



# The Hobbit as seen through Christian Virtue Ethics and Norse Mythology

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## Abstract

The works of J.R.R. Tolkien have been analysed through a Christian perspective claiming Christian influences numerous times. Additionally, Tolkien was inspired by Norse Mythology in his works. However, his first novel, *The Hobbit*, has often been overlooked. This essay has therefore analysed the main characters of *The Hobbit* in order to determine whether his influences were mainly from Christian Theology or Norse Mythology. This has been done through the use of Archetypal Criticism. Specifically, the vices of greed and pride has been set as the foundational archetypes of the research. The results show that Norse Mythology is the major influence of the characters.

**Keywords:** J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit, Archetypal Criticism, Greed, Pride



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# 1 Introduction

The literary works of John Ronald Reuel Tolkien are vast and complex with a mythology that has allowed numerous readers to analyse and interpret his worlds from multiple angles. His works also sparked fields of studies collectively known as Tolkien scholarship. However, the scholarly world of Tolkien reaches further depth. Authors such as Michael D.C. Drout claim that Tolkien scholarship can be divided into two categories: Tolkien Studies and Middle-Earth Studies. The former focuses on J.R.R. Tolkien himself and his works of literature, and the latter focusing on an "...analysis of Tolkien's invented worlds, histories, languages, creatures, etc." (xxix). Furthermore, Drout claims that neither field of Tolkien studies can stand without the other. For instance, Drout states that we cannot understand Tolkien's view of immortality without understanding the interconnection between Elves' physical bodies and spirits (xxix). Nor can we comment on Tolkien's perception of the intricate theme of madness and despair in prominent characters without *knowing* the characters (xxix). Neither can actions and reasoning of fictional peoples be fully understood without insight into Tolkien's fascination with, for example Anglo-Saxon history (xxix). David Day states that "Tolkien was deeply committed to the study of the ancient wisdom of the soul as preserved in myth and legend." (13). This tells us that Tolkien saw wisdom within mythology. Wisdom found in the collectively agreed upon norms of society that mythology provides (Steinsland, 27). Arguably, it tells us that Tolkien's own mythos contains wisdom he collected throughout his career as a scholar. As Sir George Clark notes, the works of Tolkien can be linked to every major period of English literature (5). This has inspired countless researchers to analyse the works of Tolkien in the questions of morality, right and wrong, good, and evil.

Furthermore, the world of Tolkien was not all revealed at once, and his inspirations for the different novels must have differed. It is important to note that Tolkien's first novel, *The Hobbit*, was released in 1937. The first book of the *Lord of the Rings* series, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, which followed in the footsteps of *The Hobbit* with its world and characters, was released in 1954. *The Fellowship of the Ring* gave the readers the first look into the immense world of Middle-Earth. However, the full scope of Middle-Earth and its mythos did not come to life until the release of *The Silmarillion*, in 1977. Tolkien had 17 years to evolve and expand his Middle-Earth between *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, and an additional 23 years before the release of *The Silmarillion*, which was edited and released by his son after his death. I therefore argue that *The Hobbit*, which is often overlooked in the scholarly world (Friedman, 1) should be analysed, as it was the first glimpse into Middle-Earth. Thus, an

analysis of the novel yields a unique insight into Tolkien's inspiration before he came close to finishing his world and mythos.

Moving forward, most of the world's mythologies have common elements and Tolkien's mythology draws inspiration from these, as well as western history. It is therefore unsurprising to see statements claiming that the mythology of Tolkien can "...comfortably coexist within the universal archetypal world of mythology and folklore." (Day 11). A central theme in mythology is that it serves as a model for human behaviour and societal norms (Steinsland, 27). This also includes the morality of right and wrong, or the notion of good and evil, essentially the ethics behind actions. The literary world of Tolkien, his mythology, his world, and his characters are no exception. Tolkien's presentation of morality therefore follows a common structure on what is right and wrong, based on the mythology of his world, which was created with inspiration from the real world.

Considering this, it is only natural that extensive research has been done on one of his leading themes: that of morality, and where he drew inspiration from. Not only is morality strongly represented in his works, but it also functions as a tool to view and interpret the world around us. As David Russel Mosley states: "Tolkien shows us that myth and imagination allow us to actually see the world around us." (6). We see this in research that has explored these notions in relation to some of his main inspirations, one being Christian theology. For instance, Gregory Hartley explores different elements of Christianity in the works of Tolkien. He briefly mentions that several scholars have found Christian elements in the presentation of characters such as Gandalf (96). One such element is that Gandalf is a "Vala" (Day, 450) also known as an "Ainur" (Day, 19). The Ainur are angelic powers that serve the creator, also known as "The One" or "Eru-Ilúvatar", in Tolkien's Middle-Earth. The Ainur can be compared to angels serving God in Christian theology (Day, 19). Hartley also confirms that previous scholars have interpreted Eru-Ilúvatar as Christianity's God (96). Another example is Gandalf's death and return to life in the *Lord of the Rings* series, with the purpose of serving as a saviour to Middle-Earth. This has been compared to Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and the saving of mankind (Hartley, 96). Furthermore, Hartley argues that the Holy Spirit of Christian theology is present in Tolkien's Secret Fire (96). One example being Gandalf's invocation of the Secret Fire in *Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*, to fight off evil powers, as well as several references in *The Silmarillion* (96). It is therefore evident that comparisons to Christianity's God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have been made in the works of Tolkien.

In addition to inspiration from Christian theology, Tolkien's mythology and world has been researched through a Norse Mythology perspective. Marjorie Burns does this through her analysis of Beorn in *The Hobbit*. Burns states that in Norse tradition, travelling to the North and East always entailed risk (51). In *The Hobbit*, the party, consisting of Gandalf, Bilbo and the dwarfs, reaches Beorn's homestead after travelling far to the North and East. Beorn is a skin-changer, a person of the human race with the capability to change into a ferocious and wild bear. He is also a loner (accompanied only by his animals), singular and independent of thought and action. Beorn's homestead location and his characteristics thus greatly resemble the Viking North (Burns, 50).

Sophia Friedman states that although much research has been done on the works and writings of J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* has been much overlooked (1). Despite the exploration of religious influences in the works of Tolkien, spanning from Christian theology to Norse Mythology, research is lacking on the specific theme of morality in *The Hobbit*. A plausible reason for this is that *The Hobbit* is classified as a children's classic, where notions of complex emotions tend to be simplified. Archetypal Criticism provides the foundational framework to explore this, through identifying a set of recurring patterns, or archetypes, in the novel. By doing so, we can determine where they draw their influences from. It allows us to see if they are inspired by Christian Theology or Norse Mythology. To limit the scope of the essay, the main characters, Gandalf, the dwarfs, and Bilbo are analysed.

The aim of this analysis is thus to first identify the sources from which Tolkien drew inspiration, such as Norse Mythology in *The Poetic Edda* as well as Christian theology, and to explore how they influenced Tolkien's representation of morality as seen in the archetypes of greed and pride in the main characters: Gandalf, the dwarfs and Bilbo. Furthermore, this analysis argues with the use of archetypal criticism, that the morality of the main characters in *The Hobbit* is more heavily influenced by Norse Mythology rather than Christian theology.



## 2 Archetypal Criticism

To thus understand the complex yet central theme of morality in the mythology and works of Tolkien, archetypal criticism is a strong mode of theory for analysis. Archetypal criticism is fundamentally based on the works of C.G. Jung, drawing on the archetypes in the text. Alexander Chirila presents it as being used to identify and explore universal "...reoccurring symbolic and mythic patterns." (1). Furthermore, Chirila states that archetypes, or universally recurring patterns, can best be found in myth and folklore (1). Considering how Tolkien's writings find their basis in the mythology of his world this demonstrates why the theory is applicable.

Additionally, Chirila elaborates on James Frazer's approach to archetypal criticism through the lens of anthropology. He claims that the origin of the theory has roots in humankind's relationship with forces of nature, how we are governed *by* it yet possess the capability to govern *it*. For instance, how kings and people of great power were thought to possess magical, or divine, properties to control the forces of nature. However, he also notes that the possession of these qualities walks a fine line of good- and evildoing: "The god-king, as the embodiment of spiritual power and authority, represents the dichotomy between good and evil in human form..." (2). This demonstrates how archetypal criticism is a perfect tool to analyse such a complex theme. As this essay analyses Christian and Norse influences on *The Hobbit's* main characters, we are given two perspectives on the same question of morality. Thus, demonstrating the ambiguity of certain character qualities that may otherwise seem straightforward through the perspective of *one* ethical framework. By analysing Tolkien's influences on how he presents the morality of the main characters in the novel, the essay is essentially looking at it through an anthropological point of view. The anthropological societal norms that inspired Tolkien are based on Christian theology and Norse Mythology.

Moving forward, archetypal criticism became a prevalent mode of literature analysis with Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934). Moving from Jung's field of psychoanalysis where archetypes are shared in the unconscious mind, and from Frazer's anthropological perspective, Bodkin looked at the written word. However, Bodkin retained the notion that archetypes generate an emotional response, although they evolve in literature (Chirila, 3). Encountering the archetypes in literature yields a significant emotional response that has the potential to provide insights into both past and present societal norms. Furthermore, Chirila argues that once a literary archetype has been identified, it is likely to

evolve based on the literary context that surrounds it. Thus, yielding valuable and new insight into changing values within contemporary communities (1).

Northrop Frye developed archetypal criticism further, establishing it as a forefront within literary analysis (Chirila, 1). Frye discusses archetypal criticism within literature as a structural model based upon certain archetypes. He derives the archetypes from symbolism from the Bible as well as Classical mythology (133). Frye essentially describes good and evil as separate structures of imagery that literature is shaped upon, which he names the apocalyptic and the demonic. These two structures of imagery draw heavy influences from the Bible as it is the main source for “un-displaced myth in our tradition” (140). Frye identifies the archetypes of the apocalyptic and the demonic as follows: the *divine world*, which is the society of gods, *the human world*, or the society of men, *the animal world*, domesticated or undomesticated animals, *the vegetable world*, which is the garden, park, or the natural world around us and finally *the mineral world*, essentially the city humans work out (141). He means that these are the archetypes of the metaphorical world in literature. He states that it is unified in the Bible as Christ: “Christ is both the one God and the one Man, the Lamb of God, the tree of life, or vine of which we are the branches, the stone which the builders rejected, and the rebuilt temple which is identical with his risen body.” (140-141).

Northrop Frye has essentially set up a framework for analysing recurring patterns that are linked with their original influences from the Bible. This essay uses the same framework as Frye; however, it deviates from his archetypes. Frye identifies archetypes as specific, concrete images, set in literature (140-141). This essay identifies archetypes as specific, *abstract* notions within ethics, as seen from Christian theology and Norse Mythology. Its thematic focus is that of morality through a set of specific archetypes typical to the writings of Tolkien, just as Frye analysed his archetypes through the apocalyptic and demonic imagery. Tolkien was heavily influenced by his Catholic upbringing, especially the notion of the Seven Deadly sins. Specifically, the vices of greed and pride are prevalent notions in his writings (Snyder, 153). As the morality of greed and pride is prominent in Tolkien’s writings, I use them as archetypes. The theme of morality, therefore, remains a constant. However, the archetypes differ as this essay identifies them as greed and pride. Furthermore, this essay analyses the set archetypes not only through a Christian perspective but also through a Norse mythology perspective, as will be discussed in section 3.1. This allows for the exploration of morality as seen through the archetypes of greed and pride from two perspectives, ultimately revealing Christian theology or Norse Mythology as the main inspiration for Tolkien. To further demonstrate this, Chirila states that when archetypes are brought into the rational, critical

mind, they can provide “...insight into the deeper meaning behind their presence.” (3). Analysing *The Hobbit* using this framework has therefore provided insights into the full spectrum of the theme. It has allowed the exploration of how the main characters are portrayed as seen through the archetypes, which has brought insight into their morality. Tolkien’s influences have then been analysed to identify how he came to present it the way he did. Specifically, archetypal criticism was used to identify how Tolkien’s writing was influenced by his sources.

## 3 Notions of Good and Evil

### 3.1 Christian and Norse Virtue Ethics

Christopher A. Snyder discusses virtue ethics in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* series in his book *Hobbit Virtues*. He claims that Tolkien was heavily influenced by classical ideas of vice based on "...the Catholic concept of the Seven Deadly Sins..." (153). However, he goes on to say that Tolkien adopted two of the deadly sins into Middle-Earth, namely greed and pride (153). It is through these deadly sins, these vices, that this essay finds its foundation concerning the notion of morality. However, to use the vices as a foundation, we must first analyse how they are defined to fully understand the concept.

#### 3.1.1 Greed

Concerning greed, *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines it as "a strong desire for more food, money, power, possessions etc than you need" (768). Indeed, the desire for more is prevalent throughout Tolkien's works and leads to the downfall of many characters as well as starting wars. It can be seen as an unquenchable thirst that drives people mad. For instance, we see it in *The Hobbit* in what is known as "dragon-sickness" (Snyder, 153), a desire and craving for material riches that ultimately drives one mad. Snyder further explains that dragon-sickness is greed defined as seen through Christianity's Seven Deadly Sins (153).

Furthermore, this essay also analyses greed through a Norse Mythology perspective. We see for instance that collecting treasures and riches from defeated enemies is the norm within Norse Mythology. The Norse god Thor found honour and glory in collecting the spoils of his defeated enemies (Day, 130). We see further examples of how greed can be seen in a different light in the sacrificial part of Norse Mythology. How food, property and riches would be sacrificed to the gods to gain their favour (Steinsland, 300-301).

#### 3.1.2 Pride

Pride can be defined in several ways. It can be the feeling of pleasure you feel from having personally (or someone you care about) achieved something challenging. It is also defined as a feeling of respect toward yourself or others and that you deserve that respect (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1375). Furthermore, we are presented with *authentic* pride, which can be summarised as the crown jewel of virtues (Snyder, 155). These

definitions carry a positive connotation, it is a desirable quality. However, pride can also stand in a negative light. An exaggerated pride is a trait that is frowned upon. It is the belief that you are better than other people and, that you deserve and *should* have others' respect and that you don't require help from anyone (1375).

Furthermore, Snyder compares a Christian and pagan view of pride. He states that greed is often seen as the original sin, mankind's fall from grace through Adam and Eve's disobedience, though some argue that *pride* is the original sin, specifically *hubristic* pride. He goes on to define sinful, or hubristic, pride as an obsessiveness with the self, that it is the "... feeling that one is capable of divine autonomy." (154). That ultimately, Lucifer's pride, his sense of autonomy and power led to his rebellion against God, a perspective that Tolkien was drawn to. However, Snyder explains that Tolkien was also fascinated by pride as seen through a pagan lens. In this view, pride is seen as a virtue if handled with moderation (154), which can be seen in Norse Mythology. For instance, the individual in Norse Mythology was not seen as an isolated unit. One was rather seen as a part of the whole, the whole being comprised of one's kin (Steinsland, 423). This view of a hereditary community indicates a sense of pride in kinship, exemplifying pagan pride as something positive.

## 4 Archetypes in *The Hobbit*

### 4.1 Greed

#### 4.1.1 Gandalf

Gandalf, one of the main characters in *The Hobbit*, has previously been analysed through a Christian perspective in *The Lord of the Rings* series, however, there are strong resemblances from Norse Mythology in his character, as can be seen in *The Hobbit*. One of the striking features of Gandalf is his appearance. Besides being accompanied by a staff, Gandalf is described as an old man with a "...tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung below his waist, and immense black boots." (Tolkien, 5). It is in this description that we see the first clues of Tolkien's inspiration of the character, namely Oden from Norse Mythology. Oden is a god that would often present himself amongst people under guise (Steinsland, 182). His typical attire when doing so would be a great hat and a large dark-blue cloak (182). He has also been described wearing a staff with a grey cloak (Day, 148) as well as a beard (Day, 285) striking further resemblance with Gandalf.

Gandalf's attire tells us quite a bit about his relation to greed. His clothes are not adorned with complicated patterns and beautiful jewels on luxurious fabric. It is instead comprised of simple clothing befitting a wanderer. Besides functionality, this reveals that Gandalf is not in the habit of acquiring clothes to display his grandeur as a wizard in any way. It leaves us with a humble impression of a wizard that wants good.

Additionally, we see further examples of Gandalf's relation to greed in his handling of material possession. Early in the story it is revealed that Gandalf is in the possession of a key to a secret entrance in the mountain where the party is headed (Tolkien, 20). This key is a powerful object as it is the only means to enter the mountain without the guarding dragon being aware. What is interesting is that Gandalf could have used the key to bargain for a larger part of the treasure, which was to be divided equally in the party, as they cannot enter without it. However, as soon as the secret entrance is presented on the map, Gandalf hands over the key to Thorin (Tolkien, 20). This indicates that Gandalf is willing to share the treasure equally, pointing to a positive relationship with greed. However, his motives are not entirely altruistic as he is still counted for in the equal division of the treasure. This does not paint Gandalf's relation to greed in a negative light, though. I argue that this is a sign of greed held in moderation, which is typically seen as positive in Norse Mythology.

We see further examples of greed held in moderation after Gandalf and the company finds a hoard of spoils from the trolls they defeat. The hoard is found in a cave which is described to contain pots full of gold, lavish clothes, and jewellery (Tolkien, 41). Besides food for survival, Gandalf only collects a single sword for himself. This is interesting because he is faced with an opportunity to collect a substantial amount of gold, yet he only leaves with a sword.

The sword is particularly noteworthy as it is only noticed because of its "...beautiful scabbards and jewelled hilts." (41). This leaves us with additional evidence that Gandalf is not immune to the beauty of material things, that greed is still a part of him. However, we are quickly reassured of Gandalf's positive relation to greed. The following section informs the reader that the sword was unusual: "...not made by any troll, nor by any smith among men in these parts and days; but when we can read the runes on them, we shall know more about them'." (41). The sword is described with a sense of mystery. As it did not originally belong to the trolls, we are left with a sense of contentment that a wizard should be the one to collect such a mysterious object.

#### **4.1.2 The Dwarfs**

There are several examples of the dwarfs' relation with greed in *The Hobbit*, which shall be explored further. It is evident that Tolkien found inspiration for his dwarfs in Norse Mythology. These dwarfs are makers of beautiful things such as jewels and are renowned for their guardianship of treasures (Day, 110). This can be linked to the dwarfs of *The Hobbit*. Before they were forced to leave the Lonely Mountain, their home was vast and great, and the dwarfs were immensely rich and famous for their craftsmanship (Tolkien, 22). It is described that they were so renowned that people would "...reward even the least skillful most richly." (22). It would even go so far that they were begged to take on apprentices in exchange for riches or food, as they did not care to grow it themselves (22). This description is retold in a positive sense from Thorin. However, it fits the very definition of greed: "a strong desire for more food, money, power, possessions etc than you need" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 768). Indeed, the dwarfs are described as having plenty of riches, yet as can be seen, they crave more.

Furthermore, there is a prominent similarity in the dwarfs to warrior cults adhering to the Norse Mythology god Thor. Thor found glory and honour in battle and the collection of gold and riches, taken by his defeated enemies. These are all traits reflected in the warrior cult of Thor (Day, 130). We see similarities in Tolkien's dwarfs. They are a stout warrior race

with a special fondness, if not obsessiveness, with gold and riches. We see this in their obsession with retaking the Lonely Mountain, not only to reclaim their home, but to reclaim the immense riches that lie inside it (Tolkien, 14-16).

Additionally, there are elements to the dwarfs of *The Hobbit* that display a negative relationship with greed. Thorin's obsessiveness with the Arkenstone, the heart of The Lonely Mountain, is a prime example: "'For the Arkenstone of my father,' he said, 'is worth more than a river of gold in itself and to me it is beyond price. That stone of all the treasure I name unto myself, and I will be avenged on anyone who finds it and withholds it.'" (Tolkien, 244). It is clear that the Arkenstone belonged to Thorin's father and that he claims it through his birthright. Furthermore, the proclamation of ownership is not disputed; however, it is also not explicitly supported. It is Thorin alone that stands for it, indicating a sense of greed associated with selfish desire. Additionally, the exclamation of vengeance upon those who would hide it from him tells us that Thorin is on the verge of dragon-sickness, the very opposite of moderate greed.

#### **4.1.3 Bilbo**

Hobbits (as is the race of Bilbo) in general are described to be overweight as they enjoy partaking in delicacies (Tolkien, 4). This is the first sign of hobbits' relation with greed as they are described as having an abundant access to foods, in which they like to indulge. This could be seen as an introduction of a people enjoying food too much, as weight often carries a negative connotation. However, it is portrayed in a light and positive manner rather related to moderate greed. We are not presented with a people that turn to gluttony for satisfaction.

Furthermore, to analyse Bilbo's relation with greed in *The Hobbit* it is worth looking at his full name: Bilbo *Baggins*. Tolkien is known for his love for linguistics, specifically etymology, and we see this in the choosing of his main character's surname. David Day states that the etymology of the word *Baggins* can be summarised with a two-fold meaning: money-bag or wealthy, and "afternoon tea or snack between meals" (46). These are definitions that certainly suit the character's traits. We see, for instance, in the start of the story a description of a hobbit that lives quite comfortably, and one that comes from a long line of a rich family (3).

Additionally, Day states that the word *Baggins* is related to terms such as "to bag", "baggage man" and "bagman". All of these are related to criminal activities, such as theft, carrying off loot and distributing loot acquired illegally (46). This is interesting as Bilbo is hired by Gandalf and the dwarfs to be their master *burglar* (Tolkien, 19). A burglar is defined



as someone who enters a premise and steals something that does not belong to them (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 214). The reader is then faced with conflicting impressions. A burglar is associated with unlawful activities, often related to greed. However, Tolkien's story is set up as mysterious and adventurous, not presenting a setting of thieves ready to plunder.

As it turns out, the quest is to recapture a treasure from a dangerous dragon (Tolkien, 24). This mystery and sense of adventure eliminates the negative connotations to the term burglar. Indeed, Tolkien offers an alternate term for the job as an "...*Expert Treasure-Hunter...*" (19), before settling on burglar. This further demonstrates that the negative association between a burglar and greed is not present in this story. However, the term applies to moderate greed. *Treasure-Hunter* indicates that their very purpose is to acquire treasure. With the adjective *expert* in conjunction, we are told that the treasure-hunter has done this before. Greed is thus prevalent in the job, as its very purpose is to acquire wealth.

Bilbo's relationship with greed as seen in his job description as a burglar is to be tested, though. Bilbo joined Gandalf and the dwarfs on the quest not for the treasure, per se, but rather for the adventure in itself. He had no need to acquire more wealth, as can be seen in his description of his rich family line (Tolkien, 3). However, when he first sights the incredibly vast and exaggerated wealth of the dwarfs, whom the dragon Smaug sleeps on top of, a sense of desire for more is awakened. He is filled with greed, almost to the point of danger: "His heart was filled and pierced with enchantment and with the desire of dwarves; and he gazed motionless, almost forgetting the frightful guardian, at the gold beyond price and count." (Tolkien, 198). Indeed, he was so enthralled by the treasure that he is described as to have moved almost against his own will to piles of treasure, leaving the safety of the shadows. He is compelled to take a golden cup with him, almost too heavy to carry, before he returns to the dwarfs (198).

The fact that Bilbo is so enchanted with the treasure that he almost forgets about the giant beast that protects it, is noteworthy. It indicates that he is overwhelmed with greed in the negative sense. One would think that a dragon, famous for killing thousands, would be quite a deterrent to approach any type of wealth. However, Bilbo does not only almost forget about the dragon, but he also steals from him. This, in turn, incurs the dragon's wrath who quickly realises what has happened. Indeed, they lost their ponies due to this, and the dragon would not forget his wrath soon, as can be seen in the later battle against the men living nearby the mountain.

This shows a contrasting view of moderate greed and greed as seen with negative connotations. The reader is first presented with a moderate greed in Bilbo's willingness to accept his part of the treasure, although he expresses no explicit desire for it. On the contrary, the reader is later introduced to greed that would have dire consequences, as the stolen cup set in motion the dragon's wrath and its war with men.

We see another example of negative greed in relation to Bilbo with the Arkenstone, the heart of the mountain coveted by the dwarfs. Bilbo stumbles upon the Arkenstone and collects it for himself, in pockets deep enough not to be noticed. He is aware that the act is wrong, yet he is somehow compelled to keep it (Tolkien, 217).

Bilbo also possesses redeeming qualities relating to greed. As the story progresses, both men and elves lay claim to the treasure in the mountain, and war is brewing. This leads to Bilbo meeting with their leaders in secret. He is firm in the fact that he has earned a share of the profits, however, he is more than willing to share it with all parties involved, to avoid violence. Indeed, he surrenders the coveted Arkenstone to prevent war, with no hesitation or any type of greed as could be seen when he found it. He even states that he is willing to forsake his claim on the treasure for the sake of peace (Tolkien, 248).

## **4.2 Pride**

### ***4.2.1 Gandalf***

As discussed previously, pride is often defined as the achievement of overcoming difficult challenges, a feature whom both Gandalf and the Norse god Oden are more than familiar with. Oden is a god associated with sorcery (Day, 285), which strikes an obvious likeness with Gandalf being a wizard (Tolkien, 7). He is also a god associated with ancient wisdom and arcane knowledge. One of his striking characteristics is that of endless knowledge and wisdom of which he sacrificed his eye for (Steinsland, 183). Gandalf may still have both of his eyes; however, he does possess qualities of wisdom and knowledge that others do not, indicating his status as a wizard and his likeness to Oden. We see this in his presentation of a map of The Lonely Mountain, where the adventurers are ultimately heading. One of the characters, Thorin, claims that the map is not needed as he knows the mountain well enough. However, only Gandalf is aware that the map contains a secret entrance as well as secret runes pointing to the entrance (Tolkien, 20).

Another example is the company's encounter with trolls, by whom Bilbo and the dwarfs have been trapped. Through Gandalf's wit, the trolls argue with one another until dawn comes

upon them, with the sunlight turning them into stone (Tolkien, 40). Tolkien presents the fact that trolls are turned into stone by sunlight as obvious, however, only Gandalf knew of this, yet again indicating secret knowledge that is associated with Oden.

Besides possessing arcane knowledge, Tolkien's Gandalf also serves as a guide and mentor to Bilbo and the dwarfs, leading them in the right direction and getting them out of trouble. This can be linked to Oden's qualities as the god of wisdom, with qualities of sharp logical thinking and strategizing (Steinsland, 180). Besides wisdom and mentorship, Oden is also described as an incredibly fierce god that is not shy to use violence if necessary. These would be moments when his true powers were revealed (183-184). There is a similarity in Tolkien's Gandalf here, where he saves Bilbo and the dwarves from being captives of goblins. Countless goblins are put to death by Gandalf's magic and the goblin king is slain by him (Tolkien, 61). Interestingly enough, Gandalf was nowhere to be found when they were first captured. It is later revealed that he had managed to escape in the nick of time through his quick thinking. This portrayal of ferocious battle skill and sharp wit resembles that of Oden's strategic thinking and ferocity.

Additionally, Gandalf is presented as rather quirky and comedic. We see this in Bilbo's description of the wizard as he finally remembers who he is. He is described as a teller of wondrous tales, a magician that could produce fantastical fireworks and quirky enchantments (Tolkien, 7). At first glance this might seem contrasting to Oden, the wise, yet fierce and prone to violence god of Norse Mythology. However, Steinsland (183) explains that Oden was seen as quite a comedian spreading colourful stories around him, further demonstrating the inspiration of Gandalf's character.

It is evident that hubristic pride is a trait lacking in Gandalf, with authentic pride dominating his behaviour toward the vice. This can be seen in the fact that Gandalf does not seek praise or validation of his greatness, despite rescuing the adventurers on multiple occasions, hinting at altruistic motives for his actions. However, Gandalf is not immune to pride, as can be seen in his more-than-happy retelling of how they escaped the goblin-filled mountain to Bilbo: "The wizard, to tell the truth, never minded explaining his cleverness more than once..." (Tolkien, 88).

#### ***4.2.2 The Dwarfs***

The dwarfs of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* are clearly influenced from Norse Mythology. Containing a rich collection of Norse Mythology, *The Prose Edda* includes a section named *Dvergatal*, which recounts the origin and linearity of the race of dwarfs. This source provided

Tolkien with great inspiration to his own portrayal of dwarfs. Indeed, their very names are directly taken from *Dvergatal*; Thorin, Dwalin, Balin, Kíli, Fíli, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Dori, Nori, Ori, Óin and Glóin (Day, 153). The greatest of Tolkien's dwarfs also all have names that translate into warrior qualities. We see for instance Thorin's name, the leader of the dwarfs, that translates into "bold", and his last name; Oakenshield, is also taken from *Dvergatal*'s "Eikinskjaldi", roughly translating into "...he of the Oakenshield." (153). Thorin's cousin and heir is named Dáin which translates into "Deadly" (Day, 154). Balin, translates to "burning one", indicating a fiery fierceness in battle and Ori translates to "furious" describing his fury in war (154). Steinsland explains that a common practice amongst new-borns in Norse society was to name them after certain character traits (366), which we see in Tolkien's naming of the dwarfs in *The Hobbit*. The dwarfs' names also reveal their pride in battle. This type of pride can be seen as authentic. For instance, Thorin's surname, Oakenshield, comes from his battle prowess as he used an oak branch as a shield and weapon (Day, 374), indicating his pride in his victory.

Besides having some of the main characters' names in *The Hobbit* taken directly from *Dvergatal*, the meaning behind their names also signifies Tolkien's inspiration from Norse Mythology, and their relation to pride. We see through the translation of their names that they are a warrior race familiar with violence and battle. Day also confirms this in his claim that Tolkien's dwarfs have a "...wrathful and violent nature..." (130). Day also compares the nature of the dwarfs to the warrior cult of Thor, a following of the warrior god of Norse Mythology (130). One of Thor's main tasks is to uphold the world order and is constantly fighting against giants and other powers of chaos (Steinsland, 214). He is also one of the strongest gods of Norse Mythology and is quick to violence and can therefore be seen as a warrior god. However, he is not a typical warrior god, as he is not the smartest and would rather use his hammer than to strategize, leaving that field to Oden (215-217). Similar qualities are found in Tolkien's dwarfs. We see for instance how the dwarfs' slow thinking got them captured both by trolls (Tolkien, 36) and by goblins (57). Indeed, it is up to Gandalf, in whom we see Oden, to save them on both occasions.

The dwarfs' display a sense of frustration from nearly being killed by the trolls (40). However, they show no indication of frustration toward Gandalf saving them. Hubristic pride would have their pride hurt from this, as it argues for autonomy. This tells us that their captivity did not undermine their pride. Rather, they were merely pleased with being safe once again. Despite being captured by the goblins through carelessness, Thorin displays pride in a positive sense when the dwarfs' and Bilbo are presented to the goblin king. He stays true

to the importance of dwarfs' manners and introduces himself, offering his services (60). Albeit ironically, this indicates that his pride in being a dwarf is intact, and that the goblins cannot take it away from him.

Furthermore, another indicator showing the good nature of the dwarfs is their introduction. All the dwarfs are very careful to show respect by bowing and offering their services, with the first instance being the first dwarf to show up at Bilbo's door: Balin (8). We see further examples of this when the dwarfs introduce themselves to Beorn, who clearly expressed that he is not interested in their services, however, they are adamant to show their respect anyway (112). Indeed, Beorn blatantly expresses his dislike for dwarfs and only allows them in his home because of Gandalf's reassurance of their respectability and their common enemies (112). Tolkien also describes Beorn as rarely allowing friends, never strangers, into his house (116). We are ultimately informed that Beorn has accepted the dwarfs when he allows them to stay in his home, providing both food, sleeping arrangements, gear, and guidance. I argue that it is the dwarfs' pride in respectable manners that led to Beorn's acceptance. Their insistence in offering their services and adhering to their proud customs of respect, with a little help from Gandalf's praise, finally won him over.

### ***4.2.3 Bilbo***

Bilbo is no stranger to pride in *The Hobbit*. The very first description of him sets the foundation that he is rightfully respected in the society he lives in, as was the family he's from. It is established that the family line of the Baggins's has earned their respect partly because of their predictability. They are a stable family with no unexpected adventures to disturb the peace of their society (3). It fits quite well within the definition of pride as someone who has earned it, deservedly so. Tolkien then quickly points out that Bilbo is also from a line of hobbits known as Tooks. His grandfather, we are told, was a chieftain of sorts for the hobbits in his area, and his mother is described as remarkable (Tolkien, 4-3). This is interesting because we are told that other families gossiped that the Tooks' must have had a faery in their family, due to their adventurous spirit, an unusual trait for hobbits. It is revealed that the Tooks' family secret entails the ever so often odd adventure (4). This sets the premise that Bilbo's respected, quiet lifestyle might take a turn. After all, it is in his blood. This adventurous side of his family aids in the making of Bilbo's character, as he faces different types of pride throughout the quest. We see for instance, a moment of unfamiliar pride in Bilbo as he overcomes the particularly difficult challenge of escaping from the mountain of goblins and Gollum, appearing without a warning in front of the dwarfs, despite their lookout

(87). What is interesting, though, is the fact that Bilbo intentionally did not mention that he was able to escape due to the ring he found in the mountain, which grants the bearer invisibility (87). The reader is then presented with hubristic pride, as Bilbo felt that *he* had earned his praise, not through the qualities of the ring.

Furthermore, Bilbo experiences authentic pride in battling the spiders of Mirkwood and freeing the dwarfs from their captivity. After struggling to free the dwarfs from their webbed bonds, Bilbo fights the spiders with both rocks and his dagger. As the dwarfs are dazed from the spiders' poison, Bilbo is the main proprietor of the defence against the arachnids, despite his small stature and inexperience with battle. The company is outnumbered, and Bilbo must find other means to assist them. The ring, and the invisibility it provides, proves to be the perfect diversion. However, as Bilbo is accompanied by the dwarfs, he realises that they will witness him vanish (Tolkien, 150-151). This is where his hubristic pride regarding the ring is challenged. He alerts the dwarfs that he must vanish, leaving them in confusion as an invisible hobbit diverts the spiders' attention away from them. The battle is finally won, and he is forced to confess the finding of the ring and how he used it to escape Gollum and the goblin-filled mountain (152-153). The hubristic pride he experienced earlier is eliminated by the praise of the dwarfs. They recognize that it is Bilbo's bravery and actions that saved them, not the tools he was using. However, this was not the last time that he experienced hubristic pride.

Bilbo's authentic pride from overcoming the challenges of the quest swells in his second encounter with the guarding dragon, Smaug. He is discovered by Smaug through smell, as he still benefits from the ring's invisibility-granting power. Smaug is intrigued and strikes a conversation with Bilbo, to lure him into sight. The reader is informed that it is vital not to reveal one's name to a dragon (205). Bilbo then turns to riddles, granting himself titles based on his deeds and accomplishments from the quest. This boosts his confidence, enough to present himself tauntingly with hubristic pride, resulting in a careless mistake as one of the titles reveals his visit to the nearby township of men, Lake Town. This discovery gave Smaug's vengeance a convenient target, resulting in a devastating attack on the town.

## 5 Christian or Norse Influences?

### 5.1 Gandalf

Tolkien may have had inspiration from Christian theology in the portrayal of Gandalf, however, in specifically *The Hobbit*, the Nordic influences outnumber the Christian. As previously discussed, Gandalf's story in *The Lord of the Rings* series has been compared to Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. Furthermore, Gandalf has been compared to the Christian angels serving God, as he is a "Vala" serving "Eru-Ilúvatar". Additionally, Gandalf's invocation of The Secret Fire has been compared to Christianity's Holy Spirit. This clearly indicates the Christian influences on Tolkien's portrayal of the character. The key point here, however, is that these comparisons were made in *The Lord of the Rings* series, comprising of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and finally *The Return of the King*. In the series, Gandalf undergoes a transformation where his true divine power and ultimate motive is revealed. However, in *The Hobbit*, Gandalf is still portrayed as a mysterious wandering wizard with only hints of his true power. A wizard in whom we find an overwhelming likeness to Oden of Norse Mythology. A reason for this is that *The Hobbit* was released 17 years prior to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first book in *The Lord of the Rings* series. Tolkien clearly had time to further develop the characters of his world, and Gandalf grew into the angelic being comparable to Jesus Christ. Tolkien's Gandalf in *The Hobbit* is therefore more influenced by Norse Mythology than Christian Theology.

Based on the textual evidence presented in 4.1.1. and 4.2.1., I argue that Tolkien's portrayal of Gandalf in relation to greed and pride is more influenced by Norse Mythology rather than Christian theology. It is evident that Gandalf's lack of interest in material riches, regarding adornment and treasures, eliminates any indication toward greed as seen through the Seven Deadly Sins. Although, it could be argued that a total lack of greed indicates a Christian virtue of liberality, which is seen as the virtue opposite of greed (Straker) and defined as being generous (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1004). However, as is seen through his share of the treasure, as well as his keeping of the bejewelled sword, Gandalf partakes in moderate greed.

## 5.2 The Dwarfs

The inspiration for the dwarfs has been analysed through the lens of Norse Mythology, however, we do find certain elements that can be linked to Christianity. The first link to Christianity is the creation story of the dwarfs. One of the “Vala”, an angelic being, is responsible for their creation. However, they are rather like monotonous robots without independent will or thought. It is only “Eru-Ilúvatar”, the creator of all life on Middle-Earth that can give them true life (Day, 130). We see the similarity in Christianity, where God is the sole reason for any life on earth. The history of the dwarfs is not recounted in *The Hobbit*, though. It is another example of Tolkien’s world, characters and myth expanding in his later works. Norse mythology remains the constant and clear major influence of the dwarfs in *The Hobbit*, as can be seen in the evidence presented in 4.1.2 and 4.2.2.

Thorin’s recounting of the way of the dwarfs of the Lonely Mountain before they lost their home tells us that they desired more riches than they needed. This falls in with the notion of sinful greed. However, it is told in a positive light, presented as the glory days of the dwarfs and without dispute from Gandalf. Dragon-sickness, the ultimate sinful greed, is also not present in the description. I therefore argue that the way of the dwarfs, as seen in the prime time of The Lonely Mountain, rather fits the view of moderate greed, in accordance with Norse Mythology. Furthermore, the dwarfs’ relationship with greed again fits Norse Mythology’s moderate greed with the retaking of The Lonely Mountain and its treasure. The dwarfs are essentially homeless and need their former dwellings. Defeating Smaug and claiming the treasures he guarded also adheres to the honour found in collecting the spoils of defeated enemies, as seen in Norse Mythology. It can also be argued that Thorin’s obsessiveness with the Arkenstone, which is on the verge of dragon-sickness, is the culmination of sinful greed as seen through the Seven Deadly Sins. However, Thorin’s enthrallment with the heart of the mountain do not define his entire character, nor the rest of the dwarfs in *The Hobbit*. I therefore argue that Tolkien’s influence for his portrayal of the dwarfs in *The Hobbit* are mainly from Norse Mythology.

Additionally, we see clear influences from Norse Mythology relating the dwarfs in relation to pride. The dwarfs’ characteristics are rather summed up by authentic pride than hubristic pride. This is seen in their pride in battle, which can be found in their names, in accordance with the warrior cult following of Thor. As well as their pride in respectable introduction, a common trait found in every dwarf of *The Hobbit*, though, most prominently featured in their leader: Thorin, all of which are examples of pagan pride.



### 5.3 Bilbo

Tolkien's Bilbo, as seen in *The Hobbit*, is the character most influenced by Christian theology, however, Norse Mythology also plays its part. We see, for instance, a sense of pride in Bilbo in general that falls in line with authentic pride, in the sense that he comes from a family with a societal respect that they have earned. This is relatable to the pride of hereditary kinship in Norse Mythology. Bilbo's family line has established a respect that follows him through his kin. Additionally, authentic pride through victory in battle, which is the norm of Norse Mythology, is also found in his defeat of the spiders in Mirkwood. As stated though, Christian theology is found in the influence of Tolkien's Bilbo.

For instance, Bilbo's relationship with greed is portrayed in accordance with sinful greed. Bilbo displays no explicit desire for the treasure of The Lonely Mountain at first, rather, he is more interested in the adventure. However, he is tempted by greed. The fact that he is overwhelmed by desire for the treasure when first laying eyes on it (198) indicates an allusion that dragon sickness, sinful greed, is a very real phenomenon for him. Although, Bilbo redeems himself by surrendering the Arkenstone in the name of peace, pointing to the Christian virtue of liberality, the virtue opposite of greed (Straker).

Hubristic pride, closely related to Christian theology, is also prevalent in his character. This can be seen in the neglect of the ring in his account of exiting the mountain full of goblins to Gandalf and the dwarfs, which is the reason he was able to escape. It tells us that Bilbo wanted to show *his* skills, and wanted the credit to go to *him*, not the ring. Finally, hubristic pride is also prominent in the haughty titles he awards himself in his conversation with Smaug, which had dire consequences.

## 6 Conclusion

What influenced J.R.R. Tolkien's portrayal of morality in his literary works has been identified through a Christian perspective countless times; however, in *The Hobbit*, Norse Mythology is the foremost influence behind its main characters. The linguistic repertoire of Tolkien has allowed his readers to partake in not only a story, but a mythological cosmos. This in turn, has allowed for countless interpretations that relate to contemporary society. Indeed, Tolkien's portrayal of morality in his mythos has contributed to scholarly debates regarding religions from across the globe and will continue to do so. As the author himself said: "Speaking of the history of stories ... we may say that the Pot of Soup, the Cauldron of Story, has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty." (Tolkien, 13).

This essay has analysed the scope of morality in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* through a set of abstract archetypes, namely greed and pride, to determine Christian theology or Norse Mythology as the main influence of the novel's main characters. The archetypes have been defined as seen through Christian theology and Norse Mythology. It has then been concluded that Gandalf, and the dwarfs are mainly influenced by Norse Mythology, with Bilbo being comparably Christian, though with prominent Norse Mythology traits. This is all evident in the characters' portrayal in relation to sinful and moderate greed as well as authentic and hubristic pride.

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