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### ***The Tengwar and the Angerthas: an analysis of Tolkien's Runes***

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## Abstract

The purpose of my thesis “The *Tengwar* and the *Angerthas*: an analysis of Tolkien’s Runes” is to deal with the correlation between the Germanic runes and the ones belonging to Tolkien’s works analysing historical, graphic, phonetic, and phonologic elements. The thesis is divided in three chapter. The first chapter mainly describes the evolution of Germanic runes through the centuries, the different types of runic sequence and objects on which they were carved. The second chapter is about Tolkien’s literary works, their correlation with Germanic mythology and literature and how they shaped the fantasy genre. The third chapter is focused on the comparison between the runes invented by Tolkien and the Germanic runes by showing their similarities and differences in shape, phonetic value, use and evolution. Therefore, these sections may help to better understand how the Germanic culture had a deep influence on Tolkien and the realisation of his most known works.

## Introduction.

Runes have been fundamental elements for the development of Germanic populations, and they are nowadays considered crucial witnesses of their tradition and culture. The existence of runes has inspired the creation of the languages invented by J.R.R. Tolkien. His necessity for a place where these languages could be spoken, written and used, has brought to the writing and publication of *The Hobbit* (1937). The success of this book and the requests of its fan for more material to read has led to the writing of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954) and *The Return of the King* (1955). Some aspects of these books are due to the influence that the Germanic culture had on the author, for instance, some creatures have been inspired by the Norse mythology and the Old English literature. Tolkien's works are not merely considered books of great diffusion and success, but also fantasy novels containing an exquisite philological work and creation mechanisms of artificial languages. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to analyse part of these works focusing on their connection with the Germanic world, the creation of runes and other philological aspects. The thesis is divided into three chapters.

The first one defines the concept of rune and the meaning of the word itself, describes the various types of runic inscription and their evolution through the three major runic periods, provides information about their use and their everlasting relationship with the magic and ritual field.

The second one is focused on Tolkien's works and their analysis from a perspective that privileges the medieval aspects. A comparison between *The Hobbit* and other works such as *Beowulf* and the *Völsunga Saga* shows that in the former some elements belonging to the other works have been reported, reimagined and transformed by the author. A deep examination regarding the figure of the dragon is done by comparing different characters such as Smaug, Fafnir and the dragon killed by Beowulf. A similar analysis is carried out for what concerns the other creatures that inhabit Middle-earth, some of which were originally part of the Norse mythology.

The third one deals with the similarities and differences that characterize the original Germanic runes and the ones that have been inspired by them and have been created and invented by Tolkien. This analysis considers different parameters including shape, phonetic value, use, number, meaning and the materials on which they are inscribed.

# Chapter 1 “Runes”.

## 1.1. The origin of runes.

“When and where were runes created? Who invented them? Whoever answer this question-and gets it right-has solved the riddle of runes” (Moltke, 1985, 23).

The origin of the term rune has been discussed many times in the academic field and even if different theories exist it is doubtless that runes are linked to the Germanic language, history and culture. The main aim of this first chapter it is to analyse the concept of rune, its origin and evolution, what is meant for runic inscription and the everlasting relationship between runes and magic. Runes have always been associated with magic and mystery and this may be due to the meaning of the word itself and the use that it had in the past. As stated by Antonsen (1980, in Battaglia 2013, 213) the word rune that people use nowadays is considered a loanword from the XVII century Icelandic. However, he also explains that the origin of runes is far more remote, and it can be found in the Germanic languages in which the noun *run-* expresses the idea of message or set of runes. Moreover, it is worth considering the IV century Gothic word *runa* that is a direct translation from the Greek language *mystērion*, *boulé*, *symboùlion* (divine mystery, secret, advice) (Battaglia 2013, 216). One specific example is provided by Elliott (1989, 1), in a translation of the Bible made by the Bishop Wulfila during the IV century, the Greek expression which reads in English “the mystery of the kingdom of God” is transformed into “*rūna þiudangardjōs guþs*”. Elliott (1989,1) also says that the word rune was used by Anglo-Saxons to indicate a secret gathering of chieftains and counsellors.

A more precise analysis is carried on by Meli (1988, 68) who shows how the word rune had different meanings belonging to the same semantic area in several old Germanic languages (Gothic *runa* for *mystērion*, Old High German *rūna* for “whisper”, Old Saxon *rūna* for “secret conference”, Anglo-Saxon *rūn* for “whisper” and Norse *rún* for “occult doctrine”). Thanks to these different interpretations, it may now appear clear that the word rune is strongly linked to the semantic field of secrecy and knowledge.

Runic writing refers to an epigraphic writing system through which historical evidence of Germanics have been engraved and preserved. In Runic writing every character (called rune) corresponds to a specific phoneme. Runic writing has been defined as a “pseudo-alphabetic” writing and this is due to at least two reasons: the first is the detachment with the Phoenician-Greek (*alfa*, *beta*, *gamma*) writing tradition trough the development of an independent order (f, u, þ, a, r, k), from which the whole sequence of 24 runes takes its name *fubark*. The second is the fact that at

every character is associated a phoneme with an external referent (e.g. f-*fehu* “wealth”, u-*uruz* (symbol of manly strength), þ-*purisaz* “giant” or “demon” etc.) (Elliott 1989, 71-74) (Battaglia 2013, 199).



Figure 1: *Fuþark*.  
[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fu%C3%BEark\\_antico](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fu%C3%BEark_antico) (last check 20/08/2024).

The origin of runes has not been clear and for this reason many theories have been formulated in the academic field through the course of time. Moltke (1985, 38-60) analyses the possible origins of runes and how they could be linked to others alphabets and writing systems (including Phoenician, Greek, Etruscan and Latin alphabets). Moltke then shows how runes may not be based on the first three alphabets, and that the last one seems to be the most likely leading alphabet. Corresponding features between runes and the letters of the Latin alphabet cannot be ignored: eight characters correspond both in form and sound (B, F, H, I, L, R, T, V) six are similar in form and sound (A, C or K, D, M, O, S), three are similar in form but not in sound (P, M, X) and seven runes have not correspondence in Latin. Although the similarities should be considered, the different order of the *fuþark* and the seven “missing” runes may indicate that runes are not completely based on Latin alphabet. Therefore, it may seem reasonable to conclude that the creator of the *fuþark* may have been inspired by the Latin alphabet even though he may have invented some of the other characters or he may have been inspired by some other alphabets/writing systems.

Although this theory has been accepted by some scholars, others have different views, an opposite theory is that of Antonsen (1982, in Meli 1988, 27) which attributes the origin of runes to a mutation of the Greek alphabet. Meli (1988, 51) contested these two theories, it considers the former, which has also been criticized by Antonsen (1982, in Meli 1988, 51), problematic due to chronological inconsistencies, in fact, according to them no Roman influence could have reached the river Rhine in Denmark during the first century. Meli then argues that even Antonsen’s theory

presents some inconsistencies, he considers his theory weak because it is not clear on when and where this mutation from Greek has taken place. Moreover, Meli (1988, 27) talks about another theory, which is the most diffused one, according to it, runes were created using the Venetic or a combination of Venetic and Latin, an extinct language spoken mainly in North Italy, as the main source (Prodocimi 1985, in Meli 1988, 27). A deeper analysis is carried out by Schneider (1979, in Meli 1988, 27) who argues that the *futhorc* could have been created in the North Italy during the I century B.C. by the Cimbri. They could have made the *futhorc* using the Venetic alphabet as model and the sanctuaries set on the Venetic territories as main sources. Schneider tries to understand how the *futhorc* has been invented and which is the process behind its realization, according to him the runic inscriptions were ideograms at the beginning and only then a phonetic value would be attributed to each symbol (Schneider 1979, in Meli 1988, 28). On the other hand, Duwel (1976, in Meli 1988, 29) points out that “ideographic runes” are not attested without any doubts. In addition, Meli (1988, 28) underlines how Schneider’s theory is possible only if runes were used exclusively for “magic” purposes at the early stages of the *futhorc* and that this has not been proved. Although the Latin and the Venetic may seem the most likely sources, an exhaustive answer to the opening question is still to be found and this lack of certainty has contributed to the strong connection to “ancient magic knowledge” that runes already had.

## 1.2. Runic inscriptions.

Runic inscriptions have been found on several materials (e.g. stone, metal, wood, bones, etc.) and on a variety of movable objects (e.g. weapons, coins, horns and other personal belongings) but also on stationary objects (e.g. walls, monuments, tombs, crosses, etc...). Elliott (1989, 17-18) shows that the different materials were linked to a certain type of objects: metal was most used to craft weapons, coins, tools and ornaments while stone was used for tombstones, memorial stones and monuments. Battaglia (2013, 203) explains that most of the runic inscriptions that have been found are engraved on stone because it is a more durable material while the ones engraved on wood are rarely preserved and often damaged due to the fragility of the material itself. Nonetheless, Moltke (1985) affirms in more than one occasion that runes were originally designed to be written on wood. Moltke (1985, 32) underlines the presence of vertical lines and the lack of horizontal and curved ones which were difficult to read due to the grain of the wood. Elliott (1989, 14) seems to agree with Moltke and adds that probably horizontal and curved lines would take place as the employed material changed from wood to stone and metal. Elliott (1989, 19) highlights that the methods of

inscribing changed depending on the material (e.g. writing for manuscripts, carving for wood, chiselling for stone, and stamping for metal coins).

Another point made by Moltke (1985, 114) about the material on which runes were carved is that metalworkers were not rune-masters and they were often illiterate, so that in order to craft an object containing runes they had to follow a copy often provided by someone else (e.g. their customers or experts of runes), but this inexperience in rune-making is reflected in their creations that were rarely satisfactory if compared to the original.

An example of this may be found in some bracteates, which were coins struck only on one face often made of gold or silver that were usually worn round neck as “protective” amulets (this protective property was supposed to be given by the runes carved on them). Moltke (1985, 114-115) affirms that some bracteates present meaningless inscriptions and that this happened when both the metalworker and the client were not experts of runes. Some of these inscriptions (both copied right or wrong) were suddenly interrupted because there was no more space available. In fact, although exceptions have been found, texts composed of runes (not only those found on bracteates) are, in most cases, brief texts. The main causes are the oral tradition of the language and the lack of space on the objects in which the runes were carved. The engravers often tried to use all the space available on the surface and in order to do so they adopted, through the course of time, a lot of expedients that allowed them to write more. These expedients included the elimination of the space between a rune and another which is called *scripto continua* (as stated by Battaglia (2013, 207) this phenomenon is more frequent in the runic writing preceding V century when it was regularly used) and the elimination of double sounds: if the first word finished with a rune and the second word started with the same rune only one of the two was written. Another useful technique called bind-runes is mentioned by Elliott (1989, 20), it allowed rune-masters to save time and space by sharing one stroke between two or three runes that seemed fused together. Furthermore, one difference between runic writing and Romance languages is that the former doesn't have a specific reading order (although it was possible to understand it from some writing features), in fact sometimes they had to be read from left to right or vice-versa, sometimes from top to bottom or vice-versa and sometimes boustrophedon while the latter has a specific reading order which goes from left to right (Moltke 1985, 32) (Battaglia 2013, 208). In addition to these different ways of writing and reading runes, another important element to mention is the carving of a proper name at the end of an inscription, which is not so rare, similar patterns have been found on a variety of artifacts (these patterns often included the engraving of the name of the owner/creator and in some cases the action of creating the object itself). As noted by Moltke (1985, 83) similar formulas like “I X and I made Y” or with the third person “X made Y” or with a reference to the father of X “I X, son of Z, made



Y” have been found. One famous artifact that could be an example of the aforementioned pattern is the Golden Horn of Gallehus, which is a horn made entirely of gold found in 1734 at Gallehus, the golden horn was then stolen and melted in 1802 due to the value of the precious metal, but somehow it managed to survive in drawings belonging to XVIII century.

On its surface a runic inscription is present “*ek hlewagastir holtijar horna tawido*”, Moltke (1985, 81) translates it with “I Lægæst, son of Holte, made the horn”, even though other translations and interpretations are possible, a slightly different one is provided by Elliott (1989, 80) that reports “I Hlewagast, Holt’s son, made the horn”.



Figure 2: Golden Horn of Gallehus.  
[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corni\\_d%27oro\\_di\\_Gallehus](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corni_d%27oro_di_Gallehus)  
(last check 20/08/2024)

### 1.3. The evolution of runes.

As mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter the original *futhorc* was composed by 24 runes but through the course of history it has witnessed different changes and modifications. In Moltke (1985, 24) the history of runes has been divided into three main runic periods and each of them has its own variants of the *futhorc*: the first runic period (called the late Roman and Germanic Iron Age in archaeologist’s terms or the Migration Age in runologist’s terms), the second runic period (the Viking Age) and the third runic period (the Middle Ages).

In the first runic period (0 – AD 600/700), the *futhorc* was composed of 24 runes and it appears to have developed different rune orders.

The main sources of this *fubark* are seven and they are shown in order of completeness (the first number written before every source refers to the runes present on that specific inscription while the second refers to the total number of runes which composed the *fubark*) by Elliott (1989, 13-18):

Complete sequence:

- (24/24) Gothic Stone from Kylver (Gotland, Sweden) (early V century).

Partially complete:

- (23/24) Swedish bracteate from Vadstena (final rune not visible) (mid VI century).
- (22/24) Swedish bracteate from Grumpan (is damaged and some runes cannot be read or read completely) (mid VI century).

Partially incomplete:

- (20/24) Silver fibula found at Charnay (Burgundy) (the first 20 runes are visible) (later VI).
- (19/24) On a part of a stone pillar at Breza (near Sarajevo) (probably first half VI century).

Most incomplete:

- (8/24) Silver fibula from Roman Aquincum (near Budapest, Hungary) (later V century).
- (7/24) fibula found in a grave at Beucthe (near Goslar, Germany) (second half VI century).

Information about some of these artifacts has also been provided by Moltke (1985, 25-26), the complete sequence has the first rune damaged, and four runes on the Vadstena bracteate have a different order compared to the Gothic Stone form Kylver. Moltke also points out that the runes on the Vadstena bracteates are divided into 3 shorter sequences (which he calls “families”) by dots. Elliott (1989, 13) makes a more specific division, in fact, he explains that on both bracteates the whole sequences are divided by dots into three sets of eight runes which are often called *attir*. Moltke (1985, 27) affirms that in this period runes were diffused in Germania (or more precisely in all areas where Germanic tribes were presents) and that the first runes inscribed on stone were found in Norway and Sweden (AD 300-400).

In the second runic period (AD 650-1025/50), the original sequence results modified, two main versions emerged: the Scandinavian *fubark*, which is only composed of 16 characters and the Anglo-Saxon *fubark*, which is composed of about 30 characters (the exact number of characters depends on the period).

According to Elliott (1989, 22), the Scandinavian had two main variants, the first one, the so-called Danish *fubark* (early X century or before) and the second one, the Swedish-Norwegian *fubark* (first half of the IX century), both had their first signs of change from the original series in Denmark and then they reached the whole Scandinavia. Elliott explains that these changes were probably due to fact that some runes were less and less used and this led to their elimination, while to some of the

remaining runes more than one sound for each rune was attributed. There were also runes which expressed two or more sounds (even six in a few cases).

Elliott (1989, 23) points out how the Scandinavian *futhorc* began to change from the original runic sequence, he refers to one of the bracteates, the Vadstena's one, which has the same rune to express the different sounds (b and p) This process of attributing several sounds to a rune and the following elimination of the unused runes was repeated again and again since only 16 runes remained and the Scandinavian *futhorc* was created. Moltke (1985, 30) explains that in some cases to distinguish the different sounds belonging to the same rune dots were added to the base rune when the sound was altered. The two variants of this new *futhorc* have the same sounds but their runes are written differently, in fact, the runes belonging to the Swedish-Norwegian *futhorc* result more simplified and have a lower number of traits. A more recent version of *futhorc*, which is composed by the so-called *Hälsinge* runes also known as Staveless Runes, shows a further simplification and an even lower number of traits. Moltke (1985, 30) says that the runes belonging to the Scandinavian *futhorc* are composed of only a single main stave and that they were easier to write and harder to read. It is, therefore, no surprise that, as stated by Elliott (1989, 24) that the *Hälsinge* runes were considered meaningless signs for an extended amount of time. For what concerns the division in *attir* of the Scandinavian *futhorc*, they are composed respectively by six, five, five runes. Each of these *attir* is named after the first rune of their short sequence, so that the first *attir* takes its name from the first rune of the Scandinavian *futhorc* "f", the second *attir* from the seventh rune "h" and the third from the twelfth rune "t", and their names are Freyr, Hagal and Tyr respectively (Elliott, 1989, 13).

The Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* (also called *futhorc* due to the modification of the fourth rune "a" which became "o" and the sixth rune "k" which became "c") presents a more extended sequence if compared to the original sequence of 24 runes, in fact, two of the most known sources of the *futhorc*, which are an exemplar of *Scramasax* and the *Vienna Codex*, have a sequence of 28 runes (nonetheless, as Battaglia (2013, 207) explains a variant of 33 runes have been discovered in a Northumbrian area). The term *Scramasax* is generally used to describe a 70 cm decorated one-edge longsword, one specific exemplar (dating VIII-IX century) has been found in the river Thames, and at the end of the sequence of runes present on the sword it is engraved *Beagnoþ*, which is probably the name of the owner or the creator. Moltke (1985, 27) says that the *futhorc* may have begun to develop around AD 500 and then underlines that this *Scramasax* presents some anomalies in its runic composition but that they can be attributed to the ignorance of the metalworkers in the runic field. Elliott (1989, 47) describes the evolution of *futhorc* by saying that in the first part of the Viking Age the sequence was composed of 28 runes, but only in the second part another five runes

were added and that this complete sequence of 33 runes was only found on manuscripts due to the lack of the last two runes in their inscriptions.

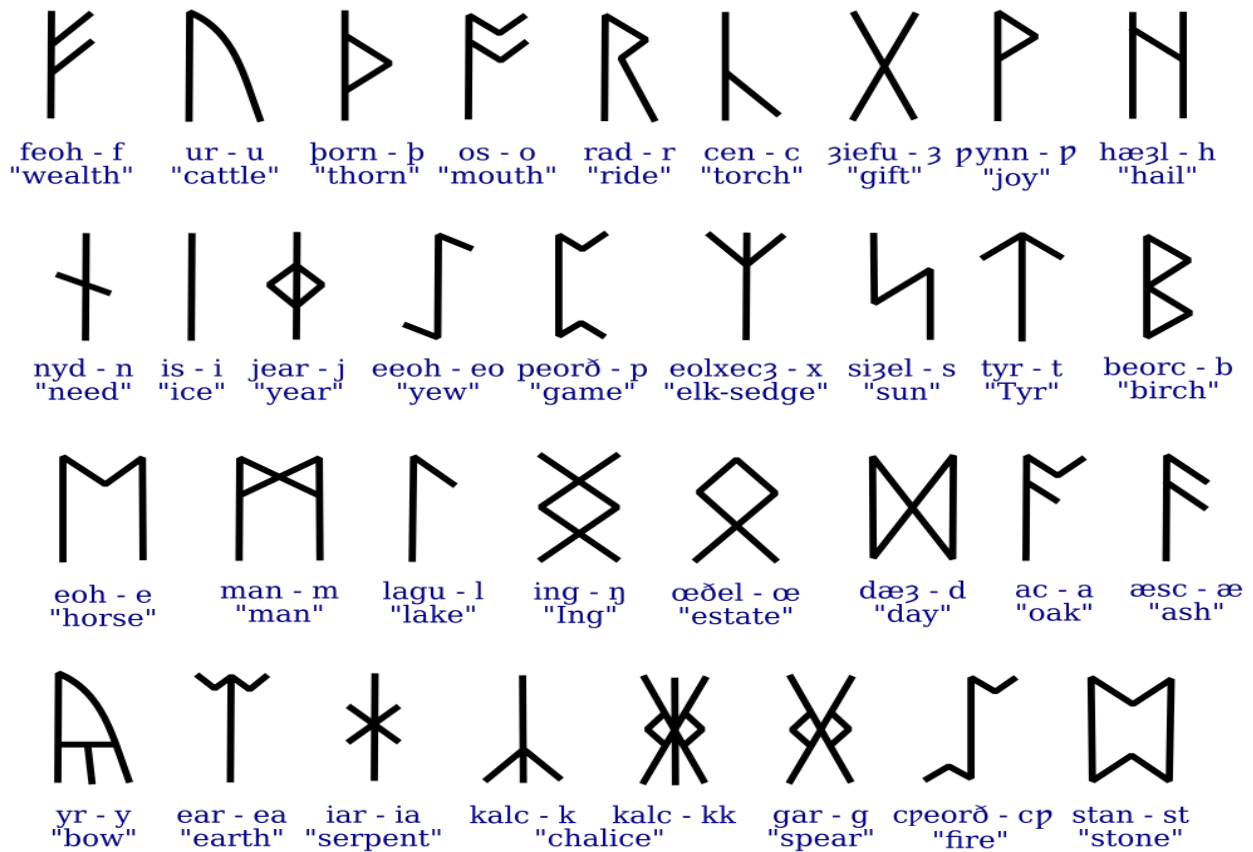


Figure 3: Futhorc.

[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futhorc#:~:text=Il%20futhorc%20\(o%20futhorc\)%20%2F,26%20e%20le%2033%20rune](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futhorc#:~:text=Il%20futhorc%20(o%20futhorc)%20%2F,26%20e%20le%2033%20rune) (last check 20/08/2024)

In the third runic period (AD 1050-1400), runes were not so used as they were in the past, but the runic tradition survived even though it was present in a different kind of objects more related to the Catholic influence (e.g. gravestone, churches and other ecclesiastical elements).



Figure 4: Franks Casket (front panel and lid)  
[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cofanetto\\_Franks](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cofanetto_Franks) (last check 20/08/2024)

One of the most famous objects that presents runes and pagan elements, but also Latin words and Catholic elements is the Franks Casket (VIII century). This casket made entirely of whalebone is covered by different images, such as Romulus and Remus, the adoration of the Magi and the legend of Weland the Smith. (Battaglia 2013, 224) (Elliott 1989,126). The reason of the disappearance of runes is often attributed to the Latin language that started to substitute the runes as a way of communication, but this may also be due to the fact that Germans would avoid using them because of their correlation to magic and pagan religions which may have led to problematic situations with the Church.

#### 1.4. Runes, magic and rituals.

The recurrent association of runes with magic has many reasons, one of them may lay in the Norse Mythology. An old myth about Odin (*Woden*) tells us how he acquired the knowledge of runes (which were not intended only as characters meant for writing but as magic signs with great power) by hanging from *Yggdrasil*, the sacred world-tree, for nine days bearing pain, hunger and thirst. After the ninth day had passed, he came down and became the god of rune-lore thanks to his new knowledge (Elliott 1989, 87).

Another element to consider is the association of runes with an external referent (e.g. *f-fehu* “wealth” etc.). Elliott (1989, 70-76) provides an interpretation of these external referents and their

meanings, and he divides them into three categories: the World of Gods and Giants, the World of Nature and the World of Man. It is the first sequence “the World of Gods and Giants” that seems more related to the magic and mythological field, the runes belonging to this section are all in Germanic and they are: *purisaz* for “giant” or “demon”, *ansuz* for “god”, *teiwaz* for the god *Tīw* (*Tir* in Old Norse), *inguz* for the god *Ing*. Elliott (1989,77-78) also explains that runes were used to evoke the power associated in their names or to protect the wielder of the object against it, and that when a rune was used alone it expresses the meaning associated with the rune itself. The reconstruction of the name associated with each rune is possible thanks to the *British Library Cotton Otho B.x.* manuscript. A manuscript that belongs to the British Library Collection and that belonged to the Cotton Library Collection, a collection of books started by an antiquarian and book collector Sir Robert Cotton (1571-1631). Although this manuscript was damaged due to a fire that partially destroyed this collection in 1731, a later copy of the poem managed to survive. The existence of this copy is due to the scholars that had access to the collection because they were used to copy various texts for their own interest. The manuscript contained an alliterative poem composed of 29 stanzas, each stanza beginning with a rune whose meaning is explained<sup>1</sup>. Runes were also used, as already mentioned, on amulets, but they were also used in rituals, in fact, Meli (1988, 79-80) explains that the word *rūno* may not be related only to writings but also to the oral tradition and that its proper meaning belonging to the semantic field of secrecy could find its place in the ritual.

Considering the general ritual element, it is not difficult to attribute them characteristics of secrecy and/or specific knowledge (e.g. some rituals can be performed or attended only by certain people or celebrants which must follow specific passages in order to complete them correctly). An example of ritual is reported in Tacitus’s *Germania* (Elliott 1989, 86) which describes a ritual concerning the interpretations of runes carved on a bough of a tree-fruit previously divided in small pieces and scattered at random on a white cloth. It is worth noting that several runic inscriptions on tombstone have been found and as Elliott (1989, 31) affirms they were the most diffused type of runic inscription in the Viking Age and that most of them presented a pattern similar to that of the classic runic inscription (e.g. “X put up this stone/cross in memory of Y”, Elliott 1989, 31). This may suggest that rituals were also performed before/during/after the burial of the dead.

On the other hand, Meli (1988, 54) analysing the work of Meyer (1907) suggests that the association between runes and names may not be directly linked to magic and rituals, but most likely be a way of memorizing runes and their phonetic value. In addition, Meli (1988, 29-30)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/sechard/492runes.htm> (last check 20/08/2024)

considers the possibility of single runes used only as abbreviation of a word that can change depending on the context (e.g. he reports two runic inscriptions in which the same rune with phonetic value “f” may have the meaning of *fehu*, which means “wealth”, in the first case and the meaning of *fahi* or *fahido*, which mean “writes” or “wrote” respectively, in the second case). Meli (1988, 37) also talks about the *Abecedarium Nordmannicum* that may be an element related to the learning process in which the 16 runes are not merely listed but their order is told in a brief poem-like text. Moreover, Meli (1988, 36) states the learning process of runes and *fupark* has too often been left behind by scholars which have focused on the crafting and composition of texts. Therefore, if we consider the supposed aim of making runes easier to memorize, the association of names that were deep-rooted in the collective imagination with these characters does not seem so unlikely. As a consequence of this the intrinsic magic value of runes could be called into question and even though runes could still be used to write “magic and ritual formulas” it would not be linked to specific properties belonging to the *fupark* itself.

Despite the possible separation between runes and the magic field, they remain strongly related and this can be witnessed even in some fictional works, especially in those with fantasy scenarios, such as *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the whole universe of Middle Earth created by J.R.R. Tolkien which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2 “Middle Ages and Middle-earth”

### 2.1. The illusion of the Secondary World

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how the phenomena of Medieval studies and Medievalism could have influenced J.R.R. Tolkien in the process of creating Middle-Earth and more specifically the book *The Hobbit* and the trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings*. Before analysing these concepts some biographic information about the author may be required to better understand his works.

J.R.R Tolkien was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1892, in Bloemfontein. He served in the first World War and then he started his academic career. Although Tolkien has been considered one of the best philologists in the world, he is most known as the author of fantasy books as *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*. His books have been translated in more than 70 languages and have sold millions of copies. He was awarded a CBE, and honorary Doctorate of Letters from Oxford University in 1972. He died in 1973 at the age of 81 (Tolkien, 2020, book cover).

The period that goes between 1937 and 1955 has been the most prolific, in fact, his most known works have been published such as *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings*, a work that he wanted to publish entirely but that has been divided in three volumes : *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954), *The return of the King* (1955). In addition, it is important to note that these three volumes are divided in six “books” in the index, two for each volume. Although the term trilogy may not be completely correct, in this thesis it is used to refer to the three books belonging to *The Lord of the Rings* and the movies based on it and *The Hobbit*.

All these works are about the universe of Middle-Earth of which he continued to write about until the day of his death. For this reason, some works have been published posthumous as *The Silmarillion* (1977).

It can easily be noticed that many years have passed between the publication of one work related to Middle-earth and another (about 17 years between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and about 22 years between the latter and *The Silmarillion*). This is probably due to the fact that Tolkien was not only a writer, but also a professor, a translator and a researcher. As reported by Johnson (1986, 24) some fans have been disappointed by the quantity of Tolkien’s work about Middle-earth because they wanted more material to read and were not entirely happy with his decision of continuing the time-consuming activities of teaching and doing his academic research. According to Johnson (1986, 24) this could not have been possible since Tolkien’s professional career and his writings were like two faces of the same coin, and one could not exist without the other.



The success of Middle-earth did not stop to the books written by Tolkien, in fact, its stories have had several cinematographic adaptations through the course of time. A first movie dedicated to *The Lord of the Rings* came out in 1978, this animated version of the trilogy was directed by Ralph Bakshi, it was a financial success even though it received many critics. The most famous cinematic adaptation is without any doubt the one made by Peter Jackson who was the director of six films about Middle-earth which are divided in two trilogies. The first part is based on *The Lord of the Rings* and it is composed by three films with the same titles of the books: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2002), *The Two Towers* (2003) and *The Return of the King* (2004). The second part is based on the events narrated in *The Hobbit*, but the adaptation differs a little from the original text, in fact, although the book is composed by a single volume its cinematographic version is composed by three films: *An Unexpected Journey* (2012), *The Desolation of Smaug* (2013), *The Battle of the Five Armies* (2014). Moreover, Tolkien's work has received even its own TV series called *The Rings of Power* (2022), the first season, which is available exclusively on Amazon Prime because it is an Amazon original production, is composed by eight episodes directed by J.A. Bayona, Wayne Che Yip and Charlotte Brändström. Nowadays, the world of Middle-earth has become so famous that gadgets based on its characters and objects have been produced (e.g. replica of objects used by the characters, statues, Lego set, Funko pop, etc...) and it has influenced even other elements not necessarily related to it (e.g. music, videogames, boardgames, RPGs (Role-Playing Games) and even making its appearance in TCGs (Trading Card Games) more specifically in *Magic: The Gathering*).

Returning to the original work, it is worth noting that Tolkien in 1947 affirms that the invention of the languages in his works preceded the invention of the fantasy world itself, as the creation of this world was a place in which these languages could come to life and be used (in Fitzpatrick 2019, 57). Another relevant statement made by Tolkien is that one of his literary necessities was the creation of the so-called "Secondary World" in which the readers could access by reading his books, but to do so, the illusion had to be credible for not to break and transport them back to the "Primary World" (in Fitzpatrick 2019, 56). The achievement of this aim has been possible thanks to the knowledge that Tolkien had in several field (such as linguistic, history, philology and literature).

Furthermore, this illusion of the Secondary World is composed by many elements which may be divided into different categories:

- World building: great attention to the journeys between the various places located in Middle-earth and the passing of time.
- Historic and Medieval references: real elements which are linked to history and Middle Ages, such as: places and constructions made by people (e.g. castles, towers, villages, paths, dikes, etc...), social classes (e.g. knights, nobles, peasants, kings, etc...), use and costumes (e.g. announce when someone is arriving at court).
- Imaginary elements: wizards, spells, magic items (e.g. the magic rings, the phial and the mirror of Galadriel, the elven swords etc.), fantastic creatures (e.g. elves, dwarfs, hobbits etc..) that are created in a way that seems credible, with their own languages, uses and costumes. Dragons, which are mythological figures that are present in several cultures, can also be found in the world of Middle-earth (they are present in *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*).

Tolkien set Middle-earth thousands of years ago in the space that today we call England. One of the main reasons of this choice is explained by Carpenter, Tolkien's biographer, who affirms that Tolkien wanted to create a mythology for England as if it was not enough rich for him compared to other mythologies such as Old Norse, Greek and Finnish (in Fitzpatrick 2019, 56). The idea of this pseudo-ethnogenesis of England is reinforced by one literary expedient in particular which is the lost manuscript. As reported by Fitzpatrick (2019, 56), Tolkien defines himself merely a translator/scholar who has found two manuscripts *There and Back Again* written by Bilbo Baggins, which is the text that constitutes *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings* written by Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee. The former tells the story of Bilbo Baggins and his unexpected adventures that see Bilbo with a company of thirteen dwarves during a long journey from The Shire (the place in which Bilbo lives) to The Lonely Mountain (the previous reign of the dwarves that now it is occupied by a dragon, Smaug) with the aim of taking back the treasure. During his adventures Bilbo finds a magic ring, the One Ring, which is an essential element of the sequel *The Lord of the Rings*. The latter is focused on the journey made by the Fellowship of the Ring, a group composed by nine characters: Gandalf, Aragorn, Boromir, Gimli, Legolas, Peregrin Took, Meriadoc Brandybuck, Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee. Their aim is to go from Rivendell to Mount Doom (the place where the One Ring created by Sauron, the Dark Lord, has been created and would be destroyed in the end).

The expedient of the lost manuscript is not new, and it has been used many times through the course of history for different reasons, for example, Alessandro Manzoni used it in the writing of

*I Promessi Sposi* in order to avoid political problems and personal consequences, while Tolkien may have used it for narrative reasons, to help readers enter in the Secondary World and to make this illusion credible.

This illusion is reinforced by the various pages dedicated to the appendix found at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. In these pages more information about Middle-earth is given to the readers such as: different chronological dating system (Shire's reckoning), important events of the world and dates, different calendar and festivities, schemes of family trees (belonging to Bilbo, some of his guests and the line of the dwarves of Erebor) and the unique languages that are/were used in Middle-earth (how they are written, pronounced, for what they were used for, when they were used and from whom). In the Appendix E, which is the one dedicated to writing and spelling the idea that the author is merely a translator is presented again, in fact, he underlines how he tried to transcribe the "ancient scripts" to modern English (Tolkien, 2020, 1113).

## 2.2 The concept of Medievalism.

When talking about Middle-earth it becomes necessary to introduce the concept of Medieval studies and Medievalism which have had great relevance in the creation of Tolkien's works. The term Medievalism itself has a problematic nature and its definition has been challenging for a long time. Fitzpatrick (2019, 11) reports that the most ancient attestation of the term Medievalism belongs to the XIX century, this term was used for the first time in 1844 by "The English Churchman", which was an Evangelic Protestant Newspaper, criticising the return to Roman Catholicism and depicting it as "medieval". Another attestation of the term Medievalism is mentioned by Fitzpatrick (2019, 12) and it can be found in an article published in 1849 by "Southern Literary Messenger", which was an American periodical, against conservative politics. This term was, therefore, used with a different meaning in the past and especially with a negative connotation. A more recent use of the term, which could be more similar to the present use, is that of Ruskin (in Fitzpatrick, 2019, 11). who used it to divide history in three periods "Classicalism, Medievalism and Modernism". In this case the term Medievalism is used as a synonym of Middle Ages, even though defining Medievalism could be more complicated than that. However, the definition of the term Middle Ages could be more immediate, in fact, it could be summarized as a social construct expressing the period between the VI century and the XV, or more often between the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476 A.D.) and Columbus' arrival in the New Continent (1492 A.D.), which is considered the starting point of modern history. According to Matthews (2011, in Fitzpatrick 2019, 12) this idea of Middle Ages was created in the XV-XVI century in opposition to the idea of Renaissance, even

though only during the XVIII century the term would be rehabilitated by losing its negative connotation and acquiring a more neutral and/or positive connotation. This idea is strengthened by Emery (2009, in Fitzpatrick 2019, 13-14) who argues that the creation of the term Middle Ages was the answer to the need of a Dark Ages period to counterbalance the new diffused idea of Renaissance. Defining Medievalism is a difficult task and for this reason many definitions have been given, a first definition is given by Workman (1999, in Fitzpatrick 2019, 13) who describes Medievalism as “the continuing process of creating Middle Ages”. Fitzpatrick (2019, 13) underlines how for Workman, Medievalism does not uncover or recover Middle Ages, but it recreates it. Another definition is given by Shippey (2009, in Fitzpatrick, 4-5) which describes Medievalism as “Any post-medieval attempt to re-imagine the Middle Ages, or some aspect of the Middle Ages, for the modern world, in any of the many different media”. Toswell (2009, in Fitzpatrick 2019, 16) states that completely defining Medievalism is so difficult because the term is used both to indicate a scholarly field and the process of recreate the Middle Ages. All these definitions clarify that Medievalism is a concept linked to Middle Ages and the constant creation and recreation of it, even though the problem of giving this cryptic term a complete definition seems to be unresolved.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Medievalism and the way Middle Ages is perceived nowadays have been affected by Tolkien’s writings. It is worth noting that like Tolkien’s works have influenced many other authors, his works have been inspired by others, some of his sources were the Old English and the Old Norse literature and Morris’ works. *Beowulf* and *the Völsunga Saga*, which are literary texts, the former belonging to the Old English literature and the latter to the Old Norse literature, have been essential to the realization of Middle-earth especially for what concerns the figure of the dragon, an element, which is present in both texts, that Tolkien has included in *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*. The only existing manuscript of the Old English poem *Beowulf*, *Cotton Vitellius A.xv*, was kept in the Cotton Library collection and was almost lost during the fire. The partially damaged manuscript was recovered and preserved (Fitzpatrick, 2019, 36). In the next paragraph a comparison between some elements that are included both in *The Hobbit* and the already mentioned works belonging to the Middle Ages is made focusing on the mythological figure of the dragon.

### 2.3 A comparison between Old English literature and Tolkien's works: *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*. Fafnir and Smaug.

As previously mentioned, Tolkien's works seem to have a deep connection with *Beowulf*, in fact, Tolkien (1983, in Fitzpatrick, 54) acknowledges that both *Beowulf* and Sigemund's story (a story told by a bard in *Beowulf*) are characterized by two main features: the presence of the dragon and the hero who kills it. Tolkien affirms that the importance of the draconic figure is reinforced by Sigemund's legend that establishes how the dragon is not one of many enemies that the hero faces during his adventures but the one that he fights at the end of his journey to accomplish his aim. Moreover, Tolkien also affirms that the depiction of the dragon as the final enemy of the hero allows *Beowulf* to preserve his honour when he dies due to the poison after killing it.

The similarity between the dragon present in *Beowulf* and Smaug in *The Hobbit* is pointed out by Shippey (1982, in Fitzpatrick, 55) who underlines how Smaug is awakened by Bilbo when he steals a two-handed cup of pure gold from his lair. The same thing happens to the dragon of *Beowulf* who is awakened by a thief when he steals a cup from the dragon's treasure.

Nonetheless, the relationship between the two works may be much deeper than that, in fact, as pointed out by Johnson (1986, 4), while Tolkien was working on *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics* (1936) he was also working on *The Hobbit* (1937). Therefore, it may be reasonable to conclude that his writings must have been affected by this to a certain degree.

Considering these two statements, it may not be a coincidence that Smaug does his appearance only in an advanced phase of the story (more precisely in chapter XII *Inside Information*) just like the dragon in *Beowulf*. Furthermore, Smaug's existence is a constant worry for the whole journey, even though Bilbo and the group of dwarves encounter other dangerous creatures (e.g. the trolls who want to cook and eat them in chapter II *Roast Mutton* and the giant spiders that hunt them in chapter VIII *Flies and Spiders*) during the permanence out of the Shire. This supports the idea of Smaug as the final challenge that the company of adventurers must overcome to fulfil their mission. One relevant difference between *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit* is that in the former the dragon is killed by the hero/protagonist himself, a character who is present from the beginning, while in the latter the dragon is killed by Bard, the Bowman, a character that is surely relevant but that it is introduced much later in the story.

Fitzpatrick (2019, 55) states that Tolkien's tribute to the Anglo-Saxon literature goes beyond what one could see at a first look because Smaug is not the only dragon that lives in Middle-earth, and he is part of a much more extended dragon-lore. This idea of dragon-lore is found in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* (Alexander, 1973,78-79) where is mentioned that a warrior called Sigemund has

slayed a different dragon. Alexander (1973, 16) refers to him as “the greatest of dragon-slayers”, making clear that the presence of dragons is not limited to the ones killed by Sigemund and Beowulf. In the *Völsunga Saga* another dragon, called Fafnir, is killed by Sigurd, son of Sigmundr. Fafnir and Smaug share similar characteristics, for instance, they are well-known dragons in their worlds, everyone is terrified by their presence, and both have a weakness: although the most part of their body is covered by impenetrable scales, they have a soft spot that makes them vulnerable to their enemy attacks. In *The Hobbit* chapter XII *Inside information* Smaug is described as a red-golden dragon with a belly crusted with gold and gems caused by his long lying on a huge pile of valuable objects (Tolkien, 2020, 217). The fact that this layer of precious metal and gems did not protect him in chapter XIV *Fire and Water*, when he dies after being hit in its left breast by a black harrow shot by Bard, means that neither the layer nor his scales covered that part (Tolkien, 2020, 251). Therefore, Smaug’s defeat was possible since the gold armour was incomplete and maybe damaged. Fafnir’s death is described in the *Völsunga Saga* where Sigurd managed to kill the dragon by striking him under his left shoulder (Koch, 1994, 137). Both dragons believe in their impenetrable defences, Smaug affirms that unlike other dragons he is armoured above and below with iron scales and gems, and that no blade can pierce him (Tolkien, 2020, 227), while Fafnir states that he has never been afraid of weapons (Koch, 1994, 141). Therefore, the existence of this weakness is crucial for the final outcome of the story because without it the dragons are practically invincible. In addition, this element fulfils two important narrative functions: the first emphasizes the figure of the hero who can defeat a huge monster thanks to the use of strategy rather than by using brute force and that can succeed in a task failed by many. The second underlines the personality of dragons because the fact that the cause of their downfall is their unawareness of a weak spot, consisting in a scar, a wound or a part not covered by hard scales, means that the true reason of their defeat may reside in their ego.

Another aspect, which needs to be considered, is the presence in both *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit* of the use of different names or titles in order to refer to the same element. The habit of using different names for the same element was diffused in Old English poems, in fact, while reading *Beowulf* it is easy to find many names and epithets used to talk about one element or character, for example, the dragon is referred to as “worm”, “serpent”, “monster”, “evil destroyer”, “winged fighter”, “monstrous being”, “horribly-patterned snake”, “fire-drake” and other similar names. In *The Hobbit* chapter XII *Inside Information* is Bilbo who presents himself with different names and titles trying to trick Smaug and not to reveal his identity, he says “I come from under the hill, and under the hills and under the hills and over the hills my paths led. And through the air. I am he that walks unseen” (Tolkien, 2020, 224), after a comment made by the dragon he then continues “I am the clue-finder,

the web-cutter, the stinging fly. I was chosen by the lucky numbers” (Tolkien, 2020, 224), after another comment Bilbo proceeds “I am he who buries his friends alive and drowns them and draws them alive again from the water. I came from the end of a bag, but no bag went over me” (Tolkien, 2020, 224) and again “I am the friend of bears and the guest of eagles. I am Ringwinner and Luckwearer, and I am Barrel-rider” (Tolkien, 2020, 224). In both cases the qualities and the actions of the character are exalted. On the one hand, for what concerns the former, the used names emphasize the feeling of terror and danger that people could experience when they faced this huge creature. Each name may underline different characteristics, “worm” may allude to its form, “serpent” may refer to its venomous bite and/or its form, “monster” and “monstrous being” evoke a general sense of fear, “horribly-patterned snake” may include all the aforementioned characteristics, “winged fighter” may be a way to highlight its flying and fighting abilities, “fire-drake” may underline the presence of its fire breath, while “evil destroyer” may be due to its actions which bring death to people and cause the fall of villages. On the other hand, the latter gives himself titles based mainly on his actions, in the first sentence he alludes in an extremely general manner to the Shire and his journey and then he states that he can walk unseen, probably referring both to his size and the fact that by wearing the One Ring he can turn invisible. In the second sentence he presents himself with a series of titles, “clue-finder” may represent his ability to find clues and solutions, for example when he managed to open the door of the Lonely Mountain and enter in Smaug’s lair at the end of chapter XI *On the Doorstep* (Tolkien, 2020, 211-212), “web-cutter” may refer to the fight against the giant spiders in chapter VIII *Flies and Spiders*. Although “stinging fly” may allude to the events of chapter VIII, it may also underline two characteristics of the protagonist, in fact, the noun “fly” may be due to his size, he is much smaller than these spiders and could easily be trapped by their webs. Nonetheless, the adjective “stinging” suggests the idea that he is not simply a prey and that he can harm them thanks to his magic sword, which he decides to call Sting during these events. He then affirms that he was “chosen by the lucky numbers” maybe because his journey was not planned by him, and he was chosen by Gandalf to be the fourteenth member of the company. The third sentence may be a reference to how he managed to free the dwarves and escape with them thanks to some wood barrels in chapter IX *Barrels Out of Bond*, another reference to this is then made by him in the third sentence “I am Barrel-rider”. It is worth noting that in some cases the ways in which Bilbo describes himself allude not only to his actions during his adventure but also to the titles of the chapters. In the second sentence he says “I came from the end of a bag, but no bag came over me”, probably a peculiar and puzzling way to indirectly say that he comes from Bag End, his home located in the Shire. In the last sentence he affirms that he is “friend of bears and guest of eagles” referring to the help received by Beorn, a shapeshifter who can become a bear, during

chapter VII *Queer Lodgings* and by the eagles in chapter VI *Out of the Frying-Pan into the Fire*. Bilbo adds that he is “Ringwinner”, which probably makes the readers think about how he found the One Ring and how he won the riddle contest with Gollum in chapter V *Riddles in the Dark*, and “Luckwearer” due to his luck that has aid him escape dangerous situations. The reason why Bilbo tries to hide his identity may be linked to the fact that in Old English literature dragons can curse their enemies if they know their names. For instance, in the *Völsunga Saga* Sigurd tries to hide his identity when talking with Fafnir, he presents himself as the “Noble Beast” and tells the dragon that he does not have a father or a mother (Koch, 1994, 137). This name may be linked to the fact that Sigurd has been raised by a deer.

Both Sigurd and Bilbo are asked their identity and then accused of lying when they present themselves without revealing their proper names (Koch, 1994, 137-139) (Tolkien, 2020, 224-225). Bilbo keeps his identity hidden, while Sigurd after being called liar decides to say his name. After this a series of curses is cast upon Sigurd by Fafnir. The dragon also cast a malediction on his treasure: Sigurd and everybody that will obtain a part of it are condemned to die (Koch, 1994, 141).

#### 2.4 Inhabitants of Middle-earth.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the world of Middle-earth is filled with fantastic creatures such as hobbits, dwarves, elves, dragons and some benevolent or malevolent entities. In this paragraph it is given a brief description of some of these creatures and their relationships with runes. The representation of these creatures in Tolkien’s works has played an important role in how they are perceived in the collective imagination. Many of these creatures derive from the Norse mythology, some of them belong to different mythologies and others have been invented by Tolkien himself. Starting from the ones that have a strong mythological connection, the dwarves and the elves are without any doubt the most associated with the Norse mythology. On the one hand, the elves have been described like humanoid creatures similar to slim or athletic humans with long hair of different colours and keen senses (especially sight and hearing) and they have been often associated with noble characteristics such as beauty, fairness and elegance. In fact, their most used weapon is the bow which reflects these qualities. One common element between Tolkien’s elves and the ones belonging to the Norse mythology is the division of elves in different types. Although different types of elves exist the main division is made between Dark Elves and Light Elves. Moreover, the elves seem to have a strong relationship with nature, but also with magic. This can be seen thanks to different magical elements that are somehow linked to them, for instance, some of the gifts done by Galadriel to the Fellowship of the Ring in book two chapter VIII *Farewell to Lórien* and the magical rings, which have been forged by the elves, after Sauron taught them the



secrets for crafting them. The idea of precious rings given by a lord to his followers, which is present in the Old English literature, has been twisted by Tolkien, in fact, they were originally given by the king as a reward for loyalty and help, while in *The Lord of the Rings* it is said that Sauron gave nineteen magical rings as gifts (nine were received by humans, seven by dwarves and three by elves), even though his true aim is to control them thanks to the One Ring that he has forged in secret. Other objects that may seem normal at first sight have some sort of supernatural properties if they are somehow associated to elves, for instance, the elvish cloaks, which are crafted by elves but can also be used by other creatures, have mimetic properties that allow the wearer to be nearly invisible, the *lembas*, a type of elvish bread, which is perfect for long journeys because it is very nutritious and can stay fresh for months if correctly preserved by wrapping it in leaves, the elvish swords, whose blades become blue whether an orc or a goblin is near, and the mithril, a light metal created by elves that is extremely resistant. These items play a key role in the story of both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the cloaks have been used by the hobbits to hide on several occasions, the *lembas* as provisions during the journey, especially used by Frodo and Sam during the final part of their journey to Mordor. For what concerns the elvish blades and the mithril, an elvish dagger is used by Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* as his main weapon, which he then calls Sting and use as a sword, while a mithril coat found in Smaug's lair is used by him as armour. Bilbo gives both the sword and the mithril coat to Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, more specifically in book two chapter III *The Ring Goes South*. Another element that has been always linked to magic in a way or another is the existence of runes, of which elves are the inventors. Tolkien (2020, 1117) explains that in the Third Age (a long period of time in which the events belonging to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are included) the main alphabets were two and that their origin was independent: the *Tengwar* or *Tiw* and the *Certar* or *Cirth*. Both are of elvish invention, more specifically of Eladrin invention. The *Tengwar* are the most ancient and they seem to have more than one version, Tolkien (2020, 1117) divides them in the *Tengwar of Rúmil*, which are not used in the Third Age, and *Tengwar of Fëanor*, which are considered relatively new for that period and seem to be partially based on the letters of *Rúmil*. Tolkien (2020, 1117-1118) adds that even the *Cirth* have different version, in the Second Age they were diffused in their older form and many different creatures managed to learn them (dwarves, humans, orcs, etc.) , while in the First Age a version of the *Cirth* was created by Daeron and this form called the Alphabet of Daeron has been then abandoned by the Elves of the West who probably preferred to write using the *Tengwar of Fëanor*. The Daeron version is then found, adapted and used by the dwarves.

On the other hand, the dwarves are very different from the elves, they are described as shorter humanoid creatures, bad tempered, with long beards and hair. They are used to live underground

and work in miners where they look for gold and gems. Some of them are depicted as extremely greedy. In addition, the ability of dwarves in the creation of jewellery, manipulation of metals and architecture is considered incomparable by most of the creatures of Middle-earth. Some of these characteristics can be found in the Norse mythology and in the Old English literature such as their ability to work with metals and their desire for gold and valuable objects. Koch (1994, 264) underlines that in the *Völsunga Saga* the dwarves are the author of the most beautiful treasures in the gods' collections. In *The Lord of the Rings* the dwarves are the smiths who created the sword *Narsil*, whose fragment have been used to craft the sword *Andúril* that is used by Aragorn. While in the Norse mythology the dwarves forged different objects for the gods including the *Mjöllnir*, which is the hammer of Thor, god of thunder and son of Odin. Therefore, it seems the dwarves play the same key role as skilled metalworkers who are even able to craft a legendary weapon. Koch (1994, 264) states that dwarves have the ability of metamorphosis and that they are permanently petrified if they go under the sunlight. These two peculiar elements do not belong to the dwarves found in Tolkien's works, while the condition of being petrified under the sunlight is reserved for other creatures, for example in chapter II *Roast Mutton* of *The Hobbit*, three trolls are transformed into stone due to this reason. The other well-known feature belonging to the dwarves is their greed which they have in common with the dragons. This characteristic is present in both *The Hobbit* and in the *Völsunga Saga*, in the former the dwarves mined with too much greed in the lonely mountain, and they draw the undesired attention of Smaug who loves gold, gems and treasures, while in the latter a dwarf is transformed into a dragon, Fafnir, as a punishment for his greed. The concept of greed is also found in book two chapter V *The bridge of Khazad-dûm* of *The Lord of the Rings* when the Fellowship of the Ring discovers that the dwarves have dug too deeply in the miners of Moria awakening an ancient and evil creature, a Balrog. Therefore, the excess of greed may be often associated with unfortunate events related somehow to the magic field. The connection between Middle-earth and the Norse mythology goes even further, in fact, most of the dwarves who make their appearance in *The Hobbit* seem to be called after the dwarves in the *Völuspá*, a poem found in the *Poetic Edda*. The names present in both works are: Balin, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, Durin, Dwalin, Fili, Gloin, Kili, Nori, Ori, Thorin, Thror and Thrainn (they are reported here in alphabetical order) (the spelling may differ between the *Poetic Edda* and *The Hobbit*). These names appear all between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> stanzas of the poem, which are dedicated to the creation of the dwarves. Tolkien (2020, 1133) reveals in the *Return of the King* that in his works the dwarves never reveal their true name to non-dwarves and that the names of all the dwarves "reported" in his books are not their true names. In the *Völuspá*, last line of the 13<sup>th</sup> stanza, the word Oakenshield, which is the title that Thorin obtained in *The Hobbit* because during a fight he lost his shield and

used a piece of oak as one, also appears even though it is not strongly related to Thorin this time. Another aspect that could be taken into consideration is the fact that in Tolkien's works some names present alliterations. The alliteration is a phenomenon by which two words have the same starting sound, even though two different starting sounds are considered an alliteration if both are vowels. This phenomenon was widely diffused among Germanic populations in poetry and in proper names. It was common to compose verses with words that started with the same consonant but the same goes for relatives that had often (but not always) similar names, especially in the case of close relatives like a father and a son or two brothers. Many Germanic ethnogenesis have a couple of brothers with alliterating names as the founding figures of a population, for example, Ybor and Agio, chiefs of the Winnili population and founding figure of Longobards, are two brothers who fought against another couple of brothers, Ambri and Assi, chiefs of Vandal population. A further example is that of the Anglo-Saxon ethnogenesis which sees Hengest and Horsa, another couple of brothers, as the founding figure and first chieftains of this population. They were the sons of Wictgils, Grandsons of Witta, whose father was Wetta, and his grandfather was Woden. As it can be seen, in most cases Germanics had one or more close relatives with a similar name. In the world of Middle-earth created by Tolkien, alliteration is present with a similar but also slightly different use, the main cases in which it occurs are three: alliteration can be found between the names of some characters and their nicknames such as Gandalf, the Grey, the names of some characters and their surnames such as Barliman Butterbur or Bilbo Baggins, or between the name some characters and some of their close relatives. The first two cases may be considered coincidences and nothing more, but the third case is the one that seems more related to the phenomenon of alliteration as it was used among Germanic population. In Tolkien's works this practice is used among dwarves who have alliterating names, for example, Gimli and his father Glóin or again Thorin and his father Thráin II whose father's name is Thrór. Moreover, dwarves have a deep relationship with runes, they did not invent them, but they started to use runes to write their own language. They adopted the already mentioned Alphabet of Daeron and they developed different forms from the original runes to write them on paper rather than only using them in inscriptions engraved on stone (Tolkien, 2020, 1118). The version modified by the dwarves is known as *Angerthas Moria* or Long Rune-rows of Moria (Tolkien, 2020, 1118). In *The Fellowship of the Ring* book two chapter IV *A journey in the dark* it is shown a runic inscription carved on the tombstone of Balin, King of Moria, while in the first part of chapter V *The Bridge of Khazad-dûm* Gandalf finds a dwarvish manuscript, the *Book of Mazarbul*, written with different types of Runes (Moria and Dale) and some elvish script, even though he is unable to translate it completely because the manuscript is badly damaged, partially burned, covered in blood and with missing pages. The fact that Gandalf cannot translate completely the

runic inscriptions due to the condition of the text is very plausible and reinforces the narrative illusion. This method is used also in *The Hobbit* chapter II *Roast Mutton* when Gandalf and Thorin find two elvish swords and Gandalf says “They were 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” (Tolkien, 2020, 48). It is not clear why Gandalf cannot read them, whether the light is too dim in the troll’s lair, or the blades are too dirty to read the inscriptions.

Although the figure of the dragon in Tolkien’s work has already been widely discussed in the precedent paragraph, it is worth noting that in *The Hobbit* it is not revealed whether they are capable of reading runes and have knowledge of the different types of languages diffused in Middle-earth or not. What emerges by the dialogue between Bilbo and Smaug is that the dragon can read between the lines, understand if someone is lying and deduct additional information from a brief dialogue thanks to his sharp senses. Therefore, it may be no surprise if Smaug and other dragons may have the skill of reading and understanding runes.

The only creatures that have completely been invented by Tolkien are the hobbits. Tolkien describes them in first chapter of *The Hobbit, An Unexpected Party*, as small humanoid creatures, which are usually fat in the stomach, do not have beards and do not tend to use shoes because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick brown hair. He adds that they are not related to magic, but they can disappear easily, thanks to their size, when creatures bigger than them are nearby. For what concerns their way of living, they are described as peaceful creatures who like to wear bright colours and live in the Shire, an isolated safe place compared to the other locations of Middle-earth. It is worth noting that the description of the hobbits is given only after an accurate description of the traditional hobbit home, the “hobbit-hole”, which are holes in the ground that contain comfortable places to live. In fact, the first chapter of *The Hobbit* begins with one of the most famous quotes belonging to the world of Middle-earth “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit” (Tolkien, 2020, 3). Although hobbits are originally present in Tolkien’s works and have no precedent appearances some of their characteristics may derive from the Norse mythology. These characteristics include: the sense of hospitality, the relevance of food, the importance of kinship and the passion for riddles. This sense of hospitality may be seen in the first chapter of *The Hobbit* when a group of dwarves enter in Bilbo’s home without his invitation, but he seems to be obliged to accept the situation, allow them to stay and give them something to eat. Another example of this may be found in the first chapter of *The Lord of The Rings*, during which it is explained that it is a hobbit tradition to give rather than receive gifts for one’s own birthday and that Bilbo has planned to give many beautiful and expensive gifts for his 111th birthday. The importance of food is underlined in more than one occasion, for example, in the prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring*

are already present different information about their relationship with the production and consumption of food “And laugh they did, and eat, and drink, often and heartily, being fond of simple jests at all times, and of six meals a day (when they could get them)” (Tolkien, 2020, 2) and again “Growing food and eating it occupied most of their time” (Tolkien, 2020, 9). This element has also been highlighted in the cinematographic adaptation made by Peter Jackson, for example, in the *Fellowship of the Ring* (2002) in a brief dialogue between Aragorn and Peregrin, it is mentioned by the latter the existence of a second breakfast as it was a regular meal in everyone’s daily routine. In the Norse mythology the feasts were a crucial part, in fact, the warriors who had survived and won the battle celebrated by meeting and eating together and after their death they continued to fight and feast in the *Valhalla*.

Another relevant element is their relationship with their kinship, in fact, in the prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring* Tolkien (2020, 7) says that in dealing with Hobbits it is extremely important to know who is related to whom, and in what degree. He also underlines their care for their family tree, which are partially reported in the Appendix C of *The Return of the King* (Tolkien, 2020, 1099-1105). The German population also took in great consideration their kinship. This can be seen in the already mentioned alliteration of proper names belonging to close relatives.

The riddle-making/solving can be seen in *The Hobbit* chapter V *Riddles in the Dark* where it plays an important part in Bilbo’s journey and allows him to take time, not to be eaten by Gollum and in the end to escape from a dark and isolated place. The presence of riddles is also an important characteristic of Norse mythology, for instance, in the *Vafþrúðnismál*, which is included in the *Poetic Edda*, Odin and a giant have a riddle contest that ends with Odin’s victory. He manages to win by hiding his true identity and asking a question to which, only the god and the dead can answer correctly. Bilbo does a similar thing by asking Gollum what he has in his pocket and giving three chances to answer correctly, which is not exactly a riddle but allows him to win.

Tolkien (2020, 1130) explains that no records of a proper language belonging to the hobbits have been found and that they acquired languages known by others. He then explains that the hobbits of the Shire and Bree in the Third Age used the Westron or Common Speech, a language that is used as lingua franca by the various creature that do not speak the same language. Tolkien says that the hobbits use this language to write *There and Back Again* and *The Lord of the Rings* of which he merely provides a translation. A section of the book, Appendix F, which is found at the end of *The Return of the King*, is dedicated to the languages of the various creatures of Middle-earth and to the adaptation from Westron to English. The narrative illusion of this far place created by Tolkien is once again reinforced thanks to these details and the existence of a whole world behind the events of the main story.

In conclusion, the deep connection between Tolkien's works and the Old English literature and Norse mythology is not present only in creatures, places, objects, uses and costumes, but also in the names of some of his characters, the languages and in the literary world itself, while the illusion of the Secondary World is strengthened by many elements and details such as the history behind the events narrated and the evolution of the different languages which is partially analysed in the next chapter focusing on a comparison between the different versions of the *fubark* and the characters invented by Tolkien.

### 3 “Runes on Middle-earth”.

#### 3.1 *The Hobbit* and the *futhorc*.

The world of Middle-earth created by Tolkien has different elements that are present in the Germanic mythology and culture. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the various types of runes and characters that have been showed and used in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* and make a comparison between them and the Germanic runes. Runes have been essential in the development of the Germanic populations, but they also play an important role in the world of Middle-earth. When talking about Tolkien’s world, runes have often been associated with the figure of the dwarves, even though they have been created by elves. This may be due to the fact that they are more used by dwarves during the events that take place in the books. In Middle-earth the use of runes may vary depending on the context and the situation, more specifically, they are used to mark property, to specify who is the creator of a certain object, to leave a message, to sign a letter, to write a funerary inscription. Before going into details, a distinction concerning the various characters found in Tolkien’s works is needed. The main types of characters are three: the runes found in *The Hobbit*, the *Tengwar* and the *Angerthas*. The runes found in *The Hobbit* seem to be close to the actual *futhorc* in shape, number and sound. The runes used in *The Hobbit* are thirty-two, a number that is similar to the Anglo-Saxon runic sequence, which goes from 28 to 33 depending on the historic period. Most of these runes shares even their sound and shape, making clear that Tolkien used them as the main source for his runes and that he slightly modified the sequence by changing the shape or sound of some specific runes. Tolkien (2020, 1) states that these runes are not the original ones that were used by the dwarves and that in *The Hobbit* they are transcribed by using English runes. In addition, Tolkien (2020, 1) explains some of the changes that he made on the original sequence, he states that on Thrór’s map all the runes, which have been “adapted to modern English”, can be found, with some exceptions: the rune “X” is not present, runes “I” and “U” must be read “J” and “V” respectively, no rune for “Q” and “Z”. He also adds that some runes are used to express two modern letters such as “th”, “ng” and “ee” (Tolkien, 2020, 2). Hyde (1987, 45-46) provides different translations of the runic inscriptions found in *The Hobbit*, in which they are used more than once to write messages in the English language. He also makes a comparison between the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc* (more specifically between Germanic runic staves, early Anglo-Saxon runes and later Anglo-Saxon runes) and the runes created by Tolkien. A further confrontation shows that Anglo-Saxon runes, which are used in the runic inscriptions found in *The Hobbit*, could also have been used by Tolkien as a base for the creation of the *Angerthas*, even though their phonetic value has been changed. In *The Hobbit* runes are used on several occasions: they can be found in

the introduction, in the title, in the first pages and/or on the cover (depending on the edition) and in Thrór's map, which contains two different runic sequences that are also reported in the introduction. The texts that compose these inscriptions share different characteristics:

- They are written in English by using runes.
- They are brief (the longest inscription is composed by 149 runes).
- They are not written by using the *scripto continua*.
- Words are divided by one dot and sentences seems to be divided by three dots in vertical position.
- The reading order is fixed, from left to right.
- Most runes can be transcribed by using the *futhorc*.
- Some runes differ from the *futhorc*.

The first runic text is found in the introduction (see *The Hobbit*, Tolkien, 2020, 1), it is composed by 26 runes and once transcribed it reads in English “*The Hobbit or There and Back Again*”, which is the title of the book. In this inscription the rune “þ” it is used to indicate the English sound “th” in his voiced version both in “the” and “there”, while a character that does not seem to be originally present in the *futhorc* or *futhorc* may have been used for “k”, even though in both a rune for this sound was already included. The character used for “k” is similar to the one used for “c” which is present in the original Anglo-Saxon sequence.

Another runic inscription is composed by 149 runes and it reads in English “The Hobbit or There and Back Again. Being the record of a year's journey made by Bilbo Baggins of Hobbiton. Compiled from his memoirs by J.R.R. Tolkien and published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd.” (Tolkien, 2020). As stated by Hyde (1987, 45) this inscription may vary depending on the edition, for instance, the one analysed by him differs in the last part which reads “published by Houghton-Mifflin and Co” and it is found on the dust cover, while the aforementioned inscription is written on the title page in the 2020 edition. Another difference may reside in the way the words “back” and “Tolkien” are written in these two editions, in the Houghton-Mifflin edition, which has been analysed by Hyde (1987, 45) the rune “k” is different in both words, while in the edition published by George Allen and Unwin, at least the 2020 edition, the rune used seems to be the same for both words and it may be the one used for the author's surname in the other edition.

Other two inscription are written on Thrór's map (see *The Hobbit*, Tolkien, 2020, cover and page 2), in the literary world one of them is always visible while the other needs special condition concerning the position and the light of the moon to be read. The first one is composed by 38 runes and it reads in English “Five feet high the door and three may walk abreast þ.p.” (Tolkien, 2020,



22). In this case, the rules about the exceptions must be used to correctly transcribe the runes, the rune “u” is used for “v” in the word “five” while two distinct runes are used for the double vowels “e” and “o” (Hyde, 1987, 46). The former is used in the words “feet” and “three” and the latter in the word “door”. The two runes for single and double “o” present a slightly different shape, while the runes for single and double “e” have a completely different form.

At the end of this inscription two runes “þ” are written and they are the initials of Thrór and Thráin (Tolkien, 2020, 2). The second inscription is longer than the first one, as it is composed by 97 runes and it reads in English “stand by the grey stone when the thrush knocks, and the setting sun with the last light of Durin’s Day will shine upon the key-hole þ.” (Tolkien, 2020, 58). In this inscription the rune “U” is used normally in the following words: “thrush”, “sun”, “Durin”, “upon” and it not used even once as “V”. A particular aspect is that two characters are used to indicate the sound “d”, one of them is used in initial position, for example in the words “Durin” and “Day” written with a capital “D”, and it is originally found in the *futhorc*, while the other is a similar character (it has two horizontal lines more than the other), and it is used at the end of a word as in the word “stand” and in the word “and”. According to Hyde (1987, 46) the rune “d” used in final position is a variant of the Anglo-Saxon “d” rune. It is curious how the variant character for “d” is only used in the second inscription, while in the other inscription the standard one is used both at the beginning and at the end of a word as in the word “door” and in the word “and”.

Returning to the second inscription, the spelling of the word “when” as “hwen” may be due to phonetic spelling or more likely to an archaic spelling (Hyde, 1987, 46). This inscription is signed using only one rune “þ” which could stay for either Thrór or Thráin. Thrór’s map is also characterized by a sort of cross consisting of a point and four arrows that go from the point to each cardinal sign. This drawn can be seen at the top right corner of the page and each first letter of every cardinal sign is written with the corresponding rune. The cardinal signs are not displayed as it is commonly done, with the north at the top and the east on the right, in this map the north is on the left and the east is at the top. The cardinal signs are arranged in this particular order only in Thrór’s map, while both in the map portraying the Wilderland, which can be observed at the end of *The Hobbit* and in the map that shows the West of Middle-earth at the end of the Third Age drawn at the beginning and at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the cardinal signs are in standard position. In the former, the only written cardinal sign is the “north” and it is marked with a lowercase “n” at the top of the cross and in the latter the same is done, even though it is shown a wind rose rather than a cross and the “north” is marked by a capital “N”. At the end of *The Return of the King* another map has been included and it focuses on three specific territories: Rohan, Gondor and Mordor. At the top right corner of this map, it is pictured a cross with all the cardinal signs written in standard position

and marked by their initial capital letters. Therefore, it is worth noting that Thrór's map is the only one that reports a different order of the cardinal signs, that it is written by using runes and it is also the only one written and drawn by dwarves.

### 3.2 The Elvish letters: the *Tengwar*.

A deep analysis of the *Tengwar* and the *Angerthas* does not occur in *The Hobbit*, even though an explanation is given in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien (2020, 1) finds a way to justify the fact that he uses in *The Hobbit* a type of runes that are not the *Angerthas*, he explains that the dwarvish runes have been translated by using the English ones. The *Tengwar* are not described as runes, they are said to be more similar to letters and that they were created to be written on paper rather than carved on stone or metal (Tolkien, 2020, 1117). This could be also deduced by their form which is more rounded than that of the actual runes and for this reason they could result too complicated for carving. Nonetheless, Tolkien (2020, 1117) states that they have another form, which is more squared, used for inscriptions. Inscriptions written with the *Tengwar* are found in magical objects made of durable materials such as the One Ring or the Doors of Moria. In the first book of the trilogy *The Fellowship of the Ring*, strange-looking characters are used in more than one occasion, for example, in the first chapter of book one *A long-expected party* there are two particular characters written on several fireworks. These two characters belong to different groups as shown by the tables in the Appendix E at the end of *The Return of the King*, the former belongs to the *Tengwar*, while the latter to the *Angerthas*, respectively the 8<sup>th</sup> character in the table at page 1119 and the 19<sup>th</sup> character in the table at page 1124. Both characters can be transcribed with the letter "G". They probably refer to the initial letter of the name Gandalf, who is the wizard that made these fireworks. Although it is not explicitly written as a rune, the rune "G" makes again its appearance in book two chapter VIII *Farewell to Lórien* when Galadriel gives Sam a small gift which consists of a little box made of grey wood, with this rune on the lid, filled with the earth of her orchard. Galadriel explains in this passage that this rune stands for Galadriel, but it may also stand for garden in the common tongue. Therefore, it may seem that the Germanic practice, which consisted of carving the name of someone who made an object or has the possession of it, has been slightly modified and included in Tolkien's works. Tolkien (2020, 1117) explains that the *Tengwar* were older compared to *Cirth*, which is used as the base source for the creation of the *Angerthas*, and that their origin is attributed to the Noldor, which were the kindred of Eldar, before their exile. The *Tengwar* were enriched by later addition, which corresponds to the last letters of the sequence and are known as

the *Tengwar of Fëanor*. Tolkien (2020, 1117-1118) shows the composition of the *Tengwar* and explains that the most complete sequence is composed by 36 letters, even though the original one was composed only by 24 letters. Although the *Tengwar* are more related to letters than runes, their original composition is constituted of 24 characters which is the same number of characters that constitute the *fupark*. Furthermore, both sequences have been enlarged in the number of characters, as stated by Elliott (1989, 47) to the original *fupark* were added four characters in its first Anglo-Saxon version (28 runes in total) and then another five (33 runes in total). The *Tengwar* were 24 at first, but their final sequence is composed by 36 characters because other characters were added through the course of time. The letters 1-24 belong to the original sequence, while the letters 25-36 are later inventions. Tolkien (2020, 1118) also divides the letters in four series, called *témar*, and each of these series is composed of six grades, called *tyeller*, he then provides an explanation about the graphic and phonetic aspects. For what concerns the graphic aspect, Tolkien (2020, 1117) states that the *Tengwar* are composed by two main parts that are the stem (*telco*) and the bow (*lúva*), the stem may be found in different verses, in 1-4 it is considered in its standard position, in 9-16 it is raised, while in 17-24 it is reduced. A similar pattern interests the bow which can be open as in I and III or closed as in II and IV, it can also be double as in 5-8 (Tolkien, 2020, 1120). The other important aspect is the phonetic one, Tolkien (2020, 1113-1123) provides the corresponding English letter and phonetic value to each *Tengwar*. Nonetheless, the graphic and the phonetic aspects cannot be considered separately because they are inevitably intertwined with each other. Tolkien (2020, 1120) explains that the doubling of the bow represents a voiced sound, while a single bow represents a voiceless sound, for instance, the letters 1, 2, 3, 4, belonging to the first series present a single bow and correspond to “t”, “p”, “ch/k”, “k/kw”, which are voiceless sounds, while the letters 5, 6, 7, 8, belonging to the second series present a doubled bow and correspond to “d”, “b”, “j/g”, “g/gw”, which are not only voiced sounds but also the voiced counterparts of the voiceless sounds that compose the first sequence. The same phenomenon seems to happen for the third and the fourth sequence. Another relevant phenomenon that interests the *Tengwar* is the writing of vowels which is often done by using the *tehtar*, which are signs that mark the consonants before or after the vowel (Tolkien, 2020, 1121). The position of the *tehta* depends on the language in which it is used, for instance, Tolkien (2020, 1121) explains that in *Quenya*, a language in which the words tend to end with a vowel the *tehta* is placed above the consonant that precedes the vowel, while in *Sindarin*, a language in which the words tend to end with a consonant the *tehta* is placed above the consonant that follows the vowel.

Moreover, Tolkien (2020, 1122-1123) explains that each letter is associated with a full name that contains such letter and that each name has its own meaning. He then adds that when possible the full name starts with the corresponding letter, but that in absence of such a word the full name starts with a vowel and the corresponding letter follows the vowel, for instance, the first letter (see Tolkien, 2020, 1119-1121) is associated with the letter “t” and the corresponding full name is *tinco*, while the fifth letter is associated with the letter “d” but the corresponding full name is *ando*. In the first case the letter “t” is also the starting letter of the full name. In the second case the letter “d” is not the starting letter of the full name but it is contained in the word. This association between a word and an external referent is common in the Germanic runic sequences where each rune has an external referent that started with the rune sound. A classification depending on the meaning of the word associated with each character, like the one made by Elliott (1989, 71), which was already mentioned in the first chapter, may be used to divide into different categories the *Tengwar*. Therefore, with the aim to better analyse the meaning of these runes I have divided them in seven different groups: the first is composed by artificial elements crafted by humans or other humanoid creatures that inhabit Middle-earth, the second by abstract concepts, the third by parts of the body, the fourth by natural elements which may be related to animals, to the landscape or to the weather, the fifth is composed by magical elements, the sixth by metals and the last one by geographic elements. The numbers indicate the corresponding letter in the *Tengwar* table (Tolkien, 2020, 1119), the groups are the following:

- Artificial elements: 2 *parma* “book”, 3 *calma* “lamp”, 5 *ando* “gate”, 14 *ampa* “hook”, 35 *yanta* “bridge”.
- Abstract concepts: 19 *noldo* (older *ngoldo*) “one of the kindred of Noldo”, 20 *nwalme* (older *ngwalme*) “torment”, 21 *óre* “heart” (inner mind), 23 *anna* “gift”, 36 *úre* “heat”.
- Body parts: 13 *anto* “mouth”, 15 *anca* “jaws”, 27 *lambe* “tongue”.
- Natural elements: 4 *quesse* “feather”, 8 *ungwe* “spider’s web”, 12 *hwesta* “breeze”, 16 *unque* “a hollow”, 24 *vilya* (older *wilya*) “air” or “sky”, 28 *alda* “tree”, 29 *silme* “starlight”, 31 *áre* “sunlight”
- Magical elements: 6 *umbar* “fate”, 9 *thúle* (*súle*) “spirit”, 22 *vala* “angelic power”
- Metals: 1 *tinco* “metal”, 7 *anga* “iron”, 11 *harma* “treasure”, 18 *malta* “gold”
- Geographic elements: 10 *formen* “north”, 17 *númen* “west”, 25 *rómen* “east”, 26 *arda* “region”, 33 *hyarmen* “south”.
- Particular cases: 30 *silme nuquerna* (s reversed), 32 *áre nuquerna*, 34 *hwesta sindarinwa*

The word fate has been included in the magical elements because it may be intended as prophetic fate, while the word treasure has been included in metals because most treasures encountered throughout the events of the books are composed of objects made of precious metals such as gold coins, jewels and magic objects crafted by elves (e.g. the elvish blades and the mithril coat). The words that do not have an explicit corresponding word assigned to them have been included in the 8<sup>th</sup> category.

Even though the *fupark* and the *Tengwar* are completely different in shape, and have differences in number and sound, it is worth noting that some runes belonging to the *fupark* and some letters belonging to the *Tengwar* have a similar meaning and both have characters associated with an external referent. Therefore, Tolkien may have been inspired by the Germanic runes not only for the creation of the *Cirth* but also for the *Tengwar*.

- The *Tengwar*: *amma* gift, *calma* lamp, *áre* sunlight, *alda* tree (Tolkien, 2020, 1123).
- The *fupark*: *geþo* gift, *kēnaz* torch, *sōwulō* sun, *āc* oak, *asc* ash (Elliott, 1989, 72-74).

*Amma* and *geþo* may have the same meaning, even though it is not clear, as reported by Elliott (1989, 74) which is exactly the context where the word *geþo* was used, in fact, according to him it could have originally be used to express the concept of gifts or sacrifices made by men and offered to gods, gifts made by gods to men or gifts made by a chief to his followers. *Calma* and *kēnaz* have different meanings but both are used to refer to an artificial source of light. Although *áre* and *sōwulō* are both used to refer to the sun, the former expresses only the concept of sunlight while the second may refer to the sun in a broader sense. In the *fupark* there are different terms referring to the different types of trees in a specific way such as *āc* which means oak or *asc* which means ash, while *alda* means simply tree and does not specify the type.

As mentioned before, in *The Lord of the Rings* the *Tengwar* are used to write inscriptions. An inscription written with *the Tengwar* is discovered and read by Gandalf in *The Fellowship of the Ring* book one chapter II *The Shadow of the Past*. A translation of it is then provided by Gandalf after some lines and again in book two chapter *The council of Elrond* which reads in English “One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them” (Tolkien, 2020, 50 and 254). In this second case it is also reported a transcription which reads “Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul, ash nazg thrakatulûk agh burzum-ishi krimpatul” (Tolkien, 2020, 254). “One Ring” could be the translation of “Ash nazg” because they are the only couple of words repeated three times. This inscription is carved on the One Ring, and it is only visible when it is heated with fire. The use of elements that work only under specific conditions is present in more than one occasion, for instance the Doors of Moria could be opened only saying the

Elvish word *Mellon* which means “friend”, the way to access the Lonely Mountain is revealed in a specific time and place and the runes on Thrór’s map are only shown at night in a specific day of the year when the moon is in a certain phase. The Doors of Moria are inscribed with *the Tengwar of Fëanor*, an image of the inscription is found in *Fellowship of the Ring* book two chapter IV *A journey in the Dark* (Tolkien, 2020, 305). This *Tengwar* inscription has been transcribed in Latin letters below the drawing and it reads “Ennyn Durin Atan Moria: pedo mellon a minno. Im Narvi hain echant: Celebrimbor Eregion teithant I thiw hin” (Tolkien, 2020, 305). A translation is provided by Gandalf which reads in English “The Doors of Durin, Lord of Moria. Speak, friend and enter. I, Narvi, made them. Celebrimbor of Hollin drew these signs” (Tolkien, 2020, 306). In this passage, it can be noted again the Germanic use of carving the name of the author (authors in this case) on their creations, the first, Narvi, seems to be the one who is responsible for the creation of the Doors of Moria, while the second is the one who write and drew the signs.

### 3.3. The Elvish and the Dwarvish runes: the *Angerthas*.

The *Cirth* were originally invented by Sindar, also called grey elves, and have been through different phases of transformation, in fact, the first phase of *Cirth* had fewer symbols compared to the *Anghertas*, which could be considered an evolution of this original runic sequence (Tolkien, 2020, 1117-1223). As stated by Tolkien (2020, 1123) the first phase of the *Cirth*, also called the oldest *Cirth*, is characterized by the presence of certain symbols, which were 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 18, 19, 22, 29, 31, 35, 36, 39, 42, 46, 50 (*Anghertas* symbols). He also adds that n. 39, 42, 46, 50 were vowels and didn’t change in *Cirth*’s variants. One evolution of *Cirth* or *Certar* is called *Angerthas* and in its older form it is called *Angerthas Daeron*, this name is due to Daeron who was responsible for the additions to the old *Cirth*. The *Cirth* had different transformations when it was more diffused and used by different races, for example the Dwarves are one of the races of Middle-earth that more than anyone else used, changed and enriched the *Anghertas* thanks to their everlasting relationship with mountains, stones and their practice of carving and engraving. The most complete *Angerthas* sequence is composed by 60 runes. Hyde (1987, 43) states that in a letter written by Tolkien to Rona Beare in June 1963, it is explained how the whole *Angerthas* sequence is created from the same pattern. In addition, the *Angerthas* may not be in a random order as they may appear at first sight, in fact, a deeper linguistic analysis reveals that the runes are organized by their phonetic value: the sequence 1-7 is composed by bilabials, the sequence 8-12 is composed by most of the dentals, 13-17 are palatals, 18-22 are velars, 23-28 are labialized or rounded velars, 29-32 are liquids, 33-38 are

consonants that were not included in the precedent sequences, the sequence 39-52 is composed by vowels and the last sequence 53-60 is composed by runes of later addition (Hyde, 1987,43).

Moreover, Tolkien (2020, 1126) explains that the later addition of the sequences 13-17 and 23-28 is due to the Noldor of Eregion and that these runes were used to express sounds that didn't belong to the original Sindarin. Despite the *Cirth* was originally created by the Sindar, important changes were made by the Dwarves of Moria. Tolkien (2020, 1126) adds that these changes are reported in the table containing the phonetic values of *Angerthas*, in the presence of two sounds for the same rune the one on the left belongs to the older *Angerthas* while the one on the right belongs to the *Angerthas Moria*. Although most sounds are both used by the Sindar and the Dwarves of Moria a difference is constituted by the fact that some sounds associated to some runes were exclusively used by one group or the other. The sounds in brackets are of exclusive elvish use while those marked by a little star are used only by dwarves (Tolkien, 2020, 1126). A peculiar aspect of the *Angerthas* is the fact that some characters are the mirrored version of others. The mirrored versions appear later in the sequence and are the aspirated version of the regular runes. For instance, the corresponding values of runes 8, 9, 19, 23, 24, 31, 40 are “t”, “d”, “g”, “kw”, “gw”, “l” and “y”, while the corresponding values of runes 10, 11, 21, 25, 26, 32, and 41 are “th”, “dh”, “gh”, “khw”, “ghw/w”, “lh” and “hy”. This is not always true, for example, in the case of runes 1 and 2, whose corresponding sounds are “p” and “b”, their mirrored version are not corresponding to their aspirated version, and they are runes 3 and 4, whose corresponding sounds are “f” and “v”. The first couple is composed by two plosive sounds and the second couple is composed by two fricative sounds. The first sound of each couple is voiceless and the second one is voiced. The decision to create mirrored runes may have derived from the knowledge of runic inscription written in different directions and sometimes with inverted runes. An inscription composed by 35 *Angerthas* runes is written in the title pages at the beginning of each volume that is part of *The Lords of the Rings*. This inscription reads in English “The Lord of the Rings translated from The Red Book”. Once again, a runic element is used to create and reinforce the narrative illusion since this red book probably refers to *The Red Book of Westmarch*, which is the book originally written by Bilbo and Frodo. Analysing this inscription, it can be noted that in order to write some words a fewer number of runes is used, for instance, the word “the”, which appears three times, is written using only two runes. The first one expresses the sound “dh” and in this case it can be interpreted as a voiced “th” sound as in the words “this”, “that” and “there”. Other words present a similar pattern, the word “rings” is written with four runes, the third rune expresses the sound of a velar “n” which is found in English in the words that have a “g” sound following the “n” sound as in the word “song” or in this case “rings”. The use of a velar “n” seems to communicate the existence of a “g” without the

need of writing it. Another case is that of the word “book” which is written with three runes, two for the consonants and one for the double “o” sound. The word “translated” is composed by nine runes, the missing letter seems to be “e”, even though it is written with a little apostrophe between the runes “t” and “d”. The abbreviation of “e” could be considered an expedient to save space. The word “of” is written in runes as “ov”. Furthermore, the character used for “e” in the word “the” and in the word “red” is different. Runes can be found again in *The Fellowship of the Ring* book one chapter X *Strider* where the 19<sup>th</sup> character belonging to the *Angerthas* group is used four times by Gandalf to sign the letter that he gave to Barliman Butterbur and that was meant to be sent to Frodo Baggins in the Shire. The reason why the letter is signed so many times may reside in the fact that after each signature Gandalf writes additional information, this conveys the idea that Gandalf had to be in a hurry while writing the text and that he forgets to include important parts that are remembered and added only when he seems ready to finish and send the letter. Therefore, Gandalf may use this rune, which is his distinctive character, as an unequivocal way to mark each part of the letter and to make sure that Frodo understand that he is truly the author avoiding that the hobbit could doubt it. In chapter XI *A Knife in the Dark* the four hobbits and Aragorn found some runes inscribed on a stone. An interpretation of this runic inscription is given by Aragorn who says that the marks seem fresh, that the first rune could stand for the rune “G”, written with thin branches, and that the three vertical strokes may refer to the day, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October. He is not sure whether these runes were carved by Gandalf or not, even though he affirms that if the runes were inscribed by him, it meant that the wizard was in danger and hurry, so that he did not have the possibility to write a longer inscription with more details. In this brief passage it can be noted how someone with enough skill in runic interpretation could gather a lot of useful information by simply reading a runic inscription only composed of three or four characters. This method does not always lead to an accurate result, and a wrong interpretation of runes could spread misinformation. Moreover, in chapter IV of book two *A Journey in the Dark* the Fellowship of the Ring finds a tombstone on which is engraved a runic inscription belonging to the *Angerthas* that reads in English “Balin son of Fundin, Lord of Moria”. This type of runic inscription is closer to the actual use that runes had in a certain period, more specifically, during the second and third runic period, when they were carved on tombstones, memorials and similar objects used in the funerary field. Moltke (1985, 407) explains that during the second runic period graves were marked by standing stones and that this custom has been modified in the third runic period preferring the use of flat tombstones. Moltke (1985, 407) then adds that these kinds of tombstones were rarely inscribed and that the few inscriptions were in Danish or Latin, written in runes, or in Latin, written in roman capitals. According to Moltke (1985, 407) some of these flat tombstones may have been intended to



represent coffin lids or sarcophagus. This idea is reflected in Balin's tombstone which seems to be more a sarcophagus than a coffin. It is found in the middle of the chamber of Mazarbul, and it is described as a single long block, high about two feet, on which is laid a slab of white stone (Tolkien, 2020, 319). Since it is placed in the middle of a room and not buried in the ground, and that it belongs to the last king of Moria and not to a common dwarf, it may be reasonable to think of it as a sarcophagus. Another important source of runes is the already mentioned Book of Marzabul, this dwarvish manuscript is found, read and translated by Gandalf in its homonymous chamber during the events told in *The Fellowship of the Ring* book 2 at the beginning of chapter V *The Bridge of Khazad-dûm*. Nonetheless, its original text is not reported in the original and/or standard edition. Some pages belonging to the dwarvish manuscript have been realized by Tolkien and are included in some special edition of *The Lord of the Rings*. One aspect that is crucial for the realization of the Secondary World is the inclusion of this type of metanarrative elements such as the reproduction of the pages of *The Book of Mazarbul*, the drawings of Thrór's map and the other maps of Middle-earth, the inscriptions found on the tomb of Balin, and the letter written by Gandalf. The maps give the various places of Middle-earth, which are many and may seem to readers that they are located in nowhere, a specific spot and underline the importance of the visual aspect, while the other material provides readers with a perfect replica of some objects and texts found by the Fellowship of the Ring during their adventure. Readers may even try to embrace the philological aspect of Tolkien's work by transcribing the runic inscription found through the pages of his books in order to find the messages and they are encouraged to do so thanks to the Appendix at the end of *The Return of the King* that gives them the code to decrypt these runic inscriptions.

## Conclusions.

The key-role played by the most important aspects of the Germanic culture and tradition such as the runic inscriptions, the Norse mythology and the Old English literature have been crucial to the creation of the detailed world of Middle-earth invented by Tolkien and the construction of the various artificial languages that are used and lived in these fantasy lands. The impact that the world of Middle-earth and his creatures have had and continue to have on the whole fantasy genre and the general perception of the Middle Ages that people have nowadays cannot be denied. Many philologists and fantasy writers start their journey and their careers thanks to the immersive experience offered by Tolkien's masterpiece. His great attention to the details has made *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* the most known fantasy books on an international level. Tolkien's success may be due to his ability of analysing, reimagining and partially transforming some of the most iconic creatures and elements that make the Norse mythology what it is. Although this must be considered, it is worth noting that the author apport his own inventions to his works, the writing of the hobbits is doubtless among his most remarkable contribution to shape the fantasy genre as it is known today. These creatures originally generated by Tolkien's mind have been included in other well-known works. The creation of specific languages that suit the atmosphere of Middle-earth is also part of this success, in fact, they are not separate entities but a necessary part of the literary world and sometimes they are essential to the resolution of the events. The evolution of these languages inside the literary world and the existence of different variants of the same language make the illusion of the Secondary World more immersive and believable. The creation of these artificial languages is based on actual runic inscriptions and their unique characteristics.

To conclude, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are clear examples of a solid world building and how fictional languages could be implemented in the narration.

## Summary

Le iscrizioni runiche sono da sempre un elemento fondante della tradizione e cultura germanica, tuttavia, esse hanno anche avuto un ruolo chiave nella creazione dell'universo letterario della Terra di Mezzo ad opera di J.R.R. Tolkien. Con il termine "runa" si intende un carattere grafico a cui è associato uno o più suoni ed uno o più referenti esterni. Per referente esterno si intende una parola che inizi con quel determinato suono/carattere (e.g. una runa a cui è associato il suono "þ" potrebbe avere *þurisaz* "gigante" o "demone" come referente esterno). Le iscrizioni runiche sono state trovate su diversi tipi di materiali (e.g. pietra, legno, metallo, osso) ed oggetti (armi, oggetti di uso comune, monete, memoriali funebri). Gli oggetti ritrovati con maggiore frequenza sono costituiti da materiali resistenti come metallo e pietra, mentre quelli ritrovati con minore frequenza sono costituiti da materiali più fragili come il legno. La ricostruzione delle rune, dei suoni e dei referenti a loro associati è stata possibile grazie ad alcuni manufatti, tra i quali un manoscritto di proprietà della British Library Collection, precedentemente appartenuto a Sir Robert Cotton (1571-1631), un noto antiquario. Le sequenze runiche differiscono dalla scrittura alfabetica in quanto a differenza di quest'ultima non hanno un ordine preciso di lettura, il quale va da sinistra verso destra. Le rune possono essere quindi scritte e/o lette da sinistra a destra e viceversa, dall'alto verso il basso e viceversa o possono essere di tipo bustrofedico. L'ordine di lettura può essere carpito da alcuni dettagli presenti nell'incisione dei caratteri. Come accade spesso con i sistemi di scrittura e le lingue, anche le rune hanno avuto la loro evoluzione ramificandosi in diverse varianti a seconda dell'area geografica e del periodo storico. L'evoluzione delle rune può essere divisa in tre macro-periodi runici che vanno dalla presunta creazione ed invenzione delle rune al loro declino e disuso. Già dal primo periodo runico (0-600/700 D.C.) le rune sono diffuse ed utilizzate da diverse popolazioni germaniche, la sequenza runica che comprende le diverse rune di questo periodo è chiamata *futhorc* per via delle prime sei rune che la compongono. Il *futhorc* si divide in due varianti durante il secondo periodo runico (650-1025 D.C.): il *futhorc* Scandinavo, composto soltanto da 16 rune, ed il *futhorc* Anglosassone, anche chiamato *futhorc*, il quale si compone di 28 rune nelle sue fasi iniziali ed arriva a contarne 33 in quelle finali. Durante il secondo periodo e tra il secondo ed il terzo sono realizzate degli oggetti "misti" contenenti elementi appartenenti sia alla tradizione germanica-norrena sia a quella latino-cattolica (come, per esempio, il cofanetto Franks). Il terzo periodo runico (1050-1400 D.C.) è caratterizzato dalla minore frequenza d'uso delle rune fino alla sua scomparsa. Le rune sono da sempre state associate all'ambito magico-rituale, questo potrebbe però derivare da diversi fattori. A partire da quello semantico la parola runa viene tradotta come "mistero", "segreto" o simili. Inoltre, è da considerare che le rune venivano utilizzate in ambito rituale (venendo incise sulle pietre tombali e su oggetti cerimoniali). Le rune potevano però avere

diversi utilizzi: marcare la proprietà, indicare il creatore di un oggetto, mandare un messaggio. Tutto ciò che concerne le rune, la mitologia norrena e la letteratura antico inglese è stato di grande ispirazione per Tolkien e lo ha portato prima alla creazione di lingue artificiali e poi alla costruzione dell'universo letterario. Il successo delle opere di Tolkien potrebbe essere in parte dovuto all'immersività che queste presentano, infatti, l'autore non si è limitato a creare una storia, ma ha invece costruito un mondo letterario vivo, in cui i suoi abitanti hanno i propri sistemi di datazione, celebrazioni, lingue, usi e costumi. La carriera professionale di Tolkien e la sua vasta conoscenza in diversi ambiti (e.g. storico, linguistico, letterario, filologico etc.) risultano dunque di enorme rilevanza e sono riflessi nella creazione dell'illusione narrativa da lui definita *Secondary World* o Mondo Secondario. Le sue opere più celebri sono senza dubbio *Lo Hobbit* (1937) e i tre volumi che compongono *il Signore degli Anelli: La Compagnia dell'Anello* (1954), *Le Due Torri* (1954) e *Il Ritorno del Re* (1955), le quali hanno avuto diversi adattamenti cinematografici. Il concetto di Medievalismo, il quale potrebbe essere riassunto in maniera semplicistica nella creazione e ricreazione del Medioevo, risulta dunque cruciale nella realizzazione e comprensione della Terra di Mezzo tolkieniana. Da questo periodo storico derivano le rune, che sono state utilizzate da Tolkien nel *Lo Hobbit* e che lo hanno successivamente portato alla creazione delle *Tengwar* e delle *Angerthas*, ma anche opere letterarie di grande rilievo come il *Beowulf* e la *Völsunga Saga*, da cui ha tratto ispirazione per alcune creature che popolano la Terra di Mezzo. Partendo dalle opere sopramenzionate, entrambe gli sono sicuramente state utili per la creazione e la realizzazione dei draghi presenti sia nel *Lo Hobbit* che nel *Silmarillion*; infatti, il drago Smaug, personaggio centrale della trama del *Lo Hobbit*, condivide caratteristiche simili (sia fisiche che comportamentali) a quelle dei draghi presenti nella letteratura antico inglese e norrena. Le caratteristiche fisiche in comune comprendono: le ali e dunque la possibilità di volare, l'enorme stazza della creatura, la capacità di sputare fuoco, la corazza impenetrabile di scaglie che ricopre la maggior parte della pelle della creatura ad eccezione di alcuni punti scoperti. Mentre quelle comportamentali includono: l'ossessione per l'oro, le gemme e i tesori, l'arroganza e l'ego, le quali portano spesso il drago a non temere i suoi avversari, a sottovalutarli, a credere di non avere punti deboli ed infine, alla sua inesorabile caduta. Le altre creature di ispirazione germanica sono gli elfi ed i nani, queste due creature sono molto diverse tra loro. I primi sono descritti come umanoidi agili e dalla lunga capigliatura, spesso associati a caratteristiche come la bellezza, l'armonia e l'eleganza e con una profonda relazione con la natura e la magia. Il rapporto con quest'ultima è riflesso nella loro creazione di oggetti magici e nella realizzazione di beni con particolari proprietà. Un altro elemento in comune tra le varie opere è la divisione degli elfi in diverse tipologie. Inoltre, nell'universo tolkieniano sono proprio gli elfi ad aver creato i diversi caratteri (lettere e rune) con cui sono scritte

le varie lingue della Terra di Mezzo. I secondi, invece, sono descritti come umanoidi tozzi, con barba e capelli lunghi, caratterizzati dal cattivo umore e dal fatto che vivono sottoterra e lavorano in delle miniere alla ricerca di metalli e gemme preziose. Gli aspetti riscontrabili sia nella versione tolkeniana che in quella norrena sono: la loro descrizione fisica, la loro ossessione ed avidità per metalli preziosi e gemme, cosa che condividono con i draghi, e la loro abilità nel lavorarli. Le uniche creature che risultano essere totalmente inventate da Tolkien sono gli hobbit, i quali sono descritti come creature umanoidi di bassa statura, che adorano indossare vestiti colorati ed avere uno stile di vita confortevole, la loro abitazione tradizionale è chiamata “buco hobbit”. Questi ultimi condividono però dei valori presenti nell’ambito germanico come: l’importanza per la stirpe, per l’ospitalità, per il cibo e per gli enigmi o indovinelli. L’illusione del *Secondary World* è dunque rafforzata dalla presenza di espedienti narrativi come per esempio il manoscritto perduto, il ritrovamento di iscrizioni da parte dei protagonisti nel corso della loro avventura e la spiegazione dettagliata di calendari, alberi genealogici, cronologia degli eventi rilevanti accaduti nella Terra di Mezzo, varie lingue/metodi di scrittura (comprendendo anche la loro evoluzione e le diverse varianti). I particolari caratteri utilizzati da Tolkien all’interno delle sue opere sono divisibili in tre tipologie principali: le rune presenti all’interno del *Lo Hobbit*, le *Tengwar* e le *Angerthas*. Le rune trovate in *Lo Hobbit* non differiscono molto dal *futhorc* ad eccezione di alcuni cambiamenti: alcuni caratteri non sono originariamente presenti nella sequenza Anglosassone, ad altri è stato attribuito un suono diverso da quello corrispondente, inoltre non è utilizzata la *scripto continua* (le parole sono separate da un punto, mentre le frasi da tre punti in posizione verticale). Queste rune vengono utilizzate più di una volta con lo scopo di scrivere sequenze runiche ma in lingua inglese, le iscrizioni presenti sono quattro: una contenente il titolo, un’altra contenente il titolo, una breve descrizione, il nome dell’autore e di chi ha pubblicato l’opera, mentre le altre due si trovano nella mappa di Thrór e svelano il modo per accedere alla montagna solitaria dall’entrata segreta. Le *Tengwar* non vengono considerate rune, bensì lettere, infatti, esse sono state create per essere scritte su carta e non incise su pietra o metallo. Queste lettere presentano delle forme tondeggianti che si adattano bene alla scrittura, ma non tanto all’incisione, sono divise in due varianti: le *Tengwar di Rúmil*, le quali non sono state diffuse nella Terra di Mezzo e le *Tengwar di Fëanor*, che invece sono utilizzate. La sequenza completa di queste ultime consta di 24 lettere nel suo stadio iniziale e 36 lettere in quello finale. Queste lettere elfiche possono essere trovate in alcune iscrizioni presenti nel *Signore degli Anelli* come: l’iscrizione presente all’interno dell’Unico Anello (scritta nella lingua nera di Mordor) e quelle incisa all’entrata delle miniere di Moria (scritta in elfico). Le *Angerthas*, invece, sono rune ed esse derivano dal *Cirth*, il quale è stato creato basandosi sulle *Tengwar*. Le varianti principali di questa sequenza runica sono: le *Angerthas Daeron* e le *Angerthas Moria*. La

prima variante è stata ideata dal menestrello elfico Daeron, mentre la seconda è una versione adattata e modificata dai nani che dimoravano nelle miniere di Moria. Tuttavia, la seconda ha subito ulteriori modifiche ad opere dei nani di Erebor. Durante gli eventi narrati nel *Signore degli Anelli* i membri della Compagnia dell'Anello si imbattono in diverse iscrizioni runiche appartenenti alle *Angerthas*: alcune sono state scritte da Gandalf per lasciare un messaggio e firmare una lettera, mentre altre sono interpretate da quest'ultimo quando egli si trova all'interno delle miniere di Moria, la prima di queste è incisa sulla pietra tombale di Balin, il re di Moria, mentre delle altre vengono ritrovate all'interno di un manoscritto nanico estremamente rovinato, il *Libro di Mazarbul*, il quale contiene non soltanto rune di Moria e Dale, ma anche scritte in elfico.

In conclusione, grazie alla cura dei dettagli di un mondo letterario vivo che si espande anche al di fuori degli eventi narrati, alla creazione di lingue artificiali ed all'uso di alcuni espedienti narrativi le opere di Tolkien sono riuscite a mantenere l'illusione del *Secondary World* e divenire tra le opere più lette e conosciute a livello mondiale, modificando nel contempo il concetto di Medioevo e di genere fantasy presenti nell'immaginario collettivo e sottolineando l'impatto che può avere l'inserimento di elementi filologici all'interno di un'opera letteraria.

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