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**The changes of literary fantastical elements visible in *The Hobbit*  
by J. R. R. Tolkien**

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### **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem autorkou této kvalifikační práce a že jsem ji vypracovala pouze s použitím pramenů a literatury uvedených v seznamu použitých zdrojů.

České Budějovice .....2023

.....  
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### **Poděkování**

Ráda bych poděkovala vedoucímu své bakalářské práce doc. PhDr. Ladislavu Nagymu, Ph.D., za poskytnutí cenných rad, informací a materiálů k vypracování této bakalářské práce a ..... cenné rady a pomoc s literárními podklady.

## **Anotace**

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje především na vývoj a evoluci fantastických prvků v moderní fantasy literatuře, přičemž jako kritický příklad slouží *Hobit* od J. R. R. Tolkiena. Jak je všeobecně známo, literatura je dynamická a vyvíjející se umělecká forma utvářená různými vnitřními i vnějšími faktory. Cílem této práce je prostřednictvím pečlivé analýzy vybraných příkladů fantasy prvků prozkoumat a ilustrovat změny, k nimž v tomto žánru v průběhu času došlo, a zároveň je porovnat se základními aspekty klasické fantasy literatury. V konečném důsledku chce tato studie přispět k hlubšímu pochopení žánru fantasy a jeho vývoje a osvětlit způsoby, jakými se měnil a zároveň zůstával věrný svým kořenům.

**Klíčová slova:** J. R. R. Tolkien, fantasy literatura, Germánská a Islandská mytologie, Artušovské legendy, *Beowulf*

## **Annotation**

The primary focus of this Bachelor thesis is to examine the development and evolution of fantastical elements in modern fantasy literature, with *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien serving as a critical example. As is widely recognized, literature is a dynamic and evolving art form shaped by various internal and external factors. Through careful analysis of selected examples of fantasy elements, this thesis aims to explore and illustrate the changes that have occurred in the genre over time while also comparing and contrasting them with the foundational aspects of classic fantasy literature. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the fantasy genre and its evolution, shedding light on the ways in which it has both changed and remained true to its roots.

**Keywords:** J. R. R. Tolkien, fantasy literature, Germanic and Islandic mythology, Arthurian legends, Beowulf

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# 1 Introduction

Since time immemorial, humanity has used innumerable ways in their free time to ward off ordinary boredom or a spare moment. The origins of visual art can be traced back to the earliest forms of human expression, such as drawings on dirt or cave walls. As humanity evolved and developed, so too did the techniques and mediums used to create art, leading to the diverse range of styles and forms we are familiar with today. One of these ways of entertainment became, for example, music, initially what we would now call simple sounds, which has become one of the most used means of distraction or entertainment in the 21st century. The central theme of this thesis will be devoted to the literary side of entertainment but also to the enrichment of knowledge, with a deeper focus on its debatably best-known and today's most-read genres, which we have long known under the name of fantasy. This raises a simple question: how did this genre evolve into the style we are all familiar with in this modern age?

This genre, which many might describe as one of the most widely read, has been affected by numerous internal and external factors, over the years. One of them being the pressure of readers or mere writing trends. In the course of time, the genre evolved into the "shape and form" that today's generation of young and adult readers continue to use as a form of entertainment. Upon further examination of this topic, we will come to the realization that even reading great literary works, such as William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, can reveal the presence of fantasy elements during the Victorian era. However, it is important to note that the writing style during that time was unique and different from what is commonly seen in contemporary literature.

However, we want to compare a so-called typical example of modern literature. In that case, it is necessary to focus on the fact that it needs to meet all the factors we imagine under the word

"fantasy". The chosen author for this thesis is John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, who is widely regarded as one of the most renowned authors of fantasy literature. Through his works such as *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*, he established a standard for modern fantasy literature, and his works are often considered as the foundation for the literary elements that define this genre today. At the same time, this world-renowned author, with his creativity and literary skill, became an inspiration for future generations of writers, not only of this specific genre, such as George Raymond Richard Martin, famous for his *Game of Thrones* series but also the four-part series by Christopher James Paolini, also called *The Inheritance Cycle* or the stories of a young wizard named *Harry Potter* by Joanne Rowling.

This thesis will explain the origins of fantasy literature that can be traced back to ancient mythology and folklore, which often featured supernatural elements and fantastical creatures, with examples like the Brothers Grimm and their fairy tales and the rise of gothic stories such as *The Vampyre* by John W. Polidori. However, the modern form of the genre can be traced to the works of a writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien. This author created a richly detailed imaginary world, often inspired by medieval mythology and folklore, and imbued their stories with themes of heroism, magic, and adventure. The popularity of his works paved the way for the emergence of a new generation of fantasy writers in the latter half of the 20th century.

The forthcoming section will cover literature from 1950 onwards. The 1950s were an important decade for the fantasy genre, as it marked the publication of several influential works that helped shape the direction of the genre in the decades that followed. During this time, authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis continued to be major figures in the fantasy world, with the publication of Tolkien's "*The Lord of the Rings*" trilogy and Lewis's "*The Chronicles of*



*Narnia*" series. These works introduced readers to expansive imaginary worlds filled with magical creatures and epic battles between good and evil.

The next chapter will build on the previous one, discussing Tolkien in more detail as an author and as a man with an incredible imagination and skill for writing and creating stories.

This bachelor's thesis will address this topic not only from the point of view of European history and mythologies, but the analysis will also focus on the point of view of other cultures and histories that had a great influence on the development of this creature.

Furthermore, we will move on to explain and describe the origin and beginnings of the development of this genre using specific examples such as the *Arthurian legends* or one of the most important literary works such as *Beowulf*. The thesis will focus more on the aesthetic elements such as "story and worldbuilding" and "heroism" in these specific works. The main question in this chapter will be whether these elements arose in an evolutionary form and their popularity only occurred with the advent of a more modern style of writing or did these stylistic forms appear in the literature already in the times of chivalry.

In the second half of this work, the previous analysis will be compared with the typical modern style of fantasy literature. From this comparison, it will be possible to create a subsequent description of the evolutionary process and the final process of this, one of the most popular literary genres in the modern era of the 21st century.

## 2 Fantasy genre

### 2.1 The Beginnings of the Genre

We all have an intuitive knowledge of what the fantasy genre could be, but the question of what this literary genre is and how it can be explained still arises. According to Medlesohn, fantasy

can be described as something "impossible and unexplainable" . (2) On top of that, in this day and age, we know that fantasy as a genre began as a response to realism. There are many written forms of art that all types of readers seek if they look more into the "not real" in a story. Although, at first, fantasy did not belong in the most popular genre, it was mostly mocked or even neglected by critics. The genre of fantasy literature has roots that extend far back into the history of human storytelling. Some of the oldest known works that we could categorize as belonging to this genre are The Epic of Gilgamesh and the works of Homer. Even though these works were created thousands of years ago, they still possess many of the same elements that we associate with modern fantasy literature, such as supernatural creatures, magic, and epic quests. In fact, it could be argued that these works helped lay the foundation for the genre and that subsequent authors have built upon this foundation over the centuries. Typical stories of heroes or extraordinary people who fought unnatural creatures or something that could not be logically explained, even though these ancient stories were most of the time heavily inspired by the Greek gods and goddesses.

To better understand fantasy literature, we need to look more deeply into the beginnings of this specific literary genre. The historically first known pieces of writing that could be included in the fantasy genre are stories from ancient Greece, although officially, we do not include these works in this genre. Suppose we delve deeper into the history of writing. In that case, we will find that relatively few books were recorded during that period, with a significant increase not occurring until much later. One of the first documented pieces of writing that can be considered representative of the fantasy genre is Beowulf. A simple story of a hero fighting against an evil being. From that period, there is also writing called Prose Edda, which includes recorded information about the old English gods, and could be used as inspiration for writing at that time.

Arguably one of the essential book series that helped to shape the fantastical genre we know today is the Icelandic Sagas, which gained popularity in the nineteenth century due to a translation of the remaining books by William Morris and others.

## 2.2 Development of the fantasy genre

While today's fantastical works might be considered a separate genre from romance, it is important to remember that this was not always the case. Before the Middle Ages and the first usage of the Old French grapheme "romanz," there were already literary narratives that bore similarities to romance. As Heng notes, "to signify an expanding category of fabulous narratives of a literary kind, something, we feel, existed that was already romance-like, that preceded the medieval concretions." (2) Although the term "fantasy" may not have existed yet, the fantastical elements that would later be classified as such were present within the broader category of romance.

Between 1130 and 1139, historically, one of the most critical pieces for fantasy and other genres was created, namely the stories of King Arthur and his knights. The extraordinary story and worldbuilding of the chronicles are something that modern authors try to achieve these days. According to Heng, it involves "Celtic legendary tradition" by Geoffrey of Monmouth in an infamous, celebrated chronicle-history, "*the Historia Regum Britannie, or History of the Kings of Britain.*" (2) Stories of highly ranked medieval knights that fight for what they think is rightful for their knightly duties. All of these chronicles contain some imaginary parts, even though their genre is far from fantasy. According to Mendlesohn:

The earliest references to Arthur occur in a Welsh context, but the first complete narratives about Arthur were written in Norman England and France, and in the course

of the thirteenth century became popular right across Europe. Many of the "French romances" were indeed written in England, whose aristocracy spoke French after 1066 and whose political and economic fortunes were entwined with France. The earlier Arthurian stories can be seen as part of the wider tradition of chivalric literature and revolve around love and adultery: later, under the influence of the Church, the stories bring in more Christian themes, codified as the quest for the Holy Grail. (10)

One of the main characters that often shows up in many of the pieces of writing is a mysterious mage called Merlin. This particular character has many roles in this series, which include being a royal advisor or warrior. Mendlesohn says that:

"Some of the Arthurian traditions, such as the figure of Merlin, seem to have been invented wholesale by Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose fictional *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136) was by the end of the twelfth century regarded as genuine history, and not questioned until the sixteenth century. The medieval Arthurian tradition in England reached its full form in the fifteenth century in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. (10)

An important characteristic that has started to rise more and more is the "Robin Hood trait," which includes the differences between the "poor" and the "dispossessed" and the "aristocracy," concluding the fight between the good and the bad.

Moving on to the more mystical aspects of literary history, we delve into the incorporation of Celtic writing traditions, which ultimately gave birth to the term "fairies." The beings that represent destiny, known as "the fates," do not have a clear origin in the original Vulgar Latin;

therefore, we can presume that as more and more folklore about them developed, the term evolved. For example, James Mendlesohn claims that the Fae are characterised as "wild and unpredictable" in the Arthurian cycle. (11) In the concept of that time, fairies were creatures from another world that lived alongside ours, and their purpose in those stories was mainly for the entanglement of the storyline. A famous example would be Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

If we move on further to the seventeenth century, the popularisation of fairy tales started to occur, which can be simply explained as a shaped and polished version of stories that people shared in social gatherings, mostly popularised by the Grimm Brothers in their collection of writings. Mendlesohn's analysis has identified the most successful stories in the fantasy genre:

"But the most successful nineteenth-century writer of fairy tales by far was Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75). Andersen's tales were written with the courtly polish of Perrault, but with the dark morality of the Brothers Grimm: "*The Little Mermaid*" (1837), "*The Snow Queen*" (1844), "*The Little Match Girl*" (1845) and "*The Red Shoes*" (1845) are all bitter tales in which right and wrong, good and evil are obscured and the world does not end happily or well. "*The Ugly Duckling*" (1844) perhaps best displays also the rigid and defensive destinarianism of Andersen's stories in which the only route to true happiness is finding or accepting your place in society: perhaps a legacy of his own displacement and bad experiences as a fostered child, and later as a parvenu in Danish society. (12)

These types of stories eventually developed into more complicated and structured fairy tales, such as *The Arabian Nights (or The Thousand and One Night)*, which started to be created. At

the same time, the European fantasy genre started to take into consideration traditions more on the eastern side of the world. The cultural tradition of using ghosts as the fantastical aspect in stories inspired by Japanese history or Chinese traditions using the fictional character Kai Lung creates fantastical series that will inspire for other authors in the future.

However, due to the brutal and horrific nature of these stories, fairy tales were meant to be only for an adult audience; surprisingly, this genre developed more to be fit primarily for children. "By the end of the nineteenth century, the "traditional" forms of the fantastic were being pulled in towards a common centre, combining with new forms that had rather more modern origins. The rise of modern fantasy is partially dependent on the changes wrought by the Enlightenment on the intellectual climate of modern Europe." (Mendlesohn 13)

Gothic is one of the genres that helped create and shape the fantasy genre as we know it today. The Castle of Otranto, written by Horace Walpole, is one of the earliest examples of a Gothic story that we would consider a classic. The defining characteristic of Gothic tales is the subversion of our normal understanding of the world, often through the creation of supernatural or otherwise unnatural elements that challenge the human mind. For the gothic stories, it was typical that the reader liked the tension between the supernatural and the scepticism that naturally comes with it. Mendlesohn James is saying that:

the Gothic, along with the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, ushered in the nineteenth-century cult of the medieval. By the early nineteenth century, Gothic stories were tending to be given contemporary settings: the place of horror was no longer the castle or the monastery, but was domesticized into the attic, the cellar, and the dark urban streets. (14)

Famous stories that helped to shape this genre and also include fantastical elements with a tinge of horror are *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818) or *The Vampyre: A Tale* by John W. Polidori (1819). However, the story that is mainly known and famous, even to the younger generation, because of its many adaptations and modern inspiration, is *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (1897).

Another notable work in the development of literature is Lewis Carroll's "*Alice in Wonderland*" (1864), which is often categorised as "children's literature." One unique aspect of this book is that it employs fantastical concepts throughout the entire story, but in a surprising twist at the end, Carroll incorporates a concept that was not widely used at the time, resulting in a shift from a fantastical to a non-fantastical ending.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, two major authors that helped to shape the fantasy literary genre as a whole were surprisingly mainly writers of children's stories. These two authors are Lyman Frank Baum and Edith Nesbit. They created something that B. Attebery named "indigenous fantasy". According to Mendlesohn:

Baum wrote that he wished to create for American children a fantastic world that owed nothing to the fantasy traditions of Europe. Nesbit was less forthcoming. A professional writer who wrote to support a growing family, Nesbit wrote in a number of different genres for both adults and children (25).

Stories such as *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* by E. Nesbit (1899), a book about children who help their widowed father, or *Five Children and It* by E. Nesbit (1902), a story about

children who discover sand fairy. He created the idea that the fantastical could burst into our world without any previously known hints with the fact that not everything extraordinary needs to be scary. Nesbit created something we know today under the name "low" or "urban" fantasy, which Mendlesohn explains as "magic entering into and disrupting the urban environment."  
(25)

On the other hand, Baum used the fantasy genre in the more Americanised style of writing and created other worlds in his stories, which created brilliant stories such as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), the first book in the long-running series of tales in the fantastical world of Oz. Mendlesohn says that:

Baum's Oz appears on maps (indeed, his are arguably the ancestors of all the maps which introduce so many modern fantasy trilogies). In later books there is a suggestion that Oz exists very close to Kansas. It can be reached in a house picked up by a whirlwind, or by sailing down a river. It has different countries, each with different polities, and there is a suggestion of an economic system. (26)

It is uncertain whether Baum and Nesbit were the actual catalysts that sparked the growth of children's literature, but what is clear is that they undoubtedly acted as a source of inspiration for numerous fantasy writers that followed them.

Not particularly fantastical tales, but still important to include, are stories created of animal fables. One of the most famous ones is *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter (1902) or *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (or by its full name: *The Story of Doctor Dolittle, Being the History of His Peculiar Life at Home and Astonishing Adventures in Foreign Parts*) by Hugh Lofting



(1920). Around the same time, a book that can also be fitted into the fantastical and animal fable standard, a story by George Orwell named *Animal Farm* (1945), was created. Still, this story, yet at first glance, can be misunderstood as a children's story and is by no means something as simple as a tale to be read before sleep.

### 2.3 Fantasy genre in the late 1950s

The latest and the final contribution of the fantasy genre, whose significance and style helped to shape and develop the genre as we know it today, are the most important additions to our list of authors, and that is J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Nevertheless, throughout their lives, they eventually found their way into the literature and language club at Oxford University. More importantly, they shared an interest in Greek, Nordic, and Icelandic mythology and the mysteries and unknowns of the medieval world. Mendlesohn is confirming the fact that:

Perhaps even more significant, both read the fantasies of the nineteenth century, above all the works of George MacDonald and William Morris. And yet, when Tolkien and Lewis became friends in Oxford in the late 1920s, what impressed Lewis at first were their differences: "At my first coming into the world I had been (implicitly) warned never to trust a Papist, and at my first coming into the English Faculty (explicitly) never to trust a philologist. Tolkien was both." (Surprised by Joy, 173)" (Gtd. 43).

It may come as a surprise that Tolkien and Lewis. However, they shared many interests but, at the end of the day, only sometimes disagreed with each other because the Oxford faculty was divided into literature and psychology. As a result, both of these authors were on opposite sides. While Lewis was using his imagination to create many of the fantastical worlds which we are familiar with, Tolkien, on the other hand, used philosophy and the study of other languages,

which attracted him to the Middle Ages in the first place and even used his knowledge for the creation of brand-new languages. Lewis eventually became most famous for his series named Narnia, which is about siblings who discover a new fantastical world through a magical wardrobe.

### 3 John Ronald Reuel Tolkien

After summarizing the beginning of the fantasy genre, we then proceed to the current days. As an example of a typical contemporary fantasy writer, I chose the infamous J. R. R. Tolkien, whose works changed and shaped what modern fantasy literature looks like today. In this part of the thesis, we will look more deeply at the author himself and move forward to his groundbreaking piece of work known as *The Hobbit*.

#### 3.1 Misunderstanding of Tolkien

His works were referred to as "for children", and on top of that, some did not agree with him being an acclaimed author. It is exceptionally unique for books to create such a substantial controversy among readers, with the author still being one of the most talked about topics in modern literature. However, at the same time, several public polls tried to analyse who was still in first place among people of Folio Society, and the result was quite surprising. As stated by Pearce:

They revealed *The Lord of the Rings* as the greatest book of the century in the view of Telegraph readers and Tolkien as the greatest author, ahead of George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh in second and third place respectively. Two months later, a poll published by the Folio Society ranked Tolkien's epic as Britain's favourite book of any century. (14-15)

Tolkien's rising popularity started to surprise the critics even more over time when his audiobook, *The Hobbit*, became the best-selling audiobook in 1997. Regardless of whether his work was selected, purchased, or heard, it was inconsequential. His reputation as a great author started to rise. "Woodhead, a former English teacher, was echoing the concerns of many educationalists who were as baffled by Tolkien's success as the literary critics." (Pearce 15)

Public polls aside, if we take into consideration the opinions of literary critics, they were of the opinion that *The Hobbit* could not be regarded as anything other than mere children's literature. At best, it could also be considered a mix of children's and adult literature. The book's evolving form contributed to some confusion over its genre and meaning, as Tolkien revised it three times. In the second edition of 1951, for example, chapter 5 was revised to create a smoother transition to *The Lord of the Rings*. These revisions, along with the book's complex themes and content, suggest that while *The Hobbit* may have been intended for younger readers, it also has the potential to appeal to adult audiences as well. Despite some critical interpretations exploring the psychological and literary aspects of J.R.R. Tolkien's work on an adult level, only some have attempted to explain the book's appeal to younger readers. For instance, they often neglect to address the use of a narrator that resembles Tolkien himself, as well as the children's story framework that underpins the narrative. Chance is saying that:

'*The Hobbit*' was written in what I should now regard as bad style, as if one were talking to children. There's nothing my children loathed more. They taught me a lesson. Anything that was in any way marked out in '*The Hobbit*' as for children, instead of just for people, they disliked—instinctively. I did too, now that I think about it.' (Quote in quote Chance 47)

Some critics even said Tolkien's "triumph" was an absolute nightmare. English teacher Mr. Greer complained about the book inventing a new era of novels with an imaginary world with the invention of new beings. Meanwhile, real books should be set in a real-time setting. However, many people jumped to his side and defended him. Pearce contends that:

‘According to Goodman the various aspects of the book’s plot ‘all point to conclusions as true as they are commonplace: that growing up is painful, but cannot be avoided; that it involves hard choices, which we are free to take; that choices have consequences, and that even good ones will not bring back the past.’ (Quote in quote 17)

### 3.2 Tolkien's Writing

If we go a few years back to 1926, when Tolkien met Lewis for the first time, he was already working on *The Silmarillion*, a book about the history and mythology of his imaginary world called Middle Earth. Despite initially creating the world of Middle-earth as a hobby, J.R.R. Tolkien was convinced by his friend C.S. Lewis to publish stories set in this world. The result was the first book in the series, titled *The Hobbit*, which was first published in 1937. “The public, of course, had to wait until 1954 and 1955 for the publication in three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings*, the events of which concerned a very brief period in the third age of Tolkien's invented world of Middle-earth.” (Hart, Khovacs 31) Their shared love for writing was what brought these two men together, while Lewis and Tolkien wrote unique fairy tales intended for both younger and older audiences. They both have their reasons for such a style of writing. The first thing to note is that these authors personally enjoyed the work of the Grimm brothers, A. Lang, and many others. At the same time, they worked as a teacher at a university, and their

profession was related to teaching about medieval romance and the background of Norse mythology. Around that time, such stories were given the label "stories for children".

“Through much of history these were tales told and enjoyed by grown-ups. Even strong warriors enjoyed them, rejoicing in their triumphant moments, weeping at tragic turns of events. These stories told them important things about reality—about who they were and what the world was like, and about the realm of the divine.” (Hart, Khovacs Duriez, 21)

Tolkien and Lewis shared a common goal of creating works that would appeal not only to children but also to adults. However, they each had their own unique approach. Tolkien, his focus was on creating a rich and detailed world, complete with its mythology, languages, and history. He wanted to immerse readers in a fully-realized universe in which they could explore and lose themselves.

On the other hand, Lewis was more interested in exploring the ideas and themes that were important to him. He used his stories to examine issues like faith, morality, and the nature of good and evil. He was also interested in creating a new world, but his emphasis was on the concepts behind it rather than the world-building itself. Despite their different approaches, both authors were hugely influential in shaping the fantasy genre and inspiring generations of writers to come.

#### 4 The Hobbit and Nordic Mythology

In order to fully appreciate the creative origins of some of the most beloved works of fantasy literature, it is often helpful to delve into the rich world of Norse mythology. This ancient mythos, with its powerful gods and mystical realms, played a significant role in shaping the literary landscape of many modern fantasy novels.

At the beginning of it was the ruler of them all, a God named Odin, who gained his powers when he hung himself from the world tree, Yggdrasil, and thanks to this suffering he gained world wisdom. At the same time, he looked upon the ancient rune, which revealed his knowledge to him, but this suffering alone was not all of it because, in the end, he even lost his eye so that we might recognise him with a patch on his left eye.

He was known under many names. He is the all-father, the gallows god, the lord of the slain, and the Grimnir and Third. Most of the time, when travelling, he only goes in disguise and in the shape of a tall man with a hat and cloak. According to the findings of Gaiman:

He has two ravens, whom he calls Huginn and Muninn, which mean “thought” and “memory.” These birds fly back and forth across the world, seeking news and bringing Odin all the knowledge of things. They perch on his shoulders and whisper into his ears. When he sits on his high throne at Hlidskjalf, he observes all things, wherever they may be. Nothing can be hidden from him. (14)

He then eventually dies in the great war called Ragnarök. Those events are written in the great Poetic Edda, which describes the death of many other gods and how the world will, in the end, rise again.

One of the many vital characters in Norse mythology is Thor, the god of thunder. He is the right opposite of his father, Odin. While his father is evil and cunning, the thunderous god is more straightforward and good-natured. At first look, we can immediately notice his enormous proportions and significantly red-coloured beard. In one of his hands, he holds his weapon, a

unique hammer that was specifically forged by dwarves for him, called Mjolnir. The creatures walking around the land shake at the simple thought of its name because of the killing that was done upon the giants, trolls, and many others. As stated by Gaiman:

Thor's mother was Jord, the earth goddess. Thor's sons are Modi, the angry, and Magni, the strong. Thor's daughter is Thrud, the powerful. His wife is Sif, of the golden hair. She had a son, Ullr, before she married Thor, and Thor is Ullr's stepfather. Ullr is a god who hunts with bow and with arrows, and he is the god with skis. Thor is the defender of Asgard and of Midgard. (15)

Another critical figure that quietly stirred up the lives of others was Loki. His looks and characteristic behaviours are more on the positive side and but throughout his life, he became more vicious and used them for his plans against other gods. He is the son of Laufey, also known as Nal or Needle, because of her beauty, sharpness, and slim figure. Loki's father is not so well known, but we can suppose that it was giant Farbauti, which Gaiman describes as "he who strikes dangerous blows," the name that evokes fear. (15) Loki was mainly known for his shapeshifting abilities. However, what was the scariest about him was his mind. His tricks and deceptive properties, in the end, helped him surpass the all-father. Gaiman's research indicates that:

Loki is Odin's blood brother. The other gods do not know when Loki came to Asgard, or how. He is Thor's friend and Thor's betrayer. He is tolerated by the gods, perhaps because his stratagems and plans save them as often as they get them into trouble. Loki makes the world more interesting but less safe. He is the father of monsters, the author of woes, and the sly god. Loki drinks too much, and he cannot guard his words or his

thoughts, or his deeds when he drinks. Loki and his children will be there for Ragnarök, the end of everything, and it will not be on the side of the gods of Asgard that they will fight. (16)

What makes Norse mythology so specific and recognisable are the wide varieties of creatures that take on many essential roles in various stories. Not only the gods played in the tales but also figures such as dwarves or elves. As in our world, the creatures have their own races up in the north. One of the most important creatures is the dwarf. Tolkien used in his novels any varieties of creatures, but dwarfs hold one of the most important ones. In Norse mythology, dwarves were primarily working for Odin. Their purpose in many stories was to craft weapons for Odin's soldiers. However, what is not so much known is the fact that few dwarves had magical power. Some of them could use shapeshifting or use their magic to create many tools.

On the other hand, we have the elves. In the original Norse mythology, there are two types of elves, dark and light. The dark elves live within the earth and have, in general, darker looks to them, called *Dökkálfar* and on the opposite side are the light elves that live in *Álfheimr* with a complexion lighter than the sun, called *Ljósálfar*. The elves are believed to cause illnesses, have strong magic, and possess extraordinary beauty. When we look at the environmental structure of Norse mythology, most of the stories are told in the winter period. However, under all that snow, the mythology is also specific for its forests and many mountains, which create and are part of the magical atmosphere. According to the analysis of Lindow:

The world in which the *æsir* and *jötnar* play out their struggle has its own set of place-names but is essentially recognizable as Scandinavia. There are rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, storms, cold weather, fierce winters, eagles, ravens, salmon, and



snakes. People get about on ships and on horseback. They eat slaughtered meat and drink beer. As in Scandinavia, north is a difficult direction, and so is east, probably because our mythology comes from west Scandinavia (Norway and Iceland), where travel to the east required going over mountains, and going west on a ship was far easier for this seafaring culture. (1)

#### 4.1 Tolkien and his Creations

Tolkien's writings were famously known for his creatures known as Hobbits. He created those creatures based on himself. He tried to include some of his own characteristics, such as his passion for gardening, his occasional smoking of a pipe, or his affection for simple and plain food. At the same time, he based hobbits on English people, and after his words, he tried to characterize these creatures as the embodiment of "Englishness". Tolkien's explanation for their visuals was that English people are, generally small in their reach for their imagination, but their reach for a sense of adventure is significant. One time he wrote to his publisher that the Shire was not based on any country; he took inspiration from the rural side of England. His explained that the inhabitants and the environment simply complemented each other.

The author's surname comes from his German ancestors from the eighteenth century, and he stood firmly behind the fact that, even though he has relatives from Germany, he is a man from England inside and out. "This anti-imperialism found expression in Middle Earth in the incarnation of hobbits as idealized Little Englanders. The localized patriotism of the Shire represents a contented, idyllic and inward-looking Little England, as distinct from the imperialism of Great Britain or the glorification of the British Empire." (Pearce 117)

His formative years, notably the time he spent growing up without access to modern technologies, impacted the inspiration for his writings. As the son says about the author, he became increasingly disillusioned with the modern world, which he associated with the rise of machines and the rapid pace of technological change. He began to see modernity as a force threatening the natural world and eroding the values and traditions of earlier times. As a result, he turned to the creation of a fictional world that was imbued with a sense of nostalgia for a simpler, more idyllic era. According to the perspective of Pearce:

In *The Hobbit* the intrinsic worth of traditional craftsmanship is contrasted with the materialism of those who hoard possessions that they do not have the skills to make themselves. This disdain by the craftsman for the possessiveness of the hoarder is voiced by the dwarf Thorin: ‘Dragons steal gold and jewels, you know, from men and elves and dwarves, wherever they can find them; and they guard their plunder as long as they live (which is practically for ever, unless they are killed), and never enjoy a brass ring of it (118).

This is also visible in his work, where Middle Earth is slowly polluted by the industrialization of the "evil parts" of the land while "the good" is still untouched. Pearce says that:

Just as Tolkien’s anti-imperialism had borne fruit in parallels between the Shire and Little England, so his anti-industrialism found fruition in the depiction of the Shire as the Merrie England of mediaeval legend. Thus the Shire is a land in which machine-based mass-production has not been introduced and where individual craftsmanship still prevails (118).

## 4.2 Ragnarök

Ragnarök, also known as the great battle between the Norse gods or “the final destiny of the gods”. Ragnarök does not come on its own. It is preceded by many acts that eventually lead to it. Three terrifying and dangerous winters in which the sun does not shine or rise are the beginning of this complicated war. After those events, another three more winters come with massive battles across the entire world, where many fathers and sons lose their lives. According to the findings of Lecouteux:

Next, the wolf Sköll will eat the sun and the wolf Hati will devour the moon; the Earth will quake; trees will be uprooted; the mountains will collapse; the wolf Fenrir will break free from his bonds, and the sea will flood over the Earth because the Midgard Serpent has come ashore. Naglfar, the boat made from the toenails and fingernails of the dead, will set sail with a giantess or Loki at the helm. Fenrir will trot along with his mouth gaping wide—the upper jaw touching the heavens and the lower one the earth—ready to swallow up everything, and the Midgard Serpent will spew its venom. (23)

The next part of those events is that heaven tears apart and “the sons of the Muspell”, also known as the giants, come forward in the leadership of Surtr to the final battle. Lecouteux describes the story as that “The Æsir and the einherjar will don their armor and emerge through the 540 gates of Valhalla, in rows of 800, with Odin at their head.” (23) However, the Ragnarök is not the ending. After the great battle comes to the extensive renewal, because of the survival of two Odins sons, gods Víðarr and Váli. “Furthermore, two human beings will also survive: Líf (“Life”) and Lífþrasir (“Striving for Life”), who will feed on the morning dew and repopulate the world that is lit by the daughter of Sól (the sun). (Lecouteux 23-24)

### 4.3 Conflict in The Hobbit

In order to draw a comparison and analyse the wars in both Nordic mythology and The Hobbit, it is crucial to provide a brief overview of the plot of The Hobbit. The tale follows the journey of a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins, who is similar to other hobbits in his love for a peaceful life at home without any disturbances. However, his life is turned upside down when he is unexpectedly recruited as a burglar to help his dwarf companions defeat the dragon Smaug. Along the way, he forges strong bonds of friendship with his companions that last a lifetime.

As the narrative progresses, it becomes evident to readers that a war is looming between humans, dwarves, and elves towards the end of the book. Despite some efforts to prevent it, the inevitability of the conflict has been long anticipated. “Suddenly without a signal they sprang silently forward to attack. Bows twanged and arrows whistled: battle was about to be joined.” (Tolkien 323) What was not expected was, right at this time, everyone was attacked by goblins. “So began a battle that none had expected, and it was called The Battle of five armies, and it was very terrible. Upon one side were the Goblins and the Wilde Wolfes, and upon the other were Elves, Men and Dwarves. This is how it fell out.” (Tolkien 324)

In The Hobbit, Gandalf plays the role of a guide and mentor to Bilbo, leading him on the adventure from Rivendell through the Misty Mountains and Mirkwood. Using his supernatural abilities, such as fire and magic, Gandalf protects the group from danger and inspires Bilbo with his tales. However, like a good parent, Gandalf knows when to step back and allows Bilbo to develop his own abilities as a burglar, which he eventually does. Later, in chapter 17, Gandalf returns as a *deus ex machina* to congratulate Bilbo on his progress and to aid in the final battle. “Bilbo learns his trade as a burglar by defeating various monsters who collectively represent *amor sui*, but individually “bodily” temptation and “spiritual” temptation, as we have previously

seen. In the process his initial physical bumbling changes to real dexterity, then skill, and is finally aided by the courage of the newly confident Hobbit.” (Chance 60)

#### 4.4 The Hobbit and Similarities with Ragnarök

The conflict between the gods known as Ragnarök was frequently explained in the chapter where we introduced the fundamentals of Norse mythology. Why was it necessary to mention this specific event? Nordic mythology has a lot of fantastical aspects that authors use as inspiration in their stories, and the war of Ragnarök especially. Although this Scandinavian occurrence is said to be inevitable, it is preceded by particular yearly events. The same goes for the story written by Tolkien.

In the book, the race of elves is mentioned as something to be afraid of but not dangerous. On the other side, the race of men gave our heroes a much more welcoming embrace. It is not so unusual that races with different backgrounds would not be fond of each other; however, what did not help this situation is that the dwarves wanted the treasure from the dragon just for themselves. Elves and men have in their subconscious minds the knowledge of the great treasure that the Lonely Mountain holds, and they both know that this treasure belongs to the dwarves, although that does not change the fact that greed is more potent than logical thinking. Previous encounters with these two races complicate the lives of our main characters.

If we delve deeper into Nordic mythology, we will come across a poem called Völuspá, which is believed to be one of the oldest and most essential poems in Norse mythology. It tells the story of the creation of the world and the gods, the events leading up to the end of the world, and the rebirth of the world after its destruction. The poem provides a rich source of inspiration for modern fantasy literature, particularly in the portrayal of epic battles, fantastical creatures,

and a world shaped by powerful divine forces. “The poem includes their genealogy and a list of their names. This ‘catalogue of the dwarfs’ was the source of the names for Gandalf, Thorin Oakenshield, Balin, Dwalin, Fili, Kíli, Dori, Nori, Ori, Óin, Glóin, Bifur, Bofur and Bombur and several other Dwarves in TH and LR.” (Lee, Solopova 59) This fact proves the explanation of the evidence that the author himself was exceptionally familiar with events of Nordic mythology and the war of Ragnarök because dwarves play significant roles in the happenings of it. It is also not surprising that dwarves, as a race, play one of the significant roles in the story of *The Hobbit*.

The similarities between Ragnarök and The Battle of Five Armies are that Tolkien was heavily inspired by the usage of different races. In Nordic mythology, the war was between the gods, but we must not forget that dwarves and elves were mythical and godly creatures and had great anticipation for this event. In both the Scandinavian War and *The Hobbit*, there was a conclusion that led to a new beginning for all the races and gods, but not without some necessary deaths. The deaths of Odin, the all-father of the Norse gods, and Thorin, the leader of the dwarves in *The Hobbit*, were sacrifices that paved the way for this new beginning. The story follows:

Upon his tomb the Elvenking then laid Orcrist, the elvish sword that was taken from Thorin in captivity. It is said in songs that it gleamed in the dark if foes approached, and the fortress of the dwarves could not be taken by surprise. There now Dain son of Nain took up his abode, and he became King under the mountain, and in time many other dwarves gathered to his throne in ancient halls. (Tolkien 336)

The similar, if not the same, can be seen in the interpretation of Ragnarök by S. Lee and E. Solopova:

In *Völuspá*, the history of the world unfolds through the death of Baldr, the son of Óðinn and the most perfect of all the gods, towards Ragnarök, ‘the doom of the gods’, in which the gods fight the giants and their allies. Some of the gods, including Óðinn, die in this battle, the earth collapses into the sea and the world is destroyed by fire. After this the world is renewed, the earth rises from the ocean and the gods who survived the Ragnarök live peacefully again. According to one of the versions of the poem, however, they no longer rule the world: in *Hauksbók* a four-line stanza included before the final stanza of the poem proclaims the coming of a single powerful ruler, which commentators see as a reference to the Christian God. (60-61)

J.S. Ryan describes the parallel between the two wars, Ragnarök and The Battle of Five Armies, in his book *Folklore*, where he says:

The final battle sequences recall the Ragnarök, where representatives of all races of men, the dead and even the wolves of the *Völuspá* come against each other. A close reading of the *Gylfaginning* will suggest many parallels to the *Lord of the Rings*, as the movement of both is towards the Last Battle at the Coming of Darkness, even as the Misty Mountains remind us ways, of Nilfheim. (49)

In essence, when we look at the theme of war in fantasy literature, it often follows a specific pattern, one that has remained relatively consistent over time. While the specifics of the conflicts may differ, we often see the build-up towards an inevitable conclusion that carries

significant consequences for the characters and world involved. However, this is not always a negative outcome. In fact, the idea of rebirth and new beginnings following the end of a war is a common trope in both old and modern fantasy literature, serving as a symbol of hope and renewal amidst the destruction and chaos of conflict. As such, it is clear that while the genre of fantasy may evolve and change over time, certain core themes and motifs remain integral to its continued relevance and popularity.

## 5 The Sagas of Icelanders

Series of prose stories most of the time inspired by the historical events that played a bigger role during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries in Iceland. Smiley argues that:

The prose literature of medieval Iceland is great world treasure – elaborate, various, strange, profound, and as eternally current as any of the other great literary treasures – The Homeric epics, Dante’s Divine Comedy, the works of William Shakespeare or of any modern writer you could name. (10)

What makes these sagas so unique, that Tolkien was exceptionally inspired by them and based on those Icelandic writings created his own world with his modern-day already significant and original language?

### 5.1 Old Norse Language

Old Norse, or in other words, Old Nordic language, was mainly used around 1150 to 1350. Its usage was recorded in the Icelandic Sagas or the infamous Poetic Edda. What is so extraordinary and unique about this specific language is that it is, in a few instances, different from the languages used by Scandinavian people in that period. When the end of the eleventh



century approached, the Icelanders mastered the art of writing. “With writing at their disposal, Icelanders soon began capturing on skin manuscripts their laws, genealogies, histories, sagas, legends, and myths. These medieval writings, many of which have survived, provide much of what we know from native Old Norse sources of the history and personalities of the Viking Age.” (Byock 19) During the recording of historical events, two of the debatably most critical books were created. The first was *The Book of Settlements [Landnamabok]*, and the other was *The Book of the Icelanders [Íslendingabók]*. Those subtle differences from almost identical Islandic Languages include: “nouns, pronouns, and adjectives were inflected for four cases, and verbs were inflected for tense, mood, person, and number. There were separate dual forms for pronouns only. Stress was placed on the first syllable of a word, and stressed syllables could be short, long, or “overlong.” (“Old Norse language”)

It is a widely known fact that Tolkien was inspired by the usage of the Nordic language and runes when creating his own stories. S. Lee and E. Solopova support this fact that:

The Old English poetic word for ‘warrior’, *guð-beorn*, is paralleled by the name *Guðlaf* in *Beowulf*. Schramm believed that ‘heroic’ names are ancient descriptive formulas, which could show what poetry was like long before the earliest surviving texts. They were built using the same vocabulary connected with war, fame, power, and nobility, used in heroic poetry, and had an identifiable rhythm based on accent and syllable count. (53)

### 5.1.1 Runes

What was an integral part of the Old Nordic Language was something that is known as “runes”. Runes are, according to Byock, “an alphabetic writing system”. (19) Individual letters of this alphabet were created from short and sharp strokes to the wood, skin, stone, and other materials.

It was always a high possibility to encounter the usage of runes on old sword blades or any other war equipment. It was pretty common to find the use of runes not only on weapons or amulets but also on various household items such as family graves or memorial stones. These artefacts would be inscribed with runes to commemorate a loved one or to serve as a reminder of a significant event. In this way, the use of runes became an integral part of daily life for the ancient Nordic people, serving not only a practical purpose but also as a way to connect with their ancestors and their rich cultural heritage. Byock contends that:

Such stones with their runes and sometimes pictorial ornamentation are called runestones. Runes were also used for everyday messages and graffiti. Many inscriptions had a magical context, and some are found on wooden healing sticks. The majority of runic finds are from mainland Scandinavia, but examples of runes have been found in many areas where the Northmen traveled or lived. (20)

The alphabet is called “futhark”. The name was given to it after the first six runic letters. Because of their old history dating somewhere around the first century A. D., they were used for sharing and retaining information. Understandably, with the further development of people and the culture of sharing, many adaptations and versions of “futharks” were created. All of them were unique in their own way, although the first one is unique, with only twenty-four characters. One of the youngest alphabets created was used by the Vikings and Icelanders.

The oldest significant sources for the creation of the Old Nordic Language are ancient texts of Icelanders and Viking runes.

## 5.2 Similarities with Old English?

One crucial question can arise from the Old Norse. The question is, ‘How similar is Old English to Old Norse?’ The answer is very. When we look more deeply into these two languages, both of these have roots in a similar Germanic source. Hence, the understanding of those languages is not so surprising when we take into consideration that Vikings also have a deep history with English. “Many words in Old Norse resemble English words in pronunciation and meaning. For example, Old Norse *dalr* is similar to English ‘dale’ and *taka* has its counterpart in English ‘take’. Such words are classified as either cognates or borrowings. “ (Byock 23)

## 6 The Hobbit and Germanic Mythology

One of the critical factors in creating fantasy literature is the understanding of Germanic mythology. Of course, we have already looked into Nordic mythology; however, that was only the tip of the iceberg into the ocean of fantasy. Everything has roots in Germanic folklore and mythology, with the creation of magic, creatures, and many more.

Every human being can recall a time in his life when he accidentally saw something he could not comprehend. Was that trick of his mind? Was that a reality? These types of questions immediately arise, and that is how, with the addition of other elements are, fantasy creatures these days created. Following the path of famous Germanic authors and writers, we follow the themes, creatures, and folk beliefs similarly in Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué’s *Undine* and the tales of the Erlking, the Lorelei, and Tannhäuser.

## 6.1 Dwarfs

According to Lecouteux, “the dwarfs that the poets and romance authors present in their narratives exhibit notable differences, depending on the country. If our aim is to get a clear and fairly precise idea of these small figures, we must make ourselves aware of their character and their most striking features.” (32)

If we look at dwarves from the literary point of view, we never see them as the main characters or just as heroes in romance stories. Instead, we typically see them as side characters that have only one purpose, and that is to support the main character. However, when we look at the epic, dwarves have an almost majestic and magical purpose of serving in armies as soldiers who protect the borders of the East.

The question we need to ask is, what is a dwarf? The definition changes from stories, writing, and authors. They have many names and descriptions. In one language, they are described as “hairy person”; in other languages, it is a “person of small stature”. However, if we look at the Proto-Indo-European roots, we can find traces of the word “zwerc”, which according to Lecouteux, meant “\*dhuer-, “deceive, harm,” and \*dheugh-, which carries a similar meaning with an added sense of cunning or guile.” (91) The word developed to the form of “dweorg” used in Old English, which meant “dwarf” and “cramp”, the second meaning was based on the belief that these creatures transmitted diseases. Their height, similar to their name, changed a lot over time. However, their height is not that important because it permanently changes.

Their creation goes way back to ancient texts, Poetic and Prose Edda. These texts are the primary sources of mystical and mythological we know today. The ancient legend goes that after Odin, Villi, and Vé enslaved the ancient giant Ymir, from his body parts were created the

world. “The gods took the skull of Ymir and from it made the sky, which they placed above the earth on four corners, and at each corner they placed a dwarf. They were named Austri (East), Vestri (West), Norðri (North), and Suðri (South)”. (Lecouteux, 97). They are described as worms, but due to the decision of other gods, they eventually have a more human-shaped appearance. Due to the large amount of gold, silver, and other precious stones, God gave dwarves the power of knowing good and evil and enriched them with the science of craft and knowledge of why these gems were good and for what they could be used.

From another perspective, Tolkien showed and proved his awareness and knowledge of Germanic folk and mythology throughout the stories of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. However, according to Ryan, the author of *The Hobbit* went far beyond the poem itself and created something different from the original saying. According to Ryan:

It must, however, be stressed that for much of the detail in the depiction of the dwarves, the author has had to go few extant references to that people. The *Voluspá* comment on that 'the dwarves are groaning before their stone doors' scarcely prepares us for the detailed world of the Kingdom under the Mountain, or the storied past associated with the Mines of Moria. (51)

As we already mentioned in the previous chapter, Tolkien created *The Silmarillion*, where he, in extraordinary detail, explained the world he gave life to, Middle Earth, which gave an explanation to three races, in which one of them being dwarves, who were created as the first ones. Similar to Germanic mythology. “When commenting on the character of his Dwarves, Tolkien, as in many other cases, acknowledged his debt to medieval literature, but insisted on the independence of his creation.” (Lee, Solopova 64)

## 6.2 Elves

Elves, an even more enigmatic and enchanting than dwarves, have been an integral part of Germanic mythology. Their awe-inspiring and stunning appearance serves not only to captivate the imagination but also serves a decorative purpose in mythology. However, in contrast with dwarves, elves do not have clear history and purpose. The word elf in the Germanic text rarely occurs until the thirteenth century, after which the word was also used for dwarfs or as a word that signifies ‘nightmare’. In England, ‘elf’ was used until the eleventh century, then it went through a similar path as in German, and it became a label for lower mystical creatures. According to the analysis of Lecouteux:

In the Scandinavian countries, the elf (Old Norse *álfr*, pl. *álfar*) is practically always a simple dwarf (*dvergr*), and the same individual can alternately be called “elf” and “dwarf,” which clearly shows that the poets of this time no longer knew that the two names should be applied to two different creatures. (116)

We can assume that this word was used as a substitute for other mythical creatures and then used for one particular being. However, one of the remaining pieces of information about elves was that the creatures were divided into light and darkness. If we look back at Nordic Mythology, there was a particular realm called “*Álfheimr*”, also called ‘The world of Elves’. The elves that lived closer to gods were called the Light elves. We do not know much about them, because their appearance was lighter and more radiant. Some texts say that elves had magical powers they could use at command. Others say that they could perform only written spells.

What is not so known about these creatures is that they have a close connection to the dead ones. The reason is that the dead are closely linked with the soil and eventually play a big part in fertilizing the earth. They also, in a sense, serve as an intermediary between the Gods and humans.

“Those who are elevated to the status of elves, therefore minor divinities, are those dead whose lives were particularly exemplary or beneficial for their contemporaries.” (Lecouteux 122)

On the other side, there were Dark elves. However, we should also take into consideration that these particular elves were divided into dark and clack. Although the Dark Elves, also called *Dökkálfar*, lived under the surface of Earth, not much is known about these creatures. What is recorded about them is that the Dark elves were “duplications” of Black elves because there is supposed to be a world *Svartálfaheimr*, which in translation should be something about the words “The world of the Black”.

If we look at other hypotheses, this deviation on the “dark and light” side was also typical in German countries. For example, when Lucifer was banished from Heaven by the Creator, some followed him, and some, on the other hand, decided to follow the other side with God.

However, Tolkien’s depiction of elves was on another level of creativity. The author liked to distance himself from the post-medieval idea that elves were devious beings with ill intentions.

“The world of Elves which he created is closer to the tradition reflected in *Sir Orfeo*, where they are portrayed as a ‘dreaded but picturesque race of immortal beings’.” (Lee, Solopova 125)

Over a period of many years, Tolkien portrays the Elves as having the ability to come back to life through their offspring, a concept that his son Christopher also confirms in his commentary.

Tolkien steadfastly maintains that the only things that can cause the death of Elves are mortal

wounds or deep grief, and he does not modify this idea in any of his revisions or texts. Nevertheless, there is no clear explanation at this point or in any later texts regarding the exact circumstances or timing of this rebirth. A Whittingham suggests:

A depiction of this possessiveness is given later in *The Hobbit* after the dragon Smaug notices that a two-handled cup is missing from his hoard: ‘His rage passes description—the sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted. (131)

### 6.3 *The Hobbit* and Similarities with Germanic Mythology

When we look back at the analysis of dwarves and elves from Nordic and Germanic mythology, few similarities can be automatically recognised; for a deeper analysis, we need to look more carefully at these fantastical beings.

After the unexpected encounter with the wizard Gandalf, the first confrontation with dwarves occurs. The wizard was supposed to see him for tea the following day, but he never showed up, and unexpectedly, the main character runs into one of the first dwarves of the night. Over the night, the readers become familiar with the whole group of dwarves.

As we reflect on the dwarves of Nordic mythology, we can see that they are still serving as companions to the main character. In this specific case, Bilbo is the main character, and the dwarves are his companions, but at the same time, both provide significant and essential parts and outcomes to the story. Their ability, which comes from Nordic mythology, to craft various weapons for Odin remains the same because dwarves in Tolkien’s stories are still skilled



warriors and craftsmen. The only thing that is never mentioned is their height. In Scandinavian mythology, dwarven height, in particular, was never mentioned in any story. In Tolkien's story, we can only assume from the subtle descriptions of the characters that they were not blessed with height. The assumption can be made from the fact that in the book, they ride ponies, and they do not struggle in Bilbo's home, which is appropriate for a hobbit of their size.

The dwarves initially come across as conducting themselves in a manner that might even be considered rude. The issue itself is a little unclear because the main character is unsure of what is happening. Because of this miscommunication, the dwarves burst into the home and life of one confused hobbit.

The first dwarf the readers encounter is not certainly described as small; however, we need to take into consideration the fact that the hobbit himself is not large in stature, and in the book, the story is told as that none of them has problems when barging into Bilbo's home, where everything is made to fit the size of a hobbit. The readers then can quickly come to the conclusion that the dwarves are also of more nominal growth.

On the other hand, while they may be smaller than an average human, they are more muscular than hobbits and even humans. "It was a dwarf with a blue beard tucked into a golden belt and very bright eyes under his dark-green hood." (Tolkien, 10) One of the essential characters was one of the last dwarves that arrived, Thorin, the leader. His personality is the most distinguishable from the others because of his mysterious and intimidating nature. "The last one belonged to Thorin, an enormously important dwarf, in fact no other than great Thorin Oakenshield himself, who was not at all pleased at falling flat on Bilbo's mat with Bifur, Bofur, and Bombur on top of him." (Tolkien 14) This claim is supported by S. Lee and by E. Solopova, by saying that "Tolkien definitely retrieved from Germanic mythology, but made extravagant

and at the same time specific changes says that: “Tolkien described his Dwarves as ‘not naturally evil’, ‘not necessarily hostile’ and ‘rational’ creatures (64) This explains that, yes, dwarves are mystical and high beings with a sense of rationality and friendship. However, we must not forget that their stubbornness in the story was one of the reasons they got in trouble in the first place.

We learn more about these characters as the narrative progresses, including their unique personalities and motivations for visiting Bilbo's house. Most, if not all, of them will eventually grow on readers because of their unique characteristics.

When we explore the fantastical elements present in *The Hobbit*, we come across the fascinating beings known as elves. The first meeting with them is through a song. The problem that this encounter brings up is that elves and dwarves do not like each other in Tolkien's story, which means that for the dwarves, the song can be interpreted as provocative. “Dwarves don't get on well with them. Even decent enough dwarves like Thorin and his friends think them foolish (which is a very foolish thing to think), or get annoyed with them.” (Tolkien 58) When making their first appearance, they seem to be very playful but, at the same time respectful, of Thorin and Gandalf, as shown by the bowing motion. “Elves know a lot and are wondrous folk for news, and known what is going on among the peoples of the land, as quick as water flows, or quicker.” (59) This implies that these beings are enriched by eternal wisdom, which could sometimes look threatening to others.

One of the most critical characters of the elf world was Elrond, master of the North House. “He was a noble and as fair in face as an elf-lord, as strong as a warrior, as wise as a wizard, as venerable as a king of dwarves, and as kind as summer.” (Tolkien 61) He graciously invites our

main characters to supper, which also implies that elves have a sense of generosity. This fact is supported by S. Lee and E. Solopova, sayings that:

Tolkien's Elves are portrayed as benign but powerful beings. Their kingdoms, like the fairy world in *Sir Orfeo*, are green, rich, beautiful and inaccessible, and they have the same love of music which appears to have saved Orfeo's life. In particular there are many parallels between *Sir Orfeo* and the descriptions of the encounters between Bilbo and the Wood-elves in TH. (126)

However, this is the only fact that remains the same. Elves in Tolkien's story are creatures enriched by eternal knowledge or creatures known for their distrust of people is because the author took inspiration from the mythological origin but created something he could call his own and something unique.

To form a conclusion to this chapter in modern literature, fantastical creatures such as dwarves, to some extent, remain the same from a characteristic point of view. If we look at those creatures from the visual side that can change from author to author, even when their height can change and so can the length of their beard, their primary abilities to be great companions and skilled artisans remain the same. While not much can be said about elves as fantastical beings, we can agree that, from the beginning, there was not much recorded about these beings in terms of their visual aspects, the little we know about their personalities being that they were skilled warriors and their purpose was mainly for protection. That being said, it was up to the author what he would do with the little he had from the beginning and create something that could serve as inspiration for many generations.

## 7 The Hobbit and Heroism

When we look at fantastical literature, there is one theme that occurs in a lot of other writings and, over time, becomes one of the main themes in the fantasy genre, and that is heroism. This particular theme, however, also has many forms. In modern writing, heroism is not the same as heroism in the “Old English” period. Debatably the first and most famous piece of writing that shaped and formed not only the fantasy genre but overall literature as we know it today is *Beowulf*. This old epic poem was created by an unknown author in the traditional style of Germanic heroic legends.

One of the initial inquiries we must pose is the subject matter of this tale. Furthermore, who is the main character?

### 7.1 The Story of *Beowulf*

Of course, we will not need the whole story, although, for the sake of the thesis, the beginning is in need of explanation. The story of *Beowulf* opens with a discussion about the great king who began his life as an orphan and quickly became powerful and strong through his life. After his death, many other tributes wanted to pay their respect at his funeral. However, the readers quickly find that this king has a descendant. A boy named Beow but the son also dies rather quickly, and the kingdom is now in the power of his son. After his son, another one becomes the ruler of the kingdom, Hrothgar. With his leadership, the kingdom is prospering, and with that in mind, he decides to build a monument – mead hall, Heorot.

For the longest time, the kingdom was enjoying its peaceful times, but one night demon named Grendel descended from placed Cain and, with the curiosity of listening to what was going on in Heorot, went there. With that, he heard how the people reciprocated the gods and mercifully

killed the men. However, unfortunately. This demon attacked the following night again and continued to do so even the nights after for twelve years. The people of Danes tried to stop his attack and even offered shrines for him, but nothing worked out.

At the same time, we get to know the main hero of this story, Beowulf, who is introduced to us as the nephew of King Hygelac. The main hero is described as the greatest hero in the world. Upon hearing the despair of the Danes, he travels to the kingdom with fourteen of his best-skilled warriors to defeat the demon. When the guards see what Beowulf and his warriors look like, they ask them for what purpose they came. After explaining the reason for their arrival, they guide the hero and his group to the mead hall. When they speak to the king of Danes, everyone in the hall has a happy feast. When night finally arrives, the demon Grendel comes again, Beowulf fights with him without any weapons, and he eventually rips out Grendel's arm and fatally wounds him. The demon runs away back home to die, and our hero celebrates his victory against him.

However, this is just the beginning of Beowulf. The story continues with a celebration of the victory; however, the following night, the demon's mother arrives to revenge her son's death. Moreover, with that plot twist, the story of our main hero continues.

## 7.2 The Hobbit and the Depiction of main hero

Beowulf is an excellent example of how the main characters of fantastical literature looked in the beginning. He is a brave warrior and throw-out the story. The reader is often reminded of that fact. With his first demonic creature, there is immense visibility of his strength and powers. He is also gifted with the traits of values typical heroes should have – helping where needed. “And a young prince must be prudent like that, giving freely while his father lives so that

afterwards in age when fighting starts steadfast companions will stand by him and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere." (Heaney 20-21)

However, like every protagonist of a heroic story, he goes through character development in his story. Because he defeated every enemy in his life, he was not prepared for the fact that he could someday be defeated by a strong opponent. At the start of the story, our main hero can be seen as having too much confidence in his abilities. "As I sat in the boat with my band of men, I meant to perform to the uttermost what your people wanted or perish in the attempt, in the fiend's clutches. And I shall fulfil that purpose, prove myself with a proud deed or meet my death here in the mead-hall." (Heaney 640)

Despite his confidence at the start, he eventually meets an opponent that seems like a challenge, even for a great hero like him. He was famous for his bravery and fighting skills, but when he eventually went to fight his last opponent, he felt something that could be compared to fear.

The story follows:

"The hoard-guard took heart, inhaled and swelled up and got a new wind; he who had once ruled was furling in fire and had to face the worst. No help or backing was to be had then from his high-born comrades; that hand-picked troop broke ranks and ran for their lives to the safety of the wood. But within one heart sorrow welled up: in a man of worth the claims of kinship cannot be denied." (Heaney 2600)

Although he meets his end here, that simultaneously proves his heroic characteristics. Although he died as a true hero, he defeated his enemy and died in a battle for a good purpose. In conclusion, Beowulf could not be a better example of a true hero.

On the other side, Bilbo Baggins is not the kind of hero we typically find in fantasy literature, but that is what makes him unique. We can immediately notice that his heroism does not lie in his swordsmanship or muscles. When he meets Gandalf for the first time, he expresses his distinctive dislike for adventures. What can seem surprising to the readers is that he eventually finds some romantic soul for adventures in himself and goes with dwarves as their burglar. As stated by Tolkien:

To the end of his days Bilbo could never remember how he found himself outside, without a hat, a walking-stick or any money, or any thing that he usually took when he went out, leaving his second breakfast half finished and quite unwashed-up, pushing his keys into Gandalf's hands, and running as fast as his furry feet could carry him down the lane, past the great Mill, across The Water, and then on for a mile more. (36)

Starting from this moment, the author is introducing a character that possesses the potential to evolve in unexpected ways, with traits and actions that may even surprise the author himself/herself. This approach allows for a more organic and unpredictable character development, as the author relinquishes some control and allows the character to take on a life of their own within the narrative.

The Hobbit's primary antagonist is a heroic figure, the artist Bilbo, who gradually develops more incredible skills as a burglar as the story unfolds. However, the narrator, often criticized as an aesthetic flaw in analyses of the novel, also takes on the characteristics of a human monster. The reason behind the weakened influence of the story being told is attributed to his arrogant and condescending remarks.

Another part of the proof of this character's heroism is the riddle event involving the creature Gollum. Bilbo is challenged to a duel by Gollum because he wants to eat him. Our main hero accepts this challenge and, surprisingly to the readers, excels thanks to his cleverness in it. Through those multiple riddles that Gollum gives him, we can assume that this hobbit is not as straightforward as we could have suspected in the first place, and thanks to little trickery and putting Gollum under the time pressure of answering, the creature loses their duel. "He knew, of course, that the riddle-game was sacred and of immense antiquity, and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat when they played at it. But he felt he could no trust thus slimy thing to keep any promise at a pinch." (Tolkien, 94) According to Lee and Solopova, the central aspect of this event was not to answer correctly. The main thing to prove here was that the hero was brave enough to face this creature and use his creativity and wisdom.

One of the other examples of his bravery is the fact that he eventually, through the story, faces the dragon who guards the mountain. "Smaug certainly looked fast asleep, almost dead and dark, with scarcely a snore more than a whiff of unseen steam, when Bilbo peeped once more from the entrance. He was just about to step out on to the floor when he caught a sudden thin and piercing ray of red from under the drooping lid of Smaug's left eye." (Tolkien 257) This encounter shows that even famously skilled warriors, such as dwarves, were so scared of the dragon that they would have sent someone else instead. Bilbo is in this situation, too, scared to death; however, the fact that he still goes inside and faces him shows the character development he went through in the story. In the beginning, he would not even think about a position like this. The theft that Bilbo commits is significant because it gives him access to the ring, which enables him to become invisible and aids in his mission to steal the dragon's treasure.



Furthermore, this act of theft boosts Bilbo's confidence in his newfound profession, allowing him to display his heroism and leadership skills in chapter 8, "Flies and Spiders". In this chapter, Bilbo demonstrates his physical abilities, such as his sharp eyesight, quick reflexes, and agility, by identifying a hidden boat, saving his companions from falling into the water, and climbing a tree to scout their location. "But then Bilbo manifests more abstract qualities like courage. Asked to investigate a fire in the forest, he eventually saves his friends not from the Elves whose festivities they have spotted but from the giant spiders who capture the Dwarves while he sleeps under the Elven spell." (Chance 61)

"The moral conflict at its end focuses on 'the bewilderment of the treasure' – the greed and lust for gold to which Thorin Oakenshield and most of the other Dwarves fall victim. Ironically, it is the 'burglar' Bilbo Baggins who is able to resist its power and is prepared to give up his share of the treasure for a peaceful outcome." (Lee, Solopova 111-112) The observation made serves as proof that Bilbo underwent a significant transformation throughout the course of the story, displaying a considerable increase in wisdom and morality when compared to the dwarves. This transformation can be seen as a reflection of Bilbo's ability to improve himself and learn from the various obstacles he encountered along the way. The comparison between Bilbo's growth and that of the dwarves highlights the divergent paths each character took in their respective journeys.

As *The Hobbit* draws to a close, Bilbo's development as a burglar has advanced significantly, to the point where he finds himself in the company of heroes and is even considered a noteworthy hero in his own right. This transformation in Bilbo's character could be seen as a testament to his resilience and adaptability, as he was able to overcome the challenges he faced

and grow in his skills and confidence. Additionally, the fact that Bilbo was could alongside the heroes suggests that he had gained their respect and admiration, further highlighting the extent of his personal growth. Overall, this demonstrates how Bilbo's experiences throughout the story had shaped him into a more capable and heroic character.

### 7.3 The Hobbit and Similarities with Heroism in Beowulf

By all means, we need to take into consideration that Beowulf was written in a different time period, human morality was directed in a different direction than it is today, and the aspect of heroism was an essential part of literature. However, in this case, we need to look at it from another perspective.

Both of those heroes went through major character development. Beowulf puts his values into protecting others and proving that he is worthy of the title "the greatest hero". In contrast Bilbo does not care about others' opinions about him at all, and his beliefs are meant to be just for himself and his comfort. We need to take this information into account because it is described as being the whole nature of hobbits. However, what can be seen as a surprise is the fact that he eventually goes on unknown adventures that come to him. They both go through primary character development as heroes. Beowulf is famous from the beginning of the story for his acts of heroism for other people, and at the end of the story, he faces someone who kills him, which is seen as a proper ending worthy of the greatest hero. On the other hand, Bilbo is no one at the beginning and eventually becomes someone worthy of being called a hero in his way. He is not the best as far as the other characters in the book go, but even though he is highly underestimated, he still shows courage and fearlessness that others do not possess.

Lee's and Solopova's research indicates that:

In *Beowulf* the hero fights the dragon to defend his people, but he also fights for the gold. To see the gold is his final wish before he dies. His dying words about his joy at winning the gold for his people are in sharp contrast to what is probably already clear to the audience from how the story develops and how the gold is described, and what is explicitly stated in the passages that follow: the gold bears a curse, it must return to the earth and Beowulf's people are doomed to destruction. (112)

In *The Hobbit*, despite everything, the exact opposite happens, Bilbo goes back home and is wiser and braver than he ever was as a hobbit. The contrasting fates of Beowulf and Bilbo define the leading difference between Tolkien's interpretation of the two heroes. Unlike Beowulf, Bilbo triumphs over both physical and emotional adversaries, leading to a happy ending that distinguishes *The Hobbit* as a "fantasy" work. On the other hand, Beowulf's tragic demise and the elegiac tone of the epic identify it as a "tragedy" that connects with the primary world. This difference in tone impacts the genres of the two works, with *The Hobbit* being associated with the secondary world of sub-creation and Beowulf being linked to the real world. This contrast highlights Tolkien's belief in the power of eucatastrophe, or the unexpected and joyous turn of events that can transform a story, as a crucial component of fantasy literature. "Their different genres affect the nature of the dual levels in each: the explicit Germanic-heroic ethic and culture of Beowulf masks a very Christian purpose, just as the explicit children's story framework of *The Hobbit* masks a more "adult" and serious purpose." (Chance 49)

To summarise this chapter, Bilbo and Beowulf were two types of heroes. On one side, Beowulf was a hero who was born into a wealthy lifestyle, and his only purpose in life was to prove his heroism. We could even say that he was written for the purpose of being a hero. On the other side, we have Bilbo, who was not exceptional in the slightest. He was perhaps born into a

prosperous family and did not have worries about his future, but that was all. He was enjoying his simple lifestyle when he met the wizard who changed his life. They both underwent extensive character changes, which shaped them into the heroes readers know them as today.

## 8 The Hobbit and Worldbuilding in Arthurian Legends

When examining the world of fantasy literature, we often encounter stories that take place in intricately crafted worlds with complex political systems and detailed family histories. First, however, it is worth asking how developed and complex these worlds were in the genre's early days. In this peculiar chapter, we will explore one of the earliest examples of a story that laid the foundation for the critical literary concept of worldbuilding.

### 8.1 The plot of Arthurian Legends

Just like we did in *Beowulf*, for the sake of the analysis, we need to look into a few of the stories about King Arthur and his Knights. *Le Morte d'Arthur*, or in other words, the *Death of Arthur*, is a compilation of many stories by Sir Thomas Malory published in 1485.

One of the most famous stories that go by the same name tells the story of Arthur, the son of King Uther Pendragon. The story begins with the king needing an heir for the throne; however, he does not have a wife. What he does have is a liking for the wife of one of the dukes, Igraine. “The king liked and loved this lady well, and he made them great cheer out of measure, and desired to have lain by her.” (King Arthur Collection: (Including Le Morte D’ Arthur, Idylls of the King, King Arthur and His Knights, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and a Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court) 9) He creates a plan with the wizard Merlin to kill the Duke of Cornwall. The plan goes well, the duke dies, and King Uther, looking like the dead Duke, beds

with Igraine. Merlin's one condition for helping the king was that Uther would give him to the wizard when a child was born. Arthur is born, and Merlin sends him to live with one of the knights, Sir Ector, to raise him with the knight's son Kay. Moreover, thus, there goes the creation of one of the most famous characters in the literature of all time.

One of the other stories that belong to the collection of *Arthurian legends* that help to explain the extension and create the visualization of the world where these stories take place is the story about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The story takes place during the time of adult King Arthur. He and his court celebrate a New Year's Eve when a mystical green Knight suddenly appears out of nowhere. He tells them he wants them to participate in his game, which is fighting with one of the present Knights with axes. The chosen knight will strike first and will have to wait a whole year for the green Knight to strike back. Nobody of the knights did want to take upon this challenge, and after some time of silence, King Arthur stood up, offering himself as the challenger. However, unexpectedly, Sir Gawain told him he would accept the Green Knights' conditions. "Then did the King command that gallant Knight to rise, And swiftly up he gat in fair and courteous wise, And knelt before his lord, and gripped the axe's haft, The King, he loosed his hold, and raised his hand aloft, And blessed him in Christ's Name, and bade him in good part To be of courage still, hardy of hand and heart." (Weston 12-13)

## 8.2 Worldbuilding

However, if we want to analyse worldbuilding in these two stories, we need first answer to the question of what worldbuilding even is. When creating believable fantasy story, we need characters, and according to Tuttle, "a fluent, readable style are absolutely vital to all saleable popular fiction – whether thriller, romance, fantasy or science fiction." (1)

One of the most crucial themes in creating an authentic fantasy world is the environment where the adventure takes place. The tale may even change depending on the environmental setting. “In a romance or a mystery, the sense of place may be important, with local colour appreciated by the reader, but it is seldom vital to an understanding of the story.” (Tuttle 35)

One of the other aspects of worldbuilding is extrapolation. According to Tuttle, extrapolation is: “To extrapolate is to infer or conjecture beyond the limits of what is known, based on what is known.” (36) This particular feature is mainly used in fantasy literature in a way that the story is put in a "special" situation in which perhaps our main hero is getting to know together with the reader, why is that?

Another aspect of extrapolation is politics. The author can create intricate relationships or conflicts between families or kingdoms that go beyond what is explicitly shown in the story. The level of politics included in the tale and how much is revealed to the reader is ultimately left up to the author's discretion. Essentially, the author can include as much or as little politics as they see fit in their story.

On the other hand, one of the aspects that creates worldbuilding in literature is consequences. One of the features that should be talked about more. Tuttle is saying that:

Even in an imaginary world, actions ripple out and have an impact on everything else. When you're world-building, you need to consider the whole ecology, not just isolated details. Political, economic and religious structures don't spring fully formed out of nowhere, nor do they usually continue unchanged for millennia. (39)

Certainly, there is so much more to discover about 'worldbuilding'. However, for the sake of this thesis, let us keep this as a short introduction to the significant broad topic.

Tolkien's work is mainly known for the extraordinary world that he builds over time. When he was younger, because of his remarkable mind, talent, and passion for languages, he created his own language. As a result of that, and after the persuasion of his close friend C. S. Lewis, he eventually created a whole world into which he, through the course of time put his stories. In this chapter, we will thoroughly analyse how the evolution of worldbuilding changed over many generations.

Tolkien's fantastical world, with its intricate and detailed creation, did not simply emerge out of nothing. Instead, it was the result of his vast and diverse interests, which included writing, language, history, folklore, mythology, geography, philosophy, and art. In many ways, it can be compared to the work of Dante, whose encyclopedic knowledge of the Middle Ages was skillfully woven into the intricate structure of the Divine Comedy. Similarly, Tolkien's world of Middle-earth and the Undying Lands was the product of a lifetime of reading, learning, imagining, and believing in the history and culture of the Western world. Every aspect of his experience was compressed and synthesized into the richly detailed world he created. Tolkien's commitment to the study of the ancient wisdom of the soul, as preserved in myth and legend, was a crucial aspect of his genius as an author. It was not only his ability as a natural storyteller that allowed him to create such a captivating world but also his intellectual capacity to draw on a vast array of sources, including literature, language, and history. By combining his knowledge and love of these subjects, he breathed life into ancient traditions that would have otherwise remained unknown to modern readers. Tolkien's dedication to studying these ancient pearls of wisdoms allowed him to craft a new mythology that not only entertained but also enriched the

minds of his readers with deep and meaningful insights. His literary contribution not only paved the way for the modern fantasy genre but also elevated it to new heights, making him one of the most influential and revered authors of the 20th century.

To continue on the topic of worldbuilding, the world in which *The Hobbit* is set is promptly introduced right from the beginning, not in the form of a description of the surroundings but from the point of view of the Baggins lineage. In the story by Tolkien, it is explained as:

The Bagginses had lived in the neighbourhood of The Hill for time out of mind, and people considered them very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected: you could tell what a Baggins would say on any question without the bother to ask him. (4)

On the basis of this specific depiction, we can see that the world has a history that extends far beyond the reader's perspective and the presumption that every individual existence, with the exception of our major protagonists, has a role to play in this world as well.

The other aspect that should be included in world-building is the description of the surroundings. The perfect depiction of the adventure and the places our main characters went through can be nicely visible in Lake Town around the second half of the book. "The sun had set when turning with another sweep towards East the forest-river rushed into the Long Lake. There it had wide mouth with stony clifflike gates at either side whose feet were piled with shingles." (Tolkien 221) In this part, which introduces the beginning of the ending of the story, there is a clear description of the river that eventually leads to the city which plays a significant part in the conflict.



According to Whittingham, she claims that: “Tolkien also made disparaging remarks about Arthurian legend and Celtic mythology, he clearly incorporated aspects of these stories into his own writing. Tolkien undoubtedly preferred Norse mythology to Greek or Roman, but avoiding or ignoring the influence of classical mythology is not easy.” (38) In a letter dated 1951, Tolkien acknowledges that although the stories in *The Silmarillion* are his original creations, they inevitably contain several ancient and widespread motifs or elements, which implies the possibility of being influenced by them. Additionally, it is worth noting that Greek and Roman myths are often the first mythological tales that English readers encounter. As such, they have a pervasive influence on English literature. Therefore, it is not surprising that even the imaginative world of Tolkien was influenced by these timeless tales that have endured for centuries.

Another important part of world-building that is noticeable in this story is consequences. At the end of the story, a war between many races happens, and the consequences of that are inevitable. “The elf-host was on the march, and if it was sadly lessened, yet many were glad, for now the northern world would be merrier for many a long day. The dragon was dead, and the goblins overthrown, and their hearts looked forward after winter to a spring of joy.” (Tolkien, 338) This passage suggests that the story highlights the idea that the world moves on and continues to exist even after unexpected or unavoidable events occur. The aftermath of such events is that everyone must adapt and learn to cope with the changes that have taken place. All the characters undergo significant transformations in the story, which are essential to the overall narrative.

According to Wolf, “sometimes details take on more significance as a world grows, even for an author; for example, the magic ring that Bilbo finds in *The Hobbit* (Tolkien 1937) becomes a central part of *The Lord of the Rings*, though it was not intended as such from the start.” (209)

Another thing that Wolf claims in his book, *Worldbuilding*, is the fact that even though we as readers are familiar with the names of the dwarves, we will probably not remember all twelve of them but remember them as Thorin’s companions. Characters that do not play any significant role or the readers consider them as part of the group fall into the background. The same goes for places. According to the findings of Wolf:

Characters may be grouped into the peoples they belong to, and likewise, we may have an image of a land like Mordor, Gondor, Narnia, or Islandia, even if we do not remember all the geographical features they contain. Whether it occurs consciously or unconsciously, chunking causes the audience to analyse a world and determine how to group its elements, and the more elements that are combined into a chunk, the richer those chunks, and the world overall, will seem. (26)

### 8.3 The Hobbit and Similarities with Worldbuilding in Arthurian Legends

The concept of worldbuilding, a crucial element in the fantasy genre, is evident in *The Hobbit* and is reminiscent of the worldbuilding techniques used in *Arthurian legends*. One such technique is extrapolation, which is used from the very beginning of *The Hobbit* to explain the lineage of the Baginnses. Similarly, in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, readers are immersed in a world where little is explicitly explained but where it is evident that the world is vast and complex.

One notable similarity between *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *The Hobbit* is the introduction of a powerful and enigmatic character at the beginning of the story, which remains present throughout various adventures. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, this character is the wizard Merlin, who is instrumental in the story of *King Arthur*. Similarly, in *The Hobbit*, the wizard Gandalf is introduced as a well-known figure in the world of Middle Earth, even though the protagonist, Bilbo, does not have a personal relationship with him.

Both characters serve a similar function in their respective stories, providing guidance and support to the protagonists and playing a significant role in the overall narrative. Their presence throughout the story creates a sense of continuity and cohesion, and their mysterious and powerful nature adds to the intrigue and sense of wonder.

Furthermore, these similarities in worldbuilding and character development serve to create a rich and immersive reading experience for the audience. By establishing a consistent and detailed world with well-developed characters, both works draw readers into their respective settings and make them feel invested in the outcome of the story. In addition, the inclusion of such influential and captivating characters as Merlin and Gandalf adds to the richness of the world and helps to create a sense of depth and complexity that enhances the overall reading experience.

Another common theme in *Arthurian legends* is the exploration of the surroundings and the world in which the story takes place. For example, the theme of tension and darkness is an essential element in the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. This is exemplified by the portrayal of the Green Knight and the ominous forest where the final battle takes place. A significant aspect of this theme is the mysterious Green Cave, which is mentioned repeatedly

throughout the tale. The cave serves as a symbol of the unknown and the terrifying, representing the challenges that Gawain must face as he confronts the Green Knight. The dark and tense atmosphere created by the cave and the forest adds depth and complexity to the story, highlighting the bravery and courage required of Gawain as he faces his fears and emerges victorious. Through the exploration of these themes, the story of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight becomes not just a tale of adventure and heroism but a profound meditation on the human experience and the challenges we face in life. Similarly, *The Hobbit* also explores this theme through its depiction of the dwarves' adventure to The Lonely Mountain. The repeated mention of this destination creates an atmosphere of tension and mystery central to the story's development, emphasizing the importance of the journey and the world in which it takes place. By incorporating this theme of surroundings and worldbuilding, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Hobbit* create a rich and immersive reading experience for their audiences, drawing readers into the story and making them feel invested in the outcome of the character's journey.

What is also similar in both of these two major literary pieces is the concept of "chunking" elements of a story together in order to create a more immersive and memorable reading experience. Wolf argues that readers are more likely to remember characters as part of a group rather than as individuals, as seen with the dwarves in *The Hobbit*, who are remembered as Thorin's companions rather than as individuals. This concept can also be applied to places in a story where readers may have a general impression of a location, such as Mordor or Narnia, without necessarily remembering all the specific details. According to Wolf, the process of chunking allows readers to analyse a story's world and create a mental map of its elements, leading to a richer and more immersive reading experience. By grouping elements, readers can more easily remember and understand the world of the story, creating a sense of familiarity and

immersion. This process can occur consciously or unconsciously but ultimately leads to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the story's world. This passage emphasizes the importance of worldbuilding in creating a compelling and memorable story. Through the concept of chunking, readers are able to more easily navigate and understand the world of the story, creating a sense of immersion that draws them in and keeps them engaged.

In conclusion, it is evident that the worldbuilding in both *Arthurian legends* and *The Hobbit* has had a profound impact on the genre of fantasy literature. Despite their distinct origins and purposes, both works succeeded in creating a captivating and immersive environment that has inspired countless writers and readers throughout history. Furthermore, the *Arthurian legends*, with their rich tapestry of characters, settings, and themes, established the groundwork for many of the tropes and motifs that are now considered integral to the fantasy genre. Similarly, *The Hobbit's* vividly realized world of Middle-earth and its diverse cast of creatures and cultures, set a new standard for worldbuilding in modern fantasy. Together, these works have contributed significantly to the evolution of fantasy literature and continue to influence contemporary works in the genre.

## 9 Conclusion

The purpose of writing this thesis was to define the evolution of fantastical elements visible in the famous book written by J. R. R. Tolkien by analysing the first aspects that we in this modern age could call the beginnings of the fantasy genre in the representation of modern literature, *The Hobbit*.

The opening chapter of the thesis centres on the evolution of the fantasy genre. While some may contend that fantasy existed prior to the era of realism, it is essential to assign a particular

time period to mark the beginning of this genre. This chapter elucidates the significance of establishing a specific point of origin for fantasy in order to comprehend the substantial growth and evolution of the genre over time.

In the second chapter, we took a deep dive into the author's writing career. We introduced Tolkien as a writing genius that was not so understood at the beginning of his career. However, through the evolution of time, we came to the realisation that readers still stand by the opinion that Tolkien is one of the best authors of modern fantasy literature. We have been introduced to Tolkien's work from the point of view of the critics, and we have also learned in this chapter about the influence of his colleague and friend C. S. Lewis on his work. However, the highlight of this chapter was, however, the fact that we described the author's passion for creating his own world, including magical and mystical creatures that live in it.

The third chapter of this thesis gave us a deeper focus on the fascinating world of Nordic mythology, which provided us with a deep dive into the depths of Scandinavian events, which became a significant inspiration for many writers of this day and age. We looked into the Nordic pantheon of gods, specifically Odin, Thor, and Loki, who played essential roles in the events of Ragnarök. This war of gods messed with the lives of many other gods and ordinary people, and the result of that was the creation of a whole new world. The first fantastical theme that was being compared is the War of the Gods in Nordic mythology, Ragnarök, and The Battle of Five Armies, a war described in *The Hobbit*. Upon closer examination, the comparison of the wars in the Norse myth of Ragnarök and their influence on plot twists in fantasy literature revealed surprising similarities. Although the wars may seem vastly different initially, a deeper analysis reveals that they share standard features that have shaped the genre. In particular, many works of fantasy employ creatures and events that closely resemble those of the Scandinavian

myth, leading to similar endings with significant consequences. Thus, it can be argued that the fundamental theme of using fantastical elements to drive the plot's conclusion has remained constant and continues to be a hallmark of the genre.

The fourth chapter explored the debatably most famous fantastical creatures and their beginnings. These creatures are more famously known from the stories and events during the War of Ragnarök. What is surprisingly little known about them is that their roots begin in different mythologies, specifically Germanic. We first looked at and analysed the creation of dwarves and then dove into the study of their social roles, which gave us a better understanding of how they came to this world and how their presence changed the stories in Germanic mythology. On the other hand, we came to the realisation that there is only little recorded about elves; what maintains the same is that, similarly to dwarves, elves were created for the purpose of protecting their world and primarily for serving Odin. Both of these creatures play significant roles in the beginnings of the fantasy genre, which was taken from Germanic mythology. The second aspects that we compared in this bachelor's thesis were the elves and dwarves mentioned in Germanic mythology for the first time. The comparison showed us that these dwarves did not change that much overall; if we take into consideration that the only aspect that was never mentioned about them was their height, which modern authors tend to edit to their liking, the characteristics and visuals remain the same. We cannot say the same for elves because these creatures did not have much recorded about them compared to dwarves, and that itself makes the comparison complicated. What was mentioned about them, and what seems to be a repeatedly occurring theme, is the difference between the race itself—light and dark, wood and east. The fact that they also fought in the War of Ragnarök makes them skilled warriors that seem to remain the same over time because the same can be seen in the modern representation of these creatures.

On the other hand, the next chapter takes on the aspect of fantastical literature from another point of view. In this chapter, we looked retrospectively at the evolution of heroism in literature. Heroism being one of the most used themes in fantastical literature and the cornerstone of the fantasy genre, we looked at Beowulf, arguably literature's first hero. His values and morals were different than we can see in more modern literature, and that goes for other heroes that came after the story of Beowulf. This story was mainly made on the basis of Christianity, and the main character acted upon the will of God and became the inspiration for many generations of authors. The third analysis was about the evolution of heroism in fantasy literature. The conclusion was that the world and people's ways of thinking have changed too. That brings to light the fact that the values of heroes from the Anglo-Saxon period were directed more towards protecting the people and serving the Lord. However, on the other hand, we must remember that it was at that time that life could not be lived otherwise unless we as a species wanted to go to hell as a sinner. The aspect of heroism changed from the core. We no longer see authors using Christianity as a justification for their actions, and the heroes of modern literature tend to act on their desires and thoughts. Bilbo is an excellent example of a hero "going from zero to hero".

Last but not least, the topic of worldbuilding was the final element we examined. Even though we may not consider it every time we read something, world-building is essential since a fantasy book would not be successful without it. This chapter analysed worldbuilding from the perspective of *Arthurian legends* and how their aspects changed over the course of time. The analysis takes a specific look into the story of the beginnings of *King Arthur*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the most used aspects of extrapolation and description were, while at the same time, a few hints of politics here and there could also be noticed, which helped create



a better understanding of the world. The last aspect of literature being compared was the theme of worldbuilding. *Arthurian legends* are a remarkable example of a complex world where multiple stories are being told, and numerous characters play their own roles, essential and non-essential. That being brought up, *Arthurian legends* were not created for this particular reason, and the stories from Tolkien were made up for an already constructed world with its own language and convoluted history. That does not particularly mean that the fact that these worlds are created in a very similar and complicated manner makes them spectacular, unique, and inspiring in their own way. This confirms that fantasy literature has not changed much in this aspect during the evolution of the genre.

To provide an overview of the main points discussed in this thesis, it can be concluded that the fantasy genre has undergone significant changes since its inception in history. Despite numerous changes to its components due to various internal and external factors, the genre's core remains relatively consistent. The evolution of this genre over the years has been complex, and without it, this type of literature would not be classified as fantasy. As such, it is essential to acknowledge the genre's historical foundations and changes over the years to fully appreciate and fully understand the modern-day fantasy genre.

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