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# **Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích**

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**Death and Resurrection in Tolkien's Essay**

**"On Fairy-Stories" and in Traditional Fairy Tales**

Smrt a vzkříšení v Tolkienově eseji "On Fairy-Stories"

a v tradičních pohádkách

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## **Poděkování**

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## **Anotace:**

V teoretické části své bakalářské práce nejprve vysvětluji klíčový pojem „vzkříšení“, a to jak v křesťanském, tak pohanském kontextu. Dále se zabývám Tolkienovou esejí „O pohádkách“, ve které, mimo jiné, pojednává o hlavních funkcích pohádky, kterými jsou podle něj obnova, útěk a útěcha. Poté svou pozornost věnuji přechodovým rituálům, které souvisí s životem, smrtí a vzkříšením. V praktické části se věnuji analýze jednotlivých klasických pohádek v kontextu poznatků z první části práce.

## **Klíčová slova:**

Klasické pohádky, smrt, vzkříšení, útěcha, Tolkien

## **Abstract:**

At first, in the theoretical part of my bachelor's work, I explain the key concept of "resurrection" in both Christian and pagan contexts. Further, I occupy myself with Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories", in which he, besides other things, deals with the main functions of fairy tales, which are recovery, escape and consolation. Afterwards, I pay attention to the rites of passage, related to life, death, and resurrection. In the practical part, I devote myself to the analysis of classical fairy tales in the context of the knowledge acquired in the first part of the work.

## **Key words:**

Classical fairy tales, death, resurrection, consolation, Tolkien

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## Introduction

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973<sup>1</sup>) was one of the greatest fantasy authors. His works are well known worldwide and still have immense numbers of fans, especially the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*.

Nevertheless, except for fantasy novels, he occupied himself with fairy stories – their origin, meaning, point and purpose. He was convinced that fairy tales are not just simplified stories for children, but there can be a lot of hidden ideas in them. Therefore, we should not underestimate them. They are as ancient as humanity itself and still have much to say to us, regardless of age, religion, or social status. Even adults should read tales because some things can be incomprehensible for kids and perfectly meaningful and enriching for adults at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

Tolkien's conception of fairy tales is closely related to religion, Roman Catholicism in particular. As he was a firm believer, he saw some religious motifs in stories, something that is more powerful than every single person on Earth. In his essay *On Fairy-Stories*, he mentioned three main aspects that were extremely important for him and essential for fairy stories: recovery, escape, and consolation. Recovery is, in his opinion, connected to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A term he uses as a synonym of a happy ending in classical fairy stories is "eucatastrophe".<sup>3</sup>

In my work, I will deal with Tolkien's understanding of fairy stories and his concept of eucatastrophe in comparison to classical fairy tales. In addition, I will try to explain the term "resurrection" and its connection to fairy stories, according to Tolkien. Afterwards, I will devote myself to analysing classical fairy stories (such as *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *The Little Red*

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<sup>1</sup> CARPENTER, Humphrey. *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016. ISBN 978-00-0820-777-9.

<sup>2</sup> TOLKIEN, John Ronald Ruel. *Tree and Leaf, including Mythopoeia*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2011. ISBN 978-0-00-710504-5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

*Riding Hood etc.*) and their parallels to the biblical texts regarding eucatastrophe, resurrection and love as a restorer of life.

## **1. Resurrection in Christianity**

### **1.1 Resurrection in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament is an archetype of the New Testament. The prophets who appear in the Old Testament promise the coming of the Saviour, who redeems humanity by his sacrifice and brings people to his kingdom. The Messiah should be, according to the prophecy, of David's family line. He is supposed to set Israel free and rule the new, restored nation. All this is fulfilled in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

### **1.2 Resurrection in the New Testament**

The apocalypse, the last book of the New Testament, also called the Book of Revelation, depicts the second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Through Jesus come justice and eternal life, which begin before death and are completed after it. Physical death is a transition that does not affect the relationship between a Christian and God.<sup>5</sup>

The life of Jesus Christ began when an angel of the Lord preached to the Virgin Mary that she conceives and gives birth to the Son of God. Later, Mary and Joseph must travel to Bethlehem as there is a census of their family line. Then, there is born Jesus Christ. On the night

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<sup>4</sup> CHALUPA, Petr. Předobrazy Ježíše Krista ve Starém Zákoně. *Cesty Katecheze: Revue pro katechetiku a náboženskou pedagogiku* [online]. Chvojenec: Katolická teologická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, 2009 [cit. 2022-03-19]. Dostupné z: <http://www.cestykatecheze.cz/casopis/2009-3/Predobrazy-Jezise-Krista-ve-Starem-zakone.html>

<sup>5</sup> Smrt, zmrtvýchvstání a Bible: Rozdíl mezi biblickou eschatologií a karmou. *Víra.cz: Z víry čerpat sílu k životu* [online]. Praha: Víra.cz, 1998 [cit. 2022-03-24]. Dostupné z: <https://www.vira.cz/texty/knihovna/kapitoly/smert-zmrtvychvstani-a-bible>



of his birth, angels announce the joyous news to everybody who is nearby, for example, to shepherds and some days later also to The Three Magi (through the comet).

During his life, Jesus makes a lot of miracles. He changes water into wine, heals the sick and the possessed or walks on water. We can also find many examples of him bringing dead people back to life, such as in Luke 7,11-17 or John 11,38-44. Gradually, some people start to hate him (mainly Jewish high priests) because of this and many other things, which leads to his charge and conviction.<sup>6</sup>

A day before his crucifixion (on Thursday), he had the last supper with twelve disciples. After the supper, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. During praying, Jesus has pre-death trepidation and fear, which shows the human aspect of his personality. The crucial moment comes when Judas betrays Jesus, and the soldiers want to capture him. As the Messiah is an incarnate God, no one can seize him unless he allows it. No evil can touch him. Jesus does not submit; he makes a free decision to sacrifice himself for the salvation of humanity. This is the main pillar of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> For the victory of life over death suffering seems necessary. In this respect, sacrifice connected with love has the greatest value.

After Jesus' capture, he is questioned, whipped, crowned with a crown of thorns and taunted. Afterwards, he carries the cross to Golgotha, where he is crucified. Again, the motif of the Saviour's free action appears when he hands over his spirit to the God-Father right before he dies. At night, from Saturday to Sunday, the Messiah rises from death. On Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene finds out that the stone has been rolled away and the grave is empty. For the next forty days, Jesus appears to disciples before Ascension.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> POSPÍŠIL, Ctirad Václav. *Utrpení Páně podle Jana: životodárná Moc ukřižovaného Slova*. Praha: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 1958. ISBN 978-80-7566-208-8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

### 1.3 Examples of Resurrection

Probably the most familiar is the story of raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, died and lay in a tomb for four days, and his body decayed. Despite this, Jesus invites him to leave the grave, and he really comes out alive.<sup>9</sup>

Not just Jesus had the power to bring people back to life. This ability was also given to some of his disciples, for example, to Saint Peter. When he was asked to resurrect a good woman for whom a lot of people mourned and who helped the poor, Tabitha from Joppa, he did.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, resurrection does not necessarily mean bringing someone back to life in the true sense of the word. In the parable of the lost son, we may find such an example. A younger son takes all his money and leaves his family, convinced he will have a better life. Instead, he squanders all his property and starves, thinking about a good life that every servant has in the house of his father, and about the life he could have. Then he goes back home and apologises to his father, who welcomes him with joy. The older son is offended, but the father explains that he has lost his son and now regained him, which must be celebrated.<sup>11</sup> The separation symbolises death, and the return represents resurrection.

*" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John 11:1-44

<sup>10</sup> Acts 9:36-43

<sup>11</sup> Luke 15:11-32

<sup>12</sup> Luke 15:31

## 2. Resurrection before Christ (in paganism)

Even though it may seem that pagan religions and Christianity have nothing in common, the very opposite is true. The motifs of incarnation, resurrection, salvation, and afterlife appear in their specific forms across many religions and philosophical movements, regardless of which gods (or how many of them) are worshipped. Although many themes are similar in Christianity and paganism, the meaning and the point entirely differ.

### 2.1 Resurrection in Grecian and Roman mythology

In Grecian mythology, it is not so typical that gods sacrifice themselves for saving people. They act in this way because it is usually expedient. That is the most significant difference between paganism and Christianity. We can find similar morals to Grecian myths in Roman fables, as Romans took over a lot from Greek culture, and both became known worldwide in art, philosophy, and political science.

God, who appears in both Greek and Roman mythos, is Dionysus, god of the vine, festivity and fertility. According to one of the fables, Zeus begot Dionysus with his lover Persephone. As his wife Hera found it out, she alerted the Titans, who dismembered the baby (who behaved as an adult) after his birth. Nevertheless, death was the beginning of a new life. Dionysus was born again when his mother Persephone gathered all the body parts. After the rebirth, he was a ruthless ruler who treated people horribly. As we can see, wrath and revenge were the reasons for his resurrection, not self-sacrifice for saving someone else.<sup>13</sup>

The next important figure of Greek mythology is Adonis. He was the son of king Theias and his daughter Myrrha. In Adonis' life, there are some elements of resurrection too. His mother (and sister at the same time) Myrrha deceived her father Theias, seduced him, and begot

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<sup>13</sup> GRAVES, Robert. *Řecké mýty*. 2. Plzeň: Mustang, 1996, 54-56, 105-108. ISBN 80-7191-156-9.

DOSTÁLOVÁ, Růžena a Radislav HOŠEK. *Antická mystéria*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 1997. ISBN 80-7021-217-9.

a child. When he regained consciousness and found out what had happened, he wanted to kill her. However, goddess Aphrodite took pity on her and saved her by changing her into a myrrh tree. In this form, she gave birth to Adonis. As Aphrodite saw him, she fell in love with him. Aphrodite entrusted Adonis to Persephone, but Persephone fell for him too. Ares, the lover of Aphrodite, got jealous. He changed into a wild boar and killed Adonis with his tusks. Adonis was later brought to life by Zeus, as Aphrodite insisted on it. That was the power of the love of the goddess, which overcame even death.<sup>14</sup>

### **3. Fairy-stories according to Tolkien**

#### **3.1 Origin and the main features**

The origin of fairy tales is uncertain. Nonetheless, we can be sure about their ancient sources. It is possible that they come from myths, as they have some common features, such as the supernatural or the magic.<sup>15</sup>

The main attribute of fairy stories is the happy ending. Without it, a narrative cannot be considered a fairy tale. As a synonym of a happy ending in classical fairy stories, Tolkien uses the term "eucatastrophe". According to him, eucatastrophe reflects the Resurrection of Christ. The next important feature of tales is the ability to enliven our fancy and imagination. Fantasy is a process that is perfectly natural to every human being and is the most potent form of art at the same time. The aim of fairy stories is to let us forget about the real world and make us believe that the fairy-tale world is the real one. This world should provide Recovery, Escape, and Consolation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> KERÉNYI, Magda. *Mytologie Řeků I*. Praha: Alfaprint, 1996, s. 62-63. ISBN 80-86005-14-3.

<sup>15</sup> TOLKIEN, John Ronald Ruel. *Tree and Leaf, including Mythopoeia*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2011. ISBN 978-0-00-710504-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## 3.2 Recovery, Escape, Consolation

**Recovery** is dependent on our fantasy. Fantasy can open the treasury of our minds, which is liberating. Then, we will not be tedious and hackneyed. Via Recovery, we should find our clear view of life again.<sup>17</sup>

**Escape** and **Consolation** are closely related. Escape is the essential function of fairy tales. Fairy stories are not the only way of escaping the everyday reality, yet they are the most common and, regrettably, considered, by some people, the most shameful way of escape. However, Tolkien puts a great emphasis on explaining what escape means in literature. Definitely, it has no negative meaning. People who read fairy tales to escape (for example, back to their childhood) do not have to be ashamed. On the contrary, any kind of escape is utterly natural for every human being.<sup>18</sup>

*"Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it."*<sup>19</sup>

The oldest desire is the escape from death, which fairy tales can provide. With love, it is possible to overcome death, or a state reminiscent of death<sup>20</sup>, as we can see in classical fairy stories, such as "Snow White", "Sleeping Beauty" or "Little Red Riding Hood".

Fairy tales give us **Consolation** through their happy ending, which Tolkien calls "eucatastrophe" (the positive opposite of catastrophe in tragic dramas). According to him, every true fairy tale should have an eucatastrophic ending. It gives the reader joy, emotions of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> TOLKIEN, John Ronald Ruel. *Tree and Leaf, including Mythopoeia*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2011. ISBN 978-0-00-710504-5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

happiness, and consolation. Even if the plot is sad and cruel, the certainty of the happy ending is uplifting.<sup>21</sup>

### **3.3 Fairy Tales and Children**

Those who would think that fairy tales are simplified stories intended for children would be proven wrong by Tolkien. He presented some reasons why we, adults, should not underestimate fairy stories and pay at least a bit of our attention to them. We all may be surprised by how useful and enriching they could be, even for us. It is generally thought that there is a connection between children's minds and tales, but Tolkien disagrees. He thinks that this seeming is a fault of our false sentiment. Children enjoy fairy tales just as adults, and that is why fairy stories should not be connected strictly with kids. It is true that children are usually more trustful—they believe all the magic that appears in the fairy stories, but this is not important. The trustworthiness of tales lies in their ability to instigate our desire, which can be very similar for kids and adults. If a tale is well written and is worth reading, adults should read it primarily, as they are able to put in it and simultaneously carry off more than children. Moreover, fairy stories provide Recovery, Escape and Consolation, which mainly adults need.<sup>22</sup>

### **3.4 Fairy Tales and Gospels**

Gospels, according to Tolkien, contain fairy tales. Recovery, one of the main features of fairy stories, is connected with the biblical resurrection of Jesus. The story of his crucifixion and rising again from death became an inseparable part of human history. The birth of the Redeemer is an eucatastrophe for humanity; the story of his incarnation begins and ends in joy.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> TOLKIEN, John Ronald Ruel. *Tree and Leaf, including Mythopoeia*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011. ISBN 978-0-00-710504-5.

Besides, through their fantasy, every human being can participate in the enrichment of the divine creation.<sup>23</sup>

#### **4. The Rites of Passage according to Gennep**

Transitional rituals, more or less, form our lives. The rites used to have a religious meaning but nowadays are more secular. Nevertheless, in general terms, the spiritual world prevails over the profane world, mainly in less developed societies. Still, some rituals are ever performed no matter what the nation or community believes in. Some practices are so common in earthly lives that we hardly recognise that they have a religious beginning. To every stage of life pertains a rite: its form depends on the particular religion or the habits of the society. It concerns, for instance, pregnancy, birth, engagement, wedding, war, baptism, et cetera.<sup>24</sup>

The interpretation of death and rising again from the death in the rites of passage differs. In Christianity, these customs should remind us of the death and the Resurrection of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. In different religions, it can be a comparison to the moon's phases. The way of parting with the deceased person and the idea of the life to come also differ according to particular cultures. The only common feature is the grief caused by the leaving of the beloved. Mourning can be found across religions, cultures or societies. On the other hand, there are many ways how to equip the departed ones. For Christians, the most important are prayers and the sanctification of a coffin. Worshippers of the pagan religions usually believe that the deceased must travel some distance to reach the world beyond. Therefore, they try to outfit them for the journey as well as possible. That is why they put into grave artefacts that the deceased may need, such as clothing, food, weapons, amulets, or coins (for a ferryman).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> VAN GENNEP, Arnold. *Přechodové rituály: Systematické studium rituálů*. Praha: NLN, 1997. ISBN 80-7106-178-6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## 5. Laugh as a symbol of life

Laugh is, according to Propp and his “Morphology of the Folktale”, an inseparable part of human beings, their life and their history. Laughter liberates us from grief and heartache. Moreover, it is a vital necessity, as happy people are usually healthier both in mind and body.<sup>26</sup>

That is why laughter was forbidden in the realm of death, for laughing proves that a person is alive. Indian myths say that everybody who wanted to enter the world beyond could not laugh since dead people cannot do what living people do and the other way round.<sup>27</sup> Greek myths describe Hades (the underworld) as the kingdom of unceasing cry and wailing, full of dread.<sup>28</sup> We can find this rule in old fairy tales and short stories too. Commonly, a foreign kingdom in tales (“the kingdom of faraway...”) may represent death and the world beyond. Also, laughing was prohibited in the ceremonies that symbolised entering the realm of death and coming back, such as the initiation of young men into their sexual maturity (the rite simulated death). Laughing meant that the person was not able to disengage from the earthly matter.<sup>29</sup>

The birth of a new life was also accompanied by laughter and a smile. In old Yakut mythos, women who laughed resoundingly got pregnant soon. Laugh represented one of the means of the origin or the renewal of life. Among other things, the Yakuts exulted when they hunted and killed an animal that served as food, or during burials as they believed that from death a new life can arise.<sup>30</sup>

As soon as agriculture came into existence, laughter became its essential part. Nature and everything in it, including crop plants, succumbs to joy and its displays such as laugh, smile,

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<sup>26</sup> PROPP, Vladimír Jakovlevič. *Morfologie pohádky a jiné studie*. 2. vyd. Jihočany: H & H, 2008. ISBN 978-80-7319-085-9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Underworld: Imagining the Afterlife. In: *Getty.edu* [online]. Los Angeles: Getty Publications., 2008 [cit. 2022-06-08]. Dostupné z: [https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/ancient\\_underworld/inner.html](https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/ancient_underworld/inner.html)

<sup>29</sup> PROPP, Vladimír Jakovlevič. *Morfologie pohádky a jiné studie*. 2. vyd. Jihočany: H & H, 2008. ISBN 978-80-7319-085-9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.



and liveliness. In Greek culture, it was typical that flowers came into bloom after a goddess's smile. Therefore, Greeks tried to make Demeter (goddess of harvest and agriculture) laugh, to have a good crop. On that account, people used to laugh and sing when seeding and planting. At Easter, Christian priests tried to make believers laugh by telling jokes and funny stories. It was not just a necessity after long fasting, but Easter was also understood as the revival of nature. People wanted to laugh during Easter, for it promised a plentiful season.<sup>31</sup>

In pagan religions, gods were laughing during the creation of the world, beings, or souls. Their laughter brought life. For example, Greeks worshipped Gelos as the god of laughter.<sup>32</sup>

In Christianity, laughter has always been a discussed topic. The Protestant reformer John Calvin claimed that everything worldly, including any display of joy, came from the devil and therefore is sinful. He even ordered to penalise laughing with a fine. Nevertheless, no extract in the Bible would prove his assertion.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, many passages in both the Old and the New Testament encourage people to laugh if the laughter is not malicious. For example, Sarah, an Old Testament character, is laughing when she receives the message of her son's conception. He then gets the name Isaac which means "grinner". It was believed that laughter and joy came from God.<sup>34</sup>

*Our mouths were filled with laughter,*

*our tongues with songs of joy.*

*Then it was said among the nations,*

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> HUBÁČKOVÁ, Bohumila a Radomír MALÝ. Je smích zakázaným ovocem?. In: *FATYM.com* [online]. Vranov: FATYM.com, 2014 [cit. 2022-06-08]. Dostupné z: [www.fatym.com/view.php?navezclanku=je-smich-zakazanym-ovocem&cislolanku=2014100149](http://www.fatym.com/view.php?navezclanku=je-smich-zakazanym-ovocem&cislolanku=2014100149)

<sup>34</sup> PROPP, Vladimír Jakovlevič. *Morfologie pohádky a jiné studie*. 2. vyd. Jihočany: H & H, 2008. ISBN 978-80-7319-085-9.

*"The Lord has done great things for them."*<sup>35</sup>

A turn comes in the New Testament. In the Gospels there is no mention of Jesus laughing or at least smiling. Still, he cried twice. The explanation for this could be either that he really never smiled, or smiling was so typical of him that the Evangelists did not consider it essential to record. Whereas the devil, symbolising death, laughs several times. Nevertheless, we can find some invitations to joy in the New Testament, not explicitly from God, but usually from the Evangelists.<sup>36</sup>

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"*<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, some of the saints are known as still smiling, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Mother Teresa, or Don Bosco, who excelled in making others laugh.<sup>38</sup>

## 6. Sleeping Beauty

For the principal analysis, I decided to use the versions of fairy tales adapted by the Brothers Grimm, and I will compare them with other world collectors of fairy stories, as the case may be. Those who know fairy stories collected by the Brothers Grimm may consider their version of *Sleeping Beauty*, which is called *The Brier-Rose*, dry or flat, as there is no blood, cut fingers and wicked intrigues. It is probably an exception among Grimm's tales, as their versions

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<sup>35</sup> Psalm 126:2

<sup>36</sup> HUBÁČKOVÁ, Bohumila a Radomír MALÝ. Je smích zakázaným ovocem?. In: *FATYM.com* [online]. Vranov: FATYM.com, 2014 [cit. 2022-06-08]. Dostupné z: [www.fatym.com/view.php?navezclanku=je-smich-zakazanym-ovocem&cisloclanku=2014100149](http://www.fatym.com/view.php?navezclanku=je-smich-zakazanym-ovocem&cisloclanku=2014100149)

<sup>37</sup> Philippians 4:4

<sup>38</sup> Bohumila Hubáčková. Je smích zakázaným ovocem?. In: *FATYM.com* [online]. Vranov: FATYM.com, 2014 [cit. 2022-06-08]. Dostupné z: [www.fatym.com/view.php?navezclanku=je-smich-zakazanym-ovocem&cisloclanku=2014100149](http://www.fatym.com/view.php?navezclanku=je-smich-zakazanym-ovocem&cisloclanku=2014100149)

are generally known for their naturalistic narration. Therefore, when the readers expect something like their other stories, they could be surprised or even disappointed.

The story introduces a king and a queen who desperately long for a child. There is no mention how long they have lived without a child, but it is probably a long time. It can remind us of the biblical characters mentioned above, Sarah and her husband Abraham, who also desire a child. Later in their lives, a child is given to them as a gift (from God), which makes them very happy. As Tolkien claims, adults can often appreciate fairy tales more than children, and this part is a good example. In my opinion, a child cannot fully understand what it means to yearn for a baby that still does not come. Adults may be able to comprehend better the grief and, after the coming of a baby, the subsequent joy. The tale also offers consolation, as it suggests that if we genuinely hunger for something, it will come true sooner or later, we just have to be patient.

Once, when the queen is bathing, a frog appears, announcing to her that she will give birth before a year passes. Once again, this motif is similar to Sarah, who is revealed by God that she will deliver a son next year the same time. Last but not least, it also echoes the way how the life of Jesus Christ begins: the Annunciation by an angel. The difference between these stories is the fact that the queen and Sarah desire to have a baby, whereas the Virgin Mary accepts a role given by God.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the common feature could be the hope that there is always someone who brings a joyful news.

Later, when the child (Rosamond) is born, the king is so happy that he cannot stop rejoicing and he invites all his friends and acquaintances to celebrate. Similarly, when Jesus was born, angels spread glory all around the world and summoned guests to pay tribute to him. So also, the father of the lost son celebrates his homecoming-rebirth and wishes everybody to celebrate with him. Joy is a common response when a child is born, and it is connected to particular rituals too. Currently there can be an ordinary an informal meeting of a father and his friends who drink to a baby. A more formal tradition is baptism and the ensuing christening party. Baptism represents the admission of a person to the Church and the elimination of the

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<sup>39</sup> Luke 1:38

original sin. Godfather or godmother usually give presents to their godchildren, reminding them of this festive day. It can be the Holy Bible, a locket or a small cross. Likewise, the wise women (sometimes called Weird Sisters) do in the fairy tale. Each of them gives a present to the little princess, nothing material, but very important. (Nevertheless, the king in the story organises a great feast, not a baptism.) The first one donates virtue to Rosamond: here we can see a resemblance with the elimination of the hereditary sin during the christening. The others give presents like beauty or riches, which may symbolise more gifts donated by God. The last wise woman, who was not invited, gives death as revenge. Accordingly, Cain was jealous of his brother Abel and killed him,<sup>40</sup> or the older brothers of Joseph tried to get rid of him because of envy.<sup>41</sup> The parents' feelings in these situations must be unimaginable, their joy replaced with deep grief and fears. The Virgin Mary experienced the same anxiety when she and Joseph came with Jesus to the temple: the Prophet Simeon, who occurred in the temple, predicted to the Virgin Mary that she would suffer because of her child. This prediction is not due to jealousy and hate, but the parents' feelings must be similar.

*"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. **And a sword will pierce your own soul too.**"<sup>42</sup>*

In the kingdom, thirteen wise women live, but only twelve of them are invited because the king has just twelve golden plates. That seems a strange reason why not to ask someone to come to the celebration. However, the numbers have a symbolic function. **Number thirteen** has different meanings in various societies, but in most cases is perceived with negative collocations. In the secular culture, number thirteen is connected with Friday, which is supposed to be an unfortunate day, or with the thirteenth chamber, which hides secrets that are not good to be uncovered. In terms of religious culture, the perception of number thirteen is

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<sup>40</sup> Genesis 4:1-10

<sup>41</sup> Genesis 37:1-36

<sup>42</sup> Luke 2:34-35

similar. It is possible that profane superstitions originated in the biblical texts.<sup>43</sup> For instance, Jesus names thirteen features of the human nature that “defile” people.<sup>44</sup> According to Saint Paul and his description of sinful men, these features represent the main failures in the human behaviour, which result in the separation from God and in death (for example, he refers to wickedness, evil, envy...).<sup>45</sup> It is significant that the thirteenth example is “God-hater”.

On the contrary, the **number twelve** is understood as an attribute of perfection and completeness. There are twelve gods on Olympus in Greek mythology; in Manichaeism, number twelve suggests the duration of the world, and some people believe in the influence of the twelve signs of the zodiac.<sup>46</sup> In the Old Testament, Jacob has twelve sons, from whom the Twelve Tribes of Israel develop. In the New Testament, Jesus has twelve apostles, and twelve baskets are left after his feeding of the five thousand pilgrims.<sup>47</sup> When the Virgin Mary is depicted, her head is usually circled with twelve stars. The symbolism of these stars can be connected with the number of twelve wise women in the tale. The twelve of them are good, whereas the thirteenth one is the enemy of the good, the symbol of evil, the one who brings death and sorrow.

The wicked woman bestows a horrible future on the princess: death at the age of fifteen. However, a good woman softens it: the princess will not die; she will just fall asleep for a hundred years. The prediction comes true when the princess opens the door leading to an old tower and finds an old woman spinning. Rosamond wants to try it too, but she falls asleep as soon as she takes the spin and pricks her finger. This room could symbolise the thirteenth chamber, which is better to remain closed forever.

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<sup>43</sup> GURYČA, Richard. Prokletí čísla 13: Proč je třináctka považovaná za symbol smůly a neštěstí?. *100+1* [online]. Extra Publishing, 2007, 13. 8. 2021 [cit. 2022-06-14]. Dostupné z: <https://www.stoplusjednicka.cz/prokleti-cisla-13-proc-je-trinactka-povazovana-za-symbol-smuly-nestesti>

<sup>44</sup> Mark 7:20-23

<sup>45</sup> Romans 1:28-32

<sup>46</sup> GRIESBECK, Robert. *Učebnice Numerologie: Esoterika a Astrologie v Numerologii*. Olomouc: Fontána, 1998. ISBN 80-86179-15-X.

<sup>47</sup> Mark 6:30-44

Old people in literature usually represent wisdom and morality, as well as persons who are always willing to give advice. On the contrary, the old wicked woman from this tale reminds us of the list of sins described by Saint Paul that is mentioned above.

Nowadays, young people at the age of fifteen are considered to be "half-adults"; they obtain an identity card and gain some new rights and duties. As is well known, people at earlier ages were considered adults sooner than in our days, they could get married at the age of fifteen. The fairy tale draws on the paradox that joy is frequently preceded by suffering. Marriage as a liminal experience is connected with symbolic death as an opportunity to start a new life. Not just the princess, but the whole court fell into a deep sleep for a hundred years.

Number hundred, also called an angel number, has a positive meaning in our culture. It symbolises fulfilment, protection of God and readiness for a new beginning, which corresponds with the symbolism of this number in the fairy tale.<sup>48</sup> The prince and the princess are prepared for a new life. The fact that the prince does not let anyone discourage him from saving Rosamond confirms that he is the true lover. Moreover, he is the only one who is able to get through the thorns, which turn into beautiful flowers. It is interesting that the princess is brought back to life with a kiss. In the New Testament, when Judas betrayed Jesus, he kissed him. That was a sign for the soldiers to know who should have been captured. This treacherous kiss brings death, whereas the kiss in the tale brings a new life.

*"While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' "*<sup>49</sup>

With Rosamond's return to life, renewal comes to the whole castle. As in the Gospel, the Resurrection of Christ brings salvation and eternal life to all people. Both the fairy tale and the Gospels aim at a happy ending, or, in other words, Tolkien's eucatastrophe, which

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<sup>48</sup> GRIESBECK, Robert. *Učebnice Numerologie: Esoterika a Astrologie v Numerologii*. Olomouc: Fontána, 1998. ISBN 80-86179-15-X.

<sup>49</sup> Luke 22:47-48

corresponds with his assertion that every fairy story contains a touch of the Christian hope that life cannot be destroyed.

## 7. Snow White

According to the fairy tale's title, we can recognise that the symbolism of colours will be significant. The story introduces a queen, who is sewing and pricks her finger. The red drops fall on the snow from a window made of black ebony: the colours (white, red and black) create a contrast that the queen likes. She wishes for a child that would be like that.

It seems interesting that in the previous fairy tale (“Sleeping Beauty”) a stick in a finger ends life, whereas, in this story, a stick brings thoughts of a new life. In terms of colours, the most dominant is white, not just because of the little princess's name and her alabaster skin. White symbolises innocence, purity and perfection,<sup>50</sup> which are the qualities that Snow White has. A white colour often appears in the Bible and always has a positive meaning; it is the sign of divine proximity. Nowadays, brides wear a white dress or, during baptism, a child is dressed in a white robe.

On the other hand, black represents darkness, hopelessness, grief and death.<sup>51</sup> People wear black clothes at funerals, and black flags are hung out after someone's decease. In the Bible, it represents the opposite of God and innocence. For example, when Saint John describes the end of the world, he says that the sun turns black.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> STEIN, Murray a Lionel CORBETT. *Příběhy duše III: Moderní jungiánský výklad pohádek*. Brno: Emitos, 2007. ISBN 978-80-903715-9-0.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Revelation 6:12

The red colour has many meanings. It is a symbol of passion or danger (e. g., traffic lights). Red clothing stands for wealth. In a religious world, it represents blood.<sup>53</sup>

Shortly after the birth of Snow White, this joyful event is followed by a sad one: the queen, her mother, dies. The king then marries a haughty woman who is possessed by her own beauty. She commands black magic and owns a magical looking-glass, which always speaks the truth. She asks it every day who is the most beautiful woman, and the mirror replies that she is. One day, when Snow White is **seven years old**, the mirror answers that Snow White is the most beautiful, which is the turning moment, for hatred appears in the **queen's heart**. Number seven appears several times in the tale (seven dwarfs, seven little plates...). This number expresses spirituality, mysticism, but also intelligence and imagination. Biblically it is completeness, fullness; for instance, God created the world in seven days.<sup>54</sup> We can say that the seven dwarfs represent the morality and cleverness that save the life of Snow White.

As the hate grows in the wicked queen, she takes into her head to remove the little girl. It may remind us of the Gospels when Jesus did no harm, but the hatred of some people led to his death. After several days, the queen orders a huntsman to kill Snow White **in the forest** and **bring her heart** back to the castle as she wants to eat it. In the forest, the girl begs for her life, and the hunter, after hesitation, takes pity on her. In a similar way, Pontius Pilate hesitated about whether to hand over Jesus to the Jews.<sup>55</sup> However, each of them chose a different option: the hunter for life, Pilate against it. The phrase explaining the change in the hunter's behaviour says that a stone was rolled away from his heart. A stone was also rolled away from Christ's grave,<sup>56</sup> which both meant rescue, and the renewal of life.

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<sup>53</sup> STEIN, Murray a Lionel CORBETT. *Příběhy duše III: Moderní jungiánský výklad pohádek*. Brno: Emitos, 2007. ISBN 978-80-903715-9-0.

<sup>54</sup> Symbolika čísel. In: *České katolické biblické dílo* [online]. Olomouc: České katolické biblické dílo, 2012 [cit. 2022-06-20]. Dostupné z: <https://biblickedilo.cz/nabidka-materialu/bible-v-liturgii/liturgicky-rok-c/symbolika-cisel/>

<sup>55</sup> John 19:4-6

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 28:2



The hunter is supposed to take the girl into the forest, which, in the past times, was considered to be a mystical place. It was believed that many different creatures lived in the woods, both good and evil, and they held various rites there. Therefore, people were in awe of forests and sometimes even afraid to go there.<sup>57</sup> That is what it means in the fairy tale: a grim place, where a horrible act should be executed.

The next noticeable motif is a **heart**. The heart was, according to some ancient cultures, a centre of the human body and the most important organ. Egyptians believed that the heart was closely connected to the soul, and that was why they tried to keep the heart of the deceased people as long as possible, using embalmment and small cases. Sometimes, they placed it back into the empty body as the only organ. They also trusted that the heart had a memory and was a witness to all people's deeds, which was determinative on the Judgement Day, when the heart testified for or against the person.<sup>58</sup>

The fairy tale mentions that the queen wants to eat the heart of Snow White. In many tribes, cannibalism and eating organs used to be practised for centuries, not just because of hunger but because it was a ritual. Nevertheless, the eating of the heart had a unique meaning. For example, it served as gaining the physical and mental strength of the enemy fighter. In some cases, it was sacrificed to gods (as the only piece of the body).<sup>59</sup> From a religious point of view, the heart is considered to be very significant. It is a core of individual human features and emotions, which differentiate us from animals. God takes a look into our hearts and judges us according to it.

*"Above all else, guard your heart,*

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<sup>57</sup> HAGENEDER, Fred. *Moudrost stromů: Historie, lidová tradice, symbolika, léčení*. Praha: Knižní klub, 2006. ISBN 80-242-1635-3.

<sup>58</sup> MRÁZOVÁ, Daniela. Hoystad, Ole Martin, *Historie srdce*. *ILiteratura.cz* [online]. Praha: Sdružení pro iliteraturu, 2011 [cit. 2022-06-20]. Dostupné z: <http://www.iliteratura.cz/Clanek/29281/h248ystad-ole-martin-historie-srdce>

<sup>59</sup> CONSTANTINE, Nathan. *Dějiny kanibalismu: Od starověkých kultur po boj o přežití a moderní psychopaty*. Praha: Brána, 2008. ISBN 978-80-7243-346-9.

*for everything you do flows from it.*"<sup>60</sup>

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."*<sup>61</sup>

As we can see, many of today's set phrases we use to describe people's qualities or express our feelings, originate in the Bible. For instance, someone has a heart of stone. Snow White later says to the dwarfs that she will take care of their house "with all her heart". To sum it up, the heart has always been considered a vital organ, not just for physiology but also for the spiritual part of our personalities. After this explanation it is clear why the queen demands the heart of the little girl: she wants to obtain her beauty, youth and innocence, and to deprive her of the symbol of life and love at the same time.

When Snow White is running through the forest, she is not devoured by wild beasts as the hunter supposed. On the contrary, the beasts ran past her but did not hurt her. That means that she had magic protection. As in Christianity, evil can never defeat good, the devil will never defeat God.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, such an immaculate and innocent child cannot be devoured by beasts representing evil. We can believe that it is for this reason that the author used the expressive word "beasts" instead of neutral "animals". Her saying the prayer before she goes to bed in the dwarfs' cottage proves the religious subtext.

When it was dark outside and the little girl was sleeping, the seven good dwarfs came home and lit candles to see better. It is symbolic that the good comes with light, dispersing darkness. People are generally afraid of the dark, and light brings consolation. When children are supposed to sleep, they fear a bogy that could be under the bed, and a bedside lamp may soothe them. In the biblical context, light represents the presence of God, hope, salvation and evangelism. It is also symbolical that the dwarfs lit candles to see what happened in their cottage. In other words, to see the truth. A saying based on this concept is often used in the

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<sup>60</sup> Proverbs 4:23

<sup>61</sup> Ezekiel 36:26

<sup>62</sup> POSPÍŠIL, Ctirad Václav. *Utrpení Páně podle Jana: životodárná Moc ukřižovaného Slova*. Praha: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2021. ISBN 978-80-7566-208-8.

Bible or during evangelism: Jesus Christ is called the Truth or the Light. A lighted candle during Christian ceremonies represents divine presence.

*"For this is what the Lord has commanded us:*

*'I have made you a light for the Gentiles,*

*that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'*"<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, the queen finds out (thanks to the looking glass) that the child lives and decides to kill her on her own. Snow White stays with the seven dwarfs, who warn her against her stepmother, but she is cunning, as evil always is. She paints her face and entices the girl with nice and cheap things she sells. In a similar way the devil acts in the Bible and in many fairy tales. He can take a lot of different forms to promise people what they like and want. Nevertheless, of course, it is never for free. The good tries to save people from hell, but they usually choose what is easier and more tempting (the way which evil offers). Nonetheless, the devil strives for people's slip and the consequent death, just like the wicked queen. He does not want to make people happy as it may seem.

*"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*<sup>64</sup>

Snow White succumbs to the temptation and buys goods from the queen. She is incorrigible, as she does it three times. Luckily, someone always saves her: twice the dwarfs and then the prince and his guard. Number three appears once more in the story when the dwarfs cry for Snow White for three days. This number is considered to be magic, and for the Greeks, it was a perfect number representing harmony and the life phases (the birth, life and death).<sup>65</sup> In Christianity, the number three stands for perfection and the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son

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<sup>63</sup> Acts 13:47

<sup>64</sup> 1 Peter 5:8

<sup>65</sup> GRIESBECK, Robert. *Učebnice Numerologie: Esoterika a Astrologie v Numerologii*. Olomouc: Fontána, 1998. ISBN 80-86179-15-X.

and the Holy Spirit.<sup>66</sup> In the fairy tale, this number probably symbolises the good, which resurrects Snow White from death.

The stepmother laughs aloud when she poisons the girl and believes the dwarfs will not wake her up again. As mentioned above, laughter in the New Testament was connected mainly to the devil, which corresponds with the malicious laugh of the queen, who represents evil.

When Snow White died, the dwarfs made the glass coffin and wrote on it in golden letters her name and that she was a princess. The dwarfs were fond of the girl, therefore, they made the gold inscription, as gold relates to wealth and grandeur. Moreover, gold was very precious for them personally, for it was their subsistence (they were gold diggers) and the best possibility how to show respect. Some birds came to the coffin to weep with the dwarfs: an owl, a raven, and a dove. The owl in literature represents wisdom, observant listening, protection, and supernatural power.<sup>67</sup> The raven was believed to be a harbinger of death in Greek mythology. Later he was perceived as a symbol of prophecy and transformation.<sup>68</sup> Then, finally, love, devotion and hope come with the dove.<sup>69</sup> These birds in the fairy tale indicate what will happen: the dead girl will go through the transformation into a new life. The power of love will defeat death.

The one who is instrumental in waking Snow White up is the prince, who falls in love with her and cannot imagine his life without looking at the beautiful girl. As he begs, the dwarfs take pity on him and give him the coffin with the girl. However, servants carrying the casket stumble, the piece of the poisoned apple comes out of the girl's throat, and she is alive again. In

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<sup>66</sup> Symbolika čísel. In: *České katolické biblické dílo* [online]. Olomouc: České katolické biblické dílo, 2012 [cit. 2022-06-20]. Dostupné z: <https://biblickedilo.cz/nabidka-materialu/bible-v-liturgii/liturgicky-rok-c/symbolika-cisel/>

<sup>67</sup> STANTON, Kristen M. Owl Symbolism, Meanings & The Owl Spirit Animal. *UniGuide* [online]. Sausalito: UniGuide Media, 2022 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.uniguide.com/?s=owl>

<sup>68</sup> STANTON, Kristen M. Raven Symbolism & Meanings & The Raven Spirit Animal. *UniGuide* [online]. Sausalito: UniGuide Media, 2022 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.uniguide.com/?s=raven>

<sup>69</sup> STANTON, Kristen M. Dove Symbolism, Meanings & The Dove Spirit Animal. *UniGuide* [online]. Sausalito: UniGuide Media, 2022 [cit. 2022-06-21]. Dostupné z: <https://www.uniguide.com/dove-symbolism-meaning-spirit-animal>

this version of the tale the kiss is not crucial as it is, for example, in *Sleeping Beauty*, but it is the importunity of the prince's love that is magic and vital (such as the endless love of God the Father that overcomes the death of God the Son). As mentioned above, in the tale there is a hint at Snow White's prayer, which implies that she probably believes in God and in the possibility that she will rise from death in the end.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."<sup>70</sup>*

The evil is defeated at the young couple's wedding once and for all when the envious queen gets the red-hot iron slippers and is forced to dance to death. There is no mention from whom she receives the shoes but the reader suspects it is an act of the divine justice. Then, the young queen and the king can live happily ever after.

*"So we say with confidence,*

*The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.*

*What can mere mortals do to me?"<sup>71</sup>*

## **8. Cinderella**

As it is common in classical fairy tales, even *Cinderella* begins with a tragic event: the death of her mother. Since that day, the girl has had a difficult time. We can learn about it from many hints: she cries when her mother dies or, when she wants to go to the feast, she is not allowed. When she plants a sprig of hazel that she got from her father, she weeps, so it is watered with her tears and grief. For the connoisseur of the biblical texts, this could be a sign of her future happiness.

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<sup>70</sup> John 3:16

<sup>71</sup> Hebrews 13:6

*"Those who sow with tears*

*will reap with songs of joy.*

*Those who go out weeping,*

*carrying seed to sow,*

*will return with songs of joy,*

*carrying sheaves with them."<sup>72</sup>*

Just before her mother dies, she orders Cinderella to be a good girl and promises to look down from heaven and guard her. Similarly, Christians have their saint patrons, guardian angels or God himself who keep an eye on people and protect them. Cinderella's lamentation on the grave of her mother could be considered praying. It is also symbolical that the hazel tree was planted on the tomb of the deceased mother, so everything good that will come of it later seems to be sent by the girl's mother or God.

*"For he will command his angels concerning you*

*to guard you in all your ways;*

*they will lift you up in their hands,*

*so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."<sup>73</sup>*

Cinderella goes to the grave every day. After some time, winter begins and white snow makes a beautiful cover of the tomb. The coming of the winter is depicted with expressive words. It is probably to emphasise the white colour: the purity and innocence of both the mother and Cinderella. However, before the snow melts, the father marries another woman with two daughters, who are pretty but cruel and treat Cinderella awfully. They are the opposite of

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<sup>72</sup> Psalm 126:5-6

<sup>73</sup> Psalm 91:11-12

Cinderella: their external appearance is good, but their hearts are spiteful, whereas Cinderella is never described as pretty, but as good and nice.

*But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."<sup>74</sup>*

The sisters often laugh at the poor girl, which creates another contrast: her frequent cry and their malicious laughter. They turn her to the kitchen, where she is bound to sleep next to the hearth. That symbolises her inferior position in the household, as in the kitchen servants usually served, and the master of the house did not go there. Also, the fact that she does not have a bed and must sleep on the floor is humiliating. It is surprising that her father, who is good and likes her, does not do anything about it. Nevertheless, all her suffering enters to her credit.

*"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."<sup>75</sup>*

Meanwhile, upon the hazel tree, a bird builds its nest and becomes a friend of Cinderella; they talk together and help each other. It seems to be a very strange friendship, but everybody needs someone to talk to, and when the girl has no human friends, she has to find someone else. It may remind us of our relationship to our beloved pets; sometimes we cannot imagine our lives without them. We are happy when we can take care of them, caress them, and, last but not least, talk to them, as they are the best listeners. Even the Bible deals with animal-human relationships. According to the way of treating animals, we can get to know people's character, for only a malevolent heart can hurt another being.

*"The righteous care for the needs of their animals,*

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<sup>74</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7

<sup>75</sup> Matthew 19:30

*but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.*"<sup>76</sup>

Later, the king organises a feast, which is supposed to last for three days, and his son should choose his bride there. The stepsisters are invited but do not want Cinderella to go with them, so the stepmother, representing evil, thinks unrealisable tasks up. Nevertheless, Cinderella cries out in the garden and asks the birds for help. Through the sky then come various species of birds, but the first are two white doves, which are, as mentioned above, the symbol of hope. Thanks to hope and aid sent down by God or her mother from heaven, she passes all the tasks but still is not allowed to go. When crying under the hazel tree, she wishes to be rich. The bird friend brings a gold and silver dress, which is not just astonishing but also magic, as her sisters do not recognise her when she is wearing it.

At the ball, the prince dances only with her. At night, she runs away from the castle, and when the prince comes to their house with her father, he does not recognise her, as she is not wearing the magical dress. That repeats twice. On the third day, when she is escaping again, she loses her slipper. She probably likes the prince, so we can just guess why she always runs away. It is possible that she does not want to be rash and believes that if he is the true one, they will marry sooner or later. In this version, written by the Brothers Grimm, there is nothing about "the midnight condition" that appears in other versions.

*"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."*<sup>77</sup>

The prince declares that his wife will become the one who puts on the shoe. The first stepsister has too big a toe, so her mother forces her to cut it off. Then, when she is leaving the house with the prince, the bird on the hazel tree sings that she is not the true one. The second sister has too big a heel, but the mother squeezes the foot till the blood comes. Nevertheless, the bird sings the song of the false bride and the slipper full of blood once more. That could be the next help from her mother in heaven. The blood here even emphasises the cruelty of the evil character as to maim one's own child for wealth is a dreadful deed. Afterwards, Cinderella tries the slipper, and it fits perfectly. At that moment, the prince awakens and recognises his beloved.

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<sup>76</sup> Proverbs 12:10

<sup>77</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4



This happy ending could be considered a resurrection (eucatastrophe) even if no main character was physically dead. The prince was dead before he met Cinderella, and love opened his eyes and woke him up for a new life. It is also a recovery of Cinderella, for she learnt the true love that saved her life.

## 9. Hansel and Gretel

The origin of all evil in this fairy tale is again connected with a stepmother figure, who forces her husband to take his two children, Hansel and Gretel, to the forest and leave them there, as the family have nothing to eat. The character of the wicked stepmother often appears in the fairy tales, the Grimms' versions included, and it is one of the oldest antagonist characters ever. The bad position of this character is given historically: long ago, when a wife died, a husband made efforts to get married as soon as possible. Usually, a younger lady who was not much older than the children became his new wife. Naturally, there arose jealousy and competitiveness, mainly between daughters and their stepmothers. That is one of the possible explanations for this character being so notorious.<sup>78</sup>

In the fairy tale, the father is the one who tries to protect the children and feels sorry when they stay in the forest, in other words, when they are under the rule of evil. The relationship between God and people is described in the Bible similarly. God is depicted as a good father who loves all people - his children and grieves when they succumb to evil. For their happy life and the ability to overcome suffering, people need unconditional love. God confirms his fatherly love by offering his only son for us all. This love gives us hope that suffering and death will be conquered.

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<sup>78</sup> BEHROOZ, Anahit. Wicked Women: The Stepmother as a Figure of Evil in the Grimms' Fairy Tales. *Retrospect Journal: EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY'S HISTORY, CLASSICS AND ARCHAEOLOGY MAGAZINE* [online]. Edinburgh: WordPress, 2006, 2016 [cit. 2022-06-29]. Dostupné z: <https://retrospectjournal.com/2016/10/26/wicked-women-the-stepmother-as-a-figure-of-evil-in-the-grimms-fairy-tales/>

*"He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."<sup>79</sup>*

As children cannot sleep for hunger, they hear what the malevolent stepmother forces their father to do. Gretel cries but Hansel stays calm and comforts his sister, saying that God will not leave them. This strong religious motif of the children putting themselves in God's hands appears in the tale twice. Children are not afraid to go to the forest, even though they know what will happen. It expresses an unwavering faith that assures of God's favour, which helps to overcome all difficulties. God sees our worries and does not want us to suffer for long.

*"The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them;*

*he delivers them from all their troubles.*

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted*

*and saves those who are crushed in spirit."<sup>80</sup>*

When the family reaches the middle of the forest, the father builds a fire for the children not to be cold, and when the flames are high, the parents leave. The fire protects them not just from cold but also from wild animal attacks. Moreover, it provides light in the darkness. The symbolism of light has been already mentioned, and the meaning of fire in this tale is the same. The fire that the father made protects the children from cold, beasts and fear, same as God, who is believed to be the father of all people (and is often represented by light), protects men from their troubles and does not let any evil to hurt them.

*"The righteous person may have many troubles,*

*but the Lord delivers him from them all;*

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<sup>79</sup> Ephesians 1:5

<sup>80</sup> Psalm 34:17-18

*he protects all his bones,*

*not one of them will be broken."*<sup>81</sup>

The motifs that appear several times in the story and therefore seem necessary to be analysed are the sun and the moon. That night when the children overhear their parents' talk, Hansel goes out and collects pebbles that glitter in the moonlight. These stones later help them to find their way back home. Thanks to the light of the moon, he can see the pebbles. As some religions believe that the world (with the sun and the moon) was created by God, we can say that the bright moonlight is the help from him to his beloved ones: innocent children.

The day has already begun when the stepmother wakes the children up, but the sun has not risen yet. We can say that the dawn, the beginning of the day, generally represents the start of something new. The daybreak also ends night and brings light into darkness. That is symbolically depicted in the Gospel when Mary Magdalene goes to look at the tomb at dawn and finds that the stone is rolled back.<sup>82</sup> The joyful news of Jesus' resurrection came during the daybreak and spread as fast as the sunlight, touched all people and brought hope of a new life for all of them.

*"The people walking in darkness*

*have seen a great light;*

*on those living in the land of deep darkness*

*a light has dawned."*<sup>83</sup>

When the children are lost in the forest, they see a snow-white bird singing delightfully. Then it flies away, and children follow it until they reach a house made of bread and covered with cakes and, because of terrible hunger, they start eating it. The white bird, possibly a dove,

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<sup>81</sup> Psalm 34:19-20

<sup>82</sup> Matthew 28:1

<sup>83</sup> Isaiah 9:2

a symbol of hope, leads them to their future happiness. Nevertheless, before it, they have to experience fear.

The children are captured by an old woman, who lives in the house and eats children. After several days of serving and hard work, Gretel, using a trick, burns the wicked old witch and both children are finally free. They rejoice, dance and kiss each other. Even in the Bible, dancing is mentioned as a praise of God and a celebration of success achieved with God's help. Kissing has, both in the biblical context and in our personal lives, more meanings. The kiss of Judas was treacherous, but in most cases, kissing expresses joy, respect, and love as it does in the tale.

*"praise him with timbrel and dancing,*

*praise him with the strings and pipe,"<sup>84</sup>*

The children fill their pockets with jewels and pearls found in the house and set out on their way home. After two hours of walking, they meet a large piece of water, but there is no bridge or boat to cross it. Finally, Gretel notices a white duckling swimming on the surface, and she asks it to take them across. As the duckling is little, Gretel decides that they must go one by one, for both of them would be too heavy. It shows Gretel's understanding and respect for all beings, which contrasts with the selfishness of the stepmother, who got rid of the children just to have enough food for herself. As the fairy tales and the Bible suggest, human deeds will be, sooner or later, recompensed. God stands with the innocent children and destroys their enemies. When the children come back home after a few days, the stepmother is already dead. It could be a retribution for her horrible behaviour.

*"For the Lord loves the just*

*and will not forsake his faithful ones.*

*Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed;*

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<sup>84</sup> Psalm 150:4

*the offspring of the wicked will perish.*"<sup>85</sup>

The father of Hansel and Gretel has had no happy moment since the children were left in the forest, and it broke his heart to leave them alone. But at the end, they all rejoice when the children find their way back home and they are again together. However, the stepmother is dead. God, as the father of all people, feels joy too when he can welcome every single person in his house, his kingdom, in the heavens. Just as the father rejoices at the return of the lost son in the parable, all parents rejoice when they get their lost children back. The resurrection in this tale has no literal meaning as there is nobody who was dead and is alive again. The symbolical death and renewal are hidden in the separation of beloved persons, their suffering and subsequent reunion. The father died in his heart and soul and was revived with the return of his children. That is the resurrection, eucatastrophe, recovery and consolation that Tolkien talked about.

## **10. Conclusion**

In my bachelor's work, I occupied myself with the analysis of classical fairy tales. Initially, it was necessary to explain the term "*resurrection*" in all its aspects, from both pagan and Christian points of view. We could see that the understanding of sacrifice and the renewal of life varies in different cultures. Therefore, I included particular examples of resurrection to understand it better.

The next chapter was devoted to Tolkien's understanding of fairy tales. He applied himself to their origin, the main features, functions, and connection with biblical texts. He believed that fairy stories have always something biblical within them, offering the readers recovery, escape, and consolation. He was also convinced that sacrifice and love were necessary for the renewal of life. In this respect, I analysed the texts of fairy tales.

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<sup>85</sup> Psalm 37:28

Two following chapters were dedicated to the rites, both secular and religious, which are connected with life, death and resurrection, as well as to the role of laughter. I mentioned the function of the rituals and laughter in our lives, but also in human history and folklore. I talked about this topic because it frequently appears in fairy tales and has significant symbolism.

In the practical part of the work, I analysed four classical fairy tales: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Hansel and Gretel*. I found many passages whose meaning corresponds with the Old and New Testament lyrics and the idea of resurrection. Tolkien's eucatastrophe, or happy ending, appears in every tale mentioned above. Injustice, suffering and death are surmounted with the strongest power: love.

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