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FELIX CULPA: theologico-poetical dialogues in Augustine, Aquinas, Milton, and Tolkien

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“Oft hope is born, when all is forlorn.”
(Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 877)

Resumo

Esta pesquisa analisa como o tropo católico da *felix culpa* foi (re)trabalhado pelas teologias agostiniana e tomista, bem como pelas obras literárias de John Milton e J.R.R. Tolkien, respectivamente em *A Cidade de Deus*, *Suma Teológica*, *Paraíso Perdido*, *O Silmarillion* e *O Senhor dos Anéis*. Trata-se de um estudo temático informado pela teoria da intertextualidade de Julia Kristeva, na medida em que busca revelar como os textos mencionados absorvem e se diferenciam entre si no tratamento do tropo da "bendita culpa", resultando, por fim, naquilo que Kristeva denominou um "mosaico de citações". Dessa forma, corrobora-se a ideia de que nenhum texto é plenamente original, mas sim parte de uma cadeia dinâmica de reescrituras constantemente renovadas pela diferença e pela reinterpretação. Ademais, o trabalho evidencia alguns dos referenciais eruditos que informam a ficção fantástica de J.R.R. Tolkien, defendendo, assim, sua relevância acadêmica e profundidade interpretativa, ao mesmo tempo em que promove um novo engajamento com clássicos teológico-poéticos por meio da análise da ficção contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: Tolkien; Milton; felix culpa; intertextualidade; fantasia.

Abstract

This research analyses how the Catholic trope of *felix culpa* has been (re)worked by Augustinian and Thomistic theologies, as well as by the literatures of John Milton and J.R.R. Tolkien in *The City of God*, *Summa Theologica*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Silmarillion*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, respectively. It provides a thematic study informed by Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality to the extent as it attempts to disclose how the texts mentioned absorb and differ from one another in their treatment of the happy fault trope, ultimately resulting in what Kristeva termed a "mosaic of quotations". Therefore, it corroborates with the suggestion that no text is fully original, but rather, that all texts are part of a dynamic chain of rewritings made anew by difference and reinterpretation. Furthermore, it discloses some of the scholarships that inform J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy fiction, hence arguing in favor of its academic relevance and interpretive depth, while also encouraging a renewed engagement with theologico-poetical classics through the examination of contemporary fiction.

Keywords: Tolkien; Milton; felix culpa; intertextuality; fantasy literature.

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1. Introduction

In the famous 1951 letter to editor Milton Waldman, J.R.R. Tolkien, while explaining the connections between *The Silmarillion* (1977) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5), delves into what he considered to be the deepest and most important theme of his tale: death. According to Tolkien, all myth and fairy-tale are "mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 145). To the author, once one becomes aware of one's own mortality, of one's own eventual departure from the world, a creative desire arises, a wish to immortalize what is loved and cherished. In this sense, art is an act of rebellion against the laws of God, against the law of mortality, and, as such, it poses many opportunities to "fall". The artist may become possessive towards his creation and thus be filled with a desire to become the Lord and God of what was produced. Thenceforth, the desire for this power leads to the Machine, or Magic: "all use of external plans or devices (apparatus) instead of development of the inherent inner powers or talents – or even the use of these talents with the corrupted motive of dominating – bulldozing the real world, or coercing other wills" (145-6). This is why Tolkien does not make a consistent use of the word "magic" in his tales. In *The Lord of the Rings*, an authorial comment appears through the words of Galadriel and clarifies this choice. After explaining that she can command the mirror to reveal what some wish to see, although it may also show things unbidden, the Elven queen tells the Hobbits: "Do you wish to look [into the mirror]? … For this is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy. But this, if you will, is the magic of Galadriel" (362). Tolkien contends that there is not a word for the devices and apparatuses of the Elves because they are not the same as the "magic" of the Enemy, a confusion that all human stories have suffered from. What Tolkien wanted to convey, therefore, is a difference: the Elves' "magic" is art, and its object is art itself, not power. The difference lies essentially in the manner with which the creation of God is handled, either with a tyrannous desire to dominate and corrupt or with a desire to sub-create, to add and contribute to the original creation. Nonetheless, Tolkien points to the inevitable problem of this conundrum: evil arises from apparently good roots.

It is in the posthumously published *The Silmarillion* that the reader is presented to the birth of Tolkien's fictional universe, Eä, and, therefore, also to the beginning of evil in this world. Melkor, an angelic spirit to whom Eru[1] gave greatest power and knowledge, plays a role

[1] "... Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar" (*The Silmarillion* 3). In Tolkien's fiction, Eru is the god who creates the world and the first creatures to inhabit it.

similar to that of Lucifer in the Christian myth. Proud and rebellious, Melkor desired to enhance his own power and glory, despite being the mightiest amongst his siblings. For defying Eru in his personal quest for power, he has to withdraw into exile, a period in which he becomes responsible for the corruption and destruction of Middle-earth and its inhabitants. However, Melkor's interference with the Music of the Ainur[2] introduces corruption to the world even before the creation of matter itself.

Such aspects have often led scholars to scrutinize the nature of evil in Tolkien's Middle-earth and, because of the heavy Christian meaning that comes combined with it, the tendency has been to do so under the light of Augustinian and Thomistic theologies. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was an important Catholic theologian and philosopher who made relevant contributions to the doctrines of the Church in his seminal works *The City of God* and *Confessions*, in which he often addresses the problem of evil, trying to reconcile its existence with that of a benevolent Creator. According to him, the nature of God is unchangeable and completely incorruptible, thus He is good, and no evil can have its source in Him. Therefore, Augustine argues that evil is the privation of good, which can be understood as the absence of God. Accordingly, what is called evil is not inherent to human nature, but rather arises through an ignorant free will that chooses to move away from Him. It is a moral failure. Henceforth, evil becomes just a tool that, through His Being, can be used to the benefit of the overall beauty and order of the universe. Echoing this theodicy and contributing with it with a further systematization within Aristotelian metaphysics, centuries later, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) would maintain in his *Summa Theologica* that all that exists is good, hence it cannot be that evil has a being, it has no *esse* – essence, or existence. To Aquinas, evil arises from a deficiency, from the limitations and imperfections inherent to created beings. However, because God does what is best for the whole and not the subject, evil becomes a Providential device; again, through the Essence of God, evil things are used to better ends. Consequently, a person might choose a lesser good, not because they are evil in nature, but because their nature is subject to failure. Differently from God, who is the supreme form of good and inherently unchangeable, His creatures – whether human or angelic – are finite and therefore liable to change.

As a Roman Catholic, Tolkien's views concerning the existence of supreme evil are analogous to Augustine's and Aquinas's. He points out his own belief on a note written in

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[2] "... the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his [Eru's] thought, and they were with him before aught else was made" (*The Silmarillion* 3). The Ainur were "angelic spirits" who took part in the song of creation and in assisting Eru in the shaping of the world. The Music of the Ainur, or the *Ainulindalë*, is the first book of *The Silmarillion* and accounts for the creation of the world through a great song conducted by Eru and played by the Ainur.

1956, in which he discusses the aspects of evil in his fiction, defending its inexistence: "In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. I do not think that at any rate any 'rational being' is wholly evil. Satan fell. In my myth Morgoth [Melkor] fell before Creation of the physical world" (*The Letters of J.R.R.* Tolkien 243). As Satan fell, in Arda, Morgoth fell; but he was not created an evil creature, he became evil through free will and pride, just like his biblical predecessor.

An analysis of evil arising from an apparently good source, "a recurrent motif" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 146) in Middle-earth, might open space for an investigation of the concept of *felix culpa.* This Catholic trope, commonly translated as "happy fault", is an attempt to answer the problem of evil by approaching the Fall as the spark that triggered the Incarnation of Christ and the subsequent redemption of Man. It deals with the nature of good and evil as well as with concepts such as temptation, atonement and redemption. However, trespassing the account of the Fall, it can be applied to any such circumstances that deal with these notions, since it has become part of the overall Christian doctrine. For that reason, in this work, I present an examination of this trope and of how it was explored by Augustine and Aquinas in their theological spheres, and by Tolkien and John Milton[3] in their literary writings. Milton, who, differently from Tolkien, recreates upon the biblical account itself, often touches the *felix culpa* trope in his epic *Paradise Lost* (1674) and, therefore, contributes to this research with a more evident creative use of it. His epic, through a rereading of the sacrifice of the Son, paints a "great Argument" (1, 24)[4] and justifies "the wayes of God to men" (1, 26), thus answering the problem of evil with the greater good argument: the loss of Eden leads to "a Paradise within thee, happier farr" (12, 587). That being, the primary sources for this study are Augustine's *The City of God*, Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*

Dialogism and intertextuality are two important concepts that encircle and guide this analysis to the extent as they dictate that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" ("Word, Dialogue and Novel" 66). In other words, it was considered for its concern with the relations between texts and with the

[3] It is relevant to mention that a research on Milton's presence on Tolkien's *The Silmarillion* has already been done at FALE/UFMG, by Giovanni Mazochi (2014), on a graduation paper entitled: "The Influence of Milton's *Paradise Lost* on Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*: a Comparative Analysis". However, this project follows another trajectory, working not only with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but also with other names that Tolkien chose to be part of his compositional universe.

[4] All the references to Paradise Lost are from Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*, edited by John Leonard, Penguin Books, 2003 and will be cited parenthetically with the book number, followed by the number of the line(s).

heritage precursors leave to later authors to build on. According to this perspective, intertextuality indicates dialogues between texts through time and space. Thenceforth, it can also be linked to what Jorge Luis Borges has suggested in his "Kafka and His Precursors" (1999), an essay that reflects upon Kafkaesque characteristics in texts that came before Kafka himself, an idea that implies that "each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future" (201). From this angle, intertextuality has assisted this study in the understanding of how each author mentioned above revisits and reworks the *felix culpa* trope. Therefore, although this is a thematic analysis and not an intertextual analysis – as it does not strictly follow the details of theory –, a review of part of the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva will follow to explore and clarify this idea.

What is appealing in studying these topics in Tolkien is that, in Middle-earth, evil seems to be invincible, sometimes even divine; but, especially in *The Lord of the Rings*, the stories are conducted with hope, always conveying the good that can be withdrawn from evil and suffering. Furthermore, this research has shown the kind of scholarship that informs this fantasy fiction – not only Theology, but also the very canon of English Literature –, thus proving that fantastic literature also deserves scholarly attention from critics. Most of all, as Michel Schneider defends in his *Voleurs de mots: essai sur le plagiat, la psychanalyse et la pensée* (1985), this is the sort of study that illustrates how repetition does not hinder innovation but, on the contrary, makes it possible by showing that words do not belong to anyone, but to the eternal, to time. Thoughts, which are individual and constantly transforming, give new form to raw material, reorganizing it, rewriting it. Like in a dialogue, the response to the precursor enters the chain of meaning and generates new readings, both for the new and the old texts. Therefore, in the words of Tom Shippey, "*The Silmarillion*, with its exile from paradise, its ages of misery, and its Intercessor, is a calque on Christian story, an answer to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*" (*The Road to Middle-earth* 268). Fundamentally, Tolkien's Middle-earth reveals itself as a living organism in a continuous state of production, taking from precursors, adding innovation and leaving space for its own successors.

2. Intertextuality and Dialogism

In an overview, the notion of intertextuality comprehends the idea that no text is created from zero, no author is able to be absolutely original, and therefore, texts are written accordingly to the author's own literary baggage. That being, this theory dictates that, through time and space, a dialogue can somehow be drawn between textual works. How do different authors approach the same subject? How do their works raise questions and give answers to

one another in spite of a gap of centuries between their creation? How does Tolkien's world, somehow conceived through his faith, dialogues with Catholic philosophy and with the canonical work of one of England's most prominent Protestant poets? The work of Julia Kristeva, based in its turn on Mikhail Bakhtin's work, seems like a coherent choice to approach the subject of this research, which is to analyze how Augustine, Aquinas, Milton and Tolkien approach the trope of *felix culpa*, considering how different each of their works are, and to attempt to draw a dialogue between their texts concerning this Catholic concept. Hence, to understand how Tolkien revisits the concept of *felix culpa* in his literature, I shall first analyze the definition and concept of *felix culpa* in Augustine's *The City of God* and *Confessions*, in Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. After establishing how it is explored in each of these works, I shall analyze how Tolkien readdresses it in *The Silmarillion* and in *The Lord of the Rings*, also trying to investigate if he does it in the same way in both novels. By demonstrating how Tolkien works with this concept, I shall be able to determine how he revisits and dialogizes with Augustine, Aquinas and Milton, using Kristeva's studies on intertextuality based on Bakhtin's notions of dialogism. Additionally, I shall also take into consideration Jorge Luis Borges's idea of precursors, which I will also approach in this chapter.

To better comprehend Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, it is essential to go through Mikhail Bakhtin's contributions to linguistic and literary analyses, keeping in mind that his examinations are grounded in the belief that language exists and acquires meaning in social situations and evaluations. Unlike Ferdinand de Saussure's belief in the abstract, arbitrary and non-referential nature of linguistic analysis, Bakhtin believed that meaning was constructed according to specific social interactions and contexts, taking into account the social backgrounds of the addressers and addressees, speakers and listeners, as, for instance, class, age, gender and so on. For example, a speaker is going to change his/her intonation and employ different words when speaking to a friend in a bar and when speaking to an audience during a lecture at a university. As Bakhtin and Valentin Voloshinov argue in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973), "I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong." (86) That is what Bakhtin called "speech genres". For Bakhtin, language could not be analyzed synchronically or abstractly, because language is always changing, it is always mirroring social contexts, interests, worldviews and interpretations. In other words, Bakhtin's focus was on utterances, in concrete verbal communication and in it taking meaning through social interaction. This is what Bakhtin denominates "dialogism": meaning depends on past utterances and on how they

are accepted and understood by others, it is attitudinal and evaluative, it depends on the addresser's attitude and on the addressee's evaluation of that attitude. Therefore, no utterance can stand on itself or acquire meaning on itself, for it depends on social interaction: language is the result of an exchange between addresser and addressee, it is inherently dialogical.

Unlike former critics, who used to split language into "literary" and "practical", Bakhtin thought that a better way of classifying it was as being characterized by the presence of sub-languages (speech genres) derived from practical languages: speech genres are the result of conflicting worldviews, ideologies and evaluations of different addressers and addressees in different social contexts. This ability of language of comprising sub-languages in coexistence was called by Bakhtin "polyglossia" or "polyphony" and it is a concept that complements the notion of dialogism since it reinforces the interactive nature of language. Bakhtin believed that the capacity of speech genres of comprising competing ideologies and worldviews is also taken into literary texts, showing that what binds literature to social reality is language, not content. Polyglossia in the literary sphere, Bakhtin asserts, is the reflection of this competing nature of language in literary discourse in a way that one cannot find, as Graham Allen puts it in *Intertextuality* (2000), an "objective, authorial voice presenting the relations and dialogues between characters but a world in which all characters, and even the narrator him - or herself, are possessed of their own discursive consciousness" (23). The polyphonic novel contests any attempt of a ruling point of view, speech mode, ideology and, therefore, of any discourse that would prevail above others in a text, what would somehow go against the dialogical nature of language. Dialogism is perceived in different speech genres presented by each and every character, including the narrator: through a constructed personality, characters express values and ideologies independently, ideas that can be associated with the character's own consciousness. This conception implies that the author shapes the character's discourse about himself and his own context and not a real, concrete image of him; the character is not a final artistic product of the author's mind, for he does not have an authoritarian guiding position towards the novel. However, dialogism might not only be found in the clash of two different characters' discourses: it is also present inside individual discourses, inside a character's single utterance, if only two ideas clash in it dialogically. This is another concept that emerged as a complement to the notion of dialogism coined by Bakhtin as "double-voiced discourse".

Comprising the concepts of speech genres and double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin introduces the notion of heteroglossia, which is language's ability to contain in itself different voices, different socio-ideological contradictions between different periods of time, groups of people,

schools of thought and so on. In one single utterance it is possible to find different speech genres, different evaluations, worldviews and ideologies conflicting dialogically. In the polyphonic novel, for instance, every character's individual utterance is heteroglot in a way that each one of them carries within themselves not only the character's own speeches, but also the author's, thus each word contains in itself the character's and the author's voices, ideas and meanings.

Bakhtin's notion of dialogism finds its roots in the interactive nature of language, in the exchange between addressers and addressees, it sheds light on the otherness aspect of utterances, suggesting that no word is originally one's own, its origins are not to be found in the addresser's mind, because utterances are acts of appropriation of previous discourses: they absorb and respond to previous utterances, then generate, cyclically, space for further answers. Bakhtin states in *Discourse in the Novel* (1981) that

> … the word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tensionfilled environment of alien words, value-judgements and accents, and weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (276)

Language is a continuous and everlasting process of change that takes place through absorption and response, through transfer from one to another, from context to context, from class to class, gender to gender, group to group, generation to generation. This endless process of renewal does not imply that language leaves behind earlier utterances, but on the contrary, it absorbs them, it absorbs other previous evaluations, so every utterance is charged with previous voices: our own thoughts, our own words are always charged with previous voices and so it cannot be analyzed as having its origin in one individual's mind. Language and human society are intrinsically dialogical.

Bakhtin's views on the dialogic nature of language and of the novel are essentially anti-authoritarian as in their very core is the contesting of any kind of ideology, worldview or discourse that might try to stand above all others. The authoritarian discourse is a one-way road: it does not promote any exchange between the addresser and the addressee as it does not allow any response or accept any evaluation. In other words, the authoritarian discourse does not make room for negotiation, it is an utterance that expects no response, only obedience. In this way, the novel in its intrinsically polyphonic, multi-voice nature is also intrinsically anti-

authoritarian in always promoting interpretations and dialogues. It is this Bakhtinian worldview that also motivates Julia Kristeva in the developing of the notion of "intertextuality".

Kristeva defends that, in the current capitalist system, it was made common sense that knowledge only acquires value when it is consumable, when it can be bought and sold, and that is because there is a general belief that communication is able to clearly convey that knowledge. Kristeva tries to establish the idea that texts are not final products, ready-made to be consumed, but bodies that are in a never-ending state of production, and the same goes for the author and the reader. This view of the text, highly inspired on Marxist and Freudian ideas, is a new way of facing textual production as non-representational and of inviting the reader to participate in the production of meaning of the text. This is the foundation upon which Kristeva develops the notion of semianalysis, a new mode of semiotics in which social practices are brought to light.

Developed in the 60's, the concept of intertextuality heavily relies on Bakhtin's idea of dialogism. Kristeva's attention was directed to establishing how texts are produced out of already existing discourses, as she believed that authors did not create their texts from zero, but rather built them up from other sources they had had contact with. Therefore, as she puts it in "The Bounded Text", first published in 1969, a text is "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (1). Hence, a text is not a separate, independent unity, but a "compilation of cultural textuality" (Allen 36) and thus, every text contains in itself society's ideologies that are always present in discourses and utterances. This, in its turn, is what Kristeva means when she assigns the text the words "practice" and "productivity": texts are the realization of the social conflict over meaning. For instance, words such as "God" or "justice" do not have a stable meaning in society, they might mean one thing for certain groups, but have a completely different meaning for others. So, when an author uses words like these, (s)he incorporates this conflict into his/her text and it consequently becomes impossible for it to acquire only one stable meaning. This presence of social conflict in the text is what Kristeva called "ideologeme" and it reinforces her defense of the analysis of texts as being composed of several pieces of the historical and social text. As Kristeva puts it in "The Bounded Text":

> The ideologeme is the intersection of a given textual arrangement (a semiotic practice) with the utterances (sequences) that it either assimilates into its own space or to which it refers in the space of exterior texts (semiotic practices). The ideologeme is that intertextual function read as 'materialized' at the different structural levels of each text,

> and which stretches along the entire length of its trajectory, giving it its historical and social coordinates. (36)

The ideologeme is the binding point in which utterances become texts, it is the materialization of utterances that brings to the text historical and social ideologies. Therefore, it is a break from the idea that texts are unities that end in themselves, an illusion created by the brief disposition of words and utterances. However, Kristeva's suggestion the approach of texts as textual dispositions of components that create meaning not only in the text itself, but also in the historical and social texts or, in other words, in the historical and social ideologies that are contained in them. Thus, meaning is built in the arrangement of words in a text that contains elements that already have meaning in society. Hence, meaning is always present "inside" and "outside" the text.

The relationship between author and reader – which Kristeva called the horizontal dimension – is always associated with the intertextuality between the present text and its predecessors – the vertical dimension – contained within the text itself, so both relationships occur simultaneously. The acknowledgment of this conjecture is of vital importance to Kristeva's additions to Bakhtin's work and to the conceptualization of the notion of intertextuality, as it unveils the fact that each text that is written is trespassed by other texts and at least one of these that are contained within a text can be read and recognized. Bakhtin introduced the concepts of the horizontal and vertical axis as "dialogue" and "ambivalence" and, though he did not elaborate much on them, they were one of the starts of Kristeva's intertextuality, as they suggest that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 66). Thus, through intertextuality the text can be faced as having a multiple nature.

To continue Bakhtin's work, Kristeva also introduces the concepts of "subject of utterance" and "subject of enunciation", in which the former is the subject uttering, the spoken word strictly connected to the speaker, and the latter focuses on the enunciation, on the verbal structure itself, independently of its origin or author. The utterance is strongly linked to the one who utters; however, when one writes, the words will not be straightly linked to its origin, especially when they are read years after its production. Hence, the author becomes the subject of enunciation, (s)he is lost in the text. This is very important in the theory of intertextuality, as it makes it clear that, when one is analyzing or working with literary forms, one cannot assume that the words written are a direct bridge to the author, for one is dealing with a subject of enunciation, so the word and the author assume the characteristic of being double-voiced.

That way, by embracing the otherness in a text or the presence of previous texts in a new one, intertextuality automatically declares itself at odds with the monological discourse and shows itself as a rebellious, disruptive tool for breaking with ruling ideologies and with the idea of the unity of meaning; it subverts reason and logic and all authoritative impositions.

In "Introduction: Literature and the visual arts; questions of influence and intertextuality" (2002), Margaret Landwehr argues that the concept of intertextuality, as opposed to historic oriented examinations, does not support the search for sources and enumeration of lists in the production of new texts to recognize influence, which is a system that holds predecessors higher than successors. Intertextuality, on the other hand, relies on other approaches, and referring to Thais Morgan in "Is there an intertext in this text: Literary and interdisciplinary approaches to intertextuality" (1985), Landwehr demonstrates how intertextuality deals with this matter:

> By shifting our attention from the triangle of author/work/tradition to that of text/discourse/culture, intertextuality replaces the evolutionary model of literary history with a structural or synchronic model of literatures as a sign system. The most salient effect of this strategic change is to free the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical determinisms, opening it up to an apparently infinite play of relationships with other texts (in Landwerh 2)

By changing the reading from author/work/tradition to text/discourse/culture, intertextuality opens space to a wide range of dialogues and relationships between texts, breaking the culture of measuring quality through influence, which used to belittle and minimize texts based on time and context of writing, thus creating a hostile environment of rivalry in literature. That way, for Kristeva, studying a text through the lenses of intertextuality makes it impossible to work with words such as "sources", "influence" or "context".

Concerning Borges, it is interesting to bring about his *The Library of Babel* (1941), a text in which the author tells the story of a library that holds all books of all languages, various methods of organization and, consequently, all human knowledge. "The library is a labyrinth, containing not one Truth, but all truths, many of them hoaxes, fallacies, frauds or imperfect facsimiles (books that differ by only a single letter or punctuation mark)" (Piper 57). However, it is told that lost in this enormous labyrinth, there is the one book that contains the code that unravels all other books, and the only librarian who once found it and learnt its code is worshiped like a god, although his identity is uncertain, and the book was never again found.

Borges's library is of course a metaphor to humankind's attempt to register our world and history, and of our ever-failing attempt to attain all this knowledge. It is a way of symbolizing the many truths that we create, catalogue and propagate, and that are present in actual libraries: real apparatuses for the acquisition of knowledge, yet real obstacles in this same purpose, for how can one know the Truth or if it even exists? Going even further, the library might be a symbol not only of Borges's own assertions on the importance of precursors, but also of the very core that constitutes the notion of intertextuality. As Graciela Keiser puts it in "Modernism/Postmodernism in 'The Library of Babel': Jorge Luis Borges's Fiction as Borderland" (1995), "the story's central concern is language's performative role, the limitless, ultimately incomprehensible dissemination of meaning" (40), qualities that leave behind any ideas of a work of literature that is autonomous, stable, or that is not somehow connected to other works: Borges's library is a statement of the unattainability of unity and of the infiniteness and unsteadiness of the work of literature.

Another chief component of the *Library* is the subversion of the authority and hegemony of the author, who plays in the story an ambivalent role of both an omniscient voice and one that is submissive to the tautologies of speech, as the narrator states "the certitude that everything has been written negates us or turn us into phantoms" (7). This subversion reminds us not only of Bakhtin's dialogism, but also of Kristeva's intertextuality, as both concepts invoke the multidimensionality of the literary work that contains many voices and ideologies interwoven, putting aside ideas such as the existence of an original text or of the author as a supreme power.

On the other hand, in "Kafka and his Precursors", Borges addresses the subject of predecessors in literature and of how each author is responsible for creating their own precursors: "the word 'precursor' is indispensable to the vocabulary of criticism, but one must try to purify it from any connotation of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that each writer *creates* his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future" (365). Borges's idea interrupts the notion of linearity in literature history since its main idea is that successors can also add meaning to predecessors and not only the other way around. In addition, the fact that each author creates their own library, for, after all, each one of them has different backgrounds, allows for different re-readings of the precursors' works. In this sense, Borges reinforces the theory of intertextuality as he, in other words, is suggesting that textual works can dialogue independently of barriers of time.

It is also relevant to mention Gérard Genette and his contributions to the studies on intertextuality. Genette develops in his *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982)

what he calls transtextual relationships or transtextuality, and from Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, he elaborates on the notions of paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality. The concept of the paratext refers to all the "extra" material, or all the other elements that orbit the text itself, adding meaning to it and changing the reader's perception and interpretation, such as the title, subtitle, preface, illustrations, cover, epigraphs, and so on. In Tolkien, for instance, not only his own illustrations can be considered paratext, but also the posthumous publications that expand and add meaningful details to the "main" texts. Genette raises the question: should we read these texts, given that there is no way of knowing if the author would have published them had he/she lived? Metatextuality, on the other hand, is the relationship that connects one text to another without necessarily the presence of a direct citation or reference, however through any sort of commentary. Does Tolkien silently evoke Augustine in his fictional portrayals of evil? Or Milton in his own painting of a fallen angel? The notion of architextuality surrounds the idea of a relationship that is expressed through the paratext of the title or, most commonly, of the subtitle, however entirely with the purpose of categorizing – titles or subtitles that include "a novel" or "a story" or "poems". When these "categories" are not expressed, it might indicate a refusal to be set under any sort of classification or to state the obvious, which is only natural, for, according to Genette, the text is not supposed to identify itself or to announce its attributes, because that should be done by the reader. Lastly, hypertextuality concerns the relationships that connect texts (hypertexts) to other works that came before them (hypotexts), though not via commentary. It is about texts that spring from earlier ones or that could not even exist without their predecessor. When the latter happens, it happens through a process Genette calls *transformation* and which is responsible for distinguishing texts that derive from the same preexisting work, as this process can happen either as *simple transformation* – referred to as only *transformation* – or as indirect transformation.

Genette's additions and contributions to Kristeva's notion of intertextuality are examples of the unfolding of this concept and of new ways of composing and approaching it, showing that the readings that will be conducted in this work can still be developed and carried on in the future, thus contributing not only to possible discussions in the field of literary studies, but also to a return to the classics through modern literature, that dialogues with its precursors by absorbing from them and answering them back, hence always adding meaning and proposing new readings and dialogues.

3. Tolkien: Life and Times

In April 1895, the S.S. Guelph left Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State, known today as South Africa, taking Mabel Suffield Tolkien and her two sons, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, then three years old, and Hilary Arthur Tolkien, one year old, to Southampton, England. Ronald[5]'s health was not doing well in the South African heat, and he had to be taken to fresher air. His father, Arthur Reuel Tolkien, could not leave his business in the country, however, so it was decided that he would join them in England later. The Tolkiens – German immigrants, English not by many generations – had made their money from an old piano manufacturing company that was, by that time, sold, leaving Arthur's father bankrupt and Arthur himself without a family business to make a living out of. Because of that, he left for South Africa, where the gold and diamond business was flourishing thus making good opportunities for bank employees. Likewise, the Suffields, who belonged to a proud and long line of English ancestry, once owned a prosperous drapery business, but were now also bankrupt. Notwithstanding, after three weeks at sea, Mabel and the kids were received by her little sister Jane and soon were back in Birmingham at their parents' house. Bad news did not take long to arrive, though, and seven months later, Mabel learned that her husband had contracted a rheumatic fever, and only three months after that, in February 1896, he died of a severe haemorrhage.

Left in a difficult position with a small budget to take care of the kids and have a comfortable place of their own, Mabel sought emotional and spiritual comfort in Christianity, and in 1900 she and her sister May were received into the Roman Catholic Church. Originally from a Protestant family, however, their conversion was not well received.

> Their father John Suffield had been brought up at a Methodist school, and was now a Unitarian. That his daughter should turn papist was to him an outrage beyond belief. May's husband, Walter Incledon, considered himself to be a pillar of his local Anglican church, and for May to associate with Rome was simply out of the question. … [He] had provided a little financial help for Mabel Tolkien since Arthur's death. But now there would be no more money from that source. Instead, Mabel would have to face hostility from Walter and from other members of her family, not to mention the Tolkiens, many of whom were Baptists and strongly opposed to Catholicism. (Carpenter 32)

[5] From now on John Ronald Reuel Tolkien will be referred to as either Ronald, JRRT, or only Tolkien.

The turning away of her family and the current financial difficulties struck Mabel's health, but she would not turn her back to the faith that welcomed her in her time of need; thus, from that point on, both Ronald, then eight years old, and Hilary, six, would begin being instructed in the Catholic faith. Mabel was responsible for their early education, since she was well instructed herself in Latin, French and German, painting, drawing and also in playing the piano. However, since Ronald was then old enough, her intention was to put him to take the entrance examination for King Edward's school, where his father had attended, and which was the best grammar school in Birmingham. Mabel had noticed that from an early age Ronald held an interest in "the sounds and shapes of the words as in their meanings, and she began to realise that he had a special aptitude for language" (Carpenter 29), and although he did not like the sounds of French, he showed a deep interest for Latin and English. Concerning literature, as a child, Tolkien held fantasy stories among his favourites and was amused by texts such as *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), the Red Indian stories, *The Princess and the Curdie* (1883) by George Mcdonald, the Arthurian legends, and Andrew Lang's Fairy Stories, especially the *Red Fairy Book* (1890). By the age of seven, Tolkien started writing his own story about a dragon, but his mind was yet mostly attracted to languages, now especially Welsh, which he had recently discovered.

In September 1900, Tolkien was accepted to King Edward's and was enrolled with the help of a Tolkien uncle who volunteered to pay for the school fees. Mabel's own financial situation was still delicate, though, and she was not satisfied with the house they were living at the time, nor with the church they were attending. Hence, in 1902, Mabel found the Birmingham Oratory, a large church established in Edgbaston in 1849 by John Henry Newman, a convert, and which was now taken care of by a community of priests. One of these priests was Father Francis Xavier Morgan, who had been recently ordained parish priest. In him, Mabel found an important friend and advisor who would play an essential role in the children's lives from that point on. Attending a new church and settled in a new house, Mabel's next step was to enrol the boys at Saint Phillip's school, where they could receive Catholic education and where the fees were cheaper. However, the school soon proved not to be able to provide for Ronald's education, and once again Mabel had to take over his tuition — but, fortunately, not for more than a few months, for the boy won a Foundation Scholarship in King Edward's, thus returning there in the Fall of 1903.

A few months later in that same year, Mabel wrote a letter to her mother-in-law mentioning among other subjects that she had not been feeling well. The hardships of poverty,

no family support and of taking care of the boys' education and welfare seemed to have overwhelmed her, and by April 1904, she was in the hospital being treated for a diagnosed diabetes case. Thence, she needed to rest and be attentive to her health, and with the help of Father Francis, Mabel and the children were able to move to the countryside, to Rednal, to live at a country house that was used as a retreat for the Oratory clergy. There they lived with the local postman and his wife in a little cottage where they had a bedroom and a sitting room. Mabel's health improved, as did the boys', who in the beginning of that year had been in bed with measles, a subsequent whooping-cough, and pneumonia, in Hilary's case. The reencounter with nature so long after having left Sarehole – their first home in England after Arthur's death – seemed to do wonders to all of them. Father Francis would often visit, but, when he was not around, they would drive a carriage to mass accompanied by the gardener and caretaker of the Oratory. September soon arrived and JRRT had to go back to King Edward's to continue his studies, but Mabel was not yet ready to move back to the city, for, although better, her condition was still delicate. Without notice, however, her situation worsened and by November 1904, she collapsed and fell into a diabetic coma. Only six days later, on November 14th, she died with Father Francis and her sister May Incledon by her side, at the postman's cottage in Rednal.

Mabel chose Father Francis to be the boys' guardian and throughout their lives he proved to be a very generous and affectionate tutor, taking from his own private income to provide for the boys. Nonetheless, Mabel's death acted on Ronald the same way Arthur's death had acted on his mother before: "… he associated her with his membership of the Catholic Church. Indeed it might be said that after she died his religion took the place in his affections that she had previously occupied. The consolation that it provided was emotional as well as spiritual" (Carpenter 39). Thus, Mabel's death became a turning point in Tolkien's life, as it would now echo on his faith, worldviews, and on his personal relationships, since he began to perceive her as a martyr of their faith.

> My own dear mother was a martyr indeed, and it is not to everybody that God grants so easy a way to his great gifts as he did to Hilary and myself, giving us a mother who killed herself with labour and trouble to ensure us keeping the faith. (qtd. in Carpenter 39)

> … [I] should chiefly be grateful for having been brought up (since I was eight) in a Faith that has nourished me and taught me all the little that I know; and that I owe to

> my mother, who clung to her conversion and died young, largely through the hardships of poverty resulting from it. (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 172)

Carpenter asserts that Mabel's death had a deep impact on Tolkien's personality, for, despite his natural joyful disposition, it awoke in him a pessimistic side capable of immense hopelessness, something close to an imminent feeling of loss. The strengthening of his bond to Catholicism then was not only a way of finding spiritual and emotional comfort, but also a way of keeping himself close to his mother, or to what he believed she had died for. From that point on, Tolkien's faith would reflect not only on his personal life, but also on much of his work.

Then being under the custody of Father Francis, a place had to be found for the boys to live, for there was already some talk coming from the family opposing Mabel's will and wishing to send the boys to a Protestant boarding-school. For a while, the boys lived with an aunt by marriage who had no specific religious preferences, but, noticing that the boys were not happy there, Father Francis looked for Mrs Faulkner, who lived behind the oratory and rented rooms. There the boys were offered a room on the second floor, and there Ronald met Edith Bratt. Three years older than JRRT, Edith was born an illegitimate child and was then an orphan just like the boys. Having a keen interest in the piano, Edith was sent to a specialized boarding-school after her mother's death, but, because her guardian did not seem to know exactly what to do with her, he found her a room at Mrs Faulkner's, expecting that the landlady's own interest in music would give Edith a place to start. However, despite giving musical soirées, Mrs Faulkner was not much willing to let Edith practice in her free time. Thus, having inherited a small amount of land in Birmingham, which provided enough income to keep herself, Edith put aside the idea of becoming a piano teacher or even a concert pianist for the time being, and just kept herself busy with a sewing-machine. She and Tolkien developed a friendship, though, and soon, during the summer of 1909, they realized they were in love.

Having his mind then taken by his affair with Edith and by his wish to create new languages, Tolkien could not work for his Oxford scholarship as he was supposed to. Because of that, when Father Francis found out about his relationship with Edith, he called out for the boy to the Oratory to tell him about his disappointment and concerns, but also to tell him that he was not allowed to see Edith again until he turned 21, when the Father would legally cease being his guardian. That being, new lodgings were arranged for Ronald and his brother, as to make sure him and Edith would be kept away.

School being then at the centre of his attention and affections, Tolkien made good friends at King Edward's. Being granted the title of Librarian alongside other senior boys, in

1911, Tolkien, Christopher Wiseman, Robert Quilter Gilson, and later on Geoffrey Bache Smith started an intellectual unofficial group named the Tea Club, Barrovian Society, often referred to as only T.C., B.S. Their common interests surrounded Latin and Greek literature, but each of them had their own distinctive expertise in different areas, and together they shared their knowledge while building what would become a long-term friendship. Thenceforth, JRRT spent lots of his school time practicing rugby, working on historical and invented languages, and engaging with the Debating Society.

> There was a custom at King Edward's of holding a debate entirely in Latin, but that was almost too easy for Tolkien, and in one debate when taking the role of a Greek Ambassador to the Senate he spoke entirely in Greek. On another occasion he astonished his schoolfellows when, in the character of a Barbarian envoy, he broke into fluent Gothic; and on a third occasion he spoke in Anglo-Saxon. (Carpenter 56)

Dealing with all of these activities, Tolkien could not focus entirely on preparing for his second attempt to earn an Oxford scholarship; however, when the time came, he was successful. At Oxford, Tolkien developed his interest in languages, and chose Comparative Philology as his special subject. A central figure during this period was Professor Joseph Wright, who encouraged him to follow up his academic interest in Welsh. It was in the course of his undergraduate time that Tolkien also discovered Finnish, a language which would reflect much on his language inventing processes, especially on the one he would in the future call "Quenya", or High-elven.

The third of January 1913 arrived, and Tolkien finally turned 21. As soon as the clock hit midnight, he wrote a letter to Edith Bratt asking her about their affair. The answer was not very pleasant, though, for she was now engaged to George Field. Tolkien would not give up on her so easily, however, since she had been his ideal and his motivation for the past three years. Additionally, she had added in her letter that she only became engaged to Field because she thought Tolkien would not be interested in her after the three years of waiting, and because she was afraid she would remain unwed. Thus, only five days after his birthday, Tolkien left for Cheltenham where Edith was then residing, and on that same day she told him she would give up on Field to marry him. There was, nonetheless, the matter of Edith's religion. She had become a very active member of the Church of England during the three years she and Ronald had been apart, which granted her some status in her parish. Hence, the idea of moving to a new church where no one knew her, and the idea of facing her Protestant uncle whom she lived with was not very encouraging. However, Tolkien did not want to hear about waiting until they

were officially engaged or until the ceremony was near, for, if his mother had endured rejection for her conversion, so could Edith. The result was as expected and Edith's uncle asked her to leave his house as soon as she could find a new place to live. She did not want to go to Oxford, in spite of the whole situation, maybe because she felt bitter about the pressure Tolkien had put on her about converting to Catholicism, and because she wanted to keep her independence while she could. Some divergences would begin to grow between the two of them from that time on, and although there was much love and affection in their relationship, they would also realize that their own individual ways could cause much irritation on one another.

> They no longer knew each other very well, for they had spent the three years of their separation in two totally different societies: the one all-male, boisterous, and academic; the other mixed, genteel, and domestic. They had grown up, but they had grown apart. From now on each would have to make concessions to the other if they were to come to a real understanding. … Neither of them would entirely succeed. … There was real love and understanding between him and Edith, but he often wrapped it up in amatory cliché; while if he had shown her more of his "bookish" face and had taken her into the company of his male friends, she might not have minded so much when these elements loomed large in their marriage. But he kept the two sides of his life firmly apart. (Carpenter 75)

Notwithstanding, Edith was received into the Church of Rome in January 1914, on the first anniversary of their reencounter. Edith would for a while feel happy to try to accommodate herself to this new faith, but, as time went by, she made only few friends at the congregation, and she began to disrelish the fact that she had to regularly confess. Therefore, she would often try to postpone going to mass, saying that she was worried about her health.

Managing to earn a Second Class on his Honour Moderations, Tolkien was advised to follow his interests in Old and Middle English and other Germanic languages and to move from studying the Classics to studying English. Among the new texts he was presented to, and which had a deep impact on him as a writer, were the *Crist* of Cynewulf, a group of Anglo-Saxon religious poems, and the Icelandic *Edda*. It was also around this time that Tolkien came across the work of William Morris, not to mention Catholic mystic poet Francis Thompson, whose verse Tolkien would become something of a *connoisseur* of and which his appreciation for was already being reflected on his own work. Enthusiastic about poetry, Tolkien wrote, still unaware of it, a short poem that would be the start of his own *legendarium*: "Earendel sprang up from the Ocean's cup / In the gloom of the mid-world's rim" (in Carpenter 79). A turn of

events would alter Tolkien's plans, however, for in August 1914, England declared war on Germany.

Attempting to not leave Oxford until he finished his degree, Tolkien found a way to train for the army while still attending university. Also concerned about his own projects, he still tried to write, and in the beginning of 1915, he decided to develop more on the Earendel poem. "He had shown the original Earendel lines to G.B. Smith, who had said that he liked them but asked what they were really about. Tolkien had replied: 'I don't know. I'll try to find out.' Not try to invent: *try to find out*. He did not see himself as an inventor of story but as a discoverer of legend. And this was really due to his private languages" (Carpenter 83). As his work with his invented languages progressed, Tolkien became sure that they needed a "history", characters to belong to, and wishing that England had a recorded mythology for itself, like Finland had the *Kalevala*, Tolkien desired to dedicate his own cosmogony to his country. Thus, he started what we know today as *The Silmarillion*, but that was then still called *The Book of Lost Tales*. Meanwhile, in June 1915 he achieved a First Class Honours on his examination, which meant he would most certainly get an academic job once the war was over; however, while it was still progressing, he had to take up his military duties. In the beginning of 1916, the troops began to embark towards France, and considering the uncertainties of war, he and Edith decided to marry before he left. Thus, married by Father Murphy on 22 March, they left for Somerset for a week for their honeymoon, and on the next June, Tolkien left for France.

Life in the trenches was certainly not pretty, and that period marked Tolkien deeply in a number of different ways. Trying to escape the heavy responsibility of commanding a platoon, Tolkien specialized himself in signalling, and at some point, he was assigned the job of battalion signalling officer. It was, nonetheless, impossible to escape the horrors of war. Long marches during the night across the trenched fields, difficulties in signalling messages due to German interceptions, which forced them to depend on lights, flags, runners, and carrier-pigeons; mutilated bodies of his fellow Englishmen covered the fields, and either the everlasting silence of anxious waiting or the never-ending loudness of guns and bombs were always present. Still, twice during his service, Tolkien met G.B. Smith and they had a few days together to remember the old T.C.B.S. days and to talk about literature and the moment they were living. Being inserted in such a violent situation in which men can count only on their own companionship and friendship, these traits become even more relevant for those who already valued them, such as Tolkien. "My 'Sam Gamgee' is indeed a reflexion of the English

soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognised as so far superior to myself" (qt. in Carpenter 89). Thus, not coincidentally, Sam is one of the main characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, and one whose main roles in the story are the loyalty and friendship to Frodo, whom he accompanies all the way through the War of the Ring and through his quest to destroy the One. Friendship was one thing that Tolkien learned to treasure even more during and after the war, especially because he lost two of his best friends from the T.C.B.S. in it: on 15 July 1916, he received a letter from G.B. Smith saying that Rob Gilson had died in battle, and only five months later, on 16 December 1916, he received another one saying that G.B. Smith himself had also died from injuries caused by shells bursting. Besides that, most of his own battalion had been killed. Tolkien's own salvation was the "trench fever" carried by lice, which caught him in October and made him be sent home. However, G.B. Smith's last words to him would strike his heart even deeper: "May God bless you, my dear John Ronald, and may you say the things I have tried to say long after I am not there to say them, if such be my lot" (qt. in Carpenter 94).

> G.B. Smith's words were a clear call to Ronald Tolkien to begin the great work that he had been meditating for some time, a grand and astonishing project with few parallels in the history of literature. He was going to create an entire mythology. The idea had its origins in his taste for inventing languages. He had discovered that to carry out such inventions to any degree of complexity he must create for the languages a "history" in which they could develop. … And there was a third element playing a part: his desire to create a mythology *for England*. (Carpenter 97)

Thence, some confusion towards the relation between Tolkien's faith and his work[6] starts to take place amongst readers. Many ask how a devout Catholic such as Tolkien created a world in which no God is worshipped, and which resembles so much many European pagan mythologies. For Carpenter, such a question is unfounded, since *The Silmarillion* is actually a work of a "profoundly religious man" (99), who with his imagination complemented the Christian mythology, instead of contradicting it, as many believe. Tolkien decided to build his stories in this form, Carpenter continues, because he wanted it to be distant and uncanny if compared to our world, but yet, he also wanted it not to be a lie.

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[6] Nonetheless, it should be noted, as Carpenter himself does, that "no account in Tolkien's life can provide more than superficial explanation of the origins of his mythology. … [His writing] cannot be explained as the mere product of literary influences and personal experience. When Tolkien began to write he drew upon some deeper, richer seam of his imagination then he had yet explored; and it was a seam that would continue to yield for the rest of his life" (98).

> He [Tolkien] wanted the mythological and legendary stories to express his own moral view of the universe; and as a Christian he could not place this view in a cosmos without the God that he worshipped. At the same time, to set his stories 'realistically' in the known world, where religious beliefs were explicitly Christian, would deprive them of imaginative colour. So while God is present in Tolkien's universe, He remains unseen. (Carpenter 99).

What Tolkien expected of his literature was that it could express what he believed to be a higher truth, for it was his creed that God could give a man the gift of recording "a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth" (qt. in Carpenter 99). Carpenter tells of a time in which Tolkien, answering to Clive Staples Lewis's[7] belief that myths are lies, said that since humans have come from God, the myths they create, though imperfect, have some glimpses of eternal truth, and only by being "sub-creators" when inventing these myths, men can hope for their prelapsarian state. This relates directly to one of the most noticeable characteristics of Tolkien's writing: he does it as if he was retelling something that already existed, and not as if he was inventing it. "The mere stories were the thing. They arose in my mind as 'given' things, and as they came, separately, so too the links grew. An absorbing, though continually interrupted labour…: yet always I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 145). It seems like Tolkien believed that his writing came from divine inspiration, and he was merely an archivist keeping records of something that he was told about. The same logic worked with his invented languages, which he built as real ones that evolved from some other more primitive.

On 16 November 1917, Edith gave birth to their first child, John Francis Reuel Tolkien, who received his second name after Father Francis. Tolkien, however, despite having been discharged from hospital after several months of recovering from trench fever, had to go back to duty and was not allowed to go home to see his son until almost a week after his birth. In 1918, JRRT was hospitalized once again, and received medical leave only in October. After this, he found a job as an assistant lexicographer within the New English Dictionary in Oxford, and also began to accept pupils to earn extra money. By 1919, he and Edith were able to rent a small house in Oxford; Edith was again expecting, and by springtime, Tolkien was making enough money from tutoring to quit his job at the Dictionary. However, a sudden turn of events changed everything for, in the summer of 1920, Tolkien took the post of Reader in English

[7] C.S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-6).

Language at the University of Leeds. In October, their second son was born, Michael Hilary Reuel Tolkien, but it was not until the beginning of 1921 that Edith and the boys were able to move to Leeds to be with JRRT. In November 1924, Edith gave birth to their third son, Christopher John Reuel Tolkien, named after Christopher Wiseman, from the T.C.B.S. In that same year, at the age of thirty-two, Tolkien became a professor at the University of Leeds, a post he would not keep for long, since in the beginning of 1925, he was made professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford.

Meanwhile, a lot was written of what would become his *legendarium*. While in hospital, Tolkien wrote "The Children of Húrin", and later on, inspired by a date with Edith in the woods, he wrote one of the pillars of *The Silmarillion*, the tale "Of Beren and Lúthien". "The Fall of Gondolin" was also written. By 1923, "Miss Biggins" and "Bag End" were already terms present in his life and work, and *The Book of Lost Tales* (*The Silmarillion*) was almost complete. The story containing his cosmogony was done, as also was the one telling of the making of the Silmarils and of their theft by Morgoth. How then could Tolkien have become famous in his lifetime only by *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, one might ask.

> Tolkien had a passion for perfection in written work of any kind, whether it be philology or stories. This grew from his emotional commitment to his work, which did not permit him to treat it in any manner than the deeply serious. Nothing was allowed to reach the printer until it had been revised, reconsidered, and polished – in which he was the opposite of C.S. Lewis, who sent manuscripts off for publication with scarcely a second glance at them. Lewis, well aware of this difference between them, wrote of Tolkien: "His standard of self-criticism was high and the mere suggestion of publication usually set him upon a revision, in the course of which so many new ideas occurred to him that where his friends had hoped for the final text of an old work they actually got the first draft of a new one". (Carpenter 143)

There was one more reason, however. Christopher Wiseman had told Tolkien that once he was done with his creation, it would be dead to him, for the only reason why his creatures lived was that he was still creating them. Hence, Carpenter theorizes that Tolkien could not live with the idea of not having more to add to his fictional universe, for that would mean that he would be done with sub-creating, and that, in its turn, had a deep religious meaning to JRRT.

Back to living in Oxford, in 1925, Tolkien bought a new home at Northmoor Road, where, on 18 June 1929, Edith gave birth to their fourth child and only daughter, Priscilla Mary Reuel Tolkien. In the gap between these years, though, Tolkien met and befriended another

important character who would become relevant in his life: Clive Staples Lewis, most known today as C.S. Lewis.

> [The] two companions become friends when they discover a shared insight, how their friendship is not jealous but seeks out the company of others, how such friendships are almost of necessity between men, how the greatest pleasure of all is for a group of friends to come to an inn after a hard day's walking … This is what it was about, those years of companionship, the walking tours, the friends gathered in Lewis's rooms on Thursday nights. … It was in part the result of the First World War, in which so many friends had been killed that the survivors felt the need to stay close together. (Carpenter 148)

The "shared insight" which might have begun this friendship was their mutual interest in Norse mythology. They first started meeting at Lewis's rooms in Magdalen to discuss for endless hours their interests, the politics of the English School, where they both worked, and to read to each other their poetry. However, one topic that bound them even closer was Christianity, for Tolkien meant to Lewis a friend to whom he could spend hours sharing intellectual knowledge, but who was still a dedicated Christian. Nonetheless, by 1929, Lewis still declared himself a theist, for, although he believed in God, he could not understand how Christ's sacrifice could, after two thousand years, help humanity here and now, except as an example, and thus he would not profess Christianity. On the other hand, Tolkien would argue that Lewis would admire the act of sacrifice and of resurrection of Northern heroes in the mythology he so much appreciated, but would demand something more from the Gospels. Lewis replied saying that "myths are lies, even though lies breathed through silver" (qt. in Carpenter 150), and Tolkien's answer to that was simple: no, they are not. According to him, we call each element of the world by their name and remember each of these elements when their names are said, because people throughout history named things as they are called. Thus we call a book a book, because one day someone named it as such. Hence, we call these pages bounded by two covers and containing long texts a book, because that is what we believe it to be, as by naming things people are only inventing terms for them. "And just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth" (Carpenter 151). In other words, since we have come from God, the myths we write, though imperfect, reflect some of the eternal truth of God. The result was that only a few days later after this conversation, Lewis started to recognize himself as Christian, and Tolkien wrote in his diary: "friendship with Lewis compensates for much, and besides giving constant pleasure and comfort has done me much good from the contact with a man at once honest, brave, intellectual – a scholar, a poet, and a philosopher – and a

lover, at least after a long pilgrimage, of Our Lord" (qt. in Carpenter 152). Nonetheless, Tolkien would always grudge over the fact that, after playing such a major role in Lewis's return to Christianity, the latter had yet not become a Catholic, but decided to return to the Anglican Church, which he attended as a child. Nonetheless, for their shared love of literature and language — and for the friendship they began to cultivate after the war, in the early 1930s — the group of men who gathered in Lewis's room to critique each other's writings, and to talk about much more, became known as The Inklings. The club became a relevant part of Tolkien's life, for he had missed such companionship as he had had with the T.C.B.S. years ago, and for it was where he read his first attempts to start what would become *The Hobbit*.

Besides his fellow Inklings, another person whom Tolkien would trust his stories for criticism was his son Christopher, who would with time become something of a *connoisseur* of his father's mythology, thus assisting him from time to time with his writing and with the art that accompanied it. By the nineteen-twenties and thirties, however, Tolkien was divided into investing in the stories he wrote for pleasure (or for the amusement of his children) and those which involved his legend and he wanted to publish. And so, on a day when he was busy marking exam papers, the first sentence of a new story — one that would tie both sides together — came to his mind: "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit". What he wrote on the back of a paper a candidate had left blank became the opening sentence of *The Hobbit*. However, what began around 1930 would not see the shelves until September 1937, for Tolkien had set it aside for a while since he became undecided about how to continue it, and because the children were growing older and not asking for more "winter reads".

Nonetheless, Carpenter argues that, in spite of Bilbo Baggins having much of what first interested Tolkien in studying *Beowulf*, *Gawain*, or the *Arcrene Wisser*, the Hobbit actually embodies much of the English West Midlands, where Tolkien's own origins could be found on the Suffield side. Personal aspects from the author's life could be found all over this new story and he was very much aware of this fact:

> I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). I do not travel much. (Tolkien, letter 213, 2012)

Hobbiton is Tolkien's version of Warwickshire, where for four years of his childhood he lived with his mother and brother in Sarehole, and where much of his love for nature was developed; Bag End, Bilbo's home, was named after his aunt Jane's Worcestershire farm, which was located at a dead end, and thus was called as such by locals. Hobbits in general are supposed to embody rustic English people: small, to reflect their small imagination, but, as Tolkien had seen on the trenches, great in courage. It all began, however, for Tolkien's own amusement, and only gradually the mythology of *The Silmarillion* was added into it. Nonetheless, it was still a children's story — written to entertain his own children, and perhaps others if it were ever published —, so he didn't want it to become as dark or serious as the material he was developing to be the core of his *legendarium*. Hence, although the writing of *The Hobbit* seemed to advance easily, Tolkien became undecided about how Smaug's death should take place, and the writing stopped. Still, it was around this time that Elaine Griffiths, one of Tolkien's former pupils who had become a friend of the family, and was by that time working for the London publishers George Allen & Unwin, recommended the unfinished story to her co-worker Susan Dagnall. Dagnall met Tolkien, who agreed to give her the typescript, and having read the entire material, she decided that it should be given to her superiors so it could be considered for publication. By August 1936, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* was sent to Stanley Unwin, who, believing that a children's story should be best judged by a child, asked his own ten-year-old son to read and give his thoughts on it. The boy was amazed by Bilbo's tale and on 21 September 1937 it was published. The reception was beyond anything Tolkien ever expected. By Christmas, *The Hobbit* had been sold out and a reprint had to be arranged in a hurry. A few months later, the story was published by Houghton Mifflin in the United States, where it became a success, being awarded a *New York Herald Tribune* prize. Thus recognizing it as a best-seller, Stanley Unwin asked Tolkien about a sequence.

Many short stories which Tolkien had worked on previously were considered, "Mr Bliss", "Farmer Giles of Ham", "Roverandom", and even the unfinished novel *The Lost Road*, but since none of them was about hobbits, they were not judged as proper successors to *The Hobbit*. *The Silmarillion*, the story which was most special to Tolkien, was also considered, but, besides it being incomplete by the time, it was sent in a somewhat unordered state to the publishers, and was judged not fit for the role. A new story should be written then, and it began much in the same way as its predecessor. Tolkien drafted a first chapter in which Bilbo was celebrating his birthday, but after a speech, he puts on the Ring and vanishes. By this point, however, Tolkien did not know yet what this new story was going to be about, so it was put on

hold. Nonetheless, a new idea occurred to him, and he left a note on this first draft that said: "make return of ring a motive" (qt. in Carpenter 189). Still, the main plot of the story remained a mystery for Tolkien for a long time, and only little by little it started to gain form. By the Autumn of 1938, Tolkien decided that the ring that Bilbo found in the last tale was a ruling ring that belonged to Sauron, but that had been lost. He had also decided that it "was to have its centre in the courage of these small people [hobbits]; and the heart of the book was to be found in the inns and gardens of The Shire, Tolkien's representation of all that he loved best about England" (Carpenter 192). At about this time, he had even given this new book a name: "The Lord of the Rings".

Meanwhile, the political scenery in Europe was again turning darker: on 30 September 1938, Chamberlain signed the Munich agreement with Hitler. Much would be theorized later about *The Lord of the Rings* being an allegorical work containing Tolkien's own political views and opinions about the war, since a great part of the story was written during this period. Tolkien would, however, for many times position himself against allegory, saying that he disliked it in all its forms, and that many people would confuse it with "applicability". To him, applicability was about the freedom of the reader in enjoying a story in light of their own ideas and experiences, whereas allegory was about the author's ideas dominating the reading of that text. As C.S. Lewis would later write about the book, "these things were not devised to reflect any particular situation in the real world. It was the other way round; real events began, horribly, to conform to the pattern he had freely invented" (qt. in Carpenter 193). Tolkien would not have to return to the battlefield as he had to in the years past, for this time, he would serve by taking turns as an air raid warden, sleeping at the local headquarters in Oxford, where there were no air attacks. Therefore, his preoccupations about the hostilities were mostly ideological. From 1940 on, however, a series of delays would take place, postponing even further the publishing of the continuation to *The Hobbit*. None of the reasons were of external nature, though, since the main contributor to this situation was his own perfectionism:

> … he once said 'If you're going to have a complicated story you must work to a map; otherwise you'll never make a map of it afterwards.' But the map in itself was not enough, and he made endless calculations of time and distance, drawing up elaborate charts concerning events in the story, showing dates, the days of the week, the hours, and sometimes even the direction of the wind and the phase of the moon. … Name making also involved much of his attention, as was inevitable, for the invented languages from which the names were constructed were both the mainspring of his

> mythology and in themselves a central activity of his intellect. … Moreover he had reached a point where the story divided into several independent and in themselves complicated chains of events … (Carpenter 198-199).

Yet, he had already decided that this new story was going to have a different tone from that of *The Hobbit*: it was going to be a tale for adults, darker and more serious, thus it should present a convincing picture. The effect was that, by 1944, *The Lord of the Rings* had not been worked on for several months. In the meantime, in 1945, he became Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, and only a few months later, C.S. Lewis was running for the Merton Professorship of English Literature, in which Tolkien was one of the electors. Despite no reason being considered for Tolkien to not have supported Lewis on the matter, the latter was not appointed for the role, and a distance began to grow between the two men, mostly on Tolkien's part. No specific reason can be appointed as the cause of this distancing, but one might suppose that Lewis's harsh criticism on *The Lord of the Rings*, especially on the poems, had somehow upset Tolkien – an intrigant reason, however, for Tolkien's disliking of Lewis's *Narnia* stories is usually also supposed to be a contributing factor. According to Carpenter, Tolkien felt like Lewis had made use of his ideas in the books, and as much as he resented him for becoming a popular theologian (for a convert), he was annoyed by the fact that Lewis would almost carelessly write his stories, having published the seven Narnia books in the short period of seven years. Therefore, after Lewis being appointed to the Medieval and Renaissance Literature chair at Cambridge, he and Tolkien did not meet as frequently as they used to.

It was not until the autumn of 1945, twelve years after the first drafts were written, that Tolkien finished *The Lord of the Rings* for publication. "It is written in my life-blood, such as that is, thick or thin; and I can no other" (qt. in Carpenter 208), he told Stanley Unwin. Nonetheless, the publication in itself would also face a series of delays, and not until 1954 it would be actually printed. The first reason for that was that Tolkien believed he had found someone else who would want to publish *The Lord of the Rings* together with *The Silmarillion*. Meanwhile, other things contributed to the long postponement of the publication, such as academic and administrative duties at the university, trips to Belgium and Ireland for work, and another house move. At this point, it was 1952 and *The Lord of the Rings* had not yet reached the printer, for since the war the price of paper had risen sharply, and Milton Waldman, the new publisher from the Collins office, wanted Tolkien to cut from the story as much as he could, especially since Tolkien's prediction was that *The Silmarillion* would be as long as the former. That was not an option. That being, he broke with Waldman and sent back the

manuscript to Rayner Unwin, Stanley Unwin's son who gave his own impressions of *The Hobbit* when he was ten years old, and who was now working for his father's company. However, it was decided that the lengthy volume would be best divided into three parts — not only to disguise its size, but also to allow for three separate sets of reviews. Tolkien insisted on keeping it as one volume, since it was one continuous story, and not a trilogy, but the matter was set, and three subtitles were needed. After much discussion, both men agreed upon *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*, in spite of Tolkien preferring "The War of the Ring" for the latter, since the chosen option betrays much of the end of the story. As it was, the first volume was published in the summer of 1954, and again the criticism was better than Tolkien expected, so no sooner than six weeks, a reprint had to be arranged. *The Two Towers* was published next in mid-November, receiving similar reviews; in the US, *The Fellowship of the Ring* was published by Houghton Mifflin in October, being followed shortly after by the second volume. *The Return of the King* was not published until 20 October 1950, though, because long appendices containing more information and texts about the story had to be added.

The entire novel published, new reviews began to arrive assessing the story as a whole, and critics seemed "firmly polarised. The book had acquired its champions and enemies, and as W.H. Auden wrote: 'Nobody seems to have a moderate opinion; either, like myself, people find it a masterpiece of its genre, or they cannot abide it.' And this was how it was to remain for the rest of Tolkien's life" (Carpenter 226). Nevertheless, the public acceptance was huge, and became even bigger after a radio dramatization[8] of the story. Hence, soon it began to pay off. In the beginning of 1956, Tolkien received his first paycheck from Allen and Unwin, and it contained an amount significantly larger than what he received annually from the university, and, a year later, he received an even considerably larger amount. Besides that, from that point on to the day he died, Tolkien would receive an uncountable number of fan-letters, which he would always make sure to thoroughly answer, especially if they were from children or older readers. Still in 1956, the first translation of the novel was published in the Netherlands, and in the following years, the major European languages also had their own translations. Sales rose consistently until 1965, when they reached a constant. Early in that year, however, it became known that an American publisher had plans to release an unauthorized cheap paperback edition which would most certainly not guarantee Tolkien any payment for it. Measures were

[8] "… which inevitably did not meet with Tolkien's approval, for if he had reservations about drama in general he was even more strongly opposed to the 'adaptation' of stories, believing that this process invariably reduced them to their merely human and thus most trivial level" (Carpenter 227).

taken, but Tolkien's own actions were the most efficient: when answering the letters from American correspondents, he would ask them not to buy from this publishing house, and to spread the word to their friends. His readers were more than happy to assist him in the matter, and soon even booksellers took the Ace editions off of their shelves.

> But the most important consequence was yet to come. The dispute had attracted considerable publicity, and as a result Tolkien's name and titles of his books were now very widely known in America. Approximately one hundred thousand copies of the Ace edition of *The Lord of the Rings* had been sold during 1965, but this figure was soon passed by the "authorized" paperback, which quickly reached the one million mark. Ace had unwittingly done a service to Tolkien, for they had helped to lift his book from the "respectable" hard-cover status in which it had languished for some years and had put it at the top of the popular best-sellers. And by now a "campus cult" had begun. (Carpenter 232)

By the end of 1966, reports began to spread about the popularity that Tolkien's books were gaining amongst American academic circles in respectable universities such as Yale and Harvard, and Tolkien Societies began to sprout in the West Coast, dedicated to studying his texts, and sometimes even Lewis's and Charles Williams's. The American enthusiasm grew to other countries, and in the meantime, it also reached The United Kingdom, where those who had read *The Hobbit* in their childhoods were becoming adults just in time to catch up with *The Lord of the Rings*. By this time, after forty years of academic service, Tolkien was retired from his Oxford duties, which he left in the summer of 1959, at the age of sixty-seven. This marked the start of a solitary period in his life, since he almost deliberately grew a distance from his peers from the university, spending much of his time at home, either working on his mythology, especially on *The Silmarillion*, or taking care of Edith, who had been suffering from arthritis and digestive problems for the past years. Additionally, his relationship with Lewis had grown even colder since his marriage to Joy Davidman, a divorcee, and, more than that, according to Carpenter, "it was almost as if Tolkien felt betrayed by the marriage, resented the intrusion of a woman into his friendship with Lewis" (239). On the other side, Lewis also resented Tolkien for not being happy for him in this time of his life. In 1960, however, Davidman died, and only three years later, C.S. Lewis, aged sixty-four, also passed away. Tolkien refused to write obituaries or to contribute to a memorial volume, but spent much time reflecting over his friend's last work, *Letters to Malcom, Chiefly on Prayer*.

After many house moves, which are not all mentioned here, in 1968, Tolkien and Edith moved once more, this time to Bournemouth, near the coast. They bought a bungalow near their favourite resort, the Miramar, which had been aiding them with their domestic difficulties, since taking care of the house became a laborious task due to Edith's health issues and Tolkien's own stiffness due to old age. It was not a very pleasing change for him, for he would not find much company in there, but he was delighted to see Edith happier than he had ever seen: "she had ceased to be the shy, uncertain, sometimes troubled wife of an Oxford professor, and became herself once more, the sociable good-humoured Miss Bratt of the Cheltenham days. She was back at the setting where she really belonged" (Carpenter 251). Besides that, Tolkien could still work on his fiction, trying to somehow finish *The Silmarillion* for publication, although much of his work now consisted in revising ancillary material, instead of actually working on the narrative. Now aged seventy-nine, in 1971, he would devote many hours to writing; nonetheless, he would also just spend other days playing patience, or enjoying a meal accompanied by plenty of wine at the Miramar. During this period, he would often find himself divided into the feelings of either taking his own time to work or feeling like he was running out of time having *The Silmarillion* still unfinished. However, after three years, his time in Bournemouth came to an end: on 29 November 1971, Edith died due to an inflamed gallbladder.

Still mourning Edith's death, Tolkien spent weeks with family members, returning to Oxford only in March 1972, after receiving an invitation from Merton College to become a resident Honorary Fellow, and an offer of a set of rooms in a college house where he could live in and be assisted by a scout and his wife. In July 1954, he received an honorary Doctorate of Letters from the National University of Ireland, in Dublin, and in 1963, an Honorary Fellowship from Exeter College, followed by an Emeritus Fellowship from Merton College; in 1973, he received another honorary degree in Edinburgh, and a C.B.E.[9] from the Queen at Buckingham Palace. None of these, however, were as gratifying to him as when he received, in 1972, an honorary Doctorate of Letters for his contributions to philology from the University of Oxford, where he had worked for four decades. Nonetheless, the work with *The Silmarillion* had not advanced much and he decided that, if he was to die before the book was complete, his son Christopher would be responsible for its completion and publication. The loneliness which had begun with his retirement and distancing from his fellow scholars had only grown stronger

[9] Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, a British order of chivalry.

after Edith's death, and by 1973, those close to him began to notice that he looked "more sad than usual, and seemed to be ageing faster" (Carpenter 256). Late in 1972, his body began to show signs of a possible disease, for he was suffering from severe indigestion. A strict diet had made it better for a few months, but in July 1973, three days after a dinner party in Cambridge, he started to feel pain, and on the next morning he was hospitalized with an acute bleeding gastric ulcer. A chest infection followed, and on 2 September 1973 he died at eighty-one, accompanied by his children John and Priscilla.

Having started his textual production still very young, Tolkien's writings are extensive and intricate, and his dedication and perfectionism only contributed to this aspect of his work, which he over analysed and reviewed thoroughly and repeatedly so it could sound believable, after all, his aim was to write a mythology for England. A brief account of his biography was considered important for this work because Tolkien studies are considerably new if compared to Milton studies, an author that has been part of the literary canon for more than three hundred years, and whose personal journey most literature scholars are acquainted to. Additionally, in spite of Tolkien himself being against the idea of approaching a literary work through the author's biography[10] – which is not at all the aim of this research –, a new window of understanding opens when one has a short notion of his personal experiences and ideas. Still, often while reading papers and studies on the natures of good and evil, morals or ethics in Tolkien's fiction, it becomes impossible not to notice the number of scholars who take into consideration his personal history with Catholicism, which admittedly brings new light to the matter, especially since he left many letters containing his open opinions about his faith and its relation to his work. The eighty-one years which Tolkien lived on this Earth also provide enlightening reflections about his literature, since he lived through the two World Wars, the Cold War, and yet to see the major effects of industrialization taking over the green English fields. The other side of his career cannot be unconsidered either, for his passion for languages and his growth as a respected philologist in one of the best universities in the world was the starting point of Middle-earth. Lastly, it also seems arguable that his personal relationships

[10] "One of my strongest opinions is that investigation of an author's biography (or such other glimpses of his 'personality' as can be gleaned by the curious) is an entirely vain and false approach to his works – and especially to a work of narrative art, of which the object aimed at by the author was to be enjoyed as such: to be read with literary pleasure. So that any reader whom the author has (to his great satisfaction) succeeded in 'pleasing' (exciting, engrossing, moving etc.), should, if he wishes others to be similarly pleased, endeavour in his own words, with only the book itself as his source, to induce them to read it for literary pleasure. When they have read it, some readers will (I suppose) wish to 'criticize' it, and even to analyze it, and if that is their mentality they are, of course, at liberty to do these things – so long as they have first read it with attention throughout. Not that this attitude of mind has my sympathy: as should be clearly perceived in Vol. I p. 272: Gandalf: 'He that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom.'" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 414)

were also echoed in his *legendarium*: the *Gest of Beren and Lúthien* was ultimately inspired by his love for Edith; much of his writings began as stories to amuse his children, and, last but not least, his deep consideration for friendship, especially after being dragged to such a horrid conflict as the Great War in which he not only lost close friends, but saw so many of his fellow Englishmen being killed atrociously. The account of soldiers, that so many times is retold in literature, telling how friendship was the only reason to keep hope alive during wartime is a central matter in *The Lord of the Rings*, for, above all, the Fellowship of the Ring is nothing more than a group of strangers from different races, places, and political views, who set aside their differences to fight the great evil that is threatening the freedom of the entire land. The narrative makes it clear that, had it not been for the bond of love and companionship that they built throughout the journey, the quest would not have been completed. This was, surely, just a brief retelling of Tolkien's life, mostly retrieved from the authorized biography written by Humphrey Carpenter and published in 1977, and for more detailed information, the same shall provide a safe source for such enterprise. Nevertheless, this section is meant to shed light on the personal and historical contexts that were behind the creation of Tolkien's Middle-earth, and to support the reader for a better comprehension of this study.

4. *Felix culpa*

For centuries, a plethora of theologians, philosophers, and even literary writers has been trying to answer, with many different theses, the problem of evil. How to reconcile the existence of God, the supreme good of the universe, an omnipotent, benevolent power, with evil? If He is good, just, and powerful, why does humanity still suffer from evil? Is He not willing to extinguish it, or is He not able to? The greater-good argument has been explored since Late Antiquity by theologians such as Ambrose of Milan (339–397), Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and, contemporarily, by the American philosopher Alvin Plantinga (1932); it comprises the Catholic trope of *felix culpa*, which is commonly translated as "happy fault", a theological term that brings to light the good outcome of the Fall from Eden: the redemption of humankind through the Incarnation of Christ. Intrinsically paradoxical, the concept is a way of approaching unfortunate events as means to fortunate ends. In the *Exsultet* – the Easter Proclamation sung before the paschal candle during the Roman Easter rituals –, the term appears in a moment of praise of Christ's Incarnation, the circumstance that granted Man redemption from original sin:

O certe necessárium Adæ peccátum,
quod Christi morte delétum est!
O felix culpa,
quæ talem ac tantum méruit habére Redemptórem!

In English,

O truly necessary sin of Adam,
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!
O happy fault
that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer![11]

In "A *Mea Culpa* for the *Felix Culpa*? A Greater Goods Response to the Problems of Evil and Hell" (2008), Ian Spencer explains that in most Christian traditions, God glorifies Himself through the grace of Incarnation and Atonement. However, an act of redemption demands a subject to be redeemed and a cause for their need for redemption and, therefore, some sort of fallen state is necessary. The human world of sin, evil, suffering and death, originated with the Fall of Adam and Eve, was thus fallen, a condition that allowed the highest of goods to take place in the form of the Incarnation and Atonement of Christ. Hence, echoing Augustine's late theodicy, which is a defence of the beauty of the world made better by the evil that gives way to God's plans of redemption, Spencer contends that "there would be tremendous goods missing were there no Fall and no evil" (17). For that reason, it is arguable that had Adam and Eve not sinned, Christ would have not incarnated and much good would have been lost.

The greater-good argument comprises the idea that God has the "ultimate power to bring good out of evil" (180), according to the "Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms". Theologically, it offers a way of understanding the Fall as the event that made Christ's coming possible, while also serving as an attempt to address the problem of evil. In Augustine and Aquinas, *felix culpa* becomes a powerful theological expression of Divine Providence for, though they do not formulate the phrase as such, the idea is embedded in their arguments. Augustine emphasizes that, in the hands of God, evil becomes a means of bringing about greater good. He famously writes in his *Enchiridion* that "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil to exist", a principle that underlies the logic of *felix culpa*: the idea that the Fall, despite its tragedy, made possible the greater good of Christ's Incarnation and humanity's redemption. Aquinas, building on Augustine's ideas, affirms this view more

[11] The Latin and English versions of the *Exsultet* were retrieved from the website of the Association of Catholic Priests: "The Exultet: Old, New and Latin." *ACP: Association of Catholic Priests*, 02 January 2022, https://www.associationofCatholicpriests.ie/2011/03/the-exultet-old-new-and-latin/.

explicitly in the *Summa Theologica*, where he argues that God, in His mercy, allowed sin so that a greater good might result — namely, the Incarnation of Christ. Quoting Romans 5:20, he writes, "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound". Thus, while Augustine lays the philosophical and theological foundation, Aquinas gives clear expression to the idea that humanity's fall into sin ultimately served a redemptive purpose in God's Providential plan.

4.1. *Felix culpa* in Augustine of Hippo

Augustine of Hippo is a recurrent name when one is dealing with Western Philosophy and Christianity, as his work is regarded as vital for the formulation of the Catholic dogmas, exploring themes such as sin, the problem of evil, free will, conversion, faith, knowledge and many more. Born to a pagan father and a Christian mother, Augustine journeyed his way into Christianity, experiencing before his conversion a few religious paths, such as Manicheism, scepticism, the Neoplatonic mysticism of Plotinus, until he was baptized by Saint Ambrose in 387. He was forced into ordination and became the bishop of Hippo in 396, a position he kept for the remaining years of his life. He documented his quest to conversion in an autobiographical work addressed to God and entitled *Confessions*, a book that communicates many of Augustine's anxieties, criticisms, and beliefs. In the introduction to the 2008 reissue of the book for the Oxford World's Classics, Henry Chadwick contends that Augustine's *Confessions* is "more than a narrative of conversion. … [it] is a polemical work, at least as much a self-vindication as an admission of mistakes. The very title carries a conscious double meaning, of confession as praise as well as of confession as acknowledgement of faults" (9). Having not led a chaste life and being known as a harsh critic of the Church before his conversion, Augustine was a very criticized figure of his time and one of the aims of his *Confessions* was to answer these critics, both Catholic and non-Catholic ones. It is also in this work that Augustine collaborates with the popularity of the famous contention of the evil non-existent, which in its turn gives way to his further writings that bring forth the *felix culpa* argument, all themes he had been dealing with since his years spent amongst the Manichees, who had as a central subject of discussion the problem of evil.

Often Augustine repeats in his works the well-known questions that try to conciliate the existence of evil and of a benevolent God. "Where … does it [evil] come from since the good God made everything good? … Is it that the matter from which he made things was somehow evil? … Was he powerless to turn and transform all matter so that no evil remained, even though God is omnipotent?" (*Confessions* 116). These reflections led Augustine to two of the most accepted answers to the theologico-philosophical problem: evil is nothing but the

privation of good, and God only allows it to remain in order to bring greater good henceforth. According to him, all things that are vulnerable to corruption are good, for if they were supreme goods or not good at all, they would not be susceptible to corruption. Corruption causes good to decrease and, therefore it is injurious. Accordingly, all that is corrupted has suffered a privation of some good.

> If they were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all. If they were to exist and to be immune from corruption, they would be superior because they would be permanently incorruptible. … Therefore, as long as they exist, they are good. Accordingly, whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance, for if it were a substance, it would be good. Either it would be an incorruptible substance, a great good indeed, or a corruptible substance, which could be corrupted only if it were good. Hence I saw and it was made clear to me that you made all things good, and there are absolutely no substances which you did not make. (*Confessions* 124-125)

Furthermore, Augustine contends that for God and all of His creation, evil does not exist, for there could not be a single thing that would be able to destroy the order which God has imposed. What we know as evil is simply a conflict of interests. God, the supreme good, is immutable in his nature, so He cannot be affected by corruption, nor any act of free will or necessity, because what he intends for Himself is good, the same as He is. Then, he concludes that the reason why we err and are put under God's judgment is free will, the precise God-given gift that led Adam and Eve into original sin.

Augustine continues his argument in his *City of God Against Pagans*, often referred to simply as *City of God*, where he states that the misery of the evil angels is their choice to turn away from God and towards themselves, a choice made out of pride, the beginning of all sins. The result is a fall from grace: "they would have existed in a higher degree, if they had adhered to him who exists in the highest degree; but in preferring themselves to him, they chose a lower degree of existence" (477). In His foreknowledge of this circumstance, He, nevertheless, chose to bestow the power of free choice on His creatures, judging it an act of greater power and goodness to bring good out of this evil than to eliminate it completely (1022). Hence, Augustine touches the very principle of the *felix culpa* trope, which in his *Confessions* he mentions not so directly, as, for instance, when he argues that "your [God's] laws have the power to temper bitter experiences in a constructive way, recalling us to yourself from the pestilential life of easy comforts which have taken us away from you" (17), or when he states that

> … but you [God], by whom 'the hairs of our head are numbered' (Matt. 10:30), used the error of all who pressed me to learn to turn out to my advantage. … So by making use of those who were failing to do anything morally right you did good to me, and from me in my sin you exacted a good retribution". (15)

With these words, Augustine seems to be saying that through errors, immorality, and bitter experiences – evils, in other words –, God is able to benefit the righteous and to bring redemption and learning. In the *City of God*, he puts it more straightforwardly when he affirms that "even poisons, which are disastrous when improperly used, are turned into wholesome medicines by their proper application" (453). He follows explaining that everything has a purpose under Divine Providence, thus humans should inquire what is the purpose under some situation, instead of falling into complaints, because even when one is not able to perceive this purpose, either because of a lack of capacity or of staying power, the faith in Providence should remain, for there is also a purpose in the non-understanding of a purpose, which might be to teach humility and lessen pride. Thus, He "would never have created a man, let alone an angel, in the foreknowledge of his future evil state, if he had not known at the same time how he would put such creatures to good use" (449): in Augustine, the possibility of what we call evil having an end in itself, of it not serving Providence, is null.

Concerning the Incarnation of Christ, an important element when it comes to the happy fault trope, Augustine defends that his sacrifice is the true cause of the redemption of men from original sin, for, although he paid the price of sin, he himself was sinless (*City of God* 405). Yet, Augustine follows defending that the redemption and repentance of humankind were not the only good outcomes brought by the Incarnation, but also

> the conversion of men's wills to God, the remissions of sins, the grace of justification; the faith of the devout, and the multitude of men all over the world who believe in the true doctrine of God; the abolition of the worship of idols and demons; and the training to resist temptation, the purification of those who persevere and their liberation from all evil; the day of judgement, the resurrection of the dead, the eternal condemnation of the society of the wicked, and the eternal dominion of the glorious City of God in the deathless enjoyment of the vision of God. (425)

Would all that be possible had Adam and Eve not sinned? Augustine argues that, concerning the first origin of man, the current state of humans' life is proof that the descendants of Adam and Eve are condemned, and that all sorrows, sins, and pains that accompany them sprang from

"that root of error and perverted affection" (1065), there their need for redemption and repentance. But if God is good, He is also just in the employment of evil through Providence, for "whereas … evil choices make a wrong use of good natures, God turns evil choices to good use" (449). Thus, Augustine held that the Incarnation was contingent upon the Fall, and would not have occurred had Adam and Eve remained sinless.

Nonetheless, one has to keep in mind at this point that God is eternal and so is His omniscience: His foreknowledge is fore-knowledge only from the perspective of temporal creatures. This means that God is always at the present time in all times, there is no past or future to Him and, therefore, His creatures' freedom to make choices is always at the present time to Him as well. Accordingly, Augustine insists that God's foreknowledge does not cause or determine human actions; His foreknowledge is not sheer determinism and does not mean that His creatures are not free in choosing. In other words, Augustine argues that foreknowledge is compatible with moral responsibility: God foreknows free choices, but that foreknowledge does not make them necessary or imposed.

Despite not being the first source of the trope of *felix culpa*, Augustine's writings were essential for its relevance and acceptance within the Church. The concept seems to permeate all of his writings, as they constantly show a deep concern with trying to prove that God was not to be held responsible for evil, but rather praised for His omnipotence, justice, and mercy. The greater good argument in Augustinian theology thus allows God to be removed from any position of a dual (good - evil) figure, it erases all traces of wickedness or powerlessness that could be attached to His character. Instead, the trope acknowledges God as a benevolent, omnipotent, and just entity, who is capable of bringing good out of the most awful evil possible. Hence, by respecting his creatures' choice to err, to fall, God confers the grace of Incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. By allowing the union of human and divine in Christ, God assumes the character of a redeemer who gifts humanity with the coming of the Mediator: through the baptism of Christ and eating of his body (the loaf) humans are freed from eternal death and welcomed to life everlasting (*City of God* 998). Man could not save himself, but the grace of Christ which trespasses time can. "This, then, is the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord – that we are reconciled to God through the Mediator and receive the Holy Spirit so that we may be changed from enemies into sons, 'for as many as are led by the Spirit of God,

they are the sons of God[12]" (*Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love* X, 33)[13]. Finally, the fault of mankind's First Parents unexpectedly becomes a fortunate one.

4.2. *Felix culpa* in Thomas Aquinas

Centuries after the writing of *Confessions* and *City of God*, Thomas Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologica*, or "Summary of Theology", with the intention of preparing an instructional guide for teachers and novices of the officially approved teachings of the Catholic Church. Born to a noble Italian Catholic family, Aquinas was meant, as a younger son, to pursue an ecclesiastical career with his uncle, who was the abbot of a Benedictine Monastery. However, around 1244, by the age of nineteen, Aquinas decided to join the Dominicans, and, despite the opposition of his family, he followed his desired path and remained a Dominican to the day of his death in 1274. As Augustine, Aquinas's works deal with subjects that are central to the Catholic dogmas, such as creation, the problem of evil, the nature of sin, grace, and the nature of God. A frequent name to those who are studying the natures of good and evil according to Christianity, Aquinas's views on the subject often echo those of Augustine, as also does his argument concerning the problem of evil. But, While Augustine frames evil primarily as a moral and spiritual issue related to the will's turning from God, Aquinas presents a more philosophical and systematic account of evil, embedding the philosophical problem within a broader metaphysical framework thus theorizing about how evil fits into a cosmos governed by divine order. A defender of the satisfaction theory of atonement, Aquinas would contend that Christ redeemed Man through *superabundant* love and obedience thus providing satisfaction for Adam and Eve's disobedience.

Aquinas argues that good means anything that is desirable, for every conscious creature desires its own being and perfection, so the being and perfection of any nature is good. Then, it follows that something is desirable only if it is perfect since every creature desires its own perfection: "But everything is perfect so far as it exists. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual, as is clear from the foregoing. Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same really" (*Summa Theologica*, "Whether Goodness Differs Really from Being?")[14]. For, if God is good and if He sustains all

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[12] Rom. 8:14.

[13] References to Augustine's *Enchiridion* are from Augustine. *Enchiridion of Faith, Hope, and Love*. Translated by Albert C. Outler, Southern Methodist University, and is cited parenthetically with the chapter number, followed by the number of the item being discussed.

[14] The references from the *Summa Theologica* are from Aquinas, Thomas. *The Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Kindle ed., Catholic Way, 2014, and will be cited parenthetically with the referred article's name, due to the edition used during the research being an e-book.

existence, it follows that all that exists is good. “Hence it cannot be that evil signifies being, or any form or nature. Therefore, it must be that by the name of evil is signified the absence of good” (*Summa Theologica*, “Whether Evil is a Nature?”). Since being is good, the lack of one suggests the lack of the other. God does not eradicate evil, because He makes what is best for the whole, – that is, the universe – not for the subject, and the perfection of the universe requires that some things fail in goodness, that there exist corruptible beings, as there exist incorruptible ones. To justify the cause of this condition, Aquinas echoes Augustine: “God is so powerful that He can even make good out of evil” (in *Summa Theologica*, “Whether Evil is Found in Things?”), adding that, as defended by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite before him, “it belongs to Providence not to destroy, but to save nature” (*Summa Theologica*, “Whether Evil is Found in Things?”). That way, if evil was to be eliminated from the world, much good would be lost.

In addressing the problem of evil, Aquinas seeks — much like Augustine — to show that God is not the author of evil, but that moral evil originates in the free choice of rational creatures who turn away from divine good. He underscores the immutability of God and the mutability of creatures, pointing to free will as the origin of sin: “those rational creatures which were turned to God by free will, were promoted to the order of angels to the diversity of merits. And those who were turned away from God were bound down to bodies according to the diversity of their sin” (*Summa Theologica*, “Whether the Inequality of Things Is from God?”). Rational creatures, such as angels and humans, were created good and endowed with freedom; those who turned toward God were elevated in being, while those who turned away fell through pride and self-love. Following Augustine, Aquinas affirms that those who sin choose a lower degree of existence, not because they were created evil, but because they failed in their use of free will. Evil, for Aquinas, is not a substance, but a privation—a lack of good in a subject that is otherwise good. Since all creatures are good by nature, there can be no first principle of evil. Drawing on Aristotle, Aquinas observes that evil depends on good in order to exist, and that pure evil would be a contradiction, for it would entail non-being. He distinguishes between the evil of punishment (*malum poenae*)—which God permits for the sake of justice and cosmic order—and the evil of fault (*malum culpae*), which stems from free will. Thus, Aquinas defends the notion that while evil can diminish the good, it can never wholly destroy it.

Evil suffered, or *malum poenae*, can be understood as evil that happens unintentionally or without the purpose of reaching an evil end. Some evils, such as death, illnesses, or animal predation, arise from the natural order and are not morally culpable, though they can be

explained as consequences of the finite, changeable nature of creatures. God created humans, and viruses, and animals that predate on other animals, and given so, death, illnesses and animal predation are only to be expected of these creatures' finite nature. Does that mean that God is the cause of evil suffered since He created a world in which it can be found? No. Evil suffered is not caused by God as an end or as a goal, but it happens given that He created good creatures that are prone to failure. According to Aquinas, by creating a world in which evil suffered can be found, God is only doing good, since evil is not a being but a privation of good: he thus holds that evil lacks *esse* — it is not a thing that "exists" in itself.

According to Brian Davies in *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (2011), the theologian believed that "evil suffered occurs only insofar as there is a concomitant good in the light of which it can be explained. It is, he thinks, due to something that by being good in its way, causes something else to be bad in its way" (69). Accordingly, God is responsible for evil suffered insofar as He is responsible for creating things that have *esse*, which drives them to act and behave in various distinct ways. On the other hand, stating that God is responsible for it does not suggest that He causes evil suffered intentionally as a final objective, but rather, as Davies appropriately puts it, it seems to be only a by-product of God's infinite good. God's intention for the things He created is the good of the order of the universe; however, the order of the universe requires that some things fail. Hence, by prompting in things the good of the universe, God causes the corruption of things as it were by accident (*per accidens*).

Conversely, evil done relates to one's freedom of choice and to the evil consequences they might lead to. In this case, Aquinas acknowledges that it cannot be good *per se*. "If I wrongly cause you pain, he thinks, there is no flourishing to appeal to by way of explanation. For where is the flourishing here? Certainly not in you. And neither in me, or so Aquinas thinks. Bad moral choices do not, for him, add to or express the goodness of any human agent" (Davies 70). Therefore, to Aquinas, immoral people are an example of failure, for they fail in being the good they were made to be. Is God responsible for evil done then? No. Aquinas believed instead that evil done intending an evil end was not created by God, for it is not a created thing (it has no *esse*). Rather, he argues that evil done is caused by a bad use of one's free will, through which humans seek an improper end and, in doing so, fail to attain their proper end. Therefore, although God might be held responsible for creating people who sin, He is not responsible for creating evil in evil done, since it actually "consists only in the gap between what exists and what should exist but does not" (Davies 71). Thence, according to Aquinas, evil done should

be considered a being inasmuch as we consider that there is an absence in it, one that springs from a created source, which is the free will that turns itself away from God.

Finally, Aquinas turns his attention to the Incarnation of Christ. "Whether, if man had not sinned, God would have become incarnate?", he asks. While some Church Fathers, such as Augustine[15], emphasized the redemptive nature of the Incarnation, Aquinas addresses the speculative question directly, asserting that God would not be limited by a human act. Thus, had sin not happened, He would still be able to grant that grace, for Incarnation was the greatest gift bestowed upon mankind, but one afforded only by Him and His own will. The fact that it happened because of sin and yielded redemption for the entire human race just adds more meaning to the grace of God, thus dignifying more His greatness. Furthermore, Aquinas contends that the coming of Christ had as its main objective the removal of original sin rather than actual sin, for the good of the whole is a more Divine thing than the good of the subject, and actual sin has the aggravating nature of being voluntary, whereas original sin is inherited. Finally, he argues that Christ paid more than was required, for he gave God something He loved more than He disliked sin:

> First of all, because of the exceeding charity from which He suffered; secondly, on account of the dignity of His life which He laid down in atonement, for it was the life of one who was God and man; thirdly, on account of the extent of the Passion, and the greatness of the grief endured, as stated above. And therefore Christ's Passion was not only a sufficient but a superabundant atonement for the sins of the human race; according to Jn. 2:2: "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (*Summa Theologica*, "Whether Christ's Passions Brought About Our Salvation by Way of Atonement?")

Aquinas was a defender of what is known as "satisfaction theory of atonement", which defends, as stated above, that Christ gave more than was asked as payment for Man's sin: his Passion was not only sufficient, but supererogatory. Thus, although God would have the power, if not the will, to concede de grace of the Incarnation of Christ had man not sinned, the presence of sin is the actual reason for the coming of Christ and the biggest proof of God's grace and benevolence. Therefore, it is arguable that the evil of sin brought the greatest divine gift ever

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[15] "On the contrary, Augustine says (De Verb. Apost. viii, 2), expounding what is set down in Lk. 19:10, 'For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost'; 'Therefore, if man had not sinned, the Son of Man would not have come.' And on Tim. 1:15, 'Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners,' a gloss says, 'There was no cause of Christ's coming into the world, except to save sinners. Take away diseases, take away wounds, and there is no need of medicine'" (*Summa Theologica*, "Whether, if Man Had Not Sinned, God Would Have Become Incarnate?").

given to mankind, as the theologian himself puts it: "now Christ made satisfaction, not by giving money or anything of the sort, but by bestowing what was of greatest price — Himself— for us. And therefore Christ's Passion is called our redemption" (*Summa Theologica*, "Whether Christ's Passion Brought About Our Salvation by Way of Redemption?"). Thenceforth, echoing Augustine, Aquinas argues that God is powerful enough to bring greater good from evil, next pointing to Romans and to the Proclamation of the Easter Candle: "… hence it is written (Rom. 5:20): 'Where sin abounded, grace did more abound.' Hence, too, in the blessing of the Paschal candle, we say: 'O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer!'" (Summa Theologica, "Whether, if Man Had not Sinned, God Would Have Become Incarnate?").

Rather than attributing evil to divine causality, Aquinas situates it within the framework of privation — a deficiency of being — and thereby maintains the integrity of God's goodness. In his treatment of the *felix culpa* motif, Aquinas advances a theological perspective that relocates the emphasis from anthropocentric benefit to divine initiative, arguing that the grace manifested in the Incarnation, though precipitated by sin, could have been conferred independently of the Fall, had God so willed. By affirming both the immutability of God and the mutability of created beings, alongside God's foreknowledge of human transgression, Aquinas constructs a coherent theodicy that accommodates the existence of evil without compromising divine benevolence. Within this framework, evil is permitted not as an end in itself but as a condition from which a greater good may arise — demonstrating, in Aquinas's view, the superabundant power and mercy of God, who is capable of drawing ultimate good even from the worst of evils.

4.3. *Felix culpa* in John Milton

Born in 1608, John Milton was the eldest son of a wealthy English family and was promised a religious career from childhood; however, it was not until some time after he finished his university education at Cambridge that he decided to redirect his professional life. With his father's financial support, Milton was able to continue his studies after university and dedicate himself to studying the classics. *Paradise Lost* is Milton's *magnum opus*, the one responsible for making him known not only for his polemical political pamphlets and ventures, but also for his literary genius. The main theme of this work, the fall, much reflects Milton's own views of his personal fall: the failure in his political endeavors and the loss of his eyesight, which forced him to dictate the entire poem to his three daughters to write down. With *Paradise Lost*, Milton wanted to create an epic that would stand for the English language and literature

as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* stood for Greek.

The *felix culpa* trope plays a significant role in this work, as it is through the Fall that the Incarnation and Atonement of the Son become possible. For instance, following the Son's offer to sacrifice Himself for humanity, God responds with the following:

> … well thou knowst how dear,
> To me are all my works, nor Man the least
> Though last created, that for him I spare
> Thee from my bosom and right hand, to save,
> By losing thee a while, the whole Race lost." (3, 276-280)

In allowing the Son to offer Himself in sacrifice, God consents to a period of suffering, fully aware that it will ultimately yield a greater good: the redemption of His creation. Milton's theodicy is further articulated in other passages — for instance, in Book 12, lines 469–473 — where Adam proclaims that the good emerging from the Fall will be "more wonderful" than creation itself.

In "O Theodicy: John Milton's Circular Theodicy as Teleological Argument in *Paradise Lost*" (2018), Tyeson Barton asserts that in Milton's epic, free will and virtue rely much on evil. He quotes the poet in his *Areopagitica* (1644) to defend that, to exercise our free will in a virtuous and moral way, we first have to know evil, as in the same manner, to consciously go against virtue and act immorally, we have first to know good (Barton 5). For Barton, good and evil exist along a spectrum; they are interconnected, as is free will with both. However, he emphasizes a contradiction between divine providence and free will throughout the poem. In the very first line of the epic — when Milton declares his subject as "man's first disobedience, and the fruit" (1, 1) — Barton interprets the term "fruit" as referring not merely to the literal act, but to the consequences of the Fall, namely, humanity's eventual salvation. Thus, by introducing the Fall and the salvation simultaneously, Milton would be giving "the reader a glimpse of the end at the very beginning" (7). Although Barton's reference pertains to the knowledge of good and evil in the prelapsarian state, one can nonetheless draw a connection between free will, virtue, and evil in the postlapsarian condition — thus leading to the concept of *felix culpa*. As Milton writes in his *Areopagitica*,

> It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil; that is to say, of knowing good by evil.

> As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil? (20)

Through the knowledge of good and evil, Adam becomes capable of consciously exercising his free will — an act that enables genuine and sincere devotion. However, in exercising this freedom, Adam comes to know good by contrast with evil, and through the experience of evil. This paradoxically opens the possibility of cultivating virtue anew, as he rediscovers good through a transformed perspective shaped by the Fall and the promise of salvation. Thus, the knowledge of evil emerges as essential not only for the demonstration of true devotion to God but also for the authentic pursuit of virtue and goodness

This argument is present in John C. Ulreich's "A Paradise Within: the Fortunate Fall in *Paradise Lost*" (1971), where the author argues that in Milton, as opposed to the conventional Humanist thinking of his time, morality is rooted in the conscious choice to avoid evil, not merely in experiencing it. Thus what man really received after the Fall was knowledge of good through the knowledge of evil. However, returning to Augustinian theodicy, Ulreich states that, in Milton, "good is not the realization of evil, for evil is impossible, a contradiction of good and itself. Good in no way depends on evil, for evil is merely a perversion. It is literally unreal" (356). This way, after the Fall, man is to achieve a "Paradise within" (12, 587), he is to transcend through his sin and recognize Creation and divinity within himself. In this sense, Adam's joyful yet regretful rejoice in Book 12 should enlighten not only our understanding of the poem, but also of the concept of *felix culpa*, as it shows that greater good "comes about not because but in spite of our transgression" (Ulreich 365).

Conversely, William G. Madsen emphasizes that the Incarnation of the Son Conversely, William G. Madsen emphasizes that the Incarnation of the Son should not be understood as a descent into human form, but rather as the rising of the human form to divinity. As the Son declares to God in Book 11, the fruits borne by man after the Fall will be of "more pleasing savour" (11, 26) than any he could have produced in Paradise. Thus, the "Paradise within" revealed by Michael is not the ending point of Redemption, but only its beginning — one that will ultimately reach fulfillment when humanity ascends to Heaven. According to Madsen, "God, then, has not merely salvaged something from the destruction caused by Satan; He has created a new and higher order of existence", in which "nature's law has been superseded by a higher law, and man's destiny is to be united with Christ. Or with Satan" (105). The ultimate point of human salvation, then, is the capacity to choose: to fall in pride into hell or rise in humiliation to Heaven, namely, to exercise free will either morally or immorally.

Arthur O. Lovejoy, in "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall" (1937), contends that original sin was the necessary condition for both a manifestation of the glory of God and of unimagined benefits for humankind. In Milton, whose objective with *Paradise Lost* was to provide a religious reading of human history, the trope helps to install a tone of "divine comedy" (163) instead of charging it with a tragic tone. Lovejoy argues that, by having Adam articulating the paradox, Milton achieves a powerful dramatic effect, even though it is not fully developed. Adam merely wonders whether he ought to repent for his sin or rejoice in its redemptive outcome, leaving unresolved the question of whether, in Milton's view, the Incarnation and Redemption would have occurred had Adam and Eve not eaten the forbidden fruit. Nonetheless, he concludes against this objection, stating that "Adam could have had no reason for this doubt except upon the assumption that the sin was truly prerequisite to the 'much more good' that was to follow – was, in Milton's own significant term, to 'spring' from it; and an intelligent reader could hardly have failed to conclude that the doubt was to be resolved in favor of the second alternative" (166). In a brief review of the trope, Lovejoy traces earlier texts that engaged with the concept of the *felix culpa* prior to Milton, concluding that its primary sources most likely include the *Exultet*, the works of Saint Ambrose, – known as Augustine's friend and the bishop who baptized him, thus formalizing his conversion to Christianity – as well as the works of Du Bartas and Fletcher. Furthermore, Lovejoy contends that, despite the Catholic origins of the Proclamation of Easter and of Saint Ambrose's works, it is possible that Milton had been familiar with these texts, as the Fathers of the Church continued to hold much authority amongst sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestants.

Taking the Fall as a necessary event for the coming of Christ and for Redemption, Lovejoy affirms that the sin of Adam and Eve remains a moral evil. But this condition proposes two problematic questions: "Was it true in general that the existence of moral evils is, from another and more comprehensive point of view, a good? And if, from such a point of view, the Fall was preponderatingly a good, was it not necessary to assume that its occurrence must after all have been in accordance with God's will?" (173). Lovejoy states that these questions were considered by Augustine, "the greatest of the Latin Fathers" (174), and that his answers to them were, in any case, affirmative. Referring to Augustine's *Enchiridion*, Lovejoy reinforces the theologian's acceptance of the paradox when he argues that

> Therefore, although evil, in so far as it is evil, is not good, still it is a good thing that not only good things exist but evil as well. For if it were not good that evil things exist, they would certainly not be allowed to exist by the Omnipotent Good, for whom it is

> undoubtedly as easy not to allow to exist what he does not will, as it is for him to do what he does will. (40)

And that,

> These are 'the great works of the Lord, well-considered in all his acts of will' – and so wisely well-considered that when his angelic and human creation sinned (that is, did not do what he willed, but what it willed) he could still accomplish what he himself had willed and this through the same creaturely will by which the first act contrary to the Creator's will had been done. As the Supreme Good, he made good use of evil deeds, for the damnation of those whom he had justly predestined to punishment and for the salvation of those whom he had mercifully predestined to grace. (42)

According to Lovejoy, in these passages, Augustine is deliberately assuming that original sin was a real frustration to God, one that compelled Him to act in a way He would not otherwise do. They disclose the moral and metaphysical problems that accompany the trope of *felix culpa*, showing that it was not a simple task to avoid the idea that the Fall was "but part of the eternal and ineluctable divine purpose for mankind" (174). Hence, considering Milton's Christian predecessors who have also worked with the paradox, the passage in the twelfth book of *Paradise Lost* ceases to represent an unthinkable idea of Milton. Furthermore, to Lovejoy, even though the antinomian charge that the term carries has probably stopped many hands from discussing the matter in text, it is undeniable that there is a "recognized and natural place in the treatment of the topic in Christian theology" (179), which is the climax of Redemption – and, for Milton, the climax of the main theme with which he works in the epic. Lovejoy concludes that the poet's direct use of the trope only in the very end of the poem enhances the tone of a happy ending, thus contrasting with the earlier chaotic and unhappy events, making them seem instrumental and necessary to that end.

Jafar Porkoli and Mohamad-Javad Haj'jari invoke the double-effect principle as part of men's limited capacity of understanding "the wayes of God" (1, 26). This limitation, as Milton affirms in *De Doctrina Christiana*, stems from the inherent imperfection of human understanding: "when we speak of knowing God, it must be understood with reference to the imperfect comprehension of man. For to know God as He really is, far transcends the power of man's thought, much more of his perception" (qtd. in Porkoli and Haj'jari 70). The double-effect reasoning, or DER, consists in justifying a tolerance towards evil actions that have good side-effects, or "double-effects", and dictates that an evil doing that has a good outcome is permissible only if it was not intended, but aimed at a good end. "How ought we act when the

doing of good involves a failure to avoid evil and the avoidance of evil involves a failure to do good?" (in Porkoli and Haj'jari 73), the authors ask by quoting Thomas Cavanaugh. A coherent argument would assert that if the sacrifice of a good is necessary to prevent a greater evil, the intention behind the act remains good rather than evil. This is because intending evil entails treating it as a good — thereby aligning oneself against the proper moral order. Consequently, it is never permissible to intend evil, even if the outcome appears to result in good. That way, euthanasia would be permissible, for, although it means ending a life (an evil action), it also means ending someone's suffering (an attempt to avoid evil); abortion in a problematic pregnancy means the death of the fetus, but the saving of the mother's life. Therefore, in both cases, the non-intended deaths help in the accomplishment of good ends.

In the Catholic doctrine, they follow, the DER mostly appears in Thomistic theology, where it was developed to deal with moral dilemmas, such as the problem of evil. This philosophical problem, however, reveals the paradoxical entanglement of good and evil. As Cavanaugh observes, when this condition appears, "neither doing good nor avoiding evil alone suffices for an ethical act" (in Porkoli and Haj'jari 73). Thus, when the Miltonic Satan expresses an evil intention by asserting that "all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good" (4, 109-110), he corrupts the natural order of these two forces, showing that he does not intend to avoid evil, but rather intends it as an end. Nonetheless, God in His omniscience and supreme goodness does not prevent it. Why? "God's goodness shall deem that whatever happens in the universe follows His Will, which is in essence good. Therefore, our logic holds that evil shall serve that goodness, if evil is not to exist in itself. As Augustine says in his *Confessions*, 'evil has no existence except as a privation of good, down to that level which is altogether without being'" (73). Aquinas explains that God possesses perfect knowledge of evil precisely because He knows good perfectly. According to this theological tradition, evil is defined as a privation of good; thus, by comprehending the fullness of good, God also comprehends the absence of it — that is, evil. As light reveals the nature of darkness, so does the knowledge of good reveals the nature of evil. Importantly, God's knowledge of evil does not cause it; rather, He is the source of the good that may emerge in response to evil. Since evil lacks ontological substance, it cannot itself be a cause. Aquinas, building on Augustine's thought, argues that evil has no formal or final cause, but arises from an accidental cause, which is itself good. As Porkoli and Haj'jari note, this theological reasoning represents a form of theodicy — an effort to reconcile the existence of evil with divine justice — and ultimately serves as an attempt to "justify the wayes of God to men" (1, 26).

Milton sought to emphasize that a good greater than the immortality and innocence of Eden could emerge from the Fall. His deliberate use of the word "justify" may reflect the Protestant reinterpretation of the doctrine of justification, which involves a theological debate over the legitimacy of defending an agent or action perceived as unjust. As Michael Bryson explains, justification refers to the process by which humanity is "either made or declared righteous in the sight of God" (qtd. in Porkoli and Haj'jari 75). In contrast to the Calvinist and Lutheran views — which hold that justification involves God imputing righteousness to humanity through faith in Christ's self-sacrifice — Augustine and Aquinas saw justification as God bringing forth goodness from human sin. Although Milton was a Protestant, his treatment of the theme aligns more closely with these Catholic thinkers. When he declares his intention to "justify the wayes of God to men" (1, 26), he is, in effect, announcing his aim to place God on trial — not to condemn, but to ultimately acquit Him of wrongdoing, demonstrating that no evil has been committed against His creation. In this sense, justification is connected to original sin and God's Grace, and, as such, to the justification of the non-interference of God within the Fall. These themes, which are essential in Augustinian theology since they explain his defense that all humans need saving, lead also to a soteriological view of the Fall: the essential role of Christ's sacrifice to redeem humankind.

> If the Fall was to remain on its own, there would be no Son of God to prove his power in humankind's destiny, and the Fall would have remained a phenomenon in essence evil. Thus, God's ultimate Grace, manifested in the Son of God's sacrifice to purify humankind, turn the Fall into a side effect as it was a process and not a product. (Porkoli and Haj'jari 76)

Leaning on C.S. Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Porkoli and Haj'jari support their argument that Milton's accounting of the Fall can be directly related to Augustine's theology, since Milton demonstrates in his epic the belief that God created all things good, and that evil is simply a word to point to a privation of goodness[16]. In both authors, this privation or perversion of good comes from pride, from a moving away from God and towards oneself, a desire to exist for its own by having no masters, but rather being the master of its own creatures. Finally, as Augustine and Aquinas maintained that although God created everything good — for He is good and He sustains all existence in the world —, He foresaw that some would freely turn away from that goodness and choose evil — evil which God would ultimately use to bring

[16] "I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. / Such I created all th'Ethereal Powers / and Spirits" (*Paradise Lost* 3, 98-101).

about greater good. Rejecting the Calvinist determinism that prevailed at his time, Milton firmly distances God from any responsibility for the Fall. Through the voice of God, he declares: "no Decree of mine / Concurring to necessitate his Fall, or touch with lightest moment of impulse / His free Will" (10, 43-46). Free will, as a central and recurring theme in Milton's work, is intricately tied to the Fall and to the respective roles of God and humankind within it. In Book III, God argues that obedience has value only when it is freely chosen; if it were compelled, it would be meaningless:

Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
Where onely what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would? What praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
Made passive both, had served necessity,
Not mee. They therefore as to right belonged,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their maker, or their making, or their Fate,
As if predestination overruled
Their will, disposed by absolute Decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown. (3, 103-119)

Later on, he continues,

I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Their nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordained
Their freedom, they themselves ordained their fall. (3, 124-128)

As Tyeson Barton, Porkoli and Haj'jari refer to Milton's *Areopagitica* to argue that the poet's insistence on the subject of free will is linked to the idea that human virtue needs testing and reinforcement to be able to distinguish true good from apparent good. Therefore, "virtue,

having not faced evil, is not true virtue" (Porkoli and Haj'jari 78), for in that way it has not been tested and strengthened. But, once virtue is tempted by evil but does not cave, it shows that freedom of choice is crucial in the shaping of true virtue. That way, when one turns away from God and towards oneself, it shows pure evil; but, if evil brings a good outcome, if it is only a means to an end, it is to be allowed. Hence, Milton's Satan sins when he *chooses* evil as good, as his truth, thus exercising his virtue and morality according to his own will. On the other hand, Adam and Eve, not yet knowing evil, are deceived to take it for good by another being that already has that knowledge. In his *Areopagitica*, Milton would argue that "Many there be that complain of Divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress. Foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose; for *reason* is but *choosing*" (28), and, for that reason, Adam and Eve are afforded forgiveness, while Satan is not.

The first sort by their own suggestions fell,
Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived
By the other first: man therefore shall find grace,
The other none… (3, 129-132)

Thus, good and evil in *Paradise Lost* are tangled in a symbiotic relationship that underlines an active double-effect reasoning in Milton's justification of God's ways. When the poet writes "knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill" (4, 222) and "knowledge of good lost, evil got" (11, 87), he echoes the Augustinian suggestion that there are two ways of knowing evil: by knowing good and by experience. "According to Poole, the prelapsarian Adam and Eve developed the former and postlapsarian Adam and Eve experienced the latter" (Porkoli and Haj'jari 85). In its postlapsarian state, Porkoli and Haj'jari continue, humankind is able to discern good better by now knowing evil.

The authors conclude that the Miltonic argument agrees with the trope of *felix culpa* and with Augustinian and Thomistic theodicies, differing only in degree, but not in kind. "That God creates goodness out of evil does not necessitate the coexistence of evil and goodness from the very beginning of the world. Rather, evil is inherent where goodness is perverted, and goodness derives from God, so that self-interest equals betraying God and His goodness" (88). Therefore, although God possessed the power to prevent Satan's rebellion, He chose not to intervene—out of respect for the freedom of created beings and to allow the Fall of Adam and Eve to unfold. More significantly, this permitted a demonstration of the Son's unwavering loyalty and devotion to the divine will.

Porkoli and Haj'jari highlight three key points that merit attention when analyzing Milton's argument through the lens of double-effect reasoning. First, "the Fall was not evil *per se* regarding the notion of *felix culpa*, independent of its evil effects for humanity" (88), as Adam and Eve could not have attained true virtue in their prelapsarian state. Second, God intended good, not evil, having endowed both humankind and the angels — including Satan — with free will and reason, thereby enabling them to choose obedience or disobedience freely (88). Third, God acted with grave and purposeful intent, grounded in His Divine Will and Providence, taking into account the necessity of evil as a condition from which greater good could emerge (88). In all possible scenarios, it is necessary to consider His Will in bringing good out of evil, since both forces exist in a symbiotic interconnection: when one lacks the other, true virtue cannot come to be, and only blind obedience or Satanic disobedience would remain.

Despite his well-known commitment to the Protestant faith, Milton's argument in *Paradise Lost* aligns closely with Augustinian and Thomistic theologies. Scholars generally agree that, within the poem, the knowledge of evil is essential to the development of true virtue and morality, as it necessitates the exercise of free will and the conscious choice to align or not with God's will. In this sense, evil can serve as a pathway to the cultivation of virtue, which, in Christian terms, is synonymous with goodness; through the experience of evil, one may come to understand, teach, and choose good. It is crucial to emphasize, however — as Ulreich does — that goodness does not depend on evil to exist or flourish. Evil, being merely a privation of good, has no positive substance, thus, good outcomes arise not because of evil, but in spite of it. In *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (1989), Neil Forsyth reminds us that Satan's crucial role, from the very root of his name to the part he takes in the Christian narrative, is opposition, a role that cannot take place without a second part to play with.

> He [Satan] is the Adversary, in much the same way that we talk of the Hero, the Donor, or the Companion, in the kind of narrative analysis pioneered by the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp. He took his function for his title, however, so Satan's name is both paradoxical and tragic. It defines a being who can only be contingent: as the adversary, he must always be a function of another, not an independent entity. As Augustine and Milton show, it is precisely when Satan imagines himself independent that he is most deluded. His character is, in this sense of the word, a fiction. (4)

This is precisely what Augustine, Aquinas and Milton sustain throughout their textual works, that evil is nothing (fiction), but a privation of good: its theoretical existence is possible only

when put in contrast to the true existence of good. It is dependent, as a parasite. Therefore, the argument that the Incarnation of Christ and subsequent redemption of humankind would not be possible without the Fall, appears amongst scholars' arguments.

4.4. *Felix culpa* in J.R.R. Tolkien

In his 1947 essay "On Fairy-Stories", J.R.R. Tolkien coined the term *eucatastrophe*, defining it as an essential element of fairy story. The eucatastrophe — literally "good catastrophe" — brings meaning to the narrative and to the struggle against a seemingly insurmountable problem. Just when all appears lost, the story takes a sudden turn, offering the possibility of failure, but also of unexpected redemption: "… it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature" (155). Tolkien saw eucatastrophe as deeply intertwined with sorrow and failure, which he considered essential precursors to the "joy of deliverance" (153) — a joy rooted in the certainty of an ultimate, redemptive end that denies final defeat. For Tolkien, the Incarnation of Christ represents "the eucatastrophe of Man's history" (156), and the Resurrection, the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. The eucatastrophic tale, therefore, is "an echo of *evangelium* in the real world" (155). From this, he identified the four main uses of the fairy-story: Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, and Consolation. As Edward James succinctly summarizes in *Tolkien, Lewis and the Explosion of Genre Fantasy*,

> Fantasy was the result of sub-creation: the creation of something which is not in our world, but which has the consistency of reality. "Fantasy (in this sense) is, I think, not a lower but a higher form of Art, indeed, the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent" ("On Fairy Stories", 45). … Fantasy brings us Recovery: the cleansing of our eyes so that we can see our world more clearly. Fantasy brings us Escape, not escapism, in a derogatory sense, which is the Flight of the Deserter, but … a mental escape from the ugliness and evil around us. And finally Fantasy brings us Consolation, above all the Consolation of the Happy Ending: Eucatastrophe … (66)

For Tolkien, the good ending is a crucial component of the fairy-story and one essentially linked to the idea of Consolation. The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the verb "to console" as "to alleviate the grief, sense of loss, or trouble of: comfort". Conversely, the Bible speaks of the consolation humanity receives from God through the sacrifice of Christ, who partakes in both its sufferings and its comforts. As Paul writes, "for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too," or, as a clarifying

footnote suggests, "for as the sufferings of Christ abound for us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:5). Both the definition of the word and its use in the Bible recall the fallen progeny of the Edenic couple, who, in need of consolation for their state, receive comfort from God through the love of Christ: the blessing that resulted from sin.

In *"*Power and Corruption: Evil in Tolkien's Eä*"* (2008), Anna Modin contends that in Tolkien's fiction, corruption is not necessarily permanent, and that good and evil are not portrayed as absolute, immutable forces. Rather, they are capable of overlapping and influencing one another — just as evil may inadvertently serve a good purpose, so too might good unintentionally serve an evil end. Modin thus underscores the presence of *felix culpa* in Tolkien's work, while also proposing its inversion. She supports this claim by examining the corruption of Denethor and Boromir, both of whom fall not out of inherent malice, but through misguided intentions. To illustrate the unraveling of *felix culpa*, she highlights Denethor's descent into despair through his use of the Palantír. Seeking insight into the enemy's plans and hoping to defend Gondor, Denethor is deceived by Sauron, who reveals only selective, intimidating visions of Mordor's growing strength—images that, as Tolkien writes, "fed the despair of his heart until it overthrew his mind" (*The Lord of the Rings*, 856). Believing that the end of Gondor was near, Denethor's despair became madness when Faramir, his only living son, was wounded, and believed to be dead. Proud and arrogant, Denethor could not accept the idea of losing his remaining heir or of becoming a subject of Sauron or Aragorn, so he chooses to burn to death. According to Modin, Denethor's initial good intention — to protect his country — ultimately leads to a tragic end, that is, his growing despair, madness and suicide.

On the other hand, to illustrate the remediability of corruption and how evil might lead to good ends, Modin mentions Boromir, who, despite having been corrupted by the Ring and gone mad, recovers sanity and sacrifices himself for the sake of others. Like Denethor, his father, Boromir is led by the desire to defend Gondor, but is gradually enticed by the power of the Ring until he finally tries to take it from Frodo using force. The hobbit manages to escape and Boromir is suddenly struck by reason: full of regret, he sacrifices himself to protect Merry and Pippin from the Uruk-hai. Boromir is initially motivated by a genuine desire to protect his people and homeland. However, blinded by fear and desperation, he becomes susceptible to the Ring and its false promise of power to defeat Sauron. Yet unlike Denethor, Boromir's moral descent is ultimately redeemed. He dies confessing his wrongdoing to Aragorn, in a gesture reminiscent of a penitent sinner before a priest. Moreover, as Modin argues, Boromir's attempt to seize the Ring from Frodo becomes a pivotal moment — one that prompts Frodo's decision

to leave the Fellowship and undertake the journey to Mordor alone. Thus, Boromir's narrative illustrates the mutable and intertwined nature of good and evil. What begins as a noble intention is corrupted into evil, but that very act contributes to a greater good. As Modin puts it, "evil purposes are distorted into serving the good forces, just as good purposes … are distorted into evil. However, in the end, no evil purpose endures in opposition to Ilúvatar's will" (30). She concludes that good and evil in Tolkien's world function as fluid points along a continuum, capable of merging and transforming within every living being.

Modin's argument is closely aligns with Augustinian and Thomistic theologies, both of which affirm that "God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom" (*Summa Theologica* "Whether, if Man Had not Sinned, God Would Have Become Incarnate?"). Crucially, Modin also maintains that "no evil purposes endure in opposition to Ilúvatar's will" (30). If this is accepted, then good in Tolkien's universe is absolute and ultimately impervious to final defeat. While good intentions may be distorted into evil actions, they cannot lead to an evil *end*. In this way, Modin moves toward a key principle in Aquinas's theology: that good possesses ontological primacy, whereas evil exists only parasitically — as a privation or corruption of good. Evil can mingle with and diminish good, but it cannot destroy it entirely. Thus, good inevitably prevails, and nothing in creation becomes wholly evil.

In "Tolkien's Theological Myth: Reflecting on good, evil and creation in Tolkien's mythos" (2017), Thomas Willcox argues that Tolkien's *legendarium* aligns with Augustinian theology, asserting that "evil negates itself and unintentionally becomes a means of divine providence" (35). He contends that Eru's response to acts of counter-creation is both *eucatastrophic* and redemptive, emphasizing a divine plan that honors the free will granted to all created beings — thus reflecting a theological stance consistent with Catholic doctrine. To support his claim, Willcox references Tolkien's *On Fairy Stories*, where the author articulates the idea that

> the peculiar quality of the 'joy' in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. … in the 'eucatastrophe' we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater – it may be a far-off gleam or echo of the *evangelium* in the real world. … The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. … It [the joy] looks forward … to the Great Eucatastrophe. The Christian joy, the *Gloria*, is of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. Because this story is supreme; and it is true.

> … The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending'. (155-156)

Eucatastrophe is formed by the affixing of the Greek prefix *eu-* (meaning *good*) to the word *catastrophe*, which is used in literary criticism to refer to the outcome of a drama's plot. In Tolkien's usage, it refers to a sudden turn of events at a story's end that guarantees a happy conclusion, in spite of the seemingly unsolvable initial problem. Recalling the trope of *felix culpa* and its denial of an evil final defeat, the elements of the eucatastrophic tale are established in the very act of creation. Answering to Melkor's repeated attempts to interfere with the Music, Eru declares that his will and power would always prevail.

> [Eru's music] was deep and wide and beautiful, but slow and blended with an immeasurable sorrow, from which its beauty chiefly came. [Melkor's music] had now achieved a unity of its own; but it was loud, and vain, and endlessly repeated; and it had little harmony, but rather a clamorous unison of many trumpets braying upon a few notes. 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. … Then Ilúvatar spoke, and he said: 'Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Ilúvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined'. (5-6)

And, as to reinforce Eru's omnipotence and prevalence over Melkor's will, Eru says to Ulmo:

> 'Seest thou not how here in this little realm in the Deeps of Time Melkor hath made war upon thy province? He hath bethought him of bitter cold immoderate, and yet hath not destroyed the beauty of thy fountains, nor of thy clear pools. Behold the snow, and the cunning work of frost! Melkor hath devised heats and fire without restraint, and hath not dried up thy desire nor utterly quelled the music of the sea. Behold rather the height and glory of the clouds, and the everchanging mists; and listen to the fall of rain upon the Earth! And in these clouds thou art drawn nearer to Manwë, thy friend, whom thou lovest'. (8)

Eru frequently intervenes to remind his creations that, despite Melkor's attempts to disrupt the Music and counter-create what he had brought into being, the ultimate outcome remains

aligned with Eru's will. Melkor, far from acting independently, serves merely as an instrument through whom Eru brings about greater ends. Thus, every act of interference on Melkor's part ultimately becomes subsumed within Eru's divine theme. His efforts to unravel the Valar's work in Middle-earth are ultimately futile, as their creations fulfill what Eru had ordained from the beginning. Melkor cannot undo the Music, nor can he corrupt the waters of Ulmo, for Eru has willed that goodness shall ultimately prevail. As Willcox observes, "this also reinforces the idea of mediation … whereby Ilúvatar, except in the devising of Elves and Men, works with and through his sub-creators in a relational manner rather than independent of them" (23). Willcox further argues that Eru's use of evil to bring about good reflects his desire for relationship with creation — a stark contrast to Melkor and Sauron, who seek only to dominate and control. This relational mode of divine engagement allows for redemption, exemplified in characters such as Saruman and Boromir, who are offered the chance to turn away from corruption.

Saruman, like Gandalf, is a Maia sent to Middle-earth to assist on the quest to defeat Sauron. However, as knowledge about the Ring grows, so too does his desire to obtain the artifact for himself in order to increase his own power. Driven by envy of Sauron's strength and consumed by greed, Saruman gradually succumbs to corruption and aligns himself with evil. Despite his fall, he is not beyond redemption — Gandalf extends to him an opportunity for repentance, which Saruman ultimately rejects:

> then I gave him a last choice and a fair one: to renounce both Mordor and his private schemes, and make amends by helping us in our need. He knows our need, none better. Great service he could have rendered. But he has chosen to withhold it, and keep the power of Orthanc. He will not serve, only command. (584)

But Gandalf notes that a turn of fortune took place in that moment, for Wormtongue, who was based at Orthanc, hurled a Palantír from the tower in an attempt to strike Gandalf: "'… Still for us things have not gone badly. Strange are the turns of fortune! Often does hatred hurt itself! I guess that, even if we had entered in, we could have found few treasures in Orthanc more precious than the thing which Wormtongue threw down at us'" (585). According to Willcox, this situation illustrates what Tom Shippey calls an "interplay of providence and free will" (in Willcox 25), as, while Gandalf freely chooses to offer Saruman a path to repentance — an act of mercy reflecting divine forbearance — Wormtongue, acting with malicious intent, ironically furthers the cause of good. Evil shows itself as self-defeating, and this episode exemplifies this idea: Wormtongue's hatred leads him to an act that ultimately strengthens the forces opposing

Sauron. Theologically, this aligns with the Augustinian-Thomistic view that evil cannot thwart divine providence; rather, it is unwittingly folded into the greater design. Thus, what appears as a chaotic or spiteful act is ultimately co-opted by a providential will, demonstrating Tolkien's deep-rooted belief in the subordination of evil to a higher good.

Like Anna Modin, Thomas Willcox references Boromir's attack on Frodo to illustrate Eru's inclination to draw good from evil. Boromir, driven by desperation to save Gondor, succumbs momentarily to the Ring's temptation, attempting to seize it by force. This act marks a moral lapse—a moment of madness rooted in fear and hopelessness. However, unlike Saruman, who defiantly rejects Gandalf's offer of redemption, Boromir experiences a moment of self-awareness and remorse, signaling the beginning of his redemption. As Modin emphasizes, and Willcox concurs, Boromir's corruption stems not from malice but from despair, which clouds his judgment and weakens his moral resolve. His return to clarity—his "moment of lucidity" — occurs when he confesses his wrongdoing to Aragorn and dies defending Merry and Pippin, an act that reaffirms his nobility. Willcox sees this progression as a testament to Tolkien's Augustinian framework: even flawed choices can become conduits for grace when met with repentance, and evil, though real and damaging, can be redirected toward a greater good within the scope of divine providence.

> … as Boromir, one of Gondor's greatest soldiers and generals, sacrificed himself to protect the weakest and most superfluous members of the Fellowship, his actions indicate he has abandoned the consequentialism that led him to try to seize the Ring for a belief in some sort of objective morality that looks beyond consequences as a motivating factor, which reflects a Catholic approach to ethics. (27)

Boromir's confession to Aragorn is not only a plea for forgiveness but also a final act of humility and repentance. His redemption yields a meaningful good, as Aragorn, moved by his courage and contrition, affirms his moral victory by assuring him that he has triumphed: "Few have gained such a victory" (*The Lord of the Rings*, 414). Furthermore, Willcox argues that Boromir's death brings not only his own redemption as a good outcome, but also what he calls a "providential direction" for Merry and Pippin, which leads them to take crucial action to the course of the story. Referring to Ralph Wood's *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-Earth* (2003), Willcox lists the successful events that take place after Boromir's death. Firstly, he argues that a moment of providence comes about when Merry and Pippin manage to escape from the Orc Grishnákh and from being trampled by a Rohirrim's horse. Secondly, Merry and Pippin's coming to Fangorn was the starting point of Saruman's

defeat by the Ents. Pippin's later possession of the Palantír proves equally crucial, as it misleads Sauron and prevents him from learning of Orthanc's fall. This moment also propels Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli to go after the hobbits, eventually putting Aragorn in the right place to take the Paths of the Dead and rally crucial support for the war. Moreover, it places Merry in the battle of Pelennor Fields, where he strikes the Witch-king of Angmar thus enabling Éowyn to ultimately kill him. Lastly, it also places Pippin in Gondor, where he becomes able to assist in the rescue of Faramir. Hence, Willcox argues that Boromir's redemption makes evident how Eru acts through his creation in a cooperative way. Boromir's repentance "and self-sacrifice does more consequential good than he [Boromir] could ever imagine, because it seems to invite Ilúvatar to work in the chain of events that follows it" (28). In this way, Eru continues to enact his will and power within the world — not through domination, but through Providence, working in harmony with the free choices of his creatures to bring good out of evil.

Willcox contends that "often evil will … counter-acts itself and gives unintended positive benefits" (34), an argument aligned with Augustine, who claimed that evil nullifies itself and inadvertently becomes a channel for Divine Providence. Willcox concludes by arguing that a "providential eucatastrophe" (35) emerges through characters who refuse to abandon hope and resist seemingly invincible evil — revealing the profound beauty in the interplay between providence and free will.

In "Eucatastrophic Tales of Redemption in *The Lord of the Rings*" (2013), William Dylan Fay argues that Tolkien's concept of eucatastrophe echoes the Eucharist and represents the ideal conclusion to narrative fiction. As Tolkien himself states, "all complete fairy-stories must have it" ("On Fairy Stories" 153); just as Christ's Incarnation would be incomplete without the Passion and Resurrection, so too would a fairy-story lack meaning without the suffering, failure, and sudden redemptive turn that defines eucatastrophe. According to Fay, it is in *The Lord of the Rings* that Tolkien most fully realizes the concept of redemptive eucatastrophe, particularly through the symbolism of the One Ring. As the narrative's central axis, the Ring functions paradoxically: though evil, it becomes a vehicle for grace, offering those who encounter it the possibility of redemption through trial. Fay notes that "as a Catholic, J.R.R. Tolkien is intimately familiar with the concept of the *felix culpa*" (2), and so, in his *legendarium*, some form of good often follows the evil temptation introduced by the Ring — most often in the form of personal redemption. Just as in Christian theology Satan's introduction of sin into Eden ultimately enables the Incarnation and sacrificial redemption of Christ, so too does Sauron, by gifting the Rings of Power, unwittingly set in motion the chain

of events that culminate in Frodo's sacrificial journey and the eucatastrophe that leads to Sauron's eventual downfall — three thousand years later. Fay argues that those who encounter the Ring and either overcome or succumb to its temptation undergo a kind of personal sacrifice, which opens the path to what he terms "Tolkien's process of eucatastrophic redemption" (2). He illustrates this through the arcs of Boromir, Sméagol, and Frodo, each of whom embodies a different dimension of this redemptive process.

After being corrupted by the Ring for hundreds of years, Gollum's redemption was uncertain and dubious, but throughout the narrative, the reader is told that he has yet a role to play before he meets his end. Fay believes that, on the slopes of Mount Doom, where Frodo finally gives in to the power of the Ring, he for the first time uses its power of Command when he tells Gollum "begone, and trouble me no more! If you touch me ever again, you shall be cast yourself into the Fire of Doom" (944). According to Fay, "by using the Ring to force Gollum away from him and to threaten him with death if he disobeys, Frodo has given in to the temptation of power and allowed it to gain a foothold in his mind that it will not relinquish" (3). Hence, there at the edge of the fire, at the edge of completing his task, Frodo decides that he will not do what he was supposed to: he fails the Ring's trial and fails at completing the quest for its destruction. This moment represents a *dyscatastrophe* — a point in the narrative where a tragic and disastrous ending appears not only possible but likely. At this stage, the only foreseeable outcomes seem to be either the rise of a new Dark Lord in Frodo or the recovery of the Ring by Sauron. Fay notes that, for Tolkien, as he articulates in "On Fairy Stories", the presence of a dyscatastrophe is essential to the emotional power of eucatastrophe. Tolkien writes that eucatastrophe "denies … universal final defeat" (153), and for that denial to be meaningful, the threat of such defeat must be fully believable. However, at the verge of this tragic end, Frodo's command comes to realization and, as Gollum jumps over him and bites off his finger with the Ring still encircling it, he falls into the fires of Orodruin. Fay argues that this sacrifice does not happen out of altruism nor out of an attempt to redeem himself. But either because of divine providence or luck Gollum's death guarantees the destruction of Sauron and the conclusion of the quest. Nevertheless, his accidental sacrifice provides not only Frodo's redemption, but his own, proving that, in spite of one's crimes, there will always be a chance of redemption, of a good end.

Regarding Frodo's path to redemption, Fay argues that it does not conclude with his confession of guilt[17], as mere admission is insufficient to atone for his ultimate failure to resist the Ring's temptation. Like others who failed at it, both Frodo and Bilbo were to make a last sacrifice in penance for using the Ring. However, differently from Boromir and Gollum, their resistance against the use of violence permits that their sacrifice may not result in death. Alternatively, the hobbits will leave Middle-Earth and pass into the West, to the Undying Land of Valinor, hence metaphorically dying for the sins of the world. As Frodo puts it, "it must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (*The Lord of the Rings* 1029). Fay concludes by drawing a parallel: like Jesus, who sacrifices his own life for the life of others, and to make possible the eradication of death and sin through the Resurrection, Frodo's symbolic death and passing into the West means the removal of the last remnants of the sins of the Ring from Middle-earth, remnants he carried on his own body and mind.

Tolkien's response to the problem of evil can be understood as a creative reimagining of the *felix culpa* trope. As many scholars have argued—and as Tolkien's own writings suggest—his personal faith and Catholic upbringing are intricately woven into the fabric of his fictional universe, allowing for the discernment of certain Catholic doctrines within it. Chief among these is the belief that God permits evil to exist in order to bring about a greater good. Whether or not Tolkien consciously intended the concept of eucatastrophe to parallel *felix culpa*, his formulation of the term marks a significant evolution of the idea of the "happy fault" in his mythology, as both concepts insist that evil cannot have the final word. Tolkien's understanding of sorrow and failure as necessary preconditions for "the joy of deliverance" ("On Fairy Stories" 153) underscores this theological perspective. His assertion that eucatastrophe is essential to the structure of a complete fairy-story reinforces its centrality in his mythopoeic vision. Thus, based on the narrative and character examples discussed, it is reasonable to argue that Tolkien presents suffering, pain, and moral failure not as endpoints, but as transformative elements within a larger redemptive journey—one that ultimately leads from sin to salvation, and from despair to divine grace.

5. The Reading of the Dialogues

For centuries, numerous theologians have addressed the problem of evil by asserting that God, in His omnipotence, is able to draw greater good from evil — so much so that, had

[17] "But for him [Gollum], Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring", (*The Lord of the Rings* 947).

humans never suffered from it, much good would have been lost. This line of reasoning, known as the greater-good argument or *felix culpa* ("happy fault"), is largely exemplified in the biblical narrative of the Fall from Eden. This account is often considered the primary and most compelling illustration of the idea, as it was through the sin of disobedience that the Incarnation of Christ and the redemption of humankind became possible. According to Augustine, God allows expressions of evil in the world because in His foreknowledge that some of His creatures would freely choose evil, He also knew how He would ultimately use it for good. In this way, the instruction and realization of good through the experience of evil becomes a part of Divine Providence.

Both Augustine and Aquinas support this perspective. Augustine argues that it is a greater display of God's goodness to bring good out of evil than to prevent its existence altogether. Aquinas expands upon this by affirming that while evil can diminish good, it can never wholly destroy it; thus, good will always prevail. This shared view is rooted in Augustine's doctrine that evil is merely the privation of good — a concept Aquinas frequently revisits and reaffirms in his own theological work.

Augustine writes in his *Confessions* that, if God is the creator of all things and the supreme good of the universe, so it follows that all of His creation is good, for no evil could sprout from a perfectly good source. Thus, all things that are vulnerable to corruption are good, for, were they wholly good or wholly evil, they would not be liable to corruption at all. An entirely good character would not have doubts when tempted by evil, it would be incorruptible; thus, a being that falls into corruption, has its goodness lessened or injured, so it has suffered a privation of good. On the other hand, an entirely evil figure would not even exist, for if God created all substances, but not evil, then evil is not a substance. Were it a substance, it would be good, either an incorruptible or a corruptible one. As Augustine puts it in *The City of God*, "that is why the *choice* of evil is an impressive proof that the *nature* is good" (448). Therefore, what we call evil is simply that privation of good which corrupted beings suffer from.

Why do some creatures become evil? According to Augustine, the answer lies within the gift of free will, which was granted to Man by God. He explains that free will is the actual cause of all falls: once Adam and Eve chose to eat from the fruit, they chose to not adhere to God, "who lives in the highest degree", but chose themselves instead, "a lower degree of existence" (*City of God* 477). For Augustine, sin is choosing something seeking satisfaction to the detriment of God, the Supreme Good (the Supreme Being) that sustains all existence. To

refuse this good is the origin of all moral evil. God foreknows those who will choose evil, he follows, and uses that as means to achieve good.

Aquinas builds upon Augustine's conception of evil as a privation of good by incorporating the metaphysical framework of Aristotle, thereby offering a more structured and philosophical account of evil. While Augustine defines evil as the absence of good, Aquinas refines this idea, arguing that evil occurs when a being fails to actualize a potential that is proper to its nature. He also asserts that evil is not a substance but a deficiency in form, a distortion or corruption of what a thing is meant to be. Furthermore, Aquinas affirms the convertibility of being and goodness, emphasizing that all existing things are good insofar as they exist, and thus evil, as a privation of being, has no independent existence. Lastly, Aquinas argues that sin arises from the misuse of free will, when individuals choose an apparent good over the true good, thereby introducing disorder into the moral order.

In Augustine and Aquinas, the development of this defence is aimed at answering the problem of evil, and thus at reconciling the expressions of evil in the world with a benevolent and powerful Creator. The underpinning of this argument is the contention that the Fall of Adam and Eve was the unfortunate event that brought the grace of Incarnation and Redemption. Thus the birth of Christ brought to the material world many blessings, and his sacrifice, humankind's redemption from original sin. It also meant the union of man and divine. But most of all, it represented humankind's return to a greater good. Aquinas contributes to this interpretation by asserting that the Incarnation would have been possible without the Fall, since God's power is not contingent upon human actions. He argues that, had God willed it, He could have bestowed the same gift upon humanity regardless. That the Incarnation occurred *because* of the Fall only magnifies God's grace, affirms His justice, and reveals His boundless benevolence. In this way, both Augustine and Aquinas shift the focus of the Fall narrative away from evil and toward the divine purpose behind it: Atonement — a return to the greater good, which is God Himself.

Paradise Lost is a retelling of both the fall of Satan and the Fall of Man aimed at justifying "the ways of God to men" (1, 26). Central to this justification is the question of divine non-intervention: if God foreknew the disobedience, why did He not prevent it? Rooted in Christian theology, the poem's response draws on the concept of *felix culpa*, and from its opening lines, points toward redemption through the coming of the Son, who will "Restore us, and regain the blissful seat" (1, 5). To follow Milton's logic, however, one must begin at the root of all sin. As the patristic tradition — and Milton himself — affirm, that root is pride.

From the first book, one can discern echoes of Augustine and Aquinas, whose theological insights subtly inform the narrative. Milton begins his theodicy by presenting pride as the sin that cast Satan from Heaven, and envy and revenge as the passions that later drive him to corrupt humankind.

Th' infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stirred up with Envy and Revenge, deceived
The Mother of Mankind, what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his Host
Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Glory above his Peers,
He trusted to have equalled the most High,
If he opposed; and with ambitious aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
Raised impious War in Heav'n and Battel proud
With vain attempt. (1, 34-44)

Pride, envy, and revenge can be understood as demonstrations of Satan's turning away from God and towards himself, towards his own desire to be above his equals and above God's nature. As Augustine declares, "In fact, not by the possession of flesh, which the Devil does not possess, that man has become like the Devil: it is by living by the rule of self, that is by the rule of man. For the Devil chose to live by the rule of self when he did not stand fast in the truth" (*City of God* 552). In the exercise of his free will, he chooses to oppose himself to God by contradicting and corrupting the order of the universe as it was set by Him. Thus, Satan's objective might indicate an answer to the *felix culpa* trope:

… but of this be sure,
To do ought good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his Providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil; (1, 158-165)

By making Satan's sole purpose the corruption of what is good, *Paradise Lost* engages directly with Augustinian and Thomistic theologies. If God's providential design transforms evil into

a means for achieving greater good, then Satan, as His adversary, assumes the inverse role: to pervert that design by attempting to draw evil from what is inherently good. Motivated by envy — of God's sovereignty and His favor toward Adam and Eve — and driven by pride, Satan wages war against the divine order. His rebellion is not merely an act of defiance, but a calculated attempt at vengeance: to spoil God's creation by tempting humanity into disobedience. In doing so, Satan not only seeks to unravel the *felix culpa*, but to redirect Adam and Eve away from divine alignment and toward the self-serving pursuit of their own will.

… What if we find
Some easier enterprise? There is a place
(If ancient and prophetic fame in Heav'n
Err not) another World, the happy seat
Of some new Race called Man, about this time
To be created like to us, though less
In power and excellence, but favoured more
Of him who rules above; so was his will
Pronounced among the Gods, and by an Oath,
That shook Heav'n's whole circumference, confirmed.
Thither let us bend all our thoughts, to learn
What creatures there inhabit, of what mould,
Or substance, how endued, and what their Power,
And where their weakness, how attempted best,
By force or subtlety: Though Heav'n be shut,
And Heav'n's high Arbitrator sit secure
In his own strength, this place may lie exposed
The utmost border of his Kingdom, left
To their defence who hold it: here perhaps
Some advantageous act may be achieved
By sudden onset, either with Hell fire
To waste his whole Creation, or possess
All as our own, and drive as we were driven,
The punie habitants, or if not drive,
Seduce them to our Party, that their God
May prove their foe, and with repenting hand

Abolish his own works. This would surpass
Common revenge, and interrupt his joy
In our Confusion, and our Joy upraise
In his disturbance; when his darling Sons
Hurled headlong to partake with us, shall curse
Their frail Original, and faded bliss,
Faded so soon. (2, 345-376)

However, despite his efforts, all attempts prove fruitless, for "their spite still serves / His glory to augment" (2, 385-386) and his malice only serves Providence to "… bring forth / Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shown / On man by him seduced" (1, 217-219). Again, echoing Augustine and Aquinas, Milton's God foreknows the corrupted state into which His creation would fall, and knows how to conduct that unfortunate situation to a better end. Despite His knowledge of the couple's transgression, God bestows upon them the gift of free will: in face of evil and temptation, those who freely chose to stay compliant prove their true allegiance to God. Were they not free to choose, what true loyalty could be shown?

Only begotten Son, seest thou what rage
Transports our Adversary, whom no bounds
Prescribed, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains
Heaped on him there, nor yet the main Abyss
Wide interrupt can hold; so bent he seems
On desperate revenge, that shall redound
Upon his own rebellious head. And now
Through all restraint broke loose he wings his way
Not far off Heav'n, in the Precincts of light,
Directly towards the new created World,
And Man there placed, with purpose to assay
If him by force he can destroy, or worse,
By some false guile pervert; and shall pervert
For man will hearken to his glozing lies,
And easily transgress the sole Command,
Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall,
He and his faithless progeny: whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee

All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all th' ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
Made passive both, had served necessity,
Not mee. They therefore as to right belonged,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
As if predestination overruled
Their will, disposed by absolute decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Their nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordained
Their freedom, they themselves ordained their fall.
The first sort by their own suggestion fell,
Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived

By the other first: Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glory excel,
But mercy first and last shall brightest shine. (3, 80-134)

It could be argued that these stanzas are the most theologically significant in the poem, as they convey the poet's own theodicy. In these lines, *Paradise Lost* achieves its purpose of justifying God's ways to man, as it also answers the problem of evil by echoing the patristic attempt to free God from the responsibility for the Fall. The Miltonic God is thus explaining why, despite His foreknowledge, nor He, or even fate are to blame for any fall from grace. By laying the responsibility on man himself ("…whose fault? / Whose but his own?"), the narrative preserves God's benevolence and justice without portraying Him as powerless. In doing so, it offers a rationale for His non-intervention: "… I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. … / Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere / Of true allegiance, constant faith and love, / Where only what they needs must do, appeared, / Not what they would?". Not free to choose, how could good be praised? Will and reason would be useless for man would only pledge passive obedience and would only be serving an obligation and not God Himself. As Tyeson Barton asserts (5), in *Paradise Lost*, the knowledge of evil is essential to the virtuous and sincere exercise of free will, for only by knowing all the options one has, one can consciously and truly use reason to make a choice. Accordingly, Milton writes in his *Areopagitica*: "what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forebear, without the knowledge evil?" (20), and then in *Paradise Lost*: "and next to life / Our death the Tree of Knowledge grew fast by, / Knowledge of Good brought dear by knowing evil" (4, 220-222). Thus, by consciously avoiding evil, real devotion and loyalty appear, a pure and real fortunate outcome.

Any theorizations about God taking part in either falls by not intervening are, therefore, rendered invalid. Foreknowledge cannot interfere with facts if reason and will are being exercised. Man, gifted with a will that is itself a divine "absolute decree," chooses his own revolt and descent from a "higher degree of existence." God's foreknowledge of the Fall does not interfere with its unfolding — had He not foreknown it, the course of events would likely have been the same. In this regard, *Paradise Lost* echoes Augustine and Aquinas when it claims that "reason also is choice," thus absorbing the theological argument that God bears no blame for either fall, placing full responsibility instead on angelic and human free will. This will, in turn, is what makes obedience, repentance, and devotion true and sincere.

The epic justifies God's non-interference by placing the burden of responsibility on the fallen, for they were gifted with the freedom to choose: God ordained their freedom; they ordained their Fall; thus, the consequences must be borne. Furthermore, when God declares that the fallen angels "by their own suggestion fell, / Self-tempted, self-depraved," while "man falls deceived / By the other first: man therefore shall find grace; / The other none: in mercy and justice both," he appears to answer Aquinas's dual conception of evil as both suffered and done. Both falls involved free will, but in different modes: Satan's fall begins with his own pride, guile, and self-temptation, while Adam and Eve, though aware of God's command, fall by choosing to trust a deceiver. Their disobedience stems not from an innate rebellion, but from being led astray by one who already possessed the knowledge of evil and sought from the outset to corrupt them. In both cases, evil is done — freedom is exercised toward disobedience — but the Edenic couple's fall is shaded by distortion, not malice. Thus, a second chance is afforded to them, unlike to Satan. Even so, mercy and justice are delivered to both alike.

The return to a greater good in *Paradise Lost* is announced from the outset: from such a great evil, God would bring to humankind a greater and redemptive end. His justice is fulfilled, for mortality becomes Man's punishment; yet, an immeasurable grace is also bestowed — the Incarnation of the Son, who, by offering His own life, redeems "the whole Race lost." As Tolkien would write many centuries later, "the Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history" ("On Fairy Stories" 156), or, as Milton renders it, the "Celestial Virtues rising," which "appear / More glorious and more dread than from no fall" (2, 15-16). Thus, by echoing Augustine, *Paradise Lost* aligns itself with the maxima: had Adam and Eve not fallen, such glory, such divine self-sacrifice, might never have been revealed.

Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace;
And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
The speediest of thy winged messengers,
To visit all thy creatures, and to all
Comes unprevented, unimplored, unsought,
Happy for man, so coming; he her aid
Can never seek, once dead in sins and lost;
Atonement for himself or offering meet,
Indebted and undone, hath none to bring:
Behold me then, me for him, life for life
I offer, on me let thine anger fall;

Account me man; I for his sake will leave
Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
Freely put off, and for him lastly die
Well pleased, on me let Death wreck all his rage;
Under his gloomy power I shall not long
Lie vanquished; thou hast given me to possess
Life in myself for ever, by thee I live,
Though now to Death I yield, and am his due
All that of me can die, yet that debt paid,
Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave
His prey, nor suffer my unspotted soul
For ever with corruption there to dwell;
But I shall rise victorious, and subdue
My vanquisher, spoiled of his vaunted spoil;
Death his deaths wound shall then receive, and stoop
Inglorious, of his mortal sting disarmed.
I through the ample air in triumph high
Shall lead Hell captive maugre Hell, and show
The powers of darkness bound. Thou at the sight
Pleased, out of Heaven shalt look down and smile,
While by thee raised I ruin all my Foes,
Death last, and with his carcass glut the grave:
Then with the multitude of my redeemed
Shall enter Heaven long absent, and return,
Father, to see thy face, wherein no cloud
Of anger shall remain, but peace assured,
And reconcilement; wrath shall be no more
Thenceforth, but in thy presence joy entire. (3, 227-265)

In its complexity, this stanza goes back to Augustine's and Aquinas's defence that give ultimate meaning to the trope of *felix culpa*: the Son, eager to appease God's anger, offers himself for the redemption of mankind, "life for life / I offer", and promises to give himself up to Death, letting all that will be mortal in him die in order to pay the owed debt. Still, he will also defeat

Death, for the Father has given him eternal life; thus, he will "rise victorious", and by subduing Death, the Son will make man, once more, be worthy of Heaven, and therefore of eternal life.

… this God-like act
Annuls thy doom, the death thou shouldst have died,
In sin for ever lost from life; this act
Shall bruise the head of Satan, crush his strength
Defeating Sin and Death, his two main arms,
And fix far deeper in his head their stings
Then temporal death shall bruise the Victors heel,
Or theirs whom he redeems, a death like sleep,
A gentle wafting to immortal life. (12, 427-435)

God allows the Incarnation and sacrifice of the Son and declares that, through him, "Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate, / Giving to death, and dying to redeem, / So dearly to redeem what Hellish hate / So easily destroyed, and still destroys" (3, 298-301). As Augustine puts it, "God also foresaw that by his grace a community of godly men was to be called to adoption as his sons, and these men, with their sins forgiven, were to be justified by the Holy Spirit and then to enter into fellowship with the holy angels in eternal peace, when the 'last enemy', death, had been destroyed" (*City of God* 503). Thus, in *Paradise Lost*, the Son becomes the Mediator, "Man's Friend" (10, 60), who delivers God's intention of "Mercy colleague with Justice" (10, 59) by intermediating man and divine thus redeeming man from sin. As Augustine explains, "we need a mediator linked with us in our lowliness by reason of the mortal nature of his body, and yet able to render us truly divine assistance for our purification and liberation" (*City of God* 364). Echoing this argument, Milton's God thus contends: "Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt reign / Both God and man, Son both of God and man" (3, 315-316). Hereafter, the son becomes the conciliator who leads man back to greater good: the paradise within.

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Then that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done and occasioned, or rejoice

Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
To God more glory, more good will to men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. (12, 469-478)

The lesson is learnt as Adam discovers what immense grace should befall his progeny, for, after the Fall, Archangel Michael goes to his encounter to communicate what should succeed. Satisfied and recomforted by the account of how reconciliation should find his offspring, Adam recognizes the knowledge of good which he obtained through evil, acknowledging that "to obey is best" (12, 561), as to "ever observe / His providence" (12, 563-564), and, in this way, still to overcome evil with good, even if by small accomplishments (12, 565-567). Accordingly, in Augustine,

> Divine providence thus warns us not to indulge in silly complaints about the state of affairs, but to take pains to inquire what useful purposes are served by things. And when we fail to find the answer, either through deficiency of insight or of staying power, we should believe that the purpose is hidden from us, as it was in many cases where we had great difficulty in discovering it. There is a useful purpose in the obscurity of the purpose; it may serve to exercise our humility or to undermine our pride. There is no such entity in nature as 'evil'; 'evil' is merely a name for the privation of good. (*City of God* 453-454)

Michael thus declares that Adam had then "attained the sum / Of wisdom" (12, 575-576), and advises him to no longer yearn for more knowledge in Heaven or Earth, but only to add to his own more virtue, patience, temperance, and love, for, in this manner, he would not "be loath / To leave Paradise, but shalt possess / A paradise within thee, happier far" (12, 585-587). The Edenic couple would therefore not only nurture within themselves the physical Paradise which they had lost, but also the virtues which they had there received from their Maker. Hence, the return to a greater good through the notion of a "paradise within" answers Augustine's belief (*City of God* 425) that the coming of Christ (or the Son) brings the "repentance of man" ["… I should repent me now of sin / By me done and occasioned" (12 474-475)], "the conversion of men's wills to God" ["to obey is best" (12, 561)], "the remission of sins" ["Thy ransom paid, which Man from death redeems" (12, 424)], "the grace of justification" ["From this descent / Celestial Virtues rising, will appear / More glorious and more dread then from no fall" (2, 14-16)], and so on. "This is the right road which leads to the vision of God and to eternal union with him" (*City of God* 425), a union which takes place in the soul, a paradise within. Adam's epiphany at the end of the epic causes an effect of rupture with the major evil that is present in

the poem since its first lines and ends the story in a somewhat higher tone, thus giving the reader the feeling that all evil can be overcome. Tolkien called this effect "eucatastrophe" and believed that it echoed the happy ending of humankind, which was its redemption conceded by Christ's sacrifice.

Tolkien's notion of *eucatastrophe* encapsulates the core elements of the theological concept of *felix culpa*, reworking them into the structure of fairy-stories. This idea asserts that a good ending is not merely desirable, but essential to such narratives, for it reveals how an initial evil — seemingly final and irredeemable — becomes the very occasion for failure, and subsequently, for redemption. For Tolkien, this redemptive element is what gives a tale its depth and meaning, and is inseparably tied to his own Christian faith. Writing on the term, he affirms his belief that God redeemed man "in a way fitting to this aspect" ("On Fairy-Stories" 155), and famously calls the Incarnation of Christ "the eucatastrophe of Man's history" ("On Fairy-Stories*"* 156). His insistence that sorrow and failure are necessary for the "joy of deliverance" (153) unmistakably echoes the theological tradition upheld by Augustine, Aquinas, and Milton. As Ian Spencer notes (16), such a structure requires both a subject in need of redemption and a cause for that fallen condition — central components of the *felix culpa* trope.

Tolkien developed this concept specifically within the literary form of the fairy-story, and it manifests in his fiction in multiple nuanced ways. Although first a student at King Edward's School and later at Oxford, and certainly well-acquainted with the English literary canon, Tolkien's personal preferences leaned elsewhere: early on, he favoured "Latin and Greek poetry to Milton and Keats" (Carpenter, 55), or even to Shakespeare. That does not mean, however, that his work fails to engage in dialogue with canonical authors. But much like Milton, Tolkien draws heavily from the theological foundations laid by Augustine and Aquinas — thinkers whose views he embraced as a Roman Catholic. This influence is felt keenly in *The Silmarillion*, where the first sign of evil in the world, revealed by an angel of God, also springs from pride.

> But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself. To Melkor among the Ainur had been given the greatest gifts of power and knowledge, and he had a share in all the gifts of his brethren. He had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of his

> own, and it seemed to him that Ilúvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren. (4)

Wishing to be a creator like the one who made him, and desiring to rise above his equals — much like Milton's Satan, who aspires to "set himself above his peers" (*Paradise Lost* 1, 39) — Melkor defies his god, seeking power and knowledge: the first, a pursuit shared with Satan; the second, with the forefathers of humankind. Melkor's pride swells to such a magnitude that, echoing his seventeenth-century counterpart, he too falls from grace. His yearning to equal his creator and the first stirring of evil that emerges from this ambition serve only to reaffirm Eru's sole right to creation and his sovereignty over it. Indeed, any opposition to his will is destined to become "his instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself [any opposer to his will] hath not imagined" (*The Silmarillion* 6). In other words, all attempts to corrupt the divine order inevitably become means toward greater ends.

This declaration almost seems to directly respond to the Miltonic Satan, who, in his defiance, proclaims: "If then his Providence / Out of our evil seek to bring forth good, / Our labour must be to pervert that end, / And out of good still to find means of evil" (*Paradise Lost* 1, 162-165). Another striking parallel between Melkor and Satan lies in their envy and desire to dominate god's new creations: Elves and Men. "He desired rather to subdue to his will both Elves and Men, envying the gifts with which Ilúvatar promised to endow them; and he wished himself to have subjects and servants, and to be called Lord, and to be a master over other wills" (*The Silmarillion* 8). Is this not a direct echo of Satan plotting to seduce Adam and Eve to his cause or claim them as his own? In *The Dark Powers of Tolkien*, David Day draws this parallel with fruitful insight, positioning Melkor as a mythopoeic mirror of Milton's great adversary.

> Both Tolkien's Melkor and Milton's Lucifer are legitimately heroic in their steadfast 'courage never to submit or yield'; however, in truth, both rebel angels are primarily motivated by overweening pride and envy. It is worth noting how, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan's minions relate to him: 'Towards him they bend / With awful reverence prone; and as a God / Extol him equal to the highest in Heaven.' It is a description that is comparable to Melkor enthroned in his subterranean halls, and reveals the true motive of both antagonists: to become God the Creator themselves. (22)

Driven by pride and envy, Satan and Melkor rebel against their god and fall into a moral descent, bringing evil and corruption into the world. However, in origin, both were made good.

As Augustine writes, "'… God saw all that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.' The meaning of this is that there is only one cause for the creation of the world – the purpose of God's goodness in the creation of good" (*City of God* 455). Day draws attention to Melkor's sinking into Angband being relatable to Satan's sinking into Pandemonium. Melkor falls transformed into Morgoth, the Dark Enemy of the World, and, like Satan, he gathers about him other fallen and corrupted creatures, "a multitude of evils and twisted forms of life" (Day 26): Satan has Beelzebulb, Mammon, Belial and Moloch; Morgoth has Sauron, his lieutenant, other fallen Valar and Maiar, and many which he corrupted into Orcs, trolls, and Balrogs.

In *Paradise Lost*, it is not only God's angels who fall from grace, but also Adam and Eve — the first couple of the new Race of Man. Unlike Satan, however, Adam and Eve fall not out of pride or rebellion, but through deception — though still by exercising their freedom of choice. In *The Silmarillion*, the new races created by Eru, Elves and Men, likewise fall through their own decisions, yet are also enticed and misled by Morgoth. From the moment the Elves first awoke in Middle-earth, they were haunted by his shadow:

> Yet many of the Quendi were filled with dread at his coming; and this was the doing of Melkor. For by after-knowledge the wise declare that Melkor, ever watchful, was first aware of the awakening of the Quendi, and sent shadows and evil spirits to spy upon them and waylay them. So it came to pass, some years ere the coming of Oromë, that if any of the Elves strayed far abroad, alone or few together, they would often vanish, and never return; and the Quendi said that the Hunter had caught them, and they were very afraid. (*The Silmarillion* 46).

Those who vanished were captured by Morgoth, held prisoner, corrupted, and enslaved — "and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the Elves" (*The Silmarillion* 47). Yet it was not only the captured whom Morgoth corrupted; many others he deceived, sowing evil and chaos even in Valinor — Tolkien's mythic reimagining of Heaven. Unaware of the coming of Men, the Noldor were led to believe that this new race would replace them: mortal and weaker, and thus more easily ruled by the Valar. Through this falsehood, Morgoth awakened in them pride, resentment, and the desire to shape the world according to their own will.

From this moment, chaos begins to spread through Valinor and into Middle-earth. Fëanor, eldest son of Finwë and prince of the Noldor, blinded by pride and maddened by possessiveness, forges arms and turns against his own half-brother, who had opposed the rebellion and warned their father against it. Proud — unwilling to be deemed lesser than the

race of Men — and consumed by lust for the Silmarils he had wrought, Fëanor seals his fall, dragging many of his kin with him. The murder of his father by Morgoth becomes the final spark that ignites his rebellion against the Valar.

> Fëanor was a master of words, and his tongue had great power over hearts when he would use it; and that night he made a speech before the Noldor which they ever remembered. Fierce and fell were his words, and filled with anger and pride; and hearing them the Noldor were stirred to madness. His wrath and his hate were given most to Morgoth, and yet well nigh all that he said came from the very lies of Morgoth himself; but he was distraught with grief for the slaying of his father, and with anguish for the rape of the Silmarils. He claimed now the kingship of all the Noldor, since Finwë was dead, and he scorned the decrees of the Valar. (*The Silmarillion* 86)

Calling the allegiance of all of his kin, Fëanor, with the support of his seven sons, swore an oath which no Noldor could ever break, or Everlasting Dark would befall upon them: he vowed "to pursue with vengeance and hatred to the ends of the World Vala[18], Demon, Elf or Man as yet unborn, or any creature, great or small, good or evil, that time should bring forth unto the end of days, whoso should hold or take or keep a Silmaril from their possession" (*The Silmarillion* 89). Thus, the greater part of the Noldor fell, for many swore the Oath, and even those who did not — yet followed Fëanor — left Valinor enchanted by his words. Among these was Galadriel, "the only woman of the Noldor to stand that day tall and valiant among the contending princes," who "was eager to be gone. No oaths she swore, but the words of Fëanor concerning Middle-earth had kindled in her heart, for she yearned to see the wide unguarded lands and to rule there a realm at her own will" (*The Silmarillion* 89). Henceforth, Fëanor and those who departed with him that day were exiled from Aman. Upon leaving, he proclaimed defiantly: "In Aman we have come through bliss to woe. The other now we will try: through sorrow to find joy; or freedom, at the least" (91). The fortunate outcomes that would eventually spring from this tragic decision, however, Fëanor would not live to witness. Still needing ships to carry his host across the sea, he incited his followers to seize them by force from the Teleri — their own kin — who had refused to join the rebellion. What became known as the Kinslaying at Alqualondë brought yet another weight to bear upon their fall, and it was then that the Prophecy of the North — the Doom of the Noldor — was pronounced.

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[18] The singular form of "Valar".

> … Their Oath shall drive them, and yet betray them, and ever snatch away the very treasures that they have sworn to pursue. To evil end shall all things turn that they begin well; and by treason of kin unto kin, and the fear of treason, shall this come to pass. The Dispossessed shall they be for ever. … For though Eru appointed to you to die not in Eä, and no sickness may assail you, yet slain ye may be, and slain ye shall be: by weapon and by torment and by grief; and your houseless spirits shall come then to Mandos. (*The Silmarillion* 94-95).

Thus the Valar shut their gates for the Noldor and many tragedies befall their kind. As Tolkien puts it, "several tales of victory and tragedy are caught up in it; but it ends with catastrophe, and the passing of the Ancient World, the world of the long First Age" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 148). Fëanor himself dies on his way to the fortress of Angband, ambushed by a group of Balrogs and killed by Gothmog, their lord. His seven sons, however, still bound by the Oath, spend their lives in search for the lost Silmarils, and six of them die in this quest. Many of their own kind they kill in this search, and they are caught up in their own web of atrocities which they cannot escape: in the horrors they cause, they find their own fates, filled with sorrow and regret. Yet, their redemption comes from the love of another who departs on a quest to ask the gods for mercy for their sins.

This was Eärendil the Mariner, the half-elf who sailed to Valinor after the sons of Fëanor launched a brutal assault on his home, slaying many in their relentless pursuit of the Silmaril that Elwing — Eärendil's wife and granddaughter of Beren — had rescued from the ruins of Doriath. By then, the last great refuges of the Noldor — Gondolin and Doriath — had already fallen to Morgoth, leaving Arvernien, under Eärendil's rule, as the final fortress still standing. Determined and desperate, Eärendil journeyed into the West and stood before the Valar, where he "delivered the errand of the Two Kindreds. Pardon he asked for the Noldor and pity for their great sorrows, and mercy upon Men and Elves and succour in their need. And his prayer was granted" (*The Silmarillion* 299). In response, the Valar summoned the Elves to leave Middle-earth and sail to Valinor, never to return to the lands of the East.

> They were admitted again to the love of Manwë and the pardon of the Valar; and the Teleri forgave their ancient grief, and the curse was laid to rest. Yet not all the Eldalië were willing to forsake the Hither Lands where they had long suffered and long dwelt; and some lingered many an age in Middle-earth. Among those were Círdan the Shipwright, and Celeborn of Doriath, with Galadriel his wife, who alone remained of those who led the Noldor to exile in Beleriand. … But Morgoth himself the Valar thrust

> through the Door of Night beyond the Walls of the World, into the Timeless Void; and a guard is set for ever on those walls, and Eärendil keeps watch upon the ramparts of the sky. (*The Silmarillion* 305-306)

Eärendil assumes the role of the Son in this tale, becoming the vital thread that links the earthly and the divine, and enabling reconciliation between Elves and Valar — between the fallen and the holy. Yet *The Silmarillion* reinterprets the Christian structure present in *Paradise Lost* through a different intertextual lens: it is not a divine being who descends to Earth to pay the price of sin, but a mortal — born of an Elven maiden and a Man — who dares to seek the path to Heaven, even though such a passage is forbidden to mortals on pain of death. The absorption from the Christian precursor remains clear, however, as Eärendil is not punished. He does not act for his own sake, but on behalf of those he loves. Thus, Manwë proclaims: "in this matter the power of doom is given to me. The peril that he ventured for love of the Two Kindreds shall not fall upon Eärendil, nor shall it fall upon Elwing his wife, who entered into peril for love of him…" (*The Silmarillion* 299).

In contrast — and directly dialoguing with *Paradise Lost* — Morgoth, who "by his own suggestion fell, / Self-tempted, self-depraved" (3, 129-130), receives no grace or pardon, but is cast into the outer void, never to return. Elves and Men, who "fall deceived by the other first" (3, 130-131), find in Eärendil — the one who carries the blood of both — a figure of mediation and redemption. Through his sacrifice and intercession, they are granted grace, while "the other none" (3, 132). In this way, Tolkien's mythology both mirrors and transforms Milton's vision, blending theological inheritance with mythopoetic reimagination.

As for Galadriel, we learn more about in *The Lord of the Rings*. In a letter written in 1971, Tolkien says that Galadriel is a penitent who "in her youth [was] a leader in the rebellion against the Valar… At the end of the First Age she proudly refused forgiveness or permission to return [to Valinor]. She was pardoned because of her resistance to the final and overwhelming temptation to take the Ring for herself" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 407). When the Fellowship of the Ring minus Gandalf arrives at Lórien, Galadriel takes Frodo to look into her mirror, which "shows things that were, and things that are, and things that yet may be" (*The Lord of the Rings* 362). Upon the sight of many sorrows that would and could follow, Frodo offers her the One Ring, expecting her to be more capable to destroy it and defeat Sauron for she was far more powerful than he was. The Lady knew, however, that in her hands, the Ring would cause even more trouble, precisely because she was extraordinarily powerful.

> I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp. … 'And now at last it comes. You will give me the Ring freely! In place of the Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!' She lifted up her hand and from the ring that she wore there issued a great light that illumined her alone and left all else dark. She stood before Frodo seeming now tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful. Then she let her hand fall, and the light faded, and suddenly she laughed again, and lo! she was shrunken: a slender elf-woman, clad in simple white, whose gentle voice was soft and sad. 'I pass the test,' she said. 'I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.' (*The Lord of the Rings* 365-366)

Galadriel resists the temptation of the Ring and chooses instead to remain in the natural order of things, as they were set by Eru. She knows that should she possess the One, her power would grow greater than herself, but turn to evil, for it sparks in its bearers a "lust for domination" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 152). Still, Galadriel's fall promotes a series of fortunate outcomes, and her role is of substantial importance to the forces of good.

In the First Age, she fought against the forces of Fëanor during the Kinslaying of Alqualondë, and despite the fact that she left Aman by taking part in his rebellion, she always disliked and opposed his violent ways. In the Third Age, she was part of the White Council, a group formed by the wisest in Middle-earth, who would unite to take counsel against the evil forces of Sauron. Galadriel also shelters and gives valuable advice to the Fellowship, besides providing them with gifts that aid them on their journeys. After Gandalf's return, she is the one responsible for healing him, and clothing him in white, as according to his new position among the Istari. Hence, by resisting the temptation of the Ring, which she confesses to have long desired for, Galadriel is redeemed for the fall of her people, and thus for her own, and is allowed to go West: she too regains Heaven and returns to a greater good.

However, before moving on to the plot of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is important to go through one more passage in *The Silmarillion*, which concerns the *Akallabêth*, or the Fall of Númenor. The island of Númenor was a gift from the Valar to the Edain, the noble Men of the First Age who fought alongside the Elves in the wars against Morgoth, and who remained loyal

to Aman. Elros, son of Eärendil the Mariner, was their first king, and to his people, the Dúnedain, was given "wisdom and power and life more enduring than any others of mortal race have possessed" (310). Yet, the Lords of Valinor prohibited them to sail so far westward that the coast could no longer be seen, for Manwë wished that "they should not be tempted to seek for the Blessed Realm, nor desire to overpass the limits set to their bliss, becoming enamoured of the immortality of the Valar and the Eldar and the lands where all things endure" (313). Nonetheless, the seed of evil that Morgoth had planted in Middle-earth was not cast away with him, and his lieutenant Sauron was still free and plotting against the order of god.

In the Second Age, Sauron rises and becomes stronger, thus fortifying Barad-dûr and ever fighting "for the dominion of Middle-earth, to become king over all kings and as a god unto Men" (319). Sauron despised the Dúnedain for the loyalty of their forefathers to the Valar and for their alliance with the Elves, and of those which he ensnared and corrupted with the Nine Rings, three were great Númenórean lords. Then, when the Nazgûl arose, they assaulted the island and the Shadow of evil grew again amongst Men, "and they hardened their hearts the more against the Valar" (320). As the years passed, a yearning for the undying lands grew among them, as also did the desire to escape death. Thus, what began as a murmur in their hearts soon became an open complaint against their own mortality and, above all, against the Ban which prohibited them to go West. However, their incomprehension towards the Gift of Ilúvatar[19] started because by "coming under the shadow of Morgoth it seemed to them that they were surrounded by a great darkness, of which they were afraid; and some grew wilful and proud and would not yield, until life was reft from them" (317). The proudest of the Númenórean kings was Ar-Pharazôn, the first to confront Sauron, who was advancing upon the island's shores and had arrogated to himself the title of King of Men, declaring his intent to wipe out the Dúnedain and destroy Númenor itself, if need be.

> Great was the anger of Ar-Pharazôn at these tidings, and as he pondered long in secret, his heart was filled with the desire of power unbounded and the sole dominion of his will. And he determined without counsel of the Valar, or the aid of any wisdom but his own, that the title of King of Men he would himself claim, and would compel Sauron to become his vassal and his servant; for in his pride he deemed that no king should ever arise so mighty as to vie with the Heir of Eärendil. (323)

[19] Mortality.

Ar-Pharazôn thus armed a host of Men and decided to sail eastward to Middle-earth, where he set up his pavilion and throne upon a hill, and commanded Sauron to come before him and swear his loyalty. Sauron abode, recognizing the might of the Kings of the Sea and knowing that none of his servants could stand against them. However, he was cunning and crafty, and his submission was nothing but part of his devising, for "his heart within was filled the more with envy and hate" (324). Ar-Pharazôn, to his own evil and fall, decided that Sauron would be better watched if taken to Númenor and, before three years had passed, he had become close to the counsels of the King

> for flattery sweet as honey was ever on his tongue, and knowledge he had of many things yet unrevealed to Men. And seeing the favour that he had of their lord all the councillors began to fawn upon him, save one alone, Amandil lord of Andúnië. Then slowly a change came over the land, and the hearts of the Elf-friends were sorely troubled, and many fell away out of fear; and although those that remained still called themselves the Faithful, their enemies named them rebels. For now, having the ears of men, Sauron with many arguments gainsaid all that the Valar had taught; and he bade men think that in the world, in the east and even in the west, there lay yet many seas and many lands for their winning, wherein was wealth uncounted. And still, if they should at the last come to the end of those lands and seas, beyond all lay the Ancient Darkness. 'And out of it the world was made. For Darkness alone is worshipful, and the Lord thereof may yet make other worlds to be gifts to those that serve him, so that the increase of their power shall find no end.' (324-325)

Sauron told the Númenóreans that the true lord of Darkness was named Melkor, and that the Valar had deceived Men by proclaiming Eru as the one and only god, merely to keep them in bondage. Thus, Ar-Pharazôn turned his back on Eru and the Valar and began to worship Melkor and his Darkness. Most of the Dúnedain followed their king in this rebellion. In this way, Sauron's power and influence among the Númenóreans deepened until he persuaded the aging king to launch an assault upon Valinor itself, seeking to conquer immortality by force. But the Eagles of Manwë came from the West, bearing thunder and lightning beneath their wings. Many perished under their wrath; some repented their revolt, while others only grew more defiant. Yet Sauron remained untouched in the Temple raised to the Darkness, standing defiantly against the storms and hailed as a god by those who brought him sacrifices to burn. Meanwhile, Ar-Pharazôn's fleet broke the Ban of the Valar, sailing westward to make war against the undying lands and claim eternal life. But when he finally reached the shores of

Valinor, his resolve faltered; he hesitated, nearly turning back. Still, "pride was now his master, and at last he left his ship and strode upon the shore, claiming the land for his own, if none should do battle for it" (*The Silmarillion* 334). At that moment, Manwë appealed to Eru, and the Valar relinquished their guardianship of the world.

> … Ilúvatar showed forth his power, and he changed the fashion of the world; and a great chasm opened in the sea between Númenor and the Deathless Lands, and the waters flowed down into it, and the noise and smoke of the cataracts went up to heaven, and the world was shaken. And all the fleets of the Númenóreans were drawn down into the abyss, and they were drowned and swallowed up for ever. But Ar-Pharazôn the King and the mortal warriors that had set foot upon the land of Aman were buried under falling hills: there it is said that they lie imprisoned in the Caves of the Forgotten, until the Last Battle and the Day of Doom. (334)

Thus, Valinor and Eressëa were taken away from the reach of Men forever, and Númenor was definitely destroyed. The only Dúnedain to escape the flood were the Faithful, led by Elendil and his sons Isildur and Anárion, son and grandsons of Amandil, lord of Andúnië, and those who founded Gondor and Arnor, two kingdoms that would become the main dominions of Men to oppose Sauron in the Third Age. The Númenóreans were the descendants of those first Men who woke up in Middle-earth still in the First Age, and from which so many fell deceived and horrified by Melkor's treachery. But even though the Dúnedain were the ones rewarded for their aid in the wars against evil, they were still the progeny of a fallen race. Their stained and corrupted behaviour in Númenor, therefore, seems to be an effect of which Michael speaks of in book eleven of *Paradise Lost*:

Th' effects which thy [Adam's] original crime hath wrought
In some to spring from thee, who never touched
Th' excepted Tree, nor with the Snake conspired,
Nor sinned thy sin, yet from that sin derive
Corruption to bring forth more violent deeds. (11, 423-428)

The flood in *The Silmarillion* seems to be reminiscent of Michael's account of what would befall Adam's offspring. It appears to be a form of washing away the sins from the world, saving only those who are righteous and "faithful", and who manage to navigate this flood to become the next generation: "the redeeming aspect of the deluge is that all of the flood myths mentioned signify the rebirth, the redemption and baptism of humanity through water" (Fenech 33). Yet, it can also be read as a new fall which opens opportunity to atonement and redemption.

As Noah is a Christ like figure whose moral and virtue give continuity to his race, Aragorn is a descendant of Isildur, and therefore of the Númenórean race, who in the Third Age will also appear as a Christ like figure who will atone and redeem his own lineage. In *Paradise Lost*:

Far less I now lament for one whole World
Of wicked Sons destroyed, then I rejoice
For one Man found so perfect and so just,
That God vouchsafes to raise another World
From him, and all his anger to forget. (11, 874-878)

Once again, an unfortunate event sets the stage for a fortunate outcome. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the redeeming aspect traditionally associated with the Son figure is embodied not only in Aragorn, but also in Gandalf and Frodo. Before exploring Aragorn's role in this redemptive arc, however, it is essential to examine the development of two central figures: the One Ring and its master, Sauron. Their histories are inextricably linked with Aragorn's ancestor, Isildur, and thereby to Aragorn himself.

Sauron was originally a Maia — one of the lesser but potent spirits created by Eru to descend into Arda and assist the Valar in shaping the world. Though many in number and similar in nature to the Ainur, the Maiar were of lesser stature. Among them, Sauron stood out as one of the mightiest. But in the early days of the world, he was seduced and ultimately corrupted by Melkor, becoming his most powerful and loyal servant. In time, Sauron became "a sorcerer of dreadful power, master of shadows and of phantoms, foul in wisdom, cruel in strength, misshaping what he touched, twisting what he ruled, lord of werewolves; his dominion was torment" (*The Silmarillion*, 181). Tolkien later described him as "a reincarnation of Evil, and a thing lusting for Complete Power – and so consumed ever more fiercely with hate (especially of gods and Elves)" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 151).

After Morgoth's defeat, Middle-earth experienced a period of relative peace, though much of it remained barren and broken. The region of Beleriand had been destroyed, and many of the remaining lands were either sparsely inhabited or darkened by the growing influence of evil men. Seeing this desolation and the seeming abandonment of Middle-earth by the Valar, Sauron's pride swelled: "his pride grew apace" (*The Silmarillion* 343). Long had he desired to bring the Elves under his dominion, thinking their power and grace could serve his designs. Thus, he cloaked himself in a fair and noble guise and adopted the name Annatar, the Lord of Gifts. In this form, he gained the trust of the Noldor of Eregion — those who had refused to return to the West but still longed for the wisdom and splendor of Valinor.

Always eager to refine their craft, the Noldor welcomed Annatar's knowledge. They learned much from him, unaware that he had once studied under Aulë, the Vala of smithing. Under his guidance, they forged the Rings of Power. But Sauron's true purpose was dominion, not instruction, and in secret he forged a master ring — One to rule all the others.

> and their power was bound up with it, to be subject wholly to it and to last only so long as it too should last. And much of the strength and will of Sauron passed into that One Ring; for the power of the Elven-rings was very great, and that which should govern them must be a thing of surpassing potency; and Sauron forged it in the Mountain of Fire in the Land of Shadow. And while he wore the One Ring he could perceive all the things that were done by means of the lesser rings, and he could see and govern the very thoughts of those that wore them. (*The Silmarillion* 344)

The Elves, however, did not fall for Sauron's trick, for as soon as the latter put the Ring around his finger, they knew that he wished to be their master, so they took their own Rings from their hands. Sauron, realizing that the Elves were not deceived by his plan, was taken by wrath, and declared open war against them. During this war, Sauron managed to capture all the Rings with exception of the three that possessed the greatest power, and which were given to the Wise, who hid and never again used them. Years later, after the Fall of Númenor, which Sauron survived though having lost his fair appearance, he regained his strength and returned to the fortress of Barad-dûr in Morgoth, decided to open war against the new realms of Men. For seven years the Last Alliance Between Men and Elves besieged Mordor, until at last they were able to break through his stronghold and defeat him. Elendil, who had led the Faithful Númenóreans out of the island before Ar-Pharazôn attacked Valinor, died in this quest, and it was his son Isildur who took the Ring from Sauron's finger.

> The Ruling Ring passed out of the knowledge even of the Wise in that age; yet it was not unmade. For Isildur would not surrender it to Elrond and Círdan who stood by. They counselled him to cast it into the fire of Orodruin nigh at hand, in which it had been forged, so that it should perish, and the power of Sauron be for ever diminished, and he should remain only as a shadow of malice in the wilderness. But Isildur refused this counsel, saying: 'This I will have as weregild for my father's death, and my brother's. Was it not I that dealt the Enemy his death-blow?' And the Ring that he held seemed to him exceedingly fair to look on; and he would not suffer it to be destroyed. (*The Silmarillion* 353-354)

Quickly ensnared by the Ring's power, which contained much of Sauron's will in itself, Isildur refused to cast the Ring into the Fires of Doom. Yet his time as a Ring-bearer was brief. Intending to settle in Eriador, the realm of his father, he journeyed northward. Along the way, Isildur was ambushed by a host of Orcs. Though he managed to escape the initial assault, he was relentlessly pursued. In a moment of betrayal, the Ring slipped from his finger as he attempted to flee across the waters of the Gladden Fields on the western banks of the Anduin. No longer cloaked by the Ring's invisibility, Isildur was spotted by the Orcs and slain by a hail of arrows.

By the time the One Ring was found again, the kingdoms of Men had greatly decayed, Gondor's glory had diminished, and Arnor was destroyed by the Witch King of Angmar, who once had been a man himself. So it was that in the Third Age, evil once more began to stir, threatening the freedom of the peoples of Middle-earth. It was in this darkening world that Aragorn was raised — not in a palace, like his royal ancestors, but in the hidden refuge of Rivendell. There, his identity was kept secret, for his mother sought to protect him from the enemies who had slain his father, grandfather, and many other noble Men. When Aragorn came of age, Elrond revealed his true heritage and bestowed upon him the heirlooms of his line — tokens of his destiny. "With these you may yet do great deeds," Elrond said, "for I foretell that the span of your life shall be greater than the measure of Men, unless evil befalls you or you fail at the test. But the test will be hard and long" (*The Lord of the Rings* 1057). Yet Aragorn did not immediately seek a throne. Instead, he chose a life of hardship, assuming the mantle of Chieftain of the Dúnedain and spending nearly thirty years wandering Middle-earth. He served in the lands of Gondor and Rohan, fighting Sauron's growing evil in secret, never revealing his true identity, and refusing the honors offered to him. In this long trial of humility, endurance, and sacrifice, Aragorn strove to redeem the failure of his ancestor, by defending the Free Peoples from the darkness Isildur had inadvertently allowed to endure.

> What roads would any dare to tread, what safety would there be in quiet lands, or in the homes of simple men at night, if the Dúnedain were asleep, or were all gone into the grave? And yet less thanks have we than you. Travelers scowl at us, and countrymen give us scornful names. 'Strider' I am to one fat man who lives within a day's march of foes that would freeze his heart, or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so. That has been the task

> of my kindred, while the years have lengthened and the grass has grown. (*The Lord of the Rings* 248)

Rejected by many of those he protects, Aragorn accepts the burden of his ancestry with humility and resolve. As he reflects, it seems only "fit that Isildur's heir should labour to repair Isildur's fault" (*The Fellowship of the Ring* 251). Thus determined to redeem his bloodline, Aragorn sacrifices not only the recognition and treatment owed to him by right, but also endures the long delay of his union with Arwen Undómiel, the elf-woman he loves. Throughout his journey, he consistently resists the temptations of power, demonstrating strength not through domination, but through service, restraint, and perseverance.

Aragorn's role is central to the struggle against Sauron. Long before Frodo begins his journey to Mordor, Aragorn is already aiding Gandalf in the preparations for war, notably by capturing Gollum after the creature's release from Mordor — a key step in understanding the threat of the Ring. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, it is Aragorn who volunteers to guide Frodo and the Hobbits to Rivendell, a decision that soon proves critical. He not only leads them through dangerous lands, but also protects them from the Nazgûl and slows the effects of the Morgul blade that wounds Frodo. After the Fellowship is formed, Aragorn leads them following Gandalf's fall in Moria, guiding them to Lothlórien. When Merry and Pippin are captured by Orcs, he, alongside Legolas and Gimli, pursues them, a journey that leads him first to Isengard and then to Helm's Deep, where he fights valiantly in the Battle of the Hornburg. Aragorn's leadership continues to grow as he reclaims another legacy of his line — the Dead Men of Dunharrow, cursed by Isildur for breaking their oath to aid the Last Alliance. Now wielding the reforged sword Narsil, symbol of his birthright, Aragorn summons the Dead to fulfill their oath in battle. Once they aid in securing victory for Gondor in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, he releases them, granting them rest at last.

Aragorn's courage and strategic wisdom come to full expression at the Battle of the Morannon, the final confrontation at the Black Gate. Knowing they cannot defeat Sauron by force, he and his companions serve as a diversion, drawing Sauron's gaze away from Frodo and Sam so they might reach Mount Doom. By this point, Aragorn has fully embraced his destiny, openly claiming his lineage as Isildur's heir and wielding the tokens of kingship in defiance of Sauron, who had long sought to destroy his line. In the end, Aragorn reigns as King Elessar, restoring peace and unity to the realms of Men. He accepts death willingly when old age draws near, secure in the knowledge that his son is ready to rule. His life, marked by

sacrifice, humility, and quiet strength, becomes the fulfillment of a long-forgotten hope — an atonement not only for his ancestor's failure, but for the world of Men itself.

Through years of hardship and self-sacrifice, Aragorn endures the long and difficult trial that Elrond foretold, remaining steadfast in his free will and resisting the lure of evil. Like the Son, Aragorn's sacrifices become a source of redemption — not only for himself, but for the Númenórean race, whose sins were once washed away in the flood that destroyed the island. As a Dúnedain, he belongs to that lineage, and his actions offer renewal beyond the ruin. Most significantly, Aragorn atones for the doom brought upon his house by Isildur, who, by refusing to destroy the One Ring, unleashed enduring evil upon the world.

Aragorn confronts Sauron's will directly when he dares to face the Eye through the Palantír, overcoming it by sheer strength of will. Twice he is offered the Ring, and twice he refuses it, passing yet another test against corruption. By rejecting the Ring, he refuses the temptation to dominate the will and freedom of others — the very desire that consumed Morgoth and Satan after their falls, and the root of their destructive legacies. Instead, Aragorn acts from love for his people and a desire to redeem them, using power not as a means of control but as a tool to liberation. As Grant Gordon notes, he "uses his power as a tool designed to set free those subject to it" (5).

By helping to rid the world of the evil of the Ring — a burden his ancestors did not create but failed to destroy — Aragorn contributes to the restoration of the original, divinely intended order of good. His life becomes a testament to the proper use of free will, aligning with the divine order Tolkien subtly evokes. This echoes *Paradise Lost*, where God declares that true allegiance and love must arise from freedom of choice: "...proof sincere / Of true allegiance, constant faith or love" (3, 103-104). It also reflects Aquinas's view that evil stems from a failure to live up to the good one is created for.

Yet, Aragorn's righteousness seems inseparable from the failings of his forebears. His virtue grows from their mistakes, and through his choices, Providence transforms past evil into present good — what Augustine describes in *Confessions* as God's ability to make "use of those who were failing to do anything morally right" (5), shaping even bitterness into benefit: "He has the power to temper bitter experiences in a constructive way" (17).

Finally, Aragorn's acceptance of death stands in stark contrast to the fear and pride of his Númenórean ancestors. Unlike them, he embraces mortality willingly, exemplifying what Tolkien considered "the nature of unfallen Man," for "it was also the Elvish (and uncorrupted Númenórean) view that a 'good' Man would or should die voluntarily by surrender (as did

Aragorn)" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 286)[20]. In this, Aragorn completes not only a heroic arc, but a spiritual one — restoring through humility and sacrifice what pride and fear had once destroyed.

> A divine 'punishment' is also a divine 'gift', if accepted, since its object is ultimate blessing, and the supreme inventiveness of the Creator will make 'punishments' (that is changes of design) produce a good not otherwise to be attained: a 'mortal' Man has probably (an Elf would say) a higher if unrevealed destiny than a longeval one. To attempt by device or 'magic' to recover longevity is thus a supreme folly and wickedness of 'mortals'. Longevity or counterfeit 'immortality' (true immortality is beyond Eä) is the chief bait of Sauron – it leads the small to a Gollum, and the great to a Ringwraith. (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 286)

This appears to be another echo from *Paradise Lost*, as it recalls to mind "Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate, / Giving to death, and dying to redeem, / So dearly to redeem what Hellish hate / So easily destroyed, and still destroys" (3, 298-301). After all, it was Sauron's hellish hate that planted in the minds of the Númenórean to attack Valinor seeking immortality. Thus, Aragorn's acceptance of death is also an acceptance of the Gift of Ilúvatar, as the Elves call it: in their immortality, much sorrow and weariness of the world they endure, but not Men, for they are given a chance to rest from these. Aragorn embraces what in *Paradise Lost* is the punishment for the Fall, and so seems to answer it saying that he embraces the "gentle wafting to immortal life" (12, 435), which also seems to indicate a return to Paradise, or the achievement of the "Paradise within" (12, 587). This way, Aragorn resumes and answers his ancestors' refusal to eternal rest, and by doing so, collaborates to their redemption and attains the "ultimate blessing" himself.

As to the Ring Bearer, Frodo plays a crucial role in the redemption of Middle-earth. "'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way'" (*The Lord of the Rings* 270). In an act of self-sacrifice, Frodo offers to take the Ring to Mordor, though he admits not knowing how to, and though he seems one of those with the least power in the Counsel. This, however, proves to be his most essential strength, as it enables him to resist the temptations of the One Ring.

> Frodo remains the Lamb whose only real strength is his capacity to make an offering of himself. Thus, from the very beginning, Tolkien is at pains to stress that it is in an

[20] See footnote.

> interior priesthood of sacrifice that Frodo's hope lies. The unseen powers that have selected him, in the apparently most accidental of ways, for the chief task, have chosen Frodo neither for power nor wisdom. (Gordon 2)

In his self-sacrifice, Frodo endures immense hardship and spiritual trial. From hunger and physical wounds to the betrayal of Gollum, the loss of companions, and the relentless pull of the Ring, his journey tests not only his body but also his mind and soul. "Frodo undertook his quest out of love – to save the world he knew from disaster at his own expense, if he could" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 327). Yet beyond love, Frodo's perseverance is marked by humility and unwavering dedication; he continues even when all hope seems lost. When his body fails him and his spirit is nearly broken, Frodo is left with nothing but his will to press forward and his desire to spare the world from Sauron: "'Look here, Sam dear lad,' said Frodo, 'I am tired, weary, I haven't a hope left. But I have to go on trying to get to the Mountain, as long as I can move'" (*The Lord of the Rings*, 918). As he had said earlier, "what comes after must come" (638), a line that underscores his conscious use of free will in service of a greater divine order.

It is also possible to interpret the fact that the Ring ends up in Frodo's possession as an act of Providence. Gandalf hints at this when he says: "'Behind that [Bilbo finding the Ring] there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you [Frodo] also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought'" (56). Frodo is thus portrayed not only as a resilient character but as one guided and supported by a higher purpose.

Nevertheless, even Frodo's exceptional will cannot hold out forever. At the final moment, standing at the Crack of Doom, he succumbs to the Ring's allure: "I have come … But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (946). Yet even in this failure, redemption is granted — through the intervention of Gollum, who had secretly followed them. In a final struggle, Gollum bites off Frodo's finger to seize the Ring, only to fall into the fire, destroying both himself and the Ring. In this moment, Providence again appears to guide events beyond the will of any single character.

> Suddenly Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upwards to his mouth; his white fangs gleamed, and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave a cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees at the chasm's edge. But Gollum, dancing like a mad thing, held aloft the ring, a finger still thrust within its circle. It shone now as if verily it was wrought of living

> fire. 'Precious, precious, precious!' Gollum cried. 'My Precious! O my Precious!' And with that, even as his eyes were lifted up to gloat on his prize, he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell. Out of the depths came his last wail Precious, and he was gone. (*The Lord of the Rings* 946)

At this point, the profound intertwining of Frodo's and Gollum's paths becomes evident, as does the unexpected role Gollum's evil plays in the sudden, joyous turn of the story. Early in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo laments, "It's a pity that Bilbo didn't stab that vile creature when he had the chance!" (59). But Gandalf corrects him, explaining that it was precisely Bilbo's pity and mercy that stayed his hand: "Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need." He continues, "He has been well rewarded… he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity" (59). Most importantly, Gandalf foresees Gollum's future significance: "My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many — yours not least" (59). This prediction is fulfilled after Frodo and Sam leave the Fellowship and continue their perilous journey to Mordor alone. When Gollum finds them, rather than killing or abandoning him, Frodo — recalling Bilbo's mercy — spares his life and enlists his help. Though Gollum repeatedly attempts to deceive, betray, and even murder them, his guidance through the dark lands of Mordor is indispensable. Frodo ultimately fails to destroy the Ring, succumbing to its power at the final moment, but the mission still succeeds. It is Gollum, driven by his madness and obsession, who bites the Ring from Frodo's finger and, in his triumph, falls into the fire, destroying both himself and the Ring. Thus, the quest is fulfilled not by strength or righteousness alone, but by the intertwined consequences of mercy, failure, and Providence. In the end, Bilbo's seemingly insignificant act of pity does, indeed, "rule the fate of many." As Gordon observes,

> Frodo's sacrifice, though complete is, in itself, not enough. Here, Tolkien's treatment of the idea of priesthood takes on a new dimension. It is only when Frodo's self-abnegation is linked to those of a number of others that the quest is completed. Without the sacrifices of Sam, his faithful servant, Frodo would have been physically incapable of reaching his goal, the Mountain of Fire. Further, without the self-denials of many others in refusing at various times, against the dictates of inclination and natural reason, to slay the murderous Gollum, the Ring would never have fallen into the volcanic depths and so be unmade. It is communal priesthood which, in the end, is decisive. (3)

Although Frodo's character, like Aragorn's, echoes that of the Son in their shared role as redeemers through self-sacrifice, Frodo also reflects Thomistic and Miltonic portrayals of flawed humanity — his failure serving as a poignant reminder of his mortal limitations. Unlike the Son, Aragorn and Frodo do not embody a direct union of the human and divine in the theological sense; nevertheless, they can be seen as instruments of Providence, "divinely inspired" to help restore the moral order of the world. In this light, they represent a union of the earthly and the transcendent — agents through whom grace operates. Yet, it is Frodo who most clearly embodies the frailty of humanity. His suffering does not end with the completion of the quest: he is left physically wounded, emotionally scarred, and spiritually burdened by the weight of his journey. Unlike the triumphant return of a typical hero, Frodo's story concludes with a quiet departure. Unable to fully recover in Middle-earth, he sails to Valinor — a land of peace beyond the shores of Middle-earth — seeking rest and healing from a world that has cost him so much.

> I do not think that Frodo's was a *moral* failure. At the last moment the pressure of the Ring would reach its maximum – impossible, I should have said, for any one to resist, certainly after long possession, months of increasing torment, and when starved and exhausted. Frodo had done what he could and spent himself completely (as an instrument of Providence) and had produced a situation in which the object of his quest could be achieved. His humility (with which he began) and his sufferings were justly rewarded by the highest honour; and his exercise of patience and mercy towards Gollum gained him Mercy: his failure was redressed. We are finite creatures with absolute limitations upon the powers of our soul-body structure in either action or endurance. *Moral* failure can only be asserted, I think, when a man's effort or endurance falls *short* of his limits, and the blame decreases as that limit is closer approached. Nonetheless, I think it can be observed in history and experience that some individuals seem to be placed in 'sacrificial' positions: situations or tasks that for perfection of solution demand powers beyond their utmost limits, even beyond all possible limits for an incarnate creature in a physical world – in which a body may be destroyed, or so maimed that it affects the mind and will. Judgement upon any such case should then depend on the motives and disposition with which he started out, and should weigh his actions against the utmost possibility of his powers, all along the road to whatever proved the breaking-point. … I do not myself see that the breaking of his mind and will under demonic pressure after torment was any more a *moral* failure than the breaking

> of his body would have been – say, by being strangled by Gollum, or crushed by a falling rock. … I think it is clear on reflection to an attentive reader that when his dark times came upon him and he was conscious of being 'wounded by knife sting and tooth and a long burden' (III 268) it was not only nightmare memories of past horrors that afflicted him, but also unreasoning self-reproach: he saw himself and all that he done as a broken failure. 'Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same, for I shall not be the same.' That was actually a temptation out of the Dark, a last flicker of pride: desire to have returned as a 'hero', not content with being a mere instrument of good. … So he went both to a purgatory and to a reward, for a while: a period of reflection and peace and a gaining of a truer understanding of his position in littleness and in greatness, spent still in Time amid the natural beauty of 'Arda Unmarred', the Earth unspoiled by evil. (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 326-7)

Even though Frodo's failure was not of moral nature, but one derived from his own limited condition, and although his actions within the quest were crucial to its success, his final error grants him a chance to redeem *himself*. Frodo acts as an instrument of Providence, and as Bilbo, he starts his ownership of the Ring with humility, love for the world he knows, and self-sacrifice, thus becoming worthy of "the highest honour" and of Mercy, for his failure — and his pride — are remediated. "But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them" (*The Lord of the Rings* 1029). After a long period of sacrifice and suffering, Frodo is granted the gift of passage to a land untouched by evil — a place of healing and rest beyond the reach of Middle-earth's sorrows. In this, he mirrors Adam in *Paradise Lost*, who, after the Fall, comes to recognize the "accomplishing of great things" (12, 567) through humble beginnings. Like Adam, Frodo attains a deeper understanding of his dual nature — his "littleness" in the face of divine Providence and his "greatness" in the weight of his moral and spiritual quest. This awareness humbles his pride while affirming the significance of his role in the cosmic order. Thus, it is through Providence that Frodo participates in the redemption of Middle-earth and ultimately attains a "paradise within" — not a return to innocence, but a hard-won peace born of suffering, love, and sacrifice.

Conversely, Gollum's death does not seem to redeem him from his sins. Many years before the events concerning the War of the Ring, Sméagol, a Stoorish Hobbit, on the day of his birthday, was boating in the Gladden Fields, on the west side of the Anduin, with his friend

and relative Déagol, who was fishing. Suddenly, a large fish drags him down the water, to the bottom of the river, where he finds a golden ring. Envious and seduced by the ring's beauty, Sméagol demands that the other give it to him as a birthday present. As Déagol refuses to, Sméagol strangles him and takes the ring to himself, putting it around his finger.

> No one ever found out what had become of Déagol; he was murdered far from home, and his body was cunningly hidden. But Sméagol returned alone; and he found that none of his family could see him, when he was wearing the ring. He was very pleased with his discovery and he concealed it; and he used it to find out secrets, and he put his knowledge to crooked and malicious uses. He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful. The ring had given him power according to his stature. It is not to be wondered at that he became very unpopular and was shunned (when visible) by all his relations. (*The Lord of the Rings* 53)

Over time, Sméagol began muttering to himself with a guttural noise "gurgling in his throat" (53), which led others to mockingly call him Gollum. His descent began with thievery — his first fall from grace — when he was expelled from his grandmother's hobbit-hole, the matriarchal home of his family. Isolated and corrupted, he wandered up the banks of the Anduin until he came to the roots of the Misty Mountains, where he hid away from the world, dragging the Ring with him into the shadows. Gandalf later explains that although the Ring had already begun to consume him, by the time he encountered Bilbo, a fragment of Sméagol still remained. "Certainly he had never 'faded'. He is thin and tough still. But the thing was eating up his mind, of course, and the torment had become almost unbearable" (55). Unlike Bilbo and Frodo, whose possession of the Ring began with mercy, humility, or love, Sméagol's ownership was born in deceit, violence, and murder. As such, there was little room for redemption; without the grace of a merciful beginning, the Ring devoured his mind, eroded his sanity, and ultimately consumed his very identity.

> Gollum was pitiable, but he ended in persistent wickedness, and the fact that this worked good was no credit to him. His marvellous courage and endurance, as great as Frodo and Sam's or greater, being devoted to evil was portentous, but not honourable. I am afraid, whatever our beliefs, we have to face the fact that there are persons who yield to temptation, reject their chances of nobility or salvation, and appear to be 'damnable'. … The domination of the Ring was much too strong for the mean soul of Sméagol. But he would have never had to endure it if he had not become a mean sort of thief before it crossed his path. Need it ever have crossed his path? Need anything dangerous ever

> cross any of our paths? A kind of answer cd. be found in trying to imagine Gollum overcoming temptation. The story would have been quite different! By temporizing, not fixing the still not wholly corrupt Sméagol-will towards good in the debate in the slag hole, he weakened himself for the final chance when dawning love of Frodo was too easily withered by the jealousy of Sam before Shelob's lair. After that he was lost. (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 234)

Tolkien seems to be referencing the internal "dialogue" between Sméagol and Gollum that Sam overhears — a psychological conflict in which the creature wrestles with his desire to steal the Ring from Frodo while simultaneously feeling a sense of loyalty to him. By the end of this debate, Gollum mutters: "'We wants it [the Ring]! But' — and here there was a long pause, as if a new thought had wakened. 'Not yet, eh? Perhaps not. She might help. She might, yes'" (*The Lord of the Rings* 633). The "she" he refers to is Shelob, the monstrous spider and last descendant of Ungoliant. Gollum begins to form a plan to lead the Hobbits into her lair, hoping that she will kill them so he can reclaim the Ring without directly harming Frodo. Before carrying out the scheme, Gollum goes ahead to visit Shelob and promise her prey. Yet, on his way back, he comes upon Frodo and Sam sleeping peacefully — and in that moment, an unexpected emotion stirs within him.

> Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee – but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing. (*The Lord of the Rings* 714)

Frodo's pity, mercy, and kindness towards Gollum often brings Sméagol to surface, what outlines the strange bond that exists between them, and which is caused by the knowledge of what it means to be a ringbearer. Both know the weight of it, the loneliness, and the feeling of losing oneself, one's own identity to the evilness of the Ring. Sméagol, on the one hand, makes some effort to keep his promise to help Frodo; on the other, Gollum seems to fear him, and keeps the promise as a way of also keeping the One away from Sauron. Frodo sees in Gollum

what might become of him, and so he treats the creature with mercy as in an attempt to save him, hoping that one day he too might be saved from the Ruling Ring.

But back at the slag hole, Sméagol's touch on Frodo's knee, prompts the Hobbit to murmur in his sleep — an action that startles Sam awake. Misinterpreting the scene, Sam lashes out, calling Gollum a "sneaking old villain" and accusing him of skulking off. The verbal attack shatters Gollum's brief moment of empathy. "Gollum withdrew himself, and a green glint flickered under his heavy lids. Almost spider-like he looked now, crouched back on his bent limbs, with his protruding eyes. The fleeting moment had passed, beyond recall" (715). This seems to be the moment Tolkien later described as Gollum's "final chance," when a path toward redemption was still possible. Had he clung to the compassion momentarily awakened in him, he might have altered his course — and perhaps the fate of all. But Sam's harsh words reignite his bitterness, and Gollum's jealousy overcomes any flicker of love for Frodo. In choosing vengeance over mercy, he seals his own doom and sets his treacherous plan back in motion.

Gollum seems to be of a nature similar to that of Melkor, Sauron, and of Milton's Satan, as he falls by his "own suggestion … / Self-tempted, self-depraved" (3, 128-129). His ownership of the Ring starts with greed and murder, and soon he puts its powers to evil use, thus causing his own fall. It is undeniable, however, that Gollum's evil choices lead to much good, to the very completion of the quest, and serve as a formidable example of *felix culpa*, and of a clear echo of *Paradise Los*t in *The Lord of the Rings*. As Gandalf suggests that there is a greater power in action, Gollum represents Providence making good use of evil, which directly dialogues with Adam's epiphany: "O goodness infinite, goodness immense! / That all this good of evil shall produce, / And evil turn to good; more wonderful / Then that which by creation first brought forth / Light out of darkness!" (12, 469-473). By taking the Ring with him into the fiery abyss, Gollum puts an end to the last Dark Lord of Middle-earth, the most powerful of Melkor's servants who carried with him all the evil designs of the one who first brought evil into Eä. Nonetheless, the merit is not his, for he does not do it willingly, not as an act of free-will, but as a product of the madness caused by the One. Thus, like Melkor, Sauron, and Frodo, he is brought to "Mercy and Justice", but unlike Frodo, he does not find grace. Paralleling Milton's epic, his cunningness and evilness only serve the purposes of Providence, to excel god's glory (3, 133), and to delineate how both in *Paradise Lost* and in *The Lord of the Rings*, "mercy first and last shall brightest shine" (3, 134).

Furthermore, another subtle yet meaningful example of *felix culpa* in *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen in the character of Boromir, a Man of Gondor who travels to Rivendell driven by a sincere desire to defend his homeland from the growing threat of Sauron. Though courageous and noble-hearted, Boromir is convinced that the Ring could be wielded as a weapon against the enemy. Even when the rest of the Council firmly opposes this idea, he remains committed to the Fellowship's mission, joining the quest to destroy the One Ring. Despite his good intentions, Boromir's proud nature makes him especially vulnerable to the Ring's corrupting influence, which constantly seeks a path back to its master. As the Fellowship journeys on, the Ring's lure grows stronger in him, until, consumed by desperation and madness, he attempts to seize it from Frodo.

> Boromir strode up and down, speaking ever more loudly. Almost he seemed to have forgotten Frodo, while his talk dwelt on walls and weapons, and the mustering of men; and he drew plans for great alliances and glorious victories to be; and he cast down Mordor, and became himself a mighty king, benevolent and wise. Suddenly he stopped and waved his arms. 'And they tell us to throw it away!' he cried. 'I do not say destroy it. That might be well, if reason could show any hope of doing so. It does not. The only plan that is proposed to us is that a halfling should walk blindly into Mordor and offer the Enemy every chance of recapturing it for himself. Folly! … 'Come, come, my friend!' said Boromir in a softer voice. 'Why not get rid of it? Why not be free of your doubt and fear? You can lay the blame on me, if you will. You can say that I was too strong and took it by force. For I am too strong for you, halfling,' he cried; and suddenly he sprang over the stone and leaped at Frodo. His fair and pleasant face was hideously changed; a raging fire was in his eyes. (*The Lord of the Rings* 398-399)

Frodo escapes Boromir's assault by slipping on the Ring and vanishing from sight. Invisible, he flees the Fellowship, determined to continue the perilous journey to Mordor alone — though Sam soon insists on accompanying him. The gravity of his actions quickly dawns on Boromir, who is overcome with remorse. "What have I said? What have I done? Frodo, Frodo! Come back!" he cries in anguish (400), but Frodo is already gone. Meanwhile, Orcs who had been tracking the Fellowship launch their attack, and Aragorn tasks Boromir with protecting Merry and Pippin, who had gone in pursuit of Frodo. When Boromir finds them, they are surrounded. In a final act of valor, he fights fiercely to defend the Hobbits, buying them time to escape. Despite his strength and courage, Boromir is vastly outnumbered, and soon falls, pierced by many arrows.

> Aragorn knelt beside him. Boromir opened his eyes and strove to speak. At last slow words came. 'I tried to take the Ring from Frodo,' he said. 'I am sorry. I have paid.' His glance strayed to his fallen enemies; twenty at least lay there. 'They have gone: the Halflings: the Orcs have taken them. I think they are not dead. Orcs bound them.' He paused and his eyes closed wearily. After a moment he spoke again. 'Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed.' (414)

Boromir pays the price of death in order to redeem himself. To save Merry and Pippin, he sacrifices his own life, for he knew he was outnumbered, and the odds were against him. In his last moments, he confesses his sins to Aragorn like a sinner to a priest: "'No!' said Aragorn, taking his hand and kissing his brow. 'You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!" (414). Aragorn, who in this story is a redeemer, absolves Boromir, and says he had conquered, which one can assume to be redemption. Boromir kept Merry and Pippin alive, though they had been captured by the Orcs. Hence, Boromir's temporary lapse of madness seems to work as a catalyst to the narrative, as he provokes Frodo to go to Mordor by himself, and to meet Gollum, something that might not have happened had the company remained as it started. It also causes Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas to go after Merry and Pippin, and on the way to help on the fight in Isengard, Rohan and Gondor — had the company stayed together, Aragorn would most certainly have gone to Mordor with Frodo. Unlike Sméagol, therefore, Boromir's death redeems him from his sins, for he accepts the chance he is given, and sacrifices his life trying to atone for his mistakes.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that both *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* engage in a rich intertextual dialogue with the other works examined in this study. They resonate not only with the theological frameworks of Augustine and Aquinas, but also with the poetic vision expressed in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. A recurring theme in Tolkien's *legendarium* is the pursuit of a return to a higher good — even when such a return appears impossible, it is ultimately achieved. As in the works of the theologians and the poet, the path to redemption typically begins with a fall rooted in pride — a desire to dominate or subvert the freedom of others. This fall opens the way for grace, as characters are presented with opportunities for repentance. Tolkien's narratives then unfold to reveal those who embrace redemption, often through self-sacrifice motivated by love and mercy, and those who reject it, consumed by evil and met with divine justice. Echoing the Catholic interpretation of *felix culpa* and Milton's Protestant elaboration of it, Tolkien presents redemption not as a mere reversal of sin, but as a transformation through suffering. Crucially, the original sins do not bring about evil and pain

in vain; rather, Providence continually works through them, repurposing even the gravest faults toward good ends — culminating, time and again, in moments of eucatastrophe.

Tolkien's writings have often led scholars to draw parallels between his mythology and Christian narratives — connections likely encouraged by the author's own deep relationship with Catholicism. A close reading of his work reveals that echoes of his faith do indeed permeate his fictional universe. However, when questioned about such influences, Tolkien consistently rejected the notion of allegory, a literary device he openly disdained. His aversion to allegory aligns with Paul de Man's critique, which argues that allegory's fixed, static nature contradicts the dynamic and evolving process of meaning-making — a process influenced by time, context, and reader. Tolkien clarified that what he disliked was "the conscious and intentional allegory," stating that "the better a deliberate allegory is made the more nearly will it be acceptable just as a story" (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 145). This suggests that he viewed intentional allegory as a limitation on interpretive freedom, one that stifles the reader's engagement by prescribing a singular, author-imposed meaning.

Tolkien believed that readers should be able to approach a story with their own interpretive lens, bringing personal experiences and prior knowledge — what he referred to as their "library" — to the reading process. This flexibility is what he termed "applicability," a principle that promotes intertextual freedom over rigid symbolism. For instance, while the notion of *felix culpa* was systematized by Thomas Aquinas, it was constructed from ideas previously explored by thinkers like Boethius and Augustine, exemplifying how meaning evolves through intertextual dialogue. Allegory, by contrast, resists such fluidity, assigning a definitive reading that precludes reinterpretation. Accordingly, Tolkien emphasized that although Christian motifs in *The Lord of the Rings* may have emerged unconsciously, they were consciously acknowledged during the revision process — an outcome, he admitted, made inevitable by the profound and enduring influence of his faith.

> *The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism. However that is very clumsily put, and sounds more self-important than I feel. For as a matter of fact, I have consciously planned very little; and should chiefly be grateful for having been brought up (since I was eight) in a Faith that has nourished me and taught me all the little that I know; and that I owe to my mother, who clung to

> her conversion and died young, largely through the hardships of poverty resulting from it. (*The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* 172)

Tolkien's use of the terms "conscious" and "unconscious" is particularly relevant to an intertextual study. An exploration of Tolkien's literary development quickly reveals that he was not an enthusiastic admirer of several central figures in the English literary canon — Milton, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth among them. Yet, his candid admission of these preferences, combined with his extensive academic background in literature and philology, confirms that he was deeply familiar with their work. Regardless of his personal tastes, Tolkien was aware that many of his influences operated unconsciously, allowing for a reciprocal interplay between his texts and those of his literary predecessors — a dynamic conversation across time.

Although Milton was not among Tolkien's favored authors, the workings of his creative mind still permitted Miltonic elements to find expression in his mythology. The same can be said of thinkers he likely admired more, such as Augustine and Aquinas, and perhaps others whose influence remains to be explored in future research. As Jorge Luis Borges insightfully observed, every writer creates their own precursors — without their contribution, the unique qualities of those earlier works could never be fully recognized. A precursor reshapes not only our understanding of newer works but also retroactively alters our interpretation of older texts by entering into dialogue with them. In this light, Tolkien's predecessors — consciously chosen or not — enabled a theological and poetic reading of his narratives. They opened the way for a fresh interpretation of modern fantasy, positioning Tolkien himself as a precursor to the many authors who would follow in his footsteps.

6. Final Considerations

Intertextuality holds that once words are committed to writing and read over time — across generations — the author's original subjectivity is gradually effaced. The writer becomes less a sovereign subject and more a subject of enunciation, meaning that the critic must consider the construction of meaning apart from its attachment to a single authorial voice. Yet, despite Tolkien's personal faith and his own statements about his work, a close textual analysis reveals that the fiction of Middle-earth bears profound affinities with Christian mythology. The nature of good and evil in his *legendarium* resonates strongly with the theological perspectives of Augustine and Aquinas — two foundational figures in Catholic doctrine and central to the tradition of Catholic education.

Renowned Tolkien scholars, such as Tom Shippey, frequently draw such parallels, especially when examining moral and metaphysical questions in Tolkien's universe. In discussing the persistent theme of good arising from evil, Shippey often returns to concepts that align closely with the idea of *felix culpa* or with its constituent elements. He argues that the logical outgrowth of the belief that all endings are good — despite preceding tragedy — inevitably invites theological reflection, making Tolkien's work a fertile ground for such inquiry.

> that evil cannot itself create, that it was not in itself created (but sprang from a voluntary exercise of free will by Satan, Adam and Eve, to separate themselves from God), that it will in the long run be annulled or eliminated, as the Fall of Man was redressed by the Incarnation and Death of Christ. Views like these are strongly present in *The Lord of the Rings*". (*The Road to Middle-earth* 159)

Later on, he continues on the subject arguing that

> … the exploit of Morgoth of which the Eldar never learnt was the traditional seduction of Adam and Eve by the serpent, while the incoming Edain and Easterlings are all descendants of Adam flying from Eden and subject to the curse of Babel. The Silmarillion, then, tells the story of the fall and partial redemption of the elves, without contradicting the story of the Fall and Redemption of Man. (268)

Furthermore, Shippey often connects Tolkien to Milton, defending that both authors, "the arch-Protestant and the committed Catholic, mean to 'assert eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men'" (426). Referring to C.S. Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942), Shippey resumes Lewis's list of doctrines of the Fall that are common to Milton, Augustine, and "the Church as a whole" (Lewis 66), defending that most of them are displayed in both the "Ainulindalë" and "Valaquenta". What Lewis included in his list is thoroughly explored in this research:

> 1. God created all things without exception good, and because they are good, 'No Nature (i.e. no positive reality) is bad and the word Bad denotes merely privation of good,' (De Gil'. Dei, XI, 2I, 22).
>
> 2. What we call bad things are good things perverted (De Civ. Dei, XIV, I I). This perversion arises when a conscious creature becomes more interested in itself than in God (ibid. XIV, I I), and wishes to exist 'on its own' (esse in semet ipso, XIV, I 3). This is the sin of Pride.

> 3. From this doctrine of good and evil it follows (a) That good can exist without evil, as in Milton's Heaven and Paradise, but not evil without good (De Civ. Dei, xrv, I r). (b) That good and bad angels have the same Nature, happy when it adheres to God and miserable when it adheres to itself.
>
> 4. Though God has made all creatures good He foreknows that some will voluntarily make themselves bad (De Civ. Dei, xrv, n) and also foreknows the good use which He will then make of their badness (*ibid.*). For as He shows His benevolence in creating good Natures, He shows His justice in exploiting evil wills.
>
> …
>
> 8. The Fall consisted in Disobedience.
>
> 9. But while the Fall consisted in Disobedience it resulted, like Satan's, from Pride (De Civ. Dei, XIV, I3). Hence Satan approaches Eve through her Pride: first by flattery of her beauty (P.L. IX, 532-48) which 'should be seen ... ador'd and served by Angels' and secondly (this is more important) by urging her selfhood to direct revolt against the fact of being subject to God at all. (Lewis 66-9)

These are some of the elements Lewis identified in his work and which led Shippey to conclude that *The Silmarillion*, with its "exile from paradise, its ages of misery, and its Intercessor, is a calque on Christian story, an answer to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*" (268). This back-and-forth movement between texts, where one borrows from and responds to the arguments of another, is central to Kristeva's notion of intertextuality. It emphasizes that texts are not fixed or final products, but living organisms engaged in a continuous process of meaning-making. Every new work casts fresh light on its predecessors, just as earlier texts shape the way we understand their successors. This dialogical process invites the reader to participate actively in the production of meaning, since each of us brings a unique literary and cultural background to the text.

As Graham Allen explains, texts are "a compilation of cultural textuality"; they are "made up of bits and pieces of the social text," and therefore reflect the ongoing ideological struggles and tensions within society itself (36). Texts do not present stable, closed meanings — they instead embody the dynamic and often conflicting forces that shape language and discourse. In this research, I have highlighted how this Bakhtinian ideologeme — the point where ideological tensions manifest in literary form — emerges in the intersections among the texts studied. All of them, in different ways, grapple with theological and philosophical elements of the *felix culpa* trope, which is deeply embedded in religious ideology and carries

lasting cultural weight. This cultural embeddedness is also a key feature of intertextuality. As Allen notes, "a text's meaning is understood as its temporary rearrangement of elements with socially pre-existent meanings. Meaning, we might say, is always at one and the same time 'inside' and 'outside' the text" (37). In this case, the "outside" of Milton's and Tolkien's texts is the theological framework developed by Augustine and Aquinas — their reflections on the fall of Satan, the Fall of Man, the nature of good and evil, atonement, and redemption according to Christian doctrine. These theological ideas form the foundation for an intertextual dialogue with literature, shaping the *felix culpa* trope as it evolves. This theologico-poetical dialogue reveals how the external influences of theological discourse are internalized and re-expressed in literary texts. The authors' imaginative minds work through their writings to allow this exchange and accumulation of meaning across texts.

Only by acknowledging that the core ideas making up the *felix culpa* trope are themselves subject to social and ideological tension — as shown by the fact that each author studied differs in at least one respect — we can see how these recurring elements function as ideologemes. Their presence proves the plurality and richness inherent in the intertextual method, and in this study as a whole.

It may seem surprising to some readers that this analysis includes a Protestant author, John Milton, alongside three Catholic writers and a discussion grounded largely in Catholic doctrine. However, this choice is justified by the theological foundation of the study, which is based primarily on the work of Augustine — widely regarded as a seminal figure in Christian theology — and of Aquinas, whose views on good and evil are in deep dialogue with Augustine's. As contemporary theologian Justo L. González notes, "the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century thought that the bishop of Hippo was a forerunner of their doctrine" ("Grace and Predestination"). Similarly, Phillip Cary argues that "the drama of Protestant theology begins on a stage set in large part by Augustinian spirituality" ("Philosophical Spirituality"). Given this, it is no coincidence that *Paradise Lost* aligns so closely with Augustinian notions of *felix culpa*, despite Milton's Protestant background.

Furthermore, this research does not aim to challenge or reinterpret the authors' personal relationships with their respective faiths. Rather, it offers an intertextual analysis of their literary works as they engage with the concept of *felix culpa*. As Bakhtin writes, in any textual work, the "word, directed towards its object … weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and

influence its entire stylistic profile" (1981, 276). Accordingly, were this study to be expanded, it could reach backward to Boethius, Aristotle, or Plato, or even to *Beowulf*, the *Poetic Edda*, or the *Kalevala*. It could also look forward to modern fantasy works such as George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, or Patrick Rothfuss's *The Name of the Wind*. In each case, an intertextual dialogue would remain not only possible but productive, as every word in these texts responds to previous words and invites new interpretations from readers — each of whom contributes to the ongoing creation of meaning.

It seems reasonable to contend that the objective of this research has been successfully fulfilled. As proposed, an intertextual dialogue concerning the trope of *felix culpa* has been established among the selected texts. Points of convergence and divergence have been thoroughly explored, demonstrating how Tolkien's fiction resonates with Catholic philosophy and enters into meaningful conversation with the canonical work of England's most prominent poet through the lens of the "happy fault." This theologico-poetical dialogue — linking a contemporary and widely popular author like Tolkien with a classical and canonical figure like Milton, both framed by the enduring philosophies of Augustine and Aquinas — aims to spark interest among young readers in discovering, or rediscovering, foundational literary works. Furthermore, it invites further scholarly exploration that may extend or challenge the arguments developed here.

This is a study in progress, and there remains a vast terrain for future inquiries. Milton and Tolkien, separated by roughly three centuries, nevertheless shared a common literary goal: to gift their nations with a foundational story. I also express my personal aspiration to deepen this study further by examining how Tolkien, in attempting the creation of a mythology for England and for literature at large, established a blueprint for the fantasy writers who followed him — and those yet to come. By drawing upon his literary and philosophical predecessors, Tolkien carved space for his own successors. A comparative analysis of the fantasy genre before and after Tolkien — now widely regarded as the father of high fantasy — could reveal the reasons behind this title and shed light on his transformative impact on the genre. Such work might expand the academic recognition of fantasy literature, granting it the critical attention it merits and offering valuable insights to emerging writers. In doing so, we may even consider placing Tolkien within the canon of literary tradition — on his own terms, and within his own mythopoeic sphere.

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