide region of fuming, barren, ash ridden land” (*LotR* 936). These three characteristics of the land of the Dark Lord can be attributed to the heavy industry that Sauron has developed in his land. More than once the forges and machines of Sauron are mentioned in *The Lord of the Rings*, which seems to lead us to a precise place. This place happens to be Mount Doom or Orodruin, the place where Sauron forged the One Ring, and the place where Frodo and Sam have to go in order to accomplish their enterprise of destroying the Ring and restore peace to Middle-earth. This mountain seems to be an immense factory with its “furnaces far below its ashen cone” (*LotR* 899) from which a “rumour and a trouble as of great engines throbbing and laboring” (*LotR* 945) can be heard. This, added to the fact that the Mountain, also called Mountain of Fire, seems to have some sort of “vast oast or chimney capped with a jagged crater” (*LotR* 941), enforces the idea of Orodruin being something like a great factory.

This vast factory, of course, as the factories of Tolkien’s Birmingham did, pollutes very heavily all the land around it. Therefore, Mordor is also a land covered in a mist and fog proceeding from the forges of the Mountain of Doom. Its chimney is constantly “belching forth a great fume” (*LotR* 920), and if we take into account that the origin of this fume is industry, it is no wonder that the air that can be breathed in that land makes breathing for Frodo and Sam “painful and difficult, and a dizziness came on them [Frodo and Sam], so that they staggered and often fell” (*LotR* 940). Of course, the

vapours, fumes and reeks that extend all over Mordor are produced on purpose by Sauron himself, since they are very useful for him in order to extend his threat all over Middle-earth. This is at least what Beregon, soldier of the citadel of Gondor tells Pippin, when Pippin asks him about the gloomy weather: “this is no weather of the world. This is some device of [Sauron’s] malice; some broil of fume from the Mountain of Fire that he sends to darken hearts and counsel” (*LotR* 808). In addition, Sauron’s industry is also polluting the streams of water that run within his realm, this being quite a clear consequence of any industrial activity. Once Frodo and Sam decide, after deliberating for a while, that both of them will drink from a stream that Sam suspected of being poisonous, we are told that the water “had an unpleasant taste, at once bitter and oily, or so they would have said at home” (*LotR* 921). We could say that these words convey the idea that, at least, the water that could be found in the Land of Shadow is not completely appropriate for drinking, and that the queerness of its taste may be caused by the industrial activity of Sauron. Here, we could draw a comparison between how Tolkien perceived the industrialised Birmingham and how the Hobbits, more precisely Sam, perceive the land of Mordor. We know that the view Tolkien caught from his window did not please him at all, since it was extremely different from what his loved Warwickshire looked like (Carpenter 33). In the same way, when for the first time Sam crosses into Mordor on his own, due to Frodo having been caught by the Orcs, he is not pleased either by what he sees. In fact, we are told that “hard and cruel and bitter was the land that met his gaze” (*LotR* 899).

Contrary to the figures of Saruman and Sauron, who, as said, could represent progress, industry and their consequences in Tolkien’s time, we also come across figures and characters whose aim is to preserve the natural environment in which they live. It could be possible that, with such characters, what Tolkien was looking forward to transmitting was the idea that nature will always have the power to overcome men’s deeds and outlast them. Examples of this behaviour are to be found in characters such as Treebeard and the Ents or Galadriel, the Lady of Lórien, among others. They are to be found within the group of people that live to overthrow the power of evil in Middle-earth.

We can start by taking a look at Treebeard and the Ents, who are the so-called shepherds of the trees. The Ents live in the Forest of Fangorn and among them Treebeard stands out. Gandalf provides us with more than an adequate definition of who

or what Treebeard is: “Treebeard is Fangorn, and the eldest and chief of Ents, and when you speak with him you will hear the speech of the oldest of all living things” (*LotR* 558). What we can deduce from these words uttered by Gandalf is the following. If we consider Treebeard, or Fangorn, to be a symbol of nature and if it is said to be the oldest living creature on earth, that could mean that Tolkien was hinting at the idea that nature was before men were. Thus, we should pay respect to it, and never dismiss it. We should under no circumstances mess with nature or, in this precise case, Treebeard and the Ents, because “Fangorn is perilous – not least to those that are too ready with their axes, and Fangorn himself, he is perilous too; yet he is wise and kindly nonetheless” (*LotR* 498). In other words, going against nature is dangerous since this has enough power to destroy anyone or anything that may harm it. At the same time, if our intentions towards it are good and fair, nature has a vast knowledge to offer to us. This is what happens to Saruman, when his mind becomes greedy for power, his attitude shifts to that of destroying nature. In light of this, the Ents get very upset with what Saruman is doing to the woods, and so, there is no other way out for him than paying the price for what he has done to Isengard and the wood of Fangorn. Let us now have a look at the following poem:

To Isengard! Though Isengard be ringed and barred with doors of
stone;
Though Isengard be strong and hard, as cold as stone and bare as
bone,
We go, we go, we go to war, to hew the stone and break the door;
For bole and bough are burning now, the furnace roars – we go to
war!
To land of gloom with tramp of doom, with roll of drum, we
come, we come;
To Isengard with doom we come!
With doom we come, with doom we come! (*LotR* 485)

The poem describes the moment when the Ents march to war with the intention of destroying what Saruman has constructed. It clearly shows that those who do not respect nature and think that they have enough to outplay it are doomed. Nature will always be above men and their deeds. In the same manner, the idea that anything created by men is

unlikely to outlast the power of nature is present in this work. After some time has passed, precisely when the Hobbits are returning to the Shire after destroying the Ring, we know that the shape of Isengard has totally changed and that there is no sign of Saruman's foul deeds anymore. What the Hobbits see is that: "All the stone circle had been thrown down and removed, and the land within was made into a garden filled with orchards and trees, and a stream ran through it; but in the midst of all there was a lake of clear water" (*LotR* 978). The valley of Isengard has been given back to nature, and no sign of human labour is to be perceived except the Tower of Orthanc.

Another example of an everlasting nature may be found in what happens in the Shire after the Hobbits return from their long voyage in the Wild Lands. Just when the Hobbits thought that after the Ring had been destroyed every sign of evil would have been cast away from Middle-earth, they find that change has come to their beloved Shire. It is, as happened to Saruman, a change triggered by the greed for power. It all boils down to Ted Sandyman wanting to improve his position and relying on mysterious and untrustworthy men to help him. In fact, the mind that is behind all the trouble is no other than Saruman himself.

What Saruman does in the Shire is similar to what he did in Isengard: turn an unspoilt natural environment and its inhabitants into an industrialised and decadent place. If before the Shire was a place where the woods had a prominent position in its landscape, at the return of the Hobbits the majority of them have been cut down (*LotR* 1013). Even many of the hobbit-holes that were spread all along the Shire have disappeared in favour of other types of houses. These new houses resemble huts (*LotR* 1017), very different from the typical hobbit-holes. Besides, there are now larger buildings that have been erected with "ugly pale bricks" (*LotR* 1003). Apart from the new style of the dwellings in which the Hobbits of the Shire now live, industry has also found its place in it. We are told about a new mill that unlike the old one, belches a "steaming and stinking outflow" (*LotR* 1016). Even a great "tall chimney of brick" (*LotR* 1004) has been erected. A direct result of this, as it could not be in any other way, is the pollution that there is in the Shire: the great chimney that we are told about pours out "black smoke" (*LotR* 1004) and there are "piles of refuse" (*LotR* 1017) to be found everywhere.

This passage of the story seems to be a simile of the industrialising process that many towns and cities underwent at the time of Tolkien, when the shape of many places

would change due to the insertion of industry. The buildings made up by pale bricks resemble a lot those typical English factories and the houses built around them, also made up of brick. Following this idea, we also read in this chapter how the new economy works. Now there is a “chief” (*LotR* 998) that controls everything and there are others that are regarded to as “sharers” (*LotR* 999). This may resemble the economical structure that the capitalist system introduced, where many businesses would have an owner and some shareholders. Of course, the appearance of a heavy industry brings with it low-rank workers, which is also due to happen in the Shire. Although Ted Sandyman’s father owned the old mill, with the coming of Saruman he is turned into a plain worker, who “works there cleaning wheels for the Men, where his dad was the Miller and his own master” (*LotR* 1013).

However, nature still has a very important role to play, since it is going to be key to set the record straight. After the Hobbits (Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin), with the help of the whole Shire, manage to drive Saruman and his Men away from the borders of the Shire, there is still much work to do. The destroyed hobbit-holes and erected buildings can be replaced, but not the trees that have been cut down and burnt. This is what Sam mourns most for, the fact that “only his great-grandchildren ... would see the Shire as it ought to be” (*LotR* 1002), that is, full of trees. And it is here where he appeals to the forces of nature to counteract the deeds of men. On this occasion, it is the gift that Galadriel gave to Sam in Lothlórien. This was a box containing “a grey dust, soft and fine, in the middle of which was a seed, like a small nut with a silver shale” (*LotR* 1022). Sam spreads the dust all over the Shire, and plants the silver nut in the place of the former Party Tree. Thanks to the power of Galadriel that resides in that gift, spring makes new and young trees sprout, giving back to the Shire its beautiful natural landscape. So, again, we have quite a clear example of how nature has the power to overcome any harm caused by men and claim its space.

Having said all this, it is quite clear that Tolkien’s naturalistic beliefs – shaped after his life experiences in Sarehole and Birmingham - are portrayed, at least to an extent, in his work. His love for nature and everything connected to it can be conveyed by powerful characters like Treebeard or Galadriel, while his disgust for the aftermath of progress can clearly be seen in the figures of Saruman and Sauron. Even the line between what is good and what is evil seems to be related to the characters’ use of nature. That is why in

the cases of Galadriel and Treebeard, we can relate their victories over evil to the figure of an almighty and everlasting nature.

3. Autofiction

In this section we are going to have a look at another way in which Tolkien's literature may have been influenced by his personal life experiences. Contrary to the previous section dealing with nature, in which it was Tolkien's ideas that were reflected in his work; in this section we have experiences of his own life that can be applied to what certain characters in his stories undergo. This new manner is called 'autofiction' and we can find traces of it in the characters of Túrin and Beren. As Manuel Alberca states, the fundamental basis of the autofiction is the recognisable identity of the author, narrator or character; identity meaning, in this case, an easily detectable incident. In other words, we would be able to draw a comparison between what a character undergoes and what really happened to the author. This is why this technique dwells between fiction and reality, creating confusion between person and personage (31). In Tolkien's mythology, very good examples of this autofiction can be found in the characters of Túrin and Beren.

3.1. Túrin

The story of Túrin Turambar, very influenced by the Finnish Kalevala, especially the figure of Kullervo (Flieger 136), is supposedly an allegory of Tolkien's childhood, which was not devoid of sorrow. In fact, we are going to be able to see that there are several similarities between Tolkien and Túrin. These similarities can be divided into two main groups: the ones making reference to childhood and the ones referring to relationships with other people.

Regarding the similarities dealing with childhood, the first ones appear connected to the dates and places of birth corresponding to both Tolkien and Túrin. Tolkien was born on the 3rd of January 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa (Carpenter 20). Thus, we can say that Tolkien was born in winter in a "dry dusty barren landscape" (Carpenter 23). Quite the same can be seen in Túrin's date and place of birth. We certainly know that Túrin was born in winter in Dor-lómin, a place surrounded by mountains and with apparently few woods. Apart from this, both of them are obliged to leave their birthplaces and move to other distant and very different lands. The places to which both of them go can be considered quite alike. Tolkien leaves South Africa to reside in England, more

precisely in Sarehole. As we have mentioned before, Sarehole was a place very much connected to nature and surrounded by woods. In the case of Túrin, he forsakes Dor-lómin to find protection in the kingdom of Thingol, which is located in the wood of Doriath. Thus, we could conclude that the destinations which were to be their homes for a period of time share similarities. As a consequence of this idea of the places where each of them dwelt, we also learn that mobility was a key factor in both of them. As we have explained before, the Tolkien family was constantly on the move from the very moment they arrived in England, which “gave [Tolkien] a sense of rootlessness” (Carpenter 27). Similarly, Túrin changes his dwellings more than once. He moves from Dor-lómin to Doriath, then he lives with the outlaws in Amon Rûdh, then in Nargothrond, later he returns to his birthplace and finally he dies in Brethil. Thus, rootlessness can also be found in Túrin, since he is a character that does not completely fit in any of the places he goes to. Both of them are, consequently, “unsettled wanderer[s]” (Garth 130). It would also be important to point out that both Tolkien and Túrin are orphans. Tolkien lost both parents, his father dying in South Africa and his mother in England some years after. In the case of Túrin, it is true that his parents do not die when he was a child, but he barely has any contact with them since he leaves for Doriath. His father, Húrin, is made prisoner by Morgoth and Morwen, his mother, remains in Dor-lómin.

Moving on to the relationships that Tolkien and Túrin developed, there are also traces of similarities. We have said that both of them were orphans, so one of the first relations that they developed had to be with someone who would take care of them. In the case of Tolkien, it was Father Francis who was chosen by his mother to be his guardian and tutor (Carpenter 39). They developed quite a close relation, to the point that Tolkien considered that Father Francis “had been as a father to him” (Carpenter 49). Concerning Túrin, he also developed a similar relationship with King Thingol, to whom he travelled in search of protection. The father-son relationship between Thingol and Túrin can be seen in the following words by the King himself: “Here, son of Húrin shall your home be; and in all your life you shall be held as my son, Man though you be” (*The Children of Húrin* 77).

In addition to this relationship with someone that is to be their protector, both of them find a friend that is going to have an impact on them. For Tolkien, this person was Christopher Wiseman, who “became an inseparable companion” (Carpenter 41) to him.

Wiseman can be considered Tolkien's first true friend since he arrived in Birmingham, and especially in King Edward's School, which was a completely new environment for him. However deep their relationship was, that does not mean that they were very much alike. In fact, they were opposites: "Wiseman was a Liberal in politics, a Wesleyan Methodist by religion, ... while Tolkien was naturally conservative, a Roman Catholic ... Theirs was an unlikely partnership, but all the richer for it" (Garth 5). This kind of rare but at the same time strong relationship is also to be found in Túrin's story, precisely in the figure of Beleg Cúthalion. When Túrin arrives in Doriath, a completely new place for him, Beleg is the first one to welcome him, and we are told that from the very first moment "he looked with liking upon Túrin" (*CoH* 76). The religious difference afore mentioned and existent between Tolkien and Wiseman can also be transferred to Túrin and Beleg, although it would happen in another manner. In this case, it is not their religion but their race that counts, since Túrin is a man and Beleg an elf. Consequently, their strong relationship – they were "companions in every peril" (*CoH* 86) – can also be catalogued as unlikely, since it happens between a man and an elf. Tolkien happened to be quite an influential figure for Wiseman, and the love that the latter professed for the former was deep, as can be seen in a letter that Wiseman wrote to Tolkien after G.B. Smith had died in the First World War: "We [Tolkien & Wiseman] must contrive to stick together somehow. I can't bear to be cut off from the seventh heaven I lived in my younger days" (Garth 251). It is also the case that Beleg's appreciation for Túrin is very deep (*CoH* 96). The last similarity that we can find in the relationships of Tolkien and Túrin with Wiseman and Beleg resides in the constant disagreements and quarrels that they had. The quarrels between Tolkien and Wiseman would stem "from a small observation and became a battle royal between rationalism and mysticism" (Garth 251). The ones between Túrin and Beleg seem to have its origin mostly in Túrin's pride and stubbornness, as it happens when Túrin refuses to accompany Beleg back to Doriath to fight side by side. Taking all these hints into account, we could be in the position of stating that there could be a certain connection between Beleg and Wiseman.

The last resemblance existing between Tolkien's life and Túrin's can be found in what is known as the 'T.C.,B.S.'. Those letters stood for 'Tea Club, Barrovian Society', a club formed in King Edward's School and whose most prominent members were Tolkien, Wiseman, G.B. Smith and Robert Gilson. The bond created among the four of

them would become very close. The literary echoes of this group could be found in the group of outlaws that Túrin joins after fleeing from Thingol's kingdom due to a murder that he has committed. Both Tolkien and Túrin will become very remarkable members in their corresponding groups. Due to his extraordinary literary creativity, Tolkien seemed to stand out of the group, being some sort of "chosen, like Saul among the children of Israel" as Smith called him (Garth 118). In a similar way, Túrin's strength and fierceness in battle lead to the outlaws taking "him as their captain" (*CoH* 107). If we have a look at what we are told about the aims of the TCBS we will find out that it resembles that of the outlaws as well. For the aim of the TCBS, as Smith once declared, was to "leave the world better that they had found it" and "to re-establish sanity, cleanliness, and the love of real and true beauty in everyone's breast" (Garth 105). Regarding the outlaws, apart from living for themselves, it is also their objective to get rid of the orcs that live in their lands, which means that their aim is also to try to build a better world. Of course, all things come to an end, and the TCBS would not be different. The end for the TCBS came during the Great War, where it lost most of its members, including Rob Gilson and G.B. Smith. Tolkien and Wiseman were luckier as they were able to survive the war. The loss of Smith and Gilson was a very painful blow for Tolkien, and his attitude to the TCBS was never really the same after the war (Carpenter 147). In Túrin's story, the end of the group of outlaws also comes after a bloody battle. This battle takes place in Amon Rûdh, after they are betrayed by Mîm, the dwarf, who was their host. The whole company is massacred by the orcs, all of them except Túrin and Beleg. Túrin is "bound and carried off", while Beleg is "laid on the ground with wrists and ankles tied to iron pins driven in to the rock" (*CoH* 150). So, we can see that the way in which the TCBS and the group of outlaws come to an end happens to be very similar, that is, through battle. Besides, the ones not being killed are also the same: Tolkien and Wiseman and their possible respective counterparts in the story, Túrin and Beleg.

3.2. Beren and Lúthien

The story of Beren and Lúthien, conceived in the period of the Great War, is supposed to be an allusion to the love story between Tolkien and his wife Edith. Tolkien himself acknowledged that Edith had always been Lúthien for him, and that she was aware of it (Garth 283). Maybe the clearest example of the relationship between Tolkien and Edith and Beren and Lúthien is the fact that the following is written in the tombstones of

Tolkien and Edith: “Edith Mary Tolkien, Lúthien, 1889-1971. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, Beren, 1892-1973” (Carpenter 259). In addition to this, we can also find certain similarities between what happened to Tolkien and Edith in real life, and what Beren and Lúthien experience in Tolkien’s literature.

First of all, we should consider the role of woods in both relationships. In Tolkien’s mythology, it is in the woods of Neldoreth that Beren gets to see Lúthien for the first time. It is in that moment when Beren “fell into an enchantment” (*Of Beren and Lúthien* 194) and falling deeply in love with Lúthien. From that moment on, both of them will meet at times and go “in secret through the woods together from spring to summer” (*OBL* 195). In the case of Tolkien and Edith, we know that the walks in the woods were also an important feature of their life together. Moreover, what happened in those strolls in the woods shares a resemblance with an important aspect about Lúthien. It was in the woods that “Edith danced and sang”, and that image seemed to remain in Tolkien’s mind forever (Garth 239). It is also by means of the dances and songs performed by Lúthien that Beren falls in love with her.

Another important characteristic in both, let us say, stories is the appearance of a restrictive male character who will disapprove of any relationship between the lovers. Regarding Tolkien’s life, this role is performed by Father Francis. He, as mentioned before, was Tolkien’s tutor and took complete charge of the Tolkien brothers after their mother died. Father Francis “demanded that the affair should stop” (Carpenter 49) when he learned that Tolkien was not concentrating as hard as he should on his studies because he was meeting a girl three years older than him. He even threatened Tolkien with stopping to fund his university career if he did not cease to see Edith (Carpenter 51). In the story of Beren and Lúthien, Thingol, King of Doriath and father of Lúthien, is the character that plays this same restrictive role. Thus, we see how the figure of someone not approving of their love affairs is present both in Tolkien’s real life and in the tale of Beren and Lúthien. It is very interesting to see how the figures of Father Francis and King Thingol are so related, since they are both protectors but also restrictive figures at the same time.

The third parallel between the two stories can be found in the figures of Edith and Lúthien. To be more precise, the similarity can be found in a very relevant decision that both of them have to make. Edith is not a Catholic like Tolkien; instead, she is a

member of the Church of England (Carpenter 73). Thus, in order for their marriage to be approved by Tolkien's Catholic church, it is compulsory for Edith to be converted into a Catholic (Carpenter 73). In the light of this, we are told that Tolkien regarded this decision by Edith as a "test of her love" (Carpenter 73). If we turn to Lúthien, we can see that her decision is very similar. Beren dies due to the wounds that he receives in the quest for the Silmaril, and as a man that he is, he has to leave Middle-earth never to return. However, Lúthien, not able to endure the loss, decides to go to the halls of Mandos and there "[kneel] before Mandos and [sing] to him" (*OBL* 221). Mandos, although being deeply moved, does not have the power to bring Beren to life again, so in the end, it is Manwë who decides upon the fate of Beren and Lúthien. After Lúthien is given two options by Manwë, she resolves to "return to Middle-earth, and take with her Beren, there to dwell again, but without certitude of joy" (*OBL* 222) and, as a consequence, to become a mere mortal like Beren. In both cases, the aftermath of the decisions is also similar. Edith and Lúthien are obliged, as a consequence of it, to stay apart from their families. In the case of Edith, she is forced by her uncle to leave the house of the Jessops, where she had lived for some time (Carpenter 74). Regarding Lúthien, since she has decided to stay in Middle-earth and become a mortal, she is not able to follow her kindred to Valimar, where the elves rest forever.

The last parallel between the stories of Tolkien and Edith and Beren and Lúthien concerns Tolkien and Beren. More precisely, the analogy can be found between the time Tolkien spends in the trenches in the Great War and Beren's journey across Nan-Dungortheb. The trenches that made up the French frontline were the place where Tolkien was sent to fight. This fighting system made war more static, since it implied two rivals, each of them fixed in their secure positions, and between them a completely spoilt and barren land, commonly known as "no-man's-land" (Carpenter 91). The very same happens in the valley of Dungortheb, a barren land that extends between Ered Gorgoroth and Doriath. In this case, we also have a piece of land between two powers fighting each other, that is, "the sorcery of Sauron and the power of Melian" (*OBL* 193). Apart from this 'geographical' similarity, there are others that we could look at. No-man's-land was a place linked to death, since many of the bombings and war action took place precisely there. The Valley of Dungortheb is also a place where only death is to be found (*OBL* 193). Apart from that, the type of war gadgets that were used also fit in the description of the threats that dwelled in Nan-Dungortheb. For example, the

barbed wire that was spread all over the fighting area (Garth 118) may resemble the “unseen webs in which all living things were snared” (*OBL* 193) made by the spiders. Also, the “hidden machine guns” (Garth, 163) and “snipers” (Garth 177) that were positioned all over no-man’s-land and killed soldiers out of nowhere can be considered like the creatures that hunted “silently with many eyes” (*OBL* 193) in Dungortheb. Taking all this into account, it is no wonder that this barren land between the trenches was perceived as something horrifying by soldiers like G.B. Smith (Garth 177), just the same way as it happened in Dungortheb, where “horror and madness walked” (*OBL* 193).

4. Conclusion

To put an end to this work, we could conclude that what has been stated as the aim of it at the very beginning has been fulfilled. The objective was to show how certain aspects like attitudes and experiences of J.R.R. Tolkien could be found in some works of his mythology. In the first section of the work, we have seen how Tolkien’s love for nature and scorn for industry developed from his experiences in Sarehole and Birmingham. Later, we have connected these attitudes to specific characters and events in *The Lord of the Rings*. On the basis of these relations, it has been possible to draw a line between ‘good’ characters and ‘evil’ characters. And finally, we have also seen how the image of an extremely powerful nature has its place in Tolkien’s literature, as it happens at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, for example. In the second part of the work, the focus has been placed on the literary resource called ‘autofiction’. By means of this, the way in which Tolkien portrayed himself as two characters that were very relevant to his mythology, like Túrin Turambar and Beren, has been shown. Certainly, it could be said that the stories of Túrin and Beren share some similarities with Tolkien’s childhood, adolescence and the time that he spent in the Great War. Similarly, it has also been possible to draw a comparison between other characters in those two stories and the people that were closely related to Tolkien, like his wife Edith, his protector Father Francis or Christopher Wiseman, a very good friend of him.

If we were to draw an overall conclusion from this work, with all the evidence that has been presented we could state that there exists a certain degree of applicability between what Tolkien went through during his lifetime and his mythology. On the one hand, there is a very clear analogy between what his thoughts were concerning nature and

progress and the figures of nature and industry depicted in his masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*. On the other hand, we could say that Tolkien shaped some characters in his mythology with the aim that they would look like him and some of the people around him.

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