Fantasy Literature and Christianity: Morality in J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit

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Master's Thesis

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Abstract

J. R. R. Tolkien is widely considered to be the father of modern fantasy. His efforts to prove to his readers that fairy stories do not belong exclusively to children's literature and his revolutionary style of creating the myths in his stories have paved the way for many other contemporary fantasy novels. He has incorporated his devout Christian beliefs into his stories and characters, which captivate numerous readers even decades after his death. Tolkien believed that the only true myth is the Gospel and that all any author can do is simply try to recreate such perfection in his own work. Even though he disliked allegory, Christian influence on his work is clearly evident, especially in the creation myth at the beginning of *The Silmarillion.* Using his characters, Tolkien demonstrates the importance of some of the essential values of Christian doctrine: pity, mercy, forgiveness, remorse, belief in a Divine power, the importance of friendship, and the significance of hope. This paper analyses and identifies the examples of those values in Tolkien's works and focuses on the morality of his characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to show in which way Tolkien's religious upbringing and devout Catholicism have influenced his writing and storytelling. The first chapter introduces various definitions of the fantasy genre, its elements and characteristics, and the connection between the fantasy genre and Christianity. Following that, the paper will focus on J. R. R. Tolkien as a father of modern fantasy and his theory that every good fairy story comes from sub-creation and it needs to engage the reader into "secondary belief" through the elements of recovery, escape, consolation, and eucatastrophe. The main section of the paper discusses the question of morality in Tolkien's works, personal inner battles of his characters, the role of a Divine Orchestrator, the importance of pity and mercy, and the eternal battle between the forces of Good and Evil.

1. Fantasy Literature and Christianity

Myths, legends and stories about various heroes are some of the oldest recorded stories in human history. Fantasy literature builds on these stories and provides us with endless imaginative worlds and characters, magic, and fairytales that seem to resist the test of time. From the early works such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, Homer's Odyssey, or the epic Victorian story of King Arthur to the magical world of modern fantasy of J. R. R. Tolkien and George Martin, fantasy literature has been a way of dealing with the real-life situations in an unrealistic way. Some of the most significant authors of every age poured their imagination into the pages of the fantasy literature to express their view and comments on topics such as politics, psychology, and even religion.

1.1 Fantasy as a Genre: Different Definitions of Fantasy Literature

There are numerous scholars who tried to define the fantasy genre. One of them is Tzvetan Todorov who did an extensive structural study in his book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), even though his study focused mainly on the fantastic genre. Todorov definition says:

> If there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world…the person…must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us…the fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. (25)

Later in the text, Todorov says that "we generally link the genre of the marvelous to that of the fairy tale. But as a matter of fact, the fairy tale is only one of the varieties of the marvellous…the supernatural events in fairy tales provoke no surprise" (54). He also defines a sub-genre between the fantastic and the marvelous and calls it the *fantastic-marvelous*, "the class of narratives that are presented as fantastic and that end with an acceptance of the supernatural…cannot be explained by the laws of nature as they are generally acknowledged" (52-53). There is also a pure marvelous, where "supernatural elements provoke no particular reaction either in the characters or in the implicit reader. It is not an attitude toward the events described which characterizes the marvelous, but the nature of these events" (54).

However, Todorov's final conclusion is quite pessimistic when he states that "the fantastic literature of the nineteenth century has given way to a new kind of literature; not, as

he thinks, a literature in which everything is fantastic, but one in which the fantasmatic appears for the first time in its own right" (Clayton 346).

Similarly to Todorov, W. R. Irwin, makes a distinction between the fantastic and fantasy, saying that "it is the former which involves an opposition of the "anti-real . . . against an established real," whereas the latter must be understood as a rhetorical strategy, a "game of the impossible" where "narrative sophistry" is deployed to make nonfact appear as fact. Yet, even on this level of game, the system of fantasy creation is still defined by reference to ontological absolutes: nonfact, impossibility" (McCaffery 123).

J. R. R. Tolkien defines fantasy literature, or rather a fairy-story, in his essay "On Fairy-Stories":

> The definition of a fairy-story—what it is, or what it should be—does not, then, depend on any definition or historical account of elf or fairy, but upon the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country. I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done... It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole... For the moment I will say only this: a "fairy-story" is one which touches on or uses Faerie, whatever its own main purpose may be: satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. Faerie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician. (114)

Despite the different interpretations and definitions, the question of the importance of fantasy as a literary genre still remains open, especially now in the twenty-first century with the ever growing popularity of fantasy literature. Todorov's opinion originated under the influence of the nineteenth century social and economic circumstances, but not everyone agrees with his pessimistic view. John Gerlach believes that it is the treatment of the story that gives the reader that fantasy effect, not the subject or theme, so there should be an endless number of possible fantasies to be written. For him, the sense of wonder is in the telling of the story, not the subject. His point of view is an optimistic one: "In Todorov's words, the hesitation must continue... Since fantasy is a process, not a result, its resources are endless, and it is in no way dependent on the fashion of the conventions it adapts" (559).

1.2 The Elements and Characteristics of the Fantasy Genre

To create a secondary world in a fantasy text, writers mostly use supernatural, unreal, and imaginary elements. Because of the prominent use of folklore, myth and legend in the early works of fantasy literature, the boundary between fantasy and myth was not clearly defined. It

all changed when modern fantasy started to develop into a clearly defined genre. While the traditional tales have their roots in the oral stories passed from one generation to another, modern fantasy stories are original in their conception. They come from the pure imagination of the fantasy writers, with completely new imaginary worlds and fantastic characters and beings.

In his text *Writing Essentials*, Regie Routman defines fantasy genre as "Fiction with strange or otherworldly settings or characters; fiction that invites suspension of reality; fiction that depends on magic or the impossible or inexplicable" (4). He also supports the opinion that fantasy literature is divided into "low fantasy (world governed by the laws of this world but inexplicable things occur) and high fantasy (set in a secondary world of magic and inhabited by supernatural beings or creatures)" (4).

For a certain text to be characterized as a fantasy text, the setting must transcend the world of reality. No matter how fantastical and imaginary it might be, the world created in the fantasy text must be convincing and the laws of the world must be consistent and credible:

> His world once invented, the highest law that comes next into play is, that there shall be harmony between the laws by which the new world has begun to exist; and in the process of his creation, the inventor must hold by those laws. The moment he forgets one of them, he makes the story, by its own postulates, incredible. To be able to live a moment in an imagined world, we must see the laws of its existence obeyed. Those broken, we fall out of it. The imagination in us, whose exercise is essential to the most temporary submission to the imagination of another, immediately, with the disappearance of Law, ceases to act… The laws of the spirit of man must hold, alike in this world and in any world he may invent… In physical things a man may invent; in moral things he must obey--and take their laws with him into his invented world as well. (MacDonald 2)

Characters of fantasy stories are well developed with a complex personality. There is usually a hero – "the founder of something -- the founder of a new age, the founder of a new religion, the founder of a new city, the founder of a new way of life" (Campbell and Moyer 110). Characters often possess special powers and unusual abilities. Some animals in fantasy stories may possess human-like characteristics, like the ability of speech (for example, the lion Aslan in Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*). No matter how great the story itself is, the characters are the ones to enable the reader to connect to the emotional aspect of the story. When writing about creating the great characters, Daniel Arenson says:

> Great fiction depends on great characters…The reason is simple. Readers need to care about the story. They want to invest their emotions in your work. Readers will care about

> a story if they care about the characters… Great characters are exaggerated. They do things we never would in the real world. They are over the top. By exaggerating their traits, you'll let them leap from the pages and become real… Your characters need to have the complexities of a real person. That means a history, motives, dreams, fears, loves, interests, and desires… The plot happens because the heroes and villains direct it. It is a poor plot which exists for its own sake, with the characters simply tagging along. (1)

Plots in fantasy stories must be organized, well-structured and follow a certain logical order. The reader should not always try to find the allegory in the story, because "in fantastic literature, the allegories, if they are there, always serve the story, and not the other way around. Their presence in the story is only part of the story's richness" (Dickerson and O'Hara qtd. in Laszkiewicz 1). Both Tolkien and Lewis insisted that their characters and storylines may have some applicability to the real world events and figures, however none of it should be considered as an allegory.

Furthermore, Tolkien's opinion was that if we try to apply the rules and laws of the real ("primary") world to the imaginary ("secondary") world the story would make no sense and would seem absurd. In their extensive work on Tolkien's literature, Hart and Khovacs talk about the autonomy of the imaginary worlds:

> Tolkien urges, stories must stand (or fall) first and foremost on their own terms, as the narration of particular happenings and individual characters. This does not mean that stories are (or could ever be) wholly divorced from what, in "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien refers to as "Primary Reality." Indeed, he insists, inasmuch as they actually contain "life" (are related in one way or another to something we may identify as "real"), all decent stories will in fact contain particular events that evoke wider patterns of experience or individual characters who embody traits of a "universal" sort... In stories, as in life, things are primarily what they are, and they should be judged as such. (55-56)

Modern fantasy stories often include the use of magic, some kind of a quest, and the battle between the forces of good and evil. All of the previously stated elements of fantasy literature help the reader to connect to the story and to the experience and the adventures of its characters. Most importantly, the imaginary world of fantasy stories invites the reader to question his/her reality: "the fantasy text leads the reader to question the order of the real world through the creation of disorder. The mirror image of the world leads the reader to see its true nature. Through the contrast of representation, the reader perceives reality" (Mitchell 4).

1.3 The Elements of Christianity in Fantasy Literature

From the first written words known to human race, religion has been a great source of inspiration. Writers often use their spiritual beliefs as pillars upon which they build their own worlds, characters, and stories. Although it might seem unlikely at first, Christianity has had a great influence on some of the greatest fantasy authors of modern time. In the words of Thomas W. Smith, "books and movies that fall within this genre, such as those by J.R.R. Tolkien and J.K. Rowling, often are thought to be irrelevant and harmless at best, or dangerous and demonic at worst. This viewpoint, I believe, is both shortsighted and misguided" (1). The biggest issue that Christians have with fantasy literature is the misrepresentation of truth; they find fantasy literature to have nothing in common with reality of the world we live in. However, some of the authors argue that fantasy literature "can function as a mirror, perhaps a fun-house mirror, whose exaggerations can help us notice what we normally would ignore" (Matthews 5-6).

With the growing popularity of fantasy books and films, many readers and viewers have raised the important question of the influence of such stories on the minds of young people around the world. Would it be possible for stories with supernatural and magic elements to seduce those susceptible young minds into the realm of sin and the occult? In her analysis of religious themes in fantasy literature, Weronika Laszkiewicz says that "the fact that people are raising such questions and have become so involved in the discussion is evidence of fantasy literature's ability to transgress the borders of imagination and touch upon issues that people consider important, in this case religion and spiritual life" (1).

One of the most frequently analysed fantasy texts is Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In his imaginary world, Tolkien uses his characters to depict the complex realism of moral decision making, the eternal struggle of good versus evil, the existence of fundamental virtues such as atonement, self-sacrifice, mercy, pity, love, courage, and integrity. Laszkiewicz also points out that there are "certain correspondences between Tolkien's creation and Christian (Catholic) faith: the genesis of Middle-earth; the recurring motifs of temptation, sin, and self-sacrifice; the presence of a benevolent Providence, and the angel-like existence of the elves" (1).

Contemporary people, who have lost themselves in the fast-paced, high-tech digital world of global market and urban lifestyle, still like to read about traditional values, marvellous stories, and fearless heroes. Łaszkiewicz believes that fantasy literature can fulfil those expectations and bring its readers closer to the religious truths and the spiritual realization in several ways:

> Firstly, authors of fantasy invent their own secondary religions (frequently derived from religions existing in the real world) to enrich their secondary reality and place their heroes in a web of meaningful moral choices and obligations. This invention of secondary religions can be taken a step further when religious/spiritual motifs become indispensable elements for the entire quest/adventure and are situated in the center of the plot. Finally, the secondary religion may become the author's personal comment on, or criticism of, existing religious systems. (1)

Even though Tolkien denied the existence of a belief system in his trilogy, there are some obvious parallels and similarities with general beliefs in western culture. Finding such moral and ethical challenges in the text may help the reader to reflect on his own personal experience and see the truths of the real world in a different light.

1.4 Tolkien's Creation Myth: The Parallels with the Book of *Genesis*

Tolkien was adamant in saying that his work was not an intentional allegory of any kind and should not be considered as such. However, the influence of Christianity and its moral principles is clearly evident throughout Tolkien's works. One of the greatest parallels a reader can notice is the one between the book of *Genesis* and Tolkien's creation myth in *The Silmarillion*. As G. A. Matthews says in his paper on the role of fantasy in a Christian's life, "Tolkien's Catholic faith became the foundation of the trilogy. Wood speaks of how his Christian worldview implicitly pervades his literary myth…Tolkien's book is pre-Christian only in chronology, not in content. The Gospel resounds in its depths" (16). Tolkien has managed to weave those religious elements and connotations into his text in such an intricate manner which would make it seem at first that *The Lord of the Rings* was nothing more but an entertaining literary classic. However, the reason it remains so popular, according to Ralph C. Wood, is "because of the insights and Christian convictions of its author, who allowed his understanding of reality to mould his fantasy and his fantasy to point to higher realities" (Wood qtd. in Bush 5).

Tolkien believed that the Gospel is the only true story made by the Creator and, for him, the story of Christ was the "true great myth" which all the other myths and stories can only attempt to echo. By writing such myths and stories, man is trying to imitate God, "he strives to be creator, or sub-creator of his own Secondary World. Because of his view of sub-creating as a glorification of God, by writing the Lord of the Rings Tolkien is performing a Christian act – he is worshiping God" (Hess 79). Tolkien gives the reader a way to ponder over some deep existential questions such as the existence of God, the choice between good and evil, and the

importance of a virtuous life. As Ryan Marotta says in his paper “Tolkien uses his mythology to communicate Truths that will help us in our search for what is sacred, in our endeavours to fulfil our destinies in the face of temptation, and in our struggles to embrace our mortality, so that in the end we too may join in the Great Music” (42).

Tolkien’s creation myth has many similarities with the Christian story of creation in the book of *Genesis*:

> In the beginning Eru, the One, who in the Elvish tongue is named Ilúvatar, made the Ainur of his thought; and they made a great Music before him. In this Music the World was begun; for Ilúvatar made visible the song of the Ainur, and they beheld it as a light in the darkness...Therefore Ilúvatar gave to their vision Being, and set it amid the Void, and the Secret Fire was sent to burn at the heart of the World; and it was called Eä. Then those of the Ainur who desired it arose and entered into the World at the beginning of Time; and it was their task to achieve it, and by their labours to fulfil the vision which they had seen. Long they laboured in the regions of Eä, which are vast beyond the thought of Elves and Men, until in the time appointed was made Arda, the Kingdom of Earth. Then they put on the raiment of Earth and descended into it, and dwelt therein. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 7)

The first parallel between Tolkien's creation myth and the book of *Genesis* is the role of the Omnipotent Creator. Eru/Iluvatar is Tolkien's version of the God Almighty, who creates all life and serves as the beacon of light and all that is good. He created the world for his children – Ainur, Valar, and Maiar - and gave them power to help in the creation as long as they stay in the accordance with his music. They can be compared to the Angels in God's Heaven, with the same role of protecting Eru's creation on Earth. Even though his vision of the world was peaceful and harmonious, just like in the book of *Genesis*, the darkness crept into Eru's creation through one of his own children.

Melkor was one of the mightiest of the Valar, but he became corrupted, envious and greedy:

> From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless. Understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame. He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness. And darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda, and filled it with fear for all living things. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 9)

Melkor managed to seduce some of his brothers and sisters with treachery and false promises to join him in his malevolent attempts to rule over the lands of the Earth. Melkor can be compared to the fallen angel Lucifer, who also became sick with greed and envy and was cast out of Heaven. With the passing of time, Melkor's reign over Earth and its inhabitants grew stronger and stronger. He managed to recruit some of the most nefarious creatures and servants of evil. One of the worst and most loyal to Melkor's perverse machinations was the one known as Sauron or Grothaur the Cruel: "In all the deeds of Melkor the Morgoth upon Arda, in his vast works and in the deceits of his cunning, Sauron had a part, and was only less evil than his master in that for long he served another and not himself" (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 9-10).

Another similarity between Tolkien's creation myth and the book of Genesis can be seen in the symbol of the "Flame Imperishable" which could be compared to the Holy Spirit in Catholicism:

> Therefore I say: *Eä!* Let these things Be! And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World, and the World shall Be; and those of you that will may go down into it. And suddenly the Ainur saw afar off a light, as it were a cloud with a living heart of flame; and they knew that this was no vision only, but that Ilúvatar had made a new thing: Eä, the World that Is. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 5)

Eru wanted to reassure his children that all will be good and that he will take care of his creation. He instructed the Ainur to go forth and continue his creation with their own voices and their own melody. But he had also sent the Flame to the Earth as "a promise of providential divine care amid a hostile world" (Lasseter 81).

The creation myth in *The Silmarillion* lays the foundation for readers to experience the "Secondary belief" which, according to Tolkien, is necessary for the recognition of meaning in any work of fantasy. He is not trying to create a story bigger than the one he considers to be the greatest fairy-story of all time, but merely trying to honour the great creator by embedding his beliefs into the world he has created. As Wood says "Tolkien's dislike of allegory proves this point. He does not intend to reiterate the story of Israel and Christ through his own mythology, but to enrich it, to pay tribute to his Creator by offering his own humble sub-creation" (Wood qtd. in Bush 43).

2. J. R. R. Tolkien

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born on January 3, 1892 to Arthur and Mabel Tolkien in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Mabel took the kids to England for a lengthy family visit, but after

her husband's sudden death she decided to stay in England permanently. Losing the income after her husband's death forced her to move to a small place near Birmingham. That particular rural English setting had a great impact on young Tolkien's imagination. Even though his family was originally Protestant, Tolkien's mother Mabel eventually converted to Catholicism. After that, religion became an important aspect of Tolkien's family life. However, Mabel's family, who were devout Protestants, was not supportive of her decision and soon after decided to cut off all the financial support for her and the boys. The stress and loss of her family's support took a toll on Mabel's health and soon after she became very ill and died at the age of thirty four. After her premature death, Tolkien and his younger brother Hillary were placed under the care of Father Francis Morgan who supported them financially and made sure that they had the best education he could provide. In 1916, Tolkien married Edith Bratt, an orphaned girl he met when he was only 16. Shortly after marrying Edith, Tolkien joined the English soldiers in World War I. He lost many of his friends on the battlefields and got trench fever himself. After the war he got a job as a professor at Leeds University, met C. S. Lewis, founded the "Inklings" and published some of his best works. *The Hobbit* was first published in 1937 and it took Tolkien nearly 20 years to publish the sequel, which eventually became *The Lord of the Rings*, published in 1954/1955. As Laura Ann Hess says, "C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien are two of the most celebrated fantasy authors of the modern era. Since initial publication in the mid-1900's, their novels have sold millions, filling the minds of readers with the adventures of Elves and Eldils" (1).

2.1 Religious Upbringing: The Influence of Christianity on Tolkien's Work

Christianity had an immense influence on Tolkien's upbringing, his life, and his work. He blamed his mother's death on his Protestant relatives and that intolerance resulted with even greater devotion to Christianity. Tolkien himself exclaimed that his "own dear mother was a martyr indeed, and it is not to everybody that God grants so easy a way to his great gifts as he did to Hilary and myself, giving us a mother who killed herself with labour and trouble to ensure us keeping the faith" (Tolkien qtd. in Hess 19).

Tolkien shared his strong religious beliefs with his wife and some of his friends later in life. One of them was a renowned author C. S. Lewis, who was Tolkien's great friend. He persuaded Lewis to convert to Catholicism, and in their belief that myth is but a form of glorifying God they wrote many works with a distinct Christian influence. Tolkien explained his philosophy about the influence of Christianity on the creation of myths in his essay "On Fairy-Stories":

> He believed in the inherent truth in all mythology; because we are created by God, in his image, when we create stories they will contain a "splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God." He said, "Only by myth-making, only by becoming a 'sub-creator' and inventing stories can Man aspire to the state of perfection he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily towards the true harbour." (Tolkien qtd. in Hess 39)

One of his works with a most obvious religious influence is *The Silmarillion*. At the beginning of the story is the act of creation by the god, Eru Iluvatar, and his children Valar. The story also features the struggle with the evil rebel Melkor (Morgoth), the fall of the Elves and their exile from Valinor, the greed and envy of people and the evil schemes and deceptions of the enemy. That influence is a bit more subtle in *The Lord of the Rings*, but still rather evident mainly in the epic battle between good and evil. Even Tolkien himself admitted that "*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" (Tolkien qtd. in Hess 67).

Even though his religious convictions are not so explicit in *The Lord of the Rings*, the influence of Christianity is evident in most of main characters' inner moral struggle, their values and ethics, their belief in providential design, their hope and persistent fight for the freedom of their people. Many of his characters fighting for the good cause can be compared to Jesus Christ, while the evil one share some traits with the Satan himself. Tolkien was a man of strong convictions and he firmly believed in Christian values and doctrines. As Smith says in his lecture:

> Tolkien sees the world in a certain way. His vision is absorbed into his story. He refuses to place any particular religious practices or religious doctrines into his story because they would only dull the vision. The whole work is religious; not any particular part of it. That's the point. Sure; one of the ways this vision manifests itself is in the themes and symbols of the story. But in addition, for Tolkien, the religious vision – the Catholic imagination – affects also his whole approach to art and life. (3-4)

2.2 Tolkien as a Father of Modern Fantasy: "On Faerie Stories" and the Making of the Myth

Tolkien is widely recognized and considered a father of modern fantasy. His revolutionary style of writing fairy stories and disillusionment of the traditional belief that such stories belong only to the world of children have paved the way for many authors to come. As Robert Rorabeck says in his essay "Tolkien's ultimate fruition of faerie must be seen as embodied within *The*

Lord of the Rings, for within the tale Tolkien's master craft is not only a superlative sub-creation of fantasy, but it is a creation with relevant insight into the primary world…a model to critique the age that Tolkien knew" (13-14).

Tolkien's creation myth in the Silmarillion provides the reader with the foundation to engage in what Tolkien calls "secondary belief", which is necessary for the reader to understand the meaning of the story. Tolkien explains that the secondary belief contains elements of moral and religious truth but in a different form than in the primary (real) world. That way of writing allows the reader to see the familiar concepts and situations in a completely new light. Tolkien wrote in his essay that "probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it (155).

Fairy story and myth were incredibly important for Tolkien while creating the intricate world of The Lord of the Rings. He wanted the story to reflect the truths, problems, and struggles of the real world, although not as an allegory but as a "tale, excite, please, and even on occasion move, and within its own imagined world be accorded (literary) belief" (Tolkien qtd. in Morris 17). Tolkien's characters are not allegories of the people from the real (Primary) world. They operate by the certain rules the author has created for them, rules that apply only to the Secondary world. Jay Bennett gives the perfect explanation of Tolkien's Secondary Belief in his essay:

> All artistic works result from sub-creation, manipulating the mediums by which we perceive reality in order to create meaning; yet works of fantasy foreground the process of subcreation and call attention to the fact that the axioms of reality are purposefully misconstrued. If the author successfully presents the impossibilities of his or her story as part of a logical structure that will ultimately reveal some meaning, then the reader temporarily accepts the clear manipulations of reality and engages in what Tolkien calls "Secondary Belief." With the reader in this state of mind, a work of fantasy creates meaning in a way that a work of realistic literature cannot, or at least cannot to the same degree. Secondary Belief temporarily removes the reader from reality, and therefore allows him or her to more objectively observe and analyze the primary world, or the world that the reader actually exists in. (12)

Due to Tolkien's religious upbringing and influence on his life, the reader can find many similarities between those two worlds, but still needs to believe that the laws of the Secondary world are undisputed. Smith considers that the reason why Tolkien disliked allegory so much

is because it "limits the scope of the reader's imagination…places restrictions on how to apply the stories to our own lives…limiting the reader's freedom to allow the author's vision to transform their own experience…inviting us to think as broadly as we can about the applicability of his stories" (2).

In his essay "On Faerie Stories", besides the term sub-creation Tolkien also introduces the terms recovery, escape, and consolation. Recovery helps the reader to approach the concepts of his own world in a different way, from a different standpoint. Escape "should not lead the reader to deny the problems facing the real world or to ignore them indefinitely. On the contrary, the passing moments that reader's escape into fantasy should revitalize their passion to change and impact the Primary World for good" (Matthews 8). Consolation provided in the fairy stories could be moral or emotional, it happens in the form of the 'eucatastrophe', "the sudden joyous 'turn'…not essentially 'escapist', nor 'fugitive'…it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur" (Tolkien, "On Faerie Stories" 153). This sudden, unexpected turn of events was for Tolkien a clear mark of a good faerie story. He considered the resurrection of Christ to be the eucatastrophe of "human history". William D. Fay compares some of the events from *The Lord of the Rings* with the ones from the Gospel:

> When Satan introduces sin into the Garden of Eden, he enables the sacrifice of Christ to break its power and thereby redeem the world. By introducing sin to mortals through the granting of rings to the races of men and dwarves, Sauron enables the sacrifice and eucatastrophic redemption of Frodo three thousand years later. In his arrogance, Sauron creates the agent of his own ultimate defeat; without the Ring, Frodo never would have been able to destroy Sauron in the fires of Mount Doom. Similarly, without Satan's introduction of sin into the world, Christ's sacrifice—the eucatastrophic act that destroyed death and one day will end Satan's power altogether—would never have occurred. (2)

Even today, Tolkien's popularity is not fading. People of all ages and cultures still enjoy his stories and characters, their inner struggles and the epic battle of good against evil. Modern fantasy nowadays is constantly finding new inspirations and styles, but the foundations that Tolkien has provided in his works are everlasting.

3. The Concept of Morality

To simply define morality one could say that it is the system through which a person can determine the right from wrong intentions, decisions, and actions. There are many different theories and definitions of morality, as well as many different approaches to it, from

philosophical and anthropological to religious and psychological. Most of them agree that every person should act according to certain moral principles for the good of the society. Morality can be considered in descriptive or normative sense, where former "is about what motivates pro-social behaviour, how people reason about ethics, what people believe to have overriding importance, and how societies regulate behaviour", and latter refers to the "intrinsic value, right and wrong, and/or virtues" (Grey 1). When talking about religious morality, one must mention the importance of conscience as an intrinsic moral compass which guides people of faith towards choosing the good over evil in the way they decide to act.

3.1 Religious Morality in Tolkien's Works

Starting with the story of creation in *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien introduces the reader to a world of intricate moral consistency and clarity, which becomes even clearer in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. This is where his inner Christian values are most evident; his characters undergo constant personal battle between good and evil, a battle of the soul. Many of them were tempted and seduced by the One Ring and some were not strong enough to resist the allure of Evil. Even today, many readers enjoy Tolkien's stories because they can identify with the moral struggles of his characters, use the examples from the story to find hope and courage to deal with the challenges of the real world, because "each generation has their own evils to confront, but virtue can be upheld if we each 'do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set'" (Bennett 52).

Tolkien uses his characters to present the importance of moral values such as friendship, love, mercy, pity, and loyalty. The purpose of the story is not only about the great battle between the forces of Good and Evil, it is also about the inner, personal battle that every character undergoes during the quest. The Creator has given everyone a freedom to choose for themselves, a free will to decide if they want to follow the path of righteousness or succumb to the lure of evil, so no matter how "strong the determinates—the pressures, the forces, the attractions, the obsessions—the decision is ultimately made in this mysterious ―free space of a soul. It is made in the play of good and evil within each person. Even Sauron at some time long ago had to choose to go over to the dark side" (McPartland 19).

In his paper "Tolkien's Heroic Criticism: A Developing Application of Anglo-Saxon Ofermod to the Monsters of Modernity", Robert Rorabeck explains that Tolkien uses hobbits as the moral centre of his story, therefore Frodo and Bilbo "become vessels for Tolkien's heroism, which is a product of Tolkien's morality and aesthetic code" (16). According to

Rorabeck, their heroism can be reduced to three main tenets, which are a clear reflection of Tolkien's devout Catholic beliefs:

> Tolkien enforces a trinity of attributes which must be accredited again to his social conditioning; those attributes would be: respect for the natural world and a life in pastoral tranquility near but not within the wilds of nature, a strong homosocial bond between the male characters (as is exemplified in the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Rings*), and above both of these a religious morality and providential view of the world and its inhabitants. (16)

3.2 Divine Orchestrator, Providence, and Predestination: The Tension Between Fate and Free Will

One of the biggest themes in Tolkien's stories is the conflict between providence, fate, and free will. It might seem that in some respect Tolkien's characters have little control over their fates and the circumstances that lead to specific events, but that is not completely true. He introduces a great degree of free will and freedom to make their own choices which gives more responsibility to the characters. It is up to them to use it wisely in accordance with the grand plan of the divine orchestrator. As Jay Bennett says:

> Tolkien once again explains why free will is essential to our being: without it, we cannot look beyond the world, cannot shape our lives, and cannot seek God. While Ilúvatar knows that giving free will to mankind allows for the possibility of evil, he reaffirms that all evil will ultimately be used for good, saying "'These too in their time shall find that all that they do redounds at the end only to the glory of my work'" (36). Here, Tolkien not only reconciles the existence of God with the existence of evil, but also reconciles free will with divine providence, and he will illuminate this idea throughout his entire mythology. (15)

Those characters serving the forces of good are provided with subtle aid and guidance, but they still have their own freedom of choice. The role of the divine orchestrator is not to subdue people to his own will and make them his own puppets, but to show them the righteous goal towards which they should all strive. The very success of their mission "rests in great part on each individual's responsibility to make right choices, but Tolkien's unnamed force is in control of all things and working toward a goal fully known only to itself" (Hillis iii). Tolkien again follows the pattern from the Bible where one can find numerous examples of God's subtle guidance through dreams and visions.

All of the beings in Tolkien's world are faced with the choice between good and evil, no one was created evil from the very beginning. However, those who are "morally upright generally heed their internal guidance system and profit by continuing on the path "appointed," toward good. Those who refuse to be an instrument of this powerful deity, resist their warnings and fall into a snare of evil and suffer the consequences" (Hillis 105). This matter of moral choice between good and evil and a force that is greater than any individual is only a reflection of the primary world. Tolkien firmly believed in the importance of personal choice and that "to the same set of circumstances, one person may react despairingly, allowing the events to control life, while another person may react hopefully, altering the outcome of his or her life in a significant manner" (Lassetter 121).

Some of the characters in Tolkien's stories have a greater understanding of that providential power. One of them is lady Galadriel who possesses wisdom and virtue that can be hardly matched by any other creature in Middle-Earth. She tells Frodo and Sam that they have chosen their path, which is a clear expression of free will, but as a consequence of that, and a suggestion of predetermination, now "the tides of fate are flowing" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 476). Another example of the importance of free will is Galadriel's explanation of the events Frodo and Sam see in her mirror. She instructs them to "remember that the Mirror shows many things, and not all have yet come to pass. Some never come to be, unless those that behold the visions turn aside from their path to prevent them. The Mirror is dangerous as a guide of deeds" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 472). Besides Galadriel, Master Elrond emphasizes the importance of free will at the Council when Frodo volunteers to take the Ring to Mordor. Elrond admits to Frodo that "it is a heavy burden. So heavy that none could lay it on another. I do not lay it on you. But if you take it freely, I will say that your choice is right" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 353). Through all these examples it is clearly evident that there is a greater providential design in place, however at the same time every character in the story has the right to exercise his free will and individually chose what they consider to be the right way.

When talking about providential design, one must mention Gandalf, who Tolkien uses as a certain "moral mouthpiece, emphasizing once more the importance of mercy and compassion" (Marotta 33). Gandalf guides Frodo at the beginning of their journey and explains to him that there might be a greater design for all that is about to happen and that the events leading to the moment of Frodo getting the Ring might not be so random as he thinks. Gandalf believes that "Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by

its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 73). When Frodo goes into despair and wishes for a different fate for himself, Gandalf reassures him: "'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us'" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 67).

Aragorn is another character who chooses to follow the righteous path and serve the forces of good. He firmly believes in moral order and that every man has to choose for himself, which is clear when he replies to Eomer that "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 570). When it was clear that the time of the final battle between the forces of good and evil is coming closer, Aragorn felt a calling to act according to a greater plan. Even though some of the people who care about him tried to dissuade him due to the danger of the path he chooses to follow, Aragorn stays firm in his decision and says that "It is not madness, lady...'for I go on a path appointed. But those who follow me do so of their free will; and if they wish now to remain and ride with the Rohirrim, they may do so. But I shall take the Paths of the Dead, alone, if needs be" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1025-1026). By following his inner moral compass in deciding what is righteous not only for himself, but for all the people of Middle-Earth, Aragorn shows great faith into providential design as a subtle guidance for the forces of good.

Being the ring-bearer, Frodo is certainly one of the crucial characters in the story. His choices and decisions affect the fate of all the free people in Middle-Earth. After realising that the Ring Bilbo left to Frodo was indeed the One Ring, Gandalf instructs Frodo to bring the Ring to the wisest beings in Middle-Earth, the Elves. During his journey, Frodo slowly discovers the true nature of the Ring, for its essential power lies in the ability to corrupt and overtake the will of its wearer. The Ring has a will of its own and its only goal is to get back to his master, the Dark Lord Sauron. Gandalf is the one who tells Frodo about the Ring's true intention: "There was more than one power at work, Frodo. The Ring was trying to get back to its master. It had slipped from Isildur's hand and betrayed him; then when a chance came it caught poor Deagol, and he was murdered; and after that Gollum, and it had devoured him" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 73). It gets harder with every passing day for Frodo to resist the power of the Ring. He undergoes an important inner battle on Amon Hen, after running away from Boromir who tried to take the Ring for himself:

> He heard himself crying out: *Never, never!* Or was it: *Verily I come, I come to you*? He could not tell. Then as a flash from some other point of power there came to his mind another thought: *Take it off! Take it off! Fool, take it off! Take off the Ring!* The two powers strove in him. For a moment, perfectly balanced between their piercing points, he writhed, tormented. Suddenly he was aware of himself again, Frodo, neither the Voice nor the Eye: free to choose, and with one remaining instant in which to do so. (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 523)

After resisting the temptation of the Ring, Frodo understands the task before him and decides to follow the path he finds was appointed for him: "I will do now what I must,' he said. 'This at least is plain: the evil of the Ring is already at work even in the Company, and the Ring must leave them before it does more harm. I will go alone" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 524). At the end of the quest, after finally reaching Mount Doom, Frodo's will and determination finally collapses and he refuses to fulfil his task and destroy the Ring: "But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1237). At that point all the little pieces of the puzzle come together in the moment of Gollum's sudden arrival. Even though Frodo has a freedom to choose not to complete his task, the presence of a higher power and fate makes sure that the forces of good finally prevail. Gollum's role in destroying the Ring was just a confirmation of Gandalf's words to Frodo from a long time ago: "My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many – yours not least" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 78).

As David Harvey says, "because Frodo has gone as far as his moral strength can take him, the fate of the Ring is literally taken out of his hands by both Gollum and the unseen force working through them all" (Harvey qtd. in Hillis 76). The final scene when Gollum inadvertently destroys the Ring is the perfect example of the "interplay between fate, free will, providence, and coincidence" (Bush 37). Tolkien once again points out that evil cannot prevail as long as there is good in the world, eventually it will only destroy itself.

3.3 The Crucial Role of Pity and Mercy

The importance of pity and mercy for Tolkien was a part of his religious upbringing. Christianity puts a great value on the virtue of mercy and forgiveness, giving someone a chance to repent and having hope that they could their way back to goodness. Tolkien implemented those same values into his story as a crucial characteristic of the two often compared characters.

The first case of mercy, which had a major impact on the entire quest that led to the final destruction of the Ring, was when Bilbo took pity on Gollum and decided to spare his life. At the moment of that vital decision Bilbo was already in the possession of the Ring, which means that the first thing he did after finding it was an act of pure goodness. Bilbo chose freely to spare Gollum's life, while Gollum's, or better yet Smeagol's first act after finding the Ring, was to murder his best friend just to gain the possession of the Ring for himself. That is the fundamental difference between their choices, which Gandalf explains to Frodo by telling him that Bilbo "took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 76). Frodo will later follow Bilbo's actions in granting Gollum the same pity as Bilbo did, which will finally lead to the best possible outcome for the people of Middle-Earth.

It was not easy for Bilbo to come to that decision because all he could feel for Gollum at the beginning was repulsion and disgust, feelings which were only heightened by the malevolent nature of the Ring Bilbo was wearing at the time. Tolkien describes Bilbo's inner struggle with the Ring's own will and the way he manages to overcome its malice:

> Bilbo almost stopped breathing, and went stiff himself. He was desperate. He must get away, out of this horrible darkness, while he had any strength left. He must fight. He must stab the foul thing, put its eyes out, kill it. It meant to kill him. No, not a fair fight. He was invisible now. Gollum had no sword. Gollum had not actually threatened to kill him, or tried to yet. And he was miserable, alone, lost. A sudden understanding, a pity mixed with horror, welled up in Bilbo's heart: a glimpse of endless unmarked days without light or hope of betterment, hard stone, cold fish, sneaking and whispering. All these thoughts passed in a flash of a second. He trembled. And then quite suddenly in another flash, as if lifted by a new strength and resolve, he leaped. (Tolkien, *The Hobbit* 56)

Bilbo found purity and compassion in his heart even while wearing the Ring, which is why he was able to successfully resist its powers for so many years.

When first faced with Gollum at the beginning of their quest, Frodo expresses regret that Bilbo did not kill him when he had a chance. However, Gandalf admonishes him by telling him that "many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement. For even the very wise cannot see all ends" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 78). The salvation of the world is therefore achieved by those acts of pity and mercy which "enables the fortunate turn that saves the Quest" (Bush 37).

Sam is the only one who cannot show pity or mercy for Gollum for a long time. Even when Gollum serves as a guide on their journey to Mordor, Sam stays constantly suspicious of his motives and empty promises. Even though Gollum starts having some flashes of his old personality, before he became corrupted by the Ring, his evil, twisted side still prevails. Frodo is able to empathize with Gollum because he knows what a burden the Ring is and, in case of failing to destroy the Ring, can see his own future in Gollum. After Frodo's fall in the battle against Shelob, Sam, believing his dear friend to be dead, decides to take over the task and carry the Ring the rest of the way to Mount Doom. The experience of briefly becoming a Ring-bearer gives Sam a glimpse into Gollum's unfortunate fate and eventually leads to him showing mercy to Gollum by deciding to spare his life. As Angela Bebb says, "thus, the Ringbearers, Bilbo, Sam, and Frodo, after initial disgust or even hatred, eventually empathize with Gollum…which enables them to master their desire to kill him and show him mercy instead, a mercy that brings about the successful completion of the Quest" (5).

3.4 Christ-like Figures in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*

Even though Tolkien adamantly denies any notion of his story being an allegory, the influence of Christianity can be seen even in some of the qualities and characteristics of his main protagonists. As Quincey Upshaw says in his paper "Structural Polarities in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*":

> Characters teach the following lessons though parallel qualities or paired opposition: one must act for the greater good and eschew self-interest (Faramir and Boromir); lead with integrity (Théoden and Denethor); show strong leadership yet nurture the weak (Aragorn and Galadriel); show mercy (Frodo and Bilbo); choose the right path even if it is difficult (Gandalf and Saruman); always offer your assistance despite being underestimated (Eówyn and the Hobbits); and loyally serve a cause greater than yourself (Sam and Gollum). (65)

There are many different theories about which character in Tolkien's story represents Christ-like qualities, however most of them agree that it is not only one character, but rather more of the together, that represent those highest of Christian virtues. In the words of Steve Higham, "the human condition is considered widely in Tolkien's book: there is the heroism of Frodo; the loyalty of Sam; the bravery of Aragorn; the wisdom of Elrond and Gandalf. Also featured are the negative aspects…the evil of Sauron; the treachery of Wormtongue; the violent orcs" (28).

One of the Christ-like figures in Tolkien's story is most certainly Gandalf. Even though Tolkien never identifies Gandalf as a God or any kind of divine being, he gives him the power to resist the temptation of sin and to overcome numerous obstacles during his mission. One of the similarities between Gandalf and the Christ is the aura of mystery and deeper wisdom they both possess. As Michelle Morris puts it "part of Christ's divinity involves communicating the message from God which humans often have difficulty understanding. Gandalf is equally responsible for spreading a message in Middle Earth" (32). Gandalf serves as a guide and a mouthpiece for a divine orchestrator, always there for the rest of the fellowship to provide advice and support in their time of need.

When the company reaches the mines of Moria, they are faced with an ancient evil that surpasses their mortal understanding and battle prowess. Gandalf takes upon himself the task of confronting the perverted creature of darkness, Balrog. Despite his power, Gandalf falls along with the creature and the company believes him to be lost forever. In sacrificing himself for the rest of the fellowship, Gandalf portrays similarities with Christ's sacrifice for the humanity. Another similarity can be noted when "Gandalf unexpectedly and miraculously returns in *The Two Towers*. In the gospel of John, Jesus' resurrection is so unexpected that his disciples do not recognize him...Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas mistake Gandalf's resurrected form for the fallen wizard Saruman" (Morris 37). Gandalf comes back stronger and more determined than ever, and again there is evidence of a bigger plan, a predestined fate, and a divine being who looks after the forces of good when he says "naked I was sent back – for a brief time, until my task is done" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 655).

Similarly to Christ, Gandalf has to face constant rejection and doubt from his own people, people he is trying to protect and save: "In Hobbiton, he is labelled a disturber of the peace...When Gandalf enters Rohan to warn King Theoden of Saruman's deception, a servant calls him Gandalf Stormcrow...like Christ, is unwelcome even though he is trying to offer counsel and aide to the troubled nation" (Morris 34). Just like Jesus was a leader to his apostles, Gandalf is a leader of the fellowship. Every member of the fellowship follows his advice and guidance without doubting it, and Gandalf shows immense wisdom and skill in leadership.

Gandalf faces betrayal from his close friend and a colleague, just like the Christ does. When he arrives to Isengard to ask for advice from his old friend, "Saruman reveals his true desire to capture the Ring for himself. He has turned away from his real purpose of protecting the world in favor of a selfish quest for power. He has betrayed Gandalf's trust" (Morris 35). Saruman was supposed to be the wiser and more powerful one, however, at the end, Gandalf is the one who resists the lure of evil and fulfils his destiny. Because he could see how the

malicious power of the Ring can corrupt even the wisest of their order, Gandalf comes to a decision that the Ring must be destroyed once and for all so no one else would be tempted to use its perverted magic.

After the final battle and the destruction of the Ring, Gandalf realises that his time among the people of the Middle-Earth has come to an end so he "imparts the dominion over Middle Earth to mankind after Sauron is defeated. When Christ returns from the dead, he passes the responsibility and care of the world over to his disciples" (Morris 38).

Another Christ-like figure in Tolkien's story is Frodo, who is marked by his sincere innocence and humility. Morris says that Tolkien portrays Frodo as "humble, pure-hearted, and selfless. Tolkien emphasizes the importance of Frodo's sacrifice and confirms that Frodo undertakes his journey out of love for the world of Middle Earth" (Morris 2-3). He selflessly chooses to take upon himself the task of destroying the Ring, however at the same time humbly admits that he will need some help with completing it. Because his heart is pure and merciful he manages to resist the alluring power of the Ring.

The Council agrees to entrust Frodo with the task of destroying the Ring, and Elrond goes as far as saying "this task is appointed for you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will... But it is a heavy burden. So heavy that none could lay it on another. I do not lay it on you. But if you take it freely, I will say that your choice is right" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 353). This statement can be seen as a confirmation of a greater plan for Frodo, which reflects the predetermined role of the Christ as a saviour of humankind.

Michelle Morris compares Frodo's physical trials with those of Jesus Christ by saying that "Frodo will later face the Ring's overwhelming force pulling him down, forcing him to crawl on hands and knees to the peak of Mount Doom. The physical struggle…mirrors perfectly Jesus' battle to carry the burden of the cross all the way to his crucifixion" (40). Morris also points out the similarity between the reluctance both Frodo and Jesus Christ show for their apparent fate at one point, Christ while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and Frodo wishing that he had never gotten the Ring in the first place (45).

Just like Jesus, Frodo was trying to lead by an example. He tries to show Gollum that he can be good again, that there's still hope left for him. He puts his faith and trust into Gollum despite Gollum's treachery and depravation. In spite all of his effort, Gollum decides to betray Frodo, just like Judas has betrayed Jesus. He lures him into a tunnel, which is a home to Sauron's perverse spider-like creature Shelob, where Frodo gets stabbed and captured by the horrendous creature. Gollum's death at the end of the quest resembles Judas's death after the betrayal of Jesus. Frodo's failure to destroy the Ring "is purely a result of his human frailty. No

mortal could have resisted the power of the Ring inside the heart of Mount Doom and so Frodo is overcome by its influence" (Morris 57). Just as Gandalf has predicted, Gollum playes a crucial role at the end, and his treachery was essential to the success of the quest.

After the Ring has been destroyed, the hobbits come back to Shire only to find it subjugated and ruined by Saruman and Grima Wormtongue. Despite all the "evil and fighting they have caused in the Shire, he tries to pardon their actions. He prevents the hobbits from executing Saruman and gives Grima the opportunity to turn away from Saruman's service" (Morris 47).

At the end, Frodo receives a special honour from the Elves when they grant him a place on the last ship to Grey Havens:

> 'But,' said Sam, and tears started in his eyes, 'I thought you were going to enjoy the Shire, too, for years and years, after all you have done.' 'So I thought too, once. But I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: someone has to give them up, lose them, so that others may the grey havens keep them. (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1346)

Aragorn is another character who shares some qualities with Jesus Christ. He was ready to sacrifice himself in order to give Frodo and Sam a better chance for success in their mission. He selflessly encourages his own people, even though he is aware how unlikely their success is:

> We must walk open-eyed into that trap, with courage, but small hope for ourselves. For, my lords, it may well prove that we ourselves shall perish utterly in a black battle far from the living lands; so that even if Barad-duˆ r be thrown down, we shall not live to see a new age. But this, I deem, is our duty. And better so than to perish nonetheless – as we surely shall, if we sit here – and know as we die that no new age shall be. (Tolkien, The Return of the King 1152)

Aragorn puts all of his trust into Gandalf's wisdom and guidance. After Gandalf's fall in Moria, he "steps up to lead the fellowship, but he follows the path Gandalf had set out for them. Aragorn's loyalty and dependence on Gandalf seem fairly similar to the disciples' dependence on Jesus" (Morris 42). When Aragorn finally assumes the throne of Gondor, Gandalf is the one who crowns him, handing him over the power and protection over the people of Middle-Earth. That act resembles Peter's responsibility for establishing and leading the Church after Jesus's resurrection (Morris 42).

3.5 Servants of Evil in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*

As the polar opposites to the forces of good, Tolkien introduces equally complex forces of evil. The most prominent characteristic of evil in his story is the will to dominate others and subdue them to the power of evil. Christy Di Frances describes evil characters in Tolkien's story as "completely lacking in identity; they must be, for theirs is a culture of systematic terror, with no stories by which to recall place and personality" (14). Tolkien uses the symbolism of light and darkness and associates it with good and evil. Sauron refers to himself "as the Dark Lord of the Rings, and his domination over Middle-earth is a menacing Shadow" (Di Frances 23). Steve Higham believes that "each kind of being has a dark opposite: Ringwraiths of men, great orcs of elves, lesser orcs of dwarves, trolls of Ents, Gollum of hobbits, and the Nazgûl steeds of honest horses such as Shadowfax" (188).

Morgoth is the first character introduced in Tolkien's world who willingly chooses to follow the path of darkness. Rather than to participate in Eru's music of creation, Morgoth decides to dominate and destroy. He despised the children of Iluvatar and wanted to deprive them of their free will. His wickedness was so great that it started corrupting the world and all the beings around him (Marotta 16). Tolkien describes Morgoth's demise and corruption:

> From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless. Understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame. He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness. And darkness he used most in his evil works upon Arda, and filled it with fear for all living things. (Tolkien, The Silmarillion 9)

Sauron is the epitome of evil in Middle-Earth in the story about the Ring. He was first lured to the dark side by Morgoth and with time became his faithful successor. His depravity and malevolence knows no bounds. After tricking the people of Middle-Earth by creating the One Ring to rule above all others, Sauron starts his reign of terror and his attempt to rule over the free peoples of Middle-Earth. However, not everything goes according to his plan and the forces of good manage to unite and defeat Sauron in his pride and overconfidence. But there is a remnant of Sauron's evil spirit that lingers on after Isildur fails to destroy the One Ring after banishing the enemy. It stays bounded to the Ring and after thousands of years in waiting, his spirit awakens and returns to the Middle-Earth in attempt to enslave and corrupt all who oppose him.

Sauron's spirit takes the form of a lidless eye which "seem pervasive and encompassing" (St. Clair 57). With the power of his Ring and the lesser rings he created for the Elves, Dwarves,

and Men, he was able to bend their free will to his own volition. Gandalf explains that Sauron is not "the Christian devil figure, bent on spreading evil through the world…Gandalf attributes Sauron's desire to the very human motives of "malice and revenge"…the implication being that Sauron would avenge himself on those who had kept the One Ring from him" (Gekas 58-59).

One of the biggest flaws in Sauron's machinations was his mistaken belief that everyone wanted to use the Ring for their own intentions. In his pride and arrogance, he was expecting one of the great warriors, Elves or wizards to come and challenge him, he "could never imagine that the Good forces would trust such an important task to a couple of powerless Hobbits from the Shire. It is this arrogance that ends up defeating his vice plans" (Maggio and Fritsch 15).

As W. H. Auden explains in his essay "The Quest Hero", Sauron possesses irrationally cruel lust for domination, he simply must subdue everyone's free will to his own. He makes a crucial mistake when faced with Pippin, who revealed himself to Sauron through the Palantir of Orthanc, and instead of questioning him about the Ring-bearer, he focused all of his power to ensnare Pippin's mind and free will (57-58). As Gandalf points out, "he was too eager. He did not want information only: he wanted *you*, quickly, so that he could deal with you in the Dark Tower, slowly" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 775). Auden also points out significant difference between the alliances of Good and alliances of Evil, where latter are "unstable and untrustworthy" by necessity because they are "based on fear or hope of profit, not on affection" (58).

The Ring represents another force of evil, not quite autonomous cause its power bounded to the will of its master, Sauron. Lassetter points out that besides "overpowering and then usurping a person's free will, the Ring also physically and spiritually corrupts its bearer…The more the wearer uses the Ring, the more he desired to use it, thus increasingly becoming its slave" (113). The Ring is the central evil entity in the story and it affects most of the characters in one way or the other. Some of them manage to resist its malicious influence, while others fail and lose their free will.

The Ring's innate corruption and wickedness would affect even those willing to use it to do good. Its purpose is to corrupt, subdue, and destroy, which is why Elrond, Galadriel, and Gandalf do their best to resist its alluring power. There is no mortal or immortal being that could escape the grim fate of a Ring-bearer. Gandalf explains that to Frodo:

> A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the Dark Power that

> rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the Dark Power will devour him. (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 61-62)

However, at the same time the Ring also represents hope. It becomes the symbol for the freedom of the people of Middle-Earth, because only with the complete annihilation of the Ring can the forces of good destroy Sauron once and for all. The Ring has also been compared "to the creation of atomic weaponry, and in the destruction of the Ring is Tolkien's rejection of Modernity and desire to a return to a simpler, more agrarian society" (Rorabeck 76).

Saruman was drawn to evil by Sauron and his wicked plan for conquering the Middle-Earth. He becomes greedy and prideful, turns away from his friends and associates and succumbs to the temptation. Even though considered as the wisest of his order, Saruman was not able to resist Sauron's lies and deceptions. In his foolish attempt to become Sauron's ally, he captures and imprisons Gandalf after he refuses to join his cause. Even though Gandalf tries to help Saruman to repent and return back to the righteous path it is too late, for his soul is already lost to greed and desire for power and dominion over others. Saruman refuses to listen to Gandalf when he tells him that "only one hand at a time can wield the One, and you know that well, so do not trouble to say *we*! But I would not give it, nay, I would not give even news of it to you, now that I learn your mind. You were head of the Council, but you have unmasked yourself at last" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 338). His own greed and pride ultimately turn out to be his own demise.

Gollum was not always this twisted, wicked creature completely obsessed with the One Ring. He was once a hobbit named Smeagol, but the choices he made after discovering the Ring of Power depraved him of his humanity. The Ring prolonged Gollum's life, but in the process it has possessed his mind and subdued him to its own will. Gandalf explains to Frodo this perverse relationship Gollum has with the Ring: "'He hated it and loved it, as he hated and loved himself. He could not get rid of it. He had no will left in the matter" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 73). Despite everything, Gandalf still believes there's a little bit of hope for Gollum, that he's human side is not completely lost and he could repent if he chose to.

There's a significant change in Gollum's behaviour after Frodo shows him some kindness and understanding. His mind has been poisoned by the Ring's malice for over five hundred years which makes it hard for Gollum to trust someone could be compassionate and tender with him. Frodo tries to gain his trust over time, slowly bringing glimpses of Smeagol to the surface. Matthews provides a fitting description of Gollum's inner struggle in his essay:

> He is a picture of what Frodo can become and, more importantly, a symbol of what humanity can become in the Primary World. However, Tolkien paints him realistically to indicate that even a monstrous sinner has hope. He is not clearly black and white. And through his incapability of forsaking goodness entirely, he attests to its potency all the more. His relationship with Frodo starts to cure him of his illness, but in order to be truly free he has to die to his own desires. Instead, he chooses to hold on to his Precious, and in turn, they fall together. (27-28)

Some of the lesser characters in Tolkien's story also have an important role of depicting qualities and struggles from the Primary World. One of them is Smaug, who represents greed in all its glory. His malevolence dominates the story of *The Hobbit* and presents a true challenge for Bilbo's courage and selflessness when he decides to face Smaug on his own in order to fulfil his promise and help his friends.

Grima the Wormtongue was an adviser to the king of Rohan, Theoden. He poisoned the king's mind with his malice and wickedness, acting as an agent for Saruman's twisted plans. They needed the king to stay weak and blind to all that was happening around him. Gandalf banishes Grima from Rohan after which he escapes to the safety of his secret ally Saruman. He follows Saruman on his run from Isengard and joins him in terrorizing the good hobbits in the Shire. Upon their arrival to the Shire, the four hobbits find their beloved homes under the tyranny of Saruman and Wormtongue. After defeating them, Frodo gives Wormtongue one last chance for repentance "You need not follow him. I know of no evil you have done to me. You can have rest and food here for a while, until you are stronger and can go your own ways" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1334). Saruman tries to stop Wormtongue from leaving him which finally leads to their shared demise.

With his malicious lies Sauron managed to entice many creatures to join his devious army. One of them were orcs, who were, according to Tolkien, once Elves, tortured by the evil and twisted Melkor to serve his own cause. At one point in The Lord of the Rings, Frodo explains to Sam that "the Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make: not real new things of its own. I don't think it gave life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1195). One of Sauron's most corrupted and perverted creatures were the nine Ringwraiths, dead kings who were once seduced by the power of the nine rings and the promised glory. They have become something that does not belong to the world of living anymore and Gandalf explains that "they themselves do not see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds…And at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it…We can feel their presence – it troubled our hearts…Also,' he

added, and his voice sank to a whisper, 'the Ring draws them.'" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 248). There were many more creatures created or perverted to serve the evil cause, some of them stronger than the others. The spider Shelob, Balrog the demon, various animals – they all fell to the temptation. And even though good always finds a way to prevail, evil cannot be destroyed forever and it will rise again in another form at another time.

3.6 A Chance for Remorse: Pride and Despair or Eternal Peace and Forgiveness

None of Tolkien's characters is completely faultless. They are all susceptible to temptation and misjudgement, but the important thing is that, due to the Christian nature and influence on Tolkien's texts and convictions, he always offers them a chance for remorse. If only they repent and realize the path they took leads to despair and destruction, they will be forgiven.

One of those characters is Boromir, a proud son of steward of Gondor, who joins the Fellowship to help Frodo destroy the Ring. However, his greed for power overcomes his mind and he tries to take the Ring from Frodo. His intentions were not altogether evil from the beginning. Boromir firmly believed that the Ring could be used to save the people of Gondor. Because he was so loyal to his people, it was hard for him to stay loyal to the company and their common cause. Even though his intention of using the Ring to help his people seemed selfless at first, there is always that hidden greed for personal glory and thirst for the power of the Ring. Just like Jay Bennett says: "If Boromir succeeded in taking the ring, his fate would mimic that of Melkor, setting out to serve but harboring a growing lust for power that would ultimately lead him to treachery" (38).

Even though Boromir's actions lead to Frodo and Sam leaving the fellowship, he still earns his chance for remorse. He gives his life to protect Merry and Pippin against the orcs, and with his dying breath he tells Aragorn that he feels sorry for what he did to Frodo and that his death is a just punishment for his crime. Boromir's actions help Frodo to see clearly what the power of the Ring can do to his friends and companions and it leads to Frodo's decision of leaving the fellowship behind. Boromir's last words show a true remorse and desire for redemption: 'I tried to take the Ring from Frodo,' he said. 'I am sorry. I have paid…Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed.' 'No!...'You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!' Boromir smiled" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 538).

There are two characters in *The Lord of the Rings* who find themselves faced with the same choice but decide to take a completely different path. One of them is Denethor, the steward of Gondor and a father to Boromir and Faramir. As one of the leaders of the people in Middle-

Earth he was experiencing both pride and despair in the fight for the freedom of his people. His wisdom deserted him as his mind got poisoned by the dark forces of Sauron, he abandons all faith into providence and hope that the forces of good will eventually prevail. Boromir's death brings utter despair to Denethor, and the supposed death of his other son Faramir takes him over the edge. As Helen Lasseter says "in Denethor, the reader sees the despairing bitterness of one who, in the face of pain and suffering, has rejected the demands of a higher moral order" (112). He loses his mind and falls into the abyss, not even Gandalf can dissuade him when he tries to remind him of his duty to his people: "Whereas your part is to go out to the battle of your City, where maybe death awaits you. This you know in your heart.'" (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1117). But Denethor is inconsolable, there are no words that can bring the hope back into his heart: "'Battle is vain. Why should we wish to live longer? Why should we not go to death side by side?'" (1117). After abandoning all hope and chance for redemption he falls to madness and decides to take his own life so he could join his sons in the afterlife:

> 'Pride and despair!' he cried. 'Didst thou think that the eyes of the White Tower were blind? Nay, I have seen more than thou knowest, Grey Fool. For thy hope is but ignorance. Go then and labour in healing! Go forth and fight! Vanity. For a little space you may triumph on the field, for a day. But against the Power that now arises there is no victory. To this City only the first finger of its hand has yet been stretched. All the East is moving. And even now the wind of thy hope cheats thee and wafts up Anduin a fleet with black sails. The West has failed. It is time for all to depart who would not be slaves.' (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1117-1118)

Theoden, the king of Rohan, on the other hand, accepts the chance for remorse and restores his faith into the higher order of things. He chooses to follow Gandalf and join the forces of good in the battle for the freedom of his people. His sense of honour and duty helps him return to the right path again, and his personal pride brings back the strength to fight for his family and his people. Theoden's mind was poisoned by Saruman who used his worthless servant Wormtongue to whisper black thoughts into his ear. His strength and will to live disappeared and he became but a shadow of a once great and powerful king. But Gandalf showed him the way back into the light, he brought hope back to his people and removed the web of lies off of his eyes. Theoden regained his strength and power and decided to lead and serve his people once again:

> 'The end will not be long,' said the king. 'But I will not end here, taken like an old badger in a trap. Snowmane and Hasufel and the horses of my guard are in the inner court. When dawn comes, I will bid men sound Helm's horn, and I will ride forth. Will

you ride with me then, son of Arathorn? Maybe we shall cleave a road, or make such an end as will be worth a song – if any be left to sing of us hereafter.' (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 703)

Saruman was once a great and a wise wizard, the leader of the order, but his mind got poisoned by greed for power. He used the palantir to communicate with Sauron, thinking he might form an alliance with him and share his dominion over the Middle-Earth. In the words of Margaret Bush "like Denethor, Saruman follows the "lust of his eyes" in his need to predict and master his own fate…chooses not to resign but to defect, to throw in his lot with the forces of darkness as a means of self-preservation…he cannot control the direction of events in his own favor, becoming both a puppet of and a weaker rival to Sauron" (21). He betrays his order and resorts to evil machinations to advance his dominion. He was so engrossed with himself that he thought he could become a new Ring-master, but as Gandalf told him "only one hand at a time can wield the One, and you know that well" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 338). Saruman managed to deceive the others on the Council for a very long time, he made them believe that he was still on their side. And even after his deception and his malicious plans were unveiled, Gandalf takes pity on him and offers him a second chance, a chance for remorse:

"'The treacherous are ever distrustful,' answered Gandalf wearily. 'But you need not fear for your skin. I do not wish to kill you, or hurt you, as you would know, if you really understood me. And I have the power to protect you. I am giving you a last chance. You can leave Orthanc, free – if you choose.'" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 760)

Saruman, however, refuses to take that chance, his mind and his heart twisted by jealousy and greed "'Later! Yes, when you also have the Keys of Barad-duˆ r itself, I suppose; and the crowns of seven kings, and the rods of the Five Wizards, and have purchased yourself a pair of boots many sizes larger than those that you wear now…I have other things to do" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers* 760-761).

Tolkien introduces the reader to the issue of corrupted pride and the power of redemption in *The Hobbit* where Thorin, "the newly crowned King under the Mountain, who despite his earlier displays of valour falls victim to the corrupting influence of gold… Just as Thror's greed had first brought Smaug to the Mountain, so now does Thorin's lust for gold bring his newly-reclaimed kingdom to the brink of destruction" (Marotta 26-27). Thorin was consumed by greed and false pride which eventually put all of his people in danger. He could not see the right path in front of him, would not listen to the counsel of his friends and allies. Marotta sums it up perfectly:

> Thorin is a truly tragic figure, and in his last words he comes to understand that while his intention to reclaim his home was genuinely noble, but upon achieving this goal he was consumed by greed and pride, leading to his downfall. In Bilbo, however, Thorin recognizes both virtues familiar to him, such as courage and wisdom, and virtues that he long overlooked: simplicity, humility, and a desire to bring goodness and joy in the world. (28)

3.7 Good That Comes from Evil

Another proof of providential power in Tolkien's works is the use of evil to for the advancement of good. By using "failures or intentionally wicked deeds of various characters, this deity figure continually brings good out of evil and weaves all actions into the tapestry of the story with divine skill" (Kocher qtd. in Hillis 77). Besides purely evil characters who have absolutely no regard for goodness, there are those who are simply led astray by their greed or weakness of their will. However, in the end, all faults and errors, "whether conscious evil or unwitting folly, becomes part of a long range plan for the right, turning evil against itself to do good unintended" (Hillis 77).

Possibly the best example for this divine plan is the eucatastrophic moment of Gollum's demise. In all his malice and corruption, Gollum plays the most crucial role in destroying the Ring. Frodo's weakness at the very end of his quest threatens to ruin their mission and to bury every glimmer of hope they had left. But in the last moment Gollum's dedication to the One Ring lead to a completely unexpected culmination. After he has bitten the Ring from Frodo's finger, he topples into the molten lava while jumping in delirium of his false victory. This is a lesson Tolkien uses to explain to his readers that evil cannot create or prevail, in the end it can only destroy itself. Gollum's death provides a double redemption for himself and for Frodo:

> But do you remember Gandalf 's words: *Even Gollum may have something yet to do*? But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. I am glad you are here with me. Here at the end of all things, Sam. (Tolkien, *The Return of the King* 1239-1240)

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show the extent in which religious upbringing and Christian doctrine have influenced the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. His mother's devotion to Christianity and her premature death have made him stand even firmer in his beliefs. Tolkien perfected the revolutionary way of mythmaking and considered it to be an act of worshiping God. Even though he did not allow for his works to be considered as allegories, the influence of his religious convictions can be seen in nearly every one of his stories.

The most evident one is the creation myth from *The Silmarillion*, which serves as the introduction to the intricate world of characters' personal battles and the difficulties of choices they have to make during their lifetime. Even for Tolkien's characters, it was not always easy to make the right choice, to follow the right path, or to resist the allure of evil. But he gives each and every one of them the freedom to choose while at the same time encouraging them to have faith in Providence and a Divine Orchestrator to bring back the balance of all things.

Even the bravest can sometimes falter, but the important thing is not to give in to despair, to repent, and to ask for guidance and forgiveness. Frodo's fall to temptation at the end of the quest in *The Lord of the Rings* only proves that no matter how secure one feels there is always room for mistakes. Tolkien uses that moment of Frodo's weakness of will to introduce his readers to the point of eucatastrophe, that sudden joyous turn when it seems that all hope is lost but at the last moment hope, faith, and Providence put all the puzzle pieces together in a fateful culmination.

Tolkien pours all the monstrosities and horrors of the twentieth century into his stories and uses his characters and settings to criticize the society and the massive industrialization of England. He gives life to new worlds and characters which can help people to see the truth of their own lives in a completely different light. Even though Christianity and fantasy literature might seem irreconcilable at first, Tolkien's works provide the impeccable evidence of how well the values and doctrines of the former can be incorporated into the magical world of the latter.

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