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ANDRÉ BRETON AND J.R.R. TOLKIEN: SURREALISM, SUBCREATION AND FRODO'S DREAMS

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FOREWORD

The central thesis of this essay is the following: Tolkien knew and correctly understood the Surrealism of André Breton and, although he did not share its fundamental theoretical assumptions, he nevertheless included surrealist dream experiences in his work through the dreams of Frodo. This thesis will be demonstrated by dividing the study into three sections:

- the first section, which is of an essentially historical nature, will examine the development of Breton's Surrealism in England [1.1], gathering the main sources of his available thoughts in English, and demonstrating that the Inklings were well aware of this contemporary avant-garde [1.2];
- the second section, will explain what Surrealism meant to Breton [2.1], how well Tolkien understood this, and how his creative sub-theory turned out to be the opposite of the surrealist perspective [2.2];
- the third and final section, will show that, despite this diversity, the character of Frodo also includes typically modern and surrealist dream experiences [3.1-3.2].

It is hoped that this essay will be useful to Tolkienian studies as it tries to fill a gap: Surrealism is in fact one of the very few contemporary movements explicitly mentioned by Tolkien in texts published during his lifetime but, to date, there is no known article devoted to a comparative examination of Tolkien and Breton, Surrealism's main theoretical exponent.¹ This path, as will be demonstrated in the conclusion, could then be used to better understand the complex link between Tolkien and modernity.

1. BRETON, SURREALISM AND THE INKLINGS: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

In order to show that Tolkien knew and understood Surrealism as theorised by André Breton, it is necessary first to follow the steps that led this French avant-garde to England [1.1]: this will also allow examination of all works of Breton already available in the English language in the 1930s-40s. I will then demonstrate the Inklings' knowledge of the surrealist movement, with particular regard to implicit or explicit references found in J. R. R. Tolkien's [1.2] works, which will be analysed in the following sections [3-4].

1.1 BRETON AND SURREALISM IN ENGLAND UP TO THE 1940s

André Breton is unanimously recognised as the founder of Surrealism, a multifaceted, relevant movement, encompassing art, philosophy, psychology and politics. He wrote the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (Breton 1924), in which he described the theoretical basis of the movement, although the

¹ Within the following bibliographic sources, there are no articles or books containing the names of André Breton or Surrealism in their titles, with the exception of the essays by Testi 2016) and Organ 2018 (published during the revision of this essay): West 1981; Druot - Wynne 2000; *Tolkien Studies* I-XIV; *Hither Shore*, (2004-2016); Hammond - Scull 2006; Bertensam 2015; Druot - Wynne - Kalafarski and others 2002. I thank Wayne Hammond for his e-mail: "Neither of us can recall seeing any mention of a relationship between Tolkien and André Breton, or of seeing Breton's name mentioned in association with Tolkien, anywhere in the literature of Tolkien studies" (e-mail, 19th June 2017).

birth of this may be traced back to a few years earlier. In fact, as stated by Breton himself, the collection of narrative texts, *The Magnetic Fields* (Breton-Soupault 1920), though written in 1920, is already a surrealist work in its own right,² though written when he was still adhering to the DaDa movement,³ before rejecting it in 1922 (Galateria 1977, p.7).

In 1935 Surrealism, which was already well established in France thanks to Breton's many publications,⁴ launched in England⁵ with the publication of *A Short Survey of Surrealism* by David Gascoyne (Gascoyne and his friend Penrose had met Breton during the 1930s).⁶ Between February and June of the following year, the *Abstract and Concrete Show*, a touring exhibition showing, among other things, works by Mondrian and Miró, was held at various venues, including Oxford, home city of the Inklings (Remy 1999, p. 123). However, the main surrealist event at this time was held in London, from the 11th of June through the 4th of July 1936: the *International Surrealist Exhibition* boasted an imposing catalogue of 390 paintings and sculptures, including works by Dalí, Magritte, Ernst and Miró (with his *Arlequin's Carnival*: see fig. in 1.2). The event featured several lectures, including "*Limits, not Frontiers, for Surrealism*" by Breton himself (Schwarz 2014, p. 216). In the same year, three works by Breton were also published in English:

- the foreword to the catalogue for the London exhibit (Breton 1936i);
- the text of the lecture "*Limits not Frontiers for Surrealism*" (Breton 1936l), contained in the anthology *Surrealism* (Read 1936);
- *What is Surrealism?* (Breton 1936), a collection of Breton's texts on Surrealism containing "*What is Surrealism?*", "*The First Dalí Exhibition*", "*The Communicating vessels. The Phantom Object*" and "*Surrealism and Painting*" (Breton 1936b-c-d-e).

These events and publications had a considerable resonance in England. The London exhibition was visited by at least 25,000 people,⁷ with the English press sneering at the phenomenon, condemning it in part because some of the performances did not help credit it as a "serious" movement; for example, Dalí delivered a speech while wearing a deep sea diving suit,⁸ and the art magazine *Apollo* published negative reviews on the pamphlet *What is Surrealism*, stigmatizing, among other things, the fact that it contained a curse word on page 22.⁹ Nevertheless, more surrealist public events were organized in England. The 1937 *London Exhibition* showcased 118 surrealist artists, followed by two other exhibitions (Remy 1999, pp. 112 ff), so one can say that "Between June 1936 and the end of 1937, Surrealism thus established itself in Britain" (Remy 1999, p. 125). English Surrealism, especially in the works of Read and Davies, developed from the beginning into a movement characterised by a strong Marxist imprint aimed at transforming the world, rather than just being aware of it (Schwarz 2014, p. 220); Herbert Read, following Breton¹⁰, also "recruited" Lewis Carroll to the English proto-surrealists (Schwarz 2014, p. 217).

In 1938-40 twenty more exhibitions on Surrealism had been organized in England¹¹ while, in the world of publishing, it's worth mentioning the *London Bulletin*, a magazine founded in 1938, that published several issues with contributions in French by Breton (Remy 1999, pp. 148-155). For this

² Breton 1952; Fontanella 1979 p.7.

³ Elger 2016; Serafini 2015.

⁴ See Breton, 1925, 1928, 1929, 1932, 1934, 1936.

⁵ Before 1935, English Surrealism had only been mentioned sporadically in a few articles and copies (Schwarz 2014 pp. 213-15, Remy 1999 p. 36).

⁶ Schwarz 2014 p. 215. A fundamental study on English Surrealism is Remy 1999. I also consulted two theses on Surrealism in England up to the 1940s at the Bodleian Library of Oxford: Gee 1973; Talbot Hamilton 1987. On the dandy movement related to Harold Acton and Brian Howard, see: Green 1977 (and in particular pp. 259, 359 e 369 on the links with Surrealism).

⁷ Schwarz 2014 p. 216; Remy 2017 p. 74; Remy 1999 p. 78.

⁸ Remy 1999 pp. 76-77; Schwarz 2014 p. 221.

⁹ Schwarz 2014 p. 216.

¹⁰ Breton 1936b p. 61; Carroll is also included in Breton's *Anthology of Black Humor* (Breton 1966).

¹¹ Remy 1999 p. 149-150; Schwarz 2014 p. 225.

study, the exhibitions *Contemporary British Drawings* and *Surrealist Painting* are particularly noteworthy, because they were organized in Oxford in 1940.¹² This relentless activity reached its peak during this period: in the years 1942-43 De Rienzo was the curator of two exhibitions in London, “*Surrealism*” and “*New Road 1943*”.¹³

It is important to note that Surrealism blended with the English cultural world, where signs of an affinity for the concept of automatic writing [see below 2.1] were already present. For example: Bergson’s Vitalism (Talbot Hamilton 1987, p. 46), Freudian unconscious, Pound’s Vorticism (*ibid.* p. 67), Yeats’ *Anima Mundi* (*ibid.* p. 392), D.H. Lawrence’s daydream writings (*ibid.* p. 147), Martinetti’s telegraphic images (*ibid.* p. 140 ff.) and Isherwood’s self-hypnosis (Gee 1974, pp. 232 ff.), up to the “stream of consciousness” of Modernism (Talbot Hamilton 1987, pp. 191 ff.).

1.2. THE INKLINGS AND SURREALISM: EXPLICIT REFERENCES

Having considered the impact of Surrealism in England in the years 1936-43 (including three exhibitions in Oxford), it would be strange to find no traces of this movement in the writings of the Inklings. In fact, definite and explicit references are present. It is therefore pertinent to collect and comment on them, since they prove how much the Oxford circle knew of the more avant-garde movements of the time.

The surrealist show held in Oxford in 1936 (the *Abstract and Concrete Show*), and the impact of the first London exhibition in the same year, will most likely explain a note that C.S. Lewis wrote on a copy of *The Pilgrim’s Regress* in 1937: “Try the work of Gertrude Stein or Joyce’s Anna Livia Plurabella [sic] or *the surrealists*, Dadaists etc.” (Lewis 2014, p. 44, italics added; see also Lamp 2014, p. xiii).

In 1940, when the exhibitions *Contemporary British Drawings* and *Surrealist Paintings* were being held in Oxford, Lewis wrote to his brother Warnie (an Inkling himself):

“...such a mess of Dadaist, *Surrealists*, nonsense, blasphemy and decadence, as I could hardly have conceived possible” (Lewis 2004, vol. II p. 437, letter dated 4/8/1940, italics added)

¹² “[Mesens] in 1940 mounted *Surrealist Painting* at the *Oxford University Art Club*” (Schwartz 2014 p. 227; Levy 2005 p. 57); “in September, Mesens organized a *surrealist exhibition* at the *Oxford University Art Society*” (Remy 1999 p. 213; see also Remy 2017, p. 131 and Remy 1986, p. 69). I found as much information as I could on the subject. First, I wrote to Graeme Salmon of the Oxford Art Society, who answered me as follows: “I have searched in the Bodleian Library a collection of papers from the *Oxford Arts Club* from its foundation in 1922 until its winding up in 1940/ 41. There was no evidence of a surrealist exhibition although the club had held over 160 loan exhibitions over the years. There was no exhibition in 1940 due to lack of premises, but members were offered invitations to exhibitions of the *Contemporary Art Society* in 1940 and to two exhibitions in 1941. In 1938 there was the 156th exhibition of Buddhist sculpture from Siam shown by the *Oxford Arts Club* run jointly with the *New Oxford Art Society*. Perhaps the latter became known as the *Oxford University Art Club* [...]. Not very useful with confusion of names but your *Oxford University Art Society* could be the same as the “New OAS”” (e-mail of July 24th, 2017; on the activity of the Oxford University Art Club see Wrigley 1979). Salmon also suggests: “May to August 1940: *Contemporary British Drawings* organized in cooperation with the *Oxford Arts Club* at the Ashmolean museum” (e-mail of July 20th, 2017). I also wrote to Stuart Inman, of the London Surrealist Group, who put me in touch with Michel Remy, the most prominent expert of English Surrealism. He answered the following: “I have no particular detail on the exhibition which ELT [Mesens] organized in Oxford in Autumn 1940. You gather that documents must be rare given the war conditions and the shortage of paper” (e-mail of August 3rd, 2017). I also wrote to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and they confirmed the exhibit *Contemporary British Drawings* was held between May and August 1940 (they also had found traces of an exhibit held in 1943 by the *Oxford Art Society*: www.ashmolean.org/sites/default/files/ashmolean/documents/media/wapastexhibition.pdf, checked 6th October 2017). I’m inclined to identify the various societies in one single society named differently (*Oxford University Art Club*, *Oxford University Art Society*, *Oxford Art Club*, *Oxford Art Society*, *New Oxford Art Society*) and validate the suggestion that the exhibitions were two, one on Surrealism (*Surrealist Painting* or *Surrealist Exhibition*) and the other one on *Contemporary British Drawings* (May-August 1940). If the latter exhibition had shown surrealist drawings or if the former had started before August, it could be supposed that C.S. Lewis wrote to his brother Warnie after visiting one or even both exhibitions.

¹³ Schwarz 2014, p. 233; another exhibition was held in London in 1945: the London Gallery closed in 1951 (Murray 1986, p. 69). However, English Surrealism is still alive, as shown by Wilson (2008).

Lewis also quotes Surrealism in 1943 in his foreword to the third Edition of *The Pilgrim's Regress* (first published in 1933), writing that "Surrealism is 'romantic'" (Lewis 2018, p. x, italics added). Sometime later he explains this facet of the word in the map attached to *The Pilgrim's Regress*, where North stands for excessive rigidity and South for *intoxication, dream and opium* (Lewis 2018, p. xv). In the same map one can find "the apostles of instinct and even of gibberish" (Lewis 2018, p. xv); in this regard, he affirms in a bold and fierce way:

D.H. Lawrence and the *Surrealists* have perhaps reached a point further 'South' than humanity ever reached before [...] With the 'North' and the 'South' a man has, I take it, only one concern – to avoid them (Lewis 2018, p. xv-xvi)

In the same period, 1943-44, C.S. Lewis wrote *That Hideous Strength* (Green-Hooper 2002, p. 204; the book was then published in 1945), in which there is another explicit reference to "surrealistic pictures",¹⁴ further demonstrating how central this theme was to the soul of the Inklings at that time. As is known, Lewis' book was greatly influenced by Charles Williams who, in 1943, critiqued an essay by Herbert Read¹⁵, prominent theorist of English Surrealism and first translator of a text by Breton¹⁶ (Read 1936).

Later, Owen Barfield, according to Reilley, described Surrealism in a negative way, similar to C.S. Lewis (who still did so in 1954 in *De Descriptione Temporum*¹⁷):

Barfield himself warned of the *Surrealists* who could usher in a "fantastically hideous world" with their "pictures of a dog with six legs emerging from a vegetable marrow or a woman with a motor-bicycle substituted for her left breast." (Reilley 2006, p. 65, italics added)¹⁸

Regarding Tolkien, one does not have any proof that he ever visited the exhibitions in London and Oxford, nor is there any knowledge of his literary sources on the subject; however, *it is likely he visited a few exhibitions on Surrealism and read a few of Bretons' works*, especially if one considers that:

- according to Hammond and Scull, "[Tolkien] had produced art, for example *Beyond* painted in January 1914, with the distinct flavour of Surrealism years before Apollinaire coined the term" (Hammond- Scull 1995, p.11), as the following pictures show.

¹⁴ "Every fold of drapery every piece of architecture, had a meaning one could not grasp but which withered the mind. Compared with these, the other *surrealistic* pictures were mere foolery." (C.S. Lewis, 2015 Ch. 14.1, p. 276, italics added). For an examination of the passage, in which C.S. Lewis' narrative approaches the technique of automatic messages typical of Surrealism, see Hodges 1982.

¹⁵ "They [Williams and his friend Heath-Stubbs] discussed Victorian poets and agreed in disliking Herbert Read's psychoanalytic approach to Wordsworth" Lindop 2015, p. 365. On Read, Breton and English Surrealism see Ray 1966.

¹⁶ Breton 1936, p. 1.

¹⁷ "I do not think that any previous age produced work which was, in its own time, as shatteringly and bewilderingly new as that of the Cubists, the Dadaists, the *Surrealists*, and Picasso has been in ours" (Lewis 1954, italics added): on this matter see Zaleski-Zaleski 2016, p. 445.

¹⁸ Reilley 2006, p. 65. The text in quotation marks is from Barfield 1988, ch xxi p. 145-146. It's worth remembering that the first edition of *Saving the Appearances* is from 1957.



J.R.R. Tolkien Beyond 1914



Mirò, Arlequin's Carnival
1924-25 (part)

- when he gave the lecture “*On Fairy-stories*” in 1939, Surrealism had already reached Oxford by way of the *Abstract and Concrete Show* and the impact generated by the London Exhibition of 1936;
- note E of “*On Fairy-stories*”, where Surrealism is explicitly mentioned [see next section], was written in 1943¹⁹ after the exhibitions *Contemporary British Drawings* and *Surrealist Painting* was held in Oxford;
- Tolkien assigns much more attention to the theme of dreams in the years 1936-45, the apex of English Surrealism, during which he writes as narrator:
 - two stories where the device of dreams for time travelling is central (*Lost Road*: 1936-37; *NCP*: 1944-45),
 - the short novel *Leaf by Niggle*, whose content he grasps in a dream and which also has dream-like qualities (LN: 1942²⁰),
 - *The Lord of the Rings* (1937-46), where several surrealist passages can be observed [3.2].

The following table summarises the above, placing the development of Surrealism in England and explicitly linking the writings of the Inklings to Surrealism or to writings that discuss central themes of the surrealist movement, such as the theme of dreaming [2.1].

¹⁹ Flieger-Anderson 2008 pp. 126-128. In a private e-mail (25th June 2017) Verlyn Flieger confirms: “I can’t say with exactitude when Tolkien wrote Note E, but it’s pretty clear when he didn’t write it, and that is in 1939. Manuscript A, the closest we can come to what Tolkien said at St. Andrews, is the draft of a talk, not a printed essay, and logic would suggest that the Notes, essentially commentary on the main text, would have been added in preparation for publication, probably around 1943.”

²⁰ As is known, Tolkien stated that he wrote the story impulsively after dreaming its content (“I woke up one morning (more than 2 years ago) with that odd thing virtually complete in my head”: *Letters* n. 98) and, even within the text, there were surreal elements because of its “dream-like qualities” (see Organ 2018, p. 2, for a complete examination of the story). On the composition date of *Leaf by Niggle*, see Scull-Hammond 2006, p. 495.

SURREALISM IN ENGLAND	INKLINGS
1936: - Oxford: <i>Abstract and Concrete Show</i> - London: 1st <i>Surrealist Exhibition</i> - BRETON publishes, in English, <i>What is Surrealism?</i> and other writings	1936-37: JRRT writes <i>The Lost Road</i>
1937: London: 2nd <i>Surrealist Exhibition</i>	1937: CSL annotates his <i>A Pilgrim Regress</i>
1938-40: 20 surrealist exhibitions	1937-46: JRRT writes <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> 1938-39: JRRT: Conference <i>On Fairy Stories</i>
1940: Oxford: <i>Contemporary British Drawings, Surrealist Paintings</i>	1940: CSL writes to Warnie Lewis 1942: JRRT writes <i>Leaf by Niggle</i>
1943: New Road Exhibition in London	1943: CSL: preface to <i>A Pilgrim Regress</i> - Williams on the English Surrealist H. Read -JRRT writes note E of <i>OFS</i> 1944-45: JRRT writes <i>The Notion Club Papers</i> 1954-57: CSL and Barfield vs/ Surrealism

2. SURREALISM VS SUB-CREATION: TOLKIEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF BRETON'S AESTHETIC

After demonstrating that C.S. Lewis, Warnie Lewis, Charles Williams, probably Owen Barfield, and certainly J.R.R. Tolkien, were aware of Surrealism, one now needs to understand Breton's Surrealism [2.1] to see if the author of *The Lord of the Rings* understood it well and accepted or refuted its premises [2.2]. For this reason, it is considered necessary first of all to briefly describe the complex bases of Breton's philosophical-aesthetic theory, chiefly citing within the body of the following section those Breton texts that had been translated into English at the time Tolkien was writing *On Fairy Stories*, and which are therefore likely to have been read by him.

2.1. WHAT IS SURREALISM?

For André Breton, the origin of the particular work of art lay mainly in its subject, in particular those experiences originating in the individual's unconscious, that cannot be brought back to the rational plane. Thus, he spoke of the experience of an *automatic message* (an apparently meaningless phrase originating in the subconscious²¹) which in turn drove him towards surrealist artistic research:

One evening in particular, as I was about to fall asleep, I became aware of *a sentence* articulated clearly to point excluding all possibly alteration and stripped of all quality of vocal sound; *a curious sort of sentence* which came to me bearing – in sober truth – not a trace of any relation whatever to any incidents I may at that time have been involved in; *an insistent sentence*, it seems

²¹ See also Breton 1925 and Breton 1934, where he writes about how the automatic message does not arise from an external voice but instead from two inner voices surfacing in the mind of the surrealist writer; the same also applies to the mystical experiences of Saint Teresa of Avila: “Unfortunately, she’s still only a saint” (ibid. p. 167).

to me, a sentence I might say, that *knocked at the window*. (Breton 1936b, p. 57, see also Breton 1924, p. 21, italics added).²²

These experiences can also originate from situations bordering on the pathological and even manifest into hallucinations:

I believe that men will long continue to feel the need of following to its source the magical river following from their eyes, bathing with the same *hallucinatory light* and shades both the things that are and the things that are not (Breton 1936e, p. 18, italics added).

This explains Breton's great admiration for Salvador Dalí, of whom Breton said: "The art of Dalí, the most hallucinatory known."²³

The task of the Surrealist is then to express these experiences, making them real (or rather "surreal"), as indicated by the below famous definition of Surrealism which Tolkien could have read:

B: Surrealism, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, *in absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupation* (Breton 1936b, p. 59; Breton 1924 p. 26).

In this landscape, the theme of dreaming becomes one of the cornerstones of Surrealism and would require a complete in-depth analysis.²⁴ However, since our main interest lies in the Tolkienian perspective of this subject, I will summarize Breton's *Communicating Vessels*, a masterful analysis of the sleep-wake relation, excerpts of which are available in English (Breton 1936b). Here he conceives Dreams (A) and Wake (not-A)²⁵ as two irreconcilable opposites that should not be confused,²⁶ nor should it be possible to confuse them, unless in the presence of mental pathologies²⁷ [see 3.1.3) below]. In the first part of the book, Breton analyses a few of his dreams in order to show how the oneiric activity is connected to experiences made during the waking-state with no "supernatural" revelations [see 3.1.2)].

In the second part of the book he shows how the waking-state and the perception of the outer world may at times take on an oneiric aspect, whether this be as a hallucination or an automatic message [see 3.1.4)]. This was the case in an experience he once had when he was in a coffee shop and saw a beautiful, almost ethereal, woman. He saw her only once but this was still enough for him to think of her as an ideal woman whose face at times appeared to him in wake-state. He also recalled other similar experiences, such as the strange images that appeared to him in wake-state, one of them being the image of an envelope with eyelashes and a handle [see note 22], or the nonsensical phrases he

²² Another famous "phantom object" Breton witnessed was "an empty envelope, white or of a very light colour, unaddressed, closed up and sealed in red [...] fringed with eyelashes along the right edge and presenting a handle for picking it up with on the left" (Breton 1936d p. 33).

²³ Breton 1936c p. 30. See also the paranoid-critical interpretation of the Angel by Millet (Dalí 1963). Miró too speaks of the hallucinations caused by starvation as the inspirational source for his famous *Carnival of Harlequin*, shown in London in 1936 ("How did I think up my drawings and my ideas for painting? Well I'd come home to my Paris studio in Rue Blomet at night, I'd go to bed, and sometimes I hadn't any supper. I saw things, and I jotted them down in a notebook. I saw shapes on the ceiling...": quoted in Mink 2000 p. 43).

²⁴ On the theme of dreams in Breton's works see: Sarane 1974 (a fundamental work for the understanding of this theme: it maintains that the originality of Surrealism lay in the re-evaluation of the dreaming state: p. 8); Margani 1976, pp. 8 ff. and 83 ff.; Passeron 2002; Galateria 1977, pp. 99 ff.

²⁵ "I believe in the future transformation of those two seemingly contradictory states, dream and reality, into a sort of absolute reality, or surreality" (Breton 1936b, p. 67).

²⁶ Positivists restrict the idea of dreaming to a downgraded state of waking; idealists consider the wake-state a form of partial dream (Breton 1932, pp. 10 ff.).

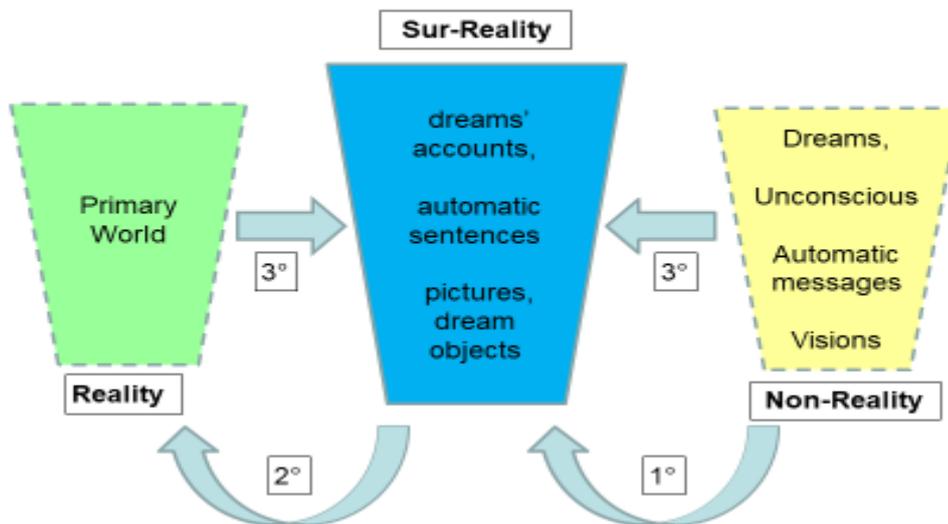
²⁷ Breton distances himself from Pascal who, along with Descartes, maintained that there was no way to demonstrate the distinction between the states of dreaming and being awake (Breton 1932, 106-108).

heard, as if resounding from within, such as: “In the regions of the Far North, under the smoking lamps...wandering, waiting for you, Olga.” (Breton 1932, p. 100)

In the third part of *The Communicating Vessels* Breton affirms that the revolutionary and innovative task of Surrealism is that of modifying both the interpretation and the social structures of the world, in order to transform it into a place where the wishes of each individual can be fulfilled, something that in Freud’s theory could only happen in dreams (“a dream is a fulfilled wish”: Freud 2010, p. 171). In light of this, it is easy to understand how an account of dreams (like Breton 1923 and Breton 1934b) or of an hallucination while in wake-state,²⁸ just as much as representation through dream-objects (paintings, sculptures, etc.) of images resulting from paranoid and altered states, may also reach the status of works of art, because they both aim to establish a link in *sur-reality* between two worlds: reality and non-reality [3.1.5]. This also explains Breton’s many references to magic, intended as an out-of-the-ordinary activity with no supernatural qualities but immanent in the world and capable of transforming reality: in Breton 1936b (p. 65) he enumerates the “secrets of Surrealistic Magic”, that is the techniques of “magical arts” (see Breton 1957) which Surrealists frequently referred to – such as automatic writing, for one.

I would summarize the logic structure of Surrealism as follows, where the two vessels of reality and non-reality are synthetized into sur-reality:

- 1° main source of inspiration is the vessel of non-reality, which includes dreams, hallucinations, subconscious, automatic messages;
- 2° surrealist art is the expression of this non-real dimension which uses paintings, writings and other oneiric objects to *populate* and change primary reality, and also through political action;
- 3° a concrete synthesis between the two vessels of real and non-real, which are in this way dialectically synthesized in the dimension of sur-reality:



²⁸ See the second part of *Communicating Vessels*, the already quoted passage in *The Magnetic Fields*, or the collections of automatic texts, *The Immaculate Conception* (Breton-Eluard 1930).

If the main purpose of art is the concrete expression of the deepest levels of the ego and subconscious, however, what follows as a consequence is Breton's rejection of the novel (made as it is of plot, characters and descriptions) as a surrealistic form of art:

By contrast, the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France, clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loathe it, for it is made up of mediocrity, hate, and dull conceit. It is this attitude which today gives birth to these ridiculous books, these insulting plays [...] *And the descriptions! There is nothing to which their vacuity can be compared* (Breton 1924, pp. 6-7, italics added).

Descriptive novels should give way to the authentic expression of subjectivity and subconscious outpourings from automatic writing, paranoia and dreams (Breton 1924, p. 7), which in literary terms does result in texts that are meaningless to the common reader and thus bring about the destruction of classic narrative literature.²⁹

Further, if art is also supposed to "magically" change the world, Breton must have despised fairy-stories and their dimension of escapism (Breton 1924, p. 16), which were in contrast fundamentally important to J.R.R. Tolkien.

2.2. TOLKIEN'S SUB-CREATION

Tolkien was certainly aware of these surrealistic theses, and quotes them explicitly and accurately in *OFS* while, at the same time, distancing himself from them. It is well known that he, in his famous essay, explained how Fantasy is better obtained through literature than painting; a representation of Fantasy in painting is much easier to obtain – and it is exactly this ease that causes paintings to prevail over the mind and fills it with vacuous and unsound images:

In human art Fantasy is a thing best left to words, to true literature. In painting, for instance, the visible presentation of the fantastic image is technically too easy; the hand tends to outrun the mind, even to overthrow it ^{Note E}. Silliness or morbidity are frequent results. (*OFS* n. 70 p. 61)

In note E he explicitly mentioned Surrealism as an example of morbid art, one where even the mind itself – and not only in the final result – was already morbid:

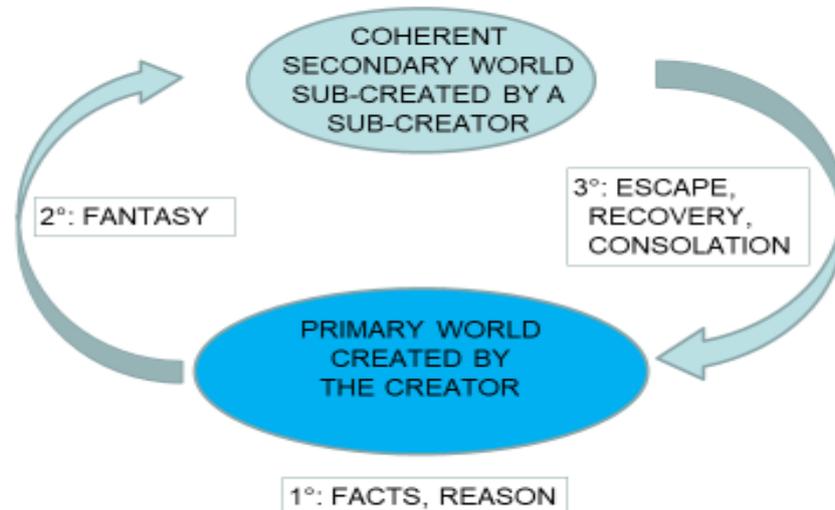
There is, for example, in *Surrealism* commonly present a *morbidity* or un-ease very rarely found in literary fantasy. The *mind* that produced the depicted images may often be suspected to have been in fact *already morbid*; yet this is not a necessary explanation in all cases. A curious disturbance of the mind is often set up by the very act of drawing things of this kind, a state similar in quality and consciousness of morbidity to the sensations in a high fever, when the mind develops a distressing fecundity and facility in figure-making, seeing forms sinister or grotesque in all visible objects about it. (*OFS* n. 112, pp. 81-82, italics added)

The above two passages demonstrate Tolkien's deep understanding of painting in general (as a decent and assiduous painter himself, Tolkien must have personally experienced what he was affirming), and of Surrealism in particular, which – unlike Tolkien – accepts altered states of mind among its primary sources of artistic production³⁰ [2.1.1]. Precisely for this reason, Tolkien could not

²⁹ As an example, see the phrase Breton deemed the most beautiful in *The Magnetic Fields* (annotation to Breton 1920, quoted in Margani 1976, p. 206): "The window carved in our flesh opens on to our heart. There can be seen an enormous lake on which at noon russet dragon-flies re-fragrant as peony-finches come to settle. What is that big tree around which the animals go to look at one another." (Breton 1920, p.29)

³⁰It should be remembered that Tolkien also has a sort of automatic message at the origin of his works: just think of *The Hobbit* which, as we know, originated from the apparently meaningless phrase, "In a hole in the ground there lived a

accept the surrealist concept of art, since he considered the sub-creative activity of Fantasy one that is not opposed to Reason or to knowledge of the primary world, but rather as arising from the primary world [1° below] and then sub-creating, with the Fantasy a coherent and rational secondary world that the reader can enter into [2°]. But this would also help one to live (Escape) and perceive (Recovery) the same primary world in a more confident manner (Consolation) [3°], without the desire to change it with Magic: all this without a dialectical synthesis, which develops on a horizontal level only [2.1.3°], but instead maintaining the "vertical" and analogical difference between creation and sub-creation³¹:



For this reason, Tolkien does not attribute any literary value to dream accounts,³² so dear to Breton (as is the case with *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, which, on the contrary, was much appreciated by Surrealists: see note 10) and distinguishes the mythopoesis of Fantasy from hallucinations and dreams:

Hobbit" (*Letters* No. 163) or Tolkien's phonaesthetics, according to which some phrases are beautiful regardless of their meaning (*EFS* pp. 63-71; see also Fimi-Higgins 2016 and Smith Ross 2007).

Regarding automatic messages, there aren't any explicitly mentioned in Tolkien's writings, with the exception of one line in a manuscript edited in *Vice* where he, after commenting on Joyce's stream of consciousness ("a mere pattern visualized (without interpretation) – even from a point of view of normalities of visible word disjointed or artificial or 'monstrous'. Not possible with meaning": *Vice* p. 91)], writes: "'Random Thought' – is satanic and anarchic" (*Vice* p. 91). It's hard to define what Tolkien really meant with this line (see Fimi 2018 pp. 15-17); as a matter of fact, if one analyses the two adjectives used by Tolkien, the result is the following:

- "satanic" could stand for "dividing", from the translation of the Hebrew word "satan" in the Greek Bible *Septuaginta*, and later in the Latin edition, with "diabolus", which means "the one who divides";
- "anarchic", on the other hand, would stand for randomness lacking a specific logic pattern.

Tolkien may then be referring to a random, unconnected thought, which would describe automatic writing – and not to stream of consciousness, which has its own sort of unity – even though the note supposedly dates back to the early '30s, before the spread of Surrealism in England.

³¹ On this theme, see Testi 2016.

³² To the present day, the most important work on Dream in Tolkien is Flieger 1997. See also: Amend-Raduege 2006; Greene 1996; Lindsay 1987; Schorr 1983. For a short overview on Dream, see Lodbell 2007.

...if a waking writer tells you that his tale is only a thing imagined in his sleep, he cheats deliberately the primal desire at the heart of Faërie: the realization, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder [...] So are Lewis Carroll's *Alice* stories, with their dream-frame and dream-transitions (*OFS* n. 17 p. 35).

Many people [...] therefore, *stupidly and even maliciously confound Fantasy with Dreaming, in which there is no art; and with mental disorders, in which there is not even control: with delusion and hallucination* (*OFS* n. 67 p. 60, italics added).

As a consequence, Tolkien's narrative, unlike Breton's, is focused on the most detailed description of secondary worlds conceived as extremely rational structured sub-realities, where stories are told in a "classic" framework made of plots, characters, languages and accurately described settings.

At this point it can therefore be said that *Tolkien knew and understood Breton's Surrealism, although his sub-creative theory is almost opposite*. This does not imply a radical rejection of Surrealism: in the next section, I will show how some essentially surrealist themes of dream experiences [3.1] must have deeply impressed and interested Tolkien, so much so that there are traces within his masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*, and in particular with the character of Frodo [3.2].

3. SURREALISM IN SUB-CREATION: FRODO AS SURREALIST

The link between Frodo and the theme of dreams has been noted by important authors such as Richard West (West, 1967) and Verlyn Flieger (Flieger 1997). The latter fully analyzes this, stating:

And so the *Hobbits* seem an odd example of cultural response to a period that encouraged the rebellion of Isadora Duncan and Nijinsky, the iconoclasm of Picasso and Braque, the innovation of Joyce and Elliot; a time that gave birth to *Surrealism* [...] "Astonish me" Diaghileff challenged Cocteau, and Cocteau obliged with sharply *surreal*, disjunct scenarios that shocked and disoriented as well as enchanted his audiences. Do *Hobbits* belong in such company? Yes. They do. They are a response to a response, and this is a continuation of the dialogue (Flieger 1997, pp. 12-13, italics added).

Personally, I fully agree with this thesis; however, I would like to add another critical element, classifying Frodo's dreams in *LotR* (already well analyzed in Lindsay 1987) according to a chronological criterion. In other words, after a brief, but necessary, history of dreams in Western culture [3.1], I will show that Frodo experiences all the dream experiences characteristic of the different historical periods [3.2], including those which were essentially surrealist, as analyzed by André Breton.

3.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF DREAMS UP TO BRETON AND J.R.R. TOLKIEN

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the dream theme in Breton and Tolkien, I will start with a brief overview on the history of dreams (see Mancina 1998) to describe how this was dealt with by the dominant and official culture of the day throughout various time periods,³³ identifying six fundamental types of oneiric experience.

³³ The category of prophetic dreams, for instance, was typical of ancient times and was rejected by modern psychoanalysis, although it persists in our contemporary esoteric and folk culture as is shown by the great number of *books on dreams* still published with the intent of providing the key to divination of the future.

Oneiric experiences of ancient times can be classified into two main groups:

- 1) prophecies or visions not based on experiences when awake (Artemidorus,³⁴ ancient Egypt³⁵);
- 2) expressions of physical and psychic phenomenon (Aristotle³⁶).

Later, Judeo-Christian culture mainly emphasized the first aspect of dreams, where prophecies and visions were thought to be directly connected with supernatural spiritual entities – God, angels, or even demons – as can be seen in the story of Joseph interpreting the Pharaoh's dreams,³⁷ or the revelation given in dreams to the Three Wise Men and Saint Joseph.³⁸

In Medieval times (see Kruger 1992), Thomas Aquinas, Aristotelian philosopher and Doctor of the Church, developed a synthesis of the two perspectives.³⁹

After the Renaissance (including Gerolamo Cardano among others), forming a bridge between the middle ages and modern times, from Cartesius onward, dreams were interpreted as events of a physiologic-psychic nature and, for the first time, attention was drawn to a theme typical of modern times:

- 3) the impossibility of drawing a clear boundary between sleep and wakefulness:

Attentively considering those cases I perceive so clearly that there exists no certain marks by which the state of waking can ever be distinguished from sleep, that I feel greatly astonished (Descartes 1913, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, 1st meditation, p.24).

The peak of modern thought on dreams was certainly reached by Freud, with his depth of insight and the cultural influence of his studies on dreams. He praised Aristotle and accepted only the second ancient concept of dreams,⁴⁰ which automatically excludes the concept of dreaming as prophetic revelation.⁴¹ Breton, as seen earlier in the first part of *The Communicating Vessels*, followed the path set by Freud⁴² but, in the second and final part of the book, bestowed a central role to two oneiric experiences which, therefore, can be defined as being essentially surrealist:

³⁴ “Dream differs from oneiric vision in that the former is a hint to what is to come, the latter of what exists at present” (Artemidoro 2002, p. 211).

³⁵ See Bresciani 2005, quoting long excerpts from the Dream Book, a sort of handbook for helping to predict future events through the interpretation of dreams. In ancient Egypt, dreams were also considered dangerous *places* where encountering the spirits of the dead was possible. However, this aspect of the oneiric experience will not be taken into consideration in this essay.

³⁶ “As for the divination that takes place during periods of sleep and is said to be based on dreams, it is not easy either to despise it or to believe in it. [...] For, apart from its general irrationality, the idea that it is God who sends dreams, and yet that he sends them not to the best and most intelligent, but to random people, is absurd.” (Aristotle 1996, 462b12-26; see also Aristotle 1957)

³⁷ *Genesis* 40-41: at the beginning, Joseph interprets the dreams of Egyptian officers, then those of the Pharaoh (the most famous being a dream of seven fat cows and seven lean cows, indicating seven years of abundance and seven of famine).

³⁸ Mt 1, 20 (an angel appears to Joseph to reassure him about Mary's pregnancy); Mt 2.12-13 (the Three Wise Men are warned in a dream to not return to Herod).

³⁹ See for instance the argument by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* (Aquinas 1985, II.II art. 95 q. 6).

⁴⁰ “In the two works of Aristotle which deal with dreams, they have already become a subject for psychological study. We are told that dreams are not sent by the gods and are not of a divine character, but that they are ‘daemonic’, since nature is demonic and not divine. Dreams, that is, do not arise from supernatural manifestations but follow the laws of human spirit.” (Freud 2010 chapter 1, pp. 36-37)

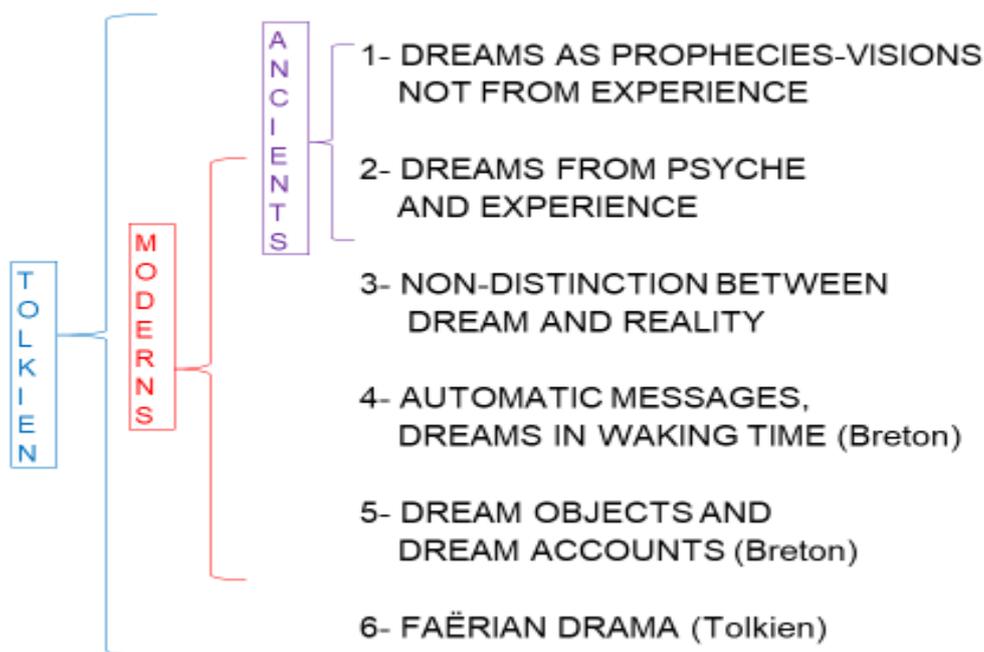
⁴¹ “And the value of dreams for giving us knowledge of the future? There is of course no question of that. It would be truer to say instead that they give us knowledge of the past. For dreams are derived from the past in every sense.” (Freud 2010, p. 615, italics added).

⁴² He also had an exchange of correspondence with Freud, although Freud was never shown to hold the surrealist movement in any great esteem (see Perazzi 1973).

- 4) the experience of oneiric moments in a state of wake (Breton's automatic messages or visions while in a wake state [2.1]);
- 5) the generating of dream accounts or oneiric objects into reality (Breton and the production of surrealist art [2.1]).

Concerning Tolkien, in the next section I will examine how in *The Lord of the Rings* and with the character of Frodo, one can find all of the five types of dream, both ancient and modern and, in addition, one specifically Tolkienian oneiric experience: the Faërian Drama, which also contains some surrealist elements in its structure.

In short:



3.2. FRODO AS SURREALIST

Before analyzing Frodo's dreams, it's necessary to distinguish between the denial of artistic value Tolkien attached to this oneiric activity (already mentioned in 2.2) and how he used it within his narrative. Tolkien frequently returns to dreams in his narrative, at least when conceived:

- as a device for providing an account of time traveling: this is the case with the unfinished stories *The Lost Road* (1936-37) and *The Notion Club Papers* (1944-45), written during the golden years of English Surrealism and contemporary to *OFS* [see 1.1];
- as a founding element of his narrative, where dream assumes a fundamental role, starting with *The Silmarillion* – where Irmo-Lórien the Vala of dreams (S, Valaquentia) names Galadriel's reign – up to *The Lord of the Rings*.⁴³

⁴³ I will not analyze "minor" works here such as *Leaf by Niggle* (see Organ 2018 and note 20) or *Smith of Wootton Major*. Of the latter, though, it is worth mentioning that Smith lives near a lake in Faërie with a particularly oneiric aspect, and

In *LotR*, there are 131 occurrences of the word *dream* and its derived forms (dream-ing, dream-ed, etc.) and there are 97 described oneiric experiences of 22 characters: of these, 37 (38.1%) concern Frodo, who experiences all six oneiric types in the history of dreaming [3.1].

1) With Frodo, we find the ancient idea of dream not derived from experience [3.1.1]), such as prophetic revelation (rejected by the modern), as Amend-Raduege already observed (Amend-Raduege 2006, p. 47); when Frodo is in Tom Bombadil's house, he receives the revelation of his future departure from the Grey Havens.⁴⁴ Frodo's dreams also contain visions which cannot be derived from experience, the first of which occurs before leaving the Shire, when "strange visions of mountains that *he had never seen* came into his dreams" (*FR I.2. The shadow of the past*, italics added). In his second vision, in Crickhollow, while asleep he hears "the sound of the Sea far-off; a sound *he had never heard in waking life*" and observes a tower he has never seen before.⁴⁵ Another dream that can be classified as a dream-vision occurs in the Dead Marshes: "He had been dreaming. The dark shadow had passed, and a *fair vision* had visited him in this land of disease. Nothing remained of it in his memory, yet because of it he felt glad and lighter of heart" (*TT IV.2. The Passage of the Marshes*, italics added).

In the *LotR*, there are also dreams concerning visions of past events that the subject has never experienced⁴⁶: in the chapter *In the House of Tom Bombadil*, Frodo dreams about Gandalf escaping from Orthanc, which had happened eight days before.⁴⁷

However, with regards to these dreams that haven't been derived from experience, it is important to emphasize that no explicit mention is given to intervention from supernatural forces (be they Eru, Valar or Maiar) that could have explained the origin of these prophecies and visions: this brings Tolkien closer to the modern Surrealists and Breton, who *explicitly* rejected the possibility of revelations or visions linked to a supernatural plane [2.1 and note 21].⁴⁸

2) With Frodo, we also find descriptions of dreams that can be explained in the light of experiences lived during wake-state; that is, according to the interpretation set out in ancient times by Aristotle and shared by the majority of modern authors, and Breton himself [3.1.2]). This is the case with the dream Frodo has in Rivendell after the ambush at the ford, an "unpleasant dream" during which, as Gandalf reports to him afterwards, he talks out loud, in an almost delirious state, of events which occurred in the preceding days (*FR II. Many Meetings*). In the same line, it is possible to classify Frodo's dream of the pale eyes he saw during the journey through the darkness of Moria, having been scarcely able to believe what he was seeing.⁴⁹ The dream Frodo has about the Shire and the Black

how the old cook thinks his encounter with the king of the Elves was a dream. However, in his comments, Tolkien denied that Smith's sojourn in Faërie occurred in a dream dimension (*SWM* p. 86).

⁴⁴ *FR I.8. Fog on the Barrow-Downs*. Another prophetic revelation is the dream shared by Bomir and Faramir, which allows Boromir to find the sword that was broken, in Imladris (*FR II.2. The Council of Elrond*).

⁴⁵ *FR I.3. Three is Company*. For a comment on this text, see Hammond– Scull 2005, pp. 119-120.

⁴⁶ Only later, during the Council of Elrond, Frodo realizes he had dreamt of a past event (*FR II.2. The Council of Elrond*).

⁴⁷ Although this is not a real dream, it is important to remember the episode of the Mirror of Galadriel, where the ships Frodo sees approaching are most likely those of the Númenóreans who landed in Middle-earth centuries earlier, and where he sees Osgiliath before its fall. Cf. Hammond-Scull 2005 p. 323. Likewise, Faramir tells of the recurring dream of a great wave (*RK VI.5 The Steward and the King*), exactly as Tolkien himself does (*Letters* n. 163).

⁴⁸ This is another example of "Tolkien's razor": that is, the tendency to *cut out any explicit Christian element* in his work; nevertheless, Tolkien *does not explicitly refuse* to connect dreams to a supernatural level. The result is that dreams in the *Legendarium* are different from the Christian interpretation of them and are also in harmony with them (on this theme, see Testi 2018).

⁴⁹ "He could see two pale points of light, almost like luminous eyes. He started. His head had nodded. 'I was on the edge of a dream.' [...] When he lay down he quickly went to sleep, but it seemed to him that the dream went on: he heard whispers, and saw the two pale points of light approaching, slowly." (*FR II.4. A Journey in the dark*).

Knights⁵⁰ just before the escape at the ford, and the one he has about Bilbo on the Caradhras⁵¹ share the same nature of dreams based on experiences from waking life.⁵²

3) Some of Frodo's oneiric experiences described in *The Lord of the Rings* unfold in an undefinable area where it is difficult to distinguish dream from reality, as mentioned in *Modernity* by Descartes [see 3.1.3)]. A hint of this can be observed during the passage through the Old Forest,⁵³ and another when, in Rivendell, Frodo thinks back to the great dangers he has just endured and they appear to him as if they were dreams.⁵⁴ However, an episode where it is impossible to distinguish dream from reality is most evident when Frodo and Sam are in Mordor, in Cirith Ungol, on their way towards Mount Doom:⁵⁵

'Am I still dreaming?' he muttered. 'But the other dreams were horrible.'
 'You're not dreaming at all, Master,' said Sam. 'It's real. It's me. I've come.'
 'I can hardly believe it,' said Frodo, clutching him. 'There was an orc with a whip, and then it turns into Sam! Then *I wasn't dreaming after all* when I heard that singing down below, and I tried to answer? [...] Something hit me, didn't it? And I fell into darkness and foul dreams, and woke *and found that waking was worse* (RK VI.1. *The Tower of Cirith Ungol*, italics added).⁵⁶

The interweaving of dream and reality caused by fatigue is described once more, albeit in a far more dramatic way, in a dialogue between Frodo and Merry on their way back to the Shire:

'Well here we are, just the four of us that started out together,' said Merry. 'We have left all the rest behind, one after another. It seems almost like a dream that has slowly faded.'
 'Not to me,' said Frodo. 'To me *it feels more like falling asleep again.*' (RK VI.7. *Homeward Bound*, italics added)

This text, masterfully analyzed in Flieger (1997, pp. 126 ff.), shows how Frodo is slowly poisoned both in his body and soul to the point where he (unlike Merry) is no longer able to clearly distinguish dream from reality, a state that can be considered typical of modern times.

4) Frodo also experiences oneiric events in a waking state [3.1.4)], in the form of visions similar to that of the woman's face that periodically appeared to Breton (cf. the second part of *The Communicating Vessels* [2.1]). The vision Frodo has "half in a dream" of wings following him at the

⁵⁰ "He lay down again and passed into an uneasy dream, in which he walked on the grass in his garden in the Shire, but it seemed faint and dim, less clear than the tall black shadows that stood looking over the hedge." (FR I.12. *Flight to the Ford*).

⁵¹ "A great sleepiness came over Frodo; he felt himself sinking fast into a warm and hazy dream. He thought a fire was heating his toes, and out of the shadows on the other side of the hearth he heard Bilbo's voice speaking." (FR *The Ring goes South*). Likewise, in Tom Bombadil's house, Pippin relives the experience of Old Man Willow (FR I.7. *In the House of Tom Bombadil*). The scene in the Barrow-downs, where Merry experiences a transfer of memory on the part of a fallen warrior who makes him relive his death, should also be mentioned (FR I.8. *Fog on the Barrow-Downs*).

⁵² For the sake of completeness, it is worth noting that Frodo also experiences dreamless sleep ("He threw himself upon a bed and fell at once into a dreamless slumber." FR I.3. *Three is Company*. "No sound or dream disturbed their slumber." FR II.8. *Lothlorien*), and dreams but the contents aren't shared with the reader ("Frodo sat upon the horse in a dark dream." FR I.12. *Flight to the Ford*; "Side by side they lay; and down swept Gwaihir, and down came Landroval and Meneldor the swift; and in a dream, not knowing what fate had befallen them, the wanderers were lifted up." RK VI.4. *The Field of Cormallen*).

⁵³ "They began to feel that all this country was *unreal, and that they were stumbling through an ominous dream that led to no awakening.*" (FR I.6. *The Old Forest*, italics added).

⁵⁴ "To Frodo his dangerous flight, and the rumours of the darkness growing in the world outside, already seemed only the memories of a troubled dream." (FR II.2. *The Council of Elrond*).

⁵⁵ "Four days had passed since they had escaped from the orcs, but the time lay behind them like an ever-darkening dream." (RK VI.3. *Mount Doom*).

⁵⁶ And the same happened to Sam: "At last wearied with his cares Sam drowsed, leaving the morrow till it came; he could do no more. *Dream and waking mingled uneasily.*" (RK VI.3. *Mount Doom*, italics added).

Ford of Bruinen,⁵⁷ the vision of roots and earth moving strangely near Old Man Willow,⁵⁸ as well as the one he has during the crisis of March 13th 1421,⁵⁹ belong to this type of vision. But, his experiences in the Dead Marshes,⁶⁰ and during his journey to Mount Doom,⁶¹ where he has a vision of a continuous fire wheel, are much more similar to hallucinations ((Breton 1936e p. 18 quoted in 2.1). At the same time, there are also episodes where Frodo experiences what could be defined as authentic automatic messages (Breton 1924 p. 21 quoted in 2.1). A first example of this is at the beginning of the story, when he automatically composes a part of the song *The Road Goes Ever On*.⁶² Another example is at the Council of Elrond, where it is said that Frodo's phrase "I will take the Ring" seems almost as if it was uttered by an entity other than himself.⁶³ Also, Frodo felt astonished to find himself⁶⁴ pronouncing the word *Elbereth* at Weathertop and, similarly, he is able to hear the call of the watchers at the stairs of Cirith Ungol.⁶⁵

5) Although Tolkien denied literary value to dreams, thus distancing himself from Breton's approach, in the *Legendarium* there is at least one account of a dream in poetry form, which Breton would have artistically classified as an oneiric object [2.1; 3.1.5]. This is *The Sea Bell*, an enigmatic poem published with the title *Frodo's Dreme* because "it was associated with the *dark and despairing dreams* which have visited himself in March and October during his last three years".⁶⁶ Tom Shippey has written important pages underlining how this version of the poem (a revision of *Looney*, probably written in the '30s) showed a darker vision compared to the first one (Shippey 2005, pp. 322 ff.). Verlyn Flieger also analysed the poem as if it were inspired by a real dream (Flieger 1997, pp. 208 ff). For this reason, *The Sea Bell* is in all respects considered a dream-object, as Tolkien, unlike Breton, inserts this dream-account into the context of a coherent and descriptive narrative [2.2]. Even in *LotR* there is a dream-account experienced by Frodo within a *Faërian Drama*, the focus of the next point.

6) *Faërian Drama* is a typically Tolkienian idea developed during the peak of English Surrealism (it is also found in *NCP*, p.33), and this is perhaps not by chance since, in some respects, surrealistic themes intermingle with it. At a critical level, the topic was gaining particular interest,⁶⁷ but it can be said that the content had not yet been clearly understood (as Verlyn Flieger admits in Flieger 2014, pp. 155-157), so Tolkien's references are cryptic and sometimes disconcerting, especially when it comes to the role of the elves in this activity. *Faërian Drama* in fact derives *not* from Fantasy but from Enchantment, which is an ability of the elves, and its effect is far superior even to the best crafted human fantasies, because it seems to occur prominently inside a dream woven by the minds of others:

⁵⁷ "Frodo lay *half in a dream*, imagining that endless dark wings were sweeping by above him." (*FR* I.12. *Flight to the Ford*, italics added).

⁵⁸ "*Half in a dream* he wandered forward to the riverward side of the tree" (*FR* I.6. *The Old Forest*, italics added).

⁵⁹ "On the thirteenth of that month Farmer Cotton found Frodo lying on his bed; he was clutching a white gem that hung on a chain about his neck and he seemed *half in a dream*" (*RK* VI.8. *The Grey Havens*, italics added).

⁶⁰ "'Dead Faces' [...] 'I don't know,' said Frodo in a *dreamlike voice*. 'But I have seen them too. In the pools when the candles were lit. [...] Frodo and Sam got up, rubbing their eyes, like children *wakened from an evil dream* to find the familiar night still over the world.'" (*TT* IV.2. *The Passage of the Marshes*, italics added).

⁶¹ "And I'm so tired. And the Ring is so heavy, Sam. And *I begin to see it in my mind all the time*, like a great wheel of fire." (*RK* VI.2. *The Land of Shadow*, italics added).

⁶² "'I don't know,' said Frodo. *It [the rhyme] came to me then, as if I was making it up*; but I may have heard it long ago." (*FR* I.3. *Three is Company*, italics added).

⁶³ "At last with an effort he spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as *if some other will was using his small voice*. 'I will take the Ring,' he said, 'though I do not know the way.'" (*FR* II.2. *The Council of Elrond*, italics added).

⁶⁴ *FR* I.11. *A Knife in the dark*.

⁶⁵ *TT* IV.8. *The Stairs of Cirith Ungol*.

⁶⁶ *ATB* p. 64, italics added. For an overview of the text see also Hammond-Scull 2005 pp. 881-882.

⁶⁷ Especially in the last few years many important contributions have been written on the *Faërian Drama*: Croft 2014; Flieger 2014; Makai 2010; Vink 2015.

Now “Faërian Drama” - those plays which according to abundant records the elves have often presented to men – can produce Fantasy with a realism and immediacy beyond the compass of any human mechanism. As a result their usual effect (upon a man) is to go beyond Secondary Belief. If you are present at a Faërian drama *you yourself are, or think that you are, bodily inside its Secondary World*. The experience may be very similar to Dreaming and has (it would seem) sometimes (by men) been confounded with it. *But in Faërian drama you are in a dream that some other mind is weaving* (OFS n. 74 p. 63, italics added).

Something similar happens to Frodo in the house of Tom Bombadil.⁶⁸ However, the most fitting and unequivocal example of *Faërian Drama* is described when the hobbit finds himself in the Hall of Fire in Rivendell and listens to the elves’ narration:

“Wake up! [said Bilbo] *I was not asleep*. Master Elrond. If you want to know, you have all come out from your feast too soon, and *you have disturbed me-in the middle of making up a song*.” [...]. Frodo began to listen. At first the beauty of the melodies and of the *interwoven words in elventongues, even though he understood them little*, held him in a spell, as soon as he began to attend to them. Almost it seemed that the words took shape, and visions of far lands and bright things that he had never yet imagined opened out before him; and the firelit hall became like a golden mist above seas of foam that sighed upon the margins of the world. *Then the enchantment became more and more dreamlike*, until he felt that an endless river of swelling gold and silver was flowing over him, too multitudinous for its pattern to be comprehended; it became part of the throbbing air about him, and it drenched and drowned him. Swiftly he sank under its shining weight into a deep realm of sleep. There he wandered long in a dream of music that turned into running water, and then suddenly into a voice. It seemed to be the voice of Bilbo chanting verses (FR.II.1. *Many Meetings*, italics added).

The situation described here is extremely fitting and well suited for the closing of this essay because:

- the scene starts with Bilbo appearing to be sleeping and dreaming;
- when Elrond awakens him, he says that he was composing a poem, in the manner of the creative process proposed by surrealist theories [2.1];
- later on, the elves sing their songs, with words Frodo can hardly understand: this is an example of Tolkienian phonaesthetics, similar to the absence of meaning in the melodious phrases of the Surrealists [2.1 and note 30];
- although the meaning of the elves’ words is not clear to Frodo, his mind becomes a stage for a portrayal of unknown lands, until images of those lands start to swarm into the hall and he, as if in a realistic dream, is consciously and *bodily* projected into the tale;
- moreover, he hears Bilbo reciting the poem he composed in his sleep, which is in actual fact a dream account [3.1.5)] within *The Lord of the Rings*. All this transforms the character of Frodo into a true Surrealist within Middle-earth.

CONCLUSION: TOLKIEN, SURREALISM AND MODERNITY

⁶⁸“*The hobbits sat still before him [Tom Bombadil], enchanted; and it seemed as if, under the spell of his words, the wind had gone, and the clouds had dried up, and the day had been withdrawn, and darkness had come from East and West, and all the sky was filled with the light of white stars*” (FR I.7. *In the House of Tom Bombadil*, italics added).

The content of this essay can be summarized as follows: Tolkien knew and understood Breton's Surrealism [1] and, despite having his own sub-creative theory opposed to the Bretonian one [2], in *LotR* (thanks to Frodo's dreams), he used typically modern and surrealist elements [3]. As mentioned in the preface, this single thread developed on two different levels:

- a historic level, considering it necessary to describe both the status of English Surrealism [1.1], in the time that Tolkien and the Inklings speak about it [1.2], and to even roughly place Breton and Tolkien within the development of dream-theories in the West [3.1]
- a theoretical one, in which it was considered important to recall the cornerstones of the Bretonian [2.1] and the Tolkienian aesthetics [2.2], to better examine the main differences.

This has allowed us to add new data and elements regarding the relationship between Tolkien, Breton and Surrealism; the existence of the various meanings of dreams as present in Western thought within the character of Frodo [3.2] can perhaps even help us to better understand the more general relationship between Tolkien and modernity.

On this vast topic, much has been written and still more remains to be written, so it is impossible to discuss all the different critical perspectives which have emerged.⁶⁹ Among these, however, is one that is particularly relevant to this work, as advanced by those⁷⁰ who recognize a simultaneous presence of different historical periods in the events of the Third Age (which in theory should be located in 4,042 BCE, 6,000 years before 1958: *Letters* n.211). There are, at the same time, examples present of societies belonging to very different times, from the almost-primitive (think of the Drúedain of Ghan-Buri-Ghan), through to the High (the Anglo-Saxon Rohan) and Low Middle Ages (Gondor, the Byzantium of Middle-earth), up to commercial companies typical of the 1600s (Lake Town is an example), and landscapes unequivocally linked to the industrial revolution of the late 1800s (as in the case of the County devastated by Sharkey). In this sense, the present essay proves this interpretation, which is valid not only at the level of socio-political structures, but also on the level of themes, since the main historical meanings of dreams are simultaneously present in the same character.

From this perspective Tolkien, who certainly was not a progressive on a biographical or narrative level,⁷¹ does not even appear to be a nostalgic traditionalist who completely rejected history and modernity.⁷² Indeed, paradoxically, thanks to a "traditional" descriptive narrative *opposed* to that of surrealist and modernist avant-gardes (aimed at expressing internal activities of the psyche and the subject's conscience [see 2.1]), it sub-creates what could be defined as an *integrative secondary world*, because it manages to *synchronize and synthesize* within it not only ancient and medieval contents, but also modern and contemporary ones. This perhaps could make it even easier to understand the

⁶⁹ On this theme see: Chance-Siewers 2005; Honegger and Weinreich 2006; Garbowski 2004, 121 ff.; Kraus 2004; Petty 2002; Wood 2015; Patchen 2005; Curry 2014; Cody 2016; Nicolay 2014; Hiley 2011; Simonson 2008. On modernity in Tolkien as a writer, Verlyn Flieger maintains that he is essentially a post-modern writer (Flieger 2005), Purtil shows how Tolkien was perfectly aware of the post-modern context where the use of myth was embedded (Purtill 2003, 7 ff.), and Nagy gives an insightful explanation of how Tolkien uses ancient myths in order to outline contemporary themes (Nagy 2005), analogous to Plato (Nagy 2004).

⁷⁰ In this sense see Manni 2009; Scull 1992.

⁷¹ The concept of progressive history was not present in Tolkien. The idea that a revolution could overcome the relics of the past and bring about a new positive era was absent in Tolkien because:

- as a devout Roman Catholic, he believed that each era is characterized by the same meta-historical Christian values a Catholic is called on to achieve in a continuous, never definitive effort; the so-called "long defeat" (*Letters* n. 195);
- besides, from a literary perspective, his *Legendarium* is the narration of a light which becomes increasingly splintered with the progress of history (see Flieger 2002), resulting in good and evil becoming inexorably weaker, although they will always be present and no era will ever see darkness defeated.

⁷² It is well known that he explicitly criticized this embalming, nostalgic attitude (*Letters* n. 154) that caused the elves, in their desire to preserve the world from the flow of time, to come to terms with Sauron, thus bringing about the forging of the Ring of Power as a consequence (*FR* II.2. *The Council of Elrond*).

depth of what, in a happy, oxymoronic way, has been defined as *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages* (Chance-Siewers 2005).

BIBLIOGRAPHY, ABBREVIATIONS, CITATIONS

Abbreviations for Tolkien's works:

- ATB: The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962.
- EFS: "Essay on Phonetic Symbolism" in *Tolkien Vice*, pp. 63-71.
- Letters: The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1999.
- LN: 'Leaf by Niggle.' *Dublin Review* (January 1945), pp. 46-61. Reprinted in *Tree*.
- LotR: The Lord of The Rings*, 50th anniversary edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- LR: The Lost Road and Other Writings: Language and Legend before The Lord of the Rings (The History of Middle-earth, 5)* edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2002.
- Lost Road: *The Lost Road*, unfinished tale written in 1936-7, published in *LR*.
- NCP: *Notion Club Papers*, unfinished tale written in 1944-45, published in *SD*.
- OFS: "On Fairy-Stories", first published in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, London: Oxford University Press, 1947, pp. 38-89. New edition edited by Verlyn Flieger, London, HarperCollinsPublishers, 2008.
- S: The Silmarillion*, edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977; reprinted London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2001.
- SD: Sauron Defeated (The History of Middle-earth, 9)* edited by Christopher Tolkien, London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1992.
- SWM: Smith of Wootton Major*, edited by V. Flieger, London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2005.
- Tree: Tree and Leaf*, London: HarperCollins, 2001
- Vice: A Secret Vice. Tolkien on Invented Languages*, a cura di Dimitra Fimi & Andrew Higgins, London, HarperCollinsPublishers, 2006.

Abbreviations for some parts of *S* and *LotR*:

- FR: The Fellowship of the Rings*
TT: The Two Towers
RK: The Return of the King
 App: Appendix

CITATIONS

For *LotR*, the reference indicates the part and the chapter:

- e.g.: (*FR* II.2 *The Council of Elrond*) indicates the second chapter of Book Two of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, contained in *The Lord of the Rings*, that is *The Council of Elrond*;
- e.g.: (*LotR*, App A.5) indicates the fifth part of the Appendix in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, that is *The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen*.

For *Letters*, the reference indicates the letter number:

- e.g.: (*Letters* nn. 131, 156) indicates the letters n. 131 and n. 156, contained in *Letters*.

For *OFS*, the first reference is for the number of the paragraph and the second for the page:

- e.g. (*OFS* n. 75 p. 64) indicates paragraph number 75 and page 64 of *OFS*.

For all other references, the last number indicates the number of the page.

- (Flieger 2002, 28) indicates p. 28 of Verlyn Flieger's *Splintered Light*;

- (*ibid.* 30) indicates the same book-article: e.g. p. 30 of Verlyn Flieger's *Splintered Light*.

- (Flieger 2002, 28 ff) indicates p. 28 and following of Verlyn Flieger's *Splintered Light*.

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