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Bakalářská práce

“The Origin and Legacy of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Character; Gandalf the Wizard”
“Původ a odkaz čaroděje Gandalfa; literární postavy J.R.R. Tolkiena”

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V Praze, dne X. 5. 2019

.....
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Table of Contents

1 Introduction	6
1.1 Fantasy Before Tolkien; A Brief History of the Genre	7
1.2 Tolkien and His Contemporaries; The Inklings	9
1.3 Tolkien's approach to fantasy, <i>Subcreation</i> , and <i>Eucatastrophe</i>	13
1.4 Fantasy after Tolkien.....	15
1. Methodology	17
2 Gandalf as a Christ Figure, The Influence of Christianity	19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 The Religious Environment of Middle-earth	21
2.3 Gandalf as a Christ Figure	23
2.4 Good vs. Evil Magic	25
3 Norse and Finnish Mythology.....	30
4.1 Introduction	30
4.2.1 A Brief History of the Norse Studies.....	31
4.3 Gandalf and Odin, names, roles, Odin's Ordeal and the motif of sacrifice.....	32
4.4 Tolkien and <i>Kalevala</i>	41
4.5 Gandalf and Vainamoinen.....	42
4 Gandalf as a Merlin figure; The Influence of the Arthurian Legend.....	46
5.1 A Brief History of Merlin in Western Literature until the 20 th Century.....	47
5.2 The 20 th Century and The Inklings.....	50
5.3 Merlin and Gandalf	51
5 Conclusion	58
6 Bibliography	60

Abstract

This thesis aims to analyse the origin, development and possible interpretations of J.R.R. Tolkien's character of Gandalf the wizard, focusing primarily on the influence of three major sources of inspiration, suggested both by the author himself and intertextual elements recognisable in his fiction; *The Bible*, Norse and Finnish mythology (represented by *The Poetic* and *The Prose Edda*, *Saga of the Volsungs* and *Kalevala*) and the literary tradition centred around the legendary figure of Merlin, as well as the later works of fiction which it has inspired. The aim of the thesis is to illustrate to what extent is Tolkien's Gandalf only a continuation or adaptation of the historical literary tradition represented by the sources named above or on the contrary, an original and independent character. This discussion is aimed to demonstrate how J.R.R Tolkien's portrayal of wizard figures has not only helped to popularize the generic characterisation of wizards in fantasy fiction but helped to pioneer a new type of wizard figure.

Tolkien's influence on the fantasy genre was not necessarily inventive but rather transformative. The fundamental elements of Tolkien's fiction were not introduced by the author, but have already been a part of the developing genre. Before Tolkien, the authors of fantasy have strongly relied on archetypal figures, the model established by children's literature and fairy stories, mythology, the Arthurian legend or Christian allegory. In the character of Gandalf, Tolkien was aware of the sources named above, and used them as a point of departure for the creation of the character. However, Gandalf surpasses and overcomes this model in many respects, primarily because of his impossibility to be easily classified into any of the presented categories and roles, his attitude towards power and his humility and humanity. But most importantly, Gandalf is no longer only an archetypal character which serves to forward the plot, but a fully developed personality which, while not yet reaching the complexity of the following wizard characters, has served as a source of inspiration for the following generations of writers of fantasy.

Key Words:

J.R.R. Tolkien, Gandalf, wizard, Bible, Odin, Vainamoinen, Merlin

Abstrakt

Tématem této bakalářské práce je průzkum původu, vývoje a možných interpretací literární postavy J.R.R. Tolkiena, čaroděje Gandalfa. Práce je zaměřena především na vliv tří možných zdrojů inspirace, o kterých vypovídají jak názory samotného autora, tak intertextuální prvky rozpoznatelné v jeho tvorbě, konkrétně *Bible*, Severská a Finská mytologie (v této práci zastoupena *Mladší i Starší Eddou*, *Ságou o Volsunzích a Kalevalou*) a literární tradice soustředěná okolo legendární postavy čaroděje Merlina i textů, které tato legenda inspirovala. Cílem této práce je pokusit se zmapovat, do jaké míry je Tolkienův Gandalf pouze pokračováním nebo adaptací historické literární tradice, zastoupené výše jmenovanými díly nebo naopak, originální a nezávislou postavou. Tento rozbor se pokusí čtenáři přiblížit, jak způsob, kterým Tolkien zobrazuje postavy čarodějů pomohl nejen popularizovat (dnes již) tradiční charakteristiku těchto postav, tak jak je známe z fantasy literatury, ale navíc pomohl vytvořit nový druh literární postavy čaroděje.

Tolkienův vliv na žánr fantasy nebyl nutně inventivní ale spíše transformativní. Základní složky Tolkienova díla nejsou jeho vlastním vynálezem, ale již před ním byly součástí rozvíjejícího se žánru. Před Tolkienem se autoři fantasy literatury silně spoléhali na archetypální postavy, model zavedený dětskou literaturou a pohádkami, mytologií, Artušovskou legendou a Křesťanskou alegorií. Když Tolkien vytvářel postavu Gandalfa, byl si plně vědom všech výše zmíněných zdrojů a použil je jako základní bod pro svoji literární postavu. Nicméně Gandalfovi se podařilo v mnoha směrech předešlý model překonat. Není možné ho lehce zařadit do tradičních kategorií ani mu přiřadit žádnou tradiční roli, liší se i jeho postoj k moci a vyniká neobvyklou skromností a lidskostí. Nejvíce důležité ale je, že Gandalf už není jen jednoduchou archetypální postavou, která by sloužila pouze k tomu, aby posouvala děj, ale plně rozvinutou osobností která, přestože ještě nedosahuje hloubky svých budoucích protějšků, posloužila jako zdroj pro budoucí generace spisovatelů fantasy literatury.

Key Words:

J.R.R. Tolkien, Gandalf, čaroděj, Bible, Odin, Vainamoinen, Merlin

1 Introduction

Wizards, sorcerers, and magicians have enjoyed a rich history in mythology, legend, fiction, and folklore. In the very beginning, there was what C. G. Jung has described as the *senex* or the wise old man archetype - a patriarchal figure, a shaman, a druid, a wild man, a magician, a philosopher, a mentor and the alike. As a result, the roots of the wizard figure lay deep in the past before the emergence of written texts, in myth and legend. In the mythological traditions, the archetype can be found anywhere from the Norse Odin or the dwarf Mimir, Greek Mentor or Nestor to Utnapishtim from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* or the biblical prophets. Europe's conversion to Christianity turned the figure into a part of the folk imagination, which later got absorbed into the developing Merlin tradition. With the arrival of the Middle Ages, the Merlin figure became a part of the Arthurian legend, and as such remained a part of the “popular literature” until the onset of realism.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the figure has entered the newly emerged fantasy genre. Since then, a wizard has become one of the traditional stock characters of the genre and has taken his place among his apprentice, the poor orphan boy who turns out to be anything but ordinary, the fearless warrior, the chosen one, the feisty female heroine or a whole list of magical races and species. The earliest works of fantasy used the wizard/magician figure in a fashion similar to myth and fairy tale, i.e., a static figure used to forward the plot and represent either the forces of good or evil. Compelling and mysterious, yet of bland character and no sign of deeper psychology of character or character development, G. MacDonald's fairy mother, T.H. White's Merlin, W. Morris's sage and enchantress, Lord Dunsany's magician or E.R. Eddison's sorcerer appear only as supportive characters. Even in the fiction of C.S. Lewis, witches and wizards remain one-dimensional and stereotypical characters.

Tolkien's Gandalf was the first prominent fantasy character to promote a wizard/magician as a fully developed main character. In *The Road to Middle-earth*, T. Shippey critiques Tolkien's characters as “flat; (without) enough awareness of sexuality; good and evil are presented as absolutes, without a proper sense of inner conflict within individuals”¹. However, although Gandalf as a character might not yet reach the realism and

¹ Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012) 153

complexity of those who followed after, he is by no means a one-dimensional character. While on the surface level, little development can be observed, since the very first chapter to the very last, Gandalf undergoes vast development in respect to his assertiveness, his growing courage to openly confront Sauron, his ability to remain composed in situations, where all others falter and despair, and to a certain extent, also his attitude towards some of the remaining characters.

In the hands of the writers who came after, the once relatively uniform character has expanded to unprecedented dimensions. In modern fantasy fiction, the reader can encounter wizards and magicians comprised of various personalities, backgrounds, temperaments, and abilities. Nowadays, probably the last remaining universal characteristic of a wizard or magician is their ability to manipulate the world around them through superhuman or magical means.

1.2 Fantasy Before Tolkien;

While the emergence of fantasy as a genre is traditionally characterized as a response to the Enlightenment and rise of realism, the fantastic was an inseparable part of Western literature since the very dawn of written texts.² A notion of the supernatural can be found anywhere from the ancient epic to medieval romance, the story of a hero confronting various obstacles, including monsters, supernatural creatures, witches and sorcerers, evil magic or unfavourable fate, forms the basis of nearly every European myth or early heroic epic. As a result, it is no wonder these texts have served as a source of inspiration for many writers in the fantasy genre, including J.R.R. Tolkien who, rather than by his immediate predecessors, was inspired by the Old and Middle English or the Old Norse myth.

The 18th century radical reorientation of the European approach to philosophy and science, accompanied by a rise of mimetic genres has pushed the fantastic out of the mainstream, into the realm of the children's literature, folk beliefs, and superstition. The first literary movement to challenge the belief that the world can be reduced to a set of scientific laws was Gothic literature. However, while the Gothic employs elements of the fantastic and

² Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, *A Short History of Fantasy* (Faringdon: Libri Publishing, 2012) 145
All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

helped to bring back the interest in medieval literature, its primary concern was a subversion of the rational view of the world and a play with the shocking sensation.

The mid-nineteenth century brought a new branch of fantasy, rooted primarily in the Arthurian legend and fairy tale.³ While W. M. Thackeray encouraged the writing of new fairy tales, Ch. Kingsley's *Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* was already an original story, despite its strong Christian moralism. Nevertheless, the most influential writer of this period was doubtlessly George MacDonald. His *At the Back of the North Wind* or *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*, while still build upon the fairy tale foundation, has a 'strange twist'⁴ and fully realized characters, including goblins. *The Phantastes* pioneered the portal fantasy, while *Lilith* explores the motif of death and immortality, and as such, is sometimes associated with Tolkien. MacDonald's work, in general, has been admired by and served as an inspiration for many future authors of fantasy, including J. M. Barrie, L. Frank Baum, T.H. White, C. S. Lewis, J. E. Nesbit or Madeleine L'Engle.

MacDonald encouraged L. Carrol to publish his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass, and what Alice Found There*, intricate fantasies with a flavour of nonsense and surrealism, full of puns and riddles. Nevertheless, the impact of Carrol's work was much more significant for the development of children's literature than on fantasy as such. The 19th century movement that gave the fantasy of the following century its typical 'look and feel' was the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The movement's medievalism, painting style, the Arthurian tableaux of Edward Burne-Jones or the poetry of Christina Rossetti helped to shape the visuals of the fantasy to come. However, the Pre-Raphaelite author most important in the scope of this thesis is doubtlessly William Morris, whose *The Wood Beyond the World* has introduced the model of a secondary world, which Tolkien and many others have followed. Probably no one has influenced Tolkien the way Morris did. His influence can be detected anywhere from "diction, syntax, imagery, narrative form to plot elements"⁵.

A significant portion of the most prominent fantasy novels of the first half of the 20th century was written for children, however most of them helped to introduce (or establish) a motif that later became an integrated part of fantasy and children's literature. While E.

³ Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, pg. 320

⁴ Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, pg. 322

⁵ Stuart D. Lee ed., *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2014) 353
All subsequent references are to this edition.

Nesbit and her stories of the fantastic hidden in the corners of our everyday lives introduced the urban fantasy, L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* helped to popularize the portal fantasy and so on. Among other works of this period, which have since become children's classic, are J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and Wendy or P.L Travers's *Mary Poppins*. Another genre, often aimed at children and employing elements of fantasy, which gained popularity at this time is animal fable. Works such as Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*, A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, E.B. White's *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*, Margery Williams's *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the works of Beatrix Potter or even G. Orwell's *Animal Farm* fall into this category.

In the early first half of the 20th century, Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter* together with E. R. Eddison's *The Worm Ouroboros* followed the example of Morris and created secondary worlds. The 1930s witnessed a revival of the allegorical Christian fantasy, with C.S. Lewis's *Space Trilogy* or his series of Christian apologetics as well as the work of Charles Williams. Other noteworthy authors who do fit neither of those categories are Hope Mirrless and her *Lud-in-the Mist*, whose average main protagonist precedes Tolkien's hobbits, or T.H. White and his Arthurian tetralogy, *The Once and Future King*, which will be further discussed in the third chapter.

This period was also a time of rising popularity of fantasy materials published in a variety of magazines, although these short stories were mostly ghost or horror stories, such as those of H. P. Lovecraft. Later on, another sub-genre sometimes associated with Tolkien has emerged, called 'sword and sorcery', with episodic tales of fearless, splendid heroes set into an ancient world, such as, e.g. R. E. Howers *Conan the Barbarian*.

1.3 Tolkien and His Contemporaries; The Inklings

Although Tolkien was active as a writer since the 1910s to the 1970s, i.e., the very peak of post-modernism, the date of publication of the vast majority of the materials which are supposed to have influenced him as an author does not reach further than the turn of the 20th century. Be it the Victorian and Edwardian Children's literature, Post-Romanticism or the slowly waning Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Tolkien's literary inspiration for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, whether "emulations or rejections"⁶, remains mostly in the previous century. Nevertheless, while the early 20th century literature might not have been as

⁶ *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 387

influential, a group of Tolkien's colleagues and contemporaries has offered a source of stimuli and encouragement, without which the publication of the author's mythology might have never been possible.

The literary society founded in 1931 by T. Lean⁷ was irregularly attended by Oxford University lecturers and their friends, brought together by their Christian faith, “a fantasy-oriented imagination, and a fondness for narrative for its own sake”⁸. Among the most regular attendees were J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and his brother Warren H. Lewis, O. Barfield, C. Williams, R. Havard, J.A.W. Bennet, David Cecil, H. Dyson, R. L. Green or Tolkien’s son Christopher Tolkien. Their meetings would consist of readings of the member’s manuscripts, followed by commentary and criticism. Among the works read in the group were also Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. In *The Inklings*, Humphrey Carpenter describes the club as more or less a group of friends and acquaintances of C.S. Lewis, who did not necessarily have much in common and sometimes had little understanding for the work of the other members (e.g., Tolkien and Williams).

Lewis truly was the force that brought together not only the members of the group, but also other early 20th century writers of fantasy. He exchanged letters with T.H. White or C. Williams, whom he later also invited to join the group, and through his efforts, the Inklings were also visited by E.R. Eddison.⁹ Moreover, while the group as such had no given ‘mission’, as D. P. Glycer notes, it is implausible that “the members of a long-standing writers’ group (would have) no influence on each other, (nevertheless, the) influence need not take the form of borrowing ideas.”¹⁰

Lewis himself was the quintessential example of such influence. His support and encouragement played a crucial role in the development and especially the publication of Tolkien's work.

“The unpayable debt that I owe to him was not “influence” as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my “stuff” could be more than a private hobby.”¹¹

⁷ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings; C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and their Friends* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1997) 57 All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁸ A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien, pg. 355

⁹ A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien, pg. 323

¹⁰ D.P. Glycer, *The Company They Keep; C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien as Writers in Community* (Kent OH: The Kent State University Press, 2008) 37

¹¹ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien; A Biography* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1995) 116 All subsequent references are to this edition.

Lewis read both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* before the time of their publication, but neither author has revealed much about the particular sections they have discussed, with only a few exceptions, e.g., the confrontation between Gandalf and Saruman¹². While according to Lewis, Tolkien was notoriously hard to influence¹³, H. Carpenter mentions the first time Tolkien asked for his friend's opinion on "The Lay of Leithian", and as a reaction to his (mostly positive) criticism have rewritten the text to such extent, it was "hardly the same story."¹⁴

Tolkien and Lewis notoriously challenged each other to write a story, one about time and the other about space travel.¹⁵ On Lewis's part, there is *The Space Trilogy*, on Tolkien's part the unfinished *The Book of Lost Tales*. Lewis's trilogy itself deals mostly with such topics as the role of myth in human experience, and unlike his counterpart, he did not hesitate to borrow from Tolkien. The supreme deity of Lewis's fictional universe is 'the Old One', a God figure similar to Tolkien's 'the One' who, just like in the case of *Eru*, does not directly intervene with the history of the created world. Instead, his will is enforced by the *eldils*, angelic beings of a lesser order, in whom Tolkien has recognized a combination of his *valar* and *eldar*- the elves.¹⁶ Each planet of the solar system has its angelic protector, except for the Earth, which is under the control of 'the Bent One', a Satan figure similar to Melkor.

Lewis goes as far as to borrow toponyms and personal names, such as his misspellings of Númenor (Núminor), or Tor and Tinidril, the first 'people' of *Perelandra*, who were very likely inspired by Tuor and Idril.¹⁷ While Tolkien was quite fond of the first two parts of the trilogy, he was heavily disappointed by the third instalment, which was written under a heavy influence of Ch. Williams who, in Tolkien's own words, "spoiled the trilogy in the last pan"¹⁸.

C. Williams is being mentioned surprisingly often in connection with Tolkien's 'membership' in the Inklings. His novels revolve mostly around mystical and supernatural events set into the environment of everyday life and employ a variety of fantastical motifs such as ghosts, demons, witches, resurrection and immortality, doppelgangers and Tarot cards, but also motif from the Arthurian Legend or Christian theology. Together with C.S.

¹² Tolkien, J. R. R. and Humphrey Carpenter, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1990) 407 All subsequent references are to this edition.

¹³ *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 354.

¹⁴ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg.

¹⁵ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 359

¹⁶ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 387

¹⁷ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 378

¹⁸ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 368

Lewis and C. Tolkien, he is regularly mentioned in *The Letters* as the only audience to the early readings of the *Lord of the Rings*. Nevertheless, it seems that, except for some of his earlier experimental writings, Tolkien was not very interested in Williams's work.

“We liked one another and enjoyed talking, but we had nothing to say to one another at deeper (or higher) levels. (...) I had read or heard a good deal of his work, but found it wholly alien, and sometimes very distasteful, occasionally ridiculous. (This is perfectly true as a general statement, but is not intended as a criticism of Williams (...)) of course in so large a range of work I found lines, passages, scenes, and thoughts that I found striking.) I remained entirely unmoved. Lewis was bowled over.”¹⁹

Nevertheless, the often overlooked Inkling who, in certain respect, influenced Tolkien more than all the other members put together, is Hugo Barfield. His *Poetic Diction; A Study in Meaning* has likely had a profound influence, while not on particular aspects of Tolkien fiction, than on his overall concept of fantasy as a genre, as expressed in “On Fairy Stories”. It was Barfield who came up with the theory, that before the division of meaning into ‘literal’ and ‘metaphorical’, there was a historical stage, when the language was used in a ‘mythological manner’, i.e. “every word carried some implication of the animate and nothing could be purely ‘abstract’ or ‘literal’”.²⁰ Tolkien has later confessed to Lewis that Barfield's “conception of the ancient semantic unity has modified his whole outlook”.²¹

The last Inkling to be discussed and whose influence naturally transcends the literary group is Tolkien's youngest son Christopher. While *The Hobbit* was written while he was still a little child and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy probably under a mild influence of his advice, the remaining (posthumously published) works were edited and put together solely thanks to his initiative. Actually, more of Tolkien's works were published after his death than during his life. *The Silmarillion*, *The Children of Húrin*, *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*, twelve volumes of *The History of Middle-earth*, *Beren and Luthien*, *The Fall of Arthur*, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*, *The Fall of Gondolin*, *The Monsters and Critics*, *Tales from the Perilous Realm* or *The Letters from Father Christmas* were all put together by Christopher Tolkien's effort, the first eight mentioned, by him personally.

This often was not an easy task. Many of the manuscripts left behind by his father were in the form of hand-written notes, full of crossed-out or/and rewritten passages. More

¹⁹ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 387

²⁰ *The Inklings*, pg. 41

²¹ *The Inklings*, pg. 41

than often there were several versions of the same text, each with only minor alternations, as best seen in *Unfinished Tales*, which include the editor's notes, such as "the remaining writings about the *Istari* (as a group) are unhappily no more than very rapid jottings, often illegible." or "illegible words follow that seems to contain the word "third"²². As C. Tolkien explains in the introduction to *The Silmarillion*, the constant development and branching of his father's fiction throughout his life made it practically impossible for his son to reconstruct the intended final version and as a result, might have left us as readers with

"As the years passed the changes and variants, both in detail and in larger perspectives, became so complex, so pervasive, and so many-layered that a final and definitive version seemed unattainable."

1.4 Tolkien's approach to fantasy; *Subcreation to Eucatastrophe*

Fantasy, and speculative fiction in general, is an extraordinarily broad term, and as such notoriously difficult to define. Its "specific location in the spectrum of the fantastic is a matter of constant critical speculation, (with) no rigorous critical consensus over its precise definition and 'reach'".²³ Even within the scope of the genre, there are countless subgenres with varying characteristics. Probably the most common definition of the genre is based on the juxtaposing of fantasy against realism and defines the genre as a self-coherent narrative, which we perceive as impossible in comparison to the Primary world and which strongly depends on the strangeness of its setting and characters.²⁴ Nevertheless, many scholars and authors didn't hesitate to form their own theory or definition of fantasy.

Tzvetan Todorov talks about "the fantastic", a term defined as a moment of hesitation between belief and disbelief in the supernatural, located somewhere between "the uncanny" and "the marvellous".²⁵ Rosemary Jackson follows in the Freudian direction and explains fantasy as an expression of our (subconscious) desires suppressed by the society and thus essentially subversive.²⁶ Katrine Hume sees the specifics of the experience of reading

²² J.R.R Tolkien and Christopher Tolkien ed., *The Unfinished Tales of Middle-earth and Númenor* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1980) pg. 276 All subsequent references are to this edition.

²³ John Clute and John Grant ed., "Genre Fantasy," *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. Digital Version. Placed online: Oct. 2012. Accessed: May 2, 2019. <<http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=fantasy>>

²⁴ *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. "Genre Fantasy"

²⁵ Todorov, Tzvetan, *Úvod do fantastické literatury*. (Praha: Karolinum, 2010)

²⁶ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy the Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981)

fantasy in the psychological response to mimesis.²⁷ According to Michael Moorcock,²⁸ fantasy is based on a specific use of language, while according to John Clute²⁹, the process of experiencing a fantasy text consists of four “medical” stages – wrongness, thinning, recognition and healing. Colin Manlove considers fantasy merely a form of allegory³⁰, while Farah Mendelsohn “a number of fuzzy sets determined by the mode in which the fantastic enters the text”³¹.

In the 1939 lecture “On Fairy Stories”, Tolkien declared his particular concept of what fantasy is and how it should operate, as well as the relationship between myth and fairy tale, *The Lord of the Rings* being “a practical demonstration of the views that (he) expressed”³². In the essay, Tolkien defends fantasy³³ as an autonomous literary genre, but refuses any dictionary definition and instead, argues that the ‘the nature of *Faërie*’ cannot be defined or described, but only perceived. Instead of trying to define fantasy, Tolkien lays out its main principles - Fantasy, Recovery, Escape and Consolation.³⁴ Another key term of the essay is “Sub-creation”, a term coined to describe the role of men as secondary creators, respectively writers as creators of “Secondary worlds” who have inherited their creative nature from the Creator himself. He describes fantasy as “the making or glimpsing of Other worlds”³⁵. Nevertheless, the Secondary world must be tied to the Primary one by “the recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it”³⁶. The primary condition of creating a Secondary world, i.e. writing a successful fantasy is, it must be done in such way, the reader does not consciously realize he is reading fiction, i.e., the Secondary world must be credible, the fantastic elements should not contradict reason. Tolkien calls this ability ‘Enchantment’, which, if successful, creates a “Secondary Belief”.

Another aspect of fantasy is its ability to offer Recovery. According to Tolkien, fairy stories allow us to regain a clear view and see the world from a different perspective, apart from ourselves, to appreciate the beauty of everyday things, the astonishment and

²⁷ Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis; Response to Reality in Western Fantasy Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984)

²⁸ Michael Moorcock, *Wizardry and Wild Romance* (London: Golancz, 1987)

²⁹ John Clute and John Grant ed. “Fantasy” *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. Placed online: Oct. 2012. Accessed: May 2, 2019. <<http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=fantasy>>

³⁰ C.N. Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan: 1999)

³¹ Farah Mendelsohn and Edward James, pg. 105

³² *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 330

³³ Note: Tolkien uses the term ‘fairy story’ synonymously with the modern use of ‘fantasy’.

³⁴ J.R.R Tolkien and Christopher Tolkien ed., “On Fairy Stories,” *The Monsters and the Critics; and Other Essays*. (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2013) Amazon Kindle Digital Version. loc. 2607 All subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁵ “On Fairy Stories”. loc. 2551

³⁶ “On Fairy Stories”. loc. 2719

“wonder of the things, such as stone, and wood, and iron; tree and grass; house and fire; bread and wine”³⁷, And as a result, they also help us to regain the strength to face the reality of our everyday lives. Concerning Escape, he refuses the usual criticism of fantasy as a means of escapism, comparing the human wish to escape the grim reality of the Primary world to a man who “has found himself in prison and tries to get out and go home”³⁸. Fantasy and fairy stories give us the chance to experience the fulfilment of those of our desires, which would never come true in the Primary world, including the escape from death.

The last function brought about by the Escape is Consolation. The surprising good ending is not simply a product of escapism in the negative sense. As an essential part of a successful fairy story, it does not run away from the reality, only denies “the universal final defeat”. Tolkien calls this “sudden joyous turn” a “*eucatastrophe*”, a term which sets his theory in the context of Christianity.

"The Gospels contain a fairy story or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: "mythical" in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfilment of Creation."³⁹

1.5 Fantasy after Tolkien

While J.R.R. Tolkien has neither invented fantasy nor was he the only author to revolutionize the genre, the influence of his work on the later writers as well as the overall understanding of fantasy literature among the broader public is indisputable. *The Lord of the Rings* has established modern fantasy literature as a genre, “codified much of how the quest fantasy deals with landscape, with character, with the isolation of the protagonists into the club-story narrative and with reader positioning”⁴⁰ and set a mode and template for later writers. Tolkien established secondary worlds as an autonomous space for the exercise of the author’s imagination and helped to remove “the necessity to ‘normalize’ them by framing them

³⁷ “On Fairy Stories“, loc. 2772

³⁸ “On Fairy Stories“, loc 2781

³⁹ “On Fairy Stories“, loc. 2913

⁴⁰Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, Con: Wesleyan University Press, 2008) 54
All subsequent references are to this edition.

as Travellers' tales or Dreams, which prove exiguous at dawn, or Timeslip tales, or as Beast Fables"⁴¹. His influence on the genre was so significant, that any later author of high/immersive, heroic or epic fantasy will be inevitably compared to Tolkien as the "original".

Ahead of his time, Tolkien has brought the high fantasy to its fullest potential. What has been only a vague outline in the works of George MacDonald or William Morris suddenly becomes a fully developed secondary world of unprecedented depth. The complexity of the historical background supplied by the author, the fictional myths, history, geography or language gives the novels unprecedented realism and complexity, yet do not present the past as fixed sequence of events, which have led to the point of crisis at which the reader enters the story. Instead, the viable past framing of Tolkien's universe suggests "a real, potential, future (...) that are interwoven with ours."⁴² The landscape itself is employed in the process of storytelling, conveying the mood or potential danger, and the appearance of land is often associated with its ruler.

Tolkien has removed the previously episodic nature of fantasy fiction, by combining adventure story with epic and as a result, assigned the journey of the main protagonist unprecedented importance within the frame of the fictional world. The traditional single archetypal protagonist has been replaced by a heterogeneous group and the fictional world they inhabit became so complex, neither the character nor the reader can be neither aware nor in control of what is happening at all places at a single moment in time. Tolkien very scarcely relies on the adventure rhetoric traditionally associated with heroic fantasy. The narrative voice regularly switches from "demotic to heroic, from domestic to epic".⁴³ The presence of the hobbits among the main protagonist often breaks the growing tension of the story and the concerns of the 'noble' characters, with their pragmatic concerns.

According to D. Fimi, the fantasy writers following Tolkien had only a few possible ways to approach the canonical status of Tolkien's fiction- either they followed the model he established (an extreme example of this approach would be the Terry Brooks's *The Sword of Shannara*), tried to avoid his influence at all cost or they acknowledged their debt to Tolkien and still managed to create independent and original fantasy. In these successful cases, the authors do usually rely not on Tolkien's model as a supply of characters,

⁴¹ John Clute and John Grant ed., "J.R.R. Tolkien" *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. Digital Version. Placed online: Oct. 2012. Accessed: May 2, 2019. <<http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=fantasy>>

⁴² *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, pg. 55

⁴³ Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James, pg. 784

motifs or plot structure, but rather as an “inventory of inter-texts to draw upon (myth, legend, folklore, often as recorded in medieval literature) and the tendency to theorize their own creative practice”⁴⁴.

A prime example of this approach is a group of writers taught by Tolkien himself at the Oxford University- S. Cooper, A. Garner, and D. Wynne Jones.⁴⁵ All of them follow in the direction of mythical, folkloric and medieval inspiration, although they rely on the Celtic and legend and folklore than would probably be to Tolkien’s taste. Another great example of such writer who has, according to her own words, been inspired by Tolkien is Ursula le Guin, whose *Earthsea* trilogy, although betraying traces of medievalism and ascribing great importance to the language, ‘discusses’ graver topic such as the traditional euro-centrism in and the role of women in fantasy.

Many of the structures contemporary fantasy fiction utilises as well as the questions it deals with, remain an integral part of the genre and reappear in works of fantasy fiction until the present day. A significant number of the most popular modern works of fantasy is still built upon the model of a grand quest against the absolute evil, employs the stock characters popularized by Tolkien and is concerned with the topics of free will, sacrifice, immortality, and death.

1. 6 Methodology

It has been discussed and proven on numerous occasions that Tolkien as an author, and subsequently, his fiction as well, has been inspired by a number of sources. A single glance at the publications dealing with this topic will reveal that they can be easily divided into three main categories. Firstly, the influence of Christianity, secondly, primarily Teutonic but also Finnish mythology and at last, the Arthurian legend and the texts that followed its model. This thesis will follow this course in order to gradually discuss this influence on the smaller scale of Gandalf, in order to argue that while Tolkien has consciously built upon the sources listed above, he has also implemented significant alternations, which differentiate Gandalf as an original character.

⁴⁴ Dimitra Fimi. “Later Fantasy Fiction: Tolkien’s Legacy” *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 371

⁴⁵ *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 373

For the first chapter, I have chosen the role of Gandalf as a teacher and counsellor as the point of departure for the analysis. As such, the wizard sets the tone for the moral environment of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which allows us to compare the promoted moral values with the Christian teaching on virtue. This section will also briefly touch upon the theory of Gandalf as a Christ figure.

In the case of the second chapter, the analysis will be based upon the comparison of the characteristics shared by the the main representatives of the sage archetype within the discourse of Norse and Finnish mythology- Odin and Vainamoinen. As the primary source for this chapter, I have naturally chosen the primary source of our knowledge of the Norse mythology, Snorri Sturluson's *The Prose* and *The Poetic Edda* as well as *Heimskringla*, supplemented by the *Saga of the Volsungs* in the case of Odin and Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* in the case of Vainamoinen.

And finally in the case of the third chapter, as the choice of a single primary source of comparison is made practically impossible by the incredible depth and complexity of the tradition, I have decided to open the chapter with a brief introduction into the history of the Merlin figure in Western literature, aimed to allow the reader to better understand the tradition Tolkien's wizard figures continue. As a point of departure for this particular section, I have chosen the Peter Goodrich's interpretation of the main roles Merlin appears in- Wild Man, Wonder Child, Prophet, Poet, Counsellor, Wizard, and Lover.

2 Gandalf as a Christ Figure and the Influence of Christianity

The influence of Tolkien's Christianity on his fiction remains one of the best-researched areas of the Tolkien studies and research. Although the subject has been discussed by countless publications, the authors of which have arrived at mostly similar conclusions, the idea of Gandalf as a Christ figure remains a point of contention. In this respect, there seem to be three main directions Tolkien scholars take: either Gandalf is presented as a Christ figure⁴⁶, alternatively, the role is spread onto several separate characters within the novel⁴⁷ (usually Gandalf, Aragorn and Frodo) or the theory is refused as overly generalizing and 'a Christ figure' is replaced with 'Christ-like'⁴⁸.

The aim of this chapter is not simply to list the elements of the character which might have been potentially influenced by the author's religion or, alternatively, intentionally served as a means of Christian didacticism, but to explore the ways in which he has broadened the horizons of Christian fantasy beyond the traditional use of symbolism and allegory. The genre we nowadays call Christian fantasy has a long and rich history starting with the works of Dante, Milton, Bunyan or Blake all the way to Tolkien's immediate predecessors and contemporaries like MacDonald, T.F. Powys, Williams or Lewis. Nevertheless, all of these have relied either on allegory or overt employment of Christian elements, all of which Tolkien has decisively denied.

In our aim to analyse the possible ways of interpreting the character within a Christian /Roman Catholic discourse, it is necessary to first consider the possible causes of such influence. To begin with, the primary impulse for any related research is naturally the fact that Tolkien himself was a devoted Roman Catholic. After the death of his father when four years old, he was raised solely by his mother, who, by converting to Catholicism angered her family to such extent, they cut off all bonds with her, leaving the young mother without any financial or emotional support. Sick and broken she died when only thirty-four years old, leaving her two sons in the care of father Francis Morgan. Tolkien himself have always expressed immense love and gratitude for the care and support of his foster-father and seen

⁴⁶ Emily McAvan, *The Post- Modern Sacred* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Inc. Publishers, 2012)108 All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴⁷ Fleming Rutledge, *The Battle for Middle-earth: Tolkien's Divine Design in The Lord of the Rings* (Grand Rapids: Eardmans Publishing Co. 2004) pg. 122

⁴⁸ Ralph Wood, *The Gospel According to Tolkien: Visions of the Kingdom in Middle-earth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2003) pg. All subsequent references are to this edition.

his mother almost as a martyr-like figure, sacrificing herself for raising her children in the true Catholic faith.⁴⁹

The most straight forward approach would naturally be to know the author's opinion on the matter, which was partially made possible by Humphrey Carpenter's *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. However, even when having the fortune to know the author's own opinion, despite his general dislike for giving interviews and commentary on his work, one must bear in mind that we are dealing with letters. The message is affected not only by the addressee and the time of its origin but also the current mood of the author or his life situation, which results in a substantial inconsistency of opinions. In the time span of the letters from 1914 to 1973, we encounter varying answers at the same question. While Tolkien's 'cordial dislike' for allegory is notorious and he has personally stated on multiple occasions that "There is *no* 'symbolism' or conscious allegory in my story, (...) moral, political, or contemporary in my work (*The Lord of the Rings*),⁵⁰ at the same time, he also wrote: "The Lord of the Rings is, of course, a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision."⁵¹

These two claims do, of course, not exclude each other. A religious influence can naturally affect the work in many ways and on various places of the scale. As Christopher Tolkien explains, according to his father's understanding of fantasy, the fictional world he created is a world on its own and while it may contain "elements of his comprehension, his view of the world at large"⁵², nothing was taken directly from our primary world, i.e., there are no direct references or classical double-sided allegory. As such, Tolkien's fictional universe can be understood as a Christian one, without its integrity and originality being disrupted by overt references to the Christian religion or the practices of the Catholic Church.

However, if we choose to view Tolkien's work as fundamentally Christian, the question of the (in)compatibility of Christian and pagan elements, (moral) values in particular, inevitably comes up. It might seem that any mixing of Catholic and pagan teaching of virtue might turn out as difficult, or in some instances, almost impossible. However, if we take a look at the history of the early days of the Catholic Church, we will find out that Christianity has got a long history of absorbing the best qualities of moral teachings of the surrounding

⁴⁹ *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography*, pg. 50

⁵⁰ *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* pg. 250

⁵¹ *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, pg. 191

⁵² "J.R.R Tolkien '1892-1973' - A Study Of The Maker Of Middle-earth" *Youtube*, Published: 13th of February 2013, Accessed: 20th April 2019 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkmNHP58OhU&t=280s>>

pagan cultures. In certain cases such behavior was not only acceptable but even desirable. St Augustine encourages early Christians:

"Raid the treasures of the pagans just as the Israelites brought gold out of Egypt. Many virtues may flourish among the pagan nations, even though they have not yet been reached by the Gospel since God's Grace is omnipresent. Yet they remain somewhat incomplete, till they are enhanced by divine grace, which may bring it even beyond the limits of average human capacities."⁵³

2.2 The Religious Environment of Middle-earth

At first glance, the cultural environment of the story seems to be set onto the background of a European pagan, most likely Germanic, society, shortly before the arrival of Christianity. However, if we take a closer look at the positive values demonstrated and praised by the main protagonists, we soon find out that many of them are surprisingly incompatible with the value system of a heroic society. One great example is the understanding of courage, and heroism suggested to the reader throughout the novels. The attitude shown by the warrior characters towards their task is the very opposite of what we would expect, they fight because of their duty to protect their land and people, not because they desire heroic deeds and subsequent fame and glory. In the end, it's Boromir's desire to have the One Ring, defeat Sauron and enjoy the glory and power it would bring that causes his betrayal and subsequent death. Faramir's words best exemplify this untraditional attitude to Frodo.

"I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, or the arrow for its swiftness, or the warrior for his glory, I love only that which they defend."⁵⁴ (A Window to the West)

Another contradictory virtue is the one which forms the very backbone of the story- pity. The pity Bilbo and Frodo show towards Gollum would be unacceptable in pagan societies- to show mercy to a murderer would be unimaginable, and a traitor would deserve nothing but death. However, Gandalf aims to enforce the very opposite attitude as best illustrated in his conversation with Frodo concerning Gollum.

⁵³ Wood, pg.76

⁵⁴ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007) 59 All subsequent references are to this edition.

“‘I do not feel any pity for Gollum. He deserves death.’ ‘Deserves death! I daresay he does. Many that live deserve death. And some die that deserve life. Can you give that to them? Then be not too eager to deal out death in the name of justice, fearing for your own safety. Even the wise cannot see all ends.’”⁵⁵

Shortly after its release, *The Lord of the Rings* was described as "a book with no religion"⁵⁶, that is, no recognizable (organized) religious practices. This view has dramatically changed with the publication of *The Silmarillion*. We learn that the world of Arda was created by Eru, the One, a monotheistic deity strongly reminiscent of the Christian God (Tolkien himself has later confirmed this theory) who, although not being physically present in the created world, directly influences the events of the whole history either by direct intervention or by the invisible workings of his Providence. As a result, all events are a part of the divine plan, which will not be revealed until the Judgment day -The Last Battle, in which all evil shall be defeated, its marring undone and the harmony of all things restored. There is a dark presence of fate or doom detectable in the novels, comparable to the one of the pagan Germanic epic (e.g. *Beowulf*). This world- view is shared by Catholics, yet dramatically transformed by hope.

“‘Actually I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect 'history' to be anything but a 'long defeat' – though it contains (and in a legend may contain more clearly and movingly) some samples or glimpses of final victory.’”⁵⁷

As suggested by Goodham’s theory, there is no sign of organized religion in all of Tolkien’s fiction.⁵⁸ There are several hardly noticeable traces of a further unspecified religious practices, such as the notion there was a custom of worshipping the One during the Golden age of Númenor in *The Silmarillion* or Faramir's gaze to the West before the dinner served in "A Window to the West", a tradition most likely brought the few faithful who have managed to escape the downfall of Númenor. This absence does not necessarily suggest Tolkien's intention to create a world completely void of religion. As R. Wood suggests, the Third Age in which *The Lord of the Rings* is set in the ancient times long before the events of the Bible.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007)

⁵⁶ All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵⁷ Wood, pg. 127

⁵⁸ Letters of J.R.R Tolkien, pg. 273

⁵⁹ McAvan, pg. 153

⁵⁹ Ralph C. Wood. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*: A Christian Classic Revisited (a Leaders article)

This theory can be supported by one of the posthumously published work - *The Debate of Finrod and Adreth*. In this work, there is a mention of the belief that Eru himself will once enter the created world to deliver the mortal men from death. There are other possible links that can be suggested, such as possible foreshadowing of the Holy Trinity through Eru, the Flame Imperishable and the incarnate God mentioned above or the the worship of Virgin Mary through the veneration of Varda and Galadriel. In *The Peoples of Middle-Earth*, Christopher Tolkien supports the theory of pre-biblical age by offering an account of the primitive stage of religion during the Third Age.

“They had little or no religion in the sense of worship. There are thus no temples or 'churches' or fanes in this 'world' among 'good' peoples. For help, they may call on a *Vala*(as *Elbereth*), as Catholic might on a Saint, though no doubt knowing in theory as well as he that the power of the Vala was limited and derivative. However, this is a 'primitive age': and these folk may be said to view the Valar as children view their parents or immediate adult superiors, and though they know, they are subjects of the King he does not live in their country nor have there any dwelling.”⁶⁰

2. 3 Gandalf

When approaching the task of assessing if and to what extent is Gandalf a character whose roots lay in the Christian tradition, it would be useful first to make clear what he quite certainly is not; a purely allegorical image of particular biblical character, as seen in, for example, the case of C. S. Lewis' Aslan. It is undeniable that the view of Gandalf as a Christ figure has a certain basis. E. McAvan draws attention to the remarkable similarities between specific episodes involving Gandalf and the biblical account of the life of Jesus.⁶¹ Probably the most prominent among them is her comparison of Saruman's attempt to corrupt Gandalf to the devil's temptation in the desert or Gandalf's reunion with the rest of the fellowship and their inability to recognize him as corresponding to the events found in Mark and Luke. And while those are undeniably interesting observations, while the first episode could be explained

⁶⁰ The *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 209

⁶¹ McAvan, pg. 108-109

simply as a generic episode of temptation, by no means exclusive to the context of the Bible, in the case of the second one, the members of the fellowship did not recognize Gandalf, simply because they considered him dead and have been warned against Saruman roaming the area.

Referring to Gandalf's return from the dead as 'resurrection' is misleading and based on insufficient evidence. He does not intentionally die for the whole of mankind, and his 'resurrection' is possible simply because he is an immortal being whose life is independent of its physical body. Neither does the very moment of his rising from the death signify a groundbreaking event in the spiritual life of the Men of Middle- Earth. In the words of Ralph Wood:

“Gandalf is not resurrected but resuscitated. He is brought back to life after having been killed. Tolkien knows that, while there have been many resuscitations, there is only one Resurrection.”⁶²

Instead of viewing Gandalf as a Christ figure, we should view him merely as Christ-like, i.e., a characteristic which is not restricted to a single individual or a chosen few, but an aspiration of every good Christian. Besides, it is not a single outstanding event, but the consistency of his behavior that sets him apart as a “Christian” character. As Tolkien notes in his letters, the mission of the wizards has essentially failed.⁶³ While it is outside of Gandalf's powers to prevent the return of Sauron and protect the people of Middle- Earth from the horrors of war, it is his faithfulness to his mission and his extraordinary perseverance that allow him alone to fully pass the test.

Gandalf attitude to his task is characterized by extraordinary humility and his understanding of the ordeals imposed onto him as “taking up the cross”⁶⁴ In “The Bridge of Khazad Dum”, his decision to stay behind and give up his life in order to save the fellowship demands him to accept his personal failure as the one who was supposed to stop Sauron, surrender and pass the lead over the situation into the hands of “the Authority”.

“For in his condition it was for him a *sacrifice* to perish on the Bridge in defence of his companions, less perhaps than for a mortal Man or Hobbit, since he had a far

⁶² Wood, pg. 16

⁶³ *Letters of J.R.R Tolkien*, pg. 217

⁶⁴ Rutledge, pg.163

greater inner power than they; but also more, since it was a humbling and abnegation of himself in conformity to 'the Rules'. (...) He was handing over to the Authority that ordained the Rules, and giving up personal hope of success.”⁶⁵

The negotiating scene in “The Voice of Saruman” shows us that this is precisely what Saruman was incapable of. When Gandalf offers him forgiveness after his defeat, he is infuriated. The same happens in the case of Frodo, who offers to let him go in “The Scouring of the Shire”. Saruman cannot accept any of these offers, being unable to accept that he is being robbed of self-pity.

2.4 Good vs. Evil Magic

The ultimate root of all evil in Tolkien's universe is the desire for absolute power and rule over the minds of others. Melkor, the first creature to rebel against Eru's will and Arda's Fallen Angel, was guilty of precisely of this sin. It was the desire for absolute power which brought evil and chaos into the once perfect universe. As a result, an integral aspect of humility in the context of Tolkien's fiction is the understanding of the necessity to let others act according to their own will and conscience. Gandalf understands that forced virtue hardly ever leads to any good, even though it was forced upon others with the best intentions. This understanding of freedom corresponds to the teachings of St. Paul or St. Augustine, who define the true freedom as the liberty to choose and do good, while to do evil means to act unfreely, to exercise enslaved will.⁶⁶

The question of humility and free will inevitably lead us to another, quite controversial issue. The concept of wizardry is traditionally seen as something utterly incompatible with Christian beliefs. As we learn from the Deuteronomy:

“There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. Alternatively, a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or *a wizard*, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and

⁶⁵ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 217

because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.” (18:10-12, King James Bible)

To understand how Tolkien manages to combine these two seemingly incompatible systems, it is necessary to draw a line between the two types of magic he recognizes⁶⁷. First, there is the sinister one, which seeks to alter and twist the Creation according to one’s own will, usually based on “desire [for] power in this world, domination of other things and wills”⁶⁸, in extreme cases, even to manipulate God's plans and intentions. This is the magic of Sauron and Saruman. Both their magic and their cunning machines serve to produce “immediacy: speed, reduction of labor, and reduction also to a minimum (or vanishing point) of the gap between the idea or desire and the result or effect.”⁶⁹ This is also the type of magic that aims to control the minds and wills of others.

Gandalf, on the other hand, performs magic of a wholly different kind, and more importantly, has an absolutely different motivation. His magic is either a form of art, heightening our regard for the glory of the Creation, or an inevitable defense against the evil. He does never use magic as a quick fix for complex and confusing situations, having in mind that good creation needs time and patience. Discussing the problematics of ‘magic’ in one of his letters⁷⁰, Tolkien mentions the terms of *magia*, the good magic, and *goeteia* the evil magic in one of his letters, but he immediately refuses this distinction in the discourse of his work, because in his view, the only thing that creates the difference between “good” or “evil” magic is the purpose of its use.

"The Enemy's operations are by no means all goetic deceits, but 'magic' that produces real effects in the physical world. However, his *magia* he uses to bulldoze both people and things, and his *goeteia* to terrify and subjugate. Their *magia* the Elves and Gandalf use (sparingly): a *magia*, producing real results (like fire in a wet wood) for specific beneficent purposes. Their goetic effects are entirely *artistic* and not intended to deceive.”⁷¹

Concerning the biblical tradition, it should also be added that in *The Lord of the Rings*, magic is not available to mortal men. Even in certain controversial moments, such as Aragorn's

⁶⁷ Wood, pg. 28

⁶⁸ *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 215

⁶⁹ *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 215

⁷⁰ *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 208

⁷¹ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 208

healing powers, were explained by Tolkien himself either as "a blend of magic with pharmacy and 'hypnotic' processes"⁷² and the fact that Aragorn is indeed not a mere man, but one of the descendants of Melian the Maia. And finally, Gandalf's magic does not result from communication with supernatural forces but comes from his "angelic" nature.

There is one more thing left to consider when approaching Gandalf as a wizard figure in a Christian fantasy. While he is referred to as a wizard, a word most readers perceive as synonymous with magician or sorcerer, the reading intended by Tolkien is different from the one of the average reader. In its original meaning, the very name of Gandalf's "profession" implies wisdom. Both the Common Speech/ English (wizard - late Middle English wysar(d, < wys, wis, wiss, wise adj. + -ard suffix and Elvish name (Istari- Quenya for "Wise Ones") suggests wisdom as the fundamental quality of Gandalf's order.⁷³

Wisdom is also a central motif of the biblical tradition⁷⁴, especially Proverbs and The Ecclesiastes. In the context of the Bible, wisdom is usually connected with old age, but also self- control, humility, honesty, and the ability to accept the council of others. In this respect, Gandalf's persona is much closer to a biblical prophet than Christ himself. His leading role in the story is not to directly intervene, but to act as the mediator of the divine will, a guide and an advisor to the people of middle earth. While Christ himself has acted as a *rabbi*, a teacher, during his life on earth, Gandalf's "teaching" lacks the revolutionary savour of the New Testament; instead, he mostly focuses on the revival and reinforcement of traditional values.

The wisdom he presents the other protagonists with is often transmitted in the form of stories, parables, and rhymes of lore. Gandalf, just like the other members of the company (each in a way slightly different to the others, depending on their nature), also often uses aphorisms, among which the most memorable ones might be "He that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom"⁷⁵ or "A traitor may betray himself and do good that he does not intend."⁷⁶ In *The Lord of the Rings*, special attention is also given to orally transmitted knowledge, often in the form of poetry. Tolkien knew the power of language well, as well as its vulnerability to corruption and use for evil means, such as in the case of Saruman's speech to the fellowship and Theoden. *The Lord of the Rings* contains numerous

⁷² *The Letters of J.R.R Tolkien*, pg. 215

⁷³ *The Unfinished Tales*, pg. 273

⁷⁴ Wood, pg. 77

⁷⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2007) pg. 815 All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁷⁶ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, pg. 259

poems, which are used by the characters to narrate a story or explain a problem. A good example would be Gandalf teaching Pippin about the Downfall of Númenor by reciting the following verses:

*Tall ships and tall kings,
three times three.
What brought they
from the foundered land
Over the flowing sea?
Seven stars and seven stones.
And one white tree. (“The Palantír”)⁷⁷*

Nevertheless, as has already been mentioned in the previous sections, it is necessary to bear in mind that besides several universally praised virtues such as courage, wisdom or patience, some of the virtues exhibited and propagated by Gandalf are not only Christian, but exclusively Christian.⁷⁸ Besides mercy and pity, R. Wood draws attention also to the less known ones, such as temperance or prudence. While nowadays, the word prudent will most likely commonly be interpreted as small minded or inaccessible to unusual or progressive ideas, but the original meaning of this word is concerned with self-discipline and the ability to avoid hasty and unpremeditated decisions. All Christian virtues are based on self-control.

Gandalf's ability to self-control is best seen in his extraordinary patience. As has been discussed above, patience is a key aspect of all good work and creation. Gandalf never acts in haste unless necessary and never makes hasty, unpremeditated decisions. It takes him many years to realize the One Ring has all this time been in the Shire, hidden in Bilbo's pocket. Even when he gains the suspicion that Bilbo's ring could be the One, instead of acting immediately, he leaves for Gondor, to study all available material which would allow him to identify the ring without any doubt and better understand its nature.

Nevertheless, it is also necessary to mention that a crucial aspect of the moral message is the profound imperfection and humanity of the characters. None of the characters is neither utterly free of fear nor infallible. The reader is repeatedly made aware that perfect virtue not only does not exist, but any virtue might have its shortcomings. Gandalf repeatedly bids the members of the fellowship to show pity to those who have trespassed against them,

⁷⁷*The Return of the King*, pg. 597

⁷⁸ Wood, pg. 57

but pity is paradoxically also Gandalf's greatest weakness. He is aware that often, it is good intentions that lead to the greatest evil. One of the most prominent moments revealing the nature of Gandalf's character is his refusal of The Ring.

Gandalf, though hardly tempted by any selfish desires, is subject to capacity even more dangerous for anyone who would wield the ring. While most of us are able, with a smaller or greater strain of will, resist using evil means for our benefit, it is incomparably harder to resist the temptation of using *any* means, for the good of the others. The better and nobler the person is, the stronger the temptation. As we have already discussed in the question of magic, Gandalf understands that evil means will never lead to good ends. Moreover, those incredibly good may sometimes even forgive and thus "loose the necessary tie between mercy and justice, pardon and repentance."⁷⁹

And in the end, a virtue all the characters have to demonstrate at some point is not only courage but mainly hope. The members of the fellowship voluntarily great face evil, while having hardly any hope that it actually could be defeated. Gandalf cannot offer any quick fix of the situation, nor does he promise personal salvation and a safe and comfortable life to any of the members of the fellowship. "We should seek a final end of this menace, even if we do not hope to make one"⁸⁰. Such determination to fight for the Good naturally denies many a sacrifice, and often may claim even one's life.

⁷⁹Wood, pg. 60

⁸⁰*The Fellowship of the Ring*, pg. 66

3 Gandalf, Odin, and Vainamoinen, The Influence of Teutonic and Finnish Mythology

From character names and toponyms, over fictional languages to plot episodes, an influence of Scandinavian mythology and heroic epic can be found in Tolkien's work on many occasions and levels⁸¹. While professionally, he was recognized mostly as a Professor of Anglo-Saxon, this area was by no means the only object of his personal and professional interest. When he held the Rawlinson and Bosworth Chair of Anglo-Saxon on the Oxford University, between the years 1925-1945⁸², he also taught a significant part of the Old Norse courses.⁸³ However, the roots of this interest reach far into the early forming years of Tolkien's fiction and fictional mythology and are inevitably tied with the development of his imagination.

The aim of the following chapter is to analyse the extent to which Tolkien's wizard relies on the models offered by the Teutonic god Odin and Vainamoinen, the ancient hero of the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, and as a result, to what extent he represents an original literary character and a historical step forward in the portrayal of wizard figures in fantasy, or on the contrary, relies on the romanticized portrayal of the pagan cultures and their deities of historical fiction or alternatively historical fantasy.

However, before we approach the analysis itself, it is necessary to understand the extraordinary variety of sources which the studies of Odin rely upon. As any mythological figure, Odin has been altered and transformed by the folk imagination and split into many separate figures. Nevertheless, there are certainly some core characteristics which remain common to all of them. Another influence worth short discussion is the history of the development of the scholarly approach to the figure and the prevailing interpretation of its function and origin. The following brief historical overview is intended to allow the reader to understand better the tradition, of which Tolkien as a scholar in this field was aware and might have been influenced by.

⁸¹ Tom Shippey, *Roots and Branches – Selected Papers on Tolkien* (Zollikofen: WalkingTreePublishers, 2007) 20

⁸² *The Historical Register of the University of Oxford*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888

⁸³A. A. Jon, "An Investigation of the Teutonic God Óðinn; and a study of his relationship to J. R.R. Tolkien's character" – a thesis (University of Canterbury, 1997) pg. 41

All subsequent references refer to this edition.

3. 1. 1 A brief history of the 'Odin Studies'

The first English publications dealing with Teutonic mythology emerged during the latter half of the 18th century, encouraged by the era's heightened interest in folklore and mythology, with Thomas Percy's *Northern Antiquities* as the most popular of these pioneering works. The first attempts of a scholarly analysis of the mythological material and its origin began to appear at the beginning of the 19th, with prevailing majority of scholars interpreting the origin of the Norse gods as reflection of the Classical ones. Other noteworthy introductory publications of this period are, e.g., *Heroes of Asgard* by Annie Keary or Padraic Colum's *The Children of Odin*.

In 1940, the Norwegian-born historian Peter A. Munch published *Norse Mythologies: Legends of Gods and Heroes*, which rapidly gained wide popularity. He claimed the Norse religion to be of significantly later origin than expected and strongly influenced by Christianity, the New Testament in particular. He based his theory on the perceived similarity of the narrative strategies, vocabulary, and imagery (especially OE poetry, e.g. "Dream of the Root's" tree imagery or the depiction of the cross as *wundrestreo* in "Elene"). Sophus Bugge further elaborates on this theory by co-dating the creation of the Teutonic mythology with the Viking raids and identifying the Christian material rather as an impulse for reworking the prior pagan materials rather than the spark for their origin.

This theory was later opposed by James Fraser's *The Golden Bough*, which firstly introduces the idea of interpreting the central pillar of the theory of Christian influence – Odin's Ordeal – in the context of shamanic practices, a theory which was accepted and supported by Professor H. Munro Chadwick in *The Cult of Odin*. This is also the time of the publication of Jacob L.C. Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology*. An alternative explanation may be found in Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* next to the prevailing viewpoint of Odin as a Scandinavian deity offer also a theory of the existence of an individual who has tricked the primitive peoples of Scandinavia into believing he is one. W. A. Craigie, and Oxford Professor of the Old Norse under whom Tolkien studied deals with the same problem in his *The Icelandic Sagas*.

The very opposite of Munch's theory was suggested by E.E. Kellert's *The Religion of Our Northern Ancestors* or C.V. Pilcher's *An Icelandic Divine Comedy* which claims the existence of the subjects common to both the Teutonic and Christian tradition might not be a result of the Pagans borrowing from the Christians, but the other way around.

At the first half of the 20th century, Fraser's interpretation was already established as the prevailing opinion and even further elaborated by others. Of particular significance might also be seen the work of Tolkien's direct student E.O.G Turville-Petre. In his *Myth and Religion of the North*, he not only further elaborates on the Christian- pagan question, but also comments on the significance of Odin's animal companions and the geographical distribution of Odin's cult.

3. 1. 2 Gandalf and Odin.

To begin with the obvious, it would be probably not entirely wrong to assume, that in the case of most readers, the perceived similarity of the two characters is based on their extraordinary physical resemblance. In the vast majority of the surviving materials, Odin appears in human form (although he is capable of shape-shifting), as a man of about "fifty- five winters"⁸⁴, missing one eye. In his full attire, he wears a horned helmet or a blue cloak, a magical spear called *Gungnir* and a ring called *Draupnir*.⁸⁵ While traveling over Midgard in disguise, he wears a cloak and a wide-brimmed hat, which hides his missing eye, and a walking-staff instead of his spear, as seen in *The Volsunga Saga*. Upon their first encounter with Gandalf, the reader is given the following description:

"All that the unsuspecting Bilbo saw that morning was an old man with a staff. He had a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots. (...) and along bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat. ⁸⁶"(*The Hobbit*, "The Unexpected Party").

However, although the visual resemblance is undeniable, if we take into account Tolkien's lifelong career in philology and deep fascination with language, we should probably pay far greater attention to the linguistic aspect of his fiction. And while we might argue that the appearance of the character is to a certain extent shared among many generic wizard characters and other figures which fit the old wise man archetype, and as a result, may to

⁸⁴A.A. Jon, pg. 19

⁸⁵ Turville-Petre, pg.

⁸⁶ Tolkien, J. R. R., and Douglas A. Anderson ed., *The Annotated Hobbit* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 24

certain extent rely not only on Odin himself, but also other derived figures of folk imagination, such as G. Mahler's *Berggeist*⁸⁷, Tolkien's choice of names and titles given to the wizard represents linguistic evidence not only of his in-depth knowledge of the Teutonic mythology but also of its intentional employment in his fiction.

Before we approach the discussion of particular names itself, it is essential to mention, that already the multiplicity of their names reflect a shared characteristic. It has been recognized already by Snorri Sturluson, that this characteristic denotes the figure as known and familiar to a wide variety of cultures or /and nations, "who wished to invoke Odin in their own language" and under various circumstances.⁸⁸ The same can be applied to Gandalf, as exemplified by the following quote:

"Many are my names in many countries: Mithrandir among the Elves, Tharkûn to the Dwarves; Olórin I was in my youth in the West that is forgotten, in the South Incánus, in the North Gandalf; to the East I go not." (*The Two Towers*, The Window on the West)⁸⁹

The name **Gandalf** itself, notoriously taken from *The Poetic Edda's* "Voluspá", is an Old Norse compound of the words *gand* (staff) and *alfr* (elf). The "staff" may suggest either a walking staff or possibly even a wand, and elves were traditionally associated with magic in the Norse mythology, the resulting translation usually being "staff bearing elf" or "magical (or magic-making) elf".⁹⁰ Tolkien has taken advantage of this translation in order to describe the common perception of Gandalf among the peoples of the North: "He was called Gandalf, 'the Elf of the Wand', for they deemed him (...) to be of Elven-kind".⁹¹ Nevertheless, although the origin of Gandalf's name is clear, we cannot forget it was initially assigned to a dwarf with no apparent connection to the Norse god.

Although there is no known closely corresponding title for Odin, several scholars have discovered a few possible links. A. A. Jon notes, that in some Anglo-Saxon medicinal text, the healing abilities of Odin have been closely tied with the magic of the elves.⁹² Lee M.

⁸⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, *A Biography*, pg. 56

⁸⁸ Turville-Petre, E.O.G., *Myth and Religion of the North; The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1975) 62 All subsequent references are to this edition

⁸⁹ *The Two Towers*, pg. 670

⁹⁰ Shippey, pg. 196

⁹¹ *The Unfinished Tales*, pg. 279

⁹² A.A.Jon, pg. 95

Hollander supports this theory by an alternative translation of the word *Gandalfr*, based on the fact elves were often believed to be the souls of the deceased ancestors.⁹³ In such case, the translation of the word *alfr* could be something along the lines of 'a soul of the ancestors', which would in the Teutonic cosmology undoubtedly refer to Ódin as the all-father figure and correspond to such titles as *Alfaddir*.⁹⁴

The second title most commonly used for Gandalf is *Mithrandir/The Grey Wanderer*. Moreover, as has been already mentioned above, the depiction of Odin in a wanderer disguise is well known and reappears throughout the Germanic sagas and literary tradition. Both characters appear as an old man, the "Grey" in their name referring to both the colour of their hair and beard and their cloak. Some of the names of Odin are Hárbarðr (Grey-beard) or Loðungr ("shaggy-cloak wearer")⁹⁵. Furthermore, A.A. Jon supports the idea of the relation of the characters' titles by an etymological analysis and translation of another of Ódin's names - "Gangleri" translating it as "way-worn" or even simply "a wanderer"⁹⁶.

However, it is necessary to put the linguistic aspect aside for a while and consider the nature of Gandalf's journeys. His lack of a permanent seat is often juxtaposed against the rest of his order as a sign of his detachment from the temporary nature of his task and the absence of desire for establishing a commanding position. While Gandalf travels as a herald of the West in order to build a relationship of trust with the nations of Middle-earth and to give advice and encouragement where needed, Odin's expeditions are mostly heroic endeavours for fame and glory, typical for the Germanic heroic myth. While Gandalf's mission aims to create a sense of community, Odin often leaves behind destruction and chaos.

Among the Teutons, Odin was primarily considered the god of war and death.⁹⁷ As the warrior who has never lost a fight, he was believed to have the power to decide the outcome of a battle and grant victory to his favourites. The motif of a hero who gains his favour reoccurs on many occasions in the Scandinavian literary materials; a great example can be found in the case of Sigmund and Sigurd, as seen below. The chosen hero would be often given the leadership of a nation, advice on tactics, a glimpse of his future fate, or even immunity against wounds by a weapon. But not all of the means used by the god or the trials

⁹³ Snorri Sturluson and Lee M. Hollander transl, *Heimskringla* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2011) pg. 336

⁹⁴ A.A.Jon, pg. 95

⁹⁵ Odin's names and titles. Encyclopedia Mythica. Published: Thursday, 16th of July 2009. Accessed: 2nd of March 2019 <https://pantheon.org/articles/o/odins_names.html >

⁹⁶A.A.Jon, pg. 11

⁹⁷Turville-Petre, pg. 50

he puts in the hero's way are pleasant, his favour is uncertain and unreliable, and in many cases, or rather sooner or later, he decides to withhold his former support.

“Now when the battle had gone on for some time, a man who had on a black cloak and a hat coming low down on his face entered the fray. He had but one eye, and in his hand, he held a spear. The man advanced towards King Sigmund, raising his spear to bar his way, and when king Edmund struck fiercely. His sword hit against the spear and split in two. After this, the balance of the causalities shifted.”⁹⁸ (The Saga of the Volsungs)

The king dies in this battle. While such move might seem to the reader simply as Odin playing god', the reason for taking the hero's life abruptly and often at a very young age is very logical within the context of the Norse afterlife. As O.E.G. Turville-Petre suggests, while Odin is aware of the prophecy of Ragnarok, he does not know the precise time of its arrival and as a result, needs to have every good warrior among his einherjar as soon as he proves his worth⁹⁹. Gandalf's himself has no supernatural power over the outcome of the War of the Ring; his success in war relies solely on his strategic skills as a general.

Olórin, Gandalf's forgotten name, appears in the whole of *The Lord of the Rings* only once, reappearing only on a single occasion in *The Silmarillion*. *The Unfinished Tales* include an etymological analysis of the word's root made by Tolkien himself, identifying its meaning as "'a dream', but certainly not the dreams of sleep, (but rather) a clear vision in mind".¹⁰⁰ Dreams were considered of great importance to the majority of the ancient civilizations, including the Teutonic people and were often believed to bear prophetic qualities or reveal hidden things. An example of this way of thinking within the frame of the *Eddas* can be found in the story of Baldr's Dream, where the son of Odin foresees his death in his dreams or Brunhild's prediction of Gunnar's death. Such revelations of hidden wisdom could also be doubtlessly connected with Odin.

While the motif of dreams and visions most likely refers to Gandalf's earlier life as a Maia of Irmo, the “master of dreams” as mentioned in 'The Valaquenta' and the notion that in the hearts of those who listened to him, he awoke thoughts “of fair things that had not yet

⁹⁸ R.G. Fincg transl., Sigurdur Nordal and E.O.G. Petre-Turville ed., *Volsunga Saga/The Saga of the Volsungs*, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965.) pg. 12

⁹⁹ Turville-Petre, pg. 53

¹⁰⁰ *The Unfinished Tales*, pg. 279

been but might yet be made for the enrichment of Arda.”¹⁰¹ This information does not necessarily have to be restricted to Gandalf’s earlier life and in relation to Odin, was quite likely not intended to refer to prophetic dreams and visions, but rather powerful words of encouragement as seen in, for example, the case of Theoden. Also, while the motif of encouragement might be applied to Odin as well, what sets the two apart is again the motivation behind their actions a

The last title to be discussed comes from Gríma Wormtongue’s mocking commentary upon Gandalf’s arrival to the Hall of Metuseld:

Such is the hour in which this wanderer chooses to return. Why indeed should we welcome you, Master **Stormcrow**? *Lathspell* I name you, Ill-news; and ill news is an ill guest they say.’¹⁰²(TTT, King of the Golden Hall)

If attempting for a literal translation, it would be considerably easier to find a match compared to the previous two, since ravens and crows are closely tied to Odin’s persona, the “corresponding” name being Hrafnár (Raven-God)¹⁰³. The same can be said about storms, as Odin was in certain cultures associated with storm and fury, the word itself appearing in several of his names, i.e., Viddrir (Storm- Maker) or Ýrungr (Stormy)¹⁰⁴. However, what A. A. Jon. seems to overlook, is that when analysing this particular name, not only should we not forget that this particular one was given to Gandalf under very specific circumstances and meant rather as an insult than an honouring description, but also that Gandalf’s association with war is dramatically different than in the case of the Norse god’s.

Gandalf resorts to violence and military intervention only in cases of need. He bids the nations of Middle-earth to war, but to a defensive and a just war. He does bring ill news but only to open people's eyes and stir them against their common enemy. As he says himself, "Yet in two ways may man come with evil tidings. He may be a worker of evil or may be such as leaves well alone and comes only to bring aid in times of need.”¹⁰⁵ When it comes to family relations and friendship, he does not disturb them for his amusement but emphasizes their value in one’s life. In this respect, the two characters represent polar opposites. Odin, as

¹⁰¹ *The Unfinished Tales*, pg. 279

¹⁰² *The Two Towers*, pg.

¹⁰³ A.A.Jon, pg. 98

¹⁰⁴ Odin's names and titles. Encyclopedia Mythica. Published: Thursday, 16th of July 2009. Accessed: 2nd of March 2019 <https://pantheon.org/articles/o/odins_names.html >

¹⁰⁵ *The Two Towers*, pg.

a god of war, on the other hand, actively promotes strife. In the most detailed sources, he is described as an “evil and sinister (god, who) highest delighted, especially in fratricidal strife and conflict between kinsmen.”¹⁰⁶

On the other hand, the association with a particular animal is another prominent shared feature to be considered. When depicted as sitting on his throne in Valhalla, Odin is traditionally accompanied by two wolves and an equal number of ravens. When it comes to the role of wolves in Tolkien’s fiction, it is purely negative. In both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, wolves (or wargs) appear as allies of the evil and as a danger threatening the company. Wolves and werewolves were to the Teutonic people the embodiment of evil in its purest form¹⁰⁷ and clearly belong to the Odin, the cruel and bloodthirsty god of war, as suggested by the names of Odin’s hounds, Geri (the greedy one) and Freki (the ravenous one). Numerous stories are available, where Odin unnecessarily kills creatures or people who did not pose any danger to him, mostly for his own amusement and pleasure. On the contrary, in the case of Gandalf, such action would be unimaginable. This might be interpreted in the same manner as Gandalf’s connection with the Merlin tradition, which will be discussed in the last chapter. While Odin represents the powerful merging of both good and evil qualities, Gandalf represents only the pure good.

Another motif often mentioned in the discussion of Tolkien’s possible inspiration found in the Norse myth are eagles, the deus-ex-machina force of Middle-Earth and another link between Gandalf and the figure of Odin. While eagles themselves may be of lesser importance to the latter, the characters’ symbolical linkage to birds offers a parallel to Odin’s ravens. Just like in the case of the ravens, their original function within Tolkien’s universe was the one of messengers and news-bearers.

“Yes,’ said Gandalf, ‘that was Gwaihir the Windlord, who rescued me from Orthanc. I sent him before me to watch the River and gather tidings.’” (TTT, *The White Rider*)¹⁰⁸

This motif strongly resembles the role of Odin’s ravens – Huginn (thought) and Muninn (memory)¹⁰⁹, who fly around the world each day and bring back news. This motif would be even more apparent in the case of Manwë, who also, in a certain way, sends his eagles around the world to bring news.

¹⁰⁶ Turville-Petre, pg. 60

¹⁰⁷ Turville-Petre, pg. 60

¹⁰⁸ *The Two Towers*, pg. 495

¹⁰⁹ Snorri Sturluson, Adam Henry Bellows transl., *The Poetic Edda*. (Public Domain, 1936) 93

"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. Thus they brought word to him of well nigh all that passed in Arda"
(*Silmarillion*, 'Valaquenta')¹¹⁰

But it is necessary to remember, that the eagles of Tolkien's universe are autonomous characters that possess reason. Gifted with extraordinary intelligence, they seem to forsake most of the "lower habits" of their kind (which could also be extended to other talking animals appearing in Tolkien's novels). In the case of Hugin and Munin, on the other hand, as Turville- Petre notes¹¹¹, their inseparability and their names suggest that there are not autonomous characters but to great extent just separate extension of Odin's mind.

Just like in the case of Odin's ravens, Tolkien's eagles appear mostly in connection with battle or another type of imminent danger. While in Gandalf's case the eagles come to help on his command in times of need, in Odin's case, thanks to his shape-shifting abilities, it is him who takes the shape of an eagle as in, for example, *Skaldskapármal*, where he uses this ability to escape the giant Stuttung.¹¹² And lastly, both Gandalf and Odin ride exceptional horses, both to a various extent of divine origin. Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged horse, was the offspring of Loki and the stallion Svathilfari¹¹³ while Shadowfax was one of the Maerás, who was believed by the people of Rohan to be brought to Middle-Earth by Oromë.

On the other hand, the description/depiction of Sleipnir bears many implications which cannot be applied to Shadowfax (and to Gandalf in consequence). In Norse mythology, horses were perceived as a symbol of fertility.¹¹⁴ Grey horses, on the other hand, or more specifically figures riding them symbolize the coming of disaster or death, thus making Odin symbolical portrayal of the cycle of life and death. This again makes Sleipnir more of a projection of part of Odin's persona (he would himself sometimes take the shape of a horse) than a separate character.

3. 1. 3 Odin's Ordeal

¹¹⁰J.R.R. Tolkien and Christopher Tolkien ed., *The Silmarillion* (London: HarperCollins Ltd, 1977) 13

¹¹¹Turville-Petre, pg.58

¹¹²The Poetic Edda, pg. 51

¹¹³The Poetic Edda, pg. 103

¹¹⁴Turville-Petre, pg. 56-57

Just like in the case of Christ discussed in the previous chapter, Odin's self-sacrifice in order to gain the knowledge of the runes as found in "Hávamal", represents a crucial episode in the development of the character and to great extent, also the plot into which they are set, and as a result, offers another alternative explanation of the events in "The Bridge of Khazad-dum" to the biblical story of crucifixion, as described in previous section.

As has already been touched upon above, in the early studies, this myth is often presented as a result of the influence of Christianity on the creation of Teutonic mythology. A perfect representation of this point of view are the works of the Norwegian scholar, Peter Andreas Munch. In his *Norse Mythology: Legends of Gods and Heroes*, he claims that the Norse religion/ mythology is actually much younger than expected, especially Odin, who was created as a Christ-like character¹¹⁵. The basis of this argument was indeed 'Odin's Ordeal' - the story supposedly depicting a god sacrificing himself by hanging himself on a tree (which was explained as a standard alternation of the original material to fit the new cultural environment¹¹⁶) for the future good of his people. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the sacrifice of Christ and Odin.

Odin did not sacrifice himself to or for anyone, only to himself, giving himself up to his magical powers. This is performed by deliberate suppressing of one's bodily needs, usually by fasting or some form of self-harm. As has been mentioned above, Rolf Pipping and J. Fraser linked Odin's act with shamanic practices¹¹⁷. Besides the obvious, there are also other signs of the possibility to characterize Odin as a shaman; his connection with animals, healing skills and shape-shifting abilities as well as the ability to travel to Hel or generally between the worlds, or alternatively, abandon his physical body and travel only in the form of a spirit. As the later interpretation has become generally, a great discrepancy arises between the motivation the two acts of self-sacrifice- while Odin sacrifices himself to gain almost unlimited knowledge and, the other surrenders, while one "dies" for his own gain and power, the other sacrifices himself for the survival of his comrades.



In certain respect, Gandalf's acceptance of his fate might be linked to the concept of *wyrd*, which in Odin's case reflects, for example, in his reaction to then Seeress's prophecy of *Ragnarok*. Nevertheless, Odin's shaman persona, just like in the case of Merlin's role of a

¹¹⁵ Peter Andreas Munch and Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt transl., *Norse Mythology: Legends of Gods and Heroes*. (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1926.) pg. 22

¹¹⁶ A.A. Jon, pg.62

¹¹⁷ A.A.Jon, pg. 50

Wild Man, is an aspect which Tolkien chose to transfer onto the last member of the Order, Radagast the Brown, who remains a faithful imitation of the original. Interestingly enough, the motif of the knowledge of the runes appears in Tolkien's fiction as well. But while Gandalf and Elrond are presented as powerful rune-masters (although this motif appears only in *The Hobbit*), neither of them did not undergo any type of trial to achieve knowledge of the runes.

Also, interestingly enough, the runes used in Tolkien's works are supposed to come from a rune writing system called *Cirth* (as seen on Balin's tomb¹¹⁸), which although being visually based on *Futhark*, does not correspond in symbolical meaning or sound value. For example, the rune Gandalf uses to mark his initials on Bilbo's door is  a sign called *fehu* in the Futhark and representing the letter/sound "f". If Tolkien would like to draw a direct connection between Gandalf and Odin via this particular means, he would have chosen the rune *anzuz* , which literally means "god" and is directly linked to Odin.

¹¹⁸*The Fellowship of the Ring*, pg. 319

3. 2 Vainamoinnen

Although Tolkien never officially studied Finnish or Finnish literature, Humphrey Carpenter notes in his biography on how Tolkien first discovered the Finnish national epos *Kalevala* and its language, having described it as “a wine-cellar filled with bottles of amazing wine of a kind and flavour never tasted before”¹¹⁹, and its characters as “strange people and these new gods, this race of unhyprocritical lowbrow scandalous heroes”¹²⁰. During his years at the University of Oxford, he wrote several papers on this topic and even rewrote a small section of the story of Kullevo into a narrative style close to the one of W. Morris¹²¹. The story remained unfinished, but it strongly influenced Tolkien's future works, namely the story of *The Children of Húrin*, especially the section dealing with the fate of Túrin Turumbar. He expressed great admiration for the beauty of the Finnish language (it even served as a base for one of his fictional languages) and for the raw and primitive nature of the nation’s tales and myths.

Based on this fact, the character of Vainamoinnen appears as another possible source of inspiration, based on both Tolkien's personal interest in *Kalevala* in general, and the resemblance between the characters. However, unlike in the case of Odin, although Vainamoinnen as a mythological figure is attested in earlier texts before Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* (first mention being as late as 1551), the written records are somewhat sporadic in details and small in number. It is the romantic epos that offers a full characterization of the cultural hero, an immortal bard, a magician, a sage, a poet and an ever- traveling adventurer.

Nevertheless, we should not forget, that *Kalevala* was first published in 1835, centuries after Finland was fully Christianised and is a result of what Tom Shippey calls “national literary traditions arms-race”¹²². Although Lönnrot’s work is based on the oral tradition gathered among the people of Karelia, it has been significantly altered to his own image of what the Finnish national epic should look like to support Finland's right for cultural and political independence. Its publication was immediately met with extensive international appraisal, which is an ideal Tolkien has probably to certain extent dreamed of, as he

¹¹⁹ *J.R.R. Tolkien; A Biography*. pg.64

¹²⁰The Letters of *J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 54

¹²¹The Letters of *J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 79

¹²²Shippey, pg. 21

notoriously shared a similar sentiment and stated “I would that we had more of it left – something of the same sort that belonged to the English.”¹²³

3. 2. 1 Gandalf and Vainamoinen

Before we approach the discussion itself, it should be noted that the character mostly connected to Vainamoinen by Tolkien scholars (T. Shippey, D.E. Gay) is not Gandalf, but Tom Bombadil, or alternatively Tree-beard¹²⁴. They are all ancient (the title “the eldest” has been assigned to all of them) immortal beings, whose origin reaches back to the moment of the Creation. The very core of their existence is tied with the natural world, having established their seat on some rather abandoned location in the heart of wild and unspoiled nature, and appear as fearless and almost careless, though their great power is undeniable. Remarkably, both Tom and Vainamoinen perform their magic through songs or singing duels. In Tolkien, such “singing duels” are a reappearing motif, which can be found not only in “The Old Forest” as Tom saves the hobbits from the grasp of the Old Man Willow. Another great example would be the “battle of songs” between Sauron and Finrod Felagund in *The Silmarillion*.¹²⁵

As in the case of Odin, what suggests the legendary hero as a source of inspiration for Tolkien’s wizard is primarily their common basis in the *senex* archetype. Within their stories, they both appear in a role of ancient men who, though not being the primary creator of the world, were present at the creation. Their knowledge and wisdom do not arise from any form of mastery or ownership, but a long, careful observation and experience. The crucial aspect in which Bombadil deviates from this scheme is that although he acts as an intriguing figure, mysterious to both the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* and the reader, his characteristic carelessness results in profound passivity. Vainamoinen, on the other hand, shares Gandalf’s initiative and actively participates in the critical events in his homeland. Unlike Bombadil, his identity is not inseparably connected with his land, and he on multiple occasions puts aside his personal comfort to secure the safety and well-being of his kinsmen. He participates in the quest for the *sampo*, saves the people of Kalevala from plague and hunger, and helps to recover the stolen Moon and Sun.

¹²³Carpenter, pg. 94

¹²⁴ Shippey, pg. 31

¹²⁵*The Silmarillion*, pg. 82-83

It is him who brings together Finland's greatest heroes, to fight for a common goal and as a proper hero, he wields a remarkable sword. Nevertheless, magic remains his primary "weapon" and he remains the primary wizard/magician figure of *Kalevala* and the author of most of its wonders and spectacles. Most of the time, the power of both wizards is hidden behind their old age and mild temper and revealed when treated with disrespect. They act as bearers of ancient wisdom and often act as teachers/counsellors to the younger characters, often chastising the naivety and irresponsibility of the foolish youth, be it the case of the young hobbits in Gandalf's case, or such episodes as Illmarinen's foolish idea of forging himself a wife of gold. It is notable that just like in the case Gandalf, Vainamoinen's identity as a wizard and a wise man are inseparable and his mastery in magical duels is based solely on his unequalled knowledge

Another interesting similarity is of course their "unnatural" old age. Vainamoinen's unnatural, eternal old age reflects the character's profound sense of alienation from the surrounding world. Although being part of the created world since the very dawn of time, he fails to form a genuine connection with its mortal inhabitants. This lack of social integration is mainly reflected in Vainamoinen's failure to find a wife, as his desperate search represents a major line of the plot. Tolkien uses motif of mortal men being made suspicious and uncomfortable by the sages who slowly age and never die as well, nevertheless in Gandalf's case, this initial intimidation is usually overcome thanks to the sage's humble and kind personality.

In the fashion of the Arthurian legend, in *Kalevala*, women play mostly a negative role or at least tend to appear as untrustworthy in the eyes of the male characters (with the exception of mother-son relationships). While there are matriarchal figures of great (magical) power and influence in *Kalevala*, unlike in the case of Gandalf, Vainamoinen does not seem to have any particular connection with them and (though most likely accepting them as worthy of certain respect) does not seek their company or council.

While in Odin's case, finding a parallel with the story depends on more their overall role within the universe, *Kalevala*'s "Rune 7" offers an episode of very Tolkien-like nature. When Vainamoinen struggles not to drown for several days, he is saved by a giant eagle, capable of using human speech. However, while at first sight, this particular episode unlike in Gandalf's case, eagles have no special place in the world of *Kalevala*, and the eagle's behaviour was rather "favour-for-favour" motivated as Vainamoinen saved a tree for

the bird to nest on earlier on.¹²⁶ But importantly, it is not only Vainamoinen and his companions who uses the help of eagles, but the antagonistic characters as well. When Leminkainen is running away from persecution, he turns himself into an eagle. Moreover, again it is him, not Vainamoinen who calls birds to help to save their sinking ship during the theft of the *sampo*. The mistress of Pohjola also takes the shape of an eagle to attack the ship.

At the very end, unlike Bombadil, Vainamoinen shows signs of overall weariness with the burden of his long life and many perilous adventures and in the end decide to leave the lands of Kalevala. When the fellowship is over, and Gandalf's work in Middle-earth is done, he leaves for the Grey Havens and the Last ship to the West. With him leaving the Keepers of the Rings and the rulers of the last elven kingdoms in Middle-earth. The departure of the representatives of the ancient world and its order marks the beginning of a new age. The ancient Vainamoinen similarly leaves the land of Kalevala, though a significantly more resentful and bitter-hearted. Seeing that his magic and wisdom are no longer needed among his people (the 50th rune is usually interpreted as the abandonment of pagan traditions and the coming of Christianity), he builds a marvellous ship and sails into the West.

Unlike Gandalf, he leaves with a promise of return in the time of need, with his poetry and the *sampo*. While Vainamoinen's departure and promised return might be easily interpreted as the typical promise of a cultural/national historical or mythical hero to save the nation in the time of its gravest need, the imagery of the scene is strikingly familiar.

“As the years passed Wainamoinen
Recognized his waning powers,
Empty-handed, heavy-hearted,
Sang his farewell song to Northland,
(...)
Westward, westward, sailed the hero

Thus the ancient Wainamoinen,
In his copper-banded vessel,
Left his tribe in Kalevala,
Sailing o'er the rolling billows,
Sailing through the azure vapors,

Sailing through the dusk of evening,
Sailing to the fiery sunset,
To the higher-landed regions,
To the lower verge of heaven;
Quickly gained the far horizon,
Gained the purple-colored harbor.

But he left his harp of magic,
Left his songs and wisdom-sayings,
To the lasting joy of Suomi.” (Rune 50)¹²⁷

“When all these things were done, and the Heir of Isildur had taken up the lordship of Men, and the dominion of the West had passed to him, then it was made plain that the power of the Three Rings also was ended, and to the Firstborn the world grew old and grey. In that time the last of the Noldor set sail from the Havens and left Middle-earth forever. So latest of all the Keepers of the Three Rings rode to the Sea, and Master Elrond took there the ship that Círdan had made ready. In the twilight of autumn it sailed out of Mithlond, until the seas of the Bent World fell away beneath it, and the winds of the round sky troubled it no more, and borne upon the high airs above the mists of the world it passed into the Ancient West, and an end has come for the Eldar of story.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷Elias Lönnrot and William Kirby transl., *Kalevala or the Land of Heroes, Volume II* (London: J.M. Dent and Co., Project Gutenberg, 2010) 174

¹²⁸*The Silmarillion*, pg. 145

4 Gandalf as a Merlin Figure; The Influence of The Arthurian Legend

Any reader with even the most basic knowledge of the tales of the Arthurian Legend cannot miss the apparent similarities between Merlin and Arthur and Tolkien's Gandalf and Aragorn. The young heir to the throne grows up in an elven kingdom, hidden before the eyes of the world. He is tutored by an ancient wizard, who helps him to defeat his enemies and ascend to the throne as the rightful king. After his task is done, the king's counsellor disappears and leaves the king and his kingdom to their fate. The similarities go as far as to such detail like the recovery of the sword only the rightful king can wield. At first glance, some readers might prematurely assume that we are dealing with approximately the same character.

However, a closer look will reveal, that while Tolkien doubtlessly uses the relationship of Merlin and Arthur as a blueprint for a significant portion of *The Lord of the Rings*, his use of the material goes far beyond the traditional use of intertextuality. He uses the classic material to “transform, transcend and transmogrify”¹²⁹ the original text in order to convey new ideas related to his fiction, to introduce his worldview and draw attention to the issues of the contemporary society. But what is the "original" text"? It is safe to mention Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as the texts Tolkien has personally worked with, T. Shippey further mentions Layamon's *Brut*.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, in our attempt to analyse the potential influence of Merlin on the creation of Gandalf, we should not perceive him as a single fictional character in the traditional sense but rather as a diverse compound consisting of the history of Merlin in the Western literary tradition. F. Riga describes Merlin as:

“A seminal figure, the point of departure for creative explorations of the concepts associated with a wizard, that nonverbal space of consciousness that is the spawning ground for new fictional creation in archetypal models. (...)More like literary genre, the material accrued to the Merlin literary figures has developed into an ever-changing series of motifs and symbolic actions, a poetic procession which writers have

¹²⁹Mark. R Hall. Gandalf and Merlin, ""Aragorn and Arthur:Tolkien's Transmogrification of the Arthurian Tradition and Its Use as a Palimpsest for The Lord of the Ring"" (Oral Roberts University :The Eighth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis & Friends and The C.S. Lewis & The Inklings Society Conference. 2012) pg. 3

¹³⁰T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003) 390

drawn to express often dramatically different religious, political and psychological views.”¹³¹

In this respect, Tolkien’s Gandalf is not only a continuation of the historical tradition but in many aspects, he overcomes many traditional characteristics of both the character and its story. The most ground-breaking changes introduced by Tolkien are the absence of Merlin’s moral ambiguity, stemming from his infernal origin, his relationship to women and his fatal love affair with Nimuë/Ninive which also causes his downfall, his attitude to power and his teaching strategies.

4. 1 The History of Merlin in the Western Literature until 19th Century¹³²

Before we approach the analysis of the connection between the two characters in closer detail, it would be helpful to briefly discuss the history of the Merlin figure in the Western literary tradition, to allow the reader to understand better the tradition Tolkien was aware of and might have been influenced by.

While it is impossible to track down the very first material mentioning the character and theories of it being based on a real historical figure are very unlikely, according to Peter Goodrich, there is no need for such search since the origins of the character predate any literary tradition. This Indo-European prototype of a priest-king, shaman, a holy or a wild man can be found in numerous alternation throughout the Indo-European literary tradition such as The Epic of Gilgamesh or the Indian tale of Rishyasninga and supposedly, some of the biblical prophets. According to A.O.H Jahrman¹³³, the character is built upon a universal model of a soldier/warrior who went mad and run off into the nearby Caledonian forest after the battle of Arfderydd and the death of his master.

While there is no surviving original Welsh prose version of the legend, it is possible to construct the likely original form with the help of about a dozen Welsh Medieval poems found in *The Black Book of Carmarthen* and *The Red Book of Hengest*, which is the first source to mention the prophecies concerning the nation’s future. Another helpful piece of

¹³¹ Frank P. Riga "Gandalf and Merlin: J.R.R. Tolkien's Adoption and Transformation of a Literary Tradition" (*Mythlore* 27.1/2 (2008): 21-44.) 4 All references are to this edition.

¹³²Note: The primary source for the information presented in this section is Peter Goodrich's *Merlin; A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2003) All references are to this edition.

¹³³ A. O. H. Jahrman. "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy" *Merlin; A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2003) pg. 103 All subsequent references are to this edition.

Welsh literature are the Welsh Triads, namely “The Three Faithful War-bands” and “Three Horses which Carried the Three Horse-Burdens”, which include a mention of Myrddyn’s former lord Gwendollau, or “The Three Futile Battle”, which mention The Battle of Afderydd.

The Scottish and Irish medieval literature have their parallel version of the wild man and prophet. The 12th century Scottish *Lailoken and Meldred* include the motif of prophetic ability. In Irish literature, probably the best-known version is the story of the mad king Suibhe”, “The Feast of Dun na nGed” and “The Battle of Moira” offer a description of the historical Battle of Moira in which Suibhne, a vassal of the king, has gone mad, while “The Frenzy of Suibhne” describes his later life, including uttering prophecies and interestingly enough, going to “the land of the Britons” and meeting a local wild man. And while there are remarkable differences between the Welsh, Scottish and Irish version, Jahrman claims them to be of the same origin.¹³⁴

The earliest surviving Latin manuscript including a fragment of the legend was recorded by Joceline of Furness in his *Life of St. Kentigern*, who introduces the character as Lailocen. Among the medieval chronicles, there are also *Itinerarium Cambriae Giraldu Cambrensis*, and *Annales Cambriae*, which discuss the story of the fatal battle. However, it was the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth that turned the local legend into a story popular all over Europe. His *Prophecies of Merlin*, known from *The History of the Kings of Britain* include the story of a boy named Ambrosius born of a mortal woman and an incubus, the story of Vortigern’s tower and a series of prophecies concerning the future of Britain – a story taken from *Historia Britonum* by Gildas. He also added such new episodes as Merlin moving Stonehenge from Ireland to the Salisbury Plain, helping Uther Pendragon to take the shape of Duke Gorlois and the story of Arthur. In the later *The Life of Merlin*, he surprisingly shifts to the story of a mad king from South Wales, who is supposed to have known both Vortigern and Arthur, and whom he claims to be identical with the Merlin of *The History*. Anyway, this attempt of uniting these two characters was refused by the readers, only to be replaced by a theory of two separate Merlin characters, Ambrosius - the wonder child and prophet and the wild Merlin Sylvestris, by Giraldu Cambrensis.

The popularity of *The History of Kings of Britain* established the Arthurian legend through Europe and became the primary source of many translations or often rather paraphrases. Among the earliest was the Anglo-Norman *Le Roman de Brut* by Wace, who

¹³⁴A. O. H. Jahrman, pg. 108

started the process of omitting Merlin's prophecies and generally the parts which he found far too marvellous and unbelievable. The early Middle English translation *Brut* of Lyamon brought the material to even wider public, creating a universal national myth for England. This is also the time when the legend starts to become a carrier of nationalistic ideology and political propaganda. At this time, Merlin is also mentioned in several chronicles, the authors of which take either somewhat sceptical approach to the character, (Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle, John Hardyng's Chronicle, Robert Mannyng's *Story of England*).

The medieval romance shifted the subject of interest from Merlin to Arthur and his knights, for example, there is only a single mention of Merlin in of all works of Chretien de Troyes. Probably the most important adaptation of this period is the one of Robert de Boron. Although he was interested in Merlin primarily for his influence on Arthur, he attributed him unprecedented powers, evangelizing functions and introduced new motifs, e.g., the sword in the stone. His works were an important source to the *Vulgate Cycle L'Estoire de Merlin*) and *The Post-Vulgate Cycle (Suite Huth)* manuscripts. While *The Vulgate* was quite benevolent to Merlin's origin and supernatural abilities, the darker *Post-Vulgate* condemns him as irredeemably tainted. Notably, this is the time of introduction of Merlin's fall by the hand of a woman.

The Renaissance brought a growing amount of scepticism concerning either the historicity and replaces his supernatural origin as the source of his power and wisdom with profound knowledge of the natural world and mastery of many arts. Thomas Malory's compendium of the Arthurian materials, *Morte d'Arthur*, although marking the peak of the Middle English romance, gives Merlin only lesser role in the story and focuses mainly on Arthur and His role as a wizard is reduced in favour of his role as a tutor and a counsellor.

During the 17th century, Merlin becomes, a fanciful figure whose magical mechanics are upon superstition and illusion. Into this category falls for example Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (Orlando's Madness), but especially Edmund Spenser's *Fearie Queene*. As such, he becomes a popular character of court masques (Ben Jonson's *Speeches at Prince Henry's Barriers* and William D'Avenant's *Britannia Triumphans*. The 18th century retains this tendency, with such works as Wiliam Rowley's *The Birth of Merlin* or *The Childe Hath Found His Father* or John Dryden's *King Arthur*.

Although Romantism brought back the interest in Merlin, primarily his roots in the Welsh and medieval tradition, the beginning of the 19th century is mostly connected with either the works of antiquarian collectors and summarizers (Comte de Tressan, Thomas Percy, Thomas, Warton, Joseph Ritson, and George Ellis) or romanticized travel literature. The

works of the romantic poets themselves contain only scarce references (William Blake's "Merlin's Prophecy", Samuel Taylor Coleridge's, "The Pang More Sharp than All", John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes", Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Charles the First", Robert Southey's "Madoc" and four poems by William Wordsworth). Walter Scott also helped this process by publishing some of the previously neglected medieval texts.

The Victorian poets' portrayal on the other hand, as mostly based on Malory and primarily focused on Merlin's connection with the Holy Grail or his fatal love affair. The romance of Tristram and Isolde has also undergone a revival in e.g. Matthew Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* or Charles A. Swinburne's *Tristram of Lyonesse*. Probably the most influential portrayal of the century is the one of Alfred Lord Tennyson in his *The Idylls of the King* is the concept of the wizard was first based mostly on the Vulgate, but was later changed in favour of Merlin as the eternal poet. The 19th century is also the time of emergence of the first Arthurian legend inspired works on the American continent, such as Joseph Leigh's anti-British *Illustration of the Fulfilment of the Prediction of Merlin*. Later the character appears even in the works of Ralph W. Emerson (Merlin III, The Harps), Nathaniel Hawthorne (The Antique Ring) or Mark Twain (*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*).

The work of the French author Edgar Quinet's, *Merlin the Enchanter*, presents Merlin as god-like figure and a universal genius, but more importantly, the most groundbreaking change introduced by Quinet is Merlin not losing his power woman's hand, but on the contrary, gaining it through love.

4. 2 The 20th Century and C.S. Lewis¹³⁵

Due to the immense amount of adaptations in the 20th century, Peter Goodrich proposes the following division of modes of representation of the Merlin figure in the modern literature- atavism, anachronism, avatar, adaptation, or commodity.

“(The figure of Merlin is)an atavism when he appears in the costume of an earlier time or practices an outmoded form of science; an anachronism when he is placed into an age where he and his belief system are not native; an avatar when he assumes a new body or persona (which tends to establish him as a divine or mythological creature); an adaptation hen this avatar is recognized as an independent identity (like Gandalf,

¹³⁵Note: The following section mentions only the works of literature published before 1954 i.e. the year of the publication of *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Spock, or Doctor Who); and a commodity when any of these forms is employed for commercial purposes.”¹³⁶

The first half of the 20th century had its fair share of Merlin themed poetry. There are Charles Williams's “Taliessin Through Logres”, “Taliessin’s Song of the Passing of Merlin” and “The Region of the Summer Star”, a highly mystical and allegorical series of complex images, Francis Burdett Coutts's series of verse plays *The Romance of King Arthur* or Laurence Binyon’s play *The Madness of Merlin*.

Other noteworthy works of the first part of the 20th century are the early books of John Cowper Powys, namely *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* or of course, T.H. White's tetralogy *The Once and Future King*, essential a rewriting of Malory, nevertheless with several interesting alterations, such as Merlin living backwards in time. There is also Cristopher Fry's *Thor, with Angels* which pursues the way of sheer anachronism, having Merlin dug out by a servant girl, while Martyn Skinner's *The Return of Arthur: A Poem of the Future* is a satirical critique of urbanisation and industrialization.

Of extraordinary importance is of course the work of C.S. Lewis, a member of the Inklings and Tolkien’s good friend, Tolkien's colleague and life-long friend namely the third part of Lewis’s “Space Trilogy”; *That Hideous Strength*. But while the narrative universe of the “Space Trilogy” shares many common traits with Tolkien's fictional universe, as has been already touched upon in the introduction, the awakened Merlin is an ancient, morally ambiguous being. His decision to join Ransom's group is made simply because of NICE's arrogant project to correct what they perceive as imperfections of the natural world, already secret and flawless to Merlin, not because of his contempt for their potential crimes against humanity.

4. 3 Merlin and Gandalf

Based on account of the literary tradition given in the previous section, it is not possible to approach the character as a unified figure with a finite set of characteristics and a given storyline. As the central wizard character of the European literary tradition, Merlin has served as a target of projection of the contemporary beliefs, general approach to the subject of magic,

¹³⁶Peter Goodrich and Raymond Thompson ed., *Merlin: A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 34

wizardry or prophecy as well as the intended audience or the general cultural and political environment contemporary to the particular author. So what approach should we take to such a complicated task?

In this thesis, we will follow the theory of P. Goodrich, who claims that “according to the authorial and cultural interests, (Merlin) assumes seven primary roles: Wild Man, Wonder Child, Prophet, Poet, Counsellor, Wizard, and Lover”.¹³⁷ While in the majority of cases, the author decides to elaborate only on one or two of these, this theory might be helpful to reduce the area we should focus on during our research. Few of them can be safely ruled out immediately as they are completely absent in Tolkien's adaptation- the Wonder Child, since Gandalf as a being older than the Creation itself has simply never had any childhood, and the Wild Man, since this aspect of the Merlin persona has been most likely projected onto another member of the order- Radagast the Brown. In Tolkien's adaptation, the role of a Lover hasn't entirely disappeared but has been transformed into a more complex and most importantly, positive relationship to certain female characters.

As has already been touched upon in the introduction, probably the most prominent parallel can be drawn between the relationship of Arthur and Merlin and the one of Aragorn and Gandalf. While there is a version of the story in which Merlin has arranged the very conception of Arthur, most omit this motif. Just like in the case of Arthur, Gandalf acts as Aragorn's tutor and counsellor since his very youth. There can be no doubt Gandalf had a significant influence on the shaping of Aragorn's character. As we learn from the appendices of *The Return of the King*, at the beginning of their friendship, Aragorn was only twenty-five years old (being seventy-eight at the beginning of the events of the trilogy)¹³⁸ which can still be considered as quite impressive age for the development of the individual's character and value system, especially when we take into consideration that the Númenoreans can live up to several hundred years.

Just like in the case of Arthur, Gandalf does not leave until the heir to the throne has become the rightful king, the enemy was defeated and order restored. However, as we know from Malory, after the disappearance of Merlin, Arthur wasn't able to retain his power for the whole time on his reign and peacefully pass the crown to a chosen heir. This may be of course explained by Arthur's failure to focus on the well-being of his kingdom of pursuing revenge or such megalomaniac plans as to conquer Rome. But to a great extent, this may also

¹³⁷Goodrich et al., pg. 34

¹³⁸ *The Return of the King*, pg. 1084

be explained by the incompetence of his tutor.

Merlin's counselling strategy lacks the aspiration to help the 'pupil' achieve independence; "he seldom explains himself, seldom asks questions and seldom shows patience with those whom he counselled".¹³⁹ This is the fatal flaw of Merlin's teaching strategy. After his disappearance or death (and eventually the death of Arthur) the land often falls into chaos and ruin. Gandalf, on the contrary, puts great emphasis on teaching those who follow him the right moral principles and the ability to make the right decisions on their own. Unlike the case of Merlin, Gandalf is acutely aware that his time in Middle-earth is not going to last forever, and the success or failure of his efforts are going to be crucial for the survival of the newly restored order.

Unlike in the case of most Merlin figures, as a teacher, Gandalf is capable of extraordinary patience. While Merlin traditionally offers his tutelage only to the chosen and the great, before the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf spent a significant portion of his time in Middle-earth traveling from one land to another, getting to know the average people, learning about their customs and history. This attitude is, after all, what led him into the Shire and subsequently, to a long chain of events, followed by the destruction of the Ring. This is especially eye-catching in the account of Saruman's spying activities in the Shire, caused by his sheer inability to believe that Gandalf would spend time among "the childish folk" if there weren't some secret purpose of his visits, and what Gandalf called "a folly born of pride".¹⁴⁰

As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, Tolkien's choice of the word 'wizard' is not necessarily intended to mark magical skills as the fundamental aspect of the character.

"Wizards is a translation (perhaps not suitable, but throughout distinguished from other "magician" terms) of Q. Elvish Istari. Their name, as related to Wise, is an Englishing of their Elvish name, and is used throughout as *utterly distinct from Sorcerer or Magician*." ¹⁴¹

This deviation from the tradition is crucial for understanding the message of the trilogy and serves as a point of departure for Tolkien's discussion of the issue of absolute power. As F. Riga suggests,¹⁴² Gandalf's purely positive moral nature is a result of the division of the

¹³⁹ Riga, pg. 21

¹⁴⁰ *The Unfinished Tales*, pg. 249

¹⁴¹ *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, pg. 176

¹⁴² Riga, pg. 28

formerly morally ambiguous character into two, each of whom represents one end of the spectrum of attitude to power. While traditionally, Merlin giving up or losing his power results in his diminishment or even death, Tolkien argues for the opposite and uses humility as means of ennoblement.

As has already been discussed in the first chapter, a crucial part of the moral principle of *The Lord of the Rings* is the importance of a free will and freedom of choice. This is an issue raised by many Merlin characters, who being aware of their own wisdom, force their own will and opinions onto others, including Arthur. Understanding the danger of falling prey to the desire for absolute power allows Gandalf to understand the mind of the enemy better and eventually defeat him. It is the desire for unlimited power and knowledge that causes Saruman's treason and subsequently his fall. The whole idea of Frodo taking the Ring to Mordor is based on the presupposition that Sauron considers his power absolute and untouchable.

Gandalf's aversion to the use of power as a means of enforcing one's will also reflect in his actual use of magic. While *The Hobbit*, mostly because of its orientation on the child reader, contains an account of few smaller magical tricks, but as the story develops into adult fantasy, the use of magic becomes more and more sparse. While in *The Hobbit*, Gandalf would use his powers only in the moments of highest need, in *The Lord of the Rings* it is made clear that in the case of problems which exist on such a large scale, a successful solution demands cooperation of those affected. This attitude surprisingly doesn't change even after his return from death.

Interestingly enough, there is a link between the specific type of magic performed by both magicians/wizards. In *The Lord of the Rings* we learn that Gandalf carries one of the three elven rings- Narya, the ring of fire, and this actually reflects in his magic. Among the hobbits, he is known for his spectacular fireworks. In *The Hobbit* we see him disappear in a flash of lightning, light wet wood with a touch of his staff or fight off the wargs by setting the surrounding trees on fire. His battle against the Balrog is depicted as the servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor, fighting against the flames of Hell (Udun). Fighting the demon, he smiths the bridge before him "a blinding sheet of white flame"¹⁴³ springs up and the bridge cracks. After his return from death, he is described as a bright flame, yet veiled save in a great need). When Aragorn Gimli and Legolas mistake him for Saruman, Aragorn's sword catches fire and Legolas's arrow burns mid-flight. Merlin's is often depicted to be

¹⁴³*The Fellowship of the Ring*, pg. 330

similar, e.g. in *L'Estoire de Merlin* he provides Arthur with a dragon banner which breathes flame.

Actually, in Gandalf's case, "a Prophet" is hardly separable from "a Wizard". What in Gandalf's case might seem as a prophecy does not originate from any sort of supernatural circumstances or prophetic ecstasy, but a long and careful observation, which results in a deep understanding of the world. While *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* work with an incredible amount of both more or less significant prophecies, rather than a time of emergence of new prophecies, they are set into the time of the fulfilment of the old ones. Gandalf is one of the primary mediators of this change. Many of the famous prophetic materials are revealed to the reader through Gandalf- the notorious "One Ring to rule them all" poem (usually called simply "The Prophecy") or the "All that is gold does not glitter" prophecy of the return of the king (actually a poem was written by Bilbo) are presented to the reader by Gandalf. Nevertheless, these occasional utterances of ancient lore are the closest Gandalf ever gets to "a Poet".

Unlike the Merlin figures who often boast about their prophetic abilities, when asked whether he has foreseen or planned any of the events leading to the defeat of Sauron, Gandalf answers in a very vague and avoiding fashion, such as "I knew it in my heart"¹⁴⁴ or "it was meant to be".¹⁴⁵ This kind of statements is what is generally interpreted as a reference to a certain higher force or being which decides the fates of all things and subsequently, a reference to Christianity. However, Gandalf openly admits that he is not allowed to speak about "what he knew before he stepped on the grey shore"¹⁴⁶ and that is usually where the conversation ends. From our knowledge of the cosmology of Tolkien's universe, we can deduce, that whatever he knew about the fate of his mission, he was told either by Manwë, the other Valar or Illuvatar himself. However, since Gandalf himself has on numerous occasions admitted, that he was afraid there is no hope, it seems that whatever he knew, it wasn't much. In this case, the only most likely answer is, that Gandalf didn't know, he only had hope, and believed into the righteousness of Illuvatar's will.

And finally, there is the role of a Lover. The Vulgate first introduced the motif of Merlin being trapped/ killed by his lover after sharing his knowledge with her. Beautiful, intelligent and ambitious women seem to be the sage's only weakness. When in love, he is helpless, and even though he has foreseen the betrayal of his lover, he cannot take any action.

¹⁴⁴*The Unfinished Tales*, pg.232

¹⁴⁵*The Unfinished Tales*, pg. 235

¹⁴⁶*The Unfinished Tales*, pg.235

From the *Vulgate*, where Merlin gives up his powers willingly only to be trapped in a death-like sleep, to Mallory, where Merlin ends up essentially buried alive, women mean the end of Merlin's power and influence. The women in the Arthurian legend can be divided into two categories, either they are incredibly beautiful, but personality-wise rather bland characters, who exist only to be saved and won, or are powerful and ambitious women, who appear in seductive or treacherous roles. Merlin's interest in female characters is motivated exclusively by romantic interest (except for Guinevere).

Tolkien has dramatically transformed the story by completely removing the fatal female influence. Gandalf's case his confrontation with strong female figures does not result in his destruction, but instead, they offer him support and encouragement. The first of them, who plays a relatively minor and distant role, is Varda. Her presence in the story is hidden behind side-notes and references, but she seems to be in some sort of a patron relationship specifically to Gandalf.

“Manwë replied that he wished Olórin (Gandalf) to go as the third messenger to Middle. But Olórin declared that he was too weak for such a task, and that he feared Sauron. Then Manwë said that that was all the more reason why he should go, and that he commanded Olórin (illegible words follow that seems to contain the word "third"). But at that Varda looked up and said: ‘Not as the third’ and Curumo (Saruman) remembered it.”¹⁴⁷

But the most important female figure of the story is naturally Galadriel. It is unknown whether they have known each other in the time of their youth in Valinor or met each other later in Middle-earth. This is not entirely unrealistic since they have lived in the same place at the same time and since Gandalf is called “a lover of Eldar” both by Manwë and the Valiquenta. When we first meet Galadriel, it is revealed that she holds the wizard in great respect, surprisingly, even greater than Saruman:

“I it was who first summoned the White Council. And if my designs had not gone amiss, it would have been governed by Gandalf the Grey, and then mayhap things would have gone otherwise.”¹⁴⁸

When Gandalf returns from death, he is carried to Lothlórien on Galadriel's command to recover. In “The King of the Golden Hall” he defends her after Gríma calls her “a Sorceress,

¹⁴⁷ *The Unfinished Tales*, pg. 273

¹⁴⁸ *Fellowship of the Ring*, pg. 353

weaving webs of deceit”. Although they are, quite frankly, “connected” by the shared mission as bearer of one of the Elven Rings, in regards to the Arthurian tradition, this relationship is primarily notable because of Tolkien’s unusual and subversive use of the traditional concept of the wizard’s relationship to women.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, we can agree that, at his time, Tolkien's Gandalf represented a revolutionary step forward in the portrayal of magic and wizard/magician figures in the fantasy genre. While he does not entirely remove the model established by fairy tale, myth and the Arthurian legend, he has demonstrated that an adaptation does not need to be restricted to the traditional model, but instead, can transform and transcend it. While at first glance, a 21st century reader might not perceive the character as revolutionary, quite on the contrary, they might view Gandalf as the quintessential fantasy wizard, it is possible only because of the example Tolkien has set to the later writers of fantasy. Before *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, wizards have played only a minor role in the genre. The alternations and innovations introduced by Tolkien may seem subtle, but in the long run, they had enormous consequences on the of wizard figures in modern fantasy.

The first chapter illustrates the way Tolkien has managed to skilfully combine pagan and Christian element and deliver a moral message without breaking the integrity of his fiction with any overt references to religion. While it is relatively safe to say that Gandalf is essentially a Christian character promoting Christian values, the character is not reduced to a see-through Christian allegory, such as e.g. Lewis's Aslan or Ransom, or an uncomfortably preachy and moralistic figure. What makes this possible is, firstly, Tolkien's decision to portray the wizard not only as a bare archetype, adjusted to the needs of the story, but a fully developed character, and secondly, his unique theory of fantasy. While Gandalf retains the function of a leader and counsellor, the reader is allowed to witness Gandalf's own worries, uncertainty, temporal despair and (slight) character development. Unlike in the overtly Christian fiction, Gandalf does not represent an unachievable ideal, but a fallible humane figure and allows the Gandalf's fall in Moria does not represent resurrection, but rather the ennobling ability to accept one's failure.

The unprecedented depth and complexity of Tolkien's fictional world were made possible mainly by his unique approach to fantasy as a genre. Middle-earth is not only a separate secondary world, but suggests a connection with the 'mythological past'. This allowed Tolkien to combine the Christian aspects of the character with both the mythological and Arthurian elements in a seamless and organic fashion. Unlike in the case of W. Morris *The House of the Wolfings* or *The Worm Ouroboros* neither Tolkien's secondary world nor Gandalf are recognisable carbon copies of the past traditions and mythologies. What allowed this shift of attitude was not only the lack of overt references, but also the author's intentional

concealing of the borrowed elements. As a result, such adaptation does not disrupt the authenticity of the fantasy world, but instead supplies the story with a depth (almost) comparable to a real mythology.

As the third chapter has shown, Tolkien's approach to the previous representatives of the Arthurian legend and the related texts is characterized by a tendency not to "break" but "bend the borders". While Tolkien essentially follows the outline suggested by Goodrich, each of the roles includes a creative "twist", which revives the traditional material and suggests new, original and innovative uses of the ancient archetype.

In conclusion, we can say without any doubt that to understand Gandalf only as a Christian allegory, a reflection of a mythological figure or simply a continuation of a historical tradition would mean to neglect its innovative contribution to the portrayal of wizard figures in fantasy fiction. The way Tolkien combines elements of various, seemingly incompatible traditions and has set a precedent for the writers of fantasy who have followed his example, whether intentionally or not. Gandalf sets an example for the employment of a wizard figure in fantasy, not only as a static character which helps to support either the plot or the development of the main character, but as a fully-fledged main character, which undergoes a precipitous development. No matter how far-fetched such claim may seem, but even such authors as Ursula le Guin or J.K. Rowling's with their adolescent wizard protagonist were to certain extent inspired by Tolkien.

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