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LIMINALITY AS A REFLECTION OF TRANSITIONAL POLICIES IN LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

A LIMINARIDADE COMO REFLEXO DAS POLÍTICAS DE TRANSIÇÃO NA LITERATURA E NA SOCIEDADE

IRINA TELEZHKO
Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) – Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4964-0143 E-mail: telezhko_iv@rudn.ru

NADEZHDA BAN'KOVA
Moscow Aviation Institute – Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3858-9389 E-mail: nvbankova@mail.ru

NATALIA FROLOVA
Technological Institute (branch) of Volgograd State Technical University – Russia. ORCID: E-mail: frolova@kti.ru

LEYLA GOYUSHOVA
Moscow Aviation Institute – Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8593-8513 E-mail: leyla_mazakhirovna@bk.ru

EKATERINA ZUDILOVA
Moscow Aviation Institute – Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0974-4359 E-mail: katarinocka@yandex.ru

ROMAN SHKILEV
Kazan Federal University – Russia. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2864-7194 E-mail: shkilev.r.e@yandex.ru

ABSTRACT

Background: Today, philological research with an interdisciplinary focus increasingly centers on categories characterized by paradox, peculiarity, and deviation from the norm, among which the phenomenon of liminality is of particular scholarly interest.

Objective: The aim of the study is to analyze the imagery of liminality in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, with a focus on liminal characters, states, time, and space.

Materials and Methods: The study employed qualitative analysis methods. Particular attention was given to key categories within the concept of liminality, such as the transition plot, liminal discourse, and liminal imagery. A component analysis of liminal elements was conducted, including architectural structures and locations, as well as the states of characters at critical moments of their transitions.

Results: The analysis revealed that the world presented in Tolkien's trilogy is in a constant state of liminality. The characters move through liminal spaces and encounter liminal characters and states, reflecting both their internal and external transformations. Architectural elements such as Moria and Minas Tirith function as symbolic liminal spaces,

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enhancing the significance of the events that occur. The study also focuses on key characters like Frodo and Aragorn and their transitions through liminal stages, which alter their essence and status.

Conclusion: Liminality in Tolkien's literature plays a crucial role in creating intermediate and transitional states that reflect both the internal changes of the characters and shifts in the world order. Thus, liminality in the trilogy serves as a fundamental structural and thematic element, linking various levels of the narrative and adding depth to Tolkien's literary world.

Keywords: Liminality; Liminal imagery; Liminal discourse; Liminal character; Liminal state; Liminal time.

RESUMO

Contexto: Atualmente, a pesquisa filológica com foco interdisciplinar está cada vez mais centrada em categorias caracterizadas por paradoxo, peculiaridade e desvio da norma, entre as quais o fenômeno da liminaridade é de particular interesse acadêmico.

Objetivo: O objetivo do estudo é analisar o imaginário da liminaridade na trilogia "O Senhor dos Anéis" de J.R.R. Tolkien, com foco em personagens, estados, tempo e espaço liminares.

Materiais e métodos: O estudo empregou métodos de análise qualitativa. Foi dada atenção especial às principais categorias do conceito de liminaridade, como o enredo de transição, o discurso liminar e as imagens liminares. Foi realizada uma análise de componentes de elementos liminares, incluindo estruturas arquitetônicas e locais, bem como os estados dos personagens em momentos críticos de suas transições.

Resultados: A análise revelou que o mundo apresentado na trilogia de Tolkien está em um estado constante de liminaridade. Os personagens se movem por espaços liminares e encontram personagens e estados liminares, refletindo suas transformações internas e externas. Elementos arquitetônicos como Moria e Minas Tirith funcionam como espaços liminares simbólicos, aumentando o significado dos eventos que ocorrem. O estudo também se concentra em personagens importantes como Frodo e Aragorn e suas transições por estágios liminares, que alteram sua essência e status.

Conclusão: A liminaridade na literatura de Tolkien desempenha um papel crucial na criação de estados intermediários e de transição que refletem tanto as mudanças internas dos personagens quanto as mudanças na ordem mundial. Assim, a liminaridade na trilogia serve como um elemento estrutural e temático fundamental, ligando vários níveis da narrativa e acrescentando profundidade ao mundo literário de Tolkien.

Palavras-chave: Liminaridade; Imagens liminares; Discurso liminar; Caráter liminar; Estado liminar; Tempo liminar.

1   INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, philological research, particularly in an interdisciplinary context, has increasingly focused on categories characterized by paradox, peculiarity, and deviation from the norm. These include concepts such as absurdity (Gavins, 2013), surrealism (Goldsmith, 2011), impossibility, unnaturalness (Alber, 2009), ambiguity (Jaccard, 2011), transgressiveness, non-creativity, unoriginality, abnormality (Perloff, 2012), and paradoxicality (Stockwell, 2017). These categories form the framework of contemporary artistic multimodal discourse (Farino, 2004), among which the phenomenon of liminality holds particular scholarly interest.

The conceptual, heuristic, and methodological potential of liminality has been actively utilized in contemporary social and humanities research. This underscores the relevance and necessity of elucidating the ontological content of liminality and its associated concepts for developing a corresponding conceptual approach in literary studies. The investigation of liminal imagery is particularly pertinent, as it aligns with the phenomena and forms functioning in contemporary literary discourse, revealing the diversity of implicit liminal meanings or those associated with liminality.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "liminality" was introduced into academic discourse by the French ethnologist and folklore expert Arnold van Gennep. His work "The Rites of Passage" was one of the first comparative surveys of material collected by 19th-century anthropologists (Gennep, 1960). In this work, van Gennep developed theoretical propositions and practically substantiated the coordinating role of liminality in the process of life transitions.

According to van Gennep, the so-called "rites of passage" are essential components of transformations in any sphere—whether place, country, social status, or age—and they highlight the dichotomy between "stable" and "variable" structures (Smorgunov, 2012; Treshchenok, 2016). Any transition involves three sequential phases: 1) separation or alienation, 2) marginality or liminality (the transition phase), and 3) incorporation or integration (Fusu, 2017). The second phase—liminality—holds particular interest for researchers, as it is during this phase that the individual experiences complete uncertainty in their social surroundings and becomes detached from their familiar reality (Brunsma et al., 2013).

This concept is deeply embedded in the fields of philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, and psychology. Drawing on philosophical research, we define the liminal world as a transitional space (Foucault, 1994; Thomassen, 2014), a corridor between "this" and "the other," (Neumann, 2012) between the existing and the alternative (e.g., slavery, imprisonment/rebellion, revolution) (Znamen'skaya, 2021). In literary analysis, the concepts of timelessness (Szakolczai, 2009) and out-of-placeness are reinterpreted as liminal time and liminal space, respectively (Ponomarenko, 2014). These ideas are adapted for analyzing literary imagery that depicts transitional times and spaces (e.g., dawn—morning, autumn—spring, door—window) (Maksimova, 2016). From philosophy, we also borrow the concept of the dialectical nature of liminal imagery—the unity of being and non-being (Sorokin, 2006) —where the former state no longer exists, and the new one has not yet emerged (Riatiani, 2008).

In this research, the concept of the liminal social status of the liminal person has been adopted from social science and is interpreted as one of the components of liminal imagery in general, and of the liminal person in particular. In literary discourse, verbal markers of the liminal person—who accordingly possesses a liminal social status—are lexical units or phrases that indicate change, transition, and/or renewal of the person's social status (Fusu, 2018; Katernyi, 2020).

In psychology, the concept of the liminal state is adopted and interpreted as a crucial component of liminal imagery in general, and particularly in relation to the liminal person (Beels, 2007; Grebenyuk, 2016; Turner, 1983). Verbal markers of a liminal person experiencing a liminal state in literary discourse are typically lexical units or phrases that indicate change, choice, transition, conflict, and uncertainty (e.g., love, pregnancy, sleep). Liminality, in this context, is understood as a situation characterized by unique experiences, particularly the intense and profound changes undergone by the protagonist (Beech, 2011; Lisina, 2011; Sapogova, 2009; Shchukina, 2017).

With the advent of postmodernism, literary scholars have increasingly focused on intermediate phenomena within artistic texts. Researchers from various scientific schools and disciplines have examined liminality from diverse perspectives, revealing distinct interpretations: sacred-mythological, ritual-symbolic, cultural-anthropological, prototypical, and ontological, among others. This scholarly focus enables contemporary researchers to address the mechanisms of the "literaturization" of liminal experience (Savelova, 2012).

Literature itself serves as an ideal manifestation of the liminal phase; it is a liminal phenomenon with the primary task of creating a new reality, a new world, a new cosmos (Riatiani, 2008). This process involves not only highlighting the noticeable differences

between real and imagined worlds but also demonstrating the logical and ontological contradictions between necessity and possibility. An alternative world becomes possible only when it is formed in the author's imagination and gradually realized through the transformative spiritual efforts of the protagonist. The positive side of this transformation process is represented by the liminal phase as a transitional space between worlds, a demarcation between existing and imagined systems, creating an ambivalent ontological landscape. From this perspective, the imagined world is perceived not as a "nonexistent object," but as a "reality" based on an alternative ontological principle formed outside the transitional phase.

Key defining categories of transitiveness include time and space. The significant paradigm of space-time for reality not only aligns with but ideally corresponds to existing social structures. In this context, the "rite of passage" serves as a bridge to another—oppositional—reality, requiring a completely different interpretation of spatial-temporal dimensions.

When investigating the experience of extreme situations and transitional states in literary texts, the focus inevitably shifts to actions related to the configuration of social, psychological, and emotional status—the "transition plot" (Bugayeva, 2010). Artistic narratives of extreme situations, much like the situations themselves, possess a dynamic structure—beginning, development, and conclusion (corresponding to the three phases of transition as outlined by A. van Gennep)—and are based on either primary (cognitive frames) or secondary (traditional, reflective, often metaphorical) transition experiences. However, the concept of liminality is not necessarily bound to the rite of passage (Bugayeva, 2010).

Liminal discourse, similar to other discourses, corresponds to a specific form of social life (life outside the "structure") or expresses a desire for it (Faritov, 2014). It also creates a conditional world, which may be ideal and harmonious, or conversely, unattractive and chaotic. This world represents both realized possibilities and impossibilities. The ideology of liminal discourse is embodied in two concepts: "liminality of the strong" (depicting weakness and humiliation) and "liminality of the weak" (depicting strength and invulnerability). Essentially, this is the ideology of the "transitional period," leading to a change in priorities or their demonstrative cancellation. Adhering to the rules of liminal discourse at the appropriate moment equips the liminal person with strategies for positive or optimal self-presentation, thereby earning "symbolic capital." Like many other forms, liminal discourse can create myths, explaining them through natural laws. On one hand, it reveals the artificial, constructed nature of structural values, but often does so to establish its own. This is why

play can degenerate into a ceremony, and pretended aggression can turn into real aggression. Finally, liminal discourse is polyphonic: this quality is more vividly expressed here than in other discourses, as the experience of appropriate and creative use of others' words is stylized, showcased, and evaluated differently by various audiences (Riatiani, 2008).

One of the most characteristic features of liminal discourse is its ability to function as a stable complex of connotations, primarily based on the emotional-expressive potential of implication and capable of shifting from one denotative layer to another.

In this context, the study aims to analyze the imagery of liminality in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, with a focus on identifying and interpreting liminal states, characters, times, and spaces, and their role in creating the narrative structure and deep meaning of the literary work.

3   METHODS AND MATERIALS

In accordance with the specific requirements for analyzing the concept of liminality in contemporary literary studies, a qualitative research approach was selected.

n the first stage of the study, information sources necessary to achieve the research objectives were selected. The data for this study consists of monographs and articles published in journals indexed by Scopus and Web of Science. Detailed study and synthesis of the theoretical, social, and philosophical achievements on the issue of liminality allowed for their extrapolation to contemporary literary discourse and identification of the trend toward its liminalization. Specifically, for further analysis, the main categories of the concept of liminality were identified, such as the transition plot, liminal discourse, and liminal imagery (Table 1) and its components (liminal person, liminal state of the literary hero, liminal time, and liminal space) (Table 2).

Table 1. Main categories of the concept of liminality

No.	Main Categories	Main Provisions
1	Transitional plot	Primarily reconstructs situations of unique experience characterized by the most intense life experiences that fundamentally change the subject.
2	Liminal discourse	A means that facilitates the transition plot.
3	Liminal imagery	A system of verbal and non-verbal images, with semantic focuses on marginality, uncertainty, diffuseness, peculiarity, and abnormality.

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Table 2. Components of liminal imagery

No.	Components of Liminal Imagery	Main provisions
1	Liminal person	A certain individual (liminar, actor) existing in various marginal situations, who does not fully or partially separate from the previous ordered state.
2	Liminal state	A marginal state that reveals aspects of human nature that would not be apparent under any other conditions in everyday life; considered one of the most contradictory states in which a person, being "on the edge," thinks, reacts, and perceives everything around them in a completely different way.
3	Liminal time	A period of unusual time, essentially "timelessness," where existence in a liminal situation becomes permanent and insurmountable.
4	Liminal space	Marginal and peripheral zones of human existence that cannot be characterized by specific socio-territorial, purely social, cultural, political, gender, national, or other characteristics, and are characterized by uncertainty and the blending of features.

In the second stage of the study, an analysis of liminal imagery in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy was conducted. The analysis of the components of liminal imagery made it possible to identify several semantic dominants of liminality—uncertainty, transgressiveness, mutability—around which networks of various semantic nuances are formed, resulting in the creation of different liminal discourses.

4   RESULTS

4.1 The "in-between" world

First and foremost, in broad terms, the world presented in Tolkien's work is entirely in an intermediate state. All the action takes place during a period of total liminality, in liminal time, as the characters are constantly accompanied by the feeling that time is running out (meaning their time, the known time). This is reflected in Galadriel's words: "The world is changing. I feel it in the water, I feel it in the earth, and I smell it in the air." This, in turn, has certain consequences for the depiction of the created world with its mystical topography and the heroes journeying through it.

This world is also at a crossroads in terms of the struggle between forces, and the balance of this world has been disrupted by the power of the Ring and its Master, Sauron (a representative of the Other World, bearing the characteristics of the "land of death"). As a result, the activity of the forces of Darkness has increased; the heroes frequently mention the appearance of strange figures, and the Ringwraiths—Nazgûl—released from the tower of Minas Morgul, who are themselves liminal beings: they are neither alive nor dead.

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Moreover, they behave as such beings "should," meaning they do not speak but either whisper or produce terrifyingly loud sounds, have no bodies, are shrouded in black, etc. All of these are typical situations of transition, the liminal phase, where This World and the Other World intermingle. However, it should be emphasized that Tolkien's world construction is not strictly dichotomous in the Manichean sense; Evil does not have an "ontological" foundation—it is a corrupted Good, a deficiency (as in the Augustinian approach), after all, Orcs were "once Elves."

In this world, the heroes move between epochs, between This World and the Other World. The adventures they experience may mean more than they initially seem, if this aspect is taken into account. Above all, in this "in-between" world, they too are "in-between," they are on a journey, and the description of their travels is, essentially, the entire content of "The Lord of the Rings."

4.2 Liminality of architectural structures and locations

The analysis of liminal spaces in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" begins with the liminality of architectural structures, such as Isengard, Moria, Minas Tirith, as well as, to some extent, Shelob's Tunnel and the Paths of the Dead. In "The Lord of the Rings," these locations are not only settings for action but also liminal spaces—places of transition. They also add to the narrative in a different way, carrying a more symbolic character. They constitute one of the levels of analogs intended to describe the characteristics of the world presented in general. Their nature harmonizes with the personalities of the characters; it is no coincidence, for example, that Hobbiton consists of small huts dug into the ground, with its inhabitants being of small stature, which in turn indicates their groundedness in a psychological sense. The beauty of the Elves equals the beauty of their lands equals the beauty of their characters; the angularity of Moria, the capital of the Dwarves, correlates with the angularity of the Dwarves' figures, as well as the roughness of their characters (Gimli). At the same time, Evil is synonymous with ugliness in all dimensions. The stylistic unity of places and objects, such as the statues on Amon Sûl or Helm's Deep, also draws attention. Moria and Minas Tirith were also built in ancient times, although they differ in style, adapted to the character of the culture of their creators, and this ancient feature is not without significance when trying to capture their symbolism.

Isengard, the residence of the White Wizard Saruman, is from ancient times. Interestingly, the structure of this place resembles a mandala system. It is separated from the outside world, divided inside by alleys running among vegetation, with a clearly defined center—the

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Tower. It is in this center that the first clash of forces occurs between the traitor Saruman and Gandalf. It is here that Gandalf's journey begins, with the events in Moria becoming the turning point.

Isengard resembles a blooming garden, and it is no coincidence that the disruption of this place's nature and harmony leads to the spread of destruction from there across all of Middle-earth; the disruption of the mandala's order disrupts the structure of the world, external to it as well. Saruman destroys trees, building an entire industrial complex, which, significantly, he places underground (he also breeds new incarnations of Orcs underground, the Uruk-hai—"monsters," a special type of mythical adversaries for the heroes). It completely changes its microcosm (nature/industry). And this destruction spreads from the center, first to the nearby Fangorn Forest, and then to the Riddermark. It's as if the center had to be demolished first, thereby performing a "rite of passage."

It should be noted that Evil, of course, has a second, separate land—the land of Shadow, Mordor—possessing all the characteristics of a land of death (darkness, dust, wastelands, etc.), but it is of a different quality; it does not become evil but already is evil, at least in the context of the events described.

Even more interesting for liminal analysis is Moria, the heart of the Dwarven kingdom, but built on an ancient site. It is a kind of vertical tunnel deep into the Universe, a channel into the Other World, down to its foundations. It is also a Mountain—a sort of world axis, though the connection of all zones is impossible because the link to the upper sphere is problematic unless one considers the possibility that Gandalf moves directly from the foot of the mountain, from the world into the sphere of the stars, where mysterious beings order him to return to the world.

Nevertheless, communication with the underworld is possible in Moria; this is why creatures from the ancient world dwell here (as Gandalf says), and in the lake near the gates, a monster resides, a kind of Lernaean Hydra. But first, you have to enter... The motif of entering a place like Moria is never simple in any myth. Here, opening the gate is tied to the need to solve a riddle. In other stories, it was even worse for those who failed to solve the riddle—think of the Theban Sphinx from Greek mythology. The riddle, the password forming a task for the hero, is, of course, an old motif in many mythical and legendary stories; it is one way to illustrate the difficulty of penetrating There, into the Other World, the Underworld, etc. Another motif is, for example, defeating the gatekeeper. Therefore, Moria is a Mountain but a special one, also a unique type of architectural structure. In both senses, it resembles a labyrinth, a notion enhanced by the presence of the Balrog—a demon from the ancient world, as Gandalf calls it, a creature of flame and shadow from the abyss of the

world, undoubtedly associated with the Minotaur of the Cretan labyrinth.

For Gandalf's journey, Moria is the most crucial location, with its labyrinths and the bridge where he battles the Balrog. The bridge is a liminal space because it represents a border zone, a symbol of both separation and connection, and it is on the Khazad-dûm Bridge that Gandalf confronts the Balrog over the abyss, the chasm of the world.

Minas Tirith, the capital of Gondor, is an extremely "rich" liminal space. Separated from the rest of the world by mountains and rivers, it is built into a rocky mountain that is itself a kind of cultural mountain, an artificial mountain. The White City has seven levels, seven gates, and a central tower; there is also a central throne room, and in the courtyard on the top level is the White Tree (temporarily withered; a variant of the Tree of Life). In short, it is a concentrated world, with a very important element—the center, around which are arranged circles or levels from which Life is born and eternally reborn. This is why the final battle of transition must take place here, completing one world epoch and beginning another, for there will be a rebirth—in the very center of the world, as Théoden declares: "So the greatest battle of our time will take place before the gates of Minas Tirith."

These are just some examples of places as liminal spaces that belong to both the physical and mystical geography of "The Lord of the Rings," though not all of them can be interpreted in this way, as they are simply locations serving the action. Another issue is the various points of contact, such as bridges or gates; many significant events occur in these places, and here are just a few examples: the Khazad-dûm Bridge, the bridge over which the Fellowship permanently leaves Rivendell, the battle at the gates of Mordor, the fight between the Hobbits and Gollum right before the gates of Mount Doom. Many of them, like the structures described above, illustrate the path of the heroes, serving as liminal spaces.

4.3 Liminal persons and states

The road, the journey—these eternal and frequent topoi—acquire a special meaning in stopped time, as the road itself is a transition. It is also clear that there is an analogy between the journey through the world and the inner journey of each of the heroes. Thus, the path illustrating the characters' inner transformation is further strengthened by elements such as symbolic places and boundaries they must overcome. In our analysis, we are interested only in the boundaries directly related to the characters, so we leave aside the issue of space delineation, such as by rivers (cf. the living river bordering Rivendell, the Isen river that the Nazgûl crossed on a highly symbolic day—the summer solstice). It should also be noted that the space and how it is constructed serve not only as an analogy but sometimes as a catalyst

for the heroes' internal journeys. Many of them, especially the main characters, experience death and rebirth in the sense of initiation during their journey.

Let us analyze the roads and boundaries the heroes overcome before reaching Minas Tirith.

Frodo. The first transition marking the beginning of the journey is Frodo's farewell words as he watches the fading lights of Hobbiton: "I don't know if I shall ever see them again." However, there is a moment, a place, a special transition for Frodo when the whole road seems like a transition to him—the entire journey seems like a trial. It is worth noting that Frodo is constantly attacked by monsters, creatures of Darkness; he is wounded by the Nazgûl (a wound that does not heal), attacked by a quasi-Hydra at the gates of Moria, and wounded by a cave troll. Finally, before the most important part of his journey, he is attacked by another incarnation of Darkness, the giant spider Shelob. Nevertheless, one of the most important moments of transition seems to be when Frodo stands on the shore of the lake before the Rauros Falls after being attacked by the Uruk-hai, hesitating. This is the moment when a mature decision is born. When Frodo crosses the lake, he will be separated from the rest of the Fellowship (except for Sam). So this is an important boundary for Frodo.

Shelob's Tunnel is, of course, another example of a transition. Moreover, the tunnel evokes several associations—narrowness, as well as darkness, threat, a lurking monster. Frodo manages to escape from the monster for a while, and at one point, he collapses from exhaustion. Finally, Frodo will be killed by Shelob, though his death will turn out to be apparent. But apart from gaining hope, Frodo undergoes no metamorphosis on his way through the tunnel. He also does not succeed in his final attempt—to cast the Ring into the fire of Mount Doom; instead, the Ring finally takes hold of him, but if not for his compassion for Gollum, it would not have been destroyed. The problem is that Frodo appears more as a suffering than an acting hero, and if we speak of initiation, then perhaps only in the sense of initiation into suffering; he clearly does not change his status or experience a breakthrough moment. Frodo's journey is more internal and spiritual than that of other characters.

Aragorn. The main transition plot of this character is the Paths of the Dead, which lie in the shadow of the Mountain, as one of the characters clearly states, and the shadow indicates its special, otherworldly nature. The path is narrow, a characteristic of the so-called narrow passage (a term used by myth researchers), variations of which can be a bridge, the throat of a monster, etc. The land of the dead (the disloyal subjects of Aragorn's ancestor) has the characteristics of the Underworld, and it is easy to see that many mythic heroes had to journey into the underworld (Aeneas, Odysseus)—a clear initiation scheme. This is the most important threshold that Aragorn must overcome. One could say—the Ranger has

died, and the King of Gondor has been born.

Gandalf. It has already been mentioned that the narrow rocky gates of the Paths of the Dead are one example of the so-called narrow passage, and another form can be a bridge. Returning to Gandalf, for whom the bridge in Moria was the boundary, the most significant threshold. To fight the monster and fall into the depths, to the very foundations of the world, to the mountain—the foundations of the universe—this is his Trial of Initiation, death, and rebirth. "In the abyss, at the summit of the mountain, I fought the Balrog," Gandalf will say. He died as one dies in initiation, "but it was not the end," and passing through death, Gandalf the Grey becomes Gandalf the White.

5   DISCUSSION

The specificity of liminal imagery in literature lies in the ambivalent state of the protagonist, characterized by irrationality, ambiguity, and transitions into intermediate zones, as well as into the realm of the unreal and mystical, forming impossible liminal conditions. The cognitive basis of liminal imagery is marked by uncertainty, diffusion, and vagueness, which evoke a sense of changeability and emotional disorientation in the reader during its comprehension and interpretation.

The results of this study suggest that liminal imagery functions as an umbrella term encompassing both verbal and non-verbal depictions of the liminal person, the liminal state of the protagonist, liminal time, and liminal space. The conceptual essence of liminal imagery is understood as an integrated form that consolidates various conceptual features of nominative units of literary imagery, through which the act of knowledge is performed. This essence is structured by conceptual schemes that highlight the linguistic and cognitive mechanisms involved in the construction of liminal imagery and determine its functioning within the text (Gennep, 1960).

The verbal aspect of liminal imagery is interpreted as the embodiment of its pre-conceptual and conceptual structures within the textual fabric through various linguistic and cognitive operations and procedures (Bugayeva, 2010). This verbal aspect is actualized through a range of liminal characteristics with varying degrees of abstraction, concentrated within the aforementioned focal points of liminality. The identification of these components is facilitated by the application of semantic, morphological, and componential analysis methods.

Key features of liminality are manifested in the semantic, syntactic, and morphological structures of liminal imagery. The semantic structure of a lexical unit encompasses both high

and low degrees of abstraction (Lisina, 2011). Denotative features (e.g., class membership, objecthood, action, process, state, quality) and significative features (i.e., a set of the most generalized and characteristic features necessary for the recognition of an object or phenomenon) are considered indicators of a high degree of abstraction. Conversely, connotative features (e.g., emotional-expressive and stylistic "additions" to the main meaning) represent a lower degree of categorization/abstraction.

The non-verbal aspect of liminal imagery is constructed through a combination of connotative features or features with a low degree of abstraction, encoded in visual, auditory, and audiovisual liminal literary forms. Through the lens of the non-verbal aspect of liminal imagery, it is possible to understand the mechanisms of its sensory impact on the emotional state of the recipient. In contemporary literary discourse research, significant attention is now being given to elements that were previously regarded merely as "embellishments" or aesthetic additions to the text itself. For example, illustrations and other graphic elements are increasingly being viewed as meaning-making components that are deliberately brought to the forefront of the recipient's perception and interpretation.

The concepts of liminal time and liminal space reflect, on one hand, the highly complex process of separating the individual from an ordered chronological system and, on the other, their integration into an alternative, anti-chronological, and anti-temporal system. As a result, the individual becomes a liminal person. In this context, liminality is considered within spatial, temporal, and socio-ethical parameters.

Regarding time, as the study results indicate, liminality is interpreted as a specific, unfinished period of transition, an indefinite segment of time characterized by a break from a previous state and the acquisition of a new one, though not yet completed. Liminal time in research is considered in two aspects: 1) as a moment/period of absolute timelessness or "frozen time" (Smorgunov, 2012); and 2) as a period/point in time between two longer or more significant segments of time. In the first aspect, liminal time can be seen as an interval of "common" time, meaning a time when opposites or incompatibles meet. Conversely, within the second aspect, the images of liminal time depict actual time segments that, depending on the context, are interpreted as boundary times. Examples include parts of the day—dawn (the time between night and morning), evening, twilight (no longer day but not yet night), and night (considered a mystical time separating days); and seasons—autumn and spring (conceptually "non-primary," intermediate between winter and summer). The components of liminal time images contain semantic features of temporariness and transience, although in some cases, existence in such time may become permanent and insurmountable.

Similarly, liminal spaces are quite diverse: they can include countries located between others, border territories, enclaves, or displaced social spaces such as concentration camps, prisons, and ghettos (environments for liminal cultures). In socio-ethical terms, liminality signifies the loss of social and ethical status, social, national, cultural identification, and recognition. Liminal space in contemporary literary discourse is constructed using lexical units marked by features of uncertainty, transgression, and being "neither here nor there," such as doors or gates, often imbued with mythological connotations. They symbolize the transition from one place/state to another, from light to shadow, from the known to the unknown; transformation, entry into a new life, and initiation. Similarly, the lexical unit "window" serves as an important mythopoetic symbol, embodying such semantic oppositions as internal—external, visible—invisible/hidden, as well as the opposition of openness—closedness, corresponding to danger (risk)—safety.

Given that liminality is often equated with death, sleep, invisibility, darkness, desert, and the eclipse of the sun or moon, it is possible to identify linguistic means of expressing liminal space and time, namely: non-existence, death, depth, sleep, dream, twilight, evening, night; nowhere, elsewhere; brilliant, boundless, dark, transparent-invisible, and so forth.

The objectification of semantic features of liminality in contemporary literary discourse is determined by a set of heterogeneous focal points, which are interpreted as the semantic dominant of liminality, around which various shades of meaning accumulate. This process forms the semantic field of liminality.

Based on the premise that the most challenging aspect of reflection in the dynamics of understanding objects and phenomena is the transition from one certainty to another, from one state of the system to another, which involves a certain stage of destructiveness and loss of certainty, researchers interpret liminal imagery as a system of verbal and non-verbal images, with focal points on boundary, uncertainty, diffusion, peculiarity, and anomaly.

The uncertainty focus embodies signs of ambivalence, changeability, and doubt, all of which are embedded in liminal imagery. The diffusion focus incorporates signs of vagueness, indistinctness, elusiveness, and fleetingness. The peculiarity focus intertwines features of phantasmagoria, inauthenticity, mysticism, and enigma. The anomaly focus accumulates the objectification of deviant traits of liminal imagery. The renewal focus concentrates on characteristics associated with rebirth and the acquisition of new qualities. The boundary focus, which structures the eponymous focal point, serves as the very foundation of creating liminal forms. Depending on which focus of liminality prevails in a particular text, different meanings of liminality are actualized.

In the semantic sphere of liminality, a stable complex of connotative characteristics is typically at play, freely shifting from one denotative layer to another, combining them with contextual, often uniquely adjacent meanings. The connotations of descriptions of spatial (physical) liminality are primarily built on the emotional-expressive potential of implication. In literary statements with the semantics of liminality in the spiritual-emotional sphere, the process of spiritual-emotional assimilation of liminality is represented as occurring on emotional, ethical, and mental levels. An example of a spiritual-emotional reaction to the inevitability of liminal existence is "madness," the connotations of which are framed by the semantics of "obsession (with a dark/light God)."

Thus, in contemporary literary studies, liminality is regarded as an intermediate, transitional, ambivalent state in which an individual detaches from the normative context and, through transformation, creates an oppositional and contrasting world, reflected in both verbal and non-verbal forms. Consequently, the liminal phase assumes the significance of a special, undoubtedly sacred, spatial-temporal zone. The process of "mystical journey," "transitiveness," "mysterious movement" is intertwined with the symbolism of death and rebirth, decay and flourishing, serving as a ritual of transition from one mode of existence to another.

In the context of this literary study, liminality is understood as a situation of unique experience, characterized by the most intense experiences of fundamental change in the literary protagonist; as an intermediate, transitional, ambivalent condition, within which the individual distances themselves from the normative context and, through transformation, creates an oppositional and contrasting world.

6   CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that liminality, in its broadest sense, represents a stage of transition in a system from one state to another, characterized by the breakdown of structure, hierarchy, and the established status of its elements. In a more specific context, liminality reflects an individual's intermediate state within a sociocultural structure, where the previous social role has been relinquished, but the new one has yet to be assumed. This stage is marked by a certain level of destructiveness and loss of certainty.

By considering interpretations of liminality from interdisciplinary perspectives—including philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, and psychology—it becomes clear that liminality in literary discourse involves constructing various transitional, threshold, ambivalent, and alternative states of individuals, society, nature, and the universe.

In contemporary literary studies, liminality is thus understood as an intermediate, transitional, and ambivalent condition of being "neither here nor there." This condition allows the individual to distance themselves from the normative context, and through transformation, create an oppositional and contrasting world, reflected in both verbal and non-verbal forms.

The analysis of liminality in "The Lord of the Rings" reveals that liminal spaces, characters, and states play a crucial and interconnected role in shaping the narrative. These elements not only drive the plot forward but also deepen the thematic complexity of Tolkien's world. The study underscores that, from this perspective, liminal space is as significant as liminal persons and liminal states, forming a cohesive framework that is essential to the story's structure and meaning.

Future research could further explore the role of liminality in other literary works or genres, or examine different aspects of liminal theory in Tolkien's work. This study contributes to the broader understanding of liminality in literature, highlighting its importance as a tool for analyzing the transitional and transformative aspects of narrative and character development.

In conclusion, the concept of liminality offers a powerful lens through which to explore the rich and complex world of "The Lord of the Rings," providing insights into the narrative's structure and the profound transformations experienced by its characters.

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