UDC 821.111.09 Tolkien J. R. R.
821.111.09 Shelley P. B.
https://doi.org/10.18485/bells.2024.16.15

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STATUES SPEAK – POLITICS AND SPIRITUALITY IN SHELLEY AND TOLKIEN

Abstract
When Frodo and Sam encounter a desecrated statue of a king while journeying to Mordor, the prose clearly recalls Shelley's "Ozymandias". The similar imagery of power found in Shelley's famous sonnet and Tolkien's equally famous work of fantasy invites discussion on their differing political views. Shelley was a revolutionary thinker, a Republican, whereas Tolkien was a conservative monarchist. The roots for their political attitudes are then sought in their distinct spiritualities. Whereas Shelley found the ultimate reality in the dialectical Spirit of Nature, Tolkien held fast to the personalistic Christian God. These beliefs persistently influence their opinions and works.

Key words: Shelley, Tolkien, politics, religion, spirituality, democracy, monarchy, Spirit, God

1. Introduction: two consistent authors

It has been said that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* "is best seen as an example of romantic religion" (Reilly 2006: 192). Elsewhere, Tolkien's works were classified as Neo-Romanticism to "exemplify the fantastical aspects of a movement which is usually seen as being "over" by the mid-1950s" (Morgan 2007: 507). Romanticism stressed spirit, organicism, inspiration, creative chaos as opposed to the rules, laws and mechanicalness

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of the previous age and its mechanistic philosophy. Thus, Romantics rediscovered idyllic literature, praised the beauties of nature and made profound use of myths and legends. The Romantic authors not only turned to ancient myths but in a sense also rediscovered the medieval age, stirring interest in medievalism. Finally, Romantic narratives were characterized by a recourse to literary fantasy.

Almost all of these can be found in Tolkien's works. Tolkien, too, made vast use of mythology, both by reworking it and by creating his own. His contemporaries also used myths; however, they used them in an ironic manner. Joyce's Ulysses is an ordinary human being. Not so in Tolkien: his mythical heroes possess exceeding strength, wisdom, valour and other traits that had belonged to mythical heroes.

Tolkien and the Romantics share an interest in similar images, materials, and narratives. Shelley proved to be an attractive choice for the purpose of comparison, not only because he is one of the most important Romantic authors but also because not much has been written on relations between his and Tolkien's works. Shelley and Tolkien both employ the imagery of ruins. Nevertheless, they often attach very different and even opposite meanings to them. Tolkien's works can safely be called (Neo-) Romantic only as far as the *choice of imagery* goes; once we delve deeper, we shall see that they are quite non-Romantic. On the other hand, Shelley fits seamlessly into the Romantic paradigm.

Our strategy here is to go behind the imagery so as to reach the strata of the *politics*, *philosophy, and spirituality* of these two authors. Needless to say, we need to begin with what is closest to our experience as readers: the texts themselves.

2. Common Imagery in Shelley and Tolkien

Although Tolkien is known to have used many sources, Shelley seems not to have been among his favourite ones. John Garth (2014) argued that Tolkien modelled the rhyme scheme and the rhythm of 'The Voyage of Éarendel the Evening Star' on Shelley's 'Arethusa' (1–2); Tolkien seems to have chosen the same motifs, as "in each poem the protagonist arises in sublime surroundings, travels a course of wonder impossible for the ordinary traveller, and makes a dramatic descent westward" (17).

An even more obvious shared image is the sitting figure of a king, whom Frodo and Sam chance upon on their journey into Mordor:

> The years had gnawed it, and violent hands had maimed it. Its head was gone, and in its place was set in mockery a rough round-hewn stone, rudely painted by savage hands in the likeness of a grinning face with one large red eye in the midst of its forehead. Upon its knees and mighty chair, and all about the pedestal, were idle scrawls mixed with the foul symbols that the maggot-folk of Mordor used. (Tolkien 2002: 709)

The scene closely resembles Shelley's 'Ozymandias':

> Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
> Stand in the desert… Near them, on the sand,
> Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
> And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
> Tell that its sculptor well those passions read.
> (Shelley 2009: 198)

Hammond and Scull (2005) state that "The description and the ravages of time and hostility on a once imposing figure recall Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *Ozymandias*, which commemorates a battered statue of an Egyptian pharaoh" (485).[1]

[1] The poem has generated much interest in Shelley's sources. Diodorus Siculus' Bibliotheca Historica was soon acknowledged as a source, but there was a notable discrepancy in that Diodorus did not know anything about the statue being broken down. Some researchers believed that, besides reading about it, Shelley spoke to a person who actually saw the remains (Griffiths 1948: 84; Parr 1951: 442; Parr 1957: 33). Richmond (1962) expounded the idea "that Shelley has coordinated the attributes of several distinct statues in order to obtain a single imaginative symbol of hallucinatory distinctness." (71) Shelley's imagination may not have been factual but has inspired reinterpretation of archaeological facts. Thus "a forgotten potentate who could have commanded the mighty to look on his works and despair, is emerging from mists of Anatolian history. A series of independent archaeological discoveries, some old and some quite recent, reveals that the most energetic instigator of building projects in the Iron Age Near East was a ruler who inspired no legends and about whom the written record tells us very little– Rusa II, the last great king of Urartu" (Zimansky 1995: 94). Shelley indeed discovered a proper archetype which in turn started attracting real-life examples of Ozymandias' fate, all the way into the popular culture: "The poem continues to influence popular culture: search for "Ozymandias" on the Internet reveals three rock-and-roll songs, an album by a German "electro-medieval" musical ensemble, a pianist's musical project, three different comic-book characters, and elements of video games and science fiction. Nor has elite

Egypt reappears in their works, either as a concrete reference (Shelley) or as an inspiration (Tolkien). Thus, in Shelley's *Queen Mab* we read:

> Beside the eternal Nile,
> The Pyramids have risen.
> Nile shall pursue his changeless way:
> Those pyramids shall fall…
> (Shelley 2009: 21, ll. 126–129).

Previously in the same poem, the ruined palaces of Palmyra are made example of. Shelley had not forgotten to condemn them to oblivion that will

> … steal silently
> The remnants of its fame.
> Monarchs and conquerors there
> Proud o'er prostrate millions trod--
> The earthquakes of the human race;
> Like them, forgotten when the ruin
> That marks their shock is past. (ibid. 21, ll. 120–125)

The poet speaks similarly of Parthia in *Alastor; or the Spirit of Solitude*:

> where the desolated tombs
> Of Parthian kings scatter to every wind
> Their wasting dust... (ibid. 99, ll. 242–244)

Shelley's condemnation to dust features in his seminal *Prometheus Unbound* in a passage whose obelisks clearly reference the iconic Egyptian monuments:

> The ghosts of a no more remembered fame,
> Which, from their unworn obelisks, look forth
> In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
> Of those who were their conquerors, mouldering round.
> (ibid. 293, ll. 169–171)

culture forgotten the poem: a recent review of Günther Grass's autobiography compared the celebrated German novelist to Ozymandias." (Stephens 2009: S155)

A final example – another image of joy in turning monarchs into the most basic substance – can be found in 'Ode to Liberty':

> O that the free would stamp the impious name
> Of KING into the dust! or write it there,
> So that this blot upon the page of fame
> Were as a serpent's path, which the light air
> Erases, and the flat sands close behind! (ibid. 472, ll. 211–215)

As indeed the same flat sands close behind the monuments of monarchs, we may now turn to Tolkien and his Egyptian references. The most glaring examples are the two figures of Argonath. Tolkien's statues refuse to be turned to dust: "…the craft and power of old had wrought upon them, and still they preserved through the suns and rains of forgotten years the mighty likenesses in which they had been hewn" (Tolkien 2002: 395). Tolkien depicts the astonishment and admiration they inspire: "Great power and majesty they still wore, the silent wardens of a long-vanished kingdom. (ibid. 395). Scull and Hammond (2005) notice the detail: "These gigantic figures recall ancient Egyptian statues such as the two Colossi of Memnon, all that remains of the Mortuary Temple of Amenophis III (1417–1379 BC) on the west bank of the Nile near the Valley of the Kings" (347). Then in the chapter "The Tower of Cirith Ungol", Sam witnesses the statues of the Two Watchers: "They were like great figures seated upon thrones. Each had three joined bodies, and three heads facing outward, and inward, and across the gateway. The heads had vulture-faces, and on their great knees were laid clawlike hands" (Tolkien 2002: 913). It is yet another image of Egypt: "Bird-headed gods were depicted in ancient Egypt, three-dimensional or in profile in low relief or painted, but always as individual figures" (Scull and Hammond 2005: 602). However, this time, in Mordor, the statues are ominous and infused with evil will; yet, they are still grandiose and again not consigned to ruin.

Tolkien's fictional world contained a whole civilization resembling Egypt in some crucial points: "Tolkien's Númenóreans resemble the ancient Egyptians also in the building of tombs and the science of embalming bodies" (Scull and Hammond 2017: 493). Admittedly, Tolkien himself had said as much in one of his letters:

> The Númenóreans of Gondor were proud, peculiar, and archaic, and I think are best pictured in (say) Egyptian terms. In many ways they resembled 'Egyptians' – the love of, and power to

> construct, the gigantic and massive. And in their great interest in ancestry and in tombs. (But not of course in 'theology': in which respect they were Hebraic and even more puritan – but this would take long to set out: to explain indeed why there is practically no overt 'religion', or rather religious acts or places or ceremonies among the 'good' or anti-Sauron peoples in *The Lord of the Rings*). I think the crown of Gondor (the S. Kingdom) was very tall, like that of Egypt, but with wings attached, not set straight back but at an angle.
>
> The N. Kingdom had only a *diadem* (III 323). Cf. the difference between the N. and S. kingdoms of Egypt. (Tolkien 1981: 281)

As far as personalities go, perhaps the closest one to Ozymandias is the Númenórean king Ar-Pharazôn whose mighty works are also forever gone, submerged underneath the waves of the ocean.

As is the case with any imaginative creation, so in Shelley and Tolkien there is always something added to the image. Ozymandias is not merely a pharaoh; he also reflects the monarchs of Shelley's time. 'Ozymandias' is a principled condemnation of monarchy as such. In the same way, Tolkien's Númenór is not merely a fusion of Egypt and Atlantis but also of their connotations in Tolkien's time – for example, ambitious and highly technological empire of the seas that desired global domination, launching an invasion against a wholly different continent of Aman. Surely, Plato's Atlantis desired to dominate the Mediterranean but Númenór is able to project its power across the world in a way that only modern superpowers are able to.

We notice some recurring attitudes. Whereas Shelley is ironic towards these relics, Tolkien is respectful towards them. Since the statues depict persons of power, we shall now delve into our authors' views on politics and try and discover metaphysical and spiritual bases of these positions. Sections 3 and 4 explore the political orientations behind the images, whereas sections 5 and 6 proceed to their metaphysical foundations.

3. Shelley's Promethean Politics

Even though "Ozymandias" does not explicitly refer to any politician of Shelley's time, it is still considered an example of his political attitudes. Ford (1960) says that "it is in the political poems, however, that Shelley's

ironic voice is most audible. "Ozymandias" is the most memorable example…" (658). However, it also speaks of a "hand that mocked" the passions of the Egyptian pharaoh. Besides the traveller who reports on the statue, both Shelley and the original sculptor took an ironic stance towards the monarch. There are three points of views, each enclosed in the other and ""Shelley" is the box that contains all others" (Freedman 1986: 70).

Shelley's accusations against monarchs can be found throughout his works and they are based on what the monarchs did, as well as how their actions were theoretically justified. Shelley had views which closely resembled those of Jean Jacque Rousseau, namely, that the human soul was originally clean yet marred by bad upbringing and unnatural laws imposed by those same monarchs. In his *Queen Mab* we can find the following lines:

> Soul is not more polluted than the beams
> Of heaven's pure orb, ere round their rapid lines
> The taint of earth-born atmosphere arise.
> (Shelley 2009: 35, ll. 151–153)

Furthermore, in the notes to this same work, Shelley states: "I hold that the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life" (ibid. 83). To liberate humanity means to abolish the abusive *political systems*, which is why Shelley was entranced with the French Revolution. As he writes in 'A Philosophical View of Reform', "The Revolution in France overthrew the hierarchy, the aristocracy, and the monarchy, and the whole of that peculiarly insolent and oppressive system on which they were based" (ibid. 645).

Shelley believed that monarchs were merely hiding behind the illusion created by this oppressive system, which is why he castigates modern monarchs. In his 'Sonnet: England in 1819' the king is presented as "old, mad, blind, despised" whereas princes are "mud from a muddy spring" and "leechlike to their fainting country cling" (ibid. 446). Rulers are depicted as cowards in the poem 'To the Emperors of Russia and Austria Who Eyed the Battle of Austerlitz from the Heights whilst Buonaparte Was Active in the Thickest of the Fight':

> Coward Chiefs! who while the fight
> Rages in the plain below
> Hide the shame of your affright (ibid. 2, ll. 1–3)

Interestingly enough, Napoleon is viewed in a positive light despite being a monarch. The reason is his taking active part in the battle. Napoleon's reception by the Romantics was not simple: Beethoven was first enthused but would later reject him violently; the first generation of the Romantics were not so enamoured, whereas some important second-generation poets such as Byron and Shelley did value him. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the chief philosopher of the age, wrote in 1806: "I saw the Emperor – this world-soul – riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it" (Hegel 1984: 114). Napoleon is thus a bringer of change, an impulse that leads to progress.

Shelley's politics is not simply anti-authoritarianism, pacifism or 'passive resistance'. This can be observed in his earlier work, *Queen Mab*. The poem's purpose was to present a "radical rereading of human history and thereby expose the anti-intellectualism and cruelty inherent in the traditional social order" (Grimes 1995: 12). However, as this author notes, Shelley cannot fully escape building upon an authority of a kind as "Queen Mab's poetic vision originates in the assumed prophetic genius of the individual poet rather than in the social institution..." (ibid. 12).

To symbolize a new order Shelley made use of the figure of Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound*, "with its vision of a worldwide egalitarianism thriving in the absence of all political and religious institution..." (White 1982: 626). Quite aware that tyrannies do not fall apart by themselves, Shelley needed another mythical image to represent the power to struggle and topple tyranny. He found it in Demogorgon,

> who appears on the scene with all his dark and brutal power. And one cannot help feeling that Shelley found in Demogorgon a tremendous henchman who at one and the same time overthrew an otherwise successfully resistant tyranny and protected the moral interest of the fable by doing what the virtuous man could not do, both because of his particular ethic of suffering, and because, as luck would have it, he happened to be chained to a rock when the revolution got under way. (ibid. 628).

Shelley may have thought that the Revolution and Napoleon were the necessary acts of violence done in order to liberate Prometheus and usher

in a society based on humanist principles. By virtue of his own works, Shelley himself became an authority for revolution as well:

> Journals like the radical *Northern Star* or the Owenite *New Moral World* contained in those years hundreds of references to "Shelleyan" ideas on revolution, reform, sexual liberation, and strategies of resistance; Bouthaina Shaaban has catalogued over sixty articles mentioning or discussing Shelley in the Chartist press from 1835 to 1850. And the young Engels reported on the popularity of Shelley in the reading rooms of the proletariat in the 1840s… (Kipperman 1992: 196).

Shelley went from being a poet to being a prophet. As the metaphor of history more and more resembled an arrow of progress, this process was "supported by the vatic insight of an individual poet" (ibid. 197).

4. Legitimacy of Kingship in Tolkien

Reading Tolkien's *Letters* might lead to the impression that he agreed with Shelley: "My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs)" (Tolkien 1981: 63). However, the end of the sentence delivers Tolkien's second preferred option: "… or to 'unconstitutional' Monarchy" (Tolkien 1981: 63). Furthermore, Tolkien was awarded an OBE in 1972 and had a very warm memory of his meeting with the Queen (Tolkien 1981: 418). His political views "on the whole were conservative, in that he supported the Conservative Party rather than the Labour Party, but also in that he wanted to conserve what was good, and not to assume that new ideas or inventions were good merely because they were new" (Scull and Hammond 2017: 1002).

Tolkien was aware of the objections Shelley made regarding kings. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn needs to earn his right to become the king. He must *personally* join the battle and lead the armies against Sauron. Denethor loses legitimacy to rule by succumbing to passivity and despair. The same motif of (il)legitimacy reappears in *Farmer Giles of Ham*. In that story too, the king is cowardly and ineffectual against the dragon. It is by actively leading the resistance that a mere farmer, Giles, becomes the king. Tolkien's ideal of a monarch is decidedly not a passive figurehead with all the rights and no responsibilities.

Even though Tolkien and Shelley both treat the issue of the legitimacy of ruling, Tolkien would probably not have chosen Napoleon as a good example of a monarch. For one thing, Napoleon was an emperor whose ambitions were contrary to Tolkien's preferred localism and regionalism. Tolkien had been staunchly against any kind of imperialism including British. He mainly expressed these ideas in letters to his son Christopher: "For I love England (not Great Britain and certainly not the British Commonwealth (grr!)…" (Tolkien 1981: 65). He had also found "Americo-cosmopolitanism very terrifying" (ibid. 65). And then again, in 1945, he repeated the very same sentiment: "… I know nothing about British or American imperialism in the Far East that does not fill me with regret and disgust…" (ibid. 115). The anti-imperialist sentiment is also fairly obvious in his works. It is Sauron who is the empire-builder, promising to put all peoples of Middle-earth into a single super-state. Tolkien does not even deny him good intentions on his way to becoming a tyrant: "beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to order all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of the Earth" (ibid. 243).

Another example is the fate of Númenór that was transformed into an empire with colonies in Middle-earth. Tolkien does sometimes present us with imagery similar to Shelley's – the destruction of Barad-dûr, the Black Gate, the sinking of Númenór. However, it is when these become *imperial* symbols that they are wiped off the face of Middle-earth.

Tolkien's politics is not Romantic; if any label could be applied to it, it would perhaps be *Platonic*. Plato's *Laws* specify that there should be 5040 citizens in an ideal city-state (*Laws* 737Eff). It is in the small community that people can have face-to-face communication and preserve their ways of life. Empires, on the other hand, tend to be universalist and subsume diversity under principles such as 'brotherhood', 'unity', 'peace', 'equality'. This is exactly what Shelley wanted: a humanity united in common values, leaving behind what may have seemed to him petty differences. This is why he has been so attractive for Marxist thinkers; and it is exactly the same reason why Tolkien has not been attractive to them. Imperialism or classless society *can* be appropriated by Romantic spirituality as the Spirit of Nature is above the differences between nations or individuals; the stress is on humanity as such.

Both Shelley and Tolkien believed their political views were backed by fundamental spiritual realities. While Shelley, like Hegel, held that

Napoleon's rise was propelled by the spirit of the age, Tolkien believed kingship was supported by God. They differ in their concepts of the divine: for Shelley, it is the Spirit of Nature; for Tolkien it is God.

A sign of Aragorn's right to be a king is also his (supernatural) power to heal with his hands. Aragorn is not only a king but a priestly figure:

> Since in Middle-earth there is no church with elders or bishops or other religious authorities, Tolkien gives spiritual power to his monarchs. This is no anomaly. Medieval kings, ruling by divine rights rather than democratic election, were believed to have supernatural powers of healing. Thus does Aragorn heal the wounded Eowyn and Faramir–using both his careful knowledge of herb lore as well as his majestic presence… (Wood 2003: 141).

Tolkien also used Aragorn to 'pardon' Boromir, letting him repent and die in peace: "We know that Boromir has received his pardon, for his last gesture is a smile" (ibid. 155). Tolkien's good kings are guided by God's providence and are under God's blessing. In Tolkien, kings turn to evil when they upset the hierarchy of values. But kingship itself was a symbol of a divine hierarchy. According to C. S. Lewis, "… Aristocracy was right: it was only the Aristocrats who were wrong. Or putting it the other way, that a society which becomes democratic in *ethos* as well as in constitution is doomed" (Lewis 2017: 90). Pharaonic Ar-Pharazôn wanted to conquer death and overturn the rule of the Valar. He was inspired by Sauron who himself "desired to be a God-King, and was held to be this by his servants; if he had been victorious, he would have demanded divine honour from all rational creatures and absolute temporal power over the whole world" (Tolkien 1981: 243–244). And even Sauron develops as a character, as he goes on to rebel against the divine hierarchy. In *Morgoth's Ring*, Tolkien goes to the crux of the issue:

> Sauron was not a 'sincere' atheist, but he preached atheism, because it weakened resistance to himself (and he had ceased to fear God's action in Arda). As was seen in the case of Ar-Pharazôn. But there was seen the effect of Melkor upon Sauron: he spoke of Melkor in Melkor's own terms: as a god, or even as God. This may have been the residue of a state which was in a sense a shadow of good: the ability once in Sauron at least to admire or admit the superiority of a being other than himself. (Tolkien 1994: 397–398).

For Tolkien, the legitimacy to rule is situated in the spiritual region. As he explained, "In *The Lord of the Rings* the conflict is not basically about 'freedom', though that is naturally involved. It is about God, and His sole right to divine honour" (Tolkien 1981: 243).

We now need to turn to their spiritual orientations that provide consistency in their depictions of power.

5. Spirit of Nature in Shelley

A biography of Shelley informs us that "before he was 18 he had escaped what he saw as the tyranny of Christianity; during his 19th year he was rebelling against what he saw as his own father's tyranny; by the time he was 19 he was promoting the destruction of the tyranny of monarchy" (Worthen 2019: 8). The leitmotif is rebellion against any kind of *personal* authority. Shelley did not assert that there was no supernatural cause of life. He simply could not accept that this cause could in any way resemble a human person. Thus, in his poetry we find these two strains: asserting the impersonality of the Spirit of Nature while at the same time criticizing the personalized God of Christianity. Therefore, he writes of his Spirit of Nature as "Soul of those mighty spheres" (Shelley 2009: 31, ll. 228). Contrary to the Christian God the Father, Shelley's Spirit is "mother of the world! / Unlike God of human error" (ibid. 50, ll. 199–200). Shelley is constantly subversive of traditional Christian imagery. In *Laon and Cythna* "the narrator's visit to the temple of a goddess is one of the most characteristic tropes of infidel poetry, affirming simply by the change of sex the displacement of the God of orthodox religion" (Priestman 2004: 230). Furthermore,

> The Morning Star which becomes a serpent combines two of the traditional associations of Lucifer (i.e. 'light-bearer'); the image of a woman welcoming a serpent to her breast in a nurturing rather than a seductive context overthrows the whole debasing iconography of Eve in ways which the woman's prototype Mary Wollstonecraft might well have approved. (ibid. 231)

Lucifer is a Promethean figure to a certain degree, insofar as he is a *rebel*, and Shelley always sympathized with rebels. They included even the Devil from Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

> Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy – not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. (Shelley 2009: 692)

Interestingly enough, personality for Shelley matters only if it is clothed in the spirit of rebellion. Humans are meant to be individualized by refusing oppression to which a human face was attached. The Spirit is boundless with a touch of Hinduism in it, "Destroyer and Preserver", as he calls it in the "Ode to the West Wind" (ibid. 412, l. 13). Attaching a human face to this Spirit is for Shelley an act of reducing its mystery to all too human concerns. In "Laon and Cythna" we read:

> What then is God? ye mock yourselves, and give
> A human heart to what ye cannot know:
> As if the cause of life could think and live!
> 'Twere as if man's own works should feel, and show
> The hopes, and fears, and thoughts from which they flow,
> And he be like to them. (ibid. 177, ll. 3235–3240)

Shelley does not mind the teachings of Jesus Christ whom he saw as "a great reformer, and attributes to him a concept of God which he adopts as his own" (Jones 1947: 782). But he does not want to admit Christ was the divine principle itself, even though, as he grew older, he became more and more Christian in his spirituality:

> Whatever Shelley's limitations as man and poet, he takes his position among those like Plato and the Renaissance Platonists who have celebrated the victory of love over sensuality and force. And his concept links him also to the greatest figure of the Christian tradition, a fact which I think Shelley began somewhat tardily to realize as he approached his thirtieth year. (Baker 1940: 517)

For Shelley, personalism reduces divine energy to a human image which to him is blasphemous. Furthermore, the humanized God is at the same

time used as a justification for 'God on Earth' in the form of a monarch or a high priest. "To conceive of power in terms of personality was instinctively difficult for him; hence the abstractness and utter impersonality of the law of Necessity appealed to him" (Gingerich 1918: 451). In *Prometheus Unbound*, Jupiter, "the anthropomorphic God, created by Prometheus through error, personifies authority and institutions, and represents the Evil Spirit" (ibid. 463).

This impersonal Spirit would guarantee that no tyrant could hide behind it as monarchs had done in the past. This concept necessarily entails a specific conception of history that

> accrues all the characteristics that have become obstructive to modernity in Shelley's thought: partiality, particularity, temporality and cultural specificity. The domain of association – holding together memories and communities in the 'bond' of 'time, place, circumstance, cause and effect' – is dismissed absolutely. Without these five elements, it is hard to see how anyone or anything can remain bound to lived experience or associated with a particular place or people. Transcending such ephemeral limitations is the sine qua non of participating in universal progress. (Tomko 2011: 120)

Names are subjective and too specific for such a power that is beyond time and thus in "Mont Blanc" "an alpine mountain can teach humanity to replace a worship of tyrannical power with an awe for the more sublime "Power" of nature" (Miller 2005: 596), a "dynamic force, striving toward perfection, toward a future paradise" (Campbell 1972: 48). We could almost say that Shelley's cult of Nature is Republican[2] as

> Necessitarian processes revealed through an "authentic" response the landscape of the natural sublime expose the artificiality–the un-naturalness–of contemporary social structures (the product of „custom"): we are reminded of Queen Mab's contention that

[2] As a matter of comparison, the contemporary fantasy author, Philip Pullman, in his work, *His Dark Materials*, also presents an alternative spirituality in which 'the Kingdom of Heaven' is replaced with 'the Republic of Heaven'. In one of his recent books set in the same universe, the domain of supernatural beings is again secularized into 'The Secret Commonwealth'. Pullman is a self-confessed atheist though in fact his spirituality could be quite close to Shelley's as *His Dark Materials* are concluded with overturning God himself (actually, an angel pretending to be God).

> "Nature rejects the monarch, not the man; / The subject, not the citizen" (Queen Mab, III, I70–17I)." (Duffy 2003: 86).

This march of Spirit is much akin to Hegel's dialectical progression towards the Absolute Spirit (which curiously coincided with the Prussian state as the perfect form of government). We can find the same sentiment in another nineteenth century giant of literature, Victor Hugo, who also spoke of the spiritual evolution of mankind:

> Little by little, however, the world outgrew its first youth. Every realm expanded; the family became a tribe, the tribe a nation. Each of these groups of people gathered around a common centre, and kingdoms appeared. The nomadic impulse was replaced by the social impulse. Camps gave way to cities, tents to palaces, arks to temples. The leaders of these embryonic states were still shepherds, but shepherds of people; their shepherds' staffs were already starting to look like sceptres. Everything became settled and fixed. Religion assumed a form; prayer was dictated by rituals, worship by dogmas. Thus priest and king shared the fatherhood of their people; a theocratic society replaced a patriarchal one. (Hugo 2004: 18)

Shelley saw himself as a reformer of this state of things – this petrification of religiosity – and was at a time passing around a 'Declaration of Rights' which blended his religious and political thought:

> As the vehement attack in the Declaration suggests, there was a strongly political cast to Shelley's concern with heaven. Conceived as a kingdom, heaven merely replicated earthly notions of monarchy, empire, and class privilege; conceived as a divine reward, it enabled a cynical deferral of earthly justice, an illusory coda to life's struggles. (Miller 2005: 578)

In this way, Ozymandias "might as well be the name for an obsolete god rather than an earthly monarch, and Shelley is really dismissing both: gods bowed to as monarchs, and tyrants worshipped as gods" (Miller 2005: 580). Names themselves, elevated beyond signifiers for this or that person, are oppressive. In *Prometheus Unbound*, "Jupiter embodies monarchy and the related systems of political repression" (Webb 1976: 367). For this reason, he needed to be overturned.

Shelley does advocate for personality where it really matters to him: in human individuals. In 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (Version A), he makes a variation on Saint Paul's "Love, hope, and Faith" with his own "Love, Hope, and Self-esteem" (Shelley 2009: 37). Instead of worshipping a father figure in the heavens, humanity needs to take a high view of itself. No wonder Ozymandias was mocked, for he had forced his subject to bow before him, their faces lying low on the dust of the ground; and this dust had finally done away with Ozymandias himself and all his works.

6. God and his collaborators in Tolkien

God in Tolkien's work is quite different from Shelley's impersonal Spirit of Nature. What is essential about the Christian God is exactly his personality: the three persons of Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost; furthermore, we have the very concrete appearance of God in the figure of Jesus Christ. In Christianity, God takes personal interest in us to such a degree that he was willing to become human himself, eat with us, go to weddings, write in the sand, play with children, talk in the street.

Tolkien differs from Shelley in religious inspiration as well. Shelley's ineffable Spirit is worshipped in nature. Tolkien too admired the natural world and wrote some of the most beautiful passages describing the flora and fauna of Middle-earth. This seemingly relates him to the Romantic movement as "Tolkien's deep connection with nature (trees in particular) has been compared to Romanticism's spiritual communion with it" (Sherwood 2020: 21). However, Tolkien in no way *communes* with Nature. The only communion he could have imagined was with God: The Holy Communion.

There is also a difference in direction. On one hand, Shelley 'deduces' Spirit by observing the diversity of the natural world and realizing its fundamental unity. On the other hand, Tolkien starts from the spiritual world that descends into nature: his Valar and Maiar serve specific aspects of the created world: trees, air, water, the Sun, the Moon, fire, earth. It is the most 'comprehensive' spirit, Melkor – who has some knowledge of all the elements – who falls.

Furthermore, Tolkien barely knows of necessity that was essential to Shelley. *Doom* in Tolkien is always a sentence that follows a moral choice: the Doom of Mandos after the Elves have chosen to disobey; the doom of the Silmarils following Fëanor's rebellion. Túrin Turambar proudly called

himself the master of his own doom, but was mastered by it. Inevitability is thus a consequence of a previous action. We ourselves are producers of our own doom insofar as we follow or stray from the right path. The same goes for the powers that are called Valar in Tolkien's legendarium. They are

> not a group of automatons who mindlessly carry out Ilúvatar's will but rather an artistic group of subcreators whose imagination leads to a splendid harmony of chords. Rather than ruling in a fashion that is justified by his vast power, Ilúvatar takes pleasure through their actions, suggesting that the proper relationship between Creators and sub-creators (or authors and characters) is a collaborative one. (Saxton 2013: 170)

This collaboration encompasses humanity as well. The Russian philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev believed that after six days of Creation and the seventh day of rest, there comes *the eighth day of Creation* on which humans are awarded the opportunity to contribute to the world: "The Creator's idea of man is sublime and beautiful. So sublime and so beautiful is the divine idea of man that creative freedom, the free power to reveal himself in creative action, is placed within man as a seal and sign of his likeness to God, as a mark of the Creator's image" (Berdyaev 1962: 93–94). Tolkien makes a similar point in his lecture *On Fairy-stories*. Being made in God's image, we are awarded the opportunity to "assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation" (Tolkien 2008: 79). It is a point in which Tolkien's Christianity and Romanticism walk hand in hand: "Tolkien's defence of Fantasy is also a defence and, it may be, the last defence of the doctrine of the creative imagination, which brings the making of God and the making of man so close that they nearly touch..." (Reilly 2006: 211). Ilúvatar invites active participation in the process of creation. This is quite distinct from Shelley's attitude towards God, which carries assumptions that can be found in a most unlikely place: literary criticism. Roland Barthes had called for the 'death of the author' because according to him, the author is a God-figure dominating the meaning of the text. And yet,

> This analogy, however, is coloured by a few assumptions: first, that domination follows naturally from God's omnipotence and omnipresence; and second, that the author retains this omnipotence when he constructs a text. It is this (understandable) displeasure that leads Barthes to rebel against an Author-God whose unitary message precludes any interpretive freedom. (Saxton 2013: 174)

Shelley needed an all-pervading and impersonal Spirit as such an entity would not impose any particularity. This is not the assumption that Tolkien himself had about God. Ironically, the one who wanted to impose unity of will was exactly the spirit of rebellion, Melkor/Morgoth. Morgoth later presented himself as the real author of the story of the children of Húrin, implying that he had devised it all. Morgoth is the tyrannical god-king and author who imposes unitary meaning. Ilúvatar allows even Morgoth's interference in history ensuring that it leads to a higher harmony that Morgoth could have envisaged. Promethean figures are depicted negatively by Tolkien. The two most striking examples, Morgoth and Fëanor are too individualistic, wilful, stubborn and prone to fixation that blind them to everything else. It is because they cling to the beauty of the Silmarils that all other wonderful things become completely invisible to them. Great things are achieved in collaboration: Ilúvatar and the Ainur make the world together; Aule and Ilúvatar make the Dwarves; Sauron is confronted by a fellowship. Individuality in Tolkien is not cherished unless it works towards the good of the whole.

Tolkien also had a different view of history. Whereas Shelley's Spirit was optimistically progressing, Tolkien sees things the other way round: from the Garden of Eden history has been going downwards. Things get better in Shelley and they get worse in Tolkien: "… each community is also marked by a sense of loss or falling off, a dim awareness […] of the fragility of this borrowed time, and a sense of fatigue to face or change its fate. Further, ruins are the dominant metaphor within the initial world of the book." (Tomko 2010: 215). The world is sadly moving further away from the original light. And yet, the nostalgia that stems from Tolkien's spirituality emphasizes the preciousness of each individual thing. The fact that everything is so short-lived and all too easily swallowed by the darkness of the past adds to its value and uniqueness.

7. Conclusion: was Tolkien a Neo-Romantic?

There are many elements which connect Tolkien to the Romantics and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Both authors used the imagery of ruins; both admired and at times even worshipped nature; they were deeply spiritual, albeit in contrary ways.

It is important to note that Shelley, while being emblematic of Romanticism, does not represent the only approach to the ruins and their significance. In his Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron presents a more sympathetic approach, as he writes on the ruins of Venice's palaces: "Beauty still is here" (Byron 1904: 227). There is the Romantic religion of Nature once more "but Nature doth not die" (Ibid.). Later on, he writes with admiration and awe:

> But my soul wanders; I demand it back
> To meditate amongst decay, and stand
> A ruin amidst ruins; there to track
> Fall'n states and buried greatness… (Byron 1904: 230).

However, even Byron has passages that closely resemble Shelley. For instance, in the same Canto, the Mediterranean takes the role of the relentless sand of Shelley's poems, impassive as empires rise and fall:

> Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee–
> Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?
> Thy waters wash'd them power while they were free,
> And many a tyrant since… (Byron 1904: 251)

The spirit of Romanticism is not by necessity that of disdain towards the 'fall'n states and buried greatness'. However, it does provide a philosophical framework that Shelley could have used to justify this disdain. Shelley's political and spiritual views individuate him within the Romantic movement, just as Tolkien's views do not permit us to call him a (Neo-) Romantic.

Shelley and Tolkien had quite distinct attitudes towards the meaning of life. Shelley could not look at a broken statue of a king without mocking its glory as sheer vanity. That is a deep wisdom of *the Ecclesiastes*, "vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (1:2). On the other hand, Tolkien could not look without sympathy. This too is deep wisdom; one we can find in a work such as *Saint Erkenwald*. In this medieval poem, Saint Erkenwald feels such sympathy for a pagan judge born before Christ and refused Heaven for not having the chance to hear the Gospel: "To þe liche þer hit lay, wyt lauande teres" (Malcolm, Waldron, and Peterson 1993: 336, l. 315).[3]

[3] "Toward the body he bowed, then, and bathed it in tears." (Malcolm, Waldron, and Peterson 1993: 337).

Through earnest prayer of the saint proven honest by his tears, the judge's soul is raised from the tomb and given a new life in Heaven. In a similar fashion, Tolkien smiles upon the king of old – and the king is crowned again by sublime nature.

While Shelley urges us to look forward and be hopeful about the future, Tolkien may urge us to cherish the past and thus appreciate even this very moment that will one day be a long-distant past. The very act of looking backwards into the mists – and sands – of times past is something Tolkien may have owed to the Romantic movement, as an inspiration if not as a source of his political opinions and spiritual convictions.

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Received: 21 May 2024
Accepted for publication: 26 August 2024