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**Orcs, Hobbits, and Dragons – Finding the  
Roots of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Mythology**

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# Introduction

This thesis deals with different creatures and human-like beings from the world that John Ronald Reuel Tolkien created and described in many of his books including *The Children of Húrin*, *The Fall of Gondolin*, *The Silmarillion*, and probably most profoundly in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which even received its movie adaptation that made those books even more famous.

The subject matter of this thesis is a search for what inspired Tolkien during the process of writing *The Silmarillion*, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and other books related to planet Arda in Eä. This search will be based on his interests, philological studies of languages and cultures and mythologies related to languages, topics that he focused on and later taught about. It will also include the facts and details he shared in the letters with his friends as well as with his son Christopher, who edited and completed his unfinished books after father's death. Part of the thesis talks about influence of religion and faith on Tolkien who was a member of the Catholic Church.

I have chosen this topic because of my interest in literature and especially fantasy literature. Tolkien's works have been one of my favourite ones since my early years and they have influenced many fantasy authors ever since they were published. My main sources will be *The Silmarillion* as well as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy with its appendices, *The Hobbit* and *Unfinished Tales*. These books tell us about the various races and stories of those. I will however include other books by Tolkien as well as several other authors. The works of these authors are focused on various mythologies and some of them on Tolkien's works.

These works will help to analyse what inspired Tolkien to create his world as it is and how even the Godfather of fantasy draw inspiration from what he knew and what he loved – the ancient mythologies of our world.

Greek gods each have their counterpart in Roman mythology. This thesis will be however using Greek gods. That is because Tolkien was influenced by the Greek ones and studied Greece and its culture. I did not find any source stating that he would take greater interest in study of Roman history and myths.

The introduction part is followed by Tolkien's biography which tells about the author himself - his life, places where he lived, his love of languages, especially Nordic and Germanic ones, and also his interest in various mythologies. Since he was Christian and believed in God, I will also discuss the influence of the Bible and related sources on his writings. Last but not least, I will describe a little about the life of Christopher Tolkien, the youngest son of J. R. R. Tolkien who provided his opinions on J. R. R. Tolkien's works during his life and later finished and edited Tolkien's unfinished works.

The main part of the thesis is dealing with creatures and related inspirations. It will be structured accordingly to the inspiration source, e.g. Greek mythology, Norse mythology, etc., with a brief introduction explaining how Tolkien was affected by this particular mythology (Norse mythology subchapter will include Scandinavian, Germanic, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic mythology

inspirations as well). Then I will describe various creatures inspired by this particular mythology. Some of the creatures overlap and take inspiration from more than just one source or mythology. These will be assigned to the mythology that influenced its invention the most.

I would like to state that even though many of his characters have common features with creatures and beings from myths and legends, they differ from their real mythology counterparts. They are indirect unintentional allegories that originated in Tolkien's knowledge of various mythologies, historical events and his faith. In the letter 163 he stated that it is almost impossible to create a story that would not be in any sense allegorical because every story is at least partially based on real-life events and facts: "In a larger sense, it is I suppose impossible to write any 'story' that is not allegorical in proportion as it 'comes to life'; since each of us is an allegory, embodying in a particular tale and clothed in the garments of time and place, universal truth and everlasting life."<sup>1</sup> And in letter 181 he wrote:

I hope that you have *enjoyed The Lord of the Rings*? *Enjoyed* is the key-word. For it was written to *amuse* (in the highest sense): to be readable. There is no 'allegory', moral, political, or contemporary in the work at all. It is a 'fairy-story', but one written – according to the belief I once expressed in an extended essay 'On Fairy-stories' that they are the proper audience – for adults. Because I think that fairy story has its own mode of reflecting 'truth', different from allegory, or (sustained) satire, or 'realism', and in some ways more powerful.<sup>2</sup>

This work is in no way intended to challenge these statements. It is meant to show how Tolkien's studies of languages and related cultures and mythologies influenced his works.

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., Humphrey Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 252.

# Chapter 1

## 1.1 The Life of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien

This part of the thesis is based mostly on Humphrey Carpenter's book *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, which provides information about Tolkien's life, places where he lived, his family and other information.

Tolkien was born on the 3 January 1892 in Bloemfontein in what is now a province of the Republic of South Africa. At that time, this country was called the Orange Free State and was later annexed by the British Empire and even later became a part of the Republic of South Africa (hereafter only South Africa). Tolkien's father was Arthur Reuel Tolkien who worked as a bank manager in an English bank. He was born in Handsworth, Staffordshire in England and moved to South Africa only after he was promoted to head of the Bloemfontein office of the British bank. A year before receiving his promotion he had to travel a great deal. This however later resulted in his promotion. His wife was Mabel Suffield and she was born in Birmingham. She was thirteen years younger than Arthur and because of this when living in England they had to keep their relationship secret for her father did not approve of this. It was only after her eighteenth birthday that Arthur could propose to her. After he received his promotion, she followed him to South Africa. This happened in 1891, a year before John was born.

When Tolkien turned three he went to England with his mother and a younger brother who was one year old at that time. They headed there for what was meant to be a long family visit. During this time his father Arthur died of rheumatic fever before he could join them. This left the family without any money income so Mabel decided to live with her family in Birmingham at her parents' house. In 1896, they moved to Sarehole and then to Worcestershire village. Mabel however died of diabetes in 1904. Before her death, she assigned guardianship to her close friend Francis Xavier Morgan who was assigned to raise them to be good Catholics.

In his early teens, Tolkien for the first time encountered constructed language – Animalic. It was constructed by Tolkien's cousins Mary and Marjorie Incledon and it consisted mostly of the English word for animals, birds and fish. When Marjorie lost interest in such things, Tolkien and Mary created a language called Nevbosh which later led to Tolkien constructing a language he called Neffarin. Before 1909 he learned Esperanto and used it to make notes at that time.

When he turned 16 he met Edith Mary Brat when he and his brother Hillary moved to the boarding house in Duchess Road. She was three years older than him and he later married her. His wife was later a great influence on his book *Beren and Lúthien* where he compares himself to Beren and Edith to Lúthien.

Tolkien began his studies at Exeter College in Oxford, studying Classics in October 1911. At this time, the university was mainly meant for richer students from wealthier families and Tolkien struggled financially because of that during the first year of his studies. He began to attend Essayistic club, Dialectic

Company and also Stapeldon - college Debate Company. Later that year he created his club called The Apolausticks (“those who indulge”). Under the mentorship of Joseph Wright, he started to study comparative philology and Welsh. He also started to develop his interest in painting and drawing and mainly in calligraphy. In the summer of 1912, the Finnish *Kalevala* sparked his interest in Finnish. He borrowed a book of Finnish grammar and started to learn. All of this made him change his study program to English language and literature in 1913 and he graduated with first-class honours in 1915.

When Britain entered First World War in 1914, he immediately volunteered. Later, in a letter to his son Michael, he wrote that he did not want to volunteer but was afraid of the public reaction if he had not. He entered a programme that delayed his enlistment and was able to finish his studies. He was sent to Calais in France on 5 June 1916. Two years later he and his battalion arrived at what is now known as the Battle of the Somme. On the first day, however, his battalion was almost completely wiped out (this later inspired *The Fall of Gondolin*). Fortunately, he survived and was able to return to England because of this. He spent the rest of the war in England switching posts between hospitals and garrison duties. In his later letter 226 Tolkien wrote:” The Dead Marshes and the approaches to the Morannon owe something to Northern France after the Battle of the Somme.”<sup>3</sup>

Tolkien left the army on 3 November 1920 demobilized. After this, his first job was working on *Oxford English Dictionary*. Later that year he became the youngest professor at the University of Leeds where he translated several works from Old and Middle English, for instance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (this one along with E. V. Gordon). In the 1920s he decided to translate *Beowulf* and finished the translation in 1926. He never released the translation, however, and it had to wait almost 90 years until his son Christopher finally edited and published it in 2014.

He returned to Oxford and was assigned to Pembroke College as a professor of Anglo-Saxon in 1925. He attended a meeting of the English Department at Merton College where he met Clive Staples Lewis in 1926. They soon became very close friends so close that some people even considered homosexual relationships among them.<sup>4</sup> Lewis and Tolkien however refused this resolutely. Both of them were very interested in Norse mythology and they soon began to share their writings before they were released and gave each other constructive criticisms. Lewis was raised as an Ulster Protestant but became an atheist throughout the years. Thanks to the debates with Tolkien (and also Hugh Dyson) he later became a theist and Christian again and joined the Church of England. These debates later impacted Tolkien’s works and convinced Tolkien that his books might become something more than just a hobby.

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<sup>3</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R. ., Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 231.

<sup>4</sup> Carpenter, Humphrey, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 147.

In 1931, Tolkien and Lewis began to attend meetings of a literary company called “The Inklings”. It was founded by university student Tangye Lean<sup>5</sup> who later left the school. The name however remained and The Inklings became a group of friends who were all Christian and men. They were meeting regularly each week at The Eagle and the Child pub where Tolkien read from yet to be finished script of *The Hobbit*. *The Hobbit* was published later in 1937.

During the Second World War, he took a course at Government Code and Cypher School about encrypting the codes but was informed that his services will not be needed. In 1945 Tolkien moved to Merton College in Oxford where he became a professor of English language and literature. His books at this time began to get more and more attention. Actually, so much attention that he later regretted not choosing early retirement. He later received the Order of the British Empire and a Doctorate of Letters from Oxford University. *Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers* were released in 1954, and *The Return of the King* was released the year after. The following years were mostly concerned with *The Lord of the Rings* series and answering fan mail. Tolkien was awarded International Fantasy Award In 1957.

He spent the rest of his life mostly editing his works and working on *The Silmarillion*. He died on 2 September 1973 from a bleeding ulcer and chest infection and was buried at Wolvercote Cemetery in Oxford next to his wife who died two years before him. He added the names Beren and Lúthien to his and his wife’s names on their tombstone.

## 1.2 Christopher John Reuel Tolkien

Christopher Tolkien was the youngest son of John Tolkien born in Leeds in 1924. During WWII he entered Royal Air Force and briefly served as an RAF pilot before he was transferred to the Royal Navy. After the end of the war, he studied at Trinity College in Oxford. He had two wives - Faith Faulconbridge and Baillie Klass. He spent most of his adult life in the French countryside with his second wife with whom he had two children – Adam and Rachel Clare.

Before his father's death, he provided his opinions on his father's works (particularly *Lord of the Rings*) and drew the maps to most of the works. After his father's death, he worked and edited his unfinished works and published posthumously *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, twelve-part series *The History of Middle-earth*, *The Children of Húrin*, *Beren and Lúthien* and *The Fall of Gondolin*. Most of these works were unfinished, many parts have been missing and his father’s notes were often illegible or were hard to put into their place on the Middle-earth timeline.

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Tangye Lean – British literary author, journalist and director of External Broadcasting at BBC.

## Chapter 2

### The Beings of Eä and Inspiration for Them

This section of the thesis will describe the different inhabitants of Tolkien's universe called Eä and the planet Arda in which most of the stories take place. It will briefly describe where these creatures came from, how they look and act, their personality traits, and some of the main events they engaged in. The second part of each section will compare similarities between Tolkien's creature and characters or creatures that appear in various mythologies. During this section, the thesis will describe various myths from different cultures. Some of those are very old and thus exist in more than one version. The work will include a few unconfirmed theories about the origins of various creatures. Tolkien never wrote what inspired his works and the creatures within those (except for a few) and thus it is hard to say what exactly inspired them

Each subchapter will begin with a description of various events in Tolkien's life that influenced his writings connected to certain mythology.

#### 2.1 Nordic – from Valhalla to Helheim

Tolkien's interest in Latin and Greek began to grow in 1905. However, his interest in languages grew even larger when he discovered Anglo-Saxon. It happened during his studies under George Bewerton. When Tolkien showed interest in Chaucerian English, Bewerton lent him *Anglo-Saxon Primer*. When Tolkien discovered an entirely new world of the Old English he was stunned for he was looking at something familiar and recognisable but weird and remote at the same time. The biggest excitement came later when he moved from simple phrases of *Primer* to the Old English poem *Beowulf* and later on to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl* (poem from the same author).

After this, he went on a different journey and began to read 13<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic *Völsunga Saga* in Old Norse. This one was even more appealing to him because as a young boy, he was mesmerised by the story of Sigurd and a dragon Fafnir.<sup>6</sup>

Later in the summer of 1912, he discovered *Kalevala* – the Finnish epic poem which sparked an interest in Finnish. He only read it in English and wanted to read it in the original. He borrowed Finnish grammar from the Exeter college library and began his campaign against the original language of the poem. Finnish was later his main inspiration for Quenya - the language of the elves of Valinor.<sup>7</sup>

This subchapter includes inspirations from Norse mythology as well as inspirations from Germanic, Welsh, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon mythologies.

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<sup>6</sup> Carpenter, J. R. R. *Tolkien: A Biography*, 38–39.

<sup>7</sup> Carpenter, J. R. R. *Tolkien: A Biography*, 64.

### 2.1.1 Manvë Súlimo – King of Valar

He was the wisest of Valar. He was called The King of Arda and together with his brother Melkor understood most of the music of Ainur.<sup>8</sup> In the beginning, he shaped the sky and air. His favourite animals are strong and fast birds that fly through the sky he shaped. His favourites were eagles whom he used as messengers and sometimes for a battle.

He is free of evil and does not understand the concept of it. This is a reason why he unchained his brother Melkor in the first age even though other Valar protested. This later resulted in the death of the first high king of the light elves Finwë, theft of Silmarills, and Eldar leaving Valinor to pursue Melkor (at that time already Morgoth).

He was also the only one who could somehow communicate with Eru Ilúvatar even though this “communication” was not one hundred per cent reliable. You can see this in the chapter Of Aulë and Yavanna where he asks Eru about the Ents, Shepherds of the trees or in Akallabêth, The Fall of Númenor where Eru destroys the Númenorian Fleet and the island of Númenor itself.

As already mentioned eagles were messengers of Manvë and they often helped elves, humans, and dwarves against evil. But these were no ordinary eagles as we know them. At some early stages of writing *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien even considered them to be Maiar. He stated it during the parts at the beginning of *The Silmarillion*: “Spirits in the shape of hawks and eagles flew ever to and from his halls and their eyes could see to the depths of the seas, and pierce the hidden caverns beneath the world.”<sup>9</sup> Later though he changed his mind and set them only as very powerful animals.

Now let us look at the resemblances and possible inspirations. As is commonly known, Nordic mythology was a great source of inspiration for Tolkien. There is a keen resemblance between Odin the All-father and Manvë. They are both leaders of gods in their Pantheons and mythologies. They are also both very wise and know and can see many things others cannot. Odin sacrificed his eye in order to see the future. In this sense, Manvë is said to see everything and anything on Arda when on Taniquetil (Holy Mountain and a seat of Manvë) with Arda. He also knows bits of the future for he heard a great deal of Ainulindalë.

Another interesting resemblance are Eagles. Odin in myths always had two ravens, Hugin (thought) and Mumin (memory). Every day they fly around the world (Midgard - one of nine worlds from Nordic mythology, the one which is inhabited by humans) and collect news that they later report to Odin. Manvë's eagles did a similar thing except they sometimes also engaged in world events and did not live only at Taniquetil but in many places in Middle-earth. In *The*

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<sup>8</sup> Ainur were angelic beings, created by Eru in the beginning. Some of the Ainur decided to enter Arda. Those were called Valar and Maiar. Valar were higher Ainur and there were fourteen of them. Maiar were lower Ainur and the servants of Valar.

<sup>9</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 37.



*Silmarillion* Tolkien wrote that Manvë love poetry and taught it to the elves. There is a well-known story in which Odin steals the Mead of Poetry a drink which whoever “drinks becomes a scholar of poetry”. There is probably some connection between this story and Manvë’s love for poetry.

As mentioned before, Manvë (along with Varda) lived on mountain Taniquetil from where he “ruled”. This resembles a god from another mythology, namely Zeus from Greek mythology who ruled from the Mountain Olympus. There however similarity with Zeus ends for there are no other important similarities.

### 2.1.2 Istari – Those Who Know

In the true sense of the word, Istari – the wizards - were not really wizards. They were ambassadors of Valar sent to Middle-earth to help free folk fight the forces of darkness. They were Maia of different Valar – Curumo or Saruman was Maia of Aulë, Olórin or Gandalf was Maia of Manvë and Varda, Aiwendil or Radagast was Maia of Yavanna and Alatar and Pallando were both Maia of Oromë. Here is a short sample of text from *The Unfinished Tales* which how the word was created:

*Wizard* is a translation of Quenya *istar* (Sindarin *ithrori*): one of the members of an ‘order’ (as they called it), claiming to possess, and exhibiting, eminent knowledge of the history and nature of the World. The translation (though suitable in its relation to ‘wise’ and other ancient words of knowing, similar to that of *istar* in Quenya) is not perhaps happy, since the *Her en Istarion* or ‘Order of Wizards’ was quite distinct from the ‘wizards’ and ‘magicians’ of later legend.<sup>10</sup>

All of them interfered in human affairs and helped free the people of Middle-earth against evil. Each of them did it in the way they were assigned to. Two blue wizards Alatar and Pallando were supposed to head east and south and help those who opposed Melkor and later Sauron in their quest to corrupt Easterlings and Haradrim. The exact reason why Yavanna sent Radagast to Middle-earth is unknown; maybe it was to use wild animals against the forces of evil. However, because he left the men and elves of Middle-earth and spent his time among animals and birds, he probably never fulfilled it. Saruman was the leader of the order and later also of the White Council and, even though it is never directly stated, his mission was to gather knowledge and directly oppose the dark lord. The mission of Gandalf was not to engage directly but rather to motivate free folks of Middle-earth to fight the dark forces.

Gandalf was in the end the only istar who stayed faithful to this mission. Saruman, however good at the beginning, was corrupted by Sauron and his own

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<sup>10</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Unfinished Tales* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), 397.

hunger for power. Alatar and Pallando succeeded only partially because Harradrim and Easterlings still arrived to aid Sauron but in fewer numbers than Sauron had hoped for. Radagast, as stated above, left men and elves and choose to stay with wild animals and later did not heavily influence the events of the War of the Ring.

Their appearance is our first clue on where Tolkien took his inspiration from. They all appeared as old men. The appearance of Gandalf, who arrived last, is most thoroughly described. In *Unfinished Tales* Tolkien wrote: "...and last came one who seemed the least, less tall than the others, and in looks more aged, grey-haired and grey-clad, and leaning on a staff."<sup>11</sup> This resembles in many aspects Norse god Odin's incarnation of a wanderer who is often portrayed as an old man with a beard. He often wears a cloak, hat with a wide brim and staff or spear.<sup>12</sup> He is also, just like Istari, associated with wisdom which he acquired through self-sacrifice<sup>13</sup> and the word istar literally means "the one who knows".

The appearance guides us even further to one of the most profound wizard of all times – Merlin. The similarity is not only in appearance but also in the role. Merlin serves as a teacher and mentor of young Arthur Pendragon. Gandalf is in a way mentor too because he guides free folks of Middle-earth towards the defeat of Sauron for that is his purpose. Even though Merlin sometimes engaged in battle, most of the time he was advising and giving council. Gandalf has a similar mission and does not engage in battle before his resurrection when his role changes. His resurrection is often perceived as an allegory to Christ's resurrection. This might be true Tolkien wrote this in one of the letters:

*The Lord of the Rings* is, of course, a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.<sup>14</sup>

However, Christ dies and is resurrected into his true form while after Gandalf is resurrected his mission and purpose change to better suit the current situation – before he served as a guide, now he became a warrior. Christ also sacrificed himself for the sins of others while Gandalf did not.

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<sup>11</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Unfinished Tales*, 398.

<sup>12</sup> T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Odin." Encyclopedia Britannica, January 25, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Odin-Norse-deity>.

<sup>13</sup> Lindow, John, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 247–252.

<sup>14</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien., *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 191.

### 2.1.3 Dragons – Great Worms of Morgoth

Dragons were creations of Morgoth. After Noldor came to Middle-earth and Beleriand, Morgoth saw that his orcs were no match for their blades. So he decided to create a new breed of monsters – dragons. Here is a passage from *The Book of Lost Tales Part Two* which describes characteristics of the dragons in Tolkien's world:

Many are the dragons that Melko has loosed upon the world and some are more mighty than others. Now the least mighty - yet were they very great beside the Men of those days - are cold as is the nature of snakes and serpents, and of them a many having wings go with the uttermost noise and speed; but the mightier are hot and very heavy and slowgoing, and some belch flame, and fire flickereth beneath their scales, and the lust and greed and cunning evil of these is the greatest of all creatures:<sup>15</sup>

After Noldor came to Middle-earth and Beleriand, Morgoth saw that his orcs were no match for their blades. Therefore he decided to create a new breed of monsters – dragons. The first dragon that came to be was Glaurung - the first of the Urulóki, the fire-drakes of the North. He was called the father of dragons, had no wings but was intelligent and had a powerful hypnotic gaze. His nickname was the Great Worm because of the absence of wings though he looked more like a snake and had reptile characteristics. Later dragons, those whom Morgoth released from Angband during the War of Wrath, had wings and could fly. Moreover, there were two types of dragons – Fire-drakes and Cold-drakes – distinguished by the ability to breathe fire. Dragons were covered with impenetrable scales but had a soft spot in the area of the chest. In *The Hobbit*, Smaug says to Bilbo: “My armor is like tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!”<sup>16</sup> This sums up what we know about the appearance of dragons.

Tolkien admitted that he loved dragons from a very young age. He was particularly inspired by the Fafnir from the *Volsunga saga* and the nameless dragon from *Beowulf*. One of his other inspirations might have been the dragon from the Legend of St. George. The story of the dragon from *Beowulf* is particularly similar to the story of *The Hobbit*. Starting with the thief stealing the golden goblet and angering the dragon – Tolkien has burglar Bilbo – *Beowulf* summons a party of eleven warriors to create a group of twelve (twelve was an important number in the Bible) – Tolkien has twelve dwarves. The dragon in both stories sleeps on great treasure and is slain but the hero dies – in *Beowulf* it is Beowulf and in *The Hobbit* it is Thorin (though Thorin dies later).

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<sup>15</sup> Tolkien, Christopher, ed. *The Book of Lost Tales Part Two* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Annotated Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 1988), 282.

In the *Volsunga saga*, Fafnir turns into a dragon and guards his golden treasures which are however cursed by Odin. In *The Hobbit*, the treasure is not cursed but it awakens greed in dwarves. They valued their gold and riches above everything else and in *The Hobbit* this greed is even reinforced by the Arkenstone.

#### **2.1.4 Elves – The Children of the Stars**

Elves are immortal, wisest, and most beautiful of all the beings. In appearance, they are similar to men because they are too Children of Ilúvatar. They are however immortal, their bodies age only before they reach certain maturity (between fiftieth and hundredth year) and they cannot die of any illness. They can be killed by psychical injury or lose the will to live. After they die, they are sent to the Halls of Mandos in Valinor. As described by Tolkien in *The Silmarillion*:

For the elves die not till the world dies, unless they are slain or waste in grief (and to both these seeming deaths they are subject); neither does age subdue their strength, unless one grow weary of ten thousand centuries; and dying they are gathered to the halls of Mandos in Valinor, whence they may in time return.<sup>17</sup>

They, however, need less food and can withstand poorer conditions compared to men. Their vision and hearing are much better than that of men and they have many other extraordinary skills honed over centuries, especially crafts. They can travel long distances by foot and have very light steps which means they can walk on snow or other soft surfaces. They are tall, usually have brownish hair (with exceptions, this refutes common knowledge about elves being blonde) and grey or blue eyes.

They are in the first age sundered into several fractions based on where they settled which later resulted in elves creating and using more languages. After awakening at Cuiviénen, they accepted the invitation to join Valar in Valinor. During their travel west, some of the groups left and chose to stay in areas through which they travelled which resulted in the development of different languages. The most important of those are Sindarin (the language of elves who stayed in Middle-earth and dwelled in Beleriand in the first age - Moriquendi) and Quenya (the language of high elves of Valinor – Calaquendi or High elves).

As mentioned above, elves are immortal in terms of age and they die this way only after they become too tired of living when their spirits or souls would consume their bodies or “waste in grief” (the best-known example is Arwen who died of a broken heart after Aragorn passed away). These characteristics are close to the characteristics of Hyperboreans which is a race of men in Greek mythology.

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<sup>17</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, 39.

They were immortal but usually lived only to one thousand years when they became fed up with living and committed suicide.

The second thing that might have had some impact is Norse *Álfheim* and its elves. Snorri Sturluson wrote about a character called High One in *The Prose Edda* and a passage where High One says: “There is one called *Álfheim*, and there live the people called the light elves, . . . The light elves are fairer than the sun to look upon . . .”<sup>18</sup> The elves were described as “the fairest of all beings” in *The Silmarillion*. The elves who reached Valinor were also called *Calaquendi* or Light elves for they saw the light of Two Trees and you could see this light in their eyes. High One also talks about the dark elves which might have some connection to *Morriquendi* or the dark elves. It is however more likely that the dark elves in *The Prose Edda* inspired the dwarves.

The third thing would be the tribe *Tuatha dé Danann* – Tribe of the goddess *Danu* – from Irish mythology. They could not die by ageing or disease but they could be killed by psychical injury (just like Hyperboreans and elves). Moreover, they were very fond of dance, singing, pretty things and also had some magical abilities.<sup>19</sup> There is a connection to their stories as well. There is a story that says that they were banished from heaven and once they reached Ireland they burned their ships to prevent themselves from returning. This is similar to the event of *Noldor* returning to Middle-earth and burning the white ships of *Teleri*. In the end, before they left, *Tuatha dé Danann* made a pact with new coming *Milesians* and departed to the otherworld. This might resemble the event of elves leaving Middle-earth and letting the race of men take over Middle-earth.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.1.5 Dwarves – The Children of Aulë

This subchapter will be introduced by the following passage from *The Silmarillion* that shows that dwarves were made early on in history by *Aulë* who was a great craftsman and wanted someone whom he could teach his skills:

It is told that in their beginning the dwarves were made by *Aulë* in the darkness of Middle-earth; for so greatly did *Aulë* desire the coming of the Children, to have learners to whom he could teach his lore and his crafts, that he was unwilling to await the fulfilment of the designs of *Ilúvatar*. And *Aulë* made the dwarves even as they still are, because the forms of the Children who were to come were unclear to his mind, and because the power of *Melkor* was yet over the Earth; and he wished therefore that they should be strong and unyielding.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sturluson, Snori, *The Prose Edda: Tales from Norse Mythology*. trans. John Young (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 46.

<sup>19</sup> Koch, John T., and Antone Minard, *The Celts: History, Life, and Culture* (Santa Barbara: CA ABC-CLIO, 2012), 751–753.

<sup>20</sup> Keating, Geoffrey, *Keating's General History of Ireland* (Dublin: J. Duffy, 1868) 82–87.

<sup>21</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, 41.

Aulë knew that dwarves will eventually fight against Melkor and his beasts and so he made them strong and resilient. However, because he did not see the Children of Ilúvatar clearly in Ainulindalë, he made dwarves different from elves and men. They are shorter than both men and elves. They are also quite strong considering they are usually only 4 to 5 feet or 1.2 to 1.5 meters tall, smaller than men but taller than hobbits. Their lifespan was from 250 to 300 years, which is longer than the lifespan of men but they were not immortal like elves.

Although dwarves have been appearing in folk tales for a long time, some leads tell us where Tolkien took inspiration for his dwarves. All dwarves had beards. They enjoyed fighting and their favourite weapon was an axe, usually double-edged. They were also quite fond of drinking and they most usually drank beer and malt. All of this quite closely resembles modern-day depictions of Vikings. By this depiction, they were strong warriors with beards and axe in their hands charging to battle after which they would enjoy mead from the skulls of their enemies.

Another resemblance would be dark elves living underneath the ground. *The Prose Edda* tells us: "...but the dark elves live down in the earth and they are unlike the others in appearance and much more so in character. The light elves are fairer than the sun to look upon, but the dark elves, blacker than pitch."<sup>22</sup> The dwarves also spent most of their lives under the ground mining. In stories of Norse Gods, dwarves also appear and it is unsure whether these creatures are the same as dark elves. They appear in the story *The Treasures of the Gods*<sup>23</sup> where two groups of dwarves create treasures for the Norse Gods, including Odin's ring Draupnir, Thor's hammer Mjölfnir, and Freyr's ship Skidbladnir. They were said to be the best blacksmiths and loved jewels which again resembles the unchallenged skill the dwarves had in forging and blacksmithing.

The third parallel is with Jews, specifically medieval Jews. They usually lived separately from other people and wore beards. They were also not allowed to own land and so they could not farm and grow plants. For this reason, they worked other jobs and bought food from others just like the dwarves did. The story of the dwarves of Erebor being driven out of their home is also kind of similar to Jews not having a home country. When it comes to language, Tolkien in his interview on BBC in 1964 said: "The dwarves of course are quite obviously—wouldn't you say that in many ways they remind you of the Jews? Their words are Semitic obviously, constructed to be Semitic."<sup>24</sup> This shows us even more links to Jews.

The last resemblance is with the dwarves from *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Dwarves appear in their stories several times and though vaguely specified, they

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<sup>22</sup> Sturluson, *The Prose Edda: Tales from Norse Mythology*, 46.

<sup>23</sup> Gaiman, Neil, *Norse Mythology* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), 29–38.

<sup>24</sup> Tolkien, John Ronald Reuel. "Interview with Tolkien." interview by Denys Gouerout. *BBC*, 1964, audio, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p021jx7j>.

have some common features with Tolkien's dwarves. "Now they were seven little dwarfs, that lived among the mountains, and dug and searched for gold."<sup>25</sup> and: "When they came nearer they saw a dwarf with an old withered face and a snow-white beard a yard long."<sup>26</sup> Described characteristics are shared by most of Tolkien's dwarves, if not by all.

### 2.1.6 Orcs – The Corrupted

Orcs were bred by Melkor from Avari – the elves who refused the invitation of Valar and stayed at Cuiviénen – as described in this passage from *The Silmarillion*:

...that all those of the Quendi who came into the hands of Melkor... were put there in prison, and by slow arts of cruelty were corrupted and enslaved; and thus did Melkor breed the hideous race of the Orcs in envy and mockery of the elves, of whom they were afterwards the bitterest foes.<sup>27</sup>

There are several versions of the orcs and they differ in body features. Generally, orcs are shorter than men with similar features to men and their bodies are usually crooked in some way. Their teeth were described as sharp and their skin was dark and grimy. They were on the other hand skilled in creating various machines and devices. They were the main battle force of Morgoth and later Sauron for which reason they were able to reproduce very quickly.

Tolkien uses the terms orc and goblin which might cause some confusion. These two terms are, however, interchangeable. There are several types of orcs like Snaga which are lower orcs, Hobgoblins, which is a bigger version of orcs, or Uruk-hai, which is a half breed between orcs and men. Overall, it seems that Tolkien was using the term goblin for lower orcs like Snagas and the term orc for bigger breeds like Uruk-hai. There is also a connection to the place of their stay, for the orcs in Misty Mountains or Moria are usually called goblins while the others are not. This could also mean that goblin is species and orc is race but that is debatable.

Goblins appear in various folk tales throughout history, especially in Norse and Germanic countries and they are usually evil and mischievous. Tolkien studied these a lot and we can assume that this was his primary source of inspiration. However, another source might have been the book *The Princess and the Goblin* by George MacDonald. Tolkien was surely influenced by MacDonald, especially by his *Phantastes*. MacDonald in his book describes goblins as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> Grimm, Jacob, Wilhelm Grimm, Matt Haig, and George Cruikshank, *Grimms' fairy tales* (London: Puffin Books, 2016), 209.

<sup>26</sup> Grimm, Grimm, Haig and Cruikshank, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, 438.

<sup>27</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, 52.

“Now in these subterranean caverns lived a strange race of beings, called...by some goblins...They were now, not ordinarily ugly, but either absolutely hideous or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form.”<sup>28</sup> MacDonald even says that they were originally ordinary people who turned to this form later on. This again resembles Tolkien’s orcs for they were originally elves but they were turned into orcs.

Lastly, *Beowulf* makes a reference<sup>29</sup> to a mythological creature or several of them called orcneas from which Tolkien probably derived the word orc. In translation, this word means demon or evil spirit.

### 2.1.7 Trolls – Trees Turned to Stone

“Obviously trolls. Even Bilbo, in spite of his sheltered life, could see that: from the great heavy faces of them, and their size, and the shape of their legs, not to mention their language, which was not drawing-room fashion at all, at all.”<sup>30</sup>

From the descriptions Tolkien gave us in *The Hobbit* and several other books, trolls were huge human-like monsters, from 10 up to 50 feet in height depending on a type of a troll, very strong but with a limited intellect. Most of the trolls (not all of them) turn into stone when exposed to direct sunlight. They most usually have grey skin and minimal hair. Treebeard said: “Maybe you have heard of Trolls? They are mighty strong. But Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy in the Great Darkness, in mockery of Ents, as Orcs were of elves.”<sup>31</sup> This means that trolls were created by Morgoth who corrupted Ents in the First Age, just like orcs were created by corrupting the elves (because evil cannot create, only corrupt).

Trolls in Norse folklore were originally quite ambiguous beings for the word troll could have been associated with anything supernatural, like ghosts or witches, or even somebody who lived alone away from the society or was weird or different in some way. Throughout the time, however, trolls began to be more closely specified. Quite close to the way they appear in Tolkien’s stories. They were large, strong, and very old and their usual food was man flesh. They were also quite dumb o the best way to save yourself from a troll was to outsmart them. And they lived in caves because they did not like sunlight. They were sometimes also said to possess treasures, just like in *The Hobbit*.<sup>32</sup> The word troll was also used as a negative synonym for the word Jötunn meaning giants who lived in

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<sup>28</sup> MacDonald, George, *The Princess and the Goblin* (Portland: Mint Editions, 2021), 1–2.

<sup>29</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., and Christopher Tolkien, *Beowulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 186.

<sup>30</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Annotated Hobbit*, 87.

<sup>31</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 633.

<sup>32</sup> Kvideland, Reimund, and Henning K. Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 302–306.



Jötunnheim which might have influenced their later appearance as big humanoid beings.

Trolls are in Norse mythology usually divided by the place of their dwellings like mountain trolls, bridge trolls or forest trolls. A similar division with some additions is used by Tolkien. He has hill trolls, cave trolls, mountain trolls, etc. named again by the place of their dwelling.

## 2.2 Greek – from Olympus to Hades

Tolkien won a foundation scholarship in 1903 and was able to go to King Edward's school. He began to learn Greek and at first, was not that interested in it. He wrote: “The fluidity of Greek, punctuated by hardness, and with its surface glitter captivated me. But part of the attraction was antiquity and alien remoteness (from me): it did not touch home.”<sup>33</sup> It was only later in 1905 when he met Christopher Wiseman. Tolkien achieved first place in the class and Wiseman was second. This rivalry later turned into a friendship and they found out that they had some common interests like Greek, Latin, and also rugby. At this moment Tolkien became more interested in Greek.

In the senior class, both Latin and Greek were taught. This provided Tolkien with another push towards Greek and language principles in general. Robert Gilson – headmaster – made a great impression on Tolkien for he wanted his pupils to learn by themselves e.g. throughout the culture and to have general knowledge, not only linguistic one. In the letter number 142 he even stated: “I was brought up in the Classics, and first discovered the sensation of literary pleasure in Homer.”<sup>34</sup>

### 2.2.1 Ulmo – Lord of Waters

Ulmo is the second most powerful Vala on Arda. He is a lord of all waters from the biggest of the seas to the smallest of the streams springing from the roots of Arda. His presence is said to be in all of those bodies of water which means that he is very well informed about everything that is happening. He is unique among Valar, firstly because he has no spouse and secondly because he does not live in Valinor like other Valar. Instead, he lives in Ekkaia, the Outer Sea that encircles the lands of Arda and rarely comes to Valinor. He visits Valinor only when a meeting of Valar of great importance takes place.

The first resemblance is from Greek mythology and it is Poseidon, brother of Zeus and also Lord of the seas and the second strongest of all Greek gods. They are similar in terms of appearance for they both are giant gods with beards who ruled over the seas. However, the appearance similarities are the only thing they have in common. Poseidon hates humans and feels like they did him wrong. An

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<sup>33</sup> Carpenter, J. R. R. Tolkien: *A Biography*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R. Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 51.

example, probably the most famous one, would be the blinding of Polyphemus, one of his sons, by Odysseus. On the other hand, Ulmo always cared about elves and humans and helped them in their fight against Melkor.

Our next small resemblance is in the story from *The Prose Edda*<sup>35</sup>. It contains a story about an old and generally unknown goddess Gefjun who took a piece of land and created an island in the sea. This might have some connection to the journey of the elves in the first age when Ulmo took a piece of land and used it to transfer Vanyar, Noldor, and some Teleri to Undying lands. There is, however, no other resemblance between Ulmo and Gefjun.

There is one final similarity that comes into question. And it is with the Greek god Apollo. Ulmo was never officially said to be the god of music but before the creation of Arda, he was said to be the best at singing and creating music and even later plays his horns Ulumúri and those who hear them hear his music in their heart forever and a passion for seas never leaves them. Apollo is a god of music. He also, just like Ulmo, does not like to spend his time with other gods. Instead, he likes to spend it with the Hyperboreans<sup>36</sup> who were kind of “superhumans” because they lived up to one thousand years and could not die and died only by suicide when they became fed up with life. This sounds similar to fates and definitions of elves. Ulmo loved the elves and he helped them the most against Morgoth in the First Age, even after the other Valar have forsaken them.

### 2.2.2 Ossë – Maia of Belegaer

Ossë is a Maia of Ulmo. In the early days, however, he was seduced by Melkor and joined him for a while. He was later brought back to Ulmo by another Maia Uinen but some of the darkness has already rooted in him and he stayed vengeful and easy to anger. He prefers coasts and islands over the open sea and enjoys raging storms and lives in Belegaer – inner sea sundering Middle-earth and The Undying lands. Sailors of elves and men do not like him for he often brings troubles upon them. His wife was already mentioned Maia Uinen who was the opposite of his rash personality and often calmed him down.

During the Great March of elves in the first age where they marched to Valinor, he befriended some of the elves that settled on the coast before leaving Middle-earth and was very sad when they later left. He, however, persuaded some of them (like Círdan) to stay in Middle-earth. These later became Falathrim.

He rules the sea (partially), is vengeful and easy to anger and has a calm wife. This all looks quite similar to the Greek god of the sea Poseidon as he is said to have all of these personality traits which can be seen in several myths. The most well-known are probably the Odyssey and the myth of the Minotaur. By smashing his trident he could cause earthquakes, floods and all sorts of destruction which also resembles Ossë and his raging storms. When it comes to

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<sup>35</sup> Sturluson, *The Prose Edda: Tales from Norse Mythology*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Hard, Robin, *Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: Routledge, 2019), 147–149.

his wife it is a little bit different but I still think that there is a similarity. His wife Amphitrite was said to be good and calm but also very jealous. In Tolkien's work, we do not get a chance to see if Uinen is jealous, because Tolkien never really mentions infidelity while on the other hand Greek mythology is full of it and it often involves deities. But we get to know that Uinen is good and calm and calms Ossë which could be considered a similarity even though Amphitrite never really calms Poseidon.

### 2.2.3 Aulë – Lord of the Crafts

Aulë is a god of craftsmanship and he is responsible for the creation of all the matter on Arda. In the beginning, he cooperated mostly with Manvë and Ulmo in the shaping of Arda. He loved creating things and also loved teaching his art to others. That is also why he created the dwarves before the awakening of the elves for he wanted students whom he could teach.

The first clue in the search for inspiration was his occasional surname Aulë the Smith. There is only one smith who is that profound and that is Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire, sculpturing, and blacksmiths. Several similarities point out that Hephaestus was probably the main source of inspiration for Aulë.

First and foremost, Aulë created the dwarves, new living beings. Hephaestus created Pandora which is also a new living being – the first woman. She is quite like men who already existed but with some differences. The same could be said about the dwarves for Aulë did not exactly see how elves and Humans looked like in Ainulindalë and thus made them a bit different. The next similarity is of course that they are both master craftsmen and smiths and when other gods need to craft something they always come to those two. For Aulë it was, for instance, Angainor (the chain for Melkor) or Lamps of Valar and for Hephaestus, it was military equipment and weapons for the Gods of Olympus.

### 2.2.4 Mandos - Judge of the Dead

Mandos is a doomsayer and judicator of spirits. He was called Mandos by the elves. That is however not his real name. His real name is Námo and elves call him Mandos by the place of his dwelling – Halls of Mandos. It is a place where the spirits of elves go when their physical bodies are killed. Mandos knows and remembers most from Ainulindalë and thus knows the most about the past, present, and future of Arda. He announces prophecies and foretells the fates of Arda inhabitants.

He and the Halls of Mandos are combination of Nordic and Greek myths. Let us start with the Halls of Mandos. It is derived from elvish *Mandostō* which is a compound of mando – custody and osto – stronghold.<sup>37</sup> As already mentioned,

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<sup>37</sup>Strack, P., *Eldamo – An Elvish Lexicon*. March 13 2022.  
<<https://eldamo.org/content/words/word-3234760691.html>>.

the spirits of the fallen elves go to the Halls of Mandos and wait there for the Dagor Dagorath or The Battle of the battles. This is similar to the Norse Valhalla where the spirits of brave fallen warriors wait for Ragnarok. The difference is that elves could return from the Halls after a period of cleansing and be reincarnated. Exceptions are those who offended Valar or committed some terrible crime. In Nordic mythology, those men do not even come to Valhalla and are sent to Helheim which is kind of an equivalent of Hell.

As for Mandos himself, he resembles the gods of the underworld of both Nordic Hel and Greek Hades. His resemblance with Hades goes further in the early versions of the legendarium. In Greek mythology, the entrance to the underworld is guarded by the three-headed hound Cerberus. Mandos similarly had a hound called Gorgumoth who guarded Melkor after his defeat at the Silent pools.

Another example is in the story of Beren and Lúthien where Lúthien sings to Mandos to release Beren and let him return to Middle-earth. This story resembles the story of Orpheus and Eurydice where Orpheus comes to sing to Hades to release Eurydice. From Nordic mythology, this resemblance stands with the release of Baldur from Helheim where the ruler of the underworld Hel is asked to return Baldur to life.

### **2.2.5 Lórien – Lord of Dreams**

Lórien is brother of Mandos and similarly to him his real name is not Lórien but Irmo. Gardens of Lórien are the place of his dwelling and he is known by their name. These gardens were a place of rest and healing for Lórien's wife Estë was Vala of healing and had the power to heal all kinds of hurt and weariness. He never help the people of Middle-earth directly, rather he helped other Valar in entering their dreams and showing them visions. He is responsible for the creation of Olóre Mallë - a path beyond a mortal realm connecting Middle-earth and Valinor through which inhabitants of Middle-earth can access the Gardens of Lórien in their dreams.

He resembles the Greek god Hypnos.<sup>38</sup> Hypnos is a god of sleep and sleep itself. He descends to the Earth every night and brings dreams and sleep to all living beings. The sleep he brings to them also relieves all sorrows and worries which is another parallel but here may be more related to Estë.

Hypnos lives in multiple places throughout the mythology. The first is in the underworld for he was a brother of Thanatos who is a personification of death and the son of Nyx who is a goddess of the night. In another version, he lived near Oceanus, the river that encircles the world and is a source of all other rivers. However, according to Homer, he lived on the Island of Lemnos which he later

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<sup>38</sup> Hard, *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 25–27, 29–30.

claimed to be his very own “dream island”. Here is a resemblance with Lorellin<sup>39</sup> and the island in it.

### 2.2.6 Oromë – Lord of Forests

He was the second in might after Tulkas. He was the Vala of hunting and he taught elves in Valinor the art of pursuing the beasts and evil creatures. His demeanour is different from Tulkas for he is more dreadful in anger than Tulkas. He actively participated in fights against Melkor and chased down his vile monsters. He rides on his white steed Nahar and blows a hunting horn called Valaróma.

Here the search is quite complicated. The first possibility was the Greek goddess of hunt and the moon Artemis. The problem is however that even though they are both hunters, Artemis is also the goddess of chastity, childbirth and midwifery. She does not ride a horse or any other animal. Goddess of chastity and midwifery does not really fit Oromë – dreadful in anger and the slayer of Melkor’s monsters.

Partial resemblance can be seen with Welsh Arawn who, even though he is a God of the underworld, loves hunting and his court goes hunting every day. He also has a pack of hounds that are said to have red eyes and white ears.<sup>40</sup> This might resemble Huan – the great wolfhound of Valinor that originally belonged to Oromë but he later gave it to Celegorm, one of Noldorin lords and an apprentice of Oromë.

The final and probably most important resemblance is with Greek giant whose name is to most people known as a constellation - Orion. Orion was a giant and a very handsome hunter. He once fell in love with Merope, daughter of the king Chios. The king however disapproved of him and eventually had him blinded. His eyesight was eventually restored by the rays of the Sun after which he travelled to Crete where he lived with Artemis, above mentioned goddess of the hunt. The resemblance is not only in hunting and living with the goddess of the hunt but partially also in the name because Orion and Oromë are not that far apart.

Tolkien loved the stars and constellations in real-life which is a reason he created so many of them even in his books and even created a Vala of stars – Varda – which is, even more, the reason why Orion is likely to be the inspiration.

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<sup>39</sup> The lake located at the Gardens of Lórien, place of Irmo’s dwelling.

<sup>40</sup> Monaghan, Patricia, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2008), 22–23.

## 2.3 Biblical – from Heaven to Hell

Tolkien's parents were Anglican and had Tolkien baptized in 1892. After the death of his father his mother began to attend Roman Catholic Church and in June 1900 was received into the Catholic Church. The rest of her family did not approve of her conversion and after this her father and brother-in-law refused to help her anymore. She kept on taking care of her children until the year 1904 when she died of diabetes.

Before her death, however, she met priest Francis Morgan who became a friend of the family and was later appointed as the guardian of the children. Morgan has led them not only in spiritual ways but also intellectually and his teachings about the anti-modernist reform of Pope Pius X had a great impact on Tolkien's life and writings.

After his return to Oxford in 1925 he attended daily mass which took place early in the morning. Debates on Christianity and Bible with C. S. Lewis also had a great impact on his works but their later friendship became somewhat cold<sup>41</sup> for Lewis became a member of the Church of England which Tolkien – a Roman Catholic – did not approve of.<sup>42</sup>

His faith and events in the Bible affected most of his works and it can be seen most clearly in the events of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the letter number 142 he wrote:

*The Lord of the Rings* is, of course, a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.3.1 Eru Ilúvatar – The One

Eru Ilúvatar is the creator of the universe. His first name Eru means "the one" and his second name Ilúvatar means "the father of all". In the beginning, he created Ainur, angelic beings. And he talked to them and was giving them musical themes for them to sing in front of him. Later he called all the Ainur and presented them with a big theme, a vision to which they all added. That is how Arda was created and Ainur were later responsible for how it was further shaped.

In terms of inspiration, there is not much to doubt. Eru resembles the biblical God in many ways. He created everything there is in the universe starting from the Ainur who later created many other things based on his visions. He is also kind and wise as you can tell from the story about the creation of the

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<sup>41</sup> Carpenter, J. R. R. *Tolkien: A Biography*, 148–150, 151.

<sup>42</sup> Carpenter, J. R. R. *Tolkien: A Biography*.

<sup>43</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 191.

dwarves. To further support this thought Tolkien talks about Eru as a God in the letters. More specifically he writes “Eru Ilúvatar (God)”.

His second name and the creation of Ainur resemble the Norse god Odin. Odin is presented as an all-father, father and creator of many other gods who came from his thought which, as I mentioned, is similar to the creation of Ainur who came from Eru’s thought. Tolkien at the beginning of *The Silmarillion* wrote: “There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made.”<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3.2 Melkor – The First Dark Lord

“I am the Elder King: Melkor, first and mightiest of all the Valar, who was before the world, and made it. The shadow of my purpose lies upon Arda, and all that is in it bends slowly and surely to my will.”<sup>45</sup>

Melkor was The First Dark Lord. Even during Ainulindalë, he always tried to twist and bend it to his own will for he wanted to rule and own. He is the mightiest of all Valar and a brother of Manvë. His name means “he who rises in power” but Noldorin prince Fëanor gave him a different name. Morgoth – Dark Enemy of the World after he killed Finwë, father of Fëanor, and stole Silmarills.

In the beginning, he was Ainu like others but arrogance and envy of what others had made him fall into contempt - contempt for all but himself. “He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness. And darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda and filled it with fear for all living things.”<sup>46</sup> He rebelled against Eru and against Valar and spoiled all their works during the creation shaping of Arda, worst of those being the destruction of the Two Lamps and of Laurelin and Telperion – Two Trees of Valinor.

Melkor is (like all Ainur) an angelic being. He falls and becomes an evil power-hungry spirit. He is defeated at the end of the first age by the armies of Valar and by Tulkas and cast out to the Outer Darkness. Lucifer was at the beginning angel but he was created very beautiful and very strong compared to his peers. That made him arrogant and soon he came up with the thought that he should be in God’s place. He led a rebellion against his father (God – Eru) and was defeated by his brother archangel Michael (Tulkas). During his rebellion, he convinced many other angels to join him just like Melkor convinced many Maiar to join him and his army.

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<sup>44</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., and Christopher Tolkien, *The Children of Húrin* (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 39–40.

<sup>46</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, 25.



The resemblance is not only in the story and also in the names. As you can see as an archangel his name is Lucifer<sup>47</sup> but after he is cast down from Heaven his name is changed simply to Devil or Satan. The same happens in the story of Melkor. His name after destroying the Trees, killing Finwë and escaping with silmarills is cursed by Fëanor and he gets a new name – Morgoth.<sup>48</sup>

The second resemblance, smaller, however, can be seen with Norse Loki – God of Mischief. He is a part of many Norse myths and in most of them, he helps the other gods. In some however he is causing mischief to the gods which influence can be seen at the beginning of *The Silmarillion* during the shaping of Arda:

Yet it is told among the Eldar that the Valar endeavoured ever, in despite of Melkor, to rule the Earth and to prepare it for the coming of the Firstborn; and they built lands and Melkor destroyed them; valleys they delved and Melkor raised them up; mountains they carved and Melkor threw them down; seas they hollowed and Melkor spilled them; and naught might have peace or come to lasting growth, for as surely as the Valar began a labour so would Melkor undo it or corrupt it.<sup>49</sup>

### 2.3.3 Balrogs - The Scourges of Fire

Balrogs were a fiery Maiar who at the beginning joined Melkor, served as his servants and were among the most powerful of his servants. The most terrifying among them was Gothmog – lord of Balrogs - who mortally wounded Fëanor and was later killed by Ecthelion at Gondolin. They had a form of tall human-like beings encapsulated in shadows and fire. They wielded flaming swords and fiery whips. The chapter Of the Enemies from *The Silmarillion* briefly describes them this way: “Dreadful among these spirits were the Valaraukar, the scourges of fire that in Middle-earth were called the Balrogs, demons of terror.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Here is a brief explanation on the Devil’s name that explains how the name Lucifer became synonymous with the Devil: “The word ‘Lucifer’ is Latin for the light bearer. It is also a Roman astrological term for the morning star which is currently known as the planet Venus. The name Lucifer was the direct translation from the Septuagint of the Greek word heosphoros (meaning dawn-bearer), and the Hebrew helel (meaning bright one) used by Jerome (who was an Illyrian Church priest and apologist) in the Vulgate, having etymologically the same meaning as Prometheus, the Greek titan who brought fire to humanity. The name Lucifer was attached to Satan by the church fathers in the belief that he was referred to in Isaiah 14:12, which in fact refers to the king of Babylon.” – Ogechukwu, Nwaocha, *The Devil: What does he look like* (Salt Lake City: Millennial Mind Pub, 2012), 35. The thesis will however list the name change as a possible inspiration for the version described in the text is more widely known.

<sup>49</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, 25.



This depiction is similar to the medieval depictions of demons as fallen angels with fangs and claws, horns and possibly wings.<sup>51</sup> Balrogs in Sindarin and Valaraukar in Quenya both mean the same thing – Demons of might. They were Maia of Fire - angelic beings corrupted by Melkor. These characteristics are almost identical with the fallen angels whom Lucifer persuaded to rebel against God. Similarly to the angles, Balrogs were originally Maiar (angelic beings) corrupted by Melkor.

Demons live in hell and Hell is usually characterised by fire and darkness. Balrogs were covered in flames and darkness but not because they lived in hell but rather because Tolkien used darkness and extreme heat or extreme cold to portray evil beings (examples being dragons and Balrogs for extreme heat and Barrow-wights or Nazghûl for extreme cold).

One other possible link would be with the giants of Muspelheim – the fiery region of Norse mythology. Gothmog – the lord of Balrogs - is supposedly about 12 feet or 3,6 meters tall which is about twice the size of Middle-earth elves who were already considered quite tall.<sup>52</sup> Thus they likely had some impact on creation of Balrogs.

#### **2.3.4 Tulkas – Champion of Valar**

Tulkas is the last Vala that came to Arda. He came because he heard that there is a war and he wanted to be part of it. Unlike other Valar, he likes to wage war for the sole purpose of fighting but he has no weapon other than his hands. His name in Quenya means “strong”. He laughs very loudly and has laughed even when fighting Melkor who was afraid of him and whom Tulkas chained with Angainor<sup>53</sup> during the War for Sake of the Elves.

More characters might have inspired Tolkien’s Tulkas. First is Magni son of Thor from Norse mythology. He was also very strong and his name also translates as “strong” or potentially “mighty”. Another one could have been Thor himself because just like Tulkas, he fought for the Norse Gods to protect them from the giants.

The third one is Hercules who became the strongest man in the world and deserved his place on Olympus in Greek mythology. Just like Tulkas was strongest among Valar. Strength was the main asset of them both.

The fourth resemblance and the most important one is with biblical Archangel Michael. When Lucifer began his rebellion in heaven, God called upon Michael to gather an army and to fight against Lucifer. He defeated Lucifer and banished him from heaven. In the last of the big Battles of Beleriand – The War of

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<sup>51</sup> Whether Balrogs had wings or not is a highly debated topic among the fans and has not been resolved to this day. The movie adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* depicts Durin's Bane with wings. In the book, however, as "wings" are described shadows spreading around the Balrog.

<sup>52</sup> Day, David, *The Dark Powers of Tolkien* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2019), 43.

<sup>53</sup> The chain created by Aulë, especially for Melkor.

Wrath – Tulkas defeated Melkor at the Pools of twilight after which Melkor was banished to the Outer Darkness.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the whole *Silmarillion* he was the one who usually fought Melkor face to face and bested him in strength and might.

### **2.3.5 Varda – Queen of the Stars**

Varda is the mightiest and most beautiful among the Ladies of Valar. She lives with Manvë on Taniquetil in their palace Ilmarin. Her element is light and light is also her joy. She created stars and constellations, filled the Lamps of Valar with light and contributed greatly to the creation of the Sun and the Moon. She also hallowed the Silmarills so that no mortal body, impure hands or anything evil could touch them.

Her association with light and purity suggests that she might be a reflection of the Virgin Mary the mother of Jesus. Tolkien was surely influenced by Christianity and Biblical themes for he was of the Catholic faith. It is said that Varda knew Melkor's evil even before he revealed himself as evil. Virgin Mary is often portrayed while crushing the head of the snake which was a common symbol for the devil which would suggest that she rejected the devil just like Varda rejected Melkor in *Ainulindalë*.

Furthermore in the Bible in *Revelation* Mary is said to be seen crowned with twelve stars and dressed in the sunshine.<sup>55</sup> She is also the most loved by the elves and Mary is in the same kind of way respected and worshipped by the Catholic Church.

## **2.4 Others**

### **2.4.1 Ents – The Shepherds of the Trees**

The Ents were created at the beginning of the days on behalf of Vala Yavanna when she discovered that Aule created dwarves and Eru showed him mercy. Their purpose was to protect all things that grow and punish all those who would do them any wrong thus the name Shepherds of the Trees. Originally, there were Ents and Entwives and their offsprings were called Entlings. However, during the second age, the Entwives discovered that they preferred smaller plants like grasses or flowers over the big trees while the Ents preferred just those trees. Consequently, the Entwives moved away from Fangorn, their original dwelling, to the Brown lands an area east of Fangorn. However, the Brown lands were along with Entwives destroyed during the second age by Sauron. In these circumstances it was no longer possible for the Ents to reproduce.

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<sup>54</sup> Tolkien, Christopher, ed. *The Book of Lost Tales Part Two*, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Rev. 12:7.

When Merry and Pippin meet Treebeard for the first time in *The Two Towers*, Tolkien describes Treebeard, the representative of the Ent race, as follows:

It belonged to a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. But at the moment the hobbits noted little but the eyes. These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. They were brown, shot with a green light.<sup>56</sup>

Tolkien in the letter 163 wrote: “I think, to my bitter disappointment and disgust from schooldays with the shabby use made in Shakespeare of the coming of ‘Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill’: I longed to devise a setting in which the trees might really march to war.”<sup>57</sup> In *Macbeth*, witches gave Macbeth several prophecies or predictions one of them mentioning that he will never vanquish until the Great Birnam Wood comes to him: “Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are. Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill Shall come against him.”<sup>58</sup> and Macbeth thinks that there is no possibility of this happening. Malcolm however, told his soldiers to take branches and mask themselves as trees. Sometime later, a messenger comes to Macbeth and tells him that Birnam Wood started to move: “As I did stand my watch upon the hill I looked toward Birnam and anon me thought the wood began to move.”<sup>59</sup> One of the inspirations for the creation of the Ents was Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and the Last march of the Ents might resemble just the event of Birnam forest coming to Dunsinane.

Other inspirations (except for his love for trees) are a little unclear for Tolkien himself stated that the concept of Ents somehow naturally came to him and that he wrote the chapter Treebeard like he already knew it. He said that he wrote it like as if he had already read it:

Take the Ents, for instance. I did not consciously invent them at all. The chapter called ‘Treebeard’, from Treebeard’s first remark on p. 66, was written off more or less as it stands, with an effect on my self (except for labour pains) almost like reading some one else’s work.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, 603.

<sup>57</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 227.

<sup>58</sup> Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth (The New Cambridge Shakespeare)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 195.

<sup>59</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 230.

The Ents are overall quite unique as there are occurrences of talking trees but creatures similar to Tolkien's Ents do not appear.

### 2.4.2 Ungoliant and her Spiders

Ungoliant was the first of the giant spiders on Arda. She came from the Outer Darkness and her origins are not known. In *The Silmarillion* Tolkien stated that in the beginning, when Melkor looked on Arda for the first time, she was among the first ones he corrupted. She later fled from her master for she feared Valar and their great light. Despite this, Morgoth later came to her and she joined forces with him again.

She is believed to be a creature born from the Outer Darkness. There is a fan based theory that says that she might be one of the unnamed things that rose from the dissonance between Eru's and Melkor's song during Ainulindalë.

Tolkien wrote this about *The Hobbit*, his first published work:

On January 15 1957 Tolkien was interviewed by Ruth Harshaw for an American radio show called 'Carnival of Books'. He said, 'I put in the spiders largely because this was, you remember, primarily written for my children (at least I had them in mind), and one of my sons in particular dislikes spiders with great intensity. I did it to thoroughly frighten him and it did!' Throughout his life, Tolkien's son Michael had what he called 'a deep-rooted abhorrence of spiders'.<sup>60</sup>

However, order in which he wrote his books is not clearly defined and it is likely that Tolkien already began to work on *The Silmarillion* and therefore the explanation might lie elsewhere.

The first part of explanation is the general fear of spiders. This inspiration probably partially stems from the facts mentioned in the paragraph from *The Annotated Hobbit* above. Arachnophobia is one of the most common fears and Tolkien wanted to create something that his readers would despise. Some critics say that he made spiders into monsters in his books because he was bitten by a tarantula during his early years in South Africa. That is however not true and Tolkien himself stated that he does not even remember this event in the letter 163: "And if that has anything to do with my being stung by a tarantula when a small child, people are welcome to the notion (supposing the improbable, that any one is interested). I can only say that I remember nothing about it, should not know it if I had not been told."<sup>61</sup>

There is a similarity with Greek goddess Nyx – the primordial goddess of night who alone spawned many dark spirits. This resembles Ungoliant's offspring

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<sup>60</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Annotated Hobbit*, 210.

<sup>61</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien, *The letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 230.

in Nan Dungortheb and Ered Gorgoroth who later troubled population of the surrounding areas. She was described as a personification of night and she covered the sky with a veil of dark mist.<sup>62</sup> Ungoliant could weave her webs which strangled light and created the Unlight through which even Manvë himself could not see. The last resemblance that might and might not hold true is the mating of Nyx and Erebor – the darkness (and also Lonely Mountain in *The Hobbit*, which probably means that Tolkien had knowledge about the Greek “Family of night”). From their union rose the Light which might have some connection to the light of Valinor trapped inside the Silmarills which Melkor and Ungoliant stole.

The next resemblance is with Indian goddess Kali – “the Destroyer of the World”. David Day stated that Kali as a “Destroyer of the World” demands blood sacrifices, intoxicating drink and ritual suicides. “She dances to demonstrate ‘the power of death at the end of the world’, which ultimately cannot help but be a dance of self-annihilation.”<sup>63</sup>

The act of self-annihilation could be referring to Ungoliant devouring herself to satisfy her insatiable hunger. Kali has more than one form but one of those has eight hands. This could mean that Tolkien took this form, removed its human aspects and replaced them with those of a spider.

One of the things that influenced Tolkien was First World War in which he participated. Spiders were often used in WWI in propaganda. It represented fear and people were sent to the front to defeat this vile monster and to stop its webs from spreading further over Europe. This, along with the general fear of spiders, might have been the reason why Tolkien used spiders as a “Devourers of the World”.

### 2.4.3 Hobbits – Lords of Comfort

Hobbits are probably the most profound of Tolkien’s inventions. They are the main characters in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and it is probably because of this that we get quite an extensive description of their looks, habits and lifestyle. Here is a short passage from *The Hobbit* that describes the appearance of the hobbits:

They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded dwarves. Hobbits have no beards... They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs...<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hard, *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 25–30, 39.

<sup>63</sup> Day, *The Dark Powers of Tolkien*, 33.

<sup>64</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Annotated Hobbit*, 30.

It is unclear how hobbits came to be. Here is a short passage from *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* that tells about origins of the hobbits:

It is plain indeed that in spite of later estrangement Hobbits are relatives of ours: far nearer to us than elves, or even than dwarves. Of old they spoke the languages of Men, after their own fashion, and liked and disliked much the same things as Men did. But what exactly our relationship is can no longer be discovered. The beginning of Hobbits lies far back in the Elder Days that are now lost and forgotten. Only the elves still preserve any records of that vanished time, and their traditions are concerned almost entirely with their own history, in which Men appear seldom and Hobbits are not mentioned at all. Yet it is clear that Hobbits had, in fact, lived quietly in Middle-earth for many long years before other folk became even aware of them.<sup>65</sup>

Originally, they used to live around the river Anduin, east of Misty Mountains and there were three branches of hobbits. Harfoots were the most numerous and were the most similar to the Hobbits in the Third Age. Stoors lived mostly near the rivers and were bigger in stature than other Hobbits. The third ones were Fallohides who lived in the woods. They were tallest of the three but there were also fewest of them. As mentioned before, they were close to the race of men and have probably developed from it. They have some common words and phrases with the people of Rohan. Considering this and the fact that the people of Rohan are descendants of Éothéod, Northmen who originally lived in the Vales of Anduin suggests that they might have common ancestors. The hobbits were said to live in Middle-earth from the First Age. However, the other races only began to notice them at some point during the Third Age. Their exact origin is unknown even to the Hobbits themselves for they are not fond of historical records.

According to an interview from the year 1964 and also his biography Tolkien wrote the first phrase of *The Hobbit* while reading through exam papers:

It was on a summer's day, and he was sitting by the window in the study at Northmoor Road, laboriously marking School Certificate exam papers. Years later he recalled: 'One of the candidates had mercifully left one of the pages with no writing on it (which is the best thing that can possibly happen to an examiner) and I wrote on it: 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit'. Names always generate a story in my mind. Eventually I thought I'd better find out what hobbits were like. But that's only the beginning.'<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the ring* (London: HarperCollins, 2012), 12.

<sup>66</sup> Carpenter, J. R. R. *Tolkien: A Biography*, 180.

This was the first occurrence of the word “hobbit” in Tolkien life. He did not know who the hobbits were, what they looked like or where and how they lived. Naturally to Tolkien, the first thing he did was creating the etymology for the word. The name however later made him create a background for the hobbits. In the letter 213 Tolkien wrote this about where he took the characteristics of hobbits:

I am in fact a *Hobbit* (in all but size). I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humour (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible).<sup>67</sup>

This shows that hobbits were mainly based on his own characteristics. On the other hand, they also represented English countryside folk and orcs and Saruman represented industrialisation.

The first hobbit Tolkien introduced was Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* with whom the similarities go even further. Citing from his biography:

In the story, Bilbo Baggins, son of the lively Belladonna Took, herself one of the three remarkable daughters of the Old Took, descended also from the respectable and solid Bagginses, is middle aged and unadventurous, dresses in sensible clothes but likes bright colours, and has a taste for plain food; but there is something strange in his character that wakes up when the adventure begins. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, son of the enterprising Mabel Suffield, herself one of the three remarkable daughters of old John Suffield (who lived to be nearly a hundred), descended also from the respectable and solid Tolkiens, was middle aged and inclined to pessimism, dressed in sensible clothes but liked coloured waistcoats when he could afford them, and had a taste for plain food.<sup>68</sup>

Bilbo is the first hobbit invented by Tolkien and other hobbits were probably based upon him. They all had quite complex family trees which were the only historical records that they valued.

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<sup>67</sup> Tolkien, J. R. R., Carpenter, and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, 303.

<sup>68</sup> Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 183.



## Conclusion

This bachelor thesis aimed to show how J. R. R. Tolkien used his knowledge of myths and cultures connected to the languages he studied to create his own mythological stories, races and many various creatures. The first chapter of this thesis deals with the life of J. R. R. Tolkien. This chapter was important because it tells about what influenced Tolkien in his language studies which later led to his interest in cultures linked to the languages and mythologies within those cultures. It also tells us about other possible inspirations and influences, whether it was his faith, his friends and colleagues, The First World War in which he fought, or his love for his wife Edith. The second part of the first chapter talks about his son Christopher who was giving J. R. R. Tolkien opinions during his life. Later, after his father passed away, he edited and finished his unpublished and unfinished works.

Chapter two deals with the main topic which is exploring what inspired Tolkien in his works. It is divided into four subchapters. Each of them focuses on a different inspiration source – Norse mythology, Greek mythology, Biblical inspirations, and Others, which is a subchapter that deals with inspirations from other sources, e.g. Celtic mythology.

The first subchapter focuses on Nordic mythology influences and talks about Tolkien's love for Norse, Anglo-Saxon and Germanic languages and the influences of the cultures connected to them. In this chapter, some of the most important beings of Arda are discussed, including the elves, dwarves, orcs, Istari – wizards who are not really wizards – or Manvë, the mightiest of Valar and King of Arda.

The first character described in this subchapter is Manvë who shows resemblances with the Norse god Odin. They are both leaders of their pantheons and can predict the future (though Odin can see the future at will and Manvë must remember parts from *Ainulindalë*). Istari – the wizards who are in fact Maiar – took their inspiration from Odin's incarnation as an old wanderer and the wizard of the Round Table Merlin. The next creature described are the dragons. The thesis explored their connections to Fafnir from the *Volsunga saga* and the dragon from the story of *Beowulf*. The main inspirations for the elves, as shown in the work, were mythological inhabitants of Norse Álfheim the light elves, from whom they took their beauty and connection with light, and Irish Tuatha dé Danann, from whom they took their immortality, magical capabilities and love for music. Dwarves, who were made by Vala Aulë, took their characteristics from dark elves, Álfheim counterparts of light elves, as well as from dwarves who appear in Norse mythology as well. They took some of their features from Vikings and Jews as well. Last but not least, their beards and several other features might have come from the dwarves that appear in *Grimm's Fairytales*. The orcs – twisted servants of Morgoth and later Sauron – have their roots in various tales and folk stories, especially from Norse and Germanic mythologies. Another inspiration described in the work was the book written by George MacDonald *The Princess and the*



*Goblin* from which Tolkien's orcs and goblins got their ugly and twisted looks. Last in this subchapter are the Trolls who were created as a mockery of the Ents. They were inspired by the trolls from Norse myths who were according to sources tall, ugly and strong. They also feasted on human flesh and were said to turn to stone in sunlight.

The second subchapter examined Greek mythology and was heavily focused on Valar and their comparison to the Greek Gods. This chapter shows how Tolkien was influenced by the Greek Pantheon when creating his own. You can, however, see that in the creation of other Valar or even Eru he chose to combine more gods to better suit his story because, as stated before, he did not like allegories.

The Greek subchapter begins with Ulmo – Vala of the seas and second in might after Manvë. The theses showed the appearance resemblances with Poseidon, some similarities in the story of Norse goddess Gefjun, and finally common features with Greek god Apollo to whom Ulmo is most similar in terms of musicianship and spending time with hyperboreans – creatures similar to elves – and who prefers to spend his time with them rather than with other Valar. The next character was his loyal servant Ossë who was in contrast with Ulmo very similar to Poseidon. He lives in the coastal areas of Belegaer or The Sundering Sea. He is vengeful and easy to anger and has a spouse who calms him down which are all features he shares with the Greek god Poseidon. Aulë who is a Vala of crafts showed characteristics similar to Hephaestus – the Greek god of fire sculpturing and blacksmiths. The similarities between those two included mastery of crafts and the creation of a new living being. Hephaestus created Pandora and Aulë created dwarves. The following part of the subchapter discussed resemblances of Mandos – doomsayer and judicator of spirits – with rulers of underworlds in Greek and Norse mythology Hades and Hel. This resemblance was further underlined by the story of Beren and Lúthien which is similar to the story of Orpheus and Euridice in Greek mythology and the story of Baldur in Norse mythology. His brother Lórien was inspired by Greek mythology as well. Lórien was Vala of dreams and visions and the Gardens of Lórien were the place of rest and healing. The mortals usually saw the visions he projected in their dreams. He resembles Hypnos – the Greek god of sleep who makes mortals fall asleep. This deep sleep relieves them of all sorrows and worries. Oromë is a Vala of hunting and a skilled warrior who hunted down Melkor's beasts and monsters in the First Age. The main inspiration for Oromë, as proved in the thesis, was Orion. Orion was a Greek giant and a hunter. Additionally, the name Oromë is similar to the name Orion. Most people connect his name to the constellation and it is known that Tolkien was deeply interested in the stars and constellations.

The third subchapter dealt with various influences from the Bible. As mentioned in the introduction and beginning of the third subchapter, Tolkien was a theist his whole life and even inspired C. S. Lewis to become a member of the Church of England. This chapter is again focused mainly on Valar for some of

them are similar to God and angels and other celestial beings described in the Bible.

The first character of this subchapter is probably the most important being in Tolkien's universe. Eru Ilúvatar is the creator of Ainur and all there is. He resembles biblical and Christian God in many ways. Tolkien further underlines this thought in the letters where he writes about Eru as God. More specifically he writes "Eru Ilúvatar (God)". Some of his features were taken from Norse Odin because Ainur came from his thought, just like other Norse gods came from Odin's thought. Melkor who was later called Morgoth was inspired by the devil himself, by his rebellion, his downfall, and by the way he corrupted other angels around him as well as by his desire for power. Apart from these, he retrieved some of his characteristics and mischievousness from Norse Loki. His servants – Balrogs – who were fallen Maia were inspired by medieval depictions of the demons. They were at the beginning corrupted by Melkor and turned against Valar which is similar to the Angels who joined the devil during his rebellion in heaven. The main inspiration for Vala Tulkas was Archangel Michael who fought the devil and banished him from heaven just like Tulkas defeated Morgoth during the War of Wrath and banished him to the Outer Darkness. The final character introduced in this subchapter is Varda – Vala of stars. Her association with light and purity suggests that she was inspired by the Virgin Mary. Melkor was afraid of Varda ever since the beginning. The devil was similarly afraid of the Virgin Mary for her purity and conviction. The Virgin Mary is in one passage of the Bible depicted with a crown of stars on her head. This probably gave Tolkien the idea to create Vala of the stars. Furthermore, the Virgin Mary is in Catholic Church worshipped and respected in a similar way the elves worship and respect Varda.

The last subchapter Others explored creatures that were inspired by other means than Norse or Greek mythology or the Bible. The creatures examined within this subchapter are the Ents who are protectors of everything that grows, the giant spider queen Ungoliant, and the hobbits who are probably the most profound of Tolkien's creations.

The inspiration for the Ents stemmed from Tolkien's disappointment with the part of the story in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Other inspirations are, however, unclear for Tolkien explicitly stated that the idea of the "living tree" came to him as naturally as if he had already read it. Ungoliant was a combination of common human fears, Indian goddess Kali, who is considered Destroyer of the World, and the First World War propaganda. The final creature the thesis examined were the hobbits. Tolkien in the letters wrote that he based Bilbo Baggins (the first hobbit he created) mainly on himself. He wrote that he likes good plain food, trees and gardens, has a simple sense of humour and so on. His family tree looks very similar to Bilbo's family tree. The key fact to remember is that hobbits were to represent countryside folk living their peaceful life and orcs and other forces of evil represented industrialisation.

Tolkien himself later became very influential in the fantasy genre. After the publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, elves, dwarves and orcs became essential for many other works and the ents, which is also Tolkien's invention, or similar treeish figures appeared too in some books and even the movies and later video games and fantasy-themed music. The plot of many fantasy books was similar to or was inspired by his works. I will now provide you with some examples of the works that were inspired by Tolkien in terms of creatures. The first example is a series of books written by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski called *The Witcher*. The elves and dwarves in these books have almost the same characteristics as those in Tolkien's works. The elves are immortal and beautiful and there are very few of them left which is similar to the elves in the Third Age, i.e. the time when *The Lord of the Rings* takes place. The dwarves are miners, their favourite weapon is an axe and they all have beards. There are several similarities in the *Harry Potter* series written by J. K. Rowling not only in terms of story. Albus Dumbledore was inspired by Gandalf as a wise old wizard with a grey beard. The great spiders and Aragorn were inspired by the great spiders and Shelob in *The Lord of the Rings*. The last example are Dementors who were inspired by Nazgûl. The fantasy game *Dungeons and Dragons* was inspired by Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy as well. *Dungeons and Dragons* later inspired not only the story of the books and the videogame series *Warcraft* but also the orcs, who are the main characters in *Warcraft*, as well as several other races including night elves, dwarves, and goblins. They are slightly different from Tolkien's orcs but there is no doubt that they were inspired by Tolkien's orcs.

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## **Abstract**

My thesis will describe the various inhabitants of Tolkien's Arda (the fictional world where *Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, *The Fall of Gondolin*, and other stories take place) and search for the sources from which Tolkien drew his inspiration. These will include the influence of Nordic and other cultures and languages as well as inspiration from spiritual beings from the Bible and related books.

## Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na mytologii vytvořenou J. R. R. Tolkienem v dílech *Silmarillion*, trilogii *Pán Prstemů*, *Nedokončené Příběhy* a dalších dílech odehrávajících se na planetě Arda v Eä. Hlavním cílem bylo zjistit, z jakých zdrojů čerpal J. R. R. Tolkien inspiraci při vytváření jednotlivých tvorů a postav v rozsáhlém fiktivním světě, který ve svém literárním díle stvořil. Hlavními zdroji informací byly *Silmarillion*, trilogie *Pán Prstemů*, *Nedokončené Příběhy* a několik dalších knih, jejichž děj se odehrává v Tolkienově fiktivním univerzu. Dalšími podklady pro analýzu Tolkienem vymyšlených tvorů byly publikace zabývající se různými evropskými mytologiemi, jmenovitě skandinávskou, germánskou, keltskou, anglosaskou a řeckou, a rovněž Bible.

První část práce se zabývá životem J. R. R. Tolkiena. Popisuje jednotlivé události v jeho životě, které jej jako autora ovlivnily. Následuje stručná biografie jeho syna Christophera, který již během života pomáhal otci při psaní a kreslil mapy k jeho dílům. Po smrti otce se zasloužil o dokončení a editaci nedokončených děl J. R. R. Tolkiena.

Druhá část se soustředí na hlavní téma práce tj. hledání inspiračních zdrojů J. R. R. Tolkiena, které ho ovlivnily při psaní výše uvedených děl. Tato část práce je rozdělena čtyři podkapitoly, z nichž každá rozebírá jiné inspirační zdroje. Výběr těchto podkapitol vychází z Tolkienova filologického a kulturního zájmu o tyto jednotlivé okruhy. Jsou jimi: Severská mytologie (zahrnující skandinávskou, germánskou, keltskou a anglosaskou mytologii), Řecká mytologie a dále inspirace vycházející z Bible. Čtvrtá podkapitola s názvem Ostatní se zabývá tvory, jejichž inspirace vzešla odjinud, než je popisováno v předešlých podkapitolách – dílčími inspiračními zdroji byly například Tolkienovy zážitky z první světové války. Čtvrtá podkapitola byla do práce zařazena, aby ilustrovala, že rozsah inspiračních zdrojů Tolkiena byl širší, než uvádějí první tři podkapitoly.

První podkapitola zaměřená na severskou mytologii začíná krátkým úvodem popisujícím autorův vztah k této problematice. Následuje výčet tvorů a postav, které byly inspirovány příběhy, postavami a tvory z uvedených mytologií. První postava, kterou se tato podkapitola zabývá, je Manvě – Král Ardy a nejmocnější z Ardy. Práce analyzuje jeho podobnost se severským bohem Odinem, který byl, stejně jako Manvě, nejvyšším bohem v severské mytologii a bývá asociován s ptáky (Odin s havrany a Manvě s orly). Manvě měl rád poezii, podobně jako Odin, který donesl bohům takzvanou medovinu poezie. Další součástí Tolkienova fiktivního světa byl řád kouzelníků Istari. Práce popisuje jejich podobnost s Odinovou inkarnací poutníka a rovněž s kouzelníkem Kulatého stolu Merlinem. Následující část o dracích zkoumá jako zdroje inspirace draka Fafnira ze severské *Ságy o Volsunzích* a draka z hrdinského eposu *Beowulf*. Předobrazem Tolkienových elfů byli světlí elfové z *Álfhaimu* a *Tuatha dé Danann* – božské bytosti vyskytující se v irské mytologii. Část práce zaměřená na trpaslíky se zabývá jejich podobností s temnými elfy a trpaslíky, kteří se vyskytují v severské mytologii. Dále tato část probírá jejich podobnost s moderním

vyobrazením Vikingů (silní, svalnatí válečníci s plnovousem) a v neposlední řadě podobnost s trpaslíky z *Pohádek bratří Grimmů*. Skřeti se v lidových pověstech vyskytovali od nepaměti, zejména v germánské mytologii. Právě tito skřeti byli pravděpodobně jedním z inspiračních zdrojů pro Tolkiena. Druhý, neméně důležitý zdroj, byli skřítci z pohádky George MacDonalda *Princezna a skřítek*. Posledním tvorem, o němž pojednává tato podkapitola, jsou trollové. Slovem troll se původně v severské mytologii označovaly různé nadpřirozené bytosti (nebo také člověk, který žil sám). V průběhu let se ale tak začali označovat bytosti, které byly takřka identické s Tolkienovými trolly.

Podkapitola o řecké mytologii začíná popisem Ulma, který je Valou jezer, řek a moří. Ulmo – Vala je jeden z bohů planety Arda. Jeho vzhled je téměř totožný se vzhledem Poseidona, který je taktéž vládcem moří. Ostatními vlastnostmi je však více podobný Apollonovi, řeckému bohu hudby a umění. Následuje Maia Ossë, který je taktéž asociován s mořem a konkrétně s pobřežními oblastmi Belegaeru. Ossë se Poseidonovi podobá mnohem více než Ulmo, a to nejen vzhledem, ale i vlastnostmi, jelikož byl mstivý a snadno se rozzuřil. Aulë je mistrem řemesel. Jeho schopnosti výroby a tvoření jsou velice podobné schopnostem Hefaesta, řeckého boha kovářů a řemeslníků. Aulë také vytvořil nové žijící bytosti, trpaslíky, stejně jako Hefaestos stvořil Pandoru, první ženu. Dalším Valou, o němž pojednává tato podkapitola, je Mandos, pán duchů a prorok Valar. Díky vládě nad duchy mrtvých a Síním Mandosu (obdoba Valhally) se podobá řeckému bohu podsvětí Hádrovi a severské bohyni Hel. Následuje Lórien, Vala vizí a snů. Ten se nejvíce podobá řeckému bohu Hypnovi, který je bohem spánku a spánek sám. Jeho spánek má léčivé účinky a zbavuje starostí a smutku. Podobný účinek má i odpočinek v Lórienových zahradách. Oromë je silou druhý hned po nejsilnějším bojovníkovi Valar Tulkasovi. Oromë je bohem lovu a divokých zvířat. Svůj předobraz má v řeckém obru a lovcu Orionovi, podle něhož je pojmenováno souhvězdí Orion.

Třetí podkapitola se zabývá inspirací, kterou Tolkien čerpal z Bible. První probíraná postava je pravděpodobně nejdůležitější z celého Tolkienova fiktivního univerza. Eru Ilúvatar je stvořitelem všeho, co v tomto vesmíru existuje. Jako první stvořil Ainur, andělské bytosti, které mu pak pomohly při tvoření planety Arda. Eru se nejvíce podobá křesťanskému Bohu a Tolkien o něm ve svých dopisech i mluví jako o „Bohu“. Částečně však vychází ze severského boha Odína, jelikož Odín je „otec všeho“ a ostatní bohové vyšli z jeho myšlenky, stejně jako andělské bytosti Ainur vyšly z myšlenky Erua. Melkor, elfy nazývaný Morgoth, byl prvním temným pánem, který se pokusil podrobit si Středozem. Jeho příběh je velice podobný příběhu biblického Dávla. Dábel vedl vzpuru proti svému otci a byl poražen a svržen z nebe. Během této vzpoury se k němu přidalo mnoho dalších andělů, kteří byli po jeho porážce také vykázáni z nebe. Tento příběh lze srovnat příběhem Melkora, jenž se vzbouřil proti Valar, kteří byli vykonavatelé Eruovy vůle. Bojoval proti nim a po porážce byl následně vykázán do Vnější Temnoty. Některé z jeho vlastností byly pravděpodobně inspirovány Lokim ze severské mytologie, který ostatním bohům často kazil jejich plány.



Padlí andělé, kteří bojovali po boku Ďábla, inspirovali Tolkienovy Balrogy – Maiar, kteří se přidali k Melkorovi a bojovali proti silám elfů a Valar a byli také vykázáni do vnější temnoty. Jejich podoba je velice blízká středověkým vyobrazením démonů. Tulkas, nejsilnější bojovník Valar, bojoval s Morgothem a porazil jej. Tulkasův příběh lze srovnat s archandělem Michaelem, který bojoval s Ďáblem, porazil jej a vykázal z nebes. Poslední postavou v této podkapitole je Varda, Vala hvězd, jejíž moci se temný pán Melkor bál již od počátku. Kromě faktu, že Tolkien miloval hvězdy a souhvězdí, díky čemuž vytvořil i Valu hvězd, se Varda podobá Panence Marii. Je to díky jejímu spojení se světlem a čistotou a faktu, že Ďábel se jí bál kvůli její čistotě a přesvědčení.

Poslední podkapitola se zabývá tvory, jejichž inspirační zdroje nespádají do žádné z výše použitých kategorií. Jednalo se o tři tvory: Enty, pasáky stromů, Ungoliant, pavoučí královnu, a hobity – Tolkienovy nejproslulejší literární hrdiny. Enti vzešli z Tolkienova zklamání ze Shakespearovy hry *Macbeth*. Tolkien totiž chtěl, aby mohly do války jít skutečně stromy, nejen vojáci převlečení za keře a stromy. Další inspirace jsou bohužel poněkud nejasné, jelikož Tolkien v jednom z dopisů napsal, že kapitolu Stromovous napsal, jako kdyby ji už někdy četl. Pro stvoření pavoučí královny Ungoliant se Tolkien inspiroval ve více oblastech. První je obecný strach z pavouků – arachnofobie. Další byla indická bohyně Kali, ničitelka světů. Jedna z podob Kali měla osm rukou a dá se předpokládat, že Tolkien vzal tuto podobu, zaměnil její lidské aspekty za pavoučí a stvořil Ungoliant. Poslední možnou inspirací mohla být válečná propaganda, která často přirovnávala nepřátele k pavoukům jako něčemu odpornému, co je třeba porazit. Posledním tvorem, kterého práce rozebírá, jsou hobiti. Sám Tolkien v dopisech uvedl, že při vymýšlení postav hobitů, se inspiroval převážně svými vlastnosti. Tak stvořil Bilbo Pytlíka, prvního hobita, podle něhož pak odvodil obecné vlastnosti ostatních hobitů.

## **Annotation**

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Title: Orcs, Hobbits, and Dragons – Finding the Roots of J. R. R. Tolkien's

Mythology

Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.

Number of Pages: 46

The aim of this work is to show what the main inspirational sources were for John Ronald Reuel Tolkien during his writings of *The Silmarillion*, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and other books related to planet Arda in Eä.

The first part briefly describes Tolkien's life, some of the main events that influenced his work, and his interest in languages. This later led to his interest in history of European cultures and mythologies linked to the languages.

The main part of the work descriptively characterizes individual creatures from Tolkien's world and then compares them with creatures, characters and stories of European mythologies. The work focuses mainly on Norse and Greek mythology, which were Tolkien's main influences, and on various characters and stories from the Bible. This focus of his interests reflects both his deep knowledge of language study and his Christian faith.

### **Keywords**

Fantasy literature, J. R. R. Tolkien, Mythology, Creatures, Greek mythology, Norse mythology, Germanic mythology, Anglo-Saxon mythology, Celtic mythology

# **Anotace**

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Název katedry: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Skřeti, hobiti a draci – Co inspirovalo práce J. R. R. Tolkiena

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.

Počet stran: 46

Hlavním cílem této práce je ukázat, z jakých zdrojů čerpal John Ronald Reuel Tolkien inspiraci při psaní knih *Silmarillion*, trilogie *Pán prstenů* a dalších knih odehrávajících se na planetě Arda v Eä.

První část práce stručně popisuje Tolkienův život, zachycuje události, které Tolkiena jako autora ovlivnily, a zaměřuje se na jeho zálibu v jazycích. Díky ní se začal zajímat o historii konkrétních evropských kultur a mytologií spojených s těmito jazyky.

Hlavní část práce formou deskripce charakterizuje jednotlivé tvory z Tolkienova světa a následně je porovnává se stvořeními, postavami a příběhy světových mytologií. Zaměřuje se hlavně na mytologii skandinávskou a řeckou, které byly hlavní inspirací pro jeho literární tvorbu, a dále také na různé postavy a příběhy z Bible. V tomto zacílení jeho zájmu se odráží jak jeho hluboké znalosti studia jazyků, tak jeho křesťanská víra.

## **Klíčová slova**

Fantasy literatura, J. R. R. Tolkien, Mytologie, Stvoření, Řecká mytologie, Skandinávská mytologie, Germánská mytologie, Anglosaská mytologie, Keltská mytologie