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Cover Page Footnote

I am thankful for the Olivet Nazarene University Honors Program, which provided financial support for this project. Also, I am grateful for the mentorship and guidance of Dr. Karen Knudson of Olivet Nazarene University. Lastly, I am indebted to Marlena Kalafut and Kiley Bronke—two friends who provided indispensable encouragement and helped me conceptualize my project over the past two years.



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ABSTRACT

This thesis endeavors to explore the connections between J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and its predecessor, the famous medieval text *Beowulf*. Though Tolkien seldom talked about his own use of *Beowulf*, his fascination with the text is obvious in his many writings and lectures. Thus, this thesis uses Tolkien's own writings as well as the scholarly writings of others to explore his integration of tropes and themes from *Beowulf*. A case is simultaneously made for the impact that the integration of *Beowulf* has on Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Arguably, Tolkien's utilization of medieval stories helps him to root his own fiction in the very foundations of English culture. This thesis attempts to reveal the ways in which Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, through its use of *Beowulf*, developed into a tribute to the culture of the country of England.

INTRODUCTION

J. R. R. Tolkien—though now a rather misunderstood pop culture icon—was a tremendously talented man whose genius was made evident in his works of criticism and philology as well as his works of fiction. Tolkien's fascination with scholarly criticism is evidenced in his many lectures and essays about medieval literature, fairy stories, and linguistics. However, Tolkien himself did not often elaborate on the connections between his scholarly work and his fiction writing. Thus, over the decades since the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, many writers and critics have attempted to understand the deep, underlying connections between Tolkien's love of ancient and medieval literature and his creation of an intricate imaginary world.

In writing *The Lord of the Rings*, author J. R. R. Tolkien hoped to create a mythology for England. According to Habermann and Kuhn, "Tolkien regretted the lack of a proper mythology for England along the lines of the Germanic or Finnish sagas which he studied and admired, and he set out to create such a mythology, which he could dedicate 'to England; to my country'" (263). Clearly, Tolkien wished to use a variety of different texts to create a body of stories and ideas that would serve as a mythology for English people. In one of his many letters, Tolkien expresses this wish:

Once upon a time ... I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story—the larger founded on the lesser in contact with the earth, the lesser drawing splendor from the vast backcloths—which I could dedicate simply to: to England; to my country. It should possess the tone and quality that I desired, somewhat cool and clear, be redolent of our 'air' (the clime and soil of the North West, meaning Britain and the hither parts of Europe: not Italy or the Aegean, still less the East), and, while possessing (if I could achieve it) the fair elusive beauty that some call Celtic (though it is rarely found in genuine ancient Celtic things), it should be 'high', purged of the gross, and fit for the more adult mind of a land long now steeped in poetry. I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama. (*Letters* 144-45)

In addition, Habermann and Kuhn write that “in [Tolkien’s] ‘invention about truth’, he gradually turned from more fanciful notions, such as seeing the world as a great Viking ship, to conceiving of his world as a mythical pre-history of our world” (264). Thus, Tolkien’s world of Middle-Earth bears great similarities to both the real world as well as many medieval texts and myths. Clearly, Tolkien admires his country and its culture; in writing *The Lord of the Rings*, he seeks to honor that culture through an imaginative and mythical medium.

In his famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien utilizes tropes, themes, and cultural characteristics from *Morte d’Arthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as many other more obscure medieval texts. However, one particular story that arguably impacted his fiction the most is *Beowulf*, an Old English epic that exists at the roots of English language and literature. *Beowulf* is thought to be one of the oldest surviving Old English stories. According to *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, *Beowulf* is “the oldest of the great long poems written in English” (23), and “it is possible that *Beowulf* may be the lone survivor of a genre of Old English long epics” (24). Often found in the first few pages of English Literature anthologies, *Beowulf* is clearly a foundational English text. In creating a mythology of England, it was only fitting for Tolkien to utilize texts that have been formative to England’s culture.

Tolkien’s fascination with *Beowulf* is evidenced in many of his writings. One of the most valuable texts on the subject is actually one of Tolkien’s lectures, which is entitled “*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*.” This lecture is famous for having reintroduced *Beowulf* as a text that is not just a valuable historical document, but a powerful literary text as well. In his lecture, Tolkien writes, “It is as an historical document that [*Beowulf*] has mainly been examined and dissected” (The Monsters and the Critics 6). However, Tolkien argues that *Beowulf* is worthy of literary study: “So far from being a poem so poor that only its accidental historical interest can still recommend it, *Beowulf* is in fact so interesting as poetry, in places poetry so powerful, that this quite overshadows the historical content, and is largely independent even of the most important facts ... that research has discovered” (7). In addition to his defense of *Beowulf*’s merit, Tolkien also translated his own version of *Beowulf* (from Old English into modern English), and he wrote several other essays and lectures on the medieval story. His interest in *Beowulf* is further revealed in his fictional works themselves, which demonstrate a dedication to the utilization of *Beowulf*’s themes and tropes.

This analysis aims to reveal the ways in which Tolkien succeeded in creating a modern mythology of England by focusing on his detailed utilization of *Beowulf* in particular. Pritha Kundu writes that Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* “critiques, reconstructs, and reappropriates several Anglo-Saxon themes and ideas” (2). Therefore, his work bears much resemblance to *Beowulf*, but it is still a modern reappraisal of the ancient text. Tolkien created an entire world in his fictional work *The Lord of the Rings*, and he created histories, genealogies, and languages to accompany it. Though the world of Middle-Earth is fictional, it is a reflection of the real world, just as *Beowulf* is a mythical reflection of real men and a real culture that once existed. This paper will argue two different points. Firstly, it will demonstrate that Tolkien indeed utilizes *Beowulf* and bases many of his themes, characters, and tropes in *The Lord of the Rings* on that famous Old English text.

Secondly, this argument will propose that Tolkien's creation of "a mythical pre-history of our world" was not only successful, but also that his use of *Beowulf* was beneficial to his efforts because of its connections to the very roots of English culture (Habermann and Kuhn 264). By rooting his stories in a foundational English text and glorifying traditionally English characteristics in his works, Tolkien creates a mythical tribute to his own culture.

Over the years since Tolkien's death, a great deal of scholarly research about his works has been published. Writers have analyzed his use of a wide variety of medieval texts such as *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Morte d'Arthur*. Additionally, scholars have also explored his linguistical naming systems, his focus on monsters, his connections with religion, and his utilization of Arthurian legends. For instance, Edman's extensive research about Tolkien's allusions to King Arthur and his knights is published in his article "Power in Jeopardy: A Poststructuralist Reading of the Arthurian Legend from Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Tennyson's 'Idylls to the King' to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*." Scholars have even studied the plants and climate of Tolkien's imaginary world, Middle Earth. For example, Graham A. Judd and Walter Steven Judd wrote a book entitled *Flora of Middle-Earth: Plants of J. R. R. Tolkien's Legendarium*. Clearly, the minute details of Tolkien's series have been studied extensively and thoroughly explored in writing and research. However, few sources focus solely on Tolkien's use of *Beowulf* itself, and Tolkien's own lack of mention about his utilization of the medieval story makes its connections to his works even more fascinating. For instance, in his most famous work related to *Beowulf*, the lecture entitled "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien examines *Beowulf* without ever mentioning his own use of the tale. In addition, Tolkien translated his own version of *Beowulf*, and he wrote a commentary to accompany it. His passion for the story is undeniable, but its actual connections to his own fictional work, *The Lord of the Rings*, are not as evident. Additionally, though some writers have analyzed the connections between the two texts, few have connected this analysis with Tolkien's focus on founding his story in English culture and creating a tribute to his own people. Thus, this particular analysis is a unique and valuable work of research because it reveals both Tolkien's use of *Beowulf* as well as the ways that that use affects the story and creates meaning for his readers.

Historical context

At the time that *The Lord of the Rings* was written, English people needed a sense of identity, hope, and unity. According to William Indinck, "In Jungian psychology, myths are collective dreams, the communal expression of a culture's goals, wishes, anxieties and fears" (1). Interestingly, *The Lord of the Rings* ultimately venerates English people because it places hobbits beside valorous warriors, praising their courage and strength. Tolkien uses *Beowulf*, with all of its cultural significance in England, to formulate a nationalistic mythology of England that honors the characteristics of modern English people. It is worth noting that the goals and fears of Englishmen at the time that *The Lord of the Rings* was written were akin to the goals and fears of the hobbits, who wished to maintain the peace and beauty of their home despite the threat of a growing shadow in the East. Written between 1937 and 1945, *The Lord of the Rings* echoes many of the core desires of English people who were finding their own courage in the face of Hitler's tyranny. Adolf Hitler, much like Tolkien's Sauron, was also a menacing threat that grew

in the East, causing English people to experience a sense of hopelessness and impending doom. Tolkien's fictional works are full of hope for hobbits and for other good and simple people who face the terrible threat of Sauron's evil. Therefore, Tolkien's attempt to create a mythology of England indeed expresses the underlying desires of English people, and it also reveals an appreciation for England's past, which is seen through a fictional lens. Amidst a culture of hopelessness and fear, Tolkien wrote fantasy stories with which English people could identify and from which they could ascertain a sense of hope. The connection between *The Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf* is yet another way in which Tolkien utilizes the core of English history and culture to create an epic mythology to which the people of his beloved country could relate at that time.

Interestingly, Tolkien himself explains that his love of mythology and fairy-stories grew to maturity through his experience in World War I. In his lecture "On Fairy Stories," which he delivered in 1939, Tolkien explains that for him, "a real taste for fairy-stories was awakened by philology on the threshold of manhood, and quickened to full life by war" (*The Monsters and the Critics* 135). Evidently, Tolkien's experience of war influenced his writing. This connection with war, power, and hope for mankind became a central element of Tolkien's writings, and his mentions of orcs "digging, digging lines of deep trenches in a huge ring" and "great engines for the casting of missiles" are reminiscent of the trenches of World War I (*Return of the King* 804). Tolkien once spoke of his experience as an Englishman in the war, saying, "I've always been impressed ... that we are here, surviving, because of the indomitable courage of quite small people against impossible odds" (Carpenter, *A Biography* 180). Similarly, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*—the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings*—Elrond says, "This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet such is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship* 262). Clearly, Tolkien's fictional works themselves are deeply connected to his own life experiences and the historical context of his life. Just like the small, seemingly insignificant people who fought in the war with J. R. R. Tolkien, the hobbits of the Shire are small and insignificant people as well. Their connection to humanity, and, in turn, to the men who fight in wars, is further demonstrated in one of Tolkien's many letters:

The Hobbits are, of course, really meant to be a branch of the specifically *human* race (not Elves or Dwarves)—hence the two kinds can dwell together (as at Bree), and are called just the Big Folk and Little Folk. They are entirely without non-human powers but are represented as being more in touch with 'nature' (the soil and other living things, plants and animals), and abnormally, for humans, free from ambition or greed of wealth. They are made *small* (little more than half human stature, but dwindling as the years pass) partly to exhibit the pettiness of man, plain unimaginative parochial man—though not with either the smallness or the savageness of Swift, and mostly to show up, in creatures of very small physical power, the amazing and unexpected heroism of ordinary men 'at a pinch.' (Carpenter 158)

Clearly, the hobbits of Tolkien's mythology are meant to represent a kind of man—a small, insignificant man—who has a good heart and very little desire for power and dominion over others. Interestingly, this lack of greed for power is part of the reason

that the ring is less tempting for the hobbits in Tolkien's tales. In turn, this idea reflects Tolkien's aversion to power-seeking men like Hitler who sought dominion—much like Sauron—around the time that Tolkien wrote his famous trilogy.

Mythology

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the meaning of the word “mythology” has changed a great deal over the decades. “Mythology” was once known to mean a “parable” or an “allegory,” but it can now refer to “a body of myths ... belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition,” “the collective or personal ideology or set of beliefs which underpins or informs a particular point of view,” or “the study of myths” (“Mythology”). Mythology is clearly a multifaceted concept, and its meaning has changed over the years. Thus, what did Tolkien mean when he said that he set out to write a mythology of England, and was he successful?

Though mythology is typically understood to be a body of pagan stories and beliefs that are considered to be untrue but perhaps useful, a new definition of mythology is now emerging. James E. Beichler writes about his understanding of modern mythologies:

Modern science fiction and fantasy fiction movies can be considered new forms of mythology because they play the same role in modern culture that older forms of mythology played in earlier cultures. In this respect, these new mythologies offer us a way to look deeper into our own personalities and consciousness as well as physical reality itself than we could normally explore by purely scientific and logical means. When we look more deeply into the mythical scenarios presented by science and fantasy fictions, we can find that they offer a way of exploring how we believe that our own human consciousness is evolving. (Beichler 127)

In other words, mythical fantasy stories contain many of the elements necessary in a mythology. They contain aspects of the stories and cultures from which they originate, and they provide readers with a better understanding of the very essence of humanity and human consciousness. This new definition of mythologies is applicable to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

England lacks its own mythology. Tolkien writes explicitly about his country's demythologization:

I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil), not of the quality that I sought, and found (as an ingredient) in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish ... but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. Of course there was and is all the Arthurian world, but powerful as it is, it is imperfectly naturalized, associated with the soil of Britain but not with English; and does not replace what I felt to be missing. (Tolkien, 144)

In agreement with Tolkien's sentiments, scholar Thomas Shippey writes, “England must be the most demythologized country in Europe, partly as a result of 1066 (which led to near-total suppression of native English belief) ... [and] partly as a result of the early

Industrial Revolution, which led to the extinction of what remained rather before the era of scholarly interest and folk-tale collectors like the Grimms” (*The Road to Middle-Earth* 304). Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien utilizes characters, archetypes, cultural references, and language from *Beowulf* in order to formulate his modern mythology. In his writings, he seeks for “a cohesion, a consistency of linguistic style, and an illusion of historicity,” which inevitably indicates the mythological quality of his works (Tolkien, *Letters* 143). His stories form a kind of shadow world that indirectly reflects the experiences of Englishmen through the use of legendary stories and mythical creatures, providing English people with tales that they can relate to and use as a source of wisdom, much like the mythical tales of other cultures.

MONSTERS

Many monsters throughout Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* bear similarities to the monsters found in *Beowulf*. Some of them have comparable physical forms while others are undeniably alike in personality and character traits. These connections between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* ultimately help Tolkien to create a mythology of England and a tribute to his own culture amidst the struggle of World War II. J. R. R. Tolkien was intrigued by monsters and their presence in various literary texts. In his influential lecture, “*Beowulf: The Monsters and Critics*,” he notably defends “the monster’s central place in *Beowulf*” (Nelson 466). He argues, “The monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of [*Beowulf*], which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness” (Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics* 19). Thus, understandably, Tolkien chose to use similar monsters in his stories, ultimately contriving a mythical style in his fiction. According to Verlyn Flieger, “The function of the monster in medieval narrative is to oppose the hero, to body forth tangibly the evil to be overcome, to be the force against which the hero’s strength and courage are tested” (142). Indeed, as in many medieval narratives, Tolkien utilizes monsters in his trilogy in order to embody the evil and corruption that his heroes must overcome. His use of monsters connects *The Lord of the Rings* to *Beowulf*, and it also allows him to display the bravery and strength of his characters, who are representatives of English culture and history.

Gollum and Grendel

One of the monsters in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* who is most recognizably connected to the story of *Beowulf* is the creature named Smeagol, who is otherwise known as Gollum. Gollum’s character is intertwined with the character of Grendel, one of the major enemies in *Beowulf*. According to Verlyn Flieger’s “Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of a Hero,” Gollum’s “parallel with Grendel, the man-eating monster of *Beowulf*, is unmistakable” (141). Gollum and Grendel’s characters have several similarities. Namely, they are physically similar, both share an affinity for water, and both bear a connection to the same biblical story.

First of all, Gollum and Grendel bear a significant physical resemblance to each other. Neither of them are described as fully human or fully monster. Instead, their true physical forms remain mysteriously ambiguous. Throughout Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum is described as a slimy, slinking creature. Tolkien writes that his

eyes are “two small pale gleaming lights” (*The Two Towers* 598). Though he is small, he possesses a malicious, wiry strength. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Tolkien writes that “[Gollum’s] malice gives him a strength hardly to be imagined” (143). In *The Two Towers*, Tolkien describes Gollum’s “clinging grip” as “soft but horribly strong” (600). Just like the slinking Gollum, Grendel is described as “a prowler through the dark” (*Beowulf* 86). The *Beowulf*-poet writes that when Grendel comes to attack Heorot, he comes “greedily loping” (711) with a “loathsome tread, while a baleful light, flame more than light, flared from his eyes” (725-27). At the thought of killing the men of Heorot, Grendel’s “glee was demonic” (730). Grendel also possesses an unimaginably powerful strength because of his malice and resentment towards humankind. Notably, just like the incredibly strong grip that Gollum uses when fighting Sam Gamgee in *The Two Towers*, Grendel’s grip is also a mighty one. Though he is able to overcome most men with the power of his hands, his vigorous handgrip is conquered by *Beowulf*, whose “handgrip [is] harder than anything / [Grendel] had ever encountered in any man / on the face of the earth” (750-52). Therefore, because of the sly, prowling bodies and the terribly strong and malicious grips of both characters, it is evident that Gollum and Grendel bear many physical similarities.

In addition, both characters, Gollum and Grendel alike, have a strong affinity for water. Gollum’s family “loved the River, and often swam in it, or made little boats of reeds” (*Fellowship* 51). Gollum, in particular, is known as a lover of water and as one who “dived into deep pools” (51). Indeed, one of the most important moments in Gollum’s life has much to do with his connection to water. When he is fishing with his kinsman Deagol in a small pond, Deagol finds a beautiful ring at the bottom of the pool of water. Overcome by temptation and lust for the object, Gollum strangles Deagol and takes the ring for his own (52). This moment of wickedness, greed, and lust is closely associated with swimming and fishing in the pond. Here, in one of the most impactful moments of Gollum’s life, his affinity for water is again revealed. Similarly, Grendel is known for “haunting the marches, marauding round the heath / and the desolate fens” (*Beowulf* 103-104). The two monsters’ similar affinity for water demonstrates another connection that draws them together.

Another similarity between Gollum and Grendel has to do with their mutual connections with the biblical story of Cain. Grendel’s connections to this story are obvious. The *Beowulf*-poet writes about Grendel’s connection to the biblical story:

He had dwelt for a time
in misery among the banished monsters,
Cain’s clan, whom the Creator had outlawed
and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel
the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:
Cain got not good from committing that murder
because the Almighty made him anathema
and out of the curse of his exile there sprang
ogres and elves and evil phantoms
and the giants too who strove with God
time and again until He gave them their reward. (*Beowulf* 104-114)

Thus, Grendel's connection to Cain is clearly stated in *Beowulf*. Later in the poem, the *Beowulf*-poet writes, "And from Cain there sprang misbegotten sprits, among them Grendel, the banished and accursed" (1265-267). Throughout the story, he is described as "lonely" (164), and the *Beowulf*-poet writes that "he was the Lord's outcast" (169). He is also characterized as "spurned and joyless" later in the story (720). Gollum, on the other hand, bears a subtler connection to the story of Cain. His given name, Smeagol, rhymes with Deagol's name, which indicates kinship between them. Brent Nelson writes, "They are at least brothers in a figurative sense, and the results are the same as in the Genesis story: the profound guilt of the murderer, his exile, and a subsequent growth of wickedness" (467). Indeed, it is Smeagol's wicked action of murdering Deagol that leads him into a state of exile, and he remains isolated under the mountains for hundreds of years. Nelson argues that a Cain figure is "marked by the guilt of his associated violence...a wandering outcast living in everlasting exile from human society" (468). Because of his status as a murderer and an exile, Gollum is associated with the story of Cain. Obviously, both Gollum and Grendel are affiliated with Cain. As a whole, the two characters bear a striking resemblance to each other, which is evidence of Tolkien's utilization of *Beowulf*.

Grendel's mother

Grendel's mother bears important connections to two different creatures in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. First of all, her lair is notably similar to the watery home of the Watcher in the Water—a sea creature that attacks the fellowship when they are attempting to enter the mines of Moria. Secondly, her character is reminiscent of Shelob, the spider that resides in Cirith Ungol. These similarities make Tolkien's use of *Beowulf* apparent, and ultimately, his use of tropes from that medieval text help him to create a mythical tribute to his own country, its medieval past, and its heroic struggle against a modern evil in the east at the time the trilogy was written.

After cutting off Grendel's arm and effectively killing him, *Beowulf* decides to follow Grendel into his mother's lair beneath a lake. Hrothgar describes Grendel and his mother:

They are fatherless creatures,
and their whole ancestry is hidden in a past
of demons and ghosts. They dwell apart
among wolves on the hills, on windswept crags
and treacherous keshes, where cold streams
pour down the mountain and disappear
under mist and moorland. (*Beowulf* 1355-361)

Similarly, in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf describes the balrog and creatures like it: "Far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves, the world is gnawed by nameless things. Even Sauron knows them not. They are older than he" (*The Two Towers* 490). Other such demons of the deep world include the Watcher in the Water, who waits outside of the gates of Moria—deep in a murky pool. In *Beowulf*, the *Beowulf*-poet writes,

A few miles from here
a frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch
above a mere; the overhanging bank

is a maze of tree-roots mirrored in its surface.
 At night there, something uncanny happens:
 the water burns. And the mere bottom
 has never been sounded by the sons of men.
 On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:
 the hart in flight from pursuing hounds
 will turn to face them with firm-set horns
 and die in the wood rather than dive
 beneath its surface. That is no good place. (*Beowulf* 1361-372)

Clearly, no one wants to draw near to the ill-boding pool where Grendel's mother resides. Even the deer choose to face death instead of stepping into the water. Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the fellowship is deeply disturbed by the pool of water where the Watcher in the Water waits. Boromir says, "How I hate this foul pool!" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship* 299), and Frodo says, "I hate this place ... and I am afraid. I don't know of what: not of wolves, or the dark behind the doors, but of something else. I am afraid of the pool. Don't disturb it!" (300). Clearly, in both stories, a detestable creature lives beneath a pool of water. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the monster has "horrible strength" and "groping tentacles" (301), while in *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother has a "brutal grip" (*Beowulf* 1502) and "savage talons" (1504). The Watcher in the Water and its watery abode are reminiscent of Grendel's mother and her home under the lake. Evidently, many of the tropes and characters in *The Lord of the Rings* have medieval precedents.

Grendel's mother also bears connections to Shelob, the horrific spider who lives in the dangerous passageway called Cirith Ungol. Both characters help contribute to an aspect of almost Gothic horror in their respective stories. In both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, some of the most horrifying enemies are females—Ungoliant and her daughter Shelob. Similarly, in *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother is particularly disgusting, mysterious, and disturbing. She is described as a "demon" (*Beowulf* 1378), a "wolfish swimmer" (1506), and a "swamp-thing from hell, / the tarn-hag in all her terrible strength" (1518-519). Just like the balrog, the Watcher in the Water, and Shelob herself, Grendel's mother is like a long-lived demon who hides in dark places. Additionally, both Shelob and Grendel's mother hungrily feed on their innocent prey. Tolkien writes about Shelob: "She served none but herself, drinking the blood of Elves and Men, bloated and grown fat with endless brooding on her feasts, weaving webs of shadow; for all living things were her food, and her vomit darkness" (*The Two Towers* 707). Later, he writes that she "herself [is] a glut of life, alone, swollen till the mountains could no longer hold her up and the darkness could not contain her" (707). As Frodo approaches her lair, Tolkien writes that Shelob had recently "lusted for sweeter meat" (708). Similarly, Grendel's mother lusts for flesh as well. The *Beowulf*-poet writes, "The one who haunted those waters ... had scavenged and gone her gluttonous rounds" (*Beowulf* 1497-498). Evidently, both Shelob and Grendel's mother are ancient creatures who feed hungrily on innocent flesh. Lastly, both creatures are ultimately killed by the stab wound of a brave and victorious warrior—a quintessential English man. In Shelob's case, she is stabbed by Sam, whose "blade scored... a dreadful gash" (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 711), and in the case of Grendel's mother, it is brave Beowulf who "took a firm hold of the hilt and swung / the blade in an

arc, a resolute blow / that bit deep” (*Beowulf* 1564-566). Therefore, the gluttonous female enemies in both stories are cut down by a brave warrior’s blade. Grendel’s mother bears connections to both the Watcher in the Water and Shelob. Her evil deeds and cruelty are juxtaposed with Beowulf’s high, elegant, courageous manner of life. In both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, such horrific female monsters only serve to demonstrate the evil of the world and the goodness and strength of quintessential English people. In the minds of most English readers, Samwise Gamgee’s defeat of Shelob is reminiscent of Beowulf’s battle with Grendel’s mother. By associating a simple hobbit like Sam with the renowned warrior Beowulf, Tolkien honors simple, brave people like those who fought with him in World War I. Thus, not only does Tolkien use *Beowulf* to form the plots of his stories, but he also uses it to form his fiction into a modern tribute to his people.

Other monster forms

There are repeated references to sea-beasts, dragons, trolls, and the like throughout both *Beowulf* and the Tolkien legendarium. Just like the *Beowulf*-poet, Tolkien seems to find such monsters to be both valuable and interesting. By including these mythical creatures in his own works, Tolkien refers to the well-known mythical beasts of English legend. Again, he invites readers to view his stories as an ultimate tribute to England, its history, and its myths.

Sea-Beasts

Near the beginning of *Beowulf*, Beowulf proudly recounts his many victories and achievements before Hrothgar, and he refers to sea-creatures in doing so. He says, “In the night-sea / [I] slaughtered sea-brutes” (*Beowulf* 421-22). Later, when he is defending his own character before Unferth, Beowulf refers to the sea-creatures again:

The deep boiled up
And its wallowing sent the sea-beasts wild.
My armor helped me to hold out;
My hard-ringed chain-mail, hand-forged and linked,
A fine, close-fitting filigree of gold,
Kept me safe when some ocean creature
Pulled me to the bottom. Pinioned fast
And swathed in its grip, I was granted one
Final chance: my sword plunged
And the ordeal was over. Through my own hands,
The fury of battle had finished off the sea-beast.
Time and again, foul things attacked me,
Lurking and stalking, but I lashed out,
Gave as good as I got with my sword.
My flesh was not for feasting on,
There would be no monsters gnawing and gloating
Over their banquet at the bottom of the sea. (*Beowulf* 548-64)

This tale of sea-beasts reveals Beowulf’s supernatural abilities and unprecedented courage in the face of terrifying creatures. Additionally, when Beowulf is later approaching Grendel’s mother’s lair, the *Beowulf*-poet writes about the contents of her watery den:

The water was infested
with all kinds of reptiles. There were writhing sea-dragons
and monsters slouching on slopes by the cliff,
serpents and wild thing such as those that often
surface at dawn to roam the sail-road
and doom the voyage. (*Beowulf* 1425-430)

Much like the *Beowulf*-poet, Tolkien includes a notable sea-beast in his trilogy as well. As previously mentioned, the Watcher in the Water is also a sea creature, and its serpent-like body also writhes and contorts, much like the sea creatures in *Beowulf*. The fellowship first sees the Watcher when they look at the lake and see “the waters ... seething, as if a host of snakes were swimming up from the southern end. Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was pale-green and luminous and wet” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 300). As the shape of the creature grows, “twenty other arms came rippling out. The dark water boiled, and there was a hideous stench... [as] groping tentacles writhed across the narrow shore” (301). Just as the *Beowulf*-poet writes about boiling water, foul creatures, and the infestation of serpent-like beasts, Tolkien also uses these descriptors to conceptualize a terrifying enemy—the Watcher in the Water. The similarities between the descriptions of sea-beasts in the two books is striking; clearly, Tolkien’s passion for the story of *Beowulf* deeply impacted his own writings.

Dragons

Additionally, both the Tolkien legendarium and *Beowulf* refer to dragons and their treasure hoards. In Tolkien’s case, the dragon actually appears in his book *The Hobbit*, which is a prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*. Additionally, the balrog in *The Lord of the Rings* is a dragon-like creature that is described as “a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, on man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it ... Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many tongs” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 321). The balrog, a kind of mix between a dragon and a demon, is extremely dangerous, just like Smaug and the dragon that is included in *Beowulf*. In particular, it is notable that Gandalf’s last battle, which leads to his death, involves the balrog, just as *Beowulf*’s last battle, which also leads to his death, involves a dragon.

In *Beowulf*’s last battle, he fights with a dragon that has been plaguing his home and his people. The *Beowulf*-poet introduces the dragon near the end of the epic as “a dragon on the prow / from the steep vaults of a stone-roofed barrow / where he guarded a hoard” (*Beowulf* 2211-213). Interestingly, the *Beowulf*-poet writes that someone has managed to sneak past the dragon and steal one goblet from his hoard:

There was a hidden passage,
unknown to men, but someone managed
to enter by it and interfere
with the heathen trove. He had handled and removed
a gem-studded goblet; it gained him nothing,
though with a thief’s wiles he had outwitted
the sleeping dragon. That drove him into rage,
as the people of that country would soon discover. (*Beowulf* 2213-220)

Similarly, Bilbo Baggins acts as a sneaky thief who angers the dragon named Smaug in *The Hobbit*. Just like Smaug, the dragon in *Beowulf* destroys the surrounding towns and countryside and plagues the people nearby. “Far and near, the Geat nation / bore the brunt of his brutal assaults / and virulent hate. Then back to the hoard / he would dart before daybreak, to hide in his den. / He had singed the land, swathed it in flame, / in fire and burning” (2317-322). Beowulf bravely fights with the dragon in order to defend his people, much like Gandalf fights with the balrog to defend the fellowship and its quest. Both scenes are epic moments in the two stories.

As a whole, the monsters in Tolkien's stories are strikingly similar to the monsters that the *Beowulf*-poet depicts throughout his famous epic. Tolkien's uses these same monsters, which were written about long ago in Old English, and he recreates them for modern readers in *The Lord of the Rings*. By reinventing a new epic tale about victorious English people and horrific enemies, Tolkien both hearkens back to his country's past and looks to its future—effectively enlivening the hopes, dreams, and desires of modern Englishmen.

ARCHETYPES

Throughout both Tolkien's legendarium and *Beowulf*, there is a focus on ancient heirlooms with a mysterious past. Often, these heirlooms are connected with famed men who were made eminent in ancient battles of renown. These ancient treasures in both stories are considered to be fascinating, powerful, and even somewhat magical. Additionally, both tales include an emphasis on the importance of ancient swords. This similarity between Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and the ancient epic *Beowulf* indicates that Tolkien used elements of *Beowulf* to form his story into a modernized Anglo-Saxon epic. Ultimately, these similarities strengthen his tale's mythical qualities and help him to effectively create a tribute to England.

The importance of treasures

Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R.R. Tolkien emphasizes the deep value of ancient archetypal treasures. Various characters throughout the story display an awe and reverence for treasures that were famed in ancient battles, and the discovery of such treasures is an exciting and awe-inspiring experience. This is first seen in Tolkien's earlier work, *The Hobbit*, which involves a dragon's lair and an ancient hoard of treasure, much like the treasure that Beowulf finds in a dragon's lair near the end of *Beowulf*. This added emphasis and valuation of treasures, found in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf*, is a common theme in medieval literature and Anglo-Saxon culture. Tolkien's utilization of this theme is a reference to early English culture and the values of the Germanic warriors who are recognized as the foundation of English people; by referencing Anglo-Saxon literature and emphasizing the importance of ancient treasures, Tolkien refers to his country and its culture.

Treasures are mentioned repeatedly throughout *Beowulf*. At the beginning of the story, the *Beowulf*-poet writes about Beowulf's attire, saying, “Far-fetched treasures / were piled upon him, and precious gear” (*Beowulf* 36-37). Treasures even have the power to influence the moods of those around them: “Then an old spearman will speak while they are drinking, / having glimpsed some heirloom that brings alive / memories of the

massacre; his mood will darken” (2041-2042). Such heirlooms seem to act as symbols of times past, and the people view them as much more than simple relics. Additionally, the dragon in *Beowulf* guards a hoard of precious treasures, which is described as a “stone-roofed barrow / where he guarded a hoard” (2212-213). This focus on treasures continues throughout the entirety of the epic, and it is seen in the dragon’s hoard (2231-236), in Beowulf’s speech to Wiglaf (2747-749), and in Beowulf’s burial scene at the end of the story (3163-167). Evidently, the Anglo-Saxons place a great deal of value on the ancient treasures that once belonged to their ancestors.

Similarly, throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien emphasizes the value and the mystical qualities of treasures and heirlooms. For one, the ring itself is a magical treasure with a mysterious past. Tolkien uses lofty speech to refer to the rings of power:

In Eregion long ago many Elven-rings were made, magic rings as you call them, and they were, of course, of various kinds: some more potent and some less. The lesser rings were only essays in the craft before it was full-grown, and to the Elven-smiths they were but trifles—yet still to my mind dangerous for mortals. But the Great Rings, the Rings of Power, they were perilous. (*Fellowship* 45-46)

Indeed, Frodo’s ring is deeply powerful and shrouded in mystery and intrigue. Instead of treating the One Ring as a beautiful relic, Tolkien treats the ring as a character from *Beowulf* might—as a powerful, magical object of far more worth than any simple hobbit could imagine.

Other treasures throughout *The Lord of the Rings* are treated in a similar manner. For instance, Tolkien seems to be in awe of the mithril coat that Bilbo gives to Frodo, the treasures that Sam sees when the hobbits are captured by a barrow-wight and brought down into the barrows beneath the earth, the treasures in the dragon’s lair in *The Hobbit*, the treasures in the troll’s cave, and the gifts that Galadriel presents to the fellowship in Lothlorien. He utilizes vivid imagery and powerful diction to captivate his readers and elevate the majestic qualities of the treasures and heirlooms in his stories. For instance, Tolkien employs rich descriptions to depict the beautiful barrow treasures and their connection with the past. When Tom Bombadil looks through the heap of treasures, “He chose for himself from the pile a brooch set with blue stones, many-shaded like flax-flowers or the wings of blue butterflies. He looked long at it, as if stirred by some memory” (*Fellowship* 142). Tom then recalls the ancient lady who once wore the brooch: “Fair was she who long ago wore this on her shoulder. Goldberry shall wear it now, and we will not forget her!” (142). Additionally, Tom presents the hobbits with daggers:

For each of the hobbits he chose a dagger, long, leaf-shaped, and keen, of marvelous workmanship, damasked with serpent-forms in red and gold. They gleamed as he drew them from their black sheaths, wrought of some strange metal, light and strong, and set with many fiery stones. Whether by some virtue in these sheaths or because of the spell that lay on the mound, the blades seemed untouched by time, unruined, sharp, glittering in the sun. (142)

As the hobbits observe these shiny daggers, they suddenly imagine ancient men who lived long ago. Tolkien writes, “They had a vision as it were of a great expanse of

years behind them, like a vast shadowy plain over which there strode shapes of Men, tall and grim with bright swords, and last came one with a star on his brow” (142-43). The magical quality of these ageless daggers and their mystical connection with great deeds of the past contribute to the mythological quality of Tolkien’s trilogy. Just as its connections to *Beowulf* and *Beowulf*’s treatment of treasures associate the story with the past, the treasures themselves remind hobbits of the history of their own country. This repeated emphasis on the significance of treasures and heirlooms reveals a connection between Tolkien’s legendarium and *Beowulf*; this connection ultimately helps Tolkien in his creation of a “mythical pre-history” of England—his beloved country (Habermann and Kuhn 264). By honoring treasures as men like Beowulf did in ancient days, Tolkien hearkens back to England’s past.

Beowulf’s sword and Aragorn’s sword

Tolkien very clearly uses his writings to emphasize the importance and power of swords, which are ancient heirlooms and treasures as well. For instance, Bilbo’s blade Sting is an ancient artifact that is recovered from the troll-hoard in *The Hobbit*. The mysterious blade notably glows blue when orcs or goblins are drawing near, and it famously helps Sam to wound and disable the monstrous spider Shelob in the passes of Cirith Ungol. Other such swords are presented throughout the tales, such as the sword that Gandalf possesses—Glamdring. When Gandalf stands in defiance of the balrog on the Bridge of Khazad-Dum, “Glamdring gleamed, cold and white” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 322). As the balrog attempts to destroy Gandalf, Tolkien writes, “From out of the shadow a red sword leaped flaming. Glamdring glittered white in answer” (322). Clearly, the swords in *The Lord of the Rings* are used for great good and great evil, and their magical qualities are reminiscent of *Beowulf*—the trilogy’s predecessor.

Another important reference to swords, which is seen both in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, is the image of a melting blade. In *Beowulf*, after the fight with Grendel’s mother, Beowulf’s newfound sword seems to melt in his hands: “Meanwhile, the sword / began to wilt into gory icicles / to slather and thaw” (1605-607). Notably, in *The Lord of the Rings*, there is a similar circumstance. After Frodo is stabbed on top of Weathertop, Aragorn picks up the knife that had inflicted the injury:

[He] stooped again and lifted up a long thin knife. There was a cold gleam in it. As Strider raised it they saw that near the end its edge was notched and the point was broken off. But even as he held it up in the growing light, they gazed in astonishment, for the blade seemed to melt, and vanished like a smoke in the air, leaving only the hilt in Strider’s hand. (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 193)

Evidently, in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the authors include the motif of a melting blade. All of these different references to powerful daggers and swords are continued throughout the Tolkien legendarium; however, the most important sword in all of Tolkien’s stories is the sword that belongs to the king of men. At first called Narsil, the sword is re-forged for Aragorn, and at that time it is renamed Andúril. Both Aragorn and Beowulf, two Anglo-Saxon kinds of warriors who act as the chief protectors of their people, have ancient swords of immeasurable power.

Throughout the epic *Beowulf*, Beowulf possesses several different powerful swords. While his men also fight with “ancestral blades” (796), Beowulf’s sword is “both precious object and token of honor” (1023). Later in the story, Unferth gives Beowulf an ancient sword and describes it in detail:

A hilted weapon,
a rare and ancient sword named Hrunting.
The iron blade with its ill-boding patterns
had been tempered in blood. It had never failed
the hand of anyone who hefted it in battle,
anyone who had fought and faced the worst
in the gap of danger. This was not the first time
it had been called to perform heroic feats. (1457-464)

Beowulf’s sword is greatly esteemed and given a name, just like many of the swords in *The Lord of the Rings*. When Beowulf describes Hrunting, he calls it his “sharp-honed, wave-sheened wonder-blade” (1490), saying, “With Hrunting I shall gain glory or die” (1491). Clearly, Beowulf’s blade is one of amazing power and mysterious associations with men of old. However, Hrunting ultimately fails Beowulf, leaving him in need of a new blade. When Beowulf is losing the battle against Grendel’s mother, the *Beowulf*-poet writes about Hrunting:

The shining blade
refused to bite. It spared her and failed
the man in his need. It had gone through many
hand-to-hand fight, had hewed the armor
and helmets of the doomed, but here at last
the fabulous powers of that heirloom failed. (1423-428)

At that moment, when Hrunting fails Beowulf, he suddenly sees another blade in Grendel’s mother’s lair. The *Beowulf*-poet writes about this new blade:

Then he saw a blade that boded well,
a sword in her armory, an ancient heirloom
from the days of the giants, an ideal weapon,
one that any warrior would envy,
but so huge and heavy of itself
only Beowulf could wield it in a battle. (1557-562)

Here, a truly magical sword is discovered. Only Beowulf can wield this sword, almost as if it was specifically meant for him and him alone. This magical attachment between Beowulf and his sword—which almost seemed to reveal itself to him in the perfect moment—indicates that the swords in *Beowulf* are mystical and bear magical attachments to powerful warriors, as if they were made for their masters.

Just like Beowulf, Aragorn esteems swords that were made long ago. These two characters’ mutual veneration for history matches Tolkien’s own veneration for the history of his country. Just as Beowulf is the only one who is meant to wield the sword

that he finds in the lair beneath the lake, Aragorn is the rightful king who is meant to restore the kingdom of Gondor with the sword that was broken long ago. Tolkien writes about how the elven smiths re-forged the ancient blade, previously known as Narsil:

The Sword of Elendil was forged anew by Elvish smiths, and on its blade was traced a device of seven stars set between the crescent Moon and the rayed Sun, and about them was written many runes; for Aragorn son of Arathorn was going to war upon the marches of Mordor. Very bright was that sword when it was made whole again; the light of the sun shone redly in it, and the light of the moon shone cold, and its edge was hard and keen. And Aragorn gave it a new name and called it Andúril, Flame of the West. (*Fellowship* 269)

Throughout the entirety of the trilogy, Aragorn's sword serves as a reminder of hope, goodness, and the fight against Mordor. Sauron, the chief antagonist of the tales, deeply fears the Blade that was Broken since it symbolizes his own pain and defeat. Notably, when Aragorn is handing his sword over to the door-warden in Rohan, he says, "I command you not to touch it, nor to permit any other to lay hand on it. In this elvish sheath dwells the Blade that was Broken and has been made again. Telchar first wrought it in the deeps of time. Death shall come to any man that draws Elendil's sword save Elendil's heir" (*Two Towers* 500). Thus, only Aragorn, the true heir of Elendil, is capable of drawing the sword and wielding it in battle. This magical quality is reminiscent of Beowulf's sword, which "only Beowulf could wield ... in battle" (*Beowulf* 1562). Indeed, both Beowulf and Aragorn possess magical, ancient blades that are meant for them alone. Not only does this elevate the value of the blades themselves, but it allows the authors to honor and celebrate the power of the two characters—both Beowulf and Aragorn. Both men are powerful, kingly Anglo-Saxon warriors who fight for the good men who are left in the world. Tolkien uses Aragorn, his sword, and his similarities to Beowulf to show an esteem for the ancestors of English people and the English qualities of strength, courage, and goodness.

CULTURE

There are two notable cultural similarities between the culture of *Beowulf* and the culture of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. For one, both works bear the same connections to paganism and Christianity. Tolkien likely identified with the *Beowulf*-poet's religious identity and admiration for certain tenets of pagan culture. Additionally, both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* depict many elements of Anglo-Saxon culture, including a heroic code of honor and a high respect for chief-figures. This section of the analysis will examine these cultural similarities. As a whole, because Tolkien uses the culture of the original inhabitants of his land in his fictional stories, he is able to create a story that ultimately magnifies and glorifies traditional English qualities and the history and culture of England.

Paganism

Interestingly, both Tolkien and the *Beowulf*-poet faced a strikingly similar cultural dilemma. Both writers maintained deep and meaningful Christian faiths, but neither one of them mentions Christ, salvation, or biblical theology in his fictional works. The *Beowulf*-poet simply shows some pity for the heathen men in his stories: "That was

their way, / their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts / they remembered hell” (*Beowulf* 178-180). Thomas Shippey writes that “the *Beowulf*-poet’s dilemma was also Tolkien’s. His whole professional life brought him into contact with the stories of pagan heroes, Englishmen or Norsemen or Goths; more than anyone he could appreciate their sterling qualities. At the same time he had no doubt that paganism itself was weak and cruel” (*The Road to Middle-Earth* 199). Tolkien attempted to “repeat the *Beowulf*-poet’s masterpiece of compromise” and create “a story of virtuous pagans in the darkest of dark pasts, before all but the faintest premonitions of dawn and revelation” (199). Thus, Tolkien and the *Beowulf*-poet share a similar appreciation for certain elements of paganism, and this similarity is apparent in their fictional tales.

Both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* hint at the idea of Christianity without providing any explicit references to the Christian faith. The *Beowulf*-poet was a Christian writer who looked back on history and wrote about pagan men. Though Tolkien’s Christian faith was an extremely important part of his life, he did not explicitly reference it in his most important work, *The Lord of the Rings*. Instead, he subtly alluded to its themes and ideas throughout his stories. For instance, the prevalent theme of hope in the face of darkness is found at the core of both *The Lord of the Rings* and the Christian faith, and that theme is further explained in a later section of this thesis. Tolkien explains his dislike for explicit references to the Christian faith in one of his many letters. He writes about Arthurian legends and their inability to mythologize his beloved country, England:

For one thing its ‘faerie’ is too lavish, and fantastical, incoherent and repetitive. For another and more important thing: it is involved in, and explicitly contains the Christian religion. For reasons which I will not elaborate, that seems to me fatal. Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary ‘real’ world. (Tolkien, *Letters* 144)

In this letter, Tolkien distinctly states his distaste for explicitly Christian stories, and he makes it clear that in writing his own mythology of England, he will not repeat the mistakes that he saw in the Arthurian legends.

Thus, Tolkien never explicitly references the faiths of his characters. However, his characters look back on their heathen ancestors with distaste, implying a newly-found faith, much like the *Beowulf*-poet, who looked back on his pagan ancestors disapprovingly. This is evidenced through the use of the word “heathen.” Scholar Thomas Shippey writes about this interesting connection in his book, *Roots and Branches: Selected Papers on Tolkien*:

It may be a coincidence, but probably is not, that both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* use the word *hæðen*, or ‘heathen’ (of human beings), exactly twice. Using the word of course implies that the user is himself a Christian ... The *Beowulf*-poet knew that his old-time characters had been heathens (so Tolkien thought), but did not want to appear to condemn them for it ... It is odd that *The Lord of the Rings*, like *Beowulf*, normally abstains carefully from saying that its characters are heathens. (Shippey 12)

Interestingly, both stories involve Christian writers who avoid explicit references to religion in order to create more timeless, archetypal, mythical stories. Because they made this choice, both writers created stories that have lasted for generations and impacted peoples of all faiths. Not only does this connection to *Beowulf* root *The Lord of the Rings* even more deeply in the foundations of English culture, but it also reveals the way that Tolkien attempted to connect with all English people and create a mythology for his entire country, not just for those who shared his faith.

Anglo-Saxon war culture

The heroic culture of Anglo-Saxon people is depicted in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf*. Pritha Kundu argues that “when the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes began to settle in South-East England during the 5th century, they brought with them a distinctly Germanic concept of the warrior and the culture of a warlike society” (2). Indeed, the bravery of the chief and the men that fight for him in an Anglo-Saxon battle is of utmost importance: “To have retreated from the field, from one’s own chief, is lasting shame and infamy for all life. To defend him, to protect him, to ascribe one’s own great deeds to his glory is their particular oath: the chiefs fight for victory, the warriors for the chief” (qtd. in Kundu 3). This heroic code is demonstrated repeatedly throughout both fictional tales.

The loyalty of Wiglaf and Sam Gamgee

The characters in *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* exemplify the Anglo-Saxon warrior-king relationship. Near the end of *Beowulf*, Wiglaf displays extraordinary loyalty to his king—exemplifying the characteristics of a perfect Anglo-Saxon thane. He reminds the other warriors that they must remain loyal to their lord:

I remember that time when mead was flowing,
how we pledged our loyalty to our lord in the hall,
promised our ring-giver we would be worth our price,
make good the gift of the war-gear,
those swords and helmets, as and when
his need required it. (*Beowulf* 2633-638)

Pleading with the other men to join Beowulf and defend their chief, Wiglaf reminds them of all the ways that Beowulf has protected them: “I well know / the things he has done for us deserve better” (2656-657). Wiglaf’s fierce loyalty to his king is a demonstration of Anglo-Saxon war culture and its values. Wiglaf proceeds to defend his aged king, demonstrating fierce bravery, despite the danger that he faces. The *Beowulf*-poet writes that the dragon attacked Beowulf “in a rush of flame and clamped sharp fangs / into his neck. Beowulf’s body ran wet with his life-blood: it came welling out” (2691-693). Wiglaf responds immediately, leaping forward. He is eager to fight for his king: “[Wiglaf] saw the king in danger at his side / and displayed his inborn bravery and strength” (2695-696). Together, Beowulf and Wiglaf kill the foul dragon, and the *Beowulf*-poet calls them a “pair of kinsmen, partners in nobility” (2707). Wiglaf’s honor, courage, and dignity is highly praised in Anglo-Saxon war culture. He fulfills his ultimate duty by sacrificing his own safety and security in order to protect his chief. Later, Wiglaf reprimands the other men for failing to protect their master, Beowulf:

Every one of you
with freeholds of land, our whole nation,
will be dispossessed, once princes from beyond
get tidings of how you turned and fled
and disgraced yourselves. A warrior will sooner
die than live a life of shame. (2886-891)

Clearly, the warrior-king relationship in Anglo-Saxon culture is of chief importance. By risking his life for his chief, Wiglaf maintains his honor.

Tolkien utilizes his knowledge of Anglo-Saxon war culture as a model for several relationships throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. One such relationship is the friendship between Sam and Frodo. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam and Frodo maintain a deep and powerful friendship that gives them inspiration and encouragement when all seems hopeless. Ultimately, it is Sam's loyalty to "Mr. Frodo," his "master," that is most notable about his character. Tolkien himself writes in one of his many published letters, "[Sam] did not think of himself as heroic or even brave, or in any way admirable—except in his service and loyalty to his master" (*Letters* 329). Here, just like in Anglo-Saxon war culture, Sam's only objective as a kind of servant or thane-figure is to be completely and wholeheartedly loyal to his master, Mr. Frodo.

At the end of Tolkien's second book in the series, *The Two Towers*, Frodo and Sam are attacked by a monstrous spider named Shelob in her den of webs. When Sam sees Shelob approaching unbeknownst to Frodo, his concern is solely for his master. He cries, "Look out behind . . . Look out, master!" (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 709). Tolkien writes about Sam's "desperation at the delay when his master was in deadly peril" (709). Though Sam Gamgee is a small, unafraid hobbit, he displays strength and bravery beyond measure in this scene. Frodo's peril gives him "a sudden violence and strength that was far beyond anything that Gollum had expected from this slow stupid hobbit, as he thought him. Not Gollum himself could have twisted more quickly or more fiercely" (709-710). Sam, a simple-minded gardener, finds himself in a fight to the death with Gollum—the traitor who led Frodo and Sam into Shelob's lair. His bravery and his loyalty to his master is vividly described.

As the scene continues, Sam's spirit of daring becomes even more striking. While Sam was fighting with Gollum, Frodo is "bound in cords" (711), and Shelob begins to drag his body away. Again, Sam springs to his master's defense. Tolkien writes, "Sam did not wait to wonder what was to be done, or whether he was brave, or loyal, or filled with rage. . . . Then he charged. No onslaught more fierce was ever seen in the savage world of beasts, where some desperate small creature armed with teeth, alone, will spring upon a tower of horn and hide that stands above its fallen mate" (711). With no fear for himself, Sam fights in defense of his master, Frodo. His loyalty to his master trumps all other desires and thoughts of his own safety. Sam's fierce anger is displayed in his speech to Shelob: "Now come, you filth . . . you've hurt my master, you brute, and you'll pay for it" (713). Again and again, Tolkien reiterates Sam's fierce loyalty to Frodo. Just like Wiglaf, Sam is a thane-figure who follows the rules of the Anglo-Saxon code. His indefatigable loyalty is deeply connected with the Anglo-Saxon warrior's sense of loyalty to his

chief. The connection between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* is quite clear. Both important scenes involve a thane-figure who fights in the face of impending death in order to defend his master. Additionally, both masters, Beowulf and Frodo, seemingly die despite their servants' valiant efforts. While Beowulf dies an honorable death, Frodo only lies in a stupor that Sam mistakes for death when he says, "Not asleep, dead!" (714) in desperation. Clearly, Sam embodies the qualities of an Anglo-Saxon warrior, just like Wiglaf does.

It is important to note that unlike the warriors in Anglo-Saxon tales such as *Beowulf*, Samwise Gamgee is a small, inconspicuous fellow. His bravery and loyalty do not match his cheerful demeanor and his short stature. In this way, Tolkien both connects his story to *Beowulf's* Anglo-Saxon war culture while also elevating hobbits and their quintessential English qualities to the ranks of the Anglo-Saxon warriors of old. Tolkien writes that Sam's strength in stabbing Shelob is "greater than any warrior's hand" (712), and he writes, "Not the doughtiest soldier of old Gondor, nor the most savage Orc entrapped, had ever thus endured her, or set blade to her beloved flesh" (712). Sam has an "indomitable spirit" that allows him to defeat Shelob, even though she is a mighty enemy (713). By revealing an undeniably brave and loyal warrior-figure in the unassuming body of a small man who loves his home, his garden, and his ale, Tolkien reveals the inner strength and value of English people. As the *Beowulf*-poet writes, "In a man of worth / the claims of kinship cannot be denied" (2600-601), and in recognition of Wiglaf's bravery, he writes, "So every man should act, / be at hand when needed" (2708-709). Just like Wiglaf, Sam's claim to kinship and status as a brave warrior is undeniable. By protecting his chief, master Frodo, Sam defends his honor and acts as a loyal Anglo-Saxon thane. By honoring Samwise Gamgee and connecting him to brave-hearted Wiglaf, Tolkien achieves his goal of writing a tribute to England, the country he so dearly loved.

Beowulf and Aragorn as Anglo-Saxon chiefs

In both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, there exists a mighty kingly figure who epitomizes hope in a hopeless time. When Beowulf arrives at Heorot, the men are disheartened because their friends have been killed. The *Beowulf*-poet writes, "There was panic after dark, people endured / raids in the night, riven by the terror" (*Beowulf* 189-190). They need an inspiring figure to replenish their hope. When Beowulf arrives, Hrothgar states his hopes:

Now Holy God
 Has, in His goodness, guided him here
 To the West-Danes, to defend us from Grendel.
 This is my hope: and for his heroism
 I will recompense him with a rich treasure. (381-85)

Just like Beowulf, Aragorn is the king who rises out of the shadows and restores hope to good men. While instilling fear in his enemy, Aragorn also reinvigorates the men in Rohan and Gondor. When Aragorn looks into the palantír, he challenges Sauron, and "wrenched the Stone to [his] own will" (*Return of the King* 763). After communicating with Sauron and showing him the sword of Elendil—the sword that has been re-forged—Aragorn says, "He is not so mighty yet that he is above fear; nay, doubt ever gnaws him" (763).

By challenging Sauron, Aragorn instills fear and doubt in Sauron's heart. Additionally, Aragorn establishes himself as a heroic Anglo-Saxon figure by committing himself to protect his people and the fellowship of the ring. He notably tells Frodo, "If by my life or death I can save you, I will" (*Fellowship* 168). This commitment to protecting his subordinates is present throughout the entire trilogy. Pritha Kundu writes about Anglo-Saxon culture, saying it is one of "intense loyalty and kinship-ethics" (3). This kinship bond exists between Aragorn and his people, and it is reminiscent of Beowulf's character.

Much like Aragorn, Beowulf is also a heroic and mighty man. Throughout *Beowulf*, he is extolled for his "heroic nature and exploits" (3173). Men say they have never "seen a mightier man-at-arms on this earth" (247-48), and they claim that "he is truly noble" (250). Just like Aragorn, he is considered "higher born" (2199). Thus, the "greater right and sway were inherited" by him (2198-199). Beowulf's kingly qualities are mirrored in Aragorn; thus, Aragorn is a kind of idyllic Anglo-Saxon king. Kundu writes, "Beowulf's greatness as a hero and a dutiful king may be wonderful to the extent of super-humanity: yet the basic virtues that are exaggerated and elevated in the character were real and respectable in actuality, for the Anglo-Saxon race and its socio-cultural ideals" (5). Thus, not only are Aragorn and Beowulf respectable fictional kings, but they also represent sociocultural ideals. By creating a modernized Anglo-Saxon king, Tolkien invites English people to reminisce about their country's heroic past and the ideal qualities of their ancestors.

Riders of Rohan

The Riders of Rohan are semi-barbaric warriors that are reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon warriors. Tolkien's use of *Beowulf* is even evidenced through the names that he bestows upon Rohan's men. For instance, the name "Eomer" is found in *Beowulf* (1960) as well as *The Lord of the Rings*. Additionally, the words "hrethel cyning," which are translated to "Hrethel King," are reminiscent of the manner in which Theoden of Rohan is addressed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Just like medieval kings of old, Theoden is called "Theoden King" rather than "King Theoden." Even these small connections are clear evidence of Tolkien's utilization of *Beowulf*.

One particular chapter of Tolkien's *The Two Towers*—a chapter that is focused on Rohan—draws its outline directly from *Beowulf*. The chapter, "The King of the Golden Hall," is quite similar to lines 229-405 of *Beowulf*. Thomas Shippey explains this similarity:

[Tolkien's] fictional involvement with [*Beowulf*] lasted for at least fifty years, and one chapter of *The Two Towers* derives in outline and in detail from it: the approach of Aragorn and his companions to Meduseld in 'The King of the Golden Hall' follows the etiquette of *Beowulf* lines 229-405 almost exactly: first challenge, leave taking by the first challenger, second challenge by the doorwarden, piling of arms outside the hall, reception standing in front of the throne. (*Roots and Branches* 10)

Indeed, the resemblance between these two passages is striking. The *Beowulf*-poet writes, "So he rode to the shore, this horseman of Hrothgar's, and challenged them in formal terms, flourishing his spear: 'What kind of men are you who arrive / rigged out for combat in your coats of mail, / sailing here over the sea-lanes / in your steep-hulled boat?'"

(*Beowulf* 234–40). Tolkien's gatekeeper at Rohan has a strikingly similar response when Gandalf, Legolas, Aragorn, and Gimli approach the gates of Rohan: "Who are you that come heedless over the plain thus strangely clad, riding horses like to our own horses?" (*Two Towers* 497). Both men, the horseman and the gatekeeper, proudly guard their respective kingdoms from outside intruders. This description of soldierly conduct and the heroic code form a clear connection between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Since the characters in *The Lord of the Rings* are connected to *Beowulf* and are representative of English people, Tolkien shows the honor, respect, and heroism in his culture.

THEMES

Hope

One of the most prominent themes in *The Lord of the Rings* is the theme of hope. Amidst the struggles of World War II, Tolkien formed a set of tales that would honor English people, venerate their ancestors, bring them hope, and inspire them to fight for ultimate glory.

Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, many characters fall into ruin because of a lack of hope. For instance, Denethor, the steward of Gondor, begins to despair in the face of evil when the armies of Mordor are at his doorstep—when he should stand strong and fight. Instead of instilling hope in his men, he waits in his tower, saying, "[The end] is near. Follow whom you will, even the Grey Fool, though his hope has failed. Here I stay" (Tolkien, *Return of the King* 806). Ultimately, Denethor tries to kill both himself and his remaining son—Faramir—by lying on a pyre and setting fire to it. His lack of hope clearly leads to his ruin. Additionally, characters like Saruman choose to believe that there is no hope for the good and beautiful things of Middle Earth. Saruman says, "There is no hope left in Elves or dying Numenor ... We may join with [Sauron]" (*Fellowship* 253). Because Saruman decides that his only chance is in joining with Sauron, he ultimately loses his power and glory, and the title of the White Wizard is passed on to Gandalf, who maintains hope and humility in the face of great evil.

Though many characters in Tolkien's trilogy experience despair and fear when they give up hope, a few characters choose to cling onto a remnant of hope, a hope which Gandalf says is only a fool's hope—but hope the same: "Just a fool's hope, as I have been told ... And yet in truth I believe that the news that Faramir brings has some hope in it" (Tolkien, *Return of the King* 797). In addition, Samwise Gamgee, one of the most honorable, loyal, and hopeful characters in the story—a true Englishman—clings onto hope and beauty even when he faces the very gates of hell—the entrance into Mordor: "For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: There was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach" (901). Indeed, even in the land of Mordor, Sam's hope does not wane: "But even as hope died in Sam, or seemed to die, it was turned to a new strength. Sam's plain hobbit-face grew stern, almost grim, as the will hardened in him, and he felt through all his limbs a thrill, as if he was turning into some creature of stone and steel that neither despair nor weariness nor endless barren miles could subdue" (913). Since Sam is one of the most important and most admirable characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, his indomitable spirit and unquenchable hope is made admirable as well.

Though *Beowulf* is not known to be focused on hope like *The Lord of the Rings* is, Beowulf brings great hope to mankind when he comes in all his power and glory to save the Danes, Hrothgar's people. In addition, Grendel—the epitome of evil—is jealous of the hope and joy of mankind since he is an exile. In other words, his own hopelessness leads to his despair and his evil deeds. Though this theme is not as prevalent in *Beowulf*, Tolkien's very utilization of *Beowulf*, which has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, helps him to form his tales into a mythology full of hope and adulation for English people. By writing about majestic kings of old who are reminiscent of old English stories, simple, honorable people like hobbits, battles of great renown, and goodness triumphing over evil, Tolkien inspires hope for his country and his people.

Power

Another prevalent theme in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is the idea of power and its evil uses. Throughout the trilogy, various characters struggle for power, the evil ring itself is named the "Ring of Power," and the desire for power often leads the peoples of Middle Earth into ruin and corruption. Ultimately, Tolkien turns the *Beowulf* epic on its head by dethroning power and emphasizing the importance of the powerless. In *Beowulf*, power is simply glorified. Men like Beowulf use power for good purposes. The *Beowulf*-poet writes, "Behavior that's admired / is the path to power among people everywhere" (24-25). Additionally, when writing about Beowulf's character, he writes, "There was no one else like him alive. / In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth, / highborn and powerful" (196-98). Though Tolkien does not completely shy away from power, he does stray from the *Beowulf*-poet's method in three different ways. First of all, he makes his kingly Beowulf character—Aragorn—hesitant about claiming power. Where Beowulf would proudly stake his claim to power, Aragorn postpones his coronation as king. Secondly, Tolkien ultimately honors simple, unpretentious hobbits above all other characters. Instead of depicting Aragorn as the chief character of the trilogy, Tolkien shifts the medieval epic's traditional plotline and creates a different kind of hero. Lastly, Tolkien chooses to create power-hungry enemies, essentially making the search for power seem like a corrupt pursuit.

Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn is cautious about claiming the throne. He is content to live in secret, out in the wild with the other Rangers—his kin. Aragorn says, "Little do I resemble the figures of Elendil and Isildur as they stand carven in their majesty in the halls of Denethor" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 241). Instead of seeking power, glory, and admiration from others, Aragorn spends years of his life wandering in the wilderness, scorned by common people. He says, "'Strider' I am to one fat man who lives within a day's march of foes that would freeze his heart, or lay his little town in ruin, if he were not guarded ceaselessly. Yet we would not have it otherwise. If simple folk are free from care and fear, simple they will be, and we must be secret to keep them so" (242). Aragorn does not seek the luxuries of kingship. Instead, he hesitantly waits in the wild. He does not lust after power. Additionally, Aragorn demonstrates his caution about power through his commitment to Frodo. Instead of seeking to take power from Frodo, he supports the adventurous hobbit, later saying, "I would have guided Frodo to Mordor and gone with him to the end" (Tolkien, *Two Towers* 409). Evidently, Aragorn is not greedy for power. He only claims his kingship when the time is right. Thus, Tolkien utilizes Beowulf's character in creating Aragorn, but he also indicates that the desire for power can be dangerous.

Though Tolkien obviously utilized Anglo-Saxon tropes and ideas throughout his trilogy, especially in his allusions to *Beowulf*, he ultimately chose not to honor the powerful Anglo-Saxon warriors alone. Instead, he chose to honor and uplift the small, unassuming hobbits who live in a land that is reminiscent of England—the Shire. Near the end of his trilogy, Tolkien writes about men who sing praises to the hobbits: “And as the Hobbits approached swords were unsheathed, and spears were shaken, and horns and trumpets sang, and men cried with many voices and in many tongues: ‘Long live the Halflings! Praise them with great praise!’” (*Return of the King* 932). Indeed, even Aragorn, the king of all men, “bowed his knee before them” and “led them to the throne...setting them upon it” (933). Though Aragorn is the powerful warrior and king, the hobbits are ultimately placed on his throne and venerated even by him. By giving power to the powerless instead of the power-hungry, Tolkien emphasizes the importance of leading a good and simple life. Unlike traditional Anglo-Saxon warriors, modern mankind should choose to honor the powerless rather than seek dominion over all. Undoubtedly, Tolkien’s experience of World War I and II encouraged him to make this shift from the *Beowulf*-poet’s understanding of power to a more nuanced understanding, which is more applicable to his modern readers.

Additionally, Tolkien solidifies the theme of power (and its association with corruption) by emphasizing the fact that the cruel enemies in *The Lord of the Rings* are power-hungry. Though Saruman and even Boromir desire power, it is Sauron’s desire for power that is most evident. Saruman is ensnared by Sauron’s call to power. He says, “A new Power is rising. Against it the old allies and policies will not avail us at all” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 253). Though Saruman thinks he can join in Sauron’s power, and he lusts after it, he is wrong. Sauron does not share power. Gandalf says, “Only one hand at a time can wield the One” (253). Clearly, Saruman’s desire for power caused his downfall. Elrond claims that the more powerful a person is, the more dangerous and evil the One Ring can make him become:

Its strength...is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. Consider Saruman. If any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron’s throne and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise” (261).

In other words, the more powerful a person is, the more he or she will desire power, and the more corrupt and evil that desire will become. Thus, the only way for the ring to be destroyed is to leave it in the hands of those who do not care much for power. C. S. Lewis writes about the dethronement of power in *The Lord of the Rings*, saying, “On the one hand, the whole world is going to war; the story rings with galloping hoofs, trumpets, steel on steel. On the other, very far away, two tiny, miserable figures creep ... through the twilight of Mordor. And all the time we know that the fate of the world depends far more on the small movement than on the great” (12). Clearly, the only way to destroy the ring is to give it to people who do not lust for power. Therefore, not only does Tolkien honor the hobbits, but he encourages readers to emulate them. Not only is the traditional

bravery, strength, and loyalty of *Beowulf* important, but the humility and simplicity of the hobbits is also valuable and necessary. In this way, Tolkien modernizes *Beowulf* and conforms its plot and themes to the troubles of the modern world, which has so often been plagued by power-hungry dictators who seek dominion over other human beings.

CONCLUSION

This thesis argues two main points. First of all, it demonstrates Tolkien's repeated use of *Beowulf* in his fictional trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. Though Tolkien wrote about his passion for *Beowulf*, few scholars have attempted to examine its reflection in his fiction. Secondly, this thesis shows how Tolkien's use of themes, characters, symbols, and ideas from *Beowulf* helps him to create a kind of mythology for his own country—a story that stands as a tribute to English people. C. S. Lewis, friend of J. R. R. Tolkien and scholar in his own right, argues that “One of the main things [Tolkien] wants to say is that the real life of men is of that mythical and heroic quality. One can see the principle at work in his characterization ... Man as a whole, man pitted against the universe, have we seen him at all till we see that he is like a hero in fairy tale?” (Lewis 14). In writing his heroic stories and including *Beowulf* in his works, Tolkien mythologizes the bravery and heroism of mankind, and especially of Englishmen. Amidst the struggles of World War II, he indicates that good and simple men can stand in the face of evil and maintain a semblance of hope, even if their fight is against all odds.

Interestingly, though writing a tribute to England seems rather nationalistic, Tolkien was careful to make sure that his stories held selflessness and simplicity in high regard. Rather than honoring power and dominion, as many nationalistic writers might do, Tolkien honors hope, glory, bravery, and goodness. He honors the natural beauty of his country, and the simple pleasures of his people. Tolkien saw his country face nationalistic leaders like Adolf Hitler, and he sought to honor his country's choice to avoid that kind of nationalism. Thus, his tribute to his country actually warns against the pitfalls of nationalism.

The similarities between *The Lord of the Rings* and *Beowulf* are striking. The monsters, archetypes, culture, and themes are all elements that are intimately connected with *Beowulf* and its medieval tradition. Tolkien's passion for medieval texts allowed him to modernize a famous epic poem. In this way, he continues the tradition of *Beowulf* and allows readers to continue to experience the magnificent power of human strength, heroism, and goodness in his trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*.

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