



**THE IMAGE OF THE TREE AS THE  
EMBODIMENT OF COSMOLOGICAL AND  
SOLAR ASPECTS IN J. R. R. TOLKIEN'S WORKS**

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**ABSTRACT**

English scientist J. Tolkien became world-famous as the creator of the fantasy genre and the author of the epic novel «The Lord of the Rings» which has overgrown the measures of a novel having become a cultural phenomena and causing cultural movement. His works – «The Lord of the Rings» and «The Hobbit» have already been analyzed in the light of the genre novelty. The **purpose** of this paper is to enlighten the ways of the embodiment of philosophical concepts of the image of the world tree in J. Tolkien's creative work. The **methodology** includes literature review related to the topic; methods of analysis, classification and comparative analysis. The image of the tree is analyzed as one of the universal symbols of the spiritual culture. It unites the Earth with the heaven, defines the human's way to oneself, to spiritual summits. In the works of J. R. R. Tolkien the tree isn't just a detail but also a character, the symbol of the eternal life circulation. Symbolizing the synthesis of heaven, earth and water, the dynamics of life, combining the worlds,

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the tree in the creation of J. Tolkien is a complex archetypal derivative that accumulates feminine as a source of life, male as a defender of the genus. The Trees of Valinor, lone tree-pastors, the creations of Niggl are characterized by the synthesis of cosmogonic and solar aspects. The depth of the perception of the artist («The Leaf by Niggle») the writer transforms into world creation. Niggle works much on details, but dreams of drawing the whole tree. The artist is inspired by a picture of a living tree, the embodiment of the mythological universe. It is **concluded** that the close relationship between the creator and creation is a reflection of the ancient beliefs about man and the tree as indivisible unity, that the tree could become a friend, a «twin brother» of a man, the incarnation of his soul.

**Key words:** the tree, personification, cosmological and solar aspects, determinism.

## АНОТАЦІЯ

### **Образ світового дерева як втілення космологічного та солярного аспектів у творчості Дж.Р.Р. Толкіна**

Англійський вчений-лінгвіст Дж.Р.Р.Толкін став всесвітньо відомим як творець жанру фентезі та автор епічного роману «Володар перснів», що переріс межі художнього твору і став культурним феноменом. Твори письменника – «Володар перснів» та «Гобіт» – вже не раз ставали предметами літературознавчих розвідок, переважно з точки зору новизни жанру. Основна **мета** цієї статті – це висвітлення шляхів втілення філософських концептів образу світового дерева у творчості письменника. **Методологія** дослідження включає літературний огляд, що стосується мети розвідки, методів аналізу, класифікації та порівняльного аналізу. Образ дерева проаналізовано як один з універсальних символів духовної культури людства. У створеному Дж. Толкієном світі, дерево є образом містким і неоднозначним; це не пейзажна деталь, а повноцінний образ-символ, що тяжіє до образу-персонажа; воно – динамічний багатоаспектний синтез космогонічного та солярного аспектів. Будучи залюбленим у валійську та фінську мови, у скандинавську та кельтську міфологію, Дж. Толкін використовує елементи останніх для побудови моделі власного художнього світу. Дерево – один з універсальних символів духовної культури людства – є тією центральною світовою віссю, що з'єднує Небо й

землю, людину та її шлях до духовних висот, цикли життя, Всесвіт та його процеси вічного й постійного оновлення, мудрість і таємничі закони буття. Символізуючи синтез неба, землі й води, динаміку життя, поєднуючи світи, дерево у творінні Дж. Толкієна є складним архетипним похідним, що акумулює жіноче як джерело життя, чоловіче – захисника роду. Дерева Валінору, самотні деревопастирі, творіння художника Ніггла характеризуються синтезом космогонічного та солярного аспектів. Глибину мистецького сприйняття у оповіданні «Лист Ніггла» письменник підносить до рівня світотворення. Працюючи над деталями, художник прагне намалювати цілу картину. Він натхненний образом живого дерева, що є уособленням Всесвіту.

У **висновках** зазначено, що тісний зв'язок між творцем і творінням є відображенням давнього вірування про незриму єдність між людиною і деревом, в якій дерево може стати «двійником» людини або втіленням душі.

**Ключові слова:** дерево, космогонічний і солярний аспекти, персоніфікація образу, детермінізм.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the study

English linguist J. Tolkien is world-famous as the creator of the fantasy genre and the author of the epic novel «The Lord of the Rings» which has overgrown the measures of a novel having become a cultural phenomena. The researcher V. Zavadskaya emphasizes J. Tolkien's role as «the demiurge, the ruler of cosmogonic power, the creator of the universe» (Zavadskaya, 2003). The creation of the novel, which made the scientist a cult writer, was preceded by an inspiration for the writing of a children's fairy tale «Hobbit, or There and back again», and the admiration of the so-called «elven» languages, created by him. Professor once confessed to his biographer and close friend H. Carpenter that, creating «The Silmarillion», he believed that he was not just inventing the plot. Those stories, he said, «arose in his consciousness as something certain. [...] All the time, he felt that he wrote something «existing» and not fictitious» (Carpenter, 1977). And as a result an extremely real world was created. It cannot be called artistic, as its reality extends beyond the limits of a particular work. The achievement of J. Tolkien is creating his personal mythology; he was a man who, according to his contemporary, K. Lewis, «visited the inner world of the

language» (Carpenter, 1977), for several decades of life he was creating an epochal thing of mythology. It was «The Silmarillion», and not the «Lord of the Rings» which the writer himself considered the work of own life. The Middle Earth is perceived by the reader as a real world as it is created by divine entities, experiencing the times of its birth and destruction. The look at Arda by the eyes of the demiurge is new, but not unusual. H. Carpenter admitted: «Tolkien made up his mythology in this way, because he wanted it to be unusual and, at the same time, not false. He wanted myths and legends to reflect his own moral ideas about the universe» (Carpenter, 1977). The latter resonates with the modern definitions of the genre of fantasy as a special model of the world, which laws «in terms of determinism seem absolute lawlessness, an adherent artistic model of the world» (Kovtun, 1998). At the same time, the fantasy world is a certain artifact characterized by the eternal existence of the Universe, living according to the writer's creation laws that are real for this world, and therefore is perceived as a parallel one» (Gusarova, 2007). The main secret of the latter, A. Gusarov, considers the creation of a demiurge as «linguistic, mythological, geographic and other detailed pictures of the imaginary world. [...] Due to it the first, the alogical world becomes deterministic and logical» (Gusarova, 2007).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

J. R. R. Tolkien's bestselling fantasy novel «The Lord of the Rings» had an initial mixed literary reception. Despite some enthusiastic early reviews from supporters such as W. H. Auden, Iris Murdoch, and C. S. Lewis, literary hostility to Tolkien quickly became acute and continued until the start of the 21st century.

From the 1980s, academic studies began to defend Tolkien; since then, the pace has steadily increased, resulting in a thorough literary re-evaluation of his work. Interpretations of The Lord of the Rings have included Marxist criticism, sometimes at odds with Tolkien's social conservatism; the psychological reading of heroes, their partners, and their opponents as Jungian archetypes; and comparison of Tolkien with modernist writers.

Tolkien's works have since become the subject of a substantial body of academic research, both as fantasy fiction and as an extended exercise in invented languages. In 1998, Daniel Timmons wrote in a dedicated issue of the Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts that scholars still disagreed about Tolkien's place in literature, but that those

critical of it were a minority.

From 1983, Tom Shippey set about systematically rebutting the literary critics' claims. His *The Road to Middle-earth*, and Verlyn Flieger's 1983 *Splintered Light*, slowly began to reduce the literary hostility to *The Lord of the Rings*. Looking for the causes of the establishment's hostility, Brian Rosebury described the work as owing something to medieval romance, though also "more than is often believed" to the mainstream tradition of the English novel. Shippey stated that many writers revealed «gross inconsistency between their self-professed critical ideals and their practice when they encounter Tolkien».

The pace of scholarly publications on Tolkien increased dramatically in the early 2000s. The dedicated journal *Tolkien Studies* was founded in 2004; that same year, the scholar Neil D. Isaacs introduced an anthology of Tolkien criticism with the words «This collection assumes that argument about the value and power of *The Lord of the Rings* has been settled, certainly to the satisfaction of its vast, growing, persistent audience, but also of a considerable body of critical judgment» (Isaacs, 2004).

### AIM OF THE ARTICLE

Being fond of Welsh and Finnish, Scandinavian and Celtic mythology, J. Tolkien used the elements of the latter to build a model of his own artistic world. But, according to H. Carpenter, «being a Christian, he could not implement his ideas into the Universe without a god [...]. God is present in the work of J. Tolkien, though remains invisible» (Carpenter, 1977). The aspects of Christian belief of the writer are traced in an example of the process of creating by Eru Ilúvatar (the only God) which is depicted as a complex of melodies, the rebellion of one of the Valar, which turns it (melody) into disharmony. The image of Melkor (the rebellious deity) is a vivid allusion to the biblical Lucifer, and the depiction of women's divine entities is a reflection of worship of the Virgin Mary.

The **purpose** of the paper is to enlighten the ways of the embodiment of philosophical concepts of the image of the world tree in J.Tolkien's creative work.

### METHODOLOGY

The **methodology** includes literature review related to the topic; methods of

analysis, classification and comparative analysis.

## RESULTS

The artistic world of many works is built around a tree, which is not only a biblical image, but also a part of the social subconscious, archetype.

The tree is one of the universal symbols of the spiritual culture of mankind is the central world axis that unites Heaven and Earth, man and his way to spiritual heights, the cycles of life, the universe and its processes of eternal and constant renewal, wisdom and mysterious laws of being.

## DISCUSSION

Scandinavian mythology tells of the ash of Iggdrasil, which has three roots that penetrate into the underground world, and from there disperse to the kingdom of giants and the human world. Its branches spread over the world and protect everything alive. The upper branches reach Heaven, while the highest one throws a shadow at Valhalla, where there live gods and the heroes who died in battle. This tree is always green and fresh, as the three sisters – Past, Present, and Future – water it every day. Under this ash, the gods are going to decide the fate of the world.

The biblical tree of knowledge is the center of the Garden of Eden, and for the first people it became a personification of moral choice. The snake guarding the tree represents the difficulty of comprehending truth and wisdom. The tree in the world created by J. Tolkien is a large and ambiguous image; it is not a landscape detail, but a full-fledged image-character, gravitating towards story character. In the mythology of «The Silmarillion» we find a dynamic multifaceted synthesis of cosmogonic and solar features.

J. Tolkien chooses the first source of light for his world as a man-made one: Aulë (one of the valar, the patron of the blacksmith's craft) takes two bright lights at the request of Yavanna (the protector of all living creatures). Therefore, the demiurge turns a tree into a symbol of the solar energy. In the world of J. Tolkien, it is not only an embodiment of the living energy of nature, but also shrouded by humanistic pathos, as the golden and silver trees – Telplion and Laurelin – grew by the blessing of Yavanna, who «blessed the seeds and for a long time had been sitting on the green

grass singing the Song of Behest in which all the thoughts of everything that grew upon the earth were invested» (Tolkien, 1977). And Nienna (the female deity, imbued with eternal grief and pity for all living, in fact, was a personalization of humanistic ideals) at this time, apparently, knowing about the sad lot of the trees, at that time being «silent and washed the mound with her tears» (Tolkien, 1977). The demiurge-writer describes the appearance of the Two Valinor Trees as «the most beautiful creatures of Yavanna», anticipatingly pointing out that «all the legends of the Ancient Epoch will be associated with them» (Tolkien, 1977).

Valinor Trees were created before the beginning of times by Yavanna and Nienna to become a source of light instead of the lamps destroyed by Melkor. The elder tree was called Telperion – Silver one, and the other one – Laurelin, Golden. The flowers of the first gave silver light, and the leaves of the other were cast in gold.

The writer's belief in the reality of the existence of Middle Earth world predetermines truthfulness, talented detailing of the image, which is not hindered by even a number of paradoxes. In particular, J. Tolkien tells about the flow of time in a fictional world, using the earthly, human system of measurement: «The trees were burning and extinguishing for seven hours every day; each of them began to shine an hour before the first extinguished. So twice a day a strange time arose in Valinor when the light of both trees was weak and their silvery rays were mixed up» (Tolkien, 1977).

Multidimensionality of the collective image of the Great Trees of Valinor has a spontaneously evolutionary character. The Scripture, describing the process of creating the world, emphasizes the spatial stratification of the sky and earth, water and land. J. Tolkien, in the universe of which, as already noted, God is present, is trying to synthesize the energy of light and water: «The light dew of Telperion and the rain of Laurelin Varda collected in large bowls [...], which became the valar for the whole earth sources of water and light» (Tolkien, 1977). The invisible presence of the creator and the mentioned synthesis of verses determines the pantheistic laws of the existence of the Middle Earth world.

The image of the creator in the mythology of the «The Silmarillion» is complemented by the aspect of the artist. Elven Master Feanor, who possessed the power over the elements, created silhouettes of diamonds and filled them with the light of the trees. J. Tolkien affirms the biblical maxim about the creation of a man in the image and likeness of God, which includes the aspect of creation, creative

influence on the world. After death of the Trees, the creation of the master became the only receptacles of their light, making Feanor a co-creator of the new world.

The Melkor, the rebel, was filled with hatred towards trees and with the help of the Ungoliant, the repository of chaos and darkness, who existed within the shape of a giant spider, destroyed the Trees, poisoned dew in the bowls and stole Sylmarils. In the idyll of Valinor the tree becomes a world-centered essence. The killing of the Two Trees is comparable to the Big Bang, the original combination of Tanotos and Eros, as this event becomes the source for the world creation via internal destruction.

The writer determines various aspects of the image of the Great Tree, since «on the top of the hill [...] Varda created for them (the first elves) a tree similar to Telperion [...]. It was called Galathion. Then it was planted in the garden [...], and was the first to begin with many such trees» (Tolkien, 1977). Galathion continues itself within Celeborn. The last name in the world of J. Tolkien accumulates the world around him (life-giving light and the universe), and has a personified embodiment in the elven prince. The love of his and the beautiful Galadriel, the morning star, gave birth to Arwen, the eve-star, a personified symbol of the completion of the golden elven era. The homonymous synthesis of the image-character and the symbol (it has already been noted that the tree in the world of J. Tolkien has overgrown these limits) in the writer's mythology. Lorien, or «the land of dreams», was also a dwelling place of the valar, one of which was also sometimes called Lorien, as well as the forest-principality of Celeborne and Galadriel. The name of Fangorn stands for the patron of the forest and gives the latter his name, giving life to all the trees.

From Celeborne-tree, the writer traces the genealogy of the White Tree of Gondor via the Numenor Nimlot, the organizing center of the given island. Sauron, having reached the island and received some power, poisoning the thoughts of the rulers, prohibits approaching the Tree. That's why Isildur secretly crawls up to it at night and steals the fruit, and then escapes from Numenor. The king follows the order of Sauron and destroys the tree, burning it, the smoke of which is winding for seven, as if giving a signal to Valinor.

The destruction of the tree begins the death of the island. The White Tree of Gondor is a symbol of royal power, the embodiment of its fate. Isildur (the one who cut Sauron's finger with the One Ring) planted the seed in the land of Minas Ithil, in order to fix the affinity with the Numenorians with the help of the tree, and via them with the elves and the valar themselves. Having captured this fort, Sauron first burns



a tree, confirming by the act of destruction the power of this symbol in accumulating moral and state power. The hope of revival is embodied by the writer in a germ, which gives life to the White Gondor Tree instead. The latter is the reflection, the embodiment of the destiny of the state, since it perishes, in order to be reborn in the seedlings found by the new king: «Aragorn turned and noticed a green spot over a stony slope. He quickly jumped up and saw a young tree [...]. The long, tiny leaves on it were dismantled, dark and silver skylights on the top, the tree was crowned with a bundle of flowers with white [...] petals» (Tolkien, 1977). Gandalf speaks of the fateful function of a fragile plant: «Such a seed ripens rarely, but the power of life can drown in it for centuries, no one can predict the time of awakening. [...] When the seed ripens, the tree must be planted so that the race is not interrupted» (Tolkien, 1977).

The writer determines the function of the tree as a source of light, giving the ability to revive. After the destruction of the Tree, «Nienna's tears could not heal wounds, but Yavanna for a long time sang in the dark». At that moment, when hope was almost abandoned, Telperion gave a huge silver flower, and Laurelin produced the only golden fruit» (Tolkien, 2002), which then became the sun and the moon. Thus, J. Tolkien defines the ways of a multi-dimensional development, of evolution, of such a Big Bang in his world, and at the same time allows it some authenticity, truthfulness, correlation with the real, since the professor noted that his Middle Earth is our Earth in ancient times, when the continents were different in shape» (Carpenter, 1977).

The image of the «living tree» is not a novelty in the literature: they are both friendly and angry with the human race; they are often found in folk and literary tales. A similar interpretation can be found in the first part of «The Lord of the Rings». Having left Hobbiton the four friends could die because of the insidious Old Willow Man as «the trees here (in the Enchanted Forest) are more alive than at home» (Tolkien, 1954).

After meeting with Fangorn in «The Two Towers» the hobbits began understanding the motives of the behavior of the former ents.

In J. Tolkien's mythology tree pastors awake awhile with other immortal elves, because their destiny was inextricably linked with the fate of Arda-Earth, and they were entrusted with the mission of protecting natural riches and experiencing all pain. This affinity is noted by Fangorn, meeting with the hobbits: «The ents are somehow like elves: we do not take so much care of ourselves as people, and penetrate deeper

into the essence of things. On the other hand, we are similar to people: we change faster than elves, adapt rather than change. Apparently, ents surpass both» (Tolkien, 1954).

Ents embody the living soul and the wisdom of nature, are the guardians of goodness. The depth of Fangorn's image of, his semantic load is traced through a portrait. Hobbits at the meeting were mostly struck by his eyes: «Dark brown, near-planted, in the bottomless depth of which there sparkled greenish lights» (Tolkien, 1954). The writer via Hobbit Pippin compares those eyes with the deepest wells in the world, in which there was «the memory of ages and endless wisdom» (Tolkien, 1954).

Ents embody the archetypal synthesis of the world tree and the wise elder one, standing at the head of the genus, at its origins.

The writer himself noted that hobbits, as a collective image, have their own traits: «I'm a hobbit in fact», Professor once admitted, « a hobbit in everything except height. I love trees, gardens, smoke the pipe, prefer easy food» (Carpenter, 1977). J. Tolkien embodies his love for languages and trust in the power of a word within Fangorn: «My name is real and long, – he says to his guests. – It grew with me, and I live long, and so it is a whole story. [...] And our language is history» (Tolkien, 1954).

The images of «living trees» are shrouded with sad romantic halo as they are doomed for loneliness: their female are separated to care for the grass and flowers far beyond the Great River. The artwork of a work is a kind of sublimation that can have a destructive character. An example of the latter are wicked trees in the enchanted forest near Hobbiton. One of these former ents almost murdered Frodo Baggins and his friends. The episode of the destruction of the mechanized Isengard by the wood-shepherds is some kind of an anti-urbanist motive, the usage of contrast between the harmony of nature and industrial chaos.

J. Tolkien is also the author of a number of philosophical tales. These are «Roverandom» – a story of a dog written for J. Tolkien's son, who was upset by a lost toy; «Smith of Wootton Major» in which the writer touches upon the problem of talent and spiritual potential; the story which is real Professor's confession – «Leaf by Niggle». The image of the tree is found in the last two works.

The mysterious star of the cake, having fallen into the mouth of the guy («Smith of Wootton Major»), strangely appears on his forehead, to accompany him until the time when he has to find successor of his, because «such things are received only for a certain time» (Tolkien, 1962).

The image of the so-called Royal Tree, which Smith comes across in the Magic Land, is similar to the above-described descriptions of the World Tree from the legends of many cultures: «It seemed as if the branches were reaching the heavens, a dazzling light like as a light of the midday sun was coming from it; the leaves were rustling on the tree, flowers were blossoming, and fruit were ripening at the same time» (Tolkien, 1962). J. Tolkien does not ignore the exclusiveness of his hero, who has innate observation, and therefore «every leaf, every flower, and every fruit» the Smith accepts «not like others» (Tolkien, 1962).

Once in the morning, J. Tolkien woke up with a ready-made fairy tale and immediately wrote it. That was the «Leaf by Niggle», in which the writer «expressed his worst fears concerned with his mythological Tree. He felt that he, like his hero, would be torn from work long before it had to be completed» (Carpenter, 1977).

The depth of the perception of the artist («The Leaf by Niggle») the writer transforms into world creation. Niggle works much on details, but dreams of drawing the whole tree. The artist is inspired by a picture of a living tree, the embodiment of the mythological universe. So Niggle himself becomes a creator, a demiurge: «At first he saw a leaf taken up by the wind. Then the leaf turned into a tree, it grew, spread forth many branches and penetrated with incredible roots to the earth's interior. A strange bird flew to it and sat down on the branch [...]. Then around the Tree and behind it, in the gaps between the leaves and the branches, the outskirts outlined» (Tolkien, 1962).

The close relationship between the creator and creation is a reflection of the ancient beliefs about man and the tree as indivisible unity, that the tree could become a friend, a «twin brother» of a man, the incarnation of his soul.

The tree becomes the creating centre of the main character's own universe, the logical conclusion of the artist's life search. Therefore, when Niggle sees «the tree, his tree, finally finished», he calls it a gift, «referring to art in general and the result in particular» (Tolkien, 1962). Not only mastery, but the power of the author's imagination is in the focus of the writer's attention. When Niggle finds himself in front of his creation, he sees all the leaves in their places, in addition, «not as he portrayed them, but how he saw them in his imagination» (Tolkien, 1962).

The vision of the perspective does not abandon the genius. The writer gradually opens the world of paintings to the readers. Firstly, he determines the place of the Tree in the Woods: «Later, Niggle turns to the Forest. Not because the Tree bored

him, on the contrary, it seemed to be stamped in his memory» (Tolkien, 1962). When the mountains, which were not the part of the picture, appear, although they «connected it with something else» (Tolkien, 1962), the artist himself becomes the personification of the creative process. This process does not end with the transition to another world, and the hero is a link that combines two worlds – real and created by himself. The other world is out of time. Therefore, among the trees formed by the imagination, or only by the Niggle’s subconsciousness, «something was seen far away – it was the next stage, the next picture» (Tolkien, 1962).

The image of the artist can be compared with the elven master Feanor from «The Silmarillion». Via these characters, J. Tolkien embodies the concept of intercreation, giving his characters the ability to create own worlds and entire universes.

Ancient belief that the tree played the role of a «bridge», the mediator between gods and people, man and his ancestors J. Tolkien embodies into the reception of Niggl’s meeting with the mysterious Voices, the judges of the otherworldly. The genius gets a chance to continue working, or, by becoming a creator himself, grows above physical existence into his own world. The image of the tree at the same time has a double semantic sense: firstly, it is the result of the painstaking work of the master, and secondly – the embodiment of the belief in the resettlement of the soul.

The image of the tree has a double semantic sense: firstly, it is the result of the painstaking work of the master, and secondly – the embodiment of the belief in the resettlement of the soul.

## CONCLUSION

So, symbolizing the synthesis of heaven, earth and water, the dynamics of life, combining the worlds, the tree in the creation of J. Tolkien is a complex archetypal derivative that accumulates feminine as a source of life, male as a defender of the genus. The Trees of Valinor, lone tree-pastors, the creations of Niggl are characterized by the synthesis of cosmogonic and solar aspects.

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