

Tolkien and the Notion of Fate

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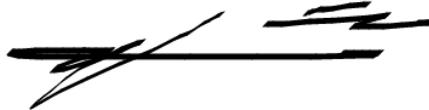
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Contents

Contents.....	3
Abstract.....	4
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Tolkien's life.....	8
3. Stories that influenced Tolkien	13
4. The notion of fate in Tolkien's work.....	20
5. Conclusion.....	23
6. Works Cited.....	25
7. Appendix.....	27



Abstract

A lot of research has already been carried out about John Ronald Reuel Tolkien's life and about how Tolkien's works can be connected to mythological and biblical stories. However, to date no studies exist that focus on the notion of fate in Tolkien's works. The main focus of this thesis will be on what kind of fate or 'wyrð' (OE) is prevailing in Tolkien's works and how Tolkien uses different types of fate.

1. Introduction

“In a hole in the ground there lived a Hobbit.” (1937, p3) This is the beginning of the story *The Hobbit* (1937) by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. This work and his more famous hexalogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) have received a lot of attention of researchers and scholars. The Elvish language (Gilson, C., 2006), Tolkien's life (Armstrong, C. & Gertz, S., 2003), Christianity in *The Lord of the Rings* (Evans, J., 2012), Good and Evil in Tolkien's works (Wood, R. C., 2003) are some examples of subjects that have been extensively studied. Many of these notions can be traced back to Germanic and Classical sources. An important notion, which has not received much scholarly attention yet, but plays an important role in many of Tolkien's sources, is the notion of fate.

Considering Tolkien's influences one wonders what role fate had in Tolkien's works. It is thus the aim of this thesis to investigate Tolkien's sources and how he used these influences in his own work. To examine Tolkien's works this thesis will consist of three different sections. The first section tries to answer the question whether fate played a significant role in Tolkien's life, notably his upbringing, his personal and academic life. A particular focus will be on how events in Tolkien's life could have influenced his view and use of the notion of fate in his works. The second section tries to answer the question whether older classic works could have influenced Tolkien, and what role fate had in these works. The last part concerns Tolkien's own works, the mythology of Middle-

earth. The third section will explore if fate has an important role in Tolkien's own works.

1.1 Method of research

The approach used in the first two sections of this philological study is to close-read Tolkien's works, with a particular focus on the notion of fate. This will be viewed in the context of Tolkien's life and his influences. The third section will consist of an analysis of empirical data, notably a Tolkien research corpus. First, I will examine what Tolkien experienced during his life. To examine this, published letters from Tolkien and studies about Tolkien's life will be used. Secondly, the importance of fate in Germanic and Christian works, which inspired Tolkien will be studied. In addition, secondary literature about Tolkien and his works will be used. Thirdly, a selection of Tolkien's works will be used to see what types of fate Tolkien used in certain situations. The works used are *The Children of Húrin* (1910 ed. 2007), *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (trans. Tolkien, 1920-1930, ed. 2009), *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55).

1.2 Definitions and explanations

The word *fate* is derived from the Old English word 'wyrd', according to the *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* by Bosworth. The *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* by Bosworth describes wyrd as “[w]hat happens, fate, fortune, chance” (web). The complete entry of *wyrd* can be found in Appendix A, Definitions. The first entry in The Oxford English Dictionary describes wyrd, “The principle, power, or agency by which events are predetermined; fate, destiny.” (web) and fate, “The principle, power, or agency by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular, are unalterably predetermined from eternity. Often personified.” (web) The complete entry of wyrd and fate taken from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) can also be found in Appendix A, Definitions. The differences in the OED between fate and wyrd / weird are of great importance to this thesis because, the difference between wyrd, “to

become” (OED, Web) and fate, “that which has been spoken” (OED, Web). While *wyrd* may be described as something unchangeable and magical (*wyrd*), *fate* appears to be something that guides (fate). In this thesis fate and *wyrd* will be divided in three different types: *wyrd* that is endowed during birth (pagan), fate from the influence of good or bad deeds (Christian) and fate from catastrophic events, which can overturn the first two fates (fatalistic). These three different types are chosen as they cover most basic situations of fate / *wyrd*. This subdivision is not pre-existing and is useful as it separates Christian fate from pagan *wyrd*. In this thesis *wyrd* and fate will both be named ‘fate’. The distinction will be signalled as pagan fate, Christian fate and fatalistic fate. Because religion plays a significant role in Tolkien’s life, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter two, the fates are associated with religious points of view. A strict definition of fate / *wyrd* must be defined to be able to count how often the different types of fate / *wyrd* appear in Tolkien's work. In this thesis the different types will be defined into the three subdivision as follows:

Pagan *wyrd* – Predestined, endowed during birth:

According to the *Online Etymological Dictionary* the etymology of Heathen: "Old English *hæðen* 'not Christian or Jewish,' also as a noun, 'heathen man' (especially of the Danes), merged with Old Norse *heiðinn* (adj.) 'heathen, pagan.'" Important in this description is that Heathens or Pagans do not believe in one God. Pagan *wyrd* therefore is not restricted to a person but can also fall upon a God. No one, i.e. not even Gods, can escape pagan fate.

Another significant aspect of pagan fate is that it can be seen as a web of events. One event triggers other events in a manner that all events eventually lead to a greater event. However, pagan fate is closely related to fatalistic fate, fatalistic fate it is not the same. Pagan fate does not happen out of nothing, it always comes forth out of a certain group of events.

Christian fate – Some control, influence of good or bad deeds:

This fate is guided by a God, or an important character (King, Emperor) and its helpers.

However the God cannot be held responsible for the outcome as the person is given a choice. As explained in the Bible: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’”

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” (James, 1:13-14) Another example that illustrates Christian fate is the following: “Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction” (Philippians, 3:18-19). Both excerpts illustrate Christian fate, both instances of fate appears to be a construct of choice.

Fatalistic fate – No control, catastrophic events:

Submission to fate or put differently - what will be, will be. The person that is struck by this fate has no influence on what is going to happen and is bound by the will of the greater deity. Acceptance is appropriate, more so than resistance against inevitability. Solomon, Robert C. describes fatalistic fate as follows: "It is fate and fatalism, ultimately, that explain why heroes like Hector and Achilles have to die, why the Hebrew temple was destroyed, why hurricane Andrew hit just as the newlyweds were putting the finishing touches on the new house, why some people are rich and so many are poor, why a young girl should die 'before her time.' It is fate and fatalism that answer such plaintive questions as 'Why me?' and 'Why should this burden fall on us, of all people, especially now?'" (p.436) An important aspect of fatalistic fate is submission to fate. This is the main factor separating fatalistic fate and pagan fate.

2. Tolkien's life

This first section will deal with fate and Tolkien's life. Based on previous studies, Tolkien's life will be investigated. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn as to how the notion of fate affected Tolkien's life and works. An important aspect of this section is to find out what influences Tolkien experienced during his life and how this is affected his works and is reflected in them.

2.1 Tolkien's biography

Tolkien was born as John Ronald Reuel Tolkien in 1892 in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa. After the death of his father Tolkien's family moved to Sarehole, United Kingdom in 1896. Tolkien received lessons from his mother in French, Latin and German. It is safe to say that Tolkien's interests for languages found its base in the early language education that he received. Tolkien studied at the University of Oxford. After Tolkien got his BA degree he joined the British army. From 1915 Tolkien served in the British army as a second lieutenant with the Lancashire Fusiliers. Tolkien married Edith Bratt before he was sent to battle in France during World War I. In France Tolkien witnessed horrible scenes when he participated in the Somme Offensive where over a million people were killed or wounded. Tolkien's participation did not last long as he was struck by trench fever in 1916 which led to his return to England. Back in England Tolkien got his MA degree. It can be said that Tolkien's experiences from World War I are reflected in his works. In the foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) Tolkien points out that, "An author cannot of course remain wholly unaffected by his experience, but the ways in which a story-germ uses the soil of experience are extremely complex, and attempts to define the process are at best guesses from evidence that is inadequate and ambiguous." (p. xxvi) Thus, concluding from Tolkien's statement, the war is bound to have had an effect on Tolkien as a person and a writer, but it is difficult to determine how pervasive this effect was. As a contrast Tolkien also points out in the foreword of the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) that, "By 1918, all but one of my close friends were dead." (p. xxvi) Many of Tolkien's friends died during the Somme Offensive. The Dead Marshes of Mordor are an exact copy of World War I's Western Front and the many lives lost on those grounds. Another similar example is the following passage from *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55): "[D]reary and wearisome. Cold, clammy winter still held sway in this forsaken country. The only green was the scum of livid weed on the dark greasy surfaces of the sullen waters. Dead grasses and rotting reeds loomed up in the mists like ragged shadows of long forgotten summers" (p818). The Somme

Offensive was during the summer of 1916. Whether this account has in fact been influenced by Tolkien's war experiences remains a matter of conjecture. A last extract in which Tolkien mentions the effect of his war experience is in a letter to his son Christopher Tolkien. In this letter Tolkien writes the following: "The burnt hand teaches most about fire" (Letters, 64). This was said in context of talking about generations of men drenched in war experience. It appears that Tolkien has to tell about wars and conflict as this is an important experience in his life. Tolkien started writing the first drafts of the myths of Middle-earth in the trenches. Back in England Tolkien started working on the *The Silmarillion: The Myths and Legends of Middle-earth* (1917). After the war Tolkien became Professor in English Language at the University of Leeds. In 1925 Tolkien accepted a position as Professor in Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford. During his time at Oxford Tolkien published one of his most important work, which is his lecture: "*Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics*" (1936) Tolkien also joined a group called "The Inklings". This group of writers gathered for drinks and to talk about writing progress. C. S. Lewis was also part of this group. Conversations included discussions about the importance of religion, mythology and fairy tales. "Tolkien firmly believed that they have moral and spiritual value" (ODNB, web). In 1937 the first edition of *The Hobbit* was published. *The Lord of the Rings* was published in 1954 -1955 in three parts: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954), and *The Return of the King* (1955). Each book contained two parts of the hexalogy. On 2 September 1973 Tolkien died at the age of 81. After Tolkien's death selected stories of his were published by his son Christopher Tolkien. Two of these stories will be discussed in this thesis: *The Children of Húrin* (1910 ed. 2007) and *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (trans. Tolkien, 1920-1930, ed. 2009).

2.2 Tolkien's opinion about Christianity and Paganism

As a Roman Catholic, Tolkien was highly influenced by his religion and by the notion of Christian fate. This is also reflected in selected letters written by Tolkien. Based on the edition *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2012), I closely studied what Tolkien's view on Christianity was and how this may

have affected this particular angle in his works. That Tolkien was a conservative Christian can be seen in a letter written to C.S. Lewis:

“I have never felt happy about your view of Christian 'policy' with regard to divorce. ... Toleration of divorce – if a Christian does tolerate it – is toleration of a human abuse, which it requires special local and temporary circumstances to justify (as does the toleration of usury) – if indeed either divorce or genuine usury should be tolerated at all, as a matter merely of expedient policy.” (Letters, 49)

In the same letter Tolkien comments on a book called *Mere Christianity* (1944) by Lewis. The harsh words to his friend contest his acceptability of progressive thoughts regarding proper Christian behaviour. An important letter which connects Tolkien's work and religion is the letter to Robert Murray, S.J., in which he states the following:

“The istari are translated 'wizards' because of the connexion of 'wizard' with wise and so with 'witting' and knowing. They are actually emissaries from the True West, and so mediately from God, sent precisely to strengthen the resistance of the 'good', when the Valar become aware that the shadow of Sauron is taking shape again.” (Letters, 156)

In this letter a connection was made between Gandalf and God. The istari are sent to Middle-earth by the Valar to save Middle-earth from Sauron, the dark missionary. This notion can be connected with Tolkien's Christian background. A third important letter was written to M. Waldman, in which Tolkien writes the following:

“I have always been seeking material, things of a certain tone and air, and not simple knowledge. Also – and here I hope I shall not sound absurd – I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English,” (Letters 131)

Tolkien continues commenting on the English works of the Arthurian world that, “its 'faerie' is too

lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive ... another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion.” (Letters 131) Tolkien ends his letter with the sentence: “Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world” (Letters 131). Tolkien was not secretive about his influences. In a letter to Deborah Webster in 1958, Tolkien writes: "... Or more important, I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic" (Letters, 231) Tolkien overtly points out that his works are influenced by his Christian belief. Based on these four excerpts, it may be argued that Tolkien tried to write a Christian story worthy to be named among the Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish classical and mythological stories. An important aspect of being such a work is according to Tolkien that it does not explicitly concern the real world. As an example Tolkien mentions in one of his letters that he received a letter from a critic. This critic pointed out that, "the invocations of Elbereth, and the character of Galadriel as directly described ... were clearly related to Catholic devotion to Mary" (Letters 231). Tolkien does not give an indication on whether this is true or false. However, it is something from the real world which is reflected in Tolkien's mythology. Reflections of Paganism, Christianity and Fatalism are expected to be seen in Tolkien's work as he has set this as a parameter for judging a story to be qualitative.

2.3 Studies on Tolkien's influences

In this section the secondary literature about Tolkien's life will be scrutinised. While Tolkien may have used pagan works as a source of inspiration, he did not want to support Paganism by writing pagan works. *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954-55) was found controversial by Christians, Joseph Pearce points out that “[s]ome Christians view Tolkien's books ... with suspicion, fearing unwholesome influences from witchcraft and paganism, and maybe even Satanism.” (2002) B.J. Birzer explains that Tolkien was “[a]fraid that such readers might create a sort of 'new paganism' around his legendarium [and that] Tolkien spent much of the last decade of his life clarifying its

theological and philosophical positions in the work that became *The Silmarillion*” (2003). This is also supported by comments made in Tolkien’s letters to friends, family and fans, in which he clarifies certain aspects about his works. From this point of view it can be said that Tolkien, as a Christian, did not wish to advocate Paganism. In addition, some critics and friends praised Tolkien for being a good Christian and approved *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954-55) to be read by Christians (Pearce 2002, Morrow 2005). Dickinson goes even further by pointing out that “[i]n my ongoing straggle up the path of Christian maturity, Tolkien's exposition has been my roadmap” (2002). Tolkien's friend, writer and Christian philosopher C.S. Lewis wrote the following on the back cover of *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers* (Tolkien, 1954): “Here are beauties which pierce like swords or bum like cold iron; here is a book that will break your heart...good beyond hope” (1975). It becomes clear that Tolkien was criticised but did everything in his power not to present his works as being supportive of Paganism. According to Morrow, “Some have hypothesized that Tolkien had a warped view of sexuality, since his stories never explicitly, or even implicitly, hint at sexual acts” (2002). This strongly hints at Christian behaviour. Caldecott concludes the following: "While it is true that these works are less overtly Christian than Lewis's Narnia series, they could have originated only in a Christian imagination" (1994). These two statements represent strong claims of Christian influences in Tolkien's works.

2.4 Concluding remarks

By viewing Tolkien’s life from three different perspectives, namely (a) his biography, (b) his personal letters, and (c) studies of Tolkien’s life and works, it is possible to shed some light on the role of fate in Tolkien’s life. Tolkien denies that his mythology of Middle-earth is a fantasy version of World War I. Tolkien does admit that World War I influenced him. Thus, while World War I may have had some influence on Tolkien’s creations, his works are not true representations of World War I. Tolkien also mentions in one of his letters that a qualitative story must not be written too explicitly. Tolkien admits that he has a great interest in old Greek, Celtic and Scandinavian works.

Pagan works seem to have been an important inspiration for Tolkien. However, it cannot have been Tolkien's intention to write a pagan work as he contested this in some of his letters (Letter 131 to Milton Waldman, Letter 156 To Robert Murray, SJ. 4 November 1954). Tolkien was a devout Christian, and religion was therefore an important aspect of his life. In letters to C.S. Lewis he made it very clear that the Christian belief must remain as it is and must not be tempered with. In other words, Tolkien was a conservative Christian and did not believe in progressive change.

3. Stories that influenced Tolkien

This section will discuss selected works that have inspired Tolkien, notably a selection of pagan works and a selection of Christian works.

3.1 Pagan influences

Regarding pagan influences from older works, the most influential works are *Beowulf* and *The Eddur*, i.e. poems and tales of Norse mythology. Tolkien would have most likely argued that *Beowulf* was not written by a Pagan but by somebody with a Christian background. In his article on *Beowulf* (1936) Tolkien argues that the author probably was a Christian looking back at a pagan past. Tolkien points out the following:

“[Beowulf's author] is concerned primarily with man on earth, rehandling in a new perspective an ancient theme: that man, each man and all men, and all their works shall die. ... Yet this theme plainly would not be so treated, but for the nearness of a pagan time. The shadow of its despair, if only as a mood, as an intense emotion of regret, is still there.”
(1936)

Like Tolkien, in this thesis *Beowulf* is seen as a Christian work, however interrelated with pagan influences. This pagan influence is for instance illustrated by elements such as heroic ideals. Another important aspect which shows pagan influence is vengeance. When Beowulf tells King

Hrothgar that it is better to avenge somebody than to grieve over him, when King Hrothgar's advisor Aeschere is killed (*Beowulf*, 1321-1323). When we look at the epic poem *Beowulf* it becomes clear that Tolkien was highly influenced by the pagan aspects contained in *Beowulf*. In *The Hobbit* (1937) pagan influences are found in the plot outline. Bilbo fought Smaug alone in the tunnel of the Lonely Mountain before he ever saw the danger awaiting him (*The Hobbit*, 256). Bilbo was able to do this because he had the magical power of the Ring to help him. Possessing magical power makes Bilbo a pagan hero as he is supernatural. The same kind of pagan heroism can be found in *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* is known to have superhuman strength and he is "greater and stronger than anyone in the world" (*Beowulf*, 110-111). A third pagan influence is that of comitatus. Comitatus is described in the *Oxford English Dictionary online* (OED online) as "[a] body of comites or companions; a retinue of warriors or nobles attached to the person of a king or chieftain." The complete entry from the OED online concerning comitatus is included in Appendix A, definitions. In *Beowulf*, for instance, Hrothgar's speech addressed at Beowulf illustrates the notion of comitatus in that Hrothgar talks about granting gifts and honour to Beowulf, in return for his valour and service for his people (950-953). Similarly, comitatus is asked of Bilbo when he agrees to help the dwarves to reclaim the Lonely Mountain. Bilbo offers his services as a burglar and receives a percentage of the gold bestowed in the Lonely Mountain. Another pagan motif that can be found both in *Beowulf* and in *Lord of the Rings* is that of renewal. For scholars of the comparative mythology theory this is known as the motifs of a dying god and of a dying-and-rising god (Frazer, 1890). The rising god is a personification of a turn of tide. The new god, or king, will turn the tides for a world. As pointed out by Tolley, "like Beowulf, whose father Ecgtheow is at best a violent renegade passing through one kingdom after another, Aragorn is a man with a dubious family past" (p.39). Both characters are personifications of a turn of tide in that Beowulf and Aragorn have to correct mistakes of their fathers. In *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) Tolkien repeats the dying-and-rising god principle (Frazer, 1890) more than once as this also occurs when King Théoden falls in battle and Aragorn rises as the new king. Another pagan influence is as Orazi,

K. points out “[In Beowulf] 'lif is læne' (life is loan). Nothing illustrates this more than the three separate encounters with monsters, for each fight focuses on the tragedy of the life cycle and of human mortality” (2013). In *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) this is illustrated by the constant struggle concerning mortality between Aragorn and Arwen. Arwen has to choose between mortal life with Aragorn who has a shorter life and is bound to the world of Men, or immortality with her own people in the West. Green points out that “[f]or pagans, mortality is often linked to carnivalesque celebration taking place in ambivalent spaces, termed heterotopia, where symbols of life and death meet. In these spaces death is sublimated into a nurturing, rather than life-denying force, strengthening pagan identity and solidarity” (2001). Arwen chooses mortality as this is not life denying but life supporting, i.e. supporting her to be with Aragorn. When looking at *The Children of Húrin* (1910 ed. 2007), both Beowulf (*Beowulf*, xxxvii, 30) and Túrin (1910 ed. 2007 p.241) appear to have a similar pagan fate. Both heroes die after a final battle with a dragon. In both stories only a close friend comes to help the hero. All other men are too afraid of the dragon. In *Beowulf* it is Wiglaf (XXXVII, 30) in *The Children of Húrin* (1910 ed. 2007) it is Hunthor (p.239) who accompany the hero. This loyalty is, as discussed earlier, comitatus towards a higher person. *The Eddur*, poems and tales of Norse mythology, pagan from the onset and throughout also had an impact on Tolkien and his writings. To illustrate this, the most obvious similarities are the names of the dwarves in *The Hobbit* (1937). The dwarves’ names are derived from the *Cōdex Rēgius* in the *Völuspá; Dvergatal*:

"10. Þar var Móðsognir mæztr of orðinn
dverga allra, en Durinn annarr;
þeir mannlíkun mörg of gerðu
dvergar í jörðu, sem Durinn sagði.

11. Nýi, Niði, Norðri, Suðri,
Austri, Vestri, Alþjófr, Dvalinn,
Nár ok Náinn Nípingr, Dáinn
Bívurr, Bávurr, Bömburr, Nóri,
Ánn ok Ánarr, Óinn, Mjöðvitnir.

12. Veggr ok Gandalfi, Vindalfi, Þorinn,
Þrár ok Þráinn, Þekkr, Littr ok Vittr,
Nýr ok Nýráðr, nú hefi ek dverga,

Reginn ok Ráðsviðr, rétt of talða.

*13. Fili, Kili, Fundinn, Náli,
Hefti, Víli, Hannar, Sviurr,
Billigr, Brúni, Bíldr ok Buri,
Frár, Hornbori, Frægr ok Lóni,
Aurvangr, Jari, Eikinskjaldi.*

*14. Mál er dverga í Dvalins liði
ljóna kindum til Lofars telja,
þeir er sóttu frá salar steini
Aurvanga sjöt til Jöruvalla.*

*15. Þar var Draupnir ok Dolgbrasir,
Hár, Haugspori, Hlévangr, Glóinn,
Dóri, Óri Dúfr, Andvari
Skirfir, Virfir, Skáfiðr, Ái.*

*16. Alfr ok Yngvi, Eikinskjaldi,
Fjalarr ok Frosti, Finnrr ok Ginnarr;
þat mun æ uppi meðan öld lifir,
langniðja tal Lofars hafat." (11-16)*

In *The Hobbit* (1937) the dwarves are called: Thorin, Nori, Bifur, Fili, Gloin, Dwalin, Oin, Ori, Bombur, Balin, Bofur, Kili and Dori. Noticeable is also the name of Gandalf appearing in this part of *The Edda* as “Gandalf” (*Völuspá*, 12). This demonstrates that Tolkien used *The Edda* as an inspiration. The work may have had a strong influence on Tolkien, not only with respect to naming but also when it comes to the notion of fate. Pagan elements like the continual shadow of fate, death, and doom return in all Tolkien’s works. Similarly, the rise of Sauron, the death of King Théoden and the doom of mankind in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-’55) and Turin’s fate, the death of Nienor in *The Children of Húrin* (1910 ed. 2007) may be seen as pagan examples. These elements are also found in *The Eddur*; e.g. the fate of Sigúrd and Guðrún and the gods and their doom in the *Völuspá*. When looking at Tolkien's *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (trans. Tolkien, 1920-1930, ed. 2009), a translation of a part of *The Eddur*, an overt influence can be noticed apart from the dragon Fáfnir sitting on a heap of gold (p.116, 37), like Smaug in *The Hobbit* (1937, p.250), Fáfnir is killed by a sword and his black blood is the cause of Sigurd's curse which kills him in the end (p.115, 29). In *The Children of Húrin* (1910 ed. 2007) a similar doom falls upon the hero. Túrin kills Glaurung with his sword. When Túrin takes back his sword, black blood from the

dragon hits him. The dragon's blood curses Túrin and he becomes paralyzed. As Túrin wakes he kills himself as he discovers some horrible secrets (p.239-258). The notion of cursing and curse is important as a Christian does not fear curses. As mentioned in *The Bible*: "like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest" (Proverbs 26:2b). God does not allow His children to be cursed.

3.2 Christian influences

Regarding works that are more Christian and had an influence on Tolkien, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been selected to be investigated more closely here. As this story was extensively studied by Tolkien, the chance of seeing influences is thus very likely. A Christian influence in Tolkien's work as well as one that can be found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is numerology. Certain numbers can refer to Christian matters. Biblical numbers which are important are for example three, the holy trinity (1 John 5:7); five; the five virtues (2 Peter 1:5); fourteen, three times fourteen equals forty-two. This is the number of generations in the family tree from Abraham to Jesus; forty, the forty nights Moses spent in the desert (Mark 1:13). Similarly, as pointed out above, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* numerology is essential. Vicente Casas Perdosa argues the following: "Even from the structural point of view, the plot is made up of three different themes which are perfectly mingled: the Beheading Game, the Sexual Temptation, and the Exchange of Winnings" (2006). Tolkien also used Christian numerology in his works. For instance, the number three in Tolkien's works can be found on a regular basis: The three elven rings and their bearers, the company of three; Sam, Frodo and Gollum, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) consists of three books. The fellowship in *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1937) consists of fourteen. The major theme in *Sir Gawain* is resisting temptation. Resisting temptation is Christian. A good Christians resist temptation when tested by the devil or by God. For example, Moses is tested in his faith by God in *The Bible* not to drink water (Exodus 15:22-27). This is also a major plot device and theme in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55). In the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* a green, bearded

knight appears to test Arthur. Sir Gawain, a lesser man than Arthur takes his place and is tested (p.5-8). In *The Hobbit* (1937) and in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) Gandalf, a grey bearded wizard, tested Bilbo and Frodo. Another significant influence is found in the five Christian virtues presented in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: generosity, fellowship, chastity, courtesy and compassion. (p.15) Bilbo and Frodo both uphold the five virtues like Sir Gawain. For example, In *The Hobbit* (1937) Bilbo is generous as he does not take his entire share of gold from the Lonely Mountain. He also foresees that more problems will come of it (p.337). Another example in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) is prominent when Bilbo gives his war gear to Frodo (p.361) and Frodo and Sam share Lembas. (p.1196) Fellowship is shown in the fellowship of fourteen in *The Hobbit* (1937, p.24) and the fellowship of nine in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55, p.359). Chastity is shown because Bilbo is unmarried and has no children. Both Bilbo and Frodo uphold sexual abstinence. The fourth virtue is embodied in all hobbits, namely courtesy. The gentle politeness and courtly manners are shown by most hobbits throughout the stories. For example, Merry who will serve King Théoden (p.1018) and Pippin who serves Denethor (p.989) in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55). As for compassion, Bilbo and Frodo both show compassion towards Gollum when sparing his life. In *The Hobbit* (1937) Bilbo spares Gollum in the Misty Mountains (p.102). In *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) Frodo more than once spares Gollum's life while travelling to Mount Doom. (p.803, p.814, p.895, p1236) A last significant influence of Christian fate is mentioned in Tolkien's essay *On Faery Stories*. (1966) 'Eucatastrophe' is a term coined by Tolkien himself to describe “the Consolation of the Happy Ending” (1966, p.13). Tolkien describes this term as “The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn'” (p.13). *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) contains a great number of eucatastrophes. The ending is not entirely 'happy'. Frodo is forever scarred by the Nazgûl sword and broken by his quest and struggle with the power of the Ring. The eucatastrophe comes when Frodo is called to leave with Gandalf, Bilbo and the elves. The reader expects a slightly unhappy ending, this mind set changes suddenly when Frodo is asked to come along. Another eucatastrophe in *The Lord of the Rings*

(1954-'55) happens at the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. Eómer is riding towards his death at the sight of the ships of the Corsairs (p.1106). This evokes the opposite of a eucatastrophe, namely a dyscatastrophe. However, the eucatastrophe comes when Eómer realises that the black sails bear the White Tree of the king. The ships of the Corsairs do no longer imply destruction but hope. The use of dyscatastrophe to strengthen the eucatastrophe is also seen in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* when Sir Gawain finds out that he is being tested and he did better than any man could do. Sir Gawain upheld the virtues better than any other man could do.

3.3 Concluding remarks

It is interesting to see that the parts which show resemblance between Tolkien's works and the old pagan works *Beowulf* and *Eddur* show Pagan fate, because this indicates that Tolkien changed some features of the older works but maintained the main outcome and situation. By doing so, Tolkien makes it overtly simple to find similarities. This results in situations where pagan fate is present in a Christian story. All examples of fate, given in the first paragraph of this chapter are not influenced by a (moral) decision by a character but are caused by a web of events resolving in an unchangeable outcome. Christian influences are very clearly presented. Besides numerology, theme and eucatastrophe the five virtues are presented more than once. Especially Bilbo and Frodo are true Christian Protagonists. Whether these Christian values and symbols are presented because of influences from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or Tolkien's Christian upbringing, it can be said that Tolkien was heavily influenced by Christianity when writing his mythology.

4. The notion of fate in Tolkien's work

This part of the thesis will take a closer look at the Tolkien corpus. The works that will be analysed are: *The Children of Húrin* (1910 ed. 2007), *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (trans. Tolkien, 1920-1930, ed. 2009), *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55). The purpose of this

empirical study is to find out how the different types of fate are distributed in the different stories and whether there are any similarities between Tolkien's different works. Special attention will be given to occasions of fate and which type of source influenced Tolkien.

4.1 Selected works by Tolkien – the research corpus

Fate is counted on a basis where it is important to the story and has substantial influence on events, characters or has a meaning. Excluded are things which do not matter. For example, in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) such things could be the colour of the trees in Rivendell. What does matter for example is the vast amount of snow in the pass of Caradhras as this influences the story (p.377-380). Counting fate is done using the descriptions given in chapter 1; wyrd that is endowed during birth (pagan), fate from the influence of good or bad deeds (Christian) and fate from catastrophic events, which can overturn the first two fates (fatalistic). The tables enclosed in Appendix A show the types of fates used in the selected books by Tolkien. The tables are divided in the X-axis representing the type of fate registered. Pagan fate is registered as a '1', Christian fate as a '2', and Fatalistic fate as a '3'. The Y-axis is representing the page where the fate is registered. The first registered occasion of fate represents the null-point of the table and the last registered occasion of fate represents the end-point of the table all tables can be seen as equal. This step is necessary because the different works differ in length. The types of fate are separated in: 1, Pagan fate; 2, Christian fate and 3, Fatalistic fate. The books containing the hexalogy, *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954-55) are divided into three separate tables, i.e. according to the three different books (table 2-4) and as a complete story (table 5).

4.2 Analysis of the Tolkien research corpus

The different tables show remarkable resemblances as both pagan and Christian fate are evenly distributed in *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-'55) and *The Children of Húrin*

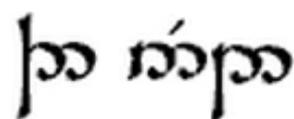
(1910 ed. 2007). However, it is important to notice that one book is entirely different from the others, namely *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun* (Tolkien 1920-'30 ed. 2009). This is the only book which is a translation of a part of an older story, *The Eddur*. As seen in chapter three, this work has had a great influence on Tolkien. As *The Eddur* is the main source of medieval Skaldic tradition in Iceland and Norse mythology, it is not surprising that this work contains solely Pagan fate. However, being completely pagan *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun* (Tolkien 1920-'30 ed. 2009) separates this story from the other works by Tolkien. Because *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrun* (Tolkien 1920-'30 ed. 2009) is obviously different from his other works, the data is not taken into account when comparing the other works. It does show that Tolkien, when translating a story, keeps the original story lines. It is possible that Tolkien used older stories from *The Eddur* and *Beowulf* and kept the original type of fate. When a part of Tolkien's work was influenced by own experiences or Christian works such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Christian fate is used. Christian fate is seen in situations where choices are made. For example, Bilbo chooses to go on an adventure, thereby choosing his own fate (*The Hobbit*, p.22). In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the same choice is made by Sir Gawain. He also chooses to go on an adventure. When looking at pagan fate, a good example is the use of curses in Tolkien's work. Pagan fate is seen in *The Children of Hurin* (1910 ed. 2007) where a dragon curses Túrin the main character. This fate is taken from *The Edda*, *Völuspá*. In *The Edda* Sigúrd is cursed by a dragon as well. Tolkien used pagan works to compile his own work, however he wrote in a letter to Father Robert Murray, that *The Lord of the Rings* is "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" (Letters 172). This is clearly seen in the Tolkien corpus as Christian fate does occur more frequently than one would suspect from a mythology about a fantasy world. Another observation from the Tolkien research corpus is that fatalistic fate does not appear often in Tolkien's works. This is not surprising as Tolkien was a Christian and the works he was interested in were mainly Christian and pagan. It seems that Tolkien succeeded in incorporating both pagan and Christian elements equally throughout the mythology leaving much room for interpretation whether it is

pagan or Christian. Tolkien judged his work as Christian (Letters 172). Research by Pearce (2002) showed that Christians find Tolkien's mythology in support of Paganism. Gilmour, P. (2005) elucidates that Tolkien is a devout Christian and so is his work to be read. Evans, J. (2012) points out that it is not as black and white as many say, Tolkien's works are a mixture of pagan and Christian influences. Many more opinions are given concerning the Tolkien corpus. From the results and conclusions of this thesis the best way to describe Tolkien's works are as Evans points out: "Tolkien the Catholic Christian fruitfully used "pagan" material in *The Lord of the Rings* without either betraying his deepest Catholic commitments on the one hand or, on the other, denouncing pagan beliefs as hopelessly benighted and therefore useless to an orthodox Christian perspective" (2002). As seen in chapter two Tolkien's Christian background has made him write like a Christian (Pearce 2002, Morrow 2005). However, in chapter three many influences from Christian and pagan works are noticed. The pagan influences from *Beowulf* and *The Eddur* are mainly seen as a result from Tolkien's interests in these works. In chapter four the empirical data supports the point Evans (2002) points out that Tolkien's mythology is influenced by both pagan and Christian literature. The notion of fate is both pagan and Christian in Tolkien's works. Both are equally important to his writings.

5. Conclusion

The main question at the start of this thesis was: Is Tolkien's work influenced by his Christian upbringing and Christian work like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or by pagan influences from works like *The Eddur* and *Beowulf* and how did Tolkien incorporate this in his mythology of Middle-earth? As we have seen in the previous three parts of this thesis, all these influences have had an important influence on Tolkien. It is safe to say that without one of these influences Tolkien's mythology would not have been what it is now. Tolkien frequently used characters, items and story lines from older works which inspired him. It seems that Tolkien as a Christian was very interested

in classical and medieval works. Pagan fate is most often found in parts similar to Germanic works as *The Eddur* and *Beowulf*. This is also true for Christian fate which comes from works like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Tolkien's upbringing and *The Bible*. By overtly using older works, which were important to him, it can be said that Tolkien is paying respect and showing his interest to older works. As has been said in one of his letters Tolkien was a stout Roman Catholic who did not support Paganism. Thus, it simply cannot have been the purpose of Tolkien to write Pagan works. When critics and Christians claimed that his works are supporting Paganism, Tolkien went to great lengths to waylay these claims. Many critics and friends such as his fellow Christian C.S. Lewis supported Tolkien in this. The conclusion of this thesis is that Tolkien was influenced by old pagan works and pagan fate. Tolkien also added many influences from Christian works and in particular his own Roman Catholic views by portraying a pagan world with dragons, wizards, elves, dwarves and other non-realistic creatures which Tolkien loved from the works that he studied. Tolkien wrote his mythology like he described the writer of *Beowulf* writing *Beowulf* in his essay “*Beowulf, the Monsters and the Critics*” (1936): A Christian writer portraying a pagan world turned into a Christian world where Christian values and virtues are present.



- The End -

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix A, definitions.

The Anglo-Saxon Dictionary by Bosworth, J., 2010:

Wyrd, N.

wyrd; What happens, fate, fortune, chance

I. the word is used to gloss the following Latin words: Eventus, Fati, Fortuna...

II. fate, the otherwise than humanly appointed order of things

III. in a personal sense, one of the Fates (the weird sisters)

III a. as a personification, fate, fortune

IV. an event, (1) with the special idea of that which happens by the determination of providence or fate

V. what happens to a person, fate, fortune, lot, condition

V a, fate, death.

VI. chance, accident

The Oxford English Dictionary:

Wyrd, N.

Pronunciation:

/wɪəd/

Forms:

OE *wyrd*, ME *wird*, (ME *wired*, ME *wirid*), *wirde*, ME *wyrde*, (transmission error) *word*; ME *wyerde*, *wierde*, ME–15 *werd* (ME *werid*), *werde*, ME– *weird* (ME Sc. *veird*), 16–17 (18 Sc.) *wierd*; Sc.15 *waired*, 15–16 *weard*, 17 *weerd*.

Etymology:

Old English *wyrd* (feminine), = Old Saxon *wurd* (plural *wurdi*), Old High German *wurt*, Old Norse *urð-r*, from the weak grade of the stem *werþ-*, *warþ-*, *wurþ-* to become: see *worth* v.

The word is common in Old English, but wanting in Middle English until c1300, and then occurs chiefly in northern texts, though employed also by Chaucer, Gower, and Langland. The normal later and modern form would have been *wird*, and the substitution of *werd*, *wērd* (which is natural in south-eastern Middle English) is difficult to account for in the northern dialects. In senses now current the word is either Scottish or archaic (chiefly under the influence of Scottish writers).

Definitions:

1a. The principle, power, or agency by which events are predetermined; fate, destiny.

1b. Magical power, enchantment.

2a. pl. The Fates, the three goddesses supposed to determine the course of human life.

2b. One pretending or supposed to have the power to foresee and to control future events; a witch or wizard, a soothsayer.

- 3a. That which is destined or fated to happen to a particular person, etc.; what one will do or suffer; one's appointed lot or fortune, destiny.
- 3b. pl. (often in reference to a single person).
- 3c. spec. An evil fate inflicted by supernatural power, esp. by way of retribution.
- 4a. A happening, event, occurrence.
- 4b. That which is destined or fated to happen; predetermined events collectively.
- †5a. A decree (of a god). Obs.
- †5b. An omen or token significant of the nature of a future event; a prognostic. Obs.
- 5c. A prediction of the fate which is to happen to a person; etc.; a prophecy.
- 5d. A supernatural or marvellous occurrence or tale.

Fate, n.

Pronunciation:

/feit/

Etymology:

< Latin *fātum*, lit. 'that which has been spoken', neuter past participle of *fārī* to speak. The primary sense of the Latin word is a sentence or doom of the gods (= Greek *θέσφατον*); but it was subsequently used as the equivalent of the Greek *μοῖρα*, which, originally meaning only a person's 'lot' or 'portion', had come to express the more abstract conception explained below (sense 1), and its personification as a mythological being.

Compare Old French *fat(e)*, Provençal *fat*, Italian *fato*, Portuguese *fado*, Spanish *hado*. (The plural *fāta* gave rise in popular Latin to the feminine singular *fāta* fairy: for the Romance forms of this see *fay* n.1) The immediate source of the English word is doubtful. Chaucer uses it in *Troilus* (where he translates from Boccaccio's Italian), but in rendering the Latin of Boethius he uses only *destiné*.

Definitions:

- 1. The principle, power, or agency by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular, are unalterably predetermined from eternity. Often personified.
- 2a. Mythol. The goddess of fate or destiny; in Homer *Μοῖρα*
- 2b. pl. In later Greek and Roman mythology, the three goddesses supposed to determine the course of human life (Greek *Μοῖραι*, Latin *Parcæ*, *Fata*).
- 3. That which is destined or fated to happen.
- 3a. gen. Also in pl. predestined events.
- 3b. Of an individual, an empire, etc.: The predestined or appointed lot; what a person, etc. is fated to do or suffer.
- 3c. In etymological sense: An oracle or portent of doom.
- 4a. What will become of, or has become of (a person or thing); ultimate condition; destiny.
- 4b. Death, destruction, ruin.
- 4c. An instrument of death or destruction. Poet.

Comitatus, n.

Pronunciation:

/kɒmɪ'tertəs/

Etymology:

Latin, collective derivative of comes, comit-em, companion, count.

Definitions:

- 1a. A body of comites or companions; a retinue of warriors or nobles attached to the person of a king or chieftain.
- b. The status or relationship of such a body to their chief.

7.2 Appendix B, empirical data tables.

Definitions concerning tables.

Y-Axis:

- 1.1. Pagan fate;
- 1.2. Christian fate;
- 1.3. Fatalistic fate.

X-Axis:

Numbers correspond with page numbers in works.

Tables on next page.

Table

